HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT

by

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With Illustrations by Marcus Stone

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CHAPTER I.

SHEWING HOW WRATH BEGAN.

[Illustration]

When Louis Trevelyan was twenty-four years old, he had all the world

before him where to choose; and, among other things, he chose to go

to the Mandarin Islands, and there fell in love with Emily Rowley,

the daughter of Sir Marmaduke, the governor. Sir Marmaduke Rowley,

at this period of his life, was a respectable middle-aged public

servant, in good repute, who had, however, as yet achieved for

himself neither an exalted position nor a large fortune. He had been

governor of many islands, and had never lacked employment; and now,

at the age of fifty, found himself at the Mandarins, with a salary

of Â£3,000 a year, living in a temperature at which 80Â° in the shade

is considered to be cool, with eight daughters, and not a shilling

saved. A governor at the Mandarins who is social by nature and

hospitable on principle, cannot save money in the islands even on

Â£3,000 a year when he has eight daughters. And at the Mandarins,

though hospitality is a duty, the gentlemen who ate Sir Rowley's

dinners were not exactly the men whom he or Lady Rowley desired to

welcome to their bosoms as sons-in-law. Nor when Mr. Trevelyan came

that way, desirous of seeing everything in the somewhat indefinite

course of his travels, had Emily Rowley, the eldest of the flock,

then twenty years of age, seen as yet any Mandariner who exactly came

up to her fancy. And, as Louis Trevelyan was a remarkably handsome

young man, who was well connected, who had been ninth wrangler at

Cambridge, who had already published a volume of poems, and who

possessed Â£3,000 a year of his own, arising from various perfectly

secure investments, he was not forced to sigh long in vain. Indeed,

the Rowleys, one and all, felt that providence had been very good to

them in sending young Trevelyan on his travels in that direction, for

he seemed to be a very pearl among men. Both Sir Marmaduke and Lady

Rowley felt that there might be objections to such a marriage as that

proposed to them, raised by the Trevelyan family. Lady Rowley would

not have liked her daughter to go to England, to be received with

cold looks by strangers. But it soon appeared that there was no one

to make objections. Louis, the lover, had no living relative nearer

than cousins. His father, a barrister of repute, had died a widower,

and had left the money which he had made to an only child. The head

of the family was a first cousin who lived in Cornwall on a moderate

property,--a very good sort of stupid fellow, as Louis said, who

would be quite indifferent as to any marriage that his cousin might

make. No man could be more independent or more clearly justified in

pleasing himself than was this lover. And then he himself proposed

that the second daughter, Nora, should come and live with them in

London. What a lover to fall suddenly from the heavens into such a

dovecote!

"I haven't a penny-piece to give to either of them," said Sir Rowley.

"It is my idea that girls should not have fortunes," said Trevelyan.

"At any rate, I am quite sure that men should never look for money.

A man must be more comfortable, and, I think, is likely to be more

affectionate, when the money has belonged to himself."

Sir Rowley was a high-minded gentleman, who would have liked to have

handed over a few thousand pounds on giving up his daughters; but,

having no thousands of pounds to hand over, he could not but admire

the principles of his proposed son-in-law. As it was about time for

him to have his leave of absence, he and sundry of the girls went to

England with Mr. Trevelyan, and the wedding was celebrated in London

by the Rev. Oliphant Outhouse, of Saint Diddulph-in-the-East, who

had married Sir Rowley's sister. Then a small house was taken and

furnished in Curzon Street, Mayfair, and the Rowleys went back to the

seat of their government, leaving Nora, the second girl, in charge of

her elder sister.

The Rowleys had found, on reaching London, that they had lighted upon

a pearl indeed. Louis Trevelyan was a man of whom all people said

all good things. He might have been a fellow of his college had he

not been a man of fortune. He might already,--so Sir Rowley was

told,--have been in Parliament, had he not thought it to be wiser to

wait awhile. Indeed, he was very wise in many things. He had gone

out on his travels thus young,--not in search of excitement, to kill

beasts, or to encounter he knew not what novelty and amusement,--but

that he might see men and know the world. He had been on his travels

for more than a year when the winds blew him to the Mandarins. Oh,

how blessed were the winds! And, moreover, Sir Rowley found that his

son-in-law was well spoken of at the clubs by those who had known him

during his university career, as a man popular as well as wise, not

a book-worm, or a dry philosopher, or a prig. He could talk on all

subjects, was very generous, a man sure to be honoured and respected;

and then such a handsome, manly fellow, with short brown hair, a nose

divinely chiselled, an Apollo's mouth, six feet high, with shoulders

and legs and arms in proportion,--a pearl of pearls! Only, as Lady

Rowley was the first to find out, he liked to have his own way.

"But his way is such a good way," said Sir Marmaduke. "He will be

such a good guide for the girls!"

"But Emily likes her way too," said Lady Rowley.

Sir Marmaduke argued the matter no further, but thought, no doubt,

that such a husband as Louis Trevelyan was entitled to have his own

way. He probably had not observed his daughter's temper so accurately

as his wife had done. With eight of them coming up around him, how

should he have observed their tempers? At any rate, if there were

anything amiss with Emily's temper, it would be well that she should

find her master in such a husband as Louis Trevelyan.

For nearly two years the little household in Curzon Street went on

well, or if anything was the matter no one outside of the little

household was aware of it. And there was a baby, a boy, a young

Louis, and a baby in such a household is apt to make things go

sweetly.

The marriage had taken place in July, and after the wedding tour

there had been a winter and a spring in London; and then they passed

a month or two at the sea-side, after which the baby had been born.

And then there came another winter and another spring. Nora Rowley

was with them in London, and by this time Mr. Trevelyan had begun to

think that he should like to have his own way completely. His baby

was very nice, and his wife was clever, pretty, and attractive. Nora

was all that an unmarried sister should be. But,--but there had come

to be trouble and bitter words. Lady Rowley had been right when she

said that her daughter Emily also liked to have her own way.

"If I am suspected," said Mrs. Trevelyan to her sister one morning,

as they sat together in the little back drawing-room, "life will not

be worth having."

"How can you talk of being suspected, Emily?"

"What does he mean then by saying that he would rather not have

Colonel Osborne here? A man older than my own father, who has known

me since I was a baby!"

"He didn't mean anything of that kind, Emily. You know he did not,

and you should not say so. It would be too horrible to think of."

"It was a great deal too horrible to be spoken, I know. If he does

not beg my pardon, I shall,--I shall continue to live with him, of

course, as a sort of upper servant, because of baby. But he shall

know what I think and feel."

"If I were you I would forget it."

"How can I forget it? Nothing that I can do pleases him. He is civil

and kind to you because he is not your master; but you don't know

what things he says to me. Am I to tell Colonel Osborne not to come?

Heavens and earth! How should I ever hold up my head again if I were

driven to do that? He will be here to-day I have no doubt; and Louis

will sit there below in the library, and hear his step, and will not

come up."

"Tell Richard to say you are not at home."

"Yes; and everybody will understand why. And for what am I to deny

myself in that way to the best and oldest friend I have? If any such

orders are to be given, let him give them and then see what will come

of it."

Mrs. Trevelyan had described Colonel Osborne truly as far as words

went, in saying that he had known her since she was a baby, and that

he was an older man than her father. Colonel Osborne's age exceeded

her father's by about a month, and as he was now past fifty, he might

be considered perhaps, in that respect, to be a safe friend for a

young married woman. But he was in every respect a man very different

from Sir Marmaduke. Sir Marmaduke, blessed and at the same time

burdened as he was with a wife and eight daughters, and condemned as

he had been to pass a large portion of his life within the tropics,

had become at fifty what many people call quite a middle-aged man.

That is to say, he was one from whom the effervescence and elasticity

and salt of youth had altogether passed away. He was fat and slow,

thinking much of his wife and eight daughters, thinking much also of

his dinner. Now Colonel Osborne was a bachelor, with no burdens but

those imposed upon him by his position as a member of Parliament,--a

man of fortune to whom the world had been very easy. It was not

therefore said so decidedly of him as of Sir Marmaduke, that he

was a middle-aged man, although he had probably already lived more

than two-thirds of his life. And he was a good-looking man of his

age, bald indeed at the top of his head, and with a considerable

sprinkling of grey hair through his bushy beard; but upright in his

carriage, active, and quick in his step, who dressed well, and was

clearly determined to make the most he could of what remained to him

of the advantages of youth. Colonel Osborne was always so dressed

that no one ever observed the nature of his garments, being no doubt

well aware that no man after twenty-five can afford to call special

attention to his coat, his hat, his cravat, or his trousers; but

nevertheless the matter was one to which he paid much attention, and

he was by no means lax in ascertaining what his tailor did for him.

He always rode a pretty horse, and mounted his groom on one at any

rate as pretty. He was known to have an excellent stud down in the

shires, and had the reputation of going well with hounds. Poor Sir

Marmaduke could not have ridden a hunt to save either his government

or his credit. When, therefore, Mrs. Trevelyan declared to her sister

that Colonel Osborne was a man whom she was entitled to regard with

semi-parental feelings of veneration because he was older than her

father, she made a comparison which was more true in the letter than

in the spirit. And when she asserted that Colonel Osborne had known

her since she was a baby, she fell again into the same mistake.

Colonel Osborne had indeed known her when she was a baby, and had in

old days been the very intimate friend of her father; but of herself

he had seen little or nothing since those baby days, till he had met

her just as she was about to become Mrs. Trevelyan; and though it was

natural that so old a friend should come to her and congratulate her

and renew his friendship, nevertheless it was not true that he made

his appearance in her husband's house in the guise of the useful old

family friend, who gives silver cups to the children and kisses the

little girls for the sake of the old affection which he has borne for

the parents. We all know the appearance of that old gentleman, how

pleasant and dear a fellow he is, how welcome is his face within the

gate, how free he makes with our wine, generally abusing it, how he

tells our eldest daughter to light his candle for him, how he gave

silver cups when the girls were born, and now bestows tea-services as

they get married,--a most useful, safe, and charming fellow, not a

year younger-looking or more nimble than ourselves, without whom life

would be very blank. We all know that man; but such a man was not

Colonel Osborne in the house of Mr. Trevelyan's young bride.

Emily Rowley, when she was brought home from the Mandarin Islands

to be the wife of Louis Trevelyan, was a very handsome young woman,

tall, with a bust rather full for her age, with dark eyes--eyes that

looked to be dark because her eye-brows and eye-lashes were nearly

black, but which were in truth so varying in colour, that you could

not tell their hue. Her brown hair was very dark and very soft; and

the tint of her complexion was brown also, though the colour of her

cheeks was often so bright as to induce her enemies to say falsely of

her that she painted them. And she was very strong, as are some girls

who come from the tropics, and whom a tropical climate has suited.

She could sit on her horse the whole day long, and would never be

weary with dancing at the Government House balls. When Colonel

Osborne was introduced to her as the baby whom he had known, he

thought it would be very pleasant to be intimate with so pleasant a

friend,--meaning no harm indeed, as but few men do mean harm on such

occasions,--but still, not regarding the beautiful young woman whom

he had seen as one of a generation succeeding to that of his own, to

whom it would be his duty to make himself useful on account of the

old friendship which he bore to her father.

It was, moreover, well known in London,--though not known at all

to Mrs. Trevelyan,--that this ancient Lothario had before this

made himself troublesome in more than one family. He was fond of

intimacies with married ladies, and perhaps was not averse to the

excitement of marital hostility. It must be remembered, however, that

the hostility to which allusion is here made was not the hostility

of the pistol or the horsewhip,--nor, indeed, was it generally the

hostility of a word of spoken anger. A young husband may dislike

the too-friendly bearing of a friend, and may yet abstain from that

outrage on his own dignity and on his wife, which is conveyed by a

word of suspicion. Louis Trevelyan having taken a strong dislike to

Colonel Osborne, and having failed to make his wife understand that

this dislike should have induced her to throw cold water upon the

Colonel's friendship, had allowed himself to speak a word which

probably he would have willingly recalled as soon as spoken. But

words spoken cannot be recalled, and many a man and many a woman who

has spoken a word at once regretted, are far too proud to express

that regret. So it was with Louis Trevelyan when he told his wife

that he did not wish Colonel Osborne to come so often to his house.

He had said it with a flashing eye and an angry tone; and though she

had seen the eye flash before, and was familiar with the angry tone,

she had never before felt herself to be insulted by her husband. As

soon as the word had been spoken Trevelyan had left the room, and had

gone down among his books. But when he was alone, he knew that he

had insulted his wife. He was quite aware that he should have spoken

to her gently, and have explained to her, with his arm round her

waist, that it would be better for both of them that this friend's

friendship should be limited. There is so much in a turn of the eye

and in the tone given to a word when such things have to be said,--so

much more of importance than in the words themselves. As Trevelyan

thought of this, and remembered what his manner had been, how much

anger he had expressed, how far he had been from having his arm round

his wife's waist as he spoke to her, he almost made up his mind to

go up-stairs and to apologise. But he was one to whose nature the

giving of any apology was repulsive. He could not bear to have to own

himself to have been wrong. And then his wife had been most provoking

in her manner to him. When he had endeavoured to make her understand

his wishes by certain disparaging hints which he had thrown out as to

Colonel Osborne, saying that he was a dangerous man, one who did not

show his true character, a snake in the grass, a man without settled

principles, and such like, his wife had taken up the cudgels for her

friend, and had openly declared that she did not believe a word of

the things that were alleged against him. "But still, for all that,

it is true," the husband had said. "I have no doubt that you think

so," the wife had replied. "Men do believe evil of one another, very

often. But you must excuse me if I say that I think you are mistaken.

I have known Colonel Osborne much longer than you have done, Louis,

and papa has always had the highest opinion of him." Then Mr.

Trevelyan had become very angry, and had spoken those words which

he could not recall. As he walked to and fro among his books

down-stairs, he almost felt that he ought to beg his wife's pardon.

He knew his wife well enough to be sure that she would not forgive

him unless he did so. He would do so, he thought, but not exactly

now. A moment would come in which it might be easier than at present.

He would be able to assure her when he went up to dress for dinner,

that he had meant no harm. They were going out to dine at the house

of a lady of rank, the Countess Dowager of Milborough, a lady

standing high in the world's esteem, of whom his wife stood a little

in awe; and he calculated that this feeling, if it did not make his

task easy would yet take from it some of its difficulty. Emily would

be, not exactly cowed, by the prospect of Lady Milborough's dinner,

but perhaps a little reduced from her usual self-assertion. He would

say a word to her when he was dressing, assuring her that he had not

intended to animadvert in the slightest degree upon her own conduct.

[Illustration: Shewing how wrath began.]

Luncheon was served, and the two ladies went down into the

dining-room. Mr. Trevelyan did not appear. There was nothing in

itself singular in that, as he was accustomed to declare that

luncheon was a meal too much in the day, and that a man should eat

nothing beyond a biscuit between breakfast and dinner. But he would

sometimes come in and eat his biscuit standing on the hearth-rug,

and drink what he would call half a quarter of a glass of sherry. It

would probably have been well that he should have done so now; but

he remained in his library behind the dining-room, and when his wife

and his sister-in-law had gone up-stairs, he became anxious to learn

whether Colonel Osborne would come on that day, and, if so, whether

he would be admitted. He had been told that Nora Rowley was to be

called for by another lady, a Mrs. Fairfax, to go out and look at

pictures. His wife had declined to join Mrs. Fairfax's party, having

declared that, as she was going to dine out, she would not leave

her baby all the afternoon. Louis Trevelyan, though he strove to

apply his mind to an article which he was writing for a scientific

quarterly review, could not keep himself from anxiety as to this

expected visit from Colonel Osborne. He was not in the least jealous.

He swore to himself fifty times over that any such feeling on his

part would be a monstrous injury to his wife. Nevertheless he knew

that he would be gratified if on that special day Colonel Osborne

should be informed that his wife was not at home. Whether the man

were admitted or not, he would beg his wife's pardon; but he could,

he thought, do so with more thorough efficacy and affection if she

should have shown a disposition to comply with his wishes on this

day.

"Do say a word to Richard," said Nora to her sister in a whisper as

they were going up-stairs after luncheon.

"I will not," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"May I do it?"

"Certainly not, Nora. I should feel that I were demeaning myself were

I to allow what was said to me in such a manner to have any effect

upon me."

"I think you are so wrong, Emily. I do indeed."

"You must allow me to be the best judge what to do in my own house,

and with my own husband."

"Oh, yes; certainly."

"If he gives me any command I will obey it. Or if he had expressed

his wish in any other words I would have complied. But to be told

that he would rather not have Colonel Osborne here! If you had seen

his manner and heard his words, you would not have been surprised

that I should feel it as I do. It was a gross insult,--and it was not

the first."

As she spoke the fire flashed from her eye, and the bright red colour

of her cheek told a tale of her anger which her sister well knew how

to read. Then there was a knock at the door, and they both knew that

Colonel Osborne was there. Louis Trevelyan, sitting in his library,

also knew of whose coming that knock gave notice.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL OSBORNE.

It has been already said that Colonel Osborne was a bachelor, a man

of fortune, a member of Parliament, and one who carried his half

century of years lightly on his shoulders. It will only be necessary

to say further of him that he was a man popular with those among

whom he lived, as a politician, as a sportsman, and as a member

of society. He could speak well in the House, though he spoke but

seldom, and it was generally thought of him that he might have been

something considerable, had it not suited him better to be nothing at

all. He was supposed to be a Conservative, and generally voted with

the Conservative party; but he could boast that he was altogether

independent, and on an occasion would take the trouble of proving

himself to be so. He was in possession of excellent health; had all

that the world could give; was fond of books, pictures, architecture,

and china; had various tastes, and the means of indulging them, and

was one of those few men on whom it seems that every pleasant thing

has been lavished. There was that little slur on his good name to

which allusion has been made; but those who knew Colonel Osborne best

were generally willing to declare that no harm was intended, and

that the evils which arose were always to be attributed to mistaken

jealousy. He had, his friends said, a free and pleasant way with

women which women like,--a pleasant way of free friendship; that

there was no more, and that the harm which had come had always

come from false suspicion. But there were certain ladies about the

town,--good, motherly, discreet women,--who hated the name of Colonel

Osborne, who would not admit him within their doors, who would not

bow to him in other people's houses, who would always speak of him as

a serpent, a hyena, a kite, or a shark. Old Lady Milborough was one

of these, a daughter of a friend of hers having once admitted the

serpent to her intimacy.

"Augustus Poole was wise enough to take his wife abroad," said old

Lady Milborough, discussing about this time with a gossip of hers

the danger of Mrs. Trevelyan's position, "or there would have been a

break-up there; and yet there never was a better girl in the world

than Jane Marriott."

The reader may be quite certain that Colonel Osborne had no

premeditated evil intention when he allowed himself to become the

intimate friend of his old friend's daughter. There was nothing

fiendish in his nature. He was not a man who boasted of his

conquests. He was not a ravening wolf going about seeking whom he

might devour, and determined to devour whatever might come in his

way; but he liked that which was pleasant; and of all pleasant things

the company of a pretty clever woman was to him the pleasantest. At

this exact period of his life no woman was so pleasantly pretty to

him, and so agreeably clever, as Mrs. Trevelyan.

When Louis Trevelyan heard on the stairs the step of the dangerous

man, he got up from his chair as though he too would have gone into

the drawing-room, and it would perhaps have been well had he done so.

Could he have done this, and kept his temper with the man, he would

have paved the way for an easy reconciliation with his wife. But when

he reached the door of his room, and had placed his hand upon the

lock, he withdrew again. He told himself he withdrew because he would

not allow himself to be jealous; but in truth he did so because he

knew he could not have brought himself to be civil to the man he

hated. So he sat down, and took up his pen, and began to cudgel

his brain about the scientific article. He was intent on raising a

dispute with some learned pundit about the waves of sound,--but he

could think of no other sound than that of the light steps of Colonel

Osborne as he had gone up-stairs. He put down his pen, and clenched

his fist, and allowed a black frown to settle upon his brow. What

right had the man to come there, unasked by him, and disturb his

happiness? And then this poor wife of his, who knew so little of

English life, who had lived in the Mandarin Islands almost since she

had been a child, who had lived in one colony or another almost since

she had been born, who had had so few of those advantages for which

he should have looked in marrying a wife, how was the poor girl to

conduct herself properly when subjected to the arts and practised

villanies of this viper? And yet the poor girl was so stiff in her

temper, had picked up such a trick of obstinacy in those tropical

regions, that Louis Trevelyan felt that he did not know how to manage

her. He too had heard how Jane Marriott had been carried off to

Naples after she had become Mrs. Poole. Must he too carry off his

wife to Naples in order to place her out of the reach of this hyena?

It was terrible to him to think that he must pack up everything and

run away from such a one as Colonel Osborne. And even were he to

consent to do this, how could he explain it all to that very wife for

whose sake he would do it? If she got a hint of the reason she would,

he did not doubt, refuse to go. As he thought of it, and as that

visit up-stairs prolonged itself, he almost thought it would be best

for him to be round with her! We all know what a husband means when

he resolves to be round with his wife. He began to think that he

would not apologise at all for the words he had spoken,--but would

speak them again somewhat more sharply than before. She would be

very wrathful with him; there would be a silent enduring indignation,

which, as he understood well, would be infinitely worse than any

torrent of words. But was he, a man, to abstain from doing that which

he believed to be his duty because he was afraid of his wife's anger?

Should he be deterred from saying that which he conceived it would

be right that he should say, because she was stiff-necked? No. He

would not apologise, but would tell her again that it was necessary,

both for his happiness and for hers, that all intimacy with Colonel

Osborne should be discontinued.

He was brought to this strongly marital resolution by the length of

the man's present visit; by that and by the fact that, during the

latter portion of it, his wife was alone with Colonel Osborne. Nora

had been there when the man came, but Mrs. Fairfax had called, not

getting out of her carriage, and Nora had been constrained to go down

to her. She had hesitated a moment, and Colonel Osborne had observed

and partly understood the hesitation. When he saw it, had he been

perfectly well-minded in the matter, he would have gone too. But he

probably told himself that Nora Rowley was a fool, and that in such

matters it was quite enough for a man to know that he did not intend

any harm.

"You had better go down, Nora," said Mrs. Trevelyan; "Mrs. Fairfax

will be ever so angry if you keep her waiting."

Then Nora had gone and the two were alone together. Nora had gone,

and Trevelyan had heard her as she was going and knew that Colonel

Osborne was alone with his wife.

"If you can manage that it will be so nice," said Mrs. Trevelyan,

continuing the conversation.

"My dear Emily," he said, "you must not talk of my managing it, or

you will spoil it all."

He had called them both Emily and Nora when Sir Marmaduke and Lady

Rowley were with them before the marriage, and, taking the liberty of

a very old family friend, had continued the practice. Mrs. Trevelyan

was quite aware that she had been so called by him in the presence of

her husband,--and that her husband had not objected. But that was now

some months ago, before baby was born; and she was aware also that

he had not called her so latterly in presence of her husband. She

thoroughly wished that she knew how to ask him not to do so again;

but the matter was very difficult, as she could not make such a

request without betraying some fear on her husband's part. The

subject which they were now discussing was too important to her

to allow her to dwell upon this trouble at the moment, and so she

permitted him to go on with his speech.

"If I were to manage it, as you call it,--which I can't do at

all,--it would be a gross job."

"That's all nonsense to us, Colonel Osborne. Ladies always like

political jobs, and think that they,--and they only,--make politics

bearable. But this would not be a job at all. Papa could do it better

than anybody else. Think how long he has been at it!"

The matter in discussion was the chance of an order being sent out to

Sir Marmaduke to come home from his islands at the public expense,

to give evidence, respecting colonial government in general, to a

committee of the House of Commons which was about to sit on the

subject. The committee had been voted, and two governors were to be

brought home for the purpose of giving evidence. What arrangement

could be so pleasant to a governor living in the Mandarin Islands,

who had had a holiday lately, and who could but ill afford to

take any holidays at his own expense? Colonel Osborne was on this

committee, and, moreover, was on good terms at the Colonial Office.

There were men in office who would be glad to do Colonel Osborne a

service, and then if this were a job, it would be so very little of

a job! Perhaps Sir Marmaduke might not be the very best man for the

purpose. Perhaps the government of the Mandarins did not afford the

best specimen of that colonial lore which it was the business of the

committee to master. But then two governors were to come, and it

might be as well to have one of the best sort, and one of the second

best. No one supposed that excellent old Sir Marmaduke was a paragon

of a governor, but then he had an infinity of experience! For over

twenty years he had been from island to island, and had at least

steered clear of great scrapes.

"We'll try it, at any rate," said the Colonel.

"Do, Colonel Osborne. Mamma would come with him, of course?"

"We should leave him to manage all that. It's not very likely that he

would leave Lady Rowley behind."

"He never has. I know he thinks more of mamma than he ever does of

himself. Fancy having them here in the autumn! I suppose if he came

for the end of the session, they wouldn't send him back quite at

once?"

"I rather fancy that our foreign and colonial servants know how to

stretch a point when they find themselves in England."

"Of course they do, Colonel Osborne; and why shouldn't they? Think of

all that they have to endure out in those horrible places. How would

you like to live in the Mandarins?"

"I should prefer London, certainly."

"Of course you would; and you mustn't begrudge papa a month or two

when he comes. I never cared about your being in Parliament before,

but I shall think so much of you now if you can manage to get papa

home."

There could be nothing more innocent than this,--nothing more

innocent at any rate as regarded any offence against Mr. Trevelyan.

But just then there came a word which a little startled Mrs.

Trevelyan, and made her feel afraid that she was doing wrong.

"I must make one stipulation with you, Emily," said the Colonel.

"What is that?"

"You must not tell your husband."

"Oh, dear! and why not?"

"I am sure you are sharp enough to see why you should not. A word of

this repeated at any club would put an end at once to your project,

and would be very damaging to me. And, beyond that, I wouldn't wish

him to know that I had meddled with it at all. I am very chary of

having my name connected with anything of the kind; and, upon my

word, I wouldn't do it for any living human being but yourself.

You'll promise me, Emily?"

She gave the promise, but there were two things in the matter, as it

stood at present, which she did not at all like. She was very averse

to having any secret from her husband with Colonel Osborne; and she

was not at all pleased at being told that he was doing for her a

favour that he would not have done for any other living human being.

Had he said so to her yesterday, before those offensive words had

been spoken by her husband, she would not have thought much about it.

She would have connected the man's friendship for herself with his

very old friendship for her father, and she would have regarded the

assurance as made to the Rowleys in general, and not to herself in

particular. But now, after what had occurred, it pained her to be

told by Colonel Osborne that he would make, specially on her behalf,

a sacrifice of his political pride which he would make for no other

person living. And then, as he had called her by her Christian name,

as he had exacted the promise, there had been a tone of affection in

his voice that she had almost felt to be too warm. But she gave the

promise; and when he pressed her hand at parting, she pressed his

again, in token of gratitude for the kindness to be done to her

father and mother.

Immediately afterwards Colonel Osborne went away, and Mrs. Trevelyan

was left alone in her drawing-room. She knew that her husband was

still down-stairs, and listened for a moment to hear whether he would

now come up to her. And he, too, had heard the Colonel's step as he

went, and for a few moments had doubted whether or no he would at

once go to his wife. Though he believed himself to be a man very firm

of purpose, his mind had oscillated backwards and forwards within the

last quarter of an hour between those two purposes of being round

with his wife, and of begging her pardon for the words which he

had already spoken. He believed that he would best do his duty by

that plan of being round with her; but then it would be so much

pleasanter--at any rate, so much easier, to beg her pardon. But of

one thing he was quite certain, he must by some means exclude Colonel

Osborne from his house. He could not live and continue to endure the

feelings which he had suffered while sitting down-stairs at his desk,

with the knowledge that Colonel Osborne was closeted with his wife

up-stairs. It might be that there was nothing in it. That his wife

was innocent he was quite sure. But nevertheless, he was himself so

much affected by some feeling which pervaded him in reference to this

man, that all his energy was destroyed, and his powers of mind and

body were paralysed. He could not, and would not, stand it. Rather

than that he would follow Mr. Poole, and take his wife to Naples. So

resolving, he put his hat on his head and walked out of the house. He

would have the advantage of the afternoon's consideration before he

took either the one step or the other.

As soon as he was gone Emily Trevelyan went up-stairs to her baby.

She would not stir as long as there had been a chance of his coming

to her. She very much wished that he would come, and had made up her

mind, in spite of the fierceness of her assertion to her sister, to

accept any slightest hint at an apology which her husband might offer

to her. To this state of mind she was brought by the consciousness of

having a secret from him, and by a sense not of impropriety on her

own part, but of conduct which some people might have called improper

in her mode of parting from the man against whom her husband had

warned her. The warmth of that hand-pressing, and the affectionate

tone in which her name had been pronounced, and the promise made to

her, softened her heart towards her husband. Had he gone to her now

and said a word to her in gentleness all might have been made right.

But he did not go to her.

"If he chooses to be cross and sulky, he may be cross and sulky,"

said Mrs. Trevelyan to herself as she went up to her baby.

"Has Louis been with you?" Nora asked, as soon as Mrs. Fairfax had

brought her home.

"I have not seen him since you left me," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"I suppose he went out before Colonel Osborne?"

"No, indeed. He waited till Colonel Osborne had gone, and then he

went himself; but he did not come near me. It is for him to judge of

his own conduct, but I must say that I think he is very foolish."

This the young wife said in a tone which clearly indicated that she

had judged her husband's conduct, and had found it to be very foolish

indeed.

"Do you think that papa and mamma will really come?" said Nora,

changing the subject of conversation.

"How can I tell? How am I to know? After all that has passed I am

afraid to say a word lest I should be accused of doing wrong. But

remember this, Nora, you are not to speak of it to any one."

"You will tell Louis?"

"No; I will tell no one."

"Dear, dear Emily; pray do not keep anything secret from him."

"What do you mean by secret? There isn't any secret. Only in such

matters as that,--about politics,--no gentleman likes to have his

name talked about!"

A look of great distress came upon Nora's face as she heard this. To

her it seemed to be very bad that there should be a secret between

her sister and Colonel Osborne to be kept from her brother-in-law.

"I suppose you will suspect me next?" said Mrs. Trevelyan, angrily.

"Emily, how can you say anything so cruel?"

"You look as if you did."

"I only mean that I think it would be wiser to tell all this to

Louis."

"How can I tell him Colonel Osborne's private business, when Colonel

Osborne has desired me not to do so. For whose sake is Colonel

Osborne doing this? For papa's and mamma's! I suppose Louis won't

be--jealous, because I want to have papa and mamma home. It would not

be a bit less unreasonable than the other."

CHAPTER III.

LADY MILBOROUGH'S DINNER PARTY.

Louis Trevelyan went down to his club in Pall Mall, the Acrobats, and

there heard a rumour that added to his anger against Colonel Osborne.

The Acrobats was a very distinguished club, into which it was now

difficult for a young man to find his way, and almost impossible

for a man who was no longer young, and therefore known to many. It

had been founded some twenty years since with the idea of promoting

muscular exercise and gymnastic amusements; but the promoters had

become fat and lethargic, and the Acrobats spent their time mostly in

playing whist, and in ordering and eating their dinners. There were

supposed to be, in some out-of-the-way part of the building, certain

poles and sticks and parallel bars with which feats of activity might

be practised, but no one ever asked for them now-a-days, and a man,

when he became an Acrobat, did so with a view either to the whist or

the cook, or possibly to the social excellences of the club. Louis

Trevelyan was an Acrobat;--as was also Colonel Osborne.

"So old Rowley is coming home," said one distinguished Acrobat to

another in Trevelyan's hearing.

"How the deuce is he managing that? He was here a year ago?"

"Osborne is getting it done. He is to come as a witness for this

committee. It must be no end of a lounge for him. It doesn't count as

leave, and he has every shilling paid for him, down to his cab-fares

when he goes out to dinner. There's nothing like having a friend at

Court."

Such was the secrecy of Colonel Osborne's secret! He had been so

chary of having his name mentioned in connection with a political

job, that he had found it necessary to impose on his young friend

the burden of a secret from her husband, and yet the husband heard

the whole story told openly at his club on the same day! There was

nothing in the story to anger Trevelyan had he not immediately felt

that there must be some plan in the matter between his wife and

Colonel Osborne, of which he had been kept ignorant. Hitherto,

indeed, his wife, as the reader knows, could not have told him. He

had not seen her since the matter had been discussed between her and

her friend. But he was angry because he first learned at his club

that which he thought he ought to have learned at home.

As soon as he reached his house he went at once to his wife's room,

but her maid was with her, and nothing could be said at that moment.

He then dressed himself, intending to go to Emily as soon as the girl

had left her; but the girl remained,--was, as he believed, kept in

the room purposely by his wife, so that he should have no moment of

private conversation. He went down-stairs, therefore, and found Nora

standing by the drawing-room fire.

"So you are dressed first to-day?" he said. "I thought your turn

always came last."

"Emily sent Jenny to me first to-day because she thought you would be

home, and she didn't go up to dress till the last minute."

This was intended well by Nora, but it did not have the desired

effect. Trevelyan, who had no command over his own features, frowned,

and showed that he was displeased. He hesitated a moment, thinking

whether he would ask Nora any question as to this report about her

father and mother; but, before he had spoken, his wife was in the

room.

"We are all late, I fear," said Emily.

"You, at any rate, are the last," said her husband.

"About half a minute," said the wife.

Then they got into the hired brougham which was standing at the door.

Trevelyan, in the sweet days of his early confidence with his wife,

had offered to keep a carriage for her, explaining to her that the

luxury, though costly, would not be beyond his reach. But she had

persuaded him against the carriage, and there had come to be an

agreement that instead of the carriage there should always be an

autumn tour. "One learns something from going about; but one learns

nothing from keeping a carriage," Emily had said. Those had been

happy days, in which it had been intended that everything should

always be rose-coloured. Now he was meditating whether, in lieu of

that autumn tour, it would not be necessary to take his wife away to

Naples altogether, so that she might be removed from the influence

of--of--of--; no, not even to himself would he think of Colonel

Osborne as his wife's lover. The idea was too horrible! And yet, how

dreadful was it that he should have, for any reason, to withdraw her

from the influence of any man!

Lady Milborough lived ever so far away, in Eccleston Square, but

Trevelyan did not say a single word to either of his companions

during the journey. He was cross and vexed, and was conscious that

they knew that he was cross and vexed. Mrs. Trevelyan and her sister

talked to each other the whole way, but they did so in that tone

which clearly indicates that the conversation is made up, not for any

interest attached to the questions asked or the answers given, but

because it is expedient that there should not be silence. Nora said

something about Marshall and Snellgrove, and tried to make believe

that she was very anxious for her sister's answer. And Emily said

something about the opera at Covent Garden, which was intended

to show that her mind was quite at ease. But both of them failed

altogether, and knew that they failed. Once or twice Trevelyan

thought that he would say a word in token, as it were, of repentance.

Like the naughty child who knew that he was naughty, he was trying to

be good. But he could not do it. The fiend was too strong within him.

She must have known that there was a proposition for her father's

return through Colonel Osborne's influence. As that man at the club

had heard it, how could she not have known it? When they got out at

Lady Milborough's door he had spoken to neither of them.

There was a large dull party, made up mostly of old people. Lady

Milborough and Trevelyan's mother had been bosom friends, and

Lady Milborough had on this account taken upon herself to be much

interested in Trevelyan's wife. But Louis Trevelyan himself, in

discussing Lady Milborough with Emily, had rather turned his mother's

old friend into ridicule, and Emily had, of course, followed her

husband's mode of thinking. Lady Milborough had once or twice given

her some advice on small matters, telling her that this or that air

would be good for her baby, and explaining that a mother during a

certain interesting portion of her life, should refresh herself

with a certain kind of malt liquor. Of all counsel on such domestic

subjects Mrs. Trevelyan was impatient,--as indeed it was her nature

to be in all matters, and consequently, authorized as she had been

by her husband's manner of speaking of his mother's friend, she

had taken a habit of quizzing Lady Milborough behind her back,

and almost of continuing the practice before the old lady's face.

Lady Milborough, who was the most affectionate old soul alive,

and good-tempered with her friends to a fault, had never resented

this, but had come to fear that Mrs. Trevelyan was perhaps a little

flighty. She had never as yet allowed herself to say anything worse

of her young friend's wife than that. And she would always add that

that kind of thing would cure itself as the nursery became full. It

must be understood therefore that Mrs. Trevelyan was not anticipating

much pleasure from Lady Milborough's party, and that she had accepted

the invitation as a matter of duty.

There was present among the guests a certain Honourable Charles

Glascock, the eldest son of Lord Peterborough, who made the

affair more interesting to Nora than it was to her sister. It had

been whispered into Nora's ears, by more than one person,--and

among others by Lady Milborough, whose own daughters were all

married,--that she might, if she thought fit, become the Honourable

Mrs. Charles Glascock. Now, whether she might think fit, or

whether she might not, the presence of the gentleman under such

circumstances, as far as she was concerned, gave an interest to the

evening. And as Lady Milborough took care that Mr. Glascock should

take Nora down to dinner, the interest was very great. Mr. Glascock

was a good-looking man, just under forty, in Parliament, heir to

a peerage, and known to be well off in respect to income. Lady

Milborough and Mrs. Trevelyan had told Nora Rowley that should

encouragement in that direction come in her way, she ought to allow

herself to fall in love with Mr. Glascock. A certain amount of

encouragement had come in her way, but she had not as yet allowed

herself to fall in love with Mr. Glascock. It seemed to her that Mr.

Glascock was quite conscious of the advantages of his own position,

and that his powers of talking about other matters than those with

which he was immediately connected were limited. She did believe that

he had in truth paid her the compliment of falling in love with her,

and this is a compliment to which few girls are indifferent. Nora

might perhaps have tried to fall in love with Mr. Glascock, had she

not been forced to make comparisons between him and another. This

other one had not fallen in love with her, as she well knew; and she

certainly had not fallen in love with him. But still, the comparison

was forced upon her, and it did not result in favour of Mr. Glascock.

On the present occasion Mr. Glascock as he sat next to her almost

proposed to her.

"You have never seen Monkhams?" he said. Monkhams was his father's

seat, a very grand place in Worcestershire. Of course he knew very

well that she had never seen Monkhams. How should she have seen it?

"I have never been in that part of England at all," she replied.

"I should so like to show you Monkhams. The oaks there are the finest

in the kingdom. Do you like oaks?"

"Who does not like oaks? But we have none in the islands, and nobody

has ever seen so few as I have."

"I'll show you Monkhams some day. Shall I? Indeed, I hope that some

day I may really show you Monkhams."

Now when an unmarried man talks to a young lady of really showing her

the house in which it will be his destiny to live, he can hardly mean

other than to invite her to live there with him. It must at least be

his purpose to signify that, if duly encouraged, he will so invite

her. But Nora Rowley did not give Mr. Glascock much encouragement on

this occasion.

"I'm afraid it is not likely that anything will ever take me into

that part of the country," she said. There was something perhaps in

her tone which checked Mr. Glascock, so that he did not then press

the invitation.

When the ladies were up-stairs in the drawing-room, Lady Milborough

contrived to seat herself on a couch intended for two persons only,

close to Mrs. Trevelyan. Emily, thinking that she might perhaps hear

some advice about Guinness's stout, prepared herself to be saucy. But

the matter in hand was graver than that. Lady Milborough's mind was

uneasy about Colonel Osborne.

"My dear," said she, "was not your father very intimate with that

Colonel Osborne?"

"He is very intimate with him, Lady Milborough."

"Ah, yes; I thought I had heard so. That makes it of course natural

that you should know him."

"We have known him all our lives," said Emily, forgetting probably

that out of the twenty-three years and some months which she had

hitherto lived, there had been a consecutive period of more than

twenty years in which she had never seen this man whom she had known

all her life.

"That makes a difference, of course; and I don't mean to say anything

against him."

"I hope not, Lady Milborough, because we are all especially fond of

him." This was said with so much of purpose, that poor, dear old Lady

Milborough was stopped in her good work. She knew well the terrible

strait to which Augustus Poole had been brought with his wife,

although nobody supposed that Poole's wife had ever entertained a

wrong thought in her pretty little heart. Nevertheless he had been

compelled to break up his establishment, and take his wife to Naples,

because this horrid Colonel would make himself at home in Mrs.

Poole's drawing-room in Knightsbridge. Augustus Poole, with courage

enough to take any man by the beard, had taking by the beard been

possible, had found it impossible to dislodge the Colonel. He could

not do so without making a row which would have been disgraceful to

himself and injurious to his wife; and therefore he had taken Mrs.

Poole to Naples. Lady Milborough knew the whole story, and thought

that she foresaw that the same thing was about to happen in the

drawing-room in Curzon Street. When she attempted to say a word to

the wife, she found herself stopped. She could not go on in that

quarter after the reception with which the beginning of her word had

been met. But perhaps she might succeed better with the husband.

After all, her friendship was with the Trevelyan side, and not with

the Rowleys.

"My dear Louis," she said, "I want to speak a word to you. Come

here." And then she led him into a distant corner, Mrs. Trevelyan

watching her all the while, and guessing why her husband was thus

carried away. "I just want to give you a little hint, which I am sure

I believe is quite unnecessary," continued Lady Milborough. Then she

paused, but Trevelyan would not speak. She looked into his face, and

saw that it was black. But the man was the only child of her dearest

friend, and she persevered. "Do you know I don't quite like that

Colonel Osborne coming so much to your house." The face before her

became still blacker, but still the man said nothing. "I dare say it

is a prejudice on my part, but I have always disliked him. I think he

is a dangerous friend;--what I call a snake in the grass. And though

Emily's high good sense, and love for you, and general feelings on

such a subject, are just what a husband must desire--Indeed, I am

quite sure that the possibility of anything wrong has never entered

into her head. But it is the very purity of her innocence which makes

the danger. He is a bad man, and I would just say a word to her, if I

were you, to make her understand that his coming to her of a morning

is not desirable. Upon my word, I believe there is nothing he likes

so much as going about and making mischief between men and their

wives."

Thus she delivered herself; and Louis Trevelyan, though he was sore

and angry, could not but feel that she had taken the part of a

friend. All that she had said had been true; all that she had said

to him he had said to himself more than once. He too hated the man.

He believed him to be a snake in the grass. But it was intolerably

bitter to him that he should be warned about his wife's conduct by

any living human being; that he, to whom the world had been so full

of good fortune,--that he, who had in truth taught himself to think

that he deserved so much good fortune, should be made the subject of

care on behalf of his friend, because of danger between himself and

his wife! On the spur of the moment he did not know what answer to

make. "He is not a man whom I like myself," he said.

"Just be careful, Louis, that is all," said Lady Milborough, and then

she was gone.

To be cautioned about his wife's conduct cannot be pleasant to any

man, and it was very unpleasant to Louis Trevelyan. He, too, had been

asked a question about Sir Marmaduke's expected visit to England

after the ladies had left the room. All the town had heard of it

except himself. He hardly spoke another word that evening till the

brougham was announced; and his wife had observed his silence. When

they were seated in the carriage, he together with his wife and Nora

Rowley, he immediately asked a question about Sir Marmaduke. "Emily,"

he said, "is there any truth in a report I hear that your father is

coming home?" No answer was made, and for a moment or two there was

silence. "You must have heard of it, then," he said. "Perhaps you can

tell me, Nora, as Emily will not reply. Have you heard anything of

your father's coming?"

"Yes; I have heard of it," said Nora slowly.

"And why have I not been told?"

"It was to be kept a secret," said Mrs. Trevelyan boldly.

"A secret from me; and everybody else knows it! And why was it to be

a secret?"

"Colonel Osborne did not wish that it should be known," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

"And what has Colonel Osborne to do between you and your father in

any matter with which I may not be made acquainted? I will have

nothing more between you and Colonel Osborne. You shall not see

Colonel Osborne. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, Louis."

"And do you mean to obey me? By G----, you shall obey me. Remember

this, that I lay my positive order upon you, that you shall not see

Colonel Osborne again. You do not know it, perhaps, but you are

already forfeiting your reputation as an honest woman, and bringing

disgrace upon me by your familiarity with Colonel Osborne."

"Oh, Louis, do not say that!" said Nora.

"You had better let him speak it all at once," said Emily.

"I have said what I have got to say. It is now only necessary that

you should give me your solemn assurance that you will obey me."

"If you have said all that you have to say, perhaps you will listen

to me," said his wife.

"I will listen to nothing till you have given me your promise."

"Then I certainly shall not give it you."

"Dear Emily, pray, pray do what he tells you," said Nora.

"She has yet to learn that it is her duty to do as I tell her," said

Trevelyan. "And because she is obstinate, and will not learn from

those who know better than herself what a woman may do, and what she

may not, she will ruin herself, and destroy my happiness."

"I know that you have destroyed my happiness by your unreasonable

jealousy," said the wife. "Have you considered what I must feel in

having such words addressed to me by my husband? If I am fit to be

told that I must promise not to see any man living, I cannot be fit

to be any man's wife." Then she burst out into an hysterical fit of

tears, and in this condition she got out of the carriage, entered her

house, and hurried up to her own room.

"Indeed, she has not been to blame," said Nora to Trevelyan on the

staircase.

"Why has there been a secret kept from me between her and this man;

and that too, after I had cautioned her against being intimate with

him? I am sorry that she should suffer; but it is better that she

should suffer a little now, than that we should both suffer much

by-and-by."

Nora endeavoured to explain to him the truth about the committee, and

Colonel Osborne's promised influence, and the reason why there was to

be a secret. But she was too much in a hurry to get to her sister to

make the matter plain, and he was too much angered to listen to her.

He shook his head when she spoke of Colonel Osborne's dislike to have

his name mentioned in connection with the matter. "All the world

knows it," he said with scornful laughter.

It was in vain that Nora endeavoured to explain to him that though

all the world might know it, Emily herself had only heard of the

proposition as a thing quite unsettled, as to which nothing at

present should be spoken openly. It was in vain to endeavour to make

peace on that night. Nora hurried up to her sister, and found that

the hysterical tears had again given place to anger. She would not

see her husband, unless he would beg her pardon; and he would not see

her unless she would give the promise he demanded. And the husband

and wife did not see each other again on that night.

CHAPTER IV.

HUGH STANBURY.

[Illustration]

It has been already stated that Nora Rowley was not quite so well

disposed as perhaps she ought to have been, to fall in love with the

Honourable Charles Glascock, there having come upon her the habit of

comparing him with another gentleman whenever this duty of falling in

love with Mr. Glascock was exacted from her. That other gentleman was

one with whom she knew that it was quite out of the question that she

should fall in love, because he had not a shilling in the world; and

the other gentleman was equally aware that it was not open to him to

fall in love with Nora Rowley--for the same reason. In regard to such

matters Nora Rowley had been properly brought up, having been made

to understand by the best and most cautious of mothers, that in that

matter of falling in love it was absolutely necessary that bread and

cheese should be considered. "Romance is a very pretty thing," Lady

Rowley had been wont to say to her daughters, "and I don't think life

would be worth having without a little of it. I should be very sorry

to think that either of my girls would marry a man only because he

had money. But you can't even be romantic without something to eat

and drink." Nora thoroughly understood all this, and being well aware

that her fortune in the world, if it ever was to be made at all,

could only be made by marriage, had laid down for herself certain

hard lines,--lines intended to be as fast as they were hard. Let

what might come to her in the way of likings and dislikings, let the

temptation to her be ever so strong, she would never allow her heart

to rest on a man who, if he should ask her to be his wife, would not

have the means of supporting her. There were many, she knew, who

would condemn such a resolution as cold, selfish, and heartless. She

heard people saying so daily. She read in books that it ought to be

so regarded. But she declared to herself that she would respect the

judgment neither of the people nor of the books. To be poor alone, to

have to live without a husband, to look forward to a life in which

there would be nothing of a career, almost nothing to do, to await

the vacuity of an existence in which she would be useful to no one,

was a destiny which she could teach herself to endure, because it

might probably be forced upon her by necessity. Were her father to

die there would hardly be bread for that female flock to eat. As it

was, she was eating the bread of a man in whose house she was no more

than a visitor. The lot of a woman, as she often told herself, was

wretched, unfortunate, almost degrading. For a woman such as herself

there was no path open to her energy, other than that of getting a

husband. Nora Rowley thought of all this till she was almost sick of

the prospect of her life,--especially sick of it when she was told

with much authority by the Lady Milboroughs of her acquaintance that

it was her bounden duty to fall in love with Mr. Glascock. As to

falling in love with Mr. Glascock, she had not as yet quite made up

her mind. There was so much to be said on that side of the question,

if such falling in love could only be made possible. But she had

quite made up her mind that she would never fall in love with a poor

man. In spite, however, of all that, she felt herself compelled to

make comparisons between Mr. Glascock and one Mr. Hugh Stanbury, a

gentleman who had not a shilling.

Mr. Hugh Stanbury had been at college the most intimate friend of

Louis Trevelyan, and at Oxford had been, in spite of Trevelyan's

successes, a bigger man than his friend. Stanbury had not taken so

high a degree as Trevelyan,--indeed had not gone out in honours at

all. He had done little for the credit of his college, and had never

put himself in the way of wrapping himself up for life in the scanty

lambswool of a fellowship. But he had won for himself reputation as

a clever speaker, as a man who had learned much that college tutors

do not profess to teach, as a hard-headed, ready-witted fellow, who,

having the world as an oyster before him, which it was necessary that

he should open, would certainly find either a knife or a sword with

which to open it.

Immediately on leaving college he had come to town, and had entered

himself at Lincoln's Inn. Now, at the time of our story, he was a

barrister of four years' standing, but had never yet made a guinea.

He had never made a guinea by his work as a barrister, and was

beginning to doubt of himself whether he ever would do so. Not, as he

knew well, that guineas are generally made with ease by barristers

of four years' standing, but because, as he said to his friends, he

did not see his way to the knack of it. He did not know an attorney

in the world, and could not conceive how any attorney should ever

be induced to apply to him for legal aid. He had done his work of

learning his trade about as well as other young men, but had had no

means of distinguishing himself within his reach. He went the Western

Circuit because his aunt, old Miss Stanbury, lived at Exeter, but, as

he declared of himself, had he had another aunt living at York, he

would have had nothing whatsoever to guide him in his choice. He sat

idle in the courts, and hated himself for so sitting. So it had been

with him for two years without any consolation or additional burden

from other employment than that of his profession. After that, by

some chance, he had become acquainted with the editor of the Daily

Record, and by degrees had taken to the writing of articles. He had

been told by all his friends, and especially by Trevelyan, that if

he did this, he might as well sell his gown and wig. He declared,

in reply, that he had no objection to sell his gown and wig. He did

not see how he should ever make more money out of them than he would

do by such sale. But for the articles which he wrote, he received

instant payment, a process which he found to be most consolatory,

most comfortable, and, as he said to Trevelyan, as warm to him as a

blanket in winter.

Trevelyan, who was a year younger than Stanbury, had taken upon

himself to be very angry. He professed that he did not think much of

the trade of a journalist, and told Stanbury that he was sinking from

the highest to almost the lowest business by which an educated man

and a gentleman could earn his bread. Stanbury had simply replied

that he saw some bread on the one side, but none on the other; and

that bread from some side was indispensable to him. Then there had

come to be that famous war between Great Britain and the republic

of Patagonia, and Hugh Stanbury had been sent out as a special

correspondent by the editor and proprietor of the Daily Record.

His letters had been much read, and had called up a great deal of

newspaper pugnacity. He had made important statements which had been

flatly denied, and found to be utterly false; which again had been

warmly reasserted and proved to be most remarkably true to the

letter. In this way the correspondence, and he as its author, became

so much talked about that, on his return to England, he did actually

sell his gown and wig and declare to his friends,--and to Trevelyan

among the number,--that he intended to look to journalism for his

future career.

He had been often at the house in Curzon Street in the earliest

happy days of his friend's marriage, and had thus become

acquainted,--intimately acquainted,--with Nora Rowley. And now again,

since his return from Patagonia, that acquaintance had been renewed.

Quite lately, since the actual sale of that wig and gown had been

effected, he had not been there so frequently as before, because

Trevelyan had expressed his indignation almost too openly.

"That such a man as you should be so faint-hearted," Trevelyan had

said, "is a thing that I can not understand."

"Is a man faint-hearted when he finds it improbable that he shall be

able to leap his horse over a house?"

"What you had to do had been done by hundreds before you."

"What I had to do has never yet been done by any man," replied

Stanbury. "I had to live upon nothing till the lucky hour should

strike."

"I think you have been cowardly," said Trevelyan.

Even this had made no quarrel between the two men; but Stanbury had

expressed himself annoyed by his friend's language, and partly on

that account, and partly perhaps on another, had stayed away from

Curzon Street. As Nora Rowley had made comparisons about him, so had

he made comparisons about her. He had owned to himself that had it

been possible that he should marry, he would willingly entrust his

happiness to Miss Rowley. And he had thought once or twice that

Trevelyan had wished that such an arrangement might be made at some

future day. Trevelyan had always been much more sanguine in expecting

success for his friend at the Bar, than Stanbury had been for

himself. It might well be that such a man as Trevelyan might think

that a clever rising barrister would be an excellent husband for his

sister-in-law, but that a man earning a precarious living as a writer

for a penny paper would be by no means so desirable a connection.

Stanbury, as he thought of this, declared to himself that he would

not care two straws for Trevelyan in the matter, if he could see his

way without other impediments. But the other impediments were there

in such strength and numbers as to make him feel that it could not

have been intended by Fate that he should take to himself a wife.

Although those letters of his to the Daily Record had been so

pre-eminently successful, he had never yet been able to earn by

writing above twenty-five or thirty pounds a month. If that might be

continued to him he could live upon it himself; but, even with his

moderate views, it would not suffice for himself and family.

He had told Trevelyan that while living as an expectant barrister he

had no means of subsistence. In this, as Trevelyan knew, he was not

strictly correct. There was an allowance of Â£100 a year coming to him

from the aunt whose residence at Exeter had induced him to devote

himself to the Western Circuit. His father had been a clergyman with

a small living in Devonshire, and had now been dead some fifteen

years. His mother and two sisters were still living in a small

cottage in his late father's parish, on the interest of the money

arising from a life insurance. Some pittance from sixty to seventy

pounds a year was all they had among them. But there was a rich aunt,

Miss Stanbury, to whom had come considerable wealth in a manner most

romantic,--the little tale shall be told before this larger tale

is completed,--and this aunt had undertaken to educate and place

out in the world her nephew Hugh. So Hugh had been sent to Harrow,

and then to Oxford,--where he had much displeased his aunt by not

accomplishing great things,--and then had been set down to make his

fortune as a barrister in London, with an allowance of Â£100 a year,

his aunt having paid, moreover, certain fees for entrance, tuition,

and the like. The very hour in which Miss Stanbury learned that her

nephew was writing for a penny newspaper she sent off a dispatch to

tell him that he must give up her or the penny paper. He replied by

saying that he felt himself called upon to earn his bread in the only

line from which, as it seemed to him, bread would be forthcoming. By

return of post he got another letter to say that he might draw for

the quarter then becoming due, but that that would be the last. And

it was the last.

Stanbury made an ineffectual effort to induce his aunt to make over

the allowance,--or at least a part of it,--to his mother and sisters,

but the old lady paid no attention whatever to the request. She never

had given, and at that moment did not intend to give, a shilling

to the widow and daughters of her brother. Nor did she intend, or

had she ever intended, to leave a shilling of her money to Hugh

Stanbury,--as she had very often told him. The money was, at her

death, to go back to the people from whom it had come to her.

When Nora Rowley made those comparisons between Mr. Hugh Stanbury and

Mr. Charles Glascock, they were always wound up very much in favour

of the briefless barrister. It was not that he was the handsomer man,

for he was by no means handsome, nor was he the bigger man, for Mr.

Glascock was six feet tall; nor was he better dressed, for Stanbury

was untidy rather than otherwise in his outward person. Nor had

he any air of fashion or special grace to recommend him, for he

was undoubtedly an awkward-mannered man. But there was a glance of

sunshine in his eye, and a sweetness in the curl of his mouth when he

smiled, which made Nora feel that it would have been all up with her

had she not made so very strong a law for her own guidance. Stanbury

was a man about five feet ten, with shoulders more than broad in

proportion, stout limbed, rather awkward of his gait, with large feet

and hands, with soft wavy light hair, with light grey eyes, with a

broad, but by no means ugly, nose. His mouth and lips were large, and

he rarely showed his teeth. He wore no other beard than whiskers,

which he was apt to cut away through heaviness of his hand in

shaving, till Nora longed to bid him be more careful. "He doesn't

care what sort of a guy he makes of himself," she once said to her

sister, almost angrily. "He is a plain man, and he knows it," Emily

had replied. Mr. Trevelyan was doubtless a handsome man, and it was

almost on Nora's tongue to say something ill-natured on the subject.

Hugh Stanbury was reputed to be somewhat hot in spirit and manner. He

would be very sage in argument, pounding down his ideas on politics,

religion, or social life with his fist as well as his voice. He was

quick, perhaps, at making antipathies, and quick, too, in making

friendships; impressionable, demonstrative, eager, rapid in his

movements,--sometimes to the great detriment of his shins and

knuckles; and he possessed the sweetest temper that was ever given

to a man for the blessing of a woman. This was the man between whom

and Mr. Glascock Nora Rowley found it to be impossible not to make

comparisons.

On the very day after Lady Milborough's dinner party Stanbury

overtook Trevelyan in the street, and asked his friend where he was

going eastward. Trevelyan was on his way to call upon his lawyer, and

said so. But he did not say why he was going to his lawyer. He had

sent to his wife by Nora that morning to know whether she would make

to him the promise he required. The only answer which Nora could draw

from her sister was a counter question, demanding whether he would

ask her pardon for the injury he had done her. Nora had been most

eager, most anxious, most conciliatory as a messenger; but no good

had come of these messages, and Trevelyan had gone forth to tell all

his trouble to his family lawyer. Old Mr. Bideawhile had been his

father's ancient and esteemed friend, and he could tell things to

Mr. Bideawhile which he could not bring himself to tell to any

other living man; and he could generally condescend to accept Mr.

Bideawhile's advice, knowing that his father before him had been

guided by the same.

"But you are out of your way for Lincoln's Inn Fields," said

Stanbury.

"I have to call at Twining's. And where are you going?"

"I have been three times round St. James's Park to collect my

thoughts," said Stanbury, "and now I am on my way to the Daily R.,

250, Fleet Street. It is my custom of an afternoon. I am prepared

to instruct the British public of to-morrow on any subject, as per

order, from the downfall of a European compact to the price of a

London mutton chop."

"I suppose there is nothing more to be said about it," said

Trevelyan, after a pause.

"Not another word. How should there be? Aunt Jemima has already drawn

tight the purse strings, and it would soon be the casual ward in

earnest if it were not for the Daily R. God bless the Daily R. Only

think what a thing it is to have all subjects open to one, from the

destinies of France to the profit proper to a butcher."

"If you like it!"

"I do like it. It may not be altogether honest. I don't know what

is. But it's a deal honester than defending thieves and bamboozling

juries. How is your wife?"

"She's pretty well, thank you."

Stanbury knew at once from the tone of his friend's voice that there

was something wrong.

"And Louis the less?" he said, asking after Trevelyan's child.

"He's all right."

"And Miss Rowley? When one begins one's inquiries one is bound to go

through the whole family."

"Miss Rowley is pretty well," said Trevelyan.

Previously to this, Trevelyan when speaking of his sister-in-law to

Stanbury, had always called her Nora, and had been wont to speak

of her as though she were almost as much the friend of one of them

as of the other. The change of tone on this occasion was in truth

occasioned by the sadness of the man's thoughts in reference to his

wife, but Stanbury attributed it to another cause. "He need not be

afraid of me," he said to himself, "and at least he should not show

me that he is." Then they parted, Trevelyan going into Twining's

bank, and Stanbury passing on towards the office of the Daily R.

Stanbury had in truth been altogether mistaken as to the state of his

friend's mind on that morning. Trevelyan, although he had, according

to his custom, put in a word in condemnation of the newspaper line of

life, was at the moment thinking whether he would not tell all his

trouble to Hugh Stanbury. He knew that he should not find anywhere,

not even in Mr. Bideawhile, a more friendly or more trustworthy

listener. When Nora Rowley's name had been mentioned, he had not

thought of her. He had simply repeated the name with the usual

answer. He was at the moment cautioning himself against a confidence

which after all might not be necessary, and which on this occasion

was not made. When one is in trouble it is a great ease to tell one's

trouble to a friend; but then one should always wash one's dirty

linen at home. The latter consideration prevailed, and Trevelyan

allowed his friend to go on without burdening him with the story of

that domestic quarrel. Nor did he on that occasion tell it to Mr.

Bideawhile; for Mr. Bideawhile was not found at his chambers.

CHAPTER V.

SHEWING HOW THE QUARREL PROGRESSED.

Trevelyan got back to his own house at about three, and on going into

the library, found on his table a letter to him addressed in his

wife's handwriting. He opened it quickly, hoping to find that promise

which he had demanded, and resolving that if it were made he would at

once become affectionate, yielding, and gentle to his wife. But there

was not a word written by his wife within the envelope. It contained

simply another letter, already opened, addressed to her. This letter

had been brought up to her during her husband's absence from the

house, and was as follows:--

Acrobats, Thursday.

DEAR EMILY,

I have just come from the Colonial Office. It is all

settled, and Sir M. has been sent for. Of course, you will

tell T. now.

Yours, F. O.

The letter was, of course, from Colonel Osborne, and Mrs. Trevelyan,

when she received it, had had great doubts whether she would enclose

it to her husband opened or unopened. She had hitherto refused to

make the promise which her husband exacted, but nevertheless, she was

minded to obey him. Had he included in his demand any requirement

that she should receive no letter from Colonel Osborne, she would not

have opened this one. But nothing had been said about letters, and

she would not shew herself to be afraid. So she read the note, and

then sent it down to be put on Mr. Trevelyan's table in an envelope

addressed to him.

"If he is not altogether blinded, it will show him how cruelly he has

wronged me," said she to her sister. She was sitting at the time with

her boy in her lap, telling herself that the child's features were in

all respects the very same as his father's, and that, come what come

might, the child should always be taught by her to love and respect

his father. And then there came a horrible thought. What if the child

should be taken away from her? If this quarrel, out of which she saw

no present mode of escape, were to lead to a separation between her

and her husband, would not the law, and the judges, and the courts,

and all the Lady Milboroughs of their joint acquaintance into the

bargain, say that the child should go with his father? The judges,

and the courts, and the Lady Milboroughs would, of course, say that

she was the sinner. And what could she do without her boy? Would not

any humility, any grovelling in the dust be better for her than that?

"It is a very poor thing to be a woman," she said to her sister.

"It is perhaps better than being a dog," said Nora; "but, of course,

we can't compare ourselves to men."

"It would be better to be a dog. One wouldn't be made to suffer so

much. When a puppy is taken away from its mother, she is bad enough

for a few days, but she gets over it in a week." There was a pause

then for a few moments. Nora knew well which way ran the current of

her sister's thoughts, and had nothing at the present moment which

she could say on that subject. "It is very hard for a woman to know

what to do," continued Emily, "but if she is to marry, I think she

had better marry a fool. After all, a fool generally knows that he is

a fool, and will trust some one, though he may not trust his wife."

"I will never wittingly marry a fool," said Nora.

"You will marry Mr. Glascock, of course. I don't say that he is a

fool; but I do not think he has that kind of strength which shows

itself in perversity."

"If he asked me, I should not have him;--and he will never ask me."

"He will ask you, and, of course, you'll take him. Why not? You can't

be otherwise than a woman. And you must marry. And this man is a

gentleman, and will be a peer. There is nothing on earth against him,

except that he does not set the Thames on fire. Louis intends to set

the Thames on fire some day, and see what comes of it."

"All the same, I shall not marry Mr. Glascock. A woman can die, at

any rate," said Nora.

"No, she can't. A woman must be decent; and to die of want is very

indecent. She can't die, and she mustn't be in want, and she oughtn't

to be a burden. I suppose it was thought necessary that every man

should have two to choose from; and therefore there are so many more

of us than the world wants. I wonder whether you'd mind taking that

down-stairs to his table? I don't like to send it by the servant; and

I don't want to go myself."

Then Nora had taken the letter down, and left it where Louis

Trevelyan would be sure to find it.

He did find it, and was sorely disappointed when he perceived that

it contained no word from his wife to himself. He opened Colonel

Osborne's note, and read it, and became, as he did so, almost more

angry than before. Who was this man that he should dare to address

another man's wife as "Dear Emily?" At the moment Trevelyan

remembered well enough that he had heard the man so call his wife,

that it had been done openly in his presence, and had not given him

a thought. But Lady Rowley and Sir Marmaduke had then been present

also; and that man on that occasion had been the old friend of the

old father, and not the would-be young friend of the young daughter.

Trevelyan could hardly reason about it, but felt that whereas the one

was not improper, the other was grossly impertinent, and even wicked.

And then, again, his wife, his Emily, was to show to him, to her

husband, or was not to show to him, the letter which she received

from this man, the letter in which she was addressed as "Dear Emily,"

according to this man's judgment and wish, and not according to his

judgment and wish,--not according to the judgment and wish of him who

was her husband, her lord, and her master! "Of course you will tell

T. now." This was intolerable to him. It made him feel that he was

to be regarded as second, and this man to be regarded as first. And

then he began to recapitulate all the good things he had done for his

wife, and all the causes which he had given her for gratitude. Had

he not taken her to his bosom, and bestowed upon her the half of all

that he had simply for herself, asking for nothing more than her

love? He had possessed money, position, a name,--all that makes life

worth having. He had found her in a remote corner of the world, with

no fortune, with no advantages of family or social standing,--so

circumstanced that any friend would have warned him against such

a marriage; but he had given her his heart, and his hand, and his

house, and had asked for nothing in return but that he should be all

in all to her,--that he should be her one god upon earth. And he had

done more even than this. "Bring your sister," he had said. "The

house shall be big enough for her also, and she shall be my sister as

well as yours." Who had ever done more for a woman, or shown a more

absolute confidence? And now what was the return he received? She was

not contented with her one god upon earth, but must make to herself

other gods,--another god, and that too out of a lump of the basest

clay to be found around her. He thought that he could remember to

have heard it said in early days, long before he himself had had

an idea of marrying, that no man should look for a wife from among

the tropics, that women educated amidst the languors of those sunny

climes rarely came to possess those high ideas of conjugal duty and

feminine truth which a man should regard as the first requisites of a

good wife. As he thought of all this, he almost regretted that he had

ever visited the Mandarins, or ever heard the name of Sir Marmaduke

Rowley.

He should have nourished no such thoughts in his heart. He had,

indeed, been generous to his wife and to his wife's family; but we

may almost say that the man who is really generous in such matters,

is unconscious of his own generosity. The giver who gives the most,

gives, and does not know that he gives. And had not she given too?

In that matter of giving between a man and his wife, if each gives

all, the two are equal, let the things given be what they may! King

Cophetua did nothing for his beggar maid, unless she were to him,

after he had married her, as royal a queen as though he had taken her

from the oldest stock of reigning families then extant. Trevelyan

knew all this himself,--had said so to himself a score of times,

though not probably in spoken words or formed sentences. But, that

all was equal between himself and the wife of his bosom, had been

a thing ascertained by him as a certainty. There was no debt of

gratitude from her to him which he did not acknowledge to exist also

as from him to her. But yet, in his anger, he could not keep himself

from thinking of the gifts he had showered upon her. And he had been,

was, would ever be, if she would only allow it, so true to her! He

had selected no other friend to take her place in his councils! There

was no "dear Mary," or "dear Augusta," with whom he had secrets to

be kept from his wife. When there arose with him any question of

interest,--question of interest such as was this of the return of Sir

Marmaduke to her,--he would show it in all its bearings to his wife.

He had his secrets too, but his secrets had all been made secrets for

her also. There was not a woman in the world in whose company he took

special delight in her absence.

And if there had been, how much less would have been her ground of

complaint? Let a man have any such friendships,--what friendships he

may,--he does not disgrace his wife. He felt himself to be so true of

heart that he desired no such friendships; but for a man indulging in

such friendships there might be excuse. Even though a man be false,

a woman is not shamed and brought unto the dust before all the world.

But the slightest rumour on a woman's name is a load of infamy on

her husband's shoulders. It was not enough for CÃ¦sar that his wife

should be true; it was necessary to CÃ¦sar that she should not even be

suspected. Trevelyan told himself that he suspected his wife of no

sin. God forbid that it should ever come to that, both for his sake

and for hers; and, above all, for the sake of that boy who was so

dear to them both! But there would be the vile whispers, and dirty

slanders would be dropped from envious tongues into envious ears, and

minds prone to evil would think evil of him and of his. Had not Lady

Milborough already cautioned him? Oh, that he should have lived to

have been cautioned about his wife;--that he should be told that eyes

outside had looked into the sacred shrine of his heart and seen that

things there were fatally amiss! And yet Lady Milborough was quite

right. Had he not in his hand at this moment a document that proved

her to be right? "Dear Emily!" He took this note and crushed it in

his fist, and then pulled it into fragments.

But what should he do? There was, first of all considerations, the

duty which he owed to his wife, and the love which he bore her.

That she was ignorant and innocent he was sure; but then she was so

contumacious that he hardly knew how to take a step in the direction

of guarding her from the effects of her ignorance, and maintaining

for her the advantages of her innocence. He was her master, and she

must know that he was her master. But how was he to proceed when she

refused to obey the plainest and most necessary command which he laid

upon her? Let a man be ever so much his wife's master, he cannot

maintain his masterdom by any power which the law places in his

hands. He had asked his wife for a promise of obedience, and she

would not give it to him! What was he to do next? He could, no

doubt,--at least he thought so,--keep the man from her presence. He

could order the servant not to admit the man, and the servant would

doubtless obey him. But to what a condition would he then have been

brought! Would not the world then be over for him,--over for him as

the husband of a wife whom he could not love unless he respected her?

Better that there should be no such world, than call in the aid of a

servant to guard the conduct of his wife!

As he thought of it all it seemed to him that if she would not obey

him, and give him this promise, they must be separated. He would not

live with her, he would not give her the privileges of his wife, if

she refused to render to him the obedience which was his privilege.

The more he thought of it, the more convinced he was that he ought

not to yield to her. Let her once yield to him, and then his

tenderness should begin, and there should be no limit to it. But he

would not see her till she had yielded. He would not see her; and if

he should find that she did see Colonel Osborne, then he would tell

her that she could no longer dwell under the same roof with him.

His resolution on these points was very strong, and yet there came

over him a feeling that it was his duty to be gentle. There was a

feeling also that that privilege of receiving obedience, which was

so indubitably his own, could only be maintained by certain wise

practices on his part, in which gentleness must predominate.

Wives are bound to obey their husbands, but obedience cannot be

exacted from wives, as it may from servants, by aid of law and

with penalties, or as from a horse, by punishments and manger

curtailments. A man should be master in his own house, but he should

make his mastery palatable, equitable, smooth, soft to the touch,

a thing almost unfelt. How was he to do all this now, when he had

already given an order to which obedience had been refused unless

under certain stipulations,--an agreement with which would be

degradation to him? He had pointed out to his wife her duty, and she

had said she would do her duty as pointed out, on condition that he

would beg her pardon for having pointed it out! This he could not and

would not do. Let the heavens fall,--and the falling of the heavens

in this case was a separation between him and his wife,--but he would

not consent to such injustice as that!

But what was he to do at this moment,--especially with reference to

that note which he had destroyed. At last he resolved to write to his

wife, and he consequently did write and send to her the following

letter:--

May 4.

DEAREST EMILY,

If Colonel Osborne should write to you again, it will

be better that you should not open his letter. As you

know his handwriting, you will have no difficulty in so

arranging. Should any further letter come from Colonel

Osborne addressed to you, you had better put it under

cover to me, and take no notice of it yourself.

I shall dine at the club to-day. We were to have gone to

Mrs. Peacock's in the evening. You had better write a line

to say that we shall not be there. I am very sorry that

Nora should lose her evening. Pray think very carefully

over what I have asked of you. My request to you is, that

you shall give me a promise that you will not willingly

see Colonel Osborne again. Of course you will understand

that this is not supposed to extend to accidental

meetings, as to which, should they occur,--and they would

be sure to occur,--you would find that they would be

wholly unnoticed by me.

But I must request that you will comply with my wish in

this matter. If you will send for me, I will go to you

instantly, and after one word from you to the desired

effect, you will find that there will be no recurrence by

me to a subject so hateful. As I have done, and am doing

what I think to be right, I cannot stultify myself by

saying that I think I have been wrong.

Yours always, dearest Emily,

With the most thorough love,

LOUIS TREVELYAN.

This letter he himself put on his wife's dressing-room table, and

then he went out to his club.

CHAPTER VI.

SHEWING HOW RECONCILIATION WAS MADE.

"Look at that," said Mrs. Trevelyan, when her sister came into her

room about an hour before dinner-time. Nora read the letter, and

then asked her sister what she meant to do. "I have written to Mrs.

Peacock. I don't know what else I can do. It is very hard upon

you,--that you should have been kept at home. But I don't suppose Mr.

Glascock would have been at Mrs. Peacock's."

"And what else will you do, Emily?"

"Nothing;--simply live deserted and forlorn till he shall choose to

find his wits again. There is nothing else that a woman can do. If he

chooses to dine at his club every day, I can't help it. We must put

off all the engagements, and that will be hard upon you."

"Don't talk about me. It is too terrible to think that there should

be such a quarrel."

"What can I do? Have I been wrong?"

"Simply do what he tells you, whether it is wrong or right. If it's

right, it ought to be done, and if it's wrong, it will not be your

fault."

"That's very easily said, and it sounds logical; but you must know

it's unreasonable."

"I don't care about reason. He is your husband, and if he wishes it

you should do it. And what will be the harm? You don't mean to see

Colonel Osborne any more. You have already said that he's not to be

admitted."

"I have said that nobody is to be admitted. Louis has driven me

to that. How can I look the servant in the face and tell him that

any special gentleman is not to be admitted to see me? Oh dear! oh

dear! have I done anything to deserve it? Was ever so monstrous an

accusation made against any woman! If it were not for my boy, I would

defy him to do his worst."

On the day following, Nora again became a messenger between the

husband and wife, and before dinner-time a reconciliation had been

effected. Of course the wife gave way at last; and of course she gave

way so cunningly that the husband received none of the gratification

which he had expected in her surrender. "Tell him to come," Nora had

urged. "Of course he can come if he pleases," Emily had replied.

Then Nora had told Louis to come, and Louis had demanded whether,

if he did so, the promise which he had exacted would be given. It

is to be feared that Nora perverted the truth a little; but if ever

such perversion may be forgiven, forgiveness was due to her. If

they could only be brought together, she was sure that there would

be a reconciliation. They were brought together, and there was a

reconciliation.

"Dearest Emily, I am so glad to come to you," said the husband,

walking up to his wife in their bed-room, and taking her in his arms.

[Illustration: Shewing how reconciliation was made.]

"I have been very unhappy, Louis, for the last two days," said she,

very gravely,--returning his kiss, but returning it somewhat coldly.

"We have both been unhappy, I am sure," said he. Then he paused that

the promise might be made to him. He had certainly understood that

it was to be made without reserve,--as an act on her part which she

had fully consented to perform. But she stood silent, with one hand

on the dressing-table, looking away from him, very beautiful, and

dignified too, in her manner; but not, as far as he could judge,

either repentant or submissive. "Nora said that you would make me the

promise which I ask from you."

"I cannot think, Louis, how you can want such a promise from me."

"I think it right to ask it; I do indeed."

"Can you imagine that I shall ever willingly see this gentleman again

after what has occurred? It will be for you to tell the servant. I

do not know how I can do that. But, as a matter of course, I will

encourage no person to come to your house of whom you disapprove. It

would be exactly the same of any man or of any woman."

"That is all that I ask."

"I am surprised that you should have thought it necessary to make any

formal request in the matter. Your word was quite sufficient. That

you should find cause of complaint in Colonel Osborne's coming here

is of course a different thing."

"Quite a different thing," said he.

"I cannot pretend to understand either your motives or your fears.

I do not understand them. My own self-respect prevents me from

supposing it to be possible that you have attributed an evil thought

to me."

"Indeed, indeed, I never have," said the husband.

"That I can assure you I regard as a matter of course," said the

wife.

"But you know, Emily, the way in which the world talks."

"The world! And do you regard the world, Louis?"

"Lady Milborough, I believe, spoke to yourself."

"Lady Milborough! No, she did not speak to me. She began to do so,

but I was careful to silence her at once. From you, Louis, I am bound

to hear whatever you may choose to say to me; but I will not hear

from any other lips a single word that may be injurious to your

honour." This she said very quietly, with much dignity, and he felt

that he had better not answer her. She had given him the promise

which he had demanded, and he began to fear that if he pushed the

matter further she might go back even from that amount of submission.

So he kissed her again, and had the boy brought into the room, and by

the time that he went to dress for dinner he was able, at any rate,

to seem to be well pleased.

"Richard," he said to the servant, as soon as he was down-stairs,

"when Colonel Osborne calls again, say that your mistress is--not at

home." He gave the order in the most indifferent tone of voice which

he could assume; but as he gave it he felt thoroughly ashamed of it.

Richard, who, with the other servants, had of course known that there

had been a quarrel between his master and mistress for the last two

days, no doubt understood all about it.

While they were sitting at dinner on the next day, a Saturday, there

came another note from Colonel Osborne. The servant brought it to

his mistress, and she, when she had looked at it, put it down by her

plate. Trevelyan knew immediately from whom the letter had come, and

understood how impossible it was for his wife to give it up in the

servant's presence. The letter lay there till the man was out of the

room, and then she handed it to Nora. "Will you give that to Louis?"

she said. "It comes from the man whom he supposes to be my lover."

"Emily!" said he, jumping from his seat, "how can you allow words so

horrible and so untrue to fall from your mouth?"

"If it be not so, why am I to be placed in such a position as this?

The servant knows, of course, from whom the letter comes, and sees

that I have been forbidden to open it." Then the man returned to the

room, and the remainder of the dinner passed off almost in silence.

It was their custom when they dined without company to leave the

dining-room together, but on this evening Trevelyan remained for a

few minutes that he might read Colonel Osborne's letter. He waited,

standing on the rug with his face to the fire-place, till he was

quite alone, and then he opened it. It ran as follows:--

House of Commons, Saturday.

DEAR EMILY,--

Trevelyan, as he read this, cursed Colonel Osborne between his teeth.

DEAR EMILY,

I called this afternoon, but you were out. I am afraid you

will be disappointed by what I have to tell you, but you

should rather be glad of it. They say at the C. O. that

Sir Marmaduke would not receive their letter if sent

now till the middle of June, and that he could not be

in London, let him do what he would, till the end of

July. They hope to have the session over by that time,

and therefore the committee is to be put off till next

session. They mean to have Lord Bowles home from Canada,

and they think that Bowles would like to be here in the

winter. Sir Marmaduke will be summoned for February next,

and will of course stretch his stay over the hot months.

All this will, on the whole, be for the best. Lady Rowley

could hardly have packed up her things and come away at a

day's notice, whatever your father might have done. I'll

call to-morrow at luncheon time.

Yours always,

F. O.

There was nothing objectionable in this letter,--excepting always the

"Dear Emily,"--nothing which it was not imperative on Colonel Osborne

to communicate to the person to whom it was addressed. Trevelyan must

now go up-stairs and tell the contents of the letter to his wife.

But he felt that he had created for himself a terrible trouble. He

must tell his wife what was in the letter, but the very telling of

it would be a renewing of the soreness of his wound. And then what

was to be done in reference to the threatened visit for the Sunday

morning? Trevelyan knew very well that were his wife denied at

that hour, Colonel Osborne would understand the whole matter. He

had doubtless in his anger intended that Colonel Osborne should

understand the whole matter; but he was calmer now than he had been

then, and almost wished that the command given by him had not been so

definite and imperious. He remained with his arm on the mantel-piece,

thinking of it, for some ten minutes, and then went up into the

drawing-room. "Emily," he said, walking up to the table at which she

was sitting, "you had better read that letter."

"I would so much rather not," she replied haughtily.

"Then Nora can read it. It concerns you both equally."

Nora, with hesitating hand, took the letter and read it. "They are

not to come after all," said she, "till next February."

"And why not?" asked Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Something about the session. I don't quite understand."

"Lord Bowles is to come from Canada," said Louis, "and they think he

would prefer being here in the winter. I dare say he would."

"But what has that to do with papa?"

"I suppose they must both be here together," said Nora.

"I call that very hard indeed," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"I can't agree with you there," said her husband. "His coming at all

is so much of a favour that it is almost a job."

"I don't see that it is a job at all," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "Somebody

is wanted, and nobody can know more of the service than papa does.

But as the other man is a lord, I suppose papa must give way. Does he

say anything about mamma, Nora?"

"You had better read the letter yourself," said Trevelyan, who was

desirous that his wife should know of the threatened visit.

"No, Louis, I shall not do that. You must not blow hot and cold too.

Till the other day I should have thought that Colonel Osborne's

letters were as innocent as an old newspaper. As you have supposed

them to be poisoned I will have nothing to do with them."

This speech made him very angry. It seemed that his wife, who

had yielded to him, was determined to take out the value of her

submission in the most disagreeable words which she could utter. Nora

now closed the letter and handed it back to her brother-in-law. He

laid it down on the table beside him, and sat for a while with his

eyes fixed upon his book. At last he spoke again. "Colonel Osborne

says that he will call to-morrow at luncheon time. You can admit him,

if you please, and thank him for the trouble he has taken in this

matter."

"I shall not remain in the room if he be admitted," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

There was silence again for some minutes, and the cloud upon

Trevelyan's brow became blacker than before. Then he rose from his

chair and walked round to the sofa on which his wife was sitting. "I

presume," said he, "that your wishes and mine in this matter must be

the same."

"I cannot tell what your wishes are," she replied. "I never was more

in the dark on any subject in my life. My wishes at present are

confined to a desire to save you as far as may be possible from the

shame which must be attached to your own suspicions."

"I have never had any suspicions."

"A husband without suspicions does not intercept his wife's letters.

A husband without suspicions does not call in the aid of his servants

to guard his wife. A husband without suspicions--"

"Emily," exclaimed Nora Rowley, "how can you say such things,--on

purpose to provoke him?"

"Yes; on purpose to provoke me," said Trevelyan.

"And have I not been provoked? Have I not been injured? You say now

that you have not suspected me, and yet in what condition do I find

myself? Because an old woman has chosen to talk scandal about me, I

am placed in a position in my own house which is disgraceful to you

and insupportable to myself. This man has been in the habit of coming

here on Sundays, and will, of course, know that we are at home. You

must manage it as you please. If you choose to receive him, I will go

up-stairs."

"Why can't you let him come in and go away, just as usual?" said

Nora.

"Because Louis has made me promise that I will never willingly be

in his company again," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "I would have given the

world to avoid a promise so disgraceful to me; but it was exacted,

and it shall be kept." Having so spoken, she swept out of the room,

and went up-stairs to the nursery. Trevelyan sat for an hour with his

book before him, reading or pretending to read, but his wife did not

come down-stairs. Then Nora went up to her, and he descended to his

solitude below. So far he had hardly gained much by the enforced

obedience of his wife.

On the next morning the three went to church together, and as they

were walking home Trevelyan's heart was filled with returning

gentleness towards his wife. He could not bear to be at wrath with

her after the church service which they had just heard together.

But he was softer-hearted than was she, and knowing this, was

almost afraid to say anything that would again bring forth from her

expressions of scorn. As soon as they were alone within the house he

took her by the hand and led her apart. "Let all this be," said he,

"as though it had never been."

"That will hardly be possible, Louis," she answered. "I cannot forget

that I have been--cautioned."

"But cannot you bring yourself to believe that I have meant it all

for your good?"

"I have never doubted it, Louis;--never for a moment. But it has hurt

me to find that you should think that such caution was needed for my

good."

It was almost on his tongue to beg her pardon, to acknowledge that

he had made a mistake, and to implore her to forget that he had ever

made an objection to Colonel Osborne's visit. He remembered at this

moment the painful odiousness of that "Dear Emily;" but he had to

reconcile himself even to that, telling himself that, after all,

Colonel Osborne was an old man,--a man older even than his wife's

father. If she would only have met him with gentleness, he would have

withdrawn his command, and have acknowledged that he had been wrong.

But she was hard, dignified, obedient, and resentful. "It will, I

think," he said, "be better for both of us that he should be asked in

to lunch to-day."

"You must judge of that," said Emily. "Perhaps, upon the whole, it

will be best. I can only say that I will not be present. I will lunch

up-stairs with baby, and you can make what excuse for me you please."

This was all very bad, but it was in this way that things were

allowed to arrange themselves. Richard was told that Colonel Osborne

was coming to lunch, and when he came something was muttered to him

about Mrs. Trevelyan being not quite well. It was Nora who told the

innocent fib, and though she did not tell it well, she did her very

best. She felt that her brother-in-law was very wretched, and she was

most anxious to relieve him. Colonel Osborne did not stay long, and

then Nora went up-stairs to her sister.

Louis Trevelyan felt that he had disgraced himself. He had meant to

have been strong, and he had, as he knew, been very weak. He had

meant to have acted in a high-minded, honest, manly manner; but

circumstances had been so untoward with him, that on looking at his

own conduct, it seemed to him to have been mean, and almost false

and cowardly. As the order for the exclusion of this hated man from

his house had been given, he should at any rate have stuck to the

order. At the moment of his vacillation he had simply intended to

make things easy for his wife; but she had taken advantage of his

vacillation, and had now clearly conquered him. Perhaps he respected

her more than he had done when he was resolving, three or four days

since, that he would be the master in his own house; but it may be

feared that the tenderness of his love for her had been impaired.

Late in the afternoon his wife and sister-in-law came down dressed

for walking, and, finding Trevelyan in the library, they asked him to

join them,--it was a custom with them to walk in the park on a Sunday

afternoon,--and he at once assented, and went out with them. Emily,

who had had her triumph, was very gracious. There should not be a

word more said by her about Colonel Osborne. She would avoid that

gentleman, never receiving him in Curzon Street, and having as little

to say to him as possible elsewhere; but she would not throw his name

in her husband's teeth, or make any reference to the injury which had

so manifestly been done to her. Unless Louis should be indiscreet,

it should be as though it had been forgotten. As they walked by

Chesterfield House and Stanhope Street into the park, she began to

discuss the sermon they had heard that morning, and when she found

that that subject was not alluring, she spoke of a dinner to which

they were to go at Mrs. Fairfax's house. Louis Trevelyan was quite

aware that he was being treated as a naughty boy, who was to be

forgiven.

They went across Hyde Park into Kensington Gardens, and still the

same thing was going on. Nora found it to be almost impossible to say

a word. Trevelyan answered his wife's questions, but was otherwise

silent. Emily worked very hard at her mission of forgiveness, and

hardly ceased in her efforts at conciliatory conversation. Women

can work so much harder in this way than men find it possible to do!

She never flagged, but continued to be fluent, conciliatory, and

intolerably wearisome. On a sudden they came across two men together,

who, as they all knew, were barely acquainted with each other. These

were Colonel Osborne and Hugh Stanbury.

"I am glad to find you are able to be out," said the Colonel.

"Thanks; yes. I think my seclusion just now was almost as much due to

baby as to anything else. Mr. Stanbury, how is it we never see you

now?"

"It is the D. R., Mrs. Trevelyan;--nothing else. The D. R. is a most

grateful mistress, but somewhat exacting. I am allowed a couple of

hours on Sundays, but otherwise my time is wholly passed in Fleet

Street."

"How very unpleasant."

"Well; yes. The unpleasantness of this world consists chiefly in the

fact that when a man wants wages, he must earn them. The Christian

philosophers have a theory about it. Don't they call it the primeval

fall, original sin, and that kind of thing?"

"Mr. Stanbury, I won't have irreligion. I hope that doesn't come from

writing for the newspapers."

"Certainly not with me, Mrs. Trevelyan. I have never been put on

to take that branch yet. Scrubby does that with us, and does it

excellently. It was he who touched up the Ritualists, and then the

Commission, and then the Low Church bishops, till he didn't leave one

of them a leg to stand upon."

"What is it, then, that the Daily Record upholds?"

"It upholds the Daily Record. Believe in that and you will surely be

saved." Then he turned to Miss Rowley, and they two were soon walking

on together, each manifestly interested in what the other was saying,

though there was no word of tenderness spoken between them.

Colonel Osborne was now between Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan. She would

have avoided the position had it been possible for her to do so.

While they were falling into their present places, she had made a

little mute appeal to her husband to take her away from the spot, to

give her his arm and return with her, to save her in some way from

remaining in company with the man to whose company for her he had

objected; but he took no such step. It had seemed to him that he

could take no such step without showing his hostility to Colonel

Osborne.

They walked on along the broad path together, and the Colonel was

between them.

"I hope you think it satisfactory,--about Sir Rowley," he said.

"Beggars must not be choosers, you know, Colonel Osborne. I felt a

little disappointed when I found that we were not to see them till

February next."

"They will stay longer then, you know, than they could now."

"I have no doubt when the time comes we shall all believe it to be

better."

"I suppose you think, Emily, that a little pudding to-day is better

than much to-morrow."

Colonel Osborne certainly had a caressing, would-be affectionate mode

of talking to women, which, unless it were reciprocated and enjoyed,

was likely to make itself disagreeable. No possible words could have

been more innocent than those he had now spoken; but he had turned

his face down close to her face, and had almost whispered them. And

then, too, he had again called her by her Christian name. Trevelyan

had not heard the words. He had walked on, making the distance

between him and the other man greater than was necessary, anxious to

show to his wife that he had no jealousy at such a meeting as this.

But his wife was determined that she would put an end to this state

of things, let the cost be what it might. She did not say a word to

Colonel Osborne, but addressed herself at once to her husband.

"Louis," she said, "will you give me your arm? We will go back, if

you please." Then she took her husband's arm, and turned herself and

him abruptly away from their companion.

The thing was done in such a manner that it was impossible that

Colonel Osborne should not perceive that he had been left in anger.

When Trevelyan and his wife had gone back a few yards, he was obliged

to return for Nora. He did so, and then rejoined his wife.

"It was quite unnecessary, Emily," he said, "that you should behave

like that."

"Your suspicions," she said, "have made it almost impossible for me

to behave with propriety."

"You have told him everything now," said Trevelyan.

"And it was requisite that he should be told," said his wife. Then

they walked home without interchanging another word. When they

reached their house, Emily at once went up to her own room, and

Trevelyan to his. They parted as though they had no common interest

which was worthy of a moment's conversation. And she by her step,

and gait, and every movement of her body showed to him that she was

not his wife now in any sense that could bring to him a feeling of

domestic happiness. Her compliance with his command was of no use

to him unless she could be brought to comply in spirit. Unless she

would be soft to him he could not be happy. He walked about his room

uneasily for half-an-hour, trying to shake off his sorrow, and then

he went up to her room. "Emily," he said, "for God's sake let all

this pass away."

"What is to pass away?"

"This feeling of rancour between you and me. What is the world to us

unless we can love one another? At any rate it will be nothing to

me."

"Do you doubt my love?" said she.

"No; certainly not."

"Nor I yours. Without love, Louis, you and I can not be happy. But

love alone will not make us so. There must be trust, and there must

also be forbearance. My feeling of annoyance will pass away in time;

and till it does, I will shew it as little as may be possible."

He felt that he had nothing more to say, and then he left her; but he

had gained nothing by the interview. She was still hard and cold, and

still assumed a tone which seemed to imply that she had manifestly

been the injured person.

Colonel Osborne, when he was left alone, stood for a few moments on

the spot, and then with a whistle, a shake of the head, and a little

low chuckle of laughter, rejoined the crowd.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS JEMIMA STANBURY, OF EXETER.

[Illustration]

Miss Jemima Stanbury, the aunt of our friend Hugh, was a maiden lady,

very much respected, indeed, in the city of Exeter. It is to be

hoped that no readers of these pages will be so un-English as to be

unable to appreciate the difference between county society and town

society,--the society, that is, of a provincial town, or so ignorant

as not to know also that there may be persons so privileged, that

although they live distinctly within a provincial town, there

is accorded to them, as though by brevet rank, all the merit of

living in the county. In reference to persons so privileged, it is

considered that they have been made free from the contamination of

contiguous bricks and mortar by certain inner gifts, probably of

birth, occasionally of profession, possibly of merit. It is very

rarely, indeed, that money alone will bestow this acknowledged

rank; and in Exeter, which by the stringency and excellence of its

well-defined rules on such matters, may perhaps be said to take the

lead of all English provincial towns, money alone has never availed.

Good blood, especially if it be blood good in Devonshire, is rarely

rejected. Clergymen are allowed within the pale,--though by no means

as certainly as used to be the case; and, indeed, in these days of

literates, clergymen have to pass harder examinations than those ever

imposed upon them by bishops' chaplains, before they are admitted ad

eundem among the chosen ones of the city of Exeter. The wives and

daughters of the old prebendaries see well to that. And, as has been

said, special merit may prevail. Sir Peter Mancrudy, the great Exeter

physician, has won his way in,--not at all by being Sir Peter, which

has stood in his way rather than otherwise,--but by the acknowledged

excellence of his book about saltzes. Sir Peter Mancrudy is supposed

to have quite a metropolitan, almost a European reputation,--and

therefore is acknowledged to belong to the county set, although he

never dines out at any house beyond the limits of the city. Now, let

it be known that no inhabitant of Exeter ever achieved a clearer

right to be regarded as "county," in opposition to "town," than had

Miss Jemima Stanbury. There was not a tradesman in Exeter who was not

aware of it, and who did not touch his hat to her accordingly. The

men who drove the flies, when summoned to take her out at night,

would bring oats with them, knowing how probable it was that they

might have to travel far. A distinct apology was made if she was

asked to drink tea with people who were simply "town." The Noels of

Doddescombe Leigh, the Cliffords of Budleigh Salterton, the Powels of

Haldon, the Cheritons of Alphington,--all county persons, but very

frequently in the city,--were greeted by her, and greeted her, on

terms of equality. Her most intimate friend was old Mrs. MacHugh,

the widow of the last dean but two, who could not have stood higher

had she been the widow of the last bishop. And then, although Miss

Stanbury was intimate with the Frenches of Heavitree, with the

Wrights of Northernhay, with the Apjohns of Helion Villa,--a really

magnificent house, two miles out of the city on the Crediton

Road, and with the Crumbies of Cronstadt House, Saint Ide's,--who

would have been county people, if living in the country made the

difference;--although she was intimate with all these families,

her manner to them was not the same, nor was it expected to be the

same, as with those of her own acknowledged set. These things are

understood in Exeter so well!

Miss Stanbury belonged to the county set, but she lived in a large

brick house, standing in the Close, almost behind the Cathedral.

Indeed it was so close to the eastern end of the edifice that a

carriage could not be brought quite up to her door. It was a large

brick house, very old, with a door in the middle, and five steps

ascending to it between high iron rails. On each side of the door

there were two windows on the ground floor, and above that there

were three tiers of five windows each, and the house was double

throughout, having as many windows looking out behind into a gloomy

courtyard. But the glory of the house consisted in this, that there

was a garden attached to it, a garden with very high walls, over

which the boughs of trees might be seen, giving to the otherwise

gloomy abode a touch of freshness in the summer, and a look of space

in the winter, which no doubt added something to the reputation even

of Miss Stanbury. The fact,--for it was a fact,--that there was

no gloomier or less attractive spot in the whole city than Miss

Stanbury's garden, when seen inside, did not militate against this

advantage. There were but half-a-dozen trees, and a few square yards

of grass that was never green, and a damp ungravelled path on which

no one ever walked. Seen from the inside the garden was not much;

but, from the outside, it gave a distinct character to the house, and

produced an unexpressed acknowledgment that the owner of it ought to

belong to the county set.

The house and all that was in it belonged to Miss Stanbury herself,

as did also many other houses in the neighbourhood. She was the owner

of the "Cock and Bottle," a very decent second class inn on the other

side of the Close, an inn supposed to have clerical tendencies, which

made it quite suitable for a close. The choristers took their beer

there, and the landlord was a retired verger. Nearly the whole of

one side of a dark passage leading out of the Close towards the High

Street belonged to her; and though the passage be narrow and the

houses dark, the locality is known to be good for trade. And she

owned two large houses in the High Street, and a great warehouse

at St. Thomas's, and had been bought out of land by the Railway at

St. David's,--much to her own dissatisfaction, as she was wont to

express herself, but, undoubtedly, at a very high price. It will be

understood therefore, that Miss Stanbury was wealthy, and that she

was bound to the city in which she lived by peculiar ties.

But Miss Stanbury had not been born to this wealth, nor can she

be said to have inherited from her forefathers any of these high

privileges which had been awarded to her. She had achieved them by

the romance of her life and the manner in which she had carried

herself amidst its vicissitudes. Her father had been vicar of

Nuncombe Putney, a parish lying twenty miles west of Exeter, among

the moors. And on her father's death, her brother, also now dead, had

become vicar of the same parish,--her brother, whose only son, Hugh

Stanbury, we already know, working for the "D. R." up in London. When

Miss Stanbury was twenty-one she became engaged to a certain Mr.

Brooke Burgess, the eldest son of a banker in Exeter,--or, it might,

perhaps, be better said, a banker himself; for at the time Mr.

Brooke Burgess was in the firm. It need not here be told how various

misfortunes arose, how Mr. Burgess quarrelled with the Stanbury

family, how Jemima quarrelled with her own family, how, when her

father died, she went out from Nuncombe Putney parsonage, and lived

on the smallest pittance in a city lodging, how her lover was untrue

to her and did not marry her, and how at last he died and left her

every shilling that he possessed.

The Devonshire people, at the time, had been much divided as to the

merits of the Stanbury quarrel. There were many who said that the

brother could not have acted otherwise than he did; and that Miss

Stanbury, though by force of character and force of circumstances

she had weathered the storm, had in truth been very indiscreet. The

results, however, were as have been described. At the period of which

we treat, Miss Stanbury was a very rich lady, living by herself in

Exeter, admitted, without question, to be one of the county set, and

still at variance with her brother's family. Except to Hugh, she had

never spoken a word to one of them since her brother's death. When

the money came into her hands, she at that time being over forty

and her nephew being then just ten years old, she had undertaken to

educate him, and to start him in the world. We know how she had kept

her word, and how and why she had withdrawn herself from any further

responsibility in the matter.

And in regard to this business of starting the young man she had been

careful to let it be known that she would do no more than start him.

In the formal document, by means of which she had made the proposal

to her brother, she had been careful to let it be understood that

simple education was all that she intended to bestow upon him,--"and

that only," she had added, "in the event of my surviving till his

education be completed." And to Hugh himself she had declared that

any allowance which she made him after he was called to the Bar,

was only made in order to give him room for his foot, a spot of

ground from whence to make his first leap. We know how he made that

leap, infinitely to the disgust of his aunt, who, when he refused

obedience to her in the matter of withdrawing from the Daily Record,

immediately withdrew from him, not only her patronage and assistance,

but even her friendship and acquaintance. This was the letter which

she wrote to him--

I don't think that writing radical stuff for a penny

newspaper is a respectable occupation for a gentleman, and

I will have nothing to do with it. If you choose to do

such work, I cannot help it; but it was not for such that

I sent you to Harrow and Oxford, nor yet up to London and

paid Â£100 a year to Mr. Lambert. I think you are treating

me badly, but that is nothing to your bad treatment of

yourself. You need not trouble yourself to answer this,

unless you are prepared to say that you will not write any

more stuff for that penny newspaper. Only I wish to be

understood. I will have no connection that I can help,

and no acquaintance at all, with radical scribblers and

incendiaries.

JEMIMA STANBURY.

The Close, Exeter, April 15, 186--.

Hugh Stanbury had answered this, thanking his aunt for past favours,

and explaining to her,--or striving to do so,--that he felt it to be

his duty to earn his bread, as a means of earning it had come within

his reach. He might as well have spared himself the trouble. She

simply wrote a few words across his own letter in red ink:--"The

bread of unworthiness should never be earned or eaten;" and then sent

the letter back under a blank envelope to her nephew.

She was a thorough Tory of the old school. Had Hugh taken to writing

for a newspaper that had cost sixpence, or even threepence, for its

copies, she might perhaps have forgiven him. At any rate the offence

would not have been so flagrant. And had the paper been conservative

instead of liberal, she would have had some qualms of conscience

before she gave him up. But to live by writing for a newspaper! and

for a penny newspaper!! and for a penny radical newspaper!!! It was

more than she could endure. Of what nature were the articles which he

contributed it was impossible that she should have any idea, for no

consideration would have induced her to look at a penny newspaper, or

to admit it within her doors. She herself took in the John Bull and

the Herald, and daily groaned deeply at the way in which those once

great organs of true British public feeling were becoming demoralised

and perverted. Had any reduction been made in the price of either of

them, she would at once have stopped her subscription. In the matter

of politics she had long since come to think that everything good was

over. She hated the name of Reform so much that she could not bring

herself to believe in Mr. Disraeli and his bill. For many years she

had believed in Lord Derby. She would fain believe in him still if

she could. It was the great desire of her heart to have some one in

whom she believed. In the bishop of her diocese she did believe, and

annually sent him some little comforting present from her own hand.

And in two or three of the clergymen around her she believed, finding

in them a flavour of the unascetic godliness of ancient days which

was gratifying to her palate. But in politics there was hardly a name

remaining to which she could fix her faith and declare that there

should be her guide. For awhile she thought she would cling to Mr.

Lowe; but, when she made inquiry, she found that there was no base

there of really well-formed conservative granite. The three gentlemen

who had dissevered themselves from Mr. Disraeli when Mr. Disraeli was

passing his Reform bill, were doubtless very good in their way; but

they were not big enough to fill her heart. She tried to make herself

happy with General Peel, but General Peel was after all no more than

a shade to her. But the untruth of others never made her untrue, and

she still talked of the excellence of George III. and the glories of

the subsequent reign. She had a bust of Lord Eldon, before which she

was accustomed to stand with hands closed and to weep,--or to think

that she wept.

She was a little woman, now nearly sixty years of age, with bright

grey eyes, and a strong Roman nose, and thin lips, and a sharp-cut

chin. She wore a head-gear that almost amounted to a mob-cap, and

beneath it her grey hair was always frizzled with the greatest care.

Her dress was invariably of black silk, and she had five gowns,--one

for church, one for evening parties, one for driving out, and one for

evenings at home, and one for mornings. The dress, when new, always

went to church. Nothing, she was wont to say, was too good for the

Lord's house. In the days of crinolines she had protested that she

had never worn one,--a protest, however, which was hardly true; and

now, in these later days, her hatred was especially developed in

reference to the head-dresses of young women. "Chignon" was a word

which she had never been heard to pronounce. She would talk of "those

bandboxes which the sluts wear behind their noddles;" for Miss

Stanbury allowed herself the use of much strong language. She was

very punctilious in all her habits, breakfasting ever at half-past

eight, and dining always at six. Half-past five had been her time,

till the bishop, who, on an occasion, was to be her guest, once

signified to her that such an hour cut up the day and interfered with

clerical work. Her lunch was always of bread and cheese, and they who

lunched with her either eat that,--or the bread without the cheese.

An afternoon "tea" was a thing horrible to her imagination. Tea and

buttered toast at half-past eight in the evening was the great luxury

of her life. She was as strong as a horse, and had never hitherto

known a day's illness. As a consequence of this, she did not believe

in the illness of other people,--especially not in the illness of

women. She did not like a girl who could not drink a glass of beer

with her bread and cheese in the middle of the day, and she thought

that a glass of port after dinner was good for everybody. Indeed, she

had a thorough belief in port wine, thinking that it would go far to

cure most miseries. But she could not put up with the idea that a

woman, young or old, should want the stimulus of a glass of sherry

to support her at any odd time of the day. Hot concoctions of strong

drink at Christmas she would allow to everybody, and was very strong

in recommending such comforts to ladies blessed, or about to be

blessed, with babies. She took the sacrament every month, and gave

away exactly a tenth of her income to the poor. She believed that

there was a special holiness in a tithe of a thing, and attributed

the commencement of the downfall of the Church of England to rent

charges, and the commutation of clergymen's incomes. Since Judas,

there had never been, to her thinking, a traitor so base, or an

apostate so sinful, as Colenso; and yet, of the nature of Colenso's

teaching she was as ignorant as the towers of the cathedral opposite

to her.

She believed in Exeter, thinking that there was no other provincial

town in England in which a maiden lady could live safely and

decently. London to her was an abode of sin; and though, as we have

seen, she delighted to call herself one of the county set, she did

not love the fields and lanes. And in Exeter the only place for a

lady was the Close. Southernhay and Northernhay might be very well,

and there was doubtless a respectable neighbourhood on the Heavitree

side of the town; but for the new streets, and especially for the

suburban villas, she had no endurance. She liked to deal at dear

shops; but would leave any shop, either dear or cheap, in regard to

which a printed advertisement should reach her eye. She paid all her

bills at the end of each six months, and almost took a delight in

high prices. She would rejoice that bread should be cheap, and grieve

that meat should be dear, because of the poor; but in regard to other

matters no reduction in the cost of an article ever pleased her.

She had houses as to which she was told by her agent that the rents

should be raised; but she would not raise them. She had others which

it was difficult to let without lowering the rents, but she would not

lower them. All change was to her hateful and unnecessary.

She kept three maid-servants, and a man came in every day to clean

the knives and boots. Service with her was well requited, and much

labour was never exacted. But it was not every young woman who could

live with her. A rigidity as to hours, as to religious exercises,

and as to dress, was exacted, under which many poor girls altogether

broke down; but they who could stand this rigidity came to know that

their places were very valuable. No one belonging to them need want

for aught, when once the good opinion of Miss Stanbury had been

earned. When once she believed in her servant there was nobody like

that servant. There was not a man in Exeter could clean a boot except

Giles Hickbody,--and if not in Exeter, then where else? And her own

maid Martha, who had lived with her now for twenty years, and who had

come with her to the brick house when she first inhabited it, was

such a woman that no other servant anywhere was fit to hold a candle

to her. But then Martha had great gifts,--was never ill, and really

liked having sermons read to her.

Such was Miss Stanbury, who had now discarded her nephew Hugh. She

had never been tenderly affectionate to Hugh, or she would hardly

have asked him to live in London on a hundred a year. She had never

really been kind to him since he was a boy, for although she had paid

for him, she had been almost penurious in her manner of doing so,

and had repeatedly given him to understand, that in the event of her

death not a shilling would be left to him. Indeed, as to that matter

of bequeathing her money, it was understood that it was her purpose

to let it all go back to the Burgess family. With the Burgess family

she had kept up no sustained connection, it being quite understood

that she was never to be asked to meet the only one of them now left

in Exeter. Nor was it as yet known to any one in what manner the

money was to go back, how it was to be divided, or who were to be the

recipients. But she had declared that it should go back, explaining

that she had conceived it to be a duty to let her own relations know

that they would not inherit her wealth at her death.

About a week after she had sent back poor Hugh's letter with the

endorsement on it as to unworthy bread, she summoned Martha to the

back parlour in which she was accustomed to write her letters. It was

one of the theories of her life that different rooms should be used

only for the purposes for which they were intended. She never allowed

pens and ink up into the bed-rooms, and had she ever heard that any

guest in her house was reading in bed, she would have made an instant

personal attack upon that guest, whether male or female, which would

have surprised that guest. Poor Hugh would have got on better with

her had he not been discovered once smoking in the garden. Nor would

she have writing materials in the drawing-room or dining-room. There

was a chamber behind the dining-room in which there was an inkbottle,

and if there was a letter to be written, let the writer go there

and write it. In the writing of many letters, however, she put no

confidence, and regarded penny postage as one of the strongest

evidences of the coming ruin.

"Martha," she said, "I want to speak to you. Sit down. I think I am

going to do something." Martha sat down, but did not speak a word.

There had been no question asked of her, and the time for speaking

had not come. "I am writing to Mrs. Stanbury, at Nuncombe Putney; and

what do you think I am saying to her?"

Now the question had been asked, and it was Martha's duty to reply.

"Writing to Mrs. Stanbury, ma'am?"

"Yes, to Mrs. Stanbury."

"It ain't possible for me to say, ma'am, unless it's to put Mr. Hugh

from going on with the newspapers."

"When my nephew won't be controlled by me, I shan't go elsewhere

to look for control over him; you may be sure of that, Martha. And

remember, Martha, I don't want to have his name mentioned again in

the house. You will tell them all so, if you please."

"He was a very nice gentleman, ma'am."

"Martha, I won't have it; and there's an end of it. I won't have it.

Perhaps I know what goes to the making of a nice gentleman as well as

you do."

"Mr. Hugh, ma'am,--"

"I won't have it, Martha. And when I say so, let there be an end

of it." As she said this, she got up from her chair, and shook her

head, and took a turn about the room. "If I'm not mistress here, I'm

nobody."

"Of course you're mistress here, ma'am."

"And if I don't know what's fit to be done, and what's not fit, I'm

too old to learn; and, what's more, I won't be taught. I'm not going

to have my house crammed with radical incendiary stuff, printed with

ink that stinks, on paper made out of straw. If I can't live without

penny literature, at any rate I'll die without it. Now listen to me."

"Yes, ma'am."

"I have asked Mrs. Stanbury to send one of the girls over here."

"To live, ma'am?" Martha's tone as she asked the question, showed how

deeply she felt its importance.

"Yes, Martha; to live."

"You'll never like it, ma'am."

"I don't suppose I shall."

"You'll never get on with it, ma'am; never. The young lady'll be out

of the house in a week; or if she ain't, somebody else will."

"You mean yourself."

"I'm only a servant, ma'am, and it don't signify about me."

"You're a fool."

"That's true, ma'am, I don't doubt."

"I've sent for her, and we must do the best we can. Perhaps she won't

come."

"She'll come fast enough," said Martha. "But whether she'll stay,

that's a different thing. I don't see how it's possible she's to

stay. I'm told they're feckless, idle young ladies. She'll be so

soft, ma'am, and you,--"

"Well; what of me?"

"You'll be so hard, ma'am!"

"I'm not a bit harder than you, Martha; nor yet so hard. I'll do my

duty, or at least I'll try. Now you know all about it, and you may go

away. There's the letter, and I mean to go out and post it myself."

CHAPTER VIII.

"I KNOW IT WILL DO."

Miss Stanbury carried her letter all the way to the chief post-office

in the city, having no faith whatever in those little subsidiary

receiving houses which are established in different parts of the

city. As for the iron pillar boxes which had been erected of late

years for the receipt of letters, one of which,--a most hateful thing

to her,--stood almost close to her own hall door, she had not the

faintest belief that any letter put into one of them would ever reach

its destination. She could not understand why people should not walk

with their letters to a respectable post-office instead of chucking

them into an iron stump,--as she called it,--out in the middle of the

street with nobody to look after it. Positive orders had been given

that no letter from her house should ever be put into the iron post.

Her epistle to her sister-in-law, of whom she never spoke otherwise

than as Mrs. Stanbury, was as follows:--

The Close, Exeter, 22nd April, 186--.

MY DEAR SISTER STANBURY,

Your son, Hugh, has taken to courses of which I do not

approve, and therefore I have put an end to my connection

with him. I shall be happy to entertain your daughter

Dorothy in my house if you and she approve of such a plan.

Should you agree to this, she will be welcome to receive

you or her sister,--\_not her brother\_,--in my house any

Wednesday morning between half-past nine and half-past

twelve. I will endeavour to make my house pleasant to her

and useful, and will make her an allowance of Â£25 per

annum for her clothes as long as she may remain with me. I

shall expect her to be regular at meals, to be constant in

going to church, and not to read modern novels.

I intend the arrangement to be permanent, but of course I

must retain the power of closing it if, and when, I shall

see fit. Its permanence must be contingent on my life. I

have no power of providing for any one \_after my death\_.

Yours truly,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

I hope the young lady does not have any false hair about

her.

When this note was received at Nuncombe Putney the amazement which it

occasioned was extreme. Mrs. Stanbury, the widow of the late vicar,

lived in a little morsel of a cottage on the outskirts of the

village, with her two daughters, Priscilla and Dorothy. Their whole

income, out of which it was necessary that they should pay rent for

their cottage, was less than Â£70 per annum. During the last few

months a five-pound note now and again had found its way to Nuncombe

Putney out of the coffers of the "D. R.;" but the ladies there were

most unwilling to be so relieved, thinking that their brother's

career was of infinitely more importance than their comforts or even

than their living. They were very poor, but they were accustomed

to poverty. The elder sister was older than Hugh, but Dorothy, the

younger, to whom this strange invitation was now made, was two years

younger than her brother, and was now nearly twenty-six. How they had

lived, and dressed themselves, and had continued to be called ladies

by the inhabitants of the village was, and is, and will be a mystery

to those who have had the spending of much larger incomes, but have

still been always poor. But they had lived, had gone to church every

Sunday in decent apparel, and had kept up friendly relations with the

family of the present vicar, and with one or two other neighbours.

When the letter had been read first by the mother, and then aloud,

and then by each of them separately, in the little sitting-room in

the cottage, there was silence among them,--for neither of them

desired to be the first to express an opinion. Nothing could be more

natural than the proposed arrangement, had it not been made unnatural

by a quarrel existing nearly throughout the whole life of the person

most nearly concerned. Priscilla, the elder daughter, was the one of

the family who was generally the ruler, and she at last expressed an

opinion adverse to the arrangement. "My dear, you would never be able

to bear it," said Priscilla.

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Stanbury, plaintively.

"I could try," said Dorothy.

"My dear, you don't know that woman," said Priscilla.

"Of course I don't know her," said Dorothy.

"She has always been very good to Hugh," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"I don't think she has been good to him at all," said Priscilla.

"But think what a saving it would be," said Dorothy. "And I could

send home half of what Aunt Stanbury says she would give me."

"You must not think of that," said Priscilla, "because she expects

you to be dressed."

"I should like to try," she said, before the morning was over,--"if

you and mamma don't think it would be wrong."

The conference that day ended in a written request to Aunt Stanbury

that a week might be allowed for consideration,--the letter being

written by Priscilla, but signed with her mother's name,--and with a

very long epistle to Hugh, in which each of the ladies took a part,

and in which advice and decision were demanded. It was very evident

to Hugh that his mother and Dorothy were for compliance, and that

Priscilla was for refusal. But he never doubted for a moment. "Of

course she will go," he said in his answer to Priscilla; "and she

must understand that Aunt Stanbury is a most excellent woman, as true

as the sun, thoroughly honest, with no fault but this, that she likes

her own way. Of course Dolly can go back again if she finds the house

too hard for her." Then he sent another five-pound note, observing

that Dolly's journey to Exeter would cost money, and that her

wardrobe would want some improvement.

"I'm very glad that it isn't me," said Priscilla, who, however, did

not attempt to oppose the decision of the man of the family. Dorothy

was greatly gratified by the excitement of the proposed change in

her life, and the following letter, the product of the wisdom of the

family, was written by Mrs. Stanbury:--

Nuncombe Putney, 1st May, 186--.

MY DEAR SISTER STANBURY,

We are all very thankful for the kindness of your offer,

which my daughter Dorothy will accept with feelings of

affectionate gratitude. I think you will find her docile,

good-tempered, and amiable; but a mother, of course,

speaks well of her own child. She will endeavour to comply

with your wishes in all things reasonable. She, of course,

understands that should the arrangement not suit, she will

come back home on the expression of your wish that it

should be so. And she will, of course, do the same, if she

should find that living in Exeter does not suit herself.

[This sentence was inserted at the instance of Priscilla,

after much urgent expostulation.] Dorothy will be ready

to go to you on any day you may fix after the 7th of this

month.

Believe me to remain,

Your affectionate sister-in-law,

P. STANBURY.

"She's going to come," said Miss Stanbury to Martha, holding the

letter in her hand.

"I never doubted her coming, ma'am," said Martha.

"And I mean her to stay, unless it's her own fault. She'll have the

small room up-stairs, looking out front, next to mine. And you must

go and fetch her."

"Go and fetch her, ma'am?"

"Yes. If you won't, I must."

"She ain't a child, ma'am. She's twenty-five years old, and surely

she can come to Exeter by herself, with a railroad all the way from

Lessboro'."

"There's no place a young woman is insulted in so bad as those

railway carriages, and I won't have her come by herself. If she is to

live with me, she shall begin decently at any rate."

Martha argued the matter, but was of course beaten, and on the day

fixed started early in the morning for Nuncombe Putney, and returned

in the afternoon to the Close with her charge. By the time that she

had reached the house she had in some degree reconciled herself to

the dangerous step that her mistress had taken, partly by perceiving

that in face Dorothy Stanbury was very like her brother Hugh, and

partly, perhaps, by finding that the young woman's manner to herself

was both gentle and sprightly. She knew well that gentleness alone,

without some back-bone of strength under it, would not long succeed

with Miss Stanbury. "As far as I can judge, ma'am, she's a sweet

young lady," said Martha, when she reported her arrival to her

mistress, who had retired up-stairs to her own room, in order that

she might thus hear a word of tidings from her lieutenant, before she

showed herself on the field of action.

"Sweet! I hate your sweets," said Miss Stanbury.

"Then why did you send for her, ma'am?"

"Because I was an old fool. But I must go down and receive her, I

suppose."

Then Miss Stanbury went down, almost trembling as she went. The

matter to her was one of vital importance. She was going to change

the whole tenour of her life for the sake,--as she told herself,--of

doing her duty by a relative whom she did not even know. But we may

fairly suppose that there had in truth been a feeling beyond that,

which taught her to desire to have some one near her to whom she

might not only do her duty as guardian, but whom she might also love.

She had tried this with her nephew; but her nephew had been too

strong for her, too far from her, too unlike to herself. When he came

to see her he had smoked a short pipe,--which had been shocking to

her,--and he had spoken of Reform, and Trades' Unions, and meetings

in the parks, as though they had not been Devil's ordinances. And he

was very shy of going to church,--utterly refusing to be taken there

twice on the same Sunday. And he had told his aunt that owing to a

peculiar and unfortunate weakness in his constitution he could not

listen to the reading of sermons. And then she was almost certain

that he had once kissed one of the maids! She had found it impossible

to manage him in any way; and when he positively declared himself as

permanently devoted to the degrading iniquities of penny newspapers,

she had thought it best to cast him off altogether. Now, thus late in

life, she was going to make another venture, to try an altogether new

mode of living,--in order, as she said to herself, that she might be

of some use to somebody,--but, no doubt, with a further unexpressed

hope in her bosom, that the solitude of her life might be relieved by

the companionship of some one whom she might love. She had arrayed

herself in a clean cap and her evening gown, and she went down-stairs

looking sternly, with a fully-developed idea that she must initiate

her new duties by assuming a mastery at once. But inwardly she

trembled, and was intensely anxious as to the first appearance of

her niece. Of course there would be a little morsel of a bonnet.

She hated those vile patches,--dirty flat daubs of millinery as

she called them; but they had become too general for her to refuse

admittance for such a thing within her doors. But a chignon, a

bandbox behind the noddle,--she would not endure. And then there were

other details of feminine gear, which shall not be specified, as to

which she was painfully anxious,--almost forgetting in her anxiety

that the dress of this young woman whom she was about to see must

have ever been regulated by the closest possible economy.

The first thing she saw on entering the room was a dark straw hat,

a straw hat with a strong penthouse flap to it, and her heart was

immediately softened.

"My dear," she said, "I am glad to see you."

Dorothy, who, on her part, was trembling also, whose position was one

to justify most intense anxiety, murmured some reply.

"Take off your hat," said the aunt, "and let me give you a kiss."

The hat was taken off and the kiss was given. There was certainly no

chignon there. Dorothy Stanbury was light haired, with almost flaxen

ringlets, worn after the old-fashioned way which we used to think so

pretty when we were young. She had very soft grey eyes, which ever

seemed to beseech you to do something when they looked at you, and

her mouth was a beseeching mouth. There are women who, even amidst

their strongest efforts at giving assistance to others, always look

as though they were asking aid themselves, and such a one was Dorothy

Stanbury. Her complexion was pale, but there was always present in

it a tint of pink running here and there, changing with every word

she spoke, changing indeed with every pulse of her heart. Nothing

ever was softer than her cheek; but her hands were thin and hard,

and almost fibrous with the working of the thread upon them. She

was rather tall than otherwise, but that extreme look of feminine

dependence which always accompanied her, took away something even

from the appearance of her height.

"These are all real, at any rate," said her aunt, taking hold of the

curls, "and won't be hurt by a little cold water."

Dorothy smiled but said nothing, and was then taken up to her

bed-room. Indeed, when the aunt and niece sat down to dinner together

Dorothy had hardly spoken. But Miss Stanbury had spoken, and things

upon the whole had gone very well.

"I hope you like roast chicken, my dear?" said Miss Stanbury.

"Oh, thank you."

"And bread sauce? Jane, I do hope the bread sauce is hot."

If the reader thinks that Miss Stanbury was indifferent to

considerations of the table, the reader is altogether ignorant of

Miss Stanbury's character. When Miss Stanbury gave her niece the

liver-wing, and picked out from the attendant sausages one that had

been well browned and properly broken in the frying, she meant to do

a real kindness.

"And now, my dear, there are mashed potatoes and bread sauce. As for

green vegetables, I don't know what has become of them. They tell me

I may have green peas from France at a shilling a quart; but if I

can't have English green peas, I won't have any."

Miss Stanbury was standing up as she said this,--as she always did on

such occasions, liking to have a full mastery over the dish.

"I hope you like it, my dear?"

"Everything is so very nice."

"That's right. I like to see a young woman with an appetite. Remember

that God sends the good things for us to eat; and as long as we

don't take more than our share, and give away something to those who

haven't a fair share of their own, I for one think it quite right to

enjoy my victuals. Jane, this bread sauce isn't hot. It never is hot.

Don't tell me; I know what hot is!"

Dorothy thought that her aunt was very angry; but Jane knew Miss

Stanbury better, and bore the scolding without shaking in her shoes.

"And now, my dear, you must take a glass of port wine. It will do you

good after your journey."

Dorothy attempted to explain that she never did drink any wine, but

her aunt talked down her scruples at once.

"One glass of port wine never did anybody any harm, and as there is

port wine, it must be intended that somebody should drink it."

Miss Stanbury, as she sipped hers out very slowly, seemed to enjoy it

much. Although May had come, there was a fire in the grate, and she

sat with her toes on the fender, and her silk dress folded up above

her knees. She sat quite silent in this position for a quarter of an

hour, every now and then raising her glass to her lips. Dorothy sat

silent also. To her, in the newness of her condition, speech was

impossible.

"I think it will do," said Miss Stanbury at last.

As Dorothy had no idea what would do, she could make no reply to

this.

"I'm sure it will do," said Miss Stanbury, after another short

interval. "You're as like my poor sister as two eggs. You don't have

headaches, do you?"

Dorothy said that she was not ordinarily affected in that way.

"When girls have headaches it comes from tight-lacing, and not

walking enough, and carrying all manner of nasty smells about with

them. I know what headaches mean. How is a woman not to have a

headache, when she carries a thing on the back of her poll as big

as a gardener's wheel-barrow? Come, it's a fine evening, and we'll

go out and look at the towers. You've never even seen them yet, I

suppose?"

So they went out, and finding the verger at the Cathedral door, he

being a great friend of Miss Stanbury's, they walked up and down the

aisles, and Dorothy was instructed as to what would be expected from

her in regard to the outward forms of religion. She was to go to the

Cathedral service on the morning of every week-day, and on Sundays in

the afternoon. On Sunday mornings she was to attend the little church

of St. Margaret. On Sunday evenings it was the practice of Miss

Stanbury to read a sermon in the dining-room to all of whom her

household consisted. Did Dorothy like daily services? Dorothy, who

was more patient than her brother, and whose life had been much less

energetic, said that she had no objection to going to church every

day when there was not too much to do.

"There never need be too much to do to attend the Lord's house," said

Miss Stanbury, somewhat angrily.

"Only if you've got to make the beds," said Dorothy.

"My dear, I beg your pardon," said Miss Stanbury. "I beg your pardon,

heartily. I'm a thoughtless old woman, I know. Never mind. Now, we'll

go in."

Later in the evening, when she gave her niece a candlestick to go to

bed, she repeated what she had said before.

"It'll do very well, my dear. I'm sure it'll do. But if you read in

bed either night or morning, I'll never forgive you."

This last caution was uttered with so much energy, that Dorothy gave

a little jump as she promised obedience.

CHAPTER IX.

SHEWING HOW THE QUARREL PROGRESSED AGAIN.

On one Sunday morning, when the month of May was nearly over, Hugh

Stanbury met Colonel Osborne in Curzon Street, not many yards from

Trevelyan's door. Colonel Osborne had just come from the house, and

Stanbury was going to it. Hugh had not spoken to Osborne since the

day, now a fortnight since, on which both of them had witnessed

the scene in the park; but on that occasion they had been left

together, and it had been impossible for them not to say a few words

about their mutual friends. Osborne had expressed his sorrow that

there should be any misunderstanding, and had called Trevelyan a

"confounded fool." Stanbury had suggested that there was something in

it which they two probably did not understand, and that matters would

be sure to come all right. "The truth is Trevelyan bullies her," said

Osborne; "and if he goes on with that he'll be sure to get the worst

of it." Now,--on this present occasion,--Stanbury asked whether he

would find the ladies at home. "Yes, they are both there," said

Osborne. "Trevelyan has just gone out in a huff. She'll never be able

to go on living with him. Anybody can see that with half an eye."

Then he had passed on, and Hugh Stanbury knocked at the door.

He was shown up into the drawing-room, and found both the sisters

there; but he could see that Mrs. Trevelyan had been in tears. The

avowed purpose of his visit,--that is, the purpose which he had

avowed to himself,--was to talk about his sister Dorothy. He had told

Miss Rowley, while walking in the park with her, how Dorothy had been

invited over to Exeter by her aunt, and how he had counselled his

sister to accept the invitation. Nora had expressed herself very

interested as to Dorothy's fate, and had said how much she wished

that she knew Dorothy. We all understand how sweet it is, when two

such persons as Hugh Stanbury and Nora Rowley cannot speak of their

love for each other, to say these tender things in regard to some

one else. Nora had been quite anxious to know how Dorothy had been

received by that old conservative warrior, as Hugh Stanbury had

called his aunt, and Hugh had now come to Curzon Street with a letter

from Dorothy in his pocket. But when he saw that there had been some

cause for trouble, he hardly knew how to introduce his subject.

"Trevelyan is not at home?" he asked.

"No," said Emily, with her face turned away. "He went out and left us

a quarter of an hour since. Did you meet Colonel Osborne?"

"I was speaking to him in the street not a moment since." As he

answered he could see that Nora was making some sign to her sister.

Nora was most anxious that Emily should not speak of what had just

occurred, but her signs were all thrown away. "Somebody must tell

him," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "and I don't know who can do so better

than so old a friend as Mr. Stanbury."

"Tell what, and to whom?" he asked.

"No, no, no," said Nora.

"Then I must tell him myself," said she, "that is all. As for

standing this kind of life, it is out of the question. I should

either destroy myself or go mad."

"If I could do any good I should be so happy," said Stanbury.

"Nobody can do any good between a man and his wife," said Nora.

Then Mrs. Trevelyan began to tell her story, putting aside, with an

impatient motion of her hands, the efforts which her sister made to

stop her. She was very angry, and as she told it, standing up, all

trace of sobbing soon disappeared from her voice. "The fact is," she

said, "he does not know his own mind, or what to fear or what not to

fear. He told me that I was never to see Colonel Osborne again."

"What is the use, Emily, of your repeating that to Mr. Stanbury?"

"Why should I not repeat it? Colonel Osborne is papa's oldest friend,

and mine too. He is a man I like very much,--who is a real friend to

me. As he is old enough to be my father, one would have thought that

my husband could have found no objection."

"I don't know much about his age," said Stanbury.

"It does make a difference. It must make a difference. I should not

think of becoming so intimate with a younger man. But, however, when

my husband told me that I was to see him no more,--though the insult

nearly killed me, I determined to obey him. An order was given that

Colonel Osborne should not be admitted. You may imagine how painful

it was; but it was given, and I was prepared to bear it."

"But he had been lunching with you on that Sunday."

"Yes; that is just it. As soon as it was given Louis would rescind

it, because he was ashamed of what he had done. He was so jealous

that he did not want me to see the man; and yet he was so afraid that

it should be known that he ordered me to see him. He ordered him into

the house at last, and I,--I went away up-stairs."

"That was on the Sunday that we met you in the park?" asked Stanbury.

"What is the use of going back to all that?" said Nora.

"Then I met him by chance in the park," continued Mrs. Trevelyan,

"and because he said a word which I knew would anger my husband, I

left him abruptly. Since that my husband has begged that things might

go on as they were before. He could not bear that Colonel Osborne

himself should think that he was jealous. Well; I gave way, and the

man has been here as before. And now there has been a scene which has

been disgraceful to us all. I cannot stand it, and I won't. If he

does not behave himself with more manliness,--I will leave him."

"But what can I do?"

"Nothing, Mr. Stanbury," said Nora.

"Yes; you can do this. You can go to him from me, and can tell him

that I have chosen you as a messenger because you are his friend.

You can tell him that I am willing to obey him in anything. If he

chooses, I will consent that Colonel Osborne shall be asked never

to come into my presence again. It will be very absurd; but if he

chooses, I will consent. Or I will let things go on as they are, and

continue to receive my father's old friend when he comes. But if I

do, I will not put up with an imputation on my conduct because he

does not like the way in which the gentleman thinks fit to address

me. I take upon myself to say that if any man alive spoke to me as

he ought not to speak, I should know how to resent it myself. But I

cannot fly into a passion with an old gentleman for calling me by my

Christian name, when he has done so habitually for years."

From all this it will appear that the great godsend of a rich

marriage, with all manner of attendant comforts, which had come in

the way of the Rowley family as they were living at the Mandarins,

had not turned out to be an unmixed blessing. In the matter of the

quarrel, as it had hitherto progressed, the husband had perhaps been

more in the wrong than his wife; but the wife, in spite of all her

promises of perfect obedience, had proved herself to be a woman very

hard to manage. Had she been earnest in her desire to please her lord

and master in this matter of Colonel Osborne's visits,--to please

him even after he had so vacillated in his own behests,--she might

probably have so received the man as to have quelled all feeling of

jealousy in her husband's bosom. But instead of doing so she had

told herself that as she was innocent, and as her innocence had been

acknowledged, and as she had been specially instructed to receive

this man whom she had before been specially instructed not to

receive, she would now fall back exactly into her old manner with

him. She had told Colonel Osborne never to allude to that meeting

in the park, and to ask no creature as to what had occasioned her

conduct on that Sunday; thus having a mystery with him, which of

course he understood as well as she did. And then she had again taken

to writing notes to him and receiving notes from him,--none of which

she showed to her husband. She was more intimate with him than ever,

and yet she hardly ever mentioned his name to her husband. Trevelyan,

acknowledging to himself that he had done no good by his former

interference, feeling that he had put himself in the wrong on that

occasion, and that his wife had got the better of him, had borne with

all this, with soreness and a moody savageness of general conduct,

but still without further words of anger with reference to the man

himself. But now, on this Sunday, when his wife had been closeted

with Colonel Osborne in the back drawing-room, leaving him with his

sister-in-law, his temper had become too hot for him, and he had

suddenly left the house, declaring that he would not walk with the

two women on that day. "Why not, Louis?" his wife had said, coming up

to him. "Never mind why not, but I shall not," he had answered; and

then he left the room.

"What is the matter with him?" Colonel Osborne had asked.

"It is impossible to say what is the matter with him," Mrs. Trevelyan

had replied. After that she had at once gone up-stairs to her child,

telling herself that she was doing all that the strictest propriety

could require in leaving the man's society as soon as her husband

was gone. Then there was an awkward minute or two between Nora and

Colonel Osborne, and he took his leave.

Stanbury at last promised that he would see Trevelyan, repeating,

however, very frequently that often-used assertion, that no task

is so hopeless as that of interfering between a man and his wife.

Nevertheless he promised, and undertook to look for Trevelyan at

the Acrobats on that afternoon. At last he got a moment in which

to produce the letter from his sister, and was able to turn the

conversation for a few minutes to his own affairs. Dorothy's letter

was read and discussed by both the ladies with much zeal. "It is

quite a strange world to me," said Dorothy, "but I am beginning to

find myself more at my ease than I was at first. Aunt Stanbury is

very good-natured, and when I know what she wants, I think I shall be

able to please her. What you said of her disposition is not so bad to

me, as of course a girl in my position does not expect to have her

own way."

"Why shouldn't she have her share of her own way as well as anybody

else?" said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Poor Dorothy would never want to have her own way," said Hugh.

"She ought to want it," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"She has spirit enough to turn if she's trodden on," said Hugh.

"That's more than what most women have," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

Then he went on with the letter. "She is very generous, and has given

me Â£6 5\_s.\_ in advance of my allowance. When I said I would send part

of it home to mamma, she seemed to be angry, and said that she wanted

me always to look nice about my clothes. She told me afterwards to do

as I pleased, and that I might try my own way for the first quarter.

So I was frightened, and only sent thirty shillings. We went out

the other evening to drink tea with Mrs. MacHugh, an old lady whose

husband was once dean. I had to go, and it was all very nice. There

were a great many clergymen there, but many of them were young men."

"Poor Dorothy," exclaimed Nora. "One of them was the minor canon who

chants the service every morning. He is a bachelor--" "Then there is

a hope for her," said Nora--"and he always talks a little as though

he were singing the Litany." "That's very bad," said Nora; "fancy

having a husband to sing the Litany to you always." "Better that,

perhaps, than having him always singing something else," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

It was decided between them that Dorothy's state might on the whole

be considered as flourishing, but that Hugh was bound as a brother

to go down to Exeter and look after her. He explained, however, that

he was expressly debarred from calling on his sister, even between

the hours of half-past nine and half-past twelve on Wednesday

mornings, and that he could not see her at all unless he did so

surreptitiously.

"If I were you I would see my sister in spite of all the old viragos

in Exeter," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "I have no idea of anybody taking so

much upon themselves."

"You must remember, Mrs. Trevelyan, that she has taken upon herself

much also in the way of kindness, in doing what perhaps I ought to

call charity. I wonder what I should have been doing now if it were

not for my Aunt Stanbury."

He took his leave, and went at once from Curzon Street to Trevelyan's

club, and found that Trevelyan had not been there as yet. In another

hour he called again, and was about to give it up, when he met the

man whom he was seeking on the steps.

"I was looking for you," he said.

"Well, here I am."

It was impossible not to see in the look of Trevelyan's face, and not

to hear in the tone of his voice, that he was, at the moment, in an

angry and unhappy frame of mind. He did not move as though he were

willing to accompany his friend, and seemed almost to know beforehand

that the approaching interview was to be an unpleasant one.

"I want to speak to you, and perhaps you wouldn't mind taking a turn

with me," said Stanbury.

But Trevelyan objected to this, and led the way into the club

waiting-room. A club waiting-room is always a gloomy, unpromising

place for a confidential conversation, and so Stanbury felt it to be

on the present occasion. But he had no alternative. There they were

together, and he must do as he had promised. Trevelyan kept on his

hat and did not sit down, and looked very gloomy. Stanbury having

to commence without any assistance from outward auxiliaries, almost

forgot what it was that he had promised to do.

"I have just come from Curzon Street," he said.

"Well!"

"At least I was there about two hours ago."

"It doesn't matter, I suppose, whether it was two hours or two

minutes," said Trevelyan.

"Not in the least. The fact is this; I happened to come upon the two

girls there, when they were very unhappy, and your wife asked me to

come and say a word or two to you."

"Was Colonel Osborne there?"

"No; I had met him in the street a minute or two before."

"Well, now; look here, Stanbury. If you'll take my advice, you'll

keep your hands out of this. It is not but that I regard you as being

as good a friend as I have in the world; but, to own the truth, I

cannot put up with interference between myself and my wife."

"Of course you understand that I only come as a messenger."

[Illustration: "I only come as a messenger."]

"You had better not be a messenger in such a cause. If she has

anything to say she can say it to myself."

"Am I to understand that you will not listen to me?"

"I had rather not."

"I think you are wrong," said Stanbury.

"In that matter you must allow me to judge for myself. I can easily

understand that a young woman like her, especially with her sister to

back her, should induce such a one as you to take her part."

"I am taking nobody's part. You wrong your wife, and you especially

wrong Miss Rowley."

"If you please, Stanbury, we will say nothing more about it." This

Trevelyan said holding the door of the room half open in his hand, so

that the other was obliged to pass out through it.

"Good evening," said Stanbury, with much anger.

"Good evening," said Trevelyan, with an assumption of indifference.

Stanbury went away in absolute wrath, though the trouble which he had

had in the interview was much less than he had anticipated, and the

result quite as favourable. He had known that no good would come of

his visit. And yet he was now full of anger against Trevelyan, and

had become a partisan in the matter,--which was exactly that which he

had resolutely determined that he would not become. "I believe that

no woman on earth could live with him," he said to himself as he

walked away. "It was always the same with him,--a desire for mastery,

which he did not know how to use when he had obtained it. If it were

Nora, instead of the other sister, he would break her sweet heart

within a month."

Trevelyan dined at his club, and hardly spoke a word to any one

during the evening. At about eleven he started to walk home, but

went by no means straight thither, taking a long turn through St.

James's Park, and by Pimlico. It was necessary that he should make

up his mind as to what he would do. He had sternly refused the

interference of a friend, and he must be prepared to act on his own

responsibility. He knew well that he could not begin again with his

wife on the next day as though nothing had happened. Stanbury's visit

to him, if it had done nothing else, had made this impossible. He

determined that he would not go to her room to-night, but would see

her as early as possible in the morning;--and would then talk to her

with all the wisdom of which he was master.

How many husbands have come to the same resolution; and how few of

them have found the words of wisdom to be efficacious!

CHAPTER X.

HARD WORDS.

[Illustration]

It is to be feared that men in general do not regret as they should

do any temporary ill-feeling, or irritating jealousy between husbands

and wives, of which they themselves have been the cause. The author

is not speaking now of actual love-makings, of intrigues and devilish

villany, either perpetrated or imagined; but rather of those passing

gusts of short-lived and unfounded suspicion to which, as to other

accidents, very well-regulated families may occasionally be liable.

When such suspicion rises in the bosom of a wife, some woman

intervening or being believed to intervene between her and the man

who is her own, that woman who has intervened or been supposed to

intervene, will either glory in her position or bewail it bitterly,

according to the circumstances of the case. We will charitably

suppose that, in a great majority of such instances, she will bewail

it. But when such painful jealous doubts annoy the husband, the

man who is in the way will almost always feel himself justified in

extracting a slightly pleasurable sensation from the transaction.

He will say to himself probably, unconsciously indeed, and with

no formed words, that the husband is an ass, an ass if he be in

a twitter either for that which he has kept or for that which he

has been unable to keep, that the lady has shewn a good deal of

appreciation, and that he himself is--is--is--quite a Captain bold

of Halifax. All the while he will not have the slightest intention

of wronging the husband's honour, and will have received no greater

favour from the intimacy accorded to him than the privilege of

running on one day to Marshall and Snellgrove's, the haberdashers,

and on another to Handcocks', the jewellers. If he be allowed to buy

a present or two, or to pay a few shillings here or there, he has

achieved much. Terrible things now and again do occur, even here in

England; but women, with us, are slow to burn their household gods.

It happens, however, occasionally, as we are all aware, that the

outward garments of a domestic deity will be a little scorched; and

when this occurs, the man who is the interloper, will generally find

a gentle consolation in his position, let its interest be ever so

flaccid and unreal, and its troubles in running about, and the like,

ever so considerable and time-destructive.

It was so certainly with Colonel Osborne when he became aware that

his intimacy with Mrs. Trevelyan had caused her husband uneasiness.

He was not especially a vicious man, and had now, as we know, reached

a time of life when such vice as that in question might be supposed

to have lost its charm for him. A gentleman over fifty, popular

in London, with a seat in Parliament, fond of good dinners, and

possessed of everything which the world has to give, could hardly

have wished to run away with his neighbour's wife, or to have

destroyed the happiness of his old friend's daughter. Such wickedness

had never come into his head; but he had a certain pleasure in being

the confidential friend of a very pretty woman; and when he heard

that that pretty woman's husband was jealous, the pleasure was

enhanced rather than otherwise. On that Sunday, as he had left the

house in Curzon Street, he had told Stanbury that Trevelyan had just

gone off in a huff, which was true enough, and he had walked from

thence down Clarges Street, and across Piccadilly to St. James's

Street, with a jauntier step than usual, because he was aware that he

himself had been the occasion of that trouble. This was very wrong;

but there is reason to believe that many such men as Colonel Osborne,

who are bachelors at fifty, are equally malicious.

He thought a good deal about it on that evening, and was still

thinking about it on the following morning. He had promised to go up

to Curzon Street on the Monday,--really on some most trivial mission,

on a matter of business which no man could have taken in hand whose

time was of the slightest value to himself or any one else. But now

that mission assumed an importance in his eyes, and seemed to require

either a special observance or a special excuse. There was no real

reason why he should not have stayed away from Curzon Street for the

next fortnight; and had he done so he need have made no excuse to

Mrs. Trevelyan when he met her. But the opportunity for a little

excitement was not to be missed, and instead of going he wrote to her

the following note:--

Albany, Monday.

DEAR EMILY,

What was it all about yesterday? I was to have come up

with the words of that opera, but perhaps it will be

better to send it. If it be not wicked, do tell me whether

I am to consider myself as a banished man. I thought that

our little meetings were so innocent,--and so pleasant!

The green-eyed monster is of all monsters the most

monstrous,--and the most unreasonable. Pray let me have a

line, if it be not forbidden.

Yours always heartily,

F. O.

Putting aside all joking, I beg you to remember that I

consider myself always entitled to be regarded by you as

your most sincere friend.

When this was brought to Mrs. Trevelyan, about twelve o'clock in

the day, she had already undergone the infliction of those words

of wisdom which her husband had prepared for her, and which were

threatened at the close of the last chapter. Her husband had come

up to her while she was yet in her bed-room, and had striven hard

to prevail against her. But his success had been very doubtful. In

regard to the number of words, Mrs. Trevelyan certainly had had

the best of it. As far as any understanding, one of another, was

concerned, the conversation had been useless. She believed herself to

be injured and aggrieved, and would continue so to assert, let him

implore her to listen to him as loudly as he might. "Yes;--I will

listen, and I will obey you," she had said, "but I will not endure

such insults without telling you that I feel them." Then he had left

her, fully conscious that he had failed, and went forth out of his

house into the City, to his club, to wander about the streets, not

knowing what he had best do to bring back that state of tranquillity

at home which he felt to be so desirable.

Mrs. Trevelyan was alone when Colonel Osborne's note was brought to

her, and was at that moment struggling with herself in anger against

her husband. If he laid any command upon her, she would execute it;

but she would never cease to tell him that he had ill-used her. She

would din it into his ears, let him come to her as often as he might

with his wise words. Wise words! What was the use of wise words when

a man was such a fool in nature? And as for Colonel Osborne,--she

would see him if he came to her three times a day, unless her husband

gave some clearly intelligible order to the contrary. She was

fortifying her mind with this resolution when Colonel Osborne's

letter was brought to her. She asked whether any servant was waiting

for an answer. No,--the servant, who had left it, had gone at once.

She read the note, and sat working, with it before her, for a quarter

of an hour; and then walked over to her desk and answered it.

MY DEAR COLONEL OSBORNE,

It will be best to say nothing whatever about the

occurrence of yesterday; and if possible, not to

think of it. As far as I am concerned, I wish for no

change;--except that people should be more reasonable.

You can call of course whenever you please; and I am very

grateful for your expression of friendship.

Yours most sincerely,

EMILY TREVELYAN.

Thanks for the words of the opera.

When she had written this, being determined that all should be open

and above board, she put a penny stamp on the envelope, and desired

that the letter should be posted. But she destroyed that which she

had received from Colonel Osborne. In all things she would act as she

would have done if her husband had not been so foolish, and there

could have been no reason why she should have kept so unimportant a

communication.

In the course of the day Trevelyan passed through the hall to the

room which he himself was accustomed to occupy behind the parlour,

and as he did so saw the note lying ready to be posted, took it up,

and read the address. He held it for a moment in his hand, then

replaced it on the hall table, and passed on. When he reached his own

table he sat down hurriedly, and took up in his hand some Review that

was lying ready for him to read. But he was quite unable to fix his

mind upon the words before him. He had spoken to his wife on that

morning in the strongest language he could use as to the unseemliness

of her intimacy with Colonel Osborne; and then, the first thing she

had done when his back was turned was to write to this very Colonel

Osborne, and tell him, no doubt, what had occurred between her and

her husband. He sat thinking of it all for many minutes. He would

probably have declared himself that he had thought of it for an hour

as he sat there. Then he got up, went up-stairs and walked slowly

into the drawing-room. There he found his wife sitting with her

sister. "Nora," he said, "I want to speak to Emily. Will you forgive

me, if I ask you to leave us for a few minutes?" Nora, with an

anxious look at Emily, got up and left the room.

"Why do you send her away?" said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Because I wish to be alone with you for a few minutes. Since what I

said to you this morning, you have written to Colonel Osborne."

"Yes;--I have. I do not know how you have found it out; but I suppose

you keep a watch on me."

"I keep no watch on you. As I came into the house, I saw your letter

lying in the hall."

"Very well. You could have read it if you pleased."

"Emily, this matter is becoming very serious, and I strongly advise

you to be on your guard in what you say. I will bear much for you,

and much for our boy; but I will not bear to have my name made a

reproach."

"Sir, if you think your name is shamed by me, we had better part,"

said Mrs. Trevelyan, rising from her chair, and confronting him with

a look before which his own almost quailed.

"It may be that we had better part," he said, slowly. "But in the

first place I wish you to tell me what were the contents of that

letter."

"If it was there when you came in, no doubt it is there still. Go and

look at it."

"That is no answer to me. I have desired you to tell me what are its

contents."

"I shall not tell you. I will not demean myself by repeating anything

so insignificant in my own justification. If you suspect me of

writing what I should not write, you will suspect me also of lying to

conceal it."

"Have you heard from Colonel Osborne this morning?"

"I have."

"And where is his letter?"

"I have destroyed it."

Again he paused, trying to think what he had better do, trying to be

calm. And she stood still opposite to him, confronting him with the

scorn of her bright angry eyes. Of course, he was not calm. He was

the very reverse of calm. "And you refuse to tell me what you wrote,"

he said.

"The letter is there," she answered, pointing away towards the door.

"If you want to play the spy, go and look at it for yourself."

"Do you call me a spy?"

"And what have you called me? Because you are a husband, is the

privilege of vituperation to be all on your side?"

"It is impossible that I should put up with this," he said;--"quite

impossible. This would kill me. Anything is better than this. My

present orders to you are not to see Colonel Osborne, not to write

to him or have any communication with him, and to put under cover to

me, unopened, any letter that may come from him. I shall expect your

implicit obedience to these orders."

"Well;--go on."

"Have I your promise?"

"No;--no. You have no promise. I will make no promise exacted from me

in so disgraceful a manner."

"You refuse to obey me?"

"I will refuse nothing, and will promise nothing."

"Then we must part;--that is all. I will take care that you shall

hear from me before to-morrow morning."

So saying, he left the room, and, passing through the hall, saw that

the letter had been taken away.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY MILBOROUGH AS AMBASSADOR.

"Of course, I know you are right," said Nora to her sister;--"right

as far as Colonel Osborne is concerned; but nevertheless you ought to

give way."

"And be trampled upon?" said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Yes; and be trampled upon, if he should trample on you;--which,

however, he is the last man in the world to do."

"And to endure any insult and any names? You yourself--you would be a

Griselda, I suppose."

"I don't want to talk about myself," said Nora, "nor about Griselda.

But I know that, however unreasonable it may seem, you had better

give way to him now and tell him what there was in the note to

Colonel Osborne."

"Never! He has ordered me not to see him or to write to him, or to

open his letters,--having, mind you, ordered just the reverse a day

or two before; and I will obey him. Absurd as it is, I will obey him.

But as for submitting to him, and letting him suppose that I think

he is right;--never! I should be lying to him then, and I will never

lie to him. He has said that we must part, and I suppose it will be

better so. How can a woman live with a man that suspects her? He

cannot take my baby from me."

There were many such conversations as the above between the two

sisters before Mrs. Trevelyan received from her husband the

communication with which she had been threatened. And Nora, acting on

her own judgment in the matter, made an attempt to see Mr. Trevelyan,

writing to him a pretty little note, and beseeching him to be kind to

her. But he declined to see her, and the two women sat at home, with

the baby between them, holding such pleasant conversations as that

above narrated. When such tempests occur in a family, a woman will

generally suffer the least during the thick of the tempest. While

the hurricane is at the fiercest, she will be sustained by the most

thorough conviction that the right is on her side, that she is

aggrieved, that there is nothing for her to acknowledge, and no

position that she need surrender. Whereas her husband will desire a

compromise, even amidst the violence of the storm. But afterwards,

when the wind has lulled, but while the heavens around are still all

black and murky, then the woman's sufferings begin. When passion

gives way to thought and memory, she feels the loneliness of her

position,--the loneliness, and the possible degradation. It is all

very well for a man to talk about his name and his honour; but it is

the woman's honour and the woman's name that are, in truth, placed in

jeopardy. Let the woman do what she will, the man can, in truth, show

his face in the world;--and, after awhile, does show his face. But

the woman may be compelled to veil hers, either by her own fault, or

by his. Mrs. Trevelyan was now told that she was to be separated from

her husband, and she did not, at any rate, believe that she had done

any harm. But, if such separation did come, where could she live,

what could she do, what position in the world would she possess?

Would not her face be, in truth, veiled as effectually as though she

had disgraced herself and her husband?

And then there was that terrible question about the child. Mrs.

Trevelyan had said a dozen times to her sister that her husband could

not take the boy away from her. Nora, however, had never assented to

this, partly from a conviction of her own ignorance, not knowing what

might be the power of a husband in such a matter, and partly thinking

that any argument would be good and fair by which she could induce

her sister to avoid a catastrophe so terrible as that which was now

threatened.

"I suppose he could take him, if he chose," she said at last.

"I don't believe he is wicked like that," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "He

would not wish to kill me."

"But he will say that he loves baby as well as you do."

"He will never take my child from me. He could never be so bad as

that."

"And you will never be so bad as to leave him," said Nora after a

pause. "I will not believe that it can come to that. You know that he

is good at heart,--that nobody on earth loves you as he does."

So they went on for two days, and on the evening of the second day

there came a letter from Trevelyan to his wife. They had neither of

them seen him, although he had been in and out of the house. And

on the afternoon of the Sunday a new grievance, a very terrible

grievance, was added to those which Mrs. Trevelyan was made to bear.

Her husband had told one of the servants in the house that Colonel

Osborne was not to be admitted. And the servant to whom he had given

this order was the--cook. There is no reason why a cook should be

less trustworthy in such a matter than any other servant; and in

Mr. Trevelyan's household there was a reason why she should be more

so,--as she, and she alone, was what we generally call an old family

domestic. She had lived with her master's mother, and had known her

master when he was a boy. Looking about him, therefore, for some one

in his house to whom he could speak,--feeling that he was bound to

convey the order through some medium,--he called to him the ancient

cook, and imparted to her so much of his trouble as was necessary

to make the order intelligible. This he did with various ill-worded

assurances to Mrs. Prodgers that there really was nothing amiss. But

when Mrs. Trevelyan heard what had been done,--which she did from

Mrs. Prodgers herself, Mrs. Prodgers having been desired by her

master to make the communication,--she declared to her sister that

everything was now over. She could never again live with a husband

who had disgraced his wife by desiring her own cook to keep a guard

upon her. Had the footman been instructed not to admit Colonel

Osborne, there would have been in such instruction some apparent

adherence to the recognised usages of society. If you do not desire

either your friend or your enemy to be received into your house, you

communicate your desire to the person who has charge of the door. But

the cook!

"And now, Nora, if it were you, do you mean to say that you would

remain with him?" asked Mrs. Trevelyan.

Nora simply replied that anything under any circumstances would be

better than a separation.

On the morning of the third day there came the following letter:--

Wednesday, June 1, 12 midnight.

DEAREST EMILY,

You will readily believe me when I say that I never in my

life was so wretched as I have been during the last two

days. That you and I should be in the same house together

and not able to speak to each other is in itself a misery,

but this is terribly enhanced by the dread lest this state

of things should be made to continue.

I want you to understand that I do not in the least

suspect you of having as yet done anything wrong,--or

having even said anything injurious either to my position

as your husband, or to your position as my wife. But I

cannot but perceive that you are allowing yourself to be

entrapped into an intimacy with Colonel Osborne which if

it be not checked, will be destructive to my happiness and

your own. After what had passed before, you cannot have

thought it right to receive letters from him which I was

not to see, or to write letters to him of which I was

not to know the contents. It must be manifest to you that

such conduct on your part is wrong as judged by any of

the rules by which a wife's conduct can be measured.

And yet you have refused even to say that this shall be

discontinued! I need hardly explain to you that if you

persist in this refusal you and I cannot continue to live

together as man and wife. All my hopes and prospects in

life will be blighted by such a separation. I have not as

yet been able to think what I should do in such wretched

circumstances. And for you, as also for Nora, such a

catastrophe would be most lamentable. Do, therefore, think

of it well, and write me such a letter as may bring me

back to your side.

There is only one friend in the world to whom I could

endure to talk of this great grief, and I have been to

her and told her everything. You will know that I mean

Lady Milborough. After much difficult conversation I

have persuaded her to see you, and she will call in

Curzon Street to-morrow about twelve. There can be no

kinder-hearted, or more gentle woman in the world than

Lady Milborough; nor did any one ever have a warmer friend

than both you and I have in her. Let me implore you then

to listen to her, and be guided by her advice.

Pray believe, dearest Emily, that I am now, as ever, your

most affectionate husband, and that I have no wish so

strong as that we should not be compelled to part.

LOUIS TREVELYAN.

This epistle was, in many respects, a very injudicious composition.

Trevelyan should have trusted either to the eloquence of his own

written words, or to that of the ambassador whom he was about to

despatch; but by sending both he weakened both. And then there were

certain words in the letter which were odious to Mrs. Trevelyan, and

must have been odious to any young wife. He had said that he did not

"as yet" suspect her of having done anything wrong. And then, when

he endeavoured to explain to her that a separation would be very

injurious to herself, he had coupled her sister with her, thus

seeming to imply that the injury to be avoided was of a material

kind. She had better do what he told her, as, otherwise, she and her

sister would not have a roof over their head! That was the nature of

the threat which his words were supposed to convey.

The matter had become so serious, that Mrs. Trevelyan, haughty and

stiff-necked as she was, did not dare to abstain from showing the

letter to her sister. She had no other counsellor, at any rate, till

Lady Milborough came, and the weight of the battle was too great for

her own unaided spirit. The letter had been written late at night, as

was shown by the precision of the date, and had been brought to her

early in the morning. At first she had determined to say nothing

about it to Nora, but she was not strong enough to maintain such a

purpose. She felt that she needed the poor consolation of discussing

her wretchedness. She first declared that she would not see Lady

Milborough. "I hate her, and she knows that I hate her, and she ought

not to have thought of coming," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

But she was at last beaten out of this purpose by Nora's argument,

that all the world would be against her if she refused to see her

husband's old friend. And then, though the letter was an odious

letter, as she declared a dozen times, she took some little

comfort in the fact that not a word was said in it about the baby.

She thought that if she could take her child with her into any

separation, she could endure it, and her husband would ultimately be

conquered.

"Yes; I'll see her," she said, as they finished the discussion. "As

he chooses to send her, I suppose I had better see her. But I don't

think he does much to mend matters when he sends the woman whom he

knows I dislike more than any other in all London."

Exactly at twelve o'clock Lady Milborough's carriage was at the door.

Trevelyan was in the house at the time and heard the knock at the

door. During those two or three days of absolute wretchedness,

he spent most of his hours under the same roof with his wife and

sister-in-law, though he spoke to neither of them. He had had his

doubts as to the reception of Lady Milborough, and was, to tell

the truth, listening with most anxious ear, when her ladyship was

announced. His wife, however, was not so bitterly contumacious as

to refuse admittance to his friend, and he heard the rustle of the

ponderous silk as the old woman was shown up-stairs. When Lady

Milborough reached the drawing-room, Mrs. Trevelyan was alone.

"I had better see her by myself," she had said to her sister.

Nora had then left her, with one word of prayer that she would be as

little defiant as possible.

"That must depend," Emily had said, with a little shake of her head.

There had been a suggestion that the child should be with her, but

the mother herself had rejected this.

"It would be stagey," she had said, "and clap-trap. There is nothing

I hate so much as that."

She was sitting, therefore, quite alone, and as stiff as a man in

armour, when Lady Milborough was shown up to her.

And Lady Milborough herself was not at all comfortable as she

commenced the interview. She had prepared many wise words to be

spoken, but was not so little ignorant of the character of the woman

with whom she had to deal, as to suppose that the wise words would

get themselves spoken without interruption. She had known from the

first that Mrs. Trevelyan would have much to say for herself, and the

feeling that it would be so became stronger than ever as she entered

the room. The ordinary feelings between the two ladies were cold and

constrained, and then there was silence for a few moments when the

Countess had taken her seat. Mrs. Trevelyan had quite determined that

the enemy should fire the first shot.

"This is a very sad state of things," said the Countess.

"Yes, indeed, Lady Milborough."

"The saddest in the world;--and so unnecessary;--is it not?"

"Very unnecessary, indeed, as I think."

"Yes, my dear, yes. But, of course, we must remember--"

Then Lady Milborough could not clearly bring to her mind what it was

that she had to remember.

"The fact is, my dear, that all this kind of thing is too monstrous

to be thought of. Goodness, gracious, me; two young people like you

and Louis, who thoroughly love each other, and who have got a baby,

to think of being separated! Of course it is out of the question."

"You cannot suppose, Lady Milborough, that I want to be separated

from my husband?"

"Of course not. How should it be possible? The very idea is too

shocking to be thought of. I declare I haven't slept since Louis

was talking to me about it. But, my dear, you must remember, you

know, that a husband has a right to expect some--some--some--a sort

of--submission from his wife."

"He has a right to expect obedience, Lady Milborough."

"Of course; that is all one wants."

"And I will obey Mr. Trevelyan--in anything reasonable."

"But, my dear, who is to say what is reasonable? That, you see, is

always the difficulty. You must allow that your husband is the person

who ought to decide that."

"Has he told you that I have refused to obey him, Lady Milborough?"

The Countess paused a moment before she replied. "Well, yes; I think

he has," she said. "He asked you to do something about a letter,--a

letter to that Colonel Osborne, who is a man, my dear, really to be

very much afraid of; a man who has done a great deal of harm,--and

you declined. Now in a matter of that kind of course the husband--"

"Lady Milborough, I must ask you to listen to me. You have listened

to Mr. Trevelyan, and I must ask you to listen to me. I am sorry

to trouble you, but as you have come here about this unpleasant

business, you must forgive me if I insist upon it."

"Of course I will listen to you, my dear."

"I have never refused to obey my husband, and I do not refuse now.

The gentleman of whom you have been speaking is an old friend of my

father's, and has become my friend. Nevertheless, had Mr. Trevelyan

given me any plain order about him, I should have obeyed him. A

wife does not feel that her chances of happiness are increased when

she finds that her husband suspects her of being too intimate with

another man. It is a thing very hard to bear. But I would have

endeavoured to bear it, knowing how important it is for both our

sakes, and more especially for our child. I would have made excuses,

and would have endeavoured to think that this horrid feeling on his

part is nothing more than a short delusion."

"But my dear--"

"I must ask you to hear me out, Lady Milborough. But when he tells me

first that I am not to meet the man, and so instructs the servants;

then tells me that I am to meet him, and go on just as I was going

before, and then again tells me that I am not to see him, and again

instructs the servants,--and, above all, the cook!--that Colonel

Osborne is not to come into the house, then obedience becomes rather

difficult."

"Just say now that you will do what he wants, and then all will be

right."

"I will not say so to you, Lady Milborough. It is not to you that

I ought to say it. But as he has chosen to send you here, I will

explain to you that I have never disobeyed him. When I was free, in

accordance with Mr. Trevelyan's wishes, to have what intercourse I

pleased with Colonel Osborne, I received a note from that gentleman

on a most trivial matter. I answered it as trivially. My husband saw

my letter, closed, and questioned me about it. I told him that the

letter was still there, and that if he chose to be a spy upon my

actions he could open it and read it."

"My dear, how could you bring yourself to use the word spy to your

husband?"

"How could he bring himself to accuse me as he did? If he cares for

me let him come and beg my pardon for the insult he has offered me."

"Oh, Mrs. Trevelyan,--"

"Yes; that seems very wrong to you, who have not had to bear it. It

is very easy for a stranger to take a husband's part, and help to put

down a poor woman who has been ill-used. I have done nothing wrong,

nothing to be ashamed of; and I will not say that I have. I never

have spoken a word to Colonel Osborne that all the world might not

hear."

"Nobody has accused you, my dear."

"Yes; he has accused me, and you have accused me, and you will make

all the world accuse me. He may put me out of his house if he likes,

but he shall not make me say I have been wrong, when I know I have

been right. He cannot take my child from me."

"But he will."

"No," shouted Mrs. Trevelyan, jumping up from her chair, "no; he

shall never do that. I will cling to him so that he cannot separate

us. He will never be so wicked,--such a monster as that. I would go

about the world saying what a monster he had been to me." The passion

of the interview was becoming too great for Lady Milborough's power

of moderating it, and she was beginning to feel herself to be in a

difficulty. "Lady Milborough," continued Mrs. Trevelyan, "tell him

from me that I will bear anything but that. That I will not bear."

"Dear Mrs. Trevelyan, do not let us talk about it."

"Who wants to talk about it? Why do you come here and threaten me

with a thing so horrible? I do not believe you. He would not dare to

separate me and my--child."

"But you have only to say that you will submit yourself to him."

"I have submitted myself to him, and I will submit no further. What

does he want? Why does he send you here? He does not know what he

wants. He has made himself miserable by an absurd idea, and he wants

everybody to tell him that he has been right. He has been very wrong;

and if he desires to be wise now, he will come back to his home,

and say nothing further about it. He will gain nothing by sending

messengers here."

Lady Milborough, who had undertaken a most disagreeable task from

the purest motives of old friendship, did not like being called a

messenger; but the woman before her was so strong in her words, so

eager, and so passionate, that she did not know how to resent the

injury. And there was coming over her an idea, of which she herself

was hardly conscious, that after all, perhaps, the husband was not in

the right. She had come there with the general idea that wives, and

especially young wives, should be submissive. She had naturally taken

the husband's part; and having a preconceived dislike to Colonel

Osborne, she had been willing enough to think that precautionary

measures were necessary in reference to so eminent, and notorious,

and experienced a Lothario. She had never altogether loved Mrs.

Trevelyan, and had always been a little in dread of her. But she had

thought that the authority with which she would be invested on this

occasion, the manifest right on her side, and the undeniable truth of

her grand argument, that a wife should obey, would carry her, if not

easily, still successfully through all difficulties. It was probably

the case that Lady Milborough when preparing for her visit, had

anticipated a triumph. But when she had been closeted for an hour

with Mrs. Trevelyan, she found that she was not triumphant. She was

told that she was a messenger, and an unwelcome messenger; and she

began to feel that she did not know how she was to take herself away.

"I am sure I have done everything for the best," she said, getting up

from her chair.

"The best will be to send him back, and make him feel the truth."

"The best for you, my dear, will be to consider well what should be

the duty of a wife."

"I have considered, Lady Milborough. It cannot be a wife's duty to

acknowledge that she has been wrong in such a matter as this."

Then Lady Milborough made her curtsey and got herself away in some

manner that was sufficiently awkward, and Mrs. Trevelyan curtseyed

also as she rang the bell; and, though she was sore and wretched,

and, in truth, sadly frightened, she was not awkward. In that

encounter, so far as it had gone, she had been the victor.

As soon as she was alone and the carriage had been driven well away

from the door, Mrs. Trevelyan left the drawing-room and went up to

the nursery. As she entered she clothed her face with her sweetest

smile. "How is his own mother's dearest, dearest, darling duck?"

she said, putting out her arms and taking the boy from the nurse.

The child was at this time about ten months old, and was a strong,

hearty, happy infant, always laughing when he was awake and always

sleeping when he did not laugh, because his little limbs were

free from pain and his little stomach was not annoyed by internal

troubles. He kicked, and crowed, and sputtered, when his mother took

him, and put up his little fingers to clutch her hair, and was to her

as a young god upon the earth. Nothing in the world had ever been

created so beautiful, so joyous, so satisfactory, so divine! And they

told her that this apple of her eye was to be taken away from her!

No;--that must be impossible. "I will take him into my own room,

nurse, for a little while--you have had him all the morning," she

said; as though the "having baby" was a privilege over which there

might almost be a quarrel. Then she took her boy away with her,

and when she was alone with him, went through such a service in

baby-worship as most mothers will understand. Divide these two! No;

nobody should do that. Sooner than that, she, the mother, would

consent to be no more than a servant in her husband's house. Was not

her baby all the world to her?

On the evening of that day the husband and wife had an interview

together in the library, which, unfortunately, was as unsatisfactory

as Lady Milborough's visit. The cause of the failure of them all

lay probably in this,--that there was no decided point which, if

conceded, would have brought about a reconciliation. Trevelyan asked

for general submission, which he regarded as his right, and which in

the existing circumstances he thought it necessary to claim, and

though Mrs. Trevelyan did not refuse to be submissive she would make

no promise on the subject. But the truth was that each desired that

the other should acknowledge a fault, and that neither of them would

make that acknowledgment. Emily Trevelyan felt acutely that she

had been ill-used, not only by her husband's suspicion, but by the

manner in which he had talked of his suspicion to others,--to Lady

Milborough and the cook, and she was quite convinced that she was

right herself, because he had been so vacillating in his conduct

about Colonel Osborne. But Trevelyan was equally sure that justice

was on his side. Emily must have known his real wishes about Colonel

Osborne; but when she had found that he had rescinded his verbal

orders about the admission of the man to the house,--which he had

done to save himself and her from slander and gossip,--she had taken

advantage of this and had thrown herself more entirely than ever into

the intimacy of which he disapproved! When they met, each was so sore

that no approach to terms was made by them.

"If I am to be treated in that way, I would rather not live with

you," said the wife. "It is impossible to live with a husband who is

jealous."

"All I ask of you is that you shall promise me to have no further

communication with this man."

"I will make no promise that implies my own disgrace."

"Then we must part; and if that be so, this house will be given up.

You may live where you please,--in the country, not in London; but I

shall take steps that Colonel Osborne does not see you."

"I will not remain in the room with you to be insulted thus," said

Mrs. Trevelyan. And she did not remain, but left the chamber,

slamming the door after her as she went.

"It will be better that she should go," said Trevelyan, when he found

himself alone. And so it came to pass that that blessing of a rich

marriage, which had as it were fallen upon them at the Mandarins from

out of heaven, had become, after an interval of but two short years,

anything but an unmixed blessing.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS STANBURY'S GENEROSITY.

On one Wednesday morning early in June, great preparations were being

made at the brick house in the Close at Exeter for an event which can

hardly be said to have required any preparation at all. Mrs. Stanbury

and her elder daughter were coming into Exeter from Nuncombe Putney

to visit Dorothy. The reader may perhaps remember that when Miss

Stanbury's invitation was sent to her niece, she was pleased to

promise that such visits should be permitted on a Wednesday morning.

Such a visit was now to be made, and old Miss Stanbury was quite

moved by the occasion. "I shall not see them, you know, Martha," she

had said, on the afternoon of the preceding day.

"I suppose not, ma'am."

"Certainly not. Why should I? It would do no good."

"It is not for me to say, ma'am, of course."

"No, Martha, it is not. And I am sure that I am right. It's no good

going back and undoing in ten minutes what twenty years have done.

She's a poor harmless creature, I believe."

"The most harmless in the world, ma'am."

"But she was as bad as poison to me when she was young, and what's

the good of trying to change it now? If I was to tell her that I

loved her, I should only be lying."

"Then, ma'am, I would not say it."

"And I don't mean. But you'll take in some wine and cake, you know."

"I don't think they'll care for wine and cake."

"Will you do as I tell you? What matters whether they care for it or

not? They need not take it. It will look better for Miss Dorothy.

If Dorothy is to remain here I shall choose that she should be

respected." And so the question of the cake and wine had been decided

overnight. But when the morning came Miss Stanbury was still in

a twitter. Half-past ten had been the hour fixed for the visit,

in consequence of there being a train in from Lessboro', due at

the Exeter station at ten. As Miss Stanbury breakfasted always

at half-past eight, there was no need of hurry on account of the

expected visit. But, nevertheless, she was in a fuss all the morning;

and spoke of the coming period as one in which she must necessarily

put herself into solitary confinement.

"Perhaps your mamma will be cold," she said, "and will expect a

fire."

"Oh, dear, no, Aunt Stanbury."

"It could be lighted of course. It is a pity they should come just so

as to prevent you from going to morning service; is it not?"

"I could go with you, aunt, and be back very nearly in time. They

won't mind waiting a quarter of an hour."

"What; and have them here all alone! I wouldn't think of such a

thing. I shall go up-stairs. You had better come to me when they are

gone. Don't hurry them. I don't want you to hurry them at all; and

if you require anything, Martha will wait upon you. I have told the

girls to keep out of the way. They are so giddy, there's no knowing

what they might be after. Besides,--they've got their work to mind."

All this was very terrible to poor Dorothy, who had not as yet quite

recovered from the original fear with which her aunt had inspired

her,--so terrible that she was almost sorry that her mother and

sister were coming to her. When the knock was heard at the door,

precisely as the cathedral clock was striking half-past ten,--to

secure which punctuality, and thereby not to offend the owner of the

mansion, Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla had been walking about the Close

for the last ten minutes,--Miss Stanbury was still in the parlour.

"There they are!" she exclaimed, jumping up. "They haven't given

a body much time to run away, have they, my dear? Half a minute,

Martha,--just half a minute!" Then she gathered up her things as

though she had been ill-treated in being driven to make so sudden a

retreat, and Martha, as soon as the last hem of her mistress's dress

had become invisible on the stairs, opened the front door for the

visitors.

"Do you mean to say you like it?" said Priscilla, when they had been

there about a quarter of an hour.

"H--u--sh," whispered Mrs. Stanbury.

"I don't suppose she's listening at the door," said Priscilla.

"Indeed, she's not," said Dorothy. "There can't be a truer, honester

woman, than Aunt Stanbury."

"But is she kind to you, Dolly?" asked the mother.

"Very kind; too kind. Only I don't understand her quite, and then

she gets angry with me. I know she thinks I'm a fool, and that's the

worst of it."

"Then, if I were you, I would come home," said Priscilla.

"She'll never forgive you if you do," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"And who need care about her forgiveness?" said Priscilla.

"I don't mean to go home yet, at any rate," said Dorothy. Then there

was a knock at the door, and Martha entered with the cake and wine.

"Miss Stanbury's compliments, ladies, and she hopes you'll take a

glass of sherry." Whereupon she filled out the glasses and carried

them round.

"Pray give my compliments and thanks to my sister Stanbury," said

Dorothy's mother. But Priscilla put down the glass of wine without

touching it, and looked her sternest at the maid.

Altogether, the visit was not very successful, and poor Dorothy

almost felt that if she chose to remain in the Close she must lose

her mother and sister, and that without really making a friend of

her aunt. There had as yet been no quarrel,--nothing that had been

plainly recognised as disagreeable; but there had not as yet come to

be any sympathy, or assured signs of comfortable love. Miss Stanbury

had declared more than once that it would do, but had not succeeded

in showing in what the success consisted. When she was told that the

two ladies were gone, she desired that Dorothy might be sent to her,

and immediately began to make anxious inquiries.

"Well, my dear, and what do they think of it?"

"I don't know, aunt, that they think very much."

"And what do they say about it?"

"They didn't say very much, aunt. I was very glad to see mamma and

Priscilla. Perhaps I ought to tell you that mamma gave me back the

money I sent her."

"What did she do that for?" asked Miss Stanbury very sharply.

"Because she says that Hugh sends her now what she wants." Miss

Stanbury, when she heard this, looked very sour. "I thought it best

to tell you, you know."

"It will never come to any good, got in that way,--never."

"But, Aunt Stanbury, isn't it good of him to send it?"

"I don't know. I suppose it's better than drinking, and smoking, and

gambling. But I dare say he gets enough for that too. When a man,

born and bred like a gentleman, condescends to let out his talents

and education for such purposes, I dare say they are willing enough

to pay him. The devil always does pay high wages. But that only makes

it so much the worse. One almost comes to doubt whether any one ought

to learn to write at all, when it is used for such vile purposes.

I've said what I've got to say, and I don't mean to say anything

more. What's the use? But it has been hard upon me,--very. It was my

money did it, and I feel I've misused it. It's a disgrace to me which

I don't deserve."

For a couple of minutes Dorothy remained quite silent, and Miss

Stanbury did not herself say anything further. Nor during that time

did she observe her niece, or she would probably have seen that the

subject was not to be dropped. Dorothy, though she was silent, was

not calm, and was preparing herself for a crusade in her brother's

defence.

"Aunt Stanbury, he's my brother, you know."

"Of course he's your brother. I wish he were not."

"I think him the best brother in the world,--and the best son."

"Why does he sell himself to write sedition?"

"He doesn't sell himself to write sedition. I don't see why it should

be sedition, or anything wicked, because it's sold for a penny."

"If you are going to cram him down my throat, Dorothy, you and I had

better part."

"I don't want to say anything about him, only you ought--not--to

abuse him--before me." By this time Dorothy was beginning to sob,

but Miss Stanbury's countenance was still very grim and very stern.

"He's coming home to Nuncombe Putney, and I want to--see--see him,"

continued Dorothy.

"Hugh Stanbury coming to Exeter! He won't come here."

"Then I'd rather go home, Aunt Stanbury."

"Very well, very well," said Miss Stanbury, and she got up and left

the room.

Dorothy was in dismay, and began to think that there was nothing for

her to do but to pack up her clothes and prepare for her departure.

She was very sorry for what had occurred, being fully alive to the

importance of the aid not only to herself, but to her mother and

sister, which was afforded by the present arrangement, and she felt

very angry with herself, in that she had already driven her aunt to

quarrel with her. But she had found it to be impossible to hear her

own brother abused without saying a word on his behalf. She did not

see her aunt again till dinner-time, and then there was hardly a word

uttered. Once or twice Dorothy made a little effort to speak, but

these attempts failed utterly. The old woman would hardly reply even

by a monosyllable, but simply muttered something, or shook her head

when she was addressed. Jane, who waited at table, was very demure

and silent, and Martha, who once came into the room during the meal,

merely whispered a word into Miss Stanbury's ear. When the cloth

was removed, and two glasses of port had been poured out by Miss

Stanbury herself, Dorothy felt that she could endure this treatment

no longer. How was it possible that she could drink wine under such

circumstances?

[Illustration: Aunt Stanbury at dinner will not speak.]

"Not for me, Aunt Stanbury," said she, with a deploring tone.

"Why not?"

"I couldn't drink it to-day."

"Why didn't you say so before it was poured out? And why not to-day?

Come, drink it. Do as I bid you." And she stood over her niece, as a

tragedy queen in a play with a bowl of poison. Dorothy took it and

sipped it from mere force of obedience. "You make as many bones about

a glass of port wine as though it were senna and salts," said Miss

Stanbury. "Now I've got something to say to you." By this time the

servant was gone, and the two were seated alone together in the

parlour. Dorothy, who had not as yet swallowed above half her wine,

at once put the glass down. There was an importance in her aunt's

tone which frightened her, and made her feel that some evil was

coming. And yet, as she had made up her mind that she must return

home, there was no further evil that she need dread. "You didn't

write any of those horrid articles?" said Miss Stanbury.

"No, aunt; I didn't write them. I shouldn't know how."

"And I hope you'll never learn. They say women are to vote, and

become doctors, and if so, there's no knowing what devil's tricks

they mayn't do. But it isn't your fault about that filthy newspaper.

How he can let himself down to write stuff that is to be printed on

straw is what I can't understand."

"I don't see how it can make a difference as he writes it."

"It would make a great deal of difference to me. And I'm told that

what they call ink comes off on your fingers like lamp-black. I never

touched one, thank God; but they tell me so. All the same; it isn't

your fault."

"I've nothing to do with it, Aunt Stanbury."

"Of course you've not. And as he is your brother it wouldn't be

natural that you should like to throw him off. And, my dear, I like

you for taking his part. Only you needn't have been so fierce with an

old woman."

"Indeed--indeed I didn't mean to be--fierce, Aunt Stanbury."

"I never was taken up so short in my life. But we won't mind that.

There; he shall come and see you. I suppose he won't insist on

leaving any of his nastiness about."

"But is he to come here, Aunt Stanbury?"

"He may if he pleases."

"Oh, Aunt Stanbury!"

"When he was here last he generally had a pipe in his mouth, and I

dare say he never puts it down at all now. Those things grow upon

young people so fast. But if he could leave it on the door-step just

while he's here I should be obliged to him."

"But, dear aunt, couldn't I see him in the street?"

"Out in the street! No, my dear. All the world is not to know that

he's your brother; and he is dressed in such a rapscallion manner

that the people would think you were talking to a house-breaker."

Dorothy's face became again red as she heard this, and the angry

words were very nearly spoken. "The last time I saw him," continued

Miss Stanbury, "he had on a short, rough jacket, with enormous

buttons, and one of those flipperty-flopperty things on his head,

that the butcher-boys wear. And, oh, the smell of tobacco! As he had

been up in London I suppose he thought Exeter was no better than a

village, and he might do just as he pleased. But he knew that if

I'm particular about anything, it is about a gentleman's hat in

the streets. And he wanted me--me!--to walk with him across to Mrs.

MacHugh's! We should have been hooted about the Close like a pair of

mad dogs;--and so I told him."

"All the young men seem to dress like that now, Aunt Stanbury."

"No, they don't. Mr. Gibson doesn't dress like that."

"But he's a clergyman, Aunt Stanbury."

"Perhaps I'm an old fool. I dare say I am, and of course that's what

you mean. At any rate I'm too old to change, and I don't mean to try.

I like to see a difference between a gentleman and a house-breaker.

For the matter of that I'm told that there is a difference, and that

the house-breakers all look like gentlemen now. It may be proper to

make us all stand on our heads, with our legs sticking up in the air;

but I for one don't like being topsy-turvey, and I won't try it. When

is he to reach Exeter?"

"He is coming on Tuesday next, by the last train."

"Then you can't see him that night. That's out of the question. No

doubt he'll sleep at the Nag's Head, as that's the lowest radical

public-house in the city. Martha shall try to find him. She knows

more about his doings than I do. If he chooses to come here the

following morning before he goes down to Nuncombe Putney, well and

good. I shall wait up till Martha comes back from the train on

Tuesday night, and hear." Dorothy was of course full of gratitude and

thanks; but yet she felt almost disappointed by the result of her

aunt's clemency on the matter. She had desired to take her brother's

part, and it had seemed to her as though she had done so in a very

lukewarm manner. She had listened to an immense number of accusations

against him, and had been unable to reply to them because she had

been conquered by the promise of a visit. And now it was out of the

question that she should speak of going. Her aunt had given way to

her, and of course had conquered her.

Late on the Tuesday evening, after ten o'clock, Hugh Stanbury was

walking round the Close with his aunt's old servant. He had not put

up at that dreadfully radical establishment of which Miss Stanbury

was so much afraid, but had taken a bed-room at the Railway Inn. From

there he had walked up to the Close with Martha, and now was having a

few last words with her before he would allow her to return to the

house.

"I suppose she'd as soon see the devil as see me," said Hugh.

"If you speak in that way, Mr. Hugh, I won't listen to you."

"And yet I did everything I could to please her; and I don't think

any boy ever loved an old woman better than I did her."

"That was while she used to send you cakes, and ham, and jam to

school, Mr. Hugh."

"Of course it was, and while she sent me flannel waistcoats to

Oxford. But when I didn't care any longer for cakes or flannel then

she got tired of me. It is much better as it is, if she'll only be

good to Dorothy."

"She never was bad to anybody, Mr. Hugh. But I don't think an old

lady like her ever takes to a young woman as she does to a young man,

if only he'll let her have a little more of her own way than you

would. It's my belief that you might have had it all for your own

some day, if you'd done as you ought."

"That's nonsense, Martha. She means to leave it all to the Burgesses.

I've heard her say so."

"Say so; yes. People don't always do what they say. If you'd managed

rightly you might have it all;--and so you might now."

"I'll tell you what, old girl; I shan't try. Live for the next twenty

years under her apron strings, that I may have the chance at the end

of it of cutting some poor devil out of his money! Do you know the

meaning of making a score off your own bat, Martha?"

"No, I don't; and if it's anything you're like to do, I don't think I

should be the better for learning,--by all accounts. And now if you

please, I'll go in."

"Good night, Martha. My love to them both, and say I'll be there

to-morrow exactly at half-past nine. You'd better take it. It won't

turn to slate-stone. It hasn't come from the old gentleman."

"I don't want anything of that kind, Mr. Hugh;--indeed I don't."

"Nonsense. If you don't take it you'll offend me. I believe you think

I'm not much better than a schoolboy still."

"I don't think you're half so good, Mr. Hugh," said the old servant,

sticking the sovereign which Hugh had given her in under her glove as

she spoke.

On the next morning that other visit was made at the brick house, and

Miss Stanbury was again in a fuss. On this occasion, however, she was

in a much better humour than before, and was full of little jokes as

to the nature of the visitation. Of course, she was not to see her

nephew herself, and no message was to be delivered from her, and none

was to be given to her from him. But an accurate report was to be

made to her as to his appearance, and Dorothy was to be enabled to

answer a variety of questions respecting him after he was gone. "Of

course, I don't want to know anything about his money," Miss Stanbury

said, "only I should like to know how much these people can afford

to pay for their penny trash." On this occasion she had left the

room and gone up-stairs before the knock came at the door, but she

managed, by peeping over the balcony, to catch a glimpse of the

"flipperty-flopperty" hat which her nephew certainly had with him on

this occasion.

Hugh Stanbury had great news for his sister. The cottage in which

Mrs. Stanbury lived at Nuncombe Putney, was the tiniest little

dwelling in which a lady and her two daughters ever sheltered

themselves. There was, indeed, a sitting-room, two bed-rooms, and a

kitchen; but they were all so diminutive in size that the cottage was

little more than a cabin. But there was a house in the village, not

large indeed, but eminently respectable, three stories high, covered

with ivy, having a garden behind it, and generally called the Clock

House, because there had once been a clock upon it. This house

had been lately vacated, and Hugh informed his sister that he was

thinking of taking it for his mother's accommodation. Now, the

late occupants of the Clock House, at Nuncombe Putney, had been

people with five or six hundred a year. Had other matters been in

accordance, the house would almost have entitled them to consider

themselves as county people. A gardener had always been kept

there,--and a cow!

"The Clock House for mamma!"

"Well, yes. Don't say a word about it as yet to Aunt Stanbury, as

she'll think that I've sold myself altogether to the old gentleman."

"But, Hugh, how can mamma live there?"

"The fact is, Dorothy, there is a secret. I can't tell you quite

yet. Of course, you'll know it, and everybody will know it, if the

thing comes about. But as you won't talk, I will tell you what most

concerns ourselves."

"And am I to go back?"

"Certainly not,--if you will take my advice. Stick to your aunt. You

don't want to smoke pipes, and wear Tom-and-Jerry hats, and write for

the penny newspapers."

Now Hugh Stanbury's secret was this;--that Louis Trevelyan's wife and

sister-in-law were to leave the house in Curzon Street, and come and

live at Nuncombe Putney, with Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla. Such, at

least, was the plan to be carried out, if Hugh Stanbury should be

successful in his present negotiations.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HONOURABLE MR. GLASCOCK.

[Illustration]

By the end of July Mrs. Trevelyan with her sister was established in

the Clock House, at Nuncombe Putney, under the protection of Hugh's

mother; but before the reader is made acquainted with any of the

circumstances of their life there, a few words must be said of an

occurrence which took place before those two ladies left Curzon

Street.

As to the quarrel between Trevelyan and his wife things went from bad

to worse. Lady Milborough continued to interfere, writing letters

to Emily which were full of good sense, but which, as Emily said

herself, never really touched the point of dispute. "Am I, who am

altogether unconscious of having done anything amiss, to confess that

I have been in the wrong? If it were about a small matter, I would

not mind, for the sake of peace. But when it concerns my conduct in

reference to another man I would rather die first." That had been

Mrs. Trevelyan's line of thought and argument in the matter; but

then old Lady Milborough in her letters spoke only of the duty of

obedience as promised at the altar. "But I didn't promise to tell a

lie," said Mrs. Trevelyan. And there were interviews between Lady

Milborough and Trevelyan, and interviews between Lady Milborough and

Nora Rowley. The poor dear old dowager was exceedingly busy and full

of groans, prescribing Naples, prescribing a course of extra prayers,

prescribing a general course of letting by-gones be by-gones,--to

which, however, Trevelyan would by no means assent without some

assurance, which he might regard as a guarantee,--prescribing

retirement to a small town in the west of France if Naples would not

suffice; but she could effect nothing.

Mrs. Trevelyan, indeed, did a thing which was sure of itself to

render any steps taken for a reconciliation ineffectual. In the midst

of all this turmoil,--while she and her husband were still living in

the same house, but apart because of their absurd quarrel respecting

Colonel Osborne, she wrote another letter to that gentleman. The

argument by which she justified this to herself, and to her sister

after it was done, was the real propriety of her own conduct

throughout her whole intimacy with Colonel Osborne. "But that is

just what Louis doesn't want you to do," Nora had said, filled with

anger and dismay. "Then let Louis give me an order to that effect,

and behave to me like a husband, and I will obey him," Emily had

answered. And she had gone on to plead that in her present condition

she was under no orders from her husband. She was left to judge for

herself, and,--judging for herself,--she knew, as she said, that it

was best that she should write to Colonel Osborne. Unfortunately

there was no ground for hoping that Colonel Osborne was ignorant

of this insane jealousy on the part of her husband. It was better,

therefore, she said, that she should write to him,--whom on the

occasion she took care to name to her sister as "papa's old

friend,"--and explain to him what she would wish him to do, and what

not to do. Colonel Osborne answered the letter very quickly, throwing

much more of demonstrative affection than he should have done into

his "Dear Emily," and his "Dearest Friend." Of course Mrs. Trevelyan

had burned this answer, and of course Mr. Trevelyan had been told of

the correspondence. His wife, indeed, had been especially careful

that there should be nothing secret about the matter,--that it should

be so known in the house that Mr. Trevelyan should be sure to hear

of it. And he had heard of it, and been driven almost mad by it. He

had flown off to Lady Milborough, and had reduced his old friend to

despair by declaring that, after all, he began to fear that his wife

was--was--was--infatuated by that d---- scoundrel. Lady Milborough

forgave the language, but protested that he was wrong in his

suspicion. "To continue to correspond with him after what I have said

to her!" exclaimed Trevelyan. "Take her to Naples at once,"--said

Lady Milborough;--"at once!" "And have him after me?" said Trevelyan.

Lady Milborough had no answer ready, and not having thought of

this looked very blank. "I should find it harder to deal with her

there even than here," continued Trevelyan. Then it was that Lady

Milborough spoke of the small town in the west of France, urging

as her reason that such a man as Colonel Osborne would certainly

not follow them there; but Trevelyan had become indignant at this,

declaring that if his wife's good name could be preserved in no other

manner than that, it would not be worth preserving at all. Then Lady

Milborough had begun to cry, and had continued crying for a very long

time. She was very unhappy,--as unhappy as her nature would allow

her to be. She would have made almost any sacrifice to bring the two

young people together;--would have willingly given her time, her

money, her labour in the cause;--would probably herself have gone

to the little town in the west of France, had her going been of any

service. But, nevertheless, after her own fashion, she extracted no

small enjoyment out of the circumstances of this miserable quarrel.

The Lady Milboroughs of the day hate the Colonel Osbornes from the

very bottoms of their warm hearts and pure souls; but they respect

the Colonel Osbornes almost as much as they hate them, and find it

to be an inestimable privilege to be brought into some contact with

these roaring lions.

