

FASHION AND PASSION;

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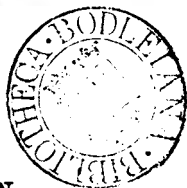
LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HONEYMOON" AND "THROUGH THE AGES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PROLOGUE.

"MORALISING is almost as much out of fashion as morality itself, and philosophy is most unpopular now-a-days amongst novel readers." Such are the words with which I closed my last romance, "*Through the Ages*;" after which I promised "not to trouble the public, nor the circulating libraries again, until I had managed to compile a wondrous novel, of the most sensational, impossible, and wordly nature, such as young ladies love to read, or rather to skim, and reviewers delight to criticise, because they can do so without taking the superfluous trouble of reading them through and understanding their purpose."

Now *this* is a *real novel*, such as I have so often been asked to write; and I expect it to become a most popular one, particularly with young ladies, as I can earnestly assure them I have tried all in my power to make it as "light and sensational" as possible; and if, unfortunately,

its plot is not "unnatural" and "far-fetched" enough for them, the fault lies in Society, which, in these days of ours, has taken it into its wild head to become more unreal than fiction, and consequently places us poor novelists in the shade.

As for reviewers, I think *they* ought to be grateful to me, for I can assure them that anything they may say about this book, good, bad, or indifferent, will just do ; as it probably will, fortunately for them, for most of the three-volume novels of the year ; but if they would kindly pronounce it "fast" or "improper," they will at once make its fortune and greatly oblige me, for my sole object is to become popular with my fair readers, to bespeak whose interest I have named my chapters after their most favourite novels, and, leaving philosophy and theology to take care of themselves, have tried as hard as I could, this time, to write a book they will be able thoroughly to "understand and enjoy."

FIRST PART.

FASHION AND PASSION;

OR,

LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNRISE.

THE sun is rising. A broad heavy array of clouds sweeps across the western sky, clouds which the fresh morning breeze causes to assume fantastic shapes of cliffs, castles, giants, towers and mountains, but, like our lives, there is more of gray and brown than of bright and gorgeous colour in that morning sky.

Yonder, from the east, comes the mighty king of day, preceded by a few dim rays of orange, which are reflected on the clouds, but only for an instant. The broad expanse of the dark sea also reflects their golden tinges—for we are at sea—and below those opaque clouds the solemn majestic waves of the Atlantic Ocean rise and fall, impelled by the wind, but the dark waves soon hide the few streaks of gold reflected by the rising sun, and, as the sky, which even now that the sun has risen still remains cloudy and threatening, give small promise of a fine day.

The tempest has raged all through the long night, and more than one strong sea-faring ship has been swept against the cruel rocks and there wrecked, for land is on the horizon although hidden by the mist and fog.

In the midst of the ocean, tossed hither and thither by the infuriated waves, we perceive a ship.

How small it seems! And yet, when looked at closely, we perceive that it is a well-trimmed brig, of no small tonnage, and that within its creaking planks live many human beings.

At this moment, however, only four are to be seen—the anxious captain, who, in his sou'-wester and rough pea jacket, has passed all the night on the bridge, and two sailors, who unite their strength to govern the helm against the opposing strength of the heavy sea.

The fourth person is leaning over the prow of the vessel, and seems anxiously watching the rising sun with an earnestness of gaze as if endeavouring to look into the future, which at that moment was as dark and impenetrable to him as the heavy clouds of that morning sky.

His position and his dress reveal to us at once that he is not a sailor. Who can he be?—what can he be doing at this early hour on the deck of the *Pathfinder*?—for such is the name of this vessel, as we are informed by the gold letters on the stern. She is a small trader between London and Bilbao.

Let us approach this stranger, and, with the ubiquitous power possessed by authors and their faithful readers, examine him closely, while he still remains anxiously watching the rising sun, intent and immovable as the figure head of the vessel.

He is a tall, well-proportioned man, of a slight figure ;

he is young, although his dark thoughtful face, the lower part of which is completely concealed by a thick moustache and short beard, seems grave almost to severity, and betrays that sad expression so rarely seen in youth, an expression which however suits his dark complexion, firmly-cut profile, and somewhat sunken cheeks, to perfection, while it only adds deeper interest to his fine Spanish eyes, which alone would suffice to light up any countenance however gloomy.

But while we have been describing him he has quitted his position, and now we see him walking, with a step which betrays him to be a landsman, towards the cabin door, which rises from the flat deck of the vessel at no great distance from the bulwarks.

He has soon reached it, but before bowing his proud head to descend the steep steps that lead into the saloon below, he pauses for one moment and looks back, as if in the vain hope of obtaining one look at the newly-arisen sun, which now seems to have disappeared altogether behind the clouds. As he does this, however, an electric thrill seems to run through his well-built and highly sensitive frame, and he is conscious that another being is watching him, although his eyes have scarcely yet caught sight of her outline.

For the short space of half a minute he seems to be undecided whether he should descend the steps, as he had at first intended, or approach this invisible person whose presence he seems to feel rather than see; but this moment is sufficient for the stranger to reveal herself through the mist; and, indeed, it would seem as if the very fog must give way before the lovely young girl who now stood before him like a vision of a saint surrounded by clouds.

It would be impossible to describe her. I might, perhaps, give easily enough a detailed account of her numerous charms—I might praise her faultless form, enlarge upon her beautifully-chiselled features, describe her fair and almost transparent complexion—but I could not possibly give my readers a fair idea of the wondrous grace that pervaded all. It would be vain to attempt to describe her lustrous and expressive eyes, which were shaded by long dark lashes, and were of the pure deep violet which harmonises so well with dark hair. Yet I suppose I must at least make an attempt to describe her to my readers, or else they will think me such a poor writer that they will throw down the book in disgust, and before many hours are over it will have found its way back again to Mr. Mudie's shelves.

She was not tall, yet anything but short; she was not thin, yet anything but stout; her figure, in one word, was perfection. Her bust was full and well-developed, her waist exceedingly small, her feet the smallest and yet the best-proportioned that ever trod a ship's deck, her hands small and beautifully formed. All this is easy enough to say, but to describe the face is really beyond my feeble pen, for there was *that* in it which was rather to be felt than seen—that indescribable *something* which makes even an ugly woman at times beautiful, and which when it exists in a handsome young face is enough to turn the head of the least impressionable man in the world. It is therefore most tantalising that this particular charm, which was the greatest characteristic of my beautiful heroine, must be passed over in silence, and that it is alone of her perfect features and lovely complexion that I am able to speak with any chance of being understood.

Her face was a perfect oval, and her features as delicately chiselled as those of the ideal statue of the Greek Slave. Her dress (which as I am speaking of a young lady I am bound to describe) consisted, I am sorry to say, but of a shabby and evidently very much worn black alpaca skirt, a coarse Scotch shawl which in its younger days might have passed for a *cachemire*, and a black silk mantilla, trimmed with a brownish black lace, of a cheap but showy pattern; but all this was worn with an elegance and grace which were altogether independent of dress.

The two figures remain for some seconds without speaking, and presently two exclamations float to our ears, and their echo is soon mingled in that of the approaching storm: "Doña Consuelo Fernandez!"—"Don Alfredo Villafranca!" These (as my readers will easily guess) came from the respective personages I have taken the liberty to introduce to them, and for whom I henceforward claim all their sympathy, and were uttered in a tone of the greatest surprise.

"You on deck at this early hour, Señorita!" exclaims the young man in the sweet language of Cervantes. "Are you not afraid of taking cold—and with the gale that is blowing too?"

"Oh no," she answers in the same language, of which the simplest word becomes a sweet melody in her mouth. "Oh no, I am not afraid of the weather, and although this is the first time I have been to sea, I have, thanks to the Blessed Virgin of Consolation, my beloved patroness, proved such a good sailor that the gale, or even the storm, has no terrors for me. I came up to see the sunrise, which I have often been told is a great sight at sea, and for this I left that horrid hole they are

pleased to call the ladies' cabin, at an earlier hour than usual, but the fog is so thick this morning that I have gained little by my early rising, for the sun, I fear, will not make its appearance to-day. But how is it that I find you here at this unearthly hour, Don Alfredo?"

"I can hardly tell you. I certainly never came to see the sunrise as you did, for I am not half romantic enough for that; besides the sight would have nothing new for me, and I was sure, from last night's gray sunset, that there would be no sunrise this morning, at least none worth looking at, but somehow or other I could not sleep this morning. I came on deck to watch the infuriated waves, a sight grand in the extreme, and which fills my mind with all-absorbing thoughts."

Consuelo now approaches him, and, with a sweet smile playing upon her rosy lips, murmurs, "Is that so?"

Another pause follows this but half-pronounced sentence, and it is again the young lady who at last breaks it.

"I should so like to know," she said, "what thoughts the waves have suggested to your mind?"

"Would you really care to know?" he asks, as if awakening from a dream, while his large dark eyes brighten up.

She answers only with a smile, but this seems enough for Alfredo, who, without saying another word, offers the pretty girl his arm, and soon they are again lost in the mist that conceals half the deck, but this time the graceful figure of the young girl and the manly form of her companion disappear together in the direction of the vessel's prow, whilst the wind continues whistling in the rigging, and the spray dashes violently once more over the deck of the *Pathfinder*.

CHAPTER II.

CONSUELO.

(Not by George Sand.)

BUT we are not going to part with our handsome hero and pretty heroine so easily as that, and, like them, we shall brave the storm and the wind and follow them, especially as the ship's motion, however violent, can have no possible effect upon our well-being.

In silence they proceeded towards the vessel's head, where she sat down on the top of some ropes which the sailors had left there to take care of themselves, and Alfredo, leaning against the forecastle rails, said, in a musing tone, "I know not why, but a ship like this, tossing on the wide, wide sea, against a headwind that seems to baffle her more at every plunge she makes, reminds me strangely of my own existence. I love to watch the dark waves as they race by with their leaping crests of foam, the dipping bowsprit, the slippery deck, the soaking canvas, the dripping spars, the men working with all their might to hold their own against the opposing elements; and, in one word, to compare our great expenditure of energy with the small results obtained. I compare all this to my own life, and however dark and wild they may be, they are neither so wild as the

hopes I once entertained, nor so deep as my present uncertainty."

"Ah, we are indeed but poor little weak ships after all," exclaimed the beautiful Consuelo thoughtfully; "weak little ships, lost in an ocean of uncertainty, tossed hither and thither by contrary winds and merciless waves."

"But is that a reason why we should give way and allow ourselves to be wrecked upon some inhospitable rocks, because the ocean of our existence is not quite as smooth, and the sky over our heads is not quite as bright, as we might have hoped? Ah, Miss Fernandez, I fear you are one of those who would have rest without labour and food without hunger; but do you not see that without the previous labour you could not appreciate the subsequent rest, and that without hunger you could not enjoy your meals?"

"Perhaps you are right, Mr. Villafranca; though your sentiments are certainly new to me—so different, oh so different, from those I am accustomed to hear every day! You would have me believe that Providence is just in all its way; but, then, why should some be rich and happy, and others poor and miserable? Why should there be so much want and hunger and poverty in the world? Ah, it is all very well to talk philosophy and sentiment. Poverty and want sound very well in poems, and, I dare say, look very picturesque in paintings, but, in reality, there is but little romance in dry bread and rags, and it strikes me that the praises of poverty are almost always sung by minstrels who chant them on golden harps—the poor poets who know what it really is to suffer may sing of poverty, but never in its praise."

"Your argument seems very good. Of course it is easy

to make a virtue of admiring rags when one is dressed in comfortable warm clothes, but yet I do believe there is a certain poetry in poverty, a certain charm and satisfaction in the thought that all we possess, little though it may be, has been earned by the work of our own hands. Besides, Miss Fernandez, you appear to think that all rich people must be happy and that the poor must necessarily be miserable—now do you really believe in your heart such to be the case?"

"I do not know; I have always been poor myself, so can hardly judge, and all the rich people I know seem to be very happy! Yet I suppose it is wrong to complain, for I must confess that I am very happy myself at times—that is to say, when my father is in good humour and my brother comes home in good spirits; then, indeed, I feel light-hearted and satisfied, and begin to think that perhaps my fate is not such a hard one as I had imagined in my long hours of despondency; but then I cannot open my window and look upon the world outside without seeing beautiful carriages pass by, drawn by splendid horses, in which lovely women recline amidst costly furs, wrapped in satins and velvets, with earrings only one of which would purchase us provisions for a whole year—and they seem so happy!—and then the vision of *my* happiness vanishes, and I feel once more so miserable!" I know it is foolish to speak like this; I know that I am teaching you to despise me when I would give the little I possess to gain your esteem, but somehow or other I cannot help it. I must open my heart to you or not speak at all—I cannot feign before you, Alfredo; only I wish you would speak as openly to me, for I am sure in your heart you, too, must admit how unsatisfactory life is at best. Let me ask you if

you have never been perplexed by the evils of life you have experienced, for, from what you have told me, it would seem that, like me, you have had more than your share of them?"

Her companion remained silent for a few seconds as if lost in profound meditation, his handsome face buried in his hands. At last he raised it, and his eyes met those of the beautiful girl which now for some time had been anxiously fixed upon him. A shudder ran through his frame as he did so, and, in a tone which betrayed his emotion, he answered—

"Life is at best most unsatisfactory, and you are right. How one's mind longs and struggles to penetrate the mysteries of its being. When we look around us how few do we see who are perfectly happy—quite contented with their lot—and indifferent to the vicissitudes of common wants! Every living thing except man seems to attain its full perfection. Man alone appears out of his element—dissatisfied, discontented, and faulty; the more he has the more he wants, nothing can fully satisfy him, and his existence does indeed seem without a definite aim."

"Ah, you are right. In what indeed can consist the great secret of happiness, which all seek to solve, one in one way, one in another, and so few succeed in discovering? It is of this that I incessantly think and dream, and I still remain lost, as if in a stormy sea of doubt, cast hither and thither by endless emotions, none of which I find sufficient to satisfy my desires and bring my troubled soul to its haven. Yet you, at least, Mr. Fernandez, have given me food for my thoughts, which I assure you until now have dwelt too much upon my own sorrows. There are so many clouds in our skies that a ray of sympathy,

like a sunbeam, seems to brighten in a moment the whole landscape and add new life to it."

"Yet, they say, there is a silver lining to every cloud, you know," Alfredo said, with the thoughtful smile peculiar to him playing upon his lips, a smile which, faint as it was, lent sudden life and brightness to his dark, grave face.

"Ah! but that is always on the side farthest from us," answered the young lady quietly; "always on the other side that the sun shines—that is to say, ever beyond our reach, and it is only now and then that we are allowed to see its borders."

"Happiness, though, believe me, beautiful Consuelo, is often within our reach. We see it, in fact, because it is so near; and we look over it and grasp at distant and more imposing objects only because they are wrapped in the false charms with which distance invests them. Yet it seems to me that only one thing is wanting to enable us to take the voyage of life in a spirit of cheerfulness, and without the danger of a fatal shipwreck upon its many rocks, and even without the fear of its merciless waves."

Consuelo lent a greedy ear to all this, her pretty face sparkling with the intelligence which lighted up her features, and it was easy to see how deep an interest she took in matters to which one would think her age and her education would have made her indifferent.

"And that is?" she murmured, in a low voice which was almost lost in the roar of the storm.

"A helpmate!—a sympathetic companion, on whom we can trust for advice, and rely for aid. Such a being as I have until now in vain sought, and yet without whom the happiest life can be but incomplete."

The soft yet earnest and eloquent tone of Alfredo's voice fell upon pleased and willing ears, and the sweet fair face before him blushed deeply ere he had half pronounced these last words, for her heart told her only too plainly what was coming.

"Consuelo," he added, taking her hand in his, "will you permit me to address you thus?" He did not wait for an answer, but in a low and passionate voice, which reached her very soul, thus proceeded—

"Consuelo, your very name indicates your mission upon earth. You are an angel sent by God to bring consolation to His unhappy children. Consuelo—will you be my guardian angel—the angel that will console me, and make me the happiest of beings?"

Her strong emotion, which only added to her beauty, prevented her from speaking, and it was he who after a few seconds continued—

"Consuelo, I love you. You must have known this from the first, for your beauty is such as to inspire the most ardent passion in any man, but I love you for your noble and thoughtful soul, not for your personal beauty alone, and if to-morrow a horrible illness were to deprive you of that beauty which makes you so charming to all, I should still love you as passionately as before."

Her lips quivered faintly, and she turned her head away, as if fearing to meet his penetrating gaze, whilst tears rose to her eyes, and her hand trembled when he pressed it against his beating heart.

"You speak hastily," she murmured; "we have scarcely known each other more than a week, and you already speak of love—of love! Oh, you do not know how wrong it is to speak like this of love to a poor foolish

girl, who, in her vanity, believes every word you utter! Nay, I do not say you are trying to deceive me; I only believe that you are deceiving yourself. Remember I am the only woman on board—at least the only young one—and that you have been attracted by my beauty, for I do not pretend to ignore the only advantage I can boast of—that you have spoken to me many times, and, that as neither of us had aught else to do, we have passed long hours together. That we have sympathised in many things, it is true; but tell me, is this enough to inspire you with love? Can your noble nature, Alfredo, be satisfied with so little? I am not the angel you suppose. I know my faults. I am ambitious—envious; I hate often when I should pity. Oh, when I compare myself to you, my heart tells me that I am not fit to be your wife, and the heart always speaks the truth, you know.”

As she spoke, the tears which had veiled her soft violet eyes—the tears of a yearning sympathy, which was love, though she scarcely knew it—now streamed down her lovely cheeks.

“Only to know and converse with you as I have done is to love you; and I feel convinced, Consuelo, that you will learn to love me in time, and I shall do my best, I swear to you, to make you the happiest of wives. It is true that I cannot offer you a coronet or a fortune, but my love will compensate for both, and I can promise you that countesses and millionaires will envy our happiness. Only bid me hope, and I shall become another being.”

The wind whistled through the rigging with greater violence than ever, and the spray dashed over the bow with more strength than before. Consuelo looked up, and, casting her eyes around her, saw the stormy sea

with its foaming waves in every direction—water and sky, sky and water, nothing else for miles and miles around, and her spirit sank within her. She felt how lonely and how unprotected she was, and her eyes almost involuntarily sought those of Alfredo as she looked up at him with an almost worshipping fondness.

"You see," he cried, "you like me better than you will allow, and your own instinct tells you to seek for protection with me," and a soft lingering passionate kiss finished his words.

No answer came from her lips—perhaps because they were so tightly pressed against his, for he had now clasped her in his arms, and held her close against his heart—against his passionate heart—which had never beaten thus until this moment.

For a moment Consuelo surrendered herself to that sweet intoxication; but her breathless trance endured only a few seconds; she suddenly drew herself away from his embrace, and looked straight up into his eyes with that deep, yet exquisitely soft, glance of hers, that possessed such inexhaustible tenderness and such an indescribable power of expression.

"I cannot deny it" she murmured. "Alfredo, I love you! . . . but do not ask me to make any promises: do not ask me to make any rash promises. I cannot. Ah, indeed I cannot!"

"My angel!" he exclaimed; and he would again have pressed her to his heart had she allowed him, but she had regained her self-command now, and in a comparatively calm voice she said—

"Though scarcely twenty yet, and though no man has ever spoken to me before as you have spoken this morning, yet I am not ignorant of what love really is. My

poor mother's marriage was one of love, and it proved anything but a happy one. She was one of many sisters, the daughters of a country gentleman of Old Castille. Her parents were not rich, but while they lived quietly in their old manor house they never felt the want of money. One day my grandmother was suddenly called to the Capital to see a rich old aunt who was dangerously ill, and who, it was supposed, would leave them all her money; my mother and two of her sisters accompanied her. The old lady was ill for many months, but at last recovered. During their stay in her house it seems they saw a great many people, for the rich aunt kept open house, and as soon as she began to recover all her friends hastened to pay her their congratulations, for she was so very well off. Amongst these there was a rich old bachelor who paid his court to my mother—who was the prettiest of the three sisters—and would have married her had she not fallen in love with my father, who was at that time a handsome young *employé* in the Foreign Office. Both her mother and her aunt did all they could to prevent it, for he had neither money, nor family connections that could have helped him to rise in the office—you know in Spain everything depends upon favour—but she loved him, and love conquered all. They were married, to the great disgust of the old aunt, who soon afterwards died, leaving all her property to some distant cousins, and to the horror of her father and mother, who from that day believed her the cause of the old lady's estrangement, and would never speak to her again nor help her in any way. The first six months were happy enough, but when the Ministry fell, and my poor father was sent out of office, and found himself without any possible means with which to sustain her in

the comfort, and, to a certain extent, luxury, in which she had been brought up, things began to look gloomy. She grew discontented; he grew cross. As the beauty of the family she had always been a spoiled child, and she now thought herself ill-used, badly treated, deceived.

Need I go on? No, the story is common enough now-a-days, particularly in our unfortunate country where people are educated to be refined gentlemen and ladies when they cannot possibly keep up their position and live as such. And their love—the love that had caused this romantic union, what had become of it? Ah, gone—gone for ever: for no love, believe me, can be proof against the miseries of poverty. Ah, Alfredo! how often have I heard my poor dear mother say, ‘my child, love is a delirium—a dream—a vain, empty dream; I may almost say, a disease of the brain. It is full of disturbance; it is unequal, capricious, unjust; its felicity, when at the highest, is nearest to its end. One step, and it is into the unfathomable gulf of woe that we fall. While the object loved is still unattained, life is darker than the darkest night; when attained, the flame is so great that it blinds, and finishes by consuming us. And, when lost—all, all is lost—the universe is nothing! Love is but a dream, Consuelo; may God protect you from its sting! It is a horrible nightmare that enfeebles your soul, and makes you suffer as much as if it were all a reality, and when you wake with the rays of the morning sun you find it has all been an empty dream!’ These were her words, not once, but on many, many occasions, and as I had the proof before my eyes, I could not close them to the miseries of her unfortunate marriage. Oh, Alfredo, forget this mad love—forget me; but forgive my words if they have pained you. Say

you will forget me; oh, would to God I could forget you!"

While she was speaking, this inward conviction that what she said was the pure truth kept up her courage, but when she had finished, and her eyes met those of her lover, on whom her words had produced a feeling akin to despair, her courage failed her. She had made up her mind to reject his love—to try and convince him of his folly—but the heart is a poor logician. It flies to its object, overleaping all reason, and as often is satisfied with error as with truth. Her heart told her that it loved Alfredo, and not all her good resolutions put together could counterbalance this newly-awakened passion, of whose power, though she pretended to know so much, she was still as ignorant as she had been till the eve of its first awakening. With the last exclamation of the long and incoherent speech which had poured with such vehemence from her heart—for her passionate nature rebelled against the conclusion she had come to from the remembrance of her mother's experience—her courage failed her completely, and again she hid her face on her lover's shoulder.

"Consuelo!" he cried, "in vain you try to deceive yourself. You love me! Ah, my heart tells me so, and you say yourself the heart cannot mislead us."

"Alfredo, Alfredo," she murmured, her words rendered almost inarticulate by her emotion, "I am convinced at last that what my mother felt was not—could not have been—love, if what I now feel for you is love, for I am sure I could brave anything for your sake. I could even undergo poverty and want without a murmur if you will only look at me always as you do at this moment, Alfredo!"

"My Consuelo! your noble heart has conquered at last. You love me as I have dreamt of being loved—as Romeo was loved, as Abelard and Antony were loved—as you are loved by me. I have not an empire to offer like Antony, but neither would I forego your love for an empire."

"Ah, Alfredo, I believe you, and I assure you that for my part I could not love you more—no, not even if you were an emperor."

Alfredo looked once more at the beautiful girl beside him, with passionate gaze, ending, as such gazes always end, in a passionate kiss.

How long this love-scene, alternating between hopes and fears, might have lasted is an open question, and most probably the newly-risen sun would have been high in the heavens ere this young couple had said half they had to communicate to one another—for we are wonderfully communicative in our first impulses of love—but just at that moment a wave higher than the rest suddenly rose from the deep dark sea, and its crest of white foam, overleaping the bulwarks, in less than one second inundated the loving pair with torrents of water.

This sea-bath would have been enough to bring any one to their senses—even a couple of lovers; and Alfredo, perceiving how drenched the poor young girl was, and how inadequate were her garments to resist the salt water, insisted upon her going below to seek for shelter in the little cabin, in which he assured her he would soon rejoin her.

She obeyed him with reluctance, for she knew that in the cabin they could not possibly remain alone for any length of time, particularly when blowing such a gale, and she would have gladly braved both the sea and the rain to have remained a few hours more alone with her lover.

CHAPTER III.

THE PATHFINDER.

(*Not by Fennimore Cooper.*)

WITH a reluctant step the beautiful Consuelo descended the steep stairs that led to the cabin, which was small and shabbily furnished, for the *Pathfinder* was anything but a first-rate vessel, and, having all the port-holes closed on account of the inclemency of the weather, the atmosphere in it was so close and oppressive that the pretty Spanish heroine nearly fainted as she entered it.

At first it would have been difficult to distinguish the passengers there assembled, as the light that came through the thick and dirty glass of the skylight was hardly sufficient to light up that gloomy interior, but one glance was sufficient to perceive that it was occupied by several people all more or less suffering from the roughness of the sea, and, as far as one could guess under such disadvantageous circumstances, of a very second or even third-rate appearance.

Had we followed our heroine into that cabin we should have been puzzled to know in which direction to advance; but not so Consuelo, who by this time had got used to its semi-darkness and gloom, and knowing everybody there, she walked straight up to the further end, and bowing to

the captain as she passed, who was busy discussing his breakfast, seated herself between a middle-aged man, with a dark gloomy face, and a younger man, dressed in a light tweed suit.

"Why, Consuelo," exclaimed the latter as he set down his cup of coffee, "we were wondering what had become of you. I do believe now you have been on deck! You are a foolish girl, and if you go on tempting Providence like this day after day, you will end by catching a most desperate cold—that you will. I think the best thing you can do is to go and change your dress."

This was said in a rough yet not unkind way, and the girl's face lit up with joy as she bent over the young man and affectionately pressed her lips to his brow.

"Good morning, my dear Juan," she said; "you are always thoughtful and kind for me, but I am not as wet as I look, I assure you."

"Oh, don't bother me with your eternal kissing. You women think you can mend everything with a kiss. There, that's enough; now go and take off your wet clothes, I tell you."

Consuelo's look of joy left her face as suddenly as it had come, and, with a resigned air, she was going to rise to obey her brother's command, for this man, as my reader must have guessed, stood in such relationship to her—when the voice of the middle-aged man on the other side caused her to turn round.

"So you are going already—and like that, without even saying, 'How do you do?' to your poor papa. Well, I must say that you are cold."

"Oh, father, forgive me!" she cried, taking his thin hand in hers and pressing her lips to his forehead, as she had done a moment before to that of her brother.

"I have been on deck all the morning, and this horrible cabin seems so dark and stuffy after the open air, that I hardly know what I am about; but you will forgive me, won't you—like a dear father as you are?"

Her manner was so winning and her beautiful eyes shone with such a loving expression as she said this, that even her hard-hearted father was touched, and, drawing her close to him, in his turn, affectionately imprinted a kiss upon her fresh cheek.

"Ah, you little enchantress," he muttered, "you know very well I can refuse you nothing. But now sit down and eat your breakfast, or there will be none left for you. Remember the proverb, '*Make hay while the sun shines.*'"

"But she must change her clothes first; I insist upon that; I won't have her catch a cold."

This was said by Juan, who, seeing that his sister was going to resume her place at the table in accordance with her father's wish, thought it fit to interfere.

"If she does she will lose her breakfast, that's all," exclaimed Mr. Fernandez, and then, recurring to one of his favourite proverbs, he added, "'*A sparrow in the hand,*' remember, '*is better than a buzzard on the wing.*'"

"Oh, never mind *that*; I am sure she deserves it if she will go on deck like this, in spite of the storm, to chat with that fellow Villafranca."

Consuelo's cheeks flushed crimson when these words reached her ears, and in a trembling voice she exclaimed—

"How can you speak like that, Juan? . . . How dare you accuse Mr. Villafranca of . . . ?"

"Oh! Now, you want us to believe that you did not go up to see him. . . . Very well; you can try and deceive our father if you like, but do not ask *me* to believe you when you say, 'I know nothing about

Mr. Villafranca," and the young fellow burst into a loud rude laugh that sounded through the long cabin like an echo of the storm blowing outside.

"You may believe me or not as you will, Juan, but you know very well that between that gentleman and myself there is nothing for you to laugh at."

"Well! he is uncommonly spooney all the same, and I assure you that I am not the only one on board who has noticed your goings on; there, go and change your dress."

"If you do, Consuelo," broke in her father, "by St. Joseph you'll get no breakfast, and that's a shame considering the money I had to pay for it beforehand, when we left Cadiz; but, of course, I was quite prepared to be cheated and swindled in every possible and impossible way, and I shall get no redress, never mind how much I swear at the captain or the steward or the cook, for they all seem to play into each other's hands in order to get as much money out of the passengers as they possibly can."

I suppose the captain was so used to this way of speaking that he had become indifferent, for, though he must necessarily have heard what had been said, he went on eating his breakfast without noticing the base insinuation.

"Never mind, father, about her breakfast; I'll bet she does not want any; people in love never do—but just think how expensive it will be if she were to get ill. Doctors in London are awful swells and charge a fortune for their fees."

This last argument seemed to be conclusive, and Mr. Fernandez now joined with his son in urging the beautiful Consuelo to enter the ladies' cabin and change her wet clothes, which she did after a little persuading; and, if the truth must be told, she went with great

pleasure, for her brother's chaffing and her father's insistence were more than she could bear so soon after the tender, passionate words of affection she had heard on deck from her lover.

While my heroine is changing her dress, I will take the opportunity of describing to my readers her father and brother, both of whom, if I am not greatly mistaken, will play most important parts in the present narrative.

Mr. Fernandez junior, or Don Juan Fernandez, as he was called in his own country, was a young man of about six and twenty, not perhaps much above the middle height, yet so narrow across the shoulders, and so small in the waist, that he appeared exceedingly tall. His face was singularly handsome and wonderfully striking, yet handsome only after a purely animal type of beauty; his nose was straight, his forehead rather low and half concealed by thick curls of a dark reddish brown, which were cut short behind; his eyes were large and expressive, like those of his sister, but with less spiritual light in them; his lips were thin and almost hidden by a thick reddish moustache; his cheek bones were rather too prominent, perhaps; but these also were half concealed by thick whiskers, the same as the lower part of his face, which otherwise might have looked too heavy, and would have given a physiologist too great an insight into his character. Yet he was a very handsome man, and handsome because so thoroughly manly, in spite of his wonderful complexion, perfect features, soft silky hair, and small delicate feet and hands, which many a woman might have envied. Indeed, the only fault that might strike one was that the eyes, which were intensely black, were placed a little too near together; but this fact only imparted a greater intensity to his glance, which

added to, rather that detracted from, the general effect of his appearance.

Altogether he was a second edition of his sister, perhaps even in some respects a more beautiful one, but his face, when closely examined, lacked the soul which reflected in every feature of hers; and his eyes, though large and penetrating, had too hard and cold an expression, and could not be compared with her soft almond-shaped violet-tinted orbs.

Mr. Fernandez the father was a very different person, and any one could see with one glance that his children did not inherit their great beauty from him. He was rather a small man, exceedingly thin, with a very yellow complexion, and his features were hard and perhaps too strongly marked, though rather classical in their outline. His eyes were small but bright and dark, and their gaze was sharp, keen, and at times disagreeable. He was closely shaved excepting upon the upper lip, where a heavy moustache overhung his mouth and partly concealed it. As to the quantity and colour of his hair it would be impossible for me to give my readers any idea, for he always wore a wig of dark curly hair, which made his severe, harsh countenance still more repulsive, though in any one else it might have seemed ludicrous.

