IS HE POPENJOY?

by

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

Author of "Doctor Thorne," "The Prime Minister," "Orley Farm," &c., &c.

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IS HE POPENJOY?

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.--NUMBER ONE.

I would that it were possible so to tell a story that a reader should

beforehand know every detail of it up to a certain point, or be so

circumstanced that he might be supposed to know. In telling the little

novelettes of our life, we commence our narrations with the presumption

that these details are borne in mind, and though they be all forgotten,

the stories come out intelligible at last. "You remember Mary Walker.

Oh yes, you do;--that pretty girl, but such a queer temper! And how she

was engaged to marry Harry Jones, and said she wouldn't at the

church-door, till her father threatened her with bread and water; and

how they have been living ever since as happy as two turtle-doves down

in Devonshire,--till that scoundrel, Lieutenant Smith, went to

Bideford! Smith has been found dead at the bottom of a saw-pit.

Nobody's sorry for him. She's in a madhouse at Exeter; and Jones has

disappeared, and couldn't have had more than thirty shillings in his

pocket." This is quite as much as anybody ought to want to know

previous to the unravelling of the tragedy of the Jones's. But such

stories as those I have to tell cannot be written after that fashion.

We novelists are constantly twitted with being long; and to the

gentlemen who condescend to review us, and who take up our volumes with

a view to business rather than pleasure, we must be infinite in length

and tedium. But the story must be made intelligible from the beginning,

or the real novel readers will not like it. The plan of jumping at once

into the middle has been often tried, and sometimes seductively enough

for a chapter or two; but the writer still has to hark back, and to

begin again from the beginning,--not always very comfortably after the

abnormal brightness of his few opening pages; and the reader who is

then involved in some ancient family history, or long local

explanation, feels himself to have been defrauded. It is as though one

were asked to eat boiled mutton after woodcocks, caviare, or maccaroni

cheese. I hold that it is better to have the boiled mutton first, if

boiled mutton there must be.

The story which I have to tell is something in its nature akin to that

of poor Mrs. Jones, who was happy enough down in Devonshire till that

wicked Lieutenant Smith came and persecuted her; not quite so tragic,

perhaps, as it is stained neither by murder nor madness. But before I

can hope to interest readers in the perplexed details of the life of a

not unworthy lady, I must do more than remind them that they do know,

or might have known, or should have known the antecedents of my

personages. I must let them understand how it came to pass that so

pretty, so pert, so gay, so good a girl as Mary Lovelace, without any

great fault on her part, married a man so grim, so gaunt, so sombre,

and so old as Lord George Germain. It will not suffice to say that she

had done so. A hundred and twenty little incidents must be dribbled

into the reader's intelligence, many of them, let me hope, in such

manner that he shall himself be insensible to the process. But unless I

make each one of them understood and appreciated by my ingenious,

open-hearted, rapid reader,--by my reader who will always have his

fingers impatiently ready to turn the page,--he will, I know, begin to

masticate the real kernel of my story with infinite prejudices against

Mary Lovelace.

Mary Lovelace was born in a country parsonage; but at the age of

fourteen, when her life was in truth beginning, was transferred by her

father to the deanery of Brotherton. Dean Lovelace had been a fortunate

man in life. When a poor curate, a man of very humble origin, with none

of what we commonly call Church interest, with nothing to recommend him

but a handsome person, moderate education, and a quick intellect, he

had married a lady with a considerable fortune, whose family had bought

for him a living. Here he preached himself into fame. It is not at all

to be implied from this that he had not deserved the fame he acquired.

He had been active and resolute in his work, holding opinions which, if

not peculiar, were at any rate advanced, and never being afraid of the

opinions which he held. His bishop had not loved him, nor had he made

himself dear to the bench of bishops generally. He had the reputation

of having been in early life a sporting parson. He had written a book

which had been characterised as tending to infidelity, and had more

than once been invited to state dogmatically what was his own belief.

He had never quite done so, and had then been made a dean. Brotherton,

as all the world knows, is a most interesting little city, neither a

Manchester nor a Salisbury; full of architectural excellencies, given

to literature, and fond of hospitality. The Bishop of Brotherton,--who

did not love the dean,--was not a general favourite, being strict,

ascetic, and utterly hostile to all compromises. At first there were

certain hostile passages between him and the new dean. But the Dean,

who was and is urbanity itself, won the day, and soon became certainly

the most popular man in Brotherton. His wife's fortune doubled his

clerical income, and he lived in all respects as a dean ought to live.

His wife had died very shortly after his promotion, and he had been

left with one only daughter on whom to lavish his cares and his

affection.

Now we must turn for a few lines to the family of Lord George Germain.

Lord George was the brother of the Marquis of Brotherton, whose family

residence was at Manor Cross, about nine miles from the city. The

wealth of the family of the Germains was not equal to their rank, and

the circumstances of the family were not made more comfortable by the

peculiarities of the present marquis. He was an idle, self-indulgent,

ill-conditioned man, who found that it suited his tastes better to live

in Italy, where his means were ample, than on his own property, where

he would have been comparatively a poor man. And he had a mother and

four sisters, and a brother with whom he would hardly have known how to

deal had he remained at Manor Cross. As it was, he allowed them to keep

the house, while he simply took the revenue of the estate. With the

marquis I do not know that it will be necessary to trouble the reader

much at present. The old marchioness and her daughters lived always at

Manor Cross in possession of a fine old house in which they could have

entertained half the county, and a magnificent park,--which, however,

was let for grazing up to the garden-gates,--and a modest income

unequal to the splendour which should have been displayed by the

inhabitants of Manor Cross.

And here also lived Lord George Germain, to whom at a very early period

of his life had been entrusted the difficult task of living as the head

of his family with little or no means for the purpose. When the old

Marquis died,--very suddenly, and soon after the Dean's coming to

Brotherton,--the widow had her jointure, some two thousand a year, out

of the property, and the younger children had each a small settled sum.

That the four ladies,--Sarah, Alice, Susanna, and Amelia,--should have

sixteen thousand pounds among them, did not seem to be so very much

amiss to those who knew how poor was the Germain family; but what was

Lord George to do with four thousand pounds, and no means of earning a

shilling? He had been at Eton, and had taken a degree at Oxford with

credit, but had gone into no profession. There was a living in the

family, and both father and mother had hoped that he would consent to

take orders; but he had declined to do so, and there had seemed to be

nothing for him but to come and live at Manor Cross. Then the old

Marquis had died, and the elder brother, who had long been abroad,

remained abroad. Lord George, who was the youngest of the family, and

at that time about five-and-twenty, remained at Manor Cross, and became

not only ostensibly but in very truth the managing head of the family.

He was a man whom no one could despise, and in whom few could find much

to blame. In the first place he looked his poverty in the face, and

told himself that he was a very poor man. His bread he might earn by

looking after his mother and sisters, and he knew no other way in

which he could do so. He was a just steward, spending nothing to

gratify his own whims, acknowledging on all sides that he had nothing

of his own, till some began to think that he was almost proud of his

poverty. Among the ladies of the family, his mother and sisters, it was

of course said that George must marry money. In such a position there

is nothing else that the younger son of a marquis can do. But Lord

George was a person somewhat difficult of instruction in such a matter.

His mother was greatly afraid of him. Among his sisters Lady Sarah

alone dared to say much to him; and even to her teaching on this

subject he turned a very deaf ear. "Quite so, George," she said; "quite

so. No man with a spark of spirit would marry a woman for her

money,"--and she laid a great stress on the word "for,"--"but I do not

see why a lady who has money should be less fit to be loved than one

who has none. Miss Barm is a most charming young woman, of excellent

manners, admirably educated, if not absolutely handsome, quite of

distinguished appearance, and she has forty thousand pounds. We all

liked her when she was here." But there came a very black frown upon

Lord George's brow, and then even Lady Sarah did not dare to speak

again in favour of Miss Barm.

Then there came a terrible blow. Lord George Germain was in love with

his cousin, Miss De Baron! It would be long to tell, and perhaps

unnecessary, how that young lady had made herself feared by the ladies

of Manor Cross. Her father, a man of birth and fortune, but not perhaps

with the best reputation in the world, had married a Germain of the

last generation, and lived, when in the country, about twenty miles

from Brotherton. He was a good deal on the turf, spent much of his time

at card-playing clubs, and was generally known as a fast man. But he

paid his way, had never put himself beyond the pale of society, and

was, of course, a gentleman. As to Adelaide de Baron, no one doubted

her dash, her wit, her grace, or her toilet. Some also gave her credit

for beauty; but there were those who said that, though she would behave

herself decently at Manor Cross and houses of that class, she could be

loud elsewhere. Such was the lady whom Lord George loved, and it may be

conceived that this passion was distressing to the ladies of Manor

Cross. In the first place, Miss De Baron's fortune was doubtful and

could not be large; and then--she certainly was not such a wife as Lady

Brotherton and her daughters desired for the one male hope of the

family.

But Lord George was very resolute, and for a time it seemed to them all

that Miss de Baron,--of whom the reader will see much if he go through

with our story,--was not unwilling to share the poverty of her noble

lover. Of Lord George personally something must be said. He was a tall,

handsome, dark-browed man, silent generally and almost gloomy, looking,

as such men do, as though he were always revolving deep things in his

mind, but revolving in truth things not very deep,--how far the money

would go, and whether it would be possible to get a new pair of

carriage-horses for his mother. Birth and culture had given to him a

look of intellect greater than he possessed; but I would not have it

thought that he traded on this or endeavoured to seem other than he

was. He was simple, conscientious, absolutely truthful, full of

prejudices, and weak-minded. Early in life he had been taught to

entertain certain ideas as to religion by those with whom he had lived

at college, and had therefore refused to become a clergyman. The bishop

of the diocese had attacked him; but, though weak, he was obstinate.

The Dean and he had become friends, and so he had learned to think

himself in advance of the world. But yet he knew himself to be a

backward, slow, unappreciative man. He was one who could bear reproach

from no one else, but who never praised himself even to himself.

But we must return to his love, which is that which now concerns us.

His mother and sisters altogether failed to persuade him. Week after

week he went over to Baronscourt, and at last threw himself at

Adelaide's feet. This was five years after his father's death, when he

was already thirty years old. Miss De Baron, though never a favourite

at Manor Cross, knew intimately the history of the family. The present

marquis was over forty, and as yet unmarried;--but then Lord George was

absolutely a pauper. In that way she might probably become a

marchioness; but then of what use would life be to her, should she be

doomed for the next twenty years to live simply as one of the ladies of

Manor Cross? She consulted her father, but he seemed to be quite

indifferent, merely reminding her that though he would be ready to do

everything handsomely for her wedding, she would have no fortune till

after his death. She consulted her glass, and told herself that,

without self-praise, she must regard herself as the most beautiful

woman of her own acquaintance. She consulted her heart, and found that

in that direction she need not trouble herself. It would be very nice

to be a marchioness, but she certainly was not in love with Lord

George. He was handsome, no doubt--very handsome; but she was not sure

that she cared much for men being handsome. She liked men that "had

some go in them," who were perhaps a little fast, and who sympathised

with her own desire for amusement. She could not bring herself to fall

in love with Lord George. But then, the rank of a marquis is very high!

She told Lord George that she must take time to consider.

When a young lady takes time to consider she has, as a rule, given way,

Lord George felt it to be so, and was triumphant. The ladies at Manor

Cross thought that they saw what was coming, and were despondent. The

whole county declared that Lord George was about to marry Miss De

Baron. The county feared that they would be very poor; but the

recompence would come at last, as the present marquis was known not to

be a marrying man. Lady Sarah was mute with despair. Lady Alice had

declared that there was nothing for them but to make the best of it.

Lady Susanna, who had high ideas of aristocratic duty, thought that

George was forgetting himself. Lady Amelia, who had been snubbed by

Miss De Baron, shut herself up and wept. The Marchioness took to her

bed. Then, exactly at the same time, two things happened, both of which

were felt to be of vital importance at Manor Cross. Miss De Baron wrote

a most determined refusal to her lover, and old Mr. Tallowax died. Now

old Mr. Tallowax had been Dean Lovelace's father-in-law, and had never

had a child but she who had been the Dean's wife.

Lord George did in truth suffer dreadfully. There are men to whom such

a disappointment as this causes enduring physical pain,--as though they

had become suddenly affected with some acute and yet lasting disease.

And there are men, too, who suffer the more because they cannot conceal

the pain. Such a man was Lord George. He shut himself up for months at

Manor Cross, and would see no one. At first it was his intention to try

again, but very shortly after the letter to himself came one from Miss

De Baron to Lady Alice, declaring that she was about to be married

immediately to one Mr. Houghton; and that closed the matter. Mr.

Houghton's history was well known to the Manor Cross family. He was a

friend of Mr. De Baron, very rich, almost old enough to be the girl's

father, and a great gambler. But he had a house in Berkeley Square,

kept a stud of horses in Northamptonshire, and was much thought of at

Newmarket. Adelaide De Baron explained to Lady Alice that the marriage

had been made up by her father, whose advice she had thought it her

duty to take. The news was told to Lord George, and then it was found

expedient never to mention further the name of Miss De Baron within the

walls of Manor Cross.

But the death of Mr. Tallowax was also very important. Of late the Dean

of Brotherton had become very intimate at Manor Cross. For some years

the ladies had been a little afraid of him, as they were by no means

given to free opinions. But he made his way. They were decidedly high;

the bishop was notoriously low; and thus, in a mild manner, without

malignity on either side, Manor Cross and the Palace fell out. Their

own excellent young clergyman was snubbed in reference to his church

postures, and Lady Sarah was offended. But the Dean's manners were

perfect. He never trod on any one's toes. He was rich, and as far as

birth went, nobody,--but he knew how much was due to the rank of the

Germains. In all matters he obliged them, and had lately made the

deanery very pleasant to Lady Alice,--to whom a widowed canon at

Brotherton was supposed to be partial. The interest between the deanery

and Manor Cross was quite close; and now Mr. Tallowax had died leaving

the greater part of his money to the Dean's daughter.

When a man suffers from disappointed love he requires consolation.

Lady Sarah boldly declared her opinion,--in female conclave of

course,--that one pretty girl is as good to a man as another, and might

be a great deal better if she were at the same time better mannered and

better dowered than the other. Mary Lovelace, when her grandfather

died, was only seventeen. Lord George was at that time over thirty. But

a man of thirty is still a young man, and a girl of seventeen may be a

young woman. If the man be not more than fifteen years older than the

woman the difference of age can hardly be regarded as an obstacle. And

then Mary was much loved at Manor Cross. She had been a most engaging

child, was clever, well-educated, very pretty, with a nice sparkling

way, fond of pleasure no doubt, but not as yet instructed to be fast.

And now she would have at once thirty thousand pounds, and in course of

time would be her father's heiress.

All the ladies at Manor Cross put their heads together,--as did also

Mr. Canon Holdenough, who, while these things had been going on, had

been accepted by Lady Alice. They fooled Lord George to the top of his

bent, smoothing him down softly amidst the pangs of his love, not

suggesting Mary Lovelace at first, but still in all things acting in

that direction. And they so far succeeded that within twelve months of

the marriage of Adelaide De Baron to Mr. Houghton, when Mary Lovelace

was not yet nineteen and Lord George was thirty-three, with some few

grey hairs on his handsome head, Lord George did go over to the deanery

and offer himself as a husband to Mary Lovelace.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCTORY NUMBER TWO.

"What ought I to do, papa?" The proposition was in the first instance

made to Mary through the Dean. Lord George had gone to the father, and

the father with many protestations of personal goodwill, had declared

that in such a matter he would not attempt to bias his daughter. "That

the connection would be personally agreeable to myself, I need hardly

say," said the Dean. "For myself, I have no objection to raise. But I

must leave it to Mary. I can only say that you have my permission to

address her." But the first appeal to Mary was made by her father

himself, and was so made in conformity with his own advice. Lord

George, when he left the deanery, had thus arranged it, but had been

hardly conscious that the Dean had advised such an arrangement. And it

may be confessed between ourselves,--between me and my readers, who in

these introductory chapters may be supposed to be looking back together

over past things,--that the Dean was from the first determined that

Lord George should be his son-in-law. What son-in-law could he find

that would redound more to his personal credit, or better advance his

personal comfort. As to his daughter, where could a safer husband be

found! And then she might in this way become a marchioness! His own

father had kept livery stables at Bath. Her other grandfather had been

a candlemaker in the Borough. "What ought I to do, papa?" Mary asked,

when the proposition was first made to her. She of course admired the

Germains, and appreciated, at perhaps more than its full value the

notice she had received from them. She had thought Lord George to be

the handsomest man she had ever seen. She had heard of his love for

Miss De Baron, and had felt for him. She was not as yet old enough to

know how dull was the house at Manor Cross, or how little of resource

she might find in the companionship of such a man as Lord George. Of

her own money she knew almost nothing. Not as yet had her fortune

become as a carcase to the birds. And now, should she decide in Lord

George's favour, would she be saved at any rate from that danger.

"You must consult your own feelings, my dear," said her father. She

looked up to him in blank dismay. She had as yet no feelings.

"But, papa----"

"Of course, my darling, there is a great deal to be said in favour of

such a marriage. The man himself is excellent,--in all respects

excellent. I do not know that there is a young man of higher principles

than Lord George in the whole county."

"He is hardly a young man, papa."

"Not a young man! He is thirty. I hope you do not call that old. I

doubt whether men in his position of life should ever marry at an

earlier age. He is not rich."

"Would that matter?"

"No; I think not. But of that you must judge. Of course with your

fortune you would have a right to expect a richer match. But though he

has not money, he has much that money gives. He lives in a large house

with noble surroundings. The question is whether you can like him?"

"I don't know, papa." Every word she spoke she uttered hesitatingly.

When she had asked whether "that would matter," she had hardly known

what she was saying. The thing was so important to her, and yet so

entirely mysterious and as yet unconsidered, that she could not collect

her thoughts sufficiently for proper answers to her father's sensible

but not too delicate inquiries. The only ideas that had really struck

her were that he was grand and handsome, but very old.

"If you can love him I think you would be happy," said the Dean. "Of

course you must look at it all round. He will probably live to be the

Marquis of Brotherton. From all that I hear I do not think that his

brother is likely to marry. In that case you would be the Marchioness

of Brotherton, and the property, though not great, would then be

handsome. In the meanwhile you would be Lady George Germain, and would

live at Manor Cross. I should stipulate on your behalf that you should

have a house of your own in town, for, at any rate, a portion of the

year. Manor Cross is a fine place, but you would find it dull if you

were to remain there always. A married woman too should always have

some home of her own."

"You want me to do it, papa?"

"Certainly not. I want you to please yourself. If I find that you

please yourself by accepting this man, I myself shall be better pleased

than if you please yourself by rejecting him; but you shall never know

that by my manner. I shall not put you on bread and water, and lock you

up in the garret either if you accept him, or if you reject him." The

Dean smiled as he said this, as all the world at Brotherton knew that

he had never in his life even scolded his daughter.

"And you, papa?"

"I shall come and see you, and you will come and see me. I shall get on

well enough. I have always known that you would leave me soon. I am

prepared for that." There was something in this which grated on her

feelings. She had, perhaps, taught herself to believe that she was

indispensable to her father's happiness. Then after a pause he

continued: "Of course you must be ready to see Lord George when he

comes again, and you ought to remember, my dear, that marquises do not

grow on every hedge."

With great care and cunning workmanship one may almost make a silk

purse out of a sow's ear, but not quite. The care which Dean Lovelace

had bestowed upon the operation in regard to himself had been very

great, and the cunning workmanship was to be seen in every plait and

every stitch. But still there was something left of the coarseness of

the original material. Of all this poor Mary knew nothing at all; but

yet she did not like being told of marquises and hedges where her heart

was concerned. She had wanted,--had unconsciously wanted,--some touch

of romance from her father to satisfy the condition in which she found

herself. But there was no touch of romance there; and when she was left

to herself to work the matter out in her own heart and in her own mind

she was unsatisfied.

Two or three days after this Mary received notice that her lover was

coming. The Dean had seen him and had absolutely fixed a time. To poor

Mary this seemed to be most unromantic, most unpromising. And though

she had thought of nothing else since she had first heard of Lord

George's intention, though she had laid awake struggling to make up her

mind, she had reached no conclusion. It had become quite clear to her

that her father was anxious for the marriage, and there was much in it

which recommended it to herself. The old elms of the park of Manor

Cross were very tempting. She was not indifferent to being called My

Lady. Though she had been slightly hurt when told that marquises did

not grow on hedges, still she knew that it would be much to be a

marchioness. And the man himself was good, and not only good but very

handsome. There was a nobility about him beyond that of his family.

Those prone to ridicule might perhaps have called him Werter-faced, but

to Mary there was a sublimity in this. But then was she in love with

him?

She was a sweet, innocent, ladylike, high-spirited, joyous creature.

Those struggles of her father to get rid of the last porcine taint,

though not quite successful as to himself, had succeeded thoroughly in

regard to her. It comes at last with due care, and the due care had

here been taken. She was so nice that middle-aged men wished themselves

younger that they might make love to her, or older that they might be

privileged to kiss her. Though keenly anxious for amusement, though

over head and ears in love with sport and frolic, no unholy thought had

ever polluted her mind. That men were men, and that she was a woman,

had of course been considered by her. Oh, that it might some day be her

privilege to love some man with all her heart and all her strength,

some man who should be, at any rate to her, the very hero of heroes,

the cynosure of her world! It was thus that she considered the matter.

There could surely nothing be so glorious as being well in love. And

the one to be thus worshipped must of course become her husband.

Otherwise would her heart be broken, and perhaps his,--and all would be

tragedy. But with tragedy she had no sympathy. The loved one must

become her husband. But the pictures she had made to herself of him

were not at all like Lord George Germain. He was to be fair, with

laughing eyes, quick in repartee, always riding well to hounds. She had

longed to hunt herself, but her father had objected. He must be sharp

enough sometimes to others, though ever soft to her, with a silken

moustache and a dimpled chin, and perhaps twenty-four years old. Lord

George was dark, his eyes never laughed; he was silent generally, and

never went out hunting at all. He was dignified, and tall, very

handsome, no doubt,--and a lord. The grand question was that;--could

she love him? Could she make another picture, and paint him as her

hero? There were doubtless heroic points in the side wave of that

coal-black lock,--coal-black where the few grey hairs had not yet shown

themselves, in his great height, and solemn polished manners.

When her lover came, she could only remember that if she accepted him

she would please everybody. The Dean had taken occasion to assure her

that the ladies at Manor Cross would receive her with open arms. But on

this occasion she did not accept him. She was very silent, hardly able

to speak a word, and almost sinking out of sight when Lord George

endeavoured to press his suit by taking her hand. But she contrived at

last to make him the very answer that Adelaide De Baron had made. She

must take time to think of it. But the answer came from her in a

different spirit. She at any rate knew as soon as it was given that it

was her destiny in life to become Lady George Germain. She did not say

"Yes" at the moment, only because it is so hard for a girl to tell a

man that she will marry him at the first asking! He made his second

offer by letter, to which the Dean wrote the reply:--

"My dear Lord George,

"My daughter is gratified by your affection, and flattered by your

manner of showing it. A few plain words are perhaps the best. She

will be happy to receive you as her future husband, whenever it

may suit you to come to the deanery.

"Yours affectionately,

"HENRY LOVELACE."

Immediately upon this the conduct of Lord George was unexceptionable.

He hurried over to Brotherton, and as he clasped his girl in his arms,

he told her that he was the happiest man in England. Poor as he was he

made her a handsome present, and besought her if she had any mercy, any

charity, any love for him, to name an early day. Then came the four

ladies from Manor Cross,--for Lady Alice had already become Lady Alice

Holdenough,--and caressed her, and patted her, and petted her, and told

her that she should be as welcome as flowers in May. Her father, too,

congratulated her with more of enthusiasm, and more also of

demonstrated feeling than she had ever before seen him evince. He had

been very unwilling, he said, to express any strong opinion of his own.

It had always been his desire that his girl should please herself. But

now that the thing was settled he could assure her of his thorough

satisfaction. It was all that he could have desired; and now he would

be ready at any time to lay himself down, and be at rest. Had his girl

married a spendthrift lord, even a duke devoted to pleasure and

iniquity, it would have broken his heart. But he would now confess that

the aristocracy of the county had charms for him; and he was not

ashamed to rejoice that his child should be accepted within their pale.

Then he brushed a real tear from his eyes, and Mary threw herself into

his arms. The tear was real, and in all that he said there was not an

insincere word. It was to him a very glory of glories that his child

should be in the way of becoming the Marchioness of Brotherton. It was

even a great glory that she should be Lady George Germain. The Dean

never forgot the livery stable, and owned day and night that God had

been very good to him.

It was soon settled that Mary was to be allowed three months for

preparation, and that the marriage was to be solemnized in June. Of

course she had much to do in preparing her wedding garments, but she

had before her a much more difficult task than that at which she worked

most sedulously. It was now the great business of her life to fall in

love with Lord George. She must get rid of that fair young man with the

silky moustache and the darling dimple. The sallow, the sublime, and

the Werter-faced must be made to take the place of laughing eyes and

pink cheeks. She did work very hard, and sometimes, as she thought,

successfully. She came to a positive conclusion that he was the

handsomest man she ever saw, and that she certainly liked the few grey

hairs. That his manner was thoroughly noble no one could doubt. If he

were seen merely walking down the street he would surely be taken for a

great man. He was one of whom, as her husband, she could be always

proud;--and that she felt to be a great thing. That he would not play

lawn tennis, and that he did not care for riding were points in his

character to be regretted. Indeed, though she made some tenderly

cautious inquiries, she could not find what were his amusements. She

herself was passionately fond of dancing, but he certainly did not

dance. He talked to her, when he did talk, chiefly of his family, of

his own poverty, of the goodness of his mother and sisters, and of the

great regret which they all felt that they should have been deserted by

the head of their family.

"He has now been away," said Lord George, "for ten years; but not

improbably he may return soon, and then we shall have to leave Manor

Cross."

"Leave Manor Cross!"

"Of course we must do so should he come home. The place belongs to him,

and we are only there because it has not suited him to reside in

England."

This he said with the utmost solemnity, and the statement had been

produced by the answer which the Marquis had made to a letter

announcing to him his brother's marriage. The Marquis had never been a

good correspondent. To the ladies of the house he never wrote at all,

though Lady Sarah favoured him with a periodical quarterly letter. To

his agent, and less frequently to his brother, he would write curt,

questions on business, never covering more than one side of a sheet of

notepaper, and always signed "Yours, B." To these the inmates of Manor

Cross had now become accustomed, and little was thought of them; but on

this occasion he had written three or four complete sentences, which

had been intended to have, and which did have, a plain meaning. He

congratulated his brother, but begged Lord George to bear in mind that

he himself might not improbably want Manor Cross for his own purpose

before long. If Lord George thought it would be agreeable, Mr. Knox,

the agent, might have instructions to buy Miss Lovelace a present. Of

this latter offer Lord George took no notice; but the intimation

concerning the house sat gravely on his mind.

The Dean did exactly as he had said with reference to the house in

town. Of course it was necessary that there should be arrangements as

to money between him and Lord George, in which he was very frank.

Mary's money was all her own,--giving her an income of nearly Â£1500

per annum. The Dean was quite of opinion that this should be left to

Lord George's management, but he thought it right as Mary's father to

stipulate that his daughter should have a home of her own. Then he

suggested a small house in town, and expressed an opinion that his

daughter should be allowed to live there six months in the year. The

expense of such a sojourn might be in some degree shared by himself if

Lord George would receive him for a month or so in the spring. And so

the thing was settled, Lord George pledging himself that the house

should be taken. The arrangement was distasteful to him in many ways,

but it did not seem to be unreasonable, and he could not oppose it.

Then came the letter from the Marquis. Lord George did not consider

himself bound to speak of that letter to the Dean; but he communicated

the threat to Mary. Mary thought nothing about it, except that her

future brother-in-law must be a very strange man.

During all those three months she strove very hard to be in love, and

sometimes she thought that she had succeeded. In her little way she

studied the man's character, and did all she could to ingratiate

herself with him. Walking seemed to be his chief relaxation, and she

was always ready to walk with him. She tried to make herself believe

that he was profoundly wise. And then, when she failed in other things,

she fell back upon his beauty. Certainly she had never seen a handsomer

face, either on a man's shoulders or in a picture. And so they were

married.

Now I have finished my introduction,--having married my heroine to my

hero,--and have, I hope, instructed my reader as to those hundred and

twenty incidents, of which I spoke--not too tediously. If he will go

back and examine, he will find that they are all there. But perhaps it

will be better for us both that he should be in quiet possession of

them without any such examination.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE AT MANOR CROSS.

The married couple passed their honeymoon in Ireland, Lady Brotherton

having a brother, an Irish peer, who lent them for a few months his

house on the Blackwater. The marriage, of course, was celebrated in the

cathedral, and equally of course, the officiating clergymen were the

Dean and Canon Holdenough. On the day before the marriage Lord George

was astonished to find how rich a man was his father-in-law.

"Mary's fortune is her own," he said; "but I should like to give her

something. Perhaps I had better give it to you on her behalf."

Then he shuffled a cheque for a thousand pounds into Lord George's

hands. He moreover gave his daughter a hundred pounds in notes on the

morning of the wedding, and thus acted the part of the benevolent

father and father-in-law to a miracle. It may be acknowledged here that

the receipt of the money removed a heavy weight from Lord George's

heart. He was himself so poor, and at the same time so scrupulous, that

he had lacked funds sufficient for the usual brightness of a wedding

tour. He would not take his mother's money, nor lessen his own small

patrimony; but now it seemed that wealth was showered on him from the

deanery.

Perhaps a sojourn in Ireland did as well as anything could towards

assisting the young wife in her object of falling in love with her

husband. He would hardly have been a sympathetic companion in

Switzerland or Italy, as he did not care for lakes or mountains. But

Ireland was new to him and new to her, and he was glad to have an

opportunity of seeing something of a people as to whom so little is

really known in England. And at Ballycondra, on the Blackwater, they

were justified in feeling a certain interest in the welfare of the

tenants around them. There was something to be done, and something of

which they could talk. Lord George, who couldn't hunt, and wouldn't

dance, and didn't care for mountains, could enquire with some zeal how

much wages a peasant might earn, and what he would do with it when

earned. It interested him to learn that whereas an English labourer

will certainly eat and drink his wages from week to week,--so that he

could not be trusted to pay any sum half-yearly,--an Irish peasant,

though he be half starving, will save his money for the rent. And Mary,

at his instance, also cared for these things. It was her gift, as with

many women, to be able to care for everything. It was, perhaps, her

misfortune that she was apt to care too much for many things. The

honeymoon in Ireland answered its purpose, and Lady George, when she

came back to Manor Cross, almost thought that she had succeeded. She

was at any rate able to assure her father that she had been as happy as

the day was long, and that he was absolutely--"perfect."

This assurance of perfection the Dean no doubt took at its proper

value. He patted his daughter's cheek as she made it, and kissed her,

and told her that he did not doubt but that with a little care she

might make herself a happy woman. The house in town had already been

taken under his auspices, but of course was not to be inhabited yet.

It was a very small but a very pretty little house, in a quaint little

street called Munster Court, near Storey's Gate, with a couple of

windows looking into St. James's Park. It was now September, and London

for the present was out of the question. Indeed, it had been arranged

that Lord George and his wife should remain at Manor Cross till after

Christmas. But the house had to be furnished, and the Dean evinced his

full understanding of the duties of a father-in-law in such an

emergency. This, indeed, was so much the case that Lord George became a

little uneasy. He had the greater part of the thousand pounds left,

which he insisted on expending,--and thought that that should have

sufficed. But the Dean explained in his most cordial manner,--and no

man's manner could be more cordial than the Dean's,--that Mary's

fortune from Mr. Tallowax had been unexpected, that having had but one

child he intended to do well by her, and that, therefore, he could now

assist in starting her well in life without doing himself a damage. The

house in this way was decorated and furnished, and sundry journeys up

to London served to brighten the autumn which might otherwise have been

dull and tedious.

At this period of her life two things acting together, and both acting

in opposition to her anticipations of life, surprised the young bride

not a little. The one was her father's manner of conversation with her,

and the other was her husband's. The Dean had never been a stern

parent; but he had been a clergyman, and as a clergyman he had

inculcated a certain strictness of life,--a very modified strictness,

indeed, but something more rigid than might have come from him had he

been a lawyer or a country gentleman. Mary had learned that he wished

her to attend the cathedral services, and to interest herself

respecting them, and she had always done so. He had explained to her

that, although he kept a horse for her to ride, he, as the Dean of

Brotherton, did not wish her to be seen in the hunting field. In her

dress, her ornaments, her books, her parties, there had been always

something to mark slightly her clerical belongings. She had never

chafed against this because she loved her father and was naturally

obedient; but she had felt something perhaps of a soft regret. Now her

father, whom she saw very frequently, never spoke to her of any duties.

How should her house be furnished? In what way would she lay herself

out for London society? What enjoyments of life could she best secure?

These seemed to be the matters on which he was most intent. It occurred

to her that when speaking to her of the house in London he never once

asked her what church she would attend; and that when she spoke with

pleasure of being so near the Abbey, he paid little or no attention to

her remark. And then, too, she felt, rather than perceived, that in his

counsels to her he almost intimated that she must have a plan of life

different from her husband's. There were no such instructions given,

but it almost seemed as though this were implied. He took it for

granted that her life was to be gay and bright, though he seemed to

take it also for granted that Lord George did not wish to be gay and

bright.

All this surprised her. But it did not perhaps surprise her so much as

the serious view of life which her husband from day to day impressed

upon her. That hero of her early dreams, that man with the light hair

and the dimpled chin, whom she had not as yet quite forgotten, had

never scolded her, had never spoken a serious word to her, and had

always been ready to provide her with amusements that never palled. But

Lord George made out a course of reading for her,--so much for the two

hours after breakfast, so much for the hour before dressing,--so much

for the evening; and also a table of results to be acquired in three

months,--in six months,--and so much by the close of the first year;

and even laid down the sum total of achievements to be produced by a

dozen years of such work! Of course she determined to do as he would

have her do. The great object of her life was to love him; and, of

course, if she really loved him, she would comply with his wishes. She

began her daily hour of Gibbon after breakfast with great zeal. But

there was present to her an idea that if the Gibbon had come from her

father, and the instigations to amuse herself from her husband, it

would have been better.

These things surprised her; but there was another matter that vexed

her. Before she had been six weeks at Manor Cross she found that the

ladies set themselves up as her tutors. It was not the Marchioness who

offended her so much as her three sisters-in-law. The one of the family

whom she had always liked best had been also liked best by Mr.

Holdenough, and had gone to live next door to her father in the Close.

Lady Alice, though perhaps a little tiresome, was always gentle and

good-natured. Her mother-in-law was too much in awe of her own eldest

daughter ever to scold anyone. But Lady Sarah could be very severe; and

Lady Susanna could be very stiff; and Lady Amelia always re-echoed what

her elder sisters said.

Lady Sarah was by far the worst. She was forty years old, and looked as

though she were fifty and wished to be thought sixty. That she was, in

truth, very good, no one either at Manor Cross or in Brotherton or any

of the parishes around ever doubted. She knew every poor woman on the

estate, and had a finger in the making of almost every petticoat worn.

She spent next to nothing on herself, giving away almost all her own

little income. She went to church whatever was the weather. She was

never idle and never wanted to be amused. The place in the carriage

which would naturally have been hers she had always surrendered to one

of her sisters when there had been five ladies at Manor Cross, and now

she surrendered again to her brother's wife. She spent hours daily in

the parish school. She was doctor and surgeon to the poor

people,--never sparing herself. But she was harsh-looking, had a harsh

voice, and was dictatorial. The poor people had become used to her and

liked her ways. The women knew that her stitches never gave way, and

the men had a wholesome confidence in her medicines, her plasters, and

her cookery. But Lady George Germain did not see by what right she was

to be made subject to her sister-in-law's jurisdiction.

Church matters did not go quite on all fours at Manor Cross. The

ladies, as has before been said, were all high, the Marchioness being

the least exigeant in that particular, and Lady Amelia the most so.

Ritual, indeed, was the one point of interest in Lady Amelia's life.

Among them there was assent enough for daily comfort; but Lord George

was in this respect, and in this respect only, a trouble to them. He

never declared himself openly, but it seemed to them that he did not

care much about church at all. He would generally go of a Sunday

morning; but there was a conviction that he did so chiefly to oblige

his mother. Nothing was ever said of this. There was probably present

to the ladies some feeling, not uncommon, that religion is not so

necessary for men as for women. But Lady George was a woman.

And Lady George was also the daughter of a clergyman. There was now a

double connexion between Manor Cross and the Close at Brotherton. Mr.

Canon Holdenough, who was an older man than the Dean, and had been

longer known in the diocese, was a most unexceptional clergyman, rather

high, leaning towards the high and dry, very dignified, and quite as

big a man in Brotherton as the Dean himself. The Dean was, indeed, the

Dean; but Mr. Holdenough was uncle to a baronet, and the Holdenoughs

had been Holdenoughs when the Conqueror came. And then he also had a

private income of his own. Now all this gave to the ladies at Manor

Cross a peculiar right to be great in church matters,--so that Lady

Sarah was able to speak with much authority to Mary when she found that

the bride, though a Dean's daughter, would only go to two services a

week, and would shirk one of them if the weather gave the slightest

colouring of excuse.

"You used to like the cathedral services," Lady Sarah said to her, one

day, when Mary had declined to go to the parish church, to sing the

praises of St. Processus.

"That was because they were cathedral services," said Mary.

"You mean to say that you attended the House of God because the music

was good!" Mary had not thought the subject over sufficiently to be

enabled to say that good music is supplied with the object of drawing

large congregations, so she only shrugged her shoulders. "I, too, like

good music, dear; but I do not think the want of it should keep me from

church." Mary again shrugged her shoulders, remembering, as she did so,

that her sister-in-law did not know one tune from another. Lady Alice

was the only one of the family who had ever studied music.

"Even your papa goes on Saints' days," continued Lady Sarah, conveying

a sneer against the Dean by that word "even."

"Papa is Dean. I suppose he has to go."

"He would not go to church, I suppose, unless he approved of going."

The subject then dropped. Lady George had not yet arrived at that sort

of snarling home intimacy, which would have justified her in telling

Lady Sarah that if she wanted a lesson at all, she would prefer to take

it from her husband.

The poor women's petticoats was another source of trouble. Before the

autumn was over,--by the end of October,--when Mary had been two months

at Manor Cross, she had been got to acknowledge that ladies living in

the country should employ a part of their time in making clothes for

the poor people; and she very soon learned to regret the

acknowledgment. She was quickly driven into a corner by an assertion

from Lady Sarah that, such being the case, the time to be so employed

should be defined. She had intended to make something,--perhaps an

entire petticoat,--at some future time. But Lady Sarah was not going to

put up with conduct such as that. Mary had acknowledged her duty. Did

she mean to perform it, or to neglect it? She made one petticoat, and

then gently appealed to her husband. Did not he think that petticoats

could be bought cheaper than they could be made? He figured it out, and

found that his wife could earn three-halfpence a day by two hours'

work; and even Lady Sarah did not require from her more than two hours

daily. Was it worth while that she should be made miserable for

ninepence a week,--less than Â£2 a-year? Lady George figured it out

also, and offered the exact sum, Â£1 19\_s.\_, to Lady Sarah, in order

that she might be let off for the first twelve months. Then Lady Sarah

was full of wrath. Was that the spirit in which offerings were to be

made to the Lord? Mary was asked, with stern indignation, whether in

bestowing the work of her hands upon the people, whether in the very

fact that she was doing for the poor that which was distasteful to

herself, she did not recognise the performance of a duty? Mary

considered a while, and then said that she thought a petticoat was a

petticoat, and that perhaps the one made by the regular petticoat-maker

would be the best. She did not allude to the grand doctrine of the

division of labour, nor did she hint that she might be doing more harm

than good by interfering with regular trade, because she had not

studied those matters. But that was the line of her argument. Lady

Sarah told her that her heart in that matter was as hard as a nether

millstone. The young wife, not liking this, withdrew; and again

appealed to her husband. His mind was divided on the subject. He was

clearly of opinion that the petticoat should be obtained in the

cheapest market, but he doubted much about that three-halfpence in two

hours. It might be that his wife could not do better at present; but

experience would come, and in that case, she would be obtaining

experience as well as earning three-halfpence. And, moreover,

petticoats made at Manor Cross would, he thought, undoubtedly be better

than any that could be bought. He came, however, to no final decision;

and Mary, finding herself every morning sitting in a great petticoat

conclave, hardly had an alternative but to join it.

It was not in any spirit of complaint that she spoke on the subject to

her father as the winter came on. A certain old Miss Tallowax had come

to the deanery, and it had been thought proper that Lady George should

spend a day or two there. Miss Tallowax, also, had money of her own,

and even still owned a share in the business; and the Dean had pointed

out, both to Lord George and his wife, that it would be well that they

should be civil to her. Lord George was to come on the last day, and

dine and sleep at the deanery. On this occasion, when the Dean and his

daughter were alone together, she said something in a playful way about

the great petticoat contest.

"Don't you let those old ladies sit upon you," said the Dean. He smiled

as he spoke, but his daughter well knew, from his tone, that he meant

his advice to be taken seriously.

"Of course, papa, I should like to accommodate myself to them as much

as I can."

"But you can't, my dear. Your manner of life can't be their manner, nor

theirs yours. I should have thought George would see that."

"He didn't take their part, you know."

"Of course he didn't. As a married woman you are entitled to have your

own way, unless he should wish it otherwise. I don't want to make this

matter serious; but if it is pressed, tell them that you do not care to

spend your time in that way. They cling to old fashions. That is

natural enough; but it is absurd to suppose that they should make you

as old-fashioned as themselves."

He had taken the matter up quite seriously, and had given his daughter

advice evidently with the intention that she should profit by it. That

which he had said as to her being a married woman struck her forcibly.

No doubt these ladies at Manor Cross were her superiors in birth; but

she was their brother's wife, and as a married woman had rights of her

own. A little spirit of rebellion already began to kindle itself within

her bosom; but in it there was nothing of mutiny against her husband.

If he were to desire her to make petticoats all day, of course she

would make them; but in this contest he had been, as it were, neutral,

and had certainly given her no orders. She thought a good deal about it

while at the deanery, and made up her mind that she would sit in the

petticoat conclave no longer. It could not be her duty to pass her time

in an employment in which a poor woman might with difficulty earn

sixpence a day. Surely she might do better with her time than that,

even though she should spend it all in reading Gibbon.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE DEANERY.

There was a dinner-party at the deanery during Miss Tallowax's sojourn

at Brotherton. Mr. Canon Holdenough and Lady Alice were there. The

bishop and his wife had been asked,--a ceremony which was gone through

once a year,--but had been debarred from accepting the invitation by

the presence of clerical guests at the palace. But his lordship's

chaplain, Mr. Groschut, was present. Mr. Groschut also held an honorary

prebendal stall, and was on of the chapter,--a thorn sometimes in the

Dean's side. But appearances were well kept up at Brotherton, and no

one was more anxious that things should be done in a seemly way than

the Dean. Therefore, Mr. Groschut, who was a very low churchman and had

once been a Jew, but who bore a very high character for theological

erudition, was asked to the deanery. There was also one or two other

clergymen there, with their wives, and Mr. and Mrs. Houghton. Mrs.

Houghton, it will be remembered, was the beautiful woman who had

refused to become the wife of Lord George Germain. Before taking this

step, the Dean had been careful to learn whether his son-in-law would

object to meet the Houghtons. Such objection would have been foolish,

as the families had all known each other. Both Mr. De Baron, Mrs.

Houghton's father, and Mr. Houghton himself, had been intimate with the

late marquis, and had been friends of the present lord before he had

quitted the country. A lady when she refuses a gentleman gives no cause

of quarrel. All this the Dean understood; and as he himself had known

both Mr. Houghton and Mr. De Baron ever since he came to Brotherton, he

thought it better that there should be such a meeting. Lord George

blushed up to the roots of his hair, and then said that he should be

very glad to meet the gentleman and his wife.

The two young brides had known each other as girls, and now met with,

at any rate, an appearance of friendship.

"My dear," said Mrs. Houghton, who was about four years the elder, "of

course I know all about it, and so do you. You are an heiress, and

could afford to please yourself. I had nothing of my own, and should

have had to pass all my time at Manor Cross. Are you surprised?"

"Why should I be surprised?" said Lady George, who was, however, very

much surprised at this address.

"Well, you know; he is the handsomest man in England. Everybody allows

that; and, then, such a family--and such possibilities! I was very much

flattered. Of course he had not seen you then, or only seen you as a

child, or I shouldn't have had a chance. It is a great deal better as

it is,--isn't it?"

"I think so, certainly."

"I am so glad to hear that you have a house in town. We go up about the

first of April, when the hunting is over. Mr. Houghton does not ride

much, but he hunts a great deal. We live in Berkeley Square, you know;

and I do so hope we shall see ever so much of you."

"I'm sure I hope so too," said Lady George, who had never hitherto been

very fond of Miss De Baron, and had entertained a vague idea that she

ought to be a little afraid of Mrs. Houghton. But when her father's

guest was so civil to her she did not know how to be other than civil

in return.

"There is no reason why what has passed should make any

awkwardness;--is there?"

"No," said Lady George, feeling that she almost blushed at the allusion

to so delicate a subject.

"Of course not. Why should there? Lord George will soon get used to me,

just as if nothing had happened; and I shall always be ever so fond of

him,--in a way, you know. There shall be nothing to make you jealous."

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," said Lady George, almost too earnestly.

"You need not be, I'm sure. Not but what I do think he was at one time

very--very much attached to me. But it couldn't be. And what's the good

of thinking of such a thing when it can't be? I don't pretend to be

very virtuous, and I like money. Now Mr. Houghton, at any rate, has got

a large income. If I had had your fortune at my own command, I don't

say what I might not have done."

Lady George almost felt that she ought to be offended by all

this,--almost felt that she was disgusted; but, at the same time, she

did not quite understand it. Her father had made a point of asking the

Houghtons, and had told her that of course she would know the Houghtons

up in town. She had an idea that she was very ignorant of the ways of

life; but that now it would behove her, as a married woman, to learn

those ways. Perhaps the free and easy mode of talking was the right

thing. She did not like being told by another lady that that other lady

would have married her own husband, only that he was a pauper; and the

offence of all this seemed to be the greater because it was all so

recent. She didn't like being told that she was not to be jealous,

especially when she remembered that her husband had been desperately in

love with the lady who told her so not many months ago. But she was not

jealous, and was quite sure she never would be jealous; and, perhaps,

it did not matter. All this had occurred in the drawing-room before

dinner. Then Mr. Houghton came up to her, telling that he had been

commissioned by the Dean to have the honour of taking her down to

dinner. Having made his little speech, Mr. Houghton retired,--as

gentlemen generally do retire when in that position.

"Be as nice as you can to him," said Mrs. Houghton. "He hasn't much to

say for himself, but he isn't half a bad fellow; and a pretty woman

like you can do what she likes with him."

Lady George, as she went down to dinner, assured herself that she had

no slightest wish to take any unfair advantage of Mr. Houghton.

Lord George had taken down Miss Tallowax, the Dean having been very

wise in this matter; and Miss Tallowax was in a seventh heaven of

happiness. Miss Tallowax, though she had made no promises, was quite

prepared to do great things for her noble connexions, if her noble

connexions would treat her properly. She had already made half-a-dozen

wills, and was quite ready to make another, if Lord George would be

civil to her. The Dean was in his heart a little ashamed of his aunt;

but he was man enough to be able to bear her eccentricities without

showing his vexation, and sufficiently wise to know that more was to be

won than lost by the relationship.

"The best woman in the world," he had said to Lord George beforehand,

speaking of his aunt; "but, of course, you will remember that she was

not brought up as a lady."

Lord George, with stately urbanity, had signified his intention of

treating Miss Tallowax with every consideration.

"She has thirty thousand pounds at her own disposal," continued the

Dean. "I have never said a word to her about money, but, upon my

honour, I think she likes Mary better than any one else. It's worth

bearing in mind, you know."

Lord George smiled again in a stately manner,--perhaps showing

something of displeasure in his smile. But, nevertheless, he was well

aware that it was worth his while to bear Miss Tallowax and her money

in his mind.

"My lord," said Miss Tallowax, "I hope you will allow me to say how

much honoured we all feel by Mary's proud position." Lord George bowed

and smiled, and led the lady into the deanery dining-room. Words did

not come easily to him, and he hardly knew how to answer the lady. "Of

course, it's a great thing for people such as us," continued Miss

Tallowax, "to be connected with the family of a Marquis." Again Lord

George bowed. This was very bad, indeed,--a great deal worse than he

had anticipated from the aunt of so courtly a man as his father-in-law,

the Dean. The lady looked to be about sixty; very small, very healthy,

with streaky red cheeks, small grey eyes, and a brown front. Then came

upon him an idea, that it would be a very long time before the thirty

thousand pounds, or any part of it, would come to him. And then there

came to him another idea, that as he had married the Dean's daughter,

it was his duty to behave well to the Dean's aunt, even though the

money should never come to him. He therefore told Miss Tallowax that

his mother hoped to have the pleasure of seeing her at Manor Cross

before she left Brotherton. Miss Tallowax almost got out of her seat,

as she curtseyed with her head and shoulders to this proposition.

The Dean was a very good man at the head of his own dinner-table, and

the party went off pleasantly in spite of sundry attempts at clerical

pugnacity made by Mr. Groschut. Every man and every beast has his own

weapon. The wolf fights with his tooth, the bull with his horn, and Mr.

Groschut always fought with his bishop,--so taught by inner instinct.

The bishop, according to Mr. Groschut, was inclined to think that this

and that might be done. That such a change might be advantageously made

in reference to certain clerical meetings, and that the hilarity of the

diocese might be enhanced by certain evangelical festivities. These

remarks were generally addressed to Mr. Canon Holdenough, who made

almost no reply to them. But the Dean was, on each occasion, prepared

with some civil answer, which, while it was an answer, would still seem

to change the conversation. It was a law in the Close that Bishop

Barton should be never allowed to interfere with the affairs of

Brotherton Cathedral; and if not the bishop, certainly not the bishop's

chaplain. Though the Canon and the Dean did not go altogether on all

fours in reference to clerical affairs generally they were both agreed

on this point. But the Chaplain, who knew the condition of affairs as

well as they did, thought the law a bad law, and was determined to

abolish it. "It certainly would be very pleasant, Mr. Holdenough, if we

could have such a meeting within the confines of the Close. I don't

mean to-day, and I don't mean to-morrow; but we might think of it. The

bishop, who has the greatest love for the cathedral services, is very

much of that mind."

"I do not know that I care very much for any out-of-door gatherings,"

said the Canon.

"But why out of doors?" asked the Chaplain.

"Whatever meeting there is to be in the Close, will, I hope, be held in

the deanery," said the Dean; "but of all meetings, I must say that I

like meetings such as this, the best. Germain, will you pass the

bottle?" When they were alone together he always called his son-in-law,

George; but in company he dropped the more familiar name.

Mr. De Baron, Mrs. Houghton's father, liked his joke. "Sporting men,"

he said, "always go to a meet, and clerical men to a meeting. What's

the difference?"

"A good deal, if it is in the colour of the coat," said the Dean.

"The one is always under cover," said the Canon. "The other, I believe,

is generally held out of doors."

"There is, I fancy, a considerable resemblance in the energy of those

who are brought together," said the Chaplain.

"But clergymen ain't allowed to hunt, are they?" said Mr. Houghton,

who, as usual, was a little in the dark as to the subject under

consideration.

"What's to prevent them?" asked the Canon, who had never been out

hunting in his life, and who certainly would have advised a young

clergyman to abstain from the sport. But in asking the question, he was

enabled to strike a sidelong blow at the objectionable chaplain, by

seeming to question the bishop's authority.

"Their own conscience, I should hope," said the Chaplain, solemnly,

thereby parrying the blow successfully.

"I am very glad, then," said Mr. Houghton, "that I didn't go into the

Church." To be thought a real hunting man was the great object of Mr.

Houghton's ambition.

"I am afraid you would hardly have suited us, Houghton," said the Dean.

"Come, shall we go up to the ladies?"

In the drawing-room, after a little while, Lord George found himself

seated next to Mrs. Houghton--Adelaide De Baron, as she had been when

he had sighed in vain at her feet. How it had come to pass that he was

sitting there he did not know, but he was quite sure that it had come

to pass by no arrangement contrived by himself. He had looked at her

once since he had been in the room, almost blushing as he did so, and

had told himself that she was certainly very beautiful. He almost

thought that she was more beautiful than his wife; but he knew,--he

knew now,--that her beauty and her manners were not as well suited to

him as those of the sweet creature whom he had married. And now he was

once more seated close to her, and it was incumbent on him to speak to

her. "I hope," she said, almost in a whisper, but still not seeming to

whisper, "that we have both become very happy since we met last."

"I hope so, indeed," said he.

"There cannot, at least, be any doubt as to you, Lord George. I never

knew a sweeter young girl than Mary Lovelace; so pretty, so innocent,

and so enthusiastic. I am but a poor worldly creature compared to her."

"She is all that you say, Mrs. Houghton." Lord George also was

displeased,--more thoroughly displeased than had been his wife. But he

did not know how to show his displeasure; and though he felt it, he

still felt, also, the old influence of the woman's beauty.

"I am so delighted to have heard that you have got a house in Munster

Court. I hope that Lady George and I may be fast friends. Indeed, I

won't call her Lady George; for she was Mary to me before we either of

us thought of getting husbands for ourselves." This was not strictly

true, but of that Lord George could know nothing. "And I do hope,--may

I hope,--that you will call on me?"

"Certainly I will do so."

"It will add so much to the happiness of my life, if you will allow me

to feel that all that has come and gone has not broken the friendship

between us."

"Certainly not," said Lord George.

The lady had then said all that she had got to say, and changed her

position as silently as she had occupied it. There was no abruptness of

motion, and yet Lord George saw her talking to her husband at the other

side of the room, almost while his own words were still sounding in his

own ears. Then he watched her for the next few minutes. Certainly, she

was very beautiful. There was no room for comparison, they were so

unlike; otherwise, he would have been disposed to say that Adelaide was

the more beautiful. But Adelaide certainly would not have suited the

air of Manor Cross, or have associated well with Lady Sarah.

On the next day the Marchioness and Ladies Susannah and Amelia drove

over to the deanery in great state, to call on Miss Tallowax, and to

take Lady George back to Manor Cross. Miss Tallowax enjoyed the company

of the Marchioness greatly. She had never seen a lady of that rank

before. "Only think how I must feel," she said to her niece, that

morning, "I, that never spoke to any one above a baronet's lady in my

life."

"I don't think you'll find much difference," said Mary.

"You're used to it. You're one of them yourself. You're above a

baronet's lady,--ain't you, my dear?"

"I have hardly looked into all that as yet, aunt." There must surely

have been a little fib in this, or the Dean's daughter must have been

very much unlike other young ladies.

"I suppose I ought to be afraid of you, my dear; only you are so nice

and so pretty. And as for Lord George, he was quite condescending."

Lady George knew that praise was intended, and therefore made no

objection to the otherwise objectionable epithet.

The visit of the Marchioness was passed over with the less disturbance

to Miss Tallowax because it was arranged that she was to be taken over

to lunch at Manor Cross on the following day. Lord George had said a

word, and Lady Sarah had consented, though, as a rule, Lady Sarah did

not like the company of vulgar people. The peasants of the parish, down

to the very poorest of the poor, were her daily companions. With them

she would spend hours, feeling no inconvenience from their language or

habits. But she did not like gentlefolk who were not gentle. In days

now long gone by, she had only assented to the Dean, because holy

orders are supposed to make a gentleman; for she would acknowledge a

bishop to be as grand a nobleman as any, though he might have been born

the son of a butcher. But nobility and gentry cannot travel backwards,

and she had been in doubt about Miss Tallowax. But even with the Lady

Sarah a feeling has made its way which teaches them to know that they

must submit to some changes. The thing was to be regretted, but Lady

Sarah knew that she was not strong enough to stand quite alone. "You

know she is very rich," the Marchioness had said in a whisper; "and if

Brotherton marries, your poor brother will want it so badly."

"That ought not to make any difference, mamma," said Lady Sarah.

Whether it did make any difference or not, Lady Sarah herself probably

hardly knew; but she did consent to the asking of Miss Tallowax to

lunch at Manor Cross.

CHAPTER V.

MISS TALLOWAX IS SHOWN THE HOUSE.

The Dean took his aunt over to Manor Cross in his brougham. The Dean's

brougham was the neatest carriage in Brotherton, very much more so than

the bishop's family carriage. It was, no doubt, generally to be seen

with only one horse; and neither the bishop or Mrs. Barton ever stirred

without two; but then one horse is enough for town work, and that one

horse could lift his legs and make himself conspicuous in a manner of

which the bishop's rather sorry jades knew nothing. On this occasion,

as the journey was long, there were two horses--hired; but,

nevertheless, the brougham looked very well as it came up the long

Manor Cross avenue. Miss Tallowax became rather frightened as she drew

near to the scene of her coming grandeur.

"Henry," she said to her nephew, "they will think so little of me."

"My dear aunt," replied the Dean, "in these days a lady who has plenty

of money of her own can hold her head up anywhere. The dear old

marchioness will think quite as much of you as you do of her."

What perhaps struck Miss Tallowax most at the first moment was the

plainness of the ladies' dresses. She, herself, was rather gorgeous in

a shot-silk gown and a fashionable bonnet crowded with flowers. She had

been ashamed of the splendour of the article as she put it on, and yet

had been ashamed also of her ordinary daily head gear. But when she saw

the Marchioness, and especially when she saw Lady Sarah, who was

altogether strange to her, she wished that she had come in her

customary black gown. She had heard something about Lady Sarah from her

niece, and had conceived an idea that Lady Sarah was the dragon of the

family. But when she saw a little woman, looking almost as old as

herself,--though in truth the one might have been the other's

mother,--dressed in an old brown merino, with the slightest morsel of

white collar to be seen round her neck, she began to hope that the

dragon would not be very fierce.

"I hope you like Brotherton, Miss Tallowax," said Lady Sarah. "I think

I have heard that you were here once before."

"I like Brotherton very much, my lady." Lady Sarah smiled as graciously

as she knew how. "I came when they first made Henry dean, a long time

ago now it seems. But he had not then the honour of knowing your mamma

or the family."

"It wasn't long before we did know him," said the Marchioness. Then

Miss Tallowax turned round and again curtseyed with her head and

shoulders.

The Dean at this moment was not in the room, having been withdrawn from

the ladies by his son-in-law at the front door; but as luncheon was

announced, the two men came in. Lord George gave his arm to his wife's

great aunt, and the Dean followed with the Marchioness.

"I really am a'most ashamed to walk out before her ladyship," said Miss

Tallowax, with a slight attempt at laughing at her own ignorance.

But Lord George rarely laughed at anything, and certainly did not know

how to treat pleasantly such a subject as this. "It's quite customary,"

he said very gravely.

The lunch was much more tremendous to Miss Tallowax than had been the

dinner at the deanery. Though she was ignorant,--ignorant at any rate

of the ways of such people as those with whom she was now

consorting,--she was by no means a stupid old woman. She was soon able

to perceive that in spite of the old merino gown, it was Lady Sarah's

spirit that quelled them all. At first there was very little

conversation. Lord George did not speak a word. The Marchioness never

exerted herself. Poor Mary was cowed and unhappy. The Dean made one or

two little efforts, but without much success. Lady Sarah was intent

upon her mutton chop, which she finished to the last shred, turning it

over and over in her plate so that it should be economically disposed

of, looking at it very closely because she was short-sighted. But when

the mutton chop had finally done its duty, she looked up from her plate

and gave evident signs that she intended to take upon herself the

weight of the conversation. All the subsequent ceremonies of the lunch

itself, the little tarts and the jelly, and the custard pudding, she

despised altogether, regarding them as wicked additions. One pudding

after dinner she would have allowed, but nothing more of that sort. It

might be all very well for parvenu millionaires to have two grand

dinners a-day, but it could not be necessary that the Germains should

live in that way, even when the Dean of Brotherton and his aunt came to

lunch with them.

"I hope you like this part of the country, Miss Tallowax," she said, as

soon as she had deposited her knife and fork over the bone.

"Manor Cross is quite splendid, my lady," said Miss Tallowax.

"It is an old house, and we shall have great pleasure in showing you

what the people call the state rooms. We never use them. Of course you

know the house belongs to my brother, and we only live here because it

suits him to stay in Italy."

"That's the young Marquis, my lady?"

"Yes; my elder brother is Marquis of Brotherton, but I cannot say that

he is very young. He is two years my senior, and ten years older than

George."

"But I think he's not married yet?" asked Miss Tallowax.

The question was felt to be disagreeable by them all. Poor Mary could

not keep herself from blushing, as she remembered how much to her might

depend on this question of her brother-in-law's marriage. Lord George

felt that the old lady was enquiring what chance there might be that

her grand niece should ever become a marchioness. Old Lady Brotherton,

who had always been anxious that her elder son should marry, felt

uncomfortable, as did also the Dean, conscious that all there must be

conscious how important must be the matter to him.

"No," said Lady Sarah, with stately gravity; "my elder brother is not

yet married. If you would like to see the rooms, Miss Tallowax, I shall

have pleasure in showing you the way."

The Dean had seen the rooms before, and remained with the old lady.

Lord George, who thought very much of everything affecting his own

family, joined the party, and Mary felt herself compelled to follow her

husband and her aunt. The two younger sisters also accompanied Lady

Sarah.

"This is the room in which Queen Elizabeth slept," said Lady Sarah,

entering a large chamber on the ground floor, in which there was a

four-post bedstead, almost as high as the ceiling, and looking as

though no human body had profaned it for the last three centuries.

"Dear me," said Miss Tallowax, almost afraid to press such sacred

boards with her feet. "Queen Elizabeth! Did she really now?"

"Some people say she never did actually come to Manor Cross at all,"

said the conscientious Lady Amelia; "but there is no doubt that the

room was prepared for her."

"Laws!" said Miss Tallowax, who began to be less afraid of distant

royalty now that a doubt was cast on its absolute presence.

"Examining the evidence as closely as we can," said Lady Sarah, with a

savage glance at her sister, "I am inclined to think that she certainly

did come. We know that she was at Brotherton in 1582, and there exists

the letter in which Sir Humphrey Germaine, as he was then, is desired

to prepare rooms for her. I myself have no doubt on the subject."

"After all it does not make much difference," said Mary.

"I think it makes all the difference in the world," said Lady Susanna.

"That piece of furniture will always be sacred to me, because I

believe it did once afford rest and sleep to the gracious majesty of

England."

"It do make a difference, certainly," said Miss Tallowax, looking at

the bed with all her eyes. "Does anybody ever go to bed here now?"

"Nobody, ever," said Lady Sarah. "Now we will go through to the great

dining hall. That's the portrait of the first earl."

"Painted by Kneller," said Lady Amelia, proudly.

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Tallowax.

"There is some doubt as to that," said Lady Sarah. "I have found out

that Sir Godfrey Kneller was only born in 1648, and as the first earl

died a year or two after the restoration, I don't know that he could

have done it."

"It was always said that it was painted by Kneller," said Lady Amelia.

"There has been a mistake, I fear," said Lady Sarah.

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Tallowax, looking up with intense admiration at

a very ill-drawn old gentleman in armour. Then they entered the state

dining-room or hall, and Miss Tallowax was informed that the room had

not been used for any purpose whatever for very many years. "And such a

beautiful room!" said Miss Tallowax, with much regret.

"The fact is, I believe, that the chimney smokes horribly," said Lord

George.

"I never remember a fire here," said Lady Sarah. "In very cold weather

we have a portable stove brought in, just to preserve the furniture.

This is called the old ball room."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Miss Tallowax, looking round at the faded yellow

hangings.

"We did have a ball here once," said Lady Amelia, "when Brotherton came

of age. I can just remember it."

"Has it never been used since?" asked Mary.

"Never," said Lady Sarah. "Sometimes when it's rainy we walk up and

down for exercise. It is a fine old house, but I often wish that it

were smaller. I don't think people want rooms of this sort now as much

as they used to do. Perhaps a time may come when my brother will make

Manor Cross gay again, but it is not very gay now. I think that is all,

Miss Tallowax."

"It's very fine;--very fine indeed," said Miss Tallowax, shivering.

Then they all trooped back into the morning room which they used for

their daily life.

The old lady when she had got back into the brougham with her nephew,

the Dean, was able to express her mind freely. "I wouldn't live in that

house, Henry, not if they was to give it me for nothing."

"They'd have to give you something to keep it up with."

"And not then, neither. Of course it's all very well having a bed that

Queen Elizabeth slept in."

"Or didn't sleep in."

"I'd teach myself to believe she did. But dear me, that isn't

everything. It nearly gave me the horrors to look at it. Room after

room,--room after room,--and nobody living in any of them."

"People can't live in more than a certain number of rooms at once,

aunt."

"Then what's the use of having them? And don't you think for the

daughters of a Marchioness they are a little what you'd call--dowdy?"

"They don't go in for dress much."

"Why, my Jemima at home, when the dirty work is done, is twice smarter

than Lady Sarah. And, Henry,--don't you think they're a little hard

upon Mary?"

"Hard upon her;--how?" The Dean had listened to the old woman's

previous criticisms with a smile; but now he was interested and turned

sharply round to her. "How hard?"

"Moping her up there among themselves; and it seemed to me they snubbed

her whenever she spoke." The Dean had not wanted his aunt's observation

to make him feel this. The tone of every syllable addressed to his girl

had caught his ear. He had been pleased to marry her into so good a

family. He had been delighted to think that by means of his prosperity

in the world his father's grand-daughter might probably become a

peeress. But he certainly had not intended that even for such a reward

as that his daughter should become submissive to the old maids at Manor

Cross. Foreseeing something of this he had stipulated that she should

have a house of her own in London; but half her time would probably be

spent in the country, and with reference to that half of her time it

would be necessary that she should be made to understand that as the

wife of Lord George she was in no respect inferior to his sisters, and

that in some respects she was their superior. "I don't see the good of

living in a big house," continued Miss Tallowax, "if all the time

everything is to be as dull as dull."

"They are older than she is, you know."

"Poor little dear! I always did say that young folk should have young

folk about 'em. Of course it's a great thing for her to have a lord for

her husband. But he looks a'most too old himself for such a pretty

darling as your Mary."

"He's only thirty-three."

"It's in the looks, I suppose, because he's so grand. But it's that

Lady Sarah puzzles me. It isn't in her looks, and yet she has it all

her in own way. Well;--I liked going there, and I'm glad I've been; but

I don't know as I shall ever want to go again." Then there was silence

for some time; but as the brougham was driven into Brotherton Miss

Tallowax spoke again. "I don't suppose an old woman like me can ever be

of any use, and you'll always be at hand to look after her. But if ever

she should want an outing, just to raise her spirits, old as I am, I

think I could make it brighter for her than it is there." The Dean took

her hand and pressed it, and then there was no more said.

When the brougham was driven away Lord George took his wife for a walk

in the park. She was still struggling hard to be in love with him,

never owning failure to herself, and sometimes assuring herself that

she had succeeded altogether. Now, when he asked her to come with him,

she put on her hat joyfully, and joined her hands over his arm as she

walked away with him into the shrubbery.

"She's a wonderful old woman;--is not she, George?"

"Not very wonderful."

"Of course you think she's vulgar."

"I didn't say so."

"No; you're too good to say so, because she's papa's aunt. But she's

very good. Don't you think she's very good?"

"I dare say she is. I don't know that I run into superlatives quite so

much as you do."

"She has brought me such a handsome present. I could not show it you

before them all just now, and it only came down from London this

morning. She did not say a word about it before. Look here." Then she

slipped her glove off and showed him a diamond ring.

"You should not wear that out of doors."

"I only put it on to show you. Wasn't it good of her? 'Young people of

rank ought to wear nice things,' she said, as she gave it me. Wasn't it

an odd thing for her to say? and yet I understood her." Lord George

frowned, thinking that he also understood the old woman's words, and

reminding himself that the ladies of rank at Manor Cross never did wear

nice things. "Don't you think it was nice?"

"Of course she is entitled to make you a present if she pleases."

"It pleased me, George."

"I dare say, and as it doesn't displease me all is well. You, however,

have quite sense enough to understand, that in this house more is

thought of--of--of--" he would have said blood, but that he did not

wish to hurt her,--"more is thought of personal good conduct than of

rings and jewels."

"Rings and jewels, and--personal conduct may go together; mayn't they?"

"Of course they may."

"And very often do. You won't think my--personal conduct--will be

injured because I wear my aunt's ring?"

When Lord George made his allusion to personal conduct one of her two

hands dropped from his arm, and now, as she repeated the words, there

was a little sting of sarcasm in her voice.

"I was intending to answer your aunt's opinion that young people ought

to wear nice things. No doubt there is at present a great rage for rich

ornaments and costly dress, and it was of these she was thinking when

she spoke of nice things. When I spoke of personal conduct being more

thought of here, I intended to imply that you had come into a family

not given to rich ornaments and costly dress. My sisters feel that

their portion in this world is assured to them without such outward

badges, and wish that you should share the feeling."

This was a regular sermon, and to Mary's thinking was very

disagreeable, and not at all deserved. Did her husband really mean to

tell her that, because his sisters chose to dress themselves down in

the country like dowdy old maids whom the world had deserted, she was

to do the same up in London? The injustice of this on all sides struck

home to her at the moment. They were old and she was young. They were

plain; she was pretty. They were poor; she was rich. They didn't feel

any wish to make themselves what she called "nice." She did feel a very

strong wish in that direction. They were old maids; she was a young

bride. And then what right had they to domineer over her, and to send

word to her through her husband of their wishes as to her manner of

dressing? She said nothing at the moment; but she became red, and began

to feel that she had power within her to rebel at any rate against her

sisters-in-law. There was silence for a moment or so, and then Lord

George reverted to the subject.

"I hope you can sympathise with my sisters," he said. He had felt that

the hand had been dropped, and had understood something of the reason.

She wished to rebel against them, but by no means wished to oppose him.

She was aware, as though by instinct, that her life would be very bad

indeed should she fail to sympathise with him. It was still the

all-paramount desire of her heart to be in love with him. But she could

not bring herself to say that she sympathised with them in this direct

attack that was made on her own mode of thought.

"Of course, they are a little older than I am," she said, hoping to get

out of the difficulty.

"And therefore, the more entitled to consideration. I think you will

own that they must know what is, and what is not, becoming to a lady."

"Do you mean," said she, hardly able to choke a rising sob, "that

they--have anything--to find fault with in me?"

"I have said nothing as to finding fault, Mary."

"Do they think that I do not dress as I ought to do?"

"Why should you ask such a question as that?"

"I don't know what else I am to understand, George. Of course I will

do anything that you tell me. If you wish me to make any change, I will

make it. But I hope they won't send me messages through you."

"I thought you would have been glad to know that they interested

themselves about you." In answer to this Mary pouted, but her husband

did not see the pout.

"Of course they are anxious that you should become one of them. We are

a very united family. I do not speak now of my elder brother, who is in

a great measure separated from us and is of a different nature. But my

mother, my sisters, and I, have very many opinions in common. We live

together, and have the same way of thinking. Our rank is high, and our

means are small. But to me blood is much more than wealth. We

acknowledge, however, that rank demands many sacrifices, and my sisters

endeavour to make those sacrifices most conscientiously. A woman more

thoroughly devoted to good works than Sarah I have never even read of.

If you will believe this, you will understand what they mean, and what

I mean, when we say that here at Manor Cross we think more of personal

conduct than of rings and jewels. You wish, Mary, to be one of us; do

you not?"

She paused for a moment, and then she answered, "I wish to be always

one with you."

He almost wanted to be angry at this, but it was impossible. "To be one

with me, dearest," he said, "you must be one, also, with them."

"I cannot love them as I do you, George. That, I am sure, is not the

meaning of being married." Then she thought of it all steadily for a

minute, and after that, made a further speech. "And I don't think I can

quite dress like them. I'm sure you would not like it if I did."

As she said this she put her second hand back upon his arm.

He said nothing further on the subject till he had brought her back to

the house, walking along by her side almost mute, not quite knowing

whether he ought to be offended with her or to take her part. It was

true that he would not have liked her to look like Lady Sarah, but he

would have liked her to make some approach in that direction,

sufficient to show submission. He was already beginning to fear the

absence of all control which would befall his young wife in that London

life to which, she was to be so soon introduced, and was meditating

whether he could not induce one of his sisters to accompany them. As to

Sarah he was almost hopeless. Amelia would be of little or no service,

though she would be more likely to ingratiate herself with his wife

than the others. Susanna was less strong than Sarah and less amiable

than Amelia. And then, how would it be if Mary were to declare that she

would rather begin the campaign without any of them?

The young wife, as soon as she found herself alone in her own bedroom,

sat down and resolved that she would never allow herself to be

domineered by her husband's sisters. She would be submissive to him in

all things, but his authority should not be delegated to them.

CHAPTER VI.

BAD TIDINGS.

About the middle of October, there came a letter from the Marquis of

Brotherton to his brother, which startled them all at Manor Cross very

much indeed. In answering Lord George's communication as to the

marriage, the Marquis had been mysterious and disagreeable;--but then

he was always disagreeable and would on occasions take the trouble to

be mysterious also. He had warned his brother that he might himself

want the house at Manor Cross; but he had said the same thing

frequently during his residence in Italy, being always careful to make

his mother and sisters understand that they might have to take

themselves away any day at a very short warning. But now the short

warning had absolutely come, and had come in such a shape as to upset

everything at Manor Cross, and to upset many things at the Brotherton

Deanery. The letter was as follows:--

"My dear George,

"I am to be married to the Marchesa Luigi. Her name is Catarina

Luigi, and she is a widow. As to her age, you can ask herself when

you see her, if you dare. I haven't dared. I suppose her to be ten

years younger than myself. I did not expect that it would be so,

but she says now that she would like to live in England. Of course

I've always meant to go back myself some day. I don't suppose we

shall be there before May, but we must have the house got ready.

My mother and the girls had better look out for a place as soon as

they can. Tell my mother of course I will allow her the rent of

Cross Hall, to which indeed she is entitled. I don't think she

would care to live there, and neither she nor the girls would get

on with my wife.

"Yours, B.

"I am waiting to know about getting the house painted and

furnished."

When Lord George received this letter, he showed it first in privacy to

his sister Sarah. As the reader will have understood, there had never

been any close family affection between the present Marquis and his

brothers and sisters; nor had he been a loving son to his mother. But

the family at Manor Cross had always endeavoured to maintain a show of

regard for the head of the family, and the old Marchioness would no

doubt have been delighted had her eldest son come home and married an

English wife. Lady Sarah, in performing what she had considered to be a

family duty, had written regular despatches to her elder brother,

telling him everything that happened about the place,--despatches which

he, probably, never read. Now there had come a blow indeed. Lady Sarah

read the letter, and then looked into her brother's face.

"Have you told Mary?" she asked.

"I have told no one."

"It concerns her as much as any of us. Of course, if he has married, it

is right that he should have his house. We ought to wish that he should

live hero."

"If he were different from what he is," said Lord George.

"If she is good it may be that he will become different. It is not the

thing, but the manner in which he tells it to us! Did you ever hear her

name before?"

"Never."

"What a way he has of mentioning her;--about her age," said Lady Sarah,

infinitely shocked. "Well! Mamma must be told, of course. Why shouldn't

we live at Cross Hall? I don't understand what he means about that.

Cross Hall belongs to mamma for her life, as much as Manor Cross does

to him for his."

Just outside the park gate, at the side of the park furthest away from

Brotherton, and therefore placed very much out of the world, there

stood a plain substantial house built in the days of Queen Anne, which

had now for some generations been the habitation of the dowager of the

Brotherton family. When the late marquis died, this had become for her

life the property of the Marchioness; but had been ceded by her to her

son, in return for the loan of the big house. The absentee Marquis had

made with his mother the best bargain in his power, and had let the

dower house, known as Cross Hall, to a sporting farmer. He now kindly

offered to allow his mother to have the rent of her own house,

signifying at the same time his wish that all his family should remove

themselves out of his way.

"He wishes that we should take ourselves off," said Lord George,

hoarsely.

"But I do not see why we are to give way to his wishes. George, where

are we to go? Of what use can we be in a strange country? Wherever we

are we shall be very poor, but our money will go further here than

elsewhere. How are we to get up new interests in life? The land is his,

but the poor people belong to us as much as to him. It is

unreasonable."

"It is frightfully selfish."

"I for one am not prepared to obey him in this," said Lady Sarah. "Of

course mamma will do as she pleases, but I do not see why we should go.

He will never live here all the year through."

"He will be sick of it after a month. Will you read the letter to my

mother?"

"I will tell her, George. She had better not see the letter, unless she

makes a point of it. I will read it again, and then do you keep it. You

should tell Mary at once. It is natural that she should have built

hopes on the improbability of Brotherton's marriage."

Before noon on that day the news had been disseminated through the

house. The old Marchioness, when she first heard of the Italian wife,

went into hysterics, and then was partly comforted by reminding herself

that all Italians were not necessarily bad. She asked after the letter

repeatedly; and at last, when it was found to be impossible to explain

to her otherwise what her eldest son meant about the houses, it was

shown to her. Then she began to weep afresh.

"Why mayn't we live at Cross Hall, Sarah?" she said.

"Cross Hall belongs to you, mamma, and nothing can hinder you from

living there."

"But Augustus says that we are to go away."

The Marchioness was the only one of the family who ever called the

Marquis by his Christian name, and she did so only when she was much

disturbed.

"No doubt he expresses a wish that we should do so?"

"Where are we to go to, and I at my age?"

"I think you should live at Cross Hall."

"But he says that we mayn't. We could never go on there if he wants us

to go away."

"Why not, mamma? It is your house as much as this is his. If you will

let him understand that when you leave this you mean to go there, he

will probably say nothing more about it."

"Mr. Price is living there. I can't make Mr. Price go away directly the

painter people come in here. They'll come to-morrow, perhaps, and what

am I to do then?"

The matter was discussed throughout the whole day between Lady Sarah

and her mother, the former bearing the old woman's plaintive weakness

with the utmost patience, and almost succeeding, before the evening

came, in inducing her mother to agree to rebel against the tyranny of

her son. There were peculiar difficulties and peculiar hardships in the

case. The Marquis could turn out all the women of his family at a day's

notice. He had only to say to them, "Go!" and they must be gone. And he

could be rid of them without even saying or writing another word. A

host of tradesmen would come, and then of course they must go. But Mr.

Price at Cross Hall must have a regular year's notice, and that notice

could not now be given till Lady-day next.

"If the worst comes to the worst, mamma we will go and live in

Brotherton for the time. Mr. Holdenough or the Dean would find some

place for us." Then the old lady began to ask how Mary had borne the

news; but as yet Lady Sarah had not been able to interest herself

personally about Mary.

Lord George was surprised to find how little his wife was affected by

the terrible thunderbolt which had fallen among them. On him the blow

had been almost as terrible as on his mother. He had taken a house in

town, at the instance of the Dean, and in consequence of a promise made

before his marriage, which was sacred to him but which he regretted. He

would have preferred himself to live the whole year through at Manor

Cross. Though he had not very much to do there the place was never dull

to him. He liked the association of the big house. He liked the sombre

grandeur of the park. He liked the magistrates' bench, though he rarely

spoke a word when he was there. And he liked the thorough economy of

the life. But as to that house in town, though his wife's fortune would

enable him to live there four or five months, he knew that he could not

stretch the income so as to bear the expense of the entire year. And

yet, what must he do now? If he could abandon the house in town, then

he could join his mother as to some new country house. But he did not

dare to suggest that the house in town should be abandoned. He was

afraid of the Dean, and afraid, so to say, of his own promise. The

thing had been stipulated, and he did not know how to go back from the

stipulation.

"Going to leave Manor Cross," said Mary, when she was told. "Dear me;

how odd. Where will they go to?"

It was evident to her husband from the tone of her voice that she

regarded her own house in Munster Court, for it was her own, as her

future residence,--as hers and his. In asking where "they" would live,

she spoke of the other ladies of the family. He had expected that she

would have shown some disappointment at the danger to her future

position which this new marriage would produce. But in regard to that

she was, he thought, either perfectly indifferent, or else a very good

actor. In truth, she was almost indifferent. The idea that she might

some day be Lady Brotherton had been something to her, but not much.

Her happiness was not nearly as much disturbed by this marriage as it

had been by the allusion made to her dress. She herself could hardly

understand the terrible gloom which seemed during that evening and the

whole of the next day to have fallen on the entire family.

"George, does it make you very unhappy?" she said, whispering to him on

the morning of the second day.

"Not that my brother should marry," he said, "God forbid that I, as a

younger brother, should wish to debar him from any tittle of what

belongs to him. If he would marry well it ought to be a joy to us all."

"Is not this marrying well?"

"What, with a foreigner; with an Italian widow? And then there will, I

fear, be great trouble in finding a comfortable home for my mother."

"Amelia says she can go to Cross Hall."

"Amelia does not know what she is talking of. It would be very long

before they could get into Cross Hall, even if they can go there at

all. It would have to be completely furnished, and there is no money to

furnish it."

"Wouldn't your brother----?" Lord George shook his head. "Or papa."

Lord George again shook his head--"What will they do?"

"If it were not for our house in London we might take a place in the

country together," said Lord George.

All the various facts of the proposition now made to her flashed upon

Mary's mind at once. Had it been suggested to her, when she was first

asked to marry Lord George, that she should live permanently in a

country house with his mother and sisters, in a house of which she

would not be and could not be the mistress, she would certainly have

rejected the offer. And now the tedium of such a life was plainer to

her than it would have been then. But, under her father's auspices, a

pleasant, gay little house in town had been taken for her, and she had

been able to gild the dullness of Manor Cross with the brightness of

her future prospects. For four or five months she would be her own

mistress, and would be so in London. Her husband would be living on her

money, but it would be the delight of her heart that he should be happy

while doing so. And all this must be safe and wise, because it was to

be done under the advice of her father. Now it was proposed to her that

she should abandon all this and live in some smaller, poorer, duller

country residence, in which she would be the least of the family

instead of the mistress of her own house. She thought of it all for a

moment, and then she answered him with a firm voice.

"If you wish to give up the house in London we will do so."

"It would distress you I fear." When we call on our friends to

sacrifice themselves, we generally wish them also to declare that they

like being sacrificed.

"I should be disappointed of course, George."

"And it would be unjust," said he.

"If you wish it I will not say a word against it."

On that afternoon he rode into Brotherton to tell the tidings to the

Dean. Upon whatever they might among them decide, it was expedient that

the Dean should be at once told of the marriage. Lord George, as he

thought over it all on horseback, found difficulties on every side. He

had promised that his wife should live in town, and he could not go

back from that promise without injustice. He understood the nature of

her lately offered sacrifice, and felt that it would not liberate his

conscience. And then he was sure that the Dean would be loud against

any such arrangement. The money no doubt was Mary's own money and,

subject to certain settlement, was at Lord George's immediate disposal;

but he would be unable to endure the Dean's reproaches. He would be

unable also to endure his own, unless--which was so very

improbable--the Dean should encourage him. But how were things to be

arranged? Was he to desert his mother and sisters in their difficulty?

He was very fond of his wife; but it had never yet occurred to him that

the daughter of Dean Lovelace could be as important to him as all the

ladies of the house of Germain. His brother purposed to bring his wife

to Manor Cross in May, when he would be up in London. Where at that

moment, and after what fashion, would his mother and sisters be living?

The Dean showed his dismay at the marriage plainly enough.

"That's very bad, George," he said; "very bad indeed!"

"Of course we don't like her being a foreigner."

"Of course you don't like his marrying at all. Why should you? You all

know enough of him to be sure that he wouldn't marry the sort of woman

you would approve."

"I don't know why my brother should not have married any lady in

England."

"At any rate he hasn't. He has married some Italian widow, and it's a

misfortune. Poor Mary!"

"I don't think Mary feels it at all."

"She will some day. Girls of her age don't feel that kind of thing at

first. So he is going to come over at once. What will your mother do?"

"She has Cross Hall."

"That man Price is there. He will go out of course?"

"With notice he must go."

"He won't stand about that, if you don't interfere with his land and

farm-yard. I know Price. He's not a bad fellow."

"But Brotherton does not want them to go there," said Lord George,

almost in a whisper.

"Does not want your mother to live in her own house! Upon my word the

Marquis is considerate to you all! He has said that plainly, has he? If

I were Lady Brotherton I would not take the slightest heed of what he

says. She is not dependent on him. In order that he may be relieved

from the bore of being civil to his own family she is to be sent out

about the world to look for a home in her old age! You must tell her

not to listen for a minute to such a proposition."

Lord George, though he put great trust in his father-in-law, did not

quite like hearing his brother spoken of so very freely by a man who

was, after all, the son of a tradesman. It seemed to him as though the

Dean made himself almost too intimate with the affairs at Manor Cross,

and yet he was obliged to go on and tell the Dean everything.

"Even if Price went, there must be some delay in getting the house

ready."

"The Marquis surely won't turn your mother out before the spring?"

"Tradesmen will have to come in. And then I don't quite know what we

are to do as to the----expense of furnishing the new house. It will

cost a couple of thousand pounds, and none of us have ready money." The

Dean assumed a very serious face. "Every spoon and fork at Manor Cross,

every towel and every sheet belongs to my brother."

"Was not the Cross House ever furnished?"

"Many years ago; in my grandmother's time. My father left money for the

purpose, but it was given up to my sister Alice when she married

Holdenough." He found himself explaining all the little intricacies of

his family to the Dean, because it was necessary that he should hold

council with some one. "I was thinking of a furnished house for them

elsewhere."

"In London?"

"Certainly not there. My mother would not like it, nor would my

sisters. I like the country very much the best myself."

"Not for the whole year?"

"I have never cared to be in London; but, of course, as for Mary and

myself that is settled. You would not wish her to give up the house in

Munster Court?"

"Certainly not. It would not be fair to her to ask her to live always

under the wing of your mother and sisters. She would never learn to be

a woman. She would always be in leading strings. Do you not feel that

yourself?"

"I feel that beggars cannot be choosers. My mother's fortune is Â£2000 a

year. As you know we have only 5000\_l.\_ a piece. There is hardly income

enough among us for a house in town and a house in the country."

The Dean paused a moment, and then replied that his daughter's welfare

could not be made subordinate to that of the family generally. He then

said that if any immediate sum of money were required he would lend it

either to the dowager or to Lord George.

Lord George, as he rode home, was angry both with himself and with the

Dean. There had been an authority in the Dean's voice which had grated

upon his feelings; of course he intended to be as good as his word;

but, nevertheless, his wife was his wife and subject to his will; and

her fortune had been her own and had not come from the Dean. The Dean

took too much upon himself. And yet, with all that, he had consulted

the Dean about everything, and had confessed the family poverty. The

thing, however, was quite certain to him; he could not get out of the

house in town.

During the whole of that day Lady Sarah had been at work with her

mother, instigating her to insist on her own rights, and at last she

had succeeded.

"What would our life be, mamma," Lady Sarah had said, "if we were

removed altogether into a new world. Here we are of some use. People

know us, and give us credit for being what we are. We can live after

our own fashion, and yet live in accordance with our rank. There is not

a man or a woman or a child in the parish whom I do not know. There is

not a house in which you would not see Amelia's and Susanna's work. We

cannot begin all that over again."

"When I am gone, my dear, you must do so."

"Who can say how much may be done before that sad day shall come to us?

He may have taken his Italian wife back again to Italy. Mamma, we ought

not to run away from our duties."

On the following morning it was settled among them that the dowager

should insist on possession of her own house at Cross Hall, and a

letter was written to the Marquis, congratulating him of course on his

marriage, but informing him at the same time that the family would

remain in the parish.

Some few days later Mr. Knox, the agent for the property, came down

from London. He had received the orders of the Marquis, and would be

prepared to put workmen into the house as soon as her ladyship would be

ready to leave it. But he quite agreed that this could not be done at

once. A beginning no doubt might be made while they were still there,

but no painting should be commenced or buildings knocked down or put up

till March. It was settled at the same time that on the first of March

the family should leave the house.

"I hope my son won't be angry," the Marchioness said to Mr. Knox.

"If he be angry, my lady, he will be angry without a cause. But I never

knew him to be very angry about anything."

"He always did like to have his own way, Mr. Knox," said the mindful

mother.

CHAPTER VII.

"CROSS HALL GATE."

While Mr. Knox was still in the country negociations were opened with

Mr. Price, the sporting farmer, who, like all sporting farmers, was in

truth a very good fellow. He had never been liked by the ladies at

Manor Cross, as having ways of his own which were not their ways. He

did not go to church as often as they thought he ought to do; and,

being a bachelor, stories were told about him which were probably very

untrue. A bachelor may live in town without any inquiries as to any of

the doings of his life; but if a man live forlorn and unmarried in a

country house, he will certainly become the victim of calumny should

any woman under sixty ever be seen about his place. It was said also of

Mr. Price that sometimes, after hunting, men had been seen to go out of

his yard in an uproarious condition. But I hardly think that old Sir

Simon Bolt, the master of the hounds, could have liked him so well, or

so often have entered his house, had there been much amiss there; and

as to the fact of there always being a fox in Cross Hall Holt, which a

certain little wood was called about half a mile of the house, no one

even doubted that. But there had always been a prejudice against Price

at the great house, and in this even Lord George had coincided. But

when Mr. Knox went to him and explained to him what was about to

happen,--that the ladies would be forced, almost before the end of

winter, to leave Manor Cross and make way for the Marquis, Mr. Price

declared that he would clear out, bag and baggage, top-boots, spurs,

and brandy-bottles, at a moment's notice. The Prices of the English

world are not, as a rule, deficient in respect for the marquises and

marchionesses. "The workmen can come in to-morrow," Price said, when he

was told that some preparations would be necessary. "A bachelor can

shake down anywhere, Mr. Knox." Now it happened that Cross Hall House

was altogether distinct from the Cross Hall Farm, on which, indeed,

there had been a separate farmhouse, now only used by labourers. But

Mr. Price was a comfortable man, and, when the house had been vacant,

had been able to afford himself the luxury of living there.

So far the primary difficulties lessened themselves when they were well

looked in the face. And yet things did not run altogether smoothly. The

Marquis did not condescend to reply to his brother's letter; but he

wrote what was for him a long letter to Mr. Knox, urging upon the agent

the duty of turning his mother and sisters altogether out of the place.

"We shall be a great deal better friends apart," he said. "If they

remain there we shall see little or nothing of each other, and it will

be very uncomfortable. If they will settle themselves elsewhere, I will

furnish a house for them; but I don't want to have them at my elbow."

Mr. Knox was of course bound to show this to Lord George, and Lord

George was bound to consult Lady Sarah. Lady Sarah told her mother

something of it, but not all; but she told it in such a way that the

old lady consented to remain and to brave her eldest son. As for Lady

Sarah herself, in spite of her true Christianity and real goodness, she

did not altogether dislike the fight. Her brother was her brother, and

the head of the family, and he had his privileges; but they too had

their rights, and she was not disposed to submit herself to tyranny.

Mr. Knox was therefore obliged to inform the Marquis in what softest

language he could find applicable for the purpose that the ladies of

the family had decided upon removing to the dower-house.

About a month after this there was a meet of the Brotherton Hunt, of

which Sir Simon Bolt was the master, at Cross Hall Gate. The

grandfather of the present Germains had in the early part of the

century either established this special pack, or at any rate become the

master of it. Previous to that the hunting probably had been somewhat

precarious; but there had been, since his time, a regular Brotherton

Hunt associated with a collar and button of its own,--a blue collar on

a red coat, with B. H. on the buttons,--and the thing had been done

well. They had four days a week, with an occasional bye, and 2500\_l.\_

were subscribed annually. Sir Simon Bolt had been the master for the

last fifteen years, and was so well known that no sporting pen and no

sporting tongue in England ever called him more than Sir Simon. Cross

Hall Gate, a well-loved meet, was the gate of the big park which opened

out upon the road just opposite to Mr. Price's house. It was an old

stone structure, with a complicated arch stretching across the gate

itself, with a lodge on each side. It lay back in a semi-circle from

the road, and was very imposing. In old days no doubt the gate was much

used, as the direct traffic from London to Brotherton passed that way.

But the railway had killed the road; and as the nearer road from the

Manor Cross House to the town came out on the same road much nearer to

Brotherton, the two lodges and all the grandeur were very much wasted.

But it was a pretty site for a meet when the hounds were seated on

their haunches inside the gate, or moving about slowly after the

huntsman's horse, and when the horses and carriages were clustered

about on the high road and inside the park. And it was a meet, too,

much loved by the riding men. It was always presumed that Manor Cross

itself was preserved for foxes, and the hounds were carefully run

through the belt of woods. But half an hour did that, and then they

went away to Price's Little Holt. On that side there were no more

gentlemen's places; there was a gorse cover or two and sundry little

spinnies; but the county was a country for foxes to run and men to

ride; and with this before them, the members of the Brotherton Hunt

were pleased to be summoned to Cross Hall Gate.

On such occasions Lord George was always there. He never hunted, and

very rarely went to any other meet; but on these occasions he would

appear mounted, in black, and would say a few civil words to Sir Simon,

and would tell George Scruby, the huntsman, that he had heard that

there was a fox among the laurels. George would touch his hat and say

in his loud, deep voice, "Hope so, my lord," having no confidence

whatever in a Manor Cross fox. Sir Simon would shake hands with him,

make a suggestion about the weather, and then get away as soon as

possible; for there was no sympathy and no common subject between the

men. On this occasion Lady Amelia had driven down Lady Susanna in the

pony-carriage, and Lady George was there, mounted, with her father the

Dean, longing to be allowed to go away with the hounds but having been

strictly forbidden by her husband to do so. Mr. Price was of course

there, as was also Mr. Knox, the agent, who had a little shooting-box

down in the country, and kept a horse, and did a little hunting.

There was good opportunity for talking as the hounds were leisurely

taken through the loose belt of woods which were by courtesy called the

Manor Cross coverts, and Mr. Price took the occasion of drawing a

letter from his pocket and showing it to Mr. Knox.

"The Marquis has written to you!" said the agent in a tone of surprise,

the wonder not being that the Marquis should write to Mr. Price, but

that he should write to any one.

"Never did such a thing in his life before, and I wish he hadn't now."

Mr. Knox wished it also when he had read the letter. It expressed a

very strong desire on the part of the Marquis that Mr. Price should

keep the Cross Hall House, saying that it was proper that the house

should go with the farm, and intimating the Marquis's wish that Mr.

Price should remain as his neighbour. "If you can manage it, I'll make

the farm pleasant and profitable to you," said the Marquis.

"He don't say a word about her ladyship," said Price; "but what he

wants is just to get rid of 'em all, box and dice."

"That's about it, I suppose," said the agent.

"Then he's come to the wrong shop, that's what he has done, Mr. Knox.

I've three more year of my lease of the farm, and after that, out I

must go, I dare say."

"There's no knowing what may happen before that, Price."

"If I was to go, I don't know that I need quite starve, Mr. Knox."

"I don't suppose you will."

"I ain't no family, and I don't know as I'm just bound to go by what a

lord says, though he is my landlord. I don't know as I don't think more

of them ladies than I does of him. ---- him, Mr. Knox."

And then Mr. Price used some very strong language indeed. "What right

has he to think as I'm going to do his dirty work? You may tell him

from me as he may do his own."

"You'll answer him, Price?"

"Not a line. I ain't got nothing to say to him. He knows I'm a-going

out of the house; and if he don't, you can tell him."

"Where are you going to?"

"Well, I was going to fit up a room or two in the old farmhouse; and if

I had anything like a lease, I wouldn't mind spending three or four

hundred pounds there. I was thinking of talking to you about it, Mr.

Knox."

"I can't renew the lease without his approval."

"You write and ask him, and mind you tell him that there ain't no doubt

at all as to any going out of Cross Hall after Christmas. Then, if

he'll make it fourteen years, I'll put the old house up and not ask him

for a shilling. As I'm a living sinner, they're on a fox! Who'd have

thought of that in the park? That's the old vixen from the holt, as

sure as my name's Price. Them cubs haven't travelled here yet."

So saying, he rode away, and Mr. Knox rode after him, and there was

consternation throughout the hunt. It was so unaccustomed a thing to

have to gallop across Manor Cross Park! But the hounds were in full

cry, through the laurels, and into the shrubbery, and round the

conservatory, close up to the house. Then she got into the

kitchen-garden, and back again through the laurels. The butler and the

gardener and the housemaid and the scullery-maid were all there to see.

Even Lady Sarah came to the front door, looking very severe, and the

old Marchioness gaped out of her own sitting-room window upstairs. Our

friend Mary thought it excellent fun, for she was really able to ride

to the hounds; and even Lady Amelia became excited as she flogged the

pony along the road. Stupid old vixen, who ought to have known better!

Price was quite right, for it was she, and the cubs in the holt were

now finally emancipated from all maternal thraldom. She was killed

ignominiously in the stokehole under the greenhouse,--she who had been

the mother of four litters, and who had baffled the Brotherton hounds

half a dozen times over the cream of the Brotherton country!

"I knew it," said Price in a melancholy tone, as he held up the head

which the huntsman had just dissevered from the body. "She might 'a

done better with herself than come to such a place as this for the last

move."

"Is it all over?" asked Lady George.

"That one is pretty nearly all over, miss," said George Scruby, as he

threw the fox to the hounds. "My Lady, I mean, begging your Ladyship's

pardon." Some one had prompted him at the moment. "I'm very glad to see

your Ladyship out, and I hope we'll show you something better before

long."

But poor Mary's hunting was over. When George Scruby and Sir Simon and

the hounds went off to the holt, she was obliged to remain with her

husband and sisters-in-law.

While this was going on Mr. Knox had found time to say a word to Lord

George about that letter from the Marquis. "I am afraid," he said,

"your brother is very anxious that Price should remain at Cross Hall."

"Has he said anything more?"

"Not to me; but to Price he has."

"He has written to Price?"

"Yes, with his own hand, urging him to stay. I cannot but think it was

very wrong." A look of deep displeasure came across Lord George's face.

"I have thought it right to mention it, because it may be a question

whether her Ladyship's health and happiness may not be best consulted

by her leaving the neighbourhood."

"We have considered it all, Mr. Knox, and my mother is determined to

stay. We are very much obliged to you. We feel that in doing your duty

by my brother you are anxious to be courteous to us. The hounds have

gone on; don't let me keep you."

Mr. Houghton was of course out. Unless the meets were very distant from

his own place, he was always out. On this occasion his wife also was

there. She had galloped across the park as quickly as anybody, and when

the fox was being broken up in the grass before the hall-door, was

sitting close to Lady George. "You are coming on?" she said in a

whisper.

"I am afraid not," answered Mary.

"Oh, yes; do come. Slip away with me. Nobody'll see you. Get as far as

the gate, and then you can see that covert drawn."

"I can't very well. The truth is, they don't want me to hunt."

"They! Who is they? 'They' don't want me to hunt. That is, Mr. Houghton

doesn't. But I mean to get out of his way by riding a little forward. I

don't see why that is not just as good as staying behind. Mr. Price is

going to give me a lead. You know Mr. Price?"

"But he goes everywhere."

"And I mean to go everywhere. What's the good of half-doing it? Come

along."

But Mary had not even thought of rebellion such as this--did not in her

heart approve of it, and was angry with Mrs. Houghton. Nevertheless,

when she saw the horsewoman gallop off across the grass towards the

gate, she could not help thinking that she would have been just as well

able to ride after Mr. Price as her old friend Adelaide de Baron. The

Dean did go on, having intimated his purpose of riding on just to see

Price's farm.

When the unwonted perturbation was over at Manor Cross Lord George was

obliged to revert again to the tidings he had received from Mr. Knox.

He could not keep it to himself. He felt himself obliged to tell it all

to Lady Sarah.

"That he should write to such a man as Mr. Price, telling him of his

anxiety to banish his own mother from her own house!"

"You did not see the letter?"

"No; but Knox did. They could not very well show such a letter to me;

but Knox says that Price was very indignant, and swore that he would

not even answer it."

"I suppose he can afford it, George? It would be very dreadful to ruin

him."

"Price is a rich man. And after all, if Price were to do all that

Brotherton desires him, he could only keep us out for a year or so. But

don't you think you will all be very uncomfortable here. How will my

mother feel if she isn't ever allowed to see him? And how will you feel

if you find that you never want to see his wife?"

Lady Sarah sat silent for a few minutes before she answered him, and

then declared for war. "It is very bad, George; very bad. I can foresee

great unhappiness; especially the unhappiness which must come from

constant condemnation of one whom we ought to wish to love and approve

of before all others. But nothing can be so bad as running away. We

ought not to allow anything to drive mamma from her own house, and us

from our own duties. I don't think we ought to take any notice of

Brotherton's letter to Mr. Price." It was thus decided between them

that no further notice should be taken of the Marquis's letter to Mr.

Price.

CHAPTER VIII.

PUGSBY BROOK.

There was great talking about the old vixen as they all trotted away to

Cross Hall Holt;--how it was the same old fox that they hadn't killed

in a certain run last January, and how one old farmer was quite sure

that this very fox was the one which had taken them that celebrated run

to Bamham Moor three years ago, and how she had been the mother of

quite a Priam's progeny of cubs. And now that she should have been

killed in a stokehole! While this was going on a young lady rode up

along side of Mr. Price, and said a word to him with her sweetest

smile.

"You remember your promise to me, Mr. Price?"

"Surely, Mrs. Houghton. Your nag can jump a few, no doubt."

"Beautifully. Mr. Houghton bought him from Lord Mountfencer. Lady

Mountfencer couldn't ride him because he pulls a little. But he's a

perfect hunter."

"We shall find him, Mrs. Houghton, to a moral; and do you stick to me.

They generally go straight away to Thrupp's larches. You see the little

wood. There's an old earth there, but that's stopped. There is only one

fence between this and that, a biggish ditch, with a bit of a hedge on

this side, but it's nothing to the horses when they're fresh."

"Mine's quite fresh."

"Then they mostly turn to the right for Pugsby; nothing but grass then

for four miles a-head."

"And the jumping?"

"All fair. There's one bit of water,--Pugsby Brook,--that you ought to

have as he'll be sure to cross it ever so much above the bridge. But,

lord love you, Mrs. Houghton, that horse'll think nothing of the

brook."

"Nothing at all, Mr. Price. I like brooks."

"I'm afraid he's not here, Price," said Sir Simon, trotting round the

cover towards the whip, who was stationed at the further end.

"Well, Sir Simon, her as we killed came from the holt, you know," said

the farmer, mindful of his reputation for foxes. "You can't eat your

cake and have it too, can you, Sir Simon?"

"Ought to be able in a covert like this."

"Well, perhaps we shall. The best lying is down in that corner. I've

seen a brace of cubs together there a score of times." Then there was

one short low, dubious, bark, and then another a little more confirmed.

"That's it, Sir Simon. There's your 'cake.'"

"Good hound, Blazer," cried Sir Simon, recognising the voice of his

dog. And many of the pack recognised the well-known sound as plainly as

the master, for you might hear the hounds rustling through the covert

as they hurried up to certify to the scent which their old leader had

found for them. The holt though thick was small and a fox had not much

chance but by breaking. Once up the covert and once back again the

animal went, and then Dick, the watchful whip, holding his hand up to

his face, holloaed him away. "Gently, gentlemen," shouted Sir Simon,

"let them settle. Now, Mr. Bottomley, if you'll only keep yourself a

little steady, you'll find yourself the better for it at the finish."

Mr. Bottomley was a young man from London, who was often addressed

after this fashion, was always very unhappy for a few minutes, and then

again forgot it in his excitement.

"Now, Mr. Price," said Mrs. Houghton in a fever of expectation. She had

been dodging backwards and forwards trying to avoid her husband, and

yet unwilling to leave the farmer's side.

"Wait a moment, ma'am; wait a moment. Now we're right; here to the

left." So saying Mr. Price jumped over a low hedge, and Mrs. Houghton

followed him, almost too closely. Mr. Houghton saw it, and didn't

follow. He had made his way up, resolved to stop his wife, but she gave

him the slip at the last moment. "Now through the gate, ma'am, and then

on straight as an arrow for the little wood. I'll give you a lead over

the ditch, but don't ride quite so close, ma'am." Then the farmer went

away feeling perhaps that his best chance of keeping clear from his too

loving friend was to make the pace so fast that she should not be able

quite to catch him. But Lady Mountfencer's nag was fast too, was fast

and had a will of his own. It was not without a cause that Lord

Mountfencer had parted with so good a horse out of his stable. "Have a

care, ma'am," said Price, as Mrs. Houghton canoned against him as they

both landed over the big ditch; "have a care, or we shall come to grief

together. Just see me over before you let him take his jump." It was

very good advice, and is very often given; but both ladies and

gentlemen, whose hands are a little doubtful, sometimes find themselves

unable to follow it. But now they were at Thrupp's larches. George

Scruby had led the way, as becomes a huntsman, and a score or more had

followed him over the big fence. Price had been going a little to the

left, and when they reached the wood was as forward as any one.

"He won't hang here, Sir Simon," said the farmer, as the master came

up, "he never does."

"He's only a cub," said the master.

"The holt cubs this time of the year are nigh as strong as old foxes.

Now for Pugsby."

Mrs. Houghton looked round, fearing every moment that her husband would

come up. They had just crossed a road, and wherever there was a road

there, she thought, he would certainly be.

"Can't we get round the other side, Mr. Price?" she said.

"You won't be any better nor here."

"But there's Mr. Houghton on the road," she whispered.

"Oh-h-h," ejaculated the farmer, just touching the end of his nose with

his finger and moving gently on through the wood. "Never spoil sport,"

was the motto of his life, and to his thinking it was certainly sport

that a young wife should ride to hounds in opposition to an old

husband. Mrs. Houghton followed him, and as they got out on the other

side, the fox was again away. "He ain't making for Pugsby's after all,"

said Price to George Scruby.

"He don't know that country yet," said the huntsman. "He'll be back in

them Manor Cross woods. You'll see else."

The park of Manor Cross lay to the left of them, whereas Pugsby and the

desirable grass country away to Bamham Moor were all to the right. Some

men mindful of the big brook and knowing the whereabouts of the bridge,

among whom was Mr. Houghton, kept very much to the right and were soon

out of the run altogether. But the worst of it was that though they

were not heading for their good country, still there was the brook,

Pugsby brook, to be taken. Had the fox done as he ought to have done,

and made for Pugsby itself, the leap would have been from grass to

grass; but now it must be from plough to plough, if taken at all. It

need hardly be said that the two things are very different. Sir Simon,

when he saw how the land lay, took a lane leading down to the

Brotherton road. If the fox was making for the park he must be right in

that direction. It is not often that a master of hounds rides for

glory, and Sir Simon had long since left all that to younger men. But

there were still a dozen riders pressing on, and among them were the

farmer and his devoted follower,--and a gentleman in black.

Let us give praise where praise is due, and acknowledge that young

Bottomley was the first at the brook,--and the first over it. As soon

as he was beyond Sir Simon's notice, he had scurried on across the

plough, and being both light and indiscreet, had enjoyed the heartfelt

pleasure of passing George Scruby. George, who hated Mr. Bottomley,

grunted out his malediction, even though no one could hear him. "He'll

soon be at the bottom of that," said George, meaning to imply in horsey

phrase that the rider, if he rode over ploughed ground after that

fashion, would soon come to the end of his steed's power. But

Bottomley, if he could only be seen to jump the big brook before any

one else, would have happiness enough for a month. To have done a thing

that he could talk about was the charm that Bottomley found in hunting.

Alas, though he rode gallantly at the brook and did get over it, there

was not much to talk about; for, unfortunately, he left his horse

behind him in the water. The poor beast going with a rush off the

plough, came with her neck and shoulders against the opposite bank, and

shot his rider well on to the dry land.

"That's about as good as a dead'un," said George, as he landed a yard

or two to the right. This was ill-natured, and the horse in truth was

not hurt. But a rider, at any rate a young rider, should not take a

lead from a huntsman unless he is very sure of himself, of his horse,

and of the run of the hounds. The next man over was the gentleman in

black, who took it in a stand, and who really seemed to know what he

was about. There were some who afterwards asserted that this was the

Dean, but the Dean was never heard to boast of the performance.

Mrs. Houghton's horse was going very strong with her. More than once

the farmer cautioned her to give him a pull over the plough. And she

attempted to obey the order. But the horse was self-willed, and she was

light; and in truth the heaviness of the ground would have been nothing

to him had he been fairly well ridden. But she allowed him to rush with

her through the mud. As she had never yet had an accident she knew

nothing of fear, and she was beyond measure excited. She had been near

enough to see that a man fell at the brook, and then she saw also that

the huntsman got over, and also the gentleman in black. It seemed to

her to be lovely. The tumble did not scare her at all, as others coming

after the unfortunate one had succeeded. She was aware that there were

three or four other men behind her, and she was determined that they

should not pass her. They should see that she also could jump the

river. She had not rid herself of her husband for nothing. Price, as he

came near the water, knew that he had plenty to do, and knew also how

very close to him the woman was. It was too late now to speak to her

again, but he did not fear for his own horse if she would only give him

room. He steadied the animal a yard or two from the margin as he came

to the headland that ran down the side of the brook, and then took his

leap.

But Mrs. Houghton rode us though the whole thing was to be accomplished

by a rush, and her horse, true to the manner of horses, insisted on

following in the direct track of the one who had led him so far. When

he got to the bank he made his effort to jump high, but had got no

footing for a fair spring. On he went, however, and struck Price's

horse on the quarter so violently as to upset that animal, as well as

himself.

Price, who was a thoroughly good horseman, was knocked off, but got on

to the bank as Bottomley had done. The two animals were both in the

brook, and when the farmer was able to look round, he saw that the lady

was out of sight. He was in the water immediately himself, but before

he made the plunge he had resolved that he never again would give a

lady a lead till he knew whether she could ride.

Mr. Knox and Dick were soon on the spot, and Mrs. Houghton was

extracted. "I'm blessed if she ain't dead," said the whip, pale as

death himself. "H--sh!" said Mr. Knox; "she's not dead, but I'm afraid

she's hurt." Price had come back through the water with the woman in

his arms, and the two horses were still floundering about, unattended.

"It's her shoulder, Mr. Knox," said Price. "The horse has jammed her

against the bank under water." During this time her head was drooping,

and her eyes were closed, and she was apparently senseless. "Do you

look to the horses, Dick. There ain't no reason why they should get

their death of cold." By this time there were a dozen men round them,

and Dick and others were able to attend to the ill-used nags. "Yes;

it's her shoulder," continued Price. "That's out, any way. What the

mischief will Mr. Houghton say to me when he comes up!"

There is always a doctor in the field,--sent there by some benignity of

providence,--who always rides forward enough to be near to accidents,

but never so forward as to be in front of them. It has been hinted that

this arrangement is professional rather than providential; but the

present writer, having given his mind to the investigation of the

matter, is inclined to think that it arises from the general fitness of

things. All public institutions have, or ought to have, their doctor,

but in no institution is the doctor so invariably at hand, just when he

is wanted, as in the hunting field. A very skilful young surgeon from

Brotherton was on the spot almost as soon as the lady was out of the

water, and declared that she had dislocated her shoulder.

What was to be done? Her hat had gone; she had been under the water;

she was covered with mud; she was still senseless, and of course she

could neither ride nor walk. There were ever so many suggestions. Price

thought that she had better be taken back to Cross Hall, which was

about a mile and a half distant. Mr. Knox, who knew the country, told

them of a side gate in the Manor Cross wall, which made the great house

nearer than Cross Hall. They could get her there in little over a mile.

But how to get her there? They must find a door on which to carry her.

First a hurdle was suggested, and then Dick was sent galloping up to

the house for a carriage. In the meantime she was carried to a

labourer's cottage by the roadside on a hurdle, and there the party was

joined by Sir Simon and Mr. Houghton.

"It's all your fault," said the husband, coming up to Price as though

he meant to strike him with his whip. "Part of it is no doubt, sir,"

said Price, looking his assailant full in the face, but almost sobbing

as he spoke, "and I'm very unhappy about it." Then the husband went and

hung over his wife, but his wife, when she saw him, found it convenient

to faint again.

At about two o'clock the cortÃ¨ge with the carriage reached the great

house. Sir Simon, after expressions of deep sorrow had, of course, gone

on after his hounds. Mr. Knox, as belonging to Manor Cross, and Price,

and, of course, the doctor, with Mr. Houghton and Mr. Houghton's groom,

accompanied the carriage. When they got to the door all the ladies were

there to receive them. "I don't think we want to see anything more of

you," said Mr. Houghton to the farmer. The poor man turned round and

went away home, alone, feeling himself to be thoroughly disgraced.

"After all," he said to himself, "if you come to fault it was she nigh

killed me, not me her. How was I to know she didn't know nothing about

it!"

"Now, Mary, I think you'll own that I was right," Lord George said to

his wife, as soon as the sufferer had been put quietly to bed.

"Ladies don't always break their arms," said Mary.