But there arose to dear Lady Milborough a great trouble out of this

quarrel, irrespective of the absolute horror of the separation of a

young husband from his young wife. And the excess of her trouble on

this head was great proof of the real goodness of her heart. For, in

this matter, the welfare of Trevelyan himself was not concerned;--but

rather that of the Rowley family. Now the Rowleys had not given Lady

Milborough any special reason for loving them. When she had first

heard that her dear young friend Louis was going to marry a girl from

the Mandarins, she had been almost in despair. It was her opinion

that had he properly understood his own position, he would have

promoted his welfare by falling in love with the daughter of some

English country gentleman,--or some English peer, to which honour,

with his advantages, Lady Milborough thought that he might have

aspired. Nevertheless, when the girl from the Mandarins had been

brought home as Mrs. Trevelyan, Lady Milborough had received her with

open arms,--had received even the sister-in-law with arms partly

open. Had either of them shown any tendency to regard her as a

mother, she would have showered motherly cares upon them. For Lady

Milborough was like an old hen, in her capacity for taking many

under her wings. The two sisters had hardly done more than bear

with her,--Nora, indeed, bearing with her more graciously than Mrs.

Trevelyan; and in return, even for this, the old dowager was full of

motherly regard. Now she knew well that Mr. Glascock was over head

and ears in love with Nora Rowley. It only wanted the slightest

management and the easiest discretion to bring him on his knees, with

an offer of his hand. And, then, how much that hand contained!--how

much, indeed, as compared with that other hand, which was to be given

in return, and which was,--to speak the truth,--completely empty! Mr.

Glascock was the heir to a peer, was the heir to a rich peer, was the

heir to a very, very old peer. He was in Parliament. The world spoke

well of him. He was not, so to say, by any means an old man himself.

He was good-tempered, reasonable, easily led, and yet by no means

despicable. On all subjects connected with land, he held an opinion

that was very much respected, and was supposed to be a thoroughly

good specimen of an upper-class Englishman. Here was a suitor! But it

was not to be supposed that such a man as Mr. Glascock would be so

violently in love as to propose to a girl whose nearest known friend

and female relation was misbehaving herself.

Only they who have closely watched the natural uneasiness of human

hens can understand how great was Lady Milborough's anxiety on

this occasion. Marriage to her was a thing always delightful to

contemplate. Though she had never been sordidly a match-maker, the

course of the world around her had taught her to regard men as fish

to be caught, and girls as the anglers who ought to catch them. Or,

rather, could her mind have been accurately analysed, it would have

been found that the girl was regarded as half-angler and half-bait.

Any girl that angled visibly with her own hook, with a manifestly

expressed desire to catch a fish, was odious to her. And she was very

gentle-hearted in regard to the fishes, thinking that every fish

in the river should have the hook and bait presented to him in the

mildest, pleasantest form. But still, when the trout was well in

the basket, her joy was great; and then came across her unlaborious

mind some half-formed idea that a great ordinance of nature was

being accomplished in the teeth of difficulties. For,--as she well

knew,--there is a difficulty in the catching of fish.

Lady Milborough, in her kind anxiety on Nora's behalf,--that the fish

should be landed before Nora might be swept away in her sister's

ruin,--hardly knew what step she might safely take. Mrs. Trevelyan

would not see her again,--having already declared that any further

interview would be painful and useless. She had spoken to Trevelyan,

but Trevelyan had declared that he could do nothing. What was there

that he could have done? He could not, as he said, overlook the gross

improprieties of his wife's conduct, because his wife's sister had,

or might possibly have, a lover. And then as to speaking to Mr.

Glascock himself,--nobody knew better than Lady Milborough how very

apt fish are to be frightened.

But at last Lady Milborough did speak to Mr. Glascock,--making no

allusion whatever to the hook prepared for himself, but saying a word

or two as to the affairs of that other fish, whose circumstances, as

he floundered about in the bucket of matrimony, were not as happy as

they might have been. The care, the discretion, nay, the wisdom with

which she did this were most excellent. She had become aware that

Mr. Glascock had already heard of the unfortunate affair in Curzon

Street. Indeed, every one who knew the Trevelyans had heard of it,

and a great many who did not know them. No harm, therefore, could

be done by mentioning the circumstance. Lady Milborough did mention

it, explaining that the only person really in fault was that odious

destroyer of the peace of families, Colonel Osborne, of whom

Lady Milborough, on that occasion, said some very severe things

indeed. Poor dear Mrs. Trevelyan was foolish, obstinate, and

self-reliant;--but as innocent as the babe unborn. That things would

come right before long no one who knew the affair,--and she knew it

from beginning to end,--could for a moment doubt. The real victim

would be that sweetest of all girls, Nora Rowley. Mr. Glascock

innocently asked why Nora Rowley should be a victim. "Don't you

understand, Mr. Glascock, how the most remote connection with a

thing of that kind tarnishes a young woman's standing in the world?"

Mr. Glascock was almost angry with the well-pleased Countess as he

declared that he could not see that Miss Rowley's standing was at all

tarnished; and old Lady Milborough, when he got up and left her, felt

that she had done a good morning's work. If Nora could have known it

all, Nora ought to have been very grateful, for Mr. Glascock got into

a cab in Eccleston Square and had himself driven direct to Curzon

Street. He himself believed that he was at that moment only doing the

thing which he had for some time past resolved that he would do; but

we perhaps may be justified in thinking that the actual resolution

was first fixed by the discretion of Lady Milborough's communication.

At any rate he arrived in Curzon Street with his mind fully resolved,

and had spent the minutes in the cab considering how he had better

perform the business in hand.

He was at once shown into the drawing-room, where he found the two

sisters, and Mrs. Trevelyan, as soon as she saw him, understood the

purpose of his coming. There was an air of determination about him, a

manifest intention of doing something, an absence of that vagueness

which almost always flavours a morning visit. This was so strongly

marked that Mrs. Trevelyan felt that she would have been almost

justified in getting up and declaring that, as this visit was paid

to her sister, she would retire. But any such declaration on her

part was unnecessary, as Mr. Glascock had not been in the room three

minutes before he asked her to go. By some clever device of his own,

he got her into the back room and whispered to her that he wanted to

say a few words in private to her sister.

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. Trevelyan, smiling.

"I dare say you may guess what they are," said he. "I don't know what

chance I may have."

"I can tell you nothing about that," she replied, "as I know nothing.

But you have my good wishes."

And then she went.

It may be presumed that gradually some idea of Mr. Glascock's

intention had made its way into Nora's mind by the time that she

found herself alone with that gentleman. Why else had he brought into

the room with him that manifest air of a purpose? Why else had he

taken the very strong step of sending the lady of the house out of

her own drawing-room? Nora, beginning to understand this, put herself

into an attitude of defence. She had never told herself that she

would refuse Mr. Glascock. She had never acknowledged to herself

that there was another man whom she liked better than she liked Mr.

Glascock. But had she ever encouraged any wish for such an interview,

her feelings at this moment would have been very different from what

they were. As it was, she would have given much to postpone it, so

that she might have asked herself questions, and have discovered

whether she could reconcile herself to do that which, no doubt, all

her friends would commend her for doing. Of course, it was clear

enough to the mind of the girl that she had her fortune to make, and

that her beauty and youth were the capital on which she had to found

it. She had not lived so far from all taint of corruption as to feel

any actual horror at the idea of a girl giving herself to a man,--not

because the man had already, by his own capacities in that direction,

forced her heart from her,--but because he was one likely to be at

all points a good husband. Had all this affair concerned any other

girl, any friend of her own, and had she known all the circumstances

of the case, she would have had no hesitation in recommending that

other girl to marry Mr. Glascock. A girl thrown out upon the world

without a shilling must make her hay while the sun shines. But,

nevertheless, there was something within her bosom which made her

long for a better thing than this. She had dreamed, if she had not

thought, of being able to worship a man; but she could hardly worship

Mr. Glascock. She had dreamed, if she had not thought, of leaning

upon a man all through life with her whole weight, as though that

man had been specially made to be her staff, her prop, her support,

her wall of comfort and protection. She knew that if she were to

marry Mr. Glascock and become Lady Peterborough, in due course she

must stand a good deal by her own strength, and live without that

comfortable leaning. Nevertheless, when she found herself alone with

the man, she by no means knew whether she would refuse him or not.

But she knew that she must pluck up courage for an important moment,

and she collected herself, braced her muscles, as it were, for a

fight, and threw her mind into an attitude of contest.

Mr. Glascock, as soon as the door was shut behind Mrs. Trevelyan's

back, took a chair and placed it close beside the head of the sofa on

which Nora was sitting. "Miss Rowley," he said, "you and I have known

each other now for some months, and I hope you have learned to regard

me as a friend."

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Nora, with some spirit.

"It has seemed to me that we have met as friends, and I can most

truly say for myself, that I have taken the greatest possible

pleasure in your acquaintance. It is not only that I admire you very

much,"--he looked straight before him as he said this, and moved

about the point of the stick which he was holding in both his

hands,--"it is not only that,--perhaps not chiefly that, though I do

admire you very much; but the truth is, that I like everything about

you."

Nora smiled, but she said nothing. It was better, she thought, to let

him tell his story; but his mode of telling it was not without its

efficacy. It was not the simple praise which made its way with her

but a certain tone in the words which seemed to convince her that

they were true. If he had really found her, or fancied her to be what

he said, there was a manliness in his telling her so in the plainest

words that pleased her much.

"I know," continued he, "that this is a very bald way of telling--of

pleading--my cause; but I don't know whether a bald way may not

be the best, if it can only make itself understood to be true. Of

course, Miss Rowley, you know what I mean. As I said before, you have

all those things which not only make me love you, but which make me

like you also. If you think that you can love me, say so; and, as

long as I live, I will do my best to make you happy as my wife."

There was a clearness of expression in this, and a downright

surrender of himself, which so flattered her and so fluttered her

that she was almost reduced to the giving of herself up because she

could not reply to such an appeal in language less courteous than

that of agreement. After a moment or two she found herself remaining

silent, with a growing feeling that silence would be taken as

conveying consent. There floated quickly across her brain an idea of

the hardness of a woman's lot, in that she should be called upon to

decide her future fate for life in half a minute. He had had weeks to

think of this,--weeks in which it would have been almost unmaidenly

in her so to think of it as to have made up her mind to accept the

man. Had she so made up her mind, and had he not come to her, where

would she have been then? But he had come to her. There he was, still

poking about with his stick, waiting for her, and she must answer

him. And he was the eldest son of a peer,--an enormous match for her,

very proper in all respects; such a man, that if she should accept

him, everybody around her would regard her fortune in life as

miraculously successful. He was not such a man that any one would

point at her and say,--"There; see another of them who has sold

herself for money and a title!" Mr. Glascock was not an Apollo, not

an admirable Crichton; but he was a man whom any girl might have

learned to love. Now he had asked her to be his wife, and it was

necessary that she should answer him. He sat there waiting for her

very patiently, still poking about the point of his stick.

Did she really love him? Though she was so pressed by consideration

of time, she did find a moment in which to ask herself the question.

With a quick turn of an eye she glanced at him, to see what he was

like. Up to this moment, though she knew him well, she could have

given no details of his personal appearance. He was a better-looking

man than Hugh Stanbury,--so she told herself with a passing thought;

but he lacked--he lacked; what was it that he lacked? Was it youth,

or spirit, or strength; or was it some outward sign of an inward gift

of mind? Was it that he was heavy while Hugh was light? Was it that

she could find no fire in his eye, while Hugh's eyes were full of

flashing? Or was it that for her, especially for her, Hugh was the

appointed staff and appropriate wall of protection? Be all that as it

might, she knew at the moment that she did love, not this man, but

that other who was writing articles for the Daily Record. She must

refuse the offer that was so brilliant, and give up the idea of

reigning as queen at Monkhams.

"Oh, Mr. Glascock," she said, "I ought to answer you more quickly."

"No, dearest; not more quickly than suits you. Nothing ever in this

world can be more important both to you and to me. If you want more

time to think of it, take more time."

"No, Mr. Glascock; I do not. I don't know why I should have paused.

Is not the truth best?"

"Yes,--certainly the truth is best."

"I do not--love you. Pray, pray understand me."

"I understand it too well, Miss Rowley." The stick was still going,

and the eyes more intently fixed than ever on something opposite.

"I do like you; I like you very much. And I am so grateful! I cannot

understand why such a man as you should want to make me your wife."

"Because I love you better than all the others; simply that. That

reason, and that only, justifies a man in wanting to marry a girl."

What a good fellow he was, and how flattering were his words! Did he

not deserve what he wanted, even though it could not be given without

a sacrifice? But yet she did not love him. As she looked at him again

she could not there recognise her staff. As she looked at him she was

more than ever convinced that that other staff ought to be her staff.

"May I come again,--after a month, say?" he asked, when there had

been another short period of silence.

"No, no. Why should you trouble yourself? I am not worth it."

"It is for me to judge of that, Miss Rowley."

"All the same, I know that I am not worth it. And I could not tell

you to do that."

"Then I will wait, and come again without your telling me."

"Oh, Mr. Glascock, I did not mean that; indeed I did not. Pray do not

think that. Take what I say as final. I like you more than I can say;

and I feel a gratitude to you that I cannot express,--which I shall

never forget. I have never known any one who has seemed to be so good

as you. But-- It is just what I said before." And then she fairly

burst into tears.

"Miss Rowley," he said, very slowly, "pray do not think that I want

to ask any question which it might embarrass you to answer. But my

happiness is so greatly at stake; and, if you will allow me to say

so, your happiness, too, is so greatly concerned, that it is most

important that we should not come to a conclusion too quickly. If I

thought that your heart were vacant I would wait patiently. I have

been thinking of you as my possible wife for weeks past,--for months

past. Of course you have not had such thoughts about me." As he said

this she almost loved him for his considerate goodness. "It has

sometimes seemed to me odd that girls should love men in such a

hurry. If your heart be free, I will wait. And if you esteem me, you

can see, and try whether you cannot learn to love me."

"I do esteem you."

"It depends on that question, then?" he said, slowly.

She sat silent for fully a minute, with her hands clasped; and then

she answered him in a whisper. "I do not know," she said.

He also was silent for a while before he spoke again. He ceased to

poke with his stick, and got up from his chair, and stood a little

apart from her, not looking at her even yet.

"I see," he said at last. "I understand. Well, Miss Rowley, I quite

perceive that I cannot press my suit any further now. But I shall not

despair altogether. I know this, that if I might possibly succeed, I

should be a very happy man. Good-bye, Miss Rowley."

She took his offered hand and pressed it so warmly, that had he not

been manly and big-hearted, he would have taken such pressure as a

sign that she wished him to ask her again. But such was his nature.

"God bless you," he said, "and make you happy, whatever you may

choose to do."

Then he left her, and she heard him walk down the stairs with heavy

slow steps, and she thought that she could perceive from the sound

that he was sad at heart, but that he was resolved not to show his

sadness outwardly.

When she was alone she began to think in earnest of what she had

done. If the reader were told that she regretted the decision which

she had been forced to make so rapidly, a wrong impression would

be given of the condition of her thoughts. But there came upon her

suddenly a strange capacity for counting up and making a mental

inventory of all that might have been hers. She knew,--and where is

the girl so placed that does not know?--that it is a great thing to

be an English peeress. Now, as she stood there thinking of it all,

she was Nora Rowley without a shilling in the world, and without a

prospect of a shilling. She had often heard her mother speak fearful

words of future possible days, when colonial governing should no

longer be within the capacity of Sir Marmaduke. She had been taught

from a very early age that all the material prosperity of her life

must depend on matrimony. She could never be comfortably disposed of

in the world, unless some fitting man who possessed those things of

which she was so bare, should wish to make her his wife. Now there

had come a man so thoroughly fitting, so marvellously endowed, that

no worldly blessing would have been wanting. Mr. Glascock had more

than once spoken to her of the glories of Monkhams. She thought of

Monkhams now more than she had ever thought of the place before.

It would have been a great privilege to be the mistress of an old

time-honoured mansion, to call oaks and elms her own, to know that

acres of gardens were submitted to her caprices, to look at herds

of cows and oxen, and be aware that they lowed on her own pastures.

And to have been the mother of a future peer of England, to

have the nursing, and sweet custody and very making of a future

senator,--would not that have been much? And the man himself who

would have been her husband was such a one that any woman might have

trusted herself to him with perfect confidence. Now that he was

gone she almost fancied that she did love him. Then she thought of

Hugh Stanbury, sitting as he had described himself, in a little

dark closet at the office of the "D. R.," in a very old inky

shooting-coat, with a tarnished square-cut cloth cap upon his head,

with a short pipe in his mouth, writing at midnight for the next

morning's impression, this or that article according to the order

of his master, "the tallow-chandler;"--for the editor of the Daily

Record was a gentleman whose father happened to be a grocer in the

City, and Hugh had been accustomed thus to describe the family

trade. And she might certainly have had the peer, and the acres of

garden, and the big house, and the senatorial honours; whereas the

tallow-chandler's journeyman had never been so out-spoken. She told

herself from moment to moment that she had done right; that she would

do the same a dozen times, if a dozen times the experiment could

be repeated; but still, still, there was the remembrance of all

that she had lost. How would her mother look at her, her anxious,

heavily-laden mother, when the story should be told of all that had

been offered to her and all that had been refused?

[Illustration: To have been the mother of a future peer!]

As she was thinking of this Mrs. Trevelyan came into the room. Nora

felt that though she might dread to meet her mother, she could be

bold enough on such an occasion before her sister. Emily had not

done so well with her own affairs, as to enable her to preach with

advantage about marriage.

"He has gone?" said Mrs. Trevelyan, as she opened the door.

"Yes, he has gone."

"Well? Do not pretend, Nora, that you will not tell me."

"There is nothing worth the telling, Emily."

"What do you mean? I am sure he has proposed. He told me in so many

words that it was his intention."

"Whatever has happened, dear, you may be quite sure that I shall

never be Mrs. Glascock."

"Then you have refused him,--because of Hugh Stanbury!"

"I have refused him, Emily, because I did not love him. Pray let that

be enough."

Then she walked out of the room with something of stateliness in her

gait,--as might become a girl who had had it in her power to be the

future Lady Peterborough; but as soon as she reached the sacredness

of her own chamber, she gave way to an agony of tears. It would,

indeed, be much to be a Lady Peterborough. And she had, in truth,

refused it all because of Hugh Stanbury! Was Hugh Stanbury worth so

great a sacrifice?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLOCK HOUSE AT NUNCOMBE PUTNEY.

It was not till a fortnight had passed after the transaction recorded

in the last chapter, that Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora Rowley first heard

the proposition that they should go to live at Nuncombe Putney. From

bad to worse the quarrel between the husband and the wife had gone

on, till Trevelyan had at last told his friend Lady Milborough

that he had made up his mind that they must live apart. "She is so

self-willed,--and perhaps I am the same," he had said, "that it

is impossible that we should live together." Lady Milborough had

implored and called to witness all testimonies, profane and sacred,

against such a step,--had almost gone down on her knees. Go to

Naples,--why not Naples? Or to the quiet town in the west of France,

which was so dull that a wicked roaring lion, fond of cities and

gambling, and eating and drinking, could not live in such a place!

Oh, why not go to the quiet town in the west of France? Was not

anything better than this flying in the face of God and man? Perhaps

Trevelyan did not himself like the idea of the quiet dull French

town. Perhaps he thought that the flying in the face of God and man

was all done by his wife, not by him; and that it was right that his

wife should feel the consequences. After many such entreaties, many

such arguments, it was at last decided that the house in Curzon

Street should be given up, and that he and his wife live apart.

"And what about Nora Rowley?" asked Lady Milborough, who had become

aware by this time of Nora's insane folly in having refused Mr.

Glascock.

"She will go with her sister, I suppose."

"And who will maintain her? Dear, dear, dear! It does seem as though

some young people were bent upon cutting their own throats, and all

their family's."

Poor Lady Milborough just at this time went as near to disliking the

Rowleys as was compatible with her nature. It was not possible to her

to hate anybody. She thought that she hated the Colonel Osbornes; but

even that was a mistake. She was very angry, however, with both Mrs.

Trevelyan and her sister, and was disposed to speak of them as though

they had been born to create trouble and vexation.

Trevelyan had not given any direct answer to that question about Nora

Rowley's maintenance, but he was quite prepared to bear all necessary

expense in that direction, at any rate till Sir Marmaduke should have

arrived. At first there had been an idea that the two sisters should

go to the house of their aunt, Mrs. Outhouse. Mrs. Outhouse was the

wife,--as the reader may perhaps remember,--of a clergyman living

in the east of London. St. Diddulph's-in-the-East was very much in

the east indeed. It was a parish outside the City, lying near the

river, very populous, very poor, very low in character, and very

uncomfortable. There was a rectory-house, queerly situated at the

end of a little blind lane, with a gate of its own, and a so-called

garden about twenty yards square. But the rectory of St. Diddulph's

cannot be said to have been a comfortable abode. The neighbourhood

was certainly not alluring. Of visiting society within a distance

of three or four miles there was none but what was afforded by the

families of other East-end clergymen. And then Mr. Outhouse himself

was a somewhat singular man. He was very religious, devoted to

his work, most kind to the poor; but he was unfortunately a

strongly-biased man, and at the same time very obstinate withal. He

had never allied himself very cordially with his wife's brother,

Sir Marmaduke, allowing himself to be carried away by a prejudice

that people living at the West-end, who frequented clubs, and

were connected in any way with fashion, could not be appropriate

companions for himself. The very title which Sir Marmaduke had

acquired was repulsive to him, and had induced him to tell his

wife more than once that Sir this or Sir that could not be fitting

associates for a poor East-end clergyman. Then his wife's niece had

married a man of fashion,--a man supposed at St. Diddulph's to be

very closely allied to fashion; and Mr. Outhouse had never been

induced even to dine in the house in Curzon Street. When, therefore,

he heard that Mr. and Mrs. Trevelyan were to be separated within two

years of their marriage, it could not be expected that he should be

very eager to lend to the two sisters the use of his rectory.

There had been interviews between Mr. Outhouse and Trevelyan, and

between Mrs. Outhouse and her niece; and then there was an interview

between Mr. Outhouse and Emily, in which it was decided that Mrs.

Trevelyan would not go to the parsonage of St. Diddulph's. She had

been very outspoken to her uncle, declaring that she by no means

intended to carry herself as a disgraced woman. Mr. Outhouse had

quoted St. Paul to her; "Wives, obey your husbands." Then she had

got up and had spoken very angrily. "I look for support from you,"

she said, "as the man who is the nearest to me, till my father

shall come." "But I cannot support you in what is wrong," said the

clergyman. Then Mrs. Trevelyan had left the room, and would not see

her uncle again.

She carried things altogether with a high hand at this time. When old

Mr. Bideawhile called upon her, her husband's ancient family lawyer,

she told that gentleman that if it was her husband's will that they

should live apart, it must be so. She could not force him to remain

with her. She could not compel him to keep up the house in Curzon

Street. She had certain rights, she believed. She spoke then, she

said, of pecuniary rights,--not of those other rights which her

husband was determined, and was no doubt able, to ignore. She did not

really know what those pecuniary rights might be, nor was she careful

to learn their exact extent. She would thank Mr. Bideawhile to see

that things were properly arranged. But of this her husband, and Mr.

Bideawhile, might be quite sure;--she would take nothing as a favour.

She would not go to her uncle's house. She declined to tell Mr.

Bideawhile why she had so decided; but she had decided. She was ready

to listen to any suggestion that her husband might make as to her

residence, but she must claim to have some choice in the matter. As

to her sister, of course she intended to give Nora a home as long as

such a home might be wanted. It would be very sad for Nora, but in

existing circumstances such an arrangement would be expedient. She

would not go into details as to expense. Her husband was driving

her away from him, and it was for him to say what proportion of his

income he would choose to give for her maintenance,--for hers and

for that of their child. She was not desirous of anything beyond the

means of decent living, but of course she must for the present find

a home for her sister as well as for herself. When speaking of her

baby she had striven hard so to speak that Mr. Bideawhile should find

no trace of doubt in the tones of her voice. And yet she had been

full of doubt,--full of fear. As Mr. Bideawhile had uttered nothing

antagonistic to her wishes in this matter,--had seemed to agree

that wherever the mother went thither the child would go also,--Mrs.

Trevelyan had considered herself to be successful in this interview.

The idea of a residence at Nuncombe Putney had occurred first to

Trevelyan himself, and he had spoken of it to Hugh Stanbury. There

had been some difficulty in this, because he had snubbed Stanbury

grievously when his friend had attempted to do some work of gentle

interference between him and his wife; and when he began the

conversation, he took the trouble of stating, in the first instance,

that the separation was a thing fixed,--so that nothing might be

urged on that subject. "It is to be. You will understand that,"

he said; "and if you think that your mother would agree to the

arrangement, it would be satisfactory to me, and might, I think,

be made pleasant to her. Of course, your mother would be made to

understand that the only fault with which my wife is charged is that

of indomitable disobedience to my wishes."

"Incompatibility of temper," suggested Stanbury.

"You may call it that if you please;--though I must say for myself

that I do not think that I have displayed any temper to which a

woman has a right to object." Then he had gone on to explain what

he was prepared to do about money. He would pay, through Stanbury's

hands, so much for maintenance and so much for house rent, on the

understanding that the money was not to go into his wife's hands.

"I shall prefer," he said, "to make myself, on her behalf, what

disbursements may be necessary. I will take care that she receives a

proper sum quarterly through Mr. Bideawhile for her own clothes,--and

for those of our poor boy." Then Stanbury had told him of the Clock

House, and there had been an agreement made between them;--an

agreement which was then, of course, subject to the approval of

the ladies at Nuncombe Putney. When the suggestion was made to Mrs.

Trevelyan,--with a proposition that the Clock House should be taken

for one year, and that for that year, at least, her boy should remain

with her,--she assented to it. She did so with all the calmness that

she was able to assume; but, in truth, almost everything seemed to

have been gained, when she found that she was not to be separated

from her baby. "I have no objection to living in Devonshire if Mr.

Trevelyan wishes it," she said, in her most stately manner; "and

certainly no objection to living with Mr. Stanbury's mother." Then

Mr. Bideawhile explained to her that Nuncombe Putney was not a large

town,--was, in fact, a very small and a very remote village. "That

will make no difference whatsoever as far as I am concerned," she

answered; "and as for my sister, she must put up with it till my

father and my mother are here. I believe the scenery at Nuncombe

Putney is very pretty." "Lovely!" said Mr. Bideawhile, who had a

general idea that Devonshire is supposed to be a picturesque

county. "With such a life before me as I must lead," continued Mrs.

Trevelyan, "an ugly neighbourhood, one that would itself have had

no interest for a stranger, would certainly have been an additional

sorrow." So it had been settled, and by the end of July, Mrs.

Trevelyan, with her sister and baby, was established at the Clock

House, under the protection of Mrs. Stanbury. Mrs. Trevelyan had

brought down her own maid and her own nurse, and had found that the

arrangements made by her husband had, in truth, been liberal. The

house in Curzon Street had been given up, the furniture had been sent

to a warehouse, and Mr. Trevelyan had gone into lodgings. "There

never were two young people so insane since the world began," said

Lady Milborough to her old friend, Mrs. Fairfax, when the thing was

done.

"They will be together again before next April," Mrs. Fairfax had

replied. But Mrs. Fairfax was a jolly dame who made the best of

everything. Lady Milborough raised her hands in despair, and shook

her head. "I don't suppose, though, that Mr. Glascock will go to

Devonshire after his lady love," said Mrs. Fairfax. Lady Milborough

again raised her hands, and again shook her head.

Mrs. Stanbury had given an easy assent when her son proposed to her

this new mode of life, but Priscilla had had her doubts. Like all

women, she thought that when a man was to be separated from his wife,

the woman must be in the wrong. And though it must be doubtless

comfortable to go from the cottage to the Clock House, it

would, she said, with much prudence, be very uncomfortable

to go back from the Clock House to the cottage. Hugh replied

very cavalierly,--generously, that is, rashly, and somewhat

impetuously,--that he would guarantee them against any such

degradation.

"We don't want to be a burden upon you, my dear," said the mother.

"You would be a great burden on me," he replied, "if you were living

uncomfortably while I am able to make you comfortable."

Mrs. Stanbury was soon won over by Mrs. Trevelyan, by Nora, and

especially by the baby; and even Priscilla, after a week or two,

began to feel that she liked their company. Priscilla was a young

woman who read a great deal, and even had some gifts of understanding

what she read. She borrowed books from the clergyman, and paid a

penny a week to the landlady of the Stag and Antlers for the hire

during half a day of the weekly newspaper. But now there came a box

of books from Exeter, and a daily paper from London, and,--to improve

all this,--both the new comers were able to talk with her about the

things she read. She soon declared to her mother that she liked

Miss Rowley much the best of the two. Mrs. Trevelyan was too fond

of having her own way. She began to understand, she would say to

her mother, that a man might find it difficult to live with Mrs.

Trevelyan. "She hardly ever yields about anything," said Priscilla.

As Miss Priscilla Stanbury was also very fond of having her own way,

it was not surprising that she should object to that quality in this

lady, who had come to live under the same roof with her.

The country about Nuncombe Putney is perhaps as pretty as any in

England. It is beyond the river Teign, between that and Dartmoor,

and is so lovely in all its variations of rivers, rivulets, broken

ground, hills and dales, old broken, battered, time-worn timber,

green knolls, rich pastures, and heathy common, that the wonder is

that English lovers of scenery know so little of it. At the Stag and

Antlers old Mrs. Crocket, than whom no old woman in the public line

was ever more generous, more peppery, or more kind, kept two clean

bed-rooms, and could cook a leg of Dartmoor mutton and make an apple

pie against any woman in Devonshire. "Drat your fish!" she would say,

when some self-indulgent and exacting traveller would wish for more

than these accustomed viands. "Cock you up with dainties! If you

can't eat your victuals without fish, you must go to Exeter. And

then you'll get it stinking mayhap." Now Priscilla Stanbury and Mrs.

Crocket were great friends, and there had been times of deep want,

in which Mrs. Crocket's friendship had been very serviceable to the

ladies at the cottage. The three young women had been to the inn one

morning to ask after a conveyance from Nuncombe Putney to Princetown,

and had found that a four-wheeled open carriage with an old horse

and a very young driver could be hired there. "We have never dreamed

of such a thing," Priscilla Stanbury had said, "and the only time

I was at Princetown I walked there and back." So they had called at

the Stag and Antlers, and Mrs. Crocket had told them her mind upon

several matters.

"What a dear old woman!" said Nora, as they came away, having made

their bargain for the open carriage.

"I think she takes quite enough upon herself, you know," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

"She is a dear old woman," said Priscilla, not attending at all to

the last words that had been spoken. "She is one of the best friends

I have in the world. If I were to say the best out of my own family,

perhaps I should not be wrong."

"But she uses such very odd language for a woman," said Mrs.

Trevelyan. Now Mrs. Crocket had certainly "dratted" and "darned" the

boy, who wouldn't come as fast as she had wished, and had laughed

at Mrs. Trevelyan very contemptuously, when that lady had suggested

that the urchin, who was at last brought forth, might not be a safe

charioteer down some of the hills.

"I suppose I'm used to it," said Priscilla. "At any rate I know I

like it. And I like her."

"I dare say she's a good sort of woman," said Mrs. Trevelyan,

"only--"

"I am not saying anything about her being a good woman now," said

Priscilla, interrupting the other with some vehemence, "but only that

she is my friend."

"I liked her of all things," said Nora. "Has she lived here always?"

"Yes; all her life. The house belonged to her father and to her

grandfather before her, and I think she says she has never slept

out of it a dozen times in her life. Her husband is dead, and her

daughters are married away, and she has the great grief and trouble

of a ne'er-do-well son. He's away now, and she's all alone." Then

after a pause, she continued; "I dare say it seems odd to you, Mrs.

Trevelyan, that we should speak of the innkeeper as a dear friend;

but you must remember that we have been poor among the poorest--and

are so indeed now. We only came into our present house to receive

you. That is where we used to live," and she pointed to the tiny

cottage, which now that it was dismantled and desolate, looked to be

doubly poor. "There have been times when we should have gone to bed

very hungry if it had not been for Mrs. Crocket."

Later in the day Mrs. Trevelyan, finding Priscilla alone, had

apologized for what she had said about the old woman. "I was very

thoughtless and forgetful, but I hope you will not be angry with me.

I will be ever so fond of her if you will forgive me."

"Very well," said Priscilla, smiling; "on those conditions I will

forgive you." And from that time there sprang up something like

a feeling of friendship between Priscilla and Mrs. Trevelyan.

Nevertheless Priscilla was still of opinion that the Clock House

arrangement was dangerous, and should never have been made; and Mrs.

Stanbury, always timid of her own nature, began to fear that it must

be so, as soon as she was removed from the influence of her son. She

did not see much even of the few neighbours who lived around her, but

she fancied that people looked at her in church as though she had

done that which she ought not to have done, in taking herself to a

big and comfortable house for the sake of lending her protection to a

lady who was separated from her husband. It was not that she believed

that Mrs. Trevelyan had been wrong; but that, knowing herself to be

weak, she fancied that she and her daughter would be enveloped in the

danger and suspicion which could not but attach themselves to the

lady's condition, instead of raising the lady out of the cloud,--as

would have been the case had she herself been strong. Mrs. Trevelyan,

who was sharpsighted and clear-witted, soon saw that it was so, and

spoke to Priscilla on the subject before she had been a fortnight in

the house. "I am afraid your mother does not like our being here,"

she said.

"How am I to answer that?" Priscilla replied.

"Just tell the truth."

"The truth is so uncivil. At first I did not like it. I disliked it

very much."

"Why did you give way?"

"I didn't give way. Hugh talked my mother over. Mamma does what I

tell her, except when Hugh tells her something else. I was afraid,

because, down here, knowing nothing of the world, I didn't wish

that we, little people, should be mixed up in the quarrels and

disagreements of those who are so much bigger."

"I don't know who it is that is big in this matter."

"You are big,--at any rate by comparison. But now it must go on. The

house has been taken, and my fears are over as regards you. What you

observe in mamma is only the effect, not yet quite worn out, of what

I said before you came. You may be quite sure of this,--that we

neither of us believe a word against you. Your position is a very

unfortunate one; but if it can be remedied by your staying here with

us, pray stay with us."

"It cannot be remedied," said Emily; "but we could not be anywhere

more comfortable than we are here."

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT IT IN THE CLOSE.

When Miss Stanbury, in the Close at Exeter, was first told of the

arrangement that had been made at Nuncombe Putney, she said some very

hard words as to the thing that had been done. She was quite sure

that Mrs. Trevelyan was no better than she should be. Ladies who were

separated from their husbands never were any better than they should

be. And what was to be thought of any woman, who, when separated from

her husband, would put herself under the protection of such a Paladin

as Hugh Stanbury? She heard the tidings of course from Dorothy, and

spoke her mind even to Dorothy plainly enough; but it was to Martha

that she expressed herself with her fullest vehemence.

"We always knew," she said, "that my brother had married an

addle-pated, silly woman, one of the most unsuited to be the mistress

of a clergyman's house that ever a man set eyes on; but I didn't

think she'd allow herself to be led into such a stupid thing as

this."

"I don't suppose the lady has done anything amiss,--any more than

combing her husband's hair, and the like of that," said Martha.

"Don't tell me! Why, by their own story, she has got a lover."

"But he ain't to come after her down here, I suppose. And as for

lovers, ma'am, I'm told that the most of 'em have 'em up in London.

But it don't mean much, only just idle talking and gallivanting."

"When women can't keep themselves from idle talking with strange

gentlemen, they are very far gone on the road to the devil. That's

my notion. And that was everybody's notion a few years ago. But now,

what with divorce bills, and women's rights, and penny papers, and

false hair, and married women being just like giggling girls, and

giggling girls knowing just as much as married women, when a woman

has been married a year or two she begins to think whether she mayn't

have more fun for her money by living apart from her husband."

"Miss Dorothy says--"

"Oh, bother what Miss Dorothy says! Miss Dorothy only knows what

it has suited that scamp, her brother, to tell her. I understand

this woman has come away because of a lover; and if that's so, my

sister-in-law is very wrong to receive her. The temptation of the

Clock House has been too much for her. It's not my doing; that's

all."

That evening Miss Stanbury and Dorothy went out to tea at the house

of Mrs. MacHugh, and there the matter was very much discussed. The

family of the Trevelyans was known by name in these parts, and the

fact of Mrs. Trevelyan having been sent to live in a Devonshire

village, with Devonshire ladies who had a relation in Exeter so

well esteemed as Miss Stanbury of the Close, were circumstances of

themselves sufficient to ensure a considerable amount of prestige

at the city tea-table for the tidings of this unfortunate family

quarrel. Some reticence was of course necessary because of the

presence of Miss Stanbury and of Dorothy. To Miss Stanbury herself

Mrs. MacHugh and Mrs. Crumbie, of Cronstadt House, did not scruple

to express themselves very plainly, and to whisper a question as to

what was to be done should the lover make his appearance at Nuncombe

Putney; but they who spoke of the matter before Dorothy, were at

first more charitable, or, at least, more forbearing. Mr. Gibson,

who was one of the minor canons, and the two Miss Frenches from

Heavitree, who had the reputation of hunting unmarried clergymen in

couples, seemed to have heard all about it. When Mrs. MacHugh and

Miss Stanbury, with Mr. and Mrs. Crumbie, had seated themselves at

their whist-table, the younger people were able to express their

opinions without danger of interruption or of rebuke. It was known

to all Exeter by this time, that Dorothy Stanbury's mother had gone

to the Clock House, and that she had done so in order that Mrs.

Trevelyan might have a home. But it was not yet known whether anybody

had called upon them. There was Mrs. Merton, the wife of the present

parson of Nuncombe, who had known the Stanburys for the last twenty

years; and there was Mrs. Ellison of Lessboro', who lived only four

miles from Nuncombe, and who kept a pony-carriage. It would be a

great thing to know how these ladies had behaved in so difficult and

embarrassing a position. Mrs. Trevelyan and her sister had now been

at Nuncombe Putney for more than a fortnight, and something in that

matter of calling must have been done,--or have been left undone. In

answer to an ingeniously-framed question asked by Camilla French,

Dorothy at once set the matter at rest. "Mrs. Merton," said Camilla

French, "must find it a great thing to have two new ladies come to

the village, especially now that she has lost you, Miss Stanbury?"

"Mamma tells me," said Dorothy, "that Mrs. Trevelyan and Miss Rowley

do not mean to know anybody. They have given it out quite plainly, so

that there should be no mistake."

"Dear, dear," said Camilla French.

"I dare say it's for the best," said Arabella French, who was the

elder, and who looked very meek and soft. Miss French almost always

looked meek and soft.

"I'm afraid it will make it very dull for your mother,--not seeing

her old friends," said Mr. Gibson.

"Mamma won't feel that at all," said Dorothy.

"Mrs. Stanbury, I suppose, will see her own friends at her own house

just the same," said Camilla.

"There would be great difficulty in that, when there is a lady who is

to remain unknown," said Arabella. "Don't you think so, Mr. Gibson?"

Mr. Gibson replied that perhaps there might be a difficulty, but he

wasn't sure. The difficulty, he thought, might be got over if the

ladies did not always occupy the same room.

"You have never seen Mrs. Trevelyan, have you, Miss Stanbury?" asked

Camilla.

"Never."

"She is not an old family friend, then,--or anything of that sort?"

"Oh, dear, no."

"Because," said Arabella, "it is so odd how different people get

together sometimes." Then Dorothy explained that Mr. Trevelyan and

her brother Hugh had long been friends.

"Oh!--of Mr. Trevelyan," said Camilla. "Then it is he that has sent

his wife to Nuncombe, not she that has come there?"

"I suppose there has been some agreement," said Dorothy.

"Just so; just so," said Arabella, the meek. "I should like to see

her. They say that she is very beautiful; don't they?"

"My brother says that she is handsome."

"Exceedingly lovely, I'm told," said Camilla. "I should like to see

her,--shouldn't you, Mr. Gibson?"

"I always like to see a pretty woman," said Mr. Gibson, with a polite

bow, which the sisters shared between them.

"I suppose she'll go to church," said Camilla.

"Very likely not," said Arabella. "Ladies of that sort very often

don't go to church. I dare say you'll find that she'll never stir

out of the place at all, and that not a soul in Nuncombe will ever

see her except the gardener. It is such a thing for a woman to be

separated from her husband! Don't you think so, Mr. Gibson?"

"Of course it is," said he, with a shake of his head, which was

intended to imply that the censure of the church must of course

attend any sundering of those whom the church had bound together; but

which implied also by the absence from it of any intense clerical

severity, that as the separated wife was allowed to live with so very

respectable a lady as Mrs. Stanbury, there must probably be some

mitigating circumstances attending this special separation.

"I wonder what he is like?" said Camilla, after a pause.

"Who?" asked Arabella.

"The gentleman," said Camilla.

"What gentleman?" demanded Arabella.

"I don't mean Mr. Trevelyan," said Camilla.

"I don't believe there really is,--eh,--is there?" said Mr. Gibson,

very timidly.

"Oh, dear, yes," said Arabella.

"I'm afraid there's something of the kind," said Camilla. "I've heard

that there is, and I've heard his name." Then she whispered very

closely into the ear of Mr. Gibson the words, "Colonel Osborne," as

though her lips were by far too pure to mention aloud any sound so

full of iniquity.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Gibson.

"But he's quite an old man," said Dorothy, "and knew her father

intimately before she was born. And, as far as I can understand, her

husband does not suspect her in the least. And it's only because

there's a misunderstanding between them, and not at all because of

the gentleman."

"Oh!" exclaimed Camilla.

"Ah!" exclaimed Arabella.

"That would make a difference," said Mr. Gibson.

"But for a married woman to have her name mentioned at all with a

gentleman,--it is so bad; is it not, Mr. Gibson?" And then Arabella

also had her whisper into the clergyman's ear,--very closely. "I'm

afraid there's not a doubt about the Colonel. I'm afraid not. I am

indeed."

"Two by honours and the odd, and it's my deal," said Miss Stanbury,

briskly, and the sharp click with which she put the markers down

upon the table was heard all through the room. "I don't want anybody

to tell me," she said, "that when a young woman is parted from her

husband, the chances are ten to one that she has been very foolish."

"But what's a woman to do, if her husband beats her?" said Mrs.

Crumbie.

"Beat him again," said Mrs. MacHugh.

"And the husband will be sure to have the worst of it," said Mr.

Crumbie. "Well, I declare, if you haven't turned up an honour again,

Miss Stanbury!"

"It was your wife that cut it to me, Mr. Crumbie." Then they were

again at once immersed in the play, and the name neither of Trevelyan

nor Osborne was heard till Miss Stanbury was marking her double under

the candlestick; but during all pauses in the game the conversation

went back to the same topic, and when the rubber was over they

who had been playing it lost themselves for ten minutes in the

allurements of the interesting subject. It was so singular a

coincidence that the lady should have gone to Nuncombe Putney of

all villages in England, and to the house of Mrs. Stanbury of all

ladies in England. And then was she innocent, or was she guilty; and

if guilty, in what degree? That she had been allowed to bring her

baby with her was considered to be a great point in her favour. Mr.

Crumbie's opinion was that it was "only a few words." Mrs. Crumbie

was afraid that she had been a little light. Mrs. MacHugh said that

there was never fire without smoke. And Miss Stanbury, as she took

her departure, declared that the young women of the present day

didn't know what they were after. "They think that the world should

be all frolic and dancing, and they have no more idea of doing their

duty and earning their bread than a boy home for the holidays has of

doing lessons."

Then, as she went home with Dorothy across the Close, she spoke a

word which she intended to be very serious. "I don't mean to say

anything against your mother for what she has done as yet. Somebody

must take the woman in, and perhaps it was natural. But if that

Colonel What's-his-name makes his way down to Nuncombe Putney, your

mother must send her packing, if she has any respect either for

herself or for Priscilla."

CHAPTER XVI.

DARTMOOR.

[Illustration]

The well-weighed decision of Miss Stanbury respecting the

Stanbury-Trevelyan arrangement at Nuncombe Putney had been

communicated to Dorothy as the two walked home at night across the

Close from Mrs. MacHugh's house, and it was accepted by Dorothy

as being wise and proper. It amounted to this. If Mrs. Trevelyan

should behave herself with propriety in her retirement at the Clock

House, no further blame in the matter should be attributed to Mrs.

Stanbury for receiving her,--at any rate in Dorothy's hearing. The

existing scheme, whether wise or foolish, should be regarded as an

accepted scheme. But if Mrs. Trevelyan should be indiscreet,--if,

for instance, Colonel Osborne should show himself at Nuncombe

Putney,--then, for the sake of the family, Miss Stanbury would speak

out, and would speak out very loudly. All this Dorothy understood,

and she could perceive that her aunt had strong suspicion that there

would be indiscretion.

"I never knew one like her," said Miss Stanbury, "who, when she'd got

away from one man, didn't want to have another dangling after her."

A week had hardly passed after the party at Mrs. MacHugh's, and Mrs.

Trevelyan had hardly been three weeks at Nuncombe Putney, before the

tidings which Miss Stanbury almost expected reached her ears.

"The Colonel's been at the Clock House, ma'am," said Martha.

Now, it was quite understood in the Close by this time that "the

Colonel" meant Colonel Osborne.

"No!"

"I'm told he has though, ma'am, for sure and certain."

"Who says so?"

"Giles Hickbody was down at Lessboro', and see'd him hisself,--a

portly, middle-aged man,--not one of your young scampish-like

lovers."

"That's the man."

"Oh, yes. He went over to Nuncombe Putney, as sure as

anything;--hired Mrs. Clegg's chaise and pair, and asked for Mrs.

Trevelyan's house as open as anything. When Giles asked in the yard,

they told him as how that was the married lady's young man."

"I'd like to be at his tail,--so I would,--with a mop-handle," said

Miss Stanbury, whose hatred for those sins by which the comfort and

respectability of the world are destroyed, was not only sincere, but

intense. "Well; and what then?"

"He came back and slept at Mrs. Clegg's that night,--at least, that

was what he said he should do."

Miss Stanbury, however, was not so precipitate or uncharitable as

to act strongly upon information such as this. Before she even said

a word to Dorothy, she made further inquiry. She made very minute

inquiry, writing even to her very old and intimate friend Mrs.

Ellison, of Lessboro',--writing to that lady a most cautious and

guarded letter. At last it became a fact proved to her mind that

Colonel Osborne had been at the Clock House, had been received there,

and had remained there for hours,--had been allowed access to Mrs.

Trevelyan, and had slept the night at the inn at Lessboro'. The thing

was so terrible to Miss Stanbury's mind, that even false hair, Dr.

Colenso, and penny newspapers did not account for it.

"I shall begin to believe that the Evil One has been allowed to come

among us in person because of our sins," she said to Martha;--and she

meant it.

In the meantime, Mrs. Trevelyan, as may be remembered, had hired Mrs.

Crocket's open carriage, and the three young women, Mrs. Trevelyan,

Nora, and Priscilla, made a little excursion to Princetown, somewhat

after the fashion of a picnic. At Princetown, in the middle of

Dartmoor, about nine miles from Nuncombe Putney, is the prison

establishment at which are kept convicts undergoing penal servitude.

It is regarded by all the country round with great interest, chiefly

because the prisoners now and again escape, and then there comes a

period of interesting excitement until the escaped felon shall have

been again taken. How can you tell where he may be, or whether it may

not suit him to find his rest in your own cupboard, or under your own

bed? And then, as escape without notice will of course be the felon's

object, to attain that he will probably cut your throat, and the

throat of everybody belonging to you. All which considerations give

an interest to Princetown, and excite in the hearts of the Devonians

of these parts a strong affection for the Dartmoor prison. Of those

who visit Princetown comparatively few effect an entrance within the

walls of the gaol. They look at the gloomy place with a mysterious

interest, feeling something akin to envy for the prisoners who have

enjoyed the privilege of solving the mysteries of prison life, and

who know how men feel when they have their hair cut short, and are

free from moral responsibility for their own conduct, and are moved

about in gangs, and treated like wild beasts.

But the journey to Princetown, from whatever side it is approached,

has the charm of wild and beautiful scenery. The spot itself is ugly

enough; but you can go not thither without breathing the sweetest,

freshest air, and encountering that delightful sense of romance which

moorland scenery always produces. The idea of our three friends was

to see the Moor rather than the prison, to learn something of the

country around, and to enjoy the excitement of eating a sandwich

sitting on a hillock, in exchange for the ordinary comforts of a good

dinner with chairs and tables. A bottle of sherry and water and a

paper of sandwiches contained their whole banquet; for ladies, though

they like good things at picnics, and, indeed, at other times, almost

as well as men like them, very seldom prepare dainties for themselves

alone. Men are wiser and more thoughtful, and are careful to have the

good things, even if they are to be enjoyed without companionship.

Mrs. Crocket's boy, though he was only about three feet high, was a

miracle of skill and discretion. He used the machine, as the patent

drag is called, in going down the hills with the utmost care. He

never forced the beast beyond a walk if there was the slightest rise

in the ground; and as there was always a rise, the journey was slow.

But the three ladies enjoyed it thoroughly, and Mrs. Trevelyan was in

better spirits than she herself had thought to be possible for her

in her present condition. Most of us have recognised the fact that

a dram of spirits will create,--that a so-called nip of brandy will

create hilarity, or, at least, alacrity, and that a glass of sherry

will often "pick up" and set in order the prostrate animal and mental

faculties of the drinker. But we are not sufficiently alive to

the fact that copious draughts of fresh air,--of air fresh and

unaccustomed,--will have precisely the same effect. We do know that

now and again it is very essential to "change the air;" but we

generally consider that to do that with any chance of advantage, it

is necessary to go far afield; and we think also that such change of

the air is only needful when sickness of the body has come upon us,

or when it threatens to come. We are seldom aware that we may imbibe

long potations of pleasure and healthy excitement without perhaps

going out of our own county; that such potations are within a day's

journey of most of us; and that they are to be had for half-a-crown

a head, all expenses told. Mrs. Trevelyan probably did not know that

the cloud was lifted off her mind, and the load of her sorrow made

light to her, by the special vigour of the air of the Moor; but

she did know that she was enjoying herself, and that the world was

pleasanter to her than it had been for months past.

When they had sat upon their hillocks, and eaten their

sandwiches,--regretting that the basket of provisions had not been

bigger,--and had drunk their sherry and water out of the little horn

mug which Mrs. Crocket had lent them, Nora started off across the

moorland alone. The horse had been left to be fed in Princetown, and

they had walked back to a bush under which they had rashly left their

basket of provender concealed. It happened, however, that on that day

there was no escaped felon about to watch what they had done, and

the food and the drink had been found secure. Nora had gone off, and

as her sister and Priscilla sat leaning against their hillocks with

their backs to the road, she could be seen standing now on one little

eminence and now on another, thinking, doubtless, as she stood on the

one how good it would be to be Lady Peterborough, and, as she stood

on the other, how much better to be Mrs. Hugh Stanbury. Only,--before

she could be Mrs. Hugh Stanbury it would be necessary that Mr. Hugh

Stanbury should share her opinion,--and necessary also that he should

be able to maintain a wife. "I should never do to be a very poor

man's wife," she said to herself; and remembered as she said it, that

in reference to the prospect of her being Lady Peterborough, the man

who was to be Lord Peterborough was at any rate ready to make her his

wife, and on that side there were none of those difficulties about

house, and money, and position which stood in the way of the Hugh

Stanbury side of the question. She was not, she thought, fit to be

the wife of a very poor man; but she conceived of herself that she

would do very well as a future Lady Peterborough in the drawing-rooms

of Monkhams. She was so far vain as to fancy that she could look,

and speak, and move, and have her being after the fashion which is

approved for the Lady Peterboroughs of the world. It was not clear

to her that Nature had not expressly intended her to be a Lady

Peterborough; whereas, as far as she could see, Nature had not

intended her to be a Mrs. Hugh Stanbury, with a precarious income of

perhaps ten guineas a week when journalism was doing well. So she

moved on to another little eminence to think of it there. It was

clear to her that if she should accept Mr. Glascock she would sell

herself, and not give herself away; and she had told herself scores

of times before this, that a young woman should give herself away,

and not sell herself;--should either give herself away, or keep

herself to herself as circumstances might go. She had been quite sure

that she would never sell herself. But this was a lesson which she

had taught herself when she was very young, before she had come to

understand the world and its hard necessities. Nothing, she now told

herself, could be worse than to hang like a mill-stone round the neck

of a poor man. It might be a very good thing to give herself away for

love,--but it would not be a good thing to be the means of ruining

the man she loved, even if that man were willing to be so ruined.

And then she thought that she could also love that other man a

little,--could love him sufficiently for comfortable domestic

purposes. And it would undoubtedly be very pleasant to have all the

troubles of her life settled for her. If she were Mrs. Glascock,

known to the world as the future Lady Peterborough, would it not be

within her power to bring her sister and her sister's husband again

together? The tribute of the Monkhams' authority and influence to her

sister's side of the question would be most salutary. She tried to

make herself believe that in this way she would be doing a good deed.

Upon the whole, she thought that if Mr. Glascock should give her

another chance she would accept him. And he had distinctly promised

that he would give her another chance. It might be that this

unfortunate quarrel in the Trevelyan family would deter him. People

do not wish to ally themselves with family quarrels. But if the

chance came in her way she would accept it. She had made up her mind

to that, when she turned round from off the last knoll on which she

had stood, to return to her sister and Priscilla Stanbury.

[Illustration: Nora tries to make herself believe.]

They two had sat still under the shade of a thorn bush, looking at

Nora as she was wandering about, and talking together more freely

than they had ever done before on the circumstances that had brought

them together. "How pretty she looks," Priscilla had said, as Nora

was standing with her figure clearly marked by the light.

"Yes; she is very pretty, and has been much admired. This terrible

affair of mine is a cruel blow to her."

"You mean that it is bad for her to come and live here--without

society."

"Not exactly that,--though of course it would be better for her to go

out. And I don't know how a girl is ever to get settled in the world

unless she goes out. But it is always an injury to be connected in

any way with a woman who is separated from her husband. It must be

bad for you."

"It won't hurt me," said Priscilla. "Nothing of that kind can hurt

me."

"I mean that people say such ill-natured things."

"I stand alone, and can take care of myself," said Priscilla. "I defy

the evil tongues of all the world to hurt me. My personal cares are

limited to an old gown and bread and cheese. I like a pair of gloves

to go to church with, but that is only the remnant of a prejudice.

The world has so very little to give me, that I am pretty nearly sure

that it will take nothing away."

"And you are contented?"

"Well, no; I can't say that I am contented. I hardly think that

anybody ought to be contented. Should my mother die and Dorothy

remain with my aunt, or get married, I should be utterly alone in the

world. Providence, or whatever you call it, has made me a lady after

a fashion, so that I can't live with the ploughmen's wives, and at

the same time has so used me in other respects, that I can't live

with anybody else."

"Why should not you get married, as well as Dorothy?"

"Who would have me? And if I had a husband I should want a good

one,--a man with a head on his shoulders, and a heart. Even if I

were young and good-looking, or rich, I doubt whether I could please

myself. As it is I am as likely to be taken bodily to heaven, as to

become any man's wife."

"I suppose most women think so of themselves at some time, and yet

they are married."

"I am not fit to marry. I am often cross, and I like my own way, and

I have a distaste for men. I never in my life saw a man whom I wished

even to make my intimate friend. I should think any man an idiot who

began to make soft speeches to me, and I should tell him so."

"Ah; you might find it different when he went on with it."

"But I think," said Priscilla, "that when a woman is married there is

nothing to which she should not submit on behalf of her husband."

"You mean that for me."

"Of course I mean it for you. How should I not be thinking of you,

living as you are under the same roof with us? And I am thinking of

Louey." Louey was the baby. "What are you to do when after a year or

two his father shall send for him to have him under his own care?"

"Nothing shall separate me from my child," said Mrs. Trevelyan

eagerly.

"That is easily said; but I suppose the power of doing as he pleased

would be with him."

"Why should it be with him? I do not at all know that it would be

with him. I have not left his house. It is he that has turned me

out."

"There can, I think, be very little doubt what you should do," said

Priscilla, after a pause, during which she had got up from her seat

under the thorn bush.

"What should I do?" asked Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Go back to him."

"I will to-morrow if he will write and ask me. Nay; how could I help

myself? I am his creature, and must go or come as he bids me. I am

here only because he has sent me."

"You should write and ask him to take you."

"Ask him to forgive me because he has ill-treated me?"

"Never mind about that," said Priscilla, standing over her companion,

who was still lying under the bush. "All that is twopenny-halfpenny

pride, which should be thrown to the winds. The more right you have

been hitherto the better you can afford to go on being right. What is

it that we all live upon but self-esteem? When we want praise it is

only because praise enables us to think well of ourselves. Every one

to himself is the centre and pivot of all the world."

"It's a very poor world that goes round upon my pivot," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

"I don't know how this quarrel came up," exclaimed Priscilla, "and

I don't care to know. But it seems a trumpery quarrel,--as to who

should beg each other's pardon first, and all that kind of thing.

Sheer and simple nonsense! Ask him to let it all be forgotten. I

suppose he loves you?"

"How can I know? He did once."

"And you love him?"

"Yes. I love him certainly."

"I don't see how you can have a doubt. Here is Jack with the

carriage, and if we don't mind he'll pass us by without seeing us."

Then Mrs. Trevelyan got up, and when they had succeeded in diverting

Jack's attention for a moment from the horse, they called to Nora,

who was still moving about from one knoll to another, and who showed

no desire to abandon the contemplations in which she had been

engaged.

It had been mid-day before they left home in the morning, and they

were due to be at home in time for tea,--which is an epoch in the

day generally allowed to be more elastic than some others. When Mrs.

Stanbury lived in the cottage her hour for tea had been six; this had

been stretched to half-past seven when she received Mrs. Trevelyan at

the Clock House; and it was half-past eight before Jack landed them

at their door. It was manifest to them all as they entered the house

that there was an air of mystery in the face of the girl who had

opened the door for them. She did not speak, however, till they were

all within the passage. Then she uttered a few words very solemnly.

"There be a gentleman come," she said.

"A gentleman!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, thinking in the first moment of

her husband, and in the second of Colonel Osborne.

"He be for you, miss," said the girl, bobbing her head at Nora.

Upon hearing this Nora sank speechless into the chair which stood in

the passage.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GENTLEMAN COMES TO NUNCOMBE PUTNEY.

It soon became known to them all as they remained clustered in the

hall that Mr. Glascock was in the house. Mrs. Stanbury came out to

them and informed them that he had been at Nuncombe Putney for the

last five hours, and that he had asked for Mrs. Trevelyan when he

called. It became evident as the affairs of the evening went on, that

Mrs. Stanbury had for a few minutes been thrown into a terrible state

of amazement, thinking that "the Colonel" had appeared. The strange

gentleman, however, having obtained admittance, explained who he was,

saying that he was very desirous of seeing Mrs. Trevelyan,--and Miss

Rowley. It may be presumed that a glimmer of light did make its way

into Mrs. Stanbury's mind on the subject; but up to the moment at

which the three travellers arrived, she had been in doubt on the

subject. Mr. Glascock had declared that he would take a walk, and

in the course of the afternoon had expressed high approval of Mrs.

Crocket's culinary skill. When Mrs. Crocket heard that she had

entertained the son of a lord, she was very loud in her praise of the

manner in which he had eaten two mutton chops and called for a third.

He had thought it no disgrace to apply himself to the second half

of an apple pie, and had professed himself to be an ardent admirer

of Devonshire cream. "It's them counter-skippers as turns up their

little noses at the victuals as is set before them," said Mrs.

Crocket.

After his dinner Mr. Glascock had returned to the Clock House, and

had been sitting there for an hour with Mrs. Stanbury, not much to

her delight or to his, when the carriage was driven up to the door.

"He is to go back to Lessboro' to-night," said Mrs. Stanbury in a

whisper.

"Of course you must see him before he goes," said Mrs. Trevelyan to

her sister. There had, as was natural, been very much said between

the two sisters about Mr. Glascock. Nora had abstained from asserting

in any decided way that she disliked the man, and had always

absolutely refused to allow Hugh Stanbury's name to be mixed up with

the question. Whatever might be her own thoughts about Hugh Stanbury

she had kept them even from her sister. When her sister had told her

that she had refused Mr. Glascock because of Hugh, she had shown

herself to be indignant, and had since that said one or two fine

things as to her capacity to refuse a brilliant offer simply because

the man who had made it was indifferent to her. Mrs. Trevelyan had

learned from her that her suitor had declared his intention to

persevere; and here was perseverance with a vengeance! "Of course you

must see him,--at once," said Mrs. Trevelyan. Nora for a few seconds

had remained silent, and then had run up to her room. Her sister

followed her instantly.

"What is the meaning of it all?" said Priscilla to her mother.

"I suppose he is in love with Miss Rowley," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"But who is he?"

Then Mrs. Stanbury told all that she knew. She had seen from his

card that he was an Honourable Mr. Glascock. She had collected from

what he had said that he was an old friend of the two ladies. Her

conviction was strong in Mr. Glascock's favour,--thinking, as she

expressed herself, that everything was right and proper,--but she

could hardly explain why she thought so.

"I do wish that they had never come," said Priscilla, who could not

rid herself of an idea that there must be danger in having to do with

women who had men running after them.

"Of course I'll see him," said Nora to her sister. "I have not

refused to see him. Why do you scold me?"

"I have not scolded you, Nora; but I do want you to think how

immensely important this is."

"Of course it is important."

"And so much the more so because of my misfortunes! Think how good he

must be, how strong must be his attachment, when he comes down here

after you in this way."

"But I have to think of my own feelings."

"You know you like him. You have told me so. And only fancy what

mamma will feel! Such a position! And the man so excellent! Everybody

says that he hasn't a fault in any way."

"I hate people without faults."

"Oh, Nora, Nora, that is foolish! There, there; you must go down.

Pray,--pray do not let any absurd fancy stand in your way, and

destroy everything. It will never come again, Nora. And, only think;

it is all now your own, if you will only whisper one word."

"Ah!--one word,--and that a falsehood!"

"No,--no. Say you will try to love him, and that will be enough. And

you do love him?"

"Do I?"

"Yes, you do. It is only the opposition of your nature that makes you

fight against him. Will you go now?"

"Let me be for two minutes by myself," said Nora, "and then I'll come

down. Tell him that I'm coming." Mrs. Trevelyan stooped over her,

kissed her, and then left her.

Nora, as soon as she was alone, stood upright in the middle of the

room and held her hands up to her forehead. She had been far from

thinking, when she was considering the matter easily among the

hillocks, that the necessity for an absolute decision would come upon

her so instantaneously. She had told herself only this morning that

it would be wise to accept the man, if he should ever ask a second

time;--and he had come already. He had been waiting for her in the

village while she had been thinking whether he would ever come across

her path again. She thought that it would have been easier for her

now to have gone down with a "yes" in her mouth, if her sister had

not pressed her so hard to say that "yes." The very pressure from her

sister seemed to imply that such pressure ought to be resisted. Why

should there have been pressure, unless there were reasons against

her marrying him? And yet, if she chose to take him, who would have

a right to complain of her? Hugh Stanbury had never spoken to her a

word that would justify her in even supposing that he would consider

himself to be ill-used. All others of her friends would certainly

rejoice, would applaud her, pat her on the back, cover her with

caresses, and tell her that she had been born under a happy star. And

she did like the man. Nay;--she thought she loved him. She withdrew

her hands from her brow, assured herself that her lot in life was

cast, and with hurrying fingers attempted to smooth her hair and to

arrange her ribbons before the glass. She would go to the encounter

boldly and accept him honestly. It was her duty to do so. What might

she not do for brothers and sisters as the wife of Lord Peterborough

of Monkhams? She saw that that arrangement before the glass could be

of no service, and she stepped quickly to the door. If he did not

like her as she was, he need not ask her. Her mind was made up, and

she would do it. But as she went down the stairs to the room in which

she knew that he was waiting for her, there came over her a cold

feeling of self-accusation,--almost of disgrace. "I do not care,"

she said. "I know that I'm right." She opened the door quickly, that

there might be no further doubt, and found that she was alone with

him.

"Miss Rowley," he said, "I am afraid you will think that I am

persecuting you."

"I have no right to think that," she answered.

"I'll tell you why I have come. My dear father, who has always been

my best friend, is very ill. He is at Naples, and I must go to him.

He is very old, you know,--over eighty; and will never live to come

back to England. From what I hear, I think it probable that I may

remain with him till everything is over."

"I did not know that he was so old as that."

"They say that he can hardly live above a month or two. He will never

see my wife,--if I can have a wife; but I should like to tell him, if

it were possible,--that,--that--"

"I understand you, Mr. Glascock."

"I told you that I should come to you again, and as I may possibly

linger at Naples all the winter, I could not go without seeing you.

Miss Rowley, may I hope that you can love me?"

She did not answer him a word, but stood looking away from him with

her hands clasped together. Had he asked her whether she would be his

wife, it is possible that the answer which she had prepared would

have been spoken. But he had put the question in another form. Did

she love him? If she could only bring herself to say that she could

love him, she might be lady of Monkhams before the next summer had

come round.

"Nora," he said, "do you think that you can love me?"

"No," she said, and there was something almost of fierceness in the

tone of her voice as she answered him.

"And must that be your final answer to me?"

"Mr. Glascock, what can I say?" she replied. "I will tell you the

honest truth:--I will tell you everything. I came into this room

determined to accept you. But you are so good, and so kind, and so

upright, that I cannot tell you a falsehood. I do not love you. I

ought not to take what you offer me. If I did, it would be because

you are rich, and a lord; and not because I love you. I love some one

else. There;--pray, pray do not tell of me; but I do." Then she flung

away from him and hid her face in a corner of the sofa out of the

light.

Her lover stood silent, not knowing how to go on with the

conversation, not knowing how to bring it to an end. After what

she had now said to him it was impossible that he should press her

further. It was almost impossible that he should wish to do so. When

a lady is frank enough to declare that her heart is not her own to

give, a man can hardly wish to make further prayer for the gift. "If

so," he said, "of course I have nothing to hope."

She was sobbing, and could not answer him. She was half repentant,

partly proud of what she had done,--half repentant in that she had

lost what had seemed to her to be so good, and full of remorse in

that she had so unnecessarily told her secret.

"Perhaps," said he, "I ought to assure you that what you have told me

shall never be repeated by my lips."

She thanked him for this by a motion of her head and hand, not by

words;--and then he was gone. How he managed to bid adieu to Mrs.

Stanbury and her sister, or whether he saw them as he left the house,

she never knew. In her corner of the sofa, weeping in the dark,

partly proud and partly repentant, she remained till her sister came

to her. "Emily," she said, jumping up, "say nothing about it; not

a word. It is of no use. The thing is done and over, and let it

altogether be forgotten."

"It is done and over, certainly," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Exactly;--and I suppose a girl may do what she likes with herself in

that way. If I choose to decline to take anything that is pleasant,

and nice, and comfortable, nobody has a right to scold me. And I

won't be scolded."

"But, my child, who is scolding you?"

"You mean to scold me. But it is of no use. The man has gone, and

there is an end of it. Nothing that you can say or I can think will

bring him back again. I don't want anybody to tell me that it would

be better to be Lady Peterborough, with everything that the world has

to give, than to live here without a soul to speak to, and to have to

go back to those horrible islands next year. You can't think that I

am very comfortable."

"But what did you say to him, Nora?"

"What did I say to him? What could I say to him? Why didn't he ask me

to be his wife without saying anything about love? He asked me if I

loved him. Of course I don't love him. I would have said I did, but

it stuck in my throat. I am willing enough, I believe, to sell myself

to the devil, but I don't know how to do it. Never mind. It's done,

and now I'll go to bed."

She did go to bed, and Mrs. Trevelyan explained to the two ladies as

much as was necessary of what had occurred. When Mrs. Stanbury came

to understand that the gentleman who had been closeted with her

would, probably, in a few months be a lord himself, that he was a

very rich man, a member of Parliament, and one of those who are

decidedly born with gold spoons in their mouths, and understood also

that Nora Rowley had refused him, she was lost in amazement. Mr.

Glascock was about forty years of age, and appeared to Nora Rowley,

who was nearly twenty years his junior, to be almost an old man.

But to Mrs. Stanbury, who was over sixty, Mr. Glascock seemed to be

quite in the flower of his age. The bald place at the top of his head

simply showed that he had passed his boyhood, and the grey hairs at

the back of his whiskers were no more than outward signs of manly

discretion. She could not understand why any girl should refuse such

an offer, unless the man were himself bad in morals, or in temper.

But Mrs. Trevelyan had told her while Nora and Mr. Glascock were

closeted together, that he was believed by them all to be good and

gentle. Nevertheless she felt a considerable increase of respect for

a young lady who had refused the eldest son of a lord. Priscilla,

when she heard what had occurred, expressed to her mother a moderated

approval. According to her views a girl would much more often be

right to refuse an offer of marriage than to accept it, let him who

made the offer be who he might. And the fact of the man having been

sent away with a refusal somewhat softened Priscilla's anger at his

coming there at all.

"I suppose he is a goose," said she to her mother, "and I hope there

won't be any more of this kind running after them while they are with

us."

Nora, when she was alone, wept till her heart was almost broken. It

was done, and the man was gone, and the thing was over. She had quite

sufficient knowledge of the world to realise perfectly the difference

between such a position as that which had been offered to her, and

the position which in all probability she would now be called upon to

fill. She had had her chance, and Fortune had placed great things at

her disposal. It must be said of her also that the great things which

Fortune had offered to her were treasures very valuable in her eyes.

Whether it be right and wise to covet or to despise wealth and rank,

there was no doubt but that she coveted them. She had been instructed

to believe in them, and she did believe in them. In some mysterious

manner of which she herself knew nothing, taught by some preceptor

the nobility of whose lessons she had not recognised though she had

accepted them, she had learned other things also,--to revere truth

and love, and to be ambitious as regarded herself of conferring the

gift of her whole heart upon some one whom she could worship as a

hero. She had spoken the simple truth when she had told her sister

that she had been willing to sell herself to the devil, but that

she had failed in her attempt to execute the contract. But now as

she lay weeping on her bed, tearing herself with remorse, picturing

to herself in the most vivid colours all that she had thrown away,

telling herself of all that she might have done and all that she

might have been, had she not allowed the insane folly of a moment

to get the better of her, she received little or no comfort from

the reflection that she had been true to her better instincts. She

had told the man that she had refused him because she loved Hugh

Stanbury;--at least, as far as she could remember what had passed,

she had so told him. And how mean it was of her to allow herself to

be actuated by an insane passion for a man who had never spoken to

her of love, and how silly of her afterwards to confess it! Of what

service could such a passion be to her life? Even were it returned,

she could not marry such a one as Hugh Stanbury. She knew enough of

herself to be quite sure that were he to ask her to do so to-morrow,

she would refuse him. Better go and be scorched, and bored to

death, and buried at the Mandarins, than attempt to regulate a poor

household which, as soon as she made one of its number, would be on

the sure road to ruin!

For a moment there came upon her, not a thought, hardly an

idea,--something of a waking dream that she would write to Mr.

Glascock and withdraw all that she had said. Were she to do so he

would probably despise her, and tell her that he despised her;--but

there might be a chance. It was possible that such a declaration

would bring him back to her;--and did it not bring him back to her

she would only be where she was, a poor lost, shipwrecked creature,

who had flung herself upon the rocks and thrown away her only chance

of a prosperous voyage across the ocean of life; her only chance, for

she was not like other girls, who at any rate remain on the scene

of action, and may refit their spars and still win their way. For

there were to be no more seasons in London, no more living in Curzon

Street, no renewed power of entering the ball-rooms and crowded

staircases in which high-born wealthy lovers can be conquered. A

great prospect had been given to her, and she had flung it aside!

That letter of retractation was, however, quite out of the question.

The reader must not suppose that she had ever thought that she could

write it. She thought of nothing but of coming misery and remorse. In

her wretchedness she fancied that she had absolutely disclosed to the

man who loved her the name of him whom she had been mad enough to say

that she loved. But what did it matter? Let it be as it might, she

was destroyed.

The next morning she came down to breakfast pale as a ghost; and they

who saw her knew at once that she had done that which had made her a

wretched woman.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STANBURY CORRESPONDENCE.

Half an hour after the proper time, when the others had finished

their tea and bread and butter, Nora Rowley came down among them pale

as a ghost. Her sister had gone to her while she was dressing, but

she had declared that she would prefer to be alone. She would be down

directly, she had said, and had completed her toilet without even the

assistance of her maid. She drank her cup of tea and pretended to eat

her toast; and then sat herself down, very wretchedly, to think of

it all again. It had been all within her grasp,--all of which she

had ever dreamed! And now it was gone! Each of her three companions

strove from time to time to draw her into conversation, but she

seemed to be resolute in her refusal. At first, till her utter

prostration had become a fact plainly recognised by them all, she

made some little attempt at an answer when a direct question was

asked of her; but after a while she only shook her head, and was

silent, giving way to absolute despair.

Late in the evening she went out into the garden, and Priscilla

followed her. It was now the end of July, and the summer was in its

glory. The ladies, during the day, would remain in the drawing-room

with the windows open and the blinds down, and would sit in the

evening reading and working, or perhaps pretending to read and work,

under the shade of a cedar which stood upon the lawn. No retirement

could possibly be more secluded than was that of the garden of the

Clock House. No stranger could see into it, or hear sounds from out

of it. Though it was not extensive, it was so well furnished with

those charming garden shrubs which, in congenial soils, become large

trees, that one party of wanderers might seem to be lost from another

amidst its walls. On this evening Mrs. Stanbury and Mrs. Trevelyan

had gone out as usual, but Priscilla had remained with Nora Rowley.

After a while Nora also got up and went through the window all alone.

Priscilla, having waited for a few minutes, followed her; and caught

her in a long green walk that led round the bottom of the orchard.

"What makes you so wretched?" she said.

"Why do you say I am wretched?"

"Because it's so visible. How is one to go on living with you all day

and not notice it?"

"I wish you wouldn't notice it. I don't think it kind of you to

notice it. If I wanted to talk of it, I would say so."

"It is better generally to speak of a trouble than to keep it to

oneself," said Priscilla.

"All the same, I would prefer not to speak of mine," said Nora.

Then they parted, one going one way and one the other, and Priscilla

was certainly angry at the reception which had been given to the

sympathy which she had proffered. The next day passed almost without

a word spoken between the two. Mrs. Stanbury had not ventured as yet

to mention to her guest the subject of the rejected lover, and had

not even said much on the subject to Mrs. Trevelyan. Between the two

sisters there had been, of course, some discussion on the matter. It

was impossible that it should be allowed to pass without it; but such

discussions always resulted in an assertion on the part of Nora that

she would not be scolded. Mrs. Trevelyan was very tender with her,

and made no attempt to scold her,--tried, at last, simply to console

her; but Nora was so continually at work scolding herself, that every

word spoken to her on the subject of Mr. Glascock's visit seemed to

her to carry with it a rebuke.

But on the second day she herself accosted Priscilla Stanbury. "Come

into the garden," she said, when they two were for a moment alone

together; "I want to speak to you." Priscilla, without answering,

folded up her work and put on her hat. "Come down to the green walk,"

said Nora. "I was savage to you last night, and I want to beg your

pardon."

"You were savage," said Priscilla, smiling, "and you shall have my

pardon. Who would not pardon you any offence, if you asked it?"

"I am so miserable!" she said.

"But why?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. And it is of no use talking about it

now, for it is all over. But I ought not to have been cross to you,

and I am very sorry."

"That does not signify a straw; only so far, that when I have been

cross, and have begged a person's pardon,--which I don't do as often

as I ought,--I always feel that it begets kindness. If I could help

you in your trouble I would."

"You can't fetch him back again."

"You mean Mr. Glascock. Shall I go and try?"

Nora smiled and shook her head. "I wonder what he would say if you

asked him. But if he came I should do the same thing."

"I do not in the least know what you have done, my dear. I only see

that you mope about, and are more down in the mouth than any one

ought to be, unless some great trouble has come."

"A great trouble has come."

"I suppose you have had your choice,--either to accept your lover or

to reject him."

"No; I have not had my choice."

"It seems to me that no one has dictated to you; or, at least, that

you have obeyed no dictation."

"Of course, I can't explain it to you. It is impossible that I

should."

"If you mean that you regret what you have done because you have been

false to the man, I can sympathise with you. No one has ever a right

to be false, and if you are repenting a falsehood, I will willingly

help you to eat your ashes and to wear your sackcloth. But if you are

repenting a truth--"

"I am."

"Then you must eat your ashes by yourself, for me; and I do not think

that you will ever be able to digest them."

"I do not want anybody to help me," said Nora proudly.

"Nobody can help you, if I understand the matter rightly. You have

got to get the better of your own covetousness and evil desires, and

you are in the fair way to get the better of them if you have already

refused to be this man's wife because you could not bring yourself to

commit the sin of marrying him when you did not love him. I suppose

that is about the truth of it; and indeed, indeed, I do sympathise

with you. If you have done that, though it is no more than the

plainest duty, I will love you for it. One finds so few people that

will do any duty that taxes their self-indulgence."

"But he did not ask me to marry him."

"Then I do not understand anything about it."

"He asked me to love him."

"But he meant you to be his wife?"

"Oh yes;--he meant that of course."

"And what did you say?" asked Priscilla.

"That I didn't love him," replied Nora.

"And that was the truth?"

"Yes;--it was the truth."

"And what do you regret?--that you didn't tell him a lie?"

"No;--not that," said Nora slowly.

"What then? You cannot regret that you have not basely deceived a man

who has treated you with a loving generosity?" They walked on silent

for a few yards, and then Priscilla repeated her question. "You

cannot mean that you are sorry that you did not persuade yourself to

do evil?"

"I don't want to go back to the islands, and to lose myself there,

and to be nobody;--that is what I mean. And I might have been so

much! Could one step from the very highest rung of the ladder to the

very lowest and not feel it?"

"But you have gone up the ladder,--if you only knew it," said

Priscilla. "There was a choice given to you between the foulest mire

of the clay of the world, and the sun-light of the very God. You have

chosen the sun-light, and you are crying after the clay! I cannot

pity you; but I can esteem you, and love you, and believe in you. And

I do. You'll get yourself right at last, and there's my hand on it,

if you'll take it." Nora took the hand that was offered to her, held

it in her own for some seconds, and then walked back to the house and

up to her own room in silence.

The post used to come into Nuncombe Putney at about eight in the

morning, carried thither by a wooden-legged man who rode a donkey.

There is a general understanding that the wooden-legged men in

country parishes should be employed as postmen, owing to the great

steadiness of demeanour which a wooden leg is generally found to

produce. It may be that such men are slower in their operations than

would be biped postmen; but as all private employers of labour demand

labourers with two legs, it is well that the lame and halt should

find a refuge in the less exacting service of the government. The

one-legged man who rode his donkey into Nuncombe Putney would reach

his post-office not above half an hour after his proper time; but he

was very slow in stumping round the village, and seldom reached the

Clock House much before ten. On a certain morning two or three days

after the conversation just recorded it was past ten when he brought

two letters to the door, one for Mrs. Trevelyan, and one for Mrs.

Stanbury. The ladies had finished their breakfast, and were seated

together at an open window. As was usual, the letters were given into

Priscilla's hands, and the newspaper which accompanied them into

those of Mrs. Trevelyan, its undoubted owner. When her letter was

handed to her, she looked at the address closely and then walked away

with it into her own room.

"I think it's from Louis," said Nora, as soon as the door was closed.

"If so, he is telling her to come back."

"Mamma, this is for you," said Priscilla. "It is from Aunt Stanbury.

I know her handwriting."

"From your aunt? What can she be writing about? There is something

wrong with Dorothy." Mrs. Stanbury held the letter but did not open

it. "You had better read it, my dear. If she is ill, pray let her

come home."

But the letter spoke of nothing amiss as regarded Dorothy, and did

not indeed even mention Dorothy's name. Luckily Priscilla read

the letter in silence, for it was an angry letter. "What is it,

Priscilla? Why don't you tell me? Is anything wrong?" said Mrs.

Stanbury.

"Nothing is wrong, mamma,--except that my aunt is a silly woman."

"Goodness me! what is it?"

"It is a family matter," said Nora smiling, "and I will go."

"What can it be?" demanded Mrs. Stanbury again as soon as Nora had

left the room.

"You shall hear what it can be. I will read it you," said Priscilla.

"It seems to me that of all the women that ever lived my Aunt

Stanbury is the most prejudiced, the most unjust, and the most given

to evil thinking of her neighbours. This is what she has thought fit

to write to you, mamma." Then Priscilla read her aunt's letter, which

was as follows:--

The Close, Exeter, July 31, 186--.

DEAR SISTER STANBURY,

I am informed that the lady who is living with you because

she could not continue to live under the same roof with

her lawful husband, has received a visit at your house

from a gentleman who was named as her lover before she

left her own. I am given to understand that it was because

of this gentleman's visits to her in London, and because

she would not give up seeing him, that her husband would

not live with her any longer.

"But the man has never been here at all," said Mrs. Stanbury, in

dismay.

"Of course he has not been here. But let me go on."

I have got nothing to do with your visitors, [continued

the letter] and I should not interfere but for the credit

of the family. There ought to be somebody to explain to

you that much of the abominable disgrace of the whole

proceeding will rest upon you, if you permit such goings

on in your house. I suppose it is your house. At any rate

you are regarded as the mistress of the establishment, and

it is for you to tell the lady that she must go elsewhere.

I do hope that you have done so, or at least that you

will do so now. It is intolerable that the widow of my

brother,--a clergyman,--should harbour a lady who is

separated from her husband and who receives visits from

a gentleman who is reputed to be her lover. I wonder

much that your eldest daughter should countenance such a

proceeding.

Yours truly,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

Mrs. Stanbury, when the letter had been read to her, held up both her

hands in despair. "Dear, dear," she exclaimed. "Oh, dear!"

"She had such pleasure in writing it," said Priscilla, "that one

ought hardly to begrudge it her." The blackest spot in the character

of Priscilla Stanbury was her hatred for her aunt in Exeter. She knew

that her aunt had high qualities, and yet she hated her aunt. She was

well aware that her aunt was regarded as a shining light by very many

good people in the county, and yet she hated her aunt. She could not

but acknowledge that her aunt had been generous to her brother, and

was now very generous to her sister, and yet she hated her aunt. It

was now a triumph to her that her aunt had fallen into so terrible

a quagmire, and she was by no means disposed to let the sinning old

woman easily out of it.

"It is as pretty a specimen," she said, "as I ever knew of malice and

eaves-dropping combined."

"Don't use such hard words, my dear."

"Look at her words to us," said Priscilla. "What business has she to

talk to you about the credit of the family and abominable disgrace?

You have held your head up in poverty, while she has been rolling in

money."

"She has been very good to Hugh,--and now to Dorothy."

"If I were Dorothy I would have none of her goodness. She likes some

one to trample on,--some one of the name to patronise. She shan't

trample on you and me, mamma."

Then there was a discussion as to what should be done; or rather

a discourse in which Priscilla explained what she thought fit to

do. Nothing, she decided, should be said to Mrs. Trevelyan on the

subject; but an answer should be sent to Aunt Stanbury. Priscilla

herself would write this answer, and herself would sign it. There was

some difference of opinion on this point, as Mrs. Stanbury thought

that if she might be allowed to put her name to it, even though

Priscilla should write it, the wording of it would be made, in some

degree, mild,--to suit her own character. But her daughter was

imperative, and she gave way.

"It shall be mild enough in words," said Priscilla, "and very short."

Then she wrote her letter as follows:--

Nuncombe Putney, August 1, 186--.

DEAR AUNT STANBURY,

You have found a mare's nest. The gentleman you speak of

has never been here at all, and the people who bring you

news have probably hoaxed you. I don't think that mamma

has ever disgraced the family, and you can have no reason

for thinking that she ever will. You should, at any rate,

be sure of what you are saying before you make such cruel

accusations.

Yours truly,

PRISCILLA STANBURY.

P.S.--Another gentleman did call here,--not to see Mrs.

Trevelyan; but I suppose mamma's house need not be closed

against all visitors.

Poor Dorothy had passed evil hours from the moment in which her

aunt had so far certified herself as to Colonel Osborne's visit to

Nuncombe as to make her feel it to be incumbent on her to interfere.

After much consideration Miss Stanbury had told her niece the

dreadful news, and had told also what she intended to do. Dorothy,

who was in truth horrified at the iniquity of the fact which was

related, and who never dreamed of doubting the truth of her aunt's

information, hardly knew how to interpose. "I am sure mamma won't let

there be anything wrong," she had said.

"And you don't call this wrong?" said Miss Stanbury, in a tone of

indignation.

"But perhaps mamma will tell them to go."

"I hope she will. I hope she has. But he was allowed to be there

for hours. And now three days have passed and there is no sign of

anything being done. He came and went and may come again when he

pleases." Still Dorothy pleaded. "I shall do my duty," said Miss

Stanbury.

"I am quite sure mamma will do nothing wrong," said Dorothy. But the

letter was written and sent, and the answer to the letter reached the

house in the Close in due time.

When Miss Stanbury had read and re-read the very short reply which

her niece had written, she became at first pale with dismay, and

then red with renewed vigour and obstinacy. She had made herself, as

she thought, quite certain of her facts before she had acted on her

information. There was some equivocation, some most unworthy deceit

in Priscilla's letter. Or could it be possible that she herself had

been mistaken? Another gentleman had been there;--not, however, with

the object of seeing Mrs. Trevelyan! So said Priscilla. But she had

made herself sure that the man in question was a man from London,

a middle-aged man from London, who had specially asked for Mrs.

Trevelyan, and who had at once been known to Mrs. Clegg, at the

Lessboro' inn, to be Mrs. Trevelyan's lover. Miss Stanbury was

very unhappy, and at last sent for Giles Hickbody. Giles Hickbody

had never pretended to know the name. He had seen the man and had

described him, "Quite a swell, ma'am; and a Lon'oner, and one as'd

be up to anything; but not a young 'un; no, not just a young 'un,

zartainly." He was cross-examined again now, and said that all he

knew about the man's name was that there was a handle to it. This was

ended by Miss Stanbury sending him down to Lessboro' to learn the

very name of the gentleman, and by his coming back with that of the

Honourable George Glascock written on a piece of paper. "They says

now as he was arter the other young 'ooman," said Giles Hickbody.

Then was the confusion of Miss Stanbury complete.

It was late when Giles returned from Lessboro', and nothing could

be done that night. It was too late to write a letter for the

next morning's post. Miss Stanbury, who was as proud of her own

discrimination as she was just and true, felt that a day of

humiliation had indeed come for her. She hated Priscilla almost as

vigorously as Priscilla hated her. To Priscilla she would not write

to own her fault; but it was incumbent on her to confess it to Mrs.

Stanbury. It was incumbent on her also to confess it to Dorothy. All

that night she did not sleep, and the next morning she went about

abashed, wretched, hardly mistress of her own maids. She must confess

it also to Martha, and Martha would be very stern to her. Martha had

pooh-poohed the whole story of the lover, seeming to think that there

could be no reasonable objection to a lover past fifty.

"Dorothy," she said at last, about noon, "I have been over

hasty about your mother and this man. I am sorry for it, and

must--beg--everybody's--pardon."

"I knew mamma would do nothing wrong," said Dorothy.

"To do wrong is human, and she, I suppose, is not more free than

others; but in this matter I was misinformed. I shall write and beg

her pardon; and now I beg your pardon."

"Not mine, Aunt Stanbury."

"Yes, yours and your mother's, and the lady's also,--for against her

has the fault been most grievous. I shall write to your mother and

express my contrition." She put off the evil hour of writing as long

as she could, but before dinner the painful letter had been written,

and carried by herself to the post. It was as follows:--

The Close, August 3, 186--.

DEAR SISTER STANBURY,

I have now learned that the information was false on which

my former letter was based. I am heartily sorry for any

annoyance I may have given you. I can only inform you

that my intentions were good and upright. Nevertheless, I

humbly beg your pardon.

Yours truly,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

Mrs. Stanbury, when she received this, was inclined to let the matter

drop. That her sister-in-law should express such abject contrition

was to her such a lowering of the great ones of the earth, that the

apology conveyed to her more pain than pleasure. She could not hinder

herself from sympathising with all that her sister-in-law had felt

when she had found herself called upon to humiliate herself. But

it was not so with Priscilla. Mrs. Stanbury did not observe that

her daughter's name was scrupulously avoided in the apology; but

Priscilla observed it. She would not let the matter drop, without

an attempt at the last word. She therefore wrote back again as

follows;--

Nuncombe Putney, August 4, 186--.

DEAR AUNT STANBURY,

I am glad you have satisfied yourself about the gentleman

who has so much disquieted you. I do not know that the

whole affair would be worth a moment's consideration, were

it not that mamma and I, living as we do so secluded a

life, are peculiarly apt to feel any attack upon our good

name,--which is pretty nearly all that is left to us. If

ever there were women who should be free from attack,

at any rate from those of their own family, we are such

women. We never interfere with you, or with anybody; and I

think you might abstain from harassing us by accusations.

Pray do not write to mamma in such a strain again, unless

you are quite sure of your ground.

Yours truly,

PRISCILLA STANBURY.

"Impudent!" said Miss Stanbury to Martha, when she had read the

letter. "Ill-conditioned, impudent vixen!"

"She was provoked, miss," said Martha.

"Well; yes; yes;--and I suppose it is right that you should tell me

of it. I dare say it is part of what I ought to bear for being an old

fool, and too cautious about my own flesh and blood. I will bear it.

There. I was wrong, and I will say that I have been justly punished.

There,--there!"

How very much would Miss Stanbury's tone have been changed had

she known that at that very moment Colonel Osborne was eating his

breakfast at Mrs. Crocket's inn, in Nuncombe Putney!

CHAPTER XIX.

BOZZLE, THE EX-POLICEMAN.

[Illustration]

When Mr. Trevelyan had gone through the miserable task of breaking up

his establishment in Curzon Street, and had seen all his furniture

packed, including his books, his pictures, and his pet Italian

ornaments, it was necessary that he should go and live somewhere. He

was very wretched at this time,--so wretched that life was a burden

to him. He was a man who loved his wife;--to whom his child was very

dear; and he was one too to whom the ordinary comforts of domestic

life were attractive and necessary. There are men to whom release

from the constraint imposed by family ties will be, at any rate for

a time, felt as a release. But he was not such a man. There was no

delight to him in being able to dine at his club, and being free to

go whither he pleased in the evening. As it was, it pleased him to

go no whither in the evenings; and his mornings were equally blank

to him. He went so often to Mr. Bideawhile, that the poor old lawyer

became quite tired of the Trevelyan family quarrel. Even Lady

Milborough, with all her power of sympathising, began to feel that

she would almost prefer on any morning that her dear young friend,

Louis Trevelyan, should not be announced. Nevertheless, she always

saw him when he came, and administered comfort according to her

light. Of course he would have his wife back before long. That was

the only consolation she was able to offer; and she offered it so

often that he began gradually to feel that something might be done

towards bringing about so desirable an event. After what had occurred

they could not live again in Curzon Street,--nor even in London for

awhile; but Naples was open to them. Lady Milborough said so much to

him of the advantages which always came in such circumstances from

going to Naples, that he began to regard such a trip as almost the

natural conclusion of his adventure. But then there came that very

difficult question;--what step should be first taken? Lady Milborough

proposed that he should go boldly down to Nuncombe Putney, and make

the arrangement. "She will only be too glad to jump into your arms,"

said Lady Milborough. Trevelyan thought that if he went to Nuncombe

Putney, his wife might perhaps jump into his arms; but what would

come after that? How would he stand then in reference to his

authority? Would she own that she had been wrong? Would she promise

to behave better in future? He did not believe that she was yet

sufficiently broken in spirit to make any such promise. And he told

himself again and again that it would be absurd in him to allow her

to return to him without such subjection, after all that he had gone

through in defence of his marital rights. If he were to write to her

a long letter, argumentative, affectionate, exhaustive, it might be

better. He was inclined to believe of himself that he was good at

writing long, affectionate, argumentative, and exhaustive letters.

But he would not do even this as yet. He had broken up his house, and

scattered all his domestic gods to the winds, because she had behaved

badly to him; and the thing done was too important to allow of

redress being found so easily.

So he lived on a wretched life in London. He could hardly endure to

show himself at his club, fearing that every one would be talking of

him as the man who was separated from his wife,--perhaps as the man

of whose wife Colonel Osborne was the dear friend. No doubt for a day

or two there had been much of such conversation; but it had died away

from the club long before his consciousness had become callous. At

first he had gone into a lodging in Mayfair; but this had been but

for a day or two. After that he had taken a set of furnished chambers

in Lincoln's Inn, immediately under those in which Stanbury lived;

and thus it came to pass that he and Stanbury were very much thrown

together. As Trevelyan would always talk of his wife this was rather

a bore; but our friend bore with it, and would even continue to

instruct the world through the columns of the D. R. while Trevelyan

was descanting on the peculiar cruelty of his own position.

"I wish to be just, and even generous; and I do love her with all my

heart," he said one afternoon, when Hugh was very hard at work.

"'It is all very well for gentlemen to call themselves reformers,'"

Hugh was writing, "'but have these gentlemen ever realised to

themselves the meaning of that word? We think that they have never

done so as long as--' Of course you love her," said Hugh, with his

eyes still on the paper, still leaning on his pen, but finding by the

cessation of sound that Trevelyan had paused, and therefore knowing

that it was necessary that he should speak.

"As much as ever," said Trevelyan, with energy.

"'As long as they follow such a leader, in such a cause, into

whichever lobby he may choose to take them--' Exactly so,--exactly,"

said Stanbury; "just as much as ever."

"You are not listening to a word," said Trevelyan.

"I haven't missed a single expression you have used," said Stanbury.

"But a fellow has to do two things at a time when he's on the daily

press."

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said Trevelyan, angrily,

getting up, taking his hat, and stalking off to the house of Lady

Milborough. In this way he became rather a bore to his friends. He

could not divest his mind of the injury which had accrued to him from

his wife's conduct, nor could he help talking of the grief with which

his mind was laden. And he was troubled with sore suspicions, which,

as far as they concerned his wife, had certainly not been merited. It

had seemed to him that she had persisted in her intimacy with Colonel

Osborne in a manner that was not compatible with that wife-like

indifference which he regarded as her duty. Why had she written to

him and received letters from him when her husband had plainly told

her that any such communication was objectionable? She had done

so, and as far as Trevelyan could remember her words, had plainly

declared that she would continue to do so. He had sent her away into

the most remote retirement he could find for her; but the post was

open to her. He had heard much of Mrs. Stanbury, and of Priscilla,

from his friend Hugh, and thoroughly believed that his wife was in

respectable hands. But what was to prevent Colonel Osborne from

going after her, if he chose to do so? And if he did so choose,

Mrs. Stanbury could not prevent their meeting. He was racked with

jealousy, and yet he did not cease to declare to himself that he knew

his wife too well to believe that she would sin. He could not rid

himself of his jealousy, but he tried with all his might to make the

man whom he hated the object of it, rather than the woman whom he

loved.

He hated Colonel Osborne with all his heart. It was a regret to him

that the days of duelling were over, so that he could not shoot the

man. And yet, had duelling been possible to him, Colonel Osborne had

done nothing that would have justified him in calling his enemy out,

or would even have enabled him to do so with any chance of inducing

his enemy to fight. Circumstances, he thought, were cruel to him

beyond compare, in that he should have been made to suffer so great

torment without having any of the satisfaction of revenge. Even Lady

Milborough, with all her horror as to the Colonel, could not tell

him that the Colonel was amenable to any punishment. He was advised

that he must take his wife away and live at Naples because of this

man,--that he must banish himself entirely if he chose to repossess

himself of his wife and child;--and yet nothing could be done to

the unprincipled rascal by whom all his wrongs and sufferings were

occasioned! Thinking it very possible that Colonel Osborne would

follow his wife, he had a watch set upon the Colonel. He had found a

retired policeman,--a most discreet man, as he was assured,--who, for

a consideration, undertook the management of interesting jobs of this

kind. The man was one Bozzle, who had not lived without a certain

reputation in the police courts. In these days of his madness,

therefore, he took Mr. Bozzle into his pay; and after a while he got

a letter from Bozzle with the Exeter post-mark. Colonel Osborne had

left London with a ticket for Lessboro'. Bozzle also had taken a

place by the same train for that small town. The letter was written

in the railway carriage, and, as Bozzle explained, would be posted by

him as he passed through Exeter. A further communication should be

made by the next day's post, in a letter which Mr. Bozzle proposed to

address to Z. A., Post-office, Waterloo Place.

On receiving this first letter, Trevelyan was in an agony of

doubt, as well as misery. What should he do? Should he go to Lady

Milborough, or to Stanbury; or should he at once follow Colonel

Osborne and Mr. Bozzle to Lessboro'? It ended in his resolving at

last to wait for the letter which was to be addressed to Z. A. But he

spent an interval of horrible suspense, and of insane rage. Let the

laws say what they might, he would have the man's blood, if he found

that the man had even attempted to wrong him. Then, at last, the

second letter reached him. Colonel Osborne and Mr. Bozzle had each of

them spent the day in the neighbourhood of Lessboro', not exactly in

each other's company, but very near to each other. "The Colonel" had

ordered a gig, on the day after his arrival at Lessboro', for the

village of Cockchaffington; and, for all Mr. Bozzle knew, the Colonel

had gone to Cockchaffington. Mr. Bozzle was ultimately inclined

to think that the Colonel had really spent his day in going to

Cockchaffington. Mr. Bozzle himself, knowing the wiles of such

men as Colonel Osborne, and thinking at first that that journey

to Cockchaffington might only be a deep ruse, had walked over to

Nuncombe Putney. There he had had a pint of beer and some bread and

cheese at Mrs. Crocket's house, and had asked various questions, to

which he did not receive very satisfactory answers. But he inspected

the Clock House very minutely, and came to a decided opinion as to

the point at which it would be attacked, if burglary were the object

of the assailants. And he observed the iron gates, and the steps,

and the shape of the trees, and the old pigeon-house-looking fabric

in which the clock used to be placed. There was no knowing when

information might be wanted, or what information might not be of use.

But he made himself tolerably sure that Colonel Osborne did not visit

Nuncombe Putney on that day; and then he walked back to Lessboro'.

Having done this, he applied himself to the little memorandum book in

which he kept the records of these interesting duties, and entered a

claim against his employer for a conveyance to Nuncombe Putney and

back, including driver and ostler; and then he wrote his letter.

After that he had a hot supper, with three glasses of brandy and

water, and went to bed with a thorough conviction that he had earned

his bread on that day.

The letter to Z. A. did not give all these particulars, but it

did explain that Colonel Osborne had gone off, apparently, to

Cockchaffington, and that he,--Bozzle,--had himself visited Nuncombe

Putney. "The hawk hasn't been nigh the dovecot as yet," said Mr.

Bozzle in his letter, meaning to be both mysterious and facetious.

It would be difficult to say whether the wit or the mystery disgusted

Trevelyan the most. He had felt that he was defiling himself with

dirt when he first went to Mr. Bozzle. He knew that he was having

recourse to means that were base and low,--which could not be other

than base or low, let the circumstances be what they might. But Mr.

Bozzle's conversation had not been quite so bad as Mr. Bozzle's

letters; as it may have been that Mr. Bozzle's successful activity

was more insupportable than his futile attempts. But, nevertheless,

something must be done. It could not be that Colonel Osborne should

have gone down to the close neighbourhood of Nuncombe Putney without

the intention of seeing the lady whom his obtrusive pertinacity had

driven to that seclusion. It was terrible to Trevelyan that Colonel

Osborne should be there, and not the less terrible because such a one

as Mr. Bozzle was watching the Colonel on his behalf. Should he go to

Nuncombe Putney himself? And if so, when he got to Nuncombe Putney

what should he do there? At last, in his suspense and his grief, he

resolved that he would tell the whole to Hugh Stanbury.

"Do you mean," said Hugh, "that you have put a policeman on his

track?"

"The man was a policeman once."

"What we call a private detective. I can't say I think you were

right."

"But you see that it was necessary," said Trevelyan.

"I can't say that it was necessary. To speak out, I can't understand

that a wife should be worth watching who requires watching."

"Is a man to do nothing then? And even now it is not my wife whom I

doubt."

"As for Colonel Osborne, if he chooses to go to Lessboro', why

shouldn't he? Nothing that you can do, or that Bozzle can do, can

prevent him. He has a perfect right to go to Lessboro'."

"But he has not a right to go to my wife."

"And if your wife refuses to see him; or having seen him,--for a man

may force his way in anywhere with a little trouble,--if she sends

him away with a flea in his ear, as I believe she would--"

"She is so frightfully indiscreet."

"I don't see what Bozzle can do."

"He has found out at any rate that Osborne is there," said Trevelyan.

"I am not more fond of dealing with such fellows than you are

yourself. But I think it is my duty to know what is going on. What

ought I to do now?"

"I should do nothing,--except dismiss Bozzle."

"You know that that is nonsense, Stanbury."

"Whatever I did I should dismiss Bozzle." Stanbury was now quite in

earnest, and, as he repeated his suggestion for the dismissal of the

policeman, pushed his writing things away from him. "If you ask my

opinion, you know, I must tell you what I think. I should get rid of

Bozzle as a beginning. If you will only think of it, how can your

wife come back to you if she learns that you have set a detective to

watch her?"

"But I haven't set the man to watch her."

"Colonel Osborne is nothing to you, except as he is concerned with

her. This man is now down in her neighbourhood; and, if she learns

that, how can she help feeling it as a deep insult? Of course the man

watches her as a cat watches a mouse."

"But what am I to do? I can't write to the man and tell him to come

away. Osborne is down there, and I must do something. Will you go

down to Nuncombe Putney yourself, and let me know the truth?"

After much debating of the subject, Hugh Stanbury said that he would

himself go down to Nuncombe Putney alone. There were difficulties

about the D. R.; but he would go to the office of the newspaper and

overcome them. How far the presence of Nora Rowley at his mother's

house may have assisted in bringing him to undertake the journey,

perhaps need not be accurately stated. He acknowledged to himself

that the claims of friendship were strong upon him; and that as he

had loudly disapproved of the Bozzle arrangement, he ought to lend a

hand to some other scheme of action. Moreover, having professed his

conviction that no improper visiting could possibly take place under

his mother's roof, he felt bound to shew that he was not afraid to

trust to that conviction himself. He declared that he would be ready

to proceed to Nuncombe Putney to-morrow;--but only on condition that

he might have plenary power to dismiss Bozzle.

"There can be no reason why you should take any notice of the man,"

said Trevelyan.

"How can I help noticing him when I find him prowling about the

place? Of course I shall know who he is."

"I don't see that you need know anything about him."

"My dear Trevelyan, you cannot have two ambassadors engaged in

the same service without communication with each other. And any

communication with Mr. Bozzle, except that of sending him back to

London, I will not have." The controversy was ended by the writing of

a letter from Trevelyan to Bozzle, which was confided to Stanbury, in

which the ex-policeman was thanked for his activity and requested to

return to London for the present. "As we are now aware that Colonel

Osborne is in the neighbourhood," said the letter, "my friend Mr.

Stanbury will know what to do."

As soon as this was settled, Stanbury went to the office of the D. R.

and made arrangement as to his work for three days. Jones could do

the article on the Irish Church upon a pinch like this, although he

had not given much study to the subject as yet; and Puddlethwaite,

who was great in City matters, would try his hand on the present

state of society in Rome, a subject on which it was essential that

the D. R. should express itself at once. Having settled these little

troubles Stanbury returned to his friend, and in the evening they

dined together at a tavern.

"And now, Trevelyan, let me know fairly what it is that you wish,"

said Stanbury.

"I wish to have my wife back again."

"Simply that. If she will agree to come back, you will make no

difficulty."

"No; not quite simply that. I shall desire that she shall be guided

by my wishes as to any intimacies she may form."

"That is all very well; but is she to give any undertaking? Do you

intend to exact any promise from her? It is my opinion that she will

be willing enough to come back, and that when she is with you there

will be no further cause for quarrelling. But I don't think she will

bind herself by any exacted promise; and certainly not through a

third person."

"Then say nothing about it. Let her write a letter to me proposing to

come,--and she shall come."

"Very well. So far I understand. And now what about Colonel Osborne?

You don't want me to quarrel with him I suppose?"

"I should like to keep that for myself," said Trevelyan, grimly.

"If you will take my advice you will not trouble yourself about him,"

said Stanbury. "But as far as I am concerned, I am not to meddle or

make with him? Of course," continued Stanbury, after a pause, "if I

find that he is intruding himself in my mother's house, I shall tell

him that he must not come there."

"But if you find him installed in your mother's house as a

visitor,--how then?"

"I do not regard that as possible."

"I don't mean living there," said Trevelyan, "but coming backwards

and forwards;--going on in habits of intimacy with,--with--?" His

voice trembled so as he asked these questions, that he could not

pronounce the word which was to complete them.

"With Mrs. Trevelyan, you mean."

"Yes; with my wife. I don't say that it is so; but it may be so. You

will be bound to tell me the truth."

"I will certainly tell you the truth."

"And the whole truth."

"Yes; the whole truth."

"Should it be so I will never see her again,--never. And as for

him;--but never mind." Then there was another short period of

silence, during which Stanbury smoked his pipe and sipped his whisky

toddy. "You must see," continued Trevelyan, "that it is absolutely

necessary that I should do something. It is all very well for you to

say that you do not like detectives. Neither do I like them. But what

was I to do? When you condemn me you hardly realise the difficulties

of my position."

"It is the deuce of a nuisance certainly," said Stanbury, through the

cloud of smoke,--thinking now not at all of Mrs. Trevelyan, but of

Mrs. Trevelyan's sister.

"It makes a man almost feel that he had better not marry at all,"

said Trevelyan.

"I don't see that. Of course there may come troubles. The tiles may

fall on your head, you know, as you walk through the streets. As far

as I can see, women go straight enough nineteen times out of twenty.

But they don't like being,--what I call looked after."

"And did I look after my wife more than I ought?"

"I don't mean that; but if I were married,--which I never shall be,

for I shall never attain to the respectability of a fixed income,--I

fancy I shouldn't look after my wife at all. It seems to me that

women hate to be told about their duties."

"But if you saw your wife, quite innocently, falling into an improper

intimacy,--taking up with people she ought not to know,--doing that

in ignorance, which could not but compromise yourself;--wouldn't you

speak a word then?"

"Oh! I might just say, in an off-hand way, that Jones was a rascal,

or a liar, or a fool, or anything of that sort. But I would never

caution her against Jones. By George, I believe a woman can stand

anything better than that."

"You have never tried it, my friend."

"And I don't suppose I ever shall. As for me, I believe Aunt Stanbury

was right when she said that I was a radical vagabond. I dare say I

shall never try the thing myself, and therefore it's very easy to

have a theory. But I must be off. Good night, old fellow. I'll do the

best I can; and, at any rate, I'll let you know the truth."

There had been a question during the day as to whether Stanbury

should let his sister know by letter that he was expected; but it had

been decided that he should appear at Nuncombe without any previous

notification of his arrival. Trevelyan had thought that this was very

necessary, and when Stanbury had urged that such a measure seemed

to imply suspicion, he had declared that in no other way could the

truth be obtained. He, Trevelyan, simply wanted to know the facts

as they were occurring. It was a fact that Colonel Osborne was down

in the neighbourhood of Nuncombe Putney. That, at least, had been

ascertained. It might very possibly be the case that he would be

refused admittance to the Clock House,--that all the ladies there

would combine to keep him out. But,--so Trevelyan urged,--the truth

on this point was desired. It was essentially necessary to his

happiness that he should know what was being done.

"Your mother and sister," said he, "cannot be afraid of your coming

suddenly among them."

Stanbury, so urged, had found it necessary to yield, but yet he had

felt that he himself was almost acting like a detective policeman, in

purposely falling down upon them without a word of announcement. Had

chance circumstances made it necessary that he should go in such a

manner he would have thought nothing of it. It would simply have been

a pleasant joke to him.

As he went down by the train on the following day, he almost felt

ashamed of the part which he had been called upon to perform.

CHAPTER XX.

SHEWING HOW COLONEL OSBORNE WENT TO COCKCHAFFINGTON.

Together with Miss Stanbury's first letter to her sister-in-law a

letter had also been delivered to Mrs. Trevelyan. Nora Rowley, as her

sister had left the room with this in her hand, had expressed her

opinion that it had come from Trevelyan; but it had in truth been

written by Colonel Osborne. And when that second letter from Miss

Stanbury had been received at the Clock House,--that in which she in

plain terms begged pardon for the accusation conveyed in her first

letter,--Colonel Osborne had started on his deceitful little journey

to Cockchaffington, and Mr. Bozzle, the ex-policeman who had him in

hand, had already asked his way to Nuncombe Putney.

When Colonel Osborne learned that Louis Trevelyan had broken up his

establishment in Curzon Street, and had sent his wife away into a

barbarous retirement in Dartmoor,--for such was the nature of the

information on the subject which was spread among Trevelyan's friends

in London;--and when he was made aware also that all this was done

on his account,--because he was so closely intimate with Trevelyan's

wife, and because Trevelyan's wife was, and persisted in continuing

to be, so closely intimate with him,--his vanity was gratified.

Although it might be true,--and no doubt was true,--that he said much

to his friends and to himself of the deep sorrow which he felt that

such a trouble should befall his old friend and his old friend's

daughter; nevertheless, as he curled his grey whiskers before the

glass, and made the most of such remnant of hair as was left on

the top of his head, as he looked to the padding of his coat, and

completed a study of the wrinkles beneath his eyes, so that in

conversation they might be as little apparent as possible, he felt

more of pleasure than of pain in regard to the whole affair. It was

very sad that it should be so, but it was human. Had it been in his

power to set the whole matter right by a word, he would probably have

spoken that word; but as this was not possible, as Trevelyan had in

his opinion made a gross fool of himself, as Emily Trevelyan was

very nice, and not the less nice in that she certainly was fond

of himself, as great tyranny had been used towards her, and as he

himself had still the plea of old family friendship to protect his

conscience,--to protect his conscience unless he went so far as to

make that plea an additional sting to his conscience,--he thought

that, as a man, he must follow up the matter. Here was a young, and

fashionable, and very pretty woman banished to the wilds of Dartmoor

for his sake. And, as far as he could understand, she would not have

been so banished had she consented to say that she would give up

her acquaintance with him. In such circumstances as these was it

possible that he should do nothing? Various ideas ran through his

head. He began to think that if Trevelyan were out of the way, he

might,--might perhaps be almost tempted to make this woman his wife.

She was so nice that he almost thought that he might be rash enough

for that, although he knew well the satisfaction of being a bachelor;

but as the thought suggested itself to him, he was well aware that

he was thinking of a thing quite distant from him. The reader is not

to suppose that Colonel Osborne meditated any making-away with the

husband. Our Colonel was certainly not the man for a murder. Nor did

he even think of running away with his friend's daughter. Though he

told himself that he could dispose of his wrinkles satisfactorily,

still he knew himself and his powers sufficiently to be aware that

he was no longer fit to be the hero of such a romance as that. He

acknowledged to himself that there was much labour to be gone through

in running away with another man's wife; and that the results, in

respect to personal comfort, are not always happy. But what if Mrs.

Trevelyan were to divorce herself from her husband on the score of

her husband's cruelty? Various horrors were related as to the man's

treatment of his wife. By some it was said that she was in the prison

on Dartmoor,--or, if not actually in the prison, an arrangement which

the prison discipline might perhaps make difficult,--that she was in

the custody of one of the prison warders who possessed a prim cottage

and a grim wife, just outside the prison walls. Colonel Osborne did

not himself believe even so much as this, but he did believe that

Mrs. Trevelyan had been banished to some inhospitable region, to some

dreary comfortless abode, of which, as the wife of a man of fortune,

she would have great ground to complain. So thinking, he did not

probably declare to himself that a divorce should be obtained,

and that, in such event, he would marry the lady,--but ideas came

across his mind in that direction. Trevelyan was a cruel Bluebeard;

Emily,--as he was studious to call Mrs. Trevelyan,--was a dear

injured saint. And as for himself, though he acknowledged to himself

that the lumbago pinched him now and again, so that he could not rise

from his chair with all the alacrity of youth, yet, when he walked

along Pall Mall with his coat properly buttoned, he could not but

observe that a great many young women looked at him with admiring

eyes.

It was thus with no settled scheme that the Colonel went to work,

and made inquiries, and ascertained Mrs. Trevelyan's address in

Devonshire. When he learned it, he thought that he had done much;

though, in truth, there had been no secrecy in the matter. Scores

of people knew Mrs. Trevelyan's address besides the newsvendor who

supplied her paper, from whose boy Colonel Osborne's servant obtained

the information. But when the information had been obtained, it was

expedient that it should be used; and therefore Colonel Osborne wrote

the following letter:--

Acrobats Club, July 31, 186--.

DEAR EMILY,

Twice the Colonel wrote Dearest Emily, and twice he tore the sheet on

which the words were written. He longed to be ardent, but still it

was so necessary to be prudent! He was not quite sure of the lady.

Women sometimes tell their husbands, even when they have quarrelled

with them. And, although ardent expressions in writing to pretty

women are pleasant to male writers, it is not pleasant for a

gentleman to be asked what on earth he means by that sort of thing at

his time of life. The Colonel gave half an hour to the consideration,

and then began the letter, Dear Emily. If prudence be the soul

of valour, may it not be considered also the very mainspring, or,

perhaps, the pivot of love?

DEAR EMILY,

I need hardly tell you with what dismay I have heard of

all that has taken place in Curzon Street. I fear that you

must have suffered much, and that you are suffering now.

It is an inexpressible relief to me to hear that you have

your child with you, and Nora. But, nevertheless, to

have your home taken away from you, to be sent out of

London, to be banished from all society! And for what?

The manner in which the minds of some men work is quite

incomprehensible.

As for myself, I feel that I have lost the company of

a friend, whom indeed I can very ill spare. I have a

thousand things to say to you, and among them one or

two which I feel that I must say,--that I ought to say.

As it happens, an old schoolfellow of mine is Vicar of

Cockchaffington, a village which I find by the map is

very near to Nuncombe Putney. I saw him in town last

spring, and he then asked me to pay him a visit. There is

something in his church which people go to see, and though

I don't understand churches much, I shall go and see it.

I shall run down on Wednesday, and shall sleep at the inn

at Lessboro'. I see that Lessboro' is a market town, and

I suppose there is an inn. I shall go over to my friend on

the Thursday, but shall return to Lessboro'. Though a man

be ever so eager to see a church door-way, he need not

sleep at the parsonage. On the following day, I will get

over to Nuncombe Putney, and I hope that you will see me.

Considering my long friendship with you, and my great

attachment to your father and mother, I do not think

that the strictest martinet would tell you that you need

hesitate in the matter.

I have seen Mr. Trevelyan twice at the club, but he has

not spoken to me. Under such circumstances I could not of

course speak to him. Indeed, I may say that my feelings

towards him just at present are of such a nature as

to preclude me from doing so with any appearance of

cordiality.

Dear Emily,

Believe me now, as always, your affectionate friend,

FREDERIC OSBORNE.

When he read that letter over to himself a second time he felt quite

sure that he had not committed himself. Even if his friend were to

send the letter to her husband, it could not do him any harm. He was

aware that he might have dilated more on the old friendship between

himself and Sir Marmaduke, but he experienced a certain distaste to

the mention of things appertaining to years long past. It did not

quite suit him in his present frame of mind to speak of his regard in

those quasi-paternal terms which he would have used had it satisfied

him to represent himself simply as her father's friend. His language

therefore had been a little doubtful, so that the lady might, if

she were so minded, look upon him in that tender light in which her

husband had certainly chosen to regard him.

When the letter was handed to Mrs. Trevelyan, she at once took it

with her up to her own room, so that she might be alone when she read

it. The handwriting was quite familiar to her, and she did not choose

that even her sister should see it. She had told herself twenty times

over that, while living at Nuncombe Putney, she was not living under

the guardianship of Mrs. Stanbury. She would consent to live under

the guardianship of no one, as her husband did not choose to remain

with her and protect her. She had done no wrong, and she would submit

to no other authority, than that of her legal lord and master. Nor,

according to her views of her own position, was it in his power to

depute that authority to others. He had caused the separation, and

now she must be the sole judge of her own actions. In itself, a

correspondence between her and her father's old friend was in no

degree criminal or even faulty. There was no reason, moral, social,

or religious, why an old man, over fifty, who had known her all her

life, should not write to her. But yet she could not say aloud before

Mrs. Stanbury, and Priscilla, and her sister, that she had received a

letter from Colonel Osborne. She felt that the colour had come to her

cheek, and that she could not even walk out of the room as though the

letter had been a matter of indifference to her.

And would it have been a matter of indifference had there been nobody

there to see her? Mrs. Trevelyan was certainly not in love with

Colonel Osborne. She was not more so now than she had been when her

father's friend, purposely dressed for the occasion, had kissed her

in the vestry of the church in which she was married, and had given

her a blessing, which was then intended to be semi-paternal,--as from

an old man to a young woman. She was not in love with him,--never

would be, never could be in love with him. Reader, you may believe

in her so far as that. But where is the woman, who, when she is

neglected, thrown over, and suspected by the man that she loves, will

not feel the desire of some sympathy, some solicitude, some show of

regard from another man? This woman's life, too, had not hitherto

been of such a nature that the tranquillity of the Clock House at

Nuncombe Putney afforded to her all that she desired. She had been

there now a month, and was almost sick from the want of excitement.

And she was full of wrath against her husband. Why had he sent her

there to break her heart in a disgraceful retirement, when she had

never wronged him? From morning to night she had no employment, no

amusement, nothing to satisfy her cravings. Why was she to be doomed

to such an existence? She had declared that as long as she could

have her boy with her, she would be happy. She was allowed to have

her boy; but she was anything but happy. When she received Colonel

Osborne's letter,--while she held it in her hand still unopened, she

never for a moment thought that that could make her happy. But there

was in it something of excitement. And she painted the man to herself

in brighter colours now than she had ever given to him in her former

portraits. He cared for her. He was gracious to her. He appreciated

her talents, her beauty, and her conduct. He knew that she deserved

a treatment very different from that accorded to her by her husband.

Why should she reject the sympathy of her father's oldest friend,

because her husband was madly jealous about an old man? Her husband

had chosen to send her away, and to leave her, so that she must act

on her own judgment. Acting on her own judgment, she read Colonel

Osborne's letter from first to last. She knew that he was wrong to

speak of coming to Nuncombe Putney; but yet she thought that she

would see him. She had a dim perception that she was standing on the

edge of a precipice, on broken ground which might fall under her

without a moment's warning, and yet she would not retreat from the

danger. Though Colonel Osborne was wrong, very wrong in coming to see

her, yet she liked him for coming. Though she would be half afraid

to tell her news to Mrs. Stanbury, and more than half afraid to tell

Priscilla, yet she liked the excitement of the fear. Nora would scold

her; but Nora's scolding she thought she could answer. And then it

was not the fact that Colonel Osborne was coming down to Devonshire

to see her. He was coming as far as Lessboro' to see his friend at

Cockchaffington. And when at Lessboro', was it likely that he should

leave the neighbourhood without seeing the daughter of his old ally?

And why should he do so? Was he to be unnatural in his conduct,

uncivil and unfriendly, because Mr. Trevelyan had been foolish,

suspicious, and insane?

So arguing with herself, she answered Colonel Osborne's letter before

she had spoken on the subject to any one in the house,--and this was

her answer:--

MY DEAR COLONEL OSBORNE,

I must leave it to your own judgment to decide whether you

will come to Nuncombe Putney or not. There are reasons

which would seem to make it expedient that you should stay

away,--even though circumstances are bringing you into

the immediate neighbourhood. But of these reasons I will

leave you to be the judge. I will never let it be said

that I myself have had cause to dread the visit of any old

friend. Nevertheless, if you stay away, I shall understand

why you do so.

Personally, I shall be glad to see you,--as I have always

been. It seems odd to me that I cannot write in warmer

tones to my father's and mother's oldest friend. Of

course, you will understand that though I shall readily

see you if you call, I cannot ask you to stay. In the

first place, I am not now living in my own house. I am

staying with Mrs. Stanbury, and the place is called the

Clock House.

Yours very sincerely,

EMILY TREVELYAN.

The Clock House, Nuncombe Putney, Monday.

Soon after she had written it, Nora came into her room, and at once

asked concerning the letter which she had seen delivered to her

sister that morning.

"It was from Colonel Osborne," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"From Colonel Osborne! How very wrong!"

"I don't see that it is wrong at all. Because Louis is foolish and

mad, that cannot make another man wrong for doing the most ordinary

thing in the world."

"I had hoped it had been from Louis," said Nora.

"Oh dear, no. He is by no means so considerate. I do not suppose I

shall hear from him, till he chooses to give some fresh order about

myself or my child. He will hardly trouble himself to write to me,

unless he takes up some new freak to show me that he is my master."

"And what does Colonel Osborne say?"

"He is coming here."

"Coming here?" almost shouted Nora.

"Yes; absolutely here. Does it sound to you as if Lucifer himself

were about to show his face? The fact is, he happens to have a friend

in the neighbourhood whom he has long promised to visit; and as he

must be at Lessboro', he does not choose to go away without the

compliment of a call. It will be as much to you as to me."

"I don't want to see him in the least," said Nora.

"There is his letter. As you seem to be so suspicious, you had better

read it."

Then Nora read it.

"And there is a copy of my answer," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "I shall

keep both, because I know so well what ill-natured things people will

say."

"Dear Emily, do not send it," said Nora.

"Indeed I shall. I will not be frightened by bugbears. And I will

not be driven to confess to any man on earth that I am afraid to see

him. Why should I be afraid of Colonel Osborne? I will not submit to

acknowledge that there can be any danger in Colonel Osborne. Were

I to do so I should be repeating the insult against myself. If my

husband wished to guide me in such matters, why did he not stay with

me?"

Then she went out into the village and posted the letter. Nora

meanwhile was thinking whether she would call in the assistance of

Priscilla Stanbury; but she did not like to take any such a step in

opposition to her sister.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHEWING HOW COLONEL OSBORNE WENT TO NUNCOMBE PUTNEY.

Colonel Osborne was expected at Nuncombe Putney on the Friday, and

it was Thursday evening before either Mrs. Stanbury or Priscilla was

told of his coming. Emily had argued the matter with Nora, declaring

that she would make the communication herself, and that she would

make it when she pleased and how she pleased. "If Mrs. Stanbury

thinks," said she, "that I am going to be treated as a prisoner, or

that I will not judge myself as to whom I may see, or whom I may not

see, she is very much mistaken." Nora felt that were she to give

information to those ladies in opposition to her sister's wishes,

she would express suspicion on her own part by doing so; and she was

silent. On that same Thursday Priscilla had written her last defiant

letter to her aunt,--that letter in which she had cautioned her aunt

to make no further accusations without being sure of her facts. To

Priscilla's imagination that coming of Lucifer in person, of which

Mrs. Trevelyan had spoken, would hardly have been worse than the

coming of Colonel Osborne. When, therefore, Mrs. Trevelyan declared

the fact on the Thursday evening, vainly endeavouring to speak of

the threatened visit in an ordinary voice, and as of an ordinary

circumstance, it was as though a thunderbolt had fallen upon them.

"Colonel Osborne coming here!" said Priscilla, mindful of the

Stanbury correspondence,--mindful of the evil tongues of the world.

"And why not?" demanded Mrs. Trevelyan, who had heard nothing of the

Stanbury correspondence.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Stanbury, who, of course, was

aware of all that had passed between the Clock House and the house in

the Close, though the letters had been written by her daughter.

Nora was determined to stand up for her sister, whatever might be the

circumstances of the case. "I wish Colonel Osborne were not coming,"

said she, "because it makes a foolish fuss; but I cannot understand

how anybody can suppose it to be wrong that Emily should see papa's

very oldest friend in the world."

"But why is he coming?" demanded Priscilla.

"Because he wants to see an acquaintance at Cockchaffington," said

Mrs. Trevelyan; "and there is a wonderful church-door there."

"A church-fiddlestick!" said Priscilla.

The matter was debated throughout all the evening. At one time

there was a great quarrel between the ladies, and then there was a

reconciliation. The point on which Mrs. Trevelyan stood with the

greatest firmness was this,--that it did not become her, as a married

woman whose conduct had always been good and who was more careful as

to that than she was even of her name, to be ashamed to meet any man.

"Why should I not see Colonel Osborne, or Colonel anybody else who

might call here with the same justification for calling which his old

friendship gives him?" Priscilla endeavoured to explain to her that

her husband's known wishes ought to hinder her from doing so. "My

husband should have remained with me to express his wishes," Mrs.

Trevelyan replied.

Neither could Mrs. Stanbury nor could Priscilla bring herself to say

that the man should not be admitted into the house. In the course of

the debate, in the heat of her anger, Mrs. Trevelyan declared that

were any such threat held out to her, she would leave the house and

see Colonel Osborne in the street, or at the inn.

"No, Emily; no," said Nora.

"But I will. I will not submit to be treated as a guilty woman, or as

a prisoner. They may say what they like; but I won't be shut up."

"No one has tried to shut you up," said Priscilla.

"You are afraid of that old woman at Exeter," said Mrs. Trevelyan;

for by this time the facts of the Stanbury correspondence had

all been elicited in general conversation; "and yet you know how

uncharitable and malicious she is."

"We are not afraid of her," said Priscilla. "We are afraid of nothing

but of doing wrong."

"And will it be wrong to let an old gentleman come into the house,"

said Nora, "who is nearly sixty, and who has known us ever since we

were born?"

"If he is nearly sixty, Priscilla," said Mrs. Stanbury, "that does

seem to make a difference." Mrs. Stanbury herself was only just

sixty, and she felt herself to be quite an old woman.

"They may be devils at eighty," said Priscilla.

"Colonel Osborne is not a devil at all," said Nora.

"But mamma is so foolish," said Priscilla. "The man's age does not

matter in the least."

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said Mrs. Stanbury, very humbly.

At that time the quarrel was raging, but afterwards came the

reconciliation. Had it not been for the Stanbury correspondence the

fact of Colonel Osborne's threatened visit would have been admitted

as a thing necessary--as a disagreeable necessity; but how was

the visit to be admitted and passed over in the teeth of that

correspondence? Priscilla felt very keenly the peculiar cruelty

of her position. Of course Aunt Stanbury would hear of the visit.

Indeed, any secrecy in the matter was not compatible with Priscilla's

ideas of honesty. Her aunt had apologised humbly for having said

that Colonel Osborne had been at Nuncombe. That apology, doubtless,

had been due. Colonel Osborne had not been at Nuncombe when the

accusation had been made, and the accusation had been unjust and

false. But his coming had been spoken of by Priscilla in her own

letters as an occurrence which was quite out of the question. Her

anger against her aunt had been for saying that the man had come,

not for objecting to such a visit. And now the man was coming, and

Aunt Stanbury would know all about it. How great, how terrible, how

crushing would be Aunt Stanbury's triumph!

"I must write and tell her," said Priscilla.

"I am sure I shall not object," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"And Hugh must be told," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"You may tell all the world, if you like," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

In this way it was settled among them that Colonel Osborne was to

be received. On the next morning, Friday morning, Colonel Osborne,

doubtless having heard something of Mrs. Crocket from his friend

at Cockchaffington, was up early, and had himself driven over to

Nuncombe Putney before breakfast. The ever-watchful Bozzle was, of

course, at his heels,--or rather, not at his heels on the first two

miles of the journey; for Bozzle, with painful zeal, had made himself

aware of all the facts, and had started on the Nuncombe Putney road

half an hour before the Colonel's fly was in motion. And when the

fly passed him he was lying discreetly hidden behind an old oak. The

driver, however, had caught a glimpse of him as he was topping a

hill, and having seen him about on the previous day, and perceiving

that he was dressed in a decent coat and trousers, and that,

nevertheless, he was not a gentleman, began to suspect that he

was--somebody. There was a great deal said afterwards about Bozzle in

Mrs. Clegg's yard at Lessboro'; but the Lessboro' mind was never able

to satisfy itself altogether respecting Bozzle and his mission. As

to Colonel Osborne and his mission, the Lessboro' mind did satisfy

itself with much certainty. The horse was hardly taken from out of

Colonel Osborne's fly in Mrs. Crocket's yard when Bozzle stepped

into the village by a path which he had already discovered, and soon

busied himself among the tombs in the churchyard. Now, one corner of

the churchyard was immediately opposite to the iron gate leading into

the Clock House. "Drat 'un," said the wooden-legged postman, still

sitting on his donkey, to Mrs. Crocket's ostler, "if there be'ant the

chap as was here yesterday when I was a starting, and I zeed 'un in

Lezbro' street thick very morning." "He be'ant arter no good, that

'un," said the ostler. After that a close watch was kept upon the

watcher.

[Illustration: The wooden-legged postman of Nuncombe Putney.]

In the meantime, Colonel Osborne had ordered his breakfast at the

Stag and Antlers, and had asked questions as to the position of the

Clock House. He was altogether ignorant of Mr. Bozzle, although Mr.

Bozzle had been on his track now for two days and two nights. He had

determined, as he came on to Nuncombe Putney, that he would not be

shame-faced about his visit to Mrs. Trevelyan. It is possible that

he was not so keen in the matter as he had been when he planned his

journey in London; and, it may be, that he really tried to make

himself believe that he had come all the way to the confines of

Dartmoor to see the porch of Cockchaffington Church. The session

in London was over, and it was necessary for such a man as Colonel

Osborne that he should do something with himself before he went down

to the Scotch grouse. He had long desired to see something of the

most picturesque county in England; and now, as he sat eating his

breakfast in Mrs. Crocket's parlour, he almost looked upon his dear

Emily as a subsidiary attraction. "Oh, that's the Clock House,"

he said to Mrs. Crocket. "No, I have not the pleasure of knowing

Mrs. Stanbury; very respectable lady, so I have heard; widow of a

clergyman; ah, yes; son up in London; I know him;--always writing

books is he? Very clever, I dare say. But there's a lady,--indeed two

ladies,--whom I do know. Mrs. Trevelyan is there, I think,--and Miss

Rowley."

"You be'ant Muster Trevelyan, be you?" said Mrs. Crocket, looking at

him very hard.

"No, I'm not Mr. Trevelyan."

"Nor yet 'the Colonel' they doo be talking about?"

"Well, yes, I am a colonel. I don't know why anybody should talk

about me. I'll just step out now, however, and see my friends."

"It's madam's lover," said Mrs. Crocket to herself, "as sure as eggs

is eggs." As she said so, Colonel Osborne boldly walked across the

village and pulled the bell at the iron gate, while Bozzle, crouching

among the tombs, saw the handle in his hand. "There he is," said

Priscilla. Everybody in the Clock House had known that the fly,

which they had seen, had brought "the Colonel" into Nuncombe Putney.

Everybody had known that he had breakfasted at the Stag and Antlers.

And everybody now knew that he was at the gate ringing the bell.

"Into the drawing-room," said Mrs. Stanbury, with a fearful,

tremulous whisper, to the girl who went across the little garden

in front to open the iron gate. The girl felt as though Apollyon

were there, and as though she were called upon to admit Apollyon.

Mrs. Stanbury having uttered her whisper, hurried away up-stairs.

Priscilla held her ground in the parlour, determined to be near the

scene of action if there might be need. And it must be acknowledged

that she peeped from behind the curtain, anxious to catch a glimpse

of the terrible man, whose coming to Nuncombe Putney she regarded as

so severe a misfortune.

The plan of the campaign had all been arranged. Mrs. Trevelyan and

Nora together received Colonel Osborne in the drawing-room. It was

understood that Nora was to remain there during the whole visit. "It

is horrible to think that such a precaution should be necessary,"

Mrs. Trevelyan had said, "but perhaps it may be best. There is no

knowing what the malice of people may not invent."

"My dear girls," said the Colonel, "I am delighted to see you," and

he gave a hand to each.

"We are not very cheerful here," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "as you may

imagine."

"But the scenery is beautiful," said Nora, "and the people we are

living with are kind and nice."

"I am very glad of that," said the Colonel. Then there was a pause,

and it seemed, for a moment or two, that none of them knew how to

begin a general conversation. Colonel Osborne was quite sure, by this

time, that he had come down to Devonshire with the express object of

seeing the door of the church at Cockchaffington, and Mrs. Trevelyan

was beginning to think that he certainly had not come to see her.

"Have you heard from your father since you have been here?" asked the

Colonel.

Then there was an explanation about Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley.

Mr. Trevelyan's name was not mentioned; but Mrs. Trevelyan stated

that she had explained to her mother all the painful circumstances of

her present life. Sir Marmaduke, as Colonel Osborne was aware, was

expected to be in England in the spring, and Lady Rowley would, of

course, come with him. Nora thought that they might probably now come

before that time; but Mrs. Trevelyan declared that it was out of the

question that they should do so. She was sure that her father could

not leave the islands except when he did so in obedience to official

orders. The expense of doing so would be ruinous to him. And what

good would he do? In this way there was a great deal of family

conversation, in which Colonel Osborne was able to take a part; but

not a word was said about Mr. Trevelyan.

Nor did "the Colonel" find an opportunity of expressing a spark of

that sentiment, for the purpose of expressing which he had made

this journey to Devonshire. It is not pleasant to make love in the

presence of a third person, even when that love is all fair and above

board; but it is quite impracticable to do so to a married lady, when

that married lady's sister is present. No more futile visit than

this of Colonel Osborne's to the Clock House was ever made. And yet,

though not a word was spoken to which Mr. Trevelyan himself could

have taken the slightest exception, the visit, futile as it was,

could not but do an enormous deal of harm. Mrs. Crocket had already

guessed that the fine gentleman down from London was the lover of the

married lady at the Clock House, who was separated from her husband.

The wooden-legged postman and the ostler were not long in connecting

the man among the tombstones with the visitor to the house.

Trevelyan, as we are aware, already knew that Colonel Osborne was in

the neighbourhood. And poor Priscilla Stanbury was now exposed to the

terrible necessity of owning the truth to her aunt. "The Colonel,"

when he had sat an hour with his young friends, took his leave; and,

as he walked back to Mrs. Crocket's, and ordered that his fly might

be got ready for him, his mind was heavy with the disagreeable

feeling that he had made an ass of himself. The whole affair had

been a failure; and though he might be able to pass off the porch at

Cockchaffington among his friends, he could not but be aware himself

that he had spent his time, his trouble, and his money for nothing.

He became aware, as he returned to Lessboro', that had he intended to

make any pleasant use whatever of his position in reference to Mrs.

Trevelyan, the tone of his letter and his whole mode of proceeding

should have been less patriarchal. And he should have contrived a

meeting without the presence of Nora Rowley.

As soon as he had left them, Mrs. Trevelyan went to her own room, and

Nora at once rejoined Priscilla.

"Is he gone?" asked Priscilla.

"Oh, yes;--he has gone."

"What would I have given that he had never come!"

"And yet," said Nora, "what harm has he done? I wish he had not come,

because, of course, people will talk! But nothing was more natural

than that he should come over to see us when he was so near us."

"Nora!"

"What do you mean?"

"You don't believe all that? In the neighbourhood! I believe he came

on purpose to see your sister, and I think that it was a dastardly

and most ungentleman-like thing to do."

"I am quite sure you are wrong, then,--altogether wrong," said Nora.

"Very well. We must have our own opinions. I am glad you can be so

charitable. But he should not have come here,--to this house, even

though imperative business had brought him into the very village.

But men in their vanity never think of the injury they may do to a

woman's name. Now I must go and write to my aunt. I am not going to

have it said hereafter that I deceived her. And then I shall write to

Hugh. Oh dear; oh dear!"

"I am afraid we are a great trouble to you."

"I will not deceive you, because I like you. This is a great trouble

to me. I have meant to be so prudent, and with all my prudence I have

not been able to keep clear of rocks. And I have been so indignant

with Aunt Stanbury! Now I must go and eat humble-pie."

Then she eat humble-pie,--after the following fashion:--

DEAR AUNT STANBURY,

After what has passed between us, I think it right to tell

you that Colonel Osborne has been at Nuncombe Putney, and

that he called at the Clock House this morning. We did not

see him. But Mrs. Trevelyan and Miss Rowley, together, did

see him. He remained here perhaps an hour.

I should not have thought it necessary to mention this to

you, the matter being one in which you are not concerned,

were it not for our former correspondence. When I last

wrote, I had no idea that he was coming,--nor had mamma.

And when you first wrote, he was not even expected by

Mrs. Trevelyan. The man you wrote about was another

gentleman;--as I told you before. All this is most

disagreeable and tiresome;--and would be quite

nonsensical, but that circumstances seem to make it

necessary.

As for Colonel Osborne, I wish he had not been here; but

his coming would do no harm,--only that it will be talked

about.

I think you will understand how it is that I feel myself

constrained to write to you. I do hope that you will spare

mamma, who is disturbed and harassed when she gets angry

letters. If you have anything to say to myself, I don't

mind it.

Yours truly,

PRISCILLA STANBURY.

The Clock House, Friday, August 5.

She wrote also to her brother Hugh; but Hugh himself reached Nuncombe

Putney before the letter reached him.

Mr. Bozzle watched the Colonel out of the house, and watched him

out of the village. When the Colonel was fairly started, Mr. Bozzle

walked back to Lessboro'.

CHAPTER XXII.

SHEWING HOW MISS STANBURY BEHAVED TO HER TWO NIECES.

[Illustration]

The triumph of Miss Stanbury when she received her niece's letter was

certainly very great,--so great that in its first flush she could not

restrain herself from exhibiting it to Dorothy. "Well,--well,--what

do you think, Dolly?"

"About what, aunt? I don't know who the letter is from."

"Nobody writes to me now so constant as your sister Priscilla. The

letter is from Priscilla. Colonel Osborne has been at the Clock

House, after all. I knew that he would be there. I knew it! I knew

it!"

Dorothy, when she heard this, was dumbfounded. She had rested her

defence of her mother and sister on the impossibility of any such

visit being admitted. According to her lights the coming of Colonel

Osborne, after all that had been said, would be like the coming of

Lucifer himself. The Colonel was, to her imagination, a horrible

roaring lion. She had no idea that the erratic manoeuvres of such

a beast might be milder and more innocent than the wooing of any

turtle-dove. She would have asked whether the roaring lion had gone

away again, and, if so, whether he had taken his prey with him,

were it not that she was too much frightened at the moment to ask

any question. That her mother and sister should have been wilfully

concerned in such iniquity was quite incredible to her, but yet she

did not know how to defend them. "But are you quite sure of it, Aunt

Stanbury? May there not be another mistake?"

"No mistake this time, I think, my dear. Any way, Priscilla says that

he is there." Now in this there was a mistake. Priscilla had said

nothing of the kind.

"You don't mean that he is staying at the Clock House, Aunt

Stanbury?"

"I don't know where he is now. I'm not his keeper. And, I'm glad to

say, I'm not the lady's keeper either. Ah, me! It's a bad business.

You can't touch pitch and not be defiled, my dear. If your mother

wanted the Clock House, I would sooner have taken it for her myself

than that all this should have happened,--for the family's sake."

But Miss Stanbury, when she was alone, and when she had read her

niece's three letters again and again, began to understand something

of Priscilla's honesty, and began also to perceive that there might

have been a great difficulty respecting the Colonel, for which

neither her niece nor her sister-in-law could fairly be held to

be responsible. It was perhaps the plainest characteristic of all

the Stanburys that they were never wilfully dishonest. Ignorant,

prejudiced, and passionate they might be. In her anger Miss Stanbury,

of Exeter, could be almost malicious; and her niece at Nuncombe

Putney was very like her aunt. Each could say most cruel things, most

unjust things, when actuated by a mistaken consciousness of perfect

right on her own side. But neither of them could lie,--even by

silence. Let an error be brought home to either of them,--so as to

be acknowledged at home,--and the error would be assuredly confessed

aloud. And, indeed, with differences in the shades, Hugh and Dorothy

were of the same nature. They were possessed of sweeter tempers than

their aunt and sister, but they were filled with the same eager

readiness to believe themselves to be right,--and to own themselves

to others to be wrong, when they had been constrained to make such

confession to themselves. The chances of life, and something probably

of inner nature, had made Dorothy mild and obedient; whereas, in

regard to Hugh, the circumstances of his life and disposition had

made him obstinate and self-reliant. But in all was to be found the

same belief in self,--which amounted almost to conceit,--the same

warmth of affection, and the same love of justice.

When Miss Stanbury had again perused the correspondence, and had come

to see, dimly, how things had gone at Nuncombe Putney,--when the

conviction came upon her mind that Priscilla had entertained a horror

as to the coming of this Colonel equal to that which she herself

had felt,--when her imagination painted to her all that her niece

had suffered, her heart was softened somewhat. She had declared to

Dorothy that pitch, if touched, would certainly defile; and she had,

at first, intended to send the same opinion, couched in very forcible

words, to her correspondents at the Clock House. They should not

continue to go astray for want of being told that they were going

astray. It must be acknowledged, too, that there was a certain

amount of ignoble wrath in the bosom of Miss Stanbury because her

sister-in-law had taken the Clock House. She had never been told, and

had not even condescended to ask Dorothy, whether the house was taken

and paid for by her nephew on behalf of his mother, or whether it

was paid for by Mr. Trevelyan on behalf of his wife. In the latter

case, Mrs. Stanbury would, she thought, be little more than an

upper servant, or keeper,--as she expressed it to herself. Such an

arrangement appeared to her to be quite disgraceful in a Stanbury;

but yet she believed that such must be the existing arrangement, as

she could not bring herself to conceive that Hugh Stanbury could keep

such an establishment over his mother's head out of money earned by

writing for a penny newspaper. There would be a triumph of democracy

in this which would vanquish her altogether. She had, therefore, been

anxious enough to trample on Priscilla and upon all the affairs of

the Clock House; but yet she had been unable to ignore the nobility

of Priscilla's truth, and having acknowledged it to herself she found

herself compelled to acknowledge it aloud. She sat down to think in

silence, and it was not till she had fortified herself by her first

draught of beer, and till she had finished her first portion of bread

and cheese, that she spoke. "I have written to your sister herself,

this time," she said. "I don't know that I ever wrote a line to her

before in my life."

"Poor Priscilla!" Dorothy did not mean to be severe on her aunt,

either in regard to the letters which had not been written, or to the

one letter which now had been written. But Dorothy pitied her sister,

whom she felt to be in trouble.

"Well; I don't know about her being so poor. Priscilla, I'll be

bound, thinks as well of herself as any of us do."

"She'd cut her fingers off before she'd mean to do wrong," said

Dorothy.

"But what does that come to? What's the good of that? It isn't

meaning to do right that will save us. For aught I know, the Radicals

may mean to do right. Mr. Beales means to do right--perhaps."

"But, aunt,--if everybody did the best they could?"

"Tush, my dear! you are getting beyond your depth. There are such

things still, thank God! as spiritual pastors and masters. Entrust

yourself to them. Do what they think right." Now if aught were known

in Exeter of Miss Stanbury, this was known,--that if any clergyman

volunteered to give to her, unasked and uninvited, counsel, either

ghostly or bodily, that clergyman would be sent from her presence

with a wigging which he would not soon forget. The thing had been

tried more than once, and the wigging had been complete. There was no

more attentive listener in church than Miss Stanbury; and she would,

now and again, appeal to a clergyman on some knotty point. But for

the ordinary authority of spiritual pastors and masters she shewed

more of abstract reverence than of practical obedience.

"I'm sure Priscilla does the best she can," said Dorothy, going back

to the old subject.

"Ah,--well,--yes. What I want to say about Priscilla is this. It is a

thousand pities she is so obstinate, so pig-headed, so certain that

she can manage everything for herself better than anybody else can

for her." Miss Stanbury was striving to say something good of her

niece, but found the task to be difficult and distasteful to her.

"She has managed for mamma ever so many years; and since she took it

we have hardly ever been in debt," said Dorothy.

"She'll do all that, I don't doubt. I don't suppose she cares much

for ribbons and false hair for herself."

"Who? Priscilla! The idea of Priscilla with false hair!"

"I dare say not;--I dare say not. I do not think she'd spend her

mother's money on things of that kind."

"Aunt Stanbury, you don't know her."

"Ah; very well. Perhaps I don't. But, come, my dear, you are very

hard upon me, and very anxious to take your sister's part. And

what is it all about? I've just written to her as civil a letter

as one woman ever wrote to another. And if I had chosen, I could

have,--could have,--h--m--m." Miss Stanbury, as she hesitated for

words in which to complete her sentence, revelled in the strength of

the vituperation which she could have poured upon her niece's head,

had she chosen to write her last letter about Colonel Osborne in her

severe strain.

"If you have written kindly to her, I am so much obliged to you,"

said Dorothy.

"The truth is, Priscilla has meant to be right. Meaning won't go

for much when the account is taken, unless the meaning comes from a

proper source. But the poor girl has done as well as she has known

how. I believe it is Hugh's fault more than anybody else's." This

accusation was not pleasant to Dorothy, but she was too intent just

now on Priscilla's case to defend her brother. "That man never ought

to have been there; and that woman never ought to have been there.

There cannot be a doubt about that. If Priscilla were sitting there

opposite to me, she would own as much. I am sure she would." Miss

Stanbury was quite right if she meant to assert that Priscilla had

owned as much to herself. "And because I think so, I am willing to

forgive her part in the matter. To me, personally, she has always

been rude,--most uncourteous,--and,--and,--and unlike a younger woman

to an older one, and an aunt, and all that. I suppose it is because

she hates me."

"Oh, no, Aunt Stanbury!"

"My dear, I suppose it is. Why else should she treat me in such a

way? But I do believe of her that she would rather eat an honest, dry

crust, than dishonest cake and ale."

"She would rather starve than pick up a crumb that was dishonest,"

said Dorothy, fairly bursting out into tears.

"I believe it. I do believe it. There; what more can I say? Clock

House, indeed! What matter what house you live in, so that you can

pay the rent of it honestly?"

"But the rent is paid--honestly," said Dorothy, amidst her sobs.

"It's paid, I don't doubt. I dare say the woman's husband and your

brother see to that among them. Oh, that my boy, Hugh, as he used

to be, should have brought us all to this! But there's no knowing

what they won't do among them. Reform, indeed! Murder, sacrilege,

adultery, treason, atheism;--that's what Reform means; besides every

kind of nastiness under the sun." In which latter category Miss

Stanbury intended especially to include bad printer's ink, and paper

made of straw.

The reader may as well see the letter which was as civil a letter

as ever one woman wrote to another, so that the collection of the

Stanbury correspondence may be made perfect.

The Close, August 6, 186--.

MY DEAR NIECE,

Your letter has not astonished me nearly as much as you

expected it would. I am an older woman than you, and,

though you will not believe it, I have seen more of the

world. I knew that the gentleman would come after the

lady. Such gentlemen always do go after their ladies.

As for yourself, I can see all that you have done, and

pretty nearly hear all that you have said, as plain as a

pike-staff. I do you the credit of believing that the plan

is none of your making. I know who made the plan, and a

very bad plan it is.

As to my former letters and the other man, I understand

all about it. You were very angry that I should accuse you

of having this man at the house; and you were right to be

angry. I respect you for having been angry. But what does

all that say as to his coming,--now that he has come?

If you will consent to take an old woman's advice, get rid

of the whole boiling of them. I say it in firm love and

friendship, for I am,--

Your affectionate aunt,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

The special vaunted courtesy of this letter consisted, no doubt, in

the expression of respect which it contained, and in that declaration

of affection with which it terminated. The epithet was one which

Miss Stanbury would by no means use promiscuously in writing to her

nearest relatives. She had not intended to use it when she commenced

her letter to Priscilla. But the respect of which she had spoken

had glowed, and had warmed itself into something of temporary love;

and feeling at the moment that she was an affectionate aunt, Miss

Stanbury had so put herself down in her letter. Having done such a

deed she felt that Dorothy, though Dorothy knew nothing about it,

ought in her gratitude to listen patiently to anything that she might

now choose to say against Priscilla.

But Dorothy was in truth very miserable, and in her misery wrote a

long letter that afternoon to her mother,--which, however, it will

not be necessary to place entire among the Stanbury records,--begging

that she might be informed as to the true circumstances of the case.

She did not say a word of censure in regard either to her mother or

sister; but she expressed an opinion in the mildest words which she

could use, that if anything had happened which had compromised their

names since their residence at the Clock House, she, Dorothy, had

better go home and join them. The meaning of which was that it would

not become her to remain in the house in the Close, if the house in

the Close would be disgraced by her presence. Poor Dorothy had taught

herself to think that the iniquity of roaring lions spread itself

very widely.

In the afternoon she made some such proposition to her aunt in

ambiguous terms. "Go home!" said Miss Stanbury. "Now?"

"If you think it best, Aunt Stanbury."

"And put yourself in the middle of all this iniquity and abomination!

I don't suppose you want to know the woman?"

"No, indeed!"

"Or the man?"

"Oh, Aunt Stanbury!"

"It's my belief that no decent gentleman in Exeter would look at you

again if you were to go and live among them at Nuncombe Putney while

all this is going on. No, no. Let one of you be saved out of it, at

least."

Aunt Stanbury had more than once made use of expressions which

brought the faintest touch of gentle pink up to her niece's cheeks.

We must do Dorothy the justice of saying that she had never dreamed

of being looked at by any gentleman, whether decent or indecent. Her

life at Nuncombe Putney had been of such a nature, that though she

knew that other girls were looked at, and even made love to, and that

they got married and had children, no dim vision of such a career

for herself had ever presented itself to her eyes. She had known

very well that her mother and sister and herself were people

apart,--ladies, and yet so extremely poor, that they could only

maintain their rank by the most rigid seclusion. To live, and work

unseen, was what the world had ordained for her. Then her call

to Exeter had come upon her, and she had conceived that she was

henceforth to be the humble companion of a very imperious old aunt.

Her aunt, indeed, was imperious, but did not seem to require humility

in her companion. All the good things that were eaten and drunk were

divided between them with the strictest impartiality. Dorothy's

cushion and hassock in the church and in the cathedral were the same

as her aunt's. Her bed-room was made very comfortable for her. Her

aunt never gave her any orders before company, and always spoke of

her before the servants as one whom they were to obey and respect.

Gradually Dorothy came to understand the meaning of this;--but her

aunt would sometimes say things about young men which she did not

quite understand. Could it be that her aunt supposed that any young

man would come and wish to marry her,--her, Dorothy Stanbury? She

herself had not quite so strong an aversion to men in general as that

which Priscilla felt, but she had not as yet found that any of those

whom she had seen at Exeter were peculiarly agreeable to her. Before

she went to bed that night her aunt said a word to her which startled

her more than she had ever been startled before. On that evening Miss

Stanbury had a few friends to drink tea with her. There were Mr. and

Mrs. Crumbie, and Mrs. MacHugh of course, and the Cheritons from

Alphington, and the Miss Apjohns from Helion Villa, and old Mr. Powel

all the way from Haldon, and two of the Wrights from their house

in the Northernhay, and Mr. Gibson;--but the Miss Frenches from

Heavitree were not there. "Why don't you have the Miss Frenches,

aunt?" Dorothy had asked.

"Bother the Miss Frenches! I'm not bound to have them every time.

There's Camilla has been and got herself a band-box on the back of

her head a great deal bigger than the place inside where her brains

ought to be." But the band-box at the back of Camilla French's head

was not the sole cause of the omission of the two sisters from the

list of Miss Stanbury's visitors on this occasion.

The party went off very much as usual. There were two whist tables,

for Miss Stanbury could not bear to cut out. At other houses than her

own, when there was cutting out, it was quite understood that Miss

Stanbury was to be allowed to keep her place. "I'll go away, and sit

out there by myself, if you like," she would say. But she was never

thus banished; and at her own house she usually contrived that

there should be no system of banishment. She would play dummy whist,

preferring it to the four-handed game; and, when hard driven, and

with a meet opponent, would not even despise double-dummy. It was

told of her and of Mrs. MacHugh that they had played double-dummy

for a whole evening together; and they who were given to calumny

had declared that the candles on that evening had been lighted very

early. On the present occasion a great many sixpenny points were

scored, and much tea and cake were consumed. Mr. Gibson never played

whist,--nor did Dorothy. That young John Wright and Mary Cheriton

should do nothing but talk to each other was a thing of course,

as they were to be married in a month or two. Then there was Ida

Cheriton, who could not very well be left at home; and Mr. Gibson

made himself pleasant to Dorothy and Ida Cheriton, instead of making

himself pleasant to the two Miss Frenches. Gentlemen in provincial

towns quite understand that, from the nature of social circumstances

in the provinces, they should always be ready to be pleasant at least

to a pair at a time. At a few minutes before twelve they were all

gone, and then came the shock.

"Dolly, my dear, what do you think of Mr. Gibson?"

"Think of him, Aunt Stanbury?"

"Yes; think of him;--think of him. I suppose you know how to think?"

"He seems to me always to preach very drawling sermons."

"Oh, bother his sermons! I don't care anything about his sermons now.

He is a very good clergyman, and the Dean thinks very much about

him."

"I am glad of that, Aunt Stanbury."

Then came the shock. "Don't you think it would be a very good thing

if you were to become Mrs. Gibson?"

It may be presumed that Miss Stanbury had assured herself that she

could not make progress with Dorothy by "beating about the bush."

There was an inaptitude in her niece to comprehend the advantages

of the situations, which made some direct explanation absolutely

necessary. Dorothy stood half-smiling, half-crying, when she heard

the proposition, her cheeks suffused with that pink colour, and with

both her hands extended with surprise.

"I've been thinking about it ever since you've been here," said Miss

Stanbury.

"I think he likes Miss French," said Dorothy, in a whisper.

"Which of them? I don't believe he likes them at all. Maybe, if they

go on long enough, they may be able to toss up for him. But I don't

think it of him. Of course they're after him, but he'll be too wise

for them. And he's more of a fool than I take him to be if he don't

prefer you to them." Dorothy remained quite silent. To such an

address as this it was impossible that she should reply a word. It

was incredible to her that any man should prefer herself to either of

the young women in question; but she was too much confounded for the

expression even of her humility. "At any rate you're wholesome, and

pleasant and modest," said Miss Stanbury.

Dorothy did not quite like being told that she was wholesome; but,

nevertheless, she was thankful to her aunt.

"I'll tell you what it is," continued Miss Stanbury; "I hate all

mysteries, especially with those I love. I've saved two thousand

pounds, which I've put you down for in my will. Now, if you and he

can make it up together, I'll give you the money at once. There's no

knowing how often an old woman may alter her will; but when you've

got a thing, you've got it. Mr. Gibson would know the meaning of a

bird in the hand as well as anybody. Now those girls at Heavitree

will never have above a few hundreds each, and not that while

their mother lives." Dorothy made one little attempt at squeezing

her aunt's hand, wishing to thank her aunt for this affectionate

generosity; but she had hardly accomplished the squeeze, when she

desisted, feeling strangely averse to any acknowledgment of such a

boon as that which had been offered to her. "And now, good night, my

dear. If I did not think you a very sensible young woman, I should

not trust you by saying all this." Then they parted, and Dorothy soon

found herself alone in her bedroom.

To have a husband of her own, a perfect gentleman too, and a

clergyman;--and to go to him with a fortune! She believed that two

thousand pounds represented nearly a hundred a year. It was a large

fortune in those parts,--according to her understanding of ladies'

fortunes. And that she, the humblest of the humble, should be

selected for so honourable a position! She had never quite known,

quite understood as yet, whether she had made good her footing in

her aunt's house in a manner pleasant to her aunt. More than once or

twice she had spoken even of going back to her mother, and things

had been said which had almost made her think that her aunt had been

angry with her. But now, after a month or two of joint residence, her

aunt was offering to her--two thousand pounds and a husband!

But was it within her aunt's power to offer to her the husband? Mr.

Gibson had always been very civil to her. She had spoken more to Mr.

Gibson than to any other man in Exeter. But it had never occurred to

her for a moment that Mr. Gibson had any special liking for her. Was

it probable that he would ever entertain any feeling of that kind

for her? It certainly had occurred to her before now that Mr. Gibson

was sometimes bored by the Miss Frenches;--but then gentlemen do get

bored by ladies.

And at last she asked herself another question,--had she any special

liking for Mr. Gibson? As far as she understood such matters

everything was blank there. Thinking of that other question, she went

to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COLONEL OSBORNE AND MR. BOZZLE RETURN TO LONDON.

Hugh Stanbury went down on the Saturday, by the early express to

Exeter, on his road to Lessboro'. He took his ticket through to

Lessboro', not purposing to stay at Exeter; but, from the exigencies

of the various trains, it was necessary that he should remain for

half an hour at the Exeter Station. This took place on the Saturday,

and Colonel Osborne's visit to the Clock House had been made on the

Friday. Colonel Osborne had returned to Lessboro', had slept again

at Mrs. Clegg's house, and returned to London on the Saturday. It so

happened that he also was obliged to spend half an hour at the Exeter

Station, and that his half-hour, and Hugh Stanbury's half-hour, were

one and the same. They met, therefore, as a matter of course, upon

the platform. Stanbury was the first to see the other, and he found

that he must determine on the spur of the moment what he would say,

and what he would do. He had received no direct commission from

Trevelyan as to his meeting with Colonel Osborne. Trevelyan had

declared that, as to the matter of quarrelling, he meant to retain

the privilege of doing that for himself; but Stanbury had quite

understood that this was only the vague expression of an angry man.

The Colonel had taken a glass of sherry, and had lighted a cigar,

and was quite comfortable,--having thrown aside, for a time, that

consciousness of the futility of his journey which had perplexed

him,--when Stanbury accosted him.

"What! Mr. Stanbury,--how do you do? Fine day, isn't it? Are you

going up or down?"

"I'm going to see my own people at Nuncombe Putney, a village beyond

Lessboro'," said Hugh.

"Ah;--indeed." Colonel Osborne of course perceived at once that as

this man was going to the house at which he had just been visiting,

it would be better that he should himself explain what he had done.

If he were to allow this mention of Nuncombe Putney to pass without

saying that he himself had been there, he would be convicted of

at least some purpose of secrecy in what he had been doing. "Very

strange," said he; "I was at Nuncombe Putney myself yesterday."

"I know you were," said Stanbury.

"And how did you know it?" There had been a tone of anger in

Stanbury's voice which Colonel Osborne had at once appreciated, and

which made him assume a similar tone. As they spoke there was a man

standing in a corner close by the bookstall, with his eye upon them,

and that man was Bozzle, the ex-policeman,--who was doing his duty

with sedulous activity by seeing "the Colonel" back to London. Now

Bozzle did not know Hugh Stanbury, and was angry with himself that he

should be so ignorant. It is the pride of a detective ex-policeman to

know everybody that comes in his way.

"Well, I had been so informed. My friend Trevelyan knew that you were

there,--or that you were going there."

"I don't care who knew that I was going there," said the Colonel.

"I won't pretend to understand how that may be, Colonel Osborne; but

I think you must be aware, after what took place in Curzon Street,

that it would have been better that you should not have attempted to

see Mrs. Trevelyan. Whether you have seen her I do not know."

"What business is it of yours, Mr. Stanbury, whether I have seen that

lady or not?"

"Unhappily for me, her husband has made it my business."

"Very unhappily for you, I should say."

"And the lady is staying at my mother's house."

"I presume the lady is not a prisoner in your mother's house, and

that your mother's hospitality is not so restricted but that her

guest may see an old friend under her roof." This Colonel Osborne

said with an assumed look of almost righteous indignation, which

was not at all lost upon Bozzle. They had returned back towards the

bookstall, and Bozzle, with his eyes fixed on a copy of the "D. R."

which he had just bought, was straining his ears to the utmost to

catch what was being said.

"You best know whether you have seen her or not."

"I have seen her."

"Then I shall take leave to tell you, Colonel Osborne, that you have

acted in a most unfriendly way, and have done that which must tend to

keep an affectionate husband apart from his wife."

"Sir, I don't at all understand this kind of thing addressed to me.

The father of the lady you are speaking of has been my most intimate

friend for thirty years." After all, the Colonel was a mean man when

he could take pride in his youth, and defend himself on the score of

his age, in one and the same proceeding.

"I have nothing further to say," replied Stanbury.

"You have said too much already, Mr. Stanbury."

"I think not, Colonel Osborne. You have, I fear, done an incredible

deal of mischief by going to Nuncombe Putney; and, after all that

you have heard on the subject, you must have known that it would be

mischievous. I cannot understand how you can force yourself about a

man's wife against the man's expressed wish."

"Sir, I didn't force myself upon anybody. Sir, I went down to see an

old friend,--and a remarkable piece of antiquity. And, when another

old friend was in the neighbourhood, close by,--one of the oldest

friends I have in the world,--wasn't I to go and see her? God bless

my soul! What business is it of yours? I never heard such impudence

in my life!" Let the charitable reader suppose that Colonel Osborne

did not know that he was lying,--that he really thought, when he

spoke, that he had gone down to Lessboro' to see the remarkable piece

of antiquity.

"Good morning," said Hugh Stanbury, turning on his heels and walking

away. Colonel Osborne shook himself, inflated his cheeks, and blew

forth the breath out of his mouth, put his thumbs up to the armholes

of his waistcoat, and walked about the platform as though he thought

it to be incumbent on him to show that he was somebody,--somebody

that ought not to be insulted,--somebody, perhaps, whom a very pretty

woman might prefer to her own husband, in spite of a small difference

in age. He was angry, but not quite so much angry as proud. And he

was safe, too. He thought that he was safe. When he should come to

account for himself and his actions to his old friend, Sir Marmaduke,

he felt that he would be able to show that he had been, in all

respects, true to friendship. Sir Marmaduke had unfortunately given

his daughter to a jealous, disagreeable fellow, and the fault all

lay in that. As for Hugh Stanbury,--he would simply despise Hugh

Stanbury, and have done with it.

Mr. Bozzle, though he had worked hard in the cause, had heard but a

word or two. Eaves-droppers seldom do hear more than that. A porter

had already told him who was Hugh Stanbury,--that he was Mr. Hugh

Stanbury, and that his aunt lived at Exeter. And Bozzle, knowing that

the lady about whom he was concerned was living with a Mrs. Stanbury

at the house he had been watching, put two and two together with

his natural cleverness. "God bless my soul! what business is it of

yours?" Those words were nearly all that Bozzle had been able to

hear; but even those sufficiently indicated a quarrel. "The lady" was

living with Mrs. Stanbury, having been so placed by her husband; and

young Stanbury was taking the lady's part! Bozzle began to fear that

the husband had not confided in him with that perfect faith which he

felt to be essentially necessary to the adequate performance of the

duties of his great profession. A sudden thought, however, struck

him. Something might be done on the journey up to London. He at

once made his way back to the ticket-window and exchanged his

ticket,--second-class for first-class. It was a noble deed, the

expense falling all upon his own pocket; for, in the natural course

of things, he would have charged his employers with the full

first-class fare. He had seen Colonel Osborne seat himself in a

carriage, and within two minutes he was occupying the opposite place.

The Colonel was aware that he had noticed the man's face lately, but

did not know where.

"Very fine summer weather, sir," said Bozzle.

"Very fine," said the Colonel, burying himself behind a newspaper.

"They is getting up their wheat nicely in these parts, sir."

The answer to this was no more than a grunt. But Bozzle was not

offended. Not to be offended is the special duty of all policemen, in

and out of office; and the journey from Exeter to London was long,

and was all before him.

"A very nice little secluded village is Nuncombe Putney," said

Bozzle, as the train was leaving the Salisbury Station.

At Salisbury two ladies had left the carriage, no one else had got

in, and Bozzle was alone with the Colonel.

"I dare say," said the Colonel, who by this time had relinquished his

shield, and who had begun to compose himself for sleep, or to pretend

to compose himself, as soon as he heard Bozzle's voice. He had been

looking at Bozzle, and though he had not discovered the man's trade,

had told himself that his companion was a thing of dangers,--a thing

to be avoided, by one engaged, as had been he himself, on a special

and secret mission.

"Saw you there,--calling at the Clock House," said Bozzle.

"Very likely," said the Colonel, throwing his head well back into the

corner, shutting his eyes, and uttering a slight preliminary snore.

"Very nice family of ladies at the Clock House," said Bozzle. The

Colonel answered him by a more developed snore. "Particularly Mrs.

T----" said Bozzle.

The Colonel could not stand this. He was so closely implicated with

Mrs. Trevelyan at the present moment that he could not omit to notice

an address so made to him. "What the devil is that to you, sir?" said

he, jumping up and confronting Bozzle in his wrath.

But policemen have always this advantage in their difficulties, that

they know to a fraction what the wrath of men is worth, and what it

can do. Sometimes it can dismiss a policeman, and sometimes break

his head. Sometimes it can give him a long and troublesome job, and

sometimes it may be wrath to the death. But in nineteen out of twenty

cases it is not a fearful thing, and the policeman knows well when

he need not fear it. On the present occasion Bozzle was not at all

afraid of Colonel Osborne's wrath.

"Well, sir, not much, indeed, if you come to that. Only you was

there, sir."

"Of course I was there," said the Colonel.

"And a very nice young gentleman is Mr. Stanbury," said Bozzle.

To this Colonel Osborne made no reply, but again had resort to his

newspaper in the most formal manner.

"He's going down to his family, no doubt," continued Bozzle.

"He may be going to the devil for what I know," said the Colonel, who

could not restrain himself.

"I suppose they're all friends of Mrs. T.'s?" asked Bozzle.

"Sir," said the Colonel, "I believe that you're a spy."

"No, Colonel, no; no, no; I'm no spy. I wouldn't demean myself to be

such. A spy is a man as has no profession, and nothing to justify his

looking into things. Things must be looked into, Colonel; or how's a

man to know where he is? or how's a lady to know where she is? But

as for spies, except in the way of evidence, I don't think nothing

of 'em." Soon after this two more passengers entered the train, and

nothing more was said between Bozzle and the Colonel.

The Colonel, as soon as he reached London, went home to his lodgings,

and then to his club, and did his best to enjoy himself. On the

following Monday he intended to start for Scotland. But he could not

quite enjoy himself,--because of Bozzle. He felt that he was being

watched; and there is nothing that any man hates so much as that,

especially when a lady is concerned. Colonel Osborne knew that his

visit to Nuncombe Putney had been very innocent; but he did not like

the feeling that even his innocence had been made the subject of

observation.

Bozzle went away at once to Trevelyan, whom he found at his chambers.

He himself had had no very deep-laid scheme in his addresses to

Colonel Osborne. He had begun to think that very little would come of

the affair,--especially after Hugh Stanbury had appeared upon the

scene,--and had felt that there was nothing to be lost by presenting

himself before the eyes of the Colonel. It was necessary that he

should make a report to his employer, and the report might be made

a little more full after a few words with the man whom he had been

"looking into." "Well, Mr. Trewillian," he said, seating himself

on a chair close against the wall, and holding his hat between the

knees,--"I've seen the parties, and know pretty much all about it."

"All I want to know, Mr. Bozzle, is, whether Colonel Osborne has been

at the Clock House?"

"He has been there, Mr. Trewillian. There is no earthly doubt about

that. From hour to hour I can tell you pretty nearly where he's been

since he left London." Then Bozzle took out his memorandum-book.

"I don't care about all that," said Trevelyan.

"I dare say not, sir; but it may be wanted all the same. Any

gentleman acting in our way can't be too particular,--can't have

too many facts. The smallest little,--tiddly things,"--and Bozzle

as he said this seemed to enjoy immensely the flavour of his own

epithet,--"the smallest little 'tiddly' things do so often turn up

trumps when you get your evidence into court."

"I'm not going to get any evidence into court."

"Maybe not, sir. A gentleman and lady is always best out of court as

long as things can hang on any way;--but sometimes things won't hang

on no way."

Trevelyan, who was conscious that the employment of Bozzle was

discreditable, and whose affairs in Devonshire were now in the hands

of, at any rate, a more honourable ally, was at present mainly

anxious to get rid of the ex-policeman. "I have no doubt you've been

very careful, Mr. Bozzle," said he.

"There isn't no one in the business could be more so, Mr.

Trewillian."

"And you have found out what it was necessary that I should know.

Colonel Osborne did go to the Clock House?"

"Was let in at the front door on Friday the 5th, by Sarah French, the

housemaid, at 10.37 a.m., and was let out again by the same young

woman at 11.41 a.m. Perhaps you'd like to have a copy of the entry,

Mr. Trewillian?"

"No, no, no."

"It doesn't matter. Of course it'll be with me when it's wanted. Who

was with him, exactly, at that time, I can't say. There is things,

Mr. Trewillian, one can't see. But I don't think as he saw neither

Mrs. Stanbury, nor Miss Stanbury,--not to speak to. I did just have

one word, promiscuous, with Sarah French, after he was gone. Whether

the other young lady was with 'em or not, and if so for how long,

I--can't--say. There is things, Mr. Trewillian, which one can't see."

How Trevelyan hated the man as he went on with his odious

details,--details not one of which possessed the slightest

importance. "It's all right, I dare say, Mr. Bozzle. And now about

the account."

"Quite so, Mr. Trewillian. But there was one question;--just one

question."

"What question?" said Trevelyan, almost angrily.

"And there's another thing I must tell you, too, Mr. Trewillian. I

come back to town in the same carriage with the Colonel. I thought it

better."

"You did not tell him who you were?"

"No, Mr. Trewillian; I didn't tell him that. I don't think he'd say

if you was to ask him that I told him much of anything. No, Mr.

Trewillian, I didn't tell him nothing. I don't often tell folks much

till the time comes. But I thought it better, and I did have a word

or two with the gent,--just a word or two. He's not so very downy,

isn't the Colonel;--for one that's been at it so long, Mr.

Trewillian."

"I dare say not. But if you could just let me have the account, Mr.

Bozzle,--"

"The account? Oh, yes;--that is necessary; ain't it? These sort of

inquiries do come a little expensive, Mr. Trewillian; because time

goes for so much; and when one has to be down on a thing, sharp, you

know, and sure, so that counsel on the other side can't part you from

it, though he shakes you like a dog does a rat,--and one has to get

oneself up ready for all that, you know, Mr. Trewillian,--as I was

saying, one can't count one's shillings when one has such a job as

this in hand. Clench your nail;--that's what I say; be it even so.

Clench your nail;--that's what you've got to do."

"I dare say we shan't quarrel about the money, Mr. Bozzle."

"Oh dear no. I find I never has any words about the money. But

there's that one question. There's a young Mr. Stanbury has gone

down, as knows all about it. What's he up to?"

"He's my particular friend," said Trevelyan.

"Oh--h. He do know all about it, then?"

"We needn't talk about that, if you please, Mr. Bozzle."

"Because there was words between him and the Colonel upon the

platform;--and very angry words. The young man went at the Colonel

quite open-mouthed,--savage-like. It's not the way such things should

be done, Mr. Trewillian; and though of course it's not for me to

speak;--she's your lady,--still, when you has got a thing of this

kind in hand, one head is better than a dozen. As for myself,

Mr. Trewillian, I never wouldn't look at a case,--not if I knew

it,--unless I was to have it all to myself. But of course there was

no bargain, and so I says nothing."

After considerable delay the bill was made out on the spot, Mr.

Bozzle copying down the figures painfully from his memorandum-book,

with his head much inclined on one side. Trevelyan asked him, almost

in despair, to name the one sum; but this Bozzle declined to do,

saying that right was right. He had a scale of pilfering of his own,

to which he had easily reconciled his conscience; and beyond that

he prided himself on the honesty of his accounts. At last the bill

was made out, was paid, and Bozzle was gone. Trevelyan, when he was

alone, threw himself back on a sofa, and almost wept in despair. To

what a depth of degradation had he not been reduced!

CHAPTER XXIV.

NIDDON PARK.

As Hugh Stanbury went over to Lessboro', and from thence to Nuncombe

Putney, he thought more of himself and Nora Rowley than he did of Mr.

and Mrs. Trevelyan. As to Mrs. Trevelyan and Colonel Osborne, he felt

that he knew everything that it was necessary that he should know.

The man had been there, and had seen Mrs. Trevelyan. Of that there

could be no doubt. That Colonel Osborne had been wickedly indifferent

to the evil consequences of such a visit, and that all the women

concerned had been most foolish in permitting him to make it, was his

present conviction. But he did not for a moment doubt that the visit

had in itself been of all things the most innocent. Trevelyan had

sworn that if his wife received the man at Nuncombe Putney, he

would never see her again. She had seen him, and this oath would be

remembered, and there would be increased difficulties. But these

difficulties, whatever they might be, must be overcome. When he had

told himself this, then he allowed his mind to settle itself on Nora

Rowley.

Hitherto he had known Miss Rowley only as a fashionable girl living

with the wife of an intimate friend of his own in London. He had

never been staying in the same house with her. Circumstances had

never given to him the opportunity of assuming the manner of an

intimate friend, justifying him in giving advice, and authorising

him to assume that semi-paternal tone which is by far the easiest

preliminary to love-making. When a man can tell a young lady what

she ought to read, what she ought to do, and whom she ought to know,

nothing can be easier than to assure her that, of all her duties,

her first duty is to prefer himself to all the world. And any young

lady who has consented to receive lessons from such a teacher, will

generally be willing to receive this special lesson among others.

But Stanbury had hitherto had no such opportunities. In London Miss

Rowley had been a fashionable young lady, living in Mayfair, and he

had been,--well, anything but a fashionable young man. Nevertheless,

he had seen her often, had sat by her very frequently, was quite sure

that he loved her dearly, and had, perhaps, some self-flattering

idea in his mind that had he stuck to his honourable profession as a

barrister, and were he possessed of some comfortable little fortune

of his own, he might, perhaps, have been able, after due siege

operations, to make this charming young woman his own. Things were

quite changed now. For the present, Miss Rowley certainly could not

be regarded as a fashionable London young lady. The house in which he

would see her was, in some sort, his own. He would be sleeping under

the same roof with her, and would have all the advantages which such

a position could give him. He would have no difficulty now in asking,

if he should choose to ask; and he thought that she might be somewhat

softer, somewhat more likely to yield at Nuncombe Putney, than she

would have been in London. She was at Nuncombe in weak circumstances,

to a certain degree friendless; with none of the excitement of

society around her, with no elder sons buzzing about her and

filling her mind, if not her heart, with the glories of luxurious

primogeniture. Hugh Stanbury certainly did not dream that any

special elder son had as yet been so attracted as to have made a

journey to Nuncombe Putney on Nora's behalf. But should he on this

account,--because she would be, as it were, without means of defence

from his attack,--should he therefore take advantage of her weakness?

She would, of course, go back to her London life after some short

absence, and would again, if free, have her chance among the favoured

ones of the earth. What had he to offer to her? He had taken the

Clock House for his mother, and it would be quite as much as he could

do, when Mrs. Trevelyan should have left the village, to keep up that

establishment and maintain himself in London,--quite as much as he

could do, even though the favours of the "D. R." should flow upon

him with their fullest tides. In such circumstances, would it be

honourable in him to ask a girl to love him because he found her

defenceless in his mother's house?

"If there bain't another for Nuncombe," said Mrs. Clegg's Ostler to

Mrs. Clegg's Boots, as Stanbury was driven off in a gig.

"That be young Stanbury, a-going of whome."

"They be all a-going for the Clock House. Since the old 'ooman took

to thick there house, there be folk a-comin' and a-goin' every day

loike."

"It's along of the madam that they keeps there, Dick," said the

Boots.

"I didn't care if there'd be madams allays. They're the best as is

going for trade anyhow," said the ostler. What the ostler said was

true. When there comes to be a feeling that a woman's character is in

any way tarnished, there comes another feeling that everybody on the

one side may charge double, and that everybody on the other side must

pay double, for everything. Hugh Stanbury could not understand why he

was charged a shilling a mile, instead of ninepence, for the gig to

Nuncombe Putney. He got no satisfactory answer, and had to pay the

shilling. The truth was, that gigs to Nuncombe Putney had gone up,

since a lady, separated from her husband, with a colonel running

after her, had been taken in at the Clock House.

"Here's Hugh!" said Priscilla, hurrying to the front door. And Mrs.

Stanbury hurried after her. Her son Hugh was the apple of her eye,

the best son that ever lived, generous, noble, a thorough

man,--almost a god!

"Dear, dear, oh dear! Who'd have expected it? God bless you, my boy!

Why didn't you write? Priscilla, what is there in the house that he

can eat?"

"Plenty of bread and cheese," said Priscilla, laughing, with her hand

inside her brother's arm. For though Priscilla hated all other men,

she did not hate her brother Hugh. "If you wanted things nice to eat

directly you got here, you ought to have written."

"I shall want my dinner, like any other Christian,--in due time,"

said Hugh. "And how is Mrs. Trevelyan,--and how is Miss Rowley?"

He soon found himself in company with those two ladies, and

experienced some immediate difficulty in explaining the cause of his

sudden coming. But this was soon put aside by Mrs. Trevelyan.

"When did you see my husband?" she asked.

"I saw him yesterday. He was quite well."

"Colonel Osborne has been here," she said.

"I know that he has been here. I met him at the station at Exeter.

Perhaps I should not say so, but I wish he had remained away."

"We all wish it," said Priscilla.

Then Nora spoke. "But what could we do, Mr. Stanbury? It seemed so

natural that he should call when he was in the neighbourhood. We have

known him so long; and how could we refuse to see him?"

"I will not let any one think that I'm afraid to see any man on

earth," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "If he had ever in his life said a word

that he should not have said, a word that would have been an insult,

of course it would have been different. But the notion of it is

preposterous. Why should I not have seen him?"

"I think he was wrong to come," said Hugh.

"Of course he was wrong;--wickedly wrong," said Priscilla.

Stanbury, finding that the subject was openly discussed between

them, declared plainly the mission that had brought him to Nuncombe.

"Trevelyan heard that he was coming, and asked me to let him know the

truth."

"Now you can tell him the truth," said Mrs. Trevelyan, with something

of indignation in her tone, as though she thought that Stanbury had

taken upon himself a task of which he ought to be ashamed.

"But Colonel Osborne came specially to pay a visit to

Cockchaffington," said Nora, "and not to see us. Louis ought to know

that."

"Nora, how can you demean yourself to care about such trash?" said

Mrs. Trevelyan. "Who cares why he came here? His visit to me was a

thing of course. If Mr. Trevelyan disapproves of it, let him say so,

and not send secret messengers."

"Am I a secret messenger?" said Hugh Stanbury.

"There has been a man here, inquiring of the servants," said

Priscilla. So that odious Bozzle had made his foul mission known

to them! Stanbury, however, thought it best to say nothing of

Bozzle,--not to acknowledge that he had ever heard of Bozzle. "I am

sure Mrs. Trevelyan does not mean you," said Priscilla.

"I do not know what I mean," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "I am so harassed

and fevered by these suspicions that I am driven nearly mad." Then

she left the room for a minute and returned with two letters. "There,

Mr. Stanbury; I got that note from Colonel Osborne, and wrote to him

that reply. You know all about it now. Can you say that I was wrong

to see him?"

"I am sure that he was wrong to come," said Hugh.

"Wickedly wrong," said Priscilla, again.

"You can keep the letters, and show them to my husband," said Mrs.

Trevelyan; "then he will know all about it." But Stanbury declined to

keep the letters.

He was to remain the Sunday at Nuncombe Putney and return to London

on the Monday. There was, therefore, but one day on which he could

say what he had to say to Nora Rowley. When he came down to breakfast

on the Sunday morning he had almost made up his mind that he had

nothing to say to her. As for Nora, she was in a state of mind much

less near to any fixed purpose. She had told herself that she loved

this man,--had indeed done so in the clearest way, by acknowledging

the fact of her love to another suitor, by pleading to that other

suitor the fact of her love as an insuperable reason why he should

be rejected. There was no longer any doubt about it to her. When

Priscilla had declared that Hugh Stanbury was at the door, her heart

had gone into her mouth. Involuntarily she had pressed her hands to

her sides, and had held her breath. Why had he come there? Had he

come there for her? Oh! if he had come there for her, and if she

might dare to forget all the future, how sweet,--sweetest of all

things in heaven or earth,--might be an August evening with him among

the lanes! But she, too, had endeavoured to be very prudent. She

had told herself that she was quite unfit to be the wife of a poor

man,--that she would be only a burden round his neck, and not an aid

to him. And in so telling herself, she had told herself also that she

had been a fool not to accept Mr. Glascock. She should have dragged

out from her heart the image of this man who had never even whispered

a word of love in her ears, and should have constrained herself to

receive with affection a man in loving whom there ought to be no

difficulty. But when she had been repeating those lessons to herself,

Hugh Stanbury had not been in the house. Now he was there;--and what

must be her answer if he should whisper that word of love? She had an

idea that it would be treason in her to disown the love she felt, if

questioned concerning her heart by the man to whom it had been given.

They all went to church on the Sunday morning, and up to that time

Nora had not been a moment alone with the man. It had been decided

that they should dine early, and then ramble out, when the evening

would be less hot than the day had been, to a spot called Niddon

Park. This was nearly three miles from Nuncombe, and was a beautiful

wild slope of ground, full of ancient, blighted, blasted, but still

half-living oaks,--oaks that still brought forth leaves,--overlooking

a bend of the river Teign. Park, in the usual sense of the word,

there was none, nor did they who lived round Nuncombe Putney know

whether Niddon Park had ever been enclosed. But of all the spots in

that lovely neighbourhood, Priscilla Stanbury swore that it was the

loveliest; and, as it had never yet been seen by Mrs. Trevelyan or

her sister, it was determined that they would walk there on this

August afternoon. There were four of them,--and, as was natural, they

fell into parties of two and two. But Priscilla walked with Nora, and

Hugh Stanbury walked with his friend's wife. Nora was talkative, but

demure in her manner, and speaking now and again as though she were

giving words and not thoughts. She felt that there was something to

hide, and was suffering from disappointment that their party should

not have been otherwise divided. Had Hugh spoken to her and asked her

to be his wife, she could not have accepted him, because she knew

that they were both poor, and that she was not fit to keep a poor

man's house. She had declared to herself most plainly that that must

be her course;--but yet she was disappointed, and talked on with the

knowledge that she had something to conceal.

[Illustration: Niddon Park.]

When they were seated beneath an old riven, withered oak, looking

down upon the river, they were still divided in the same way. In

seating herself she had been very anxious not to disarrange that

arrangement,--almost equally anxious not to seem to adhere to it

with any special purpose. She was very careful that there should be

nothing seen in her manner that was in any way special,--but in the

meantime she was suffering an agony of trouble. He did not care for

her in the least. She was becoming sure of that. She had given all

her love to a man who had none to give her in return. As she thought

of this she almost longed for the offer of that which she knew she

could not have accepted had it been offered to her. But she talked

on about the scenery, about the weather,--descanting on the pleasure

of living where such loveliness was within reach. Then there came a

pause for a moment. "Nora," said Priscilla, "I do not know what you

are thinking about, but it is not of the beauty of Niddon Park." Then

there came a faint sound as of an hysterical sob, and then a gurgle

in the throat, and then a pretence at laughter.

"I don't believe I am thinking of anything at all," said Nora.

After which Hugh insisted on descending to the bank of the river,

but, as the necessity of re-climbing the slope was quite manifest,

none of the girls would go with him. "Come, Miss Rowley," said he,

"will you not show them that a lady can go up and down a hill as well

as a man?"

"I had rather not go up and down the hill," said she.

Then he understood that she was angry with him; and in some sort

surmised the cause of her anger. Not that he believed that she loved

him; but it seemed possible to him that she resented the absence of

his attention. He went down, and scrambled out on the rocks into

the bed of the river, while the girls above looked down upon him,

watching the leaps that he made. Priscilla and Mrs. Trevelyan called

to him, bidding him beware; but Nora called not at all. He was

whistling as he made his jumps, but still he heard their voices, and

knew that he did not hear Nora's voice. He poised himself on the edge

of a rock in the middle of the stream, and looked up the river and

down the river, turning himself carefully on his narrow foothold; but

he was thinking only of Nora. Could there be anything nobler than to

struggle on with her, if she only would be willing? But then she was

young; and should she yield to such a request from him, she would not

know what she was yielding. He turned again, jumping from rock to

rock till he reached the bank, and then made his way again up to the

withered oak.

"You would not have repented it if you had come down with me," he

said to Nora.

"I am not so sure of that," she answered.

When they started to return she stepped on gallantly with Priscilla;

but Priscilla was stopped by some chance, having some word to say to

her brother, having some other word to say to Mrs. Trevelyan. Could

it be that her austerity had been softened, and that in kindness she

contrived that Nora should be left some yards behind them with her

brother? Whether it were kindness, or an unkind error, so it was.

Nora, when she perceived what destiny was doing for her, would not

interfere with destiny. If he chose to speak to her she would hear

him and would answer him. She knew very well what answer she would

give him. She had her answer quite ready at her fingers' ends. There

was no doubt about her answer.

They had walked half a mile together and he had spoken of nothing but

the scenery. She had endeavoured to appear to be excited. Oh, yes,

the scenery of Devonshire was delightful. She hardly wanted anything

more to make her happy. If only this misery respecting her sister

could be set right!

"And you, you yourself," said he, "do you mean that there is nothing

you want in leaving London?"

"Not much, indeed."

"It sometimes seemed to me that that kind of life was,--was very

pleasant to you."

"What kind of life, Mr. Stanbury?"

"The life that you were living,--going out, being admired, and having

the rich and dainty all around you."

"I don't dislike people because they are rich," she said.

"No; nor do I; and I despise those who affect to dislike them. But

all cannot be rich."

"Nor all dainty, as you choose to call them."

"But they who have once been dainty,--as I call them,--never like

to divest themselves of their daintiness. You have been one of the

dainty, Miss Rowley."

"Have I?"

"Certainly; I doubt whether you would be happy if you thought that

your daintiness had departed from you."

"I hope, Mr. Stanbury, that nothing nice and pleasant has departed

from me. If I have ever been dainty, dainty I hope I may remain. I

will never, at any rate, give it up of my own accord." Why she said

this, she could never explain to herself. She had certainly not

intended to rebuff him when she had been saying it. But he spoke not

a word to her further as they walked home, either of her mode of life

or of his own.

CHAPTER XXV.

HUGH STANBURY SMOKES HIS PIPE.

[Illustration]

Nora Rowley, when she went to bed, after her walk to Niddon Park in

company with Hugh Stanbury, was full of wrath against him. But she

could not own her anger to herself, nor could she even confess to

herself,--though she was breaking her heart,--that there really

existed for her the slightest cause of grief. But why had he been so

stern to her? Why had he gone out of his way to be uncivil to her? He

had called her "dainty," meaning to imply by the epithet that she was

one of the butterflies of the day, caring for nothing but sunshine

and an opportunity of fluttering her silly wings. She had understood

well what he meant. Of course he was right to be cold to her if

his heart was cold, but he need not have insulted her by his

ill-concealed rebukes. Had he been kind to her, he might have rebuked

her as much as he liked. She quite appreciated the delightful

intimacy of a loving word of counsel from the man she loved,--how

nice it is, as it were, to play at marriage, and to hear beforehand

something of the pleasant weight of gentle marital authority. But

there had been nothing of that in his manner to her. He had told her

that she was dainty,--and had so told it her, as she thought, that

she might learn thereby, that under no circumstances would he have

any other tale to tell her. If he had no other tale, why had he not

been silent? Did he think that she was subject to his rebuke merely

because she lived under his mother's roof? She would soon shew him

that her residence at the Clock House gave him no such authority over

her. Then, amidst her wrath and despair, she cried herself asleep.

While she was sobbing in bed, he was sitting, with a short, black

pipe stuck into his mouth, on the corner of the churchyard wall

opposite. Before he had left the house he and Priscilla had spoken

together for some minutes about Mrs. Trevelyan. "Of course she was

wrong to see him," said Priscilla. "I hesitate to wound her by so

saying, because she has been ill-used,--though I did tell her so,

when she asked me. She could have lost nothing by declining his

visit."

"The worst of it is that Trevelyan swears that he will never receive

her again if she received him."

"He must unswear it," said Priscilla, "that is all. It is out of the

question that a man should take a girl from her home, and make her

his wife, and then throw her off for so little of an offence as this.