He was not a clever man, at least not what is usually called a clever man; but he made free use of proverbs in his conversation, and this alone gave a sort of pedantry to his speech. Spain is rich in Proverbial Philosophy—the common sense of the lower classes is condensed into these terse and convenient phrases, which pass from hand to hand, or rather from mouth to mouth, like the shillings and pence of conversation. Like a few phrases of slang or *argot*, which convey in portable shape the nebulous ideas

of the vulgar; a judicious use of proverbs makes the haziest utterances seem distinct and vigorous. They are, therefore, invaluable treasures to dunces with good memories. Mr. Fernandez knew this, and he made a free use of them, bringing one in whenever he possibly could. There was thus always a fund of forethought and prudence, and a cunning knowledge of human nature, contained in these condensed apologues of his, that one would have sought for in vain in the real nature of his character.

We have already learnt a little of the history of this man from his daughter, and to see him was sufficient to understand why his wife had not led the happiest of lives with him, and why her love had been of such short duration; in fact, one could not help wondering how such a man could have inspired love in any one, even when he was young and prosperous. We know, from the beautiful Consuelo, that they were now very poor—to what extent, however, it would be difficult to guess, for evidently neither the daughter's education nor that of the son had been by any means neglected; and, indeed, in every respect the Fernandez' were of the better class.

But these anomalies are only too common in Spain, where living is comparatively cheap, and men are almost always Nature's gentlemen. Mr. Fernandez, though by no means the son of a noble house, was of honourable enough descent. His family, however, were all poor, and he had begun life as a student in one of the large Castilian Universities, where he had made the acquaintance of a rising politician—in Spain every man is a politician—who, when his party was in power, and he could exercise a little influence, had obtained for him the post of clerk in the Foreign Office, which he occupied

when he first met the handsome young lady who was destined to become his wife.

I shall not pretend to say if he had ever really loved her or not, for that is not a point of any consequence for the development of this story; but if he was influenced in the choice of a wife by her beauty, I think I can venture to say that he was still more so by the prospect of inheriting something from her well-to-do parents, and particularly from the rich old aunt, at whose house he had made her acquaintance.

They were married, as my readers already know, against the wishes of her family, and consequently the money he expected from them never made its appearance. No wonder therefore that his love should have cooled down, and indeed soon afterwards have been numbered amongst the things of the past, for these things will happen sometimes even in the most romantic and least matter-of-fact countries.

When that Ministry fell, and his friend the rising politician was no longer in power, he had to turn out of his comfortable corner in the Palace of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and, as far as I am aware, I do not think Europe missed him very much. Mr. Fernandez, however, being utterly unable to procure the necessary money for the maintenance of himself and of his rising family in any other way, was put to great inconvenience. His expenses increased daily as his children grew up, and his income decreased even more rapidly, until it became almost infinitesimal, and the time was approaching when he felt that to make the former square with the latter would be something like attempting to square the circle. He therefore pinched and scraped and hoarded until pinching and scraping and hoarding became his second self.

If his children had not been naturally clever and intelligent, they would probably never have had any education at all, but, fortunately for them and for him, they were both highly intelligent and fond of study, though in very different ways.

Consuelo, who was really good, and loved her father dearly, though she was by no means blind to his many faults, had lost no opportunity of improving her mind, and thus, though by no means an accomplished young lady as the world goes, she was anything but an ignorant one—for poverty and necessity often teach us things which all the governesses and the masters in the world would in vain toil night and day to make us even understand. For the last few years Consuelo had been her father's housekeeper, and the whole of the household duties had rested almost entirely upon her ever since she had returned home from the second-rate school at which she had acquired the first rudiments of education.

Juan, on the other hand, though equally clever, and in some respects even quicker and brighter, had learnt but little at the small college which he had attended while a boy; but in compensation he had made a few friends there, who, in their turn, had helped him on to other acquaintances, and these had opened to him a circle to which neither by his birth nor position could he ever have hoped to aspire. This, of course, had given him the ways and manners of a gentleman, and had in the course of time converted him, in spite of his position, into an agreeable and highly intelligent companion, whose society was sought for and esteemed in the richest and most convivial, if not in the highest, circles of Madrid society.

But this natural brilliancy which had opened to him

the doors of society, and which had gradually transformed him into a highly agreeable and amusing if not a very refined gentleman, had also proved detrimental to him in more ways than one, for it had made him dissatisfied with his father and sister, and with their mode of life. He loved his sister dearly in his heart, yet, as he could never hope to take her into "his world" and introduce her to "his friends," he had thus gradually become more and more indifferent to her and to his father, whom he but seldom saw, and to his mind, dazzled as it was by the vain show of fashion and worldliness amongst which he lived, the poorly dressed and unpretending image of his sister presented itself under anything but flattering circumstances.

Such had been the life of these three persons—Consuelo, the devoted daughter and sister, denying herself everything for the good of a selfish father and a reckless brother; Juan, spending his sister's small savings in dissipation, occasionally making a little money either at billiards or cards, which he invariably kept for himself; and the father spending his days at the doors of public offices, paying his court to some Minister or other, and vainly beseeching an appointment from men in office, however subordinate, and his nights in some *café* or eating-house, playing dominoes and talking politics with half a dozen idlers like himself, who would fain live upon their country and then accuse her of ingratitude for neglecting them when their special party was out of office, and returning late at night to his home to grumble at, and worry his poor daughter. Such had been their life for some time, when one day—Mr. Fernandez more convinced than ever of the ingratitude of his country, and thoroughly disgusted with the men

of his own party, who, though in power at last, had actually forgotten to re-appoint him to the comfortable sinecure he had before occupied under them, although, as he said himself, he had stuck by them through three revolutions, and had sacrificed his own convictions to keep with his party, who had lately completely transformed their programme, as parties in Spain sometimes will do, to the utter bewilderment of foreigners—he proposed to his son and daughter to quit Spain altogether and to emigrate to England—"to England, the land of gold and freedom!"

This proposition was not so strange as it may at first appear, particularly coming from a Spaniard, for it had often suggested itself to their minds when most pressed for money, or when their small resources seemed almost to have come to an end.

A great many years before, in fact before Mr. Fernandez's marriage, his sister had married a young Englishman, by name James Jobkin, employed in Spain at the time in the construction of some railway. The railway finished, Mr. Jobkin and his wife had left the country and never returned to it; but though there was very little affection between Mr. Fernandez and his sister, who happened to be considerably older than himself, yet they had corresponded at intervals, and from her letters the worthy Clerk of the Foreign Office had learnt that Mr. Jobkin had taken to a new kind of business—*what* it was he had been unable to make out—that he had entered a house of some note in the city of London—that this house had failed—that he had begun a new course of speculation—that all his speculations had proved successful—that he was amassing great wealth—that they had taken a beautiful house and were fur-

nishing it in the best and most fashionable style—and at last, in a moment of delight at her unexpected good fortune, Mrs. Jobkin wrote that both she and her husband would be very happy if they could in any way assist him or his family, and that if they ever wanted a home they were to come and live with them in their beautiful palace situated in Montague Place, Russell Square, London, W.C.

Since receiving this really kind letter Mr. Fernandez had not heard again from his sister. She was either too much occupied with the new duties devolving upon her as a leader of fashion to write to her brother; or she had repented of that first impulse which had caused her to write that affectionate and generous letter in which she offered him and his children a home.

A few years later the news came of Mr. Jobkin's death, and very soon afterwards—in the first impulse of her sorrow—she again repeated the invitation. It was this letter that had decided them to quit Spain. At first the fear of having to meet the cold, stiff, matter-of-fact James Jobkin, whom Mr. Fernandez remembered as a very disagreeable and unsociable being, had prevented him from availing himself of his sister's kind invitation, but now that Mr. Jobkin was no more, and Mrs. Jobkin was a rich widow, with only one son, and with a large part of the immense fortune left by her late husband entirely at her own disposal, there could be no more obstacles or objections to their visit to England; and consequently both Consuelo and Juan, who were charmed with the idea of travelling, devoted all their spare time to learning English. Mr. Fernandez said he was too old and too lazy to take the trouble, and as they were both quick and had been brought up in that school which often proves the best master, they had but little trouble

in learning it, and at the end of three months could read Ollendorff through, and almost understand him.

Subsequently they had left Madrid, sold the few shabby articles of furniture they possessed, and with the money they brought paid their landlord the rent of the past two years, which Mr. Fernandez, under one pretext or another, had delayed doing all that time. He had then proceeded to his favourite *café* in the Puerta del Sol, taken an affectionate farewell of his fellow *employés* out of employ, and bewailed with them for the last time, over a bottle of lemonade *purgante*, the misfortunes of the country they would fain serve, and which, blindly to its own interest, persisted in rejecting their services; while Juan, on his side, paid a few visits of farewell to his chums, visited his old haunts for the last time, and indulged in a pathetic game of billiards with his greatest bosom friend—at which, let me state, for the credit of his powers in commanding his feelings under the most trying circumstances, he managed to win a considerable amount of money, and returned home ready to start the next morning none the worse for the innumerable “last bottles” of champagne he had drained at the various casinos and dancing-rooms to drown the bitterness of his grief at having to part from the many dear friends and companions whom he had managed to amuse and swindle, to their complete satisfaction, for so many years.

As for Consuelo, she had no friends to say good-bye to. She knew no one outside the shabby third-floor which she had for so long considered her home. She had known nothing but poverty; and she, for one, quitted Madrid with a light heart and a pure conscience, which perhaps is more than could have been said either for her father or her brother if all the truth had been known.

They had then proceeded in a third-class carriage to Bilbao, where they had taken their passage in the cheapest vessel sailing that week for London, for their money was pretty nearly exhausted by this time, and thus it is that I am able to have the honour of introducing this highly interesting family to my readers, who otherwise would have remained for ever ignorant even of their existence.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE.

(Not by Lady Charlotte Bury).

BUT the beautiful Consuelo had now changed her dress—though this affair must have been a far more difficult one than might at first be imagined, when one takes into consideration the size of the ladies' cabin, and the number of suffering females therein assembled, with the incessant pitching and rocking of the ship—and was now once more seated between her father and her brother, who were still doing ample justice to the breakfast before them, and devouring one dish after another in a manner that was eminently suggestive of indigestion.

She was, however, too much moved by what had passed between that handsome fellow-passenger and herself on deck that morning, to be able to partake with anything like an appetite of the uninviting dishes which, in spite of Mr. Fernandez's caution, still remained upon the board for her to eat of if she would; and after sitting there for some time she rose when her father did, and went up again with him on deck, the storm having now subsided in some measure, while Juan remained in the main cabin to play cards with some of the other passengers.

The rest of the day passed as days at sea do pass—no one could say how. She read a little, she wrote an exercise out of her inseparable "Ollendorff," she played a game of dominoes with her father, she walked for nearly two hours, at different times, up and down the deck, and last, although in her estimation, first of all, she had another long talk with Alfredo, which caused her brother to exclaim when she went down to the cabin for supper, "Well, Consuelo, if that fellow is not in love with you, you must be very much in love with him,"—a remark which only made the poor girl laugh and blush more than ever; she felt so happy at that moment with her lover's passionate words still resounding in her ears like the strains of some sweet melody!

The following day was passed much in the same way, and might have been taken for a counterpart of the former one had it not been that the gale had now ceased, and the sea was beginning to settle down into its accustomed tranquility, while the blue sky once more smiled sunnily over everything.

This day was, however, particularly memorable for Consuelo, as it was on this afternoon that her lover told her the story of his life, while they sat side by side on the deck watching the many sea-gulls which hovered around the vessel, for they were approaching land, and the high white cliffs of England were almost in sight.

"Although my father seems so confident as to the success of this journey of ours," she said soon after taking her seat beside him, "I cannot say I share all his hopes. My aunt has never seen either Juan or me; what reason can we have therefore to believe that she loves us or even that she cares for us at all? Besides, my father's recollection of her is anything but a pleasant one, and it

would seem, from what I have often heard him say, that when young they were never very fond of each other. Since then she has lived entirely in England, and has not seen him for years and years, and from being a poor man's daughter, and a still poorer man's wife, she has suddenly become a rich widow. Now my experience of humanity tells me that neither of these changes could possibly increase her love for her brother, but rather, on the contrary, diminish it; but then I may be wrong; my sphere of observation having been, I must confess, a very limited one, I dare say my opinions of humanity are entirely mistaken ones."

"I am sorry to hear you speak like this, Consuelo," he said, and he spoke with a sad, passionate earnestness. "I see you have but little hope left, and life is indeed a hard trial when the sweet dreams which can alone brighten its dreary reality cease to accompany it."

"My existence until now, Alfredo," she answered, with an almost bitter smile playing upon her sweet lips, "has been a great deal too matter-of-fact to inspire me with many dreams—dreams such as you speak of. Ah, you little know what I have suffered—the trials I have gone through; and I must confess that I do not yet see my way out of them, for I cannot believe that our aunt will really take us into her home and adopt Juan and me—particularly as she has a child of her own—and I know that money will not go any further in London than it does in Madrid, if, indeed, it will go so far."

"You have led a sad life, my angel. Your trials have been great; but remember that the finest natures, like the truest steel, must be tempered in the hottest furnace. So much caloric would be thrown away on an inferior metal."

"Ah, yes," she answered, "this baser metal must be purified yet ere it can hope to mix with the pure gold of your nature, Alfredo." There was a thrill in her voice which went direct to his heart and made him tremble.

"You are greatly mistaken in me, Consuelo," he said, taking her hand in his. "I am by no means the perfect being you imagine, and at times when I compare myself with you I cannot but confess that you are my superior in every way. If you possess less of the coolness which springs from constitutional insensibility to danger, and which I suppose is more or less common to all men, you have infinitely more of that determined spirit which is the true strength of the mind, and which can alone give that indomitable courage which will acknowledge no failure for a defeat, and which alone will remain firm at its post, bearing up bravely even against the sickness and depressions of unremitting pain. I have suffered much, and suffered struggling constantly against fate, and often even cursing that very fate—not like you, patiently as an angel, resignedly as a saint. I have had but few sunny days in the whole of my existence, and even these have ever been shadowed by the approach of coming clouds; and now, if you see me comparatively resigned, it is only because you meet me running away from my destiny—at least so I imagine—but a stronger reason is, that I am by your side, my beloved one."

She listened, with wondering eyes, full of fire, which sparkled through her tears.

"Why are you going to England?" she said, after a short pause. "I have often been on the point of asking you that question, and I have always refrained, fearing you might think me too inquisitive."

"Oh, my Consuelo! how could such a thought ever

cross your mind? Ah! would that the time had already come when there shall be no more secrets between us! But I will tell you my reasons for leaving Spain—the reasons which I shall always bless, because they have led to our meeting, and because they will, I am convinced, lead to our future happiness. I am, as I think I have already told you, the fourth son of a country squire. My father—a good old gentleman of the old school—lives quietly in his manor-house near Jaen, in Andalusia, which is all that remains to us of the once extensive possessions of the Villafrancas. My eldest brother, Carlos, lives with him, and his wife keeps house for them; for my mother died some time ago. My two other brothers and I were sent, when almost children, to the University of Alcala, whence we of course proceeded, as every young man in Spain will ever do, to the Capital. My brothers soon settled down—the one as a doctor, the other as a lawyer—and although they are as poor as rats, for, unfortunately, Madrid is already overcrowded with physicians and lawyers—and though in reality fond of work and persevering enough, yet neither of them possesses any great genius for their respective professions—they manage however to live on somehow. I—though in the college people used to say I was the brightest and cleverest of the three—never settle down to anything. In vain did I try different ways of making my fortune. I always failed; disappointments and unexpected obstacles baffled me in every new undertaking I entered upon. I had no profession to fall back upon like my brothers, and I was certainly most unfortunate in all my experiments. One summer, disgusted with myself and with the meaningless, aimless life I led in Madrid, I took the train for the south, and ventured once more

to the home of my ancestors. Both my father and my brother Carlos received me with open arms, and I felt almost like the Prodigal Son when I once more took my old seat at the homely family board. I remained the whole of that summer with them, and it was then, that by a strange and unexpected accident, I happened to make the acquaintance of the Marquis of Belgrave, the gentleman I am now going to England to see, and he perhaps, is the only man in the whole world whom I may call my friend."

"It is strange how often the smallest incident influences the entire course of our lives far more than the greatest events could ever do from which we expect the most important results." This was said by Consuelo, who, with her hand still clasped in Alfredo's, had been listening attentively to his narrative, and now seemed almost lost in a reverie evidently suggested to her imaginative mind by his last words.

"You are right, Consuelo," he said, answering her unspoken thoughts perhaps more than her words, and fixing his gaze on her pale lovely face. "If it had not been for the adventure, which I am now going to relate to you, most likely we two should never have met, and both our lives would have been for ever incomplete. Yes, Consuelo, I am sure of this now; for I know that I could never be happy without you; and had I never seen you, should never have known what happiness really was."

He once more looked at her with that passionate adoring look which only a lover can command, and he thus continued the narrative of his life:—

"One day I was shooting in the woods above my father's home in the mountains of Cordova, when I was

suddenly startled by repeated cries as if of men in the utmost danger. I ran to the place from which I thought the cries proceeded, and, to my horror, I beheld a man in a torn hunting dress, with bare head and half-closed eyes, flying towards me faster than I have ever beheld a man run before in my life; whilst, behind him, at an alarmingly short distance, I saw a wild boar—a terrible wild boar—evidently wounded, with blood-thirsty eyes and froth-covered jaws, pursuing him furiously. The man had evidently run for a long distance, and was already almost exhausted, and the ferocious animal was close upon him, when instinctively, and almost without thinking what I was doing, I fired upon it, and the next moment I saw the savage beast roll dead down the side of the mountain. It was a dangerous thing to do; and most likely if I had waited to think I should not have dared to do it, for the wild animal was almost upon the man, and if I had missed would probably have made me his prey, for I should not even have had time to re-load my gun; besides I might have shot the man instead of the boar, for they were almost in a line at that moment; but, fortunately, I was a good marksman, and my one shot sent the brute head over heels into the abyss at the foot of the mountain, while the terrified sportsman fell exhausted at my feet.

“My first idea was to go in search of the men whose shouts I had heard, and who were evidently his companions; but I suppose they had gone on the wrong track, and were already far away and beyond the reach of my voice, for I heard no more of them, and all my endeavours to find them proved fruitless. I then returned to the man I had saved, and, seeing that he was still unconscious, and was likely to remain so for some time—

for the shock he had sustained must indeed have been frightful—I took him upon my back and carried him as well as I could to my father's home; and this was no easy task, for he was a large man, a great deal taller than myself, and the distance was some miles, but I at length succeeded in getting him home, though at the end of the journey I was almost as exhausted and as senseless as he was himself. I then gave him into the charge of my brother's wife, who had him conveyed to bed, promising to take the greatest care of him. I, in my turn, went to lie down and sleep off the effects of my fatigue. The next morning I was as fresh as ever, but the unfortunate sportsman was now delirious; and at my father's request I rode into the neighbouring village for a doctor, who, when he saw the patient, pronounced him in the greatest danger. A long and serious illness followed, during which I, having been the one who had brought him home, felt compelled to nurse him; and many sleepless nights did I pass by his bed-side, for he was delirious almost all the time, and the doctors said required the most careful attention. All this time we were entirely ignorant as to who he was, for all our inquiries had proved fruitless, and his companions were never found. We afterwards discovered—but not till a long time afterwards—that these men, who had been only keepers and guides, fearing to be called to account for their master's death—for they supposed him dead—had fled to some distant town, and had remained there concealed. But we had no means of ascertaining either his name or station. He was evidently a foreigner—a German or an Englishman, we were not very sure which—but we concluded he was from the north for his skin was exceedingly fair, and his hair and whiskers were

of a very light brown. Altogether I think he is the handsomest man I have ever seen, and the best and kindest one too: for when he at last recovered, and learned what had happened, his gratitude to us knew no bounds, and words seemed to fail him, though he spoke Spanish perfectly, when he tried to thank us for our kind hospitality.

"We soon became great friends, and, strange to say, sympathised with one another from the very first. We remained for a long time together, for his convalescence was a long and tedious one, and during the whole of that time we lived like brothers, sharing the same room, for my father's house was a small one, and sharing each other's thoughts as if we had known each other all our lives. He then told me that he was Lord Beauville, the eldest son of the Marquis of Belgrave, an English nobleman; that he had been travelling in Spain for some time, and that being very fond of sport, had set out on a wild-boar hunting expedition through the mountains of Cordova, where these animals were said to be very plentiful, accompanied only by a couple of keepers and a guide, for neither his English valet nor his courier could be useful on such an occasion, and he had left them at his hotel in Seville.

"When he was quite recovered he left us to rejoin his party at Seville, but some time afterwards I again met him in Madrid, and it was then, when he was on the point of quitting Spain for good, that he offered to take me with him to England. "I owe my life to you" he said, "and I am convinced that I shall never find anywhere a better or a truer friend than you." I was loth at that time to leave my country and my family, so I excused myself as well as I could, but he made me

promise that if ever I wanted a friend I would seek him, and that I was to look upon him in every respect as a brother.

"Three years have passed since then, three long dreary years, during which I have vainly tried to make my way in the world. Ah, my Consuelo, you do not know how hard it is when one has no money and no friends! I shall spare you the long account of my failures, though my heart yearns to pour all its troubles into your sympathetic ear. Suffice it to say that I have exhausted all my means, that all my dreams are at an end, that hope itself seemed banished from my heart, and that in my despair I decided to quit Spain altogether—to fly to England, where I knew there was at least one who cared for me and took an interest in my well-being.

"Such has been the history of my life, Consuelo. Do you see anything in it to admire?"

She looked at him with her large violet eyes, none the less lovely at that moment because their usual brightness was dimmed and softened by a mist of tears. "Yes, Alfredo," she said, "I see a great deal to admire in your life, for I see even in your failures the heart of a great and noble spirit fighting against the strong hand of fate—the persevering soul of a great man who would fain surmount all difficulties and struggle to the end. But this man whom you saved so bravely, at the risk of your own life, this Marquis—he is doubtless a great and powerful nobleman. Tell me something more about him."

"Yes, Consuelo, he is a powerful and wealthy nobleman, and that is the reason why I have always shrunk from being intimate with him. His friendship for me always seemed to me misplaced. I cannot delude myself

into thinking that we are equals, and I often told him so when we were together, and I once wrote to him in the same spirit when he had sent me a long affectionate letter telling me of his father's death, and describing the splendid estates and the gorgeous mansions of which he had become the master. But his kind heart does not allow him to see this, and he persists in telling me that one gentleman is as good as another, and when he received that letter of mine, he wrote hastily by return of post saying that he had enough for us both, and that as long as he had a house I should not want a home—always putting me on an equality with himself; but I am not vain enough to delude myself with those ideas, and to me he will always be the Most Noble the Marquis of Belgrave, and I, the poor fourth son of an obscure farmer."

"You are wrong, Alfredo, in thus humbling yourself; for, as your noble friend rightly says, no one can be more than a gentleman, be he ever so rich or ever so noble; and I dare say, if one only knew, the Roman blood that flows in your veins is a great deal better than the Saxon blood that flows in his. But it must be indeed glorious to be a Marquis, with magnificent estates and gorgeous palaces. You must introduce me to him when we are in London. He is very handsome, too, you say? But, Holy Virgin, what am I talking about! How can I, a poor unknown girl, ever hope to make the acquaintance of a great man like him. Of course, you must never speak to him of me or of my family. What would he say if he knew! Oh, no, you must never mention my name; but you will love me all the same, will you not, my darling?"

And she looked at him with a smile—that smile of imploring tenderness which ever makes the female face half divine.

"Do you think I could ever be ashamed of *you*, my dearest?" he exclaimed. "It is not our fault that he is so far above us; but we can be his friends, and yet let him see that we know what position we should occupy beside him."

Consuelo sighed. "I cannot understand friendship where there is no equality," she murmured. "Ah, I wish you also were a Marquis, Alfredo!"

CHAPTER V.

GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART.

(Not by Rhoda Broughton.)

THE *Pathfinder* was now fast approaching the end of her long voyage. She had entered the mouth of the Thames, and was now sailing fast up that noble river towards the great metropolis of Europe, that London, whose towers and spires would have been visible to the many anxious persons who crowded her deck had it not been for the thick fog which as usual enveloped it almost completely, and added to the feelings of gloom and sadness felt by those poor foreigners who now for the first time approached the great Capital.

During the last few days Juan had been in a better temper, for he had managed to win a little money from his fellow-passengers at cards, and by a few well-planned bets. Mr. Fernandez had got a little more accustomed to the ship's fare, and had not grumbled quite so much as at first; and the weather having greatly improved, the rest of the passengers had not suffered so much from sea-sickness, and had consequently been in better humour. As for Alfredo and Consuelo, their days had been without exception the happiest days of their whole existence, for they both loved for the first time in their lives. He

loved her with passionate, absolute, and all-absorbing adoration. She loved him with the sweetest, highest, and yet most innocent of devotions. No wonder, therefore, that they should have felt so supremely happy.

But the time was fast approaching when, once arrived at the end of their journey, innumerable obstacles would present themselves, and when their meetings would have to become fewer and shorter. They both felt this, although they never spoke of it, for the only future they cared to think of was that distant one when they should be husband and wife. Of the past they seldom spoke, and of the present never; for such is, indeed, one of the peculiarities of love, which unconsciously makes us forget everything excepting just what we love to dwell upon. Yet they both felt that the time was only too near when the pleasant unrestrained intercourse they had enjoyed while on board would be at an end.

"Let me ask your hand from your father," he had said one day; "if we are once engaged no one will think it strange that we should wish to see each other very often. I am sure he will not refuse me."

"I am not so sure of that, Alfredo," she had answered. "Papa has strange wild notions in his head, and, although he loves me dearly, he would never consent to my marrying only for love. We are so very poor, you know, that he would like me to marry a rich man if possible."

"And you would give me up for the sake of having a fine house and a carriage?"

A cloud passed over her brow and tears sprung to her eyes. "How can you doubt my love, Alfredo?" she cried. *I forsake you?* Ah! I would not give *you* up for the finest palace in Europe and all the carriages that

were ever made; and I know only too well what it is to live in a garret, and have to walk through the mud and the rain, and the frost and the snow, with only a thin shawl to protect one from the cold, cold wind that freezes the very marrow of one's bones!"

"Ah, my child," he exclaimed, and he clasped her to his manly breast, as if he would thus preserve her for ever from the cold winds of heaven, or the still colder evils of earth.

"I have not a fortune to offer you. I have however a heart but what am I saying? I always forget that you are so wondrously beautiful that your charms alone would procure you not only riches and palaces, but hearts as good and as devoted as mine, whilst I . . . I have nothing to recommend me. . . . Oh, if it were not a sin, I would pray to God to take away your beauty—your beauty that I know but too well will always stand between us."

"But you are handsome, too, Alfredo," she said innocently; "nay, much handsomer than I am, for you are strong and hardy, and I am only a poor feeble little thing that cannot even take care of herself."

"You do not know what you are talking about, Consuelo but tell me something of your father's projects."

She looked at him for some time before answering. "Well," she said at last, "I do not mind letting you into his secrets, though he forbade me to speak of them to any one; but his plans really seem to me so wild that I do not mind telling them to you, for I am convinced they will never be realized. You know that my aunt, Mrs. Jobkin, has a son—an only son, a man about thirty, I believe, and immensely rich; for he not only inherited

almost the whole of his father's money, but he has made a great deal himself in some business of his own. It is strange how money always goes to those who already possess a great deal! Well, my father imagined that it would be a very good thing if I were to marry this cousin of mine—and of course, in some respects, it would; only I do not believe for a moment that it could ever be, for he is already past thirty, and I have no doubt is already engaged; only, you see, my father is so proud of my beauty, and believes that it will produce such a wonderful effect, that he insists at least on trying the experiment; and between ourselves, Alfredo, I believe this is the only reason that ever induced him to leave Madrid and all his friends, and come to England to visit his sister."

"Good God! how calmly you can speak of this horrible project! Do you not see that it will be fatal to our love, that it will destroy our happiness for ever? Of course if Mr. Jobkin sees you he will fall in love with you—and your father will be delighted—and you will marry him—and I . . . I shall die!"

There was something so pathetic in his words that they went to her innermost heart, and made her tremble as the leaves do in early spring when the first equinoctial gale sweeps over them.

"No, Alfredo," she exclaimed, "I shall never consent to be his wife—never—never! You may trust me when I tell you this; but do not ask me to make promises which I may be unable to keep. I would not cause my poor father any pain, however much I may have to bear myself. He has enough to put up with without this, but I shall always love you, Alfredo. I shall always love you—and you alone."

In spite of Consuelo's repeated requests, however, Alfredo did speak to her father and asked him for his daughter's hand, and, strange to say, Mr. Fernandez was neither so surprised at the demand nor so opposed to it as Consuelo had led him to expect he would be. He asked seriously what his prospects were—how much he thought he could count upon—what he intended doing in England—and altogether seemed rather pleased than otherwise with him.

"I can have no objection whatever to your marrying my daughter," he said; "only, you see, I can give her nothing myself, and I could hardly give my consent to any marriage that would not secure for her at least a comfortable independence."

"I have very little myself just now," Alfredo answered, "but I hope in time to make some money—though as yet, I must confess, I do not see my way to it as clearly as I could wish, and then I shall be in a position to marry your daughter and keep her as she deserves. Do not imagine for a moment, Mr. Fernandez," he added, "that I could ever think of marrying her before then; but I should like it to be a settled thing between us that she shall be mine as soon as I am in a position to claim her, and that in the meantime I should be treated by you all as her accepted suitor."

"As to that, I have no objection. My house shall always be open to you, but I shall make no promises of any kind. If you like to consider yourself engaged to my daughter you may do so, but I tell you frankly, that if a richer man should propose to her, I shall encourage her to accept him, and indeed use my utmost endeavours to induce her to do so; for though doubtless you both fancy yourselves very much in love with each other, yet

I shall always think it my duty as a father to provide the best I can for the well-being of my children."

So in this way it was arranged—that Alfredo was virtually engaged to Consuelo, while she remained free to marry some one else if she liked.

When she heard this she was furious with her father for having proposed any such one-sided arrangement, and swore to her lover that for her own part she would henceforward consider herself engaged to him, and that no power on earth should induce her to marry any one else.

"No, no!" he exclaimed remonstratingly; "you do not know what may happen to-morrow; wait till you have seen your cousin—Mr. Jobkin. Remember that I have seen thousands of women, and have only chosen you after a long and anxious search, while you have seen but few men, and amongst them none whom you would ever have thought of marrying. All I can ask of you therefore is—not that you should think only of me but that you should remember me when you are in the company of others, and that you should compare me with them, uninfluenced by any preconceived prejudice."

Shortly afterwards London Bridge came in sight, and the beautiful Consuelo was obliged to go down to the ladies' cabin to finish putting her small packages together so as to be ready to land.

They had been threading their way for some time amongst the innumerable ships which crowd the river Thames, and which bring to the wharves of the great city the products of a thousand different countries. On either side of them lay the docks, which seemed to extend for miles and miles away in the distance, and ships' masts and the funnels of steamers were all that their anxious eyes could discern.

The sight would have been grand indeed but for the dense fog, for nowhere else in the world is so much wealth gathered; and if any one coming to London for the first time desires to be impressed with the greatness and the power of the country of which it is the capital, I should certainly recommend him to enter London by the Thames and sail up that noble river to the very arches of London Bridge.

But a thousand different emotions troubled our friends at that moment, and it was only occasionally and with an indifferent glance that they directed their eyes towards the spirited and busy scene before them, and neither Consuelo nor Alfredo cared to realize that what they saw were really men, and not ghosts, for they felt themselves, and not without some reason, alone in the midst of that countless multitude.

Soon afterwards Mr. Fernandez came and took his daughter's arm.

"Mr. Villafranca," he said, "we are off. Remember that we shall always be charmed to see you. '*Friendship is long, though money is short!*' Consuelo will drop you a line, letting you know where we are to be found as soon as we settle down. Good-bye."

Consuelo was too much moved to say anything; but her eyes expressed more in that one parting look of intense devotion which she bestowed upon him, than her lips would have uttered in a fortnight.

Juan then came up and shook hands with him very cordially. He had heard his sister say that he was going to stop with a Marquis, and he therefore thought it wise to be on friendly terms with him; but his manner was so frank and straightforward that no one would ever have guessed this reason, and Alfredo parted from him as he would have done from a loving brother.