"It might have been you as well as Mrs. Houghton."

"As I didn't go, you need not scold me, George."

"But you were discontented because you were prevented," said he,

determined to have the last word.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. HOUGHTON.

Lady Sarah, who was generally regarded as the arbiter of the very

slender hospitalities exercised at Manor Cross, was not at all well

pleased at being forced to entertain Mrs. Houghton, whom she especially

disliked; but, circumstanced as they were, there was no alternative.

She had been put to bed with a dislocated arm, and had already suffered

much in having it reduced, before the matter could be even discussed.

And then it was of course felt that she could not be turned out of the

house. She was not only generally hurt, but she was a cousin, also. "We

must ask him, mamma," Lady Sarah said. The Marchioness whined

piteously. Mr. Houghton's name had always been held in great

displeasure by the ladies at Manor Cross. "I don't think we can help

it. Mr. Sawyer"--Mr. Sawyer was the very clever young surgeon from

Brotherton--"Mr. Sawyer says that she ought not to be removed for at

any rate a week." The Marchioness groaned. But the evil became less

than had been anticipated, by Mr. Houghton's refusal. At first, he

seemed inclined to stay, but after he had seen his wife he declared

that, as there was no danger, he would not intrude upon Lady

Brotherton, but would, if permitted, ride over and see how his wife was

progressing on the morrow. "That is a relief," said Lady Sarah to her

mother; and yet Lady Sarah had been almost urgent in assuring Mr.

Houghton that they would be delighted to have him.

In spite of her suffering, which must have been real, and her fainting,

which had partly been so, Mrs. Houghton had had force enough to tell

her husband that he would himself be inexpressibly bored by remaining

at Manor Cross, and that his presence would inexpressibly bore "all

those dowdy old women," as she called the ladies of the house.

"Besides, what's the use?" she said; "I've got to lay here for a

certain time. You would not be any good at nursing. You'd only kill

yourself with ennui. I shall do well enough, and do you go on with your

hunting." He had assented; but finding her to be well enough to express

her opinion as to the desirability of his absence strongly, thought

that she was well enough, also, to be rebuked for her late

disobedience. He began, therefore, to say a word. "Oh! Jeffrey, are you

going to scold me," she said, "while I am in such a state as this!" and

then, again, she almost fainted. He knew that he was being ill-treated,

but knowing, also, that he could not avoid it, he went away without a

further word.

But she was quite cheerful that evening when Lady George came up to

give her her dinner. She had begged that it might be so. She had known

"dear Mary" so long, and was so warmly attached to her. "Dear Mary" did

not dislike the occupation, which was soon found to comprise that of

being head nurse to the invalid. She had never especially loved

Adelaide De Baron, and had felt that there was something amiss in her

conversation when they had met at the deanery; but she was brighter

than the ladies at Manor Cross, was affectionate in her manner, and was

at any rate young. There was an antiquity about every thing at Manor

Cross, which was already crushing the spirit of the young bride.

"Dear me! this is nice," said Mrs. Houghton, disregarding, apparently

altogether, the pain of her shoulder; "I declare, I shall begin to be

glad of the accident!"

"You shouldn't say that."

"Why not, if I feel it? Doesn't it seem like a thing in a story that I

should be brought to Lord George's house, and that he was my lover only

quite the other day?" The idea had never occurred to Mary, and now that

it was suggested to her, she did not like it. "I wonder when he'll come

and see me. It would not make you jealous, I hope."

"Certainly not."

"No, indeed. I think he's quite as much in love with you as ever he was

with me. And yet, he was very, very fond of me once. Isn't it odd that

men should change so?"

"I suppose you are changed, too," said Mary,--hardly knowing what to

say.

"Well,--yes,--no. I don't know that I'm changed at all. I never told

Lord George that I loved him. And what's more, I never told Mr.

Houghton so. I don't pretend to be very virtuous, and of course I

married for an income. I like him very well, and I always mean to be

good to him; that is, if he lets me have my own way. I'm not going to

be scolded, and he need not think so."

"You oughtn't to have gone on to-day, ought you?"

"Why not? If my horse hadn't gone so very quick, and Mr. Price at that

moment hadn't gone so very slow, I shouldn't have come to grief, and

nobody would have known anything about it. Wouldn't you like to ride?"

"Yes; I should like it. But are not you exerting yourself too much?"

"I should die if I were made to lie here without speaking to any one.

Just put the pillow a little under me. Now I'm all right. Who do you

think was going as well as anybody yesterday? I saw him."

"Who was it?"

"The very Reverend the Dean of Brotherton, my dear."

"No!"

"But he was. I saw him jump the brook just before I fell into it. What

will Mr. Groschut say?"

"I don't think papa cares much what Mr. Groschut says."

"And the Bishop?"

"I'm not sure that he cares very much for the Bishop either. But I am

quite sure that he would not do anything that he thought to be wrong."

"A Dean never does, I suppose."

"My papa never does."

"Nor Lord George, I dare say," said Mrs. Houghton.

"I don't say anything about Lord George. I haven't known him quite so

long."

"If you won't speak up for him, I will. I'm quite sure Lord George

Germain never in his life did anything that he ought not to do. That's

his fault. Don't you like men who do what they ought not to do?"

"No," said Mary, "I don't. Everybody always ought to do what they ought

to do. And you ought to go to sleep, and so I shall go away." She knew

that it was not all right,--that there was something fast, and also

something vulgar, about this self-appointed friend of hers. But though

Mrs. Houghton was fast, and though she was vulgar, she was a relief to

the endless gloom of Manor Cross.

On the next day Mr. Houghton came, explaining to everybody that he had

given up his day's hunting for the sake of his wife. But he could say

but little, and could do nothing, and he did not remain long. "Don't

stay away from the meet another day," his wife said to him; "I shan't

get well any the sooner, and I don't like being a drag upon you." Then

the husband went away, and did not come for the next two days. On the

Sunday he came over in the afternoon and stayed for half-an-hour, and

on the following Tuesday he appeared on his way to the meet in top

boots and a red coat. He was, upon the whole, less troublesome to the

Manor Cross people than might have been expected.

Mr. Price came every morning to enquire, and very gracious passages

passed between him and the lady. On the Saturday she was up, sitting on

a sofa in a dressing gown, and he was brought in to see her. "It was

all my fault, Mr. Price," she said immediately. "I heard what Mr.

Houghton said to you; I couldn't speak then, but I was so sorry."

"What a husband says, ma'am, at such a time, goes for nothing."

"What husbands say, Mr. Price, very often does go for nothing." He

turned his hat in his hand, and smiled. "If it had not been so, all

this wouldn't have happened, and I shouldn't have upset you into the

water. But all the same, I hope you'll give me a lead another day, and

I'll take great care not to come so close to you again." This pleased

Mr. Price so much, that as he went home he swore to himself that if

ever she asked him again, he would do just the same as he had done on

the day of the accident.

When Price, the farmer, had seen her, of course it became Lord George's

duty to pay her his compliments in person. At first he visited her in

company with his wife and Lady Sarah, and the conversation was very

stiff. Lady Sarah was potent enough to quell even Mrs. Houghton. But

later in the afternoon Lord George came back again, his wife being in

the room, and then there was a little more ease. "You can't think how

it grieves me," she said, "to bring all this trouble upon you." She

emphasised the word "you," as though to show him that she cared nothing

for his mother and sisters.

"It is no trouble to me," said Lord George, bowing low. "I should say

that it was a pleasure, were it not that your presence here is attended

with so much pain to yourself."

"The pain is nothing," said Mrs. Houghton. "I have hardly thought of

it. It is much more than compensated by the renewal of my intimacy with

Lady George Germain." This she said with her very prettiest manner, and

he told himself that she was, indeed, very pretty.

Lady George,--or Mary, as we will still call her, for simplicity, in

spite of her promotion,--had become somewhat afraid of Mrs. Houghton;

but now, seeing her husband's courtesy to her guest, understanding from

his manner that he liked her society, began to thaw, and to think that

she might allow herself to be intimate with the woman. It did not occur

to her to be in any degree jealous,--not, at least, as yet. In her

innocence she did not think it possible that her husband's heart should

be untrue to her, nor did it occur to her that such a one as Mrs.

Houghton could be preferred to herself. She thought that she knew

herself to be better than Mrs. Houghton, and she certainly thought

herself to be the better looking of the two.

Mrs. Houghton's beauty, such as it was, depended mainly on style; on a

certain dash and manner which she had acquired, and which, to another

woman, were not attractive. Mary knew that she, herself, was beautiful.

She could not but know it. She had been brought up by all belonging to

her with that belief; and so believing, had taught herself to

acknowledge that no credit was due to herself on that score. Her beauty

now belonged entirely to her husband. There was nothing more to be done

with it, except to maintain her husband's love, and that, for the

present, she did not in the least doubt. She had heard of married men

falling in love with other people's wives, but she did not in the least

bring home the fact to her own case.

In the course of that afternoon all the ladies of the family sat for a

time with their guest. First came Lady Sarah and Lady Susanna. Mrs.

Houghton, who saw very well how the land lay, rather snubbed Lady

Sarah. She had nothing to fear from the dragon of the family. Lady

Sarah, in spite of their cousinship, had called her Mrs. Houghton, and

Mrs. Houghton, in return, called the other Lady Sarah. There was to be

no intimacy, and she was only received there because of her dislocated

shoulder. Let it be so. Lord George and his wife were coming up to

town, and the intimacy should be there. She certainly would not wish to

repeat her visit to Manor Cross.

"Some ladies do like hunting, and some don't," she said, in answer to a

severe remark from Lady Sarah. "I am one of those who do, and I don't

think an accident like that has anything to do with it."

"I can't say I think it an amusement fit for ladies," said Lady Sarah.

"I suppose ladies may do what clergymen do. The Dean jumped over the

brook just before me." There was not much of an argument in this, but

Mrs. Houghton knew that it would vex Lady Sarah, because of the

alliance between the Dean and the Manor Cross family.

"She's a detestable young woman," Lady Sarah said to her mother, "and I

can only hope that Mary won't see much of her up in town."

"I don't see how she can, after what there has been between her and

George," said the innocent old lady. In spite, however, of this

strongly expressed opinion, the old lady made her visit, taking Lady

Amelia with her. "I hope, my dear, you find yourself getting better."

"So much better, Lady Brotherton! But I am so sorry to have given you

all this trouble; but it has been very pleasant to me to be here, and

to see Lord George and Mary together. I declare I think hers is the

sweetest face I ever looked upon. And she is so much improved. That's

what perfect happiness does. I do so like her."

"We love her very dearly," said the Marchioness.

"I am sure you do. And he is so proud of her!" Lady Sarah had said that

the woman was detestable, and therefore the Marchioness felt that she

ought to detest her. But, had it not been for Lady Sarah, she would

have been rather pleased with her guest than otherwise. She did not

remain very long, but promised that she would return on the next day.

On the following morning Mr. Houghton came again, staying only a few

minutes; and while he was in his wife's sitting-room, both Lord George

and Mary found them. As they were all leaving her together, she

contrived to say a word to her old lover. "Don't desert me all the

morning. Come and talk to me a bit. I am well now, though they won't

let me move about." In obedience to this summons, he returned to her

when his wife was called upon to attend to the ordinary cloak and

petticoat conclave of the other ladies. In regard to these charitable

meetings she had partly carried her own way. She had so far thrown off

authority as to make it understood that she was not to be bound by the

rules which her sisters-in-law had laid down for their own guidance.

But her rebellion had not been complete, and she still gave them a

certain number of weekly stitches. Lord George had said nothing of his

purpose; but for a full hour before luncheon he was alone with Mrs.

Houghton. If a gentleman may call on a lady in her house, surely he

may, without scandal, pay her a visit in his own. That a married man

should chat for an hour with another man's wife in a country house is

not much. Where is the man and where the woman who has not done that,

quite as a matter of course? And yet when Lord George knocked at the

door there was a feeling on him that he was doing something in which he

would not wish to be detected. "This is so good of you," she said. "Do

sit down; and don't run away. Your mother and sisters have been

here,--so nice of them, you know; but everybody treats me as though I

oughtn't to open my mouth for above five minutes at a time. I feel as

though I should like to jump the brook again immediately."

"Pray don't do that."

"Well, no; not quite yet. You don't like hunting, I'm afraid?"

"The truth is," said Lord George, "that I've never been able to afford

to keep horses."

"Ah, that's a reason. Mr. Houghton, of course, is a rich man; but I

don't know anything so little satisfactory in itself as being rich."

"It is comfortable."

"Oh yes, it is comfortable; but so unsatisfactory! Of course Mr.

Houghton can keep any number of horses; but, what's the use, when he

never rides to hounds? Better not have them at all, I think. I am very

fond of hunting myself."

"I daresay I should have liked it had it come in my way early in life."

"You speak of yourself as if you were a hundred years old. I know your

age exactly. You are just seventeen years younger than Mr. Houghton!"

To this Lord George had no reply to make. Of course he had felt that

when Miss De Baron had married Mr. Houghton she had married quite an

old man. "I wonder whether you were much surprised when you heard that

I was engaged to Mr. Houghton?"

"I was, rather."

"Because he is so old?"

"Not that altogether."

"I was surprised myself, and I knew that you would be. But what was I

to do?"

"I think you have been very wise," said Lord George.

"Yes, but you think I have been heartless. I can see it in your eyes

and hear it in your voice. Perhaps I was heartless;--but then I was

bound to be wise. A man may have a profession before him. He may do

anything. But what has a girl to think of? You say that money is

comfortable."

"Certainly it is."

"How is she to get it, if she has not got it of her own, like dear

Mary?"

"You do not think that I have blamed you."

"But even though you have not, yet I must excuse myself to you," she

said with energy, bending forward from her sofa towards him. "Do you

think that I do not know the difference?"

"What difference?"

"Ah, you shouldn't ask. I may hint at it, but you shouldn't ask. But it

wouldn't have done, would it?" Lord George hardly understood what it

was that wouldn't have done; but he knew that a reference was being

made to his former love by the girl he had loved; and, upon the whole,

he rather liked it. The flattery of such intrigues is generally

pleasant to men, even when they cannot bring their minds about quick

enough to understand all the little ins and outs of the woman's

manoeuvres. "It is my very nature to be extravagant. Papa has brought

me up like that. And yet I had nothing that I could call my own. I had

no right to marry any one but a rich man. You said just now you

couldn't afford to hunt."

"I never could."

"And I couldn't afford to have a heart. You said just now, too, that

money is very comfortable. There was a time when I should have found it

very, very comfortable to have had a fortune of my own."

"You have plenty now."

She wasn't angry with him, because she had already found out that it is

the nature of men to be slow. And she wasn't angry with him, again,

because, though he was slow, yet also was he evidently gratified.

"Yes," she said, "I have plenty now. I have secured so much. I couldn't

have done without a large income; but a large income doesn't make me

happy. It's like eating and drinking. One has to eat and drink, but yet

one doesn't care very much about it. Perhaps you don't regret hunting

very much?"

"Yes I do, because it enables a man to know his neighbours."

"I know that I regret the thing I couldn't afford."

Then a glimmer of what she meant did come across him, and he blushed.

"Things will not always turn out as they are wanted," he said. Then his

conscience upbraided him, and he corrected himself. "But, God knows

that I have no reason to complain. I have been fortunate."

"Yes, indeed."

"I sometimes think it is better to remember the good things we have

than to regret those that are gone."

"That is excellent philosophy, Lord George. And therefore I go out

hunting, and break my bones, and fall into rivers, and ride about with

such men as Mr. Price. One has to make the best of it, hasn't one? But

you, I see, have no regrets."

He paused for a moment, and then found himself driven to make some

attempt at gallantry. "I didn't quite say that," he replied.

"You were able to re-establish yourself according to your own tastes. A

man can always do so. I was obliged to take whatever came. I think that

Mary is so nice."

"I think so too, I can assure you."

"You have been very fortunate to find such a girl; so innocent, so

pure, so pretty, and with a fortune too. I wonder how much difference

it would have made in your happiness if you had seen her before we had

ever been acquainted. I suppose we should never have known each other

then."

"Who can say?"

"No; no one can say. For myself, I own that I like it better as it is.

I have something to remember that I can be proud of."

"And I something to be ashamed of."

"To be ashamed of!" she said, almost rising in anger.

"That you should have refused me!"

She had got it at last. She had made her fish rise to the fly. "Oh,

no," she said; "there can be nothing of that. If I did not tell you

plainly then, I tell you plainly now. I should have done very wrong to

marry a poor man."

"I ought not to have asked you."

"I don't know how that may be," she said in a very low voice, looking

down to the ground. "Some say that if a man loves he should declare his

love, let the circumstances be what they may. I rather think that I

agree with them. You at any rate knew that I felt greatly honoured,

though the honour was out of my reach." Then there was a pause, during

which he could find nothing to say. He was trapped by her flattery, but

he did not wish to betray his wife by making love to the woman. He

liked her words and her manner; but he was aware that she was a thing

sacred as being another man's wife. "But it is all better as it is,"

she said with a laugh, "and Mary Lovelace is the happiest girl of her

year. I am so glad you are coming to London, and do so hope you'll come

and see me."

"Certainly I will."

"I mean to be such friends with Mary. There is no woman I like so much.

And then circumstances have thrown us together, haven't they; and if

she and I are friends, real friends, I shall feel that our friendship

may be continued,--yours and mine. I don't mean that all this accident

shall go for nothing. I wasn't quite clever enough to contrive it; but

I am very glad of it, because it has brought us once more together, so

that we may understand each other. Good-bye, Lord George. Don't let me

keep you longer now. I wouldn't have Mary jealous, you know."

"I don't think there is the least fear of that," he said in real

displeasure.

"Don't take me up seriously for my little joke," she said as she put

out her left hand. He took it, and once more smiled, and then left her.

When she was alone there came a feeling on her that she had gone

through some hard work with only moderate success; and also a feeling

that the game was hardly worth the candle. She was not in the least in

love with the man, or capable of being in love with any man. In a

certain degree she was jealous, and felt that she owed Mary Lovelace a

turn for having so speedily won her own rejected lover. But her

jealousy was not strong enough for absolute malice. She had formed no

plot against the happiness of the husband and wife when she came into

the house; but the plot made itself, and she liked the excitement. He

was heavy,--certainly heavy; but he was very handsome, and a lord; and

then, too, it was much in her favour that he certainly had once loved

her dearly.

Lord George, as he went down to lunch, felt himself to be almost

guilty, and hardly did more than creep into the room where his wife and

sisters were seated.

"Have you been with Mrs. Houghton?" asked Lady Sarah in a firm voice.

"Yes, I have been sitting with her for the last half hour," he replied;

but he couldn't answer the question without hesitation in his manner.

Mary, however, thought nothing about it.

CHAPTER X.

THE DEAN AS A SPORTING MAN.

In Brotherton the Dean's performance in the run from Cross Hall Holt

was almost as much talked of as Mrs. Houghton's accident. There had

been rumours of things that he had done in the same line after taking

orders, when a young man,--of runs that he had ridden, and even of

visits which he had made to Newmarket and other wicked places. But, as

far as Brotherton knew, there had been nothing of all this since the

Dean had been a dean. Though he was constantly on horseback, he had

never been known to do more than perhaps look at a meet, and it was

understood through Brotherton generally that he had forbidden his

daughter to hunt. But now, no sooner was his daughter married, and the

necessity of setting an example to her at an end, than the Dean, with a

rosette in his hat,--for so the story was told,--was after the hounds

like a sporting farmer or a mere country gentleman! On the very next

day Mr. Groschut told the whole story to the Bishop. But Mr. Groschut

had not seen the performance, and the Bishop affected to disbelieve it.

"I'm afraid, my lord," said the chaplain, "I'm afraid you'll find it's

true." "If he rides after every pack of dogs in the county, I don't

know that I can help it," said the Bishop. With this Mr. Groschut was

by no means inclined to agree. A bishop is as much entitled to cause

inquiries to be made into the moral conduct of a dean as of any country

clergyman in his diocese. "Suppose he were to take to gambling on the

turf," said Mr. Groschut, with much horror expressed in his tone and

countenance. "But riding after a pack of dogs isn't gambling on the

turf," said the Bishop, who, though he would have liked to possess the

power of putting down the Dean, by no means relished the idea of being

beaten in an attempt to do so.

And Mr. Canon Holdenough heard of it. "My dear," he said to his wife,

"Manor Cross is coming out strong in the sporting way. Not only is Mrs.

Houghton laid up there with a broken limb, but your brother's

father-in-law took the brush on the same day."

"The Dean!" said Lady Alice.

"So they tell me."

"He was always so particular in not letting Mary ride over a single

fence. He would hardly let her go to a meet on horseback."

"Many fathers do what they won't let their daughters do. The Dean has

been always giving signs that he would like to break out a little."

"Can they do anything to him?"

"Oh dear no;--not if he was to hunt a pack of hounds himself, as far as

I know."

"But I suppose it's wrong, Canon," said the clerical wife.

"Yes; I think it's wrong because it will scandalise. Everything that

gives offence is wrong, unless it be something that is on other grounds

expedient. If it be true we shall hear about it a good deal here, and

it will not contribute to brotherly love and friendship among us

clergymen."

There was another canon at Brotherton, one Dr. Pountner, a red-faced

man, very fond of his dinner, a man of infinite pluck, and much

attached to the Cathedral, towards the reparation of which he had

contributed liberally. And, having an ear for music, he had done much

to raise the character of the choir. Though Dr. Pountner's sermons were

supposed to be the worst ever heard from the pulpit of the Cathedral,

he was, on account of the above good deeds, the most popular clergyman

in the city. "So I'm told you've been distinguishing yourself, Mr.

Dean," said the Doctor, meeting our friend in the close.

"Have I done so lately, more than is usual with me?" asked the Dean,

who had not hitherto heard of the rumour of his performances.

"I am told that you were so much ahead the other day in the hunting

field, that you were unable to give assistance to the poor lady who

broke her arm."

"Oh, that's it! If I do anything at all, though I may do it but once in

a dozen years, I like to do it well, Dr. Pountner. I wish I thought

that you could follow my example, and take a little exercise. It would

be very good for you." The Doctor was a heavy man, and hardly walked

much beyond the confines of the Close or his own garden. Though a bold

man, he was not so ready as the Dean, and had no answer at hand. "Yes,"

continued our friend, "I did go a mile or two with them, and I enjoyed

it amazingly. I wish with all my heart there was no prejudice against

clergymen hunting."

"I think it would be an abominable practice," said Dr. Pountner,

passing on.

The Dean himself would have thought nothing more about it had there not

appeared a few lines on the subject in a weekly newspaper called the

"Brotherton Church," which was held to be a pestilential little rag by

all the Close. Deans, canons, and minor canons were all agreed as to

this, Dr. Pountner hating the "Brotherton Church" quite as sincerely as

did the Dean. The "Brotherton Church" was edited nominally by a

certain Mr. Grease,--a very pious man who had long striven, but

hitherto in vain, to get orders. But it was supposed by many that the

paper was chiefly inspired by Mr. Groschut. It was always very

laudatory of the Bishop. It had distinguished itself by its elaborate

opposition to ritual. Its mission was to put down popery in the diocese

of Brotherton. It always sneered at the Chapter generally, and very

often said severe things of the Dean. On this occasion the paragraph

was as follows; "There is a rumour current that Dean Lovelace was out

with the Brotherton foxhounds last Wednesday, and that he rode with the

pack all the day, leading the field. We do not believe this, but we

hope that for the sake of the Cathedral and for his own sake, he will

condescend to deny the report." On the next Saturday there was another

paragraph, with a reply from the Dean; "We have received from the Dean

of Brotherton the following startling letter, which we publish without

comment. What our opinion on the subject may be our readers will

understand.

"Deanery, November, 187--

"Sir,--You have been correctly informed that I was out with the

Brotherton foxhounds on Wednesday week last. The other reports

which you have published, and as to which after publication, you

have asked for information, are unfortunately incorrect. I wish I

could have done as well as my enemies accuse me of doing.

"I am, Sir,

"Your humble servant,

"HENRY LOVELACE.

"To the Editor of the 'Brotherton Church.'"

The Dean's friends were unanimous in blaming him for having taken any

notice of the attack. The Bishop, who was at heart an honest man and a

gentleman, regretted it. All the Chapter were somewhat ashamed of it.

The Minor Canons were agreed that it was below the dignity of a dean.

Dr. Pountner, who had not yet forgotten the allusion to his obesity,

whispered in some clerical ear that nothing better could be expected

out of a stable; and Canon Holdenough, who really liked the Dean in

spite of certain differences of opinion, expostulated with him about

it.

"I would have let it pass," said the Canon. "Why notice it at all?"

"Because I would not have any one suppose that I was afraid to notice

it. Because I would not have it thought that I had gone out with the

hounds and was ashamed of what I had done."

"Nobody who knows you would have thought that."

"I am proud to think that nobody who knows me would. I make as many

mistakes as another, and am sorry for them afterwards. But I am never

ashamed. I'll tell you what happened, not to justify my hunting, but

to justify my letter. I was over at Manor Cross, and I went to the

meet, because Mary went. I have not done such a thing before since I

came to Brotherton, because there is,--what I will call a feeling

against it. When I was there I rode a field or two with them, and I can

tell you I enjoyed it."

"I daresay you did."

"Then, very soon after the fox broke, there was that brook at which

Mrs. Houghton hurt herself. I happened to jump it, and the thing became

talked about because of her accident. After that we came out on the

Brotherton road, and I went back to Manor Cross. Do not suppose that I

should have been ashamed of myself if I had gone on even half a dozen

more fields."

"I'm sure you wouldn't."

"The thing in itself is not bad. Nevertheless,--thinking as the world

around us does about hunting,--a clergyman in my position would be

wrong to hunt often. But a man who can feel horror at such a thing as

this is a prig in religion. If, as is more likely, a man affects

horror, he is a hypocrite. I believe that most clergymen will agree

with me in that; but there is no clergyman in the diocese of whose

agreement I feel more certain than of yours."

"It is the letter, not the hunting, to which I object."

"There was an apparent cowardice in refraining from answering such an

attack. I am aware, Canon, of a growing feeling of hostility to

myself."

"Not in the Chapter?"

"In the diocese. And I know whence it comes, and I think I understand

its cause. Let what will come of it I am not going to knock under. I

want to quarrel with no man, and certainly with no clergyman,--but I am

not going to be frightened out of my own manner of life or my own

manner of thinking by fear of a quarrel."

"Nobody doubts your courage; but what is the use of fighting when there

is nothing to win. Let that wretched newspaper alone. It is beneath you

and me, Dean."

"Very much beneath us, and so is your butler beneath you. But if he

asks you a question, you answer him. To tell the truth I would rather

they should call me indiscreet than timid. If I did not feel that it

would be really wrong and painful to my friends I would go out hunting

three days next week, to let them know that I am not to be cowed."

There was a good deal said at Manor Cross about the newspaper

correspondence, and some condemnation of the Dean expressed by the

ladies, who thought that he had lowered himself by addressing a reply

to the editor. In the heat of discussion a word or two was spoken by

Lady Susanna,--who entertained special objections to all things

low,--which made Mary very angry. "I think papa is at any rate a better

judge than you can be," she said. Between sisters as sisters generally

are, or even sisters-in-laws, this would not be much; but at Manor

Cross it was felt to be misconduct. Mary was so much younger than they

were! And then she was the grand-daughter of a tradesman! No doubt they

all thought that they were willing to admit her among themselves on

terms of equality; but then there was a feeling among them that she

ought to repay this great goodness by a certain degree of humility and

submission. From day to day the young wife strengthened herself in a

resolution that she would not be humble and would not be submissive.

Lady Susanna, when she heard the words, drew herself up with an air of

offended dignity. "Mary, dear," said Lady Sarah, "is not that a little

unkind?"

"I think it is unkind to say that papa is indiscreet," said the Dean's

daughter. "I wonder what you'd all think if I were to say a word

against dear mamma." She had been specially instructed to call the

Marchioness mamma.

"The Dean is not my father-in-law," said Lady Amelia, very proudly, as

though in making the suggestion, she begged it to be understood that

under no circumstances could such a connection have been possible.

"But he's my papa, and I shall stand up for him,--and I do say that he

must know more about such things than any lady." Then Lady Susanna got

up and marched majestically out of the room.

Lord George was told of this, and found himself obliged to speak to his

wife. "I'm afraid there has been something between you and Susanna,

dear."

"She abused papa, and I told her papa knew better than she did, and

then she walked out of the room."

"I don't suppose she meant to--abuse the Dean."

"She called him names."

"She said he was indiscreet."

"That is calling him names."

"No, my dear, indiscreet is an epithet; and even were it a noun

substantive, as a name must be, it could only be one name." It was

certainly very hard to fall in love with a man who could talk about

epithets so very soon after his marriage; but yet she would go on

trying. "Dear George," she said, "don't you scold me. I will do

anything you tell me, but I don't like them to say hard things of papa.

You are not angry with me for taking papa's part, are you?"

He kissed her, and told her that he was not in the least angry with

her; but, nevertheless, he went on to insinuate, that if she could

bring herself to show something of submission to his sisters, it would

make her own life happier and theirs and his. "I would do anything I

could to make your life happy," she said.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD AND LADY GEORGE GO UP TO TOWN.

Time went on, and the day arranged for the migration to London came

round. After much delicate fencing on one side and the other, this was

fixed for the 31st January. The fencing took place between the Dean,

acting on behalf of his daughter, and the ladies of the Manor Cross

family generally. They, though they conceived themselves to have had

many causes of displeasure with Mary, were not the less anxious to keep

her at Manor Cross. They would all, at any moment, have gladly assented

to an abandonment of the London house, and had taught themselves to

look upon the London house as an allurement of Satan, most unwisely

contrived and countenanced by the Dean. And there was no doubt that, as

the Dean acted on behalf of his daughter, so did they act on behalf of

their brother. He could not himself oppose the London house; but he

disliked it and feared it, and now, at last, thoroughly repented

himself of it. But it had been a stipulation made at the marriage; and

the Dean's money had been spent. The Dean had been profuse with his

money, and had shown himself to be a more wealthy man than any one at

Manor Cross had suspected. Mary's fortune was no doubt her own; but the

furniture had been in a great measure supplied by the Dean, and the

Dean had paid the necessary premium on going into the house. Lord

George felt it to be impossible to change his mind after all that had

been done; but he had been quite willing to postpone the evil day as

long as possible.

Lady Susanna was especially full of fears, and, it must be owned,

especially inimical to all Mary's wishes. She was the one who had

perhaps been most domineering to her brother's wife, and she was

certainly the one whose domination Mary resisted with the most settled

determination. There was a self-abnegation about Lady Sarah, a

downright goodness, and at the same time an easily-handled magisterial

authority, which commanded reverence. After three months of residence

at Manor Cross, Mary was willing to acknowledge that Lady Sarah was

more than a sister-in-law,--that her nature partook of divine

omnipotence, and that it compelled respect, whether given willingly or

unwillingly. But to none of the others would her spirit thus humble

itself, and especially not to Lady Susanna. Therefore Lady Susanna was

hostile, and therefore Lady Susanna was quite sure that Mary would fall

into great trouble amidst the pleasures of the metropolis.

"After all," she said to her elder sister, "what is Â£1,500 a year to

keep up a house in London?"

"It will only be for a few months," said Lady Sarah.

"Of course she must have a carriage, and then George will find himself

altogether in the hands of the Dean. That is what I fear. The Dean has

done very well with himself, but he is not a man whom I like to trust

altogether."

"He is at any rate generous with his money."

"He is bound to be that, or he could not hold up his head at all. He

has nothing else to depend on. Did you hear what Dr. Pountner said

about him the other day? Since that affair with the newspaper, he has

gone down very much in the Chapter. I am sure of that."

"I think you are a little hard upon him, Susanna."

"You must feel that he is very wrong about this house in London. Why is

a man, because he's married, to be taken away from all his own

pursuits? If she could not accommodate herself to his tastes, she

should not have accepted him."

"Let us be just," said Lady Sarah.

"Certainly, let us be just," said Lady Amelia, who in these

conversations seldom took much part, unless when called upon to support

her eldest sister.

"Of course we should be just," said Lady Susanna.

"She did not accept him," said Lady Sarah, "till he had agreed to

comply with the Dean's wish that they should spend part of their time

in London."

"He was very weak," said Lady Susanna.

"I wish it could have been otherwise," continued Lady Sarah; "but we

can hardly suppose that the tastes of a young girl from Brotherton

should be the same as ours. I can understand that Mary should find

Manor Cross dull."

"Dull!" exclaimed Lady Susanna.

"Dull!" ejaculated Lady Amelia, constrained on this occasion to differ

even from her eldest sister. "I can't understand that she should find

Manor Cross dull, particularly while she has her husband with her."

"The bargain, at any rate, was made," said Lady Sarah, "before the

engagement was settled; and as the money is hers, I do not think we

have a right to complain. I am very sorry that it should be so. Her

character is very far from being formed, and his tastes are so

completely fixed that nothing will change them."

"And then there's that Mrs. Houghton!" said Lady Susanna. Mrs. Houghton

had of course left Manor Cross long since; but she had left a most

unsatisfactory feeling behind her in the minds of all the Manor Cross

ladies. This arose not only from their personal dislike, but from a

suspicion, a most agonising suspicion, that their brother was more fond

than he should have been of the lady's society. It must be understood

that Mary herself knew nothing of this, and was altogether free from

such suspicion. But the three sisters, and the Marchioness under their

tuition, had decided that it would be very much better that Lord

George should see no more of Mrs. Houghton. He was not, they thought,

infatuated in such a fashion that he would run to London after her;

but, when in London, he would certainly be thrown into her society. "I

cannot bear to think of it," continued Lady Susanna. Lady Amelia shook

her head. "I think, Sarah, you ought to speak to him seriously. No man

has higher ideas of duty than he has; and if he be made to think of it,

he will avoid her."

"I have spoken," replied Lady Sarah, almost in a whisper.

"Well!"

"Well!"

"Was he angry?"

"How did he bear it?"

"He was not angry, but he did not bear it very well. He told me that he

certainly found her to be attractive, but that he thought he had power

enough to keep himself free from any such fault as that. I asked him to

promise me not to see her; but he declined to make a promise which he

said he might not be able to keep."

"She is a horrid woman, and Mary. I am afraid, likes her," said Lady

Susanna. "I know that evil will come of it."

Sundry scenes counter to this were enacted at the deanery. Mary was in

the habit of getting herself taken over to Brotherton more frequently

than the ladies liked; but it was impossible that they should openly

oppose her visits to her father. On one occasion, early in January, she

had got her husband to ride over with her, and was closeted with the

Dean while he was away in the city. "Papa," she said, "I almost think

that I'll give up the house in Munster Court."

"Give it up! Look here, Mary; you'll have no happiness in life unless

you can make up your mind not to allow those old ladies at Manor Cross

to sit upon you."

"It is not for their sake. He does not like it, and I would do anything

for him."

"That is all very well; and I would be the last to advise you to oppose

his wishes if I did not see that the effect would be to make him

subject to his sisters' dominion as well as you. Would you like him to

be always under their thumb?"

"No, papa; I shouldn't like that."

"It was because I foresaw all this that I stipulated so expressly as I

did that you should have a house of your own. Every woman, when she

marries, should be emancipated from other domestic control than that of

her husband. From the nature of Lord George's family this would have

been impossible at Manor Cross, and therefore I insisted on a house in

town. I could do this the more freely because the wherewithal was to

come from us, and not from them. Do not disturb what I have done."

"I will not go against you, of course, papa."

"And remember always that this is to be done as much for his sake as

for yours. His position has been very peculiar. He has no property of

his own, and he has lived there with his mother and sisters till the

feminine influences of the house have almost domineered him. It is your

duty to assist in freeing him from this." Looking at the matter in the

light now presented to her, Mary began to think that her father was

right. "With a husband there should at any rate be only one feminine

influence," he added, laughing.

"I shall not over rule him, and I shall not try," said Mary, smiling.

"At any rate, do not let other women rule him. By degrees he will learn

to enjoy London society, and so will you. You will spend half the year

at Manor Cross or the deanery, and by degrees both he and you will be

emancipated. For myself, I can conceive nothing more melancholy than

would be his slavery and yours if you were to live throughout the year

with those old women." Then, too, he said something to her of the

satisfaction which she herself would receive from living in London, and

told her that, for her, life itself had hardly as yet been commenced.

She received her lessons with thankfulness and gratitude, but with

something of wonder that he should so openly recommend to her a manner

of life which she had hitherto been taught to regard as worldly.

After that no further hint was given to her that the house in London

might yet be abandoned. When riding back with her husband, she had been

clever enough to speak of the thing as a fixed certainty; and he had

then known that he also must regard it as fixed. "You had better not

say anything more about it," he said one day almost angrily to Lady

Susanna, and then nothing more had been said about it--to him.

There were other causes of confusion,--of terrible confusion,--at Manor

Cross, of confusion so great that from day to day the Marchioness would

declare herself unable to go through the troubles before her. The

workmen were already in the big house preparing for the demolition and

reconstruction of everything as soon as she should be gone; and other

workmen were already demolishing and reconstructing Cross Hall. The

sadness of all this and the weight on the old lady's mind were

increased by the fact that no member of the family had received so much

even as a message from the Marquis himself since it had been decided

that his wishes should not be obeyed. Over and over again the dowager

attempted to give way, and suggested that they should all depart and be

out of sight. It seemed to her that when a marquis is a marquis he

ought to have his own way, though it be never so unreasonable. Was he

not the head of the family? But Lady Sarah was resolved, and carried

her point. Were they all to be pitched down in some strange corner,

where they would be no better than other women, incapable of doing good

or exercising influence, by the wish of one man who had never done any

good anywhere, or used his own influence legitimately? Lady Sarah was

no coward, and Lady Sarah stuck to Cross Hall, though in doing so she

had very much to endure. "I won't go out, my Lady," said Price, "not

till the day when her Ladyship is ready to come in. I can put up with

things, and I'll see as all is done as your Ladyship wishes." Price,

though he was a sporting farmer, and though men were in the habit of

drinking cherry brandy at his house, and though naughty things had been

said about him, had in these days become Lady Sarah's prime minister at

Cross Hall, and was quite prepared in that capacity to carry on war

against the Marquis.

When the day came for the departure of Mary and her husband, a

melancholy feeling pervaded the whole household. A cook had been sent

up from Brotherton who had lived at Manor Cross many years previously.

Lord George took a man who had waited on himself lately at the old

house, and Mary had her own maid who had come with her when she

married. They had therefore been forced to look for but one strange

servant. But this made the feeling the stronger that they would all be

strange up in London. This was so strong with Lord George that it

almost amounted to fear. He knew that he did not know how to live in

London. He belonged to the Carlton, as became a conservative nobleman;

but he very rarely entered it, and never felt himself at home when he

was there. And Mary, though she had been quite resolved since the

conversation with her father that she would be firm about her house,

still was not without her own dread. She herself had no personal

friends in town,--not one but Mrs. Houghton, as to whom she heard

nothing but evil words from the ladies around her. There had been an

attempt made to get one of the sisters to go up with them for the first

month. Lady Sarah had positively refused, almost with indignation. Was

it to be supposed that she would desert her mother at so trying a time?

Lady Amelia was then asked, and with many regrets declined the

invitation. She had not dared to use her own judgment, and Lady Sarah

had not cordially advised her to go. Lady Sarah had thought that Lady

Susanna would be the most useful. But Lady Susanna was not asked. There

were a few words on the subject between Lord George and his wife. Mary,

remembering her father's advice, had determined that she would not be

sat upon, and had whispered to her husband that Susanna was always

severe to her. When, therefore, the time came, they departed from Manor

Cross without any protecting spirit.

There was something sad in this, even to Mary. She knew that she was

taking her husband away from the life he liked, and that she, herself,

was going to a life as to which she could not even guess, whether she

would like it or not. But she had the satisfaction of feeling that she

was at last going to begin to live as a married woman. Hitherto she

had been treated as a child. If there was danger, there was, at any

rate, the excitement which danger produces. "I am almost glad that we

are going alone, George," she said. "It seems to me that we have never

been alone yet."

He wished to be gracious and loving to her, and yet he was not disposed

to admit anything which might seem to imply that he had become tired of

living with his own family. "It is very nice, but----"

"But what, dear?"

"Of course I am anxious about my mother just at present."

"She is not to move for two months yet."

"No,--not to move; but there are so many things to be done."

"You can run down whenever you please?"

"That's expensive; but of course it must be done."

"Say that you'll like being with me alone." They had the compartment of

the railway carriage all to themselves, and she, as she spoke, leaned

against him, inviting him to caress her. "You don't think it a trouble,

do you, having to come and live with me?" Of course he was conquered,

and said, after his nature, what prettiest things he could to her,

assuring her that he would sooner live with her than with any one in

the world, and promising that he would always endeavour to make her

happy. She knew that he was doing his best to be a loving husband, and

she felt, therefore, that she was bound to be loyal in her endeavours

to love him; but at the same time, at the very moment in which she was

receiving his words with outward show of satisfied love, her

imagination was picturing to her something else which would have been

so immeasurably superior, if only it had been possible.

That evening they dined together, alone; and it was the first time that

they had ever done so, except at an inn. Never before had been imposed

on her the duty of seeing that his dinner was prepared for him. There

certainly was very little of duty to perform in the matter, for he was

a man indifferent as to what he ate, or what he drank. The plainness of

the table at Manor Cross had surprised Mary, after the comparative

luxury of the deanery. All her lessons at Manor Cross had gone to show

that eating was not a delectation to be held in high esteem. But still

she was careful that everything around him should be nice. The

furniture was new, the glasses and crockery were new. Few, if any, of

the articles used, had ever been handled before. All her bridal

presents were there; and no doubt there was present to her mind the

fact that everything in the house had in truth been given to him by

her. If only she could make the things pleasant! If only he would allow

himself to be taught that nice things are nice! She hovered around him,

touching him every now and then with her light fingers, moving a lock

of his hair, and then stooping over him and kissing his brow. It might

still be that she would be able to galvanise him into that lover's

vitality, of which she had dreamed. He never rebuffed her; he did not

scorn her kisses, or fail to smile when his hair was moved; he answered

every word she spoke to him carefully and courteously; he admired her

pretty things when called upon to admire them. But through it all, she

was quite aware that she had not galvanised him as yet.

Of course there were books. Every proper preparation had been made for

rendering the little house pleasant. In the evening she took from her

shelf a delicate little volume of poetry, something exquisitely bound,

pretty to look at, and sweet to handle, and settled herself down to be

happy in her own drawing-room. But she soon looked up from the troubles

of Aurora Leigh to see what her husband was doing. He was comfortable

in his chair, but was busy with the columns of the Brothershire Herald.

"Dear me, George, have you brought that musty old paper up here?"

"Why shouldn't I read the Herald here, as well as at Manor Cross?"

"Oh! yes, if you like it."

"Of course I want to know what is being done in the county." But when

next she looked, the county had certainly faded from his mind, for he

was fast asleep.

On that occasion she did not care very much for Aurora Leigh. Her mind

was hardly tuned to poetry of that sort. The things around her were too

important to allow her mind to indulge itself with foreign cares. And

then she found herself looking at the watch. At Manor Cross ten o'clock

every night brought all the servants into the drawing-room. First the

butler would come and place the chairs, and then the maids, and then

the coachman and footman would follow. Lord George read the prayers,

and Mary had always thought them to be very tiring. But she now felt

that it would almost be a relief if the butler would come in and place

the chairs.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS MILDMAY AND JACK DE BARON.

Lady George was not left long in her new house without visitors. Early

on the day after her arrival, Mrs. Houghton came to her, and began at

once, with great volubility, to explain how the land lay, and to

suggest how it should be made to lie for the future. "I am so glad you

have come. As soon, you know, as they positively forbade me to get on

horseback again this winter, I made up my mind to come to town. What

is there to keep me down there if I don't ride? I promised to obey if I

was brought here,--and to disobey if I was left there. Mr. Houghton

goes up and down, you know. It is hard upon him, poor old fellow. But

then the other thing would be harder on me. He and papa are together

somewhere now, arranging about the spring meetings. They have got their

stables joined, and I know very well who will have the best of that. A

man has to get up very early to see all round papa. But Mr. Houghton is

so rich, it doesn't signify. And now, my dear, what are you going to

do? and what is Lord George going to do? I am dying to see Lord George.

I dare say you are getting a little tired of him by this time."

"Indeed, I'm not."

"You haven't picked up courage enough yet to say so; that's it, my

dear. I've brought cards from Mr. Houghton, which means to say that

though he is down somewhere at Newmarket in the flesh he is to be

supposed to have called upon you and Lord George. And now we want you

both to come and dine with us on Monday. I know Lord George is

particular, and so I've brought a note. You can't have anything to do

yet, and of course you'll come. Houghton will be back on Sunday, and

goes down again on Tuesday morning. To hear him talk about it you'd

think he was the keenest man in England across a country. Say that

you'll come."

"I'll ask Lord George."

"Fiddle de dee. Lord George will be only too delighted to come and see

me. I've got such a nice cousin to introduce to you; not one of the

Germain sort, you know, who are all perhaps a little slow. This man is

Jack De Baron, a nephew of papa's. He's in the Coldstreams, and I do

think you'll like him. There's nothing on earth he can't do, from

waltzing down to polo. And old Mildmay will be there, and Guss Mildmay,

who is dying in love with Jack."

"And is Jack dying in love with Guss?"

"Oh! dear no; not a bit. You needn't be afraid. Jack De Baron has just

Â£500 a year and his commission, and must, I should say, be over head

and ears in debt. Miss Mildmay may perhaps have Â£5,000 for her fortune.

Put this and that together, and you can hardly see anything comfortable

in the way of matrimony, can you?"

"Then I fear your----Jack is mercenary."

"Mercenary;--of course he's mercenary. That is to say, he doesn't want

to go to destruction quite at one leap. But he's awfully fond of

falling in love, and when he is in love he'll do almost

anything,--except marry."

"Then if I were you, I shouldn't ask--Guss to meet him."

"She can fight her own battles, and wouldn't thank me at all if I were

to fight them for her after that fashion. There'll be nobody else

except Houghton's sister, Hetta. You never met Hetta Houghton?"

"I've heard of her."

"I should think so. 'Not to know her,'--I forget the words; but if you

don't know Hetta Houghton, you're just nowhere. She has lots of money,

and lives all alone, and says whatever comes uppermost, and does what

she pleases. She goes everywhere, and is up to everything. I always

made up my mind I wouldn't be an old maid, but I declare I envy Hetta

Houghton. But then she'd be nothing unless she had money. There'll be

eight of us, and at this time of the year we dine at half-past seven,

sharp. Can I take you anywhere? The carriage can come back with you?"

"Thank you, no. I am going to pick Lord George up at the Carlton at

four."

"How nice! I wonder how long you'll go on picking up Lord George at the

Carlton."

She could only suppose, when her friend was gone, that this was the

right kind of thing. No doubt Lady Susanna had warned her against Mrs.

Houghton, but then she was not disposed to take Lady Susanna's warnings

on any subject. Her father had known that she intended to know the

woman; and her father, though he had cautioned her very often as to the

old women at Manor Cross, as he called them, had never spoken a word of

caution to her as to Mrs. Houghton. And her husband was well aware of

the intended intimacy. She picked up her husband, and rather liked

being kept waiting a few minutes at the club door in her brougham. Then

they went together to look at a new picture, which was being exhibited

by gas-light in Bond Street, and she began to feel that the pleasures

of London were delightful. "Don't you think those two old priests are

magnificent?" she said, pressing on his arm, in the obscurity of the

darkened chamber. "I don't know that I care much about old priests,"

said Lord George.

"But the heads are so fine."

"I dare say. Sacerdotal pictures never please me. Didn't you say you

wanted to go to Swann and Edgar's?" He would not sympathize with her

about pictures, but perhaps she would be able to find out his taste at

last.

He seemed quite well satisfied to dine with the Houghtons, and did, in

fact, call at the house before that day came round. "I was in Berkeley

Square this morning," he said one day, "but I didn't find any one."

"Nobody ever is at home, I suppose," she said. "Look here. There have

been Lady Brabazon, and Mrs. Patmore Green, and Mrs. Montacute Jones.

Who is Mrs. Montacute Jones?"

"I never heard of her."

"Dear me; how very odd. I dare say it was kind of her to come. And

yesterday the Countess of Care called. Is not she some relative?"

"She is my mother's first cousin."

"And then there was dear old Miss Tallowax. And I wasn't at home to see

one of them."

"No one I suppose ever is at home in London unless they fix a day for

seeing people."

Lady George, having been specially asked to come "sharp" to her

friend's dinner party, arrived with her husband exactly at the hour

named, and found no one in the drawing-room. In a few minutes Mrs.

Houghton hurried in, apologising. "It's all Mr. Houghton's fault

indeed, Lord George. He was to have been in town yesterday, but would

stay down and hunt to-day. Of course the train was late, and of course

he was so tired that he couldn't dress without going to sleep first."

As nobody else came for a quarter of an hour Mrs. Houghton had an

opportunity of explaining some things. "Has Mrs. Montacute Jones

called? I suppose you were out of your wits to find out who she was.

She's a very old friend of papa's, and I asked her to call. She gives

awfully swell parties, and has no end of money. She was one of the

Montacutes of Montacute, and so she sticks her own name on to her

husband's. He's alive, I believe, but he never shews. I think she keeps

him somewhere down in Wales."

"How odd!"

"It is a little queer, but when you come to know her you'll find it

will make no difference. She's the ugliest old woman in London, but I'd

be as ugly as she is to have her diamonds."

"I wouldn't," said Mary.

"Your husband cares about your appearance," said Mrs. Houghton, turning

her eyes upon Lord George. He simpered and looked pleased and did not

seem to be at all disgusted by their friend's slang, and yet had she

talked of "awfully swell" parties, he would, she was well aware, have

rebuked her seriously.

Miss Houghton--Hetta Houghton--was the first to arrive, and she

somewhat startled Mary by the gorgeous glories of her dress, though

Mrs. Houghton afterwards averred that she wasn't "a patch upon Mrs.

Montacute Jones." But Miss Houghton was a lady, and though over forty

years of age, was still handsome.

"Been hunting to-day, has he?" she said. "Well, if he likes it, I

shan't complain. But I thought he liked his ease too well to travel

fifty miles up to town after riding about all day."

"Of course he's knocked up, and at his age it's quite absurd," said the

young wife. "But Hetta, I want you to know my particular friend Lady

George Germain. Lord George, if he'll allow me to say so, is a cousin,

though I'm afraid we have to go back to Noah to make it out."

"Your great-grandmother was my great-grandmother's sister. That's not

so very far off."

"When you get to grandmothers no fellow can understand it, can they,

Mary?" Then came Mr. and Miss Mildmay. He was a gray-haired old

gentleman, rather short and rather fat, and she looked to be just such

another girl as Mrs. Houghton herself had been, though blessed with

more regular beauty. She was certainly handsome, but she carried with

her that wearied air of being nearly worn out by the toil of searching

for a husband which comes upon some young women after the fourth or

fifth year of their labours. Fortune had been very hard upon Augusta

Mildmay. Early in her career she had fallen in love, while abroad, with

an Italian nobleman, and had immediately been carried off home by her

anxious parents. Then in London she had fallen in love again with an

English nobleman, an eldest son, with wealth of his own. Nothing could

be more proper, and the young man had fallen also in love with her. All

her friends were beginning to hate her with virulence, so lucky had she

been! When on a sudden, the young lord told her that the match would

not please his father and mother, and that therefore there must be an

end of it. What was there to be done! All London had talked of it; all

London must know the utter failure. Nothing more cruel, more barefaced,

more unjust had ever been perpetrated. A few years since all the

Mildmays in England, one after another, would have had a shot at the

young nobleman. But in these days there seems to be nothing for a girl

to do but to bear it and try again. So Augusta Mildmay bore it and did

try again; tried very often again. And now she was in love with Jack De

Baron. The worst of Guss Mildmay was that, through it all, she had a

heart and would like the young men,--would like them, or perhaps

dislike them, equally to her disadvantage. Old gentlemen, such as was

Mr. Houghton, had been willing to condone all her faults, and all her

loves, and to take her as she was. But when the moment came, she would

not have her Houghton, and then she was in the market again. Now a

young woman entering the world cannot make a greater mistake than not

to know her own line, or, knowing it, not to stick to it. Those who are

thus weak are sure to fall between two stools. If a girl chooses to

have a heart, let her marry the man of her heart, and take her mutton

chops and bread and cheese, her stuff gown and her six children, as

they may come. But if she can decide that such horrors are horrid to

her, and that they must at any cost be avoided, then let her take her

Houghton when he comes, and not hark back upon feelings and fancies,

upon liking and loving, upon youth and age. If a girl has money and

beauty too, of course she can pick and choose. Guss Mildmay had no

money to speak of, but she had beauty enough to win either a working

barrister or a rich old sinner. She was quite able to fall in love with

the one and flirt with the other at the same time; but when the moment

for decision came, she could not bring herself to put up with either.

At present she was in real truth in love with Jack De Baron, and had

brought herself to think that if Jack would ask her, she would risk

everything. But were he to do so, which was not probable, she would

immediately begin to calculate what could be done by Jack's moderate

income and her own small fortune. She and Mrs. Houghton kissed each

other affectionately, being at the present moment close in each other's

confidences, and then she was introduced to Lady George. "Adelaide

hasn't a chance," was Miss Mildmay's first thought as she looked at the

young wife.

Then came Jack De Baron. Mary was much interested in seeing a man of

whom she had heard so striking an account, and for the love of whom she

had been told that a girl was almost dying. Of course all that was to

be taken with many grains of salt; but still the fact of the love and

the attractive excellence of the man had been impressed upon her. She

declared to herself at once that his appearance was very much in his

favour, and a fancy passed across her mind that he was somewhat like

that ideal man of whom she herself had dreamed, ever so many years ago

as it seemed to her now, before she had made up her mind that she would

change her ideal and accept Lord George Germain. He was about the

middle height, light haired, broad shouldered, with a pleasant smiling

mouth and well formed nose; but above all, he had about him that

pleasure-loving look, that appearance of taking things jauntily and of

enjoying life, which she in her young girlhood had regarded as being

absolutely essential to a pleasant lover. There are men whose very eyes

glance business, whose every word imports care, who step as though

their shoulders were weighed with thoughtfulness, who breathe

solicitude, and who seem to think that all the things of life are too

serious for smiles. Lord George was such a man, though he had in truth

very little business to do. And then there are men who are always

playfellows with their friends, who--even should misfortune be upon

them,--still smile and make the best of it, who come across one like

sunbeams, and who, even when tears are falling, produce the tints of a

rainbow. Such a one Mary Lovelace had perhaps seen in her childhood and

had then dreamed of him. Such a one was Jack De Baron, at any rate to

the eye.

And such a one in truth he was. Of course the world had spoiled him. He

was in the Guards. He was fond of pleasure. He was fairly well off in

regard to all his own wants, for his cousin had simply imagined those

debts with which ladies are apt to believe that young men of pleasure

must be overwhelmed. He had gradually taught himself to think that his

own luxuries and his own comforts should in his own estimation be

paramount to everything. He was not naturally selfish, but his life had

almost necessarily engendered selfishness. Marrying had come to be

looked upon as an evil,--as had old age;--not of course an unavoidable

evil, but one into which a man will probably fall sooner or later. To

put off marriage as long as possible, and when it could no longer be

put off to marry money was a part of his creed. In the meantime the

great delight of his life came from women's society. He neither gambled

nor drank. He hunted and fished, and shot deer and grouse, and

occasionally drove a coach to Windsor. But little love affairs,

flirtation, and intrigues, which were never intended to be guilty, but

which now and again had brought him into some trouble, gave its charm

to his life. On such occasions he would too, at times, be very badly in

love, assuring himself sometimes with absolute heroism that he would

never again see this married woman, or declaring to himself in moments

of self-sacrificial grandness that he would at once marry that

unmarried girl. And then, when he had escaped from some especial

trouble, he would take to his regiment for a month, swearing to himself

that for the next year he would see no women besides his aunts and his

grandmother. When making this resolution he might have added his cousin

Adelaide. They were close friends, but between them there had never

been the slightest spark of a flirtation.

In spite of all his little troubles Captain De Baron was a very popular

man. There was a theory abroad about him that he always behaved like a

gentleman, and that his troubles were misfortunes rather than faults.

Ladies always liked him, and his society was agreeable to men because

he was neither selfish nor loud. He talked only a little, but still

enough not to be thought dull. He never bragged or bullied or bounced.

He didn't want to shoot more deer or catch more salmon than another

man. He never cut a fellow down in the hunting-field. He never borrowed

money, but would sometimes lend it when a reason was given. He was

probably as ignorant as an owl of anything really pertaining to

literature, but he did not display his ignorance. He was regarded by

all who knew him as one of the most fortunate of men. He regarded

himself as being very far from blessed, knowing that there must come a

speedy end to the things which he only half enjoyed, and feeling partly

ashamed of himself in that he had found for himself no better part.

"Jack," said Mrs. Houghton, "I can't blow you up for being late,

because Mr. Houghton has not yet condescended to shew himself. Let me

introduce you to Lady George Germain." Then he smiled in his peculiar

way, and Mary thought his face the most beautiful she had ever seen.

"Lord George Germain,--who allows me to call him my cousin, though he

isn't as near as you are. My sister-in-law, you know." Jack shook hands

with the old lady in his most cordial manner. "I think you have seen

Mr. Mildmay before, and Miss Mildmay." Mary could not but look at the

greeting between the two, and she saw that Miss Mildmay almost turned

up her nose at him. She was quite sure that Mrs. Houghton had been

wrong about the love. There had surely only been a pretence of love.

But Mrs. Houghton had been right, and Mary had not yet learned to read

correctly the signs which men and women hang out.

At last Mr. Houghton came down. "Upon my word," said his wife, "I

wonder you ain't ashamed to shew yourself."

"Who says I'm not ashamed? I'm very much ashamed. But how can I help

it if the trains won't keep their time? We were hunting all day

to-day,--nothing very good, Lord George, but on the trot from eleven to

four. That tires a fellow, you know. And the worst of it is I've got to

do it again on Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday."

"Is there a necessity?" asked Lord George.

"When a man begins that kind of thing he must go through with it.

Hunting is like women. It's a jealous sport. Lady George, may I take

you down to dinner? I am so sorry to have kept you waiting."

CHAPTER XIII.

MORE NEWS FROM ITALY.

Mr. Houghton took Lady George down to dinner; but Jack De Baron sat on

his left hand. Next to him was Augusta Mildmay, who had been consigned

to his care. Then came Lord George sitting opposite to his host at a

round table, with Mrs. Houghton at his right hand. Mrs. Mildmay and

Miss Hetta Houghton filled up the vacant places. To all this a great

deal of attention had been given by the hostess. She had not wished to

throw her cousin Jack and Miss Mildmay together. She would probably

have said to a confidential friend that "there had been enough of all

that." In her way she liked Guss Mildmay; but Guss was not good enough

to marry her cousin. Guss herself must know that such a marriage was

impossible. She had on an occasion said a word or two to Guss upon the

subject. She had thought that a little flirtation between Jack and her

other friend Lady George might put things right; and she had thought,

too,--or perhaps felt rather than thought,--that Lord George had

emancipated himself from the thraldom of his late love rather too

quickly. Mary was a dear girl. She was quite prepared to make Mary her

friend, being in truth somewhat sick of the ill-humours and

disappointments of Guss Mildmay; but it might be as well that Mary

should be a little checked in her triumph. She herself had been obliged

to put up with old Mr. Houghton. She never for a moment told herself

that she had done wrong; but of course she required compensation. When

she was manoeuvring she never lost sight of her manoeuvres. She had had

all this in her mind when she made up her little dinner-party. She had

had it all in her mind when she arranged the seats. She didn't want to

sit next to Jack herself, because Jack would have talked to her to the

exclusion of Lord George, so she placed herself between Lord George and

Mr. Mildmay. It had been necessary that Mr. Mildmay should take Miss

Houghton down to dinner, and therefore she could not separate Guss

from Jack De Baron. Anybody who understands dinner-parties will see it

all at a glance. But she was convinced that Jack would devote himself

to Lady George at his left hand; and so he did.

"Just come up to town, haven't you?" said Jack.

"Only last week."

"This is the nicest time in the year for London, unless you do a deal

of hunting; then it's a grind."

"I never hunt at all; Lord George won't let me."

"I wish some one wouldn't let me. It would save me a deal of money, and

a great deal of misery. It's all a delusion and a snare. You never get

a run nowadays."

"Do you think so? I'd rather hunt than do anything."

"That's because you are not let to do it; the perversity of human

nature, you know! The only thing I'm not allowed to do is to marry, and

it's the only thing I care for."

"Who prevents it, Captain de Baron?"

"There's a new order come out from the Horse Guards yesterday. No one

under a field officer is to marry unless he has got Â£2,000 a year."

"Marrying is cheaper than hunting."

"Of course, Lady George, you may buy your horses cheap or dear, and you

may do the same with your wives. You may have a cheap wife who doesn't

care for dress, and likes to sit at home and read good books."

"That's just what I do."

"But then they're apt to go wrong and get out of order."

"How do you mean? I shan't get out of order, I hope."

"The wheels become rusty, don't you think? and then they won't go as

they ought. They scold and turn up their noses. What I want to find is

perfect beauty, devoted affection, and Â£50,000."

"How modest you are."

In all this badinage there was not much to make a rival angry; but Miss

Mildmay, who heard a word or two now and then, was angry. He was

talking to a pretty woman about marriage and money, and of course that

amounted to flirtation. Lord George, on her other hand, now and then

said a word to her; but he was never given to saying many words, and

his attention was nearly monopolised by his hostess. She had heard the

last sentence, and determined to join the conversation.

"If you had the Â£50,000, Captain De Baron," she said, "I think you

would manage to do without the beauty and the devoted affection."

"That's ill-natured, Miss Mildmay, though it may be true. Beggars can't

be choosers. But you've known me a long time, and I think it's unkind

that you should run me down with a new acquaintance. Suppose I was to

say something bad of you."

"You can say whatever you please, Captain De Baron."

"There is nothing bad to say, of course, except that you are always

down on a poor fellow in distress. Don't you think it's a grand thing

to be good-natured, Lady George?"

"Indeed I do. It's almost better than being virtuous."

"Ten to one. I don't see the good of virtue myself. It always makes

people stingy and cross and ill-mannered. I think one should always

promise to do everything that is asked. Nobody would be fool enough to

expect you to keep your word afterwards, and you'd give a lot of

pleasure."

"I think promises ought to be kept, Captain De Baron."

"I can't agree to that. That's bondage, and it puts an embargo on the

pleasant way of living that I like. I hate all kind of strictness, and

duty, and self-denying, and that kind of thing. It's rubbish. Don't you

think so?"

"I suppose one has to do one's duty."

"I don't see it. I never do mine."

"Suppose there were a battle to fight."

"I should get invalided at once. I made up my mind to that long ago.

Fancy the trouble of it. And when they shoot you they don't shoot you

dead, but knock half your face away, or something of that sort. Luckily

we live in an island, and haven't much fighting to do. If we hadn't

lived in an island I should never have gone into the army."

This was not flirting certainly. It was all sheer nonsense,--words

without any meaning in them. But Mary liked it. She decidedly would not

have liked it had it ever occurred to her that the man was flirting

with her. It was the very childishness of the thing that pleased

her,--the contrast to conversation at Manor Cross, where no childish

word was ever spoken. And though she was by no means prepared to flirt

with Captain De Baron, still she found in him something of the

realisation of her dreams. There was the combination of manliness,

playfulness, good looks, and good humour which she had pictured to

herself. To sit well-dressed in a well-lighted room and have nonsense

talked to her suited her better than a petticoat conclave. And she knew

of no harm in it. Her father encouraged her to be gay, and altogether

discouraged petticoat conclaves. So she smiled her sweetest on Captain

De Baron, and replied to his nonsense with other nonsense, and was

satisfied.

But Guss Mildmay was very much dissatisfied, both as to the amusement

of the present moment and as to the conduct of Captain De Baron

generally. She knew London life well, whereas Lady George did not know

it at all; and she considered that this was flirtation. She may have

been right in any accusation which she made in her heart against the

man, but she was quite wrong in considering Lady George to be a flirt.

She had, however, grievances of her own--great grievances. It was not

only that the man was attentive to some one else, but that he was not

attentive to her. He and she had had many passages in life together,

and he owed it to her at any rate not to appear to neglect her. And

then what a stick was that other man on the other side of her,--that

young woman's husband! During the greater part of dinner she was

sitting speechless,--not only loverless, but manless. It is not what

one suffers that kills one, but what one knows that other people see

that one suffers.

There was not very much conversation between Lord George and Mrs.

Houghton at dinner. Perhaps she spoke as much to Mr. Mildmay as to him;

for she was a good hostess, understanding and performing her duty. But

what she did say to him she said very graciously, making allusions to

further intimacy between herself and Mary, flattering his vanity by

little speeches as to Manor Cross, always seeming to imply that she

felt hourly the misfortune of having been forced to decline the honour

of such an alliance as had been offered to her. He was, in truth, as

innocent as his wife, except in this, that he would not have wished her

to hear all that Mrs. Houghton said to him, whereas Mary would have had

not the slightest objection to his hearing all the nonsense between her

and Captain De Baron.

The ladies sat a long time after dinner, and when they went Mrs.

Houghton asked her husband to come up in ten minutes. They did not

remain much longer, but during those ten minutes Guss Mildmay said

something of her wrongs to her friend, and Lady George heard some news

from Miss Houghton. Miss Houghton had got Lady George on to a sofa, and

was talking to her about Brotherton and Manor Cross. "So the Marquis is

coming," she said. "I knew the Marquis years ago, when we used to be

staying with the De Barons,--Adelaide's father and mother. She was

alive then, and the Marquis used to come over there. So he has

married?"

"Yes; an Italian."

"I did not think he would ever marry. It makes a difference to

you;--does it not?"

"I don't think of such things."

"You will not like him, for he is the very opposite to Lord George."

"I don't know that I shall ever even see him. I don't think he wants to

see any of us."

"I dare say not. He used to be very handsome, and very fond of ladies'

society,--but, I think, the most selfish human being I ever knew in my

life. That is a complaint that years do not cure. He and I were great

friends once."

"Did you quarrel?"

"Oh, dear no. I had rather a large fortune of my own, and there was a

time in which he was, perhaps, a little in want of money. But they had

to build a town on his property in Staffordshire, and you see that did

instead."

"Did instead!" said Lady George, altogether in the dark.

"There was suddenly a great increase to his income, and, of course,

that altered his view. I am bound to say that he was very explicit. He

could be so without suffering himself, or understanding that any one

else would suffer. I tell you because you are one of the family, and

would, no doubt, hear it all some day through Adelaide. I had a great

escape."

"And he a great misfortune," said Mary civilly.

"I think he had, to tell you the truth. I am good-tempered,

long-suffering, and have a certain grain of sagacity that might have

been useful to him. Have you heard about this Italian lady?"

"Only that she is an Italian lady."

"He is about my age. If I remember rightly there is hardly a month or

two between us. She is three or four years older."

"You knew her then?"

"I knew of her. I have been curious enough to enquire, which is, I dare

say, more than any body has done at Manor Cross."

"And is she so old?"

"And a widow. They have been married, you know, over twelve months;

nearly two years, I believe."

"Surely not; we heard of it only since our own marriage."

"Exactly; but the Marquis was always fond of a little mystery. It was

the news of your marriage that made him hint at the possibility of such

a thing; and he did not tell the fact till he had made up his mind to

come home. I do not know that he has told all now."

"What else is there?"

"She has a baby,--a boy." Mary felt that the colour flew to her cheeks;

but she knew that it did so, not from any disappointment of her own,

not because these tidings were in truth a blow to her, but because

others,--this lady, for instance,--would think that she suffered. "I am

afraid it is so," said Miss Houghton.

"She may have twenty, for what I care," said Mary, recovering herself.

"I think Lord George ought to know."

"Of course I shall tell him what you told me. I am sorry that he is not

nice, that's all. I should have liked a brother-in-law that I could

have loved. And I wish he had married an English woman. I think English

women are best for English men."

"I think so too. I am afraid you will none of you like the lady. She

cannot speak a word of English. Of course you will use my name in

telling Lord George. I heard it all from a friend of mine who is

married to one of the Secretaries at the Embassy." Then the gentlemen

came in, and Mary began to be in a hurry to get away that she might

tell this news to her husband.

In the meantime Guss Mildmay made her complaints, deep but not loud.

She and Mrs. Houghton had been very intimate as girls, knew each

other's secrets, and understood each other's characters. "Why did you

have him to such a party as this?" said Guss.

"I told you he was coming."

"But you didn't tell me about that young woman. You put him next to her

on purpose to annoy me."

"That's nonsense. You know as well as I do that nothing can come of it.

You must drop it, and you'd better do it at once. You don't want to be

known as the girl who is dying for the love of a man she can't marry.

That's not your mÃ©tier."

"That's my own affair. If I choose to stick to him you, at least, ought

not to cross me."

"But he won't stick to you. Of course he's my cousin, and I don't see

why he's to be supposed never to say a word to anyone else, when it's

quite understood that you're not going to have one another. What's the

good of being a dog in the manger?"

"Adelaide, you never had any heart!"

"Of course not;--or, if I had, I knew how to get the better of so

troublesome an appendage. I hate hearing about hearts. If he'd take you

to-morrow you wouldn't marry him?"

"Yes, I would."

"I don't believe it. I don't think you'd be so wicked. Where would you

live, and how? How long would it be before you hated each other?

Hearts! As if hearts weren't just like anything else which either you

can or you cannot afford yourself. Do you think I couldn't go and fall

in love to-morrow, and think it the best fun in the world? Of course

it's nice to have a fellow like Jack always ready to spoon, and sending

one things, and riding with one, and all that. I don't know any young

woman in London would like it better than I should. But I can't afford

it, my dear, and so I don't do it."

"It seems to me you are going to do it with your old lover?"

"Dear Lord George! I swear it's only to bring Mary down a peg, because

she is so proud of her nobleman. And then he is handsome! But, my dear,

I've pleased myself. I have got a house over my head, and a carriage to

sit in, and servants to wait on me, and I've settled myself. Do you do

likewise, and you shall have your Lord George, or Jack De Baron, if he

pleases;--only don't go too far with him."

"Adelaide," said the other, "I'm not good, but you're downright bad."

Mrs. Houghton only laughed, as she got up from her seat to welcome the

gentlemen as they entered the room.

Mary, as soon as the door of the brougham had been closed upon her, and

her husband, began to tell her story. "What do you think Miss Houghton

has told me?" Lord George, of course, could have no thoughts about it,

and did not at first very much care what the story might have been.

"She says that your brother was married ever so long ago!"

"I don't believe it," said Lord George, suddenly and angrily.

"A year before we were married, I mean."

"I don't believe it."

"And she says that they have a son."

"What!"

"That there is a baby,--a boy. She has heard it all from some friend of

hers at Rome."

"It can't be true."

"She said that I had better tell you. Does it make you unhappy,

George?" To this he made no immediate answer. "What can it matter

whether he was married two months ago or two years? It does not make me

unhappy;" as she said this, she locked herself close into his arm.

"Why should he deceive us? That would make me unhappy. If he had

married in a proper way and had a family, here in England, of course I

should have been glad. I should have been loyal to him as I am to the

others. But if this be true, of course, it will make me unhappy. I do

not believe it. It is some gossip."

"I could not but tell you."

"It is some jealousy. There was a time when they said that Brotherton

meant to marry her."

"What difference could it make to her? Of course we all know that he is

married. I hope it won't make you unhappy, George." But Lord George was

unhappy, or at any rate, was moody, and would talk no more then on that

subject, or any other. But in truth the matter rested on his mind all

the night.

CHAPTER XIV.

"ARE WE TO CALL HIM POPENJOY?"

The news which he had heard did afflict Lord George very much. A day or

two after the dinner-party in Berkeley Square he found Mr. Knox, his

brother's agent, and learned from him that Miss Houghton's story was

substantially true. The Marquis had informed his man of business that

an heir had been born to him, but had not communicated the fact to any

one of the family! This omission, in such a family, was, to Lord

George's thinking, so great a crime on the part of his brother, as to

make him doubt whether he could ever again have fraternal relations

with a man who so little knew his duty. When Mr. Knox showed him the

letter his brow became very black. He did not often forget

himself,--was not often so carried away by any feeling as to be in

danger of doing so. But on this occasion even he was so moved as to be

unable to control his words. "An Italian brat? Who is to say how it was

born?"

"The Marquis, my Lord, would not do anything like that," said Mr. Knox,

very seriously.

Then Lord George was ashamed of himself, and blushed up to the roots of

his hair. He had hardly himself known what he had meant. But he

mistrusted an Italian widow, because she was an Italian, and because

she was a widow, and he mistrusted the whole connexion, because there

had been in it none of that honourable openness which should, he

thought, characterise all family doings in such a family as that of the

Germains. "I don't know of what kind you mean," he said, shuffling, and

knowing that he shuffled. "I don't suppose my brother would do anything

really wrong. But it's a blot to the family--a terrible blot."

"She is a lady of good family,--a Marchese," said Mr. Knox.

"An Italian Marchese!" said Lord George, with that infinite contempt

which an English nobleman has for foreign nobility not of the highest

order.

He had learnt that Miss Houghton's story was true, and was certainly

very unhappy. It was not at all that he had pictured to himself the

glory of being himself the Marquis of Brotherton after his brother's

death; nor was it only the disappointment which he felt as to any

possible son of his own, though on that side he did feel the blow. The

reflection which perplexed him most was the consciousness that he must

quarrel with his brother, and that after such a quarrel he would become

nobody in the world. And then, added to this, was the sense of family

disgrace. He would have been quite content with his position had he

been left master of the house at Manor Cross, even without any of his

brother's income wherewith to maintain the house. But now he would only

be his wife's husband, the Dean's son-in-law, living on their money,

and compelled by circumstances to adapt himself to them. He almost

thought that had he known that he would be turned out of Manor Cross,

he would not have married. And then, in spite of his disclaimer to Mr.

Knox, he was already suspicious of some foul practice. An heir to the

title and property, to all the family honours of the Germains, had

suddenly burst upon him, twelve months,--for aught that he knew, two or

three years,--after the child's birth! Nobody had been informed when

the child was born, or in what circumstances,--except that the mother

was an Italian widow! What evidence on which an Englishman might rely

could possibly be forthcoming from such a country as Italy! Poor Lord

George, who was himself as honest as the sun, was prepared to believe

all evil things of people of whom he knew nothing! Should his brother

die,--and his brother's health was bad,--what steps should he take?

Would it be for him to accept this Italian brat as the heir to

everything, or must he ruin himself by a pernicious lawsuit? Looking

forward he saw nothing but family misery and disgrace, and he saw,

also, inevitable difficulties with which he knew himself to be

incapable to cope. "It is true," he said to his wife very gloomily,

when he first met her after his interview with Mr. Knox.

"What Miss Houghton said? I felt sure it was true, directly she told

me."

"I don't know why you should have felt sure, merely on her word, as to

a thing so monstrous as this is. You don't seem to see that it concerns

yourself."

"No; I don't. It doesn't concern me at all, except as it makes you

unhappy." Then there was a pause for a moment, during which she crept

close up to him, in a manner that had now become usual with her. "Why

do you think I married you?" she said. He was too unhappy to answer her

pleasantly,--too much touched by her sweetness to answer her

unpleasantly; and so he said nothing. "Certainly not with any hope that

I might become Marchioness of Brotherton. Whatever may have made me do

such a thing, I can assure you that that had nothing to do with it."

"Can't you look forward? Don't you suppose that you may have a son?"

Then she buried her face upon his shoulder. "And if so, would it not be

better that a child so born should be the heir, than some Italian baby,

of whom no one knows anything?"

"If you are unhappy, George, I shall be unhappy. But for myself I will

not affect to care anything. I don't want to be a Marchioness. I only

want to see you without a frown on your brow. To tell the truth, if you

didn't mind it, I should care nothing about your brother and his

doings. I would make a joke of this Marchese, who, Miss Houghton says,

is a puckered-faced old woman. Miss Houghton seems to care a great deal

more about it than I do."

"It cannot be a subject for a joke." He was almost angry at the idea of

the wife of the head of the family being made a matter of laughter.

That she should be reprobated, hated,--cursed, if necessary,--was

within the limits of family dignity; but not that she should become a

joke to those with whom she had unfortunately connected herself. When

he had finished speaking to her she could not but feel that he was

displeased, and could not but feel also the injustice of such

displeasure. Of course she had her own little share in the general

disappointments. But she had striven before him to make nothing of it,

in order that he might be quite sure that she had married him--not with

any idea of rank or wealth, but for himself alone. She had made light

of the family misfortune, in order that he might be relieved. And yet

he was angry with her! This was unreasonable. How much had she done for

him! Was she not striving every hour of her life to love him, and, at

any rate, to comfort him with the conviction that he was loved? Was she

not constant in her assurance to herself that her whole life should be

devoted to him? And yet he was surly to her simply because his brother

had disgraced himself! When she was left alone she sat down and cried,

and then consoled herself by remembering that her father was coming to

her.

It had been arranged that the last days of February should be spent by

Lord George with his mother and sisters at Cross Hall, and that the

Dean should run up to town for a week. Lord George went down to

Brotherton by a morning train, and the Dean came up on the same

afternoon. But the going and coming were so fixed that the two men met

at the deanery. Lord George had determined that he would speak fully to

the Dean respecting his brother. He was always conscious of the Dean's

low birth, remembering, with some slight discomfort, the stable-keeper

and the tallow-chandler; and he was a little inclined to resent what he

thought to be a disposition on the part of the Dean to domineer. But

still the Dean was a practical, sagacious man, in whom he could trust;

and the assistance of such a friend was necessary to him. Circumstances

had bound him to the Dean, and he was a man not prone to bind himself

to many men. He wanted and yet feared the confidence of friendship. He

lunched with the Dean, and then told his story. "You know," he said,

"that my brother is married?"

"Of course, we all heard that."

"He was married more than twelve months before he informed us that he

was going to be married."

"No!"

"It was so."

"Do you mean, then, that he told you a falsehood?"

"His letter to me was very strange, though I did not think much of it

at the time. He said, 'I am to be married'--naming no day."

"That certainly was--a falsehood, as, at that time, he was married."

"I do not know that harsh words will do any good."

"Nor I. But it is best, George, that you and I should be quite plain in

our words to each other. Placed as he was, and as you were, he was

bound to tell you of his marriage as soon as he knew it himself. You

had waited till he was between forty and fifty, and, of course, he must

feel that what you would do would depend materially upon what he did."

"It didn't at all."

"And then, having omitted to do his duty, he screens his fault by

a----positive misstatement, when his intended return home makes further

concealment impossible."

"All that, however, is of little moment," said Lord George, who could

not but see that the Dean was already complaining that he had been left

without information which he ought to have possessed when he was giving

his daughter to a probable heir to the title. "There is more than

that."

"What more?"

"He had a son born more than twelve months since."

"Who says so?" exclaimed the Dean, jumping up from his chair.

"I heard it first,--or rather Mary did,--in common conversation, from

an old friend. I then learned the truth from Knox. Though he had told

none of us, he had told Knox."

"And Knox has known it all through?"

"No, only lately. But he knows it now. Knox supposes that they are

coming home so that the people about may be reconciled to the idea of

his having an heir. There will be less trouble, he thinks, if the boy

comes now, than if he were never heard of till he was ten or fifteen

years old,--or perhaps till after my brother's death."

"There may be trouble enough still," said the Dean, almost with a gasp.

The Dean, it was clear, did not believe in the boy. Lord George

remembered that he himself had expressed disbelief, and that Mr. Knox

had almost rebuked him. "I have now told you all the facts," said Lord

George, "and have told them as soon as I knew them."

"You are as true as the sun," said the Dean, putting his hand on his

son-in-law's shoulder. "You will be honest. But you must not trust in

the honesty of others. Poor Mary!"

"She does not feel it in the least;--will not even interest herself

about it."

"She will feel it some day. She is no more than a child now. I feel it,

George;--I feel it; and you ought to feel it."

"I feel his ill-treatment of myself."

"What--in not telling you? That is probably no more than a small part

of a wide scheme. We must find out the truth of all this."

"I don't know what there is to find out," said Lord George, hoarsely.

"Nor do I; but I do feel that there must be something. Think of your

brother's position and standing,--of his past life and his present

character! This is no time now for being mealy-mouthed. When such a man

as he appears suddenly with a foreign woman and a foreign child, and

announces one as his wife and the other as his heir, having never

reported the existence of one or of the other, it is time that some

enquiry should be made. I, at any rate, shall make enquiry. I shall

think myself bound to do so on behalf of Mary." Then they parted as

confidential friends do part, but each with some feeling antagonistic

to the other. The Dean, though he had from his heart acknowledged that

Lord George was as honest as the sun, still felt himself to be

aggrieved by the Germain family, and doubted whether his son-in-law

would be urgent enough and constant in hostility to his own brother. He

feared that Lord George would be weak, feeling; as regarded himself,

that he would fight till he had spent his last penny, as long as there

was a chance that, by fighting, a grandson of his own might be made

Marquis of Brotherton. He, at any rate, understood his own heart in the

matter, and knew what it was that he wanted. But Lord George, though he

had found himself compelled to tell everything to the Dean, still

dreaded the Dean. It was not in accordance with his principles that he

should be leagued against his brother with such a man as Dean Lovelace,

and he could see that the Dean was thinking of his own possible

grandchildren, whereas he himself was thinking only of the family of

Germain.

He found his mother and sister at the small house,--the house at which

Farmer Price was living only a month or two since. No doubt it was the

recognised dower house, but nevertheless there was still about it a

flavour of Farmer Price. A considerable sum of money had been spent

upon it, which had come from a sacrifice of a small part of the capital

belonging to the three sisters, with an understanding that it should be

repaid out of the old lady's income. But no one, except the old lady

herself, anticipated such repayment. All this had created trouble and

grief, and the family, which was never gay, was now more sombre than

ever. When the further news was told to Lady Sarah it almost crushed

her. "A child!" she said in a horror-stricken whisper, turning quite

pale, and looking as though the crack of doom were coming at once. "Do

you believe it?" Then her brother explained the grounds he had for

believing it. "And that it was born in wedlock twelve months before the

fact was announced to us."

"It has never been announced to us," said Lord George.

"What are we to do? is my mother to be told? She ought to know at once;

and yet how can we tell her? What shall you do about the Dean?"

"He knows."

"You told him?"

"Yes; I thought it best."

"Well,--perhaps. And yet it is terrible that any man so distant from us

should have our secrets in his keeping."

"As Mary's father, I thought it right that he should know."

"I have always liked the Dean personally," said Lady Sarah. "There is a

manliness about him which has recommended him, and having a full hand

he knows how to open it. But he isn't----; he isn't quite----"

"No; he isn't quite----," said Lord George, also hesitating to

pronounce the word which was understood by both of them.

"You must tell my mother, or I must. It will be wrong to withhold it.

If you like, I will tell Susanna and Amelia."

"I think you had better tell my mother," said Lord George; "she will

take it more easily from you. And then, if she breaks down, you can

control her better." That Lady Sarah should have the doing of any

difficult piece of work was almost a matter of course. She did tell the

tale to her mother, and her mother did break down. The Marchioness,

when she found that an Italian baby had been born twelve months before

the time which she had been made to believe was the date of the

marriage, took at once to her bed. What a mass of horrors was coming on

them! Was she to go and see a woman who had had a baby under such

circumstances? Or was her own eldest son, the very, very Marquis of

Brotherton, to be there with his wife, and was she not to go and see

them? Through it all her indignation against her son had not been hot

as had been theirs against their brother. He was her eldest son,--the

very Marquis,--and ought to be allowed to do almost anything he

pleased. Had it not been impossible for her to rebel against Lady Sarah

she would have obeyed her son in that matter of the house. And, even

now, it was not against her son that her heart was bitter, but against

the woman, who, being an Italian, and having been married, if married,

without the knowledge of the family, presumed to say that her child was

legitimate. Had her eldest son brought over with him to the halls of

his ancestors an Italian mistress that would, of course, have been very

bad, but it would not have been so bad as this. Nothing could be so bad

as this. "Are we to call him Popenjoy?" she asked with a gurgling voice

from amidst the bed clothes. Now the eldest son of the Marquis of

Brotherton would, as a matter of course, be Lord Popenjoy, if

legitimate. "Certainly we must," said Lady Sarah, authoritatively,

"unless the marriage should be disproved."

"Poor dear little thing," said the Marchioness, beginning to feel some

pity for the odious stranger as soon as she was told that he really was

to be called Popenjoy. Then the Ladies Susanna and Amelia were

informed, and the feeling became general throughout the household that

the world must be near its end. What were they all to do when he should

come? That was the great question. He had begun by declaring that he

did not want to see any of them. He had endeavoured to drive them away

from the neighbourhood, and had declared that neither his mother nor

his sisters would "get on" with his wife. All the ladies at Cross Hall

had a very strong opinion that this would turn out to be true, but

still they could not bear to think that they should be living as it

were next door to the head of the family, and never see him. A feeling

began to creep over all of them, except Lady Sarah, that it would have

been better for them to have obeyed the head of the family and gone

elsewhere. But it was too late now. The decision had been made, and

they must remain.

Lady Sarah, however, never gave way for a minute. "George," she said

very solemnly, "I have thought a great deal about this, and I do not

mean to let him trample upon us."

"It is all very sad," said Lord George.

"Yes, indeed. If I know myself, I think I should be the last person to

attribute evil motives to my elder brother, or to stand in his way in

aught that he might wish to do in regard to the family. I know all that

is due to him. But there is a point beyond which even that feeling

cannot carry me. He has disgraced himself." Lord George shook his head.

"And he is doing all he can to bring disgrace upon us. It has always

been my wish that he should marry."

"Of course, of course."

"It is always desirable that the eldest son should marry. The heir to

the property then knows that he is the heir, and is brought up to

understand his duties. Though he had married a foreigner, much as I

should regret it, I should be prepared to receive her as a sister; it

is for him to please himself; but in marrying a foreigner he is more

specially bound to let it be known to all the world, and to have

everything substantiated, than if he had married an English girl in her

own parish church. As it is, we must call on her, because he says that

she is his wife. But I shall tell him that he is acting very wrongly by

us all, especially by you, and most especially by his own child, if he

does not take care that such evidence of his marriage is forthcoming as

shall satisfy all the world."

"He won't listen to you."

"I think I can make him, as far as that goes; at any rate I do not mean

to be afraid of him. Nor must you."

"I hardly know whether I will even see him."

"Yes; you must see him. If we are to be expelled from the family house,

let it be his doing, and not ours. We have to take care, George, that

we do not make a single false step. We must be courteous to him, but

above all we must not be afraid of him."

In the meantime the Dean went up to London, meaning to spend a week

with his daughter in her new house. They had both intended that this

should be a period of great joy to them. Plans had been made as to the

theatres and one or two parties, which were almost as exciting to the

Dean as to his daughter. It was quite understood by both of them that

the Dean up in London was to be a man of pleasure, rather than a

clergyman. He had no purpose of preaching either at St. Paul's or the

Abbey. He was going to attend no Curates' Aid Society or Sons of the

Clergy. He intended to forget Mr. Groschut, to ignore Dr. Pountney, and

have a good time. That had been his intention, at least till he saw

Lord George at the deanery. But now there were serious thoughts in his

mind. When he arrived Mary had for the time got nearly rid of the

incubus of the Italian Marchioness with her baby. She was all smiles as

she kissed him. But he could not keep himself from the great subject.

"This is terrible news, my darling," he said at once.

"Do you think so, papa?"

"Certainly I do."

"I don't see why Lord Brotherton should not have a son and heir as well

as anybody else."

"He is quite entitled to have a son and heir,--one may almost say more

entitled than anyone else, seeing that he has got so much to leave to

him,--but on that very account he is more bound than anyone else to let

all the world feel sure that his declared son and heir is absolutely

his son and heir."

"He couldn't be so vile as that, papa!"

"God forbid that I should say that he could. It may be that he

considers himself married, though the marriage would not be valid here.

Maybe he is married, and that yet the child is not legitimate." Mary

could not but blush as her father spoke to her thus plainly. "All we do

know is that he wrote to his own brother declaring that he was about to

be married twelve months after the birth of the child whom he now

expects us to recognise as the heir to the title. I for one am not

prepared to accept his word without evidence, and I shall have no

scruple in letting him know that such evidence will be wanted."

CHAPTER XV.

"DROP IT."

For ten or twelve days after the little dinner in Berkeley Square Guss

Mildmay bore her misfortunes without further spoken complaint. During

all that time, though they were both in London, she never saw Jack De

Baron, and she knew that in not seeing her he was neglecting her. But

for so long she bore it. It is generally supposed that young ladies

have to bear such sorrow without loud complaint; but Guss was more

thoroughly emancipated than are some young ladies, and when moved was

wont to speak her mind. At last, when she herself was only on foot with

her father, she saw Jack De Baron riding with Lady George. It is quite

true that she also saw, riding behind them, her perfidious friend, Mrs.

Houghton, and a gentleman whom at that time she did not know to be Lady

George's father. This was early in March, when equestrians in the park

are not numerous. Guss stood for a moment looking at them, and Jack De

Baron took off his hat. But Jack did not stop, and went on talking with

that pleasant vivacity which she, poor girl, knew so well and valued so

highly. Lady George liked it too, though she could hardly have given

any reason for liking it, for, to tell the truth, there was not often

much pith in Jack's conversation.

On the following morning Captain De Baron, who had lodgings in Charles

Street close to the Guards' Club, had a letter brought to him before

he was out of bed. The letter was from Guss Mildmay, and he knew the

handwriting well. He had received many notes from her, though none so

interesting on the whole as was this letter. Miss Mildmay's letter to

Jack was as follows. It was written, certainly, with a swift pen, and,

but that he knew her writing well, would in parts have been hardly

legible.

"I think you are treating me very badly. I tell you openly and

fairly. It is neither gentlemanlike or high spirited, as you know

that I have no one to take my part but myself. If you mean to cut

me, say so, and let me understand it at once. You have taken up

now with that young married woman just because you know it will

make me angry. I don't believe for a moment that you really care

for such a baby-faced chit as that. I have met her too, and I know

that she hasn't a word to say for herself. Do you mean to come and

see me? I expect to hear from you, letting me know when you will

come. I do not intend to be thrown over for her or anyone. I

believe it is mostly Adelaide's doing, who doesn't like to think

that you should really care for anyone. You know very well what my

feelings are, and what sacrifice I am ready to make. And you know

what you have told me of yourself. I shall be at home all this

afternoon. Papa, of course, will go to his club at three. Aunt

Julia has an afternoon meeting at the Institute for the

distribution of prizes among the Rights-of-Women young men, and I

have told her positively that I won't go. Nobody else will be

admitted. Do come and at any rate let us have it out. This state

of things will kill me,--though, of course, you don't mind that.

"G.

"I shall think you a coward if you don't come. Oh, Jack, do come."

She had begun like a lion, but had ended like a lamb; and such was the

nature of every thought she had respecting him. She was full of

indignation. She assured herself hourly that such treachery as his

deserved death. She longed for a return of the old times,--thirty years

since,--and for some old-fashioned brother, so that Jack might be shot

at and have a pistol bullet in his heart. And yet she told herself as

often that she could not live without him. Where should she find

another Jack after her recklessness in letting all the world know that

this man was her Jack? She hardly wanted to marry him, knowing full

well the nature of the life which would then be before her. Jack had

told her often that if forced to do that he must give up the army and

go and live in ----, he had named Dantzic as having the least alluring

sound of any place he knew. To her it would be best that things should

go on just as they were now till something should turn up. But that she

should be enthralled and Jack free was not to be borne! She begrudged

him no other pleasure. She was willing that he should hunt, gamble,

eat, drink, smoke, and be ever so wicked, if that were his taste; but

not that he should be seen making himself agreeable to another young

woman. It might be that their position was unfortunate, but of that

misfortune she had by far the heavier share. She could not eat, drink,

smoke, gamble, hunt, and be generally wicked. Surely he might bear it

if she could.

Jack, when he had read the letter, tossed it on to the counterpane, and

rolled himself again in bed. It was not as yet much after nine, and he

need not decide for an hour or two whether he would accept the

invitation or not. But the letter bothered him and he could not sleep.

She told him that if he did not come he would be a coward, and he felt

that she had told him the truth. He did not want to see her,--not

because he was tired of her, for in her softer humours she was always

pleasant to him,--but because he had a clear insight into the misery of

the whole connection. When the idea of marrying her suggested itself,

he always regarded it as being tantamount to suicide. Were he to be

persuaded to such a step he would simply be blowing his own brains out

because someone else asked him to do so. He had explained all this to

her at various times when suggesting Dantzic, and she had agreed with

him. Then, at that point, his common sense had been better than hers,

and his feeling really higher. "That being so," he had said, "it is

certainly for your advantage that we should part." But this to her had

been as though he were striving to break his own chains and was

indifferent as to her misery. "I can take care of myself," she had

answered him. But he knew that she could not take care of herself. Had

she not been most unwise, most imprudent, she would have seen the

wisdom of letting the intimacy of their acquaintance drop without any

further explanation. But she was most unwise. Nevertheless, when she

accused him of cowardice, must he not go?

He breakfasted uncomfortably, trying to put off the consideration, and

then uncomfortably sauntered down to the Guard House, at St. James's.

He had no intention of writing, and was therefore not compelled to make

up his mind till the hour named for the appointment should actually

have come. He thought for a while that he would write her a long

letter, full of good sense; explaining to her that it was impossible

that they should be useful to each other, and that he found himself

compelled, by his regard for her, to recommend that their peculiar

intimacy should be brought to an end. But he knew that such a letter

would go for nothing with her,--that she would regard it simply as an

excuse on his part. They two had tacitly agreed not to be bound by

common sense,--not to be wise. Such tacit agreements are common enough

between men, between women, and between men and women. What! a sermon

from you! No indeed; not that. Jack felt all this,--felt that he could

not preach without laying himself open to ridicule. When the time came

he made up his mind that he must go. Of course it was very bad for her.

The servants would all know it. Everybody would know it. She was

throwing away every chance she had of doing well for herself. But what

was he to do? She told him that he would be a coward, and he at any

rate could not bear that.

Mr. Mildmay lived in a small house in Green Street, very near the Park,

but still a modest, unassuming, cheap little house. Jack De Baron knew

the way to it well, and was there not above a quarter-of-an-hour after

the appointed time. "So aunt Ju has gone to the Rights of Women, has

she?" he said, after his first greeting. He might have kissed her if he

would, but he didn't. He had made up his mind about that. And so had

she. She was ready for him, whether he should kiss her or not,--ready

to accept either greeting, as though it was just that which she had

expected.

"Oh, yes; she is going to make a speech herself."

"But why do they give prizes to young men?"

"Because the young men have stood up for the old women. Why don't you

go and get a prize?"

"I had to be here instead."

"Had to be here, sir!"

"Yes, Guss; had to be here! Isn't that about it? When you tell me to

come, and tell me that I am a coward if I don't come, of course I am

here."

"And now you are here, what have you got to say for yourself?" This she

attempted to say easily and jauntily.

"Not a word."

"Then I don't see what is the use of coming?"

"Nor I, either. What would you have me say?"

"I would have you,--I would have you----" And then there was something

like a sob. It was quite real. "I would have you tell me--that

you--love me."

"Have I not told you so a score of times; and what has come of it?"

"But is it true?"

"Come, Guss, this is simple folly. You know it is true; and you know,

also, that there is no good whatever to be got from such truth."

"If you loved me, you would like--to--see me."

"No, I shouldn't;--no, I don't;--unless it could lead to something.

There was a little fun to be had when we could spoon together,--when I

hardly knew how to ask for it, and you hardly knew how to grant it;

when it was a little shooting bud, and had to be nursed by smiles and

pretty speeches. But there are only three things it can come to now.

Two are impossible, and therefore there is the other."

"What are the three?"

"We might get married."

"Well?"

"One of the three I shall not tell you. And we might--make up our

minds to forget it all. Do what the people call, part. That is what I

suggest."

"So that you may spend your time in riding about with Lady George

Germain."

"That is nonsense, Guss. Lady George Germain I have seen three times,

and she talks only about her husband; a pretty little woman more

absolutely in love I never came across."

"Pretty little fool!"

"Very likely. I have nothing to say against that. Only, when you have

no heavier stone to throw against me than Lady George Germain, really

you are badly off for weapons."

"I have stones enough, if I chose to throw them. Oh, Jack!"

"What more is there to be said?"

"Have you had enough of me already, Jack?"

"I should not have had half enough of you if either you or I had fifty

thousand pounds."

"If I had them I would give them all to you."

"And I to you. That goes without telling. But as neither of us have got

the money, what are we to do? I know what we had better not do. We had

better not make each other unhappy by what people call recriminations."

"I don't suppose that anything I say can affect your happiness."

"Yes, it does; very much. It makes me think of deep rivers, and high

columns; of express trains and prussic acid. Well as we have known each

other, you have never found out how unfortunately soft I am."

"Very soft!"

"I am. This troubles me so that I ride over awfully big places,

thinking that I might perhaps be lucky enough to break my neck."

"What must I feel, who have no way of amusing myself at all?"

"Drop it. I know it is a hard thing for me to say. I know it will sound

heartless. But I am bound to say so. It is for your sake. I can't hurt

myself. It does me no harm that everybody knows that I am philandering

after you; but it is the very deuce for you." She was silent for a

moment. Then he said again emphatically, "Drop it."

"I can't drop it," she said, through her tears.

"Then what are we to do?" As he asked this question, he approached her

and put his arm round her waist. This he did in momentary vacillating

mercy,--not because of the charm of the thing to himself, but through

his own inability not to give her some token of affection.

"Marry," she said, in a whisper.

"And go and live at Dantzic for the rest of our lives!" He did not

speak these words, but such was the exclamation which he at once made

internally to himself. If he had resolved on anything, he had resolved

that he would not marry her. One might sacrifice one's self, he had

said to himself, if one could do her any good; but what's the use of

sacrificing both. He withdrew his arm from her, and stood a yard apart

from her, looking into her face.

"That would be so horrible to you!" she said.

"It would be horrible to have nothing to eat."

"We should have seven hundred and fifty pounds a year," said Guss, who

had made her calculations very narrowly.

"Well, yes; and no doubt we could get enough to eat at such a place as

Dantzic."

"Dantzic! you always laugh at me when I speak seriously."

"Or Lubeck, if you like it better; or Leipsig. I shouldn't care the

least in the world where we went. I know a chap who lives in Minorca

because he has not got any money. We might go to Minorca, only the

mosquitoes would eat you up."

"Will you do it? I will if you will." They were standing now three

yards apart, and Guss was looking terrible things. She did not

endeavour to be soft, but had made up her mind as to the one step that

must be taken. She would not lose him. They need not be married

immediately. Something might turn up before any date was fixed for

their marriage. If she could only bind him by an absolute promise that

he would marry her some day! "I will, if you will," she said again,

after waiting a second or two for his answer. Then he shook his head.

"You will not, after all that you have said to me?" He shook his head

again. "Then, Jack De Baron, you are perjured, and no gentleman."

"Dear Guss, I can bear that. It is not true, you know, as I have never

made you any promise which I am not ready to keep; but still I can bear

it."

"No promise! Have you not sworn that you loved me?"

"A thousand times."

"And what does that mean from a gentleman to a lady?"

"It ought to mean matrimony and all that kind of thing, but it never

did mean it with us. You know how it all began."

"I know what it has come to, and that you owe it to me as a gentleman

to let me decide whether I am able to encounter such a life or not.

Though it were absolute destruction, you ought to face it if I bid

you."

"If it were destruction for myself only--perhaps, yes. But though you

have so little regard for my happiness, I still have some for yours. It

is not to be done. You and I have had our little game, as I said

before, and now we had better put the rackets down and go and rest

ourselves."

"What rest? Oh, Jack,--what rest is there?"

"Try somebody else."

"Can you tell me to do that!"

"Certainly I can. Look at my cousin Adelaide."

"Your cousin Adelaide never cared for any human being in her life

except herself. She had no punishment to suffer as I have. Oh, Jack! I

do so love you." Then she rushed at him, and fell upon his bosom, and

wept.

He knew that this would come, and he felt that, upon the whole, this

was the worst part of the performance. He could bear her anger or her

sullenness with fortitude, but her lachrymose caresses were

insupportable. He held her, however, in his arms, and gazed at himself

in the pier glass most uncomfortably over her shoulder. "Oh, Jack," she

said, "oh, Jack,--what is to come next?" His face became somewhat more

lugubrious than before, but he said not a word. "I cannot lose you

altogether. There is no one else in the wide world that I care for.

Papa thinks of nothing but his whist. Aunt Ju, with her 'Rights of

Women,' is an old fool."

"Just so," said Jack, still holding her, and still looking very

wretched.

"What shall I do if you leave me?"

"Pick up some one that has a little money. I know it sounds bad and

mercenary, and all that, but in our way of life there is nothing else

to be done. We can't marry like the ploughboy and milkmaid?"

"I could."

"And would be the first to find out your mistake afterwards. It's all

very well saying that Adelaide hasn't got a heart. I dare say she has

as much heart as you or me."

"As you;--as you."

"Very well. Of course you have a sort of pleasure in abusing me. But

she has known what she could do, and what she could not. Every year as

she grows older she will become more comfortable. Houghton is very good

to her, and she has lots of money to spend. If that's heartlessness

there's a good deal to be said for it." Then he gently disembarrassed

himself of her arms, and placed her on a sofa.

"And this is to be the end?"

"Well,--I think so really." She thumped her hand upon the head of the

sofa as a sign of her anger. "Of course we shall always be friends?"

"Never," she almost screamed.

"We'd better. People will talk less about it, you know."

"I don't care what people talk. If they knew the truth, no one would

ever speak to you again."

"Good bye, Guss." She shook her head, as he had shaken his before. "Say

a word to a fellow." Again she shook her head. He attempted to take her

hand, but she withdrew it. Then he stood for perhaps a minute looking

at her, but she did not move. "Good bye, Guss," he said again, and then

he left the room.

When he got into the street he congratulated himself. He had undergone

many such scenes before, but none which seemed so likely to bring the

matter to an end. He was rather proud of his own conduct, thinking that

he had been at the same time both tender and wise. He had not given way

in the least, and had yet been explicit in assuring her of his

affection. He felt now that he would go and hunt on the morrow without

any desire to break his neck over the baron's fences. Surely the thing

was done now for ever and ever! Then he thought how it would have been

with him at this moment had he in any transient weakness told her that

he would marry her. But he had been firm, and could now walk along with

a light heart.

She, as soon as he had left her, got up, and taking the cushion off the

sofa, threw it to the further end of the room. Having so relieved

herself, she walked up to her own chamber.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL IS FISH THAT COMES TO HIS NET.

The Dean's week up in London during the absence of Lord George was gay

enough; but through it all and over it all there was that cloud of

seriousness which had been produced by the last news from Italy. He

rode with his daughter, dined out in great state at Mrs. Montacute

Jones's, talked to Mr. Houghton about Newmarket and the next Derby, had

a little flirtation of his own with Hetta Houghton,--into which he

contrived to introduce a few serious words about the Marquis,--and was

merry enough; but, to his daughter's surprise, he never for a moment

ceased to be impressed with the importance of the Italian woman and her

baby. "What does it signify, papa?" she said.

"Not signify!"

"Of course it was to be expected that the Marquis should marry. Why

should he not marry as well as his younger brother?"

"In the first place, he is very much older."

"As to that, men marry at any age. Look at Mr. Houghton." The Dean only

smiled. "Do you know, papa, I don't think one ought to trouble about

such things."

"That's nonsense, my dear. Men, and women too, ought to look after

their own interests. It is the only way in which progress can be made

in the world. Of course you are not to covet what belongs to others.

You will make yourself very unhappy if you do. If Lord Brotherton's

marriage were all fair and above board, nobody would say a word; but,

as it has not been so, it will be our duty to find out the truth. If

you should have a son, do not you think that you would turn every stone

before you would have him defrauded of his rights?"

"I shouldn't think any one would defraud him."

"But if this child be--anything else than what he pretends to be, there

will be fraud. The Germains, though they think as I do, are frightened

and superstitious. They are afraid of this imbecile who is coming over;

but they shall find that if they do not move in the matter, I will. I

want nothing that belongs to another; but while I have a hand and

tongue with which to protect myself, or a purse,--which is better than

either,--no one shall take from me what belongs to me." All this seemed

to Mary to be pagan teaching, and it surprised her much as coming from

her father. But she was beginning to find out that she, as a married

woman, was supposed to be now fit for other teaching than had been

administered to her as a child. She had been cautioned in her father's

house against the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and could

remember the paternal, almost divine expression of the Dean's face as

the lesson was taught. But now it seemed to her that the pomps and

vanities were spoken of in a very different way. The divine expression

was altogether gone, and that which remained, though in looking at her

it was always pleasant, was hardly paternal.

Miss Mildmay,--Aunt Ju as she was called,--and Guss Mildmay came and

called, and as it happened the Dean was in the drawing-room when they

came. They were known to be friends of Mrs. Houghton's who had been in

Brothershire, and were therefore in some degree connected even with the

Dean. Guss began at once about the new Marchioness and the baby; and

the Dean, though he did not of course speak to Guss Mildmay as he had

done to his own daughter, still sneered at the mother and her child. In

the meantime Aunt Ju was enlisting poor Mary. "I should be so proud if

you would come with me to the Institute, Lady George."

"I am sure I should be delighted. But what Institute?"

"Don't you know?--in the Marylebone Road,--for relieving females from

their disabilities."

"Do you mean Rights of Women? I don't think papa likes that," said

Mary, looking round at her father.

"You haven't got to mind what papa likes and dislikes any more," said

the Dean, laughing. "Whether you go in for the rights or the wrongs of

women is past my caring for now. Lord George must look after that."

"I am sure Lord George could not object to your going to the Marylebone

Institute," said Aunt Ju. "Lady Selina Protest is there every week, and

Baroness Banmann, the delegate from Bavaria, is coming next Friday."

"You'd find the Disabilities awfully dull, Lady George," said Guss.

"Everybody is not so flighty as you are, my dear. Some people do

sometimes think of serious things. And the Institute is not called the

Disabilities."

"What is it all about?" said Mary.

"Only to empower women to take their own equal places in the

world,--places equal to those occupied by men," said Aunt Ju

eloquently. "Why should one-half of the world be ruled by the \_ipse

dixit\_ of the other?"

"Or fed by their labours?" said the Dean.

"That is just what we are not. There are 1,133,500 females in

England----"

"You had better go and hear it all at the Disabilities, Lady George,"

said Guss. Lady George said that she would like to go for once, and so

that matter was settled.

While Aunt Ju was pouring out the violence of her doctrine upon the

Dean, whom she contrived to catch in a corner just before she left the

house, Guss Mildmay had a little conversation on her own part with Lady

George. "Captain De Baron," she said, "is an old friend of yours, I

suppose." She, however, had known very well that Jack had never seen

Lady George till within the last month.

"No, indeed; I never saw him till the other day."

"I thought you seemed to be intimate. And then the Houghtons and the De

Barons and the Germains are all Brothershire people."

"I knew Mrs. Houghton's father, of course, a little; but I never saw

Captain De Baron." This she said rather seriously, remembering what

Mrs. Houghton had said to her of the love affair between this young

lady and the Captain in question.

"I thought you seemed to know him the other night, and I saw you riding

with him."

"He was with his cousin Adelaide,--not with us."

"I don't think he cares much for Adelaide. Do you like him?"

"Yes, I do; very much. He seems to be so gay."

"Yes, he is gay. He's a horrid flirt, you know."

"I didn't know; and what is more, I don't care."

"So many girls have said that about Captain De Baron; but they have

cared afterwards."

"But I am not a girl, Miss Mildmay," said Mary, colouring, offended and

resolved at once that she would have no intimacy and as little

acquaintance as possible with Guss Mildmay.

"You are so much younger than so many of us that are girls," said Guss,

thinking to get out of the little difficulty in that way. "And then

it's all fish that comes to his net." She hardly knew what she was

saying, but was anxious to raise some feeling that should prevent any

increased intimacy between her own lover and Lady George. It was

nothing to her whether or no she offended Lady George Germain. If she

could do her work without sinning against good taste, well; but if not,

then good taste must go to the wall. Good taste certainly had gone to

the wall.

"Upon my word, I can hardly understand you!" Then Lady George turned

away to her father. "Well, papa, has Miss Mildmay persuaded you to come

to the Institute with me?"

"I am afraid I should hardly be admitted, after what I have just said."

"Indeed you shall be admitted, Mr. Dean," said the old woman. "We are

quite of the Church's way of thinking, that no sinner is too hardened

for repentance."

"I am afraid the day of grace has not come yet," said the Dean.

"Papa," said Lady George, as soon as her visitors were gone, "do you

know I particularly dislike that younger Miss Mildmay."

"Is she worth being particularly disliked so rapidly?"

"She says nasty, impudent things. I can't quite explain what she said."

And again Lady George blushed.

"People in society now do give themselves strange liberty;--women, I

think, more than men. You shouldn't mind it."

"Not mind it?"

"Not mind it so as to worry yourself. If a pert young woman like that

says anything to annoy you, put her down at the time, and then think no

more about it. Of course you need not make a friend of her."

"That I certainly shall not do."

On the Sunday after this Lady George dined again with her father at Mr.

Houghton's house, the dinner having been made up especially for the

Dean. On this occasion the Mildmays were not there; but Captain De

Baron was one of the guests. But then he was Mrs. Houghton's cousin,

and had the run of the house on all occasions. Again, there was no

great party; Mrs. Montacute Jones was there, and Hetta,--Miss Houghton,

that is, whom all the world called Hetta,--and Mrs. Houghton's father,

who happened to be up in town. Again Lady George found herself sitting

between her host and Jack De Baron, and again she thought that Jack was

a very agreeable companion. The idea of being in any way afraid of him

did not enter into her mind. Those horrid words which Guss Mildmay had

said to her,--as to all being fish for his net,--had no effect of that

nature. She assured herself that she knew herself too well to allow

anything of that kind to influence her. That she, Lady George Germain,

the daughter of the Dean of Brotherton, a married woman, should be

afraid of any man, afraid of any too close intimacy! The idea was

horrible and disgusting to her. So that when Jack proposed to join her

and her father in the park on the next afternoon, she said that she

would be delighted; and when he told her absurd stories of his

regimental duties, and described his brother officers who probably did

not exist as described by him, and then went on to hunting legends in

Buckinghamshire, she laughed at everything he said and was very merry.

"Don't you like Jack?" Mrs. Houghton said to her in the drawing-room.

"Yes, I do; very much. He's just what Jack ought to be."

"I don't know about that. I suppose Jack ought to go to church twice on

Sundays, and give half what he has to the poor, just as well as John."

"Perhaps he does. But Jack is bound to be amusing, while John need not

have a word to say for himself."

"You know he's my pet friend. We are almost like brother and sister,

and therefore I need not be afraid of him."

"Afraid of him! Why should anybody be afraid of him?"

"I am sure you needn't. But Jack has done mischief in his time. Perhaps

he's not the sort of man that would ever touch your fancy." Again Lady

George blushed, but on this occasion she had nothing to say. She did

not want to quarrel with Mrs. Houghton, and the suggestion that she

could possibly love any other man than her husband had not now been

made in so undisguised a manner as before.

"I thought he was engaged to Miss Mildmay," said Lady George.

"Oh, dear no; nothing of the kind. It is impossible, as neither of them

has anything to speak of. When does Lord George come back?"

"To-morrow."

"Mind that he comes to see me soon. I do so long to hear what he'll say

about his new sister-in-law. I had made up my mind that I should have

to koto to you before long as a real live marchioness."

"You'll never have to do that."

"Not if this child is a real Lord Popenjoy. But I have my hopes still,

my dear."

Soon after that Hetta Houghton reverted to the all important subject.

"You have found out that what I told you was true, Lady George."

"Oh yes,--all true."

"I wonder what the Dowager thinks about it."

"My husband is with his mother. She thinks, I suppose, just what we all

think, that it would have been better if he had told everybody of his

marriage sooner."

"A great deal better."

"I don't know whether, after all, it will make a great deal of

difference. Lady Brotherton,--the Dowager I mean,--is so thoroughly

English in all her ways that she never could have got on very well with

an Italian daughter-in-law."

"The question is whether when a man springs a wife and family on his

relations in that way, everything can be taken for granted. Suppose a

man had been ever so many years in Kamptschatka, and had then come back

with a Kamptschatkean female, calling her his wife, would everybody

take it as all gospel?"

"I suppose so."

"Do you? I think not. In the first place it might be difficult for an

Englishman to get himself married in that country according to English

laws, and in the next, when there, he would hardly wish to do so."

"Italy is not Kamptschatka, Miss Houghton."

"Certainly not; and it isn't England. People are talking about it a

great deal, and seem to think that the Italian lady oughtn't to have a

walk over."