She might compel him by law to take her back."

"What would she get by that?"

"Little enough," said Priscilla; "and it was little enough she got by

marrying him. She would have had bread, and meat, and raiment without

being married, I suppose."

"But it was a love-match."

"Yes;--and now she is at Nuncombe Putney, and he is roaming about in

London. He has to pay ever so much a year for his love-match, and she

is crushed into nothing by it. How long will she have to remain here,

Hugh?"

"How can I say? I suppose there is no reason against her remaining as

far as you are concerned?"

"For me personally, none. Were she much worse than I think she is, I

should not care in the least for myself, if I thought that we were

doing her good,--helping to bring her back. She can't hurt me. I am

so fixed, and dry, and established, that nothing anybody says will

affect me. But mamma doesn't like it."

"What is it she dislikes?"

"The idea that she is harbouring a married woman, of whom people say,

at least, that she has a lover."

"Is she to be turned out because people are slanderers?"

"Why should mamma suffer because this woman, who is a stranger to

her, has been imprudent? If she were your wife, Hugh--"

"God forbid!"

"If we were in any way bound to her, of course we would do our duty.

But if it makes mamma unhappy I am sure you will not press it. I

think Mrs. Merton has spoken to her. And then Aunt Stanbury has

written such letters!"

"Who cares for Aunt Jemima?"

"Everybody cares for her,--except you and I. And now this man who has

been here asking the servant questions has upset her greatly. Even

your coming has done so, knowing, as she does, that you have come,

not to see us, but to make inquiries about Mrs. Trevelyan. She is so

annoyed by it, that she does not sleep."

"Do you wish her to be taken away at once?" asked Hugh, almost in an

angry tone.

"Certainly not. That would be impossible. We have agreed to take her,

and must bear with it. And I would not have her moved from this, if I

thought that if she stayed awhile it might be arranged that she might

return from us direct to her husband."

"I shall try that, of course;--now."

"But if he will not have her;--if he be so obstinate, so foolish, and

so wicked, do not leave her here longer than you can help." Then Hugh

explained that Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley were to be in England in

the spring, and that it would be very desirable that the poor woman

should not be sent abroad to look for a home before that. "If it must

be so, it must," said Priscilla. "But eight months is a long time."

Hugh went out to smoke his pipe on the church-wall in a moody,

unhappy state of mind. He had hoped to have done so well in regard

to Mrs. Trevelyan! Till he had met Colonel Osborne, he felt sure,

almost sure, that she would have refused to see that pernicious

troubler of the peace of families. In this he found that he had been

disappointed; but he had not expected that Priscilla would have been

so much opposed to the arrangement which he had made about the house,

and then he had been buoyed up by the anticipation of some delight in

meeting Nora Rowley. There was, at any rate, the excitement of seeing

her to keep his spirits from flagging. He had seen her, and had had

the opportunity of which he had so long been thinking. He had seen

her, and had had every possible advantage on his side. What could any

man desire better than the privilege of walking home with the girl

he loved through country lanes of a summer evening? They had been an

hour together,--or might have been, had he chosen to prolong the

interview. But the words which had been spoken between them had had

not the slightest interest,--unless it were that they had tended to

make the interval between him and her wider than ever. He had asked

her,--he thought that he had asked,--whether it would grieve her to

abandon that delicate, dainty mode of life to which she had been

accustomed; and she had replied, that she would never abandon it of

her own accord. Of course she had intended him to take her at her

word.

He blew forth quick clouds of heavy smoke, as he attempted to make

himself believe that this was all for the best. What would such a one

as he was do with a wife? Or, seeing as he did see, that marriage

itself was quite out of the question, how could it be good either for

him or her that they should be tied together by a long engagement?

Such a future would not at all suit the purpose of his life. In his

life absolute freedom would be needed;--freedom from unnecessary

ties, freedom from unnecessary burdens. His income was most

precarious, and he certainly would not make it less so by submission

to any closer literary thraldom. And he believed himself to be a

Bohemian,--too much of a Bohemian to enjoy a domestic fireside with

children and slippers. To be free to go where he liked, and when he

liked; to think as he pleased; to be driven nowhere by conventional

rules; to use his days, Sundays as well as Mondays, as he pleased

to use them; to turn Republican, if his mind should take him that

way,--or Quaker, or Mormon, or Red Indian, if he wished it, and in so

turning to do no damage to any one but himself;--that was the life

which he had planned for himself. His Aunt Stanbury had not read

his character altogether wrongly, as he thought, when she had once

declared that decency and godliness were both distasteful to him.

Would it not be destruction to such a one as he was, to fall into an

interminable engagement with any girl, let her be ever so sweet?

But yet, he felt as he sat there, filling pipe after pipe, smoking

away till past midnight, that though he could not bear the idea of

trammels, though he was totally unfit for matrimony, either present

or in prospect,--he felt that he had within his breast a double

identity, and that that other division of himself would be utterly

crushed if it were driven to divest itself of the idea of love.

Whence was to come his poetry, the romance of his life, the springs

of clear water in which his ignoble thoughts were to be dipped till

they should become pure, if love was to be banished altogether from

the list of delights that were possible to him? And then he began

to speculate on love,--that love of which poets wrote, and of which

he found that some sparkle was necessary to give light to his life.

Was it not the one particle of divine breath given to man, of which

he had heard since he was a boy? And how was this love to be come

at, and was it to be a thing of reality, or merely an idea? Was

it a pleasure to be attained, or a mystery that charmed by the

difficulties of the distance,--a distance that never could be so

passed that the thing should really be reached? Was love to be

ever a delight, vague as is that feeling of unattainable beauty

which far-off mountains give, when you know that you can never

place yourself amidst their unseen valleys? And if love could be

reached,--the love of which the poets sing, and of which his own

heart was ever singing,--what were to be its pleasures? To press a

hand, to kiss a lip, to clasp a waist, to hear even the low voice of

the vanquished, confessing loved one as she hides her blushing cheek

upon your shoulder,--what is it all but to have reached the once

mysterious valley of your far-off mountain, and to have found that it

is as other valleys,--rocks and stones, with a little grass, and a

thin stream of running water? But beyond that pressure of the hand,

and that kissing of the lips,--beyond that short-lived pressure of

the plumage which is common to birds and men,--what could love do

beyond that? There were children with dirty faces, and household

bills, and a wife who must, perhaps, always darn the stockings,--and

be sometimes cross. Was love to lead only to this,--a dull life, with

a woman who had lost the beauty from her cheeks, and the gloss from

her hair, and the music from her voice, and the fire from her eye,

and the grace from her step, and whose waist an arm should no longer

be able to span? Did the love of the poets lead to that, and that

only? Then, through the cloud of smoke, there came upon him some

dim idea of self-abnegation,--that the mysterious valley among

the mountains, the far-off prospect of which was so charming to

him,--which made the poetry of his life, was, in fact, the capacity

of caring more for other human beings than for himself. The beauty of

it all was not so much in the thing loved as in the loving. "Were she

a cripple, hunchbacked, eyeless," he said to himself, "it might be

the same. Only she must be a woman." Then he blew off a great cloud

of smoke, and went into bed lost amidst poetry, philosophy, love, and

tobacco.

It had been arranged over-night that he was to start the next morning

at half-past seven, and Priscilla had promised to give him his

breakfast before he went. Priscilla, of course, kept her word. She

was one of those women who would take a grim pleasure in coming

down to make the tea at any possible hour,--at five, at four, if it

were needed,--and who would never want to go to bed again when the

ceremony was performed. But when Nora made her appearance,--Nora, who

had been called dainty,--both Priscilla and Hugh were surprised. They

could not say why she was there,--nor could Nora tell herself. She

had not forgiven him. She had no thought of being gentle and loving

to him. She declared to herself that she had no wish of saying

good-bye to him once again. But yet she was in the room, waiting

for him, when he came down to his breakfast. She had been unable to

sleep, and had reasoned with herself as to the absurdity of lying in

bed awake, when she preferred to be up and out of the house. It was

true that she had not been out of her bed at seven any morning since

she had been at Nuncombe Putney; but that was no reason why she

should not be more active on this special morning. There was a noise

in the house, and she never could sleep when there was a noise. She

was quite sure that she was not going down because she wished to see

Hugh Stanbury, but she was equally sure that it would be a disgrace

to her to be deterred from going down, simply because the man was

there. So she descended to the parlour, and was standing near the

open window when Stanbury bustled into the room, some quarter of

an hour after the proper time. Priscilla was there also, guessing

something of the truth, and speculating whether these two young

people, should they love each other, would be the better or the worse

for such love. There must be marriages,--if only that the world

might go on in accordance with the Creator's purpose. But, as far

as Priscilla could see, blessed were they who were not called upon

to assist in the scheme. To her eyes all days seemed to be days of

wrath, and all times, times of tribulation. And it was all mere

vanity and vexation of spirit. To go on and bear it till one

was dead,--helping others to bear it, if such help might be of

avail,--that was her theory of life. To make it pleasant by eating,

and drinking, and dancing, or even by falling in love, was, to her

mind, a vain crunching of ashes between the teeth. Not to have ill

things said of her and of hers, not to be disgraced, not to be

rendered incapable of some human effort, not to have actually to

starve,--such was the extent of her ambition in this world. And for

the next,--she felt so assured of the goodness of God that she could

not bring herself to doubt of happiness in a world that was to be

eternal. Her doubt was this, whether it was really the next world

which would be eternal. Of eternity she did not doubt;--but might

there not be many worlds? These things, however, she kept almost

entirely to herself. "You down!" Priscilla had said.

"Well, yes; I could not sleep when I heard you all moving. And the

morning is so fine, and I thought that perhaps you would go out and

walk after your brother has gone." Priscilla promised that she would

walk, and then the tea was made.

"Your sister and I are going out for an early walk," said Nora, when

she was greeted by Stanbury. Priscilla said nothing, but thought she

understood it all.

"I wish I were going with you," said Hugh. Nora, remembering how very

little he had made of his opportunity on the evening before, did not

believe him.

The eggs and fried bacon were eaten in a hurry, and very little was

said. Then there came the moment for parting. The brother and sister

kissed each other, and Hugh took Nora by the hand. "I hope you make

yourself happy here," he said.

"Oh, yes;--if it were only for myself I should want nothing."

"I will do the best I can with Trevelyan."

"The best will be to make him, and every one, understand that the

fault is altogether his, and not Emily's."

"The best will be to make each think that there has been no real

fault," said Hugh.

"There should be no talking of faults," said Priscilla. "Let the

husband take his wife back,--as he is bound to do."

These words occupied hardly a minute in the saying, but during that

minute Hugh Stanbury held Nora by the hand. He held it fast. She

would not attempt to withdraw it, but neither would she return his

pressure by the muscle of a single finger. What right had he to press

her hand; or to make any sign of love, any pretence of loving, when

he had gone out of his way to tell her that she was not good enough

for him? Then he started, and Nora and Priscilla put on their hats

and left the house.

"Let us go to Niddon Park," said Nora.

"To Niddon Park again?"

"Yes; it is so beautiful! And I should like to see it by the morning

light. There is plenty of time."

So they walked to Niddon Park in the morning, as they had done on the

preceding evening. Their conversation at first regarded Trevelyan and

his wife, and the old trouble; but Nora could not keep herself from

speaking of Hugh Stanbury.

"He would not have come," she said, "unless Louis had sent him."

"He would not have come now, I think."

"Of course not;--why should he?--before Parliament was hardly over,

too? But he won't remain in town now,--will he?"

"He says somebody must remain,--and I think he will be in London till

near Christmas."

"How disagreeable! But I suppose he doesn't care. It's all the same

to a man like him. They don't shut the clubs up, I dare say. Will he

come here at Christmas?"

"Either then or for the New Year;--just for a day or two."

"We shall be gone then, I suppose?" said Nora.

"That must depend on Mr. Trevelyan," said Priscilla.

"What a life for two women to lead;--to depend upon the caprice of a

man who must be mad! Do you think that Mr. Trevelyan will care for

what your brother says to him?"

"I do not know Mr. Trevelyan."

"He is very fond of your brother, and I suppose men friends do listen

to each other. They never seem to listen to women. Don't you think

that, after all, they despise women? They look on them as dainty,

foolish things."

"Sometimes women despise men," said Priscilla.

"Not very often;--do they? And then women are so dependent on men. A

woman can get nothing without a man."

"I manage to get on somehow," said Priscilla.

"No, you don't, Miss Stanbury,--if you think of it. You want mutton.

And who kills the sheep?"

"But who cooks it?"

"But the men-cooks are the best," said Nora; "and the men-tailors,

and the men to wait at table, and the men-poets, and the

men-painters, and the men-nurses. All the things that women do, men

do better."

"There are two things they can't do," said Priscilla.

"What are they?"

"They can't suckle babies, and they can't forget themselves."

"About the babies, of course not. As for forgetting themselves,--I am

not quite so sure that I can forget myself.--That is just where your

brother went down last night."

They had at this moment reached the top of the steep slope below

which the river ran brawling among the rocks, and Nora seated herself

exactly where she had sat on the previous evening.

"I have been down scores of times," said Priscilla.

"Let us go now."

"You wouldn't go when Hugh asked you yesterday."

"I didn't care then. But do come now,--if you don't mind the climb."

Then they went down the slope and reached the spot from whence Hugh

Stanbury had jumped from rock to rock across the stream. "You have

never been out there, have you?" said Nora.

"On the rocks? Oh, dear, no! I should be sure to fall."

"But he went; just like a goat."

"That's one of the things that men can do, I suppose," said

Priscilla. "But I don't see any great glory in being like a goat."

"I do. I should like to be able to go, and I think I'll try. It is so

mean to be dainty and weak."

"I don't think it at all dainty to keep dry feet."

"But he didn't get his feet wet," said Nora. "Or if he did, he didn't

mind. I can see at once that I should be giddy and tumble down if I

tried it."

"Of course you would."

"But he didn't tumble down."

"He has been doing it all his life," said Priscilla.

"He can't do it up in London. When I think of myself, Miss Stanbury,

I am so ashamed. There is nothing that I can do. I couldn't write an

article for a newspaper."

"I think I could. But I fear no one would read it."

"They read his," said Nora, "or else he wouldn't be paid for writing

them." Then they climbed back again up the hill, and during the

climbing there were no words spoken. The slope was not much of a

hill,--was no more than the fall from the low ground of the valley to

the course which the river had cut for itself; but it was steep while

it lasted; and both the young women were forced to pause for a minute

before they could proceed upon their journey. As they walked home

Priscilla spoke of the scenery, and of the country, and of the

nature of the life which she and her mother and sister had passed at

Nuncombe Putney. Nora said but little till they were just entering

the village, and then she went back to the subject of her thoughts.

"I would sooner," said she, "write for a newspaper than do anything

else in the world."

"Why so?"

"Because it is so noble to teach people everything! And then a man

who writes for a newspaper must know so many things himself! I

believe there are women who do it, but very few. One or two have done

it, I know."

"Go and tell that to Aunt Stanbury, and hear what she will say about

such women."

"I suppose she is very,--prejudiced."

"Yes; she is; but she is a clever woman. I am inclined to think women

had better not write for newspapers."

"And why not?" Nora asked.

"My reasons would take me a week to explain, and I doubt whether I

have them very clear in my own head. In the first place there is that

difficulty about the babies. Most of them must get married you know."

"But not all," said Nora.

"No; thank God; not all."

"And if you are not married you might write for a newspaper. At any

rate, if I were you, I should be very proud of my brother."

"Aunt Stanbury is not at all proud of her nephew," said Priscilla, as

they entered the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A THIRD PARTY IS SO OBJECTIONABLE.

Hugh Stanbury went in search of Trevelyan immediately on his return

to London, and found his friend at his rooms in Lincoln's Inn.

"I have executed my commission," said Hugh, endeavouring to speak of

what he had done in a cheery voice.

"I am much obliged to you, Stanbury; very much;--but I do not know

that I need trouble you to tell me anything about it."

"And why not?"

"I have learned it all from that--man."

"What man?"

"From Bozzle. He has come back, and has been with me, and has learned

everything."

"Look here, Trevelyan;--when you asked me to go down to Devonshire,

you promised me that there should be nothing more about Bozzle. I

expect you to put that rascal, and all that he has told you, out of

your head altogether. You are bound to do so for my sake, and you

will be very wise to do so for your own."

"I was obliged to see him when he came."

"Yes, and to pay him, I do not doubt. But that is all done, and

should be forgotten."

"I can't forget it. Is it true or untrue that he found that man down

there? Is it true or untrue that my wife received Colonel Osborne at

your mother's house? Is it true or untrue that Colonel Osborne went

down there with the express object of seeing her? Is it true or

untrue that they had corresponded? It is nonsense to bid me to forget

all this. You might as well ask me to forget that I had desired her

neither to write to him, nor to see him."

"If I understand the matter," said Trevelyan, "you are incorrect in

one of your assertions."

"In which?"

"You must excuse me if I am wrong, Trevelyan; but I don't think you

ever did tell your wife not to see this man, or not to write to him?"

"I never told her! I don't understand what you mean."

"Not in so many words. It is my belief that she has endeavoured to

obey implicitly every clear instruction that you have given her."

"You are wrong;--absolutely and altogether wrong. Heaven and earth!

Do you mean to tell me now, after all that has taken place, that she

did not know my wishes?"

"I have not said that. But you have chosen to place her in such a

position, that though your word would go for much with her, she

cannot bring herself to respect your wishes."

"And you call that being dutiful and affectionate!"

"I call it human and reasonable; and I think that it is compatible

with duty and affection. Have you consulted her wishes?"

"Always!"

"Consult them now then, and bid her come back to you."

"No;--never! As far as I can see, I will never do so. The moment she

is away from me this man goes to her, and she receives him. She must

have known that she was wrong,--and you must know it."

"I do not think that she is half so wrong as you yourself," said

Stanbury. To this Trevelyan made no answer, and they both remained

silent some minutes. Stanbury had a communication to make before he

went, but it was one which he wished to delay as long as there was a

chance that his friend's heart might be softened;--one which he need

not make if Trevelyan would consent to receive his wife back to his

house. There was the day's paper lying on the table, and Stanbury had

taken it up and was reading it,--or pretending to read it.

"I will tell you what I propose to do," said Trevelyan.

"Well."

"It is best both for her and for me that we should be apart."

"I cannot understand how you can be so mad as to say so."

"You don't understand what I feel. Heaven and earth! To have a man

coming and going--. But, never mind. You do not see it, and nothing

will make you see it. And there is no reason why you should."

"I certainly do not see it. I do not believe that your wife cares

more for Colonel Osborne, except as an old friend of her father's,

than she does for the fellow that sweeps the crossing. It is a matter

in which I am bound to tell you what I think."

"Very well. Now, if you have freed your mind, I will tell you my

purpose. I am bound to do so, because your people are concerned in

it. I shall go abroad."

"And leave her in England?"

"Certainly. She will be safer here than she can be abroad,--unless

she should choose to go back with her father to the islands."

"And take the boy?"

"No;--I could not permit that. What I intend is this. I will give

her Â£800 a year, as long as I have reason to believe that she has no

communication whatever, either by word of mouth or by letter, with

that man. If she does, I will put the case immediately into the hands

of my lawyer, with instructions to him to ascertain from counsel what

severest steps I can take."

"How I hate that word severe, when applied to a woman."

"I dare say you do,--when applied to another man's wife. But there

will be no severity in my first proposition. As for the child,--if

I approve of the place in which she lives, as I do at present,--he

shall remain with her for nine months in the year till he is

six years old. Then he must come to me. And he shall come to me

altogether if she sees or hears from that man. I believe that Â£800

a year will enable her to live with all comfort under your mother's

roof."

"As to that," said Stanbury, slowly, "I suppose I had better tell you

at once, that the Nuncombe Putney arrangement cannot be considered as

permanent."

"Why not?"

"Because my mother is timid and nervous, and altogether unused to the

world."

"That unfortunate woman is to be sent away,--even from Nuncombe

Putney!"

"Understand me, Trevelyan."

"I understand you. I understand you most thoroughly. Nor do I wonder

at it in the least. Do not suppose that I am angry with your mother,

or with you, or with your sister. I have no right to expect that they

should keep her after that man has made his way into their house. I

can well conceive that no honest, high-minded lady would do so."

"It is not that at all."

"But it is that. How can you tell me that it isn't? And yet you would

have me believe that I am not disgraced!" As he said this Trevelyan

got up, and walked about the room, tearing his hair with his hands.

He was in truth a wretched man, from whose mind all expectation of

happiness was banished, who regarded his own position as one of

incurable ignominy, looking upon himself as one who had been made

unfit for society by no fault of his own. What was he to do with the

wretched woman who could be kept from the evil of her pernicious

vanity by no gentle custody, whom no most distant retirement

would make safe from the effects of her own ignorance, folly, and

obstinacy? "When is she to go?" he asked in a low, sepulchral

tone,--as though these new tidings that had come upon him had been

fatal--laden with doom, and finally subversive of all chance even of

tranquillity.

"When you and she may please."

"That is all very well;--but let me know the truth. I would not have

your mother's house--contaminated; but may she remain there for a

week?"

Stanbury jumped from his seat with an oath. "I tell you what it

is, Trevelyan;--if you speak of your wife in that way, I will not

listen to you. It is unmanly and untrue to say that her presence

can--contaminate any house."

"That is very fine. It may be chivalrous in you to tell me on her

behalf that I am a liar,--and that I am not a man."

"You drive me to it."

"But what am I to think when you are forced to declare that this

unfortunate woman can not be allowed to remain at your mother's

house,--a house which has been especially taken with reference to a

shelter for her? She has been received,--with the idea that she would

be discreet. She has been indiscreet, past belief, and she is to be

turned out,--most deservedly. Heaven and earth! Where shall I find

a roof for her head?" Trevelyan as he said this was walking about

the room with his hands stretched up towards the ceiling; and as

his friend was attempting to make him comprehend that there was no

intention on the part of any one to banish Mrs. Trevelyan from the

Clock House, at least for some months to come,--not even till after

Christmas unless some satisfactory arrangement could be sooner

made,--the door of the room was opened by the boy, who called himself

a clerk, and who acted as Trevelyan's servant in the chambers, and

a third person was shown into the room. That third person was Mr.

Bozzle. As no name was given, Stanbury did not at first know Mr.

Bozzle, but he had not had his eye on Mr. Bozzle for half a minute

before he recognised the ex-policeman by the outward attributes

and signs of his profession. "Oh, is that you, Mr. Bozzle?" said

Trevelyan, as soon as the great man had made his bow of salutation.

"Well;--what is it?"

[Illustration: That third person was Mr. Bozzle.]

"Mr. Hugh Stanbury, I think," said Bozzle, making another bow to the

young barrister.

"That's my name," said Stanbury.

"Exactly so, Mr. S. The identity is one as I could prove on oath in

any court in England. You was on the railway platform at Exeter on

Saturday when we was waiting for the 12 express 'buss;--wasn't you

now, Mr. S.?"

"What's that to you?"

"Well;--as it do happen, it is something to me. And, Mr. S., if you

was asked that question in hany court in England or before even one

of the metropolitan bekes, you wouldn't deny it."

"Why the devil should I deny it? What's all this about, Trevelyan?"

"Of course you can't deny it, Mr. S. When I'm down on a fact, I am

down on it. Nothing else wouldn't do in my profession."

"Have you anything to say to me, Mr. Bozzle?" asked Trevelyan.

"Well;--I have; just a word."

"About your journey to Devonshire?"

"Well;--in a way it is about my journey to Devonshire. It's all along

of the same job, Mr. Trewillian."

"You can speak before my friend here," said Trevelyan. Bozzle had

taken a great dislike to Hugh Stanbury, regarding the barrister with

a correct instinct as one who was engaged for the time in the same

service with himself, and who was his rival in that service. When

thus instigated to make as it were a party of three in this delicate

and most confidential matter, and to take his rival into his

confidence, he shook his head slowly and looked Trevelyan hard in the

face,--"Mr. Stanbury is my particular friend," said Trevelyan, "and

knows well the circumstances of this unfortunate affair. You can say

anything before him."

Bozzle shook his head again. "I'd rayther not, Mr. Trewillian," said

he. "Indeed I'd rayther not. It's something very particular."

"If you take my advice," said Stanbury, "you will not hear him

yourself."

"That's your advice, Mr. S.?" asked Mr. Bozzle.

"Yes;--that's my advice. I'd never have anything to do with such a

fellow as you as long as I could help it."

"I dare say not, Mr. S.; I dare say not. We're hexpensive, and we're

haccurate;--neither of which is much in your line, Mr. S., if I

understand about it rightly."

"Mr. Bozzle, if you've got anything to tell, tell it," said Trevelyan

angrily.

"A third party is so objectionable," pleaded Bozzle.

"Never mind. That is my affair."

"It is your affair, Mr. Trewillian. There's not a doubt of that. The

lady is your wife."

"Damnation!" shouted Trevelyan.

"But the credit, sir," said Bozzle. "The credit is mine. And here

is Mr. S. has been down a interfering with me, and doing no 'varsal

good, as I'll undertake to prove by evidence before the affair is

over."

"The affair is over," said Stanbury.

"That's as you think, Mr. S. That's where your information goes to,

Mr. S. Mine goes a little beyond that, Mr. S. I've means as you can

know nothing about, Mr. S. I've irons in the fire, what you're as

ignorant on as the babe as isn't born."

"No doubt you have, Mr. Bozzle," said Stanbury.

"I has. And now if it be that I must speak before a third party, Mr.

Trewillian, I'm ready. It ain't that I'm no ways ashamed. I've done

my duty, and knows how to do it. And let a counsel be ever so sharp,

I never yet was so 'posed but what I could stand up and hold my own.

The Colonel, Mr. Trewillian, got,--a letter,--from your lady,--this

morning."

"I don't believe it," said Stanbury, sharply.

"Very likely not, Mr. S. It ain't in my power to say anything

whatever about you believing or not believing. But Mr. T.'s lady

has wrote the letter; and the Colonel,--he has received it. You

don't look after these things, Mr. S. You don't know the ways of

'em. But it's my business. The lady has wrote the letter, and the

Colonel,--why, he has received it." Trevelyan had become white with

rage when Bozzle first mentioned this continued correspondence

between his wife and Colonel Osborne. It never occurred to him to

doubt the correctness of the policeman's information, and he regarded

Stanbury's assertion of incredulity as being simply of a piece with

his general obstinacy in the matter. At this moment he began to

regret that he had called in the assistance of his friend, and that

he had not left the affair altogether in the hands of that much more

satisfactory, but still more painful, agent, Mr. Bozzle. He had again

seated himself, and for a moment or two remained silent on his chair.

"It ain't my fault, Mr. Trewillian," continued Bozzle, "if this

little matter oughtn't never to have been mentioned before a third

party."

"It is of no moment," said Trevelyan, in a low voice. "What does it

signify who knows it now?"

"Do not believe it, Trevelyan," said Stanbury.

"Very well, Mr. S. Very well. Just as you like. Don't believe it.

Only it's true, and it's my business to find them things out. It's

my business, and I finds 'em out. Mr. Trewillian can do as he likes

about it. If it's right, why, then it is right. It ain't for me to

say nothing about that. But there's the fact. The lady, she has wrote

another letter; and the Colonel,--why, he has received it. There

ain't nothing wrong about the post-office. If I was to say what was

inside of that billydou,--why, then I should be proving what I didn't

know; and when it came to standing up in court, I shouldn't be able

to hold my own. But as for the letter, the lady wrote it, and the

Colonel,--he received it."

"That will do, Mr. Bozzle," said Trevelyan.

"Shall I call again, Mr. Trewillian?"

"No;--yes. I'll send to you, when I want you. You shall hear from

me."

"I suppose I'd better be keeping my eyes open about the Colonel's

place, Mr. Trewillian?"

"For God's sake, Trevelyan, do not have anything more to do with this

man!"

"That's all very well for you, Mr. S.," said Bozzle. "The lady ain't

your wife."

"Can you imagine anything more disgraceful than all this?" said

Stanbury.

"Nothing; nothing; nothing!" answered Trevelyan.

"And I'm to keep stirring, and be on the move?" again suggested

Bozzle, who prudently required to be fortified by instructions before

he devoted his time and talents even to so agreeable a pursuit as

that in which he had been engaged.

"You shall hear from me," said Trevelyan.

"Very well;--very well. I wish you good-day, Mr. Trewillian. Mr. S.,

yours most obedient. There was one other point, Mr. Trewillian."

"What point?" asked Trevelyan, angrily.

"If the lady was to join the Colonel--"

"That will do, Mr. Bozzle," said Trevelyan, again jumping up from

his chair. "That will do." So saying, he opened the door, and Bozzle,

with a bow, took his departure. "What on earth am I to do? How am I

to save her?" said the wretched husband, appealing to his friend.

Stanbury endeavoured with all his eloquence to prove that this latter

piece of information from the spy must be incorrect. If such a letter

had been written by Mrs. Trevelyan to Colonel Osborne, it must have

been done while he, Stanbury, was staying at the Clock House. This

seemed to him to be impossible; but he could hardly explain why

it should be impossible. She had written to the man before, and

had received him when he came to Nuncombe Putney. Why was it even

improbable that she should have written to him again? Nevertheless,

Stanbury felt sure that she had sent no such letter. "I think I

understand her feelings and her mind," said he; "and if so, any such

correspondence would be incompatible with her previous conduct."

Trevelyan only smiled at this,--or pretended to smile. He would

not discuss the question; but believed implicitly what Bozzle had

told him in spite of all Stanbury's arguments. "I can say nothing

further," said Stanbury.

"No, my dear fellow. There is nothing further to be said, except

this, that I will have my unfortunate wife removed from the decent

protection of your mother's roof with the least possible delay. I

feel that I owe Mrs. Stanbury the deepest apology for having sent

such an inmate to trouble her repose."

"Nonsense!"

"That is what I feel."

"And I say that it is nonsense. If you had never sent that wretched

blackguard down to fabricate lies at Nuncombe Putney, my mother's

repose would have been all right. As it is, Mrs. Trevelyan can remain

where she is till after Christmas. There is not the least necessity

for removing her at once. I only meant to say that the arrangement

should not be regarded as altogether permanent. I must go to my work

now. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Stanbury."

Stanbury paused at the door, and then once more turned round. "I

suppose it is of no use my saying anything further; but I wish you to

understand fully that I regard your wife as a woman much ill-used,

and I think you are punishing her, and yourself, too, with a cruel

severity for an indiscretion of the very slightest kind."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. TREVELYAN'S LETTER TO HIS WIFE.

Trevelyan, when he was left alone, sat for above a couple of hours

contemplating the misery of his position, and endeavouring to teach

himself by thinking what ought to be his future conduct. It never

occurred to him during these thoughts that it would be well that he

should at once take back his wife, either as a matter of duty, or of

welfare, for himself or for her. He had taught himself to believe

that she had disgraced him; and, though this feeling of disgrace

made him so wretched that he wished that he were dead, he would

allow himself to make no attempt at questioning the correctness of

his conviction. Though he were to be shipwrecked for ever, even

that seemed to be preferable to supposing that he had been wrong.

Nevertheless, he loved his wife dearly, and, in the white heat of his

anger endeavoured to be merciful to her. When Stanbury accused him

of severity, he would not condescend to defend himself; but he told

himself then of his great mercy. Was he not as fond of his own boy

as any other father, and had he not allowed her to take the child

because he had felt that a mother's love was more imperious, more

craving in its nature, than the love of a father? Had that been

severe? And had he not resolved to allow her every comfort which

her unfortunate position,--the self-imposed misfortune of her

position,--would allow her to enjoy? She had come to him without

a shilling; and yet, bad as her treatment of him had been, he was

willing to give enough not only to support her, but her sister also,

with every comfort. Severe! No; that, at least, was an undeserved

accusation. He had been anything but severe. Foolish he might have

been, in taking a wife from a home in which she had been unable to

learn the discretion of a matron; too trusting he had been, and too

generous,--but certainly not severe. But, of course, as he said to

himself, a young man like Stanbury would take the part of a woman

with whose sister he was in love. Then he turned his thoughts upon

Bozzle, and there came over him a crushing feeling of ignominy,

shame, moral dirt, and utter degradation, as he reconsidered his

dealings with that ingenious gentleman. He was paying a rogue to

watch the steps of a man whom he hated, to pry into the home secrets,

to read the letters, to bribe the servants, to record the movements

of this rival, this successful rival, in his wife's affections! It

was a filthy thing,--and yet what could he do? Gentlemen of old, his

own grandfather, or his father, would have taken such a fellow as

Colonel Osborne by the throat and have caned him, and afterwards

would have shot him, or have stood to be shot. All that was changed

now,--but it was not his fault that it was changed. He was willing

enough to risk his life, could any opportunity of risking it in this

cause be obtained for him. But were he to cudgel Colonel Osborne,

he would be simply arrested, and he would then be told that he had

disgraced himself foully by striking a man old enough to be his

father!

How was he to have avoided the employment of some such man as Bozzle?

He had also employed a gentleman, his friend, Stanbury; and what was

the result? The facts were not altered. Even Stanbury did not attempt

to deny that there had been a correspondence, and that there had been

a visit. But Stanbury was so blind to all impropriety, or pretended

such blindness, that he defended that which all the world agreed

in condemning. Of what use had Stanbury been to him? He had wanted

facts, not advice. Stanbury had found out no facts for him; but

Bozzle, either by fair means or foul, did get at the truth. He did

not doubt but that Bozzle was right about that letter written only

yesterday, and received on that very morning. His wife, who had

probably been complaining of her wrongs to Stanbury, must have

retired from that conversation to her chamber, and immediately have

written this letter to her lover! With such a woman as that what can

be done in these days otherwise than by the aid of such a one as

Bozzle? He could not confine his wife in a dungeon. He could not

save himself from the disgrace of her misconduct, by any rigours of

surveillance on his own part. As wives are managed now-a-days, he

could not forbid to her the use of the post-office,--could not hinder

her from seeing this hypocritical scoundrel, who carried on his

wickedness under the false guise of family friendship. He had given

her every chance to amend her conduct: but, if she were resolved

on disobedience, he had no means of enforcing obedience. The facts,

however, it was necessary that he should know.

And now, what should he do? How should he go to work to make her

understand that she could not write even a letter without his knowing

it; and that if she did either write to the man or see him he would

immediately take the child from her, and provide for her only in such

fashion as the law should demand from him? For himself, and for his

own life, he thought that he had determined what he would do. It was

impossible that he should continue to live in London. He was ashamed

to enter a club. He had hardly a friend to whom it was not an agony

to speak. They who knew him, knew also of his disgrace, and no longer

asked him to their houses. For days past he had eaten alone, and sat

alone, and walked alone. All study was impossible to him. No pursuit

was open to him. He spent his time in thinking of his wife, and of

the disgrace which she had brought upon him. Such a life as this, he

knew, was unmanly and shameful, and it was absolutely necessary for

him that he should in some way change it. He would go out of England,

and would travel,--if only he could so dispose of his wife that she

might be safe from any possible communication with Colonel Osborne.

If that could be effected, nothing that money could do should be

spared for her. If that could not be effected he would remain at

home,--and crush her.

That night before he went to bed he wrote a letter to his wife, which

was as follows;--

DEAR EMILY,

I have learned, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that you

have corresponded with Colonel Osborne since you have been

at Nuncombe Putney, and also that you have seen him there.

This has been done in direct opposition to my expressed

wishes, and I feel myself compelled to tell you that such

conduct is disgraceful to you, and disgracing to me. I am

quite at a loss to understand how you can reconcile to

yourself so flagrant a disobedience of my instructions,

and so perverse a disregard to the opinion of the world at

large.

But I do not write now for the sake of finding fault with

you. It is too late for me to have any hope that I can do

so with good effect, either as regards your credit or my

happiness. Nevertheless, it is my duty to protect both you

and myself from further shame; and I wish to tell you what

are my intentions with that view. In the first place, I

warn you that I keep a watch on you. The doing so is very

painful to me, but it is absolutely necessary. You cannot

see Colonel Osborne, or write to him, without my knowing

it. I pledge you my word that in either case,--that is, if

you correspond with him or see him,--I will at once take

our boy away from you. I will not allow him to remain,

even with a mother, who shall so misconduct herself.

Should Colonel Osborne address a letter to you, I desire

that you will put it under an envelope addressed to me.

If you obey my commands on this head I will leave our boy

with you nine months out of every year till he shall be

six years old. Such, at least, is my present idea, though

I will not positively bind myself to adhere to it. And I

will allow you Â£800 per year for your own maintenance and

that of your sister. I am greatly grieved to find from

my friend Mr. Stanbury that your conduct in reference to

Colonel Osborne has been such as to make it necessary that

you should leave Mrs. Stanbury's house. I do not wonder

that it should be so. I shall immediately seek for a

future home for you, and when I have found one that is

suitable, I will have you conveyed to it.

I must now further explain my purposes,--and I must beg

you to remember that I am driven to do so by your direct

disobedience to my expressed wishes. Should there be any

further communication between you and Colonel Osborne,

not only will I take your child away from you, but I will

also limit the allowance to be made to you to a bare

sustenance. In such case, I shall put the matter into the

hands of a lawyer, and shall probably feel myself driven

to take steps towards freeing myself from a connection

which will be disgraceful to my name.

For myself, I shall live abroad during the greater part of

the year. London has become to me uninhabitable, and all

English pleasures are distasteful.

Yours affectionately,

LOUIS TREVELYAN.

When he had finished this he read it twice, and believed that he had

written, if not an affectionate, at any rate a considerate letter.

He had no bounds to the pity which he felt for himself in reference

to the injury which was being done to him, and he thought that the

offers which he was making, both in respect to his child and the

money, were such as to entitle him to his wife's warmest gratitude.

He hardly recognised the force of the language which he used when he

told her that her conduct was disgraceful, and that she had disgraced

his name. He was quite unable to look at the whole question between

him and his wife from her point of view. He conceived it possible

that such a woman as his wife should be told that her conduct would

be watched, and that she should be threatened with the Divorce Court,

with an effect that should, upon the whole, be salutary. There

be men, and not bad men either, and men neither uneducated, or

unintelligent, or irrational in ordinary matters, who seem to be

absolutely unfitted by nature to have the custody or guardianship of

others. A woman in the hands of such a man can hardly save herself or

him from endless trouble. It may be that between such a one and his

wife, events shall flow on so evenly that no ruling, no constraint

is necessary,--that even the giving of advice is never called for

by the circumstances of the day. If the man be happily forced to

labour daily for his living till he be weary, and the wife be laden

with many ordinary cares, the routine of life may run on without

storms;--but for such a one, if he be without work, the management

of a wife will be a task full of peril. The lesson may be learned at

last; he may after years come to perceive how much and how little of

guidance the partner of his life requires at his hands; and he may be

taught how that guidance should be given;--but in the learning of the

lesson there will be sorrow and gnashing of teeth. It was so now with

this man. He loved his wife. To a certain extent he still trusted

her. He did not believe that she would be faithless to him after the

fashion of women who are faithless altogether. But he was jealous of

authority, fearful of slights, self-conscious, afraid of the world,

and utterly ignorant of the nature of a woman's mind.

He carried the letter with him in his pocket throughout the next

morning, and in the course of the day he called upon Lady Milborough.

Though he was obstinately bent on acting in accordance with his own

views, yet he was morbidly desirous of discussing the grievousness of

his position with his friends. He went to Lady Milborough, asking for

her advice, but desirous simply of being encouraged by her to do that

which he was resolved to do on his own judgment.

"Down,--after her,--to Nuncombe Putney!" said Lady Milborough,

holding up both her hands.

"Yes; he has been there. And she has been weak enough to see him."

"My dear Louis, take her to Naples at once,--at once."

"It is too late for that now, Lady Milborough."

"Too late! Oh, no. She has been foolish, indiscreet,

disobedient,--what you will of that kind. But, Louis, don't send her

away; don't send your young wife away from you. Those whom God has

joined together, let no man put asunder."

"I cannot consent to live with a wife with whom neither my wishes

nor my word have the slightest effect. I may believe of her what I

please, but, think what the world will believe! I cannot disgrace

myself by living with a woman who persists in holding intercourse

with a man whom the world speaks of as her lover."

"Take her to Naples," said Lady Milborough, with all the energy of

which she was capable.

"I can take her nowhere, nor will I see her, till she has given proof

that her whole conduct towards me has been altered. I have written a

letter to her, and I have brought it. Will you excuse me if I ask you

to take the trouble to read it?"

Then he handed Lady Milborough the letter, which she read very

slowly, and with much care.

"I don't think I would--would--would--"

"Would what?" demanded Trevelyan.

"Don't you think that what you say is a little,--just a little prone

to make,--to make the breach perhaps wider?"

"No, Lady Milborough. In the first place, how can it be wider?"

"You might take her back, you know; and then if you could only get to

Naples!"

"How can I take her back while she is corresponding with this man?"

"She wouldn't correspond with him at Naples."

Trevelyan shook his head and became cross. His old friend would not

at all do as old friends are expected to do when called upon for

advice.

"I think," said he, "that what I have proposed is both just and

generous."

"But, Louis, why should there be any separation?"

"She has forced it upon me. She is headstrong, and will not be

ruled."

"But this about disgracing you. Do you think that you must say that?"

"I think I must, because it is true. If I do not tell her the truth,

who is there that will do so? It may be bitter now, but I think that

it is for her welfare."

"Dear, dear, dear!"

"I want nothing for myself, Lady Milborough."

"I am sure of that, Louis."

"My whole happiness was in my home. No man cared less for going out

than I did. My child and my wife were everything to me. I don't

suppose that I was ever seen at a club in the evening once throughout

a season. And she might have had anything that she liked,--anything!

It is hard, Lady Milborough; is it not?"

Lady Milborough, who had seen the angry brow, did not dare to suggest

Naples again. But yet, if any word might be spoken to prevent this

utter wreck of a home, how good a thing it would be! He had got up to

leave her, but she stopped him by holding his hand. "For better, for

worse, Louis; remember that."

"Why has she forgotten it?"

"She is flesh of your flesh, bone of your bone. And for the boy's

sake! Think of your boy, Louis. Do not send that letter. Sleep on it,

Louis, and think of it."

"I have slept on it."

"There is no promise in it of forgiveness after a while. It is

written as though you intended that she should never come back to

you."

"That shall be as she behaves herself."

"But tell her so. Let there be some one bright spot in what you say

to her, on which her mind may fix itself. If she be not altogether

hardened, that letter will drive her to despair."

But Trevelyan would not give up the letter, nor indicate by a word

that he would reconsider the question of its propriety. He escaped as

soon as he could from Lady Milborough's room, and almost declared as

he did so, that he would never enter her doors again. She had utterly

failed to see the matter in the proper light. When she talked of

Naples she must surely have been unable to comprehend the extent

of the ill-usage to which he, the husband, had been subjected. How

was it possible that he should live under the same roof with a wife

who claimed to herself the right of receiving visitors of whom he

disapproved,--a visitor,--a gentleman,--one whom the world called her

lover? He gnashed his teeth and clenched his fist as he thought of

his old friend's ignorance of the very first law in a married man's

code of laws.

But yet when he was out in the streets he did not post his letter at

once; but thought of it throughout the whole day, trying to prove

the weight of every phrase that he had used. Once or twice his heart

almost relented. Once he had the letter in his hand, that he might

tear it. But he did not tear it. He put it back into his pocket, and

thought again of his grievance. Surely it was his first duty in such

an emergency to be firm!

It was certainly a wretched life that he was leading. In the evening

he went all alone to an eating-house for his dinner, and then,

sitting with a miserable glass of sherry before him, he again read

and re-read the epistle which he had written. Every harsh word that

it contained was, in some sort, pleasant to his ear. She had hit

him hard, and should he not hit her again? And then, was it not his

bounden duty to let her know the truth? Yes; it was his duty to be

firm.

So he went out and posted the letter.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GREAT TRIBULATION.

[Illustration]

Trevelyan's letter to his wife fell like a thunderbolt among them at

Nuncombe Putney. Mrs. Trevelyan was altogether unable to keep it to

herself;--indeed she made no attempt at doing so. Her husband had

told her that she was to be banished from the Clock House because her

present hostess was unable to endure her misconduct, and of course

she demanded the reasons of the charge that was thus brought against

her. When she first read the letter, which she did in the presence of

her sister, she towered in her passion.

"Disgraced him! I have never disgraced him. It is he that has

disgraced me. Correspondence! Yes;--he shall see it all. Unjust,

ignorant, foolish man! He does not remember that the last

instructions he really gave me, were to bid me see Colonel Osborne.

Take my boy away! Yes. Of course, I am a woman and must suffer. I

will write to Colonel Osborne, and will tell him the truth, and will

send my letter to Louis. He shall know how he has ill-treated me! I

will not take a penny of his money;--not a penny. Maintain you! I

believe he thinks that we are beggars. Leave this house because of my

conduct! What can Mrs. Stanbury have said? What can any of them have

said? I will demand to be told. Free himself from the connection!

Oh, Nora, Nora! that it should come to this!--that I should be thus

threatened, who have been as innocent as a baby! If it were not for

my child, I think that I should destroy myself!"

Nora said what she could to comfort her sister, insisting chiefly on

the promise that the child should not be taken away. There was no

doubt as to the husband's power in the mind of either of them; and

though, as regarded herself, Mrs. Trevelyan would have defied her

husband, let his power be what it might, yet she acknowledged to

herself that she was in some degree restrained by the fear that she

would find herself deprived of her only comfort.

"We must just go where he bids us,--till papa comes," said Nora.

"And when papa is here, what help will there be then? He will not let

me go back to the islands,--with my boy. For myself I might die, or

get out of his way anywhere. I can see that. Priscilla Stanbury is

right when she says that no woman should trust herself to any man.

Disgraced! That I should live to be told by my husband that I had

disgraced him,--by a lover!"

There was some sort of agreement made between the two sisters as to

the manner in which Priscilla should be interrogated respecting the

sentence of banishment which had been passed. They both agreed that

it would be useless to make inquiry of Mrs. Stanbury. If anything had

really been said to justify the statement made in Mr. Trevelyan's

letter, it must have come from Priscilla, and have reached Trevelyan

through Priscilla's brother. They, both of them, had sufficiently

learned the ways of the house to be sure that Mrs. Stanbury had not

been the person active in the matter. They went down, therefore,

together, and found Priscilla seated at her desk in the parlour.

Mrs. Stanbury was also in the room, and it had been presumed between

the sisters that the interrogations should be made in that lady's

absence; but Mrs. Trevelyan was too hot in the matter for restraint,

and she at once opened out her budget of grievance.

"I have a letter from my husband," she said,--and then paused. But

Priscilla, seeing from the fire in her eyes that she was much moved,

made no reply, but turned to listen to what might further be said. "I

do not know why I should trouble you with his suspicions," continued

Mrs. Trevelyan, "or read to you what he says about--Colonel Osborne."

As she spoke she was holding her husband's letter open in her

hands. "There is nothing in it that you do not know. He says

I have corresponded with him. So I have;--and he shall see the

correspondence. He says that Colonel Osborne visited me. He did come

to see me and Nora."

"As any other old man might have done," said Nora.

"It was not likely that I should openly confess myself to be afraid

to see my father's old friend. But the truth is, my husband does not

know what a woman is."

She had begun by declaring that she would not trouble her friend with

any statement of her husband's complaints against her; but now she

had made her way to the subject, and could hardly refrain herself.

Priscilla understood this, and thought that it would be wise to

interrupt her by a word that might bring her back to her original

purpose. "Is there anything," said she, "which we can do to help

you?"

"To help me? No;--God only can help me. But Louis informs me that I

am to be turned out of this house, because you demand that we should

go."

"Who says that?" exclaimed Mrs. Stanbury.

"My husband. Listen; this is what he says:--'I am greatly grieved to

hear from my friend Mr. Stanbury that your conduct in reference to

Colonel Osborne has been such as to make it necessary that you should

leave Mrs. Stanbury's house.' Is that true? Is that true?" In her

general mode of carrying herself, and of enduring the troubles of

her life, Mrs. Trevelyan was a strong woman; but now her grief was

too much for her, and she burst out into tears. "I am the most

unfortunate woman that ever was born!" she sobbed out through her

tears.

"I never said that you were to go," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"But your son has told Mr. Trevelyan that we must go," said Nora,

who felt that her sense of injury against Hugh Stanbury was greatly

increased by what had taken place. To her mind he was the person most

important in the matter. Why had he desired that they should be sent

away from the Clock House? She was very angry with him, and declared

to herself that she hated him with all her heart. For this man she

had sent away that other lover,--a lover who had really loved her!

And she had even confessed that it was so!

"There is a misunderstanding about this," said Priscilla.

"It must be with your brother, then," said Nora.

"I think not," said Priscilla. "I think that it has been with Mr.

Trevelyan." Then she went on to explain, with much difficulty,

but still with a slow distinctness that was peculiar to her, what

had really taken place. "We have endeavoured," she said, "to show

you,--my mother and I,--that we have not misjudged you; but it

is certainly true that I told my brother that I did not think

the arrangement a good one,--quite as a permanence." It was very

difficult, and her cheeks were red as she spoke, and her lips

faltered. It was an exquisite pain to her to have to give the pain

which her words would convey; but there was no help for it,--as she

said to herself more than once at the time,--there was nothing to be

done but to tell the truth.

"I never said so," blurted out Mrs. Stanbury, with her usual

weakness.

"No, mother. It was my saying. In discussing what was best for us

all, with Hugh, I told him,--what I have just now explained."

"Then of course we must go," said Mrs. Trevelyan, who had gulped down

her sobs and was resolved to be firm,--to give way to no more tears,

to bear all without sign of womanly weakness.

"You will stay with us till your father comes," said Priscilla.

"Of course you will," said Mrs. Stanbury,--"you and Nora. We have got

to be such friends, now."

"No," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "As to friendship for me, it is out of

the question. We must pack up, Nora, and go somewhere. Heaven knows

where!"

Nora was now sobbing. "Why your brother--should want to turn us

out,--after he has sent us here--!"

"My brother wants nothing of the kind," said Priscilla. "Your sister

has no better friend than my brother."

"It will be better, Nora, to discuss the matter no further," said

Mrs. Trevelyan. "We must go away,--somewhere; and the sooner the

better. To be an unwelcome guest is always bad; but to be unwelcome

for such a reason as this is terrible."

"There is no reason," said Mrs. Stanbury; "indeed there is none."

"Mrs. Trevelyan will understand us better when she is less excited,"

said Priscilla. "I am not surprised that she should be indignant now.

I can only say again that we hope you will stay with us till Sir

Marmaduke Rowley shall be in England."

"That is not what your brother means," said Nora.

"Nor is it what I mean," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "Nora, we had better

go to our own room. I suppose I must write to my husband; indeed,

of course I must, that I may send him--the correspondence. I fear

I cannot walk out into the street, Mrs. Stanbury, and make you quit

of me, till I hear from him. And if I were to go to an inn at once,

people would speak evil of me;--and I have no money."

"My dear, how can you think of such a thing!" said Mrs. Stanbury.

"But you may be quite sure that we shall be gone within three

days,--or four at the furthest. Indeed, I will pledge myself not to

remain longer than that,--even though I should have to go to the

poor-house. Neither I nor my sister will stay in any family,--to

contaminate it. Come, Nora." And so speaking she sailed out of the

room, and her sister followed her.

"Why did you say anything about it? Oh dear, oh dear! why did you

speak to Hugh? See what you have done!"

"I am sorry that I did speak," replied Priscilla slowly.

"Sorry! Of course you are sorry; but what good is that?"

"But, mother, I do not think that I was wrong. I feel sure that the

real fault in all this is with Mr. Trevelyan, as it has been all

through. He should not have written to her as he has done."

"I suppose Hugh did tell him."

"No doubt;--and I told Hugh; but not after the fashion in which he

has told her. I blame myself mostly for this,--that we ever consented

to come to this house. We had no business here. Who is to pay the

rent?"

"Hugh insisted upon taking it."

"Yes;--and he will pay the rent; and we shall be a drag upon him, as

though he had been fool enough to have a wife and a family of his

own. And what good have we done? We had not strength enough to say

that that wicked man should not see her when he came;--for he is a

wicked man."

"If we had done that she would have been as bad then as she is now."

"Mother, we had no business to meddle either with her badness or

her goodness. What had we to do with the wife of such a one as Mr.

Trevelyan, or with any woman who was separated from her husband?"

"It was Hugh who thought we should be of service to them."

"Yes;--and I do not blame him. He is in a position to be of service

to people. He can do work and earn money, and has a right to think

and to speak. We have a right to think only for ourselves, and we

should not have yielded to him. How are we to get back again out of

this house to our cottage?"

"They are pulling the cottage down, Priscilla."

"To some other cottage, mother. Do you not feel while we are living

here that we are pretending to be what we are not? After all, Aunt

Stanbury was right, though it was not her business to meddle with us.

We should never have come here. That poor woman now regards us as her

bitter enemies."

"I meant to do for the best," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"The fault was mine, mother."

"But you meant it for the best, my dear."

"Meaning for the best is trash. I don't know that I did mean it for

the best. While we were at the cottage we paid our way and were

honest. What is it people say of us now?"

"They can't say any harm."

"They say that we are paid by the husband to keep his wife, and paid

again by the lover to betray the husband."

"Priscilla!"

"Yes;--it is shocking enough. But that comes of people going out

of their proper course. We were too humble and low to have a right

to take any part in such a matter. How true it is that while one

crouches on the ground, one can never fall."

The matter was discussed in the Clock House all day, between Mrs.

Stanbury and Priscilla, and between Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora, in their

rooms and in the garden; but nothing could come of such discussions.

No change could be made till further instructions should have been

received from the angry husband; nor could any kind of argument be

even invented by Priscilla which might be efficacious in inducing the

two ladies to remain at the Clock House, even should Mr. Trevelyan

allow them to do so. They all felt the intolerable injustice, as

it appeared to them,--of their subjection to the caprice of an

unreasonable and ill-conditioned man; but to all of them it seemed

plain enough that in this matter the husband must exercise his own

will,--at any rate till Sir Marmaduke should be in England. There

were many difficulties throughout the day. Mrs. Trevelyan would not

go down to dinner, sending word that she was ill, and that she would,

if she were allowed, have some tea in her own room. And Nora said

that she would remain with her sister. Priscilla went to them more

than once; and late in the evening they all met in the parlour. But

any conversation seemed to be impossible; and Mrs. Trevelyan, as she

went up to her room at night, again declared that she would rid the

house of her presence as soon as possible.

One thing, however, was done on that melancholy day. Mrs. Trevelyan

wrote to her husband, and enclosed Colonel Osborne's letter to

herself, and a copy of her reply. The reader will hardly require to

be told that no such further letter had been written by her as that

of which Bozzle had given information to her husband. Men whose

business it is to detect hidden and secret things, are very apt to

detect things which have never been done. What excuse can a detective

make even to himself for his own existence if he can detect nothing?

Mr. Bozzle was an active-minded man, who gloried in detecting, and

who, in the special spirit of his trade, had taught himself to

believe that all around him were things secret and hidden, which

would be within his power of unravelling if only the slightest clue

were put in his hand. He lived by the crookednesses of people, and

therefore was convinced that straight doings in the world were quite

exceptional. Things dark and dishonest, fights fought and races run

that they might be lost, plants and crosses, women false to their

husbands, sons false to their fathers, daughters to their mothers,

servants to their masters, affairs always secret, dark, foul, and

fraudulent, were to him the normal condition of life. It was to be

presumed that Mrs. Trevelyan should continue to correspond with her

lover,--that old Mrs. Stanbury should betray her trust by conniving

at the lover's visit,--that everybody concerned should be steeped to

the hips in lies and iniquity. When, therefore, he found at Colonel

Osborne's rooms that the Colonel had received a letter with the

Lessboro' post-mark, addressed in the handwriting of a woman, he

did not scruple to declare that Colonel Osborne had received, on

that morning, a letter from Mr. Trevelyan's "lady." But in sending

to her husband what she called with so much bitterness, "the

correspondence," Mrs. Trevelyan had to enclose simply the copy of one

sheet note from herself.

But she now wrote again to Colonel Osborne, and enclosed to her

husband, not a copy of what she had written, but the note itself. It

was as follows:--

Nuncombe Putney, Wednesday, August 10.

MY DEAR COLONEL OSBORNE,

My husband has desired me not to see you, or to write to

you, or to hear from you again. I must therefore beg you

to enable me to obey him,--at any rate till papa comes to

England.

Yours truly,

EMILY TREVELYAN.

And then she wrote to her husband, and in the writing of this letter

there was much doubt, much labour, and many changes. We will give it

as it was written when completed:--

I have received your letter, and will obey your commands

to the best of my power. In order that you may not be

displeased by any further unavoidable correspondence

between me and Colonel Osborne, I have written to him a

note, which I now send to you. I send it that you may

forward it. If you do not choose to do so, I cannot be

answerable either for his seeing me, or for his writing to

me again.

I send also copies of all the correspondence I have had

with Colonel Osborne since you turned me out of your

house. When he came to call on me, Nora remained with me

while he was here. I blush while I write this;--not for

myself, but that I should be so suspected as to make such

a statement necessary.

You say that I have disgraced you and myself. I have

done neither. I am disgraced;--but it is you that have

disgraced me. I have never spoken a word or done a thing,

as regards you, of which I have cause to be ashamed.

I have told Mrs. Stanbury that I and Nora will leave her

house as soon as we can be made to know where we are to

go. I beg that this may be decided instantly, as else we

must walk out into the street without a shelter. After

what has been said, I cannot remain here.

My sister bids me say that she will relieve you of all

burden respecting herself as soon as possible. She will

probably be able to find a home with my aunt, Mrs.

Outhouse, till papa comes to England. As for myself, I can

only say that till he comes, I shall do exactly what you

order.

EMILY TREVELYAN.

Nuncombe Putney, August 10.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. AND MRS. OUTHOUSE.

Both Mr. Outhouse and his wife were especially timid in taking upon

themselves the cares of other people. Not on that account is it to be

supposed that they were bad or selfish. They were both given much to

charity, and bestowed both in time and money more than is ordinarily

considered necessary, even from persons in their position. But what

they gave, they gave away from their own quiet hearth. Had money

been wanting to the daughters of his wife's brother, Mr. Outhouse

would have opened such small coffer as he had with a free hand. But

he would have much preferred that his benevolence should be used

in a way that would bring upon him no further responsibility and

no questionings from people whom he did not know and could not

understand.

The Rev. Oliphant Outhouse had been Rector of St.

Diddulph's-in-the-East for the last fifteen years, having married

the sister of Sir Marmaduke Rowley,--then simply Mr. Rowley, with a

colonial appointment in Jamaica of Â£120 per annum,--twelve years

before his promotion, while he was a curate in one of the populous

borough parishes. He had thus been a London clergyman all his life;

but he knew almost as little of London society as though he had held

a cure in a Westmoreland valley. He had worked hard, but his work had

been altogether among the poor. He had no gift of preaching, and had

acquired neither reputation nor popularity. But he could work;--and

having been transferred because of that capability to the temporary

curacy of St. Diddulph's,--out of one diocese into another,--he had

received the living from the bishop's hands when it became vacant.

A dreary place was the parsonage of St. Diddulph's-in-the-East for

the abode of a gentleman. Mr. Outhouse had not, in his whole parish,

a parishioner with whom he could consort. The greatest men around

him were the publicans, and the most numerous were men employed in

and around the docks. Dredgers of mud, navvies employed on suburban

canals, excavators, loaders and unloaders of cargo, cattle drivers,

whose driving, however, was done mostly on board ship,--such and

such like were the men who were the fathers of the families of St.

Diddulph's-in-the-East. And there was there, not far removed from the

muddy estuary of a little stream that makes its black way from the

Essex marshes among the houses of the poorest of the poor into the

Thames, a large commercial establishment for turning the carcasses of

horses into manure. Messrs. Flowsem and Blurt were in truth the great

people of St. Diddulph's-in-the-East; but the closeness of their

establishment was not an additional attraction to the parsonage.

They were liberal, however, with their money, and Mr. Outhouse was

disposed to think,--custom perhaps having made the establishment

less objectionable to him than it was at first,--that St.

Diddulph's-in-the-East would be more of a Pandemonium than it now

was, if by any sanitary law Messrs. Flowsem and Blurt were compelled

to close their doors. "Non olet," he would say with a grim smile when

the charitable cheque of the firm would come punctually to hand on

the first Saturday after Christmas.

But such a house as his would be, as he knew, but a poor residence

for his wife's nieces. Indeed, without positively saying that he

was unwilling to receive them, he had, when he first heard of the

breaking up of the house in Curzon Street, shewn that he would rather

not take upon his shoulders so great a responsibility. He and his

wife had discussed the matter between them, and had come to the

conclusion that they did not know what kind of things might have been

done in Curzon Street. They would think no evil, they said; but the

very idea of a married woman with a lover was dreadful to them. It

might be that their niece was free from blame. They hoped so. And

even though her sin had been of ever so deep a dye, they would take

her in,--if it were indeed necessary. But they hoped that such help

from them might not be needed. They both knew how to give counsel to

a poor woman, how to rebuke a poor man,--how to comfort, encourage,

or to upbraid the poor. Practice had told them how far they might go

with some hope of doing good;--and at what stage of demoralisation

no good from their hands was any longer within the scope of fair

expectation. But all this was among the poor. With what words to

encourage such a one as their niece Mrs. Trevelyan,--to encourage her

or to rebuke her, as her conduct might seem to make necessary,--they

both felt that they were altogether ignorant. To them Mrs. Trevelyan

was a fine lady. To Mr. Outhouse, Sir Marmaduke had ever been a fine

gentleman, given much to worldly things, who cared more for whist and

a glass of wine than for anything else, and who thought that he had

a good excuse for never going to church in England because he was

called upon, as he said, to show himself in the governor's pew always

once on Sundays, and frequently twice, when he was at the seat of his

government. Sir Marmaduke manifestly looked upon church as a thing

in itself notoriously disagreeable. To Mr. Outhouse it afforded the

great events of the week. And Mrs. Outhouse would declare that to

hear her husband preach was the greatest joy of her life. It may

be understood therefore that though the family connection between

the Rowleys and the Outhouses had been kept up with a semblance of

affection, it had never blossomed forth into cordial friendship.

When therefore the clergyman of St. Diddulph's received a letter from

his niece, Nora, begging him to take her into his parsonage till Sir

Marmaduke should arrive in the course of the spring, and hinting

also a wish that her uncle Oliphant should see Mr. Trevelyan and

if possible arrange that his other niece should also come to the

parsonage, he was very much perturbed in spirit. There was a long

consultation between him and his wife before anything could be

settled, and it may be doubted whether anything would have been

settled, had not Mr. Trevelyan himself made his way to the parsonage,

on the second day of the family conference. Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse had

both seen the necessity of sleeping upon the matter. They had slept

upon it, and the discourse between them on the second day was so

doubtful in its tone that more sleeping would probably have been

necessary had not Mr. Trevelyan appeared and compelled them to a

decision.

"You must remember that I make no charge against her," said

Trevelyan, after the matter had been discussed for about an hour.

"Then why should she not come back to you?" said Mr. Outhouse,

timidly.

"Some day she may,--if she will be obedient. But it cannot be now.

She has set me at defiance; and even yet it is too clear from the

tone of her letter to me that she thinks that she has been right to

do so. How could we live together in amity when she addresses me as a

cruel tyrant?"

"Why did she go away at first?" asked Mrs. Outhouse.

"Because she would compromise my name by an intimacy which I did not

approve. But I do not come here to defend myself, Mrs. Outhouse. You

probably think that I have been wrong. You are her friend; and to

you, I will not even say that I have been right. What I want you to

understand is this. She cannot come back to me now. It would not be

for my honour that she should do so."

"But, sir,--would it not be for your welfare, as a Christian?" asked

Mr. Outhouse.

"You must not be angry with me, if I say that I will not discuss that

just now. I did not come here to discuss it."

"It is very sad for our poor niece," said Mrs. Outhouse.

"It is very sad for me," said Trevelyan, gloomily;--"very sad,

indeed. My home is destroyed; my life is made solitary; I do not even

see my own child. She has her boy with her, and her sister. I have

nobody."

"I can't understand, for the life of me, why you should not live

together just like any other people," said Mrs. Outhouse, whose

woman's spirit was arising in her bosom. "When people are married,

they must put up with something;--at least, most always." This she

added, lest it might be for a moment imagined that she had had any

cause for complaint with her Mr. Outhouse.

"Pray excuse me, Mrs. Outhouse; but I cannot discuss that. The

question between us is this,--can you consent to receive your two

nieces till their father's return;--and if so, in what way shall I

defray the expense of their living? You will of course understand

that I willingly undertake the expense not only of my wife's

maintenance and of her sister's also, but that I will cheerfully

allow anything that may be required either for their comfort or

recreation."

"I cannot take my nieces into my house as lodgers," said Mr.

Outhouse.

"No, not as lodgers; but of course you can understand that it is for

me to pay for my own wife. I know I owe you an apology for mentioning

it;--but how else could I make my request to you?"

"If Emily and Nora come here they must come as our guests," said Mrs.

Outhouse.

"Certainly," said the clergyman. "And if I am told they are in want

of a home they shall find one here till their father comes. But I am

bound to say that as regards the elder I think her home should be

elsewhere."

"Of course it should," said Mrs. Outhouse. "I don't know anything

about the law, but it seems to me very odd that a young woman should

be turned out in this way. You say she has done nothing?"

"I will not argue the matter," said Trevelyan.

"That's all very well, Mr. Trevelyan," said the lady, "but she's my

own niece, and if I don't stand up for her I don't know who will. I

never heard such a thing in my life as a wife being sent away after

such a fashion as that. We wouldn't treat a cookmaid so; that we

wouldn't. As for coming here, she shall come if she pleases, but I

shall always say that it's the greatest shame I ever heard of."

Nothing came of this visit at last. The lady grew in her anger; and

Mr. Trevelyan, in his own defence, was driven to declare that his

wife's obstinate intimacy with Colonel Osborne had almost driven

him out of his senses. Before he left the parsonage he was brought

even to tears by his own narration of his own misery;--whereby Mr.

Outhouse was considerably softened, although Mrs. Outhouse became

more and more stout in the defence of her own sex. But nothing at

last came of it. Trevelyan insisted on paying for his wife, wherever

she might be placed; and when he found that this would not be

permitted to him at the parsonage, he was very anxious to take some

small furnished house in the neighbourhood, in which the two sisters

might live for the next six months under the wings of their uncle

and aunt. But even Mr. Outhouse was moved to pleasantry by this

suggestion, as he explained the nature of the tenements which were

common at St. Diddulph's. Two rooms, front and back, they might

have for about five-and-sixpence a week in a house with three other

families. "But perhaps that is not exactly what you'd like," said Mr.

Outhouse. The interview ended with no result, and Mr. Trevelyan took

his leave, declaring to himself that he was worse off than the foxes,

who have holes in which to lay their heads;--but it must be presumed

that his sufferings in this respect were to be by attorney; as it was

for his wife, and not for himself, that the necessary hole was now

required.

As soon as he was gone Mrs. Outhouse answered Nora's letter, and

without meaning to be explicit, explained pretty closely what had

taken place. The spare bedroom at the parsonage was ready to receive

either one or both of the sisters till Sir Marmaduke should be in

London, if one or both of them should choose to come. And though

there was no nursery at the parsonage,--for Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse had

been blessed with no children,--still room should be made for the

little boy. But they must come as visitors,--"as our own nieces,"

said Mrs. Outhouse. And she went on to say that she would have

nothing to do with the quarrel between Mr. Trevelyan and his wife.

All such quarrels were very bad,--but as to this quarrel she could

take no part either one side or the other. Then she stated that Mr.

Trevelyan had been at the parsonage, but that no arrangement had been

made, because Mr. Trevelyan had insisted on paying for their board

and lodging.

This letter reached Nuncombe Putney before any reply was received by

Mrs. Trevelyan from her husband. This was on the Saturday morning,

and Mrs. Trevelyan had pledged herself to Mrs. Stanbury that she

would leave the Clock House on the Monday. Of course, there was no

need that she should do so. Both Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla would

now have willingly consented to their remaining till Sir Marmaduke

should be in England. But Mrs. Trevelyan's high spirit revolted

against this after all that had been said. She thought that she

should hear from her husband on the morrow, but the post on Sunday

brought no letter from Trevelyan. On the Saturday they had finished

packing up,--so certain was Mrs. Trevelyan that some instructions as

to her future destiny would be sent to her by her lord.

At last they decided on the Sunday that they would both go at once

to St. Diddulph's; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that

this was the decision of the elder sister. Nora would willingly have

yielded to Priscilla's entreaties, and have remained. But Emily

declared that she could not, and would not, stay in the house. She

had a few pounds,--what would suffice for her journey; and as Mr.

Trevelyan had not thought proper to send his orders to her, she would

go without them. Mrs. Outhouse was her aunt, and her nearest relative

in England. Upon whom else could she lean in this time of her great

affliction? A letter, therefore, was written to Mrs. Outhouse, saying

that the whole party, including the boy and nurse, would be at St.

Diddulph's on the Monday evening, and the last cord was put to the

boxes.

"I suppose that he is very angry," Mrs. Trevelyan said to her sister,

"but I do not feel that I care about that now. He shall have nothing

to complain of in reference to any gaiety on my part. I will see no

one. I will have no--correspondence. But I will not remain here after

what he has said to me, let him be ever so angry. I declare, as I

think of it, it seems to me that no woman was ever so cruelly treated

as I have been." Then she wrote one further line to her husband.

Not having received any orders from you, and having

promised Mrs. Stanbury that I would leave this house

on Monday, I go with Nora to my aunt, Mrs. Outhouse,

to-morrow.

E. T.

On the Sunday evening the four ladies drank tea together, and they

all made an effort to be civil, and even affectionate, to each other.

Mrs. Trevelyan had at last allowed Priscilla to explain how it had

come to pass that she had told her brother that it would be better

both for her mother and for herself that the existing arrangements

should be brought to an end, and there had come to be an agreement

between them that they should all part in amity. But the conversation

on the Sunday evening was very difficult.

"I am sure we shall always think of you both with the greatest

kindness," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"As for me," said Priscilla, "your being with us has been a delight

that I cannot describe;--only it has been wrong."

"I know too well," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "that in our present

circumstances we are unable to carry delight with us anywhere."

"You hardly understand what our life has been," said Priscilla; "but

the truth is that we had no right to receive you in such a house as

this. It has not been our way of living, and it cannot continue to be

so. It is not wonderful that people should talk of us. Had it been

called your house, it might have been better."

"And what will you do now?" asked Nora.

"Get out of this place as soon as we can. It is often hard to go

back to the right path; but it may always be done,--or at least

attempted."

"It seems to me that I take misery with me wherever I go," said Mrs.

Trevelyan.

"My dear, it has not been your fault," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"I do not like to blame my brother," said Priscilla, "because he has

done his best to be good to us all;--and the punishment will fall

heaviest upon him, because he must pay for it."

"He should not be allowed to pay a shilling," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

Then the morning came, and at seven o'clock the two sisters, with the

nurse and child, started for Lessboro' Station in Mrs. Crocket's open

carriage, the luggage having been sent on in a cart. There were many

tears shed, and any one looking at the party would have thought that

very dear friends were being torn asunder.

"Mother," said Priscilla, as soon as the parlour door was shut, and

the two were alone together, "we must take care that we never are

brought again into such a mistake as that. They who protect the

injured should be strong themselves."

CHAPTER XXX.

DOROTHY MAKES UP HER MIND.

It was true that most ill-natured things had been said at Lessboro'

and at Nuncombe Putney about Mrs. Stanbury and the visitors at the

Clock House, and that these ill-natured things had spread themselves

to Exeter. Mrs. Ellison of Lessboro', who was not the most

good-natured woman in the world, had told Mrs. Merton of Nuncombe

that she had been told that the Colonel's visit to the lady had been

made by express arrangement between the Colonel and Mrs. Stanbury.

Mrs. Merton, who was very good-natured, but not the wisest woman

in the world, had declared that any such conduct on the part of

Mrs. Stanbury was quite impossible. "What does it matter which it

is,--Priscilla or her mother?" Mrs. Ellison had said. "These are the

facts. Mrs. Trevelyan has been sent there to be out of the way of

this Colonel; and the Colonel immediately comes down and sees her at

the Clock House. But when people are very poor they do get driven to

do almost anything."

Mrs. Merton, not being very wise, had conceived it to be her duty

to repeat this to Priscilla; and Mrs. Ellison, not being very

good-natured, had conceived it to be hers to repeat it to Mrs.

MacHugh at Exeter. And then Bozzle's coming had become known.

"Yes, Mrs. MacHugh, a policeman in mufti down at Nuncombe! I wonder

what our friend in the Close here will think about it! I have always

said, you know, that if she wanted to keep things straight at

Nuncombe, she should have opened her purse-strings."

From all which it may be understood, that Priscilla Stanbury's desire

to go back to their old way of living had not been without reason.

It may be imagined that Miss Stanbury of the Close did not receive

with equanimity the reports which reached her. And, of course, when

she discussed the matter either with Martha or with Dorothy, she fell

back upon her own early appreciation of the folly of the Clock House

arrangement. Nevertheless, she had called Mrs. Ellison very bad

names, when she learned from her friend Mrs. MacHugh what reports

were being spread by the lady from Lessboro'.

"Mrs. Ellison! Yes; we all know Mrs. Ellison. The bitterest tongue in

Devonshire, and the falsest! There are some people at Lessboro' who

would be well pleased if she paid her way there as well as those poor

women do at Nuncombe. I don't think much of what Mrs. Ellison says."

"But it is bad about the policeman," said Mrs. MacHugh.

"Of course it's bad. It's all bad. I'm not saying that it's not bad.

I'm glad I've got this other young woman out of it. It's all that

young man's doing. If I had a son of my own, I'd sooner follow him to

the grave than hear him call himself a Radical."

Then, on a sudden, there came to the Close news that Mrs. Trevelyan

and her sister were gone. On the very Monday on which they went,

Priscilla sent a note on to her sister, in which no special allusion

was made to Aunt Stanbury, but which was no doubt written with the

intention that the news should be communicated.

"Gone; are they? As it is past wishing that they hadn't come, it's

the best thing they could do now. And who is to pay the rent of the

house, now they have gone?" As this was a point on which Dorothy was

not prepared to trouble herself at present, she made no answer to the

question.

Dorothy at this time was in a state of very great perturbation on her

own account. The reader may perhaps remember that she had been much

startled by a proposition that had been made to her in reference

to her future life. Her aunt had suggested to her that she should

become--Mrs. Gibson. She had not as yet given any answer to that

proposition, and had indeed found it to be quite impossible to speak

about it at all. But there can be no doubt that the suggestion had

opened out to her altogether new views of life. Up to the moment

of her aunt's speech to her, the idea of her becoming a married

woman had never presented itself to her. In her humility it had

not occurred to her that she should be counted as one among the

candidates for matrimony. Priscilla had taught her to regard

herself,--indeed, they had both so regarded themselves,--as born to

eat and drink, as little as might be, and then to die. Now, when she

was told that she could, if she pleased, become Mrs. Gibson, she was

almost lost in a whirl of new and confused ideas. Since her aunt had

spoken, Mr. Gibson himself had dropped a hint or two which seemed to

her to indicate that he also must be in the secret. There had been

a party, with a supper, at Mrs. Crumbie's, at which both the Miss

Frenches had been present. But Mr. Gibson had taken her, Dorothy

Stanbury, out to supper, leaving both Camilla and Arabella behind

him in the drawing-room! During the quarter of an hour afterwards

in which the ladies were alone while the gentlemen were eating

and drinking, both Camilla and Arabella continued to wreak their

vengeance. They asked questions about Mrs. Trevelyan, and suggested

that Mr. Gibson might be sent over to put things right. But Miss

Stanbury had heard them, and had fallen upon them with a heavy hand.

"There's a good deal expected of Mr. Gibson, my dears," she said,

"which it seems to me Mr. Gibson is not inclined to perform."

"It is quite indifferent to us what Mr. Gibson may be inclined to

perform," said Arabella. "I'm sure we shan't interfere with Miss

Dorothy."

As this was said quite out loud before all the other ladies, Dorothy

was overcome with shame. But her aunt comforted her when they were

again at home.

"Laws, my dear; what does it matter? When you're Mrs. Gibson, you'll

be proud of it all."

Was it then really written in the book of the Fates that she, Dorothy

Stanbury, was to become Mrs. Gibson? Poor Dorothy began to feel

that she was called upon to exercise an amount of thought and

personal decision to which she had not been accustomed. Hitherto,

in the things which she had done, or left undone, she had received

instructions which she could obey. Had her mother and Priscilla

told her positively not to go to her aunt's house, she would have

remained at Nuncombe without complaint. Had her aunt since her coming

given her orders as to her mode of life,--enjoined, for instance,

additional church attendances, or desired her to perform menial

services in the house,--she would have obeyed, from custom, without a

word. But when she was told that she was to marry Mr. Gibson, it did

seem to her to be necessary to do something more than obey. Did she

love Mr. Gibson? She tried hard to teach herself to think that she

might learn to love him. He was a nice-looking man enough, with sandy

hair, and a head rather bald, with thin lips, and a narrow nose, who

certainly did preach drawling sermons; but of whom everybody said

that he was a very excellent clergyman. He had a house and an income,

and all Exeter had long since decided that he was a man who would

certainly marry. He was one of those men of whom it may be said that

they have no possible claim to remain unmarried. He was fair game,

and unless he surrendered himself to be bagged before long, would

subject himself to just and loud complaint. The Miss Frenches had

been aware of this, and had thought to make sure of him among them.

It was a little hard upon them that the old maid of the Close, as

they always called Miss Stanbury, should interfere with them when

their booty was almost won. And they felt it to be the harder because

Dorothy Stanbury was, as they thought, so poor a creature. That

Dorothy herself should have any doubt as to accepting Mr. Gibson, was

an idea that never occurred to them. But Dorothy had her doubts. When

she came to think of it, she remembered that she had never as yet

spoken a word to Mr. Gibson, beyond such little trifling remarks as

are made over a tea-table. She might learn to love him, but she did

not think that she loved him as yet.

"I don't suppose all this will make any difference to Mr. Gibson,"

said Miss Stanbury to her niece, on the morning after the receipt of

Priscilla's note stating that the Trevelyans had left Nuncombe.

Dorothy always blushed when Mr. Gibson's name was mentioned, and she

blushed now. But she did not at all understand her aunt's allusion.

"I don't know what you mean, aunt," she said.

"Well, you know, my dear, what they say about Mrs. Trevelyan and the

Clock House is not very nice. If Mr. Gibson were to turn round and

say that the connection wasn't pleasant, no one would have a right to

complain."

The faint customary blush on Dorothy's cheeks which Mr. Gibson's name

had produced now covered her whole face even up to the roots of her

hair. "If he believes bad of mamma, I'm sure, Aunt Stanbury, I don't

want to see him again."

"That's all very fine, my dear, but a man has to think of himself,

you know."

"Of course he thinks of himself. Why shouldn't he? I dare say he

thinks of himself more than I do."

"Dorothy, don't be a fool. A good husband isn't to be caught every

day."

"Aunt Stanbury, I don't want to catch any man."

"Dorothy, don't be a fool."

"I must say it. I don't suppose Mr. Gibson thinks of me the least in

the world."

"Psha! I tell you he does."

"But as for mamma and Priscilla, I never could like anybody for a

moment who would be ashamed of them."

She was most anxious to declare that, as far as she knew herself

and her own wishes at present, she entertained no partiality for Mr.

Gibson,--no feeling which could become partiality even if Mr. Gibson

was to declare himself willing to accept her mother and her sister

with herself. But she did not dare to say so. There was an instinct

within her which made it almost impossible to her to express an

objection to a suitor before the suitor had declared himself to be

one. She could speak out as touching her mother and her sister,--but

as to her own feelings she could express neither assent nor dissent.

"I should like to have it settled soon," said Miss Stanbury, in a

melancholy voice. Even to this Dorothy could make no reply. What did

soon mean? Perhaps in the course of a year or two. "If it could be

arranged by the end of this week, it would be a great comfort to me."

Dorothy almost fell off her chair, and was stricken altogether dumb.

"I told you, I think, that Brooke Burgess is coming here?"

"You said he was to come some day."

"He is to be here on Monday. I haven't seen him for more than twelve

years; and now he's to be here next week? Dear, dear! When I think

sometimes of all the hard words that have been spoken, and the harder

thoughts that have been in people's minds, I often regret that the

money ever came to me at all. I could have done without it, very

well,--very well."

"But all the unpleasantness is over now, aunt."

"I don't know about that. Unpleasantness of that kind is apt to

rankle long. But I wasn't going to give up my rights. Nobody but a

coward does that. They talked of going to law and trying the will,

but they wouldn't have got much by that. And then they abused me for

two years. When they had done and got sick of it, I told them they

should have it all back again as soon as I am dead. It won't be long

now. This Burgess is the elder nephew, and he shall have it all."

"Is not he grateful?"

"No. Why should he be grateful? I don't do it for special love of

him. I don't want his gratitude; nor anybody's gratitude. Look at

Hugh. I did love him."

"I am grateful, Aunt Stanbury."

"Are you, my dear? Then show it by being a good wife to Mr. Gibson,

and a happy wife. I want to get everything settled while Burgess is

here. If he is to have it, why should I keep him out of it whilst I

live? I wonder whether Mr. Gibson would mind coming and living here,

Dolly?"

The thing was coming so near to her that Dorothy began to feel that

she must, in truth, make up her mind, and let her aunt know also how

it had been made up. She was sensible enough to perceive that if

she did not prepare herself for the occasion she would find herself

hampered by an engagement simply because her aunt had presumed that

it was out of the question that she should not acquiesce. She would

drift into marriage with Mr. Gibson against her will. Her greatest

difficulty was the fact that her aunt clearly had no doubt on the

subject. And as for herself, hitherto her feelings did not, on either

side, go beyond doubts. Assuredly it would be a very good thing for

her to become Mrs. Gibson, if only she could create for herself some

attachment for the man. At the present moment her aunt said nothing

more about Mr. Gibson, having her mind much occupied with the coming

of Mr. Brooke Burgess.

"I remember him twenty years ago and more; as nice a boy as you would

wish to see. His father was the fourth of the brothers. Dear, dear!

Three of them are gone; and the only one remaining is old Barty, whom

no one ever loved."

The Burgesses had been great people in Exeter, having been both

bankers and brewers there, but the light of the family had paled;

and though Bartholomew Burgess, of whom Miss Stanbury declared that

no one had ever loved him, still had a share in the bank, it was

well understood in the city that the real wealth in the firm of

Cropper and Burgess belonged to the Cropper family. Indeed the most

considerable portion of the fortune that had been realised by old

Mr. Burgess had come into the possession of Miss Stanbury herself.

Bartholomew Burgess had never forgiven his brother's will, and

between him and Jemima Stanbury the feud was irreconcileable. The

next brother, Tom Burgess, had been a solicitor at Liverpool, and had

done well there. But Miss Stanbury knew nothing of the Tom Burgesses

as she called them. The fourth brother, Harry Burgess, had been a

clergyman, and this Brooke Burgess, Junior, who was now coming to

the Close, had been left with a widowed mother, the eldest of a

large family. It need not now be told at length how there had been

ill-blood also between this clergyman and the heiress. There had been

attempts at friendship, and at one time Miss Stanbury had received

the Rev. Harry Burgess and all his family at the Close;--but the

attempts had not been successful; and though our old friend had never

wavered in her determination to leave the money all back to some one

of the Burgess family, and with this view had made a pilgrimage to

London some twelve years since, and had renewed her acquaintance

with the widow and the children, still there had been no comfortable

relations between her and any of the Burgess family. Old Barty

Burgess, whom she met in the Close, or saw in the High Street every

day of her life, was her great enemy. He had tried his best,--so at

least she was convinced,--to drive her out of the pale of society,

years upon years ago, by saying evil things of her. She had conquered

in that combat. Her victory had been complete, and she had triumphed

after a most signal fashion. But this triumph did not silence Barty's

tongue, nor soften his heart. When she prayed to be forgiven, as she

herself forgave others, she always exempted Barty Burgess from her

prayers. There are things which flesh and blood cannot do. She had

not liked Harry Burgess' widow, nor for the matter of that, Harry

Burgess himself. When she had last seen the children she had not

liked any of them much, and had had her doubts even as to Brooke. But

with that branch of the family she was willing to try again. Brooke

was now coming to the Close, having received, however, an intimation,

that if, during his visit to Exeter, he chose to see his Uncle Barty,

any such intercourse must be kept quite in the background. While he

remained in Miss Stanbury's house he was to remain there as though

there were no such person as Mr. Bartholomew Burgess in Exeter.

At this time Brooke Burgess was a man just turned thirty, and was

a clerk in the Ecclesiastical Record Office, in Somerset House. No

doubt the peculiar nature and name of the public department to which

he was attached had done something to recommend him to Miss Stanbury.

Ecclesiastical records were things greatly to be reverenced in her

eyes, and she felt that a gentleman who handled them and dealt with

them would probably be sedate, gentlemanlike, and conservative.

Brooke Burgess, when she had last seen him, was just about to enter

upon the duties of the office. Then there had come offence, and she

had in truth known nothing of him from that day to this. The visitor

was to be at Exeter on the following Monday, and very much was done

in preparation of his coming. There was to be a dinner party on that

very day, and dinner parties were not common with Miss Stanbury. She

had, however, explained to Martha that she intended to put her best

foot forward. Martha understood perfectly that Mr. Brooke Burgess

was to be received as the heir of property. Sir Peter Mancrudy, the

great Devonshire chemist, was coming to dinner, and Mr. and Mrs.

Powel from Haldon,--people of great distinction in that part of the

county,--Mrs. MacHugh of course; and, equally of course, Mr. Gibson.

There was a deep discussion between Miss Stanbury and Martha

as to asking two of the Cliffords, and Mr. and Mrs. Noel from

Doddiscombeleigh. Martha had been very much in favour of having

twelve. Miss Stanbury had declared that with twelve she must have two

waiters from the greengrocer's, and that two waiters would overpower

her own domesticities below stairs. Martha had declared that she

didn't care about them any more than if they were puppy dogs. But

Miss Stanbury had been quite firm against twelve. She had consented

to have ten,--for the sake of artistic arrangement at the table;

"They should be pantaloons and petticoats alternate, you know," she

had said to Martha,--and had therefore asked the Cliffords. But the

Cliffords could not come, and then she had declined to make any

further attempt. Indeed, a new idea had struck her. Brooke Burgess,

her guest, should sit at one end of the table, and Mr. Gibson, the

clergyman, at the other. In this way the proper alternation would be

effected. When Martha heard this, Martha quite understood the extent

of the good fortune that was in store for Dorothy. If Mr. Gibson was

to be welcomed in that way, it could only be in preparation of his

becoming one of the family.

And Dorothy herself became aware that she must make up her mind. It

was not so declared to her, but she came to understand that it was

very probable that something would occur on the coming Monday which

would require her to be ready with her answer on that day. And she

was greatly tormented by feeling that if she could not bring herself

to accept Mr. Gibson,--should Mr. Gibson propose to her, as to which

she continued to tell herself that the chance of such a thing must

be very remote indeed,--but that if he should propose to her, and if

she could not accept him, her aunt ought to know that it would be so

before the moment came. But yet she could not bring herself to speak

to her aunt as though any such proposition were possible.

It happened that during the week, on the Saturday, Priscilla came

into Exeter. Dorothy met her sister at the railway station, and then

the two walked together two miles and back along the Crediton Road.

Aunt Stanbury had consented to Priscilla coming to the Close, even

though it was not the day appointed for such visits; but the walk

had been preferred, and Dorothy felt that she would be able to ask

for counsel from the only human being to whom she could have brought

herself to confide the fact that a gentleman was expected to ask her

to marry him. But it was not till they had turned upon their walk,

that she was able to open her mouth on the subject even to her

sister. Priscilla had been very full of their own cares at Nuncombe,

and had said much of her determination to leave the Clock House and

to return to the retirement of some small cottage. She had already

written to Hugh to this effect, and during their walk had said much

of her own folly in having consented to so great a change in their

mode of life. At last Dorothy struck in with her story.

"Aunt Stanbury wants me to make a change too."

"What change?" asked Priscilla anxiously.

"It is not my idea, Priscilla, and I don't think that there can be

anything in it. Indeed, I'm sure there isn't. I don't see how it's

possible that there should be."

"But what is it, Dolly?"

"I suppose there can't be any harm in my telling you."

"If it's anything concerning yourself, I should say not. If it

concerns Aunt Stanbury, I dare say she'd rather you held your

tongue."

"It concerns me most," said Dorothy.

"She doesn't want you to leave her, does she?"

"Well; yes; no. By what she said last,--I shouldn't leave her at all

in that way. Only I'm sure it's not possible."

"I am the worst hand in the world, Dolly, at guessing a riddle."

"You've heard of that Mr. Gibson, the clergyman;--haven't you?"

"Of course I have."

"Well--. Mind, you know, it's only what Aunt Stanbury says. He has

never so much as opened his lips to me himself, except to say, 'How

do you do?' and that kind of thing."

"Aunt Stanbury wants you to marry him?"

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"Of course it's out of the question," said Dorothy, sadly.

"I don't see why it should be out of the question," said Priscilla

proudly. "Indeed, if Aunt Stanbury has said much about it, I should

say that Mr. Gibson himself must have spoken to her."

"Do you think he has?"

"I do not believe that my aunt would raise false hopes," said

Priscilla.

"But I haven't any hopes. That is to say, I had never thought about

such a thing."

"But you think about it now, Dolly?"

"I should never have dreamed about it, only for Aunt Stanbury."

"But, dearest, you are dreaming of it now, are you not?"

"Only because she says that it is to be so. You don't know how

generous she is. She says that if it should be so, she will give me

ever so much money;--two thousand pounds!"

"Then I am quite sure that she and Mr. Gibson must understand each

other."

"Of course," said Dorothy, sadly, "if he were to think of such a

thing at all, it would only be because the money would be

convenient."

"Not at all," said Priscilla, sternly,--with a sternness that was

very comfortable to her listener. "Not at all. Why should not Mr.

Gibson love you as well as any man ever loved any woman? You are

nice-looking,"--Dorothy blushed beneath her hat even at her sister's

praise,--"and good-tempered, and lovable in every way. And I think

you are just fitted to make a good wife. And you must not suppose,

Dolly, that because Mr. Gibson wouldn't perhaps have asked you

without the money, that therefore he is mercenary. It so often

happens that a gentleman can't marry unless the lady has some money!"

"But he hasn't asked me at all."

"I suppose he will, dear."

"I only know what Aunt Stanbury says."

"You may be sure that he will ask you."

"And what must I say, Priscilla?"

"What must you say? Nobody can tell you that, dear, but yourself. Do

you like him?"

"I don't dislike him."

"Is that all?"

"I know him so very little, Priscilla. Everybody says he is very

good;--and then it's a great thing, isn't it, that he should be a

clergyman?"

"I don't know about that."

"I think it is. If it were possible that I should ever marry any one,

I should like a clergyman so much the best."

"Then you do know what to say to him."

"No, I don't, Priscilla. I don't know at all."

"Look here, dearest. What my aunt offers to you is a very great

step in life. If you can accept this gentleman I think you would be

happy;--and I think, also, which should be of more importance for

your consideration, that you would make him happy. It is a brighter

prospect, dear Dolly, than to live either with us at Nuncombe, or

even with Aunt Stanbury as her niece."

"But if I don't love him, Priscilla?"

"Then give it up, and be as you are, my own own, dearest sister."

"So I will," said Dorothy, and at that time her mind was made up.

[Illustration: Dorothy makes up her mind.]

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. BROOKE BURGESS.

[Illustration]

The hour at which Mr. Brooke Burgess was to arrive had come round,

and Miss Stanbury was in a twitter, partly of expectation, and

partly, it must be confessed, of fear. Why there should be any fear

she did not herself know, as she had much to give and nothing to

expect. But she was afraid, and was conscious of it, and was out

of temper because she was ashamed of herself. Although it would be

necessary that she should again dress for dinner at six, she had put

on a clean cap at four, and appeared at that early hour in one of

her gowns which was not customarily in use for home purposes at that

early hour. She felt that she was "an old fool" for her pains, and

was consequently cross to poor Dorothy. And there were other reasons

for some display of harshness to her niece. Mr. Gibson had been at

the house that very morning, and Dorothy had given herself airs. At

least, so Miss Stanbury thought. And during the last three or four

days, whenever Mr. Gibson's name had been mentioned, Dorothy had

become silent, glum, and almost obstructive. Miss Stanbury had been

at the trouble of explaining that she was specially anxious to have

that little matter of the engagement settled at once. She knew that

she was going to behave with great generosity;--that she was going to

sacrifice, not her money only, of which she did not think much, but a

considerable portion of her authority, of which she did think a great

deal; and that she was about to behave in a manner which demanded

much gratitude. But it seemed to her that Dorothy was not in

the least grateful. Hugh had proved himself to be "a mass of

ingratitude," as she was in the habit of saying. None of the

Burgesses had ever shown to her any gratitude for promises made to

them, or, indeed, for any substantial favours conferred upon them.

And now Dorothy, to whom a very seventh heaven of happiness had been

opened,--a seventh heaven, as it must be computed in comparison with

her low expectations,--now Dorothy was already shewing how thankless

she could become. Mr. Gibson had not yet declared his passion, but he

had freely admitted to Miss Stanbury that he was prepared to do so.

Priscilla had been quite right in her suggestion that there was a

clear understanding between the clergyman and her aunt.

"I don't think he is come after all," said Miss Stanbury, looking

at her watch. Had the train arrived at the moment that it was due,

had the expectant visitor jumped out of the railway carriage into

a fly, and had the driver galloped up to the Close, it might have

been possible that the wheels should have been at the door as Miss

Stanbury spoke.

"It's hardly time yet, aunt."

"Nonsense; it is time. The train comes in at four. I dare say he

won't come at all."

"He is sure to come, aunt."

"I've no doubt you know all about it better than any one else. You

usually do." Then five minutes were passed in silence. "Heaven and

earth! what shall I do with these people that are coming? And I told

them especially that it was to meet this young man! It's the way I am

always treated by everybody that I have about me."

"The train might be ten minutes late, Aunt Stanbury."

"Yes;--and monkeys might chew tobacco. There;--there's the omnibus at

the Cock and Bottle; the omnibus up from the train. Now, of course,

he won't come."

"Perhaps he's walking, Aunt Stanbury."

"Walking,--with his luggage on his shoulders? Is that your idea of

the way in which a London gentleman goes about? And there are two

flies,--coming up from the train, of course." Miss Stanbury was

obliged to fix the side of her chair very close to the window in

order that she might see that part of the Close in which the vehicles

of which she had spoken were able to pass.

"Perhaps they are not coming from the train, Aunt Stanbury."

"Perhaps a fiddlestick! You have lived here so much longer than

I have done that, of course, you must know all about it." Then

there was an interval of another ten minutes, and even Dorothy was

beginning to think that Mr. Burgess was not coming. "I've given him

up now," said Miss Stanbury. "I think I'll send and put them all

off." Just at that moment there came a knock at the door. But there

was no cab. Dorothy's conjecture had been right. The London gentleman

had walked, and his portmanteau had been carried behind him by a boy.

"How did he get here?" exclaimed Miss Stanbury, as she heard the

strange voice speaking to Martha down-stairs. But Dorothy knew better

than to answer the question.

"Miss Stanbury, I am very glad to see you," said Mr. Brooke Burgess,

as he entered the room. Miss Stanbury courtesied, and then took

him by both hands. "You wouldn't have known me, I dare say," he

continued. "A black beard and a bald head do make a difference."

"You are not bald at all," said Miss Stanbury.

"I am beginning to be thin enough at the top. I am so glad to come to

you, and so much obliged to you for having me! How well I remember

the old room!"

"This is my niece, Miss Dorothy Stanbury, from Nuncombe Putney."

Dorothy was about to make some formal acknowledgment of the

introduction, when Brooke Burgess came up to her, and shook her hand

heartily. "She lives with me," continued the aunt.

"And what has become of Hugh?" said Brooke.

"We never talk of him," said Miss Stanbury gravely.

"I hope there's nothing wrong? I hear of him very often in London."

"My aunt and he don't agree;--that's all," said Dorothy.

"He has given up his profession as a barrister,--in which he might

have lived like a gentleman," said Miss Stanbury, "and has taken to

writing for a--penny newspaper."

"Everybody does that now, Miss Stanbury."

"I hope you don't, Mr. Burgess."

"I! Nobody would print anything that I wrote. I don't write for

anything, certainly."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Miss Stanbury.

Brooke Burgess, or Mr. Brooke, as he came to be called very shortly

by the servants in the house, was a good-looking man, with black

whiskers and black hair, which, as he said, was beginning to be thin

on the top of his head, and pleasant small bright eyes. Dorothy

thought that next to her brother Hugh he was the most good-natured

looking man she had ever seen. He was rather below the middle height,

and somewhat inclined to be stout. But he would boast that he could

still walk his twelve miles in three hours, and would add that as

long as he could do that he would never recognise the necessity of

putting himself on short commons. He had a well-cut nose, not quite

aquiline, but tending that way, a chin with a dimple on it, and as

sweet a mouth as ever declared the excellence of a man's temper.

Dorothy immediately began to compare him with her brother Hugh, who

was to her, of all men, the most godlike. It never occurred to her to

make any comparison between Mr. Gibson and Mr. Burgess. Her brother

Hugh was the most godlike of men; but there was something godlike

also about the new comer. Mr. Gibson, to Dorothy's eyes, was by no

means divine.

"I used to call you Aunt Stanbury," said Brooke Burgess to the old

lady; "am I to go on doing it now?"

"You may call me what you like," said Miss Stanbury. "Only,--dear

me;--I never did see anybody so much altered." Before she went up to

dress herself for dinner, Miss Stanbury was quite restored to her

good humour, as Dorothy could perceive.

The dinner passed off well enough. Mr. Gibson, at the head of the

table, did, indeed, look very much out of his element, as though he

conceived that his position revealed to the outer world those ideas

of his in regard to Dorothy, which ought to have been secret for a

while longer. There are few men who do not feel ashamed of being

paraded before the world as acknowledged suitors, whereas ladies

accept the position with something almost of triumph. The lady

perhaps regards herself as the successful angler, whereas the

gentleman is conscious of some similitude to the unsuccessful fish.

Mr. Gibson, though he was not yet gasping in the basket, had some

presentiment of this feeling, which made his present seat of honour

unpleasant to him. Brooke Burgess, at the other end of the table,

was as gay as a lark. Mrs. MacHugh sat on one side of him, and

Miss Stanbury on the other, and he laughed at the two old ladies,

reminding them of his former doings in Exeter,--how he had hunted

Mrs. MacHugh's cat, and had stolen Aunt Stanbury's best apricot jam,

till everybody began to perceive that he was quite a success. Even

Sir Peter Mancrudy laughed at his jokes, and Mrs. Powel, from the

other side of Sir Peter, stretched her head forward so that she might

become one of the gay party.

"There isn't a word of it true," said Miss Stanbury. "It's all pure

invention, and a great scandal. I never did such a thing in my life."

"Didn't you though?" said Brooke Burgess. "I remember it as well

as if it was yesterday, and old Dr. Ball, the prebendary, with the

carbuncles on his nose, saw it too."

"Dr. Ball had no carbuncles on his nose," said Mrs. MacHugh. "You'll

say next that I have carbuncles on my nose."

"He had three. I remember each of them quite well, and so does Sir

Peter."

Then everybody laughed; and Martha, who was in the room, knew that

Brooke Burgess was a complete success.

In the meantime Mr. Gibson was talking to Dorothy; but Dorothy was

endeavouring to listen to the conversation at the other end of the

table. "I found it very dirty on the roads to-day outside the city,"

said Mr. Gibson.

"Very dirty," said Dorothy, looking round at Mr. Burgess as she

spoke.

"But the pavement in the High Street was dry enough."

"Quite dry," said Dorothy. Then there came a peal of laughter from

Mrs. MacHugh and Sir Peter, and Dorothy wondered whether anybody

before had ever made those two steady old people laugh after that

fashion.

"I should so like to get a drive with you up to the top of Haldon

Hill," said Mr. Gibson. "When the weather gets fine, that is. Mrs.

Powel was talking about it."

"It would be very nice," said Dorothy.

"You have never seen the view from Haldon Hill yet?" asked Mr.

Gibson. But to this question Dorothy could make no answer. Miss

Stanbury had lifted one of the table-spoons, as though she was going

to strike Mr. Brooke Burgess with the bowl of it. And this during

a dinner party! From that moment Dorothy turned herself round, and

became one of the listeners to the fun at the other end of the table.

Poor Mr. Gibson soon found himself "nowhere."

"I never saw a man so much altered in my life," said Mrs. MacHugh, up

in the drawing-room. "I don't remember that he used to be clever."

"He was a bright boy," said Miss Stanbury.

"But the Burgesses all used to be such serious, strait-laced people,"

said Mrs. MacHugh. "Excellent people," she added, remembering the

source of her friend's wealth; "but none of them like that."

"I call him a very handsome man," said Mrs. Powel. "I suppose he's

not married yet?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Miss Stanbury. "There's time enough for him

yet."

"He'll find plenty here to set their caps at him," said Mrs. MacHugh.

"He's a little old for my girls," said Mrs. Powel, laughing. Mrs.

Powel was the happy mother of four daughters, of whom the eldest was

only twelve.

"There are others who are more forward," said Mrs. MacHugh. "What a

chance it would be for dear Arabella French!"

"Heaven forbid!" said Miss Stanbury.

"And then poor Mr. Gibson wouldn't be any longer like the donkey

between two bundles of hay," said Mrs. Powel. Dorothy was quite

determined that she would never marry a man who was like a donkey

between two bundles of hay.

When the gentlemen came up into the drawing-room, Dorothy was seated

behind the urn and tea-things at a large table, in such a position as

to be approached only at one side. There was one chair at her left

hand, but at her right hand there was no room for a seat,--only room

for some civil gentleman to take away full cups and bring them back

empty. Dorothy was not sufficiently ready-witted to see the danger of

this position till Mr. Gibson had seated himself in the chair. Then

it did seem cruel to her that she should be thus besieged for the

rest of the evening as she had been also at dinner. While the tea

was being consumed Mr. Gibson assisted at the service, asking ladies

whether they would have cake or bread and butter; but when all that

was over Dorothy was still in her prison, and Mr. Gibson was still

the jailer at the gate. She soon perceived that everybody else was

chatting and laughing, and that Brooke Burgess was the centre of a

little circle which had formed itself quite at a distance from her

seat. Once, twice, thrice she meditated an escape, but she had not

the courage to make the attempt. She did not know how to manage it.

She was conscious that her aunt's eye was upon her, and that her aunt

would expect her to listen to Mr. Gibson. At last she gave up all

hope of moving, and was anxious simply that Mr. Gibson should confine

himself to the dirt of the paths and the noble prospect from Haldon

Hill.

"I think we shall have more rain before we are done with it," he

said. Twice before during the evening he had been very eloquent about

the rain.

"I dare say we shall," said Dorothy. And then there came the sound

of loud laughter from Sir Peter, and Dorothy could see that he was

poking Brooke Burgess in the ribs. There had never been anything so

gay before since she had been in Exeter, and now she was hemmed up in

that corner, away from it all, by Mr. Gibson!

"This Mr. Burgess seems to be different from the other Burgesses,"

said Mr. Gibson.

"I think he must be very clever," said Dorothy.

"Well;--yes; in a sort of a way. What people call a Merry Andrew."

"I like people who make me laugh and laugh themselves," said Dorothy.

"I quite agree with you that laughter is a very good thing,--in

its place. I am not at all one of those who would make the world

altogether grave. There are serious things, and there must be serious

moments."

"Of course," said Dorothy.

"And I think that serious conversation upon the whole has more

allurements than conversation which when you come to examine it is

found to mean nothing. Don't you?"

"I suppose everybody should mean something when he talks."

"Just so. That is exactly my idea," said Mr. Gibson. "On all such

subjects as that I should be so sorry if you and I did not agree. I

really should." Then he paused, and Dorothy was so confounded by what

she conceived to be the dangers of the coming moment that she was

unable even to think what she ought to say. She heard Mrs. MacHugh's

clear, sharp, merry voice, and she heard her aunt's tone of pretended

anger, and she heard Sir Peter's continued laughter, and Brooke

Burgess as he continued the telling of some story; but her own

trouble was too great to allow of her attending to what was going on

at the other end of the room. "There is nothing as to which I am so

anxious as that you and I should agree about serious things," said

Mr. Gibson.

"I suppose we do agree about going to church," said Dorothy. She knew

that she could have made no speech more stupid, more senseless, more

inefficacious;--but what was she to say in answer to such an

assurance?

"I hope so," said Mr. Gibson; "and I think so. Your aunt is a most

excellent woman, and her opinion has very great weight with me on all

subjects,--even as to matters of church discipline and doctrine, in

which, as a clergyman, I am of course presumed to be more at home.

But your aunt is a woman among a thousand."

"Of course I think she is very good."

"And she is so right about this young man and her property. Don't you

think so?"

"Quite right, Mr. Gibson."

"Because you know, to you, of course, being her near relative, and

the one she has singled out as the recipient of her kindness, it

might have been cause for some discontent."

"Discontent to me, Mr. Gibson!"

"I am quite sure your feelings are what they ought to be. And for

myself, if I ever were,--that is to say, supposing I could be in any

way interested--. But perhaps it is premature to make any suggestion

on that head at present."

"I don't at all understand what you mean, Mr. Gibson."

"I thought that perhaps I might take this opportunity of

expressing--. But, after all, the levity of the moment is hardly in

accordance with the sentiments which I should wish to express."

"I think that I ought to go to my aunt now, Mr. Gibson, as perhaps

she might want something." Then she did push back her chair, and

stand upon her legs,--and Mr. Gibson, after pausing for a moment,

allowed her to escape. Soon after that the visitors went, and Brooke

Burgess was left in the drawing-room with Miss Stanbury and Dorothy.

"How well I recollect all the people," said Brooke; "Sir Peter, and

old Mrs. MacHugh, and Mrs. Powel, who then used to be called the

beautiful Miss Noel. And I remember every bit of furniture in the

room."

"Nothing changed except the old woman, Brooke," said Miss Stanbury.

"Upon my word, you are the least changed of all,--except that you

don't seem to be so terrible as you were then."

"Was I very terrible, Brooke?"

"My mother had told me, I fancy, that I was never to make a noise,

and be sure not to break any of the china. You were always very

good-natured, and when you gave me a silver watch I could hardly

believe the extent of my own bliss."

"You wouldn't care about a watch from an old woman now, Brooke?"

"You try me. But what rakes you are here! It's past eleven o'clock,

and I must go and have a smoke."

"Have a what?" said Miss Stanbury, with a startled air.

"A smoke. You needn't be frightened; I don't mean in the house."

"No;--I hope you don't mean that."

"But I may take a turn round the Close with a pipe;--mayn't I?"

"I suppose all young men do smoke now," said Miss Stanbury,

sorrowfully.

"Every one of them; and they tell me that the young women mean to

take to it before long."

"If I saw a young woman smoking, I should blush for my sex; and

though she were the nearest and dearest that I had, I would never

speak to her;--never. Dorothy, I don't think Mr. Gibson smokes."

"I'm sure I don't know, aunt."

"I hope he doesn't. I do hope that he does not. I cannot understand

what pleasure it is that men take in making chimneys of themselves,

and going about smelling so that no one can bear to come near them."

Brooke merely laughed at this, and went his way, and smoked his pipe

out in the Close, while Martha sat up to let him in when he had

finished it. Then Dorothy escaped at once to her room, fearful of

being questioned by her aunt about Mr. Gibson. She had, she thought

now, quite made up her mind. There was nothing in Mr. Gibson that

she liked. She was by no means so sure as she had been when she was

talking to her sister, that she would prefer a clergyman to any one

else. She had formed no strong ideas on the subject of love-making,

but she did think that any man who really cared for her, would find

some other way of expressing his love than that which Mr. Gibson had

adopted. And then Mr. Gibson had spoken to her about her aunt's money

in a way that was distasteful to her. She thought that she was quite

sure that if he should ask her, she would not accept him.

She was nearly undressed, nearly safe for the night, when there came

a knock at the door, and her aunt entered the room. "He has come in,"

said Miss Stanbury.

"I suppose he has had his pipe, then."

"I wish he didn't smoke. I do wish he didn't smoke. But I suppose an

old woman like me is only making herself a fool to care about such

things. If they all do it I can't prevent them. He seems to be a very

nice young man--in other things; does he not, Dolly?"

"Very nice indeed, Aunt Stanbury."

"And he has done very well in his office. And as for his saying that

he must smoke, I like that a great deal better than doing it on the

sly."

"I don't think Mr. Burgess would do anything on the sly, aunt."

"No, no; I don't think he would. Dear me; he's not at all like what I

fancied."

"Everybody seemed to like him very much."

"Didn't they? I never saw Sir Peter so much taken. And there was

quite a flirtation between him and Mrs. MacHugh. And now, my dear,

tell me about Mr. Gibson."

"There is nothing to tell, Aunt Stanbury."

"Isn't there? From what I saw going on, I thought there would be

something to tell. He was talking to you the whole evening."

"As it happened he was sitting next to me,--of course."

"Indeed he was sitting next to you;--so much so that I thought

everything would be settled."

"If I tell you something, Aunt Stanbury, you mustn't be angry with

me."

"Tell me what? What is it you have to tell me?"

"I don't think I shall ever care for Mr. Gibson;--not in that way."

"Why not, Dorothy?"

"I'm sure he doesn't care for me. And I don't think he means it."

"I tell you he does mean it. Mean it! Why, I tell you it has all been

settled between us. Since I first spoke to you I have explained to

him exactly what I intend to do. He knows that he can give up his

house and come and live here. I am sure he must have said something

about it to you to-night."

"Not a word, Aunt Stanbury."

"Then he will."

"Dear aunt, I do so wish you would prevent it. I don't like him. I

don't indeed."

"Not like him!"

"No;--I don't care for him a bit, and I never shall. I can't help

it, Aunt Stanbury. I thought I would try, but I find it would be

impossible. You can't want me to marry a man if I don't love him."

"I never heard of such a thing in my life. Not love him! And why

shouldn't you love him? He's a gentleman. Everybody respects him.

He'll have plenty to make you comfortable all your life! And then why

didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't know, Aunt Stanbury. I thought that perhaps--"

"Perhaps what?"

"I could not say all at once that I didn't care for him, when I had

never so much as thought about it for a moment before."

"You haven't told him this?"

"No, I have not told him. I couldn't begin by telling him, you know."

"Then I must pray that you will think about it again. Have you

imagined what a great thing for you it would be to be established for

life,--so that you should never have any more trouble again about a

home, or about money, or anything? Don't answer me now, Dorothy, but

think of it. It seemed to me that I was doing such an excellent thing

for both of you." So saying Miss Stanbury left the room, and Dorothy

was enabled to obey her, at any rate, in one matter. She did think of

it. She laid awake thinking of it almost all the night. But the more

she thought of it, the less able was she to realise to herself any

future comfort or happiness in the idea of becoming Mrs. Gibson.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE "FULL MOON" AT ST. DIDDULPH'S.

The receipt of Mrs. Trevelyan's letter on that Monday morning was a

great surprise both to Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse. There was no time for

any consideration, no opportunity for delaying their arrival till

they should have again referred the matter to Mr. Trevelyan. Their

two nieces were to be with them on that evening, and even the

telegraph wires, if employed with such purpose, would not be quick

enough to stop their coming. The party, as they knew, would have left

Nuncombe Putney before the arrival of the letter at the parsonage of

St. Diddulph's. There would have been nothing in this to have caused

vexation, had it not been decided between Trevelyan and Mr. Outhouse

that Mrs. Trevelyan was not to find a home at the parsonage. Mr.

Outhouse was greatly afraid of being so entangled in the matter as to

be driven to take the part of the wife against the husband; and Mrs.

Outhouse, though she was full of indignation against Trevelyan, was

at the same time not free from anger in regard to her own niece.

She more than once repeated that most unjust of all proverbs, which

declares that there is never smoke without fire, and asserted broadly

that she did not like to be with people who could not live at

home, husbands with wives, and wives with husbands, in a decent,

respectable manner. Nevertheless the preparations went on busily, and

when the party arrived at seven o'clock in the evening, two rooms had

been prepared close to each other, one for the two sisters, and the

other for the child and nurse, although poor Mr. Outhouse himself was

turned out of his own little chamber in order that the accommodation

might be given. They were all very hot, very tired, and very dusty,

when the cab reached the parsonage. There had been the preliminary

drive from Nuncombe Putney to Lessboro'. Then the railway journey

from thence to the Waterloo Bridge Station had been long. And it had

seemed to them that the distance from the station to St. Diddulph's

had been endless. When the cabman was told whither he was to go, he

looked doubtingly at his poor old horse, and then at the luggage

which he was required to pack on the top of his cab, and laid himself

out for his work with a full understanding that it would not be

accomplished without considerable difficulty. The cabman made it

twelve miles from Waterloo Bridge to St. Diddulph's, and suggested

that extra passengers and parcels would make the fare up to ten and

six. Had he named double as much Mrs. Trevelyan would have assented.

So great was the fatigue, and so wretched the occasion, that there

was sobbing and crying in the cab, and when at last the parsonage was

reached, even the nurse was hardly able to turn her hand to anything.

The poor wanderers were made welcome on that evening without a word

of discussion as to the cause of their coming. "I hope you are not

angry with us, Uncle Oliphant," Emily Trevelyan had said, with tears

in her eyes. "Angry with you, my dear;--for coming to our house!

How could I be angry with you?" Then the travellers were hurried

up-stairs by Mrs. Outhouse, and the master of the parsonage was left

alone for a while. He certainly was not angry, but he was ill at

ease, and unhappy. His guests would probably remain with him for

six or seven months. He had resolutely refused all payment from Mr.

Trevelyan, but, nevertheless, he was a poor man. It is impossible

to conceive that a clergyman in such a parish as St. Diddulph's,

without a private income, should not be a poor man. It was but a

hand-to-mouth existence which he lived, paying his way as his money

came to him, and sharing the proceeds of his parish with the poor.

He was always more or less in debt. That was quite understood among

the tradesmen. And the butcher who trusted him, though he was a

bad churchman, did not look upon the parson's account as he did on

other debts. He would often hint to Mr. Outhouse that a little money

ought to be paid, and then a little money would be paid. But it was

never expected that the parsonage bill should be settled. In such a

household the arrival of four guests, who were expected to remain for

an almost indefinite number of months, could not be regarded without

dismay. On that first evening, Emily and Nora did come down to tea,

but they went up again to their rooms almost immediately afterwards;

and Mr. Outhouse found that many hours of solitary meditation were

allowed to him on the occasion. "I suppose your brother has been told

all about it," he said to his wife, as soon as they were together on

that evening.

"Yes;--he has been told. She did not write to her mother till after

she had got to Nuncombe Putney. She did not like to speak about her

troubles while there was a hope that things might be made smooth."

"You can't blame her for that, my dear."

"But there was a month lost, or nearly. Letters go only once a month.

And now they can't hear from Marmaduke or Bessy,"--Lady Rowley's name

was Bessy,--"till the beginning of September."

"That will be in a fortnight."

"But what can my brother say to them? He will suppose that they are

still down in Devonshire."

"You don't think he will come at once?"

"How can he, my dear? He can't come without leave, and the expense

would be ruinous. They would stop his pay, and there would be all

manner of evils. He is to come in the spring, and they must stay

here till he comes." The parson of St. Diddulph's sighed and groaned.

Would it not have been almost better that he should have put his

pride in his pocket, and have consented to take Mr. Trevelyan's

money?

On the second morning Hugh Stanbury called at the parsonage, and was

closeted for a while with the parson. Nora had heard his voice in the

passage, and every one in the house knew who it was that was talking

to Mr. Outhouse, in the little back parlour that was called a study.

Nora was full of anxiety. Would he ask to see them,--to see her? And

why was he there so long? "No doubt he has brought a message from Mr.

Trevelyan," said her sister. "I dare say he will send word that I

ought not to have come to my uncle's house." Then, at last, both Mr.

Outhouse and Hugh Stanbury came into the room in which they were all

sitting. The greetings were cold and unsatisfactory, and Nora barely

allowed Hugh to touch the tip of her fingers. She was very angry with

him, and yet she knew that her anger was altogether unreasonable.

That he had caused her to refuse a marriage that had so much to

attract her was not his sin;--not that; but that, having thus

overpowered her by his influence, he should then have stopped. And

yet Nora had told herself twenty times that it was quite impossible

that she should become Hugh Stanbury's wife;--and that, were Hugh

Stanbury to ask her, it would become her to be indignant with him,

for daring to make a proposition so outrageous. And now she was sick

at heart, because he did not speak to her!

He had, of course, come to St. Diddulph's with a message from

Trevelyan, and his secret was soon told to them all. Trevelyan

himself was up-stairs in the sanded parlour of the Full Moon

public-house, round the corner. Mrs. Trevelyan, when she heard this,

clasped her hands and bit her lips. What was he there for? If he

wanted to see her, why did he not come boldly to the parsonage? But

it soon appeared that he had no desire to see his wife. "I am to take

Louey to him," said Hugh Stanbury, "if you will allow me."

"What;--to be taken away from me!" exclaimed the mother. But Hugh

assured her that no such idea had been formed; that he would have

concerned himself in no such stratagem, and that he would himself

undertake to bring the boy back again within an hour. Emily was, of

course, anxious to be informed what other message was to be conveyed

to her; but there was no other message--no message either of love or

of instruction.

"Mr. Stanbury," said the parson, "has left something in my hands for

you." This "something" was given over to her as soon as Stanbury

had left the house, and consisted of cheques for various small sums,

amounting in all to Â£200. "And he hasn't said what I am to do with

it?" Emily asked of her uncle. Mr. Outhouse declared that the cheques

had been given to him without any instructions on that head. Mr.

Trevelyan had simply expressed his satisfaction that his wife should

be with her uncle and aunt, had sent the money, and had desired to

see the child.

The boy was got ready, and Hugh walked with him in his arms round the

corner, to the Full Moon. He had to pass by the bar, and the barmaid

and the potboy looked at him very hard. "There's a young 'ooman has

to do with that ere little game," said the potboy. "And it's two to

one the young 'ooman has the worst of it," said the barmaid. "They

mostly does," said the potboy, not without some feeling of pride in

the immunities of his sex. "Here he is," said Hugh, as he entered

the parlour. "My boy, there's papa." The child at this time was more

than a year old, and could crawl about and use his own legs with the

assistance of a finger to his little hand, and could utter a sound

which the fond mother interpreted to mean papa; for with all her hot

anger against her husband, the mother was above all things anxious

that her child should be taught to love his father's name. She

would talk of her separation from her husband as though it must be

permanent; she would declare to her sister how impossible it was that

they should ever again live together; she would repeat to herself

over and over the tale of the injustice that had been done to her,

assuring herself that it was out of the question that she should ever

pardon the man; but yet, at the bottom of her heart, there was a hope

that the quarrel should be healed before her boy would be old enough

to understand the nature of quarrelling. Trevelyan took the child on

to his knee, and kissed him; but the poor little fellow, startled by

his transference from one male set of arms to another, confused by

the strangeness of the room, and by the absence of things familiar

to his sight, burst out into loud tears. He had stood the journey

round the corner in Hugh's arms manfully, and, though he had looked

about him with very serious eyes, as he passed through the bar,

he had borne that, and his carriage up the stairs; but when he

was transferred to his father, whose air, as he took the boy, was

melancholy and lugubrious in the extreme, the poor little fellow

could endure no longer a mode of treatment so unusual, and, with a

grimace which for a moment or two threatened the coming storm, burst

out with an infantine howl. "That's how he has been taught," said

Trevelyan.

[Illustration: The "Full Moon" at St. Diddulph's.]

"Nonsense," said Stanbury. "He's not been taught at all. It's

Nature."

"Nature that he should be afraid of his own father! He did not cry

when he was with you."

"No;--as it happened, he did not. I played with him when I was at

Nuncombe; but, of course, one can't tell when a child will cry, and

when it won't."

"My darling, my dearest, my own son!" said Trevelyan, caressing the

child, and trying to comfort him; but the poor little fellow only

cried the louder. It was now nearly two months since he had seen his

father, and, when age is counted by months only, almost everything

may be forgotten in six weeks. "I suppose you must take him back

again," said Trevelyan, sadly.

"Of course I must take him back again. Come along, Louey, my boy."

"It is cruel;--very cruel," said Trevelyan. "No man living could love

his child better than I love mine;--or, for the matter of that, his

wife. It is very cruel."

"The remedy is in your own hands, Trevelyan," said Stanbury, as he

marched off with the boy in his arms.

Trevelyan had now become so accustomed to being told by everybody

that he was wrong, and was at the same time so convinced that he was

right, that he regarded the perversity of his friends as a part of

the persecution to which he was subjected. Even Lady Milborough,

who objected to Colonel Osborne quite as strongly as did Trevelyan

himself, even she blamed him now, telling him that he had done

wrong to separate himself from his wife. Mr. Bideawhile, the old

family lawyer, was of the same opinion. Trevelyan had spoken to Mr.

Bideawhile as to the expediency of making some lasting arrangement

for a permanent maintenance for his wife; but the attorney had told

him that nothing of the kind could be held to be lasting. It was

clearly the husband's duty to look forward to a reconciliation, and

Mr. Bideawhile became quite severe in the tone of rebuke which he

assumed. Stanbury treated him almost as though he were a madman. And

as for his wife herself--when she wrote to him she would not even

pretend to express any feeling of affection. And yet, as he thought,

no man had ever done more for a wife. When Stanbury had gone with the

child, he sat waiting for him in the parlour of the public-house, as

miserable a man as one could find. He had promised himself something

that should be akin to pleasure in seeing his boy;--but it had been

all disappointment and pain. What was it that they expected him to

do? What was it that they desired? His wife had behaved with such

indiscretion as almost to have compromised his honour; and in return

for that he was to beg her pardon, confess himself to have done

wrong, and allow her to return in triumph! That was the light in

which he regarded his own position; but he promised to himself that

let his own misery be what it might he would never so degrade him.

The only person who had been true to him was Bozzle. Let them all

look to it. If there were any further intercourse between his wife

and Colonel Osborne, he would take the matter into open court, and

put her away publicly, let Mr. Bideawhile say what he might. Bozzle

should see to that;--and as to himself, he would take himself out of

England and hide himself abroad. Bozzle should know his address, but

he would give it to no one else. Nothing on earth should make him

yield to a woman who had ill-treated him,--nothing but confession

and promise of amendment on her part. If she would acknowledge and

promise, then he would forgive all, and the events of the last four

months should never again be mentioned by him. So resolving he sat

and waited till Stanbury should return to him.

When Stanbury got back to the parsonage with the boy he had nothing

to do but to take his leave. He would fain have asked permission to

come again, could he have invented any reason for doing so. But the

child was taken from him at once by its mother, and he was left alone

with Mr. Outhouse. Nora Rowley did not even show herself, and he

hardly knew how to express sympathy and friendship for the guests at

the parsonage, without seeming to be untrue to his friend Trevelyan.

"I hope all this may come to an end soon," he said.

"I hope it may, Mr. Stanbury," said the clergyman; "but to tell you

the truth, it seems to me that Mr. Trevelyan is so unreasonable a

man, so much like a madman indeed, that I hardly know how to look

forward to any future happiness for my niece." This was spoken with

the utmost severity that Mr. Outhouse could assume.

"And yet no man loves his wife more tenderly."

"Tender love should show itself by tender conduct, Mr. Stanbury. What

has he done to his wife? He has blackened her name among all his

friends and hers, he has turned her out of his house, he has reviled

her,--and then thinks to prove how good he is by sending her money.

The only possible excuse is that he must be mad."

Stanbury went back to the Full Moon, and retraced his steps with his

friend towards Lincoln's Inn. Two minutes took him from the parsonage

to the public-house, but during these two minutes he resolved that

he would speak his mind roundly to Trevelyan as they returned home.

Trevelyan should either take his wife back again at once, or else he,

Stanbury, would have no more to do with him. He said nothing till

they had threaded together the maze of streets which led them from

the neighbourhood of the Church of St. Diddulph's into the straight

way of the Commercial Road. Then he began. "Trevelyan," said he, "you

are wrong in all this from beginning to end."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. If there was anything in what your wife did to

offend you, a soft word from you would have put it all right."

"A soft word! How do you know what soft words I used?"

"A soft word now would do it. You have only to bid her come back to

you, and let bygones be bygones, and all would be right. Can't you be

man enough to remember that you are a man?"

"Stanbury, I believe you want to quarrel with me."

"I tell you fairly that I think that you are wrong."

"They have talked you over to their side."

"I know nothing about sides. I only know that you are wrong."

"And what would you have me do?"

"Go and travel together for six months." Here was Lady Milborough's

receipt again! "Travel together for a year if you will. Then come

back and live where you please. People will have forgotten it;--or if

they remember it, what matters? No sane person can advise you to go

on as you are doing now."

But it was of no avail. Before they had reached the Bank the two

friends had quarrelled and had parted. Then Trevelyan felt that there

was indeed no one left to him but Bozzle. On the following morning he

saw Bozzle, and on the evening of the next day he was in Paris.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HUGH STANBURY SMOKES ANOTHER PIPE.

Trevelyan was gone, and Bozzle alone knew his address. During the

first fortnight of her residence at St. Diddulph's Mrs. Trevelyan

received two letters from Lady Milborough, in both of which she

was recommended, indeed tenderly implored, to be submissive to

her husband. "Anything," said Lady Milborough, "is better than

separation." In answer to the second letter Mrs. Trevelyan told the

old lady that she had no means by which she could shew any submission

to her husband, even if she were so minded. Her husband had gone

away, she did not know whither, and she had no means by which she

could communicate with him. And then came a packet to her from her

father and mother, despatched from the islands after the receipt by

Lady Rowley of the melancholy tidings of the journey to Nuncombe

Putney. Both Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley were full of anger against

Trevelyan, and wrote as though the husband could certainly be brought

back to a sense of his duty, if they only were present. This packet

had been at Nuncombe Putney, and contained a sealed note from Sir

Marmaduke addressed to Mr. Trevelyan. Lady Rowley explained that it

was impossible that they should get to England earlier than in the

spring. "I would come myself at once and leave papa to follow," said

Lady Rowley, "only for the children. If I were to bring them, I

must take a house for them, and the expense would ruin us. Papa has

written to Mr. Trevelyan in a way that he thinks will bring him to

reason."

But how was this letter, by which the husband was to be brought to

reason, to be put into the husband's hands? Mrs. Trevelyan applied

to Mr. Bideawhile and to Lady Milborough, and to Stanbury, for

Trevelyan's address; but was told by each of them that nothing was

known of his whereabouts. She did not apply to Mr. Bozzle, although

Mr. Bozzle was more than once in her neighbourhood; but as yet she

knew nothing of Mr. Bozzle. The replies from Mr. Bideawhile and from

Lady Milborough came by the post; but Hugh Stanbury thought that duty

required him to make another journey to St. Diddulph's and carry his

own answer with him.

And on this occasion Fortune was either very kind to him,--or very

unkind. Whichever it was, he found himself alone for a few seconds

in the parsonage parlour with Nora Rowley. Mr. Outhouse was away at

the time. Emily had gone up-stairs for the boy; and Mrs. Outhouse,

suspecting nothing, had followed her. "Miss Rowley," said he, getting

up from his seat, "if you think it will do any good I will follow

Trevelyan till I find him."

"How can you find him? Besides, why should you give up your own

business?"

"I would do anything--to serve your sister." This he said with

hesitation in his voice, as though he did not dare to speak all that

he desired to have spoken.

"I am sure that Emily is very grateful," said Nora; "but she would

not wish to give you such trouble as that."

"I would do anything for your sister," he repeated, "--for your sake,

Miss Rowley." This was the first time that he had ever spoken a word

to her in such a strain, and it would be hardly too much to say that

her heart was sick for some such expression. But now that it had

come, though there was a sweetness about it that was delicious to

her, she was absolutely silenced by it. And she was at once not only

silent, but stern, rigid, and apparently cold. Stanbury could not but

feel as he looked at her that he had offended her. "Perhaps I ought

not to say as much," said he; "but it is so."

"Mr. Stanbury," said she, "that is nonsense. It is of my sister, not

of me, that we are speaking."

Then the door was opened and Emily came in with her child, followed

by her aunt. There was no other opportunity, and perhaps it was well

for Nora and for Hugh that there should have been no other. Enough

had been said to give her comfort; and more might have led to his

discomposure. As to that matter on which he was presumed to have come

to St. Diddulph's, he could do nothing. He did not know Trevelyan's

address, but did know that Trevelyan had abandoned the chambers in

Lincoln's Inn. And then he found himself compelled to confess that he

had quarrelled with Trevelyan, and that they had parted in anger on

the day of their joint visit to the East. "Everybody who knows him

must quarrel with him," said Mrs. Outhouse. Hugh when he took his

leave was treated by them all as a friend who had been gained. Mrs.

Outhouse was gracious to him. Mrs. Trevelyan whispered a word to him

of her own trouble. "If I can hear anything of him, you may be sure

that I will let you know," he said. Then it was Nora's turn to bid

him adieu. There was nothing to be said. No word could be spoken

before others that should be of any avail. But as he took her hand

in his he remembered the reticence of her fingers on that former day,

and thought that he was sure there was a difference.

On this occasion he made his journey back to the end of Chancery Lane

on the top of an omnibus; and as he lit his little pipe, disregarding

altogether the scrutiny of the public, thoughts passed through his

mind similar to those in which he had indulged as he sat smoking on

the corner of the churchyard wall at Nuncombe Putney. He declared to

himself that he did love this girl; and as it was so, would it not be

better, at any rate more manly, that he should tell her so honestly,

than go on groping about with half-expressed words when he saw her,

thinking of her and yet hardly daring to go near her, bidding himself

to forget her although he knew that such forgetting was impossible,

hankering after the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand, and

something of the tenderness of returned affection,--and yet regarding

her as a prize altogether out of his reach! Why should she be out

of his reach? She had no money, and he had not a couple of hundred

pounds in the world. But he was earning an income which would give

them both shelter and clothes and bread and cheese.

What reader is there, male or female, of such stories as is this, who

has not often discussed in his or her own mind the different sides of

this question of love and marriage? On either side enough may be said

by any arguer to convince at any rate himself. It must be wrong for a

man, whose income is both insufficient and precarious also, not only

to double his own cares and burdens, but to place the weight of that

doubled burden on other shoulders besides his own,--on shoulders that

are tender and soft, and ill adapted to the carriage of any crushing

weight. And then that doubled burden,--that burden of two mouths to

be fed, of two backs to be covered, of two minds to be satisfied, is

so apt to double itself again and again. The two so speedily become

four, and six! And then there is the feeling that that kind of

semi-poverty, which has in itself something of the pleasantness of

independence, when it is borne by a man alone, entails the miseries

of a draggle-tailed and querulous existence when it is imposed on a

woman who has in her own home enjoyed the comforts of affluence. As a

man thinks of all this, if he chooses to argue with himself on that

side, there is enough in the argument to make him feel that not only

as a wise man but as an honest man, he had better let the young lady

alone. She is well as she is, and he sees around him so many who have

tried the chances of marriage and who are not well! Look at Jones

with his wan, worn wife and his five children, Jones who is not yet

thirty, of whom he happens to know that the wretched man cannot look

his doctor in the face, and that the doctor is as necessary to the

man's house as is the butcher! What heart can Jones have for his work

with such a burden as this upon his shoulders? And so the thinker,

who argues on that side, resolves that the young lady shall go her

own way for him.

But the arguments on the other side are equally cogent, and so much

more alluring! And they are used by the same man with reference to

the same passion, and are intended by him to put himself right in his

conduct in reference to the same dear girl. Only the former line of

thoughts occurred to him on a Saturday, when he was ending his week

rather gloomily, and this other way of thinking on the same subject

has come upon him on a Monday, as he is beginning his week with

renewed hope. Does this young girl of his heart love him? And if so,

their affection for each other being thus reciprocal, is she not

entitled to an expression of her opinion and her wishes on this

difficult subject? And if she be willing to run the risk and to

encounter the dangers,--to do so on his behalf, because she is

willing to share everything with him,--is it becoming in him, a man,

to fear what she does not fear? If she be not willing let her say so.

If there be any speaking, he must speak first;--but she is entitled,

as much as he is, to her own ideas respecting their great outlook

into the affairs of the world. And then is it not manifestly God's

ordinance that a man should live together with a woman? How poor

a creature does the man become who has shirked his duty in this

respect, who has done nothing to keep the world going, who has been

willing to ignore all affection so that he might avoid all burdens,

and who has put into his own belly every good thing that has come to

him, either by the earning of his own hands or from the bounty and

industry of others! Of course there is a risk; but what excitement is

there in anything in which there is none? So on the Tuesday he speaks

his mind to the young lady, and tells her candidly that there will be

potatoes for the two of them,--sufficient, as he hopes, of potatoes,

but no more. As a matter of course the young lady replies that

she for her part will be quite content to take the parings for her

own eating. Then they rush deliciously into each other's arms and

the matter is settled. For, though the convictions arising from

the former line of argument may be set aside as often as need be,

those reached from the latter are generally conclusive. That such

a settlement will always be better for the young gentleman and the

young lady concerned than one founded on a sterner prudence is more

than one may dare to say; but we do feel sure that that country will

be most prosperous in which such leaps in the dark are made with the

greatest freedom.

Our friend Hugh, as he sat smoking on the knife-board of the omnibus,

determined that he would risk everything. If it were ordained that

prudence should prevail, the prudence should be hers. Why should he

take upon himself to have prudence enough for two, seeing that she

was so very discreet in all her bearings? Then he remembered the

touch of her hand, which he still felt upon his palm as he sat

handling his pipe, and he told himself that after that he was bound

to say a word more. And moreover he confessed to himself that he was

compelled by a feeling that mastered him altogether. He could not get

through an hour's work without throwing down his pen and thinking of

Nora Rowley. It was his destiny to love her,--and there was, to his

mind, a mean, pettifogging secrecy, amounting almost to daily lying,

in his thus loving her and not telling her that he loved her. It

might well be that she should rebuke him; but he thought that he

could bear that. It might well be that he had altogether mistaken

that touch of her hand. After all it had been the slightest possible

motion of no more than one finger. But he would at any rate know the

truth. If she would tell him at once that she did not care for him,

he thought that he could get over it; but life was not worth having

while he lived in this shifty, dubious, and uncomfortable state. So

he made up his mind that he would go to St. Diddulph's with his heart

in his hand.

In the mean time, Mr. Bozzle had been twice to St. Diddulph's;--and

now he made a third journey there, two days after Stanbury's visit.

Trevelyan, who, in truth, hated the sight of the man, and who

suffered agonies in his presence, had, nevertheless, taught himself

to believe that he could not live without his assistance. That it

should be so was a part of the cruelty of his lot. Who else was there

that he could trust? His wife had renewed her intimacy with Colonel

Osborne the moment that she had left him. Mrs. Stanbury, who had been

represented to him as the most correct of matrons, had at once been

false to him and to her trust, in allowing Colonel Osborne to enter

her house. Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse, with whom his wife had now located

herself, not by his orders, were, of course, his enemies. His old

friend, Hugh Stanbury, had gone over to the other side, and had

quarrelled with him purposely, with malice prepense, because he would

not submit himself to the caprices of the wife who had injured him.

His own lawyer had refused to act for him; and his fast and oldest

ally, the very person who had sounded in his ear the earliest warning

note against that odious villain, whose daily work it was to destroy

the peace of families,--even Lady Milborough had turned against him!

Because he would not follow the stupid prescription which she, with

pig-headed obstinacy, persisted in giving,--because he would not

carry his wife off to Naples,--she was ill-judging and inconsistent

enough to tell him that he was wrong! Who was then left to him but

Bozzle? Bozzle was very disagreeable. Bozzle said things, and made

suggestions to him which were as bad as pins stuck into his flesh.

But Bozzle was true to his employer, and could find out facts. Had

it not been for Bozzle, he would have known nothing of the Colonel's

journey to Devonshire. Had it not been for Bozzle, he would never

have heard of the correspondence; and, therefore, when he left

London, he gave Bozzle a roving commission; and when he went to

Paris, and from Paris onwards, over the Alps into Italy, he furnished

Bozzle with his address. At this time, in the midst of all his

misery, it never occurred to him to inquire of himself whether

it might be possible that his old friends were right, and that

he himself was wrong. From morning to night he sang to himself

melancholy silent songs of inward wailing, as to the cruelty of his

own lot in life;--and, in the mean time, he employed Bozzle to find

out for him how far that cruelty was carried.

Mr. Bozzle was, of course, convinced that the lady whom he was

employed to watch was--no better than she ought to be. That is the

usual Bozzlian language for broken vows, secrecy, intrigue, dirt, and

adultery. It was his business to obtain evidence of her guilt. There

was no question to be solved as to her innocency. The Bozzlian mind

would have regarded any such suggestion as the product of a green

softness, the possession of which would have made him quite unfit for

his profession. He was aware that ladies who are no better than they

should be are often very clever,--so clever, as to make it necessary

that the Bozzles who shall at last confound them should be first-rate

Bozzles, Bozzles quite at the top of their profession,--and,

therefore, he went about his work with great industry and much

caution. Colonel Osborne was at the present moment in Scotland.

Bozzle was sure of that. He was quite in the north of Scotland.

Bozzle had examined his map, and had found that Wick, which was the

Colonel's post-town, was very far north indeed. He had half a mind to

run down to Wick, as he was possessed by a certain honest zeal, which

made him long to do something hard and laborious; but his experience

told him that it was very easy for the Colonel to come up to the

neighbourhood of St. Diddulph's, whereas the lady could not go down

to Wick, unless she were to decide upon throwing herself into her

lover's arms,--whereby Bozzle's work would be brought to an end. He,

therefore, confined his immediate operations to St. Diddulph's.

He made acquaintance with one or two important persons in and about

Mr. Outhouse's parsonage. He became very familiar with the postman.

He arranged terms of intimacy, I am sorry to say, with the housemaid;

and, on the third journey, he made an alliance with the potboy at the

Full Moon. The potboy remembered well the fact of the child being

brought to "our 'ouse," as he called the Full Moon; and he was

enabled to say, that the same "gent as had brought the boy backards

and forrards," had since that been at the parsonage. But Bozzle

was quite quick enough to perceive that all this had nothing to do

with the Colonel. He was led, indeed, to fear that his "governor,"

as he was in the habit of calling Trevelyan in his half-spoken

soliloquies,--that his governor was not as true to him as he was to

his governor. What business had that meddling fellow Stanbury at St.

Diddulph's?--for Trevelyan had not thought it necessary to tell his

satellite that he had quarrelled with his friend. Bozzle was grieved

in his mind when he learned that Stanbury's interference was still

to be dreaded; and wrote to his governor, rather severely, to

that effect; but, when so writing, he was able to give no further

information. Facts, in such cases, will not unravel themselves

without much patience on the part of the investigators.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PRISCILLA'S WISDOM.

[Illustration]

On the night after the dinner party in the Close, Dorothy was not the

only person in the house who laid awake thinking of what had taken

place. Miss Stanbury also was full of anxiety, and for hour after

hour could not sleep as she remembered the fruitlessness of her

efforts on behalf of her nephew and niece.

It had never occurred to her, when she had first proposed to herself

that Dorothy should become Mrs. Gibson that Dorothy herself would

have any objection to such a step in life. Her fear had been that

Dorothy would have become over-radiant with triumph at the idea of

having a husband, and going to that husband with a fortune of her

own. That Mr. Gibson might hesitate she had thought very likely.

It is thus in general that women regard the feelings, desires, and

aspirations of other women. You will hardly ever meet an elderly lady

who will not speak of her juniors as living in a state of breathless

anxiety to catch husbands. And the elder lady will speak of

the younger as though any kind of choice in such catching was

quite disregarded. The man must be a gentleman,--or, at least,

gentlemanlike,--and there must be bread. Let these things be given,

and what girl won't jump into what man's arms? Female reader, is it

not thus that the elders of your sex speak of the younger? When old

Mrs. Stanbury heard that Nora Rowley had refused Mr. Glascock, the

thing was to her unintelligible; and it was now quite unintelligible

to Miss Stanbury that Dorothy should prefer a single life to

matrimony with Mr. Gibson.

It must be acknowledged, on Aunt Stanbury's behalf, that Dorothy was

one of those yielding, hesitating, submissive young women, trusting

others, but doubting ever of themselves, as to whom it is natural

that their stronger friends should find it expedient to decide for

them. Miss Stanbury was almost justified in thinking that unless she

were to find a husband for her niece, her niece would never find

one for herself. Dorothy would drift into being an old maid, like

Priscilla, simply because she would never assert herself,--never

put her best foot foremost. Aunt Stanbury had therefore taken upon

herself to put out a foot; and having carefully found that Mr.

Gibson was "willing," had conceived that all difficulties were over.

She would be enabled to do her duty by her niece, and establish

comfortably in life, at any rate, one of her brother's children. And

now Dorothy was taking upon herself to say that she did not like

the gentleman! Such conduct was almost equal to writing for a penny

newspaper!

On the following morning, after breakfast, when Brooke Burgess was

gone out to call upon his uncle,--which he insisted upon doing

openly, and not under the rose, in spite of Miss Stanbury's great

gravity on the occasion,--there was a very serious conversation, and

poor Dorothy had found herself to be almost silenced. She did argue

for a time; but her arguments seemed, even to herself, to amount to

so little! Why shouldn't she love Mr. Gibson? That was a question

which she found it impossible to answer. And though she did not

actually yield, though she did not say that she would accept the man,

still, when she was told that three days were to be allowed to her

for consideration, and that then the offer would be made to her

in form, she felt that, as regarded the anti-Gibson interest, she

had not a leg to stand upon. Why should not such an insignificant

creature, as was she, love Mr. Gibson,--or any other man who had

bread to give her, and was in some degree like a gentleman? On that

night, she wrote the following letter to her sister:--

The Close, Tuesday.

DEAREST PRISCILLA,

I do so wish that you could be with me, so that I could

talk to you again. Aunt Stanbury is the most affectionate

and kindest friend in the world; but she has always been

so able to have her own way, because she is both clever

and good, that I find myself almost like a baby with her.

She has been talking to me again about Mr. Gibson; and it

seems that Mr. Gibson really does mean it. It is certainly

very strange; but I do think now that it is true. He is to

come on Friday. It seems very odd that it should all be

settled for him in that way; but then Aunt Stanbury is so

clever at settling things!

He sat next to me almost all the evening yesterday; but

he didn't say anything about it, except that he hoped I

agreed with him about going to church, and all that. I

suppose I do; and I am quite sure that if I were to be a

clergyman's wife, I should endeavour to do whatever my

husband thought right about religion. One ought to try

to do so, even if the clergyman is not one's husband.

Mr. Burgess has come, and he was so very amusing all the

evening, that perhaps that was the reason Mr. Gibson said

so little. Mr. Burgess is a very nice man, and I think

Aunt Stanbury is more fond of him than of anybody. He is

not at all the sort of person that I expected.

But if Mr. Gibson does come on Friday, and does really

mean it, what am I to say to him? Aunt Stanbury will be

very angry if I do not take her advice. I am quite sure

that she intends it all for my happiness; and then, of

course, she knows so much more about the world than I do.

She asks me what it is that I expect. Of course, I do not

expect anything. It is a great compliment from Mr. Gibson,

who is a clergyman, and thought well of by everybody. And

nothing could be more respectable. Aunt Stanbury says

that with the money she would give us we should be quite

comfortable; and she wants us to live in this house. She

says that there are thirty girls round Exeter who would

give their eyes for such a chance; and, looking at it

in that light, of course, it is a very great thing for

me. Only think how poor we have been! And then, dear

Priscilla, perhaps he would let me be good to you and dear

mamma!

But of course he will ask me whether I--love him; and what

am I to say? Aunt Stanbury says that I am to love him.

"Begin to love him at once," she said this morning. I

would if I could, partly for her sake, and because I do

feel that it would be so respectable. When I think of it,

it does seem such a pity that poor I should throw away

such a chance. And I must say that Mr. Gibson is very

good and most obliging; and everybody says that he has

an excellent temper, and that he is a most prudent,

well-dispositioned man. I declare, dear Priscilla, when I

think of it, I cannot bring myself to believe that such a

man should want me to be his wife.

But what ought I to do? I suppose when a girl is in love

she is very unhappy if the gentleman does not propose to

her. I am sure it would not make me at all unhappy if I

were told that Mr. Gibson had changed his mind.

Dearest Priscilla, you must write at once, because he is

to be here on Friday. Oh, dear; Friday does seem to be so

near! And I shall never know what to say to him, either

one way or the other.

Your most affectionate sister,

DOROTHY STANBURY.

P.S.--Give my kindest love to mamma; but you need not tell

her unless you think it best.

Priscilla received this letter on the Wednesday morning, and felt

herself bound to answer it on that same afternoon. Had she postponed

her reply for a day, it would still have been in Dorothy's hands

before Mr. Gibson could have come to her on the dreaded Friday

morning. But still that would hardly give her time enough to consider

the matter with any degree of deliberation after she should have been

armed with what wisdom Priscilla might be able to send her. The post

left Nuncombe Putney at three; and therefore the letter had to be

written before their early dinner.

So Priscilla went into the garden and sat herself down under an old

cedar that she might discuss the matter with herself in all its

bearings. She felt that no woman could be called upon to write a

letter that should be of more importance. The whole welfare in life

of the person who was dearest to her would probably depend upon it.

The weight upon her was so great that she thought for a while she

would take counsel with her mother; but she felt sure that her mother

would recommend the marriage; and that if she afterwards should find

herself bound to oppose it, then her mother would be a miserable

woman. There could be no use to her in taking counsel with her

mother, because her mother's mind was known to her beforehand. The

responsibility was thrown upon her, and she alone must bear it.

She tried hard to persuade herself to write at once and tell her

sister to marry the man. She knew her sister's heart so well as to be

sure that Dorothy would learn to love the man who was her husband. It

was almost impossible that Dorothy should not love those with whom

she lived. And then her sister was so well adapted to be a wife and

a mother. Her temper was so sweet, she was so pure, so unselfish, so

devoted, and so healthy withal! She was so happy when she was acting

for others; and so excellent in action when she had another one to

think for her! She was so trusting and trustworthy that any husband

would adore her! Then Priscilla walked slowly into the house, got

her prayer-book, and returning to her seat under the tree read the

marriage service. It was one o'clock when she went up-stairs to write

her letter, and it had not yet struck eleven when she first seated

herself beneath the tree. Her letter, when written, was as follows:--

Nuncombe Putney, August 25, 186--.

DEAREST DOROTHY,

I got your letter this morning, and I think it is better

to answer it at once, as the time is very short. I have

been thinking about it with all my mind, and I feel almost

awe-stricken lest I should advise you wrongly. After all,

I believe that your own dear sweet truth and honesty would

guide you better than anybody else can guide you. You may

be sure of this, that whichever way it is, I shall think

that you have done right. Dearest sister, I suppose there

can be no doubt that for most women a married life is

happier than a single one. It is always thought so, as we

may see by the anxiety of others to get married; and when

an opinion becomes general, I think that the world is most

often right. And then, my own one, I feel sure that you

are adapted both for the cares and for the joys of married

life. You would do your duty as a married woman happily,

and would be a comfort to your husband;--not a thorn in

his side, as are so many women.

But, my pet, do not let that reasoning of Aunt Stanbury's

about the thirty young girls who would give their eyes for

Mr. Gibson, have any weight with you. You should not take

him because thirty other young girls would be glad to have

him. And do not think too much of that respectability

of which you speak. I would never advise my Dolly to

marry any man unless she could be respectable in her new

position; but that alone should go for nothing. Nor should

our poverty. We shall not starve. And even if we did, that

would be but a poor excuse.

I can find no escape from this,--that you should love him

before you say that you will take him. But honest, loyal

love need not, I take it, be of that romantic kind which

people write about in novels and poetry. You need not

think him to be perfect, or the best or grandest of men.

Your heart will tell you whether he is dear to you. And

remember, Dolly, that I shall remember that love itself

must begin at some precise time. Though you had not

learned to love him when you wrote on Tuesday, you may

have begun to do so when you get this on Thursday.

If you find that you love him, then say that you will be

his wife. If your heart revolts from such a declaration

as being false;--if you cannot bring yourself to feel

that you prefer him to others as the partner of your

life,--then tell him, with thanks for his courtesy, that

it cannot be as he would have it.

Yours always and ever most affectionately,

PRISCILLA.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. GIBSON'S GOOD FORTUNE.

"I'll bet you half-a-crown, my lad, you're thrown over at last, like

the rest of them. There's nothing she likes so much as taking some

one up in order that she may throw him over afterwards." It was thus

that Mr. Bartholomew Burgess cautioned his nephew Brooke.

"I'll take care that she shan't break my heart, Uncle Barty. I will

go my way and she may go hers, and she may give her money to the

hospital if she pleases."

On the morning after his arrival Brooke Burgess had declared aloud

in Miss Stanbury's parlour that he was going over to the bank to see

his uncle. Now there was in this almost a breach of contract. Miss

Stanbury, when she invited the young man to Exeter, had stipulated

that there should be no intercourse between her house and the bank.

"Of course, I shall not need to know where you go or where you don't

go," she had written; "but after all that has passed there must not

be any positive intercourse between my house and the bank." And now

he had spoken of going over to C and B, as he called them, with the

utmost indifference. Miss Stanbury had looked very grave, but had

said nothing. She had determined to be on her guard, so that she

should not be driven to quarrel with Brooke if she could avoid it.

Bartholomew Burgess was a tall, thin, ill-tempered old man, as

well-known in Exeter as the cathedral, and respected after a fashion.

No one liked him. He said ill-natured things of all his neighbours,

and had never earned any reputation for doing good-natured acts. But

he had lived in Exeter for nearly seventy years, and had achieved

that sort of esteem which comes from long tenure. And he had

committed no great iniquities in the course of his fifty years of

business. The bank had never stopped payment, and he had robbed no

one. He had not swallowed up widows and orphans, and had done his

work in the firm of Cropper and Burgess after the old-fashioned safe

manner, which leads neither to riches nor to ruin. Therefore he was

respected. But he was a discontented, sour old man, who believed

himself to have been injured by all his own friends, who disliked

his own partners because they had bought that which had, at any rate,

never belonged to him;--and whose strongest passion it was to hate

Miss Stanbury of the Close.

"She's got a parson by the hand, now," said the uncle, as he

continued his caution to the nephew.

"There was a clergyman there last night."

"No doubt, and she'll play him off against you, and you against him;

and then she'll throw you both over. I know her."

"She has got a right to do what she likes with her own, Uncle Barty."

"And how did she get it? Never mind. I'm not going to set you against

her, if you're her favourite for the moment. She has a niece with her

there,--hasn't she?"

"One of her brother's daughters."

"They say she's going to make that clergyman marry her."

"What;--Mr. Gibson?"

"Yes. They tell me he was as good as engaged to another girl,--one of

the Frenches of Heavitree. And therefore dear Jemima could do nothing

better than interfere. When she has succeeded in breaking the girl's

heart--"

"Which girl's heart, Uncle Barty?"

"The girl the man was to have married; when that's done she'll throw

Gibson over. You'll see. She'll refuse to give the girl a shilling.

She took the girl's brother by the hand ever so long, and then she

threw him over. And she'll throw the girl over too, and send her back

to the place she came from. And then she'll throw you over."

"According to you, she must be the most malicious old woman that ever

was allowed to live!"

"I don't think there are many to beat her, as far as malice goes. But

you'll find out for yourself. I shouldn't be surprised if she were to

tell you before long that you were to marry the niece."

"I shouldn't think that such very hard lines either," said Brooke

Burgess.

"I've no doubt you may have her if you like," said Barty, "in spite

of Mr. Gibson. Only I should recommend you to take care and get the

money first."

When Brooke went back to the house in the Close, Miss Stanbury was

quite fussy in her silence. She would have given much to have been

told something about Barty, and, above all, to have learned what

Barty had said about herself. But she was far too proud even to

mention the old man's name of her own accord. She was quite sure that

she had been abused. She guessed, probably with tolerable accuracy,

the kind of things that had been said of her, and suggested to

herself what answer Brooke would make to such accusations. But she

had resolved to cloak it all in silence, and pretended for a while

not to remember the young man's declared intention when he left the

house. "It seems odd to me," said Brooke, "that Uncle Barty should

always live alone as he does. He must have a dreary time of it."

"I don't know anything about your Uncle Barty's manner of living."

"No;--I suppose not. You and he are not friends."

"By no means, Brooke."

"He lives there all alone in that poky bank-house, and nobody ever

goes near him. I wonder whether he has any friends in the city?"

"I really cannot tell you anything about his friends. And, to tell

you the truth, Brooke, I don't want to talk about your uncle. Of

course, you can go to see him when you please, but I'd rather you

didn't tell me of your visits afterwards."

"There is nothing in the world I hate so much as a secret," said he.

He had no intention in this of animadverting upon Miss Stanbury's

secret enmity, nor had he purposed to ask any question as to her

relations with the old man. He had alluded to his dislike of having

secrets of his own. But she misunderstood him.

"If you are anxious to know--" she said, becoming very red in the

face.

"I am not at all curious to know. You quite mistake me."

"He has chosen to believe,--or to say that he believed,--that I

wronged him in regard to his brother's will. I nursed his brother

when he was dying,--as I considered it to be my duty to do. I cannot

tell you all that story. It is too long, and too sad. Romance is very

pretty in novels, but the romance of a life is always a melancholy

matter. They are most happy who have no story to tell."

"I quite believe that."

"But your Uncle Barty chose to think,--indeed, I hardly know what

he thought. He said that the will was a will of my making. When it

was made I and his brother were apart; we were not even on speaking

terms. There had been a quarrel, and all manner of folly. I am not

very proud when I look back upon it. It is not that I think myself

better than others; but your Uncle Brooke's will was made before we

had come together again. When he was ill it was natural that I should

go to him,--after all that had passed between us. Eh, Brooke?"

"It was womanly."

"But it made no difference about the will. Mr. Bartholomew Burgess

might have known that at once, and must have known it afterwards. But

he has never acknowledged that he was wrong;--never even yet."

"He could not bring himself to do that, I should say."

"The will was no great triumph to me. I could have done without it.

As God is my judge, I would not have lifted up my little finger to

get either a part or the whole of poor Brooke's money. If I had known

that a word would have done it, I would have bitten my tongue out

before it should have been spoken." She had risen from her seat, and

was speaking with a solemnity that almost filled her listener with

awe. She was a woman short of stature; but now, as she stood over

him, she seemed to be tall and majestic. "But when the man was dead,"

she continued, "and the will was there,--the property was mine,

and I was bound in duty to exercise the privileges and bear the

responsibilities which the dead man had conferred upon me. It was

Barty, then, who sent a low attorney to me, offering me a compromise.

What had I to compromise? Compromise! No. If it was not mine by all

the right the law could give, I would sooner have starved than have

had a crust of bread out of the money." She had now clenched both her

fists, and was shaking them rapidly as she stood over him, looking

down upon him.

"Of course it was your own."

"Yes. Though they asked me to compromise, and sent messages to me to

frighten me;--both Barty and your Uncle Tom; ay, and your father too,

Brooke; they did not dare to go to law. To law, indeed! If ever there

was a good will in the world, the will of your Uncle Brooke was good.

They could talk, and malign me, and tell lies as to dates, and strive

to make my name odious in the county; but they knew that the will was

good. They did not succeed very well in what they did attempt."

"I would try to forget it all now, Aunt Stanbury."

"Forget it! How is that to be done? How can the mind forget the

history of its own life? No,--I cannot forget it. I can forgive it."

"Then why not forgive it?"

"I do. I have. Why else are you here?"

"But forgive old Uncle Barty also!"

"Has he forgiven me? Come now. If I wished to forgive him, how should

I begin? Would he be gracious if I went to him? Does he love me,

do you think,--or hate me? Uncle Barty is a good hater. It is the

best point about him. No, Brooke, we won't try the farce of a

reconciliation after a long life of enmity. Nobody would believe us,

and we should not believe each other."

"Then I certainly would not try."

"I do not mean to do so. The truth is, Brooke, you shall have it

all when I'm gone, if you don't turn against me. You won't take to

writing for penny newspapers, will you, Brooke?" As she asked the

question she put one of her hands softly on his shoulder.

"I certainly shan't offend in that way."

"And you won't be a Radical?"

"No, not a Radical."

"I mean a man to follow Beales and Bright, a republican, a

putter-down of the Church, a hater of the Throne. You won't take up

that line, will you, Brooke?"

"It isn't my way at present, Aunt Stanbury. But a man shouldn't

promise."

"Ah me! It makes me sad when I think what the country is coming

to. I'm told there are scores of members of Parliament who don't

pronounce their h's. When I was young, a member of Parliament used to

be a gentleman;--and they've taken to ordaining all manner of people.

It used to be the case that when you met a clergyman you met a

gentleman. By-the-bye, Brooke, what do you think of Mr. Gibson?"

"Mr. Gibson! To tell the truth, I haven't thought much about him."

"But you must think about him. Perhaps you haven't thought about my

niece, Dolly Stanbury?"

"I think that she's an uncommonly nice girl."

"She's not to be nice for you, young man. She's to be married to Mr.

Gibson."

"Are they engaged?"

"Well, no; but I intend that they shall be. You won't begrudge that I

should give my little savings to one of my own name?"

"You don't know me, Aunt Stanbury, if you think that I should

begrudge anything that you might do with your money."

"Dolly has been here a month or two. I think it's three months since

she came, and I do like her. She's soft and womanly, and hasn't taken

up those vile, filthy habits which almost all the girls have adopted.

Have you seen those Frenches with the things they have on their

heads?"

"I was speaking to them yesterday."

"Nasty sluts! You can see the grease on their foreheads when they try

to make their hair go back in the dirty French fashion. Dolly is not

like that;--is she?"

"She is not in the least like either of the Miss Frenches."

"And now I want her to become Mrs. Gibson. He is quite taken."

"Is he?"

"Oh dear, yes. Didn't you see him the other night at dinner and

afterwards? Of course he knows that I can give her a little bit of

money, which always goes for something, Brooke. And I do think it

would be such a nice thing for Dolly."

"And what does Dolly think about it?"

"There's the difficulty. She likes him well enough; I'm sure of that.

And she has no stuck-up ideas about herself. She isn't one of those

who think that almost nothing is good enough for them. But--"

"She has an objection."

"I don't know what it is. I sometimes think she is so bashful and

modest she doesn't like to talk of being married,--even to an old

woman like me."

"Dear me! That's not the way of the age;--is it, Aunt Stanbury?"

"It's coming to that, Brooke, that the girls will ask the men soon.

Yes,--and that they won't take a refusal either. I do believe that

Camilla French did ask Mr. Gibson."

"And what did Mr. Gibson say?"

"Ah;--I can't tell you that. He knows too well what he's about to

take her. He's to come here on Friday at eleven, and you must be out

of the way. I shall be out of the way too. But if Dolly says a word

to you before that, mind you make her understand that she ought to

accept Gibson."

"She's too good for him, according to my thinking."

"Don't you be a fool. How can any young woman be too good for

a gentleman and a clergyman? Mr. Gibson is a gentleman. Do you

know,--only you must not mention this,--that I have a kind of idea

that we could get Nuncombe Putney for him. My father had the living,

and my brother; and I should like it to go on in the family."

No opportunity came in the way of Brooke Burgess to say anything in

favour of Mr. Gibson to Dorothy Stanbury. There did come to be very

quickly a sort of intimacy between her and her aunt's favourite; but

she was one not prone to talk about her own affairs. And as to such

an affair as this,--a question as to whether she should or should not

give herself in marriage to her suitor,--she, who could not speak

of it even to her own sister without a blush, who felt confused

and almost confounded when receiving her aunt's admonitions and

instigations on the subject, would not have endured to hear Brooke

Burgess speak on the matter. Dorothy did feel that a person easier to

know than Brooke had never come in her way. She had already said as

much to him as she had spoken to Mr. Gibson in the three months that

she had made his acquaintance. They had talked about Exeter, and

about Mrs. MacHugh, and the cathedral, and Tennyson's poems, and the

London theatres, and Uncle Barty, and the family quarrel. They had

become quite confidential with each other on some matters. But on

this heavy subject of Mr. Gibson and his proposal of marriage not

a word had been said. When Brooke once mentioned Mr. Gibson on the

Thursday morning, Dorothy within a minute had taken an opportunity of

escaping from the room.

But circumstances did give him an opportunity of speaking to Mr.

Gibson. On the Wednesday afternoon both he and Mr. Gibson were

invited to drink tea at Mrs. French's house on that evening. Such

invitations at Exeter were wont to be given at short dates, and both

the gentlemen had said that they would go. Then Arabella French had

called in the Close and had asked Miss Stanbury and Dorothy. It was

well understood by Arabella that Miss Stanbury herself would not

drink tea at Heavitree. And it may be that Dorothy's company was not

in truth desired. The ladies both declined. "Don't you stay at home

for me, my dear," Miss Stanbury said to her niece. But Dorothy had

not been out without her aunt since she had been at Exeter, and

understood perfectly that it would not be wise to commence the

practice at the house of the Frenches. "Mr. Brooke is coming, Miss

Stanbury; and Mr. Gibson," Miss French said. And Miss Stanbury had

thought that there was some triumph in her tone. "Mr. Brooke can go

where he pleases, my dear," Miss Stanbury replied. "And as for Mr.

Gibson, I am not his keeper." The tone in which Miss Stanbury

spoke would have implied great imprudence, had not the two ladies

understood each other so thoroughly, and had not each known that it

was so.

There was the accustomed set of people in Mrs. French's

drawing-room;--the Crumbies, and the Wrights, and the Apjohns. And

Mrs. MacHugh came also,--knowing that there would be a rubber. "Their

naked shoulders don't hurt me," Mrs. MacHugh said, when her friend

almost scolded her for going to the house. "I'm not a young man. I

don't care what they do to themselves." "You might say as much if

they went naked altogether," Miss Stanbury had replied in anger. "If

nobody else complained, I shouldn't," said Mrs. MacHugh. Mrs. MacHugh

got her rubber; and as she had gone for her rubber, on a distinct

promise that there should be a rubber, and as there was a rubber, she

felt that she had no right to say ill-natured things. "What does it

matter to me," said Mrs. MacHugh, "how nasty she is? She's not going

to be my wife." "Ugh!" exclaimed Miss Stanbury, shaking her head both

in anger and disgust.

Camilla French was by no means so bad as she was painted by Miss

Stanbury, and Brooke Burgess rather liked her than otherwise. And it

seemed to him that Mr. Gibson did not at all dislike Arabella, and

felt no repugnance at either the lady's noddle or shoulders now that

he was removed from Miss Stanbury's influence. It was clear enough

also that Arabella had not given up the attempt, although she must

have admitted to herself that the claims of Dorothy Stanbury were

very strong. On this evening it seemed to have been specially

permitted to Arabella, who was the elder sister, to take into her own

hands the management of the case. Beholders of the game had hitherto

declared that Mr. Gibson's safety was secured by the constant

coupling of the sisters. Neither would allow the other to hunt

alone. But a common sense of the common danger had made some special

strategy necessary, and Camilla hardly spoke a word to Mr. Gibson

during the evening. Let us hope that she found some temporary

consolation in the presence of the stranger.

"I hope you are going to stay with us ever so long, Mr. Burgess?"

said Camilla.

"A month. That is ever so long;--isn't it? Why I mean to see all

Devonshire within that time. I feel already that I know Exeter

thoroughly and everybody in it."

"I'm sure we are very much flattered."

"As for you, Miss French, I've heard so much about you all my life,

that I felt that I knew you before I came here."

"Who can have spoken to you about me?"

"You forget how many relatives I have in the city. Do you think my

Uncle Barty never writes to me?"

"Not about me."

"Does he not? And do you suppose I don't hear from Miss Stanbury?"

"But she hates me. I know that."

"And do you hate her?"

"No, indeed. I've the greatest respect for her. But she is a little

odd; isn't she, now, Mr. Burgess? We all like her ever so much; and

we've known her ever so long, six or seven years,--since we were

quite young things. But she has such queer notions about girls."

"What sort of notions?"

"She'd like them all to dress just like herself; and she thinks that

they should never talk to young men. If she was here she'd say I was

flirting with you, because we're sitting together."

"But you are not; are you?"

"Of course I am not."

"I wish you would," said Brooke.

"I shouldn't know how to begin. I shouldn't indeed. I don't know what

flirting means, and I don't know who does know. When young ladies and

gentlemen go out, I suppose they are intended to talk to each other."

"But very often they don't, you know."

"I call that stupid," said Camilla. "And yet, when they do, all the

old maids say that the girls are flirting. I'll tell you one thing,

Mr. Burgess. I don't care what any old maid says about me. I always

talk to people that I like, and if they choose to call me a flirt,

they may. It's my opinion that still waters run the deepest."

"No doubt the noisy streams are very shallow," said Brooke.

"You may call me a shallow stream if you like, Mr. Burgess."

"I meant nothing of the kind."

"But what do you call Dorothy Stanbury? That's what I call still

water. She runs deep enough."

"The quietest young lady I ever saw in my life."

"Exactly. So quiet, but so--clever. What do you think of Mr. Gibson?"

"Everybody is asking me what I think of Mr. Gibson."

"You know what they say. They say he is to marry Dorothy Stanbury.

Poor man! I don't think his own consent has ever been asked

yet;--but, nevertheless, it's settled."

"Just at present he seems to me to be,--what shall I say?--I oughtn't

to say flirting with your sister; ought I?"

"Miss Stanbury would say so if she were here, no doubt. But the fact

is, Mr. Burgess, we've known him almost since we were infants, and

of course we take an interest in his welfare. There has never been

anything more than that. Arabella is nothing more to him than I am.

Once, indeed--; but, however--; that does not signify. It would be

nothing to us, if he really liked Dorothy Stanbury. But as far as we

can see,--and we do see a good deal of him,--there is no such feeling

on his part. Of course we haven't asked. We should not think of such

a thing. Mr. Gibson may do just as he likes for us. But I am not

quite sure that Dorothy Stanbury is just the girl that would make

him a good wife. Of course when you've known a person seven or eight

years you do get anxious about his happiness. Do you know, we think

her,--perhaps a little,--sly."

In the meantime, Mr. Gibson was completely subject to the individual

charms of Arabella. Camilla had been quite correct in a part of

her description of their intimacy. She and her sister had known Mr.

Gibson for seven or eight years; but nevertheless the intimacy could

not with truth be said to have commenced during the infancy of the

young ladies, even if the word were used in its legal sense. Seven or

eight years, however, is a long acquaintance; and there was, perhaps,

something of a real grievance in this Stanbury intervention. If it

be a recognised fact in society that young ladies are in want of

husbands, and that an effort on their part towards matrimony is not

altogether impossible, it must be recognised also that failure will

be disagreeable, and interference regarded with animosity. Miss

Stanbury the elder was undoubtedly interfering between Mr. Gibson

and the Frenches; and it is neither manly nor womanly to submit

to interference with one's dearest prospects. It may, perhaps, be

admitted that the Miss Frenches had shown too much open ardour in

their pursuit of Mr. Gibson. Perhaps there should have been no ardour

and no pursuit. It may be that the theory of womanhood is right which

forbids to women any such attempts,--which teaches them that they

must ever be pursued, never the pursuers. As to that there shall be

no discourse at present. But it must be granted that whenever the

pursuit has been attempted, it is not in human nature to abandon it

without an effort. That the French girls should be very angry with

Miss Stanbury, that they should put their heads together with the

intention of thwarting her, that they should think evil things of

poor Dorothy, that they should half despise Mr. Gibson, and yet

resolve to keep their hold upon him as a chattel and a thing of value

that was almost their own, was not perhaps much to their discredit.

"You are a good deal at the house in the Close now," said Arabella,

in her lowest voice,--in a voice so low that it was almost

melancholy.

"Well; yes. Miss Stanbury, you know, has always been a staunch friend

of mine. And she takes an interest in my little church." People say

that girls are sly; but men can be sly, too, sometimes.

"It seems that she has taken you so much away from us, Mr. Gibson."

"I don't know why you should say that, Miss French."

"Perhaps I am wrong. One is apt to be sensitive about one's friends.

We seem to have known you so well. There is nobody else in Exeter

that mamma regards as she does you. But, of course, if you are happy

with Miss Stanbury that is everything."

"I am speaking of the old lady," said Mr. Gibson, who, in spite of

his slyness, was here thrown a little off his guard.

"And I am speaking of the old lady too," said Arabella. "Of whom else

should I be speaking?"

"No;--of course not."

"Of course," continued Arabella, "I hear what people say about the

niece. One cannot help what one hears, you know, Mr. Gibson; but I

don't believe that, I can assure you." As she said this, she looked

into his face, as though waiting for an answer; but Mr. Gibson had no

answer ready. Then Arabella told herself that if anything was to be

done it must be done at once. What use was there in beating round

the bush, when the only chance of getting the game was to be had by

dashing at once into the thicket. "I own I should be glad," she said,

turning her eyes away from him, "if I could hear from your own mouth

that it is not true."

Mr. Gibson's position was one not to be envied. Were he willing to

tell the very secrets of his soul to Miss French with the utmost

candour, he could not answer her question either one way or the

other, and he was not willing to tell her any of his secrets. It was

certainly the fact, too, that there had been tender passages between

him and Arabella. Now, when there have been such passages, and the

gentleman is cross-examined by the lady, as Mr. Gibson was being

cross-examined at the present moment,--the gentleman usually teaches

himself to think that a little falsehood is permissible. A gentleman

can hardly tell a lady that he has become tired of her, and has

changed his mind. He feels the matter, perhaps, more keenly even than

she does; and though, at all other times he may be a very Paladin in

the cause of truth, in such strait as this he does allow himself some

latitude.

"You are only joking, of course," he said.

"Indeed, I am not joking. I can assure you, Mr. Gibson, that the

welfare of the friends whom I really love can never be a matter of

joke to me. Mrs. Crumbie says that you positively are engaged to

marry Dorothy Stanbury."

"What does Mrs. Crumbie know about it?"

"I dare say, nothing. It is not so;--is it?"

"Certainly not."

"And there is nothing in it;--is there?"

"I wonder why people make these reports," said Mr. Gibson,

prevaricating.

[Illustration: "I wonder why people make these reports."]

"It is a fabrication from beginning to end then," said Arabella,

pressing the matter quite home. At this time she was very close to

him, and though her words were severe, the glance from her eyes was

soft. And the scent from her hair was not objectionable to him, as

it would have been to Miss Stanbury. And the mode of her head-dress

was not displeasing to him. And the folds of her dress, as they fell

across his knee, were welcome to his feelings. He knew that he was as

one under temptation, but he was not strong enough to bid the tempter

avaunt. "Say that it is so, Mr. Gibson!"

"Of course, it is not so," said Mr. Gibson--lying.

"I am so glad. For of course, Mr. Gibson, when we heard it we thought

a great deal about it. A man's happiness depends so much on whom he

marries;--doesn't it? And a clergyman's more than anybody else's. And

we didn't think she was quite the sort of woman that you would like.

You see, she has had no advantages, poor thing. She has been shut up

in a little country cottage all her life;--just a labourer's hovel,

no more;--and though it wasn't her fault, of course, and we all

pitied her, and were so glad when Miss Stanbury brought her to

the Close;--still, you know, though one was very glad of her as

an acquaintance, yet, you know, as a wife,--and for such a dear,

dear friend--" She went on, and said many other things with equal

enthusiasm, and then wiped her eyes, and then smiled and laughed.

After that she declared that she was quite happy,--so happy; and so

she left him. The poor man, after the falsehood had been extracted

from him, said nothing more; but sat, in patience, listening to the

raptures and enthusiasm of his friend. He knew that he had disgraced

himself, and he knew also that his disgrace would be known, if

Dorothy Stanbury should accept his offer on the morrow. And yet how

hardly he had been used! What answer could he have given compatible

both with the truth and with his own personal dignity?

About half an hour afterwards he was walking back to Exeter with

Brooke Burgess, and then Brooke did ask him a question or two.

"Nice girls those Frenches, I think," said Brooke.

"Very nice," said Mr. Gibson.

"How Miss Stanbury does hate them," says Brooke.

"Not hate them, I hope," said Mr. Gibson.

"She doesn't love them;--does she?"

"Well, as for love;--yes; in one sense,--I hope she does. Miss

Stanbury, you know, is a woman who expresses herself strongly."

"What would she say, if she were told that you and I were going to

marry those two girls? We are both favourites, you know."

"Dear me! What a very odd supposition," said Mr. Gibson.

"For my part, I don't think I shall," said Brooke.

"I don't suppose I shall either," said Mr. Gibson, with a gravity

which was intended to convey some smattering of rebuke.

"A fellow might do worse, you know," said Brooke. "For my part, I

rather like girls with chignons, and all that sort of get-up. But the

worst of it is, one can't marry two at a time."

"That would be bigamy," said Mr. Gibson.

"Just so," said Brooke.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISS STANBURY'S WRATH.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on the Friday morning Mr. Gibson

knocked at the door of the house in the Close. The reader must not

imagine that he had ever wavered in his intention with regard to

Dorothy Stanbury, because he had been driven into a corner by the

pertinacious ingenuity of Miss French. He never for a moment thought

of being false to Miss Stanbury the elder. Falseness of that nature

would have been ruinous to him,--would have made him a marked man in

the city all his days, and would probably have reached even to the

bishop's ears. He was neither bad enough, nor audacious enough, nor

foolish enough, for such perjury as that. And, moreover, though the

wiles of Arabella had been potent with him, he very much preferred

Dorothy Stanbury. Seven years of flirtation with a young lady is more

trying to the affection than any duration of matrimony. Arabella had

managed to awaken something of the old glow, but Mr. Gibson, as soon

as he was alone, turned from her mentally in disgust. No! Whatever

little trouble there might be in his way, it was clearly his duty

to marry Dorothy Stanbury. She had the sweetest temper in the world,

and blushed with the prettiest blush! She would have, moreover, two

thousand pounds on the day she married, and there was no saying what

other and greater pecuniary advantages might follow. His mind was

quite made up; and during the whole morning he had been endeavouring

to drive all disagreeable reminiscences of Miss French from his

memory, and to arrange the words with which he would make his offer

to Dorothy. He was aware that he need not be very particular about

his words, as Dorothy, from the bashfulness of her nature, would be

no judge of eloquence at such a time. But still, for his own sake,

there should be some form of expression, some propriety of diction.

Before eleven o'clock he had it all by heart, and had nearly freed

himself from the uneasiness of his falsehood to Arabella. He had

given much serious thought to the matter, and had quite resolved that

he was right in his purpose, and that he could marry Dorothy with a

pure conscience, and with a true promise of a husband's love. "Dear

Dolly!" he said to himself, with something of enthusiasm as he walked

across the Close. And he looked up to the house as he came to it.

There was to be his future home. There was not one of the prebends

who had a better house. And there was a dove-like softness about

Dorothy's eyes, and a winning obedience in her manner, that were

charming. His lines had fallen to him in very pleasant places.

Yes;--he would go up to her, and take her at once by the hand, and

ask her whether she would be his, now and for ever. He would not

let go her hand till he had brought her so close to him that she

could hide her blushes on his shoulder. The whole thing had been so

well conceived, had become so clear to his mind, that he felt no

hesitation or embarrassment as he knocked at the door. Arabella

French would, no doubt, hear of it soon. Well;--she must hear of it.

After all she could do him no injury.

He was shown up at once into the drawing-room, and there he

found--Miss Stanbury the elder. "Oh, Mr. Gibson!" she said at once.

"Is anything the matter with--dear Dorothy?"

"She is the most obstinate, pig-headed young woman I ever came across

since the world began."

"You don't say so! But what is it, Miss Stanbury?"

"What is it? Why just this. Nothing on earth that I can say to her

will induce her to come down and speak to you."

"Have I offended her?"

"Offended a fiddlestick! Offence indeed! An offer from an honest man,

with her friends' approval, and a fortune at her back, as though she

had been born with a gold spoon in her mouth! And she tells me that

she can't, and won't, and wouldn't, and shouldn't, as though I were

asking her to walk the streets. I declare I don't know what has come

to the young women;--or what it is they want. One would have thought

that butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"But what is the reason, Miss Stanbury?"

"Oh, reason! You don't suppose people give reasons in these days.

What reason have they when they dress themselves up with bandboxes on

their sconces? Just simply the old reason--'I do not like thee, Dr.

Fell;--why I cannot tell.'"

"May I not see her myself, Miss Stanbury?"

"I can't make her come down-stairs to you. I've been at her the whole

morning, Mr. Gibson. Ever since daylight, pretty nearly. She came

into my room before I was up, and told me she had made up her mind.

I've coaxed, and scolded, and threatened, and cried;--but if she'd

been a milestone it couldn't have been of less use. I told her she

might go back to Nuncombe, and she just went off to pack up."

"But she's not to go?"

"How can I say what such a young woman will do? I'm never allowed a

way of my own for a moment. There's Brooke Burgess been scolding me

at that rate I didn't know whether I stood on my head or my heels.

And I don't know now."

Then there was a pause, while Mr. Gibson was endeavouring to decide

what would now be his best course of action. "Don't you think she'll

ever come round, Miss Stanbury?"

"I don't think she'll ever come any way that anybody wants her to

come, Mr. Gibson."

"I didn't think she was at all like that," said Mr. Gibson, almost in

tears.

"No,--nor anybody else. I've been seeing it come all the same. It's

just the Stanbury perversity. If I'd wanted to keep her by herself,

to take care of me, and had set my back up at her if she spoke to

a man, and made her understand that she wasn't to think of getting

married, she'd have been making eyes at every man that came into the

house. It's just what one gets for going out of one's way. I did

think she'd be so happy, Mr. Gibson, living here as your wife. She

and I between us could have managed for you so nicely."

Mr. Gibson was silent for a minute or two, during which he walked up

and down the room,--contemplating, no doubt, the picture of married

life which Miss Stanbury had painted for him,--a picture which, as

it seemed, was not to be realised. "And what had I better do, Miss

Stanbury?" he asked at last.

"Do! I don't know what you're to do. I'm groom enough to bring a mare

to water, but I can't make her drink."

"Will waiting be any good?"

"How can I say? I'll tell you one thing not to do. Don't go and

philander with those girls at Heavitree. It's my belief that Dorothy

has been thinking of them. People talk to her, of course."

"I wish people would hold their tongues. People are so indiscreet.

People don't know how much harm they may do."

"You've given them some excuse, you know, Mr. Gibson."

This was very ill-natured, and was felt by Mr. Gibson to be so rude,

that he almost turned upon his patroness in anger. He had known Dolly

for not more than three months, and had devoted himself to her, to

the great anger of his older friends. He had come this morning true

to his appointment, expecting that others would keep their promises

to him, as he was ready to keep those which he had made;--and now he

was told that it was his fault! "I do think that's rather hard, Miss

Stanbury," he said.

"So you have," said she;--"nasty, slatternly girls, without an idea

inside their noddles. But it's no use your scolding me."

"I didn't mean to scold, Miss Stanbury."

"I've done all that I could."

"And you think she won't see me for a minute?"

"She says she won't. I can't bid Martha carry her down."

"Then, perhaps, I had better leave you for the present," said Mr.

Gibson, after another pause. So he went, a melancholy, blighted man.

Leaving the Close, he passed through into Southernhay, and walked

across by the new streets towards the Heavitree road. He had no

design in taking this route, but he went on till he came in sight

of the house in which Mrs. French lived. As he walked slowly by it,

he looked up at the windows, and something of a feeling of romance

came across his heart. Were his young affections buried there, or

were they not? And, if so, with which of those fair girls were

they buried? For the last two years, up to last night, Camilla had

certainly been in the ascendant. But Arabella was a sweet young

woman; and there had been a time,--when those tender passages were

going on,--in which he had thought that no young woman ever was so

sweet. A period of romance, an era of enthusiasm, a short-lived,

delicious holiday of hot-tongued insanity had been permitted to him

in his youth;--but all that was now over. And yet here he was, with

three strings to his bow,--so he told himself,--and he had not as yet

settled for himself the great business of matrimony. He was inclined

to think, as he walked on, that he would walk his life alone, an

active, useful, but a melancholy man. After such experiences as

his, how should he ever again speak of his heart to a woman? During

this walk, his mind recurred frequently to Dorothy Stanbury; and,

doubtless, he thought that he had often spoken of his heart to her.

He was back at his lodgings before three, at which hour he ate an

early dinner, and then took the afternoon cathedral service at four.

The evening he spent at home, thinking of the romance of his early

days. What would Miss Stanbury have said, had she seen him in his

easy chair behind the "Exeter Argus,"--with a pipe in his mouth?

In the meantime, there was an uncomfortable scene in progress between

Dorothy and her aunt. Brooke Burgess, as desired, had left the house

before eleven, having taken upon himself, when consulted, to say in

the mildest terms, that he thought that, in general, young women

should not be asked to marry if they did not like to;--which opinion

had been so galling to Miss Stanbury that she had declared that he

had so scolded her, that she did not know whether she was standing

on her head or her heels. As soon as Mr. Gibson left her, she sat

herself down, and fairly cried. She had ardently desired this thing,

and had allowed herself to think of her desire as of one that would

certainly be accomplished. Dorothy would have been so happy as the

wife of a clergyman! Miss Stanbury's standard for men and women was

not high. She did not expect others to be as self-sacrificing, as

charitable, and as good as herself. It was not that she gave to

herself credit for such virtues; but she thought of herself as one

who, from the peculiar circumstances of life, was bound to do much

for others. There was no end to her doing good for others,--if only

the others would allow themselves to be governed by her. She did not

think that Mr. Gibson was a great divine; but she perceived that he

was a clergyman, living decently,--of that secret pipe Miss Stanbury

knew nothing,--doing his duty punctually, and, as she thought, very

much in want of a wife. Then there was her niece, Dolly,--soft,

pretty, feminine, without a shilling, and much in want of some one

to comfort and take care of her. What could be better than such a

marriage! And the overthrow to the girls with the big chignons would

be so complete! She had set her mind upon it, and now Dorothy said

that it couldn't, and it wouldn't, and it shouldn't be accomplished!

She was to be thrown over by this chit of a girl, as she had been

thrown over by the girl's brother! And, when she complained, the girl

simply offered to go away!

At about twelve Dorothy came creeping down into the room in which her

aunt was sitting, and pretended to occupy herself on some piece of

work. For a considerable time,--for three minutes perhaps,--Miss

Stanbury did not speak. She had resolved that she would not speak

to her niece again,--at least, not for that day. She would let the

ungrateful girl know how miserable she had been made. But at the

close of the three minutes her patience was exhausted. "What are you

doing there?" she said.

"I am quilting your cap, Aunt Stanbury."

"Put it down. You shan't do anything for me. I won't have you touch

my things any more. I don't like pretended service."

"It is not pretended, Aunt Stanbury."

"I say it is pretended. Why did you pretend to me that you would have

him when you had made up your mind against it all the time?"

"But I hadn't--made up my mind."

"If you had so much doubt about it, you might have done what I wanted

you."

"I couldn't, Aunt Stanbury."

"You mean you wouldn't. I wonder what it is you do expect."

"I don't expect anything, Aunt Stanbury."

"No; and I don't expect anything. What an old fool I am ever to look

for any comfort. Why should I think that anybody would care for me?"

"Indeed, I do care for you."

"In what sort of way do you show it? You're just like your brother

Hugh. I've disgraced myself to that man,--promising what I could not

perform. I declare it makes me sick when I think of it. Why did you

not tell me at once?" Dorothy said nothing further, but sat with the

cap on her lap. She did not dare to resume her needle, and she did

not like to put the cap aside, as by doing so it would seem as though

she had accepted her aunt's prohibition against her work. For half

an hour she sat thus, during which time Miss Stanbury dropped asleep.

She woke with a start, and began to scold again. "What's the good of

sitting there all the day, with your hands before you, doing

nothing?"

But Dorothy had been very busy. She had been making up her mind,

and had determined to communicate her resolution to her aunt. "Dear

aunt," she said, "I have been thinking of something."

"It's too late now," said Miss Stanbury.

"I see I've made you very unhappy."

"Of course you have."

"And you think that I'm ungrateful. I'm not ungrateful, and I don't

think that Hugh is."

"Never mind Hugh."

"Only because it seems so hard that you should take so much trouble

about us, and that then there should be so much vexation."

"I find it very hard."

"So I think that I'd better go back to Nuncombe."

"That's what you call gratitude."

"I don't like to stay here and make you unhappy. I can't think that I

ought to have done what you asked me, because I did not feel at all

in that way about Mr. Gibson. But as I have only disappointed you,

it will be better that I should go home. I have been very happy

here,--very."

"Bother!" exclaimed Miss Stanbury.

"I have,--and I do love you, though you won't believe it. But I am

sure I oughtn't to remain to make you unhappy. I shall never forget

all that you have done for me; and though you call me ungrateful, I

am not. But I know that I ought not to stay, as I cannot do what you

wish. So, if you please, I will go back to Nuncombe."

"You'll not do anything of the kind," said Miss Stanbury.

"But it will be better."

"Yes, of course; no doubt. I suppose you're tired of us all."

"It is not that I'm tired, Aunt Stanbury. It isn't that at all."

Dorothy had now become red up to the roots of her hair, and her eyes

were full of tears. "But I cannot stay where people think that I

am ungrateful. If you please, Aunt Stanbury, I will go." Then, of

course, there was a compromise. Dorothy did at last consent to remain

in the Close, but only on condition that she should be forgiven for

her sin in reference to Mr. Gibson, and be permitted to go on with

her aunt's cap.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MONT CENIS.

[Illustration]

The night had been fine and warm, and it was now noon on a fine

September day when the train from Paris reached St. Michael, on the

route to Italy by Mont Cenis,--as all the world knows St. Michael

is, or was a year or two back, the end of railway travelling in

that direction. At the time Mr. Fell's grand project of carrying a

line of rails over the top of the mountain was only in preparation,

and the journey from St. Michael to Susa was still made by the

diligences,--those dear old continental coaches which are now nearly

as extinct as our own, but which did not deserve death so fully as

did our abominable vehicles. The coupÃ© of a diligence, or better

still, the banquette, was a luxurious mode of travelling as compared

with anything that our coaches offered. There used indeed to be a

certain halo of glory round the occupant of the box of a mail-coach.

The man who had secured that seat was supposed to know something

about the world, and to be such a one that the passengers sitting

behind him would be proud to be allowed to talk to him. But the

prestige of the position was greater than the comfort. A night on

the box of a mail-coach was but a bad time, and a night inside a

mail-coach was a night in purgatory. Whereas a seat up above, on the

banquette of a diligence passing over the Alps, with room for the

feet, and support for the back, with plenty of rugs and plenty of

tobacco, used to be on the Mont Cenis, and still is on some other

mountain passes, a very comfortable mode of seeing a mountain route.

For those desirous of occupying the coupÃ©, or the three front seats

of the body of the vehicle, it must be admitted that difficulties

frequently arose; and that such difficulties were very common at

St. Michael. There would be two or three of those enormous vehicles

preparing to start for the mountain, whereas it would appear that

twelve or fifteen passengers had come down from Paris armed with

tickets assuring them that this preferable mode of travelling should

be theirs. And then assertions would be made, somewhat recklessly,

by the officials, to the effect that all the diligence was coupÃ©.

It would generally be the case that some middle-aged Englishman who

could not speak French would go to the wall, together with his wife.

Middle-aged Englishmen with their wives, who can't speak French, can

nevertheless be very angry, and threaten loudly, when they suppose

themselves to be ill-treated. A middle-aged Englishman, though he

can't speak a word of French, won't believe a French official who

tells him that the diligence is all coupÃ©, when he finds himself

with his unfortunate partner in a roundabout place behind with two

priests, a dirty man who looks like a brigand, a sick maid-servant,

and three agricultural labourers. The attempt, however, was

frequently made, and thus there used to be occasionally a little

noise round the bureau at St. Michael.