Soon afterwards they had all landed, and Alfredo Villafranca saw the beautiful Consuelo disappear in a thick London fog, as he had seen her a few days before appear through the sea mist.

How much had happened since that morning! What vows had not passed between them! In the future who could tell what might happen? Ah, at that moment that future seemed to him as dark and mysterious as the thick, dense, heavy fog that surrounded him on all sides.

CHAPTER VI.

LA DEBUTANTE.

(Not by Mrs. Gore.)

It was a fine clear evening in early spring. The fields in the neighbourhood of the city were beginning to look green and fresh; the meadows were all golden with daffodils and kingcups and buttercups, while the hawthorn buds blossomed in every hedge.

In the city itself the vegetation was not quite so advanced, yet the plants in the parks were uncovered, and the trees began to have a tinge of green.

London was filling fast, for Parliament had opened early that year, and the forthcoming season was expected by all to be an unusually gay and eventful one.

In one of those fine houses in Carlton House Terrace, the back windows of which look upon St James's Park, and in which the families of Her Majesty's Secretaries of State usually reside, four young ladies are assembled on this particular evening in a small boudoir on the second floor—a boudoir which has a bow-window looking over the trees of the Park towards the Houses of Parliament.

Permit me, gentle reader, to introduce them to you.

One look suffices to show that two of them at least are sisters—not that they are by any means alike either

in features or complexion, though they are both good-looking without being by any means pretty—but because they are dressed exactly alike, in white silk dresses, trimmed with dark green velvet, with square cut bodices, and with broad green velvets round their throats. These are the Ladies Maude and Juliet Standish, the daughters of the Earl of Cowes, and are very well known in the yachting world at the Isle of Wight, and in the fashionable world of London, where they have been out now two seasons, and are very much admired.

It would be far more difficult to determine in what relation the other two young ladies stand to these two, or indeed to each other, for they are totally unlike both in appearance and dress. Yet these two are also sisters, and, in fact, the young ladies of the house—the daughters of the Right Honourable Gerald Fetherstone, one of Her Majesty's Ministers.

The tall one, standing beside the marble fire-place, in which a bright fire burns—for though the days are beginning to get warm, the nights are still chilly—is evidently the elder of the two, and it would indeed be difficult to imagine a handsomer or more fascinating woman.

She has a tall, commanding, yet beautifully-proportioned figure; her shoulders are of dazzling whiteness, round and shapely as those of the Venus of Milo—shoulders that would have rendered a sculptor happy if he had been allowed to model them; the swan-like neck, like her shoulders, is perfection, and is encircled by a thick chain of dead gold in the shape of a serpent with large ruby eyes, which sparkle in the red light of the flames with an almost infernal glare.

But if her shoulders would make the delight of a

sculptor, it would certainly puzzle any painter to reproduce her face upon canvas, for it is one of those faces upon which Nature seems to have exhausted her greatest powers. Her complexion is dazzlingly white, but her cheeks have the bloom of the peach, and her full lips, which possess a cruel sensuality of their own, are red like the coral; her dark almond-shaped eyes look out from under their languid lids with a peculiar, glittering, furtive, voluptuous, merciless, scornful, yet encouraging gaze, which seems to penetrate through and through the persons she deigns to look upon. Such eyes indeed as would make strong men quiver and brave soldiers quake.

Her hair, which is coiled round the back of her head in rich luxuriant plaits, is black as ebony, and here and there, where the light of the fire touches it, it reflects rich warm tints; but this magnificent hair, which adorns a head so classical in form that it might easily be taken for that of a Greek statue, shades a brow which, though lofty and commanding, yet has the low, brutal, cruel instincts of the savage imprinted upon it. But then, with all that youth, that colour, that matchless form, that magnificent hair, that strange, almost superhuman, loveliness—who could ever stay to find this out?

Sibyl Fetherstone, for such was her name, was indeed a splendid creature, one of those matchless women who only make their appearance at long intervals upon the earth, and then are destined to create more disturbance and misery than all the rest of their sex put together—a woman such as Helen of Greece might have been, such as the Egyptian Cleopatra no doubt was.

She wears this evening a simple dress of black tulle, the folds of which cling gracefully round her lovely form.

She has no ornaments whatever, except the golden serpent around her neck, yet she seems to want none, and it would be a difficult matter indeed to know precisely where to add or take away anything without spoiling the wondrous perfection of the whole.

As she stands there, as erect as a classical column from one of the temples in which, had she been a Greek, and had she lived in the days of old—the days of art and poetry—she would no doubt have been worshipped, her lustrous mocking eyes are fixed upon her sister who reclines near her in a low arm chair.

Geraldine Fetherstone is by no means a beauty, and though three years younger than her sister, and a *débutante* in her very first season, seems older and more worn. Her complexion has none of the dazzling whiteness of her sister's; her cheeks have none of the other's bloom and freshness upon them; and her grey eyes, which are exceedingly large, are lustreless and lack fire and expression; her hair is of a lighter hue than her sister's, and compared with hers looks dull and cold, and her figure has none of that grace and lightness which so characterise that of Sibyl.

As she leans back in the low arm-chair, her head resting upon her hand, the long training folds of her pale blue silk dress falling around her in artistic disorder, she seems weary and disheartened, and the handsome *parure* of turquoise and pearls, which her step-mother, Lady Twickenham, gave her on the occasion of her coming out, rises and falls on her bosom, which seems troubled and agitated.

It would seem as if a conversation more or less interesting to those four young ladies had been going on, for, after a short silence, Geraldine, without lifting her eyes

from the ground, said, as if it were in answer to some observation before made by one of the other three—

"He may be a great match: no doubt he is rich, handsome, and a Peer but he has no heart!"

"Never mind that," burst forth the Lady Juliet, getting up and walking towards the fire, "he is as gallant a gentleman as ever sprang into a saddle."

"And a Marquis," added Lady Maude.

"I suppose no one ought to expect any more from a man," continued Geraldine Fetherstone, as if pursuing her own train of thought, "and yet for a husband I at least hoped for more."

"How easily one can see, Geraldine, that you are but just out! You will not speak like that when you have been out a couple of seasons." This was said by Lady Maude, who, being the eldest there, believed herself to possess the most experience.

"Yes, we all know that the year of our coming out we determine to marry nothing under a Duke or a Marquis; the next year we could put up with an Earl or a Lord; at the end of the second season we come down to a plain Mister if he be rich enough, or to a penniless Peer; and a few seasons later on we end by marrying the first man who proposes, and consider ourselves fortunate: yes, I suppose that is the fate of us all."

"It is true," said Sibyl, thoughtfully speaking for the first time. "We all begin life more or less with great expectations, with wondrous dreams of what we shall make others do, dreams which generally end in nothing, as vain empty dreams always will end."

"Oh, how you talk!" burst out Geraldine, raising her eyes and fixing them on the fire. "To hear you speak it

would seem as if the only business of our lives is to get married to as rich or as noble a man as we can find to propose to us; that the only happiness to be desired is that of wearing a coronet and driving in a carriage, the amount of happiness, of course, depending on the quantity of ornaments on the top of the coronet, and the number of horses attached to the carriage. Ah! you call *that* happiness! I do not. I care not if the man I marry be rich or poor, a nobleman or a commoner, so long as he has a heart, but he must love me and I must love him. I should not care for any man's hand if I did not get his heart at the same time."

Lady Juliet burst out laughing. "Ah, Geraldine, Geraldine," she said, "you do not know how intensely amusing you are sometimes, particularly when you choose to talk that wondrous jargon you are pleased to call sentiment; why, it is as good as a play. Love, indeed! Love, ah! can you look at me straight in the face and tell me you believe in such a thing?"

"Why, Juliet," said her sister, Lady Maude, who was a serious young lady, for she was under the impression that laughing hardly suited her peculiar type of beauty, "you talk as if you knew all about it. I am convinced from what you say that you are in love yourself. Confess that you are in love, and do not laugh at Geraldine because the poor girl would like to be in love and cannot make up her mind with whom it shall be."

Lady Juliet's cheeks coloured deeply at these words, but fortunately she had her back turned to the fire, and the lamp at the other end of the apartment was shaded by a thick Parisian *abat-jour*, and gave but a soft subdued light, so that this blush, which only lasted a few seconds, was unperceived by all excepting perhaps by Sibyl, who

was standing near her at the time, and whose keen penetrating eyes were fixed upon her.

Another silence followed, which again was broken after a time by Geraldine.

"Lord Belgrave is a great man, and would no doubt be a great match for me, but I do not believe I can ever love him."

"Of course not," exclaimed Sibyl, a scornful smile playing upon her coral lips; "the man you love, Geraldine, must not only be immensely rich and a nobleman, but he must also be handsome and good, clever and accomplished, very wise yet deferring to your opinion in all things, generous and economical, gay and fond of society yet domestic in all his habits, quick-sighted but blind to all your faults and shortcomings, very much in love yet never jealous, manly but never from your side, fascinating and amusing but only so to you! Such must be the characteristics of the man you want, and with whom you intend to fall desperately in love at first sight. Well, Geraldine, I quite sympathize with you, and with all my heart wish you may soon find him. . . . I, for my part, have given up that idea long ago—that is to say at the end of my first season, and now will think myself happy if I marry a man with only one of those numerous virtues—only one—provided he be rich enough to make up for the want of the others, but of course every one must gain his own experience. My experience will be useless to you, so of course I advise you to go on dreaming of your beloved *beau idéal* of a husband as long as you can, and only hope that when that *beau idéal* comes to the ground with a crash, it may not frighten you so much as to render you utterly indifferent, and ready to marry the first fool who makes love to you. That is *my* advice,

Geraldine. And you, Maude," she added, turning towards that young lady, who was still seated beside the table apparently looking over some albums, "what is your advice in respect to this difficult question—the choice of a husband?"

Lady Maude looked up, and, without taking her hands off the album she had been looking at, answered—

"You should not ask *me*—I cannot possibly say anything on the subject, for you know I made up my mind long ago to remain standing like Patience on the top of a monument, high and dry on the barren shores of old maidism, and all I can hope is that the monument may be of marble, and that a substantial baldachino may rise above my head to protect me from the storms and contrary winds of life."

"Why, Maude," exclaimed her sister, with a merry laugh, "you speak like an old book—like one of those books people used to write before the days of railways and three-volume novels, when the paragraphs were not obliged to be under six lines, and people had time to read them without skipping. But, speaking seriously, why should you say that you have made up your mind to be an old maid? Fancy any one at six-and-twenty speaking like that!"

"When I speak as I do, rest assured, dear Juliet, that I know very well what I am talking about. You see I have nothing to recommend me: I am neither beautiful nor talented, and I have no money; I have nothing but my rank, and I am sure that I could never 'honour and obey' a man who will marry me only for *that*—a horrible snob, no doubt some rich greengrocer, who wants to get into society, or some horrid city man, who has ruined half a dozen families, and who wants some one to

teach him how to spend their money in the fashionable way. No, I shall never consent to sell myself like *that*, and that is why I tell you that I shall never marry. You see, Juliet, that I am not joking."

"Do you think," inquired Geraldine, rising from the low arm-chair in which she had been reclining, and going towards Lady Maude, "do you think that any one will love *me* for myself?"

I hardly know how her friend would have answered her; for if the Lady Maude Standish, who was a handsome fine-looking girl in her way, with no end of accomplishments, thought that there was little chance of any one marrying her for herself, how much less chance must she have seen for Miss Geraldine Fetherstone—plain sickly-looking girl as she was, with hardly any fortune, and with, at the best, but questionable family connections to help her on—but Sibyl walked towards the table at that moment, and, taking a seat near it, said in a loud, clear voice—

"Why must you always think of love when you talk of marriage? It strikes me that affection has little place in such a business-like and conventional transaction as a matrimonial alliance; but then there is always the advantage that, as we marry to please our families, and love to please ourselves, we may, with justice, exact fidelity from our lovers as a debt of honour, while we need only pay our husbands with affection as we pay our tradesmen with money, that is to say, at long intervals, and always taking off a certain discount."

The other three young ladies looked down at the books on the table and seemed—or pretended to be—shocked. Sibyl went on, not deigning to notice this—

"As for me, I have made up my mind to try the

French system. Last season I tried the English—that is to say, I looked out for a man I could marry and love all in one, and I found it did not answer; this year I shall look out for a rich husband who will marry me, and try and do without the lover, for I suppose, being an English woman and the daughter of a Secretary of State, I must keep up the proprieties and give a good example of what a good wife should be.”

It would seem from these strange words that Sibyl Fetherstone delighted in shocking her sister and her friends; for though these three young ladies remained silent, and to all appearance pretended not to have heard what she said, there was a scornfully-defiant but pleased smile on her proud red lips, and her large black eyes sparkled with more animation than usual as they wandered from one to the other of the three fair heads bent over the table.

As she stood there, erect beside them, her beautiful arm resting upon the carved oak back of the chair from which she had just risen, she looked so wondrously like that beautiful picture of Herodias in the Pitti Palace, that the eyes involuntary looked for John's blood-stained head, and the very thought made one shudder. But the red *abat-jour* on the lamps diffused such a rich warm tint over her bare shoulders and beautifully-rounded arms, while the ruby eyes of the serpent coiled round her throat sparkled with such a devilish lustre that another comparison, perhaps even a truer one, could not but flash across the beholder's mind; but this simile, strangely true though it no doubt was, could hardly find expression in a human mouth.

Sibyl and Geraldine Fetherstone were the daughters—as I have before informed my reader when I intro-

duced them to him—of the Right Honourable Gerald Fetherstone.—(I always make a point of telling people when I introduce any one to them, who they are, what they are, and what are their connections—a necessary precaution in England, and one which, if generally adopted, would save us from many an un-Christian-like “cut.”)—I need not say anything about this well-known and greatly-appreciated statesman and politician, who for so many years has been one of the columns upon which the Conservative party chiefly rests for support. Of his wife, the beautiful and clever Elizabeth, Countess of Twickenham, of course I need say but little either, as I suppose the greater part of my readers are in society, and therefore know that charming lady as well or perhaps better than I do myself. But for any amongst them who live in the country, or who have not the honour of knowing Lady Twickenham personally—for, of course, she is a very difficult person to get to know—I shall state in passing that she was the daughter of Sacs the great baritone, and was known when a girl as Beta Sacs. Of course some evil tongues whispered that she was a Jewess and that her real name was Isaacs; but in this world there are always plenty of envious persons who will take any one's character to pieces with the greatest delight if you only listen to them. In those days, however, Beta Sacs was scarcely in society, and consequently but little known, so no one troubled themselves very much to discuss if her name was really Sacs or Isaacs. But she was wonderfully pretty, this singer's daughter, and one fine day no less a person than the Earl of Twickenham fell in love with her and married her. As she was always exceedingly respectable and accomplished and ladylike, nothing could ever be

whispered against her. Society took her up without making too much fuss about the matter, and when Lord Twickenham died, leaving her very well off indeed (the bulk of his fortune going to their son, the present Lord Twickenham), she was wise enough to marry a man greatly older than herself and eminently respectable in every way—a man of great abilities and immense popularity, who, of course, raised her immediately in popular estimation, and placed her beyond any scandal that could ever be invented. This gentleman dead, she married a rich banker, who soon afterwards died, leaving her all his money. Mr. Fetherstone was her fourth husband, and she was often heard to say that this was the only one she could really accustom herself to consider her husband. The first time she had married for rank—the second for position—the third for money—but Mr. Fetherstone she had married solely for love. How much truth there may be in this pretty story is more than I can venture to say; yet to one thing I can bear testimony, and that is, that she gets on very well with him, and that he seems very happy—but then it is true she had got on well with her three previous husbands, and all of them had believed themselves the happiest of mortals. What a pity that there are not a few more women like Lady Twickenham in the world!

Mr. Fetherstone had been a widower for some time when he married Lady Twickenham (she had never liked to part with that title), and the very first season after their marriage she had presented to the world his eldest daughter, the handsome Sibyl, who by rights should have come out before; but her father, being a hard-working statesman, and not over-fond of society, had delayed that important event for two years. As was to be expected,

Sibyl had had a great success, for her beauty was really of a most uncommon type, but, strange to say, she had had few proposals, at least few of those she or her father would have cared to accept, for men as a rule were more frightened than attracted by her strange beauty, and young men found her too cynical to be amusing.

This year her sister was to make her *début*, but no great things were expected of her, either by her family or by her friends, for, as I have already said, she was neither pretty nor attractive; but she believed herself that the success she would create would be something tremendous, and that she had only to show herself at a ball for all the young men of London to fall immediately at her feet. Not that she considered herself so beautiful—I will do the girl credit for that—no—but that she thought, and indeed honestly believed, that there was something so interesting and romantic about her that *no man* could see her and remain heart-whole. How far her dreams were realized yet remains to be seen.

Lady Twickenham got on very well with her step-daughters, who had learnt from their father to love and respect her, and she in a manner loved them too, and spared no pains to render them happy in her house, but all her thoughts and all her dreams were concentrated in her son—her only son—Lord Twickenham.

This young nobleman had only just entered into possession of his extensive estates, having only attained his majority a few months before. Until quite lately he had been at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he had rendered himself highly popular by his sumptuous dinners, and by the profusion and quality of his wines. It was whispered at the University that he had spent quite a fortune during his three years' residence there; but then

his father had died when he was quite a child, and during his long minority his estates, which were always very extensive and productive, had improved so much, and his capital had altogether increased to such an extent, that no one could blame him for spending freely of what one day, and very soon, would be all his to spend as he liked best; and his mother, who had been his sole guardian during all these years, loved him so dearly that she would have taken mortal offence if anyone had dared even to hint to her that her son lived a great deal too fast and spent too much money.

This particular season was to be his first one in London. He had taken his seat at the House of Lords soon after the opening of Parliament, a month previously, and, at the express desire of his mother and of his step-father, intended to attend it regularly, though he himself was often heard to pronounce it amongst his Cambridge friends, "A confounded bore, by Jove!"

Lady Twickenham would have wished her son to live with her in the family mansion on Carlton House Terrace, where a comfortable suite of apartments might easily have been arranged for him, but he preferred to have rooms of his own some where else, as he had been accustomed to have at the University. So he took a fine set of apartments at the Albany, which had just been vacated by an Indian Prince, who had furnished them in a luxurious eastern style that pleased his fancy, and there he was now settled for the rest of the London season.

The room in which we have first made the acquaintance of the Misses Fetherstone and their bosom friends, the Ladies Standish, was anything but a fine apartment. The ceiling was low, for the height had evidently been sacrificed to give greater proportions to the splendid

drawing-rooms below, and it was plainly, nay scantily, furnished. The walls were covered with a soiled paper, which had been white and gold in its youth, but which now looked more like gray and red; for such is indeed the wonderful metamorphosis the London smoke can produce at times. The curtains, which hung on either side of the windows, were of faded creton, and the red carpet which covered the floor was worn and in parts almost thread-bare. No pictures, or indeed ornaments of any kind, adorned this room, and altogether it was easy to see that the usual occupants of it had either no taste for art, or were far above such trumpery things as fine furniture and the common objects of art and *vertu* which generally adorn the boudoirs of less fashionable young ladies. It was a comfortable room, but that is all it could ever pretend to be; yet the view which that bow-window commanded over the trees of St. James's Park, and its pretty little lake towards the Houses of Parliament and the glorious old Abbey, was enough of itself to render it a most pleasant apartment.

On one side there was a large folding door which led to the young ladies' sleeping room, and which on this occasion was opened and allowed us to behold the two pretty little beds, with their white muslin and blue satin curtains, in which these young ladies rested after the fatigues of the day. They might easily have had separate rooms had they liked, but though so entirely different in every respect the Misses Fetherstone were exceedingly fond of each other and preferred sharing the same room as I believe for some reason or other—best known of course to themselves—young ladies generally do.

On the night when I first introduced these charming young ladies to my readers, there was a large official

dinner in the house—a dinner at which Mr. Fetherstone had proposed to assemble the leading men of his party with a view of discussing the important events of the coming session ; and after the dinner, at which no ladies were to be admitted, Lady Twickenham had determined to hold a reception—a reception which was announced on the large cards which invited people to it, and which had been left a fortnight before at their houses without any envelope, so that every one might see the honour that great lady deigned to confer upon her friends—a “Small and Early”—not that this “At Home” was by any means meant to be a small or an early one, but only to show that Lady Twickenham could give larger ones if she chose, and that her favoured friends who received these much-coveted cards should appreciate to its full value the honour she conferred upon them.

The Countess of Cowes and her daughters, the two Ladies Standish, had of course received their invitations, and as the party was not to begin till past ten, on account of the Statesmen requiring all that time to drink Mr. Fetherstone's wines and discuss his Bills, Sibyl and Geraldine had determined to invite their young friends to come an hour earlier, so that they might enjoy “a quiet chat” before the business of the evening began. I say “business” of the evening, because, as all my readers have no doubt found out before this if they go out ever so little into what is called London Society, these sort of semi-official parties are indeed a business to get through, and could hardly be classified under any other head.

I have taken advantage of the long pause which followed Sibyl's last words to explain all this to my readers ; but now the sweet and silvery voice of Lady

Juliet Standish calls me back to the side of these charming young ladies, and I therefore must beg my readers to give all their attention to their interesting and highly edifying conversation.

"But returning to Lord Belgrave," she said, "has he ever proposed to you, by the bye, Geraldine?"

The young lady in question coloured deeply ere she replied, "Well, I can hardly say he has, in so many words, you know."

"Exactly," burst out Sibyl, "but you, of course, believe that he will do so before long. Ah! Geraldine, Geraldine! how much you have to learn yet. I too, at the beginning of last season, believed that he would propose to me the very first opportunity he had, and you see he has not done so, although the opportunities were not wanting, and I sat with him for hours at a time on the stone steps of cold back-staircases, shivering with cold, whilst I listened to his pretty little speeches. Ah, men are but a set of gay deceivers, who only think of the amusement of the moment!"

"I have come to that conclusion, too," said Lady Maude, turning over the pages of a new novel, "and I verily believe that if, instead of going to parties and balls as we do, purely for business purposes, we went as they do, to amuse ourselves, we should not only look much fresher at the end of the season, but should get married much sooner and to nicer men."

"There is Lord Edwin, Lord Belgrave's brother," said Geraldine thoughtfully, as she always spoke; "he is a charming man, if you like—but then he has no money!"

Sibyl's eyes flashed like the eyes of the serpent round her neck, as her sister pronounced these words, but she said nothing, and Geraldine's remark passed unnoticed,

for young ladies, as a rule, seldom care to talk about second sons.

A few minutes later a servant in the gorgeous livery of the house of Twickenham opened the door and announced to the young ladies that her ladyship had gone to the drawing-room, and that the company had begun to assemble—an event which they might have known before this if they had only paid a little attention to the noise of the numerous carriages which had for some time past been depositing ladies and gentlemen at the door of the mansion.

“Who has come?” asked Geraldine of the servant, rising and going up towards the glass over the mantelpiece to give a finishing touch to her toilette.

“Oh, there’s a lot of people come;—there is the Countess of Cowes, and the Marquis of Belgrave, and his brother, Lord Edwin Beauville, and lots more.”

As the servant said these names, Lady Juliet rose hastily from the chair in which she had been sitting near the table, and walked straight towards the door.

“Ah! ah!” shouted her sister, the serious Lady Maude, laughing for the first time that evening, “we have your secret now, Juliet; so it is the handsome Marquis who has enslaved your heart!”

She was greatly mistaken—the name of the rich and powerful Marquis of Belgrave had only been heard by her, for the other two young ladies who still remained near the table, had alone noticed that of Lord Edwin.

Sibyl saw the movement of her friend, and her heart told her at once its cause. Her eyes flashed fire, her heart throbbed with emotion, and her proud red lips were tightly compressed; for that movement had revealed to her that she had a rival.

CHAPTER VII.

LORDS AND LADIES.

(Not by the author of the Queen of the County.)

GERALDINE, having finished the last touches of her toilette to her entire satisfaction, clasped her arm round Lady Juliet's waist and proceeded with her down the stairs, Lady Maude following behind with Sibyl, who had now once more regained the full possession of her self-command.

At the immense doors which led to the principal drawing-room they met Lady Twickenham, who stood near the top of the staircase, attired in a becoming rose-coloured satin dress trimmed with white lace and radiant with diamonds, receiving her guests. She welcomed the Ladies Standish with a patronising yet affectionate air, and with one look of love towards her step-daughters, motioned them to enter the sumptuous apartments, which were brilliantly illuminated.

At no great distance from the lady of the house they saw her husband, a tall, slim, and very gentlemanly-looking man, who was in earnest conversation with the Premier, his intimate and highly-appreciated friend.

The rooms were still very empty, for it was only half-past ten, and people in London seldom think of going out

much before eleven. There were all the gentlemen who had dined with Mr. Fetherstone—but these were nearly all old politicians and worn-out Statesmen, so possessed no interest for our four young friends. There were also a few old dowagers, who, this being the beginning of the season, would not for worlds have missed a quarter of an hour of such a charming entertainment as one of Lady Twickenham's "Small and Early" "At Homes."

Near the fireplace of the principal drawing-room stood Lady Cowes, and it was towards her that our four young ladies directed their steps when they first entered the room. This lady was still young, and was by some considered exceedingly handsome. She had not been long known in the gay London world, because her husband had only come into the title quite unexpectedly a few years previously, and before that they had been too poor to care to mix much in society; but he had acquired a great taste for yachting, and in the Isle of Wight, where they resided a great part of the year, they were greatly looked up to and much sought after. I hardly know how the friendship began between the Ladies Standish and the Misses Fetherstone, and indeed it would be difficult to say how such friendships generally do begin between girls. Perhaps it was on account of the similarity in their ages, for Lady Maude was about the same age as Sibyl, and Lady Juliet was only a year older than Geraldine; but, of course, this might be the case or it might not; at all events the Misses Fetherstone were always charmed to go and stay with them in their beautiful house at Cowes for the regatta week, and the Standishes were only too happy always to be invited to Lady Twickenham's parties.

They had been talking for about five minutes with

Lady Cowes, when Lord Belgrave and his brother approached them and joined in the conversation.

Edward, 14th Marquis of Belgrave, and Earl of Beauville, was a man of about thirty-six, and it would have been difficult—as all his friends agreed in saying—to find anywhere a better specimen of an English gentleman. His features were delicate and very refined, and though his eyes were perhaps rather incredulous and cold, they were by no means devoid of expression. He wore his beard short, with a long moustache, which though rather darker than Alfredo described them, reflected golden tints as he turned his handsome face from one young lady to the other. As we learnt from the poor Spaniard, he was exceedingly tall, but he was large in proportion, and his hands and feet were small and well formed, as those of an aristocrat should be.

His brother—Lord Edwin—was altogether a smaller man, but by no means less handsome, and he, too, seemed a thorough gentleman in every respect. He was exceedingly slim, and as he stood there before the fireplace, his handsome head bent over the beautiful Sibyl, to whom he was at the time speaking, it would have been difficult not to admire his regular and clear-cut profile, which accorded so well with that of the splendid beauty beside him, and his fair complexion and light hair, which formed such a strong contrast to hers. The conversation, as I have said before, was general, yet it was easy to see that Lord Edwin at least directed all his remarks to Sibyl Fetherstone, and that Lady Juliet, who was on the other side of her, seemed to be watching him too anxiously to take much part in it.

When the rooms became more crowded—for people kept coming in now fast enough—Geraldine retired to a

distant corner with the Marquis, and, a friend coming up at that moment, stopped to talk with Lady Cowes and her daughters, and soon afterwards moved off with Lady Juliet very much against that young lady's wishes, I'll be bound to say. As for Sibyl and Lord Edwin, they were carried on with the crowd, and soon afterwards found themselves, perhaps not quite against their will, at the other end of the room, where a large glass door opened into the prettiest of conservatories.

Lady Cowes and her eldest daughter were left quite alone, but not long, for Lady Tottenham, that highly-feared ruler of fashion, came up to them, accompanied by her daughter.

"How do you do, Lady Cowes?" she said, in rather a patronising tone, when she saw that the lady near whom she had been brought by the pushing crowd—for people in London society could hardly get on at all if they did not "push" in more ways than one—was no other than her friend the Countess of Cowes. "How do you do, Lady Cowes? So here we are—in town once more for the season. It seems as if we had never left at all; how the time does pass! . . . but not for you, Lady Cowes, for you do not look a day older than when I saw you last."

Lady Cowes felt highly flattered at this unexpected compliment, for Lady Tottenham was known at times to say exceedingly bitter and highly disagreeable things, so much so that society almost forgot that in reality she was a very kind woman and an exceedingly soft-hearted one.

"But see," she went on, "each season seems to bring us new people. Now, who is that girl with the low dress there . . . just behind Lady Pencarlin? I have never seen her before."

"I am sure I do not know," answered Lady Cowes turning her head in the direction of the lady in question, while Lady Tottenham, taking out her gold-rimmed eyeglass, fixed her gaze upon her.

"Oh, I know who she is, mamma," exclaimed Miss Tottenham. "She is that girl old Lady Skewton intends taking out this year, and for whom she wrote to ask you for an invitation to our theatricals next week."

"Ah, yes, I recollect now. Do you know, Lady Cowes, who she really is? Some people *will* have it that she is a daughter of her son by her maid. I am sure I hardly know what to believe. Anyhow, I do not like her style, and I am glad I have seen her, for I shall not send Lady Skewton the cards she asked me for, and in that way I shall have one questionable person the less at my party. Ah, Lady Cowes, you do not know how difficult it is to get rid of such people once one gets them inside the house. If I were to invite her this time, I should have her coming to my house every Friday. No, I shall certainly write to Lady Skewton declining her *protégée*. Oh! she will be only too glad to come herself, and she can send the girl downstairs to see her relations that evening." And Lady Tottenham smiled, for she believed, in the ignorance of her heart, that she had said something very witty.

At that moment another person walked towards the little circle formed by these two ladies and their daughters before the fireplace. This was no other than the well-known Catholic lady, Mrs. Boston Gilbert—a woman of a certain age—which, as Byron tells us, is by far the most uncertain of all ages—yet so beautifully dressed, and altogether so becomingly got up, that some people might even have thought her good looking.

"Here is that old fool, the Boston Gilbert," muttered

Lady Tottenham to herself when she saw her, and then, turning round to meet her, exclaimed, "So glad to see you, my dear!"

"How do you do, Mrs. Boston Gilbert?" said Lady Cowes, shaking hands with her coldly; for she was a quiet woman, and never gave herself up to violent emotions of any kind. The new comer shook hands with the two ladies and their daughters, who soon afterwards retired to another corner to talk quietly, and then, seating herself in an arm-chair near the fire, began talking to Lady Tottenham, turning her back upon Lady Cowes, without paying any attention to her, for, of course, in good society no one is ever afraid of being rude.

"So you are going to bring out a new man this year, I hear, Mrs. Boston Gilbert?" said Lady Tottenham, taking another chair.

"Well, yes, I am going to make another experiment, but if it fails, I assure you, Lady Tottenham, that it will be the very last I shall ever attempt, however much I may be entreated to do so, for it is dreadfully up-hill work, I assure you. You have no idea what I went through last year to get people to go to Mrs. Bolton's parties, and the difficulty I had to get her invitations, and then I got no thanks after all my trouble—nothing, not even an invitation to stop at her country house in Kent. Would you believe there could exist such ingratitude in the world?"

Lady Tottenham smiled—for she knew very well, as indeed everybody in London knew, how largely Mrs. Bolton had contributed to Mrs. Boston Gilbert's charities, and that one day, when at that lady's request she had to make her husband sign a heavy cheque for the erection of a new Catholic convent—although she herself, as well as all her family, were strong Protestants—she had

exclaimed, in the presence of an intimate friend, who, of course had told the story all over London the next day, that it had been almost ruination her getting fine people to go to her house, for, taking it on an average, they had come to about fifty pounds a head!

"But this man you are going to thrust upon us this year is exceedingly rich, I believe; is he not?" she asked, after a short silence.