Miss Houghton had heard a good deal about races from her brother, and

the phrase she had used was quite an everyday word to her. Lady George

did not understand it, but felt that Miss Houghton was talking very

freely about a very delicate matter. And she remembered at the same

time what had been the aspirations of the lady's earlier life, and put

down a good deal of what was said to personal jealousy. "Papa," she

said, as she went home, "it seems to me that people here talk a great

deal about one's private concerns."

"You mean about Lord Brotherton's marriage."

"That among other things."

"Of course they will talk about that. It is hardly to be considered

private. And I don't know but what the more it is talked about the

better for us. It is felt to be a public scandal, and that feeling may

help us."

"Oh, papa, I wish you wouldn't think that we wanted any help."

"We want the truth, my dear, and we must have it."

On the next day they met Jack De Baron in the park. They had not been

long together before the Dean saw an old friend on the footpath and

stopped to speak to him. Mary would have stayed too, had not her horse

displayed an inclination to go on, and that she had felt herself

unwilling to make an effort in the matter. As she rode on with Captain

De Baron she remembered all that had been said by Guss Mildmay and Mrs.

Houghton, and remembered also her own decision that nothing of that

kind could matter to her. It was an understood thing that ladies and

gentlemen when riding should fall into this kind of intercourse. Her

father was with her, and it would be absurd that she should be afraid

to be a minute or two out of his sight. "I ought to have been hunting,"

said Jack; "but there was frost last night, and I do hate going down

and being told that the ground is as hard as brickbats at the kennels,

while men are ploughing all over the country. And now it's a delicious

spring day."

"You didn't like getting up, Captain De Baron," she said.

"Perhaps there's something in that. Don't you think getting up is a

mistake? My idea of a perfect world is one where nobody would ever have

to get up."

"I shouldn't at all like always to lie in bed."

"But there might be some sort of arrangement to do away with the

nuisance. See what a good time the dogs have."

"Now, Captain De Baron, would you like to be a dog?" This she said

turning round and looking him full in the face.

"Your dog I would." At that moment, just over his horse's withers, she

saw the face of Guss Mildmay who was leaning on her father's arm. Guss

bowed to her, and she was obliged to return the salute. Jack De Baron

turned his face to the path and seeing the lady raised his hat. "Are

you two friends?" he asked.

"Not particularly."

"I wish you were. But, of course, I have no right to wish in such a

matter as that." Lady George felt that she wished that Guss Mildmay had

not seen her riding in the park on that day with Jack De Baron.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DISABILITIES.

It had been arranged that on Friday evening Lady George should call for

Aunt Ju in Green Street, and that they should go together to the

Institute in the Marylebone Road. The real and full name of the

college, as some ladies delighted to call it, was, though somewhat

lengthy, placarded in big letters on a long black board on the front of

the building, and was as follows, "Rights of Women Institute;

Established for the Relief of the Disabilities of Females." By friendly

tongues to friendly ears "The College" or "the Institute" was the

pleasant name used; but the irreverent public was apt to speak of the

building generally as the "Female Disabilities." And the title was made

even shorter. Omnibuses were desired to stop at the "Disabilities;" and

it had become notorious that it was just a mile from King's Cross to

the "Disabilities." There had been serious thoughts among those who

were dominant in the Institute of taking down the big board and

dropping the word. But then a change of a name implies such a

confession of failure! It had on the whole been thought better to

maintain the courage of the opinion which had first made the mistake.

"So you're going to the Disabilities, are you?" Mrs. Houghton had said

to Lady George.

"I'm to be taken by old Miss Mildmay."

"Oh, yes; Aunt Ju is a sort of first-class priestess among them. Don't

let them bind you over to belong to them. Don't go in for it." Lady

George had declared it to be very improbable that she should go in for

it, but had adhered to her determination of visiting the Institute.

She called in Green Street fearing that she should see Guss Mildmay

whom she had determined to keep at arm's distance as well as her

friendship with Mrs. Houghton would permit; but Aunt Ju was ready for

her in the passage. "I forgot to tell you that we ought to be a little

early, as I have to take the chair. I daresay we shall do very well,"

she added, "if the man drives fast. But the thing is so important! One

doesn't like to be flurried when one gets up to make the preliminary

address." The only public meetings at which Mary had ever been present

had appertained to certain lectures at Brotherton, at which her father

or some other clerical dignity had presided, and she could not as yet

understand that such a duty should be performed by a woman. She

muttered something expressing a hope that all would go right. "I've got

to introduce the Baroness, you know."

"Introduce the Baroness?"

"The Baroness Banmann. Haven't you seen the bill of the evening? The

Baroness is going to address the meeting on the propriety of

patronising female artists,--especially in regard to architecture. A

combined college of female architects is to be established in Posen and

Chicago, and why should we not have a branch in London, which is the

centre of the world?"

"Would a woman have to build a house?" asked Lady George.

"She would draw the plans, and devise the proportions, and--and--do the

Ã¦sthetic part of it. An architect doesn't carry bricks on his back, my

dear."

"But he walks over planks, I suppose."

"And so could I walk over a plank; why not as well as a man? But you

will hear what the Baroness says. The worst is that I am a little

afraid of her English."

"She's a foreigner, of course. How will she manage?"

"Her English is perfect, but I am afraid of her pronunciation. However,

we shall see." They had now arrived at the building, and Lady George

followed the old lady in with the crowd. But when once inside the door

they turned to a small passage on the left, which conducted those in

authority to the august room preparatory to the platform. It is here

that bashful speakers try to remember their first sentences, and that

lecturers, proud of their prominence, receive the homage of the

officers of the Institute. Aunt Ju, who on this occasion was second in

glory, made her way in among the crowd and welcomed the Baroness, who

had just arrived. The Baroness, was a very stout woman, about fifty,

with a double chin, a considerable moustache, a low broad forehead, and

bright, round, black eyes, very far apart. When introduced to Lady

George, she declared that she had great honour in accepting the

re-cog-nition. She had a stout roll of paper in her hand, and was

dressed in a black stuff gown, with a cloth jacket buttoned up to neck,

which hardly gave to her copious bust that appearance of manly firmness

which the occasion almost required. But the virile collars budding out

over it perhaps supplied what was wanting. Lady George looked at her to

see if she was trembling. How, thought Lady George, would it have been

with herself if she had been called upon to address a French audience

in French! But as far as she could judge from experience, the Baroness

was quite at her ease. Then she was introduced by Aunt Ju to Lady

Selina Protest, who was a very little woman with spectacles,--of a

most severe aspect. "I hope, Lady George, that you mean to put your

shoulder to the wheel," said Lady Selina. "I am only here as a

stranger," said Lady George. Lady Selina did not believe in strangers

and passed on very severely. There was no time for further ceremonies,

as a bald-headed old gentleman, who seemed to act as chief usher,

informed Aunt Ju that it was time for her to take the Baroness on to

the platform. Aunt Ju led the way, puffing a little, for she had been

somewhat hurried on the stairs, and was not as yet quite used to the

thing,--but still with a proudly prominent step. The Baroness waddled

after her, apparently quite indifferent to the occasion. Then followed

Lady Selina,--and Lady George, the bald-headed gentleman telling her

where to place herself. She had never been on a platform before, and it

seemed as though the crowd of people below was looking specially at

her. As she sat down, at the right hand of the Baroness, who was of

course at the right hand of the Chairwoman, the bald-headed gentleman

introduced her to her other neighbour, Miss Doctor Olivia Q. Fleabody,

from Vermont. There was so much of the name and it all sounded so

strange to the ears of Lady George that she could remember very little

of it, but she was conscious that her new acquaintance was a miss and a

doctor. She looked timidly round, and saw what would have been a pretty

face, had it not been marred by a pinched look of studious severity and

a pair of glass spectacles of which the glasses shone in a disagreeable

manner. There are spectacles which are so much more spectacles than

other spectacles that they make the beholder feel that there is before

him a pair of spectacles carrying a face, rather than a face carrying a

pair of spectacles. So it was with the spectacles of Olivia Q.

Fleabody. She was very thin, and the jacket and collars were quite

successful. Sitting in the front row she displayed her feet,--and it

may also be said her trousers, for the tunic which she wore came down

hardly below the knees. Lady George's enquiring mind instantly began to

ask itself what the lady had done with her petticoats. "This is a great

occasion," said Dr. Fleabody, speaking almost out loud, and with a very

strong nasal twang.

Lady George looked at the chair before she answered, feeling that she

would not dare to speak a word if Aunt Ju were already on her legs; but

Aunt Ju was taking advantage of the commotion which was still going on

among those who were looking for seats to get her breath, and therefore

she could whisper a reply. "I suppose it is," she said.

"If it were not that I have wedded myself in a peculiar manner to the

prophylactick and therapeutick sciences, I would certainly now put my

foot down firmly in the cause of architecture. I hope to have an

opportunity of saying a few words on the subject myself before this

interesting session shall have closed." Lady George looked at her again

and thought that this enthusiastic hybrid who was addressing her could

not be more than twenty-four years old.

But Aunt Ju was soon on her legs. It did not seem to Lady George that

Aunt Ju enjoyed the moment now that it was come. She looked hot, and

puffed once or twice before she spoke. But she had studied her few

words so long, and had made so sure of them, that she could not go very

far wrong. She assured her audience that the Baroness Banmann, whose

name had only to be mentioned to be honoured both throughout Europe and

America, had, at great personal inconvenience, come all the way from

Bavaria to give them the advantage of her vast experience on the

present occasion. Like a good chairwoman, she took none of the bread

out of the Baroness's mouth--as we have occasionally known it to be

done on such occasions--but confined herself to ecstatic praises of the

German lady. All these the Baroness bore without a quiver, and when

Aunt Ju sat down she stepped on to the rostrum of the evening amidst

the plaudits of the room, with a confidence which to Lady George was

miraculous. Then Aunt Ju took her seat, and was able for the next hour

and a half to occupy her arm-chair with gratifying fainÃ©ant dignity.

The Baroness, to tell the truth, waddled rather than stepped to the

rostrum. She swung herself heavily about as she went sideways; but it

was manifest to all eyes that she was not in the least ashamed of her

waddling. She undid her manuscript on the desk, and flattened it down

all over with her great fat hand, rolling her head about as she looked

around, and then gave a grunt before she began. During this time the

audience was applauding her loudly, and it was evident that she did not

intend to lose a breath of their incense by any hurry on her own part.

At last the voices and the hands and the feet were silent. Then she

gave a last roll to her head and a last pat to the papers, and began.

"De manifest infairiority of de tyrant saix----."

Those first words, spoken in a very loud voice, came clearly home to

Lady George's ear, though they were uttered with a most un-English

accent. The Baroness paused before she completed her first sentence,

and then there was renewed applause. Lady George could remark that the

bald-headed old gentleman behind and a cadaverous youth who was near to

him were particularly energetic in stamping on the ground. Indeed, it

seemed that the men were specially charmed with this commencement of

the Baroness's oration. It was so good that she repeated it with,

perhaps, even a louder shout. "De manifest infairiority of de tyrant

saix----." Lady George, with considerable trouble, was able to follow

the first sentence or two, which went to assert that the inferiority of

man to woman in all work was quite as conspicuous as his rapacity and

tyranny in taking to himself all the wages. The Baroness, though

addressing a mixed audience, seemed to have no hesitation in speaking

of man generally as a foul worm who ought to be put down and kept

under, and merely allowed to be the father of children. But after a

minute or two Lady George found that she could not understand two words

consecutively, although she was close to the lecturer. The Baroness,

as she became heated, threw out her words quicker and more quickly,

till it became almost impossible to know in what language they were

spoken. By degrees our friend became aware that the subject of

architecture had been reached, and then she caught a word or two as the

Baroness declared that the science was "adaapted only to de Ã¦stetic and

comprehensive intelligence of de famale mind." But the audience

applauded throughout as though every word reached them; and when from

time to time the Baroness wiped her brows with a very large

handkerchief, they shook the building with their appreciation of her

energy. Then came a loud rolling sentence, with the old words as an

audible termination--"de manifest infairiority of de tyrant saix!" As

she said this she waved her handkerchief in the air and almost threw

herself over the desk. "She is very great to-night,--very great

indeed," whispered Miss Doctor Olivia Q. Fleabody to Lady George. Lady

George was afraid to ask her neighbour whether she understood one word

out of ten that were being spoken.

Great as the Baroness was, Lady George became very tired of it all. The

chair was hard and the room was full of dust, and she could not get up.

It was worse than the longest and the worst sermon she had ever heard.

It seemed to her at last that there was no reason why the Baroness

should not go on for ever. The woman liked it, and the people applauded

her. The poor victim had made up her mind that there was no hope of

cessation, and in doing so was very nearly asleep, when, on a sudden,

the Baroness had finished and had thrown herself violently back into

her chair. "Baroness, believe me," said Dr. Fleabody, stretching across

Lady George, "it is the greatest treat I ever had in my life." The

Baroness hardly condescended to answer the compliment. She was at this

moment so great a woman, at this moment so immeasurably the greatest

human being at any rate in London, that it did not become her to

acknowledge single compliments. She had worked hard and was very hot,

but still she had sufficient presence of mind to remember her

demeanour.

When the tumult was a little subsided, Lady Selina Protest got up to

move a vote of thanks. She was sitting on the left-hand side of the

Chair, and rose so silently that Lady George had at first thought that

the affair was all over, and that they might go away. Alas, alas! there

was more to be borne yet! Lady Selina spoke with a clear but low voice,

and though she was quite audible, and an earl's sister, did not evoke

any enthusiasm. She declared that the thanks of every woman in England

were due to the Baroness for her exertions, and of every man who wished

to be regarded as the friend of women. But Lady Selina was very quiet,

making no gestures, and was indeed somewhat flat. When she sat down no

notice whatever was taken of her. Then very quickly, before Lady George

had time to look about her, the Doctor was on her feet. It was her task

to second the vote of thanks, but she was far too experienced an

occupant of platforms to waste her precious occasion simply on so poor

a task. She began by declaring that never in her life had a duty been

assigned to her more consonant to her taste than that of seconding a

vote of thanks to a woman so eminent, so humanitarian, and at the same

time so essentially a female as the Baroness Banmann. Lady George, who

knew nothing about speaking, felt at once that here was a speaker who

could at any rate make herself audible and intelligible. Then the

Doctor broke away into the general subject, with special allusions to

the special matter of female architecture, and went on for twenty

minutes without dropping a word. There was a moment in which she had

almost made Lady George think that women ought to build houses. Her

dislike to the American twang had vanished, and she was almost sorry

when Miss Doctor Fleabody resumed her seat.

But it was after that,--after the Baroness had occupied another ten

minutes in thanking the British public for the thanks that had been

given to herself,--that the supreme emotion of the evening came to Lady

George. Again she had thought, when the Baroness a second time rolled

back to her chair, that the time for departure had come. Many in the

hall, indeed, were already going, and she could not quite understand

why no one on the platform had as yet moved. Then came that bald-headed

old gentleman to her, to her very self, and suggested to her that

she,--she, Lady George Germain, who the other day was Mary Lovelace,

the Brotherton girl,--should stand up and make a speech! "There is to

be a vote of thanks to Miss Mildmay as Chairwoman," said the

bald-headed old man, "and we hope, Lady George, that you will favour us

with a few words."

Her heart utterly gave way and the blood flew into her cheeks, and she

thoroughly repented of having come to this dreadful place. She knew

that she could not do it, though the world were to depend upon it; but

she did not know whether the bald-headed old gentleman might not have

the right of insisting on it. And then all the people were looking at

her as the horrible old man was pressing his request over her shoulder.

"Oh," she said; "no, I can't. Pray don't. Indeed I can't,--and I

won't." The idea had come upon her that it was necessary that she

should be very absolute. The old man retired meekly, and himself made

the speech in honour of Aunt Ju.

As they were going away Lady George found that she was to have the

honour of conveying the Baroness to her lodgings in Conduit Street.

This was all very well, as there was room for three in the brougham,

and she was not ill-pleased to hear the ecstasies of Aunt Ju about the

lecture. Aunt Ju declared that she had agreed with every word that had

been uttered. Aunt Ju thought that the cause was flourishing. Aunt Ju

was of opinion that women in England would before long be able to sit

in Parliament and practice in the Law Courts. Aunt Ju was thoroughly in

earnest; but the Baroness had expended her energy in the lecture, and

was more inclined to talk about persons. Lady George was surprised to

hear her say that this young man was a very handsome young man, and

that old man a very nice old man. She was almost in love with Mr.

Spuffin, the bald-headed gentleman usher; and when she was particular

in asking whether Mr. Spuffin was married, Lady George could hardly

think that this was the woman who had been so eloquent on the

"infairiority of de tyrant saix."

But it was not till Aunt Ju had been dropped in Green Street, and the

conversation fell upon Lady George herself, that the difficulty began.

"You no speak?" asked the Baroness.

"What, in public! Not for the world!"

"You wrong dere. Noting so easy. Say just as you please, only say it

vera loud. And alvays abuse somebody or someting. You s'ould try."

"I would sooner die," said Lady George. "Indeed, I should be dead

before I could utter a word. Isn't it odd how that lady Doctor could

speak like that."

"De American young woman! Dey have de impudence of--of--of everything

you please; but it come to noting."

"But she spoke well."

"Dear me, no; noting at all. Dere was noting but vords, vords, vords.

Tank you; here I am. Mind you come again, and you shall learn to

speak."

Lady George, as she was driven home, was lost in her inability to

understand it all. She had thought that the Doctor spoke the best of

all, and now she was told that it was nothing. She did not yet

understand that even people so great as female orators, so nobly

humanitarian as the Baroness Banmann, can be jealous of the greatness

of others.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LORD GEORGE UP IN LONDON.

Lord George returned to town the day after the lecture, and was not

altogether pleased that his wife should have gone to the Disabilities.

She thought, indeed, that he did not seem to be in a humour to be

pleased with anything. His mind was thoroughly disturbed by the coming

of his brother, and perplexed with the idea that something must be done

though he knew not what. And he was pervaded by a feeling that in the

present emergency it behoved him to watch his own steps, and more

especially those of his wife. An anonymous letter had reached Lady

Sarah, signed, "A Friend of the Family," in which it was stated that

the Marquis of Brotherton had allied himself to the highest blood that

Italy knew, marrying into a family that had been noble before English

nobility had existed, whereas his brother had married the granddaughter

of a stable-keeper and a tallow chandler. This letter had, of course,

been shown to Lord George; and, though he and his sisters agreed in

looking upon it as an emanation from their enemy, the new Marchioness,

it still gave them to understand that she, if attacked, would be

prepared to attack again. And Lord George was open to attack on the

side indicated. He was, on the whole, satisfied with his wife. She was

ladylike, soft, pretty, well-mannered, and good to him. But her

grandfathers had been stable-keepers and tallow-chandlers. Therefore it

was specially imperative that she should be kept from injurious

influences. Lady Selina Protest and Aunt Ju, who were both well-born,

might take liberties; but not so his wife. "I don't think that was a

very nice place to go to, Mary."

"It wasn't nice at all, but it was very funny. I never saw such a

vulgar creature as the Baroness, throwing herself about and wiping her

face."

"Why should you go and see a vulgar creature throw herself about and

wipe her face?"

"Why should anybody do it? One likes to see what is going on, I

suppose. The woman's vulgarity could not hurt me, George."

"It could do you no good."

"Lady Selina Protest was there, and I went with Miss Mildmay."

"Two old maids who have gone crazy about Woman's Rights because nobody

has married them. The whole thing is distasteful to me, and I hope you

will not go there again."

"That I certainly shall not, because it is very dull," said Mary.

"I hope, also, that, independently of that, my request would be

enough."

"Certainly it would, George; but I don't know why you should be so

cross to me."

"I don't think that I have been cross; but I am anxious, specially

anxious. There are reasons why I have to be very anxious in regard to

you, and why you have to be yourself more particular than others."

"What reasons?" She asked this with a look of bewildered astonishment.

He was not prepared to answer the question, and shuffled out of it,

muttering some further words as to the peculiar difficulty of their

position. Then he kissed her and left her, telling her that all would

be well if she would be careful.

If she would be careful! All would be well if she would be careful! Why

should there be need of more care on her part than on that of others?

She knew that all this had reference in some way to that troublesome

lady and troublesome baby who were about to be brought home; but she

could not conceive how her conduct could be specially concerned. It was

a sorrow to her that her husband should allow himself to be ruffled

about the matter at all. It was a sorrow also that her father should do

so. As to herself, she had an idea that if Providence chose to make her

a Marchioness, Providence ought to be allowed to do it without any

interference on her part. But it would be a double sorrow if she were

told that she mustn't do this and mustn't do that because there was

before her a dim prospect of being seated in a certain high place which

was claimed and occupied by another person. And she was aware, too,

that her husband had in very truth scolded her. The ladies at Manor

Cross had scolded her before, but he had never done so. She had got

away from Manor Cross, and had borne the scolding because the prospect

of escape had been before her. But it would be very bad indeed if her

husband should take to scold her. Then she thought that if Jack De

Baron were married he would never scold his wife.

The Dean had not yet gone home, and in her discomfort she had recourse

to him. She did not intend to complain of her husband to her father.

Had any such idea occurred to her, she would have stamped it out at

once, knowing that such a course would be both unloyal and unwise. But

her father was so pleasant with her, so easy to be talked to, so easy

to be understood, whereas her husband was almost mysterious,--at any

rate, gloomy and dark. "Papa," she said, "what does George mean by

saying that I ought to be more particular than other people?"

"Does he say so?"

"Yes; and he didn't like my going with that old woman to hear the other

women. He says that I ought not to do it though anybody else might."

"I think you misunderstood him."

"No; I didn't, papa."

"Then you had better imagine that he was tired with his journey, or

that his stomach was a little out of order. Don't fret about such

things, and whatever you do, make the best of your husband."

"But how am I to know where I may go and where I mayn't? Am I to ask

him everything first?"

"Don't be a child, whatever you do. You will soon find out what pleases

him and what doesn't, and, if you manage well, what you do will please

him. Whatever his manner may be, he is soft-hearted and affectionate."

"I know that, papa."

"If he says a cross word now and again just let it go by. You should

not suppose that words always mean what they seem to mean. I knew a man

who used to tell his wife ever so often that he wished she were dead."

"Good heavens, papa!"

"Whenever he said so she always put a little magnesia into his beer,

and things went on as comfortably as possible. Never magnify things,

even to yourself. I don't suppose Lord George wants magnesia as yet,

but you will understand what I mean." She said that she did; but she

had not, in truth, quite comprehended the lesson as yet, nor could her

father as yet teach it to her in plainer language.

On that same afternoon Lord George called in Berkeley Square and saw

Mrs. Houghton. At this time the whole circle of people who were in any

way connected with the Germain family, or who, by the circumstances of

their lives were brought within the pale of the Germain influence, were

agog with the marriage of the Marquis. The newspapers had already

announced the probable return of the Marquis and the coming of a new

Marchioness and a new Lord Popenjoy. Occasion had been taken to give

some details of the Germain family, and public allusion had even been

made to the marriage of Lord George. These are days in which, should

your wife's grandfather have ever been insolvent, some newspaper, in

its catering for the public, will think it proper to recall the fact.

The Dean's parentage had been alluded to, and the late Tallowax will,

and the Tallowax property generally. It had also been declared that the

Marchesa Luigi,--now the present Marchioness,--had been born an Orsini;

and also, in another paper, the other fact (?) that she had been

divorced from her late husband. This had already been denied by Mr.

Knox, who had received a telegram from Florence ordering such denial to

be made. It may, therefore, be conceived that the Germains were at this

moment the subject of much conversation, and it may be understood that

Mrs. Houghton, who considered herself to be on very confidential terms

with Lord George, should, as they were alone, ask a few questions and

express a little sympathy. "How does the dear Marchioness like the new

house?" she asked.

"It is tolerably comfortable."

"That Price is a darling, Lord George; I've known him ever so long.

And, of course, it is the dower house."

"It was the suddenness that disturbed my mother."

"Of course; and then the whole of it must have gone against the grain

with her. You bear it like an angel."

"For myself, I don't know that I have anything to bear."

"The whole thing is so dreadful. There are you and your dear

wife,--everything just as it ought to be,--idolized by your mother,

looked up to by the whole country, the very man whom we wish to see the

head of such a family."

"Don't talk in that way, Mrs. Houghton."

"I know it is very distant; but still, I do feel near enough related to

you all to be justified in being proud, and also to be justified in

being ashamed. What will they do about calling upon her?"

"My brother will, of course, come to my mother first. Then Lady Sarah

and one of her sisters will go over. After that he will bring his wife

to Cross Hall if he pleases."

"I am so glad it is all settled; it is so much better. But you know,

Lord George,--I must say it to you as I would to my own brother,

because my regard for you is the same,--I shall never think that that

woman is really his wife." Lord George frowned heavily, but did not

speak. "And I shall never think that that child is really Lord

Popenjoy."

Neither did Lord George in his heart of hearts believe that the Italian

woman was a true Marchioness or the little child a true Lord Popenjoy;

but he had confessed to himself that he had no adequate reason for such

disbelief, and had perceived that it would become him to keep his

opinion to himself. The Dean had been explicit with him, and that very

explicitness had seemed to impose silence on himself. To his mother he

had not whispered an idea of a suspicion. With his sisters he had been

reticent, though he knew that Lady Sarah, at any rate, had her

suspicions. But now an open expression of the accusation from so dear a

friend as Mrs. Houghton,--from the Adelaide De Baron whom he had so

dearly loved,--gratified him and almost tempted him into confidence. He

had frowned at first, because his own family was to him so august that

he could not but frown when anyone ventured to speak of it. Even

crowned princes are driven to relax themselves on occasions, and Lord

George Germain felt that he would almost like, just for once, to talk

about his brothers and sisters as though they were Smiths and Joneses.

"It is very hard to know what to think," he said.

Mrs. Houghton at once saw that the field was open to her. She had

ventured a good deal, and, knowing the man, had felt the danger of

doing so; but she was satisfied now that she might say almost anything.

"But one is bound to think, isn't one? Don't you feel that? It is for

the whole family that you have to act."

"What is to be done? I can't go and look up evidence."

"But a paid agent can. Think of Mary. Think of Mary's child,--if she

should have one." As she said this she looked rather anxiously into his

face, being desirous of receiving an answer to a question which she did

not quite dare to ask.

"Of course there's all that," he said, not answering the question.

"I can only just remember him though papa knew him so well. But I

suppose he has lived abroad till he has ceased to think and feel like

an Englishman. Could anyone believe that a Marquis of Brotherton would

have married a wife long enough ago to have a son over twelve months

old, and never to have said a word about it to his brother or mother? I

don't believe it."

"I don't know what to believe," said Lord George.

"And then to write in such a way about the house! Of course I hear it

talked of by people who won't speak before you; but you ought to know."

"What do people say?"

"Everybody thinks that there is some fraud. There is old Mrs. Montacute

Jones,--I don't know anybody who knows everything better than she

does,--and she was saying that you would be driven by your duty to

investigate the matter. 'I daresay he'd prefer to do nothing,' she

said, 'but he must.' I felt that to be so true! Then Mr. Mildmay, who

is so very quiet, said that there would be a lawsuit. Papa absolutely

laughed at the idea of the boy being Lord Popenjoy, though he was

always on good terms with your brother. Mr. Houghton says that nobody

in society will give the child the name. Of course he's not very

bright, but on matters like that he does know what he's talking about.

When I hear all this I feel it a great deal, Lord George."

"I know what a friend you are."

"Indeed I am. I think very often what I might have been, but could not

be; and though I am not jealous of the happiness and honours of

another, I am anxious for your happiness and your honours." He was

sitting near her, on a chair facing the fire, while she was leaning

back on the sofa. He went on staring at the hot coals, flattered, in

some sort elate, but very disturbed. The old feeling was coming back

upon him. She was not as pretty as his wife,--but she was, he thought,

more attractive, had more to say for herself, was more of a woman. She

could pour herself into his heart and understand his feelings, whereas

Mary did not sympathize with him at all in this great family trouble.

But then Mary was, of course, his wife, and this woman was the wife of

another man. He would be the last man in the world,--so he would have

told himself could he have spoken to himself on the subject,--to bring

disgrace on himself and misery on other people by declaring his love to

another man's wife. He was the last man to do an injury to the girl

whom he had made his own wife! But he liked being with his old love,

and felt anxious to say a word to her that should have in it something

just a little beyond the ordinary tenderness of friendship. The proper

word, however, did not come to him at that moment. In such moments the

proper word very often will not come. "You are not angry with me for

saying so?" she asked.

"How can I be angry?"

"I don't think that there can have been such friendship, as there was

between you and me, and that it should fade and die away, unless there

be some quarrel. You have not quarrelled with me?"

"Quarrelled with you? Never!"

"And you did love me once?" She at any rate knew how to find the tender

words that were required for her purpose.

"Indeed I did."

"It did not last very long; did it, Lord George?"

"It was you that--that--. It was you that stopped it."

"Yes, it was I that stopped it. Perhaps I found it easier to--stop than

I had expected. But it was all for the best. It must have been

stopped. What could our life have been? I was telling a friend to mine

the other day, a lady, that there are people who cannot afford to wear

hearts inside them. If I had jumped at your offer,--and there was a

moment when I would have done so----"

"Was there?"

"Indeed there was, George." The "George" didn't mean quite as much as

it might have meant between others, because they were cousins. "But, if

I had, the joint home of us all must have been in Mr. Price's

farm-house."

"It isn't a farm-house."

"You know what I mean. But I want you to believe that I thought of you

quite as much as of myself,--more than of myself. I should at any rate

have had brilliant hopes before me. I could understand what it would be

to be the Marchioness of Brotherton. I could have borne much for years

to think that at some future day I might hang on your arm in London

salons as your wife. I had an ambition which now can never be

gratified. I, too, can look on this picture and on that. But I had to

decide for you as well as for myself, and I did decide that it was not

for your welfare nor for your honour, nor for your happiness to marry a

woman who could not help you in the world." She was now leaning forward

and almost touching his arm. "I think sometimes that those most nearly

concerned hardly know what a woman may have to endure because she is

not selfish."

How could any man stand this? There are words which a man cannot resist

from a woman even though he knows them to be false. Lord George, though

he did not quite believe that all these words were sincere, did think

that there was a touch of sincerity about them--an opinion which the

reader probably will not share with Lord George. "Have you suffered?"

he said, putting out his hand to her and taking hers.

"Suffered!" she exclaimed, drawing away her hand, and sitting bolt

upright and shaking her head. "Do you think that I am a fool, not to

know! Do you suppose that I am blind and deaf? When I said that I was

one of those who could not afford to wear a heart, did you imagine that

I had been able to get rid of the article? No, it is here still," and

she put her hand upon her side. "It is here still, and very troublesome

I find it. I suppose the time will come when it will die away. They say

that every plant will fade if it be shut in from the light, and never

opened to the rains of heaven."

"Alas! alas!" he said. "I did not know that you would feel like that."

"Of course I feel. I have had something to do with my life, and I have

done this with it! Two men have honoured me with their choice, and out

of the two I have chosen--Mr. Houghton. I comfort myself by telling

myself that I did right;--and I did do right. But the comfort is not

very comforting." Still he sat looking at the fire. He knew that it was

open to him to get up and swear to her that she still had his heart.

She could not be angry with him as she had said as much to himself. And

he almost believed at the moment that it was so. He was quite alive to

the attraction of the wickedness, though, having a conscience, he was

aware that the wickedness should, if possible, be eschewed. There is no

romance in loving one's own wife. The knowledge that it is a duty

deadens the pleasure. "I did not mean to say all this," she exclaimed

at last, sobbing.

"Adelaide!" he said.

"Do you love me? You may love me without anything wrong."

"Indeed I do." Then there was an embrace, and after that he hurried

away, almost without another word.

CHAPTER XIX.

RATHER "BOISTEROUS."

"After all, he's very dreary!" It was this that Adelaide Houghton spoke

to herself as soon as Lord George had left her. No doubt the whole work

of the interview had fallen on to her shoulders. He had at last been

talked into saying that he loved her, and had then run away frightened

by the unusual importance and tragic signification of his own words.

"After all, he's very dreary."

Mrs. Houghton wanted excitement. She probably did like Lord George as

well as she liked any one. Undoubtedly she would have married him had

he been able to maintain her as she liked to be maintained. But, as he

had been unable, she had taken Mr. Houghton without a notion on her

part of making even an attempt to love him. When she said that she

could not afford to wear a heart,--and she had said so to various

friends and acquaintances,--she did entertain an idea that

circumstances had used her cruelly, that she had absolutely been forced

to marry a stupid old man, and that therefore some little freedom was

due to her as a compensation. Lord George was Lord George, and might,

possibly, some day be a marquis. He was at any rate a handsome man, and

he had owned allegiance to her before he had transferred his homage to

that rich little chit Mary Lovelace. She was incapable of much passion,

but she did feel that she owed it to herself to have some revenge on

Mary Lovelace. The game as it stood had charms sufficient to induce her

to go on with it; and yet,--after all, he was dreary.

Such was the lady's feeling when she was left alone; but Lord George

went away from the meeting almost overcome by the excitement of the

occasion. To him the matter was of such stirring moment that he could

not go home, could not even go to his club. He was so moved by his

various feelings, that he could only walk by himself and consider

things. To her that final embrace had meant very little. What did it

signify? He had taken her in his arms and kissed her forehead. It might

have been her lips had he so pleased. But to him it had seemed to mean

very much indeed. There was a luxury in it which almost intoxicated

him, and a horror in it which almost quelled him. That she should so

love him as to be actually subdued by her love could not but charm him.

He had none of that strength which arms a man against flatterers;--none

of that experience which strengthens a man against female cajolery. It

was to him very serious and very solemn. There might, perhaps, have

been exaggeration in her mode of describing her feelings, but there

could be no doubt in this,--that he had held her in his arms and that

she was another man's wife.

The wickedness of the thing was more wicked to him than the charm of it

was charming. It was dreadful to him to think that he had done a thing

of which he would have to be ashamed if the knowledge of it were

brought to his wife's ears. That he should have to own himself to have

been wrong to her would tear him to pieces! That he should lord it over

her as a real husband, was necessary to his happiness, and how can a

man be a real lord over a woman when he has had to confess his fault to

her, and to beg her to forgive him? A wife's position with her husband

may be almost improved by such asking for pardon. It will enhance his

tenderness. But the man is so lowered that neither of them can ever

forget the degradation. And, though it might never come to that, though

this terrible passion might be concealed from her, still it was a

grievance to him and a disgrace that he should have anything to

conceal. It was a stain in his own eyes on his own nobility, a slur

upon his escutcheon, a taint in his hitherto unslobbered honesty, and

then the sin of it;--the sin of it! To him it already sat heavy on his

conscience. In his ear, even now, sounded that commandment which he

weekly prayed that he might be permitted to keep. While with her there

was hardly left a remembrance of the kiss which he had imprinted on her

brow, his lips were still burning with the fever. Should he make up his

mind, now at once, that he would never, never see her again? Should he

resolve that he would write to her a moving tragic letter,--not a love

letter,--in which he would set forth the horrors of unhallowed love,

and tell her that there must be a gulf between them, over which neither

must pass till age should have tamed their passions! As he walked

across the park he meditated what would be the fitting words for such a

letter, and almost determined that it should be written. Did he not owe

his first duty to his wife, and was he not bound for her sake to take

such a step? Then, as he wandered alone in Kensington Gardens,--for it

had taken him many steps, and occupied much time to think of it

all,--there came upon him an idea that perhaps the lady would not

receive the letter in the proper spirit. Some idea occurred to him of

the ridicule which would befall him should the lady at last tell him

that he had really exaggerated matters. And then the letter might be

shown to others. He did love the lady. With grief and shame and a

stricken conscience he owned to himself that he loved her. But he could

not quite trust her. And so, as he walked down towards the Albert

Memorial, he made up his mind that he would not write the letter. But

he also made up his mind,--he thought that he made up his mind,--that

he would go no more alone to Berkeley Square.

As he walked on he suddenly came upon his wife walking with Captain De

Baron, and he was immediately struck by the idea that his wife ought

not to be walking in Kensington Gardens with Captain De Baron. The idea

was so strong as altogether to expel from his mind for the moment all

remembrance of Mrs. Houghton. He had been unhappy before because he was

conscious that he was illtreating his wife, but now he was almost more

disturbed because it seemed to him to be possible that his wife was

illtreating him. He had left her but a few minutes ago,--he thought of

it now as being but a few minutes since,--telling her with almost his

last word that she was specially bound, more bound than other women, to

mind her own conduct,--and here she was walking in Kensington Gardens

with a man whom all the world called Jack De Baron? As he approached

them his brow became clouded, and she could see that it was so. She

could not but fear that her companion would see it also. Lord George

was thinking how to address them, and had already determined on tucking

his wife under his own arm and carrying her off, before he saw that a

very little way behind them the Dean was walking with--Adelaide

Houghton herself. Though he had been more than an hour wandering about

the park he could not understand that the lady whom he had left in her

own house so recently, in apparently so great a state of agitation,

should be there also, in her best bonnet and quite calm. He had no

words immediately at command, but she was as voluble as ever. "Doesn't

this seem odd?" she said. "Why, it is not ten minutes since you left me

in Berkeley Square. I wonder what made you come here."

"What made you come?"

"Jack brought me here. If it were not for Jack I should never walk or

ride or do anything, except sit in a stupid carriage. And just at the

gate of the gardens we met the Dean and Lady George."

This was very simple and straightforward. There could be no doubt of

the truth of it all. Lady George had come out with her father and

nothing could be more as it ought to be. As to "Jack" and the lady he

did not, at any rate as yet, feel himself justified in being angry at

that arrangement. But nevertheless he was disturbed. His wife had been

laughing when he first saw her, and Jack had been talking, and they had

seemed to be very happy together. The Dean no doubt was there; but

still the fact remained that Jack had been laughing and talking with

his wife. He almost doubted whether his wife ought under any

circumstances to laugh in Kensington Gardens. And then the Dean was so

indiscreet! He, Lord George, could not of course forbid his wife to

walk with her father;--but the Dean had no idea that any real looking

after was necessary for anybody. He at once gave his arm to his wife,

but in two minutes she had dropped it. They were on the steps of the

Albert Memorial, and it was perhaps natural that she should do so. But

he hovered close to her as they were looking at the figures, and was

uneasy. "I think it's the prettiest thing in London," said the Dean,

"one of the prettiest things in the world."

"Don't you find it very cold?" said Lord George, who did not at the

present moment care very much for the fine arts.

"We have been walking quick," said Mrs. Houghton, "and have enjoyed

it." The Dean with the two others had now passed round one of the

corners. "I wonder," she went on, "I do wonder how it has come to pass

that we should be brought together again so soon!"

"We both happened to come the same way," said Lord George, who was

still thinking of his wife.

"Yes;--that must have been it. Though is it not a strange coincidence?

My mind had been so flurried that I was glad to get out into the fresh

air. When shall I see you again?" He couldn't bring himself to

say--never. There would have been a mock-tragic element about the

single word which even he felt. And yet, here on the steps of the

monument, there was hardly an opportunity for him to explain at length

the propriety of their both agreeing to be severed. "You wish to see

me;--don't you?" she asked.

"I hardly know what to say."

"But you love me!" She was now close to him, and there was no one else

near enough to interfere. She was pressing close up to him, and he was

sadly ashamed of himself. And yet he did love her. He thought that she

had never looked so well as at the present moment. "Say that you love

me," she said, stamping her foot almost imperiously.

"You know I do, but--"

"But what."

"I had better come to you again and tell you all." The words were no

sooner out of his mouth than he remembered that he had resolved that he

would never go to her again. But yet, after what had passed, something

must be done. He had also made up his mind that he wouldn't write. He

had quite made up his mind about that. The words that are written

remain. It would perhaps be better that he should go to her and tell

her everything.

"Of course you will come again," she said. "What is it ails you? You

are unhappy because she is here with my cousin Jack?" It was

intolerable to him that any one should suspect him of jealousy. "Jack

has a way of getting intimate with people, but it means nothing." It

was dreadful to him that an allusion should be made to the possibility

of anybody "meaning anything" with his wife.

Just at this moment Jack's voice was heard coming back round the

corner, and also the laughter of the Dean. Captain De Baron had been

describing the persons represented on the base of the monument, and had

done so after some fashion of his own that had infinitely amused not

only Lady George but her father also. "You ought to be appointed Guide

to the Memorial," said the Dean.

"If Lady George will give me a testimonial no doubt I might get it,

Dean," said Jack.

"I don't think you know anything about any of them," said Lady George.

"I'm sure you've told me wrong about two. You're the last man in the

world that ought to be a guide to anything."

"Will you come and be guide, and I'll just sweep the steps!"

Lord George heard the last words, and allowed himself to be annoyed at

them, though he felt them to be innocent. He knew that his wife was

having a game of pleasant play, like a child with a pleasant

play-fellow. But then he was not satisfied that his wife should play

like a child,--and certainly not with such a playfellow. He doubted

whether his wife ought to allow playful intimacy from any man. Marriage

was to him a very serious thing. Was he not prepared to give up a real

passion because he had made this other woman his wife? In thinking over

all this his mind was not very logical, but he did feel that he was

justified in exacting particularly strict conduct from her because he

was going to make Mrs. Houghton understand that they two, though they

loved each other, must part. If he could sacrifice so much for his

wife, surely she might sacrifice something for him.

They returned altogether to Hyde Park Corner and then they separated.

Jack went away towards Berkeley Square with his cousin; the Dean got

himself taken in a cab to his club; and Lord George walked his wife

down Constitution Hill towards their own home. He felt it to be

necessary that he should say something to his wife; but, at the same

time, was specially anxious that he should give her no cause to suspect

him of jealousy. Nor was he jealous, in the ordinary sense of the word.

He did not suppose for a moment that his wife was in love with Jack De

Baron, or Jack with his wife. But he did think that whereas she had

very little to say to her own husband she had a great deal to say to

Jack. And he was sensible, also, of a certain unbecomingness in such

amusement on her part. She had to struggle upwards, so as to be able to

sustain properly the position and dignity of Lady George Germain, and

the possible dignity of the Marchioness of Brotherton. She ought not to

want playfellows. If she would really have learned the names of all

those artists on the base of the Memorial, as she might so easily have

done, there would have been something in it. A lady ought to know, at

any rate, the names of such men. But she had allowed this Jack to make

a joke of it all, and had rather liked the joke. And the Dean had

laughed loud,--more like the son of a stable-keeper than a Dean. Lord

George was almost more angry with the Dean than with his wife. The

Dean, when at Brotherton, did maintain a certain amount of dignity; but

here, up in London, he seemed to be intent only on "having a good

time," like some schoolboy out on a holiday.

"Were you not a little loud when you were on the steps of the

Memorial?" he said.

"I hope not, George; not too loud."

"A lady should never be in the least loud, nor for the matter of that

would a gentleman either if he knew what he was about."

She walked on a little way, leaning on his arm in silence, considering

whether he meant anything by what he was saying, and how much he meant.

She felt almost sure that he did mean something disagreeable, and that

he was scolding her. "I don't quite know what you mean by loud, George?

We were talking, and of course wanted to make each other hear. I

believe with some people loud means--vulgar. I hope you didn't mean

that."

He certainly would not tell his wife that she was vulgar. "There is,"

he said, "a manner of talking which leads people on to--to--being

boisterous."

"Boisterous, George? Was I boisterous?"

"I think your father was a little."

She felt herself blush beneath her veil as she answered. "Of course if

you tell me anything about myself, I will endeavour to do as you tell

me; but, as for papa, I am sure he knows how to behave himself. I don't

think he ought to be found fault with because he likes to amuse

himself."

"And that Captain De Baron was very loud," said Lord George, conscious

that though his ground might be weak in reference to the Dean, he could

say what he pleased about Jack De Baron.

"Young men do laugh and talk, don't they, George?"

"What they do in their barracks, or when they are together, is nothing

to you or me. What such a one may do when he is in company with my wife

is very much to me, and ought to be very much to you."

"George," she said, again pausing for a moment, "do you mean to tell me

that I have misbehaved myself? Because, if so, speak it out at once."

"My dear, that is a foolish question for you to ask. I have said

nothing about misbehaviour, and you ought, at any rate, to wait till I

have done so. I should be very sorry to use such a word, and do not

think that I shall ever have occasion. But surely you will admit that

there may be practices, and manners, and customs on which I am at

liberty to speak to you. I am older than you."

"Husbands, of course, are older than their wives, but wives generally

know what they are about quite as well as their husbands."

"Mary, that isn't the proper way to take what I say. You have a very

peculiar place to fill in the world,--a place for which your early life

could not give you the very fittest training."

"Then why did you put me there?"

"Because of my love, and also because I had no doubt whatever as to

your becoming fit. There is a levity which is often pretty and becoming

in a girl, in which a married woman in some ranks of life may, perhaps,

innocently indulge, but which is not appropriate to higher positions."

"This is all because I laughed when Captain De Baron mispronounced the

men's names. I don't know anything peculiar in my position. One would

suppose that I was going to be made a sort of female bishop, or to sit

all my life as a chairwoman, like that Miss Mildmay. Of course I laugh

when things are said that make me laugh. And as for Captain De Baron, I

think he is very nice. Papa likes him, and he is always at the

Houghtons, and I cannot agree that he was loud and vulgar, or

boisterous, because he made a few innocent jokes in Kensington

Gardens."

He perceived now, for the first time since he had known her, that she

had a temper of her own, which he might find some difficulty in

controlling. She had endured gently enough his first allusions to

herself, but had risen up in wrath against him from the moment in which

he had spoken disparagingly of her father. At the moment he had nothing

further to say. He had used what eloquence there was in him, what words

he had collected together, and then walked home in silence. But his

mind was full of the matter; and though he made no further allusion on

that day, or for some subsequent days either to this conversation or to

his wife's conduct in the park, he had it always in his mind. He must

be the master, and in order that he might be master the Dean must be as

little as possible in the house. And that intimacy with Jack De Baron

must be crushed,--if only that she might be taught that he intended to

be master.

Two or three days passed by, and during those two or three days he did

not go to Berkeley Square.

CHAPTER XX.

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS.

In the middle of the next week the Dean went back to Brotherton. Before

starting he had an interview with Lord George which was not altogether

pleasant; but otherwise he had thoroughly enjoyed his visit. On the day

on which he started he asked his host what inquiries he intended to set

on foot in reference to the validity of the Italian marriage and the

legitimacy of the Italian baby. Now Lord George had himself in the

first instance consulted the Dean on this very delicate subject, and

was therefore not entitled to be angry at having it again mentioned;

but nevertheless he resented the question as an interference. "I

think," he replied, "that at present nothing had better be said upon

the subject."

"I cannot agree with you there, George."

"Then I am afraid I must ask you to be silent without agreeing with

me."

The Dean felt this to be intentionally uncivil. They two were in a boat

together. The injury to be done, if there were an injury, would affect

the wife as much as the husband. The baby which might some day be born,

and which might be robbed of his inheritance, would be as much the

grandchild of the Dean of Brotherton as of the old Marquis. And then

perhaps there was present to the Dean some unacknowledged feeling that

he was paying and would have to pay for the boat. Much as he revered

rank, he was not disposed to be snubbed by his son-in-law, because his

son-in-law was a nobleman. "You mean to tell me that I am to hold my

tongue," he said angrily.

"For the present I think we had both better do so."

"That may be, as regards any discussion of the matter with outsiders. I

am not at all disposed to act apart from you on a subject of such

importance to us both. If you tell me that you are advised this way or

that, I should not, without very strong ground, put myself in

opposition to that advice; but I do expect that you will let me know

what is being done."

"Nothing is being done."

"And also that you will not finally determine on doing nothing without

consulting me." Lord George drew himself up and bowed, but made no

further reply; and then the two parted, the Dean resolving that he

would be in town again before long, and Lord George reselving that the

Dean should spend as little time as possible in his house. Now, there

had been an undertaking, after a sort, made by the Dean,--a compact

with his daughter contracted in a jocose fashion,--which in the

existing circumstances was like to prove troublesome. There had been a

question of expenditure when the house was furnished,--whether there

should or should not be a carriage kept. Lord George had expressed an

opinion that their joint means would not suffice to keep a carriage.

Then the Dean had told his daughter that he would allow her Â£300 a-year

for her own expenses, to include the brougham,--for it was to be no

more than a brougham,--during the six months they would be in London,

and that he would regard this as his subscription towards the

household. Such a mode of being generous to his own child was pretty

enough. Of course the Dean would be a welcome visitor. Equally, of

course, a son-in-law may take any amount of money from a father-in-law

as a portion of his wife's fortune. Lord George, though he had suffered

some inward qualms, had found nothing in the arrangement to which he

could object while his friendship with the deanery was close and

pleasant. But now, as the Dean took his departure, and as Mary, while

embracing her father, said something of his being soon back, Lord

George remembered the compact with inward grief, and wished that there

had been no brougham.

In the mean time he had not been to Berkeley Square; nor was he at all

sure that he would go there. A distant day had been named, before that

exciting interview in the square, on which the Houghtons were to dine

in Munster Court. The Mildmays were also to be there, and Mrs.

Montacute Jones, and old Lord Parachute, Lord George's uncle. That

would be a party, and there would be no danger of a scene then. He had

almost determined that, in spite of his promise, he would not go to

Berkeley Square before the dinner. But Mrs. Houghton was not of the

same mind. A promise on such a subject was a sacred thing, and

therefore she wrote the following note to Lord George at his club. The

secrecy which some correspondence requires certainly tends to make a

club a convenient arrangement. "Why don't you come as you said you

would? A." In olden times, fifteen or twenty years ago, when telegraph

wires were still young, and messages were confined to diplomatic

secrets, horse-racing, and the rise and fall of stocks, lovers used to

indulge in rapturous expressions which would run over pages; but the

pith and strength of laconic diction has now been taught to us by the

self-sacrificing patriotism of the Post Office. We have all felt the

vigour of telegrammatic expression, and, even when we do not trust the

wire, we employ the force of wiry language. "Wilt thou be mine?--M.

N.," is now the ordinary form of an offer of marriage by post; and the

answer seldom goes beyond "Ever thine--P. Q." Adelaide Houghton's

love-letter was very short, but it was short from judgment and with a

settled purpose. She believed that a long epistle declaratory of her

everlasting but unfortunate attachment would frighten him. These few

words would say all that she had to say, and would say it safely. He

certainly had promised that he would go to her, and, as a gentleman, he

was bound to keep his word. He had mentioned no exact time, but it had

been understood that the visit was to be made at once. He would not

write to her. Heaven and earth! How would it be with him if Mr.

Houghton were to find the smallest scrap from him indicating improper

affection for Mrs. Houghton? He could not answer the note, and

therefore he must go at once.

He went into a deserted corner of a drawing-room at his club, and there

Seated himself for half an hour's meditation. How should he extricate

himself from this dilemma? In what language should he address a young

and beautiful woman devoted to him, but whose devotion he was bound to

repudiate? He was not voluble in conversation, and he was himself aware

of his own slowness. It was essential to him that he should prepare

beforehand almost the very words for an occasion of such

importance,--the very words and gestures and action. Would she not fly

into his arms, or at least expect that he should open his own? That

must be avoided. There must be no embracing. And then he must at once

proceed to explain all the evils of this calamitous passion;--how he

was the husband of another wife; how she was the wife of another

husband; how they were bound by honour, by religion, and equally by

prudence to remember the obligations they had incurred. He must beg her

to be silent while he said all this, and then he would conclude by

assuring her that she should always possess his steadiest friendship.

The excogitation of this took long, partly because his mind was greatly

exercised in the matter, and partly through a nervous desire to

postpone the difficult moment. At last, however, he seized his hat and

went away straight to Berkeley Square. Yes, Mrs. Houghton was at home.

He had feared that there was but little chance that she should be out

on the very day on which she knew that he would get her note. "Oh, so

you have come at last," she said as soon as the drawing-room door was

closed. She did not get up from her chair, and there was therefore no

danger of that immediate embrace which he had felt that it would be

almost equally dangerous to refuse or to accept.

"Yes," he said, "I have come."

"And now sit down and make yourself comfortable. It's very bad out of

doors, isn't it?"

"Cold, but dry."

"With a wretched east wind. I know it, and I don't mean to stir out the

whole day. So you may put your hat down, and not think of going for the

next hour and a half." It was true that he had his hat still in his

hand, and he deposited it forthwith on the floor, feeling that had he

been master of the occasion, he would have got rid of it less

awkwardly. "I shouldn't wonder if Mary were to be here by and by. There

was a sort of engagement that she and Jack De Baron were to come and

play bagatelle in the back drawing-room; but Jack never comes if he

says he will, and I daresay she has forgotten all about it."

He found that his purpose was altogether upset. In the first place, he

could hardly begin about her unfortunate passion when she received him

just as though he were an ordinary acquaintance; and then the whole

tenour of his mind was altered by this allusion to Jack De Baron. Had

it come to this, that he could not get through a day without having

Jack De Baron thrown at his head? He had from the first been averse to

living in London; but this was much worse than he had expected. Was it

to be endured that his wife should make appointments to play bagatelle

with Jack De Baron by way of passing her time? "I had heard nothing

about it," he said with gloomy, truthful significance. It was

impossible for him to lie even by a glance of his eye or a tone of his

voice. He told it all at once; how unwilling he was that his wife

should come out on purpose to meet this man, and how little able he

felt himself to prevent it.

"Of course dear Mary has to amuse herself," said the lady, answering

the man's look rather than his words. "And why should she not?"

"I don't know that bagatelle is a very improving occupation."

"Or Jack a very improving companion, perhaps. But I can tell you,

George, that there are more dangerous companions than poor Jack. And

then, Mary, who is the sweetest, dearest young woman I know, is not

impulsive in that way. She is such a very child. I don't suppose she

understands what passion means. She has the gaiety of a lark, and the

innocence. She is always soaring upwards, which is so beautiful."

"I don't know that there is much soaring upwards in bagatelle."

"Nor in Jack De Baron, perhaps. But we must take all that as we find

it. Of course Mary will have to amuse herself. She will never live such

a life as your sisters live at Manor Cross. The word that best

describes her disposition is--gay. But she is not mischievous."

"I hope not."

"Nor is she--passionate. You know what I mean." He did know what she

meant, and was lost in amazement at finding that one woman, in talking

of another, never contemplated the idea that passion could exist in a

wife for her husband. He was to regard himself as safe, not because his

wife loved himself, but because it was not necessary to her nature to

be in love with any one! "You need not be afraid," she went on to say.

"I know Jack au fond. He tells me everything; and should there be

anything to fear, I will let you know at once."

But what had all this to do with the momentous occasion which had

brought him to Berkeley Square? He was almost beginning to be sore at

heart because she had not thrown herself into his arms. There was no

repetition of that "But you do love me?" which had been so very

alarming but at the same time so very exciting on the steps of the

Albert Memorial. And then there seemed to be a probability that the

words which he had composed with so much care at his club would be

altogether wasted. He owed it to himself to do or to say something, to

allude in some way to his love and hers. He could not allow himself to

be brought there in a flurry of excitement, and there to sit till it

was time for him to go, just as though it were an ordinary morning

visit. "You bade me come," he said, "and so I came."

"Yes, I did bid you come. I would always have you come."

"That can hardly be; can it?"

"My idea of a friend,--of a man friend, I mean, and a real friend--is

some one to whom I can say everything, who will do everything for me,

who will come if I bid him and will like to stay and talk to me just as

long as I will let him; who will tell me everything, and as to whom I

may be sure that he likes me better than anybody else in the world,

though he perhaps doesn't tell me so above once a month. And then in

return----"

"Well, what in return?"

"I should think a good deal about him, you know; but I shouldn't want

always to be telling him that I was thinking about him. He ought to be

contented with knowing how much he was to me. I suppose that would not

suffice for you?"

Lord George was disposed to think that it would suffice, and that the

whole matter was now being represented to him in a very different light

than that in which he had hitherto regarded it. The word "friend"

softened down so many asperities! With such a word in his mind he need

not continually scare himself with the decalogue. All the pleasure

might be there, and the horrors altogether omitted. There would,

indeed, be no occasion for his eloquence; but he had already become

conscious that at this interview his eloquence could not be used. She

had given everything so different a turn! "Why not suffice for me?" he

said. "Only this,--that all I did for my friend I should expect her to

do for me."

"But that is unreasonable. Who doesn't see that in the world at large

men have the best of it almost in everything. The husband is not only

justified in being a tyrant, but becomes contemptible if he is not so.

A man has his pocket full of money; a woman is supposed to take what he

gives her. A man has all manner of amusements."

"What amusements have I?"

"You can come to me."

"Yes, I can do that."

"I cannot go to you. But when you come to me,--if I am to believe that

I am really your friend,--then I am to be the tyrant of the moment. Is

it not so? Do you think you would find me a hard tyrant? I own to you

freely that there is nothing in the world I like so much as your

society. Do I not earn by that a right to some obedience from you, to

some special observance?"

All this was so different from what he had expected, and so much more

pleasant! As far as he could look into it and think of it at the

pressure of the moment he did not see any reason why it should not be

as she proposed. There was clearly no need for those prepared words.

There had been one embrace,--an embrace that was objectionable because,

had either his wife seen it or Mr. Houghton, he would have been forced

to own himself wrong; but that had come from sudden impulse, and need

not be repeated. This that was now proposed to him was friendship, and

not love. "You shall have all observance," he said with his sweetest

smile.

"And as to obedience? But you are a man, and therefore must not be

pressed too hard. And now I may tell you what is the only thing that

can make me happy, and the absence of which would make me miserable."

"What thing?"

"Your society." He blushed up to his eyes as he heard this. "Now that,

I think, is a very pretty speech, and I expect something equally pretty

from you." He was much embarrassed, but was at the moment delivered

from his embarrassment by the entrance of his wife. "Here she is," said

Mrs. Houghton, getting up from her chair. "We have been just talking

about you, my dear. If you have come for bagatelle, you must play with

Lord George, for Jack De Baron isn't here."

"But I haven't come for bagatelle."

"So much the better, for I doubt whether Lord George would be very good

at it. I have been made to play so much that I hate the very sound of

the balls."

"I didn't expect to find you here," said Mary, turning to her husband.

"Nor I you, till Mrs. Houghton said that you were coming."

After that there was nothing of interest in their conversation. Jack

did not come, and after a few minutes Lord George proposed to his wife

that they should return home together. Of course she assented, and as

soon as they were in the brougham made a little playful attack upon

him. "You are becoming fond of Berkeley Square, I think."

"Mrs. Houghton is a friend of mine, and I am fond of my friends," he

said, gravely.

"Oh, of course."

"You went there to play that game with Captain De Baron."

"No, I didn't. I did nothing of the kind."

"Were you not there by appointment?"

"I told her that I should probably call. We were to have gone to some

shop together, only it seems she has changed her mind. Why do you tell

me that I had gone there to play some game with Captain De Baron?"

"Bagatelle."

"Bagatelle, or anything else! It isn't true. I have played bagatelle

with Captain de Baron, and I daresay I may again. Why shouldn't I?"

"And if so, would probably make some appointment to play with him."

"Why not?"

"That was all I said. What I suggested you had done is what you declare

you will do."

"But I had done nothing of the kind. I know very well, from the tone of

your voice, that you meant to scold me. You implied that I had done

something wrong. If I had done it, it wouldn't be wrong, as far as I

know. But your scolding me about it when I hadn't done it at all is

very hard to bear."

"I didn't scold you."

"Yes you did, George. I understand your voice and your look. If you

mean to forbid me to play bagatelle with Captain De Baron, or Captain

anybody else, or to talk with Mr. This, or to laugh with Major That,

tell me so at once. If I know what you want, I will do it. But I must

say that I shall feel it very, very hard if I cannot take care of

myself in such matters as that. If you are going to be jealous, I shall

wish that I were dead."

Then she burst out crying; and he, though he would not quite own that

he had been wrong, was forced to do so practically by little acts of

immediate tenderness.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MARQUIS COMES HOME.

Some little time after the middle of April, when the hunting was all

over, and Mr. Price had sunk down into his summer insignificance, there

came half a dozen telegrams to Manor Cross, from Italy, from Mr. Knox,

and from a certain managing tradesman in London, to say that the

Marquis was coming a fortnight sooner than he had expected. Everything

was at sixes and sevens. Everything was in a ferment. Everybody about

Manor Cross seemed to think that the world was coming to an end. But

none of these telegrams were addressed to any of the Germain family,

and the last people in the county who heard of this homeward rush of

the Marquis were the ladies at Cross Hall, and they heard it from Lord

George, upon whom Mr. Knox called in London; supposing, however, when

he did call that Lord George had already received full information on

the subject. Lord George's letter to Lady Sarah was full of dismay,

full of horror. "As he has not taken the trouble to communicate his

intentions to me, I shall not go down to receive him." "You will know

how to deal with the matter, and will, I am sure, support our mother

in this terrible trial." "I think that the child should, at any rate,

at first be acknowledged by you all as Lord Popenjoy." "We have to

regard, in the first place, the honour of the family. No remissness on

his part should induce us to forget for a moment what is due to the

title, the property, and the name." The letter was very long, and was

full of sententious instructions, such as the above. But the purport of

it was to tell the ladies at Cross Hall that they must go through the

first burden of receiving the Marquis without any assistance from

himself.

The Dean heard of the reported arrival some days before the family did

so. It was rumoured in Brotherton, and the rumour reached the deanery.

But he thought that there was nothing that he could do on the spur of

the moment. He perfectly understood the condition of Lord George's

mind, and perceived that it would not be expedient for him to interfere

quite on the first moment. As soon as the Marquis should have settled

himself in the house, of course he would call; and when the Marquis had

settled himself, and when the world had begun to recognise the fact

that the Marquis, with his Italian Marchioness, and his little Italian,

so-called Popenjoy, were living at Manor Cross, then,--if he saw his

way,--the Dean would bestir himself.

And so the Marquis arrived. He reached the Brotherton station with his

wife, a baby, a lady's maid, a nurse, a valet, a cook, and a courier,

about three o'clock in the afternoon; and the whole crowd of them were

carried off in their carriages to Manor Cross. A great many of the

inhabitants of Brotherton were there to see, for this coming of the

Marquis had been talked of far and wide. He himself took no notice of

the gathering people,--was perhaps unaware that there was any

gathering. He and his wife got into one carriage; the nurse, the lady's

maid, and the baby into a second; the valet and courier, and cook into

a third. The world of Brotherton saw them, and the world of Brotherton

observed that the lady was very old and very ugly. Why on earth could

he have married such a woman as that, and then have brought her home!

That was the exclamation which was made by Brotherton in general.

It was soon ascertained by every one about Manor Cross that the

Marchioness could not speak a word of English, nor could any of the

newly imported servants do so with the exception of the courier, who

was supposed to understand all languages. There was, therefore, an

absolutely divided household. It had been thought better that the old

family housekeeper, Mrs. Toff, should remain in possession. Through a

long life she had been devoted to the old Marchioness and to the ladies

of the family generally; but she would have been useless at their new

home, and there was an idea that Manor Cross could not be maintained

without her. It might also be expedient to have a friend in the enemy's

camp. Other English servants had been provided,--a butler, two

footmen, a coachman, and the necessary housemaids and kitchen maids. It

had been stated that the Marquis would bring his own cook. There were,

therefore, at once two parties, at the head of one of which was Mrs.

Toff, and at the head of the other the courier,--who remained, none of

the English people knew why.

For the first three days the Marchioness showed herself to no one. It

was understood that the fatigues of the journey had oppressed her, and

that she chose to confine herself to two or three rooms upstairs, which

had been prepared for her. Mrs. Toff, strictly obeying orders which had

come from Cross Hall, sent up her duty and begged to know whether she

should wait upon my lady. My lady sent down word that she didn't want

to see Mrs. Toff. These messages had to be filtered through the

courier, who was specially odious to Mrs. Toff. His Lordship was almost

as closely secluded as her Ladyship. He did, indeed, go out to the

stables, wrapped up in furs, and found fault with everything he saw

there. And he had himself driven round the park. But he did not get up

on any of these days till noon, and took all his meals by himself. The

English servants averred that during the whole of this time he never

once saw the Marchioness or the baby; but then the English servants

could not very well have known what he saw or what he did not see.

But this was very certain, that during those three days he did not go

to Cross Hall, or see any one of his own family. Mrs. Toff in the

gloaming of the evening, on the third day, hurried across the park to

see--the young ladies as she still called them. Mrs. Toff thought that

it was all very dreadful. She didn't know what was being done in those

apartments. She had never set her eyes upon the baby. She didn't feel

sure that there was any baby at all, though John,--John was one of the

English servants,--had seen a bundle come into the house. Wouldn't it

be natural and right that any real child should be carried out to take

the air? "And then all manner of messes were," said Mrs. Toff,

"prepared up in the closed room." Mrs. Toff didn't believe in anything,

except that everything was going to perdition. The Marchioness was

intent on asking after the health and appearance of her son, but Mrs.

Toff declared that she hadn't been allowed to catch a sight of "my

lord." Mrs. Toff's account was altogether very lachrymose. She spoke of

the Marquis, of course, with the utmost respect. But she was

sufficiently intimate with the ladies to treat the baby and its mother

with all the scorn of an upturned nose. Nor was the name of Popenjoy

once heard from her lips.

But what were the ladies to do? On the evening of the third day Lady

Sarah wrote to her brother George, begging him to come down to them.

"The matter was so serious, that he was," said Lady Sarah, "bound to

lend the strength of his presence to his mother and sisters." But on

the fourth morning Lady Sarah sent over a note to her brother, the

Marquis.

"DEAR BROTHERTON,--We hope that you and your wife and little boy

have arrived well, and have found things comfortable. Mamma is

most anxious to see you,--as of course we all are. Will you not

come over to us to-day. I dare say my sister-in-law may be too

fatigued to come out as yet. I need not tell you that we are very

anxious to see your little Popenjoy.

"Your affectionate Sister,

"SARAH GERMAIN."

It may be seen from this that the ladies contemplated peace, if peace

were possible. But in truth the nature of the letter, though not the

words, had been dictated by the Marchioness. She was intent upon seeing

her son, and anxious to acknowledge her grandchild. Lady Sarah had felt

her position to be very difficult, but had perceived that no temporary

acceptance by them of the child would at all injure her brother

George's claim, should Lord George set up a claim, and so, in deference

to the old lady, the peaceful letter was sent off, with directions to

the messenger to wait for an answer. The messenger came back with

tidings that his Lordship was in bed. Then there was another

consultation. The Marquis, though in bed, had of course read the

letter. Had he felt at all as a son and a brother ought to feel, he

would have sent some reply to such a message. It must be, they felt,

that he intended to live there and utterly ignore his mother and

sisters. What should they do then? How should they be able to live? The

Marchioness surrendered herself to a paroxysm of weeping, bitterly

blaming those who had not allowed her to go away and hide herself in

some distant obscurity. Her son, her eldest son, had cast her off

because she had disobeyed his orders! "His orders!" said Lady Sarah, in

scorn, almost in wrath against her mother. "What right has he to give

orders either to you or us? He has forgotten himself, and is only

worthy to be forgotten." Just as she spoke the Manor Cross phaeton,

with the Manor Cross ponies, was driven up to the door, and Lady

Amelia, who went to the window, declared that Brotherton himself was in

the carriage. "Oh, my son; my darling son," said the Marchioness,

throwing up her arms.

It really was the Marquis. It seemed to the ladies to be a very long

time indeed before he got into the room, so leisurely was he in

divesting himself of his furs and comforters. During this time the

Marchioness would have rushed into the hall had not Lady Sarah

prevented her. The old lady was quite overcome with emotion, and

prepared to lay at the feet of her eldest son, if he would only extend

to her the slightest sign of affection. "So, here you all are," he said

as he entered the room. "It isn't much of a house for you, but you

would have it so." He was of course forced to kiss his mother, but the

kiss was not very fervent in its nature. To each of his sisters he

merely extended his hand. This Amelia received with empressement; for,

after all, severe though he was, nevertheless he was the head of the

family. Susanna measured the pressure which he gave, and returned back

to him the exact weight. Lady Sarah made a little speech. "We are very

glad to see you; Brotherton. You have been away a long time."

"A deuced long time."

"I hope your wife is well;--and the little boy. When will she wish that

we should go and see her?" The Marchioness during this time had got

possession of his left hand, and from her seat was gazing up into his

face. He was a very handsome man, but pale, worn, thin, and apparently

unhealthy. He was very like Lord George, but smaller in feature, and

wanting full four inches of his brother's height. Lord George's hair

was already becoming grey at the sides. That of the Marquis, who was

ten years older, was perfectly black;--but his Lordship's valet had

probably more to do with that than nature. He wore an exquisite

moustache, but in other respects was close shaven. He was dressed with

great care, and had fur even on the collar of his frock coat, so much

did he fear the inclemency of his native climate.

"She doesn't speak a word of English, you know," he said, answering his

sister's question.

"We might manage to get on in French," said Lady Sarah.

"She doesn't speak a word of French either. She never was out of Italy

till now. You had better not trouble yourselves about her."

This was dreadful to them all. It was monstrous to them that there

should be a Marchioness of Brotherton, a sister-in-law, living close to

them, whom they were to acknowledge to be the reigning Marchioness, and

that they should not be allowed to see her. It was not that they

anticipated pleasure from her acquaintance. It was not that they were

anxious to welcome such a new relation. This marriage, if it were a

marriage, was a terrible blow to them. It would have been infinitely

better for them all that, having such a wife, he should have kept her

in Italy. But, as she was here in England, as she was to be

acknowledged,--as far as they knew at present,--it was a fearful thing

that she should be living close to them and not be seen by them. For

some moments after his last announcement they were stricken dumb. He

was standing with his back to the fire, looking at his boots. The

Marchioness was the first to speak. "We may see Popenjoy!" she

exclaimed through her sobs.

"I suppose he can be brought down,--if you care about it."

"Of course we care about it," said Lady Amelia.

"They tell me he is not strong, and I don't suppose they'll let him

come out such weather as this. You'll have to wait. I don't think any

body ought to stir out in this weather. It doesn't suit me, I know.

Such an abominable place as it is I never saw in my life. There is not

a room in the house that is not enough to make a man blow his brains

out."

Lady Sarah could not stand this, nor did she think it right to put up

with the insolence of his manner generally. "If so," she said, "it is a

pity that you came away from Italy."

He turned sharply round and looked at her for an instant before he

answered. And as he did so she remembered the peculiar tyranny of his

eyes,--the tyranny to which, when a boy, he had ever endeavoured to

make her subject, and all others around him. Others had become subject

because he was the Lord Popenjoy of the day, and would be the future

Marquis; but she, though recognising his right to be first in every

thing, had ever rebelled against his usurpation of unauthorized power.

He, too, remembered all this, and almost snarled at her with his eyes.

"I suppose I might stay if I liked, or come back if I liked, without

asking you," he said.

"Certainly."

"But you are the same as ever you were."

"Oh, Brotherton," said the Marchioness, "do not quarrel with us

directly you have come back."

"You may be quite sure, mother, that I shall not take the trouble to

quarrel with any one. It takes two for that work. If I wanted to

quarrel with her or you, I have cause enough."

"I know of none," said Lady Sarah.

"I explained to you my wishes about this house, and you disregarded

them altogether." The old lady looked up at her eldest daughter as

though to say, "There,--that was your sin." "I knew what was better for

you and better for me. It is impossible that there should be pleasant

intercourse between you and my wife, and I recommended you to go

elsewhere. If you had done so I would have taken care that you were

comfortable." Again the Marchioness looked at Lady Sarah with bitter

reproaches in her eyes.

"What interest in life would we have had in a distant home?" said Lady

Sarah.

"Why not you as well as other people?"

"Because, unlike other people, we have become devoted to one spot. The

property belongs to you."

"I hope so."

"But the obligations of the property have been, at any rate, as near to

us as to you. Society, I suppose, may be found in a new place, but we

do not care much for society."

"Then it would have been so much the easier."

"But it would have been impossible for us to find new duties."

"Nonsense," said the Marquis, "humbug; d----d trash."

"If you cannot speak otherwise than like that before your mother,

Brotherton, I think you had better leave her," said Lady Sarah,

bravely.

"Don't, Sarah,--don't!" said the Marchioness.

"It is trash and nonsense, and humbug. I told you that you were better

away, and you determined to stay. I knew what was best for you, but you

chose to be obstinate. I have not the slightest doubt as to who did

it."

"We were all of the same mind," said Lady Susanna. "Alice said it would

be quite cruel that mamma should be moved." Alice was now the wife of

Canon Holdenough.

"It would have been very bad for us all to go away," said Lady Amelia.

"George was altogether against it," said Lady Susanna.

"And the Dean," said Lady Amelia, indiscreetly.

"The Dean!" exclaimed the Marquis. "Do you mean to say that that stable

boy has been consulted about my affairs? I should have thought that not

one of you would have spoken to George after he had disgraced himself

by such a marriage."

"There was no need to consult any one," said Lady Sarah. "And we do not

think George's marriage at all disgraceful."

"Mary is a very nice young person," said the Marchioness.

"I dare say. Whether she is nice or not is very little to me. She has

got some fortune, and I suppose that was what he wanted. As you are all

of you fixed here now, and seem to have spent a lot of money, I suppose

you will have to remain. You have turned my tenant out----"

"Mr. Price was quite willing to go," said Lady Susanna.

"I dare say. I trust he may be as willing to give up the land when his

lease is out. I have been told that he is a sporting friend of the

Dean's. It seems to me that you have, all of you, got into a nice mess

here by yourselves. All I want you to understand is that I cannot now

trouble myself about you."

"You don't mean to give us up," said the afflicted mother. "You'll come

and see me sometimes, won't you?"

"Certainly not, if I am to be insulted by my sister."

"I have insulted no one," said Lady Sarah, haughtily.

"It was no insult to tell me that I ought to have stayed in Italy, and

not have come to my own house!"

"Sarah, you ought not to have said that," exclaimed the Marchioness.

"He complained that everything here was uncomfortable, and therefore I

said it. He knows that I did not speak of his return in any other

sense. Since he settled himself abroad there has not been a day on

which I have not wished that he would come back to his own house and

his own duties. If he will treat us properly, no one will treat him

with higher consideration than I. But we have our own rights as well as

he, and are as well able to guard them."

"Sarah can preach as well as ever," he said.

"Oh! my children,--oh! my children!" sobbed the old lady.

"I have had about enough of this. I knew what it would be when you

wrote to me to come to you." Then he took up his hat, as though he were

going.

"And am I to see nothing more of you?" asked his mother.

"I will come to you, mother,--once a-week if you wish it. Every Sunday

afternoon will be as good a time as any other. But I will not come

unless I am assured of the absence of Lady Sarah. I will not subject

myself to her insolence, nor put myself in the way of being annoyed by

a ballyragging quarrel."

"I and my sisters are always at Church on Sunday afternoons," said Lady

Sarah.

In this way the matter was arranged, and then the Marquis took himself

off. For some time after he left the room the Marchioness sat in

silence, sobbing now and again, and then burying her face in her

handkerchief. "I wish we had gone away when he told us," she said, at

last.

"No, mamma," said her eldest daughter. "No,--certainly no. Even though

all this is very miserable, it is not so bad as running away in order

that we might be out of his way. No good can ever be got by yielding in

what is wrong to any one. This is your house; and as yours it is ours."

"Oh, yes."

"And here we can do something to justify our lives. We have a work

appointed to us which we are able to perform. What will his wife do for

the people here? Why are we not to say our prayers in the Church which

we all know and love? Why are we to leave Alice--and Mary? Why should

he, because he is the eldest of us,--he, who for so many years has

deserted the place,--why is he to tell us where to live, and where not

to live. He is rich, and we are poor, but we have never been pensioners

on his bounty. The park, I suppose, is now closed to us; but I am

prepared to live here in defiance of him." This she said walking up and

down the room as she spoke, and she said it with so much energy that

she absolutely carried her sisters with her and again partly convinced

her mother.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MARQUIS AMONG HIS FRIENDS.

There was, of course, much perturbation of mind at Brotherton as to

what should be done on this occasion of the Marquis's return. Mr. Knox

had been consulted by persons in the town, and had given it as his

opinion that nothing should be done. Some of the tradesmen and a few of

the tenants living nearest to the town had suggested a triumphal

entry,--green boughs, a bonfire, and fire works. This idea, however,

did not prevail long. The Marquis of Brotherton was clearly not a man

to be received with green boughs and bonfires. All that soon died away.

But there remained what may be called the private difficulty. Many in

Brotherton and around Brotherton had of course known the man when he

was young, and could hardly bring themselves to take no notice of his

return. One or two drove over and simply left their cards. The bishop

asked to see him, and was told that he was out. Dr. Pountner did see

him, catching him at his own hall door, but the interview was very

short, and not particularly pleasant. "Dr. Pountner. Well; I do

remember you, certainly. But we have all grown older, you know."

"I came," said the doctor, with a face redder than ever, "to pay my

respects to your Lordship, and to leave my card on your wife."

"We are much obliged to you,--very much obliged. Unfortunately we are

both invalids." Then the doctor, who had not got out of his carriage,

was driven home again. The doctor had been a great many years at

Brotherton, and had known the old Marquis well. "I don't know what you

and Holdenough will make of him," the doctor said to the Dean. "I

suppose you will both be driven into some communion with him. I shan't

try it again."

The Dean and Canon Holdenough had been in consultation on the subject,

and had agreed that they would each of them act as though the Marquis

had been like any other gentleman, and his wife like any other newly

married lady. They were both now connected with the family, and even

bound to act on the presumption that there would be family friendship.

The Dean went on his errand first, and the Dean was admitted into his

sitting-room. This happened a day or two after the scene at Cross Hall.

"I don't know that I should have troubled you so soon," said the Dean,

"had not your brother married my daughter." The Dean had thought over

the matter carefully, making up his mind how far he would be courteous

to the man, and where he would make a stand if it were necessary that

he should make a stand at all. And he had determined that he would ask

after the new Lady Brotherton, and speak of the child as Lord Popenjoy,

the presumption being that a man is married when he says so himself,

and that his child is legitimate when declared to be so. His present

acknowledgment would not bar any future proceedings.

"There has been a good deal of marrying and giving in marriage since I

have been away," replied the Marquis.

"Yes, indeed. There has been your brother, your sister, and last, not

least, yourself."

"I was not thinking of myself. I meant among you here. The church seems

to carry everything before it."

It seemed to the Dean, who was sufficiently mindful of his daughter's

fortune, and who knew to a penny what was the very liberal income of

Canon Holdenough, that in these marriages the church had at least given

as much as it had got. "The church holds its own," said the Dean, "and

I hope that it always will. May I venture to express a hope that the

Marchioness is well."

"Not very well."

"I am sorry for that. Shall I not have the pleasure of seeing her

to-day?"

The Marquis looked as though he were almost astounded at the impudence

of the proposition; but he replied to it by the excuse that he had made

before. "Unless you speak Italian I'm afraid you would not get on very

well with her."

"She will not find that I have the Tuscan tongue or the Roman mouth,

but I have enough of the language to make myself perhaps intelligible

to her ladyship."

"We will postpone it for the present, if you please, Mr. Dean."

There was an insolence declared in the man's manner and almost declared

in his words, which made the Dean at once determine that he would never

again ask after the new Marchioness, and that he would make no allusion

whatever to the son. A man may say that his wife is too unwell to

receive strangers without implying that the wish to see her should not

have been expressed. The visitor bowed, and then the two men both sat

silent for some moments. "You have not seen your brother since you have

been back?" the Dean said at last.

"I have not seen him. I don't know where he is, or anything about him."

"They live in London,--in Munster Court."

"Very likely. He didn't consult me about his marriage, and I don't know

anything about his concerns."

"He told you of it,--before it took place."

"Very likely,--though I do not exactly see how that concerns you and

me."

"You must be aware that he is married to--my daughter."

"Quite so."

"That would, generally, be supposed to give a common interest."

"Ah! I dare say. You feel it so, no doubt. I am glad that you are

satisfied by an alliance with my family. You are anxious for me to

profess that it is reciprocal."

"I am anxious for nothing of the kind," said the Dean, jumping up from

his chair. "I have nothing to get and nothing to lose by the alliance.

The usual courtesies of life are pleasant to me."

"I wish that you would use them then on the present occasion by being a

little quieter."

"Your brother has married a lady, and my daughter has married a

gentleman."

"Yes; George is a great ass; in some respects the greatest ass I know;

but he is a gentleman. Perhaps if you have anything else that you wish

to say you will do me the honour of sitting down."

The Dean was so angry that he did not know how to contain himself. The

Marquis had snubbed him for coming. He had then justified his visit by

an allusion to the connection between them, and the Marquis had replied

to this by hinting that though a Dean might think it a very fine thing

to have his daughter married into the family of a Marquis, the Marquis

probably would not look at it in the same light. And yet what was the

truth? Whence had come the money which had made the marriage possible?

In the bargain between them which party had had the best of it? He was

conscious that it would not become him to allude to the money, but his

feeling on the subject was very strong. "My lord," he said, "I do not

know that there is anything to be gained by my sitting down again."

"Perhaps not. I dare say you know best."

"I came here intent on what I considered to be a courtesy due to your

lordship. I am sorry that my visit has been mistaken."

"I don't see that there is anything to make a fuss about."

"It shall not be repeated, my lord." And so he left the room.

Why on earth had the man come back to England, bringing a foreign woman

and an Italian brat home with him, if he intended to make the place too

hot to hold him by insulting everybody around him? This was the first

question the Dean asked himself, when he found himself outside the

house. And what could the man hope to gain by such insolence? Instead

of taking the road through the park back to Brotherton, he went on to

Cross Hall. He was desirous of learning what were the impressions, and

what the intentions, of the ladies there. Did this madman mean to

quarrel with his mother and sisters as well as with his other

neighbours? He did not as yet know what intercourse there had been

between the two houses, since the Marquis had been at Manor Cross. And

in going to Cross Hall in the midst of all these troubles, he was no

doubt actuated in part by a determination to show himself to be one of

the family. If they would accept his aid, no one would be more loyal

than he to these ladies. But he would not be laid aside. If anything

unjust were intended, if any fraud was to be executed, the person most

to be injured would be that hitherto unborn grandson of his for whose

advent he was so anxious. He had been very free with his money, but he

meant to have his money's worth.

At Cross Hall he found Canon Holdenough's wife and the Canon. At the

moment of his entrance old Lady Brotherton was talking to the

clergyman, and Lady Alice was closeted in a corner with her sister

Sarah. "I would advise you to go just as though you had heard nothing

from us," Lady Sarah had said. "Of course he would be readier to

quarrel with me than with any one. For mamma's sake I would go away for

a time if I had anywhere to go to."

"Come to us," Lady Alice had said. But Lady Sarah had declared that she

would be as much in the way at Brotherton as at Cross Hall, and had

then gone on to explain that it was Lady Alice's duty to call on her

sister-in-law, and that she must do so,--facing the consequences

whatever they might be. "Of course mamma could not go till he had been

here," Lady Sarah added; "and now he has told mamma not to go at all.

But that is nothing to you."

"I have just come from the house," said the Dean.

"Did you see him?" asked the old woman with awe.

"Yes; I saw him."

"Well!"

"I must say that he was not very civil to me, and that I suppose I have

seen all of him that I shall see."

"It is only his manner," said her ladyship.

"An unfortunate manner, surely."

"Poor Brotherton!"

Then the Canon said a word. "Of course no one wants to trouble him. I

can speak at least for myself. I do not,--certainly. I have requested

her ladyship to ask him whether he would wish me to call or not. If he

says that he does, I shall expect him to receive me cordially. If he

does not--there's an end of it."

"I hope you won't all of you turn against him," said the Marchioness.

"Turn against him!" repeated the Dean. "I do not suppose that there is

any one who would not be both kind and courteous to him, if he would

accept kindness and courtesy. It grieves me to make you unhappy,

Marchioness, but I am bound to let you know that he treated me very

badly." From that moment the Marchioness made up her mind that the Dean

was no friend of the family, and that he was, after all, vulgar and

disagreeable. She undertook, however, to enquire from her son on next

Sunday whether he would wish to be called upon by his brother-in-law,

the Canon.

On the following day Lady Alice went alone to Manor Cross,--being the

first lady who had gone to the door since the new arrivals,--and asked

for Lady Brotherton. The courier came to the door and said "not at

home," in a foreign accent, just as the words might have been said to

any chance caller in London. Then Lady Alice asked the man to tell her

brother that she was there. "Not at home, miladi," said the man, in the

same tone. At that moment Mrs. Toff came running through the long hall

to the carriage door. The house was built round a quadrangle, and all

the ground floor of the front and of one of the sides consisted of

halls, passages, and a billiard-room. Mrs. Toff must have been watching

very closely or she could hardly have known that Lady Alice was there.

She came out and stood beside the carriage, and leaning in, whispered

her fears and unhappinesses. "Oh! my lady, I'm afraid it's very bad. I

haven't set eyes on the--the--his wife, my lady, yet; nor the little

boy."

"Are they in now, Mrs. Toff?"

"Of course they're in. They never go out. He goes about all the

afternoon in a dressing-gown, smoking bits of paper, and she lies in

bed or gets up and doesn't do,--nothing at all, as far as I can see,

Lady Alice. But as for being in, of course they're in; they're always

in." Lady Alice, however, feeling that she had done her duty, and not

wishing to take the place by storm, had herself driven back to

Brotherton.

On the following Sunday afternoon the Marquis came, according to his

promise, and found his mother alone. "The fact is, mother," he said,

"you have got a regular church set around you during the last year or

two, and I will have nothing to do with them. I never cared much for

Brotherton Close, and now I like it less than ever." The Marchioness

moaned and looked up into his face imploringly. She was anxious to say

something in defence, at any rate, of her daughter's marriage, but

specially anxious to say nothing that should not anger him. Of course

he was unreasonable, but, according to her lights, he, being the

Marquis, had a right to be unreasonable. "The Dean came to me the other

day," continued he, "and I could see at a glance that he meant to be

quite at home in the house, if I didn't put him down."

"You'll see Mr. Holdenough, won't you? Mr. Holdenough is a very

gentlemanlike man, and the Holdenoughs were always quite county people.

You used to like Alice."

"If you ask me, I think she has been a fool at her age to go and marry

an old parson. As for receiving him, I shan't receive anybody,--in the

way of entertaining them. I haven't come home for that purpose. My

child will have to live here when he is a man."

"God bless him!" said the Marchioness.

"Or at any rate his property will be here. They tell me that it will be

well that he should be used to this damnable climate early in life. He

will have to go to school here, and all that. So I have brought him,

though I hate the place."

"It is so nice to have you back, Brotherton."

"I don't know about its being nice. I don't find much niceness in it.

Had I not got myself married I should never have come back. But it's as

well that you all should know that there is an heir."

"God bless him!" said the Marchioness, again. "But don't you think that

we ought to see him?"

"See him! Why?" He asked the question sharply, and looked at her with

that savageness in his eyes which all the family remembered so well,

and which she specially feared.

That question of the legitimacy of the boy had never been distinctly

discussed at Cross Hall, and the suspicious hints on the subject which

had passed between the sisters, the allusions to this and the other

possibility which had escaped them, had been kept as far as possible

from their mother. They had remarked among themselves that it was very

odd that the marriage should have been concealed, and almost more than

odd that an heir to the title should have been born without any

announcement of such a birth. A dread of some evil mystery had filled

their thoughts, and shown itself in their words and looks to each

other. And, though they had been very anxious to keep this from their

mother, something had crept through which had revealed a suspicion of

the suspicion even to her. She, dear old lady, had resolved upon no

line of conduct in the matter. She had conceived no project of

rebelling against her eldest daughter, or of being untrue to her

youngest son. But now that she was alone with her eldest son, with the

real undoubted Marquis, with him who would certainly be to her more

than all the world beside if he would only allow it, there did come

into her head an idea that she would put him on his guard.

"Because,--because----"

"Because what? Speak out, mother."

"Because, perhaps they'll say that--that----"

"What will they say?"

"If they don't see him, they may think he isn't Popenjoy at all."

"Oh! they'll think that, will they? How will seeing help them?"

"It would be so nice to have him here, if it's only for a little," said

the Marchioness.

"So that's it," he said, after a long pause. "That's George's game, and

the Dean's; I can understand."

"No, no, no; not George," said the unhappy mother.

"And Sarah, I dare say, is in a boat with them. I don't wonder that

they should choose to remain here and watch me."

"I am sure George has never thought of such a thing."

"George will think as his father-in-law bids him. George was never very

good at thinking for himself. So you fancy they'll be more likely to

accept the boy if they see him."

"Seeing is believing, Brotherton."

"There's something in that, to be sure. Perhaps they don't think I've

got a wife at all, because they haven't seen her."

"Oh, yes; they believe that."

"How kind of them. Well, mother, you've let the cat out of the bag."

"Don't tell them that I said so."

"No; I won't tell. Nor am I very much surprised. I thought how it would

be when I didn't announce it all in the old-fashioned way. It's lucky

that I have the certificated proof of the date of my marriage, isn't

it?"

"It's all right, of course. I never doubted it, Brotherton."

"But all the others did. I knew there was something up when George

wasn't at home to meet me."

"He is coming."

"He may stay away if he likes it. I don't want him. He won't have the

courage to tell me up to my face that he doesn't intend to acknowledge

my boy. He's too great a coward for that."

"I'm sure it's not George, Brotherton."

"Who is it, then?"

"Perhaps it's the Dean."

"D---- his impudence. How on earth among you could you let George marry

the daughter of a low-bred ruffian like that,--a man that never ought

to have been allowed to put his foot inside the house?"

"She had such a very nice fortune! And then he wanted to marry that

scheming girl, Adelaide De Baron,--without a penny."

"The De Barons, at any rate, are gentlefolk. If the Dean meddles with

me, he shall find that he has got the wrong sow by the ear. If he puts

his foot in the park again I'll have him warned off as a trespasser."

"But you'll see Mr. Holdenough?"

"I don't want to see anybody. I mean to hold my own, and do as I please

with my own, and live as I like, and toady no one. What can I have in

common with an old parson like that?"

"You'll let me see Popenjoy, Brotherton?"

"Yes," he said, pausing a moment before he answered her. "He shall be

brought here, and you shall see him. But mind, mother, I shall expect

you to tell me all that you hear."

"Indeed, I will."

"You will not rebel against me, I suppose."

"Oh, no;--my son, my son!" Then she fell upon his neck, and he suffered

it for a minute, thinking it wise to make sure of one ally in that

house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MARQUIS SEES HIS BROTHER.

When Lord George was summoned down to Manor Cross,--or rather, to Cross

Hall, he did not dare not to go. Lady Sarah had told him that it was

his duty, and he could not deny the assertion. But he was very angry

with his brother, and did not in the least wish to see him. Nor did he

think that by seeing him he could in any degree render easier that

horrible task which would, sooner or later, be imposed upon him, of

testing the legitimacy of his brother's child. And there were other

reasons which made him unwilling to leave London. He did not like to be

away from his young wife. She was, of course, a matron now, and

entitled to be left alone, according to the laws of the world; but then

she was so childish, and so fond of playing bagatelle with Jack De

Baron! He had never had occasion to find fault with her; not to say

words to her which he himself would regard as fault-finding words

though she had complained more than once of his scolding her. He would

caution her, beg her to be grave, ask her to read heavy books, and try

to impress her with the solemnity of married life. In this way he would

quell her spirits for a few hours. Then she would burst out again, and

there would be Jack De Baron and the bagatelle. In all these sorrows he

solaced himself by asking advice from Mrs. Houghton. By degrees he told

Mrs. Houghton almost everything. The reader may remember that there had

been a moment in which he had resolved that he would not again go to

Berkeley Square. But all that was very much altered now. He was there

almost every day, and consulted the lady about every thing. She had

induced him even to talk quite openly about this Italian boy, to

express his suspicions, and to allude to most distressing duties which

might be incumbent on him. She strenuously advised him to take nothing

for granted. If the Marquisate was to be had by careful scrutiny she

was quite of opinion that it should not be lost by careless confidence.

This sort of friendship was very pleasant to him, and especially so,

because he could tell himself that there was nothing wicked in it. No

doubt her hand would be in his sometimes for a moment, and once or

twice his arm had almost found its way round her waist. But these had

been small deviations, which he had taken care to check. No doubt it

had occurred to him, once or twice, that she had not been careful to

check them. But this, when he thought of it maturely, he attributed to

innocence.

It was at last, by her advice, that he begged that one of his sisters

might come up to town, as a companion to Mary during his absence at

Cross Hall. This counsel she had given to him after assuring him

half-a-dozen times that there was nothing to fear. He had named Amelia,

Mary having at once agreed to the arrangement, on condition that the

younger of the three sisters should be invited. The letter was of

course written to Lady Sarah. All such letters always were written to

Lady Sarah. Lady Sarah had answered, saying, that Susanna would take

the place destined for Amelia. Now Susanna, of all the Germain family,

was the one whom Mary disliked the most. But there was no help for it.

She thought it hard, but she was not strong enough in her own position

to say that she would not have Susanna, because Susanna had not been

asked. "I think Lady Susanna will be the best," said Lord George,

"because she has so much strength of character."

"Strength of character! You speak as if you were going away for three

years, and were leaving me in the midst of danger. You'll be back in

five days, I suppose. I really think I could have got on without

Susanna's--strength of character!" This was her revenge; but, all the

same, Lady Susanna came.

"She is as good as gold," said Lord George, who was himself as weak as

water. "She is as good as gold; but there is a young man comes here

whom I don't care for her to see too often." This was what he said to

Lady Susanna.

"Oh, indeed! Who is he?"

"Captain De Baron. You are not to suppose that she cares a straw about

him."

"Oh, no; I am sure there can be nothing of that," said Lady Susanna,

feeling herself to be as energetic as Cerberus, and as many-eyed as

Argus.

"You must take care of yourself now, master Jack," Mrs. Houghton said

to her cousin. "A duenna has been sent for."

"Duennas always go to sleep, don't they; and take tips; and are

generally open to reason?"

"Oh, heavens! Fancy tipping Lady Susanna! I should think that she never

slept in her life with both eyes at the same time, and that she thinks

in her heart that every man who says a civil word ought to have his

tongue cut out."

"I wonder how she'd take it if I were to say a civil word to herself?"

"You can try; but as far as Madame is concerned, you had better wait

till Monsieur is back again."

Lord George, having left his wife in the hands of Lady Susanna, went

down to Brotherton and on to Cross Hall. He arrived on the Saturday

after that first Sunday visit paid by the Marquis to his mother. The

early part of the past week had been very blank down in those parts. No

further personal attempts had been made to intrude upon the Manor Cross

mysteries. The Dean had not been seen again, even at Cross Hall. Mr.

Holdenough had made no attempt after the reception,--or rather

non-reception,--awarded to his wife. Old Mr. De Baron had driven over,

and had seen the Marquis, but nothing more than that fact was known at

Cross Hall. He had been there for about an hour, and as far as Mrs.

Toff knew, the Marquis had been very civil to him. But Mr. De Baron,

though a cousin, was not by any means one of the Germain party. Then,

on Saturday there had been an affair. Mrs. Toff had come to the Hall,

boiling over with the importance of her communication, and stating that

she had been--turned out of the house. She, who had presided over

everything material at Manor Cross for more than thirty years, from the

family pictures down to the kitchen utensils, had been absolutely

desired to--walk herself off. The message had been given to her by that

accursed Courier, and she had then insisted on seeing the Marquis. "My

Lord," she said, only laughed at her. "'Mrs. Toff,' he had said, 'you

are my mother's servant, and my sisters'. You had better go and live

with them.'" She had then hinted at the shortness of the notice given

her, upon which he had offered her anything she chose to ask in the way

of wages and board wages. "But I wouldn't take a penny, my Lady; only

just what was due up to the very day." As Mrs. Toff was a great deal

too old a servant to be really turned away, and as she merely migrated

from Manor Cross to Cross Hall, she did not injure herself much by

refusing the offers made to her.

It must be held that the Marquis was justified in getting rid of Mrs.

Toff. Mrs. Toff was, in truth, a spy in his camp, and, of course, his

own people were soon aware of that fact. Her almost daily journeys to

Cross Hall were known, and it was remembered, both by the Marquis and

his wife, that this old woman, who had never been allowed to see the

child, but who had known all the preceding generation as children,

could not but be an enemy. Of course it was patent to all the servants,

and to every one connected with the two houses, that there was war. Of

course, the Marquis, having an old woman acting spy in his stronghold,

got rid of her. But justice would shortly have required that the other

old woman, who was acting spy in the other stronghold, should be turned

out, also. But the Marchioness, who had promised to tell everything to

her son, could not very well be offered wages and be made to go.

In the midst of the ferment occasioned by this last piece of work Lord

George reached Cross Hall. He had driven through the park, that way

being nearly as short as the high road, and had left word at the house

that he would call on the following morning, immediately after morning

church. This he did, in consequence of a resolution which he had

made,--to act on his own judgment. A terrible crisis was coming, in

which it would not be becoming that he should submit himself either to

his eldest sister, or to the Dean. He had talked the matter over fully

with Mrs. Houghton, and Mrs. Houghton had suggested that he should call

on his way out to the Hall.

The ladies had at first to justify their request that he should come to

them, and there was a difficulty in doing this, as he was received in

presence of their mother. Lady Sarah had not probably told herself that

the Marchioness was a spy, but she had perceived that it would not be

wise to discuss everything openly in her mother's presence. "It is

quite right that you should see him," said Lady Sarah.

"Quite right," said the old lady.

"Had he sent me even a message I should have been here, of course,"

said the brother. "He passed through London, and I would have met him

there had he not kept everything concealed."

"He isn't like anybody else, you know. You mustn't quarrel with him. He

is the head of the family. If we quarrel with him, what will become of

us?"

"What will become of him if everybody falls off from him. That's what I

am thinking of," said Lady Sarah.

Soon after this all the horrors that had taken place,--horrors which

could not be entrusted to a letter,--were narrated him. The Marquis had

insulted Dr. Pountner, he had not returned the Bishop's visit, he had

treated the Dean with violent insolence, and he had refused to receive

his brother-in-law, Mr. Holdenough, though the Holdenoughs had always

moved in county society! He had declared that none of his relatives

were to be introduced to his wife. He had not as yet allowed the

so-called Popenjoy to be seen. He had said none of them were to trouble

him at Manor Cross, and had explained his purpose, of only coming to

the Hall when he knew that his sister Sarah was away. "I think he must

be mad," said the younger brother.

"It is what comes of living in a godless country like Italy," said Lady

Amelia.

"It is what comes of utterly disregarding duty," said Lady Sarah.

But what was to be done? The Marquis had declared his purpose of doing

what he liked with his own, and certainly none of them could hinder

him. If he chose to shut himself and his wife up at the big house, he

must do so. It was very bad, but it was clear that they could not

interfere with his eccentricities. How was anybody to interfere? Of

course, there was present in the mind of each of them a feeling that

this woman might not be his wife, or that the child might not be

legitimate. But they did not like with open words among themselves to

accuse their brother of so great a crime. "I don't see what there is to

be done," said Lord George.

The Church was in the park, not very far from the house, but nearer to

the gate leading to Brotherton. On that Sunday morning the Marchioness

and her youngest daughter went there in the carriage, and in doing so,

had to pass the front doors. The previous Sunday had been cold, and

this was the first time that the Marchioness had seen Manor Cross since

her son had been there. "Oh, dear! if I could only go in and see the

dear child," she said.

"You know you can't, mamma," said Amelia.

"It is all Sarah's fault, because she would quarrel with him."

After Church the ladies returned in the carriage, and Lord George went

to the house according to his appointment. He was shown into a small

parlour, and in about half an hour's time luncheon was brought to him.

He then asked whether his brother was coming. The servant went away,

promising to enquire, but did not return. He was cross and would eat no

lunch,--but after awhile rang the bell, loudly, and again asked the

same question. The servant again went away and did not return. He had

just made up his mind to leave the house and never to return to it,

when the Courier, of whom he had heard, came to usher him into his

brother's room. "You seem to be in a deuce of a hurry, George," said

the Marquis, without getting out of his chair. "You forget that people

don't get up at the same hour all the world over."

"It's half-past two now."

"Very likely; but I don't know that there is any law to make a man

dress himself before that hour."

"The servant might have given me a message."

"Don't make a row now you are here, old fellow. When I found you were

in the house I got down as fast as I could. I suppose your time isn't

so very precious."

Lord George had come there determined not to quarrel if he could help

it. He had very nearly quarrelled already. Every word that his brother

said was in truth an insult,--being, as they were, the first words

spoken after so long an interval. They were intended to be insolent,

probably intended to drive him away. But if anything was to be gained

by the interview he must not allow himself to be driven away. He had a

duty to perform,--a great duty. He was the last man in England to

suspect a fictitious heir,--would at any rate be the last to hint at

such an iniquity without the strongest ground. Who is to be true to a

brother if not a brother? Who is to support the honour of a great

family if not its own scions? Who is to abstain from wasting the wealth

and honour of another, if not he who has the nearest chance of

possessing them? And yet who could be so manifestly bound as he to take

care that no surreptitious head was imposed upon the family. This

little child was either the real Popenjoy, a boy to be held by him as

of all boys the most sacred, to the promotion of whose welfare all his

own energies would be due,--or else a brat so abnormously distasteful

and abominable as to demand from him an undying enmity, till the

child's wicked pretensions should be laid at rest. There was something

very serious in it, very tragic,--something which demanded that he

should lay aside all common anger, and put up with many insults on

behalf of the cause which he had in hand. "Of course I could wait,"

said he; "only I thought that perhaps the man would have told me."

"The fact is, George, we are rather a divided house here. Some of us

talk Italian and some English. I am the only common interpreter in the

house, and I find it a bore."

"I dare say it is troublesome."

"And what can I do for you now you are here?"

Do for him! Lord George didn't want his brother to do anything for him.

"Live decently, like an English nobleman, and do not outrage your

family." That would have been the only true answer he could have made

to such a question. "I thought you would wish to see me after your

return," he said.

"It's rather lately thought of; but, however, let that pass. So you've

got a wife for yourself."

"As you have done also."

"Just so. I have got a wife too. Mine has come from one of the oldest

and noblest families in Christendom."

"Mine is the granddaughter of a livery-stable keeper," said Lord

George, with a touch of real grandeur; "and, thank God, I can be proud

of her in any society in England."

"I dare say;--particularly as she had some money."

"Yes; she had money. I could hardly have married without. But when you

see her I think you will not be ashamed of her as your sister-in-law."

"Ah! She lives in London and I am just at present down here."

"She is the daughter of the Dean of Brotherton."

"So I have heard. They used to make gentlemen Deans." After this there

was a pause, Lord George finding it difficult to go on with the

conversation without a quarrel. "To tell you the truth, George, I will

not willingly see anything more of your Dean. He came here and insulted

me. He got up and blustered about the room because I wouldn't thank him

for the honour he had done our family by his alliance. If you please,

George, we'll understand that the less said about the Dean the better.

You see I haven't any of the money out of the stable-yard."

"My wife's money didn't come out of a stable-yard. It came from a

wax-chandler's shop," said Lord George, jumping up, just as the Dean

had done. There was something in the man's manner worse even than his

words which he found it almost impossible to bear. But he seated

himself again as his brother sat looking at him with a bitter smile

upon his face. "I don't suppose," he said, "you can wish to annoy me."

"Certainly not. But I wish that the truth should be understood between

us."

"Am I to be allowed to pay my respects to your wife?" said Lord George

boldly.

"I think, you know, that we have gone so far apart in our marriages

that there is nothing to be gained by it. Besides, you couldn't speak

to her,--nor she to you."

"May I be permitted to see--Popenjoy?"

The Marquis paused a moment, and then rang the bell. "I don't know what

good it will do you, but if he can be made fit he shall be brought

down." The Courier entered the room and received certain orders in

Italian. After that there was considerable delay, during which an

Italian servant brought the Marquis a cup of chocolate and a cake. He

pushed a newspaper over to his brother, and as he was drinking his

chocolate, lighted a cigarette. In this way there was a delay of over

an hour, and then there entered the room an Italian nurse with a little

boy who seemed to Lord George to be nearly two years old. The child was

carried in by the woman, but Lord George thought that he was big enough

to have walked. He was dressed up with many ribbons, and was altogether

as gay as apparel could make him. But he was an ugly, swarthy little

boy, with great black eyes, small cheeks, and a high forehead,--very

unlike such a Popenjoy as Lord George would have liked to have seen.

Lord George got up and stood over him, and leaning down kissed the high

forehead. "My poor little darling," he said.

"As for being poor," said the Marquis, "I hope not. As to being a

darling, I should think it doubtful. If you've done with him, she can

take him away, you know." Lord George had done with him, and so he was

taken away. "Seeing is believing, you know," said the Marquis; "that's

the only good of it." Lord George said to himself that in this case

seeing was not believing.

At this moment the open carriage came round to the door. "If you like

to get up behind," said the Marquis, "I can take you back to Cross

Hall, as I am going to see my mother. Perhaps you'll remember that I

wish to be alone with her." Lord George then expressed his preference

for walking. "Just as you please. I want to say a word. Of course I

took it very ill of you all when you insisted on keeping Cross Hall in

opposition to my wishes. No doubt they acted on your advice."

"Partly so."

"Exactly; your's and Sarah's. You can't expect me to forget it,

George;--that's all." Then he walked out of the room among the

servants, giving his brother no opportunity for further reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MARQUIS GOES INTO BROTHERTON.

The poor dear old Marchioness must have had some feeling that she was

regarded as a spy. She had promised to tell everything to her eldest

son, and though she had really nothing to tell, though the Marquis did

in truth know all that there was as yet to know, still there grew up at

Cross Hall a sort of severance between the unhappy old lady and her

children. This showed itself in no diminution of affectionate

attention; in no intentional change of manner; but there was a

reticence about the Marquis and Popenjoy which even she perceived, and

there crept into her mind a feeling that Mrs. Toff was on her guard

against her,--so that on two occasions she almost snubbed Mrs. Toff. "I

never see'd him, my Lady; what more can I say?" said Mrs. Toff. "Toff,

I don't believe you wanted to see your master's son and heir!" said the

Marchioness. Then Mrs. Toff pursed up her lips, and compressed her

nose, and half-closed her eyes, and the Marchioness was sure that Mrs.

Toff did not believe in Popenjoy.

No one but Lord George had seen Popenjoy. To no eyes but his had the

august baby been displayed. Of course many questions had been asked,

especially by the old lady, but the answers to them had not been

satisfactory. "Dark, is he?" asked the Marchioness. Lord George replied

that the child was very swarthy. "Dear me! That isn't like the

Germains. The Germains were never light, but they're not swarthy. Did

he talk at all?" "Not a word." "Did he play about?" "Never was out of

the nurse's arms." "Dear me! Was he like Brotherton?" "I don't think I

am a judge of likenesses." "He's a healthy child?" "I can't say. He

seemed to be a good deal done up with finery." Then the Marchioness

declared that her younger son showed an unnatural indifference to the

heir of the family. It was manifest that she intended to accept the new

Popenjoy, and to ally herself with no party base enough to entertain

any suspicion.

These examinations respecting the baby went on for the three first days

of the week. It was Lord George's intention to return to town on the

Saturday, and it seemed to them all to be necessary that something

should be arranged before that. Lady Sarah thought that direct

application should be made to her brother for proof of his marriage and

for a copy of the register of the birth of his child. She quite

admitted that he would resent such application with the bitterest

enmity. But that she thought must be endured. She argued that nothing

could be done more friendly to the child than this. If all was right

the enquiry which circumstances certainly demanded would be made while

he could not feel it. If no such proof were adduced now there would

certainly be trouble, misery, and perhaps ruin in coming years. If the

necessary evidence were forthcoming, then no one would wish to

interfere further. There might be ill blood on their brother's part,

but there would be none on theirs. Neither Lord George nor their

younger sister gainsayed this altogether. Neither of them denied the

necessity of enquiry. But they desired to temporise;--and then how was

the enquiry to be made? Who was to bell the cat? And how should they go

on when the Marquis refused to take any heed of them,--as, of course,

he would do? Lady Sarah saw at once that they must employ a

lawyer;--but what lawyer? Old Mr. Stokes, the family attorney, was the

only lawyer they knew. But Mr. Stokes was Lord Brotherton's lawyer, and

would hardly consent to be employed against his own client. Lady Sarah

suggested that Mr. Stokes might be induced to explain to the Marquis

that these enquiries should be made for his, the Marquis's, own

benefit. But Lord George felt that this was impossible. It was evident

that Lord George would be afraid to ask Mr. Stokes to undertake the

work.

At last it came to be understood among them that they must have some

friend to act with them. There could be no doubt who that friend should

be. "As to interfering," said Lady Sarah, speaking of the Dean, "he

will interfere, whether we ask him to or not. His daughter is as much

affected as anybody, and if I understand him he is not the man to see

any interest of his own injured by want of care." Lord George shook his

head but yielded. He greatly disliked the idea of putting himself into

the Dean's hands; of becoming a creature of the Dean's. He felt the

Dean to be stronger than himself, endowed with higher spirit and more

confident hopes. But he also felt that the Dean was--the son of a

stable-keeper. Though he had professed to his brother that he could own

the fact without shame, still he was ashamed. It was not the Dean's

parentage that troubled him so much as a consciousness of some defect,

perhaps only of the absence of some quality, which had been caused by

that parentage. The man looked like a gentleman, but still there was a

smell of the stable. Feeling this rather than knowing it Lord George

resisted for awhile the idea of joining forces with the Dean; but when

it was suggested to him as an alternative that he himself must go to

Mr. Stokes and explain his suspicions in the lawyer's room, then he

agreed that, as a first step, he would consult the Dean. The Dean, no

doubt, would have his own lawyer, who would not care a fig for the

Marquis.

It was thought by them at Cross Hall that the Dean would come over to

them, knowing that his son-in-law was in the country; but the Dean did

not come, probably waiting for the same compliment from Lord George. On

the Friday Lord George rode into Brotherton early, and was at the

Deanery by eleven o'clock. "I thought I should see you," said the Dean,

in his pleasantest manner. "Of course, I heard from Mary that you were

down here. Well;--what do you think of it all?"

"It is not pleasant."

"If you mean your brother, I am bound to say, that he is very

unpleasant. Of course you have seen him?"

"Yes; I have seen him."

"And her ladyship?"

"No. He said that as I do not speak Italian it would be no good."

"And he seemed to think," said the Dean, "that as I do speak Italian it

would be dangerous. Nobody has seen her then?"

"Nobody."

"That promises well! And the little lord?"

"He was brought down to me."

"That was gracious! Well; what of him. Did he look like a Popenjoy?"

"He is a nasty little black thing."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And looks----. Well, I don't want to abuse the poor child, and God

knows, if he is what he pretends to be, I would do anything to serve

him."

"That's just it, George," said the Dean, very seriously,--seriously,

and with his kindest manner, being quite disposed to make himself

agreeable to Lord George, if Lord George would be agreeable to him.

"That's just it. If we were certified as to that, what would we not do

for the child in spite of the father's brutality? There is no

dishonesty on our side, George. You know of me, and I know of you,

that if every tittle of the evidence of that child's birth were in the

keeping of either of us, so that it could be destroyed on the moment,

it should be made as public as the winds of heaven to-morrow, so that

it was true evidence. If he be what he pretends to be, who would

interfere with him? But if he be not?"

"Any suspicion of that kind is unworthy of us;--except on very strong

ground."

"True. But if there be very strong ground, it is equally true that such

suspicion is our duty. Look at the case. When was it that he told you

that he was going to be married? About six months since, as far as my

memory goes."

"He said, 'I am to be married.'"

"That is speaking in the future tense; and now he claims to have been

married two or three years ago. Has he ever attempted to explain this?"

"He has not said a word about it. He is quite unwilling to talk about

himself."

"I dare say. But a man in such circumstances must be made to talk about

himself. You and I are so placed that if we did not make him talk about

himself, we ought to be made to make him do so. He may be deceitful if

he pleases. He may tell you and me fibs without end. And he may give us

much trouble by doing so. Such trouble is the evil consequence of

having liars in the world." Lord George winced at the rough word as

applied by inference to his own brother. "But liars themselves are

always troubled by their own lies. If he chooses to tell you that on a

certain day he is about to be married, and afterwards springs a

two-year old child upon you as legitimate, you are bound to think that

there is some deceit. You cannot keep yourself from knowing that there

is falsehood; and if falsehood, then probably fraud. Is it likely that

a man with such privileges, and such property insured to a legitimate

son, would allow the birth of such a child to be slurred over without

due notice of it? You say that suspicion on our part without strong

ground would be unworthy of us. I agree with you. But I ask you whether

the grounds are not so strong as to force us to suspect. Come," he

continued, as Lord George did not answer at once; "let us be open to

each other, knowing as each does that the other means to do what is

right. Do not you suspect?"

"I do," said Lord George.

"And so do I. And I mean to learn the truth."

"But how?"

"That is for us to consider; but of one thing I am quite sure. I am

quite certain that we must not allow ourselves to be afraid of your

brother. To speak the truth, as it must be spoken, he is a bully,

George."

"I would rather you would not abuse him, sir."