On the morning of which we are speaking two Englishmen had just made

good their claim, each independently of the other, each without

having heard or seen the other, when two American ladies, coming up

very tardily, endeavoured to prove their rights. The ladies were

without other companions, and were not fluent with their French,

but were clearly entitled to their seats. They were told that the

conveyance was all coupÃ©, but perversely would not believe the

statement. The official shrugged his shoulders and signified that

his ultimatum had been pronounced. What can an official do in such

circumstances, when more coupÃ© passengers are sent to him than the

coupÃ©s at his command will hold? "But we have paid for the coupÃ©,"

said the elder American lady, with considerable indignation, though

her French was imperfect;--for American ladies understand their

rights. "Bah; yes; you have paid and you shall go. What would you

have?" "We would have what we have paid for," said the American lady.

Then the official rose from his stool and shrugged his shoulders

again, and made a motion with both his hands, intended to shew that

the thing was finished. "It is a robbery," said the elder American

lady to the younger. "I should not mind, only you are so unwell."

"It will not kill me, I dare say," said the younger. Then one of

the English gentlemen declared that his place was very much at the

service of the invalid,--and the other Englishman declared that his

also was at the service of the invalid's companion. Then, and not

till then, the two men recognised each other. One was Mr. Glascock,

on his way to Naples, and the other was Mr. Trevelyan, on his

way,--he knew not whither.

Upon this, of course, they spoke to each other. In London they had

been well acquainted, each having been an intimate guest at the house

of old Lady Milborough. And each knew something of the other's recent

history. Mr. Glascock was aware, as was all the world, that Trevelyan

had quarrelled with his wife; and Trevelyan was aware that Mr.

Glascock had been spoken of as a suitor to his own sister-in-law. Of

that visit which Mr. Glascock had made to Nuncombe Putney, and of

the manner in which Nora had behaved to her lover, Trevelyan knew

nothing. Their greetings spoken, their first topic of conversation

was, of course, the injury proposed to be done to the American

ladies, and which would now fall upon them. They went into the

waiting-room together, and during such toilet as they could make

there, grumbled furiously. They would take post horses over the

mountain, not from any love of solitary grandeur, but in order that

they might make the company pay for its iniquity. But it was soon

apparent to them that they themselves had no ground of complaint, and

as everybody was very civil, and as a seat in the banquette over the

heads of the American ladies was provided for them, and as the man

from the bureau came and apologised, they consented to be pacified,

and ended, of course, by tipping half-a-dozen of the servants about

the yard. Mr. Glascock had a man of his own with him, who was very

nearly being put on to the same seat with his master as an extra

civility; but this inconvenience was at last avoided. Having settled

these little difficulties, they went into breakfast in the buffet.

There could be no better breakfast than used to be given in the

buffet at the railway terminus at St. Michael. The company might

occasionally be led into errors about that question of coupÃ© seats,

but in reference to their provisions, they set an example which might

be of great use to us here in England. It is probably the case that

breakfasts for travellers are not so frequently needed here as they

are on the Continent; but, still, there is often to be found a crowd

of people ready to eat if only the wherewithal were there. We are

often told in our newspapers that England is disgraced by this and

by that; by the unreadiness of our army, by the unfitness of our

navy, by the irrationality of our laws, by the immobility of our

prejudices, and what not; but the real disgrace of England is the

railway sandwich,--that whited sepulchre, fair enough outside, but

so meagre, poor, and spiritless within, such a thing of shreds and

parings, such a dab of food, telling us that the poor bone whence it

was scraped had been made utterly bare before it was sent into the

kitchen for the soup pot. In France one does get food at the railway

stations, and at St. Michael the breakfast was unexceptional.

Our two friends seated themselves near to the American ladies, and

were, of course, thanked for their politeness. American women are

taught by the habits of their country to think that men should give

way to them more absolutely than is in accordance with the practices

of life in Europe. A seat in a public conveyance in the States, when

merely occupied by a man, used to be regarded by any woman as being

at her service as completely as though it were vacant. One woman

indicating a place to another would point with equal freedom to a man

or a space. It is said that this is a little altered now, and that

European views on this subject are spreading themselves. Our two

ladies, however, who were pretty, clever-looking, and attractive even

after the night's journey, were manifestly more impressed with the

villainy of the French officials than they were with the kindness of

their English neighbours.

"And nothing can be done to punish them?" said the younger of them to

Mr. Glascock.

"Nothing, I should think," said he. "Nothing will, at any rate."

"And you will not get back your money?" said the elder,--who, though

the elder, was probably not much above twenty.

"Well;--no. Time is money, they say. It would take thrice the value

of the time in money, and then one would probably fail. They have

done very well for us, and I suppose there are difficulties."

"It couldn't have taken place in our country," said the younger lady.

"All the same, we are very much obliged to you. It would not have

been nice for us to have to go up into the banquette."

"They would have put you into the interior."

"And that would have been worse. I hate being put anywhere,--as if I

were a sheep. It seems so odd to us, that you here should be all so

tame."

"Do you mean the English or the French, or the world in general on

this side of the Atlantic?"

"We mean Europeans," said the younger lady, who was better after

her breakfast. "But then we think that the French have something

of compensation, in their manners, and their ways of life, their

climate, the beauty of their cities, and their general management of

things."

"They are very great in many ways, no doubt," said Mr. Glascock.

"They do understand living better than you do," said the elder.

"Everything is so much brighter with them," said the younger.

"They contrive to give a grace to every-day existence," said the

elder.

"There is such a welcome among them for strangers," said the younger.

"Particularly in reference to places taken in the coupÃ©," said

Trevelyan, who had hardly spoken before.

"Ah, that is an affair of honesty," said the elder. "If we want

honesty, I believe we must go back to the stars and stripes."

Mr. Glascock looked up from his plate almost aghast. He said nothing,

however, but called for the waiter, and paid for his breakfast.

Nevertheless, there was a considerable amount of travelling

friendship engendered between the ladies and our two friends

before the diligence had left the railway yard. They were two Miss

Spaldings, going on to Florence, at which place they had an uncle,

who was minister from the States to the kingdom of Italy; and they

were not at all unwilling to receive such little civilities as

gentlemen can give to ladies when travelling. The whole party

intended to sleep at Turin that night, and they were altogether on

good terms with each other when they started on the journey from St.

Michael.

"Clever women those," said Mr. Glascock, as soon as they had arranged

their legs and arms in the banquette.

"Yes, indeed."

"American women always are clever,--and are almost always pretty."

"I do not like them," said Trevelyan,--who in these days was in a

mood to like nothing. "They are exigeant;--and then they are so hard.

They want the weakness that a woman ought to have."

"That comes from what they would call your insular prejudice. We

are accustomed to less self-assertion on the part of women than is

customary with them. We prefer women to rule us by seeming to yield.

In the States, as I take it, the women never yield, and the men have

to fight their own battles with other tactics."

"I don't know what their tactics are."

"They keep their distance. The men live much by themselves, as though

they knew they would not have a chance in the presence of their wives

and daughters. Nevertheless they don't manage these things badly. You

very rarely hear of an American being separated from his wife."

The words were no sooner out of his mouth, than Mr. Glascock knew,

and remembered, and felt what he had said. There are occasions in

which a man sins so deeply against fitness and the circumstances

of the hour, that it becomes impossible for him to slur over his

sin as though it had not been committed. There are certain little

peccadilloes in society which one can manage to throw behind

one,--perhaps with some difficulty, and awkwardness; but still they

are put aside, and conversation goes on, though with a hitch. But

there are graver offences, the gravity of which strikes the offender

so seriously that it becomes impossible for him to seem even to

ignore his own iniquity. Ashes must be eaten publicly, and sackcloth

worn before the eyes of men. It was so now with poor Mr. Glascock. He

thought about it for a moment,--whether or no it was possible that

he should continue his remarks about the American ladies, without

betraying his own consciousness of the thing that he had done; and

he found that it was quite impossible. He knew that he was red up to

his hairs, and hot, and that his blood tingled. His blushes, indeed,

would not be seen in the seclusion of the banquette; but he could not

overcome the heat and the tingling. There was silence for about three

minutes, and then he felt that it would be best for him to confess

his own fault. "Trevelyan," he said, "I am very sorry for the

allusion that I made. I ought to have been less awkward, and I beg

your pardon."

"It does not matter," said Trevelyan. "Of course I know that

everybody is talking of it behind my back. I am not to expect that

people will be silent because I am unhappy."

"Nevertheless I beg your pardon," said the other.

There was but little further conversation between them till they

reached Lanslebourg, at the foot of the mountain, at which place they

occupied themselves with getting coffee for the two American ladies.

The Miss Spaldings took their coffee almost with as much grace as

though it had been handed to them by Frenchmen. And indeed they were

very gracious,--as is the nature of American ladies in spite of that

hardness of which Trevelyan had complained. They assume an intimacy

readily, with no appearance of impropriety, and are at their ease

easily. When, therefore, they were handed out of their carriage by

Mr. Glascock, the bystanders at Lanslebourg might have thought that

the whole party had been travelling together from New York. "What

should we have done if you hadn't taken pity on us?" said the elder

lady. "I don't think we could have climbed up into that high place;

and look at the crowd that have come out of the interior. A man has

some advantages after all."

"I am quite in the dark as to what they are," said Mr. Glascock.

"He can give up his place to a lady, and can climb up into a

banquette."

"And he can be a member of Congress," said the younger. "I'd sooner

be senator from Massachusetts than be the Queen of England."

"So would I," said Mr. Glascock. "I'm glad we can agree about one

thing."

The two gentlemen agreed to walk up the mountain together, and with

some trouble induced the conductor to permit them to do so. Why

conductors of diligences should object to such relief to their horses

the ordinary Englishman can hardly understand. But in truth they

feel so deeply the responsibility which attaches itself to their

shepherding of their sheep, that they are always fearing lest some

poor lamb should go astray on the mountain side. And though the road

be broad and very plainly marked, the conductor never feels secure

that his passenger will find his way safely to the summit. He likes

to know that each of his flock is in his right place, and disapproves

altogether of an erratic spirit. But Mr. Glascock at last prevailed,

and the two men started together up the mountain. When the permission

has been once obtained the walker may be sure that his guide and

shepherd will not desert him.

"Of course I know," said Trevelyan, when the third twist up the

mountain had been overcome, "that people talk about me and my wife.

It is a part of the punishment for the mistake that one makes."

"It is a sad affair altogether."

"The saddest in the world. Lady Milborough has no doubt spoken to you

about it."

"Well;--yes; she has."

"How could she help it? I am not such a fool as to suppose that

people are to hold their tongues about me more than they do about

others. Intimate as she is with you, of course she has spoken to

you."

"I was in hopes that something might have been done by this time."

"Nothing has been done. Sometimes I think I shall put an end to

myself, it makes me so wretched."

"Then why don't you agree to forget and forgive and have done with

it?"

"That is so easily said;--so easily said." After this they walked on

in silence for a considerable distance. Mr. Glascock was not anxious

to talk about Trevelyan's wife, but he did wish to ask a question or

two about Mrs. Trevelyan's sister, if only this could be done without

telling too much of his own secret. "There's nothing I think so

grand, as walking up a mountain," he said after a while.

"It's all very well," said Trevelyan, in a tone which seemed to

imply that to him in his present miserable condition all recreations,

exercises, and occupations were mere leather and prunella.

"I don't mean, you know, in the Alpine Club way," said Glascock. "I'm

too old and too stiff for that. But when the path is good, and the

air not too cold, and when it is neither snowing, nor thawing, nor

raining, and when the sun isn't hot, and you've got plenty of time,

and know that you can stop any moment you like and be pushed up by a

carriage, I do think walking up a mountain is very fine,--if you've

got proper shoes, and a good stick, and it isn't too soon after

dinner. There's nothing like the air of Alps." And Mr. Glascock

renewed his pace, and stretched himself against the hill at the rate

of three miles an hour.

"I used to be very fond of Switzerland," said Trevelyan, "but I don't

care about it now. My eye has lost all its taste."

"It isn't the eye," said Glascock.

"Well; no. The truth is that when one is absolutely unhappy one

cannot revel in the imagination. I don't believe in the miseries of

poets."

"I think myself," said Glascock, "that a poet should have a good

digestion. By-the-bye, Mrs. Trevelyan and her sister went down to

Nuncombe Putney, in Devonshire."

"They did go there."

"Have they moved since? A very pretty place is Nuncombe Putney."

"You have been there then?"

Mr. Glascock blushed again. He was certainly an awkward man, saying

things that he ought not to say, and telling secrets which ought not

to have been told. "Well;--yes. I have been there,--as it happens."

"Just lately do you mean?"

Mr. Glascock paused, hoping to find his way out of the scrape, but

soon perceived that there was no way out. He could not lie, even

in an affair of love, and was altogether destitute of those honest

subterfuges,--subterfuges honest in such position,--of which a dozen

would have been at once at the command of any woman, and with one

of which, sufficient for the moment, most men would have been able

to arm themselves. "Indeed, yes," he said, almost stammering as

he spoke. "It was lately;--since your wife went there." Trevelyan,

though he had been told of the possibility of Mr. Glascock's

courtship, felt himself almost aggrieved by this man's intrusion

on his wife's retreat. Had he not sent her there that she might

be private; and what right had any one to invade such privacy? "I

suppose I had better tell the truth at once," said Mr. Glascock. "I

went to see Miss Rowley."

"Oh, indeed."

"My secret will be safe with you, I know."

"I did not know that there was a secret," said Trevelyan. "I should

have thought that they would have told me."

"I don't see that. However, it doesn't matter much. I got nothing by

my journey. Are the ladies still at Nuncombe Putney?"

"No, they have moved from there to London."

"Not back to Curzon Street?"

"Oh dear, no. There is no house in Curzon Street for them now." This

was said in a tone so sad that it almost made Mr. Glascock weep.

"They are staying with an aunt of theirs,--out to the east of the

city."

"At St. Diddulph's?"

"Yes;--with Mr. Outhouse, the clergyman there. You can't conceive

what it is not to be able to see your own child; and yet, how can I

take the boy from her?"

"Of course not. He's only a baby."

"And yet all this is brought on me solely by her obstinacy. God

knows, however, I don't want to say a word against her. People choose

to say that I am to blame, and they may say so for me. Nothing that

any one may say can add anything to the weight that I have to bear."

Then they walked to the top of the mountain in silence, and in due

time were picked up by their proper shepherd and carried down to Susa

at a pace that would give an English coachman a concussion of the

brain.

Why passengers for Turin, who reach Susa dusty, tired, and sleepy,

should be detained at that place for an hour and a half instead of

being forwarded to their beds in the great city, is never made very

apparent. All travelling officials on the continent of Europe are

very slow in their manipulation of luggage; but as they are equally

correct we will find the excuse for their tardiness in the latter

quality. The hour and a half, however, is a necessity, and it is very

grievous. On this occasion the two Miss Spaldings ate their supper,

and the two gentlemen waited on them. The ladies had learned to

regard at any rate Mr. Glascock as their own property, and received

his services, graciously indeed, but quite as a matter of course.

When he was sent from their peculiar corner of the big, dirty

refreshment room to the supper-table to fetch an apple, and then

desired to change it because the one which he had brought was

spotted, he rather liked it. And when he sat down with his knees

near to theirs, actually trying to eat a large Italian apple himself

simply because they had eaten one, and discussed with them the

passage over the Mont Cenis, he began to think that Susa was, after

all, a place in which an hour and a half might be whiled away without

much cause for complaint.

"We only stay one night at Turin," said Caroline Spalding, the elder.

"And we shall have to start at ten,--to get through to Florence

to-morrow," said Olivia, the younger. "Isn't it cruel, wasting all

this time when we might be in bed?"

"It is not for me to complain of the cruelty," said Mr. Glascock.

"We should have fared infinitely worse if we hadn't met you," said

Caroline Spalding.

"But our republican simplicity won't allow us to assert that even

your society is better than going to bed, after a journey of thirty

hours," said Olivia.

In the meantime Trevelyan was roaming about the station moodily by

himself, and the place is one not apt to restore cheerfulness to a

moody man by any resources of its own. When the time for departure

came Mr. Glascock sought him and found him; but Trevelyan had chosen

a corner for himself in a carriage, and declared that he would rather

avoid the ladies for the present. "Don't think me uncivil to leave

you," he said, "but the truth is, I don't like American ladies."

"I do rather," said Mr. Glascock.

"You can say that I've got a headache," said Trevelyan. So Mr.

Glascock returned to his friends, and did say that Mr. Trevelyan had

a headache. It was the first time that a name had been mentioned

between them.

"Mr. Trevelyan! What a pretty name. It sounds like a novel," said

Olivia.

"A very clever man," said Mr. Glascock, "and much liked by his own

circle. But he has had trouble, and is unhappy."

"He looks unhappy," said Caroline.

"The most miserable looking man I ever saw in my life," said Olivia.

Then it was agreed between them as they went up to Trompetta's hotel,

that they would go on together by the ten o'clock train to Florence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VERDICT OF THE JURY--"MAD, MY LORD."

Trevelyan was left alone at Turin when Mr. Glascock went on to

Florence with his fair American friends. It was imperatively

necessary that he should remain at Turin, though he had no business

there of any kind whatever, and did not know a single person in the

city. And of all towns in Italy Turin has perhaps less of attraction

to offer to the solitary visitor than any other. It is new and

parallelogrammatic as an American town, is very cold in cold weather,

very hot in hot weather, and now that it has been robbed of its life

as a capital, is as dull and uninteresting as though it were German

or English. There is the Armoury, and the river Po, and a good hotel.

But what are these things to a man who is forced to live alone in a

place for four days, or perhaps a week? Trevelyan was bound to remain

at Turin till he should hear from Bozzle. No one but Bozzle knew his

address; and he could do nothing till Bozzle should have communicated

to him tidings of what was being done at St. Diddulph's.

There is perhaps no great social question so imperfectly understood

among us at the present day as that which refers to the line which

divides sanity from insanity. That this man is sane and that other

unfortunately mad we do know well enough; and we know also that one

man may be subject to various hallucinations,--may fancy himself to

be a teapot, or what not,--and yet be in such a condition of mind as

to call for no intervention either on behalf of his friends, or of

the law; while another may be in possession of intellectual faculties

capable of lucid exertion for the highest purposes, and yet be so mad

that bodily restraint upon him is indispensable. We know that the

sane man is responsible for what he does, and that the insane man

is irresponsible; but we do not know,--we only guess wildly, at the

state of mind of those, who now and again act like madmen, though no

court or council of experts has declared them to be mad. The bias of

the public mind is to press heavily on such men till the law attempts

to touch them, as though they were thoroughly responsible; and

then, when the law interferes, to screen them as though they were

altogether irresponsible. The same juryman who would find a man mad

who has murdered a young woman, would in private life express a

desire that the same young man should be hung, crucified, or skinned

alive, if he had moodily and without reason broken his faith to the

young woman in lieu of killing her. Now Trevelyan was, in truth, mad

on the subject of his wife's alleged infidelity. He had abandoned

everything that he valued in the world, and had made himself wretched

in every affair of life, because he could not submit to acknowledge

to himself the possibility of error on his own part. For that, in

truth, was the condition of his mind. He had never hitherto believed

that she had been false to her vow, and had sinned against him

irredeemably; but he had thought that in her regard for another man

she had slighted him; and, so thinking, he had subjected her to a

severity of rebuke which no high-spirited woman could have borne. His

wife had not tried to bear it,--in her indignation had not striven to

cure the evil. Then had come his resolution that she should submit,

or part from him; and, having so resolved, nothing could shake him.

Though every friend he possessed was now against him,--including

even Lady Milborough,--he was certain that he was right. Had not his

wife sworn to obey him, and was not her whole conduct one tissue of

disobedience? Would not the man who submitted to this find himself

driven to submit to things worse? Let her own her fault, let her

submit, and then she should come back to him.

He had not considered, when his resolutions to this effect were first

forming themselves, that a separation between a man and his wife once

effected cannot be annulled, and as it were cured, so as to leave no

cicatrice behind. Gradually, as he spent day after day in thinking on

this one subject, he came to feel that even were his wife to submit,

to own her fault humbly, and to come back to him, this very coming

back would in itself be a new wound. Could he go out again with

his wife on his arm to the houses of those who knew that he had

repudiated her because of her friendship with another man? Could

he open again that house in Curzon Street, and let things go on

quietly as they had gone before? He told himself that it was

impossible;--that he and she were ineffably disgraced;--that, if

reunited, they must live buried out of sight in some remote distance.

And he told himself, also, that he could never be with her again

night or day without thinking of the separation. His happiness had

been shipwrecked.

Then he had put himself into the hands of Mr. Bozzle, and Mr. Bozzle

had taught him that women very often do go astray. Mr. Bozzle's idea

of female virtue was not high, and he had opportunities of implanting

his idea on his client's mind. Trevelyan hated the man. He was filled

with disgust by Bozzle's words, and was made miserable by Bozzle's

presence. Yet he came gradually to believe in Bozzle. Bozzle alone

believed in him. There were none but Bozzle who did not bid him to

submit himself to his disobedient wife. And then, as he came to

believe in Bozzle, he grew to be more and more assured that no one

but Bozzle could tell him facts. His chivalry, and love, and sense of

woman's honour, with something of manly pride on his own part,--so

he told himself,--had taught him to believe it to be impossible that

his wife should have sinned. Bozzle, who knew the world, thought

otherwise. Bozzle, who had no interest in the matter, one way or the

other, would find out facts. What if his chivalry, and love, and

manly pride had deceived him? There were women who sinned. Then he

prayed that his wife might not be such a woman; and got up from his

prayers almost convinced that she was a sinner.

His mind was at work upon it always. Could it be that she was so base

as this--so vile a thing, so abject, such dirt, pollution, filth? But

there were such cases. Nay, were they not almost numberless? He found

himself reading in the papers records of such things from day to

day, and thought that in doing so he was simply acquiring experience

necessary for himself. If it were so, he had indeed done well to

separate himself from a thing so infamous. And if it were not so,

how could it be that that man had gone to her in Devonshire? He had

received from his wife's hands a short note addressed to the man, in

which the man was desired by her not to go to her, or to write to

her again, because of her husband's commands. He had shown this to

Bozzle, and Bozzle had smiled. "It's just the sort of thing they

does," Bozzle had said. "Then they writes another by post." He had

consulted Bozzle as to the sending on of that letter, and Bozzle had

been strongly of opinion that it should be forwarded, a copy having

been duly taken and attested by himself. It might be very pretty

evidence by-and-by. If the letter were not forwarded, Bozzle thought

that the omission to do so might be given in evidence against his

employer. Bozzle was very careful, and full of "evidence." The letter

therefore was sent on to Colonel Osborne. "If there's billy-dous

going between 'em we shall nobble 'em," said Bozzle. Trevelyan tore

his hair in despair, but believed that there would be billy-dous.

He came to believe everything; and, though he prayed fervently that

his wife might not be led astray, that she might be saved at any

rate from utter vice, yet he almost came to hope that it might be

otherwise;--not, indeed, with the hope of the sane man, who desires

that which he tells himself to be for his advantage; but with the

hope of the insane man, who loves to feed his grievance, even though

the grief should be his death. They who do not understand that a man

may be brought to hope that which of all things is the most grievous

to him, have not observed with sufficient closeness the perversity of

the human mind. Trevelyan would have given all that he had to save

his wife; would, even now, have cut his tongue out before he would

have expressed to anyone,--save to Bozzle,--a suspicion that she

could in truth have been guilty; was continually telling himself that

further life would be impossible to him, if he, and she, and that

child of theirs, should be thus disgraced;--and yet he expected it,

believed it, and, after a fashion, he almost hoped it.

He was to wait at Turin till tidings should come from Bozzle, and

after that he would go on to Venice; but he would not move from Turin

till he should have received his first communication from England.

When he had been three days at Turin they came to him, and, among

other letters in Bozzle's packet, there was a letter addressed in his

wife's handwriting. The letter was simply directed to Bozzle's house.

In what possible way could his wife have found out ought of his

dealings with Bozzle,--where Bozzle lived, or could have learned that

letters intended for him should be sent to the man's own residence?

Before, however, we inspect the contents of Mr. Bozzle's dispatch, we

will go back and see how Mrs. Trevelyan had discovered the manner of

forwarding a letter to her husband.

The matter of the address was, indeed, very simple. All letters for

Trevelyan were to be redirected from the house in Curzon Street, and

from the chambers in Lincoln's Inn, to the Acrobats' Club; to the

porter of the Acrobats' Club had been confided the secret, not of

Bozzle's name, but of Bozzle's private address, No. 55, Stony Walk,

Union Street, Borough. Thus all letters reaching the Acrobats' were

duly sent to Mr. Bozzle's house. It may be remembered that Hugh

Stanbury, on the occasion of his last visit to the parsonage of St.

Diddulph's, was informed that Mrs. Trevelyan had a letter from her

father for her husband, and that she knew not whither to send it.

It may well be that, had the matter assumed no other interest in

Stanbury's eyes than that given to it by Mrs. Trevelyan's very

moderate anxiety to have the letter forwarded, he would have thought

nothing about it; but having resolved, as he sat upon the knife-board

of the omnibus,--the reader will, at any rate, remember those

resolutions made on the top of the omnibus while Hugh was smoking his

pipe,--having resolved that a deed should be done at St. Diddulph's,

he resolved also that it should be done at once. He would not allow

the heat of his purpose to be cooled by delay. He would go to St.

Diddulph's at once, with his heart in his hand. But it might, he

thought, be as well that he should have an excuse for his visit.

So he called upon the porter at the Acrobats', and was successful

in learning Mr. Trevelyan's address. "Stony Walk, Union Street,

Borough," he said to himself, wondering; then it occurred to him

that Bozzle, and Bozzle only among Trevelyan's friends, could

live at Stony Walk in the Borough. Thus armed, he set out for St.

Diddulph's;--and, as one of the effects of his visit to the East, Sir

Marmaduke's note was forwarded to Louis Trevelyan at Turin.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MISS NORA ROWLEY IS MALTREATED.

Hugh Stanbury, when he reached the parsonage, found no difficulty

in making his way into the joint presence of Mrs. Outhouse, Mrs.

Trevelyan, and Nora. He was recognised by the St. Diddulph's party

as one who had come over to their side, as a friend of Trevelyan

who had found himself constrained to condemn his friend in spite of

his friendship, and was consequently very welcome. And there was

no difficulty about giving the address. The ladies wondered how it

came to pass that Mr. Trevelyan's letters should be sent to such

a locality, and Hugh expressed his surprise also. He thought it

discreet to withhold his suspicions about Mr. Bozzle, and simply

expressed his conviction that letters sent in accordance with the

directions given by the club-porter would reach their destination.

Then the boy was brought down, and they were all very confidential

and very unhappy together. Mrs. Trevelyan could see no end to the

cruelty of her position, and declared that her father's anger against

her husband was so great that she anticipated his coming with almost

more of fear than of hope. Mrs. Outhouse expressed an opinion that

Mr. Trevelyan must surely be mad; and Nora suggested that the

possibility of such perversity on the part of a man made it almost

unwise in any woman to trust herself to the power of a husband. "But

there are not many like him, thank God," said Mrs. Outhouse, bridling

in her wrath. Thus they were very friendly together, and Hugh

was allowed to feel that he stood upon comfortable terms in the

parsonage;--but he did not as yet see how he was to carry out his

project for the present day.

At last Mrs. Trevelyan went away with the child. Hugh felt that he

ought to go, but stayed courageously. He thought he could perceive

that Nora suspected the cause of his assiduity; but it was quite

evident that Mrs. Outhouse did not do so. Mrs. Outhouse, having

reconciled herself to the young man, was by no means averse to his

presence. She went on talking about the wickedness of Trevelyan, and

her brother's anger, and the fate of the little boy, till at last the

little boy's mother came back into the room. Then Mrs. Outhouse went.

They must excuse her for a few minutes, she said. If only she would

have gone a few minutes sooner, how well her absence might have been

excused. Nora understood it all now; and though she became almost

breathless, she was not surprised, when Hugh got up from his chair

and asked her sister to go away. "Mrs. Trevelyan," he said, "I want

to speak a few words to your sister. I hope you will give me the

opportunity."

"Nora!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevelyan.

"She knows nothing about it," said Hugh.

"Am I to go?" said Mrs. Trevelyan to her sister. But Nora said never

a word. She sat perfectly fixed, not turning her eyes from the object

on which she was gazing.

[Illustration: "Am I to go?"]

"Pray,--pray do," said Hugh.

"I cannot think that it will be for any good," said Mrs. Trevelyan;

"but I know that she may be trusted. And I suppose it ought to be so,

if you wish it."

"I do wish it, of all things," said Hugh, still standing up, and

almost turning the elder sister out of the room by the force of his

look and voice. Then, with another pause of a moment, Mrs. Trevelyan

rose from her chair and left the room, closing the door after her.

Hugh, when he found that the coast was clear for him, immediately

began his task with a conviction that not a moment was to be lost.

He had told himself a dozen times that the matter was hopeless,

that Nora had shown him by every means in her power that she was

indifferent to him, that she with all her friends would know that

such a marriage was out of the question; and he had in truth come

to believe that the mission which he had in hand was one in which

success was not possible. But he thought that it was his duty to go

on with it. "If a man love a woman, even though it be the king and

the beggar-woman reversed,--though it be a beggar and a queen, he

should tell her of it. If it be so, she has a right to know it and to

take her choice. And he has a right to tell her, and to say what he

can for himself." Such was Hugh's doctrine in the matter; and, acting

upon it, he found himself alone with his mistress.

"Nora," he said, speaking perhaps with more energy than the words

required, "I have come here to tell you that I love you, and to ask

you to be my wife."

Nora, for the last ten minutes, had been thinking that this would

come,--that it would come at once; and yet she was not at all

prepared with an answer. It was now weeks since she had confessed to

herself frankly that nothing else but this,--this one thing which was

now happening, this one thing which had now happened,--that nothing

else could make her happy, or could touch her happiness. She had

refused a man whom she otherwise would have taken, because her heart

had been given to Hugh Stanbury. She had been bold enough to tell

that other suitor that it was so, though she had not mentioned the

rival's name. She had longed for some expression of love from this

man when they had been at Nuncombe together, and had been fiercely

angry with him because no such expression had come from him. Day

after day, since she had been with her aunt, she had told herself

that she was a broken-hearted woman, because she had given away all

that she had to give and had received nothing in return. Had he said

a word that might have given her hope, how happy could she have been

in hoping. Now he had come to her with a plain-spoken offer, telling

her that he loved her, and asking her to be his wife,--and she was

altogether unable to answer. How could she consent to be his wife,

knowing as she did that there was no certainty of an income on which

they could live? How could she tell her father and mother that she

had engaged herself to marry a man who might or might not make Â£400 a

year, and who already had a mother and sister depending on him?

In truth, had he come more gently to her, his chance of a happy

answer,--of an answer which might be found to have in it something

of happiness,--would have been greater. He might have said a word

which she could not but have answered softly;--and then from that

constrained softness other gentleness would have followed, and so

he would have won her in spite of her discretion. She would have

surrendered gradually, accepting on the score of her great love all

the penalties of a long and precarious engagement. But when she

was asked to come and be his wife, now and at once, she felt that

in spite of her love it was impossible that she could accede to a

request so sudden, so violent, so monstrous. He stood over her as

though expecting an instant answer; and then, when she had sat dumb

before him for a minute, he repeated his demand. "Tell me, Nora, can

you love me? If you knew how thoroughly I have loved you, you would

at least feel something for me."

To tell him that she did not love him was impossible to her. But how

was she to refuse him without telling him either a lie, or the truth?

Some answer she must give him; and as to that matter of marrying him,

the answer must be a negative. Her education had been of that nature

which teaches girls to believe that it is a crime to marry a man

without an assured income. Assured morality in a husband is a great

thing. Assured good temper is very excellent. Assured talent,

religion, amiability, truth, honesty, are all desirable. But an

assured income is indispensable. Whereas, in truth, the income may

come hereafter; but the other things, unless they be there already,

will hardly be forthcoming. "Mr. Stanbury," she said, "your

suddenness has quite astounded me."

"Ah, yes; but how should I not be sudden? I have come here on purpose

to say this to you. If I do not say it now--"

"You heard what Emily said."

"No;--what did she say?"

"She said that it would not be for good that you should speak to me

thus."

"Why not for good? But she is unhappy, and looks gloomily at things."

"Yes, indeed."

"But all the world need not be sad for ever because she has been

unfortunate."

"Not all the world, Mr. Stanbury;--but you must not be surprised if

it affects me."

"But would that prevent your loving me,--if you did love me? But,

Nora, I do not expect you to love me,--not yet. I do not say that I

expect it,--ever. But if you would--. Nora, I can do no more than

tell you the simple truth. Just listen to me for a minute. You know

how I came to be intimate with you all in Curzon Street. The first

day I saw you I loved you; and there has come no change yet. It is

months now since I first knew that I loved you. Well; I told myself

more than once,--when I was down at Nuncombe for instance,--that I

had no right to speak to you. What right can a poor devil like me

have, who lives from hand to mouth, to ask such a girl as you to be

his wife? And so I said nothing,--though it was on my lips every

moment that I was there." Nora remembered at the moment how she had

looked to his lips, and had not seen the words there. "But I think

there is something unmanly in this. If you cannot give me a grain

of hope;--if you tell me that there never can be hope, it is my

misfortune. It will be very grievous, but I will bear it. But that

will be better than puling and moping about without daring to tell my

tale. I am not ashamed of it. I have fallen in love with you, Nora,

and I think it best to come for an answer."

He held out his arms as though he thought that she might perhaps come

to him. Indeed he had no idea of any such coming on her part; but

she, as she looked at him, almost thought that it was her duty to go.

Had she a right to withhold herself from him, she who loved him so

dearly? Had he stepped forward and taken her in his arms it might be

that all power of refusal would soon have been beyond her power.

"Mr. Stanbury," she said, "you have confessed yourself that it is

impossible."

"But do you love me;--do you think that it is possible that you

should ever love me?"

"You know, Mr. Stanbury, that you should not say anything further.

You know that it cannot be."

"But do you love me?"

"You are ungenerous not to take an answer without driving me to be

uncourteous."

"I do not care for courtesy. Tell me the truth. Can you ever love me?

With one word of hope I will wait, and work, and feel myself to be a

hero. I will not go till you tell me that you cannot love me."

"Then I must tell you so."

"What is it you will tell me, Nora? Speak it. Say it. If I knew that

a girl disliked me, nothing should make me press myself upon her. Am

I odious to you, Nora?"

"No; not odious,--but very, very unfair."

"I will have the truth if I be ever so unfair," he said. And by this

time probably some inkling of the truth had reached his intelligence.

There was already a tear in Nora's eye, but he did not pity her. She

owed it to him to tell him the truth, and he would have it from her

if it was to be reached. "Nora," he said, "listen to me again. All my

heart and soul are in this. It is everything to me. If you can love

me you are bound to say so. By Jove, I will believe you do unless you

swear to me that it is not so!" He was now holding her by the hand

and looking closely into her face.

"Mr. Stanbury," she said, "let me go; pray, pray let me go."

"Not till you say that you love me. Oh, Nora, I believe that you love

me. You do; yes; you do love me. Dearest, dearest Nora, would you not

say a word to make me the happiest man in the world?" And now he had

his arm round her waist.

"Let me go," she said, struggling through her tears and covering her

face with her hands. "You are very, very wicked. I will never speak

to you again. Nay, but you shall let me go!" And then she was out of

his arms and had escaped from the room before he had managed to touch

her face with his lips.

As he was thinking how he also might escape now,--might escape

and comfort himself with his triumph,--Mrs. Outhouse returned to

the chamber. She was very demure, and her manner towards him was

considerably changed since she had left the chamber. "Mr. Stanbury,"

she said, "this kind of thing mustn't go any further indeed;--at

least not in my house."

"What kind of thing, Mrs. Outhouse?"

"Well;--what my elder niece has told me. I have not seen Miss Rowley

since she left you. I am quite sure she has behaved with discretion."

"Indeed she has, Mrs. Outhouse."

"The fact is my nieces are in grief and trouble, and this is no time

or place for love-making. I am sorry to be uncivil, but I must ask

you not to come here any more."

"I will stay away from this house, certainly, if you bid me."

"I am very sorry; but I must bid you. Sir Marmaduke will be home in

the spring, and if you have anything to say to him of course you can

see him."

Then Hugh Stanbury took his leave of Mrs. Outhouse; but as he went

home, again on the knifeboard of an omnibus, he smoked the pipe of

triumph rather than the pipe of contemplation.

CHAPTER XL.

"C. G."

The Miss Spaldings were met at the station at Florence by their

uncle, the American Minister, by their cousin, the American Secretary

of Legation, and by three or four other dear friends and relations,

who were there to welcome the newcomers to sunny Italy. Mr. Glascock,

therefore, who ten minutes since had been, and had felt himself to

be, quite indispensable to their comfort, suddenly became as though

he were nothing and nobody. Who is there that has not felt these

sudden disruptions to the intimacies and friendships of a long

journey? He bowed to them, and they to him, and then they were

whirled away in their grandeur. He put himself into a small, open

hackney-carriage, and had himself driven to the York Hotel, feeling

himself to be deserted and desolate. The two Miss Spaldings were

the daughters of a very respectable lawyer at Boston, whereas Mr.

Glascock was heir to a peerage, to an enormous fortune, and to one of

the finest places in England. But he thought nothing of this at the

time. As he went he was meditating which young woman was the most

attractive, Nora Rowley or Caroline Spalding. He had no doubt but

that Nora was the prettier, the pleasanter in manner, the better

dressed, the more engaging in all that concerned the outer woman;

but he thought that he had never met any lady who talked better than

Caroline Spalding. And what was Nora Rowley's beauty to him? Had she

not told him that she was the property of some one else; or, for the

matter of that, what was Miss Spalding to him? They had parted, and

he was going on to Naples in two days. He had said some half-defined

word as to calling at the American Embassy, but it had not been taken

up by either of the ladies. He had not pressed it, and so they had

parted without an understanding as to a future meeting.

The double journey, from Turin to Bologna and from Bologna to

Florence, is very long, and forms ample time for a considerable

intimacy. There had, too, been a long day's journeying together

before that; and with no women is a speedy intimacy so possible, or

indeed so profitable, as with Americans. They fear nothing,--neither

you nor themselves; and talk with as much freedom as though they

were men. It may, perhaps, be assumed to be true as a rule that

women's society is always more agreeable to men than that of other

men,--except for the lack of ease. It undoubtedly is so when the

women be young and pretty. There is a feeling, however, among pretty

women in Europe that such freedom is dangerous, and it is withheld.

There is such danger, and more or less of such withholding is

expedient: but the American woman does not recognise the danger; and,

if she withhold the grace of her countenance and the pearls of her

speech, it is because she is not desirous of the society which is

proffered to her. These two American sisters had not withholden their

pearls from Mr. Glascock. He was much their senior in age; he was

gentle in his manners, and they probably recognised him to be a safe

companion. They had no idea who he was, and had not heard his name

when they parted from him. But it was not probable that they should

have been with him so long, and that they should leave him without

further thought of him, without curiosity or a desire to know more

of him. They had seen "C. G." in large letters on his dressing-bag,

and that was all they had learned as to his identity. He had known

their names well, and had once called Olivia by hers, in the

hurry of speaking to her sister. He had apologised, and there had

been a little laugh, and a discussion about the use of Christian

names,--such as is very conducive to intimacy between gentlemen and

ladies. When you can talk to a young lady about her own Christian

name, you are almost entitled for the nonce to use it.

Mr. Glascock went to his hotel, and was very moody and desolate. His

name was very soon known there, and he received the honours due to

his rank and station. "I should like to travel in America," he said

to himself, "if I could be sure that no one would find out who I

was." He had received letters at Turin, stating that his father was

better, and, therefore, he intended to remain two days at Florence.

The weather was still very hot, and Florence in the middle of

September is much preferable to Naples.

That night, when the two Miss Spaldings were alone together, they

discussed their fellow-traveller thoroughly. Something, of course,

had been said about him to their uncle the minister, to their aunt

the minister's wife, and to their cousin the secretary of legation.

But travellers will always observe that the dear new friends they

have made on their journey are not interesting to the dear old

friends whom they meet afterwards. There may be some touch of

jealousy in this; and then, though you, the traveller, are fully

aware that there has been something special in the case which has

made this new friendship more peculiar than others that have sprung

up in similar circumstances, fathers and brothers and wives and

sisters do not see it in that light. They suspect, perhaps, that

the new friend was a bagman, or an opera dancer, and think that the

affair need not be made of importance. The American Minister had

cast his eye on Mr. Glascock during that momentary parting, and had

not thought much of Mr. Glascock. "He was certainly a gentleman,"

Caroline had said. "There are a great many English gentlemen," the

minister had replied.

"I thought you would have asked him to call," Olivia said to her

sister. "He did offer."

"I know he did. I heard it."

"Why didn't you tell him he might come?"

"Because we are not in Boston, Livy. It might be the most horrible

thing in the world to do here in Florence; and it may make a

difference, because Uncle Jonas is minister."

"Why should that make a difference? Do you mean that one isn't to see

one's own friends? That must be nonsense."

"But he isn't a friend, Livy."

"It seems to me as if I'd known him for ever. That soft, monotonous

voice, which never became excited and never disagreeable, is as

familiar to me as though I had lived with it all my life."

"I thought him very pleasant."

"Indeed you did, Carry. And he thought you pleasant too. Doesn't it

seem odd? You were mending his glove for him this very afternoon,

just as if he were your brother."

"Why shouldn't I mend his glove?"

"Why not, indeed? He was entitled to have everything mended after

getting us such a good dinner at Bologna. By-the-bye, you never paid

him."

"Yes, I did,--when you were not by."

"I wonder who he is! C. G.! That fine man in the brown coat was his

servant, you know. I thought at first that C. G. must have been

cracked, and that the tall man was his keeper."

"I never knew any one less like a madman."

"No;--but the man was so queer. He did nothing, you know. We hardly

saw him, if you remember, at Turin. All he did was to tie the shawls

at Bologna. What can any man want with another man about with him

like that, unless he is cracked either in body or mind?"

"You'd better ask C. G. yourself."

"I shall never see C. G. again, I suppose. I should like to see him

again. I guess you would too, Carry. Eh?"

"Of course, I should;--why not?"

"I never knew a man so imperturbable, and who had yet so much to say

for himself. I wonder what he is! Perhaps he's on business, and that

man was a kind of a clerk."

"He had livery buttons on," said Carry.

"And does that make a difference?"

"I don't think they put clerks into livery, even in England."

"Nor yet mad doctors," said Olivia. "Well, I like him very much; and

the only thing against him is that he should have a man, six feet

high, going about with him doing nothing."

"You'll make me angry, Livy, if you talk in that way. It's

uncharitable."

"In what way?"

"About a mad doctor."

"It's my belief," said Olivia, "that he's an English swell, a lord,

or a duke;--and it's my belief, too, that he's in love with you."

"It's my belief, Livy, that you're a regular ass;"--and so the

conversation was ended on that occasion.

On the next day, about noon, the American Minister, as a part of the

duty which he owed to his country, read in a publication of that day,

issued for the purpose, the names of the new arrivals at Florence.

First and foremost was that of the Honourable Charles Glascock, with

his suite, at the York Hotel, en route to join his father, Lord

Peterborough, at Naples. Having read the news first to himself, the

minister read it out loud in the presence of his nieces.

"That's our friend C. G.," said Livy.

"I should think not," said the minister, who had his own ideas about

an English lord.

"I'm sure it is, because of the tall man with the buttons," said

Olivia.

"It's very unlikely," said the secretary of legation. "Lord

Peterborough is a man of immense wealth, very old, indeed. They say

he is dying at Naples. This man is his eldest son."

"Is that any reason why he shouldn't have been civil to us?" asked

Olivia.

"I don't think he is the sort of man likely to sit up in the

banquette; and he would have posted over the Alps. Moreover, he had

his suite with him."

"His suite was Buttons," said Olivia. "Only fancy, Carry, we've been

waited on for two days by a lord as is to be, and didn't know it! And

you have mended the tips of his lordship's glove!" But Carry said

nothing at all.

Late on that same evening, they met Mr. Glascock close to the Duomo,

under the shade of the Campanile. He had come out as they had done,

to see by moonlight that loveliest of all works made by man's hands.

They were with the minister, but Mr. Glascock came up and shook hands

with them.

"I would introduce you to my uncle, Mr. Spalding," said

Olivia,--"only,--as it happens,--we have never yet heard your name."

"My name is Mr. Glascock," said he, smiling. Then the introduction

was made; and the American Minister took off his hat, and was very

affable.

"Only think, Carry," said Olivia, when they were alone that evening,

"if you were to become the wife of an English lord!"

CHAPTER XLI.

SHEWING WHAT TOOK PLACE AT ST. DIDDULPH'S.

[Illustration]

Nora Rowley, when she escaped from the violence of her lover, at once

rushed up to her own room, and managed to fasten herself in before

she had been seen by any one. Her elder sister had at once gone to

her aunt when, at Hugh's request, she had left the room, thinking it

right that Mrs. Outhouse should know what was being done in her own

house. Mrs. Outhouse had considered the matter patiently for awhile,

giving the lovers the benefit of her hesitation, and had then spoken

her mind to Stanbury, as we have already heard. He had, upon the

whole, been so well pleased with what had occurred, that he was not

in the least angry with the parson's wife when he left the parsonage.

As soon as he was gone Mrs. Outhouse was at once joined by her elder

niece, but Nora remained for a while alone in her room.

Had she committed herself; and if so, did she regret it? He had

behaved very badly to her, certainly, taking her by the hand and

putting his arm round her waist. And then had he not even attempted

to kiss her? He had done all this, although she had been resolute in

refusing to speak to him one word of kindness,--though she had told

him with all the energy and certainty of which she was mistress, that

she would never be his wife. If a girl were to be subjected to such

treatment as this when she herself had been so firm, so discreet,

so decided, then indeed it would be unfit that a girl should trust

herself with a man. She had never thought that he had been such a one

as that, to ill-use her, to lay a hand on her in violence, to refuse

to take an answer. She threw herself on the bed and sobbed, and

then hid her face,--and was conscious that in spite of this acting

before herself she was the happiest girl alive. He had behaved very

badly;--of course, he had behaved most wickedly, and she would tell

him so some day. But was he not the dearest fellow living? Did ever

man speak with more absolute conviction of love in every tone of

his voice? Was it not the finest, noblest heart that ever throbbed

beneath a waistcoat? Had not his very wickedness come from the

overpowering truth of his affection for her? She would never quite

forgive him because it had been so very wrong; but she would be

true to him for ever and ever. Of course they could not marry.

What!--would she go to him and be a clog round his neck, and a weight

upon him for ever, bringing him down to the gutter by the burden of

her own useless and unworthy self? No. She would never so injure

him. She would not even hamper him by an engagement. But yet she

would be true to him. She had an idea that in spite of all her

protestations,--which, as she looked back upon them, appeared to her

to have been louder than they had been,--that through the teeth of

her denials, something of the truth had escaped from her. Well,--let

it be so. It was the truth, and why should he not know it? Then

she pictured to herself a long romance, in which the heroine lived

happily on the simple knowledge that she had been beloved. And

the reader may be sure that in this romance Mr. Glascock with his

splendid prospects filled one of the characters.

She had been so wretched at Nuncombe Putney when she had felt herself

constrained to admit to herself that this man for whom she had

sacrificed herself did not care for her, that she could not now but

enjoy her triumph. After she had sobbed upon the bed, she got up and

walked about the room smiling; and she would now press her hands to

her forehead, and then shake her tresses, and then clasp her own left

hand with her right, as though he were still holding it. Wicked man!

Why had he been so wicked and so violent? And why, why, why had she

not once felt his lips upon her brow?

And she was pleased with herself. Her sister had rebuked her because

she had refused to make her fortune by marrying Mr. Glascock; and,

to own the truth, she had rebuked herself on the same score when she

found that Hugh Stanbury had not had a word of love to say to her. It

was not that she regretted the grandeur which she had lost, but that

she should, even within her own thoughts, with the consciousness of

her own bosom, have declared herself unable to receive another man's

devotion because of her love for this man who neglected her. Now

she was proud of herself. Whether it might be accounted as good or

ill-fortune that she had ever seen Hugh Stanbury, it must at any rate

be right that she should be true to him now that she had seen him

and had loved him. To know that she loved and that she was not loved

again had nearly killed her. But such was not her lot. She too had

been successful with her quarry, and had struck her game, and brought

down her dear. He had been very violent with her, but his violence

had at least made the matter clear. He did love her. She would

be satisfied with that, and would endeavour so to live that that

alone should make life happy for her. How should she get his

photograph,--and a lock of his hair?--and when again might she have

the pleasure of placing her own hand within his great, rough, violent

grasp? Then she kissed the hand which he had held, and opened the

door of her room, at which her sister was now knocking.

"Nora, dear, will you not come down?"

"Not yet, Emily. Very soon I will."

"And what has happened, dearest?"

"There is nothing to tell, Emily."

"There must be something to tell. What did he say to you?"

"Of course you know what he said."

"And what answer did you make?"

"I told him that it could not be."

"And did he take that,--as final, Nora?"

"Of course not. What man ever takes a No as final?"

"When you said No to Mr. Glascock he took it."

"That was different, Emily."

"But how different? I don't see the difference, except that if you

could have brought yourself to like Mr. Glascock, it would have been

the greatest thing in the world for you, and for all of them."

"Would you have me take a man, Emily, that I didn't care one straw

for, merely because he was a lord? You can't mean that."

"I'm not talking about Mr. Glascock now, Nora."

"Yes, you are. And what's the use? He is gone, and there's an end of

it."

"And is Mr. Stanbury gone?"

"Of course."

"In the same way?" asked Mrs. Trevelyan.

"How can I tell about his ways? No; it is not in the same way. There!

He went in a very different way."

"How was it different, Nora?"

"Oh, so different. I can't tell you how. Mr. Glascock will never come

back again."

"And Mr. Stanbury will?" said the elder sister. Nora made no reply,

but after a while nodded her head. "And you want him to come back?"

She paused again, and again nodded her head. "Then you have accepted

him?"

"I have not accepted him. I have refused him. I have told him that it

was impossible."

"And yet you wish him back again!" Nora again nodded her head.

"That is a state of things I cannot at all understand," said Mrs.

Trevelyan, "and would not believe unless you told me so yourself."

"And you think me very wrong, of course. I will endeavour to do

nothing wrong, but it is so. I have not said a word of encouragement

to Mr. Stanbury; but I love him with all my heart. Ought I to tell

you a lie when you question me? Or is it natural that I should never

wish to see again a person whom I love better than all the world? It

seems to me that a girl can hardly be right if she have any choice of

her own. Here are two men, one rich and the other poor. I shall fall

to the ground between them. I know that. I have fallen to the ground

already. I like the one I can't marry. I don't care a straw for the

one who could give me a grand house. That is falling to the ground.

But I don't see that it is hard to understand, or that I have

disgraced myself."

"I said nothing of disgrace, Nora."

"But you looked it."

"I did not intend to look it, dearest."

"And remember this, Emily, I have told you everything because you

asked me. I do not mean to tell anybody else, at all. Mamma would not

understand me. I have not told him, and I shall not."

"You mean Mr. Stanbury?"

"Yes; I mean Mr. Stanbury. As to Mr. Glascock, of course I shall tell

mamma that. I have no secret there. That is his secret, and I suppose

mamma should know it. But I will have nothing told about the other.

Had I accepted him, or even hinted to him that I cared for him, I

would tell mamma at once."

After that there came something of a lecture, or something, rather,

of admonition, from Mrs. Outhouse. That lady did not attempt to

upbraid, or to find any fault; but observed that as she understood

that Mr. Stanbury had no means whatever, and as Nora herself had

none, there had better be no further intercourse between them, till,

at any rate, Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley should be in London. "So

I told him that he must not come here any more, my dear," said Mrs.

Outhouse.

"You are quite right, aunt. He ought not to come here."

"I am so glad that you agree with me."

"I agree with you altogether. I think I was bound to see him when he

asked to see me; but the thing is altogether out of the question. I

don't think he'll come any more, aunt." Then Mrs. Outhouse was quite

satisfied that no harm had been done.

A month had now passed since anything had been heard at St.

Diddulph's from Mr. Trevelyan, and it seemed that many months might

go on in the same dull way. When Mrs. Trevelyan first found herself

in her uncle's house, a sum of two hundred pounds had been sent to

her; and since that she had received a letter from her husband's

lawyer saying that a similar amount would be sent to her every three

months, as long as she was separated from her husband. A portion

of this she had given over to Mr. Outhouse; but this pecuniary

assistance by no means comforted that unfortunate gentleman in his

trouble. "I don't want to get into debt," he said, "by keeping a lot

of people whom I haven't the means to feed. And I don't want to board

and lodge my nieces and their family at so much a head. It's very

hard upon me either way." And so it was. All the comfort of his home

was destroyed, and he was driven to sacrifice his independence by

paying his tradesmen with a portion of Mrs. Trevelyan's money. The

more he thought of it all, and the more he discussed the matter with

his wife, the more indignant they became with the truant husband. "I

can't believe," he said, "but what Mr. Bideawhile could make him come

back, if he chose to do his duty."

"But they say that Mr. Trevelyan is in Italy, my dear."

"And if I went to Italy, might I leave you to starve, and take my

income with me?"

"He doesn't leave her quite to starve, my dear."

"But isn't a man bound to stay with his wife? I never heard of such a

thing,--never. And I'm sure that there must be something wrong. A man

can't go away and leave his wife to live with her uncle and aunt. It

isn't right."

"But what can we do?"

Mr. Outhouse was forced to acknowledge that nothing could be done. He

was a man to whom the quiescence of his own childless house was the

one pleasure of his existence. And of that he was robbed because this

wicked madman chose to neglect all his duties, and leave his wife

without a house to shelter her. "Supposing that she couldn't have

come here, what then?" said Mr. Outhouse. "I did tell him, as plain

as words could speak, that we couldn't receive them." "But here they

are," said Mrs. Outhouse, "and here they must remain till my brother

comes to England." "It's the most monstrous thing that I ever heard

of in all my life," said Mr. Outhouse. "He ought to be locked

up;--that's what he ought."

It was hard, and it became harder, when a gentleman, whom Mr.

Outhouse certainly did not wish to see, called upon him about the

latter end of September. Mr. Outhouse was sitting alone, in the

gloomy parlour of his parsonage,--for his own study had been given

up to other things, since this great inroad had been made upon his

family;--he was sitting alone on one Saturday morning, preparing for

the duties of the next day, with various manuscript sermons lying on

the table around him, when he was told that a gentleman had called

to see him. Had Mr. Outhouse been an incumbent at the West-end of

London, or had his maid been a West-end servant, in all probability

the gentleman's name would have been demanded; but Mr. Outhouse was a

man who was not very ready in foreseeing and preventing misfortunes,

and the girl who opened the door was not trained to discreet

usages in such matters. As she announced the fact that there was a

gentleman, she pointed to the door, to show that the gentleman was

there; and before Mr. Outhouse had been able to think whether it

would be prudent for him to make some preliminary inquiry, Colonel

Osborne was in the room. Now, as it happened, these two men had never

hitherto met each other, though one was the brother-in-law of Sir

Marmaduke Rowley, and the other had been his very old friend. "My

name, Mr. Outhouse, is Colonel Osborne," said the visitor, coming

forward, with his hand out. The clergyman, of course, took his hand,

and asked him to be seated. "We have known each other's names very

long," continued the Colonel, "though I do not think we have ever yet

had an opportunity of becoming acquainted."

[Illustration: At St. Diddulph's.]

"No," said Mr. Outhouse; "we have never been acquainted, I believe."

He might have added, that he had no desire whatever to make such

acquaintance; and his manner, over which he himself had no control,

did almost say as much. Indeed, this coming to his house of the

suspected lover of his niece appeared to him to be a heavy addition

to his troubles; for, although he was disposed to take his niece's

part against her husband to any possible length,--even to the locking

up of the husband as a madman, if it were possible,--nevertheless, he

had almost as great a horror of the Colonel, as though the husband's

allegation as to the lover had been true as gospel. Because Trevelyan

had been wrong altogether, Colonel Osborne was not the less wrong.

Because Trevelyan's suspicions were to Mr. Outhouse wicked and

groundless, he did not the less regard the presumed lover to be an

iniquitous roaring lion, going about seeking whom he might devour.

Elderly unmarried men of fashion generally, and especially colonels,

and majors, and members of parliament, and such like, were to him

as black sheep or roaring lions. They were "fruges consumere nati;"

men who stood on club doorsteps talking naughtily and doing nothing,

wearing sleek clothing, for which they very often did not pay, and

never going to church. It seemed to him,--in his ignorance,--that

such men had none of the burdens of this world upon their shoulders,

and that, therefore, they stood in great peril of the burdens of the

next. It was, doubtless, his special duty to deal with men in such

peril;--but those wicked ones with whom he was concerned were those

whom he could reach. Now, the Colonel Osbornes of the earth were

not to be got at by any clergyman, or, as far as Mr. Outhouse could

see, by any means of grace. That story of the rich man and the camel

seemed to him to be specially applicable to such people. How was such

a one as Colonel Osborne to be shewn the way through the eye of a

needle? To Mr. Outhouse, his own brother-in-law, Sir Marmaduke, was

almost of the same class,--for he frequented clubs when in London,

and played whist, and talked of the things of the world,--such as the

Derby, and the levÃ©es, and West-end dinner parties,--as though they

were all in all to him. He, to be sure, was weighted with so large

a family that there might be hope for him. The eye of the needle

could not be closed against him as a rich man; but he savoured of

the West-end, and was worldly, and consorted with such men as this

Colonel Osborne. When Colonel Osborne introduced himself to Mr.

Outhouse, it was almost as though Apollyon had made his way into the

parsonage of St. Diddulph's.

"Mr. Outhouse," said the Colonel, "I have thought it best to come

to you the very moment that I got back to town from Scotland." Mr.

Outhouse bowed, and was bethinking himself slowly what manner of

speech he would adopt. "I leave town again to-morrow for Dorsetshire.

I am going down to my friends, the Brambers, for partridge shooting."

Mr. Outhouse knitted his thick brows, in further inward condemnation.

Partridge shooting! yes;--this was September, and partridge shooting

would be the probable care and occupation of such a man at such a

time. A man without a duty in the world! Perhaps, added to this there

was a feeling that, whereas Colonel Osborne could shoot Scotch grouse

in August, and Dorsetshire partridges in September, and go about

throughout the whole year like a roaring lion, he, Mr. Outhouse,

was forced to remain at St. Diddulph's-in-the-East, from January to

December, with the exception of one small parson's week spent at

Margate, for the benefit of his wife's health. If there was such a

thought, or rather, such a feeling, who will say that it was not

natural? "But I could not go through London without seeing you,"

continued the Colonel. "This is a most frightful infatuation of

Trevelyan!"

"Very frightful, indeed," said Mr. Outhouse.

"And, on my honour as a gentleman, not the slightest cause in the

world."

"You are old enough to be the lady's father," said Mr. Outhouse,

managing in that to get one blow at the gallant Colonel.

"Just so. God bless my soul!" Mr. Outhouse shrunk visibly at this

profane allusion to the Colonel's soul. "Why, I've known her father

ever so many years. As you say, I might almost be her father myself."

As far as age went, such certainly might have been the case, for the

Colonel was older than Sir Marmaduke. "Look here, Mr. Outhouse, here

is a letter I got from Emily--"

"From Mrs. Trevelyan?"

"Yes, from Mrs. Trevelyan; and as well as I can understand, it must

have been sent to me by Trevelyan himself. Did you ever hear of such

a thing? And now I'm told he has gone away, nobody knows where, and

has left her here."

"He has gone away,--nobody knows where."

"Of course, I don't ask to see her."

"It would be imprudent, Colonel Osborne; and could not be permitted

in this house."

"I don't ask it. I have known Emily Trevelyan since she was an

infant, and have always loved her. I'm her godfather, for aught I

know,--though one forgets things of that sort." Mr. Outhouse again

knit his eyebrows and shuddered visibly. "She and I have been fast

friends,--and why not? But, of course, I can't interfere."

"If you ask me, Colonel Osborne, I should say that you can do nothing

in the matter;--except to remain away from her. When Sir Marmaduke is

in England, you can see him, if you please."

"See him;--of course, I shall see him. And, by George, Louis

Trevelyan will have to see him, too! I shouldn't like to have to

stand up before Rowley if I had treated a daughter of his in such a

fashion. You know Rowley, of course?"

"Oh, yes; I know him."

"He's not the sort of man to bear this sort of thing. He'll about

tear Trevelyan in pieces if he gets hold of him. God bless my soul--"

the eyebrows went to work again,--"I never heard of such a thing in

all my life! Does he pay anything for them, Mr. Outhouse?"

This was dreadful to the poor clergyman. "That is a subject which

we surely need not discuss," said he. Then he remembered that

such speech on his part was like to a subterfuge, and he found it

necessary to put himself right. "I am repaid for the maintenance here

of my nieces, and the little boy, and their attendants. I do not know

why the question should be asked, but such is the fact."

"Then they are here by agreement between you and him?"

"No, sir; they are not. There is no such agreement. But I do not like

these interrogatives from a stranger as to matters which should be

private."

"You cannot wonder at my interest, Mr. Outhouse."

"You had better restrain it, sir, till Sir Marmaduke arrives. I shall

then wash my hands of the affair."

"And she is pretty well;--Emily, I mean?"

"Mrs. Trevelyan's health is good."

"Pray tell her though I could not--might not ask to see her, I came

to inquire after her the first moment that I was in London. Pray

tell her how much I feel for her;--but she will know that. When Sir

Marmaduke is here, of course, we shall meet. When she is once more

under her father's wing, she need not be restrained by any absurd

commands from a husband who has deserted her. At present, of course,

I do not ask to see her."

"Of course, you do not, Colonel Osborne."

"And give my love to Nora;--dear little Nora! There can be no reason

why she and I should not shake hands."

"I should prefer that it should not be so in this house," said the

clergyman, who was now standing,--in expectation that his unwelcome

guest would go.

"Very well;--so be it. But you will understand I could not be in

London without coming and asking after them." Then the Colonel at

last took his leave, and Mr. Outhouse was left to his solitude and

his sermons.

Mrs. Outhouse was very angry when she heard of the visit. "Men of

that sort," she said, "think it a fine thing, and talk about it. I

believe the poor girl is as innocent as I am, but he isn't innocent.

He likes it."

"'It is easier,'" said Mr. Outhouse solemnly, "'for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom

of God.'"

"I don't know that he is a rich man," said Mrs. Outhouse; "but he

wouldn't have come here if he had been honest."

Mrs. Trevelyan was told of the visit, and simply said that of course

it was out of the question that she should have seen Colonel Osborne.

Nevertheless she seemed to think it quite natural that he should have

called, and defended him with some energy when her aunt declared that

he had been much to blame. "He is not bound to obey Mr. Trevelyan

because I am," said Emily.

"He is bound to abstain from evil doing," said Mrs. Outhouse; "and he

oughtn't to have come. There; let that be enough, my dear. Your uncle

doesn't wish to have it talked about." Nevertheless it was talked

about between the two sisters. Nora was of opinion that Colonel

Osborne had been wrong, whereas Emily defended him. "It seems to me

to have been the most natural thing in life," said she.

Had Colonel Osborne made the visit as Sir Marmaduke's friend, feeling

himself to be an old man, it might have been natural. When a man has

come to regard himself as being, on the score of age, about as fit to

be a young lady's lover as though he were an old woman instead of an

old man,--which some men will do when they are younger even than was

Colonel Osborne,--he is justified in throwing behind him as utterly

absurd the suspicions of other people. But Colonel Osborne cannot be

defended altogether on that plea.

CHAPTER XLII.

MISS STANBURY AND MR. GIBSON BECOME TWO.

There came to be a very gloomy fortnight at Miss Stanbury's house

in the Close. For two or three days after Mr. Gibson's dismissal at

the hands of Miss Stanbury herself, Brooke Burgess was still in the

house, and his presence saved Dorothy from the full weight of her

aunt's displeasure. There was the necessity of looking after Brooke,

and scolding him, and of praising him to Martha, and of dispraising

him, and of seeing that he had enough to eat, and of watching whether

he smoked in the house, and of quarrelling with him about everything

under the sun, which together so employed Miss Stanbury that she

satisfied herself with glances at Dorothy which were felt to be full

of charges of ingratitude. Dorothy was thankful that it should be so,

and bore the glances with abject submission. And then there was a

great comfort to her in Brooke's friendship. On the second day after

Mr. Gibson had gone she found herself talking to Brooke quite openly

upon the subject. "The fact was, Mr. Burgess, that I didn't really

care for him. I know he's very good and all that, and of course Aunt

Stanbury meant it all for the best. And I would have done it if I

could, but I couldn't." Brooke patted her on the back,--not in the

flesh but in the spirit,--and told her that she was quite right. And

he expressed an opinion too that it was not expedient to yield too

much to Aunt Stanbury. "I would yield to her in anything that was

possible to me," said Dorothy. "I won't," said he; "and I don't think

I should do any good if I did. I like her, and I like her money. But

I don't like either well enough to sell myself for a price."

A great part too of the quarrelling which went on from day to day

between Brooke and Miss Stanbury was due to the difference of their

opinions respecting Dorothy and her suitor. "I believe you put her up

to it," said Aunt Stanbury.

"I neither put her up nor down, but I think that she was quite

right."

"You've robbed her of a husband, and she'll never have another

chance. After what you've done, you ought to take her yourself."

"I shall be ready to-morrow," said Brooke.

"How can you tell such a lie?" said Aunt Stanbury.

But after two or three days Brooke was gone to make a journey through

the distant part of the county, and see the beauties of Devonshire.

He was to be away for a fortnight, and then come back for a day or

two before he returned to London. During that fortnight things did

not go well with poor Dorothy at Exeter.

"I suppose you know your own business best," her aunt said to her

one morning. Dorothy uttered no word of reply. She felt it to be

equally impossible to suggest either that she did or that she did

not know her own business best. "There may be reasons which I don't

understand," exclaimed Aunt Stanbury; "but I should like to know what

it is you expect."

"Why should I expect anything, Aunt Stanbury?"

"That's nonsense. Everybody expects something. You expect to have

your dinner by-and-by,--don't you?"

"I suppose I shall," said Dorothy, to whom it occurred at the moment

that such expectation was justified by the fact that on every day of

her life hitherto some sort of a dinner had come in her way.

"Yes,--and you think it comes from heaven, I suppose."

"It comes by God's goodness and your bounty, Aunt Stanbury."

"And how will it come when I'm dead? Or how will it come if things

should go in such a way that I can't stay here any longer? You don't

ever think of that."

"I should go back to mamma, and Priscilla."

"Psha! As if two mouths were not enough to eat all the meal there is

in that tub. If there was a word to say against the man, I wouldn't

ask you to have him; if he drank, or smoked, or wasn't a gentleman,

or was too poor, or anything you like. But there's nothing. It's all

very well to tell me you don't love him, but why don't you love him?

I don't like a girl to go and throw herself at a man's head, as those

Frenches have done; but when everything has been prepared for you

and made proper, it seems to me to be like turning away from good

victuals." Dorothy could only offer to go home if she had offended

her aunt, and then Miss Stanbury scolded her for making the offer. As

this kind of thing went on at the house in the Close for a fortnight,

during which there was no going out, and no society at home, Dorothy

began to be rather tired of it.

At the end of the fortnight, on the morning of the day on which

Brooke Burgess was expected back, Dorothy, slowly moving into the

sitting room with her usual melancholy air, found Mr. Gibson talking

to her aunt. "There she is herself," said Miss Stanbury, jumping

up briskly, "and now you can speak to her. Of course I have no

authority,--none in the least. But she knows what my wishes are."

And, having so spoken, Miss Stanbury left the room.

It will be remembered that hitherto no word of affection had been

whispered by Mr. Gibson into Dorothy's ears. When he came before to

press his suit, she had been made aware of his coming, and had fled,

leaving her answer with her aunt. Mr. Gibson had then expressed

himself as somewhat injured, in that no opportunity of pouring forth

his own eloquence had been permitted to him. On that occasion Miss

Stanbury, being in a snubbing humour, had snubbed him. She had in

truth scolded him almost as much as she had scolded Dorothy, telling

him that he went about the business in hand as though butter wouldn't

melt in his mouth. "You're stiff as a chair-back," she had said to

him, with a few other compliments, and these amenities had for a

while made him regard the establishment at Heavitree as being, at

any rate, pleasanter than that in the Close. But since that cool

reflection had come. The proposal was not that he should marry Miss

Stanbury, senior, who certainly could be severe on occasions, but

Miss Stanbury, junior, whose temper was as sweet as primroses in

March. That which he would have to take from Miss Stanbury, senior,

was a certain sum of money, as to which her promise was as good as

any bond in the world. Things had come to such a pass with him in

Exeter,--from the hints of his friend the Prebend, from a word or two

which had come to him from the Dean, from certain family arrangements

proposed to him by his mother and sisters,--things had come to such

a pass that he was of a mind that he had better marry some one. He

had, as it were, three strings to his bow. There were the two French

strings, and there was Dorothy. He had not breadth of genius enough

to suggest to himself that yet another woman might be found. There

was a difficulty on the French score even about Miss Stanbury; but

it was clear to him that, failing her, he was due to one of the

two Miss Frenches. Now it was not only that the Miss Frenches were

empty-handed, but he was beginning to think himself that they were

not as nice as they might have been in reference to the arrangement

of their head-gear. Therefore, having given much thought to the

matter, and remembering that he had never yet had play for his own

eloquence with Dorothy, he had come to Miss Stanbury asking that he

might have another chance. It had been borne in upon him that he had

perhaps hitherto regarded Dorothy as too certainly his own since she

had been offered to him by her aunt,--as being a prize that required

no eloquence in the winning; and he thought that if he could have an

opportunity of amending that fault, it might even yet be well with

his suit. So he prepared himself, and asked permission, and now found

himself alone with the young lady.

"When last I was in this house, Miss Stanbury," he began, "I was not

fortunate enough to be allowed an opportunity of pleading my cause to

yourself." Then he paused, and Dorothy was left to consider how best

she might answer him. All that her aunt had said to her had not been

thrown away upon her. The calls upon that slender meal-tub at home

she knew were quite sufficient. And Mr. Gibson was, she believed, a

good man. And how better could she dispose of herself in life? And

what was she that she should scorn the love of an honest gentleman?

She would take him, she thought,--if she could. But then there came

upon her, unconsciously, without work of thought, by instinct rather

than by intelligence, a feeling of the closeness of a wife to her

husband. Looking at it in general she could not deny that it would

be very proper that she should become Mrs. Gibson. But when there

came upon her a remembrance that she would be called upon for

demonstration of her love,--that he would embrace her, and hold her

to his heart, and kiss her,--she revolted and shuddered. She believed

that she did not want to marry any man, and that such a state of

things would not be good for her. "Dear young lady," continued Mr.

Gibson, "you will let me now make up for the loss which I then

experienced?"

"I thought it was better not to give you trouble," said Dorothy.

"Trouble, Miss Stanbury! How could it be trouble? The labour we

delight in physics pain. But to go back to the subject-matter. I hope

you do not doubt that my affection for you is true and honest, and

genuine."

"I don't want to doubt anything, Mr. Gibson; but--"

"You needn't, dearest Miss Stanbury; indeed you needn't. If you

could read my heart you would see written there true love very

plainly;--very plainly. And do you not think it a duty that people

should marry?" It may be surmised that he had here forgotten some

connecting link which should have joined without abruptness the

declaration of his own love, and his social view as to the general

expediency of matrimony. But Dorothy did not discover the hiatus.

"Certainly,--when they like each other, and if their friends think it

proper."

"Our friends think it proper, Miss Stanbury,--may I say Dorothy?--all

of them. I can assure you that on my side you will be welcomed by a

mother and sisters only too anxious to receive you with open arms.

And as regards your own relations, I need hardly allude to your

revered aunt. As to your own mother and sister,--and your brother,

who, I believe, gives his mind chiefly to other things,--I am assured

by Miss Stanbury that no opposition need be feared from them. Is that

true, dearest Dorothy?"

"It is true."

"Does not all that plead in my behalf? Tell me, Dorothy."

"Of course it does."

"And you will be mine?" As far as eloquence could be of service, Mr.

Gibson was sufficiently eloquent. To Dorothy his words appeared good,

and true, and affecting. All their friends did wish it. There were

many reasons why it should be done. If talking could have done it,

his talking was good enough. Though his words were in truth cold,

and affected, and learned by rote, they did not offend her; but his

face offended her; and the feeling was strong within her that if she

yielded, it would soon be close to her own. She couldn't do it. She

didn't love him, and she wouldn't do it. Priscilla would not grudge

her her share out of that meagre meal-tub. Had not Priscilla told her

not to marry the man if she did not love him? She found that she was

further than ever from loving him. She would not do it. "Say that you

will be mine," pleaded Mr. Gibson, coming to her with both his hands

outstretched.

"Mr. Gibson, I can't," she said. She was sobbing now, and was half

choked by tears.

"And why not, Dorothy?"

"I don't know, but I can't. I don't feel that I want to be married at

all."

"But it is honourable."

"It's no use, Mr. Gibson; I can't, and you oughtn't to ask me any

more."

"Must this be your very last answer?"

"What's the good of going over it all again and again? I can't do

it."

"Never, Miss Stanbury?"

"No;--never."

"That is cruel, very cruel. I fear that you doubt my love."

"It isn't cruel, Mr. Gibson. I have a right to have my own feelings,

and I can't. If you please, I'll go away now." Then she went, and

he was left standing alone in the room. His first feeling was one

of anger. Then there came to be mixed with that a good deal of

wonder,--and then a certain amount of doubt. He had during the last

fortnight discussed the matter at great length with a friend, a

gentleman who knew the world, and who took upon himself to say that

he specially understood female nature. It was by advice from this

friend that he had been instigated to plead his own cause. "Of course

she means to accept you," the friend had said. "Why the mischief

shouldn't she? But she has some flimsy, old-fashioned country idea

that it isn't maidenly to give in at first. You tell her roundly that

she must marry you." Mr. Gibson was just reaching that roundness

which his friend had recommended when the lady left him and he was

alone.

Mr. Gibson was no doubt very much in love with Dorothy Stanbury. So

much, we may take for granted. He, at least, believed that he was in

love with her. He would have thought it wicked to propose to her had

he not been in love with her. But with his love was mingled a certain

amount of contempt which had induced him to look upon her as an easy

conquest. He had been perhaps a little ashamed of himself for being

in love with Dorothy, and had almost believed the Frenches when they

had spoken of her as a poor creature, a dependant, one born to be

snubbed,--as a young woman almost without an identity of her own.

When, therefore, she so pertinaciously refused him, he could not but

be angry. And it was natural that he should be surprised. Though he

was to have received a fortune with Dorothy, the money was not hers.

It was to be hers,--or rather theirs,--only if she would accept him.

Mr. Gibson thoroughly understood this point. He knew that Dorothy had

nothing of her own. The proposal made to her was as rich as though

he had sought her down at Nuncombe Putney, with his preferment, plus

the Â£2,000, in his own pocket. And his other advantages were not

hidden from his own eyes. He was a clergyman, well thought of, not

bad-looking certainly, considerably under forty,--a man, indeed, who

ought to have been, in the eyes of Dorothy, such an Orlando as she

would have most desired. He could not therefore but wonder. And then

came the doubt. Could it be possible that all those refusals were

simply the early pulses of hesitating compliance produced by maidenly

reserve? Mr. Gibson's friend had expressed a strong opinion that

almost any young woman would accept any young man if he put his

"com 'ether" upon her strong enough. For Mr. Gibson's friend was an

Irishman. As to Dorothy the friend had not a doubt in the world. Mr.

Gibson, as he stood alone in the room after Dorothy's departure,

could not share his friend's certainty; but he thought it just

possible that the pulsations of maidenly reserve were yet at work. As

he was revolving these points in his mind, Miss Stanbury entered the

room.

"It's all over now," she said.

"As how, Miss Stanbury?"

"As how! She's given you an answer; hasn't she?"

"Yes, Miss Stanbury, she has given me an answer. But it has occurred

to me that young ladies are sometimes,--perhaps a little--"

"She means it, Mr. Gibson; you may take my word for that. She is

quite in earnest. She can take the bit between her teeth as well as

another, though she does look so mild and gentle. She's a Stanbury

all over."

"And must this be the last of it, Miss Stanbury?"

"Upon my word, I don't know what else you can do,--unless you send

the Dean and Chapter to talk her over. She's a pig-headed, foolish

young woman;--but I can't help that. The truth is, you didn't make

enough of her at first, Mr. Gibson. You thought the plum would tumble

into your mouth."

This did seem cruel to the poor man. From the first day in which

the project had been opened to him by Miss Stanbury, he had yielded

a ready acquiescence,--in spite of those ties which he had at

Heavitree,--and had done his very best to fall into her views. "I

don't think that is at all fair, Miss Stanbury," he said, with some

tone of wrath in his voice.

"It's true,--quite true. You always treated her as though she were

something beneath you." Mr. Gibson stood speechless, with his mouth

open. "So you did. I saw it all. And now she's had spirit enough to

resent it. I don't wonder at it; I don't, indeed. It's no good your

standing there any longer. The thing is done."

Such intolerable ill-usage Mr. Gibson had never suffered in his life.

Had he been untrue, or very nearly untrue, to those dear girls at

Heavitree for this? "I never treated her as anything beneath me," he

said at last.

"Yes, you did. Do you think that I don't understand? Haven't I eyes

in my head, and ears? I'm not deaf yet, nor blind. But there's an

end of it. If any young woman ever meant anything, she means it. The

truth is, she don't like you."

Was ever a lover despatched in so uncourteous a way! Then, too, he

had been summoned thither as a lover, had been specially encouraged

to come there as a lover, had been assured of success in a peculiar

way, had had the plum actually offered to him! He had done all that

this old woman had bidden him,--something, indeed, to the prejudice

of his own heart; he had been told that the wife was ready for

him; and now, because this foolish young woman didn't know her own

mind,--this was Mr. Gibson's view of the matter,--he was reviled

and abused, and told that he had behaved badly to the lady. "Miss

Stanbury," he said, "I think that you are forgetting yourself."

"Highty, tighty!" said Miss Stanbury. "Forgetting myself! I shan't

forget you in a hurry, Mr. Gibson."

"Nor I you, Miss Stanbury. Good morning, Miss Stanbury." Mr. Gibson,

as he went from the hall-door into the street, shook the dust off his

feet, and resolved that for the future he and Miss Stanbury should be

two. There would arise great trouble in Exeter, but, nevertheless, he

and Miss Stanbury must be two. He could justify himself in no other

purpose after such conduct as he had received.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LABURNUM COTTAGE.

There had been various letters passing, during the last six weeks,

between Priscilla Stanbury and her brother, respecting the Clock

House at Nuncombe Putney. The ladies at Nuncombe had, certainly, gone

into the Clock House on the clear understanding that the expenses of

the establishment were to be incurred on behalf of Mrs. Trevelyan.

Priscilla had assented to the movement most doubtingly. She had

disliked the idea of taking the charge of a young married woman who

was separated from her husband, and she had felt that a going down

after such an uprising,--a fall from the Clock House back to a

cottage,--would be very disagreeable. She had, however, allowed her

brother's arguments to prevail, and there they were. The annoyance

which she had anticipated from the position of their late guest had

fallen upon them: it had been felt grievously, from the moment in

which Colonel Osborne called at the house; and now that going back

to the cottage must be endured. Priscilla understood that there had

been a settlement between Trevelyan and Stanbury as to the cost of

the establishment so far;--but that must now be at an end. In their

present circumstances she would not continue to live there, and had

already made inquiries as to some humble roof for their shelter. For

herself she would not have cared had it been necessary for her to

hide herself in a hut,--for herself, as regarded any feeling as to

her own standing in the village. For herself, she was ashamed of

nothing. But her mother would suffer, and she knew what Aunt Stanbury

would say to Dorothy. To Dorothy at the present moment, if Dorothy

should think of accepting her suitor, the change might be very

deleterious; but still it should be made. She could not endure

to live there on the very hard-earned proceeds of her brother's

pen,--proceeds which were not only hard-earned, but precarious. She

gave warning to the two servants who had been hired, and consulted

with Mrs. Crocket as to a cottage, and was careful to let it be known

throughout Nuncombe Putney that the Clock House was to be abandoned.

The Clock House had been taken furnished for six months, of which

half were not yet over; but there were other expenses of living there

much greater than the rent, and go she would. Her mother sighed and

assented; and Mrs. Crocket, having strongly but fruitlessly advised

that the Clock House should be inhabited at any rate for the six

months, promised her assistance. "It has been a bad business, Mrs.

Crocket," said Priscilla; "and all we can do now is to get out of

it as well as we can. Every mouthful I eat chokes me while I stay

there." "It ain't good, certainly, miss, not to know as you're all

straight the first thing as you wakes in the morning," said Mrs.

Crocket,--who was always able to feel when she woke that everything

was straight with her.

Then there came the correspondence between Priscilla and Hugh.

Priscilla was at first decided, indeed, but mild in the expression

of her decision. To this, and to one or two other missives

couched in terms of increasing decision, Hugh answered with manly,

self-asserting, overbearing arguments. The house was theirs till

Christmas; between this and then he would think about it. He could

very well afford to keep the house on till next Midsummer, and then

they might see what had best be done. There was plenty of money, and

Priscilla need not put herself into a flutter. In answer to that word

flutter, Priscilla wrote as follows:--

Clock House, September 16, 186--.

DEAR HUGH,

I know very well how good you are, and how generous, but

you must allow me to have feelings as well as yourself. I

will not consent to have myself regarded as a grand lady

out of your earnings. How should I feel when some day I

heard that you had run yourself into debt? Neither mamma

nor I could endure it. Dorothy is provided for now, at any

rate for a time, and what we have is enough for us. You

know I am not too proud to take anything you can spare to

us, when we are ourselves placed in a proper position: but

I could not live in this great house, while you are paying

for everything,--and I will not. Mamma quite agrees with

me, and we shall go out of it on Michaelmas-day. Mrs.

Crocket says she thinks she can get you a tenant for the

three months, out of Exeter,--if not for the whole rent,

at least for part of it. I think we have already got a

small place for eight shillings a week, a little out of

the village, on the road to Cockchaffington. You will

remember it. Old Soames used to live there. Our old

furniture will be just enough. There is a mite of a

garden, and Mrs. Crocket says she thinks we can get it for

seven shillings, or perhaps for six and sixpence, if we

stay there. We shall go in on the 29th. Mrs. Crocket will

see about having somebody to take care of the house.

Your most affectionate sister,

PRISCILLA.

On the receipt of this letter, Hugh proceeded to Nuncombe. At this

time he was making about ten guineas a week, and thought that

he saw his way to further work. No doubt the ten guineas were

precarious;--that is, the "Daily Record" might discontinue his

services to-morrow, if the "Daily Record" thought fit to do so. The

greater part of his earnings came from the "D. R.," and the editor

had only to say that things did not suit any longer, and there would

be an end of it. He was not as a lawyer or a doctor with many clients

who could not all be supposed to withdraw their custom at once; but

leading articles were things wanted with at least as much regularity

as physic or law, and Hugh Stanbury, believing in himself, did not

think it probable that an editor, who knew what he was about, would

withdraw his patronage. He was proud of his weekly ten guineas,

feeling sure that a weekly ten guineas would not as yet have been

his had he stuck to the Bar as a profession. He had calculated, when

Mrs. Trevelyan left the Clock House, that two hundred a year would

enable his mother to continue to reside there, the rent of the place

furnished, or half-furnished, being only eighty; and he thought

that he could pay the two hundred easily. He thought so still, when

he received Priscilla's last letter; but he knew something of the

stubbornness of his dear sister, and he, therefore, went down to

Nuncombe Putney, in order that he might use the violence of his logic

on his mother.

He had heard of Mr. Gibson from both Priscilla and from Dorothy,

and was certainly desirous that "dear old Dolly," as he called her,

should be settled comfortably. But when dear old Dolly wrote to him

declaring that it could not be so, that Mr. Gibson was a very nice

gentleman, of whom she could not say that she was particularly

fond,--"though I really do think that he is an excellent man, and if

it was any other girl in the world, I should recommend her to take

him,"--and that she thought that she would rather not get married, he

wrote to her the kindest brotherly letter in the world, telling her

that she was "a brick," and suggesting to her that there might come

some day some one who would suit her taste better than Mr. Gibson.

"I'm not very fond of parsons myself," said Hugh, "but you must not

tell that to Aunt Stanbury." Then he suggested that as he was going

down to Nuncombe, Dorothy should get leave of absence and come over

and meet him at the Clock House. Dorothy demanded the leave of

absence somewhat imperiously, and was at home at the Clock House when

Hugh arrived.

"And so that little affair couldn't come off?" said Hugh at their

first family meeting.

"It was a pity," said Mrs. Stanbury, plaintively. She had been very

plaintive on the subject. What a thing it would have been for her,

could she have seen Dorothy so well established!

"There's no help for spilt milk, mother," said Hugh. Mrs. Stanbury

shook her head.

"Dorothy was quite right," said Priscilla.

"Of course she was right," said Hugh. "Who doubts her being right?

Bless my soul! What's any girl to do if she don't like a man except

to tell him so? I honour you, Dolly,--not that I ever should have

doubted you. You're too much of a chip of the old block to say you

liked a man when you didn't."

"He is a very excellent young man," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"An excellent fiddlestick, mother. Loving and liking don't go by

excellence. Besides, I don't know about his being any better than

anybody else, just because he's a clergyman."

"A clergyman is more likely to be steady than other men," said the

mother.

"Steady, yes; and as selfish as you please."

"Your father was a clergyman, Hugh."

"I don't mean to say that they are not as good as others; but I won't

have it that they are better. They are always dealing with the Bible,

till they think themselves apostles. But when money comes up, or

comfort, or, for the matter of that either, a pretty woman with a

little money, then they are as human as the rest of us."

If the truth had been told on that occasion, Hugh Stanbury would have

had to own that he had written lately two or three rather stinging

articles in the "Daily Record," as "to the assumed merits and actual

demerits of the clergy of the Church of England." It is astonishing

how fluent a man is on a subject when he has lately delivered himself

respecting it in this fashion.

Nothing on that evening was said about the Clock House, or about

Priscilla's intentions. Priscilla was up early on the next morning,

intending to discuss it in the garden with Hugh before breakfast; but

Hugh was aware of her purpose and avoided her. It was his intention

to speak first to his mother; and though his mother was, as he knew,

very much in awe of her daughter, he thought that he might carry his

point, at any rate for the next three months, by forcing an assent

from the elder lady. So he managed to waylay Mrs. Stanbury before she

descended to the parlour.

"We can't afford it, my dear;--indeed we can't," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"That's not the question, mother. The rent must be paid up to

Christmas, and you can live here as cheap as you can anywhere."

"But Priscilla--"

"Oh, Priscilla! Of course we know what Priscilla says. Priscilla has

been writing to me about it in the most sensible manner in the world;

but what does it all come to? If you are ashamed of taking assistance

from me, I don't know who is to do anything for anybody. You are

comfortable here?"

"Very comfortable; only Priscilla feels--"

"Priscilla is a tyrant, mother; and a very stern one. Just make up

your mind to stay here till Christmas. If I tell you that I can

afford it, surely that ought to be enough." Then Dorothy entered the

room, and Hugh appealed to her. Dorothy had come to Nuncombe only on

the day before, and had not been consulted on the subject. She had

been told that the Clock House was to be abandoned, and had been

taken down to inspect the cottage in which old Soames had lived;--but

her opinion had not been asked. Priscilla had quite made up her mind,

and why should she ask an opinion of any one? But now Dorothy's

opinion was demanded. "It's what I call the rhodomontade of

independence," said Hugh.

"I suppose it is very expensive," suggested Dorothy.

"The house must be paid for," said Hugh;--"and if I say that I've got

the money, is not that enough? A miserable, dirty little place, where

you'll catch your death of lumbago, mother."

"Of course it's not a comfortable house," said Mrs. Stanbury,--who,

of herself, was not at all indifferent to the comforts of her present

residence.

"And it is very dirty," said Dorothy.

"The nastiest place I ever saw in my life. Come, mother; if I say

that I can afford it, ought not that to be enough for you? If you

think you can't trust me, there's an end of everything, you know."

And Hugh, as he thus expressed himself, assumed an air of injured

virtue.

Mrs. Stanbury had very nearly yielded, when Priscilla came in among

them. It was impossible not to continue the conversation, though Hugh

would much have preferred to have forced an assent from his mother

before he opened his mouth on the subject to his sister. "My mother

agrees with me," said he abruptly, "and so does Dolly, that it will

be absurd to move away from this house at present."

"Mamma!" exclaimed Priscilla.

"I don't think I said that, Hugh," murmured Dorothy, softly.

"I'm sure I don't want anything for myself," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"It's I that want it," said Hugh. "And I think that I've a right to

have my wishes respected, so far as that goes."

"My dear Hugh," said Priscilla, "the cottage is already taken, and we

shall certainly go into it. I spoke to Mrs. Crocket yesterday about

a cart for moving the things. I'm sure mamma agrees with me. What

possible business can people have to live in such a house as this

with about twenty-four shillings a week for everything? I won't do

it. And as the thing is settled, it is only making trouble to disturb

it."

"I suppose, Priscilla," said Hugh, "you'll do as your mother

chooses?"

"Mamma chooses to go. She has told me so already."

"You have talked her into it."

"We had better go, Hugh," said Mrs. Stanbury. "I'm sure we had better

go."

"Of course we shall go," said Priscilla. "Hugh is very kind and very

generous, but he is only giving trouble for nothing about this. Had

we not better go down to breakfast?"

And so Priscilla carried the day. They went down to breakfast, and

during the meal Hugh would speak to nobody. When the gloomy meal

was over he took his pipe and walked out to the cottage. It was an

untidy-looking, rickety place, small and desolate, with a pretension

about it of the lowest order, a pretension that was evidently ashamed

of itself. There was a porch. And the one sitting-room had what the

late Mr. Soames had always called his bow window. But the porch

looked as though it were tumbling down, and the bow window looked

as though it were tumbling out. The parlour and the bedroom over it

had been papered;--but the paper was torn and soiled, and in sundry

places was hanging loose. There was a miserable little room called a

kitchen to the right as you entered the door, in which the grate was

worn out, and behind this was a shed with a copper. In the garden

there remained the stumps and stalks of Mr. Soames's cabbages, and

there were weeds in plenty, and a damp hole among some elder bushes

called an arbour. It was named Laburnum Cottage, from a shrub that

grew at the end of the house. Hugh Stanbury shuddered as he stood

smoking among the cabbage-stalks. How could a man ask such a girl

as Nora Rowley to be his wife, whose mother lived in a place like

this? While he was still standing in the garden, and thinking of

Priscilla's obstinacy and his own ten guineas a week, and the sort of

life which he lived in London,--where he dined usually at his club,

and denied himself nothing in the way of pipes, beer, and beefsteaks,

he heard a step behind him, and turning round, saw his elder sister.

"Hugh," she said, "you must not be angry with me."

"But I am angry with you."

"I know you are; but you are unjust. I am doing what I am sure is

right."

"I never saw such a beastly hole as this in all my life."

"I don't think it beastly at all. You'll find that I'll make it nice.

Whatever we want here you shall give us. You are not to think that I

am too proud to take anything at your hands. It is not that."

"It's very like it."

"I have never refused anything that is reasonable, but it is quite

unreasonable that we should go on living in such a place as that, as

though we had three or four hundred a year of our own. If mamma got

used to the comfort of it, it would be hard then upon her to move.

You shall give her what you can afford, and what is reasonable; but

it is madness to think of living there. I couldn't do it."

"You're to have your way at any rate, it seems."

"But you must not quarrel with me, Hugh. Give me a kiss. I don't have

you often with me; and yet you are the only man in the world that I

ever speak to, or even know. I sometimes half think that the bread is

so hard and the water so bitter, that life will become impossible. I

try to get over it; but if you were to go away from me in anger, I

should be so beaten for a week or two that I could do nothing."

"Why won't you let me do anything?"

"I will;--whatever you please. But kiss me." Then he kissed her, as

he stood among Mr. Soames's cabbage-stalks. "Dear Hugh; you are such

a god to me!"

"You don't treat me like a divinity."

"But I think of you as one when you are absent. The gods were never

obeyed when they showed themselves. Let us go and have a walk.

Come;--shall we get as far as Ridleigh Mill?" Then they started

together, and all unpleasantness was over between them when they

returned to the Clock House.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BROOKE BURGESS TAKES LEAVE OF EXETER.

[Illustration]

The time had arrived at which Brooke Burgess was to leave Exeter. He

had made his tour through the county, and returned to spend his two

last nights at Miss Stanbury's house. When he came back Dorothy was

still at Nuncombe, but she arrived in the Close the day before his

departure. Her mother and sister had wished her to stay at Nuncombe.

"There is a bed for you now, and a place to be comfortable in,"

Priscilla had said, laughing, "and you may as well see the last of

us." But Dorothy declared that she had named a day to her aunt, and

that she would not break her engagement. "I suppose you can stay if

you like," Priscilla had urged. But Dorothy was of opinion that she

ought not to stay. She said not a word about Brooke Burgess; but it

may be that it would have been matter of regret to her not to shake

hands with him once more. Brooke declared to her that had she not

come back he would have gone over to Nuncombe to see her; but Dorothy

did not consider herself entitled to believe that.

On the morning of the last day Brooke went over to his uncle's

office. "I've come to say good-bye, Uncle Barty," he said.

"Good-bye, my boy. Take care of yourself."

"I mean to try."

"You haven't quarrelled with the old woman,--have you?" said Uncle

Barty.

"Not yet;--that is to say, not to the knife."

"And you still believe that you are to have her money?"

"I believe nothing one way or the other. You may be sure of this,--I

shall never count it mine till I've got it; and I shall never make

myself so sure of it as to break my heart because I don't get it. I

suppose I've got as good a right to it as anybody else, and I don't

see why I shouldn't take it if it come in my way."

"I don't think it ever will," said the old man, after a pause.

"I shall be none the worse," said Brooke.

"Yes, you will. You'll be a broken-hearted man. And she means to

break your heart. She does it on purpose. She has no more idea of

leaving you her money than I have. Why should she?"

"Simply because she takes the fancy."

"Fancy! Believe me, there is very little fancy about it. There isn't

one of the name she wouldn't ruin if she could. She'd break all our

hearts if she could get at them. Look at me and my position. I'm

little more than a clerk in the concern. By God;--I'm not so well off

as a senior clerk in many a bank. If there came a bad time, I must

lose as the others would lose;--but a clerk never loses. And my share

in the business is almost a nothing. It's just nothing,--compared to

what it would have been, only for her."

Brooke had known that his uncle was a disappointed, or at least

a discontented man; but he had never known much of the old man's

circumstances, and certainly had not expected to hear him speak in

the strain that he had now used. He had heard often that his Uncle

Barty disliked Miss Stanbury, and had not been surprised at former

sharp, biting little words spoken in reference to that lady's

character. But he had not expected such a tirade of abuse as the

banker had now poured out. "Of course I know nothing about the bank,"

said he; "but I did not suppose that she had had anything to do with

it."

"Where do you think the money came from that she has got? Did

you ever hear that she had anything of her own? She never had a

penny,--never a penny. It came out of this house. It is the capital

on which this business was founded, and on which it ought to be

carried on to this day. My brother had thrown her off; by heavens,

yes;--had thrown her off. He had found out what she was, and had got

rid of her."

"But he left her his money."

"Yes;--she got near him when he was dying, and he did leave her his

money;--his money, and my money, and your father's money."

"He could have given her nothing, Uncle Barty, that wasn't his own."

"Of course that's true;--it's true in one way. You might say the same

of a man who was cozened into leaving every shilling away from his

own children. I wasn't in Exeter when the will was made. We none

of us were here. But she was here; and when we came to see him die,

there we found her. She had had her revenge upon him, and she means

to have it on all of us. I don't believe she'll ever leave you a

shilling, Brooke. You'll find her out yet, and you'll talk of her to

your nephews as I do to you."

Brooke made some ordinary answer to this, and bade his uncle adieu.

He had allowed himself to entertain a half chivalrous idea that he

could produce a reconciliation between Miss Stanbury and his uncle

Barty; and since he had been at Exeter he had said a word, first to

the one and then to the other, hinting at the subject; but his hints

had certainly not been successful. As he walked from the bank into

the High Street he could not fail to ask himself whether there were

any grounds for the terrible accusations which he had just heard from

his uncle's lips. Something of the same kind, though in form much

less violent, had been repeated to him very often by others of the

family. Though he had as a boy known Miss Stanbury well, he had been

taught to regard her as an ogress. All the Burgesses had regarded

Miss Stanbury as an ogress since that unfortunate will had come

to light. But she was an ogress from whom something might be

gained,--and the ogress had still persisted in saying that a Burgess

should be her heir. It had therefore come to pass that Brooke had

been brought up half to revere her and half to abhor her. "She is a

dreadful woman," said his branch of the family, "who will not scruple

at anything evil. But as it seems that you may probably reap the

advantage of the evil that she does, it will become you to put up

with her iniquity." As he had become old enough to understand the

nature of her position, he had determined to judge for himself;--but

his judgment hitherto simply amounted to this,--that Miss Stanbury

was a very singular old woman, with a kind heart and good instincts,

but so capricious withal that no sensible man would risk his

happiness on expectations formed on her promises. Guided by this

opinion, he had resolved to be attentive to her and, after a certain

fashion, submissive; but certainly not to become her slave. She had

thrown over her nephew. She was constantly complaining to him of her

niece. Now and again she would say a very bitter word to him about

himself. When he had left Exeter on his little excursion, no one was

so much in favour with her as Mr. Gibson. On his return he found that

Mr. Gibson had been altogether discarded, and was spoken of in terms

of almost insolent abuse. "If I were ever so humble to her," he had

said to himself, "it would do no good; and there is nothing I hate so

much as humility." He had thus determined to take the goods the gods

provided, should it ever come to pass that such godlike provision was

laid before him out of Miss Stanbury's coffers;--but not to alter

his mode of life or put himself out of his way in obedience to her

behests, as a man might be expected to do who was destined to receive

so rich a legacy. Upon this idea he had acted, still believing the

old woman to be good, but believing at the same time that she was

very capricious. Now he had heard what his Uncle Bartholomew Burgess

had had to say upon the matter, and he could not refrain from asking

himself whether his uncle's accusations were true.

In a narrow passage between the High Street and the Close he met Mr.

Gibson. There had come to be that sort of intimacy between the two

men which grows from closeness of position rather than from any

social desire on either side, and it was natural that Burgess should

say a word of farewell. On the previous evening Miss Stanbury

had relieved her mind by turning Mr. Gibson into ridicule in her

description to Brooke of the manner in which the clergyman had

carried on his love affair; and she had at the same time declared

that Mr. Gibson had been most violently impertinent to herself. He

knew, therefore, that Miss Stanbury and Mr. Gibson had become two,

and would on this occasion have passed on without a word relative

to the old lady had Mr. Gibson allowed him to do so. But Mr. Gibson

spoke his mind freely.

"Off to-morrow, are you?" he said. "Good-bye. I hope we may meet

again; but not in the same house, Mr. Burgess."

"There or anywhere I shall be very happy," said Brooke.

"Not there, certainly. While you were absent Miss Stanbury treated me

in such a way that I shall certainly never put my foot in her house

again."

"Dear me! I thought that you and she were such great friends."

"I knew her very well, of course;--and respected her. She is a good

churchwoman, and is charitable in the city; but she has got such a

tongue in her head that there is no bearing it when she does what she

calls giving you a bit of her mind."

"She has been indulgent to me, and has not given me much of it."

"Your time will come, I've no doubt," continued Mr. Gibson.

"Everybody has always told me that it would be so. Even her oldest

friends knew it. You ask Mrs. MacHugh, or Mrs. French, at Heavitree."

"Mrs. French!" said Brooke, laughing. "That would hardly be fair

evidence."

"Why not? I don't know a better judge of character in all Exeter than

Mrs. French. And she and Miss Stanbury have been intimate all their

lives. Ask your uncle at the bank."

"My uncle and Miss Stanbury never were friends," said Brooke.

"Ask Hugh Stanbury what he thinks of her. But don't suppose I want

to say a word against her. I wouldn't for the world do such a thing.

Only, as we've met there and all that, I thought it best to let you

know that she had treated me in such a way, and has been altogether

so violent, that I never will go there again." So saying, Mr.

Gibson passed on, and was of opinion that he had spoken with great

generosity of the old woman who had treated him so badly.

In the afternoon Brooke Burgess went over to the further end of the

Close, and called on Mrs. MacHugh; and from thence he walked across

to Heavitree, and called on the Frenches. It may be doubted whether

he would have been so well behaved to these ladies had they not been

appealed to by Mr. Gibson as witnesses to the character of Miss

Stanbury. He got very little from Mrs. MacHugh. That lady was kind

and cordial, and expressed many wishes that she might see him again

in Exeter. When he said a few words about Mr. Gibson, Mrs. MacHugh

only laughed, and declared that the gentleman would soon find a

plaister for that sore. "There are more fishes than one in the sea,"

she said.

"But I'm afraid they've quarrelled, Mrs. MacHugh."

"So they tell me. What should we have to talk about here if somebody

didn't quarrel sometimes? She and I ought to get up a quarrel for the

good of the public;--only they know that I never can quarrel with

anybody. I never see anybody interesting enough to quarrel with." But

Mrs. MacHugh said nothing about Miss Stanbury, except that she sent

over a message with reference to a rubber of whist for the next night

but one.

He found the two French girls sitting with their mother, and they all

expressed their great gratitude to him for coming to say good-bye

before he went. "It's so very nice of you, Mr. Burgess," said

Camilla, "and particularly just at present."

"Yes, indeed," said Arabella, "because you know things have been so

unpleasant."

"My dears, never mind about that," said Mrs. French. "Miss Stanbury

has meant everything for the best, and it is all over now."

"I don't know what you mean by its being all over, mamma," said

Camilla. "As far as I can understand, it has never been begun."

"My dear, the least said the soonest mended," said Mrs. French.

"That's of course, mamma," said Camilla; "but yet one can't hold

one's tongue altogether. All the city is talking about it, and I dare

say Mr. Burgess has heard as much as anybody else."

"I've heard nothing at all," said Brooke.

"Oh yes, you have," continued Camilla. Arabella conceived herself

at this moment to be situated in so delicate a position, that it

was best that her sister should talk about it, and that she herself

should hold her tongue,--with the exception, perhaps, of a hint here

and there which might be of assistance; for Arabella completely

understood that the prize was now to be hers, if the prize could be

rescued out of the Stanbury clutches. She was aware,--no one better

aware,--how her sister had interfered with her early hopes, and was

sure, in her own mind, that all her disappointment had come from

fratricidal rivalry on the part of Camilla. It had never, however,

been open to her to quarrel with Camilla. There they were, linked

together, and together they must fight their battles. As two pigs may

be seen at the same trough, each striving to take the delicacies of

the banquet from the other, and yet enjoying always the warmth of

the same dunghill in amicable contiguity, so had these young ladies

lived in sisterly friendship, while each was striving to take a

husband from the other. They had understood the position, and,

though for years back they had talked about Mr. Gibson, they had

never quarrelled; but now, in these latter days of the Stanbury

interference, there had come tacitly to be something of an

understanding between them that, if any fighting were still possible

on the subject, one must be put forward and the other must yield.

There had been no spoken agreement, but Arabella quite understood

that she was to be put forward. It was for her to take up the

running, and to win, if possible, against the Stanbury filly. That

was her view, and she was inclined to give Camilla credit for acting

in accordance with it with honesty and zeal. She felt, therefore,

that her words on the present occasion ought to be few. She sat back

in her corner of the sofa, and was intent on her work, and shewed by

the pensiveness of her brow that there were thoughts within her bosom

of which she was not disposed to speak. "You must have heard a great

deal," said Camilla, laughing. "You must know how poor Mr. Gibson has

been abused, because he wouldn't--"

"Camilla, don't be foolish," said Mrs. French.

"Because he wouldn't what?" asked Brooke. "What ought he to have done

that he didn't do?"

"I don't know anything about ought," said Camilla. "That's a matter

of taste altogether."

"I'm the worst hand in the world at a riddle," said Brooke.

"How sly you are," continued Camilla, laughing; "as if dear Aunt

Stanbury hadn't confided all her hopes to you."

"Camilla, dear,--don't," said Arabella.

"But when a gentleman is hunted, and can't be caught, I don't think

he ought to be abused to his face."

"But who hunted him, and who abused him?" asked Brooke.

"Mind, I don't mean to say a word against Miss Stanbury, Mr. Burgess.

We've known her and loved her all our lives;--haven't we, mamma?"

"And respected her," said Arabella.

"Quite so," continued Camilla. "But you know, Mr. Burgess, that she

likes her own way."

"I don't know anybody that does not," said Brooke.

"And when she's disappointed, she shows it. There's no doubt she is

disappointed now, Mr. Burgess."

"What's the good of going on, Camilla?" said Mrs. French. Arabella

sat silent in her corner, with a conscious glow of satisfaction, as

she reflected that the joint disappointment of the elder and the

younger Miss Stanbury had been caused by a tender remembrance of her

own charms. Had not dear Mr. Gibson told her, in the glowing language

of truth, that there was nothing further from his thoughts than the

idea of taking Dorothy Stanbury for his wife?

"Well, you know," continued Camilla, "I think that when a person

makes an attempt, and comes by the worst of it, that person should

put up with the defeat, and not say all manner of ill-natured things.

Everybody knows that a certain gentleman is very intimate in this

house."

"Don't, dear," said Arabella, in a whisper.

"Yes, I shall," said Camilla. "I don't know why people should hold

their tongues, when other people talk so loudly. I don't care a bit

what anybody says about the gentleman and us. We have known him for

ever so many years, and mamma is very fond of him."

"Indeed I am, Camilla," said Mrs. French.

"And for the matter of that, so am I,--very," said Camilla, laughing

bravely. "I don't care who knows it."

"Don't be so silly, child," said Arabella. Camilla was certainly

doing her best, and Arabella was grateful.

"We don't care what people may say," continued Camilla again.

"Of course we heard, as everybody else heard too, that a certain

gentleman was to be married to a certain lady. It was nothing to us

whether he was married or not."

"Nothing at all," said Arabella.

"We never spoke ill of the young lady. We did not interfere. If the

gentleman liked the young lady, he was quite at liberty to marry

her, as far as we were concerned. We had been in the habit of seeing

him here, almost as a brother, and perhaps we might feel that a

connection with that particular young lady would take him from us;

but we never hinted so much even as that,--to him or to anyone else.

Why should we? It was nothing to us. Now it turns out that the

gentleman never meant anything of the kind, whereupon he is pretty

nearly kicked out of the house, and all manner of ill-natured things

are said about us everywhere." By this time Camilla had become quite

excited, and was speaking with much animation.

"How can you be so foolish, Camilla?" said Arabella.

"Perhaps I am foolish," said Camilla, "to care what anybody says."

"What can it all be to Mr. Burgess?" said Mrs. French.

"Only this, that as we all like Mr. Burgess, and as he is almost one

of the family in the Close, I think he ought to know why we are not

quite so cordial as we used to be. Now that the matter is over I have

no doubt things will get right again. And as for the young lady, I'm

sure we feel for her. We think it was the aunt who was indiscreet."

"And then she has such a tongue," said Arabella.

Our friend Brooke, of course, knew the whole truth;--knew the nature

of Mr. Gibson's failure, and knew also how Dorothy had acted in the

affair. He was inclined, moreover, to believe that the ladies who

were now talking to him were as well instructed on the subject as

was he himself. He had heard, too, of the ambition of the two young

ladies now before him, and believed that that ambition was not yet

dead. But he did not think it incumbent on him to fight a battle even

on behalf of Dorothy. He might have declared that Dorothy, at least,

had not been disappointed, but he thought it better to be silent

about Dorothy. "Yes," he said, "Miss Stanbury has a tongue; but I

think it speaks as much good as it does evil, and perhaps that is a

great deal to say for any lady's tongue."

"We never speak evil of anybody," said Camilla; "never. It is a rule

with us." Then Brooke took his leave, and the three ladies were

cordial and almost affectionate in their farewell greetings.

Brooke was to start on the following morning before anybody would

be up except Martha, and Miss Stanbury was very melancholy during

the evening. "We shall miss him very much; shall we not?" she said,

appealing to Dorothy. "I am sure you will miss him very much," said

Dorothy. "We are so stupid here alone," said Miss Stanbury. When they

had drank their tea, she sat nearly silent for half an hour, and then

summoned him up into her own room. "So you are going, Brooke?" she

said.

"Yes; I must go now. They would dismiss me if I stayed an hour

longer."

"It was good of you to come to the old woman; and you must let me

hear of you from time to time."

"Of course I'll write."

"And, Brooke,--"

"What is it, Aunt Stanbury?"

"Do you want any money, Brooke?"

"No;--none, thank you. I've plenty for a bachelor."

"When you think of marrying, Brooke, mind you tell me."

"I'll be sure to tell you;--but I can't promise yet when that will

be." She said nothing more to him, though she paused once more as

though she were going to speak. She kissed him and bade him good-bye,

saying that she would not go down-stairs again that evening. He was

to tell Dorothy to go to bed. And so they parted.

But Dorothy did not go to bed for an hour after that. When Brooke

came down into the parlour with his message she intended to go at

once, and put up her work, and lit her candle, and put out her hand

to him, and said good-bye to him. But, for all that, she remained

there for an hour with him. At first she said very little, but by

degrees her tongue was loosened, and she found herself talking with a

freedom which she could hardly herself understand. She told him how

thoroughly she believed her aunt to be a good woman,--how sure she

was that her aunt was at any rate honest. "As for me," said Dorothy,

"I know that I have displeased her about Mr. Gibson;--and I would go

away, only that I think she would be so desolate." Then Brooke begged

her never to allow the idea of leaving Miss Stanbury to enter her

head. Because Miss Stanbury was capricious, he said, not on that

account should her caprices either be indulged or permitted. That

was his doctrine respecting Miss Stanbury, and he declared that, as

regarded himself, he would never be either disrespectful to her or

submissive. "It is a great mistake," he said, "to think that anybody

is either an angel or a devil." When Dorothy expressed an opinion

that with some people angelic tendencies were predominant, and with

others diabolic tendencies, he assented; but declared that it was not

always easy to tell the one tendency from the other. At last, when

Dorothy had made about five attempts to go, Mr. Gibson's name was

mentioned. "I am very glad that you are not going to be Mrs. Gibson,"

said he.

[Illustration: Brooke Burgess takes his leave.]

"I don't know why you should be glad."

"Because I should not have liked your husband,--not as your husband."

"He is an excellent man, I'm sure," said Dorothy.

"Nevertheless I am very glad. But I did not think you would accept

him, and I congratulate you on your escape. You would have been

nothing to me as Mrs. Gibson."

"Shouldn't I?" said Dorothy, not knowing what else to say.

"But now I think we shall always be friends."

"I'm sure I hope so, Mr. Burgess. But indeed I must go now. It is

ever so late, and you will hardly get any sleep. Good night." Then he

took her hand, and pressed it very warmly, and referring to a promise

before made to her, he assured her that he would certainly make

acquaintance with her brother as soon as he was back in London.

Dorothy, as she went up to bed, was more than ever satisfied with

herself, in that she had not yielded in reference to Mr. Gibson.

CHAPTER XLV.

TREVELYAN AT VENICE.

Trevelyan passed on moodily and alone from Turin to Venice, always

expecting letters from Bozzle, and receiving from time to time the

dispatches which that functionary forwarded to him, as must be

acknowledged, with great punctuality. For Mr. Bozzle did his work,

not only with a conscience, but with a will. He was now, as he had

declared more than once, altogether devoted to Mr. Trevelyan's

interest; and as he was an active, enterprising man, always on the

alert to be doing something, and as he loved the work of writing

dispatches, Trevelyan received a great many letters from Bozzle. It

is not exaggeration to say that every letter made him for the time

a very wretched man. This ex-policeman wrote of the wife of his

bosom,--of her who had been the wife of his bosom, and who was the

mother of his child, who was at this very time the only woman whom he

loved,--with an entire absence of delicacy. Bozzle would have thought

reticence on his part to be dishonest. We remember Othello's demand

of Iago. That was the demand which Bozzle understood that Trevelyan

had made of him, and he was minded to obey that order. But Trevelyan,

though he had in truth given the order, was like Othello also in

this,--that he would have preferred before all the prizes of the

world to have had proof brought home to him exactly opposite to that

which he demanded. But there was nothing so terrible to him as the

grinding suspicion that he was to be kept in the dark. Bozzle could

find out facts. Therefore he gave, in effect, the same order that

Othello gave;--and Bozzle went to work determined to obey it. There

came many dispatches to Venice, and at last there came one, which

created a correspondence which shall be given here at length. The

first is a letter from Mr. Bozzle to his employer:--

55, Stony Walk, Union Street, Borough,

September 29, 186--, 4.30 P.M.

HOND. SIR,

Since I wrote yesterday morning, something has occurred

which, it may be, and I think it will, will help to bring

this melancholy affair to a satisfactory termination and

conclusion. I had better explain, Mr. Trewilyan, how I

have been at work from the beginning about watching the

Colonel. I couldn't do nothing with the porter at the

Albany, which he is always mostly muzzled with beer, and

he wouldn't have taken my money, not on the square. So,

when it was tellegrammed to me as the Colonel was on the

move in the North, I put on two boys as knows the Colonel,

at eighteenpence a day, at each end, one Piccadilly end,

and the other Saville Row end, and yesterday morning,

as quick as ever could be, after the Limited Express

Edinburgh Male Up was in, there comes the Saville Row End

Boy here to say as the Colonel was lodged safe in his

downey. Then I was off immediate myself to St. Diddulph's,

because I knows what it is to trust to Inferiors when

matters gets delicate. Now, there hadn't been no letters

from the Colonel, nor none to him as I could make out,

though that mightn't be so sure. She might have had 'em

addressed to A. Z., or the like of that, at any of the

Post-offices as was distant, as nobody could give the

notice to 'em all. Barring the money, which I know ain't

an object when the end is so desirable, it don't do to be

too ubiketous, because things will go astray. But I've

kept my eye uncommon open, and I don't think there have

been no letters since that last which was sent, Mr.

Trewilyan, let any of 'em, parsons, or what not, say what

they will. And I don't see as parsons are better than

other folk when they has to do with a lady as likes her

fancy-man.

Trevelyan, when he had read as far as this, threw down the letter and

tore his hair in despair. "My wife," he exclaimed, "Oh, my wife!" But

it was essential that he should read Bozzle's letter, and he

persevered.

Well; I took to the ground myself as soon as ever I heard

that the Colonel was among us, and I hung out at the Full

Moon. They had been quite on the square with me at the

Full Moon, which I mention, because, of course, it has

to be remembered, and it do come up as a hitem. And I'm

proud, Mr. Trewilyan, as I did take to the ground myself;

for what should happen but I see the Colonel as large as

life ringing at the parson's bell at 1.47 p.m. He was let

in at 1.49, and he was let out at 2.17. He went away in a

cab which it was kept, and I followed him till he was put

down at the Arcade, and I left him having his 'ed washed

and greased at Trufitt's rooms, half-way up. It was a

wonder to me when I see this, Mr. Trewilyan, as he didn't

have his 'ed done first, as they most of 'em does when

they're going to see their ladies; but I couldn't make

nothing of that, though I did try to put too and too

together, as I always does.

What he did at the parson's, Mr. Trewilyan, I won't

say I saw, and I won't say I know. It's my opinion the

young woman there isn't on the square, though she's

been remembered too, and is a hitem of course. And, Mr.

Trewilyan, it do go against the grain with me when they're

remembered and ain't on the square. I doesn't expect too

much of Human Nature, which is poor, as the saying goes;

but when they're remembered and ain't on the square after

that, it's too bad for Human Nature. It's more than poor.

It's what I calls beggarly.

He ain't been there since, Mr. Trewilyan, and he goes out

of town to-morrow by the 1.15 p.m. express to Bridport. So

he lets on; but of course I shall see to that. That he's

been at St. Diddulph's, in the house from 1.47 to 2.17,

you may take as a fact. There won't be no shaking of that,

because I have it in my mem. book, and no Counsel can get

the better of it. Of course he went there to see her, and

it's my belief he did. The young woman as was remembered

says he didn't, but she isn't on the square. They never is

when a lady wants to see her gentleman, though they comes

round afterwards, and tells up everything when it comes

before his ordinary lordship.

If you ask me, Mr. Trewilyan, I don't think it's ripe yet

for the court, but we'll have it ripe before long. I'll

keep a look-out, because it's just possible she may leave

town. If she do, I'll be down upon them together, and no

mistake.

Yours most respectful,

S. BOZZLE.

Every word in the letter had been a dagger to Trevelyan, and yet he

felt himself to be under an obligation to the man who had written

it. No one else would or could make facts known to him. If she were

innocent, let him know that she were innocent, and he would proclaim

her innocence, and believe in her innocence,--and sacrifice himself

to her innocence, if such sacrifice were necessary. But if she were

guilty, let him also know that. He knew how bad it was, all that

bribing of postmen and maidservants, who took his money, and her

money also, very likely. It was dirt, all of it. But who had put him

into the dirt? His wife had, at least, deceived him,--had deceived

him and disobeyed him, and it was necessary that he should know the

facts. Life without a Bozzle would now have been to him a perfect

blank.

The Colonel had been to the parsonage at St. Diddulph's, and had

been admitted! As to that he had no doubt. Nor did he really doubt

that his wife had seen the visitor. He had sent his wife first

into a remote village on Dartmoor, and there she had been visited

by her--lover! How was he to use any other word? Iago;--oh, Iago!

The pity of it, Iago! Then, when she had learned that this was

discovered, she had left the retreat in which he had placed

her,--without permission from him,--and had taken herself to

the house of a relative of hers. Here she was visited again by

her--lover! Oh, Iago; the pity of it, Iago! And then there had been

between them an almost constant correspondence. So much he had

ascertained as fact; but he did not for a moment believe that Bozzle

had learned all the facts. There might be correspondence, or even

visits, of which Bozzle could learn nothing. How could Bozzle know

where Mrs. Trevelyan was during all those hours which Colonel Osborne

passed in London? That which he knew, he knew absolutely, and on

that he could act; but there was, of course, much of which he knew

nothing. Gradually the truth would unveil itself, and then he would

act. He would tear that Colonel into fragments, and throw his wife

from him with all the ignominy which the law made possible to him.

But in the meantime he wrote a letter to Mr. Outhouse. Colonel

Osborne, after all that had been said, had been admitted at the

parsonage, and Trevelyan was determined to let the clergyman know

what he thought about it. The oftener he turned the matter in his

mind, as he walked slowly up and down the piazza of St. Mark, the

more absurd it appeared to him to doubt that his wife had seen the

man. Of course she had seen him. He walked there nearly the whole

night, thinking of it, and as he dragged himself off at last to his

inn, had almost come to have but one desire,--namely, that he should

find her out, that the evidence should be conclusive, that it should

be proved, and so brought to an end. Then he would destroy her, and

destroy that man,--and afterwards destroy himself, so bitter to him

would be his ignominy. He almost revelled in the idea of the tragedy

he would make. It was three o'clock before he was in his bedroom, and

then he wrote his letter to Mr. Outhouse before he took himself to

his bed. It was as follows:--

Venice, Oct. 4, 186--.

SIR,

Information of a certain kind, on which I can place a

firm reliance, has reached me, to the effect that Colonel

Osborne has been allowed to visit at your house during

the sojourn of my wife under your roof. I will thank you

to inform me whether this be true; as, although I am

confident of my facts, it is necessary, in reference to my

ulterior conduct, that I should have from you either an

admission or a denial of my assertion. It is of course

open to you to leave my letter unanswered. Should you

think proper to do so, I shall know also how to deal with

that fact.

As to your conduct in admitting Colonel Osborne into your

house while my wife is there,--after all that has passed,

and all that you know that has passed,--I am quite unable

to speak with anything like moderation of feeling. Had the

man succeeded in forcing himself into your residence, you

should have been the first to give me notice of it. As it

is, I have been driven to ascertain the fact from other

sources. I think that you have betrayed the trust that a

husband has placed in you, and that you will find from the

public voice that you will be regarded as having disgraced

yourself as a clergyman.

In reference to my wife herself, I would wish her to know,

that after what has now taken place, I shall not feel

myself justified in leaving our child longer in her hands,

even tender as are his years. I shall take steps for

having him removed. What further I shall do to vindicate

myself, and extricate myself as far as may be possible

from the slough of despond in which I have been submerged,

she and you will learn in due time.

Your obedient servant,

L. TREVELYAN.

A letter addressed "poste restante, Venice," will reach me

here.

If Trevelyan was mad when he wrote this letter, Mr. Outhouse was

very nearly as mad when he read it. He had most strongly desired

to have nothing to do with his wife's niece when she was separated

from her husband. He was a man honest, charitable, and sufficiently

affectionate; but he was timid, and disposed to think ill of those

whose modes of life were strange to him. Actuated by these feelings,

he would have declined to offer the hospitality of his roof to Mrs.

Trevelyan, had any choice been left to him. But there had been no

choice. She had come thither unasked, with her boy and baggage, and

he could not send her away. His wife had told him that it was his

duty to protect these women till their father came, and he recognised

the truth of what his wife said. There they were, and there they must

remain throughout the winter. It was hard upon him,--especially as

the difficulties and embarrassments as to money were so disagreeable

to him;--but there was no help for it. His duty must be done though

it were ever so painful. Then that horrid Colonel had come. And now

had come this letter, in which he was not only accused of being an

accomplice between his married niece and her lover, but was also

assured that he should be held up to public ignominy and disgrace.

Though he had often declared that Trevelyan was mad, he would not

remember that now. Such a letter as he had received should have been

treated by him as the production of a madman. But he was not sane

enough himself to see the matter in that light. He gnashed his teeth,

and clenched his fist, and was almost beside himself as he read the

letter a second time.

There had been a method in Trevelyan's madness; for though he had

declared to himself that without doubt Bozzle had been right in

saying that as the Colonel had been at the parsonage, therefore, as a

certainty, Mrs. Trevelyan had met the Colonel there, yet he had not

so stated in his letter. He had merely asserted that Colonel Osborne

had been at the house, and had founded his accusation upon that

alleged fact. The alleged fact had been in truth a fact. So far

Bozzle had been right. The Colonel had been at the parsonage; and the

reader knows how far Mr. Outhouse had been to blame for his share

in the matter! He rushed off to his wife with the letter, declaring

at first that Mrs. Trevelyan, Nora, and the child, and the servant,

should be sent out of the house at once. But at last Mrs. Outhouse

succeeded in showing him that he would not be justified in ill-using

them because Trevelyan had ill-used him. "But I will write to him,"

said Mr. Outhouse. "He shall know what I think about it." And he did

write his letter that day, in spite of his wife's entreaties that

he would allow the sun to set upon his wrath. And his letter was as

follows:--

St. Diddulph's, October 8, 186--.

SIR,

I have received your letter of the 4th, which is more

iniquitous, unjust, and ungrateful, than anything I ever

before saw written. I have been surprised from the first

at your gross cruelty to your unoffending wife; but even

that seems to me more intelligible than your conduct in

writing such words as those which you have dared to send

to me.

For your wife's sake, knowing that she is in a great

degree still in your power, I will condescend to tell

you what has happened. When Mrs. Trevelyan found herself

constrained to leave Nuncombe Putney by your aspersions

on her character, she came here, to the protection of her

nearest relatives within reach, till her father and mother

should be in England. Sorely against my will I received

them into my home, because they had been deprived of other

shelter by the cruelty or madness of him who should have

been their guardian. Here they are, and here they shall

remain till Sir Marmaduke Rowley arrives. The other day,

on the 29th of September, Colonel Osborne, who is their

father's old friend, called, not on them, but on me. I may

truly say that I did not wish to see Colonel Osborne. They

did not see him, nor did he ask to see them. If his coming

was a fault,--and I think it was a fault,--they were

not implicated in it. He came, remained a few minutes,

and went without seeing any one but myself. That is the

history of Colonel Osborne's visit to my house.

I have not thought fit to show your letter to your wife,

or to make her acquainted with this further proof of your

want of reason. As to the threats which you hold out

of removing her child from her, you can of course do

nothing except by law. I do not think that even you will

be sufficiently audacious to take any steps of that

description. Whatever protection the law may give her

and her child from your tyranny and misconduct cannot be

obtained till her father shall be here.

I have only further to request that you will not address

any further communication to me. Should you do so, it will

be refused.

Yours in deep indignation,

OLIPHANT OUTHOUSE.

Trevelyan had also written two other letters to England, one to Mr.

Bideawhile and the other to Bozzle. In the former he acquainted the

lawyer that he had discovered that his wife still maintained her

intercourse with Colonel Osborne, and that he must therefore remove

his child from her custody. He then inquired what steps would be

necessary to enable him to obtain possession of his little boy.

In the letter to Bozzle he sent a cheque, and his thanks for the

ex-policeman's watchful care. He desired Bozzle to continue his

precautions, and explained his intentions about his son. Being

somewhat afraid that Mr. Bideawhile might not be zealous on his

behalf, and not himself understanding accurately the extent of his

power with regard to his own child, or the means whereby he might

exercise it, he was anxious to obtain assistance from Bozzle also on

this point. He had no doubt that Bozzle knew all about it. He had

great confidence in Bozzle. But still he did not like to consult the

ex-policeman. He knew that it became him to have some regard for his

own dignity. He therefore put the matter very astutely to Bozzle,

asking no questions, but alluding to his difficulty in a way that

would enable Bozzle to offer advice.

And where was he to get a woman to take charge of his child? If Lady

Milborough would do it, how great would be the comfort! But he was

almost sure that Lady Milborough would not do it. All his friends had

turned against him, and Lady Milborough among the number. There was

nobody left to him, but Bozzle. Could he entrust Bozzle to find some

woman for him who would take adequate charge of the little fellow,

till he himself could see to the child's education? He did not put

this question to Bozzle in plain terms; but he was very astute, and

wrote in such a fashion that Bozzle could make a proposal, if any

proposal were within his power.

The answer from Mr. Outhouse came first. To this Mr. Trevelyan paid

very little attention. It was just what he expected. Of course Mr.

Outhouse's assurance about Colonel Osborne went for nothing. A man

who would permit intercourse in his house between a married lady and

her lover would not scruple to deny that he had permitted it. Then

came Mr. Bideawhile's answer, which was very short. Mr. Bideawhile

said that nothing could be done about the child till Mr. Trevelyan

should return to England;--and that he could give no opinion as to

what should be done then till he knew more of the circumstances. It

was quite clear to Trevelyan that he must employ some other lawyer.

Mr. Bideawhile had probably been corrupted by Colonel Osborne. Could

Bozzle recommend a lawyer?

From Bozzle himself there came no other immediate reply than, "his

duty, and that he would make further inquiries."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE AMERICAN MINISTER.

In the second week in October, Mr. Glascock returned to Florence,

intending to remain there till the weather should have become

bearable at Naples. His father was said to be better, but was in

such a condition as hardly to receive much comfort from his son's

presence. His mind was gone, and he knew no one but his nurse; and,

though Mr. Glascock was unwilling to put himself altogether out of

the reach of returning at a day's notice, he did not find himself

obliged to remain in Naples during the heat of the autumn. So Mr.

Glascock returned to the hotel at Florence, accompanied by the tall

man who wore the buttons. The hotel-keeper did not allow such a light

to remain long hidden under a bushel, and it was soon spread far and

wide that the Honourable Charles Glascock and his suite were again in

the beautiful city.

And the fact was soon known to the American Minister and his family.

Mr. Spalding was a man who at home had been very hostile to English

interests. Many American gentlemen are known for such hostility. They

make anti-English speeches about the country, as though they thought

that war with England would produce certain triumph to the States,

certain increase to American trade, and certain downfall to a tyranny

which no Anglo-Saxon nation ought to endure. But such is hardly their

real opinion. There, in the States, as also here in England, you

shall from day to day hear men propounding, in very loud language,

advanced theories of political action, the assertion of which

is supposed to be necessary to the end which they have in view.

Men whom we know to have been as mild as sucking doves in the

political aspiration of their whole lives, suddenly jump up,

and with infuriated gestures declare themselves the enemies

of everything existing. When they have attained their little

purpose,--or have failed to do so,--they revert naturally into their

sucking-dove elements. It is so with Americans as frequently as

with ourselves,--and there is no political subject on which it is

considered more expedient to express pseudo-enthusiasm than on that

of the sins of England. It is understood that we do not resent it.

It is presumed that we regard it as the Irishman regarded his wife's

cuffs. In the States a large party, which consists chiefly of those

who have lately left English rule, and who are keen to prove to

themselves how wise they have been in doing so, is pleased by this

strong language against England; and, therefore, the strong language

is spoken. But the speakers, who are, probably, men knowing something

of the world, mean it not at all; they have no more idea of war with

England than they have of war with all Europe; and their respect for

England and for English opinion is unbounded. In their political

tones of speech and modes of action they strive to be as English as

possible. Mr. Spalding's aspirations were of this nature. He had

uttered speeches against England which would make the hair stand on

end on the head of an uninitiated English reader. He had told his

countrymen that Englishmen hugged their chains, and would do so until

American hammers had knocked those chains from off their wounded

wrists and bleeding ankles. He had declared that, if certain American

claims were not satisfied, there was nothing left for Americans to do

but to cross the ferry with such a sheriff's officer as would be able

to make distraint on the great English household. He had declared

that the sheriff's officer would have very little trouble. He had

spoken of Canada as an outlying American territory, not yet quite

sufficiently redeemed from savage life to be received into the Union

as a State. There is a multiplicity of subjects of this kind ready

to the hand of the American orator. Mr. Spalding had been quite

successful, and was now Minister at Florence; but, perhaps, one of

the greatest pleasures coming to him from his prosperity was the

enjoyment of the society of well-bred Englishmen, in the capital to

which he had been sent. When, therefore, his wife and nieces pointed

out to him the fact that it was manifestly his duty to call upon Mr.

Glascock after what had passed between them on that night under the

Campanile, he did not rebel for an instant against the order given

to him. His mind never reverted for a moment to that opinion which

had gained for him such a round of applause, when expressed on the

platform of the Temperance Hall at Nubbly Creek, State of Illinois,

to the effect that the English aristocrat, thorough-born and

thorough-bred, who inherited acres and titles from his father, could

never be fitting company for a thoughtful Christian American citizen.

He at once had his hat brushed, and took up his best gloves and

umbrella, and went off to Mr. Glascock's hotel. He was strictly

enjoined by the ladies to fix a day on which Mr. Glascock would come

and dine at the American embassy.

"'C. G.' has come back to see you," said Olivia to her elder sister.

They had always called him "C. G." since the initials had been seen

on the travelling bag.

"Probably," said Carry. "There is so very little else to bring people

to Florence, that there can hardly be any other reason for his

coming. They do say it's terribly hot at Naples just now; but that

can have had nothing to do with it."

"We shall see," said Livy. "I'm sure he's in love with you. He looked

to me just like a proper sort of lover for you, when I saw his long

legs creeping up over our heads into the banquette."

"You ought to have been very much obliged to his long legs;--so sick

as you were at the time."

"I like him amazingly," said Livy, "legs and all. I only hope Uncle

Jonas won't bore him, so as to prevent his coming."

"His father is very ill," said Carry, "and I don't suppose we shall

see him at all."

But the American Minister was successful. He found Mr. Glascock

sitting in his dressing-gown, smoking a cigar, and reading a

newspaper. The English aristocrat seemed very glad to see his

visitor, and assumed no airs at all. The American altogether forgot

his speech at Nubbly Creek, and found the aristocrat's society to

be very pleasant. He lit a cigar, and they talked about Naples,

Rome, and Florence. Mr. Spalding, when the marbles of old Rome were

mentioned, was a little too keen in insisting on the merits of Story,

Miss Hosmer, and Hiram Powers, and hardly carried his listener with

him in the parallel which he drew between Greenough and Phidias; and

he was somewhat repressed by the apathetic curtness of Mr. Glascock's

reply, when he suggested that the victory gained by the gunboats at

Vicksburg, on the Mississippi, was vividly brought to his mind by

an account which he had just been reading of the battle of Actium;

but he succeeded in inducing Mr. Glascock to accept an invitation to

dinner for the next day but one, and the two gentlemen parted on the

most amicable terms.

Everybody meets everybody in Florence every day. Carry and Livy

Spalding had met Mr. Glascock twice before the dinner at their

uncle's house, so that they met at dinner quite as intimate friends.

Mrs. Spalding had very large rooms, up three flights of stairs, on

the Lungarno. The height of her abode was attributed by Mrs. Spalding

to her dread of mosquitoes. She had not yet learned that people in

Florence require no excuse for being asked to walk up three flights

of stairs. The rooms, when they were reached, were very lofty,

floored with what seemed to be marble, and were of a nature almost to

warrant Mrs. Spalding in feeling that nature had made her more akin

to an Italian countess than to a matron of Nubbly Creek, State of

Illinois, where Mr. Spalding had found her and made her his own.

There was one other Englishman present, Mr. Harris Hyde Granville

Gore, from the Foreign Office, now serving temporarily at the English

Legation in Florence; and an American, Mr. Jackson Unthank, a man of

wealth and taste, who was resolved on having such a collection of

pictures at his house in Baltimore that no English private collection

should in any way come near to it; and a Tuscan, from the Italian

Foreign Office, to whom nobody could speak except Mr. Harris Hyde

Granville Gore,--who did not indeed seem to enjoy the efforts of

conversation which were expected of him. The Italian, who had a

handle to his name,--he was a Count Buonarosci,--took Mrs. Spalding

in to dinner. Mrs. Spalding had been at great trouble to ascertain

whether this was proper, or whether she should not entrust herself

to Mr. Glascock. There were different points to be considered in

the matter. She did not quite know whether she was in Italy or in

America. She had glimmerings on the subject of her privilege to carry

her own nationality into her own drawing-room. And then she was

called upon to deal between an Italian Count with an elder brother,

and an English Honourable, who had no such incumbrance. Which of the

two was possessed of the higher rank? "I've found it all out, Aunt

Mary," said Livy. "You must take the Count." For Livy wanted to give

her sister every chance. "How have you found it out?" said the aunt.

"You may be sure it is so," said Livy. And the lady in her doubt

yielded the point. Mrs. Spalding, as she walked along the passage on

the Count's arm, determined that she would learn Italian. She would

have given all Nubbly Creek to have been able to speak a word to

Count Buonarosci. To do her justice, it must be admitted that she had

studied a few words. But her courage failed her, and she could not

speak them. She was very careful, however, that Mr. H. H. G. Gore was

placed in the chair next to the Count.

"We are very glad to see you here," said Mr. Spalding, addressing

himself especially to Mr. Glascock, as he stood up at his own seat at

the round table. "In leaving my own country, sir, there is nothing

that I value more than the privilege of becoming acquainted with

those whose historic names and existing positions are of such

inestimable value to the world at large." In saying this, Mr.

Spalding was not in the least insincere, nor did his conscience at

all prick him in reference to that speech at Nubbly Creek. On both

occasions he half thought as he spoke,--or thought that he thought

so. Unless it be on subjects especially endeared to us the thoughts

of but few of us go much beyond this.

Mr. Glascock, who sat between Mrs. Spalding and her niece, was soon

asked by the elder lady whether he had been in the States. No; he

had not been in the States. "Then you must come, Mr. Glascock," said

Mrs. Spalding, "though I will not say, dwelling as we now are in the

metropolis of the world of art, that we in our own homes have as much

of the outer beauty of form to charm the stranger as is to be found

in other lands. Yet I think that the busy lives of men, and the

varied institutions of a free country, must always have an interest

peculiarly their own." Mr. Glascock declared that he quite agreed

with her, and expressed a hope that he might some day find himself in

New York.

"You wouldn't like it at all," said Carry; "because you are an

aristocrat. I don't mean that it would be your fault."

"Why should that prevent my liking it,--even if I were an

aristocrat?"

"One half of the people would run after you, and the other half would

run away from you," said Carry.

"Then I'd take to the people who ran after me, and would not regard

the others."

"That's all very well,--but you wouldn't like it. And then you would

become unfair to what you saw. When some of our speechifying people

talked to you about our institutions through their noses, you would

think that the institutions themselves must be bad. And we have

nothing to show except our institutions."

"What are American institutions?" asked Mr. Glascock.

"Everything is an institution. Having iced water to drink in every

room of the house is an institution. Having hospitals in every town

is an institution. Travelling altogether in one class of railway

cars is an institution. Saying sir, is an institution. Teaching all

the children mathematics is an institution. Plenty of food is an

institution. Getting drunk is an institution in a great many towns.

Lecturing is an institution. There are plenty of them, and some are

very good;--but you wouldn't like it."

"At any rate, I'll go and see," said Mr. Glascock.

"If you do, I hope we may be at home," said Miss Spalding.

Mr. Spalding, in the mean time, with the assistance of his

countryman, the man of taste, was endeavouring to explain a certain

point in American politics to the Count. As, in doing this, they

called upon Mr. Gore to translate every speech they made into

Italian, and as Mr. Gore had never offered his services as an

interpreter, and as the Italian did not quite catch the subtle

meanings of the Americans in Mr. Gore's Tuscan version, and did not

in the least wish to understand the things that were explained to

him, Mr. Gore and the Italian began to think that the two Americans

were bores. "The truth is, Mr. Spalding," said Mr. Gore, "I've got

such a cold in my head, that I don't think I can explain it any

more." Then Livy Spalding laughed aloud, and the two American

gentlemen began to eat their dinner. "It sounds ridiculous, don't

it?" said Mr. Gore, in a whisper.

"I ought not to have laughed, I know," said Livy.

"The very best thing you could have done. I shan't be troubled any

more now. The fact is, I know just nine words of Italian. Now there

is a difficulty in having to explain the whole theory of American

politics to an Italian, who doesn't want to know anything about it,

with so very small a repertory of words at one's command."

"How well you did it!"

"Too well. I felt that. So well that, unless I had stopped it, I

shouldn't have been able to say a word to you all through dinner.

Your laughter clenched it, and Buonarosci and I will be grateful to

you for ever."

After the ladies went there was rather a bad half hour for Mr.

Glascock. He was button-holed by the minister, and found it

oppressive before he was enabled to escape into the drawing-room.

"Mr. Glascock," said the minister, "an English gentleman, sir,

like you, who has the privilege of an hereditary seat in your

parliament,"--Mr. Glascock was not quite sure whether he were being

accused of having an hereditary seat in the House of Commons, but he

would not stop to correct any possible error on that point,--"and who

has been born to all the gifts of fortune, rank, and social eminence,

should never think that his education is complete till he has visited

our great cities in the west." Mr. Glascock hinted that he by no

means conceived his education to be complete; but the minister went

on without attending to this. "Till you have seen, sir, what men

can do who are placed upon the earth with all God's gifts of free

intelligence, free air, and a free soil, but without any of those

other good things which we are accustomed to call the gifts of

fortune, you can never become aware of the infinite ingenuity of

man." There had been much said before, but just at this moment Mr.

Gore and the American left the room, and the Italian followed them

briskly. Mr. Glascock at once made a decided attempt to bolt; but the

minister was on the alert, and was too quick for him. And he was by

no means ashamed of what he was doing. He had got his guest by the

coat, and openly declared his intention of holding him. "Let me keep

you for a few minutes, sir," said he, "while I dilate on this point

in one direction. In the drawing-room female spells are too potent

for us male orators. In going among us, Mr. Glascock, you must not

look for luxury or refinement, for you will find them not. Nor must

you hope to encounter the highest order of erudition. The lofty

summits of acquired knowledge tower in your country with an altitude

we have not reached yet."

"It's very good of you to say so," said Mr. Glascock.

"No, sir. In our new country and in our new cities we still lack the

luxurious perfection of fastidious civilisation. But, sir, regard our

level. That is what I say to every unprejudiced Britisher that comes

among us; look at our level. And when you have looked at our level,

I think that you will confess that we live on the highest table-land

that the world has yet afforded to mankind. You follow my meaning,

Mr. Glascock?" Mr. Glascock was not sure that he did, but the

minister went on to make that meaning clear. "It is the multitude

that with us is educated. Go into their houses, sir, and see how they

thumb their books. Look at the domestic correspondence of our helps

and servants, and see how they write and spell. We haven't got the

mountains, sir, but our table-lands are the highest on which the

bright sun of our Almighty God has as yet shone with its illuminating

splendour in this improving world of ours! It is because we are a

young people, sir,--with nothing as yet near to us of the decrepitude

of age. The weakness of age, sir, is the penalty paid by the folly of

youth. We are not so wise, sir, but what we too shall suffer from its

effects as years roll over our heads." There was a great deal more,

but at last Mr. Glascock did escape into the drawing-room.

"My uncle has been saying a few words to you perhaps," said Carry

Spalding.

"Yes; he has," said Mr. Glascock.

"He usually does," said Carry Spalding.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ABOUT FISHING, AND NAVIGATION, AND HEAD-DRESSES.

[Illustration]

The feud between Miss Stanbury and Mr. Gibson raged violently in

Exeter, and produced many complications which were very difficult

indeed of management. Each belligerent party felt that a special

injury had been inflicted upon it. Mr. Gibson was quite sure that he

had been grossly misused by Miss Stanbury the elder, and strongly

suspected that Miss Stanbury the younger had had a hand in this

misconduct. It had been positively asserted to him,--at least so he

thought, but in this was probably in error,--that the lady would

accept him if he proposed to her. All Exeter had been made aware of

the intended compact. He, indeed, had denied its existence to Miss

French, comforting himself, as best he might, with the reflection

that all is fair in love and war; but when he counted over his

injuries he did not think of this denial. All Exeter, so to say, had

known of it. And yet, when he had come with his proposal, he had been

refused without a moment's consideration, first by the aunt, and then

by the niece;--and, after that, had been violently abused, and at

last turned out of the house! Surely, no gentleman had ever before

been subjected to ill-usage so violent! But Miss Stanbury the elder

was quite as assured that the injury had been done to her. As to the

matter of the compact itself, she knew very well that she had been as

true as steel. She had done everything in her power to bring about

the marriage. She had been generous in her offers of money. She had

used all her powers of persuasion on Dorothy, and she had given

every opportunity to Mr. Gibson. It was not her fault if he had not

been able to avail himself of the good things which she had put in

his way. He had first been, as she thought, ignorant and arrogant,

fancying that the good things ought to be made his own without any

trouble on his part;--and then awkward, not knowing how to take the

trouble when trouble was necessary. And as to that matter of abusive

language and turning out of the house, Miss Stanbury was quite

convinced that she was sinned against, and not herself the sinner.

She declared to Martha, more than once, that Mr. Gibson had used such

language to her that, coming out of a clergyman's mouth, it had quite

dismayed her. Martha, who knew her mistress, probably felt that Mr.

Gibson had at least received as good as he gave; but she had made no

attempt to set her mistress right on that point.

But the cause of Miss Stanbury's sharpest anger was not to be found

in Mr. Gibson's conduct either before Dorothy's refusal of his offer,

or on the occasion of his being turned out of the house. A base

rumour was spread about the city that Dorothy Stanbury had been

offered to Mr. Gibson, that Mr. Gibson had civilly declined the

offer,--and that hence had arisen the wrath of the Juno of the Close.

Now this was not to be endured by Miss Stanbury. She had felt even

in the moment of her original anger against Mr. Gibson that she was

bound in honour not to tell the story against him. She had brought

him into the little difficulty, and she at least would hold her

tongue. She was quite sure that Dorothy would never boast of her

triumph. And Martha had been strictly cautioned,--as indeed, also,

had Brooke Burgess. The man had behaved like an idiot, Miss Stanbury

said; but he had been brought into a little dilemma, and nothing

should be said about it from the house in the Close. But when the

other rumour reached Miss Stanbury's ears, when Mrs. Crumbie condoled

with her on her niece's misfortune, when Mrs. MacHugh asked whether

Mr. Gibson had not behaved rather badly to the young lady, then our

Juno's celestial mind was filled with a divine anger. But even then

she did not declare the truth. She asked a question of Mrs. Crumbie,

and was enabled, as she thought, to trace the falsehood to the

Frenches. She did not think that Mr. Gibson could on a sudden have

become so base a liar. "Mr. Gibson fast and loose with my niece!" she

said to Mrs. MacHugh. "You have not got the story quite right, my

dear friend. Pray, believe me;--there has been nothing of that sort."

"I dare say not," said Mrs. MacHugh, "and I'm sure I don't care. Mr.

Gibson has been going to marry one of the French girls for the last

ten years, and I think he ought to make up his mind and do it at

last."

"I can assure you he is quite welcome as far as Dorothy is

concerned," said Miss Stanbury.

Without a doubt the opinion did prevail throughout Exeter that Mr.

Gibson, who had been regarded time out of mind as the property of

the Miss Frenches, had been angled for by the ladies in the Close,

that he had nearly been caught, but that he had slipped the hook

out of his mouth, and was now about to subside quietly into the net

which had been originally prepared for him. Arabella French had not

spoken loudly on the subject, but Camilla had declared in more than

one house that she had most direct authority for stating that the

gentleman had never dreamed of offering to the young lady. "Why he

should not do so if he pleases, I don't know," said Camilla. "Only

the fact is that he has not pleased. The rumour of course has reached

him, and, as we happen to be very old friends, we have authority for

denying it altogether." All this came round to Miss Stanbury, and she

was divine in her wrath.

"If they drive me to it," she said to Dorothy, "I'll have the whole

truth told by the bellman through the city, or I'll publish it in the

County Gazette."

"Pray don't say a word about it, Aunt Stanbury."

"It is those odious girls. He's there now every day."

"Why shouldn't he go there, Aunt Stanbury?"

"If he's fool enough, let him go. I don't care where he goes. But

I do care about these lies. They wouldn't dare to say it only they

think my mouth is closed. They've no honour themselves, but they

screen themselves behind mine."

"I'm sure they won't find themselves mistaken in what they trust to,"

said Dorothy, with a spirit that her aunt had not expected from her.

Miss Stanbury at this time had told nobody that the offer to her

niece had been made and repeated and finally rejected;--but she found

it very difficult to hold her tongue.

In the meantime Mr. Gibson spent a good deal of his time at

Heavitree. It should not perhaps be asserted broadly that he had made

up his mind that marriage would be good for him; but he had made up

his mind, at least, to this, that it was no longer to be postponed

without a balance of disadvantage. The Charybdis in the Close drove

him helpless into the whirlpool of the Heavitree Scylla. He had no

longer an escape from the perils of the latter shore. He had been so

mauled by the opposite waves, that he had neither spirit nor skill

left to him to keep in the middle track. He was almost daily at

Heavitree, and did not attempt to conceal from himself the approach

of his doom.

But still there were two of them. He knew that he must become a prey,

but was there any choice left to him as to which siren should have

him? He had been quite aware in his more gallant days, before he had

been knocked about on that Charybdis rock, that he might sip, and

taste, and choose between the sweets. He had come to think lately

that the younger young lady was the sweeter. Eight years ago indeed

the passages between him and the elder had been tender; but Camilla

had then been simply a romping girl, hardly more than a year or two

beyond her teens. Now, with her matured charms, Camilla was certainly

the more engaging as far as outward form went. Arabella's cheeks

were thin and long, and her front teeth had come to show themselves.

Her eyes were no doubt still bright, and what she had of hair was

soft and dark. But it was very thin in front, and what there was of

supplemental mass behind,--the bandbox by which Miss Stanbury was

so much aggrieved,--was worn with an indifference to the lines of

beauty, which Mr. Gibson himself found to be very depressing. A man

with a fair burden on his back is not a grievous sight; but when

we see a small human being attached to a bale of goods which he

can hardly manage to move, we feel that the poor fellow has been

cruelly overweighted. Mr. Gibson certainly had that sensation about

Arabella's chignon. And as he regarded it in a nearer and a dearer

light,--as a chignon that might possibly become his own, as a burden

which in one sense he might himself be called upon to bear, as a

domestic utensil which he himself might be called upon to inspect,

and perhaps to aid the shifting on and the shifting off, he did begin

to think that that side of the Scylla gulf ought to be avoided if

possible. And probably this propensity on his part, this feeling that

he would like to reconsider the matter dispassionately before he

gave himself up for good to his old love, may have been increased by

Camilla's apparent withdrawal of her claims. He felt mildly grateful

to the Heavitree household in general for accepting him in this time

of his affliction, but he could not admit to himself that they had a

right to decide upon him in private conclave, and allot him either to

the one or to the other nuptials without consultation with himself.

To be swallowed up by Scylla he now recognised as his doom; but he

thought he ought to be asked on which side of the gulf he would

prefer to go down. The way in which Camilla spoke of him as a thing

that wasn't hers, but another's; and the way in which Arabella looked

at him, as though he were hers and could never be another's, wounded

his manly pride. He had always understood that he might have his

choice, and he could not understand that the little mishap which had

befallen him in the Close was to rob him of that privilege.

He used to drink tea at Heavitree in those days. On one evening on

going in he found himself alone with Arabella. "Oh, Mr. Gibson," she

said, "we weren't sure whether you'd come. And mamma and Camilla have

gone out to Mrs. Camadge's." Mr. Gibson muttered some word to the

effect that he hoped he had kept nobody at home; and, as he did so,

he remembered that he had distinctly said that he would come on

this evening. "I don't know that I should have gone," said Arabella,

"because I am not quite,--not quite myself at present. No, not ill;

not at all. Don't you know what it is, Mr. Gibson, to be,--to be,--to

be,--not quite yourself?" Mr. Gibson said that he had very often felt

like that. "And one can't get over it;--can one?" continued Arabella.

"There comes a presentiment that something is going to happen, and

a kind of belief that something has happened, though you don't know

what; and the heart refuses to be light, and the spirit becomes

abashed, and the mind, though it creates new thoughts, will not

settle itself to its accustomed work. I suppose it's what the novels

have called Melancholy."

"I suppose it is," said Mr. Gibson. "But there's generally some cause

for it. Debt for instance--"

"It's nothing of that kind with me. It's no debt, at least, that can

be written down in the figures of ordinary arithmetic. Sit down, Mr.

Gibson, and we will have some tea." Then, as she stretched forward to

ring the bell, he thought that he never in his life had seen anything

so unshapely as that huge wen at the back of her head. "Monstrum

horrendum, informe, ingens!" He could not help quoting the words to

himself. She was dressed with some attempt at being smart, but her

ribbons were soiled, and her lace was tawdry, and the fabric of her

dress was old and dowdy. He was quite sure that he would feel no

pride in calling her Mrs. Gibson, no pleasure in having her all to

himself at his own hearth. "I hope we shall escape the bitterness of

Miss Stanbury's tongue if we drink tea tÃªte-Ã -tÃªte," she said, with

her sweetest smile.

"I don't suppose she'll know anything about it."

"She knows about everything, Mr. Gibson. It's astonishing what she

knows. She has eyes and ears everywhere. I shouldn't care, if she

didn't see and hear so very incorrectly. I'm told now that she

declares--; but it doesn't signify."

"Declares what?" asked Mr. Gibson.

"Never mind. But wasn't it odd how all Exeter believed that you were

going to be married in that house, and to live there all the rest of

your life, and be one of Miss Stanbury's slaves. I never believed

it, Mr. Gibson." This she said with a sad smile, that ought to have

brought him on his knees, in spite of the chignon.

"One can't help these things," said Mr. Gibson.

"I never could have believed it;--not even if you had not given me an

assurance so solemn, and so sweet, that there was nothing in it." The

poor man had given the assurance, and could not deny the solemnity

and the sweetness. "That was a happy moment for us, Mr. Gibson;

because, though we never believed it, when it was dinned into our

ears so frequently, when it was made such a triumph in the Close, it

was impossible not to fear that there might be something in it." He

felt that he ought to make some reply, but he did not know what to

say. He was thoroughly ashamed of the lie he had told, but he could

not untell it. "Camilla reproached me afterwards for asking you,"

whispered Arabella, in her softest, tenderest voice. "She said

that it was unmaidenly. I hope you did not think it unmaidenly, Mr.

Gibson?"

"Oh dear no;--not at all," said he.

Arabella French was painfully alive to the fact that she must do

something. She had her fish on the hook; but of what use is a fish

on your hook, if you cannot land him? When could she have a better

opportunity than this of landing the scaly darling out of the fresh

and free waters of his bachelor stream, and sousing him into the pool

of domestic life, to be ready there for her own household purposes?

"I had known you so long, Mr. Gibson," she said, "and had valued your

friendship so--so deeply." As he looked at her he could see nothing

but the shapeless excrescence to which his eyes had been so painfully

called by Miss Stanbury's satire. It is true that he had formerly

been very tender with her, but she had not then carried about with

her that distorted monster. He did not believe himself to be at all

bound by anything which had passed between them in circumstances

so very different. But yet he ought to say something. He ought to

have said something; but he said nothing. She was patient, however,

very patient; and she went on playing him with her hook. "I am so

glad that I did not go out to-night with mamma. It has been such a

pleasure to me to have this conversation with you. Camilla, perhaps,

would say that I am--unmaidenly."

"I don't think so."

"That is all that I care for, Mr. Gibson. If you acquit me, I do

not mind who accuses. I should not like to suppose that you thought

me unmaidenly. Anything would be better than that; but I can throw

all such considerations to the wind when true--true--friendship is

concerned. Don't you think that one ought, Mr. Gibson?"

If it had not been for the thing at the back of her head, he would

have done it now. Nothing but that gave him courage to abstain.

It grew bigger and bigger, more shapeless, monstrous, absurd, and

abominable, as he looked at it. Nothing should force upon him the

necessity of assisting to carry such an abortion through the world.

"One ought to sacrifice everything to friendship," said Mr. Gibson,

"except self-respect."

He meant nothing personal. Something special, in the way of an

opinion, was expected of him; and, therefore, he had striven to

say something special. But she was in tears in a moment. "Oh, Mr.

Gibson," she exclaimed; "oh, Mr. Gibson!"

"What is the matter, Miss French?"

"Have I lost your respect? Is it that that you mean?"

"Certainly not, Miss French."

"Do not call me Miss French, or I shall be sure that you condemn me.

Miss French sounds so very cold. You used to call me--Bella." That

was quite true; but it was long ago, thought Mr. Gibson,--before the

monster had been attached. "Will you not call me Bella now?"

He thought that he had rather not; and yet, how was he to avoid it?

On a sudden he became very crafty. Had it not been for the sharpness

of his mother wit, he would certainly have been landed at that

moment. "As you truly observed just now," he said, "the tongues

of people are so malignant. There are little birds that hear

everything."

"I don't care what the little birds hear," said Miss French, through

her tears. "I am a very unhappy girl;--I know that; and I don't care

what anybody says. It is nothing to me what anybody says. I know what

I feel." At this moment there was some dash of truth about her. The

fish was so very heavy on hand that, do what she would, she could

not land him. Her hopes before this had been very low,--hopes that

had once been high; but they had been depressed gradually; and, in

the slow, dull routine of her daily life, she had learned to bear

disappointment by degrees, without sign of outward suffering, without

consciousness of acute pain. The task of her life had been weary,

and the wished-for goal was ever becoming more and more distant;

but there had been still a chance, and she had fallen away into a

lethargy of lessening expectation, from which joy, indeed, had been

banished, but in which there had been nothing of agony. Then had

come upon the whole house at Heavitree the great Stanbury peril, and,

arising out of that, had sprung new hopes to Arabella, which made her

again capable of all the miseries of a foiled ambition. She could

again be patient, if patience might be of any service; but in such a

condition an eternity of patience is simply suicidal. She was willing

to work hard, but how could she work harder than she had worked. Poor

young woman,--perishing beneath an incubus which a false idea of

fashion had imposed on her!

"I hope I have said nothing that makes you unhappy," pleaded Mr.

Gibson. "I'm sure I haven't meant it."

"But you have," she said. "You make me very unhappy. You condemn me.

I see you do. And if I have done wrong it has been all because-- Oh

dear, oh dear, oh dear!"

"But who says you have done wrong?"

"You won't call me Bella,--because you say the little birds will hear

it. If I don't care for the little birds, why should you?"

There is no question more difficult than this for a gentleman to

answer. Circumstances do not often admit of its being asked by a lady

with that courageous simplicity which had come upon Miss French in

this moment of her agonising struggle; but nevertheless it is one

which, in a more complicated form, is often put, and to which some

reply, more or less complicated, is expected. "If I, a woman, can

dare, for your sake, to encounter the public tongue, will you, a man,

be afraid?" The true answer, if it could be given, would probably

be this; "I am afraid, though a man, because I have much to lose

and little to get. You are not afraid, though a woman, because you

have much to get and little to lose." But such an answer would be

uncivil, and is not often given. Therefore men shuffle and lie, and

tell themselves that in love,--love here being taken to mean all

antenuptial contests between man and woman,--everything is fair. Mr.

Gibson had the above answer in his mind, though he did not frame

it into words. He was neither sufficiently brave nor sufficiently

cruel to speak to her in such language. There was nothing for him,

therefore, but that he must shuffle and lie.

"I only meant," said he, "that I would not for worlds do anything to

make you uneasy."

She did not see how she could again revert to the subject of her own

Christian name. She had made her little tender, loving request, and

it had been refused. Of course she knew that it had been refused as a

matter of caution. She was not angry with him because of his caution,

as she had expected him to be cautious. The barriers over which

she had to climb were no more than she had expected to find in her

way;--but they were so very high and so very difficult! Of course she

was aware that he would escape if he could. She was not angry with

him on that account. Anger could not have helped her. Indeed, she did

not price herself highly enough to make her feel that she would be

justified in being angry. It was natural enough that he shouldn't

want her. She knew herself to be a poor, thin, vapid, tawdry

creature, with nothing to recommend her to any man except a sort

of second-rate, provincial-town fashion which,--infatuated as she

was,--she attributed in a great degree to the thing she carried on

her head. She knew nothing. She could do nothing. She possessed

nothing. She was not angry with him because he so evidently wished to

avoid her. But she thought that if she could only be successful she

would be good and loving and obedient,--and that it was fair for her

at any rate to try. Each created animal must live and get its food

by the gifts which the Creator has given to it, let those gifts be

as poor as they may,--let them be even as distasteful as they may to

other members of the great created family. The rat, the toad, the

slug, the flea, must each live according to its appointed mode of

existence. Animals which are parasites by nature can only live by

attaching themselves to life that is strong. To Arabella Mr. Gibson

would be strong enough, and it seemed to her that if she could fix

herself permanently upon his strength, that would be her proper

mode of living. She was not angry with him because he resisted

the attempt, but she had nothing of conscience to tell her that

she should spare him as long as there remained to her a chance of

success. And should not her plea of excuse, her justification be

admitted? There are tormentors as to which no man argues that they

are iniquitous, though they be very troublesome. He either rids

himself of them, or suffers as quiescently as he may.

"We used to be such--great--friends," she said, still crying, "and I

am afraid you don't like me a bit now."

"Indeed I do;--I have always liked you. But--"

"But what? Do tell me what the but means. I will do anything that you

bid me."

Then it occurred to him that if, after such a promise, he were to

confide to her his feeling that the chignon which she wore was ugly

and unbecoming, she would probably be induced to change her mode of

head-dress. It was a foolish idea, because, had he followed it out,

he would have seen that compliance on her part in such a matter could

only be given with the distinct understanding that a certain reward

should be the consequence. When an unmarried gentleman calls upon an

unmarried lady to change the fashion of her personal adornments, the

unmarried lady has a right to expect that the unmarried gentleman

means to make her his wife. But Mr. Gibson had no such meaning; and

was led into error by the necessity for sudden action. When she

offered to do anything that he might bid her do, he could not take up

his hat and go away. She looked up into his face, expecting that he

would give her some order;--and he fell into the temptation that was

spread for him.

"If I might say a word,--" he began.

"You may say anything," she exclaimed.

"If I were you I don't think--"

"You don't think what, Mr. Gibson?"

He found it to be a matter very difficult of approach. "Do you know,

I don't think the fashion that has come up about wearing your hair

quite suits you,--not so well as the way you used to do it." She

became on a sudden very red in the face, and he thought that she was

angry. Vexed she was, but still, accompanying her vexation, there

was a remembrance that she was achieving victory even by her own

humiliation. She loved her chignon; but she was ready to abandon even

that for him. Nevertheless she could not speak for a moment or two,

and he was forced to continue his criticism. "I have no doubt those

things are very becoming and all that, and I dare say they are

comfortable."

"Oh, very," she said.

"But there was a simplicity that I liked about the other."

Could it be then that for the last five years he had stood aloof from

her because she had arrayed herself in fashionable attire? She was

still very red in the face, still suffering from wounded vanity,

still conscious of that soreness which affects us all when we are

made to understand that we are considered to have failed there, where

we have most thought that we excelled. But her womanly art enabled

her quickly to conceal the pain. "I have made a promise," she said,

"and you will find that I will keep it."

"What promise?" asked Mr. Gibson.

"I said that I would do as you bade me, and so I will. I would have

done it sooner if I had known that you wished it. I would never have

worn it at all if I had thought that you disliked it."

"I think that a little of them is very nice," said Mr. Gibson. Mr.

Gibson was certainly an awkward man. But there are men so awkward

that it seems to be their especial province to say always the very

worst thing at the very worst moment.

She became redder than ever as she was thus told of the hugeness of

her favourite ornament. She was almost angry now. But she restrained

herself, thinking perhaps of how she might teach him taste in days to

come as he was teaching her now. "I will change it to-morrow," she

said with a smile. "You come and see to-morrow."

Upon this he got up and took his hat and made his escape, assuring

her that he would come and see her on the morrow. She let him go now

without any attempt at further tenderness. Certainly she had gained

much during the interview. He had as good as told her in what had

been her offence, and of course, when she had remedied that offence,

he could hardly refuse to return to her. She got up as soon as she

was alone, and looked at her head in the glass, and told herself that

the pity would be great. It was not that the chignon was in itself

a thing of beauty, but that it imparted so unmistakable an air of

fashion! It divested her of that dowdiness which she feared above

all things, and enabled her to hold her own among other young women,

without feeling that she was absolutely destitute of attraction.

There had been a certain homage paid to it, which she had recognised

and enjoyed. But it was her ambition to hold her own, not among

young women, but among clergymen's wives, and she would certainly

obey his orders. She could not make the attempt now because of the

complications; but she certainly would make it before she laid her

head on the pillow,--and would explain to Camilla that it was a

little joke between herself and Mr. Gibson.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MR. GIBSON IS PUNISHED.

Miss Stanbury was divine in her wrath, and became more and more so

daily as new testimony reached her of dishonesty on the part of

the Frenches and of treachery on the part of Mr. Gibson. And these

people, so empty, so vain, so weak, were getting the better of her,

were conquering her, were robbing her of her prestige and her ancient

glory, simply because she herself was too generous to speak out and

tell the truth! There was a martyrdom to her in this which was almost

unendurable.

Now there came to her one day at luncheon time,--on the day

succeeding that on which Miss French had promised to sacrifice her

chignon,--a certain Mrs. Clifford from Budleigh Salterton, to whom

she was much attached. Perhaps the distance of Budleigh Salterton

from Exeter added somewhat to this affection, so that Mrs. Clifford

was almost closer to our friend's heart even than Mrs. MacHugh, who

lived just at the other end of the cathedral. And in truth Mrs.

Clifford was a woman more serious in her mode of thought than Mrs.

MacHugh, and one who had more in common with Miss Stanbury than that

other lady. Mrs. Clifford had been a Miss Noel of Doddiscombe Leigh,

and she and Miss Stanbury had been engaged to be married at the same

time,--each to a man of fortune. One match had been completed in the

ordinary course of matches. What had been the course of the other we

already know. But the friendship had been maintained on very close

terms. Mrs. MacHugh was a Gallio at heart, anxious chiefly to remove

from herself,--and from her friends also,--all the troubles of life,

and make things smooth and easy. She was one who disregarded great

questions; who cared little or nothing what people said of her; who

considered nothing worth the trouble of a fight;--Epicuri de grege

porca. But there was nothing swinish about Mrs. Clifford of Budleigh

Salterton. She took life thoroughly in earnest. She was a Tory who

sorrowed heartily for her country, believing that it was being

brought to ruin by the counsels of evil men. She prayed daily to

be delivered from dissenters, radicals, and wolves in sheep's

clothing,--by which latter bad name she meant especially a certain

leading politician of the day who had, with the cunning of the

devil, tempted and perverted the virtue of her own political friends.

And she was one who thought that the slightest breath of scandal

on a young woman's name should be stopped at once. An antique,

pure-minded, anxious, self-sacrificing matron was Mrs. Clifford, and

very dear to the heart of Miss Stanbury.

After lunch was over on the day in question Mrs. Clifford got Miss

Stanbury into some closet retirement, and there spoke her mind as

to the things which were being said. It had been asserted in her

presence by Camilla French that she, Camilla, was authorised by Mr.

Gibson to declare that he had never thought of proposing to Dorothy

Stanbury, and that Miss Stanbury had been "labouring under some

strange misapprehension in the matter." "Now, my dear, I don't care

very much for the young lady in question," said Mrs. Clifford,

alluding to Camilla French.

"Very little, indeed, I should think," said Miss Stanbury, with a

shake of her head.

"Quite true, my dear,--but that does not make the words out of her

mouth the less efficacious for evil. She clearly insinuated that you

had endeavoured to make up a match between this gentleman and your

niece, and that you had failed." So much was at least true. Miss

Stanbury felt this, and felt also that she could not explain the

truth, even to her dear old friend. In the midst of her divine wrath

she had acknowledged to herself that she had brought Mr. Gibson into

his difficulty, and that it would not become her to tell any one

of his failure. And in this matter she did not herself accuse Mr.

Gibson. She believed that the lie originated with Camilla French, and

it was against Camilla that her wrath raged the fiercest.

"She is a poor, mean, disappointed thing," said Miss Stanbury.

"Very probably;--but I think I should ask her to hold her tongue

about Miss Dorothy," said Mrs. Clifford.

The consultation in the closet was carried on for about half-an-hour,

and then Miss Stanbury put on her bonnet and shawl and descended into

Mrs. Clifford's carriage. The carriage took the Heavitree road, and

deposited Miss Stanbury at the door of Mrs. French's house. The walk

home from Heavitree would be nothing, and Mrs. Clifford proceeded on

her way, having given this little help in counsel and conveyance to

her friend. Mrs. French was at home, and Miss Stanbury was shown up

into the room in which the three ladies were sitting.

[Illustration: Miss Stanbury visits the Frenches.]

The reader will doubtless remember the promise which Arabella had

made to Mr. Gibson. That promise she had already fulfilled,--to the

amazement of her mother and sister;--and when Miss Stanbury entered

the room the elder daughter of the family was seen without her

accustomed head-gear. If the truth is to be owned, Miss Stanbury gave

the poor young woman no credit for her new simplicity, but put down

the deficiency to the charge of domestic slatternliness. She was

unjust enough to declare afterwards that she had found Arabella

French only half dressed at between three and four o'clock in the

afternoon! From which this lesson may surely be learned,--that though

the way down Avernus may be, and customarily is, made with great

celerity, the return journey, if made at all, must be made slowly. A

young woman may commence in chignons by attaching any amount of an

edifice to her head; but the reduction should be made by degrees.

Arabella's edifice had, in Miss Stanbury's eyes, been the ugliest

thing in art that she had known; but, now, its absence offended her,

and she most untruly declared that she had come upon the young woman

in the middle of the day just out of her bed-room and almost in her

dressing-gown.

And the whole French family suffered a diminution of power from the

strange phantasy which had come upon Arabella. They all felt, in

sight of the enemy, that they had to a certain degree lowered their

flag. One of the ships, at least, had shown signs of striking,

and this element of weakness made itself felt through the whole

fleet. Arabella, herself, when she saw Miss Stanbury, was painfully

conscious of her head, and wished that she had postponed the

operation till the evening. She smiled with a faint watery smile, and

was aware that something ailed her.

The greetings at first were civil, but very formal, as are those

between nations which are nominally at peace, but which are waiting

for a sign at which each may spring at the other's throat. In this

instance the Juno from the Close had come quite prepared to declare

her casus belli as complete, and to fling down her gauntlet, unless

the enemy should at once yield to her everything demanded with an

abject submission. "Mrs. French," she said, "I have called to-day

for a particular purpose, and I must address myself chiefly to Miss

Camilla."

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. French.

"I shall be delighted to hear anything from you, Miss Stanbury," said

Camilla,--not without an air of bravado. Arabella said nothing, but

she put her hand up almost convulsively to the back of her head.

"I have been told to-day by a friend of mine, Miss Camilla," began

Miss Stanbury, "that you declared yourself, in her presence,

authorised by Mr. Gibson to make a statement about my niece Dorothy."

"May I ask who was your friend?" demanded Mrs. French.

"It was Mrs. Clifford, of course," said Camilla. "There is nobody

else would try to make difficulties."

"There need be no difficulty at all, Miss Camilla," said Miss

Stanbury, "if you will promise me that you will not repeat the

statement. It can't be true."

"But it is true," said Camilla.

"What is true?" asked Miss Stanbury, surprised by the audacity of the

girl.

"It is true that Mr. Gibson authorised us to state what I did state

when Mrs. Clifford heard me."

"And what was that?"

"Only this,--that people had been saying all about Exeter that he

was going to be married to a young lady, and that as the report was

incorrect, and as he had never had the remotest idea in his mind of

making the young lady his wife,--" Camilla, as she said this, spoke

with a great deal of emphasis, putting forward her chin and shaking

her head,--"and as he thought it was uncomfortable both for the young

lady and for himself, and as there was nothing in it the least in the

world,--nothing at all, no glimmer of a foundation for the report, it

would be better to have it denied everywhere. That is what I said;

and we had authority from the gentleman himself. Arabella can say

the same, and so can mamma;--only mamma did not hear him." Nor had

Camilla heard him, but that incident she did not mention.

The circumstances were, in Miss Stanbury's judgment, becoming very

remarkable. She did not for a moment believe Camilla. She did not

believe that Mr. Gibson had given to either of the Frenches any

justification for the statement just made. But Camilla had been so

much more audacious than Miss Stanbury had expected, that that lady

was for a moment struck dumb. "I'm sure, Miss Stanbury," said Mrs.

French, "we don't want to give any offence to your niece,--very far

from it."

"My niece doesn't care about it two straws," said Miss Stanbury. "It

is I that care. And I care very much. The things that have been said

have been altogether false."

"How false, Miss Stanbury?" asked Camilla.

"Altogether false,--as false as they can be."

"Mr. Gibson must know his own mind," said Camilla.

"My dear, there's a little disappointment," said Miss French, "and it

don't signify."

"There's no disappointment at all," said Miss Stanbury, "and it does

signify very much. Now that I've begun, I'll go to the bottom of it.

If you say that Mr. Gibson told you to make these statements, I'll go

to Mr. Gibson. I'll have it out somehow."

"You may have what you like out for us, Miss Stanbury," said Camilla.

"I don't believe Mr. Gibson said anything of the kind."

"That's civil," said Camilla.

"But why shouldn't he?" asked Arabella.

"There were the reports, you know," said Mrs. French.

"And why shouldn't he deny them when there wasn't a word of truth

in them?" continued Camilla. "For my part I think the gentleman is

bound for the lady's sake to declare that there's nothing in it when

there is nothing in it." This was more than Miss Stanbury could bear.

Hitherto the enemy had seemed to have the best of it. Camilla was

firing broadside after broadside, as though she was assured of

victory. Even Mrs. French was becoming courageous; and Arabella was

forgetting the place where her chignon ought to have been. "I really

do not know what else there is for me to say," remarked Camilla, with

a toss of her head, and an air of impudence that almost drove poor

Miss Stanbury frantic.

It was on her tongue to declare the whole truth, but she refrained.

She had schooled herself on this subject vigorously. She would not

betray Mr. Gibson. Had she known all the truth,--or had she believed

Camilla French's version of the story,--there would have been no

betrayal. But looking at the matter with such knowledge as she had

at present, she did not even yet feel herself justified in declaring

that Mr. Gibson had offered his hand to her niece, and had been

refused. She was, however, sorely tempted. "Very well, ladies," she

said. "I shall now see Mr. Gibson, and ask him whether he did give

you authority to make such statements as you have been spreading

abroad everywhere." Then the door of the room was opened, and in a

moment Mr. Gibson was among them. He was true to his promise, and had

come to see Arabella with her altered head-dress;--but he had come

at this hour thinking that escape in the morning would be easier and

quicker than it might have been in the evening. His mind had been

full of Arabella and her head-dress even up to the moment of his

knocking at the door; but all that was driven out of his brain at

once when he saw Miss Stanbury.

"Here is Mr. Gibson himself," said Mrs. French.

"How do you do, Mr. Gibson?" said Miss Stanbury, with a very stately

courtesy. They had never met since the day on which he had been, as

he stated, turned out of Miss Stanbury's house. He now bowed to her;

but there was no friendly greeting, and the Frenches were able to

congratulate themselves on the apparent loyalty to themselves of

the gentleman who stood among them. "I have come here, Mr. Gibson,"

continued Miss Stanbury, "to put a small matter right in which you

are concerned."

"It seems to me to be the most insignificant thing in the world,"

said Camilla.

"Very likely," said Miss Stanbury. "But it is not insignificant

to me. Miss Camilla French has asserted publicly that you have

authorised her to make a statement about my niece Dorothy."

Mr. Gibson looked into Camilla's face doubtingly, inquisitively,

almost piteously. "You had better let her go on," said Camilla. "She

will make a great many mistakes, no doubt, but you had better let her

go on to the end."

"I have made no mistake as yet, Miss Camilla. She so asserted, Mr.

Gibson, in the hearing of a friend of mine, and she repeated the

assertion here in this room to me just before you came in. She says

that you have authorised her to declare that--that--that,--I had

better speak it out plainly at once."

"Much better," said Camilla.

"That you never entertained an idea of offering your hand to my

niece." Miss Stanbury paused, and Mr. Gibson's jaw fell visibly. But

he was not expected to speak as yet; and Miss Stanbury continued her

accusation. "Beyond that, I don't want to mention my niece's name, if

it can be avoided."

"But it can't be avoided," said Camilla.

"If you please, I will continue. Mr. Gibson will understand me.

I will not, if I can help it, mention my niece's name again, Mr.

Gibson. But I still have that confidence in you that I do not think

that you would have made such a statement in reference to yourself

and any young lady,--unless it were some young lady who had

absolutely thrown herself at your head." And in saying this she

paused, and looked very hard at Camilla.

"That's just what Dorothy Stanbury has been doing," said Camilla.

"She has been doing nothing of the kind, and you know she hasn't,"

said Miss Stanbury, raising her arm as though she were going to

strike her opponent. "But I am quite sure, Mr. Gibson, that you

never could have authorised these young ladies to make such an

assertion publicly on your behalf. Whatever there may have been of

misunderstanding between you and me, I can't believe that of you."

Then she paused for a reply. "If you will be good enough to set us

right on that point, I shall be obliged to you."

Mr. Gibson's position was one of great discomfort. He had given no

authority to any one to make such a statement. He had said nothing

about Dorothy Stanbury to Camilla; but he had told Arabella, when

hard pressed by that lady, that he did not mean to propose to

Dorothy. He could not satisfy Miss Stanbury because he feared

Arabella. He could not satisfy the Frenches because he feared Miss

Stanbury. "I really do not think," said he, "that we ought to talk

about a young lady in this way."

"That's my opinion, too," said Camilla; "but Miss Stanbury will."

"Exactly so. Miss Stanbury will," said that lady. "Mr. Gibson,

I insist upon it, that you tell me whether you did give any such

authority to Miss Camilla French, or to Miss French."

"I wouldn't answer her, if I were you," said Camilla.

"I really don't think this can do any good," said Mrs. French.

"And it is so very harassing to our nerves," said Arabella.

"Nerves! Pooh!" exclaimed Miss Stanbury. "Now, Mr. Gibson, I am

waiting for an answer."

"My dear Miss Stanbury, I really think it better,--the situation

is so peculiar, and, upon my word, I hardly know how not to give

offence, which I wouldn't do for the world."

"Do you mean to tell me that you won't answer my question?" demanded

Miss Stanbury.

"I really think that I had better hold my tongue," pleaded Mr.

Gibson.

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibson," said Camilla.

"Indeed, it is wisest," said Mrs. French.

"I don't see what else he can do," said Arabella.

Then was Miss Stanbury driven altogether beyond her powers of

endurance. "If that be so," said she, "I must speak out, though I

should have preferred to hold my tongue. Mr. Gibson did offer to my

niece the week before last,--twice, and was refused by her. My niece,

Dorothy, took it into her head that she did not like him; and, upon

my word, I think she was right. We should have said nothing about

this,--not a word; but when these false assertions are made on Mr.

Gibson's alleged authority, and Mr. Gibson won't deny it, I must

tell the truth." Then there was silence among them for a few seconds,

and Mr. Gibson struggled hard, but vainly, to clothe his face in

a pleasant smile. "Mr. Gibson, is that true?" said Miss Stanbury.

But Mr. Gibson made no reply. "It is as true as heaven," said Miss

Stanbury, striking her hand upon the table. "And now you had better,

all of you, hold your tongues about my niece, and she will hold her

tongue about you. And as for Mr. Gibson,--anybody who wants him

after this is welcome to him for us. Good-morning, Mrs. French;

good-morning, young ladies." And so she stalked out of the room, and

out of the house, and walked back to her house in the Close.

"Mamma," said Arabella, as soon as the enemy was gone, "I have got

such a headache that I think I will go up-stairs."

"And I will go with you, dear," said Camilla.

Mr. Gibson, before he left the house, confided his secret to the

maternal ears of Mrs. French. He certainly had been allured into

making an offer to Dorothy Stanbury, but was ready to atone for

this crime by marrying her daughter,--Camilla,--as soon as might

be convenient. He was certainly driven to make this declaration by

intense cowardice,--not to excuse himself, for in that there could

be no excuse;--but how else should he dare to suggest that he might

as well leave the house? "Shall I tell the dear girl?" asked Mrs.

French. But Mr. Gibson requested a fortnight, in which to consider

how the proposition had best be made.

CHAPTER XLIX.

MR. BROOKE BURGESS AFTER SUPPER.

Brooke Burgess was a clerk in the office of the Ecclesiastical

Commissioners in London, and as such had to do with things very

solemn, grave, and almost melancholy. He had to deal with the rents

of episcopal properties, to correspond with clerical claimants,

and to be at home with the circumstances of underpaid vicars and

perpetual curates with much less than Â£300 a-year; but yet he was

as jolly and pleasant at his desk as though he were busied about

the collection of the malt tax, or wrote his letters to admirals

and captains instead of to deans and prebendaries. Brooke Burgess

had risen to be a senior clerk, and was held in some respect in his

office; but it was not perhaps for the amount of work he did, nor yet

on account of the gravity of his demeanour, nor for the brilliancy of

his intellect. But if not clever, he was sensible; though he was not

a dragon of official virtue, he had a conscience;--and he possessed

those small but most valuable gifts by which a man becomes popular

among men. And thus it had come to pass in all those battles as to

competitive merit which had taken place in his as in other public

offices, that no one had ever dreamed of putting a junior over

the head of Brooke Burgess. He was tractable, easy, pleasant, and

therefore deservedly successful. All his brother clerks called him

Brooke,--except the young lads who, for the first year or two of

their service, still denominated him Mr. Burgess.

"Brooke," said one of his juniors, coming into his room and standing

before the fireplace with a cigar in his mouth, "have you heard who

is to be the new Commissioner?"

"Colenso, to be sure," said Brooke.

"What a lark that would be. And I don't see why he shouldn't. But it

isn't Colenso. The name has just come down."

"And who is it?"

"Old Proudie, from Barchester."

"Why, we had him here years ago, and he resigned."

"But he's to come on again now for a spell. It always seems to me

that the bishops ain't a bit of use here. They only get blown up, and

snubbed, and shoved into corners by the others."

"You young reprobate,--to talk of shoving an archbishop into a

corner."

"Well,--don't they? It's only for the name of it they have them.

There's the Bishop of Broomsgrove;--he's always sauntering about the

place, looking as though he'd be so much obliged if somebody would

give him something to do. He's always smiling, and so gracious,--just

as if he didn't feel above half sure that he had any right to be

where he is, and he thought that perhaps somebody was going to kick

him."

"And so old Proudie is coming up again," said Brooke. "It certainly

is very much the same to us whom they send. He'll get shoved into a

corner, as you call it,--only that he'll go into the corner without

any shoving." Then there came in a messenger with a card, and Brooke

learned that Hugh Stanbury was waiting for him in the strangers'

room. In performing the promise made to Dorothy, he had called upon

her brother as soon as he was back in London, but had not found him.

This now was the return visit.

"I thought I was sure to find you here," said Hugh.

"Pretty nearly sure from eleven till five," said Brooke. "A hard

stepmother like the Civil Service does not allow one much chance of

relief. I do get across to the club sometimes for a glass of sherry

and a biscuit,--but here I am now, at any rate; and I'm very glad

you have come." Then there was some talk between them about affairs

at Exeter; but as they were interrupted before half an hour was

over their heads by a summons brought for Burgess from one of

the secretaries, it was agreed that they should dine together at

Burgess's club on the following day. "We can manage a pretty good

beef-steak," said Brooke, "and have a fair glass of sherry. I don't

think you can get much more than that anywhere nowadays,--unless you

want a dinner for eight at three guineas a head. The magnificence of

men has become so intolerable now that one is driven to be humble in

one's self-defence." Stanbury assured his acquaintance that he was

anything but magnificent in his own ideas, that cold beef and beer

was his usual fare, and at last allowed the clerk to wait upon the

secretary.

"I wouldn't have any other fellow to meet you," said Brooke as they

sat at their dinners, "because in this way we can talk over the dear

old woman at Exeter. Yes, our fellow does make good soup, and it's

about all that he does do well. As for getting a potato properly

boiled, that's quite out of the question. Yes, it is a good glass

of sherry. I told you we'd a fairish tap of sherry on. Well, I was

there, backwards and forwards, for nearly six weeks."

"And how did you get on with the old woman?"

"Like a house on fire," said Brooke.

"She didn't quarrel with you?"

"No,--upon the whole she did not. I always felt that it was touch

and go. She might or she might not. Every now and then she looked at

me, and said a sharp word, as though it was about to come. But I had

determined when I went there altogether to disregard that kind of

thing."

"It's rather important to you,--is it not?"

"You mean about her money?"

"Of course, I mean about her money," said Stanbury.

"It is important;--and so it was to you."

"Not in the same degree, or nearly so. And as for me, it was not on

the cards that we shouldn't quarrel. I am so utterly a Bohemian in

all my ideas of life, and she is so absolutely the reverse, that not

to have quarrelled would have been hypocritical on my part or on

hers. She had got it into her head that she had a right to rule

my life; and, of course, she quarrelled with me when I made her

understand that she should do nothing of the kind. Now, she won't

want to rule you."

"I hope not."

"She has taken you up," continued Stanbury, "on altogether a

different understanding. You are to her the representative of a

family to whom she thinks she owes the restitution of the property

which she enjoys. I was simply a member of her own family, to which

she owes nothing. She thought it well to help one of us out of what

she regarded as her private purse, and she chose me. But the matter

is quite different with you."

"She might have given everything to you, as well as to me," said

Brooke.

"That's not her idea. She conceives herself bound to leave all she

has back to a Burgess, except anything she may save,--as she says,

off her own back, or out of her own belly. She has told me so a score

of times."

"And what did you say?"

"I always told her that, let her do as she would, I should never ask

any question about her will."

"But she hates us all like poison,--except me," said Brooke. "I never

knew people so absurdly hostile as are your aunt and my uncle Barty.

Each thinks the other the most wicked person in the world."

"I suppose your uncle was hard upon her once."

"Very likely. He is a hard man,--and has, very warmly, all the

feelings of an injured man. I suppose my uncle Brooke's will was a

cruel blow to him. He professes to believe that Miss Stanbury will

never leave me a shilling."

"He is wrong, then," said Stanbury.

"Oh yes;--he's wrong, because he thinks that that's her present

intention. I don't know that he's wrong as to the probable result."

"Who will have it, then?"

"There are ever so many horses in the race," said Brooke. "I'm one."

"You're the favourite," said Stanbury.

"For the moment I am. Then there's yourself."

"I've been scratched, and am altogether out of the betting."

"And your sister," continued Brooke.

"She's only entered to run for the second money; and, if she'll trot

over the course quietly, and not go the wrong side of the posts,

she'll win that."

"She may do more than that. Then there's Martha."

"My aunt will never leave her money to a servant. What she may give

to Martha would come from her own savings."

"The next is a dark horse, but one that wins a good many races of

this kind. He's apt to come in with a fatal rush at the end."

"Who is it?"

"The hospitals. When an old lady finds in her latter days that she

hates everybody, and fancies that the people around her are all

thinking of her money, she's uncommon likely to indulge herself in a

little bit of revenge, and solace herself with large-handed charity."

"But she's so good a woman at heart," said Hugh.

"And what can a good woman do better than promote hospitals?"

"She'll never do that. She's too strong. It's a maudlin sort of

thing, after all, for a person to leave everything to a hospital."

"But people are maudlin when they're dying," said Brooke,--"or even

when they think they're dying. How else did the Church get the

estates, of which we are now distributing so bountifully some of the

last remnants down at our office? Come into the next room, and we'll

have a smoke."

They had their smoke, and then they went at half-price to the play;

and, after the play was over, they eat three or four dozen of oysters

between them. Brooke Burgess was a little too old for oysters at

midnight in September; but he went through his work like a man. Hugh

Stanbury's powers were so great, that he could have got up and done

the same thing again, after he had been an hour in bed, without any

serious inconvenience.

But, in truth, Brooke Burgess had still another word or two to say

before he went to his rest. They supped somewhere near the Haymarket,

and then he offered to walk home with Stanbury, to his chambers in

Lincoln's Inn. "Do you know that Mr. Gibson at Exeter?" he asked, as

they passed through Leicester Square.

"Yes; I knew him. He was a sort of tame-cat parson at my aunt's

house, in my days."

"Exactly;--but I fancy that has come to an end now. Have you heard

anything about him lately?"

"Well;--yes I have," said Stanbury, feeling that dislike to speak

of his sister which is common to most brothers when in company with

other men.

"I suppose you've heard of it, and, as I was in the middle of it all,

of course I couldn't but know all about it too. Your aunt wanted him

to marry your sister."

"So I was told."

"But your sister didn't see it," said Brooke.

"So I understand," said Stanbury. "I believe my aunt was exceedingly

liberal, and meant to do the best she could for poor Dorothy; but, if

she didn't like him, I suppose she was right not to have him," said

Hugh.

"Of course she was right," said Brooke, with a good deal of

enthusiasm.

"I believe Gibson to be a very decent sort of fellow," said Stanbury.

"A mean, paltry dog," said Brooke. There had been a little

whisky-toddy after the oysters, and Mr. Burgess was perhaps moved to

a warmer expression of feeling than he might have displayed had he

discussed this branch of the subject before supper. "I knew from the

first that she would have nothing to say to him. He is such a poor

creature!"

"I always thought well of him," said Stanbury, "and was inclined to

think that Dolly might have done worse."

"It is hard to say what is the worst a girl might do; but I think she

might do, perhaps, a little better."

"What do you mean?" said Hugh.

"I think I shall go down, and ask her to take myself."

"Do you mean it in earnest?"

"I do," said Brooke. "Of course, I hadn't a chance when I was there.

She told me--"

"Who told you;--Dorothy?"

"No, your aunt;--she told me that Mr. Gibson was to marry your

sister. You know your aunt's way. She spoke of it as though the thing

were settled as soon as she had got it into her own head; and she was

as hot upon it as though Mr. Gibson had been an archbishop. I had

nothing to do then but to wait and see."

"I had no idea of Dolly being fought for by rivals."

"Brothers never think much of their sisters," said Brooke Burgess.

"I can assure you I think a great deal of Dorothy," said Hugh. "I

believe her to be as sweet a woman as God ever made. She hardly knows

that she has a self belonging to herself."

"I am sure she doesn't," said Brooke.

"She is a dear, loving, sweet-tempered creature, who is only too

ready to yield in all things."

"But she wouldn't yield about Gibson," said Brooke.

"How did she and my aunt manage?"