"Yes, Mr. Jobkin is a wonderfully rich man, and a very gentlemanly one too considering his father began life as a greengrocer, or something of the kind. I really think I shall manage with him. Of course, his name is against him—horrible name, is it not?—Jobkin!"

"Well it is not pretty, certainly!"

"He wanted to call himself Percy Howard Jobkin, but I soon convinced him that *that* would never do, for people would only laugh. Ah, Lady Tottenham! you little know the odd things these people say and do. Why it is as good as going to the play. Percy Howard Jobkin, Esq.!—Did you ever hear anything so amusing in your life?"

"What a sacrilege!" was all Lady Tottenham could say in her astonishment.

"With the Boltons, last year, I had a great many things to contend with. You see they were a large family with sons and daughters, and not only did Mrs. Bolton insist on my inviting all her relations to her ball, which alone was enough to spoil a hundred parties, but she even went so far as to make me ask a number of her old friends. Ah, you have no conception how they were dressed, and the shocking things people said about them. The very thought of it makes me shudder even now; and then the woman complained that, at the end of

the season, and after having given four balls herself, she had only gone to ten—and these, as she remarked, “only second-rate ones,” when she had been led to believe that she would get invited to the Duchess of Northland’s, to the Duchess of the Isles’, and, indeed, to all the best houses in London.

“Ah, Mrs. Boston Gilbert, you ought to have known beforehand that those sort of people have no consciences. They begin by robbing people in the City of their money, and end by robbing us of our rights in the West End.”

“But I have hit upon a better man this time. Mr. Jobkin, you see, is single, and immensely rich—two attractions which no mother will be able to resist. Then I have insisted on his becoming an M.P., which will at once give him a certain position; I have made him take a fine house in Grosvenor Square, and I have made him promise that he will not invite a single friend of his who is not in the world. People, of course, cannot bear to meet other people whom no one knows; but as soon as everybody one knows goes to a man’s house, then all want to know him, never mind who he is. That is one of the first principles of society. I have tried to make him aware of its full value, and I think I have succeeded. I have engaged half a dozen friends to talk about him at the clubs and at parties, but he is himself to remain a mystery until the day of his ball. No one is to see him till then, when he will make his *début* in the world, supported by me and surrounded by the whole of Mayfair. His parties will be very exclusive, and as difficult to get to as Mrs. Muleta’s, whose list is, I am told, always submitted to the Prince of Wales before a single invitation is sent—and we shall see if any one dares to snub him!”

"I, for one," said Lady Tottenham, putting her eye-glass up for the hundredth time, and looking round the room, "shall not be able to attend Mr. Jobkin's ball."

"And why?—surely, Lady Tottenham, when the card comes *with my compliments!*"

"Ah," answered the proud dame, giving a glance of recognition towards a sickly-looking young man, who stood at a short distance, vainly endeavouring to join in the conversation of Lady Maude and Miss Tottenham—"you see, last year he gave a great fancy ball at Willis's Rooms—a horrible thing I believe—no one there one ever heard of; and the impudent fellow actually had the audacity to put my name down in the papers the next morning as having been there! Of course, I wrote to the *Morning Post* to contradict it and to say I had never even heard of the man—but you see, after that, I could hardly go to his house."

I don't know what Mrs. Boston Gilbert would have answered to this, but, whatever it was, she forgot all about it when her eyes suddenly resting upon an animated-looking lady near the conservatory door, she recognised in her one of her dearest lady friends, the Honourable Lady Brightly, who was in close conversation with one of her best male friends, Lord Clare. This was too much for her.

"Just look yonder, Lady Tottenham; do you see Lady Brightly? Why she is more *décolletée* than ever; and how intimate she seems to be with Lord Clare! Did you ever see anything so fast as her manner when talking to gentlemen!"

Lady Tottenham's eye-glass was immediately directed towards that particular corner of the room.

"I declare you are right. How dreadful!"

And the two ladies bent their heads closer together to discuss the behaviour of their mutual friend.

Mrs. Boston Gilbert's remark must have aroused my reader's curiosity, and so, leaving that worthy lady to finish her conversation with Lady Tottenham undisturbed, I shall proceed across the room and approach the graceful Lady Brightly and judge of her conduct for myself.

It is fortunate that I can do so without having to make my way across the crowded saloon, through the numerous groups of ladies and gentlemen who stand so close together that it is indeed a wonder they are not all suffocated—and when I arrive at the conservatory it is a good thing, too, that I am able to glide between two fat old dowagers and place myself beside Lord Clare and his companion in the very small space left near them; for otherwise it would have been impossible for me ever to have heard a word that passed between them.

But when I do get close and listen to what they are saying, I must confess that I hardly think it worth repeating, and, in spite of Mrs. Boston Gilbert and her friend Lady Tottenham, I beg to inform the world that what passed between them was of anything but an exciting character. Their conversation, in fact, seemed to me to be entirely about horses and dogs, and if the words "I bet" and "I take" and "I stake" and "I give" occurred rather oftener in the course of their talk than perhaps some over-strict people might have found necessary—surely this cannot be brought against them?—and both Lady Brightly and her youthful companion appeared so completely absorbed in the contemplation of the pretty little red morocco-covered books which they each held in their hands that they never even looked at each other—a

sufficient proof that anything like love or sentiment was far from their minds at that moment.

The Honourable Lady Brightly is the daughter of Lord Fitzpaddy, and was married a few years ago to Sir James Brightly. She is very well known in London society, where her wonderful talents for acting have made her a general favourite—so much so that no private theatricals would be considered complete without her. She is not pretty, yet she possesses a charming and graceful figure, and her face portrays faithfully the genius which animates her, and is therefore interesting and attractive, perhaps even more so than if her features had been perfect and regular, and her complexion lilies and roses. Being exceedingly talented, and a great favourite with men, ladies, as a rule, are rather jealous of her, and disappointed old maids are not wanting who concoct scandals which they generously attribute to her. But these, of course, are seldom believed; and as, in spite of all her lady friends, she has managed to keep her reputation intact, she is invited everywhere, and there is not a breakfast or a dance given in Mayfair at which we do not meet her—the admired of all admirers.

Lord Clare, the man she is talking to, is a young Irish Peer, who has only lately come into his estates, and is therefore much sought after by the mammas and papas, whom he already begins to dread; preferring by far to talk with women like Lady Brightly, who amuse him, and on whose account he is not afraid to be called over the coals the next morning by some anxious mother or aspiring father.

As the young Lord and his graceful companion close their pretty little morocco-covered books, and replace them in their respective pockets, Lord Belgrave issues

from the neighbouring conservatory with Geraldine Fetherstone by his side.

"How do you do, Lady Brightly?" said this young lady, shaking hands with her in the languid fashion of Mayfair, and, without waiting for an answer, she abruptly turned round and said in a hurried voice, "Excuse me, Lord Belgrave, but I see Lady Twickenham is summoning me at the other end of the room. I suppose she wants me to go and talk with Lady Isobel Clanfyne, who, I see, has just arrived with her father the Duke of the Isles;" and without saying another word she hurried away towards where the noble Duke and his proud daughter stood, while the crowd made way as well as they could to let her pass.

"Now you are free, Lord Belgrave," said Lady Brightly, as soon as Geraldine had gone, "will you be good enough to give me your arm downstairs to the supper room? I am very tired, and should like to get away before the crush below begins to get too formidable."

The Marquis gallantly gave his arm to the fascinating lady, and, taking her through the conservatory, conducted her towards the staircase. As they emerged on the landing they were pushed against by a young man with short reddish hair and an excuse for a moustache. This was the son of the house—the Earl of Twickenham.

"Hallo, Belgrave," he said when he recognised that gentleman. "So you are off already—are you going to the Terpsichore to-night?"

"No; I was thinking of looking in at Green's. The Terpsichore does not amuse me much. Shall I see you there, Charlie?"

"Well, perhaps, if I can manage to steal away before three without being seen. Ta-ta."

Lady Brightly looked up at her companion, whose eyes seemed to follow the young hopeful who had just spoken to him, and who was now making his way through the crowd towards the Lady Isobel Clanfyne, whose society, I suppose, his mother had advised him to cultivate. "The Terpsichore!" she said, "*c'est chic ça n'est-ce pas?*"

"*Fi donc!*" was all he said, and began descending the stairs.

"Oh! how I should like to go to those places. How happy you men ought to feel at being able to go wherever you like without making people talk," she exclaimed, as they made their way through the ascending crowds down the stately staircase.

Once arrived at the bottom, Lord Belgrave conducted his companion into the dining-room.

"What will you take?" he said, as they approached the table, which still remained in the centre of the room as the politicians had left it after their dessert, with some of that last service still displayed upon the gorgeous family plate of the Twickenhams.

"Champagne, if you please," she answered—a request which, in his turn, he transmitted to one of the numerous footmen who, in their state liveries, surrounded the table; but the servant answered—

"There is none, my Lord."

"Oh, never mind," exclaimed Lady Brightly, "I will take a glass of sherry instead."

"There is no sherry either, my lady," answered the man.

"What on earth have you got, then?" exclaimed Lord Belgrave impatiently.

"There is tea and coffee, and lemonade and soda-water, my lord; which will you take?"

"Strange," said the Marquis, as he repeated this to Lady Brightly, "that in such a house as this there should be such wretched refreshments."

"Well, I suppose," answered this lady, "that Lady Twickenham finds people are only too glad to come to her parties, and thinks the bait in the shape of iced champagne, tongues, chickens, and ices, which a *parvenu* could hardly dispense with, totally unnecessary."

"Perhaps you are right. I have indeed noticed that in great houses one never can get anything worth eating excepting at dinner parties, to which of course only a few privileged persons are invited—but what will you take?"

"I will have a sandwich and a cup of tea. I suppose I should get nothing better if we were to go to the other side of the table."

Lord Belgrave passed the sandwiches to her—a couple of very thick pieces of bread with a little mustard between them—and asked the stately servant to get a cup of tea from the immense silver urn which stood at the other end of the long table.

"Why, Lord Belgrave, just look there," exclaimed Lady Brightly, suddenly attracting his attention. "There is my husband coming towards us with Totty on his arm!"

A moment after Sir James Brightly joined them with Lady Tottenham. Sir James was a very small man, with quick movements and a rather pleasing face.

"How do you do, my dear Lady Brightly?—so glad to see you. Your husband has been so gallant! he has brought me down to supper you see!" exclaimed Lady Tottenham, with such an affectionate and loving smile that no one could ever have supposed that five minutes before she had been pulling this very woman's character to pieces. But then, such are the ways of Mayfair! It

has been said before now, that if our best friends were to hear what we say of them behind their backs no two members of society would be upon speaking terms. It is therefore fortunate this polite deception is kept up. But I must do poor Lady Tottenham the justice to say that on this occasion she was placed in a rather awkward position. She was anxious to keep well with Lady Brightly, who was going to act for her in some private theatricals she intended giving the following week, and at the same time she could hardly defend her conduct when Mrs. Boston Gilbert criticised it. When Lady Brightly had finished her tea and sandwiches, Lord Belgrave conducted her to the cloak-room.

"I wonder where my brother can be," he said, as they crossed the inner hall. "I had promised to take him in my brougham to the club, and now I am tired and want to go away but do not know where to find him."

"Oh, I believe I can help you, Lord Belgrave," answered his fair companion laughing. "I'll put you up to a trick or two; come with me."

And passing the cloak-room, Lady Brightly opened a small door beyond the principal staircase and disclosed the back stairs. "There," she said, turning round to the Marquis, her bright face expressing unutterable things, "go up a few steps and if I am not much mistaken you will find your brother. I will go back to the cloak-room and wait for you," and she closed the door upon him.

Lord Belgrave was not a little bewildered and surprised, though he was a man who would not have looked so for worlds; but he hardly knew what to think of this strange adventure, and very much feared a practical joke on the part of the witty Lady Brightly, as, with a reluctant step, he went up the dimly-lighted staircase.

He passed in succession three different couples, who, sitting on the cold stone steps, seemed utterly indifferent to what went on outside. Near the door which he guessed led to the drawing-room landing he saw, to his astonishment, his brother, Lord Edwin, sitting by the side of a tall young lady dressed in black tulle. As he approached them the lady rose, and he then recognized in her the handsome daughter of the house—Sibyl Fetherstone. Neither she nor her companion, however, seemed in the least disconcerted, and, hiding his astonishment, he informed his brother that he should be leaving immediately.

"Are you running away so early, Lord Belgrave?" said the beautiful Sibyl, giving her hand to Lord Edwin.

"Yes, I must—it is late, and I have promised to meet some men at Green's this evening. I am sorry to interrupt your flirtation," he added, turning towards his brother, "but if you want to profit by my brougham I fear I shall have to take you away from Miss Fetherstone."

Sibyl's large expressive eyes fixed themselves on the face of the Marquis with an expression of mute disdain.

"Will you give me your arm, Lord Edwin?" she said, without deigning to notice his brother, "I am going downstairs myself;" and, leaning gracefully on his arm, she descended the narrow stairs with the younger brother, leaving the noble Marquis to follow by himself.

Arrived at the bottom, she led the way to the dining-room, but this was now so crowded that, turning round, she went instead to the cloak-room opposite. At the door stood Lady Brightly, enveloped in a rich mantle of fur, evidently waiting for her carriage, and a look of intelligence was exchanged between her and Lord Belgrave as they passed.

In the cloak-room Sibyl discovered Lady Cowes and her two daughters, who were making vain endeavours to discover their wraps amidst the numbers collected there, and which were all in great confusion. She advanced and offered to assist them.

"Thank you, Sibyl," said Lady Juliet, colouring deeply as she looked up and saw Beauville, who had followed Sybil into the room. "I think we shall manage to get them sooner or later, and you must be in such request at this moment."

There was a certain sarcasm in these words, which the proud Sibyl resented deeply.

"Do not trouble yourself about us, I pray you," said Lady Cowes, very kindly, shaking hands with her. "Good-bye."

"Yes, we shall manage to get away soon now, I hope. Good-bye, Sibyl; don't let me detain you any longer. I see you are anxious to go upstairs again."

This was said by Lady Juliet, and rather bitterly, for she saw that Lord Edwin stood at the door talking with Lady Brightly and appearing not to see her.

"You are mistaken, Juliet; I am not going upstairs, but Lord Edwin Beauville is just going away with his brother, and I dare say he will have no objection to see you into your carriage. Lord Edwin," she said, addressing herself this time to that gentleman, "will you be so kind as to call Lady Cowes's carriage and see her and her daughters into it?"

And casting one glance of supreme contempt upon her favourite friend, she moved away in the direction of the dining-room, from whence Lord Twickenham and Lady Isobel Clanfyne were at that moment issuing, and with whom she stopped to talk, without looking once

back at her friends, until Lady Cowes's cloaks having been found, and her carriage having come to the door, Lord Edwin, obeying her own special commands, had seen that lady and her daughters out of the house.

Lord Belgrave now approached to say good-bye, and a moment afterwards he and his brother were driving up Pall Mall towards St James's Street in one of the most elegant of broughams.

CHAPTER VIII.

LONDON'S HEART.

(Not by Mr. Farjeon.)

WHEN Lord Edwin and Lord Belgrave were comfortably seated in the latter's brougham silence reigned for some minutes between the brothers.

It was the Marquis who first broke it.

"You are in love with Sibyl Fetherstone, Edwin," he said. "I hardly know whether to congratulate or pity you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if your intentions are only to amuse yourself with that beautiful girl, I could congratulate you on your choice, for she is a clever woman, and in every way superior to the common new-dress-worshipping young ladyhood of London, or to the frisky, sharp young ladies of New York; but that if you are really in love with that young lady I should rather pity you, for you know very well that she would never consent to become your wife."

Lord Edwin coloured, but fortunately the light of their cigars, the only light in the carriage, was not enough to betray this weakness to his brother.

"You wrong me, Belgrave, he said in a calm tone

after a short pause. "I neither seek Miss Fetherstone's society for amusement, nor have I ever dreamt of becoming her husband. I know very well that I am only a second son, and that my means will never allow me to indulge in such a luxury as a wife!"

This was said in a bitter yet resigned tone which went straight to the Marquis's heart.

"I am awfully sorry, Edwin, to have offended you," he said. "I assure you I did not mean to do so; but your behaviour to-night has been, to say the least of it, strange. But, of course, I have no right to accuse you, or indeed any one, and I dare say you are right in thinking that I should remove the beam in my own eye before I attempt to draw out the mote in yours; but, you see, it pains me to hear any one laughing at you, and if you go on flirting with Miss Fetherstone, or indeed with any young lady, on back staircases, you expose yourself sadly to remarks. But tell me truly, are you really in love with that girl?"

"Of course not! Love! Fancy you and I, Belgrave, of all men in the world, talking of being really in love! Why the idea was exploded long ago; it is confounded rot, and that's all I can call it; yet I must confess that I really do admire Miss Fetherstone. I know that she is a dangerous woman—that her beautiful soul-stirring face is the face of a man-snarer, subtle and passionate and cruel in its blind selfishness—yet she is so wondrously handsome that any man might yield to it against all the warnings of reason. You see how far I am from being in love when I can talk of her like this, and I am not blind either to other realities, which, if less dangerous, are not perhaps less opposed to any love I might entertain for her. I am fully aware that she is poor, and that her

father will never dream of her marrying any one who has not at least a large income. Of course, in his position, and with her wondrous beauty, he has a right to expect this, and I know Sibyl too well to indulge even in the doubtful idea that she herself would prefer me to a richer man, were he even an old widower with six grown-up daughters, all expecting to be chaperoned by her in her first season as a married woman."

"I am glad to hear you talk like that, Edwin. I see you are not in love yet—but take care. When women encourage and flatter you, and drive you on and on, until they make you propose *bon gré mal gré*, do not think for a moment that it is because they ever thought of you as a husband. No—but because they like to see handsome fellows like you at their feet, and because their vanity is flattered by the idea that while strong powerful men are pining in fetters, the slaves of their slightest whims, they are themselves free to love whom they like, and scorn your suit. They are like cats—they like to catch mice; but only to play with them, and toss them into the air, as the fancy of the moment strikes them. They seldom care to swallow them."

My readers will see that Lord Belgrave's idea of women was not of the highest. The truth was that he had been born and bred in a sphere where women are often feared and often despised, but where they are but seldom loved. He divided the sex into two classes—those who expected to be amused by him, and those by whom he expected to be amused; and he despised one almost as much as the other, for he was too keen an observer, and too calm a judge, not to be fully aware that in both these classes the end in view was the same, however different might be the means employed.

In the *grand monde* he was besieged by young ladies in search of a husband—by young married women in search of a “friend”—by respectable mammas in search of a son-in-law; for, as Byron truly remarks—

“Good society is but a game,
‘The royal game of goose,’ as I may say;
Where everybody has some separate aim,
An end to answer, or a plan to lay—
The single ladies wishing to be double,
The married ones to save the virgins trouble.”

In the *demi monde*, which in his youth he had much frequented, the demon called Marriage was of course exorcised; yet he knew very well that there was not a smile given, or a kiss bestowed, which was not prompted by some interested motive, and which, had he been a poor or an unknown man, would not have been so lavishly given.

But my readers must not think badly of my hero, for it was not his fault that the women of these two classes—the only ones he knew, or could ever hope to know—carefully hid behind a mask of perfect heartlessness and consummate selfishness, any real feeling of love or hatred, any sudden but yet natural outburst of true feeling, as if they were actually ashamed of such sentiments. I say this—not that I know this to be the case for certain, for, of course, to me, as to every other man, women always show themselves behind this mask, and I have never had a chance of seeing them without it—but because my own heart tells me that all women—from the proud Princess, who sits in solitary grandeur in her palace, to the fascinating Anonyma, who is enthroned in her brougham, surrounded by crowds of devoted admirers—must experience feelings of their own—feelings which,

however much they may try to smother under the mask society obliges them to wear, must always be asserting their rights, and causing them at times even to despise themselves.

Lord Belgrave was not a better man than his neighbours, yet he was not worse than most of his set. He possessed what few, indeed, really own—a heart and a conscience. Yet he was man of the world enough to keep these treasures for himself, and not exhibit to the general public qualities they never appreciate, or even understand. The consequence was that Lord Belgrave had been set down, by people who not possessing either heart or conscience themselves, yet endeavoured to appear as if they did, as a reckless, cold, and unimpressionable man—a man of wild and highly disreputable habits, yet one who, being the owner of fine estates, and two of the oldest coronets in England, no one could afford to cut.

Strange to say, he had but few friends, and amongst these not one with whom he was intimate, although every man of any standing in Europe, and every woman who had any pretensions to fashion or beauty, claimed acquaintance with him.

In his youth he had been but little in England. During his father's lifetime, and ever since he had left College, he had been a constant traveller, and his *début* in London society had only taken place a year or two after the old Marquis's death.

His brother, Lord Edwin Beauville, on the contrary, had lived almost entirely with his father, and had but seldom left his native country.

Thus the brothers had seen but little of each other, and though in reality they appreciated each other's good

qualities and were the best of friends, yet they were far from entertaining that brotherly affection and all-confiding love which can only spring from mutual sympathy and long and intimate intercourse.

Lord Edwin, as I said before, had lived a great deal during the first years of his manhood in the stately palace of the Belgraves—the world-famed Holm Abbey, only leaving it, in the autumn, to go to Scotland to one of his father's numerous shooting lodges, and, in the spring, to pass the season in the old family mansion in London, or, in the summer, to enjoy a few weeks' cruise in one of his father's yachts. He had always been accustomed to every luxury money could procure, and at his father's house he had always had as many horses and carriages as he required at his disposal; one of the finest kennels in the country, for Lord Belgrave was master of the hounds; covers full of game, moors well stocked with grouse, and a fine house to which to invite his friends.

Such had been his life until his father died, when the happy dream vanished, and he found out, what he had not realised till then—that he was only a second son, and that every inch of the immense family estates, and every house, and yacht, and shooting box, belonged to his brother—the brother whom he had only seen at long and rare intervals, the present Marquis of Belgrave. His father, though he loved him dearly, could not provide for him, the property being all entailed, and the money which he had received from the late Marquis having been long ago spent. His mother, the beautiful daughter of a duke, had had but a small portion, and that too had vanished. His father, of course, had done what he could for his favourite son—he had given him a University

education, he had caused him to be returned as Member for the county of which he was the Lord Lieutenant, and he had settled as large a sum as he could dispose of upon him. But what was all this after what he had been accustomed to? How could he keep up his position as a nobleman with means so slender? Of course, his brother, on his return, had told him to remain with him as long as he liked, and that he was still to consider Holm Abbey as his home. But Lord Edwin was proud, and, though he liked his brother well enough, he would not be indebted to him for anything. He had therefore come to town, where he had taken chambers at the Albany, and where he had settled down. He visited his brother occasionally during the autumn and winter, but only as he visited several other friends; and Lord Belgrave had never been able to induce him to take up his abode in Beauville House, the old family mansion in Belgrave Square, where a set of rooms might have easily been allotted to him quite independent of the Marquis's own apartments; but he would have considered this as living upon his brother's charity, and therefore his proud spirit revolted against such a measure.

By the world he was considered the merriest and happiest of men, for he always seemed light-hearted, and he always had something pleasant to say to everyone. As a rule he was more popular than his brother, who rather shunned society, and whose cold distant manner frightened people. The men all agreed in calling him a "jolly good fellow," and the ladies pronounced him from the first a "charming man."

I have already said that he was very handsome, and although by no means clever, yet he was well versed in those arts which most attract the notice of men in

every-day life. He was far from being the great classic scholar, or profound philosopher, or accomplished linguist his brother was; but was a good rider and a crack shot. He could play billiards, or, indeed, any game, as well as most people; and his French was grammatical and intelligible, which is more than can be said of many.

Such were the two men whom we left sitting in the brougham, quietly smoking their havanas, while it rolled over the pavement of St. James's, and who are now stepping out of that carriage and entering the wide doorway of Green's Club.

Arm-in-arm they ascended the splendid marble staircase, when, half-way up, they were met by two other men, who had been talking in a low tone of voice for some time, and who, when they saw Lord Belgrave and Lord Edwin approach, immediately joined them.

"Any news, Ferrers?" said the Marquis, in his usual careless tone.

"Nothing new that I know of—excepting that there is a new loan to be issued by Turkey, and that Lord Townsdown's wife has run away for the second time, and that Sancho Panza is not going to run for the Derby after all."

"Well, come, that's not so bad; who is upstairs?"

"Oh, very few; there seems to be hardly any one in town yet. But as you are going up, Belgrave, I don't half mind going up with you; we can have a turn at baccarat, if you like."

The four men proceeded up the stairs and entered an immense saloon on the first floor, brilliantly lighted, around which stood about a dozen small tables covered with green cloth, on each of which were placed a pair of candles with pretty little green shades. This sight was

too tempting, and soon afterwards Lord Edwin and his companion, who was no other than the well-known Ralph Erroll of the Blues, sat down with a few other friends to a game of Loo.

Lord Belgrave walked to the end of the room and flung himself into an arm-chair near the fire, without removing his hat from his head. There was a group of four men standing before the immense marble fireplace, who, when he approached, politely made way for him, though he seemed prepared to pay them but little attention. The conversation, which till then had been general, did not flag now. In truth, how could it do so, considering that the beautiful Marchioness of Townsdown, the lady who, as we have heard already, had eloped for the second time, was the heroine?

Of course, according to these men, this lady had a very good excuse for running away from her husband—he was older than she was, and hated society, etc.

"For my part," said Percy Ferrers, joining in the conversation, "I think Townsdown fully deserves what has happened, for he did the most foolish thing a man could do—took back his wife after she had run away the first time."

"You are right, Ferrers," burst out Lord Malise, a fair-haired youth, in whom one could not help noticing the unmistakable signs of excessive dissipation already impressed upon the open patrician brow. "Why, confound the jackass, how could he expect any one, even his wife, to have any respect for him *after that!*"

"Well, I suppose the woman always gets the best of it, in spite of society," said Fred Stoneleigh, one of the favourite *habitués* of Green's. "Of course, everybody pretends to be shocked, and the highly-respectable

matrons of Mayfair will shut their doors against her, and wise men shake their heads when her name is mentioned, and the young ladies forget their slang for once, and blush and cast down their eyes; but in the long run all agree that he must have been a horrible man when she ran away from him, and, in their hearts, everybody respects and admires her for her courage in thus braving society at large, and feel very thankful to her for so kindly procuring them a new scandal to talk about and moralize upon. As for her husband, he only gets laughed at, and at best pitied, which, perhaps, is the hardest blow of all!"

Lord Malise, who was lighting a new cigar at that moment, stopped short, and allowed the match to go out.

"Hang it, Stoneleigh," he said, turning towards the man who had just spoken, "what's the matter with you? is it women or Jews? Come, what makes you so despondent to-night? Is it a plant in the turf, or a bad vein at baccarat?"

"Neither one nor the other, old fellow," he answered doggedly; "only as I am on the point of getting married myself, it pains me to see the way women treat their husbands in Mayfair. You must confess that it is a damper under the circumstances. The other day I had a violent discussion with a Frenchman on this very point. He pretended that it was only English women who ran away from their husbands; and that French women, though in other respects perhaps inferior, as he confessed, always managed to keep sacred their husbands' reputation."

"Well," exclaimed Percy Ferrers, "they may keep sacred their husbands' reputation, but, by Jove! they do manage somehow or other to play precious lightly with

their own! Why, I do not believe there exists a pretty French woman who has not, or has not had, a *liaison* of some kind in her day! Only that in England we hear more of these things, because we are shocked at them, and make a noise about them; while on the Continent such things are too common even to be talked about. Vice is our episode—it is their epic.”

“Yet the Frenchman was right,” said Lord Malise, who had now succeeded in lighting his cigar. “They manage these things quietly in France, and we seldom hear of scandals in Paris such as we have almost every day in London. The French husbands may have to put up with quite as much as the English; but, at least, they are spared the laughter of their friends, and their wives are not the less invited to people’s houses because everybody knows they only go to meet their *cher ami*, and to have a quiet chat with him.”

“Well, such fashions may do for France, where people are so exceedingly good-natured that they actually make a point of asking each aristocratic sinner, with his or her favourite ‘*friend*,’ in the kindest and most charitable manner; but I must confess that I doubt very much if John Bull—that highly proper and exceedingly crotchety old gentleman—would ever put up with *ménages à trois*, and shut his eyes to the consequences.”

“Yet,” said Fred Stoneleigh, thoughtfully, “don’t you think anything is better than to create a scandal by running away, or by getting into the Divorce Court; for then, with the best possible intentions, society can no longer shut its eyes and remain silent? What is your opinion, Lord Belgrave?” he added, turning towards that nobleman.

"My opinion, I am afraid, is not a very consolatory one. It is that if you wish to keep your wife for yourself, you must choose a woman who has nothing that can attract any other man. The great beauty of the mistress and her chief charm must lie entirely in the lover's eye, and then alone he may hope that she will remain faithful to him."

A tall thin man, with a dark beard, now approached the group. Ferrers and Stoneleigh shook hands with him. "Anything new, Cyril?" asked the first.

"New! why, don't you know Mortland is dead, and the seat for Brightborough is vacant? I only heard it three days ago, and I immediately took the first train, and two hours afterwards I had put up Jobkin for that queen of watering-places. Now he must go there himself and canvass for a while."

"I had no idea your friend Jobkin was a politician," said Lord Malise, calmly. "What are his views?"

"Of course he is not a politician. Whoever said he was? and as for his principles, we have not quite decided yet what they shall be, although I strongly advise him to stick to something down-right, and stand either as a regular old Tory or as an out-and-out Radical; none of your half-and-half for me. Mortland, the late member, was a Liberal-Conservative, and the one before him a Conservative-Liberal. The Brightboroughians must be sick of such mild mixtures by this time, and a good dose of something rattling can hardly help taking their fancy. But you must not call Jobkin my friend—remember he is only my *protégé*."

The other men laughed, but in a careless manner, and a glance of mute intelligence passed between Ferrers and Stoneleigh.

"My aunt, Mrs. Boston Gilbert," proceeded Mr. Cyril Scholl, who seemed very communicative that evening, "has undertaken to bring him out this year. You all know how fond she is of introducing *parvenus* into society. You see, she is so very kind-hearted that it pains her to see a rich man like Jobkin, who could afford to give grand balls and splendid dinners to the 'upper ten,' wasting his millions upon his own stupid set of friends down in Bedford Square and Clapham. Jobkin of course, is an ass—a man with no education whatever, and no manners: but then he has sixty thousand a year, and he will not object to spend them in a good cause, so I have promised to help my aunt. The first necessity, of course, is to get a position for him. The name of Jobkin by itself sounds commercial enough, it is true; but James Jobkin, Esq., M.P., is quite another thing. So my first care has been to get a borough for him, which, I assure you, is a difficult matter just now: so you may imagine my joy yesterday morning when I heard of Mortland's death and that the seat for Brightborough was consequently vacant. So we shall have Jobkin a legislator before long. By-the-bye, Lord Belgrave, you know he is going to give a grand ball at his new house in Grosvenor Square. Do you think you could be induced to attend it? You know how you would please my aunt, Mrs. Boston Gilbert, if you made your appearance there only for five seconds."

The Marquis shook his head and coldly remarked that he disliked balls and seldom went to them.

"Of course, of course," added Cyril Scholl, "we all hate balls. I am sure no one can dislike them more than I do. But I think the poor fellow should be patronized, and that we should all make an exception in his favour."

"*You* may do what you please, Mr. Scholl," answered Lord Belgrave, with an ironical smile playing upon his finely-chiselled lips. "I, for one, prefer to patronize those sort of people by encouraging their trade rather than their balls, and by helping them to make money rather than by aiding them to spend it. Society, I assure you, is quite large enough as it is; and although I certainly have no business to find fault with Mrs. Boston Gilbert for her mistaken kindness of heart in trying to push people amongst us, and turning into Statesmen men whom we should respect and admire infinitely more if they would only keep east of Temple Bar, and deal in bonds and coupons instead of balls and invitation cards, yet I must confess that I, for my part, must decline to have anything to do with them."