"Speak ill of him I must. His character is bad, and I have to speak of

it. He is a bully. He set himself to work to put me down when I did

myself the honour to call on him, because he felt that my connexion

with you would probably make me an enemy to him. I intend that he shall

know that he cannot put me down. He is undoubtedly Lord Brotherton. He

is the owner of a wide property. He has many privileges and much power,

with which I cannot interfere. But there is a limit to them. If he have

a legitimate son, those privileges will be that son's property, but he

has to show to the world that that son is legitimate. When a man

marries before all the world, in his own house, and a child is born to

him as I may say openly, the proofs are there of themselves. No

bringing up of evidence is necessary. The thing is simple, and there is

no suspicion and no enquiry. But he has done the reverse of this, and

now flatters himself that he can cow those who are concerned by a

domineering manner. He must be made to feel that this will not

prevail."

"Sarah thinks that he should be invited to produce the necessary

certificates." Lord George, when he dropped his sister's title in

speaking of her to the Dean, must have determined that very familiar

intercourse with the Dean was a necessity.

"Lady Sarah is always right. That should be the first step. But will

you invite him to do so? How shall the matter be broken to him?"

"She thinks a lawyer should do it."

"It must be done either by you or by a lawyer." Lord George looked very

blank. "Of course, if the matter were left in my hands;--if I had to do

it,--I should not do it personally. The question is, whether you might

not in the first instance write to him?"

"He would not notice it."

"Very likely not. Then we must employ a lawyer."

The matter was altogether so distasteful to Lord George, that more than

once during the interview he almost made up his mind that he would

withdraw altogether from the work, and at any rate appear to take it

for granted that the child was a real heir, an undoubted Popenjoy. But

then, as often, the Dean showed him that he could not so withdraw

himself. "You will be driven," said the Dean, "to express your belief,

whatever it may be; and if you think that there has been foul play, you

cannot deny that you think so." It was at last decided that Lord George

should write a letter to his brother, giving all the grounds, not of

his own suspicion, but which the world at large would have for

suspecting; and earnestly imploring that proper evidence as to his

brother's marriage and as to the child's birth, might be produced.

Then, if this letter should not be attended to, a lawyer should be

employed. The Dean named his own lawyer, Mr. Battle, of Lincoln's Inn

Fields. Lord George having once yielded, found it convenient to yield

throughout. Towards the end of the interview the Dean suggested that he

would "throw a few words together," or, in other language, write the

letter which his son-in-law would have to sign. This suggestion was

also accepted by Lord George.

The two men were together for a couple of hours, and then, after lunch,

went out together into the town. Each felt that he was now more closely

bound to the other than ever. The Dean was thoroughly pleased that it

should be so. He intended his son-in-law to be the Marquis, and being

sanguine as well as pugnacious looked forward to seeing that time

himself. Such a man as the Marquis would probably die early, whereas he

himself was full of health. There was nothing he would not do to make

Lord George's life pleasant, if only Lord George would be pleasant to

him, and submissive. But Lord George himself was laden with many

regrets. He had formed a conspiracy against the head of his own family,

and his brother conspirator was the son of a stable-keeper. It might be

also that he was conspiring against his own legitimate nephew; and if

so, the conspiracy would of course fail, and he would be stigmatised

for ever among the Germains as the most sordid and vile of the name.

The Dean's house was in the Close, joined on to the Cathedral, a

covered stone pathway running between the two. The nearest way from the

Deanery to the High Street was through the Cathedral, the transept of

which could be entered by crossing the passage. The Dean and his

son-in-law on this occasion went through the building to the west

entrance, and there stood for a few minutes in the street while the

Dean spoke to men who were engaged on certain repairs of the fabric. In

doing this they all went out into the middle of the wide street in

order that they might look up at the work which was being done. While

they were there, suddenly an open carriage, with a postilion, came upon

them unawares, and they had to retreat out of the way. As they did so

they perceived that Lord Brotherton was in the carriage, enveloped in

furs, and that a lady, more closely enveloped even than himself, was by

his side. It was evident to them that he had recognised them. Indeed he

had been in the act of raising his hand to greet his brother when he

saw the Dean. They both bowed to him, while the Dean, who had the

readier mind, raised his hat to the lady. But the Marquis steadily

ignored them. "That's your sister-in-law," said the Dean.

"Perhaps so."

"There is no other lady here with whom he could be driving. I am pretty

sure that it is the first time that either of them have been in

Brotherton."

"I wonder whether he saw us."

"Of course he saw us. He cut me from fixed purpose, and you because I

was with you. I shall not disturb him by any further recognition." Then

they went on about their business, and in the afternoon, when the Dean

had thrown his few words together, Lord George rode back to Cross Hall.

"Let the letter be sent at once,--but date it from London." These were

the last words the Dean said to him.

It was the Marquis and his wife. All Brotherton heard the news. She had

absolutely called at a certain shop and the Marquis had condescended to

be her interpreter. All Brotherton was now sure that there was a new

Marchioness, a fact as to which a great part of Brotherton had hitherto

entertained doubts. And it seemed that this act of condescension in

stopping at a Brotherton shop was so much appreciated that all the

former faults of the Marquis were to be condoned on that account. If

only Popenjoy could be taken to a Brotherton pastrycook, and be got to

eat a Brotherton bun, the Marquis would become the most popular man in

the neighbourhood, and the undoubted progenitor of a long line of

Marquises to come. A little kindness after continued cruelty will

always win a dog's heart;--some say, also a woman's. It certainly

seemed to be the way to win Brotherton.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY SUSANNA IN LONDON.

In spite of the caution which he had received from his friend and

cousin Mrs. Houghton, Jack De Baron did go to Munster Court during the

absence of Lord George, and there did encounter Lady Susanna. And Mrs.

Houghton herself, though she had given such excellent advice,

accompanied him. She was of course anxious to see Lady Susanna, who had

always especially disliked her; and Jack himself was desirous of making

the acquaintance of a lady who had been, he was assured, sent up to

town on purpose to protect the young wife from his wiles. Both Mrs.

Houghton and Jack had become very intimate in Munster Court, and there

was nothing strange in their dropping in together even before lunch.

Jack was of course introduced to Lady Susanna. The two ladies grimaced

at each other, each knowing the other's feeling towards herself. Mary

having suspected that Lady Susanna had been sent for in reference to

this special friend, determined on being specially gracious to Jack.

She had already, since Lady Susanna's arrival, told that lady that she

was able to manage her own little affairs. Lady Susanna had said an

unfortunate word as to the unnecessary expense of four wax candles

when they two were sitting alone in the drawing-room. Lady George had

said that it was pretty. Lady Susanna had expostulated gravely, and

then Lady George had spoken out. "Dear Susanna, do let me manage my own

little affairs." Of course the words had rankled, and of course the

love which the ladies bore to each other had not been increased. Lady

George was now quite resolved to show dear Susanna that she was not

afraid of her duenna.

"We thought we'd venture to see if you'd give us lunch," said Mrs.

Houghton.

"Delightful!" exclaimed Lady George. "There's nothing to eat; but you

won't mind that."

"Not in the least," said Jack. "I always think the best lunch in the

world is a bit of the servants' dinner. It's always the best meat, and

the best cooked and the hottest served."

There was plenty of lunch from whatsoever source it came, and the three

young people were very merry. Perhaps they were a little noisy. Perhaps

there was a little innocent slang in their conversation. Ladies do

sometimes talk slang, and perhaps the slang was encouraged for the

special edification of Lady Susanna. But slang was never talked at

Manor Cross or Cross Hall, and was odious to Lady Susanna. When Lady

George declared that some offending old lady ought to be "jumped upon,"

Lady Susanna winced visibly. When Jack told Lady George that "she was

the woman to do it," Lady Susanna shivered almost audibly. "Is anything

the matter?" asked Lady George, perhaps not quite innocently.

It seemed to Lady Susanna that these visitors were never going away,

and yet this was the very man as to whom her brother had cautioned her!

And what an odious man he was--in Lady Susanna's estimation! A

puppy,--an absolute puppy! Good-looking, impudent, familiar, with a

light visage, and continually smiling! All those little gifts which

made him so pleasant to Lady George were stains and blemishes in the

eyes of Lady Susanna. To her thinking, a man,--at any rate a

gentleman,--should be tall, dark, grave, and given to silence rather

than to much talk. This Jack chattered about everything, and hardly

opened his mouth without speaking slang. About half-past three, when

they had been chattering in the drawing-room for an hour, after having

chattered over their lunch for a previous hour, Mrs. Houghton made a

most alarming proposition. "Let us all go to Berkeley Square and play

bagatelle."

"By all means," said Jack. "Lady George, you owe me two new hats

already."

Playing bagatelle for new hats! Lady Susanna felt that if ever there

could come a time in which interference would be necessary that time

had come now. She had resolved that she would be patient; that she

should not come down as an offended deity upon Lady George, unless

some sufficient crisis should justify such action. But now surely, if

ever, she must interpose. Playing at bagatelle with Jack De Baron for

new hats, and she with the prospect before her of being Marchioness of

Brotherton! "It's only one," said Lady George gaily, "and I daresay

I'll win that back to-day. Will you come, Susanna?"

"Certainly not," said Lady Susanna, very grimly. They all looked at

her, and Jack De Baron raised his eyebrows, and sat for a moment

motionless. Lady Susanna knew that Jack De Baron was intending to

ridicule her. Then she remembered that should this perverse young woman

insist upon going to Mrs. Houghton's house with so objectionable a

companion, her duty to her brother demanded that she also should go. "I

mean," said Lady Susanna, "that I had rather not go."

"Why not?" asked Mary.

"I do not think that playing bagatelle for new hats is--is--the best

employment in the world either for a lady or for a gentleman." The

words were hardly out of her mouth before she herself felt that they

were overstrained and more than even this occasion demanded.

"Then we will only play for gloves," said Mary. Mary was not a woman to

bear with impunity such an assault as had been made on her.

"Perhaps you will not mind giving it up till George comes back," said

Lord George's sister.

"I shall mind very much. I will go up and get ready. You can do as you

please." So Mary left the room, and Lady Susanna followed her.

"She means to have her own way," said Jack, when he was alone with his

cousin.

"She is not at all what I took her to be," said Mrs. Houghton. "The

fact is, one cannot know what a girl is as long as a girl is a girl. It

is only when she's married that she begins to speak out." Jack hardly

agreed with this, thinking that some girls he had known had learned to

speak out before they were married.

They all went out together to walk across the parks to Berkeley Square,

orders being left that the brougham should follow them later in the

afternoon. Lady Susanna had at last resolved that she also would go.

The very fact of her entering Mrs. Houghton's house was disagreeable to

her; but she felt that duty called her. And, after all, when they got

to Berkeley Square no bagatelle was played at all. But the bagatelle

would almost have been better than what occurred. A small parcel was

lying on the table which was found to contain a pack of pictured cards

made for the telling of fortunes, and which some acquaintance had sent

to Mrs. Houghton. With these they began telling each other's fortunes,

and it seemed to Lady Susanna that they were all as free with lovers

and sweethearts as though the two ladies had been housemaids instead

of being the wives of steady, well-born husbands. "That's a dark man,

with evil designs, a wicked tongue, and no money," said Mrs. Houghton,

as a combination of cards lay in Lady George's lap. "Jack, the lady

with light hair is only flirting with you. She doesn't care for you one

bit."

"I daresay not," said Jack.

"And yet she'll trouble you awfully. Lady Susanna, will you have your

fortune told?"

"No," said Lady Susanna, very shortly.

This went on for an hour before the brougham came, during the latter

half of which Lady Susanna sat without once opening her lips. If any

play could have been childish, it was this play; but to her it was

horrible. And then they all sat so near together, and that man was

allowed to put cards into her brother's wife's hand and to take them

out just as though they had been brother and sister, or playfellows all

their days. And then, as they were going down to the brougham, the

odious man got Lady George aside and whispered to her for two minutes.

Lady Susanna did not hear a word of their whispers, but knew that they

were devilish. And so she would have thought if she had heard them.

"You're going to catch it, Lady George," Jack had said. "There's

somebody else will catch something if she makes herself disagreeable,"

Lady George had answered. "I wish I could be invisible and hear it,"

had been Jack's last words.

"My dear Mary," said Lady Susanna, as soon as they were seated, "you

are very young."

"That's a fault that will mend of itself."

"Too quickly, as you will soon find; but in the meantime, as you are a

married woman, should you not be careful to guard against the

indiscretions of youth?"

"Well, yes; I suppose I ought," said Mary, after a moment of mock

consideration. "But then if I were unmarried I ought to do just the

same. It's a kind of thing that is a matter of course without talking

about it." She had firmly made up her mind that she would submit in no

degree to Lady Susanna, and take from her no scolding. Indeed, she had

come to a firm resolve long since that she would be scolded by no one

but her husband--and by him as little as possible. Now she was angry

with him because he had sent this woman to watch her, and was

determined that he should know that, though she would submit to him,

she would not submit to his sister. The moment for asserting herself

had now come.

"A young married woman," said the duenna, "owes it to her husband to be

peculiarly careful. She has his happiness and his honour in her hands."

"And he has hers. It seems to me that all these things are matters of

course."

"They should be, certainly," said Lady Susanna, hardly knowing how to

go on with her work; a little afraid of her companion, but still very

intent. "But it will sometimes happen that a young person does not

quite know what is right and what is wrong."

"And sometimes it happens that old people don't know. There was Major

Jones had his wife taken away from him the other day by the Court

because he was always beating her, and he was fifty. I read all about

it in the papers. I think the old people are just as bad as the young."

Lady Susanna felt that her approaches were being cut off from her, and

that she must rush at once against the citadel if she meant to take it.

"Do you think that playing bagatelle is--nice?"

"Yes, I do;--very nice."

"Do you think George would like your playing with Captain De Baron?"

"Why not with Captain de Baron?" said Mary, turning round upon her

assailant with absolute ferocity.

"I don't think he would like it. And then that fortune-telling! If you

will believe me, Mary, it was very improper."

"I will not believe anything of the kind. Improper!--a joke about a lot

of picture-cards!"

"It was all about love and lovers," said Lady Susanna, not quite

knowing how to express herself, but still sure that she was right.

"Oh, what a mind you must have, Susanna, to pick wrong out of that! All

about love and lovers! So are books and songs and plays at the theatre.

I suppose you didn't understand that it was intended as a burlesque on

fortune-telling?"

"And I am quite sure George wouldn't like the kind of slang you were

talking with Captain De Baron at lunch."

"If George does not like anything he had better tell me so, and not

depute you to do it for him. If he tells me to do anything I shall do

it. If you tell me I shall pay no attention to it whatever. You are

here as my guest, and not as my governess; and I think your

interference very impertinent." This was strong language,--so strong

that Lady Susanna found it impossible to continue the conversation at

that moment. Nothing, indeed, was said between them during the whole

afternoon, or at dinner, or in the evening,--till Lady Susanna had

taken up her candlestick.

There had been that most clearly declared of all war which is shown by

absolute silence. But Lady Susanna, as she was retiring to rest,

thought it might be wise to make a little effort after peace. She did

not at all mean to go back from what charges she had made. She had no

idea of owning herself to be wrong. But perhaps she could throw a

little oil upon the waters. "Of course," she said, "I should not have

spoken as I have done but for my great love for George and my regard

for you."

"As far as I am concerned, I think it a mistaken regard," said Mary.

"Of course I shall tell George; but even to him I shall say that I will

not endure any authority but his own."

"Will you hear me?"

"No, not on this subject. You have accused me of behaving

improperly--with that man."

"I do think," began Lady Susanna, not knowing how to pick her words in

this emergency, fearing to be too strong, and at the same time

conscious that weakness would be folly----; "I do think that anything

like--like--like flirting is so very bad!"

"Susanna," said Lady George, with a start as she heard the odious

words, "as far as I can help it, I will never speak to you again."

There certainly had been no oil thrown upon the waters as yet.

The next day was passed almost in absolute silence. It was the Friday,

and each of them knew that Lord George would be home on the morrow. The

interval was so short that nothing could be gained by writing to him.

Each had her own story to tell, and each must wait till he should be

there to hear it. Mary with a most distant civility went through her

work of hostess. Lady Susanna made one or two little efforts to subdue

her; but, failing, soon gave up the endeavour. In the afternoon Aunt Ju

called with her niece, but their conversation did not lessen the

breach. Then Lady Susanna went out alone in the brougham; but that had

been arranged beforehand. They ate their dinner in silence, in silence

read their books, and met in silence at the breakfast-table. At three

o'clock Lord George came home, and then Mary, running downstairs, took

him with her into the drawing-room. There was one embrace, and then she

began. "George," she said, "you must never have Susanna here again."

"Why?" said he.

"She has insulted me. She has said things so nasty that I cannot repeat

them, even to you. She has accused me to my face--of flirting. I won't

bear it from her. If you said it, it would kill me; but of course you

can say what you please. But she shall not scold me, and tell me that I

am this and that because I am not as solemn as she is, George. Do you

believe that I have ever--flirted?" She was so impetuous that he had

been quite unable to stop her. "Did you mean that she should behave to

me like that?"

"This is very bad," he said.

"What is very bad. Is it not bad that she should say such things to me

as that? Are you going to take her part against me?"

"Dearest Mary, you seem to be excited."

"Of course I am excited. Would you wish me to have such things as that

said to me, and not to be excited? You are not going to take part

against me?"

"I have not heard her yet."

"Will you believe her against me? Will she be able to make you believe

that I have--flirted? If so, then it is all over."

"What is all over?"

"Oh, George, why did you marry me, if you cannot trust me?"

"Who says that I do not trust you? I suppose the truth is you have been

a little--flighty."

"Been what? I suppose you mean the same thing. I have talked and

laughed, and been amused, if that means being flighty. She thinks it

wicked to laugh, and calls it slang if every word doesn't come out of

the grammar. You had better go and hear her, since you will say nothing

more to me."

Lord George thought so too; but he stayed for a few moments in the

dining-room, during which he stooped over his wife, who had thrown

herself into an arm-chair, and kissed her. As he did so, she merely

shook her head, but made no response to his caress. Then he slowly

strode away, and went up stairs into the drawing-room.

What took place there need not be recorded at length. Lady Susanna did

not try to be mischievous. She spoke much of Mary's youth, and

expressed a strong opinion that Captain De Baron was not a fit

companion for her. She was very urgent against the use of slang, and

said almost harder things of Mrs. Houghton than she did of Jack. She

never had meant to imply that Mary had allowed improper attentions from

the gentleman, but that Mary, being young, had not known what

attentions were proper and what improper. To Lady Susanna the whole

matter was so serious that she altogether dropped the personal quarrel.

"Of course, George," she said, "young people do not like to be told;

but it has to be done. And I must say that Mary likes it as little as

any person that I have ever known."

This multiplicity of troubles falling together on to the poor man's

back almost crushed him. He had returned to town full of that terrible

letter which he had pledged himself to write; but the letter was

already driven out of his head for the time. It was essentially

necessary that he should compose this domestic trouble, and of course

he returned to his wife. Equally of course after a little time she

prevailed. He had to tell her that he was sure that she never flirted.

He had to say that she did not talk slang. He had to protest that the

fortune-telling cards were absolutely innocent. Then she condescended

to say that she would for the present be civil to Susanna, but even

while saying that she protested that she would never again have her

sister-in-law as a guest in the house. "You don't know, George, even

yet, all that she said to me, or in what sort of way she behaved."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEAN RETURNS TO TOWN.

"Do you mean to say that you have any objection to my being acquainted

with Captain De Baron?" This question Mary asked her husband on the

Monday after his return. On that day Lady Susanna went back to

Brothershire, having somewhat hurried her return in consequence of the

uncomfortable state of things in Minister Court. They had all gone to

church together on the intermediate Sunday, and Lady Susanna had done

her best to conciliate her sister-in-law. But she was ignorant of the

world, and did not know how bitter to a young married woman is such

interference as that of which she had been guilty. She could not

understand the amount of offence which was rankling in Mary's bosom. It

had not consisted only in the words spoken, but her looks in the man's

presence had conveyed the same accusation, so that it could be seen and

understood by the man himself. Mary, with an effort, had gone on with

her play, determined that no one should suppose her to be cowed by her

grand sister-in-law; but through it all she had resolved always to look

upon Lady Susanna as an enemy. She had already abandoned her threat of

not speaking to her own guest; but nothing that Lady Susanna could say,

nothing that Lord George could say, softened her heart in the least.

The woman had told her that she was a flirt, had declared that what she

did and said was improper. The woman had come there as a spy, and the

woman should never be her friend. In these circumstances Lord George

found it impossible not to refer to the unfortunate subject again, and

in doing so caused the above question to be asked. "Do you mean to say

that you have any objection to my being acquainted with Captain De

Baron?" She looked at him with so much eagerness in her eyes as she

spoke that he knew that much at any rate of his present comfort might

depend on the answer which he made.

He certainly did object to her being acquainted with Jack De Baron. He

did not at all like Jack De Baron. In spite of what he had found

himself obliged to say, in order that she might be comforted on his

first arrival, he did not like slang, and he did not like

fortune-telling cards or bagatelle. His sympathies in these matters

were all with his sister. He did like spending his own time with Mrs.

Houghton, but it was dreadful to him to think that his wife should be

spending hers with Jack De Baron. Nevertheless he could not tell her

so. "No," he said, "I have no particular objection."

"Of course if you had, I would never see him again. But it would be

very dreadful. He would have to be told that you were--jealous."

"I am not in the least jealous," said he, angrily. "You should not use

such a word."

"Certainly I should not have used it, but for the disturbance which

your sister has caused. But after all that she has said, there must be

some understanding. I like Captain De Baron very much, as I dare say

you like other ladies. Why not?"

"I have never suspected anything."

"But Susanna did. Of course you don't like all this, George. I don't

like it. I have been so miserable that I have almost cried my eyes out.

But if people will make mischief, what is one to do? The only thing is

not to have the mischief maker any more."

The worst of this was, to him, that she was so manifestly getting the

better of him! When he had married her, not yet nine months since, she

had been a little girl, altogether in his hands, not pretending to any

self-action, and anxious to be guided in everything by him. His only

fear had been that she might be too slow in learning that

self-assertion which is necessary from a married woman to the world at

large. But now she had made very great progress in the lesson, not only

as regarded the world at large, but as regarded himself also. As for

his family,--the grandeur of his family,--she clearly had no reverence

for that. Lady Susanna, though generally held to be very awful, had

been no more to her than any other Susan. He almost wished that he had

told her that he did object to Jack De Baron. There would have been a

scene, of course; and she, not improbably, might have told her father.

That at present would have been doubly disagreeable, as it was

incumbent upon him to stand well with the Dean, just at this time.

There was this battle to be fought with his brother, and he felt that

he could not fight it without the Dean!

Having given his sanction to Jack De Baron, he went away to his club to

write his letter. This writing really amounted to no more than copying

the Dean's words, which he had carried in his pocket ever since he had

left the deanery, and the Dean's words were as follows:--

"Munster Court, \_26th April, 187--\_.

"MY DEAR BROTHERTON,--I am compelled to write to you under very

disagreeable circumstances, and to do so on a subject which I

would willingly avoid if a sense of duty would permit me to be

silent.

"You will remember that you wrote to me in October last, telling

me that you were about to be married. 'I am to be married to the

Marchesa Luigi,' were your words. Up to that moment we had heard

nothing of the lady or of any arrangement as to a marriage. When I

told you of my own intended marriage a few months before that, you

merely said in answer that you might probably soon want the house

at Manor Cross yourself. It now seems that when you told us of

your intended marriage you had already been married over two

years, and that when I told you of mine you had a son over twelve

months old,--a fact which I might certainly expect that you would

communicate to me at such a time.

"I beg to assure you that I am now urged to write by no suspicions

of my own; but I know that if things are left to go on as they are

now, suspicions will arise at a future time. I write altogether in

the interests of your son and heir; and for his sake I beseech you

to put at once into the hands of your own lawyer absolute evidence

of the date of your marriage, of its legality, and of the birth of

your son. It will also be expedient that my lawyer shall see the

evidence in your lawyer's hands. If you were to die as matters are

now it would be imperative on me to take steps which would seem to

be hostile to Popenjoy's interest. I think you must yourself feel

that this would be so. And yet nothing would be further from my

wish. If we were both to die, the difficulty would be still

greater, as in that case proceedings would have to be taken by

more distant members of the family.

"I trust you will believe me when I say that my only object is to

have the matter satisfactorily settled.

"Your affectionate brother,

"GEORGE GERMAIN."

When the Marquis received this letter he was not in the least

astonished by it. Lord George had told his sister Sarah that it was to

be written, and had even discussed with her the Dean's words. Lady

Sarah had thought that as the Dean was a sagacious man, his exact words

had better be used. And then Lady Amelia had been told, Lady Amelia

having asked various questions on the subject. Lady Amelia had of

course known that her brother would discuss the matter with the Dean,

and had begged that she might not be treated as a stranger. Everything

had not been told to Lady Amelia, nor had Lady Amelia told all that she

had heard to her mother. But the Marchioness had known enough, and had

communicated enough to her son to save him from any great astonishment

when he got his brother's letter. Of course he had known that some

steps would be taken.

He answered the letter at once.

"MY DEAR BROTHER," he said,--"I don't think it necessary to let

you know the reasons which induced me to keep my marriage private

awhile. You rush at conclusions very fast in thinking that because

a marriage is private, therefore it is illegal. I am glad that you

have no suspicions of your own, and beg to assure you I don't care

whether you have or not. Whenever you or anybody else may want to

try the case, you or he or they will find that I have taken care

that there is plenty of evidence. I didn't know that you had a

lawyer. I only hope he won't run you into much expense in finding

a mare's nest.

"Yours truly,

"B."

This was not in itself satisfactory; but such as it was, it did for a

time make Lord George believe that Popenjoy was Popenjoy. It was

certainly true of him that he wished Popenjoy to be Popenjoy. No

personal longing for the title or property made him in his heart

disloyal to his brother or his family. And then the trouble and expense

and anxieties of such a contest were so terrible to his imagination,

that he rejoiced when he thought that they might be avoided. But there

was the Dean. The Dean must be satisfied as well as he, and he felt

that the Dean would not be satisfied. According to agreement he sent a

copy of his brother's letter down to the Dean, and added the assurance

of his own belief that the marriage had been a marriage, that the heir

was an heir, and that further steps would be useless. It need hardly be

said that the Dean was not satisfied. Before dinner on the following

day the Dean was in Minister Court. "Oh, papa," exclaimed Mary, "I am

so glad to see you." Could it be anything about Captain De Baron that

had brought him up? If so, of course she would tell him everything.

"What brought you up so suddenly? Why didn't you write? George is at

the club, I suppose." George was really in Berkeley Square at that

moment. "Oh, yes; he will be home to dinner. Is there anything wrong at

Manor Cross, papa?" Her father was so pleasant in his manner to her,

that she perceived at once that he had not come up in reference to

Captain De Baron. No complaint of her behaviour on that score had as

yet reached him. "Where's your portmanteau, papa?"

"I've got a bed at the hotel in Suffolk Street. I shall only be here

one night, or at the most two; and as I had to come suddenly I wouldn't

trouble you."

"Oh, papa, that's very bad of you."

This she said with that genuine tone which begets confidence. The Dean

was very anxious that his daughter should in truth be fond of his

company. In the game which he intended to play her co-operation and her

influence over her husband would be very necessary to him. She must be

a Lovelace rather than a Germain till she should blaze forth as the

presiding genius of the Germain family. That Lord George should become

tired of him and a little afraid of him he knew could not be avoided;

but to her he must, if possible, be a pleasant genius, never

accompanied in her mind by ideas of parental severity or clerical

heaviness. "I should weary you out if I came too often and came so

suddenly," he said, laughing.

"But what has brought you, papa?"

"The Marquis, my dear, who, it seems to me, will, for some time to

come, have a considerable influence on my doings."

"The Marquis!"

He had made up his mind that she should know everything. If her husband

did not tell her, he would. "Yes, the Marquis. Perhaps I ought to say

the Marchioness, only that I am unwilling to give that title to a lady

who I think very probably has no right to it."

"Is all that coming up already?"

"The longer it is postponed the greater will be the trouble to all

parties. It cannot be endured that a man in his position should tell us

that his son is legitimate when that son was born more than a year

before he had declared himself about to marry, and that he should then

refuse to furnish us with any evidence."

"Have you asked him?" Mary, as she made the suggestion, was herself

horror-stricken at the awfulness of the occasion.

"George has asked him."

"And what has the Marquis done?"

"Sent him back a jeering reply. He has a way of jeering which he thinks

will carry everything before it. When I called upon him he jeered at

me. But he'll have to learn that he cannot jeer you out of your

rights."

"I wish you would not think about my rights, papa."

"Your rights will probably be the rights of some one else."

"I know, papa; but still----"

"It has to be done, and George quite agrees with me. The letter which

he did write to his brother was arranged between us. Lady Sarah is

quite of the same accord, and Lady Susanna----"

"Oh, papa, I do so hate Susanna." This she said with all her eloquence.

"I daresay she can make herself unpleasant."

"I have told George that she shall not come here again as a guest."

"What did she do?"

"I cannot bring myself to tell you what it was that she said. I told

George, of course. She is a nasty evil-minded creature--suspecting

everything."

"I hope there has been nothing disagreeable."

"It was very disagreeable, indeed, while George was away. Of course I

did not care so much when he came back." The Dean, who had been almost

frightened, was reassured when he learned that there had been no

quarrel between the husband and wife. Soon afterwards Lord George came

in and was astonished to find that his letter had brought up the Dean

so quickly. No discussion took place till after dinner, but then the

Dean was very perspicuous, and at the same time very authoritative. It

was in vain that Lord George asked what they could do, and declared

that the evil troubles which must probably arise would all rest on his

brother's head. "But we must prevent such troubles, let them rest where

they will," said the Dean.

"I don't see what we can do."

"Nor do I, because we are not lawyers. A lawyer will tell us at once.

It will probably be our duty to send a commissioner out to Italy to

make enquiry."

"I shouldn't like to do that about my brother."

"Of course your brother should be told; or rather everything should be

told to your brother's lawyer, so that he might be advised what steps

he ought to take. We would do nothing secretly--nothing of which any

one could say that we ought to be ashamed." The Dean proposed that they

should both go to his attorney, Mr. Battle, on the following day; but

this step seemed to Lord George to be such an absolute declaration of

war that he begged for another day's delay; and it was at last arranged

that he himself should on that intervening day call on Mr. Stokes, the

Germain family lawyer. The Marquis, with one of his jeers, had told his

brother that, being a younger brother, he was not entitled to have a

lawyer. But in truth Lord George had had very much more to do with Mr.

Stokes than the Marquis. All the concerns of the family had been

managed by Mr. Stokes. The Marquis probably meant to insinuate that the

family bill, which was made out perhaps once every three years, was

charged against his account. Lord George did call on Mr. Stokes, and

found Mr. Stokes very little disposed to give him any opinion. Mr.

Stokes was an honest man who disliked trouble of this kind. He freely

admitted that there was ground for enquiry, but did not think that he

himself was the man who ought to make it. He would certainly

communicate with the Marquis, should Lord George think it expedient to

employ any other lawyer, and should that lawyer apply to him. In the

meantime he thought that immediate enquiry would be a little

precipitate. The Marquis might probably himself take steps to put the

matter on a proper footing. He was civil, gracious, almost subservient;

but he had no comfort to give and no advice to offer, and, like all

attorneys, he was in favour of delay. "Of course, Lord George, you must

remember that I am your brother's lawyer, and may in this matter be

called upon to act as his confidential adviser." All this Lord George

repeated that evening to the Dean, and the Dean merely said that it had

been a matter of course.

Early on the next morning the Dean and Lord George went together to Mr.

Battle's chambers. Lord George felt that he was being driven by his

father-in-law; but he felt also that he could not help himself. Mr.

Battle, who had chambers in Lincoln's Inn, was a very different man

from Mr. Stokes, who carried on his business in a private house at the

West End, who prepared wills and marriage settlements for gentlefolk,

and who had, in fact, very little to do with law. Mr. Battle was an

enterprising man with whom the Dean's first acquaintance had arisen

through the Tallowaxes and the stable interests,--a very clever man,

and perhaps a little sharp. But an attorney ought to be sharp, and it

is not to be understood that Mr. Battle descended to sharp practice.

But he was a solicitor with whom the old-fashioned Mr. Stokes's would

not find themselves in accord. He was a handsome burly man, nearly

sixty years of age, with grey hair and clean shorn face, with bright

green eyes, and a well-formed nose and mouth,--a prepossessing man,

till something restless about the eyes would at last catch the

attention and a little change the judgment.

The Dean told him the whole story, and during the telling he sat

looking very pleasant, with a smile on his face, rubbing his two hands

together. All the points were made. The letter of the Marquis, in which

he told his brother that he was to be married, was shown to him. The

concealment of the birth of the boy till the father had made up his

mind to come home was urged. The absurdity of his behaviour since he

had been at home was described. The singularity of his conduct in

allowing none of his family to become acquainted with his wife was

pointed out. This was done by the Dean rather than by Lord George, and

Lord George, as he heard it all, almost regarded the Dean as his enemy.

At last he burst out in his own defence. "Of course you will

understand, Mr. Battle, that our only object is to have the thing

proved, so that hereafter there may be no trouble."

"Just so, my Lord."

"We do not want to oppose my brother, or to injure his child."

"We want to get at the truth," said the Dean.

"Just so."

"Where there is concealment there must be suspicion," urged the Dean.

"No doubt."

"But everything must be done quite openly," said Lord George. "I would

not have a step taken without the knowledge of Mr. Stokes. If Mr.

Stokes would do it himself on my brother's behalf it would be so much

the better."

"That is hardly probable," said the Dean.

"Not at all probable," said Mr. Battle.

"I couldn't be a party to an adverse suit," said Lord George.

"There is no ground for any suit at all," said the lawyer. "We cannot

bring an action against the Marquis because he chooses to call the lady

he lives with a Marchioness, or because he calls an infant Lord

Popenjoy. Your brother's conduct may be ill-judged. From what you tell

me, I think it is. But it is not criminal."

"Then nothing need be done," said Lord George.

"A great deal may be done. Enquiry may be made now which might

hereafter be impossible." Then he begged that he might have a week to

consider the matter, and requested that the two gentlemen would call

upon him again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BARONESS BANMANN AGAIN.

A day or two after the meeting at Mr. Battle's office there came to

Lord George a letter from that gentleman suggesting that, as the Dean

had undertaken to come up to London again, and as he, Mr. Battle, might

not be ready with his advice at the end of a week, that day fortnight

might be fixed. To Lord George this delay was agreeable rather than

otherwise, as he was not specially anxious for the return of his

father-in-law, nor was he longing for action in this question as to his

brother's heir. But the Dean, when the lawyer's letter reached him, was

certain that Mr. Battle did not mean to lose the time simply in

thinking over the matter. Some preliminary enquiry would now be made,

even though no positive instructions had been given. He did not at all

regret this, but was sure that Lord George would be very angry if he

knew it. He wrote back to say that he would be in Munster Court on the

evening before the day appointed.

It was now May, and London was bright with all the exotic gaiety of the

season. The park was crowded with riders at one, and was almost

impassable at six. Dress was outvying dress, and equipage equipage. Men

and women, but principally women, seemed to be intent on finding out

new ways of scattering money. Tradesmen no doubt knew much of

defaulters, and heads of families might find themselves pressed for

means; but to the outside west-end eye looking at the outside west-end

world it seemed as though wealth was unlimited and money a drug. To

those who had known the thing for years, to young ladies who were now

entering on their seventh or eighth campaign, there was a feeling of

business about it all which, though it buoyed them up by its

excitement, robbed amusement of most of its pleasure. A ball cannot be

very agreeable in which you may not dance with the man you like and are

not asked by the man you want; at which you are forced to make a note

that that full-blown hope is futile, and that this little bud will

surely never come to flower. And then the toil of smiles, the pretence

at flirtation, the long-continued assumption of fictitious character,

the making of oneself bright to the bright, solemn to the solemn, and

romantic to the romantic, is work too hard for enjoyment. But our

heroine had no such work to do. She was very much admired and could

thoroughly enjoy the admiration. She had no task to perform. She was

not carrying out her profession by midnight labours. Who shall say

whether now and again a soft impalpable regret,--a regret not

recognised as such,--may not have stolen across her mind, telling her

that if she had seen all this before she was married instead of

afterwards, she might have found a brighter lot for herself? If it were

so, the only enduring effect of such a feeling was a renewal of that

oft-made resolution that she would be in love with her husband. The

ladies whom she knew had generally their carriages and riding horses.

She had only a brougham, and had that kept for her by the generosity of

her father. The Dean, when coming to town, had brought with him the

horse which she used to ride, and wished that it should remain. But

Lord George, with a husband's solicitude, and perhaps with something of

a poor man's proper dislike to expensive habits, had refused his

permission. She soon, too, learned to know the true sheen of diamonds,

the luxury of pearls, and the richness of rubies; whereas she herself

wore only the little ornaments which had come from the deanery. And as

she danced in spacious rooms and dined in noble halls, and was fÃªted on

grand staircases, she remembered what a little place was the little

house in Munster Court, and that she was to stay there only for a few

weeks more before she was taken to the heavy dulness of Cross Hall. But

still she always came back to that old resolution. She was so

flattered, so courted, so petted and made much of, that she could not

but feel that had all this world been opened to her sooner her destiny

would probably have been different;--but then it might have been

different, and very much less happy. She still told herself that she

was sure that Lord George was all that he ought to be.

Two or three things did tease her certainly. She was very fond of

balls, but she soon found that Lord George disliked them as much, and

when present was always anxious to get home. She was a married woman,

and it was open to her to go alone; but that she did not like, nor

would he allow it. Sometimes she joined herself to other parties. Mrs.

Houghton was always ready to be her companion, and old Mrs. Montacute

Jones, who went everywhere, had taken a great liking to her. But there

were two antagonistic forces, her husband and herself, and of course

she had to yield to the stronger force. The thing might be managed

occasionally,--and the occasion was no doubt much the pleasanter

because it had to be so managed,--but there was always the feeling that

these bright glimpses of Paradise, these entrances into Elysium, were

not free to her as to other ladies. And then one day, or rather one

night, there came a great sorrow,--a sorrow which robbed these

terrestrial Paradises of half their brightness and more than half their

joy. One evening he told her that he did not like her to waltz. "Why?"

she innocently asked. They were in the brougham, going home, and she

had been supremely happy at Mrs. Montacute Jones's house. Lord George

said that he could hardly explain the reason. He made rather a long

speech, in which he asked her whether she was not aware that many

married women did not waltz. "No," said she. "That is, of course, when

they get old they don't." "I am sure," said he, "that when I say I do

not like it, that will be enough." "Quite enough," she answered, "to

prevent my doing it, though not enough to satisfy me why it should not

be done." He said no more to her on the occasion, and so the matter was

considered to be settled. Then she remembered that her very last waltz

had been with Jack De Baron. Could it be that he was jealous? She was

well aware that she took great delight in waltzing with Captain De

Baron because he waltzed so well. But now that pleasure was over, and

for ever! Was it that her husband disliked waltzing, or that he

disliked Jack De Baron?

A few days after this Lady George was surprised by a visit from the

Baroness Banmann, the lady whom she had been taken to hear at the

Disabilities. Since that memorable evening she had seen Aunt Ju more

than once, and had asked how the cause of the female architects was

progressing; but she had never again met the Baroness. Aunt Ju had

apparently been disturbed by these questions. She had made no further

effort to make Lady George a proselyte by renewed attendances at the

Rights of Women Institute, and had seemed almost anxious to avoid the

subject. As Lady George's acquaintance with the Baroness had been owing

altogether to Aunt Ju she was now surprised that the German lady should

call upon her.

The German lady began a story with great impetuosity,--with so much

impetuosity that poor Mary could not understand half that was said to

her. But she did learn that the Baroness had in her own estimation been

very ill-treated, and that the ill-treatment had come mainly from the

hands of Aunt Ju and Lady Selina Protest. And it appeared at length

that the Baroness claimed to have been brought over from Bavaria with a

promise that she should have the exclusive privilege of using the hall

of the Disabilities on certain evenings, but that this privilege was

now denied to her. The Disabilities seemed to prefer her younger rival,

Miss Doctor Olivia Q. Fleabody, whom Mary now learned to be a person of

no good repute whatever, and by no means fit to address the masses of

Marylebone. But what did the Baroness want of her? What with the female

lecturer's lack of English pronunciation, what with her impetuosity,

and with Mary's own innocence on the matter, it was some time before

the younger lady did understand what the elder lady required. At last

eight tickets were brought out of her pocket, on looking at which Mary

began to understand that the Baroness had established a rival

Disabilities, very near the other, in Lisson Grove; and then at last,

but very gradually, she further understood that these were front-row

tickets, and were supposed to be worth 2\_s.\_ 6\_d.\_ each. But it was not

till after that, till further explanation had been made which must, she

feared, have been very painful to the Baroness, that she began to

perceive that she was expected to pay for the eight tickets on the

moment. She had a sovereign in her pocket, and was quite willing to

sacrifice it; but she hardly knew how to hand the coin bodily to a

Baroness. When she did do so, the Baroness very well knew how to put it

into her pocket. "You vill like to keep the entire eight?" asked the

Baroness. Mary thought that four might perhaps suffice for her own

wants;--whereupon the Baroness re-pocketed four, but of course did not

return the change.

But even then the Baroness had not completed her task. Aunt Ju had

evidently been false and treacherous, but might still be won back to

loyal honesty. So much Mary gradually perceived to be the drift of the

lady's mind. Lady Selina was hopeless. Lady Selina, whom the Baroness

intended to drag before all the judges in England, would do nothing

fair or honest; but Aunt Ju might yet be won. Would Lady George go with

the Baroness to Aunt Ju? The servant had unfortunately just announced

the brougham as being at the door. "Ah," said the Baroness, "it vould

be ten minutes, and vould be my salvation." Lady George did not at all

want to go to the house in Green Street. She had no great desire to

push her acquaintance with Aunt Ju, she particularly disliked the

younger Miss Mildmay, and she felt that she had no business to

interfere in this matter. But there is nothing which requires so much

experience to attain as the power of refusing. Almost before she had

made up her mind whether she would refuse or not the Baroness was in

the brougham with her, and the coachman had been desired to take them

to Green Street. Throughout the whole distance the Baroness was voluble

and unintelligible; but Lady George could hear the names of Selina

Protest and Olivia Q. Fleabody through the thunder of the lady's loud

complaints.

Yes, Miss Mildmay was at home. Lady George gave her name to the

servant, and also especially requested that the Baroness Banmann might

be first announced. She had thought it over in the brougham, and had

determined that if possible it should appear that the Baroness had

brought her. Twice she repeated the name to the servant. When they

reached the drawing-room only the younger Miss Mildmay was present. She

sent the servant to her aunt, and received her two visitors very

demurely. With the Baroness, of whom probably she had heard quite

enough, she had no sympathies; and with Lady George she had her own

special ground of quarrel. Five or six very long minutes passed during

which little or nothing was said. The Baroness did not wish to expend

her eloquence on an unprofitable young lady, and Lady George could find

no subject for small talk. At last the door was opened and the servant

invited the Baroness to go downstairs. The Baroness had perhaps been

unfortunate, for at this very time Lady Selina Protest was down in the

dining-room discussing the affairs of the Institute with Aunt Ju. There

was a little difficulty in making the lady understand what was required

of her, but after a while she did follow the servant down to the

dining-room.

Lady George, as soon as the door was closed, felt that the blood

rushed to her face. She was conscious at the moment that Captain De

Baron had been this girl's lover, and that there were some who said

that it was because of her that he had deserted the girl. The girl had

already said words to her on the subject which had been very hard to

bear. She had constantly told herself that in this matter she was quite

innocent,--that her friendship with Jack was simple, pure friendship,

that she liked him because he laughed and talked and treated the world

lightly; that she rarely saw him except in the presence of his cousin,

and that everything was as it ought to be. And yet, when she found

herself alone with this Miss Mildmay, she was suffused with blushes and

uneasy. She felt that she ought to make some excuse for her visit. "I

hope," she said, "that your aunt will understand that I brought the

lady here only because she insisted on being brought." Miss Mildmay

bowed. "She came to me, and I really couldn't quite understand what she

had to say. But the brougham was there, and she would get into it. I am

afraid there has been some quarrel."

"I don't think that matters at all," said Miss Mildmay.

"Only your aunt might think it so impertinent of me! She took me to

that Institute once, you know."

"I don't know anything about the Institute. As for the German woman,

she is an impostor; but it doesn't matter. There are three of them

there now, and they can have it out together." Lady George didn't

understand whether her companion meant to blame her for coming, but was

quite sure, from the tone of the girl's voice and the look of her eyes,

that she meant to be uncivil. "I am surprised," continued Miss Mildmay,

"that you should come to this house at all."

"I hope your aunt will not think----"

"Never mind my aunt. The house is more my house than my aunt's. After

what you have done to me----"

"What have I done to you?" She could not help asking the question, and

yet she well knew the nature of the accusation. And she could not stop

the rushing of the tell-tale blood.

Augusta Mildmay was blushing too, but the blush on her face consisted

in two red spots beneath the eyes. The determination to say what she

was going to say had come upon her suddenly. She had not thought that

she was about to meet her rival. She had planned nothing; but now she

was determined. "What have you done?" she said. "You know very well

what you have done. Do you mean to tell me that you had never heard of

anything between me and Captain De Baron? Will you dare to tell me

that? Why don't you answer me, Lady George Germain?"

This was a question which she did not wish to answer, and one that did

not at all appertain to herself--which did not require any answer for

the clearing of herself; but yet it was now asked in such a manner

that she could not save herself from answering it. "I think I did hear

that you and he--knew each other."

"Knew each other! Don't be so mealy-mouthed. I don't mean to be

mealy-mouthed, I can tell you. You knew all about it. Adelaide had told

you. You knew that we were engaged."

"No," exclaimed Lady George; "she never told me that."

"She did. I know she did. She confessed to me that she had told you

so."

"But what if she had?"

"Of course he is nothing to you," said the young lady with a sneer.

"Nothing at all;--nothing on earth. How dare you ask such a question?

If Captain De Baron is engaged, I can't make him keep his engagements."

"You can make him break them."

"That is not true. I can make him do nothing of the kind. You have no

right to talk to me in this way, Miss Mildmay."

"Then I shall do it without a right. You have come between me and all

my happiness."

"You cannot know that I am a married woman," said Lady George, speaking

half in innocence and half in anger, almost out of breath with

confusion, "or you wouldn't speak like that."

"Psha!" exclaimed Miss Mildmay. "It is nothing to me whether you are

married or single. I care nothing though you have twenty lovers if you

do not interfere with me."

"It is a falsehood," said Lady George, who was now standing. "I have no

lover. It is a wicked falsehood."

"I care nothing for wickedness or falseness either. Will you promise me

if I hold my tongue that you will have nothing further to say to

Captain De Baron?"

"No; I will promise nothing. I should be ashamed of myself to make such

a promise."

"Then I shall go to Lord George. I do not want to make mischief, but I

am not going to be treated in this way. How would you like it? When I

tell you that the man is engaged to me why cannot you leave him alone?"

"I do leave him alone," said Mary, stamping her foot.

"You do everything you can to cheat me of him. I shall tell Lord

George."

"You may tell whom you like," said Mary, rushing to the bell-handle and

pulling it with all her might. "You have insulted me, and I will never

speak to you again." Then she burst out crying, and hurried to the

door. "Will you--get me--my--carriage?" she said to the man through her

sobs. As she descended the stairs she remembered that she had brought

the German baroness with her, and that the German baroness would

probably expect to be taken away again. But when she reached the hall

the door of the dining-room burst open, and the German baroness

appeared. It was evident that two scenes had been going on in the same

house at the same moment. Through the door the Baroness came first,

waving her hands above her head. Behind her was Aunt Ju, advancing with

imploring gesture. And behind Aunt Ju might be seen Lady Selina Protest

standing in mute dignity. "It is all a got up cheating and a fraud,"

said the Baroness: "and I vill have justice,--English justice." The

servant was standing with the front door open, and the Baroness went

straight into Lady George's brougham, as though it had been her own.

"Oh, Lady George," said Aunt Ju, "what are you to do with her?" But

Lady George was so taken up with her own trouble that she could hardly

think of the other matter. She had to say something. "Perhaps I had

better go with her. Good-bye." And then she followed the Baroness. "I

did not tink dere was such robbery with ladies," said the Baroness. But

the footman was asking for directions for the coachman. Whither was he

to go? "I do not care," said the Baroness. Lady George asked her in a

whisper whether she would be taken home. "Anywhere," said the Baroness.

In the meantime the footman was still standing, and Aunt Ju could be

seen in the hall through the open door of the house. During the whole

time our poor Mary's heart was crushed by the accusations which had

been made against her upstairs. "Home," said Mary in despair. To have

the Baroness in Munster Court would be dreadful; but anything was

better than standing in Green Street with the servant at the carriage

window.

Then the Baroness began her story. Lady Selina Protest had utterly

refused to do her justice, and Aunt Ju was weak enough to be domineered

by Lady Selina. That, as far as Mary understood anything about it, was

the gist of the story. But she did not try to understand anything about

it. During the drive her mind was intent on forming some plan by which

she might be able to get rid of her companion without asking her into

her house. She had paid her sovereign, and surely the Baroness had no

right to demand more of her. When she reached Munster Court her plan

was in some sort framed. "And now, madam," she said, "where shall I

tell my servant to take you?" The Baroness looked very suppliant. "If

you vas not busy I should so like just one half-hour of conversation."

Mary nearly yielded. For a moment she hesitated as though she were

going to put up her hand and help the lady out. But then the memory of

her own unhappiness steeled her heart, and the feeling grew strong

within her that this nasty woman was imposing on her,--and she refused.

"I am afraid, madam," she said, "that my time is altogether occupied."

"Then let him take me to 10, Alexandrina Row, Maida Vale," said the

Baroness, throwing herself sulkily back into the carriage. Lady George

gave the direction to the astounded coachman,--for Maida Vale was a

long way off,--and succeeded in reaching her own drawing-room alone.

What was she to do? The only course in which there seemed to be safety

was in telling all to her husband. If she did not, it would probably be

told by the cruel lips of that odious woman. But yet, how was she to

tell it? It was not as though everything in this matter was quite

pleasant between her and him. Lady Susanna had accused her of flirting

with the man, and that she had told to him. And in her heart of hearts

she believed that the waltzing had been stopped because she had waltzed

with Jack De Baron. Nothing could be more unjust, nothing more cruel;

but still there were the facts. And then the sympathy between her and

her husband was so imperfect. She was ever trying to be in love with

him, but had never yet succeeded in telling even herself that she had

succeeded.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHAT MATTER IF SHE DOES?"

About noon on the day after the occurrences related in the last chapter

Lady George owned to herself that she was a most unfortunate young

woman. Her husband had gone out, and she had not as yet told him

anything of what that odious Augusta Mildmay had said to her. She had

made various little attempts but had not known how to go on with them.

She had begun by giving him her history of the Baroness, and he had

scolded her for giving the woman a sovereign and for taking the woman

about London in her carriage. It is very difficult to ask in a fitting

way for the sympathies and co-operation of one who is scolding you. And

Mary in this matter wanted almost more than sympathy and co-operation.

Nothing short of the fullest manifestation of affectionate confidence

would suffice to comfort her; and, desiring this, she had been afraid

to mention Captain De Baron's name. She thought of the waltzing,

thought of Susanna, and was cowardly. So the time slipped away from

her, and when he left her on the following morning her story had not

been told. He was no sooner gone than she felt that if it were to be

told at all it should have been told at once.

Was it possible that that venomous girl should really go to her husband

with such a complaint? She knew well enough, or at any rate thought

that she knew, that there had never been an engagement between the girl

and Jack De Baron. She had heard it all over and over again from

Adelaide Houghton, and had even herself been present at some joke on

the subject between Adelaide and Jack. There was an idea that Jack was

being pursued, and Mrs. Houghton had not scrupled to speak of it before

him. Mary had not admired her friend's taste, and had on such

occasions thought well of Jack because he had simply disowned any

consciousness of such a state of things. But all this had made Mary

sure that there was not and that there never had been any engagement;

and yet the wretched woman, in her futile and frantic endeavours to

force the man to marry her, was not ashamed to make so gross an attack

as this!

If it hadn't been for Lady Susanna and those wretched fortune-telling

cards, and that one last waltz, there would be nothing in it; but as it

was, there might be so much! She had begun to fear that her husband's

mind was suspicious,--that he was prone to believe that things were

going badly. Before her marriage, when she had in truth known him not

at all, her father had given her some counsels in his light airy way,

which, however, had sunk deep into her mind and which she had

endeavoured to follow to the letter. He had said not a word to her as

to her conduct to other men. It would not be natural that a father

should do so. But he had told her how to behave to her husband. Men, he

had assured her, were to be won by such comforts as he described. A

wife should provide that a man's dinner was such as he liked to eat,

his bed such as he liked to lie on, his clothes arranged as he liked to

wear them, and the household hours fixed to suit his convenience. She

should learn and indulge his habits, should suit herself to him in

external things of life, and could thus win from him a liking and a

reverence which would wear better than the feeling generally called

love, and would at last give the woman her proper influence. The Dean

had meant to teach his child how she was to rule her husband, but of

course had been too wise to speak of dominion. Mary, declaring to

herself that the feeling generally called love should exist as well as

the liking and the reverence, had laboured hard to win it all from her

husband in accordance with her father's teaching; but it had seemed to

her that her labour was wasted. Lord George did not in the least care

what he ate. He evidently had no opinion at all about the bed; and as

to his clothes, seemed to receive no accession of comfort by having one

wife and her maid, instead of three sisters and their maid and old Mrs.

Toff to look after them. He had no habits which she could indulge. She

had looked about for the weak point in his armour, but had not found

it. It seemed to her that she had no influence over him whatever. She

was of course aware that they lived upon her fortune; but she was aware

also that he knew that it was so, and that the consciousness made him

unhappy. She could not, therefore, even endeavour to minister to his

comfort by surrounding him with pretty things. All expenditure was

grievous to him. The only matter in which she had failed to give way to

any expressed wish had been in that important matter of their town

residence; and, as to that, she had in fact had no power of yielding.

It had been of such moment as to have been settled for her by previous

contract. But, she had often thought, whether in her endeavour to force

herself to be in love with him, she would not persistently demand that

Munster Court should be abandoned, and that all the pleasures of her

own life should be sacrificed.

Now, for a day or two, she heartily wished that she had done so. She

liked her house; she liked her brougham; she liked the gaieties of her

life; and in a certain way she liked Jack De Baron; but they were all

to her as nothing when compared to her duty and her sense of the

obligations which she owed to her husband. Playful and childish as she

was, all this was very serious to her;--perhaps the more serious

because she was playful and childish. She had not experience enough to

know how small some things are, and how few are the evils which cannot

be surmounted. It seemed to her that if Miss Mildmay were at this

moment to bring the horrid charge against her, it might too probably

lead to the crash of ruin and the horrors of despair. And yet, through

it all, she had a proud feeling of her own innocence and a

consciousness that she would speak out very loudly should her husband

hint to her that he believed the accusation.

Her father would now be in London in a day or two, and on this occasion

would again be staying in Munster Court. At last she made up her mind

that she would tell everything to him. It was not, perhaps, the wisest

resolution to which she could have come. A married woman should not

usually teach herself to lean on her parents instead of her husband,

and certainly not on her father. It is in this way that divided

households are made. But she had no other real friend of whom she could

ask a question. She liked Mrs. Houghton, but, as to such a matter as

this, distrusted her altogether. She liked Miss Houghton, her friend's

aunt, but did not know her well enough for such service as this. She

had neither brother nor sister of her own, and her husband's brothers

and sisters were certainly out of the question. Old Mrs. Montacute

Jones had taken a great fancy to her, and she almost thought that she

could have asked Mrs. Jones for advice; but she had no connection with

Mrs. Jones, and did not dare to do it. Therefore she resolved to tell

everything to her father.

On the evening before her father came to town there was another ball at

Mrs. Montacute Jones's. This old lady, who had no one belonging to her

but an invisible old husband, was the gayest of the gay among the gay

people of London. On this occasion Mary was to have gone with Lady

Brabazon, who was related to the Germains, and Lord George had arranged

an escape for himself. They were to drive out together, and when she

went to her ball he would go to bed. But in the course of the afternoon

she told him that she was writing to Lady Brabazon to decline. "Why

won't you go?" said he.

"I don't care about it."

"If you mean that you won't go without me, of course I will go."

"It isn't that exactly. Of course it is nicer if you go; though I

wouldn't take you if you don't like it. But----"

"But what, dear?"

"I think I'd rather not to-night. I don't know that I am quite strong

enough." Then he didn't say another word to press her,--only begging

that she would not go to the dinner either if she were not well. But

she was quite well, and she did go to the dinner.

Again she had meant to tell him why she would not go to Mrs. Jones's

ball, but had been unable. Jack De Baron would be there, and would want

to know why she would not waltz. And Adelaide Houghton would tease her

about it, very likely before him. She had always waltzed with him, and

could not now refuse without some reason. So she gave up her ball,

sending word to say that she was not very well. "I shouldn't at all

wonder if he has kept her at home because he's afraid of you," said

Mrs. Houghton to her cousin.

Late in the following afternoon, before her husband had come home from

his club, she told her father the whole story of her interview with

Miss Mildmay. "What a tiger," he said, when he had heard it. "I have

heard of women like that before, but I have never believed in them."

"You don't think she will tell him?"

"What matter if she does? What astonishes me most is that a woman

should be so unwomanly as to fight for a man in such a way as that. It

is the sort of thing that men used to do. 'You must give up your claim

to that lady, or else you must fight me.' Now she comes forward and

says that she will fight you."

"But, papa, I have no claim."

"Nor probably has she?"

"No; I'm sure she has not. But what does that matter? The horrid thing

is that she should say all this to me. I told her that she couldn't

know that I was married."

"She merely wanted to make herself disagreeable. If one comes across

disagreeable people one has to bear with it. I suppose she was jealous.

She had seen you dancing or perhaps talking with the man."

"Oh, yes."

"And in her anger she wanted to fly at some one."

"It is not her I care about, papa."

"What then?"

"If she were to tell George."

"What if she did? You do not mean to say that he would believe her? You

do not think that he is jealous?"

She began to perceive that she could not get any available counsel from

her father unless she could tell him everything. She must explain to

him what evil Lady Susanna had already done; how her sister-in-law had

acted as duenna, and had dared to express a suspicion about this very

man. And she must tell him that Lord George had desired her not to

waltz, and had done so, as she believed, because he had seen her

waltzing with Jack De Baron. But all this seemed to her to be

impossible. There was nothing which she would not be glad that he

knew, if only he could be made to know it all truly. But she did not

think that she could tell him what had really happened; and were she to

do so, there would be horrid doubts on his mind. "You do not mean to

say that he is given to that sort of thing?" asked the Dean, again with

a look of anger.

"Oh no,--at least I hope not. Susanna did try to make mischief."

"The d---- she did," said the Dean. Mary almost jumped in her chair,

she was so much startled by such a word from her father's mouth. "If

he's fool enough to listen to that old cat, he'll make himself a

miserable and a contemptible man. Did she say anything to him about

this very man?"

"She said something very unpleasant to me, and of course I told

George."

"Well?"

"He was all that was kind. He declared that he had no objection to make

to Captain De Baron at all. I am sure there was no reason why he

should."

"Tush!" exclaimed the Dean, as though any assurance or even any notice

of the matter in that direction were quite unnecessary. "And there was

an end of that?"

"I think he is a little inclined to be--to be----"

"To be what? You had better tell it all out, Mary."

"Perhaps what you would call strict. He told me not to waltz any more

the other day."

"He's a fool," said the Dean angrily.

"Oh no, papa; don't say that. Of course he has a right to think as he

likes, and of course I am bound to do as he says."

"He has no experience, no knowledge of the world. Perhaps one of the

last things which a man learns is to understand innocence when he sees

it." The word innocence was so pleasant to her that she put out her

hand and touched his knee. "Take no notice of what that angry woman

said to you. Above all, do not drop your acquaintance with this

gentleman. You should be too proud to be influenced in any way by such

scandal."

"But if she were to speak to George?"

"She will hardly dare. But if she does, that is no affair of yours. You

can have nothing to do with it till he shall speak to you."

"You would not tell him?"

"No; I should not even think about it. She is below your notice. If it

should be the case that she dares to speak to him, and that he should

be weak enough to be moved by what such a creature can say to him, you

will, I am sure, have dignity enough to hold your own with him. Tell

him that you think too much of his honour as well of your own to make

it necessary for him to trouble himself. But he will know that himself,

and if he does speak to you, he will speak only in pity for her." All

this he said slowly and seriously, looking as she had sometimes seen

him look when preaching in the cathedral. And she believed him now as

she always believed him then, and was in a great measure comforted.

But she could not but be surprised that her father should so absolutely

refuse to entertain the idea that any intimacy between herself and

Captain De Baron should be injurious. It gratified her that it should

be so, but nevertheless she was surprised. She had endeavoured to

examine the question by her own lights, but had failed in answering it.

She knew well enough that she liked the man. She had discovered in him

the realization of those early dreams. His society was in every respect

pleasant to her. He was full of playfulness, and yet always gentle. He

was not very clever, but clever enough. She had made the mistake in

life,--or rather others had made it for her,--of taking herself too

soon from her playthings and devoting herself to the stern reality of a

husband. She understood something of this, and liked to think that she

might amuse herself innocently with such a one as Jack De Baron. She

was sure that she did not love him,--that there was no danger of her

loving him; and she was quite confident also that he did not love her.

But yet,--yet there had been a doubt on her mind. Innocent as it all

was, there might be cause of offence to her husband. It was this

thought that had made her sometimes long to be taken away from London

and be immured amidst the dulness of Cross Hall. But of such dangers

and of such fears her father saw nothing. Her father simply bade her to

maintain her own dignity and have her own way. Perhaps her father was

right.

On the next day the Dean and his son-in-law went, according to

appointment, to Mr. Battle. Mr. Battle received them with his usual

bland courtesy, and listened attentively to whatever the two gentlemen

had to say. Lawyers who know their business always allow their clients

to run out their stories even when knowing that the words so spoken are

wasted words. It is the quickest way of arriving at their desired

result. Lord George had a good deal to say, because his mind was full

of the conviction that he would not for worlds put an obstacle in the

way of his brother's heir, if he could be made sure that the child was

the heir. He wished for such certainty, and cursed the heavy chance

that had laid so grievous a duty on his shoulders.

When he had done, Mr. Battle began. "I think, Lord George, that I have

learned most of the particulars."

Lord George started back in his chair. "What particulars?" said the

Dean.

"The Marchioness's late husband,--for she doubtless is his Lordship's

wife,--was a lunatic."

"A lunatic!" said Lord George.

"We do not quite know when he died, but we believe it was about a month

or two before the date at which his Lordship wrote home to say that he

was about to be married."

"Then that child cannot be Lord Popenjoy," said the Dean with

exultation.

"That's going a little too fast, Mr. Dean. There may have been a

divorce."

"There is no such thing in Roman Catholic countries," said the Dean.

"Certainly not in Italy."

"I do not quite know," said the lawyer. "Of course we are as yet very

much in the dark. I should not wonder if we found that there had been

two marriages. All this is what we have got to find out. The lady

certainly lived in great intimacy with your brother before her first

husband died."

"How do you know anything about it?" asked Lord George.

"I happened to have heard the name of the Marchese Luigi, and I knew

where to apply for information."

"We did not mean that any inquiry should be made so suddenly," said

Lord George angrily.

"It was for the best," said the Dean.

"Certainly for the best," said the unruffled lawyer. "I would now

recommend that I may be commissioned to send out my own confidential

clerk to learn all the circumstances of the case; and that I should

inform Mr. Stokes that I am going to do so, on your instructions, Lord

George." Lord George shivered. "I think we should even offer to give

his Lordship time to send an agent with my clerk if he pleases to do

so, or to send one separately at the same time, or to take any other

step that he may please. It is clearly your duty, my Lord, to have the

inquiry made."

"Your manifest duty," said the Dean, unable to restrain his triumph.

Lord George pleaded for delay, and before he left the lawyer's chambers

almost quarrelled with his father-in-law; but before he did leave them

he had given the necessary instructions.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. HOUGHTON WANTS A GLASS OF SHERRY.

Lord George, when he got out of the lawyer's office with his

father-in-law, expressed himself as being very angry at what had been

done. While discussing the matter within, in the presence of Mr.

Battle, he had been unable to withstand the united energies of the Dean

and the lawyer, but, nevertheless, even while he had yielded, he had

felt that he was being driven.

"I don't think he was at all justified in making any inquiry," he said,

as soon as he found himself in the Square.

"My dear George," replied the Dean, "the quicker this can be done the

better."

"An agent should only act in accordance with his instructions."

"Without disputing that, my dear fellow, I cannot but say that I am

glad to have learned so much."

"And I am very sorry."

"We both mean the same thing, George."

"I don't think we do," said Lord George, who was determined to be

angry.

"You are sorry that it should be so,--and so am I." The triumph which

had sat in the Dean's eye when he heard the news in the lawyer's

chambers almost belied this latter assertion. "But I certainly am glad

to be on the track as soon as possible, if there is a track which it is

our duty to follow."

"I didn't like that man at all," said Lord George.

"I neither like him nor dislike him; but I believe him to be honest,

and I know him to be clever. He will find out the truth for us."

"And when it turns out that Brotherton was legally married to the

woman, what will the world think of me then?"

"The world will think that you have done your duty. There can be no

question about it, George. Whether it be agreeable or disagreeable, it

must be done. Could you have brought yourself to have thrown the burden

of doing this upon your own child, perhaps some five-and-twenty years

hence, when it may be done so much easier now by yourself."

"I have no child," said Lord George.

"But you will have." The Dean, as he said this, could not keep himself

from looking too closely into his son-in-law's face. He was most

anxious for the birth of that grandson who was to be made a Marquis by

his own energies.

"God knows. Who can say?"

"At any rate there is that child at Manor Cross. If he be not the

legitimate heir, is it not better for him that the matter should be

settled now than when he may have lived twenty years in expectation of

the title and property?" The Dean said much more than this, urging the

propriety of what had been done, but he did not succeed in quieting

Lord George's mind.

That same day the Dean told the whole story to his daughter, perhaps in

his eagerness adding something to what he had heard from the lawyer.

"Divorces in Roman Catholic countries," he said, "are quite impossible.

I believe they are never granted, except for State purposes. There may

be some new civil law, but I don't think it; and then, if the man was

an acknowledged lunatic, it must have been impossible."

"But how could the Marquis be so foolish, papa?"

"Ah, that is what we do not understand. But it will come out. You may

be sure it will all come out. Why did he come home to England and bring

them with him? And why just at this time? Why did he not communicate

his first marriage; and if not that, why the second? He probably did

not intend at first to put his child forward as Lord Popenjoy, but has

become subsequently bold. The woman, perhaps, has gradually learned the

facts and insisted on making the claim for her child. She may gradually

have become stronger than he. He may have thought that by coming here

and declaring the boy to be his heir, he would put down suspicion by

the very boldness of his assertion. Who can say? But these are the

facts, and they are sufficient to justify us in demanding that

everything shall be brought to light." Then for the first time, he

asked her what immediate hope there was that Lord George might have an

heir. She tried to laugh, then blushed; then wept a tear or two, and

muttered something which he failed to hear. "There is time enough for

all that, Mary," he said, with his pleasantest smile, and then left

her.

Lord George did not return home till late in the afternoon. He went

first to Mrs. Houghton's house, and told her nearly everything. But he

told it in such a way as to make her understand that his strongest

feeling at the present moment was one of anger against the Dean.

"Of course, George," she said, for she always called him George

now,--"The Dean will try to have it all his own way."

"I am almost sorry that I ever mentioned my brother's name to him."

"She, I suppose, is ambitious," said Mrs. Houghton. 'She,' was intended

to signify Mary.

"No. To do Mary justice, it is not her fault. I don't think she cares

for it."

"I dare say she would like to be a Marchioness as well as any one else.

I know I should."

"You might have been," he said, looking tenderly into her face.

"I wonder how I should have borne all this. You say that she is

indifferent. I should have been so anxious on your behalf,--to see you

installed in your rights!"

"I have no rights. There is my brother."

"Yes; but as the heir. She has none of the feeling about you that I

have, George." Then she put out her hand to him, which he took and

held. "I begin to think that I was wrong. I begin to know that I was

wrong. We could have lived at any rate."

"It is too late," he said, still holding her hand.

"Yes,--it is too late. I wonder whether you will ever understand the

sort of struggle which I had to go through, and the feeling of duty

which overcame me at last. Where should we have lived?"

"At Cross Hall, I suppose."

"And if there had been children, how should we have brought them up?"

She did not blush as she asked the question, but he did. "And yet I

wish that I had been braver. I think I should have suited you better

than she."

"She is as good as gold," he said, moved by a certain loyalty which,

though it was not sufficient absolutely to protect her from wrong, was

too strong to endure to hear her reproached.

"Do not tell me of her goodness," said Mrs. Houghton, jumping up from

her seat. "I do not want to hear of her goodness. Tell me of my

goodness. Does she love you as I do? Does she make you the hero of her

thoughts? She has no idea of any hero. She would think more of Jack De

Baron whirling round the room with her than of your position in the

world, or of his, or even of her own." He winced visibly when he heard

Jack De Baron's name. "You need not be afraid," she continued, "for

though she is, as you say, as good as gold, she knows nothing about

love. She took you when you came because it suited the ambition of the

Dean,--as she would have taken anything else that he provided for her."

"I believe she loves me," he said, having in his heart of hearts, at

the moment, much more solicitude in regard to his absent wife than to

the woman who was close to his feet and was flattering him to the top

of his bent.

"And her love, such as it is, is sufficient for you?"

"She is my wife."

"Yes; because I allowed it; because I thought it wrong to subject your

future life to the poverty which I should have brought with me. Do you

think there was no sacrifice then?"

"But, Adelaide;--it is so."

"Yes, it is so. But what does it all mean? The time is gone by when

men, or women either, were too qualmish and too queasy to admit the

truth even to themselves. Of course you are married, and so am I; but

marriage does not alter the heart. I did not cease to love you because

I would not marry you. You could not cease to love me merely because I

refused you. When I acknowledged to myself that Mr. Houghton's income

was necessary to me, I did not become enamoured of him. Nor I suppose

did you when you found the same as to Miss Lovelace's money."

Upon this he also jumped up from his seat, and stood before her. "I

will not have even you say that I married my wife for her money."

"How was it then, George? I am not blaming you for doing what I did as

well as you."

"I should blame myself. I should feel myself to be degraded."

"Why so? It seems to me that I am bolder than you. I can look the

cruelties of the world in the face, and declare openly how I will meet

them. I did marry Mr. Houghton for his money, and of course he knew it.

Is it to be supposed that he or any human being could have thought that

I married him for love? I make his house comfortable for him as far as

I can, and am civil to his friends, and look my best at his table. I

hope he is satisfied with his bargain; but I cannot do more. I cannot

wear him in my heart. Nor, George, do I believe that you in your heart

can ever wear Mary Lovelace!" But he did,--only that he thought that he

had space there for two, and that in giving habitation to this second

love he was adding at any rate to the excitements of his life. "Tell

me, George," said the woman, laying her hand upon his breast, "is it

she or I that have a home there?"

"I will not say that I do not love my wife," he said.

"No; you are afraid. The formalities of the world are so much more to

you than to me! Sit down, George. Oh, George!" Then she was on her

knees at his feet, hiding her face upon her hands, while his arms were

almost necessarily thrown over her and embracing her. The lady was

convulsed with sobs, and he was thinking how it would be with him and

her should the door be opened and some pair of eyes see them as they

were. But her ears were sharp in spite of her sobs. There was the fall

of a foot on the stairs which she heard long before it reached him,

and, in a moment, she was in her chair. He looked at her, and there was

no trace of a tear. "It's Houghton," she said, putting her finger up to

her mouth with almost a comic gesture. There was a smile in her eyes,

and a little mockery of fear in the trembling of her hand and the

motion of her lips. To him it seemed to be tragic enough. He had to

assume to this gentleman whom he had been injuring a cordial friendly

manner,--and thus to lie to him. He had to make pretences, and at a

moment's notice to feign himself something very different from what he

was. Had the man come a little more quickly, had the husband caught him

with the wife at his knees, nothing could have saved him and his own

wife from utter misery. So he felt it to be, and the feeling almost

overwhelmed him. His heart palpitated with emotion as the wronged

husband's hand was on the door. She, the while, was as thoroughly

composed as a stage heroine. But she had flattered him and pretended to

love him, and it did not occur to him that he ought to be angry with

her. "Who would ever think of seeing you at this time of day?" said

Mrs. Houghton.

"Well, no; I'm going back to the club in a few minutes. I had to come

up to Piccadilly to have my hair cut!"

"Your hair cut!"

"Honour bright! Nothing upsets me so much as having my hair cut. I'm

going to ring for a glass of sherry. By the bye, Lord George, a good

many of them are talking at the club about young Popenjoy."

"What are they saying?" Lord George felt that he must open his mouth,

but did not wish to talk to this man, and especially did not wish to

talk about his own affairs.

"Of course I know nothing about it; but surely the way Brotherton has

come back is very odd. I used to be very fond of your brother, you

know. There was nobody her father used to swear by so much as him. But,

by George, I don't know what to make of it now. Nobody has seen the

Marchioness!"

"I have not seen her," said Lord George; "but she is there all the same

for that."

"Nobody doubts that she's there. She's there, safe enough. And the boy

is there too. We're all quite sure of that. But you know the Marquis of

Brotherton is somebody."

"I hope so," said Lord George.

"And when he brings his wife home people will expect,--will expect to

know something about it;--eh?" All this was said with an intention of

taking Lord George's part in a question which was already becoming one

of interest to the public. It was hinted here and there that there was

"a screw loose" about this young Popenjoy, who had just been brought

from Italy, and that Lord George would have to look to it. Of course

they who were connected with Brothershire were more prone to talk of it

than others, and Mr. Houghton, who had heard and said a good deal about

it, thought that he was only being civil to Lord George in seeming to

take part against the Marquis.

But Lord George felt it to be matter of offence that any outsider

should venture to talk about his family. "If people would only confine

themselves to subjects with which they are acquainted, it would be very

much better," he said;--and then almost immediately took his leave.

"That's all regular nonsense, you know," Mr. Houghton said as soon as

he was alone with his wife. "Of course people are talking about it.

Your father says that Brotherton must be mad."

"That's no reason why you should come and tell Lord George what people

say. You never have any tact."

"Of course I'm wrong; I always am," said the husband, swallowing his

glass of sherry and then taking his departure.

Lord George was now in a very uneasy state of mind. He intended to be

cautious,--had intended even to be virtuous and self-denying; and yet,

in spite of his intentions, he had fallen into such a condition of

things with Mr. Houghton's wife, that were the truth to be known, he

would be open to most injurious proceedings. To him the love affair

with another man's wife was more embarrassing even than pleasant. Its

charm did not suffice to lighten for him the burden of the wickedness.

He had certain inklings of complaint in his own mind against his own

wife, but he felt that his own hands should be perfectly clean before

he could deal with those inklings magisterially and maritally. How

would he look were she to turn upon him and ask him as to his own

conduct with Adelaide Houghton? And then into what a sea of trouble

had he not already fallen in this matter of his brother's marriage? His

first immediate duty was that of writing to his elder sister, and he

expressed himself to her in strong language. After telling her all that

he had heard from the lawyer, he spoke of himself and of the Dean. "It

will make me very unhappy," he wrote. "Do you remember what Hamlet

says:

'O, cursed spite,

That ever I was born to set it right!'

"I feel like that altogether. I want to get nothing by it. No man ever

less begrudged to his elder brother than I do all that belongs to him.

Though he has himself treated me badly, I would support him in anything

for the sake of the family. At this moment I most heartily wish that

the child may be Lord Popenjoy. The matter will destroy all my

happiness perhaps for the next ten years;--perhaps for ever. And I

cannot but think that the Dean has interfered in a most unjustifiable

manner. He drives me on, so that I almost feel that I shall be forced

to quarrel with him. With him it is manifestly personal ambition, and

not duty." There was much more of it in the same strain, but at the

same time an acknowledgment that he had now instructed the Dean's

lawyer to make the inquiry.

Lady Sarah's answer was perhaps more judicious; and as it was shorter

it shall be given entire.

"Cross Hall, May 10, 187--.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,--Of course it is a sad thing to us all that this

terrible inquiry should be forced upon us;--and more grievous to

you than to us, as you must take the active part in it. But this

is a manifest duty, and duties are seldom altogether pleasant. All

that you say as to yourself,--which I know to be absolutely

true,--must at any rate make your conscience clear in the matter.

It is not for your sake nor for our sake that this is to be done,

but for the sake of the family at large, and to prevent the

necessity of future lawsuits which would be ruinous to the

property. If the child be legitimate, let that, in God's name, be

proclaimed so loud that no one shall hereafter be able to cast a

doubt upon the fact. To us it must be matter of deepest sorrow

that our brother's child and the future head of our family should

have been born under circumstances which, at the best, must still

be disgraceful. But, although that is so, it will be equally our

duty to acknowledge his rights to the full, if they be his rights.

Though the son of the widow of a lunatic foreigner, still if the

law says that he is Brotherton's heir, it is for us to render the

difficulties in his way as light as possible. But that we may do

so, we must know what he is.

"Of course you find the Dean to be pushing and perhaps a little

vulgar. No doubt with him the chief feeling is one of personal

ambition. But in his way he is wise, and I do not know that in

this matter he has done anything which had better have been left

undone. He believes that the child is not legitimate;--and so in

my heart do I.

"You must remember that my dear mother is altogether on

Brotherton's side. The feeling that there should be an heir is so

much to her, and the certainty that the boy is at any rate her

grandson, that she cannot endure that a doubt should be expressed.

Of course this does not tend to make our life pleasant down here.

Poor dear mamma! Of course we do all we can to comfort her.

"Your affectionate sister,

"SARAH GERMAIN."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEAN IS VERY BUSY.

A week had passed away and nothing had as yet been heard from the

Marquis, nor had Mr. Battle's confidential clerk as yet taken his

departure for Italy, when Mrs. Montacute Jones called one day in

Munster Court. Lady George had not seen her new old friend since the

night of the ball to which she had not gone, but had received more than

one note respecting her absence on that occasion, and various other

little matters. Why did not Lady George come and lunch; and why did not

Lady George come and drive? Lady George was a little afraid that there

was a conspiracy about her in reference to Captain De Baron, and that

Mrs. Montacute Jones was one of the conspirators. If so Adelaide

Houghton was certainly another. It had been very pleasant. When she

examined herself about this man, as she endeavoured to do, she declared

that it had been as innocent as pleasant. She did not really believe

that either Adelaide Houghton or Mrs. Montacute Jones had intended to

do mischief. Mischief, such as the alienation of her own affections

from her husband, she regarded as quite out of the question. She would

not even admit to herself that it was possible that she should fall

into such a pit as that. But there were other dangers; and those

friends of hers would indeed be dangerous if they brought her into any

society that made her husband jealous. Therefore, though she liked Mrs.

Montacute Jones very much, she had avoided the old lady lately, knowing

that something would be said about Jack De Baron, and not quite

confident as to her own answers.

And now Mrs. Montacute Jones had come to her. "My dear Lady George,"

she said, "where on earth have you been? Are you going to cut me? If

so, tell me at once."

"Oh, Mrs. Jones," said Lady George, kissing her, "how can you ask such

a question?"

"Because you know it requires two to play at that game, and I'm not

going to be cut." Mrs. Montacute Jones was a stout built but very short

old lady, with grey hair curled in precise rolls down her face, with

streaky cheeks, giving her a look of extreme good health, and very

bright grey eyes. She was always admirably dressed, so well dressed

that her enemies accused her of spending enormous sums on her toilet.

She was very old,--some people said eighty, adding probably not more

than ten years to her age,--very enthusiastic, particularly in

reference to her friends; very fond of gaiety, and very charitable.

"Why didn't you come to my ball?"

"Lord George doesn't care about balls," said Mary, laughing.

"Come, come! Don't try and humbug me. It had been all arranged that you

should come when he went to bed. Hadn't it now?"

"Something had been said about it."

"A good deal had been said about it, and he had agreed. Are you going

to tell me that he won't go out with you, and yet dislikes your going

out without him? Is he such a Bluebeard as that?"

"He's not a Bluebeard at all, Mrs. Jones."

"I hope not. There has been something about that German

Baroness;--hasn't there?"

"Oh dear no."

"I heard that there was. She came and took you and the brougham all

about London. And there was a row with Lady Selina. I heard of it."

"But that had nothing to do with my going to your party."

"Well, no; why should it? She's a nasty woman, that Baroness Banmann.

If we can't get on here in England without German Baronesses and

American she doctors, we are in a bad way. You shouldn't have let them

drag you into that lot. Women's rights! Women are quite able to hold

their own without such trash as that. I'm told she's in debt

everywhere, and can't pay a shilling. I hope they'll lock her up."

"She is nothing to me, Mrs. Jones."

"I hope not. What was it then? I know there was something. He doesn't

object to Captain De Baron; does he?"

"Object to him! Why should he object to Captain De Baron?"

"I don't know why. Men do take such fancies into their heads. You are

not going to give up dancing;--are you?"

"Not altogether. I'm not sure that I care for it very much."

"Oh, Lady George; where do you expect to go to?" Mary could not keep

herself from laughing, though she was at the same time almost inclined

to be angry with the old lady's interference. "I should have said that

I didn't know a young person in the world fonder of dancing than you

are. Perhaps he objects to it."

"He doesn't like my waltzing," said Mary, with a blush. On former

occasions she had almost made up her mind to confide her troubles to

this old woman, and now the occasion seemed so suitable that she could

not keep herself from telling so much as that.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Montacute Jones. "That's it! I knew there was

something. My dear, he's a goose, and you ought to tell him so."

"Couldn't you tell him," said Mary, laughing.

"Would do it in half a minute, and think nothing of it!"

"Pray, don't. He wouldn't like it at all."

"My dear, you shouldn't be afraid of him. I'm not going to preach up

rebellion against husbands. I'm the last woman in London to do that. I

know the comfort of a quiet house as well as any one, and that two

people can't get along easy together unless there is a good deal of

give and take. But it doesn't do to give up everything. What does he

say about it?"

"He says he doesn't like it."

"What would he say if you told him you didn't like his going to his

club."

"He wouldn't go."

"Nonsense! It's being a dog in the manger, because he doesn't care for

it himself. I should have it out with him,--nicely and pleasantly. Just

tell him that you're fond of it, and ask him to change his mind. I

can't bear anybody interfering to put down the innocent pleasures of

young people. A man like that just opens his mouth and speaks a word,

and takes away the whole pleasure of a young woman's season! You've got

my card for the 10th of June?"

"Oh yes,--I've got it."

"And I shall expect you to come. It's only going to be a small affair.

Get him to bring you if you can, and you do as I bid you. Just have it

out with him,--nicely and quietly. Nobody hates a row so much as I do,

but people oughtn't to be trampled on."

All this had considerable effect upon Lady George. She quite agreed

with Mrs. Jones that people ought not to be trampled on. Her father had

never trampled on her. From him there had been very little positive

ordering as to what she might and what she might not do. And yet she

had been only a child when living with her father. Now she was a

married woman, and the mistress of her own house. She was quite sure

that were she to ask her father, the Dean would say that such a

prohibition as this was absurd. Of course she could not ask her father.

She would not appeal from her husband to him. But it was a hardship,

and she almost made up her mind that she would request him to revoke

the order.

Then she was very much troubled by a long letter from the Baroness

Banmann. The Baroness was going to bring an action jointly against Lady

Selina Protest and Miss Mildmay, whom the reader will know as Aunt Ju;

and informed Lady George that she was to be summoned as a witness.

This was for a while a grievous affliction to her. "I know nothing

about it," she said to her husband, "I only just went there once

because Miss Mildmay asked me."

"It was a very foolish thing for her to do."

"And I was foolish, perhaps; but what can I say about it? I don't know

anything."

"You shouldn't have bought those other tickets."

"How could I refuse when the woman asked for such a trifle?"

"Then you took her to Miss Mildmay's."

"She would get into the brougham, and I couldn't get rid of her. Hadn't

I better write and tell her that I know nothing about it?" But to this

Lord George objected, requesting her altogether to hold her peace on

the subject, and never even to speak about it to anyone. He was not

good humoured with her, and this was clearly no occasion for asking him

about the waltzing. Indeed, just at present he rarely was in a good

humour, being much troubled in his mind on the great Popenjoy question.

At this time the Dean was constantly up in town, running backwards and

forwards between London and Brotherton, prosecuting his enquiry and

spending a good deal of his time at Mr. Battle's offices. In doing all

this he by no means acted in perfect concert with Lord George, nor did

he often stay or even dine at the house in Munster Court. There had

been no quarrel, but he found that Lord George was not cordial with

him, and therefore placed himself at the hotel in Suffolk Street. "Why

doesn't papa come here as he is in town?" Mary said to her husband.

"I don't know why he comes to town at all," replied her husband.

"I suppose he comes because he has business, or because he likes it. I

shouldn't think of asking why he comes; but as he is here, I wish he

wouldn't stay at a nasty dull hotel after all that was arranged."

"You may be sure he knows what he likes best," said Lord George

sulkily. That allusion to "an arrangement" had not served to put him in

a good humour.

Mary had known well why her father was so much in London, and had in

truth known also why he did not come to Munster Court. She could

perceive that her father and husband were drifting into unfriendly

relations, and greatly regretted it. In her heart she took her father's

part. She was not keen as he was in this matter of the little Popenjoy,

being restrained by a feeling that it would not become her to be over

anxious for her own elevation or for the fall of others; but she had

always sympathised with her father in everything, and therefore she

sympathised with him in this. And then there was gradually growing upon

her a conviction that her father was the stronger man of the two, the

more reasonable, and certainly the kinder. She had thoroughly

understood when the house was furnished, very much at the Dean's

expense, that he was to be a joint occupant in it when it might suit

him to be in London. He himself had thought less about this, having

rather submitted to the suggestion as an excuse for his own liberality

than contemplated any such final arrangement. But Lord George

remembered it. The house would certainly be open to him should he

choose to come;--but Lord George would not press it.

Mr. Stokes had thought it proper to go in person to Manor Cross, in

order that he might receive instructions from the Marquis. "Upon my

word, Mr. Stokes," said the Marquis, "only that I would not seem to be

uncourteous to you I should feel disposed to say that this interview

can do no good."

"It is a very serious matter, my Lord."

"It is a very serious annoyance, certainly, that my own brother and

sisters should turn against me, and give me all this trouble because I

have chosen to marry a foreigner. It is simply an instance of that

pigheaded English blindness which makes us think that everything

outside our own country is or ought to be given up to the devil. My

sisters are very religious, and, I daresay, very good women. But they

are quite willing to think that I and my wife ought to be damned

because we talk Italian, and that my son ought to be disinherited

because he was not baptised in an English church. They have got this

stupid story into their heads, and they must do as they please about

it. I will have no hand in it. I will take care that there shall be no

difficulty in my son's way when I die."

"That will be right, of course, my Lord."

"I know where all this comes from. My brother, who is an idiot, has

married the daughter of a vulgar clergyman, who thinks in his ignorance

that he can make his grandson, if he has one, an English nobleman.

He'll spend his money and he'll burn his fingers, and I don't care how

much money he spends or how much he burns his hands. I don't suppose

his purse is so very long but that he may come to the bottom of it."

This was nearly all that passed between Mr. Stokes and the Marquis. Mr.

Stokes then went back to town and gave Mr. Battle to understand that

nothing was to be done on their side.

The Dean was very anxious that the confidential clerk should be

dispatched, and at one time almost thought that he would go himself.

"Better not, Mr. Dean. Everybody would know," said Mr. Battle.

"And I should intend everybody to know," said the Dean. "Do you suppose

that I am doing anything that I'm ashamed of."

"But being a dignitary----" began Mr. Battle.

"What has that to do with it? A dignitary, as you call it, is not to

see his child robbed of her rights. I only want to find the truth, and

I should never take shame to myself in looking for that by honest

means." But Mr. Battle prevailed, persuading the Dean that the

confidential clerk, even though he confined himself to honest means,

would reach his point more certainly than a Dean of the Church of

England.

But still there was delay. Mr. Stokes did not take his journey down to

Brotherton quite as quickly as he perhaps might have done, and then

there was a prolonged correspondence carried on through an English

lawyer settled at Leghorn. But at last the man was sent. "I think we

know this," said Mr. Battle to the Dean on the day before the man

started, "there were certainly two marriages. One of them took place as

much as five years ago, and the other after his lordship had written to

his brother."

"Then the first marriage must have been nothing," said the Dean.

"It does not follow. It may have been a legal marriage, although the

parties chose to confirm it by a second ceremony."

"But when did the man Luigi die?"

"And where and how? That is what we have got to find out. I shouldn't

wonder if we found that he had been for years a lunatic."

Almost all this the Dean communicated to Lord George, being determined

that his son-in-law should be seen to act in co-operation with him.

They met occasionally in Mr. Battle's chambers, and sometimes by

appointment in Munster Court. "It is essentially necessary that you

should know what is being done," said the Dean to his son-in-law. Lord

George fretted and fumed, and expressed an opinion that as the matter

had been put into a lawyer's hands it had better be left there. But the

Dean had very much his own way.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MARQUIS MIGRATES TO LONDON.

Soon after Mr. Stokes' visit there was a great disturbance at Manor

Cross, whether caused or not by that event no one was able to say. The

Marquis and all the family were about to proceed to London. The news

first reached Cross Hall through Mrs. Toff, who still kept up friendly

relations with a portion of the English establishment at the great

house. There probably was no idea of maintaining a secret on the

subject. The Marquis and his wife, with Lord Popenjoy and the servants,

could not have had themselves carried up to town without the knowledge

of all Brotherton, nor was there any adequate reason for supposing that

secrecy was desired. Nevertheless Mrs. Toff made a great deal of the

matter, and the ladies at Cross Hall were not without a certain

perturbed interest as though in a mystery. It was first told to Lady

Sarah, for Mrs. Toff was quite aware of the position of things, and

knew that the old Marchioness herself was not to be regarded as being

on their side. "Yes, my Lady, it's quite true," said Mrs. Toff. "The

horses is ordered for next Friday." This was said on the previous

Saturday, so that considerable time was allowed for the elucidation of

the mystery. "And the things is already being packed, and her

Ladyship,--that is, if she is her Ladyship,--is taking every dress and

every rag as she brought with her."

"Where are they going to, Toff?--Not to the Square?" Now the Marquis of

Brotherton had an old family house in Cavendish Square, which, however,

had been shut up for the last ten or fifteen years, but was still known

as the family house by all the adherents of the family.

"No, my Lady. I did hear from one of the servants that they are going

to Scumberg's Hotel, in Albemarle Street."

Then Lady Sarah told the news to her mother. The poor old lady felt

that she was ill-used. She had been at any rate true to her eldest son,

had always taken his part during his absence by scolding her daughters

whenever an allusion was made to the family at Manor Cross, and had

almost worshipped him when he would come to her on Sunday. And now he

was going off to London without saying a word to her of the journey. "I

don't believe that Toff knows anything about it," she said. "Toff is a

nasty, meddling creature, and I wish she had not come here at all." The

management of the Marchioness under these circumstances was very

difficult, but Lady Sarah was a woman who allowed no difficulty to

crush her. She did not expect the world to be very easy. She went on

with her constant needle, trying to comfort her mother as she worked.

At this time the Marchioness had almost brought herself to quarrel with

her younger son, and would say very hard things about him and about the

Dean. She had more than once said that Mary was a "nasty sly thing,"

and had expressed herself as greatly aggrieved by that marriage. All

this came of course from the Marquis, and was known by her daughters to

come from the Marquis; and yet the Marchioness had never as yet been

allowed to see either her daughter-in-law or Popenjoy.

On the following day her son came to her when the three sisters were at

church in the afternoon. On these occasions he would stay for a quarter

of an hour, and would occupy the greater part of the time in abusing

the Dean and Lord George. But on this day she could not refrain from

asking him a question. "Are you going up to London, Brotherton?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because they tell me so. Sarah says that the servants are talking

about it."

"I wish Sarah had something to do better than listening to the

servants?"

"But you are going?"

"If you want to know, I believe we shall go up to town for a few days.

Popenjoy ought to see a dentist, and I want to do a few things. Why the

deuce shouldn't I go up to London as well as any one else?"

"Of course, if you wish it."

"To tell you the truth, I don't much wish anything, except to get out

of this cursed country again."

"Don't say that, Brotherton. You are an Englishman."

"I am ashamed to say I am. I wish with all my heart that I had been

born a Chinese or a Red Indian." This he said, not in furtherance of

any peculiar cosmopolitan proclivities, but because the saying of it

would vex his mother. "What am I to think of the country, when the

moment I get here I am hounded by all my own family because I choose to

live after my own fashion and not after theirs?"

"I haven't hounded you."

"No. You might possibly get more by being on good terms with me than

bad. And so might they if they knew it. I'll be even with Master George

before I've done with him; and I'll be even with that parson, too, who

still smells of the stables. I'll lead him a dance that will about ruin

him. And as for his daughter----"

"It wasn't I got up the marriage, Brotherton."

"I don't care who got it up. But I can have enquiries made as well as

another person. I am not very fond of spies; but if other people use

spies, so can I too. That young woman is no better than she ought to

be. The Dean, I daresay, knows it; but he shall know that I know it.

And Master George shall know what I think about it. As there is to be

war, he shall know what it is to have war. She has got a lover of her

own already, and everybody who knows them is talking about it."

"Oh, Brotherton!"

"And she is going in for women's rights! George has made a nice thing

of it for himself. He has to live on the Dean's money, so that he

doesn't dare to call his soul his own. And yet he's fool enough to send

a lawyer to me to tell me that my wife is a ----, and my son a ----!"

He made use of very plain language, so that the poor old woman was

horrified and aghast and dumbfounded. And as he spoke the words there

was a rage in his eyes worse than anything she had seen before. He was

standing with his back to the fire, which was burning though the

weather was warm, and the tails of his coat were hanging over his arms

as he kept his hands in his pockets. He was generally quiescent in his

moods, and apt to express his anger in sarcasm rather than in outspoken

language; but now he was so much moved that he was unable not to give

vent to his feelings. As the Marchioness looked at him, shaking with

fear, there came into her distracted mind some vague idea of Cain and

Abel, though had she collected her thoughts she would have been far

from telling herself that her eldest son was Cain. "He thinks,"

continued the Marquis, "that because I have lived abroad I shan't mind

that sort of thing. I wonder how he'll feel when I tell him the truth

about his wife. I mean to do it;--and what the Dean will think when I

use a little plain language about his daughter. I mean to do that too.

I shan't mince matters. I suppose you have heard of Captain De Baron,

mother?"

Now the Marchioness unfortunately had heard of Captain De Baron. Lady

Susanna had brought the tidings down to Cross Hall. Had Lady Susanna

really believed that her sister-in-law was wickedly entertaining a

lover, there would have been some reticence in her mode of alluding to

so dreadful a subject. The secret would have been confided to Lady

Sarah in awful conclave, and some solemn warning would have been

conveyed to Lord George, with a prayer that he would lose no time in

withdrawing the unfortunate young woman from evil influences. But Lady

Susanna had entertained no such fear. Mary was young, and foolish, and

fond of pleasure. Hard as was this woman in her manner, and

disagreeable as she made herself, yet she could, after a fashion,

sympathise with the young wife. She had spoken of Captain De Baron with

disapprobation certainly, but had not spoken of him as a fatal danger.

And she had spoken also of the Baroness Banmann and Mary's folly in

going to the Institute. The old Marchioness had heard of these things,

and now, when she heard further of them from her son, she almost

believed all that he told her. "Don't be hard upon poor George," she

said.

"I give as I get, mother. I'm not one of those who return good for

evil. Had he left me alone, I should have left him alone. As it is, I

rather think I shall be hard upon poor George. Do you suppose that all

Brotherton hasn't heard already what they are doing;--that there is a

man or a woman in the county who doesn't know that my own brother is

questioning the legitimacy of my own son? And then you ask me not to be

hard."

"It isn't my doing, Brotherton."

"But those three girls have their hand in it. That's what they call

charity! That's what they go to church for!"

All this made the poor old Marchioness very ill. Before her son left

her she was almost prostrate; and yet, to the end, he did not spare

her. But as he left he said one word which apparently was intended to

comfort her. "Perhaps Popenjoy had better be brought here for you to

see before he is taken up to town." There had been a promise made

before that the child should be brought to the hall to bless his

grandmother. On this occasion she had been too much horrified and

overcome by what had been said to urge her request; but when the

proposition was renewed by him of course she assented.

Popenjoy's visit to Cross Hall was arranged with a good deal of state,

and was made on the following Tuesday. On the Monday there came a

message to say that the child should be brought up at twelve on the

following day. The Marquis was not coming himself, and the child would

of course be inspected by all the ladies. At noon they were assembled

in the drawing-room; but they were kept there waiting for half an hour,

during which the Marchioness repeatedly expressed her conviction that

now, at the last moment, she was to be robbed of the one great desire

of her heart. "He won't let him come because he's so angry with

George," she said, sobbing.

"He wouldn't have sent a message yesterday, mother," said Lady Amelia,

"if he hadn't meant to send him."

"You are all so very unkind to him," ejaculated the Marchioness.

But at half-past twelve the cortÃ¨ge appeared. The child was brought up

in a perambulator which had at first been pushed by the under-nurse, an

Italian, and accompanied by the upper-nurse, who was of course an

Italian also. With them had been sent one of the Englishmen to show the

way. Perhaps the two women had been somewhat ill-treated, as no true

idea of the distance had been conveyed to them; and though they had now

been some weeks at Manor Cross, they had never been half so far from

the house. Of course the labour of the perambulator had soon fallen to

the man; but the two nurses, who had been forced to walk a mile, had

thought that they would never come to the end of their journey. When

they did arrive they were full of plaints, which, however, no one could

understand. But Popenjoy was at last brought into the hall.

"My darling," said the Marchioness, putting out both her arms. But

Popenjoy, though a darling, screamed frightfully beneath his heap of

clothes.

"You had better let him come into the room, mamma," said Lady Susanna.

Then the nurse carried him in, and one or two of his outer garments

were taken from him.

"Dear me, how black he is!" said Lady Susanna.

The Marchioness turned upon her daughter in great anger. "The Germains

were always dark," she said. "You're dark yourself,--quite as black as

he is. My darling!"

She made another attempt to take the boy; but the nurse with voluble

eloquence explained something which of course none of them understood.

The purport of her speech was an assurance that "Tavo," as she most

unceremoniously called the child whom no Germain thought of naming

otherwise than as Popenjoy, never would go to any "foreigner." The

nurse therefore held him up to be looked at for two minutes while he

still screamed, and then put him back into his covering raiments. "He

is very black," said Lady Sarah severely.

"So are some people's hearts," said the Marchioness with a vigour for

which her daughters had hardly given her credit. This, however, was

borne without a murmur by the three sisters.

On the Friday the whole family, including all the Italian servants,

migrated to London, and it certainly was the case that the lady took

with her all her clothes and everything that she had brought with her.

Toff had been quite right, there. And when it came to be known by the

younger ladies at Cross Hall that Toff had been right, they argued from

the fact that their brother had concealed something of the truth when

saying that he intended to go up to London only for a few days. There

had been three separate carriages, and Toff was almost sure that the

Italian lady had carried off more than she had brought with her, so

exuberant had been the luggage. It was not long before Toff effected an

entrance into the house, and brought away a report that very many

things were missing. "The two little gilt cream-jugs is gone," she said

to Lady Sarah, "and the minitshur with the pearl settings out of the

yellow drawing-room!" Lady Sarah explained that as these things were

the property of her brother, he or his wife might of course take them

away if so pleased. "She's got 'em unbeknownst to my Lord, my Lady,"

said Toff, shaking her head. "I could only just scurry through with

half an eye; but when I comes to look there will be more, I warrant

you, my Lady."

The Marquis had expressed so much vehement dislike of everything about

his English home, and it had become so generally understood that his

Italian wife hated the place, that everybody agreed that they would not

come back. Why should they? What did they get by living there? The lady

had not been outside the house a dozen times, and only twice beyond the

park gate. The Marquis took no share in any county or any country

pursuit. He went to no man's house and received no visitors. He would

not see the tenants when they came to him, and had not even returned a

visit except Mr. De Baron's. Why had he come there at all? That was the

question which all the Brothershire people asked of each other, and

which no one could answer. Mr. Price suggested that it was just

devilry,--to make everybody unhappy. Mrs. Toff thought that it was the

woman's doing,--because she wanted to steal silver mugs, miniatures,

and such like treasures. Mr. Waddy, the vicar of the parish, said that

it was "a trial," having probably some idea in his own mind that the

Marquis had been sent home by Providence as a sort of precious blister

which would purify all concerned in him by counter irritation. The old

Marchioness still conceived that it had been brought about that a

grandmother might take delight in the presence of her grandchild. Dr.

Pountner said that it was impudence. But the Dean was of opinion that

it had been deliberately planned with the view of passing off a

supposititious child upon the property and title. The Dean, however,

kept his opinion very much to himself.

Of course tidings of the migration were sent to Munster Court. Lady

Sarah wrote to her brother, and the Dean wrote to his daughter. "What

shall you do, George? Shall you go and see him?"

"I don't know what I shall do?"

"Ought I to go?"

"Certainly not. You could only call on her, and she has not even seen

my mother and sisters. When I was there he would not introduce me to

her, though he sent for the child. I suppose I had better go. I do not

want to quarrel with him if I can help it."

"You have offered to do everything together with him, if only he would

let you."

"I must say that your father has driven me on in a manner which

Brotherton would be sure to resent."

"Papa has done everything from a sense of duty, George."

"Perhaps so. I don't know how that is. It is very hard sometimes to

divide a sense of duty from one's own interest. But it has made me very

miserable,--very wretched, indeed."

"Oh George; is it my fault?"

"No; not your fault. If there is one thing worse to me than another, it

is the feeling of being divided from my own family. Brotherton has

behaved badly to me."

"Very badly."

"And yet I would give anything to be on good terms with him. I think I

shall go and call. He is at an hotel in Albemarle Street. I have done

nothing to deserve ill of him, if he knew all."

It should, of course, be understood that Lord George did not at all

know the state of his brother's mind towards him, except as it had been

exhibited at that one interview which had taken place between them at

Manor Cross. He was aware that in every conversation which he had had

with the lawyers,--both with Mr. Battle and Mr. Stokes,--he had

invariably expressed himself as desirous of establishing the legitimacy

of the boy's birth. If Mr. Stokes had repeated to his brother what he

had said, and had done him the justice of explaining that in all that

he did he was simply desirous of performing his duty to the family,

surely his brother would not be angry with him! At any rate it would

not suit him to be afraid of his brother, and he went to the hotel.

After being kept waiting in the hall for about ten minutes, the Italian

courier came down to him. The Marquis at the present moment was not

dressed, and Lord George did not like being kept waiting. Would Lord

George call at three o'clock on the following day. Lord George said

that he would, and was again at Scumberg's Hotel at three o'clock on

the next afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LORD GEORGE IS TROUBLED.

This was a day of no little importance to Lord George; so much so, that

one or two circumstances which occurred before he saw his brother at

the hotel must be explained. On that day there had come to him from the

Dean a letter written in the Dean's best humour. When the house had

been taken in Munster Court there had been a certain understanding,

hardly quite a fixed assurance, that it was to be occupied up to the

end of June, and that then Lord George and his wife should go into

Brothershire. There had been a feeling ever since the marriage that

while Mary preferred London, Lord George was wedded to the country.

They had on the whole behaved well to each other in the matter. The

husband, though he feared that his wife was surrounded by dangers, and

was well aware that he himself was dallying on the brink of a terrible

pitfall, would not urge a retreat before the time that had been named.

And she, though she had ever before her eyes the fear of the dullness

of Cross Hall, would not ask to have the time postponed. It was now the

end of May, and a certain early day in July had been fixed for their

retreat from London. Lord George had, with a good grace, promised to

spend a few days at the deanery before he went to Cross Hall, and had

given Mary permission to remain there for some little time afterwards.

Now there had come a letter from the Dean full of smiles and

pleasantness about this visit. There were tidings in it about Mary's

horse, which was still kept at the deanery, and comfortable assurances

of sweetest welcome. Not a word had been said in this letter about the

terrible family matter. Lord George, though he was at the present

moment not disposed to think in the most kindly manner of his

father-in-law, appreciated this, and had read the letter aloud to his

wife at the breakfast table with pleasant approbation. As he left the

house to go to his brother, he told her that she had better answer her

father's letter, and had explained to her where she would find it in

his dressing room.

But on the previous afternoon he had received at his club another

letter, the nature of which was not so agreeable. This letter had not

been pleasant even to himself, and certainly was not adapted to give

pleasure to his wife. After receiving it he had kept it in the close

custody of his breast-pocket; and when, as he left the house, he sent

his wife to find that which had come from her father, he certainly

thought that this prior letter was at the moment secure from all eyes

within the sanctuary of his coat. But it was otherwise. With that

negligence to which husbands are so specially subject, he had made the

Dean's letter safe next to his bosom, but had left the other epistle

unguarded. He had not only left it unguarded, but had absolutely so

put his wife on the track of it that it was impossible that she should

not read it.

Mary found the letter and did read it before she left her husband's

dressing room,--and the letter was as follows:--

"Dearest George;--" When she read the epithet, which she and she only

was entitled to use, she paused for a moment and all the blood rushed

up into her face. She had known the handwriting instantly, and at the

first shock she put the paper down upon the table. For a second there

was a feeling prompting her to read no further. But it was only for a

second. Of course she would read it. It certainly never would have

occurred to her to search her husband's clothes for letters. Up to this

moment she had never examined a document of his except at his bidding

or in compliance with his wish. She had suspected nothing, found

nothing, had entertained not even any curiosity about her husband's

affairs. But now must she not read this letter to which he himself had

directed her? Dearest George! And that in the handwriting of her

friend,--her friend!--Adelaide Houghton;--in the handwriting of the

woman to whom her husband had been attached before he had known

herself! Of course she read the letter.

"DEAREST GEORGE,--

"I break my heart when you don't come to me; for heaven's sake be

here to-morrow. Two, three, four, five, six, seven--I shall be

here any hour till you come. I don't dare to tell the man that I

am not at home to anybody else, but you must take your chance.

Nobody ever does come till after three or after six. He never

comes home till half-past seven. Oh me! what is to become of me

when you go out of town? There is nothing to live for,

nothing;--only you. Anything that you write is quite safe. Say

that you love me. A."

The letter had grieved him when he got it,--as had other letters before

that. And yet it flattered him, and the assurance of the woman's love

had in it a certain candied sweetness which prevented him from

destroying the paper instantly, as he ought to have done. Could his

wife have read all his mind in the matter her anger would have been

somewhat mollified. In spite of the candied sweetness he hated the

correspondence. It had been the woman's doing and not his. It is so

hard for a man to be a Joseph! The Potiphar's wife of the moment has

probably had some encouragement,--and after that Joseph can hardly flee

unless he be very stout indeed. This Joseph would have fled, though

after a certain fashion he liked the woman, had he been able to assure

himself that the fault had in no degree been his. But looking back, he

thought that he had encouraged her, and did not know how to fly. Of all

this Mary knew nothing. She only knew that old Mr. Houghton's wife, who

professed to be her dear friend, had written a most foul love-letter to

her husband, and that her husband had preserved it carefully, and had

then through manifest mistake delivered it over into her hands.

She read it twice, and then stood motionless for a few minutes thinking

what she would do. Her first idea was that she would tell her father.

But that she soon abandoned. She was grievously offended with her

husband; but, as she thought of it, she became aware that she did not

wish to bring on him any anger but her own. Then she thought that she

would start immediately for Berkeley Square, and say what she had to

say to Mrs. Houghton. As this idea presented itself to her, she felt

that she could say a good deal. But how would that serve her? Intense

as was her hatred at present against Adelaide, Adelaide was nothing to

her in comparison with her husband. For a moment she almost thought

that she would fly after him, knowing, as she did, that he had gone to

see his brother at Scumberg's Hotel. But at last she resolved that she

would do nothing and say nothing till he should have perceived that she

had read the letter. She would leave it open on his dressing-table so

that he might know immediately on his return what had been done. Then

it occurred to her that the servants might see the letter if she

exposed it. So she kept it in her pocket, and determined that when she

heard his knock at the door she would step into his room, and place the

letter ready for his eyes. After that she spent the whole day in

thinking of it, and read the odious words over and over again till they

were fixed in her memory. "Say that you love me!" Wretched viper;

ill-conditioned traitor! Could it be that he, her husband, loved this

woman better than her? Did not all the world know that the woman was

plain and affected, and vulgar, and odious? "Dearest George!" The woman

could not have used such language without his sanction. Oh;--what

should she do? Would it not be necessary that she should go back and

live with her father? Then she thought of Jack De Baron. They called

Jack De Baron wild; but he would not have been guilty of wickedness

such as this. She clung, however, to the resolution of putting the

letter ready for her husband, so that he should know that she had read

it before they met.

In the meantime Lord George, ignorant as yet of the storm which was

brewing at home, was shown into his brother's sitting-room. When he

entered he found there, with his brother, a lady whom he could

recognise without difficulty as his sister-in-law. She was a tall, dark

woman, as he thought very plain, but with large bright eyes and very

black hair. She was ill-dressed, in a morning wrapper, and looked to

him to be at least as old as her husband. The Marquis said something to

her in Italian which served as an introduction, but of which Lord

George could not understand a word. She curtseyed and Lord George put

out his hand. "It is perhaps as well that you should make her

acquaintance," said the Marquis. Then he again spoke in Italian, and

after a minute or two the lady withdrew. It occurred to Lord George

afterwards that the interview had certainly been arranged. Had his

brother not wished him to see the lady, the lady could have been kept

in the background here as well as at Manor Cross. "It's uncommon civil

of you to come," said the Marquis as soon as the door was closed. "What

can I do for you?"

"I did not like that you should be in London without my seeing you."

"I daresay not. I daresay not. I was very much obliged to you, you

know, for sending that lawyer down to me."

"I did not send him."

"And particularly obliged to you for introducing that other lawyer into

our family affairs."

"I would have done nothing of the kind if I could have helped it. If

you will believe me, Brotherton, my only object is to have all this so

firmly settled that there may not be need of further enquiry at a

future time."

"When I am dead?"

"When we may both be dead."

"You have ten years advantage of me. Your own chance isn't bad."

"If you will believe me----"

"But suppose I don't believe you! Suppose I think that in saying all

that you are lying like the very devil!" Lord George jumped in his

chair, almost as though he had been shot. "My dear fellow, what's the

good of this humbug? You think you've got a chance. I don't believe you

were quick enough to see it yourself, but your father-in-law has put

you up to it. He is not quite such an ass as you are; but even he is

ass enough to fancy that because I, an Englishman, have married an

Italian lady, therefore the marriage may, very likely, be good for

nothing."

"We only want proof."

"Does anybody ever come to you and ask you for proofs of your marriage

with that very nice young woman, the Dean's daughter?"

"Anybody may find them at Brotherton."

"No doubt. And I can put my hand on the proofs of my marriage when I

want to do so. In the meantime I doubt whether you can learn anything

to your own advantage by coming here."

"I didn't want to learn anything."

"If you would look after your own wife a little closer, I fancy it

would be a better employment for you. She is at present probably

amusing herself with Captain De Baron."

"That is calumny," said Lord George, rising from his chair.

"No doubt. Any imputation coming from me is calumny. But you can make

imputations as heavy and as hard as you please--and all in the way of

honour. I've no doubt you'll find her with Captain De Baron if you'll

go and look."

"I should find her doing nothing that she ought not to do," said the

husband, turning round for his hat and gloves.

"Or perhaps making a speech at the Rights of Women Institute on behalf

of that German baroness who, I'm told, is in gaol. But, George, don't

you take it too much to heart. You've got the money. When a man goes

into a stable for his wife, he can't expect much in the way of conduct

or manners. If he gets the money he ought to be contented." He had to

hear it all to the last bitter word before he could escape from the

room and make his way out into the street.

It was at this time about four o'clock, and in his agony of mind he had

turned down towards Piccadilly before he could think what he would do

with himself for the moment. Then he remembered that Berkeley Square

was close to him on the other side, and that he had been summoned there

about this hour. To give him his due, it should be owned that he had no

great desire to visit Berkeley Square in his present condition of

feeling. Since the receipt of that letter,--which was now awaiting him

at home,--he had told himself half a dozen times that he must and would

play the part of Joseph. He had so resolved when she had first spoken

to him of her passion, now some months ago; and then his resolution had

broken down merely because he had not at the moment thought any great

step to be necessary. But now it was clear that some great step was

necessary. He must make her know that it did not suit him to be called

"dearest George" by her, or to be told to declare that he loved her.

And this accusation against his wife, made in such coarse and brutal

language by his brother, softened his heart to her. Why, oh why, had he

allowed himself to be brought up to a place he hated as he had always

hated London! Of course Jack De Baron made him unhappy, though he was

at the present moment prepared to swear that his wife was as innocent

as any woman in London.