"Your sister simply said she couldn't,--and then that she wouldn't. I

never thought from the first moment that she'd take that fellow. In

the first place he can't say boo to a goose."

"But Dolly wouldn't want a man to say--boo."

"I'm not so sure of that, old fellow. At any rate I mean to try

myself. Now,--what'll the old woman say?"

"She'll be pleased as Punch, I should think," said Stanbury.

"Either that;--or else she'll swear that she'll never speak another

word to either of us. However, I shall go on with it."

"Does Dorothy know anything of this?" asked Stanbury.

"Not a word," said Brooke. "I came away a day or so after Gibson was

settled; and as I had been talked to all through the affair by both

of them, I couldn't turn round and offer myself the moment he was

gone. You won't object;--will you?"

"Who; I?" said Stanbury. "I shall have no objection as long as Dolly

pleases herself. Of course you know that we haven't as much as a

brass farthing among us?"

"That won't matter if the old lady takes it kindly," said Brooke.

Then they parted, at the corner of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Hugh as

he went up to his own rooms, reflected with something of wonderment

on the success of Dorothy's charms. She had always been the poor one

of the family, the chick out of the nest which would most require

assistance from the stronger birds; but it now appeared that she

would become the first among all the Stanburys. Wealth had first

flowed down upon the Stanbury family from the will of old Brooke

Burgess; and it now seemed probable that poor Dolly would ultimately

have the enjoyment of it all.

CHAPTER L.

CAMILLA TRIUMPHANT.

[Illustration]

It was now New Year's day, and there was some grief and perhaps more

excitement in Exeter,--for it was rumoured that Miss Stanbury lay

very ill at her house in the Close. But in order that our somewhat

uneven story may run as smoothly as it may be made to do, the little

history of the French family for the intervening months shall be told

in this chapter, in order that it may be understood how matters were

with them when the tidings of Miss Stanbury's severe illness first

reached their house at Heavitree.

After that terrible scene in which Miss Stanbury had so dreadfully

confounded Mr. Gibson by declaring the manner in which he had been

rebuffed by Dorothy, the unfortunate clergyman had endeavoured to

make his peace with the French family by assuring the mother that in

very truth it was the dearest wish of his heart to make her daughter

Camilla his wife. Mrs. French, who had ever been disposed to favour

Arabella's ambition, well knowing its priority and ancient right,

and who of late had been taught to consider that even Camilla had

consented to waive any claim that she might have once possessed,

could not refrain from the expression of some surprise. That he

should be recovered at all out of the Stanbury clutches was very

much to Mrs. French,--was so much that, had time been given her for

consideration, she would have acknowledged to herself readily that

the property had best be secured at once to the family, without

incurring that amount of risk which must unquestionably attend any

attempt on her part to direct Mr. Gibson's purpose hither or thither.

But the proposition came so suddenly that time was not allowed to her

to be altogether wise. "I thought it was poor Bella," she said, with

something of a piteous whine in her voice. At the moment Mr. Gibson

was so humble, that he was half inclined to give way even on that

head. He felt himself to have been brought so low in the market by

that terrible story of Miss Stanbury's,--which he had been unable

either to contradict or to explain,--that there was but little power

of fighting left in him. He was, however, just able to speak a word

for himself, and that sufficed. "I hope there has been no mistake,"

he said; "but really it is Camilla that has my heart." Mrs. French

made no rejoinder to this. It was so much to her to know that Mr.

Gibson's heart was among them at all after what had occurred in

the Close, that she acknowledged to herself after that moment of

reflection that Arabella must be sacrificed for the good of the

family interests. Poor, dear, loving, misguided, and spiritless

mother! She would have given the blood out of her bosom to get

husbands for her daughters, though it was not of her own experience

that she had learned that of all worldly goods a husband is the best.

But it was the possession which they had from their earliest years

thought of acquiring, which they first expected, for which they had

then hoped, and afterwards worked and schemed and striven with every

energy,--and as to which they had at last almost despaired. And now

Arabella's fire had been rekindled with a new spark, which, alas,

was to be quenched so suddenly! "And am I to tell them?" asked

Mrs. French, with a tremor in her voice. To this, however, Mr.

Gibson demurred. He said that for certain reasons he should like a

fortnight's grace; and that at the end of the fortnight he would

be prepared to speak. The interval was granted without further

questions, and Mr. Gibson was allowed to leave the house.

After that Mrs. French was not very comfortable at home. As soon as

Mr. Gibson had departed, Camilla at once returned to her mother and

desired to know what had taken place. Was it true that the perjured

man had proposed to that young woman in the Close? Mrs. French was

not clever at keeping a secret, and she could not keep this by her

own aid. She told all that happened to Camilla, and between them

they agreed that Arabella should be kept in ignorance till the fatal

fortnight should have passed. When Camilla was interrogated as to

her own purpose, she said she should like a day to think of it. She

took the twenty-four hours, and then made the following confession

of her passion to her mother. "You see, mamma, I always liked Mr.

Gibson,--always."

"So did Arabella, my dear,--before you thought of such things."

"I dare say that may be true, mamma; but that is not my fault. He

came here among us on such sweetly intimate terms that the feeling

grew up with me before I knew what it meant. As to any idea of

cutting out Arabella, my conscience is quite clear. If I thought

there had been anything really between them I would have gone

anywhere,--to the top of a mountain,--rather than rob my sister of a

heart that belonged to her."

"He has been so slow about it," said Mrs. French.

"I don't know about that," said Camilla. "Gentlemen have to be

slow, I suppose, when they think of their incomes. He only got St.

Peter's-cum-Pumpkin three years ago, and didn't know for the first

year whether he could hold that and the minor canonry together. Of

course a gentleman has to think of these things before he comes

forward."

"My dear, he has been very backward."

"If I'm to be Mrs. Gibson, mamma, I beg that I mayn't hear anything

said against him. Then there came all this about that young woman;

and when I saw that Arabella took on so,--which I must say was very

absurd,--I'm sure I put myself out of the way entirely. If I'd buried

myself under the ground I couldn't have done it more. And it's my

belief that what I've said, all for Arabella's sake, has put the old

woman into such a rage that it has made a quarrel between him and the

niece; otherwise that wouldn't be off. I don't believe a word of her

refusing him, and never shall. Is it in the course of things, mamma?"

Mrs. French shook her head. "Of course not. Then when you question

him,--very properly,--he says that he's devoted to--poor me. If I was

to refuse him, he wouldn't put up with Bella."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. French.

"He hates Bella. I've known it all along, though I wouldn't say

so. If I were to sacrifice myself ever so it wouldn't be of any

good,--and I shan't do it." In this way the matter was arranged.

At the end of the fortnight, however, Mr. Gibson did not come,--nor

at the end of three weeks. Inquiries had of course been made, and it

was ascertained that he had gone into Cornwall for a parson's holiday

of thirteen days. That might be all very well. A man might want the

recruiting vigour of some change of air after such scenes as those

Mr. Gibson had gone through with the Stanburys, and before his

proposed encounter with new perils. And he was a man so tied by the

leg that his escape could not be for any long time. He was back

on the appointed Sunday, and on the Wednesday Mrs. French, under

Camilla's instruction, wrote to him a pretty little note. He replied

that he would be with her on the Saturday. It would then be nearly

four weeks after the great day with Miss Stanbury, but no one would

be inclined to quarrel with so short a delay as that. Arabella in the

meantime had become fidgety and unhappy. She seemed to understand

that something was expected, being quite unable to guess what that

something might be. She was true throughout these days to the

simplicity of head-gear which Mr. Gibson had recommended to her,

and seemed in her questions to her mother and to Camilla to be more

fearful of Dorothy Stanbury than of any other enemy. "Mamma, I think

you ought to tell her," said Camilla more than once. But she had not

been told when Mr. Gibson came on the Saturday. It may truly be said

that the poor mother's pleasure in the prospects of one daughter was

altogether destroyed by the anticipation of the other daughter's

misery. Had Mr. Gibson made Dorothy Stanbury his wife they could

have all comforted themselves together by the heat of their joint

animosity.

He came on the Saturday, and it was so managed that he was closeted

with Camilla before Arabella knew that he was in the house. There

was a quarter of an hour during which his work was easy, and perhaps

pleasant. When he began to explain his intention, Camilla, with the

utmost frankness, informed him that her mother had told her all about

it. Then she turned her face on one side and put her hand in his; he

got his arm round her waist, gave her a kiss, and the thing was done.

Camilla was fully resolved that after such a betrothal it should not

be undone. She had behaved with sisterly forbearance, and would not

now lose the reward of virtue. Not a word was said of Arabella at

this interview till he was pressed to come and drink tea with them

all that night. He hesitated a moment; and then Camilla declared,

with something perhaps of imperious roughness in her manner, that he

had better face it all at once. "Mamma will tell her, and she will

understand," said Camilla. He hesitated again, but at last promised

that he would come.

Whilst he was yet in the house Mrs. French had told the whole story

to her poor elder daughter. "What is he doing with Camilla?" Arabella

had asked with feverish excitement.

"Bella, darling;--don't you know?" said the mother.

"I know nothing. Everybody keeps me in the dark, and I am badly used.

What is it that he is doing?" Then Mrs. French tried to take the

poor young woman in her arms, but Arabella would not submit to be

embraced. "Don't!" she exclaimed. "Leave me alone. Nobody likes me,

or cares a bit about me! Why is Cammy with him there, all alone?"

"I suppose he is asking her--to be--his wife." Then Arabella threw

herself in despair upon the bed, and wept without any further attempt

at control over her feelings. It was a death-blow to her last hope,

and all the world, as she looked upon the world then, was over for

her. "If I could have arranged it the other way, you know that I

would," said the mother.

"Mamma," said Arabella, jumping up, "he shan't do it. He hasn't a

right. And as for her,-- Oh, that she should treat me in this way!

Didn't he tell me the other night, when he drank tea here with me

alone--"

"What did he tell you, Bella?"

"Never mind. Nothing shall ever make me speak to him again;--not if

he married her three times over; nor to her. She is a nasty, sly,

good-for-nothing thing!"

"But, Bella--"

"Don't talk to me, mamma. There never was such a thing done before

since people--were--people at all. She has been doing it all the

time. I know she has."

Nevertheless Arabella did sit down to tea with the two lovers that

night. There was a terrible scene between her and Camilla; but

Camilla held her own; and Arabella, being the weaker of the two, was

vanquished by the expenditure of her own small energies. Camilla

argued that as her sister's chance was gone, and as the prize had

come in her own way, there was no good reason why it should be lost

to the family altogether, because Arabella could not win it. When

Arabella called her a treacherous vixen and a heartless, profligate

hussy, she spoke out freely, and said that she wasn't going to be

abused. A gentleman to whom she was attached had asked her for her

hand, and she had given it. If Arabella chose to make herself a fool

she might,--but what would be the effect? Simply that all the world

would know that she, Arabella, was disappointed. Poor Bella at last

gave way, put on her discarded chignon, and came down to tea. Mr.

Gibson was already in the room when she entered it. "Arabella," he

said, getting up to greet her, "I hope you will congratulate me."

He had planned his little speech and his manner of making it, and

had wisely decided that in this way might he best get over the

difficulty.

"Oh yes;--of course," she said, with a little giggle, and then a sob,

and then a flood of tears.

"Dear Bella feels these things so strongly," said Mrs. French.

"We have never been parted yet," said Camilla. Then Arabella tapped

the head of the sofa three or four times sharply with her knuckles.

It was the only protest against the reading of the scene which

Camilla had given of which she was capable at that moment. After that

Mrs. French gave out the tea, Arabella curled herself upon the sofa

as though she were asleep, and the two lovers settled down to proper

lover-like conversation.

The reader may be sure that Camilla was not slow in making the fact

of her engagement notorious through the city. It was not probably

true that the tidings of her success had anything to do with Miss

Stanbury's illness; but it was reported by many that such was the

case. It was in November that the arrangement was made, and it

certainly was true that Miss Stanbury was rather ill about the same

time. "You know, you naughty Lothario, that you did give her some

ground to hope that she might dispose of her unfortunate niece," said

Camilla playfully to her own one, when this illness was discussed

between them. "But you are caught now, and your wings are clipped,

and you are never to be a naughty Lothario again." The clerical

Don Juan bore it all, awkwardly indeed, but with good humour, and

declared that all his troubles of that sort were over, now and for

ever. Nevertheless he did not name the day, and Camilla began to feel

that there might be occasion for a little more of that imperious

roughness which she had at her command.

November was nearly over and nothing had been fixed about the day.

Arabella never condescended to speak to her sister on the subject;

but on more than one occasion made some inquiry of her mother. And

she came to perceive, or to think that she perceived, that her mother

was still anxious on the subject. "I shouldn't wonder if he wasn't

off some day now," she said at last to her mother.

"Don't say anything so dreadful, Bella."

"It would serve Cammy quite right, and it's just what he's likely to

do."

"It would kill me," said the mother.

"I don't know about killing," said Arabella; "it's nothing to what

I've had to go through. I shouldn't pretend to be sorry if he were to

go to Hong-Kong to-morrow."

But Mr. Gibson had no idea of going to Hong-Kong. He was simply

carrying out his little scheme for securing the advantages of a "long

day." He was fully resolved to be married, and was contented to think

that his engagement was the best thing for him. To one or two male

friends he spoke of Camilla as the perfection of female virtue, and

entertained no smallest idea of ultimate escape. But a "long day" is

often a convenience. A bill at three months sits easier on a man than

one at sixty days; and a bill at six months is almost as little of a

burden as no bill at all.

But Camilla was resolved that some day should be fixed. "Thomas," she

said to her lover one morning, as they were walking home together

after service at the cathedral, "isn't this rather a fool's Paradise

of ours?"

"How a fool's Paradise?" asked the happy Thomas.

"What I mean is, dearest, that we ought to fix something. Mamma is

getting uneasy about her own plans."

"In what way, dearest?"

"About a thousand things. She can't arrange anything till our plans

are made. Of course there are little troubles about money when people

ain't rich." Then it occurred to her that this might seem to be a

plea for postponing rather than for hurrying the marriage, and she

mended her argument. "The truth is, Thomas, she wants to know when

the day is to be fixed, and I've promised to ask. She said she'd ask

you herself, but I wouldn't let her do that."

"We must think about it, of course," said Thomas.

"But, my dear, there has been plenty of time for thinking. What do

you say to January?" This was on the last day of November.

"January!" exclaimed Thomas, in a tone that betrayed no triumph. "I

couldn't get my services arranged for in January."

"I thought a clergyman could always manage that for his marriage,"

said Camilla.

"Not in January. Besides, I was thinking you would like to be away in

warmer weather."

They were still in November, and he was thinking of postponing it

till the summer! Camilla immediately perceived how necessary it was

that she should be plain with him. "We shall not have warm weather,

as you call it, for a very long time, Thomas;--and I don't think that

it would be wise to wait for the weather at all. Indeed, I've begun

to get my things for doing it in the winter. Mamma said that she was

sure January would be the very latest. And it isn't as though we had

to get furniture or anything of that kind. Of course a lady shouldn't

be pressing." She smiled sweetly and leaned on his arm as she said

this. "But I hate all girlish nonsense and that kind of thing. It is

such a bore to be kept waiting. I'm sure there's nothing to prevent

it coming off in February."

The 31st of March was fixed before they reached Heavitree, and

Camilla went into her mother's house a happy woman. But Mr. Gibson,

as he went home, thought that he had been hardly used. Here was a

girl who hadn't a shilling of money,--not a shilling till her mother

died,--and who already talked about his house, and his furniture,

and his income, as if it were all her own! Circumstanced as she was,

what right had she to press for an early day? He was quite sure that

Arabella would have been more discreet and less exacting. He was very

angry with his dear Cammy as he went across the Close to his house.

CHAPTER LI.

SHEWING WHAT HAPPENED DURING MISS STANBURY'S ILLNESS.

It was on Christmas-day that Sir Peter Mancrudy, the highest

authority on such matters in the west of England, was sent for to see

Miss Stanbury; and Sir Peter had acknowledged that things were very

serious. He took Dorothy on one side, and told her that Mr. Martin,

the ordinary practitioner, had treated the case, no doubt, quite

wisely throughout; that there was not a word to be said against

Mr. Martin, whose experience was great, and whose discretion was

undeniable; but, nevertheless,--at least it seemed to Dorothy that

this was the only meaning to be attributed to Sir Peter's words,--Mr.

Martin had in this case taken one line of treatment, when he ought

to have taken another. The plan of action was undoubtedly changed,

and Mr. Martin became very fidgety, and ordered nothing without Sir

Peter's sanction. Miss Stanbury was suffering from bronchitis, and a

complication of diseases about her throat and chest. Barty Burgess

declared to more than one acquaintance in the little parlour behind

the bank, that she would go on drinking four or five glasses of

new port wine every day, in direct opposition to Martin's request.

Camilla French heard the report, and repeated it to her lover, and

perhaps another person or two, with an expression of her assured

conviction that it must be false,--at any rate, as regarded the

fifth glass. Mrs. MacHugh, who saw Martha daily, was much frightened.

The peril of such a friend disturbed equally the repose and the

pleasures of her life. Mrs. Clifford was often at Miss Stanbury's

bed-side,--and would have sat there reading for hours together,

had she not been made to understand by Martha that Miss Stanbury

preferred that Miss Dorothy should read to her. The sick woman

received the Sacrament weekly,--not from Mr. Gibson, but from the

hands of another minor canon; and, though she never would admit her

own danger, or allow others to talk to her of it, it was known to

them all that she admitted it to herself because she had, with much

personal annoyance, caused a codicil to be added to her will. "As

you didn't marry that man," she said to Dorothy, "I must change it

again." It was in vain that Dorothy begged her not to trouble herself

with such thoughts. "That's trash," said Miss Stanbury, angrily. "A

person who has it is bound to trouble himself about it. You don't

suppose I'm afraid of dying;--do you?" she added. Dorothy answered

her with some commonplace,--declaring how strongly they all expected

to see her as well as ever. "I'm not a bit afraid to die," said the

old woman, wheezing, struggling with such voice as she possessed;

"I'm not afraid of it, and I don't think I shall die this time; but

I'm not going to have mistakes when I'm gone." This was on the eve

of the new year, and on the same night she asked Dorothy to write to

Brooke Burgess, and request him to come to Exeter. This was Dorothy's

letter:--

Exeter, 31st December, 186--.

MY DEAR MR. BURGESS,

Perhaps I ought to have written before, to say that Aunt

Stanbury is not as well as we could wish her; but, as I

know that you cannot very well leave your office, I have

thought it best not to say anything to frighten you. But

to-night Aunt herself has desired me to tell you that she

thinks you ought to know that she is ill, and that she

wishes you to come to Exeter for a day or two, if it is

possible. Sir Peter Mancrudy has been here every day

since Christmas-day, and I believe he thinks she may get

over it. It is chiefly in the throat;--what they call

bronchitis,--and she has got to be very weak with it, and

at the same time very liable to inflammation. So I know

that you will come if you can.

Yours very truly,

DOROTHY STANBURY.

Perhaps I ought to tell you that she had her lawyer here

with her the day before yesterday; but she does not seem

to think that she herself is in danger. I read to her a

good deal, and I think she is generally asleep; when I

stop she wakes, and I don't believe she gets any other

rest at all.

When it was known in Exeter that Brooke Burgess had been sent for,

then the opinion became general that Miss Stanbury's days were

numbered. Questions were asked of Sir Peter at every corner of the

street; but Sir Peter was a discreet man, who could answer such

questions without giving any information. If it so pleased God, his

patient would die; but it was quite possible that she might live.

That was the tenor of Sir Peter's replies,--and they were read in any

light, according to the idiosyncracies of the reader. Mrs. MacHugh

was quite sure that the danger was over, and had a little game of

cribbage on the sly with old Miss Wright;--for, during the severity

of Miss Stanbury's illness, whist was put on one side in the vicinity

of the Close. Barty Burgess was still obdurate, and shook his head.

He was of opinion that they might soon gratify their curiosity, and

see the last crowning iniquity of this wickedest of old women. Mrs.

Clifford declared that it was all in the hands of God; but that

she saw no reason why Miss Stanbury should not get about again. Mr.

Gibson thought that it was all up with his late friend; and Camilla

wished that at their last interview there had been more of charity

on the part of one whom she had regarded in past days with respect

and esteem. Mrs. French, despondent about everything, was quite

despondent in this case. Martha almost despaired, and already was

burdened with the cares of a whole wardrobe of solemn funereal

clothing. She was seen peering in for half-an-hour at the windows and

doorway of a large warehouse for the sale of mourning. Giles Hickbody

would not speak above his breath, and took his beer standing; but

Dorothy was hopeful, and really believed that her aunt would recover.

Perhaps Sir Peter had spoken to her in terms less oracular than those

which he used towards the public.

Brooke Burgess came, and had an interview with Sir Peter, and to

him Sir Peter was under some obligation to speak plainly, as being

the person whom Miss Stanbury recognised as her heir. So Sir Peter

declared that his patient might perhaps live, and perhaps might die.

"The truth is, Mr. Burgess," said Sir Peter, "a doctor doesn't know

so very much more about these things than other people." It was

understood that Brooke was to remain three days in Exeter, and then

return to London. He would, of course, come again if--if anything

should happen. Sir Peter had been quite clear in his opinion, that no

immediate result was to be anticipated,--either in the one direction

or the other. His patient was doomed to a long illness; she might get

over it, or she might succumb to it.

Dorothy and Brooke were thus thrown much together during these three

days. Dorothy, indeed, spent most of her hours beside her aunt's bed,

instigating sleep by the reading of a certain series of sermons in

which Miss Stanbury had great faith; but nevertheless, there were

some minutes in which she and Brooke were necessarily together. They

eat their meals in each other's company, and there was a period in

the evening, before Dorothy began her night-watch in her aunt's room,

at which she took her tea while Martha was nurse in the room above.

At this time of the day she would remain an hour or more with Brooke;

and a great deal may be said between a man and a woman in an hour

when the will to say it is there. Brooke Burgess had by no means

changed his mind since he had declared it to Hugh Stanbury under the

midnight lamps of Long Acre, when warmed by the influence of oysters

and whisky toddy. The whisky toddy had in that instance brought out

truth and not falsehood,--as is ever the nature of whisky toddy and

similar dangerous provocatives. There is no saying truer than that

which declares that there is truth in wine. Wine is a dangerous

thing, and should not be made the exponent of truth, let the truth

be good as it may; but it has the merit of forcing a man to show his

true colours. A man who is a gentleman in his cups may be trusted to

be a gentleman at all times. I trust that the severe censor will not

turn upon me, and tell me that no gentleman in these days is ever to

be seen in his cups. There are cups of different degrees of depth;

and cups do exist, even among gentlemen, and seem disposed to hold

their own let the censor be ever so severe. The gentleman in his cups

is a gentleman always; and the man who tells his friend in his cups

that he is in love, does so because the fact has been very present

to himself in his cooler and calmer moments. Brooke Burgess, who

had seen Hugh Stanbury on two or three occasions since that of the

oysters and toddy, had not spoken again of his regard for Hugh's

sister; but not the less was he determined to carry out his plan and

make Dorothy his wife if she would accept him. But could he ask her

while the old lady was, as it might be, dying in the house? He put

this question to himself as he travelled down to Exeter, and had told

himself that he must be guided for an answer by circumstances as

they might occur. Hugh had met him at the station as he started for

Exeter, and there had been a consultation between them as to the

propriety of bringing about, or of attempting to bring about, an

interview between Hugh and his aunt. "Do whatever you like," Hugh had

said. "I would go down to her at a moment's warning, if she should

express a desire to see me."

On the first night of Brooke's arrival this question had been

discussed between him and Dorothy. Dorothy had declared herself

unable to give advice. If any message were given to her she would

deliver it to her aunt, but she thought that anything said to her

aunt on the subject had better come from Brooke himself. "You

evidently are the person most important to her," Dorothy said, "and

she would listen to you when she would not let any one else say a

word." Brooke promised that he would think of it; and then Dorothy

tripped up to relieve Martha, dreaming nothing at all of that other

doubt to which the important personage downstairs was now subject.

Dorothy was, in truth, very fond of the new friend she had made; but

it had never occurred to her that he might be a possible suitor to

her. Her old conception of herself,--that she was beneath the notice

of any man,--had only been partly disturbed by the absolute fact of

Mr. Gibson's courtship. She had now heard of his engagement with

Camilla French, and saw in that complete proof that the foolish man

had been induced to offer his hand to her by the promise of her

aunt's money. If there had been a moment of exaltation,--a period in

which she had allowed herself to think that she was, as other women,

capable of making herself dear to a man,--it had been but a moment.

And now she rejoiced greatly that she had not acceded to the wishes

of one to whom it was so manifest that she had not made herself in

the least dear.

On the second day of his visit, Brooke was summoned to Miss

Stanbury's room at noon. She was forbidden to talk, and during a

great portion of the day could hardly speak without an effort; but

there would be half hours now and again in which she would become

stronger than usual, at which time nothing that Martha and Dorothy

could say would induce her to hold her tongue. When Brooke came to

her on this occasion he found her sitting up in bed with a great

shawl round her; and he at once perceived she was much more like her

own self than on the former day. She told him that she had been an

old fool for sending for him, that she had nothing special to say

to him, that she had made no alteration in her will in regard to

him,--"except that I have done something for Dolly that will have to

come out of your pocket, Brooke." Brooke declared that too much could

not be done for a person so good, and dear, and excellent as Dorothy

Stanbury, let it come out of whose pocket it might. "She is nothing

to you, you know," said Miss Stanbury.

"She is a great deal to me," said Brooke.

"What is she?" asked Miss Stanbury.

"Oh;--a friend; a great friend."

"Well; yes. I hope it may be so. But she won't have anything that

I haven't saved," said Miss Stanbury. "There are two houses at St.

Thomas's; but I bought them myself, Brooke;--out of the income."

Brooke could only declare that as the whole property was hers, to do

what she liked with it as completely as though she had inherited it

from her own father, no one could have any right to ask questions

as to when or how this or that portion of the property had accrued.

"But I don't think I'm going to die yet, Brooke," she said. "If it is

God's will, I am ready. Not that I'm fit, Brooke. God forbid that I

should ever think that. But I doubt whether I shall ever be fitter. I

can go without repining if He thinks best to take me." Then he stood

up by her bedside, with his hand upon hers, and after some hesitation

asked her whether she would wish to see her nephew Hugh. "No," said

she, sharply. Brooke went on to say how pleased Hugh would have been

to come to her. "I don't think much of death-bed reconciliations,"

said the old woman, grimly. "I loved him dearly, but he didn't love

me, and I don't know what good we should do each other." Brooke

declared that Hugh did love her; but he could not press the matter,

and it was dropped.

On that evening at eight Dorothy came down to her tea. She had dined

at the same table with Brooke that afternoon, but a servant had been

in the room all the time and nothing had been said between them. As

soon as Brooke had got his tea he began to tell the story of his

failure about Hugh. He was sorry, he said, that he had spoken on the

subject, as it had moved Miss Stanbury to an acrimony which he had

not expected.

"She always declares that he never loved her," said Dorothy. "She has

told me so twenty times."

"There are people who fancy that nobody cares for them," said Brooke.

"Indeed there are, Mr. Burgess; and it is so natural."

"Why natural?"

"Just as it is natural that there should be dogs and cats that are

petted and loved and made much of, and others that have to crawl

through life as they can, cuffed and kicked and starved."

"That depends on the accident of possession," said Brooke.

"So does the other. How many people there are that don't seem to

belong to anybody,--and if they do, they're no good to anybody.

They're not cuffed exactly, or starved; but--"

"You mean that they don't get their share of affection?"

"They get perhaps as much as they deserve," said Dorothy.

"Because they're cross-grained, or ill-tempered, or disagreeable?"

"Not exactly that."

"What then?" asked Brooke.

"Because they're just nobodies. They are not anything particular to

anybody, and so they go on living till they die. You know what I

mean, Mr. Burgess. A man who is a nobody can perhaps make himself

somebody,--or, at any rate, he can try; but a woman has no means of

trying. She is a nobody, and a nobody she must remain. She has her

clothes and her food, but she isn't wanted anywhere. People put up

with her, and that is about the best of her luck. If she were to die

somebody perhaps would be sorry for her, but nobody would be worse

off. She doesn't earn anything or do any good. She is just there and

that's all."

Brooke had never heard her speak after this fashion before, had never

known her to utter so many consecutive words, or to put forward any

opinion of her own with so much vigour. And Dorothy herself, when she

had concluded her speech, was frightened by her own energy and grew

red in the face, and showed very plainly that she was half ashamed

of herself. Brooke thought that he had never seen her look so pretty

before, and was pleased by her enthusiasm. He understood perfectly

that she was thinking of her own position, though she had entertained

no idea that he would so read her meaning; and he felt that it was

incumbent on him to undeceive her, and make her know that she was not

one of those women who are "just there and that's all." "One does see

such a woman as that now and again," he said.

"There are hundreds of them," said Dorothy. "And of course it can't

be helped."

"Such as Arabella French," said he, laughing.

"Well,--yes; if she is one. It is very easy to see the difference.

Some people are of use and are always doing things. There are others,

generally women, who have nothing to do, but who can't be got rid of.

It is a melancholy sort of feeling."

"You at least are not one of them."

"I didn't mean to complain about myself," she said. "I have got a

great deal to make me happy."

"I don't suppose you regard yourself as an Arabella French," said he.

"How angry Miss French would be if she heard you. She considers

herself to be one of the reigning beauties of Exeter."

"She has had a very long reign, and dominion of that sort to be

successful ought to be short."

"That is spiteful, Mr. Burgess."

"I don't feel spiteful against her, poor woman. I own I do not love

Camilla. Not that I begrudge Camilla her present prosperity."

"Nor I either, Mr. Burgess."

"She and Mr. Gibson will do very well together, I dare say."

"I hope they will," said Dorothy, "and I do not see any reason

against it. They have known each other a long time."

"A very long time," said Brooke. Then he paused for a minute,

thinking how he might best tell her that which he had now resolved

should be told on this occasion. Dorothy finished her tea and got up

as though she were about to go to her duty up-stairs. She had been as

yet hardly an hour in the room, and the period of her relief was not

fairly over. But there had come something of a personal flavour in

their conversation which prompted her, unconsciously, to leave him.

She had, without any special indication of herself, included herself

among that company of old maids who are born and live and die without

that vital interest in the affairs of life which nothing but family

duties, the care of children, or at least of a husband, will give to

a woman. If she had not meant this she had felt it. He had understood

her meaning, or at least her feeling, and had taken upon himself to

assure her that she was not one of the company whose privations she

had endeavoured to describe. Her instinct rather than her reason put

her at once upon her guard, and she prepared to leave the room. "You

are not going yet," he said.

"I think I might as well. Martha has so much to do, and she comes to

me again at five in the morning."

"Don't go quite yet," he said, pulling out his watch. "I know all

about the hours, and it wants twenty minutes to the proper time."

"There is no proper time, Mr. Burgess."

"Then you can remain a few minutes longer. The fact is, I've got

something I want to say to you."

He was now standing between her and the door, so that she could not

get away from him; but at this moment she was absolutely ignorant of

his purpose, expecting nothing of love from him more than she would

from Sir Peter Mancrudy. Her face had become flushed when she made

her long speech, but there was no blush on it as she answered him

now. "Of course, I can wait," she said, "if you have anything to say

to me."

"Well;--I have. I should have said it before, only that that other

man was here." He was blushing now,--up to the roots of his hair, and

felt that he was in a difficulty. There are men, to whom such moments

of their lives are pleasurable, but Brooke Burgess was not one of

them. He would have been glad to have had it done and over,--so that

then he might take pleasure in it.

"What man?" asked Dorothy, in perfect innocence.

"Mr. Gibson, to be sure. I don't know that there is anybody else."

"Oh, Mr. Gibson. He never comes here now, and I don't suppose he will

again. Aunt Stanbury is so very angry with him."

"I don't care whether he comes or not. What I mean is this. When I

was here before, I was told that you were going--to marry him."

"But I wasn't."

"How was I to know that, when you didn't tell me? I certainly did

know it after I came back from Dartmoor." He paused a moment, as

though she might have a word to say. She had no word to say, and

did not in the least know what was coming. She was so far from

anticipating the truth, that she was composed and easy in her mind.

"But all that is of no use at all," he continued. "When I was here

before Miss Stanbury wanted you to marry Mr. Gibson; and, of course,

I had nothing to say about it. Now I want you--to marry me."

"Mr. Burgess!"

"Dorothy, my darling, I love you better than all the world. I do,

indeed." As soon as he had commenced his protestations he became

profuse enough with them, and made a strong attempt to support them

by the action of his hands. But she retreated from him step by step,

till she had regained her chair by the tea-table, and there she

seated herself,--safely, as she thought; but he was close to her,

over her shoulder, still continuing his protestations, offering up

his vows, and imploring her to reply to him. She, as yet, had not

answered him by a word, save by that one half-terrified exclamation

of his name. "Tell me, at any rate, that you believe me, when I

assure you that I love you," he said. The room was going round with

Dorothy, and the world was going round, and there had come upon her

so strong a feeling of the disruption of things in general, that she

was at the moment anything but happy. Had it been possible for her to

find that the last ten minutes had been a dream, she would at this

moment have wished that it might become one. A trouble had come upon

her, out of which she did not see her way. To dive among the waters

in warm weather is very pleasant; there is nothing pleasanter. But

when the young swimmer first feels the thorough immersion of his

plunge, there comes upon him a strong desire to be quickly out again.

He will remember afterwards how joyous it was; but now, at this

moment, the dry land is everything to him. So it was with Dorothy.

She had thought of Brooke Burgess as one of those bright ones of the

world, with whom everything is happy and pleasant, whom everybody

loves, who may have whatever they please, whose lines have been laid

in pleasant places. She thought of him as a man who might some day

make some woman very happy as his wife. To be the wife of such a man

was, in Dorothy's estimation, one of those blessed chances which come

to some women, but which she never regarded as being within her own

reach. Though she had thought much about him, she had never thought

of him as a possible possession for herself; and now that he was

offering himself to her, she was not at once made happy by his love.

Her ideas of herself and of her life were all dislocated for the

moment, and she required to be alone, that she might set herself in

order, and try herself all over, and find whether her bones were

broken. "Say that you believe me," he repeated.

[Illustration: The world was going round with Dorothy.]

"I don't know what to say," she whispered.

"I'll tell you what to say. Say at once that you will be my wife."

"I can't say that, Mr. Burgess."

"Why not? Do you mean that you cannot love me?"

"I think, if you please, I'll go up to Aunt Stanbury. It is time for

me; indeed it is; and she will be wondering, and Martha will be put

out. Indeed I must go up."

"And will you not answer me?"

"I don't know what to say. You must give me a little time to

consider. I don't quite think you're serious."

"Heaven and earth!" began Brooke.

"And I'm sure it would never do. At any rate, I must go now. I must,

indeed."

And so she escaped, and went up to her aunt's room, which she reached

at ten minutes after her usual time, and before Martha had begun

to be put out. She was very civil to Martha, as though Martha had

been injured; and she put her hand on her aunt's arm, with a soft,

caressing, apologetic touch, feeling conscious that she had given

cause for offence. "What has he been saying to you?" said her aunt,

as soon as Martha had closed the door. This was a question which

Dorothy, certainly, could not answer. Miss Stanbury meant nothing

by it,--nothing beyond a sick woman's desire that something of the

conversation of those who were not sick should be retailed to her;

but to Dorothy the question meant so much! How should her aunt have

known that he had said anything? She sat herself down and waited,

giving no answer to the question. "I hope he gets his meals

comfortably," said Miss Stanbury.

"I am sure he does," said Dorothy, infinitely relieved. Then, knowing

how important it was that her aunt should sleep, she took up the

volume of Jeremy Taylor, and, with so great a burden on her mind,

she went on painfully and distinctly with the second sermon on the

Marriage Ring. She strove valiantly to keep her mind to the godliness

of the discourse, so that it might be of some possible service to

herself; and to keep her voice to the tone that might be of service

to her aunt. Presently she heard the grateful sound which indicated

her aunt's repose, but she knew of experience that were she to stop,

the sound and the sleep would come to an end also. For a whole hour

she persevered, reading the sermon of the Marriage Ring with such

attention to the godly principles of the teaching as she could

give,--with that terrible burden upon her mind.

"Thank you;--thank you; that will do, my dear. Shut it up," said

the sick woman. "It's time now for the draught." Then Dorothy moved

quietly about the room, and did her nurse's work with soft hand, and

soft touch, and soft tread. After that her aunt kissed her, and bade

her sit down and sleep.

"I'll go on reading, aunt, if you'll let me," said Dorothy. But

Miss Stanbury, who was not a cruel woman, would have no more of the

reading, and Dorothy's mind was left at liberty to think of the

proposition that had been made to her. To one resolution she came

very quickly. The period of her aunt's illness could not be a proper

time for marriage vows, or the amenities of love-making. She did not

feel that he, being a man, had offended; but she was quite sure that

were she, a woman, the niece of so kind an aunt, the nurse at the

bed-side of such an invalid,--were she at such a time to consent to

talk of love, she would never deserve to have a lover. And from this

resolve she got great comfort. It would give her an excuse for making

no more assured answer at present, and would enable her to reflect

at leisure as to the reply she would give him, should he ever, by

any chance, renew his offer. If he did not,--and probably he would

not,--then it would have been very well that he should not have been

made the victim of a momentary generosity. She had complained of the

dulness of her life, and that complaint from her had produced his

noble, kind, generous, dear, enthusiastic benevolence towards her.

As she thought of it all,--and by degrees she took great pleasure in

thinking of it,--her mind bestowed upon him all manner of eulogies.

She could not persuade herself that he really loved her, and yet she

was full at heart of gratitude to him for the expression of his love.

And as for herself, could she love him? We who are looking on of

course know that she loved him;--that from this moment there was

nothing belonging to him, down to his shoe-tie, that would not be

dear to her heart and an emblem so tender as to force a tear from

her. He had already become her god, though she did not know it. She

made comparisons between him and Mr. Gibson, and tried to convince

herself that the judgment, which was always pronounced very clearly

in Brooke's favour, came from anything but her heart. And thus

through the long watches of the night she became very happy, feeling

but not knowing that the whole aspect of the world was changed to her

by those few words which her lover had spoken to her. She thought now

that it would be consolation enough to her in future to know that

such a man as Brooke Burgess had once asked her to be the partner of

his life, and that it would be almost ungenerous in her to push her

advantage further and attempt to take him at his word. Besides, there

would be obstacles. Her aunt would dislike such a marriage for him,

and he would be bound to obey her aunt in such a matter. She would

not allow herself to think that she could ever become Brooke's wife,

but nothing could rob her of the treasure of the offer which he had

made her. Then Martha came to her at five o'clock, and she went to

her bed to dream for an hour or two of Brooke Burgess and her future

life.

On the next morning she met him at breakfast. She went down stairs

later than usual, not till ten, having hung about her aunt's room,

thinking that thus she would escape him for the present. She would

wait till he was gone out, and then she would go down. She did wait;

but she could not hear the front door, and then her aunt murmured

something about Brooke's breakfast. She was told to go down, and she

went. But when on the stairs she slunk back to her own room, and

stood there for awhile, aimless, motionless, not knowing what to do.

Then one of the girls came to her, and told her that Mr. Burgess was

waiting breakfast for her. She knew not what excuse to make, and at

last descended slowly to the parlour. She was very happy, but had it

been possible for her to have run away she would have gone.

"Dear Dorothy," he said at once. "I may call you so,--may I not?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you will love me;--and be my own, own wife?"

"No, Mr. Burgess."

"No?"

"I mean;--that is to say--"

"Do you love me, Dorothy?"

"Only think how ill Aunt Stanbury is, Mr. Burgess;--perhaps dying!

How can I have any thought now except about her? It wouldn't be

right;--would it?"

"You may say that you love me."

"Mr. Burgess, pray, pray don't speak of it now. If you do I must go

away."

"But do you love me?"

"Pray, pray don't, Mr. Burgess!"

There was nothing more to be got from her during the whole day than

that. He told her in the evening that as soon as Miss Stanbury was

well, he would come again;--that in any case he would come again. She

sat quite still as he said this, with a solemn face,--but smiling at

heart, laughing at heart, so happy! When she got up to leave him, and

was forced to give him her hand, he seized her in his arms and kissed

her. "That is very, very wrong," she said, sobbing, and then ran to

her room,--the happiest girl in all Exeter. He was to start early on

the following morning, and she knew that she would not be forced to

see him again. Thinking of him was so much pleasanter than seeing

him!

CHAPTER LII.

MR. OUTHOUSE COMPLAINS THAT IT'S HARD.

Life had gone on during the winter at St. Diddulph's Parsonage in a

dull, weary, painful manner. There had come a letter in November from

Trevelyan to his wife, saying that as he could trust neither her nor

her uncle with the custody of his child, he should send a person

armed with due legal authority, addressed to Mr. Outhouse, for the

recovery of the boy, and desiring that little Louis might be at once

surrendered to the messenger. Then of course there had arisen great

trouble in the house. Both Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora Rowley had learned

by this time that, as regarded the master of the house, they were not

welcome guests at St. Diddulph's. When the threat was shewn to Mr.

Outhouse, he did not say a word to indicate that the child should be

given up. He muttered something, indeed, about impotent nonsense,

which seemed to imply that the threat could be of no avail; but there

was none of that reassurance to be obtained from him which a positive

promise on his part to hold the bairn against all comers would have

given. Mrs. Outhouse told her niece more than once that the child

would be given to no messenger whatever; but even she did not give

the assurance with that energy which the mother would have liked.

"They shall drag him away from me by force if they do take him!" said

the mother, gnashing her teeth. Oh, if her father would but come!

For some weeks she did not let the boy out of her sight; but when no

messenger had presented himself by Christmas time, they all began to

believe that the threat had in truth meant nothing,--that it had been

part of the ravings of a madman.

But the threat had meant something. Early on one morning in January

Mr. Outhouse was told that a person in the hall wanted to see him,

and Mrs. Trevelyan, who was sitting at breakfast, the child being at

the moment up-stairs, started from her seat. The maid described the

man as being "All as one as a gentleman," though she would not go so

far as to say that he was a gentleman in fact. Mr. Outhouse slowly

rose from his breakfast, went out to the man in the passage, and bade

him follow into the little closet that was now used as a study. It is

needless perhaps to say that the man was Bozzle.

"I dare say, Mr. Houthouse, you don't know me," said Bozzle. Mr.

Outhouse, disdaining all complimentary language, said that he

certainly did not. "My name, Mr. Houthouse, is Samuel Bozzle, and I

live at No. 55, Stony Walk, Union Street, Borough. I was in the Force

once, but I work on my own 'ook now."

"What do you want with me, Mr. Bozzle?"

"It isn't so much with you, sir, as it is with a lady as is under

your protection; and it isn't so much with the lady as it is with her

infant."

"Then you may go away, Mr. Bozzle," said Mr. Outhouse, impatiently.

"You may as well go away at once."

"Will you please read them few lines, sir," said Mr. Bozzle. "They

is in Mr. Trewilyan's handwriting, which will no doubt be familiar

characters,--leastways to Mrs. T., if you don't know the gent's

fist." Mr. Outhouse, after looking at the paper for a minute, and

considering deeply what in this emergency he had better do, did take

the paper and read it. The words ran as follows: "I hereby give full

authority to Mr. Samuel Bozzle, of 55, Stony Walk, Union Street,

Borough, to claim and to enforce possession of the body of my child,

Louis Trevelyan; and I require that any person whatsoever who may

now have the custody of the said child, whether it be my wife or any

of her friends, shall at once deliver him up to Mr. Bozzle, on the

production of this authority.--LOUIS TREVELYAN." It may be explained

that before this document had been written there had been much

correspondence on the subject between Bozzle and his employer. To

give the ex-policeman his due, he had not at first wished to meddle

in the matter of the child. He had a wife at home who expressed an

opinion with much vigour that the boy should be left with its mother,

and that he, Bozzle, should he succeed in getting hold of the child,

would not know what to do with it. Bozzle was aware, moreover, that

it was his business to find out facts, and not to perform actions.

But his employer had become very urgent with him. Mr. Bideawhile had

positively refused to move in the matter; and Trevelyan, mad as he

was, had felt a disinclination to throw his affairs into the hands of

a certain Mr. Skint, of Stamford Street, whom Bozzle had recommended

to him as a lawyer. Trevelyan had hinted, moreover, that if Bozzle

would make the application in person, that application, if not

obeyed, would act with usefulness as a preliminary step for further

personal measures to be taken by himself. He intended to return

to England for the purpose, but he desired that the order for the

child's rendition should be made at once. Therefore Bozzle had come.

He was an earnest man, and had now worked himself up to a certain

degree of energy in the matter. He was a man loving power, and

specially anxious to enforce obedience from those with whom he came

in contact by the production of the law's mysterious authority. In

his heart he was ever tapping people on the shoulder, and telling

them that they were wanted. Thus, when he displayed his document to

Mr. Outhouse, he had taught himself at least to desire that that

document should be obeyed.

Mr. Outhouse read the paper and turned up his nose at it. "You had

better go away," said he, as he thrust it back into Bozzle's hand.

"Of course I shall go away when I have the child."

"Psha!" said Mr. Outhouse.

"What does that mean, Mr. Houthouse? I presume you'll not dispute the

paternal parent's legal authority?"

"Go away, sir," said Mr. Outhouse.

"Go away!"

"Yes;--out of this house. It's my belief that you are a knave."

"A knave, Mr. Houthouse?"

"Yes;--a knave. No one who was not a knave would lend a hand towards

separating a little child from its mother. I think you are a knave,

but I don't think you are fool enough to suppose that the child will

be given up to you."

"It's my belief that knave is hactionable," said Bozzle,--whose

respect, however, for the clergyman was rising fast. "Would you mind

ringing the bell, Mr. Houthouse, and calling me a knave again before

the young woman?"

"Go away," said Mr. Outhouse.

"If you have no objection, sir, I should be glad to see the lady

before I goes."

"You won't see any lady here; and if you don't get out of my house

when I tell you, I'll send for a real policeman." Then was Bozzle

conquered; and, as he went, he admitted to himself that he had sinned

against all the rules of his life in attempting to go beyond the

legitimate line of his profession. As long as he confined himself

to the getting up of facts nobody could threaten him with a "real

policeman." But one fact he had learned to-day. The clergyman of St.

Diddulph's, who had been represented to him as a weak, foolish man,

was anything but that. Bozzle was much impressed in favour of Mr.

Outhouse, and would have been glad to have done that gentleman a

kindness had an opportunity come in his way.

"What does he want, Uncle Oliphant?" said Mrs. Trevelyan at the foot

of the stairs, guarding the way up to the nursery. At this moment the

front door had just been closed behind the back of Mr. Bozzle.

"You had better ask no questions," said Mr. Outhouse.

"But is it about Louis?"

"Yes, he came about him."

"Well? Of course you must tell me, Uncle Oliphant. Think of my

condition."

"He had some stupid paper in his hand from your husband, but it meant

nothing."

"He was the messenger, then?"

"Yes, he was the messenger. But I don't suppose he expected to get

anything. Never mind. Go up and look after the child." Then Mrs.

Trevelyan returned to her boy, and Mr. Outhouse went back to his

papers.

It was very hard upon him, Mr. Outhouse thought,--very hard. He

was threatened with an action now, and most probably would become

subject to one. Though he had been spirited enough in presence of the

enemy, he was very much out of spirits at this moment. Though he had

admitted to himself that his duty required him to protect his wife's

niece, he had never taken the poor woman to his heart with a loving,

generous feeling of true guardianship. Though he would not give up

the child to Bozzle, he thoroughly wished that the child was out of

his house. Though he called Bozzle a knave and Trevelyan a madman,

still he considered that Colonel Osborne was the chief sinner, and

that Emily Trevelyan had behaved badly. He constantly repeated to

himself the old adage, that there was no smoke without fire; and

lamented the misfortune that had brought him into close relation

with things and people that were so little to his taste. He sat for

awhile, with a pen in his hand, at the miserable little substitute

for a library table which had been provided for him, and strove to

collect his thoughts and go on with his work. But the effort was in

vain. Bozzle would be there, presenting his document, and begging

that the maid might be rung for, in order that she might hear him

called a knave. And then he knew that on this very day his niece

intended to hand him money, which he could not refuse. Of what use

would it be to refuse it now, after it had been once taken? As he

could not write a word, he rose and went away to his wife.

"If this goes on much longer," said he, "I shall be in Bedlam."

"My dear, don't speak of it in that way!"

"That's all very well. I suppose I ought to say that I like it. There

has been a policeman here who is going to bring an action against

me."

"A policeman!"

"Some one that her husband has sent for the child."

"The boy must not be given up, Oliphant."

"It's all very well to say that, but I suppose we must obey the law.

The parsonage of St. Diddulph's isn't a castle in the Apennines. When

it comes to this, that a policeman is sent here to fetch any man's

child, and threatens me with an action because I tell him to leave my

house, it is very hard upon me, seeing how very little I've had to do

with it. It's all over the parish now that my niece is kept here away

from her husband, and that a lover comes to see her. This about the

policeman will be known now, of course. I only say it is hard; that's

all." The wife did all that she could to comfort him, reminding him

that Sir Marmaduke would be home soon, and that then the burden would

be taken from his shoulders. But she was forced to admit that it was

very hard.

CHAPTER LIII.

HUGH STANBURY IS SHEWN TO BE NO CONJUROR.

[Illustration]

Many weeks had now passed since Hugh Stanbury had paid his visit to

St. Diddulph's, and Nora Rowley was beginning to believe that her

rejection of her lover had been so firm and decided that she would

never see him or hear from him more; and she had long since confessed

to herself that if she did not see him or hear from him soon, life

would not be worth a straw to her. To all of us a single treasure

counts for much more when the outward circumstances of our life are

dull, unvaried, and melancholy, than it does when our days are full

of pleasure, or excitement, or even of business. With Nora Rowley at

St. Diddulph's life at present was very melancholy. There was little

or no society to enliven her. Her sister was sick at heart, and

becoming ill in health under the burden of her troubles. Mr. Outhouse

was moody and wretched; and Mrs. Outhouse, though she did her best

to make her house comfortable to her unwelcome inmates, could not

make it appear that their presence there was a pleasure to her.

Nora understood better than did her sister how distasteful the

present arrangement was to their uncle, and was consequently very

uncomfortable on that score. And in the midst of that unhappiness,

she of course told herself that she was a young woman miserable and

unfortunate altogether. It is always so with us. The heart when it is

burdened, though it may have ample strength to bear the burden, loses

its buoyancy and doubts its own power. It is like the springs of a

carriage which are pressed flat by the superincumbent weight. But,

because the springs are good, the weight is carried safely, and they

are the better afterwards for their required purposes because of the

trial to which they have been subjected.

Nora had sent her lover away, and now at the end of three months

from the day of his dismissal she had taught herself to believe that

he would never come again. Amidst the sadness of her life at St.

Diddulph's some confidence in a lover expected to come again would

have done much to cheer her. The more she thought of Hugh Stanbury,

the more fully she became convinced that he was the man who as a

lover, as a husband, and as a companion, would just suit all her

tastes. She endowed him liberally with a hundred good gifts in the

disposal of which Nature had been much more sparing. She made for

herself a mental portrait of him more gracious in its flattery than

ever was canvas coming from the hand of a Court limner. She gave

him all gifts of manliness, honesty, truth, and energy, and felt

regarding him that he was a Paladin,--such as Paladins are in this

age, that he was indomitable, sure of success, and fitted in all

respects to take the high position which he would certainly win

for himself. But she did not presume him to be endowed with such a

constancy as would make him come to seek her hand again. Had Nora at

this time of her life been living at the West-end of London, and

going out to parties three or four times a week, she would have been

quite easy about his coming. The springs would not have been weighted

so heavily, and her heart would have been elastic.

No doubt she had forgotten many of the circumstances of his visit

and of his departure. Immediately on his going she had told her

sister that he would certainly come again, but had said at the same

time that his coming could be of no use. He was so poor a man; and

she,--though poorer than he,--had been so little accustomed to

poverty of life, that she had then acknowledged to herself that she

was not fit to be his wife. Gradually, as the slow weeks went by her,

there had come a change in her ideas. She now thought that he never

would come again; but that if he did she would confess to him that

her own views about life were changed. "I would tell him frankly

that I could eat a crust with him in any garret in London." But this

was said to herself;--never to her sister. Emily and Mrs. Outhouse

had determined together that it would be wise to abstain from all

mention of Hugh Stanbury's name. Nora had felt that her sister had so

abstained, and this reticence had assisted in producing the despair

which had come upon her. Hugh, when he had left her, had certainly

given her encouragement to expect that he would return. She had been

sure then that he would return. She had been sure of it, though she

had told him that it would be useless. But now, when these sad weeks

had slowly crept over her head, when during the long hours of the

long days she had thought of him continually,--telling herself that

it was impossible that she should ever become the wife of any man if

she did not become his,--she assured herself that she had seen and

heard the last of him. She must surely have forgotten his hot words

and that daring embrace.

Then there came a letter to her. The question of the management of

letters for young ladies is handled very differently in different

houses. In some establishments the post is as free to young ladies

as it is to the reverend seniors of the household. In others it is

considered to be quite a matter of course that some experienced

discretion should sit in judgment on the correspondence of the

daughters of the family. When Nora Rowley was living with her sister

in Curzon Street, she would have been very indignant indeed had it

been suggested to her that there was any authority over her letters

vested in her sister. But now, circumstanced as she was at St.

Diddulph's, she did understand that no letter would reach her

without her aunt knowing that it had come. All this was distasteful

to her,--as were indeed all the details of her life at St.

Diddulph's;--but she could not help herself. Had her aunt told her

that she should never be allowed to receive a letter at all, she must

have submitted till her mother had come to her relief. The letter

which reached her now was put into her hands by her sister, but it

had been given to Mrs. Trevelyan by Mrs. Outhouse. "Nora," said

Mrs. Trevelyan, "here is a letter for you. I think it is from Mr.

Stanbury."

"Give it me," said Nora greedily.

"Of course I will give it you. But I hope you do not intend to

correspond with him."

"If he has written to me I shall answer him of course," said Nora,

holding her treasure.

"Aunt Mary thinks that you should not do so till papa and mamma have

arrived."

"If Aunt Mary is afraid of me let her tell me so, and I will contrive

to go somewhere else." Poor Nora knew that this threat was futile.

There was no house to which she could take herself.

"She is not afraid of you at all, Nora. She only says that she thinks

you should not write to Mr. Stanbury." Then Nora escaped to the cold

but solitary seclusion of her bed-room and there she read her letter.

The reader may remember that Hugh Stanbury when he last left St.

Diddulph's had not been oppressed by any of the gloomy reveries of a

despairing lover. He had spoken his mind freely to Nora, and had felt

himself justified in believing that he had not spoken in vain. He had

had her in his arms, and she had found it impossible to say that she

did not love him. But then she had been quite firm in her purpose to

give him no encouragement that she could avoid. She had said no word

that would justify him in considering that there was any engagement

between them; and, moreover, he had been warned not to come to the

house by its mistress. From day to day he thought of it all, now

telling himself that there was nothing to be done but to trust in

her fidelity till he should be in a position to offer her a fitting

home, and then reflecting that he could not expect such a girl as

Nora Rowley to wait for him, unless he could succeed in making her

understand that he at any rate intended to wait for her. On one day

he would think that good faith and proper consideration for Nora

herself required him to keep silent; on the next he would tell

himself that such maudlin chivalry as he was proposing to himself was

sure to go to the wall and be neither rewarded nor recognised. So at

last he sat down and wrote the following letter:--

Lincoln's Inn Fields, January, 186--.

DEAREST NORA,

Ever since I last saw you at St. Diddulph's, I have been

trying to teach myself what I ought to do in reference

to you. Sometimes I think that because I am poor I ought

to hold my tongue. At others I feel sure that I ought to

speak out loud, because I love you so dearly. You may

presume that just at this moment the latter opinion is in

the ascendant.

As I do write I mean to be very bold; so bold that if I am

wrong you will be thoroughly disgusted with me and will

never willingly see me again. But I think it best to be

true, and to say what I think. I do believe that you love

me. According to all precedent I ought not to say so;--but

I do believe it. Ever since I was at St. Diddulph's that

belief has made me happy,--though there have been moments

of doubt. If I thought that you did not love me, I would

trouble you no further. A man may win his way to love when

social circumstances are such as to throw him and the girl

together; but such is not the case with us; and unless you

love me now, you never will love me.

"I do--I do!" said Nora, pressing the letter to her bosom.

If you do, I think that you owe it me to say so, and

to let me have all the joy and all the feeling of

responsibility which such an assurance will give me.

"I will tell him so," said Nora; "I don't care what may come

afterwards, but I will tell him the truth."

I know [continued Hugh] that an engagement with me now

would be hazardous, because what I earn is both scanty and

precarious; but it seems to me that nothing could ever

be done without some risk. There are risks of different

kinds,--

She wondered whether he was thinking when he wrote this of the rock

on which her sister's barque had been split to pieces;--

and we may hardly hope to avoid them all. For myself,

I own that life would be tame to me, if there were no

dangers to be overcome.

If you do love me, and will say so, I will not ask you

to be my wife till I can give you a proper home; but the

knowledge that I am the master of the treasure which I

desire will give me a double energy, and will make me feel

that when I have gained so much I cannot fail of adding to

it all other smaller things that may be necessary.

Pray,--pray, send me an answer. I cannot reach you except

by writing, as I was told by your aunt not to come to the

house again.

Dearest Nora, pray believe

That I shall always be truly yours only,

HUGH STANBURY.

Write to him! Of course she would write to him. Of course she would

confess to him the truth. "He tells me that I owe it to him to say

so, and I acknowledge the debt," she said aloud to herself. "And as

for a proper home, he shall be the judge of that." She resolved that

she would not be a fine lady, not fastidious, not coy, not afraid

to take her full share of the risk of which he spoke in such manly

terms. "It is quite true. As he has been able to make me love him,

I have no right to stand aloof,--even if I wished it." As she was

walking up and down the room so resolving her sister came to her.

"Well, dear!" said Emily. "May I ask what it is he says?"

Nora paused a moment, holding the letter tight in her hand, and then

she held it out to her sister. "There it is. You may read it." Mrs.

Trevelyan took the letter and read it slowly, during which Nora

stood looking out of the window. She would not watch her sister's

face, as she did not wish to have to reply to any outward signs of

disapproval. "Give it me back," she said, when she heard by the

refolding of the paper that the perusal was finished.

"Of course I shall give it you back, dear."

"Yes;--thanks. I did not mean to doubt you."

"And what will you do, Nora?"

"Answer it of course."

"I would think a little before I answered it," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"I have thought,--a great deal, already."

"And how will you answer it?"

Nora paused again before she replied. "As nearly as I know how to do

in such words as he would put into my mouth. I shall strive to write

just what I think he would wish me to write."

"Then you will engage yourself to him, Nora?"

"Certainly I shall. I am engaged to him already. I have been ever

since he came here."

"You told me that there was nothing of the kind."

"I told you that I loved him better than anybody in the world, and

that ought to have made you know what it must come to. When I am

thinking of him every day, and every hour, how can I not be glad to

have an engagement settled with him? I couldn't marry anybody else,

and I don't want to remain as I am." The tears came into the married

sister's eyes, and rolled down her cheeks, as this was said to her.

Would it not have been better for her had she remained as she was?

"Dear Emily," said Nora, "you have got Louey still."

"Yes;--and they mean to take him from me. But I do not wish to speak

of myself. Will you postpone your answer till mamma is here?"

"I cannot do that, Emily. What; receive such a letter as that, and

send no reply to it!"

"I would write a line for you, and explain--"

"No, indeed, Emily. I choose to answer my own letters. I have shewn

you that, because I trust you; but I have fully made up my mind as

to what I shall write. It will have been written and sent before

dinner."

"I think you will be wrong, Nora."

"Why wrong! When I came over here to stay with you, would mamma ever

have thought of directing me not to accept any offer till her consent

had been obtained all the way from the Mandarins? She would never

have dreamed of such a thing."

"Will you ask Aunt Mary?"

"Certainly not. What is Aunt Mary to me? We are here in her house for

a time, under the press of circumstances; but I owe her no obedience.

She told Mr. Stanbury not to come here; and he has not come; and I

shall not ask him to come. I would not willingly bring any one into

Uncle Oliphant's house that he and she do not wish to see. But I will

not admit that either of them have any authority over me."

"Then who has, dearest?"

"Nobody;--except papa and mamma; and they have chosen to leave me to

myself."

Mrs. Trevelyan found it impossible to shake her sister's firmness,

and could herself do nothing, except tell Mrs. Outhouse what was the

state of affairs. When she said that she should do this, there almost

came to be a flow of high words between the two sisters; but at last

Nora assented. "As for knowing, I don't care if all the world knows

it. I shall do nothing in a corner. I don't suppose Aunt Mary will

endeavour to prevent my posting my letter."

Emily at last went to seek Mrs. Outhouse, and Nora at once sat

down to her desk. Neither of the sisters felt at all sure that Mrs.

Outhouse would not attempt to stop the emission of the letter from

her house; but, as it happened, she was out, and did not return till

Nora had come back from her journey to the neighbouring post-office.

She would trust her letter, when written, to no hands but her

own; and as she herself dropped it into the safe custody of the

Postmaster-General, it also shall be revealed to the public:--

Parsonage, St. Diddulph's, January, 186--.

DEAR HUGH,

For I suppose I may as well write to you in that way now.

I have been made so happy by your affectionate letter. Is

not that a candid confession for a young lady? But you

tell me that I owe you the truth, and so I tell you the

truth. Nobody will ever be anything to me, except you; and

you are everything. I do love you; and should it ever be

possible, I will become your wife.

I have said so much, because I feel that I ought to obey

the order you have given me; but pray do not try to see me

or write to me till mamma has arrived. She and papa will

be here in the spring,--quite early in the spring, we

hope; and then you may come to us. What they may say, of

course, I cannot tell; but I shall be true to you.

Your own, with truest affection,

NORA.

Of course, you knew that I loved you, and I don't think

that you are a conjuror at all.

[Illustration: Nora's letter.]

As soon as ever the letter was written, she put on her bonnet, and

went forth with it herself to the post-office. Mrs. Trevelyan stopped

her on the stairs, and endeavoured to detain her, but Nora would not

be detained. "I must judge for myself about this," she said. "If

mamma were here, it would be different, but, as she is not here, I

must judge for myself."

What Mrs. Outhouse might have done had she been at home at the time,

it would be useless to surmise. She was told what had happened

when it occurred, and questioned Nora on the subject. "I thought I

understood from you," she said, with something of severity in her

countenance, "that there was to be nothing between you and Mr.

Stanbury--at any rate, till my brother came home?"

"I never pledged myself to anything of the kind, Aunt Mary," Nora

said. "I think he promised that he would not come here, and I don't

suppose that he means to come. If he should do so, I shall not see

him."

With this Mrs. Outhouse was obliged to be content. The letter was

gone, and could not be stopped. Nor, indeed, had any authority been

delegated to her by which she would have been justified in stopping

it. She could only join her husband in wishing that they both

might be relieved, as soon as possible, from the terrible burden

which had been thrown upon them. "I call it very hard," said Mr.

Outhouse;--"very hard, indeed. If we were to desire them to leave

the house, everybody would cry out upon us for our cruelty; and yet,

while they remain here, they will submit themselves to no authority.

As far as I can see, they may, both of them, do just what they

please, and we can't stop it."

CHAPTER LIV.

MR. GIBSON'S THREAT.

Miss Stanbury for a long time persisted in being neither better nor

worse. Sir Peter would not declare her state to be precarious, nor

would he say that she was out of danger; and Mr. Martin had been so

utterly prostrated by the nearly-fatal effects of his own mistake

that he was quite unable to rally himself and talk on the subject

with any spirit or confidence. When interrogated he would simply

reply that Sir Peter said this and Sir Peter said that, and thus

add to, rather than diminish, the doubt, and excitement, and varied

opinion which prevailed through the city. On one morning it was

absolutely asserted within the limits of the Close that Miss Stanbury

was dying,--and it was believed for half a day at the bank that she

was then lying in articulo mortis. There had got about, too, a report

that a portion of the property had only been left to Miss Stanbury

for her life, that the Burgesses would be able to reclaim the

houses in the city, and that a will had been made altogether in

favour of Dorothy, cutting out even Brooke from any share in the

inheritance;--and thus Exeter had a good deal to say respecting

the affairs and state of health of our old friend. Miss Stanbury's

illness, however, was true enough. She was much too ill to hear

anything of what was going on;--too ill to allow Martha to talk to

her at all about the outside public. When the invalid herself would

ask questions about the affairs of the world, Martha would be very

discreet and turn away from the subject. Miss Stanbury, for instance,

ill as she was, exhibited a most mundane interest, not exactly in

Camilla French's marriage, but in the delay which that marriage

seemed destined to encounter. "I dare say he'll slip out of it yet,"

said the sick lady to her confidential servant. Then Martha had

thought it right to change the subject, feeling it to be wrong

that an old lady on her death-bed should be taking joy in the

disappointment of her young neighbour. Martha changed the subject,

first to jelly, and then to the psalms of the day. Miss Stanbury

was too weak to resist; but the last verse of the last psalm of the

evening had hardly been finished before she remarked that she would

never believe it till she saw it. "It's all in the hands of Him as is

on high, mum," said Martha, turning her eyes up to the ceiling, and

closing the book at the same time, with a look strongly indicative of

displeasure.

Miss Stanbury understood it all as well as though she were in perfect

health. She knew her own failings, was conscious of her worldly

tendencies, and perceived that her old servant was thinking of it.

And then sundry odd thoughts, half-digested thoughts, ideas too

difficult for her present strength, crossed her brain. Had it been

wicked of her when she was well to hope that a scheming woman should

not succeed in betraying a man by her schemes into an ill-assorted

marriage; and if not wicked then, was it wicked now because she was

ill? And from that thought her mind travelled on to the ordinary

practices of death-bed piety. Could an assumed devotion be of use to

her now,--such a devotion as Martha was enjoining upon her from hour

to hour, in pure and affectionate solicitude for her soul? She had

spoken one evening of a game of cards, saying that a game of cribbage

would have consoled her. Then Martha, with a shudder, had suggested

a hymn, and had had recourse at once to a sleeping draught. Miss

Stanbury had submitted, but had understood it all. If cards were

wicked, she had indeed been a terrible sinner. What hope could there

be now, on her death-bed, for one so sinful? And she could not repent

of her cards, and would not try to repent of them, not seeing the

evil of them; and if they were innocent, why should she not have the

consolation now,--when she so much wanted it? Yet she knew that the

whole household, even Dorothy, would be in arms against her, were she

to suggest such a thing. She took the hymn and the sleeping draught,

telling herself that it would be best for her to banish such ideas

from her mind. Pastors and masters had laid down for her a mode of

living, which she had followed, but indifferently perhaps, but still

with an intention of obedience. They had also laid down a mode of

dying, and it would be well that she should follow that as closely

as possible. She would say nothing more about cards. She would

think nothing more of Camilla French. But, as she so resolved, with

intellect half asleep, with her mind wandering between fact and

dream, she was unconsciously comfortable with an assurance that if

Mr. Gibson did marry Camilla French, Camilla French would lead him

the very devil of a life.

During three days Dorothy went about the house as quiet as a mouse,

sitting nightly at her aunt's bedside, and tending the sick woman

with the closest care. She, too, had been now and again somewhat

startled by the seeming worldliness of her aunt in her illness. Her

aunt talked to her about rents, and gave her messages for Brooke

Burgess on subjects which seemed to Dorothy to be profane when spoken

of on what might perhaps be a death-bed. And this struck her the more

strongly, because she had a matter of her own on which she would have

much wished to ascertain her aunt's opinion, if she had not thought

that it would have been exceedingly wrong of her to trouble her

aunt's mind at such a time by any such matter. Hitherto she had said

not a word of Brooke's proposal to any living being. At present it

was a secret with herself, but a secret so big that it almost caused

her bosom to burst with the load that it bore. She could not, she

thought, write to Priscilla till she had told her aunt. If she were

to write a word on the subject to any one, she could not fail to make

manifest the extreme longing of her own heart. She could not have

written Brooke's name on paper, in reference to his words to herself,

without covering it with epithets of love. But all that must be known

to no one if her love was to be of no avail to her. And she had an

idea that her aunt would not wish Brooke to marry her,--would think

that Brooke should do better; and she was quite clear that in such a

matter as this her aunt's wishes must be law. Had not her aunt the

power of disinheriting Brooke altogether? And what then if her aunt

should die,--should die now,--leaving Brooke at liberty to do as he

pleased? There was something so distasteful to her in this view of

the matter that she would not look at it. She would not allow herself

to think of any success which might possibly accrue to herself by

reason of her aunt's death. Intense as was the longing in her heart

for permission from those in authority over her to give herself to

Brooke Burgess, perfect as was the earthly Paradise which appeared to

be open to her when she thought of the good thing which had befallen

her in that matter, she conceived that she would be guilty of the

grossest ingratitude were she in any degree to curtail even her own

estimate of her aunt's prohibitory powers because of her aunt's

illness. The remembrance of the words which Brooke had spoken to her

was with her quite perfect. She was entirely conscious of the joy

which would be hers, if she might accept those words as properly

sanctioned; but she was a creature in her aunt's hands,--according to

her own ideas of her own duties; and while her aunt was ill she could

not even learn what might be the behests which she would be called on

to obey.

She was sitting one evening alone, thinking of all this, having left

Martha with her aunt, and was trying to reconcile the circumstances

of her life as it now existed with the circumstances as they had been

with her in the old days at Nuncombe Putney, wondering at herself in

that she should have a lover, and trying to convince herself that for

her this little episode of romance could mean nothing serious, when

Martha crept down into the room to her. Of late days,--the alteration

might perhaps be dated from the rejection of Mr. Gibson,--Martha, who

had always been very kind, had become more respectful in her manner

to Dorothy than had heretofore been usual with her. Dorothy was quite

aware of it, and was not unconscious of a certain rise in the world

which was thereby indicated. "If you please, miss," said Martha, "who

do you think is here?"

"But there is nobody with my aunt?" said Dorothy.

"She is sleeping like a babby, and I came down just for a moment.

Mr. Gibson is here, miss,--in the house! He asked for your aunt, and

when, of course, he could not see her, he asked for you." Dorothy for

a few minutes was utterly disconcerted, but at last she consented to

see Mr. Gibson. "I think it is best," said Martha, "because it is bad

to be fighting, and missus so ill. 'Blessed are the peace-makers,'

miss, 'for they shall be called the children of God.'" Convinced by

this argument, or by the working of her own mind, Dorothy directed

that Mr. Gibson might be shewn into the room. When he came, she found

herself unable to address him. She remembered the last time in which

she had seen him, and was lost in wonder that he should be there. But

she shook hands with him, and went through some form of greeting in

which no word was uttered.

"I hope you will not think that I have done wrong," said he, "in

calling to ask after my old friend's state of health?"

"Oh dear, no," said Dorothy, quite bewildered.

"I have known her for so very long, Miss Dorothy, that now in the

hour of her distress, and perhaps mortal malady, I cannot stop to

remember the few harsh words that she spoke to me lately."

"She never means to be harsh, Mr. Gibson."

"Ah; well; no,--perhaps not. At any rate, I have learned to forgive

and forget. I am afraid your aunt is very ill, Miss Dorothy."

"She is ill, certainly, Mr. Gibson."

"Dear, dear! We are all as the grass of the field, Miss

Dorothy,--here to-day and gone to-morrow, as sparks fly upwards. Just

fit to be cut down and cast into the oven. Mr. Jennings has been with

her, I believe?" Mr. Jennings was the other minor canon.

"He comes three times a week, Mr. Gibson."

"He is an excellent young man,--a very good young man. It has been a

great comfort to me to have Jennings with me. But he's very young,

Miss Dorothy; isn't he?" Dorothy muttered something, purporting to

declare that she was not acquainted with the exact circumstances of

Mr. Jennings' age. "I should be so glad to come if my old friend

would allow me," said Mr. Gibson, almost with a sigh. Dorothy was

clearly of opinion that any change at the present would be bad for

her aunt, but she did not know how to express her opinion; so she

stood silent and looked at him. "There needn't be a word spoken, you

know, about the ladies at Heavitree," said Mr. Gibson.

"Oh dear, no," said Dorothy. And yet she knew well that there would

be such words spoken if Mr. Gibson were to make his way into her

aunt's room. Her aunt was constantly alluding to the ladies at

Heavitree, in spite of all the efforts of her old servant to restrain

her.

"There was some little misunderstanding," said Mr. Gibson; "but all

that should be over now. We both intended for the best, Miss Dorothy;

and I'm sure nobody here can say that I wasn't sincere." But Dorothy,

though she could not bring herself to answer Mr. Gibson plainly,

could not be induced to assent to his proposition. She muttered

something about her aunt's weakness, and the great attention which

Mr. Jennings shewed. Her aunt had become very fond of Mr. Jennings,

and she did at last express her opinion, with some clearness, that

her aunt should not be disturbed by any changes at present. "After

that I should not think of pressing it, Miss Dorothy," said Mr.

Gibson; "but, still, I do hope that I may have the privilege of

seeing her yet once again in the flesh. And touching my approaching

marriage, Miss Dorothy--" He paused, and Dorothy felt that she

was blushing up to the roots of her hair. "Touching my marriage,"

continued Mr. Gibson, "which however will not be solemnized till the

end of March;"--it was manifest that he regarded this as a point that

would in that household be regarded as an argument in his favour,--"I

do hope that you will look upon it in the most favourable light,--and

your excellent aunt also, if she be spared to us."

"I am sure we hope that you will be happy, Mr. Gibson."

"What was I to do, Miss Dorothy? I know that I have been very much

blamed;--but so unfairly! I have never meant to be untrue to a mouse,

Miss Dorothy." Dorothy did not at all understand whether she were the

mouse, or Camilla French, or Arabella. "And it is so hard to find

that one is ill-spoken of because things have gone a little amiss."

It was quite impossible that Dorothy should make any answer to this,

and at last Mr. Gibson left her, assuring her with his last word that

nothing would give him so much pleasure as to be called upon once

more to see his old friend in her last moments.

Though Miss Stanbury had been described as sleeping "like a babby,"

she had heard the footsteps of a strange man in the house, and had

made Martha tell her whose footsteps they were. As soon as Dorothy

went to her, she darted upon the subject with all her old keenness.

"What did he want here, Dolly?"

"He said he would like to see you, aunt,--when you are a little

better, you know. He spoke a good deal of his old friendship and

respect."

"He should have thought of that before. How am I to see people now?"

"But when you are better, aunt--?"

"How do I know that I shall ever be better? He isn't off with those

people at Heavitree,--is he?"

"I hope not, aunt."

"Psha! A poor, weak, insufficient creature;--that's what he is.

Mr. Jennings is worth twenty of him." Dorothy, though she put the

question again in its most alluring form of Christian charity and

forgiveness, could not induce her aunt to say that she would see

Mr. Gibson. "How can I see him, when you know that Sir Peter has

forbidden me to see anybody except Mrs. Clifford and Mr. Jennings?"

Two days afterwards there was an uncomfortable little scene at

Heavitree. It must, no doubt, have been the case, that the same train

of circumstances which had produced Mr. Gibson's visit to the Close,

produced also the scene in question. It was suggested by some who

were attending closely to the matter that Mr. Gibson had already come

to repent his engagement with Camilla French; and, indeed, there were

those who pretended to believe that he was induced, by the prospect

of Miss Stanbury's demise, to transfer his allegiance yet again, and

to bestow his hand upon Dorothy at last. There were many in the city

who could never be persuaded that Dorothy had refused him,--these

being, for the most part, ladies in whose estimation the value of a

husband was counted so great, and a beneficed clergyman so valuable

among suitors, that it was to their thinking impossible that Dorothy

Stanbury should in her sound senses have rejected such an offer. "I

don't believe a bit of it," said Mrs. Crumbie to Mrs. Apjohn; "is

it likely?" The ears of all the French family were keenly alive

to rumours, and to rumours of rumours. Reports of these opinions

respecting Mr. Gibson reached Heavitree, and had their effect.

As long as Mr. Gibson was behaving well as a suitor, they were

inoperative there. What did it matter to them how the prize might

have been struggled for,--might still be struggled for elsewhere,

while they enjoyed the consciousness of possession? But when the

consciousness of possession became marred by a cankerous doubt, such

rumours were very important. Camilla heard of the visit in the Close,

and swore that she would have justice done her. She gave her mother

to understand that, if any trick were played upon her, the diocese

should be made to ring of it, in a fashion that would astonish them

all, from the bishop downwards. Whereupon Mrs. French, putting much

faith in her daughter's threats, sent for Mr. Gibson.

"The truth is, Mr. Gibson," said Mrs. French, when the civilities of

their first greeting had been completed, "my poor child is pining."

"Pining, Mrs. French!"

"Yes;--pining, Mr. Gibson. I am afraid that you little understand

how sensitive is that young heart. Of course, she is your own now.

To her thinking, it would be treason to you for her to indulge in

conversation with any other gentleman; but, then, she expects that

you should spend your evenings with her,--of course!"

"But, Mrs. French,--think of my engagements, as a clergyman."

"We know all about that, Mr. Gibson. We know what a clergyman's calls

are. It isn't like a doctor's, Mr. Gibson."

"It's very often worse, Mrs. French."

"Why should you go calling in the Close, Mr. Gibson?" Here was the

gist of the accusation.

"Wouldn't you have me make my peace with a poor dying sister?"

pleaded Mr. Gibson.

"After what has occurred," said Mrs. French, shaking her head at him,

"and while things are just as they are now, it would be more like an

honest man of you to stay away. And, of course, Camilla feels it. She

feels it very much;--and she won't put up with it neither."

"I think this is the cruellest, cruellest thing I ever heard," said

Mr. Gibson.

"It is you that are cruel, sir."

Then the wretched man turned at bay. "I tell you what it is, Mrs.

French;--if I am treated in this way, I won't stand it. I won't,

indeed. I'll go away. I'm not going to be suspected, nor yet blown

up. I think I've behaved handsomely, at any rate to Camilla."

"Quite so, Mr. Gibson, if you would come and see her on evenings,"

said Mrs. French, who was falling back into her usual state of

timidity.

"But, if I'm to be treated in this way, I will go away. I've thought

of it as it is. I've been already invited to go to Natal, and if I

hear anything more of these accusations, I shall certainly make up

my mind to go." Then he left the house, before Camilla could be down

upon him from her perch on the landing-place.

CHAPTER LV.

THE REPUBLICAN BROWNING.

Mr. Glascock had returned to Naples after his sufferings in the

dining-room of the American Minister, and by the middle of February

was back again in Florence. His father was still alive, and it was

said that the old lord would now probably live through the winter.

And it was understood that Mr. Glascock would remain in Italy. He

had declared that he would pass his time between Naples, Rome, and

Florence; but it seemed to his friends that Florence was, of the

three, the most to his taste. He liked his room, he said, at the York

Hotel, and he liked being in the capital. That was his own statement.

His friends said that he liked being with Carry Spalding, the

daughter of the American Minister; but none of them, then in Italy,

were sufficiently intimate with him to express that opinion to

himself.

It had been expressed more than once to Carry Spalding. The world in

general says such things to ladies more openly than it does to men,

and the probability of a girl's success in matrimony is canvassed

in her hearing by those who are nearest to her with a freedom which

can seldom be used in regard to a man. A man's most intimate friend

hardly speaks to him of the prospect of his marriage till he himself

has told that the engagement exists. The lips of no living person had

suggested to Mr. Glascock that the American girl was to become his

wife; but a great deal had been said to Carry Spalding about the

conquest she had made. Her uncle, her aunt, her sister, and her great

friend Miss Petrie, the poetess,--the Republican Browning as she

was called,--had all spoken to her about it frequently. Olivia had

declared her conviction that the thing was to be. Miss Petrie had,

with considerable eloquence, explained to her friend that that

English title, which was but the clatter of a sounding brass, should

be regarded as a drawback rather than as an advantage. Mrs. Spalding,

who was no poetess, would undoubtedly have welcomed Mr. Glascock as

her niece's husband with all an aunt's energy. When told by Miss

Petrie that old Lord Peterborough was a tinkling cymbal she snapped

angrily at her gifted countrywoman. But she was too honest a woman,

and too conscious also of her niece's strength, to say a word to urge

her on. Mr. Spalding as an American minister, with full powers at the

court of a European sovereign, felt that he had full as much to give

as to receive; but he was well inclined to do both. He would have

been much pleased to talk about his nephew Lord Peterborough, and

he loved his niece dearly. But by the middle of February he was

beginning to think that the matter had been long enough in training.

If the Honourable Glascock meant anything, why did he not speak

out his mind plainly? The American Minister in such matters was

accustomed to fewer ambages than were common in the circles among

which Mr. Glascock had lived.

In the meantime Caroline Spalding was suffering. She had allowed

herself to think that Mr. Glascock intended to propose to her, and

had acknowledged to herself that were he to do so she would certainly

accept him. All that she had seen of him, since the day on which he

had been courteous to her about the seat in the diligence, had been

pleasant to her. She had felt the charm of his manner, his education,

and his gentleness; and had told herself that with all her love for

her own country, she would willingly become an Englishwoman for the

sake of being that man's wife. But nevertheless the warnings of her

great friend, the poetess, had not been thrown away upon her. She

would put away from herself as far as she could any desire to become

Lady Peterborough. There should be no bias in the man's favour on

that score. The tinkling cymbal and the sounding brass should be

nothing to her. But yet,--yet what a chance was there here for her?

"They are dishonest, and rotten at the core," said Miss Petrie,

trying to make her friend understand that a free American should

under no circumstances place trust in an English aristocrat. "Their

country, Carry, is a game played out, while we are still breasting

the hill with our young lungs full of air." Carry Spalding was proud

of her intimacy with the Republican Browning; but nevertheless she

liked Mr. Glascock; and when Mr. Glascock had been ten days in

Florence, on his third visit to the city, and had been four or five

times at the embassy without expressing his intentions in the proper

form, Carry Spalding began to think that she had better save herself

from a heartbreak while salvation might be within her reach. She

perceived that her uncle was gloomy and almost angry when he spoke of

Mr. Glascock, and that her aunt was fretful with disappointment. The

Republican Browning had uttered almost a note of triumph; and had it

not been that Olivia persisted, Carry Spalding would have consented

to go away with Miss Petrie to Rome. "The old stones are rotten too,"

said the poetess; "but their dust tells no lies." That well known

piece of hers--"Ancient Marbles, while ye crumble," was written at

this time, and contained an occult reference to Mr. Glascock and her

friend.

But Livy Spalding clung to the alliance. She probably knew her

sister's heart better than did the others; and perhaps also had a

clearer insight into Mr. Glascock's character. She was at any rate

clearly of opinion that there should be no running away. "Either you

do like him, or you don't. If you do, what are you to get by going to

Rome?" said Livy.

"I shall get quit of doubt and trouble."

"I call that cowardice. I would never run away from a man, Carry.

Aunt Sophie forgets that they don't manage these things in England

just as we do."

"I don't know why there should be a difference."

"Nor do I;--only that there is. You haven't read so many of their

novels as I have."

"Who would ever think of learning to live out of an English novel?"

said Carry.

"I am not saying that. You may teach him to live how you like

afterwards. But if you have anything to do with people it must be

well to know what their manners are. I think the richer sort of

people in England slide into these things more gradually than we do.

You stand your ground, Carry, and hold your own, and take the goods

the gods provide you." Though Caroline Spalding opposed her sister's

arguments, and was particularly hard upon that allusion to "the

richer sort of people,"--which, as she knew, Miss Petrie would have

regarded as evidence of reverence for sounding brasses and tinkling

cymbals,--nevertheless she loved Livy dearly for what she said, and

kissed the sweet counsellor, and resolved that she would for the

present decline the invitation of the poetess. Then was Miss Petrie

somewhat indignant with her friend, and threw out her scorn in those

lines which have been mentioned.

But the American Minister hardly knew how to behave himself when he

met Mr. Glascock, or even when he was called upon to speak of him.

Florence no doubt is a large city, and is now the capital of a great

kingdom; but still people meet in Florence much more frequently

than they do in Paris or in London. It may almost be said that they

whose habit it is to go into society, and whose circumstances bring

them into the same circles, will see each other every day. Now the

American Minister delighted to see and to be seen in all places

frequented by persons of a certain rank and position in Florence.

Having considered the matter much, he had convinced himself that

he could thus best do his duty as minister from the great Republic

of Free States to the newest and,--as he called it,--"the free-est

of the European kingdoms." The minister from France was a marquis;

he from England was an earl; from Spain had come a count,--and so

on. In the domestic privacy of his embassy Mr. Spalding would be

severe enough upon the sounding brasses and the tinkling cymbals,

and was quite content himself to be the Honourable Jonas G.

Spalding,--Honourable because selected by his country for a post of

honour; but he liked to be heard among the cymbals and seen among

the brasses, and to feel that his position was as high as theirs. Mr.

Glascock also was frequently in the same circles, and thus it came

to pass that the two gentlemen saw each other almost daily. That Mr.

Spalding knew well how to bear himself in his high place no one could

doubt; but he did not quite know how to carry himself before Mr.

Glascock. At home at Boston he would have been more completely master

of the situation.

He thought too that he began to perceive that Mr. Glascock avoided

him, though he would hear on his return home that that gentleman had

been at the embassy, or had been walking in the Cascine with his

nieces. That their young ladies should walk in public places with

unmarried gentlemen is nothing to American fathers and guardians.

American young ladies are accustomed to choose their own companions.

But the minister was tormented by his doubts as to the ways of

Englishmen, and as to the phase in which English habits might most

properly exhibit themselves in Italy. He knew that people were

talking about Mr. Glascock and his niece. Why then did Mr. Glascock

avoid him? It was perhaps natural that Mr. Spalding should have

omitted to observe that Mr. Glascock was not delighted by those

lectures on the American constitution which formed so large a part of

his ordinary conversation with Englishmen.

It happened one afternoon that they were thrown together so closely

for nearly an hour that neither could avoid the other. They were both

at the old palace in which the Italian parliament is held, and were

kept waiting during some long delay in the ceremonies of the place.

They were seated next to each other, and during such delay there was

nothing for them but to talk. On the other side of each of them was a

stranger, and not to talk in such circumstances would be to quarrel.

Mr. Glascock began by asking after the ladies.

"They are quite well, sir, thank you," said the minister. "I hope

that Lord Peterborough was pretty well when last you heard from

Naples, Mr. Glascock." Mr. Glascock explained that his father's

condition was not much altered, and then there was silence for a

moment.

"Your nieces will remain with you through the spring I suppose?" said

Mr. Glascock.

"Such is their intention, sir."

"They seem to like Florence, I think."

"Yes;--yes; I think they do like Florence. They see this capital,

sir, perhaps under more favourable circumstances than are accorded

to most of my countrywomen. Our republican simplicity, Mr. Glascock,

has this drawback, that away from home it subjects us somewhat to the

cold shade of unobserved obscurity. That it possesses merits which

much more than compensate for this trifling evil I should be the last

man in Europe to deny." It is to be observed that American citizens

are always prone to talk of Europe. It affords the best counterpoise

they know to that other term, America,--and America and the United

States are of course the same. To speak of France or of England as

weighing equally against their own country seems to an American to be

an absurdity,--and almost an insult to himself. With Europe he can

compare himself, but even this is done generally in the style of the

Republican Browning when she addressed the Ancient Marbles.

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Glascock, "the family of a minister

abroad has great advantages in seeing the country to which he is

accredited."

"That is my meaning, sir. But, as I was remarking, we carry with us

as a people no external symbols of our standing at home. The wives

and daughters, sir, of the most honoured of our citizens have no

nomenclature different from that which belongs to the least noted

among us. It is perhaps a consequence of this that Europeans who are

accustomed in their social intercourse to the assistance of titles,

will not always trouble themselves to inquire who and what are the

American citizens who may sit opposite to them at table. I have

known, Mr. Glascock, the wife and daughter of a gentleman who has

been thrice sent as senator from his native State to Washington,

to remain as disregarded in the intercourse of a European city, as

though they had formed part of the family of some grocer from your

Russell Square!"

"Let the Miss Spaldings go where they will," said Mr. Glascock, "they

will not fare in that way."

"The Miss Spaldings, sir, are very much obliged to you," said the

minister with a bow.

"I regard it as one of the luckiest chances of my life that I was

thrown in with them at St. Michael as I was," said Mr. Glascock with

something like warmth.

"I am sure, sir, they will never forget the courtesy displayed by you

on that occasion," said the minister bowing again.

"That was a matter of course. I and my friend would have done the

same for the grocer's wife and daughter of whom you spoke. Little

services such as that do not come from appreciation of merit, but are

simply the payment of the debt due by all men to all women."

"Such is certainly the rule of living in our country, sir," said Mr.

Spalding.

"The chances are," continued the Englishman, "that no further

observation follows the payment of such a debt. It has been a thing

of course."

"We delight to think it so, Mr. Glascock, in our own cities."

"But in this instance it has given rise to one of the pleasantest,

and as I hope most enduring friendships that I have ever formed,"

said Mr. Glascock with enthusiasm. What could the American Minister

do but bow again three times? And what other meaning could he attach

to such words than that which so many of his friends had been

attributing to Mr. Glascock for some weeks past? It had occurred to

Mr. Spalding, even since he had been sitting in his present close

proximity to Mr. Glascock, that it might possibly be his duty as an

uncle having to deal with an Englishman, to ask that gentleman what

were his intentions. He would do his duty let it be what it might;

but the asking of such a question would be very disagreeable to him.

For the present he satisfied himself with inviting his neighbour to

come and drink tea with Mrs. Spalding on the next evening but one.

"The girls will be delighted, I am sure," said he, thinking himself

to be justified in this friendly familiarity by Mr. Glascock's

enthusiasm. For Mr. Spalding was clearly of opinion that, let the

value of republican simplicity be what it might, an alliance with the

crumbling marbles of Europe would in his niece's circumstances be not

inexpedient. Mr. Glascock accepted the invitation with alacrity, and

the minister when he was closeted with his wife that evening declared

his opinion that after all the Britisher meant fighting. The aunt

told the girls that Mr. Glascock was coming, and in order that it

might not seem that a net was being specially spread for him, others

were invited to join the party. Miss Petrie consented to be there,

and the Italian, Count Buonarosci, to whose presence, though she

could not speak to him, Mrs. Spalding was becoming accustomed. It

was painful to her to feel that she could not communicate with those

around her, and for that reason she would have avoided Italians. But

she had an idea that she could not thoroughly realise the advantages

of foreign travel unless she lived with foreigners; and, therefore,

she was glad to become intimate at any rate with the outside of Count

Buonarosci.

"I think your uncle is wrong, dear," said Miss Petrie early in the

day to her friend.

"But why? He has done nothing more than what is just civil."

"If Mr. Glascock kept a store in Broadway he would not have thought

it necessary to shew the same civility."

"Yes;--if we all liked the Mr. Glascock who kept the store."

"Caroline," said the poetess with severe eloquence, "can you put your

hand upon your heart and say that this inherited title, this tinkling

cymbal as I call it, has no attraction for you or yours? Is it the

unadorned simple man that you welcome to your bosom, or a thing of

stars and garters, a patch of parchment, the minion of a throne,

the lordling of twenty descents, in which each has been weaker than

that before it, the hero of a scutcheon, whose glory is in his

quarterings, and whose worldly wealth comes from the sweat of serfs

whom the euphonism of an effete country has learned to decorate with

the name of tenants?"

But Caroline Spalding had a spirit of her own, and had already made

up her mind that she would not be talked down by Miss Petrie. "Uncle

Jonas," said she, "asks him because we like him; and would do so

too if he kept the store in Broadway. But if he did keep the store

perhaps we should not like him."

"I trow not," said Miss Petrie.

Livy was much more comfortable in her tactics, and without consulting

anybody sent for a hairdresser. "It's all very well for Wallachia,"

said Livy,--Miss Petrie's name was Wallachia,--"but I know a nice

sort of man when I see him, and the ways of the world are not to be

altered because Wally writes poetry."

When Mr. Glascock was announced Mrs. Spalding's handsome rooms were

almost filled, as rooms in Florence are filled,--obstruction in every

avenue, a crowd in every corner, and a block at every doorway, not

being among the customs of the place. Mr. Spalding immediately caught

him,--intercepting him between the passages and the ladies,--and

engaged him at once in conversation.

"Your John S. Mill is a great man," said the minister.

"They tell me so," said Mr. Glascock. "I don't read what he writes

myself."

This acknowledgment seemed to the minister to be almost disgraceful,

and yet he himself had never read a word of Mr. Mill's writings.

"He is a far-seeing man," continued the minister. "He is one of

the few Europeans who can look forward, and see how the rivers of

civilization are running on. He has understood that women must at

last be put upon an equality with men."

"Can he manage that men shall have half the babies?" said Mr.

Glascock, thinking to escape by an attempt at playfulness.

But the minister was down upon him at once,--had him by the lappet

of his coat, though he knew how important it was for his dear niece

that he should allow Mr. Glascock to amuse himself this evening after

another fashion. "I have an answer ready, sir, for that difficulty,"

he said. "Step aside with me for a moment. The question is important,

and I should be glad if you would communicate my ideas to your great

philosopher. Nature, sir, has laid down certain laws, which are

immutable; and, against them,--"

But Mr. Glascock had not come to Florence for this. There were

circumstances in his present position which made him feel that he

would be gratified in escaping, even at the cost of some seeming

incivility. "I must go in to the ladies at once," he said, "or I

shall never get a word with them." There came across the minister's

brow a momentary frown of displeasure, as though he felt that he were

being robbed of that which was justly his own. For an instant his

grasp fixed itself more tightly to the coat. It was quite within

the scope of his courage to hold a struggling listener by physical

strength;--but he remembered that there was a purpose, and he relaxed

his hold.

"I will take another opportunity," said the minister. "As you have

raised that somewhat trite objection of the bearing of children,

which we in our country, sir, have altogether got over, I must put

you in possession of my views on that subject; but I will find

another occasion." Then Mr. Glascock began to reflect whether an

American lady, married in England, would probably want to see much of

her uncle in her adopted country.

Mrs. Spalding was all smiles when her guest reached her. "We did not

mean to have such a crowd of people," she said, whispering; "but you

know how one thing leads to another, and people here really like

short invitations." Then the minister's wife bowed very low to an

Italian lady, and for the moment wished herself in Beacon Street. It

was a great trouble to her that she could not pluck up courage to

speak a word in Italian. "I know more about it than some that are

glib enough," she would say to her niece Livy, "but these Tuscans are

so particular with their Bocca Toscana."

It was almost spiteful on the part of Miss Petrie,--the manner in

which, on this evening, she remained close to her friend Caroline

Spalding. It is hardly possible to believe that it came altogether

from high principle,--from a determination to save her friend from

an impending danger. One's friend has no right to decide for one

what is, and what is not dangerous. Mr. Glascock after awhile found

himself seated on a fixed couch, that ran along the wall, between

Carry Spalding and Miss Petrie; but Miss Petrie was almost as bad

to him as had been the minister himself. "I am afraid," she said,

looking up into his face with some severity, and rushing upon her

subject with audacity, "that the works of your Browning have not

been received in your country with that veneration to which they are

entitled."

"Do you mean Mr. or Mrs. Browning?" asked Mr. Glascock,--perhaps with

some mistaken idea that the lady was out of her depth, and did not

know the difference.

"Either;--both; for they are one, the same, and indivisible. The

spirit and germ of each is so reflected in the outcome of the other,

that one sees only the result of so perfect a combination, and one

is tempted to acknowledge that here and there a marriage may have

been arranged in Heaven. I don't think that in your country you have

perceived this, Mr. Glascock."

"I am not quite sure that we have," said Mr. Glascock.

"Yours is not altogether an inglorious mission," continued Miss

Petrie.

"I've got no mission," said Mr. Glascock,--"either from the Foreign

Office, or from my own inner convictions."

Miss Petrie laughed with a scornful laugh. "I spoke, sir, of the

mission of that small speck on the earth's broad surface, of which

you think so much, and which we call Great Britain."

"I do think a good deal of it," said Mr. Glascock.

"It has been more thought of than any other speck of the same size,"

said Carry Spalding.

"True," said Miss Petrie, sharply;--"because of its iron and coal.

But the mission I spoke of was this." And she put forth her hand with

an artistic motion as she spoke. "It utters prophecies, though it

cannot read them. It sends forth truth, though it cannot understand

it. Though its own ears are deaf as adders', it is the nursery of

poets, who sing not for their own countrymen, but for the higher

sensibilities and newer intelligences of lands, in which philanthropy

has made education as common as the air that is breathed."

"Wally," said Olivia, coming up to the poetess, in anger that was

almost apparent, "I want to take you, and introduce you to the

Marchesa Pulti."

But Miss Petrie no doubt knew that the eldest son of an English lord

was at least as good as an Italian marchesa. "Let her come here,"

said the poetess, with her grandest smile.

CHAPTER LVI.

WITHERED GRASS.

[Illustration]

When Caroline Spalding perceived how direct an attempt had been made

by her sister to take the poetess away, in order that she might

thus be left alone with Mr. Glascock, her spirit revolted against

the manoeuvre, and she took herself away amidst the crowd. If Mr.

Glascock should wish to find her again he could do so. And there came

across her mind something of a half-formed idea that, perhaps after

all her friend Wallachia was right. Were this man ready to take her

and she ready to be taken, would such an arrangement be a happy one

for both of them? His high-born, wealthy friends might very probably

despise her, and it was quite possible that she also might despise

them. To be Lady Peterborough, and have the spending of a large

fortune, would not suffice for her happiness. She was sure of that.

It would be a leap in the dark, and all such leaps must needs be

dangerous, and therefore should be avoided. But she did like the man.

Her friend was untrue to her and cruel in those allusions to tinkling

cymbals. It might be well for her to get over her liking, and to

think no more of one who was to her a foreigner and a stranger,--of

whose ways of living in his own home she knew so little, whose people

might be antipathetic to her, enemies instead of friends, among whom

her life would be one long misery; but it was not on that ground

that Miss Petrie had recommended her to start for Rome as soon as

Mr. Glascock had reached Florence. "There is no reason," she said to

herself, "why I should not marry a man if I like him, even though

he be a lord. And of him I should not be the least afraid. It's the

women that I fear." And then she called to mind all that she had ever

heard of English countesses and duchesses. She thought that she knew

that they were generally cold and proud, and very little given to

receive outsiders graciously within their ranks. Mr. Glascock had

an aunt who was a Duchess, and a sister who would be a Countess.

Caroline Spalding felt how her back would rise against these new

relations, if it should come to pass that they should look unkindly

upon her when she was taken to her own home;--how she would fight

with them, giving them scorn for scorn; how unutterably miserable

she would be; how she would long to be back among her own equals, in

spite even of her love for her husband. "How grand a thing it is,"

she said, "to be equal with those whom you love!" And yet she was to

some extent allured by the social position of the man. She could

perceive that he had a charm of manner which her countrymen lacked.

He had read, perhaps, less than her uncle;--knew, perhaps, less than

most of those men with whom she had been wont to associate in her

own city life at home;--was not braver, or more virtuous, or more

self-denying than they; but there was a softness and an ease in

his manner which was palatable to her, and an absence of that too

visible effort of the intellect which is so apt to mark and mar

the conversation of Americans. She almost wished that she had been

English, in order that the man's home and friends might have suited

her. She was thinking of all this as she stood pretending to talk to

an American lady, who was very eloquent on the delights of Florence.

In the meantime Olivia and Mr. Glascock had moved away together, and

Miss Petrie was left alone. This was no injury to Miss Petrie, as her

mind at once set itself to work on a sonnet touching the frivolity

of modern social gatherings; and when she complained afterwards to

Caroline that it was the curse of their mode of life that no moment

could be allowed for thought,--in which she referred specially to a

few words that Mr. Gore had addressed to her at this moment of her

meditations,--she was not wilfully a hypocrite. She was painfully

turning her second set of rhymes, and really believed that she had

been subjected to a hardship. In the meantime Olivia and Mr. Glascock

were discussing her at a distance.

"You were being put through your facings, Mr. Glascock," Olivia had

said.

"Well; yes; and your dear friend, Miss Petrie, is rather a stern

examiner."

"She is Carry's ally, not mine," said Olivia. Then she remembered

that by saying this she might be doing her sister an injury. Mr.

Glascock might object to such a bosom friend for his wife. "That is

to say, of course we are all intimate with her, but just at this

moment Carry is most in favour."

"She is very clever, I am quite sure," said he.

"Oh yes;--she's a genius. You must not doubt that on the peril of

making every American in Italy your enemy."

"She is a poet,--is she not?"

"Mr. Glascock!"

"Have I said anything wrong?" he asked.

"Do you mean to look me in the face and tell me that you are not

acquainted with her works,--that you don't know pages of them by

heart, that you don't sleep with them under your pillow, don't travel

about with them in your dressing-bag? I'm afraid we have mistaken

you, Mr. Glascock."

"Is it so great a sin?"

"If you'll own up honestly, I'll tell you something,--in a whisper.

You have not read a word of her poems?"

"Not a word."

"Neither have I. Isn't it horrible? But, perhaps, if I heard Tennyson

talking every day, I shouldn't read Tennyson. Familiarity does breed

contempt;--doesn't it? And then poor dear Wallachia is such a bore. I

sometimes wonder, when English people are listening to her, whether

they think that American girls generally talk like that."

"Not all, perhaps, with that perfected eloquence."

"I dare say you do," continued Olivia, craftily. "That is just the

way in which people form their opinions about foreigners. Some

specially self-asserting American speaks his mind louder than other

people, and then you say that all Americans are self-asserting."

"But you are a little that way given, Miss Spalding."

"Because we are always called upon to answer accusations against

us, expressed or unexpressed. We don't think ourselves a bit better

than you; or, if the truth were known, half as good. We are always

struggling to be as polished and easy as the French, or as sensible

and dignified as the English; but when our defects are thrown in our

teeth--"

"Who throws them in your teeth, Miss Spalding?"

"You look it,--all of you,--if you do not speak it out. You do assume

a superiority, Mr. Glascock; and that we cannot endure."

"I do not feel that I assume anything," said Mr. Glascock, meekly.

"If three gentlemen be together, an Englishman, a Frenchman, and an

American, is not the American obliged to be on his mettle to prove

that he is somebody among the three? I admit that he is always

claiming to be the first; but he does so only that he may not be too

evidently the last. If you knew us, Mr. Glascock, you would find us

to be very mild, and humble and nice, and good, and clever, and kind,

and charitable, and beautiful,--in short, the finest people that have

as yet been created on the broad face of God's smiling earth." These

last words she pronounced with a nasal twang, and in a tone of voice

which almost seemed to him to be a direct mimicry of the American

Minister. The upshot of the conversation, however, was that the

disgust against Americans which, to a certain degree, had been

excited in Mr. Glascock's mind by the united efforts of Mr. Spalding

and the poetess, had been almost entirely dispelled. From all of

which the reader ought to understand that Miss Olivia Spalding was a

very clever young woman.

But nevertheless Mr. Glascock had not quite made up his mind to ask

the elder sister to be his wife. He was one of those men to whom

love-making does not come very easy, although he was never so much at

his ease as when he was in company with ladies. He was sorely in want

of a wife, but he was aware that at different periods during the last

fifteen years he had been angled for as a fish. Mothers in England

had tried to catch him, and of such mothers he had come to have the

strongest possible detestation. He had seen the hooks,--or perhaps

had fancied that he saw them when they were not there. Lady Janes and

Lady Sarahs had been hard upon him, till he learned to buckle himself

into triple armour when he went amongst them, and yet he wanted

a wife;--no man more sorely wanted one. The reader will perhaps

remember how he went down to Nuncombe Putney in quest of a wife, but

all in vain. The lady in that case had been so explicit with him that

he could not hope for a more favourable answer; and, indeed, he would

not have cared to marry a girl who had told him that she preferred

another man to himself, even if it had been possible for him to do

so. Now he had met a lady very different from those with whom he had

hitherto associated,--but not the less manifestly a lady. Caroline

Spalding was bright, pleasant, attractive, very easy to talk to, and

yet quite able to hold her own. But the American Minister was--a

bore; and Miss Petrie was--unbearable. He had often told himself that

in this matter of marrying a wife he would please himself altogether,

that he would allow himself to be tied down by no consideration of

family pride,--that he would consult nothing but his own heart and

feelings. As for rank, he could give that to his wife. As for money,

he had plenty of that also. He wanted a woman that was not blasÃ©e

with the world, that was not a fool, and who would respect him. The

more he thought of it, the more sure he was that he had seen none who

pleased him so well as Caroline Spalding; and yet he was a little

afraid of taking a step that would be irrevocable. Perhaps the

American Minister might express a wish to end his days at Monkhams,

and might think it desirable to have Miss Petrie always with him as a

private secretary in poetry!

"Between you and us, Mr. Glascock, the spark of sympathy does not

pass with a strong flash," said a voice in his ear. As he turned

round rapidly to face his foe, he was quite sure, for the moment,

that under no possible circumstances would he ever take an American

woman to his bosom as his wife.

"No," said he; "no, no. I rather think that I agree with you."

"The antipathy is one," continued Miss Petrie, "which has been

common on the face of the earth since the clown first trod upon the

courtier's heels. It is the instinct of fallen man to hate equality,

to desire ascendancy, to crush, to oppress, to tyrannise, to

enslave. Then, when the slave is at last free, and in his freedom

demands--equality, man is not great enough to take his enfranchised

brother to his bosom."

"You mean negroes," said Mr. Glascock, looking round and planning for

himself a mode of escape.

"Not negroes only,--not the enslaved blacks, who are now enslaved no

more,--but the rising nations of white men wherever they are to be

seen. You English have no sympathy with a people who claim to be at

least your equals. The clown has trod upon the courtier's heels till

the clown is clown no longer, and the courtier has hardly a court in

which he may dangle his sword-knot."

"If so the clown might as well spare the courtier," not meaning the

rebuke which his words implied.

"Ah--h,--but the clown will not spare the courtier, Mr. Glascock. I

understand the gibe, and I tell you that the courtier shall be spared

no longer;--because he is useless. He shall be cut down together with

the withered grasses and thrown into the oven, and there shall be an

end of him." Then she turned round to appeal to an American gentleman

who had joined them, and Mr. Glascock made his escape. "I hold it to

be the holiest duty which I owe to my country never to spare one of

them when I meet him."

"They are all very well in their way," said the American gentleman.

"Down with them, down with them!" exclaimed the poetess, with a

beautiful enthusiasm. In the meantime Mr. Glascock had made up his

mind that he could not dare to ask Caroline Spalding to be his wife.

There were certain forms of the American female so dreadful that no

wise man would wilfully come in contact with them. Miss Petrie's

ferocity was distressing to him, but her eloquence and enthusiasm

were worse even than her ferocity. The personal incivility of which

she had been guilty in calling him a withered grass was distasteful

to him, as being opposed to his ideas of the customs of society; but

what would be his fate if his wife's chosen friend should be for ever

dinning her denunciation of withered grasses into his ear?

He was still thinking of all this when he was accosted by Mrs.

Spalding. "Are you going to dear Lady Banbury's to-morrow?" she

asked. Lady Banbury was the wife of the English Minister.

"I suppose I shall be there in the course of the evening."

"How very nice she is; is she not? I do like Lady Banbury;--so soft,

and gentle, and kind."

"One of the pleasantest old ladies I know," said Mr. Glascock.

"It does not strike you so much as it does me," said Mrs. Spalding,

with one of her sweetest smiles. "The truth is, we all value what

we have not got. There are no Lady Banburys in our country, and

therefore we think the more of them when we meet them here. She is

talking of going to Rome for the Carnival, and has asked Caroline

to go with her. I am so pleased to find that my dear girl is such a

favourite."

Mr. Glascock immediately told himself that he saw the hook. If he

were to be fished for by this American aunt as he had been fished

for by English mothers, all his pleasure in the society of Caroline

Spalding would be at once over. It would be too much, indeed, if

in this American household he were to find the old vices of an

aristocracy superadded to young republican sins! Nevertheless Lady

Banbury was, as he knew well, a person whose opinion about young

people was supposed to be very good. She noticed those only who were

worthy of notice; and to have been taken by the hand by Lady Banbury

was acknowledged to be a passport into good society. If Caroline

Spalding was in truth going to Rome with Lady Banbury, that fact

was in itself a great confirmation of Mr. Glascock's good opinion

of her. Mrs. Spalding had perhaps understood this; but had not

understood that having just hinted that it was so, she should have

abstained from saying a word more about her dear girl. Clever and

well-practised must, indeed, be the hand of the fisherwoman in

matrimonial waters who is able to throw her fly without showing

any glimpse of the hook to the fish for whom she angles. Poor Mrs.

Spalding, though with kindly instincts towards her niece she did on

this occasion make some slight attempt at angling, was innocent of

any concerted plan. It seemed to her to be so natural to say a good

word in praise of her niece to the man whom she believed to be in

love with her niece.

Caroline and Mr. Glascock did not meet each other again till late in

the evening, and just as he was about to take his leave. As they came

together each of them involuntarily looked round to see whether Miss

Petrie was near. Had she been there nothing would have been said

beyond the shortest farewell greeting. But Miss Petrie was afar

off, electrifying some Italian by the vehemence of her sentiments,

and the audacious volubility of a language in which all arbitrary

restrictions were ignored. "Are you going?" she asked.

"Well;--I believe I am. Since I saw you last I've encountered Miss

Petrie again, and I'm rather depressed."

"Ah;--you don't know her. If you did you wouldn't laugh at her."

"Laugh at her! Indeed I do not do that; but when I'm told that I'm to

be thrown into the oven and burned because I'm such a worn-out old

institution--"

"You don't mean to say that you mind that!"

"Not much, when it comes up in the ordinary course of conversation;

but it palls upon one when it is asserted for the fourth or fifth

time in an evening."

"Alas, alas!" exclaimed Miss Spalding, with mock energy.

"And why, alas?"

"Because it is so impossible to make the oil and vinegar of the old

world and of the new mix together and suit each other."

"You think it is impossible, Miss Spalding?"

"I fear so. We are so terribly tender, and you are always pinching us

on our most tender spot. And we never meet you without treading on

your gouty toes."

"I don't think my toes are gouty," said he.

"I apologise to your own, individually, Mr. Glascock; but I must

assert that nationally you are subject to the gout."

"That is, when I'm told over and over again that I'm to be cut down

and thrown into the oven--"

"Never mind the oven now, Mr. Glascock. If my friend has been

over-zealous I will beg pardon for her. But it does seem to me,

indeed it does, with all the reverence and partiality I have

for everything European,"--the word European was an offence to

him, and he shewed that it was so by his countenance,--"that the

idiosyncrasies of you and of us are so radically different, that

we cannot be made to amalgamate and sympathise with each other

thoroughly."

He paused for some seconds before he answered her, but it was so

evident by his manner that he was going to speak, that she could

neither leave him nor interrupt him. "I had thought that it might

have been otherwise," he said at last, and the tone of his voice was

so changed as to make her know that he was in earnest.

But she did not change her voice by a single note. "I'm afraid it

cannot be so," she said, speaking after her old fashion--half in

earnest, half in banter. "We may make up our minds to be very civil

to each other when we meet. The threats of the oven may no doubt be

dropped on our side, and you may abstain from expressing in words

your sense of our inferiority."

"I never expressed anything of the kind," he said, quite in anger.

"I am taking you simply as the sample Englishman, not as Mr.

Glascock, who helped me and my sister over the mountains. Such of

us as have to meet in society may agree to be very courteous; but

courtesy and cordiality are not only not the same, but they are

incompatible."

"Why so?"

"Courtesy is an effort, and cordiality is free. I must be allowed

to contradict the friend that I love; but I assent,--too often

falsely,--to what is said to me by a passing acquaintance. In spite

of what the Scripture says, I think it is one of the greatest

privileges of a brother that he may call his brother a fool."

"Shall you desire to call your husband a fool?"

"My husband!"

"He will, I suppose, be at least as dear to you as a brother?"

"I never had a brother."

"Your sister, then! It is the same, I suppose?"

"If I were to have a husband, I hope he would be the dearest to me

of all. Unless he were so, he certainly would not be my husband. But

between a man and his wife there does not spring up that playful,

violent intimacy admitting of all liberties, which comes from early

nursery associations; and then, there is the difference of sex."

"I should not like my wife to call me a fool," he said.

"I hope she may never have occasion to do so, Mr. Glascock. Marry an

English wife in your own class,--as, of course, you will,--and then

you will be safe."

"But I have set my heart fast on marrying an American wife," he said.

"Then I can't tell what may befall you. It's like enough, if you do

that, that you may be called by some name you will think hard to

bear. But you'll think better of it. Like should pair with like, Mr.

Glascock. If you were to marry one of our young women, you would lose

in dignity as much as she would lose in comfort." Then they parted,

and she went off to say farewell to other guests. The manner in which

she had answered what he had said to her had certainly been of a

nature to stop any further speech of the same kind. Had she been

gentle with him, then he would certainly have told her that she was

the American woman whom he desired to take with him to his home in

England.

CHAPTER LVII.

DOROTHY'S FATE.

Towards the end of February Sir Peter Mancrudy declared Miss Stanbury

to be out of danger, and Mr. Martin began to be sprightly on the

subject, taking to himself no inconsiderable share of the praise

accruing to the medical faculty in Exeter generally for the saving of

a life so valuable to the city. "Yes, Mr. Burgess," Sir Peter said

to old Barty of the bank, "our friend will get over it this time,

and without any serious damage to her constitution, if she will only

take care of herself." Barty made some inaudible grunt, intended

to indicate his own indifference on the subject, and expressed his

opinion to the chief clerk that old Jemima Wideawake,--as he was

pleased to call her,--was one of those tough customers who would

never die. "It would be nothing to us, Mr. Barty, one way or the

other," said the clerk; to which Barty Burgess assented with another

grunt.

Camilla French declared that she was delighted to hear the news. At

this time there had been some sort of a reconciliation between her

and her lover. Mrs. French had extracted from him a promise that he

would not go to Natal; and Camilla had commenced the preparations for

her wedding. His visits to Heavitree were as few and far between as

he could make them with any regard to decency; but the 31st of March

was coming on quickly, and as he was to be made a possession of them

for ever, it was considered to be safe and well to allow him some

liberty in his present condition. "My dear, if they are driven, there

is no knowing what they won't do," Mrs. French said to her daughter.

Camilla had submitted with compressed lips and a slight nod of her

head. She had worked very hard, but her day of reward was coming. It

was impossible not to perceive,--both for her and her mother,--that

the scantiness of Mr. Gibson's attention to his future bride was

cause of some weak triumph to Arabella. She said that it was very odd

that he did not come,--and once added with a little sigh that he used

to come in former days, alluding to those happy days in which another

love was paramount. Camilla could not endure this with an equal mind.

"Bella, dear," she said, "we know what all that means. He has made

his choice, and if I am satisfied with what he does now, surely you

need not grumble." Miss Stanbury's illness had undoubtedly been a

great source of contentment to the family at Heavitree, as they had

all been able to argue that her impending demise was the natural

consequence of her great sin in the matter of Dorothy's proposed

marriage. When, however, they heard from Mr. Martin that she would

certainly recover, that Sir Peter's edict to that effect had gone

forth, they were willing to acknowledge that Providence, having so

far punished the sinner, was right in staying its hand and abstaining

from the final blow. "I'm sure we are delighted," said Mrs. French,

"for though she has said cruel things of us,--and so untrue too,--yet

of course it is our duty to forgive her. And we do forgive her."

Dorothy had written three or four notes to Brooke since his

departure, which contained simple bulletins of her aunt's health.

She always began her letters with "My dear Mr. Burgess," and ended

them with "yours truly." She never made any allusion to Brooke's

declaration of love, or gave the slightest sign in her letters to

shew that she even remembered it. At last she wrote to say that her

aunt was convalescent; and, in making this announcement, she allowed

herself some enthusiasm of expression. She was so happy, and was so

sure that Mr. Burgess would be equally so! And her aunt had asked

after her "dear Brooke," expressing her great satisfaction with

him, in that he had come down to see her when she had been almost

too ill to see any one. In answer to this there came to her a real

love-letter from Brooke Burgess. It was the first occasion on

which he had written to her. The little bulletins had demanded no

replies, and had received none. Perhaps there had been a shade of

disappointment on Dorothy's side, in that she had written thrice, and

had been made rich with no word in return. But, although her heart

had palpitated on hearing the postman's knock, and had palpitated in

vain, she had told herself that it was all as it should be. She wrote

to him, because she possessed information which it was necessary that

she should communicate. He did not write to her, because there was

nothing for him to tell. Then had come the love-letter, and in the

love-letter there was an imperative demand for a reply.

What was she to do? To have recourse to Priscilla for advice was

her first idea; but she herself believed that she owed a debt

of gratitude to her aunt, which Priscilla would not take into

account,--the existence of which Priscilla would by no means

admit. She knew Priscilla's mind in this matter, and was sure that

Priscilla's advice, whatever it might be, would be given without any

regard to her aunt's views. And then Dorothy was altogether ignorant

of her aunt's views. Her aunt had been very anxious that she should

marry Mr. Gibson, but had clearly never admitted into her mind the

idea that she might possibly marry Brooke Burgess; and it seemed to

her that she herself would be dishonest, both to her aunt and to her

lover, if she were to bind this man to herself without her aunt's

knowledge. He was to be her aunt's heir, and she was maintained by

her aunt's liberality! Thinking of all this, she at last resolved

that she would take the bull by the horns, and tell her aunt. She

felt that the task would be one almost beyond her strength. Thrice

she went into her aunt's room, intending to make a clean breast.

Thrice her courage failed her, and she left the room with her tale

untold, excusing herself on various pretexts. Her aunt had seemed to

be not quite so well, or had declared herself to be tired, or had

been a little cross;--or else Martha had come in at the nick of time.

But there was Brooke Burgess's letter unanswered,--a letter that was

read night and morning, and which was never for an instant out of her

mind. He had demanded a reply, and he had a right at least to that.

The letter had been with her for four entire days before she had

ventured to speak to her aunt on the subject.

On the first of March Miss Stanbury came out of her bed-room for the

first time. Dorothy, on the previous day, had decided on postponing

her communication for this occasion; but, when she found herself

sitting in the little sitting-room up-stairs close at her aunt's

elbow, and perceived the signs of weakness which the new move had

made conspicuous, and heard the invalid declare that the little

journey had been almost too much for her, her heart misgave her. She

ought to have told her tale while her aunt was still in bed. But

presently there came a question, which put her into such a flutter

that she was for the time devoid of all resolution. "Has Brooke

written?" said Miss Stanbury.

"Yes,--aunt; he has written."

"And what did he say?" Dorothy was struck quite dumb. "Is there

anything wrong?" And now, as Miss Stanbury asked the question, she

seemed herself to have forgotten that she had two minutes before

declared herself to be almost too feeble to speak. "I'm sure there is

something wrong. What is it? I will know."

"There is nothing wrong, Aunt Stanbury."

"Where is the letter? Let me see it."

"I mean there is nothing wrong about him."

"What is it, then?"

"He is quite well, Aunt Stanbury."

"Shew me the letter. I will see the letter. I know that there is

something the matter. Do you mean to say you won't shew me Brooke's

letter?"

There was a moment's pause before Dorothy answered. "I will shew you

his letter;--though I am sure he didn't mean that I should shew it to

anyone."

"He hasn't written evil of me?"

"No; no; no. He would sooner cut his hand off than say a word bad

of you. He never says or writes anything bad of anybody. But--. Oh,

aunt; I'll tell you everything. I should have told you before, only

that you were ill."

Then Miss Stanbury was frightened. "What is it?" she said hoarsely,

clasping the arms of the great chair, each with a thin, shrivelled

hand.

"Aunt Stanbury, Brooke,--Brooke,--wants me to be his--wife!"

[Illustration: "Brooke wants me to be his wife."]

"What!"

"You cannot be more surprised than I have been, Aunt Stanbury; and

there has been no fault of mine."

"I don't believe it," said the old woman.

"Now you may read the letter," said Dorothy, standing up. She was

quite prepared to be obedient, but she felt that her aunt's manner of

receiving the information was almost an insult.

"He must be a fool," said Miss Stanbury.

This was hard to bear, and the colour went and came rapidly across

Dorothy's cheeks as she gave herself a few moments to prepare an

answer. She already perceived that her aunt would be altogether

adverse to the marriage, and that therefore the marriage could never

take place. She had never for a moment allowed herself to think

otherwise, but, nevertheless, the blow was heavy on her. We all know

how constantly hope and expectation will rise high within our own

bosoms in opposition to our own judgment,--how we become sanguine

in regard to events which we almost know can never come to pass. So

it had been with Dorothy. Her heart had been almost in a flutter of

happiness since she had had Brooke's letter in her possession, and

yet she never ceased to declare to herself her own conviction that

that letter could lead to no good result. In regard to her own wishes

on the subject she had never asked herself a single question. As it

had been quite beyond her power to bring herself to endure the idea

of marrying Mr. Gibson, so it had been quite impossible to her not

to long to be Brooke's wife from the moment in which a suggestion to

that effect had fallen from his lips. This was a state of things so

certain, so much a matter of course, that, though she had not spoken

a word to him in which she owned her love, she had never for a moment

doubted that he knew the truth,--and that everybody else concerned

would know it too. But she did not suppose that her wishes would go

for anything with her aunt. Brooke Burgess was to become a rich man

as her aunt's heir, and her aunt would of course have her own ideas

about Brooke's advancement in life. She was quite prepared to submit

without quarrelling when her aunt should tell her that the idea must

not be entertained. But the order might be given, the prohibition

might be pronounced, without an insult to her own feelings as a

woman. "He must be a fool," Miss Stanbury had said, and Dorothy took

time to collect her thoughts before she would reply. In the meantime

her aunt finished the reading of the letter.

"He may be foolish in this," Dorothy said; "but I don't think you

should call him a fool."

"I shall call him what I please. I suppose this was going on at the

time when you refused Mr. Gibson."

"Nothing was going on. Nothing has gone on at all," said Dorothy,

with as much indignation as she was able to assume.

"How can you tell me that? That is an untruth."

"It is not--an untruth," said Dorothy, almost sobbing, but driven at

the same time to much anger.

"Do you mean to say that this is the first you ever heard of it?" And

she held out the letter, shaking it in her thin hand.

"I have never said so, Aunt Stanbury."

"Yes, you did."

"I said that nothing--was--going on, when Mr. Gibson--was--. If you

choose to suspect me, Aunt Stanbury, I'll go away. I won't stay here

if you suspect me. When Brooke spoke to me, I told him you wouldn't

like it."

"Of course I don't like it." But she gave no reason why she did not

like it.

"And there was nothing more till this letter came. I couldn't help

his writing to me. It wasn't my fault."

"Psha!"

"If you are angry, I am very sorry. But you haven't a right to be

angry."

"Go on, Dorothy; go on. I'm so weak that I can hardly stir myself;

it's the first moment that I've been out of my bed for weeks;--and of

course you can say what you please. I know what it will be. I shall

have to take to my bed again, and then,--in a very little time,--you

can both--make fools of yourselves,--just as you like."

This was an argument against which Dorothy of course found it to be

quite impossible to make continued combat. She could only shuffle her

letter back into her pocket, and be, if possible, more assiduous than

ever in her attentions to the invalid. She knew that she had been

treated most unjustly, and there would be a question to be answered

as soon as her aunt should be well as to the possibility of her

remaining in the Close subject to such injustice; but let her aunt

say what she might, or do what she might, Dorothy could not leave

her for the present. Miss Stanbury sat for a considerable time quite

motionless, with her eyes closed, and did not stir or make signs of

life till Dorothy touched her arm, asking her whether she would not

take some broth which had been prepared for her. "Where's Martha? Why

does not Martha come?" said Miss Stanbury. This was a hard blow, and

from that moment Dorothy believed that it would be expedient that

she should return to Nuncombe Putney. The broth, however, was taken,

while Dorothy sat by in silence. Only one word further was said that

evening by Miss Stanbury about Brooke and his love affair. "There

must be nothing more about this, Dorothy; remember that; nothing at

all. I won't have it." Dorothy made no reply. Brooke's letter was in

her pocket, and it should be answered that night. On the following

day she would let her aunt know what she had said to Brooke. Her aunt

should not see the letter, but should be made acquainted with its

purport in reference to Brooke's proposal of marriage.

"I won't have it!" That had been her aunt's command. What right had

her aunt to give any command upon the matter? Then crossed Dorothy's

mind, as she thought of this, a glimmering of an idea that no one can

be entitled to issue commands who cannot enforce obedience. If Brooke

and she chose to become man and wife by mutual consent, how could her

aunt prohibit the marriage? Then there followed another idea, that

commands are enforced by the threatening and, if necessary, by the

enforcement of penalties. Her aunt had within her hand no penalty of

which Dorothy was afraid on her own behalf; but she had the power

of inflicting a terrible punishment on Brooke Burgess. Now Dorothy

conceived that she herself would be the meanest creature alive if she

were actuated by fears as to money in her acceptance or rejection of

a man whom she loved as she did Brooke Burgess. Brooke had an income

of his own which seemed to her to be ample for all purposes. But that

which would have been sordid in her, did not seem to her to have any

stain of sordidness for him. He was a man, and was bound to be rich

if he could. And, moreover, what had she to offer in herself,--such a

poor thing as was she,--to make compensation to him for the loss of

fortune? Her aunt could inflict this penalty, and therefore the power

was hers, and the power must be obeyed. She would write to Brooke in

a manner that should convey to him her firm decision. But not the

less on that account would she let her aunt know that she thought

herself to have been ill-used. It was an insult to her, a most

ill-natured insult,--that telling her that Brooke had been a fool

for loving her. And then that accusation against her of having been

false, of having given one reason for refusing Mr. Gibson, while

there was another reason in her heart,--of having been cunning and

then untrue, was not to be endured. What would her aunt think of her

if she were to bear such allegations without indignant protest? She

would write her letter, and speak her mind to her aunt as soon as her

aunt should be well enough to hear it.

As she had resolved, she wrote her letter that night before she went

to bed. She wrote it with floods of tears, and a bitterness of heart

which almost conquered her. She too had heard of love, and had been

taught to feel that the success or failure of a woman's life depended

upon that,--whether she did, or whether she did not, by such gifts

as God might have given to her, attract to herself some man strong

enough, and good enough, and loving enough to make straight for her

her paths, to bear for her her burdens, to be the father of her

children, the staff on which she might lean, and the wall against

which she might grow, feeling the sunshine, and sheltered from the

wind. She had ever estimated her own value so lowly as to have told

herself often that such success could never come in her way. From her

earliest years she had regarded herself as outside the pale within

which such joys are to be found. She had so strictly taught herself

to look forward to a blank existence, that she had learned to do so

without active misery. But not the less did she know where happiness

lay; and when the good thing came almost within her reach, when it

seemed that God had given her gifts which might have sufficed, when

a man had sought her hand whose nature was such that she could have

leaned on him with a true worship, could have grown against him as

against a wall with perfect confidence, could have lain with her head

upon his bosom, and have felt that of all spots that in the world was

the most fitting for her,--when this was all but grasped, and must

yet be abandoned, there came upon her spirit an agony so bitter

that she had not before known how great might be the depth of human

disappointment. But the letter was at last written, and when finished

was as follows:--

The Close, Exeter, March 1, 186--.

DEAR BROOKE,

There had been many doubts about this; but at last they were

conquered, and the name was written.

I have shown your letter to my aunt, as I am sure you will

think was best. I should have answered it before, only

that I thought that she was not quite well enough to talk

about it. She says, as I was sure she would, that what you

propose is quite out of the question. I am aware that I

am bound to obey her; and as I think that you also ought

to do so, I shall think no more of what you have said to

me and have written. It is quite impossible now, even if

it might have been possible under other circumstances. I

shall always remember your great kindness to me. Perhaps

I ought to say that I am very grateful for the compliment

you have paid me. I shall think of you always;--till I

die.

Believe me to be,

Your very sincere friend,

DOROTHY STANBURY.

The next day Miss Stanbury again came out of her room, and on the

third day she was manifestly becoming stronger. Dorothy had as yet

not spoken of her letter, but was prepared to do so as soon as she

thought that a fitting opportunity had come. She had a word or two to

say for herself; but she must not again subject herself to being told

that she was taking her will of her aunt because her aunt was too ill

to defend herself. But on the third day Miss Stanbury herself asked

the question. "Have you written anything to Brooke?" she asked.

"I have answered his letter, Aunt Stanbury."

"And what have you said to him?"

"I have told him that you disapproved of it, and that nothing more

must be said about it."

"Yes;--of course you made me out to be an ogre."

"I don't know what you mean by that, aunt. I am sure that I told him

the truth."

"May I see the letter?"

"It has gone."

"But you have kept a copy," said Miss Stanbury.

"Yes; I have got a copy," replied Dorothy; "but I would rather not

shew it. I told him just what I tell you."

"Dorothy, it is not at all becoming that you should have a

correspondence with any young man of such a nature that you should be

ashamed to shew it to your aunt."

"I am not ashamed of anything," said Dorothy sturdily.

"I don't know what young women in these days have come to," continued

Miss Stanbury. "There is no respect, no subjection, no obedience, and

too often--no modesty."

"Does that mean me, Aunt Stanbury?" asked Dorothy.

"To tell you the truth, Dorothy, I don't think you ought to have

been receiving love-letters from Brooke Burgess when I was lying ill

in bed. I didn't expect it of you. I tell you fairly that I didn't

expect it of you."

Then Dorothy spoke out her mind. "As you think that, Aunt Stanbury,

I had better go away. And if you please I will,--when you are well

enough to spare me."

"Pray don't think of me at all," said her aunt.

"And as for love-letters,--Mr. Burgess has written to me once. I

don't think that there can be anything immodest in opening a letter

when it comes by the post. And as soon as I had it I determined to

shew it to you. As for what happened before, when Mr. Burgess spoke

to me, which was long, long after all that about Mr. Gibson was over,

I told him that it couldn't be so; and I thought there would be no

more about it. You were so ill that I could not tell you. Now you

know it all."

"I have not seen your letter to him."

"I shall never shew it to anybody. But you have said things, Aunt

Stanbury, that are very cruel."

"Of course! Everything I say is wrong."

"You have told me that I was telling untruths, and you have called

me--immodest. That is a terrible word."

"You shouldn't deserve it then."

"I never have deserved it, and I won't bear it. No; I won't. If Hugh

heard me called that word, I believe he'd tear the house down."

"Hugh, indeed! He's to be brought in between us;--is he?"

"He's my brother, and of course I'm obliged to think of him. And if

you please, I'll go home as soon as you are well enough to spare me."

Quickly after this there were very many letters coming and going

between the house in the Close and the ladies at Nuncombe Putney, and

Hugh Stanbury and Brooke Burgess. The correspondent of Brooke Burgess

was of course Miss Stanbury herself. The letters to Hugh and to

Nuncombe Putney were written by Dorothy. Of the former we need be

told nothing at the present moment; but the upshot of all poor

Dolly's letters was, that on the tenth of March she was to return

home to Nuncombe Putney, share once more her sister's bed and

mother's poverty, and abandon the comforts of the Close. Before

this became a definite arrangement Miss Stanbury had given way in a

certain small degree. She had acknowledged that Dorothy had intended

no harm. But this was not enough for Dorothy, who was conscious of

no harm either done or intended. She did not specify her terms, or

require specifically that her aunt should make apology for that word

immodest, or at least withdraw it; but she resolved that she would go

unless it was most absolutely declared to have been applied to her

without the slightest reason. She felt, moreover, that her aunt's

house ought to be open to Brooke Burgess, and that it could not be

open to them both. And so she went;--having resided under her aunt's

roof between nine and ten months.

"Good-bye, Aunt Stanbury," said Dorothy, kissing her aunt, with a

tear in her eye and a sob in her throat.

"Good-bye, my dear, good-bye." And Miss Stanbury, as she pressed her

niece's hand, left in it a bank-note.

"I'm much obliged, aunt; I am indeed; but I'd rather not." And the

bank-note was left on the parlour table.

CHAPTER LVIII.

DOROTHY AT HOME.

Dorothy was received at home with so much affection and such

expressions of esteem as to afford her much consolation in her

misery. Both her mother and her sister approved of her conduct.

Mrs. Stanbury's approval was indeed accompanied by many expressions

of regret as to the good things lost. She was fully alive to the

fact that life in the Close at Exeter was better for her daughter

than life in their little cottage at Nuncombe Putney. The outward

appearance which Dorothy bore on her return home was proof of this.

Her clothes, the set of her hair, her very gestures and motions had

framed themselves on town ideas. The faded, wildered, washed-out

look, the uncertain, purposeless bearing which had come from her

secluded life and subjection to her sister had vanished from her.

She had lived among people, and had learned something of their gait

and carriage. Money we know will do almost everything, and no doubt

money had had much to do with this. It is very pretty to talk of the

alluring simplicity of a clean calico gown; but poverty will shew

itself to be meagre, dowdy, and draggled in a woman's dress, let

the woman be ever so simple, ever so neat, ever so independent, and

ever so high-hearted. Mrs. Stanbury was quite alive to all that her

younger daughter was losing. Had she not received two offers of

marriage while she was at Exeter? There was no possibility that

offers of marriage should be made in the cottage at Nuncombe Putney.

A man within the walls of the cottage would have been considered as

much out of place as a wild bull. It had been matter of deep regret

to Mrs. Stanbury that her daughter should not have found herself able

to marry Mr. Gibson. She knew that there was no matter for reproach

in this, but it was a misfortune,--a great misfortune. And in the

mother's breast there had been a sad, unrepressed feeling of regret

that young people should so often lose their chances in the world

through over-fancifulness, and ignorance as to their own good. Now

when she heard the story of Brooke Burgess, she could not but think

that had Dorothy remained at Exeter, enduring patiently such hard

words as her aunt might speak, the love affair might have been

brought at some future time to a happy conclusion. She did not say

all this; but there came on her a silent melancholy, made expressive

by constant little shakings of the head and a continued reproachful

sadness of demeanour, which was quite as intelligible to Priscilla

as would have been any spoken words. But Priscilla's approval of her

sister's conduct was clear, outspoken, and satisfactory. She had been

quite sure that her sister had been right about Mr. Gibson; and was

equally sure that she was now right about Brooke Burgess. Priscilla

had in her mind an idea that if B. B., as they called him, was half

as good as her sister represented him to be,--for indeed Dorothy

endowed him with every virtue consistent with humanity,--he would

not be deterred from his pursuit either by Dolly's letter or by Aunt

Stanbury's commands. But of this she thought it wise to say nothing.

She paid Dolly the warm and hitherto unaccustomed compliment of

equality, assuming to regard her sister's judgment and persistent

independence to be equally strong with her own; and, as she knew

well, she could not have gone further than this. "I never shall agree

with you about Aunt Stanbury," she said. "To me she seems to be so

imperious, so exacting, and also so unjust, as to be unbearable."

"But she is affectionate," said Dolly.

"So is the dog that bites you, and, for aught I know, the horse that

kicks you. But it is ill living with biting dogs and kicking horses.

But all that matters little as you are still your own mistress. How

strange these nine months have been, with you in Exeter, while we

have been at the Clock House. And here we are, together again in the

old way, just as though nothing had happened." But Dorothy knew well

that a great deal had happened, and that her life could never be as

it had been heretofore. The very tone in which her sister spoke to

her was proof of this. She had an infinitely greater possession in

herself than had belonged to her before her residence at Exeter; but

that possession was so heavily mortgaged and so burthened as to make

her believe that the change was to be regretted.

At the end of the first week there came a letter from Aunt Stanbury

to Dorothy. It began by saying that Dolly had left behind her certain

small properties which had now been made up in a parcel and sent by

the railway, carriage paid. "But they weren't mine at all," said

Dolly, alluding to certain books in which she had taken delight. "She

means to give them to you," said Priscilla, "and I think you must

take them." "And the shawl is no more mine than it is yours, though

I wore it two or three times in the winter." Priscilla was of opinion

that the shawl must be taken also. Then the letter spoke of the

writer's health, and at last fell into such a strain of confidential

gossip that Mrs. Stanbury, when she read it, could not understand

that there had been a quarrel. "Martha says that she saw Camilla

French in the street to-day, such a guy in her new finery as never

was seen before except on May-day." Then in the postscript Dorothy

was enjoined to answer this letter quickly. "None of your short

scraps, my dear," said Aunt Stanbury.

"She must mean you to go back to her," said Mrs. Stanbury.

"No doubt she does," said Priscilla; "but Dolly need not go because

my aunt means it. We are not her creatures."

But Dorothy answered her aunt's letter in the spirit in which it had

been written. She asked after her aunt's health, thanked her aunt for

the gift of the books,--in each of which her name had been clearly

written,--protested about the shawl, sent her love to Martha and her

kind regards to Jane, and expressed a hope that C. F. enjoyed her new

clothes. She described the cottage, and was funny about the cabbage

stumps in the garden, and at last succeeded in concocting a long

epistle. "I suppose there will be a regular correspondence," said

Priscilla.

Two days afterwards, however, the correspondence took altogether

another form. The cottage in which they now lived was supposed to be

beyond the beat of the wooden-legged postman, and therefore it was

necessary that they should call at the post-office for their letters.

On the morning in question Priscilla obtained a thick letter from

Exeter for her mother, and knew that it had come from her aunt.

Her aunt could hardly have found it necessary to correspond with

Dorothy's mother so soon after that letter to Dorothy had been

written had there not arisen some very peculiar cause. Priscilla,

after much meditation, thought it better that the letter should be

opened in Dorothy's absence, and in Dorothy's absence the following

letter was read both by Priscilla and her mother:--

The Close, March 19, 186--.

DEAR SISTER STANBURY,

After much consideration, I think it best to send under

cover to you the enclosed letter from Mr. Brooke Burgess,

intended for your daughter Dorothy. You will see that I

have opened it and read it,--as I was clearly entitled to

do, the letter having been addressed to my niece while she

was supposed to be under my care. I do not like to destroy

the letter, though, perhaps, that would be best; but I

would advise you to do so, if it be possible, without

shewing it to Dorothy. I have told Mr. Brooke Burgess what

I have done.

I have also told him that I cannot sanction a marriage

between him and your daughter. There are many reasons of

old date,--not to speak of present reasons also,--which

would make such a marriage highly inexpedient. Mr. Brooke

Burgess is, of course, his own master, but your daughter

understands completely how the matter stands.

Yours truly,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

"What a wicked old woman!" said Priscilla. Then there arose a

question whether they should read Brooke's letter, or whether they

should give it unread to Dorothy. Priscilla denounced her aunt in

the strongest language she could use for having broken the seal.

"'Clearly entitled,'--because Dorothy had been living with her!"

exclaimed Priscilla. "She can have no proper conception of honour

or of honesty. She had no more right to open Dorothy's letter than

she had to take her money." Mrs. Stanbury was very anxious to read

Brooke's letter, alleging that they would then be able to judge

whether it should be handed over to Dorothy. But Priscilla's sense of

right would not admit of this. Dorothy must receive the letter from

her lover with no further stain from unauthorised eyes than that to

which it had been already subjected. She was called in, therefore,

from the kitchen, and the whole packet was given to her. "Your aunt

has read the enclosure, Dolly; but we have not opened it."

Dorothy took the packet without a word and sat herself down. She

first read her aunt's letter very slowly. "I understand perfectly,"

she said, folding it up, almost listlessly, while Brooke's letter lay

still unopened on her lap. Then she took it up, and held it awhile in

both hands, while her mother and Priscilla watched her. "Priscilla,"

she said, "do you read it first."

Priscilla was immediately at her side, kissing her. "No, my darling;

no," she said; "it is for you to read it." Then Dorothy took the

precious contents from the envelope, and opened the folds of the

paper. When she had read a dozen words, her eyes were so suffused

with tears, that she could hardly make herself mistress of the

contents of the letter; but she knew that it contained renewed

assurances of her lover's love, and assurance on his part that he

would take no refusal from her based on any other ground than that of

her own indifference to him. He had written to Miss Stanbury to the

same effect; but he had not thought it necessary to explain this to

Dorothy; nor did Miss Stanbury in her letter tell them that she had

received any communication from him. "Shall I read it now?" said

Priscilla, as soon as Dorothy again allowed the letter to fall into

her lap.

Both Priscilla and Mrs. Stanbury read it, and for awhile they sat

with the two letters among them without much speech about them.

Mrs. Stanbury was endeavouring to make herself believe that her

sister-in-law's opposition might be overcome, and that then Dorothy

might be married. Priscilla was inquiring of herself whether it would

be well that Dorothy should defy her aunt,--so much, at any rate,

would be well,--and marry the man, even to his deprivation of the

old woman's fortune. Priscilla had her doubts about this, being very

strong in her ideas of self-denial. That her sister should put up

with the bitterest disappointment rather than injure the man she

loved was right;--but then it would also be so extremely right to

defy Aunt Stanbury to her teeth! But Dorothy, in whose character was

mixed with her mother's softness much of the old Stanbury strength,

had no doubt in her mind. It was very sweet to be so loved. What

gratitude did she not owe to a man who was so true to her! What was

she that she should stand in his way? To lay herself down that she

might be crushed in his path was no more than she owed to him. Mrs.

Stanbury was the first to speak.

"I suppose he is a very good young man," she said.

"I am sure he is;--a noble, true-hearted man," said Priscilla.

"And why shouldn't he marry whom he pleases, as long as she is

respectable?" said Mrs. Stanbury.

"In some people's eyes poverty is more disreputable than vice," said

Priscilla.

"Your aunt has been so fond of Dorothy," pleaded Mrs. Stanbury.

"Just as she is of her servants," said Priscilla.

But Dorothy said nothing. Her heart was too full to enable her to

defend her aunt; nor at the present moment was she strong enough to

make her mother understand that no hope was to be entertained. In the

course of the day she walked out with her sister on the road towards

Ridleigh, and there, standing among the rocks and ferns, looking down

upon the river, with the buzz of the little mill within her ears,

she explained the feelings of her heart and her many thoughts with a

flow of words stronger, as Priscilla thought, than she had ever used

before.

"It is not what he would suffer now, Pris, or what he would feel, but

what he would feel ten, twenty years hence, when he would know that

his children would have been all provided for, had he not lost his

fortune by marrying me."

"He must be the only judge whether he prefers you to the old woman's

money," said Priscilla.

"No, dear; not the only judge. And it isn't that, Pris,--not which

he likes best now, but which it is best for him that he should have.

What could I do for him?"

"You can love him."

"Yes;--I can do that." And Dorothy paused a moment, to think how

exceedingly well she could do that one thing. "But what is that? As

you said the other day, a dog can do that. I am not clever. I can't

play, or talk French, or do things that men like their wives to do.

And I have lived here all my life; and what am I, that for me he

should lose a great fortune?"

"That is his look out."

"No, dearest;--it is mine, and I will look out. I shall be able, at

any rate, to remember always that I have loved him, and have not

injured him. He may be angry with me now,"--and there was a feeling

of pride at her heart, as she thought that he would be angry with

her, because she did not go to him,--"but he will know at last that I

have been as good to him as I knew how to be."

Then Priscilla wound her arms round Dorothy, and kissed her.

"My sister," she said; "my own sister!" They walked on further,

discussing the matter in all its bearings, talking of the act of

self-denial which Dorothy was called on to perform, as though it were

some abstract thing, the performance of which was, or perhaps was

not, imperatively demanded by the laws which should govern humanity;

but with no idea on the mind of either of them that there was any

longer a doubt as to this special matter in hand. They were away

from home over three hours; and, when they returned, Dorothy at once

wrote her two letters. They were very simple, and very short. She

told Brooke, whom she now addressed as "Dear Mr. Burgess," that

it could not be as he would have it; and she told her aunt,--with

some terse independence of expression, which Miss Stanbury quite

understood,--that she had considered the matter, and had thought it

right to refuse Mr. Burgess's offer.

"Don't you think she is very much changed?" said Mrs. Stanbury to her

eldest daughter.

"Not changed in the least, mother; but the sun has opened the bud,

and now we see the fruit."

CHAPTER LIX.

MR. BOZZLE AT HOME.

[Illustration]

It had now come to pass that Trevelyan had not a friend in the world

to whom he could apply in the matter of his wife and family. In the

last communication which he had received from Lady Milborough she

had scolded him, in terms that were for her severe, because he had

not returned to his wife and taken her off with him to Naples. Mr.

Bideawhile had found himself obliged to decline to move in the matter

at all. With Hugh Stanbury, Trevelyan had had a direct quarrel. Mr.

and Mrs. Outhouse he regarded as bitter enemies, who had taken the

part of his wife without any regard to the decencies of life. And now

it had come to pass that his sole remaining ally, Mr. Samuel Bozzle,

the ex-policeman, was becoming weary of his service. Trevelyan

remained in the north of Italy up to the middle of March, spending a

fortune in sending telegrams to Bozzle, instigating Bozzle by all the

means in his power to obtain possession of the child, desiring him at

one time to pounce down upon the parsonage of St. Diddulph's with a

battalion of policemen armed to the teeth with the law's authority,

and at another time suggesting to him to find his way by stratagem

into Mr. Outhouse's castle and carry off the child in his arms. At

last he sent word to say that he himself would be in England before

the end of March, and would see that the majesty of the law should be

vindicated in his favour.

Bozzle had in truth made but one personal application for the child

at St. Diddulph's. In making this he had expected no success, though,

from the energetic nature of his disposition, he had made the attempt

with some zeal. But he had never applied again at the parsonage,

disregarding the letters, the telegrams, and even the promises which

had come to him from his employer with such frequency. The truth was

that Mrs. Bozzle was opposed to the proposed separation of the mother

and the child, and that Bozzle was a man who listened to the words of

his wife. Mrs. Bozzle was quite prepared to admit that Madame T.,--as

Mrs. Trevelyan had come to be called at No. 55, Stony Walk,--was

no better than she should be. Mrs. Bozzle was disposed to think

that ladies of quality, among whom Madame T. was entitled in her

estimation to take rank, were seldom better than they ought to be,

and she was quite willing that her husband should earn his bread

by watching the lady or the lady's lover. She had participated in

Bozzle's triumph when he had discovered that the Colonel had gone to

Devonshire, and again when he had learned that the Lothario had been

at St. Diddulph's. And had the case been brought before the judge

ordinary by means of her husband's exertions, she would have taken

pleasure in reading every word of the evidence, even though her

husband should have been ever so roughly handled by the lawyers. But

now, when a demand was made upon Bozzle to violate the sanctity of

the clergyman's house, and withdraw the child by force or stratagem,

she began to perceive that the palmy days of the Trevelyan affair

were over for them, and that it would be wise on her husband's part

gradually to back out of the gentleman's employment. "Just put it on

the fire-back, Bozzle," she said one morning, as her husband stood

before her reading for the second time a somewhat lengthy epistle

which had reached him from Italy, while he held the baby over his

shoulder with his left arm. He had just washed himself at the sink,

and though his face was clean, his hair was rough, and his shirt

sleeves were tucked up.

[Illustration: "Put it on the fire-back, Bozzle."]

"That's all very well, Maryanne; but when a party has took a gent's

money, a party is bound to go through with the job."

"Gammon, Bozzle."

"It's all very well to say gammon; but his money has been took,--and

there's more to come."

"And ain't you worked for the money,--down to Hexeter one time,

across the water pretty well day and night watching that ere

clergyman's 'ouse like a cat? What more'd he have? As to the child,

I won't hear of it, B. The child shan't come here. We'd all be

shewed up in the papers as that black, that they'd hoot us along the

streets. It ain't the regular line of business, Bozzle; and there

ain't no good to be got, never, by going off the regular line."

Whereupon Bozzle scratched his head and again read the letter. A

distinct promise of a hundred pounds was made to him, if he would

have the child ready to hand over to Trevelyan on Trevelyan's arrival

in England.

"It ain't to be done, you know," said Bozzle.

"Of course it ain't," said Mrs. Bozzle.

"It ain't to be done anyways;--not in my way of business. Why didn't

he go to Skint, as I told him, when his own lawyer was too dainty for

the job? The paternal parent has a right to his infants, no doubt."

That was Bozzle's law.

"I don't believe it, B."

"But he have, I tell you."

"He can't suckle 'em;--can he? I don't believe a bit of his rights."

"When a married woman has followers, and the husband don't go the

wrong side of the post too, or it ain't proved again him that he do,

they'll never let her have nothing to do with the children. It's been

before the court a hundred times. He'll get the child fast enough if

he'll go before the court."

"Anyways it ain't your business, Bozzle, and don't you meddle nor

make. The money's good money as long as it's honest earned; but when

you come to rampaging and breaking into a gent's house, then I say

money may be had a deal too hard." In this special letter, which had

now come to hand, Bozzle was not instructed to "rampage." He was

simply desired to make a further official requisition for the boy at

the parsonage, and to explain to Mr. Outhouse, Mrs. Outhouse, and

Mrs. Trevelyan, or to as many of them as he could contrive to see,

that Mr. Trevelyan was immediately about to return to London, and

that he would put the law into execution if his son were not given

up to him at once. "I'll tell you what it is, B.," exclaimed Mrs.

Bozzle, "it's my belief as he ain't quite right up here;" and Mrs.

Bozzle touched her forehead.

"It's love for her as has done it then," said Bozzle, shaking his

head.

"I'm not a taking of her part, B. A woman as has a husband as finds

her with her wittels regular, and with what's decent and comfortable

beside, ought to be contented. I've never said no other than that.

I ain't no patience with your saucy madames as can't remember as

they're eating an honest man's bread. Drat 'em all; what is it they

wants? They don't know what they wants. It's just hidleness,--cause

there ain't a ha'porth for 'em to do. It's that as makes 'em--, I

won't say what. But as for this here child, B.--." At that moment

there came a knock at the door. Mrs. Bozzle going into the passage,

opened it herself, and saw a strange gentleman. Bozzle, who had stood

at the inner door, saw that the gentleman was Mr. Trevelyan.

The letter, which was still in the ex-policeman's hand, had reached

Stony Walk on the previous day; but the master of the house had been

absent, finding out facts, following up his profession, and earning

an honest penny. Trevelyan had followed his letter quicker than

he had intended when it was written, and was now with his prime

minister, before his prime minister had been able to take any action

on the last instruction received. "Does one Mr. Samuel Bozzle live

here?" asked Trevelyan. Then Bozzle came forward and introduced his

wife. There was no one else present except the baby, and Bozzle

intimated that let matters be as delicate as they might, they could

be discussed with perfect security in his wife's presence. But

Trevelyan was of a different opinion, and he was disgusted and

revolted,--most unreasonably,--by the appearance of his minister's

domestic arrangements. Bozzle had always waited upon him with a

decent coat, and a well-brushed hat, and clean shoes. It is very much

easier for such men as Mr. Bozzle to carry decency of appearance

about with them than to keep it at home. Trevelyan had never believed

his ally to be more than an ordinary ex-policeman, but he had not

considered how unattractive might be the interior of a private

detective's private residence. Mrs. Bozzle had set a chair for

him, but he had declined to sit down. The room was dirty, and very

close,--as though no breath of air was ever allowed to find entrance

there. "Perhaps you could put on your coat, and walk out with me for

a few minutes," said Trevelyan. Mrs. Bozzle, who well understood that

business was business, and that wives were not business, felt no

anger at this, and handed her husband his best coat. The well-brushed

hat was fetched from a cupboard, and it was astonishing to see

how easily and how quickly the outer respectability of Bozzle was

restored.

"Well?" said Trevelyan, as soon as they were together in the middle

of Stony Walk.

"There hasn't been nothing to be done, sir," said Bozzle.

"Why not?" Trevelyan could perceive at once that the authority which

he had once respected had gone from the man. Bozzle away from his own

home, out on business, with his coat buttoned over his breast, and

his best hat in his hand, was aware that he commanded respect,--and

he could carry himself accordingly. He knew himself to be

somebody, and could be easy, self-confident, confidential, severe,

authoritative, or even arrogant, as the circumstances of the moment

might demand. But he had been found with his coat off, and a baby in

his arms, and he could not recover himself. "I do not suppose that

anybody will question my right to have the care of my own child,"

said Trevelyan.

"If you would have gone to Mr. Skint, sir--," suggested Bozzle.

"There ain't no smarter gent in all the profession, sir, than Mr.

Skint."

Mr. Trevelyan made no reply to this, but walked on in silence, with

his minister at his elbow. He was very wretched, understanding well

the degradation to which he was subjecting himself in discussing his

wife's conduct with this man;--but with whom else could he discuss

it? The man seemed to be meaner now than he had been before he had

been seen in his own home. And Trevelyan was conscious too that he

himself was not in outward appearance as he used to be; that he was

ill-dressed, and haggard, and worn, and visibly a wretched being. How

can any man care to dress himself with attention who is always alone,

and always miserable when alone? During the months which had passed

over him since he had sent his wife away from him, his very nature

had been altered, and he himself was aware of the change. As he went

about, his eyes were ever cast downwards, and he walked with a quick

shuffling gait, and he suspected others, feeling that he himself was

suspected. And all work had ceased with him. Since she had left him

he had not read a single book that was worth the reading. And he knew

it all. He was conscious that he was becoming disgraced and degraded.

He would sooner have shot himself than have walked into his club,

or even have allowed himself to be seen by daylight in Pall Mall,

or Piccadilly. He had taken in his misery to drinking little drops

of brandy in the morning, although he knew well that there was no

shorter road to the devil than that opened by such a habit. He looked

up for a moment at Bozzle, and then asked him a question. "Where is

he now?"

"You mean the Colonel, sir. He's up in town, sir, a minding of his

parliamentary duties. He have been up all this month, sir."

"They haven't met?"

Bozzle paused a moment before he replied, and then smiled as he

spoke. "It is so hard to say, sir. Ladies is so cute and cunning.

I've watched as sharp as watching can go, pretty near. I've put a

youngster on at each hend, and both of 'em 'd hear a mouse stirring

in his sleep. I ain't got no evidence, Mr. Trevelyan. But if you ask

me my opinion, why in course they've been together somewhere. It

stands to reason, Mr. Trevelyan; don't it?" And Bozzle as he said

this smiled almost aloud.

"D----n and b----t it all for ever!" said Trevelyan, gnashing his

teeth, and moving away into Union Street as fast as he could walk.

And he did go away, leaving Bozzle standing in the middle of Stony

Walk.

"He's disturbed in his mind,--quite 'orrid," Bozzle said when he got

back to his wife. "He cursed and swore as made even me feel bad."

"B.," said his wife, "do you listen to me. Get in what's a howing,

and don't you have nothing more to do with it."

CHAPTER LX.

ANOTHER STRUGGLE.

Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley were to reach England about the end of

March or the beginning of April, and both Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora

Rowley were almost sick for their arrival. Both their uncle and aunt

had done very much for them, had been true to them in their need, and

had submitted to endless discomforts in order that their nieces might

have respectable shelter in their great need; but nevertheless their

conduct had not been of a kind to produce either love or friendship.

Each of the sisters felt that she had been much better off at

Nuncombe Putney, and that either the weakness of Mrs. Stanbury,

or the hardness of Priscilla, was preferable to the repulsive

forbearance of their clerical host. He did not scold them. He never

threw it in Mrs. Trevelyan's teeth that she had been separated

from her husband by her own fault; he did not tell them of his own

discomfort. But he showed it in every gesture, and spoke of it in

every tone of his voice;--so that Mrs. Trevelyan could not refrain

from apologising for the misfortune of her presence.

"My dear," he said, "things can't be pleasant and unpleasant at the

same time. You were quite right to come here. I am glad for all our

sakes that Sir Marmaduke will be with us so soon."

She had almost given up in her mind the hope that she had long

cherished, that she might some day be able to live again with her

husband. Every step which he now took in reference to her seemed to

be prompted by so bitter an hostility, that she could not but believe

that she was hateful to him. How was it possible that a husband and

his wife should again come together, when there had been between

them such an emissary as a detective policeman? Mrs. Trevelyan

had gradually come to learn that Bozzle had been at Nuncombe

Putney, watching her, and to be aware that she was still under the

surveillance of his eye. For some months past now she had neither

seen Colonel Osborne, nor heard from him. He had certainly by his

folly done much to produce the ruin which had fallen upon her; but it

never occurred to her to blame him. Indeed she did not know that he

was liable to blame. Mr. Outhouse always spoke of him with indignant

scorn, and Nora had learned to think that much of their misery was

due to his imprudence. But Mrs. Trevelyan would not see this, and,

not seeing it, was more widely separated from her husband than

she would have been had she acknowledged that any excuse for his

misconduct had been afforded by the vanity and folly of the other

man.

Lady Rowley had written to have a furnished house taken for them

from the first of April, and a house had been secured in Manchester

Street. The situation in question is not one which is of itself very

charming, nor is it supposed to be in a high degree fashionable; but

Nora looked forward to her escape from St. Diddulph's to Manchester

Street as though Paradise were to be re-opened to her as soon as she

should be there with her father and mother. She was quite clear now

as to her course about Hugh Stanbury. She did not doubt but that she

could so argue the matter as to get the consent of her father and

mother. She felt herself to be altogether altered in her views of

life, since experience had come upon her, first at Nuncombe Putney,

and after that, much more heavily and seriously, at St. Diddulph's.

She looked back as though to a childish dream to the ideas which had

prevailed with her when she had told herself, as she used to do so

frequently, that she was unfit to be a poor man's wife. Why should

she be more unfit for such a position than another? Of course there

were many thoughts in her mind, much of memory if nothing of regret,

in regard to Mr. Glascock and the splendour that had been offered

to her. She had had her chance of being a rich man's wife, and had

rejected it,--had rejected it twice, with her eyes open. Readers

will say that if she loved Hugh Stanbury with all her heart, there

could be nothing of regret in her reflections. But we are perhaps

accustomed in judging for ourselves and of others to draw the

lines too sharply, and to say that on this side lie vice, folly,

heartlessness, and greed,--and on the other honour, love, truth, and

wisdom,--the good and the bad each in its own domain. But the good

and the bad mix themselves so thoroughly in our thoughts, even in our

aspirations, that we must look for excellence rather in overcoming

evil than in freeing ourselves from its influence. There had been

many moments of regret with Nora;--but none of remorse. At the very

moment in which she had sent Mr. Glascock away from her, and had

felt that he had now been sent away for always, she had been full of

regret. Since that there had been many hours in which she had thought

of her own self-lesson, of that teaching by which she had striven to

convince herself that she could never fitly become a poor man's wife.

But the upshot of it all was a healthy pride in what she had done,

and a strong resolution that she would make shirts and hem towels for

her husband if he required it. It had been given her to choose, and

she had chosen. She had found herself unable to tell a man that she

loved him when she did not love him,--and equally unable to conceal

the love which she did feel. "If he wheeled a barrow of turnips about

the street, I'd marry him to-morrow," she said to her sister one

afternoon as they were sitting together in the room which ought to

have been their uncle's study.

"If he wheeled a big barrow, you'd have to wheel a little one," said

her sister.

"Then I'd do it. I shouldn't mind. There has been this advantage in

St. Diddulph's, that nothing can be triste, nothing dull, nothing

ugly after it."

"It may be so with you, Nora;--that is in imagination."

"What I mean is that living here has taught me much that I never

could have learned in Curzon Street. I used to think myself such a

fine young woman,--but, upon my word, I think myself a finer one

now."

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"I don't quite know myself; but I nearly know. I do know this, that

I've made up my own mind about what I mean to do."

"You'll change it, dear, when mamma is here, and things are

comfortable again. It's my belief that Mr. Glascock would come to you

again to-morrow if you would let him." Mrs. Trevelyan was, naturally,

in complete ignorance of the experience of transatlantic excellence

which Mr. Glascock had encountered in Italy.

"But I certainly should not let him. How would it be possible after

what I wrote to Hugh?"

"All that might pass away," said Mrs. Trevelyan,--slowly, after a

long pause.

"All what might pass away? Have I not given him a distinct promise?

Have I not told him that I loved him, and sworn that I would be true

to him? Can that be made to pass away,--even if one wished it?"

"Of course it can. Nothing need be fixed for you till you have stood

at the altar with a man and been made his wife. You may choose still.

I can never choose again."

"I never will, at any rate," said Nora.

Then there was another pause. "It seems strange to me, Nora," said

the elder sister, "that after what you have seen you should be so

keen to be married to any one."

"What is a girl to do?"

"Better drown herself than do as I have done. Only think what there

is before me. What I have gone through is nothing to it. Of course I

must go back to the Islands. Where else am I to live? Who else will

take me?"

"Come to us," said Nora.

"Us, Nora! Who are the us? But in no way would that be possible.

Papa will be here, perhaps, for six months." Nora thought it quite

possible that she might have a home of her own before six months were

passed,--even though she might be wheeling the smaller barrow,--but

she would not say so. "And by that time everything must be decided."

"I suppose it must."

"Of course papa and mamma must go back," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"Papa might take a pension. He's entitled to a pension now."

"He'll never do that as long as he can have employment. They'll go

back, and I must go with them. Who else would take me in?"

"I know who would take you in, Emily."

"My darling, that is romance. As for myself, I should not care where

I went. If it were even to remain here, I could bear it."

"I could not," said Nora, decisively.

"It is so different with you, dear. I don't suppose it is possible

I should take my boy with me to the Islands; and how--am I--to

go--anywhere--without him?" Then she broke down, and fell into a

paroxysm of sobs, and was in very truth a broken-hearted woman.

Nora was silent for some minutes, but at last she spoke. "Why do you

not go back to him, Emily?"

"How am I to go back to him? What am I to do to make him take me

back?" At this very moment Trevelyan was in the house, but they did

not know it.

"Write to him," said Nora.

"What am I to say? In very truth I do believe that he is mad. If I

write to him, should I defend myself or accuse myself? A dozen times

I have striven to write such a letter,--not that I might send it, but

that I might find what I could say should I ever wish to send it. And

it is impossible. I can only tell him how unjust he has been, how

cruel, how mad, how wicked!"

"Could you not say to him simply this?--'Let us be together, wherever

it may be; and let bygones be bygones.'"

"While he is watching me with a policeman? While he is still thinking

that I entertain a--lover? While he believes that I am the base thing

that he has dared to think me?"

"He has never believed it."

"Then how can he be such a villain as to treat me like this? I could

not go to him, Nora;--not unless I went to him as one who was known

to be mad, over whom in his wretched condition it would be my duty

to keep watch. In no other way could I overcome my abhorrence of the

outrages to which he has subjected me."

"But for the child's sake, Emily."

"Ah, yes! If it were simply to grovel in the dust before him it

should be done. If humiliation would suffice,--or any self-abasement

that were possible to me! But I should be false if I said that I look

forward to any such possibility. How can he wish to have me back

again after what he has said and done? I am his wife, and he has

disgraced me before all men by his own words. And what have I done,

that I should not have done;--what left undone on his behalf that

I should have done? It is hard that the foolish workings of a weak

man's mind should be able so completely to ruin the prospects of a

woman's life!"

Nora was beginning to answer this by attempting to shew that the

husband's madness was, perhaps, only temporary, when there came a

knock at the door, and Mrs. Outhouse was at once in the room. It

will be well that the reader should know what had taken place at the

parsonage while the two sisters had been together up-stairs, so that

the nature of Mrs. Outhouse's mission to them may explain itself. Mr.

Outhouse had been in his closet down-stairs, when the maid-servant

brought word to him that Mr. Trevelyan was in the parlour, and was

desirous of seeing him.

"Mr. Trevelyan!" said the unfortunate clergyman, holding up both his

hands. The servant understood the tragic importance of the occasion

quite as well as did her master, and simply shook her head. "Has your

mistress seen him?" said the master. The girl again shook her head.

"Ask your mistress to come to me," said the clergyman. Then the girl

disappeared; and in a few minutes Mrs. Outhouse, equally imbued with

the tragic elements of the day, was with her husband.

Mr. Outhouse began by declaring that no consideration should induce

him to see Trevelyan, and commissioned his wife to go to the man and

tell him that he must leave the house. When the unfortunate woman

expressed an opinion that Trevelyan had some legal rights upon which

he might probably insist, Mr. Outhouse asserted roundly that he could

have no legal right to remain in that parsonage against the will

of the rector. "If he wants to claim his wife and child, he must

do it by law,--not by force; and thank God, Sir Marmaduke will be

here before he can do that." "But I can't make him go," said Mrs.

Outhouse. "Tell him that you'll send for a policeman," said the

clergyman.

It had come to pass that there had been messages backwards and

forwards between the visitor and the master of the house, all carried

by that unfortunate lady. Trevelyan did not demand that his wife and

child should be given up to him;--did not even, on this occasion,

demand that his boy should be surrendered to him,--now, at once.

He did say, very repeatedly, that of course he must have his boy,

but seemed to imply that, under certain circumstances, he would

be willing to take his wife to live with him again. This appeared

to Mrs. Outhouse to be so manifestly the one thing that was

desirable,--to be the only solution of the difficulty that could be

admitted as a solution at all,--that she went to work on that hint,

and ventured to entertain a hope that a reconciliation might be

effected. She implored her husband to lend a hand to the work;--by

which she intended to imply that he should not only see Trevelyan,

but consent to meet the sinner on friendly terms. But Mr. Outhouse

was on the occasion even more than customarily obstinate. His wife

might do what she liked. He would neither meddle nor make. He would

not willingly see Mr. Trevelyan in his own house;--unless, indeed,

Mr. Trevelyan should attempt to force his way up into the nursery.

Then he said that which left no doubt on his wife's mind that, should

any violence be attempted, her husband would manfully join the mÃªlÃ©e.

But it soon became evident that no such attempt was to be made on

that day. Trevelyan was lachrymose, heartbroken, and a sight pitiable

to behold. When Mrs. Outhouse loudly asserted that his wife had not

sinned against him in the least,--"not in a tittle, Mr. Trevelyan,"

she repeated over and over again,--he began to assert himself,

declaring that she had seen the man in Devonshire, and corresponded

with him since she had been at St. Diddulph's; and when the lady had

declared that the latter assertion was untrue, he had shaken his

head, and had told her that perhaps she did not know all. But the

misery of the man had its effect upon her, and at last she proposed

to be the bearer of a message to his wife. He had demanded to see his

child, offering to promise that he would not attempt to take the boy

by force on this occasion,--saying, also, that his claim by law was

so good, that no force could be necessary. It was proposed by Mrs.

Outhouse that he should first see the mother,--and to this he at last

assented. How blessed a thing would it be if these two persons could

be induced to forget the troubles of the last twelve months, and once

more to love and trust each other! "But, sir," said Mrs. Outhouse,

putting her hand upon his arm;--"you must not upbraid her, for

she will not bear it." "She knows nothing of what is due to a

husband," said Trevelyan, gloomily. The task was not hopeful; but,

nevertheless, the poor woman resolved to do her best.

And now Mrs. Outhouse was in her niece's room, asking her to go down

and see her husband. Little Louis had at the time been with the

nurse, and the very moment that the mother heard that the child's

father was in the house, she jumped up and rushed away to get

possession of her treasure. "Has he come for baby?" Nora asked in

dismay. Then Mrs. Outhouse, anxious to obtain a convert to her

present views, boldly declared that Mr. Trevelyan had no such

intention. Mrs. Trevelyan came back at once with the boy, and then

listened to all her aunt's arguments. "But I will not take baby with

me," she said. At last it was decided that she should go down alone,

and that the child should afterwards be taken to his father in the

drawing-room; Mrs. Outhouse pledging herself that the whole household

should combine in her defence if Mr. Trevelyan should attempt to take

the child out of that room. "But what am I to say to him?" she asked.

"Say as little as possible," said Mrs. Outhouse,--"except to make him

understand that he has been in error in imputing fault to you."

"He will never understand that," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

A considerable time elapsed after that before she could bring herself

to descend the stairs. Now that her husband was so near her, and that

her aunt had assured her that she might reinstate herself in her

position, if she could only abstain from saying hard words to him,

she wished that he was away from her again, in Italy. She knew that

she could not refrain from hard words. How was it possible that she

should vindicate her own honour, without asserting with all her

strength that she had been ill-used; and, to speak truth on the

matter, her love for the man, which had once been true and eager, had

been quelled by the treatment she had received. She had clung to her

love in some shape, in spite of the accusations made against her,

till she had heard that the policeman had been set upon her heels.

Could it be possible that any woman should love a man, or at least

that any wife should love a husband, after such usage as that? At

last she crept gently down the stairs, and stood at the parlour-door.

She listened, and could hear his steps, as he paced backwards and

forwards through the room. She looked back, and could see the face

of the servant peering round from the kitchen-stairs. She could not

endure to be watched in her misery, and, thus driven, she opened the

parlour-door. "Louis," she said, walking into the room, "Aunt Mary

has desired me to come to you."

"Emily!" he exclaimed, and ran to her and embraced her. She did not

seek to stop him, but she did not return the kiss which he gave her.

Then he held her by her hands, and looked into her face, and she

could see how strangely he was altered. She thought that she would

hardly have known him, had she not been sure that it was he. She

herself was also changed. Who can bear sorrow without such change,

till age has fixed the lines of the face, or till care has made them

hard and unmalleable? But the effect on her was as nothing to that

which grief, remorse, and desolation had made on him. He had had

no child with him, no sister, no friend. Bozzle had been his only

refuge,--a refuge not adapted to make life easier to such a man as

Trevelyan; and he,--in spite of the accusations made by himself

against his wife, within his own breast hourly since he had

left her,--had found it to be very difficult to satisfy his own

conscience. He told himself from hour to hour that he knew that he

was right; but in very truth he was ever doubting his own conduct.

"You have been ill, Louis," she said, looking at him.

"Ill at ease, Emily;--very ill at ease! A sore heart will make the

face thin, as well as fever or ague. Since we parted I have not had

much to comfort me."

"Nor have I,--nor any of us," said she. "How was comfort to come from

such a parting?"

Then they both stood silent together. He was still holding her by

the hand, but she was careful not to return his pressure. She would

not take her hand away from him; but she would show him no sign

of softness till he should have absolutely acquitted her of the

accusation he had made against her. "We are man and wife," he said

after awhile. "In spite of all that has come and gone I am yours, and

you are mine."

"You should have remembered that always, Louis."

"I have never forgotten it,--never. In no thought have I been untrue

to you. My heart has never changed since first I gave it you." There

came a bitter frown upon her face, of which she was so conscious

herself, that she turned her face away from him. She still remembered

her lesson, that she was not to anger him, and, therefore, she

refrained from answering him at all. But the answer was there, hot

within her bosom. Had he loved her,--and yet suspected that she was

false to him and to her vows, simply because she had been on terms

of intimacy with an old friend? Had he loved her, and yet turned her

from his house? Had he loved her,--and set a policeman to watch her?

Had he loved her, and yet spoken evil of her to all their friends?

Had he loved her, and yet striven to rob her of her child? "Will you

come to me?" he said.

"I suppose it will be better so," she answered slowly.

"Then you will promise me--" He paused, and attempted to turn her

towards him, so that he might look her in the face.

"Promise what?" she said, quickly glancing round at him, and drawing

her hand away from him as she did so.

"That all intercourse with Colonel Osborne shall be at an end."

"I will make no promise. You come to me to add one insult to another.

Had you been a man, you would not have named him to me after what you

have done to me."

"That is absurd. I have a right to demand from you such a pledge. I

am willing to believe that you have not--"

"Have not what?"

"That you have not utterly disgraced me."

"God in heaven, that I should hear this!" she exclaimed. "Louis

Trevelyan, I have not disgraced you at all,--in thought, in word, in

deed, in look, or in gesture. It is you that have disgraced yourself,

and ruined me, and degraded even your own child."

"Is this the way in which you welcome me?"

"Certainly it is,--in this way and in no other if you speak to me

of what is past, without acknowledging your error." Her brow became

blacker and blacker as she continued to speak to him. "It would be

best that nothing should be said,--not a word. That it all should be

regarded as an ugly dream. But, when you come to me and at once go

back to it all, and ask me for a promise--"

"Am I to understand then that all idea of submission to your husband

is to be at an end?"

"I will submit to no imputation on my honour,--even from you. One

would have thought that it would have been for you to preserve it

untarnished."

"And you will give me no assurance as to your future life?"

"None;--certainly none. If you want promises from me, there can be no

hope for the future. What am I to promise? That I will not have--a

lover? What respect can I enjoy as your wife if such a promise be

needed? If you should choose to fancy that it had been broken you

would set your policeman to watch me again! Louis, we can never live

together again ever with comfort, unless you acknowledge in your own

heart that you have used me shamefully."

"Were you right to see him in Devonshire?"

"Of course I was right. Why should I not see him,--or any one?"

"And you will see him again?"

"When papa comes, of course I shall see him."

"Then it is hopeless," said he, turning away from her.

"If that man is to be a source of disquiet to you, it is hopeless,"

she answered. "If you cannot so school yourself that he shall be the

same to you as other men, it is quite hopeless. You must still be

mad,--as you have been mad hitherto."

He walked about the room restlessly for a time, while she stood with

assumed composure near the window. "Send me my child," he said at

last.

"He shall come to you, Louis,--for a little; but he is not to be

taken out from hence. Is that a promise?"

"You are to exact promises from me, where my own rights are

concerned, while you refuse to give me any, though I am entitled to

demand them! I order you to send the boy to me. Is he not my own?"

"Is he not mine too? And is he not all that you have left to me?"

He paused again, and then gave the promise. "Let him be brought to

me. He shall not be removed now. I intend to have him. I tell you

so fairly. He shall be taken from you unless you come back to me

with such assurances as to your future conduct as I have a right to

demand. There is much that the law cannot give me. It cannot procure

wife-like submission, love, gratitude, or even decent matronly

conduct. But that which it can give me, I will have."

She walked off to the door, and then as she was quitting the room she

spoke to him once again. "Alas, Louis," she said, "neither can the

law, nor medicine, nor religion, restore to you that fine intellect

which foolish suspicions have destroyed." Then she left him and

returned to the room in which her aunt, and Nora, and the child

were all clustered together, waiting to learn the effects of the

interview. The two women asked their questions with their eyes,

rather than with spoken words. "It is all over," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"There is nothing left for me but to go back to papa. I only hear the

same accusations, repeated again and again, and make myself subject

to the old insults." Then Mrs. Outhouse knew that she could interfere

no further, and that in truth nothing could be done till the return

of Sir Marmaduke should relieve her and her husband from all further

active concern in the matter.

But Trevelyan was still down-stairs waiting for the child. At last it

was arranged that Nora should take the boy into the drawing-room, and

that Mrs. Outhouse should fetch the father up from the parlour to the

room above it. Angry as was Mrs. Trevelyan with her husband, not the

less was she anxious to make the boy good-looking and seemly in his

father's eyes. She washed the child's face, put on him a clean frill

and a pretty ribbon; and, as she did so, she bade him kiss his papa,

and speak nicely to him, and love him. "Poor papa is unhappy," she

said, "and Louey must be very good to him." The boy, child though he

was, understood much more of what was passing around him than his

mother knew. How was he to love papa when mamma did not do so? In

some shape that idea had framed itself in his mind; and, as he was

taken down, he knew it was impossible that he should speak nicely

to his papa. Nora did as she was bidden, and went down to the

first-floor. Mrs. Outhouse, promising that even if she were put out

of the room by Mr. Trevelyan she would not stir from the landing

outside the door, descended to the parlour and quickly returned with

the unfortunate father. Mr. Outhouse, in the meantime, was still

sitting in his closet, tormented with curiosity, but yet determined

not to be seen till the intruder should have left his house.

"I hope you are well, Nora," he said, as he entered the room with

Mrs. Outhouse.

"Quite well, thank you, Louis."

"I am sorry that our troubles should have deprived you of the home

you had been taught to expect." To this Nora made no reply, but

escaped, and went up to her sister. "My poor little boy," said

Trevelyan, taking the child and placing it on his knee. "I suppose

you have forgotten your unfortunate father." The child, of course,

said nothing, but just allowed himself to be kissed.

"He is looking very well," said Mrs. Outhouse.

"Is he? I dare say he is well. Louey, my boy, are you happy?" The

question was asked in a voice that was dismal beyond compare, and it

also remained unanswered. He had been desired to speak nicely to his

papa, but how was it possible that a child should speak nicely under

such a load of melancholy? "He will not speak to me," said Trevelyan.

"I suppose it is what I might have expected." Then the child was put

off his knee on to the floor, and began to whimper. "A few months

since he would sit there for hours, with his head upon my breast,"

said Trevelyan.

"A few months is a long time in the life of such an infant," said

Mrs. Outhouse.

"He may go away," said Trevelyan. Then the child was led out of the

room, and sent up to his mother.

"Emily has done all she can to make the child love your memory," said

Mrs. Outhouse.

"To love my memory! What;--as though I were dead. I will teach him to

love me as I am, Mrs. Outhouse. I do not think that it is too late.

Will you tell your husband from me, with my compliments, that I shall

cause him to be served with a legal demand for the restitution of my

child?"

"But Sir Marmaduke will be here in a few days."

"I know nothing of that. Sir Marmaduke is nothing to me now. My child

is my own,--and so is my wife. Sir Marmaduke has no authority over

either one or the other. I find my child here, and it is here that

I must look for him. I am sorry that you should be troubled, but the

fault does not rest with me. Mr. Outhouse has refused to give me up

my own child, and I am driven to take such steps for his recovery as

the law has put within my reach."

"Why did you turn your wife out of doors, Mr. Trevelyan?" asked Mrs.

Outhouse boldly.

"I did not turn her out of doors. I provided a fitting shelter

for her. I gave her everything that she could want. You know what

happened. That man went down and was received there. I defy you, Mrs.

Outhouse, to say that it was my fault."

Mrs. Outhouse did attempt to show him that it was his fault; but

while she was doing so he left the house. "I don't think she could go

back to him," said Mrs. Outhouse to her husband. "He is quite insane

upon this matter."

"I shall be insane, I know," said Mr. Outhouse, "if Sir Marmaduke

does not come home very quickly." Nevertheless he quite ignored any

legal power that might be brought to bear against him as to the

restitution of the child to its father.

CHAPTER LXI.

PARKER'S HOTEL, MOWBRAY STREET.

Within a week of the occurrence which is related in the last chapter,

there came a telegram from Southampton to the parsonage at St.

Diddulph's, saying that Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley had reached

England. On the evening of that day they were to lodge at a small

family hotel in Baker Street, and both Mrs. Trevelyan and Nora were

to be with them. The leave-taking at the parsonage was painful, as

on both sides there existed a feeling that affection and sympathy

were wanting. The uncle and aunt had done their duty, and both Mrs.

Trevelyan and Nora felt that they ought to have been demonstrative

and cordial in their gratitude;--but they found it impossible to

become so. And the rector could not pretend but that he was glad to

be rid of his guests. There were, too, some last words about money to

be spoken, which were grievous thorns in the poor man's flesh. Two

bank notes, however, were put upon his table, and he knew that unless

he took them he could not pay for the provisions which his unwelcome

visitors had consumed. Surely there never was a man so cruelly

ill-used as had been Mr. Outhouse in all this matter. "Another such

winter as that would put me in my grave," he said, when his wife

tried to comfort him after they were gone. "I know that they have

both been very good to us," said Mrs. Trevelyan, as she and her

sister, together with the child and the nurse, hurried away towards

Baker Street in a cab, "but I have never for a moment felt that

they were glad to have us." "But how could they have been glad to

have us," she added afterwards, "when we brought such trouble with

us?" But they to whom they were going now would receive her with

joy;--would make her welcome with all her load of sorrows, would give

to her a sympathy which it was impossible that she should receive

from others. Though she might not be happy now,--for in truth how

could she be ever really happy again,--there would be a joy to her in

placing her child in her mother's arms, and in receiving her father's

warm caresses. That her father would be very vehement in his anger

against her husband she knew well,--for Sir Marmaduke was a vehement

man. But there would be some support for her in the very violence

of his wrath, and at this moment it was such support that she most

needed. As they journeyed together in the cab, the married sister

seemed to be in the higher spirits of the two. She was sure, at any

rate, that those to whom she was going would place themselves on her

side. Nora had her own story to tell about Hugh Stanbury, and was

by no means so sure that her tale would be received with cordial

agreement. "Let me tell them myself," she whispered to her sister.

"Not to-night, because they will have so much to say to you; but I

shall tell mamma to-morrow."

The train by which the Rowleys were to reach London was due at the

station at 7.30 p.m., and the two sisters timed their despatch from

St. Diddulph's so as to enable them to reach the hotel at eight. "We

shall be there now before mamma," said Nora, "because they will have

so much luggage, and so many things, and the trains are always late."

When they started from the door of the parsonage, Mr. Outhouse gave

the direction to the cabman, "Gregg's Hotel, Baker Street." Then at

once he began to console himself in that they were gone.

It was a long drive from St. Diddulph's in the east, to Marylebone in

the west, of London. None of the party in the cab knew anything of

the region through which they passed. The cabman took the line by the

back of the Bank, and Finsbury Square and the City Road, thinking it

best, probably, to avoid the crush at Holborn Hill, though at the

expense of something of a circuit. But of this Mrs. Trevelyan and

Nora knew nothing. Had their way taken them along Piccadilly, or

through Mayfair, or across Grosvenor Square, they would have known

where they were; but at present they were not thinking of those once

much-loved localities. The cab passed the Angel, and up and down the

hill at Pentonville, and by the King's Cross stations, and through

Euston Square,--and then it turned up Gower Street. Surely the man

should have gone on along the New Road, now that he had come so far

out of his way. But of this the two ladies knew nothing,--nor did the

nurse. It was a dark, windy night, but the lamps in the streets had

given them light, so that they had not noticed the night. Nor did

they notice it now as the streets became narrower and darker. They

were hardly thinking that their journey was yet at an end, and the

mother was in the act of covering her boy's face as he lay asleep on

the nurse's lap, when the cab was stopped. Nora looking out through

the window, saw the word "Hotel" over a doorway, and was satisfied.

"Shall I take the child, ma'am?" said a man in black, and the child

was handed out. Nora was the first to follow, and she then perceived

that the door of the hotel was not open. Mrs. Trevelyan followed;

and then they looked round them,--and the child was gone. They heard

the rattle of another cab as it was carried away at a gallop round a

distant corner;--and then some inkling of what had happened came upon

them. The father had succeeded in getting possession of his child.

It was a narrow, dark street, very quiet, having about it a certain

air of poor respectability,--an obscure, noiseless street, without

even a sign of life. Some unfortunate one had endeavoured here to

keep an hotel;--but there was no hotel kept there now. There had

been much craft in selecting the place in which the child had been

taken from them. As they looked around them, perceiving the terrible

misfortune which had befallen them, there was not a human being near

them save the cabman, who was occupied in unchaining, or pretending

to unchain the heavy mass of luggage on the roof. The windows of

the house before which they were stopping, were closed, and Nora

perceived at once that the hotel was not inhabited. The cabman must

have perceived it also. As for the man who had taken the child, the

nurse could only say that he was dressed in black, like a waiter,

that he had a napkin under his arm, and no hat on his head. He had

taken the boy tenderly in his arms,--and then she had seen nothing

further. The first thing that Nora had seen, as she stood on the

pavement, was the other cab moving off rapidly.

Mrs. Trevelyan had staggered against the railings, and was soon

screaming in her wretchedness. Before long there was a small crowd

around them, comprising three or four women, a few boys, an old man

or two,--and a policeman. To the policeman Nora had soon told the

whole story, and the cabman was of course attacked. But the cabman

played his part very well. He declared that he had done just what

he had been told to do. Nora was indeed sure that she had heard her

uncle desire him to drive to Gregg's Hotel in Baker Street. The

cabman in answer to this, declared that he had not clearly heard the

old gentleman's directions; but that a man whom he had conceived to

be a servant, had very plainly told him to drive to Parker's Hotel,

Mowbray Street, Gower Street. "I comed ever so far out of my way,"

said the cabman, "to avoid the rumpus with the homnibuses at the

hill,--cause the ladies' things is so heavy we'd never got up if the

'orse had once jibbed." All which, though it had nothing to do with

the matter, seemed to impress the policeman with the idea that the

cabman, if not a true man, was going to be too clever for them on

this occasion. And the crafty cabman went on to declare that his

horse was so tired with the load that he could not go on to Baker

Street. They must get another cab. Take his number! Of course they

could take his number. There was his number. His fare was four and

six,--that is if the ladies wouldn't pay him anything extra for the

terrible load; and he meant to have it. It would be sixpence more if

they kept him there many minutes longer. The number was taken, and

another cab was got, and the luggage was transferred, and the money

was paid, while the unhappy mother was still screaming in hysterics

against the railings. What had been done was soon clear enough to all

those around her. Nora had told the policeman, and had told one of

the women, thinking to obtain their sympathy and assistance. "It's

the kid's dada as has taken it," said one man, "and there ain't

nothing to be done." There was nothing to be done;--nothing at any

rate then and there.

Nora had been very eager that the cabman should be arrested; but the

policeman assured her that such an arrest was out of the question,

and would have been useless had it been possible. The man would be

forthcoming if his presence should be again desired, but he had

probably,--so said the policeman,--really been desired to drive to

Mowbray Street. "They knows where to find me if they wants me,--only

I must be paid my time," said the cabman confidently. And the

policeman was of opinion that as the boy had been kidnapped on behalf

of the father, no legal steps could be taken either for the recovery

of the child or for the punishment of the perpetrators of the act. He

got up, however, on the box of the cab, and accompanied the party to

the hotel in Baker Street. They reached it almost exactly at the same

time with Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley, and the reader must imagine

the confusion, the anguish, and the disappointment of that meeting.

Mrs. Trevelyan was hardly in possession of her senses when she

reached her mother, and could not be induced to be tranquil even when

she was assured by her father that her son would suffer no immediate

evil by being transferred to his father's hands. She in her frenzy

declared that she would never see her little one again, and seemed to

think that the father might not improbably destroy the child. "He is

mad, papa, and does not know what he does. Do you mean to say that a

madman may do as he pleases?--that he may rob my child from me in the

streets?--that he may take him out of my very arms in that way?" And

she was almost angry with her father because no attempt was made that

night to recover the boy.

Sir Marmaduke, who was not himself a good lawyer, had been closeted

with the policeman for a quarter of an hour, and had learned the

policeman's views. Of course, the father of the child was the person

who had done the deed. Whether the cabman had been in the plot or

not, was not matter of much consequence. There could be no doubt that

some one had told the man to go to Parker's Hotel, as the cab was

starting; and it would probably be impossible to punish him in the

teeth of such instructions. Sir Marmaduke, however, could doubtless

have the cabman summoned. And as for the absolute abduction of the

child, the policeman was of opinion that a father could not be

punished for obtaining possession of his son by such a stratagem,

unless the custody of the child had been made over to the mother

by some court of law. The policeman, indeed, seemed to think that

nothing could be done, and Sir Marmaduke was inclined to agree with

him. When this was explained to Mrs. Trevelyan by her mother, she

again became hysterical in her agony, and could hardly be restrained

from going forth herself to look for her lost treasure.

It need hardly be further explained that Trevelyan had planned the

stratagem in concert with Mr. Bozzle. Bozzle, though strongly

cautioned by his wife to keep himself out of danger in the matter,

was sorely tempted by his employer's offer of a hundred pounds.

He positively refused to be a party to any attempt at violence at

St. Diddulph's; but when he learned, as he did learn, that Mrs.

Trevelyan, with her sister and baby, were to be transferred from St.

Diddulph's in a cab to Baker Street, and that the journey was luckily

to be made during the shades of evening, his active mind went to

work, and he arranged the plan. There were many difficulties, and

even some pecuniary difficulty. He bargained that he should have his

hundred pounds clear of all deduction for expenses, and then the

attendant expenses were not insignificant. It was necessary that

there should be four men in the service, all good and true; and men

require to be well paid for such goodness and truth. There was the

man, himself an ex-policeman, who gave the instructions to the first

cabman, as he was starting. The cabman would not undertake the job at

all unless he were so instructed on the spot, asserting that in this

way he would be able to prove that the orders he obeyed came from

the lady's husband. And there was the crafty pseudo-waiter, with the

napkin and no hat, who had carried the boy to the cab in which his

father was sitting. And there were the two cabmen. Bozzle planned

it all, and with some difficulty arranged the preliminaries. How

successful was the scheme, we have seen; and Bozzle, for a month, was

able to assume a superiority over his wife, which that honest woman

found to be very disagreeable. "There ain't no fraudulent abduction

in it at all," Bozzle exclaimed, "because a wife ain't got no rights

again her husband,--not in such a matter as that." Mrs. Bozzle

implied that if her husband were to take her child away from her

without her leave, she'd let him know something about it. But as

the husband had in his possession the note for a hundred pounds,

realized, Mrs. Bozzle had not much to say in support of her view of

the case.