Cyril Scholl was evidently offended by these observations, for he turned away before Lord Belgrave had half finished, and when the last words reached his ear, left the circle altogether. Yet he dared not show his displeasure in any stronger manner, for he would not have broken with the noble Marquis for all the rich men in the City of London, for whom, by-the-bye, some cruel tongues said he had rather a strong predilection.

When he was out of hearing Lord Belgrave rose, and, coming closer to the other three men, said, in a kinder and more earnest tone than that which he had before used—

"If there is one thing I hate in the world, it is snobism. I can put up with want of education—even with want of manners; I can fully appreciate and admire a plain-spoken rough country ploughman; I could even bring myself to love a simple uneducated mountain lass; but these City men of ours, with all their prejudices and

tricks—with their incessant flutter and bluster and pretension—with their constant boasting of wealth—with their perpetual strain after effect—with their insatiable desire to get on in society—with their stupid imitations, I cannot and will not endure!”

“You are right, Belgrave,” burst out Ferrers. “I quite agree with you. Men like this Jobkin should not be encouraged. Our society is quite mixed enough without him and his friends; for if once we allow him to get a footing in Mayfair, what will prevent him from introducing all his City friends, with their wives and families, amongst us?”

“I shall take care to have him black-balled all the way down St. James’s Street and up Pall-Mall,” said Lord Malise, who liked to be considered a ruler of men as far as clubs were concerned.

“Thank you very much for your kind intentions, Malise,” said Stoneleigh; “but Percy Ferrers here and I have done perhaps more to ruin that poor fellow’s bright prospects of social success than you can ever imagine;” and as the two men’s eyes met they both of them involuntarily burst out into a hearty laugh.

“What do you mean?”

Fred Stoneleigh looked at Ferrers, and when he had recovered from his fit of laughter, he said—

“Simply this, my dear fellow, that we are going to stand for Brightborough ourselves.”

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Lord Malise, more and more surprised and bewildered.

“The thing is simple enough,” said Percy Ferrers. “That fellow, Scholl, tried to deceive us in a mean, shameful way, when he said his friend Jobkin had not decided as yet what side he should take. Yesterday, I

was all day at Brightborough; and there everybody knows as well as he does himself, what he tries so hard to pretend he does not know, that Jobkin stands for that town as a Moderate-Conservative; but we shall manage to baffle him yet—shan't we, old boy?"

And Percy Ferrers again looked at his friend, and burst out laughing for the second time.

"But I cannot yet understand why you are going to stand also for that town," said the bewildered young nobleman. "And you too, Stoneleigh—you must know that neither of you can have much chance of success against a rich man like that, and surely you do not intend to cut out your friend here?"

"No, no. I must try and explain this wonderful mystery to you. You know that Lord Twiston has great possessions in and near Brightborough; so he wants his son to stand for that town. Now, Willy Twiston is a great friend of ours, and we are going to help him, but in a new and highly scientific manner, the invention of which, I am sure, will add greatly to our credit. The Twistons have always been Liberals; and Willy Twiston will, of course, stand as a Liberal member. But, you see, unfortunately, in Brightborough, as in all fashionable watering-places, the Tory party is the strongest. Now, our plan of action is this: Ferrers will stand as a regular old Tory, and I as an out-and-out Conservative. Of course, neither of us are intended to come in. Our only plan is to split the Conservative party, and, by dividing the votes, render the Liberals the most powerful, so that our friend Willy may come in with flying colours. Do you understand now?"

"You must mention, Stoneleigh," added Ferrers, "that Lord Twiston is going to pay our expenses. He is rich

enough to keep all the three Conservatives in the field if necessary ; and, as he has set his heart on his son being an M.P., he will stop short of nothing. So, you see, that that poor fool, Jobkin, has but few chances—unless indeed he spends all his money amongst the shop-people in Brightborough, and wins their hearts by means of his gold—which I doubt he will ever do, for he has made all his money himself, and must know its full value.”

Both Lord Belgrave and Lord Malise burst out laughing, and the joke was soon all over the Club. Percy Ferrers and Stoneleigh were congratulated by all for their talent for political intrigue, and became the heroes of the night.

Lord Belgrave, however, was not quite so ready in his praises as the rest, and though he had laughed heartily enough at the plan so well described and so cunningly conceived by his two friends, he could not but exclaim to himself, as he left Green's at a late hour that night—

“Poor England ; poor England !—to think that we must be governed by such men, and for such motives !”

As for his brother, Lord Edwin Beauville, he still sat at the little table with Ralph Erroll.

The other tables were by this time all occupied, and so were many more in the adjoining room and in the upper apartments ; while the billiard-balls flew incessantly round the great tables in the rooms at the top of the house. Silver and gold were staked freely on all sides, and until late the next morning heavy betting went on, on the players, even amongst those who did not indulge in the games themselves.

The English Legislation is a precious good one ! Gaming-houses, we are told, are done away with and

gambling is forbidden—*rouge et noir* only exists, we are assured, in some out-of-the-way places on the shores of the distant Mediterranean! Ah, the English Legislation is a clever one. I suppose no Member of Parliament ever entered a club after midnight? What am I saying? Of course not!—and if he did, why Statesmen make laws for others, not for themselves!

CHAPTER IX.

HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT.

(Not by Anthony Trollope.)

As I think I have before stated, Lord Belgrave lived all by himself, in the magnificent mansion built by his ancestors in the great square which derives its name from them, in what was then a suburb and is now the centre of fashion of the Metropolis.

His brother, Lord Edwin Beauville, had declined the honour of sharing it with him, and preferred to occupy a couple of bed-rooms near Piccadilly where, as he said, he could feel himself his own master.

Lord Belgrave only inhabited, however, a small portion of Beauville House, for such was the name by which this beautiful mansion was known—a name dear to the annals of English fashion and art, for in past generations that house had been the *rendezvous* of all the rank, talent, and beauty London could in those days boast of. On the ground-floor, looking towards the garden—which with every new tenant seemed to grow smaller, the houses around gradually coming upon it on all sides from year to year—there was a set of apartments which in the days of his father, the late Marquis, had been set apart for visitors, and had consequently been but little

used by the family during their annual stay in town, for it was separated from the rest of the house by the great hall and the principal staircase, and being near the garden, and almost on the same level, had been considered too damp for general use. It was here that our friend, Lord Belgrave, had fixed his residence, partly because he preferred living on the ground-floor, near the garden and the stables, and partly because he could in that way shut up the rest of the house, and go in and out without having to pass through dreary and deserted saloons and galleries, which, as a single man, he could not have used himself, for he gave no parties, and when he wanted to ask more than a couple of friends to dinner or supper, he resorted, as a rule, to some *restaurant*.

He generally rose late and had his breakfast in his bed-room, but the morning after we made his acquaintance at Lady Twickenham's "Small and Early," he was later even than usual, and eleven o'clock had struck by the monumental Louis XIV. clock in the hall before he had rung for his valet to bring him his coffee and the *Morning Post*.

He had not enjoyed a good night's rest, however; for do what he would he could not dismiss from his mind the thought of his brother being in love. He did not sympathize much, it is true, with this younger brother of his—with his reckless habits, and superficial knowledge, and meaningless, unsatisfactory mode of life; yet he could not but love him, for he was his only brother, and, besides, he pitied more than he blamed him, and would gladly have done anything in his power to render his lot in life a happier one. But he could not dispose even of his own property, and knowing but too well that the beautiful and proud Sibyl Fetherstone would not be a woman

to throw herself away upon a man who could hardly keep her in feathers and laces, he could not but feel for him if he should ever fall in love with her—an event which seemed only too probable—for had he not himself been struck by her wondrous charms, and almost fallen a victim to them the previous season?

His thoughts had wandered in that direction, perhaps at first against his will, and, as it generally happens when we begin to think of another person's misfortunes, he had ended by applying the lesson to himself.

"I shall never marry," he had repeated to himself that night, perhaps for the hundredth time. "The more I live in this world the less I believe in love; and yet I cannot but feel *that* in myself which tells me how deeply and how faithfully I could love. Yet marriage is too dangerous an experiment. If I were a poor man like my brother, with nothing to recommend me but my good looks and my true heart, I do believe I should be tempted to try it—that is to say, if I could find a woman who would be contented with these things alone, which I doubt; but as I am convinced that when women smile at me, and cast down their eyes, and blush at my stereotyped speeches, it is of my coronet and my estate alone that they are thinking, I can never allow myself to feel towards any girl as I should like to feel, nor try to inspire her with such feelings as I would like her to entertain for me. Sibyl Fetherstone! Ah! can it be possible that such a beautiful creature, such a perfect woman, as Sibyl Fetherstone, can be like the rest of the title and fortune-hunting young ladyhood of society—a heartless coquette, who displays only just a little more talent than the rest in the way she manages to hide her true feelings?"

"Ah, if we could only find out the true feelings of the women we most admire! But no; they are all like those beautiful azalea trees at the flower-shows; the stalks, the branches, the twigs, the leaves, the buds, are all invisible, and the bright, beautiful, dazzling but scentless flowers alone are allowed to strike our eyes. Yes, they are like those azalea trees, with which Scotch gardeners take such pains, and for which golden prizes are offered every day. They are cut perfectly round, with no branches here and there that might catch the eye; with every spontaneous outburst of their characters kept back, with every impulse primed away as no flower-bearing branch that might disfigure with a few green leaves the uniform colouring of the whole; and our eyes are dazzled by the wondrous colouring, the perfect shape, the fresh healthy appearance of every flower; and we buy the tree, we expend our gold in embellishing it, we transplant it into a costly Sèvres vase, and we place it in our drawing-room in the post of honour; but the spring soon passes by and with it the beautiful flowers; the hot summer comes and burns the new blossoms with its overpowering rays; and when winter at last makes its appearance, when the cold and the frost drive us into our houses, and we seek for refuge in our warm drawing-room, and we sit down beside the fire to contemplate our beautiful azalea, what do we find? The beautiful flowers that took our fancy are gone, the perfect shape of the tree is no more, and instead of a handsome, healthy plant, that would have gladdened our hearts, we can discover in that artistic and expensive vase nothing but a miserable branch and a few frost-bitten twigs! Even Moore's charming idea—

'You may break, you may ruin, the vase, if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still'

cannot be applied to them—the beautiful azalea shrub never had any scent!”

Such were the thoughts that disturbed Lord Belgrave's mind and prevented him from sleeping. And from these thoughts it may be inferred that he knew very little of what love really was. Such thoughts, however, he would have shrunk from divulging even to his most intimate friends; for, as I have said before, Lord Belgrave, like a great many other men I know, took particular care never to show the best side of his nature to the world; the consequence being that his friends were only acquainted with the uniform contemptuous severity and coldness of manner, the slighting languor of habit, the listless fatigue of tone, the continual suppression of all feeling beneath set phrases of half-sardonic and half-ridiculing brevity, the irony of all his remarks, and the apparently general want of heart, which are the common attributes of the men of Mayfair. No wonder, therefore, that he should have been set down by society at large as a man without a heart, incapable of feeling any more tender passion than self-love.

“Lord Belgrave,” I heard Lady Paul say the other day, “is a man without a heart, and a dreadful rake; he is hardly fit to be admitted into the society of ladies.” I must not forget to mention, however, that Lady Paul has six unmarried daughters, all of whom have been for the last three years making violent efforts to obtain that nobleman's heart; and that it was only after they were fully convinced that that heart was above their commonplace fascinations that Lady Paul began to tell her friends that he had no heart, and that his society was dangerous to the morals of young ladies.

A few days before, at a little supper in the Hay-

market, I had heard Mdle. Mariolette, the famous, or rather infamous, dancer, exclaim when she heard some one mention his name—

"Oh, là là! Cet homme là a une araignée dans le plafond. Hein il ne se gêne pas par exemple!"

And at Prince's, a couple of days later, Mrs. Muleta, the lovely Spanish lady who rejoices in a character which Lord Byron would have classified as "*Couleur de Rose*," neither white nor scarlet—speaking to an intimate friend, whispered, while I passed her on my skates—

"No, no, I cannot invite Lord Belgrave; what *would* the Prince say?"

Such was the character Lord Belgrave had won for himself; a character ill-deserved enough, yet a character of which he felt by no means ashamed.

"The deuce!—he is a prig that I should like to take down a peg or two," had said Cyril Scholl the night before at Green's, when speaking of him to a club acquaintance; and this man in his turn had exclaimed—"You are right; he is a snob, though he wears one of the oldest coronets in England, and he only cares to associate with Lords and Dukes." This he had said because he had happened to get introduced to him three years previously, and Lord Belgrave, never having seen him since, had passed him in the Row that morning without bowing—so he considered himself slighted.

When Lord Belgrave at last fell asleep it was to dream of his happy youth. He thought himself once more in the sunny south; he saw woods of olive and orange trees all round him, while the lovely green vines covered all the surrounding hills; he thought himself once more far away from Mayfair and all its bustle; miles and miles away from tender-hearted maidens, plotting mothers,

designing actresses, intruding friends, and pushing acquaintances; and, instead of all these, he saw one friend by his side, one friend he could love and esteem, a man who had risked his own life to save his—Alfredo Villafranca.

But this dream did not last very long. When he again awoke he found that it was already broad day, and he mechanically rang the bell beside his bed, and his valet entered with his coffee, and, opening the shutters wide, allowed the cold foggy light of a London day to enter the room, while he placed upon the bed the last number of the *Morning Post*.

Lord Belgrave glanced over its pages in his usual careless manner—as he was wont to do every morning—saw that his name had been put in the right place in the list of those who had been at Lady Twickenham's the night before—was a little surprised to learn that he was engaged to be married to one of Lady Paul's daughters, just looked to see how the election at Brightborough was going on, and then, flinging the paper away, rose and proceeded to his customary morning toilette.

When he had finished, and was on the point of opening the plate-glass window, which opened in the French way, down the centre, to go into the garden for his usual constitutional, and first cigarette, a footman came to the door, and announced that a visitor wanted to see his lordship.

"A visitor at this unusual hour! Who can it be—do you know him, James?"

James shook his head and said he had never seen the gentleman before. "He is a foreigner, my lord, though he speaks very good English."

"A foreigner! Some penniless wretch, who comes to beg, I dare say."

"I don't think so, my lord, begging your lordship's pardon; he has come in a hansom."

"Never mind, James; say I am busy and cannot see any one."

Just as the footman was going out of the room to deliver this message to the unwelcome visitor, Lord Belgrave stopped him by saying, "Wait a moment, James; just ask the gentleman to give you his card."

With a weary expression on his face, Lord Belgrave flung himself into an arm-chair near the window, and carelessly took up one of the books lying on the small table beside him. A few seconds afterwards James re-entered the room with a neat little silver salver in his hand, bearing a card, which by its size seemed a lady's, and by its unusual thickness could be easily seen to be of foreign manufacture."

He glanced at the card, and, to his utter astonishment, read the name of his old Spanish friend, Alfredo Villafranca.

With one bound he was on his feet, and the next moment he was out of the room, and the noble Marquis and the poor Spaniard were clasped in each other's arms, to the great bewilderment of the three footmen and of the solemn butler, who stood at the other end of the long hall, and who firmly believed their master had gone raving mad all at once.

"Can it be you, Alfredo?" he exclaimed. "What an unexpected happiness!"

"Yes, it is no other; I wondered very much if you would remember me, but I see you have not forgotten your old friend!"

"Forgotten you, Alfredo!" Lord Belgrave repeated in Spanish, a language he spoke with great facility. "But

come into my den; don't let us stand here in the cold hall, and before all these men. Come, come; it is such a new sensation to show a friend into one's room whom one really likes—come," and with a light and quick step he led the way across the hall and through a side door at the end nearest the principal staircase into his library, the room in which he generally sat in the morning, Alfredo following him closely. "

Long and affectionate was this, their first interview, after so many years of separation. They both had so much to tell that they hardly allowed each other to speak. Lord Belgrave's face was so animated and had such a sweet smile upon it; his cheeks, usually so pale, were flushed, his eyes bright; he seemed altogether so little like his ordinary cold repellent self that I wonder very much if one of his every-day London acquaintances would have recognised him at that moment, for it was seldom that the proud aristocrat forgot the part he was called upon to play in society, enough to show to his friends his true nature, and to make such an unaristocratic display before them of the innermost feelings of his heart—of that heart he was accused of not possessing! Perhaps, so fully aware of the importance of his rôle in society was he, that he would not have showed himself as he really was to any one of his friends *in it*. But then, Alfredo was not in the society of Mayfair; he was a stranger to *that world*, and in the Marquis's eyes he appeared like the welcome messenger of another—a purer and better world.

It was decided that Alfredo should take up his abode in Beauville House, as the Marquis would not hear of his remaining in the small hotel, nearly three miles from Belgrave Square, at which he had put up the previous

night. "It is not often that I have the pleasure of receiving such a sympathetic friend as you in my house ; do not deprive me of any part of this enjoyment ?"

Alfredo was quite overpowered by this warm reception. He knew Lord Belgrave well enough to have expected a kind welcome from him, but he had never even dreamed of such a true-hearted and affectionate hospitality as was now offered to him, for how could he have guessed that the pleasures and duties of the elevated position the Marquis had been called upon to occupy since he quitted Spain, instead of causing him to forget the friend he had made in that country, would only endear him to him the more, and make him long all the more for his society?

"You must not call me Marquis, old fellow," he said when (his own excitement having calmed somewhat) he noticed that his friend called him by his title. "It is not the fashion in England, I assure you. Everybody calls me Lord Belgrave, and my friends call me Belgrave, *tout court*. You used to call me Beauville before, why don't you call me Belgrave now? You will always be Alfredo to me, for I shall never accustom myself to call you anything else, so you had better address me by my name too, like the good friend you always were."

A servant was dispatched to his hotel ("such a hole! —you have no conception," as the aristocratic footman described it afterwards in the servants' hall) and his slender luggage brought over to the Marquis's house. The rest of the day was spent by the two friends in talking over their past adventures while in Andalusia. Alfredo was burning with the desire to tell him all about Consuelo—to confess his love for her, and to describe her numerous charms—which I have no doubt he would

have succeeded in doing to perfection, for love is undoubtedly the best and most flattering of photographers—but he had promised that lovely girl not to speak of her to his noble friend; and then, if the truth must be all known, he involuntarily shrank from mentioning the name of one so poor and humble, and so very innocent and pure, when Lord Belgrave was describing to him the countless attractions, the wondrous fascinations, the witty sayings, and the questionable morals of the great ladies of Mayfair, and the perhaps still lovelier damsels they take for their models—the *cocottes* and the *cocodettes* of Paris.

In the evening they were forced to part, as the Marquis had a committee to attend in the House, but Alfredo was not sorry for this, as the unexpected hospitality he had received from his old friend had almost bewildered him. He wanted to compose his ideas, and to convince himself that, in spite of the confidential and intimate friendship between them, they were by no means of the same sphere, and that sooner or later Lord Belgrave would discover this, and end by regretting all the more the all-confiding proofs of friendship he now showered upon him.

“I must let him see that I, for one, am fully aware of the immense difference in our positions, and that I feel as grateful to him for all his kindness towards me as any man in my position could feel for one in his exalted station, but that the thought of friendship, or anything like equality between us, never entered *my* head.”

Then he thought that, perhaps, such words as these might offend Lord Belgrave, who evidently felt for him more than a mere passing interest. “I can hardly repay his confidence with such cold words of distant respect as

I should like to speak to him to bring him to his senses.

"What a kind, warm-hearted fellow he is! Oh, would he were not a nobleman," he exclaimed; "or, as Consuelo says—Would I were a Marquis myself!"

And he laid down to rest, and to dream of his beloved Consuelo.

CHAPTER X.

THE LADY'S MILE.

(Not by Miss Braddon.)

THE next morning Lord Belgrave met his friend in the elegant little breakfast-room with the large bow-window looking over the pretty garden, with such a happy smile playing on his lips, and such a joyful look in his eyes; and he shook hands with him so cordially, and spoke so unaffectedly about the previous night's proceedings in the House of Lords, and inquired with so much interest how he had passed the evening himself, and if he had found his bed comfortable and had slept well, that all Alfredo's good intentions of speaking to him concerning the difference in their position, and the necessity he had felt so strong the previous night of making him aware that their spheres in life were as widely apart as the countries to which they each belonged, vanished all at once from his mind.

A whole week passed, and Alfredo, though constantly in Lord Belgrave's company, had never found a convenient moment to speak to him concerning his private affairs, and the name of Consuelo, which so filled his heart, had not once escaped his lips. Yet he was happy with the life he led in that splendid mansion, surrounded by men of

talent and refinement ; riding out in the mornings in the Park, taking leisurely strolls in the afternoons through the great streets of London, which seemed so new and strange to him, and accompanying his noble friend in the evenings to the play, or to the House of Lords, a place he had often wanted to see, or to some fashionable reception or crowded ball ; all this was new and bewildering enough to make him even forget the sad state of his own affairs.

Yet neither gorgeous saloons, nor brilliant plays, nor wise orators, nor over-heated rooms and crowded streets, nor all the bustle, and hurry, and pushing, and confusion of fashionable life, could make him forget the sunny land he had left behind. London, at its best, seemed to him a cold, cheerless city, in which no two people cared for one another ; in which there was nothing real, nothing noble, and in which everybody and everything pretended to be different from what they really were ; in one word, a world without a sun. There were artificial lights enough, dazzling gas jets in every direction, and here and there a room brilliantly illuminated with pure candles of virgin wax, but the warm, penetrating, true light which the sun alone can give, and which nothing in this world can ever reproduce or imitate, was nowhere. To him the society of Mayfair was like its climate—cold, damp, cheerless, cloudy, foggy, rainy ; he missed the bright life-giving sun of Spain, and he also missed the beloved form of the woman he loved.

Since his arrival at Beauville House he had received no news of his Consuelo. He had neither seen nor heard anything of her since they had parted that cold bitter morning at the stairs of Wapping ; she had vanished from his eyes in the grey impenetrable London fog, and

he had never beheld her again. He knew that she was in London; he knew that old Fernandez had intended taking up his abode for the present in that city, but where? In vain did he look about him in the streets in the hope of catching a glimpse of her beloved form. He saw hundreds of women everywhere, but his Consuelo, the only woman he would have cared to see, where was she? He looked for her in theatres and at parties, but nowhere did he see any traces of her. He passed hours poring over the map of London, and wondering in what part of this immense city she could be living; but that chart only bewildered him the more. He compared the part he knew of London (the few streets and the couple of squares between Beauville House and Hyde Park) with the vast regions in all directions which he still ignored; and he rose, having gained nothing save perhaps a bad headache, from this bewildering study. She had promised to write to him as soon as they had found a lodging; why had she not done so? Had she forgotten his address?—or, perhaps, had she forgotten *him*? He dared not dwell on either of these alternatives, for if either of them were true, most likely he should never see her again, and it was only now that he had been a whole week without seeing her that he fully realised how dear she was to him and how aimless life would be without her.

One fine morning, near the end of April, when Alfredo had been a little more than a week with Lord Belgrave, the latter asked him if he would go for an early canter through the Park with him. The young Spaniard gladly agreed, for, as a rule—accustomed as he had been all his life to rise at an early hour—the mornings seemed very long, for, of course, in the house of the noble Marquis of

Belgrave anything like business was quite out of the question.

The friends mounted their thoroughbred steeds, and a few minutes later they were trotting over the well-paved streets of Balgravia towards that most delicious of all Mayfairian lounges—the Lady's Mile.

It was the first really fine day they had had since Alfredo's arrival; for in London, and especially during the early part of the season, bad weather is not quite so uncommon as some might suppose. The trees were just beginning to bud, and the grass looked fresh and green; the curious plants and beautiful flowers which adorn the long drive along Park Lane were in full bloom; and the rays of the morning sun shone for once over the Park with almost a tropical glare, which caused the tranquil waters of the Serpentine to glint and shine like a surface of glass studded with diamonds. The Row was full of people on horseback, and the walks along it were crowded with loungers on foot; while beautiful ladies in gorgeous costumes sat in the chairs on either side, or reclined in the many carriages drawn up at no great distance.

What a pity it is that this early ride in the Row should be so fast going out of fashion!—for indeed, what can be more agreeable, in the midst of a busy London season, than a matutinal stroll to this *rus in urbe*, where the country and the city join together to offer us their combined beauties and attractions; and indeed where could an observer find a spot more fitted in which to make his observations and draw his conclusions than this same Rotten Row? And where could a philosopher discover a fitter field for his investigations on that strange compound of amusements and ennui, decorum and corruption, virtue and vice, licentiousness and con-

ventionality, beauty and ugliness, which is called London society?—ah, indeed, where? But I suppose nothing is ever intended to last, and I dare say, when these pages see the light of public censure, my readers will exclaim, “What an ignorant fellow this foreigner must be, and how evident it is that he knows nothing of the English society he wants to depict, when he deliberately makes a Marquis take a morning ride in such an out-of-date and snobbish place as Rotten Row!”—forgetting that they have themselves taken many a one there not so very long ago.

Many men, and perhaps even more women, bowed to the noble lord and his handsome friend as they rode up and down the Lady's Mile. Some advanced and spoke to them, but Lord Belgrave was not over communicative that morning; and as he had seen most of them the night before at Lady Twisleton's dance, or afterwards at Green's, where he had gone for a few minutes before returning home, he had but little to say, and cared still less to listen to what they had to tell him. But he conversed freely enough with Alfredo, and as they passed any man of note, or any lady celebrated either for her position, beauty, or questionable character, he told him all he knew about them—or rather what the world had invented about them—and drew many a smile from his generally sad and melancholy-looking companion. For Lord Belgrave found a never-ceasing charm in letting his friend into all the secrets and peculiarities of fashionable life; and it was with the greatest possible pleasure that he daily initiated him into the mysteries of Mayfair.

“You see that man leaning against the railing, with a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, that is Mr. Victor Gordon, the great millionaire, who the other

day presented a garden to the City of London. I could tell you some funny stories about him, but it would take too long just now. You see he has his hands in his pockets—he generally has, it is one of his peculiarities; although people say he still oftener has them in other people's pockets than even in his own. As yet he is not in society, but he is building a magnificent house, and if he only gets some influential person to push him on, I dare say he will soon be able to fill it with the best people. Do you see that fine-looking man riding the high-stepping mare?—the one with the flower in his button-hole; that is Soltoun, the rich banker. He has failed three times, and ruined more men, perhaps, than any other merchant in the City of London; but now he is immensely rich, and as he has a handsome house in Grosvenor Street, and good shootings in Scotland, everybody visits him, and his invitations are at a premium. What a good example men like these two must give to the numerous starving city clerks who crowd our busy streets, of the great advantages which success commands; and what a lesson they must afford them of that sad truth, that honesty is, after all, but a secondary thing now-a-days, and that nothing succeeds, or will ever succeed, like success!"

At that moment a strikingly handsome brunette cantered past them on a fine Arab horse, which she chastised unmercifully with the jewelled whip she held in her delicately-gloved hand.

"Look," he said, "look at that woman; that is the celebrated Eglantine Rosefield. Two years ago I remember her a stupid country girl, with red hair, coarse hands, and red cheeks, who could hardly speak two words of good English. She is now the celebrated, the

famous, the rich actress, whose sayings every man quotes, whose dresses every lady copies. She has no more education now than she had then; off the stage she is a regular *grenouille*, and men take her coarse sayings, which she delivers with a strong Yorkshire accent, for witty *jeu de mots*. She has no talent for acting, and merely repeats her part like a parrot, and her dancing is simply a mixture of an English north-country clog-dance and a Parisian can-can; but she has become the fashion, somehow or other, and Eglantine Rosefield is the talk of the town; the envy of all her sex; the great and irresistible attraction of ours. There, that is the sort of women we exhibit now-a-days to our sisters and daughters and ask them to admire; and these are the daily examples we offer to our peasant girls, and then want them to remain virtuous on seven shillings a week!"

As Lord Belgrave was speaking, a large carriage, drawn by two fine-looking bays, stopped short just in front of the two men, and caused Alfredo's horse—which was rather a frisky one—to bound backwards.

"That is the Lady Elizabeth Schletter," said Lord Belgrave, calling his attention to the fair occupant of the carriage—a tall thin woman, with a delicate face, in an elegant white silk dress, and with a large Rubens hat of dark blue velvet on her lustrous hair, which was dressed in rather a classical style, highly becoming to the wearer. "That lady also affords our young ladies a lesson in Mayfair morality. She was one of the many daughters of a poor Scotch Earl. Several men of very good rank and family proposed to her, for she was very handsome, but she refused them all, and preferred marrying Mr. Schletter, a nobody who was very rich, and who wanted to get a footing in society. She did not love him, though

I will not say that she actually loved anyone else; but she sacrificed herself to a man whom she could never honour or look up to, a man whom she herself called a snob; but she was wise, and look at the result! There she is—riding in as handsome a carriage as you would wish to look at; dressed in the most costly of materials, made by the most fashionable of Parisian dressmakers; with ear-rings in her ears which would have been worth a king's ransom in the good old days when kings were worth something. She has a fine town house and two country seats, the best horses money can procure, and a kind, devoted husband, who denies her nothing; while her sisters—well, no one knows much of them. One is married, I have heard, to a poor Irish peer, and lives in Ireland, nursing her children. The other, I believe, is also too poor to come to town, and is settled in some distant island in the north seas, and passes her days scolding her maids, when she hasn't enough money to pay their wages, and worrying her miserable husband, the fourth son of an Earl, of as ancient an extraction as her father, but, unfortunately, also as poor. But do you see those three rather pretty girls, with the mauve dresses, sitting under that tree, by the side of a fat old lady in green? They are the Ladies Morley; they are hunting for husbands, and I dare say their mother at this very moment is pointing out Lady Elizabeth to them, and asking them to follow her good example; for the Morleys are also very poor, though the brother, the young Earl of Malise, stakes a small fortune at lansquenet every night at Green's, and has just taken a handsome house in Park Lane for Mariolette, the dancer at the Alhambra.

Percy Ferrers now rode towards them on a thoroughbred mare.

"How do you do, Ferrers?" said Lord Belgrave, assuming suddenly his colder manner. "Who is that pretty woman you just bowed to, riding with Lord Clare?"

"Oh, that woman with the golden hair? That is Mrs. Askew, a nice jolly sort of woman, who does not mind smoke, and who doesn't resent being cut if you are driving with your wife or your sister. She is amusing enough, like all those of her set; she is highly respectable though, and her husband, who is in the City, is a rich, stupid old fogey, whom you may make a butt of as much as you like. She is good for all sorts of fun—you know the style I mean—shall I introduce you to her? She will be an acquisition, I assure you, for your country houses, where great ladies will not go because you are not married, and cocottes are too expensive to treat your friends to, and refuse to go for nothing—come, let us ride towards her."

"Thank you, I would rather be excused," answered Lord Belgrave, coldly, "I do not care for half-and-half; she may not be an a but she certainly is a confounded adulteration." Then turning towards Alfredo, he added, "Shall we take our departure? The Row is beginning to get so crowded that it is almost impossible to move; come, Alfredo." And without saying another word he trotted off in the direction of Hyde Park Corner without taking any further notice of his aristocratic friend.

As they approached the monumental gate near Apsley House, a carriage passed them, drawn by two splendid horses, which diverted the attention of Alfredo from the highly artistic bronze horse on the opposite side, which he had been contemplating in mute amazement and surprise at what English art was capable of.

"Belgrave," he exclaimed, "who is that?"

Lord Belgrave looked up, and his cold grey eyes followed the direction of his friend's admiring gaze. He then answered in his usual indifferent manner—"Oh, that is the Countess of Birmingham."

"By the Holy Virgin, she is beautiful!" exclaimed the enthusiastic Spaniard. "But who is that old woman by her side, with the dark curls hanging over her haggard colourless face?"

"The old woman by her side!" repeated Lord Belgrave, laughing. "Why, that's her husband, Lord Birmingham; did you never hear of him?"

"No—how should I? You know very well I never was in what you are pleased to call 'the world;' and these famous, or, as you would have me believe, infamous aristocrats of yours, are total strangers to me."