But now, as he was so near, and as his decision must be declared in

person, he might as well go to Berkeley Square. As he descended Hay

Hill he put his hand into his pocket for the lady's letter, and pulled

out that from the Dean which he had intended to leave with his wife. In

an instant he knew what he had done. He remembered it all, even to the

way in which he had made the mistake with the two letters. There could

be no doubt but that he had given Adelaide Houghton's letter into his

wife's hands, and that she had read it. At the bottom of Hill Street,

near the stables, he stopped suddenly and put his hand up to his head.

What should he do now? He certainly could not pay his visit in Berkeley

Square. He could not go and tell Mrs. Houghton that he loved her, and

certainly would not have strength to tell her that he did not love her

while suffering such agony as this. Of course he must see his wife. Of

course he must,--if I may use the slang phrase,--of course he must

"have it out with her," after some fashion, and the sooner the better.

So he turned his stops homewards across the Green Park. But, in going

homewards, he did not walk very fast.

What would she do? How would she take it? Of course women daily forgive

such offences; and he might probably, after the burst of the storm was

over, succeed in making her believe that he did in truth love her and

did not love the other woman. In his present mood he was able to assure

himself most confidently that such was the truth. He could tell himself

now that he never wished to see Adelaide Houghton again. But, before

anything of this could be achieved, he would have to own himself a

sinner before her. He would have, as it were, to grovel at her feet.

Hitherto, in all his intercourse with her, he had been masterful and

marital. He had managed up to this point so to live as to have kept in

all respects the upper hand. He had never yet been found out even in a

mistake or an indiscretion. He had never given her an opening for the

mildest finding of fault. She, no doubt, was young, and practice had

not come to her. But, as a natural consequence of this, Lord George had

hitherto felt that an almost divine superiority was demanded from him.

That sense of divine superiority must now pass away.

I do not know whether a husband's comfort is ever perfect till some

family peccadilloes have been conclusively proved against him. I am

sure that a wife's temper to him is sweetened by such evidence of human

imperfection. A woman will often take delight in being angry; will

sometimes wrap herself warm in prolonged sullenness; will frequently

revel in complaint;--but she enjoys forgiving better than aught else.

She never feels that all the due privileges of her life have been

accorded to her, till her husband shall have laid himself open to the

caresses of a pardon. Then, and not till then, he is her equal; and

equality is necessary for comfortable love. But the man, till he be

well used to it, does not like to be pardoned. He has assumed divine

superiority, and is bound to maintain it. Then, at last, he comes home

some night with a little too much wine, or he cannot pay the weekly

bills because he has lost too much money at cards, or he has got into

trouble at his office and is in doubt for a fortnight about his place,

or perhaps a letter from a lady falls into wrong hands. Then he has to

tell himself that he has been "found out." The feeling is at first very

uncomfortable; but it is, I think, a step almost necessary in reaching

true matrimonial comfort. Hunting men say that hard rain settles the

ground. A good scold with a "kiss and be friends" after it, perhaps,

does the same.

Now Lord George had been found out. He was quite sure of that. And he

had to undergo all that was unpleasant without sufficient experience to

tell him that those clouds too would pass away quickly. He still walked

homewards across St. James's Park, never stopping, but dragging himself

along slowly, and when he came to his own door he let himself in very

silently. She did not expect him so soon, and when he entered the

drawing-room was startled to see him. She had not as yet put the

letter, as she had intended, on his dressing-table, but still had it in

her pocket; nor had it occurred to her that he would as yet have known

the truth. She looked at him when he entered, but did not at first

utter a word. "Mary," he said.

"Well; is anything the matter?"

It was possible that she had not found the letter,--possible, though

very improbable. But he had brought his mind so firmly to the point of

owning what was to be owned and defending what might be defended, that

he hardly wished for escape in that direction. At any rate, he was not

prepared to avail himself of it. "Did you find the letter?" he asked.

"I found a letter."

"Well!"

"Of course I am sorry to have intruded upon so private a

correspondence. There it is." And she threw the letter to him. "Oh,

George!"

He picked up the letter, which had fallen to the ground, and, tearing

it into bits, threw the fragments into the grate. "What do you believe

about it, Mary?"

"Believe!"

"Do you think that I love any one as I love you?"

"You cannot love me at all,--unless that wicked, wretched creature is a

liar."

"Have I ever lied to you? You will believe me?"

"I do not know."

"I love no one in the world but you."

Even that almost sufficed for her. She already longed to have her arms

round his neck and to tell him that it was all forgiven;--that he at

least was forgiven. During the whole morning she had been thinking of

the angry words she would say to him, and of the still more angry words

which she would speak of that wicked, wicked viper. The former were

already forgotten; but she was not as yet inclined to refrain as to

Mrs. Houghton. "Oh, George, how could you bear such a woman as

that;--that you should let her write to you in such language? Have you

been to her?"

"What, to-day?"

"Yes, to-day."

"Certainly not. I have just come from my brother."

"You will never go into the house again! You will promise that!"

Here was made the first direct attack upon his divine superiority! Was

he, at his wife's instance, to give a pledge that he would not go into

a certain house under any circumstances? This was the process of

bringing his nose down to the ground which he had feared. Here was the

first attempt made by his wife to put her foot on his neck. "I think

that I had better tell you all that I can tell," he said.

"I only want to know that you hate her," said Mary.

"I neither hate her nor love her. I did--love her--once. You knew

that."

"I never could understand it. I never did believe that you really could

have loved her." Then she began to sob. "I shouldn't--ever--have taken

you--if--I had."

"But from the moment when I first knew you it was all changed with me."

As he said this he put out his arms to her, and she came to him. "There

has never been a moment since in which you have not had all my heart."

"But why--why--why--," she sobbed, meaning to ask how it could have

come to pass that the wicked viper could, in those circumstances, have

written such a letter as that which had fallen into her hands.

The question certainly was not unnatural. But it was a question very

difficult to answer. No man likes to say that a woman has pestered him

with unwelcome love, and certainly Lord George was not the man to make

such a boast. "Dearest Mary," he said, "on my honour as a gentleman I

am true to you."

Then she was satisfied and turned her face to him and covered him with

kisses. I think that morning did more than any day had done since their

marriage to bring about the completion of her desire to be in love with

her husband. Her heart was so softened towards him that she would not

even press a question that would pain him. She had intended sternly to

exact from him a pledge that he would not again enter the house in

Berkeley Square, but she let even that pass by because she would not

annoy him. She gathered herself up close to him on the sofa, and

drawing his arm over her shoulder, sobbed and laughed, stroking him

with her hands as she crouched against his shoulder. But yet, every now

and then, there came forth from, her some violent ebullition against

Mrs. Houghton. "Nasty creature! wicked, wicked beast! Oh, George, she

is so ugly!" And yet before this little affair, she had been quite

content that Adelaide Houghton should be her intimate friend.

It had been nearly five when Lord George reached the house, and he had

to sit enduring his wife's caresses, and listening to devotion to

himself and her abuses of Mrs. Houghton till past six. Then it struck

him that a walk by himself would be good for him. They were to dine

out, but not till eight, and there would still be time. When he

proposed it, she acceded at once. Of course she must go and dress, and

equally of course he would not, could not go to Berkeley Square now.

She thoroughly believed that he was true to her, but yet she feared the

wiles of that nasty woman. They would go to the country soon, and then

the wicked viper would not be near them.

Lord George walked across to Pall Mall, looked at an evening paper at

his club, and then walked back again. Of course it had been his object

to have a cool half hour in which to think it all over,--all that had

passed between him and his wife, and also what had passed between him

and his brother. That his wife was the dearest, sweetest woman in the

world he was quite sure. He was more than satisfied with her conduct to

him. She had exacted from him very little penitence:--had not required

to put her foot in any disagreeable way upon his neck. No doubt she

felt that his divine superiority had been vanquished, but she had

uttered no word of triumph. With all that he was content. But what was

he to do with Mrs. Houghton, as to whom he had sworn a dozen times

within the last hour that she was quite indifferent to him. He now

repeated the assertion to himself, and felt himself to be sure of the

fact. But still he was her lover. He had allowed her so to regard him,

and something must be done. She would write to him letters daily if he

did not stop it; and every such letter not shown to his wife would be a

new treason against her. This was a great trouble. And then, through it

all, those terrible words which his brother had spoken to him about

Captain De Baron rung in his ears. This afternoon had certainly

afforded no occasion to him to say a word about Captain De Baron to his

wife. When detected in his own sin he could not allude to possible

delinquencies on the other side. Nor did he think that there was any

delinquency. But CÃ¦sar said that CÃ¦sar's wife should be above

suspicion, and in that matter every man is a CÃ¦sar to himself. Lady

Susanna had spoken about this Captain, and Adelaide Houghton had said

an ill-natured word or two, and he himself had seen them walking

together. Now his brother had told him that Captain De Baron was his

wife's lover. He did not at all like Captain De Baron.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAPTAIN DE BARON.

Of course as the next day or two passed by, the condition of Mrs.

Houghton was discussed between Lord George and his wife. The affair

could not be passed over without further speech. "I am quite contented

with you," he said; "more than contented. But I suppose she does not

feel herself contented with Mr. Houghton."

"Then why did she marry him?"

"Ah;--why indeed."

"A woman ought to be contented with her husband. But at any rate what

right can she have to disturb other people? I suppose you never wrote

her a love-letter."

"Never, certainly;--since her marriage." This indeed was true. The lady

had frequently written to him, but he had warily kept his hands from

pen and ink and had answered her letters by going to her.

"And yet she could persevere! Women can do such mean things! I would

sooner have broken my heart and died than have asked a man to say that

he loved me. I don't suppose you have much to be proud of. I daresay

she has half a dozen others. You won't see her again?"

"I think I may be driven to do so. I do not wish to have to write to

her, and yet I must make her understand that all this is to be over."

"She'll understand that fast enough when she does not see you. It would

have served her right to have sent that letter to her husband."

"That would have been cruel, Mary."

"I didn't do it. I thought of doing it, and wouldn't do it. But it

would have served her right. I suppose she was always writing."

"She had written, but not quite like that," said Lord George. He was

not altogether comfortable during this conversation.

"She writes lots of such letters no doubt. You do then mean to go there

again?"

"I think so. Of course I do not look upon her as being so utterly a

castaway as you do."

"I believe her to be a heartless, vile, intriguing woman, who married

an old man without caring a straw for him, and who doesn't care how

miserable she makes other people. And I think she is very--very ugly.

She paints frightfully. Anybody can see it. And as for false

hair,--why, it's nearly all false." Lady George certainly did not

paint, and had not a shred of false hair about her. "Oh, George, if you

do go, do be firm! You will be firm;--will you not?"

"I shall go simply that this annoyance may be at an end."

"Of course you will tell her that I will never speak to her again. How

could I? You would not wish it;--would you?" In answer to this there

was nothing for him to say. He would have wished that a certain amount

of half friendly intercourse should be carried on; but he could not ask

her to do this. After a time he might perhaps be able to press on her

the advantage of avoiding a scandal, but as yet he could not do even

that. He had achieved more than he had a right to expect in obtaining

her permission to call once more in Berkeley Square himself. After that

they would soon be going down to Brotherton, and when they were there

things might be allowed to settle themselves. Then she asked him

another question. "You don't object to my going to Mrs. Jones' party on

Thursday?"

The question was very sudden, so that he was almost startled. "It is a

dance, I suppose."

"Oh yes, a dance of course."

"No;--I have no objection."

She had meant to ask him to reconsider his verdict against round

dances, but she could hardly do so at this moment. She could not take

advantage of her present strength to extract from him a privilege which

under other circumstances he had denied to her. Were she to do so it

would be as much as to declare that she meant to waltz because he had

amused himself with Mrs. Houghton. Her mind was not at all that way

given. But she did entertain an idea that something more of freedom

should be awarded to her because her husband had given her cause of

offence and had been forgiven. While he was still strong with that

divine superiority which she had attributed to him, she had almost

acknowledged to herself that he had a right to demand that she should

be dull and decorous. But now that she had found him to be in the

receipt of clandestine love-letters, it did seem that she might allow

herself a little liberty. She had forgiven him freely. She had really

believed that in spite of the letter she herself was the woman he

loved. She had said something to herself about men amusing themselves,

and had told herself that though no woman could have written such a

letter as that without disgracing herself altogether, a man might

receive it and even keep it in his pocket without meaning very much

harm. But the accident must, she thought, be held to absolve her from

some part of the strictness of her obedience. She almost thought that

she would waltz at Mrs. Jones's ball; perhaps not with Captain De

Baron; perhaps not with much energy or with full enjoyment; but still

sufficiently to disenthral herself. If possible she would say a word to

her husband first. They were both going to a rather crowded affair at

Lady Brabazon's before the night of Mrs. Jones's party. They had agreed

that they would do little more than shew themselves there. He was

obliged to go to this special place and he hated staying. But even at

Lady Brabazon's she might find an opportunity of saying what she wished

to say.

On that day she took him out in her brougham, and on her return home

was alone all the afternoon till about five; and then who should come

to her but Captain De Baron. No doubt they two had become very

intimate. She could not at all have defined her reasons for liking him.

She was quite sure of one thing,--she was not in the least in love with

him. But he was always gay, always good humoured, always had plenty to

say. He was the source of all the fun that ever came in her way; and

fun was very dear to her. He was nice-looking and manly, and gentle

withal. Why should she not have her friend? He would not write

abominable letters and ask her to say that she loved him! And yet she

was aware that there was a danger. She knew that her husband was a

little jealous. She knew that Augusta Mildmay was frightfully jealous.

That odious creature Mrs. Houghton had made ever so many nasty little

allusions to her and Jack. When his name was announced she almost

wished that he had not come; but yet she received him very pleasantly.

He immediately began about the Baroness Banmann. The Baroness had on

the previous evening made her way on to the platform at the

Disabilities when Dr. Fleabody was lecturing, and Lady Selina was

presiding and had, to use Jack's own words, "Kicked up the most

delightful bobbery that had ever been witnessed! She bundled poor old

Lady Selina out of the chair."

"Nonsense!"

"So I am told;--took the chair by the back and hoisted her out."

"Didn't they send for the police?"

"I suppose they did at last; but the American doctor was too many for

her. The Baroness strove to address the meeting; but Olivia Q. Fleabody

has become a favourite, and carried the day. I am told that at last the

bald-headed old gentleman took the Baroness home in a cab. I'd have

given a five-pound note to be there. I think I must go some night and

hear the Doctor."

"I wouldn't go again for anything."

"You women are all so jealous of each other. Poor Lady Selina! I'm told

she was very much shaken."

"How did you hear it all?"

"From Aunt Ju," said the Captain. "Aunt Ju was there, of course. The

Baroness tried to fly into Aunt Ju's arms, but Aunt Ju seems to have

retired."

Then the quarrel must have been made up between Captain De Baron and

Miss Mildmay. That was the idea which at once came into Mary's head. He

could hardly have seen Aunt Ju without seeing her niece at the same

time. Perhaps it was all settled. Perhaps, after all, they would be

married. It would be a pity, because she was not half nice enough for

him. And then Mary doubted whether Captain De Baron as a married man

would be nearly so pleasant as in his present condition. "I hope Miss

Mildmay is none the worse," she said.

"A little shaken in her nerves."

"Was--Augusta Mildmay there?"

"Oh dear no. It is quite out of her line. She is not at all disposed to

lay aside the feeblenesses of her sex and go into one of the learned

professions. By the bye, I am afraid you and she are not very good

friends."

"What makes you say that, Captain De Baron?"

"But are you?"

"I don't know why you should enquire."

"It is natural to wish that one's own friends should be friends."

"Has Miss Mildmay said--anything about--me?"

"Not a word;--nor you about her. And, therefore, I know that something

is wrong."

"The last time I saw her I did not think that Miss Mildmay was very

happy," said Mary, in a low voice.

"Did she complain to you?" Mary had no answer ready for this question.

She could not tell a lie easily, nor could she acknowledge the

complaint which the lady had made, and had made so loudly. "I suppose

she did complain," he said, "and I suppose I know the nature of her

complaint."

"I cannot tell;--though, of course, it was nothing to me."

"It is very much to me, though. I wish, Lady George, you could bring

yourself to tell me the truth." He paused, but she did not speak. "If

it were as I fear, you must know how much I am implicated. I would not

for the world that you should think I am behaving badly."

"You should not permit her to think so, Captain De Baron."

"She doesn't think so. She can't think so. I am not going to say a word

against her. She and I have been dear friends, and there is no

one,--hardly any one,--for whom I have a greater regard. But I do

protest to you, Lady George, that I have never spoken an untrue word to

Augusta Mildmay in my life."

"I have not accused you."

"But has she? Of course it is a kind of thing that a man cannot talk

about without great difficulty."

"Is it not a thing that a man should not talk about at all?"

"That is severe, Lady George;--much more severe than I should have

expected from your usual good nature. Had you told me that nothing had

been said to you, there would have been an end of it. But I cannot bear

to think that you should have been told that I had behaved badly, and

that I should be unable to vindicate myself."

"Have you not been engaged to marry Miss Mildmay?"

"Never."

"Then why did you allow yourself to become so--so much to her?"

"Because I liked her. Because we were thrown together. Because the

chances of things would have it so. Don't you know that that kind of

thing is occurring every day? Of course, if a man were made up of

wisdom and prudence and virtue and self-denial, this kind of thing

wouldn't occur. But I don't think the world would be pleasanter if men

were like that. Adelaide Houghton is Miss Mildmay's most intimate

friend, and Adelaide has always known that I couldn't marry." As soon

as Mrs. Houghton's name was mentioned a dark frown came across Lady

George's brow. Captain De Baron saw it, but did not as yet know

anything of its true cause.

"Of course I am not going to judge between you," said Lady George, very

gravely.

"But I want you to judge me. I want you of all the world to feel that I

have not been a liar and a blackguard."

"Captain De Baron! how can you use such language?"

"Because I feel this very acutely. I do believe that Miss Mildmay has

accused me to you. I do not wish to say a word against her. I would do

anything in the world to protect her from the ill words of others. But

I cannot bear that your mind should be poisoned against me. Will you

believe me when I tell you that I have never said a word to Miss

Mildmay which could possibly be taken as an offer of marriage?"

"I had rather give no opinion."

"Will you ask Adelaide?"

"No; certainly not." This she said with so much vehemence that he was

thoroughly startled. "Mrs. Houghton is not among the number of my

acquaintances."

"Why not? What is the matter?"

"I can give no explanation, and I had rather that no questions should

be asked. But so it is."

"Has she offended Lord George?"

"Oh dear no; that is to say I cannot tell you anything more about it.

You will never see me in Berkeley Square again. And now, pray say no

more about it."

"Poor Adelaide. Well; it does seem terrible that there should be such

misunderstandings. She knows nothing about it. I was with her this

morning, and she was speaking of you with the greatest affection." Mary

struggled hard to appear indifferent to all this, but struggled in

vain. She could not restrain herself from displaying her feeling. "May

I not ask any further questions?"

"No, Captain De Baron."

"Nor hope that I may be a peacemaker between you?"

"Certainly not. I wish you wouldn't talk about it any more."

"I certainly will not if it offends you. I would not offend you for all

the world. When you came up to town, Lady George, a few months ago,

there were three or four of us that soon became such excellent friends!

And now it seems that everything has gone wrong. I hope we need not

quarrel--you and I?"

"I know no reason why we should."

"I have liked you so much. I am sure you have known that. Sometimes one

does come across a person that one really likes; but it is so seldom."

"I try to like everybody," she said.

"I don't do that. I fear that at first starting I try to dislike

everybody. I think it is natural to hate people the first time you see

them."

"Did you hate me?" she asked, laughing.

"Oh, horribly,--for two minutes. Then you laughed, or cried, or

sneezed, or did something in a manner that I liked, and I saw at once

that you were the most charming human being in the world."

When a young man tells a young woman that she is the most charming

human being in the world, he is certainly using peculiar language. In

most cases the young man would be supposed to be making love to the

young woman. Mary, however, knew very well that Captain De Baron was

not making love to her. There seemed to be an understanding that all

manner of things should be said between them, and that yet they should

mean nothing. But, nevertheless, she felt that the language which this

man had used to her would be offensive to her husband if he knew that

it had been used when they two were alone together. Had it been said

before a room-full of people it would not have mattered. And yet she

could not rebuke him. She could not even look displeased. She had

believed all that he had said to her about Augusta Mildmay, and was

glad to believe it. She liked him so much, that she would have spoken

to him as to a brother of the nature of her quarrel with Mrs. Houghton,

only that, even to a brother, she would not have mentioned her

husband's folly. When he spoke of her crying, or laughing, or sneezing,

she liked the little attempt at drollery. She liked to know that he had

found her charming. Where is the woman who does not wish to charm, and

is not proud to think that she has succeeded with those whom she most

likes? She could not rebuke him. She could not even avoid letting him

see that she was pleased. "You have a dozen human beings in the world

who are the most delightful," she said, "and another dozen who are the

most odious."

"Quite a dozen who are the most odious, but only one, Lady George, who

is the most delightful." He had hardly said this when the door opened

and Lord George entered the room. Lord George was not a clever

hypocrite. If he disliked a person he soon showed his dislike in his

manner. It was very clear to both of them on the present occasion that

he did not like the presence of Captain De Baron. He looked very

gloomy,--almost angry, and after speaking hardly more than a single

word to his wife's guest, he stood silent and awkward, leaning against

the mantel-piece. "What do you think Captain De Baron tells me?" Mary

said, trying, but not very successfully, to speak with natural ease.

"I don't in the least know."

"There has been such a scene at the Women's Institute! That Baroness

made a dreadful attack on poor Lady Selina Protest."

"She and the American female doctor were talking against each other

from the same platform, at the same time," said De Baron.

"Very disgraceful!" said Lord George. "But then the whole thing is

disgraceful, and always was. I should think Lord Plausible must be

thoroughly ashamed of his sister." Lady Selina was sister to the Earl

of Plausible, but, as all the world knew, was not on speaking terms

with her brother.

"I suppose that unfortunate German lady will be put in prison," said

Lady George.

"I only trust she may never be able to put her foot into your house

again."

Then there was a pause. He was apparently so cross that conversation

seemed to be impossible. The Captain would have gone away at once had

he been able to escape suddenly. But there are times when it is very

hard to get out of a room, at which a sudden retreat would imply a

conviction that something was wrong. It seemed to him that for her sake

he was bound to remain a few minutes longer. "When do you go down to

Brothershire?" he asked.

"About the 7th of July," said Mary.

"Or probably earlier," said Lord George;--at which his wife looked up

at him, but without making any remark.

"I shall be down at my cousin's place some day in August," De Baron

said. Lord George frowned more heavily than ever. "Mr. De Baron is

going to have a large gathering of people about the end of the month."

"Oh, indeed," said Mary.

"The Houghtons will be there." Then Mary also frowned. "And I have an

idea that your brother, Lord George, has half promised to be one of the

party."

"I know nothing at all about it."

"My cousin was up in town yesterday with the Houghtons. Good-bye, Lady

George; I shan't be at Lady Brabazon's, because she has forgotten to

invite me, but I suppose I shall see you at Mrs. Montacute Jones'?"

"I shall certainly be at Mrs. Montacute Jones'," said Mary, trying to

speak cheerfully.

The bell was rang and the door was closed, and then the husband and

wife were together. "A dreadful communication has just been made to

me," said Lord George in his most solemn and funereal voice;--"a most

dreadful communication!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DREADFUL COMMUNICATION.

"A most dreadful communication!" There was something in Lord George's

voice as he uttered these words which so frightened his wife that she

became at the moment quite pale. She was sure, almost sure from his

countenance that the dreadful communication had some reference to

herself. Had any great calamity happened in regard to his own family he

would not have looked at her as he was now looking. And yet she could

not imagine what might be the nature of the communication. "Has

anything happened at Manor Cross?" she asked.

"It is not about Manor Cross."

"Or your brother?"

"It is not about my brother; it does not in any way concern my family.

It is about you."

"About me! Oh, George! do not look at me like that. What is it?"

He was very slow in the telling of the story; slow even in beginning to

tell it; indeed, he hardly knew how to begin. "You know Miss Augusta

Mildmay?" he asked.

Then she understood it all. She might have told him that he could spare

himself all further trouble in telling, only that to do so would hardly

have suited her purpose; therefore she had to listen to the story, very

slowly told. Miss Augusta Mildmay had written to him begging him to

come to her. He, very much astonished at such a request, had

nevertheless obeyed it; and Augusta Mildmay had assured him that his

wife, by wicked wiles and lures, was interfering between her and her

affianced lover Captain De Baron. Mary sat patiently till she had heard

it all,--sat almost without speaking a word; but there was a stern look

on her face which he had never seen there before. Still he went on with

his determined purpose. "These are the kind of things which are being

repeated of you," he said at last. "Susanna made the same complaint.

And it had reached Brotherton's ears. He spoke to me of it in

frightfully strong language. And now this young lady tells me that you

are destroying her happiness."

"Well!"

"You can't suppose that I can hear all this without uneasiness."

"Do you believe it?"

"I do not know what to believe. I am driven mad."

"If you believe it, George, if you believe a word of it, I will go away

from you. I will go back to papa. I will not stay with you to be

doubted."

"That is nonsense."

"It shall not be nonsense. I will not live to hear myself accused by my

husband as to another man. Wicked young woman! Oh, what women are and

what they can do! She has never been engaged to Captain De Baron."

"What is that to you or me?"

"Nothing, if you had not told me that I stood in her way."

"It is not her engagement, or her hopes, whether ill or well founded,

or his treachery to a lady, that concerns you and me, Mary; but that

she should send for me and tell me to my face that you are the cause of

her unhappiness. Why should she pitch upon you?"

"How can I say? Because she is very wicked."

"And why should Susanna feel herself obliged to caution me as to this

Captain De Baron? She had no motive. She is not wicked."

"I don't know that."

"And why should my brother tell me that all the world is speaking of

your conduct with this very man?"

"Because he is your bitterest enemy. George, do you believe it?"

"And why, when I come home with all this heavy on my heart, do I find

this very man closeted with you?"

"Closeted with me!"

"You were alone with him."

"Alone with him! Of course I am alone with anyone who calls. Would you

like me to tell the servant that Captain De Baron is to be

excluded,--so that all the world might know that you are jealous?"

"He must be excluded."

"Then you must do it. But it will be unnecessary. As you believe all

this, I will tell my father everything and will go back to him. I will

not live here, George, to be so suspected that the very servants have

to be told that I am not to be allowed to see one special man."

"No; you will go down into the country with me."

"I will not stay in the same house with you," she said, jumping up from

her seat, "unless you tell me that you suspect me of nothing--not even

of an impropriety. You may lock me up, but you cannot hinder me from

writing to my father."

"I trust you will do nothing of the kind."

"Not tell him! Who then is to be my friend if you turn against me? Am I

to be all alone among a set of people who think nothing but ill of me?"

"I am to be your friend."

"But you think ill of me."

"I have not said so, Mary."

"Then say at once that you think no ill, and do not threaten me that I

am to be taken into the country for protection. And when you tell me of

the bold-faced villany of that young woman, speak of her with the

disgust that she deserves; and say that your sister Susanna is

suspicious and given to evil thoughts; and declare your brother to be a

wicked slanderer if he has said a word against the honour of your wife.

Then I shall know that you think no ill of me; and then I shall know

that I may lean upon you as my real friend."

Her eyes flashed fire as she spoke, and he was silenced for the moment

by an impetuosity and a passion which he had not at all expected. He

was not quite disposed to yield to her, to assure her of his conviction

that those to whom she alluded were all wrong, and that she was all

right; but yet he was beginning to wish for peace. That Captain De

Baron was a pestilential young man whose very business it was to bring

unhappiness into families, he did believe; and he feared also that his

wife had allowed herself to fall into an indiscreet intimacy with this

destroyer of women's characters. Then there was that feeling of CÃ¦sar's

wife strong within his bosom, which he could, perhaps, have more fully

explained to her but for that unfortunate letter from Mrs. Houghton.

Any fault, however, of that kind on his part was, in his estimation,

nothing to a fault on the part of his wife. She, when once assured

that he was indifferent about Mrs. Houghton, would find no cause for

unhappiness in the matter. But what would all the world be to him if

his wife were talked about commonly in connection with another man?

That she should not absolutely be a castaway would not save him from a

perpetual agony which he would find to be altogether unendurable. He

was, he was sure, quite right as to that theory about CÃ¦sar's wife,

even though, from the unfortunate position of circumstances, he could

not dilate upon it at the present moment. "I think," he said, after a

pause, "that you will allow that you had better drop this gentleman's

acquaintance."

"I will allow nothing of the kind, George. I will allow nothing that

can imply the slightest stain upon my name or upon your honour. Captain

De Baron is my friend. I like him very much. A great many people know

how intimate we are. They shall never be taught to suppose that there

was anything wrong in that intimacy. They shall never, at any rate, be

taught so by anything that I will do. I will admit nothing. I will do

nothing myself to show that I am ashamed. Of course you can take me

into the country; of course you can lock me up if you like; of course

you can tell all your friends that I have misbehaved myself; you can

listen to calumny against me from everybody; but if you do I will have

one friend to protect me, and I will tell papa everything." Then she

walked away to the door as though she were leaving the room.

"Stop a moment," he said. Then she stood with her hand still on the

lock, as though intending to stay merely till he should have spoken

some last word to her. He was greatly surprised by her strength and

resolution, and now hardly knew what more to say to her. He could not

beg her pardon for his suspicion; he could not tell her that she was

right; and yet he found it impossible to assert that she was wrong. "I

do not think that passion will do any good," he said.

"I do not know what will do any good. I know what I feel."

"It will do good if you will allow me to advise you."

"What is your advice?"

"To come down to the country as soon as possible, and to avoid, as far

as possible, seeing Captain De Baron before you go."

"That would be running away from Captain De Baron. I am to meet him at

Mrs. Montacute Jones' ball."

"Send an excuse to Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"You may do so, George, if you like. I will not. If I am told by you

that I am not to meet this man, of course I shall obey you; but I shall

consider myself to have been insulted,--to have been insulted by you."

As she said this his brow became very black. "Yes, by you. You ought to

defend me from these people who tell stories about me, and not accuse

me yourself. I cannot and will not live with you if you think evil of

me." Then she opened the door, and slowly left the room. He would have

said more had he known what to say. But her words came more fluently

than his, and he was dumbfounded by her volubility; yet he was as much

convinced as ever that it was his duty to save her from the ill repute

which would fall upon her from further intimacy with this Captain. He

could, of course, take her into the country to-morrow, if he chose to

do so; but he could not hinder her from writing to the Dean; he could

not debar her from pen and ink and the use of the post-office; nor

could he very well forbid her to see her father.

Of course if she did complain to the Dean she would tell the Dean

everything. So he told himself. Now, when a man assumes the divine

superiority of an all-governing husband his own hands should be quite

clean. Lord George's hands were by no means clean. It was not, perhaps,

his own fault that they were dirty. He was able at any rate to tell

himself that the fault had not been his. But there was that undoubted

love-letter from Mrs. Houghton. If the Dean were to question him about

that he could not lie. And though he would assure himself that the

fault had all been with the lady, he could not excuse himself by that

argument in discussing the matter with the Dean. He was in such trouble

that he feared to drive his wife to retaliation; and yet he must do his

duty. His honour and her honour must be his first consideration. If she

would only promise him not willingly to see Captain De Baron there

should be an end of it, and he would allow her to stay the allotted

time in London; but if she would not do this he thought that he must

face the Dean and all his terrors.

But he hardly knew his wife--was hardly aware of the nature of her

feelings. When she spoke of appealing to her father, no idea crossed

her mind of complaining of her husband's infidelity. She would seek

protection for herself, and would be loud enough in protesting against

the slanderous tongues of those who had injured her. She would wage war

to the knife against the Marquis, and against Lady Susanna, and against

Augusta Mildmay, and would call upon her father to assist her in that

warfare; but she would not condescend to allude to a circumstance

which, if it were an offence against her, she had pardoned, but as to

which, in her heart of hearts, she believed her husband to be, if not

innocent, at least not very guilty. She despised Adelaide Houghton too

much to think that her husband had really loved such a woman, and was

too confident in herself to doubt his love for many minutes. She could

hate Adelaide Houghton for making the attempt, and yet could believe

that the attempt had been futile.

Nevertheless when she was alone she thought much of Mrs. Houghton's

letter. Throughout her interview with her husband she had thought of

it, but had determined from the very first that she would not cast it

in his teeth. She would do nothing ungenerous. But was it not singular

that he should be able to upbraid her for her conduct, for conduct in

which there had been no trespass, knowing as he must have known,

feeling as he must have felt, that every word of that letter was

dwelling in her memory! He had, at any rate, intended that the

abominable correspondence should be clandestine. He must have been

sadly weak, to make the least of it, to have admitted such a

correspondence. "Pray tell me that you love me!" That had been the

language addressed to him only a few days since by a married lady to

whom he had once made an offer of marriage; and yet he could now come

and trample on her as though his marital superiority had all the

divinity of snow-white purity. This was absolute tyranny. But yet in

complaining to her father of his tyranny she would say nothing of

Adelaide Houghton. Of the accusations made against herself she would

certainly tell her father, unless they were withdrawn as far as her own

husband could withdraw them. For an hour after leaving him her passion

still sustained her. Was this to be her reward for all her endeavours

to become a loving wife?

They were engaged to dine that evening with a certain Mrs. Patmore

Green, who had herself been a Germain, and who had been first cousin to

the late marquis. Mary came down dressed into the drawing room at the

proper time, not having spoken another word to her husband, and there

she found him also dressed. She had schooled herself to show no sign

either of anger or regret, and as she entered the room said some

indifferent words about the brougham. He still looked as dark as a

thunder-cloud, but he rang the bell and asked the servant a question.

The brougham was there, and away they went to Mrs. Patmore Green's. She

spoke half-a-dozen words on the way, but he hardly answered her. She

knew that he would not do so, being aware that it was not within his

power to rise above the feelings of the moment. But she exerted herself

so that he might know that she did not mean to display her ill-humour

at Mrs. Patmore Green's house.

Lady Brabazon, whose sister had married a Germain, was there, and a

Colonel Ansley, who was a nephew of Lady Brotherton's; so that the

party was very much a Germain party. All these people had been a good

deal exercised of late on the great Popenjoy question. So immense is

the power of possession that the Marquis, on his arrival in town, had

been asked to all the Germain houses in spite of his sins, and had been

visited with considerable family affection and regard; for was he not

the head of them all? But he had not received these offers graciously,

and now the current of Germain opinion was running against him. Of the

general propriety of Lord George's conduct ever since his birth there

had never been a doubt, and the Greens and Brabazons and Ansleys were

gradually coming round to the opinion that he was right to make

enquiries as to the little Popenjoy's antecedents. They had all taken

kindly to Mary, though they were, perhaps, beginning to think that she

was a little too frivolous, too fond of pleasure for Lord George. Mrs.

Patmore Green, who was the wife of a very rich man, and the mother of a

very large family, and altogether a very worthy woman, almost at once

began to whisper to Mary--"Well, my dear, what news from Italy?"

"I never hear anything about it, Mrs. Green," said Mary, with a laugh.

"And yet the Dean is so eager, Lady George!"

"I won't let papa talk to me about it. Lord Brotherton is quite welcome

to his wife and his son, and everything else for me--only I do wish he

would have remained away."

"I think we all wish that, my dear."

Mr. Patmore Green, and Colonel Ansley, and Lady Brabazon all spoke a

word or two in the course of the evening to Lord George on the same

subject, but he would only shake his head and say nothing. At that time

this affair of his wife's was nearer to him and more burdensome to him

than even the Popenjoy question. He could not rid himself of this new

trouble even for a moment. He was still thinking of it when all the

enquiries about Popenjoy were being made. What did it matter to him how

that matter should be settled, if all the happiness of his life were to

be dispelled by this terrible domestic affliction. "I am afraid this

quarrel with his brother will be too much for Lord George," said Mr.

Patmore Green to his wife, when the company were gone. "He was not able

to say a word the whole evening."

"And I never knew her to be more pleasant," said Mrs. Patmore Green.

"She doesn't seem to care about it the least in the world." The husband

and wife did not speak a word to each other as they went home in the

brougham. Mary had done her duty by sustaining herself in public, but

was not willing to let him think that she had as yet forgiven the

cruelty of his suspicions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I DENY IT."

During the whole of that night Lord George lay suffering from his

troubles, and his wife lay thinking about them. Though the matter

affected her future life almost more materially than his, she had the

better courage to maintain her, and a more sustained conviction. It

might be that she would have to leave her home and go back to the

deanery, and in that there would be utter ruin to her happiness. Let

the result, however, be as it would, she could never own herself to

have been one tittle astray, and she was quite sure that her father

would support her in that position. The old 'ruat coelum' feeling was

strong within her. She would do anything she could for her husband

short of admitting, by any faintest concession, that she had been wrong

in reference to Captain De Baron. She would talk to him, coax him,

implore him, reason with him, forgive him, love him, and caress him.

She would try to be gentle with him this coming morning. But if he were

obdurate in blaming her, she would stand on her own innocence and fight

to the last gasp. He was supported by no such spirit of pugnacity. He

felt it to be his duty to withdraw his wife from the evil influence of

this man's attractions, but felt, at the same time, that he might

possibly lack the strength to do so. And then, what is the good of

withdrawing a wife, if the wife thinks that she ought not to be

withdrawn? There are sins as to which there is no satisfaction in

visiting the results with penalties. The sin is in the mind, or in the

heart, and is complete in its enormity, even though there be no result.

He was miserable because she had not at once acknowledged that she

never ought to see this man again, as soon as she had heard the horrors

which her husband had told her. "George," she said to him at breakfast,

the next morning, "do not let us go on in this way together."

"In what way?"

"Not speaking to each other,--condemning each other."

"I have not condemned you, and I don't know why you should condemn me."

"Because I think that you suspect me without a cause."

"I only tell you what people say!"

"If people told me bad things of you, George,--that you were this or

that, or the other, should I believe them?"

"A woman's name is everything."

"Then do you protect my name. But I deny it. Her name should be as

nothing when compared with her conduct. I don't like to be evil spoken

of, but I can bear that, or anything else, if you do not think evil of

me,--you and papa." This reference to her father brought back the black

cloud which her previous words had tended to dispel. "Tell me that you

do not suspect me."

"I never said that I suspected you of anything."

"Say that you are sure that in regard to this man I never said, or did,

or thought anything that was wrong. Come, George, have I not a right to

expect that from you?" She had come round the table and was standing

over him, touching his shoulder.

"Even then it would be better that you should go away from him."

"No!"

"I say that it would be better, Mary."

"And I say that it would be worse,--much worse. What? Will you bid your

wife make so much of any man as to run away from him? Will you let the

world say that you think that I cannot be safe in his company? I will

not consent to that, George. The running away shall not be mine. Of

course you can take me away, if you please, but I shall feel----"

"Well!"

"You know what I shall feel. I told you last night."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, after a pause.

"Nothing."

"I am to hear these stories and not even to tell you that I have heard

them?"

"I did not say that, George. I suppose it is better that you should

tell me. But I think you should say at the same time that you know them

to be false." Even though they were false, there was that doctrine of

CÃ¦sar's wife which she would not understand! "I think I should be told,

and then left to regulate my own ways accordingly." This was mutinously

imperious, and yet he did not quite know how to convince her of her

mutiny. Through it all he was cowed by the remembrance of that

love-letter, which, of course, was in her mind, but which she was

either too generous or too wise to mention. He almost began to think

that it was wisdom rather than generosity, feeling himself to be more

cowed by her reticence than he would have been by her speech.

"You imagine, then, that a husband should never interfere."

"Not to protect a wife from that from which she is bound to protect

herself. If he has to do so, she is not the worth the trouble, and he

had better get rid of her. It is like preventing a man from drinking by

locking up the wine."

"That has to be done sometimes."

"It sha'n't be done to me, George. You must either trust me, or we must

part."

"I do trust you," he said, at last.

"Then let there be an end of all this trouble. Tell Susanna that you

trust me. For your brother and that disappointed young woman I care

nothing. But if I am to spend my time at Cross Hall, whatever they may

think, I should not wish them to believe that you thought evil of me.

And, George, don't suppose that because I say that I will not run away

from Captain De Baron, all this will go for nothing with me. I will not

avoid Captain De Baron, but I will be careful to give no cause for

ill-natured words." Then she put her arm round his neck, and kissed

him, and had conquered him.

When he went away from the house he had another great trouble before

him. He had not seen Mrs. Houghton as yet, since his wife had found

that love-letter; but she had written to him often. She had sent notes

to his club almost wild with love and anger,--with that affectation of

love and anger which some women know how to assume, and which so few

men know how to withstand. It was not taken to be quite real, even by

Lord George; and yet he could not withstand it. Mrs. Houghton, who

understood the world thoroughly, had become quite convinced that Lady

George had quarrelled with her. The two women had been very intimate

ever since Lady George had been in town, and now for the last few days

they had not seen each other. Mrs. Houghton had called twice, and had

been refused. Then she had written, and had received no answer. She

knew then that Mary had discovered something, and, of course,

attributed her lover's absence to the wife's influence. But it did not

occur to her that she should, on this account, give up her intercourse

with Lord George. Scenes, quarrels, reconciliations, troubles,

recriminations, jealousies, resolves, petty triumphs, and the general

upsetting of the happiness of other people,--these were to her the

sweets of what she called a passion. To give it all up because her

lover's wife had found her out, and because her lover was in trouble,

would be to abandon her love just when it was producing the desired

fruit. She wrote short letters and long letters, angry letters, and

most affectionate letters to Lord George at his club, entreating him to

come to her, and almost driving him out of his wits. He had, from the

first, determined that he would go to her. He had even received his

wife's sanction for doing so; but, knowing how difficult it would be to

conduct such an interview, had, hitherto, put off the evil hour. But

now a day and an hour had been fixed, and the day and the hour had

come. The hour had very nearly come. When he left his house there was

still time for him to sit for awhile at his club, and think what he

would say to this woman.

He wished to do what was right. There was not a man in England less

likely to have intended to amuse himself with a second love within

twelve months of his marriage than Lord George Germain. He had never

been a Lothario,--had never thought himself to be gifted in that way.

In the first years of his manhood, when he had been shut up at Manor

Cross, looking after his mother's limited means, with a full conviction

that it was his duty to sacrifice himself to her convenience, he had

been apt to tell himself that he was one of those men who have to go

through life without marrying--or loving. Though strikingly handsome,

he had never known himself to be handsome. He had never thought himself

to be clever, or bright, or agreeable. High birth had been given to

him, and a sense of honour. Of those gifts he had been well aware and

proud enough, but had taken credit to himself for nothing else. Then

had come that startling episode of his life in which he had fallen in

love with Adelaide De Baron, and then the fact of his marriage with

Mary Lovelace. Looking back at it now, he could hardly understand how

it had happened that he had either fallen in love or married. He

certainly was not now the least in love with Mrs. Houghton. And, though

he did love his wife dearly, though the more he saw of her the more he

admired her, yet his marriage had not made him happy. He had to live on

her money, which galled him, and to be assisted by the Dean's money,

which was wormwood to him. And he found himself to be driven whither

he did not wish to go, and to be brought into perils from which his

experience did not suffice to extricate him. He already repented the

step he had taken in regard to his brother, knowing that it was the

Dean who had done it, and not he himself. Had he not married, he might

well have left the battle to be fought in after years,--when his

brother should be dead, and very probably he himself also.

He was aware that he must be very firm with Mrs. Houghton. Come what

might he must give her to understand quite clearly that all love-making

must be over between them. The horrors of such a condition of things

had been made much clearer to him than before by his own anxiety in

reference to Captain De Baron. But he knew himself to be too

soft-hearted for such firmness. If he could send some one else, how

much better it would be! But, alas! this was a piece of work which no

deputy could do for him. Nor could a letter serve as a deputy. Let him

write as carefully as he might, he must say things which would condemn

him utterly were they to find their way into Mr. Houghton's hands. One

terrible letter had gone astray, and why not another?

She had told him to be in Berkeley Square at two, and he was there very

punctually. He would at the moment have given much to find the house

full of people; but she was quite alone. He had thought that she would

receive him with a storm of tears, but when he entered she was radiant

with smiles. Then he remembered how on a former occasion she had

deceived him, making him believe that all her lures to him meant little

or nothing just when he had determined to repudiate them because he had

feared that they meant so much. He must not allow himself to be won in

that way again. He must be firm, even though she smiled. "What is all

this about?" she said in an affected whisper as soon as the door was

closed. He looked very grave and shook his head. "'Thou canst not say I

did it. Never shake thy gory locks at me.' That wife of yours has found

out something, and has found it out from you, my Lord."

"Yes, indeed."

"What has she found out?"

"She read a letter to me which you sent to the club."

"Then I think it very indecent behaviour on her part. Does she search

her husband's correspondence? I don't condescend to do that sort of

thing."

"It was my fault. I put it into her hand by mistake. But that does not

matter."

"Not matter! It matters very much to me, I think. Not that I care. She

cannot hurt me. But, George, was not that careless--very careless; so

careless as to be--unkind?"

"Of course it was careless."

"And ought you not to think more of me than that? Have you not done me

an injury, sir, when you owed me all solicitude and every possible

precaution?" This was not to be denied. If he chose to receive such

letters, he was bound at any rate to keep them secret. "But men are so

foolish--so little thoughtful! What did she say, George?"

"She behaved like an angel."

"Of course. Wives in such circumstances always do. Just a few drops of

anger, and then a deluge of forgiveness. That was it, was it not?"

"Something like it."

"Of course. It happens every day,--because men are so stupid, but at

the same time so necessary. But what did she say of me I Was she angel

on my side of the house as well as yours?"

"Of course she was angry."

"It did not occur to her that she had been the interloper, and had

taken you away from me?"

"That was not so. You had married."

"Psha! Married! Of course I had married. Everybody marries. You had

married; but I did not suppose that for that reason you would forget me

altogether. People must marry as circumstances suit. It is no good

going back to that old story. Why did you not come to me sooner, and

tell me of this tragedy I Why did you leave me to run after her and

write to her?"

"I have been very unhappy."

"So you ought to be. But things are never so bad in the wearing as in

the anticipation. I don't suppose she'll go about destroying my name

and doing me a mischief?"

"Never."

"Because if she did, you know, I could retaliate."

"What do you mean by that, Mrs. Houghton?"

"Nothing that need disturb you, Lord George. Do not look such daggers

at me. But women have to be forbearing to each other. She is your wife,

and you may be sure I shall never say a nasty word about her,--unless

she makes herself very objectionable to me."

"Nobody can say nasty things about her."

"That is all right, then. And now what have you to say to me about

myself? I am not going to be gloomy because a little misfortune has

happened. It is not my philosophy to cry after spilt milk."

"I will sit down a minute," he said; for hitherto he had been standing.

"Certainly; and I will sit opposite to you,--for ten minutes if you

wish it. I see that there is something to be said. What is it?"

"All that has passed between you and me for the last month or two must

be forgotten."

"Oh, that is it!"

"I will not make her miserable, nor will I bear a burden upon my own

conscience."

"Your conscience! What a speech for a man to make to a woman! And how

about my conscience? And then one thing further. You say that it must

be all forgotten?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Can you forget it?"

"I can strive to do so. By forgetting, one means laying it aside. We

remember chiefly those things which we try to remember."

"And you will not try to remember me--in the least? You will lay me

aside--like an old garment? Because this--angel--has come across a

scrawl which you were too careless either to burn or to lock up! You

will tell yourself to forget me, as you would a servant that you had

dismissed,--much more easily than you would a dog? Is that so?"

"I did not say that I could do it easily."

"You shall not do it at all. I will not be forgotten. Did you ever love

me, sir?"

"Certainly I did. You know that I did."

"When? How long since? Have you ever sworn that you loved me since

this--angel--has been your wife?" Looking back as well as he could, he

rather thought that he never had sworn that he loved her in these

latter days. She had often bidden him to do so; but as far as he could

recollect at the moment, he had escaped the absolute utterance of the

oath by some subterfuge. But doubtless he had done that which had been

tantamount to swearing; and, at any rate, he could not now say that he

had never sworn. "Now you come to tell me that it must all be

forgotten! Was it she taught you that word?"

"If you upbraid me I will go away."

"Go, sir,--if you dare. You first betray me to your wife by your

egregious folly, and then tell me that you will leave me because I have

a word to say for myself. Oh, George, I expected more tenderness than

that from you."

"There is no use in being tender. It can only produce misery and

destruction."

"Well; of all the cold-blooded speeches I ever heard, that is the

worst. After all that has passed between us, you do not scruple to tell

me that you cannot even express tenderness for me, lest it should bring

you into trouble! Men have felt that before, I do not doubt; but I

hardly think any man was ever hard enough to make such a speech. I

wonder whether Captain De Baron is so considerate."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You come here and talk to me about your angel, and then tell me that

you cannot show me even the slightest tenderness, lest it should make

you miserable,--and you expect me to hold my tongue."

"I don't know why you should mention Captain De Baron."

"I'll tell you why, Lord George. There are five or six of us playing

this little comedy. Mr. Houghton and I are married, but we have not

very much to say to each other. It is the same with you and Mary."

"I deny it."

"I daresay; but at the same time you know it to be true. She consoles

herself with Captain De Baron. With whom Mr. Houghton consoles himself

I have never taken the trouble to enquire. I hope someone is

good-natured to him, poor old soul. Then, as to you and me,--you used,

I think, to get consolation here. But such comforts cost trouble, and

you hate trouble." As she said this, she wound her arm inside his; and

he, angry as he was with her for speaking as she had done of his wife,

could not push her from him roughly. "Is not that how it is, George?"

"No?"

"Then I don't think you understand the play as well as I do."

"No! I deny it all."

"All?"

"Everything about Mary. It's a slander to mention that man's name in

connection with her,--a calumny which I will not endure."

"How is it, then, if they mention mine in connection with you?"

"I am saying nothing about that."

"But I suppose you think of it. I am hardly of less importance to

myself than Lady George is to herself. I did think I was not of less

importance to you."

"Nobody ever was or ever can be of so much importance to me as my wife,

and I will be on good terms with no one who speaks evil of her."

"They may say what they like of me?"

"Mr. Houghton must look to that."

"It is no business of yours, George?"

He paused a moment, and then found the courage to answer her.

"No--none," he said. Had she confined herself to her own assumed

wrongs, her own pretended affection,--had she contented herself with

quarrelling with him for his carelessness, and had then called upon him

for some renewed expression of love,--he would hardly have been strong

enough to withstand her. But she could not keep her tongue from

speaking evil of his wife. From the moment in which he had called Mary

an angel, it was necessary to her comfort to malign the angel. She did

not quite know the man, or the nature of men generally. A man, if his

mind be given that way, may perhaps with safety whisper into a woman's

ear that her husband is untrue to her. Such an accusation may serve his

purpose. But the woman, on her side, should hold her peace about the

man's wife. A man must be very degraded indeed if his wife be not holy

to him. Lord George had been driving his wife almost mad during the

last twenty-four hours by implied accusations, and yet she was to him

the very holy of holies. All the Popenjoy question was as nothing to

him in comparison with the sanctity of her name. And now, weak as he

was, incapable as he would have been, under any other condition of

mind, of extricating himself from the meshes which this woman was

spinning for him, he was enabled to make an immediate and most salutary

plunge by the genuine anger she had produced. "No, none," he said.

"Oh, very well. The angel is everything to you, and I am nothing?"

"Yes; my wife is everything to me."

"How dared you, then, come here and talk to me of love? Do you think I

will stand this,--that I will endure to be treated in this way? Angel,

indeed! I tell you that she cares more for Jack De Baron's little

finger than for your whole body. She is never happy unless he is with

her. I don't think very much of my cousin Jack, but to her he is a

god."

"It is false."

"Very well. It is nothing to me; but you can hardly expect, my Lord,

that I should hear from you such pleasant truths as you have just told

me, and not give you back what I believe to be truth in return."

"Have I spoken evil of any one? But I will not stay here, Mrs.

Houghton, to make recriminations. You have spoken most cruelly of a

woman who never injured you, who has always been your firm friend. It

is my duty to protect her, and I shall always do so in all

circumstances. Good morning." Then he went before she could say another

word to him.

He would perhaps have been justified had he been a little proud of the

manner in which he had carried himself through this interview; but he

entertained no such feeling. To the lady he had just left he feared

that he had been rough and almost cruel. She was not to him the mass of

whipped cream turned sour which she may perhaps be to the reader.

Though he had been stirred to anger, he had been indignant with

circumstances rather than with Mrs. Houghton. But in truth the renewed

accusation against his wife made him so wretched that there was no room

in his breast for pride. He had been told that she liked Jack De

Baron's little finger better than his whole body, and had been so told

by one who knew both his wife and Jack De Baron. Of course there had

been spite and malice and every possible evil passion at work. But then

everybody was saying the same thing. Even though there were not a word

of truth in it, such a rumour alone would suffice to break his heart.

How was he to stop cruel tongues, especially the tongue of this woman,

who would now be his bitterest enemy? If such things were repeated by

all connected with him, how would he be able to reconcile his own

family to his wife? There was nothing which he valued now but the

respect which he held in his own family and that which his wife might

hold. And in his own mind he could not quite acquit her. She would not

be made to understand that she might injure his honour and destroy his

happiness even though she committed no great fault. To take her away

with a strong hand seemed to be his duty. But then there was the Dean,

who would most certainly take her part,--and he was afraid of the Dean.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

POPENJOY IS POPENJOY.

Then came Lady Brabazon's party. Lord George said nothing further to

his wife about Jack De Baron for some days after that storm in Berkeley

Square,--nor did she to him. She was quite contented that matters

should remain as they now were. She had vindicated herself, and if he

made no further accusation, she was willing to be appeased. He was by

no means contented;--but as a day had been fixed for them to leave

London, and that day was now but a month absent, he hardly knew how to

insist upon an alteration of their plans. If he did so he must declare

war against the Dean, and, for a time, against his wife also. He

postponed, therefore, any decision, and allowed matters to go on as

they were. Mary was no doubt triumphant in her spirit. She had

conquered him for a time, and felt that it was so. But she was, on that

account, more tender and observant to him than ever. She even offered

to give up Lady Brabazon's party, altogether. She did not much care for

Lady Brabazon's party, and was willing to make a sacrifice that was

perhaps no sacrifice. But to this he did not assent. He declared

himself to be quite ready for Lady Brabazon's party, and to Lady

Brabazon's party they went. As she was on the staircase she asked him a

question. "Do you mind my having a waltz to-night?" He could not bring

himself for the moment to be stern enough to refuse. He knew that the

pernicious man would not be there. He was quite sure that the question

was not asked in reference to the pernicious man. He did not

understand, as he should have done, that a claim was being made for

general emancipation, and he muttered something which was intended to

imply assent. Soon afterwards she took two or three turns with a stout

middle-aged gentleman, a Count somebody, who was connected with the

German embassy. Nothing on earth could have been more harmless or

apparently uninteresting. Then she signified to him that she had done

her duty to Lady Brabazon and was quite ready to go home. "I'm not

particularly bored," he said; "don't mind me." "But I am," she

whispered, laughing, "and as I know you don't care about it, you might

as well take me away." So he took her home. They were not there above

half-an-hour, but she had carried her point about the waltzing.

On the next day the Dean came to town to attend a meeting at Mr.

Battle's chambers by appointment. Lord George met him there, of course,

as they were at any rate supposed to act in strict concert; but on

these days the Dean did not stay in Munster Court when in London.

He would always visit his daughter, but would endeavour to do so in her

husband's absence, and was unwilling even to dine there. "We shall be

better friends down at Brotherton," he said to her. "He is always angry

with me after discussing this affair of his brother's; and I am not

quite sure that he likes seeing me here." This he had said on a

previous occasion, and now the two men met in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, not

having even gone there together.

At this meeting the lawyer told them a strange story, and one which to

the Dean was most unsatisfactory,--one which he resolutely determined

to disbelieve. "The Marquis," said Mr. Battle, "had certainly gone

through two marriage ceremonies with the Italian lady, one before the

death and one after the death of her first reputed husband. And as

certainly the so-called Popenjoy had been born before the second

ceremony." So much the Dean believed very easily, and the information

tallied altogether with his own views. If this was so, the so-called

Popenjoy could not be a real Popenjoy, and his daughter would be

Marchioness of Brotherton when this wicked ape of a marquis should die;

and her son, should she have one, would be the future marquis. But then

there came the remainder of the lawyer's story. Mr. Battle was

inclined, from all that he had learned, to believe that the Marchioness

had never really been married at all to the man whose name she had

first borne, and that the second marriage had been celebrated merely to

save appearances.

"What appearances!" exclaimed the Dean. Mr. Battle shrugged his

shoulders. Lord George sat in gloomy silence. "I don't believe a word

of it," said the Dean.

Then the lawyer went on with his story. This lady had been betrothed

early in life to the Marchese Luigi; but the man had become

insane--partially insane and by fits and starts. For some reason, not

as yet understood, which might probably never be understood, the lady's

family had thought it expedient that the lady should bear the name of

the man to whom she was to be married. She had done so for some years

and had been in possession of some income belonging to him. But Mr.

Battle was of opinion that she had never been Luigi's wife. Further

enquiries might possibly be made, and might add to further results. But

they would be very expensive. A good deal of money had already been

spent. "What did Lord George wish?"

"I think we have done enough," said Lord George, slowly,--thinking also

that he had been already constrained to do much too much.

"It must be followed out to the end," said the Dean. "What! Here is a

woman who professed for years to be a man's wife, who bore his name,

who was believed by everybody to have been his wife----"

"I did not say that, Mr. Dean," interrupted the lawyer.

"Who lived on the man's revenues as his wife, and even bore his title,

and now in such an emergency as this we are to take a cock and bull

story as gospel. Remember, Mr. Battle, what is at stake."

"Very much is at stake, Mr. Dean, and therefore these enquiries have

been made,--at a very great expense. But our own evidence as far as it

goes is all against us. The Luigi family say that there was no

marriage. Her family say that there was, but cannot prove it. The child

may die, you know."

"Why should he die?" asked Lord George.

"I am trying the matter all round, you know. I am told the poor child

is in ill health. One has got to look at probabilities. Of course you

do not abandon a right by not prosecuting it now."

"It would be a cruelty to the boy to let him be brought up as Lord

Popenjoy and afterwards dispossessed," said the Dean.

"You, gentlemen, must decide," said the lawyer. "I only say that I do

not recommend further steps."

"I will do nothing further," said Lord George. "In the first place I

cannot afford it."

"We will manage that between us," said the Dean. "We need not trouble

Mr. Battle with that. Mr. Battle will not fear but that all expenses

will be paid."

"Not in the least," said Mr. Battle, smiling.

"I do not at all believe the story," said the Dean. "It does not sound

like truth. If I spent my last shilling in sifting the matter to the

bottom, I would go on with it. Though I were obliged to leave England

for twelve months myself, I would do it. A man is bound to ascertain

his own rights."

"I will have nothing more to do with it," said Lord George, rising from

his chair. "As much has been done as duty required; perhaps more. Mr.

Battle, good morning. If we could know as soon as possible what this

unfortunate affair has cost, I shall be obliged." He asked his

father-in-law to accompany him, but the Dean said that he would speak a

word or two further to Mr. Battle and remained.

At his club Lord George was much surprised to find a note from his

brother. The note was as follows:--

"Would you mind coming to me here to-morrow or the next day at 3.

"B. Scumberg's Hotel, Tuesday."

This to Lord George was very strange indeed. He could not but remember

all the circumstances of his former visit to his brother,--how he had

been insulted, how his wife had been vilified, how his brother had

heaped scorn on him. At first he thought that he was bound to refuse to

do as he was asked. But why should his brother ask him? And his brother

was his brother,--the head of his family. He decided at last that he

would go, and left a note himself at Scumberg's Hotel that evening,

saying that he would be there on the morrow.

He was very much perplexed in spirit as he thought of the coming

interview. He went to the Dean's club and to the Dean's hotel, hoping

to find the Dean, and thinking that as he had consented to act with the

Dean against his brother, he was bound in honour to let the Dean know

of the new phase in the affair. But he did not find his father-in-law.

The Dean returned to Brotherton on the following morning, and therefore

knew nothing of this meeting till some days after it had taken place.

The language which the Marquis had used to his brother they were last

together had been such as to render any friendly intercourse almost

impossible. And then the mingled bitterness, frivolity, and wickedness

of his brother, made every tone of the man's voice and every glance of

his eye distasteful to Lord George. Lord George was always honest, was

generally serious, and never malicious. There could be no greater

contrast than that which had been produced between the brothers, either

by difference of disposition from their birth, or by the varied

circumstances of a residence on an Italian lake and one at Manor Cross.

The Marquis thought his brother to be a fool, and did not scruple to

say so on all occasions. Lord George felt that his brother was a knave,

but would not have so called him on any consideration. The Marquis in

sending for his brother hoped that even after all that had passed, he

might make use of Lord George. Lord George in going to his brother,

hoped that even after all that had passed he might be of use to the

Marquis.

When he was shown into the sitting-room at the hotel, the Marchioness

was again there. She, no doubt, had been tutored. She got up at once

and shook hands with her brother-in-law, smiling graciously. It must

have been a comfort to both of them that they spoke no common language,

as they could hardly have had many thoughts to interchange with each

other.

"I wonder why the deuce you never learned Italian," said the Marquis.

"We never were taught," said Lord George.

"No;--nobody in England ever is taught anything but Latin and

Greek,--with this singular result, that after ten or a dozen years of

learning not one in twenty knows a word of either language. That is our

English idea of education. In after life a little French may be picked

up, from necessity; but it is French of the very worst kind. My wonder

is that Englishman can hold their own in the world at all."

"They do," said Lord George,--to whom all this was ear-piercing

blasphemy. The national conviction that an Englishman could thrash

three foreigners, and if necessary eat them, was strong with him.

"Yes; there is a ludicrous strength even in their pig-headedness. But

I always think that Frenchmen, Italians, and Prussians must in dealing

with us, be filled with infinite disgust. They must ever be saying,

'pig, pig, pig,' beneath their breath, at every turn."

"They don't dare to say it out loud," said Lord George.

"They are too courteous, my dear fellow." Then he said a few words to

his wife in Italian, upon which she left the room, again shaking hands

with her brother-in-law, and again smiling.

Then the Marquis rushed at once into the middle of his affairs.

"Don't you think George that you are an infernal fool to quarrel with

me."

"You have quarrelled with me. I haven't quarrelled with you."

"Oh no;--not at all! When you send lawyer's clerks all over Italy to

try to prove my boy to be a bastard, and that is not quarrelling with

me! When you accuse my wife of bigamy that is not quarrelling with me!

When you conspire to make my house in the country too hot to hold me,

that is not quarrelling with me!"

"How have I conspired? with whom have I conspired?"

"When I explained my wishes about the house at Cross Hall, why did you

encourage those foolish old maids to run counter to me. You must have

understood pretty well that it would not suit either of us to be near

the other, and yet you chose to stick up for legal rights."

"We thought it better for my mother."

"My mother would have consented to anything that I proposed. Do you

think I don't know how the land lies? Well; what have you learned in

Italy?" Lord George was silent. "Of course, I know. I'm not such a fool

as not to keep my ears and eyes open. As far as your enquiries have

gone yet, are you justified in calling Popenjoy a bastard?"

"I have never called him so;--never. I have always declared my belief

and my wishes to be in his favour."

"Then why the d---- have you made all this rumpus?"

"Because it was necessary to be sure. When a man marries the same wife

twice over----"

"Have you never heard of that being done before? Are you so ignorant as

not to know that there are a hundred little reasons which may make that

expedient? You have made your enquiries now and what is the result?"

Lord George paused a moment before he replied, and then answered with

absolute honesty. "It is all very odd to me. That may be my English

prejudice. But I do think that your boy is legitimate."

"You are satisfied as to that?"

He paused again, meditating his reply. He did not wish to be untrue to

the Dean, but then he was very anxious to be true to his brother. He

remembered that in the Dean's presence he had told the lawyer that he

would have nothing to do with further enquiries. He had asked for the

lawyer's bill, thereby withdrawing from the investigation. "Yes," he

said slowly; "I am satisfied."

"And you mean to do nothing further?"

Again he was very slow, remembering how necessary it would be that he

should tell all this to the Dean, and how full of wrath the Dean would

be. "No; I do not mean to do anything further."

"I may take that as your settled purpose?"

There was another pause, and then he spoke, "Yes; you may."

"Then, George, let us try and forget what has passed. It cannot pay for

you and me to quarrel. I shall not stay in England very long. I don't

like it. It was necessary that the people about should know that I had

a wife and son, and so I brought him and her to this comfortless

country. I shall return before the winter, and for anything that I care

you may all go back to Manor Cross."

"I don't think my mother would like that."

"Why shouldn't she like it? I suppose I was to be allowed to have my

own house when I wanted it? I hope there was no offence in that, even

to that dragon Sarah? At any rate, you may as well look after the

property; and if they won't live there, you can. But there's one

question I want to ask you."

"Well?"

"What do you think of your precious father-in-law; and what do you

think that I must think of him? Will you not admit that for a vulgar,

impudent brute, he is about as bad as even England can supply?" Of

course Lord George had nothing to say in answer to this. "He is going

on with this tom-foolery, I believe?"

"You mean the enquiry?"

"Yes; I mean the enquiry whether my son and your nephew is a bastard. I

know he put you up to it. Am I right in saying that he has not

abandoned it?"

"I think you are right."

"Then by heaven I'll ruin him. He may have a little money, but I don't

think his purse is quite so long as mine. I'll lead him such a dance

that he shall wish he had never heard the name of Germain. I'll make

his deanery too hot to hold him. Now, George, as between you and me

this shall be all passed over. That poor child is not strong, and after

all you may probably be my heir. I shall never live in England, and you

are welcome to the house. I can be very bitter, but I can forgive; and

as far as you are concerned I do forgive. But I expect you to drop your

precious father-in-law." Lord George was again silent. He could not say

that he would drop the Dean; but at this moment he was not sufficiently

fond of the Dean to rise up in his stirrups and fight a battle for him.

"You understand me," continued the Marquis, "I don't want any assurance

from you. He is determined to prosecute an enquiry adverse to the

honour of your family, and in opposition to your settled convictions. I

don't think that after that you can doubt about your duty. Come and

see me again before long; won't you?" Lord George said that he would

come again before long, and then departed.

As he walked home his mind was sorely perplexed and divided. He had

made up his mind to take no further share in the Popenjoy

investigation, and must have been right to declare as much to his

brother. His conscience was clear as to that. And then there were many

reasons which induced him to feel coldly about the Dean. His own wife

had threatened him with her father. And the Dean was always driving

him. And he hated the Dean's money. He felt that the Dean was not quite

all that a gentleman should be. But, nevertheless, it behoved him above

all things to be honest and straightforward with the Dean.

There had been something in his interview with his brother to please

him, but it had not been all delightful.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BALL.

How was he to keep faith with the Dean? This was Lord George's first

trouble after his reconciliation with his brother. The Dean was back at

the deanery, and Lord George mistrusted his own power of writing such a

letter as would be satisfactory on so abstruse a matter. He knew that

he should fail in making a good story, even face to face, and that his

letter would be worse than spoken words. In intellect he was much

inferior to the Dean, and was only too conscious of his own

inferiority. In this condition of mind he told his story to his wife.

She had never even seen the Marquis, and had never quite believed in

those ogre qualities which had caused so many groans to Lady Sarah and

Lady Susanna. When, therefore, her husband told her that he had made

his peace with his brother she was inclined to rejoice. "And Popenjoy

is Popenjoy," she said smiling.

"I believe he is, with all my heart."

"And that is to be an end of it, George? You know that I have never

been eager for any grandeur."

"I know it. You have behaved beautifully all along."

"Oh; I won't boast. Perhaps I ought to have been more ambitious for

you. But I hate quarrels, and I shouldn't like to have claimed anything

which did not really belong to us. It is all over now."

"I can't answer for your father."

"But you and papa are all one."

"Your father is very steadfast. He does not know yet that I have seen

my brother. I think you might write to him. He ought to know what has

taken place. Perhaps he would come up again if he heard that I had been

with my brother."

"Shall I ask him to come here?"

"Certainly. Why should he not come here? There is his room. He can

always come if he pleases." So the matter was left, and Mary wrote her

letter. It was not very lucid;--but it could hardly have been lucid,

the writer knowing so few of the details. "George has become friends

with his brother," she said, "and wishes me to tell you. He says that

Popenjoy is Popenjoy, and I am very glad. It was such a trouble. George

thinks you will come up to town when you hear, and begs you will come

here. Do come, papa! It makes me quite wretched when you go to that

horrid hotel. There is such a lot of quarrelling, and it almost seems

as if you were going to quarrel with us when you don't come here. Pray,

papa, never, never do that. If I thought you and George weren't friends

it would break my heart. Your room is always ready for you, and if

you'll say what day you'll be here I will get a few people to meet

you." The letter was much more occupied with her desire to see her

father than with that momentous question on which her father was so

zealously intent. Popenjoy is Popenjoy! It was very easy to assert so

much. Lord George would no doubt give way readily, because he disliked

the trouble of the contest. But it was not so with the Dean. "He is no

more Popenjoy than I am Popenjoy," said the Dean to himself when he

read the letter. Yes; he must go up to town again. He must know what

had really taken place between the two brothers. That was essential,

and he did not doubt but that he should get the exact truth from Lord

George. But he would not go to Munster Court. There was already a

difference of opinion between him and his son-in-law sufficient to make

such a sojourn disagreeable. If not disagreeable to himself, he knew

that it would be so to Lord George. He was sorry to vex Mary, but

Mary's interests were more at his heart than her happiness. It was now

the business of his life to make her a Marchioness, and that business

he would follow whether he made himself, her, and others happy or

unhappy. He wrote to her, bidding her tell her husband that he would

again be in London on a day which he named, but adding that for the

present he would prefer going to the hotel. "I cannot help it," said

Lord George moodily. "I have done all I could to make him welcome here.

If he chooses to stand off and be stiff he must do so."

At this time Lord George had many things to vex him. Every day he

received at his club a letter from Mrs. Houghton, and each letter was a

little dagger. He was abused by every epithet, every innuendo, and

every accusation familiar to the tongues and pens of the irritated

female mind. A stranger reading them would have imagined that he had

used all the arts of a Lothario to entrap the unguarded affections of

the writer, and then, when successful, had first neglected the lady and

afterwards betrayed her. And with every stab so given there was a

command expressed that he should come instantly to Berkeley Square in

order that he might receive other and worse gashes at the better

convenience of the assailant. But as Mrs. Bond's ducks would certainly

not have come out of the pond had they fully understood the nature of

that lady's invitation, so neither did Lord George go to Berkeley

Square in obedience to these commands. Then there came a letter which

to him was no longer a little dagger, but a great sword,--a sword

making a wound so wide that his life-blood seemed to flow. There was no

accusation of betrayal in this letter. It was simply the broken-hearted

wailings of a woman whose love was too strong for her. Had he not

taught her to regard him as the only man in the world whose presence

was worth having? Had he not so wound himself into every recess of her

heart as to make life without seeing him insupportable? Could it be

possible that, after having done all this, he had no regard for her?

Was he so hard, so cruel, such adamant as to deny her at least a

farewell? As for herself, she was now beyond all fear of consequences.

She was ready to die if it were necessary,--ready to lose all the

luxuries of her husband's position rather than never see him again. She

had a heart! She was inclined to doubt whether any one among her

acquaintances was so burdened. Why, oh why, had she thought so

steadfastly of his material interests when he used to kneel at her feet

and ask her to be his bride, before he had ever seen Mary Lovelace?

Then this long epistle was brought to an end. "Come to me to-morrow, A.

H. Destroy this the moment you have read it." The last behest he did

obey. He would put no second letter from this woman in his wife's way.

He tore the paper into minute fragments, and deposited the portions in

different places. That was easily done; but what should be done as to

the other behest? If he went to Berkeley Square again, would he be able

to leave it triumphantly as he had done on his last visit? That he did

not wish to see her for his own sake he was quite certain. But he

thought it incumbent on him to go yet once again. He did not altogether

believe all that story as to her tortured heart. Looking back at what

had passed between them since he had first thought himself to be in

love with her, he could not remember such a depth of love-making on his

part as that which she described. In the ordinary way he had proposed

to her, and had, in the ordinary way, been rejected. Since that, and

since his marriage, surely the protestations of affection had come

almost exclusively from the lady! He thought that it was so, and yet

was hardly sure. If he had got such a hold on her affections as she

described, certainly, then, he owed to her some reparation. But as he

remembered her great head of false hair and her paint, and called to

mind his wife's description of her, he almost protested to himself that

she was deceiving him;--he almost read her rightly. Nevertheless, he

would go once more. He would go and tell her sternly that the thing

must come to an end, and that no more letters were to be written.

He did go and found Jack De Baron there, and heard Jack discourse

enthusiastically about Mrs. Montacute Jones's ball, which was to be

celebrated in two or three days from the present time. Then Mrs.

Houghton was very careful to ask some question in Lord George's

presence as to some special figure-dance which was being got up for the

occasion. It was a dance newly introduced from Moldavia, and was the

most ravishing thing in the way of dancing that had ever yet found its

way into this country. Nobody had yet seen it, and it was being kept a

profound secret,--to be displayed only at Mrs. Montacute Jones's party.

It was practised in secret in her back drawing room by the eight

performers, with the assistance of a couple of most trustworthy hired

musicians, whom that liberal old lady, Mrs. Montacute Jones,

supplied,--so that the rehearsals might make the performers perfect for

the grand night. This was the story as told with great interest by Mrs.

Houghton, who seemed for the occasion almost to have recovered from her

heart complaint. That, however, was necessarily kept in abeyance during

Jack's presence. Jack, though he had been enthusiastic about Mrs. Jones

and her ball before Lord George's arrival, and though he had continued

to talk freely up to a certain point, suddenly became reticent as to

the great Moldavian dance. But Mrs. Houghton would not be reticent. She

declared the four couple who had been selected as performers to be the

happy, fortunate ones of the season. Mrs. Montacute Jones was a nasty

old woman for not having asked her. Of course there was a difficulty,

but there might have been two sets. "And Jack is such a false loon,"

she said to Lord George, "that he won't show me one of the figures."

"Are you going to dance it?" asked Lord George.

"I fancy I'm to be one of the team."

"He is to dance with Mary," said Mrs. Houghton. Then Lord George

thought that he understood the young man's reticence, and he was once

again very wretched. There came that cloud upon his brow which never

sat there without being visible to all who were in the company. No man

told the tale of his own feelings so plainly as he did. And Mrs.

Houghton, though declaring herself to be ignorant of the figure, had

described the dance as a farrago of polkas, waltzes, and galops, so

that the thing might be supposed to be a fast rapturous whirl from the

beginning to the end. And his wife was going through this indecent

exhibition at Mrs. Montacute Jones' ball with Captain de Baron after

all that he had said!

"You are quite wrong in your ideas about the dance," said Jack to his

cousin. "It is the quietest thing out,--almost as grave as a minuet.

It's very pretty, but people here will find it too slow." It may be

doubted whether he did much good by this explanation. Lord George

thought that he was lying, though he had almost thought before that

Mrs. Houghton was lying on the other side. But it was true at any rate

that after all that had passed a special arrangement had been made for

his wife to dance with Jack De Baron. And then his wife had been called

by implication, "One of the team."

Jack got up to go, but before he left the room Aunt Ju was there, and

then that sinful old woman Mrs. Montacute Jones herself. "My dear," she

said in answer to a question from Mrs. Houghton about the dance, "I am

not going to tell anybody anything about it. I don't know why it should

have been talked of. Four couple of good looking young people are going

to amuse themselves, and I have no doubt that those who look on will be

very much gratified." Oh, that his wife, that Lady Mary Germain, should

be talked of as one of "four couple of good looking young people," and

that she should be about to dance with Jack De Baron, in order that

strangers might be gratified by looking at her!

It was manifest that nothing special could be said to Mrs. Houghton on

that occasion, as one person came after another. She looked all the

while perfectly disembarrassed. Nobody could have imagined that she was

in the presence of the man whose love was all the world to her. When he

got up to take his leave she parted from him as though he were no more

to her than he ought to have been. And indeed he too had for the time

been freed from the flurry of his affair with Mrs. Houghton by the

other flurry occasioned by the Moldavian dance. The new dance was

called, he had been told, the Kappa-kappa. There was something in the

name suggestive of another dance of which he had heard,--and he was

very unhappy.

He found the Dean in Munster Court when he reached his own house. The

first word that his wife spoke to him was about the ball. "George, papa

is going with me on Friday to Mrs. Montacute Jones'."

"I hope he will like it," said Lord George.

"I wish you would come."

"Why should I go? I have already said that I would not."

"As for the invitation that does not signify in the least. Do come just

about twelve o'clock. We've got up such a dance, and I should like you

to come and see it."

"Who is we?"

"Well;--the parties are not quite arranged yet. I think I'm to dance

with Count Costi. Something depends on colours of dress and other

matters. The gentlemen are all to be in some kind of uniform. We have

rehearsed it, and in rehearsing we have done it all round, one with the

other."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"We weren't to tell till it was settled."

"I mean to go and see it," said the Dean. "I delight in anything of

that kind."

Mary was so perfectly easy in the matter, so free from doubt, so

disembarrassed, that he was for the moment tranquillised. She had said

that she was to dance, not with that pernicious Captain, but with a

foreign Count. He did not like foreign Counts, but at the present

moment he preferred any one to Jack De Baron. He did not for a moment

doubt her truth. And she had been true,--though Jack De Baron and Mrs.

Houghton had been true also. When Mary had been last at Mrs. Jones'

house the matter had not been quite settled, and in her absence Jack

had foolishly, if not wrongly, carried his point with the old lady. It

had been decided that the performers were to go through their work in

the fashion that might best achieve the desired effect;--that they were

not to dance exactly with whom they pleased, but were to have their

parts assigned them as actors on a stage. Jack no doubt had been led by

his own private wishes in securing Mary as his partner, but of that

contrivance on his part she had been ignorant when she gave her

programme of the affair to her husband. "Won't you come in and see it?"

she said again.

"I am not very fond of those things. Perhaps I may come in for a few

minutes."

"I am fond of them," said the Dean. "I think any innocent thing that

makes life joyous and pretty is good."

"That is rather begging the question," said Lord George, as he left the

room.

Mary had not known what her husband meant by begging the question, but

the Dean had of course understood him. "I hope he is not going to

become ascetic," he said. "I hope at least that he will not insist that

you should be so."

"It is not his nature to be very gay," she answered.

On the next day, in the morning, was the last rehearsal, and then Mary

learned what was her destiny. She regretted it, but could not

remonstrate. Jack's uniform was red. The Count's dress was blue and

gold. Her dress was white, and she was told that the white and red must

go together. There was nothing more to be said. She could not plead

that her husband was afraid of Jack De Baron. Nor certainly would she

admit to herself that she was in the least afraid of him herself. But

for her husband's foolish jealousy she would infinitely have preferred

the arrangement as now made,--just as a little girl prefers as a

playmate a handsome boy whom she has long known, to some ill-visaged

stranger with whom she has never quarrelled and never again made

friends. But when she saw her husband she found herself unable to tell

him of the change which had been made. She was not actor enough to be

able to mention Jack De Baron's name to him with tranquillity.

On the next morning,--the morning of the important day,--she heard

casually from Mrs. Jones that Lord George had been at Mrs. Houghton's

house. She had quite understood from her husband that he intended to

see that evil woman again after the discovery and reading of the

letter. He had himself told her that he intended it; and she, if she

had not actually assented, had made no protest against his doing so.

But that visit, represented as being one final necessary visit, had,

she was well aware, been made some time since. She had not asked him

what had taken place. She had been unwilling to show any doubt by such

a question. The evil woman's name had never been on her tongue since

the day on which the letter had been read. But now, when she heard that

he was there again, so soon, as a friend joining in general

conversation in the evil woman's house, the matter did touch her. Could

it be that he was deceiving her after all, and that he loved the woman?

Did he really like that helmet, that paint and that affected laugh? And

had he lied to her,--deceived her with a premeditated story which must

have been full of lies? She could hardly bring herself to believe this;

and yet, why, why, why should he be there? The visit of which he had

spoken had been one intended to put an end to all close

friendship,--one in which he was to tell the woman that though the

scandal of an outward quarrel might be avoided, he and she were to meet

no more. And yet he was there. For aught she knew, he might be there

every day! She did know that Mrs. Montacute Jones had found him there.

Then he could come home to her and talk of the impropriety of dancing!

He could do such thinks as this, and yet be angry with her because she

liked the society of Captain De Baron!

Certainly she would dance with Captain De Baron. Let him come and see

her dancing with him; and then, if he dared to upbraid her, she would

ask him why he continued his intimacy in Berkeley Square. In her anger

she almost began to think that a quarrel was necessary. Was it not

manifest that he was deceiving her about that woman? The more she

thought of it the more wretched she became; but on that day she said

nothing of it to him. They dined together, the Dean dining with them.

He was perturbed and gloomy, the Dean having assured them that he did

not mean to allow the Popenjoy question to rest. "I stand in no awe of

your brother," the Dean had said to him. This had angered Lord George,

and he had refused to discuss the matter any further.

At nine Lady George went up to dress, and at half-past ten she started

with her father. At that time her husband had left the house and had

said not a word further as to his intention of going to Mrs. Jones'

house. "Do you think he will come?" she said to the Dean.

"Upon my word I don't know. He seems to me to be in an ill-humour with

all the world."

"Don't quarrel with him, papa."

"I do not mean to do so. I never mean to quarrel with anyone, and least

of all with him. But I must do what I conceive to be my duty whether he

likes it or not."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE KAPPA-KAPPA.

Mrs. Montacute Jones' house in Grosvenor Place was very large and very

gorgeous. On this occasion it was very gorgeous indeed. The party had

grown in dimensions. The new Moldavian dance had become the topic of

general discourse. Everybody wanted to see the Kappa-kappa. Count

Costi, Lord Giblet, young Sir Harry Tripletoe, and, no doubt, Jack De

Baron also, had talked a good deal about it at the clubs. It had been

intended to be a secret, and the ladies, probably, had been more

reticent. Lady Florence Fitzflorence had just mentioned it to her

nineteen specially intimate friends. Madame Gigi, the young wife of the

old Bohemian minister, had spoken of it only to the diplomatic set;

Miss Patmore Green had been as silent as death, except in her own

rather large family, and Lady George had hardly told anybody, except

her father. But, nevertheless, the secret had escaped, and great

efforts had been made to secure invitations. "I can get you to the

Duchess of Albury's in July if you can manage it for me," one young

lady said to Jack De Baron.

"Utterly impossible!" said Jack, to whom the offered bribe was not

especially attractive. "There won't be standing room in the cellars. I

went down on my knees to Mrs. Montacute Jones for a very old friend,

and she simply asked me whether I was mad." This was, of course,

romance; but, nevertheless, the crowd was great, and the anxiety to see

the Kappa-kappa universal.

By eleven the dancing had commenced. Everything had been arranged in

the strictest manner. Whatever dance might be going on was to be

brought to a summary close at twelve o'clock, and then the Kappa-kappa

was to be commenced. It had been found that the dance occupied exactly

forty minutes. When it was over the doors of the banquetting hall would

be opened. The Kappa-kappaites would then march into supper, and the

world at large would follow them.

Lady George, when she first entered the room, found a seat near the

hostess, and sat herself down, meaning to wait for the important

moment. She was a little flurried as she thought of various things.

There was the evil woman before her, already dancing. The evil woman

had nodded at her, and had then quickly turned away, determined not to

see that her greeting was rejected; and there was Augusta Mildmay

absolutely dancing with Jack De Baron, and looking as though she

enjoyed the fun. But to Mary there was something terrible in it all.

She had been so desirous to be happy,--to be gay,--to amuse herself,

and yet to be innocent. Her father's somewhat epicurean doctrines had

filled her mind completely. And what had hitherto come of it? Her

husband mistrusted her; and she at this moment certainly mistrusted him

most grievously. Could she fail to mistrust him? And she, absolutely

conscious of purity, had been so grievously suspected! As she looked

round on the dresses and diamonds, and heard the thick hum of voices,

and saw on all sides the pretence of cordiality, as she watched the

altogether unhidden flirtations of one girl, and the despondent frown

of another, she began to ask herself whether her father had not been

wrong when he insisted that she should be taken to London. Would she

not have been more safe and therefore more happy even down at Cross

Hall, with her two virtuous sisters-in-law? What would become of her

should she quarrel with her husband, and how should she not quarrel

with him if he would suspect her, and would frequent the house of that

evil woman?

Then Jack De Baron came up to her, talking to her father. The Dean

liked the young man, who had always something to say for himself, whose

manners were lively, and who, to tell the truth, was more than

ordinarily civil to Lady George's father. Whether Jack would have put

himself out of the way to describe the Kappa-kappa to any other

dignitary of the Church may be doubted, but he had explained it all

very graciously to the Dean. "So it seems that, after all, you are to

dance with Captain De Baron," said the Dean.

"Yes; isn't it hard upon me? I was to have stood up with a real French

Count, who has real diamond buttons, and now I am to be put off with a

mere British Captain, because my white frock is supposed to suit his

red coat!"

"And who has the Count?"

"That odiously fortunate Lady Florence;--and she has diamonds of her

own! I think they should have divided the diamonds. Madame Gigi has the

Lord. Between ourselves, papa,"--and as she said this she whispered,

and both her father and Jack bent over to hear her--"we are rather

afraid of our Lord; ain't we, Captain De Baron? There has been ever so

much to manage, as we none of us quite wanted the Lord. Madame Gigi

talks very little English, so we were able to put him off upon her."

"And does the Lord talk French?"

"That doesn't signify as Giblet never talks at all," said Jack.

"Why did you have him?"

"To tell you the truth, among us all there is rather a hope that he

will propose to Miss Patmore Green. Dear Mrs. Montacute Jones is very

clever at these things, and saw at a glance that nothing would be so

likely to make him do it as seeing Madeline Green dancing with

Tripletoe. No fellow ever did dance so well as Tripletoe, or looked

half so languishing. You see, Dean, there are a good many in's and

out's in these matters, and they have to be approached carefully." The

Dean was amused, and his daughter would have been happy, but for the

double care which sat heavy at her heart. Then Jack suggested to her

that she might as well stand up for a square dance. All the other

Kappa-kappaites had danced or were dancing. The one thing on which she

was firmly determined was that she would not be afraid of Captain De

Baron. Whatever she did now she did immediately under her father's eye.

She made no reply, but got up and put her hand on the Captain's arm

without spoken assent, as a woman will do when she is intimate with a

man.

"Upon my word, for a very young creature I never saw such impudence as

that woman's," said a certain Miss Punter to Augusta Mildmay. Miss

Punter was a great friend of Augusta Mildmay, and was watching her

friend's broken heart with intense interest.

"It is disgusting," said Augusta.

"She doesn't seem to mind the least who sees it. She must mean to leave

Lord George altogether, or she would never go on like that. De Baron

wouldn't be such a fool as to go off with her?"

"Men are fools enough for anything," said the broken-hearted one. While

this was going on Mary danced her square dance complaisantly; and her

proud father, looking on, thought that she was by far the prettiest

woman in the room.

Before the quadrille was over a gong was struck, and the music stopped

suddenly. It was twelve o'clock, and the Kappa-kappa was to be danced.

It is hard in most amusements to compel men and women into disagreeable

punctuality; but the stopping of music will bring a dance to a sudden

end. There were some who grumbled, and one or two declared that they

would not even stay to look at the Kappa-kappa. But Mrs. Montacute

Jones was a great autocrat; and in five minutes' time the four couples

were arranged, with ample space, in spite of the pressing crowd.

It must be acknowledged that Jack De Baron had given no correct idea of

the dance when he said that it was like a minuet; but it must be

remembered also that Lady George had not been a party to that deceit.

The figure was certainly a lively figure. There was much waltzing to

quick time, the glory of which seemed to consist in going backwards,

and in the interweaving of the couples without striking each other, as

is done in skating. They were all very perfect, except poor Lord

Giblet, who once or twice nearly fell into trouble. During the

performance they all changed partners more than once, but each lady

came back to her own after very short intervals. All those who were not

envious declared it to be very pretty and prophesied great future

success for the Kappa-kappa. Those who were very wise and very discreet

hinted that it might become a romp when danced without all the

preparation which had been given to it on the present occasion. It

certainly became faster as it progressed, and it was evident that

considerable skill and considerable physical power were necessary for

its completion. "It would be a deal too stagey for my girls," said Mrs.

Conway Smith, whose "girls" had, during the last ten years, gone

through every phase of flirtation invented in these latter times.

Perhaps it did savour a little too much of ballet practice; perhaps it

was true that with less care there might have been inconveniences.

Faster it grew and faster; but still they had all done it before, and

done it with absolute accuracy. It was now near the end. Each lady had

waltzed a turn with each gentleman. Lady George had been passed on from

the Count to Sir Harry, and from Sir Harry to Lord Giblet. After her

turn it was his lordship's duty to deliver her up to her partner, with

whom she would make a final turn round the dancing space; and then the

Kappa-kappa would have been danced. But alas! as Lord Giblet was doing

this he lost his head and came against the Count and Madame Gigi. Lady

George was almost thrown to the ground, but was caught by the Captain,

who had just parted with Lady Florence to Sir Harry. But poor Mary had

been almost on the floor, and could hardly have been saved without

something approaching to the violence of an embrace.

Lord George had come into the room very shortly after the Kappa-kappa

had been commenced, but had not at once been able to get near the

dancers. Gradually he worked his way through the throng, and when he

first saw the performers could not tell who was his wife's partner. She

was then waltzing backwards with Count Costi; and he, though he hated

waltzing, and considered the sin to be greatly aggravated by the

backward movement, and though he hated Counts, was still somewhat

pacified. He had heard since he was in the room how the partners were

arranged, and had thought that his wife had deceived him. The first

glance was reassuring. But Mary soon returned to her real partner; and

he slowly ascertained that she was in very truth waltzing with Captain

De Baron. He stood there, a little behind the first row of spectators,

never for a moment seen by his wife, but able himself to see

everything, with a brow becoming every moment blacker and blacker. To

him the exhibition was in every respect objectionable. The brightness

of the apparel of the dancers was in itself offensive to him. The

approach that had been made to the garishness of a theatrical

performance made the whole thing, in his eyes, unfit for modest

society. But that his wife should be one of the performers, that she

should be gazed at by a crowd as she tripped about, and that, after all

that had been said, she should be tripping in the arms of Captain De

Baron, was almost more than he could endure. Close to him, but a little

behind, stood the Dean, thoroughly enjoying all that he saw. It was to

him a delight that there should be such a dance to be seen in a lady's

drawing-room, and that he should be there to see it. It was to him an

additional delight that his daughter should have been selected as one

of the dancers. These people were all persons of rank and fashion, and

his girl was among them quite as their equal,--his girl, who some day

should be Marchioness of Brotherton. And it gratified him thoroughly to

think that she enjoyed it,--that she did it well,--that she could dance

so that standers-by took pleasure in seeing her dancing. His mind in

the matter was altogether antagonistic to that of his son-in-law.

Then came the little accident. The Dean, with a momentary impulse, put

up his hand, and then smiled well pleased when he saw how well the

matter had been rectified by the Captain's activity. But it was not so

with Lord George. He pressed forward into the circle with so determined

a movement that nothing could arrest him till he had his wife by the

arm. Everybody, of course, was staring at him. The dancers were

astounded. Mary apparently thought less of it than the others, for she

spoke to him with a smile. "It is all right, George; I was not in the

least hurt."

"It is disgraceful!" said he, in a loud voice; "come away."

"Oh, yes," she said; "I think we had finished. It was nobody's fault."

"Come away; I will have no more of this."

"Is there anything wrong?" asked the Dean, with an air of innocent

surprise.

The offended husband was almost beside himself with passion. Though he

knew that he was surrounded by those who would mock him he could not

restrain himself. Though he was conscious at the moment that it was his

special duty to shield his wife, he could not restrain his feelings.

The outrage was too much for him. "There is very much the matter," he

said, aloud; "let her come away with me." Then he took her under his

arm, and attempted to lead her away to the door.

Mrs. Montacute Jones had, of course, seen it all, and was soon with

him. "Pray, do not take her away, Lord George," she said.

"Madam, I must be allowed to do so," he replied, still pressing on. "I

would prefer to do so."

"Wait till her carriage is here."

"We will wait below. Good-night, good-night." And so he went out of the

room with his wife on his arm, followed by the Dean. Since she had

perceived that he was angry with her, and that he had displayed his

anger in public Mary had not spoken a word. She had pressed him to come

and see the dance, not without a purpose in her mind. She meant to get

rid of the thraldom to which he had subjected her when desiring her not

to waltz, and had done so in part when she obtained his direct sanction

at Lady Brabazon's. No doubt she had felt that as he took liberties as

to his own life, as he received love-letters from an odious woman, he

was less entitled to unqualified obedience than he might have been had

his hands been perfectly clean. There had been a little spirit of

rebellion engendered in her by his misconduct; but she had determined

to do nothing in secret. She had asked his leave to waltz at Lady

Brabazon's, and had herself persuaded him to come to Mrs. Montacute

Jones'. Perhaps she would hardly have dared to do so had she known that

Captain De Baron was to be her partner. While dancing she had been

unaware of her husband's presence, and had not thought of him. When he

had first come to her she had in truth imagined that he had been

frightened by her narrow escape from falling. But when he bade her come

away with that frown on his face, and with that awful voice, then she

knew it all. She had no alternative but to take his arm, and to "come

away." She had not courage enough,--I had better perhaps say impudence

enough,--to pretend to speak to him or to anyone near him with ease.

All eyes were upon her, and she felt them; all tongues would be talking

of her, and she already heard the ill-natured words. Her own husband

had brought all this upon her,--her own husband, whose love-letter from

another woman she had so lately seen, and so readily forgiven! It was

her own husband who had so cruelly, so causelessly subjected her to

shame in public, which could never be washed out or forgotten! And who

would sympathise with her? There was no one now but her father. He

would stand by her; he would be good to her; but her husband by his own

doing had wilfully disgraced her.

Not a word was spoken till they were in the cloak-room, and then Lord

George stalked out to find the brougham, or any cab that might take

them away from the house. Then for the first time the Dean whispered a

word to her. "Say as little as you can to him to-night, but keep up

your courage."

"Oh, papa!"

"I understand it all. I will be with you immediately after breakfast."

"You will not leave me here alone?"

"Certainly not,--nor till you are in your carriage. But listen to what

I am telling you. Say as little as you can till I am with you. Tell him

that you are unwell to-night, and that you must sleep before you talk

to him."

"Ah! you don't know, papa."

"I know that I will have the thing put on a right footing." Then Lord

George came back, having found a cab. He gave his arm to his wife and

took her away, without saying a word to the Dean. At the door of the

cab the Dean bade them both good-night. "God bless you, my child," he

said.

"Good-night; you'll come to-morrow?"

"Certainly." Then the door was shut, and the husband and wife were

driven away.

Of course this little episode contributed much to the amusement of Mrs.

Montacute Jones's guests. The Kappa-kappa had been a very pretty

exhibition, but it had not been nearly so exciting as that of the

jealous husband. Captain De Baron, who remained, was, of course, a

hero. As he could not take his partner into supper, he was honoured by

the hand of Mrs. Montacute Jones herself. "I wouldn't have had that

happen for a thousand pounds," said the old lady.

"Nor I for ten," said Jack.

"Has there been any reason for it?"

"None in the least. I can't explain of what nature is my intimacy with

Lady George, but it has been more like that of children than grown

people."

"I know. When grown people play at being children, it is apt to be

dangerous."

"But we had no idea of the kind. I may be wicked enough. I say nothing

about that. But she is as pure as snow. Mrs. Jones, I could no more

dare to press her hand than I would to fly at the sun. Of course I like

her."

"And she likes you."

"I hope so,--in that sort of way. But it is shocking that such a scene

should come from such a cause."

"Some men, Captain De Baron, don't like having their handsome young

wives liked by handsome young officers. It's very absurd, I grant."

Mrs. Jones and Captain De Baron did really grieve at what had been

done, but to others, the tragedy coming after the comedy had not been

painful. "What will be the end of it?" said Miss Patmore Green to Sir

Harry.

"I am afraid they won't let her dance it any more," said Sir Harry, who

was intent solely on the glories of the Kappa-kappa. "We shall hardly

get any one to do it so well."

"There'll be something worse than that, I'm afraid," said Miss Green.

Count Costi suggested to Lady Florence that there would certainly be a

duel. "We never fight here in England, Count."

"Ah! dat is bad. A gentleman come and make himself vera disagreeable.

If he most fight perhaps he would hold his tong. I tink we do things

better in Paris and Vienna." Lord Giblet volunteered his opinion to

Madame Gigi that it was very disgraceful. Madame Gigi simply shrugged

her shoulders, and opened her eyes. She was able to congratulate

herself on being able to manage her own husband better than that.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

REBELLION.

Lady George never forgot that slow journey home in the cab,--for in

truth it was very slow. It seemed to her that she would never reach her

own house. "Mary," he said, as soon as they were seated, "you have made

me a miserable man." The cab rumbled and growled frightfully, and he

felt himself unable to attack her with dignity while they were

progressing. "But I will postpone what I have to say till we have

reached home."

"I have done nothing wrong," said Mary, very stoutly.

"You had better say nothing more till we are at home." After that not a

word more was said, but the journey was very long.

At the door of the house Lord George gave his hand to help her out of

the cab, and then marched before her through the passage into the

dining-room. It was evident that he was determined to make his harangue

on that night. But she was the first to speak. "George," she said, "I

have suffered very much, and am very tired. If you please, I will go to

bed."

"You have disgraced me," he said.

"No; it is you that have disgraced me and put me to shame before

everybody,--for nothing, for nothing. I have done nothing of which I am

ashamed." She looked up into his face, and he could see that she was

full of passion, and by no means in a mood to submit to his reproaches.

She, too, could frown, and was frowning now. Her nostrils were dilated,

and her eyes were bright with anger. He could see how it was with her;

and though he was determined to be master, he hardly knew how he was to

make good his masterdom.

"You had better listen to me," he said.

"Not to-night. I am too ill, too thoroughly wretched. Anything you have

got to say of course I will listen to,--but not now." Then she walked

to the door.

"Mary!" She paused with her hand on the lock. "I trust that you do not

wish to contest the authority which I have over you?"

"I do not know; I cannot say. If your authority calls upon me to own

that I have done anything wrong, I shall certainly contest it. And if I

have not, I think--I think you will express your sorrow for the injury

you have done me to-night." Then she left the room before he had made

up his mind how he would continue his address. He was quite sure that

he was right. Had he not desired her not to waltz? At that moment he

quite forgot the casual permission he had barely given at Lady

Brabazon's, and which had been intended to apply to that night only.

Had he not specially warned her against this Captain De Baron, and told

her that his name and hers were suffering from her intimacy with the

man? And then, had she not deceived him directly by naming another

person as her partner in that odious dance? The very fact that she had

so deceived him was proof to him that she had known that she ought not

to dance with Captain De Baron, and that she had a vicious pleasure in

doing so which she had been determined to gratify even in opposition to

his express orders. As he stalked up and down the room in his wrath, he

forgot as much as he remembered. It had been represented to him that

this odious romp had been no more than a minuet; but he did not bear

in mind that his wife had been no party to that misrepresentation. And

he forgot, too, that he himself had been present as a spectator at her

express request. And when his wrath was at the fullest he almost forgot

those letters from Adelaide Houghton! But he did not forget that all

Mrs. Montacute Jones' world had seen him as in his offended marital

majesty he took his wife out from amidst the crowd, declaring his

indignation and his jealousy to all who were there assembled. He might

have been wrong there. As he thought of it all he confessed to himself

as much as that. But the injury done had been done to himself rather

than to her. Of course they must leave London now, and leave it for

ever. She must go with him whither he might choose to take her. Perhaps

Manor Cross might serve for their lives' seclusion, as the Marquis

would not live there. But Manor Cross was near the deanery, and he must

sever his wife from her father. He was now very hostile to the Dean,

who had looked on and seen his abasement, and had smiled. But, through

it all, there never came to him for a moment any idea of a permanent

quarrel with his wife. It might, he thought, be long before there was

permanent comfort between them. Obedience, absolute obedience, must

come before that could be reached. But of the bond which bound them

together he was far too sensible to dream of separation. Nor, in his

heart, did he think her guilty of anything but foolish, headstrong

indiscretion,--of that and latterly of dissimulation. It was not that

CÃ¦sar had been wronged, but that his wife had enabled idle tongues to

suggest a wrong to CÃ¦sar.

He did not see her again that night, betaking himself at a very late

hour to his own dressing-room. On the next morning at an early hour he

was awake thinking. He must not allow her to suppose for a moment that

he was afraid of her. He went into her room a few minutes before their

usual breakfast hour, and found her, nearly dressed, with her maid. "I

shall be down directly, George," she said in her usual voice. As he

could not bid the woman go away, he descended and waited for her in the

parlour. When she entered the room she instantly rang the bell and

contrived to keep the man in the room while she was making the tea. But

he would not sit down. How is a man to scold his wife properly with

toast and butter on a plate before him? "Will you not have your tea?"

she asked--oh, so gently.

"Put it down," he said. According to her custom, she got up and brought

it round to his place. When they were alone she would kiss his forehead

as she did so; but now the servant was just closing the door, and there

was no kiss.

"Do come to your breakfast, George," she said.

"I cannot eat my breakfast while all this is on my mind. I must speak

of it. We must leave London at once."

"In a week or two."

"At once. After last night, there must be no more going to parties."

She lifted her cup to her lips and sat quite silent. She would hear a

little more before she answered him. "You must feel yourself that for

some time to come, perhaps for some years, privacy will be the best for

us."

"I feel nothing of the kind, George."

"Could you go and face those people after what happened last night?"

"Certainly I could, and should think it my duty to do so to-night, if

it were possible. No doubt you have made it difficult, but I would do

it."

"I was forced to make it difficult. There was nothing for me to do but

to take you away."

"Because you were angry, you were satisfied to disgrace me before all

the people there. What has been done cannot be helped. I must bear it.

I cannot stop people from talking and thinking evil. But I will never

say that I think evil of myself by hiding myself. I don't know what you

mean by privacy. I want no privacy."

"Why did you dance with that man?"

"Because it was so arranged."

"You had told me it was some one else?"

"Do you mean to accuse me of a falsehood, George? First one arrangement

had been made, and then another."

"I had been told before how it was to be."

"Who told you? I can only answer for myself."

"And why did you waltz?"

"Because you had withdrawn your foolish objection. Why should I not

dance like other people? Papa does not think it wrong?"

"Your father has nothing to do with it."

"If you ill-treat me, George, papa must have something to do with it.

Do you think he will see me disgraced before a room full of people, as

you did yesterday, and hold his tongue? Of course you are my husband,

but he is still my father; and if I want protection he will protect

me."

"I will protect you," said Lord George, stamping his foot upon the

floor.

"Yes; by burying me somewhere. That is what you say you mean to do. And

why? Because you get some silly nonsense into your head, and then make

yourself and me ridiculous in public. If you think I am what you seem

to suspect, you had better let papa have me back again,--though that is

so horrible that I can hardly bring myself to think of it. If you do

not think so, surely you should beg my pardon for the affront you put

on me last night."

This was a way in which he had certainly not looked at the matter. Beg

her pardon! He, as a husband, beg a wife's pardon under any

circumstances! And beg her pardon for having carried her away from a

house in which she had manifestly disobeyed him. No, indeed. But then

he was quite as strongly opposed to that other idea of sending her back

to her father, as a man might send a wife who had disgraced herself.

Anything would be better than that. If she would only acknowledge that

she had been indiscreet, they would go down together into Brothershire,

and all might be comfortable. Though she was angry with him, obstinate

and rebellious, yet his heart was softened to her because she did not

throw the woman's love-letter in his teeth. He had felt that here would

be his great difficulty, but his difficulty now arose rather from the

generosity which kept her silent on the subject. "What I did," he said,

"I did to protect you."

"Such protection was an insult." Then she left the room before he had

tasted his tea or his toast. She had heard her father's knock, and knew

that she would find him in the drawing-room. She had made up her mind

how she would tell the story to him; but when she was with him he would

have no story told at all. He declared that he knew everything, and

spoke as though there could be no doubt as to the heinousness, or

rather, absurdity, of Lord George's conduct. "It is very sad,--very

sad, indeed," he said; "one hardly knows what one ought to do."

"He wants to go down--to Cross Hall."

"That is out of the question. You must stay out your time here and then

come to me, as you arranged. He must get out of it by saying that he

was frightened by thinking that you had fallen."

"It was not that, papa."

"Of course it was not; but how else is he to escape from his own

folly?"

"You do not think that I have been--wrong--with Captain De Baron?"

"I! God bless you, my child. I think that you have been wrong! He

cannot think so either. Has he accused you?"

Then she told him, as nearly as she could, all that had passed between

them, including the expression of his desire that she should not waltz,

and his subsequent permission given at Lady Brabazon's. "Pish!" he

ejaculated. "I hate these attempted restrictions. It is like a woman

telling her husband not to smoke. What a fool a man must be not to see

that he is preparing misery for himself by laying embargoes on the

recreations of his nearest companion!" Then he spoke of what he himself

would do. "I must see him, and if he will not hear reason you must go

with me to the Deanery without him."

"Don't separate us, papa."

"God forbid that there should be any permanent separation. If he be

obstinate, it may be well that you should be away from him for a week

or two. Why can't a man wash his dirty linen at home, if he has any to

wash. His, at any rate, did not come to him with you."

Then there was a very stormy scene in the dining-room between the two

men. The Dean, whose words were infinitely more ready and available

than those of his opponent, said very much the most, and by the fierce

indignation of his disclaimers, almost prevented the husband from

dwelling on the wife's indiscretion. "I did not think it possible that

such a man as you could have behaved so cruelly to such a girl."

"I was not cruel; I acted for the best."

"You degraded yourself, and her too."

"I degraded no one," said Lord George.

"It is hard to think what may now best be done to cure the wound which

she has been made to suffer. I must insist on this,--that she must not

be taken from town before the day fixed for her departure."

"I think of going to-morrow," said Lord George, gloomily.

"Then you must go alone, and I must remain with her."

"Certainly not;--certainly not."

"She will not go. She shall not be made to run away. Though everything

have to be told in the public prints, I will not submit to that. I

suppose you do not dare to tell me that you suspect her of any evil?"

"She has been indiscreet."

"Suppose I granted that,--which I don't,--is she to be ground into dust

in this way for indiscretion? Have not you been indiscreet?" Lord

George made no direct answer to this question, fearing that the Dean

had heard the story of the love-letter; but of that matter the Dean had

heard nothing. "In all your dealings with her, can you tax yourself

with no deviation from wisdom?"

"What a man does is different. No conduct of mine can blemish her

name."

"But it may destroy her happiness,--and if you go on in this way it

will do so."

During the whole of that day the matter was discussed. Lord George

obstinately insisted on taking his wife down to Cross Hall, if not on

the next day, then on the day after. But the Dean, and with the Dean

the young wife, positively refused to accede to this arrangement. The

Dean had his things brought from the inn to the house in Munster Court,

and though he did not absolutely declare that he had come there for his

daughter's protection, it was clear that this was intended. In such an

emergency Lord George knew not what to do. Though the quarrel was

already very bitter, he could not quite tell his father-in-law to leave

the house; and then there was always present to his mind a feeling that

the Dean had a right to be there in accordance with the pecuniary

arrangement made. The Dean would have been welcome to the use of the

house and all that was in it, if only Mary would have consented to be

taken at once down to Cross Hall. But being under her father's wing,

she would not consent. She pleaded that by going at once, or running

away as she called it, she would own that she had done something wrong,

and she was earnest in declaring that nothing should wring such a

confession from her. Everybody, she said, knew that she was to stay in

London to the end of June. Everybody knew that she was then to go to

the Deanery. It was not to be borne that people should say that her

plans had been altered because she had danced the Kappa-kappa with

Captain De Baron. She must see her friends before she went, or else her

friends would know that she had been carried into banishment. In answer

to this, Lord George declared that he, as husband, was paramount. This

Mary did not deny, but, paramount as the authority was, she would not,

in this instance, be governed by it.

It was a miserable day to them all. Many callers came, asking after

Lady George, presuming that her speedy departure from the ball had been

caused by her accident. No one was admitted, and all were told that she

had not been much hurt. There were two or three stormy scenes between

the Dean and his son-in-law, in one of which Lord George asked the Dean

whether he conceived it to be compatible with his duty as a clergyman

of the Church of England to induce a wife to disobey her husband. In

answer to this, the Dean said that in such a matter the duty of a

Church dignitary was the same as that of any other gentleman, and that

he, as a gentleman, and also as a dignitary, meant to stand by his

daughter. She refused to pack up, or to have her things packed. When he

came to look into himself, he found that he had not power to bid the

servants do it in opposition to their mistress. That the power of a

husband was paramount he was well aware, but he did not exactly see his

way to the exercise of it. At last he decided that he, at any rate,

would go down to Cross Hall. If the Dean chose to create a separation

between his daughter and her husband, he must bear the responsibility.

On the following day he did go down to Cross Hall, leaving his wife and

her father in Munster Court without any definite plans.

CHAPTER XL.

AS TO BLUEBEARD.

When Lord George left his own house alone he was very wretched, and his

wife, whom he left behind him, was as wretched as himself. Of course

the matter had not decided itself in this way without very much

absolute quarrelling between them. Lord George had insisted, had

stamped his foot, and had even talked of force. Mary, prompted by her

father, had protested that she would not run away from the evil tongues

of people who would be much more bitter in her absence than they would

dare to be if she remained among them. He, when he found that his

threat of forcible abduction was altogether vain, had to make up his

mind whether he also would remain. But both the Dean and his wife had

begged that he would do so, and he would not even seem to act in

obedience to them. So he went, groaning much in spirit, puzzled to

think what story he should tell to his mother and sisters, terribly

anxious as to the future, and in spirit repentant for the rashness of

his conduct at the ball. Before he was twenty miles out of London he

was thinking with infinite regret of his love for his wife, already

realising the misery of living without her, almost stirred to get out

at the next station and return by the first train to Munster Court. In

this hour of his sorrow there came upon him a feeling of great hatred

for Mrs. Houghton. He almost believed that she had for her own vile

purposes excited Captain De Baron to make love to his wife. And then,

in regard to that woman, his wife had behaved so well! Surely something

was due to so much generosity. And then, when she had been angry with

him, she had been more beautiful than ever. What a change had those few

months in London made in her! She had lost her childish little

timidities, and had bloomed forth a beautiful woman. He had no doubt as

to her increased loveliness, and had been proud to think that all had

acknowledged it. But as to the childish timidity, perhaps he would have

preferred that it should not have been so quickly or so entirely

banished. Even at Brotherton he hankered to return to London; but, had

he done so, the Brotherton world would have known it. He put himself

into a carriage instead, and had himself driven through the park to

Cross Hall.

All this occurred on the day but one subsequent to the ball, and he had

by the previous post informed Lady Sarah that he was coming. But in

that letter he had said that he would bring his wife with him, and on

his immediate arrival had to answer questions as to her unexpected

absence. "Her father was very unwilling that she should come," he said.

"But I thought he was at the hotel," said Lady Sarah.

"He is in Munster Court, now. To tell the truth I am not best pleased

that it should be so; but at the last moment I did not like to

contradict her. I hate London and everything in it. She likes it, and

as there was a kind of bargain made I could not well depart from it."

"And you have left her alone with her father in London," said Lady

Susanna, with a tone of pretended dismay.

"How can she be alone if her father is with her," answered Lord George,

who did not stand in awe of Lady Susanna as he did of Lady Sarah.

Nothing further at the moment was said, but all the sisters felt that

there was something wrong.

"I don't think it at all right that Mary should be left with the Dean,"

said the old lady to her second daughter. But the old lady was

specially prejudiced against the Dean as being her eldest son's great

enemy. Before the day was over Lord George wrote a long letter to his

wife,--full of affection indeed, but still more full of covert

reproaches. He did not absolutely scold her; but he told her that there

could be no happiness between a wife and a husband unless the wife

would obey, and he implored her to come to him with as little delay as

possible. If she would only come, all should be right between them.

Mary, when her husband was really gone, was much frightened at her own

firmness. That doctrine of obedience to her husband had been accepted

by her in full. When disposed to run counter to the ladies at Manor

Cross, she always had declared to herself that they bore no authority

delegated from "George," and that she would obey "George," and no one

but George. She had told him more than once, half-playfully, that if he

wanted anything done, he must tell her himself. And this, though he

understood it to contain rebellion against the Germains generally, had

a pleasant flavour with him as acknowledging so completely his own

power. She had said to her father, and unfortunately to Mrs. Houghton

when Mrs. Houghton was her friend, that she was not going to do what

all the Germain women told her; but she had always spoken of her

husband's wishes as absolutely imperative. Now she was in open mutiny

against her husband, and, as she thought of it, it seemed to her to be

almost impossible that peace should be restored between them.