On the morning after the occurrence, while Sir Marmaduke was waiting

with his solicitor upon a magistrate to find whether anything could

be done, the following letter was brought to Mrs. Trevelyan at

Gregg's Hotel:--

Our child is safe with me, and will remain so. If you care

to obtain legal advice you will find that I as his father

have a right to keep him under my protection. I shall

do so; but will allow you to see him as soon as I shall

have received a full guarantee that you have no idea of

withdrawing him from my charge.

A home for yourself with me is still open to you,--on

condition that you will give me the promise that I have

demanded from you; and as long as I shall not hear that

you again see or communicate with the person to whose

acquaintance I object. While you remain away from me I

will cause you to be paid Â£50 a month, as I do not wish

that you should be a burden on others. But this payment

will depend also on your not seeing or holding any

communication with the person to whom I have alluded.

Your affectionate and offended husband,

LOUIS TREVELYAN.

A letter addressed to the Acrobats' Club will reach me.

Sir Rowley came home dispirited and unhappy, and could not give much

comfort to his daughter. The magistrate had told him that though the

cabman might probably be punished for taking the ladies otherwise

than as directed,--if the direction to Baker Street could be

proved,--nothing could be done to punish the father. The magistrate

explained that under a certain Act of Parliament the mother might

apply to the Court of Chancery for the custody of any children under

seven years of age, and that the court would probably grant such

custody,--unless it were shewn that the wife had left her husband

without sufficient cause. The magistrate could not undertake to say

whether or no sufficient cause had here been given;--or whether the

husband was in fault or the wife. It was, however, clear that nothing

could be done without application to the Court of Chancery. It

appeared,--so said the magistrate,--that the husband had offered a

home to his wife, and that in offering it he had attempted to impose

no conditions which could be shown to be cruel before a judge. The

magistrate thought that Mr. Trevelyan had done nothing illegal in

taking the child from the cab. Sir Marmaduke, on hearing this, was

of opinion that nothing could be gained by legal interference. His

private desire was to get hold of Trevelyan and pull him limb from

limb. Lady Rowley thought that her daughter had better go back to her

husband, let the future consequences be what they might. And the poor

desolate mother herself had almost brought herself to offer to do so,

having in her brain some idea that she would after a while be able to

escape with her boy. As for love for her husband, certainly there was

none now left in her bosom. Nor could she teach herself to think it

possible that she should ever live with him again on friendly terms.

But she would submit to anything with the object of getting back her

boy. Three or four letters were written to Mr. Trevelyan in as many

days from his wife, from Lady Rowley, and from Nora; in which various

overtures were made. Trevelyan wrote once again to his wife. She

knew, he said, already the terms on which she might come back. These

terms were still open to her. As for the boy, he certainly should not

leave his father. A meeting might be planned on condition that he,

Trevelyan, were provided with a written assurance from his wife that

she would not endeavour to remove the boy, and that he himself should

be present at the meeting.

Thus the first week was passed after Sir Marmaduke's return,--and a

most wretched time it was for all the party at Gregg's Hotel.

CHAPTER LXII.

LADY ROWLEY MAKES AN ATTEMPT.

[Illustration]

Nothing could be more uncomfortable than the state of Sir Marmaduke

Rowley's family for the first ten days after the arrival in London of

the Governor of the Mandarin Islands. Lady Rowley had brought with

her two of her girls,--the third and fourth,--and, as we know, had

been joined by the two eldest, so that there was a large family

of ladies gathered together. A house had been taken in Manchester

Street, to which they had intended to transfer themselves after a

single night passed at Gregg's Hotel. But the trouble and sorrow

inflicted upon them by the abduction of Mrs. Trevelyan's child, and

the consequent labours thrust upon Sir Marmaduke's shoulders had been

so heavy, that they had slept six nights at the hotel, before they

were able to move themselves into the house prepared for them. By

that time all idea had been abandoned of recovering the child by any

legal means to be taken as a consequence of the illegality of the

abduction. The boy was with his father, and the lawyers seemed to

think that the father's rights were paramount,--as he had offered a

home to his wife without any conditions which a court of law would

adjudge to be cruel. If she could shew that he had driven her to live

apart from him by his own bad conduct, then probably the custody of

her boy might be awarded to her, until the child should be seven

years old. But when the circumstances of the case were explained to

Sir Marmaduke's lawyer by Lady Rowley, that gentleman shook his head.

Mrs. Trevelyan had, he said, no case with which she could go into

court. Then by degrees there were words whispered as to the husband's

madness. The lawyer said that that was a matter for the doctors. If

a certain amount of medical evidence could be obtained to shew that

the husband was in truth mad, the wife could, no doubt, obtain the

custody of the child. When this was reported to Mrs. Trevelyan, she

declared that conduct such as her husband's must suffice to prove any

man to be mad; but at this Sir Marmaduke shook his head, and Lady

Rowley sat, sadly silent, with her daughter's hand within her own.

They would not dare to tell her that she could regain her child by

that plea.

During those ten days they did not learn whither the boy had been

carried, nor did they know even where the father might be found. Sir

Marmaduke followed up the address as given in the letter, and learned

from the porter at "The Acrobats" that the gentleman's letters

were sent to No. 55, Stony Walk, Union Street, Borough. To this

uncomfortable locality Sir Marmaduke travelled more than once. Thrice

he went thither, intent on finding his son-in-law's residence. On the

two first occasions he saw no one but Mrs. Bozzle; and the discretion

of that lady in declining to give any information was most admirable.

"Trewillian!" Yes, she had heard the name certainly. It might be that

her husband had business engagements with a gent of that name. She

would not say even that for certain, as it was not her custom ever

to make any inquiries as to her husband's business engagements. Her

husband's business engagements were, she said, much too important

for the "likes of she" to know anything about them. When was

Bozzle likely to be at home? Bozzle was never likely to be at home.

According to her showing, Bozzle was of all husbands the most

erratic. He might perhaps come in for an hour or two in the middle of

the day on a Wednesday, or perhaps would take a cup of tea at home on

Friday evening. But anything so fitful and uncertain as were Bozzle's

appearances in the bosom of his family was not to be conceived in the

mind of woman. Sir Marmaduke then called in the middle of the day on

Wednesday, but Bozzle was reported to be away in the provinces. His

wife had no idea in which of the provinces he was at that moment

engaged. The persevering governor from the islands called again on

the Friday evening, and then, by chance, Bozzle was found at home.

But Sir Marmaduke succeeded in gaining very little information

even from Bozzle. The man acknowledged that he was employed by Mr.

Trevelyan. Any letter or parcel left with him for Mr. Trevelyan

should be duly sent to that gentleman. If Sir Marmaduke wanted Mr.

Trevelyan's address, he could write to Mr. Trevelyan and ask for it.

If Mr. Trevelyan declined to give it, was it likely that he, Bozzle,

should betray it? Sir Marmaduke explained who he was at some length.

Bozzle with a smile assured the governor that he knew very well

who he was. He let drop a few words to show that he was intimately

acquainted with the whole course of Sir Marmaduke's family affairs.

He knew all about the Mandarins, and Colonel Osborne, and Gregg's

Hotel,--not that he said anything about Parker's Hotel,--and the

Colonial Office. He spoke of Miss Nora, and even knew the names of

the other two young ladies, Miss Sophia and Miss Lucy. It was a

weakness with Bozzle,--that of displaying his information. He would

have much liked to be able to startle Sir Marmaduke by describing

the Government House in the island, or by telling him something of

his old carriage-horses. But of such information as Sir Marmaduke

desired, Sir Marmaduke got none.

And there were other troubles which fell very heavily upon the poor

governor, who had come home as it were for a holiday, and who was a

man hating work naturally, and who, from the circumstances of his

life, had never been called on to do much work. A man may govern the

Mandarins and yet live in comparative idleness. To do such governing

work well a man should have a good presence, a flow of words which

should mean nothing, an excellent temper, and a love of hospitality.

With these attributes Sir Rowley was endowed; for, though his

disposition was by nature hot, for governing purposes it had been

brought by practice under good control. He had now been summoned

home through the machinations of his dangerous old friend Colonel

Osborne, in order that he might give the results of his experience in

governing before a committee of the House of Commons. In coming to

England on this business he had thought much more of his holiday, of

his wife and children, of his daughters at home, of his allowance per

day while he was to be away from his government, and of his salary to

be paid to him entire during his absence, instead of being halved as

it would be if he were away on leave,--he had thought much more in

coming home on these easy and pleasant matters, than he did on the

work that was to be required from him when he arrived. And then it

came to pass that he felt himself almost injured when the Colonial

Office demanded his presence from day to day, and when clerks

bothered him with questions as to which they expected ready replies,

but in replying to which Sir Marmaduke was by no means ready. The

working men at the Colonial Office had not quite thought that Sir

Marmaduke was the most fitting man for the job in hand. There was a

certain Mr. Thomas Smith at another set of islands in quite another

part of the world, who was supposed by these working men at home to

be a very paragon of a governor. If he had been had home,--so said

the working men,--no Committee of the House would have been able to

make anything of him. They might have asked him questions week after

week, and he would have answered them all fluently and would have

committed nobody. He knew all the ins and outs of governing,--did

Mr. Thomas Smith,--and was a match for the sharpest Committee that

ever sat at Westminster. Poor Sir Marmaduke was a man of a very

different sort; all of which was known by the working men; but

the Parliamentary interest had been too strong, and here was Sir

Marmaduke at home. But the working men were not disposed to make

matters so pleasant for Sir Marmaduke, as Sir Marmaduke had expected.

The Committee would not examine Sir Marmaduke till after Easter, in

the middle of April; but it was expected of him that he should read

blue-books without number, and he was so catechised by the working

men that he almost began to wish himself back at the Mandarins. In

this way the new establishment in Manchester Street was not at first

in a happy or even in a contented condition.

At last, after about ten days, Lady Rowley did succeed in obtaining

an interview with Trevelyan. A meeting was arranged through Bozzle,

and took place in a very dark and gloomy room at an inn in the City.

Why Bozzle should have selected the Bremen Coffee House, in Poulter's

Alley, for this meeting no fit reason can surely be given, unless

it was that he conceived himself bound to select the most dreary

locality within his knowledge on so melancholy an occasion. Poulter's

Alley is a narrow dark passage somewhere behind the Mansion House;

and the Bremen Coffee House,--why so called no one can now tell,--is

one of those strange houses of public resort in the City at which

the guests seem never to eat, never to drink, never to sleep, but to

come in and out after a mysterious and almost ghostly fashion, seeing

their friends,--or perhaps their enemies, in nooks and corners, and

carrying on their conferences in low, melancholy whispers. There is

an aged waiter at the Bremen Coffee House; and there is certainly

one private sitting-room up-stairs. It was a dingy, ill-furnished

room, with an old large mahogany table, an old horse-hair sofa, six

horse-hair chairs, two old round mirrors, and an old mahogany press

in a corner. It was a chamber so sad in its appearance that no

wholesome useful work could have been done within it; nor could men

have eaten there with any appetite, or have drained the flowing bowl

with any touch of joviality. It was generally used for such purposes

as that to which it was now appropriated, and no doubt had been

taken by Bozzle on more than one previous occasion. Here Lady Rowley

arrived precisely at the hour fixed, and was told that the gentleman

was waiting up-stairs for her.

There had, of course, been many family consultations as to the manner

in which this meeting should be arranged. Should Sir Marmaduke

accompany his wife;--or, perhaps, should Sir Marmaduke go alone? Lady

Rowley had been very much in favour of meeting Mr. Trevelyan without

any one to assist her in the conference. As for Sir Marmaduke, no

meeting could be concluded between him and his son-in-law without a

personal, and probably a violent quarrel. Of that Lady Rowley had

been quite sure. Sir Marmaduke, since he had been home, had, in the

midst of his various troubles, been driven into so vehement a state

of indignation against his son-in-law as to be unable to speak of

the wretched man without strongest terms of opprobrium. Nothing was

too bad to be said by him of one who had ill-treated his dearest

daughter. It must be admitted that Sir Marmaduke had heard only

one side of the question. He had questioned his daughter, and had

constantly seen his old friend Osborne. The Colonel's journey down

to Devonshire had been made to appear the most natural proceeding

in the world. The correspondence of which Trevelyan thought so much

had been shown to consist of such notes as might pass between any

old gentleman and any young woman. The promise which Trevelyan had

endeavoured to exact, and which Mrs. Trevelyan had declined to give,

appeared to the angry father to be a monstrous insult. He knew that

the Colonel was an older man than himself, and his Emily was still to

him only a young girl. It was incredible to him that anybody should

have regarded his old comrade as his daughter's lover. He did not

believe that anybody had, in truth, so regarded the man. The tale had

been a monstrous invention on the part of the husband, got up because

he had become tired of his young wife. According to Sir Marmaduke's

way of thinking, Trevelyan should either be thrashed within an inch

of his life, or else locked up in a mad-house. Colonel Osborne shook

his head, and expressed a conviction that the poor man was mad.

But Lady Rowley was more hopeful. Though she was as confident about

her daughter as was the father, she was less confident about the old

friend. She, probably, was alive to the fact that a man of fifty

might put on the airs and assume the character of a young lover;

and acting on that suspicion, entertaining also some hope that bad

as matters now were they might be mended, she had taken care that

Colonel Osborne and Mrs. Trevelyan should not be brought together.

Sir Marmaduke had fumed, but Lady Rowley had been firm. "If you think

so, mamma," Mrs. Trevelyan had said, with something of scorn in her

tone,--"of course let it be so." Lady Rowley had said that it would

be better so; and the two had not seen each other since the memorable

visit to Nuncombe Putney. And now Lady Rowley was about to meet her

son-in-law with some slight hope that she might arrange affairs.

She was quite aware that present indignation, though certainly a

gratification, might be indulged in at much too great a cost. It

would be better for all reasons that Emily should go back to her

husband and her home, and that Trevelyan should be forgiven for his

iniquities.

Bozzle was at the tavern during the interview, but he was not seen

by Lady Rowley. He remained seated down-stairs, in one of the dingy

corners, ready to give assistance to his patron should assistance be

needed. When Lady Rowley was shown into the gloomy sitting-room by

the old waiter, she found Trevelyan alone, standing in the middle of

the room, and waiting for her. "This is a sad occasion," he said, as

he advanced to give her his hand.

"A very sad occasion, Louis."

"I do not know what you may have heard of what has occurred, Lady

Rowley. It is natural, however, to suppose that you must have heard

me spoken of with censure."

"I think my child has been ill used, Louis," she replied.

"Of course you do. I could not expect that it should be otherwise.

When it was arranged that I should meet you here, I was quite aware

that you would have taken the side against me before you had heard

my story. It is I that have been ill used,--cruelly misused; but I

do not expect that you should believe me. I do not wish you to do.

I would not for worlds separate the mother from her daughter."

"But why have you separated your own wife from her child?"

"Because it was my duty. What! Is a father not to have the charge

of his own son? I have done nothing, Lady Rowley, to justify a

separation which is contrary to the laws of nature."

"Where is the boy, Louis?"

"Ah;--that is just what I am not prepared to tell any one who has

taken my wife's side till I know that my wife has consented to pay to

me that obedience which I, as her husband, have a right to demand. If

Emily will do as I request of her, as I command her,"--as Trevelyan

said this, he spoke in a tone which was intended to give the highest

possible idea of his own authority and dignity,--"then she may see

her child without delay."

"What is it you request of my daughter?"

"Obedience;--simply that. Submission to my will, which is surely a

wife's duty. Let her beg my pardon for what has occurred,--"

"She cannot do that, Louis."

"And solemnly promise me," continued Trevelyan, not deigning to

notice Lady Rowley's interruption, "that she will hold no further

intercourse with that snake in the grass who wormed his way into my

house,--let her be humble, and penitent, and affectionate, and then

she shall be restored to her husband and to her child." He said this

walking up and down the room, and waving his hand, as though he were

making a speech that was intended to be eloquent,--as though he had

conceived that he was to overcome his mother-in-law by the weight

of his words and the magnificence of his demeanour. And yet his

demeanour was ridiculous, and his words would have had no weight had

they not tended to show Lady Rowley how little prospect there was

that she should be able to heal this breach. He himself, too, was so

altered in appearance since she had last seen him, bright with the

hopes of his young married happiness, that she would hardly have

recognised him had she met him in the street. He was thin, and pale,

and haggard, and mean. And as he stalked up and down the room, it

seemed to her that the very character of the man was changed. She

had not previously known him to be pompous, unreasonable, and absurd.

She did not answer him at once, as she perceived that he had not

finished his address;--and, after a moment's pause, he continued.

"Lady Rowley, there is nothing I would not have done for your

daughter,--for my wife. All that I had was hers. I did not dictate to

her any mode of life; I required from her no sacrifices; I subjected

her to no caprices; but I was determined to be master in my own

house."

"I do not think, Louis, that she has ever denied your right to be

master."

"To be master in my own house, and to be paramount in my influence

over her. So much I had a right to demand."

"Who has denied your right?"

"She has submitted herself to the counsels and to the influences of a

man who has endeavoured to undermine me in her affection. In saying

that I make my accusation as light against her as is possible. I

might make it much heavier, and yet not sin against the truth."

"This is an illusion, Louis."

"Ah;--well. No doubt it becomes you to defend your child. Was it

an illusion when he went to Devonshire? Was it an illusion when he

corresponded with her,--contrary to my express orders,--both before

and after that unhallowed journey? Lady Rowley, there must be no more

such illusions. If my wife means to come back to me, and to have her

child in her own hands, she must be penitent as regards the past, and

obedient as regards the future."

There was a wicked bitterness in that word penitent which almost

maddened Lady Rowley. She had come to this meeting believing that

Trevelyan would be rejoiced to take back his wife, if details could

be arranged for his doing so which should not subject him to the

necessity of crying, peccavi; but she found him speaking of his wife

as though he would be doing her the greatest possible favour in

allowing her to come back to him dressed in sackcloth, and with ashes

on her head. She could understand from what she had heard that his

tone and manner were much changed since he obtained possession of

the child, and that he now conceived that he had his wife within his

power. That he should become a tyrant because he had the power to

tyrannise was not in accordance with her former conception of the

man's character;--but then he was so changed, that she felt that

she knew nothing of the man who now stood before her. "I cannot

acknowledge that my daughter has done anything that requires

penitence," said Lady Rowley.

"I dare say not; but my view is different."

"She cannot admit herself to be wrong when she knows herself to be

right. You would not have her confess to a fault, the very idea of

which has always been abhorrent to her?"

"She must be crushed in spirit, Lady Rowley, before she can again

become a pure and happy woman."

"This is more than I can bear," said Lady Rowley, now, at last,

worked up to a fever of indignation. "My daughter, sir, is as pure a

woman as you have ever known, or are likely to know. You, who should

have protected her against the world, will some day take blame to

yourself as you remember that you have so cruelly maligned her." Then

she walked away to the door, and would not listen to the words which

he was hurling after her. She went down the stairs, and out of the

house, and at the end of Poulter's Alley found the cab which was

waiting for her.

Trevelyan, as soon as he was alone, rang the bell, and sent for

Bozzle. And while the waiter was coming to him, and until his

myrmidon had appeared, he continued to stalk up and down the room,

waving his hand in the air as though he were continuing his speech.

"Bozzle," said he, as soon as the man had closed the door, "I have

changed my mind."

"As how, Mr. Trewillian?"

"I shall make no further attempt. I have done all that man can do,

and have done it in vain. Her father and mother uphold her in her

conduct, and she is lost to me,--for ever."

"But the boy, Mr. T.?"

"I have my child. Yes,--I have my child. Poor infant. Bozzle, I look

to you to see that none of them learn our retreat."

"As for that, Mr. Trewillian,--why facts is to be come at by one

party pretty well as much as by another. Now, suppose the things

was changed, wicey warsey,--and as I was hacting for the Colonel's

party."

"D---- the Colonel!" exclaimed Trevelyan.

"Just so, Mr. Trewillian; but if I was hacting for the other party,

and they said to me, 'Bozzle,--where's the boy?' why, in three days

I'd be down on the facts. Facts is open, Mr. Trewillian, if you knows

where to look for them."

"I shall take him abroad,--at once."

"Think twice of it, Mr. T. The boy is so young, you see, and a

mother's 'art is softer and lovinger than anything. I'd think twice

of it, Mr. T., before I kept 'em apart." This was a line of thought

which Mr. Bozzle's conscience had not forced him to entertain to the

prejudice of his professional arrangements; but now, as he conversed

with his employer, and became by degrees aware of the failure of

Trevelyan's mind, some shade of remorse came upon him, and made him

say a word on behalf of the "other party."

"Am I not always thinking of it? What else have they left me to think

of? That will do for to-day. You had better come down to me to-morrow

afternoon." Bozzle promised obedience to these instructions, and as

soon as his patron had started he paid the bill, and took himself

home.

Lady Rowley, as she travelled back to her house in Manchester Street,

almost made up her mind that the separation between her daughter and

her son-in-law had better be continued. It was a very sad conclusion

to which to come, but she could not believe that any high-spirited

woman could long continue to submit herself to the caprices of a

man so unreasonable and dictatorial as he to whom she had just been

listening. Were it not for the boy, there would, she felt, be no

doubt upon the matter. And now, as matters stood, she thought that

it should be their great object to regain possession of the child.

Then she endeavoured to calculate what would be the result to her

daughter, if in very truth it should be found that the wretched

man was mad. To hope for such a result seemed to her to be very

wicked;--and yet she hardly knew how not to hope for it.

"Well, mamma," said Emily Trevelyan, with a faint attempt at a smile,

"you saw him?"

"Yes, dearest, I saw him. I can only say that he is a most

unreasonable man."

"And he would tell you nothing of Louey?"

"No dear,--not a word."

CHAPTER LXIII.

SIR MARMADUKE AT HOME.

Nora Rowley had told her lover that there was to be no further

communication between them till her father and mother should be

in England; but in telling him so, had so frankly confessed her

own affection for him and had so sturdily promised to be true to

him, that no lover could have been reasonably aggrieved by such an

interdiction. Nora was quite conscious of this, and was aware that

Hugh Stanbury had received such encouragement as ought at any rate to

bring him to the new Rowley establishment, as soon as he should learn

where it had fixed itself. But when at the end of ten days he had

not shown himself, she began to feel doubts. Could it be that he had

changed his mind, that he was unwilling to encounter refusal from her

father, or that he had found, on looking into his own affairs more

closely, that it would be absurd for him to propose to take a wife to

himself while his means were so poor and so precarious? Sir Marmaduke

during this time had been so unhappy, so fretful, so indignant,

and so much worried, that Nora herself had become almost afraid of

him; and, without much reasoning on the matter, had taught herself

to believe that Hugh might be actuated by similar fears. She had

intended to tell her mother of what had occurred between her and

Stanbury the first moment that she and Lady Rowley were together; but

then there had fallen upon them that terrible incident of the loss

of the child, and the whole family had become at once so wrapped up

in the agony of the bereaved mother, and so full of rage against the

unreasonable father, that there seemed to Nora to be no possible

opportunity for the telling of her own love-story. Emily herself

appeared to have forgotten it in the midst of her own misery, and had

not mentioned Hugh Stanbury's name since they had been in Manchester

Street. We have all felt how on occasions our own hopes and fears,

nay, almost our own individuality, become absorbed in and obliterated

by the more pressing cares and louder voices of those around us. Nora

hardly dared to allude to herself while her sister's grief was still

so prominent, and while her father was daily complaining of his own

personal annoyances at the Colonial Office. It seemed to her that at

such a moment she could not introduce a new matter for dispute, and

perhaps a new subject of dismay.

Nevertheless, as the days passed by, and as she saw nothing of Hugh

Stanbury, her heart became sore and her spirit vexed. It seemed to

her that if she were now deserted by him, all the world would be

over for her. The Glascock episode in her life had passed by,--that

episode which might have been her history, which might have been a

history so prosperous, so magnificent, and probably so happy. As she

thought of herself and of circumstances as they had happened to her,

of the resolutions which she had made as to her own career when she

first came to London, and of the way in which she had thrown all

those resolutions away in spite of the wonderful success which had

come in her path, she could not refrain from thinking that she had

brought herself to shipwreck by her own indecision. It must not be

imagined that she regretted what she had done. She knew very well

that to have acted otherwise than she did when Mr. Glascock came

to her at Nuncombe Putney would have proved her to be heartless,

selfish, and unwomanly. Long before that time she had determined that

it was her duty to marry a rich man,--and, if possible, a man in

high position. Such a one had come to her,--one endowed with all the

good things of the world beyond her most sanguine expectation,--and

she had rejected him! She knew that she had been right because she

had allowed herself to love the other man. She did not repent what

she had done, the circumstances being as they were, but she almost

regretted that she had been so soft in heart, so susceptible of the

weakness of love, so little able to do as she pleased with herself.

Of what use to her was it that she loved this man with all her

strength of affection when he never came to her, although the time at

which he had been told that he might come was now ten days past?

She was sitting one afternoon in the drawing-room listlessly

reading, or pretending to read, a novel, when, on a sudden, Hugh

Stanbury was announced. The circumstances of the moment were most

unfortunate for such a visit. Sir Marmaduke, who had been down at

Whitehall in the morning, and from thence had made a journey to St.

Diddulph's-in-the-East and back, was exceedingly cross and out of

temper. They had told him at his office that they feared he would not

suffice to carry through the purpose for which he had been brought

home. And his brother-in-law, the parson, had expressed to him an

opinion that he was in great part responsible for the misfortune of

his daughter, by the encouragement which he had given to such a man

as Colonel Osborne. Sir Marmaduke had in consequence quarrelled both

with the chief clerk and with Mr. Outhouse, and had come home surly

and discontented. Lady Rowley and her eldest daughter were away,

closeted at the moment with Lady Milborough, with whom they were

endeavouring to arrange some plan by which the boy might at any

rate be given back. Poor Emily Trevelyan was humble enough now to

Lady Milborough,--was prepared to be humble to any one, and in any

circumstances, so that she should not be required to acknowledge that

she had entertained Colonel Osborne as her lover. The two younger

girls, Sophy and Lucy, were in the room when Stanbury was announced,

as was also Sir Marmaduke, who at that very moment was uttering angry

growls at the obstinacy and want of reason with which he had been

treated by Mr. Outhouse. Now Sir Marmaduke had not so much as heard

the name of Hugh Stanbury as yet; and Nora, though her listlessness

was all at an end, at once felt how impossible it would be to explain

any of the circumstances of her case in such an interview as this.

While, however, Hugh's dear steps were heard upon the stairs,

her feminine mind at once went to work to ascertain in what best

mode, with what most attractive reason for his presence, she might

introduce the young man to her father. Had not the girls been then

present, she thought that it might have been expedient to leave Hugh

to tell his own story to Sir Marmaduke. But she had no opportunity of

sending her sisters away; and, unless chance should remove them, this

could not be done.

"He is son of the lady we were with at Nuncombe Putney," she

whispered to her father as she got up to move across the room to

welcome her lover. Now Sir Marmaduke had expressed great disapproval

of that retreat to Dartmoor, and had only understood respecting it

that it had been arranged between Trevelyan and the family in whose

custody his two daughters had been sent away into banishment. He

was not therefore specially disposed to welcome Hugh Stanbury in

consequence of this mode of introduction.

Hugh, who had asked for Lady Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan and had

learned that they were out before he had mentioned Miss Rowley's

name, was almost prepared to take his sweetheart into his arms. In

that half-minute he had taught himself to expect that he would meet

her alone, and had altogether forgotten Sir Marmaduke. Young men

when they call at four o'clock in the day never expect to find papas

at home. And of Sophia and Lucy he had either heard nothing or had

forgotten what he had heard. He repressed himself however in time,

and did not commit either Nora or himself by any very vehement

demonstration of affection. But he did hold her hand longer than he

should have done, and Sir Marmaduke saw that he did so.

"This is papa," said Nora. "Papa, this is our friend, Mr. Hugh

Stanbury." The introduction was made in a manner almost absurdly

formal, but poor Nora's difficulties lay heavy upon her. Sir

Marmaduke muttered something;--but it was little more than a grunt.

"Mamma and Emily are out," continued Nora. "I dare say they will be

in soon." Sir Marmaduke looked round sharply at the man. Why was he

to be encouraged to stay till Lady Rowley should return? Lady Rowley

did not want to see him. It seemed to Sir Marmaduke, in the midst of

his troubles, that this was no time to be making new acquaintances.

"These are my sisters, Mr. Stanbury," continued Nora. "This is

Sophia, and this is Lucy." Sophia and Lucy would have been thoroughly

willing to receive their sister's lover with genial kindness if they

had been properly instructed, and if the time had been opportune;

but, as it was, they had nothing to say. They, also, could only

mutter some little sound intended to be more courteous than their

father's grunt. Poor Nora!

"I hope you are comfortable here," said Hugh.

"The house is all very well," said Nora, "but we don't like the

neighbourhood."

Hugh also felt that conversation was difficult. He had soon come to

perceive,--before he had been in the room half a minute,--that the

atmosphere was not favourable to his mission. There was to be no

embracing or permission for embracing on the present occasion. Had he

been left alone with Sir Marmaduke he would probably have told his

business plainly, let Sir Marmaduke's manner to him have been what

it might; but it was impossible for him to do this with three young

ladies in the room with him. Seeing that Nora was embarrassed by

her difficulties, and that Nora's father was cross and silent, he

endeavoured to talk to the other girls, and asked them concerning

their journey and the ship in which they had come. But it was very

up-hill work. Lucy and Sophy could talk as glibly as any young

ladies home from any colony,--and no higher degree of fluency can

be expressed;--but now they were cowed. Their elder sister was

shamefully and most undeservedly disgraced, and this man had had

something,--they knew not what,--to do with it. "Is Priscilla quite

well?" Nora asked at last.

"Quite well. I heard from her yesterday. You know they have left the

Clock House."

"I had not heard it."

"Oh yes;--and they are living in a small cottage just outside the

village. And what else do you think has happened?"

"Nothing bad, I hope, Mr. Stanbury."

"My sister Dorothy has left her aunt, and is living with them again

at Nuncombe."

"Has there been a quarrel, Mr. Stanbury?"

"Well, yes;--after a fashion there has, I suppose. But it is a long

story and would not interest Sir Marmaduke. The wonder is that

Dorothy should have been able to stay so long with my aunt. I will

tell it you all some day." Sir Marmaduke could not understand why

a long story about this man's aunt and sister should be told to

his daughter. He forgot,--as men always do in such circumstances

forget,--that, while he was living in the Mandarins, his daughter,

living in England, would of course pick up new interest and become

intimate with new histories. But he did not forget that pressure

of the hand which he had seen, and he determined that his daughter

Nora could not have any worse lover than the friend of his elder

daughter's husband.

Stanbury had just determined that he must go, that there was no

possibility for him either to say or do anything to promote his cause

at the present moment, when the circumstances were all changed by the

return home of Lady Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan. Lady Rowley knew, and

had for some days known, much more of Stanbury than had come to the

ears of Sir Marmaduke. She understood in the first place that the

Stanburys had been very good to her daughter, and she was aware that

Hugh Stanbury had thoroughly taken her daughter's part against his

old friend Trevelyan. She would therefore have been prepared to

receive him kindly had he not on this very morning been the subject

of special conversation between her and Emily. But, as it had

happened, Mrs. Trevelyan had this very day told Lady Rowley the

whole story of Nora's love. The elder sister had not intended to be

treacherous to the younger; but in the thorough confidence which

mutual grief and close conference had created between the mother

and daughter, everything had at last come out, and Lady Rowley had

learned the story, not only of Hugh Stanbury's courtship, but of

those rich offers which had been made by the heir to the barony of

Peterborough.

It must be acknowledged that Lady Rowley was greatly grieved and

thoroughly dismayed. It was not only that Mr. Glascock was the eldest

son of a peer, but that he was represented by the poor suffering wife

of the ill-tempered man to be a man blessed with a disposition sweet

as an angel's. "And she would have liked him," Emily had said, "if

it had not been for this unfortunate young man." Lady Rowley was not

worse than are other mothers, not more ambitious, or more heartless,

or more worldly. She was a good mother, loving her children, and

thoroughly anxious for their welfare. But she would have liked to

be the mother-in-law of Lord Peterborough, and she would have liked,

dearly, to see her second daughter removed from the danger of those

rocks against which her eldest child had been shipwrecked. And when

she asked after Hugh Stanbury, and his means of maintaining a wife,

the statement which Mrs. Trevelyan made was not comforting. "He

writes for a penny newspaper,--and, I believe, writes very well,"

Mrs. Trevelyan had said.

"For a penny newspaper! Is that respectable?"

"His aunt, Miss Stanbury, seemed to think not. But I suppose men of

education do write for such things now. He says himself that it is

very precarious as an employment."

"It must be precarious, Emily. And has he got nothing?"

"Not a penny of his own," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

Then Lady Rowley had thought again of Mr. Glascock, and of the family

title, and of Monkhams. And she thought of her present troubles, and

of the Mandarins, and the state of Sir Marmaduke's balance at the

bankers;--and of the other girls, and of all there was before her to

do. Here had been a very Apollo among suitors kneeling at her child's

feet, and the foolish girl had sent him away for the sake of a young

man who wrote for a penny newspaper! Was it worth the while of

any woman to bring up daughters with such results? Lady Rowley,

therefore, when she was first introduced to Hugh Stanbury, was not

prepared to receive him with open arms.

On this occasion the task of introducing him fell to Mrs. Trevelyan,

and was done with much graciousness. Emily knew that Hugh Stanbury

was her friend, and would sympathise with her respecting her child.

"You have heard what has happened to me?" she said. Stanbury,

however, had heard nothing of that kidnapping of the child. Though

to the Rowleys it seemed that such a deed of iniquity, done in the

middle of London, must have been known to all the world, he had not

as yet been told of it;--and now the story was given to him. Mrs.

Trevelyan herself told it, with many tears and an agony of fresh

grief; but still she told it as to one whom she regarded as a sure

friend, and from whom she knew that she would receive sympathy. Sir

Marmaduke sat by the while, still gloomy and out of humour. Why was

their family sorrow to be laid bare to this stranger?

"It is the cruellest thing I ever heard," said Hugh.

"A dastardly deed," said Lady Rowley.

"But we all feel that for the time he can hardly know what he does,"

said Nora.

"And where is the child?" Stanbury asked.

"We have not the slightest idea," said Lady Rowley. "I have seen him,

and he refuses to tell us. He did say that my daughter should see her

boy; but he now accompanies his offer with such conditions that it is

impossible to listen to him."

"And where is he?"

"We do not know where he lives. We can reach him only through a

certain man--"

"Ah, I know the man," said Stanbury; "one who was a policeman once.

His name is Bozzle."

"That is the man," said Sir Marmaduke. "I have seen him."

"And of course he will tell us nothing but what he is told to tell

us," continued Lady Rowley. "Can there be anything so horrible as

this,--that a wife should be bound to communicate with her own

husband respecting her own child through such a man as that?"

"One might possibly find out where he keeps the child," said Hugh.

"If you could manage that, Mr. Stanbury!" said Lady Rowley.

"I hardly see that it would do much good," said Hugh. "Indeed I do

not know why he should keep the place a secret. I suppose he has a

right to the boy until the mother shall have made good her claim

before the court." He promised, however, that he would do his best to

ascertain where the child was kept, and where Trevelyan resided, and

then,--having been nearly an hour at the house,--he was forced to

get up and take his leave. He had said not a word to any one of the

business that had brought him there. He had not even whispered an

assurance of his affection to Nora. Till the two elder ladies had

come in, and the subject of the taking of the boy had been mooted, he

had sat there as a perfect stranger. He thought that it was manifest

enough that Nora had told her secret to no one. It seemed to him

that Mrs. Trevelyan must have forgotten it;--that Nora herself must

have forgotten it, if such forgetting could be possible! He got up,

however, and took his leave, and was comforted in some slight degree

by seeing that there was a tear in Nora's eye.

"Who is he?" demanded Sir Marmaduke, as soon as the door was closed.

"He is a young man who was an intimate friend of Louis's," answered

Mrs. Trevelyan; "but he is so no longer, because he sees how

infatuated Louis has been."

"And why does he come here?"

[Illustration: "And why does he come here?"]

"We know him very well," continued Mrs. Trevelyan. "It was he

that arranged our journey down to Devonshire. He was very kind

about it, and so were his mother and sister. We have every reason

to be grateful to Mr. Stanbury." This was all very well, but

Nora nevertheless felt that the interview had been anything but

successful.

"Has he any profession?" asked Sir Marmaduke.

"He writes for the press," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"What do you mean;--books?"

"No;--for a newspaper."

"For a penny newspaper," said Nora boldly--"for the Daily Record."

"Then I hope he won't come here any more," said Sir Marmaduke. Nora

paused a moment, striving to find words for some speech which might

be true to her love and yet not unseemly,--but finding no such words

ready, she got up from her seat and walked out of the room. "What is

the meaning of it all?" asked Sir Marmaduke. There was a silence for

a while, and then he repeated his question in another form. "Is there

any reason for his coming here,--about Nora?"

"I think he is attached to Nora," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"My dear," said Lady Rowley, "perhaps we had better not speak about

it just now."

"I suppose he has not a penny in the world," said Sir Marmaduke.

"He has what he earns," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"If Nora understands her duty she will never let me hear his name

again," said Sir Marmaduke. Then there was nothing more said, and as

soon as they could escape, both Lady Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan left

the room.

"I should have told you everything," said Nora to her mother that

night. "I had no intention to keep anything a secret from you. But we

have all been so unhappy about Louey, that we have had no heart to

talk of anything else."

"I understand all that, my darling."

"And I had meant that you should tell papa, for I supposed that

he would come. And I meant that he should go to papa himself. He

intended that himself,--only, to-day,--as things turned out--"

"Just so, dearest;--but it does not seem that he has got any income.

It would be very rash,--wouldn't it?"

"People must be rash sometimes. Everybody can't have an income

without earning it. I suppose people in professions do marry without

having fortunes."

"When they have settled professions, Nora."

"And why is not his a settled profession? I believe he receives quite

as much at seven and twenty as Uncle Oliphant does at sixty."

"But your Uncle Oliphant's income is permanent."

"Lawyers don't have permanent incomes, or doctors,--or merchants."

"But those professions are regular and sure. They don't marry,

without fortunes, till they have made their incomes sure."

"Mr. Stanbury's income is sure. I don't know why it shouldn't be

sure. He goes on writing and writing every day, and it seems to me

that of all professions in the world it is the finest. I'd much

sooner write for a newspaper than be one of those old musty, fusty

lawyers, who'll say anything that they're paid to say."

"My dearest Nora, all that is nonsense. You know as well as I do that

you should not marry a man when there is a doubt whether he can keep

a house over your head;--that is his position."

"It is good enough for me, mamma."

"And what is his income from writing?"

"It is quite enough for me, mamma. The truth is I have promised, and

I cannot go back from it. Dear, dear mamma, you won't quarrel with

us, and oppose us, and make papa hard against us. You can do what you

like with papa. I know that. Look at poor Emily. Plenty of money has

not made her happy."

"If Mr. Glascock had only asked you a week sooner," said Lady Rowley,

with a handkerchief to her eyes.

"But you see he didn't, mamma."

"When I think of it I cannot but weep"--and the poor mother burst out

into a full flood of tears--"such a man, so good, so gentle, and so

truly devoted to you."

"Mamma, what's the good of that now?"

"Going down all the way to Devonshire after you!"

"So did Hugh, mamma."

"A position that any girl in England would have envied you. I cannot

but feel it. And Emily says she is sure he would come back if he got

the very slightest encouragement."

"That is quite impossible, mamma."

"Why should it be impossible? Emily declares that she never saw a man

so much in love in her life;--and she says also that she believes he

is abroad now simply because he is broken-hearted about it."

"Mr. Glascock, mamma, was very nice and good and all that; but indeed

he is not the man to suffer from a broken heart. And Emily is quite

mistaken. I told him the whole truth."

"What truth?"

"That there was somebody else that I did love. Then he said that of

course that put an end to it all, and he wished me good-bye ever so

calmly."

"How could you be so infatuated? Why should you have cut the ground

away from your feet in that way?"

"Because I chose that there should be an end to it. Now there has

been an end to it; and it is much better, mamma, that we should

not think about Mr. Glascock any more. He will never come again to

me,--and if he did, I could only say the same thing."

"You mustn't be surprised, Nora, if I'm unhappy; that is all. Of

course I must feel it. Such a connection as it would have been for

your sisters! Such a home for poor Emily in her trouble! And as for

this other man--"

"Mamma, don't speak ill of him."

"If I say anything of him, I must say the truth," said Lady Rowley.

"Don't say anything against him, mamma, because he is to be my

husband. Dear, dear mamma, you can't change me by anything you say.

Perhaps I have been foolish; but it is settled now. Don't make me

wretched by speaking against the man whom I mean to love all my life

better than all the world."

"Think of Louis Trevelyan."

"I will think of no one but Hugh Stanbury. I tried not to love him,

mamma. I tried to think that it was better to make believe that I

loved Mr. Glascock. But he got the better of me, and conquered me,

and I will never rebel against him. You may help me, mamma;--but you

can't change me."

CHAPTER LXIV.

SIR MARMADUKE AT HIS CLUB.

Sir Marmaduke had come away from his brother-in-law the parson in

much anger, for Mr. Outhouse, with that mixture of obstinacy and

honesty which formed his character, had spoken hard words of Colonel

Osborne, and words which by implication had been hard also against

Emily Trevelyan. He had been very staunch to his niece when attacked

by his niece's husband; but when his sympathies and assistance were

invoked by Sir Marmaduke it seemed as though he had transferred his

allegiance to the other side. He pointed out to the unhappy father

that Colonel Osborne had behaved with great cruelty in going to

Devonshire, that the Stanburys had been untrue to their trust in

allowing him to enter the house, and that Emily had been "indiscreet"

in receiving him. When a young woman is called indiscreet by her

friends it may be assumed that her character is very seriously

assailed. Sir Marmaduke had understood this, and on hearing the word

had become wroth with his brother-in-law. There had been hot words

between them, and Mr. Outhouse would not yield an inch or retract

a syllable. He conceived it to be his duty to advise the father

to caution his daughter with severity, to quarrel absolutely with

Colonel Osborne, and to let Trevelyan know that this had been done.

As to the child, Mr. Outhouse expressed a strong opinion that the

father was legally entitled to the custody of his boy, and that

nothing could be done to recover the child, except what might be

done with the father's consent. In fact, Mr. Outhouse made himself

exceedingly disagreeable, and sent away Sir Marmaduke with a very

heavy heart. Could it really be possible that his old friend Fred

Osborne, who seven or eight-and-twenty years ago had been potent

among young ladies, had really been making love to his old friend's

married daughter? Sir Marmaduke looked into himself, and conceived it

to be quite out of the question that he should make love to any one.

A good dinner, good wine, a good cigar, an easy chair, and a rubber

of whist,--all these things, with no work to do, and men of his own

standing around him were the pleasures of life which Sir Marmaduke

desired. Now Fred Osborne was an older man than he, and though Fred

Osborne did keep up a foolish system of padded clothes and dyed

whiskers, still,--at fifty-two or fifty-three,--surely a man might be

reckoned safe. And then, too, that ancient friendship! Sir Marmaduke,

who had lived all his life in the comparative seclusion of a colony,

thought perhaps more of that ancient friendship than did the Colonel,

who had lived amidst the blaze of London life, and who had had many

opportunities of changing his friends. Some inkling of all this

made its way into Sir Marmaduke's bosom, as he thought of it with

bitterness; and he determined that he would have it out with his

friend.

Hitherto he had enjoyed very few of those pleasant hours which he had

anticipated on his journey homewards. He had had no heart to go to

his club, and he had fancied that Colonel Osborne had been a little

backward in looking him up, and providing him with amusement. He had

suggested this to his wife, and she had told him that the Colonel had

been right not to come to Manchester Street. "I have told Emily,"

said Lady Rowley, "that she must not meet him, and she is quite of

the same opinion." Nevertheless, there had been remissness. Sir

Marmaduke felt that it was so, in spite of his wife's excuses. In

this way he was becoming sore with everybody, and very unhappy. It

did not at all improve his temper when he was told that his second

daughter had refused an offer from Lord Peterborough's eldest son.

"Then she may go into the workhouse for me," the angry father had

said, declaring at the same time that he would never give his consent

to her marriage with the man who "did dirty work" for the Daily

Record,--as he, with his paternal wisdom, chose to express it. But

this cruel phrase was not spoken in Nora's hearing, nor was it

repeated to her. Lady Rowley knew her husband, and was aware that he

would on occasions change his opinion.

It was not till two or three days after his visit to St. Diddulph's

that he met Colonel Osborne. The Easter recess was then over,

and Colonel Osborne had just returned to London. They met on the

door-steps of "The Acrobats," and the Colonel immediately began

with an apology. "I have been so sorry to be away just when you are

here;--upon my word I have. But I was obliged to go down to the

duchess's. I had promised early in the winter; and those people

are so angry if you put them off. By George, it's almost as bad as

putting off royalty."

"D----n the duchess," said Sir Marmaduke.

"With all my heart," said the Colonel;--"only I thought it as well

that I should tell you the truth."

"What I mean is, that the duchess and her people make no difference

to me. I hope you had a pleasant time; that's all."

"Well;--yes, we had. One must get away somewhere at Easter. There is

no one left at the club, and there's no House, and no one asks one to

dinner in town. In fact, if one didn't go away one wouldn't know what

to do. There were ever so many people there that I liked to meet.

Lady Glencora was there, and uncommon pleasant she made it. That

woman has more to say for herself than any half-dozen men that I

know. And Lord Cantrip, your chief, was there. He said a word or two

to me about you."

"What sort of a word?"

"He says he wishes you would read up some blue-books, or papers, or

reports, or something of that kind, which he says that some of his

fellows have sent you. It seems that there are some new rules, or

orders, or fashions, which he wants you to have at your fingers'

ends. Nothing could be more civil than he was,--but he just wished

me to mention this, knowing that you and I are likely to see each

other."

"I wish I had never come over," said Sir Marmaduke.

"Why so?"

"They didn't bother me with their new rules and fashions over there.

When the papers came somebody read them, and that was enough. I could

do what they wanted me to do there."

"And so you will here,--after a bit."

"I'm not so sure of that. Those young fellows seem to forget that

an old dog can't learn new tricks. They've got a young brisk fellow

there who seems to think that a man should be an encyclopedia of

knowledge because he has lived in a colony over twenty years."

"That's the new under-secretary."

"Never mind who it is. Osborne, just come up to the library, will

you? I want to speak to you." Then Sir Marmaduke, with considerable

solemnity, led the way up to the most deserted room in the club, and

Colonel Osborne followed him, well knowing that something was to be

said about Emily Trevelyan.

Sir Marmaduke seated himself on a sofa, and his friend sat close

beside him. The room was quite deserted. It was four o'clock in

the afternoon, and the club was full of men. There were men in the

morning-room, and men in the drawing-room, and men in the card-room,

and men in the billiard-room; but no better choice of a chamber for

a conference intended to be silent and secret could have been made

in all London than that which had induced Sir Marmaduke to take his

friend into the library of "The Acrobats." And yet a great deal of

money had been spent in providing this library for "The Acrobats."

Sir Marmaduke sat for awhile silent, and had he sat silent for an

hour, Colonel Osborne would not have interrupted him. Then, at last,

he began, with a voice that was intended to be serious, but which

struck upon the ear of his companion as being affected and unlike the

owner of it. "This is a very sad thing about my poor girl," said Sir

Marmaduke.

"Indeed it is. There is only one thing to be said about it, Rowley."

"And what's that?"

"The man must be mad."

"He is not so mad as to give us any relief by his madness,--poor as

such comfort would be. He has got Emily's child away from her, and

I think it will about kill her. And what is to become of her? As to

taking her back to the islands without her child, it is out of the

question. I never knew anything so cruel in my life."

"And so absurd, you know."

"Ah,--that's just the question. If anybody had asked me, I should

have said that you were the man of all men whom I could have best

trusted."

"Do you doubt it now?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Do you mean to say that you suspect me,--and your daughter too?"

"No;--by heavens! Poor dear. If I suspected her, there would be an

end of all things with me. I could never get over that. No; I don't

suspect her!" Sir Marmaduke had now dropped his affected tone, and

was speaking with natural energy.

"But you do me?"

"No;--if I did, I don't suppose I should be sitting with you here;

but they tell me--"

"They tell you what?"

"They tell me that,--that you did not behave wisely about it. Why

could you not let her alone when you found out how matters were

going?"

"Who has been telling you this, Rowley?"

Sir Marmaduke considered for awhile, and then remembering that

Colonel Osborne could hardly quarrel with a clergyman, told him the

truth. "Outhouse says that you have done her an irretrievable injury

by going down to Devonshire to her, and by writing to her."

"Outhouse is an ass."

"That is easily said;--but why did you go?"

"And why should I not go? What the deuce! Because a man like that

chooses to take vagaries into his head I am not to see my own

godchild!" Sir Marmaduke tried to remember whether the Colonel was in

fact the godfather of his eldest daughter, but he found that his mind

was quite a blank about his children's godfathers and godmothers.

"And as for the letters;--I wish you could see them. The only letters

which had in them a word of importance were those about your coming

home. I was anxious to get that arranged, not only for your sake, but

because she was so eager about it."

"God bless her, poor child," said Sir Marmaduke, rubbing the tears

away from his eyes with his red silk pocket-handkerchief.

"I will acknowledge that those letters,--there may have been one or

two,--were the beginning of the trouble. It was these that made this

man show himself to be a lunatic. I do admit that. I was bound not to

talk about your coming, and I told her to keep the secret. He went

spying about, and found her letters, I suppose,--and then he took

fire because there was to be a secret from him. Dirty, mean dog! And

now I'm to be told by such a fellow as Outhouse that it's my fault,

that I have caused all the trouble, because, when I happened to be in

Devonshire, I went to see your daughter!" We must do the Colonel the

justice of supposing that he had by this time quite taught himself to

believe that the church porch at Cockchaffington had been the motive

cause of his journey into Devonshire. "Upon my word it is too hard,"

continued he indignantly. "As for Outhouse,--only for the gown upon

his back, I'd pull his nose. And I wish that you would tell him that

I say so."

"There is trouble enough without that," said Sir Marmaduke.

"But it is hard. By G----, it is hard. There is this comfort;--if

it hadn't been me, it would have been some one else. Such a man as

that couldn't have gone two or three years, without being jealous of

some one. And as for poor Emily, she is better off perhaps with an

accusation so absurd as this, than she might have been had her name

been joined with a younger man, or with one whom you would have less

reason for trusting."

There was so much that seemed to be sensible in this, and it was

spoken with so well assumed a tone of injured innocence, that Sir

Marmaduke felt that he had nothing more to say. He muttered something

further about the cruelty of the case, and then slunk away out of the

club, and made his way home to the dull gloomy house in Manchester

Street. There was no comfort for him there;--but neither was there

any comfort for him at the club. And why did that vexatious Secretary

of State send him messages about blue books? As he went, he expressed

sundry wishes that he was back at the Mandarins, and told himself

that it would be well that he should remain there till he died.

CHAPTER LXV.

MYSTERIOUS AGENCIES.

[Illustration]

When the thirty-first of March arrived, Exeter had not as yet been

made gay with the marriage festivities of Mr. Gibson and Camilla

French. And this delay had not been the fault of Camilla. Camilla had

been ready, and when, about the middle of the month, it was hinted

to her that some postponement was necessary, she spoke her mind out

plainly, and declared that she was not going to stand that kind of

thing. The communication had not been made to her by Mr. Gibson in

person. For some days previously he had not been seen at Heavitree,

and Camilla had from day to day become more black, gloomy, and harsh

in her manners both to her mother and her sister. Little notes had

come and little notes had gone, but no one in the house, except

Camilla herself, knew what those notes contained. She would not

condescend to complain to Arabella; nor did she say much in

condemnation of her lover to Mrs. French, till the blow came. With

unremitting attention she pursued the great business of her wedding

garments, and exacted from the unfortunate Arabella an amount of work

equal to her own,--of thankless work, as is the custom of embryo

brides with their unmarried sisters. And she drew with great audacity

on the somewhat slender means of the family for the amount of

feminine gear necessary to enable her to go into Mr. Gibson's house

with something of the Ã©clat of a well-provided bride. When Mrs.

French hesitated, and then expostulated, Camilla replied that she did

not expect to be married above once, and that in no cheaper or more

productive way than this could her mother allow her to consume her

share of the family resources. "What matter, mamma, if you do have to

borrow a little money? Mr. Burgess will let you have it when he knows

why. And as I shan't be eating and drinking at home any more, nor yet

getting my things here, I have a right to expect it." And she ended

by expressing an opinion, in Arabella's hearing, that any daughter

of a house who proves herself to be capable of getting a husband for

herself, is entitled to expect that those left at home shall pinch

themselves for a time, in order that she may go forth to the world in

a respectable way, and be a credit to the family.

Then came the blow. Mr. Gibson had not been at the house for some

days, but the notes had been going and coming. At last Mr. Gibson

came himself; but, as it happened, when he came, Camilla was out

shopping. In these days she often did go out shopping between eleven

and one, carrying her sister with her. It must have been but a poor

pleasure for Arabella, this witnessing the purchases made, seeing

the pleasant draperies, and handling the real linens and admiring

the fine cambrics spread out before them on the shop counters by

obsequious attendants. And the questions asked of her by her sister,

whether this was good enough for so august an occasion, or that

sufficiently handsome, must have been harassing. She could not have

failed to remember that it ought all to have been done for her,--that

had she not been treated with monstrous injustice, with most

unsisterly cruelty, all these good things would have been spread on

her behoof. But she went on and endured it, and worked diligently

with her needle, and folded and unfolded as she was desired, and

became as it were quite a younger sister in the house,--creeping out

by herself now and again into the purlieus of the city, to find such

consolation as she might receive from her solitary thoughts.

But Arabella and Camilla were both away when Mr. Gibson called to

tell Mrs. French of his altered plans. And as he asked, not for

his lady-love, but for Mrs. French herself, it is probable that he

watched his opportunity and that he knew to what cares his Camilla

was then devoting herself. "Perhaps it is quite as well that I should

find you alone," he said, after sundry preludes, to his future

mother-in-law, "because you can make Camilla understand this better

than I can. I must put off the day for about three weeks."

"Three weeks, Mr. Gibson?"

"Or a month. Perhaps we had better say the 29th of April." Mr. Gibson

had by this time thrown off every fear that he might have entertained

of the mother, and could speak to her of such an unwarrantable change

of plans with tolerable equanimity.

"But I don't know that that will suit Camilla at all."

"She can name any other day she pleases, of course;--that is, in

May."

"But why is this to be?"

"There are things about money, Mrs. French, which I cannot arrange

sooner. And I find that unfortunately I must go up to London." Though

many other questions were asked, nothing further was got out of

Mr. Gibson on that occasion; and he left the house with a perfect

understanding on his own part,--and on that of Mrs. French,--that the

marriage was postponed till some day still to be fixed, but which

could not and should not be before the 29th of April. Mrs. French

asked him why he did not come up and see Camilla. He replied,--false

man that he was,--that he had hoped to have seen her this morning,

and that he would come again before the week was over.

Then it was that Camilla spoke her mind out plainly. "I shall go to

his house at once," she said, "and find out all about it. I don't

understand it. I don't understand it at all; and I won't put up with

it. He shall know who he has to deal with, if he plays tricks upon

me. Mamma, I wonder you let him out of the house, till you had made

him come back to his old day."

"What could I do, my dear?"

"What could you do? Shake him out of it,--as I would have done. But

he didn't dare to tell me,--because he is a coward."

Camilla in all this showed her spirit; but she allowed her anger

to hurry her away into an indiscretion. Arabella was present, and

Camilla should have repressed her rage.

"I don't think he's at all a coward," said Arabella.

"That's my business. I suppose I'm entitled to know what he is better

than you."

"All the same I don't think Mr. Gibson is at all a coward," said

Arabella, again pleading the cause of the man who had misused her.

"Now, Arabella, I won't take any interference from you; mind that.

I say it was cowardly, and he should have come to me. It's my

concern, and I shall go to him. I'm not going to be stopped by any

shilly-shally nonsense, when my future respectability, perhaps, is

at stake. All Exeter knows that the marriage is to take place on the

31st of this month."

On the next day Camilla absolutely did go to Mr. Gibson's house at

an early hour, at nine, when, as she thought, he would surely be at

breakfast. But he had flown. He had left Exeter that morning by an

early train, and his servant thought that he had gone to London. On

the next morning Camilla got a note from him, written in London.

It affected to be very cheery and affectionate, beginning "Dearest

Cammy," and alluding to the postponement of his wedding as though

it were a thing so fixed as to require no further question. Camilla

answered this letter, still in much wrath, complaining, protesting,

expostulating;--throwing in his teeth the fact that the day had been

fixed by him, and not by her. And she added a postscript in the

following momentous words:--"If you have any respect for the name of

your future wife, you will fall back upon your first arrangement." To

this she got simply a line of an answer, declaring that this falling

back was impossible, and then nothing was heard of him for ten days.

He had gone from Tuesday to Saturday week;--and the first that

Camilla saw of him was his presence in the reading desk when he

chaunted the cathedral service as priest-vicar on the Sunday.

At this time Arabella was very ill, and was confined to her bed.

Mr. Martin declared that her system had become low from over

anxiety,--that she was nervous, weak, and liable to hysterics,--that

her feelings were in fact too many for her,--and that her efforts to

overcome them, and to face the realities of the world, had exhausted

her. This was, of course, not said openly, at the town-cross of

Exeter; but such was the opinion which Mr. Martin gave in confidence

to the mother. "Fiddle-de-dee!" said Camilla, when she was told of

feelings, susceptibilities, and hysterics. At the present moment she

had a claim to the undivided interest of the family, and she believed

that her sister's illness was feigned in order to defraud her of her

rights. "My dear, she is ill," said Mrs. French. "Then let her have

a dose of salts," said the stern Camilla. This was on the Sunday

afternoon. Camilla had endeavoured to see Mr. Gibson as he came out

of the cathedral, but had failed. Mr. Gibson had been detained within

the building,--no doubt by duties connected with the choral services.

On that evening he got a note from Camilla, and quite early on the

Monday morning he came up to Heavitree.

"You will find her in the drawing-room," said Mrs. French, as she

opened the hall-door for him. There was a smile on her face as she

spoke, but it was a forced smile. Mr. Gibson did not smile at all.

"Is it all right with her?" he asked.

"Well;--you had better go to her. You see, Mr. Gibson, young ladies,

when they are going to be married, think that they ought to have

their own way a little, just for the last time, you know." He took no

notice of the joke, but went with slow steps up to the drawing-room.

It would be inquiring too curiously to ask whether Camilla, when

she embraced him, discerned that he had fortified his courage that

morning with a glass of curacoa.

"What does all this mean, Thomas?" was the first question that

Camilla asked when the embrace was over.

"All what mean, dear?"

"This untoward delay. Thomas, you have almost broken my heart. You

have been away, and I have not heard from you."

"I wrote twice, Camilla."

"And what sort of letters? If there is anything the matter, Thomas,

you had better tell me at once." She paused, but Thomas held his

tongue. "I don't suppose you want to kill me."

"God forbid," said Thomas.

"But you will. What must everybody think of me in the city when

they find that it is put off? Poor mamma has been dreadful;--quite

dreadful! And here is Arabella now laid up on a bed of sickness."

This, too, was indiscreet. Camilla should have said nothing about her

sister's sickness.

"I have been so sorry to hear about dear Bella," said Mr. Gibson.

"I don't suppose she's very bad," said Camilla, "but of course we all

feel it. Of course we're upset. As for me, I bear up; because I've

that spirit that I won't give way if it's ever so; but, upon my word,

it tries me hard. What is the meaning of it, Thomas?"

But Thomas had nothing to say beyond what he had said before to Mrs.

French. He was very particular, he said, about money; and certain

money matters made it incumbent on him not to marry before the 29th

of April. When Camilla suggested to him that as she was to be his

wife, she ought to know all about his money matters, he told her that

she should,--some day. When they were married, he would tell her all.

Camilla talked a great deal, and said some things that were very

severe. Mr. Gibson did not enjoy his morning, but he endured the

upbraidings of his fair one with more firmness than might perhaps

have been expected from him. He left all the talking to Camilla; but

when he got up to leave her, the 29th of April had been fixed, with

some sort of assent from her, as the day on which she was really to

become Mrs. Gibson.

When he left the room, he again met Mrs. French on the landing-place.

She hesitated a moment, waiting to see whether the door would be

shut; but the door could not be shut, as Camilla was standing in

the entrance. "Mr. Gibson," said Mrs. French, in a voice that was

scarcely a whisper, "would you mind stepping in and seeing poor Bella

for a moment?"

"Why;--she is in bed," said Camilla.

"Yes;--she is in bed; but she thinks it would be a comfort to her.

She has seen nobody these four days except Mr. Martin, and she thinks

it would comfort her to have a word or two with Mr. Gibson." Now

Mr. Gibson was not only going to be Bella's brother-in-law, but

he was also a clergyman. Camilla in her heart believed that the

half-clerical aspect which her mother had given to the request was

false and hypocritical. There were special reasons why Bella should

not have wished to see Mr. Gibson in her bedroom, at any rate till

Mr. Gibson had become her brother-in-law. The expression of such a

wish at the present moment was almost indecent.

"You'll be there with them?" said Camilla. Mr. Gibson blushed up to

his ears as he heard the suggestion. "Of course you'll be there with

them, mamma."

"No, my dear, I think not. I fancy she wishes him to read to her,--or

something of that sort." Then Mr. Gibson, without speaking a word,

but still blushing up to his ears, was taken to Arabella's room; and

Camilla, flouncing into the drawing-room, banged the door behind her.

She had hitherto fought her battle with considerable skill and with

great courage;--but her very success had made her imprudent. She

had become so imperious in the great position which she had reached,

that she could not control her temper or wait till her power was

confirmed. The banging of that door was heard through the whole

house, and every one knew why it was banged. She threw herself on to

a sofa, and then, instantly rising again, paced the room with quick

step. Could it be possible that there was treachery? Was it on the

cards that that weak, poor creature, Bella, was intriguing once again

to defraud her of her husband? There were different things that she

now remembered. Arabella, in that moment of bliss in which she had

conceived herself to be engaged to Mr. Gibson, had discarded her

chignon. Then she had resumed it,--in all its monstrous proportions.

Since that it had been lessened by degrees, and brought down, through

various interesting but abnormal shapes, to a size which would hardly

have drawn forth any anathema from Miss Stanbury. And now, on this

very morning, Arabella had put on a clean nightcap, with muslin

frills. It is perhaps not unnatural that a sick lady, preparing

to receive a clergyman in her bedroom, should put on a clean

nightcap,--but to suspicious eyes small causes suffice to create

alarm. And if there were any such hideous wickedness in the wind, had

Arabella any colleague in her villainy? Could it be that the mother

was plotting against her daughter's happiness and respectability?

Camilla was well aware that her mamma would at first have preferred

to give Arabella to Mr. Gibson, had the choice in the matter been

left to her. But now, when the thing had been settled before all

the world, would not such treatment on a mother's part be equal to

infanticide? And then as to Mr. Gibson himself! Camilla was not

prone to think little of her own charms, but she had been unable

not to perceive that her lover had become negligent in his personal

attentions to her. An accepted lover, who deserves to have been

accepted, should devote every hour at his command to his mistress.

But Mr. Gibson had of late been so chary of his presence at

Heavitree, that Camilla could not but have known that he took no

delight in coming thither. She had acknowledged this to herself; but

she had consoled herself with the reflection that marriage would make

this all right. Mr. Gibson was not the man to stray from his wife,

and she could trust herself to obtain a sufficient hold upon her

husband hereafter, partly by the strength of her tongue, partly by

the ascendency of her spirit, and partly, also, by the comforts which

she would provide for him. She had not doubted but that it would be

all well when they should be married;--but how if, even now, there

should be no marriage for her? Camilla French had never heard of

Creusa and of Jason, but as she paced her mother's drawing-room that

morning she was a Medea in spirit. If any plot of that kind should be

in the wind, she would do such things that all Devonshire should hear

of her wrongs and of her revenge!

In the meantime Mr. Gibson was sitting by Arabella's bedside, while

Mrs. French was trying to make herself busy in her own chamber, next

door. There had been a reading of some chapter of the Bible,--or of

some portion of a chapter. And Mr. Gibson, as he read, and Arabella,

as she listened, had endeavoured to take to their hearts and to make

use of the word which they heard. The poor young woman, when she

begged her mother to send to her the man who was so dear to her, did

so with some half-formed condition that it would be good for her to

hear a clergyman read to her. But now the chapter had been read, and

the book was back in Mr. Gibson's pocket, and he was sitting with

his hand on the bed. "She is so very arrogant," said Bella,--"and

so domineering." To this Mr. Gibson made no reply. "I'm sure I have

endeavoured to bear it well, though you must have known what I have

suffered, Thomas. Nobody can understand it so well as you do."

"I wish I had never been born," said Mr. Gibson, tragically.

"Don't say that, Thomas,--because it's wicked."

"But I do. See all the harm I have done;--and yet I did not mean it."

"You must try and do the best you can now. I am not saying what that

should be. I am not dictating to you. You are a man, and, of course,

you must judge for yourself. But I will say this. You shouldn't do

anything just because it is the easiest. I don't suppose I should

live after it. I don't indeed. But that should not signify to you."

"I don't suppose that any man was ever before in such a terrible

position since the world began."

"It is difficult;--I am sure of that, Thomas."

"And I have meant to be so true. I fancy sometimes that some

mysterious agency interferes with the affairs of a man, and drives

him on,--and on,--and on,--almost,--till he doesn't know where it

drives him." As he said this in a voice that was quite sepulchral

in its tone, he felt some consolation in the conviction that this

mysterious agency could not affect a man without embuing him with

a certain amount of grandeur,--very uncomfortable, indeed, in its

nature, but still having considerable value as a counterpoise. Pride

must bear pain;--but pain is recompensed by pride.

"She is so strong, Thomas, that she can put up with anything," said

Arabella, in a whisper.

"Strong;--yes," said he, with a shudder;--"she is strong enough."

"And as for love--"

"Don't talk about it," said he, getting up from his chair. "Don't

talk about it. You will drive me frantic."

"You know what my feelings are, Thomas; you have always known them.

There has been no change since I was the young thing you first knew

me." As she spoke, she just touched his hand with hers; but he did

not seem to notice this, sitting with his elbow on the arm of his

chair and his forehead on his hand. In reply to what she said to him,

he merely shook his head,--not intending to imply thereby any doubt

of the truth of her assertion. "You have now to make up your mind and

to be bold, Thomas," continued Arabella. "She says that you are a

coward; but I know that you are no coward. I told her so, and she

said that I was interfering. Oh,--that she should be able to tell me

that I interfere when I defend you!"

"I must go," said Mr. Gibson, jumping up from his chair. "I must go.

Bella, I cannot stand this any longer. It is too much for me. I will

pray that I may decide aright. God bless you!" Then he kissed her

brow as she lay in bed, and hurried out of the room.

He had hoped to go from the house without further converse with any

of its inmates; for his mind was disturbed, and he longed to be at

rest. But he was not allowed to escape so easily. Camilla met him at

the dining-room door, and accosted him with a smile. There had been

time for much meditation during the last half hour, and Camilla had

meditated. "How do you find her, Thomas?" she asked.

"She seems weak, but I believe she is better. I have been reading to

her."

"Come in, Thomas;--will you not? It is bad for us to stand talking on

the stairs. Dear Thomas, don't let us be so cold to each other." He

had no alternative but to put his arm round her waist and kiss her,

thinking, as he did so, of the mysterious agency which afflicted him.

"Tell me that you love me, Thomas," she said.

"Of course I love you." The question is not a pleasant one when put

by a lady to a gentleman whose affections towards her are not strong,

and it requires a very good actor to produce an efficient answer.

"I hope you do, Thomas. It would be sad, indeed, if you did not. You

are not weary of your Camilla,--are you?"

For a moment there came upon him an idea that he would confess that

he was weary of her, but he found at once that such an effort was

beyond his powers. "How can you ask such a question?" he said.

"Because you do not--come to me." Camilla, as she spoke, laid her

head upon his shoulder, and wept. "And now you have been five minutes

with me and nearly an hour with Bella."

"She wanted me to read to her," said Mr. Gibson;--and he hated

himself thoroughly as he said it.

"And now you want to get away as fast as you can," continued Camilla.

"Because of the morning service," said Mr. Gibson. This was quite

true, and yet he hated himself again for saying it. As Camilla knew

the truth of the last plea, she was obliged to let him go; but she

made him swear before he went that he loved her dearly. "I think it's

all right," she said to herself as he went down the stairs. "I don't

think he'd dare make it wrong. If he does;--o-oh!"

Mr. Gibson, as he walked into Exeter, endeavoured to justify his

own conduct to himself. There was no moment, he declared to himself,

in which he had not endeavoured to do right. Seeing the manner in

which he had been placed among these two young women, both of whom

had fallen in love with him, how could he have saved himself from

vacillation? And by what untoward chance had it come to pass that he

had now learned to dislike so vigorously, almost to hate, the one

with whom he had been for a moment sufficiently infatuated to think

that he loved?

But with all his arguments he did not succeed in justifying to

himself his own conduct, and he hated himself.

CHAPTER LXVI.

OF A QUARTER OF LAMB.

Miss Stanbury, looking out of her parlour window, saw Mr. Gibson

hurrying towards the cathedral, down the passage which leads from

Southernhay into the Close. "He's just come from Heavitree, I'll be

bound," said Miss Stanbury to Martha, who was behind her.

"Like enough, ma'am."

"Though they do say that the poor fool of a man has become quite sick

of his bargain already."

"He'll have to be sicker yet, ma'am," said Martha.

"They were to have been married last week, and nobody ever knew why

it was put off. It's my belief he'll never marry her. And she'll be

served right;--quite right."

"He must marry her now, ma'am. She's been buying things all over

Exeter, as though there was no end of their money."

"They haven't more than enough to keep body and soul together," said

Miss Stanbury. "I don't see why I mightn't have gone to service this

morning, Martha. It's quite warm now out in the Close."

"You'd better wait, ma'am, till the east winds is over. She was at

Puddock's only the day before yesterday, buying bed-linen,--the

finest they had, and that wasn't good enough."

"Psha!" said Miss Stanbury.

"As though Mr. Gibson hadn't things of that kind good enough for

her," said Martha.

Then there was silence in the room for awhile. Miss Stanbury was

standing at one window, and Martha at the other, watching the people

as they passed backwards and forwards, in and out of the Close.

Dorothy had now been away at Nuncombe Putney for some weeks, and her

aunt felt her loneliness with a heavy sense of weakness. Never had

she entertained a companion in the house who had suited her as well

as her niece, Dorothy. Dorothy would always listen to her, would

always talk to her, would always bear with her. Since Dorothy had

gone, various letters had been interchanged between them. Though

there had been anger about Brooke Burgess, there had been no absolute

rupture; but Miss Stanbury had felt that she could not write and beg

her niece to come back to her. She had not sent Dorothy away. Dorothy

had chosen to go, because her aunt had had an opinion of her own as

to what was fitting for her heir; and as Miss Stanbury would not give

up her opinion, she could not ask her niece to return to her. Such

had been her resolution, sternly expressed to herself a dozen times

during these solitary weeks; but time and solitude had acted upon

her, and she longed for the girl's presence in the house. "Martha,"

she said at last, "I think I shall get you to go over to Nuncombe

Putney."

"Again, ma'am?"

"Why not again? It's not so far, I suppose, that the journey will

hurt you."

"I don't think it'd hurt me, ma'am;--only what good will I do?"

"If you'll go rightly to work, you may do good. Miss Dorothy was a

fool to go the way she did;--a great fool."

"She stayed longer than I thought she would, ma'am."

"I'm not asking you what you thought. I'll tell you what. Do you send

Giles to Winslow's, and tell them to send in early to-morrow a nice

fore-quarter of lamb. Or it wouldn't hurt you if you went and chose

it yourself."

"It wouldn't hurt me at all, ma'am."

"You get it nice;--not too small, because meat is meat at the price

things are now; and how they ever see butcher's meat at all is more

than I can understand."

"People as has to be careful, ma'am, makes a little go a long way."

"You get it a good size, and take it over in a basket. It won't hurt

you, done up clean in a napkin."

"It won't hurt me at all, ma'am."

"And you give it to Miss Dorothy with my love. Don't you let 'em

think I sent it to my sister-in-law."

"And is that to be all, ma'am?"

"How do you mean all?"

"Because, ma'am, the railway and the carrier would take it quite

ready, and there would be a matter of ten or twelve shillings saved

in the journey."

"Whose affair is that?"

"Not mine, ma'am, of course."

"I believe you are afraid of the trouble, Martha. Or else you don't

like going because they're poor."

"It ain't fair, ma'am, of you to say so;--that it ain't. All I ask

is,--is that to be all? When I've giv'em the lamb, am I just to come

away straight, or am I to say anything? It will look so odd if I'm

just to put down the basket and come away without e'er a word."

"Martha!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You're a fool."

"That's true, too, ma'am."

"It would be like you to go about in that dummy way,--wouldn't

it;--and you that was so fond of Miss Dorothy."

"I was fond of her, ma'am."

"Of course you'll be talking to her;--and why not? And if she should

say anything about returning--"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You can say that you know her old aunt wouldn't,--wouldn't refuse

to have her back again. You can put it your own way, you know. You

needn't make me find words for you."

"But she won't, ma'am."

"Won't what?"

"Won't say anything about returning."

"Yes, she will, Martha, if you talk to her rightly." The servant

didn't reply for awhile, but stood looking out of the window. "You

might as well go about the lamb at once, Martha."

"So I will, ma'am, when I've got it out, all clear."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why,--just this, ma'am. May I tell Miss Dolly straight out that you

want her to come back, and that I've been sent to say so?"

"No, Martha."

"Then how am I to do it, ma'am?"

"Do it out of your own head, just as it comes up at the moment."

"Out of my own head, ma'am?"

"Yes;--just as you feel, you know."

"Just as I feel, ma'am?"

"You understand what I mean, Martha."

"I'll do my best, ma'am, and I can't say no more. And if you scolds

me afterwards, ma'am,--why, of course, I must put up with it."

"But I won't scold you, Martha."

"Then I'll go out to Winslow's about the lamb at once, ma'am."

"Very nice, and not too small, Martha."

Martha went out and ordered the lamb, and packed it as desired quite

clean in a napkin, and fitted it into the basket, and arranged with

Giles Hickbody to carry it down for her early in the morning to the

station, so that she might take the first train to Lessborough. It

was understood that she was to hire a fly at Lessborough to take her

to Nuncombe Putney. Now that she understood the importance of her

mission and was aware that the present she took with her was only

the customary accompaniment of an ambassadress entrusted with a

great mission, Martha said nothing even about the expense. The train

started for Lessborough at seven, and as she was descending from her

room at six, Miss Stanbury, in her flannel dressing-gown, stepped

out of the door of her own room. "Just put this in the basket," said

she, handing a note to her servant. "I thought last night I'd write a

word. Just put it in the basket and say nothing about it." The note

which she sent was as follows:--

The Close, 8th April, 186--.

MY DEAR DOROTHY,--

As Martha talks of going over to pay you a visit, I've

thought that I'd just get her to take you a quarter of

lamb, which is coming in now very nice. I do envy her

going to see you, my dear, for I had gotten somehow to

love to see your pretty face. I'm getting almost strong

again; but Sir Peter, who was here this afternoon, just

calling as a friend, was uncivil enough to say that I'm

too much of an old woman to go out in the east wind. I

told him it didn't much matter;--for the sooner old women

made way for young ones, the better.

I am very desolate and solitary here. But I rather think

that women who don't get married are intended to be

desolate; and perhaps it is better for them, if they

bestow their time and thoughts properly,--as I hope you

do, my dear. A woman with a family of children has almost

too many of the cares of this world, to give her mind as

she ought to the other. What shall we say then of those

who have no such cares, and yet do not walk uprightly?

Dear Dorothy, be not such a one. For myself, I acknowledge

bitterly the extent of my shortcomings. Much has been

given to me; but if much be expected, how shall I answer

the demand?

I hope I need not tell you that whenever it may suit you

to pay a visit to Exeter, your room will be ready for you,

and there will be a warm welcome. Mrs. MacHugh always asks

after you; and so has Mrs. Clifford. I won't tell you

what Mrs. Clifford said about your colour, because it

would make you vain. The Heavitree affair has all been put

off;--of course you have heard that. Dear, dear, dear! You

know what I think, so I need not repeat it.

Give my respects to your mamma and Priscilla,--and for

yourself, accept the affectionate love of

Your loving old aunt,

JEMIMA STANBURY.

P.S.--If Martha should say anything to you, you may feel

sure that she knows my mind.

Poor old soul. She felt an almost uncontrollable longing to have her

niece back again, and yet she told herself that she was bound not

to send a regular invitation, or to suggest an unconditional return.

Dorothy had herself decided to take her departure, and if she chose

to remain away,--so it must be. She, Miss Stanbury, could not demean

herself by renewing her invitation. She read her letter before she

added to it the postscript, and felt that it was too solemn in its

tone to suggest to Dorothy that which she wished to suggest. She had

been thinking much of her own past life when she wrote those words

about the state of an unmarried woman, and was vacillating between

two minds,--whether it were better for a young woman to look forward

to the cares and affections, and perhaps hard usage, of a married

life; or to devote herself to the easier and safer course of an

old maid's career. But an old maid is nothing if she be not kind

and good. She acknowledged that, and, acknowledging it, added the

postscript to her letter. What though there was a certain blow

to her pride in the writing of it! She did tell herself that in

thus referring her niece to Martha for an expression of her own

mind,--after that conversation which she and Martha had had in the

parlour,--she was in truth eating her own words. But the postscript

was written, and though she took the letter up with her to her own

room in order that she might alter the words if she repented of them

in the night, the letter was sent as it was written,--postscript and

all.

She spent the next day with very sober thoughts. When Mrs. MacHugh

called upon her and told her that there were rumours afloat in

Exeter that the marriage between Camilla French and Mr. Gibson would

certainly be broken off, in spite of all purchases that had been

made, she merely remarked that they were two poor, feckless things,

who didn't know their own minds. "Camilla knows hers plain enough,"

said Mrs. MacHugh sharply; but even this did not give Miss Stanbury

any spirit. She waited, and waited patiently, till Martha should

return, thinking of the sweet pink colour which used to come and

go in Dorothy's cheeks,--which she had been wont to observe so

frequently, not knowing that she had observed it and loved it.

CHAPTER LXVII.

RIVER'S COTTAGE.

Three days after Hugh Stanbury's visit to Manchester Street, he wrote

a note to Lady Rowley, telling her of the address at which might be

found both Trevelyan and his son. As Bozzle had acknowledged, facts

are things which may be found out. Hugh had gone to work somewhat

after the Bozzlian fashion, and had found out this fact. "He lives at

a place called River's Cottage, at Willesden," wrote Stanbury. "If

you turn off the Harrow Road to the right, about a mile beyond the

cemetery, you will find the cottage on the left hand side of the lane

about a quarter of a mile from the Harrow Road. I believe you can go

to Willesden by railway, but you had better take a cab from London."

There was much consultation respecting this letter between Lady

Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan, and it was decided that it should not

be shown to Sir Marmaduke. To see her child was at the present

moment the most urgent necessity of the poor mother, and both the

ladies felt that Sir Marmaduke in his wrath might probably impede

rather than assist her in this desire. If told where he might find

Trevelyan, he would probably insist on starting in quest of his

son-in-law himself, and the distance between the mother and her child

might become greater in consequence, instead of less. There were many

consultations; and the upshot of these was, that Lady Rowley and her

daughter determined to start for Willesden without saying anything to

Sir Marmaduke of the purpose they had in hand. When Emily expressed

her conviction that if Trevelyan should be away from home they would

probably be able to make their way into the house,--so as to see the

child, Lady Rowley with some hesitation acknowledged that such might

be the case. But the child's mother said nothing to her own mother of

a scheme which she had half formed of so clinging to her boy that no

human power should separate them.

They started in a cab, as advised by Stanbury, and were driven to a

point on the road from which a lane led down to Willesden, passing by

River's Cottage. They asked as they came along, and met no difficulty

in finding their way. At the point on the road indicated, there was

a country inn for hay-waggoners, and here Lady Rowley proposed that

they should leave their cab, urging that it might be best to call at

the cottage in the quietest manner possible; but Mrs. Trevelyan, with

her scheme in her head for the recapture of their child, begged that

the cab might go on;--and thus they were driven up to the door.

River's Cottage was not a prepossessing abode. It was a new building,

of light-coloured bricks, with a door in the middle and one window

on each side. Over the door was a stone tablet, bearing the

name,--River's Cottage. There was a little garden between the

road and the house, across which there was a straight path to the

door. In front of one window was a small shrub, generally called

a puzzle-monkey, and in front of the other was a variegated laurel.

There were two small morsels of green turf, and a distant view round

the corner of the house of a row of cabbage stumps. If Trevelyan were

living there, he had certainly come down in the world since the days

in which he had occupied the house in Curzon Street. The two ladies

got out of the cab, and slowly walked across the little garden. Mrs.

Trevelyan was dressed in black, and she wore a thick veil. She had

altogether been unable to make up her mind as to what should be her

conduct to her husband should she see him. That must be governed by

circumstances as they might occur. Her visit was made not to him, but

to her boy.

The door was opened before they knocked, and Trevelyan himself was

standing in the narrow passage. Lady Rowley was the first to speak.

"Louis," she said, "I have brought your wife to see you."

"Who told you that I was here?" he asked, still standing in the

passage.

"Of course a mother would find out where was her child," said Lady

Rowley.

"You should not have come here without notice," he said. "I was

careful to let you know the conditions on which you should come."

"You do not mean that I shall not see my child," said the mother.

"Oh, Louis, you will let me see him."

Trevelyan hesitated a moment, still keeping his position firmly in

the doorway. By this time an old woman, decently dressed and of

comfortable appearance, had taken her place behind him, and behind

her was a slip of a girl about fifteen years of age. This was the

owner of River's Cottage and her daughter, and all the inhabitants

of the cottage were now there, standing in the passage. "I ought not

to let you see him," said Trevelyan; "you have intruded upon me in

coming here! I had not wished to see you here,--till you had complied

with the order I had given you." What a meeting between a husband and

a wife who had not seen each other now for many months,--between a

husband and a wife who were still young enough not to have outlived

the first impulses of their early love! He still stood there guarding

the way, and had not even put out his hand to greet her. He was

guarding the way lest she should, without his permission, obtain

access to her own child! She had not removed her veil, and now she

hardly dared to step over the threshold of her husband's house. At

this moment, she perceived that the woman behind was pointing to

the room on the left, as the cottage was entered, and Emily at once

understood that her boy was there. Then at that moment she heard her

son's voice, as, in his solitude, the child began to cry. "I must go

in," she said; "I will go in;" and rushing on she tried to push aside

her husband. Her mother aided her, nor did Trevelyan attempt to stop

her with violence, and in a moment she was kneeling at the foot of a

small sofa, with her child in her arms. "I had not intended to hinder

you," said Trevelyan, "but I require from you a promise that you will

not attempt to remove him."

"Why should she not take him home with her?" said Lady Rowley.

"Because I will not have it so," replied Trevelyan. "Because I choose

that it should be understood that I am to be the master of my own

affairs."

Mrs. Trevelyan had now thrown aside her bonnet and her veil, and was

covering her child with caresses. The poor little fellow, whose mind

had been utterly dismayed by the events which had occurred to him

since his capture, though he returned her kisses, did so in fear

and trembling. And he was still sobbing, rubbing his eyes with his

knuckles, and by no means yielding himself with his whole heart to

his mother's tenderness,--as she would have had him do. "Louey,"

she said, whispering to him, "you know mamma; you haven't forgotten

mamma?" He half murmured some little infantine word through his sobs,

and then put his cheek up to be pressed against his mother's face.

"Louey will never, never forget his own mamma; will he, Louey?" The

poor boy had no assurances to give, and could only raise his cheek

again to be kissed. In the meantime Lady Rowley and Trevelyan were

standing by, not speaking to each other, regarding the scene in

silence.

[Illustration: "You haven't forgotten Mamma?"]

She,--Lady Rowley,--could see that he was frightfully altered in

appearance, even since the day on which she had so lately met him

in the City. His cheeks were thin and haggard, and his eyes were

deep and very bright,--and he moved them quickly from side to side,

as though ever suspecting something. He seemed to be smaller in

stature,--withered, as it were, as though he had melted away. And

though he stood looking upon his wife and child, he was not for a

moment still. He would change the posture of his hands and arms,

moving them quickly with little surreptitious jerks, and would

shuffle his feet upon the floor, almost without altering his

position. His clothes hung about him, and his linen was soiled and

worn. Lady Rowley noticed this especially, as he had been a man

peculiarly given to neatness of apparel. He was the first to speak.

"You have come down here in a cab?" said he.

"Yes,--in a cab, from London," said Lady Rowley.

"Of course you will go back in it? You cannot stay here. There is no

accommodation. It is a wretched place, but it suits the boy. As for

me, all places are now alike."

"Louis," said his wife, springing up from her knees, coming to him,

and taking his right hand between both her own, "you will let me take

him with me. I know you will let me take him with me."

"I cannot do that, Emily; it would be wrong."

"Wrong to restore a child to his mother? Oh, Louis, think of it. What

must my life be without him,--or you?"

"Don't talk of me. It is too late for that."

"Not if you will be reasonable, Louis, and listen to me. Oh, heavens,

how ill you are!" As she said this she drew nearer to him, so that

her face was almost close to his. "Louis, come back; come back, and

let it all be forgotten. It shall be a dream, a horrid dream, and

nobody shall speak of it." He left his hand within hers and stood

looking into her face. He was well aware that his life since he had

left her had been one long hour of misery. There had been to him no

alleviation, no comfort, no consolation. He had not a friend left to

him. Even his satellite, the policeman, was becoming weary of him and

manifestly suspicious. The woman with whom he was now lodging, and

whose resources were infinitely benefited by his payments to her, had

already thrown out hints that she was afraid of him. And as he looked

at his wife, he knew that he loved her. Everything for him now was

hot and dry and poor and bitter. How sweet would it be again to sit

with her soft hand in his, to feel her cool brow against his own, to

have the comfort of her care, and to hear the music of loving words!

The companionship of his wife had once been to him everything in the

world; but now, for many months past, he had known no companion. She

bade him come to her, and look upon all this trouble as a dream not

to be mentioned. Could it be possible that it should be so, and that

they might yet be happy together,--perhaps in some distant country,

where the story of all their misery might not be known? He felt all

this truly and with a keen accuracy. If he were mad, he was not all

mad. "I will tell you of nothing that is past," said she, hanging to

him, and coming still nearer to him, and embracing his arm.

Could she have condescended to ask him not to tell her of the

past;--had it occurred to her so to word her request,--she might

perhaps have prevailed. But who can say how long the tenderness of

his heart would have saved him from further outbreak;--and whether

such prevailing on her part would have been of permanent service? As

it was, her words wounded him in that spot of his inner self which

was most sensitive,--on that spot from whence had come all his fury.

A black cloud came upon his brow, and he made an effort to withdraw

himself from her grasp. It was necessary to him that she should in

some fashion own that he had been right, and now she was promising

him that she would not tell him of his fault! He could not thus

swallow down all the convictions by which he had fortified himself to

bear the misfortunes which he had endured. Had he not quarrelled with

every friend he possessed on this score; and should he now stultify

himself in all those quarrels by admitting that he had been cruel,

unjust, and needlessly jealous? And did not truth demand of him that

he should cling to his old assurances? Had she not been disobedient,

ill-conditioned, and rebellious? Had she not received the man, both

him personally and his letters, after he had explained to her that

his honour demanded that it should not be so? How could he come into

such terms as those now proposed to him, simply because he longed

to enjoy the rich sweetness of her soft hand, to feel the fragrance

of her breath, and to quench the heat of his forehead in the cool

atmosphere of her beauty? "Why have you driven me to this by your

intercourse with that man?" he said. "Why, why, why did you do it?"

She was still clinging to him. "Louis," she said, "I am your wife."

"Yes; you are my wife."

"And will you still believe such evil of me without any cause?"

"There has been cause,--horrible cause. You must

repent,--repent,--repent."

"Heaven help me," said the woman, falling back from him, and

returning to the boy who was now seated in Lady Rowley's lap. "Mamma,

do you speak to him. What can I say? Would he think better of me were

I to own myself to have been guilty, when there has been no guilt, no

slightest fault? Does he wish me to purchase my child by saying that

I am not fit to be his mother?"

"Louis," said Lady Rowley, "if any man was ever wrong, mad, madly

mistaken, you are so now."

"Have you come out here to accuse me again, as you did before in

London?" he asked. "Is that the way in which you and she intend to

let the past be, as she says, like a dream? She tells me that I am

ill. It is true. I am ill,--and she is killing me, killing me, by her

obstinacy."

"What would you have me do?" said the wife, again rising from her

child.

"Acknowledge your transgressions, and say that you will amend your

conduct for the future."

"Mamma, mamma,--what shall I say to him?"

"Who can speak to a man that is beside himself?" replied Lady Rowley.

"I am not so beside myself as yet, Lady Rowley, but that I know how

to guard my own honour and to protect my own child. I have told you,

Emily, the terms on which you can come back to me. You had better now

return to your mother's house; and if you wish again to have a house

of your own, and your husband, and your boy, you know by what means

you may acquire them. For another week I shall remain here;--after

that I shall remove far from hence."

"And where will you go, Louis?"

"As yet I know not. To Italy I think,--or perhaps to America. It

matters little where for me."

"And will Louey be taken with you?"

"Certainly he will go with me. To strive to bring him up so that he

may be a happier man than his father is all that there is now left

for me in life." Mrs. Trevelyan had now got the boy in her arms, and

her mother was seated by her on the sofa. Trevelyan was standing away

from them, but so near the door that no sudden motion on their part

would enable them to escape with the boy without his interposition.

It now again occurred to the mother to carry off her prize in

opposition to her husband;--but she had no scheme to that effect laid

with her mother, and she could not reconcile herself to the idea of

a contest with him in which personal violence would be necessary.

The woman of the house had, indeed, seemed to sympathise with her,

but she could not dare in such a matter to trust to assistance from a

stranger. "I do not wish to be uncourteous," said Trevelyan, "but if

you have no assurance to give me, you had better--leave me."

Then there came to be a bargaining about time, and the poor woman

begged almost on her knees that she might be allowed to take her

child up-stairs and be with him alone for a few minutes. It seemed

to her that she had not seen her boy till she had had him to herself,

in absolute privacy, till she had kissed his limbs, and had her hand

upon his smooth back, and seen that he was white and clean and bright

as he had ever been. And the bargain was made. She was asked to

pledge her word that she would not take him out of the house,--and

she pledged her word, feeling that there was no strength in her for

that action which she had meditated. He, knowing that he might still

guard the passage at the bottom of the stairs, allowed her to go with

the boy to his bedroom, while he remained below with Lady Rowley. A

quarter of an hour was allowed to her, and she humbly promised that

she would return when that time was expired.

Trevelyan held the door open for her as she went, and kept it open

during her absence. There was hardly a word said between him and Lady

Rowley, but he paced from the passage into the room and from the room

into the passage with his hands behind his back. "It is cruel," he

said once. "It is very cruel."

"It is you that are cruel," said Lady Rowley.

"Of course;--of course. That is natural from you. I expect that from

you." To this she made no answer, and he did not open his lips again.

After a while Mrs. Trevelyan called to her mother, and Lady Rowley

was allowed to go up-stairs. The quarter of an hour was of course

greatly stretched, and all the time Trevelyan continued to pace in

and out of the room. He was patient, for he did not summon them; but

went on pacing backwards and forwards, looking now and again to see

that the cab was at its place,--that no deceit was being attempted,

no second act of kidnapping being perpetrated. At last the two ladies

came down the stairs, and the boy was with them,--and the woman of

the house.

"Louis," said the wife, going quickly up to her husband, "I will do

anything, if you will give me my child."

"What will you do?"

"Anything;--say what you want. He is all the world to me, and I

cannot live if he be taken from me."

"Acknowledge that you have been wrong."

"But how;--in what words;--how am I to speak it?"

"Say that you have sinned;--and that you will sin no more."

"Sinned, Louis;--as the woman did,--in the Scripture? Would you have

me say that?"

"He cannot think that it is so," said Lady Rowley.

But Trevelyan had not understood her. "Lady Rowley, I should have

fancied that my thoughts at any rate were my own. But this is useless

now. The child cannot go with you to-day, nor can you remain here. Go

home and think of what I have said. If then you will do as I would

have you, you shall return."

With many embraces, with promises of motherly love, and with prayers

for love in return, the poor woman did at last leave the house, and

return to the cab. As she went there was a doubt on her own mind

whether she should ask to kiss her husband; but he made no sign, and

she at last passed out without any mark of tenderness. He stood by

the cab as they entered it, and closed the door upon them, and then

went slowly back to his room. "My poor bairn," he said to the boy;

"my poor bairn."

"Why for mamma go?" sobbed the child.

"Mamma goes--; oh, heaven and earth, why should she go? She goes

because her spirit is obstinate, and she will not bend. She is

stiff-necked, and will not submit herself. But Louey must love mamma

always;--and mamma some day will come back to him, and be good to

him."

"Mamma is good,--always," said the child. Trevelyan had intended on

this very afternoon to have gone up to town,--to transact business

with Bozzle; for he still believed, though the aspect of the man was

bitter to him as wormwood, that Bozzle was necessary to him in all

his business. And he still made appointments with the man, sometimes

at Stony Walk, in the Borough, and sometimes at the tavern in

Poulter's Court, even though Bozzle not unfrequently neglected to

attend the summons of his employer. And he would go to his banker's

and draw out money, and then walk about the crowded lanes of the

City, and afterwards return to his desolate lodgings at Willesden,

thinking that he had been transacting business,--and that this

business was exacted from him by the unfortunate position of his

affairs. But now he gave up his journey. His retreat had been

discovered; and there came upon him at once a fear that if he left

the house his child would be taken. His landlady told him on this

very day that the boy ought to be sent to his mother, and had made

him understand that it would not suit her to find a home any longer

for one who was so singular in his proceedings. He believed that his

child would be given up at once, if he were not there to guard it.

He stayed at home, therefore, turning in his mind many schemes. He

had told his wife that he should go either to Italy or to America at

once; but in doing so he had had no formed plan in his head. He had

simply imagined at the moment that such a threat would bring her to

submission. But now it became a question whether he would do better

than go to America. He suggested to himself that he should go to

Canada, and fix himself with his boy on some remote farm,--far away

from any city; and would then invite his wife to join him if she

would. She was too obstinate, as he told himself, ever to yield,

unless she should be absolutely softened and brought down to the

ground by the loss of her child. What would do this so effectually

as the interposition of the broad ocean between him and her? He sat

thinking of this for the rest of the day, and Louey was left to the

charge of the mistress of River's Cottage.

"Do you think he believes it, mamma?" Mrs. Trevelyan said to her

mother when they had already made nearly half their journey home in

the cab. There had been nothing spoken hitherto between them, except

some half-formed words of affection intended for consolation to the

young mother in her great affliction.

"He does not know what he believes, dearest."

"You heard what he said. I was to own that I had--sinned."

"Sinned;--yes; because you will not obey him like a slave. That is

sin--to him."

"But I asked him, mamma. Did you not hear me? I could not say

the word plainer,--but I asked him whether he meant that sin.

He must have known, and he would not answer me. And he spoke of

my--transgression. Mamma, if he believed that, he would not let me

come back at all."

"He did not believe it, Emily."

"Could he possibly then so accuse me,--the mother of his child! If

his heart be utterly hard and false towards me, if it is possible

that he should be cruel to me with such cruelty as that,--still he

must love his boy. Why did he not answer me, and say that he did not

think it?"

"Simply because his reason has left him."

"But if he be mad, mamma, ought we to leave him like that? And, then,

did you see his eyes, and his face, and his hands? Did you observe

how thin he is,--and his back, how bent? And his clothes,--how they

were torn and soiled. It cannot be right that he should be left like

that."

"We will tell papa when we get home," said Lady Rowley, who was

herself beginning to be somewhat frightened by what she had seen.

It is all very well to declare that a friend is mad when one simply

desires to justify one's self in opposition to that friend;--but

the matter becomes much more serious when evidence of the friend's

insanity becomes true and circumstantial. "I certainly think that a

physician should see him," continued Lady Rowley. On their return

home Sir Marmaduke was told of what had occurred, and there was a

long family discussion in which it was decided that Lady Milborough

should be consulted, as being the oldest friend of Louis Trevelyan

himself with whom they were acquainted. Trevelyan had relatives of

his own name living in Cornwall; but Mrs. Trevelyan herself had never

even met one of that branch of the family.

Sir Marmaduke, however, resolved that he himself would go out and

see his son-in-law. He too had called Trevelyan mad, but he did not

believe that the madness was of such a nature as to interfere with

his own duties in punishing the man who had ill used his daughter. He

would at any rate see Trevelyan himself;--but of this he said nothing

either to his wife or to his child.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

MAJOR MAGRUDER'S COMMITTEE.

[Illustration]

Sir Marmaduke could not go out to Willesden on the morning after Lady

Rowley's return from River's Cottage, because on that day he was

summoned to attend at twelve o'clock before a Committee of the House

of Commons, to give his evidence and the fruit of his experience as

to the government of British colonies generally; and as he went down

to the House in a cab from Manchester Street he thoroughly wished

that his friend Colonel Osborne had not been so efficacious in

bringing him home. The task before him was one which he thoroughly

disliked, and of which he was afraid. He dreaded the inquisitors

before whom he was to appear, and felt that though he was called

there to speak as a master of his art of governing, he would in truth

be examined as a servant,--and probably as a servant who did not

know his business. Had his sojourn at home been in other respects

happy, he might have been able to balance the advantage against the

inquiry;--but there was no such balancing for him now. And, moreover,

the expense of his own house in Manchester Street was so large that

this journey, in a pecuniary point of view, would be of but little

service to him. So he went down to the House in an unhappy mood; and

when he shook hands in one of the passages with his friend Osborne

who was on the Committee, there was very little cordiality in his

manner. "This is the most ungrateful thing I ever knew," said the

Colonel to himself; "I have almost disgraced myself by having this

fellow brought home; and now he quarrels with me because that idiot,

his son-in-law, has quarrelled with his wife." And Colonel Osborne

really did feel that he was a martyr to the ingratitude of his

friend.

The Committee had been convoked by the House in compliance with the

eager desires of a certain ancient pundit of the constitution, who

had been for many years a member, and who had been known as a stern

critic of our colonial modes of government. To him it certainly

seemed that everything that was, was bad,--as regarded our national

dependencies. But this is so usually the state of mind of all

parliamentary critics, it is so much a matter of course that the

members who take up the army or the navy, guns, India, our relations

with Spain, or workhouse management, should find everything to

be bad, rotten, and dishonest, that the wrath of the member for

Killicrankie against colonial peculation and idleness, was not

thought much of in the open House. He had been at the work for years,

and the Colonial Office were so used to it that they rather liked

him. He had made himself free of the office, and the clerks were

always glad to see him. It was understood that he said bitter things

in the House,--that was Major Magruder's line of business; but he

could be quite pleasant when he was asking questions of a private

secretary, or telling the news of the day to a senior clerk. As he

was now between seventy and eighty, and had been at the work for at

least twenty years, most of those concerned had allowed themselves

to think that he would ride his hobby harmlessly to the day of his

parliamentary death. But the drop from a house corner will hollow

a stone by its constancy, and Major Magruder at last persuaded the

House to grant him a Committee of Inquiry. Then there came to be

serious faces at the Colonial Office, and all the little pleasantries

of a friendly opposition were at an end. It was felt that the battle

must now become a real fight, and Secretary and Under-Secretary

girded up their loins.

Major Magruder was chairman of his own committee, and being a man

of a laborious turn of mind, much given to blue-books, very patient,

thoroughly conversant with the House, and imbued with a strong belief

in the efficacy of parliamentary questionings to carry a point, if

not to elicit a fact, had a happy time of it during this session.

He was a man who always attended the House from 4 p.m. to the time

of its breaking up, and who never missed a division. The slight

additional task of sitting four hours in a committee-room three days

a week, was only a delight the more,--especially as during those four

hours he could occupy the post of chairman. Those who knew Major

Magruder well did not doubt but that the Committee would sit for many

weeks, and that the whole theory of colonial government, or rather of

imperial control supervising such government, would be tested to the

very utmost. Men who had heard the old Major maunder on for years

past on his pet subject, hardly knew how much vitality would be found

in him when his maundering had succeeded in giving him a committee.

A Governor from one of the greater colonies had already been under

question for nearly a week, and was generally thought to have come

out of the fire unscathed by the flames of the Major's criticism.

This Governor had been a picked man, and he had made it appear that

the control of Downing Street was never more harsh and seldom less

refreshing and beautifying than a spring shower in April. No other

lands under the sun were so blest, in the way of government, as were

the colonies with which he had been acquainted; and, as a natural

consequence, their devotion and loyalty to the mother country were

quite a passion with them. Now the Major had been long of a mind that

one or two colonies had better simply be given up to other nations,

which were more fully able to look after them than was England, and

that three or four more should be allowed to go clear,--costing

England nothing, and owing England nothing. But the well-chosen

Governor who had now been before the Committee, had rather staggered

the Major,--and things altogether were supposed to be looking up for

the Colonial Office.

And now had come the day of Sir Marmaduke's martyrdom. He was first

requested, with most urbane politeness, to explain the exact nature

of the government which he exercised in the Mandarins. Now it

certainly was the case that the manner in which the legislative and

executive authorities were intermingled in the affairs of these

islands, did create a complication which it was difficult for any man

to understand, and very difficult indeed for any man to explain to

others. There was a Court of Chancery, so called, which Sir Marmaduke

described as a little parliament. When he was asked whether the court

exercised legislative or executive functions, he said at first that

it exercised both, and then that it exercised neither. He knew that

it consisted of nine men, of whom five were appointed by the colony

and four by the Crown. Yet he declared that the Crown had the control

of the court;--which, in fact, was true enough no doubt, as the five

open members were not perhaps, all of them, immaculate patriots; but

on this matter poor Sir Marmaduke was very obscure. When asked who

exercised the patronage of the Crown in nominating the four members,

he declared that the four members exercised it themselves. Did he

appoint them? No; he never appointed anybody himself. He consulted

the Court of Chancery for everything. At last it came out that the

chief justice of the islands, and three other officers, always sat in

the court;--but whether it was required by the constitution of the

islands that this should be so, Sir Marmaduke did not know. It had

worked well; that was to say, everybody had complained of it, but

he, Sir Marmaduke, would not recommend any change. What he thought

best was that the Colonial Secretary should send out his orders, and

that the people in the colonies should mind their business and grow

coffee. When asked what would be the effect upon the islands, under

his scheme of government, if an incoming Colonial Secretary should

change the policy of his predecessor, he said that he didn't think it

would much matter if the people did not know anything about it.

In this way the Major had a field day, and poor Sir Marmaduke

was much discomfited. There was present on the Committee a young

Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who with much attention had studied

the subject of the Court of Chancery in the Mandarins, and who had

acknowledged to his superiors in the office that it certainly was of

all legislative assemblies the most awkward and complicated. He did

what he could, by questions judiciously put, to pull Sir Marmaduke

through his difficulties; but the unfortunate Governor had more than

once lost his temper in answering the chairman; and in his heavy

confusion was past the power of any Under-Secretary, let him be ever

so clever, to pull him through. Colonel Osborne sat by the while and

asked no questions. He had been put on the Committee as a respectable

dummy; but there was not a member sitting there who did not know that

Sir Marmaduke had been brought home as his friend;--and some of them,

no doubt, had whispered that this bringing home of Sir Marmaduke

was part of the payment made by the Colonel for the smiles of the

Governor's daughter. But no one alluded openly to the inefficiency of

the evidence given. No one asked why a Governor so incompetent had

been sent to them. No one suggested that a job had been done. There

are certain things of which opposition members of Parliament complain

loudly;--and there are certain other things as to which they are

silent. The line between these things is well known; and should an

ill-conditioned, a pig-headed, an underbred, or an ignorant member

not understand this line and transgress it, by asking questions which

should not be asked, he is soon put down from the Treasury bench, to

the great delight of the whole House.

Sir Marmaduke, after having been questioned for an entire afternoon,

left the House with extreme disgust. He was so convinced of his own

failure, that he felt that his career as a Colonial Governor must be

over. Surely they would never let him go back to his islands after

such an exposition as he had made of his own ignorance. He hurried

off into a cab, and was ashamed to be seen of men. But the members

of the Committee thought little or nothing about it. The Major, and

those who sided with him, had been anxious to entrap their witness

into contradictions and absurdities, for the furtherance of their own

object; and for the furtherance of theirs, the Under-Secretary from

the Office and the supporters of Government had endeavoured to defend

their man. But, when the affair was over, if no special admiration

had been elicited for Sir Marmaduke, neither was there expressed

any special reprobation. The Major carried on his Committee over

six weeks, and succeeded in having his blue-book printed; but, as

a matter of course, nothing further came of it; and the Court of

Chancery in the Mandarin Islands still continues to hold its own,

and to do its work, in spite of the absurdities displayed in its

construction. Major Magruder has had his day of success, and now

feels that Othello's occupation is gone. He goes no more to the

Colonial Office, lives among his friends on the memories of his

Committee,--not always to their gratification,--and is beginning to

think that as his work is done he may as well resign Killicrankie to

some younger politician. Poor Sir Marmaduke remembered his defeat

with soreness long after it had been forgotten by all others who had

been present, and was astonished when he found that the journals of

the day, though they did in some curt fashion report the proceedings

of the Committee, never uttered a word of censure against him, as

they had not before uttered a word of praise for that pearl of a

Governor who had been examined before him.

On the following morning he went to the Colonial Office by

appointment, and then he saw the young Irish Under-Secretary whom he

had so much dreaded. Nothing could be more civil than was the young

Irish Under-Secretary, who told him that he had better of course stay

in town till the Committee was over, though it was not probable that

he would be wanted again. When the Committee had done its work he

would be allowed to remain six weeks on service to prepare for his

journey back. If he wanted more time after that he could ask for

leave of absence. So Sir Marmaduke left the Colonial Office with a

great weight off his mind, and blessed that young Irish Secretary as

he went.

CHAPTER LXIX.

SIR MARMADUKE AT WILLESDEN.

On the next day Sir Marmaduke purposed going to Willesden. He was in

great doubt whether or no he would first consult that very eminent

man Dr. Trite Turbury, as to the possibility, and,--if possible,--as

to the expediency, of placing Mr. Trevelyan under some control. But

Sir Marmaduke, though he would repeatedly declare that his son-in-law

was mad, did not really believe in this madness. He did not, that

is, believe that Trevelyan was so mad as to be fairly exempt from

the penalties of responsibility; and he was therefore desirous of

speaking his own mind out fully to the man, and, as it were, of

having his own personal revenge, before he might be deterred by the

interposition of medical advice. He resolved therefore that he would

not see Sir Trite Turbury, at any rate till he had come back from

Willesden. He also went down in a cab, but he left the cab at the

public-house at the corner of the road, and walked to the cottage.

When he asked whether Mr. Trevelyan was at home, the woman of

the house hesitated and then said that her lodger was out. "I

particularly wish to see him," said Sir Marmaduke, feeling that the

woman was lying to him. "But he ain't to be seen, sir," said the

woman. "I know he is at home," said Sir Marmaduke. But the argument

was soon cut short by the appearance of Trevelyan behind the woman's

shoulder.

"I am here, Sir Marmaduke Rowley," said Trevelyan. "If you wish to

see me you may come in. I will not say that you are welcome, but you

can come in." Then the woman retired, and Sir Marmaduke followed

Trevelyan into the room in which Lady Rowley and Emily had been

received; but the child was not now in the chamber.

"What are these charges that I hear against my daughter?" said Sir

Marmaduke, rushing at once into the midst of his indignation.

"I do not know what charges you have heard."

"You have put her away."

"In strict accuracy that is not correct, Sir Marmaduke."

"But she is put away. She is in my house now because you have no

house of your own for her. Is not that so? And when I came home she

was staying with her uncle, because you had put her away. And what

was the meaning of her being sent down into Devonshire? What has she

done? I am her father, and I expect to have an answer."

"You shall have an answer, certainly."

"And a true one. I will have no hocus-pocus, no humbug, no Jesuitry."

"Have you come here to insult me, Sir Marmaduke? Because, if so,

there shall be an end to this interview at once."

"There shall not be an end;--by G----, no, not till I have heard what

is the meaning of all this. Do you know what people are saying of

you;--that you are mad, and that you must be locked up, and your

child taken away from you, and your property?"

"Who are the people that say so? Yourself;--and, perhaps, Lady

Rowley? Does my wife say so? Does she think that I am mad? She did

not think so on Thursday, when she prayed that she might be allowed

to come back and live with me."

"And you would not let her come?"

"Pardon me," said Trevelyan. "I would wish that she should come,--but

it must be on certain conditions."

"What I want to know is why she was turned out of your house?"

"She was not turned out."

"What has she done that she should be punished?" urged Sir Marmaduke,

who was unable to arrange his questions with the happiness which had

distinguished Major Magruder. "I insist upon knowing what it is that

you lay to her charge. I am her father, and I have a right to know.

She has been barbarously, shamefully ill-used, and by G---- I will

know."

"You have come here to bully me, Sir Marmaduke Rowley."

"I have come here, sir, to do the duty of a parent to his child;

to protect my poor girl against the cruelty of a husband who in

an unfortunate hour was allowed to take her from her home. I will

know the reason why my daughter has been treated as though,--as

though,--as though--"

"Listen to me for a minute," said Trevelyan.

"I am listening."

"I will tell you nothing; I will answer you not a word."

"You will not answer me?"

"Not when you come to me in this fashion. My wife is my wife, and

my claim to her is nearer and closer than is yours, who are her

father. She is the mother of my child, and the only being in the

world,--except that child,--whom I love. Do you think that with

such motives on my part for tenderness towards her, for loving care,

for the most anxious solicitude, that I can be made more anxious,

more tender, more loving by coarse epithets from you? I am the

most miserable being under the sun because our happiness has been

interrupted, and is it likely that such misery should be cured by

violent words and gestures? If your heart is wrung for her, so is

mine. If she be much to you, she is more to me. She came here the

other day, almost as a stranger, and I thought that my heart would

have burst beneath its weight of woe. What can you do that can add

an ounce to the burden that I bear? You may as well leave me,--or at

least be quiet."

Sir Marmaduke had stood and listened to him, and he, too, was so

struck by the altered appearance of the man that the violence of his

indignation was lessened by the pity which he could not suppress.

When Trevelyan spoke of his wretchedness, it was impossible not to

believe him. He was as wretched a being to look at as it might have

been possible to find. His contracted cheeks, and lips always open,

and eyes glowing in their sunken caverns, told a tale which even

Sir Marmaduke, who was not of nature quick in deciphering such

stories, could not fail to read. And then the twitching motion of

the man's hands, and the restless shuffling of his feet, produced a

nervous feeling that if some remedy were not applied quickly, some

alleviation given to the misery of the suffering wretch, human power

would be strained too far, and the man would break to pieces,--or

else the mind of the man. Sir Marmaduke, during his journey in the

cab, had resolved that, old as he was, he would take this sinner

by the throat, this brute who had striven to stain his daughter's

name,--and would make him there and then acknowledge his own

brutality. But it was now very manifest to Sir Marmaduke that there

could be no taking by the throat in this case. He could not have

brought himself to touch the poor, weak, passionate creature before

him. Indeed, even the fury of his words was stayed, and after that

last appeal he stormed no more. "But what is to be the end of it?" he

said.

"Who can tell? Who can say? She can tell. She can put an end to it

all. She has but to say a word, and I will devote my life to her. But

that word must be spoken." As he said this, he dashed his hand upon

the table, and looked up with an air that would have been comic with

its assumed magnificence had it not been for the true tragedy of the

occasion.

"You had better, at any rate, let her have her child for the

present."

"No;--my boy shall go with me. She may go, too, if she pleases, but

my boy shall certainly go with me. If I had put her from me, as you

said just now, it might have been otherwise. But she shall be as

welcome to me as flowers in May,--as flowers in May! She shall be as

welcome to me as the music of heaven."

Sir Marmaduke felt that he had nothing more to urge. He had

altogether abandoned that idea of having his revenge at the cost of

the man's throat, and was quite convinced that reason could have

no power with him. He was already thinking that he would go away,

straight to his lawyer, so that some step might be taken at once to

stop, if possible, the taking away of the boy to America, when the

lock of the door was gently turned, and the landlady entered the

room.

"You will excuse me, sir," said the woman, "but if you be anything to

this gentleman--"

"Mrs. Fuller, leave the room," said Trevelyan. "I and the gentleman

are engaged."

"I see you be engaged, and I do beg pardon. I ain't one as would

intrude wilful, and, as for listening, or the likes of that, I scorn

it. But if this gentleman be anything to you, Mr. Trevelyan--"

"I am his wife's father," said Sir Marmaduke.

"Like enough. I was thinking perhaps so. His lady was down here on

Thursday,--as sweet a lady as any gentleman need wish to stretch by

his side."

"Mrs. Fuller," said Trevelyan, marching up towards her, "I will not

have this, and I desire that you will retire from my room."

But Mrs. Fuller escaped round the table, and would not be banished.

She got round the table, and came closely opposite to Sir Marmaduke.

"I don't want to say nothing out of my place, sir," said she, "but

something ought to be done. He ain't fit to be left to hisself,--not

alone,--not as he is at present. He ain't, indeed, and I wouldn't be

doing my duty if I didn't say so. He has them sweats at night as'd be

enough to kill any man; and he eats nothing, and he don't do nothing;

and as for that poor little boy as is now in my own bed upstairs, if

it wasn't that I and my Bessy is fond of children, I don't know what

would become of that boy."

Trevelyan, finding it impossible to get rid of her, had stood

quietly, while he listened to her. "She has been good to my child,"

he said. "I acknowledge it. As for myself, I have not been well. It

is true. But I am told that travel will set me on my feet again.

Change of air will do it." Not long since he had been urging the

wretchedness of his own bodily health as a reason why his wife

should yield to him; but now, when his sickness was brought as a

charge against him,--was adduced as a reason why his friends should

interfere, and look after him, and concern themselves in his affairs,

he saw at once that it was necessary that he should make little of

his ailments.

"Would it not be best, Trevelyan, that you should come with me to a

doctor?" said Sir Marmaduke.

"No;--no. I have my own doctor. That is, I know the course which

I should follow. This place, though it is good for the boy, has

disagreed with me, and my life has not been altogether pleasant;--I

may say, by no means pleasant. Troubles have told upon me, but change

of air will mend it all."

"I wish you would come with me, at once, to London. You shall come

back, you know. I will not detain you."

"Thank you,--no. I will not trouble you. That will do, Mrs. Fuller.

You have intended to do your duty, no doubt, and now you can go."

Whereupon Mrs. Fuller did go. "I am obliged for your care, Sir

Marmaduke, but I can really do very well without troubling you."

"You cannot suppose, Trevelyan, that we can allow things to go on

like this."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Well;--I shall take advice. I shall go to a lawyer,--and to a

doctor, and perhaps to the Lord Chancellor, and all that kind of

thing. We can't let things go on like this."

"You can do as you please," said Trevelyan, "but as you have

threatened me, I must ask you to leave me."

Sir Marmaduke could do no more, and could say no more, and he took

his leave, shaking hands with the man, and speaking to him with a

courtesy which astonished himself. It was impossible to maintain

the strength of his indignation against a poor creature who was so

manifestly unable to guide himself. But when he was in London he

drove at once to the house of Dr. Trite Turbury, and remained there

till the doctor returned from his round of visits. According to

the great authority, there was much still to be done before even

the child could be rescued out of the father's hands. "I can't act

without the lawyers," said Dr. Turbury. But he explained to Sir

Marmaduke what steps should be taken in such a matter.

Trevelyan, in the mean time, clearly understanding that hostile

measures would now be taken against him, set his mind to work to

think how best he might escape at once to America with his boy.

CHAPTER LXX.

SHEWING WHAT NORA ROWLEY THOUGHT ABOUT CARRIAGES.

Sir Marmaduke, on his return home from Dr. Turbury's house, found

that he had other domestic troubles on hand over and above those

arising from his elder daughter's position. Mr. Hugh Stanbury had

been in Manchester Street during his absence, and had asked for him,

and, finding that he was away from home, had told his story to Lady

Rowley. When he had been shown up-stairs all the four daughters had

been with their mother; but he had said a word or two signifying his

desire to speak to Lady Rowley, and the three girls had left the

room. In this way it came to pass that he had to plead his cause

before Nora's mother and her elder sister. He had pleaded it well,

and Lady Rowley's heart had been well disposed towards him; but when

she asked of his house and his home, his answer had been hardly more

satisfactory than that of Alan-a-Dale. There was little that he

could call his own beyond "The blue vault of heaven." Had he saved

any money? No,--not a shilling;--that was to say,--as he himself

expressed it,--nothing that could be called money. He had a few

pounds by him, just to go on with. What was his income? Well--last

year he had made four hundred pounds, and this year he hoped to make

something more. He thought he could see his way plainly to five

hundred a year. Was it permanent; and if not, on what did it depend?

He believed it to be as permanent as most other professional incomes,

but was obliged to confess that, as regarded the source from whence

it was drawn at the present moment, it might be brought to an abrupt

end any day by a disagreement between himself and the editor of the

D. R. Did he think that this was a fixed income? He did think that if

he and the editor of the D. R. were to fall out, he could come across

other editors who would gladly employ him. Would he himself feel safe

in giving his own sister to a man with such an income? In answer to

this question, he started some rather bold doctrines on the subject

of matrimony in general, asserting that safety was not desirable,

that energy, patience, and mutual confidence would be increased by

the excitement of risk, and that in his opinion it behoved young men

and young women to come together and get themselves married, even

though there might be some not remote danger of distress before them.

He admitted that starvation would be disagreeable,--especially for

children, in the eyes of their parents,--but alleged that children

as a rule were not starved, and quoted the Scripture to prove that

honest laborious men were not to be seen begging their bread in

the streets. He was very eloquent, but his eloquence itself was

against him. Both Lady Rowley and Mrs. Trevelyan were afraid of such

advanced opinions; and, although everything was of course to be left,

nominally, to the decision of Sir Marmaduke, they both declared that

they could not recommend Sir Marmaduke to consent. Lady Rowley said

a word as to the expediency of taking Nora back with her to the

Mandarins, pointing out what appeared to her then to be the necessity

of taking Mrs. Trevelyan with them also; and in saying this she

hinted that if Nora were disposed to stand by her engagement, and

Mr. Stanbury equally so disposed, there might be some possibility

of a marriage at a future period. Only in such case, there must be

no correspondence. In answer to this Hugh declared that he regarded

such a scheme as being altogether bad. The Mandarins were so very far

distant that he might as well be engaged to an angel in heaven. Nora,

if she were to go away now, would perhaps never come back again; and

if she did come back, would be an old woman, with hollow cheeks. In

replying to this proposition, he let fall an opinion that Nora was

old enough to judge for herself. He said nothing about her actual

age, and did not venture to plead that the young lady had a legal

right to do as she liked with herself; but he made it manifest that

such an idea was in his mind. In answer to this, Lady Rowley asserted

that Nora was a good girl, and would do as her father told her; but

she did not venture to assert that Nora would give up her engagement.

Lady Rowley at last undertook to speak to Sir Rowley, and to speak

also to her daughter. Hugh was asked for his address, and gave that

of the office of the D. R. He was always to be found there between

three and five; and after that, four times a week, in the reporters'

gallery of the House of Commons. Then he was at some pains to explain

to Lady Rowley that though he attended the reporters' gallery, he

did not report himself. It was his duty to write leading political

articles, and, to enable him to do so, he attended the debates.

Before he went Mrs. Trevelyan thanked him most cordially for the

trouble he had taken in procuring for her the address at Willesden,

and gave him some account of the journey which she and her mother

had made to River's Cottage. He argued with both of them that the

unfortunate man must now be regarded as being altogether out of his

mind, and something was said as to the great wisdom and experience of

Dr. Trite Turbury. Then Hugh Stanbury took his leave; and even Lady

Rowley bade him adieu with kind cordiality. "I don't wonder, mamma,

that Nora should like him," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"That is all very well, my dear, and no doubt he is pleasant, and

manly, and all that;--but really it would be almost like marrying a

beggar."

"For myself," said Mrs. Trevelyan, "if I could begin life again, I do

not think that any temptation would induce me to place myself in a

man's power."

Sir Marmaduke was told of all this on his return home, and he asked

many questions as to the nature of Stanbury's work. When it was

explained to him,--Lady Rowley repeating as nearly as she could all

that Hugh had himself said about it, he expressed his opinion that

writing for a penny newspaper was hardly more safe as a source of

income than betting on horse races. "I don't see that it is wrong,"

said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"I say nothing about wrong. I simply assert that it is uncertain. The

very existence of such a periodical must in itself be most insecure."

Sir Marmaduke, amidst the cares of his government at the Mandarins,

had, perhaps, had no better opportunity of watching what was going on

in the world of letters than had fallen to the lot of Miss Stanbury

at Exeter.

"I think your papa is right," said Lady Rowley.

"Of course I am right. It is out of the question; and so Nora must

be told." He had as yet heard nothing about Mr. Glascock. Had that

misfortune been communicated to him his cup would indeed have been

filled with sorrow to overflowing.

In the evening Nora was closeted with her father. "Nora, my dear,

you must understand, once and for all, that this cannot be," said

Sir Marmaduke. The Governor, when he was not disturbed by outward

circumstances, could assume a good deal of personal dignity, and

could speak, especially to his children, with an air of indisputable

authority.

"What can't be, papa?" said Nora.

Sir Marmaduke perceived at once that there was no indication of

obedience in his daughter's voice, and he prepared himself for

battle. He conceived himself to be very strong, and thought that his

objections were so well founded that no one would deny their truth

and that his daughter had not a leg to stand on. "This, that your

mamma tells me of about Mr. Stanbury. Do you know, my dear, that he

has not a shilling in the world?"

"I know that he has no fortune, papa,--if you mean that."

"And no profession either;--nothing that can be called a profession.

I do not wish to argue it, my dear, because there is no room for

argument. The whole thing is preposterous. I cannot but think ill

of him for having proposed it to you; for he must have known,--must

have known, that a young man without an income cannot be accepted as

a fitting suitor for a gentleman's daughter. As for yourself, I can

only hope that you will get the little idea out of your head very

quickly;--but mamma will speak to you about that. What I want you to

understand from me is this,--that there must be an end to it."

Nora listened to this speech in perfect silence, standing before her

father, and waiting patiently till the last word of it should be

pronounced. Even when he had finished she still paused before she

answered him. "Papa," she said at last, and hesitated again before

she went on.

"Well, my dear."

"I can not give it up."

"But you must give it up."

[Illustration: "But you must give it up," said Sir Marmaduke.]

"No, papa. I would do anything I could for you and mamma, but that is

impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because I love him so dearly."

"That is nonsense. That is what all girls say when they choose to

run against their parents. I tell you that it shall be given up. I

will not have him here. I forbid you to see him. It is quite out of

the question that you should marry such a man. I do hope, Nora, that

you are not going to add to mamma's difficulties and mine by being

obstinate and disobedient." He paused a moment, and then added, "I do

not think that there is anything more to be said."

"Papa."

"My dear, I think you had better say nothing further about it. If you

cannot bring yourself at the present moment to promise that there

shall be an end of it, you had better hold your tongue. You have

heard what I say, and you have heard what mamma says. I do not for

a moment suppose that you dream of carrying on a communication with

this gentleman in opposition to our wishes."

"But I do."

"Do what?"

"Papa, you had better listen to me." Sir Marmaduke, when he heard

this, assumed an air of increased authority, in which he intended

that paternal anger should be visible; but he seated himself, and

prepared to receive, at any rate, some of the arguments with which

Nora intended to bolster up her bad cause. "I have promised Mr.

Stanbury that I will be his wife."

"That is all nonsense."

"Do listen to me, papa. I have listened to you and you ought to

listen to me. I have promised him, and I must keep my promise. I

shall keep my promise if he wishes it. There is a time when a girl

must be supposed to know what is best for herself,--just as there is

for a man."

"I never heard such stuff in all my life. Do you mean that you'll go

out and marry him like a beggar, with nothing but what you stand up

in, with no friend to be with you, an outcast, thrown off by your

mother,--with your father's--curse?"

"Oh, papa, do not say that. You would not curse me. You could not."

"If you do it at all, that will be the way."

"That will not be the way, papa. You could not treat me like that."

"And how are you proposing to treat me?"

"But, papa, in whatever way I do it, I must do it. I do not say

to-day or to-morrow; but it must be the intention and purpose of

my life, and I must declare that it is, everywhere. I have made

up my mind about it. I am engaged to him, and I shall always say

so,--unless he breaks it. I don't care a bit about fortune. I thought

I did once, but I have changed all that."

"Because this scoundrel has talked sedition to you."

"He is not a scoundrel, papa, and he has not talked sedition. I don't

know what sedition is. I thought it meant treason, and I'm sure he is

not a traitor. He has made me love him, and I shall be true to him."

Hereupon Sir Marmaduke began almost to weep. There came first a

half-smothered oath and then a sob, and he walked about the room, and

struck the table with his fist, and rubbed his bald head impatiently

with his hand. "Nora," he said, "I thought you were so different from

this! If I had believed this of you, you never should have come to

England with Emily."

"It is too late for that now, papa."

"Your mamma always told me that you had such excellent ideas about

marriage."

"So I have,--I think," said she, smiling.

"She always believed that you would make a match that would be a

credit to the family."

"I tried it, papa;--the sort of match that you mean. Indeed I was

mercenary enough in what I believed to be my views of life. I meant

to marry a rich man,--if I could, and did not think much whether I

should love him or not. But when the rich man came--"

"What rich man?"

"I suppose mamma has told you about Mr. Glascock."

"Who is Mr. Glascock? I have not heard a word about Mr. Glascock."

Then Nora was forced to tell her story,--was called upon to tell it

with all its aggravating details. By degrees Sir Marmaduke learned

that this Mr. Glascock, who had desired to be his son-in-law, was in

very truth the heir to the Peterborough title and estates,--would

have been such a son-in-law as almost to compensate, by the

brilliance of the connection, for that other unfortunate alliance. He

could hardly control his agony when he was made to understand that

this embryo peer had in truth been in earnest. "Do you mean that he

went down after you into Devonshire?"

"Yes, papa."

"And you refused him then,--a second time?"

"Yes, papa."

"Why;--why;--why? You say yourself that you liked him;--that you

thought that you would accept him."

"When it came to speaking the word, papa, I found that I could not

pretend to love him when I did not love him. I did not care for

him,--and I liked somebody else so much better! I just told him the

plain truth,--and so he went away."

The thought of all that he had lost, of all that might so easily have

been his, for a time overwhelmed Sir Marmaduke, and drove the very

memory of Hugh Stanbury almost out of his head. He could understand

that a girl should not marry a man whom she did not like; but he

could not understand how any girl should not love such a suitor

as was Mr. Glascock. And had she accepted this pearl of men, with

her position, with her manners and beauty and appearance, such a

connection would have been as good as an assured marriage for every

one of Sir Marmaduke's numerous daughters. Nora was just the woman to

look like a great lady, a lady of high rank,--such a lady as could

almost command men to come and throw themselves at her unmarried

sisters' feet. Sir Marmaduke had believed in his daughter Nora, had

looked forward to see her do much for the family; and, when the crash

had come upon the Trevelyan household, had thought almost as much

of her injured prospects as he had of the misfortune of her sister.

But now it seemed that more than all the good things of what he had

dreamed had been proposed to this unruly girl, in spite of that great

crash,--and had been rejected! And he saw more than this,--as he

thought. These good things would have been accepted had it not been

for this rascal of a penny-a-liner, this friend of that other rascal

Trevelyan, who had come in the way of their family to destroy the

happiness of them all! Sir Marmaduke, in speaking of Stanbury after

this, would constantly call him a penny-a-liner, thinking that the

contamination of the penny communicated itself to all transactions of

the Daily Record.

"You have made your bed for yourself, Nora, and you must lie upon

it."

"Just so, papa."

"I mean that, as you have refused Mr. Glascock's offer, you can never

again hope for such an opening in life."

"Of course I cannot. I am not such a child as to suppose that there

are many Mr. Glascocks to come and run after me. And if there were

ever so many, papa, it would be no good. As you say, I have chosen

for myself, and I must put up with it. When I see the carriages going

about in the streets, and remember how often I shall have to go home

in an omnibus, I do think about it a good deal."

"I'm afraid you will think when it is too late."

"It isn't that I don't like carriages, papa. I do like them; and

pretty dresses, and brooches, and men and women who have nothing to

do, and balls, and the opera; but--I love this man, and that is more

to me than all the rest. I cannot help myself, if it were ever so.

Papa, you mustn't be angry with me. Pray, pray, pray do not say that

horrid word again."

This was the end of the interview. Sir Marmaduke found that he had

nothing further to say. Nora, when she reached her last prayer to her

father, referring to that curse with which he had threatened her, was

herself in tears, and was leaning on him with her head against his

shoulder. Of course he did not say a word which could be understood

as sanctioning her engagement with Stanbury. He was as strongly

determined as ever that it was his duty to save her from the perils

of such a marriage as that. But, nevertheless, he was so far overcome

by her as to be softened in his manners towards her. He kissed her as

he left her, and told her to go to her mother. Then he went out and

thought of it all, and felt as though Paradise had been opened to his

child and she had refused to enter the gate.

CHAPTER LXXI.

SHEWING WHAT HUGH STANBURY THOUGHT ABOUT THE DUTY OF MAN.

In the conference which took place between Sir Marmaduke and his

wife after the interview between him and Nora, it was his idea that

nothing further should be done at all. "I don't suppose the man will

come here if he be told not," said Sir Marmaduke, "and if he does,

Nora of course will not see him." He then suggested that Nora would

of course go back with them to the Mandarins, and that when once

there she would not be able to see Stanbury any more. "There must be

no correspondence or anything of that sort, and so the thing will die

away." But Lady Rowley declared that this would not quite suffice.

Mr. Stanbury had made his offer in due form, and must be held to be

entitled to an answer. Sir Marmaduke, therefore, wrote the following

letter to the "penny-a-liner," mitigating the asperity of his

language in compliance with his wife's counsels.

Manchester Street, April 20th, 186--.

MY DEAR SIR,--

Lady Rowley has told me of your proposal to my daughter

Nora; and she has told me also what she learned from you

as to your circumstances in life. I need hardly point out

to you that no father would be justified in giving his

daughter to a gentleman upon so small an income, and upon

an income so very insecure.

I am obliged to refuse my consent, and I must therefore

ask you to abstain from visiting and from communicating

with my daughter.

Yours faithfully,

MARMADUKE ROWLEY.

Hugh Stanbury, Esq.

This letter was directed to Stanbury at the office of the D. R.,

and Sir Marmaduke, as he wrote the pernicious address, felt himself

injured in that he was compelled to write about his daughter to a man

so circumstanced. Stanbury, when he got the letter, read it hastily

and then threw it aside. He knew what it would contain before he

opened it. He had heard enough from Lady Rowley to be aware that Sir

Marmaduke would not welcome him as a son-in-law. Indeed, he had never

expected such welcome. He was half-ashamed of his own suit because of

the lowliness of his position,--half-regretful that he should have

induced such a girl as Nora Rowley to give up for his sake her hopes

of magnificence and splendour. But Sir Marmaduke's letter did not add

anything to this feeling. He read it again, and smiled as he told

himself that the father would certainly be very weak in the hands

of his daughter. Then he went to work again at his article with a

persistent resolve that so small a trifle as such a note should have

no effect upon his daily work. Of course Sir Marmaduke would refuse

his consent. Of course it would be for him, Stanbury, to marry the

girl he loved in opposition to her father. Her father indeed! If Nora

chose to take him,--and as to that he was very doubtful as to Nora's

wisdom,--but if Nora would take him, what was any father's opposition

to him? He wanted nothing from Nora's father. He was not looking

for money with his wife;--nor for fashion, nor countenance. Such a

Bohemian was he that he would be quite satisfied if his girl would

walk out to him, and become his wife, with any morning-gown on and

with any old hat that might come readiest to hand. He wanted neither

cards, nor breakfast, nor carriages, nor fine clothes. If his Nora

should choose to come to him as she was, he having had all previous

necessary arrangements duly made,--such as calling of banns or

procuring of licence if possible,--he thought that a father's

opposition would almost add something to the pleasure of the

occasion. So he pitched the letter on one side, and went on with his

article. And he finished his article; but it may be doubted whether

it was completed with the full strength and pith needed for moving

the pulses of the national mind,--as they should be moved by leading

articles in the D. R. As he was writing he was thinking of Nora,--and

thinking of the letter which Nora's father had sent to him. Trivial

as was the letter, he could not keep himself from repeating the words

of it to himself. "'Need hardly point out,'--oh; needn't he. Then

why does he? Refusing his consent! I wonder what the old buffers

think is the meaning of their consent, when they are speaking of

daughters old enough to manage for themselves? Abstain from visiting

or communicating with her! But if she visits and communicates with

me;--what then? I can't force my way into the house, but she can

force her way out. Does he imagine that she can be locked up in the

nursery or put into the corner?" So he argued with himself, and by

such arguments he brought himself to the conviction that it would

be well for him to answer Sir Marmaduke's letter. This he did at

once,--before leaving the office of the D. R.

250, Fleet Street, 20th April.

MY DEAR SIR MARMADUKE ROWLEY,--

I have just received your letter, and am indeed sorry that

its contents should be so little favourable to my hopes.

I understand that your objection to me is simply in regard

to the smallness and insecurity of my income. On the first

point I may say that I have fair hopes that it may be

at once increased. As to the second, I believe I may

assert that it is as sure at least as the income of other

professional men, such as barristers, merchants, and

doctors. I cannot promise to say that I will not see your

daughter. If she desires me to do so, of course I shall

be guided by her views. I wish that I might be allowed an

opportunity of seeing you, as I think I could reverse or

at least mitigate some of the objections which you feel to

our marriage.

Yours most faithfully,

HUGH STANBURY.

On the next day but one Sir Marmaduke came to him. He was sitting

at the office of the D. R., in a very small and dirty room at the

back of the house, and Sir Marmaduke found his way thither through

a confused crowd of compositors, pressmen, and printers' boys. He

thought that he had never before been in a place so foul, so dark,

so crowded, and so comfortless. He himself was accustomed to do his

work, out in the Islands, with many of the appanages of vice-royalty

around him. He had his secretary, and his private secretary, and his

inner-room, and his waiting-room; and not unfrequently he had the

honour of a dusky sentinel walking before the door through which he

was to be approached. He had an idea that all gentlemen at their

work had comfortable appurtenances around them,--such as carpets,

dispatch-boxes, unlimited stationery, easy chairs for temporary

leisure, big table-space, and a small world of books around them

to give at least a look of erudition to their pursuits. There was

nothing of the kind in the miserably dark room occupied by Stanbury.

He was sitting at a wretched little table on which there was nothing

but a morsel of blotting paper, a small ink-bottle, and the paper

on which he was scribbling. There was no carpet there, and no

dispatch-box, and the only book in the room was a little dog's-eared

dictionary. "Sir Marmaduke, I am so much obliged to you for coming,"

said Hugh. "I fear you will find this place a little rough, but we

shall be all alone."

"The place, Mr. Stanbury, will not signify, I think."

"Not in the least,--if you don't mind it. I got your letter, you

know, Sir Marmaduke."

"And I have had your reply. I have come to you because you have

expressed a wish for an interview;--but I do not see that it will do

any good."

"You are very kind for coming, indeed, Sir Marmaduke;--very kind. I

thought I might explain something to you about my income."

"Can you tell me that you have any permanent income?"

"It goes on regularly from month to month;"--Sir Marmaduke did not

feel the slightest respect for an income that was paid monthly.

According to his ideas, a gentleman's income should be paid

quarterly, or perhaps half-yearly. According to his view, a monthly

salary was only one degree better than weekly wages;--"and I suppose

that is permanence," said Hugh Stanbury.

"I cannot say that I so regard it."

"A barrister gets his, you know, very irregularly. There is no saying

when he may have it."

"But a barrister's profession is recognised as a profession among

gentlemen, Mr. Stanbury."

"And is not ours recognised? Which of us, barristers or men of

literature, have the most effect on the world at large? Who is most

thought of in London, Sir Marmaduke,--the Lord Chancellor or the

Editor of the 'Jupiter?'"

"The Lord Chancellor a great deal," said Sir Marmaduke, quite

dismayed by the audacity of the question.

"By no means, Sir Marmaduke," said Stanbury, throwing out his hand

before him so as to give the energy of action to his words. "He has

the higher rank. I will admit that."

"I should think so," said Sir Marmaduke.

"And the larger income."

"Very much larger, I should say," said Sir Marmaduke, with a smile.

"And he wears a wig."

"Yes;--he wears a wig," said Sir Marmaduke, hardly knowing in what

spirit to accept this assertion.

"And nobody cares one brass button for him or his opinions," said

Stanbury, bringing down his hand heavily on the little table for the

sake of emphasis.

"What, sir?"

"If you'll think of it, it is so."

"Nobody cares for the Lord Chancellor!" It certainly is the fact that

gentlemen living in the Mandarin Islands do think more of the Lord

Chancellor, and the Lord Mayor, and the Lord-Lieutenant, and the Lord

Chamberlain, than they whose spheres of life bring them into closer

contact with those august functionaries. "I presume, Mr. Stanbury,

that a connection with a penny newspaper makes such opinions as these

almost a necessity."

"Quite a necessity, Sir Marmaduke. No man can hold his own in print,

now-a-days, unless he can see the difference between tinsel and

gold."

"And the Lord Chancellor, of course, is tinsel."

"I do not say so. He may be a great lawyer,--and very useful. But his

lordship, and his wig, and his woolsack, are tinsel in comparison

with the real power possessed by the editor of a leading newspaper.

If the Lord Chancellor were to go to bed for a month, would he be

much missed?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm not in the secrets of the Cabinet. I should

think he would."

"About as much as my grandmother;--but if the Editor of the 'Jupiter'

were to be taken ill, it would work quite a commotion. For myself I

should be glad,--on public grounds,--because I don't like his mode of

business. But it would have an effect,--because he is a leading man."

"I don't see what all this leads to, Mr. Stanbury."

"Only to this,--that we who write for the press think that our

calling is recognised, and must be recognised as a profession. Talk

of permanence, Sir Marmaduke, are not the newspapers permanent? Do

not they come out regularly every day,--and more of them, and still

more of them, are always coming out? You do not expect a collapse

among them."

"There will be plenty of newspapers, I do not doubt;--more than

plenty, perhaps."

"Somebody must write them,--and the writers will be paid."

"Anybody could write the most of them, I should say."

"I wish you would try, Sir Marmaduke. Just try your hand at a leading

article to-night, and read it yourself to-morrow morning."

"I've a great deal too much to do, Mr. Stanbury."

"Just so. You have, no doubt, the affairs of your Government to look

to. We are all so apt to ignore the work of our neighbours! It seems

to me that I could go over and govern the Mandarins without the

slightest trouble in the world. But no doubt I am mistaken;--just as

you are about writing for the newspapers."

"I do not know," said Sir Marmaduke, rising from his chair with

dignity, "that I called here to discuss such matters as these. As it

happens, you, Mr. Stanbury, are not the Governor of the Mandarins,

and I have not the honour to write for the columns of the penny

newspaper with which you are associated. It is therefore useless

to discuss what either of us might do in the position held by the

other."

"Altogether useless, Sir Marmaduke,--except just for the fun of the

thing."

"I do not see the fun, Mr. Stanbury. I came here, at your request,

to hear what you might have to urge against the decision which I

expressed to you in reference to my daughter. As it seems that you

have nothing to urge, I will not take up your time further."

"But I have a great deal to urge, and have urged a great deal."

"Have you, indeed?"

"You have complained that my work is not permanent. I have shewn that

it is so permanent that there is no possibility of its coming to an

end. There must be newspapers, and the people trained to write them

must be employed. I have been at it now about two years. You know

what I earn. Could I have got so far in so short a time as a lawyer,

a doctor, a clergyman, a soldier, a sailor, a Government clerk, or

in any of those employments which you choose to call professions? I

think that is urging a great deal. I think it is urging everything."

"Very well, Mr. Stanbury. I have listened to you, and in a certain

degree I admire your,--your,--your zeal and ingenuity, shall I say."

"I didn't mean to call for admiration, Sir Marmaduke; but suppose you

say,--good sense and discrimination."

"Let that pass. You must permit me to remark that your position is

not such as to justify me in trusting my daughter to your care. As my

mind on that matter is quite made up, as is that also of Lady Rowley,

I must ask you to give me your promise that your suit to my daughter

shall be discontinued."

"What does she say about it, Sir Marmaduke?"

"What she has said to me has been for my ears, and not for yours."

"What I say is for her ears and for yours, and for her mother's ears,

and for the ears of any who may choose to hear it. I will never give

up my suit to your daughter till I am forced to do so by a full

conviction that she has given me up. It is best to be plain, Sir

Marmaduke, of course."

"I do not understand this, Mr. Stanbury."

"I mean to be quite clear."

"I have always thought that when a gentleman was told by the head of

a family that he could not be made welcome in that family, it was

considered to be the duty of that gentleman,--as a gentleman,--to

abandon his vain pursuit. I have been brought up with that idea."

"And I, Sir Marmaduke, have been brought up in the idea that when

a man has won the affections of a woman, it is the duty of that

man,--as a man,--to stick to her through thick and thin; and I mean

to do my duty, according to my idea."

"Then, sir, I have nothing further to say, but to take my leave. I

must only caution you not to enter my doors." As the passages were

dark and intricate, it was necessary that Stanbury should shew Sir

Marmaduke out, and this he did in silence. When they parted each of

them lifted his hat, and not a word more was said.

That same night there was a note put into Nora's hands, as she was

following her mother out of one of the theatres. In the confusion she

did not even see the messenger who had handed it to her. Her sister

Lucy saw that she had taken the note, and questioned her about it

afterwards,--with discretion, however, and in privacy. This was the

note:--

DEAREST LOVE,

I have seen your father, who is stern,--after the manner

of fathers. What granite equals a parent's flinty bosom!

For myself, I do not prefer clandestine arrangements

and rope ladders; and you, dear, have nothing of the

Lydia about you. But I do like my own way, and like it

especially when you are at the end of the path. It is

quite out of the question that you should go back to those

islands. I think I am justified in already assuming enough

of the husband to declare that such going back must not be

held for a moment in question. My proposition is that you

should authorise me to make such arrangements as may be

needed, in regard to licence, banns, or whatever else, and

that you should then simply walk from the house to the

church and marry me. You are of age, and can do as you

please. Neither your father nor mother can have any right

to stop you. I do not doubt but that your mother would

accompany you, if she were fully satisfied of your

purpose. Write to me to the D. R.

Your own, ever and ever, and always,

H. S.

I shall try and get this given to you as you leave the

theatre. If it should fall into other hands, I don't much

care. I'm not in the least ashamed of what I am doing; and

I hope that you are not.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE DELIVERY OF THE LAMB.

[Illustration]

It is hoped that a certain quarter of lamb will not have been

forgotten,--a quarter of lamb that was sent as a peace-offering from

Exeter to Nuncombe Putney by the hands of Miss Stanbury's Martha, not

with purposes of corruption, not intended to buy back the allegiance

of Dorothy,--folded delicately and temptingly in one of the best

table napkins, with no idea of bribery, but sent as presents used

to be sent of old in the trains of great ambassadors as signs of

friendship and marks of true respect. Miss Stanbury was, no doubt,

most anxious that her niece should return to her, but was not,

herself, low spirited enough to conceive that a quarter of lamb

could be efficacious in procuring such return. If it might be that

Dorothy's heart could be touched by mention of the weariness of her

aunt's solitary life; and if, therefore, she would return, it would

be very well; but it could not be well so, unless the offer should

come from Dorothy herself. All of which Martha had been made to

understand by her mistress, considerable ingenuity having been

exercised in the matter on each side.

On her arrival at Lessboro', Martha had hired a fly, and been driven

out to Nuncombe Putney; but she felt, she knew not why, a dislike

to be taken in her carriage to the door of the cottage; and was put

down in the middle of the village, from whence she walked out to Mrs.

Stanbury's abode, with the basket upon her arm. It was a good half

mile, and the lamb was heavy, for Miss Stanbury had suggested that a

bottle of sherry should be put in under the napkin,--and Martha was

becoming tired of her burden, when,--whom should she see on the road

before her but Brooke Burgess! As she said herself afterwards, it

immediately occurred to her, "that all the fat was in the fire." Here

had this young man come down, passing through Exeter without even a

visit to Miss Stanbury, and had clandestinely sought out the young

woman whom he wasn't to marry; and here was the young woman herself

flying in her aunt's face, when one scratch of a pen might ruin them

both! Martha entertained a sacred, awful, overcoming feeling about

her mistress's will. That she was to have something herself she

supposed, and her anxiety was not on that score; but she had heard

so much about it, had realised so fully the great power which Miss

Stanbury possessed, and had had her own feelings so rudely invaded by

alterations in Miss Stanbury's plans, that she had come to entertain

an idea that all persons around her should continually bear that will

in their memory. Hugh had undoubtedly been her favourite, and, could

Martha have dictated the will herself, she would still have made Hugh

the heir; but she had realised the resolution of her mistress so

far as to confess that the bulk of the property was to go back to a

Burgess. But there were very many Burgesses; and here was the one

who had been selected flying in the very face of the testatrix! What

was to be done? Were she to go back and not tell her mistress that

she had seen Brooke Burgess at Nuncombe then,--should the fact be

found out,--would the devoted anger of Miss Stanbury fall upon

her own head? It would be absolutely necessary that she should

tell the story, let the consequences be what they might;--but the

consequences, probably, would be very dreadful. "Mr. Brooke, that is

not you?" she said, as she came up to him, putting her basket down in

the middle of the dusty road.

"Then who can it be?" said Brooke, giving her his hand to shake.

"But what do bring you here, Mr. Brooke? Goodness me, what will

missus say?"

"I shall make that all straight. I'm going back to Exeter to-morrow."

Then there were many questions and many answers. He was sojourning

at Mrs. Crocket's, and had been there for the last two days. "Dear,

dear, dear," she said over and over again. "Deary me, deary me!" and

then she asked him whether it was "all along of Miss Dorothy" that he

had come. Of course, it was all along of Miss Dorothy. Brooke made no

secret about it. He had come down to see Dorothy's mother and sister,

and to say a bit of his own mind about future affairs;--and to see

the beauties of the country. When he talked about the beauties of the

country, Martha looked at him as the people of Lessboro' and Nuncombe

Putney should have looked at Colonel Osborne, when he talked of

the church porch at Cockchaffington. "Beauties of the country, Mr.

Brooke;--you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said Martha.

"But I ain't,--the least in the world," said Brooke.

Then Martha took up her basket, and went on to the cottage, which had

been close in sight during their conversation in the road. She felt

angry with Dorothy. In such matters a woman is always angry with the

woman,--who has probably been quite passive, and rarely with the man,

who is ever the real transgressor. Having a man down after her at

Nuncombe Putney! It had never struck Martha as very horrible that

Brooke Burgess should fall in love with Dorothy in the city;--but

this meeting, in the remoteness of the country, out of sight even of

the village, was almost indecent; and all, too, with Miss Stanbury's

will just, as one might say, on the balance! Dorothy ought to have

buried herself rather than have allowed Brooke to see her at Nuncombe

Putney; and Dorothy's mother and Priscilla must be worse. She trudged

on, however, with her lamb, and soon found herself in the presence of

the three ladies.

"What,--Martha!" said Dorothy.

"Yes, miss,--here I am. I'd have been here half-an-hour ago amost, if

I hadn't been stopped on the road."

"And who stopped you?" asked Priscilla.

"Why,--Mr. Brooke, of course."

"And what did Mr. Brooke say to you?" asked Dorothy.

Martha perceived at once that Dorothy was quite radiant. She told her

mistress that she had never seen Miss Dorothy look half so comely

before. "Laws, ma'am, she brightened up and speckled about, till it

did your heart good to see her in spite of all." But this was some

time afterwards.

"He didn't say very much," replied Martha, gravely.

"But I've got very much to tell you," continued Dorothy. "I'm engaged

to be married to Mr. Brooke, and you must congratulate me. It is

settled now, and mamma and my sister know all about it."

Martha, when she was thus asked directly for congratulation, hardly

knew at once how to express herself. Being fully aware of Miss

Stanbury's objection to the marriage, she could not venture to

express her approbation of it. It was very improper, in Martha's

mind, that any young woman should have a follower, when the "missus"

didn't approve of it. She understood well enough that, in that matter

of followers, privileges are allowed to young ladies which are not

accorded to maid servants. A young lady may do things,--have young

men to walk and talk with them, to dance with them and embrace them,

and perhaps even more than this,--when for half so much a young woman

would be turned into the streets without a character. Martha knew

all this, and knew also that Miss Dorothy, though her mother lived

in a very little cottage, was not altogether debarred, in the matter

of followers, from the privileges of a lady. But yet Miss Dorothy's

position was so very peculiar! Look at that will,--or, rather, at

that embryo will, which might be made any day, which now probably

would be made, and which might affect them both so terribly! People

who have not got money should not fly in the face of those who have.

Such at least was Martha's opinion very strongly. How could she

congratulate Miss Dorothy under the existing circumstances? "I do

hope you will be happy, miss;--that you knows," said Martha, in her

difficulty. "And now, ma'am;--miss, I mean," she added, correcting

herself, in obedience to Miss Stanbury's direct orders about the

present,--"missus has just sent me over with a bit of lamb, and a

letter as is here in the basket, and to ask how you is,--and the

other ladies."

"We are very much obliged," said Mrs. Stanbury, who had not

understood the point of Martha's speech.

"My sister is, I'm sure," said Priscilla, who had understood it.

Dorothy had taken the letter, and had gone aside with it, and was

reading it very carefully. It touched her nearly, and there had come

tears into both her eyes, as she dwelt upon it. There was something

in her aunt's allusion to the condition of unmarried women which came

home to her especially. She knew her aunt's past history, and now she

knew, or hoped that she knew, something of her own future destiny.

Her aunt was desolate, whereas upon her the world smiled most

benignly. Brooke had just informed her that he intended to make

her his wife as speedily as possible,--with her aunt's consent if

possible, but if not, then without it. He had ridiculed the idea of

his being stopped by Miss Stanbury's threats, and had said all this

in such fashion that even Priscilla herself had only listened and

obeyed. He had spoken not a word of his own income, and none of them

had dreamed even of asking him a question. He had been as a god in

the little cottage, and all of them had been ready to fall down

and worship him. Mrs. Stanbury had not known how to treat him

with sufficient deference, and, at the same time, with sufficient

affection. He had kissed them all round, and Priscilla had felt an

elation which was hardly intelligible to herself. Dorothy, who was so

much honoured, had come to enjoy a status in her mother's estimation

very different from that which she had previously possessed, and had

grown to be quite beautiful in her mother's eyes.

There was once a family of three ancient maiden ladies, much

respected and loved in the town in which they lived. Their manners

of life were well known among their friends, and excited no surprise;

but a stranger to the locality once asked of the elder why Miss

Matilda, the younger, always went first out of the room? "Matilda

once had an offer of marriage," said the dear simple old lady, who

had never been so graced, and who felt that such an episode in life

was quite sufficient to bestow brevet rank. It was believed by Mrs.

Stanbury that Dorothy's honours would be carried further than those

of Miss Matilda, but there was much of the same feeling in the bosom

of the mother towards the fortunate daughter, who, in the eyes of a

man, had seemed goodly enough to be his wife.

With this swelling happiness round her heart, Dorothy read her aunt's

letter, and was infinitely softened. "I had gotten somehow to love

to see your pretty face." Dorothy had thought little enough of her

own beauty, but she liked being told by her aunt that her face had

been found to be pretty. "I am very desolate and solitary here," her

aunt said; and then had come those words about the state of maiden

women;--and then those other words, about women's duties, and her

aunt's prayer on her behalf. "Dear Dorothy, be not such an one."

She held the letter to her lips and to her bosom, and could hardly

continue its perusal because of her tears. Such prayers from the aged

addressed to the young are generally held in light esteem, but this

adjuration was valued by the girl to whom it was addressed. She put

together the invitation,--or rather the permission accorded to her,

to make a visit to Exeter,--and the intimation in the postscript

that Martha knew her mistress's mind; and then she returned to the

sitting-room, in which Martha was still seated with her mother, and

took the old servant apart. "Martha," she said, "is my aunt happy

now?"

"Well,--miss."

"She is strong again; is she not?"

"Sir Peter says she is getting well; and Mr. Martin--; but Mr. Martin

isn't much account."

"She eats and drinks again?"

"Pretty well;--not as it used to be, you know, miss. I tell her she

ought to go somewheres,--but she don't like moving nohow. She never

did. I tell her if she'd go to Dawlish,--just for a week. But she

don't think there's a bed fit to sleep on, nowhere, except just her

own."

"She would go if Sir Peter told her."

"She says that these movings are newfangled fashions, and that the

air didn't use to want changing for folk when she was young. I heard

her tell Sir Peter herself, that if she couldn't live at Exeter,

she would die there. She won't go nowheres, Miss Dorothy. She ain't

careful to live."

"Tell me something, Martha; will you?"

"What is it, Miss Dorothy?"

"Be a dear good woman now, and tell me true. Would she be better if I

were with her?"

"She don't like being alone, miss. I don't know nobody as does."

"But now, about Mr. Brooke, you know."

"Yes, Mr. Brooke! That's it."

"Of course, Martha, I love him better than anything in all the world.

I can't tell you how it was, but I think I loved him the very first

moment I saw him."

"Dear, dear, dear!"

"I couldn't help it, Martha;--but it's no good talking about it, for

of course I shan't try to help it now. Only this,--that I would do

anything in the world for my aunt,--except that."

"But she don't like it, Miss Dorothy. That is the truth, you know."

"It can't be helped now, Martha; and of course she'll be told at

once. Shall I go and tell her? I'd go to-day if you think she would

like it."

"And Mr. Brooke?"

"He is to go to-morrow."

"And will you leave him here?"

"Why not? Nobody will hurt him. I don't mind a bit about having him

with me now. But I can tell you this. When he went away from us once

it made me very unhappy. Would Aunt Stanbury be glad to see me,

Martha?"

Martha's reserve was at last broken down, and she expressed herself

in strong language. There was nothing on earth her mistress wanted so

much as to have her favourite niece back again. Martha acknowledged

that there were great difficulties about Brooke Burgess, and she did

not see her way clearly through them. Dorothy declared her purpose of

telling her aunt boldly,--at once. Martha shook her head, admiring

the honesty and courage, but doubting the result. She understood

better than did any one else the peculiarity of mind which made her

mistress specially anxious that none of the Stanbury family should

enjoy any portion of the Burgess money, beyond that which she herself

had saved out of the income. There had been moments in which Martha

had hoped that this prejudice might be overcome in favour of Hugh;

but it had become stronger as the old woman grew to be older and

more feeble,--and it was believed now to be settled as Fate. "She'd

sooner give it all to old Barty over the way," Martha had once said,

"than let it go to her own kith and kin. And if she do hate any human

creature, she do hate Barty Burgess." She assented, however, to

Dorothy's proposal; and, though Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla were

astounded by the precipitancy of the measure they did not attempt to

oppose it.

"And what am I to do?" said Brooke, when he was told.

"You'll come to-morrow, of course," said Dorothy.

"But it may be that the two of us together will be too many for the

dear old lunatic."

"You shan't call her a lunatic, Brooke. She isn't so much a lunatic

as you are, to run counter to her, and disobey her, and all that kind

of thing."

"And how about yourself?"

"How can I help it, Brooke? It is you that say it must be so."

"Of course it must. Who is to be stayed from doing what is reasonable

because an old woman has a bee on her bonnet. I don't believe in

people's wills."

"She can do what she likes about it, Brooke."

"Of course she can, and of course she will. What I mean is that it

never pays to do this or that because somebody may alter his will, or

may make a will, or may not make a will. You become a slave for life,

and then your dead tyrant leaves you a mourning-ring, and grins at

you out of his grave. All the same she'll kick up a row, I fancy, and

you'll have to bear the worst of it."

"I'll tell her the truth; and if she be very angry, I'll just come

home again. But I think I'll come home to-morrow any way, so that

I'll pass you on the road. That will be best. She won't want us both

together. Only then, Brooke, I shan't see you again."

"Not till June."

"And is it to be really in June?"

"You say you don't like May."

"You are such a goose, Brooke. It will be May almost to-morrow. I

shall be such a poor wife for you, Brooke. As for getting my things

ready, I shall not bring hardly any things at all. Have you thought

what it is to take a body so very poor?"

"I own I haven't thought as much about it, Dolly,--as I ought to have

done, perhaps."

"It is too late now, Brooke."

"I suppose it is."

"Quite too late. A week ago I could have borne it. I had almost got

myself to think that it would be better that I should bear it. But

you have come, and banished all the virtue out of my head. I am

ashamed of myself, because I am so unworthy; but I would put up with

that shame rather than lose you now. Brooke, Brooke, I will so try to

be good to you!"

In the afternoon Martha and Dorothy started together for Exeter,

Brooke and Priscilla accompanying them as far as Mrs. Crocket's,

where the Lessboro' fly was awaiting them. Dorothy said little or

nothing during the walk, nor, indeed, was she very communicative

during the journey into Exeter. She was going to her aunt, instigated

simply by the affection of her full heart; but she was going with a

tale in her mouth which she knew would be very unwelcome. She could

not save herself from feeling that, in having accepted Brooke, and in

having not only accepted him but even fixed the day for her marriage,

she had been ungrateful to her aunt. Had it not been for her aunt's

kindness and hospitality, she would never have seen Brooke Burgess.

And as she had been under her aunt's care at Exeter, she doubted

whether she had not been guilty of some great fault in falling in

love with this man, in opposition as it were to express orders.

Should her aunt still declare that she would in no way countenance

the marriage, that she would still oppose it and use her influence

with Brooke to break it off, then would Dorothy return on the morrow

to her mother's cottage at Nuncombe Putney, so that her lover might

be free to act with her aunt as he might think fit. And should he

yield, she would endeavour,--she would struggle hard, to think that

he was still acting for the best. "I must tell her myself, Martha,"

said Dorothy, as they came near to Exeter.

"Certainly, miss;--only you'll do it to-night."

"Yes;--at once. As soon after I get there as possible."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

DOROTHY RETURNS TO EXETER.

Miss Stanbury perfectly understood that Martha was to come back by

the train reaching Exeter at 7 p.m., and that she might be expected

in the Close about a quarter-of-an-hour after that time. She had been

nervous and anxious all day,--so much so that Mr. Martin had told

her that she must be very careful. "That's all very well," the old

woman had said, "but you haven't got any medicine for my complaint,

Mr. Martin." The apothecary had assured her that the worst of her

complaint was in the east wind, and had gone away begging her to be

very careful. "It is not God's breezes that are hard to any one," the

old lady had said to herself,--"but our own hearts." After her lonely

dinner she had fidgeted about the room, and had rung twice for the

girl, not knowing what order to give when the servant came to her.

She was very anxious about her tea, but would not have it brought to

her till after Martha should have arrived. She was half-minded to

order that a second cup and saucer should be placed there, but she

had not the courage to face the disappointment which would fall upon

her, should the cup and saucer stand there for no purpose. And yet,

should she come, how nice it would be to shew her girl that her old

aunt had been ready for her. Thrice she went to the window after the

cathedral clock had struck seven, to see whether her ambassador was

returning. From her window there was only one very short space of

pathway on which she could have seen her,--and, as it happened, there

came the ring at the door, and no ambassador had as yet been viewed.

Miss Stanbury was immediately off her seat, and out upon the landing.

"Here we are again, Miss Dorothy," said Martha. Then Miss Stanbury

could not restrain herself,--but descended the stairs, moving as she

had never moved since she had first been ill. "My bairn," she said;

"my dearest bairn! I thought that perhaps it might be so. Jane,

another tea-cup and saucer up-stairs." What a pity that she had not

ordered it before! "And get a hot cake, Jane. You will be ever so

hungry, my darling, after your journey."

"Are you glad to see me, Aunt Stanbury?" said Dorothy.

"Glad, my pretty one!" Then she put up her hands, and smoothed down

the girl's cheeks, and kissed her, and patted Martha on the back, and

scolded her at the same time for not bringing Miss Dorothy from the

station in a cab. "And what is the meaning of that little bag?" she

said. "You shall go back for the rest yourself, Martha, because it is

your own fault." Martha knew that all this was pleasant enough;--but

then her mistress's moods would sometimes be changed so suddenly! How

would it be when Miss Stanbury knew that Brooke Burgess had been left

behind at Nuncombe Putney?

"You see I didn't stay to eat any of the lamb," said Dorothy,

smiling.

"You shall have a calf instead, my dear," said Miss Stanbury,

"because you are a returned prodigal."

All this was very pleasant, and Miss Stanbury was so happy dispensing

her tea, and the hot cake, and the clotted cream, and was so intent

upon her little methods of caressing and petting her niece, that

Dorothy had no heart to tell her story while the plates and cups were

still upon the table. She had not, perhaps, cared much for the hot

cake, having such a weight upon her mind, but she had seemed to care,

understanding well that she might so best conduce to her aunt's

comfort. Miss Stanbury was a woman who could not bear that the good

things which she had provided for a guest should not be enjoyed. She

could taste with a friend's palate, and drink with a friend's throat.

But when debarred these vicarious pleasures by what seemed to her to

be the caprice of her guests, she would be offended. It had been one

of the original sins of Camilla and Arabella French that they would

declare at her tea-table that they had dined late and could not eat

tea-cake. Dorothy knew all this,--and did her duty;--but with a

heavy heart. There was the story to be told, and she had promised

Martha that it should be told to-night. She was quite aware, too,

independently of her promise, that it was necessary that it should

be told to-night. It was very sad,--very grievous that the dear old

lady's happiness should be disturbed so soon; but it must be done.

When the tea-things were being taken away her aunt was still purring

round her, and saying gentle, loving words. Dorothy bore it as well

as she could,--bore it well, smiling and kissing her aunt's hand, and

uttering now and then some word of affection. But the thing had to be

done; and as soon as the room was quiet for a moment, she jumped up

from her chair and began. "Aunt Stanbury, I must tell you something

at once. Who, do you think, is at Nuncombe Putney?"

"Not Brooke Burgess?"

"Yes, he is. He is there now, and is to be here with you to-morrow."

The whole colour and character of Miss Stanbury's face was changed in

a moment. She had been still purring up to the moment in which this

communication had been made to her. Her gratification had come to her

from the idea that her pet had come back to her from love of her,--as

in very truth had been the case; but now it seemed that Dorothy had

returned to ask for a great favour for herself. And she reflected at

once that Brooke had passed through Exeter without seeing her. If

he was determined to marry without reference to her, he might at

any rate have had the grace to come to her and say so. She, in the

fulness of her heart, had written words of affection to Dorothy;--and

both Dorothy and Brooke had at once taken advantage of her

expressions for their own purposes. Such was her reading of the story

of the day. "He need not trouble himself to come here now," she said.

"Dear aunt, do not say that."

"I do say it. He need not trouble himself to come now. When I said

that I should be glad to see you, I did not intend that you should

meet Mr. Burgess under my roof. I did not wish to have you both

together."

"How could I help coming, when you wrote to me like that?"

"It is very well,--but he need not come. He knows the way from

Nuncombe to London without stopping at Exeter."

"Aunt Stanbury, you must let me tell it you all."

"There is no more to tell, I should think."

"But there is more. You knew what he thought about me, and what he

wished."

"He is his own master, my dear;--and you are your own mistress."

"If you speak to me like that you will kill me, Aunt Stanbury. I did

not think of coming; only when Martha brought your dear letter I

could not help it. But he was coming. He meant to come to-morrow,

and he will. Of course he must defend himself, if you are angry with

him."

"He need not defend himself at all."

"I told them, and I told him, that I would only stay one night,--if

you did not wish that we should be here together. You must see him,

Aunt Stanbury. You would not refuse to see him."

"If you please, my dear, you must allow me to judge whom I will see."

After that the discussion ceased between them for awhile, and Miss

Stanbury left the room that she might hold a consultation with

Martha. Dorothy went up to her chamber, and saw that everything had

been prepared for her with most scrupulous care. Nothing could be

whiter, neater, cleaner, nicer than was everything that surrounded

her. She had perceived while living under her aunt's roof, how,

gradually, small, delicate feminine comforts had been increased for

her. Martha had been told that Miss Dorothy ought to have this, and

that Miss Dorothy ought to have that; till at last she, who had

hitherto known nothing of the small luxuries that come from an easy

income, had felt ashamed of the prettinesses that had been added to

her. Now she could see at once that infinite care had been used to

make her room bright and smiling,--only in the hope that she would

return. As soon as she saw it all, she sat down on her bed and burst

out into tears. Was it not hard upon her that she should be forced

into such ingratitude! Every comfort prepared for her was a coal of

hot fire upon her head. And yet what had she done that she ought not

to have done? Was it unreasonable that she should have loved this

man, when they two were brought together? And had she even dared to

think of him otherwise than as an acquaintance till he had compelled

her to confess her love? And after that had she not tried to separate

herself from him, so that they two,--her aunt and her lover,--might

be divided by no quarrel? Had not Priscilla told her that she was

right in all that she was doing? Nevertheless, in spite of all this,

she could not refrain from accusing herself of ingratitude towards

her aunt. And she began to think it would have been better for her

now to have remained at home, and have allowed Brooke to come alone

to Exeter than to have obeyed the impulse which had arisen from the

receipt of her aunt's letter. When she went down again she found

herself alone in the room, and she was beginning to think that it was

intended that she should go to bed without again seeing her aunt;

but at last Miss Stanbury came to her, with a sad countenance, but

without that look of wrath which Dorothy knew so well. "My dear,"

she said, "it will be better that Mr. Burgess should go up to London

to-morrow. I will see him, of course, if he chooses to come, and

Martha shall meet him at the station and explain it. If you do not

mind, I would prefer that you should not meet him here."

"I meant only to stay one night, aunt."

"That is nonsense. If I am to part with either of you, I will part

with him. You are dearer to me than he is. Dorothy, you do not know

how dear to me you are."

Dorothy immediately fell on her knees at her aunt's feet, and hid her

face in her aunt's lap. Miss Stanbury twined round her fingers the

soft hair which she loved so well,--because it was a grace given by

God and not bought out of a shop,--and caressed the girl's head, and

muttered something that was intended for a prayer. "If he will let

me, aunt, I will give him up," said Dorothy, looking up into her

aunt's face. "If he will say that I may, though I shall love him

always, he may go."

"He is his own master," said Miss Stanbury. "Of course he is his own

master."

"Will you let me return to-morrow,--just for a few days,--and then

you can talk to him as you please. I did not mean to come to stay. I

wished him good-bye because I knew that I should not meet him here."

"You always talk of going away, Dorothy, as soon as ever you are in

the house. You are always threatening me."

"I will come again, the moment you tell me. If he goes in the

morning, I will be here the same evening. And I will write to him,

Aunt Stanbury, and tell him,--that he is--quite free,--quite

free,--quite free."

Miss Stanbury made no reply to this, but sat, still playing with her

niece's hair. "I think I will go to bed," she said at last. "It is

past ten. You need not go to Nuncombe, Dorothy. Martha shall meet

him, and he can see me here. But I do not wish him to stay in the

house. You can go over and call on Mrs. MacHugh. Mrs. MacHugh will

take it well of you that you should call on her." Dorothy made no

further opposition to this arrangement, but kissed her aunt, and went

to her chamber.

How was it all to be for her? For the last two days she had been

radiant with new happiness. Everything had seemed to be settled. Her

lover, in his high-handed way, had declared that in no important

crisis of life would he allow himself to be driven out of his way

by the fear of what an old woman might do in her will. When Dorothy

assured him that not for worlds would she, though she loved him

dearly, injure his material prospects, he had thrown it all aside,

after a grand fashion, that had really made the girl think that

all Miss Stanbury's money was as nothing to his love for her. She

and Priscilla and her mother had been carried away so entirely by

Brooke's oratory as to feel for the time that the difficulties were

entirely conquered. But now the aspect of things was so different!

Whatever Brooke might owe to Miss Stanbury, she, Dorothy, owed her

aunt everything. She would immolate herself,--if Brooke would only

let her. She did not quite understand her aunt's stubborn opposition;

but she knew that there was some great cause for her aunt's feeling

on the matter. There had been a promise made, or an oath sworn, that

the property of the Burgess family should not go into the hands of

any Stanbury. Dorothy told herself that, were she married, she would

be a Stanbury no longer;--that her aunt would still comply with the

obligation she had fixed for herself; but, nevertheless, she was

ready to believe that her aunt might be right. Her aunt had always

declared that it should be so; and Dorothy, knowing this, confessed

to herself that she should have kept her heart under better control.

Thinking of these things, she went to the table, where paper and ink

and pens had all been prepared for her so prettily, and began her

letter to Brooke. "Dearest, dearest Brooke." But then she thought

that this was not a fair keeping of her promise, and she began again.

"My dear Brooke." The letter, however, did not get itself written

that night. It was almost impossible for her to write it. "I think it

will be better for you," she had tried to say, "to be guided by my

aunt." But how could she say this when she did not believe it? It was

her wish to make him understand that she would never think ill of

him, for a moment, if he would make up his mind to abandon her;--but

she could not find the words to express herself,--and she went, at

last, to bed, leaving the half-covered paper upon the table.

She went to bed, and cried herself to sleep. It had been so sweet

to have a lover,--a man of her own, to whom she could say what she

pleased, from whom she had a right to ask for counsel and protection,

a man who delighted to be near her, and to make much of her. In

comparison with her old mode of living, her old ideas of life, her

life with such a lover was passed in an elysium. She had entered from

barren lands into so rich a paradise! But there is no paradise, as

she now found, without apples which must be eaten, and which lead

to sorrow. She regretted in this hour that she had ever seen Brooke

Burgess. After all, with her aunt's love and care for her, with

her mother and sister near her, with the respect of those who knew

her, why should the lands have been barren, even had there been no

entrance for her into that elysium? And did it not all result in

this,--that the elysium to be desired should not be here; that the

paradise, without the apples, must be waited for till beyond the

grave? It is when things go badly with us here, and for most of us

only then, that we think that we can see through the dark clouds into

the joys of heaven. But at last she slept, and in her dreams Brooke

was sitting with her in Niddon Park with his arm tight clasped round

her waist.

She slept so soundly, that when a step crept silently into her room,

and when a light was held for awhile over her face, neither the step

nor the light awakened her. She was lying with her head back upon the

pillow, and her arm hung by the bedside, and her lips were open, and

her loose hair was spread upon the pillow. The person who stood there

with the light thought that there never had been a fairer sight.

Everything there was so pure, so sweet, so good! She was one whose

only selfish happiness could come to her from the belief that others

loved her. The step had been very soft, and even the breath of the

intruder was not allowed to pass heavily into the air, but the light

of the candle shone upon the eyelids of the sleeper, and she moved

her head restlessly on the pillow. "Dorothy, are you awake? Can you

speak to me?"

Then the disturbed girl gradually opened her eyes and gazed upwards,

and raised herself in her bed, and sat wondering. "Is anything the

matter, aunt?" she said.

"Only the vagaries of an old woman, my pet,--of an old woman who

cannot sleep in her bed."

[Illustration: "Only the vagaries of an old woman."]

"But what is it, aunt?"

"Kiss me, dearest." Then with something of slumber still about her,

Dorothy raised herself in her bed, and placed her arm on her aunt's

shoulder and embraced her. "And now for my news," said Miss Stanbury.

"What news, aunt? It isn't morning yet; is it?"

"No;--it is not morning. You shall sleep again presently. I have

thought of it, and you shall be Brooke's wife, and I will have it

here, and we will all be friends."

"What!"

"You will like that;--will you not?"

"And you will not quarrel with him? What am I to say? What am I to

do?" She was, in truth, awake now, and, not knowing what she did, she

jumped out of bed, and stood holding her aunt by the arm.

"It is not a dream," said Miss Stanbury.

"Are you sure that it is not a dream? And may he come here

to-morrow?"

"Of course he will come to-morrow."

"And may I see him, Aunt Stanbury?"

"Not if you go home, my dear."

"But I won't go home. And will you tell him? Oh dear, oh dear! Aunt

Stanbury, I do not think that I believe it yet."

"You will catch cold, my dear, if you stay there trying to believe

it. You have nothing on. Get into bed and believe it there. You will

have time to think of it before the morning." Then Miss Stanbury went

back to her own chamber, and Dorothy was left alone to realise her

bliss.

She thought of all her life for the last twelve months,--of the

first invitation to Exeter, and the doubts of the family as to

its acceptance, of her arrival and of her own doubts as to the

possibility of her remaining, of Mr. Gibson's courtship and her

aunt's disappointment, of Brooke's coming, of her love and of

his,--and then of her departure back to Nuncombe. After that had come

the triumph of Brooke's visit, and then the terrible sadness of her

aunt's displeasure. But now everything was good and glorious. She

did not care for money herself. She thought that she never could

care much for being rich. But had she made Brooke poor by marrying

him, that must always have been to her matter of regret, if not of

remorse. But now it was all to be smooth and sweet. Now a paradise

was to be opened to her, with no apples which she might not eat;--no

apples which might not, but still must, be eaten. She thought that it

would be impossible that she should sleep again that night; but she

did sleep, and dreamed that Brooke was holding her in Niddon Park,

tighter than ever.

When the morning came she trembled as she walked down into the

parlour. Might it not still be possible that it was all a dream? Or

what if her aunt should again have changed her purpose? But the first

moment of her aunt's presence told her that there was nothing to

fear. "How did you sleep, Dorothy?" said the old lady.

"Dear aunt, I do not know. Was it all sleep?"

"What shall we say to Brooke when he comes?"

"You shall tell him."

"No, dearest, you must tell him. And you must say to him that if he

is not good to my girl, and does not love her always, and cling to

her, and keep her from harm, and be in truth her loving husband, I

will hold him to be the most ungrateful of human beings." And before

Brooke came, she spoke again. "I wonder whether he thinks you as

pretty as I do, Dolly?"

"He never said that he thought me pretty at all."

"Did he not? Then he shall say so, or he shall not have you. It was

your looks won me first, Dolly,--like an old fool as I am. It is so

pleasant to have a little nature after such a deal of artifice." In

which latter remarks it was quite understood that Miss Stanbury was

alluding to her enemies at Heavitree.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE LIONESS AROUSED.

Brooke Burgess had been to Exeter and had gone,--for he only remained

there one night,--and everything was apparently settled. It was not

exactly told through Exeter that Miss Stanbury's heir was to be

allowed to marry Miss Stanbury's niece; but Martha knew it, and Giles

Hickbody guessed it, and Dorothy was allowed to tell her mother and

sister, and Brooke himself, in his own careless way, had mentioned

the matter to his uncle Barty. As Miss Stanbury had also told the

secret in confidence to Mrs. MacHugh, it cannot be said that it was

altogether well kept. Four days after Brooke's departure the news

reached the Frenches at Heavitree. It was whispered to Camilla by

one of the shopmen with whom she was still arranging her marriage

trousseau, and was repeated by her to her mother and sister with some

additions which were not intended to be good-natured. "He gets her

and the money together as a bargain--of course," said Camilla. "I

only hope the money won't be found too dear."

"Perhaps he won't get it after all," said Arabella.

"That would be cruel," replied Camilla. "I don't think that even Miss

Stanbury is so false as that."

Things were going very badly at Heavitree. There was war there,

almost everlastingly, though such little playful conversations as the

above shewed that there might be an occasional lull in the battle.

Mr. Gibson was not doing his duty. That was clear enough. Even Mrs.

French, when she was appealed to with almost frantic energy by her

younger daughter, could not but acknowledge that he was very remiss

as a lover. And Camilla, in her fury, was very imprudent. That very

frantic energy which induced her to appeal to her mother was, in

itself, proof of her imprudence. She knew that she was foolish, but

she could not control her passion. Twice had she detected Arabella in

receiving notes from Mr. Gibson, which she did not see, and of which

it had been intended that she should know nothing. And once, when

she spent a night away at Ottery St. Mary with a friend,--a visit

which was specially prefatory to marriage, and made in reference to

bridesmaids' dresses,--Arabella had had,--so at least Camilla was

made to believe,--a secret meeting with Mr. Gibson in some of the

lanes which lead down from Heavitree to the Topsham road.

"I happened to meet him, and spoke two words to him," said Arabella.

"Would you have me cut him?"

"I'll tell you what it is, Bella;--if there is any underhand game

going on that I don't understand, all Exeter shall be on fire before

you shall carry it out."

Bella made no answer to this, but shrugged her shoulders. Camilla

was almost at a loss to guess what might be the truth. Would not any

sister, so accused on such an occasion, rebut the accusation with

awful wrath? But Arabella simply shrugged her shoulders, and went her

way. It was now the 15th of April, and there wanted but one short

fortnight to their marriage. The man had not the courage to jilt

her! She felt sure that he had not heart enough to do a deed of such

audacity. And her sister, too, was weak and a coward, and would

lack the power to stand on her legs and declare herself to be the

perpetrator of such villany. Her mother, as she knew well, would

always have preferred that her elder daughter should be the bride;

but her mother was not the woman to have the hardihood, now, in

the eleventh hour, to favour such an intrigue. Let her wish be

what it might, she would not be strong enough to carry through the

accomplishment of it. They would all know that that threat of hers

of setting Exeter on fire would be carried out after some fashion

that would not be inadequate to the occasion. A sister, a mother, a

promised lover, all false,--all so damnably, cruelly false! It was

impossible. No history, no novel of most sensational interest, no

wonderful villany that had ever been wrought into prose or poetry,

would have been equal to this. It was impossible. She told herself so

a score of times a day. And yet the circumstances were so terribly

suspicious! Mr. Gibson's conduct as a lover was simply disgraceful

to him as a man and a clergyman. He was full of excuses, which she

knew to be false. He would never come near her if he could help it.

When he was with her, he was as cold as an archbishop both in word

and in action. Nothing would tempt him to any outward manifestation

of affection. He would talk of nothing but the poor women of St.

Peter-cum-Pumpkin in the city, and the fraudulent idleness of a

certain colleague in the cathedral services, who was always shirking

his work. He made her no presents. He never walked with her. He was

always gloomy,--and he had indeed so behaved himself in public that

people were beginning to talk of "poor Mr. Gibson." And yet he could

meet Arabella on the sly in the lanes, and send notes to her by the

green-grocer's boy! Poor Mr. Gibson indeed! Let her once get him

well over the 29th of April, and the people of Exeter might talk

about poor Mr. Gibson if they pleased. And Bella's conduct was more

wonderful almost than that of Mr. Gibson. With all her cowardice, she

still held up her head,--held it perhaps a little higher than was

usual with her. And when that grievous accusation was made against

her,--made and repeated,--an accusation the very thought and sound

of which would almost have annihilated her had there been a decent

feeling in her bosom, she would simply shrug her shoulders and walk

away. "Camilla," she had once said, "you will drive that man mad

before you have done." "What is it to you how I drive him?" Camilla

had answered in her fury. Then Arabella had again shrugged her

shoulders and walked away. Between Camilla and her mother, too, there

had come to be an almost internecine quarrel on a collateral point.

Camilla was still carrying on a vast arrangement which she called the

preparation of her trousseau, but which both Mrs. French and Bella

regarded as a spoliation of the domestic nest, for the proud purposes

of one of the younger birds. And this had grown so fearfully that

in two different places Mrs. French had found herself compelled to

request that no further articles might be supplied to Miss Camilla.

The bride elect had rebelled, alleging that as no fortune was to be

provided for her, she had a right to take with her such things as she

could carry away in her trunks and boxes. Money could be had at the

bank, she said; and, after all, what were fifty pounds more or less

on such an occasion as this? And then she went into a calculation to

prove that her mother and sister would be made so much richer by her

absence, and that she was doing so much for them by her marriage,

that nothing could be more mean in them than that they should

hesitate to supply her with such things as she desired to make her

entrance into Mr. Gibson's house respectable. But Mrs. French was

obdurate, and Mr. Gibson was desired to speak to her. Mr. Gibson, in

fear and trembling, told her that she ought to repress her spirit of

extravagance, and Camilla at once foresaw that he would avail himself

of this plea against her should he find it possible at any time to

avail himself of any plea. She became ferocious, and, turning upon

him, told him to mind his own business. Was it not all for him that

she was doing it? "She was not," she said, "disposed to submit to any

control in such matters from him till he had assumed his legal right

to it by standing with her before the altar." It came, however, to

be known all over Exeter that Miss Camilla's expenditure had been

checked, and that, in spite of the joys naturally incidental to a

wedding, things were not going well with the ladies at Heavitree.

At last the blow came. Camilla was aware that on a certain morning

her mother had been to Mr. Gibson's house, and had held a long

conference with him. She could learn nothing of what took place

there, for at that moment she had taken upon herself to place herself

on non-speaking terms with her mother in consequence of those

disgraceful orders which had been given to the tradesmen. But Bella

had not been at Mr. Gibson's house at the time, and Camilla, though

she presumed that her own conduct had been discussed in a manner very

injurious to herself, did not believe that any step was being then

arranged which would be positively antagonistic to her own views. The

day fixed was now so very near, that there could, she felt, be no

escape for the victim. But she was wrong.

Mr. Gibson had been found by Mrs. French in a very excited state on

that occasion. He had wept, and pulled his hair, and torn open his

waistcoat, had spoken of himself as a wretch,--pleading, however,

at the same time, that he was more sinned against than sinning, had

paced about the room with his hands dashing against his brows, and

at last had flung himself prostrate on the ground. The meaning of it

all was, that he had tried very hard, and had found at last that "he

couldn't do it." "I am ready to submit," said he, "to any verdict

that you may pronounce against me, but I should deceive you and

deceive her if I didn't say at once that I can't do it." He went on

to explain that since he had unfortunately entered into his present

engagement with Camilla,--of whose position he spoke in quite a

touching manner,--and since he had found what was the condition of

his own heart and feelings he had consulted a friend,--who, if any

merely human being was capable of advising, might be implicitly

trusted for advice in such a matter,--and that his friend had told

him that he was bound to give up the marriage let the consequences

to himself or to others be what they might. "Although the skies

should fall on me, I cannot stand at the hymeneal altar with a lie

in my mouth," said Mr. Gibson immediately upon his rising from his

prostrate condition on the floor. In such a position as this a

mother's fury would surely be very great! But Mrs. French was hardly

furious. She cried, and begged him to think better of it, and assured

him that Camilla, when she should be calmed down by matrimony, would

not be so bad as she seemed;--but she was not furious. "The truth

is, Mr. Gibson," she said through her tears, "that, after all, you

like Bella best." Mr. Gibson owned that he did like Bella best,

and although no bargain was made between them then and there,--and

such making of a bargain then and there would hardly have been

practicable,--it was understood that Mrs. French would not proceed to

extremities if Mr. Gibson would still make himself forthcoming as a

husband for the advantage of one of the daughters of the family.

So far Mr. Gibson had progressed towards a partial liberation from

his thraldom with a considerable amount of courage; but he was well

aware that the great act of daring still remained to be done. He

had suggested to Mrs. French that she should settle the matter with

Camilla,--but this Mrs. French had altogether declined to do. It

must, she said, come from himself. If she were to do it, she must

sympathise with her child; and such sympathy would be obstructive

of the future arrangements which were still to be made. "She always

knew that I liked Bella best," said Mr. Gibson,--still sobbing, still

tearing his hair, still pacing the room with his waistcoat torn open.

"I would not advise you to tell her that," said Mrs. French. Then

Mrs. French went home, and early on the following morning it was

thought good by Arabella that she also should pay a visit at Ottery

St. Mary's. "Good-bye, Cammy," said Arabella as she went. "Bella,"

said Camilla, "I wonder whether you are a serpent. I do not think

you can be so base a serpent as that." "I declare, Cammy, you do say

such odd things that no one can understand what you mean." And so she

went.

On that morning Mr. Gibson was walking at an early hour along the

road from Exeter to Cowley, contemplating his position and striving

to arrange his plans. What was he to do, and how was he to do it? He

was prepared to throw up his living, to abandon the cathedral, to

leave the diocese,--to make any sacrifice rather than take Camilla

to his bosom. Within the last six weeks he had learned to regard her

with almost a holy horror. He could not understand by what miracle

of self-neglect he had fallen into so perilous an abyss. He had long

known Camilla's temper. But in those days in which he had been beaten

like a shuttlecock between the Stanburys and the Frenches, he had

lost his head and had done,--he knew not what. "Those whom the God

chooses to destroy, he first maddens," said Mr. Gibson to himself

of himself, throwing himself back upon early erudition and pagan

philosophy. Then he looked across to the river Exe, and thought that

there was hardly water enough there to cover the multiplicity of his

sorrows.

But something must be done. He had proceeded so far in forming a

resolution, as he reached St. David's Church on his return homewards.

His sagacious friend had told him that as soon as he had altered

his mind, he was bound to let the lady know of it without delay.

"You must remember," said the sagacious friend, "that you will owe

her much,--very much." Mr. Gibson was perplexed in his mind when he

reflected how much he might possibly be made to owe her if she should

decide on appealing to a jury of her countrymen for justice. But

anything would be better than his home at St. Peter's-cum-Pumpkin

with Camilla sitting opposite to him as his wife. Were there not

distant lands in which a clergyman, unfortunate but still energetic,

might find work to do? Was there not all America?--and were there

not Australia, New Zealand, Natal, all open to him? Would not a

missionary career among the Chinese be better for him than St.

Peter's-cum-Pumpkin with Camilla French for his wife? By the time he

had reached home his mind was made up. He would write a letter to

Camilla at once; and he would marry Arabella at once,--on any day

that might be fixed,--on condition that Camilla would submit to her

defeat without legal redress. If legal redress should be demanded, he

would put in evidence the fact that her own mother had been compelled

to caution the tradesmen of the city in regard to her extravagance.

He did write his letter,--in an agony of spirit. "I sit down,

Camilla, with a sad heart and a reluctant hand," he said,

to communicate to you a fatal truth. But truth should be

made to prevail, and there is nothing in man so cowardly,

so detrimental, and so unmanly as its concealment. I have

looked into myself, and have inquired of myself, and have

assured myself, that were I to become your husband, I

should not make you happy. It would be of no use for me

now to dilate on the reasons which have convinced me;--but

I am convinced, and I consider it my duty to inform you so

at once. I have been closeted with your mother, and have

made her understand that it is so.

I have not a word to say in my own justification but

this,--that I am sure I am acting honestly in telling you

the truth. I would not wish to say a word animadverting

on yourself. If there must be blame in this matter, I am

willing to take it all on my own shoulders. But things

have been done of late, and words have been spoken, and

habits have displayed themselves, which would not, I am

sure, conduce to our mutual comfort in this world, or to

our assistance to each other in our struggles to reach the

happiness of the world to come.

I think that you will agree with me, Camilla, that when

a man or a woman has fallen into such a mistake as

that which I have now made, it is best that it should

be acknowledged. I know well that such a change of

arrangements as that which I now propose will be regarded

most unfavourably. But will not anything be better than

the binding of a matrimonial knot which cannot be again

unloosed, and which we should both regret?

I do not know that I need add anything further. What can

I add further? Only this;--that I am inflexible. Having

resolved to take this step,--and to bear the evil things

that may be said of me,--for your happiness and for my own

tranquility,--I shall not now relinquish my resolution. I

do not ask you to forgive me. I doubt much whether I shall

ever be quite able to forgive myself. The mistake which

I have made is one which should not have been committed.