"I wonder at that. I thought everybody had heard of Lady Birmingham. Why, if you only walk two hundred yards down Regent Street, you will see her portrait reproduced in half-a-dozen shop windows, and placed generally between those of the favourite actresses and dancers of the day. She is one of the standard beauties by whom men swear in public, and at whom women swear in private. I could tell you such strange stories about her, and especially about her husband—'the haggard old woman,' as you called him! Lord Birmingham is immensely rich—though, I am assured, tradesmen find it most difficult to get any money from him—and one of his whims is to buy all the jewels he can find—not for his wife, however, though he does pretend to give them to her—but to send to all the public exhibitions he can think of, both at home and abroad, to display them to the bewildered eyes of the world. His poor wife is

never allowed to wear them. They seem very happy though, don't they?—and in public, at least, they are always to be seen side by side. People say, in private a natural reaction takes place—but I know you hate scandal, and I shall say no more. However, you should admire Lord Birmingham, for he is a great patron of art and artists, and as for his wife—why, she is the admiration of all London, and the envy of half England; so what does it matter if at home she be happy or not?”

At that moment they were passing under the marble arch, and the crowd of people on horseback, who were now returning homewards to lunch, forced them to take to the side nearest the pavement, and to stop for a few seconds before entering Piccadilly. As they did so, Alfredo's attention was involuntarily attracted towards the great mass of men and women who had congregated there, close beside the rails, to see the gentlemen and ladies pass on their fine horses; and amongst this crowd his eyes accidentally rested on one, the sight of whom made his heart bound with joy, for this person was no other than Juan Fernandez, the brother of his Consuelo.

Juan had also recognized him, for, pushing through the people in front of him in an unceremonious manner, he made his way as quickly as he could towards Alfredo, and was the first to speak.

“Villafranca,” he said, “well met! I thought I should find you at last, though this confounded city seems to be a pandemonium without limit.”

I need not say how pleased Alfredo was to see the brother of his beloved. Of all men in the whole world, he was precisely the most welcome to him at that moment—for he was the only one who could give him news of her.

"I am so glad to see you," he said, shaking hands with him over the low railing. "I almost began to despair of ever seeing any of you again. How is your sister? and why—why has she not written to me to tell me of her whereabouts?"

"Because she stupidly lost the address you gave her, as I said she would; but I have found you at last, and you will come to see her, and enliven her a little, Caspita! she is in need of it!"

"And where are you stopping?—where shall I find my poor Consuelo?"

Juan's handsome face flushed for a moment, and his lustrous black eyes sought the ground. "Oh, it is a horrible place!" he muttered. "Father would remain there, as he said he could not afford a better lodging for the present; but it is a horrible neighbourhood—a nasty dirty street—a miserable house."

"Never mind what the place is like—tell me where I can find my Consuelo, and I will go to her this moment."

"Well, I suppose I must tell you. You will find her then in Bull Street, Soho, number five—but not to-day, wait until to-morrow—she will be out the whole of this afternoon with father. Good-bye. Stop—is that the Marquis of Belgrave riding with you?"

"Yes."

"And that beautiful animal you are riding is no doubt his? Ah, you are a lucky dog, Villafranca!"

Alfredo had no time to say more—for Lord Belgrave, who had been waiting for him all this time, began to show signs of impatience, for he knew that he was blocking up the road, and that he and his friend would be voted a nuisance, for the crowd had already begun to

collect around them. When he joined his companion he asked him, in a tone of voice which betrayed more interest than perhaps the question coming from such a man as Lord Belgrave warranted—

“Who is that handsome fellow, Alfredo?”

Alfredo remained silent for one second. Should he confess all to him now, and tell him of his beautiful Consuelo?—or should he still retain that, the dearest, the one all-absorbing thought of his mind, from his most faithful friend? He wavered for one second, but he looked around him and everywhere his eyes rested on beautiful women, leaning down from their four hundred guinea hacks to smile upon his friend—on gorgeously-attired ladies, whose soft eyes were fixed upon him from the magnificent carriages in which they sat—on bright-eyed servant girls, who stood against the Park railings evidently in mute contemplation of him—on fascinating Anonymas with golden locks, who nodded at him and laughed, displaying teeth whiter than pearls, through coral lips; for they all recognised in him the noble, the rich, the talented Marquis of Belgrave. And his good resolution left him—his courage failed him—he dared not speak to such a man of a woman so pure and so lovely that he well knew one smile from her would cause him to forget the charms of all the women he had till then known. No, he would keep his Consuelo for himself; and in an indifferent tone he answered—

“Oh, only a fellow-passenger of mine in the horrible little ship that brought me to England—a Spaniard, of course.”

“I never saw such a handsome man before,” said Lord Belgrave thoughtfully. “Such a man in London society would break more hearts than a Don Juan.”

Alfredo laughed—"Why, I thought English young ladies were not troubled with such inconvenient superfluities, but, strange to say, his name is Juan."

Lord Belgrave soon forgot this little adventure, but Alfredo congratulated himself all through that day on not having told his friend anything about Consuelo that might awaken in him a desire to make her acquaintance. "If he is so much struck with the beauty of the brother, what would he feel were he ever to see the sister!"

CHAPTER XI.

MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS.

(Not by Grant.)

THAT evening they were to dine with Mr. Gerald Fetherstone and his wife Lady Twickenham. Lord Belgrave had asked them for an invitation for his friend, and though Alfredo naturally shrank from intruding upon people whom he knew to belong to such a different sphere from his, and with whom he could entertain no feelings of sympathy, he felt compelled to go, so as not to disappoint his kind friend.

It was a small dinner party, the guests being only Lady Tottenham and her daughter, Lady Brightly and her husband, Mrs. Lovel (Mr. Fetherstone's sister), Lord Edwin Beauville, and Lord Twickenham, who, together with the people of the house, completed the magic number of twelve. Lord Edwin took down the eldest daughter of the house, while the youngest, Geraldine, fell to Alfredo's lot.

It was a gay and pleasant dinner enough, gayer and pleasanter than such dinners usually are in Mayfair, for after the first service the conversation became general and never flagged for one moment. There was one object of common, and, for the moment at least, of vital

interest to all present, an object that caused persons of such different characters and ideas to become for once highly interesting to one another—this object was some private theatricals which were to take place the next evening at Lady Tottenham's house, in which the two Miss Fetherstones and Lord Edwin were going to take part, and in which all were consequently more or less interested.

I think I have already spoken of Lady Tottenham's intention of having a play acted in her house. Private theatricals were the *mode* in Paris. London could not help following the lead, and Lady Tottenham, as the self-constituted leader of fashion, believed herself bound to start this new attraction. Besides, her daughter might look so bewitching, with a fresh complexion and a light-coloured wig, behind a row of footlights, that perhaps—who knows?—some Earl's eldest son or some rich young Peer, might be found to propose to her then and there.

A handsome stage was consequently erected in the banquetting hall downstairs—the largest room in the whole house, and the one best fitted for such a purpose—and Netham, that invaluable man, was engaged to supply the scenes and stage appointments, to say nothing of the costumes, which were to be of the most gorgeous and costly description. All this was easy enough, and the carpenters and decorators worked so well and so noiselessly that neither Lady Tottenham nor her husband were once troubled by the unmusical sounds of hammers and saws. But now the difficult part of it began.

The more poor Miss Tottenham thought over the subject the more convinced was she, that whatever else she was born to become, she was not born to be an actress. Nature might have intended her for a beautiful

young lady—which, by-the-bye, she was not—or for the wife of some rich nobleman—which even she herself began now to doubt; but Nature had never intended her for an actress—and the dreadful thought staggered her so completely that the poor girl was at her wits' end before the close of the first week, and when the stage was erected, and the invitations had been issued, she rushed into her mother's room and declared that some one else must be found to take the management of the whole affair and act her part.

Lady Tottenham looked at her daughter through her gold-rimmed eye-glass, and simply said, with icy composure, "I always said you had turned out a failure, my dear. Never mind, I'll get Lady Brightly to take the whole of the management and responsibility into her hands; my theatricals *shall* be a success."

Consequently Lady Tottenham ordered her brougham and repaired forthwith to Lady Brightly's house. She found that lady lying on a comfortable sofa in her private boudoir, reading a French novel and smoking a cigarette. Lady Tottenham would have been shocked at any other time—she could not afford to be shocked then, and, like a clever woman, she rushed into Lady Brightly's arms and declared she did not mind the smoke of Turkish tobacco, though of course she strongly objected to the Cuban, and pretended not to see the French novel, the name of which she nevertheless made a note of in her mind, to be able on some future occasion (when the theatricals were safely over) to tell all her friends what Lady Brightly did in the secrecy of her boudoir.

Lady Brightly, at once equal to the occasion, readily agreed to form a company, choose a piece, learn it, get others to learn it, act it in Lady Tottenham's

house, and by these means save that worthy lady's reputation of leader of fashion, from the evil tongues of her most intimate friends.

I have already stated that Lady Brightly was a great actress and loved acting; therefore she immediately seized this opportunity of making for herself a reputation in quite a new line. She would have no common piece, such as young ladies act every day in drawing-rooms, no worn-out comedy which every amateur knew already by heart. No, none of these for her; she felt within her the celestial fire that had animated Rachel and Siddons; she felt that if opportunity were given her the fame of Ristori herself would fade before her wondrous acting, and with these ideas nothing less than a regular tragedy in five acts, with a thrilling death-scene at the end, would satisfy her.

She immediately went over the names of all Shakespeare's plays. She knew them all by heart, but none of these would do for her. They were too well known, too common for her; she must have something new. So her thoughts immediately flew from Shakesphere to Schiller. She rushed to her bookcase, took down a volume of his tragedies, read the whole of them through that afternoon, and before she sat down to dinner that evening had made up her mind, and startled her little husband almost out of his wits by asking him in the middle of that meal if he thought her neck was slender enough to be cut off with one stroke. She already believed herself Marie Stuart!

The next day she communicated her choice to Lady Tottenham, who was enchanted, and afterwards drove to her dressmaker to order a black velvet dress embroidered with jet for the first part of the drama, and a red velvet

for the last act, as she was determined to die, as she termed it, "historically."

The scene-painters began to raise the halls of Greenwich and of the Tower of London, and the woods and dungeons of Fotheringay, that very afternoon, as no time was to be lost, for rumours were already abroad that Lady Queenstown was contemplating giving private theatricals in her house.

All this was easy enough, and so far as professional people went, nothing would be wanting; but then Schiller's Marie Stuart has no less than eighteen characters. Where could eighteen ladies and gentlemen be found who would consent to take part in such a play as this? Lady Brightly, of course, with her usual devotion to art and to friendship, offered to act them all herself, but when she had thought longer on the subject she discovered that the rival characters of Queen Marie and Queen Elizabeth were never intended to be acted by the same person, and that as for the other parts they were altogether below her notice.

Miss Tottenham, however, came to the rescue and offered to act the part of the English Queen, for which she believed herself singularly fitted, being a virgin herself, and likely to remain one till her dying day. But then there still remained sixteen characters to be filled up; so actors and actresses were sought with a characteristic disregard of all considerations of personal fitness for the parts they were to perform; the only condition which Lady Tottenham thought absolutely necessary to impose being that they should all be persons in society, and that, if possible, they should possess that great attraction which would be sure to make a Mayfair audience quite overlook the acting—handles to their names. But Lords

and Ladies are not so easily got who will consent to wear trunks and hose, wigs and paint, and expose themselves to the criticism of all their friends.

Lady Brightly little knew the responsibilities she had undertaken.

In less than four days she knew the whole of her part by heart, and came to Lady Tottenham's house to rehearse her great scene with that lady's daughter. To her utter bewilderment, she then discovered that Miss Tottenham, though a proud-spirited young lady, was not a Queen Elizabeth, and that she could never muster courage enough to deliver those long speeches with which Schiller has enriched her part in his great tragedy, even supposing she could succeed in committing them to memory, which Miss Tottenham herself greatly doubted.

A Queen Elizabeth must therefore be found without loss of time; and Miss Tottenham, from being the all-powerful Queen of England, must shrink into the humble companion of her hated rival—Anna Kennedy. This was an easy, sentimental part, which she believed, by taking great pains, she could contrive to learn by heart.

Thus the part of Queen Elizabeth went begging for a whole week throughout Mayfair. Lady Tottenham and Lady Brightly called on every lady they knew, and offered the part to them all in due succession, beginning, of course, with the highest in the peerage and coming down gradually to plain Mistress and Misses. But everybody declined the honour of personating that great Queen. Most of them were shocked at being asked to act at all; and the few who thought they would not mind wearing a red wig for once in their lives, and putting a little deeper tint of rouge on their cheeks than they did in private life, read the part over, but, remarking at what a

great disadvantage that poor woman appeared in the drama, and how repulsive and cruel her character was, a fact which had never struck them before—objected to take such a disagreeable part, and returned the book to Lady Tottenham, declining, with many apologies, to take any part in her private theatricals.

As a last resource, Lady Brightly thought of Sibyl Fetherstone. She was sure that *she* at least could make no objection to take part in the performance; and, as far as her looks went, why, the innumerable resources of theatrical art could perform the miracle of transforming Cleopatra herself into the Virgin Queen—red hair and all.

At first Sibyl shrunk from appearing in public—though she herself saw no harm in it—and afterwards confessed that the mere idea had made her jump for joy; but her step-mother, Lady Twickenham, being herself of theatrical extraction, greatly objected to her acting at all; and Mrs. Lovel, her aunt (who generally chaperoned the two sisters when Lady Twickenham felt either too tired or too grand to go to balls and concerts), suggested that it was hardly becoming for the daughter of one of Her Majesty's Ministers to appear in London society in the character of an actress.

But Sibyl was too true a woman to be sat upon in this way; and, like the greater and, perhaps, better part of her sex, had the bump of contradiction strongly developed. If her friends had shrugged their shoulders and said nothing, she would have laughed at Lady Brightly's presumption in addressing herself to her and asking her to act, and would have thought no more of the matter; but both her step-mother and her aunt set themselves against her acting—could she therefore ever find a better opportunity of displaying her total disregard of

their opinion?—No. So she wrote a pretty little letter to Lady Brightly, and set herself immediately to work to learn the part of Queen Elizabeth—at first merely to set her friends at defiance; but, as she gradually got interested in the piece and all the beauties of the great drama—which, though only a translation, yet preserves many of the famous passages and a great deal of the wondrous vigour and power of the German original—she gradually began to like her work; and, after a week's careful and conscientious study—such as the part deserved, and she was so fitted to bestow upon it—it flashed upon her that, after all, she had not done such a foolish thing in accepting the *rôle*, and that if she took pains she could easily create a great sensation in it.

Mr. Fetherstone was too much accustomed to give way to his daughter on all occasions, not to do so in the present case. Lady Twickenham merely smiled, and remarked, patronisingly, that she was sorry, but that she would make a point of attending the performance, though she hated plays, and hardly liked to be seen in Lady Tottenham's house. As for Mrs. Lovel, there was but one thing for her to do. She could only lift up her eyes to heaven in utter amazement at what the world was coming to, and, with Christian patience, promise to accompany her niece to the rehearsals. She duly registered her protest against the private theatricals in that form, and, like a wise woman, said no more.

From the moment Sibyl Fetherstone agreed to take part in the performance, the whole business of the private theatricals, which, until now, had looked so desperate, seemed to take a new lease of life. People of their own accord offered to act in them; and the difficulty now was to know whom to choose for the different parts and whom

to refuse. With a very few exceptions none had ever acted before; but then the professional man, who, under Lady Brightly's directions, had undertaken to coach up the aristocratic troupe, said that this made no difference whatever.

At Sybil's instigation Lord Edwin Beauville accepted the part of the Earl of Leicester, and resigned himself to be laughed at by all his friends for that young lady's sake. Another young nobleman, who prided himself on his fine legs, and liked the idea of appearing in pink-coloured tights before the young ladies, secured for himself the heavy part of Lord Shrewsbury. The minor characters were soon filled up by men whose names, as Lady Tottenham remarked to her husband, would look well in the programme however badly they might act; and as, after all, the pretty Rimmel-scented programmes would last, while the acting, good or bad, would soon be forgotten, this was the principal consideration.

The rehearsals went on without loss of time. Lady Brightly, of course, only repeated her part without making any attempt to act it, for she reserved all her acting for the real performance. Miss Fetherstone delighted everybody by her self-possession, and by the way she had managed to learn her part by heart—a thing so wonderful that the professional man, who sat in a corner, book in hand, declared her to be “a born actress,” to the great discomfiture of Mrs. Lovel, who had insisted on being present. The gentlemen, with one or two exceptions, had unfortunately forgotten to learn their parts, and exhibited the customary inability to manage their arms, legs, and voices. All these deficiencies, however, could be remedied before the night of the performance.

But when Miss Tottenham came on the stage and

began to recite her part, it became evident that such a thing was altogether beyond her. She turned very red, twisted her hands in despair, and rushed off the boards, saying that no power on earth would make her act at all. What was to be done? In less than a week the play was to be performed; and the Queen of Scots, unfortunate on the small stage in Lady Tottenham's mansion, as she had been unfortunate on the greater stage called the world, stood there alone without a confidential hand-maiden, and with no possibility of procuring one at such a short notice. Who would unfasten her dress before her execution? Who would support her in her last agonies? Who would defend her in her absence? Lady Brightly felt ready to go into hysterics—a last resource, which she would no doubt have carried into effect, had not Lady Tottenham caused her to roar with laughter by exclaiming, in her usual cold, icy tone, which nothing seemed ever to change: "I thought as much; I always said you would prove a failure, my dear."

What course events would have taken I dread even to think of had not Miss Fetherstone with her usual promptitude come to the rescue, and suggested that her sister Geraldine should take the part of Anna Kennedy, and thus saved for the second time the theatrical entertainment at Tottenham House, and the noble hostess's endangered reputation as a leader of fashion.

Thus it came about that at a week's notice, and at the beginning of her very first season, Geraldine Fetherstone was called upon to appear before the fashionable world of Mayfair in the character of an actress. And thus, through Lady Tottenham's intense desire to be the first in instituting private theatricals in London society, the two sisters—with no knowledge in their minds of the

consequences such a step might bring upon them—by an impulse of sheer obstinacy in one, and a submissive act of compliance in the other, which so well characterized their respective natures, took the first step side by side in the way which was to conduct them, through many an unexpected event yet, to the goal of their existence.

CHAPTER XII.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

(Not by Miss Austen.)

I HAVE already stated that the younger Miss Fetherstone was a young lady endowed with a highly poetical temperament, and that in her own mind she believed herself born to experience the most romantic adventures ever described in poem or romance; the thought therefore of acting a real genuine drama upon raised boards and before a double row of gas-lights, which, by an ingenious contrivance could at a moment's notice give a ghastly blue light, delighted her beyond measure. When her sister had undertaken the part of Queen Elizabeth it had been with the idea, partly of showing her independence, and partly of creating a sensation by appearing in a wonderful sixteenth century costume and making people talk about her. Geraldine's one and sole thought when she agreed to take the part of Anna was that of acting for acting's sake. The dress she was to wear and the remarks people would make did not influence her in the least. "Sibyl," she had said to her elder sister, as they retired to rest the night of the first rehearsal in which she had taken part; "the more I live in the world the more convinced I am, that I shall never be happy in it,

everything seems so unreal—so false; there is so little true sentiment in this society of ours. Now if I had been born an actress!”

Sibyl looked at her with her deep penetrating eyes, which seemed to search her very heart and always caused her to lower hers, and laughed. “You silly thing, would you go on the stage to seek for truth, noble feelings, and real affection? I thought that once out, once launched on the tide of fashionable life, you would forget your stupid sentimental nonsense, but I see you are as mad as ever. Physiologists tell us that we have five senses; I hold there is one more, common sense, and that you don’t possess.”

Geraldine had now been out nearly two months, and had been to every party and ball given as yet that season. Lady Twickenham had presented her at Court, and the *Court Journal* had duly notified the fact the following morning, adding, in another page, that Mr. Gerald Fetherstone’s youngest daughter was one of the prettiest and most amiable of the four hundred *débutantes* introduced into London society at that particular drawing-room.

Geraldine was highly pleased, and immediately prepared herself to take young England by storm. She went to her first ball in high spirits, danced every dance, flirted with all her partners, and, when at last she went to bed at five o’clock the next morning, could not sleep but lay awake for hours thinking about them. The next day she went to another ball, in equally high spirits, again danced every dance, for she was the daughter of a Secretary of State, and young men liked to be invited to her father’s house; but all her partners were new, and the only man in the room whom she recognized as having

danced with the night before, never asked her to dance. The following day she went to the skating rink at Prince's, of which Mrs. Lovel was a member. Lady Twickenham was, of course, too grand to patronize such a place. She saw a great many people, and was introduced to no end of young men, a few of whom she liked, and would gladly have invited to come and see her had not the established rules of good society forbidden her to do so. That night she had two balls. The first she enjoyed very much, for she actually found a partner who could talk of something more interesting to her than either the weather or the Academy, and she had engaged herself to him for a second dance, when her step-mother approached her, all tulle, feathers, and lace, and told her that it was time to go on to the other ball. The other ball proved a failure. Lady Twickenham knew only a few people there, and these of a set she hardly cared to cultivate. She was cold and distant with them, and introduced no partners to her step-daughter, who hardly danced at all, and was pretty nearly suffocated in the crowd. All the way home, Lady Twickenham complained bitterly of having to go to such places, and accused the poor girl of mercilessly dragging her to houses she would never have thought of entering but for her.

Thus passed the first week of Geraldine's first season. "A highly unsatisfactory and exceedingly disheartening beginning," as she remarked to her sister.

The second and the third proved, however, to be exactly the same, except that as the season advanced the parties became more numerous and more crowded, the rooms hotter, the dancing more difficult, the young men more tired, stupid, and sleepy, and the hurry and bewilderment greater. She had seen many men she would

have liked, but could not help noticing at the same time, that amongst these, very few indeed had liked her, for she was not so conceited as to imagine that to see her was to love her, though, as I have said before, she had a great idea in her mind of her true worth, and honestly believed herself superior to most girls, though she was forced to confess, hardly as attractive in mere personal appearance as the greater part.

She was not pretty, and she was fully aware of this, and felt it all the more because her sister was so wondrously handsome, and attracted such universal attention. Yet she, too, possessed charms of her own, though in a mild way, which at first sight would have passed unperceived by most people. Her hair was light, and she knew how to dress it in a becoming style, and her eyes, though of a cold uninteresting grey, little attractive in themselves, possessed the rare compensating merit of interpreting at times the finest gradations of thought, the gentlest changes of feeling, and the deepest trouble of passion, with a subtle transparency of expression which her sister's beautiful dark and brilliant orbs could not command.

If she had taken her friend Lady Maude Standish's advice, and gone in for amusement alone, I make no doubt she would have enjoyed herself greatly at all these parties and balls; but unfortunately, like most young ladies, her mind was bent on one object—on one all-absorbing object—which nothing would ever make her forget—the search for a husband; and as none of the young men she had happened to dance with until now had thought of her as a suitable wife for them, I need scarcely say how disappointed and disheartened she felt. Most young ladies desire rank or fortune, but I

must do Geraldine the justice to state here, that she, for one, did not wish for either in particular. She wanted a husband—what more natural? and she would have preferred that husband to be a Duke with a large fortune—equally natural; but, failing the Dukedom and the large fortune, which she knew to be difficult things to find now-a-days, a handsome man who could appreciate her good qualities, and talk, as she expressed it, “from his heart,” would have contented her.

Such was the state of her mind when her sister proposed to her that she should take part in Lady Tottenham’s theatricals, an event which she hailed with a joyful heart, as it would afford her, she believed, a new sensation, and would give her something to think about and look forward to.

She had learned her part easily enough, and had been complimented upon it by the professional manager of the theatricals, who had heard her repeat it at the last two rehearsals. The drama had necessarily been curtailed a great deal in order to adapt it to the small resources of a private stage, so the secondary part of Anna Kennedy had consequently shrunk into a very small and easy one, and no one doubted that the younger Miss Fetherstone would act it to perfection.

Thus the matter stood when, the night before the great performance, the persons principally interested in it met at Lady Twickenham’s table.

The conversation naturally ran on theatrical topics, though none of those present, excepting, of course, Lady Brightly, knew anything about either acting or actors; and Lady Twickenham strongly objected to such low things. Lord Belgrave, as the principal man present, had taken her down, and, when the dessert had been passed

round, began talking to her on other subjects which he knew could give even the daughter of the actor Sacs no offence. Mr. Fetherstone and Lady Tottenham, together with that lady's daughter and Lady Brightly, took that opportunity to talk scandal at the other end of the table, and abused their friends to their hearts' content; while Lord Twickenham and Sir James Brightly listened enchanted. Lord Edwin Beauville, who sat on Lady Twickenham's left, from that moment addressed all his conversation to the beautiful Sibyl, whom he had taken down to dinner, and who now sat by him with her dark handsome face steadily averted, her eyes cast down, and the rich colour in her cheeks and lips warmer and deeper even than usual.

It was then that Alfredo began, for the first time, to talk seriously to Geraldine, and, to his surprise, he found that young lady infinitely more communicative and sensible than he had ever expected a young lady of fashion to be. He asked her what she thought of the world she had just entered, and she gave him her impressions unaffectedly, while she in her turn asked him his ideas of what society should be, and what opinion he had formed of London society, with an interest which quite surprised him in one so young and so entirely brought up in the school of fashion. This conversation went on for some time, and when at last the fair lady at the head of the table gave the accustomed signal for the ladies to withdraw, it was with a mutual feeling of regret that they parted.

When, later on in the evening, the gentlemen, after having discussed a few of the more or less interesting topics of the day, ascended the stairs and joined the ladies in the small drawing-room, in which, on such

occasions as this, it was the custom of the Countess to receive her guests, Alfredo again sought Geraldine's side, and remained near her the rest of the evening.

Lady Twickenham was going to Lady Boro's concert, in Belgrave Square, which, as everybody knows, is always one of the best of the season, but her step-daughters did not feel inclined to accompany her, for neither of them cared much for music, and preferred to remain quiet so as to be quite fresh for the theatricals the next day. They therefore remained at home with their father and their aunt, and Lord Twickenham (very much against his own wish, I must confess) accompanied his mother like a dutiful son. Lady Tottenham and her daughter, and Sir James and Lady Brightly, had left a few minutes before for the same concert, as they wanted to get away from it early, for they were all bent on attending Mrs. Hobard's ball later on in the evening. Lord Belgrave and Alfredo soon followed, thus leaving Lord Edwin and Sibyl in full possession of the drawing-room that they might rehearse once more the love-scene they were going to act the following evening at Lady Tottenham's house, and in which both of them confessed they were not at all perfect. Whether the handsome Sibyl Fetherstone and the charming Lord Edwin ever forgot that they were only acting—the one the part of Queen Elizabeth, and the other that of Lord Leicester—and made love on their own account, independently of Schiller, is more than any one could tell, for Mr. Fetherstone and his sister had retired to an inner room, and were too engaged at the time in a quiet game of picquet to pay any attention to what went on in the drawing-room.

Lord Belgrave and his friend, in the meantime, too tired to go that evening to Green's, had driven straight

to Beauville House, and were sitting smoking a last havana, and sipping a last tumbler of brandy and soda, in the little library on the ground-floor. Their conversation naturally turned on what they had seen and heard that evening, and the two young ladies of the house at which they had been dining were, of course, the subject of their especial discussion.

"What charming girls those Miss Fetherstones are!" exclaimed Alfredo.

Lord Belgrave remained silent, as if lost in deep thought, before he answered; and when at last he did so, it was with a cold and composed manner. "I hardly know what to think," he said. "The eldest is certainly one of the handsomest women I know, but I much fear she possesses a deep and designing spirit. Last year, when I saw her for the first time, I confess I was wonderfully taken with her. She perceived it, and tried very hard to catch me in her toils, but, as you see, failed to do so. Of course, I should never speak of these things to anyone; but I know I can trust you, Alfredo, as I would trust myself, and therefore I do not mind telling you that we went a pretty long way together. I do not pretend that Sibyl Fetherstone was ever in love with me; no, she was not, or she certainly would not have done the things she did; but she was anxious to become my wife, and tried all she could to induce me to marry her. I am not a marrying man, as you know; at least, I should never think of marrying a woman like that, and I am still free; but I am sorry to see my brother flirt so desperately with her. He is young and inexperienced, though he affects to be *blasé* already, and, if he does not take care, will soon find himself a helpless tool in the hands of this modern Cleopatra—for she is a regular Cleopatra, who will shrink

from nothing, who will surmount all obstacles, whose pride and ambition will be satisfied at any cost. Oh, I know her well! But how can I explain all this to Edwin? How can I save him from her? Ah! it is a dreadful thing that a man should always be so powerless and weak when he has to contest with a woman! It is horrible to think that the most insignificant and least attractive of women, perhaps a woman whom he has only seen once, and never even spoken to, may exercise a greater influence over a man's heart than his greatest of friends could ever command!"

"You think Miss Fetherstone would like to marry Lord Edwin?"

"Marry him! Ah, no: I am not afraid of that. She has been brought up in too worldly a school not to know that a second son without a private fortune is not worth having. No—the thought of marrying him never entered her head, I am sure of *that*; but it is precisely this that makes me so uneasy about my poor brother. Alfredo, you do not know him, and perhaps you will never be able to understand him, though he is but one of many; for, unfortunately, in England, men like him are to be found in the younger branches of almost every great family. He is a good fellow enough; do not think for a moment I want to lower him in your estimation. Oh, no! his nature is as true as steel; but like steel, it will bend in any direction. His heart is good, but soft, easily touched, easily moved; a heart which if once inspired with a *grande passion* could be made to serve any purpose; yet a noble and true heart, if there is one in the world. If Edwin had been born in the middle classes, he would have turned out a clever and useful member of society. He would have learnt the

true value of money, and would have acquired perseverance and economy; talent he has. But, unfortunately, he was born in a great house where economy and work were certainly not the virtues most prominent. From his earliest youth he has been accustomed to mix with only the richest and idlest, and, consequently, the most depraved of men. At Eton, Cambridge, and also in my father's house, he was never taught anything but the art of spending money. We can hardly blame him therefore if all his tastes and all his habits are of such an expensive nature that nothing under a large fortune could properly satisfy them; but when you take this into consideration, and think that, as a second son, he has hardly any money at all of his own, and that society, with its usual inconsistent tyranny, forbids him to make any for himself, even supposing he had been taught to do so, and had any capacities or opportunities for it, you cannot, I am sure, help pitying him."

"You speak very feelingly, Belgrave, about this brother of yours, and I honour you the more for so doing; yet I cannot help disagreeing with you on one point. I cannot help thinking that a *grande passion*, such as you hinted a girl like Miss Fetherstone might inspire him with, would be the saving of him if he would but marry and settle down—anywhere away from London and its temptation; away from the friends who only encourage him in his recklessness, with whom he is spending the most precious part of his life, and who can offer him nothing in return. If he would love a woman, as a woman should be loved; and as you say he could love, with a love that would conquer all other passions in his heart; with a love that would sanctify and redeem his whole existence; with such a love as renders a man indifferent to all

vicissitudes of fortune; don't you think with me that he would still become a happy man?"

"No," answered Lord Belgrave, coldly. "And for this simple reason. I believe that a man could indeed love with such a love as you describe, and that such a love would raise his whole being, and make of him a better, truer, happier man; but I doubt very much that a woman could ever be found who could share such a love; though, I dare say, thousands could be met with in every town who might inspire it. Anyhow, London society, of all places, is the last where such a four-leaved shamrock could ever grow; and Edwin is not a man to creep on his knees through damp fields and virgin woods to find it."

"Your opinion of the English young ladies is not a very flattering one. Are you sure you are not doing them a great injustice, Belgrave?"