"I think I will go down very soon," she said to her father, after she

had received her husband's letter.

"What do you call very soon?"

"In a day or two."

"Do not do anything of the kind. Stay here till the appointed time

comes. It is only a fortnight now. I have made arrangements at

Brotherton, so that I can be with you till then. After that come down

to me. Of course your husband will come over to you at the deanery."

"But if he shouldn't come?"

"Then he would be behaving very wickedly. But, of course, he will come.

He is not a man to be obstinate in that fashion."

"I do not know that, papa."

"But I do. You had better take my advice in this matter. Of course I do

not want to foster a quarrel between you and your husband."

"Pray,--pray don't let there be a quarrel."

"Of course not. But the other night he lost his head, and treated you

badly. You and I are quite willing to forgive and forget all that. Any

man may do a foolish thing, and men are to be judged by general results

rather than single acts."

"He is very kind to me--generally."

"Just so; and I am not angry with him in the least. But after what

occurred it would be wrong that you should go away at once. You felt it

yourself at the moment."

"But anything would be better than quarrelling, papa."

"Almost anything would be better than a lasting quarrel with your

husband; but the best way to avoid that is to show him that you know

how to be firm in such an emergency as this." She was, of course,

compelled by her father's presence and her father's strength to remain

in town, but she did so longing every hour to pack up and be off to

Cross Hall. She had very often doubted whether she could love her

husband as a husband ought to be loved, but now, in her present

trouble, she felt sure of her own heart. She had never been really on

bad terms with him before since their marriage, and the very fact of

their separation increased her tenderness to him in a wonderful degree.

She answered his letter with Language full of love and promises and

submission, loaded with little phrases of feminine worship, merely

adding that papa thought she had better stay in town till the end of

the month. There was not a word of reproach in it. She did not allude

to his harsh conduct at the ball, nor did she write the name of Mrs.

Houghton.

Her father was very urgent with her to see all her friends, to keep any

engagements previously made, to be seen at the play, and to let all the

world know by her conduct that she was not oppressed by what had taken

place. There was some intention of having the Kappa-kappa danced again,

as far as possible by the same people. Lord Giblet was to retire in

favour of some more expert performer, but the others were supposed to

be all worthy of an encore. But of course there arose a question as to

Lady George. There could be no doubt that Lord George had disapproved

very strongly of the Kappa-kappa. The matter got to the Dean's ears,

and the Dean counselled his daughter to join the party yet again. "What

would he say, papa?" The Dean was of opinion that in such case Lord

George would say and do much less than he had said and done before.

According to his views, Lord George must be taught that his wife had

her privileges as well as he his. This fresh difficulty dissolved

itself because the second performance was fixed for a day after that on

which it had been long known that Lady George was to leave London; and

even the Dean did not propose that she should remain in town after that

date with a direct view to the Kappa-kappa.

She was astonished at the zeal with which he insisted that she should

go out into the gay world. He almost ridiculed her when she spoke of

economy in her dress, and seemed to think that it was her duty to be a

woman of fashion. He still spoke to her from time to time of the

Popenjoy question, always asserting his conviction that, whatever the

Marquis might think, even if he were himself deceived through ignorance

of the law, the child would be at last held to be illegitimate. "They

tell me, too," he said, "that his life is not worth a year's purchase."

"Poor little boy!"

"Of course, if he had been born as the son of the Marquis of Brotherton

ought to be born, nobody would wish him anything but good."

"I don't wish him anything but good," said Mary.

"But as it is," continued the Dean, apparently not observing his

daughter's remark, "everybody must feel that it would be better for the

family that he should be out of the way. Nobody can think that such a

child can live to do honour to the British peerage."

"He might be well brought up."

"He wouldn't be well brought up. He has an Italian mother and Italian

belongings, and everything around him as bad as it can be. But the

question at last is one of right. He was clearly born when his mother

was reputed to be the wife, not of his father, but of another man. That

cock-and-bull story which we have heard may be true. It is possible.

But I could not rest in my bed if I did not persevere in ascertaining

the truth." The Dean did persevere, and was very constant in his visits

to Mr. Battle's office. At this time Miss Tallowax came up to town, and

she also stayed for a day or two in Munster Court. What passed between

the Dean and his aunt on the subject Mary, of course, did not hear; but

she soon found that Miss Tallowax was as eager as her father, and she

learned that Miss Tallowax had declared that the inquiry should not

languish from want of funds. Miss Tallowax was quite alive to the glory

of the Brotherton connection.

As the month drew to an end Mary, of course, called on all her London

friends. Her father was always eager to know whom she saw, and whether

any allusion was made by any of them to the scene at the ball. But

there was one person, who had been a friend, on whom she did not call,

and this omission was observed by the Dean. "Don't you ever see Mrs.

Houghton now?" he asked.

"No, papa," said Mary, with prompt decision.

"Why not?"

"I don't like her."

"Why don't you like her? You used to be friends. Have you quarrelled?"

"Yes; I have quarrelled with her."

"What did she do?" Mary was silent. "Is it a secret?"

"Yes, papa; it is a secret. I would rather you would not ask. But she

is a nasty vile creature, and I will never speak to her again."

"That is strong language, Mary."

"It is. And now that I have said that, pray don't talk about her any

more."

The Dean was discreet, and did not talk about Mrs. Houghton any more;

but he set his mind to work to guess, and guessed something near the

truth. Of course he knew that his son-in-law had professed at one time

to love this lady when she had been Miss De Baron, and he had been able

to see that subsequently to that they had been intimate friends. "I

don't think, my dear," he said, laughing, "that you can be jealous of

her attractions."

"I am not in the least jealous of her, papa. I don't know anyone that I

think so ugly. She is a nasty made-up thing. But pray don't talk about

her anymore." Then the Dean almost knew that Mary had discovered

something, and was too noble to tell a story against her husband.

The day but one before she was to leave town Mrs. Montacute Jones came

to her. She had seen her kind old friend once or twice since the

catastrophe at the ball, but always in the presence of other persons.

Now they were alone together. "Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jones, "I hope

you have enjoyed your short season. We have all been very fond of you."

"You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Jones."

"I do my best to make young people pleasant, my dear. You ought to have

liked it all, for I don't know anybody who has been so much admired.

His Royal Highness said the other night that you were the handsomest

woman in London."

"His Royal Highness is an old fool," said Mary, laughing.

"He is generally thought to be a very good judge in that matter. You

are going to keep the house, are you not?"

"Oh, yes; I think there is a lease."

"I am glad of that. It is a nice little house, and I should be sorry to

think that you are not coming back."

"We are always to live here half the year, I believe," said Mary. "That

was agreed when we married, and that's why I go away now."

"Lord George, I suppose, likes the country best?"

"I think he does. I don't, Mrs. Jones."

"They are both very well in their way, my dear. I am a wicked old

woman, who like to have everything gay. I never go out of town till

everything is over, and I never come up till everything begins. We have

a nice place down in Scotland, and you must come and see me there some

autumn. And then we go to Rome. It's a pleasant way of living, though

we have to move about so much."

"It must cost a great deal of money?"

"Well, yes. One can't drive four-in-hand so cheap as a pair. Mr. Jones

has a large income." This was the first direct intimation Mary had ever

received that there was a Mr. Jones. "But we weren't always rich. When

I was your age I hadn't nearly so nice a house as you. Indeed, I hadn't

a house at all, for I wasn't married, and was thinking whether I would

take or reject a young barrister of the name of Smith, who had nothing

a year to support me on. You see I never got among the aristocratic

names, as you have done."

"I don't care a bit about that."

"But I do. I like Germains, and Talbots, and Howards, and so does

everybody else, only so many people tell lies about it. I like having

lords in my drawing-room. They look handsomer and talk better than

other men. That's my experience. And you are pretty nearly sure with

them that you won't find you have got somebody quite wrong."

"I know a lord," said Mary, "who isn't very right. That is, I don't

know him, for I never saw him."

"You mean your wicked brother-in-law. I should like to know him of all

things. He'd be quite an attraction. I suppose he knows how to behave

like a gentleman?"

"I'm not so sure of that. He was very rough to papa."

"Ah;--yes. I think we can understand that, my dear. Your father hasn't

made himself exactly pleasant to the Marquis. Not that I say he's

wrong. I think it was a pity, because everybody says that the little

Lord Popenjoy will die. You were talking of me and my glories, but long

before you are my age you will be much more glorious. You will make a

charming Marchioness."

"I never think about it, Mrs. Jones; and I wish papa didn't. Why

shouldn't the little boy live? I could be quite happy enough as I am if

people would only be good to me and let me alone."

"Have I distressed you?" asked the old woman.

"Oh, dear no;--not you."

"You mean what happened at my house the other night?"

"I didn't mean anything particular, Mrs. Jones. But I do think that

people sometimes are very ill-natured."

"I think, you know, that was Lord George's doing. He shouldn't have

taken you off so suddenly. It wasn't your fault that the stupid man

tripped. I suppose he doesn't like Captain De Baron?"

"Don't talk about it, Mrs. Jones."

"Only that I know the world so well that what I say might, perhaps, be

of use. Of course I know that he has gone out of town."

"Yes, he has gone."

"I was so glad that you didn't go with him. People will talk, you know,

and it did look as though he were a sort of Bluebeard. Bluebeards, my

dear, must be put down. There may be most well-intentioned Bluebeards,

who have no chambers of horrors, no secrets,"--Mary thought of the

letter from Mrs. Houghton, of which nobody knew but herself,--"who

never cut off anybody's heads, but still interfere dreadfully with the

comfort of a household. Lord George is very nearly all that a man ought

to be."

"He is the best man in the world," said Mary.

"I am sure you think so. But he shouldn't be jealous, and above all he

shouldn't show that he's jealous. You were bound, I think, to stay

behind and show the world that you had nothing to fear. I suppose the

Dean counselled it?"

"Yes;--he did."

"Fathers of married daughters shouldn't often interfere, but there I

think he was right. It is much better for Lord George himself that it

should be so. There is nothing so damaging to a young woman as to have

it supposed she has had to be withdrawn from the influence of a young

man."

"It would be wicked of anybody to think so," said Mary, sobbing.

"But they must have thought so if you hadn't remained. You may be sure,

my dear, that your father was quite right. I am sorry that you cannot

make one in the dance again, because we shall have changed Lord Giblet

for Lord Augustus Grandison, and I am sure it will be done very well.

But of course I couldn't ask you to stay for it. As your departure was

fixed beforehand you ought not to stay for it. But that is very

different from being taken away in a jiffey, like some young man who is

spending more than he ought to spend, and is hurried off suddenly

nobody knows where."

Mary, when Mrs. Jones had left the house, found that upon the whole she

was thankful to her friend for what had been said. It pained her to

hear her husband described as a jealous Bluebeard; but the fact of his

jealousy had been so apparent, that in any conversation on the matter

intended to be useful so much had to be acknowledged. She, however, had

taken the strong course of trusting to her father rather than to her

husband, and she was glad to find that her conduct and her father's

conduct were approved by so competent a judge as Mrs. Montacute Jones.

And throughout the whole interview there had been an air of kindness

which Mary had well understood. The old lady had intended to be useful,

and her intentions were accepted.

On the next morning, soon after breakfast, the Dean received a note

which puzzled him much, and for an hour or two left him in doubt as to

what he would do respecting it,--whether he would comply with, or

refuse to comply with, the request made in it. At first he said nothing

of the letter to his daughter. He had, as she was aware, intended to go

to Lincoln's Inn early in the day, but he sat thinking over something,

instead of leaving the house, till at last he went to Mary and put the

letter into her hands. "That," said he, "is one of the most unexpected

communications I ever had in my life, and one which it is most

difficult to answer. Just read it." The letter, which was very short,

was as follows:--

"The Marquis of Brotherton presents his compliments to the Dean of

Brotherton, and begs to say that he thinks that some good might

now be done by a personal interview. Perhaps the Dean will not

object to call on the Marquis here at some hour after two o'clock

to-morrow.

"Scumberg's Hotel,

"Albemarle Street.

"\_29th June, 187--\_."

"But we go to-morrow," said Mary.

"Ah;--he means to-day. The note was written last night. I have been

thinking about it, and I think I shall go."

"Have you written to him?"

"There is no need. A man who sends to me a summons to come to him so

immediately as that has no right to expect an answer. He does not mean

anything honest."

"Then why do you go?"

"I don't choose to appear to be afraid to meet him. Everything that I

do is done above board. I rather imagine that he doesn't expect me to

come; but I will not let him have to say that he had asked me and that

I had refused. I shall go."

"Oh, papa, what will he say to you?"

"I don't think he can eat me, my dear; nor will he dare even to murder

me. I daresay he would if he could."

And so it was decided; and at the hour appointed the Dean sallied forth

to keep the appointment.

CHAPTER XLI.

SCUMBERG'S.

The Dean as he walked across the park towards Albemarle Street had many

misgivings. He did not at all believe that the Marquis entertained

friendly relations in regard to him, or even such neutral relations as

would admit of the ordinary courtesies of civilized life. He made up

his mind that he would be insulted,--unless indeed he should be so

cowed as to give way to the Marquis. But, that he himself thought to be

impossible. The more he reflected about it, the more assured he became

that the Marquis had not expected him to obey the summons. It was

possible that something might be gained on the other side by his

refusal to see the elder brother of his son-in-law. He might, by

refusing, leave it open to his enemies to say that he had rejected an

overture to peace, and he now regarded as his enemies almost the entire

Germain family. His own son-in-law would in future, he thought, be as

much opposed to him as the head of the family. The old Marchioness, he

knew, sincerely believed in Popenjoy. And the daughters, though they

had at first been very strong in their aversion to the foreign mother

and the foreign boy, were now averse to him also, on other grounds. Of

course Lord George would complain of his wife at Cross Hall. Of course

the story of the Kappa-kappa would be told in a manner that would

horrify those three ladies. The husband would of course be indignant at

his wife's disobedience in not having left London when ordered by him

to do so. He had promised not to foster a quarrel between Mary and Lord

George, but he thought it by no means improbable that circumstances

would for a time render it expedient that his daughter should live at

the deanery, while Lord George remained at Cross Hall. As to nothing

was he more fully resolved than this,--that he would not allow the

slightest blame to be attributed to his daughter, without repudiating

and resenting the imputation. Any word against her conduct, should such

word reach his ears even through herself, he would resent, and it would

go hard with him, but he would exceed such accusations by

recriminations. He would let them know, that if they intended to fight,

he also could fight. He had never uttered a word as to his own

liberality in regard to money, but he had thought of it much. Theirs

was the rank, and the rank was a great thing in his eyes; but his was

at present the wealth; and wealth, he thought was as powerful as rank.

He was determined that his daughter should be a Marchioness, and in

pursuit of that object he was willing to spend his money;--but he

intended to let those among whom he spent it know that he was not to be

set on one side, as a mere parson out of the country, who happened to

have a good income of his own.

It was in this spirit,--a spirit of absolute pugnacity,--that he asked

for the Marquis at Scumberg's hotel. Yes;--the Marquis was at home, and

the servant would see if his master could be seen. "I fancy that I have

an appointment with him," said the Dean, as he gave his card. "I am

rather hurried, and if he can't see me perhaps you'll let me know at

once." The man soon returned, and with much condescension told the Dean

that his lordship would see him. "That is kind, as his lordship told me

to come," said the Dean to himself, but still loud enough for the

servant to hear him. "His Lordship will be with you in a few minutes,"

said the man, as he shut the door of the sitting room.

"I shall be gone if he's not here in a very few minutes," said the

Dean, unable to restrain himself.

And he very nearly did go before the Marquis came to him. He had

already walked to the rug with the object of ringing the bell, and had

then decided on giving the lord two minutes more, resolving also that

he would speak his mind to the lord about this delay, should the lord

make his appearance before the two minutes were over. The time had just

expired when his lordship did make his appearance. He came shuffling

into the room after a servant, who walked before him with the pretence

of carrying books and a box of papers. It had all been arranged, the

Marquis knowing that he would secure the first word by having his own

servant in the room. "I am very much obliged to you for coming, Mr.

Dean," he said. "Pray sit down. I should have been here to receive you

if you had sent me a line."

"I only got your note this morning," said the Dean angrily.

"I thought that perhaps you might have sent a message. It doesn't

signify in the least. I never go out till after this, but had you named

a time I should have been here to receive you. That will do,

John,--shut the door. Very cold,--don't you think it."

"I have walked, my lord, and am warm."

"I never walk,--never could walk. I don't know why it is, but my legs

won't walk."

"Perhaps you never tried."

"Yes, I have. They wanted to make me walk in Switzerland twenty years

ago, but I broke down after the first mile. George used to walk like

the very d----. You see more of him now than I do. Does he go on

walking?"

"He is an active man."

"Just that. He ought to have been a country letter-carrier. He would

have been as punctual as the sun, and has quite all the necessary

intellect."

"You sent for me, Lord Brotherton----"

"Yes; yes. I had something that I thought I might as well say to you,

though, upon my word, I almost forget what it was."

"Then I may as well take my leave."

"Don't do that. You see, Mr. Dean, belonging to the church militant as

you do, you are so heroically pugnacious! You must like fighting very

much."

"When I have anything which I conceive it to be my duty to fight for, I

think I do."

"Things are generally best got without fighting. You want to make your

grandson Marquis of Brotherton."

"I want to ensure to my grandson anything that may be honestly and

truly his own."

"You must first catch a grandson."

It was on his lips to say that certainly no heir should be caught on

his side of the family after the fashion that had been practised by his

lordship in catching the present pseudo-Popenjoy; but he was restrained

by a feeling of delicacy in regard to his own daughter. "My lord," he

said, "I am not here to discuss any such contingency."

"But you don't scruple to discuss my contingency, and that in the most

public manner. It has suited me, or at any rate it has been my chance,

to marry a foreigner. Because you don't understand Italian fashions you

don't scruple to say that she is not my wife."

"I have never said so."

"And to declare that my son is not my son."

"I have never said that."

"And to set a dozen attorneys to work to prove that my heir is a

bastard."

"We heard of your marriage, my lord, as having been fixed for a certain

date,--a date long subsequent to that of the birth of your son. What

were we to think?"

"As if that hadn't been explained to you, and to all the world, a dozen

times over. Did you never hear of a second marriage being solemnized in

England to satisfy certain scruples? You have sent out and made your

inquiries, and what have they come to? I know all about it."

"As far as I am concerned you are quite welcome to know everything."

"I dare say;--even though I should be stung to death by the knowledge.

Of course I understand. You think that I have no feeling at all."

"Not much as to duty to your family, certainly," said the Dean,

stoutly.

"Exactly. Because I stand a little in the way of your new ambition, I

am the Devil himself. And yet you and those who have abetted you think

it odd that I haven't received you with open arms. My boy is as much to

me as ever was your daughter to you."

"Perhaps so, my lord. The question is not whether he is beloved, but

whether he is Lord Popenjoy."

"He is Lord Popenjoy. He is a poor weakling, and I doubt whether he may

enjoy the triumph long, but he is Lord Popenjoy. You must know it

yourself, Dean."

"I know nothing of the kind," said the Dean, furiously.

"Then you must be a very self-willed man. When this began George was

joined with you in the unnatural inquiry. He at any rate has been

convinced."

"It may be he has submitted himself to his brother's influence."

"Not in the least. George is not very clever, but he has at any rate

had wit enough to submit to the influence of his own legal adviser,--or

rather to the influence of your legal adviser. Your own man, Mr.

Battle, is convinced. You are going on with this in opposition even to

him. What the devil is it you want? I am not dead, and may outlive at

any rate you. Your girl hasn't got a child, and doesn't seem likely to

have one. You happen to have married her into a noble family, and now,

upon my word, it seems to me that you are a little off your head with

downright pride."

"Was it for this you sent for me?"

"Well;--yes it was. I thought it might be as well to argue it out. It

isn't likely that there should be much love between us, but we needn't

cut each other's throats. It is costing us both a d----d lot of money;

but I should think that my purse must be longer than yours."

"We will try it, my lord."

"You intend to go on with this persecution then?"

"The Countess Luigi was presumably a married woman when she bore that

name, and I look upon it as a sacred duty to ascertain whether she was

so or not."

"Sacred!" said the Marquis, with a sneer.

"Yes;--sacred. There can be no more sacred duty than that which a

father owes to his child."

"Ah!" Then the Marquis paused and looked at the Dean before he went on

speaking. He looked so long that the Dean was preparing to take his hat

in his hand ready for a start. He showed that he was going to move, and

then the Marquis went on speaking. "Sacred! Ah!--and such a child!"

"She is one of whom I am proud as a father, and you should be proud as

a sister-in-law."

"Oh, of course. So I am. The Germains were never so honoured before. As

for her birth I care nothing about that. Had she behaved herself, I

should have thought nothing of the stable."

"What do you dare to say?" said the Dean, jumping from his seat.

The Marquis sat leaning back in his arm-chair, perfectly motionless.

There was a smile,--almost a pleasant smile on his face. But there was

a very devil in his eye, and the Dean, who stood some six feet removed

from him, saw the devil plainly. "I live a solitary life here, Mr.

Dean," said the Marquis, "but even I have heard of her."

"What have you heard?"

"All London have heard of her,--this future Marchioness, whose ambition

is to drive my son from his title and estates. A sacred duty, Mr. Dean,

to put a coronet on the head of that young ----!" The word which we

have not dared to print was distinctly spoken,--more distinctly, more

loudly, more incisively, than any word which had yet fallen from the

man's lips. It was evident that the lord had prepared the word, and had

sent for the father that the father might hear the word applied to his

own daughter,--unless indeed he should first acknowledge himself to

have lost his case. So far the interview had been carried out very much

in accordance with the preparations as arranged by the Marquis; but, as

to what followed, the Marquis had hardly made his calculations

correctly.

A clergyman's coat used to save him from fighting in fighting days; and

even in these days, in which broils and personal encounters are held to

be generally disreputable, it saves the wearer from certain remote

dangers to which other men are liable. And the reverse of this is also

true. It would probably be hard to extract a first blow from the whole

bench of bishops. And deans as a rule are more sedentary, more

quiescent, more given to sufferance even than bishops. The normal Dean

is a goodly, sleek, bookish man, who would hardly strike a blow under

any provocation. The Marquis, perhaps, had been aware of this. He had,

perhaps, fancied that he was as good a man as the Dean who was at least

ten years his senior. He had not at any rate anticipated such speedy

violence as followed the utterance of the abominable word.

The Dean, as I have said, had been standing about six feet from the

easy chair in which the Marquis was lolling when the word was spoken.

He had already taken his hat in his hand and had thought of some means

of showing his indignation as he left the room. Now his first impulse

was to rid himself of his hat, which he did by pitching it along the

floor. And then in an instant he was at the lord's throat. The lord had

expected it so little that up to the last he made no preparation for

defence. The Dean had got him by his cravat and shirt-collar before he

had begun to expect such usage as this. Then he simply gurgled out some

ejaculated oath, uttered half in surprise and half in prayer. Prayer

certainly was now of no use. Had five hundred feet of rock been there

the Marquis would have gone down it, though the Dean had gone with him.

Fire flashed from the clergyman's eyes, and his teeth were set fast and

his very nostrils were almost ablaze. His daughter! The holy spot of

his life! The one being in whom he believed with all his heart and with

all his strength!

The Dean was fifty years of age, but no one had ever taken him for an

old man. They who at home at Brotherton would watch his motions, how he

walked and how he rode on horseback, how he would vault his gates when

in the fields, and scamper across the country like a schoolboy, were

wont to say that he was unclerical. Perhaps Canons Pountner and

Holdenough, with Mr. Groschut, the bishop's chaplain, envied him

something of his juvenile elasticity. But I think that none of them had

given him credit for such strength as he now displayed. The Marquis, in

spite of what feeble efforts he made, was dragged up out of his chair

and made to stand, or rather to totter, on his legs. He made a clutch

at the bell-rope, which to aid his luxurious ease had been brought

close to his hand as he sat, but failed, as the Dean shook him hither

and thither. Then he was dragged on to the middle of the rug, feeling

by this time that he was going to be throttled. He attempted to throw

himself down, and would have done so but that the Dean with his left

hand prevented him from falling. He made one vigorous struggle to free

himself, striving as he did so to call for assistance. But the Dean

having got his victim's back to the fireplace, and having the poor

wretch now fully at his command, threw the man with all his strength

into the empty grate. The Marquis fell like a heap within the fender,

with his back against the top bar and his head driven further back

against the bricks and iron. There for a second or two he lay like a

dead mass.

Less than a minute had done it all, and for so long a time the Dean's

ungoverned fury had held its fire. What were consequences to him with

that word as applied to his child ringing in his ears? How should he

moderate his wrath under such outrage as that? Was it not as though

beast had met beast in the forest between whom nothing but internecine

fight to the end was possible? But when that minute was over, and he

saw what he had done,--when the man, tumbled, dishevelled, all alump

and already bloody, was lying before him,--then he remembered who he

was himself and what it was that he had done. He was Dean Lovelace, who

had already made for himself more than enough of clerical enmity; and

this other man was the Marquis of Brotherton, whom he had perhaps

killed in his wrath, with no witness by to say a word as to the

provocation he had received.

The Marquis groaned and impotently moved an arm as though to raise

himself. At any rate, he was not dead as yet. With a desire to do what

was right now, the Dean rang the bell violently, and then stooped down

to extricate his foe. He had succeeded in raising the man and in

seating him on the floor with his head against the arm-chair before the

servant came. Had he wished to conceal anything, he could without much

increased effort have dragged the Marquis up into his chair; but he was

anxious now simply that all the truth should be known. It seemed to him

still that no one knowing the real truth would think that he had done

wrong. His child! His daughter! His sweetly innocent daughter! The man

soon rushed into the room, for the ringing of the bell had been very

violent. "Send for a doctor," said the Dean, "and send the landlord

up."

"Has my lord had a fit?" said the man, advancing into the room. He was

the servant, not of the hotel, but of the Marquis himself.

"Do as I bid you;--get a doctor and send up the landlord immediately.

It is not a fit, but his lordship has been much hurt. I knocked him

down." The Dean made the last statement slowly and firmly, under a

feeling at the moment that it became him to leave nothing concealed,

even with a servant.

"He has murdered me," groaned the Marquis. The injured one could speak

at least, and there was comfort in that. The servant rushed back to the

regions below, and the tidings were soon spread through the house.

Resident landlord there was none. There never are resident landlords in

London hotels. Scumberg was a young family of joint heirs and

heiresses, named Tomkins, who lived at Hastings, and the house was

managed by Mrs. Walker. Mrs. Walker was soon in the room, with a German

deputy manager kept to maintain the foreign Scumberg connection, and

with them sundry waiters and the head chambermaid. Mrs. Walker made a

direct attack upon the Dean, which was considerably weakened by

accusations from the lips of the Marquis himself. Had he remained

speechless for a while the horrors of the Dean's conduct would have

been greatly aggravated. "My good woman," said the Dean, "wait till

some official is here. You cannot understand. And get a little warm

water and wash his lordship's head."

"He has broken my back," said his lordship. "Oh, oh, oh."

"I am glad to hear you speak, Lord Brotherton," said the Dean. "I think

you will repent having used such a word as that to my daughter." It

would be necessary now that everybody should understand everything; but

how terrible would it be for the father even to say that such a name

had been applied to his child!

First there came two policemen, then a surgeon, and then a sergeant. "I

will do anything that you suggest, Mr. Constable," said the Dean,

"though I hope it may not be necessary that I should remain in custody.

I am the Dean of Brotherton." The sergeant made a sign of putting his

finger up to his cap. "This, man, as you know, is the Marquis of

Brotherton." The sergeant bowed to the groaning nobleman. "My daughter

is married to his brother. There have been family quarrels, and he just

now applied a name to his own sister-in-law, to my child,--which I will

not utter because there are women here. Fouler slander never came from

a man's mouth. I took him from his chair and threw him beneath the

grate. Now you know it all. Were it to do again, I would do it again."

"She is a ----," said the imprudent prostrate Marquis. The sergeant,

the doctor who was now present, and Mrs. Walker suddenly became the

Dean's friends. The Marquis was declared to be much shaken, to have a

cut head, and to be very badly bruised about the muscles of the back.

But a man who could so speak of his sister-in-law deserved to have his

head cut and his muscles bruised. Nevertheless the matter was too

serious to be passed over without notice. The doctor could not say that

the unfortunate nobleman had received no permanent injury;--and the

sergeant had not an opportunity of dealing with deans and marquises

every day of his life. The doctor remained with his august patient and

had him put to bed, while the Dean and the sergeant together went off

in a cab to the police-office which lies in the little crowded streets

between the crooked part of Regent Street and Piccadilly. Here

depositions were taken and forms filled, and the Dean was allowed to

depart with an understanding that he was to be forthcoming immediately

when wanted. He suggested that it had been his intention to go down to

Brotherton on the following day, but the Superintendent of Police

recommended him to abandon that idea. The superintendent thought that

the Dean had better make arrangements to stay in London till the end of

the week.

CHAPTER XLII.

"NOT GO!"

The Dean had a great deal to think of as he walked home a little too

late for his daughter's usual dinner hour. What should he tell

her;--and what should he do as to communicating or not communicating

tidings of the day's work to Lord George? Of course everybody must know

what had been done sooner or later. He would have had no objection to

that,--providing the truth could be told accurately,--except as to the

mention of his daughter's name in the same sentence with that

abominable word. But the word would surely be known, and the facts

would not be told with accuracy unless he told them himself. His only,

but his fully sufficient defence was in the word. But who would know

the tone? Who would understand the look of the man's eye and the smile

on his mouth? Who could be made to conceive, as the Dean himself had

conceived, the aggravated injury of the premeditated slander? He would

certainly write and tell Lord George everything. But to his daughter he

thought that he would tell as little as possible. Might God in his

mercy save her ears, her sacred feelings, her pure heart from the wound

of that word! He felt that she was dearer to him than ever she had

been,--that he would give up deanery and everything if he could save

her by doing so. But he felt that if she were to be sacrificed in the

contest, he would give up deanery and everything in avenging her.

But something must be told to her. He at any rate must remain in town,

and it would be very desirable that she should stay with him. If she

went alone she would at once be taken to Cross Hall; and he could

understand that the recent occurrence would not add to the serenity of

her life there. The name that had been applied to her, together with

the late folly of which her husband had been guilty, would give those

Manor Cross dragons,--as the Dean was apt in his own thoughts to call

the Ladies Germain--a tremendous hold over her. And should she be once

at Cross Hall he would hardly be able to get her back to the deanery.

He hurried up to dress as soon as he reached the house, with a word of

apology as to being late, and then found her in the drawing room.

"Papa," she said, "I do like Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"So do I, my dear, because she is good-humoured."

"But she is so good-natured also! She has been here again to-day and

wants me and George to go down to Scotland in August. I should so like

it."

"What will George say?"

"Of course he won't go; and of course I shan't. But that doesn't make

it the less good-natured. She wishes all her set to think that what

happened the other night doesn't mean anything."

"I'm afraid he won't consent."

"I know he won't. He wouldn't know what to do with himself. He hates a

house full of people. And now tell me what the Marquis said." But

dinner was announced, and the Dean was not forced to answer this

question immediately.

"Now, papa," she said again, as soon as the coffee was brought and the

servant was gone, "do tell me what my most noble brother-in-law wanted

to say to you?"

That he certainly would not tell. "Your brother-in-law, my dear,

behaved about as badly as a man could behave."

"Oh, dear! I am so sorry!"

"We have to be sorry,--both of us. And your husband will be sorry." He

was so serious that she hardly knew how to speak to him. "I cannot tell

you everything; but he insulted me, and I was forced to--strike him."

"Strike him! Oh, papa!"

"Bear with me, Mary. In all things I think well of you, and do you try

to think well of me."

"Dear papa! I will. I do. I always did."

"Anything he might have said of myself I could have borne. He could

have applied no epithet to me which, I think, could even have ruffled

me. But he spoke evil of you." While he was sitting there he made up

his mind that he would tell her as much as that, though he had before

almost resolved that he would not speak to her of herself. But she must

hear something of the truth, and better that she should hear it from

his than from other lips. She turned very pale, but did not immediately

make any reply. "Then I was full of wrath," he continued. "I did not

even attempt to control myself; but I took him by the throat and flung

him violently to the ground. He fell upon the grate, and it may be that

he has been hurt. Had the fall killed him he would have deserved it. He

had courage to wound a father in his tenderest part, only because that

father was a clergyman. His belief in a black coat will, I think, be a

little weakened by what occurred to-day."

"What will be done?" she asked, whispering.

"Heaven only knows. But I can't go out of town to-morrow. I shall write

to George to-night and tell him everything that has occurred, and shall

beg that you may be allowed to stay with me for the few days that will

be necessary."

"Of course I will not leave you."

"It is not that. But I do not want you to go to Cross Hall quite at

present. If you went without me they would not let you come to the

deanery. Of course there will be a great commotion at Cross Hall. Of

course they will condemn me. Many will condemn me, as it will be

impossible to make the world believe the exact truth."

"I will never condemn you," she said. Then she came over and threw

herself on her knees at his feet, and embraced him. "But, papa, what

did the man say of me?"

"Not what he believed;--but what he thought would give me the greatest

anguish. Never mind. Do not ask any more questions. You also had better

write to your husband, and you can tell him fully all that I have told

you. If you will write to-night I will do so also, and I will take care

that they shall have our letters to-morrow afternoon. We must send a

message to say that we shall not be at the deanery to-morrow." The two

letters to Lord George were both written that night, and were both very

long. They told the same story, though in a different tone. The Dean

was by no means apologetic, but was very full and very true. When he

came to the odious word he could not write it, but he made it very

clear without writing. Would not the husband feel as he the father had

felt in regard to his young wife, the sweet pure girl of whose love and

possession he ought to be so proud? How would any brother be forgiven

who had assailed such a treasure as this;--much less such a brother as

this Marquis? Perhaps Lord George might think it right to come up. The

Dean would of course ask at the hotel on the following day, and would

go to the police office. He believed, he said, that no permanent injury

had been done. Then came, perhaps, the pith of his letter. He trusted

that Lord George would agree with him in thinking that Mary had better

remain with him in town during the two or three days of his necessarily

prolonged sojourn. This was put in the form of a request; but was put

in a manner intended to show that the request if not granted would be

enforced. The Dean was fully determined that Mary should not at once go

down to Cross Hall.

Her letter was supplicatory, spasmodic, full of sorrow, and full of

love. She was quite sure that her dear papa would have done nothing

that he ought not to have done; but yet she was very sorry for the

Marquis, because of his mother and sisters, and because of her dear,

dear George. Could he not run up to them and hear all about it from

papa? If the Marquis had said ill-natured things of her it was very

cruel, because nobody loved her husband better than she loved her dear,

dear George,--and so on. The letters were then sent under cover to the

housekeeper at the deanery, with orders to send them on by private

messenger to Cross Hall.

On the following day the Dean went to Scumberg's, but could not learn

much there. The Marquis had been very bad, and had had one and another

doctor with him almost continually; but Mrs. Walker could not take upon

herself to say that "it was dangerous." She thought it was "in'ard."

Mrs. Walkers always do think that it is "in'ard" when there is nothing

palpable outward. At any rate his lordship had not been out of bed and

had taken nothing but tapioca and brandy. There was very little more

than this to be learned at the police court. The case might be serious,

but the superintendent hoped otherwise. The superintendent did not

think that the Dean should go down quite to-morrow. The morrow was

Friday; but he suggested Saturday as possible, Monday as almost

certain. It may be as well to say here that the Dean did not call at

the police court again, and heard nothing further from the officers of

the law respecting the occurrence at Scumberg's. On the Friday he

called again at Scumberg's, and the Marquis was still in bed. His

"in'ards" had not ceased to be matter of anxiety to Mrs. Walker; but

the surgeon, whom the Dean now saw, declared that the muscles of the

nobleman's back were more deserving of sympathy. The surgeon, with a

gravity that almost indicated offence, expressed his opinion that the

Marquis's back had received an injury which--which might be--very

injurious.

Lord George when he received the letters was thrown into a state of

mind that almost distracted him. During the last week or two the

animosity felt at Cross Hall against the Marquis had been greatly

weakened. A feeling had come upon the family that after all Popenjoy

was Popenjoy; and that, although the natal circumstances of such a

Popenjoy were doubtless unfortunate for the family generally, still, as

an injury had been done to the Marquis by the suspicion, those

circumstances ought now to be in a measure forgiven. The Marquis was

the head of the family, and a family will forgive much to its head when

that head is a Marquis. As we know the Dowager had been in his favour

from the first, Lord George had lately given way and had undergone a

certain amount of reconciliation with his brother. Lady Amelia had

seceded to her mother, as had also Mrs. Toff, the old housekeeper. Lady

Susanna was wavering, having had her mind biased by the objectionable

conduct of the Dean and his daughter. Lady Sarah was more stanch. Lady

Sarah had never yet given way; she never did give way; and, in her very

heart, she was the best friend that Mary had among the ladies of the

family. But when her brother gave up the contest she felt that further

immediate action was impossible. Things were in this state at Cross

Hall when Lord George received the two letters. He did not wish to

think well of the Dean just at present, and was horrified at the idea

of a clergyman knocking a Marquis into the fire-place. But the word

indicated was very plain, and that word had been applied to his own

wife. Or, perhaps, no such word had really been used. Perhaps the Dean

had craftily saved himself from an absolute lie, and in his attempt to

defend the violence of his conduct had brought an accusation against

the Marquis, which was in its essence, untrue. Lord George was quite

alive to the duty of defending his wife; but in doing so he was no

longer anxious to maintain affectionate terms with his wife's father.

She had been very foolish. All the world had admitted as much. He had

seen it with his own eyes at that wretched ball. She had suffered her

name to be joined with that of a stranger in a manner derogatory to her

husband's honour. It was hardly surprising that his brother should have

spoken of her conduct in disparaging terms;--but he did not believe

that his brother had used that special term. Personal violence;--blows

and struggling, and that on the part of a Dean of the Church of

England, and violence such as this seemed to have been,--violence that

might have killed the man attacked, seemed to him to be in any case

unpardonable. He certainly could not live on terms of friendship with

the Dean immediately after such a deed. His wife must be taken away and

secluded, and purified by a long course of Germain asceticism.

But what must he do now at once? He felt that it was his duty to hurry

up to London, but he could not bring himself to live in the same house

with the Dean. His wife must be taken away from her father. However bad

may have been the language used by the Marquis, however indefensible,

he could not allow himself even to seem to keep up affectionate

relations with the man who had half slaughtered his brother. He too

thought of what the world would say, he too felt that such an affair,

after having become known to the police, would be soon known to every

one else. But what must he do at once? He had not as yet made up his

mind as to this when he took his place at the Brotherton Railway

Station on the morning after he had received the letters.

But on reaching the station in London he had so far made up his mind as

to have his portmanteau taken to the hotel close at hand, and then to

go to Munster Court. He had hoped to find his wife alone; but on his

arrival the Dean was there also. "Oh, George," she said, "I am so glad

you have come; where are your things?" He explained that he had no

things, that he had come up only for a short time, and had left his

luggage at the station. "But you will stay here to-night?" asked Mary,

in despair.

Lord George hesitated, and the Dean at once saw how it was. "You will

not go back to Brotherton to-day," he said. Now, at this moment the

Dean had to settle in his mind the great question whether it would be

best for his girl that she should be separated from her husband or from

her father. In giving him his due it must be acknowledged that he

considered only what might in truth be best for her. If she were now

taken away from him there would be no prospect of recovery. After all

that had passed, after Lord George's submission to his brother, the

Dean was sure that he would be held in abhorrence by the whole Germain

family. Mary would be secluded and trodden on, and reduced to pale

submission by all the dragons till her life would be miserable. Lord

George himself would be prone enough to domineer in such circumstances.

And then that ill word which had been spoken, and which could only be

effectually burned out of the thoughts of people by a front to the

world at the same time innocent and bold, would stick to her for ever

if she were carried away into obscurity.

But the Dean knew as well as others know how great is the evil of a

separation, and how specially detrimental such a step would be to a

young wife. Than a permanent separation anything would be better;

better even that she should be secluded and maligned, and even, for a

while, trodden under foot. Were such separation to take place his girl

would have been altogether sacrificed, and her life's happiness brought

to shipwreck. But then a permanent separation was not probable. She had

done nothing wrong. The husband and wife did in truth love each other

dearly. The Marquis would be soon gone, and then Lord George would

return to his old habits of thought and his old allegiance. Upon the

whole the Dean thought it best that his present influence should be

used in taking his daughter to the deanery.

"I should like to return quite early to-morrow," said Lord George, very

gravely, "unless my brother's condition should make it impossible."

"I trust you won't find your brother much the worse for what has

happened," said the Dean.

"But you will sleep here to-night," repeated Mary.

"I will come for you the first thing in the morning," said Lord George

in the same funereal voice.

"But why;--why?"

"I shall probably have to be a good deal with my brother during the

afternoon. But I will be here again in the afternoon. You can be at

home at five, and you can get your things ready for going to-morrow."

"Won't you dine here?"

"I think not."

Then there was silence for a minute. Mary was completely astounded.

Lord George wished to say nothing further in the presence of his

father-in-law. The Dean was thinking how he would begin to use his

influence. "I trust you will not take Mary away to-morrow."

"Oh;--certainly."

"I trust not. I must ask you to hear me say a few words about this."

"I must insist on her coming with me to-morrow, even though I should

have to return to London myself afterwards."

"Mary," said her father, "leave us for a moment." Then Mary retired,

with a very saddened air. "Do you understand, George, what it was that

your brother said to me?"

"I suppose so," he answered, hoarsely.

"Then, no doubt, I may take it for granted that you approve of the

violence of my resentment? To me as a clergyman, and as a man past

middle life, the position was very trying. But had I been an

Archbishop, tottering on the grave with years, I must have endeavoured

to do the same." This he said with great energy. "Tell me, George, that

you think that I was right."

But George had not heard the word, had not seen the man's face. And

then, though he would have gone to a desert island with his wife, had

such exile been necessary for her protection, he did believe that she

had misconducted herself. Had he not seen her whirling round the room

with that man after she had been warned against him. "It cannot be

right to murder a man," he said at last.

"You do not thank me then for vindicating your honour and your wife's

innocence?"

"I do not think that that was the way. The way is to take her home."

"Yes;--to her old home,--to the deanery for a while; so that the world,

which will no doubt hear the malignant epithet applied to her by your

wicked brother, may know that both her husband and her father support

her. You had promised to come to the deanery."

"We cannot do that now."

"Do you mean that after what has passed you will take your brother's

part?"

"I will take my wife to Cross Hall," he said, leaving the room and

following Mary up to her chamber.

"What am I to do, papa?" she said when she came down about half-an-hour

afterwards. Lord George had then started to Scumberg's, saying that he

would come to Munster Court again before dinner, but telling her

plainly that he would not sit down to dine with her father, "He has

determined to quarrel with you."

"It will only be for a time, dearest."

"But what shall I do?"

Now came the peril of the answer. He was sure, almost sure, that she

would in this emergency rely rather upon him than on her husband, if he

were firm; but should he be firm as against the husband, how great

would be his responsibility! "I think, my dear," he said, at last,

"that you should go with me to Brotherton."

"But he will not let me."

"I think that you should insist on his promise."

"Don't make us quarrel, papa."

"Certainly not. Anything would be better than a permanent quarrel. But,

after what has been said, after the foul lies that have been told, I

think that you should assert your purpose of staying for awhile with

your father. Were you now to go to Cross Hall there would be no limit

to their tyranny." He left her without a word more, and calling at

Scumberg's Hotel was told that the Marquis could not move.

At that moment Lord George was with his brother, and the Marquis could

talk though he could not move. "A precious family you've married into,

George," he said, almost as soon as his brother was in the room. Then

he gave his own version of the affair, leaving his brother in doubt as

to the exact language that had been used. "He ought to have been a

coal-heaver instead of a clergyman," said the Marquis.

"Of course he would be angry," said Lord George.

"Nothing astonishes me so much," said the Marquis, "as the way in which

you fellows here think you may say whatever comes into your head about

my wife, because she is an Italian, and you seem to be quite surprised

if I object; yet you rage like wild beasts if the compliment is

returned. Why am I to think better of your wife than you of mine?"

"I have said nothing against your wife, Brotherton."

"By ----, I think you have said a great deal,--and with much less

reason than I have. What did you do yourself when you found her

struggling in that fellow's arms at the old woman's party?" Some

good-natured friend had told the Marquis the whole story of the

Kappa-kappa. "You can't be deaf to what all the world is saying of

her." This was wormwood to the wretched husband, and yet he could not

answer with angry, self-reliant indignation, while his brother was

lying almost motionless before him.

Lord George found that he could do nothing at Scumberg's Hotel. He was

assured that his brother was not in danger, and that the chief injury

done was to the muscles of his back, which bruised and lacerated as

they were, would gradually recover such elasticity as they had ever

possessed. But other words were said and other hints expressed, all of

which tended to increase his animosity against the Dean, and almost to

engender anger against his wife. To himself, personally, except in

regard to his wife, his brother had not been ungracious. The Marquis

intended to return to Italy as soon as he could. He hated England and

everything in it. Manor Cross would very soon be at Lord George's

disposal, "though I do hope," said the Marquis, "that the lady who has

condescended to make me her brother-in-law, will never reign paramount

there." By degrees there crept on Lord George's mind a feeling that his

brother looked to a permanent separation,--something like a

repudiation. Over and over again he spoke of Mary as though she had

disgraced herself utterly; and when Lord George defended his wife, the

lord only smiled and sneered.

The effect upon Lord George was to make him very imperious as he walked

back to Munster Court. He could not repudiate his wife, but he would

take her away with a very high hand. Crossing the Green Park, at the

back of Arlington Street, whom should he meet but Mrs. Houghton with

her cousin Jack. He raised his hat, but could not stop a moment. Mrs.

Houghton made an attempt to arrest him,--but he escaped without a word

and went on very quickly. His wife had behaved generously about Mrs.

Houghton. The sight of the woman brought that truth to his mind. He was

aware of that. But no generosity on the part of the wife, no love, no

temper, no virtue, no piety can be accepted by CÃ¦sar as weighing a

grain in counterpoise against even suspicion.

He found his wife and asked her whether her things were being packed.

"I cannot go to-morrow," she said.

"Not go?"

"No, George;--not to Cross Hall. I will go to the deanery. You promised

to go to the deanery."

"I will not go to the deanery. I will go to Cross Hall." There was an

hour of it, but during the entire hour, the young wife persisted

obstinately that she would not be taken to Cross Hall. "She had," she

said, "been very badly treated by her husband's family." "Not by me,"

shouted the husband. She went on to say that nothing could now really

put her right but the joint love of her father and her husband. Were

she at Cross Hall her father could do nothing for her. She would not go

to Cross Hall. Nothing short of policemen should take her to Cross Hall

to-morrow.

CHAPTER XLIII.

REAL LOVE.

"He is looking awfully cut up," Mrs. Houghton said to her cousin.

"He is one of the most infernal fools that ever I came across in my

life," said Jack.

"I don't see that he is a fool at all,--any more than all men are

fools. There isn't one among you is ever able to keep his little

troubles to himself. You are not a bit wiser than the rest of them

yourself."

"I haven't got any troubles,--of that sort."

"You haven't a wife,--but you'll be forced into having one before long.

And when you like another man's wife you can't keep all the world from

knowing it."

"All the world may know everything that has taken place between me and

Lady George," said Jack. "Of course I like her."

"I should say, rather."

"And so do you."

"No, I don't, sir. I don't like her at all. She is a foolish,

meaningless little creature, with nothing to recommend her but a pretty

colour. And she has cut me because her husband will come and pour out

his sorrow into my ears. For his sake I used to be good to her."

"I think she is the sweetest human being I ever came across in my

life," said Jack, enthusiastically.

"Everybody in London knows that you think so,--and that you have told

her your thoughts."

"Nobody in London knows anything of the kind. I never said a word to

her that her husband mightn't have heard."

"Jack!"

"I never did."

"I wonder you are not ashamed to confess such simplicity, even to me."

"I am not a bit ashamed of that, though I am ashamed of having in some

sort contributed to do her an injury. Of course I love her."

"Rather,--as I said before."

"Of course you intended that I should."

"I intended that you should amuse yourself. As long as you are good to

me, I shall be good to you."

"My dear Adelaide, nobody can be so grateful as I am. But in this

matter the thing hasn't gone quite as you intended. You say that she is

meaningless."

"Vapid, flabby, childish, and innocent as a baby."

"Innocent I am sure she is. Vapid and flabby she certainly is not. She

is full of fun, and is quite as witty as a woman should be."

"You always liked fools, Jack."

"Then how did I come to be so very fond of you." In answer to this she

merely made a grimace at him. "I hadn't known her three days,"

continued he, "before I began to feel how impossible it would be to say

anything to her that ought not to be said."

"That is just like the world all over," said Mrs. Houghton. "When a man

really falls in love with a woman he always makes her such a goddess

that he doesn't dare to speak to her. The effect is that women are

obliged to put up with men who ain't in love with them,--either that,

or vouchsafe to tell their own little story,--when, lo, they are

goddesses no longer."

"I dare say it's very ridiculous," said Jack, in a mooning despondent

way. "I dare say I'm not the man I ought to be after the advantages I

have had in such friends as you and others."

"If you try to be severe to me, I'll quarrel with you."

"Not severe at all. I'm quite in earnest. A man, and a woman too, have

to choose which kind of role shall be played. There is innocence and

purity, combined with going to church and seeing that the children's

faces are washed. The game is rather slow, but it lasts a long time,

and leads to great capacity for digesting your dinner in old age. You

and I haven't gone in for that."

"Do you mean to say that I am not innocent?"

"Then there is the Devil with all his works,--which I own are, for the

most part, pleasant works to me. I have always had a liking for the

Devil."

"Jack!"

"Of all the saints going he is certainly the most popular. It is

pleasant to ignore the Commandments and enjoy the full liberty of a

debauched conscience. But there are attendant evils. It costs money and

wears out the constitution."

"I should have thought that you had never felt the latter evil."

"The money goes first, no doubt. This, however, must surely be clear. A

man should make up his mind and not shilly-shally between the two."

"I should have thought you had made up your mind very absolutely."

"I thought so, too, Adelaide, till I knew Lady George Germain. I'll

tell you what I feel about her now. If I could have any hope that he

would die I would put myself into some reformatory to fit myself to be

her second husband."

"Good heavens!"

"That is one idea that I have. Another is to cut his throat, and take

my chance with the widow. She is simply the only woman I ever saw that

I have liked all round."

"You come and tell me this, knowing what I think of her."

"Why shouldn't I tell you? You don't want me to make love to you?"

"But a woman never cares to hear all these praises of another."

"It was you began it, and if I do speak of her I shall tell the truth.

There is a freshness as of uncut flowers about her."

"Psha! Worms and grubs!"

"And when she laughs one dreams of a chaste Venus."

"My heavens, Jack! You should publish all that!"

"The dimples on her cheeks are so alluring that I would give my

commission to touch them once with my finger. When I first knew her I

thought that the time would come when I might touch them. Now I feel

that I would not commit such an outrage to save myself from being

cashiered."

"Shall I tell you what you ought to do?"

"Hang myself."

"Just say to her all that you have said to me. You would soon find that

her dimples are not more holy than another's."

"You think so."

"Of course I think so. The only thing that puzzles me is that you, Jack

De Baron, should be led away to such idolatry. Why should she be

different from others? Her father is a money-loving, selfish old

reprobate, who was born in a stable. She married the first man that was

brought to her, and has never cared for him because he does not laugh,

and dance, and enjoy himself after her fashion. I don't suppose she is

capable of caring very much for anybody, but she likes you better than

any one else. Have you seen her since the row at Mrs. Jones's?"

"No."

"You have not been, then?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't think she would wish to see me," said Jack. "All that

affair must have troubled her."

"I don't know how that is. She has been in town ever since, and he

certainly went down to Brotherton. He has come up, I suppose, in

consequence of this row between the Dean and his brother. I wonder what

really did happen?"

"They say that there was a scuffle and that the parson had very much

the best of it. The police were sent for, and all that kind of thing. I

suppose the Marquis said something very rough to him."

"Or he to the Marquis, which is rather more likely. Well,--good-day,

Jack." They were now at the house-door in Berkeley Square. "Don't come

in, because Houghton will be here." Then the door was opened. "But take

my advice, and go and call in Munster Court at once. And, believe me,

when you have found out what one woman is, you have found out what most

women are. There are no such great differences."

It was then six o'clock, and he knew that in Munster Court they did not

dine till near eight. There was still time with a friend so intimate as

he was for what is styled a morning call. The words which his cousin

had spoken had not turned him,--had not convinced him. Were he again

tempted to speak his real mind about this woman,--as he had spoken in

very truth his real mind,--he would still express the same opinion. She

was to him like a running stream to a man who had long bathed in

stagnant waters. But the hideous doctrines which his cousin had

preached to him were not without their effect. If she were as other

women,--meaning such women as Adelaide Houghton,--or if she were not,

why should he not find out the truth? He was well aware that she liked

him. She had not scrupled to show him that by many signs. Why should he

scruple to say a word that might show him how the wind blew? Then he

remembered a few words which he had spoken, but which had been taken so

innocently, that they, though they had been meant to be mischievous,

had become innocent themselves. Even things impure became pure by

contact with her. He was sure, quite sure, that that well-known pupil

of Satan, his cousin, was altogether wrong in her judgment. He knew

that Adelaide Houghton could not recognise, and could not appreciate, a

pure woman. But still,--still it is so poor a thing to miss your plum

because you do not dare to shake the tree! It is especially so, if you

are known as a professional stealer of plums!

When he got into Piccadilly, he put himself into a cab, and had himself

driven to the corner of Munster Court. It was a little street, gloomy

to look at, with dingy doors and small houses, but with windows

looking into St. James's Park. There was no way through it, so that he

who entered it must either make his way into some house, or come back.

He walked up to the door, and then taking out his watch, saw that it

was half-past six. It was almost too late for calling. And then this

thing that he intended to do required more thought than he had given

it. Would it not be well for him that there should be something holy,

even to him, in spite of that Devil's advocate who had been so powerful

with him. So he turned, and walking slowly back towards Parliament

Street, got into another cab, and was taken to his club. "It has come

out," said Major M'Mickmack to him, immediately on his entrance, "that

when the Dean went to see Brotherton at the hotel, Brotherton called

Lady George all the bad names he could put his tongue to."

"I dare say. He is blackguard enough for anything," said De Baron.

"Then the old Dean took his lordship in his arms, and pitched him bang

into the fireplace. I had it all from the police myself."

"I always liked the Dean."

"They say he is as strong as Hercules," continued M'Mickmack. "But he

is to lose his deanery."

"Gammon!"

"You just ask any of the fellows that know. Fancy a clergyman pitching

a Marquis into the fire!"

"Fancy a father not doing so if the Marquis spoke ill of his daughter,"

said Jack De Baron.

CHAPTER XLIV.

WHAT THE BROTHERTON CLERGYMEN SAID ABOUT IT.

Had Jack knocked at the door and asked for Lady George he certainly

would not have seen her. She was enduring at that moment, with almost

silent obstinacy, the fierce anger of her indignant husband. "She was

sure that it would be bad for her to go to Cross Hall at present, or

anywhere among the Germains, while such things were said of her as the

Marquis had said." Could Lord George have declared that the Marquis was

at war with the family as he had been at war some weeks since, this

argument would have fallen to the ground. But he could not do so, and

it seemed to be admitted that by going to Cross Hall she was to take

part against her father, and so far to take part with the Marquis, who

had maligned her. This became her strong point, and as Lord George was

not strong in argument, he allowed her to make the most of it. "Surely

you wouldn't let me go anywhere," she said, "where such names as that

are believed against me?" She had not heard the name, nor had he, and

they were in the dark;--but she pleaded her cause well, and appealed

again and again to her husband's promise to take her to the deanery.

His stronghold was that of marital authority,--authority unbounded,

legitimate, and not to be questioned. "But if you commanded me to

quarrel with papa?" she asked.

"I have commanded nothing of the kind."

"But if you did?"

"Then you must quarrel with him."

"I couldn't,--and I wouldn't," said she, burying her face upon the arm

of the sofa.

At any rate on the next morning she didn't go, nor, indeed, did he come

to fetch her, so convinced had he been of the persistency of her

obstinacy. But he told her as he left her that if she separated herself

from him now, then the separation must be lasting. Her father, however,

foreseeing this threat, had told her just the reverse. "He is an

obstinate man," the Dean had said, "but he is good and conscientious,

and he loves you."

"I hope he loves me."

"I am sure he does. He is not a fickle man. At present he has put

himself into his brother's hands, and we must wait till the tide turns.

He will learn by degrees to know how unjust he has been."

So it came to pass that Lord George went down to Cross Hall in the

morning and that Mary accompanied her father to the deanery the same

afternoon. The Dean had already learned that it would be well that he

should face his clerical enemies as soon as possible. He had already

received a letter worded in friendly terms from the Bishop, asking him

whether he would not wish to make some statement as to the occurrence

at Scumberg's Hotel which might be made known to the clergymen of the

Cathedral. He had replied by saying that he wished to make no such

statement, but that on his return to Brotherton he would be very

willing to tell the Bishop the whole story if the Bishop wished to hear

it. He had been conscious of Mr. Groschut's hand even among the civil

phrases which had come from the Bishop himself. "In such a matter," he

said in his reply, "I am amenable to the laws of the land, and am not,

as I take it, amenable to any other authority." Then he went on to say

that for his own satisfaction he should be very glad to tell the story

to the Bishop.

The story as it reached Brotherton had, no doubt, given rise to a great

deal of scandal and a great deal of amusement. Pountner and Holdenough

were to some extent ashamed of their bellicose Dean. There is something

ill-mannered, ungentlemanlike, what we now call rowdy, in personal

encounters, even among laymen,--and this is of course aggravated when

the assailant is a clergyman. And these canons, though they kept up

pleasant, social relations with the Dean, were not ill-disposed to

make use of so excellent a weapon against a man, who, though coming

from a lower order than themselves, was never disposed in any way to

yield to them. But the two canons were gentlemen, and as gentlemen were

gracious. Though they liked to have the Dean on the hip, they did not

want to hurt him sorely when they had gotten him there. They would be

contented with certain sly allusions, and only half-expressed triumphs.

But Mr. Groschut was confirmed in his opinion that the Dean was

altogether unfit for his position,--which, for the interests of the

Church, should be filled by some such man as Mr. Groschut himself, by

some God-fearing clergyman, not known as a hard rider across country

and as a bruiser with his fists. There had been an article in the

"Brotherton Church Gazette," in which an anxious hope was expressed

that some explanation would be given of the very incredible tidings

which had unfortunately reached Brotherton. Then Mr. Groschut had

spoken a word in season to the Bishop. Of course he said it could not

be true; but would it not be well that the Dean should be invited to

make his own statement? It was Mr. Groschut who had himself used the

word "incredible" in the article. Mr. Groschut, in speaking to the

Bishop, said that the tidings must be untrue. And yet he believed and

rejoiced in believing every word of them. He was a pious man, and did

not know that he was lying. He was an anxious Christian, and did not

know that he was doing his best to injure an enemy behind his back. He

hated the Dean;--but he thought that he loved him. He was sure that the

Dean would go to some unpleasant place, and gloried in the certainty;

but he thought that he was most anxious for the salvation of the Dean's

soul. "I think your Lordship owes it to him to offer him the

opportunity," said Mr. Groschut.

The Bishop, too, was what we call a severe man;--but his severity was

used chiefly against himself. He was severe in his principles; but,

knowing the world better than his chaplain, was aware how much latitude

it was necessary that he should allow in dealing with men. And in his

heart of hearts he had a liking for the Dean. Whenever there were any

tiffs the Dean could take a blow and give a blow, and then think no

more about it. This, which was a virtue in the eyes of the Bishop, was

no virtue at all to Mr. Groschut, who hated to be hit himself and

wished to think that his own blows were fatal. In urging the matter

with the bishop, Mr. Groschut expressed an opinion that, if this story

were unfortunately true, the Dean should cease to be Dean. He thought

that the Dean must see this himself. "I am given to understand that he

was absolutely in custody of the police," said Mr. Groschut. The Bishop

was annoyed by his chaplain; but still he wrote the letter.

On the very morning of his arrival in Brotherton the Dean went to the

palace. "Well, my lord," said the Dean, "you have heard this cock and

bull story."

"I have heard a story," said the Bishop. He was an old man, very tall

and very thin, looking as though he had crushed out of himself all

taste for the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, but singularly

urbane in his manner, with an old-fashioned politeness. He smiled as he

invited the Dean to a seat, and then expressed a hope that nobody had

been much hurt. "Very serious injuries have been spoken of here, but I

know well how rumour magnifies these things."

"Had I killed him, my lord, I should have been neither more nor less to

blame than I am now, for I certainly endeavoured to do my worst to

him." The Bishop's face assumed a look of pain and wonder. "When I had

the miscreant in my hands I did not pause to measure the weight of my

indignation. He told me, me a father, that my child was ----." He had

risen from his chair, and as he pronounced the word, stood looking into

the Bishop's eyes. "If there be purity on earth, sweet feminine

modesty, playfulness devoid of guile, absolute freedom from any stain

of leprosy, they are to be found with my girl."

"Yes! yes; I am sure of that."

"She is my worldly treasure. I have none other. I desire none other. I

had wounded this man by certain steps which I have taken in reference

to his family;--and then, that he might wound me in return, he did not

scruple, to use that word to his own sister-in-law, to my daughter. Was

that a time to consider whether a clergyman may be justified in putting

out his strength? No; my lord. Old as you are you would have attempted

it yourself. I took him up and smote him, and it is not my fault if he

is not a cripple for life." The Bishop gazed at him speechlessly, but

felt quite sure that it was not in his power to rebuke his fellow

clergyman. "Now, my lord," continued the Dean, "you have heard the

story. I tell it to you, and I shall tell it to no one else. I tell it

you, not because you are the bishop of this diocese, and I, the Dean of

this Cathedral,--and as such I am in such a matter by no means subject

to your lordship's authority;--but, because of all my neighbours you

are the most respected, and I would wish that the truth should be known

to some one." Then he ceased, neither enjoining secrecy, or expressing

any wish that the story should be correctly told to others.

"He must be a cruel man," said the Bishop.

"No, my lord;--he is no man at all. He is a degraded animal

unfortunately placed almost above penalties by his wealth and rank. I

am glad to think that he has at last encountered some little

punishment, though I could wish that the use of the scourge had fallen

into other hands than mine." Then he took his leave, and as he went the

Bishop was very gracious to him.

"I am almost inclined to think he was justified," said the Bishop to

Mr. Groschut.

"Justified, my lord! The Dean;--in striking the Marquis of Brotherton,

and then falling into the hands of the police!"

"I know nothing about the police."

"May I ask your lordship what was his account of the transaction."

"I cannot give it you. I simply say that I think that he was

justified." Then Mr. Groschut expressed his opinion to Mrs. Groschut

that the Bishop was getting old,--very old indeed. Mr. Groschut was

almost afraid that no good could be done in the diocese till a firmer

and a younger man sat in the seat.

The main facts of the story came to the knowledge of the canons, though

I doubt whether the Bishop ever told all that was told to him. Some few

hard words were said. Canon Pountner made a remark in the Dean's

hearing about the Church militant, which drew forth from the Dean an

allusion to the rites of Bacchus, which the canon only half understood.

And Dr. Holdenough asked the Dean whether there had not been some

little trouble between him and the Marquis. "I am afraid you have been

a little hard upon my noble brother-in-law," said the Doctor. To which

the Dean replied that the Doctor should teach his noble brother-in-law

better manners. But, upon the whole, the Dean held his own well, and

was as carefully waited upon to his seat by the vergers as though there

had been no scene at Scumberg's Hotel.

For a time no doubt there was a hope on the part of Mr. Groschut

and his adherents that there would be some further police

interference;--that the Marquis would bring an action, or that the

magistrates would demand some inquiry. But nothing was done. The

Marquis endured his bruised back at any rate in silence. But there came

tidings to Brotherton that his lordship would not again be seen at

Manor Cross that year. The house had been kept up as though for him,

and he had certainly declared his purpose of returning when he left the

place. He had indeed spoken of living there almost to the end of

autumn. But early in July it became known that when he left Scumberg's

Hotel, he would go abroad;--and before the middle of July it was

intimated to Lady Alice, and through her to all Brotherton, that the

Dowager with her daughters and Lord George were going back to the old

house.

In the meantime Lady George was still at the deanery, and Lord George

at Cross Hall, and to the eyes of the world the husband had been

separated from his wife. His anger was certainly very deep, especially

against his wife's father. The fact that his commands had been

twice,--nay as he said thrice,--disobeyed rankled in his mind. He had

ordered her not to waltz, and she had waltzed with, as Lord George

thought, the most objectionable man in all London. He had ordered her

to leave town with him immediately after Mrs. Jones's ball, and she had

remained in town. He had ordered her now to leave her father and to

cleave to him; but she had cleft to her father and had deserted him.

What husband can do other than repudiate his wife under such

circumstances as these! He was moody, gloomy, silent, never speaking of

her, never going into Brotherton lest by chance he should see her; but

always thinking of her,--and always, always longing for her company.

She talked of him daily to her father, and was constant in her prayer

that they should not be made to quarrel. Having so long doubted whether

she could ever love him, she now could not understand the strength of

her own feeling. "Papa, mightn't I write to him," she said. But her

father thought that she should not herself take the first step at any

rate till the Marquis was gone. It was she who had in fact been

injured, and the overture should come from the other side. Then at

last, in a low whisper, hiding her face, she told her father a great

secret,--adding with a voice a little raised, "Now, papa, I must write

to him."

"My darling, my dearest," said the Dean, leaning over and kissing her

with more than his usual demonstration of love.

"I may write now."

"Yes, dear, you should certainly tell him that." Then the Dean went out

and walked round the deanery garden, and the cathedral cloisters, and

the close, assuring himself that after a very little while the real

Lord Popenjoy would be his own grandson.

CHAPTER XLV.

LADY GEORGE AT THE DEANERY.

It took Mary a long long morning,--not altogether an unhappy

morning,--to write her letter to her husband. She was forced to make

many attempts before she could tell the great news in a fitting way,

and even when the telling was done she was very far from being

satisfied with the manner of it. There should have been no necessity

that such tidings should be told by letter. It was cruel, very cruel,

that such a moment should not have been made happy to her by his joy.

The whisper made to her father should have been made to him,--but that

things had gone so untowardly with her. And then, in her present

circumstances, she could not devote her letter to the one event. She

must refer to the said subject of their separation. "Dear, dearest

George, pray do not think of quarrelling with me," she said twice over

in her letter. The letter did get itself finished at last, and the

groom was sent over with it on horseback.

What answer would he make to her? Would he be very happy? would he be

happy enough to forgive her at once and come and stay with her at the

deanery? or would the importance of the moment make him more imperious

than ever in commanding that she should go with him to Cross Hall. If

he did command her now she thought that she must go. Then she sat

meditating what would be the circumstances of her life there,--how

absolutely she would be trodden upon; how powerless she would be to

resist those Dorcas conclaves after her mutiny and subsequent

submission! Though she could not quite guess, she could nearly guess

what bad things had been said of her; and the ladies at Cross Hall

were, as she understood, now in amity with him who had said them. They

had believed evil of her, and of course, therefore, in going to Cross

Hall, she would go to it as to a reformatory. But the deanery would be

to her a paradise if only her husband would but come to her there. It

was not only that she was mistress of everything, including her own

time, but that her father's infinite tenderness made all things soft

and sweet to her. She hated to be scolded, and the slightest roughness

of word or tone seemed to her to convey a rebuke. But he was never

rough. She loved to be caressed by those who were dear and near and

close to her, and his manner was always caressing. She often loved, if

the truth is to be spoken, to be idle, and to spend hours with an

unread book in her hand under the shade of the deanery trees, and among

the flowers of the deanery garden. The Dean never questioned her as to

those idle hours. But at Cross Hall not a half-hour would be allowed to

pass without enquiry as to its purpose. At Cross Hall there would be no

novels,--except those of Miss Edgeworth, which were sickening to her.

She might have all Mudie down to the deanery if she chose to ask for

it. At Cross Hall she would be driven out with the Dowager, Lady

Susanna, and Lady Amelia, for two hours daily, and would have to get

out of the carriage at every cottage she came to. At the deanery there

was a pair of ponies, and it was her great delight to drive her father

about the roads outside the city. She sometimes thought that a long

sojourn at Cross Hall would kill her. Would he not be kind to her now,

and loving, and would he not come and stay with her for one or two

happy weeks in her father's house? If so, how dearly she would love

him; how good she would be to him; how she would strive to gratify him

in all his whims! Then she thought of Adelaide Houghton and the letter;

and she thought also of those subsequent visits to Berkeley Square. But

still she did not in the least believe that he cared for Adelaide

Houghton. It was impossible that he should like a painted, unreal,

helmeted creature, who smelt of oils, and was never unaffected for a

moment. At any rate she would never, never throw Adelaide Houghton in

his teeth. If she had been imprudent, so had he; and she would teach

him how small errors ought to be forgiven. But would he come to her, or

would he only write? Surely he would come to her now when there was

matter of such vital moment to be discussed between them! Surely there

would be little directions to her given, which should be obeyed,--oh,

with such care, if he would be good to her.

That pernicious groom must have ridden home along the road nearly as

quick as the Dean's cob would carry him for the express purpose of

saying that there was no message. When he had been about ten minutes in

the Cross Hall kitchen, he was told that there was no message, and had

trotted off with most unnecessary speed. Mary was with her father when

word was brought to him, saying that there was no message. "Oh, papa,

he doesn't care!" she said.

"He will be sure to write," said the Dean, "and he would not allow

himself to write in a hurry."

"But why doesn't he come?"

"He ought to come."

"Oh, papa;--if he doesn't care, I shall die."

"Men always care very much."

"But if he has made up his mind to quarrel with me for ever, then he

won't care. Why didn't he send his love?"

"He wouldn't do that by the groom."

"I'd send him mine by a chimney-sweep if there were nobody else." Then

the door was opened, and in half a second she was in her husband's

arms. "Oh, George, my darling, my own, I am so happy. I thought you

would come. Oh, my dear!" Then the Dean crept out without a word, and

the husband and the wife were together for hours.

"Do you think she is well," said Lord George to the Dean in the course

of the afternoon.

"Well? why shouldn't she be well!"

"In this condition I take it one never quite knows."

"I should say there isn't a young woman in England in better general

health. I never knew her to be ill in my life since she had the

measles."

"I thought she seemed flushed."

"No doubt,--at seeing you."

"I suppose she ought to see the doctor."

"See a fiddlestick. If she's not fretted she won't want a doctor till

the time comes when the doctor will be with her whether she wants him

or not. There's nothing so bad as coddling. Everybody knows that now.

The great thing is to make her happy."

There came a cloud across Lord George's brow as this was said,--a cloud

which he could not control, though, as he had hurried across the park

on horseback, he had made up his mind to be happy and good-humoured. He

certainly had cared very much. He had spoken no word on the subject to

anyone, but he had been very much disappointed when he had been married

twelve months and no hope of an heir had as yet been vouchsafed to him.

When his brother had alluded to the matter, he had rebuked even his

brother. He had never ventured to ask a question even of his wife. But

he had been himself aware of his own bitter disappointment. The reading

of his wife's letter had given him a feeling of joy keener than any he

had before felt. For a moment he had been almost triumphant. Of course

he would go to her. That distasteful Popenjoy up in London was sick and

ailing; and after all this might be the true Popenjoy who, in coming

days, would re-establish the glory of the family. But, at any rate, she

was his wife, and the bairn would be his bairn. He had been made a

happy man, and had determined to enjoy to the full the first blush of

his happiness. But when he was told that she was not to be fretted,

that she was to be made especially happy, and was so told by her

father, he did not quite clearly see his way for the future. Did this

mean that he was to give up everything, that he was to confess tacitly

that he had been wrong in even asking his wife to go with him to Cross

Hall, and that he was to be reconciled in all things to the Dean? He

was quite ready to take his wife back, to abstain from accusations

against her, to let her be one of the family, but he was as eager as

ever to repudiate the Dean. To the eyes of his mother the Dean was now

the most horrible of human beings, and her eldest born the dearest of

sons. After all that he had endured he was again going to let her live

at the old family house, and all those doubts about Popenjoy had, she

thought, been fully satisfied. The Marquis to her thinking was now

almost a model Marquis, and this dear son, this excellent head of the

family, had been nearly murdered by the truculent Dean. Of course the

Dean was spoken of at Cross Hall in very bitter terms, and of course

those terms made impression on Lord George. In the first moments of his

paternal anxiety he had been willing to encounter the Dean in order

that he might see his wife; but he did not like to be told by the Dean

that his wife ought to be made happy. "I don't know what there is to

make her unhappy," he said, "if she will do her duty."

"That she has always done," said the Dean, "both before her marriage

and since."

"I suppose she will come home now," said Lord George.

"I hardly know what home means. Your own home I take it is in Munster

Court."

"My own home is at Manor Cross," said Lord George, proudly.

"While that is the residence of Lord Brotherton it is absolutely

impossible that she should go there. Would you take her to the house of

a man who has scurrilously maligned her as he has done?"

"He is not there or likely to be there. Of course she would come to

Cross Hall first."

"Do you think that would be wise? You were speaking just now with

anxiety as to her condition."

"Of course I am anxious."

"You ought to be at any rate. Do you think, that as she is now she

should be subjected to the cold kindnesses of the ladies of your

family?"

"What right have you to call their kindness cold?"

"Ask yourself. You hear what they say. I do not. You must know exactly

what has been the effect in your mother's house of the scene between me

and your brother at that hotel. I spurned him from me with violence

because he had maligned your wife. I may expect you to forgive me."

"It was very unfortunate."

"I may feel sure that you as a man must exonerate me from blame in that

matter, but I cannot expect your mother to see it in the same light. I

ask you whether they do not regard her as wayward and unmanageable?"

He paused for a reply; and Lord George found himself obliged to say

something. "She should come and show that she is not wayward or

unmanageable."

"But she would be so to them. Without meaning it they would torment

her, and she would be miserable. Do you not know that it would be so?"

He almost seemed to yield. "If you wish her to be happy, come here for

a while. If you will stay here with us for a month, so that this stupid

idea of a quarrel shall be wiped out of people's minds, I will

undertake that she shall then go to Cross Hall. To Manor Cross she

cannot go while the Marquis is its ostensible master."

Lord George was very far from being prepared to yield in this way. He

had thought that his wife in her present condition would have been sure

to obey him, and had even ventured to hope that the Dean would make no

further objection. "I don't think that this is the place for her," he

said. "Wherever I am she should be with me."

"Then come here, and it will be all right," said the Dean.

"I don't think that I can do that."

"If you are anxious for her health you will." A few minutes ago the

Dean had been very stout in his assurances that everything was well

with his daughter, but he was by no means unwilling to take advantage

of her interesting situation to forward his own views. "I certainly

cannot say that she ought to go to Cross Hall at present. She would be

wretched there. Ask yourself."

"Why should she be wretched?"

"Ask yourself. You had promised her that you would come here. Does not

the very fact of your declining to keep that promise declare that you

are dissatisfied with her conduct, and with mine?" Lord George was

dissatisfied with his wife's conduct and with the Dean's, but at the

present moment did not wish to say so. "I maintain that her conduct is

altogether irreproachable; and as for my own, I feel that I am entitled

to your warmest thanks for what I have done. I must desire you to

understand that we will neither of us submit to blame."

Nothing had been arranged when Lord George left the deanery. The

husband could not bring himself to say a harsh word to his wife. When

she begged him to promise that he would come over to the deanery, he

shook his head. Then she shed a tear, but as she did it she kissed him,

and he could not answer her love by any rough word. So he rode back to

Cross Hall, feeling that the difficulties of his position were almost

insuperable.

On the next morning Mr. Price came to him. Mr. Price was the farmer who

had formerly lived at Cross Hall, who had given his house up to the

Dowager, and who had in consequence been told that he must quit the

land at the expiration of his present term. "So, my lord, his lordship

ain't going to stay very long after all," said Mr. Price.

"I don't quite know as yet," said Lord George.

"I have had Mr. Knox with me this morning, saying that I may go back to

the Hall whenever I please. He took me so much by surprise, I didn't

know what I was doing."

"My mother is still there, Mr. Price."

"In course she is, my lord. But Mr. Knox was saying that she is going

to move back at once to the old house. It's very kind of his lordship,

I'm sure, to let bygones be bygones." Lord George could only say that

nothing was as yet settled, but that Mr. Price would be, of course,

welcome to Cross Hall, should the family go back to Manor Cross.

This took place about the 10th of June, and for a fortnight after that

no change took place in any of their circumstances. Lady Alice

Holdenough called upon Lady George, and, with her husband, dined at the

deanery; but Mary saw nothing else of any of the ladies of the family.

No letter came from either of her sisters-in-law congratulating her as

to her new hopes, and the Manor Cross carriage never stopped at the

Dean's door. The sisters came to see Lady Alice, who lived also in the

Close, but they never even asked for Lady George. All this made the

Dean very angry, so that he declared that his daughter should under no

circumstances be the first to give way. As she had not offended, she

should never be driven to ask for pardon. During this time Lord George

more than once saw his wife, but he had no further interview with the

Dean.

CHAPTER XLVI.

LADY SARAH'S MISSION.

Towards the end of June the family at Cross Hall were in great

perturbation. In the first place it had been now settled that they were

to go back to the great house early in July. This might have been a

source of unalloyed gratification. The old Marchioness had been made

very unhappy by the change to Cross Hall, and had persisted in calling

her new home a wretched farmhouse. Both Lady Susanna and Lady Amelia

were quite alive to the advantages of the great mansion. Lord George

had felt that his position in the county had been very much injured by

recent events. This might partly have come from his residence in

London; but had, no doubt, been chiefly owing to the loss of influence

arising from the late migration. He was glad enough to go back again.

But Lady Sarah was strongly opposed to the new movement. "I don't think

that mamma should be made liable to be turned out again," she had said

to her brother and sisters.

"But mamma is particularly anxious to go," Amelia had replied.

"You can't expect mamma to think correctly about Brotherton," said Lady

Sarah. "He is vicious and fickle, and I do not like to feel that any of

us should be in his power." But Lady Sarah, who had never been on good

terms with her elder brother, was overruled, and everybody knew that in

July the family was to return to Manor Cross.

Then there came tidings from London,--unauthorised tidings, and, one

may say, undignified tidings,--but still tidings which were received

with interest. Mrs. Toff had connections with Scumberg's, and heard

through these connections that things at Scumberg's were not going on

in a happy way. Mrs. Toff's correspondent declared that the Marquis had

hardly been out of his bed since he had been knocked into the

fireplace. Mrs. Toff, who had never loved the Dean and had never

approved of that alliance, perhaps made the most of this. But the

report, which was first made to the Dowager herself, caused very great

uneasiness. The old lady said that she must go up to London herself to

nurse her son. Then a letter was written by Lady Amelia to her brother,

asking for true information. This was the answer which Lady Amelia

received;--

"DEAR A.,--I'm pretty well, thank you. Don't trouble yourselves.

Yours, B."

"I'm sure he's dying," said the Marchioness, "and he's too

noble-hearted to speak of his sufferings." Nevertheless she felt that

she did not dare to go up to Scumberg's just at present.

Then there came further tidings. Mrs. Toff was told that the Italian

Marchioness had gone away, and had taken Popenjoy with her. There was

not anything necessarily singular in this. When a gentleman is going

abroad with his family, he and his family need not as a matter of

course travel together. Lord Brotherton had declared his purpose of

returning to Italy, and there could be no reason why his wife, with the

nurses and the august Popenjoy, should not go before him. It was just

such an arrangement as such a man as Lord Brotherton would certainly

make. But Mrs. Toff was sure that there was more in it than this. The

Italian Marchioness had gone off very suddenly. There had been no grand

packing up;--but there had been some very angry words. And Popenjoy,

when he was taken away, was supposed to be in a very poor condition of

health. All this created renewed doubts in the mind of Lord George, or

rather, perhaps, renewed hopes. Perhaps, after all, Popenjoy was not

Popenjoy. And even if he were, it seemed that everyone concurred in

thinking that the poor boy would die. Surely the Marquis would not have

allowed a sick child to be carried away by an indiscreet Italian mother

if he cared much for the sick child. But then Lord George had no real

knowledge of these transactions. All this had come through Mrs. Toff,

and he was hardly able to rely upon Mrs. Toff. Could he have

communicated with the Dean, the Dean would soon have found out the

truth. The Dean would have flown up to London and have known all about

it in a couple of hours; but Lord George was not active and clever as

the Dean.

Then he wrote a letter to his brother;--as follows;--

"MY DEAR BROTHERTON,--We have heard through Mr. Knox that you wish

us to move to Manor Cross at once, and we are preparing to do so.

It is very kind of you to let us have the house, as Cross Hall is

not all that my mother likes, and as there would hardly be room

for us should my wife have children. I ought perhaps to have told

you sooner that she is in the family way. We hear too that you are

thinking of starting for Italy very soon, and that the Marchioness

and Popenjoy have already gone. Would it suit you to tell us

something of your future plans? It is not that I want to be

inquisitive, but that I should like to know with reference to your

comfort and our own whether you think that you will be back at

Manor Cross next year. Of course we should be very sorry to be in

your way, but we should not like to give up Cross Hall till we

know that it will not be wanted again.

"I hope you are getting better. I could of course come up to town

at a moment's notice, if you wished to see me.

"Yours affectionately,

"GEORGE GERMAIN."

There was nothing in this letter which ought to have made any brother

angry, but the answer which came to it certainly implied that the

Marquis had received it with dudgeon.

"MY DEAR GEORGE," the Marquis said,

"I can give you no guarantee that I shall not want Manor Cross

again, and you ought not to expect it. If you and the family go

there of course I must have rent for Cross Hall. I don't suppose

I shall ever recover altogether from the injury that cursed brute

did me.

"Yours, 'B.'

"As to your coming family of course I can say nothing. You won't

expect me to be very full of joy. Nevertheless, for the honour of

the family, I hope it is all right."

There was a brutality about this which for a time made the expectant

father almost mad. He tore the letter at once into fragments, so that

he might be ready with an answer if asked to show it to his sisters.

Lady Sarah had known of his writing, and did ask as to her brother's

answer. "Of course he told me nothing," said Lord George. "He is not

like any other brother that ever lived."

"May I see his letter?"

"I have destroyed it. It was not fit to be seen. He will not say

whether he means to come back next year or not."

"I would not stir, if it were for me to determine," said Lady Sarah.

"Nobody ever ought to live in another person's house as long as he has

one of his own;--and of all men certainly not in Brotherton's."

Nevertheless, the migration went on, and early in July the Marchioness

was once more in possession of her own room at Manor Cross, and Mrs.

Toff was once again in the ascendant.

But what was to be done about Mary? Had Popenjoy been reported to enjoy

robust health, and had Mary been as Mary was a month or two since, the

Marchioness and Lady Susanna would have been contented that the present

separation should have been permanent. They would at any rate have

taken no steps to put an end to it which would not have implied abject

submission on Mary's part. But now things were so altered! If this

Popenjoy should die, and if Mary should have a son, Mary's position

would be one which they could not afford to overlook. Though Mary

should be living in absolute rebellion with that horrid Dean, still her

Popenjoy would in course of time be the Popenjoy, and nothing that any

Germain could do would stand in her way. Her Popenjoy would be Popenjoy

as soon as the present Marquis should die, and the family estates would

all in due time be his! Her position had been becoming daily more

honourable as these rumours were received. Everyone at Manor Cross,

down to the boy in the kitchen, felt that her dignity had been

immeasurably increased. Her child should now certainly be born at Manor

Cross,--though the deanery would have been quite good enough had the

present Popenjoy been robust. Something must be done. The Marchioness

was clear that Mary should be taken into favour and made much of,--even

hinted that she should not be asked to make shirts and petticoats,--if

only she could be separated from the pestilential Dean. She spoke in

private to her son, who declared that nothing would separate Mary from

her father. "I don't think I could entertain him after what he did to

Brotherton," said the Marchioness, bursting into tears.

There were great consultations at Manor Cross, in which the wisdom of

Lady Sarah and Lady Susanna, and sometimes the good offices of Lady

Alice Holdenough were taxed to the utmost. Lady Sarah had since the

beginning of these latter troubles been Mary's best friend, though

neither Mary nor the Dean had known of her good services. She had

pretty nearly understood the full horror of the accusation brought by

the Marquis, and had in her heart acquitted the Dean. Though she was

hard she was very just. She believed no worse evil of Mary than that

she had waltzed when her husband had wished her not to do so. To Lady

Sarah all waltzing was an abomination, and disobedience to legitimate

authority was abominable also. But then Mary had been taken to London,

and had been thrown into temptation, and was very young. Lady Sarah

knew that her own life was colourless, and was contented. But she could

understand that women differently situated should not like a colourless

existence. She had seen Adelaide Houghton and her sister-in-law

together, and had known that her brother's lot had fallen in much the

better place, and, to her, any separation between those whom God had

bound together was shocking and wicked. Lady Susanna was louder and

less just. She did not believe that Mary had done anything to merit

expulsion from the family; but she did think that her return to it

should be accompanied by sackcloth and ashes. Mary had been pert to

her, and she was not prone to forgive. Lady Alice had no

opinion,--could say nothing about it; but would be happy if, by her

services, she could assuage matters.

"Does she ever talk of him," Lady Susanna asked.

"Not to me; I don't think she dares. But whenever he goes there she is

delighted to see him."

"He has not been for the last ten days," said Lady Sarah.

"I don't think he will ever go again,--unless it be to fetch her," said

Lady Susanna. "I don't see how he can keep on going there, when she

won't do as he bids her. I never heard of such a thing! Why should she

choose to live with her father when she is his wife? I can't understand

it at all."

"There has been some provocation," said Lady Sarah.

"What provocation? I don't know of any. Just to please her fancy,

George had to take a house in London, and live there against his own

wishes."

"It was natural that she should go to the deanery for a few days; but

when she was there no one went to see her."

"Why did she not come here first?" said Lady Susanna. "Why did she take

upon herself to say where she would go, instead of leaving it to her

husband. Of course it was the Dean. How can any man be expected to

endure that his wife should be governed by her father instead of by

himself? I think George has been very forbearing."

"You have hardly told the whole story," said Lady Sarah. "Nor do I wish

to tell it. Things were said which never should have been spoken. If

you will have me, Alice, I will go to Brotherton for a day or two, and

I will then go and see her."

And so it was arranged. No one in the house was told of the new plan,

Lady Susanna having with difficulty been brought to promise silence.

Lady Sarah's visit was of course announced, and that alone created

great surprise, as Lady Sarah very rarely left home. The Marchioness

had two or three floods of tears over it, and suggested that the

carriage would be wanted for the entire day. This evil, however, was

altogether escaped, as Lady Alice had a carriage of her own. "I'm sure

I don't know who is to look after Mrs. Green," said the Marchioness.

Mrs. Green was an old woman of ninety who was supported by Germain

charity and was visited almost daily by Lady Sarah. But Lady Amelia

promised that she would undertake Mrs. Green. "Of course I'm nobody,"

said the Marchioness. Mrs. Toff and all who knew the family were sure

that the Marchioness would, in truth, enjoy her temporary freedom from

her elder daughter's control.

Whatever might have been Lord George's suspicion, he said nothing about

it. It had not been by agreement with him that the ladies of the family

had abstained from calling on his wife. He had expressed himself in

very angry terms as to the Dean's misconduct in keeping her in

Brotherton, and in his wrath had said more than once that he would

never speak to the Dean again. He had not asked any one to go there;

but neither had he asked them not to do so. In certain of his moods he

was indignant with his sisters for their treatment of his wife; and

then again he would say to himself that it was impossible that they

should go into the Dean's house after what the Dean had done. Now, when

he heard that his eldest sister was going to the Close, he said not a

word.

On the day of her arrival Lady Sarah knocked at the deanery door alone.

Up to this moment she had never put her foot in the house. Before the

marriage she had known the Dean but slightly, and the visiting to be

done by the family very rarely fell to her share. The streets of

Brotherton were almost strange to her, so little was she given to leave

the sphere of her own duties. In the hall, at the door of his study,

she met the Dean. He was so surprised that he hardly knew how to greet

her. "I am come to call upon Mary," said Lady Sarah, very brusquely.

"Better late than never," said the Dean, with a smile.

"I hope so," said Lady Sarah, very solemnly. "I hope that I am not

doing that which ought not to be done. May I see her?"

"Of course you can see her. I dare say she will be delighted. Is your

carriage here?"

"I am staying with my sister. Shall I go upstairs?"

Mary was in the garden, and Lady Sarah was alone for a few minutes in

the drawing-room. Of course she thought that this time was spent in

conference by the father and daughter; but the Dean did not even see

his child. He was anxious enough himself that the quarrel should be

brought to an end, if only that end could be reached by some steps to

be taken first by the other side. Mary, as she entered the room, was

almost frightened, for Lady Sarah had certainly been the greatest of

the bugbears when she was living at Manor Cross, "I am come to

congratulate you," said Lady Sarah, putting her hand out straight

before her.

Better late than never. Mary did not say so, as her father had done,

but only thought it. "Thank you," she said, in a very low voice. "Has

any one else come?"

"No,--no one else. I am with Alice, and as I have very very much to

say, I have come alone. Oh! Mary,--dear Mary, is not this sad?" Mary

was not at all disposed to yield, or to acknowledge that the sadness

was, in any degree, her fault, but she remembered, at the moment, that

Lady Sarah had never called her "dear Mary" before. "Don't you wish

that you were back with George?"

"Of course I do. How can I wish anything else?"

"Why don't you go back to him?"

"Let him come here and fetch me, and be friends with papa. He promised

that he would come and stay here. Is he well, Sarah?"

"Yes; he is well."

"Quite well? Give him my love,--my best love. Tell him that in spite of

everything I love him better than all the world."

"I am sure you do."

"Yes;--of course I do. I could be so happy now if he would come to me."

"You can go to him. I will take you if you wish it."

"You don't understand," said Mary.

"What don't I understand?"

"About papa."

"Will he not let you go to your husband?"

"I suppose he would let me go;--but if I were gone what would become of

him?"

Lady Sarah did not, in truth, understand this. "When he gave you to be

married," she said, "of course he knew that you must go away from him

and live with your husband. A father does not expect a married daughter

to stay in his own house."

"But he expects to be able to go to hers. He does not expect to be

quarrelled with by everybody. If I were to go to Manor Cross, papa

couldn't even come and see me."

"I think he could."

"You don't know papa if you fancy he would go into any house in which

he was not welcome. Of course I know that you have all quarrelled with

him. You think because he beat the Marquis up in London that he

oughtn't ever to be spoken to again. But I love him for what he did

more dearly than ever. He did it for my sake. He was defending me, and

defending George. I have done nothing wrong. If it is only for George's

sake, I will never admit that I have deserved to be treated in this

way. None of you have come to see me before, since I came back from

London, and now George doesn't come."

"We should all have been kind to you if you had come to us first."

"Yes; and then I should never have been allowed to be here at all. Let

George come and stay here, if it is only for two days, and be kind to

papa, and then I will go with him to Manor Cross."

Lady Sarah was much surprised by the courage and persistence of the

young wife's plea. The girl had become a woman, and was altered even in

appearance. She certainly looked older, but then she was certainly much

more beautiful than before. She was dressed, not richly, but with care,

and looked like a woman of high family. Lady Sarah, who never changed

either the colour or the material of her brown morning gown, liked to

look at her, telling herself that should it ever be this woman's fate

to be Marchioness of Brotherton, she would not in appearance disgrace

the position. "I hope you can understand that we are very anxious about

you," she said.

"I don't know."

"You might know, then. Your baby will be a Germain."

"Ah,--yes,--for that! You can't think I am happy without George. I am

longing all day long, from morning to night, that he will come back to

me. But after all that has happened, I must do what papa advises. If I

were just to go to Manor Cross now, and allow myself to be carried

there alone, you would all feel that I had been--forgiven. Isn't that

true?"

"You would be very welcome."

"Susanna would forgive me, and your mother. And I should be like a girl

who has been punished, and who is expected to remember ever so long

that she has been naughty. I won't be forgiven, except by George,--and

he has nothing to forgive. You would all think me wicked if I were

there, because I would not live in your ways."

"We should not think you wicked, Mary."

"Yes, you would. You thought me wicked before."

"Don't you believe we love you, Mary?"

She considered a moment before she made a reply, but then made it very

clearly: "No," she said, "I don't think you do. George loves me. Oh, I

hope he loves me."

"You may be quite sure of that. And I love you."

"Yes;--just as you love all people, because the Bible tells you. That

is not enough."

"I will love you like a sister, Mary, if you will come back to us."

She liked being asked. She was longing to be once more with her

husband. She desired of all things to be able to talk to him of her

coming hopes. There was something in the tone of Lady Sarah's voice,

different from the tones of old, which had its effect. She would

promise to go if only some slightest concession could be made, which

should imply that neither she nor her father had given just cause of

offence. And she did feel,--she was always feeling,--that her husband

ought to remember that she had never brought counter-charges against

him. She had told no one of Mrs. Houghton's letter. She was far too

proud to give the slightest hint that she too had her grievance. But

surely he should remember it. "I should like to go," she said.

"Then come back with me to-morrow." Lady Sarah had come only on this

business, and if the business were completed there would be no

legitimate reason for her prolonged sojourn at Brotherton.

"Would George come here for one night."

"Surely, Mary, you would not drive a bargain with your husband."

"But papa!"

"Your father can only be anxious for your happiness."

"Therefore I must be anxious for his. I can't say that I'll go without

asking him."

"Then ask him and come in and see me at Alice's house this afternoon.

And tell your father that I say you shall be received with all

affection."

Mary made no promise that she would do even this as Lady Sarah took her

leave; but she did at once consult her father. "Of course you can go if

you like it, dearest."

"But you!"

"Never mind me. I am thinking only of you. They will be different to

you now that they think you will be the mother of the heir."

"Would you take me, and stay there, for one night?"

"I don't think I could do that, dear. I do not consider that I have

been exactly asked."

"But if they will ask you?"

"I cannot ask to be asked. To tell the truth I am not at all anxious to

be entertained at Manor Cross. They would always be thinking of that

fireplace into which the Marquis fell."

The difficulty was very great and Mary could not see her way through

it. She did not go to Dr. Holdenough's house that afternoon, but wrote

a very short note to Lady Sarah begging that George might come over and

talk to her.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"THAT YOUNG FELLOW IN THERE."

A day or two after this Lord George did call at the deanery, but stayed

there only for a minute or two, and on that occasion did not even speak

of Mary's return to Manor Cross. He was considerably flurried, and

showed his wife the letter which had caused his excitement. It was from

his brother, and like most of the Marquis's letters was very short.

"I think you had better come up and see me. I'm not very well. B." That

was the entire letter, and he was now on his way to London.

"Do you think it is much, George?"

"He would not write like that unless he were really ill. He has never

recovered from the results of that--accident."

Then it occurred to Mary that if the Marquis were to die, and Popenjoy

were to die, she would at once be the Marchioness of Brotherton, and

that people would say that her father had raised her to the title

by--killing the late lord. And it would be so. There was something so

horrible in this that she trembled as she thought of it. "Oh, George!"

"It is very--very sad."

"It was his fault; wasn't it? I would give all the world that he were

well; but it was his fault." Lord George was silent. "Oh, George, dear

George, acknowledge that. Was it not so? Do you not think so? Could

papa stand by and hear him call me such names as that? Could you have

done so?"

"A man should not be killed for an angry word."

"Papa did not mean to kill him!"

"I can never be reconciled to the man who has taken the life of my

brother."

"Do you love your brother better than me?"

"You and your father are not one."

"If this is to be said of him I will always be one with papa. He did it

for my sake and for yours. If they send him to prison I will go with

him. George, tell the truth about it."

"I always tell the truth," he said angrily.

"Did he not do right to protect his girl's name? I will never leave him

now; never. If everybody is against him, I will never leave him."

No good was to be got from the interview. Whatever progress Lady Sarah

may have made was altogether undone by the husband's sympathy for his

injured brother. Mary declared to herself that if there must be two

sides, if there must be a real quarrel, she could never be happy again,

but that she certainly would not now desert her father. Then she was

left alone. Ah, what would happen if the man were to die. Would any

woman ever have risen to high rank in so miserable a manner! In her

tumult of feelings she told her father everything, and was astonished

by his equanimity. "It may be so," he said, "and if so, there will be

considerable inconvenience."

"Inconvenience, papa!"

"There will be a coroner's inquest, and perhaps some kind of trial. But

when the truth comes out no English jury will condemn me."

"Who will tell the truth, papa?"

The Dean knew it all, and was well aware that there would be no one to

tell the truth on his behalf,--no one to tell it in such guise that a

jury would be entitled to accept the telling as evidence. A verdict of

manslaughter with punishment, at the discretion of the judge, would be

the probable result. But the Dean did not choose to add to his

daughter's discomfort by explaining this. "The chances are that this

wretched man is dying. No doubt his health is bad. How should the

health of such a man be good? But had he been so hurt as to die from

it, the doctor would have found something out long since. He may be

dying, but he is not dying from what I did to him." The Dean was

disturbed, but in his perturbation he remembered that if the man were

to die there would be nothing but that little alien Popenjoy between

his daughter and the title.

Lord George hurried up to town, and took a room for himself at an hotel

in Jermyn Street. He would not go to Scumberg's, as he did not wish to

mix his private life with that of his brother. That afternoon he went

across, and was told that his brother would see him at three o'clock

the next day. Then he interrogated Mrs. Walker as to his brother's

condition. Mrs. Walker knew nothing about it, except that the Marquis

lay in bed during the most of his time, and that Dr. Pullbody was there

every day. Now Dr. Pullbody was an eminent physician, and had the

Marquis been dying from an injury in his back an eminent surgeon would

have been required. Lord George dined at his club on a mutton chop and

a half a pint of sherry, and then found himself terribly dull. What

could he do with himself? Whither could he betake himself? So he walked

across Piccadilly and went to the old house in Berkeley Square.

He had certainly become very sick of the woman there. He had discussed

the matter with himself and had found out that he did not care one

straw for the woman. He had acknowledged to himself that she was a

flirt, a mass of affectation, and a liar. And yet he went to her house.

She would be soft to him and would flatter him, and the woman would

trouble herself to do so. She would make him welcome, and in spite of

his manifest neglect would try, for the hour, to make him comfortable.

He was shown up into the drawing-room and there he found Jack De Baron,

Guss Mildmay;--and Mr. Houghton, fast asleep. The host was wakened up

to bid him welcome, but was soon slumbering again. De Baron and Guss

Mildmay had been playing bagatelle,--or flirting in the back

drawing-room, and after a word or two returned to their game. "Ill is

he?" said Mrs. Houghton, speaking of the Marquis, "I suppose he has

never recovered from that terrible blow."

"I have not seen him yet, but I am told that Dr. Pullbody is with him."

"What a tragedy,--if anything should happen! She has gone away; has she

not."

"I do not know. I did not ask."

"I think she has gone, and that she has taken the child with her; a

poor puny thing. I made Houghton go there to enquire, and he saw the

child. I hear from my father that we are to congratulate you."

"Things are too sad for congratulation."

"It is horrible; is it not? And Mary is with her father."

"Yes, she's at the deanery."

"Is that right?--when all this is going on?"

"I don't think anything is right," he said, gloomily.

"Has she--quarrelled with you, George?" At the sound of his Christian

name from the wife's lips he looked round at the sleeping husband. He

was quite sure that Mr. Houghton would not like to hear his wife call

him George. "He sleeps like a church," said Mrs. Houghton, in a low

voice. The two were sitting close together and Mr. Houghton's arm-chair

was at a considerable distance. The occasional knocking of the balls,

and the continued sound of voices was to be heard from the other room.

"If you have separated from her I think you ought to tell me."

"I saw her to-day as I came through."

"But she does not go to Manor Cross?"

"She has been at the deanery since she went down."

Of course this woman knew of the quarrel which had taken place in

London. Of course she had been aware that Lady George had stayed behind

in opposition to her husband's wishes. Of course she had learned every

detail as to the Kappa-kappa. She took it for granted that Mary was in

love with Jack De Baron, and thought it quite natural that she should

be so. "She never understood you as I should have done, George,"

whispered the lady. Lord George again looked at the sleeping man, who

grunted and moved, "He would hardly hear a pistol go off."

"Shouldn't I?" said the sleeping man, rubbing away the flies from his

nose. Lord George wished himself back at his club.

"Come out into the balcony," said Mrs. Houghton. She led the way and he

was obliged to follow her. There was a balcony to this house surrounded

with full-grown shrubs, so that they who stood there could hardly be

seen from the road below. "He never knows what any one is saying." As

she spoke she came close up to her visitor. "At any rate he has the

merit of never troubling me or himself by any jealousies."

"I should be very sorry to give him cause," said Lord George.

"What's that you say?" Poor Lord George had simply been awkward, having

intended no severity. "Have you given him no cause?"

"I meant that I should be sorry to trouble him."

"Ah--h! That is a different thing. If husbands would only be

complaisant, how much nicer it would be for everybody." Then there was

a pause. "You do love me, George?" There was a beautiful moon that was

bright through the green foliage, and there was a smell of sweet

exotics, and the garden of the Square was mysteriously pretty as it lay

below them in the moonlight. He stood silent, making no immediate

answer to this appeal. He was in truth plucking up his courage for a

great effort. "Say that you love me. After all that is passed you must

love me." Still he was silent. "George, will you not speak?"

"Yes; I will speak."

"Well, sir!"

"I do not love you."

"What! But you are laughing at me. You have some scheme or some plot

going on."

"I have nothing going on. It is better to say it. I love my wife."

"Psha! love her;--yes, as you would a doll or any pretty plaything. I

loved her too till she took it into her stupid head to quarrel with me.

I don't grudge her such love as that. She is a child."

It occurred to Lord George at the moment that his wife had certainly

more than an infantine will of her own. "You don't know her," he said.

"And now, after all, you tell me to my face that you do not love me!

Why have you sworn so often that you did?" He hadn't sworn it often. He

had never sworn it at all since she had rejected him. He had been

induced to admit a passion in the most meagre terms. "Do you own

yourself to be false?" she asked.

"I am true to my wife."

"Your wife! One would think you were the curate of the parish. And is

that to be all?"

"Yes, Mrs. Houghton; that had better be all."

"Then why did you come here? Why are you here now?" She had not

expected such courage from him, and almost thought more of him now than

she had ever thought before. "How dare you come to this house at all?"

"Perhaps I should not have come."

"And I am nothing to you?" she asked in her most plaintive accents.

"After all those scenes at Manor Cross you can think of me with

indifference?" There had been no scenes, and as she spoke he shook his

head, intending to disclaim them. "Then go!" How was he to go? Was he

to wake Mr. Houghton? Was he to disturb that other loving couple? Was

he to say no word of farewell to her? "Oh, stay," she added, "and unsay

it all--unsay it all and give no reason, and it shall be as though it

were never said." Then she seized him by the arm and looked

passionately up into his eyes. Mr. Houghton moved restlessly in his

chair and coughed aloud. "He'll be off again in half a moment," said

Mrs. Houghton. Then he was silent, and she was silent, looking at him.

And he heard a word or two come clearly from the back drawing-room.

"You will, Jack; won't you, dear Jack?"

The ridicule of the thing touched even him. "I think I had better go,"

he said.

"Then go!"

"Good-night, Mrs. Houghton."

"I will not say good-night. I will never speak to you again. You are

not worth speaking to. You are false. I knew that men could be false,

but not so false as you. Even that young fellow in there has some

heart. He loves your--darling wife, and will be true to his love." She

was a very devil in her wickedness. He started as though he had been

stung, and rushed inside for his hat. "Halloa, Germain, are you going?"

said the man of the house, rousing himself for the moment.

"Yes, I am going. Where did I leave my hat?"

"You put it on the piano," said Mrs. Houghton in her mildest voice,

standing at the window. Then he seized his hat and went off. "What a

very stupid man he is," she said, as she entered the room.

"A very good sort of fellow," said Mr. Houghton.

"He's a gentleman all round," said Jack De Baron. Jack knew pretty well

how the land lay and could guess what had occurred.

"I am not so sure of that," said the lady. "If he were a gentleman as

you say all round, he would not be so much afraid of his elder brother.

He has come up to town now merely because Brotherton sent to him, and

when he went to Scumberg's the Marquis would not see him. He is just

like his sisters,--priggish, punctilious and timid."

"He has said something nasty to you," remarked her husband, "or you

would not speak of him like that."

She had certainly said something very nasty to him. As he returned to

his club he kept on repeating to himself her last words;--"He loves

your darling wife." Into what a mass of trouble had he not fallen

through the Dean's determination that his daughter should live in

London! He was told on all sides that this man was in love with his

wife, and he knew,--he had so much evidence for knowing,--that his wife

liked the man. And now he was separated from his wife, and she could

go whither her father chose to take her. For aught that he could do she

might be made to live within the reach of this young scoundrel. No

doubt his wife would come back if he would agree to take her back on

her own terms. She would again belong to him if he would agree to take

the Dean along with her. But taking the Dean would be to put himself

into the Dean's leading strings. The Dean was strong and imperious; and

then the Dean was rich. But anything would be better than losing his

wife. Faulty as he thought her to be, she was sweet as no one else was

sweet. When alone with him she would seem to make every word of his a

law. Her caresses were full of bliss to him. When he kissed her her

face would glow with pleasure. Her voice was music to him; her least

touch was joy. There was a freshness about the very things which she

wore which pervaded his senses. There was a homeliness about her beauty

which made her more lovely in her own room than when dressed for balls

and parties. And yet he had heard it said that when dressed she was

declared to be the most lovely woman that had come to London that

season. And now she was about to become the mother of his child. He was

thoroughly in love with his wife. And yet he was told that his wife was

"Jack De Baron's darling!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE MARQUIS MAKES A PROPOSITION.

The next morning was very weary with him, as he had nothing to do till

three o'clock. He was most anxious to know whether his sister-in-law

had in truth left London, but he had no means of finding out. He could

not ask questions on such a subject from Mrs. Walker and her

satellites; and he felt that it would be difficult to ask even his

brother. He was aware that his brother had behaved to him badly, and he

had determined not to be over courteous,--unless, indeed, he should

find his brother to be dangerously ill. But above all things he would

avoid all semblance of inquisitiveness which might seem to have a

reference to the condition of his own unborn child. He walked up and

down St. James' Park thinking of all this, looking up once at the

windows of the house which had brought so much trouble on him, that

house of his which had hardly been his own, but not caring to knock at

the door and enter it. He lunched in solitude at his club, and exactly

at three o'clock presented himself at Scumberg's door. The Marquis's

servant was soon with him, and then again he found himself alone in

that dreary sitting-room. How wretched must his brother be, living

there from day to day without a friend, or, as far as he was aware,

without a companion!

He was there full twenty minutes, walking about the room in exasperated

ill-humour, when at last the door was opened and his brother was

brought in between two men-servants. He was not actually carried, but

was so supported as to appear to be unable to walk. Lord George asked

some questions, but received no immediate answers. The Marquis was at

the moment thinking too much of himself and of the men who were

ministering to him to pay any attention to his brother. Then by degrees

he was fixed in his place, and after what seemed to be interminable

delay the two men went away. "Ugh!" ejaculated the Marquis.

"I am glad to see that you can at any rate leave your room," said Lord

George.

"Then let me tell you that it takes deuced little to make you glad."

The beginning was not auspicious, and further progress in conversation

seemed to be difficult. "They told me yesterday that Dr. Pullbody was

attending you."

"He has this moment left me. I don't in the least believe in him. Your

London doctors are such conceited asses that you can't speak to them?

Because they can make more money than their brethren in other countries

they think that they know everything, and that nobody else knows

anything. It is just the same with the English in every branch of life.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the greatest priest going, because he

has the greatest income, and the Lord Chancellor the greatest lawyer.

All you fellows here are flunkies from top to bottom."

Lord George certainly had not come up to town merely to hear the great

dignitaries of his country abused. But he was comforted somewhat as he

reflected that a dying man would hardly turn his mind to such an

occupation. When a sick man criticises his doctor severely he is seldom

in a very bad way. "Have you had anybody else with you, Brotherton?"

"One is quite enough. But I had another. A fellow named Bolton was

here, a baronet, I believe, who told me I ought to walk a mile in Hyde

Park every day. When I told him I couldn't he said I didn't know till I

tried. I handed him a five-pound note, upon which he hauled out three

pounds nineteen shillings change and walked off in a huff. I didn't

send for him any more."

"Sir James Bolton has a great reputation."

"No doubt. I daresay he could cut off my leg if I asked him, and would

then have handed out two pounds eighteen with the same indifference."

"I suppose your back is better?"

"No, it isn't,--not a bit. It gets worse and worse."

"What does Dr. Pullbody say?"

"Nothing that anybody can understand. By George! he takes my money

freely enough. He tells me to eat beefsteaks and drink port-wine. I'd

sooner die at once. I told him so, or something a little stronger, I

believe, and he almost jumped out of his shoes."

"He doesn't think there is any----danger?"

"He doesn't know anything about it. I wish I could have your

father-in-law in a room by ourselves, with a couple of loaded

revolvers. I'd make better work of it than he did."

"God forbid!"

"I daresay he won't give me the chance. He thinks he has done a plucky

thing because he's as strong as a brewer's horse. I call that downright

cowardice."

"It depends on how it began, Brotherton."

"Of course there had been words between us. Things always begin in that

way."

"You must have driven him very hard."

"Are you going to take his part? Because, if so, there may as well be

an end of it. I thought you had found him out and had separated

yourself from him. You can't think that he is a gentleman?"

"He is a very liberal man."

"You mean to sell yourself, then, for the money that was made in his

father's stables?"

"I have not sold myself at all. I haven't spoken to him for the last

month."

"So I understood; therefore I sent for you. You are all back at Manor

Cross now?"

"Yes;--we are there."

"You wrote me a letter which I didn't think quite the right thing. But,

however, I don't mind telling you that you can have the house if we can

come to terms about it."

"What terms?"

"You can have the house and the park, and Cross Hall Farm, too, if

you'll pledge yourself that the Dean shall never enter your house

again, and that you will never enter his house or speak to him. You

shall do pretty nearly as you please at Manor Cross. In that event I

shall live abroad, or here in London if I come to England. I think

that's a fair offer, and I don't suppose that you yourself can be very

fond of the man." Lord George sat perfectly silent while the Marquis

waited for a reply. "After what has passed," continued he, "you can't

suppose that I should choose that he should be entertained in my

dining-room."

"You said the same about my wife before."

"Yes, I did; but a man may separate himself from his father-in-law when

he can't very readily get rid of his wife. I never saw your wife."

"No;--and therefore cannot know what she is."

"I don't in the least want to know what she is. You and I, George,

haven't been very lucky in our marriages."

"I have."

"Do you think so? You see I speak more frankly of myself. But I am not

speaking of your wife. Your wife's father has been a blister to me ever

since I came back to this country, and you must make up your mind

whether you will take his part or mine. You know what he did, and what

he induced you to do about Popenjoy. You know the reports that he has

spread abroad. And you know what happened in this room. I expect you to

throw him off altogether." Lord George had thrown the Dean off

altogether. For reasons of his own he had come to the conclusion that

the less he had to do with the Dean the better for himself; but he

certainly could give no such pledge as this now demanded from him. "You

won't make me this promise?" said the Marquis.

"No; I can't do that."

"Then you'll have to turn out of Manor Cross," said the Marquis,

smiling.

"You do not mean that my mother must be turned out?"

"You and my mother, I suppose, will live together?"

"It does not follow. I will pay you rent for Cross Hall."

"You shall do no such thing. I will not let Cross Hall to any friend of

the Dean's."

"You cannot turn your mother out immediately after telling her to go

there?"

"It will be you who turn her out,--not I. I have made you a very

liberal offer," said the Marquis.

"I will have nothing to do with it," said Lord George. "In any house in

which I act as master I will be the judge who shall be entertained and

who not."

"The first guests you will ask, no doubt, will be the Dean of

Brotherton and Captain De Baron." This was so unbearable that he at

once made a rush at the door. "You'll find, my friend," said the

Marquis, "that you'll have to get rid of the Dean and of the Dean's

daughter as well." Then Lord George swore to himself as he left the

room that he would never willingly be in his brother's company again.

He was rushing down the stairs, thinking about his wife, swearing to

himself that all this was calumny, yet confessing to himself that there

must have been terrible indiscretion to make the calumny so general,

when he was met on the landing by Mrs. Walker in her best silk gown.

"Please, my lord, might I take the liberty of asking for one word in my

own room?" Lord George followed her and heard the one word. "Please, my

lord, what are we to do with the Marquis?"

"Do with him!"

"About his going."

"Why should he go? He pays his bills, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, my lord; the Marquis pays his bills. There ain't no difficulty

there, my lord. He's not quite himself."

"You mean in health?"

"Yes, my lord;--in health. He don't give himself,--not a chance. He's

out every night,--in his brougham."

"I thought he was almost confined to his room?"