I do not ask you to forgive me; but I do ask you to pray

that I may be forgiven.

Yours, with feelings of the truest friendship,

THOMAS GIBSON.

The letter had been very difficult, but he was rather proud of it

than otherwise when it was completed. He had felt that he was writing

a letter which not improbably might become public property. It was

necessary that he should be firm, that he should accuse himself a

little in order that he might excuse himself much, and that he should

hint at causes which might justify the rupture, though he should

so veil them as not to appear to defend his own delinquency by

ungenerous counter-accusation. When he had completed the letter,

he thought that he had done all this rather well, and he sent the

despatch off to Heavitree by the clerk of St. Peter's Church, with

something of that feeling of expressible relief which attends the

final conquest over some fatal and all but insuperable misfortune. He

thought that he was sure now that he would not have to marry Camilla

on the 29th of the month,--and there would probably be a period of

some hours before he would be called upon to hear or read Camilla's

reply.

Camilla was alone when she received the letter, but she rushed at

once to her mother. "There," said she; "there--I knew that it was

coming!" Mrs. French took the paper into her hands, and gasped, and

gazed at her daughter without speaking. "You knew of it, mother."

"Yesterday,--when he told me, I knew of it."

"And Bella knows it."

"Not a word of it."

"She does. I am sure she does. But it is all nothing. I will not

accept it. He cannot treat me so. I will drag him there;--but he

shall come."

"You can't make him, my dear."

"I will make him. And you would help me, mamma, if you had any

spirit. What,--a fortnight before the time, when the things are all

bought! Look at the presents that have been sent! Mamma, he doesn't

know me. And he never would have done it, if it had not been for

Bella,--never. She had better take care, or there shall be such a

tragedy that nobody ever heard the like. If she thinks that she is

going to be that man's wife,--she is--mistaken." Then there was a

pause for a moment. "Mamma," she said, "I shall go to him at once.

I do not care in the least what anybody may say. I shall--go to

him,--at once." Mrs. French felt that at this moment it was best that

she should be silent.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE ROWLEYS GO OVER THE ALPS.

[Illustration]

By the thirteenth of May the Rowley family had established itself in

Florence, purposing to remain either there or at the baths of Lucca

till the end of June, at which time it was thought that Sir Marmaduke

should begin to make preparations for his journey back to the

Islands. Their future prospects were not altogether settled. It was

not decided whether Lady Rowley should at once return with him,

whether Mrs. Trevelyan should return with him,--nor was it settled

among them what should be the fate of Nora Rowley. Nora Rowley was

quite resolved herself that she would not go back to the Islands, and

had said as much to her mother. Lady Rowley had not repeated this

to Sir Marmaduke, and was herself in doubt as to what might best be

done. Girls are understood by their mothers better than they are by

their fathers. Lady Rowley was beginning to be aware that Nora's

obstinacy was too strong to be overcome by mere words, and that other

steps must be taken if she were to be weaned from her pernicious

passion for Hugh Stanbury. Mr. Glascock was still in Florence. Might

she not be cured by further overtures from Mr. Glascock? The chance

of securing such a son-in-law was so important, so valuable, that no

trouble was too great to be incurred, even though the probability of

success might not be great.

It must not, however, be supposed that Lady Rowley carried off all

the family to Italy, including Sir Marmaduke, simply in chase of

Mr. Glascock. Anxious as she was on the subject, she was too proud,

and also too well-conditioned, to have suggested to herself such a

journey with such an object. Trevelyan had escaped from Willesden

with the child, and they had heard,--again through Stanbury,--that

he had returned to Italy. They had all agreed that it would be well

that they should leave London for awhile, and see something of

the Continent; and when it was told to them that little Louis was

probably in Florence, that alone was reason enough for them to go

thither. They would go to the city till the heat was too great and

the mosquitoes too powerful, and then they would visit the baths

of Lucca for a month. This was their plan of action, and the cause

for their plan; but Lady Rowley found herself able to weave into it

another little plan of her own of which she said nothing to anybody.

She was not running after Mr. Glascock; but if Mr. Glascock should

choose to run after them,--or her, who could say that any harm had

been done?

Nora had answered that proposition of her lover's to walk out of the

house in Manchester Street, and get married at the next church, in a

most discreet manner. She had declared that she would be true and

firm, but that she did not wish to draw upon herself the displeasure

of her father and mother. She did not, she said, look upon a

clandestine marriage as a happy resource. But,--this she added at the

end of a long and very sensible letter,--she intended to abide by her

engagement, and she did not intend to go back to the Mandarins. She

did not say what alternative she would choose in the event of her

being unable to obtain her father's consent before his return. She

did not suggest what was to become of her when Sir Marmaduke's leave

of absence should be expired. But her statement that she would not go

back to the islands was certainly made with more substantial vigour,

though, perhaps, with less of reasoning, than any other of the

propositions made in her letter. Then, in her postscript, she told

him that they were all going to Italy. "Papa and mamma think that we

ought to follow poor Mr. Trevelyan. The lawyer says that nothing can

be done while he is away with the boy. We are therefore all going to

start to Florence. The journey is delightful. I will not say whose

presence will be wanting to make it perfect."

Before they started there came a letter to Nora from Dorothy, which

shall be given entire, because it will tell the reader more of

Dorothy's happiness than would be learned from any other mode of

narrative.

The Close, Thursday.

DEAREST NORA,

I have just had a letter from Hugh, and that makes me feel

that I should like to write to you. Dear Hugh has told me

all about it, and I do so hope that things may come right

and that we may be sisters. He is so good that I do not

wonder that you should love him. He has been the best son

and the best brother in the world, and everybody speaks

well of him,--except my dear aunt, who is prejudiced

because she does not like newspapers. I need not praise

him to you, for I dare say you think quite as well of him

as I do. I cannot tell you all the beautiful things he

says about you, but I dare say he has told them to you

himself.

I seem to know you so well because Priscilla has talked

about you so often. She says that she knew that you and

my brother were fond of each other because you growled at

each other when you were together at the Clock House, and

never had any civil words to say before people. I don't

know whether growling is a sign of love, but Hugh does

growl sometimes when he is most affectionate. He growls at

me, and I understand him, and I like to be growled at. I

wonder whether you like him to growl at you.

And now I must tell you something about myself,--because

if you are to be my sister you ought to know it all. I

also am going to be married to a man whom I love,--oh, so

dearly! His name is Mr. Brooke Burgess, and he is a great

friend of my aunt's. At first she did not like our being

engaged, because of some family reason;--but she has got

over that, and nothing can be kinder and nicer than she

is. We are to be married here, some day in June,--the 11th

I think it will be. How I do wish you could have been here

to be my bridesmaid. It would have been so nice to have

had Hugh's sweetheart with me. He is a friend of Hugh's,

and no doubt you will hear all about him. The worst of it

is that we must live in London, because my husband as will

be,--you see I call him mine already,--is in an office

there. And so poor Aunt Stanbury will be left all alone.

It will be very sad, and she is so wedded to Exeter that I

fear we shall not get her up to London.

I would describe Mr. Burgess to you, only I do not suppose

you would care to hear about him. He is not so tall as

Hugh, but he is a great deal better looking. With you two

the good looks are to be with the wife; but, with us, with

the husband. Perhaps you think Hugh is handsome. We used

to declare that he was the ugliest boy in the country.

I don't suppose it makes very much difference. Brooke is

handsome, but I don't think I should like him the less if

he were ever so ugly.

Do you remember hearing about the Miss Frenches when you

were in Devonshire? There has come up such a terrible

affair about them. A Mr. Gibson, a clergyman, was going to

marry the younger; but has changed his mind and wants to

take the elder. I think he was in love with her first.

Dorothy did not say a word about the little intermediate stage of

attachment to herself.

All this is making a great noise in the city, and some

people think he should be punished severely. It seems to

me that a gentleman ought not to make such a mistake; but

if he does, he ought to own it. I hope they will let him

marry the elder one. Aunt Stanbury says it all comes from

their wearing chignons. I wish you knew Aunt Stanbury,

because she is so good. Perhaps you wear a chignon. I

think Priscilla said that you did. It must not be large,

if you come to see Aunt Stanbury.

Pray write to me,--and believe that I hope to be your most

affectionate sister,

DOROTHY STANBURY.

P.S.--I am so happy, and I do so hope that you will be the

same.

This was received only a day before the departure of the Rowleys for

Italy, and was answered by a short note promising that Nora would

write to her correspondent from Florence.

There could be no doubt that Trevelyan had started with his boy,

fearing the result of the medical or legal interference with his

affairs which was about to be made at Sir Marmaduke's instance. He

had written a few words to his wife, neither commencing nor ending

his note after any usual fashion, telling her that he thought it

expedient to travel, that he had secured the services of a nurse for

the little boy, and that during his absence a certain income would,

as heretofore, be paid to her. He said nothing as to his probable

return, or as to her future life; nor was there anything to indicate

whither he was going. Stanbury, however, had learned from the

faithless and frightened Bozzle that Trevelyan's letters were to be

sent after him to Florence. Mr. Bozzle, in giving this information,

had acknowledged that his employer was "becoming no longer quite

himself under his troubles," and had expressed his opinion that he

ought to be "looked after." Bozzle had made his money; and now,

with a grain of humanity mixed with many grains of faithlessness,

reconciled it to himself to tell his master's secrets to his master's

enemies. What would a counsel be able to say about his conduct

in a court of law? That was the question which Bozzle was always

asking himself as to his own business. That he should be abused

by a barrister to a jury, and exposed as a spy and a fiend, was,

he thought, a matter of course. To be so abused was a part of his

profession. But it was expedient for him in all cases to secure some

loop-hole of apparent duty by which he might in part escape from such

censures. He was untrue to his employer now, because he thought that

his employer ought to be "looked after." He did, no doubt, take a

five-pound note from Hugh Stanbury; but then it was necessary that

he should live. He must be paid for his time. In this way Trevelyan

started for Florence, and within a week afterwards the Rowleys were

upon his track.

Nothing had been said by Sir Marmaduke to Nora as to her lover since

that stormy interview in which both father and daughter had expressed

their opinions very strongly, and very little had been said by Lady

Rowley. Lady Rowley had spoken more than once of Nora's return to

the Mandarins, and had once alluded to it as a certainty. "But I do

not know that I shall go back," Nora had said. "My dear," the mother

had replied, "unless you are married, I suppose your home must be

with your parents." Nora, having made her protest, did not think it

necessary to persevere, and so the matter was dropped. It was known,

however, that they must all come back to London before they started

for their seat of government, and therefore the subject did not at

present assume its difficult aspect. There was a tacit understanding

among them that everything should be done to make the journey

pleasant to the young mother who was in search of her son; and, in

addition to this, Lady Rowley had her own little understanding, which

was very tacit indeed, that in Mr. Glascock might be found an escape

from one of their great family difficulties.

"You had better take this, papa," Mrs. Trevelyan had said, when she

received from the office of Mr. Bideawhile a cheque payable to her

order for the money sent to her by her husband's direction.

"I do not want the man's money," said Sir Marmaduke.

"But you are going to this place for my sake, papa;--and it is right

that he should bear the expense for his own wife. And, papa, you must

remember always that though his mind is distracted on this horrible

business, he is not a bad man. No one is more liberal or more just

about money." Sir Marmaduke's feelings on the matter were very

much the same as those which had troubled Mr. Outhouse, and he,

personally, refused to touch the money; but his daughter paid her own

share of the expenses of the journey.

They travelled at their ease, stopping at Paris, and at Geneva, and

at Milan. Lady Rowley thought that she was taken very fast, because

she was allowed to sleep only two nights at each of these places,

and Sir Rowley himself thought that he had achieved something of a

Hannibalian enterprise in taking five ladies and two maids over the

Simplon and down into the plains of Lombardy, with nobody to protect

him but a single courier. He had been a little nervous about it,

being unaccustomed to European travelling, and had not at first

realised the fact that the journey is to be made with less trouble

than one from the Marble Arch to Mile End. "My dears," he said to his

younger daughters, as they were rattling round the steep downward

twists and turns of the great road, "you must sit quite still on

these descents, or you do not know where you may go. The least thing

would overset us." But Lucy and Sophy soon knew better, and became

so intimate with the mountain, under the friendly guidance of their

courier, that before the plains were reached, they were in and out,

and here and there, and up and down, as though they had been bred

among the valleys of the pass. There would come a ringing laugh from

some rock above their head, and Lady Rowley looking up would see

their dresses fluttering on a pinnacle which appeared to her to be

fit only for a bird; and there would be the courier behind them, with

two parasols, and a shawl, and a cloak, and an eye-glass, and a fine

pair of grizzled whiskers. They made an Alpine club of their own,

refusing to admit their father because he would not climb up a rock,

and Nora thought of the letters about it which she would write to

her lover,--only that she had determined that she would not write to

him at all without telling her mother,--and Mrs. Trevelyan would for

moments almost forget that she had been robbed of her child.

From Milan they went on to Florence, and though they were by that

time quite at home in Italy, and had become critical judges of

Italian inns and Italian railways, they did not find that journey

to be quite so pleasant. There is a romance to us still in the name

of Italy which a near view of many details in the country fails to

realise. Shall we say that a journey through Lombardy is about as

interesting as one through the flats of Cambridgeshire and the fens

of Norfolk? And the station of Bologna is not an interesting spot

in which to spend an hour or two, although it may be conceded that

provisions may be had there much better than any that can be procured

at our own railway stations. From thence they went, still by rail,

over the Apennines, and unfortunately slept during the whole time.

The courier had assured them that if they would only look out they

would see the castles of which they had read in novels; but the day

had been very hot, and Sir Marmaduke had been cross, and Lady Rowley

had been weary, and so not a castle was seen. "Pistoia, me lady,

this," said the courier opening the door;--"to stop half an hour."

"Oh, why was it not Florence?" Another hour and a half! So they

all went to sleep again, and were very tired when they reached the

beautiful city.

During the next day they rested at their inn, and sauntered through

the Duomo, and broke their necks looking up at the inimitable glories

of the campanile. Such a one as Sir Marmaduke had of course not come

to Florence without introductions. The Foreign Office is always very

civil to its next-door neighbour of the colonies,--civil and cordial,

though perhaps a little patronising. A minister is a bigger man than

a governor; and the smallest of the diplomatic fry are greater swells

than even secretaries in quite important dependencies. The attachÃ©,

though he be unpaid, dwells in a capital, and flirts with a countess.

The governor's right-hand man is confined to an island, and dances

with a planter's daughter. The distinction is quite understood, but

is not incompatible with much excellent good feeling on the part of

the superior department. Sir Marmaduke had come to Florence fairly

provided with passports to Florentine society, and had been mentioned

in more than one letter as the distinguished Governor of the

Mandarins, who had been called home from his seat of government on a

special mission of great importance. On the second day he went out

to call at the embassy and to leave his cards. "Have you been able

to learn whether he is here?" asked Lady Rowley of her husband in a

whisper, as soon as they were alone.

"Who;--Trevelyan?"

"I did not suppose you could learn about him, because he would be

hiding himself. But is Mr. Glascock here?"

"I forgot to ask," said Sir Marmaduke.

Lady Rowley did not reproach him. It is impossible that any father

should altogether share a mother's anxiety in regard to the marriage

of their daughters. But what a thing it would be! Lady Rowley thought

that she could compound for all misfortunes in other respects, if she

could have a daughter married to the future Lord Peterborough. She

had been told in England that he was faultless,--not very clever, not

very active, not likely to be very famous; but, as a husband, simply

faultless. He was very rich, very good-natured, easily managed,

more likely to be proud of his wife than of himself, addicted to no

jealousies, afflicted by no vices, so respectable in every way that

he was sure to become great as an English nobleman by the very weight

of his virtues. And it had been represented also to Lady Rowley

that this paragon among men had been passionately attached to her

daughter! Perhaps she magnified a little the romance of the story;

but it seemed to her that this greatly endowed lover had rushed away

from his country in despair, because her daughter Nora would not

smile upon him. Now they were, as she hoped, in the same city with

him. But it was indispensable to her success that she should not seem

to be running after him. To Nora, not a word had been said of the

prospect of meeting Mr. Glascock at Florence. Hardly more than a

word had been said to her sister Emily, and that under injunction

of strictest secrecy. It must be made to appear to all the world

that other motives had brought them to Florence,--as, indeed, other

motives had brought them. Not for worlds would Lady Rowley have run

after a man for her daughter; but still, still,--still, seeing that

the man was himself so unutterably in love with her girl, seeing that

he was so fully justified by his position to be in love with any

girl, seeing that such a maximum of happiness would be the result of

such a marriage, she did feel that, even for his sake, she must be

doing a good thing to bring them together! Something, though not much

of all this, she had been obliged to explain to Sir Marmaduke;--and

yet he had not taken the trouble to inquire whether Mr. Glascock was

in Florence!

On the third day after their arrival, the wife of the British

minister came to call upon Lady Rowley, and the wife of the British

minister was good-natured, easy-mannered, and very much given to

conversation. She preferred talking to listening, and in the course

of a quarter of an hour had told Lady Rowley a good deal about

Florence; but she had not mentioned Mr. Glascock's name. It would

have been so pleasant if the requisite information could have been

obtained without the asking of any direct question on the subject!

But Lady Rowley, who from many years' practice of similar, though

perhaps less distinguished, courtesies on her part, knew well the

first symptom of the coming end of her guest's visit, found that the

minister's wife was about to take her departure without an allusion

to Mr. Glascock. And yet the names had been mentioned of so many

English residents in Florence, who neither in wealth, rank, or

virtue, were competent to hold a candle to that phoenix! She was

forced, therefore, to pluck up courage, and to ask the question.

"Have you had a Mr. Glascock here this spring?" said Lady Rowley.

"What;--Lord Peterborough's son? Oh, dear, yes. Such a singular

being!"

Lady Rowley thought that she could perceive that her phoenix had

not made himself agreeable at the embassy. It might perhaps be that

he had buried himself away from society because of his love. "And is

here now?" asked Lady Rowley.

"I cannot say at all. He is sometimes here and sometimes with his

father at Naples. But when here, he lives chiefly with the Americans.

They say he is going to marry an American girl,--their minister's

niece. There are three of them, I think, and he is to take the

eldest." Lady Rowley asked no more questions, and let her august

visitor go, almost without another word.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

"WE SHALL BE SO POOR."

Mr. Glascock at that moment was not only in Florence, but was

occupying rooms in the very hotel in which the Rowleys were staying.

Lady Rowley, when she heard that he was engaged to marry an American

lady, became suddenly very sick at heart,--sick with a sickness

that almost went beyond her heart. She felt ill, and was glad to be

alone. The rumour might be untrue. Such rumours generally are untrue.

But then, as Lady Rowley knew very well, they generally have some

foundation in truth. Mr. Glascock, if he were not actually engaged

to the American girl, had probably been flirting with her;--and, if

so, where was that picture which Lady Rowley had been painting for

herself of a love-lorn swain to be brought back to the pleasures and

occupations of the world only by the girl of whom he was enamoured?

But still she would not quite give up the project. Mr. Glascock,

if he was in Italy, would no doubt see by the newspapers that Sir

Marmaduke and his family were in Florence,--and would probably come

to them. Then, if Nora would only behave herself, the American girl

might still be conquered.

During two or three days after this nothing was seen or heard of

Mr. Glascock. Had Lady Rowley thought of mentioning the name to the

waiter at the hotel, she would have learned that he was living in the

next passage; but it did not occur to her to seek information in that

fashion. Nor did she ask direct questions in other quarters about

Mr. Glascock himself. She did, however, make inquiry about Americans

living in Florence,--especially about the American Minister,--and,

before a week had passed overhead, had been introduced to the

Spaldings. Mrs. Spalding was very civil, and invited Lady Rowley and

all the girls and Sir Marmaduke to come to her on her "Fridays." She

received her friends every Friday, and would continue to do so till

the middle of June. She had nieces who would, she said, be so happy

to make the acquaintance of the Miss Rowleys.

By this time the picture galleries, the churches, and the palaces in

Florence had nearly all been visited. Poor Lady Rowley had dragged

herself wearily from sight to sight, hoping always to meet with

Mr. Glascock, ignorant of the fact that residents in a town do not

pass their mornings habitually in looking after pictures. During

this time inquiries were being made through the police, respecting

Trevelyan; and Sir Marmaduke had obtained information that an English

gentleman, with a little boy, had gone on to Siena, and had located

himself there. There seemed to be but little doubt that this was

Trevelyan,--though nothing had been learned with certainty as to the

gentleman's name. It had been decided that Sir Marmaduke, with his

courier and Mrs. Trevelyan, should go on to Siena, and endeavour

to come upon the fugitive, and they had taken their departure on a

certain morning. On that same day Lady Rowley was walking with Nora

and one of the other girls through the hall of the hotel, when they

were met in full face--by Mr. Glascock! Lady Rowley and Lucy were in

front, and they, of course, did not know the man. Nora had seen him

at once, and in her confusion hardly knew how to bear herself. Mr.

Glascock was passing by her without recognising her,--had passed her

mother and sister, and had so far gone on, that Nora had determined

to make no sign, when he chanced to look up and see who it was that

was so close to him. "Miss Rowley," he said, "who thought of meeting

you in Florence!" Lady Rowley, of course, turned round, and there was

an introduction. Poor Nora, though she knew nothing of her mother's

schemes, was confused and ill at ease. Mr. Glascock was very civil,

but at the same time rather cold. Lady Rowley was all smiles and

courtesy. She had, she said, heard his name from her daughters, and

was very happy to make his acquaintance. Lucy looked on somewhat

astonished to find that the lover whom her sister had been blamed for

rejecting, and who was spoken of with so many encomiums, was so old a

man. Mr. Glascock asked after Mrs. Trevelyan; and Lady Rowley, in a

low, melancholy whisper, told him that they were now all in Florence,

in the hope of meeting Mr. Trevelyan. "You have heard the sad story,

I know, Mr. Glascock,--and therefore I do not mind telling you." Mr.

Glascock acknowledged that he did know the story, and informed her

that he had seen Mr. Trevelyan in Florence within the last ten days.

This was so interesting, that, at Lady Rowley's request, he went with

them up to their rooms, and in this way the acquaintance was made. It

turned out that Mr. Glascock had spoken to Mr. Trevelyan, and that

Trevelyan had told him that he meant for the present to take up his

residence in some small Italian town. "And how was he looking, Mr.

Glascock?"

"Very ill, Lady Rowley;--very ill, indeed."

"Do not tell her so, Mr. Glascock. She has gone now with her father

to Siena. We think that he is there, with the boy,--or, at least,

that he may be heard of there. And you;--you are living here?" Mr.

Glascock said that he was living between Naples and Florence,--going

occasionally to Naples, a place that he hated, to see his father,

and coming back at intervals to the capital. Nora sat by, and hardly

spoke a word. She was nicely dressed, with an exquisite little

bonnet, which had been bought as they came through Paris; and Lady

Rowley, with natural pride, felt that if he was ever in love with her

child, that love must come back upon him now. American girls, she had

been told, were hard, and dry, and sharp, and angular. She had seen

some at the Mandarins, with whom she thought it must be impossible

that any Englishman should be in love. There never, surely, had

been an American girl like her Nora. "Are you fond of pictures, Mr.

Glascock?" she asked. Mr. Glascock was not very fond of pictures,

and thought that he was rather tired of them. What was he fond of?

Of sitting at home and doing nothing. That was his reply, at least;

and a very unsatisfactory reply it was, as Lady Rowley could hardly

propose that they should come and sit and do nothing with him. Could

he have been lured into churches or galleries, Nora might have been

once more thrown into his company. Then Lady Rowley took courage,

and asked him whether he knew the Spaldings. They were going to Mrs.

Spalding's that very evening,--she and her daughters. Mr. Glascock

replied that he did know the Spaldings, and that he also should be at

their house. Lady Rowley thought that she discovered something like a

blush about his cheekbones and brow, as he made his answer. Then he

left them, giving his hand to Nora as he went;--but there was nothing

in his manner to justify the slightest hope.

"I don't think he is nice at all," said Lucy.

"Don't be so foolish, Lucy," said Lady Rowley angrily.

"I think he is very nice," said Nora. "He was only talking nonsense

when he said that he liked to sit still and do nothing. He is not at

all an idle man;--at least I am told so."

"But he is as old as Methuselah," said Lucy.

"He is between thirty and forty," said Lady Rowley. "Of course we

know that from the peerage." Lady Rowley, however, was wrong. Had she

consulted the peerage, she would have seen that Mr. Glascock was over

forty.

Nora, as soon as she was alone and could think about it all, felt

quite sure that Mr. Glascock would never make her another offer. This

ought not to have caused her any sorrow, as she was very well aware

that she would not accept him, should he do so. Yet, perhaps, there

was a moment of some feeling akin to disappointment. Of course she

would not have accepted him. How could she? Her faith was so plighted

to Hugh Stanbury that she would be a by-word among women for ever,

were she to be so false. And as she told herself, she had not the

slightest feeling of affection for Mr. Glascock. It was quite out of

the question, and a matter simply for speculation. Nevertheless it

would have been a very grand thing to be Lady Peterborough, and she

almost regretted that she had a heart in her bosom.

She had become fully aware during that interview that her mother

still entertained hopes, and almost suspected that Lady Rowley had

known something of Mr. Glascock's residence in Florence. She had

seen that her mother had met Mr. Glascock almost as though some such

meeting had been expected, and had spoken to him almost as though she

had expected to have to speak to him. Would it not be better that she

should at once make her mother understand that all this could be of

no avail? If she were to declare plainly that nothing could bring

about such a marriage, would not her mother desist? She almost made

up her mind to do so; but as her mother said nothing to her before

they started for Mr. Spalding's house, neither did she say anything

to her mother. She did not wish to have angry words if they could be

avoided, and she felt that there might be anger and unpleasant words

were she to insist upon her devotion to Hugh Stanbury while this rich

prize was in sight. If her mother should speak to her, then, indeed,

she would declare her own settled purpose; but she would do nothing

to accelerate the evil hour.

There were but few people in Mrs. Spalding's drawing-room when they

were announced, and Mr. Glascock was not among them. Miss Wallachia

Petrie was there, and in the confusion of the introduction was

presumed by Lady Rowley to be one of the nieces introduced. She had

been distinctly told that Mr. Glascock was to marry the eldest, and

this lady was certainly older than the other two. In this way Lady

Rowley decided that Miss Wallachia Petrie was her daughter's hated

rival, and she certainly was much surprised at the gentleman's taste.

But there is nothing,--nothing in the way of an absurd matrimonial

engagement,--into which a man will not allow himself to be entrapped

by pique. Nora would have a great deal to answer for, Lady Rowley

thought, if the unfortunate man should be driven by her cruelty to

marry such a woman as this one now before her.

It happened that Lady Rowley soon found herself seated by Miss

Petrie, and she at once commenced her questionings. She intended to

be very discreet, but the subject was too near her heart to allow her

to be altogether silent. "I believe you know Mr. Glascock?" she said.

"Yes," said Wallachia, "I do know him." Now the peculiar nasal twang

which our cousins over the water have learned to use, and which

has grown out of a certain national instinct which coerces them to

express themselves with self-assertion;--let the reader go into his

closet and talk through his nose for awhile with steady attention

to the effect which his own voice will have, and he will find that

this theory is correct;--this intonation, which is so peculiar among

intelligent Americans, had been adopted con amore, and, as it were,

taken to her bosom by Miss Petrie. Her ears had taught themselves

to feel that there could be no vitality in speech without it, and

that all utterance unsustained by such tone was effeminate, vapid,

useless, unpersuasive, unmusical,--and English. It was a complaint

frequently made by her against her friends Caroline and Olivia that

they debased their voices, and taught themselves the puling British

mode of speech. "I do know the gentleman," said Wallachia;--and Lady

Rowley shuddered. Could it be that such a woman as this was to reign

over Monkhams, and become the future Lady Peterborough?

"He told me that he is acquainted with the family," said Lady Rowley.

"He is staying at our hotel, and my daughter knew him very well when

he was living in London."

"I dare say. I believe that in London the titled aristocrats do hang

pretty much together." It had never occurred to poor Lady Rowley,

since the day in which her husband had been made a knight, at the

advice of the Colonial Minister, in order that the inhabitants of

some island might be gratified by the opportunity of using the

title, that she and her children had thereby become aristocrats.

Were her daughter Nora to marry Mr. Glascock, Nora would become an

aristocrat,--or would, rather, be ennobled,--all which Lady Rowley

understood perfectly.

"I don't know that London society is very exclusive in that respect,"

said Lady Rowley.

"I guess you are pretty particular," said Miss Petrie, "and it seems

to me you don't have much regard to intellect or erudition,--but fix

things up straight according to birth and money."

"I hope we are not quite so bad as that," said Lady Rowley. "I do not

know London well myself, as I have passed my life in very distant

places."

"The distant places are, in my estimation, the best. The further the

mind is removed from the contamination incidental to the centres of

long-established luxury, the more chance it has of developing itself

according to the intention of the Creator, when he bestowed his gifts

of intellect upon us." Lady Rowley, when she heard this eloquence,

could hardly believe that such a man as Mr. Glascock should really be

intent upon marrying such a lady as this who was sitting next to her.

In the meantime, Nora and the real rival were together, and they also

were talking of Mr. Glascock. Caroline Spalding had said that Mr.

Glascock had spoken to her of Nora Rowley, and Nora acknowledged that

there had been some acquaintance between them in London. "Almost more

than that, I should have thought," said Miss Spalding, "if one might

judge by his manner of speaking of you."

[Illustration: The rivals.]

"He is a little given to be enthusiastic," said Nora, laughing.

"The least so of all mankind, I should have said. You must know he is

very intimate in this house. It begun in this way;--Olivia and I were

travelling together, and there was--a difficulty, as we say in our

country when three or four gentlemen shoot each other. Then there

came up Mr. Glascock and another gentleman. By-the-bye, the other

gentleman was your brother-in-law."

"Poor Mr. Trevelyan!"

"He is very ill;--is he not?"

"We think so. My sister is with us, you know. That is to say, she is

at Siena to-day."

"I have heard about him, and it is so sad. Mr. Glascock knows him. As

I said, they were travelling together, when Mr. Glascock came to our

assistance. Since that, we have seen him very frequently. I don't

think he is enthusiastic,--except when he talks of you."

"I ought to be very proud," said Nora.

"I think you ought,--as Mr. Glascock is a man whose good opinion is

certainly worth having. Here he is. Mr. Glascock, I hope your ears

are tingling. They ought to do so, because we are saying all manner

of fine things about you."

"I could not be well spoken of by two on whose good word I should set

a higher value," said he.

"And whose do you value the most?" said Caroline.

"I must first know whose eulogium will run the highest."

Then Nora answered him. "Mr. Glascock, other people may praise

you louder than I can do, but no one will ever do so with more

sincerity." There was a pretty earnestness about her as she spoke,

which Lady Rowley ought to have heard. Mr. Glascock bowed, and Miss

Spalding smiled, and Nora blushed.

"If you are not overwhelmed now," said Miss Spalding, "you must be so

used to flattery, that it has no longer any effect upon you. You must

be like a drunkard, to whom wine is as water, and who thinks that

brandy is not strong enough."

"I think I had better go away," said Mr. Glascock, "for fear the

brandy should be watered by degrees." And so he left them.

Nora had become quite aware, without much process of thinking about

it, that her former lover and this American young lady were very

intimate with each other. The tone of the conversation had shewn that

it was so;--and, then, how had it come to pass that Mr. Glascock had

spoken to this American girl about her,--Nora Rowley? It was evident

that he had spoken of her with warmth, and had done so in a manner to

impress his hearer. For a minute or two they sat together in silence

after Mr. Glascock had left them, but neither of them stirred. Then

Caroline Spalding turned suddenly upon Nora, and took her by the

hand. "I must tell you something," said she, "only it must be a

secret for awhile."

"I will not repeat it."

"Thank you, dear. I am engaged to him,--as his wife. He asked me this

very afternoon, and nobody knows it but my aunt. When I had accepted

him, he told me all the story about you. He had very often spoken

of you before, and I had guessed how it must have been. He wears

his heart so open for those whom he loves, that there is nothing

concealed. He had seen you just before he came to me. But perhaps I

am wrong to tell you that now. He ought to have been thinking of you

again at such a time."

"I did not want him to think of me again."

"Of course you did not. Of course I am joking. You might have been

his wife if you wished it. He has told me all that. And he especially

wants us to be friends. Is there anything to prevent it?"

"On my part? Oh, dear, no;--except that you will be such grand folk,

and we shall be so poor."

"We!" said Caroline, laughing. "I am so glad that there is a 'we.'"

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE FUTURE LADY PETERBOROUGH.

"If you have not sold yourself for British gold, and for British

acres, and for British rank, I have nothing to say against it,"

said Miss Wallachia Petrie that same evening to her friend Caroline

Spalding.

"You know that I have not sold myself, as you call it," said

Caroline. There had been a long friendship between these two ladies,

and the younger one knew that it behoved her to bear a good deal

from the elder. Miss Petrie was honest, clever, and in earnest. We

in England are not usually favourably disposed to women who take a

pride in a certain antagonism to men in general, and who are anxious

to shew the world that they can get on very well without male

assistance; but there are many such in America who have noble

aspirations, good intellects, much energy, and who are by no means

unworthy of friendship. The hope in regard to all such women,--the

hope entertained not by themselves, but by those who are solicitous

for them,--is that they will be cured at last by a husband and

half-a-dozen children. In regard to Wallachia Petrie there was not,

perhaps, much ground for such hope. She was so positively wedded to

women's rights in general, and to her own rights in particular, that

it was improbable that she should ever succumb to any man;--and where

would be the man brave enough to make the effort? From circumstances

Caroline Spalding had been the beloved of her heart since Caroline

Spalding was a very little girl; and she had hoped that Caroline

would through life have borne arms along with her in that contest

which she was determined to wage against man, and which she always

waged with the greatest animosity against men of the British race.

She hated rank; she hated riches; she hated monarchy;--and with

a true woman's instinct in battle, felt that she had a specially

strong point against Englishmen, in that they submitted themselves

to dominion from a woman monarch. And now the chosen friend of her

youth,--the friend who had copied out all her poetry, who had learned

by heart all her sonnets, who had, as she thought, reciprocated all

her ideas, was going to be married,--and to be married to an English

lord! She had seen that it was coming for some time, and had spoken

out very plainly, hoping that she might still save the brand from

the burning. Now the evil was done; and Caroline Spalding, when she

told her news, knew well that she would have to bear some heavy

reproaches.

"How many of us are there who never know whether we sell ourselves

or not?" said Wallachia. "The senator who longs for office, and who

votes this way instead of that in order that he may get it, thinks

that he is voting honestly. The minister who calls himself a teacher

of God's word, thinks that it is God's word that he preaches when

he strains his lungs to fill his church. The question is this,

Caroline;--would you have loved the same man had he come to you with

a woodman's axe in his hand or a clerk's quill behind his ear? I

guess not."

"As to the woodman's axe, Wally, it is very well in theory; but--"

"Things good in theory, Caroline, will be good also when practised.

You may be sure of that. We dislike theory simply because our

intelligences are higher than our wills. But we will let that pass."

"Pray let it pass, Wally. Do not preach me sermons to-night. I am so

happy, and you ought to wish me joy."

"If wishing you joy would get you joy, I would wish it you while I

lived. I cannot be happy that you should be taken from us whither I

shall never see you again."

"But you are to come to us. I have told him so, and it is settled."

"No, dear; I shall not do that. What should I be in the glittering

halls of an English baron? Could there be any visiting less fitting,

any admixture less appropriate? Could I who have held up my voice

in the Music Hall of LacedÃ¦mon, amidst the glories of the West, in

the great and free State of Illinois, against the corruption of an

English aristocracy,--could I, who have been listened to by two

thousand of my countrywomen,--and men,--while I spurned the unmanly,

inhuman errors of primogeniture,--could I, think you, hold my tongue

beneath the roof of a feudal lord!" Caroline Spalding knew that her

friend could not hold her tongue, and hesitated to answer. There had

been that fatal triumph of a lecture on the joint rights of men and

women, and it had rendered poor Wallachia Petrie unfit for ordinary

society.

"You might come there without talking politics, Wally," said

Caroline.

"No, Caroline; no. I will go into the house of no man in which the

free expression of my opinion is debarred me. I will not sit even

at your table with a muzzled tongue. When you are gone, Caroline,

I shall devote myself to what, after all, must be the work of my

life, and I shall finish the biographical history of our great

hero in verse,--which I hope may at least be not ephemeral. From

month to month I shall send you what I do, and you will not refuse

me your friendly criticism,--and, perhaps, some slight meed of

approbation,--because you are dwelling beneath the shade of a throne.

Oh, Caroline, let it not be a upas tree!"

The Miss Petries of the world have this advantage,--an advantage

which rarely if ever falls to the lot of a man,--that they are never

convinced of error. Men, let them be ever so much devoted to their

closets, let them keep their work ever so closely veiled from public

scrutiny, still find themselves subjected to criticism, and under

the necessity of either defending themselves or of succumbing. If,

indeed, a man neither speaks, nor writes,--if he be dumb as regards

opinion,--he passes simply as one of the crowd, and is in the way

neither of convincing nor of being convinced; but a woman may speak,

and almost write, as she likes, without danger of being wounded by

sustained conflict. Who would have the courage to begin with such a

one as Miss Petrie, and endeavour to prove to her that she is wrong

from the beginning? A little word of half-dissent, a smile, a shrug,

and an ambiguous compliment which is misunderstood, are all the forms

of argument which can be used against her. Wallachia Petrie, in

her heart of hearts, conceived that she had fairly discussed her

great projects from year to year with indomitable eloquence and

unanswerable truth,--and that none of her opponents had had a leg

to stand upon. And this she believed because the chivalry of men

had given to her sex that protection against which her life was one

continued protest.

"Here he is," said Caroline, as Mr. Glascock came up to them. "Try

and say a civil word to him, if he speaks about it. Though he is to

be a lord, still he is a man and a brother."

"Caroline," said the stern monitress, "you are already learning to

laugh at principles which have been dear to you since you left your

mother's breast. Alas, how true it is, 'You cannot touch pitch and

not be defiled.'"

The further progress of these friendly and feminine amenities was

stopped by the presence of the gentleman who had occasioned them.

"Miss Petrie," said the hero of the hour, "Caroline was to tell you

of my good fortune, and no doubt she has done so."

"I cannot wait to hear the pretty things he has to say," said

Caroline, "and I must look after my aunt's guests. There is poor

Signor Buonarosci without a soul to say a syllable to him, and I must

go and use my ten Italian words."

"You are about to take with you to your old country, Mr. Glascock,"

said Miss Petrie, "one of the brightest stars in our young American

firmament." There could be no doubt, from the tone of Miss Petrie's

voice, that she now regarded this star, however bright, as one of a

sort which is subjected to falling.

"I am going to take a very nice young woman," said Mr. Glascock.

"I hate that word woman, sir, uttered with the half-hidden sneer

which always accompanies its expression from the mouth of a man."

"Sneer, Miss Petrie!"

"I quite allow that it is involuntary, and not analysed or understood

by yourselves. If you speak of a dog, you intend to do so with

affection, but there is always contempt mixed with it. The so-called

chivalry of man to woman is all begotten in the same spirit. I want

no favour, but I claim to be your equal."

"I thought that American ladies were generally somewhat exacting as

to those privileges which chivalry gives them."

"It is true, sir, that the only rank we know in our country is in

that precedence which man gives to woman. Whether we maintain that,

or whether we abandon it, we do not intend to purchase it at the

price of an acknowledgment of intellectual inferiority. For myself, I

hate chivalry;--what you call chivalry. I can carry my own chair, and

I claim the right to carry it whithersoever I may please."

Mr. Glascock remained with her for some time, but made no opportunity

for giving that invitation to Monkhams of which Caroline had spoken.

As he said afterwards, he found it impossible to expect her to attend

to any subject so trivial; and when, afterwards, Caroline told him,

with some slight mirth,--the capability of which on such a subject

was coming to her with her new ideas of life,--that, though he was

partly saved as a man and a brother, still he was partly the reverse

as a feudal lord, he began to reflect that Wallachia Petrie would be

a guest with whom he would find it very difficult to make things go

pleasant at Monkhams. "Does she not bully you horribly?" he asked.

"Of course she bullies me," Caroline answered; "and I cannot expect

you to understand as yet how it is that I love her and like her; but

I do. If I were in distress to-morrow, she would give everything she

has in the world to put me right."

"So would I," said he.

"Ah, you;--that is a matter of course. That is your business now.

And she would give everything she has in the world to set the world

right. Would you do that?"

"It would depend on the amount of my faith. If I could believe in the

result, I suppose I should do it."

"She would do it on the slightest hope that such giving would have

any tendency that way. Her philanthropy is all real. Of course she is

a bore to you."

"I am very patient."

"I hope I shall find you so,--always. And, of course, she is

ridiculous--in your eyes. I have learned to see it, and to regret it;

but I shall never cease to love her."

"I have not the slightest objection. Her lessons will come from over

the water, and mine will come from--where shall I say?--over the

table. If I can't talk her down with so much advantage on my side, I

ought to be made a woman's-right man myself."

Poor Lady Rowley had watched Miss Petrie and Mr. Glascock during

those moments that they had been together, and had half believed the

rumour, and had half doubted, thinking in the moments of her belief

that Mr. Glascock must be mad, and in the moments of unbelief that

the rumours had been set afloat by the English Minister's wife with

the express intention of turning Mr. Glascock into ridicule. It had

never occurred to her to doubt that Wallachia was the eldest of that

family of nieces. Could it be possible that a man who had known

her Nora, who had undoubtedly loved her Nora,--who had travelled

all the way from London to Nuncombe Putney to ask Nora to be his

wife,--should within twelve months of that time have resolved to

marry a woman whom he must have selected simply as being the most

opposite to Nora of any female human being that he could find? It was

not credible to her; and if it were not true, there might still be a

hope. Nora had met him, and had spoken to him, and it had seemed that

for a moment or two they had spoken as friends. Lady Rowley, when

talking to Mrs. Spalding, had watched them closely; and she had seen

that Nora's eyes had been bright, and that there had been something

between them which was pleasant. Suddenly she found herself close to

Wallachia, and thought that she would trust herself to a word.

"Have you been long in Florence?" asked Lady Rowley in her softest

voice.

"A pretty considerable time, ma'am;--that is, since the fall began."

What a voice;--what an accent;--and what words! Was there a man

living with sufficient courage to take this woman to England, and

shew her to the world as Lady Peterborough?

"Are you going to remain in Italy for the summer?" continued Lady

Rowley.

"I guess I shall;--or, perhaps, locate myself in the purer atmosphere

of the Swiss mountains."

"Switzerland in summer must certainly be much pleasanter."

"I was thinking at the moment of the political atmosphere," said Miss

Petrie; "for although, certainly, much has been done in this country

in the way of striking off shackles and treading sceptres under foot,

still, Lady Rowley, there remains here that pernicious thing,--a

king. The feeling of the dominion of a single man,--and that of a

single woman is, for aught I know, worse,--with me so clouds the air,

that the breath I breathe fails to fill my lungs." Wallachia, as she

said this, put forth her hand, and raised her chin, and extended

her arm. She paused, feeling that justice demanded that Lady Rowley

should have a right of reply. But Lady Rowley had not a word to say,

and Wallachia Petrie went on. "I cannot adapt my body to the sweet

savours and the soft luxuries of the outer world with any comfort to

my inner self, while the circumstances of the society around me are

oppressive to my spirit. When our war was raging all around me I was

light-spirited as the lark that mounts through the morning sky."

"I should have thought it was very dreadful," said Lady Rowley.

"Full of dread, of awe, and of horror, were those fiery days of

indiscriminate slaughter; but they were not days of desolation,

because hope was always there by our side. There was a hope in

which the soul could trust, and the trusting soul is ever light and

buoyant."

"I dare say it is," said Lady Rowley.

"But apathy, and serfdom, and kinghood, and dominion, drain the

fountain of its living springs, and the soul becomes like the plummet

of lead, whose only tendency is to hide itself in subaqueous mud and

unsavoury slush."

Subaqueous mud and unsavoury slush! Lady Rowley repeated the words to

herself as she made good her escape, and again expressed to herself

her conviction that it could not possibly be so. The "subaqueous mud

and unsavoury slush," with all that had gone before it about the

soul was altogether unintelligible to her; but she knew that it was

American buncom of a high order of eloquence, and she told herself

again and again that it could not be so. She continued to keep her

eyes upon Mr. Glascock, and soon saw him again talking to Nora. It

was hardly possible, she thought, that Nora should speak to him

with so much animation, or he to her, unless there was some feeling

between them which, if properly handled, might lead to a renewal of

the old tenderness. She went up to Nora, having collected the other

girls, and said that the carriage was then waiting for them. Mr.

Glascock immediately offered Lady Rowley his arm, and took her

down to the hall. Could it be that she was leaning upon a future

son-in-law? There was something in the thought which made her lay

her weight upon him with a freedom which she would not otherwise

have used. Oh!--that her Nora should live to be Lady Peterborough!

We are apt to abuse mothers for wanting high husbands for their

daughters;--but can there be any point in which the true maternal

instinct can shew itself with more affectionate enthusiasm? This poor

mother wanted nothing for herself from Mr. Glascock. She knew very

well that it was her fate to go back to the Mandarins, and probably

to die there. She knew also that such men as Mr. Glascock, when they

marry beneath themselves in rank and fortune, will not ordinarily

trouble themselves much with their mothers-in-law. There was nothing

desired for herself. Were such a match accomplished, she might,

perhaps, indulge herself in talking among the planters' wives of her

daughter's coronet; but at the present moment there was no idea even

of this in her mind. It was of Nora herself, and of Nora's sisters,

that she was thinking,--for them that she was plotting,--that the

one might be rich and splendid, and the others have some path opened

for them to riches and splendour. Husband-hunting mothers may be

injudicious; but surely they are maternal and unselfish. Mr. Glascock

put her into the carriage, and squeezed her hand;--and then he

squeezed Nora's hand. She saw it, and was sure of it. "I am so glad

you are going to be happy," Nora had said to him before this. "As

far as I have seen her, I like her so much." "If you do not come

and visit her in her own house, I shall think you have no spirit of

friendship," he said. "I will," Nora had replied;--"I will." This had

been said up-stairs, just as Lady Rowley was coming to them, and on

this understanding, on this footing, Mr. Glascock had pressed her

hand.

As she went home, Lady Rowley's mind was full of doubt as to the

course which it was best that she should follow with her daughter.

She was not unaware how great was the difficulty before her. Hugh

Stanbury's name had not been mentioned since they left London, but at

that time Nora was obstinately bent on throwing herself away upon the

"penny-a-liner." She had never been brought to acknowledge that such

a marriage would be even inappropriate, and had withstood gallantly

the expression of her father's displeasure. But with such a spirit as

Nora's, it might be easier to prevail by silence than by many words.

Lady Rowley was quite sure of this,--that it would be far better to

say nothing further of Hugh Stanbury. Let the cure come, if it might

be possible, from absence and from her daughter's good sense. The

only question was whether it would be wise to say any word about Mr.

Glascock. In the carriage she was not only forbearing but flattering

in her manner to Nora. She caressed her girl's hand and spoke to

her,--as mothers know how to speak when they want to make much of

their girls, and to have it understood that those girls are behaving

as girls should behave. There was to be nobody to meet them to-night,

as it had been arranged that Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Trevelyan should

sleep at Siena. Hardly a word had been spoken in the carriage; but

up-stairs, in their drawing-room, there came a moment in which Lucy

and Sophie had left them, and Nora was alone with her mother. Lady

Rowley almost knew that it would be most prudent to be silent;--but a

word spoken in season;--how good it is! And the thing was so near to

her that she could not hold her peace. "I must say, Nora," she began,

"that I do like your Mr. Glascock."

"He is not my Mr. Glascock, mamma," said Nora, smiling.

"You know what I mean, dear." Lady Rowley had not intended to utter a

word that should appear like pressure on her daughter at this moment.

She had felt how imprudent it would be to do so. But now Nora seemed

to be leading the way herself to such discourse. "Of course, he is

not your Mr. Glascock. You cannot eat your cake and have it, nor can

you throw it away and have it."

"I have thrown my cake away altogether, and certainly I cannot have

it." She was still smiling as she spoke, and seemed to be quite merry

at the idea of regarding Mr. Glascock as the cake which she had

declined to eat.

"I can see one thing quite plainly, dear."

"What is that, mamma?"

"That in spite of what you have done, you can still have your cake

whenever you choose to take it."

"Why, mamma, he is engaged to be married!"

"Mr. Glascock?"

"Yes, Mr. Glascock. It's quite settled. Is it not sad?"

"To whom is he engaged?" Lady Rowley's solemnity as she asked this

question was piteous to behold.

"To Miss Spalding,--Caroline Spalding."

"The eldest of those nieces?"

"Yes;--the eldest."

"I cannot believe it."

"Mamma, they both told me so. I have sworn an eternal friendship with

her already."

"I did not see you speaking to her."

"But I did talk to her a great deal."

"And he is really going to marry that dreadful woman?"

"Dreadful, mamma!"

"Perfectly awful! She talked to me in a way that I have read about

in books, but which I did not before believe to be possible. Do you

mean that he is going to be married to that hideous old maid,--that

bell-clapper?"

"Oh, mamma, what slander! I think her so pretty."

"Pretty!"

"Very pretty. And, mamma, ought I not to be happy that he should

have been able to make himself so happy? It was quite, quite, quite

impossible that I should have been his wife. I have thought about it

ever so much, and I am so glad of it! I think she is just the girl

that is fit for him."

Lady Rowley took her candle and went to bed, professing to herself

that she could not understand it. But what did it signify? It was,

at any rate, certain now that the man had put himself out of Nora's

reach, and if he chose to marry a republican virago, with a red nose,

it could now make no difference to Nora. Lady Rowley almost felt

a touch of satisfaction in reflecting on the future misery of his

married life.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

CASALUNGA.

Sir Marmaduke had been told at the Florence post-office that he would

no doubt be able to hear tidings of Trevelyan, and to learn his

address, from the officials in the post-office at Siena. At Florence

he had been introduced to some gentleman who was certainly of

importance,--a superintendent who had clerks under him and who was a

big man. This person had been very courteous to him, and he had gone

to Siena thinking that he would find it easy to obtain Trevelyan's

address,--or to learn that there was no such person there. But at

Siena he and his courier together could obtain no information. They

rambled about the huge cathedral and the picturesque market-place

of that quaint old city for the whole day, and on the next morning

after breakfast they returned to Florence. They had learned nothing.

The young man at the post-office had simply protested that he knew

nothing of the name of Trevelyan. If letters should come addressed to

such a name, he would keep them till they were called for; but, to

the best of his knowledge, he had never seen or heard the name. At

the guard-house of the gendarmerie they could not, or would not, give

him any information, and Sir Marmaduke came back with an impression

that everybody at Siena was ignorant, idiotic, and brutal. Mrs.

Trevelyan was so dispirited as to be ill, and both Sir Marmaduke and

Lady Rowley were disposed to think that the world was all against

them. "You have no conception of the sort of woman that man is going

to marry," said Lady Rowley.

"What man?"

"Mr. Glascock! A horrid American female, as old almost as I am, who

talks through her nose, and preaches sermons about the rights of

women. It is incredible! And Nora might have had him just for lifting

up her hand." But Sir Marmaduke could not interest himself much about

Mr. Glascock. When he had been told that his daughter had refused the

heir to a great estate and a peerage, it had been matter of regret;

but he had looked upon the affair as done, and cared nothing now

though Mr. Glascock should marry a transatlantic Xantippe. He was

angry with Nora because by her obstinacy she was adding to the

general perplexities of the family, but he could not make comparisons

on Mr. Glascock's behalf between her and Miss Spalding,--as his wife

was doing, either mentally or aloud, from hour to hour. "I suppose it

is too late now," said Lady Rowley, shaking her head.

"Of course it is too late. The man must marry whom he pleases. I am

beginning to wonder that anybody should ever want to get married. I

am indeed."

"But what are the girls to do?"

"I don't know what anybody is to do. Here is a man as mad as a March

hare, and yet nobody can touch him. If it was not for the child, I

should advise Emily to put him out of her head altogether."

But though Sir Marmaduke could not bring himself to take any interest

in Mr. Glascock's affairs, and would not ask a single question

respecting the fearful American female whom this unfortunate man

was about to translate to the position of an English peeress, yet

circumstances so fell out that before three days were over he and

Mr. Glascock were thrown together in very intimate relations. Sir

Marmaduke had learned that Mr. Glascock was the only Englishman in

Florence to whom Trevelyan had been known, and that he was the only

person with whom Trevelyan had been seen to speak while passing

through the city. In his despair, therefore, Sir Marmaduke had gone

to Mr. Glascock, and it was soon arranged that the two gentlemen

should renew the search at Siena together, without having with them

either Mrs. Trevelyan or the courier. Mr. Glascock knew the ways

of the people better than did Sir Marmaduke, and could speak the

language. He obtained a passport to the good offices of the police of

Siena, and went prepared to demand rather than to ask for assistance.

They started very early, before breakfast, and on arriving at Siena

at about noon, first employed themselves in recruiting exhausted

nature. By the time that they had both declared that the hotel at

Siena was the very worst in all Italy, and that a breakfast without

eatable butter was not to be considered a breakfast at all, they

had become so intimate that Mr. Glascock spoke of his own intended

marriage. He must have done this with the conviction on his mind that

Nora Rowley would have told her mother of his former intention, and

that Lady Rowley would have told Sir Marmaduke; but he did not feel

it to be incumbent on himself to say anything on that subject. He had

nothing to excuse. He had behaved fairly and honourably. It was not

to be expected that he should remain unmarried for ever for the sake

of a girl who had twice refused him. "Of course there are very many

in England," he said, "who will think me foolish to marry a girl from

another country."

"It is done every day," said Sir Marmaduke.

"No doubt it is. I admit, however, that I ought to be more careful

than some other persons. There is a title and an estate to be

perpetuated, and I cannot, perhaps, be justified in taking quite so

much liberty as some other men may do; but I think I have chosen a

woman born to have a high position, and who will make her own way in

any society in which she may be placed."

"I have no doubt she will," said Sir Marmaduke, who had still

sounding in his ears the alarming description which his wife had

given him of this infatuated man's proposed bride. But he would have

been bound to say as much had Mr. Glascock intended to marry as lowly

as did King Cophetua.

"She is highly educated, gentle-mannered, as sweetly soft as any

English girl I ever met, and very pretty. You have met her, I think."

"I do not remember that I have observed her."

"She is too young for me, perhaps," said Mr. Glascock; "but that is a

fault on the right side." Sir Marmaduke, as he wiped his beard after

his breakfast, remembered what his wife had told him about the lady's

age. But it was nothing to him. "She is four-and-twenty, I think,"

said Mr. Glascock. If Mr. Glascock chose to believe that his intended

wife was four-and-twenty instead of something over forty, that was

nothing to Sir Marmaduke.

"The very best age in the world," said he.

They had sent for an officer of the police, and before they had been

three hours in Siena they had been told that Trevelyan lived about

seven miles from the town, in a small and very remote country house,

which he had hired for twelve months from one of the city hospitals.

He had hired it furnished, and had purchased a horse and small

carriage from a man in the town. To this man they went, and it soon

became evident to them that he of whom they were in search was living

at this house, which was called Casalunga, and was not, as the police

officer told them, on the way to any place. They must leave Siena by

the road for Rome, take a turn to the left about a mile beyond the

city gate, and continue on along the country lane till they saw a

certain round hill to the right. On the top of that round hill was

Casalunga. As the country about Siena all lies in round hills, this

was no adequate description;--but it was suggested that the country

people would know all about it. They got a small open carriage in

the market-place, and were driven out. Their driver knew nothing of

Casalunga, and simply went whither he was told. But by the aid of the

country people they got along over the unmade lanes, and in little

more than an hour were told, at the bottom of the hill, that they

must now walk up to Casalunga. Though the hill was round-topped, and

no more than a hill, still the ascent at last was very steep, and

was paved with stones set edgeway in a manner that could hardly have

been intended to accommodate wheels. When Mr. Glascock asserted that

the signor who lived there had a carriage of his own, the driver

suggested that he must keep it at the bottom of the hill. It was

clearly not his intention to attempt to drive up the ascent, and Sir

Marmaduke and Mr. Glascock were therefore obliged to walk. It was

now in the latter half of May, and there was a blazing Italian sky

over their heads. Mr. Glascock was acclimated to Italian skies, and

did not much mind the work; but Sir Marmaduke, who never did much

in walking, declared that Italy was infinitely hotter than the

Mandarins, and could hardly make his way as far as the house door.

It seemed to both of them to be a most singular abode for such a

man as Trevelyan. At the top of the hill there was a huge entrance

through a wooden gateway, which seemed to have been constructed with

the intention of defying any intruders not provided with warlike

ammunition. The gates were, indeed, open at the period of their

visit, but it must be supposed that they were intended to be closed

at any rate at night. Immediately on the right, as they entered

through the gates, there was a large barn, in which two men were

coopering wine vats. From thence a path led slanting to the house,

of which the door was shut, and all the front windows blocked with

shutters. The house was very long, and only of one story for a

portion of its length. Over that end at which the door was placed

there were upper rooms, and there must have been space enough for a

large family with many domestics. There was nothing round or near

the residence which could be called a garden, so that its look of

desolation was extreme. There were various large barns and outhouses,

as though it had been intended by the builder that corn and hay and

cattle should be kept there; but it seemed now that there was nothing

there except the empty vats at which the two men were coopering. Had

the Englishmen gone farther into the granary, they would have seen

that there were wine-presses stored away in the dark corners.

They stopped and looked at the men, and the men halted for a moment

from their work and looked at them; but the men spoke never a word.

Mr. Glascock then asked after Mr. Trevelyan, and one of the coopers

pointed to the house. Then they crossed over to the door, and Mr.

Glascock finding there neither knocker nor bell, first tapped with

his knuckles, and then struck with his stick. But no one came. There

was not a sound in the house, and no shutter was removed. "I don't

believe that there is a soul here," said Sir Marmaduke.

"We'll not give it up till we've seen it all at any rate," said Mr.

Glascock. And so they went round to the other front.

On this side of the house the tilled ground, either ploughed or dug

with the spade, came up to the very windows. There was hardly even

a particle of grass to be seen. A short way down the hill there

were rows of olive trees, standing in prim order and at regular

distances, from which hung the vines that made the coopering of

the vats necessary. Olives and vines have pretty names, and call

up associations of landscape beauty. But here they were in no way

beautiful. The ground beneath them was turned up, and brown, and

arid, so that there was not a blade of grass to be seen. On some

furrows the maize or Indian corn was sprouting, and there were

patches of growth of other kinds,--each patch closely marked by its

own straight lines; and there were narrow paths, so constructed as to

take as little room as possible. But all that had been done had been

done for economy, and nothing for beauty. The occupiers of Casalunga

had thought more of the produce of their land than of picturesque or

attractive appearance.

The sun was blazing fiercely hot, hotter on this side, Sir Marmaduke

thought, even than on the other; and there was not a wavelet of a

cloud in the sky. A balcony ran the whole length of the house, and

under this Sir Marmaduke took shelter at once, leaning with his back

against the wall. "There is not a soul here at all," said he.

"The men in the barn told us that there was," said Mr. Glascock;

"and, at any rate, we will try the windows." So saying, he walked

along the front of the house, Sir Marmaduke following him slowly,

till they came to a door, the upper half of which was glazed, and

through which they looked into one of the rooms. Two or three of the

other windows in this frontage of the house came down to the ground,

and were made for egress and ingress; but they had all been closed

with shutters, as though the house was deserted. But they now looked

into a room which contained some signs of habitation. There was a

small table with a marble top, on which lay two or three books, and

there were two arm-chairs in the room, with gilded arms and legs,

and a morsel of carpet, and a clock on a shelf over a stove, and--a

rocking-horse. "The boy is here, you may be sure," said Mr. Glascock.

"The rocking-horse makes that certain. But how are we to get at any

one!"

"I never saw such a place for an Englishman to come and live in

before," said Sir Marmaduke. "What on earth can he do here all day!"

As he spoke the door of the room was opened, and there was Trevelyan

standing before them, looking at them through the window. He wore an

old red English dressing-gown, which came down to his feet, and a

small braided Italian cap on his head. His beard had been allowed

to grow, and he had neither collar nor cravat. His trousers were

unbraced, and he shuffled in with a pair of slippers, which would

hardly cling to his feet. He was paler and still thinner than when he

had been visited at Willesden, and his eyes seemed to be larger, and

shone almost with a brighter brilliancy.

Mr. Glascock tried to open the door, but found that it was closed.

"Sir Marmaduke and I have come to visit you," said Mr. Glascock,

aloud. "Is there any means by which we can get into the house?"

Trevelyan stood still and stared at them. "We knocked at the front

door, but nobody came," continued Mr. Glascock. "I suppose this is

the way you usually go in and out."

"He does not mean to let us in," whispered Sir Marmaduke.

"Can you open this door," said Mr. Glascock, "or shall we go round

again?" Trevelyan had stood still contemplating them, but at last

came forward and put back the bolt. "That is all right," said

Mr. Glascock, entering. "I am sure you will be glad to see Sir

Marmaduke."

"I should be glad to see him,--or you, if I could entertain you,"

said Trevelyan. His voice was harsh and hard, and his words were

uttered with a certain amount of intended grandeur. "Any of the

family would be welcome were it not--"

"Were it not what?" asked Mr. Glascock.

"It can be nothing to you, sir, what troubles I have here. This is my

own abode, in which I had flattered myself that I could be free from

intruders. I do not want visitors. I am sorry that you should have

had trouble in coming here, but I do not want visitors. I am very

sorry that I have nothing that I can offer you, Mr. Glascock."

"Emily is in Florence," said Sir Marmaduke.

"Who brought her? Did I tell her to come? Let her go back to her

home. I have come here to be free from her, and I mean to be free. If

she wants my money, let her take it."

"She wants her child," said Mr. Glascock.

"He is my child," said Trevelyan, "and my right to him is better than

hers. Let her try it in a court of law, and she shall see. Why did

she deceive me with that man? Why has she driven me to this? Look

here, Mr. Glascock;--my whole life is spent in this seclusion, and it

is her fault."

"Your wife is innocent of all fault, Trevelyan," said Mr. Glascock.

"Any woman can say as much as that;--and all women do say it.

Yet,--what are they worth?"

"Do you mean, sir, to take away your wife's character?" said Sir

Marmaduke, coming up in wrath. "Remember that she is my daughter, and

that there are things which flesh and blood cannot stand."

"She is my wife, sir, and that is ten times more. Do you think that

you would do more for her than I would do,--drink more of Esill? You

had better go away, Sir Marmaduke. You can do no good by coming here

and talking of your daughter. I would have given the world to save

her;--but she would not be saved."

"You are a slanderer!" said Sir Marmaduke, in his wrath.

Mr. Glascock turned round to the father, and tried to quiet him. It

was so manifest to him that the balance of the poor man's mind was

gone, that it seemed to him to be ridiculous to upbraid the sufferer.

He was such a piteous sight to behold, that it was almost impossible

to feel indignation against him. "You cannot wonder," said Mr.

Glascock, advancing close to the master of the house, "that the

mother should want to see her only child. You do not wish that your

wife should be the most wretched woman in the world."

"Am not I the most wretched of men? Can anything be more wretched

than this? Is her life worse than mine? And whose fault was it? Had

I any friend to whom she objected? Was I untrue to her in a single

thought?"

"If you say that she was untrue, it is a falsehood," said Sir

Marmaduke.

"You allow yourself a liberty of expression, sir, because you are my

wife's father," said Trevelyan, "which you would not dare to take in

other circumstances."

"I say that it is a false calumny,--a lie! and I would say so to any

man on earth who should dare to slander my child's name."

"Your child, sir! She is my wife;--my wife;--my wife!" Trevelyan, as

he spoke, advanced close up to his father-in-law; and at last hissed

out his words, with his lips close to Sir Marmaduke's face. "Your

right in her is gone, sir. She is mine,--mine,--mine! And you see the

way in which she has treated me, Mr. Glascock. Everything I had was

hers; but the words of a grey-haired sinner were sweeter to her than

all my love. I wonder whether you think that it is a pleasant thing

for such a one as I to come out here and live in such a place as

this? I have not a friend,--a companion,--hardly a book. There is

nothing that I can eat or drink. I do not stir out of the house,--and

I am ill;--very ill! Look at me. See what she has brought me to! Mr.

Glascock, on my honour as a man, I never wronged her in a thought or

a word."

Mr. Glascock had come to think that his best chance of doing any good

was to get Trevelyan into conversation with himself, free from the

interruption of Sir Marmaduke. The father of the injured woman could

not bring himself to endure the hard words that were spoken of his

daughter. During this last speech he had broken out once or twice;

but Trevelyan, not heeding him, had clung to Mr. Glascock's arm. "Sir

Marmaduke," said he, "would you not like to see the boy?"

"He shall not see the boy," said Trevelyan. "You may see him. He

shall not. What is he that he should have control over me?"

"This is the most fearful thing I ever heard of," said Sir Marmaduke.

"What are we to do with him?"

Mr. Glascock whispered a few words to Sir Marmaduke, and then

declared that he was ready to be taken to the child. "And he will

remain here?" asked Trevelyan. A pledge was then given by Sir

Marmaduke that he would not force his way farther into the house,

and the two other men left the chamber together. Sir Marmaduke,

as he paced up and down the room alone, perspiring at every pore,

thoroughly uncomfortable and ill at ease, thought of all the hard

positions of which he had ever read, and that his was harder than

them all. Here was a man married to his daughter, in possession of

his daughter's child, manifestly mad,--and yet he could do nothing

to him! He was about to return to the seat of his government, and

he must leave his own child in this madman's power! Of course, his

daughter could not go with him, leaving her child in this madman's

hands. He had been told that even were he to attempt to prove the man

to be mad in Italy, the process would be slow; and, before it could

be well commenced, Trevelyan would be off with the child elsewhere.

There never was an embarrassment, thought Sir Marmaduke, out of which

it was so impossible to find a clear way.

In the meantime, Mr. Glascock and Trevelyan were visiting the child.

It was evident that the father, let him be ever so mad, had discerned

the expediency of allowing some one to see that his son was alive

and in health. Mr. Glascock did not know much of children, and could

only say afterwards that the boy was silent and very melancholy, but

clean, and apparently well. It appeared that he was taken out daily

by his father in the cool hours of the morning, and that his father

hardly left him from the time that he was taken up till he was put to

bed. But Mr. Glascock's desire was to see Trevelyan alone, and this

he did after they had left the boy. "And now, Trevelyan," he said,

"what do you mean to do?"

"To do?"

"In what way do you propose to live? I want you to be reasonable with

me."

"They do not treat me reasonably."

"Are you going to measure your own conduct by that of other people?

In the first place, you should go back to England. What good can you

do here?" Trevelyan shook his head, but remained silent. "You cannot

like this life."

"No, indeed. But whither can I go now that I shall like to live?"

"Why not home?"

"I have no home."

"Why not go back to England? Ask your wife to join you, and return

with her. She would go at a word." The poor wretch again shook

his head. "I hope you think that I speak as your friend," said Mr.

Glascock.

"I believe you do."

"I will say nothing of any imprudence; but you cannot believe that

she has been untrue to you?" Trevelyan would say nothing to this, but

stood silent waiting for Mr. Glascock to continue. "Let her come back

to you--here; and then, as soon as you can arrange it, go to your own

home."

"Shall I tell you something?" said Trevelyan.

"What is it?"

He came up close to Mr. Glascock, and put his hand upon his visitor's

shoulder. "I will tell you what she would do at once. I dare say that

she would come to me. I dare say that she would go with me. I am

sure she would. And directly she got me there, she would--say that I

was--mad! She,--my wife, would do it! He,--that furious, ignorant old

man below, tried to do it before. His wife said that I was mad." He

paused a moment, as though waiting for a reply; but Mr. Glascock had

none to make. It had not been his object, in the advice which he had

given, to entrap the poor fellow by a snare, and to induce him so to

act that he should deliver himself up to keepers; but he was well

aware that wherever Trevelyan might be, it would be desirable that he

should be placed for awhile in the charge of some physician. He could

not bring himself at the spur of the moment to repudiate the idea by

which Trevelyan was actuated. "Perhaps you think that she would be

right?" said Trevelyan.

"I am quite sure that she would do nothing that is not for the best,"

said Mr. Glascock.

"I can see it all. I will not go back to England, Mr. Glascock. I

intend to travel. I shall probably leave this and go to--to--to

Greece, perhaps. It is a healthy place, this, and I like it for that

reason; but I shall not stay here. If my wife likes to travel with

me, she can come. But,--to England I will not go."

"You will let the child go to his mother?"

"Certainly not. If she wants to see the child, he is here. If she

will come,--without her father,--she shall see him. She shall not

take him from hence. Nor shall she return to live with me, without

full acknowledgment of her fault, and promises of an amended life. I

know what I am saying, Mr. Glascock, and have thought of these things

perhaps more than you have done. I am obliged to you for coming to

me; but now, if you please, I would prefer to be alone."

Mr. Glascock, seeing that nothing further could be done, joined Sir

Marmaduke, and the two walked down to their carriage at the bottom of

the hill. Mr. Glascock, as he went, declared his conviction that the

unfortunate man was altogether mad, and that it would be necessary

to obtain some interference on the part of the authorities for the

protection of the child. How this could be done, or whether it

could be done in time to intercept a further flight on the part of

Trevelyan, Mr. Glascock could not say. It was his idea that Mrs.

Trevelyan should herself go out to Casalunga, and try the force of

her own persuasion.

"I believe that he would murder her," said Sir Marmaduke.

"He would not do that. There is a glimmer of sense in all his

madness, which will keep him from any actual violence."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

"I CAN SLEEP ON THE BOARDS."

Three days after this there came another carriage to the bottom of

the hill on which Casalunga stood, and a lady got out of it all

alone. It was Emily Trevelyan, and she had come thither from Siena

in quest of her husband and her child. On the previous day Sir

Marmaduke's courier had been at the house with a note from the

wife to the husband, and had returned with an answer, in which

Mrs. Trevelyan was told that, if she would come quite alone, she

should see her child. Sir Marmaduke had been averse to any further

intercourse with the man, other than what might be made in accordance

with medical advice, and, if possible, with government authority.

Lady Rowley had assented to her daughter's wish, but had suggested

that she should at least be allowed to go also,--at any rate, as

far as the bottom of the hill. But Emily had been very firm, and Mr.

Glascock had supported her. He was confident that the man would do no

harm to her, and he was indisposed to believe that any interference

on the part of the Italian Government could be procured in such a

case with sufficient celerity to be of use. He still thought it might

be possible that the wife might prevail over the husband, or the

mother over the father. Sir Marmaduke was at last obliged to yield,

and Mrs. Trevelyan went to Siena with no other companion but the

courier. From Siena she made the journey quite alone; and having

learned the circumstances of the house from Mr. Glascock, she got out

of the carriage, and walked up the hill. There were still the two men

coopering at the vats, but she did not stay to speak to them. She

went through the big gates, and along the slanting path to the door,

not doubting of her way;--for Mr. Glascock had described it all to

her, making a small plan of the premises, and even explaining to her

the position of the room in which her boy and her husband slept. She

found the door open, and an Italian maid-servant at once welcomed

her to the house, and assured her that the signor would be with her

immediately. She was sure that the girl knew that she was the boy's

mother, and was almost tempted to ask questions at once as to the

state of the household; but her knowledge of Italian was slight, and

she felt that she was so utterly a stranger in the land that she

could dare to trust no one. Though the heat was great, her face was

covered with a thick veil. Her dress was black, from head to foot,

and she was as a woman who mourned for her husband. She was led into

the room which her father had been allowed to enter through the

window; and here she sat, in her husband's house, feeling that in no

position in the world could she be more utterly separated from the

interests of all around her. In a few minutes the door was opened,

and her husband was with her, bringing the boy in his hand. He had

dressed himself with some care; but it may be doubted whether the

garments which he wore did not make him appear thinner even and more

haggard than he had looked to be in his old dressing-gown. He had not

shaved himself, but his long hair was brushed back from his forehead,

after a fashion quaint and very foreign to his former ideas of

dress. His wife had not expected that her child would come to her

at once,--had thought that some entreaties would be necessary, some

obedience perhaps exacted from her, before she would be allowed to

see him; and now her heart was softened, and she was grateful to her

husband. But she could not speak to him till she had had the boy in

her arms. She tore off her bonnet, and then clinging to the child,

covered him with kisses. "Louey, my darling! Louey; you remember

mamma?" The child pressed himself close to the mother's bosom, but

spoke never a word. He was cowed and overcome, not only by the

incidents of the moment, but by the terrible melancholy of his

whole life. He had been taught to understand, without actual spoken

lessons, that he was to live with his father, and that the former

woman-given happinesses of his life were at an end. In this second

visit from his mother he did not forget her. He recognised the luxury

of her love; but it did not occur to him even to hope that she might

have come to rescue him from the evil of his days. Trevelyan was

standing by, the while, looking on; but he did not speak till she

addressed him.

"I am so thankful to you for bringing him to me," she said.

"I told you that you should see him," he said. "Perhaps it might have

been better that I should have sent him by a servant; but there are

circumstances which make me fear to let him out of my sight."

"Do you think that I did not wish to see you also? Louis, why do

you do me so much wrong? Why do you treat me with such cruelty?"

Then she threw her arms round his neck, and before he could repulse

her,--before he could reflect whether it would be well that he should

repulse her or not,--she had covered his brow and cheeks and lips

with kisses. "Louis," she said; "Louis, speak to me!"

"It is hard to speak sometimes," he said.

[Illustration: "It is hard to speak sometimes."]

"You love me, Louis?"

"Yes;--I love you. But I am afraid of you!"

"What is it that you fear? I would give my life for you, if you would

only come back to me and let me feel that you believed me to be

true." He shook his head, and began to think,--while she still clung

to him. He was quite sure that her father and mother had intended to

bring a mad doctor down upon him, and he knew that his wife was in

her mother's hands. Should he yield to her now,--should he make her

any promise,--might not the result be that he would be shut up in

dark rooms, robbed of his liberty, robbed of what he loved better

than his liberty,--his power as a man. She would thus get the better

of him and take the child, and the world would say that in this

contest between him and her he had been the sinning one, and she the

one against whom the sin had been done. It was the chief object of

his mind, the one thing for which he was eager, that this should

never come to pass. Let it once be conceded to him from all sides

that he had been right, and then she might do with him almost as she

willed. He knew well that he was ill. When he thought of his child,

he would tell himself that he was dying. He was at some moments of

his miserable existence fearfully anxious to come to terms with his

wife, in order that at his death his boy might not be without a

protector. Were he to die, then it would be better that his child

should be with its mother. In his happy days, immediately after

his marriage, he had made a will, in which he had left his entire

property to his wife for her life, providing for its subsequent

descent to his child,--or children. It had never even occurred to his

poor shattered brain that it would be well for him to alter his will.

Had he really believed that his wife had betrayed him, doubtless he

would have done so. He would have hated her, have distrusted her

altogether, and have believed her to be an evil thing. He had no such

belief. But in his desire to achieve empire, and in the sorrows which

had come upon him in his unsuccessful struggle, his mind had wavered

so frequently, that his spoken words were no true indicators of his

thoughts; and in all his arguments he failed to express either his

convictions or his desires. When he would say something stronger than

he intended, and it would be put to him by his wife, by her father or

mother, or by some friend of hers, whether he did believe that she

had been untrue to him, he would recoil from the answer which his

heart would dictate, lest he should seem to make an acknowledgment

that might weaken the ground upon which he stood. Then he would

satisfy his own conscience by assuring himself that he had never

accused her of such sin. She was still clinging to him now as his

mind was working after this fashion. "Louis," she said, "let it all

be as though there had been nothing."

"How can that be, my dear?"

"Not to others;--but to us it can be so. There shall be no word

spoken of the past." Again he shook his head. "Will it not be best

that there should be no word spoken?"

"'Forgiveness may be spoken with the tongue,'" he said, beginning to

quote from a poem which had formerly been frequent in his hands.

"Cannot there be real forgiveness between you and me,--between

husband and wife who, in truth, love each other? Do you think that I

would tell you of it again?" He felt that in all that she said there

was an assumption that she had been right, and that he had been

wrong. She was promising to forgive. She was undertaking to forget.

She was willing to take him back to the warmth of her love, and the

comfort of her kindness,--but was not asking to be taken back. This

was what he could not and would not endure. He had determined that

if she behaved well to him, he would not be harsh to her, and he

was struggling to keep up to his resolve. He would accuse her of

nothing,--if he could help it. But he could not say a word that would

even imply that she need forget,--that she should forgive. It was for

him to forgive;--and he was willing to do it, if she would accept

forgiveness. "I will never speak a word, Louis," she said, laying her

head upon his shoulder.

"Your heart is still hardened," he replied slowly.

"Hard to you?"

"And your mind is dark. You do not see what you have done. In our

religion, Emily, forgiveness is sure, not after penitence, but with

repentance."

"What does that mean?"

"It means this, that though I would welcome you back to my arms with

joy, I cannot do so, till you have--confessed your fault."

"What fault, Louis? If I have made you unhappy, I do, indeed, grieve

that it has been so."

"It is of no use," said he. "I cannot talk about it. Do you suppose

that it does not tear me to the very soul to think of it?"

"What is it that you think, Louis?" As she had been travelling

thither, she had determined that she would say anything that he

wished her to say,--make any admission that might satisfy him. That

she could be happy again as other women are happy, she did not

expect; but if it could be conceded between them that bygones should

be bygones, she might live with him and do her duty, and, at least,

have her child with her. Her father had told her that her husband was

mad; but she was willing to put up with his madness on such terms as

these. What could her husband do to her in his madness that he could

not do also to the child? "Tell me what you want me to say, and I

will say it," she said.

"You have sinned against me," he said, raising her head gently from

his shoulder.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "As God is my judge, I never have!" As she

said this, she retreated and took the sobbing boy again into her

arms.

He was at once placed upon his guard, telling himself that he saw the

necessity of holding by his child. How could he tell? Might there not

be a policeman down from Florence, ready round the house, to seize

the boy and carry him away? Though all his remaining life should be

a torment to him, though infinite plagues should be poured upon his

head, though he should die like a dog, alone, unfriended, and in

despair, while he was fighting this battle of his, he would not give

way. "That is sufficient," he said. "Louey must return now to his own

chamber."

"I may go with him?"

"No, Emily. You cannot go with him now. I will thank you to release

him, that I may take him." She still held the little fellow closely

pressed in her arms. "Do not reward me for my courtesy by further

disobedience," he said.

"You will let me come again?" To this he made no reply. "Tell me that

I may come again."

"I do not think that I shall remain here long."

"And I may not stay now?"

"That would be impossible. There is no accommodation for you."

"I could sleep on the boards beside his cot," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"That is my place," he replied. "You may know that he is not

disregarded. With my own hands I tend him every morning. I take him

out myself. I feed him myself. He says his prayers to me. He learns

from me, and can say his letters nicely. You need not fear for him.

No mother was ever more tender with her child than I am with him."

Then he gently withdrew the boy from her arms, and she let her child

go, lest he should learn to know that there was a quarrel between

his father and his mother. "If you will excuse me," he said, "I will

not come down to you again to-day. My servant will see you to your

carriage."

So he left her; and she, with an Italian girl at her heels, got into

her vehicle, and was taken back to Siena. There she passed the night

alone at the inn, and on the next morning returned to Florence by the

railway.

CHAPTER LXXX.

"WILL THEY DESPISE HIM?"

Gradually the news of the intended marriage between Mr. Glascock and

Miss Spalding spread itself over Florence, and people talked about

it with that energy which subjects of such moment certainly deserve.

That Caroline Spalding had achieved a very great triumph, was, of

course, the verdict of all men and of all women; and I fear that

there was a corresponding feeling that poor Mr. Glascock had been

triumphed over, and as it were, subjugated. In some respects he had

been remiss in his duties as a bachelor visitor to Florence,--as a

visitor to Florence who had manifestly been much in want of a wife.

He had not given other girls a fair chance, but had thrown himself

down at the feet of this American female in the weakest possible

manner. And then it got about the town that he had been refused over

and over again by Nora Rowley. It is too probable that Lady Rowley

in her despair and dismay had been indiscreet, and had told secrets

which should never have been mentioned by her. And the wife of

the English minister, who had some grudges of her own, lifted her

eyebrows and shook her head and declared that all the Glascocks at

home would be outraged to the last degree. "My dear Lady Rowley,"

she said, "I don't know whether it won't become a question with them

whether they should issue a commission de lunatico." Lady Rowley did

not know what a commission de lunatico meant, but was quite willing

to regard poor Mr. Glascock as a lunatic. "And there is poor Lord

Peterborough at Naples just at death's door," continued the British

Minister's wife. In this she was perhaps nearly correct; but as Lord

Peterborough had now been in the same condition for many months, as

his mind had altogether gone, and as the doctor declared that he

might live in his present condition for a year, or for years, it

could not fairly be said that Mr. Glascock was acting without due

filial feeling in engaging himself to marry a young lady. "And she

such a creature!" said Lady Rowley, with emphasis. This the British

Minister's wife noticed simply by shaking her head. Caroline Spalding

was undoubtedly a pretty girl; but, as the British Minister's wife

said afterwards, it was not surprising that poor Lady Rowley should

be nearly out of her mind.

This had occurred a full week after the evening spent at Mr.

Spalding's house; and even yet Lady Rowley had never been put right

as to that mistake of hers about Wallachia Petrie. That other trouble

of hers, and her eldest daughter's journey to Siena, had prevented

them from going out; and though the matter had often been discussed

between Lady Rowley and Nora, there had not as yet come between them

any proper explanation. Nora would declare that the future bride

was very pretty and very delightful; and Lady Rowley would throw up

her hands in despair and protest that her daughter was insane. "Why

should he not marry whom he likes, mamma?" Nora once said, almost

with indignation.

"Because he will disgrace his family."

"I cannot understand what you mean, mamma. They are, at any rate, as

good as we are. Mr. Spalding stands quite as high as papa does."

"She is an American," said Lady Rowley.

"And her family might say that he is an Englishman," said Nora.

"My dear, if you do not understand the incongruity between an English

peer and a Yankee--female, I cannot help you. I suppose it is because

you have been brought up within the limited society of a small

colony. If so, it is not your fault. But I had hoped you had been in

Europe long enough to have learned what was what. Do you think, my

dear, that she will look well when she is presented to her Majesty as

Lord Peterborough's wife?"

"Splendid," said Nora. "She has just the brow for a coronet."

"Heavens and earth!" said Lady Rowley, throwing up her hands. "And

you believe that he will be proud of her in England?"

"I am sure he will."

"My belief is that he will leave her behind him, or that they

will settle somewhere in the wilds of America,--out in Mexico, or

Massachusetts, or the Rocky Mountains. I do not think that he will

have the courage to shew her in London."

The marriage was to take place in the Protestant church at Florence

early in June, and then the bride and bridegroom were to go over the

Alps, and to remain there subject to tidings as to the health of the

old man at Naples. Mr. Glascock had thrown up his seat in Parliament,

some month or two ago, knowing that he could not get back to his

duties during the present session, and feeling that he would shortly

be called upon to sit in the other House. He was thus free to use his

time and to fix his days as he pleased; and it was certainly clear to

those who knew him, that he was not ashamed of his American bride.

He spent much of his time at the Spaldings' house, and was always

to be seen with them in the Cascine and at the Opera. Mrs. Spalding,

the aunt, was, of course, in great glory. A triumphant, happy, or

even simply a splendid marriage, for the rising girl of a family is

a great glory to the maternal mind. Mrs. Spalding could not but be

aware that the very air around her seemed to breathe congratulations

into her ears. Her friends spoke to her, even on indifferent

subjects, as though everything was going well with her,--better with

her than with anybody else; and there came upon her in these days

a dangerous feeling, that in spite of all the preachings of the

preachers, the next world might perhaps be not so very much better

than this. She was, in fact, the reverse of the medal of which

poor Lady Rowley filled the obverse. And the American Minister was

certainly an inch taller than before, and made longer speeches, being

much more regardless of interruption. Olivia was delighted at her

sister's success, and heard with rapture the description of Monkhams,

which came to her second-hand through her sister. It was already

settled that she was to spend her next Christmas at Monkhams, and

perhaps there might be an idea in her mind that there were other

eldest sons of old lords who would like American brides. Everything

around Caroline Spalding was pleasant,--except the words of Wallachia

Petrie.

Everything around her was pleasant till there came to her a touch of

a suspicion that the marriage which Mr. Glascock was going to make

would be detrimental to her intended husband in his own country.

There were many in Florence who were saying this besides the wife of

the English Minister and Lady Rowley. Of course Caroline Spalding

herself was the last to hear it, and to her the idea was brought

by Wallachia Petrie. "I wish I could think you would make yourself

happy,--or him," Wallachia had said, croaking.

"Why should I fail to make him happy?"

"Because you are not of the same blood, or race, or manners as

himself. They say that he is very wealthy in his own country, and

that those who live around him will look coldly on you."

"So that he does not look coldly, I do not care how others may look,"

said Caroline proudly.

"But when he finds that he has injured himself by such a marriage in

the estimation of all his friends,--how will it be then?"

This set Caroline Spalding thinking of what she was doing. She began

to realise the feeling that perhaps she might not be a fit bride for

an English lord's son, and in her agony she came to Nora Rowley for

counsel. After all, how little was it that she knew of the home and

the country to which she was to be carried! She might not, perhaps,

get adequate advice from Nora, but she would probably learn something

on which she could act. There was no one else among the English at

Florence to whom she could speak with freedom. When she mentioned her

fears to her aunt, her aunt of course laughed at her. Mrs. Spalding

told her that Mr. Glascock might be presumed to know his own business

best, and that she, as an American lady of high standing,--the niece

of a minister!--was a fitting match for any Englishman, let him be

ever so much a lord. But Caroline was not comforted by this, and in

her suspense she went to Nora Rowley. She wrote a line to Nora, and

when she called at the hotel, was taken up to her friend's bed-room.

She found great difficulty in telling her story, but she did tell it.

"Miss Rowley," she said, "if this is a silly thing that he is going

to do, I am bound to save him from his own folly. You know your own

country better than I do. Will they think that he has disgraced

himself?"

"Certainly not that," said Nora.

"Shall I be a load round his neck? Miss Rowley, for my own sake I

would not endure such a position as that, not even though I love him.

But for his sake! Think of that. If I find that people think ill of

him,--because of me--!"

"No one will think ill of him."

"Is it esteemed needful that such a one as he should marry a woman of

his own rank? I can bear to end it all now; but I shall not be able

to bear his humiliation, and my own despair, if I find that I have

injured him. Tell me plainly,--is it a marriage that he should not

make?" Nora paused for a while before she answered, and as she sat

silent the other girl watched her face carefully. Nora on being thus

consulted, was very careful that her tongue should utter nothing that

was not her true opinion as best she knew how to express it. Her

sympathy would have prompted her to give such an answer as would

at once have made Caroline happy in her mind. She would have been

delighted to have been able to declare that these doubts were utterly

groundless, and this hesitation needless. But she conceived that she

owed it as a duty from one woman to another to speak the truth as she

conceived it on so momentous an occasion, and she was not sure but

that Mr. Glascock would be considered by his friends in England to be

doing badly in marrying an American girl. What she did not remember

was this,--that her very hesitation was in fact an answer, and such

an answer as she was most unwilling to give. "I see that it would be

so," said Caroline Spalding.

"No;--not that."

"What then? Will they despise him,--and me?"

"No one who knows you can despise you. No one who sees you can fail

to admire you." Nora, as she said this, thought of her mother, but

told herself at once that in this matter her mother's judgment had

been altogether destroyed by her disappointment. "What I think will

take place will be this. His family, when first they hear of it, will

be sorry."

"Then," said Caroline, "I will put an end to it."

"You can't do that, dear. You are engaged, and you haven't a right.

I am engaged to a man, and all my friends object to it. But I shan't

put an end to it. I don't think I have a right. I shall not do it any

way, however."

"But if it were for his good?"

"It couldn't be for his good. He and I have got to go along together

somehow."

"You wouldn't hurt him," said Caroline.

"I won't if I can help it, but he has got to take me along with him

any how; and Mr. Glascock has got to take you. If I were you, I

shouldn't ask any more questions."

"It isn't the same. You said that you were to be poor, but he is very

rich. And I am beginning to understand that these titles of yours are

something like kings' crowns. The man who has to wear them can't do

just as he pleases with them. Noblesse oblige. I can see the meaning

of that, even when the obligation itself is trumpery in its nature.

If it is a man's duty to marry a Talbot because he's a Howard, I

suppose he ought to do his duty." After a pause she went on again. "I

do believe that I have made a mistake. It seemed to be absurd at the

first to think of it, but I do believe it now. Even what you say to

me makes me think it."

"At any rate you can't go back," said Nora enthusiastically.

"I will try."

"Go to himself and ask him. You must leave him to decide it at last.

I don't see how a girl when she is engaged, is to throw a man over

unless he consents. Of course you can throw yourself into the Arno."

"And get the water into my shoes,--for it wouldn't do much more at

present."

"And you can--jilt him," said Nora.

"It would not be jilting him."

"He must decide that. If he so regards it, it will be so. I advise

you to think no more about it; but if you speak to anybody it should

be to him." This was at last the result of Nora's wisdom, and then

the two girls descended together to the room in which Lady Rowley was

sitting with her other daughters. Lady Rowley was very careful in

asking after Miss Spalding's sister, and Miss Spalding assured her

that Olivia was quite well. Then Lady Rowley made some inquiry about

Olivia and Mr. Glascock, and Miss Spalding assured her that no two

persons were ever such allies, and that she believed that they were

together at this moment investigating some old church. Lady Rowley

simpered, and declared that nothing could be more proper, and

expressed a hope that Olivia would like England. Caroline Spalding,

having still in her mind the trouble that had brought her to Nora,

had not much to say about this. "If she goes again to England I am

sure she will like it," replied Miss Spalding.

"But of course she is going," said Lady Rowley.

"Of course she will some day, and of course she'll like it," said

Miss Spalding. "We both of us have been there already."

"But I mean Monkhams," said Lady Rowley, still simpering.

"I declare I believe mamma thinks that your sister is to be married

to Mr. Glascock!" said Lucy.

"And so she is;--isn't she?" said Lady Rowley.

"Oh, mamma!" said Nora, jumping up. "It is Caroline;--this one,

this one, this one,"--and Nora took her friend by the arm as she

spoke,--"it is this one that is to be Mrs. Glascock."

"It is a most natural mistake to make," said Caroline.

Lady Rowley became very red in the face, and was unhappy. "I

declare," she said, "that they told me it was your elder sister."

"But I have no elder sister," said Caroline, laughing.

"Of course she is oldest," said Nora,--"and looks to be so, ever so

much. Don't you, Miss Spalding?"

"I have always supposed so."

"I don't understand it at all," said Lady Rowley, who had no image

before her mind's eye but that of Wallachia Petrie, and who was

beginning to feel that she had disgraced her own judgment by the

criticisms she had expressed everywhere as to Mr. Glascock's bride.

"I don't understand it at all. Do you mean that both your sisters are

younger than you, Miss Spalding?"

"I have only got one, Lady Rowley."

"Mamma, you are thinking of Miss Petrie," said Nora, clapping both

her hands together.

"I mean the lady that wears the black bugles."

"Of course you do;--Miss Petrie. Mamma has all along thought that Mr.

Glascock was going to carry away with him the republican Browning!"

"Oh, mamma, how can you have made such a blunder!" said Sophie

Rowley. "Mamma does make such delicious blunders."

"Sophie, my dear, that is not a proper way of speaking."

"But, dear mamma, don't you?"

"If somebody has told me wrong, that has not been my fault," said

Lady Rowley.

The poor woman was so evidently disconcerted that Caroline Spalding

was quite unhappy. "My dear Lady Rowley, there has been no fault. And

why shouldn't it have been so? Wallachia is so clever, that it is the

most natural thing in the world to have thought."

"I cannot say that I agree with you there," said Lady Rowley,

somewhat recovering herself.

"You must know the whole truth now," said Nora, turning to her

friend, "and you must not be angry with us if we laugh a little at

your poetess. Mamma has been frantic with Mr. Glascock because he has

been going to marry,--whom shall I say,--her edition of you. She has

sworn that he must be insane. When we have sworn how beautiful you

were, and how nice, and how jolly, and all the rest of it,--she has

sworn that you were at least a hundred, and that you had a red nose.

You must admit that Miss Petrie has a red nose."

"Is that a sin?"

"Not at all in the woman who has it; but in the man who is going to

marry it,--yes. Can't you see how we have all been at cross-purposes,

and what mamma has been thinking and saying of poor Mr. Glascock?

You mustn't repeat it, of course; but we have had such a battle here

about it. We thought that mamma had lost her eyes and her ears and

her knowledge of things in general. And now it has all come out! You

won't be angry?"

"Why should I be angry?"

"Miss Spalding," said Lady Rowley, "I am really unhappy at what has

occurred, and I hope that there may be nothing more said about it.

I am quite sure that somebody told me wrong, or I should not have

fallen into such an error. I beg your pardon,--and Mr. Glascock's!"

"Beg Mr. Glascock's pardon, certainly," said Lucy.

Miss Spalding looked very pretty, smiled very gracefully, and coming

up to Lady Rowley to say good-bye, kissed her on her cheeks. This

overcame the spirit of the disappointed mother, and Lady Rowley never

said another word against Caroline Spalding or her marriage. "Now,

mamma, what do you think of her?" said Nora, as soon as Caroline was

gone.

"Was it odd, my dear, that I should be astonished at his wanting to

marry that other woman?"

"But, mamma, when we told you that she was young and pretty and

bright!"

"I thought that you were all demented. I did indeed. I still think it

a pity that he should take an American. I think that Miss Spalding is

very nice, but there are English girls quite as nice-looking as her."

After that there was not another word said by Lady Rowley against

Caroline Spalding.

Nora, when she thought of it all that night, felt that she had hardly

spoken to Miss Spalding as she should have spoken as to the treatment

in England which would be accorded to Mr. Glascock's wife. She became

aware of the effect which her own hesitation must have had, and

thought that it was her duty to endeavour to remove it. Perhaps, too,

the conversion of her mother had some effect in making her feel that

she had been wrong in supposing that there would be any difficulty

in Caroline's position in England. She had heard so much adverse

criticism from her mother that she had doubted in spite of

her own convictions;--but now it had come to light that Lady

Rowley's criticisms had all come from a most absurd blunder. "Only

fancy;"--she said to herself;--"Miss Petrie coming out as Lady

Peterborough! Poor mamma!" And then she thought of the reception

which would be given to Caroline, and of the place the future Lady

Peterborough would fill in the world, and of the glories of Monkhams!

Resolving that she would do her best to counteract any evil which

she might have done, she seated herself at her desk, and wrote the

following letter to Miss Spalding:--

MY DEAR CAROLINE,

I am sure you will let me call you so, as had you not felt

towards me like a friend, you would not have come to me

to-day and told me of your doubts. I think that I did not

answer you as I ought to have done when you spoke to me.

I did not like to say anything off-hand, and in that way

I misled you. I feel quite sure that you will encounter

nothing in England as Mr. Glascock's wife to make you

uncomfortable, and that he will have nothing to repent.

Of course Englishmen generally marry Englishwomen; and,

perhaps, there may be some people who will think that such

a prize should not be lost to their countrywomen. But that

will be all. Mr. Glascock commands such universal respect

that his wife will certainly be respected, and I do not

suppose that anything will ever come in your way that can

possibly make you feel that he is looked down upon. I hope

you will understand what I mean.

As for your changing now, that is quite impossible. If I

were you, I would not say a word about it to any living

being; but just go on,--straight forward,--in your own

way, and take the good the gods provide you,--as the poet

says to the king in the ode. And I think the gods have

provided for you very well,--and for him.

I do hope that I may see you sometimes. I cannot explain

to you how very much out of your line "we" shall be;--for

of course there is a "we." People are more separated with

us than they are, I suppose, with you. And my "we" is

a very poor man, who works hard at writing in a dingy

newspaper office, and we shall live in a garret and have

brown sugar in our tea, and eat hashed mutton. And I shall

have nothing a year to buy my clothes with. Still I mean

to do it; and I don't mean to be long before I do do it.

When a girl has made up her mind to be married, she had

better go on with it at once, and take it all afterwards

as it may come. Nevertheless, perhaps, we may see each

other somewhere, and I may be able to introduce you to the

dearest, honestest, very best, and most affectionate man

in the world. And he is very, very clever.

Yours very affectionately,

NORA ROWLEY.

Thursday morning.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

MR. GLASCOCK IS MASTER.

[Illustration]

Caroline Spalding, when she received Nora's letter, was not disposed

to give much weight to it. She declared to herself that the girl's

unpremeditated expression of opinion was worth more than her studied

words. But she was not the less grateful or the less loving towards

her new friend. She thought how nice it would be to have Nora at that

splendid abode in England of which she had heard so much,--but she

thought also that in that splendid abode she herself ought never to

have part or share. If it were the case that this were an unfitting

match, it was clearly her duty to decide that there should be no

marriage. Nora had been quite right in bidding her speak to Mr.

Glascock himself, and to Mr. Glascock she would go. But it was very

difficult for her to determine on the manner in which she would

discuss the subject with him. She thought that she could be firm if

her mind were once made up. She believed that perhaps she was by

nature more firm than he. In all their intercourse together he had

ever yielded to her; and though she had been always pleased and

grateful, there had grown upon her an idea that he was perhaps too

easy,--that he was a man as to whom it was necessary that they who

loved him should see that he was not led away by weakness into folly.

But she would want to learn something from him before her decision

was finally reached, and in this she foresaw a great difficulty.

In her trouble she went to her usual counsellor,--the Republican

Browning. In such an emergency she could hardly have done worse.

"Wally," she said, "we talk about England, and Italy, and France,

as though we knew all about them; but how hard it is to realise the

difference between one's own country and others."

"We can at least learn a great deal that is satisfactory," said

Wallachia. "About one out of every five Italians can read a book,

about two out of every five Englishmen can read a book. Out of every

five New Englanders four and four-fifths can read a book. I guess

that is knowing a good deal."

"I don't mean in statistics."

"I cannot conceive how you are to learn anything about any country

except by statistics. I have just discovered that the number of

illegitimate children--"

"Oh, Wally, I can't talk about that,--not now at least. What I cannot

realise is this,--what sort of a life it is that they will lead at

Monkhams."

"Plenty to eat and drink, I guess; and you'll always have to go round

in fine clothes."

"And that will be all?"

"No;--not all. There will be carriages and horses, and all manner

of people there who won't care much about you. If he is firm,--very

firm;--if he have that firmness which one does not often meet, even

in an American man, he will be able, after a while, to give you

a position as an English woman of rank." It is to be feared that

Wallachia Petrie had been made aware of Caroline's idea as to Mr.

Glascock's want of purpose.

"And that will be all?"

"If you have a baby, they'll let you go and see it two or three times

a day. I don't suppose you will be allowed to nurse it, because they

never do in England. You have read what the Saturday Review says. In

every other respect the Saturday Review has been the falsest of all

false periodicals, but I guess it has been pretty true in what it has

said about English women."

"I wish I knew more about it really."

"When a man has to leap through a window in the dark, Caroline, of

course he doubts whether the feather bed said to be below will be

soft enough for him."

"I shouldn't fear the leap for myself, if it wouldn't hurt him. Do

you think it possible that society can be so formed that a man should

lose caste because he doesn't marry just one of his own set?"

"It has been so all over the world, my dear. If like to like is to be

true anywhere, it should be true in marriage."

"Yes;--but with a difference. He and I are like to like. We come of

the same race, we speak the same language, we worship the same God,

we have the same ideas of culture and of pleasures. The difference is

one that is not patent to the eye or to the ear. It is a difference

of accidental incident, not of nature or of acquirement."

"I guess you would find, Caroline, that a jury of English matrons

sworn to try you fairly, would not find you to be entitled to come

among them as one of themselves."

"And how will that affect him?"

"Less powerfully than many others, because he is not impassioned. He

is, perhaps--lethargic."

"No, Wally, he is not lethargic."

"If you ask me I must speak. It would harass some men almost to

death; it will not do so with him. He would probably find his

happiness best in leaving his old country and coming among your

people."

The idea of Mr. Glascock,--the future Lord Peterborough,--leaving

England, abandoning Monkhams, deserting his duty in the House of

Lords, and going away to live in an American town, in order that he

might escape the miseries which his wife had brought upon him in his

own country, was more than Caroline could bear. She knew that, at

any rate, it would not come to that. The lord of Monkhams would live

at Monkhams, though the heavens should fall--in regard to domestic

comforts. It was clear to Caroline that Wallachia Petrie had in truth

never brought home to her own imagination the position of an English

peer. "I don't think you understand the people at all," she said

angrily.

"You think that you can understand them better because you are

engaged to this man!" said Miss Petrie, with well-pronounced irony.

"You have found generally that when the sun shines in your eyes your

sight is improved by it! You think that the love-talk of a few weeks

gives clearer instruction than the laborious reading of many volumes

and thoughtful converse with thinking persons! I hope that you may

find it so, Caroline." So saying Wallachia Petrie walked off in great

dudgeon.

Miss Petrie, not having learned from her many volumes and her much

converse with thoughtful persons to read human nature aright, was

convinced by this conversation that her friend Caroline was blind

to all results, and was determined to go on with this dangerous

marriage, having the rays of that sun of Monkhams so full upon her

eyes that she could not see at all. She was specially indignant at

finding that her own words had no effect. But, unfortunately, her

words had had much effect; and Caroline, though she had contested her

points, had done so only with the intention of producing her Mentor's

admonitions. Of course it was out of the question that Mr. Glascock

should go and live in Providence, Rhode Island, from which thriving

town Caroline Spalding had come; but, because that was impossible,

it was not the less probable that he might be degraded and made

miserable in his own home. That suggested jury of British matrons

was a frightful conclave to contemplate, and Caroline was disposed

to believe that the verdict given in reference to herself would

be adverse to her. So she sat and meditated, and spoke not a word

further to any one on the subject till she was alone with the man

that she loved.

Mr. Spalding at this time inhabited the ground floor of a large

palace in the city, from which there was access to a garden which at

this period of the year was green, bright, and shady, and which as

being in the centre of a city was large and luxurious. From one end

of the house there projected a covered terrace, or loggia, in which

there were chairs and tables, sculptured ornaments, busts, and old

monumental relics let into the wall in profusion. It was half chamber

and half garden,--such an adjunct to a house as in our climate would

give only an idea of cold, rheumatism, and a false romance, but under

an Italian sky, is a luxury daily to be enjoyed during most months of

the year. Here Mr. Glascock and Caroline had passed many hours,--and

here they were now seated, late in the evening, while all others of

the family were away. As far as regarded the rooms occupied by the

American Minister, they had the house and garden to themselves, and

there never could come a time more appropriate for the saying of a

thing difficult to be said. Mr. Glascock had heard from his father's

physician, and had said that it was nearly certain now that he

need not go down to Naples again before his marriage. Caroline was

trembling, not knowing how to speak, not knowing how to begin;--but

resolved that the thing should be done. "He will never know you,

Carry," said Mr. Glascock. "It is, perhaps, hardly a sorrow to me,

but it is a regret."

"It would have been a sorrow perhaps to him had he been able to know

me," said she, taking the opportunity of rushing at her subject.

"Why so? Of all human beings he was the softest-hearted."

"Not softer-hearted than you, Charles. But soft hearts have to be

hardened."

"What do you mean? Am I becoming obdurate?"

"I am, Charles," she said. "I have got something to say to you. What

will your uncles and aunts and your mother's relations say of me when

they see me at Monkhams?"

"They will swear to me that you are charming; and then,--when my back

is turned,--they'll pick you to pieces a little among themselves. I

believe that is the way of the world, and I don't suppose that we are

to do better than others."

"And if you had married an English girl, a Lady Augusta

Somebody,--would they pick her to pieces?"

"I guess they would, as you say."

"Just the same?"

"I don't think anybody escapes, as far as I can see. But that won't

prevent their becoming your bosom friends in a few weeks time."

"No one will say that you have been wrong to marry an American girl?"

"Now, Carry, what is the meaning of all this?"

"Do you know any man in your position who ever did marry an American

girl;--any man of your rank in England?" Mr. Glascock began to think

of the case, and could not at the moment remember any instance.

"Charles, I do not think you ought to be the first."

"And yet somebody must be first, if the thing is ever to be

done;--and I am too old to wait on the chance of being the second."

She felt that at the rate she was now progressing she would only run

from one little suggestion to another, and that he, either wilfully

or in sheer simplicity, would take such suggestions simply as jokes;

and she was aware that she lacked the skill to bring the conversation

round gradually to the point which she was bound to reach. She must

make another dash, let it be ever so sudden. Her mode of doing so

would be crude, ugly,--almost vulgar she feared; but she would attain

her object and say what she had to say. When once she had warmed

herself with the heat which argument would produce, then, she was

pretty sure, she would find herself at least as strong as he. "I

don't know that the thing ought to be done at all," she said. During

the last moment or two he had put his arm round her waist; and she,

not choosing to bid him desist from embracing her, but unwilling in

her present mood to be embraced, got up and stood before him. "I have

thought, and thought, and thought, and feel that it should not be

done. In marriage, like should go to like." She despised herself for

using Wallachia's words, but they fitted in so usefully, that she

could not refrain from them. "I was wrong not to know it before, but

it is better to know it now, than not to have known it till too late.

Everything that I hear and see tells me that it would be so. If you

were simply an Englishman, I would go anywhere with you; but I am not

fit to be the wife of an English lord. The time would come when I

should be a disgrace to you, and then I should die."

"I think I should go near dying myself," said he, "if you were a

disgrace to me." He had not risen from his chair, and sat calmly

looking up into her face.

"We have made a mistake, and let us unmake it," she continued. "I

will always be your friend. I will correspond with you. I will come

and see your wife."

"That will be very kind!"

"Charles, if you laugh at me, I shall be angry with you. It is right

that you should look to your future life, as it is right that I

should do so also. Do you think that I am joking? Do you suppose that

I do not mean it?"

"You have taken an extra dose this morning of Wallachia Petrie, and

of course you mean it."

"If you think that I am speaking her mind and not my own, you do not

know me."

"And what is it you propose?" he said, still keeping his seat and

looking calmly up into her face.

"Simply that our engagement should be over."

"And why?"

"Because it is not a fitting one for you to have made. I did not

understand it before, but now I do. It will not be good for you to

marry an American girl. It will not add to your happiness, and may

destroy it. I have learned, at last, to know how much higher is your

position than mine."

"And I am to be supposed to know nothing about it?"

"Your fault is only this,--that you have been too generous. I can be

generous also."

"Now, look here, Caroline, you must not be angry with me if on such

a subject I speak plainly. You must not even be angry if I laugh a

little."

"Pray do not laugh at me!--not now."

"I must a little, Carry. Why am I to be supposed to be so ignorant of

what concerns my own happiness and my own duties? If you will not sit

down, I will get up, and we will take a turn together." He rose from

his seat, but they did not leave the covered terrace. They moved on

to the extremity, and then he stood hemming her in against a marble

table in the corner. "In making this rather wild proposition, have

you considered me at all?"

"I have endeavoured to consider you, and you only."

"And how have you done it? By the aid of some misty, far-fetched

ideas respecting English society, for which you have no basis except

your own dreams,--and by the fantasies of a rabid enthusiast."

"She is not rabid," said Caroline earnestly; "other people think just

the same."

"My dear, there is only one person whose thinking on this subject

is of any avail, and I am that person. Of course, I can't drag you

into church to be married, but practically you can not help yourself

from being taken there now. As there need be no question about our

marriage,--which is a thing as good as done--"

"It is not done at all," said Caroline.

"I feel quite satisfied you will not jilt me, and as I shall insist

on having the ceremony performed, I choose to regard it as a

certainty. Passing that by, then, I will go on to the results. My

uncles, and aunts, and cousins, and the people you talk of, were very

reasonable folk when I last saw them, and quite sufficiently alive to

the fact that they had to regard me as the head of their family. I

do not doubt that we shall find them equally reasonable when we get

home; but should they be changed, should there be any sign shewn that

my choice of a wife had occasioned displeasure,--such displeasure

would not affect you."

"But it would affect you."

"Not at all. In my own house I am master,--and I mean to continue to

be so. You will be mistress there, and the only fear touching such

a position is that it may be recognised by others too strongly. You

have nothing to fear, Carry."

"It is of you I am thinking."

"Nor have I. What if some old women, or even some young women, should

turn up their noses at the wife I have chosen, because she has not

been chosen from among their own countrywomen, is that to be a cause

of suffering to us? Can not we rise above that,--lasting as it would

do for a few weeks, a month or two perhaps,--say a year,--till my

Caroline shall have made herself known? I think that we are strong

enough to live down a trouble so light." He had come close to her

as he was speaking, and had again put his arm round her waist. She

tried to escape from his embrace,--not with persistency, not with the

strength which always suffices for a woman when the embrace is in

truth a thing to be avoided, but clutching at his fingers with hers,

pressing them rather than loosening their grasp. "No, Carry," he

continued; "we have got to go through with it now, and we will try

and make the best of it. You may trust me that we shall not find it

difficult,--not, at least, on the ground of your present fears. I can

bear a heavier burden than you will bring upon me."

"I know that I ought to prove to you that I am right," she said,

still struggling with his hand.

"And I know that you can prove nothing of the kind. Dearest, it is

fixed between us now, and do not let us be so silly as to raise

imaginary difficulties. Of course you would have to marry me, even if

there were cause for such fears. If there were any great cause, still

the game would be worth the candle. There could be no going back, let

the fear be what it might. But there need be no fear if you will only

love me." She felt that he was altogether too strong for her,--that

she had mistaken his character in supposing that she could be more

firm than he. He was so strong that he treated her almost as a

child;--and yet she loved him infinitely the better for so treating

her. Of course, she knew now that her objection, whether true or

unsubstantial, could not avail. As he stood with his arm round her,

she was powerless to contradict him in anything. She had so far

acknowledged this that she no longer struggled with him, but allowed

her hand to remain quietly within his. If there was no going back

from this bargain that had been made,--why, then, there was no need

for combating. And when he stooped over and kissed her lips, she had

not a word to say. "Be good to me," he said, "and tell me that I am

right."

"You must be master, I suppose, whether you are right or wrong. A man

always thinks himself entitled to his own way."

"Why, yes. When he has won the battle, he claims his captive. Now,

the truth is this, I have won the battle, and your friend, Miss

Petrie, has lost it. I hope she will understand that she has been

beaten at last out of the field." As he said this, he heard a step

behind them, and turning round saw Wallachia there almost before he

could drop his arm.

"I am sorry that I have intruded on you," she said very grimly.

"Not in the least," said Mr. Glascock. "Caroline and I have had a

little dispute, but we have settled it without coming to blows."

"I do not suppose that an English gentleman ever absolutely strikes a

lady," said Wallachia Petrie.

"Not except on strong provocation," said Mr. Glascock. "In reference

to wives, a stick is allowed as big as your thumb."

"I have heard that it is so by the laws of England," said Wallachia.

"How can you be so ridiculous, Wally!" said Caroline. "There is

nothing that you would not believe."

"I hope that it may never be true in your case," said Wallachia.

A couple of days after this Miss Spalding found that it was

absolutely necessary that she should explain the circumstances of her

position to Nora. She had left Nora with the purpose of performing

a very high-minded action, of sacrificing herself for the sake of

her lover, of giving up all her golden prospects, and of becoming

once again the bosom friend of Wallachia Petrie, with this simple

consolation for her future life,--that she had refused to marry

an English nobleman because the English nobleman's condition was

unsuited to her. It would have been an episode in female life in

which pride might be taken;--but all that was now changed. She had

made her little attempt,--had made it, as she felt, in a very languid

manner, and had found herself treated as a child for doing so. Of

course she was happy in her ill success; of course she would have

been broken-hearted had she succeeded. But, nevertheless, she was

somewhat lowered in her own esteem, and it was necessary that she

should acknowledge the truth to the friend whom she had consulted. A

day or two had passed before she found herself alone with Nora, but

when she did so she confessed her failure at once.

"You told him all, then?" said Nora.

"Oh yes, I told him all. That is, I could not really tell him. When

the moment came I had no words."

"And what did he say?"

"He had words enough. I never knew him to be eloquent before."

"He can speak out if he likes," said Nora.

"So I have found,--with a vengeance. Nobody was ever so put down as I

was. Don't you know that there are times when it does not seem to be

worth your while to put out your strength against an adversary? So it

was with him. He just told me that he was my master, and that I was

to do as he bade me."

"And what did you say?"

"I promised to be a good girl," said Caroline, "and not to pretend

to have any opinion of my own ever again. And so we kissed, and were

friends."

"I dare say there was a kiss, my dear."

"Of course there was;--and he held me in his arms, and comforted me,

and told me how to behave;--just as you would do a little girl. It's

all over now, of course; and if there be a mistake, it is his fault.

I feel that all responsibility is gone from myself, and that for all

the rest of my life I have to do just what he tells me."

"And what says the divine Wallachia?"

"Poor Wally! She says nothing, but she thinks that I am a castaway

and a recreant. I am a recreant, I know;--but yet I think that I was

right. I know I could not help myself."

"Of course you were right, my dear," said the sage Nora. "If you had

the notion in your head, it was wise to get rid of it; but I knew how

it would be when you spoke to him."

"You were not so weak when he came to you."

"That was altogether another thing. It was not arranged in heaven

that I was to become his captive."

After that Wallachia Petrie never again tried her influence on her

former friend, but admitted to herself that the evil was done, and

that it could not be remedied. According to her theory of life,

Caroline Spalding had been wrong, and weak,--had shewn herself to

be comfort-loving and luxuriously-minded, had looked to get her

happiness from soft effeminate pleasures rather than from rational

work and the useful, independent exercise of her own intelligence.

In the privacy of her little chamber Wallachia Petrie shed,--not

absolute tears,--but many tearful thoughts over her friend. It was

to her a thing very terrible that the chosen one of her heart should

prefer the career of an English lord's wife to that of an American

citizeness, with all manner of capability for female voting, female

speech-making, female poetising, and, perhaps, female political

action before her. It was a thousand pities! "You may take a horse

to water,"--said Wallachia to herself, thinking of the ever-freshly

springing fountain of her own mind, at which Caroline Spalding would

always have been made welcome freely to quench her thirst,--"but you

cannot make him drink if he be not athirst." In the future she would

have no friend. Never again would she subject herself to the disgrace

of such a failure. But the sacrifice was to be made, and she knew

that it was bootless to waste her words further on Caroline Spalding.

She left Florence before the wedding, and returned alone to the land

of liberty. She wrote a letter to Caroline explaining her conduct,

and Caroline Spalding shewed the letter to her husband,--as one that

was both loving and eloquent.

"Very loving and very eloquent," he said. "But, nevertheless, one

does think of sour grapes."

"There I am sure you wrong her," said Caroline.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

MRS. FRENCH'S CARVING KNIFE.

During these days there were terrible doings at Exeter. Camilla had

sworn that if Mr. Gibson did not come to, there should be a tragedy,

and it appeared that she was inclined to keep her word. Immediately

after the receipt of her letter from Mr. Gibson she had had an

interview with that gentleman in his lodgings, and had asked him his

intentions. He had taken measures to fortify himself against such an

attack; but, whatever those measures were, Camilla had broken through

them. She had stood before him as he sat in his arm-chair, and he had

been dumb in her presence. It had perhaps been well for him that the

eloquence of her indignation had been so great that she had hardly

been able to pause a moment for a reply. "Will you take your letter

back again?" she had said. "I should be wrong to do that," he had

lisped out in reply, "because it is true. As a Christian minister

I could not stand with you at the altar with a lie in my mouth."

In no other way did he attempt to excuse himself,--but that, twice

repeated, filled up all the pause which she made for him.

[Illustration: Camilla's wrath.]

There never had been such a case before,--so impudent, so cruel, so

gross, so uncalled for, so unmanly, so unnecessary, so unjustifiable,

so damnable,--so sure of eternal condemnation! All this she

said to him with loud voice, and clenched fist, and starting

eyes,--regardless utterly of any listeners on the stairs, or of

outside passers in the street. In very truth she was moved to a

sublimity of indignation. Her low nature became nearly poetic under

the wrong inflicted upon her. She was almost tempted to tear him with

her hands, and inflict upon him at the moment some terrible vengeance

which should be told of for ever in the annals of Exeter. A man so

mean as he, so weak, so cowardly, one so little of a hero;--that he

should dare to do it, and dare to sit there before her, and to say

that he would do it! "Your gown shall be torn off your back, sir, and

the very boys of Exeter shall drag you through the gutters!" To this

threat he said nothing, but sat mute, hiding his face in his hands.

"And now tell me this, sir;--is there anything between you and

Bella?" But there was no voice in reply. "Answer my question, sir.

I have a right to ask it." Still he said not a word. "Listen to me.

Sooner than that you and she should be man and wife, I would stab

her! Yes, I would;--you poor, paltry, lying, cowardly creature!" She

remained with him for more than half an hour, and then banged out of

the room flashing back a look of scorn at him as she went. Martha,

before that day was over, had learned the whole story from Mr.

Gibson's cook, and had told her mistress.

"I did not think he had so much spirit in him," was Miss Stanbury's

answer. Throughout Exeter the great wonder arising from the crisis

was the amount of spirit which had been displayed by Mr. Gibson.

When he was left alone he shook himself, and began to think that if

there were danger that such interviews might occur frequently he had

better leave Exeter for good. As he put his hand over his forehead,

he declared to himself that a very little more of that kind of thing

would kill him. When a couple of hours had passed over his head he

shook himself again, and sat down and wrote a letter to his intended

mother-in-law.

I do not mean to complain [he said], God knows I have

no right; but I cannot stand a repetition of what has

occurred just now. If your younger daughter comes to see

me again I must refuse to see her, and shall leave the

town. I am ready to make what reparation may be possible

for the mistake into which I have fallen.

T. G.

Mrs. French was no doubt much afraid of her younger daughter, but

she was less afraid of her than were other people. Familiarity, they

say, breeds contempt; and who can be so familiar with a child as its

parent? She did not in her heart believe that Camilla would murder

anybody, and she fully realised the conviction that, even after all

that was come and gone, it would be better that one of her daughters

should have a husband than that neither should be so blessed. If only

Camilla could be got out of Exeter for a few months,--how good a

thing it would be for them all! She had a brother in Gloucester,--if

only he could be got to take Camilla for a few months! And then, too,

she knew that if the true rights of her two daughters were strictly

and impartially examined, Arabella's claim was much stronger than any

that Camilla could put forward to the hand of Mr. Gibson.

"You must not go there again, Camilla," the mother said.

"I shall go whenever I please," replied the fury.

"Now, Camilla, we may as well understand each other. I will not have

it done. If I am provoked, I will send to your uncle at Gloucester."

Now the uncle at Gloucester was a timber merchant, a man with

protuberant eyes and a great square chin,--known to be a very stern

man indeed, and not at all afraid of young women.

"What do I care for my uncle? My uncle would take my part."

"No, he would not. The truth is, Camilla, you interfered with Bella

first."

"Mamma, how dare you say so!"

"You did, my dear. And these are the consequences."

"And you mean to say that she is to be Mrs. Gibson?"

"I say nothing about that. But I do not see why they shouldn't be

married if their hearts are inclined to each other."

"I will die first!"

"Your dying has nothing to do with it, Camilla."

"And I will kill her!"

"If you speak to me again in that way I will write to your uncle at

Gloucester. I have done the best I could for you both, and I will not

bear such treatment."

"And how am I treated?"

"You should not have interfered with your sister."

"You are all in a conspiracy together," shouted Camilla, "you are!

There never was anybody so badly treated,--never,--never,--never!

What will everybody say of me?"

"They will pity you, if you will be quiet."

"I don't want to be pitied;--I won't be pitied. I wish I could

die,--and I will die! Anybody else would, at any rate, have had their

mother and sister with them!" Then she burst into a flood of real,

true, womanly tears.

After this there was a lull at Heavitree for a few days. Camilla

did not speak to her sister, but she condescended to hold some

intercourse with her mother, and to take her meals at the family

table. She did not go out of the house, but she employed herself in

her own room, doing no one knew what, with all that new clothing and

household gear which was to have been transferred in her train to

Mr. Gibson's house. Mrs. French was somewhat uneasy about the new

clothing and household gear, feeling that, in the event of Bella's

marriage, at least a considerable portion of it must be transferred

to the new bride. But it was impossible at the present moment to open

such a subject to Camilla;--it would have been as a proposition to a

lioness respecting the taking away of her whelps. Nevertheless, the

day must soon come in which something must be said about the clothing

and household gear. All the property that had been sent into the

house at Camilla's orders could not be allowed to remain as Camilla's

perquisites, now that Camilla was not to be married. "Do you know

what she is doing, my dear?" said Mrs. French to her elder daughter.

"Perhaps she is picking out the marks," said Bella.

"I don't think she would do that as yet," said Mrs. French.

"She might just as well leave it alone," said Bella, feeling that one

of the two letters would do for her. But neither of them dared to

speak to her of her occupation in these first days of her despair.

Mr. Gibson in the meantime remained at home, or only left his house

to go to the Cathedral or to visit the narrow confines of his little

parish. When he was out he felt that everybody looked at him, and it

seemed to him that people whispered about him when they saw him at

his usual desk in the choir. His friends passed him merely bowing to

him, and he was aware that he had done that which would be regarded

by every one around him as unpardonable. And yet,--what ought he to

have done? He acknowledged to himself that he had been very foolish,

mad,--quite demented at the moment,--when he allowed himself to think

it possible that he should marry Camilla French. But having found out

how mad he had been at that moment, having satisfied himself that to

live with her as his wife would be impossible, was he not right to

break the engagement? Could anything be so wicked as marrying a woman

whom he--hated? Thus he tried to excuse himself; but yet he knew that

all the world would condemn him. Life in Exeter would be impossible,

if no way to social pardon could be opened for him. He was willing to

do anything within bounds in mitigation of his offence. He would give

up fifty pounds a year to Camilla for his life,--or he would marry

Bella. Yes; he would marry Bella at once,--if Camilla would only

consent, and give up that idea of stabbing some one. Bella French

was not very nice in his eyes; but she was quiet, he thought, and it

might be possible to live with her. Nevertheless, he told himself

over and over again that the manner in which unmarried men with

incomes were set upon by ladies in want of husbands was very

disgraceful to the country at large. That mission to Natal which had

once been offered to him would have had charms for him now, of which

he had not recognised the force when he rejected it.

"Do you think that he ever was really engaged to her?" Dorothy said

to her aunt. Dorothy was now living in a seventh heaven of happiness,

writing love-letters to Brooke Burgess every other day, and devoting

to this occupation a number of hours of which she ought to have

been ashamed; making her purchases for her wedding,--with nothing,

however, of the magnificence of a Camilla,--but discussing everything

with her aunt, who urged her on to extravagances which seemed beyond

the scope of her own economical ideas; settling, or trying to settle,

little difficulties which perplexed her somewhat, and wondering

at her own career. She could not of course be married without the

presence of her mother and sister, and her aunt,--with something of

a grim courtesy,--had intimated that they should be made welcome to

the house in the Close for the special occasion. But nothing had been

said about Hugh. The wedding was to be in the Cathedral, and Dorothy

had a little scheme in her head for meeting her brother among the

aisles. He would no doubt come down with Brooke, and nothing perhaps

need be said about it to Aunt Stanbury. But still it was a trouble.

Her aunt had been so good that Dorothy felt that no step should be

taken which would vex the old woman. It was evident enough that

when permission had been given for the visit of Mrs. Stanbury and

Priscilla, Hugh's name had been purposely kept back. There had been

no accidental omission. Dorothy, therefore, did not dare to mention

it,--and yet it was essential for her happiness that he should be

there. At the present moment Miss Stanbury's intense interest in the

Stanbury wedding was somewhat mitigated by the excitement occasioned

by Mr. Gibson's refusal to be married. Dorothy was so shocked that

she could not bring herself to believe the statement that had reached

them through Martha.

"Of course he was engaged to her. We all knew that," said Miss

Stanbury.

"I think there must have been some mistake," said Dorothy. "I don't

see how he could do it."

"There is no knowing what people can do, my dear, when they're hard

driven. I suppose we shall have a lawsuit now, and he'll have to pay

ever so much money. Well, well, well! see what a deal of trouble you

might have saved!"

"But he'd have done the same to me, aunt;--only, you know, I never

could have taken him. Isn't it better as it is, aunt? Tell me."

"I suppose young women always think it best when they can get their

own ways. An old woman like me has only got to do what she is bid."

"But this was best, aunt;--was it not?"

"My dear, you've had your way, and let that be enough. Poor Camilla

French is not allowed to have hers at all. Dear, dear, dear! I didn't

think the man would ever have been such a fool to begin with;--or

that he would ever have had the heart to get out of it afterwards."

It astonished Dorothy to find that her aunt was not loud in

reprobation of Mr. Gibson's very dreadful conduct.

In the meantime Mrs. French had written to her brother at Gloucester.

The maid-servant, in making Miss Camilla's bed, and in "putting the

room to rights," as she called it,--which description probably was

intended to cover the circumstances of an accurate search,--had

discovered, hidden among some linen,--a carving knife! such a

knife as is used for the cutting up of fowls; and, after two days'

interval, had imparted the discovery to Mrs. French. Instant visit

was made to the pantry, and it was found that a very aged but

unbroken and sharply-pointed weapon was missing. Mrs. French at once

accused Camilla, and Camilla, after some hesitation, admitted that

it might be there. Molly, she said, was a nasty, sly, wicked thing,

to go looking in her drawers, and she would never leave anything

unlocked again. The knife, she declared, had been taken up-stairs,

because she had wanted something very sharp to cut,--the bones of

her stays. The knife was given up, but Mrs. French thought it best

to write to her brother, Mr. Crump. She was in great doubt about

sundry matters. Had the carving knife really pointed to a domestic

tragedy;--and if so, what steps ought a poor widow to take with

such a daughter? And what ought to be done about Mr. Gibson? It ran

through Mrs. French's mind that unless something were done at once,

Mr. Gibson would escape scot free. It was her wish that he should yet

become her son-in-law. Poor Bella was entitled to her chance. But

if Bella was to be disappointed,--from fear of carving knives, or

for other reasons,--then there came the question whether Mr. Gibson

should not be made to pay in purse for the mischief he had done. With

all these thoughts and doubts running through her head, Mrs. French

wrote to her brother at Gloucester.

There came back an answer from Mr. Crump, in which that gentleman

expressed a very strong idea that Mr. Gibson should be prosecuted for

damages with the utmost virulence, and with the least possible delay.

No compromise should be accepted. Mr. Crump would himself come to

Exeter and see the lawyer as soon as he should be told that there

was a lawyer to be seen. As to the carving knife, Mr. Crump was of

opinion that it did not mean anything. Mr. Crump was a gentleman who

did not believe in strong romance, but who had great trust in all

pecuniary claims. The Frenches had always been genteel. The late

Captain French had been an officer in the army, and at ordinary times

and seasons the Frenches were rather ashamed of the Crump connection.

But now the timber merchant might prove himself to be a useful

friend.

Mrs. French shewed her brother's letter to Bella,--and poor Bella was

again sore-hearted, seeing that nothing was said in it of her claims.

"It will be dreadful scandal to have it all in the papers!" said

Bella.

"But what can we do?"

"Anything would be better than that," said Bella. "And you don't want

to punish Mr. Gibson, mamma."

"But, my dear, you see what your uncle says. What can I do, except go

to him for advice?"

"Why don't you go to Mr. Gibson yourself, mamma?"

But nothing was said to Camilla about Mr. Crump;--nothing as yet.

Camilla did not love Mr. Crump, but there was no other house except

that of Mr. Crump's at Gloucester to which she might be sent, if

it could be arranged that Mr. Gibson and Bella should be made one.

Mrs. French took her eldest daughter's advice, and went to Mr.

Gibson;--taking Mr. Crump's letter in her pocket. For herself she

wanted nothing,--but was it not the duty of her whole life to fight

for her daughters? Poor woman! If somebody would only have taught her

how that duty might best be done, she would have endeavoured to obey

the teaching. "You know I do not want to threaten you," she said to

Mr. Gibson; "but you see what my brother says. Of course I wrote to

my brother. What could a poor woman do in such circumstances except

write to her brother?"

"If you choose to set the bloodhounds of the law at me, of course you

can," said Mr. Gibson.

"I do not want to go to law at all;--God knows I do not!" said Mrs.

French. Then there was a pause. "Poor dear Bella!" ejaculated Mrs.

French.

"Dear Bella!" echoed Mr. Gibson.

"What do you mean to do about Bella?" asked Mrs. French.

"I sometimes think that I had better take poison and have done with

it!" said Mr. Gibson, feeling himself to be very hard pressed.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

BELLA VICTRIX.

Mr. Crump arrived at Exeter. Camilla was not told of his coming till

the morning of the day on which he arrived; and then the tidings were

communicated, because it was necessary that a change should be made

in the bed-rooms. She and her sister had separate rooms when there

was no visitor with them, but now Mr. Crump must be accommodated.

There was a long consultation between Bella and Mrs. French, but at

last it was decided that Bella should sleep with her mother. There

would still be too much of the lioness about Camilla to allow of her

being regarded as a safe companion through the watches of the night.

"Why is Uncle Jonas coming now?" she asked.

"I thought it better to ask him," said Mrs. French.

After a long pause, Camilla asked another question. "Does Uncle Jonas

mean to see Mr. Gibson?"

"I suppose he will," said Mrs. French.

"Then he will see a low, mean fellow;--the lowest, meanest fellow

that ever was heard of! But that won't make much difference to Uncle

Jonas. I wouldn't have him now, if he was to ask me ever so;--that I

wouldn't!"

Mr. Crump came, and kissed his sister and two nieces. The embrace

with Camilla was not very affectionate. "So your Joe has been and

jilted you?" said Uncle Jonas;--"it's like one of them clergymen.

They say so many prayers, they think they may do almost anything

afterwards. Another man would have had his head punched."

"The less talk there is about it the better," said Camilla.

On the following day Mr. Crump called by appointment on Mr. Gibson,

and remained closeted with that gentleman for the greater portion of

the morning. Camilla knew well that he was going, and went about the

house like a perturbed spirit during his absence. There was a look

about her that made them all doubt whether she was not, in truth,

losing her mind. Her mother more than once went to the pantry to

see that the knives were right; and, as regarded that sharp-pointed

weapon, was careful to lock it up carefully out of her daughter's

way. Mr. Crump had declared himself willing to take Camilla back to

Gloucester, and had laughed at the obstacles which his niece might,

perhaps, throw in the way of such an arrangement. "She mustn't have

much luggage;--that is all," said Mr. Crump. For Mr. Crump had been

made aware of the circumstances of the trousseau. About three o'clock

Mr. Crump came back from Mr. Gibson's, and expressed a desire to be

left alone with Camilla. Mrs. French was prepared for everything; and

Mr. Crump soon found himself with his younger niece.

"Camilla, my dear," said he, "this has been a bad business."

"I don't know what business you mean, Uncle Jonas."

"Yes, you do, my dear;--you know. And I hope it won't come too late

to prove to you that young women shouldn't be too keen in setting

their caps at the gentlemen. It's better for them to be hunted, than

to hunt."

"Uncle Jonas, I will not be insulted."

"Stick to that, my dear, and you won't get into a scrape again. Now,

look here. This man can never be made to marry you, anyhow."

"I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs, if he were kneeling at my

feet!"

"That's right; stick to that. Of course, you wouldn't now, after all

that has come and gone. No girl with any spirit would."

"He's a coward and a thief, and he'll be--damned for what he has

done, some of these days!"

"T-ch, t-ch, t-ch! That isn't a proper way for a young lady to talk.

That's cursing and swearing."

"It isn't cursing and swearing;--it's what the Bible says."

"Then we'll leave him to the Bible. In the meantime, Mr. Gibson wants

to marry some one else, and that can't hurt you."

"He may marry whom he likes;--but he shan't marry Bella--that's all!"

"It is Bella that he means to marry."

"Then he won't. I'll forbid the banns. I'll write to the bishop. I'll

go to the church and prevent its being done. I'll make such a noise

in the town that it can't be done. It's no use your looking at me

like that, Uncle Jonas. I've got my own feelings, and he shall never

marry Bella. It's what they have been intending all through, and it

shan't be done!"

"It will be done."

"Uncle Jonas, I'll stab her to the heart, and him too, before I'll

see it done! Though I were to be killed the next day, I would. Could

you bear it?"

"I'm not a young woman. Now, I'll tell you what I want you to do."

"I'll not do anything."

"Just pack up your things, and start with me to Gloucester

to-morrow."

"I--won't!"

"Then you'll be carried, my dear. I'll write to your aunt, to say

that you're coming; and we'll be as jolly as possible when we get you

home."

"I won't go to Gloucester, Uncle Jonas. I won't go away from Exeter.

I won't let it be done. She shall never, never, never be that man's

wife!"

Nevertheless, on the day but one after this, Camilla French did go to

Gloucester. Before she went, however, things had to be done in that

house which almost made Mrs. French repent that she had sent for so

stern an assistant. Camilla was at last told, in so many words, that

the things which she had prepared for her own wedding must be given

up for the wedding of her sister; and it seemed that this item in

the list of her sorrows troubled her almost more than any other. She

swore that whither she went there should go the dresses, and the

handkerchiefs, and the hats, the bonnets, and the boots. "Let her

have them," Bella had pleaded. But Mr. Crump was inexorable. He had

looked into his sister's affairs, and found that she was already in

debt. To his practical mind, it was an absurdity that the unmarried

sister should keep things that were wholly unnecessary, and that the

sister that was to be married should be without things that were

needed. There was a big trunk, of which Camilla had the key, but

which, unfortunately for her, had been deposited in her mother's

room. Upon this she sat, and swore that nothing should move her but a

promise that her plunder should remain untouched. But there came this

advantage from the terrible question of the wedding raiments,--that

in her energy to keep possession of them, she gradually abandoned her

opposition to her sister's marriage. She had been driven from one

point to another till she was compelled at last to stand solely upon

her possessions. "Perhaps we had better let her keep them," said Mrs.

French. "Trash and nonsense!" said Mr. Crump. "If she wants a new

frock, let her have it; as for the sheets and tablecloths, you'd

better keep them yourself. But Bella must have the rest."

It was found on the eve of the day on which she was told that she was

to depart that she had in truth armed herself with a dagger or clasp

knife. She actually displayed it when her uncle told her to come away

from the chest on which she was sitting. She declared that she would

defend herself there to the last gasp of her life; but of course the

knife fell from her hand the first moment that she was touched. "I

did think once that she was going to make a poke at me," Mr. Crump

said afterwards; "but she had screamed herself so weak that she

couldn't do it."

When the morning came, she was taken to the fly and driven to

the station without any further serious outbreak. She had even

condescended to select certain articles, leaving the rest of

the hymeneal wealth behind her. Bella, early on that morning of

departure, with great humility, implored her sister to forgive her;

but no entreaties could induce Camilla to address one gracious word

to the proposed bride. "You've been cheating me all along!" she said;

and that was the last word she spoke to poor Bella.

She went, and the field was once more open to the amorous Vicar

of St. Peter's-cum-Pumpkin. It is astonishing how the greatest

difficulties will sink away, and become as it were nothing, when

they are encountered face to face. It is certain that Mr. Gibson's

position had been one most trying to the nerves. He had speculated on

various modes of escape;--a curacy in the north of England would be

welcome, or the duties of a missionary in New Zealand,--or death. To

tell the truth, he had, during the last week or two, contemplated

even a return to the dominion of Camilla. That there should ever

again be things pleasant for him in Exeter seemed to be quite

impossible. And yet, on the evening of the day but one after the

departure of Camilla, he was seated almost comfortably with his own

Arabella! There is nothing that a man may not do, nothing that he may

not achieve, if he have only pluck enough to go through with it.

"You do love me?" Bella said to him. It was natural that she should

ask him; but it would have been better perhaps if she had held her

tongue. Had she spoken to him about his house, or his income, or the

servants, or the duties of his parish church, it would have been

easier for him to make a comfortable reply.

"Yes;--I love you," he replied; "of course I love you. We have always

been friends, and I hope things will go straight now. I have had

a great deal to go through, Bella, and so have you;--but God will

temper the wind to the shorn lambs." How was the wind to be tempered

for the poor lamb who had gone forth shorn down to the very skin!

Soon after this Mrs. French returned to the room, and then there was

no more romance. Mrs. French had by no means forgiven Mr. Gibson

all the trouble he had brought into the family, and mixed a certain

amount of acrimony with her entertainment of him. She dictated to

him, treated him with but scant respect, and did not hesitate to let

him understand that he was to be watched very closely till he was

actually and absolutely married. The poor man had in truth no further

idea of escape. He was aware that he had done that which made it

necessary that he should bear a great deal, and that he had no right

to resent suspicion. When a day was fixed in June on which he should

be married at the church of Heavitree, and it was proposed that he

should be married by banns, he had nothing to urge to the contrary.

And when it was also suggested to him by one of the prebendaries of

the Cathedral that it might be well for him to change his clerical

duties for a period with the vicar of a remote parish in the north

of Cornwall,--so as to be out of the way of remark from those whom

he had scandalised by his conduct,--he had no objection to make to

that arrangement. When Mrs. MacHugh met him in the Close, and told

him that he was a gay Lothario, he shook his head with a melancholy

self-abasement, and passed on without even a feeling of anger. "When

they smite me on the right cheek, I turn unto them my left," he said

to himself, when one of the cathedral vergers remarked to him that

after all he was going to be married, at last. Even Bella became

dominant over him, and assumed with him occasionally the air of one

who had been injured.

Bella wrote a touching letter to her sister;--a letter that ought to

have touched Camilla, begging for forgiveness, and for one word of

sisterly love. Camilla answered the letter, but did not send a word

of sisterly love. "According to my way of thinking, you have been a

nasty sly thing, and I don't believe you'll ever be happy. As for

him, I'll never speak to him again." That was nearly the whole of her

letter. "You must leave it to time," said Mrs. French wisely; "she'll

come round some day." And then Mrs. French thought how bad it would

be for her if the daughter who was to be her future companion did not

"come round" some day.

And so it was settled that they should be married in Heavitree

Church,--Mr. Gibson and his first love,--and things went on

pretty much as though nothing had been done amiss. The gentleman

from Cornwall came down to take Mr. Gibson's place at St.

Peter's-cum-Pumpkin, while his duties in the Cathedral were

temporarily divided among the other priest-vicars,--with some amount

of grumbling on their part. Bella commenced her modest preparations

without any of the Ã©clat which had attended Camilla's operations, but

she felt more certainty of ultimate success than had ever fallen to

Camilla's lot. In spite of all that had come and gone, Bella never

feared again that Mr. Gibson would be untrue to her. In regard to

him, it must be doubted whether Nemesis ever fell upon him with a

hand sufficiently heavy to punish him for the great sins which he

had manifestly committed. He had encountered a bad week or two, and

there had been days in which, as has been said, he thought of Natal,

of ecclesiastical censures, and even of annihilation; but no real

punishment seemed to fall upon him. It may be doubted whether, when

the whole arrangement was settled for him, and when he heard that

Camilla had yielded to the decrees of Fate, he did not rather flatter

himself on being a successful man of intrigue,--whether he did not

take some glory to himself for his good fortune with women, and pride

himself amidst his self-reproaches for the devotion which had been

displayed for him by the fair sex in general. It is quite possible

that he taught himself to believe that at one time Dorothy Stanbury

was devotedly in love with him, and that when he reckoned up his

sins she was one of those in regard to whom he accounted himself

to have been a sinner. The spirit of intrigue with women, as to

which men will flatter themselves, is customarily so vile, so mean,

so vapid a reflection of a feeling, so aimless, resultless, and

utterly unworthy! Passion exists and has its sway. Vice has its

votaries,--and there is, too, that worn-out longing for vice,

"prurient, yet passionless, cold-studied lewdness," which drags on

a feeble continuance with the aid of money. But the commonest folly

of man in regard to women is a weak taste for intrigue, with little

or nothing on which to feed it;--a worse than feminine aptitude for

male coquetry, which never ascends beyond a desire that somebody

shall hint that there is something peculiar; and which is shocked and

retreats backwards into its boots when anything like a consequence

forces itself on the apprehension. Such men have their glory in their

own estimation. We remember how Falstaff flouted the pride of his

companion whose victory in the fields of love had been but little

glorious. But there are victories going now-a-days so infinitely less

glorious, that Falstaff's page was a Lothario, a very Don Juan, in

comparison with the heroes whose praises are too often sung by their

own lips. There is this recompense,--that their defeats are always

sung by lips louder than their own. Mr. Gibson, when he found that he

was to escape apparently unscathed,--that people standing respectably

before the world absolutely dared to whisper words to him of

congratulation on this third attempt at marriage within little more

than a year, took pride to himself, and bethought himself that he

was a gay deceiver. He believed that he had selected his wife,--and

that he had done so in circumstances of peculiar difficulty! Poor Mr.

Gibson,--we hardly know whether most to pity him, or the unfortunate,

poor woman who ultimately became Mrs. Gibson.

"And so Bella French is to be the fortunate woman after all," said

Miss Stanbury to her niece.

"It does seem to me to be so odd," said Dorothy. "I wonder how he

looked when he proposed it."

"Like a fool,--as he always does."

Dorothy refrained from remarking that Miss Stanbury had not always

thought that Mr. Gibson looked like a fool, but the idea occurred to

her mind. "I hope they will be happy at last," she said.

"Pshaw! Such people can't be happy, and can't be unhappy. I don't

suppose it much matters which he marries, or whether he marries them

both, or neither. They are to be married by banns, they say,--at

Heavitree."

"I don't see anything bad in that."

"Only Camilla might step out and forbid them," said Aunt Stanbury. "I

almost wish she would."

"She has gone away, aunt,--to an uncle who lives at Gloucester."

"It was well to get her out of the way, no doubt. They'll be married

before you now, Dolly."

"That won't break my heart, aunt."

"I don't suppose there'll be much of a wedding. They haven't anybody

belonging to them, except that uncle at Gloucester." Then there was a

pause. "I think it is a nice thing for friends to collect together at

a wedding," continued Aunt Stanbury.

"I think it is," said Dorothy, in the mildest, softest voice.

"I suppose we must make room for that black sheep of a brother of

yours, Dolly,--or else you won't be contented."

"Dear, dear, dearest aunt!" said Dorothy, falling down on her knees

at her aunt's feet.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

[Illustration]

Trevelyan, when his wife had left him, sat for hours in silence

pondering over his own position and hers. He had taken his child to

an upper room, in which was his own bed and the boy's cot, and before

he seated himself, he spread out various toys which he had been at

pains to purchase for the unhappy little fellow,--a regiment of

Garibaldian soldiers, all with red shirts, and a drum to give the

regiment martial spirit, and a soft fluffy Italian ball, and a

battledore and a shuttlecock,--instruments enough for juvenile joy,

if only there had been a companion with whom the child could use

them. But the toys remained where the father had placed them, almost

unheeded, and the child sat looking out of the window, melancholy,

silent, and repressed. Even the drum did not tempt him to be noisy.

Doubtless he did not know why he was wretched, but he was fully

conscious of his wretchedness. In the meantime the father sat

motionless, in an old worn-out but once handsome leathern arm-chair,

with his eyes fixed against the opposite wall, thinking of the wreck

of his life.

Thought deep, correct, continued, and energetic is quite compatible

with madness. At this time Trevelyan's mind was so far unhinged, his

ordinary faculties were so greatly impaired, that they who declared

him to be mad were justified in their declaration. His condition was

such that the happiness and welfare of no human being,--not even his

own,--could safely be entrusted to his keeping. He considered himself

to have been so injured by the world, to have been the victim of so

cruel a conspiracy among those who ought to have been his friends,

that there remained nothing for him but to flee away from them and

remain in solitude. But yet, through it all, there was something

approaching to a conviction that he had brought his misery upon

himself by being unlike to other men; and he declared to himself

over and over again that it was better that he should suffer than

that others should be punished. When he was alone his reflections

respecting his wife were much juster than were his words when he

spoke either with her, or to others, of her conduct. He would declare

to himself not only that he did not believe her to have been false to

him, but that he had never accused her of such crime. He had demanded

from her obedience, and she had been disobedient. It had been

incumbent upon him,--so ran his own ideas, as expressed to himself

in these long unspoken soliloquies,--to exact obedience, or at least

compliance, let the consequences be what they might. She had refused

to obey or even to comply, and the consequences were very grievous.

But, though he pitied himself with a pity that was feminine, yet he

acknowledged to himself that her conduct had been the result of his

own moody temperament. Every friend had parted from him. All those to

whose counsels he had listened, had counselled him that he was wrong.

The whole world was against him. Had he remained in England, the

doctors and lawyers among them would doubtless have declared him to

be mad. He knew all this, and yet he could not yield. He could not

say that he had been wrong. He could not even think that he had been

wrong as to the cause of the great quarrel. He was one so miserable

and so unfortunate,--so he thought,--that even in doing right he had

fallen into perdition!

He had had two enemies, and between them they had worked his ruin.

These were Colonel Osborne and Bozzle. It may be doubted whether he

did not hate the latter the more strongly of the two. He knew now

that Bozzle had been untrue to him, but his disgust did not spring

from that so much as from the feeling that he had defiled himself by

dealing with the man. Though he was quite assured that he had been

right in his first cause of offence, he knew that he had fallen from

bad to worse in every step that he had taken since. Colonel Osborne

had marred his happiness by vanity, by wicked intrigue, by a devilish

delight in doing mischief; but he, he himself, had consummated the

evil by his own folly. Why had he not taken Colonel Osborne by the

throat, instead of going to a low-born, vile, mercenary spy for

assistance? He hated himself for what he had done;--and yet it was

impossible that he should yield.

It was impossible that he should yield;--but it was yet open to him

to sacrifice himself. He could not go back to his wife and say that

he was wrong; but he could determine that the destruction should

fall upon him and not upon her. If he gave up his child and then

died,--died, alone, without any friend near him, with no word of love

in his ears, in that solitary and miserable abode which he had found

for himself,--then it would at least be acknowledged that he had

expiated the injury that he had done. She would have his wealth, his

name, his child to comfort her,--and would be troubled no longer by

demands for that obedience which she had sworn at the altar to give

him, and which she had since declined to render to him. Perhaps there

was some feeling that the coals of fire would be hot upon her head

when she should think how much she had received from him and how

little she had done for him. And yet he loved her, with all his

heart, and would even yet dream of bliss that might be possible with

her,--had not the terrible hand of irresistible Fate come between

them and marred it all. It was only a dream now. It could be no more

than a dream. He put out his thin wasted hands and looked at them,

and touched the hollowness of his own cheeks, and coughed that he

might hear the hacking sound of his own infirmity, and almost took

glory in his weakness. It could not be long before the coals of fire

would be heaped upon her head.

"Louey," he said at last, addressing the child who had sat for an

hour gazing through the window without stirring a limb or uttering a

sound; "Louey, my boy, would you like to go back to mamma?" The child

turned round on the floor, and fixed his eyes on his father's face,

but made no immediate reply. "Louey, dear, come to papa and tell him.

Would it be nice to go back to mamma?" And he stretched out his hand

to the boy. Louey got up, and approached slowly and stood between his

father's knees. "Tell me, darling;--you understand what papa says?"

"Altro!" said the boy, who had been long enough among Italian

servants to pick up the common words of the language. Of course he

would like to go back. How indeed could it be otherwise?

"Then you shall go to her, Louey."

"To-day, papa?"

"Not to-day, nor to-morrow."

"But the day after?"

"That is sufficient. You shall go. It is not so bad with you that one

day more need be a sorrow to you. You shall go,--and then you will

never see your father again!" Trevelyan as he said this drew his

hands away so as not to touch the child. The little fellow had put

out his arm, but seeing his father's angry gesture had made no

further attempt at a caress. He feared his father from the bottom of

his little heart, and yet was aware that it was his duty to try to

love papa. He did not understand the meaning of that last threat,

but slunk back, passing his untouched toys, to the window, and there

seated himself again, filling his mind with the thought that when two

more long long days should have crept by, he should once more go to

his mother.

Trevelyan had tried his best to be soft and gentle to his child.

All that he had said to his wife of his treatment of the boy had

been true to the letter. He had spared no personal trouble, he had

done all that he had known how to do, he had exercised all his

intelligence to procure amusement for the boy;--but Louey had hardly

smiled since he had been taken from his mother. And now that he was

told that he was to go and never see his father again, the tidings

were to him simply tidings of joy. "There is a curse upon me," said

Trevelyan; "it is written down in the book of my destiny that nothing

shall ever love me!"

He went out from the house, and made his way down by the narrow path

through the olives and vines to the bottom of the hill in front of

the villa. It was evening now, but the evening was very hot, and

though the olive trees stood in long rows, there was no shade. Quite

at the bottom of the hill there was a little sluggish muddy brook,

along the sides of which the reeds grew thickly and the dragon-flies

were playing on the water. There was nothing attractive in the spot,

but he was weary, and sat himself down on the dry hard bank which had

been made by repeated clearing of mud from the bottom of the little

rivulet. He sat watching the dragon-flies as they made their short

flights in the warm air, and told himself that of all God's creatures

there was not one to whom less power of disporting itself in God's

sun was given than to him. Surely it would be better for him that he

should die, than live as he was now living without any of the joys of

life. The solitude of Casalunga was intolerable to him, and yet there

was no whither that he could go and find society. He could travel if

he pleased. He had money at command, and, at any rate as yet, there

was no embargo on his personal liberty. But how could he travel

alone,--even if his strength might suffice for the work? There had

been moments in which he had thought that he would be happy in the

love of his child,--that the companionship of an infant would suffice

for him if only the infant would love him. But all such dreams as

that were over. To repay him for his tenderness his boy was always

dumb before him. Louey would not prattle as he had used to do. He

would not even smile, or give back the kisses with which his father

had attempted to win him. In mercy to the boy he would send him back

to his mother;--in mercy to the boy if not to the mother also. It was

in vain that he should look for any joy in any quarter. Were he to

return to England, they would say that he was mad!

[Illustration: Trevelyan at Casalunga.]

He lay there by the brook-side till the evening was far advanced,

and then he arose and slowly returned to the house. The labour of

ascending the hill was so great to him that he was forced to pause

and hold by the olive trees as he slowly performed his task. The

perspiration came in profusion from his pores, and he found himself

to be so weak that he must in future regard the brook as being beyond

the tether of his daily exercise. Eighteen months ago he had been a

strong walker, and the snow-bound paths of Swiss mountains had been

a joy to him. He paused as he was slowly dragging himself on, and

looked up at the wretched, desolate, comfortless abode which he

called his home. Its dreariness was so odious to him that he was

half-minded to lay himself down where he was, and let the night air

come upon him and do its worst. In such case, however, some Italian

doctor would be sent down who would say that he was mad. Above

all the things, and to the last, he must save himself from that

degradation.

When he had crawled up to the house, he went to his child, and found

that the woman had put the boy to bed. Then he was angry with himself

in that he himself had not seen to this, and kept up his practice

of attending the child to the last. He would, at least, be true to

his resolution, and prepare for the boy's return to his mother. Not

knowing how otherwise to manage it, he wrote that night the following

note to Mr. Glascock;--

Casalunga, Thursday night.

MY DEAR SIR,

Since you last were considerate enough to call upon me I

have resolved to take a step in my affairs which, though

it will rob me of my only remaining gratification, will

tend to lessen the troubles under which Mrs. Trevelyan is

labouring. If she desires it, as no doubt she does, I will

consent to place our boy again in her custody,--trusting

to her sense of honour to restore him to me should I

demand it. In my present unfortunate position I cannot

suggest that she should come for the boy. I am unable to

support the excitement occasioned by her presence. I will,

however, deliver up my darling either to you, or to any

messenger sent by you whom I can trust. I beg heartily

to apologise for the trouble I am giving you, and to

subscribe myself yours very faithfully,

LOUIS TREVELYAN.

The Hon. C. Glascock.

P.S.--It is as well, perhaps, that I should explain that

I must decline to receive any visit from Sir Marmaduke

Rowley. Sir Marmaduke has insulted me grossly on each

occasion on which I have seen him since his return home.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE BATHS OF LUCCA.

June was now far advanced, and the Rowleys and the Spaldings had

removed from Florence to the Baths of Lucca. Mr. Glascock had

followed in their wake, and the whole party were living at the Baths

in one of those hotels in which so many English and Americans are

wont to congregate in the early weeks of the Italian summer. The

marriage was to take place in the last week of the month; and all

the party were to return to Florence for the occasion,--with the

exception of Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Trevelyan. She was altogether

unfitted for wedding joys, and her father had promised to bear her

company when the others left her. Mr. Glascock and Caroline Spalding

were to be married in Florence, and were to depart immediately from

thence for some of the cooler parts of Switzerland. After that

Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley were to return to London with their

daughters, preparatory to that dreary journey back to the Mandarins;

and they had not even yet resolved what they had better do respecting

that unfortunate man who was living in seclusion on the hill-top near

Siena. They had consulted lawyers and doctors in Florence, but it had

seemed that everybody there was afraid of putting the law in force

against an Englishman. Doubtless there was a law in respect to the

custody of the insane; and it was admitted that if Trevelyan were

dangerously mad something could be done; but it seemed that nobody

was willing to stir in such a case as that which now existed.

Something, it was said, might be done at some future time; but the

difficulties were so great that nothing could be done now.

It was very sad, because it was necessary that some decision

should be made as to the future residence of Mrs. Trevelyan and of

Nora. Emily had declared that nothing should induce her to go to

the Islands with her father and mother unless her boy went with

her. Since her journey to Casalunga she had also expressed her

unwillingness to leave her husband. Her heart had been greatly

softened towards him, and she had declared that where he remained,

there would she remain,--as near to him as circumstances would admit.

It might be that at last her care would be necessary for his comfort.

He supplied her with means of living, and she would use these means

as well as she might be able in his service.

Then there had arisen the question of Nora's future residence. And

there had come troubles and storms in the family. Nora had said that

she would not go back to the Mandarins, but had not at first been

able to say where or how she would live. She had suggested that

she might stay with her sister, but her father had insisted that

she could not live on the income supplied by Trevelyan. Then, when

pressed hard, she had declared that she intended to live on Hugh

Stanbury's income. She would marry him at once,--with her father's

leave, if she could get it, but without it if it needs must be so.

Her mother told her that Hugh Stanbury was not himself ready for her;

he had not even proposed so hasty a marriage, nor had he any home

fitted for her. Lady Rowley, in arguing this, had expressed no assent

to the marriage, even as a distant arrangement, but had thought

thus to vanquish her daughter by suggesting small but insuperable

difficulties. On a sudden, however, Lady Rowley found that all

this was turned against her, by an offer that came direct from Mr.

Glascock. His Caroline, he said, was very anxious that Nora should

come to them at Monkhams as soon as they had returned home from

Switzerland. They intended to be there by the middle of August, and

would hurry there sooner, if there was any intermediate difficulty

about finding a home for Nora. Mr. Glascock said nothing about Hugh

Stanbury; but, of course, Lady Rowley understood that Nora had told

all her troubles and hopes to Caroline, and that Caroline had told

them to her future husband. Lady Rowley, in answer to this, could

only say that she would consult her husband.

There was something very grievous in the proposition to Lady Rowley.

If Nora had not been self-willed and stiff-necked beyond the usual

self-willedness and stiff-neckedness of young women she might have

been herself the mistress of Monkhams. It was proposed now that she

should go there to wait till a poor man should have got together

shillings enough to buy a few chairs and tables, and a bed to lie

upon! The thought of this was very bitter. "I cannot think, Nora, how

you could have the heart to go there," said Lady Rowley.

"I cannot understand why not, mamma. Caroline and I are friends, and

surely he and I need not be enemies. He has never injured me; and if

he does not take offence, why should I?"

"If you don't see it, I can't help it," said Lady Rowley.

And then Mrs. Spalding's triumph was terrible to Lady Rowley. Mrs.

Spalding knew nothing of her future son-in-law's former passion, and

spoke of her Caroline as having achieved triumphs beyond the reach of

other girls. Lady Rowley bore it, never absolutely telling the tale

of her daughter's fruitless victory. She was too good at heart to

utter the boast;--but it was very hard to repress it. Upon the whole

she would have preferred that Mr. Glascock and his bride should not

have become the fast friends of herself and her family. There was

more of pain than of pleasure in the alliance. But circumstances

had been too strong for her. Mr. Glascock had been of great use in

reference to Trevelyan, and Caroline and Nora had become attached

to each other almost on their first acquaintance. Here they were

together at the Baths of Lucca, and Nora was to be one of the four

bridesmaids. When Sir Marmaduke was consulted about this visit to

Monkhams, he became fretful, and would give no answer. The marriage,

he said, was impossible, and Nora was a fool. He could give her no

allowance more than would suffice for her clothes, and it was madness

for her to think of stopping in England. But he was so full of cares

that he could come to no absolute decision on this matter. Nora,

however, had come to a very absolute decision.

"Caroline," she said, "if you will have me, I will go to Monkhams."

"Of course we will have you. Has not Charles said how delighted he

would be?"

"Oh yes,--your Charles," said Nora, laughing.

"He is mine now, dear. You must not expect him to change his mind

again. I gave him the chance, you know, and he would not take it.

But, Nora, come to Monkhams, and stay as long as it suits. I have

talked it all over with him, and we both agree that you shall have

a home there. You shall be just like a sister. Olivia is coming too

after a bit; but he says there is room for a dozen sisters. Of course

it will be all right with Mr. Stanbury after a while." And so it was

settled among them that Nora Rowley should find a home at Monkhams,

if a home in England should be wanted for her.

It wanted but four days to that fixed for the marriage at Florence,

and but six to that on which the Rowleys were to leave Italy for

England, when Mr. Glascock received Trevelyan's letter. It was

brought to him as he was sitting at a late breakfast in the garden

of the hotel; and there were present at the moment not only all the

Spalding family, but the Rowleys also. Sir Marmaduke was there and

Lady Rowley, and the three unmarried daughters; but Mrs. Trevelyan,

as was her wont, had remained alone in her own room. Mr. Glascock

read the letter, and read it again, without attracting much

attention. Caroline, who was of course sitting next to him, had her

eyes upon him, and could see that the letter moved him; but she was

not curious, and at any rate asked no question. He himself understood

fully how great was the offer made,--how all-important to the

happiness of the poor mother,--and he was also aware, or thought

that he was aware, how likely it might be that the offer would be

retracted. As regarded himself, a journey from the Baths at Lucca to

Casalunga and back before his marriage, would be a great infliction

on his patience. It was his plan to stay where he was till the day

before his marriage, and then to return to Florence with the rest

of the party. All this must be altered, and sudden changes must be

made, if he decided on going to Siena himself. The weather now was

very hot, and such a journey would be most disagreeable to him. Of

course he had little schemes in his head, little amatory schemes

for prÃ¦nuptial enjoyment, which, in spite of his mature years,

were exceedingly agreeable to him. The chestnut woods round the

Baths of Lucca are very pleasant in the early summer, and there

were excursions planned in which Caroline would be close to his

side,--almost already his wife. But, if he did not go, whom could he

send? It would be necessary at least that he should consult her, the

mother of the child, before any decision was formed.

At last he took Lady Rowley aside, and read to her the letter. She

understood at once that it opened almost a heaven of bliss to her

daughter;--and she understood also how probable it might be that that

wretched man, with his shaken wits, should change his mind. "I think

I ought to go," said Mr. Glascock.

"But how can you go now?"

"I can go," said he. "There is time for it. It need not put off my

marriage,--to which of course I could not consent. I do not know whom

I could send."

"Monnier could go," said Lady Rowley, naming the courier.

"Yes;--he could go. But it might be that he would return without

the child, and then we should not forgive ourselves. I will go,

Lady Rowley. After all, what does it signify? I am a little old, I

sometimes think, for this philandering. You shall take this letter to

your daughter, and I will explain it all to Caroline."

Caroline had not a word to say. She could only kiss him, and promise

to make him what amends she could when he came back. "Of course you

are right," she said. "Do you think that I would say a word against

it, even though the marriage were to be postponed?"

"I should;--a good many words. But I will be back in time for that,

and will bring the boy with me."

Mrs. Trevelyan, when her husband's letter was read to her, was almost

overcome by the feelings which it excited. In her first paroxysm of

joy she declared that she would herself go to Siena, not for her

child's sake, but for that of her husband. She felt at once that the

boy was being given up because of the father's weakness,--because

he felt himself to be unable to be a protector to his son,--and

her woman's heart was melted with softness as she thought of the

condition of the man to whom she had once given her whole heart.

Since then, doubtless, her heart had revolted from him. Since that

time there had come hours in which she had almost hated him for his

cruelty to her. There had been moments in which she had almost cursed

his name because of the aspersion which it had seemed that he had

thrown upon her. But this was now forgotten, and she remembered only

his weakness. "Mamma," she said, "I will go. It is my duty to go to

him." But Lady Rowley withheld her, explaining that were she to go,

the mission might probably fail in its express purpose. "Let Louey be

sent to us first," said Lady Rowley, "and then we will see what can

be done afterwards."

And so Mr. Glascock started, taking with him a maid-servant who might

help him with the charge of the child. It was certainly very hard

upon him. In order to have time for his journey to Siena and back,

and time also to go out to Casalunga, it was necessary that he should

leave the Baths at five in the morning. "If ever there was a hero of

romance, you are he!" said Nora to him.

"The heroes of life are so much better than the heroes of romance,"

said Caroline.

"That is a lesson from the lips of the American Browning," said Mr.

Glascock. "Nevertheless, I think I would rather ride a charge against

a Paynim knight in Palestine than get up at half-past four in the

morning."

"We will get up too, and give the knight his coffee," said Nora.

They did get up, and saw him off; and when Mr. Glascock and Caroline

parted with a lover's embrace, Nora stood by as a sister might have

done. Let us hope that she remembered that her own time was coming.

There had been a promise given by Nora, when she left London, that

she would not correspond with Hugh Stanbury while she was in Italy,

and this promise had been kept. It may be remembered that Hugh had

made a proposition to his lady-love, that she should walk out of the

house one fine morning, and get herself married without any reference

to her father's or her mother's wishes. But she had not been willing

to take upon herself as yet independence so complete as this would

have required. She had assured her lover that she did mean to marry

him some day, even though it should be in opposition to her father,

but that she thought that the period for filial persuasion was not

yet over; and then, in explaining all this to her mother, she had

given a promise neither to write nor to receive letters during the

short period of her sojourn in Italy. She would be an obedient child

for so long;--but, after that, she must claim the right to fight her

own battle. She had told her lover that he must not write; and, of

course, she had not written a word herself. But now, when her mother

threw it in her teeth that Stanbury would not be ready to marry her,

she thought that an unfair advantage was being taken of her,--and of

him. How could he be expected to say that he was ready,--deprived as

he was of the power of saying anything at all?

"Mamma," she said, the day before they went to Florence, "has papa

fixed about your leaving England yet? I suppose you'll go now on the

last Saturday in July?"

"I suppose we shall, my dear."

"Has not papa written about the berths?"

"I believe he has, my dear."

"Because he ought to know who are going. I will not go."

"You will not, Nora. Is that a proper way of speaking?"

"Dear mamma, I mean it to be proper. I hope it is proper. But is it

not best that we should understand each other? All my life depends on

my going or my staying now. I must decide."

"After what has passed, you do not, I suppose, mean to live in Mr.

Glascock's house?"

"Certainly not. I mean to live with,--with,--with my husband. Mamma,

I promised not to write, and I have not written. And he has not

written,--because I told him not. Therefore, nothing is settled. But

it is not fair to throw it in my teeth that nothing is settled."

"I have thrown nothing in your teeth, Nora."

"Papa talks sneeringly about chairs and tables. Of course, I know

what he is thinking of. As I cannot go with him to the Mandarins, I

think I ought to be allowed to look after the chairs and tables."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"That you should absolve me from my promise, and let me write to Mr.

Stanbury. I do not want to be left without a home."

"You cannot wish to write to a gentleman and ask him to marry you!"

"Why not? We are engaged. I shall not ask him to marry me,--that is

already settled; but I shall ask him to make arrangements."

"Your papa will be very angry if you break your word to him."

"I will write, and show you the letter. Papa may see it, and if he

will not let it go, it shall not go. He shall not say that I broke my

word. But, mamma, I will not go out to the Islands. I should never

get back again, and I should be broken-hearted." Lady Rowley had

nothing to say to this; and Nora went and wrote her letter. "Dear

Hugh," the letter ran, "Papa and mamma leave England on the last

Saturday in July. I have told mamma that I cannot return with them.

Of course, you know why I stay. Mr. Glascock is to be married the day

after to-morrow, and they have asked me to go with them to Monkhams

some time in August. I think I shall do so, unless Emily wants me to

remain with her. At any rate, I shall try to be with her till I go

there. You will understand why I tell you all this. Papa and mamma

know that I am writing. It is only a business letter, and, therefore,

I shall say no more, except that I am ever and always yours,--NORA."

"There," she said, handing her letter to her mother, "I think that

that ought to be sent. If papa chooses to prevent its going, he can."

Lady Rowley, when she handed the letter to her husband, recommended

that it should be allowed to go to its destination. She admitted

that, if they sent it, they would thereby signify their consent to

her engagement;--and she alleged that Nora was so strong in her will,

and that the circumstances of their journey out to the Antipodes were

so peculiar, that it was of no avail for them any longer to oppose

the match. They could not force their daughter to go with them.

"But I can cast her off from me, if she be disobedient," said Sir

Marmaduke. Lady Rowley, however, had no desire that her daughter

should be cast off, and was aware that Sir Marmaduke, when it came

to the point of casting off, would be as little inclined to be stern

as she was herself. Sir Marmaduke, still hoping that firmness would

carry the day, and believing that it behoved him to maintain his

parental authority, ended the discussion by keeping possession of the

letter, and saying that he would take time to consider the matter.

"What security have we that he will ever marry her, if she does

stay?" he asked the next morning. Lady Rowley had no doubt on this

score, and protested that her opposition to Hugh Stanbury arose

simply from his want of income. "I should never be justified," said

Sir Marmaduke, "if I were to go and leave my girl as it were in the

hands of a penny-a-liner." The letter, in the end, was not sent; and

Nora and her father hardly spoke to each other as they made their

journey back to Florence together.

Emily Trevelyan, before the arrival of that letter from her husband,

had determined that she would not leave Italy. It had been her

purpose to remain somewhere in the neighbourhood of her husband and

child; and to overcome her difficulties,--or be overcome by them, as

circumstances might direct. Now her plans were again changed,--or,

rather, she was now without a plan. She could form no plan till

she should again see Mr. Glascock. Should her child be restored to

her, would it not be her duty to remain near her husband? All this

made Nora's line of conduct the more difficult for her. It was

acknowledged that she could not remain in Italy. Mrs. Trevelyan's

position would be most embarrassing; but as all her efforts were to

be used towards a reconciliation with her husband, and as his state

utterly precluded the idea of a mixed household,--of any such a

family arrangement as that which had existed in Curzon Street,--Nora

could not remain with her. Mrs. Trevelyan herself had declared that

she would not wish it. And, in that case, where was Nora to bestow

herself when Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley had sailed? Caroline

offered to curtail those honeymoon weeks in Switzerland, but it was

impossible to listen to an offer so magnanimous and so unreasonable.

Nora had a dim romantic idea of sharing Priscilla's bed-room in that

small cottage near Nuncombe Putney, of which she had heard, and of

there learning lessons in strict economy;--but of this she said

nothing. The short journey from the Baths of Lucca to Florence was

not a pleasant one, and the Rowley family were much disturbed as they

looked into the future. Lodgings had now been taken for them, and

there was the great additional doubt whether Mrs. Trevelyan would

find her child there on her arrival.

The Spaldings went one way from the Florence station, and the Rowleys

another. The American Minister had returned to the city some days

previously,--drawn there nominally by pleas of business, but, in

truth, by the necessities of the wedding breakfast,--and he met them

at the station. "Has Mr. Glascock come back?" Nora was the first to

ask. Yes;--he had come. He had been in the city since two o'clock,

and had been up at the American Minister's house for half a minute.

"And has he brought the child?" asked Caroline, relieved of doubt

on her own account. Mr. Spalding did not know;--indeed, he had not

interested himself quite so intently about Mrs. Trevelyan's little

boy, as had all those who had just returned from the Baths. Mr.

Glascock had said nothing to him about the child, and he had not

quite understood why such a man should have made a journey to Siena,

leaving his sweetheart behind him, just on the eve of his marriage.

He hurried his women-kind into their carriage, and they were driven

away; and then Sir Marmaduke was driven away with his women-kind.

Caroline Spalding had perhaps thought that Mr. Glascock might have

been there to meet her.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

MR. GLASCOCK AS NURSE.

A message had been sent by the wires to Trevelyan, to let him know

that Mr. Glascock was himself coming for the boy. Whether such

message would or would not be sent out to Casalunga Mr. Glascock had

been quite ignorant;--but it could, at any rate, do no harm. He did

feel it hard as in this hot weather he made the journey, first to

Florence, and then on to Siena. What was he to the Rowleys, or to

Trevelyan himself, that such a job of work should fall to his lot at

such a period of his life? He had been very much in love with Nora,

no doubt; but, luckily for him, as he thought, Nora had refused him.

As for Trevelyan,--Trevelyan had never been his friend. As for Sir

Marmaduke,--Sir Marmaduke was nothing to him. He was almost angry

even with Mrs. Trevelyan as he arrived tired, heated, and very dusty,

at Siena. It was his purpose to sleep at Siena that night, and to

go out to Casalunga early the next morning. If the telegram had not

been forwarded, he would send a message on that evening. On inquiry,

however, he found that the message had been sent, and that the paper

had been put into the Signore's own hand by the Sienese messenger.

Then he got into some discourse with the landlord about the strange

gentleman at Casalunga. Trevelyan was beginning to become the subject

of gossip in the town, and people were saying that the stranger was

very strange indeed. The landlord thought that if the Signore had

any friends at all, it would be well that such friends should come

and look after him. Mr. Glascock asked if Mr. Trevelyan was ill. It

was not only that the Signore was out of health,--so the landlord

heard,--but that he was also somewhat-- And then the landlord touched

his head. He eat nothing, and went nowhere, and spoke to no one; and

the people at the hospital to which Casalunga belonged were beginning

to be uneasy about their tenant. Perhaps Mr. Glascock had come to

take him away. Mr. Glascock explained that he had not come to take

Mr. Trevelyan away,--but only to take away a little boy that was with

him. For this reason he was travelling with a maid-servant,--a fact

for which Mr. Glascock clearly thought it necessary that he should

give an intelligible and credible explanation. The landlord seemed to

think that the people at the hospital would have been much rejoiced

had Mr. Glascock intended to take Mr. Trevelyan away also.

He started after a very early breakfast, and found himself walking

up over the stone ridges to the house between nine and ten in the

morning. He himself had sat beside the driver and had put the maid

inside the carriage. He had not deemed it wise to take an undivided

charge of the boy even from Casalunga to Siena. At the door of the

house, as though waiting for him, he found Trevelyan, not dirty as he

had been before, but dressed with much appearance of smartness. He

had a brocaded cap on his head, and a shirt with a laced front, and a

worked waistcoat, and a frock coat, and coloured bright trousers. Mr.

Glascock knew at once that all the clothes which he saw before him

had been made for Italian and not for English wear; and could almost

have said that they had been bought in Siena and not in Florence.

"I had not intended to impose this labour on you, Mr. Glascock,"

Trevelyan said, raising his cap to salute his visitor.

"For fear there might be mistakes, I thought it better to come

myself," said Mr. Glascock. "You did not wish to see Sir Marmaduke?"

"Certainly not Sir Marmaduke," said Trevelyan, with a look of anger

that was almost grotesque.

"And you thought it better that Mrs. Trevelyan should not come."

"Yes;--I thought it better;--but not from any feeling of anger

towards her. If I could welcome my wife here, Mr. Glascock, without

a risk of wrath on her part, I should be very happy to receive her.

I love my wife, Mr. Glascock. I love her dearly. But there have been

misfortunes. Never mind. There is no reason why I should trouble you

with them. Let us go in to breakfast. After your drive you will have

an appetite."

Poor Mr. Glascock was afraid to decline to sit down to the meal which

was prepared for him. He did mutter something about having already

eaten, but Trevelyan put this aside with a wave of his hand as he led

the way into a spacious room, in which had been set out a table with

almost a sumptuous banquet. The room was very bare and comfortless,

having neither curtains nor matting, and containing not above half

a dozen chairs. But an effort had been made to give it an air of

Italian luxury. The windows were thrown open, down to the ground, and

the table was decorated with fruits and three or four long-necked

bottles. Trevelyan waved with his hand towards an arm-chair, and Mr.

Glascock had no alternative but to seat himself. He felt that he was

sitting down to breakfast with a madman; but if he did not sit down,

the madman might perhaps break out into madness. Then Trevelyan went

to the door and called aloud for Catarina. "In these remote places,"

said he, "one has to do without the civilisation of a bell. Perhaps

one gains as much in quiet as one loses in comfort." Then Catarina

came with hot meats and fried potatoes, and Mr. Glascock was

compelled to help himself.

"I am but a bad trencherman myself," said Trevelyan, "but I shall

lament my misfortune doubly if that should interfere with your

appetite." Then he got up and poured out wine into Mr. Glascock's

glass. "They tell me that it comes from the Baron's vineyard," said

Trevelyan, alluding to the wine-farm of Ricasoli, "and that there is

none better in Tuscany. I never was myself a judge of the grape, but

this to me is as palatable as any of the costlier French wines. How

grand a thing would wine really be, if it could make glad the heart

of man. How truly would one worship Bacchus if he could make one's

heart to rejoice. But if a man have a real sorrow, wine will not wash

it away,--not though a man were drowned in it, as Clarence was."

Mr. Glascock hitherto had spoken hardly a word. There was an attempt

at joviality about this breakfast,--or, at any rate, of the usual

comfortable luxury of hospitable entertainment,--which, coming as it

did from Trevelyan, almost locked his lips. He had not come there to

be jovial or luxurious, but to perform a most melancholy mission; and

he had brought with him his saddest looks, and was prepared for a

few sad words. Trevelyan's speech, indeed, was sad enough, but Mr.

Glascock could not take up questions of the worship of Bacchus at

half a minute's warning. He eat a morsel, and raised his glass to his

lips, and felt himself to be very uncomfortable. It was necessary,

however, that he should utter a word. "Do you not let your little boy

come in to breakfast?" he said.

"He is better away," said Trevelyan gloomily.

"But as we are to travel together," said Mr. Glascock, "we might as

well make acquaintance."

"You have been a little hurried with me on that score," said

Trevelyan. "I wrote certainly with a determined mind, but things have

changed somewhat since then."

"You do not mean that you will not send him?"

"You have been somewhat hurried with me, I say. If I remember

rightly, I named no time, but spoke of the future. Could I have

answered the message which I received from you, I would have

postponed your visit for a week or so."

"Postponed it! Why,--I am to be married the day after to-morrow.

It was just as much as I was able to do, to come here at all." Mr.

Glascock now pushed his chair back from the table, and prepared

himself to speak up. "Your wife expects her child now, and you will

break her heart by refusing to send him."

"Nobody thinks of my heart, Mr. Glascock."

"But this is your own offer."

"Yes, it was my own offer, certainly. I am not going to deny my own

words, which have no doubt been preserved in testimony against me."

"Mr. Trevelyan, what do you mean?" Then, when he was on the point of

boiling over with passion, Mr. Glascock remembered that his companion

was not responsible for his expressions. "I do hope you will let

the child go away with me," he said. "You cannot conceive the state

of his mother's anxiety, and she will send him back at once if you

demand it."

"Is that to be in good faith?"

"Certainly, in good faith. I would lend myself to nothing, Mr.

Trevelyan, that was not said and done in good faith."

"She will not break her word, excusing herself, because I am--mad?"

"I am sure that there is nothing of the kind in her mind."

"Perhaps not now; but such things grow. There is no iniquity, no

breach of promise, no treason that a woman will not excuse to

herself,--or a man either,--by the comfortable self-assurance that

the person to be injured is--mad. A hound without a friend is not so

cruelly treated. The outlaw, the murderer, the perjurer has surer

privileges than the man who is in the way, and to whom his friends

can point as being--mad!" Mr. Glascock knew or thought that he knew

that his host in truth was mad, and he could not, therefore, answer

this tirade by an assurance that no such idea was likely to prevail.

"Have they told you, I wonder," continued Trevelyan, "how it was

that, driven to force and an ambuscade for the recovery of my own

child, I waylaid my wife and took him from her? I have done nothing

to forfeit my right as a man to the control of my own family. I

demanded that the boy should be sent to me, and she paid no attention

to my words. I was compelled to vindicate my own authority; and then,

because I claimed the right which belongs to a father, they said that

I was--mad! Ay, and they would have proved it, too, had I not fled

from my country and hidden myself in this desert. Think of that, Mr.

Glascock! Now they have followed me here,--not out of love for me;

and that man whom they call a governor comes and insults me; and my

wife promises to be good to me, and says that she will forgive and

forget! Can she ever forgive herself her own folly, and the cruelty

that has made shipwreck of my life? They can do nothing to me here;

but they would entice me home because there they have friends, and

can fee doctors,--with my own money,--and suborn lawyers, and put me

away,--somewhere in the dark, where I shall be no more heard of among

men! As you are a man of honour, Mr. Glascock,--tell me; is it not

so?"

"I know nothing of their plans,--beyond this, that you wrote me word

that you would send them the boy."

"But I know their plans. What you say is true. I did write you

word,--and I meant it. Mr. Glascock, sitting here alone from

morning to night, and lying down from night till morning, without

companionship, without love, in utter misery, I taught myself to feel

that I should think more of her than of myself."

"If you are so unhappy here, come back yourself with the child. Your

wife would desire nothing better."

"Yes;--and submit to her, and her father, and her mother. No,--Mr.

Glascock; never, never. Let her come to me."

"But you will not receive her."

"Let her come in a proper spirit, and I will receive her. She is the

wife of my bosom, and I will receive her with joy. But if she is to

come to me and tell me that she forgives me,--forgives me for the

evil that she has done,--then, sir, she had better stay away. Mr.

Glascock, you are going to be married. Believe me,--no man should

submit to be forgiven by his wife. Everything must go astray if that

be done. I would rather encounter their mad doctors, one of them

after another till they had made me mad;--I would encounter anything

rather than that. But, sir, you neither eat nor drink, and I fear

that my speech disturbs you."

It was like enough that it may have done so. Trevelyan, as he had

been speaking, had walked about the room, going from one extremity to

the other with hurried steps, gesticulating with his arms, and every

now and then pushing back with his hands the long hair from off his

forehead. Mr. Glascock was in truth very much disturbed. He had come

there with an express object; but, whenever he mentioned the child,

the father became almost rabid in his wrath. "I have done very well,

thank you," said Mr. Glascock. "I will not eat any more, and I

believe I must be thinking of going back to Siena."

"I had hoped you would spend the day with me, Mr. Glascock."

"I am to be married, you see, in two days; and I must be in Florence

early to-morrow. I am to meet my--wife, as she will be, and the

Rowleys, and your wife. Upon my word I can't stay. Won't you just say

a word to the young woman and let the boy be got ready?"

"I think not;--no, I think not."

"And am I to have had all this journey for nothing? You will have

made a fool of me in writing to me."

"I intended to be honest, Mr. Glascock."

"Stick to your honesty, and send the boy back to his mother. It will

be better for you, Trevelyan."

"Better for me! Nothing can be better for me. All must be worst. It

will be better for me, you say; and you ask me to give up the last

drop of cold water wherewith I can touch my parched lips. Even in my

hell I had so much left to me of a limpid stream, and you tell me

that it will be better for me to pour it away. You may take him, Mr.

Glascock. The woman will make him ready for you. What matters it

whether the fiery furnace be heated seven times, or only six;--in

either degree the flames are enough! You may take him;--you may take

him." So saying, Trevelyan walked out of the window, leaving Mr.

Glascock seated in his chair. He walked out of the window and went

down among the olive trees. He did not go far, however, but stood

with his arm round the stem of one of them, playing with the shoots

of a vine with his hand. Mr. Glascock followed him to the window and

stood looking at him for a few moments. But Trevelyan did not turn

or move. There he stood gazing at the pale, cloudless, heat-laden,

motionless sky, thinking of his own sorrows, and remembering too,

doubtless, with the vanity of a madman, that he was probably being

watched in his reverie.

Mr. Glascock was too practical a man not to make the most of the

offer that had been made to him, and he went back among the passages

and called for Catarina. Before long he had two or three women with

him, including her whom he had brought from Florence, and among them

Louey was soon made to appear, dressed for his journey, together with

a small trunk in which were his garments. It was quite clear that

the order for his departure had been given before that scene at the

breakfast-table, and that Trevelyan had not intended to go back from

his promise. Nevertheless Mr. Glascock thought it might be as well to

hurry his departure, and he turned back to say the shortest possible

word of farewell to Trevelyan in the garden. But when he got to the

window, Trevelyan was not to be found among the olive trees. Mr.

Glascock walked a few steps down the hill, looking for him, but

seeing nothing of him, returned to the house. The elder woman said

that her master had not been there, and Mr. Glascock started with his

charge. Trevelyan was manifestly mad, and it was impossible to treat

him as a sane man would have been treated. Nevertheless, Mr. Glascock

felt much compunction in carrying the child away without a final kiss

or word of farewell from its father. But it was not to be so. He

had got into the carriage with the child, having the servant seated

opposite to him,--for he was moved by some undefinable fear which

made him determine to keep the boy close to him, and he had not,

therefore, returned to the driver's seat,--when Trevelyan appeared

standing by the road-side at the bottom of the hill. "Would you take

him away from me without one word!" said Trevelyan bitterly.

"I went to look for you but you were gone," said Mr. Glascock.

"No, sir, I was not gone. I am here. It is the last time that I shall

ever gladden my eyes with his brightness. Louey, my love, will you

come to your father?" Louey did not seem to be particularly willing

to leave the carriage, but he made no loud objection when Mr.

Glascock held him up to the open space above the door. The child had

realised the fact that he was to go, and did not believe that his

father would stop him now; but he was probably of opinion that the

sooner the carriage began to go on the better it would be for him.

Mr. Glascock, thinking that his father intended to kiss him over the

door, held him by his frock; but the doing of this made Trevelyan

very angry. "Am I not to be trusted with my own child in my arms?"

said he. "Give him to me, sir. I begin to doubt now whether I am

right to deliver him to you." Mr. Glascock immediately let go his

hold of the boy's frock and leaned back in the carriage. "Louey will

tell papa that he loves him before he goes?" said Trevelyan. The poor

little fellow murmured something, but it did not please his father,

who had him in his arms. "You are like the rest of them, Louey," he

said; "because I cannot laugh and be gay, all my love for you is

nothing;--nothing! You may take him. He is all that I have;--all that

I have;--and I shall never see him again!" So saying he handed the

child into the carriage, and sat himself down by the side of the road

to watch till the vehicle should be out of sight. As soon as the last

speck of it had vanished from his sight, he picked himself up, and

dragged his slow footsteps back to the house.

Mr. Glascock made sundry attempts to amuse the child, with whom he

had to remain all that night at Siena; but his efforts in that line

were not very successful. The boy was brisk enough, and happy, and

social by nature; but the events, or rather the want of events of

the last few months, had so cowed him, that he could not recover his

spirits at the bidding of a stranger. "If I have any of my own," said

Mr. Glascock to himself, "I hope they will be of a more cheerful

disposition."

As we have seen, he did not meet Caroline at the station,--thereby

incurring his lady-love's displeasure for the period of

half-a-minute; but he did meet Mrs. Trevelyan almost at the door of

Sir Marmaduke's lodgings. "Yes, Mrs. Trevelyan; he is here."

"How am I ever to thank you for such goodness?" said she. "And Mr.

Trevelyan;--you saw him?"

"Yes:--I saw him."

Before he could answer her further she was up-stairs, and had her

child in her arms. It seemed to be an age since the boy had been

stolen from her in the early spring in that unknown, dingy street

near Tottenham Court Road. Twice she had seen her darling since

that,--twice during his captivity; but on each of these occasions

she had seen him as one not belonging to herself, and had seen him

under circumstances which had robbed the greeting of almost all its

pleasure. But now he was her own again, to take whither she would,

to dress and to undress, to feed, to coax, to teach, and to caress.

And the child lay close up to her as she hugged him, putting up his

little cheek to her chin, and burying himself happily in her embrace.

He had not much as yet to say, but she could feel that he was

contented.

Mr. Glascock had promised to wait for her a few minutes,--even at the

risk of Caroline's displeasure,--and Mrs. Trevelyan ran down to him

as soon as the first craving of her mother's love was satisfied. Her

boy would at any rate be safe with her now, and it was her duty to

learn something of her husband. It was more than her duty;--if only

her services might be of avail to him. "And you say he was well?"

she asked. She had taken Mr. Glascock apart, and they were alone

together, and he had determined that he would tell her the truth.

"I do not know that he is ill,--though he is pale and altered beyond

belief."

"Yes;--I saw that."

"I never knew a man so thin and haggard."

"My poor Louis!"

"But that is not the worst of it."

"What do you mean, Mr. Glascock?"

"I mean that his mind is astray, and that he should not be left

alone. There is no knowing what he might do. He is so much more alone

there than he would be in England. There is not a soul who could

interfere."

"Do you mean that you think--that he is in danger--from himself?"

"I would not say so, Mrs. Trevelyan; but who can tell? I am sure of

this,--that he should not be left alone. If it were only because of

the misery of his life, he should not be left alone."

"But what can I do? He would not even see papa."

"He would see you."

"But he would not let me guide him in anything. I have been to him

twice, and he breaks out,--as if I were--a bad woman."

"Let him break out. What does it matter?"

"Am I to own to a falsehood,--and such a falsehood?"

"Own to anything, and you will conquer him at once. That is what I

think. You will excuse what I say, Mrs. Trevelyan."

"Oh, Mr. Glascock, you have been such a friend! What should we have

done without you!"

"You cannot take to heart the words that come from a disordered

reason. In truth, he believes no ill of you."

"But he says so."

"It is hard to know what he says. Declare that you will submit to

him, and I think that he will be softened towards you. Try to bring

him back to his own country. It may be that were he to--die there,

alone, the memory of his loneliness would be heavy with you in after

days." Then, having so spoken, he rushed off, declaring, with a

forced laugh, that Caroline Spalding would never forgive him.

The next day was the day of the wedding, and Emily Trevelyan was

left all alone. It was of course out of the question that she should

join any party the purport of which was to be festive. Sir Marmaduke

went with some grumbling, declaring that wine and severe food in the

morning were sins against the plainest rules of life. And the three

Rowley girls went, Nora officiating as one of the bridesmaids. But

Mrs. Trevelyan was left with her boy, and during the day she was

forced to resolve what should be the immediate course of her life.

Two days after the wedding her family would return to England. It was

open to her to go with them, and to take her boy with her. But a few

days since how happy she would have been could she have been made to

believe that such a mode of returning would be within her power! But

now she felt that she might not return and leave that poor, suffering

wretch behind her. As she thought of him she tried to interrogate

herself in regard to her feelings. Was it love, or duty, or

compassion which stirred her? She had loved him as fondly as any

bright young woman loves the man who is to take her away from

everything else, and make her a part of his house and of himself.

She had loved him as Nora now loved the man whom she worshipped and

thought to be a god, doing godlike work in the dingy recesses of the

D. R. office. Emily Trevelyan was forced to tell herself that all

that was over with her. Her husband had shown himself to be weak,

suspicious, unmanly,--by no means like a god. She had learned to feel

that she could not trust her comfort in his hands,--that she could

never know what his thoughts of her might be. But still he was her

husband, and the father of her child; and though she could not dare

to look forward to happiness in living with him, she could understand

that no comfort would be possible to her were she to return to

England and to leave him to perish alone at Casalunga. Fate seemed

to have intended that her life should be one of misery, and she must

bear it as best she might.