"No; I do not make them out worse than they would make themselves if we were to allow them to plead their own cause. I do not accuse them, mind; with our present state of society they could hardly be otherwise. It is society that forbids them to have any heart; it is society that makes them what they are—heartless coquettes—for if they had a heart, or if they were not coquettes, do you believe they would ever get married at all? Ah, no. In olden times a girl married to have a husband and a home; to see pretty rosy children around her; to be happy in the seclusion of a family circle. Do you imagine that young ladies now-a-days are influenced by such ideas as these when they choose a husband? Ah, no. Lady Elizabeth marries to have a beautiful house and a handsome carriage; to get precious jewels and matchless lace; to be able to say, 'I have carried off the great matrimonial prize of the year;

behold me, the envy of all my sex.' A fashionable lady is now never to be found at home, excepting when she sends cards to all her acquaintances to inform them of the fact, or when she invites her friends to stop for a week in her country house. A fashionable lady must consequently have a large town house, an immense country residence, with good hunting and plenty of shooting for her gentlemen friends, and a series of entertainments for her lady friends; servants, carriages, horses, yachts; and jewels, furs, laces, and dresses; toilettes de bal, toilettes de promenade, toilettes de visite, de bateau, de cheval, de chasse, de pêche, de bain, de wagon, de traîneau, de soleil, de pluie, de brouillard, de nuit and every year more and more. And when she has all these, do you think she is contented? Ah, no! for there must always be another woman who possesses something she has not got. As for being happy, she has no time to think about it. Her husband she regards in the light of an amiable banker, whom she must at times propitiate; her children, as necessary nuisances; her home, as the scene of her greatest triumphs when she chooses to be 'At Home,' and as the essence of *ennui* when she is forced to remain in it by herself."

"Then I suppose you hold that the most foolish thing a man can do is to get married?"

"Of course, that's an acknowledged fact. As long as you are a single man everybody courts you; fathers invite you to their country houses and offer you their shooting; mammas send you cards for all their parties; brothers are as amiable as they can possibly be, and young ladies make themselves charming and fascinating for your sake; but as soon as you become a married

man you drop at once into oblivion, and are in future regarded as a bore and a nuisance. No wonder, therefore, that it should have been voted that the most foolish and expensive thing a man can do is to get married, especially now-a-days that he can get so much love without undergoing that ceremony."

"Oh, as for that, Belgrave, I am sure that those *qu'on n'épouse pas ne vont pas mal aussi*, and that a *cocotte* requires quite as many houses, and perhaps even more dresses, than a lady, and is always free to draw cheques from as many bankers as she chooses, and when once she has ruined you no law can detain her by your side."

"Ah, as to *that*—why, if you allow yourself to be ruined, you must be a confounded jackass, and deserve to be left as soon as possible; but do not infer from what I say that I approve of this horrible system for one moment. I am quite convinced that true happiness can only exist in true love, and the love which you purchase must necessarily partake of the alloy which is mixed up in your gold."

"Oh! let us drop this subject, Belgrave—and, returning to the young ladies of Mayfair, do you know that I begin to think you must be after all a very poor observer, for, without going any further than this very evening, I think I have met a girl who, though brought up in the worldly school you speak of, is not one of those, I feel convinced, who would sell herself for either rank or fortune."

Lord Belgrave smiled in his usual cynical way, and his cold grey eyes flashed for one moment as he glanced at his friend. "You mean the younger Miss Fetherstone," he said, re-lighting his cigar which had gone out.

"Geraldine Fetherstone, that silly, romantic school-girl! well, wonders will never cease; are you smitten with her?"

"I! What a question! No, you always forget that I go about in the character of a sociable ghost; that I see, admire, criticise, observe this fashionable world of yours, and draw my own conclusions from it, but that I am forbidden to take any active part in it, for in reality I belong to another world, though you *do* try very hard, my good fellow, to make me forget it."

"How often have I told you that I hate to hear you talk like that? As if you did not know that in reality you are my equal, nay, my superior in every respect."

"Can it be the proud Marquis of Belgrave who speaks in this strain?"

"Yes, it is, and he never felt prouder, I assure you, than the day when, taking Alfredo Villafranca by the hand—that hand to which he owed his life—he was able to call himself his friend."

The two men remained silent for some minutes. At last Alfredo was the first to speak, for he did not want to follow the turn the conversation had taken.

"Returning to the Misses Fetherstone, I should like to know why you classify the younger sister as a silly, romantic girl. You seem to me most inconsistent; at one moment you blame the whole lot of English young ladies because they only think of getting as rich a husband as they can, and the next moment you accuse the one English young lady I propose to you as an exception, of being a silly, romantic girl."

"Because there is nothing in this world so inconsistent as human nature. Geraldine Fetherstone *may* be a charming girl. I am sure I know nothing whatever about her that is not in her favour, yet to such a crisis

have we arrived that I should be inclined to believe that either her sentimentalism and romanticism is merely put on as a new and attractive mask, assumed to fascinate men by a clever woman who is too plain to hope to attract them by her personal charms alone, or that she is a fool who deserves no pity."

"You are hard upon the poor girl, but her sister—what say you of the beautiful Sibyl?"

"I take her to be one of the best examples that can be found of the evils this fashionable society of ours must necessarily produce. Sibyl Fetherstone! Ah, look at her bright almond-shaped eyes, that flash fire from under their long dark lids, with all the peculiar dreamy scornfulness of Oriental eyes; look at the bright colour in her soft velvet-like cheeks; look at her full coral lips, that smile with a half-voluptuous, half-cynical expression; look at her round shoulders, which seem carved in ivory; look at her low brow and her wondrous black hair; and, tell me, do not all these speak to you of a woman capable of an intense, all-absorbing, all-consuming passion; a woman who, if well governed by the superior mind of a powerful and wise man, could love to distraction; or, if exposed to the cruel changes of fate, could hate without mercy? She is a Cleopatra, I told you before; and do you think the love she has for Edwin is a passion such as a Cleopatra could feel for the Antony who would think the world well lost for her sake? No, she likes my brother; she finds his society agreeable; he amuses her, and she flirts with him, as any other girl might do, but that is all. You will say, perhaps, that she may one day meet the man whom she can love with all the ardour of her southern nature. I doubt it. If she had been born in the East, where, as Byron informs us,

the climate is sultry, or in a country where love was upheld as something holy and grand, instead of being laughed at and degraded as it is in Mayfair, she might have loved and concentrated the whole of her feelings in that love; but no—the passions which if left to themselves would have centred themselves wholly upon one man, the degrading influences of our state of society will divert—remember my words, Alfredo—will divert into another, darker, and more tortuous channel, through which they will run wild and uncontrolled, and, instead of making the supreme happiness of one man, she will cause the misery and the ruin of hundreds.”

A long silence again reigned between the two friends, for the Marquis's strange words seemed to unfold before Alfredo's eyes a mysterious problem which until then he had ignored; and Lord Belgrave was following in his own mind the train of his ideas on this same subject. It was Alfredo who again was the first to break the oppressive silence.

“Do you intend going to see them act to-morrow?” he inquired.

“No,” answered Lord Belgrave, recovering once more his habitual cold tone, which Alfredo, by this time, began to realise as a mere affectation on his part. “I cannot say I like to see a good play murdered; besides, Totty, with her usual bluntness of manner, has refused me an invitation for you, and I would not think of going without you.”

The Spaniard started in his chair, and almost upset the tumbler before him. “Has Lady Tottenham refused *you* an invitation for *me*!” he exclaimed, utterly bewildered.

“Yes; is there anything so wonderful in that?”

"But when I saw her this evening she was as amiable to me as any one could possibly be! She was so kind—she seemed to take such an interest in me, and asked me so many questions as to my family, and who I knew in Madrid, and seemed altogether so pleased with me, surely there must be a mistake!"

"You are still very innocent, Alfredo. I see you do not yet understand all the merits of our society. Learn at once, therefore, that one of the greatest arts in Mayfair is to be able to be all honey at one moment and all vinegar the next; to be able to compliment and abuse in the same breath; to stare your oldest friends in the face as if you had never seen them before, and rush into their arms the next time you meet them; regulating all your actions, of course, according to the place or the company in which you find yourself at the moment; and I assure you that those who do not practise these rules are soon dropped altogether out of the magic pale of good society, and only those who excel in them acquire for themselves and their families a lasting position in it. 'The art of forgetting your friends'—I heard my father say, who was a thorough gentleman in every respect, and as good a man as ever lived besides—'is the most useful art in this world—if you only practise it as an art—for ninety-nine times out of a hundred you do really want to cut them; and if the hundredth time you don't, why it only looks good form to have forgotten people, and makes them feel themselves of little consequence in your presence, which alone is a great object gained.' Totty is too true a specimen of Mayfair aristocracy not to be fully aware of the immense advantages of this art, and while she was amiably talking to you this evening, to try and find out all about you,

she was planning the best way of cutting you in future."

"Well!" exclaimed Alfredo, greatly bewildered by these, to him, new and strange doctrines, "I can understand her trying to get rid of me; it is natural that she should not care to have *me* at her parties; but *you*—I wonder at her daring to offend *you*!"

"Oh, I am not offended! People in good society never are. She knows very well that by rights—that is to say, according to the established rules of Mayfair—her rude answer should have had no influence over me, and that I should go to her theatricals all the same; but as it happens, I chance to care for you a little more than people in our world ever care for one another, and therefore prefer not going at all to going without you; though I might have chanced to have exchanged a word with some Royal personage at her house—an honour for which any true English gentleman would readily forget—I shall not say an insult offered to a friend of his—but even an insult purposely made to himself."

"Don't mind me then, and go; I shall not be offended; nay, perhaps I shall begin to think more of you if you slight me and cut me every now and then!"

"Do not make fun of me, Alfredo. You know very well that, however heartless I may be to others, to you I shall always be the same. Let us forget Lady Tottenham and her theatricals, which I dare say will be as intensely stupid as such performances generally are; and I'll take you to the Terpsichore, of which I have no doubt you have heard men speak often enough."

"I have to go and see some friends of mine in the morning" Alfredo said, thinking of Consuelo.

"Very well, I shall set you free all the morning to do what you like, but at ten o'clock meet me here, and we'll go to that masculine paradise, the Terpsichore."

Shortly after this the friends separated for the night.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUT OF THE WORLD.

(Not by Mr. Healy.)

THE following morning Alfredo rose at an earlier hour than usual. The whole night he had been dreaming of his Consuelo, and his desire of seeing her had only been increased, it seemed such an age since he had last beheld her. He seemed to have lived so fast, and to have experienced so many new sensations since he had parted from her at Wapping Stairs on the day of their arrival, that although in reality only a little more than a week had actually elapsed, yet he seemed to look back upon that last meeting through a long and ever-lengthening perspective of subsequent events.

He spent the early part of the morning wandering through the streets, for he feared to make his appearance at such an unusually early hour at Mr. Fernandez's house, and yet he could not settle down to anything, so much was his mind bent on that visit.

About eleven o'clock he found himself near the river, by the Thames Embankment, where he had almost unconsciously been drawn by sweet recollections connected in his mind with that river. He was leaning over the handsome stone balustrade, looking at the steamers

which passed one after another before him, thinking of course of the beautiful girl of his heart, when the deep tones of Big Ben told him the hour and awoke him to the reality of outward life.

With a hurried step he ascended the steps, and calling a hansom, he directed the cabman in a tremulous voice to take him to Bull Street, Soho.

The hansom rolled on rapidly in a northerly direction, past Charing Cross and the thoroughfares he knew, into a labyrinth of crooked streets, which were quite new to him. When on its onward course it threaded Oxford Street, he thought for one moment that he recognized the locality, but his mind was soon bewildered once more when the cab entered the precincts of Soho.

At last it stopped in a miserable-looking street, in which the mud of centuries seemed to have accumulated on the badly-kept pavement. On either side of him rose dark and sombre houses of repelling exteriors, evidently the residence of the most wretched and miserable of all classes—the lower order of Cockney middle-class. As the cab stopped in this street, squalid children and ill-dressed uncombed women rushed out of the different doors, and looked out of the upper windows in amazement, for it was evident that such a thing as a hansom cab was a rare sight in Bull Street, Soho, though not a hundred yards lower down the never-ceasing tide of omnibusses, carriages, and cabs rolled towards the City night and day.

The house in front of which he had stopped had nothing whatever that might have distinguished it from the rest. It was a narrow house of four stories, black and dirty as its companions, with a gloomy door in the centre, which gave entrance to a long narrow passage, with a

counter on one side, and a couple of benches on the other, which the neighbourhood dignified with the name of a shop. The door had immense shutters before it, painted bright red, which seemed only to bring into more prominence the wretched dilapidation of the rest of the house, and on either side a board, newly covered with the most sensational of all publications—the *Police News*, which in half-a-dozen illustrations exhibited to the admiring crowd that weekly collected before this house to admire every new number, with the most minute and detailed particulars, always characterised by a horrible and painful unreality, the latest crimes committed in the country. Beyond these immense boards, which stood against the wall, on the left-hand side there was a window of small dimensions, in which were daily exhibited, behind dirty and cracked panes of glass, from one year's end to the other, half-a-dozen cheap novels in paper covers, of the common piratical or highwayman style, and a choice selection of newspapers and magazines. On an upper shelf three rows of green glass bottles, filled with brilliant-coloured toffy, told the passers-by that in this delightful shop nourishment for the body as well as for the mind, and of quite as refined and wholesome a quality, could be procured for a few pence. Over the door was written in large black letters, which when they were newly painted must have looked quite startling—"Potts, Stationer."

Alfredo jumped out of the cab, and looked at the house before him in mute astonishment. "This cannot be the house," he said, turning round to the cabman; "this is a shop."

"Well, sir," answered the man rather indignantly—"You told me to come to 5, Bull Street, Soho—this be No. 5, Bull Street, Soho."

Alfredo looked up at the number, which was also painted in black on either side of the name, and convinced himself that the cabman was right. He paid him his fare, which according to the man was anything but a fair one, and dismissed him. He then entered the stationer's shop, and addressing himself to a gaunt, shrivelled, cruel-eyed old woman, with a black front, who stood on the other side of the counter, enthroned amongst newspapers, oranges, toys, and a lot of indescribable rubbish, he inquired whether a Mr. Fernandez, a Spanish gentleman, lived in the house.

Mrs. Potts—for this woman was no other than the proprietress of the shop—looked at him from head to foot, with a suspicious glance in her cold grey eyes. But I suppose his good looks and gentlemanly appearance satisfied and gave her confidence, for in a polite tone, though with a strong Irish accent, she informed him that the gentleman he asked for was indeed lodging with her, and that both he and his daughter—"Oh, faith, and its a beauty she is, the darlint!"—were upstairs at that moment. She seemed inclined to be very communicative, more so than Alfredo, who was all impatience to see his Consuelo, and, so cutting one of her long Irish speeches short with little politeness, he asked her to go up and inform her lodgers that Mr. Villafranca wanted to see them.

Mrs. Potts rose, and in a loud gruff voice, which contrasted strongly with the sweet expressions she had before used with all the blarney of an Irishwoman, summoned up, from some mysterious hiding-place at the back of the shop, "that lazy, good-for-nothing Polly!" who she said would conduct him upstairs, as she herself could not leave the shop, and who she informed

Alfredo was her step-daughter, and as "silly and useless a brat as you'd care to look at, yer honour."

After this description Alfredo expected to see a dirty, hideous-looking girl, coming out of that mysterious room at the back, when, to his great surprise, he beheld emerging into the light from the darkness which completely involved the back of the shop, a young and exceedingly pretty girl, with golden hair and blue eyes. Her face was perhaps not classically perfect, and she was decidedly a little too stout for her height, but she possessed one of those charming *piquante* faces which would have looked lovely anywhere, and which, when seen in such a place as Mrs. Potts' shop in Bull Street, Soho, could not but surprise and delight. She was badly dressed in a showy style, and she looked altogether untidy, and even dirty. Her hair, which was of a pure golden tint, unmixed either with red or flaxen, hung about her shoulders, and, being devoid of all natural tendency to curl, looked more like tinsel than anything else.

"Show the gentleman up to the first-front lodger, ye lazy bones—up yer go!" were the words addressed to this lovely girl by Mrs. Potts. The girl looked at her step-mother with a glance in those beautiful blue eyes of hers which expressed intense dread, and, taking hold of Alfredo's arm in a most unceremonious manner, which seemed more prompted by fear for herself than by anxiety for him, she opened the door at the back of the shop, and led the way with a hurried step up a steep and dark staircase, which had evidently not been swept since a period too remote for the memory of man to dwell upon.

As Alfredo followed this strange girl, slipping at

every step over decayed pieces of orange-peel, and taking violent hold of the rotten banister, which trembled under his weight and presented every appearance of giving way at any moment, his thoughts could not help wandering in the direction of the beloved one he was going to see; and yet when he looked at the poor creature before him a certain tremor of his heart told him, in that voice which the heart alone can speak, that that lovely girl was destined to be mixed up in his future, and that in spite of himself she would one day exercise a power over him which he would fain try to subdue.

But these vague impressions of his highly sensitive imagination were soon forgotten when Polly Potts—the unconscious object of them—opening, with a trembling hand, a door on the first landing of that dark staircase, admitted him into a blaze of light and into the presence of his Consuelo.

Yes, there before him stood the woman he loved!—beautiful as she alone could be, with sweet tears of affection standing in her great, soft, violet orbs; with a sweet angelic smile playing upon her tender lips; with a sudden glow of gladness on her delicate cheeks; with a tremulous hand and a palpitating heart; there, in that strange neighbourhood, and in that miserable home—there she stood before him once more—the woman he loved!

The words with which she welcomed him were of intense love; for it was one of those few moments in which the great affection she bore him broke out into yearning and passionate speech. She had waited so long for him; she had suffered so much for his sake; she had felt so deeply the loss of the address he had given her; and she had begun to despair of ever seeing him again; that it was only natural she should welcome him with words

which, warm as they were, spoke only feebly of the all-absorbing passion she felt for him.

Their interview was a long and tender one in spite of old Fernandez, whom Alfredo, after saluting, had almost entirely forgotten, and who sat in a corner of the room very much displeased with things in general, and with his daughter's conduct in particular. It had been arranged that they should go that afternoon to see his nephew, Mr. Jobkin, who had only arrived the night before from Brightborough, where, as his servants had informed them every time they had called at his home, he had gone to canvass; and Mr. Fernandez was consequently very impatient to be off, and considered Alfredo's prolonged visit—especially as his conversation was entirely directed to his daughter—as a confounded bore, and took, I am sorry to say, little pains to disguise his feelings on the occasion. Alfredo, however, was too happy to notice his annoyance; and, as for Consuelo, how could she think of anybody else when her Alfredo was by her side?

The more the handsome Spaniard saw of her the more he admired her; and he could not help comparing her with the young ladies he had met in the fashionable world of Mayfair since his arrival in London; and this comparison, I must confess, greatly endeared her to him, for through it he was able to appreciate the unmistakable advantages which youth and innocence and a true and noble nature must naturally command. He had seen pretty women enough in the *grande monde* into which he had been so unexpectedly thrown; he had met the greatest beauties of whom men talk and rave; he had admired the stately Lady Birmingham, with her swan-like neck and her commanding stature; he had fully appreciated all the advantages of Lady Belleville's lovely

face; he had not been indifferent to Sibyl Fetherstone's charms, nor to Miss Graham's fascinations; yet near Consuelo Fernandez, what were all these?—the loveliest actresses, the prettiest young ladies of Mayfair, what were they compared to his Consuelo—to the woman he loved—to the woman who loved him?

As these thoughts passed through his mind he could not but congratulate himself on not having spoken about her to Lord Belgrave. "He is just the sort of man," he said to himself, "who would fall in love with her, and who would sacrifice everything to win her. No—come what may—he would never introduce them to each other;—not," he repeated to himself with a joyful self-conviction, "that I could ever doubt her love or his friendship for a single moment; but because I know that the very reasons that cause me to love her would also force him to love her in spite of himself." The words he had uttered on the previous night, when speaking of the great question of love and marriage, came back to his mind. "Yes," he exclaimed, "this is the four-leaved shamrock he spoke about—the one woman who could love with a love that will conquer all other passions, all other longings of the heart—with a love that will satisfy and redeem the nature of the man she loves—with a love which will render that man indifferent to all the vicissitudes of fortune or fate—with a love that will make of this earth a paradise of happiness! Yes, this is that one woman whom men would search in vain for in the gilded saloons of palaces, or in the stately parks of castles; this is that one perfect woman that could love without alloy, whose love will make the supreme happiness of the man she loves—and—I am that man!"

At that moment I doubt very much if the poor

Spaniard would have exchanged his position for that of the noble Marquis of Belgrave.

"Consuelo," he exclaimed, prompted by such thoughts as these, "Consuelo, I love you! Be mine—mine only! What is to prevent us from marrying? Let us be married directly, and return as soon as possible to our country—to our beloved Spain."

"Married now! Ah, Alfredo!" she answered, "you do not know what you say. Do you think my father would ever allow me to marry you when you confess yourself you have not money enough to keep me? What have we to live upon? Ah, it is very well for you, who live in a palace with a Marquis, and have servants and horses and carriages and opera-boxes at your disposal, to talk like this; but I, Alfredo, know only too well what it is to have no money. Introduce me to your noble friend—confess all to him—and I have no doubt that he will help us. Juan says he is rich enough for anything, and you tell me that he is devoted to you."

"Speak not like that, Consuelo! I would not be indebted to Lord Belgrave—no—not for a single morsel of bread, were he to offer it to me in charity."

"You are proud! and yet you live in his house, and allow him to pay all your expenses."

"Only as a friend, I am on a visit to him; and I do not receive more from him than I would give myself were I in Spain, once more in my father's house. Consuelo, you do not know my friend."

"Oh, I can easily guess what he is like—a proud aristocrat, whom you amuse, and who repays you for the amusement you afford him by giving you a *shelter* under his roof."

"Nay! these are not your own words. I know well

who has put them into your mouth. Ah, both your father and your brother are greatly mistaken. Tell them, from me, that Lord Belgrave is the best, noblest, truest of men; that I love him as I could love no other man; and that were he a common, poor, hard-working labourer, I should love him as I love him now!—but, no; I fear they will not believe me. Oh! Consuelo, would he were one of us!”

Consuelo looked at him in silence for a second, her dark eyes fixed on his as if they would read in them his inmost thoughts. “Would you not rather,” she said at last, “that we were of his sphere—that you were a noble lord, and I a rich lady?”

“No—ten thousand times no! I must confess that I would like to be rich for your sake; but to belong to his sphere—ah, Consuelo! you do not know what you say. The glittering tinsel, the false stones, and the painted paradises of the pantomime called the fashionable world, have fascinated you, as they fascinate so many unsophisticated, ignorant spectators in the lowly pit. Your eyes are blinded by the outward show and splendour, and you foolishly wish yourself one of the actors on the stage. Ah, Consuelo! how little you know what takes place behind the scenes! How little you suspect what goes on there! You think that those men with coronets, splendid houses, and magnificent horses, must be always happy; you think that those women dressed in satins and velvets, with diamonds on their necks, must be the happiest of women. Ah! they are only poor miserable mortals like ourselves after all, and the gaudy costumes they must wear, and the grand parts they must act, only add more trouble and more misery to their lot! I have seen enough of the world of fashion to despise it and to pity its victims. Do not let me hear

you speak any more of it; an angel like you should not know anything about the horrors of that purgatory. Oh, let me forget them, Consuelo of my heart, in the heaven of your love."

The lovely eyes of the young girl assumed a gentler and more lovely expression, and her arms entwined themselves, almost involuntarily, round those of her lover.

"Alfredo, Alfredo," she cried, as she clung to him, "do not leave me! When you are by my side I feel so much better, so much more worthy of you; every word you utter seems to give me courage, and inspire me with truer, holier feelings, with purer aspirations. When I am by your side, the world with all its miseries, with all its wretchedness, comes to my mind, only like the distant recollections of a bad dream, which the true light of day has for ever obliterated—and I am so happy—ah, so happy! But when you go, when you are not near me to give me courage, to inspire me with hope, and to renew my perseverance, everything seems so dark, so miserable; I feel weary and wicked—I begin to hate all those around me, I begin to hate life itself—and the recollection of your love only makes me more unhappy, for I feel how unworthy I am of it, how ill I deserve to be loved by one so noble, so true, as yourself! All those you see around me think and talk so differently from you—their ideas are so different from yours, their actions so very unlike yours. My poor father, you know, has led such a miserable life—he has been tried so much by perverse fate, he has suffered so many disappointments, so many reverses of fortune, that he has gradually become hardened and embittered. How can you expect his heart to beat as strongly as yours?—how can you

expect him to feel as warmly as you do? Yet he is my father, and, though I love him dearly, I cannot help seeing his faults; and his words, his sentiments, freeze my heart, and make me doubt of everything, and almost render me blind to the better and nobler feelings which something within me tells me must exist, and which you express so satisfactorily to my heart. My brother—ah, Alfredo!—you know him. He is naturally good—he has a noble heart—he loves me dearly—but he, too, suffers the dreadful consequences of our position. I know there are temptations in his path which, in his present circumstances, he will find it difficult to resist, and my heart bleeds for him. Oh, if we could die at this moment—if we could, the whole of us, quit this miserable earth this very minute, and step, just as we now are, into a world where wretchedness and want are unknown, I think we could become so good, so noble; we could yet be so happy! But no; there seems no way out of this horrible world; we must walk every step of the dark, ill-paved, tortuous path before us ere we can hope to reach that purer world above, and the way seems so wretched, so dark, so long—ah, so dreadfully long!”

A flow of tears, which rushed to her eyes from the pure spring of her heart, interrupted her speech. She clung closer still to her lover's manly breast, and hid her drooping head on it as if seeking for shelter there, where she knew only the truest and noblest of sentiments found a home. Alfredo was much moved;—horrible thoughts crossed his mind in spite of himself; a terrible dread of the future began to take possession of him, although he tried hard to fight against it. When he could master his emotion enough to speak, he exclaimed—

“Your own lips, Consuelo, tell me that there is danger

for you if you remain much longer here. Your own pure heart has revealed to you the dreadful consequences of living entirely with such companions as surround you now. There is danger for your body, danger for your soul, if you persist in remaining near these men, whom I dare not denounce to you as wicked, yet whose sentiments and ideas you cannot yourself help finding wrong. Let me therefore persuade you to quit them. Love your father—love your brother; but love them at a distance. Come with me; let us quit them for ever, let us fly from all these miseries. I have not a brilliant prospect to offer you, but, as my wife, you will possess one treasure, which all the gold of the most envied heiress in the world could not purchase—you will possess my heart—the heart of an honest man who loves you, and whose whole life will be devoted to rendering you the happiest of women. Say but one word, and seal both our futures with the irrevocable seal of true love.”

Consuelo's beautiful face, now brightening with hope, now clouding again with fear, showed plainly the struggle which it cost her to make up her mind—to decide whether she should quit her poor father, whom, in spite of all his weakness and meanness, she loved, and her brother, to whom she still clung with all the desperate perseverance of the swimmer, who, half-drowned himself, would fain save his brother from the horrors of an early death—and follow the man she loved with all the passion of her warm southern nature. She tried to gain time.

“Alfredo,” she said, “how can I leave them when they are on the very verge of the precipice, into which the first mistaken step in their career will plunge them headlong for ever? Would it not be wrong of me to leave them? Do you think I could be happy were they not so

too? Wait, Alfredo, wait. To-day we are going to see my cousin, Mr. Jobkin. Papa expects great things from this interview; perhaps—who knows—whether to-morrow our lot may not be changed? We have learnt since our arrival in England, that my aunt, Mrs. Jobkin, is dead, and her son has been all this time at some watering-place on the south coast, canvassing to get into Parliament, so that we have not yet seen him. Who knows whether he may not take a fancy to us, and help us? He is rich, immensely rich, and we are his only relations; surely the voice of blood will speak to his heart in our favour, and the day may come when I shall have a fortune to offer you. Let us wait; Alfredo, let us wait."

"Take a fancy to you!" he repeated, as if the words had made a deep impression on his heart and awakened new feelings, new fears. "Ah, Consuelo, if he were to fall in love with you! Do you think you could resist the temptation of becoming a great lady?—the still stronger temptation of saving your father and your brother from ruin and dishonour?"

"If you love me I can resist any temptation—every temptation," she answered; "though I know how selfish and how wrong my conduct would be; but love is always selfish, and—Alfredo—I love you!"

These words seemed to give him new courage; they inspired him once more with confidence and hope, and, taking her once more in his arms, he consented to wait for some time yet."

"Remember," he added, "that you are free, although I consider myself engaged to you. But I can trust you, Consuelo, if you can trust yourself. Think of me, and remember that heaven destined you for my wife."

Shortly afterwards he left the house, to the immense

satisfaction of Mr. Fernandez, who had been very impatient all along for his departure, and who said, when he had gone, with little regard for his daughter's feelings—

"That fellow is an ass; he is the most impractical man I know. He will never succeed in the world, I feel convinced of it. If you take my advice, Consuelo, you will forget him and all his stupid sentimental nonsense, and try and captivate your cousin. Remember that if you choose you are pretty enough and winning enough to captivate any man living. There, that will do—do not cry any more, you know it makes your eyes red; put on your bonnet and let us be off; Juan is waiting for us downstairs. Make haste, and remember that the whole of our future is at this moment in your hands. Remember the proverb—'*A miauling cat catches no mice.*'"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN OF FORTUNE.

(Not by Albany Fonblanque.)

CONSUELO dried her tears as well as she could, though they would flow in spite of all her efforts to check them, for her interview with Alfredo had moved her more even than she liked to confess; and, putting on her shawl, a new one purchased for the occasion, and her bonnet, a pretty little black tulle, one of her own manufacture, in which both her father and her brother said she looked lovely, and at the sight of which Polly Potts fell into ecstasies, while her ill-tempered step-mother muttered something to herself which she would hardly have liked the handsome young gentleman who had just left her house to hear; she took Mr. Fernandez's arm, and walked out of the dirty little shop in the direction of Russell Square, near which her cousin lived.

Old Mr. Jobkin, although a very rich man, had been a very economical one. He hated show of all kinds, and knowing very well that the doors of the world of fashion would remain for ever closed to *him*, had never even attempted to enter it, but, like a wise man, had contented himself with a large and comfortable house in Montague

Place, Bedford Square, which he had furnished in a substantial but unpretending manner, and with the few friends and acquaintances whom he picked up in the City, and who for the most part entertained the highest admiration and esteem for him. Acting on these principles, he had insisted on his son being brought up entirely like a merchant's son, and on his taking a part from an early age in the business. James Jobkin therefore had been able to add to his father's immense wealth, which naturally increased every day, for it was allowed to accumulate, and every now and then double itself by some clever speculation on the Stock Exchange. But James Jobkin, besides the talent of the old generation of City men for making money, had acquired the intense passion of the younger generation for fashionable life. "With all my money," he had said to himself while yet only a clerk in his father's counting-house, "I shall be a precious fool if I do not make my name as well known in the West End as my governor has made his known in the City."

During his father's lifetime, however, all his dreams of social success were but vague and in the distant future, for the fear of offending him and being disinherited was stronger in him than even his passion for what he called "life." At Mr. Jobkin's death he had tried to induce his mother to move into a more fashionable locality and entertain; but Mrs. Jobkin was an old lady of the old school and shared all the views of her husband, for whom she had felt a real regard. She retained just enough of the national characteristics of the country of her birth to remain faithful to his memory in every way, and to decline the honour of being introduced into the world. "What could a poor old foreign woman like

me do amongst all those great ladies of yours? I should be lost, and, what is worse, laughed at and ridiculed. No, James, I shall not make a fool of myself in my old age. If you like to become a man of fashion, you may do so; you are your own master, and I am sure, dear, you are fit to shine in any society; but let me live as I have lived until now. I have you for my companion; I want no other."

James Jobkin had therefore given up the idea of introducing his mother into the world of fashion, but his desire to get into it himself had only increased. He had made two or three violent endeavours to take that mysterious world by storm, but he had in every case failed at the very starting-point. With all the innocence of a City man in social affairs, which can only be compared to his sharpness and skill in commercial undertakings, he had allowed himself to be taken in repeatedly in a most shameful manner, by men, who, by giving themselves grand airs, and snubbing him a great deal, had led him to believe they belonged to the best society. He had confided in them, spent his money to propitiate them, and only discovered his mistake when it was too late.