"Out every night, my lord,--and that Courier with him on the box. When

we gave him to understand that all manner of people couldn't be allowed

to come here, we thought he'd go."

"The Marchioness has gone?"

"Oh yes;--and the poor little boy. It was bad enough when they was

here, because things were so uncomfortable; but now----. I wish

something could be done, my lord." Lord George could only assure her

that it was out of his power to do anything. He had no control over his

brother, and did not even mean to come and see him again. "Dearie me!"

said Mrs. Walker; "he's a very owdacious nobleman, I fear,--is the

Marquis."

All this was very bad. Lord George had learned, indeed, that the

Marchioness and Popenjoy were gone, and was able to surmise that the

parting had not been pleasant. His brother would probably soon follow

them. But what was he to do himself! He could not, in consequence of

such a warning, drag his mother and sisters back to Cross Hall, into

which house Mr. Price, the farmer, had already moved himself. Nor could

he very well leave his mother without explaining to her why he did so.

Would it be right that he should take such a threat, uttered as that

had been, as a notice to quit the house? He certainly would not live in

his brother's house in opposition to his brother. But how was he to

obey the orders of such a madman?

When he reached Brotherton he went at once to the deanery and was very

glad to find his wife without her father. He did not as yet wish to

renew his friendly relations with the Dean, although he had refused to

pledge himself to a quarrel. He still thought it to be his duty to take

his wife away from her father, and to cause her to expiate those

calumnies as to De Baron by some ascetic mode of life. She had been,

since his last visit, in a state of nervous anxiety about the Marquis.

"How is he, George?" she asked at once.

"I don't know how he is. I think he's mad."

"Mad?"

"He's leading a wretched life."

"But his back? Is he;--is he--? I am afraid that papa is so unhappy

about it! He won't say anything, but I know he is unhappy."

"You may tell your father from me that as far as I can judge his

illness, if he is ill, has nothing to do with that."

"Oh, George, you have made me so happy."

"I wish I could be happy myself. I sometimes think that we had better

go and live abroad."

"Abroad! You and I?"

"Yes. I suppose you would go with me?"

"Of course I would. But your mother?"

"I know there is all manner of trouble about it." He could not tell her

of his brother's threat about the house, nor could he, after that

threat, again bid her come to Manor Cross. As there was nothing more to

be said he soon left her, and went to the house which he had again been

forbidden to call his home.

But he told his sister everything. "I was afraid," she said, "that we

should be wrong in coming here."

"It is no use going back to that now."

"Not the least. What ought we to do? It will break mamma's heart to be

turned out again."

"I suppose we must ask Mr. Knox."

"It is unreasonable;--monstrous! Mr. Price has got all his furniture

back again into the Hall! It is terrible that any man should have so

much power to do evil."

"I could not pledge myself about the Dean, Sarah."

"Certainly not. Nothing could be more wicked than his asking you. Of

course, you will not tell mamma."

"Not yet."

"I should take no notice of it whatever. If he means to turn us out of

the house let him write to you, or send word by Mr. Knox. Out every

night in London! What does he do?" Lord George shook his head. "I don't

think he goes into society." Lord George could only shake his head

again. There are so many kinds of society! "They said he was coming

down to Mr. De Baron's in August."

"I heard that too. I don't know whether he'll come now. To see him

brought in between two servants you'd think that he couldn't move."

"But they told you he goes out every night?"

"I've no doubt that is true."

"I don't understand it all," said Lady Sarah. "What is he to gain by

pretending. And so they used to quarrel."

"I tell you what the woman told me."

"I've no doubt it's true. And she has gone and taken Popenjoy? Did he

say anything about Popenjoy?"

"Not a word," said Lord George.

"It's quite possible that the Dean may have been right all through.

What terrible mischief a man may do when he throws all idea of duty to

the winds! If I were you, George, I should just go on as though I had

not seen him at all."

That was the decision to which Lord George came, but in that he was

soon shaken by a letter which he received from Mr. Knox. "I think if

you were to go up to London and see your brother it would have a good

effect," said Mr. Knox. In fact Mr. Knox's letter contained little more

than a petition that Lord George would pay another visit to the

Marquis. To this request, after consultation with his sister, he gave a

positive refusal.

"MY DEAR MR. KNOX," he said,

"I saw my brother less than a week ago, and the meeting was so

unsatisfactory in every respect that I do not wish to repeat it.

If he has anything to say to me as to the occupation of the house

he had better say it through you. I think, however, that my

brother should be told that though I may be subject to his freaks,

we cannot allow that my mother should be annoyed by them.

"Faithfully yours,

"GEORGE GERMAIN."

At the end of another week Mr. Knox came in person. The Marquis was

willing that his mother should live at Manor Cross,--and his sisters.

But he had,--so he said,--been insulted by his brother, and must insist

that Lord George should leave the house. If this order were not obeyed

he should at once put the letting of the place into the hands of a

house agent. Then Mr. Knox went on to explain that he was to take back

to the Marquis a definite reply. "When people are dependent on me I

choose that they shall be dependent," the Marquis had said.

Now, after a prolonged consultation to which Lady Susanna was

admitted,--so serious was the thing to be considered,--it was found to

be necessary to explain the matter to the Marchioness. Some step

clearly must be taken. They must all go, or Lord George must go. Cross

Hall was occupied, and Mr. Price was going to be married on the

strength of his occupation. A lease had been executed to Mr. Price,

which the Dowager herself had been called upon to sign. "Mamma will

never be made to understand it," said Lady Susanna.

"No one can understand it," said Lord George. Lord George insisted that

the ladies should continue to live at the large house, insinuating

that, for himself, he would take some wretched residence in the most

miserable corner of the globe, which he could find.

The Marchioness was told and really fell into a very bad way. She

literally could not understand it, and aggravated matters by appearing

to think that her younger son had been wanting in respect to his elder

brother. And it was all that nasty Dean! And Mary must have behaved

very badly or Brotherton would not have been so severe! "Mamma," said

Lady Sarah, moved beyond her wont, "you ought not to think such things.

George has been true to you all his life, and Mary has done nothing. It

is all Brotherton's fault. When did he ever behave well? If we are to

be miserable, let us at any rate tell the truth about it." Then the

Marchioness was put to bed and remained there for two days.

At last the Dean heard of it,--first through Lady Alice, and then

directly from Lady Sarah, who took the news to the deanery. Upon which

he wrote the following letter to his son-in-law;--

"MY DEAR GEORGE,--I think your brother is not quite sane. I never

thought that he was. Since I have had the pleasure of knowing you,

especially since I have been connected with the family, he has

been the cause of all the troubles that have befallen it. It is to

be regretted that you should ever have moved back to Manor Cross,

because his temper is so uncertain, and his motives so

unchristian!

"I think I understand your position now, and will therefore not

refer to it further than to say, that when not in London I hope

you will make the deanery your home. You have your own house in

town, and when here will be close to your mother and sisters.

Anything I can do to make this a comfortable residence for you

shall be done; and it will surely go for something with you, that

a compliance with this request on your part will make another

person the happiest woman in the world.

"In such an emergency as this am I not justified in saying that

any little causes of displeasure that may have existed between you

and me should now be forgotten? If you will think of them they

really amount to nothing. For you I have the esteem of a friend

and the affection of a father-in-law. A more devoted wife than my

daughter does not live. Be a man and come to us, and let us make

much of you.

"She knows I am writing, and sends her love; but I have not told

her of the subject lest she should be wild with hope.

"Affectionately yours,

"HENRY LOVELACE."

The letter as he read it moved him to tears, but when he had finished

the reading he told himself that it was impossible. There was one

phrase in the letter which went sorely against the grain with him. The

Dean told him to be a man. Did the Dean mean to imply that his conduct

hitherto had been unmanly?

CHAPTER XLIX.

"WOULDN'T YOU COME HERE--FOR A WEEK?"

Lord George Germain was very much troubled by the nobility of the

Dean's offer. He felt sure that he could not accept it, but he felt at

the same time that it would be almost as difficult to decline to accept

it. What else was he to do? where was he to go? how was he now to

exercise authority over his wife? With what face could he call upon her

to leave her father's house, when he had no house of his own to which

to take her? There was, no doubt, the house in London, but that was her

house, and peculiarly disagreeable to him. He might go abroad; but then

what would become of his mother and sisters? He had trained himself to

think that his presence was necessary to the very existence of the

family; and his mother, though she ill-treated him, was quite of the

same opinion. There would be a declaration of a break up made to all

the world if he were to take himself far away from Manor Cross. In his

difficulty, of course he consulted Lady Sarah. What other counsellor

was possible to him?

He was very fair with his sister, trying to explain everything to

her--everything, with one or two exceptions. Of course he said nothing

of the Houghton correspondence, nor did he give exactly a true account

of the scene at Mrs. Montacute Jones' ball; but he succeeded in making

Lady Sarah understand that though he accused his wife of nothing, he

felt it to be incumbent on him to make her completely subject to his

own authority. "No doubt she was wrong to waltz after what you told

her," said Lady Sarah.

"Very wrong."

"But it was simply high spirits, I suppose."

"I don't think she understands how circumspect a young married woman

ought to be," said the anxious husband. "She does not see how very much

such high spirits may injure me. It enables an enemy to say such

terrible things."

"Why should she have an enemy, George?" Then Lord George merely

whispered his brother's name. "Why should Brotherton care to be her

enemy?"

"Because of the Dean."

"She should not suffer for that. Of course, George, Mary and I are very

different. She is young and I am old. She has been brought up to the

pleasures of life, which I disregard, perhaps because they never came

in my way. She is beautiful and soft,--a woman such as men like to have

near them. I never was such a one. I see the perils and pitfalls in her

way; but I fancy that I am prone to exaggerate them, because I cannot

sympathise with her yearnings. I often condemn her frivolity, but at

the same time I condemn my own severity. I think she is true of

heart,--a loving woman. And she is at any rate your wife."

"You don't suppose that I wish to be rid of her?"

"Certainly not; but in keeping her close to you you must remember that

she has a nature of her own. She cannot feel as you do in all things

any more than you feel as she does."

"One must give way to the other."

"Each must give way to the other if there is to be any happiness."

"You don't mean to say she ought to waltz, or dance stage dances?"

"Let all that go for the present. She won't want to dance much for a

time now, and when she has a baby in her arms she will be more apt to

look at things with your eyes. If I were you I should accept the Dean's

offer."

There was a certain amount of comfort in this, but there was more pain.

His wife had defied him, and it was necessary to his dignity that she

should be brought to submission before she was received into his full

grace. And the Dean had encouraged her in those acts of defiance. They

had, of course, come from him. She had been more her father's daughter

than her husband's wife, and his pride could not endure that it should

be so. Everything had gone against him. Hitherto he had been able to

desire her to leave her father and to join him in his own home. Now he

had no home to which to take her. He had endeavoured to do his

duty,--always excepting that disagreeable episode with Mrs.

Houghton,--and this was the fruit of it. He had tried to serve his

brother, because his brother was Marquis of Brotherton, and his brother

had used him like an enemy. His mother treated him, with steady

injustice. And now his sister told him that he was to yield to the

Dean! He could not bring himself to yield to the Dean. At last he

answered the Dean's letter as follows;--

"MY DEAR DEAN,--

"Your offer is very kind, but I do not think that I can accept it

just at present. No doubt I am very much troubled by my brother's

conduct. I have endeavoured to do my duty by him, and have met

with but a poor return. What arrangements I shall ultimately make

as to a home for myself and Mary, I cannot yet say. When anything

is settled I shall, of course, let her know at once. It will

always be, at any rate, one of my chief objects to make her

comfortable, but I think that this should be done under my roof

and not under yours. I hope to be able to see her in a day or two,

when perhaps I shall have been able to settle upon something.

"Yours always affectionately,

"G. GERMAIN."

Then, upon reading this over and feeling that it was cold and almost

heartless, he added a postscript. "I do feel your offer to be very

generous, but I think you will understand the reasons which make it

impossible that I should accept it." The Dean as he read this declared

to himself that he knew the reasons very well. The reasons were not far

to search. The man was pigheaded, foolish, and obstinately proud. So

the Dean thought. As far as he himself was concerned Lord George's

presence in the house would not be a comfort to him. Lord George had

never been a pleasant companion to him. But he would have put up with

worse than Lord George for the sake of his daughter.

On the very next day Lord George rode into Brotherton and went direct

to the deanery. Having left his horse at the inn he met the Dean in the

Close, coming out of a side door of the Cathedral close to the deanery

gate. "I thought I would come in to see Mary," he said.

"Mary will be delighted."

"I did not believe that I should be able to come so soon when I wrote

yesterday."

"I hope you are going to tell her that you have thought better of my

little plan."

"Well;--no; I don't think I can do that. I think she must come to me

first, sir."

"But where!"

"I have not yet quite made up my mind. Of course there is a difficulty.

My brother's conduct has been so very strange."

"Your brother is a madman, George."

"It is very easy to say so, but that does not make it any better.

Though he be ever so mad the house is his own. If he chooses to turn me

out of it he can. I have told Mr. Knox that I would leave it within a

month,--for my mother's sake; but that as I had gone there at his

express instance, I could not move sooner. I think I was justified in

that."

"I don't see why you should go at all."

"He would let the place."

"Or, if you do go, why you should not come here. But, of course, you

know your own business best. How d'ye do, Mr. Groschut? I hope the

Bishop is better this morning."

At this moment, just as they were entering the deanery gate, the

Bishop's chaplain had appeared. He had been very studious in spreading

a report, which he had no doubt believed to be true, that all the

Germain family, including Lord George, had altogether repudiated the

Dean, whose daughter, according to his story, was left upon her

father's hands because she would not be received at Manor Cross. For

Mr. Groschut had also heard of Jack De Baron, and had been cut to the

soul by the wickedness of the Kappa-kappa. The general iniquity of

Mary's life in London had been heavy on him. Brotherton, upon the

whole, had pardoned the Dean for knocking the Marquis into the

fireplace, having heard something of the true story with more or less

correctness. But the Chaplain's morals were sterner than those of

Brotherton at large, and he was still of opinion that the Dean was a

child of wrath, and poor Mary, therefore, a grandchild. Now, when he

saw the Dean and his son-in-law apparently on friendly terms, the

spirit of righteousness was vexed within him as he acknowledged this to

be another sign that the Dean was escaping from that punishment which

alone could be of service to him in this world. "His Lordship is better

this morning. I hope, my Lord, I have the pleasure of seeing your

Lordship quite well." Then Mr. Groschut passed on.

"I'm not quite sure," said the Dean, as he opened his own door,

"whether any good is ever done by converting a Jew."

"But St. Paul was a converted Jew," said Lord George.

"Well--yes; in those early days Christians were only to be had by

converting Jews or Pagans; and in those days they did actually become

Christians. But the Groschuts are a mistake." Then he called to Mary,

and in a few minutes she was in her husband's arms on the staircase.

The Dean did not follow them, but went into his own room on the ground

floor; and Lord George did not see him again on that day.

Lord George remained with his wife nearly all the afternoon, going out

with her into the town as she did some little shopping, and being seen

with her in the market-place and Close. It must be owned of Mary that

she was proud thus to be seen with him again, and that in buying her

ribbons and gloves she referred to him, smiling as he said this, and

pouting and pretending to differ as he said that, with greater urgency

than she would have done had there been no breach between them. It had

been terrible to her to think that there should be a quarrel,--terrible

to her that the world should think so. There was a gratification to her

in feeling that even the shopkeepers should see her and her husband

together. And when she met Canon Pountner and stopped a moment in the

street while that worthy divine shook hands with her husband, that was

an additional pleasure to her. The last few weeks had been heavy to her

in spite of her father's affectionate care,--heavy with a feeling of

disgrace from which no well-minded young married woman can quite

escape, when she is separated from her husband. She had endeavoured to

do right. She thought she was doing right. But it was so sad! She was

fond of pleasure, whereas he was little given to any amusement; but no

pleasures could be pleasant to her now unless they were in some sort

countenanced by him. She had never said such a word to a human being,

but since that dancing of the Kappa-kappa she had sworn to herself a

thousand times that she would never waltz again. And she hourly yearned

for his company, having quite got over that first difficulty of her

married life, that doubt whether she could ever learn to love her

husband. During much of this day she was actually happy in spite of the

great sorrow which still weighed so heavily upon them both.

And he liked it also in his way. He thought that he had never seen her

looking more lovely. He was sure that she had never been more gracious

to him. The touch of her hand was pleasant to his arm, and even he had

sufficient spirit of fun about him to enjoy something of the mirth of

her little grimaces. When he told her what her father had said about

Mr. Groschut, even he laughed at her face of assumed disgust. "Papa

doesn't hate him half as much as I do," she said. "Papa always does

forgive at last, but I never can forgive Mr. Groschut."

"What has the poor man done?"

"He is so nasty! Don't you see that his face always shines. Any man

with a shiny face ought to be hated." This was very well to give as a

reason, but Mary entertained a very correct idea as to Mr. Groschut's

opinion of herself.

Not a word had been said between the husband and wife as to the great

question of residence till they had returned to the deanery after their

walk. Then Lord George found himself unable to conceal from her the

offer which the Dean had made. "Oh, George,--why don't you come?"

"It would not be--fitting."

"Fitting! Why not fitting? I think it would fit admirably. I know it

would fit me." Then she leaned over him and took his hand and kissed

it.

"It was very good of your father."

"I am sure he meant to be good."

"It was very good of your father," Lord George repeated,--"very good

indeed; but it cannot be. A married woman should live in her husband's

house and not in her father's."

Mary gazed into his face with a perplexed look, not quite understanding

the whole question, but still with a clear idea as to a part of it. All

that might be very true, but if a husband didn't happen to have a house

then might not the wife's father's house be a convenience? They had

indeed a house, provided no doubt with her money, but not the less now

belonging to her husband, in which she would be very willing to live if

he pleased it,--the house in Munster Court. It was her husband that

made objection to their own house. It was her husband who wished to

live near Manor Cross, not having a roof of his own under which to do

so. Were not these circumstances which ought to have made the deanery a

convenience to him? "Then what will you do?" she asked.

"I cannot say as yet." He had become again gloomy and black-browed.

"Wouldn't you come here--for a week?"

"I think not, my dear."

"Not when you know how happy it would make me to have you with me once

again. I do so long to be telling you everything." Then she leant

against him and embraced him, and implored him to grant her this

favour. But he would not yield. He had told himself that the Dean had

interfered between him and his wife, and that he must at any rate go

through the ceremony of taking his wife away from her father. Let it be

accorded to him that he had done that, and then perhaps he might visit

the deanery. As for her, she would have gone with him anywhere now,

having fully established her right to visit her father after leaving

London.

There was nothing further settled, and very little more said, when Lord

George left the deanery and started back to Manor Cross. But with Mary

there had been left a certain comfort. The shopkeepers and Dr. Pountner

had seen her with her husband, and Mr. Groschut had met Lord George at

the deanery door.

CHAPTER L.

RUDHAM PARK.

Lord George had undertaken to leave Manor Cross by the middle of

August, but when the first week of that month had passed away he had

not as yet made up his mind what he would do with himself. Mr. Knox had

told him that should he remain with his mother the Marquis would not,

as Mr. Knox thought, take further notice of the matter; but on such

terms as these he could not consent to live in his brother's house.

On a certain day early in August Lord George had gone with a return

ticket to a town but a few miles distant from Brotherton to sit on a

committee for the distribution of coals and blankets, and in the

afternoon got into a railway carriage on his way home. How great was

his consternation when, on taking his seat, he found that his brother

was seated alongside of him! There was one other old gentleman in the

carriage, and the three passengers were all facing the engine. On two

of the seats opposite were spread out the Marquis's travelling

paraphernalia,--his French novel, at which he had not looked, his

dressing bag, the box in which his luncheon had been packed, and his

wine flask. There was a small basket of strawberries, should he be

inclined to eat fruit, and an early peach out of a hothouse, with some

flowers. "God Almighty, George;--is that you?" he said. "Where the

devil have you been?"

"I've been to Grumby."

"And what are the people doing at Grumby?"

"Much the same as usual. It was the coal and blanket account."

"Oh!--the coal and blanket account! I hope you liked it." Then he

folded himself afresh in his cloaks, ate a strawberry, and looked as

though he had taken sufficient notice of his brother.

But the matter was very important to Lord George. Nothing ever seemed

to be of importance to the Marquis. It might be very probable that the

Marquis, with half-a-dozen servants behind him, should drive up to the

door at Manor Cross without having given an hour's notice of his

intention. It seemed to be too probable to Lord George that such would

be the case now. For what other reason could he be there? And then

there was his back. Though they had quarrelled he was bound to ask

after his brother's back. When last they two had met, the Marquis had

been almost carried into the room by two men. "I hope you find yourself

better than when I last saw you," he said, after a pause of five

minutes.

"I've not much to boast of. I can just travel, and that's all."

"And how is--Popenjoy?"

"Upon my word I can't tell you. He has never seemed to be very well

when I've seen him."

"I hope the accounts have been better," said Lord George, with

solicitude.

"Coal and blanket accounts!" suggested the Marquis. And then the

conversation was again brought to an end for five minutes.

But it was essential that Lord George should know whither his brother

was going. If to Manor Cross, then, thought Lord George, he himself

would stay at an inn at Brotherton. Anything, even the deanery, would

be better than sitting at table with his brother, with the insults of

their last interview unappeased. At the end of five minutes he plucked

up his courage, and asked his brother another question. "Are you going

to the house, Brotherton?"

"The house! What house? I'm going to a house, I hope."

"I mean to Manor Cross."

"Not if I know it. There is no house in this part of the country in

which I should be less likely to show my face." Then there was not

another word said till they reached the Brotherton Station, and there

the Marquis, who was sitting next the door, requested his brother to

leave the carriage first. "Get out, will you?" he said. "I must wait

for somebody to come and take these things. And don't trample on me

more than you can help." This last request had apparently been made,

because Lord George was unable to step across him without treading on

the cloak.

"I will say good-bye, then," said Lord George, turning round on the

platform for a moment.

"Ta, ta," said the Marquis, as he gave his attention to the servant who

was collecting the fruit, and the flowers, and the flask. Lord George

then passed on out of the station, and saw no more of his brother.

"Of course he is going to Rudham," said Lady Susanna, when she heard

the story. Rudham Park was the seat of Mr. De Baron, Mrs. Houghton's

father, and tidings had reached Manor Cross long since that the Marquis

had promised to go there in the autumn. No doubt other circumstances

had seemed to make it improbable that the promise should be kept.

Popenjoy had gone away ill,--as many said, in a dying condition. Then

the Marquis had been thrown into a fireplace, and report had said that

his back had been all but broken. It had certainly been generally

thought that the Marquis would go nowhere after that affair in the

fireplace, till he returned to Italy. But Lady Susanna was, in truth,

right. His Lordship was on his way to Rudham Park.

Mr. De Baron, of Rudham Park, though a much older man than the Marquis,

had been the Marquis's friend,--when the Marquis came of age, being

then the Popenjoy of those days and a fast young man known as such

about England. Mr. De Baron, who was a neighbour, had taken him by the

hand. Mr. De Baron had put him in the way of buying and training

race-horses, and had, perhaps, been godfather to his pleasures in other

matters. Rudham Park had never been loved at Manor Cross by others than

the present Lord, and for that reason, perhaps, was dearer to him. He

had promised to go there soon after his return to England, and was now

keeping his promise. On his arrival there the Marquis found a houseful

of people. There were Mr. and Mrs. Houghton, and Lord Giblet, who,

having engaged himself rashly to Miss Patmore Green, had rushed out of

town sooner than usual that he might devise in retirement some means of

escaping from his position; and, to Lord Giblet's horror, there was

Mrs. Montacute Jones, who, he well knew, would, if possible, keep him

to the collar. There was also Aunt Julia, with her niece Guss, and of

course, there was Jack De Baron. The Marquis was rather glad to meet

Jack, as to whom he had some hope that he might be induced to run away

with Lord George's wife, and thus free the Germain family from that

little annoyance. But the guest who surprised the Marquis the most, was

the Baroness Banmann, whose name and occupation he did not at first

learn very distinctly.

"All right again, my lord?" asked Mr. De Baron, as he welcomed his

noble guest.

"Upon my word I'm not, then. That coal-heaving brute of a parson pretty

nearly did for me."

"A terrible outrage it was."

"Outrage! I should think so. There's nothing so bad as a clerical

bully. What was I to do with him? Of course he was the stronger. I

don't pretend to be a Samson. One doesn't expect that kind of thing

among gentlemen?"

"No, indeed."

"I wish I could have him somewhere with a pair of foils with the

buttons off. His black coat shouldn't save his intestines. I don't

know what the devil the country is come to, when such a fellow as that

is admitted into people's houses."

"You won't meet him here, Brotherton."

"I wish I might. I think I'd manage to be even with him before he got

away. Who's the Baroness you have got?"

"I don't know much about her. My daughter Adelaide,--Mrs. Houghton, you

know,--has brought her down. There's been some row among the women up

in London. This is one of the prophets, and I think she is brought here

to spite Lady Selina Protest who has taken an American prophetess by

the hand. She won't annoy you, I hope?"

"Not in the least. I like strange wild beasts. And so that is Captain

De Baron, of whom I have heard?"

"That is my nephew, Jack. He has a small fortune of his own, which he

is spending fast. As long as it lasts one has to be civil to him."

"I am delighted to meet him. Don't they say he is sweet on a certain

young woman?"

"A dozen, I believe."

"Ah,--but one I know something of."

"I don't think there is anything in that, Brotherton;--I don't, indeed,

or I shouldn't have brought him here."

"I do, though. And as to not bringing him here, why shouldn't you bring

him? If she don't go off with him, she will with somebody else, and the

sooner the better, according to my ideas." This was a matter upon which

Mr. De Baron was not prepared to dilate, and he therefore changed the

subject.

"My dear Lord Giblet, it is such a pleasure to me to meet you here,"

old Mrs. Jones said to that young nobleman. "When I was told you were

to be at Rudham, it determined me at once." This was true, for there

was no more persistent friend living than old Mrs. Jones, though it

might be doubted whether, on this occasion, Lord Giblet was the friend

on whose behalf she had come to Rudham.

"It's very nice, isn't it?" said Lord Giblet, gasping.

"Hadn't we a pleasant time of it with our little parties in Grosvenor

Place?"

"Never liked anything so much in life; only I don't think that fellow

Jack De Baron, dances so much better than other people, after all?"

"Who says he does? But I'll tell you who dances well. Olivia Green was

charming in the Kappa-kappa. Don't you think so?"

"Uncommon pretty." Lord Giblet was quite willing to be understood to

admire Miss Patmore Green, though he thought it hard that people should

hurry him on into matrimony.

"The most graceful girl I ever saw in my life, certainly," said Mrs.

Montacute Jones. "His Royal Highness, when he heard of the engagement,

said that you were the happiest man in London."

Lord Giblet could not satisfy himself by declaring that H.R.H. was an

old fool, as poor Mary had done on a certain occasion,--but at the

present moment he did not feel at all loyal to the Royal Family

generally. Nor did he, in the least, know how to answer Mrs. Jones. She

had declared the engagement as a fact, and he did not quite dare to

deny it altogether. He had, in an unguarded moment, when the weather

had been warm and the champagne cool, said a word with so definite a

meaning that the lady had been justified in not allowing it to pass by

as idle. The lady had accepted him, and on the following morning he had

found the lock of hair and the little stud which she had given him, and

had feverish reminiscences of a kiss. But surely he was not a bird to

be caught with so small a grain of salt as that! He had not as yet seen

Mr. Patmore Green, having escaped from London at once. He had answered

a note from Olivia, which had called him "dearest Charlie" by a counter

note, in which he had called her "dear O," and had signed himself "ever

yours, G," promising to meet her up the river. But of course he had not

gone up the river! The rest of the season might certainly be done

without assistance from him. He knew that he would be pursued. He could

not hope not to be pursued. But he had not thought that Mrs. Montacute

Jones would be so quick upon him. It was impossible that H.R.H should

have heard of any engagement as yet. What a nasty, false, wicked old

woman she was! He blushed, red as a rose, and stammered out that he

"didn't know." He was only four-and-twenty, and perhaps he didn't know.

"I never saw a girl so much in love in my life," continued Mrs. Jones.

"I know her just as well as if she were my own, and she speaks to me as

she doesn't dare to speak to you at present. Though she is barely

twenty-one, she has been very much sought after already, and the very

day she marries she has ten thousand pounds in her own hands. That

isn't a large fortune, and of course you don't want a large fortune,

but it isn't every girl can pay such a sum straight into her husband's

bank the moment she marries!"

"No, indeed," said Lord Giblet. He was still determined that nothing

should induce him to marry Miss Green; but nevertheless, behind that

resolution there was a feeling, that if anything should bring about the

marriage, such a sum of ready money would be a consolation. His father,

the Earl of Jopling, though a very rich man, kept him a little close,

and ten thousand pounds would be nice. But then, perhaps the old woman

was lying.

"Now I'll tell you what I want you to do," said Mrs. Jones, who was

resolved that if the game were not landed it should not be her fault.

"We go from here to Killancodlem next week. You must come and join

us."

"I've got to go and grouse at Stranbracket's," said Lord Giblet, happy

in an excuse.

"It couldn't be better. They're both within eight miles of Dunkeld." If

so, then ropes shouldn't take him to Stranbracket's that year. "Of

course you'll come. It's the prettiest place in Perth, though I say it,

as oughtn't. And she will be there. If you really want to know a girl,

see her in a country house."

But he didn't really want to know the girl. She was very nice, and he

liked her uncommonly, but he didn't want to know anything more about

her. By George! Was a man to be persecuted this way, because he had

once spooned a girl a little too fiercely? As he thought of this he

almost plucked up his courage sufficiently to tell Mrs. Jones that she

had better pick out some other young man for deportation to

Killancodlem. "I should like it ever so," he said.

"I'll take care that you shall like it, Lord Giblet. I think I may

boast that when I put my wits to work I can make my house agreeable.

I'm very fond of young people, but there's no one I love as I do Olivia

Green. There isn't a young woman in London has so much to be loved for.

Of course you'll come. What day shall we name?"

"I don't think I could name a day."

"Let us say the 27th. That will give you nearly a week at the grouse

first. Be with us to dinner on the 27th."

"Well,--perhaps I will."

"Of course you will. I shall write to Olivia to-night, and I daresay

you will do so also."

Lord Giblet, when he was let to go, tried to suck consolation from the

Â£10,000. Though he was still resolved, he almost believed that Mrs.

Montacute Jones would conquer him. Write to Olivia to-night! Lying,

false old woman! Of course she knew that there was hardly a lady in

England to whom it was so little likely that he should write as to Miss

Patmore Green. How could an old woman, with one foot in the grave, be

so wicked? And why should she persecute him? What had he done to her?

Olivia Green was not her daughter, or even her niece. "So you are going

to Killancodlem?" Mrs. Houghton said to him that afternoon.

"She has asked me," said Lord Giblet.

"It's simply the most comfortable house in all Scotland, and they tell

me some of the best deer-stalking. Everybody likes to get to

Killancodlem. Don't you love old Mrs. Jones?"

"Charming old woman!"

"And such a friend! If she once takes to you she never drops you."

"Sticks like wax, I should say."

"Quite like wax, Lord Giblet. And when she makes up her mind to do a

thing she always does it. It's quite wonderful; but she never gets

beaten."

"Doesn't she now?"

"Never. She hasn't asked us to Killancodlem yet, but I hope she will."

A manly resolution now roused itself in Lord Giblet's bosom that he

would be the person to beat Mrs. Jones at last. But yet he doubted. If

he were asked the question by anyone having a right to ask he could not

deny that he had proposed to marry Miss Patmore Green.

"So you've come down to singe your wings again?" said Mrs. Houghton to

her cousin Jack.

"My wings have been burned clean away already, and, in point of fact, I

am not half so near to Lady George here as I was in London."

"It's only ten miles."

"If it were five it would be the same. We're not in the same set down

in Barsetshire."

"I suppose you can have yourself taken to Brotherton if you please?"

"Yes,--I can call at the deanery; but I shouldn't know what to say when

I got there."

"You've become very mealy-mouthed of a sudden."

"Not with you, my sweet cousin. With you I can discuss the devil and

all his works as freely as ever; but with Lady George, at her father's

house, I think I should be dumb. In truth, I haven't got anything to

say to her."

"I thought you had."

"I know you think so; but I haven't. It is quite on the card that I may

ride over some day, as I would to see my sister."

"Your sister!"

"And that I shall make eager enquiries after her horse, her pet dog,

and her husband."

"You will be wrong there, for she has quarrelled with her husband

altogether."

"I hope not."

"They are not living together, and never even see each other. He's at

Manor Cross, and she's at the deanery. She's a divinity to you, but

Lord George seems to have found her so human that he's tired of her

already."

"Then it must be his own fault."

"Or perhaps yours, Jack. You don't suppose a husband goes through a

little scene like that at Mrs. Jones' without feeling it?"

"He made an ass of himself, and a man generally feels that afterwards,"

said Jack.

"The truth is, they're tired of each other. There isn't very much in

Lord George, but there is something. He is slow, but there is a certain

manliness at the bottom of it. But there isn't very much in her!"

"That's all you know about it."

"Perhaps you may know her better, but I never could find anything. You

confess to being in love, and of course a lover is blind. But where you

are most wrong is in supposing that she is something so much better

than other women. She flirted with you so frankly that she made you

think her a goddess."

"She never flirted with me in her life."

"Exactly;--because flirting is bad, and she being a goddess cannot do

evil. I wish you'd take her in your arms and kiss her."

"I shouldn't dare."

"No;--and therefore you're not in the way to learn that she's a woman

just the same as other women. Will Mrs. Jones succeed with that stupid

young man?"

"With Giblet? I hope so. It can't make any difference to him whether

it's this one or another, and I do like Mrs. Jones."

"Would they let me have just a little lecture in the dining-room?"

asked the Baroness of her friend, Aunt Ju. There had been certain

changes among the Disabilities up in London. Lady Selina Protest had

taken Dr. Olivia Q. Fleabody altogether by the hand, and had appointed

her chief professor at the Institute, perhaps without sufficient

authority. Aunt Ju had been cast into the shade, and had consequently

been driven to throw herself into the arms of the Baroness. At present

there was a terrible feud in which Aunt Ju was being much worsted. For

the Baroness was an old Man of the Sea, and having got herself on to

Aunt Ju's shoulders could not be shaken off. In the meantime Dr.

Fleabody was filling the Institute, reaping a golden harvest, and

breaking the heart of the poor Baroness, who had fallen into much

trouble and was now altogether penniless.

"I'm afraid not," said Aunt Ju. "I'm afraid we can't do that."

"Perhaps de Marquis would like it?"

"I hardly think so."

"He did say a word to me, and I tink he would like it. He vant to

understand."

"My dear Baroness, I'm sure the Marquis of Brotherton does not care

about it in the least. He is quite in the dark on such subjects--quite

benighted." What was the use, thought the Baroness, of bringing her

down to a house in which people were so benighted that she could not be

allowed to open her mouth or carry on her profession. Had she not been

enticed over from her own country in order that she might open her

mouth, and preach her doctrine, and become a great and a wealthy woman?

There was a fraud in this enforced silence which cut her to the very

quick. "I tink I shall try," she said, separating herself in her wrath

from her friend.

CHAPTER LI.

GUSS MILDMAY'S SUCCESS.

The treatment which the Marquis received at Rudham did not certainly

imply any feeling that he had disgraced himself by what he had done

either at Manor Cross or up in London. Perhaps the ladies there did not

know as much of his habits as did Mrs. Walker at Scumberg's. Perhaps

the feeling was strong that Popenjoy was Popenjoy, and that therefore

the Marquis had been injured. If a child be born in British

purple,--true purple, though it may have been stained by

circumstances,--that purple is very sacred. Perhaps it was thought that

under no circumstances should a Marquis be knocked into the fireplace

by a clergyman. There was still a good deal of mystery, both as to

Popenjoy and as to the fireplace, and the Marquis was the hero of these

mysteries. Everyone at Rudham was anxious to sit by his side and to be

allowed to talk to him. When he abused the Dean, which he did freely,

those who heard him assented to all he said. The Baroness Banmann held

up her hands in horror when she heard the tale, and declared the Church

to be one grand bÃªtise. Mrs. Houghton, who was very attentive to the

Marquis and whom the Marquis liked, was pertinacious in her enquiries

after Popenjoy, and cruelly sarcastic upon the Dean. "Think what was

his bringing up," said Mrs. Houghton.

"In a stable," said the Marquis.

"I always felt it to be a great pity that Lord George should have made

that match;--not but what she is a good creature in her way."

"She is no better than she should be," said the Marquis. Then Mrs.

Houghton found herself able to insinuate that perhaps, after all, Mary

was not a good creature, even in her own way. But the Marquis's chief

friend was Jack De Baron. He talked to Jack about races and billiards,

and women; but though he did not refrain from abusing the Dean, he said

no word to Jack against Mary. If it might be that the Dean should

receive his punishment in that direction he would do nothing to prevent

it. "They tell me she's a beautiful woman. I have never seen her

myself," said the Marquis.

"She is very beautiful," said Jack.

"Why the devil she should have married George, I can't think. She

doesn't care for him the least."

"Don't you think she does?"

"I'm sure she don't. I suppose her pestilent father thought it was the

nearest way to a coronet. I don't know why men should marry at all.

They always get into trouble by it."

"Somebody must have children," suggested Jack.

"I don't see the necessity. It's nothing to me what comes of the

property after I'm gone. What is it, Madam?" They were sitting out on

the lawn after lunch and Jack and the Marquis were both smoking. As

they were talking the Baroness had come up to them and made her little

proposition. "What! a lecture! If Mr. De Baron pleases, of course. I

never listen to lectures myself,--except from my wife."

"Ah! dat is vat I vant to prevent."

"I have prevented it already by sending her to Italy. Oh, rights of

women! Very interesting; but I don't think I'm well enough myself. Here

is Captain De Baron, a young man as strong as a horse, and very fond of

women. He'll sit it out."

"I beg your pardon; what is it?" Then the Baroness, with rapid words,

told her own sad story. She had been deluded, defrauded, and ruined by

those wicked females, Lady Selina Protest and Dr. Fleabody. The Marquis

was a nobleman whom all England, nay, all Europe, delighted to honour.

Could not the Marquis do something for her? She was rapid and eloquent,

but not always intelligible. "What is it she wants?" asked the Marquis,

turning to Jack.

"Pecuniary assistance, I think, my Lord."

"Yah, yah. I have been bamboozled of everything, my Lord Marquis."

"Oh, my G--, De Baron shouldn't have let me in for this. Would you mind

telling my fellow to give her a ten-pound note?" Jack said that he

would not mind; and the Baroness stuck to him pertinaciously, not

leaving his side a moment till she had got the money. Of course there

was no lecture. The Baroness was made to understand that visitors at a

country house in England could not be made to endure such an

infliction; but she succeeded in levying a contribution from Mrs.

Montacute Jones, and there were rumours afloat that she got a sovereign

out of Mr. Houghton.

Lord Giblet had come with the intention of staying a week, but, the day

after the attack made upon him by Mrs. Montacute Jones, news arrived

which made it absolutely necessary that he should go to Castle Gossling

at once. "We shall be so sorry to miss you," said Mrs. Montacute Jones,

whom he tried to avoid in making his general adieux, but who was a

great deal too clever not to catch him.

"My father wants to see me about the property, you know."

"Of course. There must be a great deal to do between you." Everybody

who knew the affairs of the family was aware that the old Earl never

thought of consulting his son; and Mrs. Montacute Jones knew

everything.

"Ever so much; therefore I must be off at once. My fellow is packing my

things now; and there is a train in an hour's time."

"Did you hear from Olivia this morning?"

"Not to-day."

"I hope you are as proud as you ought to be of having such a sweet girl

belonging to you." Nasty old woman! What right had she to say these

things? "I told Mrs. Green that you were here, and that you were coming

to meet Olivia on the 27th."

"What did she say?"

"She thinks you ought to see Mr. Green as you go through London. He is

the easiest, most good-natured man in the world. Don't you think you

might as well speak to him?" Who was Mrs. Montacute Jones that she

should talk to him in this way? "I would send a telegram if I were you,

to say I would be there to-night."

"Perhaps it would be best," said Lord Giblet.

"Oh, certainly. Now mind, we expect you to dinner on the 27th. Is there

anybody else you'd specially like me to ask?"

"Nobody in particular, thank ye."

"Isn't Jack De Baron a friend of yours?"

"Yes,--I like Jack pretty well. He thinks a great deal of himself, you

know."

"All the young men do that now. At any rate I'll ask Jack to meet you."

Unfortunately for Lord Giblet Jack appeared in sight at this very

moment. "Captain De Baron, Lord Giblet has been good enough to say that

he'll come to my little place at Killancodlem on the 27th. Can you meet

him there?"

"Delighted, Mrs. Jones. Who ever refuses to go to Killancodlem?"

"It isn't Killancodlem and its little comforts that are bringing his

lordship. We shall be delighted to see him; but he is coming to

see----. Well I suppose it's no secret now, Lord Giblet?" Jack bowed

his congratulations, and Lord Giblet again blushed as red as a rose.

Detestable old woman! Whither should he take himself? In what furthest

part of the Rocky Mountains should he spend the coming autumn? If

neither Mr. nor Mrs. Green called upon him for an explanation, what

possible right could this abominable old harpy have to prey upon him?

Just at the end of a cotillon he had said one word! He knew men who had

done ten times as much and had not been as severely handled. And he was

sure that Jack De Baron had had something to do with it. Jack had been

hand in hand with Mrs. Jones at the making up of the Kappa-kappa. But

as he went to the station he reflected that Olivia Green was a very

nice girl. If those ten thousand pounds were true they would be a great

comfort to him. His mother was always bothering him to get married. If

he could bring himself to accept this as his fate he would be saved a

deal of trouble. Spooning at Killancodlem, after all, would not be bad

fun. He almost told himself that he would marry Miss Green, were it not

that he was determined not to be dictated to by that old harridan.

Many people came and went at Rudham Park, but among those who did not

go was Guss Mildmay. Aunt Julia, who had become thoroughly ashamed of

the Baroness, had wished to take her departure on the third day; but

Guss had managed to stop her. "What's the good of coming to a house for

three days? You said you meant to stay a week. They know what she is

now, and the harm's done. It was your own fault for bringing her. I

don't see why I'm to be thrown over because you've made a mistake about

a vulgar old woman. We've nowhere to go to till November, and now we

are out of town for heaven's sake let us stay as long as we can." In

this way Guss carried her point, watching her opportunity for a little

conversation with her former lover.

At last the opportunity came. It was not that Jack had avoided her, but

that it was necessary that she should be sure of having half-an-hour

alone with him. At last she made the opportunity, calling upon him to

walk with her one Sunday morning when all other folk were in

church--or, perhaps, in bed. "No; I won't go to church," she had said

to Aunt Ju. "What is the use of your asking 'why not?' I won't go. They

are quite accustomed at Rudham to people not going to church. I always

go in a stiff house, but I won't go here. When you are at Rome you

should do as the Romans do. I don't suppose there'll be half-a-dozen

there out of the whole party." Aunt Ju went to church as a matter of

course, and the opportunity of walking in the grounds with Jack was

accomplished. "Are you going to Killancodlem?" she said.

"I suppose I shall, for a few days."

"Have you got anything to say before you go?"

"Nothing particular."

"Of course I don't mean to me."

"I've nothing particular to say to anybody just at present. Since I've

been here that wretched old Marquis has been my chief fate. It's quite

a pleasure to hear him abuse the Dean."

"And the Dean's daughter?"

"He has not much good to say about her either."

"I'm not surprised at that, Jack. And what do you say to him about the

Dean's daughter?"

"Very little, Guss."

"And what are you going to say to me about her?"

"Nothing at all, Guss."

"She's all the world to you, I suppose?"

"What's the use of your saying that? In one sense she's nothing to me.

My belief is that the only man she'll ever care a pin about is her

husband. At any rate she does not care a straw for me."

"Nor you for her?"

"Well;--Yes I do. She's one of my pet friends. There's nobody I like

being with better."

"And if she were not married?"

"God knows what might have happened. I might have asked her to have me,

because she has got money of her own. What's the use of coming back to

the old thing, Guss?"

"Money, money, money!"

"Nothing more unfair was ever said to anyone. Have I given any signs of

selling myself for money? Have I been a fortune hunter? No one has ever

found me guilty of so much prudence. All I say is that having found out

the way to go to the devil myself, I won't take any young woman I like

with me there by marrying her. Heavens and earth! I can fancy myself

returned from a wedding tour with some charmer, like you, without a

shilling at my banker's, and beginning life at lodgings, somewhere down

at Chelsea. Have you no imagination? Can't you see what it would be?

Can't you fancy the stuffy sitting room with the horsehair chairs, and

the hashed mutton, and the cradle in the corner before long?"

"No I can't," said Guss.

"I can;--two cradles, and very little of the hashed mutton; and my lady

wife with no one to pin her dress for her but the maid of all work with

black fingers."

"It wouldn't be like that."

"It very soon would, if I were to marry a girl without a fortune. And I

know myself. I'm a very good fellow while the sun shines, but I

couldn't stand hardship. I shouldn't come home to the hashed mutton. I

should dine at the club, even though I had to borrow the money. I

should come to hate the cradle and its occupant, and the mother of its

occupant. I should take to drink, and should blow my brains out just as

the second cradle came. I can see it all as plain as a pikestaff. I

often lay awake the whole night and look at it. You and I, Guss, have

made a mistake from the beginning. Being poor people we have lived as

though we were rich."

"I have never done so."

"Oh yes, you have. Instead of dining out in Fitzroy Square and drinking

tea in Tavistock Place, you have gone to balls in Grosvenor Square and

been presented at Court."

"It wasn't my fault."

"It has been so, and therefore you should have made up your mind to

marry a rich man."

"Who was it asked me to love him?"

"Say that I did if you please. Upon my word I forget how it began, but

say that it was my fault. Of course it was my fault. Are you going to

blow me up for that? I see a girl, and first I like her, and then I

love her, and then I tell her so;--or else she finds it out without my

telling. Was that a sin you can't forgive?"

"I never said it was a sin."

"I don't mind being a worm, but I won't be trodden upon overmuch. Was

there ever a moment in which you thought that I thought of marrying

you?"

"A great many, Jack."

"Did I ever say so?"

"Never. I'll do you justice there. You have been very cautious."

"Of course you can be severe, and of course I am bound to bear it. I

have been cautious,--for your sake!"

"Oh, Jack!"

"For your sake. When I first saw how it was going to be,--how it might

be between you and me,--I took care to say outright that I couldn't

marry unless a girl had money."

"There will be something--when papa dies."

"The most healthy middle-aged gentleman in London! There might be half

a dozen cradles, Guss, before that day. If it will do you good, you

shall say I'm the greatest rascal walking."

"That will do me no good."

"But I don't know that I can give you any other privilege."

Then there was a long pause during which they were sauntering together

under an old oak tree in the park. "Do you love me, Jack?" she then

asked, standing close up to him.

"God bless my soul! That's going back to the beginning."

"You are heartless,--absolutely heartless. It has come to that with you

that any real idea of love is out of the question."

"I can't afford it, my dear."

"But is there no such thing as love that you can't help? Can you drop a

girl out of your heart altogether simply because she has got no money?

I suppose you did love me once?" Here Jack scratched his head. "You did

love me once?" she said, persevering with her question.

"Of course I did," said Jack, who had no objection to making assurances

of the past.

"And you don't now?"

"Whoever said so? What's the good of talking about it?"

"Do you think you owe me nothing?"

"What's the good of owing, if a man can't pay his debts?"

"You will own nothing then?"

"Yes, I will. If anyone left me twenty thousand pounds to-morrow, then

I should owe you something."

"What would you owe me?"

"Half of it."

"And how would you pay me?" He thought a while before he made his

answer. He knew that in that case he would not wish to pay the debt in

the only way in which it would be payable. "You mean then that you

would--marry me?"

"I shouldn't be afraid of the hashed mutton and cradles."

"In that case you--would marry me?"

"A man has no right to take so much on himself as to say that."

"Psha!"

"I suppose I should. I should make a devilish bad husband even then."

"Why should you be worse than others?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I was made worse. I can't fancy myself doing any

duty well. If I had a wife of my own I should be sure to fall in love

with somebody else's."

"Lady George for instance."

"No;--not Lady George. It would not be with somebody whom I had learned

to think the very best woman in all the world. I am very bad, but I'm

just not bad enough to make love to her. Or rather I am very foolish,

but just not foolish enough to think that I could win her."

"I suppose she's just the same as others, Jack."

"She's not just the same to me. But I'd rather not talk about her,

Guss. I'm going to Killancodlem in a day or two, and I shall leave this

to-morrow!"

"To-morrow!"

"Well; yes; to-morrow. I must be a day or two in town, and there is not

much doing here. I'm tired of the old Marquis who is the most

illnatured brute I ever came across in my life, and there's no more fun

to be made of the Baroness. I'm not sure but that she has the best of

the fun. I didn't think there was an old woman in the world could get a

five pound note out of me; but she had."

"How could you be so foolish?"

"How indeed! You'll go back to London?"

"I suppose so;--unless I drown myself."

"Don't do that, Guss?"

"I often think it will be best. You don't know what my life is,--how

wretched. And you made it so."

"Is that fair, Guss?"

"Quite fair! Quite true! You have made it miserable. You know you have.

Of course you know it."

"Can I help it now?"

"Yes you can. I can be patient if you will say that it shall be some

day. I could put up with anything if you would let me hope. When you

have got that twenty thousand pounds----?"

"But I shall never have it."

"If you do,--will you marry me then? Will you promise me that you will

never marry anybody else?"

"I never shall."

"But will you promise me? If you will not say so much as that to me you

must be false indeed. When you have the twenty thousand pounds will you

marry me?"

"Oh, certainly."

"And you can laugh about such a matter when I am pouring out my very

soul to you? You can make a joke of it when it is all my life to me!

Jack, if you will say that it shall happen some day,--some day,--I will

be happy. If you won't,--I can only die. It may be play to you, but

it's death to me." He looked at her, and saw that she was quite in

earnest. She was not weeping, but there was a drawn, heavy look about

her face which, in truth, touched his heart. Whatever might be his

faults he was not a cruel man. He had defended himself without any

scruples of conscience when she had seemed to attack him, but now he

did not know how to refuse her request. It amounted to so little! "I

don't suppose it will ever take place, but I think I ought to allow

myself to consider myself as engaged to you," she said.

"As it is you are free to marry anyone else," he replied.

"I don't care for such freedom. I don't want it. I couldn't marry a man

whom I didn't love."

"Nobody knows what that they can do till they're tried."

"Do you suppose, sir, I've never been tried? But I can't bring myself

to laugh now, Jack. Don't joke now. Heaven knows when we may see each

other again. You will promise me that, Jack?"

"Yes;--if you wish it." And so at last she had got a promise from him!

She said nothing more to fix it, fearing that in doing so she might

lose it; but she threw herself into his arms and buried her face upon

his bosom.

Afterwards, when she was leaving him, she was very solemn in her manner

to him. "I will say good-bye now, Jack, for I shall hardly see you

again to speak to. You do love me?"

"You know I do."

"I am so true to you! I have always been true to you. God bless you,

Jack. Write me a line sometimes." Then he escaped, having brought her

back to the garden among the flowers, and he wandered away by himself

across the park. At last he had engaged himself. He knew that it was

so, and he knew that she would tell all her friends. Adelaide Houghton

would know, and would, of course, congratulate him. There never could

be a marriage. That would, of course, be out of the question. But,

instead of being the Jack De Baron of old, at any rate free as air, he

would be the young man engaged to marry Augusta Mildmay. And then he

could hardly now refuse to answer the letters which she would be sure

to write to him, at least twice a week. There had been a previous

period of letter-writing, but that had died a natural death through

utter neglect on his part. But now----. It might be as well that he

should take advantage of the new law and exchange into an Indian

regiment.

But, even in his present condition, his mind was not wholly occupied

with Augusta Mildmay. The evil words which had been spoken to him of

Mary had not been altogether fruitless. His cousin Adelaide had told

him over and over again that Lady George was as other women,--by which

his cousin had intended to say that Lady George was the same as

herself. Augusta Mildmay had spoken of his Phoenix in the same strain.

The Marquis had declared her to be utterly worthless. It was not that

he wished to think of her as they thought, or that he could be brought

so to think; but these suggestions, coming as they did from those who

knew how much he liked the woman, amounted to ridicule aimed against

the purity of his worship. They told him,--almost told him,--that he

was afraid to speak of love to Lady George. Indeed he was afraid, and

within his own breast he was in some sort proud of his fear. But,

nevertheless, he was touched by their ridicule. He and Mary had

certainly been dear friends. Certainly that friendship had given great

umbrage to her husband. Was he bound to keep away from her because of

her husband's anger? He knew that they two were not living together. He

knew that the Dean would at any rate welcome him. And he knew, too,

that there was no human being he wished to see again so much as Lady

George. He had no purpose as to anything that he would say to her, but

he was resolved that he would see her. If then some word warmer than

any he had yet spoken should fall from him, he would gather from her

answer what her feelings were towards him. In going back to London on

the morrow he must pass by Brotherton, and he would make his

arrangements so as to remain there for an hour or two.

CHAPTER LII.

ANOTHER LOVER.

The party at Rudham Park had hardly been a success,--nor was it much

improved in wit or gaiety when Mrs. Montacute Jones, Lord Giblet, and

Jack de Baron had gone away, and Canon Holdenough and his wife, with

Mr. Groschut, had come in their places. This black influx, as Lord

Brotherton called it, had all been due to consideration for his

Lordship. Mr. De Baron thought that his guest would like to see, at any

rate, one of his own family, and Lady Alice Holdenough was the only one

whom he could meet. As to Mr. Groschut, he was the Dean's bitterest

enemy, and would, therefore, it was thought, be welcome. The Bishop had

been asked, as Mr. De Baron was one who found it expedient to make

sacrifices to respectability; but, as was well known, the Bishop never

went anywhere except to clerical houses. Mr. Groschut, who was a

younger man, knew that it behoved him to be all things to all men, and

that he could not be efficacious among sinners unless he would allow

himself to be seen in their paths. Care was, of course, taken that

Lady Alice should find herself alone with her brother. It was probably

expected that the Marquis would be regarded as less of an ogre in the

country if it were known that he had had communication with one of the

family without quarrelling with her. "So you're come here," he said.

"I didn't know that people so pious would enter De Baron's doors."

"Mr. De Baron is a very old friend of the Canon's. I hope he isn't very

wicked, and I'm afraid we are not very pious."

"If you don't object, of course I don't. So they've all gone back to

the old house?"

"Mamma is there."

"And George?" he asked in a sharp tone.

"And George,--at present."

"George is, I think, the biggest fool I ever came across in my life. He

is so cowed by that man whose daughter he has married that he doesn't

know how to call his soul his own."

"I don't think that, Brotherton. He never goes to the deanery to stay

there."

"Then what makes him quarrel with me? He ought to know which side his

bread is buttered."

"He had a great deal of money with her, you know."

"If he thinks his bread is buttered on that side, let him stick to that

side and say so. I will regard none of my family as on friendly terms

with me who associate with the Dean of Brotherton or his daughter after

what took place up in London." Lady Alice felt this to be a distinct

threat to herself, but she allowed it to pass by without notice. She

was quite sure that the Canon would not quarrel with the Dean out of

deference to his brother-in-law. "The fact is they should all have gone

away as I told them, and especially when George had married the girl

and got her money. It don't make much difference to me, but it will

make a deal to him."

"How is Popenjoy, Brotherton?" asked Lady Alice, anxious to change the

conversation.

"I don't know anything about him."

"What!"

"He has gone back to Italy with his mother. How can I tell? Ask the

Dean. I don't doubt that he knows all about him. He has people

following them about, and watching every mouthful they eat."

"I think he has given all that up."

"Not he. He'll have to, unless he means to spend more money than I

think he has got."

"George is quite satisfied about Popenjoy now," said Lady Alice.

"I fancy George didn't like the expense. But he began it, and I'll

never forgive him. I fancy it was he and Sarah between them. They'll

find that they will have had the worst of it. The poor little beggar

hadn't much life in him. Why couldn't they wait?"

"Is it so bad as that, Brotherton?"

"They tell me he is not a young Hercules. Oh yes;--you can give my love

to my mother. Tell her that if I don't see her it is all George's

fault. I am not going to the house while he's there." To the Canon he

hardly spoke a word, nor was the Canon very anxious to talk to him. But

it became known throughout the country that the Marquis had met his

sister at Rudham Park, and the general effect was supposed to be good.

"I shall go back to-morrow, De Baron," he said to his host that same

afternoon. This was the day on which Jack had gone to Brotherton.

"We shall be sorry to lose you. I'm afraid it has been rather dull."

"Not more dull than usual. Everything is dull after a certain time of

life unless a man has made some fixed line for himself. Some men can

eat and drink a great deal, but I haven't got stomach for that. Some

men play cards; but I didn't begin early enough to win money, and I

don't like losing it. The sort of things that a man does care for die

away from him, and of course it becomes dull."

"I wonder you don't have a few horses in training."

"I hate horses, and I hate being cheated."

"They don't cheat me," said Mr. De Baron.

"Ah;--very likely. They would me. I think I made a mistake, De Baron,

in not staying at home and looking after the property."

"It's not too late, now."

"Yes, it is. I could not do it. I could not remember the tenants'

names, and I don't care about game. I can't throw myself into a litter

of young foxes, or get into a fury of passion about pheasants' eggs.

It's all beastly nonsense, but if a fellow could only bring himself to

care about it that wouldn't matter. I don't care about anything."

"You read."

"No, I don't. I pretend to read--a little. If they had left me alone I

think I should have had myself bled to death in a warm bath. But I

won't now. That man's daughter shan't be Lady Brotherton if I can help

it. I have rather liked being here on the whole, though why the d----

you should have a Germain impostor in your house, and a poor clergyman,

I can't make out."

"He's the Deputy Bishop of the diocese."

"But why have the Bishop himself unless he happen to be a friend? Does

your daughter like her marriage?"

"I hope so. She does not complain."

"He's an awful ass,--and always was. I remember when you used always to

finish up your books by making him bet as you pleased."

"He always won."

"And now you've made him marry your daughter. Perhaps he has won

there. I like her. If my wife would die and he would die, we might get

up another match and cut out Lord George after all." This speculation

was too deep even for Mr. De Baron, who laughed and shuffled himself

about, and got out of the room.

"Wouldn't you have liked to be a marchioness," he said, some hours

afterwards, to Mrs. Houghton. She was in the habit of sitting by him

and talking to him late in the evening, while he was sipping his

curaÃ§oa and soda water, and had become accustomed to hear odd things

from him. He liked her because he could say what he pleased to her, and

she would laugh and listen, and show no offence. But this last question

was very odd. Of course she thought that it referred to the old

overtures made to her by Lord George; but in that case, had she married

Lord George, she could only have been made a marchioness by his own

death,--by that and by the death of the little Popenjoy of whom she had

heard so much.

"If it had come in my way fairly," she said with an arch smile.

"I don't mean that you should have murdered anybody. Suppose you had

married me?"

"You never asked me, my lord."

"You were only eight or nine years old when I saw you last."

"Isn't it a pity you didn't get yourself engaged to me then? Such

things have been done."

"If the coast were clear I wonder whether you'd take me now."

"The coast isn't clear, Lord Brotherton."

"No, by George. I wish it were, and so do you too, if you'd dare to say

so."

"You think I should be sure to take you."

"I think you would. I should ask you at any rate. I'm not so old by ten

years as Houghton."

"Your age would not be the stumbling block."

"What then?"

"I didn't say there would be any. I don't say that there would not.

It's a kind of thing that a woman doesn't think of."

"It's just the kind of thing that women do think of."

"Then they don't talk about it, Lord Brotherton. Your brother you know

did want me to marry him."

"What, George? Before Houghton?"

"Certainly;--before I had thought of Mr. Houghton."

"Why the deuce did you refuse him? Why did you let him take that

little----" He did not fill up the blank, but Mrs. Houghton quite

understood that she was to suppose everything that was bad. "I never

heard of this before."

"It wasn't for me to tell you."

"What an ass you were."

"Perhaps so. What should we have lived upon? Papa would not have given

us an income."

"I could."

"But you wouldn't. You didn't know me then."

"Perhaps you'd have been just as keen as she is to rob my boy of his

name. And so George wanted to marry you! Was he very much in love?"

"I was bound to suppose so, my lord."

"And you didn't care for him!"

"I didn't say that. But I certainly did not care to set up housekeeping

without a house or without the money to get one. Was I wrong?"

"I suppose a fellow ought to have money when he wants to marry. Well,

my dear, there is no knowing what may come yet. Won't it be odd, if

after all, you should be Marchioness of Brotherton some day? After that

won't you give me a kiss before you say good-night."

"I would have done if you had been my brother-in-law,--or, perhaps, if

the people were not all moving about in the next room. Good-night,

Marquis."

"Good-night. Perhaps you'll regret some day that you haven't done what

I asked."

"I might regret it more if I did." Then she took herself off, enquiring

in her own mind whether it might still be possible that she should ever

preside in the drawing-room at Manor Cross. Had he not been very much

in love with her, surely he would not have talked to her like that.

"I think I'll say good-bye to you, De Baron," the Marquis said to his

host, that night.

"You won't be going early."

"No;--I never do anything early. But I don't like a fuss just as I am

going. I'll get down and drive away to catch some train. My man will

manage it all."

"You go to London?"

"I shall be in Italy within a week. I hate Italy, but I think I hate

England worse. If I believed in heaven and thought I were going there,

what a hurry I should be in to die."

"Let us know how Popenjoy is."

"You'll be sure to know whether he is dead or alive. There's nothing

else to tell. I never write letters except to Knox, and very few to

him. Good-night."

When the Marquis was in his room, his courier, or the man so called,

came to undress him. "Have you heard anything to-day?" he asked in

Italian. The man said that he had heard. A letter had reached him that

afternoon from London. The letter had declared that little Popenjoy was

sinking. "That will do Bonni," he said. "I will get into bed by

myself." Then he sat down and thought of himself, and his life, and his

prospects,--and of the prospects of his enemies.

CHAPTER LIII.

POOR POPENJOY!

On the following morning the party at Rudham Park were assembled at

breakfast between ten and eleven. It was understood that the Marquis

was gone,--or going. The Mildmays were still there with the Baroness,

and the Houghtons, and the black influx from the cathedral town. A few

other new comers had arrived on the previous day. Mr. Groschut, who was

sitting next to the Canon, had declared his opinion that, after all,

the Marquis of Brotherton was a very affable nobleman. "He's civil

enough," said the Canon, "when people do just what he wants."

"A man of his rank and position of course expects to have some

deference paid to him."

"A man of his rank and position should be very careful of the rights of

others, Mr. Groschut."

"I'm afraid his brother did make himself troublesome. You're one of the

family, Canon, and therefore, of course, know all about it."

"I know nothing at all about it, Mr. Groschut."

"But it must be acknowledged that the Dean behaved very badly.

Violence!--personal violence! And from a clergyman,--to a man of his

rank!"

"You probably don't know what took place in that room. I'm sure I

don't. But I'd rather trust the Dean than the Marquis any day. The

Dean's a man!"

"But is he a clergyman?"

"Of course he is; and a father. If he had been very much in the wrong

we should have heard more about it through the police."

"I cannot absolve a clergyman for using personal violence," said Mr.

Groschut, very grandly. "He should have borne anything sooner than

degrade his sacred calling." Mr. Groschut had hoped to extract from the

Canon some expression adverse to the Dean, and to be able to assure

himself that he had enrolled a new ally.

"Poor dear little fellow!" aunt Ju was saying to Mrs. Holdenough. Of

course she was talking of Popenjoy. "And you never saw him?"

"No; I never saw him."

"I am told he was a lovely child."

"Very dark, I fancy."

"And all those--those doubts? They're all over now?"

"I never knew much about it, Miss Mildmay. I never inquired into it.

For myself, I always took it for granted that he was Popenjoy. I think

one always does take things for granted till somebody proves that it is

not so."

"The Dean, I take it, has given it up altogether," said Mrs. Houghton

to old Lady Brabazon, who had come down especially to meet her nephew,

the Marquis, but who had hardly dared to speak a word to him on the

previous evening, and was now told that he was gone. Lady Brabazon for

a week or two had been quite sure that Popenjoy was not Popenjoy, being

at that time under the influence of a very strong letter from Lady

Sarah. But, since that, a general idea had come to prevail that the

Dean was wrong-headed, and Lady Brabazon had given in her adhesion to

Popenjoy. She had gone so far as to call at Scumberg's, and to leave a

box of bonbons.

"I hope so, Mrs. Houghton; I do hope so. Quarrels are such dreadful

things in families. Brotherton isn't, perhaps, all that he might have

been."

"Not a bad fellow, though, after all."

"By no means, Mrs. Houghton, and quite what he ought to be in

appearance. I always thought that George was very foolish."

"Lord George is foolish--sometimes."

"Very stubborn, you know, and pigheaded. And as for the Dean,--is was

great interference on his part, very great interference. I won't say

that I like foreigners myself. I should be very sorry if Brabazon were

to marry a foreigner. But if he chooses to do so I don't see why he is

to be told that his heir isn't his heir. They say she is a very worthy

woman, and devoted to him." At this moment the butler came in and

whispered a word to Mr. De Baron, who immediately got up from his

chair. "So my nephew hasn't gone," said Lady Brabazon. "That was a

message from him. I heard his name."

Her ears had been correct. The summons which Mr. De Baron obeyed had

come from the Marquis. He went upstairs at once, and found Lord

Brotherton sitting in his dressing-gown, with a cup of chocolate before

him, and a bit of paper in his hand. He did not say a word, but handed

the paper, which was a telegram, to Mr. De Baron. As the message was in

Italian, and as Mr. De Baron did not read the language, he was at a

loss. "Ah! you don't understand it," said the Marquis. "Give it me.

It's all over with little Popenjoy."

"Dead!" said Mr. De Baron.

"Yes. He has got away from all his troubles,--lucky dog! He'll never

have to think what he'll do with himself. They'd almost told me that it

must be so, before he went."

"I grieve for you greatly, Brotherton."

"There's no use in that, old fellow. I'm sorry to be a bother to you,

but I thought it best to tell you. I don't understand much about what

people call grief. I can't say that I was particularly fond of him, or

that I shall personally miss him. They hardly ever brought him to me,

and when they did, it bothered me. And yet, somehow it pinches me;--it

pinches me."

"Of course it does."

"It will be such a triumph to the Dean, and George. That's about the

worst of it. But they haven't got it yet. Though I should be the most

miserable dog on earth I'll go on living as long as I can keep my body

and soul together. I'll have another son yet, if one is to be had for

love or money. They shall have trouble enough before they find

themselves at Manor Cross."

"The Dean'll be dead before that time;--and so shall I," said Mr. De

Baron.

"Poor little boy! You never saw him. They didn't bring him in when you

were over at Manor Cross?"

"No;--I didn't see him."

"They weren't very proud of showing him. He wasn't much to look at.

Upon my soul I don't know whether he was legitimate or not, according

to English fashions." Mr. De Baron stared. "They had something to stand

upon, but,--damn it,--they went about it in such a dirty way! It don't

matter now, you know, but you needn't repeat all this."

"Not a word," said Mr. De Baron, wondering why such a communication

should have been made to him.

"And there was plenty of ground for a good fight. I hardly know whether

she had been married or not. I never could quite find out." Again Mr.

De Baron stared. "It's all over now."

"But if you were to have another son?"

"Oh! we're married now! There were two ceremonies. I believe the Dean

knows quite as much about it as I do;--very likely more. What a rumpus

there has been about a rickety brat who was bound to die."

"Am I to tell them downstairs?"

"Yes;--you might as well tell them. Wait till I'm gone. They'd say I'd

concealed it if I didn't let them know, and I certainly shan't write.

There's no Popenjoy now. If that young woman has a son he can't be

Popenjoy as long as I live. I'll take care of myself. By George I will.

Fancy, if the Dean had killed me. He'd have made his own daughter a

Marchioness."

"But he'd have been hung."

"Then I wish he'd done it. I wonder how it would have gone. There was

nobody there to see, nor to hear. Well;--I believe I'll think of going.

There's a train at two. You'll let me have a carriage; won't you?"

"Certainly."

"Let me get out some back way, and don't say a word about this till I'm

off. I wouldn't have them condoling with me, and rejoicing in their

sleeves, for a thousand pounds. Tell Holdenough, or my sister;--that'll

be enough. Good-bye. If you want ever to see me again, you must come to

Como." Then Mr. De Baron took his leave, and the Marquis prepared for

his departure.

As he was stepping into the carriage at a side door he was greeted by

Mr. Groschut. "So your Lordship is leaving us," said the Chaplain. The

Marquis looked at him, muttered something, and snarled as he hurried up

the step of the carriage. "I'm sorry that we are to lose your Lordship

so soon." Then there was another snarl. "I had one word I wanted to

say."

"To me! What can you have to say to me?"

"If at any time I can do anything for your Lordship at Brotherton----"

"You can't do anything. Go on." The last direction was given to the

coachman, and the carriage was driven off, leaving Mr. Groschut on the

path.

Before lunch everybody in the house knew that poor little Popenjoy was

dead, and that the Dean had, in fact, won the battle,--though not in

the way that he had sought to win it. Lord Brotherton had, after a

fashion, been popular at Rudham, but, nevertheless, it was felt by them

all that Lady George was a much greater woman to-day than she had been

yesterday. It was felt also that the Dean was in the ascendant. The

Marquis had been quite agreeable, making love to the ladies, and fairly

civil to the gentlemen,--excepting Mr. Groschut; but he certainly was

not a man likely to live to eighty. He was married, and, as was

generally understood, separated from his wife. They might all live to

see Lady George Marchioness of Brotherton and a son of hers Lord

Popenjoy.

"Dead!" said Lady Brabazon, when Lady Alice, with sad face, whispered

to her the fatal news.

"He got a telegram this morning from Italy. Poor little boy."

"And what'll he do now;--the Marquis I mean?"

"I suppose he'll follow his wife," said Lady Alice.

"Was he much cut up?"

"I didn't see him. He merely sent me word by Mr. De Baron." Mr. De

Baron afterwards assured Lady Brabazon that the poor father had been

very much cut up. Great pity was expressed throughout the party, but

there was not one there who would not now have been civil to poor Mary.

The Marquis had his flowers, and his fruit, and his French novels on

his way up to town, and kept his sorrow, if he felt it, very much to

himself. Soon after his arrival at Scumberg's, at which place they were

obliged to take him in as he was still paying for his rooms, he made it

known that he should start for Italy in a day or two. On that night and

on the next he did not go out in his brougham, nor did he give any

offence to Mrs. Walker. London was as empty as London ever is, and

nobody came to see him. For two days he did not leave his room, the

same room in which the Dean had nearly killed him, and received nobody

but his tailor and his hair-dresser. I think that, in his way, he did

grieve for the child who was gone, and who, had he lived, would have

been the intended heir of his title and property. They must now all go

from him to his enemies! And the things themselves were to himself of

so very little value! Living alone at Scumberg's was not a pleasant

life. Even going out in his brougham at nights was not very pleasant to

him. He could do as he liked at Como, and people wouldn't grumble;--but

what was there even at Como that he really liked to do? He had a half

worn out taste for scenery which he had no longer energy to gratify by

variation. It had been the resolution of his life to live without

control, and now, at four and forty, he found that the life he had

chosen was utterly without attraction. He had been quite in earnest in

those regrets as to shooting, hunting, and the duties of an English

country life. Though he was free from remorse, not believing in

anything good, still he was open to a conviction that had he done what

other people call good, he would have done better for himself.

Something of envy stirred him as he read the records of a nobleman

whose political life had left him no moment of leisure for his private

affairs;--something of envy when he heard of another whose cattle were

the fattest in the land. He was connected with Lord Grassangrains, and

had always despised that well-known breeder of bullocks;--but he could

understand now that Lord Grassangrains should wish to live, whereas

life to him was almost unbearable. Lord Grassangrains probably had a

good appetite.

On the last morning of his sojourn at Scumberg's he received two or

three letters which he would willingly have avoided by running away had

it been possible. The first he opened was from his old mother, who had

not herself troubled him much with letters for some years past. It was

as follows:--

"DEAREST BROTHERTON,--I have heard about poor Popenjoy, and I am

so unhappy. Darling little fellow. We are all very wretched here,

and I have nearly cried my eyes out. I hope you won't go away

without seeing me. If you'll let me, I'll go up to London, though

I haven't been there for I don't know how long. But perhaps you

will come here to your own house. I do so wish you would.

"Your most affectionate mother,

"H. BROTHERTON.

"P.S.--Pray don't turn George out at the end of the month."

This he accepted without anger as being natural, but threw aside as

being useless. Of course he would not answer it. They all knew that he

never answered their letters. As to the final petition he had nothing

to say to it.

The next was from Lord George, and shall also be given:--

"MY DEAR BROTHERTON,--I cannot let the tidings which I have just

heard pass by without expressing my sympathy. I am very sorry

indeed that you should have lost your son. I trust you will credit

me for saying so much with absolute truth.

"Yours always,

"GEORGE GERMAIN."

"I don't believe a word of it," he said almost out loud. To his

thinking it was almost impossible that what his brother said should be

true. Why should he be sorry,--he that had done his utmost to prove

that Popenjoy was not Popenjoy? He crunched the letter up and cast it

on one side. Of course he would not answer that.

The third was from a new correspondent; and that also the reader shall

see;--

"MY DEAR LORD MARQUIS,--Pray believe that had I known under what

great affliction you were labouring when you left Rudham Park I

should have been the last man in the world to intrude myself upon

you. Pray believe me also when I say that I have heard of your

great bereavement with sincere sympathy, and that I condole with

you from the bottom of my heart. Pray remember, my dear Lord, that

if you will turn aright for consolation you certainly will not

turn in vain.

"Let me add, though this is hardly the proper moment for such

allusion, that both his lordship the Bishop and myself were most

indignant when we heard of the outrage committed upon you at your

hotel. I make no secret of my opinion that the present Dean of

Brotherton ought to be called upon by the great Council of the

Nation to vacate his promotion. I wish that the bench of bishops

had the power to take from him his frock.

"I have the honour to be,

"My Lord Marquis,

"With sentiments of most unfeigned respect,

"Your Lordship's most humble servant,

"JOSEPH GROSCHUT."

The Marquis smiled as he also threw this letter into the waste-paper

basket, telling himself that birds of that feather very often did fall

out with one another.

CHAPTER LIV.

JACK DE BARON'S VIRTUE.

We must now go back to Jack De Baron, who left Rudham Park the same day

as the Marquis,--having started before the news of Lord Popenjoy's

death had been brought down stairs by Mr. De Baron. Being only Jack De

Baron he had sent to Brotherton for a fly, and in that conveyance had

had himself taken to the "Lion," arriving there three or four hours

before the time at which he purposed to leave the town. Indeed his

arrangements had intentionally been left so open that he might if he

liked remain the night,--or if he pleased, remain a week at the "Lion."

He thought it not improbable that the Dean might ask him to dinner,

and, if so, he certainly would dine with the Dean.

He was very serious,--considering who he was, we may almost say solemn,

as he sat in the fly. It was the rule of his life to cast all cares

from him, and his grand principle to live from hand to mouth. He was

almost a philosopher in his epicureanism, striving always that nothing

should trouble him. But now he had two great troubles, which he could

not throw off from him. In the first place, after having striven

against it for the last four or five years with singular success, he

had in a moment of weakness allowed himself to become engaged to Guss

Mildmay. She had gone about it so subtlely that he had found himself

manacled almost before he knew that the manacles were there. He had

fallen into the trap of an hypothesis, and now felt that the

preliminary conditions on which he had seemed to depend could never

avail him. He did not mean to marry Guss Mildmay. He did not suppose

that she thought he meant to marry her. He did not love her, and he did

not believe very much in her love for him. But Guss Mildmay, having

fought her battle in the world for many years with but indifferent

success, now felt that her best chance lay in having a bond upon her

old lover. He ought not to have gone to Rudham when he knew that she

was to be there. He had told himself that before, but he had not liked

to give up the only chance which had come in his way of being near Lady

George since she had left London. And now he was an engaged man,--a

position which had always been to him full of horrors. He had run his

bark on to the rock, which it had been the whole study of his

navigation to avoid. He had committed the one sin which he had always

declared to himself that he never would commit. This made him unhappy.

And he was uneasy also,--almost unhappy,--respecting Lady George.

People whom he knew to be bad had told him things respecting her which

he certainly did not believe, but which he did not find it compatible

with his usual condition of life altogether to disbelieve. If he had

ever loved any woman he loved her. He certainly respected her as he had

never respected any other young woman. He had found the pleasure to be

derived from her society to be very different from that which had come

from his friendship with others. With her he could be perfectly

innocent, and at the same time completely happy. To dance with her, to

ride with her, to walk with her, to sit with the privilege of looking

at her, was joy of itself, and required nothing beyond. It was a

delight to him to have any little thing to do for her. When his daily

life was in any way joined with hers there was a brightness in it which

he thoroughly enjoyed though he did not quite understand. When that

affair of the dance came, in which Lord George had declared his

jealousy, he had been in truth very unhappy because she was unhappy,

and he had been thoroughly angry with the man, not because the man had

interfered with his own pleasures, but because of the injury and the

injustice done to the wife. He found himself wounded, really hurt,

because she had been made subject to calumny. When he tried to analyse

the feeling he could not understand it. It was so different from

anything that had gone before! He was sure that she liked him, and yet

there was a moment in which he thought that he would purposely keep out

of her way for the future, lest he might be a trouble to her. He loved

her so well that his love for a while almost made him unselfish.

And yet,--yet he might be mistaken about her. It had been the theory of

his life that young married women become tired of their husbands, and

one of his chief doctrines that no man should ever love in such a way

as to believe in the woman he loves. After so many years, was he to

give up his philosophy? Was he to allow the ground to be cut from under

his feet by a young creature of twenty-one who had been brought up in a

county town? Was he to run away because a husband had taken it into his

head to be jealous? All the world had given him credit for his

behaviour at the Kappa-kappa. He had gathered laurels,--very much

because he was supposed to be the lady's lover. He had never boasted to

others of the lady's favour; but he knew that she liked him, and he had

told himself that he would be poor-spirited if he abandoned her.

He drove up to the "Lion" and ordered a room. He did not know whether

he should want it, but he would at any rate bespeak it. And he ordered

his dinner. Come what come might, he thought that he would dine and

sleep at Brotherton that day. Finding himself so near to Lady George,

he would not leave her quite at once. He asked at the inn whether the

Dean was in Brotherton. Yes; the Dean was certainly at the deanery. He

had been seen about in the city that morning. The inhabitants, when

they talked about Brotherton, always called it the city. And were Lord

George and Lady George at the deanery? In answer to this question, the

landlady with something of a lengthened face declared that Lady George

was with her papa, but that Lord George was at Manor Cross. Then Jack

De Baron strolled out towards the Close.

It was a little after one when he found himself at the cathedral door,

and thinking that the Dean and his daughter might be at lunch, he went

into the building, so that he might get rid of half an hour. He had not

often been in cathedrals of late years, and now looked about him with

something of awe. He could remember that when he was a child he had

been brought here to church, and as he stood in the choir with the

obsequient verger at his elbow he recollected how he had got through

the minutes of a long sermon,--a sermon that had seemed to be very

long,--in planning the way in which, if left to himself, he would climb

to the pinnacle which culminated over the bishop's seat, and thence

make his way along the capitals and vantages of stonework, till he

would ascend into the triforium and thus become lord and master of the

old building. How much smaller his ambitions had become since then, and

how much less manly. "Yes, sir; his Lordship is here every Sunday when

he is at the palace," said the verger. "But his Lordship is ailing

now."

"And the Dean?"

"The Dean always comes once a day to service when he is here; but the

Dean has been much away of late. Since Miss Mary's marriage the Dean

isn't in Brotherton as much as formerly."

"I know the Dean. I'm going to his house just now. They like him in

Brotherton, I suppose?"

"That's according to their way of thinking, sir. We like him. I suppose

you heard, sir, there was something of a row between him and Miss

Mary's brother-in-law!" Jack said that he had heard of it. "There's

them as say he was wrong."

"I say he was quite right."

"That's what we think, sir. It's got about that his Lordship said some

bad word of Miss Mary. A father wasn't to stand that because he's a

clergyman, was he, sir?"

"The Dean did just what you or I would do."

"That's just it, sir. That's what we all say. Thank you, sir. You won't

see Prince Edward's monument, sir? Gentlemen always do go down to the

crypt." Jack wouldn't see the monument to-day, and having paid his

half-crown, was left to wander about alone through the aisles.

How would it have been with him if his life had been different; if he

had become, perhaps, a clergyman and had married Mary Lovelace?--or if

he had become anything but what he was with her for his wife? He knew

that his life had been a failure, that the best of it was gone, and

that even the best of it had been unsatisfactory. Many people liked

him, but was there any one who loved him? In all the world there was

but one person that he loved, and she was the wife of another man. Of

one thing at this moment he was quite sure,--that he would never wound

her ears by speaking of his love. Would it not be better that he should

go away and see her no more? The very tone in which the verger had

spoken of Miss Mary had thrown to the winds those doubts which had come

from the teaching of Adelaide Houghton and Guss Mildmay. If she had

been as they said, would even her father have felt for her as he did

feel, and been carried away by his indignation at the sound of an evil

word?

But he had asked after the Dean at the hotel, and had told the verger

of his acquaintance, and had been seen by many in the town. He could

not now leave the place without calling. So resolving he knocked at

last at the deanery door, and was told that the Dean was at home. He

asked for the Dean, and not for Lady George, and was shown into the

library. In a minute the Dean was with him. "Come in and have some

lunch," said the Dean. "We have this moment sat down. Mary will be

delighted to see you,--and so am I." Of course he went in to lunch, and

in a moment was shaking hands with Mary, who in truth was delighted to

see him.

"You've come from Rudham?" asked the Dean.

"This moment."

"Have they heard the news there?"

"What news?"

"Lord Brotherton is there, is he not?"

"I think he left to-day. He was to do so. I heard no news." He looked

across to Mary, and saw that her face was sad and solemn.

"The child that they called Lord Popenjoy is dead," said the Dean. He

was neither sad nor solemn. He could not control the triumph of his

voice as he told the news.

"Poor little boy!" said Mary.

"Dead!" exclaimed Jack.

"I've just had a telegram from my lawyer in London. Yes; he's out of

the way. Poor little fellow! As sure as I sit here he was not Lord

Popenjoy."

"I never understood anything about it," said Jack.

"But I did. Of course the matter is at rest now. I'm not the man to

grudge any one what belongs to him; but I do not choose that any one

belonging to me should be swindled. If she were to have a son now, he

would be the heir."

"Oh, papa, do not talk in that way."

"Rights are rights, and the truth is the truth. Can any one wish that

such a property and such a title should go to the child of an Italian

woman whom no one has seen or knows?"

"Let it take its chance now, papa."

"Of course it must take its chance; but your chances must be

protected."

"Papa, he was at any rate my nephew."

"I don't know that. In law, I believe, he was no such thing. But he

has gone, and we need think of him no further." He was very triumphant.

There was an air about him as though he had already won the great stake

for which he had been playing. But in the midst of it all he was very

civil to Jack De Baron. "You will stay and dine with us to-day, Captain

De Baron?"

"Oh, do," said Mary.

"We can give you a bed if you will sleep here."

"Thanks. My things are at the hotel, and I will not move them. I will

come and dine if you'll have me."

"We shall be delighted. We can't make company of you, because no one is

coming. I shouldn't wonder if Lord George rode over. He will if he

hears of this. Of course he'll know to-morrow; but perhaps they will

not have telegraphed to him. I should go out to Manor Cross, only I

don't quite like to put my foot in that man's house." Jack could not

but feel that the Dean treated him almost as though he were one of the

family. "I rather think I shall ride out and risk it. You won't mind my

leaving you?" Of course Jack declared that he would not for worlds be

in the way. "Mary will play Badminton with you, if you like it. Perhaps

you can get hold of Miss Pountner and Grey; and make up a game." Mr.

Grey was one of the minor canons, and Miss Pountner was the canon's

daughter.

"We shall do very well, papa. I'm not mad after Badminton, and I dare

say we shall manage without Miss Pountner."

The Dean went off, and in spite of the feud did ride over to Manor

Cross. His mind was so full of the child's death and of the all but

certainty of coming glory which now awaited his daughter, that he could

not keep himself quiet. It seemed to him that a just Providence had

interfered to take that child away. And as the Marquis hated him, so

did he hate the Marquis. He had been willing at first to fight the

battle fairly without personal animosity. On the Marquis's first

arrival he had offered him the right hand of fellowship. He remembered

it all accurately,--how the Marquis had on that occasion ill-used and

insulted him. No man knew better than the Dean when he was well-treated

and when ill-treated. And then this lord had sent for him for the very

purpose of injuring and wounding him through his daughter's name. His

wrath on that occasion had not all expended itself in the blow. After

that word had been spoken he was the man's enemy for ever. There could

be no forgiveness. He could not find room in his heart for even a spark

of pity because the man had lost an only child. Had not the man tried

to do worse than kill his only child--his daughter? Now the

pseudo-Popenjoy was dead, and the Dean was in a turmoil of triumph. It

was essential to him that he should see his son-in-law. His son-in-law

must be made to understand what it would be to be the father of the

future Marquis of Brotherton.

"I think I'll just step across to the inn," said Jack, when the Dean

had left them.

"And we'll have a game of croquet when you come back. I do like

croquet, though papa laughs at me. I think I like all games. It is so

nice to be doing something."

Jack sauntered back to the inn, chiefly that he might have a further

opportunity of considering what he would say to her. And he did make up

his mind. He would play croquet with all his might, and behave to her

as though she were his dearest sister.

CHAPTER LV.

HOW COULD HE HELP IT?

When he returned she was out in the garden with her hat on and a mallet

in her hand; but she was seated on one of a cluster of garden-chairs

under a great cedar tree. "I think it's almost too hot to play," she

said. It was an August afternoon, and the sun was very bright in the

heavens. Jack was of course quite willing to sit under the cedar-tree

instead of playing croquet. He was prepared to do whatever she wished.

If he could only know what subjects she would prefer, he would talk

about them and nothing else. "How do you think papa is looking?" she

asked.

"He always looks well."

"Ah; he was made dreadfully unhappy by that affair up in London. He

never would talk about it to me; but he was quite ill while he thought

the Marquis was in danger."

"I don't believe the Marquis was much the worse for it."

"They said he was, and papa for some time could not get over it. Now he

is elated. I wish he would not be so glad because that poor little boy

has died."

"It makes a great difference to him, Lady George;--and to you."

"Of course it makes a difference, and of course I feel it. I am as

anxious for my husband as any other woman. If it should come fairly, as

it were by God's doing, I am not going to turn up my nose at it."

"Is not this fairly?"

"Oh yes. Papa did not make the little boy die, of course. But I don't

think that people should long for things like this. If they can't keep

from wishing them, they should keep their wishes to themselves. It is

so like coveting other people's goods. Don't you think we ought to keep

the commandments, Captain De Baron?"

"Certainly--if we can."

"Then we oughtn't to long for other people's titles."

"If I understand it, the Dean wanted to prevent somebody else from

getting a title which wasn't his own. That wouldn't be breaking the

commandment."

"Of course I am not finding fault with papa. He would not for worlds

try to take anything that wasn't his,--or mine. But it's so sad about

the little boy."

"I don't think the Marquis cared for him."

"Oh, he must have cared! His only child! And the poor mother;--think

how she must feel."

"In spite of it all, I do think it's a very good thing that he's dead,"

said Jack, laughing.

"Then you ought to keep it to yourself, sir. It's a very horrid thing

to say so. Wouldn't you like to smoke a cigar? You may, you know. Papa

always smokes out here, because he says Mr. Groschut can't see him."

"Mr. Groschut is at Rudham," said Jack, as he took a cigar out of his

case and lit it.

"At Rudham? What promotion!"

"He didn't seem to me to be a first-class sort of a fellow."

"Quite a last-class sort of fellow, if there is a last class. I'll tell

you a secret, Captain De Baron. Mr. Groschut is my pet abomination. If

I hate anybody, I hate him. I think I do really hate Mr. Groschut. I

almost wish that they would make him bishop of some unhealthy place."

"So that he might go away and die?"

"If the mosquitoes would eat him day and night, that would be enough.

Who else was there at Rudham?"

"Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"Dear Mrs. Jones. I do like Mrs. Jones."

"And Adelaide Houghton with her husband." Mary turned up her nose and

made a grimace as the Houghtons were named. "You used to be very fond

of Adelaide."

"Very fond is a long word. We were by way of being friends; but we are

friends no longer."

"Tell me what she did to offend you, Lady George? I know there was

something."

"You are her cousin. Of course I am not going to abuse her to you."

"She's not half so much my cousin as you are my friend,--if I may say

so. What did she do or what did she say?"

"She painted her face."

"If you're going to quarrel, Lady George, with every woman in London

who does that, you'll have a great many enemies."

"And the hair at the back of her head got bigger and bigger every

month. Papa always quotes something about Dr. Fell when he's asked why

he does not like anybody. She's Dr. Fell to me."

"I don't think she quite knows why you've cut her."

"I'm quite sure she does, Captain De Baron. She knows all about it. And

now, if you please, we won't talk of her any more. Who else was there

at Rudham?"

"All the old set. Aunt Ju and Guss."

"Then you were happy."

"Quite so. I believe that no one knows all about that better than you

do."

"You ought to have been happy."

"Lady George, I thought you always told the truth."

"I try to; and I think you ought to have been happy. You don't mean to

tell me that Miss Mildmay is nothing to you?"

"She is a very old friend."

"Ought she not to be more? Though of course I have no right to ask."

"You have a right if any one has. I haven't a friend in the world I

would trust as I would you. No; she ought not to be more."

"Have you never given her a right to think that she would be more?"

He paused a moment or two before he answered. Much as he wished to

trust her, anxious as he was that she should be his real friend he

could hardly bring himself to tell her all that had taken place at

Rudham Park during the last day or two. Up to that time he never had

given Miss Mildmay any right. So, at least, he still assured himself.

But now,--it certainly was different now. He desired of all things to

be perfectly honest with Lady George,--to be even innocent in all that

he said to her; but--just for this once--he was obliged to deviate into

a lie. "Never!" he said.

"Of course it is not for me to enquire further."

"It is very hard to describe the way in which such an intimacy has come

about. Guss Mildmay and I have been very much thrown together; but,

even had she wished it, we never could have married. We have no means."

"And yet you live like rich people."

"We have no means because we have lived like rich people."

"You have never asked her to marry you?"

"Never."

"Nor made her think that you would ask her? That comes to the same

thing, Captain De Baron."

"How am I to answer that? How am I to tell it all without seeming to

boast. When it first came to pass that we knew ourselves well enough to

admit of such a thing being said between us, I told her that marriage

was impossible. Is not that enough?"

"I suppose so," said Lady George, who remembered well every word that

Gus Mildmay had said to herself. "I don't know why I should enquire

about it, only I thought----"

"I know what you thought."

"What did I think?"

"That I was a heartless scoundrel."

"No, never. If I had, I should not have,--have cared about it. Perhaps

it has been unfortunate."

"Most unfortunate!" Then again there was a pause, during which he went

on smoking while she played with her mallet. "I wish I could tell you

everything about it;--only I can't. Did she ever speak to you?"

"Yes, once."

"And what did she say?"

"I cannot tell you that either."

"I have endeavoured to be honest; but sometimes it is so difficult. One

wants sometimes to tell the whole truth, but it won't come out. I am

engaged to her now."

"You are engaged to her!"

"And two days since I was as free as ever."

"Then I may congratulate you."

"No, no. It makes me miserable. I do not love her. There is one other

person that I care for, and I never can care for any one else. There is

one woman that I love, and I never really loved any one else."

"That is very sad, Captain De Baron."

"Is it not? I can never marry Miss Mildmay."

"And yet you have promised?"

"I have promised under certain circumstances which can never, never

come about."

"Why did you promise if you do not love her?"

"Cannot you understand without my telling you? I cannot tell you that.

I am sure you understand."

"I suppose I do. Poor Miss Mildmay!"

"And poor Jack De Baron!"

"Yes; poor Jack De Baron also! No man should talk to a girl of marrying

her unless he loves her. It is different with a girl. She may come to

love a man. She may love a man better than all the world, though she

hardly knew him when she married him. If he is good to her, she will

certainly do so. But if a man marries a woman without loving her, he

will soon hate her."

"I shall never marry Miss Mildmay."

"And yet you have said you would?"

"I told you that I wanted to tell you everything. It is so pleasant to

have some one to trust, even though I should be blamed as you are

blaming me. It simply means that I can marry no one else."

"But you love some one?" She felt when she was asking the question that

it was indiscreet. When the assertion was made she had not told herself

that she was the woman. She had not thought it. For an instant she had

tried to imagine who that other one could be. But yet, when the words

were out of her mouth, she knew that they were indiscreet. Was she not

indiscreet in holding any such conversation with a man who was not her

brother or even her cousin? She wished that he were her cousin, so that

she might become the legitimate depository of his secrets. Though she

was scolding him for his misdoings, yet she hardly liked him the less

for them. She thought that she did understand how it was, and she

thought that the girl was more in fault than the man. It was not till

the words had passed her mouth and the question had been asked that she

felt the indiscretion. "But you love some one else?"

"Certainly I do; but I had not meant to speak about that."

"I will enquire into no secrets."

"Is that a secret? Can it be a secret? Do you not know that ever since

I knew you I have had no pleasure but in being with you, and talking to

you, and looking at you?"

"Captain De Baron!" As she spoke she rose from her seat as though she

would at once leave him and go back into the house.

"You must hear me now. You must not go without hearing me. I will not

say a word to offend you."

"You have offended me."

"How could I help it? What was I to do? What ought I to have said? Pray

do not go, Lady George."

"I did not think you would have insulted me. I did trust you."

"You may trust me. On my honour as a gentleman, I will never say

another word that you can take amiss. I wish I could tell you all my

feelings. One cannot help one's love."

"A man may govern his words."

"As I trust in heaven, I had determined that I would never say a

syllable to you that I might not have spoken to my sister. Have I asked

you to love me? I have not thought it possible that you should do so. I

know you to be too good. It has never come within my dreams."

"It is wicked to think of it."

"I have not thought of it. I will never think of it. You are like an

angel to me. If I could write poetry, I should write about you. If ever

I build castles in the air and think what I might have been if things

had gone well with me, I try to fancy then that I might have had you

for a wife. That is not wicked. That is not a crime. Can you be angry

with me because, having got to know you as I do, I think you better,

nicer, jollier, more beautiful than any one else? Have you never really

loved a friend?"

"I love my husband with all my heart,--oh, better than all the world."

Jack did not quite understand this. His angel was an angel. He was sure

of that. And he wished her to be still an angel. But he could not

understand how any angel could passionately love Lord George

Germain,--especially this angel who had been so cruelly treated by him.

Had she loved him better than all the world when he walked her out of

Mrs. Jones' drawing-room, reprimanding her before all the guests for

her conduct in dancing the Kappa-kappa? But this was a matter not open

to argument. "I may still be your friend?" he said.

"I think you had better not come again."

"Do not say that, Lady George. If I have done wrong, forgive me. I

think you must admit that I could hardly help myself."

"Not help yourself!"

"Did I not tell you that I wanted you to know the whole truth? How

could I make you understand about Miss Mildmay without telling it all?

Say that you will forgive me."

"Say that it is not so, and then I will forgive you."

"No. It is so, and it must be so. It will remain so always, but yet you

will surely forgive me, if I never speak of it again. You will forgive

me and understand me, and when hereafter you see me as a middle-aged

man about town, you will partly know why it is so. Oh dear; I forgot to

tell you. We had another old friend of yours at Rudham,--a very

particular friend." Of course she had forgiven him and now she was

thankful to him for his sudden breach of the subject; but she was not

herself strong enough immediately to turn to another matter. "Who do

you think was there?"

"How can I tell?"

"The Baroness."

"No?"

"As large as life."

"Baroness Banmann at Mr. De Baron's."

"Yes;--Baroness Banmann. Aunt Julia had contrived to get permission to

bring her, and the joke was that she did us all out of our money. She

got a five-pound note from me."

"What a goose you were."

"And ten from Lord Brotherton! I think that was the greatest triumph.

She was down on him without the slightest compunction. I never saw a

man so shot in my life. He sent me to look for the money, and she never

left me till I had got it for her."

"I thought Aunt Ju had had enough of her."

"I should think she has now. And we had Lord Giblet. Lord Giblet is to

marry Miss Patmore Green after all."

"Poor Lord Giblet!"

"And poor Miss Patmore Green. I don't know which will have the worst of

it. They can practice the Kappa-kappa together for consolation. It is

all Mrs. Jones' doing, and she is determined that he shan't escape. I'm

to go down to Killancodlem and help."

"Why should you have anything to do with it?"

"Very good shooting, and plenty to eat and drink,--and Giblet is a

friend of mine; so I'm bound to lend a hand. And now, Lady George, I

think I'll go to the hotel and be back to dinner. We are friends."

"Yes; if you promise not to offend me."

"I will never offend you. I will never say a word that all the world

might not hear,--except this once,--to thank you." Then he seized her

hand and kissed it. "You shall always be a sister to me," he said.

"When I am in trouble I will come to you. Say that you will love me as

a brother."

"I will always regard you as a friend."

"Regard is a cold word, but I will make the most of it. Here is your

father."

At this moment they were coming from a side path on to the lawn, and as

they did so the Dean appeared upon the terrace through the deanery room

window. With the Dean was Lord George, and Mary, as soon as she saw

him, rushed up to him and threw her arms round his neck. "Oh George,

dear, dearest George, papa said that perhaps you would come. You are

going to stay?"

"He will dine here," said the Dean.

"Only dine!"

"I cannot stay longer to-day," said Lord George, with his eye upon

Captain De Baron. The Dean had told him that De Baron was there; but,

still, when he saw that the man had been walking with his wife, a

renewed uneasiness came upon him. It could not be right that the man

from whose arms he had rescued her on the night of the ball should be

left alone with her a whole afternoon in the Deanery Garden! She was

thoughtless as a child;--but it seemed to him that the Dean was as

thoughtless as his daughter. The Dean must know what people had said.

The Dean had himself seen that horrid dance, with its results. The

awful accusation made by the Marquis had been uttered in the Dean's

ears. Because that had been wicked and devilishly false, the Dean's

folly was not the less. Lord George embraced his wife, but she knew

from the touch of his arm round her waist that there was something

wrong with him.

The two men shook hands of course, and then De Baron went out,

muttering something to the Dean as to his being back to dinner. "I

can't say I like that young man," said Lord George.

"I like him very much," replied the Dean. "He is always good-humoured,

and I think he's honest. I own to a predilection for happy people."

Mary was of course soon upstairs with her husband. "I thought you would

come," she said, hanging on him.

"I did not like not to see you after the news. It is important. You

must feel that."

"Poor little boy! Don't you grieve for them."

"Yes, I do. Brotherton has treated me very badly, but I do feel for

him. I shall write to him and say so. But that will not alter the fact.

Popenjoy is dead."

"No; it will not alter the fact." He was so solemn with her that she

hardly knew how to talk to him.

"Popenjoy is dead,--if he was Popenjoy. I suppose he was; but that does

not signify now."

"Not in the least I suppose."

"And if you have a son----"

"Oh, George?"

"He won't be Popenjoy yet."

"Or perhaps ever."

"Or perhaps ever;--but a time will probably come when he will be

Popenjoy. We can't help thinking about it, you know."

"Of course not."

"I'm sure I don't want my brother to die."

"I am sure I don't."

"But the family has to be kept up. I do care about the family. They all

think at Manor Cross that you should go over at once."

"Are you going to stay there, George. Of course I will go if you are

going to stay there."

"They think you should come, though it were only for a few days."

"And then? Of course I will go, George, if you say so. I have had my

visit with papa,--as much as I had a right to expect. And, oh George, I

do so long to be with you again." Then she hung upon him and kissed

him. It must have been impossible that he should be really jealous,

though Captain De Baron had been there the whole day. Nor was he

jealous, except with that CÃ¦sarian jealousy lest she should be

unfortunate enough to cause a whisper derogatory to his marital

dignity.

The matter had been fully discussed at Manor Cross; and the Manor Cross

conclave, meaning of course Lady Sarah, had thought that Mary should be

brought to the house, if only for a day or two, if only that people in

Brothershire might know that there had been no quarrel between her and

her husband. That she should have visited her father might be

considered as natural. It need not be accounted as quite unnatural that

she should have done so without her husband. But now,--now it was

imperative that Brothershire should know that the mother of the future

Lord Popenjoy was on good terms with the family. "Of course her

position is very much altered," Lady Susanna had said in private to

Lady Amelia. The old Marchioness felt a real longing to see "dear

Mary," and to ask becoming questions as to her condition. And it was

quite understood that she was not to be required to make any cloaks or

petticoats. The garments respecting which she must be solicitous for

the next six months would, as the Marchioness felt, be of a very august

nature. Oh, that the future baby might be born at Manor Cross! The

Marchioness did not see why Lord George should leave the house at all.

Brotherton couldn't know anything about it in Italy, and if George must

go, Mary might surely be left there for the event. The Marchioness

declared that she could die happy if she might see another Popenjoy

born in the purple of Manor Cross.

"When am I to go?" asked Mary. She was sitting now close to him, and

the question was asked with full delight.

"I do not know whether you can be ready to-morrow."

"Of course I can be ready to-morrow. Oh George, to be back with you!

Even for ten days it seems to be a great happiness. But if you go, then

of course you will take me with you." There was a reality about this

which conquered him, even in spite of Captain De Baron, so that he came

down to dinner in good-humour with the world.

CHAPTER LVI.

SIR HENRY SAID IT WAS THE ONLY THING.

The dinner at the deanery went off without much excitement. Captain De

Baron would of course have preferred that Lord George should have

remained at Manor Cross, but under no circumstances could he have had

much more to say to the lady. They understood each other now. He was

quite certain that any evil thing spoken of her had been sheer slander,

and yet he had managed to tell her everything of himself without

subjecting himself to her undying anger. When she left the

drawing-room, the conversation turned again upon the great Popenjoy

question, and from certain words which fell from the Dean, Jack was

enabled to surmise that Lord George had reason to hope that an heir

might be born to him. "He does not look as though he would live long

himself," said the Dean, speaking of the Marquis.

"I trust he may with all my heart," said Lord George.

"That's another question," replied the Dean. "I only say that he

doesn't look like it." Lord George went away early, and Jack De Baron

thought it prudent to retire at the same time. "So you're going

to-morrow, dear," said the Dean.

"Yes, papa. Is it not best?"

"Oh yes. Nothing could be worse than a prolonged separation. He means

to be honest and good."

"He is honest and good, papa."

"You have had your triumph."

"I did not want to triumph;--not at least over him."

"After what had occurred it was necessary that you should have your own

way in coming here. Otherwise he would have triumphed. He would have

taken you away, and you and I would have been separated. Of course you

are bound to obey him;--but there must be limits. He would have taken

you away as though in disgrace, and that I could not stand. There will

be an end of that now. God knows when I shall see you again, Mary."

"Why not, papa?"

"Because he hasn't got over his feeling against me. I don't think he

ever gets over any feeling. Having no home of his own why does he not

bring you here?"

"I don't think he likes the idea of being a burden to you."

"Exactly. He has not cordiality enough to feel that when two men are in

a boat together, as he and I are because of you, all that feeling

should go to the wind. He ought not to be more ashamed to sit at my

table and drink of my cup than you are. If it were all well between us

and he had the property, should I scruple to go and stay at Manor

Cross."

"You would still have your own house to go back to."

"So will he,--after a while. But it can't be altered, dear, and God

forbid that I should set you against him. He is not a rake nor a

spendthrift, nor will he run after other women." Mary thought of Mrs.

Houghton, but she held her tongue. "He is not a bad man and I think he

loves you."

"I am sure he does."

"But I can't help feeling sad at parting with you. I suppose I shall at

any rate be able to see you up in town next season." The Dean as he

said this was almost weeping.

Mary, when she was alone in her room, of course thought much of Captain

De Baron and his story. It was a pity,--a thousand pities,--that it

should be so. It was to be regretted,--much regretted,--that he had

been induced to tell his story. She was angry with herself because she

had been indiscreet, and she was still angry,--a little angry with

him,--because he had yielded to the temptation. But there had been

something sweet in it. She was sorry, grieved in her heart of hearts

that he should love her. She had never striven to gain his love. She

had never even thought of it. It ought not to have been so. She should

have thought of it; she should not have shown herself to be so pleased

with his society. But yet,--yet it was sweet. Then there came upon her

some memory of her old dreams, before she had been engaged to Lord

George. She knew how vain had been those dreams, because she now loved

Lord George with her whole heart; but yet she remembered them, and felt

as though they had come true with a dreamy half truth. And she brought

to mind all those flattering words with which he had spoken her

praises,--how he had told her that she was an angel, too good and pure

to be supposed capable of evil; how he had said that in his castles in

the air he would still think of her as his wife. Surely a man may build

what castles in the air he pleases, if he will only hold his tongue!

She was quite sure that she did not love him, but she was sure also

that his was the proper way of making love. And then she thought of

Guss Mildmay. Could she not in pure charity do a good turn to that poor

girl? Might she not tell Captain De Baron that it was his duty to marry

her? And if he felt it to be his duty would he not do so? It may be

doubted whether in these moments she did not think much better of

Captain De Baron than that gentleman deserved.

On the next day the Manor Cross carriage came over for her. The Dean

had offered to send her, but Lord George had explained that his mother

was anxious that the carriage should come. There would be a cart for

the luggage. As to Lady George herself there was a general feeling at

Manor Cross that in the present circumstances the family carriage

should bring her home. But it came empty. "God bless you, dearest,"

said the Dean as he put her into the vehicle.

"Good-bye, papa. I suppose you can come over and see me."

"I don't know that I can. I saw none of the ladies when I was there

yesterday."

"I don't care a bit for the ladies. Where I go, papa, you can come. Of

course George will see you, and you could ask for me." The Dean smiled,

and kissed her again, and then she was gone.

She hardly knew what grand things were in store for her. She was still

rebelling in her heart against skirts and petticoats, and resolving

that she would not go to church twice on Sundays unless she liked it,

when the carriage drove up to the door. They were all in the hall, all

except the Marchioness. "We wouldn't go in," said Lady Amelia, "because

we didn't like to fill the carriage."

"And George wanted us to send it early," said Lady Sarah, "before we

had done our work." They all kissed her affectionately, and then she

was again in her husband's arms. Mrs. Toff curtseyed to her most

respectfully. Mary observed the curtsey and reminded herself at the

moment that Mrs. Toff had never curtseyed to her before. Even the tall

footman in knee-breeches stood back with a demeanour which had hitherto

been vouchsafed only to the real ladies of the family. Who could tell

how soon that wicked Marquis would die; and then,--then how great would

not be the glory of the Dean's daughter! "Perhaps you won't mind coming

up to mamma as soon as you have got your hat off," said Lady Susanna.

"Mamma is so anxious to see you." Mary's hat was immediately off, and

she declared herself ready to go to the Marchioness. "Mamma has had a

great deal to trouble her since you were here," said Lady Susanna, as

she led the way upstairs. "She has aged very much. You'll be kind to

her, I know."

"Of course I'll be kind," said Mary; "I hope I never was unkind."

"She thinks so much of things now, and then she cries so often. We do

all we can to prevent her from crying, because it does make her so

weak. Beef-tea is best, we think; and then we try to get her to sleep

a good deal. Mary has come, mamma. Here she is. The carriage has only

just arrived." Mary followed Lady Susanna into the room, and the

Marchioness was immediately immersed in a flood of tears.

"My darling!" she exclaimed; "my dearest, if anything can ever make me

happy again it is that you should have come back to me." Mary kissed

her mother-in-law and submitted to be kissed with a pretty grace, as

though she and the old lady had always been the warmest, most

affectionate friends. "Sit down, my love. I have had the easy chair

brought there on purpose for you. Susanna, get her that footstool."

Susanna, without moving a muscle of her face, brought the footstool.

"Now sit down, and let me look at you. I don't think she's much

changed." This was very distressing to poor Mary, who, with all her

desire to oblige the Marchioness could not bring herself to sit down in

the easy chair. "So that poor little boy has gone, my dear?"

"I was so sorry to hear it."

"Yes, of course. That was quite proper. When anybody dies we ought to

be sorry for them. I'm sure I did all I could to make things

comfortable for him. Didn't I, Susanna?"

"You were quite anxious about him, mamma."

"So I was,--quite anxious. I have no doubt his mother neglected him. I

always thought that. But now there will be another, won't there?" This

was a question which the mother expectant could not answer, and in

order to get over the difficulty Susanna suggested that Mary should be

allowed to go down to lunch.

"Certainly, my dear. In her condition she ought not to be kept waiting

a minute. And mind, Susanna, she has bottled porter. I spoke about it

before. She should have a pint at lunch and a pint at dinner."

"I can't drink porter," said Mary, in despair.

"My dear, you ought to; you ought indeed; you must. I remember as well

as if it were yesterday Sir Henry telling me it was the only sure

thing. That was before Popenjoy was born,--I mean Brotherton. I do so

hope it will be a Popenjoy, my dear." This was the last word said to

her as Mary was escaping from the room.

She was not expected to make cloaks and skirts, but she was obliged to

fight against a worse servitude even than that. She almost longed for

the cloaks and skirts when day after day she was entreated to take her

place in the easy chair by the couch of the Marchioness. There was a

cruelty in refusing, but in yielding there was a crushing misery. The

Marchioness evidently thought that the future stability of the family

depended on Mary's quiescence and capability for drinking beer. Very

many lies were necessarily told her by all the family. She was made to

believe that Mary never got up before eleven; and the doctor who came

to see herself and to whose special care Mary was of course

recommended, was induced to say that it was essential that Lady George

should be in the open air three hours every day. "You know I'm not the

least ill, mother," Mary said to her one day. Since these new hopes and

the necessity for such hopes had come up the Marchioness had requested

that she might be called mother by her daughter-in-law.

"No, my dear, not ill; but I remember as though it were yesterday what

Sir Henry said to me when Popenjoy was going to be born. Of course he

was Popenjoy when he was born. I don't think they've any physicians

like Sir Henry now. I do hope it'll be a Popenjoy."

"But that can't be, mother. You are forgetting."

The old woman thought for a while, and then remembered the difficulty.

"No, not quite at once." Then her mind wandered again. "But if this

isn't a Popenjoy, my dear,--and it's all in the hands of God,--then the

next may be. My three first were all girls; and it was a great trouble;

but Sir Henry said the next would be a Popenjoy; and so it was. I hope

this will be a Popenjoy, because I might die before the next." When a

week of all this had been endured Mary in her heart was glad that the

sentence of expulsion from Manor Cross still stood against her husband,

feeling that six months of reiterated longings for a Popenjoy would

kill her and the possible Popenjoy also.

Then came the terrible question of an immediate residence. The month

was nearly over, and Lord George had determined that he would go up to

town for a few days when the time came. Mary begged to be taken with

him, but to this he would not accede, alleging that his sojourn there

would only be temporary, till something should be settled. "I am sure,"

said Mary, "your brother would dislike my being here worse than you."

That might be true, but the edict, as it had been pronounced, had not

been against her. The Marquis had simply ordered that in the event of

Lord George remaining in the house, the house and park should be

advertised for letting. "George, I think he must be mad," said Mary.

"He is sane enough to have the control of his own property."

"If it is let, why shouldn't you take it?"

"Where on earth should I get the money?"

"Couldn't we all do it among us?"

"He wouldn't let it to us; he will allow my mother and sisters to live

here for nothing; and I don't think he has said anything to Mr. Knox

about you. But I am to be banished."

"He must be mad."

"Mad or not, I must go."

"Do,--do let me go with you! Do go to the deanery. Papa will make it

all square by coming up to us in London."

"Your father has a right to be in the house in London," said Lord

George with a scowl.

When the month was over he did go up to town, and saw Mr. Knox. Mr.

Knox advised him to go back to Manor Cross, declaring that he himself

would take no further steps without further orders. He had not had a

line from the Marquis. He did not even know where the Marquis was,

supposing, however, that he was in his house on the lake; but he did

know that the Marchioness was not with him, as separate application had

been made to him by her Ladyship for money. "I don't think I can do

it," said Lord George. Mr. Knox shrugged his shoulders, and again said

that he saw no objection. "I should be very slow in advertising, you

know," said Mr. Knox.

"But I don't think that I have a right to be in a man's house without

his leave. I don't think I am justified in staying there against his

will because he is my brother." Mr. Knox could only shrug his

shoulders.

He remained up in town doing nothing, doubtful as to where he should go

and whither he should take his wife, while she was still at Manor

Cross, absolutely in the purple, but still not satisfied with her

position. She was somewhat cheered at this time by a highspirited

letter from her friend Mrs. Jones, written from Killancodlem.