The more she thought of it, however, the greater seemed to be her

difficulties. What was she to do when her father and mother should

have left her? She could not go to Casalunga if her husband would not

give her entrance; and if she did go, would it be safe for her to

take her boy with her? Were she to remain in Florence she would be

hardly nearer to him for any useful purpose than in England; and even

should she pitch her tent at Siena, occupying there some desolate

set of huge apartments in a deserted palace, of what use could she

be to him? Could she stay there if he desired her to go; and was it

probable that he would be willing that she should be at Siena while

he was living at Casalunga,--no more than two leagues distant? How

should she begin her work; and if he repulsed her, how should she

then continue it?

But during these wedding hours she did make up her mind as to what

she would do for the present. She would certainly not leave Italy

while her husband remained there. She would for a while keep her

rooms in Florence, and there should her boy abide. But from time

to time,--twice a week perhaps,--she would go down to Siena and

Casalunga, and there form her plans in accordance with her husband's

conduct. She was his wife, and nothing should entirely separate her

from him, now that he so sorely wanted her aid.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

MR. GLASCOCK'S MARRIAGE COMPLETED.

[Illustration]

The Glascock marriage was a great affair in Florence;--so much

so, that there were not a few who regarded it as a strengthening

of peaceful relations between the United States and the United

Kingdom, and who thought that the Alabama claims and the question

of naturalisation might now be settled with comparative ease. An

English lord was about to marry the niece of an American Minister

to a foreign court. The bridegroom was not, indeed, quite a lord as

yet, but it was known to all men that he must be a lord in a very

short time, and the bride was treated with more than usual bridal

honours because she belonged to a legation. She was not, indeed, an

ambassador's daughter, but the niece of a daughterless ambassador,

and therefore almost as good as a daughter. The wives and daughters

of other ambassadors, and the other ambassadors themselves, of

course, came to the wedding; and as the palace in which Mr. Spalding

had apartments stood alone, in a garden, with a separate carriage

entrance, it seemed for all wedding purposes as though the

whole palace were his own. The English Minister came, and his

wife,--although she had never quite given over turning up her nose at

the American bride whom Mr. Glascock had chosen for himself. It was

such a pity, she said, that such a man as Mr. Glascock should marry

a young woman from Providence, Rhode Island. Who in England would

know anything of Providence, Rhode Island? And it was so expedient,

in her estimation, that a man of family should strengthen himself

by marrying a woman of family. It was so necessary, she declared,

that a man when marrying should remember that his child would have

two grandfathers, and would be called upon to account for four

great-grandfathers. Nevertheless Mr. Glascock was--Mr. Glascock;

and, let him marry whom he would, his wife would be the future Lady

Peterborough. Remembering this, the English Minister's wife gave up

the point when the thing was really settled, and benignly promised to

come to the breakfast with all the secretaries and attachÃ©s belonging

to the legation, and all the wives and daughters thereof. What may

a man not do, and do with Ã©clat, if he be heir to a peer and have

plenty of money in his pocket?

Mr. and Mrs. Spalding were covered with glory on the occasion; and

perhaps they did not bear their glory as meekly as they should have

done. Mrs. Spalding laid herself open to some ridicule from the

British Minister's wife because of her inability to understand with

absolute clearness the condition of her niece's husband in respect to

his late and future seat in Parliament, to the fact of his being a

commoner and a nobleman at the same time, and to certain information

which was conveyed to her, surely in a most unnecessary manner, that

if Mr. Glascock were to die before his father her niece would never

become Lady Peterborough, although her niece's son, if she had

one, would be the future lord. No doubt she blundered, as was most

natural; and then the British Minister's wife made the most of the

blunders; and when once Mrs. Spalding ventured to speak of Caroline

as her ladyship, not to the British Minister's wife, but to the

sister of one of the secretaries, a story was made out of it which

was almost as false as it was ill-natured. Poor Caroline was spoken

of as her ladyship backward and forwards among the ladies of the

legation in a manner which might have vexed her had she known

anything about it; but, nevertheless, all the ladies prepared their

best flounces to go to the wedding. The time would soon come when she

would in truth be a "ladyship," and she might be of social use to any

one of the ladies in question.

But Mr. Spalding was, for the time, the most disturbed of any of

the party concerned. He was a tall, thin, clever Republican of the

North,--very fond of hearing himself talk, and somewhat apt to take

advantage of the courtesies of conversation for the purpose of making

unpardonable speeches. As long as there was any give and take going

on in the mÃªlÃ©e of words he would speak quickly and with energy,

seizing his chances among others; but the moment he had established

his right to the floor,--as soon as he had won for himself the

position of having his turn at the argument, he would dole out his

words with considerable slowness, raise his hand for oratorial

effect, and proceed as though Time were annihilated. And he would go

further even than this, for,--fearing by experience the escape of his

victims,--he would catch a man by the button-hole of his coat, or

back him ruthlessly into the corner of a room, and then lay on to him

without quarter. Since the affair with Mr. Glascock had been settled,

he had talked an immensity about England,--not absolutely taking

honour to himself because of his intended connection with a lord, but

making so many references to the aristocratic side of the British

constitution as to leave no doubt on the minds of his hearers as

to the source of his arguments. In old days, before all this was

happening, Mr. Spalding, though a courteous man in his personal

relations, had constantly spoken of England with the bitter

indignation of the ordinary American politician. England must be made

to disgorge. England must be made to do justice. England must be

taught her place in the world. England must give up her claims. In

hot moments he had gone further, and had declared that England must

be--whipped. He had been specially loud against that aristocracy of

England which, according to a figure of speech often used by him,

was always feeding on the vitals of the people. But now all this was

very much changed. He did not go the length of expressing an opinion

that the House of Lords was a valuable institution; but he discussed

questions of primogeniture and hereditary legislation, in reference

to their fitness for countries which were gradually emerging

from feudal systems, with an equanimity, an impartiality, and a

perseverance which soon convinced those who listened to him where he

had learned his present lessons, and why. "The conservative nature of

your institutions, sir," he said to poor Sir Marmaduke at the Baths

of Lucca a very few days before the marriage, "has to be studied

with great care before its effects can be appreciated in reference

to a people who, perhaps, I may be allowed to say, have more in

their composition of constitutional reverence than of educated

intelligence." Sir Marmaduke, having suffered before, had endeavoured

to bolt; but the American had caught him and pinned him, and the

Governor of the Mandarins was impotent in his hands. "The position

of the great peer of Parliament is doubtless very splendid, and

may be very useful," continued Mr. Spalding, who was intending to

bring round his argument to the evil doings of certain scandalously

extravagant young lords, and to offer a suggestion that in such

cases a committee of aged and respected peers should sit and decide

whether a second son, or some other heir should not be called to the

inheritance both of the title and the property. But Mrs. Spalding

had seen the sufferings of Sir Marmaduke, and had rescued him. "Mr.

Spalding," she had said, "it is too late for politics, and Sir

Marmaduke has come out here for a holiday." Then she took her husband

by the arm, and led him away helpless.

In spite of these drawbacks to the success,--if ought can be

said to be a drawback on success of which the successful one is

unconscious,--the marriage was prepared with great splendour, and

everybody who was anybody in Florence was to be present. There

were only to be four bridesmaids, Caroline herself having strongly

objected to a greater number. As Wallachia Petrie had fled at

the first note of preparation for these trivial and unpalatable

festivities, another American young lady was found; and the sister of

the English secretary of legation, who had so maliciously spread that

report about her "ladyship," gladly agreed to be the fourth.

As the reader will remember, the whole party from the Baths of Lucca

reached Florence only the day before the marriage, and Nora at

the station promised to go up to Caroline that same evening. "Mr.

Glascock will tell me about the little boy," said Caroline; "but I

shall be so anxious to hear about your sister." So Nora crossed the

bridge after dinner, and went up to the American Minister's palatial

residence. Caroline was then in the loggia, and Mr. Glascock was

with her; and for a while they talked about Emily Trevelyan and her

misfortunes. Mr. Glascock was clearly of opinion that Trevelyan would

soon be either in an asylum or in his grave. "I could not bring

myself to tell your sister so," he said; "but I think your father

should be told,--or your mother. Something should be done to put an

end to that fearful residence at Casalunga." Then by degrees the

conversation changed itself to Nora's prospects; and Caroline, with

her friend's hand in hers, asked after Hugh Stanbury.

"You will not mind speaking before him,--will you?" said Caroline,

putting her hand on her own lover's arm.

"Not unless he should mind it," said Nora, smiling. She had meant

nothing beyond a simple reply to her friend's question, but he took

her words in a different sense, and blushed as he remembered his

visit to Nuncombe Putney.

"He thinks almost more of your happiness than he does of mine," said

Caroline; "which isn't fair, as I am sure that Mr. Stanbury will not

reciprocate the attention. And now, dear, when are we to see you?"

"Who on earth can say?"

"I suppose Mr. Stanbury would say something,--only he is not here."

"And papa won't send my letter," said Nora.

"You are sure that you will not go out to the Islands with him?"

"Quite sure," said Nora. "I have made up my mind so far as that."

"And what will your sister do?"

"I think she will stay. I think she will say good-bye to papa and

mamma here in Florence."

"I am quite of opinion that she should not leave her husband alone in

Italy," said Mr. Glascock.

"She has not told us with certainty," said Nora; "but I feel sure

that she will stay. Papa thinks she ought to go with them to London."

"Your papa seems to have two very intractable daughters," said

Caroline.

"As for me," declared Nora, solemnly, "nothing shall make me go back

to the Islands,--unless Mr. Stanbury should tell me to do so."

"And they start at the end of July?"

"On the last Saturday."

"And what will you do then, Nora?"

"I believe there are casual wards that people go to."

"Casual wards!" said Caroline.

"Miss Rowley is condescending to poke her fun at you," said Mr.

Glascock.

"She is quite welcome, and shall poke as much as she likes; only we

must be serious now. If it be necessary, we will get back by the end

of July;--won't we, Charles?"

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Nora. "What!--give up your

honeymoon to provide me with board and lodgings! How can you suppose

that I am so selfish or so helpless? I would go to my aunt, Mrs.

Outhouse."

"We know that that wouldn't do," said Caroline. "You might as well be

in Italy as far as Mr. Stanbury is concerned."

"If Miss Rowley would go to Monkhams, she might wait for us,"

suggested Mr. Glascock. "Old Mrs. Richards is there; and though of

course she would be dull--"

"It is quite unnecessary," said Nora. "I shall take a two-pair back

in a respectable feminine quarter, like any other young woman who

wants such accommodation, and shall wait there till my young man can

come and give me his arm to church. That is about the way we shall do

it. I am not going to give myself any airs, Mr. Glascock, or make any

difficulties. Papa is always talking to me about chairs and tables

and frying-pans, and I shall practise to do with as few of them as

possible. As I am headstrong about having my young man,--and I own

that I am headstrong about that,--I guess I've got to fit myself for

that sort of life." And Nora, as she said this, pronounced her words

with something of a nasal twang, imitating certain countrywomen of

her friend's.

"I like to hear you joking about it, Nora; because your voice is so

cheery and you are so bright when you joke. But, nevertheless, one

has to be reasonable, and to look the facts in the face. I don't see

how you are to be left in London alone, and you know that your aunt

Mrs. Outhouse,--or at any rate your uncle,--would not receive you

except on receiving some strong anti-Stanbury pledge."

"I certainly shall not give an anti-Stanbury pledge."

"And, therefore, that is out of the question. You will have a

fortnight or three weeks in London, in all the bustle of their

departure, and I declare I think that at the last moment you will go

with them."

"Never!--unless he says so."

"I don't see how you are even to meet--'him,' and talk it over."

"I'll manage that. My promise not to write lasts only while we are in

Italy."

"I think we had better get back to England, Charles, and take pity on

this poor destitute one."

"If you talk of such a thing I will swear that I will never go to

Monkhams. You will find that I shall manage it. It may be that I

shall do something very shocking,--so that all your patronage will

hardly be able to bring me round afterwards; but I will do something

that will serve my purpose. I have not gone so far as this to be

turned back now." Nora, as she spoke of having "gone so far," was

looking at Mr. Glascock, who was seated in an easy arm-chair close

to the girl whom he was to make his wife on the morrow, and she

was thinking, no doubt, of the visit which he had made to Nuncombe

Putney, and of the first irretrievable step which she had taken when

she told him that her love was given to another. That had been her

Rubicon. And though there had been periods with her since the passing

of it, in which she had felt that she had crossed it in vain, that

she had thrown away the splendid security of the other bank without

obtaining the perilous object of her ambition,--though there had been

moments in which she had almost regretted her own courage and noble

action, still, having passed the river, there was nothing for her

but to go on to Rome. She was not going to be stopped now by the

want of a house in which to hide herself for a few weeks. She was

without money, except so much as her mother might be able, almost

surreptitiously, to give her. She was without friends to help

her,--except these who were now with her, whose friendship had come

to her in so singular a manner, and whose power to aid her at the

present moment was cruelly curtailed by their own circumstances.

Nothing was settled as to her own marriage. In consequence of

the promise that had been extorted from her that she should not

correspond with Stanbury, she knew nothing of his present wishes or

intention. Her father was so offended by her firmness that he would

hardly speak to her. And it was evident to her that her mother,

though disposed to yield, was still in hopes that her daughter, in

the press and difficulty of the moment, would allow herself to be

carried away with the rest of the family to the other side of the

world. She knew all this,--but she had made up her mind that she

would not be carried away. It was not very pleasant, the thought that

she would be obliged at last to ask her young man, as she called

him, to provide for her; but she would do that and trust herself

altogether in his hands sooner than be taken to the Antipodes. "I

can be very resolute if I please, my dear," she said, looking at

Caroline. Mr. Glascock almost thought that she must have intended to

address him.

They sat there discussing the matter for some time through the long,

cool, evening hours, but nothing could be settled further,--except

that Nora would write to her friend as soon as her affairs had begun

to shape themselves after her return to England. At last Caroline

went into the house, and for a few minutes Mr. Glascock was alone

with Nora. He had remained, determining that the moment should come,

but now that it was there he was for awhile unable to say the words

that he wished to utter. At last he spoke. "Miss Rowley, Caroline is

so eager to be your friend."

"I know she is, and I do love her so dearly. But, without joke, Mr.

Glascock, there will be as it were a great gulf between us."

"I do not know that there need be any gulf, great or little. But

I did not mean to allude to that. What I want to say is this. My

feelings are not a bit less warm or sincere than hers. You know of

old that I am not very good at expressing myself."

"I know nothing of the kind."

"There is no such gulf as what you speak of. All that is mostly

gone by, and a nobleman in England, though he has advantages as a

gentleman, is no more than a gentleman. But that has nothing to

do with what I am saying now. I shall never forget my journey to

Devonshire. I won't pretend to say now that I regret its result."

"I am quite sure you don't."

"No; I do not;--though I thought then that I should regret it always.

But remember this, Miss Rowley,--that you can never ask me to do

anything that I will not, if possible, do for you. You are in some

little difficulty now."

"It will disappear, Mr. Glascock. Difficulties always do."

"But we will do anything that we are wanted to do; and should a

certain event take place--"

"It will take place some day."

"Then I hope that we may be able to make Mr. Stanbury and his wife

quite at home at Monkhams." After that he took Nora's hand and kissed

it, and at that moment Caroline came back to them.

"To-morrow, Mr. Glascock," she said, "you will, I believe, be at

liberty to kiss everybody; but to-day you should be more discreet."

It was generally admitted among the various legations in Florence

that there had not been such a wedding in the City of Flowers since

it had become the capital of Italia. Mr. Glascock and Miss Spalding

were married in the chapel of the legation,--a legation chapel on the

ground floor having been extemporised for the occasion. This greatly

enhanced the pleasantness of the thing, and saved the necessity of

matrons and bridesmaids packing themselves and their finery into

close fusty carriages. A portion of the guests attended in the

chapel, and the remainder, when the ceremony was over, were found

strolling about the shady garden. The whole affair of the breakfast

was very splendid and lasted some hours. In the midst of this the

bride and bridegroom were whisked away with a pair of grey horses to

the railway station, and before the last toast of the day had been

proposed by the Belgian Councillor of Legation, they were half way up

the Apennines on their road to Bologna. Mr. Spalding behaved himself

like a man on the occasion. Nothing was spared in the way of expense,

and when he made that celebrated speech, in which he declared that

the republican virtue of the New World had linked itself in a happy

alliance with the aristocratic splendour of the Old, and went on with

a simile about the lion and the lamb, everybody accepted it with good

humour in spite of its being a little too long for the occasion.

"It has gone off very well, mamma; has it not?" said Nora, as she

returned home with her mother to her lodgings.

"Yes, my dear; much, I fancy, as these things generally do."

"I thought it was so nice. And she looked so very well. And he was so

pleasant, and so much like a gentleman;--not noisy, you know,--and

yet not too serious."

"I dare say, my love."

"It is easy enough, mamma, for a girl to be married, for she has

nothing to do but to wear her clothes and look as pretty as she can.

And if she cries and has a red nose it is forgiven her. But a man has

so difficult a part to play. If he tries to carry himself as though

it were not a special occasion, he looks like a fool that way; and if

he is very special, he looks like a fool the other way. I thought Mr.

Glascock did it very well."

"To tell you the truth, my dear, I did not observe him."

"I did,--narrowly. He hadn't tied his cravat at all nicely."

"How you could think of his cravat, Nora, with such memories as you

must have, and such regrets, I cannot understand."

"Mamma, my memories of Mr. Glascock are pleasant memories, and as for

regrets,--I have not one. Can I regret, mamma, that I did not marry a

man whom I did not love,--and that I rejected him when I knew that I

loved another? You cannot mean that, mamma."

"I know this;--that I was thinking all the time how proud I should

have been, and how much more fortunate he would have been, had you

been standing there instead of that American young woman." As she

said this Lady Rowley burst into tears, and Nora could only answer

her mother by embracing her. They were alone together, their party

having been too large for one carriage, and Sir Marmaduke having

taken his two younger daughters. "Of course I feel it," said Lady

Rowley, through her tears. "It would have been such a position for

my child! And that young man,--without a shilling in the world; and

writing in that way, just for bare bread!" Nora had nothing more

to say. A feeling that in herself would have been base, was simply

affectionate and maternal in her mother. It was impossible that she

should make her mother see it as she saw it.

There was but one intervening day and then the Rowleys returned to

England. There had been, as it were, a tacit agreement among them

that, in spite of all their troubles, their holiday should be a

holiday up to the time of the Glascock marriage. Then must commence

at once the stern necessity of their return home,--home, not only

to England, but to those antipodean islands from which it was

too probable that some of them might never come back. And the

difficulties in their way seemed to be almost insuperable. First

of all there was to be the parting from Emily Trevelyan. She had

determined to remain in Florence, and had written to her husband

saying that she would do so, and declaring her willingness to go out

to him, or to receive him in Florence at any time and in any manner

that he might appoint. She had taken this as a first step, intending

to go to Casalunga very shortly, even though she should receive

no answer from him. The parting between her and her mother and

father and sisters was very bitter. Sir Marmaduke, as he had become

estranged from Nora, had grown to be more and more gentle and loving

with his elder daughter, and was nearly overcome at the idea of

leaving her in a strange land, with a husband near her, mad, and yet

not within her custody. But he could do nothing,--could hardly say a

word,--toward opposing her. Though her husband was mad, he supplied

her with the means of living; and when she said that it was her duty

to be near him, her father could not deny it. The parting came. "I

will return to you the moment you send to me," were Nora's last words

to her sister. "I don't suppose I shall send," said Emily. "I shall

try to bear it without assistance."

Then the journey from Italy to England was made without much

gratification or excitement, and the Rowley family again found

themselves at Gregg's Hotel.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

CROPPER AND BURGESS.

We must now go back to Exeter and look after Mr. Brooke Burgess and

Miss Dorothy Stanbury. It is rather hard upon readers that they

should be thus hurried from the completion of hymeneals at Florence,

to the preparations for other hymeneals in Devonshire; but it is the

nature of a complex story to be entangled with many weddings towards

its close. In this little history there are, we fear, three or four

more to come. We will not anticipate by alluding prematurely to Hugh

Stanbury's treachery, or death,--or the possibility that he after all

may turn out to be the real descendant of the true Lord Peterborough

and the actual inheritor of the title and estate of Monkhams, nor

will we speak of Nora's certain fortitude under either of these

emergencies. But the instructed reader must be aware that Camilla

French ought to have a husband found for her; that Colonel Osborne

should be caught in some matrimonial trap,--as, how otherwise

should he be fitly punished?--and that something should be at least

attempted for Priscilla Stanbury, who from the first has been

intended to be the real heroine of these pages. That Martha should

marry Giles Hickbody, and Barty Burgess run away with Mrs. MacHugh,

is of course evident to the meanest novel-expounding capacity; but

the fate of Brooke Burgess and of Dorothy will require to be evolved

with some delicacy and much detail.

There was considerable difficulty in fixing the day. In the first

place Miss Stanbury was not very well,--and then she was very

fidgety. She must see Brooke again before the day was fixed, and

after seeing Brooke she must see her lawyer. "To have a lot of money

to look after is more plague than profit, my dear," she said to

Dorothy one day; "particularly when you don't quite know what you

ought to do with it." Dorothy had always avoided any conversation

with her aunt about money since the first moment in which she had

thought of accepting Brooke Burgess as her husband. She knew that

her aunt had some feeling which made her averse to the idea that any

portion of the property which she had inherited should be enjoyed by

a Stanbury after her death, and Dorothy, guided by this knowledge,

had almost convinced herself that her love for Brooke was treason

either against him or against her aunt. If, by engaging herself to

him, she should rob him of his inheritance, how bitter a burden to

him would her love have been! If, on the other hand, she should

reward her aunt for all that had been done for her by forcing

herself, a Stanbury, into a position not intended for her, how base

would be her ingratitude! These thoughts had troubled her much, and

had always prevented her from answering any of her aunt's chance

allusions to the property. For her, things had at last gone very

right. She did not quite know how it had come about, but she was

engaged to marry the man she loved. And her aunt was, at any rate,

reconciled to the marriage. But when Miss Stanbury declared that she

did not know what to do about the property, Dorothy could only hold

her tongue. She had had plenty to say when it had been suggested to

her that the marriage should be put off yet for a short while, and

that, in the meantime, Brooke should come again to Exeter. She swore

that she did not care for how long it was put off,--only that she

hoped it might not be put off altogether. And as for Brooke's coming,

that, for the present, would be very much nicer than being married

out of hand at once. Dorothy, in truth, was not at all in a hurry to

be married, but she would have liked to have had her lover always

coming and going. Since the courtship had become a thing permitted,

she had had the privilege of welcoming him twice at the house in the

Close; and that running down to meet him in the little front parlour,

and the getting up to make his breakfast for him as he started in

the morning, were among the happiest epochs of her life. And then,

as soon as ever the breakfast was eaten, and he was gone, she would

sit down to write him a letter. Oh, those letters, so beautifully

crossed, more than one of which was copied from beginning to end

because some word in it was not thought to be sweet enough;--what a

heaven of happiness they were to her! The writing of the first had

disturbed her greatly, and she had almost repented of the privilege

before it was ended; but with the first and second the difficulties

had disappeared; and, had she not felt somewhat ashamed of the

occupation, she could have sat at her desk and written him letters

all day. Brooke would answer them, with fair regularity, but in a

most cursory manner,--sending seven or eight lines in return for two

sheets fully crossed; but this did not discompose her in the least.

He was worked hard at his office, and had hundreds of other things

to do. He, too, could say,--so thought Dorothy,--more in eight lines

than she could put into as many pages.

She was quite happy when she was told that the marriage could not

take place till August, but that Brooke must come again in July.

Brooke did come in the first week of July, and somewhat horrified

Dorothy by declaring to her that Miss Stanbury was unreasonable.

"If I insist upon leaving London so often for a day or two," said he,

"how am I to get anything like leave of absence when the time comes?"

In answer to this Dorothy tried to make him understand that business

should not be neglected, and that, as far as she was concerned, she

could do very well without that trip abroad which he had proposed for

her. "I'm not going to be done in that way," said Brooke. "And now

that I am here she has nothing to say to me. I've told her a dozen

times that I don't want to know anything about her will, and that

I'll take it all for granted. There is something to be settled on

you, that she calls her own."

"She is so generous, Brooke."

"She is generous enough, but she is very whimsical. She is going

to make her whole will over again, and now she wants to send some

message to Uncle Barty. I don't know what it is yet, but I am to take

it. As far as I can understand, she has sent all the way to London

for me, in order that I may take a message across the Close."

"You talk as though it were very disagreeable, coming to Exeter,"

said Dorothy, with a little pout.

"So it is,--very disagreeable."

"Oh, Brooke!"

"Very disagreeable if our marriage is to be put off by it. I think

it will be so much nicer making love somewhere on the Rhine than

having snatches of it here, and talking all the time about wills and

tenements and settlements." As he said this, with his arm round her

waist and his face quite close to hers,--shewing thereby that he was

not altogether averse even to his present privileges,--she forgave

him.

On that same afternoon, just before the banking hours were over,

Brooke went across to the house of Cropper and Burgess, having first

been closeted for nearly an hour with his aunt,--and, as he went,

his step was sedate and his air was serious. He found his uncle

Barty, and was not very long in delivering his message. It was to

this effect,--that Miss Stanbury particularly wished to see Mr.

Bartholomew Burgess on business, at some hour on that afternoon

or that evening. Brooke himself had been made acquainted with the

subject in regard to which this singular interview was desired;

but it was not a part of his duty to communicate any information

respecting it. It had been necessary that his consent to certain

arrangements should be asked before the invitation to Barty Burgess

could be given; but his present mission was confined to an authority

to give the invitation.

Old Mr. Burgess was much surprised, and was at first disposed to

decline the proposition made by the "old harridan," as he called her.

He had never put any restraint on his language in talking of Miss

Stanbury with his nephew, and was not disposed to do so now, because

she had taken a new vagary into her head. But there was something in

his nephew's manner which at last induced him to discuss the matter

rationally.

"And you don't know what it's all about?" said Uncle Barty.

"I can't quite say that. I suppose I do know pretty well. At any

rate, I know enough to think that you ought to come. But I must not

say what it is."

"Will it do me or anybody else any good?"

"It can't do you any harm. She won't eat you."

"But she can abuse me like a pickpocket, and I should return it, and

then there would be a scolding match. I always have kept out of her

way, and I think I had better do so still."

Nevertheless Brooke prevailed,--or rather the feeling of curiosity

which was naturally engendered prevailed. For very, very many years

Barty Burgess had never entered or left his own house of business

without seeing the door of that in which Miss Stanbury lived,--and

he had never seen that door without a feeling of detestation for the

owner of it. It would, perhaps, have been a more rational feeling on

his part had he confined his hatred to the memory of his brother, by

whose will Miss Stanbury had been enriched, and he had been, as he

thought, impoverished. But there had been a contest, and litigation,

and disputes, and contradictions, and a long course of those

incidents in life which lead to rancour and ill blood, after the

death of the former Brooke Burgess; and, as the result of all this,

Miss Stanbury held the property and Barty Burgess held his hatred.

He had never been ashamed of it, and had spoken his mind out to all

who would hear him. And, to give Miss Stanbury her due, it must be

admitted that she had hardly been behind him in the warmth of her

expression,--of which old Barty was well aware. He hated, and knew

that he was hated in return. And he knew, or thought that he knew,

that his enemy was not a woman to relent because old age and weakness

and the fear of death were coming on her. His enemy, with all her

faults, was no coward. It could not be that now at the eleventh hour

she should desire to reconcile him by any act of tardy justice,--nor

did he wish to be reconciled at this the eleventh hour. His hatred

was a pleasant excitement to him. His abuse of Miss Stanbury was a

chosen recreation. His unuttered daily curse, as he looked over to

her door, was a relief to him. Nevertheless he would go. As Brooke

had said,--no harm could come of his going. He would go, and at least

listen to her proposition.

About seven in the evening his knock was heard at the door. Miss

Stanbury was sitting in the small up-stairs parlour, dressed in her

second best gown, and was prepared with considerable stiffness and

state for the occasion. Dorothy was with her, but was desired in a

quick voice to hurry away the moment the knock was heard, as though

old Barty would have jumped from the hall door into the room at

a bound. Dorothy collected herself with a little start, and went

without a word. She had heard much of Barty Burgess, but had never

spoken to him, and was subject to a feeling of great awe when she

would remember that the grim old man of whom she had heard so much

evil would soon be her uncle. According to arrangement, Mr. Burgess

was shewn up-stairs by his nephew. Barty Burgess had been born in

this very house, but had not been inside the walls of it for more

than thirty years. He also was somewhat awed by the occasion, and

followed his nephew without a word. Brooke was to remain at hand,

so that he might be summoned should he be wanted; but it had been

decided by Miss Stanbury that he should not be present at the

interview. As soon as her visitor entered the room she rose in a

stately way, and curtseyed, propping herself with one hand upon the

table as she did so. She looked him full in the face meanwhile, and

curtseying a second time asked him to seat himself in a chair which

had been prepared for him. She did it all very well, and it may be

surmised that she had rehearsed the little scene, perhaps more than

once, when nobody was looking at her. He bowed, and walked round to

the chair and seated himself; but finding that he was so placed that

he could not see his neighbour's face, he moved his chair. He was not

going to fight such a duel as this with the disadvantage of the sun

in his eyes.

[Illustration: Barty Burgess.]

Hitherto there had hardly been a word spoken. Miss Stanbury had

muttered something as she was curtseying, and Barty Burgess had made

some return. Then she began: "Mr. Burgess," she said, "I am indebted

to you for your complaisance in coming here at my request." To this

he bowed again. "I should not have ventured thus to trouble you were

it not that years are dealing more hardly with me than they are

with you, and that I could not have ventured to discuss a matter

of deep interest otherwise than in my own room." It was her room

now, certainly, by law; but Barty Burgess remembered it when it was

his mother's room, and when she used to give them all their meals

there,--now so many, many years ago! He bowed again, and said not a

word. He knew well that she could sooner be brought to her point by

his silence than by his speech.

She was a long time coming to her point. Before she could do so she

was forced to allude to times long past, and to subjects which she

found it very difficult to touch without saying that which would

either belie herself, or seem to be severe upon him. Though she had

prepared herself, she could hardly get the words spoken, and she was

greatly impeded by the obstinacy of his silence. But at last her

proposition was made to him. She told him that his nephew, Brooke,

was about to be married to her niece, Dorothy; and that it was her

intention to make Brooke her heir in the bulk of the property which

she had received under the will of the late Mr. Brooke Burgess.

"Indeed," she said, "all that I received at your brother's hands

shall go back to your brother's family unimpaired." He only bowed,

and would not say a word. Then she went on to say that it had at

first been a matter to her of deep regret that Brooke should have set

his affections upon her niece, as there had been in her mind a strong

desire that none of her own people should enjoy the reversion of the

wealth, which she had always regarded as being hers only for the

term of her life; but that she had found that the young people had

been so much in earnest, and that her own feeling had been so near

akin to a prejudice, that she had yielded. When this was said Barty

smiled instead of bowing, and Miss Stanbury felt that there might be

something worse even than his silence. His smile told her that he

believed her to be lying. Nevertheless she went on. She was not fool

enough to suppose that the whole nature of the man was to be changed

by a few words from her. So she went on. The marriage was a thing

fixed, and she was thinking of settlements, and had been talking to

lawyers about a new will.

"I do not know that I can help you," said Barty, finding that a

longer pause than usual made some word from him absolutely necessary.

"I am going on to that, and I regret that my story should detain

you so long, Mr. Burgess." And she did go on. She had, she said,

made some saving out of her income. She was not going to trouble Mr.

Burgess with this matter,--only that she might explain to him that

what she would at once give to the young couple, and what she would

settle on Dorothy after her own death, would all come from such

savings, and that such gifts and bequests would not diminish the

family property. Barty again smiled as he heard this, and Miss

Stanbury in her heart likened him to the devil in person. But still

she went on. She was very desirous that Brooke Burgess should

come and live at Exeter. His property would be in the town and

the neighbourhood. It would be a seemly thing,--such were her

words,--that he should occupy the house that had belonged to his

grandfather and his great-grandfather; and then, moreover,--she

acknowledged that she spoke selfishly,--she dreaded the idea of being

left alone for the remainder of her own years. Her proposition at

last was uttered. It was simply this, that Barty Burgess should give

to his nephew, Brooke, his share in the bank.

"I am damned, if I do!" said Barty Burgess, rising up from his chair.

But before he had left the room he had agreed to consider the

proposition. Miss Stanbury had of course known that any such

suggestion coming from her without an adequate reason assigned, would

have been mere idle wind. She was prepared with such adequate reason.

If Mr. Burgess could see his way to make the proposed transfer of his

share of the bank business, she, Miss Stanbury, would hand over to

him, for his life, a certain proportion of the Burgess property which

lay in the city, the income of which would exceed that drawn by him

from the business. Would he, at his time of life, take that for doing

nothing which he now got for working hard? That was the meaning of

it. And then, too, as far as the portion of the property went,--and

it extended to the houses owned by Miss Stanbury on the bank side

of the Close,--it would belong altogether to Barty Burgess for his

life. "It will simply be this, Mr. Burgess;--that Brooke will be your

heir,--as would be natural."

"I don't know that it would be at all natural," said he. "I should

prefer to choose my own heir."

"No doubt, Mr. Burgess,--in respect to your own property," said Miss

Stanbury.

At last he said that he would think of it, and consult his partner;

and then he got up to take his leave. "For myself," said Miss

Stanbury, "I would wish that all animosities might be buried."

"We can say that they are buried," said the grim old man,--"but

nobody will believe us."

"What matters,--if we could believe it ourselves?"

"But suppose we didn't. I don't believe that much good can come from

talking of such things, Miss Stanbury. You and I have grown too old

to swear a friendship. I will think of this thing, and if I find

that it can be made to suit without much difficulty, I will perhaps

entertain it." Then the interview was over, and old Barty made

his way down-stairs, and out of the house. He looked over to the

tenements in the Close which were offered to him, every circumstance

of each one of which he knew, and felt that he might do worse. Were

he to leave the bank, he could not take his entire income with him,

and it had been long said of him that he ought to leave it. The

Croppers, who were his partners,--and whom he had never loved,--would

be glad to welcome in his place one of the old family who would have

money; and then the name would be perpetuated in Exeter, which, even

to Barty Burgess, was something.

On that night the scheme was divulged to Dorothy, and she was in

ecstasies. London had always sounded bleak and distant and terrible

to her; and her heart had misgiven her at the idea of leaving her

aunt. If only this thing might be arranged! When Brooke spoke the

next morning of returning at once to his office, he was rebuked by

both the ladies. What was the Ecclesiastical Commission Office to any

of them, when matters of such importance were concerned? But Brooke

would not be talked out of his prudence. He was very willing to be

made a banker at Exeter, and to go to school again and learn banking

business; but he would not throw up his occupation in London till he

knew that there was another ready for him in the country. One day

longer he spent in Exeter, and during that day he was more than once

with his uncle. He saw also the Messrs. Cropper, and was considerably

chilled by the manner in which they at first seemed to entertain the

proposition. Indeed, for a couple of hours he thought that the scheme

must be abandoned. It was pointed out to him that Mr. Barty Burgess's

life would probably be short, and that he--Barty--had but a small

part of the business at his disposal. But gradually a way to terms

was seen,--not quite so simple as that which Miss Stanbury had

suggested; and Brooke, when he left Exeter, did believe it possible

that he, after all, might become the family representative in the old

banking-house of the Burgesses.

"And how long will it take, Aunt Stanbury?" Dorothy asked.

"Don't you be impatient, my dear."

"I am not the least impatient; but of course I want to tell mamma and

Priscilla. It will be so nice to live here and not go up to London.

Are we to stay here,--in this very house?"

"Have you not found out yet that Brooke will be likely to have an

opinion of his own on such things?"

"But would you wish us to live here, aunt?"

"I hardly know, dear. I am a foolish old woman, and cannot say what I

would wish. I cannot bear to be alone."

"Of course we will stay with you."

"And yet I should be jealous if I were not mistress of my own house."

"Of course you will be mistress."

"I believe, Dolly, that it would be better that I should die. I have

come to feel that I can do more good by going out of the world than

by remaining in it." Dorothy hardly answered this in words, but sat

close by her aunt, holding the old woman's hand and caressing it, and

administering that love of which Miss Stanbury had enjoyed so little

during her life and which had become so necessary to her.

The news about the bank arrangements, though kept of course as a

great secret, soon became common in Exeter. It was known to be a good

thing for the firm in general that Barty Burgess should be removed

from his share of the management. He was old-fashioned, unpopular,

and very stubborn; and he and a certain Mr. Julius Cropper, who was

the leading man among the Croppers, had not always been comfortable

together. It was at first hinted that old Miss Stanbury had been

softened by sudden twinges of conscience, and that she had confessed

to some terrible crime in the way of forgery, perjury, or perhaps

worse, and had relieved herself at last by making full restitution.

But such a rumour as this did not last long or receive wide credence.

When it was hinted to such old friends as Sir Peter Mancrudy and Mrs.

MacHugh, they laughed it to scorn,--and it did not exist even in the

vague form of an undivulged mystery for above three days. Then it

was asserted that old Barty had been found to have no real claim

to any share in the bank, and that he was to be turned out at Miss

Stanbury's instance;--that he was to be turned out, and that Brooke

had been acknowledged to be the owner of the Burgess share of her

business. Then came the fact that old Barty had been bought out, and

that the future husband of Miss Stanbury's niece was to be the junior

partner. A general feeling prevailed at last that there had been

another great battle between Miss Stanbury and old Barty, and that

the old maid had prevailed now as she had done in former days.

Before the end of July the papers were in the lawyer's hands, and

all the terms had been fixed. Brooke came down again and again, to

Dorothy's great delight, and displayed considerable firmness in the

management of his own interest. If Fate intended to make him a banker

in Exeter instead of a clerk in the Ecclesiastical Commission Office,

he would be a banker after a respectable fashion. There was more

than one little struggle between him and Mr. Julius Cropper, which

ended in accession of respect on the part of Mr. Cropper for his new

partner. Mr. Cropper had thought that the establishment might best

be known to the commercial world of the West of England as "Croppers'

Bank;" but Brooke had been very firm in asserting that if he was to

have anything to do with it the old name should be maintained.

"It's to be 'Cropper and Burgess,'" he said to Dorothy one afternoon.

"They fought hard for 'Cropper, Cropper, and Burgess;'--but I

wouldn't stand more than one Cropper."

"Of course not," said Dorothy, with something almost of scorn in

her voice. By this time Dorothy had gone very deeply into banking

business.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

"I WOULDN'T DO IT, IF I WAS YOU."

Miss Stanbury at this time was known all through Exeter to be very

much altered from the Miss Stanbury of old;--or even from the Miss

Stanbury of two years since. The Miss Stanbury of old was a stalwart

lady who would play her rubber of whist five nights a week, and could

hold her own in conversation against the best woman in Exeter,--not

to speak of her acknowledged superiority over every man in that city.

Now she cared little for the glories of debate; and though she still

liked her rubber, and could wake herself up to the old fire in the

detection of a revoke or the claim for a second trick, her rubbers

were few and far between, and she would leave her own house on an

evening only when all circumstances were favourable, and with many

precautions against wind and water. Some said that she was becoming

old, and that she was going out like the snuff of a candle. But Sir

Peter Mancrudy declared that she might live for the next fifteen

years, if she would only think so herself. "It was true," Sir Peter

said, "that in the winter she had been ill, and that there had been

danger as to her throat during the east winds of the spring;--but

those dangers had passed away, and, if she would only exert herself,

she might be almost as good a woman as ever she had been." Sir Peter

was not a man of many words, or given to talk frequently of his

patients; but it was clearly Sir Peter's opinion that Miss Stanbury's

mind was ill at ease. She had become discontented with life, and

therefore it was that she cared no longer for the combat of tongues,

and had become cold even towards the card-table. It was so in truth;

and yet perhaps the lives of few men or women had been more innocent,

and few had struggled harder to be just in their dealings and

generous in their thoughts.

There was ever present to her mind an idea of failure and a fear lest

she had been mistaken in her views throughout her life. No one had

ever been more devoted to peculiar opinions, or more strong in the

use of language for their expression; and she was so far true to

herself, that she would never seem to retreat from the position she

had taken. She would still scorn the new fangles of the world around

her, and speak of the changes which she saw as all tending to evil.

But, through it all, there was an idea present to herself that

it could not be God's intention that things should really change

for the worse, and that the fault must be in her, because she had

been unable to move as others had moved. She would sit thinking of

the circumstances of her own life and tell herself that with her

everything had failed. She had loved, but had quarrelled with her

lover; and her love had come to nothing--but barren wealth. She had

fought for her wealth and had conquered;--and had become hard in the

fight, and was conscious of her own hardness. In the early days of

her riches and power she had taken her nephew by the hand,--and had

thrown him away from her because he would not dress himself in her

mirror. She had believed herself to be right, and would not, even

now, tell herself that she had been wrong; but there were doubts, and

qualms of conscience, and an uneasiness,--because her life had been

a failure. Now she was seeking to appease her self-accusations by

sacrificing everything for the happiness of her niece and her chosen

hero; but as she went on with the work she felt that all would be in

vain, unless she could sweep herself altogether from off the scene.

She had told herself that if she could bring Brooke to Exeter, his

prospects would be made infinitely brighter than they would be in

London, and that she in her last days would not be left utterly

alone. But as the prospect of her future life came nearer to her, she

saw, or thought that she saw, that there was still failure before

her. Young people would not want an old woman in the house with

them;--even though the old woman would declare that she would be no

more in the house than a tame cat. And she knew herself also too well

to believe that she could make herself a tame cat in the home that

had so long been subject to her dominion. Would it not be better that

she should go away somewhere,--and die?

"If Mr. Brooke is to come here," Martha said to her one day, "we

ought to begin and make the changes, ma'am."

"What changes? You are always wanting to make changes."

"If they was never made till I wanted them they'd never be made,

ma'am. But if there is to be a married couple there should be things

proper. Anyways, ma'am, we ought to know;--oughtn't we?"

The truth of this statement was so evident that Miss Stanbury could

not contradict it. But she had not even yet made up her mind. Ideas

were running through her head which she knew to be very wild, but

of which she could not divest herself. "Martha," she said, after a

while, "I think I shall go away from this myself."

"Leave the house, ma'am?" said Martha, awestruck.

"There are other houses in the world, I suppose, in which an old

woman can live and die."

"There is houses, ma'am, of course."

"And what is the difference between one and another?"

"I wouldn't do it, ma'am, if I was you. I wouldn't do it if it was

ever so. Sure the house is big enough for Mr. Brooke and Miss Dorothy

along with you. I wouldn't go and make such change as that;--I

wouldn't indeed, ma'am." Martha spoke out almost with eloquence, so

much expression was there in her face. Miss Stanbury said nothing

more at the moment, beyond signifying her indisposition to make up

her mind to anything at the present moment. Yes;--the house was big

enough as far as rooms were concerned; but how often had she heard

that an old woman must always be in the way, if attempting to live

with a newly-married couple? If a mother-in-law be unendurable, how

much more so one whose connection would be less near? She could keep

her own house no doubt, and let them go elsewhere; but what then

would come of her old dream, that Burgess, the new banker in the

city, should live in the very house that had been inhabited by the

Burgesses, the bankers of old? There was certainly only one way out

of all these troubles, and that way would be that she should--go from

them and be at rest.

Her will had now been drawn out and completed for the third or fourth

time, and she had made no secret of its contents either with Brooke

or Dorothy. The whole estate she left to Brooke, including the houses

which were to become his after his uncle's death; and in regard to

the property she had made no further stipulation. "I might have

settled it on your children," she said to him, "but in doing so I

should have settled it on hers. I don't know why an old woman should

try to interfere with things after she has gone. I hope you won't

squander it, Brooke."

"I shall be a steady old man by that time," he said.

"I hope you'll be steady at any rate. But there it is, and God must

direct you in the use of it, if He will. It has been a burthen to

me; but then I have been a solitary old woman." Half of what she had

saved she proposed to give Dorothy on her marriage, and for doing

this arrangements had already been made. There were various other

legacies, and the last she announced was one to her nephew, Hugh. "I

have left him a thousand pounds," she said to Dorothy,--"so that he

may remember me kindly at last." As to this, however, she exacted a

pledge that no intimation of the legacy was to be made to Hugh. Then

it was that Dorothy told her aunt that Hugh intended to marry Nora

Rowley, one of the ladies who had been at the Clock House during the

days in which her mother had lived in grandeur; and then it was also

that Dorothy obtained leave to invite Hugh to her own wedding. "I

hope she will be happier than her sister," Miss Stanbury said, when

she heard of the intended marriage.

"It wasn't Mrs. Trevelyan's fault, you know, aunt."

"I say nothing about anybody's fault; but this I do say, that it was

a very great misfortune. I fought all that battle with your sister

Priscilla, and I don't mean to fight it again, my dear. If Hugh

marries the young lady, I hope she will be more happy than her

sister. There can be no harm in saying that."

Dorothy's letter to her brother shall be given, because it will

inform the reader of all the arrangements as they were made up to

that time, and will convey the Exeter news respecting various persons

with whom our story is concerned.

The Close, July 20th, 186--.

DEAR HUGH,--

The day for my marriage is now fixed, and I wish with all

my heart that it was the same with you. Pray give my love

to Nora. It seems so odd that, though she was living for a

while with mamma at Nuncombe Putney, I never should have

seen her yet. I am very glad that Brooke has seen her, and

he declares that she is quite \_magnificently beautiful\_.

Those are his own words.

We are to be married on the 10th of August, a Wednesday,

and now comes my great news. Aunt Stanbury says that you

are to come and stay in the house. She bids me tell you so

with her love; and that you can have a room as long as you

like. \_Of course you must come.\_ In the first place, you

must because you are to give me away, and Brooke wouldn't

have me if I wasn't given away properly; and then it will

make me so happy that you and Aunt Stanbury should be

friends again. You can stay as long as you like, but, of

course, you must come the day before the wedding. We are

to be married in the Cathedral, and there are to be two

clergymen, but I don't yet know who they will be;--not Mr.

Gibson, certainly, as you were good enough to suggest.

Mr. Gibson is married to Arabella French, and they have

gone away somewhere into Cornwall. Camilla has come back,

and I have seen her once. She looked ever so fierce, as

though she intended to declare that she didn't mind what

anybody may think. They say that she still protests that

she never will speak to her sister again.

I was introduced to Mr. Barty Burgess the other day.

Brooke was here, and we met him in the Close. I hardly

knew what he said to me, I was so frightened; but Brooke

said that he meant to be civil, and that he is going

to send me a present. I have got a quantity of things

already, and yesterday Mrs. MacHugh sent me such a

beautiful cream-jug. If you'll come in time on the 9th,

you shall see them all before they are put away.

Mamma and Priscilla are to be here, and they will come

on the 9th also. Poor, dear mamma is, I know, terribly

flurried about it, and so is Aunt Stanbury. It is so long

since they have seen each other. I don't think Priscilla

feels it the same way, because she is so brave. Do you

remember when it was first proposed that I should come

here? I am so glad I came,--because of Brooke. He will

come on the 9th, quite early, and I do so hope you will

come with him.

Yours most affectionately,

DOROTHY STANBURY.

Give my best, best love to Nora.

CHAPTER XC.

LADY ROWLEY CONQUERED.

[Illustration]

When the Rowleys were back in London, and began to employ themselves

on the terrible work of making ready for their journey to the

Islands, Lady Rowley gradually gave way about Hugh Stanbury. She had

become aware that Nora would not go back with them,--unless under an

amount of pressure which she would find it impossible to use. And if

Nora did not go out to the Islands, what was to become of her unless

she married this man? Sir Marmaduke, when all was explained to him,

declared that a girl must do what her parents ordered her to do.

"Other girls live with their fathers and mothers, and so must she."

Lady Rowley endeavoured to explain that other girls lived with their

fathers and mothers, because they found themselves in established

homes from which they are not disposed to run away; but Nora's

position was, as she alleged, very different. Nora's home had

latterly been with her sister, and it was hardly to be expected

that the parental authority should not find itself impaired by the

interregnum which had taken place. Sir Marmaduke would not see the

thing in the same light, and was disposed to treat his daughter with

a high hand. If she would not do as she was bidden, she should no

longer be daughter of his. In answer to this Lady Rowley could only

repeat her conviction that Nora would not go out to the Mandarins;

and that as for disinheriting her, casting her off, cursing her, and

the rest,--she had no belief in such doings at all. "On the stage

they do such things as that," she said; "and, perhaps, they used to

do it once in reality. But you know that it's out of the question,

now. Fancy your standing up and cursing at the dear girl, just as we

are all starting from Southampton!" Sir Marmaduke knew as well as his

wife that it would be impossible, and only muttered something about

the "dear girl" behaving herself with great impropriety.

They were all aware that Nora was not going to leave England, because

no berth had been taken for her on board the ship, and because, while

the other girls were preparing for their long voyage, no preparations

were made for her. Of course she was not going. Sir Marmaduke would

probably have given way altogether immediately on his return to

London, had he not discussed the matter with his friend Colonel

Osborne. It became, of course, his duty to make some inquiry as

to the Stanbury family, and he knew that Osborne had visited Mrs.

Stanbury when he made his unfortunate pilgrimage to the porch of

Cockchaffington Church. He told Osborne the whole story of Nora's

engagement, telling also that other most heart-breaking tale of

her conduct in regard to Mr. Glascock, and asked the Colonel what

he thought about the Stanburys. Now the Colonel did not hold the

Stanburys in high esteem. He had met Hugh, as the reader may perhaps

remember, and had had some intercourse with the young man, which

had not been quite agreeable to him, on the platform of the railway

station at Exeter. And he had also heard something of the ladies

at Nuncombe Putney during his short sojourn at the house of Mrs.

Crocket. "My belief is, they are beggars," said Colonel Osborne.

"I suppose so," said Sir Marmaduke, shaking his head.

"When I went over to call on Emily,--that time I was at

Cockchaffington, you know, when Trevelyan made himself such a d----

fool,--I found the mother and sister living in a decentish house

enough; but it wasn't their house."

"Not their own, you mean?"

"It was a place that Trevelyan had got this young man to take for

Emily, and they had merely gone there to be with her. They had been

living in a little bit of a cottage; a sort of a place that any--any

ploughman would live in. Just that kind of cottage."

"Goodness gracious!"

"And they've gone to another just like it;--so I'm told."

"And can't he do anything better for them than that?" asked Sir

Marmaduke.

"I know nothing about him. I have met him, you know. He used to be

with Trevelyan;--that was when Nora took a fancy for him, of course.

And I saw him once down in Devonshire, when I must say he behaved

uncommonly badly,--doing all he could to foster Trevelyan's stupid

jealousy."

"He has changed his mind about that, I think."

"Perhaps he has; but he behaved very badly then. Let him shew up his

income;--that, I take it, is the question in such a case as this. His

father was a clergyman, and therefore I suppose he must be considered

to be a gentleman. But has he means to support a wife, and keep up a

house in London? If he has not, that is an end to it, I should say."

But Sir Marmaduke could not see his way to any such end, and,

although he still looked black upon Nora, and talked to his wife

of his determination to stand no contumacy, and hinted at cursing,

disinheriting, and the like, he began to perceive that Nora would

have her own way. In his unhappiness he regretted this visit to

England, and almost thought that the Mandarins were a pleasanter

residence than London. He could do pretty much as he pleased there,

and could live quietly, without the trouble which encountered him now

on every side.

Nora, immediately on her return to London, had written a note to

Hugh, simply telling him of her arrival and begging him to come and

see her. "Mamma," she said, "I must see him, and it would be nonsense

to say that he must not come here. I have done what I have said

I would do, and you ought not to make difficulties." Lady Rowley

declared that Sir Marmaduke would be very angry if Hugh were admitted

without his express permission. "I don't want to do anything in the

dark," continued Nora, "but of course I must see him. I suppose it

will be better that he should come to me than that I should go to

him?" Lady Rowley quite understood the threat that was conveyed in

this. It would be much better that Hugh should come to the hotel, and

that he should be treated then as an accepted lover. She had come to

that conclusion. But she was obliged to vacillate for awhile between

her husband and her daughter. Hugh came of course, and Sir Marmaduke,

by his wife's advice, kept out of the way. Lady Rowley, though she

was at home, kept herself also out of the way, remaining above with

her two other daughters. Nora thus achieved the glory and happiness

of receiving her lover alone.

"My own true girl!" he said, speaking with his arms still round her

waist.

"I am true enough; but whether I am your own,--that is another

question."

"You mean to be?"

"But papa doesn't mean it. Papa says that you are nobody, and that

you haven't got an income; and thinks that I had better go back and

be an old maid at the Mandarins."

"And what do you think yourself, Nora?"

"What do I think? As far as I can understand, young ladies are not

allowed to think at all. They have to do what their papas tell them.

That will do, Hugh. You can talk without taking hold of me."

"It is such a time since I have had a hold of you,--as you call it."

"It will be much longer before you can do so again, if I go back

to the Islands with papa. I shall expect you to be true, you know;

and it will be ten years at the least before I can hope to be home

again."

"I don't think you mean to go, Nora."

"But what am I to do? That idea of yours of walking out to the

next church and getting ourselves married sounds very nice and

independent, but you know that it is not practicable."

"On the other hand, I know it is."

"It is not practicable for me, Hugh. Of all things in the world I

don't want to be a Lydia. I won't do anything that anybody shall ever

say that your wife ought not to have done. Young women when they are

married ought to have their papas' and mammas' consent. I have been

thinking about it a great deal for the last month or two, and I have

made up my mind to that."

"What is it all to come to, then?"

"I mean to get papa's consent. That is what it is to come to."

"And if he is obstinate?"

"I shall coax him round at last. When the time for going comes, he'll

yield then."

"But you will not go with them?" As he asked this he came to her and

tried again to take her by the waist; but she retreated from him, and

got herself clear from his arm. "If you are afraid of me, I shall

know that you think it possible that we may be parted."

"I am not a bit afraid of you, Hugh."

"Nora, I think you ought to tell me something definitely."

"I think I have been definite enough, sir. You may be sure of this,

however;--I will not go back to the Islands."

"Give me your hand on that."

"There is my hand. But, remember;--I had told you just as much

before. I don't mean to go back. I mean to stay here. I mean;--but I

do not think I will tell you all the things I mean to do."

"You mean to be my wife?"

"Certainly;--some day, when the difficulty about the chairs and

tables can settle itself. The real question now is,--what am I to do

with myself when papa and mamma are gone?"

"Become Mrs. H. Stanbury at once. Chairs and tables! You shall have

chairs and tables as many as you want. You won't be too proud to live

in lodgings for a few months?"

"There must be preliminaries, Hugh,--even for lodgings, though they

may be very slender. Papa goes in less than three weeks now, and

mamma has got something else to think of than my marriage garments.

And then there are all manner of difficulties, money difficulties

and others, out of which I don't see my way yet." Hugh began to

asseverate that it was his business to help her through all money

difficulties as well as others; but she soon stopped his eloquence.

"It will be by-and-by, Hugh, and I hope you'll support the burden

like a man; but just at present there is a hitch. I shouldn't have

come over at all;--I should have stayed with Emily in Italy, had I

not thought that I was bound to see you."

"My own darling!"

"When papa goes, I think that I had better go back to her."

"I'll take you!" said Hugh, picturing to himself all the pleasures of

such a tour together over the Alps.

"No you won't, because that would be improper. When we travel

together we must go Darby and Joan fashion, as man and wife. I think

I had better go back to Emily, because her position there is so

terrible. There must come some end to it, I suppose soon. He will be

better, or he will become so bad that,--that medical interference

will be unavoidable. But I do not like that she should be alone. She

gave me a home when she had one;--and I must always remember that

I met you there." After this there was of course another attempt

with Hugh's right arm, which on this occasion was not altogether

unsuccessful. And then she told him of her friendship for Mr.

Glascock's wife, and of her intention at some future time to visit

them at Monkhams.

[Illustration: "I must always remember that I met you there."]

"And see all the glories that might have been your own," he said.

"And think of the young man who has robbed me of them all! And you

are to go there too, so that you may see what you have done. There

was a time, Hugh, when I was very nearly pleasing all my friends

and shewing myself to be a young lady of high taste and noble

fortune,--and an obedient, good girl."

"And why didn't you?"

"I thought I would wait just a little longer.

Because,--because,--because--. Oh, Hugh, how cross you were to me

afterwards when you came down to Nuncombe and would hardly speak to

me!"

"And why didn't I speak to you?"

"I don't know. Because you were cross, and surly, and thinking of

nothing but your tobacco, I believe. Do you remember how we walked to

Niddon, and you hadn't a word for anybody?"

"I remember I wanted you to go down to the river with me, and you

wouldn't go."

"You asked me only once, and I did so long to go with you. Do you

remember the rocks in the river? I remember the place as though I saw

it now; and how I longed to jump from one stone to another. Hugh, if

we are ever married, you must take me there, and let me jump on those

stones."

"You pretended that you could not think of wetting your feet."

"Of course I pretended,--because you were so cross, and so cold. Oh,

dear! I wonder whether you will ever know it all."

"Don't I know it all now?"

"I suppose you do, nearly. There is mighty little of a secret in it,

and it is the same thing that is going on always. Only it seems so

strange to me that I should ever have loved any one so dearly,--and

that for next to no reason at all. You never made yourself very

charming that I know of;--did you?"

"I did my best. It wasn't much, I dare say."

"You did nothing, sir,--except just let me fall in love with you. And

you were not quite sure that you would let me do that."

"Nora, I don't think you do understand."

"I do;--perfectly. Why were you cross with me, instead of saying one

nice word when you were down at Nuncombe? I do understand."

"Why was it?"

"Because you did not think well enough of me to believe that I would

give myself to a man who had no fortune of his own. I know it now,

and I knew it then; and therefore I wouldn't dabble in the river with

you. But it's all over now, and we'll go and get wet together like

dear little children, and Priscilla shall scold us when we come

back."

They were alone in the sitting-room for more than an hour, and Lady

Rowley was patient up-stairs as mothers will be patient in such

emergencies. Sophie and Lucy had gone out and left her; and there

she remained telling herself, as the weary minutes went by, that as

the thing was to be, it was well that the young people should be

together. Hugh Stanbury could never be to her what Mr. Glascock would

have been,--a son-in-law to sit and think about, and dream of, and

be proud of,--whose existence as her son-in-law would in itself have

been a happiness to her out in her banishment at the other side of

the world; but nevertheless it was natural to her, as a soft-hearted

loving mother with many daughters, that any son-in-law should be dear

to her. Now that she had gradually brought herself round to believe

in Nora's marriage, she was disposed to make the best of Hugh, to

remember that he was certainly a clever man, that he was an honest

fellow, and that she had heard of him as a good son and a kind

brother, and that he had behaved well in reference to her Emily and

Trevelyan. She was quite willing now that Hugh should be happy, and

she sat there thinking that the time was very long, but still waiting

patiently till she should be summoned. "You must let me go for mamma

for a moment," Nora said. "I want you to see her and make yourself a

good boy before her. If you are ever to be her son-in-law, you ought

to be in her good graces." Hugh declared that he would do his best,

and Nora fetched her mother.

Stanbury found some difficulty in making himself a "good boy" in

Lady Rowley's presence; and Lady Rowley herself, for some time, felt

very strongly the awkwardness of the meeting. She had never formally

recognised the young man as her daughter's accepted suitor, and was

not yet justified in doing so by any permission from Sir Marmaduke;

but, as the young people had been for the last hour or two alone

together, with her connivance and sanction, it was indispensable

that she should in some way signify her parental adherence to the

arrangement. Nora began by talking about Emily, and Trevelyan's

condition and mode of living were discussed. Then Lady Rowley said

something about their coming journey, and Hugh, with a lucky blunder,

spoke of Nora's intended return to Italy. "We don't know how that may

be," said Lady Rowley. "Her papa still wishes her to go back with

us."

"Mamma, you know that that is impossible," said Nora.

"Not impossible, my love."

"But she will not go back," said Hugh. "Lady Rowley, you would not

propose to separate us by such a distance as that?"

"It is Sir Marmaduke that you must ask."

"Mamma, mamma!" exclaimed Nora, rushing to her mother's side, "it is

not papa that we must ask,--not now. We want you to be our friend.

Don't we, Hugh? And, mamma, if you will really be our friend, of

course, papa will come round."

"My dear Nora!"

"You know he will, mamma; and you know that you mean to be good and

kind to us. Of course I can't go back to the Islands with you. How

could I go so far and leave him behind? He might have half-a-dozen

wives before I could get back to him--"

"If you have not more trust in him than that--!"

"Long engagements are awful bores," said Hugh, finding it to be

necessary that he also should press forward his argument.

"I can trust him as far as I can see him," said Nora, "and therefore

I do not want to lose sight of him altogether."

Lady Rowley of course gave way and embraced her accepted son-in-law.

After all it might have been worse. He saw his way clearly, he said,

to making six hundred a year, and did not at all doubt that before

long he would do better than that. He proposed that they should be

married some time in the autumn, but was willing to acknowledge that

much must depend on the position of Trevelyan and his wife. He would

hold himself ready at any moment, he said, to start to Italy, and

would do all that could be done by a brother. Then Lady Rowley gave

him her blessing, and kissed him again,--and Nora kissed him too, and

hung upon him, and did not push him away at all when his arm crept

round her waist. And that feeling came upon him which must surely be

acknowledged by all engaged young men when they first find themselves

encouraged by mammas in the taking of liberties which they have

hitherto regarded as mysteries to be hidden, especially from maternal

eyes,--that feeling of being a fine fat calf decked out with ribbons

for a sacrifice.

CHAPTER XCI.

FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

Another week went by and Sir Marmaduke had even yet not surrendered.

He quite understood that Nora was not to go back to the Islands.

And he had visited Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse at St. Diddulph's in order

to secure a home for her there, if it might be possible. Mr. Outhouse

did not refuse, but gave the permission in such a fashion as to make

it almost equal to a refusal. "He was," he said, "much attached to

his niece Nora, but he had heard that there was a love affair." Sir

Marmaduke, of course, could not deny the love affair. There was

certainly a love affair of which he did not personally approve, as

the gentleman had no fixed income and as far as he could understand

no fixed profession. "Such a love affair," thought Mr. Outhouse, "was

a sort of thing that he didn't know how to manage at all. If Nora

came to him, was the young man to visit at the house, or was he

not?" Then Mrs. Outhouse said something as to the necessity of an

anti-Stanbury pledge on Nora's part, and Sir Marmaduke found that

that scheme must be abandoned. Mrs. Trevelyan had written from

Florence more than once or twice, and in her last letter had said

that she would prefer not to have Nora with her. She was at that

time living in lodgings at Siena and had her boy there also. She saw

her husband every other day; but nevertheless,--according to her

statements,--her visits to Casalunga were made in opposition to his

wishes. He had even expressed a desire that she should leave Siena

and return to England. He had once gone so far as to say that if she

would do so, he would follow her. But she clearly did not believe

him, and in all her letters spoke of him as one whom she could not

regard as being under the guidance of reason. She had taken her

child with her once or twice to the house, and on the first occasion

Trevelyan had made much of his son, had wept over him, and professed

that in losing him he had lost his only treasure; but after that he

had not noticed the boy, and latterly she had gone alone. She thought

that perhaps her visits cheered him, breaking the intensity of his

solitude; but he never expressed himself gratified by them, never

asked her to remain at the house, never returned with her into Siena,

and continually spoke of her return to England as a step which must

be taken soon,--and the sooner the better. He intended to follow her,

he said; and she explained very fully how manifest was his wish that

she should go, by the temptation to do so which he thought that he

held out by this promise. He had spoken, on every occasion of her

presence with him, of Sir Marmaduke's attempt to prove him to be a

madman; but declared that he was afraid of no one in England, and

would face all the lawyers in Chancery Lane and all the doctors

in Savile Row. Nevertheless, so said Mrs. Trevelyan, he would

undoubtedly remain at Casalunga till after Sir Marmaduke should have

sailed. He was not so mad but that he knew that no one else would be

so keen to take steps against him as would Sir Marmaduke. As for his

health, her account of him was very sad. "He seemed," she said, "to

be withering away." His hand was mere skin and bone. His hair and

beard so covered his thin long cheeks, that there was nothing left

of his face but his bright, large, melancholy eyes. His legs had

become so frail and weak that they would hardly bear his weight as he

walked; and his clothes, though he had taken a fancy to throw aside

all that he had brought with him from England, hung so loose about

him that they seemed as though they would fall from him. Once she had

ventured to send out to him from Siena a doctor to whom she had been

recommended in Florence; but he had taken the visit in very bad part,

had told the gentleman that he had no need for any medical services,

and had been furious with her, because of her offence in having sent

such a visitor. He had told her that if ever she ventured to take

such a liberty again, he would demand the child back, and refuse her

permission inside the gates of Casalunga. "Don't come, at any rate,

till I send for you," Mrs. Trevelyan said in her last letter to her

sister. "Your being here would do no good, and would, I think, make

him feel that he was being watched. My hope is, at last, to get him

to return with me. If you were here, I think this would be less

likely. And then why should you be mixed up with such unutterable

sadness and distress more than is essentially necessary? My health

stands wonderfully well, though the heat here is very great. It is

cooler at Casalunga than in the town,--of which I am glad for his

sake. He perspires so profusely that it seems to me he cannot stand

the waste much longer. I know he will not go to England as long as

papa is there;--but I hope that he may be induced to do so by slow

stages as soon as he knows that papa has gone. Mind you send me a

newspaper, so that he may see it stated in print that papa has

sailed."

It followed as one consequence of these letters from Florence that

Nora was debarred from the Italian scheme as a mode of passing her

time till some house should be open for her reception. She had

suggested to Hugh that she might go for a few weeks to Nuncombe

Putney, but he had explained to her the nature of his mother's

cottage, and had told her that there was no hole there in which she

could lay her head. "There never was such a forlorn young woman,"

she said. "When papa goes I shall literally be without shelter."

There had come a letter from Mrs. Glascock,--at least it was signed

Caroline Glascock, though another name might have been used,--dated

from Milan, saying that they were hurrying back to Naples even at

that season of the year, because Lord Peterborough was dead. "And

she is Lady Peterborough!" said Lady Rowley, unable to repress the

expression of the old regrets. "Of course she is Lady Peterborough,

mamma; what else should she be?--though she does not so sign

herself." "We think," said the American peeress, "that we shall be

at Monkhams before the end of August, and Charles says that you are

to come just the same. There will be nobody else there, of course,

because of Lord Peterborough's death." "I saw it in the paper," said

Sir Marmaduke, "and quite forgot to mention it."

That same evening there was a long family discussion about Nora's

prospects. They were all together in the gloomy sitting-room at

Gregg's Hotel, and Sir Marmaduke had not yielded. The ladies had

begun to feel that it would be well not to press him to yield.

Practically he had yielded. There was now no question of cursing

and of so-called disinheritance. Nora was to remain in England, of

course with the intention of being married to Hugh Stanbury; and the

difficulty consisted in the need of an immediate home for her. It

wanted now but twelve days to that on which the family were to sail

from Southampton, and nothing had been settled. "If papa will allow

me something ever so small, and will trust me, I will live alone in

lodgings," said Nora.

"It is the maddest thing I ever heard," said Sir Marmaduke.

"Who would take care of you, Nora?" asked Lady Rowley.

"And who would walk about with you?" said Lucy.

"I don't see how it would be possible to live alone like that," said

Sophie.

"Nobody would take care of me, and nobody would walk about with me,

and I could live alone very well," said Nora. "I don't see why a

young woman is to be supposed to be so absolutely helpless as all

that comes to. Of course it won't be very nice,--but it need not be

for long."

"Why not for long?" asked Sir Marmaduke.

"Not for very long," said Nora.

"It does not seem to me," said Sir Marmaduke, after a considerable

pause, "that this gentleman himself is so particularly anxious for

the match. I have heard no day named, and no rational proposition

made."

"Papa, that is unfair, most unfair,--and ungenerous."

"Nora," said her mother, "do not speak in that way to your father."

"Mamma, it is unfair. Papa accuses Mr. Stanbury of being,--being

lukewarm and untrue,--of not being in earnest."

"I would rather that he were not in earnest," said Sir Marmaduke.

"Mr. Stanbury is ready at any time," continued Nora. "He would have

the banns at once read, and marry me in three weeks,--if I would let

him."

"Good gracious, Nora!" exclaimed Lady Rowley.

"But I have refused to name any day, or to make any arrangement,

because I did not wish to do so before papa had given his consent.

That is why things are in this way. If papa will but let me take a

room till I can go to Monkhams, I will have everything arranged from

there. You can trust Mr. Glascock for that, and you can trust her."

"I suppose your papa will make you some allowance," said Lady Rowley.

"She is entitled to nothing, as she has refused to go to her proper

home," said Sir Marmaduke.

The conversation, which had now become very disagreeable, was

not allowed to go any further. And it was well that it should be

interrupted. They all knew that Sir Marmaduke must be brought round

by degrees, and that both Nora and Lady Rowley had gone as far as was

prudent at present. But all trouble on this head was suddenly ended

for this evening by the entrance of the waiter with a telegram.

It was addressed to Lady Rowley, and she opened it with trembling

hands,--as ladies always do open telegrams. It was from Emily

Trevelyan. "Louis is much worse. Let somebody come to me. Hugh

Stanbury would be the best."

In a few minutes they were so much disturbed that no one quite knew

what should be done at once. Lady Rowley began by declaring that she

would go herself. Sir Marmaduke of course pointed out that this was

impossible, and suggested that he would send a lawyer. Nora professed

herself ready to start immediately on the journey, but was stopped by

a proposition from her sister Lucy that in that case Hugh Stanbury

would of course go with her. Lady Rowley asked whether Hugh would go,

and Nora asserted that he would go immediately as a matter of course.

She was sure he would go, let the people at the D. R. say what they

might. According to her there was always somebody at the call of the

editor of the D. R. to do the work of anybody else, when anybody else

wanted to go away. Sir Marmaduke shook his head, and was very uneasy.

He still thought that a lawyer would be best, feeling, no doubt, that

if Stanbury's services were used on such an occasion, there must be

an end of all opposition to the marriage. But before half-an-hour was

over Stanbury was sent for. The boots of the hotel went off in a cab

to the office of the D. R. with a note from Lady Rowley. "Dear Mr.

Stanbury,--We have had a telegram from Emily, and want to see you,

\_at once\_. Please come. We shall sit up and wait for you till you do

come.--E. R."

It was very distressing to them because, let the result be what it

might, it was all but impossible that Mrs. Trevelyan should be with

them before they had sailed, and it was quite out of the question

that they should now postpone their journey. Were Stanbury to start

by the morning train on the following day, he could not reach Siena

till the afternoon of the fourth day; and let the result be what

it might when he arrived there, it would be out of the question

that Emily Trevelyan should come back quite at once, or that she

should travel at the same speed. Of course they might hear again by

telegram, and also by letter; but they could not see her, or have any

hand in her plans. "If anything were to happen, she might have come

with us," said Lady Rowley.

"It is out of the question," said Sir Marmaduke gloomily. "I could

not give up the places I have taken."

"A few days more would have done it."

"I don't suppose she would wish to go," said Nora. "Of course she

would not take Louey there. Why should she? And then I don't suppose

he is so ill as that."

"There is no saying," said Sir Marmaduke. It was very evident

that, whatever might be Sir Marmaduke's opinion, he had no

strongly-developed wish for his son-in-law's recovery.

They all sat up waiting for Hugh Stanbury till eleven, twelve, one,

and two o'clock at night. The "boots" had returned, saying that Mr.

Stanbury had not been at the office of the newspaper, but that,

according to information received, he certainly would be there that

night. No other address had been given to the man, and the note had

therefore of necessity been left at the office. Sir Marmaduke became

very fretful, and was evidently desirous of being liberated from his

night watch. But he could not go himself, and shewed his impatience

by endeavouring to send the others away. Lady Rowley replied for

herself that she should certainly remain in her corner on the sofa

all night, if it were necessary; and as she slept very soundly in her

corner, her comfort was not much impaired. Nora was pertinacious in

refusing to go to bed. "I should only go to my own room, papa, and

remain there," she said. "Of course I must speak to him before he

goes." Sophie and Lucy considered that they had as much right to sit

up as Nora, and submitted to be called geese and idiots by their

father.

Sir Marmaduke had arisen with a snort from a short slumber, and

had just sworn that he and everybody else should go to bed, when

there came a ring at the front-door bell. The trusty boots had also

remained up, and in two minutes Hugh Stanbury was in the room. He

had to make his excuses before anything else could be said. When he

reached the D. R. office between ten and eleven, it was absolutely

incumbent on him to write a leading article before he left it. He

had been in the reporter's gallery of the House all the evening,

and he had come away laden with his article. "It was certainly

better that we should remain up, than that the whole town should be

disappointed," said Sir Marmaduke, with something of a sneer.

"It is so very, very good of you to come," said Nora.

"Indeed, it is," said Lady Rowley; "but we were quite sure you would

come." Having kissed and blessed him as her son-in-law, Lady Rowley

was now prepared to love him almost as well as though he had been

Lord Peterborough.

"Perhaps, Mr. Stanbury, we had better show you this telegram," said

Sir Marmaduke, who had been standing with the scrap of paper in his

hand since the ring of the bell had been heard. Hugh took the message

and read it. "I do not know what should have made my daughter mention

your name," continued Sir Marmaduke;--"but as she has done so, and as

perhaps the unfortunate invalid himself may have alluded to you, we

thought it best to send for you."

"No doubt it was best, Sir Marmaduke."

"We are so situated that I cannot go. It is absolutely necessary that

we should leave town for Southampton on Friday week. The ship sails

on Saturday."

"I will go as a matter of course," said Hugh. "I will start at

once,--at any time. To tell the truth, when I got Lady Rowley's note,

I thought that it was to be so. Trevelyan and I were very intimate at

one time, and it may be that he will receive me without displeasure."

There was much to be discussed, and considerable difficulty in

the discussion. This was enhanced, too, by the feeling in the

minds of all of them that Hugh and Sir Marmaduke would not meet

again,--probably for many years. Were they to part now on terms of

close affection, or were they to part almost as strangers? Had Lucy

and Sophie not persistently remained up, Nora would have faced the

difficulty, and taken the bull by the horns, and asked her father to

sanction her engagement in the presence of her lover. But she could

not do it before so many persons, even though the persons were her

own nearest relatives. And then there arose another embarrassment.

Sir Marmaduke, who had taught himself to believe that Stanbury

was so poor as hardly to have the price of a dinner in his

pocket,--although, in fact, our friend Hugh was probably the richer

man of the two,--said something about defraying the cost of the

journey. "It is taken altogether on our behalf," said Sir Marmaduke.

Hugh became red in the face, looked angry, and muttered a word or two

about Trevelyan being the oldest friend he had in the world,--"even

if there were nothing else." Sir Marmaduke felt ashamed of

himself,--without cause, indeed, for the offer was natural,--said

nothing further about it; but appeared to be more stiff and ungainly

than ever.

The Bradshaw was had out and consulted, and nearly half an hour

was spent in poring over that wondrous volume. It is the fashion

to abuse Bradshaw,--we speak now especially of Bradshaw the

Continental,--because all the minutest details of the autumn tour,

just as the tourist thinks that it may be made, cannot be made patent

to him at once without close research amidst crowded figures. After

much experience we make bold to say that Bradshaw knows more, and

will divulge more in a quarter of an hour, of the properest mode of

getting from any city in Europe to any other city more than fifty

miles distant, than can be learned in that first city in a single

morning with the aid of a courier, a carriage, a pair of horses, and

all the temper that any ordinary tourist possesses. The Bradshaw was

had out, and it was at last discovered that nothing could be gained

in the journey from London to Siena by starting in the morning.

Intending as he did to travel through without sleeping on the road,

Stanbury could not do better than leave London by the night mail

train, and this he determined to do. But when that was arranged, then

came the nature of his commission. What was he to do? No commission

could be given to him. A telegram should be sent to Emily the next

morning to say that he was coming; and then he would hurry on and

take his orders from her.

They were all in doubt, terribly in doubt, whether the aggravated

malady of which the telegram spoke was malady of the mind or of the

body. If of the former nature then the difficulty might be very great

indeed; and it would be highly expedient that Stanbury should have

some one in Italy to assist him. It was Nora who suggested that he

should carry a letter of introduction to Mr. Spalding, and it was she

who wrote it. Sir Marmaduke had not foregathered very closely with

the English Minister, and nothing was said of assistance that should

be peculiarly British. Then, at last, about three or four in the

morning came the moment for parting. Sir Marmaduke had suggested that

Stanbury should dine with them on the next day before he started, but

Hugh had declined, alleging that as the day was at his command it

must be devoted to the work of providing for his absence. In truth,

Sir Marmaduke had given the invitation with a surly voice, and Hugh,

though he was ready to go to the North Pole for any others of the

family, was at the moment in an aggressive mood of mind towards Sir

Marmaduke.

"I will send a message directly I get there," he said, holding Lady

Rowley by the hand, "and will write fully,--to you,--immediately."

"God bless you, my dear friend!" said Lady Rowley, crying.

"Good night, Sir Marmaduke," said Hugh.

"Good night, Mr. Stanbury."

Then he gave a hand to the two girls, each of whom, as she took it,

sobbed, and looked away from Nora. Nora was standing away from them,

by herself, and away from the door, holding on to her chair, and with

her hands clasped together. She had prepared nothing,--not a word, or

an attitude, not a thought, for his farewell. But she had felt that

it was coming, and had known that she must trust to him for a cue

for her own demeanour. If he could say adieu with a quiet voice, and

simply with a touch of the hand, then would she do the same,--and

endeavour to think no worse of him. Nor had he prepared anything; but

when the moment came he could not leave her after that fashion. He

stood a moment hesitating, not approaching her, and merely called her

by her name,--"Nora!" For a moment she was still; for a moment she

held by her chair; and then she rushed into his arms. He did not much

care for her father now, but kissed her hair and her forehead, and

held her closely to his bosom. "My own, own Nora!"

It was necessary that Sir Marmaduke should say something. There

was at first a little scene between all the women, during which he

arranged his deportment. "Mr. Stanbury," he said, "let it be so.

I could wish for my child's sake, and also for your own, that your

means of living were less precarious." Hugh accepted this simply as

an authority for another embrace, and then he allowed them all to go

to bed.

CHAPTER XCII.

TREVELYAN DISCOURSES ON LIFE.

Stanbury made his journey without pause or hindrance till he reached

Florence, and as the train for Siena made it necessary that he should

remain there for four or five hours, he went to an inn, and dressed

and washed himself, and had a meal, and was then driven to Mr.

Spalding's house. He found the American Minister at home, and was

received with cordiality; but Mr. Spalding could tell him little or

nothing about Trevelyan. They went up to Mrs. Spalding's room, and

Hugh was told by her that she had seen Mrs. Trevelyan once since her

niece's marriage, and that then she had represented her husband as

being very feeble. Hugh, in the midst of his troubles, was amused

by a second and a third, perhaps by a fourth, reference to "Lady

Peterborough." Mrs. Spalding's latest tidings as to the Trevelyans

had been received through "Lady Peterborough" from Nora Rowley. "Lady

Peterborough" was at the present moment at Naples, but was expected

to pass north through Florence in a day or two. They, the Spaldings

themselves, were kept in Florence in this very hot weather by this

circumstance. They were going up to the Tyrolese mountains for a

few weeks as soon as "Lady Peterborough" should have left them for

England. "Lady Peterborough" would have been so happy to make Mr.

Stanbury's acquaintance, and to have heard something direct from

her friend Nora. Then Mrs. Spalding smiled archly, showing thereby

that she knew all about Hugh Stanbury and his relation to Nora

Rowley. From all which, and in accordance with the teaching which

we got,--alas, now many years ago,--from a great master on the

subject, we must conclude that poor, dear Mrs. Spalding was a snob.

Nevertheless, with all deference to the memory of that great master,

we think that Mrs. Spalding's allusions to the success in life

achieved by her niece were natural and altogether pardonable; and

that reticence on the subject,--a calculated determination to

abstain from mentioning a triumph which must have been very dear to

her,--would have betrayed on the whole a condition of mind lower than

that which she exhibited. While rank, wealth, and money are held to

be good things by all around us, let them be acknowledged as such. It

is natural that a mother should be as proud when her daughter marries

an Earl's heir as when her son becomes Senior Wrangler; and when we

meet a lady in Mrs. Spalding's condition who purposely abstains from

mentioning the name of her titled daughter, we shall be disposed to

judge harshly of the secret workings of that lady's thoughts on the

subject. We prefer the exhibition, which we feel to be natural. Mr.

Spalding got our friend by the button-hole, and was making him a

speech on the perilous condition in which Mrs. Trevelyan was placed;

but Stanbury, urged by the circumstances of his position, pulled out

his watch, pleaded the hour, and escaped.

He found Mrs. Trevelyan waiting for him at the station at Siena.

He would hardly have known her,--not from any alteration that was

physically personal to herself, not that she had become older in

face, or thin, or grey, or sickly,--but that the trouble of her

life had robbed her for the time of that brightness of apparel, of

that pride of feminine gear, of that sheen of high-bred womanly

bearing with which our wives and daughters are so careful to invest

themselves. She knew herself to be a wretched woman, whose work in

life now was to watch over a poor prostrate wretch, and who had

thrown behind her all ideas of grace and beauty. It was not quickly

that this condition had come upon her. She had been unhappy at

Nuncombe Putney; but unhappiness had not then told upon the outward

woman. She had been more wretched still at St. Diddulph's, and all

the outward circumstances of life in her uncle's parsonage had been

very wearisome to her; but she had striven against it all, and the

sheen and outward brightness had still been there. After that her

child had been taken from her, and the days which she had passed in

Manchester Street had been very grievous;--but even yet she had not

given way. It was not till her child had been brought back to her,

and she had seen the life which her husband was living, and that her

anger,--hot anger,--had been changed to pity, and that with pity love

had returned, it was not till this point had come in her sad life

that her dress became always black and sombre, that a veil habitually

covered her face, that a bonnet took the place of the jaunty hat that

she had worn, and that the prettinesses of her life were lain aside.

"It is very good of you to come," she said; "very good. I hardly knew

what to do, I was so wretched. On the day that I sent he was so bad

that I was obliged to do something." Stanbury, of course, inquired

after Trevelyan's health, as they were being driven up to Mrs.

Trevelyan's lodgings. On the day on which she had sent the telegram

her husband had again been furiously angry with her. She had

interfered, or had endeavoured to interfere, in some arrangements as

to his health and comfort, and he had turned upon her with an order

that the child should be at once sent back to him, and that she

should immediately quit Siena. "When I said that Louey could not be

sent,--and who could send a child into such keeping,--he told me

that I was the basest liar that ever broke a promise, and the vilest

traitor that had ever returned evil for good. I was never to come to

him again,--never; and the gate of the house would be closed against

me if I appeared there."

On the next day she had gone again, however, and had seen him, and

had visited him on every day since. Nothing further had been said

about the child, and he had now become almost too weak for violent

anger. "I told him you were coming, and though he would not say so,

I think he is glad of it. He expects you to-morrow."

"I will go this evening, if he will let me."

"Not to-night. I think he goes to bed almost as the sun sets. I am

never there myself after four or five in the afternoon. I told him

that you should be there to-morrow,--alone. I have hired a little

carriage, and you can take it. He said specially that I was not

to come with you. Papa goes certainly on next Saturday?" It was a

Saturday now,--this day on which Stanbury had arrived at Siena.

"He leaves town on Friday."

"You must make him believe that. Do not tell him suddenly, but bring

it in by degrees. He thinks that I am deceiving him. He would go back

if he knew that papa were gone."

They spent a long evening together, and Stanbury learned all that

Mrs. Trevelyan could tell him of her husband's state. There was no

doubt, she said, that his reason was affected; but she thought the

state of his mind was diseased in a ratio the reverse of that of his

body, and that when he was weakest in health, then were his ideas the

most clear and rational. He never now mentioned Colonel Osborne's

name, but would refer to the affairs of the last two years as though

they had been governed by an inexorable Fate which had utterly

destroyed his happiness without any fault on his part. "You may be

sure," she said, "that I never accuse him. Even when he says terrible

things of me,--which he does,--I never excuse myself. I do not think

I should answer a word, if he called me the vilest thing on earth."

Before they parted for the night many questions were of course asked

about Nora, and Hugh described the condition in which he and she

stood to each other. "Papa has consented, then?"

"Yes,--at four o'clock in the morning,--just as I was leaving them."

"And when is it to be?"

"Nothing has been settled, and I do not as yet know where she will go

to when they leave London. I think she will visit Monkhams when the

Glascock people return to England."

"What an episode in life,--to go and see the place, when it might all

now have been hers!"

"I suppose I ought to feel dreadfully ashamed of myself for having

marred such promotion," said Hugh.

"Nora is such a singular girl;--so firm, so headstrong, so good, and

so self-reliant that she will do as well with a poor man as she would

have done with a rich. Shall I confess to you that I did wish that

she should accept Mr. Glascock, and that I pressed it on her very

strongly? You will not be angry with me?"

"I am only the more proud of her;--and of myself."

"When she was told of all that he had to give in the way of wealth

and rank, she took the bit between her teeth and would not be turned

an inch. Of course she was in love."

"I hope she may never regret it;--that is all."

"She must change her nature first. Everything she sees at Monkhams

will make her stronger in her choice. With all her girlish ways, she

is like a rock;--nothing can move her."

Early on the next morning Hugh started alone for Casalunga, having

first, however, seen Mrs. Trevelyan. He took out with him certain

little things for the sick man's table;--as to which, however, he

was cautioned to say not a word to the sick man himself. And it was

arranged that he should endeavour to fix a day for Trevelyan's return

to England. That was to be the one object in view. "If we could get

him to England," she said, "he and I would, at any rate, be together,

and gradually he would be taught to submit himself to advice." Before

ten in the morning, Stanbury was walking up the hill to the house,

and wondering at the dreary, hot, hopeless desolation of the spot.

It seemed to him that no one could live alone in such a place, in

such weather, without being driven to madness. The soil was parched

and dusty, as though no drop of rain had fallen there for months.

The lizards, glancing in and out of the broken walls, added to the

appearance of heat. The vegetation itself was of a faded yellowish

green, as though the glare of the sun had taken the fresh colour out

of it. There was a noise of grasshoppers and a hum of flies in the

air, hardly audible, but all giving evidence of the heat. Not a human

voice was to be heard, nor the sound of a human foot, and there was

no shelter; but the sun blazed down full upon everything. He took

off his hat, and rubbed his head with his handkerchief as he struck

the door with his stick. Oh God, to what misery had a little folly

brought two human beings who had had every blessing that the world

could give within their reach!

In a few minutes he was conducted through the house, and found

Trevelyan seated in a chair under the verandah which looked down

upon the olive trees. He did not even get up from his seat, but put

out his left hand and welcomed his old friend. "Stanbury," he said,

"I am glad to see you,--for auld lang syne's sake. When I found

out this retreat, I did not mean to have friends round me here.

I wanted to try what solitude was;--and, by heaven, I've tried

it!" He was dressed in a bright Italian dressing-gown or woollen

paletot,--Italian, as having been bought in Italy, though, doubtless,

it had come from France,--and on his feet he had green worked

slippers, and on his head a brocaded cap. He had made but little

other preparation for his friend in the way of dressing. His long

dishevelled hair came down over his neck, and his beard covered his

face. Beneath his dressing-gown he had on a night-shirt and drawers,

and was as dirty in appearance as he was gaudy in colours. "Sit

down and let us two moralise," he said. "I spend my life here doing

nothing,--nothing,--nothing; while you cudgel your brain from day

to day to mislead the British public. Which of us two is taking the

nearest road to the devil?"

Stanbury seated himself in a second arm-chair, which there was there

in the verandah, and looked as carefully as he dared to do at his

friend. There could be no mistake as to the restless gleam of that

eye. And then the affected air of ease, and the would-be cynicism,

and the pretence of false motives, all told the same story. "They

used to tell us," said Stanbury, "that idleness is the root of all

evil."

"They have been telling us since the world began so many lies, that I

for one have determined never to believe anything again. Labour leads

to greed, and greed to selfishness, and selfishness to treachery,

and treachery straight to the devil,--straight to the devil. Ha, my

friend, all your leading articles won't lead you out of that. What's

the news? Who's alive? Who dead? Who in? Who out? What think you of

a man who has not seen a newspaper for two months; and who holds no

conversation with the world further than is needed for the cooking of

his polenta and the cooling of his modest wine-flask?"

"You see your wife sometimes," said Stanbury.

"My wife! Now, my friend, let us drop that subject. Of all topics of

talk it is the most distressing to man in general, and I own that

I am no exception to the lot. Wives, Stanbury, are an evil, more

or less necessary to humanity, and I own to being one who has not

escaped. The world must be populated, though for what reason one does

not see. I have helped,--to the extent of one male bantling; and if

you are one who consider population desirable, I will express my

regret that I should have done no more."

It was very difficult to force Trevelyan out of this humour, and it

was not till Stanbury had risen apparently to take his leave that he

found it possible to say a word as to his mission there. "Don't you

think you would be happier at home?" he asked.

"Where is my home, Sir Knight of the midnight pen?"

"England is your home, Trevelyan."

"No, sir; England was my home once; but I have taken the liberty

accorded to me by my Creator of choosing a new country. Italy is now

my nation, and Casalunga is my home."

"Every tie you have in the world is in England."

"I have no tie, sir;--no tie anywhere. It has been my study to untie

all the ties; and, by Jove, I have succeeded. Look at me here. I have

got rid of the trammels pretty well,--haven't I?--have unshackled

myself, and thrown off the paddings, and the wrappings, and the

swaddling clothes. I have got rid of the conventionalities, and can

look Nature straight in the face. I don't even want the Daily Record,

Stanbury;--think of that!"

Stanbury paced the length of the terrace, and then stopped for a

moment down under the blaze of the sun, in order that he might think

how to address this philosopher. "Have you heard," he said at last,

"that I am going to marry your sister-in-law, Nora Rowley?"

"Then there will be two more full-grown fools in the world certainly,

and probably an infinity of young fools coming afterwards. Excuse me,

Stanbury, but this solitude is apt to make one plain-spoken."

"I got Sir Marmaduke's sanction the day before I left."

"Then you got the sanction of an illiterate, ignorant,

self-sufficient, and most contemptible old man; and much good may it

do you."

"Let him be what he may, I was glad to have it. Most probably I shall

never see him again. He sails from Southampton for the Mandarins on

this day week."

"He does,--does he? May the devil sail along with him!--that is all I

say. And does my much-respected and ever-to-be-beloved mother-in-law

sail with him?"

"They all return together,--except Nora."

"Who remains to comfort you? I hope you may be comforted;--that is

all. Don't be too particular. Let her choose her own friends, and go

her own gait, and have her own way, and do you be blind and deaf and

dumb and properly submissive; and it may be that she'll give you your

breakfast and dinner in your own house,--so long as your hours don't

interfere with her pleasures. If she should even urge you beside

yourself by her vanity, folly, and disobedience,--so that at last you

are driven to express your feeling,--no doubt she will come to you

after a while and tell you with the sweetest condescension that she

forgives you. When she has been out of your house for a twelvemonth

or more, she will offer to come back to you, and to forget

everything,--on condition that you will do exactly as she bids you

for the future."

This attempt at satire, so fatuous, so plain, so false, together

with the would-be jaunty manner of the speaker, who, however, failed

repeatedly in his utterances from sheer physical exhaustion, was

excessively painful to Stanbury. What can one do at any time with a

madman? "I mentioned my marriage," said he, "to prove my right to

have an additional interest in your wife's happiness."

"You are quite welcome, whether you marry the other one or

not;--welcome to take any interest you please. I have got beyond all

that, Stanbury;--yes, by Jove, a long way beyond all that."

"You have not got beyond loving your wife, and your child,

Trevelyan?"

"Upon my word, yes;--I think I have. There may be a grain of weakness

left, you know. But what have you to do with my love for my wife?"

"I was thinking more just now of her love for you. There she is at

Siena. You cannot mean that she should remain there?"

"Certainly not. What the deuce is there to keep her there?"

"Come with her then to England."

"Why should I go to England with her? Because you bid me, or because

she wishes it,--or simply because England is the most damnable,

puritanical, God-forgotten, and stupid country on the face of the

globe? I know no other reason for going to England. Will you take a

glass of wine, Stanbury?" Hugh declined the offer. "You will excuse

me," continued Trevelyan; "I always take a glass of wine at this

hour." Then he rose from his chair, and helped himself from a

cupboard that was near at hand. Stanbury, watching him as he filled

his glass, could see that his legs were hardly strong enough to carry

him. And Stanbury saw, moreover, that the unfortunate man took two

glasses out of the bottle. "Go to England indeed. I do not think much

of this country; but it is, at any rate, better than England."

Hugh perceived that he could do nothing more on the present occasion.

Having heard so much of Trevelyan's debility, he had been astonished

to hear the man speak with so much volubility and attempts at

high-flown spirit. Before he had taken the wine he had almost sunk

into his chair, but still he had continued to speak with the same

fluent would-be cynicism. "I will come and see you again," said Hugh,

getting up to take his departure.

"You might as well save your trouble, Stanbury; but you can come if

you please, you know. If you should find yourself locked out, you

won't be angry. A hermit such as I am must assume privileges."

"I won't be angry," said Hugh, good humouredly.

"I can smell what you are come about," said Trevelyan. "You and my

wife want to take me away from here among you, and I think it best to

stay here. I don't want much for myself, and why should I not live

here? My wife can remain at Siena if she pleases, or she can go to

England if she pleases. She must give me the same liberty;--the same

liberty,--the same liberty." After this he fell a-coughing violently,

and Stanbury thought it better to leave him. He had been at Casalunga

about two hours, and did not seem as yet to have done any good.

He had been astonished both by Trevelyan's weakness, and by his

strength; by his folly, and by his sharpness. Hitherto he could see

no way for his future sister-in-law out of her troubles.

When he was with her at Siena, he described what had taken place

with all the accuracy in his power. "He has intermittent days,"

said Emily. "To-morrow he will be in quite another frame of

mind,--melancholy, silent perhaps, and self-reproachful. We will

both go to-morrow, and we shall find probably that he has forgotten

altogether what has passed to-day between you and him."

So their plans for the morrow were formed.

CHAPTER XCIII.

"SAY THAT YOU FORGIVE ME."

[Illustration]

On the following day, again early in the morning, Mrs. Trevelyan and

Stanbury were driven out to Casalunga. The country people along the

road knew the carriage well, and the lady who occupied it, and would

say that the English wife was going to see her mad husband. Mrs.

Trevelyan knew that these words were common in the people's mouths,

and explained to her companion how necessary it would be to use these

rumours, to aid her in putting some restraint over her husband even

in this country, should they fail in their effort to take him to

England. She saw the doctor in Siena constantly, and had learned from

him how such steps might be taken. The measure proposed would be

slow, difficult, inefficient, and very hard to set aside, if once

taken;--but still it might be indispensable that something should be

done. "He would be so much worse off here than he would be at home,"

she said;--"if we could only make him understand that it would be

so." Then Stanbury asked about the wine. It seemed that of late

Trevelyan had taken to drink freely, but only of the wine of the

country. But the wine of the country in these parts is sufficiently

stimulating, and Mrs. Trevelyan acknowledged that hence had arisen a

further cause of fear.

They walked up the hill together, and Mrs. Trevelyan, now well

knowing the ways of the place, went round at once to the front

terrace. There he was, seated in his arm-chair, dressed in the same

way as yesterday, dirty, dishevelled, and gaudy with various colours;

but Stanbury could see at once that his mood had greatly changed. He

rose slowly, dragging himself up out of his chair, as they came up to

him, but shewing as he did so,--and perhaps somewhat assuming,--the

impotency of querulous sickness. His wife went to him, and took him

by the hand, and placed him back in his chair. He was weak, he said,

and had not slept, and suffered from the heat; and then he begged her

to give him wine. This she did, half filling for him a tumbler, of

which he swallowed the contents greedily. "You see me very poorly,

Stanbury,--very poorly," he said, seeming to ignore all that had

taken place on the previous day.

"You want change of climate, old fellow," said Stanbury.

"Change of everything;--I want change of everything," he said. "If

I could have a new body and a new mind, and a new soul!"

"The mind and soul, dear, will do well enough, if you will let us

look after the body," said his wife, seating herself on a stool near

his feet. Stanbury, who had settled beforehand how he would conduct

himself, took out a cigar and lighted it;--and then they sat together

silent, or nearly silent, for half an hour. She had said that if Hugh

would do so, Trevelyan would soon become used to the presence of his

old friend, and it seemed that he had already done so. More than

once, when he coughed, his wife fetched him some drink in a cup,

which he took from her without a word. And Stanbury the while went on

smoking in silence.

"You have heard, Louis," she said at last, "that, after all, Nora and

Mr. Stanbury are going to be married?"

"Ah;--yes; I think I was told of it. I hope you may be happy,

Stanbury;--happier than I have been." This was unfortunate, but

neither of the visitors winced, or said a word.

"It will be a pity that papa and mamma cannot be present at the

wedding," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"If I had to do it again, I should not regret your father's absence;

I must say that. He has been my enemy. Yes, Stanbury,--my enemy. I

don't care who hears me say so. I am obliged to stay here, because

that man would swear every shilling I have away from me if I were in

England. He would strive to do so, and the struggle in my state of

health would be too much for me."

"But Sir Marmaduke sails from Southampton this very week," said

Stanbury.

"I don't know. He is always sailing, and always coming back again. I

never asked him for a shilling in my life, and yet he has treated me

as though I were his bitterest enemy."

"He will trouble you no more now, Louis," said Mrs. Trevelyan.

"He cannot trouble you again. He will have left England before you

can possibly reach it."

"He will have left other traitors behind him,--though none as bad as

himself," said Trevelyan.

Stanbury, when his cigar was finished, rose and left the husband and

wife together on the terrace. There was little enough to be seen at

Casalunga, but he strolled about looking at the place. He went into

the huge granary, and then down among the olive trees, and up into

the sheds which had been built for beasts. He stood and teased the

lizards, and listened to the hum of the insects, and wiped away the

perspiration which rose to his brow even as he was standing. And all

the while he was thinking what he would do next, or what say next,

with the view of getting Trevelyan away from the place. Hitherto he

had been very tender with him, contradicting him in nothing, taking

from him good humouredly any absurd insult which he chose to offer,

pressing upon him none of the evil which he had himself occasioned,

saying to him no word that could hurt either his pride or his

comfort. But he could not see that this would be efficacious for the

purpose desired. He had come thither to help Nora's sister in her

terrible distress, and he must take upon himself to make some plan

for giving this aid. When he had thought of all this and made his

plan, he sauntered back round the house on to the terrace. She was

still there, sitting at her husband's feet, and holding one of his

hands in hers. It was well that the wife should be tender, but he

doubted whether tenderness would suffice.

"Trevelyan," he said, "you know why I have come over here?"

"I suppose she told you to come," said Trevelyan.

"Well; yes; she did tell me. I came to try and get you back to

England. If you remain here, the climate and solitude together will

kill you."

"As for the climate, I like it;--and as for solitude, I have got used

even to that."

"And then there is another thing," said Stanbury.

"What is that?" asked Trevelyan, starting.

"You are not safe here."

"How not safe?"

"She could not tell you, but I must." His wife was still holding his

hand, and he did not at once attempt to withdraw it; but he raised

himself in his chair, and fixed his eyes fiercely on Stanbury. "They

will not let you remain here quietly," said Stanbury.

"Who will not?"

"The Italians. They are already saying that you are not fit to be

alone; and if once they get you into their hands,--under some Italian

medical board, perhaps into some Italian asylum, it might be years

before you could get out,--if ever. I have come to tell you what the

danger is. I do not know whether you will believe me."

"Is it so?" he said, turning to his wife.

"I believe it is, Louis."

"And who has told them? Who has been putting them up to it?" Now his

hand had been withdrawn. "My God, am I to be followed here too with

such persecution as this?"

"Nobody has told them,--but people have eyes."

"Liar, traitor, fiend!--it is you!" he said, turning upon his wife.

"Louis, as I hope for mercy, I have said not a word to any one that

could injure you."

"Trevelyan, do not be so unjust, and so foolish," said Stanbury. "It

is not her doing. Do you suppose that you can live here like this

and give rise to no remarks? Do you think that people's eyes are not

open, and that their tongues will not speak? I tell you, you are in

danger here."

"What am I to do? Where am I to go? Can not they let me stay till I

die? Whom am I hurting here? She may have all my money, if she wants

it. She has got my child."

"I want nothing, Louis, but to take you where you may be safe and

well."

"Why are you afraid of going to England?" Stanbury asked.

"Because they have threatened to put me--in a madhouse."

"Nobody ever thought of so treating you," said his wife.

"Your father did,--and your mother. They told me so."

"Look here, Trevelyan. Sir Marmaduke and Lady Rowley are gone. They

will have sailed, at least, before we can reach England. Whatever may

have been either their wishes or their power, they can do nothing

now. Here something would be done,--very soon; you may take my word

for that. If you will return with me and your wife, you shall choose

your own place of abode. Is not that so, Emily?"

"He shall choose everything. His boy will be with him, and I will be

with him, and he shall be contradicted in nothing. If he only knew my

heart towards him!"

"You hear what she says, Trevelyan?"

"Yes; I hear her."

"And you believe her?"

"I'm not so sure of that. Stanbury, how should you like to be locked

up in a madhouse and grin through the bars till your heart was

broken? It would not take long with me, I know."

"You shall never be locked up;--never be touched," said his wife.

"I am very harmless here," he said, almost crying; "very harmless. I

do not think anybody here will touch me," he added, afterwards. "And

there are other places. There are other places. My God, that I should

be driven about the world like this!" The conference was ended by his

saying that he would take two days to think of it, and by his then

desiring that they would both leave him. They did so, and descended

the hill together, knowing that he was watching them,--that he would

watch them till they were out of sight from the gate;--for, as Mrs.

Trevelyan said, he never came down the hill now, knowing that the

labour of ascending it was too much for him. When they were at the

carriage they were met by one of the women of the house, and strict

injunctions were given to her by Mrs. Trevelyan to send on word

to Siena if the Signore should prepare to move. "He cannot go far

without my knowing it," said she, "because he draws his money in

Siena, and lately I have taken to him what he wants. He has not

enough with him for a long journey." For Stanbury had suggested that

he might be off to seek another residence in another country, and

that they would find Casalunga vacant when they reached it on the

following Tuesday. But he told himself almost immediately,--not

caring to express such an opinion to Emily,--that Trevelyan would

hardly have strength even to prepare for such a journey by himself.

On the intervening day, the Monday, Stanbury had no occupation

whatever, and he thought that since he was born no day had ever been

so long. Siena contains many monuments of interest, and much that is

valuable in art,--having had a school of painting of its own, and

still retaining in its public gallery specimens of its school, of

which as a city it is justly proud. There are palaces there to be

beaten for gloomy majesty by none in Italy. There is a cathedral

which was to have been the largest in the world, and than which few

are more worthy of prolonged inspection. The town is old, and quaint,

and picturesque, and dirty, and attractive,--as it becomes a town in

Italy to be. But in July all such charms are thrown away. In July

Italy is not a land of charms to an Englishman. Poor Stanbury did

wander into the cathedral, and finding it the coolest place in the

town, went to sleep on a stone step. He was awoke by the voice of the

priests as they began to chant the vespers. The good-natured Italians

had let him sleep, and would have let him sleep till the doors were

closed for the night. At five he dined with Mrs. Trevelyan, and then

endeavoured to while away the evening thinking of Nora with a pipe in

his mouth. He was standing in this way at the hotel gateway, when, on

a sudden, all Siena was made alive by the clatter of an open carriage

and four on its way through the town to the railway. On looking up,

Stanbury saw Lord Peterborough in the carriage,--with a lady whom

he did not doubt to be Lord Peterborough's wife. He himself had not

been recognised, but he slowly followed the carriage to the railway

station. After the Italian fashion, the arrival was three-quarters

of an hour before the proper time, and Stanbury had full opportunity

of learning their news and telling his own. They were coming up from

Rome, and thought it preferable to take the route by Siena than to

use the railway through the Maremma; and they intended to reach

Florence that night.

"And do you think he is really mad?" asked Lady Peterborough.

"He is undoubtedly so mad as to be unfit to manage anything for

himself, but he is not in such a condition that any one would wish to

see him put into confinement. If he were raving mad there would be

less difficulty, though there might be more distress."

A great deal was said about Nora, and both Lord Peterborough and his

wife insisted that the marriage should take place at Monkhams. "We

shall be home now in less than three weeks," said Caroline, "and she

must come to us at once. But I will write to her from Florence, and

tell her how we saw you smoking your pipe under the archway. Not that

my husband knew you in the least."

"Upon my word no," said the husband,--"one didn't expect to find you

here. Good-bye. I hope you may succeed in getting him home. I went

to him once, but could do very little." Then the train started, and

Stanbury went back to Mrs. Trevelyan.

On the next day Stanbury went out to Casalunga alone. He had

calculated, on leaving England, that if any good might be done

at Siena it could be done in three days, and that he would have

been able to start on his return on the Wednesday morning,--or on

Wednesday evening at the latest. But now there did not seem to be any

chance of that;--and he hardly knew how to guess when he might get

away. He had sent a telegram to Lady Rowley after his first visit,

in which he had simply said that things were not at all changed at

Casalunga, and he had written to Nora each day since his arrival. His

stay was prolonged at great expense and inconvenience to himself;

and yet it was impossible that he should go and leave his work half

finished. As he walked up the hill to the house he felt very angry

with Trevelyan, and prepared himself to use hard words and dreadful

threats. But at the very moment of his entrance on the terrace,

Trevelyan professed himself ready to go to England. "That's right,

old fellow," said Hugh. "I am so glad." But in expressing his joy he

had hardly noticed Trevelyan's voice and appearance.

"I might as well go," he said. "It matters little where I am, or

whether they say that I am mad or sane."

"When we have you over there, nobody shall say a word that is

disagreeable."

"I only hope that you may not have the trouble of burying me on the

road. You don't know, Stanbury, how ill I am. I cannot eat. If I

were at the bottom of that hill, I could no more walk up it than I

could fly. I cannot sleep, and at night my bed is wet through with

perspiration. I can remember nothing,--nothing but what I ought to

forget."

"We'll put you on to your legs again when we get you to your own

climate."

"I shall be a poor traveller,--a poor traveller; but I will do my

best."

When would he start? That was the next question. Trevelyan asked for

a week, and Stanbury brought him down at last to three days. They

would go to Florence by the evening train on Friday, and sleep there.

Emily should come out and assist him to arrange his things on the

morrow. Having finished so much of his business, Stanbury returned to

Siena.

They both feared that he might be found on the next day to have

departed from his intention; but no such idea seemed to have occurred

to him. He gave instructions as to the notice to be served on the

agent from the Hospital as to his house, and allowed Emily to go

among his things and make preparations for the journey. He did not

say much to her; and when she attempted, with a soft half-uttered

word, to assure him that the threat of Italian interference, which

had come from Stanbury, had not reached Stanbury from her, he simply

shook his head sadly. She could not understand whether he did not

believe her, or whether he simply wished that the subject should be

dropped. She could elicit no sign of affection from him, nor would he

willingly accept such from her;--but he allowed her to prepare for

the journey, and never hinted that his purpose might again be liable

to change. On the Friday, Emily with her child, and Hugh with all

their baggage, travelled out on the road to Casalunga, thinking it

better that there should be no halt in the town on their return.

At Casalunga, Hugh went up the hill with the driver, leaving Mrs.

Trevelyan in the carriage. He had been out at the house before in the

morning, and had given all necessary orders;--but still at the last

moment he thought that there might be failure. But Trevelyan was

ready, having dressed himself up with a laced shirt, and changed his

dressing-gown for a blue frock-coat, and his brocaded cap for a Paris

hat, very pointed before and behind, and closely turned up at the

sides. But Stanbury did not in the least care for his friend's dress.

"Take my arm," he said, "and we will go down, fair and easy. Emily

would not come up because of the heat." He suffered himself to be

led, or almost carried down the hill; and three women, and the

coachman, and an old countryman who worked on the farm, followed with

the luggage. It took about an hour and a half to pack the things; but

at last they were all packed, and corded, and bound together with

sticks, as though it were intended that they should travel in that

form to Moscow. Trevelyan the meanwhile sat on a chair which had been

brought out for him from one of the cottages, and his wife stood

beside him with her boy. "Now then we are ready," said Stanbury. And

in that way they bade farewell to Casalunga. Trevelyan sat speechless

in the carriage, and would not even notice the child. He seemed to be

half dreaming and to fix his eyes on vacancy. "He appears to think of

nothing now," Emily said that evening to Stanbury. But who can tell

how busy and how troubled are the thoughts of a madman!

They had now succeeded in their object of inducing their patient to

return with them to England; but what were they to do with him when

they had reached home with him? They rested only a night at Florence;

but they found their fellow-traveller so weary, that they were unable

to get beyond Bologna on the second day. Many questions were asked

of him as to where he himself would wish to take up his residence in

England; but it was found almost impossible to get an answer. Once

he suggested that he would like to go back to Mrs. Fuller's cottage

at Willesden, from whence they concluded that he would wish to live

somewhere out of London. On his first day's journey, he was moody

and silent,--wilfully assuming the airs of a much-injured person. He

spoke hardly at all, and would notice nothing that was said to him by

his wife. He declared once that he regarded Stanbury as his keeper,

and endeavoured to be disagreeable and sullenly combative; but on

the second day, he was too weak for this, and accepted, without

remonstrance, the attentions that were paid to him. At Bologna they

rested a day, and from thence both Stanbury and Mrs. Trevelyan wrote

to Nora. They did not know where she might be now staying, but the

letters, by agreement, were addressed to Gregg's Hotel. It was

suggested that lodgings, or, if possible, a small furnished house,

should be taken in the neighbourhood of Mortlake, Richmond, or

Teddington, and that a telegram as well as a letter should be sent to

them at the Paris hotel. As they could not travel quick, there might

be time enough for them in this way to know whither they should go on

their reaching London.

They stayed a day at Bologna, and then they went on again,--to Turin,

over the mountains to Chambery, thence to Dijon, and on to Paris. At

Chambery they remained a couple of days, fancying that the air there

was cool, and that the delay would be salutary to the sick man. At

Turin, finding that they wanted further assistance, they had hired

a courier, and at last Trevelyan allowed himself to be carried in

and out of the carriages and up and down the hotel stairs almost as

though he were a child. The delay was terribly grievous to Stanbury,

and Mrs. Trevelyan, perceiving this more than once, begged him to

leave them, and to allow her to finish the journey with the aid

of the courier. But this he could not do. He wrote letters to

his friends at the D. R. office, explaining his position as well

as he could, and suggesting that this and that able assistant

should enlighten the British people on this and that subject,

which would,--in the course of nature, as arranged at the D. R.

office,--have fallen into his hands. He and Mrs. Trevelyan became

as brother and sister to each other on their way home,--as, indeed,

it was natural that they should do. Were they doing right or wrong

in this journey that they were taking? They could not conceal from

themselves that the labour was almost more than the poor wretch could

endure; and that it might be, as he himself had suggested, that they

would be called on to bury him on the road. But that residence at

Casalunga had been so terrible,--the circumstances of it, including

the solitude, sickness, madness, and habits of life of the wretched

hermit, had been so dangerous,--the probability of interference on

the part of some native authority so great, and the chance of the

house being left in Trevelyan's possession so small, that it had

seemed to him that they had no other alternative; and yet, how would

it be if they were killing him by the toil of travelling? From

Chambery, they made the journey to Paris in two days, and during that

time Trevelyan hardly opened his mouth. He slept much, and ate better

than he had done in the hotter climate on the other side of the Alps.

They found a telegram at Paris, which simply contained the promise

of a letter for the next day. It had been sent by Nora, before she

had gone out on her search. But it contained one morsel of strange

information; "Lady Milborough is going with me." On the next day

they got a letter, saying that a cottage had been taken, furnished,

between Richmond and Twickenham. Lady Milborough had known of the

cottage, and everything would be ready then. Nora would herself meet

them at the station in London, if they would, as she proposed, stay

a night at Dover. They were to address to her at Lady Milborough's

house, in Eccleston Square. In that case, she would have a carriage

for them at the Victoria Station, and would go down with them at once

to the cottage.

There were to be two days more of weary travelling, and then they

were to be at home again. She and he would have a house together as

husband and wife, and the curse of their separation would, at any

rate, be over. Her mind towards him had changed altogether since

the days in which she had been so indignant, because he had set a

policeman to watch over her. All feeling of anger was over with her

now. There is nothing that a woman will not forgive a man, when he is

weaker than she is herself.

The journey was made first to Dover, and then to London. Once, as

they were making their way through the Kentish hop-fields, he put

out his hand feebly, and touched hers. They had the carriage to

themselves, and she was down on her knees before him instantly. "Oh,

Louis! Oh, Louis! say that you forgive me!" What could a woman do

more than that in her mercy to a man?

"Yes;--yes; yes," he said; "but do not talk now; I am so tired."

CHAPTER XCIV.

A REAL CHRISTIAN.

In the meantime the Rowleys were gone. On the Monday after the

departure of Stanbury for Italy, Lady Rowley had begun to look the

difficulty about Nora in the face, and to feel that she must do

something towards providing the poor girl with a temporary home.

Everybody had now agreed that she was to marry Hugh Stanbury as soon

as Hugh Stanbury could be ready, and it was not to be thought of that

she should be left out in the world as one in disgrace or under a

cloud. But what was to be done? Sir Marmaduke was quite incapable of

suggesting anything. He would make her an allowance, and leave her a

small sum of ready money;--but as to residence, he could only suggest

again and again that she should be sent to Mrs. Outhouse. Now Lady

Rowley was herself not very fond of Mrs. Outhouse, and she was aware

that Nora herself was almost as averse to St. Diddulph's as she was

to the Mandarins. Nora already knew that she had the game in her

own hands. Once when in her presence her father suggested the near

relationship and prudent character and intense respectability of Mrs.

Outhouse, Nora, who was sitting behind Sir Marmaduke, shook her head

at her mother, and Lady Rowley knew that Nora would not go to St.

Diddulph's. This was the last occasion on which that proposition was

discussed.

Throughout all the Trevelyan troubles Lady Milborough had continued

to shew a friendly anxiety on behalf of Emily Trevelyan. She had

called once or twice on Lady Rowley, and Lady Rowley had of course

returned the visits. She had been forward in expressing her belief

that in truth the wife had been but little if at all to blame,

and had won her way with Lady Rowley, though she had never been

a favourite with either of Lady Rowley's daughters. Now, in her

difficulty, Lady Rowley went to Lady Milborough, and returned with

an invitation that Nora should come to Eccleston Square, either till

such time as she might think fit to go to Monkhams, or till Mrs.

Trevelyan should have returned, and should be desirous of having her

sister with her. When Nora first heard of this she almost screamed

with surprise, and, if the truth must be told, with disappointment

also.

"She never liked me, mamma."

"Then she is so much more good-natured."

"But I don't want to go to her merely because she is good-natured

enough to receive a person she dislikes. I know she is very good. I

know she would sacrifice herself for anything she thought right. But,

mamma, she is such a bore!"

But Lady Rowley would not be talked down, even by Nora, in this

fashion. Nora was somewhat touched with an idea that it would be a

fine independent thing to live alone, if it were only for a week or

two, just because other young ladies never lived alone. Perhaps there

was some half-formed notion in her mind that permission to do so was

part of the reward due to her for having refused to marry a lord.

Stanbury was in some respects a Bohemian, and it would become her,

she thought, to have a little practice herself in the Bohemian

line. She had, indeed, declined a Bohemian marriage, feeling

strongly averse to encounter the loud displeasure of her father and

mother;--but as long as everything was quite proper, as long as there

should be no running away, or subjection of her name to scandal, she

considered that a little independence would be useful and agreeable.

She had looked forward to sitting up at night alone by a single

tallow candle, to stretching a beefsteak so as to last her for two

days' dinners, and perhaps to making her own bed. Now, there would

not be the slightest touch of romance in a visit to Lady Milborough's

house in Eccleston Square, at the end of July. Lady Rowley, however,

was of a different opinion, and spoke her mind plainly. "Nora, my

dear, don't be a fool. A young lady like you can't go and live in

lodgings by herself. All manner of things would be said. And this is

such a very kind offer! You must accept it,--for Hugh's sake. I have

already said that you would accept it."

"But she will be going out of town."

"She will stay till you can go to Monkhams,--if Emily is not back

before then. She knows all about Emily's affairs; and if she does

come back,--which I doubt, poor thing,--Lady Milborough and you will

be able to judge whether you should go to her." So it was settled,

and Nora's Bohemian Castle in the Air fell into shatters.

The few remaining days before the departure to Southampton passed

quickly, but yet sadly. Sir Marmaduke had come to England expecting

pleasure,--and with that undefined idea which men so employed always

have on their return home that something will turn up which will make

their going back to that same banishment unnecessary. What Governor

of Hong-Kong, what Minister to Bogota, what General of the Forces

at the Gold Coast, ever left the scene of his official or military

labours without a hope, which was almost an expectation, that a

grateful country would do something better for him before the period

of his return should have arrived? But a grateful country was doing

nothing better for Sir Marmaduke, and an ungrateful Secretary of

State at the Colonial Office would not extend the term during which

he could regard himself as absent on special service. How thankful he

had been when first the tidings reached him that he was to come home

at the expense of the Crown, and without diminution of his official

income! He had now been in England for five months, with a per diem

allowance, with his very cabs paid for him, and he was discontented,

sullen, and with nothing to comfort him but his official grievance,

because he could not be allowed to extend his period of special

service more than two months beyond the time at which those special

services were in truth ended! There had been a change of Ministry in

the last month, and he had thought that a Conservative Secretary of

State would have been kinder to him. "The Duke says I can stay three

months with leave of absence;--and have half my pay stopped. I wonder

whether it ever enters into his august mind that even a Colonial

Governor must eat and drink." It was thus he expressed his great

grievance to his wife. "The Duke," however, had been as inexorable

as his predecessor, and Sir Rowley, with his large family, was too

wise to remain to the detriment of his pocket. In the meantime the

clerks in the office, who had groaned in spirit over the ignorance

displayed in his evidence before the committee, were whispering

among themselves that he ought not to be sent back to his seat of

government at all.

Lady Rowley also was disappointed and unhappy. She had expected so

much pleasure from her visit to her daughter, and she had received so

little! Emily's condition was very sad, but in her heart of hearts

perhaps she groaned more bitterly over all that Nora had lost, than

she did over the real sorrows of her elder child. To have had the cup

at her lip, and then not to have tasted it! And she had the solace of

no communion in this sorrow. She had accepted Hugh Stanbury as her

son-in-law, and not for worlds would she now say a word against him

to any one. She had already taken him to her heart, and she loved

him. But to have had it almost within her grasp to have had a lord,

the owner of Monkhams, for her son-in-law! Poor Lady Rowley!

Sophie and Lucy, too, were returning to their distant and dull

banishment without any realisation of their probable but unexpressed

ambition. They made no complaint, but yet it was hard on them

that their sister's misfortune should have prevented them from

going,--almost to a single dance. Poor Sophie and poor Lucy! They

must go, and we shall hear no more about them. It was thought well

that Nora should not go down with them to Southampton. What good

would her going do? "God bless you, my darling," said the mother, as

she held her child in her arms.

"Good-bye, dear mamma."

"Give my best love to Hugh, and tell him that I pray him with my

last word to be good to you." Even then she was thinking of Lord

Peterborough, but the memory of what might have been was buried deep

in her mind.

"Nora, tell me all about it," said Lucy.

"There will be nothing to tell," said Nora.

"Tell it all the same," said Lucy. "And bring Hugh out to write a

book of travels about the Mandarins. Nobody has ever written a book

about the Mandarins." So they parted; and when Sir Marmaduke and his

party were taken off in two cabs to the Waterloo Station, Nora was

taken in one cab to Eccleston Square.

It may be doubted whether any old lady since the world began ever did

a more thoroughly Christian and friendly act than this which was now

being done by Lady Milborough. It was the end of July, and she would

already have been down in Dorsetshire, but for her devotion to this

good deed. For, in truth, what she was doing was not occasioned by

any express love for Nora Rowley. Nora Rowley was all very well, but

Nora Rowley towards her had been flippant, impatient, and, indeed,

not always so civil as a young lady should be to the elderly friends

of her married sister. But to Lady Milborough it had seemed to be

quite terrible that a young girl should be left alone in the world,

without anybody to take care of her. Young ladies, according to her

views of life, were fragile plants that wanted much nursing before

they could be allowed to be planted out in the gardens of the

world as married women. When she heard from Lady Rowley that Nora

was engaged to marry Hugh Stanbury,--"You know all about Lord

Peterborough, Lady Milborough; but it is no use going back to that

now,--is it? And Mr. Stanbury has behaved so exceedingly well

in regard to poor Louis,"--when Lady Milborough heard this, and

heard also that Nora was talking of going to live by herself--in

lodgings--she swore to herself, like a goodly Christian woman, as

she was, that such a thing must not be. Eccleston Square in July

and August is not pleasant, unless it be to an inhabitant who

is interested in the fag-end of the parliamentary session. Lady

Milborough had no interest in politics,--had not much interest even

in seeing the social season out to its dregs. She ordinarily remained

in London till the beginning or middle of July, because the people

with whom she lived were in the habit of doing so;--but as soon as

ever she had fixed the date of her departure, that day to her was

a day of release. On this occasion the day had been fixed,--and it

was unfixed, and changed, and postponed, because it was manifest

to Lady Milborough that she could do good by remaining for another

fortnight. When she made the offer she said nothing of her previous

arrangements. "Lady Rowley, let her come to me. As soon as her friend

Lady Peterborough is at Monkhams, she can go there."

Thus it was that Nora found herself established in Eccleston Square.

As she took her place in Lady Milborough's drawing-rooms, she

remembered well a certain day, now two years ago, when she had first

heard of the glories of Monkhams in that very house. Lady Milborough,

as good-natured then as she was now, had brought Mr. Glascock and

Nora together, simply because she had heard that the gentleman

admired the young lady. Nora, in her pride, had resented this as

interference,--had felt that the thing had been done, and, though she

had valued the admiration of the man, had ridiculed the action of the

woman. As she thought of it now she was softened by gratitude. She

had not on that occasion been suited with a husband, but she had

gained a friend. "My dear," said Lady Milborough, as at her request

Nora took off her hat, "I am afraid that the parties are mostly

over,--that is, those I go to; but we will drive out every day, and

the time won't be so very long."

"It won't be long for me, Lady Milborough;--but I cannot but know how

terribly I am putting you out."

"I am never put out, Miss Rowley," said the old lady, "as long as I

am made to think that what I do is taken in good part."

"Indeed, indeed it shall be taken in good part," said Nora,--"indeed

it shall." And she swore a solemn silent vow of friendship for the

dear old woman.

Then there came letters and telegrams from Chambery, Dijon, and

Paris, and the joint expedition in search of the cottage was made

to Twickenham. It was astonishing how enthusiastic and how loving

the elder and the younger lady were together before the party from

Italy had arrived in England. Nora had explained everything about

herself,--how impossible it had been for her not to love Hugh

Stanbury; how essential it had been for her happiness and self-esteem

that she should refuse Mr. Glascock; how terrible had been the

tragedy of her sister's marriage. Lady Milborough spoke of the former

subject with none of Lady Rowley's enthusiasm, but still with an

evident partiality for her own rank, which almost aroused Nora to

indignant eloquence. Lady Milborough was contented to acknowledge

that Nora might be right, seeing that her heart was so firmly fixed;

but she was clearly of opinion that Mr. Glascock, being Mr. Glascock,

had possessed a better right to the prize in question than could

have belonged to any man who had no recognised position in the world.

Seeing that her heart had been given away, Nora was no doubt right

not to separate her hand from her heart; but Lady Milborough was of

opinion that young ladies ought to have their hearts under better

control, so that the men entitled to the prizes should get them. It

was for the welfare of England at large that the eldest sons of good

families should marry the sweetest, prettiest, brightest, and most

lovable girls of their age. It is a doctrine on behalf of which very

much may be said.

On that other matter, touching Emily Trevelyan, Lady Milborough

frankly owned that she had seen early in the day that he was the one

most in fault. "I must say, my dear," she said, "that I very greatly

dislike your friend, Colonel Osborne."

"I am sure that he meant not the slightest harm,--no more than she

did."

"He was old enough, and ought to have known better. And when the

first hint of an uneasiness in the mind of Louis was suggested to

him, his feelings as a gentleman should have prompted him to remove

himself. Let the suspicion have been ever so absurd, he should

have removed himself. Instead of that, he went after her,--into

Devonshire."

"He went to see other friends, Lady Milborough."

"I hope it may have been so;--I hope it may have been so. But he

should have cut off his hand before he rang at the door of the house

in which she was living. You will understand, my dear, that I acquit

your sister altogether. I did so all through, and said the same to

poor Louis when he came to me. But Colonel Osborne should have known

better. Why did he write to her? Why did he go to St. Diddulph's? Why

did he let it be thought that,--that she was especially his friend.

Oh dear; oh dear; oh dear! I am afraid he is a very bad man."

"We had known him so long, Lady Milborough."

"I wish you had never known him at all. Poor Louis! If he had only

done what I told him at first, all might have been well. 'Go to

Naples, with your wife,' I said. 'Go to Naples.' If he had gone to

Naples, there would have been no journeys to Siena, no living at

Casalunga, no separation. But he didn't seem to see it in the same

light. Poor dear Louis. I wish he had gone to Naples when I told

him."

While they were going backwards and forwards, looking at the cottage

at Twickenham and trying to make things comfortable there for the

sick man, Lady Milborough hinted to Nora that it might be distasteful

to Trevelyan, in his present condition, to have even a sister-in-law

staying in the house with him. There was a little chamber which Nora

had appropriated to herself, and at first it seemed to be taken

for granted that she should remain there at least till the 10th of

August, on which day Lady Peterborough had signified that she and her

husband would be ready to receive their visitor. But Lady Milborough

slept on the suggestion, and on the next morning hinted her

disapprobation. "You shall take them down in the carriage, and their

luggage can follow in a cab;--but the carriage can bring you back.

You will see how things are then."

"Dear Lady Milborough, you would go out of town at once if I left

you."

"And I shall not go out of town if you don't leave me. What

difference does it make to an old woman like me? I have got no

lover coming to look for me, and all I have to do is to tell my

daughter-in-law that I shall not be there for another week or so.

Augusta is very glad to have me, but she is the wisest woman in the

world, and can get on very well without me."

"And as I am the silliest, I cannot."

"You shall put it in that way if you like it, my dear. Girls in your

position often do want assistance. I dare say you think me very

straight-laced, but I am quite sure Mr. Stanbury will be grateful to

me. As you are to be married from Monkhams, it will be quite well

that you should pass thither through my house as an intermediate

resting-place, after leaving your father and mother." By all which

Lady Milborough intended to express an opinion that the value of

the article which Hugh Stanbury would receive at the altar would be

enhanced by the distinguished purity of the hands through which it

had passed before it came into his possession;--in which opinion she

was probably right as regarded the price put upon the article by

the world at large, though it may perhaps be doubted whether the

recipient himself would be of the same opinion.

"I hope you know that I am grateful, whatever he may be," said Nora,

after a pause.

"I think that you take it as it is meant, and that makes me quite

comfortable."

"Lady Milborough, I shall love you for ever and ever. I don't think I

ever knew anybody so good as you are,--or so nice."

"Then I shall be more than comfortable," said Lady Milborough. After

that there was an embrace, and the thing was settled.

CHAPTER XCV.

TREVELYAN BACK IN ENGLAND.

Nora, with Lady Milborough's carriage, and Lady Milborough's coach

and footman, and with a cab ready for the luggage close behind the

carriage, was waiting at the railway station when the party from

Dover arrived. She soon saw Hugh upon the platform, and ran to

him with her news. They had not a word to say to each other of

themselves, so anxious were they both respecting Trevelyan. "We got a

bed-carriage for him at Dover," said Hugh; "and I think he has borne

the journey pretty well;--but he feels the heat almost as badly as

in Italy. You will hardly know him when you see him." Then, when the

rush of passengers was gone, Trevelyan was brought out by Hugh and

the courier, and placed in Lady Milborough's carriage. He just smiled

as his eye fell upon Nora, but he did not even put out his hand to

greet her.

"I am to go in the carriage with him," said his wife.

"Of course you are,--and so will I and Louey. I think there will be

room: it is so large. There is a cab for all the things. Dear Emily,

I am so glad to see you."

"Dearest Nora! I shall be able to speak to you by-and-by, but you

must not be angry with me now. How good you have been."

"Has not she been good? I don't understand about the cottage. It

belongs to some friend of hers; and I have not been able to say a

word about the rent. It is so nice;--and looks upon the river. I hope

that he will like it."

"You will be with us?"

"Not just at first. Lady Milborough thinks I had better not,--that he

will like it better. I will come down almost every day, and will stay

if you think he will like it."

These few words were said while the men were putting Trevelyan

into the carriage. And then another arrangement was made. Hugh

hired a second cab, in which he and the courier made a part of the

procession; and so they all went to Twickenham together. Hugh had not

yet learned that he would be rewarded by coming back alone with Nora

in the carriage.

The cottage by the River Thames, which, as far as the party knew, was

nameless, was certainly very much better than the house on the top of

the hill at Casalunga. And now, at last, the wife would sleep once

more under the same roof with her husband, and the separation would

be over. "I suppose that is the Thames," said Trevelyan; and they

were nearly the only words he spoke in Nora's hearing that evening.

Before she started on her return journey, the two sisters were

together for a few minutes, and each told her own budget of news in

short, broken fragments. There was not much to tell. "He is so weak,"

said Mrs. Trevelyan, "that he can do literally nothing. He can hardly

speak. When we give him wine, he will say a few words, and his mind

seems then to be less astray than it was. I have told him just simply

that it was all my doing,--that I have been in fault all through, and

every now and then he will say a word, to shew me that he remembers

that I have confessed."

"My poor Emily!"

"It was better so. What does it all matter? He had suffered so, that

I would have said worse than that to give him relief. The pride has

gone out of me so, that I do not regard what anybody may say. Of

course, it will be said that I--went astray, and that he forgave me."

"Nobody will say that, dearest; nobody. Lady Milborough is quite

aware how it all was."

"What does it signify? There are things in life worse even than a bad

name."

"But he does not think it?"

"Nora, his mind is a mystery to me. I do not know what is in it.

Sometimes I fancy that all facts have been forgotten, and that he

merely wants the childish gratification of being assured that he is

the master. Then, again, there come moments, in which I feel sure

that suspicion is lurking within him, that he is remembering the

past, and guarding against the future. When he came into this house,

a quarter of an hour ago, he was fearful lest there was a mad doctor

lurking about to pounce on him. I can see in his eye that he had some

such idea. He hardly notices Louey,--though there was a time, even at

Casalunga, when he would not let the child out of his sight."

"What will you do now?"

"I will try to do my duty;--that is all."

"But you will have a doctor?"

"Of course. He was content to see one in Paris, though he would not

let me be present. Hugh saw the gentleman afterwards, and he seemed

to think that the body was worse than the mind." Then Nora told her

the name of a doctor whom Lady Milborough had suggested, and took her

departure along with Hugh in the carriage.

In spite of all the sorrow that they had witnessed and just left,

their journey up to London was very pleasant. Perhaps there is no

period so pleasant among all the pleasant periods of love-making as

that in which the intimacy between the lovers is so assured, and the

coming event so near, as to produce and to endure conversation about

the ordinary little matters of life;--what can be done with the

limited means at their mutual disposal; how that life shall be begun

which they are to lead together; what idea each has of the other's

duties; what each can do for the other; what each will renounce for

the other. There was a true sense of the delight of intimacy in the

girl who declared that she had never loved her lover so well as when

she told him how many pairs of stockings she had got. It is very

sweet to gaze at the stars together; and it is sweet to sit out

among the haycocks. The reading of poetry together, out of the same

book, with brows all close, and arms all mingled, is very sweet. The

pouring out of the whole heart in written words, which the writer

knows would be held to be ridiculous by any eyes, and any ears, and

any sense, but the eyes and ears and sense of the dear one to whom

they are sent, is very sweet;--but for the girl who has made a shirt

for the man that she loves, there has come a moment in the last

stitch of it, sweeter than any that stars, haycocks, poetry, or

superlative epithets have produced. Nora Rowley had never as yet

been thus useful on behalf of Hugh Stanbury. Had she done so, she

might perhaps have been happier even than she was during this

journey;--but, without the shirt, it was one of the happiest moments

of her life. There was nothing now to separate them but their own

prudential scruples;--and of them it must be acknowledged that Hugh

Stanbury had very few. According to his shewing, he was as well

provided for matrimony as the gentleman in the song, who came out

to woo his bride on a rainy night. In live stock he was not so well

provided as the Irish gentleman to whom we allude; but in regard to

all other provisions for comfortable married life, he had, or at a

moment's notice could have, all that was needed. Nora could live just

where she pleased;--not exactly in Whitehall Gardens or Belgrave

Square; but the New Road, Lupus Street, Montague Place, the North

Bank, or Kennington Oval, with all their surrounding crescents,

terraces, and rows, offered, according to him, a choice so wide,

either for lodgings or small houses, that their only embarrassment

was in their riches. He had already insured his life for a thousand

pounds, and, after paying yearly for that, and providing a certain

surplus for saving, five hundred a year was the income on which they

were to commence the world. "Of course, I wish it were five thousand

for your sake," he said; "and I wish I were a Cabinet Minister, or a

duke, or a brewer; but, even in heaven, you know all the angels can't

be archangels." Nora assured him that she would be quite content with

virtues simply angelic. "I hope you like mutton-chops and potatoes; I

do," he said. Then she told him of her ambition about the beef-steak,

acknowledging that, as it must now be shared between two, the

glorious idea of putting a part of it away in a cupboard must be

abandoned. "I don't believe in beef-steaks," he said. "A beef-steak

may mean anything. At our club, a beef-steak is a sumptuous and

expensive luxury. Now, a mutton-chop means something definite, and

must be economical."

"Then we will have the mutton-chops at home," said Nora, "and you

shall go to your club for the beef-steak."

When they reached Eccleston Square, Nora insisted on taking Hugh

Stanbury up to Lady Milborough. It was in vain that he pleaded that

he had come all the way from Dover on a very dusty day,--all the way

from Dover, including a journey in a Hansom cab to Twickenham and

back, without washing his hands and face. Nora insisted that Lady

Milborough was such a dear, good, considerate creature, that she

would understand all that, and Hugh was taken into her presence. "I

am delighted to see you, Mr. Stanbury," said the old lady, "and hope

you will think that Nora is in good keeping."

"She has been telling me how very kind you have been to her. I do not

know where she could have bestowed herself if you had not received

her."

"There, Nora;--I told you he would say so. I won't tell tales, Mr.

Stanbury; but she had all manner of wild plans which I knew you

wouldn't approve. But she is very amiable, and if she will only

submit to you as well as she does to me--"

"I don't mean to submit to him at all, Lady Milborough;--of course

not. I am going to marry for liberty."

"My dear, what you say, you say in joke; but a great many young women

of the present day do, I really believe, go up to the altar and

pronounce their marriage vows, with the simple idea that as soon as

they have done so, they are to have their own way in everything. And

then people complain that young men won't marry! Who can wonder at

it?"

"I don't think the young men think much about the obedience," said

Nora. "Some marry for money, and some for love. But I don't think

they marry to get a slave."

"What do you say, Mr. Stanbury?" asked the old lady.

"I can only assure you that I shan't marry for money," said he.

Two or three days after this Nora left her friend in Eccleston

Square, and domesticated herself for awhile with her sister. Mrs.

Trevelyan declared that such an arrangement would be comfortable

for her, and that it was very desirable now, as Nora would so soon

be beyond her reach. Then Lady Milborough was enabled to go to

Dorsetshire, which she did not do, however, till she had presented

Nora with the veil which she was to wear on the occasion of her

wedding. "Of course I cannot see it, my dear, as it is to take place

at Monkhams; but you must write and tell me the day;--and I will

think of you. And you, when you put on the veil, must think of me."

So they parted, and Nora knew that she had made a friend for life.

[Illustration: Nora's veil.]

When she first took her place in the house at Twickenham as a

resident, Trevelyan did not take much notice of her;--but, after

awhile, he would say a few words to her, especially when it might

chance that she was with him in her sister's absence. He would speak

of dear Emily, and poor Emily, and shake his head slowly, and talk of

the pity of it. "The pity of it, Iago; oh, the pity of it," he said

once. The allusion to her was so terrible that she almost burst out

in anger, as she would have done formerly. She almost told him that

he had been as wrong throughout as was the jealous husband in the

play whose words he quoted, and that his jealousy, if continued, was

likely to be as tragical. But she restrained herself, and kept close

to her needle,--making, let us hope, an auspicious garment for Hugh

Stanbury. "She has seen it now," he continued; "she has seen it now."

Still she went on with her hemming in silence. It certainly could not

be her duty to upset at a word all that her sister had achieved. "You

know that she has confessed?" he asked.

"Pray, pray do not talk about it, Louis."

"I think you ought to know," he said. Then she rose from her seat and

left the room. She could not stand it, even though he were mad,--even

though he were dying!

She went to her sister and repeated what had been said. "You had

better not notice it," said Emily. "It is only a proof of what I told

you. There are times in which his mind is as active as ever it was,

but it is active in so terrible a direction!"

"I cannot sit and hear it. And what am I to say when he asks me a

question as he did just now? He said that you had confessed."

"So I have. Do none confess but the guilty? What is all that we have

read about the Inquisition and the old tortures? I have had to learn

that torturing has not gone out of the world;--that is all."

"I must go away if he says the same thing to me so again."

"That is nonsense, Nora. If I can bear it, cannot you? Would you have

me drive him into violence again by disputing with him upon such a

subject?"

"But he may recover;--and then he will remember what you have said."

"If he recovers altogether he will suspect nothing. I must take my

chance of that. You cannot suppose that I have not thought about it.

I have often sworn to myself that though the world should fall around

me, nothing should make me acknowledge that I had ever been untrue

to my duty as a married woman, either in deed, or word, or thought.

I have no doubt that the poor wretches who were tortured in their

cells used to make the same resolutions as to their confessions. But

yet, when their nails were dragged out of them, they would own to

anything. My nails have been dragged out, and I have been willing to

confess anything. When he talks of the pity of it, of course I know

what he means. There has been something, some remainder of a feeling,

which has still kept him from asking me that question. May God, in

his mercy, continue to him that feeling!"

"But you would answer truly?"

"How can I say what I might answer when the torturer is at my nails?

If you knew how great was the difficulty to get him away from that

place in Italy and bring him here; and what it was to feel that one

was bound to stay near him, and that yet one was impotent,--and to

know that even that refuge must soon cease for him, and that he might

have gone out and died on the road-side, or have done anything which

the momentary strength of madness might have dictated,--if you could

understand all this, you would not be surprised at my submitting to

any degradation which would help to bring him here."

Stanbury was often down at the cottage, and Nora could discuss the

matter better with him than with her sister. And Stanbury could learn

more thoroughly from the physician who was now attending Trevelyan

what was the state of the sick man, than Emily could do. According

to the doctor's idea there was more of ailment in the body than in

the mind. He admitted that his patient's thoughts had been forced

to dwell on one subject till they had become distorted, untrue,

jaundiced, and perhaps mono-maniacal; but he seemed to doubt whether

there had ever been a time at which it could have been decided that

Trevelyan was so mad as to make it necessary that the law should

interfere to take care of him. A man,--so argued the doctor,--need

not be mad because he is jealous, even though his jealousy be ever

so absurd. And Trevelyan, in his jealousy, had done nothing cruel,

nothing wasteful, nothing infamous. In all this Nora was very little

inclined to agree with the doctor, and thought nothing could be more

infamous than Trevelyan's conduct at the present moment,--unless,

indeed, he could be screened from infamy by that plea of madness.

But then there was more behind. Trevelyan had been so wasted by the

kind of life which he had led, and possessed by nature stamina so

insufficient to resist such debility, that it was very doubtful

whether he would not sink altogether before he could be made to

begin to rise. But one thing was clear. He should be contradicted in

nothing. If he chose to say that the moon was made of green cheese,

let it be conceded to him that the moon was made of green cheese.

Should he make any other assertion equally removed from the truth,

let it not be contradicted. Who would oppose a man with one foot in

the grave?

"Then, Hugh, the sooner I am at Monkhams the better," said Nora, who

had again been subjected to inuendoes which had been unendurable to

her. This was on the 7th of August, and it still wanted three days to

that on which the journey to Monkhams was to be made.

"He never says anything to me on the subject," said Hugh.

"Because you have made him afraid of you. I almost think that Emily

and the doctor are wrong in their treatment, and that it would be

better to stand up to him and tell him the truth." But the three days

passed away, and Nora was not driven to any such vindication of her

sister's character towards her sister's husband.

CHAPTER XCVI.

MONKHAMS.

[Illustration]

On the 10th of August Nora Rowley left the cottage by the river-side

at Twickenham, and went down to Monkhams. The reader need hardly be

told that Hugh brought her up from Twickenham and sent her off in the

railway carriage. They agreed that no day could be fixed for their

marriage till something further should be known of Trevelyan's state.

While he was in his present condition such a marriage could not have

been other than very sad. Nora, when she left the cottage, was still

very bitter against her brother-in-law, quoting the doctor's opinion

as to his sanity, and expressing her own as to his conduct under that

supposition. She also believed that he would rally in health, and was

therefore, on that account, less inclined to pity him than was his

wife. Emily Trevelyan of course saw more of him than did her sister,

and understood better how possible it was that a man might be in such

a condition as to be neither mad nor sane;--not mad, so that all

power over his own actions need be taken from him; nor sane, so

that he must be held to be accountable for his words and thoughts.

Trevelyan did nothing, and attempted to do nothing, that could injure

his wife and child. He submitted himself to medical advice. He did

not throw away his money. He had no Bozzle now waiting at his heels.

He was generally passive in his wife's hands as to all outward

things. He was not violent in rebuke, nor did he often allude to

their past unhappiness. But he still maintained, by a word spoken

every now and then, that he had been right throughout in his contest

with his wife,--and that his wife had at last acknowledged that it

was so. She never contradicted him, and he became bolder and bolder

in his assertions, endeavouring on various occasions to obtain some

expression of an assent from Nora. But Nora would not assent, and he

would scowl at her, saying words, both in her presence and behind her

back, which implied that she was his enemy. "Why not yield to him?"

her sister said the day before she went. "I have yielded, and your

doing so cannot make it worse."

"I can't do it. It would be false. It is better that I should go

away. I cannot pretend to agree with him, when I know that his mind

is working altogether under a delusion." When the hour for her

departure came, and Hugh was waiting for her, she thought that it

would be better that she should go, without seeing Trevelyan. "There

will only be more anger," she pleaded. But her sister would not be

contented that she should leave the house in this fashion, and urged

at last, with tears running down her cheeks, that this might possibly

be the last interview between them.

"Say a word to him in kindness before you leave us," said Mrs.

Trevelyan. Then Nora went up to her brother-in-law's bed-side, and

told him that she was going, and expressed a hope that he might be

stronger when she returned. And as she did so she put her hand upon

the bed-side, intending to press his in token of affection. But his

face was turned from her, and he seemed to take no notice of her.

"Louis," said his wife, "Nora is going to Monkhams. You will say

good-bye to her before she goes?"

"If she be not my enemy, I will," said he.

"I have never been your enemy, Louis," said Nora, "and certainly I am

not now."

"She had better go," he said. "It is very little more that I expect

of any one in this world;--but I will recognise no one as my friend

who will not acknowledge that I have been sinned against during the

last two years;--sinned against cruelly and utterly." Emily, who

was standing at the bed-head, shuddered as she heard this, but made

no reply. Nor did Nora speak again, but crept silently out of the

room;--and in half a minute her sister followed her.

"I feared how it would be," said Nora.

"We can only do our best. God knows that I try to do mine."

"I do not think you will ever see him again," said Hugh to her in the

train.

"Would you have had me act otherwise? It is not that it would have

been a lie. I would not have minded that to ease the shattered

feelings of one so infirm and suffering as he. In dealing with mad

people I suppose one must be false. But I should have been accusing

her; and it may be that he will get well, and it might be that he

would then remember what I had said."

At the station near Monkhams she was met by Lady Peterborough in the

carriage. A tall footman in livery came on to the platform to shew

her the way and to look after her luggage, and she could not fail to

remember that the man might have been her own servant, instead of

being the servant of her who now sat in Lord Peterborough's carriage.

And when she saw the carriage, and her ladyship's great bay horses,

and the glittering harness, and the respectably responsible coachman,

and the arms on the panel, she smiled to herself at the sight of

these first outward manifestations of the rank and wealth of the man

who had once been her lover. There are men who look as though they

were the owners of bay horses and responsible coachmen and family

blazons,--from whose outward personal appearance, demeanour, and tone

of voice, one would expect a following of liveries and a magnificence

of belongings; but Mr. Glascock had by no means been such a man. It

had suited his taste to keep these things in abeyance, and to place

his pride in the oaks and elms of his park rather than in any of

those appanages of grandeur which a man may carry about with him. He

could talk of his breed of sheep on an occasion, but he never talked

of his horses; and though he knew his position and all its glories as

well as any nobleman in England, he was ever inclined to hang back a

little in going out of a room, and to bear himself as though he were

a small personage in the world. Some perception of all this came

across Nora's mind as she saw the equipage, and tried to reflect, at

a moment's notice, whether the case might have been different with

her, had Mr. Glascock worn a little of his tinsel outside when she

first met him. Of course she told herself that had he worn it all on

the outside, and carried it ever so gracefully, it could have made no

difference.

It was very plain, however, that, though Mr. Glascock did not like

bright feathers for himself, he chose that his wife should wear them.

Nothing could be prettier than the way in which Caroline Spalding,

whom we first saw as she was about to be stuck into the interior

of the diligence, at St. Michel, now filled her carriage as Lady

Peterborough. The greeting between them was very affectionate, and

there was a kiss in the carriage, even though the two pretty hats,

perhaps, suffered something. "We are so glad to have you at last,"

said Lady Peterborough. "Of course we are very quiet; but you won't

mind that." Nora declared that no house could be too quiet for her,

and then said something of the melancholy scene which she had just

left. "And no time is fixed for your own marriage? But of course it

has not been possible. And why should you be in a hurry? We quite

understand that this is to be your home till everything has arranged

itself." There was a drive of four or five miles before they reached

the park gates, and nothing could be kinder or more friendly than was

the new peeress; but Nora told herself that there was no forgetting

that her friend was a peeress. She would not be so ill-conditioned as

to suggest to herself that her friend patronised her;--and, indeed,

had she done so, the suggestion would have been false;--but she could

not rid herself of a certain sensation of external inferiority, and

of a feeling that the superiority ought to be on her side, as all

this might have been hers,--only that she had not thought it worth

her while to accept it. As these ideas came into her mind, she hated

herself for entertaining them; and yet, come they would. While she

was talking about her emblematic beef-steak with Hugh, she had no

regret, no uneasiness, no conception that any state of life could be

better for her than that state in which an emblematic beef-steak was

of vital importance; but she could not bring her mind to the same

condition of unalloyed purity while sitting with Lady Peterborough in

Lord Peterborough's carriage. And for her default in this respect she

hated herself.

"This is the beginning of the park," said her friend.

"And where is the house?"

"You can't see the house for ever so far yet; it is two miles off.

There is about a mile before you come to the gates, and over a mile

afterwards. One has a sort of feeling when one is in that one can't

get out,--it is so big." In so speaking, it was Lady Peterborough's

special endeavour to state without a boast facts which were

indifferent, but which must be stated.

"It is very magnificent," said Nora. There was in her voice the

slightest touch of sarcasm, which she would have given the world not

to have uttered; but it had been irrepressible.

Lady Peterborough understood it instantly, and forgave it, not

attributing to it more than its true meaning, acknowledging to

herself that it was natural. "Dear Nora," she said,--not knowing what

to say, blushing as she spoke,--"the magnificence is nothing; but the

man's love is everything."

Nora shook herself, and determined that she would behave well. The

effort should be made, and the required result should be produced by

it. "The magnificence, as an adjunct, is a great deal," she said;

"and for his sake, I hope that you enjoy it."

"Of course I enjoy it."

"Wallachia's teachings and preachings have all been thrown to the

wind, I hope."

"Not quite all. Poor dear Wally! I got a letter from her the

other day, which she began by saying that she would attune her

correspondence to my changed condition in life. I understood the

reproach so thoroughly! And, when she told me little details of

individual men and women, and of things she had seen, and said not a

word about the rights of women, or even of politics generally, I felt

that I was a degraded creature in her sight. But, though you laugh at

her, she did me good,--and will do good to others. Here we are inside

Monkhams, and now you must look at the avenue."

Nora was now rather proud of herself. She had made the effort, and

it had been successful; and she felt that she could speak naturally,

and express her thoughts honestly. "I remember his telling me about

the avenue the first time I ever saw him;--and here it is. I did not

think then that I should ever live to see the glories of Monkhams.

Does it go all the way like this to the house?"

"Not quite;--where you see the light at the end the road turns to the

right, and the house is just before you. There are great iron gates,

and terraces, and wondrous paraphernalia before you get up to the

door. I can tell you Monkhams is quite a wonder. I have to shut

myself up every Wednesday morning, and hand the house over to Mrs.

Crutch, the housekeeper, who comes out in a miraculous brown silk

gown, to shew it to visitors. On other days, you'll find Mrs. Crutch

quite civil and useful;--but on Wednesdays, she is majestic. Charles

always goes off among his sheep on that day, and I shut myself up

with a pile of books in a little room. You will have to be imprisoned

with me. I do so long to peep at the visitors."

"And I dare say they want to peep at you."

"I proposed at first to shew them round myself;--but Charles wouldn't

let me."

"It would have broken Mrs. Crutch's heart."

"That's what Charles said. He thinks that Mrs. Crutch tells them

that I'm locked up somewhere, and that that gives a zest to the

search. Some people from Nottingham once did break into old Lady

Peterborough's room, and the shew was stopped for a year. There was

such a row about it! It prevented Charles coming up for the county.

But he wouldn't have got in; and therefore it was lucky, and saved

money."

By this time Nora was quite at her ease; but still there was before

her the other difficulty, of meeting Lord Peterborough. They were

driven out of the avenue, and round to the right, and through the

iron gate, and up to the huge front door. There, upon the top step,

was standing Lord Peterborough, with a billycock hat and a very old

shooting coat, and nankeen trousers, which were considerably too

short for him. It was one of the happinesses of his life to dress

just as he pleased as he went about his own place; and it certainly

was his pleasure to wear older clothes than any one else in his

establishment. "Miss Rowley," he said, coming forward to give her

a hand out of the carriage, "I am delighted that you should see

Monkhams at last."

"You see I have kept you to your promise. Caroline has been telling

me everything about it; but she is not quite a complete guide as yet.

She does not know where the seven oaks are. Do you remember telling

me of the seven oaks?"

"Of course I do. They are five miles off;--at Clatton farm, Carry.

I don't think you have been near Clatton yet. We will ride there

to-morrow." And thus Nora Rowley was made at home at Monkhams.

She was made at home, and after a week or two she was very happy. She

soon perceived that her host was a perfect gentleman, and as such,

a man to be much loved. She had probably never questioned the fact,

whether Mr. Glascock was a gentleman or not, and now she did not

analyse it. It probably never occurred to her, even at the present

time, to say to herself that he was certainly that thing, so

impossible of definition, and so capable of recognition; but she knew

that she had to do with one whose presence was always pleasant to

her, whose words and acts towards her extorted her approbation, whose

thoughts seemed to her to be always good and manly. Of course she

had not loved him, because she had previously known Hugh Stanbury.

There could be no comparison between the two men. There was a

brightness about Hugh which Lord Peterborough could not rival.

Otherwise,--except for this reason,--it seemed to her to be

impossible that any young woman should fail to love Lord Peterborough

when asked to do so.

About the middle of September there came a very happy time for her,

when Hugh was asked down to shoot partridges,--in the doing of which,

however, all his brightness did not bring him near in excellence to

his host. Lord Peterborough had been shooting partridges all his

life, and shot them with a precision which excited Hugh's envy. To

own the truth, Stanbury did not shoot well, and was treated rather

with scorn by the gamekeeper; but in other respects he spent three or

four of the happiest days of his life. He had his work to do, and

after the second day over the stubbles, declared that the exigencies

of the D. R. were too severe to enable him to go out with his gun

again; but those rambles about the park with Nora, for which, among

the exigencies of the D. R., he did find opportunity, were never to

be forgotten.

"Of course I remember that it might have been mine," she said,

sitting with him under an old, hollow, withered sloping stump of an

oak, which still, however, had sufficient of a head growing from one

edge of the trunk to give them the shade they wanted; "and if you

wish me to own to regrets,--I will."

"It would kill me, I think, if you did; and yet I cannot get it out

of my head that if it had not been for me your rank and position in

life might have been so--so suitable to you."

"No, Hugh; there you're wrong. I have thought about it a good deal,

too; and I know very well that the cold beef-steak in the cupboard is

the thing for me. Caroline will do very well here. She looks like a

peeress, and bears her honours grandly; but they will never harden

her. I, too, could have been magnificent with fine feathers. Most

birds are equal to so much as that. I fancy that I could have

looked the part of the fine English lady, and could have patronised

clergymen's wives in the country, could have held my own among my

peers in London, and could have kept Mrs. Crutch in order; but it

would have hardened me, and I should have learned to think that to be

a lady of fashion was everything."

"I do not believe a bit of it."

"It is better as it is, Hugh;--for me at least. I had always a sort

of conviction that it would be better, though I had a longing to play

the other part. Then you came, and you have saved me. Nevertheless,

it is very nice, Hugh, to have the oaks to sit under." Stanbury

declared that it was very nice.

[Illustration: Monkhams.]

But still nothing was settled about the wedding. Trevelyan's

condition was so uncertain that it was very difficult to settle

anything. Though nothing was said on the subject between Stanbury

and Mrs. Trevelyan, and nothing written between Nora and her sister,

it could not but be remembered that should Trevelyan die, his widow

would require a home with them. They were deterred from choosing a

house by this reflection, and were deterred from naming a day also by

the consideration that were they to do so, Trevelyan's state might

still probably prevent it. But this was arranged, that if Trevelyan

lived through the winter, or even if he should not live, their

marriage should not be postponed beyond the end of March. Till

that time Lord Peterborough would remain at Monkhams, and it was

understood that Nora's invitation extended to that period.

"If my wife does not get tired of you, I shall not," Lord

Peterborough said to Nora. "The thing is that when you do go we shall

miss you so terribly." In September, too, there happened another

event which took Stanbury to Exeter, and all needful particulars as

to that event shall be narrated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XCVII.

MRS. BROOKE BURGESS.

It may be doubted whether there was a happier young woman in England

than Dorothy Stanbury when that September came which was to make

her the wife of Mr. Brooke Burgess, the new partner in the firm of

Cropper and Burgess. Her early aspirations in life had been so low,

and of late there had come upon her such a succession of soft showers

of success,--mingled now and then with slight threatenings of storms

which had passed away,--that the Close at Exeter seemed to her to

have become a very Paradise. Her aunt's temper had sometimes been to

her as the threat of a storm, and there had been the Gibson marriage

treaty, and the short-lived opposition to the other marriage treaty

which had seemed to her to be so very preferable; but everything had

gone at last as though she had been Fortune's favourite,--and now

had come this beautiful arrangement about Cropper and Burgess, which

would save her from being carried away to live among strangers in

London! When she first became known to us on her coming to Exeter,

in compliance with her aunt's suggestion, she was timid, silent,

and altogether without self-reliance. Even they who knew her best

had never guessed that she possessed a keen sense of humour, a nice

appreciation of character, and a quiet reticent wit of her own, under

that staid and frightened demeanour. Since her engagement with Brooke

Burgess it seemed to those who watched her that her character had

become changed, as does that of a flower when it opens itself in its

growth. The sweet gifts of nature within became visible, the petals

sprang to view, and the leaves spread themselves, and the sweet scent

was felt upon the air. Had she remained at Nuncombe, it is probable

that none would ever have known her but her sister. It was necessary

to this flower that it should be warmed by the sun of life, and

strengthened by the breezes of opposition, and filled by the showers

of companionship, before it could become aware of its own loveliness.

Dorothy was one who, had she remained ever unseen in the retirement

of her mother's village cottage, would have lived and died ignorant

of even her own capabilities for enjoyment. She had not dreamed that

she could win a man's love,--had hardly dreamed till she had lived at

Exeter that she had love of her own to give back in return. She had

not known that she could be firm in her own opinion, that she could

laugh herself and cause others to laugh, that she could be a lady and

know that other women were not so, that she had good looks of her own

and could be very happy when told of them by lips that she loved. The

flower that blows the quickest is never the sweetest. The fruit that

ripens tardily has ever the finest flavour. It is often the same with

men and women. The lad who talks at twenty as men should talk at

thirty, has seldom much to say worth the hearing when he is forty;

and the girl who at eighteen can shine in society with composure, has

generally given over shining before she is a full-grown woman. With

Dorothy the scent and beauty of the flower, and the flavour of the

fruit, had come late; but the fruit will keep, and the flower will

not fall to pieces with the heat of an evening.

"How marvellously your bride has changed since she has been here,"

said Mrs. MacHugh to Miss Stanbury. "We thought she couldn't say boo

to a goose at first; but she holds her own now among the best of

'em."

"Of course she does;--why shouldn't she? I never knew a Stanbury yet

that was a fool."

"They are a wonderful family, of course," said Mrs. MacHugh; "but I

think that of all of them she is the most wonderful. Old Barty said

something to her at my house yesterday that wasn't intended to be

kind."

"When did he ever intend to be kind?"

"But he got no change out of her. 'The Burgesses have been in Exeter

a long time,' she said, 'and I don't see why we should not get on at

any rate as well as those before us.' Barty grunted and growled and

slunk away. He thought she would shake in her shoes when he spoke to

her."

"He has never been able to make a Stanbury shake in her shoes yet,"

said the old lady.

Early in September, Dorothy went to Nuncombe Putney to spend a week

with her mother and sister at the cottage. She had insisted on this,

though Priscilla had hinted, somewhat unnecessarily, that Dorothy,

with her past comforts and her future prospects, would find the

accommodation at the cottage very limited. "I suppose you and I,

Pris, can sleep in the same bed, as we always did," she said, with a

tear in each eye. Then Priscilla had felt ashamed of herself, and had

bade her come.

"The truth is, Dolly," said the elder sister, "that we feel so unlike

marrying and giving in marriage at Nuncombe, that I'm afraid you'll

lose your brightness and become dowdy, and grim, and misanthropic, as

we are. When mamma and I sit down to what we call dinner, I always

feel that there is a grace hovering in the air different to that

which she says."

"And what is it, Pris?"

"Pray, God, don't quite starve us, and let everybody else have

indigestion. We don't say it out loud, but there it is; and the

spirit of it might damp the orange blossoms."

She went of course, and the orange blossoms were not damped. She had

long walks with her sister round by Niddon and Ridleigh, and even as

far distant as Cockchaffington, where much was said about that wicked

Colonel as they stood looking at the porch of the church. "I shall be

so happy," said Dorothy, "when you and mother come to us. It will be

such a joy to me that you should be my guests."

"But we shall not come."

"Why not, Priscilla?"

"I know it will be so. Mamma will not care for going, if I do not

go."

"And why should you not come?"

"For a hundred reasons, all of which you know, Dolly. I am stiff,

impracticable, ill-conditioned, and very bad at going about visiting.

I am always thinking that other people ought to have indigestion, and

perhaps I might come to have some such feeling about you and Brooke."

"I should not be at all afraid of that."

"I know that my place in the world is here, at Nuncombe Putney. I

have a pride about myself, and think that I never did wrong but

once,--when I let mamma go into that odious Clock House. It is a bad

pride, and yet I'm proud of it. I haven't got a gown fit to go and

stay with you, when you become a grand lady in Exeter. I don't doubt

you'd give me any sort of gown I wanted."

"Of course I would. Ain't we sisters, Pris?"

"I shall not be so much your sister as he will be your husband.

Besides, I hate to take things. When Hugh sends money, and for

mamma's sake it is accepted, I always feel uneasy while it lasts, and

think that that plague of an indigestion ought to come upon me also.

Do you remember the lamb that came when you went away? It made me so

sick."

"But, Priscilla;--isn't that morbid?"

"Of course it is. You don't suppose I really think it grand. I am

morbid. But I am strong enough to live on, and not get killed by the

morbidity. Heaven knows how much more there may be of it;--forty

years, perhaps, and probably the greater portion of that absolutely

alone;--"

"No;--you'll be with us then,--if it should come."

"I think not, Dolly. Not to have a hole of my own would be

intolerable to me. But, as I was saying, I shall not be unhappy. To

enjoy life, as you do, is I suppose out of the question for me. But

I have a satisfaction when I get to the end of the quarter and find

that there is not half-a-crown due to any one. Things get dearer and

dearer, but I have a comfort even in that. I have a feeling that I

should like to bring myself to the straw a day." Of course there

were offers made of aid,--offers which were rather prayers,--and

plans suggested of what might be done between Brooke and Hugh; but

Priscilla declared that all such plans were odious to her. "Why

should you be unhappy about us?" she continued. "We will come and see

you,--at least I will,--perhaps once in six months, and you shall pay

for the railway ticket; only I won't stay, because of the gown."

"Is not that nonsense, Pris?"

"Just at present it is, because mamma and I have both got new gowns

for the wedding. Hugh sent them, and ever so much money to buy

bonnets and gloves."

"He is to be married himself soon,--down at a place called Monkhams.

Nora is staying there."

"Yes;--with a lord," said Priscilla. "We sha'n't have to go there, at

any rate."

"You liked Nora when she was here?"

"Very much;--though I thought her self-willed. But she is not

worldly, and she is conscientious. She might have married that lord

herself if she would. I do like her. When she comes to you at Exeter,

if the wedding gown isn't quite worn out, I shall come and see her. I

knew she liked him when she was here, but she never said so."

"She is very pretty, is she not? He sent me her photograph."

"She is handsome rather than pretty. I wonder why it is that you two

should be married, and so grandly married, and that I shall never,

never have any one to love."

"Oh, Priscilla, do not say that. If I have a child will you not love

it?"

"It will be your child;--not mine. Do not suppose that I complain.

I know that it is right. I know that you ought to be married and I

ought not. I know that there is not a man in Devonshire who would

take me, or a man in Devonshire whom I would accept. I know that I am

quite unfit for any other kind of life than this. I should make any

man wretched, and any man would make me wretched. But why is it so? I

believe that you would make any man happy."

"I hope to make Brooke happy."

"Of course you will, and therefore you deserve it. We'll go home now,

dear, and get mamma's things ready for the great day."

On the afternoon before the great day all the visitors were to come,

and during the forenoon old Miss Stanbury was in a great fidget.

Luckily for Dorothy, her own preparations were already made, so that

she could give her time to her aunt without injury to herself. Miss

Stanbury had come to think of herself as though all the reality of

her life had passed away from her. Every resolution that she had

formed had been broken. She had had the great enemy of her life,

Barty Burgess, in the house with her upon terms that were intended

to be amicable, and had arranged with him a plan for the division of

the family property. Her sister-in-law, whom in the heyday of her

strength she had chosen to regard as her enemy, and with whom even as

yet there had been no reconciliation, was about to become her guest,

as was also Priscilla,--whom she had ever disliked almost as much as

she had respected. She had quarrelled utterly with Hugh,--in such a

manner as to leave no possible chance of a reconciliation,--and he

also was about to be her guest. And then, as to her chosen heir, she

was now assisting him in doing the only thing, as to which she had

declared that if he did do it, he should not be her heir. As she went

about the house, under an idea that such a multiplicity of persons

could not be housed and fed without superhuman exertion, she thought

of all this, and could not help confessing to herself that her life

had been very vain. It was only when her eyes rested on Dorothy, and

she saw how supremely happy was the one person whom she had taken

most closely to her heart, that she could feel that she had done

anything that should not have been left undone. "I think I'll sit

down now, Dorothy," she said, "or I sha'n't be able to be with you

to-morrow."

"Do, aunt. Everything is all ready, and nobody will be here for an

hour yet. Nothing can be nicer than the rooms, and nothing ever was

done so well before. I'm only thinking how lonely you'll be when

we're gone."

"It'll be only for six weeks."

"But six weeks is such a long time."

"What would it have been if he had taken you up to London, my pet?

Are you sure your mother wouldn't like a fire in her room, Dorothy?"

"A fire in September, aunt?"

"People live so differently. One never knows."

"They never have but one fire at Nuncombe, aunt, summer or winter."

"That's no reason they shouldn't be comfortable here." However, she

did not insist on having the fire lighted.

Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla came first, and the meeting was certainly

very uncomfortable. Poor Mrs. Stanbury was shy, and could hardly

speak a word. Miss Stanbury thought that her visitor was haughty,

and, though she endeavoured to be gracious, did it with a struggle.

They called each other ma'am, which made Dorothy uneasy. Each of them

was so dear to her, that it was a pity that they should glower at

each other like enemies. Priscilla was not at all shy; but she was

combative, and, as her aunt said of her afterwards, would not keep

her prickles in. "I hope, Priscilla, you like weddings," said Miss

Stanbury to her, not knowing where to find a subject for

conversation.

"In the abstract I like them," said Priscilla. Miss Stanbury did not

know what her niece meant by liking weddings in the abstract, and was

angry.

"I suppose you do have weddings at Nuncombe Putney sometimes," she

said.

"I hope they do," said Priscilla, "but I never saw one. To-morrow

will be my first experience."

"Your own will come next, my dear," said Miss Stanbury.

"I think not," said Priscilla. "It is quite as likely to be yours,

aunt." This, Miss Stanbury thought, was almost an insult, and she

said nothing more on the occasion.

Then came Hugh and the bridegroom. The bridegroom, as a matter of

course, was not accommodated in the house, but he was allowed to

come there for his tea. He and Hugh had come together; and for Hugh

a bed-room had been provided. His aunt had not seen him since he

had been turned out of the house, because of his bad practices, and

Dorothy had anticipated the meeting between them with alarm. It was,

however, much more pleasant than had been that between the ladies.

"Hugh," she said stiffly, "I am glad to see you on such an occasion

as this."

"Aunt," he said, "I am glad of any occasion that can get me an

entrance once more into the dear old house. I am so pleased to see

you." She allowed her hand to remain in his a few moments, and

murmured something which was intended to signify her satisfaction.

"I must tell you that I am going to be married myself, to one of the

dearest, sweetest, and loveliest girls that ever were seen, and you

must congratulate me."

"I do, I do; and I hope you may be happy."

"We mean to try to be; and some day you must let me bring her to you,

and shew her. I shall not be satisfied, if you do not know my wife."

She told Martha afterwards that she hoped that Mr. Hugh had sown his

wild oats, and that matrimony would sober him. When, however, Martha

remarked that she believed Mr. Hugh to be as hardworking a young man

as any in London, Miss Stanbury shook her head sorrowfully. Things

were being very much changed with her; but not even yet was she to be

brought to approve of work done on behalf of a penny newspaper.

On the following morning, at ten o'clock, there was a procession from

Miss Stanbury's house into the Cathedral, which was made entirely on

foot;--indeed, no assistance could have been given by any carriage,

for there is a back entrance to the Cathedral, near to the Lady

Chapel, exactly opposite Miss Stanbury's house. There were many

of the inhabitants of the Close there, to see the procession, and

the cathedral bells rang out their peals very merrily. Brooke, the

bridegroom, gave his arm to Miss Stanbury, which was, no doubt, very

improper,--as he should have appeared in the church as coming from

quite some different part of the world. Then came the bride, hanging

on her brother, then two bridesmaids,--friends of Dorothy's, living

in the town; and, lastly, Priscilla with her mother, for nothing

would induce Priscilla to take the part of a bridesmaid. "You might

as well ask an owl to sing to you," she said. "And then all the

frippery would be thrown away upon me." But she stood close to

Dorothy, and when the ceremony had been performed, was the first,

after Brooke, to kiss her.

Everybody acknowledged that the bride was a winsome bride. Mrs.

MacHugh was at the breakfast, and declared afterwards that Dorothy

Burgess,--as she then was pleased to call her,--was a girl very hard

to be understood. "She came here," said Mrs. MacHugh, "two years ago,

a plain, silent, shy, dowdy young woman, and we all said that Miss

Stanbury would be tired of her in a week. There has never come a time

in which there was any visible difference in her, and now she is one

of our city beauties, with plenty to say to everybody, with a fortune

in one pocket and her aunt in the other, and everybody is saying what

a fortunate fellow Brooke Burgess is to get her. In a year or two

she'll be at the top of everything in the city, and will make her way

in the county too."

The compiler of this history begs to add his opinion to that of

"everybody," as quoted above by Mrs. MacHugh. He thinks that Brooke

Burgess was a very fortunate fellow to get his wife.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

ACQUITTED.

During this time, while Hugh was sitting with his love under the oak

trees at Monkhams, and Dorothy was being converted into Mrs. Brooke

Burgess in Exeter Cathedral, Mrs. Trevelyan was living with her

husband in the cottage at Twickenham. Her life was dreary enough,

and there was but very little of hope in it to make its dreariness

supportable. As often happens in periods of sickness, the single

friend who could now be of service to the one or to the other was

the doctor. He came daily to them, and with that quick growth of

confidence which medical kindness always inspires, Trevelyan told

to this gentleman all the history of his married life,--and all

that Trevelyan told to him he repeated to Trevelyan's wife. It may

therefore be understood that Trevelyan, between them, was treated

like a child.

Dr. Nevill had soon been able to tell Mrs. Trevelyan that her

husband's health had been so shattered as to make it improbable that

he should ever again be strong either in body or in mind. He would

not admit, even when treating his patient like a child, that he had

ever been mad, and spoke of Sir Marmaduke's threat as unfortunate.

"But what could papa have done?" asked the wife.

"It is often, no doubt, difficult to know what to do; but threats are

seldom of avail to bring a man back to reason. Your father was angry

with him, and yet declared that he was mad. That in itself was hardly

rational. One does not become angry with a madman."

One does not become angry with a madman; but while a man has power

in his hands over others, and when he misuses that power grossly

and cruelly, who is there that will not be angry? The misery of the

insane more thoroughly excites our pity than any other suffering

to which humanity is subject; but it is necessary that the madness

should be acknowledged to be madness before the pity can be felt. One

can forgive, or, at any rate, make excuses for any injury when it is

done; but it is almost beyond human nature to forgive an injury when

it is a-doing, let the condition of the doer be what it may. Emily

Trevelyan at this time suffered infinitely. She was still willing to

yield in all things possible, because her husband was ill,--because

perhaps he was dying; but she could no longer satisfy herself with

thinking that all that she admitted,--all that she was still ready to

admit,--had been conceded in order that her concessions might tend to

soften the afflictions of one whose reason was gone. Dr. Nevill said

that her husband was not mad;--and indeed Trevelyan seemed now to be

so clear in his mind that she could not doubt what the doctor said to

her. She could not think that he was mad,--and yet he spoke of the

last two years as though he had suffered from her almost all that a

husband could suffer from a wife's misconduct. She was in doubt about

his health. "He may recover," the doctor said; "but he is so weak

that the slightest additional ailment would take him off." At this

time Trevelyan could not raise himself from his bed, and was carried,

like a child, from one room to another. He could eat nothing solid,

and believed himself to be dying. In spite of his weakness,--and of

his savage memories in regard to the past,--he treated his wife on

all ordinary subjects with consideration. He spoke much of his money,

telling her that he had not altered, and would not alter, the will

that he had made immediately on his marriage. Under that will all his

property would be hers for her life, and would go to their child when

she was dead. To her this will was more than just,--it was generous

in the confidence which it placed in her; and he told his lawyer, in

her presence, that, to the best of his judgment, he need not change

it. But still there passed hardly a day in which he did not make some

allusion to the great wrong which he had endured, throwing in her

teeth the confessions which she had made,--and almost accusing her

of that which she certainly never had confessed, even when, in the

extremity of her misery at Casalunga, she had thought that it little

mattered what she said, so that for the moment he might be appeased.

If he died, was he to die in this belief? If he lived, was he to live

in this belief? And if he did so believe, was it possible that he

should still trust her with his money and with his child?

"Emily," he said one day, "it has been a terrible tragedy, has it

not?" She did not answer his question, sitting silent as it was her

custom to do when he addressed her after such fashion as this. At

such times she would not answer him; but she knew that he would

press her for an answer. "I blame him more than I do you," continued

Trevelyan,--"infinitely more. He was a serpent intending to sting me

from the first,--not knowing perhaps how deep the sting would go."

There was no question in this, and the assertion was one which had

been made so often that she could let it pass. "You are young, Emily,

and it may be that you will marry again."

"Never," she said, with a shudder. It seemed to her then that

marriage was so fearful a thing that certainly she could never

venture upon it again.

"All I ask of you is, that should you do so, you will be more careful

of your husband's honour."

"Louis," she said, getting up and standing close to him, "tell me

what it is that you mean." It was now his turn to remain silent,

and hers to demand an answer. "I have borne much," she continued,

"because I would not vex you in your illness."

"You have borne much?"

"Indeed and indeed, yes. What woman has ever borne more!"

"And I?" said he.

"Dear Louis, let us understand each other at last. Of what do you

accuse me? Let us, at any rate, know each other's thoughts on this

matter, of which each of us is ever thinking."

"I make no new accusation."

"I must protest then against your using words which seem to convey

accusation. Since marriages were first known upon earth, no woman has

ever been truer to her husband than I have been to you."

"Were you lying to me then at Casalunga when you acknowledged that

you had been false to your duties?"

"If I acknowledged that, I did lie. I never said that; but yet I did

lie,--believing it to be best for you that I should do so. For your

honour's sake, for the child's sake, weak as you are, Louis, I must

protest that it was so. I have never injured you by deed or thought."

"And yet you have lied to me! Is a lie no injury;--and such a lie!

Emily, why did you lie to me? You will tell me to-morrow that you

never lied, and never owned that you had lied."

Though it should kill him, she must tell him the truth now. "You were

very ill at Casalunga," she said, after a pause.

"But not so ill as I am now. I could breathe that air. I could live

there. Had I remained I should have been well now,--but what of

that?"

"Louis, you were dying there. Pray, pray listen to me. We thought

that you were dying; and we knew also that you would be taken from

that house."

"That was my affair. Do you mean that I could not keep a house over

my head?" At this moment he was half lying, half sitting, in a large

easy chair in the little drawing-room of their cottage, to which he

had been carried from the adjoining bed-room. When not excited, he

would sit for hours without moving, gazing through the open window,

sometimes with some pretext of a book lying within the reach of his

hand; but almost without strength to lift it, and certainly without

power to read it. But now he had worked himself up to so much energy

that he almost raised himself up in his chair, as he turned towards

his wife. "Had I not the world before me, to choose a house in?"

"They would have put you somewhere, and I could not have reached

you."

"In a madhouse, you mean. Yes;--if you had told them."

"Will you listen, dear Louis? We knew that it was our duty to bring

you home; and as you would not let me come to you, and serve you, and

assist you to come here where you are safe,--unless I owned that you

had been right, I said that you had been right."

"And it was a lie,--you say now?"

"All that is nothing. I cannot go through it; nor should you. There

is the only question. You do not think that I have been--? I need not

say the thing. You do not think that?" As she asked the question, she

knelt beside him, and took his hand in hers, and kissed it. "Say that

you do not think that, and I will never trouble you further about the

past."

"Yes;--that is it. You will never trouble me!" She glanced up into

his face and saw there the old look which he used to wear when he was

at Willesden and at Casalunga; and there had come again the old tone

in which he had spoken to her in the bitterness of his wrath:--the

look and the tone, which had made her sure that he was a madman. "The

craft and subtlety of women passes everything!" he said. "And so at

last I am to tell you that from the beginning it has been my doing. I

will never say so, though I should die in refusing to do it."

After that there was no possibility of further conversation, for

there came upon him a fit of coughing, and then he swooned; and in

half-an-hour he was in bed, and Dr. Nevill was by his side. "You must

not speak to him at all on this matter," said the doctor. "But if he

speaks to me?" she asked. "Let it pass," said the doctor. "Let the

subject be got rid of with as much ease as you can. He is very ill

now, and even this might have killed him." Nevertheless, though this

seemed to be stern, Dr. Nevill was very kind to her, declaring that

the hallucination in her husband's mind did not really consist of a

belief in her infidelity, but arose from an obstinate determination

to yield nothing. "He does not believe it; but he feels that were he

to say as much, his hands would be weakened and yours strengthened."

"Can he then be in his sane mind?"

"In one sense all misconduct is proof of insanity," said the doctor.

"In his case the weakness of the mind has been consequent upon the

weakness of the body."

Three days after that Nora visited Twickenham from Monkhams in

obedience to a telegram from her sister. "Louis," she said, "had

become so much weaker, that she hardly dared to be alone with him.

Would Nora come to her?" Nora came of course, and Hugh met her at the

station, and brought her with him to the cottage. He asked whether

he might see Trevelyan, but was told that it would be better that

he should not. He had been almost continually silent since the last

dispute which he had with his wife; but he had given little signs

that he was always thinking of the manner in which he had been

brought home by her from Italy, and of the story she had told him

of her mode of inducing him to come. Hugh Stanbury had been her

partner in that struggle, and would probably be received, if not with

sullen silence, then with some attempt at rebuke. But Hugh did see

Dr. Nevill, and learned from him that it was hardly possible that

Trevelyan should live many hours. "He has worn himself out," said the

doctor, "and there is nothing left in him by which he can lay hold of

life again." Of Nora her brother-in-law took but little notice, and

never again referred in her hearing to the great trouble of his life.

He said to her a word or two about Monkhams, and asked a question now

and again as to Lord Peterborough,--whom, however, he always called

Mr. Glascock; but Hugh Stanbury's name was never mentioned by him.

There was a feeling in his mind that at the very last he had been

duped in being brought to England, and that Stanbury had assisted in

the deception. To his wife he would whisper little petulant regrets

for the loss of the comforts of Casalunga, and would speak of the air

of Italy and of Italian skies and of the Italian sun, as though he

had enjoyed at his Sienese villa all the luxuries which climate can

give, and would have enjoyed them still had he been allowed to remain

there. To all this she would say nothing. She knew now that he was

failing quickly, and there was only one subject on which she either

feared or hoped to hear him speak. Before he left her for ever and

ever would he tell her that he had not doubted her faith?

She had long discussions with Nora on the matter, as though all the

future of her life depended on it. It was in vain that Nora tried to

make her understand that if hereafter the spirit of her husband could

know anything of the troubles of his mortal life, could ever look

back to the things which he had done in the flesh, then would he

certainly know the truth, and all suspicion would be at an end. And

if not, if there was to be no such retrospect, what did it matter

now, for these few last hours before the coil should be shaken off,

and all doubt and all sorrow should be at an end? But the wife, who

was soon to be a widow, yearned to be acquitted in this world by him

to whom her guilt or her innocence had been matter of such vital

importance. "He has never thought it," said Nora.

"But if he would say so! If he would only look it! It will be all in

all to me as long as I live in this world." And then, though they had

determined between themselves in spoken words never to regard him

again as one who had been mad, in all their thoughts and actions

towards him they treated him as though he were less responsible than

an infant. And he was mad;--mad though every doctor in England had

called him sane. Had he not been mad he must have been a fiend,--or

he could not have tortured, as he had done, the woman to whom he owed

the closest protection which one human being can give to another.

During these last days and nights she never left him. She had done

her duty to him well, at any rate since the time when she had been

enabled to come near him in Italy. It may be that in the first days

of their quarrel, she had not been regardful, as she should have

been, of a husband's will,--that she might have escaped this tragedy

by submitting herself to the man's wishes, as she had always been

ready to submit herself to his words. Had she been able always to

keep her neck in the dust under his foot, their married life might

have been passed without outward calamity, and it is possible that

he might still have lived. But if she erred, surely she had been

scourged for her error with scorpions. As she sat at his bedside

watching him, she thought of her wasted youth, of her faded beauty,

of her shattered happiness, of her fallen hopes. She had still her

child,--but she felt towards him that she herself was so sad a

creature, so sombre, so dark, so necessarily wretched from this time

forth till the day of her death, that it would be better for the boy

that she should never be with him. There could be nothing left for

her but garments dark with woe, eyes red with weeping, hours sad from

solitude, thoughts weary with memory. And even yet,--if he would only

now say that he did not believe her to have been guilty, how great

would be the change in her future life!

Then came an evening in which he seemed to be somewhat stronger than

he had been. He had taken some refreshment that had been prepared

for him, and, stimulated by its strength, had spoken a word or two

both to Nora and to his wife. His words had been of no especial

interest,--alluding to some small detail of his own condition, such

as are generally the chosen topics of conversation with invalids.

But he had been pronounced to be better, and Nora spoke to him

cheerfully, when he was taken into the next room by the man who

was always at hand to move him. His wife followed him, and soon

afterwards returned, and bade Nora good night. She would sit by her

husband, and Nora was to go to the room below, that she might receive

her lover there. He was expected out that evening, but Mrs. Trevelyan

said that she would not see him. Hugh came and went, and Nora took

herself to her chamber. The hours of the night went on, and Mrs.

Trevelyan was still sitting by her husband's bed. It was still

September, and the weather was very warm. But the windows had been

all closed since an hour before sunset. She was sitting there

thinking, thinking, thinking. Dr. Nevill had told her that the time

now was very near. She was not thinking now how very near it might

be, but whether there might yet be time for him to say that one word

to her.

"Emily," he said, in the lowest whisper.

"Darling!" she answered, turning round and touching him with her

hand.

"My feet are cold. There are no clothes on them."

She took a thick shawl and spread it double across the bottom of

the bed, and put her hand upon his arm. Though it was clammy with

perspiration, it was chill, and she brought the warm clothes up close

round his shoulders. "I can't sleep," he said. "If I could sleep,

I shouldn't mind." Then he was silent again, and her thoughts went

harping on, still on the same subject. She told herself that if ever

that act of justice were to be done for her, it must be done that

night. After a while she turned round over him ever so gently, and

saw that his large eyes were open and fixed upon the wall.

She was kneeling now on the chair close by the bed head, and her hand

was on the rail of the bedstead supporting her. "Louis," she said,

ever so softly.

"Well."

"Can you say one word for your wife, dear, dear, dearest husband?"

"What word?"

"I have not been a harlot to you;--have I?"

"What name is that?"

"But what a thing, Louis! Kiss my hand, Louis, if you believe me."

And very gently she laid the tips of her fingers on his lips. For a

moment or two she waited, and the kiss did not come. Would he spare

her in this the last moment left to him either for justice or for

mercy? For a moment or two the bitterness of her despair was almost

unendurable. She had time to think that were she once to withdraw

her hand, she would be condemned for ever;--and that it must be

withdrawn. But at length the lips moved, and with struggling ear she

could hear the sound of the tongue within, and the verdict of the

dying man had been given in her favour. He never spoke a word more

either to annul it or to enforce it.

Some time after that she crept into Nora's room. "Nora," she said,

waking the sleeping girl, "it is all over."

"Is he--dead?"

"It is all over. Mrs. Richards is there. It is better than an hour

since now. Let me come in." She got into her sister's bed, and there

she told the tale of her tardy triumph. "He declared to me at last

that he trusted me," she said,--almost believing that real words had

come from his lips to that effect. Then she fell into a flood of

tears, and after a while she also slept.

CHAPTER XCIX.

CONCLUSION.

At last the maniac was dead, and in his last moments he had made such

reparation as was in his power for the evil that he had done. With

that slight touch of his dry fevered lips he had made the assertion

on which was to depend the future peace and comfort of the woman whom

he had so cruelly misused. To her mind the acquittal was perfect;

but she never explained to human ears,--not even to those of her

sister,--the manner in which it had been given. Her life, as far as

we are concerned with it, has been told. For the rest, it cannot be

but that it should be better than that which was passed. If there be

any retribution for such sufferings in money, liberty, and outward

comfort, such retribution she possessed;--for all that had been his,

was now hers. He had once suggested what she should do, were she

ever to be married again; and she felt that of such a career there

could be no possibility. Anything but that! We all know that widows'

practices in this matter do not always tally with wives' vows; but,

as regards Mrs. Trevelyan, we are disposed to think that the promise

will be kept. She has her child, and he will give her sufficient

interest to make life worth having.

Early in the following spring Hugh Stanbury was married to Nora

Rowley in the parish church of Monkhams,--at which place by that time

Nora found herself to be almost as much at home as she might have

been under other circumstances. They had prayed that the marriage

might be very private;--but when the day arrived there was no

very close privacy. The parish church was quite full, there were

half-a-dozen bridesmaids, there was a great breakfast, Mrs. Crutch

had a new brown silk gown given to her, there was a long article

in the county gazette, and there were short paragraphs in various

metropolitan newspapers. It was generally thought among his compeers

that Hugh Stanbury had married into the aristocracy, and that the

fact was a triumph for the profession to which he belonged. It shewed

what a Bohemian could do, and that men of the press in England might

gradually hope to force their way almost anywhere. So great was the

name of Monkhams! He and his wife took for themselves a very small

house near the Regent's Park, at which they intend to remain until

Hugh shall have enabled himself to earn an additional two hundred

a-year. Mrs. Trevelyan did not come to live with them, but kept the

cottage near the river at Twickenham. Hugh Stanbury was very averse

to any protracted connection with comforts to be obtained from poor

Trevelyan's income, and told Nora that he must hold her to her

promise about the beef-steak in the cupboard. It is our opinion that

Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Stanbury will never want for a beef-steak and all

comfortable additions until the inhabitants of London shall cease to

require newspapers on their breakfast tables.

Brooke and Mrs. Brooke established themselves in the house in the

Close on their return from their wedding tour, and Brooke at once put

himself into intimate relations with the Messrs. Croppers, taking

his fair share of the bank work. Dorothy was absolutely installed as

mistress in her aunt's house with many wonderful ceremonies, with

the unlocking of cupboards, the outpouring of stores, the giving

up of keys, and with many speeches made to Martha. This was all

very painful to Dorothy, who could not bring herself to suppose it

possible that she should be the mistress of that house, during her

aunt's life. Miss Stanbury, however, of course persevered, speaking

of herself as a worn-out old woman, with one foot in the grave, who

would soon be carried away and put out of sight. But in a very few

days things got back into their places, and Aunt Stanbury had the

keys again. "I knew how it would be, miss," said Martha to her young

mistress, "and I didn't say nothing, 'cause you understand her so

well."

Mrs. Stanbury and Priscilla still live at the cottage, which,

however, to Priscilla's great disgust, has been considerably improved

and prettily furnished. This was done under the auspices of Hugh, but

with funds chiefly supplied from the house of Brooke, Dorothy, and

Co. Priscilla comes into Exeter to see her sister, perhaps, every

other week; but will never sleep away from home, and very rarely will

eat or drink at her sister's table. "I don't know why, I don't," she

said to Dorothy, "but somehow it puts me out. It delays me in my

efforts to come to the straw a day." Nevertheless, the sisters are

dear friends.

I fear that in some previous number a half promise was made that a

husband should be found for Camilla French. That half-promise cannot

be treated in the manner in which any whole promise certainly would

have been handled. There is no husband ready for Cammy French. The

reader, however, will be delighted to know that she made up her

quarrel with her sister and Mr. Gibson, and is now rather fond

of being a guest at Mr. Gibson's house. On her first return to

Exeter after the Gibsons had come back from their little Cornish

rustication, Camilla declared that she could not and would not bring

herself to endure a certain dress of which Bella was very fond;--and

as this dress had been bought for Camilla with special reference

to the glories of her anticipated married life, this objection was

almost natural. But Bella treated it as absurd, and Camilla at last

gave way.

It need only further be said that though Giles Hickbody and Martha

are not actually married as yet,--men and women in their class of

life always moving towards marriage with great precaution,--it is

quite understood that the young people are engaged, and are to be

made happy together at some future time.