"We are all here," said Mrs. Jones, "and we do so wish you were with

us. I have heard of your condition at last, and of course it would not

be fit that you should be amusing yourself with wicked idle people like

us, while all the future of all the Germains is, so to say, in your

keeping. How very opportune that that poor boy should have gone just as

the other is coming! Mind that you are a good girl and take care of

yourselves. I daresay all the Germain ladies are looking after you day

and night, so that you can't misbehave very much. No more Kappa-kappas

for many a long day for you!

"We have got Lord Giblet here. It was such a task! I thought cart-ropes

wouldn't have brought him? Now he is as happy as the day is long, and

like a tame cat in my hands. I really think he is very much in love

with her, and she behaves quite prettily. I took care that Green pÃ¨re

should come down in the middle of it, and that clenched it. The lover

didn't make the least fight when papa appeared, but submitted himself

like a sheep to the shearers. I shouldn't have done it if I hadn't

known that he wanted a wife and if I hadn't been sure that she would

make a good one. There are some men who never really get on their legs

till they're married, and never would get married without a little

help. I'm sure he'll bless me, or would do, only he'll think after a

bit that he did it all by himself.

"Our friend Jack is with us, behaving very well, but not quite like

himself. There are two or three very pretty girls here, but he goes

about among them quite like a steady old man. I got him to tell me that

he'd seen you at Brotherton, and then he talked a deal of nonsense

about the good you'd do when you were Marchioness. I don't see, my

dear, why you should do more good than other people. I hope you'll be

gracious to your old friends, and keep a good house, and give nice

parties. Try and make other people happy. That's the goodness I believe

in. I asked him why you were to be particularly good, and then he

talked a deal more nonsense, which I need not repeat.

"I hear very queer accounts about the Marquis. He behaved himself at

Rudham almost like anybody else, and walked into dinner like a

Christian. They say that he is all alone in Italy, and that he won't

see her. I fancy he was more hurt in that little affair than some

people will allow. Whatever it was, it served him right. Of course I

should be glad to see Lord George come to the throne. I always tell the

truth, my dear, about these things. What is the use of lying. I shall

be very glad to see Lord George a marquis,--and then your Popenjoy will

be Popenjoy.

"You remember the Baroness,--your Baroness. Oh, the Baroness! She

absolutely asked me to let her come to Killancodlem. 'But I hate

disabilities and rights,' said I. She gave me to understand that that

made no difference. Then I was obliged to tell her that I hadn't a bed

left. Any little room would do for her. 'We haven't any little rooms at

Killancodlem,' said I;--and then I left her.

"Good-bye. Mind you are good and take care of yourself; and, whatever

you do, let Popenjoy have a royal godfather."

Then her father came over to see her. At this time Lord George was up

in town, and when her father was announced she felt that there was no

one to help her. If none of the ladies of the family would see her

father she never would be gracious to them again. This was the

turning-point. She could forgive them for the old quarrel. She could

understand that they might have found themselves bound to take their

elder brother's part at first. Then they had quarrelled with her, too.

Now they had received her back into their favour. But she would have

none of their favours, unless they would take her father with her.

She was sitting at the time in that odious arm-chair in the old lady's

room; and when Mrs. Toff brought in word that the Dean was in the

little drawing-room, Lady Susanna was also present. Mary jumped up

immediately, and knew that she was blushing. "Oh! I must go down to

papa," she said. And away she went.

The Dean was in one of his best humours, and was full of Brotherton

news. Mr. Groschut had been appointed to the vicarage of Pugsty, and

would leave Brotherton within a month.

"I suppose it's a good living."

"About Â£300 a year, I believe. He's been acting not quite on the square

with a young lady, and the Bishop made him take it. It was that or

nothing." The Dean was quite delighted; and when Mary told him

something of her troubles,--how impossible she found it to drink

bottled porter,--he laughed, and bade her be of good cheer, and told

her that there were good days coming. They had been there for nearly

an hour together, and Mary was becoming unhappy. If her father were

allowed to go without some recognition from the family, she would never

again be friends with those women. She was beginning to think that she

never would be friends again with any of them, when the door opened,

and Lady Sarah entered the room.

The greeting was very civil on both sides. Lady Sarah could, if she

pleased, be gracious, though she was always a little grand; and the

Dean was quite willing to be pleased, if only any effort was made to

please him. Lady Sarah hoped that he would stay and dine. He would

perhaps excuse the Marchioness, as she rarely now left her room. The

Dean could not dine at Manor Cross on that day, and then Lady Sarah

asked him to come on the Thursday following.

CHAPTER LVII.

MR. KNOX HEARS AGAIN FROM THE MARQUIS.

"Do come, papa," said Mary, jumping up and putting her arm round her

father's shoulders. She was more than willing to meet them all

half-way. She would sit in the arm-chair all the morning and try to

drink porter at lunch if they would receive her father graciously. Of

course she was bound to her husband. She did not wish not to be bound

to him. She was quite sure that she loved her husband with a perfect

love. But her marriage happiness could not be complete unless her

father was to make a part of the intimate home circle of her life. She

was now so animated in her request to him, that her manner told all her

little story,--not only to him, but to Lady Sarah also.

"I will say do come also," said Lady Sarah, smiling.

Mary looked up at her and saw the smile. "If he were your papa," she

said, "you would be as anxious as I am." But she also smiled as she

spoke.

"Even though he is not, I am anxious."

"Who could refuse when so entreated? Of course I shall be delighted to

come," said the Dean. And so it was settled. Her father was to be again

made welcome at Manor Cross, and Mary thought that she could now be

happy.

"It was very good of you," she whispered to Lady Sarah, as soon as he

had left them. "Of course I understand. I was very, very sorry that he

and Lord Brotherton had quarrelled. I won't say anything now about

anybody being wrong or anybody being right. But it would be dreadful to

me if papa couldn't come to see me. I don't think you know what he

is."

"I do know that you love him very dearly."

"Of course I do. There is nothing on earth he wouldn't do for me. He is

always trying to make me happy. And he'd do just as much for George, if

George would let him. You've been very good about it, and I love you

for it." Lady Sarah was quite open to the charm of being loved. She did

not talk much of such things, nor was it compatible with her nature to

make many professions of affection. But it would be a happiness to her

if this young sister-in-law, who would no doubt sooner or later be the

female head of the house, could be taught to love her. So she kissed

Mary, and then walked demurely away, conscious that any great display

of feeling would be antagonistic to her principles.

During the hour that Mary had been closeted with her father there had

been much difficulty among the ladies upstairs about the Dean. The

suggestion that he should be asked to dine had of course come from Lady

Sarah, and it fell like a little thunderbolt among them. In the first

place, what would Brotherton say? Was it not an understood portion of

the agreement under which they were allowed to live in the house, that

the Dean should not be a guest there? Lady Susanna had even shuddered

at his coming to call on his daughter, and they had all thought it to

be improper when a short time since he had personally brought the news

of Popenjoy's death to the house. And then there was their own

resentment as to that affray at Scumberg's. They were probably inclined

to agree with Lady Brabazon that Brotherton was not quite all that he

should be; but still he was Brotherton, and the man who had nearly

murdered him could not surely be a fit guest at Manor Cross. "I don't

think we can do that, Sarah," Lady Susanna had said after a long

silence. "Oh dear! that would be very dreadful!" the Marchioness had

exclaimed. Lady Amelia had clasped her hands together and had trembled

in every limb. But Lady Sarah, who never made any suggestion without

deep thought, was always loth to abandon any that she had made. She

clung to this with many arguments. Seeing how unreasonable Brotherton

was, they could not feel themselves bound to obey him. As to the house,

while their mother lived there it must be regarded as her house. It was

out of the question that they should have their guests dictated to them

by their brother. Perhaps the Dean was not all that a dean ought to

be,--but then, who was perfect? George had married his daughter, and it

could not be right to separate the daughter from the father. Then came

the final, strong, clenching argument. Mary would certainly be

disturbed in her mind if not allowed to see her father. Perfect

tranquillity for Mary was regarded as the chief ingredient in the cup

of prosperity which, after many troubles, was now to be re-brewed for

the Germain family. If she were not allowed to see her father, the

coming Popenjoy would suffer for it. "You'd better let him come,

Susanna," said the Marchioness through her tears. Susanna had looked

as stern as an old sibyl. "I really think it will be best," said Lady

Amelia. "It ought to be done," said Lady Sarah. "I suppose you had

better go to him," said the Marchioness. "I could not see him; indeed I

couldn't. But he won't want to see me." Lady Susanna did not yield, but

Lady Sarah, as we know, went down on her mission of peace.

Mary, as soon as she was alone, sat herself down to write a letter to

her husband. It was then Monday, and her father was to dine there on

Thursday. The triumph would hardly be complete unless George would come

home to receive him. Her letter was full of arguments, full of

entreaties, and full of love. Surely he might come for one night, if he

couldn't stay longer. It would be so much nicer for her father to have

a gentleman there. Such an attention would please him so much! "I am

sure he would go twice the distance if you were coming to his house,"

pleaded Mary.

Lord George came, and in a quiet way the dinner was a success. The Dean

made himself very agreeable. The Marchioness did not appear, but her

absence was attributed to the condition of her health. Lady Sarah, as

the great promoter of the festival, was bound to be on her good

behaviour, and Lady Amelia endeavoured to copy her elder sister. It was

not to be expected that Lady Susanna should be cordially hospitable;

but it was known that Lady Susanna was habitually silent in company.

Mary could forgive her second sister-in-law's sullenness,

understanding, as she did quite well, that she was at this moment

triumphing over Lady Susanna. Mr. Groschut was not a favourite with any

of the party at Manor Cross, and the Dean made himself pleasant by

describing the nature of the late chaplain's promotion. "He begged the

Bishop to let him off," said the Dean, "but his Lordship was

peremptory. It was Pugsty or leave the diocese."

"What had he done, papa?" asked Mary.

"He had promised to marry Hawkins' daughter." Hawkins was the

Brotherton bookseller on the Low Church side. "And then he denied the

promise. Unfortunately he had written letters, and Hawkins took them to

the Bishop. I should have thought Groschut would have been too sharp to

write letters."

"But what was all that to the Bishop?" asked Lord George.

"The Bishop was, I think, just a little tired of him. The Bishop is old

and meek, and Mr. Groschut thought that he could domineer. He did not

quite know his man. The Bishop is old and meek, and would have borne

much. When Mr. Groschut scolded him, I fancy that he said nothing. But

he bided his time; and when Mr. Hawkins came, then there was a decision

pronounced. It was Pugsty, or nothing."

"Is Pugsty very nasty, papa?"

"It isn't very nice, I fancy. It just borders on the Potteries, and

the population is heavy. As he must marry the bookseller's daughter

also, the union, I fear, won't be very grateful."

"I don't see why a bishop should send a bad man to any parish,"

suggested Lady Sarah.

"What is he to do with a Groschut, when he has unfortunately got hold

of one? He couldn't be turned out to starve. The Bishop would never

have been rid of him. A small living--some such thing as Pugsty--was

almost a necessity."

"But the people," said Lady Sarah. "What is to become of the poor

people?"

"Let us hope they may like him. At any rate, he will be better at

Pugsty than at Brotherton." In this way the evening passed off; and

when at ten o'clock the Dean took his departure, it was felt by every

one except Lady Susanna that the proper thing had been done.

Lord George, having thus come back to Manor Cross, remained there. He

was not altogether happy in his mind; but his banishment seemed to be

so absurd a thing that he did not return to London. At Manor Cross

there was something for him to do. In London there was nothing. And,

after all, there was a question whether, as a pure matter of right, the

Marquis had the power to pronounce such a sentence. Manor Cross no

doubt belonged to him, but then so also did Cross Hall belong for the

time to his mother; and he was receiving the rent of Cross Hall while

his mother was living at Manor Cross. Lady Sarah was quite clear that

for the present they were justified in regarding Manor Cross as

belonging to them. "And who'll tell him when he's all the way out

there?" asked Mary. "I never did hear of such a thing in all my life.

What harm can you do to the house, George?"

So they went on in peace and quietness for the next three months,

during which not a single word was heard from the Marquis. They did not

even know where he was, and under the present circumstances did not

care to ask any questions of Mr. Knox. Lord George had worn out his

scruples, and was able to go about his old duties in his old fashion.

The Dean had dined there once or twice, and Lord George on one occasion

had consented to stay with his wife for a night or two at the deanery.

Things seemed to have fallen back quietly into the old way,--as they

were before the Marquis with his wife and child had come to disturb

them. Of course there was a great difference in Mary's position. It was

not only that she was about to become a mother, but that she would do

so in a very peculiar manner. Had not the Marquis taken a wife to

himself, there would always have been the probability that he would

some day do so. Had there not been an Italian Marchioness and a little

Italian Popenjoy, the ladies at Manor Cross would still have given him

credit for presenting them with a future marchioness and a future

Popenjoy at some future day. Now his turn had, as it were, gone.

Another Popenjoy from that side was not to be expected. In consequence

of all this Mary was very much exalted. They none of them now wished

for another Popenjoy from the elder branch. All their hopes were

centred in Mary. To Mary herself this importance had its drawbacks.

There was the great porter question still unsettled. The arm-chair with

the footstool still was there. And she did not like being told that a

mile and a half on the sunny side of the trees was the daily amount of

exercise which Sir Henry, nearly half a century ago, had prescribed for

ladies in her condition. But she had her husband with her, and could,

with him, be gently rebellious and affectionately disobedient. It is a

great thing, at any rate, to be somebody. In her early married days she

had felt herself to be snubbed as being merely the Dean's daughter. Her

present troubles brought a certain balm with them. No one snubbed her

now. If she had a mind for arrowroot, Mrs. Toff would make it herself

and suggest a thimbleful of brandy in it with her most coaxing words.

Cloaks and petticoats she never saw, and she was quite at liberty to

stay away from afternoon church if she pleased.

It had been decided, after many discussions on the subject, that she

and her husband should go up to town for a couple of months after

Christmas, Lady Amelia going with them to look after the porter and

arrowroot, and that in March she should be brought back to Manor Cross

with a view to her confinement. This had not been conceded to her

easily, but it had at last been conceded. She had learned in secret

from her father that he would come up to town for a part of the time,

and after that she never let the question rest till she had carried her

point. The Marchioness had been obliged to confess that, in

anticipation of her Popenjoy, Sir Henry had recommended a change from

the country to town. She did not probably remember that Sir Henry had

done so because she had been very cross at the idea of being kept

running down to the country all through May. Mary pleaded that it was

no use having a house if she were not allowed to see it, that all her

things were in London, and at last declared that it would be very

convenient to have the baby born in London. Then the Marchioness saw

that a compromise was necessary. It was not to be endured that the

future Popenjoy, the future Brotherton, should be born in a little

house in Munster Court. With many misgivings it was at last arranged

that Mary should go to London on the 18th of January, and be brought

back on the 10th of March. After many consultations, computations, and

calculations, it was considered that the baby would be born somewhere

about the 1st of April.

It may be said that things at Manor Cross were quite in a halcyon

condition, when suddenly a thunderbolt fell among them. Mr. Knox

appeared one day at the house and showed to Lord George a letter from

the Marquis. It was written with his usual contempt of all ordinary

courtesy of correspondence, but with more than his usual bitterness.

It declared the writer's opinion that his brother was a mean fellow,

and deserving of no trust in that he had continued to live at the house

after having been desired to leave it by its owner; and it went on to

give peremptory orders to Mr. Knox to take steps for letting the house

at once. This took place at the end of the first week in December. Then

there was a postscript to the letter in which the Marquis suggested

that Mr. Knox had better take a house for the Marchioness, and apply

Mr. Price's rent in the payment for such house. "Of course you will

consult my mother," said the postscript; "but it should not be anywhere

near Brotherton."

There was an impudence as well as a cruelty about this which almost

shook the belief which Lord George still held in the position of an

elder brother. Mr. Knox was to take a house;--as though his mother and

sisters had no rights, no freedom of their own! "Of course I will go,"

said he, almost pale with anger.

Then Mr. Knox explained his views. It was his intention to write back

to the Marquis and to decline to execute the task imposed upon him. The

care of the Marquis's property was no doubt his chief mainstay; but

there were things, he said, which he could not do. Of course the

Marquis would employ someone else, and he must look for his bread

elsewhere. But he could not, he said, bring himself to take steps for

the letting of Manor Cross as long as the Marchioness was living there.

Of course there was a terrible disturbance in the house. There arose a

great question whether the old lady should or should not be told of

this new trouble, and it was decided at last that she should for the

present be kept in the dark. Mr. Knox was of opinion that the house

never would be let, and that it would not be in his Lordship's power to

turn them out without procuring for them the use of Cross Hall;--in

which Mr. Price's newly married bride had made herself comfortable on a

lease of three years. And he was also of opinion that the attempt made

by the Marquis to banish his brother was a piece of monstrous tyranny

to which no attention should be paid. This he said before all the

younger ladies;--but to Lord George himself he said even more. He

expressed a doubt whether the Marquis could be in his right mind, and

added a whisper that the accounts of the Marquis's health were very bad

indeed. "Of course he could let the house?" asked Lord George.

"Yes;--if he can get anybody to let it for him, and anybody else to

take it. But I don't think it ever will be let. He won't quite know

what to do when he gets my letter. He can hardly change his agent

without coming to London, and he won't like to do that in the winter.

He'll write me a very savage letter, and then in a week or two I shall

answer him. I don't think I'd disturb the Marchioness if I were you, my

lord."

The Marchioness was not disturbed, but Lord George again went up to

London, on this occasion occupying the house in Munster Court in

solitude. His scruples were all renewed, and it was in vain that Lady

Sarah repeated to him all Mr. Knox's arguments. He had been called a

mean fellow, and the word rankled with him. He walked about alone

thinking of the absolute obedience with which in early days he had

complied with all the behests of his elder brother, and the perfect

faith with which in latter days he had regarded that brother's

interests. He went away swearing to himself that he would never again

put his foot within the domain of Manor Cross as long as it was his

brother's property. A day might come when he would return there; but

Lord George was not a man to anticipate his own prosperity. Mary wished

to accompany him; but this was not allowed. The Marchioness inquired a

dozen times why he should go away; but there was no one who could tell

her.

CHAPTER LVIII.

MRS. JONES' LETTER.

A few days before Christmas Mary received a long letter from her friend

Mrs. Montacute Jones. At this time there was sad trouble again at Manor

Cross. Lord George had been away for a fortnight, and no reason for his

departure had as yet been given to the Marchioness. She had now become

aware that he was not to be at home at Christmas, and she was full of

doubt, full of surmises of her own. He must have quarrelled with his

sisters! They all assured her that there hadn't been an unpleasant word

between him and any one of them. Then he must have quarrelled with his

wife! "Indeed, indeed he has not," said Mary. "He has never quarrelled

with me and he never shall." Then why did he stay away? Business was

nonsense. Why was he going to stay away during Christmas. Then it was

necessary to tell the old lady a little fib. She was informed that

Brotherton had specially desired him to leave the house. This certainly

was a fib, as Brotherton's late order had been of a very different

nature. "I hope he hasn't done anything to offend his brother again,"

said the Marchioness. "I wonder whether it's about Popenjoy!" In the

midst of her troubles the poor old woman's wits were apt to wander.

Mary too had become rather cross, thinking that as her husband was up

in town she should be allowed to be there too. But it had been conceded

by her, and by her father on her behalf, that her town life was not to

begin till after Christmas, and now she was unable to prevail. She and

the family were in this uncomfortable condition when Mrs. Montacute

Jones' letter came for her consolation. As it contained tidings, more

or less accurate, concerning many persons named in this chronicle, it

shall be given entire. Mrs. Montacute Jones was a great writer of

letters, and she was wont to communicate many details among her friends

and acquaintances respecting one another. It was one of the marvels of

the day that Mrs. Jones should have so much information; and no one

could say how or whence she got it.

"CURRY HALL, \_December 12, 187--\_."

Curry Hall was the name of Mr. Jones' seat in Gloucestershire, whereas,

as all the world knew, Killancodlem was supposed to belong to Mrs.

Jones herself.

"DEAREST LADY GEORGE,--We have been here for the last six weeks,

quite quiet. A great deal too quiet for me, but for the three or

four winter months, I am obliged to give way a little to Mr.

Jones. We have had the Mildmays here, because they didn't seem to

have any other place to go to. But I barred the Baroness. I am

told that she is now bringing an action against Aunt Ju, who

unfortunately wrote the letter which induced the woman to come

over from--wherever she came from. Poor Aunt Ju is in a terrible

state, and wants her brother to buy the woman off,--which he will

probably have to do. That's what comes, my dear, of meddling with

disabilities. I know my own disabilities, but I never think of

interfering with Providence. Mr. Jones was made a man, and I was

made a woman. So I put up with it, and I hope you will do the

same.

"Mr. and Mrs. Green are here also, and remain till Christmas when

the Giblets are coming. It was the prettiest wedding in the world,

and they have been half over Europe since. I am told he's the

happiest man in the world, and the very best husband. Old Gossling

didn't like it at all, but every stick is entailed, and they say

he's likely to have gout in his stomach, so that everything will

go pleasantly. Lord Giblet himself is loud against his father,

asking everybody whether it was to be expected that in such a

matter as that he shouldn't follow his own inclination. I do hope

he'll show a little gratitude to me. But it's an ungrateful world,

and they'll probably both forget what I did for them.

"And now I want to ask you your opinion about another friend.

Don't you think that Jack had better settle down with poor dear

Guss? She's here, and upon my word I think she's nearly

broken-hearted. Of course you and I know what Jack has been

thinking of lately. But when a child cries for the top brick of

the chimney, it is better to let him have some possible toy. You

know what top brick he has been crying for. But I'm sure you like

him, and so do I, and I think we might do something for him. Mr.

Jones would let them a nice little house a few miles from here at

a peppercorn rent; and I suppose old Mr. Mildmay could do

something. They are engaged after a fashion. She told me all about

it the other day. So I've asked him to come down for Christmas,

and have offered to put up his horses if he wants to hunt.

"And now, my dear, I want to know what you have heard about Lord

Brotherton at Manor Cross. Of course we all know the way he has

behaved to Lord George. If I were Lord George I should not pay the

slightest attention to him. But I'm told he is in a very low

condition,--never sees anybody except his courier, and never stirs

out of the house. Of course you know that he makes his wife an

allowance, and refuses to see her. From what I hear privately I

really do think that he'll not last long. What a blessing it would

be! That's plain speaking;--but it would be a blessing! Some

people manage to live so that everybody will be the better for

their dying. I should break my heart if anybody wanted me to die.

"How grand it would be! The young and lovely Marchioness of

Brotherton! I'll be bound you think about it less than anybody

else, but it would be nice. I wonder whether you'd cut a poor old

woman like me, without a handle to her name. And then it would be

Popenjoy at once! Only how the bonfires wouldn't burn if it should

turn out to be only a disability after all. But we should say,

better luck next time, and send you caudle cups by the dozen. Who

wouldn't send a caudle cup to a real young lovely live

Marchioness? I'll be bound your father knows all about it, and has

counted it all up a score of times. I suppose it's over Â£40,000 a

year since they took to working the coal at Popenjoy, and whatever

the present man has done he can't have clipped the property. He

has never gambled, and never spent his income. Italian wives and

that sort of thing don't cost so much money as they do in England.

"Pray write and tell me all about it. I shall be in town in

February, and of course shall see you. I tell Mr. Jones that I

can't stand Curry Hall for more than three months. He won't come

to town till May, and perhaps when May comes he'll have forgotten

all about it. He is very fond of sheep, but I don't think he cares

for anything else, unless he has a slight taste for pigs.

"Your affectionate friend,

"G. MONTACUTE JONES."

There was much in this letter that astonished Mary, something that

shocked her, but something also that pleased her. The young and lovely

Marchioness of Brotherton! Where is the woman who would not like to be

a young and lovely Marchioness, so that it had all been come by

honestly, that the husband had been married as husbands ought to be

married, and had not been caught like Lord Giblet; and she knew that

her old friend,--her old friend whom she had not yet known for quite

twelve months,--was only joking with her in that suggestion as to

being cut. What a fate was this in store for her--if it really was in

store--that so early in her life she should be called upon to fill so

high a place. Then she made some resolutions in her mind that should it

be so she would be humble and meek; and a further resolution that she

would set her heart upon none of it till it was firmly her own.

But it shocked her that the Marquis should be so spoken of, especially

that he should be so spoken of if he were really dying! Plain speaking!

Yes, indeed. But such plain speaking was very terrible. This old woman

could speak of another nobleman having gout in his stomach as though

that were a thing really to be desired. And then that allusion to the

Italian wife or wives! Poor Mary blushed as she thought of it.

But there was a paragraph in the letter which interested her as much as

the tidings respecting Lord Brotherton. Could it be right that Jack De

Baron should be made to marry Guss Mildmay? She thought not, for she

knew that he did not love Guss Mildmay. That he should have wanted an

impossible brick, whether the highest or lowest brick, was very sad.

When children cry for impossible bricks they must of course be

disappointed. But she hardly thought that this would be the proper cure

for his disappointment. There had been a moment in which the same idea

had suggested itself to her; but now since her friendship with Jack had

been strengthened by his conduct in the deanery garden she thought that

he might do better with himself than be made by Mrs. Jones to marry

Guss Mildmay. Of course she could not interfere, but she hoped that

something might prevent Jack De Baron from spending his Christmas at

Curry Hall. She answered Mrs. Jones' letter very prettily. She trusted

that Lord Giblet might be happy with his wife, even though his father

should get well of the gout. She was very sorry to hear that Lord

Brotherton was ill. Nothing was known about him at Manor Cross, except

that he seemed to be very ill-natured to everybody. She was surprised

that anybody should be so ill-natured as he was. If ever she should

live to fill a high position she hoped she would be good-natured. She

knew that the people she would like best would be those who had been

kind to her, and nobody had been so kind as a certain lady named Mrs.

Montacute Jones. Then she spoke of her coming trial. "Don't joke with

me about it any more, there's a dear woman. They all flutter me here,

talking of it always, though they mean to be kind. But it seems to me

so serious. I wish that nobody would speak to me of it except George,

and he seems to think nothing about it."

Then she came to the paragraph the necessity for writing which had made

her answer Mrs. Jones' letter so speedily. "I don't think you ought to

persuade anybody to marry anyone. It didn't much signify, perhaps, with

Lord Giblet, as he isn't clever, and I daresay that Miss Green will

suit him very well; but as a rule I think gentlemen should choose for

themselves. In the case you speak of I don't think he cares for her,

and then they would be unhappy." She would not for worlds have

mentioned Captain De Baron's name; but she thought that Mrs. Jones

would understand her.

Of course Mrs. Jones understood her,--had understood more than Mary had

intended her to understand. Christmas was over and Mary was up in town

when she received Mrs. Jones' rejoinder, but it may as well be given

here. "The child who wanted the top brick is here, and I think will

content himself with a very much less exalted morsel of the building. I

am older than you, my dear, and know better. Our friend is a very good

fellow in his way, but there is no reason why he should not bend his

neck as well as another. To you no doubt he seems to have many graces.

He has had the great grace of holding his tongue because he appreciated

your character." Mary, as she read this, knew that even Mrs. Montacute

Jones could be misinformed now and then. "But I do not know that he is

in truth more gracious than others, and I think it quite as well that

Miss Mildmay should have the reward of her constancy."

But this was after Christmas, and in the meantime other occurrences had

taken place. On the 20th of December Lord George was informed by Mr.

Knox that his brother, who was then at Naples, had been struck by

paralysis, and at Mr. Knox's advice he started off for the southern

capital of Italy. The journey was a great trouble to him, but this was

a duty which he would under no circumstances neglect. The tidings were

communicated to Manor Cross, and after due consultation, were conveyed

by Lady Sarah to her mother. The poor old lady did not seem to be made

very unhappy by them. "Of course I can't go to him," she said; "how

could I do it?" When she was told that that was out of the question she

subsided again into tranquillity, merely seeming to think it necessary

to pay increased attention to Mary; for she was still quite alive to

the fact that all this greatly increased the chances that the baby

would be Popenjoy; but even in this the poor old lady's mind wandered

much, for every now and then she would speak of Popenjoy as though

there were a living Popenjoy at the present moment.

Lord George hurried off to Naples, and found that his brother was

living at a villa about eight miles from the town. He learned in the

city, before he had made his visit, that the Marquis was better, having

recovered his speech and apparently the use of his limbs. Still being

at Naples he found himself bound to go out to the villa. He did so, and

when he was there his brother refused to see him. He endeavoured to get

what information he could from the doctor; but the doctor was an

Italian, and Lord George could not understand him. As far as he could

learn the doctor thought badly of the case; but for the present his

patient had so far recovered as to know what he was about. Then Lord

George hurried back to London, having had a most uncomfortable journey

in the snow. Come what might he didn't think that he would ever again

take the trouble to pay a visit to his brother. The whole time taken on

his journey and for his sojourn in Naples was less than three weeks,

and when he returned the New Year had commenced.

He went down to Brotherton to bring his wife up to London, but met her

at the deanery, refusing to go to the house. When the Marchioness heard

of this,--and it became impossible to keep it from her,--she declared

that it was with herself that her son George must have quarrelled. Then

it was necessary to tell her the whole truth, or nearly the whole.

Brotherton had behaved so badly to his brother that Lord George had

refused to enter even the park. The poor old woman was very wretched,

feeling in some dim way that she was being robbed of both her sons. "I

don't know what I've done," she said, "that everything should be like

this. I'm sure I did all I could for them; but George never would

behave properly to his elder brother, and I don't wonder that

Brotherton feels it. Brotherton always had so much feeling. I don't

know why George should be jealous because Popenjoy was born. Why

shouldn't his elder brother have a son of his own like anybody else?"

And yet whenever she saw Mary, which she did for two or three hours

every day, she was quite alive to the coming interest. It was suggested

to her that she should be driven into Brotherton, so that she might see

George at the deanery; but her objection to go to the Dean's house was

as strong as was that of Lord George to come to his brother's.

Mary was of course delighted when the hour of her escape came. It had

seemed to her that there was especial cruelty in keeping her at Manor

Cross while her husband was up in town. Her complaints on this head had

of course been checked by her husband's unexpected journey to Naples,

as to which she had hardly heard the full particulars till she found

herself in the train with him. "After going all that way he wouldn't

see you!"

"He neither would see me or send me any message."

"Then he must be a bad man."

"He has lived a life of self-indulgence till he doesn't know how to

control a thought or a passion. It was something of that kind which was

meant when we were told about the rich man and the eye of the needle."

"But you will be a rich man soon, George."

"Don't think of it, Mary; don't anticipate it. God knows I have never

longed for it. Your father longs for it."

"Not for his own sake, George."

"He is wrong all the same. It will not make you happier,--nor me."

"But, George, when you thought that that little boy was not Popenjoy

you were as anxious as papa to find it all out."

"Right should be done," said Lord George, after a pause. "Whether it be

for weal or woe, justice should have its way. I never wished that the

child should be other than what he was called; but when there seemed to

be reason for doubt I thought that it should be proved."

"It will certainly come to you now, George, I suppose."

"Who can say? I might die to-night, and then Dick Germain, who is a

sailor somewhere, would be the next Lord Brotherton."

"Don't talk like that, George."

"He would be if your child happened to be a girl. And Brotherton might

live ever so long. I have been so harassed by it all that I am almost

sick of the title and sick of the property. I never grudged him

anything, and see how he has treated me." Then Mary was very gracious

to him and tried to comfort him, and told him that fortune had at any

rate given him a loving wife.

CHAPTER LIX.

BACK IN LONDON.

Mary was fond of her house in Munster Court. It was her own; and her

father and Miss Tallowax between them had enabled her to make it very

pretty. The married woman who has not some pet lares of her own is but

a poor woman. Mary worshipped her little household gods with a perfect

religion, and was therefore happy in being among them again; but she

was already beginning to feel that in a certain event she would be

obliged to leave Munster Court. She knew that as Marchioness of

Brotherton she would not be allowed to live there. There was a large

brick house, with an unbroken row of six windows on the first-floor, in

St. James' Square, which she already knew as the town house of the

Marquis of Brotherton. It was, she thought, by far the most gloomy

house in the whole square. It had been uninhabited for years, the

present Marquis having neither resided there nor let it. Her husband

had never spoken to her about the house, had never, as far as she could

remember, been with her in St. James' Square. She had enquired about it

of her father, and he had once taken her through the square, and had

shown her the mansion. But that had been in the days of the former

Popenjoy, when she, at any rate, had never thought that the

dreary-looking mansion would make or mar her own comfort. Now there had

arisen a question of a delicate nature on which she had said a word or

two to her husband in her softest whisper. Might not certain changes be

made in the house at Munster Court in reference to--well, to a nursery.

A room to be baby's own she had called it. She had thus made herself

understood, though she had not said the word which seemed to imply a

plural number. "But you'll be down at Manor Cross," said Lord George.

"You don't mean to keep me there always."

"No, not always; but when you come back to London it may be to another

house."

"You don't mean St. James' Square?" But that was just what he did mean.

"I hope we shan't have to live in that prison."

"It's one of the best houses in London," said Lord George, with a

certain amount of family pride. "It used to be, at least, before the

rich tradesmen had built all those palaces at South Kensington."

"It's dreadfully dingy."

"Because it has not been painted lately. Brotherton has never done

anything like anybody else."

"Couldn't we keep this and let that place?"

"Not very well. My father and grandfather, and great-grandfather lived

there. I think we had better wait a bit and see." Then she felt sure

that the glory was coming. Lord George would never have spoken of her

living in St. James' Square had he not felt almost certain that it

would soon come about.

Early in February her father came to town, and he was quite certain.

"The poor wretch can't speak articulately," he said.

"Who says so, papa?"

"I have taken care to find out the truth. What a life! And what a

death! He is there all alone. Nobody ever sees him but an Italian

doctor. If it's a boy, my dear, he will be my lord as soon as he's

born; or for the matter of that, if it's a girl she will be my lady."

"I wish it wasn't so."

"You must take it all as God sends it, Mary."

"They've talked about it till I'm sick of it," said Mary angrily. Then

she checked herself and added--"I don't mean you, papa; but at Manor

Cross they all flatter me now, because that poor man is dying. If you

were me you wouldn't like that."

"You've got to bear it, my dear. It's the way of the world. People at

the top of the tree are always flattered. You can't expect that Mary

Lovelace and the Marchioness of Brotherton will be treated in the same

way."

"Of course it made a difference when I was married."

"But suppose you had married a curate in the neighbourhood."

"I wish I had," said Mary wildly, "and that someone had given him the

living of Pugsty." But it all tended in the same direction. She began

to feel now that it must be, and must be soon. She would, she told

herself, endeavour to do her duty; she would be loving to all who had

been kind to her, and kind even to those who had been unkind. To all of

them at Manor Cross she would be a real sister,--even to Lady Susanna

whom certainly she had not latterly loved. She would forgive

everybody,--except one. Adelaide Houghton she never could forgive, but

Adelaide Houghton should be her only enemy. It did not occur to her

that Jack De Baron had been very nearly as wicked as Adelaide

Houghton. She certainly did not intend that Jack De Baron should be one

of her enemies.

When she had been in London about a week or two Jack De Baron came to

see her. She knew that he had spent his Christmas at Curry Hall, and

she knew that Guss Mildmay had also been there. That Guss Mildmay

should have accepted such an invitation was natural enough, but she

thought that Jack had been very foolish. Why should he have gone to the

house when he had known that the girl whom he had promised to marry,

but whom he did not intend to marry, was there? And now what was to be

the result? She did not think that she could ask him; but she was

almost sure that he would tell her.

"I suppose you've been hunting?" she asked.

"Yes; they put up a couple of horses for me, or I couldn't have

afforded it."

"She is so good-natured."

"Mrs. Jones! I should think she was; but I'm not quite sure that she

intended to be very good-natured to me."

"Why not?" Mary, of course, understood it all; but she could not

pretend to understand it, at any rate as yet.

"Oh, I don't know. It was all fair, and I won't complain. She had got

Miss Green off her hands, and therefore she wanted something to do. I'm

going to exchange, Lady George, into an Indian regiment."

"You're not in earnest."

"Quite in earnest. My wing will be at Aden, at the bottom of the Red

Sea, for the next year or two. Aden, I'm told, is a charming place."

"I thought it was hot."

"I like hot places; and as I have got rather sick of society I shall do

very well there, because there's none. A fellow can't spend any money,

except in soda and brandy. I suppose I shall take to drink."

"Don't talk of yourself in that horrid way, Captain De Baron."

"It won't much matter to any one, for I don't suppose I shall ever come

back again. There's a place called Perim, out in the middle of the sea,

which will just suit me. They only send one officer there at a time,

and there isn't another soul in the place."

"How dreadful!"

"I shall apply to be left there for five years. I shall get through all

my troubles by that time."

"I am sure you won't go at all."

"Why not?"

"Because you have got so many friends here."

"Too many, Lady George. Of course you know what Mrs. Jones has been

doing?"

"What has she been doing?"

"She tells you everything, I fancy. She has got it all cut and dry. I'm

to be married next May, and am to spend the honeymoon at Curry Hall. Of

course I'm to leave the army and put the value of my commission into

the three per cents. Mr. Jones is to let me have a place called Clover

Cottage, down in Gloucestershire, and, I believe, I'm to take a farm

and be churchwarden of the parish. After paying my debts we shall have

about two hundred a-year, which of course will be ample for Clover

Cottage. I don't exactly see how I'm to spend my evenings, but I

suppose that will come. It's either that or Perim. Which would you

advise?"

"I don't know what I ought to say."

"Of course I might cut my throat."

"I wish you wouldn't talk in that way. If it's all a joke I'll take it

as a joke."

"It's no joke at all; it's very serious. Mrs. Jones wants me to marry

Guss Mildmay."

"And you are engaged to her?"

"Only on certain conditions,--which conditions are almost impossible."

"What did you say to--Miss Mildmay at Curry Hall?"

"I told her I should go to Perim."

"And what did she say?"

"Like a brick, she offered to go with me, just as the girl offered to

eat the potato parings when the man said that there would not be

potatoes enough for both. Girls always say that kind of thing, though,

when they are taken at their words, they want bonnets and gloves and

fur cloaks."

"And you are going to take her?"

"Not unless I decide upon Clover Cottage. No; if I do go to Perim I

think that I shall manage to go alone."

"If you don't love her, Captain De Baron, don't marry her."

"There's Giblet doing very well, you know; and I calculate I could

spend a good deal of my time at Curry Hall. Perhaps if we made

ourselves useful, they would ask us to Killancodlem. I should manage to

be a sort of factotum to old Jones. Don't you think it would suit me?"

"You can't be serious about it."

"Upon my soul, Lady George, I never was so serious in my life. Do you

think that I mean nothing because I laugh at myself? You know I don't

love her."

"Then say so, and have done with it."

"That is so easy to suggest, but so impossible to do. How is a man to

tell a girl that he doesn't love her after such an acquaintance as I

have had with Guss Mildmay? I have tried to do so, but I couldn't do

it. There are men, I believe, hard enough even for that; and things are

changed now, and the affectation of chivalry has gone bye. Women ask

men to marry them, and the men laugh and refuse."

"Don't say that, Captain De Baron."

"I'm told that's the way the thing is done now; but I've no strength

myself, and I'm not up to it. I'm not at all joking. I think I shall

exchange and go away. I've brought my pigs to a bad market, but as far

as I can see that is the best that is left for me." Mary could only say

that his friends would be very--very sorry to lose him, but that in her

opinion anything would be better than marrying a girl whom he did not

love.

Courtesies at this time were showered upon Lady George from all sides.

Old Lady Brabazon, to whom she had hardly spoken, wrote to her at great

length. Mrs. Patmore Green came to her on purpose to talk about her

daughter's marriage. "We are very much pleased of course," said Mrs.

Green. "It was altogether a love affair, and the young people are so

fond of each other! I do so hope you and she will be friends. Of course

her position is not so brilliant as yours, but still it is very good.

Poor dear Lord Gossling"--whom, by the bye, Mrs. Patmore Green had

never seen--"is failing very much; he is a martyr to the gout, and then

he is so imprudent."

Lady Mary smiled and was civil, but did not make any promise of

peculiarly intimate friendship. Lady Selina Protest came to her with a

long story of her wrongs, and a petition that she would take the

Fleabody side in the coming contest. It was in vain that she declared

that she had no opinion whatsoever as to the rights of women; a

marchioness she was told would be bound to have opinions, or, at any

rate, would be bound to subscribe.

But the courtesy which surprised and annoyed her most was a visit from

Adelaide Houghton. She came up to London for a week about the end of

February, and had the hardihood to present herself at the house in

Munster Court. This was an insult which Mary had by no means expected;

she had therefore failed to guard herself against it by any special

instructions to her servant. And thus Mrs. Houghton, the woman who had

written love-letters to her husband, was shown up into her drawing-room

before she had the means of escaping. When the name was announced she

felt that she was trembling. There came across her a feeling that she

was utterly incapable of behaving properly in such an emergency. She

knew that she blushed up to the roots of her hair. She got up from her

seat as she heard the name announced, and then seated herself again

before her visitor had entered the room. She did resolve that nothing

on earth should induce her to shake hands with the woman. "My dear Lady

George," said Mrs. Houghton, hurrying across the room, "I hope you will

let me explain." She had half put out her hand, but had done so in a

manner which allowed her to withdraw it without seeming to have had her

overture refused.

"I do not know that there is anything to explain," said Mary.

"You will let me sit down?" Mary longed to refuse; but, not quite

daring to do so, simply bowed,--upon which Mrs. Houghton did sit down.

"You are very angry with me, it seems?"

"Well;--yes, I am."

"And yet what harm have I done you?"

"None in the least--none at all. I never thought that you could do me

any harm."

"Is it wise, Lady George, to give importance to a little trifle?"

"I don't know what you call a trifle."

"I had known him before you did; and, though it had not suited me to

become his wife, I had always liked him. Then the intimacy sprang up

again; but what did it amount to? I believe you read some foolish

letter?"

"I did read a letter, and I was perfectly sure that my husband had done

nothing, I will not say to justify, but even to excuse the writing of

it. I am quite aware, Mrs. Houghton, that it was all on one side."

"Did he say so?"

"You must excuse me if I decline altogether to tell you what he said."

"I am sure he did not say that. But what is the use of talking of it

all. Is it necessary, Lady George, that you and I should quarrel about

such a thing as that?"

"Quite necessary, Mrs. Houghton."

"Then you must be very fond of quarrelling."

"I never quarrelled with anybody else in my life."

"When you remember how near we are to each other in the country----. I

will apologise if you wish it."

"I will remember nothing, and I want no apology. To tell you the truth,

I really think that you ought not to have come here."

"It is childish, Lady George, to make so much of it."

"It may be nothing to you. It is a great deal to me. You must excuse me

if I say that I really cannot talk to you any more." Then she got up

and walked out of the room, leaving Mrs. Houghton among her treasures.

In the dining-room she rang the bell and told the servant to open the

door when the lady upstairs came down. After a very short pause, the

lady upstairs did come down, and walked out to her carriage with an

unabashed demeanour.

After much consideration Lady George determined that she must tell her

husband what had occurred. She was aware that she had been very

uncourteous, and was not sure whether in her anger she had not been

carried further than became her. Nothing could, she thought, shake her

in her determination to have no further friendly intercourse of any

kind with the woman. Not even were her husband to ask her would that be

possible. Such a request from him would be almost an insult to her. And

no request from anyone else could have any strength, as no one else

knew the circumstances of the case. It was not likely that he would

have spoken of it,--and of her own silence she was quite sure. But how

had it come to pass that the woman had had the face to come to her?

Could it be that Lord George had instigated her to do so? She never

made enquiries of her husband as to where he went and whom he saw. For

aught that she knew, he might be in Berkeley Square every day. Then she

called to mind Mrs. Houghton's face, with the paint visible on it in

the broad day, and her blackened eyebrows, and her great crested helmet

of false hair nearly eighteen inches deep, and her affected voice and

false manner,--and then she told herself that it was impossible that

her husband should like such a creature.

"George," she said to him abruptly, as soon as he came home, "who do

you think has been here? Mrs. Houghton has been here." Then came that

old frown across his brow; but she did not know at first whether it was

occasioned by anger against herself or against Mrs. Houghton. "Don't

you think it was very unfortunate?"

"What did she say?"

"She wanted to be friends with me."

"And what did you say?"

"I was very rude to her. I told her that I would never have anything to

do with her; and then I left the room, so that she had to get out of

the house as she could. Was I not right? You don't want me to know her,

do you?"

"Certainly not."

"And I was right."

"Quite right. She must be a very hardened woman."

"Oh George, dear George! You have made me so happy!" Then she jumped up

and threw her arms round him. "I never doubted you for a moment--never,

never; but I was afraid you might have thought----. I don't know what I

was afraid of, but I was a fool. She is a nasty hardened creature, and

I do hate her. Don't you see how she covers herself with paint?"

"I haven't seen her for the last three months."

Then she kissed him again and again, foolishly betraying her past

fears. "I am almost sorry I bothered you by telling you, only I didn't

like to say nothing about it. It might have come out, and you would

have thought it odd. How a woman can be so nasty I cannot imagine. But

I will never trouble you by talking of her again. Only I have told

James that she is not to be let into the house."

CHAPTER LX.

THE LAST OF THE BARONESS.

At this time Dr. Olivia Q. Fleabody had become quite an institution in

London. She had obtained full though by no means undisputed possession

of the great hall in the Marylebone Road, and was undoubtedly for the

moment the Queen of the Disabilities. She lectured twice a week to

crowded benches. A seat on the platform on these occasions was

considered by all high-minded women to be an honour, and the body of

the building was always filled by strongly-visaged spinsters and

mutinous wives, who twice a week were worked up by Dr. Fleabody to a

full belief that a glorious era was at hand in which woman would be

chosen by constituencies, would wag their heads in courts of law, would

buy and sell in Capel Court, and have balances at their banker's. It

was certainly the case that Dr. Fleabody had made proselytes by the

hundred, and disturbed the happiness of many fathers of families.

It may easily be conceived that all this was gall and wormwood to the

Baroness Banmann. The Baroness, on her arrival in London, had

anticipated the success which this low-bred American female had

achieved. It was not simply the honour of the thing,--which was very

great and would have been very dear to the Baroness,--but the American

Doctor was making a rapid fortune out of the proceeds of the hall. She

had on one occasion threatened to strike lecturing unless she were

allowed a certain very large percentage on the sum taken at the doors,

and the stewards and directors of the Institute had found themselves

compelled to give way to her demands. She had consequently lodged

herself magnificently at the Langham Hotel, had set up her brougham, in

which she always had herself driven to the Institute, and was asked out

to dinner three or four times a week; whereas the Baroness was in a

very poor condition. She had indeed succeeded in getting herself

invited to Mr. De Baron's house, and from time to time raised a little

money from those who were unfortunate enough to come in her way. But

she was sensible of her own degradation, and at the same time quite

assured that as a preacher on women's rights at large she could teach

lessons infinitely superior to anything that had come from that

impudent but imbecile American.

She had undoubtedly received overtures from the directors of the

Institute of whom poor Aunt Ju had for the moment been the spokeswoman,

and in these overtures it had been intimated to her that the directors

would be happy to remunerate her for her trouble should the money

collected at the hall enable them to do so. The Baroness believed that

enormous sums had been received, and was loud in assuring all her

friends that this popularity had in the first place been produced by

her own exertions. At any rate, she was resolved to seek redress at

law, and at last had been advised to proceed conjointly against Aunt

Ju, Lady Selina Protest, and the bald-headed old gentleman. The

business had now been brought into proper form, and the trial was to

take place in March.

All this was the cause of much trouble to poor Mary, and of very great

vexation to Lord George. When the feud was first becoming furious, an

enormous advertisement was issued by Dr. Fleabody's friends, in which

her cause was advocated and her claims recapitulated. And to this was

appended a list of the nobility, gentry, and people of England who

supported the Disabilities generally and her cause in particular. Among

these names, which were very numerous, appeared that of Lady George

Germain. This might probably have escaped both her notice and her

husband's, had not the paper been sent to her, with usual friendly

zeal, by old Lady Brabazon. "Oh George," she said, "look here. What

right have they to say so? I never patronised anything. I went there

once when I came to London first, because Miss Mildmay asked me."

"You should not have gone," said he.

"We have had all that before, and you need not scold me again. There

couldn't be any great harm in going to hear a lecture." This occurred

just previous to her going down to Manor Cross,--that journey which was

to be made for so important an object.

Then Lord George did--just what he ought not to have done. He wrote an

angry letter to Miss Fleabody, as he called her, complaining bitterly

of the insertion of his wife's name. Dr. Fleabody was quite clever

enough to make fresh capital out of this. She withdrew the name,

explaining that she had been ordered to do so by the lady's husband,

and implying that thereby additional evidence was supplied that the

Disabilities of Women were absolutely crushing to the sex in England.

Mary, when she saw this,--and the paper did not reach her till she was

at Manor Cross,--was violent in her anxiety to write herself, in her

own name, and disclaim all disabilities; but her husband by this time

had been advised to have nothing further to do with Dr. Fleabody, and

Mary was forced to keep her indignation to herself.

But worse than this followed the annoyance of the advertisement. A man

came all the way down from London for the purpose of serving Lady

George with a subpoena to give evidence at the trial on the part of the

Baroness. Lord George was up in London at the time, never having

entered the house at Manor Cross, or even the park, since his visit to

Italy. The consternation of the ladies may be imagined. Poor Mary was

certainly not in a condition to go into a court of law, and would be

less so on the day fixed for the trial. And yet this awful document

seemed to her and to her sisters-in-law to be so imperative as to admit

of no escape. It was in vain that Lady Sarah, with considerable

circumlocution, endeavoured to explain to the messenger the true state

of the case. The man could simply say that he was only a messenger, and

had now done his work. Looked at in any light, the thing was very

terrible. Lord George might probably even yet be able to run away with

her to some obscure corner of the continent in which messengers from

the Queen's judges would not be able to find her; and she might perhaps

bear the journey without injury. But then what would become of a

baby--perhaps of a Popenjoy--so born? There were many who still thought

that the Marquis would go before the baby came; and, in that case, the

baby would at once be a Popenjoy. What a condition was this for a

Marchioness to be in at the moment of the birth of her eldest child!

"But I don't know anything about the nasty women!" said Mary, through

her tears.

"It is such a pity that you should ever have gone," said Lady Susanna,

shaking her head.

"It wasn't wicked to go," said Mary, "and I won't be scolded about it

any more. You went to a lecture yourself when you were in town, and

they might just as well have sent for you."

Lady Sarah promised her that she should not be scolded, and was very

keen in thinking what steps had better be taken. Mary wished to run off

to the deanery at once, but was told that she had better not do so till

an answer had come to the letter which was of course written by that

day's post to Lord George. There were still ten days to the trial, and

twenty days, by computation, to the great event. There were, of course,

various letters written to Lord George. Lady Sarah wrote very sensibly,

suggesting that he should go to Mr. Stokes, the family lawyer. Lady

Susanna was full of the original sin of that unfortunate visit to the

Disabilities. She was, however, of opinion that if Mary was concealed

in a certain room at Manor Cross, which might she thought be

sufficiently warmed and ventilated for health, the judges of the

Queen's Bench would never be able to find her. The baby in that case

would have been born at Manor Cross, and posterity would know nothing

about the room. Mary's letter was almost hysterically miserable. She

knew nothing about the horrid people. What did they want her to say?

All she had done was to go to a lecture, and to give the wicked woman a

guinea. Wouldn't George come and take her away. She wouldn't care where

she went. Nothing on earth should make her go up and stand before the

judges. It was, she said, very cruel, and she did hope that George

would come to her at once. If he didn't come she thought that she would

die.

Nothing, of course, was said to the Marchioness, but it was found

impossible to keep the matter from Mrs. Toff. Mrs. Toff was of opinion

that the bit of paper should be burned, and that no further notice

should be taken of the matter at all. "If they don't go they has to pay

Â£10," said Mrs. Toff with great authority,--Mrs. Toff remembering that

a brother of hers, who had "forgotten himself in liquor" at the

Brotherton assizes, had been fined Â£10 for not answering to his name as

a juryman. "And then they don't really have to pay it," said Mrs. Toff,

who remembered also that the good-natured judge had not at last exacted

the penalty. But Lady Sarah could not look at the matter in that light.

She was sure that if a witness were really wanted, that witness could

not escape by paying a fine.

The next morning there came a heartrending letter from Aunt Ju. She was

very sorry that Lady George should have been so troubled;--but then let

them think of her trouble, of her misery! She was quite sure that it

would kill her,--and it would certainly ruin her. That odious Baroness

had summoned everybody that had ever befriended her. Captain De Baron

had been summoned, and the Marquis, and Mrs. Montacute Jones. And the

whole expense, according to Aunt Ju, would fall upon her; for it seemed

to be the opinion of the lawyers that she had hired the Baroness. Then

she said some very severe things against the Disabilities generally.

There was that woman Fleabody making a fortune in their hall, and would

take none of this expense upon herself. She thought that such things

should be left to men, who after all were not so mean as women;--so, at

least, said Aunt Ju.

And then there was new cause for wonderment. Lord Brotherton had been

summoned, and would Lord Brotherton come? They all believed that he was

dying, and, if so, surely he could not be made to come. "But is it not

horrible," said Lady Susanna, "that people of rank should be made

subject to such an annoyance! If anybody can summon anybody, nobody can

ever be sure of herself!"

On the next morning Lord George himself came down to Brotherton, and

Mary with a carriage full of precautions, was sent into the deanery to

meet him. The Marchioness discovered that the journey was to be made,

and was full of misgivings and full of enquiries. In her present

condition, the mother expectant ought not to be allowed to make any

journey at all. The Marchioness remembered how Sir Henry had told her,

before Popenjoy was born, that all carriage exercise was bad. And why

should she go to the deanery? Who could say whether the Dean would let

her come away again? What a feather it would be in the Dean's cap if

the next Popenjoy were born at the deanery. It was explained to her

that in no other way could she see her husband. Then the poor old woman

was once more loud in denouncing the misconduct of her youngest son to

the head of the family.

Mary made the journey in perfect safety, and then was able to tell her

father the whole story. "I never heard of anything so absurd in my

life," said the Dean.

"I suppose I must go, papa?"

"Not a yard."

"But won't they come and fetch me?"

"Fetch you? No."

"Does it mean nothing."

"Very little. They won't attempt to examine half the people they have

summoned. That Baroness probably thinks that she will get money out of

you. If the worst comes to the worst, you must send a medical

certificate."

"Will that do?"

"Of course it will. When George is here we will get Dr. Loftly, and he

will make it straight for us. You need not trouble yourself about it at

all. Those women at Manor Cross are old enough to have known better."

Lord George came and was very angry. He quite agreed as to Dr. Loftly,

who was sent for, and who did give a certificate,--and who took upon

himself to assure Lady George that all the judges in the land could not

enforce her attendance as long as she had that certificate in her

hands. But Lord George was vexed beyond measure that his wife's name

should have been called in question, and could not refrain himself from

a cross word or two. "It was so imprudent your going to such a place!"

"Oh George, are we to have that all again?"

"Why shouldn't she have gone?" asked the Dean.

"Are you in favour of rights of women?"

"Not particularly;--though if there be any rights which they haven't

got, I thoroughly wish that they might get them. I certainly don't

believe in the Baroness Banmann, nor yet in Dr. Fleabody; but I don't

think they could have been wrong in going in good company to hear what

a crazy old woman might have to say."

"It was very foolish," said Lord George. "See what has come of it!"

"How could I tell, George? I thought you had promised that you wouldn't

scold any more. Nasty fat old woman! I'm sure I didn't want to hear

her." Then Lord George went back to town with the medical certificate

in his pocket, and Mary, being in her present condition, afraid of the

authorities, was unable to stay and be happy even for one evening with

her father.

During the month the Disabilities created a considerable interest

throughout London, of which Dr. Fleabody reaped the full advantage. The

Baroness was so loud in her clamours that she forced the question of

the Disabilities on the public mind generally, and the result was that

the world flocked to the Institute. The Baroness, as she heard of this,

became louder and louder. It was not this that she wanted. Those who

wished to sympathise with her should send her money,--not go to the

hall to hear that loud imbecile American female! The Baroness, when she

desired to be-little the doctor, always called her a female. And the

Baroness, though in truth she was not personally attractive, did

contrive to surround herself with supporters, and in these days moved

into comfortable lodgings in Wigmore Street. Very few were heard to

speak in her favour, but they who contributed to the relief of her

necessities were many. It was found to be almost impossible to escape

from her without leaving some amount of money in her hands. And then,

in a happy hour, she came at last across an old gentleman who did

appreciate her and her wrongs. How it was that she got an introduction

to Mr. Philogunac Coelebs was not, I think, ever known. It is not

improbable that having heard of his soft heart, his peculiar

propensities, and his wealth, she contrived to introduce herself. It

was, however, suddenly understood that Mr. Philogunac Coelebs, who was

a bachelor and very rich, had taken her by the hand, and intended to

bear all the expenses of the trial. It was after the general intimation

which had been made to the world in this matter that the summons for

Lady Mary had been sent down to Manor Cross.

And now in these halcyon days of March the Baroness also had her

brougham and was to be seen everywhere. How she did work! The attornies

who had the case in hands, found themselves unable to secure themselves

against her. She insisted on seeing the barristers, and absolutely did

work her way into the chambers of that discreet junior Mr. Stuffenruff.

She was full of her case, full of her coming triumph. She would teach

women like Miss Julia Mildmay and Lady Selina Protest what it was to

bamboozle a Baroness of the Holy Roman Empire! And as for the American

female----.

"You'll put her pipe out," suggested Mr. Philogunac Coelebs, who was

not superior to a mild joke.

"Stop her from piping altogether in dis contry," said the Baroness, who

in the midst of her wrath and zeal and labour was superior to all

jokes.

Two days before that fixed for the trial there fell a great blow upon

those who were interested in the matter;--a blow that was heavy on Mr.

Coelebs but heavier still on the attornies. The Baroness had taken

herself off, and when enquiries were made it was found that she was at

Madrid. Mr. Snape, one of the lawyers, was the person who first

informed Mr. Coelebs, and did so in a manner which clearly implied that

he expected Mr. Coelebs to pay the bill. Then Mr. Snape encountered a

terrible disappointment, and Mr. Coelebs was driven to confess his own

disgrace. He had, he said, never undertaken to pay the cost of the

trial, but he had, unfortunately, given the lady a thousand pounds to

enable her to pay the expenses herself. Mr. Snape, expostulated, and,

later on, urged with much persistency, that Mr. Coelebs had more than

once attended in person at the office of Messrs. Snape and Cashett. But

in this matter the lawyers did not prevail. They had taken their orders

from the lady, and must look to the lady for payment. They who best

knew Mr. Philogunac Coelebs thought that he had escaped cheaply, as

there had been many fears that he should make the Baroness altogether

his own.

"I am so glad she has gone," said Mary, when she heard the story. "I

should never have felt safe while that woman was in the country. I'm

quite sure of one thing. I'll never have anything more to do with

disabilities. George need not be afraid about that."

CHAPTER LXI.

THE NEWS COMES HOME.

During those last days of the glory of the Baroness, when she was

driving about London under the auspices of Philogunac Coelebs in her

private brougham and talking to everyone of the certainty of her coming

success, Lord George Germain was not in London either to hear or to see

what was going on. He had gone again to Naples, having received a

letter from the British Consul there telling him that his brother was

certainly dying. The reader will understand that he must have been most

unwilling to take this journey. He at first refused to do so, alleging

that his brother's conduct to him had severed all ties between them;

but at last he allowed himself to be persuaded by the joint efforts of

Mr. Knox, Mr. Stokes, and Lady Sarah, who actually came up to London

herself for the purpose of inducing him to take the journey. "He is not

only your brother," said Lady Sarah, "but the head of your family as

well. It is not for the honour of the family that he should pass away

without having someone belonging to him at the last moment." When Lord

George argued that he would in all probability be too late, Lady Sarah

explained that the last moments of a Marquis of Brotherton could not

have come as long as his body was above ground.

So urged the poor man started again, and found his brother still alive,

but senseless. This was towards the end of March, and it is hoped that

the reader will remember the event which was to take place on the 1st

of April. The coincidence of the two things added of course very

greatly to his annoyance. Telegrams might come to him twice a-day, but

no telegram could bring him back in a flash when the moment of peril

should arrive, or enable him to enjoy the rapture of standing at his

wife's bedside when that peril should be over. He felt as he went away

from his brother's villa to the nearest hotel,--for he would not sleep

nor eat in the villa,--that he was a man marked out for misfortune.

When he returned to the villa on the next morning the Marquis of

Brotherton was no more. His Lordship had died in the 44th year of his

age, on the 30th March, 187--.

The Marquis of Brotherton was dead, and Lord George Germain was Marquis

of Brotherton, and would be so called by all the world as soon as his

brother was decently hidden under the ground. It concerns our story now

to say that Mary Lovelace was Marchioness of Brotherton, and that the

Dean of Brotherton was the father-in-law of a Marquis, and would, in

all probability, be the progenitor of a long line of Marquises. Lord

George, as soon as the event was known, caused telegrams to be sent to

Mr. Knox, to Lady Sarah,--and to the Dean. He had hesitated about the

last, but his better nature at last prevailed. He was well aware that

no one was so anxious as the Dean, and though he disliked and condemned

the Dean's anxiety, he remembered that the Dean had at any rate been a

loving father to his wife, and a very liberal father-in-law.

Mr. Knox, when he received the news, went at once to Mr. Stokes, and

the two gentlemen were not long in agreeing that a very troublesome and

useless person had been removed out of the world. "Oh, yes; there's a

will," said Mr. Stokes in answer to an enquiry from Mr. Knox, "made

while he was in London the other day, just before he started,--as bad a

will as a man could make; but he couldn't do very much harm. Every acre

was entailed."

"How about the house in town?" asked Mr. Knox.

"Entailed on the baby about to be born, if he happens to be a boy."

"He didn't spend his income?" suggested Mr. Knox.

"He muddled a lot of money away; but since the coal came up he couldn't

spend it all, I should say."

"Who gets it?" asked Mr. Knox, laughing.

"We shall see that when the will is read," said the attorney with a

smile.

The news was brought out to Lady Sarah as quick as the very wretched

pony which served for the Brotherton telegraph express could bring it.

The hour which was lost in getting the pony ready, perhaps, did not

signify much. Lady Sarah, at the moment, was busy with her needle, and

her sisters were with her. "What is it?" said Lady Susanna, jumping up.

Lady Sarah, with cruel delay, kept the telegram for a moment in her

hand. "Do open it," said Lady Amelia; "is it from George? Pray open

it;--pray do!" Lady Sarah, feeling certain of the contents of the

envelope, and knowing the importance of the news, slowly opened the

cover. "It is all over," she said, "Poor Brotherton!" Lady Amelia burst

into tears. "He was never so very unkind to me," said Lady Susanna,

with her handkerchief up to her eyes. "I cannot say that he was good to

me," said Lady Sarah, "but it may be that I was hard to him. May God

Almighty forgive him all that he did amiss!"

Then there was a consultation held, and it was decided that Mary and

the Marchioness must both be told at once. "Mamma will be dreadfully

cut up," said Lady Susanna. Then Lady Amelia suggested that their

mother's attention should be at once drawn off to Mary's condition,

for the Marchioness at this time was much worried in her feelings about

Mary,--as to whom it now seemed that some error must have been made.

The calculations had not been altogether exact. So at least, judging

from Mary's condition, they all now thought at Manor Cross. Mrs. Toff

was quite sure, and the Marchioness was perplexed in her memory as to

certain positive information which had been whispered into her ear by

Sir Henry just before the birth of that unfortunate Popenjoy, who was

now lying dead as Lord Brotherton at Naples.

The telegram had arrived in the afternoon at the hour in which Mary was

accustomed to sit in the easy chair with the Marchioness. The penalty

had now been reduced to an hour a day, and this, as it happened, was

the hour. The Marchioness had been wandering a good deal in her mind.

From time to time she expressed her opinion that Brotherton would get

well and would come back; and she would then tell Mary how she ought to

urge her husband to behave well to his elder brother, always asserting

that George had been stiff-necked and perverse. But in the midst of all

this she would refer every minute to Mary's coming baby as the coming

Popenjoy--not a possible Popenjoy at some future time, but the

immediate Popenjoy of the hour,--to be born a Popenjoy! Poor Mary, in

answer to all this, would agree with everything. She never contradicted

the old lady, but sat longing that the hour might come to an end.

Lady Sarah entered the room, followed by her two sisters. "Is there any

news?" asked Mary.

"Has Brotherton come back?" demanded the Marchioness.

"Dear mamma!" said Lady Sarah;--and she went up and knelt down before

her mother and took her hand.

"Where is he?" asked the Marchioness.

"Dear mamma! He has gone away,--beyond all trouble."

"Who has gone away?"

"Brotherton is--dead, mamma. This is a telegram from George." The old

woman looked bewildered, as though she did not as yet quite comprehend

what had been said to her. "You know," continued Lady Sarah, "that he

was so ill that we all expected this."

"Expected what?"

"That my brother could not live."

"Where is George? What has George done? If George had gone to him----.

Oh me! Dead! He is not dead! And what has become of the child?"

"You should think of Mary, mamma."

"My dear, of course I think of you. I am thinking of nothing else. I

should say it would be Friday. Sarah,--you don't mean to say that

Brotherton is--dead?" Lady Sarah merely pressed her mother's hand and

looked into the old lady's face. "Why did not they let me go to him?

And is Popenjoy dead also?"

"Dear mamma, don't you remember?" said Lady Susanna.

"Yes; I remember. George was determined it should be so. Ah me!--ah me!

Why should I have lived to hear this!" After that it was in vain that

they told her of Mary and of the baby that was about to be born. She

wept herself into hysterics,--was taken away and put to bed; and then

soon wept herself asleep.

Mary during all this had said not a word. She had felt that the moment

of her exaltation,--the moment in which she had become the mistress of

the house and of everything around it,--was not a time in which she

could dare even to speak to the bereaved mother. But when the two

younger sisters had gone away with the Marchioness, she asked after her

husband. Then Lady Sarah showed her the telegram in which Lord George,

after communicating the death of his brother, had simply said that he

should himself return home as quickly as possible. "It has come very

quick," said Lady Sarah.

"What has come!"

"Your position, Mary. I hope,--I hope you will bear it well."

"I hope so," said Mary, almost sullenly. But she was awestruck, and not

sullen.

"It will all be yours now,--the rank, the wealth, the position, the

power of spending money, and tribes of friends anxious to share your

prosperity. Hitherto you have only seen the gloom of this place, which

to you has of course been dull. Now it will be lighted up, and you can

make it gay enough."

"This is not a time to think of gaiety," said Mary.

"Poor Brotherton was nothing to you. I do not think you ever saw him."

"Never."

"He was nothing to you. You cannot mourn."

"I do mourn. I wish he had lived. I wish the boy had lived. If you have

thought that I wanted all this, you have done me wrong. I have wanted

nothing but to have George to live with me. If anybody thinks that I

married him because all this might come,--oh, they do not know me."

"I know you, Mary."

"Then you will not believe that."

"I do not believe it. I have never believed it. I know that you are

good and disinterested and true of heart. I have loved you dearly and

more dearly as I have seen you every day. But Mary, you are fond of

what the world calls--pleasure."

"Yes," said Mary, after a pause, "I am fond of pleasure. Why not? I

hope I am not fond of doing harm to anyone."

"If you will only remember how great are your duties. You may have

children to whom you may do harm. You have a husband, who will now have

many cares, and to whom much harm may be done. Among women you will be

the head of a noble family, and may grace or disgrace them all by your

conduct."

"I will never disgrace them," she said proudly.

"Not openly, not manifestly I am sure. Do you think that there are no

temptations in your way?"

"Everybody has temptations."

"Who will have more than you? Have you thought that every tenant, every

labourer on the estate will have a claim on you?"

"How can I have thought of anything yet?"

"Don't be angry with me, dear, if I bid you think of it. I think of

it,--more I know than I ought to do. I have been so placed that I could

do but little good and little harm to others than myself. The females

of a family such as ours, unless they marry, are very insignificant in

the world. You who but a few years ago were a little school girl in

Brotherton have now been put over all our heads."

"I didn't want to be put over anybody's head."

"Fortune has done it for you, and your own attractions. But I was going

to say that little as has been my power and low as is my condition, I

have loved the family and striven to maintain its respectability. There

is not, I think, a face on the estate I do not know. I shall have to go

now and see them no more."

"Why should you go?"

"It will probably be proper. No married man likes to have his unmarried

sisters in his house."

"I shall like you. You shall never go."

"Of course I shall go with mamma and the others. But I would have you

sometimes think of me and those I have cared for, and I would have you

bear in mind that the Marchioness of Brotherton should have more to do

than to amuse herself."

Whatever assurances Mary might have made or have declined to make in

answer to this were stopped by the entrance of a servant, who came to

inform Lady George that her father was below. The Dean too had received

his telegram, and had at once ridden over to greet the new Marchioness

of Brotherton.

Of all those who first heard the news, the Dean's feelings were by far

the strongest. It cannot be said of any of the Germains that there was

sincere and abiding grief at the death of the late Marquis. The poor

mother was in such a state, was mentally so weak, that she was in truth

no longer capable of strong grief or strong joy. And the man had been,

not only so bad but so injurious also, to all connected with him,--had

contrived of late to make his whole family so uncomfortable,--that he

had worn out even that enduring love which comes of custom. He had been

a blister to them,--assuring them constantly that he would ever be a

blister; and they could not weep in their hearts because the blister

was removed. But neither did they rejoice. Mary, when, in her simple

language, she had said that she did not want it, had spoken the plain

truth. Munster Court, with her husband's love and the power to go to

Mrs. Jones' parties, sufficed for her ambition. That her husband should

be gentle with her, should caress her as well as love her, was all the

world to her. She feared rather than coveted the title of Marchioness,

and dreaded that gloomy house in the Square with all her heart. But to

the Dean the triumph was a triumph indeed and the joy was a joy! He had

set his heart upon it from the first moment in which Lord George had

been spoken of as a suitor for his daughter's hand,--looking forward to

it with the assured hope of a very sanguine man. The late Marquis had

been much younger than he, but he calculated that his own life had been

wholesome while that of the Marquis was the reverse. Then had come the

tidings of the Marquis' marriage. That had been bad;--but he had again

told himself how probable it was that the Marquis should have no son.

And then the Lord had brought home a son. All suddenly there had come

to him the tidings that a brat called Popenjoy,--a brat who in life

would crush all his hopes,--was already in the house at Manor Cross! He

would not for a moment believe in the brat. He would prove that the boy

was not Popenjoy, though he should have to spend his last shilling in

doing so. He had set his heart upon the prize, and he would allow

nothing to stand in his way.

And now the prize had come before his daughter had been two years

married, before the grandchild was born on whose head was to be

accumulated all these honours! There was no longer any doubt. The

Marquis was gone, and that false Popenjoy was gone; and his daughter

was the wife of the reigning Lord, and the child,--his grandchild,--was

about to be born. He was sure that the child would be a boy! But even

were a girl the eldest, there would be time enough for boys after that.

There surely would be a real Popenjoy before long.

And what was he to gain,--he himself? He often asked himself the

question, but could always answer it satisfactorily. He had risen above

his father's station by his own intellect and industry so high as to be

able to exalt his daughter among the highest in the land. He could

hardly have become a Marquis himself. That career could not have been

open to him; but a sufficiency of the sweets of the peerage would be

his own if he could see his daughter a Marchioness. And now that was

her rank. Fate could not take it away from her. Though Lord George were

to die to-morrow, she would still be a Marchioness, and the coming boy,

his grandson, would be the Marquis. He himself was young for his age.

He might yet live to hear his grandson make a speech in the House of

Commons as Lord Popenjoy.

He had been out about the city and received the telegram at three

o'clock. He felt at the moment intensely grateful to Lord George for

having sent it;--as he would have been full of wrath had none been sent

to him. There was no reference to "Poor Brotherton!" on his tongue; no

reference to "Poor Brotherton!" in his heart. The man had grossly

maligned his daughter to his own ears, had insulted him with bitter

malignity, and was his enemy. He did not pretend to himself that he

felt either sorrow or pity. The man had been a wretch and his enemy and

was now dead; and he was thoroughly glad that the wretch was out of his

way. "Marchioness of Brotherton!" he said to himself, as he rested for

a few minutes alone in his study. He stood with his hands in his

pockets, looking up at the ceiling, and realizing it all. Yes; all that

was quite true which had been said to himself more than once. He had

begun his life as a stable-boy. He could remember the time when his

father touched his hat to everybody that came into the yard.

Nevertheless he was Dean of Brotherton,--and so much a Dean as to have

got the better of all enemies in the Close. And his daughter was

Marchioness of Brotherton. She would be Mary to him, and would

administer to his little comforts when men descended from the comrades

of William the Conqueror would treat her with semi-regal respect. He

told himself that he was sure of his daughter.

Then he ordered his horse, and started off to ride to Manor Cross. He

did not doubt but that she knew it already, but still it was necessary

that she should hear it from his lips and he from hers. As he rode

proudly beneath the Manor Cross oaks he told himself again and again

that they would all belong to his grandson.

When the Dean was announced Mary almost feared to see him,--or rather

feared that expression of triumph which would certainly be made both by

his words and manner. All that Lady Sarah had said had entered into her

mind. There were duties incumbent on her which would be very heavy, for

which she felt that she could hardly be fit,--and the first of these

duties was to abstain from pride as to her own station in life. But her

father she knew would be very proud, and would almost demand pride from

her. She hurried down to him nevertheless. Were she ten times a

Marchioness, next to her husband her care would be due to him. What

daughter had ever been beloved more tenderly than she? Administer to

him! Oh yes, she would do that as she had always done. She rushed into

his arms in the little parlour and then burst into tears.

"My girl," he said, "I congratulate you."

"No;--no, no."

"Yes, yes, yes. Is it not better in all ways that it should be so? I do

congratulate you. Hold up your head, dear, and bear it well."

"Oh, papa, I shall never bear it well."

"No woman that was ever born has, I believe, borne it better than you

will. No woman was ever more fit to grace a high position. My own

girl!"

"Yes, papa, your own girl. But I wish,--I wish----"

"All that I have wished has come about." She shuddered as she heard

these words, remembering that two deaths had been necessary for this

fruition of his desires. But he repeated his words. "All that I have

wished has come about. And, Mary, let me tell you this;--you should in

no wise be afraid of it, nor should you allow yourself to think of it

as though there were anything to be regretted. Which do you believe

would make the better peer; your husband or that man who has died?"

"Of course George is ten times the best."

"Otherwise he would be very bad. But no degree of comparison would

express the difference. Your husband will add an honour to his rank."

She took his hand and kissed it as he said this,--which certainly would

not have been said had not that telegram come direct to the deanery.

"And, looking to the future, which would probably make the better peer

in coming years;--the child born of that man and woman, and bred by

them as they would have bred it, or your child,--yours and your

husband's? And here, in the country,--from which lord would the tenants

receive the stricter justice, and the people the more enduring

kindness? Don't you know that he disgraced his order, and that the

woman was unfit to bear the name which rightly or wrongly she had

assumed? You will be fit."

"No, papa."

"Excuse me, dear. I am praising myself rather than you when I

say,--yes. But though I praise myself it is a matter as to which I have

no shadow of doubt. There can be nothing to regret,--no cause for

sorrow. With the inmates of this house custom demands the decency of

outward mourning;--but there can be no grief of heart. The man was a

wild beast, destroying everybody and everything that came near him.

Only think how he treated your husband."

"He is dead, papa!"

"I thank God that he has gone. I cannot bring myself to lie about it. I

hate such lying. To me it is unmanly. Grief or joy, regrets or

satisfaction, when expressed, should always be true. It is a grand

thing to rise in the world. The ambition to do so is the very salt of

the earth. It is the parent of all enterprise, and the cause of all

improvement. They who know no such ambition are savages and remain

savage. As far as I can see, among us Englishmen such ambition is

healthily and happily almost universal, and on that account we stand

high among the citizens of the world. But, owing to false teaching, men

are afraid to own aloud a truth which is known to their own hearts. I

am not afraid to do so and I would not have you afraid. I am proud that

by one step after another I have been able so to place you and so to

form you that you should have been found worthy of rank much higher

than my own. And I would have you proud also and equally ambitious for

your child. Let him be the Duke of Brotherton. Let him be brought up to

be one of England's statesmen, if God shall give him intellect for the

work. Let him be seen with the George and Garter, and be known

throughout Europe as one of England's worthiest worthies. Though not

born as yet his career should already be a care to you. And that he may

be great you should rejoice that you yourself are great already."

After that he went away, leaving messages for Lord George and the

family. He bade her tell Lady Sarah that he would not intrude on the

present occasion, but that he hoped to be allowed to see the ladies of

the family very shortly after the funeral.

Poor Mary could not but be bewildered by the difference of the two

lessons she had received on this the first day of her assured honours.

And she was the more perplexed because both her instructors had

appeared to her to be right in their teaching. The pagan exaltation of

her father at the death of his enemy she could put on one side,

excusing it by the remembrance of the terrible insult which she knew

that he had received. But the upshot of his philosophy she did receive

as true, and she declared to herself that she would harbour in her

heart of hearts the lessons which he had given her as to her own child,

lessons which must be noble as they tended to the well-being of the

world at large. To make her child able to do good to others, to assist

in making him able and anxious to do so,--to train him from the first

in that way,--what wish could be more worthy of a mother than this? But

yet the humility and homely carefulness inculcated by Lady Sarah,--was

not that lesson also true? Assuredly yes! And yet how should she

combine the two?

She was unaware that within herself there was a power, a certain

intellectual alembic of which she was quite unconscious, by which she

could distil the good of each, and quietly leave the residuum behind

her as being of no moment.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE WILL.

Lord George came back to England as quick as the trains would carry

him, and with him came the sad and mournful burden which had to be

deposited in the vaults of the parish church at Manor Cross. There must

be a decent tombstone now that the life was gone, with decent words

upon it and a decent effigy,--even though there had been nothing decent

in the man's life. The long line of past Marquises must be perpetuated,

and Frederic Augustus, the tenth peer of the name, must be made to lie

with the others. Lord George, therefore,--for he was still Lord George

till after the funeral,--travelled with his sad burden, some deputy

undertaker having special charge of it, and rested for a few hours in

London. Mr. Knox met him in Mr. Stokes' chambers, and there he learned

that his brother, who had made many wills in his time, had made one

last will just before he left London, after his return from Rudham

Park. Mr. Stokes took him aside and told him that he would find the

will to be unfavourable. "I thought the property was entailed," said

Lord George very calmly. Mr. Stokes assented, with many assurances as

to the impregnability of the family acres and the family houses; but

added that there was money, and that the furniture had belonged to the

late Marquis to dispose of as he pleased. "It is a matter of no

consequence," said Lord George,--whom the loss of the money and

furniture did not in truth at all vex.

Early on the following morning he went down to Brotherton, leaving the

undertakers to follow him as quickly as they might. He could enter the

house now, and to him as he was driven home under the oaks no doubt

there came some idea of his own possession of them. But the idea was

much less vivid than the Dean's, and was chiefly confined to the

recollection that no one could now turn him out of the home in which he

had been born and in which his mother and sisters and wife were living.

Had his elder brother been a man of whom he could have been proud, I

almost think he would have been more contented as a younger brother.

"It is over at last" were the first words he said to his wife, not

finding it to be more important that his greatness was beginning than

that his humiliation should be brought to an end.

The funeral took place with all the state that undertakers could give

to it in a little village, but with no other honours. Lord George was

the chief mourner and almost the only one. One or two neighbours

came,--Mr. De Baron, from Rudham Park, and such of the farmers as had

been long on the land, among them being Mr. Price. But there was one

person among the number whom no one had expected. This was Jack De

Baron. "He has been mentioned in the will," said Mr. Stokes very

gravely to Lord George, "and perhaps you would not object to my asking

him to be present." Lord George did not object, though certainly

Captain De Baron was the last person whom he would have thought of

asking to Manor Cross on any occasion. He was made welcome, however,

with a grave courtesy.

"What on earth has brought you here?" said old Mr. De Baron to his

cousin.

"Don't in the least know! Got a letter from a lawyer, saying I had

better come. Thought everybody was to be here who had ever seen him."

"He hasn't left you money, Jack," said Mr. De Baron.

"What will you give for my chance?" said Jack. But Mr. De Baron, though

he was much given to gambling speculations, did not on this occasion

make an offer.

After the funeral, which was sadder even than funerals are in general

though no tear was shed, the will was read in the library at Manor

Cross, Lord George being present, together with Mr. Knox, Mr. Stokes

and the two De Barons. The Dean might have wished to be there; but he

had written early on that morning an affectionate letter to his

son-in-law, excusing himself from being present at the funeral. "I

think you know," he had said, "that I would do anything either to

promote your welfare or to gratify your feelings, but there had

unfortunately been that between me and the late Marquis which would

make my attendance seem to be a mockery." He did not go near Manor

Cross on that day; but no one knew better than he,--not even Mr. Knox

himself,--that the dead lord had possessed no power of alienating a

stick or a brick upon the property. The will was very short, and the

upshot of it was that every shilling of which the Marquis died

possessed, together with his house at Como and the furniture contained

in the three houses, was left to our old friend Jack De Baron. "I took

the liberty," said Mr. Stokes, "to inform his lordship that should he

die before his wife, his widow would be entitled to a third of his

personal property. He replied that whatever his widow could claim by

law, she could get without any act of his. I mention this, as Captain

De Baron may perhaps be willing that the widow of the late Marquis may

be at once regarded as possessed of a third of the property."

"Quite so," said Jack, who had suddenly become as solemn and funereal

as Mr. Stokes himself. He was now engaged to Guss Mildmay with a

vengeance!

When the solemnity of the meeting was over, Lord George,--or the

Marquis, as he must now be called,--congratulated the young heir with

exquisite grace. "I was so severed from my brother of late," he said,

"that I had not known of the friendship."

"Never saw him in my life till I met him down at Rudham," said Jack. "I

was civil to him there because he seemed to be ill. He sent me once to

fetch a ten-pound note. I thought it odd, but I went. After that he

seemed to take to me a good deal."

"He took to you to some purpose, Captain De Baron. As to me, I did not

want it, and certainly should not have got it. You need not for a

moment think that you are robbing us."

"That is so good of you!" said Jack, whose thoughts, however, were too

full of Guss Mildmay to allow of any thorough enjoyment of his

unexpected prosperity.

"Stokes says that after the widow is paid and the legacy duty there

will be eight--and twenty--thousand pounds!" whispered Mr. De Baron to

his relative. "By heavens! you are a lucky fellow."

"I am rather lucky."

"It will be fourteen hundred a year, if you only look out for a good

investment. A man with ready money at his own disposal can always get

five per cent, at least. I never heard of such a fluke in my life."

"It was a fluke, certainly."

"You'll marry now and settle down, I suppose?"

"I suppose I shall," said Jack. "One has to come to that kind of thing

at last. I knew when I was going to Rudham that some d---- thing would

come of it. Oh,--of course I'm awfully glad. It's sure to come sooner

or later, and I suppose I've had my run. I've just seen Stokes, and he

says I'm to go to him in about a month's time. I thought I should have

got some of it to-morrow?"

"My dear fellow, I can let you have a couple of hundreds, if you want

them," said Mr. De Baron, who had never hitherto been induced to

advance a shilling when his young cousin had been needy.

Mr. Stokes, Mr. Knox, Mr. De Baron and the heir went away, leaving the

family to adjust their own affairs in their new position. Then Mary

received a third lecture as she sat leaning upon her husband's

shoulder.

"At any rate, you won't have to go away any more," she had said to him.

"You have been always away, for ever so long."

"It was you who would go to the deanery when you left London."

"I know that. Of course I wanted to see papa then. I don't want to talk

about that any more. Only, you won't go away again?"

"When I do you shall go with me."

"That won't be going away. Going away is taking yourself off,--by

yourself."

"Could I help it?"

"I don't know. I could have gone with you. But it's over now, isn't

it?"

"I hope so."

"It shall be over. And when this other trouble is done,--you'll go to

London then?"

"It will depend on your health, dear."

"I am very well. Why shouldn't I be well? When a month is over,--then

you'll go."

"In two months, perhaps."

"That'll be the middle of June. I'm sure I shall be well in three

weeks. And where shall we go? We'll go to Munster Court,--shan't we?"

"As soon as the house is ready in St. James' Square, we must go there."

"Oh! George,--I do so hate that house in St. James' Square. I shall

never be happy there. It's like a prison."

Then he gave her his lecture. "My love, you should not talk of hating

things that are necessary."

"But why is St. James' Square necessary?"

"Because it is the town residence belonging to the family. Munster

Court was very well for us as we were before. Indeed, it was much too

good, as I felt every hour that I was there. It was more than we could

afford without drawing upon your father for assistance."

"But he likes being drawn upon," said Mary. "I don't think there is

anything papa likes so much as to be drawn upon."

"That could make no difference to me, my dear. I don't think that as

yet you understand money matters."

"I hope I never shall, then."

"I hope you will. It will be your duty to do so. But, as I was saying,

the house at Munster Court will be unsuitable to you as Lady

Brotherton." On hearing this Mary pouted and made a grimace. "There is

a dignity to be borne which, though it may be onerous, must be

supported."

"I hate dignity."

"You would not say that if you knew how it vexed me. Could I have

chosen for myself personally, perhaps, neither would I have taken this

position. I do not think that I am by nature ambitious. But a man is

bound to do his duty in that position in which he finds himself

placed,--and so is a woman."

"And it will be my duty to live in an ugly house?"

"Perhaps the house may be made less ugly; but to live in it will

certainly be a part of your duty. And if you love me, Mary----"

"Do you want me to tell you whether I love you?"

"But, loving me as I know you do, I am sure you will not neglect your

duty. Do not say again that you hate your dignity. You must never

forget now that you are Marchioness of Brotherton."

"I never shall, George."

"That is right, my dear," he said, omitting to understand the little

satire conveyed in her words. "It will come easy to you before long.

But I would have all the world feel that you are the mistress of the

rank to which you have been raised. Of course, it has been different

hitherto," he said, endeavouring in his own mind to excuse the

indiscretion of that Kappa-kappa. This lecture also she turned to

wholesome food and digested, obtaining from it some strength and

throwing off the bombast by which a weaker mind might have been

inflated. She understood, at any rate, that St. James' Square must be

her doom; but while acknowledging this to herself, she made a little

resolution that a good deal would have to be done to the house before

it was ready for her reception, and that the doing would require a

considerable time.

When she heard the purport of the late lord's will she was much

surprised,--more surprised, probably, than Jack himself. Why should a

man who was so universally bad,--such a horror,--leave his money to one

who was so--so--so good as Jack De Baron. The epithet came to her at

last in preference to any other. And what would he do now? George had

told her that the sum would be very large, and of course he could marry

if he pleased. At any rate he would not go to Perim. The idea that he

should go to Perim had made her uncomfortable. Perhaps he had better

marry Guss Mildmay. She was not quite all that his wife should be; but

he had said that he would do so in certain circumstances. Those

circumstances had come round and it was right that he should keep his

word. And yet it made her somewhat melancholy to think that he should

marry Guss Mildmay.

Very shortly after this, and when she was becoming aware that the event

which ought to have taken place on the 1st of April would not be much

longer delayed, there came home to her various things containing

lectures almost as severe, and perhaps more eloquent than those she had

received from her sister, her father, and her husband. There was an

infinity of clothes which someone had ordered for her, and on all the

things which would bear a mark, there was a coronet. The coronets on

the pockethandkerchiefs seemed to be without end. And there was

funereal note-paper, on which the black edges were not more visible

than the black coronets. And there came invoices to her from the

tradesmen, addressed to the Marchioness of Brotherton. And then there

came the first letter from her father with her rank and title on the

envelope. At first she was almost afraid to open it.

CHAPTER LXIII.

POPENJOY IS BORN--AND CHRISTENED.

At last, not much above a week after the calculations, in all the glory

of the purple of Manor Cross, the new Popenjoy was born. For it was a

Popenjoy. The Fates, who had for some time past been unpropitious to

the house of Brotherton, now smiled; and Fortune, who had been good to

the Dean throughout, remained true to him also in this. The family had

a new heir, a real Popenjoy; and the old Marchioness when the baby was

shown to her for awhile forgot her sorrows and triumphed with the rest.

The Dean's anxiety had been so great that he had insisted on remaining

at the house. It had been found impossible to refuse such a request

made at such a time. And now, at last, the ladies at Manor Cross

gradually forgave the Dean his offences. To the old dowager they did

not mention his name, and she probably forgot his existence; but the

Marquis appeared to live with him on terms of perfect friendship, and

the sisters succumbed to the circumstances and allowed themselves to

talk to him as though he were in truth the father of the reigning

Marchioness.

It will be understood that for forty-eight hours before the birth of

the child and for forty-eight hours afterwards all Manor Cross was

moved in the matter, as though this were the first male child born into

the world since the installation of some new golden age. It was a great

thing that, after all the recent troubles, a Popenjoy,--a proper

Popenjoy,--should be born at Manor Cross of English parents,--a healthy

boy,--a bouncing little lord, as Mrs. Toff called him; and the event

almost justified the prophetic spirit in which his grandmother spoke of

this new advent. "Little angel!" she said. "I know he'll grow up to

bring new honours to the family, and do as much for it as his

great-grandfather." The great-grandfather spoken of had been an earl,

great in borough-mongery, and had been made a marquis by Pitt on the

score of his votes. "George," she went on to say, "I do hope there will

be bells and bonfires, and that the tenants will be allowed to see

him." There were bells and bonfires. But in these days tenants are

perhaps busier men than formerly, and have less in them certainly of

the spirit of heir-worship than their fathers. But Mr. Price, with his

bride, did come down and see the baby; on which occasion the gallant

husband bade his wife remember that although they had been married more

than twelve months after Lord George, their baby would only be three

months younger. Whereupon Mrs. Price boxed her husband's ears,--to the

great delight of Mrs. Toff, who was dispensing sherry and cherry brandy

in her own sitting-room.

The Dean's joy, though less ecstatic in its expression, was quite as

deep and quite as triumphant as that of the Marchioness. When he was

admitted for a moment to his daughter's bedside, the tears rolled down

his face as he prayed for a blessing for her and her baby. Lady Sarah

was in the room, and began to doubt whether she had read the man's

character aright. There was an ineffable tenderness about him, a

sweetness of manners, a low melody of voice, a gracious solemnity in

which piety seemed to be mingled with his love and happiness! That he

was an affectionate father had been always known; but now it had to be

confessed that he bore himself as though he had sprung from some noble

family or been the son and grandson of archbishops. How it would have

been with him on such an occasion had his daughter married some vicar

of Pugsty, as she had herself once suggested, Lady Sarah did not now

stop to enquire. It was reasonable to Lady Sarah that the coming of a

Popenjoy should be hailed with greater joy and receive a warmer welcome

than the birth of any ordinary baby. "You have had a good deal to bear,

Brotherton," he said, holding his noble son-in-law by the hand; "but I

think that this will compensate for it all." The tears were still in

his eyes, and they were true tears,--tears of most unaffected joy. He

had seen the happy day; and as he told himself in words which would

have been profane had they been absolutely uttered, he was now ready

to die in peace. Not that he meant to die, or thought that he should

die. That vision of young Popenjoy, bright as a star, beautiful as a

young Apollo, with all the golden glories of the aristocracy upon his

head, standing up in the House of Commons and speaking to the world at

large with modest but assured eloquence, while he himself occupied some

corner in the gallery, was still before his eyes.

After all, who shall say that the man was selfish? He was contented to

shine with a reflected honour. Though he was wealthy, he never desired

grand doings at the deanery. In his own habits he was simple. The

happiness of his life had been to see his daughter happy. His very soul

had smiled within him when she had smiled in his presence. But he had

been subject to one weakness, which had marred a manliness which would

otherwise have been great. He, who should have been proud of the

lowliness of his birth, and have known that the brightest feather in

his cap was the fact that having been humbly born he had made himself

what he was,--he had never ceased to be ashamed of the stable-yard. And

as he felt himself to be degraded by that from which he had sprung, so

did he think that the only whitewash against such dirt was to be found

in the aggrandisement of his daughter and the nobility of her children.

He had, perhaps, been happier than he deserved. He might have sold her

to some lord who would have scorned her after a while and despised

himself. As it was, the Marquis, who was his son-in-law, was a man whom

upon the whole he could well trust. Lord George had indeed made one

little error in regard to Mrs. Houghton; but that had passed away and

would not probably be repeated.

Of all those closely concerned in the coming of Popenjoy the father

seemed to bear the greatness of the occasion with the most modesty.

When the Dean congratulated him he simply smiled and expressed a hope

that Mary would do well in her troubles. Poor Mary's welfare had

hitherto been almost lost in the solicitude for her son. "She can't but

do well now," said the Dean, who of all men was the most sanguine. "She

is thoroughly healthy, and nothing has been amiss."

"We must be very careful--that's all," said the Marquis. Hitherto he

had not brought his tongue to speak of his son as Popenjoy, and did not

do so for many a day to come. That an heir had been born was very well;

but of late the name of Popenjoy had not been sweet to his ears.

Nothing had gone amiss, and nothing did go amiss. When it was decided

that the young Marchioness was to nurse her own baby,--a matter which

Mary took into her own hands with a very high tone,--the old

Marchioness became again a little troublesome. She had her memories

about it all in her own time; how she had not been able to do as Mary

was doing. She remembered all that, and how unhappy it had made her;

but she remembered also that, had she done so for Popenjoy, Sir Henry

would have insisted on three pints of porter. Then Mary rebelled

altogether, and talked of drinking nothing but tea,--and would not be

brought to consent even to bitter beer without a great deal of trouble.

But, through it all, the mother throve and the baby throve; and when

the bonfires had been all burned and the bells had been all rung, and

the child had been shown to such tenants and adherents and workmen as

desired to see him, the family settled down to a feeling of permanent

satisfaction.

And then came the christening. Now in spite of the permanent

satisfaction there were troubles,--troubles of which the Marquis became

conscious very soon, and which he was bound to communicate to his

sister,--troubles of which the Dean was unfortunately cognisant, and of

which he would speak and with which he would concern him,--much to the

annoyance of the Marquis. The will which the late man had made was a

serious temporary embarrassment. There was no money with which to do

anything. The very bed on which the mother lay with her baby belonged

to Jack De Baron. They were absolutely drinking Jack De Baron's port

wine, and found, when the matter came to be considered, that they were

making butter from Jack De Baron's cows. This could not be long

endured. Jack, who was now bound to have a lawyer of his own, had very

speedily signified his desire that the family should be put to no

inconvenience, and had declared that any suggestion from the Marquis as

to the house in town or that in the country would be a law to him. But

it was necessary that everything should be valued at once, and either

purchased or given up to be sold to those who would purchase it. There

was, however, no money, and the Marquis who hated the idea of borrowing

was told that he must go among the money-lenders. Then the Dean

proposed that he and Miss Tallowax between them might be able to

advance what was needed. The Marquis shook his head and said nothing.

The proposition had been very distasteful to him.

Then there came another proposition. But it will be right in the first

place to explain that the great question of godfather and godmother had

received much attention. His Royal Highness the Duke of Windsor had

signified through young Lord Brabazon that he would stand as one of the

sponsors. The honour had been very great, and had of course been

accepted at the moment. The Dean had hankered much after the office,

but had abstained from asking with a feeling that should the request be

refused a coolness would be engendered which he himself would be unable

to repress. It would have filled him with delight to stand in his own

cathedral as godfather to the little Popenjoy; but he abstained, and

soon heard that the Duke of Dunstable, who was a distant cousin, was to

be the colleague of His Royal Highness. He smiled and said nothing of

himself,--but thought that his liberality might have been more

liberally remembered.

Just at this time Miss Tallowax arrived at the deanery, and on the next

morning the Dean came over to Manor Cross with a proposition from that

lady. She would bestow twenty thousand pounds immediately upon

Popenjoy, and place it for instant use in the father's hands, on

condition that she might be allowed to stand as godmother!

"We could not consent to accept the money," said the Marquis very

gravely.

"Why not? Mary is her nearest living relative in that generation. As a

matter of course, she will leave her money to Mary or her

children,--unless she be offended. Nothing is so common as for old

people with liberal hearts to give away the money which they must soon

leave behind them. A more generous creature than my old aunt doesn't

live."

"Very generous; but I am afraid we cannot accept it."

"After all, it is only an empty honour. I would not ask it for myself

because I knew how you might be situated. But I really think you might

gratify the old lady. Twenty thousand pounds is an important sum, and

would be so useful just at present!"

This was true, but the father at the moment declined. The Dean,

however, who knew his man, determined that the money should not be

lost, and communicated with Mr. Knox. Mr. Knox came down to Manor Cross

and held a long consultation at which both the Dean and Lady Sarah were

present. "Let it be granted," said the Dean, "that it is a foolish

request; but are you justified in refusing twenty thousand pounds

offered to Popenjoy?"

"Certainly," said Lady Sarah, "if the twenty thousand pounds is a

bribe."

"But it is no bribe, Lady Sarah," said Mr. Knox. "It is not

unreasonable that Miss Tallowax should give her money to her

great-nephew, nor is it unreasonable that she should ask for this

honour, seeing that she is the child's great-aunt." There was a strong

opposition to Miss Tallowax's liberal offer,--but in the end it was

accepted. The twenty thousand pounds was important, and, after all, the

godmother could do no lasting injury to the child. Then it was

discovered that the offer was clogged with a further stipulation. The

boy must be christened Tallowax! To this father and mother and aunts

all objected, swearing that they would not subject their young Popenjoy

to so great an injury,--till it was ascertained that the old lady did

not insist on Tallowax as a first name, or even as a second. It would

suffice that Tallowax should be inserted among others. It was at last

decided that the boy should be christened Frederic Augustus Tallowax.

Thus he became Frederic Augustus Tallowax Germain,--commonly to be

called, by the Queen's courtesy, Lord Popenjoy. The christening itself

was not very august, as neither the Royal Duke nor his fellow attended

in person. The Dean stood proxy for the one, and Canon Holdenough for

the other.

Mary by this time was able to leave her room, and was urgent with her

husband to take her up to London. Had she not been very good, and done

all that she was told,--except in regard to the porter? And was it not

manifest to everybody that she would be able to travel to St.

Petersburg and back if such a journey were required? Her husband

assured her that she would be knocked up before she got half-way. "But

London isn't a tenth part of the distance," said Mary, with a woman's

logic. Then it was settled that on May 20th she should be taken with

her baby to Munster Court. The following are a few of the letters of

congratulation which she received during the period of her

convalescence.

"GROSVENOR PLACE.

"MY DEAR MARCHIONESS,--Of course I have heard all about you from

time to time, and of course I have been delighted. In the first

place, we none of us could grieve very much for that unfortunate

brother of yours. Really it was so very much better for everybody

that Lord George should have the title and property,--not to talk

of all the advantage which the world expects from a young and

fascinating Lady Brotherton. I am told that the scaffolding is

already up in St. James' Square. I drove through the place the

other day, and bethought myself how long it might be before I

should receive the honour of a card telling me that on such and

such a day the Marchioness of Brotherton would be at home. I

should not suggest such a thing but for a dearly kind expression

in your last letter.

"But the baby of course is the first object. Pray tell me what

sort of a baby it is. Two arms and two legs, I know, for even a

young Lord Popenjoy is not allowed to have more; but of his

special graces you might send me a catalogue, if you have as yet

been allowed pen and paper. I can believe that a good deal of mild

tyranny would go on with those estimable sisters, and that Lord

George would be anxious. I beg his pardon,--the Marquis. Don't you

find this second change in your name very

perplexing,--particularly in regard to your linen? All your nice

wedding things will have become wrong so soon!

"And now I can impart a secret. There are promises of a little

Giblet. Of course it is premature to speak with certainty; but why

shouldn't there be a little Giblet as well as a little Popenjoy?

Only it won't be a Giblet as long as dear old Lord Gossling can

keep the gout out of his stomach. They say that in anger at his

son's marriage he has forsworn champagne and confines himself to

two bottles of claret a-day. But Giblet, who is the happiest young

man of my acquaintance, says that his wife is worth it all.

"And so our friend the Captain is a millionaire! What will he do?

Wasn't it an odd will? I couldn't be altogether sorry, for I have

a little corner in my heart for the Captain, and would have left

him something myself if I had anything to leave. I really think he

had better marry his old love. I like justice, and that would be

just. He would do it to-morrow if you told him. It might take me a

month of hard work. How much is it he gets? I hear such various

sums,--from a hundred thousand down to as many hundreds.

Nevertheless, the will proves the man to have been mad,--as I

always said he was.

"I suppose you'll come to Munster Court till the house in the

square be finished. Or will you take some furnished place for a

month or two? Munster Court is small; but it was very pretty, and

I hope I may see it again.

"Kiss the little Popenjoy for me, and believe me to be,

"Dear Lady Brotherton,

"Your affectionate old friend,

"G. MONTACUTE JONES."

The next was from their friend the Captain himself.

"DEAR LADY BROTHERTON,--I hope it won't be wrong in me to

congratulate you on the birth of your baby. I do so with all my

heart. I hope that some day, when I am an old fogy, I may be

allowed to know him and remind him that in old days I used to know

his mother. I was down at Manor Cross the other day; but of course

on such an occasion I could not see you. I was sent for because of

that strange will; but it was more strange to me that I should so

soon find myself in your house. It was not very bright on that

occasion.

"I wonder who was surprised most by the will,--you or I?" Mary,

when she read this, declared to herself that she ought not to have

been surprised at all. How could anyone be surprised by what such

a man as that might do?

"He had never seen me, as far as I know, till he met me at Rudham.

I did not want his money,--though I was poor enough. I don't know

what I shall do now; but I shan't go to Perim.

"Mrs. Jones says you will soon be in town. I hope I may be allowed

to call.

"Believe me always,

"Most sincerely yours,

"JOHN DE BARON."

Both those letters gave her pleasure, and both she answered. To all

Mrs. Jones' enquiries she gave very full replies, and enjoyed her jokes

with her old friend. She hinted that she did not at all intend to hurry

the men at St. James' Square, and that certainly she would be found in

Munster Court till the men had completed their work. As to what their

young friend would do with his money she could say nothing. She could

not undertake the commission,--though perhaps that might be best,--and

so on. Her note to Jack was very short. She thanked him heartily for

his good wishes, and told him the day on which she would be in Munster

Court. Then in a postscript she said that she was "\_very, very glad\_"

that he had inherited the late lord's money.

The other letter offended her as much as those two had pleased her. It

offended her so much that when she saw the handwriting she would not

have read it but that curiosity forbade her to put it on one side. It

was from Adelaide Houghton, and as she opened it there was a sparkle of

anger in her eyes which perhaps none of her friends had ever seen

there. This letter was as follows;--

"DEAR LADY BROTHERTON,--Will you not at length allow bygones to be

bygones? What can a poor woman do more than beg pardon and promise

never to be naughty again. Is it worth while that we who have

known each other so long should quarrel about what really amounted

to nothing? It was but a little foolish romance, the echo of a

past feeling,--a folly if you will, but innocent. I own my fault

and put on the sackcloth and ashes of confession, and, after that,

surely you will give me absolution.

"And now, having made my apology, which I trust will be accepted,

pray let me congratulate you on all your happiness. The death of

your poor brother-in-law of course we have all expected. Mr.

Houghton had heard a month before that it was impossible that he

should live. Of course, we all feel that the property has fallen

into much better hands. And I am so glad that you have a boy. Dear

little Popenjoy! Do, do forgive me, so that I may have an

opportunity of kissing him. I am, at any rate,

"Your affectionate old friend,

"ADELAIDE HOUGHTON."

Affectionate old friend! Serpent! Toad! Nasty degraded painted Jezebel!

Forgive her! No,--never; not though she were on her knees! She was

contemptible before, but doubly contemptible in that she could humble

herself to make an apology so false, so feeble, and so fawning. It was

thus that she regarded her correspondent's letter. Could any woman who

knew that love-letters had been written to her husband by another woman

forgive that other? We are all conscious of trespassers against

ourselves whom we especially bar when we say our prayers. Forgive us

our trespasses, as we forgive them who trespass against us,--excepting

Jones who has committed the one sin that we will not forgive, that we

ought not to forgive. Is there not that sin against the Holy Ghost to

justify us? This was the sin that Mary could not forgive. The

disgusting woman,--for to Mary the woman was now absolutely

disgusting,--had attempted to take from her the heart of her husband!

There was a good deal of evidence also against her husband, but that

she had quite forgotten. She did not in the least believe that Adelaide

was preferred to herself. Her husband had eyes, and could see,--a

heart, and could feel,--an understanding, and could perceive. She was

not in the least afraid as to her husband. But nothing on earth should

induce her to forgive Mrs. Houghton. She thought for a moment whether

it was worth her while to show the letter to the Marquis, and then tore

it into fragments and threw the pieces away.

CHAPTER LXIV.

CONCLUSION.

It is now only necessary that we should collect together the few loose

threads of our story which require to be tied lest the pieces should

become unravelled in the wear. Of our hero, Lord Popenjoy, it need only

be said that when we last heard of him he was a very healthy and rather

mischievous boy of five years old, who tyrannised over his two little

sisters,--the Lady Mary and the Lady Sarah. Those, however, who look

most closely to his character think that they can see the germs of that

future success which his grandfather so earnestly desires for him. His

mother is quite sure that he will live to be Prime Minister, and has

already begun to train him for that office. The house in Munster Court

has of course been left, and the Marchioness was on one occasion roused

into avowing that the family mansion is preferable. But then the family

mansion has been so changed that no Germain of a former generation

would know it. The old Dowager who still lives at Manor Cross has never

seen the change, but Lady Sarah, who always spends a month or two in

town, pretends to disbelieve that it is the same house. One of the

events in Mary's life which astonishes her most is the perfect

friendship which exists between her and her eldest sister-in-law. She

corresponds regularly with Lady Sarah, and is quite content to have her

letters filled with the many ailments and scanty comforts of the poor

people on the estate. Lady Sarah is more than content to be able to

love the mother of the heir, and she does love her, and the boy too,

with all her heart. Now that there is a Popenjoy,--a coming Brotherton,

of whom she can be proud, she finds nothing in her own life with which

she ought to quarrel. The Ladies Susanna and Amelia also come up to

town every year, very greatly to their satisfaction, and are most

devoted to the young Marchioness. But the one guest who is honoured

above all others in St. James' Square, for whose comfort everything is

made to give way, whom not to treat with loving respect is to secure a

banishment from the house, whom all the servants are made to regard as

a second master, is the Dean. His lines have certainly fallen to him in

pleasant places. No woman in London is more courted and more popular

than the Marchioness of Brotherton, and consequently the Dean spends

his two months in London very comfortably. But perhaps the happiest

period of his life is the return visit which his daughter always makes

to him for a fortnight during the winter. At this period the Marquis

will generally pass a couple of days at the deanery, but for the

greater part of the time the father and daughter are alone together.

Then he almost worships her. Up in London he allows himself to be

worshipped with an exquisite grace. To Mrs. Houghton the Marchioness

has never spoken, and on that subject she is inexorable. Friends have

interceded, but such intercession has only made matters worse. Of what

nature must the woman be who could speak to any friend of such an

offence as she had committed? The Marchioness, in refusing to be

reconciled, has never alluded to the cause of her anger, but has shown

her anger plainly and has persistently refused to abandon it.

The Marquis has become a model member of the House of Lords. He is

present at all their sittings, and is indefatigably patient on

Committees,--but very rarely speaks. In this way he is gradually

gaining weight in the country, and when his hair is quite grey and his

step less firm than at present, he will be an authority in Parliament.

He is also a pattern landlord, listening to all complaints, and

endeavouring in everything to do justice between himself and those who

are dependent on him. He is also a pattern father, expecting great

things from Popenjoy, and resolving that the child shall be subjected

to proper discipline as soon as he is transferred from feminine to

virile teaching. In the meantime the Marchioness reigns supreme in the

nursery,--as it is proper that she should do.

The husband now never feels himself called upon to remind his wife to

support her dignity. Since the dancing of the Kappa-kappa she has never

danced, except when on grand occasions she has walked through a

quadrille with some selected partner of special rank; and this she does

simply as a duty. Nevertheless, in society she is very gay and very

joyous. But dancing has been a peril to her, and she avoids it

altogether, pleading to such friends as Mrs. Jones that a woman with a

lot of babies is out of place capering about a room. Mrs. Jones

remembers the Kappa-kappa and says little or nothing on the subject,

but she heartily dissents from her friend, and still hopes that there

may be a good time coming. The Marquis remembers it all, too, and is

thoroughly thankful to his wife, showing his gratitude every now and

then by suggesting that Captain and Mrs. De Baron may be asked to

dinner. He knows that there is much for which he has to be grateful.

Though the name of Mrs. Houghton is never on his tongue, he has not

forgotten the way in which he went astray in Berkeley Square,--nor the

sweet reticence of his wife, who has never thrown his fault in his

teeth since that day on which, at his bidding, she took the letter from

his pocket and read it. No man in London is better satisfied with his

wife than the Marquis, and perhaps no man in London has better cause to

be satisfied.

Yes! Captain De Baron--and his wife--do occasionally dine together in

St. James' Square. Whether it was that Mrs. Montacute Jones was

successful in her efforts, or that Guss was enabled to found arguments

on Jack's wealth which Jack was unable to oppose, or that a sense of

what was due to the lady prevailed with him at last, he did marry her

about a twelvemonth after the reading of the will. When the Marchioness

came to town,--before Popenjoy was born,--he called, and was allowed to

see her. Nothing could be more respectful than was his demeanour then,

nor than it had been ever since; and when he announced to his friend,

as he did in person, that he was about to be married to Miss Mildmay,

she congratulated him with warmth, not saying a word as to past

occurrences. But she determined that she would ever be his friend, and

for his sake she has become friendly also to his wife. She never really

liked poor Guss,--nor perhaps does the Captain. But there have been no

quarrels, at any rate, no public quarrels, and Jack has done his duty

in a manner that rather surprised his old acquaintances. But he is a

much altered man, and is growing fat, and has taken to playing whist at

his club before dinner for shilling points. I have always thought that

in his heart of hearts he regrets the legacy.

Whether to spite his son, or at the urgent entreaty of his wife and

doctors, Lord Gossling has of late been so careful, that the gout has

not had a chance of getting into his stomach. Lord Giblet professes

himself to be perfectly satisfied with things as they are. He has

already four children. He lives in a small house in Green Street, and

is a member of the Entomological Society. He is so strict in his

attendance that it is thought that he will some day be president. But

the old lord does not like this turn in his son's life, and says that

the family of De Geese must be going to the dogs when the heir has

nothing better to do than to attend to insects.

Mrs. Montacute Jones gives as many parties as ever in Grosvenor Place,

and is never so well pleased as when she can get the Marchioness of

Brotherton to her house. She is still engaged in matrimonial pursuits,

and is at the present moment full of an idea that the minister from

Saxony, who is a fine old gentleman of sixty, but a bachelor, may be

got to marry Lady Amelia Germain. Mary assures her that there isn't the

least chance,--that Amelia would certainly not accept him,--and that an

old German of sixty, used to diplomacy all his life, is the last man in

the world to be led into difficulties. But Mrs. Jones never gives way

in such matters, and has already made the plans for a campaign at

Killancodlem next August.

I regret to state that Messrs. Snape and Cashett have persecuted the

poor Baroness most cruelly. They have contrived to show that the lady

has not only got into their debt, but has also swindled them,--swindled

them according to law,--and consequently they have been able to set all

the police of the continent on her track. She had no sooner shown her

face back in Germany, than they were upon her. For a while she

escaped, rushing from one country to another, but at last she was

arrested on a platform in Oregon, and is soon about to stand her trial

in an English Court. As a good deal of sympathy has been expressed in

her favour, and as Mr. Philogunac Coelebs has taken upon himself the

expense of her defence, it is confidently hoped in many quarters that

no jury will convict her. In the meantime, Dr. Fleabody has, I am told,

married a store-keeper in New York, and has settled down into a good

mother of a family.

At Manor Cross during the greater portion of the year things go on very

much as they used. The Marchioness is still living, and interests

herself chiefly in the children of her daughter-in-law,--born, and to

be born. But the great days of her life are those in which Popenjoy is

brought to her. The young scapegrace will never stay above five minutes

with his grandmother, but the old lady is sure that she is regarded by

him with a love passing the love of children. At Christmas time, and

for a week or two before, and a month or two afterwards, the house is

full of company and bright with unaccustomed lights. Lady Sarah puts on

her newest silk, and the Marchioness allows herself to be brought into

the drawing-room after dinner. But at the end of February the young

family flits to town, and then the Manor Cross is as Manor Cross so

long has been.

Mr. Price still hunts, and is as popular in the country as ever. He

often boasts that although he was married much after the Marquis, the

youngest of his three children is older than Lady Mary. But when he

does this at home, his ears are always boxed for him.

Of Mr. Groschut it is only necessary to say that he is still at Pugsty,

vexing the souls of his parishioners by Sabbatical denunciations.

THE END.

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