Once, indeed, he had imagined himself well launched on the tide of fashion. Hamilton Nares, a little man, who hung about the City doing some mysterious business of his own, had been introduced to him by a mutual friend. Mr. Nares soon found his way into Mr. Jobkin's good graces by constantly speaking of his friend the dear Duchess and his crony the jolly Marquis; and, following his advice, Mr. Jobkin agreed to give a grand ball at Willis's Rooms, which was to be entirely under Mr. Nares's superintendence. The busy little man was to

arrange everything and invite all the company, and Mr. Jobkin was to be the hero of that London season.

The ball took place. Mr. Nares kept his promise and invited all the titled people he could think of; but as none of them had ever heard either his name or that of Mr. Jobkin, none of them went, and, as we have heard from Lady Tottenham, resented the insult greatly, and took great pains to contradict the false list which appeared in the *Morning Post* the following day.

Poor Mr. Jobkin was sadly cut up by this misfortune, but his friend Hamilton Nares reaped golden results from the ball, to which he had invited all his own friends and paid them off in that way for all previous invitations, and secured for himself a succession of new ones.

Two other men who pretended to be great swells, then took possession of the innocent millionaire, and made as much as they could out of him at the Derby and Ascot, where they introduced him to a select circle of lords of the turf, who managed to make a good little income out of his unfortunate bets.

At one of these races he had been introduced to a real live Lord, but this sporting nobleman, although he was exceedingly amiable to him and most condescendingly patronising in his manner, and had accepted all his bets and won ever so much money from him, had deliberately cut him the next day when he had met him in St. James's Street.

Mr. Jobkin was now in despair, when, soon after his mother's death, he happened to meet, by accident at a house in Paris where he had gone shortly after the funeral, a charming lady, Mrs. Boston Gilbert, whose name alone gave a fresh impulse to his thoughts and renewed

his hopes of social success, for he was well aware—as indeed who in London is not?—that Mrs. Boston Gilbert was one of the most influential and amiable of the leaders of fashion. From the moment he heard her name he made himself as agreeable as he *could* to her, and devoted himself entirely to her service with that assiduity which no woman past the prime of her youth can well resist. Although by no means a well-educated man, James Jobkin was most gentlemanly-looking, and his manners, though of course constrained and artificial, were pleasing and conventional enough to pass for those of the world.

Mrs. Boston Gilbert, as I think I have before stated, was a devout Catholic, the daughter of one of the oldest Catholic families in England, and her strongest passion was that of doing good to, and forwarding the interest of, Mother Church. Her first idea, therefore, when she saw Mr. Jobkin, and heard of his immense wealth, was naturally that of converting him. She learnt from him that his mother, who had just died, had been a Spaniard, and consequently a Catholic in her youth, but that his father and all the rest of his family were strong Protestants. She therefore tried hard to work upon his feelings, and upon his love for his deceased mother, to convert him to the true faith, but, seeing that his religious convictions were too strong to be shaken, and that with all the obstinacy of an old London merchant he clung to the doctrines of the Puritans, she changed her tactics, and thinking that the next best thing to obtaining for him a place in Heaven would be to obtain for his money a place in the coffers of the Church, she offered to his bewildered gaze the tempting prize of an introduction into the very best .

society in London, if he would agree, in his turn, to help her in her charities, and make a present worthy of his fortune to her Church and her priests.

The temptation was too strong for James Jobkin to be able long to resist, though he was uncommonly fond of his money, and had undergone lessons enough already to teach him not to be too rash. He at length accepted this treaty of mutual assistance and put himself and his money into Mrs. Boston Gilbert's hands. But Mrs. Boston Gilbert was not a woman to do things by halves. Once having promised to introduce Mr. Jobkin into society, she considered her honour involved in the success of the undertaking, and as she would not have had him fail for the world, she insisted—firstly, on his implicit obedience to her and to her only; secondly, on his taking a large house in a fashionable quarter to which people would go with pleasure and convenience; and thirdly, on his becoming an M.P., the only way he would obtain a position which would at once raise him from the slanders of the world, who otherwise would no doubt call him a nobody and an impostor. Jobkin agreed to all this, and on his arrival in London took a fine large house in Grosvenor Square and ordered it to be furnished in the newest and most lavish style. He then placed himself under the patronage and guidance of Mr. Cyril Scholl (a nephew of Mrs. Boston Gilbert), and prepared himself to stand for any borough that highly influential gentleman thought advisable, adapting his political opinions to the circumstances in which he should be placed, with all the self-denying devotion worthy of a true Englishman.

The seat for Brightborough had become vacant about this time, and for Brightborough had Mr. Jobkin deter-

mined to stand as a Moderate Conservative under the direction of Cyril Scholl and Co.

He had been for the last week in that watering-place canvassing, and this was the reason why, when the Fernandez family called at his house in Montague Place, they had learnt that he was out of town, together with the news of Mrs. Jobkin's death, of which they were ignorant until then. The servant had also told them that he would be back on Wednesday, when some affairs in the City required his presence, and that if they would call again on that day, about one o'clock, they would most probably find him at home. It was therefore upon this chance that Mr. Fernandez, accompanied by his pretty daughter and handsome son, knocked at the door of Mr. Jobkin's house in Montague Place, Bedford Square, one fine afternoon in the month of April.

The same servant whom they had seen before opened it, and on being asked if his master was at home answered in the affirmative, and conducted them into a room at the back, evidently Mr. Jobkin's library, and, as they afterwards learnt, the only room in the house which was at that moment habitable, the furniture of the others having been already sent to the new house in Grosvenor Square.

The general appearance of this apartment was more characteristic of the elder Mr. Jobkin than of the younger. The furniture was plain and massive; a small mahogany bookcase filled the central panel, and contained a choice selection of standard works which nobody had ever yet read, bound in calf with red morocco backs; on the top of this bookcase was a plaster bust of the late Duke of Wellington, very much the worse for age and dust. A hideous green paper, with a barbarous design of

colossal dimensions upon it, covered the walls, and a still more hideous carpet, with a still more barbarous pattern, of still more colossal dimensions, of flowers of all imaginable and unimaginable forms and colours, very worn and in parts threadbare, covered the floor. The chairs were of red morocco, and a large writing-table, upon which lay a confusion of letters, papers, newspapers and pamphlets, stood near the window ; and that was all the furniture in the room, perhaps some of it having already been sent over to the new house.

Mr. Fernandez and his son looked about them with an unspoken but deeply-felt sense of the atmosphere of respectability and gentility which breathed from everything in that room ; while the beautiful Consuelo, going straight up to the looking-glass over the mantel-piece, re-arranged her hair and straightened her bonnet, to the use of which she had not yet become quite accustomed, but which became her greatly.

As she stood there in front of that old glass, in that old-fashioned, matter-of-fact room, she looked most wonderfully lovely. Her rich auburn hair was done up in thick coils at the back, and raised from off her noble forehead ; her eyes looked brighter even than usual, and her cheeks, still burning with the remembrance of the sweet words she had lately heard from her lover, reflected a rich glow as if of sunshine. She was dressed entirely in black, on account of her aunt's death, and the deep folds of her new dress fell around her handsome figure like those of a royal mantle on a proud queen, for, indeed, she looked most queenly in her intense simplicity and supreme grace.

A few moments elapsed and then the door opened and a tall, stout man, with light hair and moustache and whiskers of a reddish tint, and with florid complexion,

dressed entirely in black from head to foot, stood before them. It was Mr. Jobkin.

His small brown eyes moved with restless uneasiness. He evidently felt very much embarrassed by the presence of strangers, but there were no signs of shyness in his voice when he asked—addressing himself to Mr. Fernandez as the oldest of the party—what had procured him the honour of their visit.

Mr. Fernandez only desired immediately to open his heart to his beloved nephew, and, in a pathetic voice, and throwing every now and then mysterious side glances in the direction of his daughter, he presented himself to the astonished Jobkin in the character of an affectionate uncle, and introduced Consuelo and Juan to him as his first cousins.

Mr. Jobkin looked first at one and then at the other in mute astonishment. He knew, or rather guessed, that he had relations in Spain, although his mother had seldom spoken to him of them; but the fact of these people coming all the way to London to claim the relationship so completely staggered him that for the moment he hardly knew what to say. A dim vague idea also suggested itself to his mind that he was about to be the victim of some beggarly impostors, and the very thought of being thus deceived caused him to change colour.

Mr. Fernandez, little guessing the bad effect he was producing, went on enlarging in a most pathetic manner on the great love he had always had for his dear deceased sister, his beloved mother. He informed him of the Spanish proverb—“*An ounce of blood is better than a pound of friendship*,” and, placing his thin yellow hand upon his worn-out coat, in that place where the heart is

supposed to be, he exclaimed in a tone which wanted little to be a sob, and which the peculiar nature of his English rendered intensely comical—"Me always, always love thee!" Then noticing, by the effect these words had produced, that he had said something ridiculous, he inquired whether his dear nephew spoke Spanish.

No, his dear nephew spoke no Spanish, but politely said he understood it a little. Mr. Fernandez then resorted to his own language, over which he possessed a supreme mastery, and, using the longest words he could think of, not one of which, however, seemed to convey any definite meaning to the ear of the Londoner, and bringing in as many proverbs as he possibly could, he delivered a long speech of the tenderest nature, a speech which, as he flattered himself, would have "softened a stone." But as Mr. Jobkin was not a stone, and as he hardly understood a word of it, his suspicions that he was the victim of an imposture were only increased, and a strong desire seized him of ringing the bell and ordering his servant to show the door to his affectionate new-found relations. But Mr. Fernandez at that moment pointed with a graceful wave of the hand to his daughter, who had remained all this time standing in front of the fireplace, and observed that she was in deep mourning for her beloved aunt, Mrs. Jobkin. The Englishman's attention was consequently drawn towards her, and as his eyes rested upon her beautiful form and lovely countenance, an expression of undisguised admiration spread itself over his broad honest face, and caused him to blush more than ever. It was a momentary feeling, yet it was sufficient to make him forget his intention of ringing the bell and summoning the servant.

Both Mr. Fernandez and his son noticed the effect

Consuelo's beauty had produced upon him. It was a sign that spoke well for the future, and a look of intelligence passed between them which the beautiful girl could not help noticing.

Her cousin's hearty open look of admiration had been too evidently sincere, too evidently beyond his own control, to be resented by her; but the half-disguised, half-transparent look of mutual understanding that had passed between her father and her brother went to her very heart and wounded her pride. All the colour left her cheeks, and in one instant she turned deadly pale, while the blood almost sprung from her firmly-compressed lips. She had understood all the secret meaning of that look, and could not help resenting it; so, frowning at them impatiently, she turned away and looked straight at Mr. Jobkin, whose eyes were still fixed upon her in mute admiration.

That one frank look had more effect on him than all the flattery of the father, and, rising from his chair, he politely offered her a seat, and exclaimed, addressing himself entirely to her—"So very 'appy to 'ave the 'onour of receiving you in my 'ouse."

It was now the turn of Consuelo and Juan to look at each other in speechless amazement. Their notions of English were very vague, it is true, yet they knew their Ollendorff well enough to notice that something was wanting in their cousin's words, which, though at the moment neither of them could well realize what it was, made his polite little speech sound strange and unmusical to their ears. Old Fernandez, however, who knew little of English pronunciation or English grammar, and who, even if he had been fully aware of this deficiency in his host, would have been only too glad to pass it over

unnoticed, was delighted with his nephew's more friendly manner, and, taking immediate advantage of it, began once more to enlarge upon the supreme happiness he experienced in making his acquaintance.

From that moment the visit lost much of the restraint and coldness with which it had begun. Mr. Jobkin sat down near his beautiful cousin, and, paying no more attention to Mr. Fernandez, whose foreign familiar manners displeased him greatly, he devoted himself entirely to her and her brother, whose handsome open countenance and whose manly bearing produced upon him the happy effect which they generally produced upon most people.

But it did not require long for the penetrating and quick understanding of this young man, brought up in the stern school of adversity, which had forced him to use his wits to the best advantage, to comprehend the nature of the man he had this time to deal with, and to realize the little profit he would derive from it. One look was sufficient to convince him that, in spite of the pleasant effect his sister's beauty had produced upon him, he was determined not to recognise these new relations more than was absolutely necessary. He was polite, but distant; he talked to Consuelo freely enough, but not as a cousin would have talked, for evidently the notion of his self-importance was never once out of his mind.

He asked them how they liked England—"a grand country, ain't it?"—and he inquired how long they intended remaining in it, whether they thought of making a long visit, whether she could find time to call upon him again; but he never once asked if they wanted any assistance—he never once offered his services to them.

"I am so busy, you know," he said, drawing out his

words to their utmost, and pulling down his cuffs, which were of irreproachable whiteness; "England expects that every man will do his duty, you see; and in my position, with my wealth, and my reputation, I must be unselfish, and sacrifice myself to the good of my country. A bore! yes; but you understand, although a City man, and although I take but little interest in abstract politics—for I am, like my father, a practical man, sir—I must sacrifice myself, and represent the interest of my less successful countrymen in Parliament. A grand thing, our Parliament; would you like to see it? Yes—then when I am an honourable member I shall be very 'appy to allow you to see it. So very glad you understand the necessities of my position."

Juan took upon himself this time to answer his cousin, and tried to flatter his vanity as much as possible, a plan which he seized upon as being the only one which offered a shadow of success, though this was a difficult one, as he said afterwards to his father—"for the confounded fool is already so full of the notion of his own importance that it will be a clever man who succeeds in flattering him."

Consuelo in the meantime looked at him as she might have looked at a curious animal newly imported from some distant land. She felt how intensely vulgar and common this man was; and yet when she thought of his wealth and of his position she could hardly credit her own senses. She knew so little of England and Englishmen that the idea naturally struck her, that perhaps all English gentlemen were like this, and she wondered whether Lord Belgrave resembled her cousin; and, if so, how infinitely superior her Alfredo must be to him.

Mr. Jobkin was enlarging upon the nuisances to

which his position exposed him. "You see," he was telling Juan, "the eyes of England are upon me. I cannot move a step without being criticised; everything I say is printed and published; I cannot take up a paper without seeing my name. Look 'ere," and taking from the writing-table a newspaper, he opened it and pointed out to Juan a certain paragraph, which he was to read. It ran thus—"We understand that a marriage has been arranged between Lady Jane Vane, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Mauvebery, and James Jobkin, Esq., of Grosvenor Square, the candidate for Brightborough." Jobkin's eye sparkled with a supreme sense of satisfaction when Juan read this aloud.

"Let me congratulate you; I am sure we had no idea you were going to be married."

"Thank you, thank you; but it is premature yet, very premature."

The poor man did not like to confess that he himself had put that paragraph in the paper, and that in reality he had only seen the Lady Jane once, and had not yet even been introduced to her. The paper was two days old, and if Juan had chanced to look at that day's *Morning Post*, he would have seen the false statement contradicted by the young lady's family, who disclaimed all acquaintance with Mr. Jobkin.

If his visitors had been English, Mr. Jobkin's pride would have been much gratified, for such an advertisement as that could not but have impressed them with a full sense of his merits and importance; but as the Fernandez's were Spanish, and as they had never even heard of Lady Jane, nor of her proud papa, the paragraph in the paper only surprised them a little, and nothing more. But Mr. Jobkin's pride was gratified; and when he thought that

these people believed it all to be true he grew so great in his own estimation that he hardly cast another glance upon the beautiful Consuelo.

Shortly afterwards he rose, and, saying he was very sorry to say good-bye in this unceremonious manner, but that "Lady Boston Gilbert" was waiting for him in his "new 'ouse," he bowed them out of the room before they had even time to give him their address, and rung the bell for the servant to open the street-door.

"A most unsatisfactory beginning," burst out old Fernandez as soon as they were once more in the street, with the dry cough which he always affected when displeased.

"Say rather an unsatisfactory end to our journey, father," said Juan, giving a sharp bang with his stick against the iron railings of the house they had just left.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, simply this—that from this moment you may give up all thoughts of getting anything out of that man. He is a close, mean, vulgar snob, that's what he is; and I would not mind telling him so to his face, so sure am I that we shall never see the colour of his money."

"And it is for this that we have come to England!

"Ah! go further and fare worse!"

CHAPTER XV.

BREAKING A BUTTERFLY.

(Not by the author of Guy Livingstone.)

THE Fernandez family returned to their lodgings in silence. Old Fernandez and his son did not care to talk, they had been so disappointed and vexed. With Consuelo it was perhaps another feeling that kept her silent. She was sorry that their visit to their rich cousin, so long looked forward to, should have proved so unsatisfactory, yet she could not but be thankful that Mr. Jobkin had not fallen in love with her—as her father had hoped and expected he would—and that she herself should never therefore be put to the trial of having to refuse his hand, which she well knew would have broken her father's heart.

After a light dinner, during which Juan preserved a sulky silence, and his father took the opportunity of venting his anger by swearing at everything, and running down everything English, Consuelo sat down close to the old lamp, which gave just sufficient light to make the obscurity in the dingy uncomfortable room visible, and began reading to her father an old Spanish newspaper, which Juan had procured the previous night in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and which

contained the first news from their country that they had seen since their arrival in England.

Juan in the meantime descended the stairs and was met in the little dark parlour behind Mrs. Potts' shop by that worthy lady's pretty step-daughter, Polly Potts.

Any one who had seen the girl at this moment could not but have been struck by the pretty picture she presented. She had on a silk dress, new and fresh, of a bright hue but simply trimmed; on her head she wore a little black velvet hat with a blue ribbon and a long white feather, and round her neck she had a tulle scarf, which looked soft and lacey against her white skin. She was very much flushed—at first sight one would have said she was rouged—but a nearer inspection showed plainly that all the colour was natural, and therefore anything but unbecoming to that pretty girlish face, that might have been the face of a babe it was so round and pure and so fair in all its details. Her blue eyes sparkled like stars, and her pretty little mouth smiled as Juan entered the room.

What could this poor artisan's daughter be doing in this elegant and expensive costume?—and why did her cheeks flush, and her eyes sparkle, and her lips quiver with a half-suppressed smile, when the young Spaniard approached her?

"Look at me—look at me, Jack," she said, springing lightly towards him, "ain't these lovely? Just look, real silk—real silk like a lady, and a feather as I never saw in all my born days!"

Juan approached her and examined her minutely before he spoke.

"Very pretty" he said at last, depositing a kiss upon that pretty little mouth, which trembled with pleasure as

it returned it—"but not yet pretty enough for your face. What did old Mother Brown tell you?"

"She told me that I was to give her five shillings every night for the clothes, and that if I passed a night in her house I was to give her ten. She says I'll be good for a Lord if he sees me in these here. She is a hard woman, old Mother Brown, she be—but bless you, old Brown!—anything to get out of my step-mother's eternal nagging and knocking about—I says."

Juan smiled. "That's right, my girl; there is nothing like having a determined spirit to succeed," he said, "and you will succeed. I'll be shot if you don't; but mind what you are about. Don't you go on talking too much; gentlemen like a few observations—particularly if they are cutting, but low twaddle and ungrammatical English finishes by boring them. Now walk a few steps; let's have a specimen of your walk."

Polly walked a few paces up and down the room and then stopped. There is almost always an indescribable *je ne sais quoi* of Nature's own gentility in very young girls, that makes them easily adapt their movements to the polished conventional type of perfect grace which society has established. Polly—though only a common little girl, a child of the gutter, and of the most wretched of gutters, a St. Giles's gutter—possessed this natural instinct of womanly grace, and her walk—which she had evidently practised lately—was at once graceful and unaffected. Juan was pleased.

"I am so glad you admire me, Jack," she said. "Some how or other, you know, a word from you pleases me more than all the big compliments men pay me every night."

"You are a nice one—you are!"

"You don't believe me—I know you don't—but does it never make you jealous to see others near me?"

"Jealous!—*me* jealous?—don't be a fool, Polly. Whatever else you may be, don't be a fool. I know the world too well to be jealous of other men—they are too necessary to me ever to offend me. By the bye, I have been thinking that you must have a new name. Polly Potts doesn't sound pretty—now does it? You are English, so tell me what name you think sounds pretty in English?"

Polly blushed. "Why," she answered, "what can a poor hignorant girl like me know of pretty names? But I don't mind having a longer one if you don't ask *me* to spout it. Now what shall it be?—choose something that means something. You knows what I means—I can't express it better—there."

Juan was for one moment lost in thought. "Polly Potts certainly does not sound pretty. What do you think of Stella—now?"

"It ain't English, is it?"

"Hang it—I can't tell; but it sounds pretty, doesn't it?—and it means Star."

"Oh yes, I'll be Stella! I likes it—it sounds like Star. At Cremorne the other night they had stars that went up and up, and then burst; and all said—How pretty! Jolly to be like a star!—there, let's be off towards the Terpsichore. I'll show you as how I am up to snuff yet. Come along, old man."

"Wait a moment, Stella," said Juan, looking round on all the different shelves for something he did not seem to find; "do you know where that witch keeps her almonds?"

"Her what do you call them? Her halmonds?—Oh, I knows; but what can you want with halmonds?"

"Never you mind, girl ; get them quick, and don't chatter."

The newly-christened Stella stepped upon a chair, and, stretching her arm to its full extent, brought down from one of the upper shelves a large glass bottle, which when opened proved to be full of almonds. Juan took one, and placing it near the flame of the tallow candle which lighted the room, burnt one end of it. He then approached the young girl, and, with a steady hand, which showed evident signs of dexterity, he passed the burnt end all round her eyes, leaving a dark line, which produced a pleasant effect, for it seemed to add brilliancy to her face, and caused her blue eyes to sparkle more than ever through the darkened eye-lashes.

"Now, you'll do, Stella," he said. "You wanted a little shadow in your bright face. Let's go ; but mind, if any one asks your name, that you are Stella."

"And do you think as I shall succeed ?" she asked, taking his arm and looking him lovingly in the face. "Do you think I shall make a fortune and become independent of step-mother, and be a lady with silk gowns and gloves of my own ?"

"Yes ! If you are a good girl and do what I tell you, before many days are over, Stella, you'll ride through London in your carriage, and wear the finest jewels your eyes ever saw. I'll take my oath of it, for you are as pretty a girl as ever lived ; but will you still love me then ? Will you not forget your old friend, and believe what other men tell you in preference to what I say ?"

"Oh, Jack, how can you speak like that ? Doesn't I love you with all my heart ? Don't I owe you everything ? Do you think I should ever have thought of going to Mrs. Brown and asking for gowns, and then going to

the Argyle and the Terpsichore all by myself? Why, I should have died of fright; besides, how should I ever have heard of such places, or dreamt of wearing silk gowns and feathers? No, Jack, it would be wicked of me to forget you, and I am a good girl, ain't I?"

And blowing out the candle, the handsome Spaniard and the pretty young girl, arm in arm, took with a brisk step and a light heart the high road which leads to pleasure and to sin.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE NIGHT SIDE OF NATURE.

(Not by Mrs. Crowe.)

THAT evening Lord Belgrave was dining with some friends at his club, but he was punctual to his appointment, and a little after ten the noble Marquis and the young Spaniard were seated side by side in a hansom cab driving toward the Haymarket.

The cab stopped at the door of the Terpsichore, and the two friends entered arm-in-arm those sacred precincts dedicated to the worship of Pleasure.

I dare say my readers will wonder that a man possessing the superior talents and the fine mind of Lord Belgrave should have cared to frequent such haunts as these. The truth of the matter was, that finding the *grand-monde* too narrow and confined for him, he was only too glad to forget its petty rules and absurd conventionalities in the free and unconstrained sphere of the *demi-monde*, the only other world, as I have said before, which a man in his position could well frequent.

He was not happy in the *grand-monde*. That you will say is not to be wondered at; but he was not amused, and that, to a man like Lord Belgrave, was infinitely more disheartening. He was essentially a man

of the world, at least what we now-a-days call a man of the world. He had lived so much in good society—he had tasted, over and over, all its charms—he had experienced all the excitements it could offer, which are by no means few—he had lived so fast in a fast world, that it is not to be wondered at, that, at the age of thirty-six, when men who have had to make their own fortune and build up their own position, only begin to enjoy life, he had grown tired of it, and the pretty nothings of Duchesses only bored him, and the incessant excitement of the turf and the drawing-room fatigued without amusing him.

This was the reason why every now and then he turned his back upon the *grand-monde*, to try what the *demi-monde* could offer in the way of amusements.

"I wonder, Belgrave, at a man like you caring for such places as this," said Alfredo, as he made his first entrance into the spacious saloon of the Terpsichore, all light and gold, noise and bustle, arm-in-arm with his handsome, reckless, indolent-looking friend.

"Well, I hardly know myself," he answered, lighting a cigar, and offering one to his friend. "I dare say you find it awfully slow, and so it is; for, after all, these women only try to imitate *our* women, and, in truth, are infinitely more stupid and slow than some young ladies, though they don't mind smoke, and don't blush at what we say to them. By Jove!—a pretty girl!"

"Yes, all paint. I wonder you can admire such wretched specimens of the lovely sex, the sex that should be the essence of purity and truth."

"Purity and truth! Well, as to that, I can't say that *our world* is any better than this. Believe me, Alfredo, the chief charm of women, never mind to what sphere they belong—be they Countesses or Cocottes—is their

unreality. Why, if a girl were to show herself just as she is, do you think we should cast a second glance upon her? These women may be false and artful; but do you think they are falser and more artful than the young ladies we flirt with in Mayfair? Ah no; the one is as unreal and artificial as the other, and these have at least the advantage that they amuse without expecting in their turn to be amused."

In this, perhaps, lies the great secret that draws so many men to the haunts of the cocottes, and deprives the most fashionable drawing-rooms of their best beaux. It is so much easier to talk to women who are sure to appreciate all your jokes, and whom you are sure that nothing will offend—it is so much more amusing to hear slang uttered by pretty lips that don't object to being kissed, than to listen to the vapid utterances and meaningless nothings of young ladies just out of the school-room, or to the coquettish repartees of some painted old Marchioness, all starch and stays—it is so much more comfortable to be able to lie down with a cigar in one's mouth, and one's arm around a shapely waist on a comfortable sofa, than to stand half crushed between velvet dresses and stuck-up dignity in a hot dining-room, holding their plates and having to smile when their tightly-gloved hands upset a champagne glass over your best dress coat—and it is so much safer too; for here, at least, the siege is to your heart, not to your hand, and there are no plotting mothers under the stairs; nor proud fathers, coming round awkward corners; nor bothering brothers, all strut and whiskers, demanding what your intentions are, and threatening to bring you up before a tribunal for breach of promise, for the silly amusement of an hour. As for morality—well, I wish that some

unprejudiced person, who does not belong to either, would tell me which is the least immoral."

Just as they were making the third turn of the room, and as Lord Belgrave was pointing out to his innocent friend that pretty girl, Bella Jordan, the one who last year ruined poor Lord Charming; Lord Twickenham entered by the great door under the orchestra and joined them.

"Why, Charlie—you here?" exclaimed Lord Belgrave, shaking hands with him. "I thought you would have been at Lady Tottenham's theatricals, seeing your handsome step-sisters act."

"Well, and so I was; but the crowd was so great, and the heat so overpowering, that I ran away, and here I am. I am awfully used up; but anything is better than those confounded hot rooms. Who is that jolly girl with the dark hair?"

Lord Belgrave looked towards the jolly girl with the dark hair.

"I don't know," he said. "A new importation, I dare say. But Lady Isobel Fitzfyne, I wonder you had the heart to leave *her*."

"The stupid bore! I wish my mother would not bother me so about her. Why, the girl doesn't care anything for me; and I am sure if there ever was a stupid, ugly girl, she's one!"

"Why—the daughter of the clever Duke of the Isles stupid! Why, Charlie, you are difficult to please."

"No," answered the young man, shaking hands in an off-hand sort of way with a tall and well-dressed woman who had come up to them, but whose face was anything but pretty. "This is the sort of girl I like. You see I am not difficult." "*Bon jour, cousine!*"

"*Bon soir, mon petit.*"

"Hang your French! Can't you talk English? If you had been talking with that vapid French ambassador for nearly an hour, as I have, you would not be so anxious to spout your confounded language."

"*Sapristi—il a une araignée dans le plafond le petit ce soir, ta-ta, je me la brise, moi,*" and the Frenchwoman walked away, but not before casting a side glance at Lord Twickenham which made him leave his friends and follow her in the direction of the bar.

"You like that young man, don't you, Belgrave?" said Alfredo to his friend, as soon as he was out of reach of their voices.

"Yes; he is a nice boy, and I cannot help taking some interest in him; but he is a butterfly, and I am very much afraid he will end by getting his wings burnt one of these days. I am sorry to see him so at home here. He seems a regular Terpsichorian—doesn't he?"

"And yet you come yourself?"

"Ah! but remember my age, Alfredo. I am past the dangers of youth. I know the precise value of things, and can therefore make bargains without being taken in. A handsome, open-hearted, reckless, pleasure-loving boy like Charlie Twickenham, with all his money, and in his position, runs dreadful risks in this two-fold world of ours. Sharpers and scoundrels will take him in at every turn, and will end by sending him to the Jews. I pity him, and I should like to save him if I could; but I suppose I am scarcely the man to preach morality to him. What do you think?"

"There is his mother—a clever, clear-headed woman if there is one in the world."

"Yes; but an indulgent mother, too proud of her son

ever to discover any faults in his conduct. Besides, Lady Twickenham is a most ambitious woman. She was the daughter of a singer. You know how she began life; you know what she is now. You know that, in order to climb to the top of the ladder of social position, in which she now holds her own as proudly as any, she has not scrupled to take four husbands, all of them old and infirm, for whom she could not have cared a pin. Do you think her ambition will ever be satisfied? No; she wants her son to make a grand match—one that will make people forget the questionable origin of his mother's family; and she has fixed upon the Lady Isobel Fitzfyne, the proud daughter of one of our proudest noblemen—one who has married his eldest son to—well, never mind—and gives himself the airs of a prince. You see what the young hopeful himself thinks of the lady. She could hardly be called pretty, though she is statuesque, and, as I daresay, she takes no pains to amuse him. I should not wonder if Lady Twickenham's fine plans were after all to fall through. But look!—look there! Do you see that lovely girl in blue—the one with the golden hair and the black hat? I must speak to her. I don't think I ever saw such a pretty woman."

Alfredo followed the direction of his friend's eyes, and he then recognized, standing at a little distance, the brother of his Consuelo, Juan Fernandez. His first impulse was one of pleasure. He was glad to meet any one who belonged to her; but when he thought of the place in which they were, and when the words she had spoken to him that morning concerning this very brother of hers came to his mind, he could not help shuddering. A dreadful presentiment took possession of him—a horrible idea crept, in spite of himself, into his mind. He how-

ever approached Juan and spoke to him; and it was then that he recognized in the pretty girl beside him, with the elegant dress and the beautiful feathers, the dirty, untidy, and uncombed girl who had showed him the way upstairs in his Consuelo's wretched home—Polly Potts!

Lord Belgrave had already introduced himself, and was talking away and laughing and joking as if they had known each other all their lives.

"This is the very last place I should have expected to meet *you*, Villafranca," said Juan.

"Indeed; and that girl, who is she? I saw her this morning at your house, and I took her for a common maid-of-all-work, and now I see her dressed in silk and velvet, and giving herself the airs of a duchess. What is she to you?"

"She is my property. You need ask no questions. This morning she was the unhappy step-daughter of one of the most cruel of old hags that ever lived. She was obliged to work hard and starve. To-night she is a young lady of whose acquaintance your proudest nobles might be glad. It is all my doing. I have a knack for this sort of business—I practised it often to some advantage in Madrid. In London, with a large field to work in, and a better supply of instruments, I may reasonably expect to make larger profits. I shall not be surprised if to-morrow we see this very girl here—the ex-maid-of-all work, and the present fascinating little girl—a woman of fashion, capable of ruining half London."

"Fernandez! how can you speak like this? Do you never think of the harm you are doing? Does the thought of the misery you are causing, and the ruin you will produce, never stagger you and make you tremble?

Think of this poor, innocent, deluded girl, for whom you are digging the infernal pit that will end by burying her. Think of her pure heart wrecked upon the world of sin your hand opens to her; think of the hundreds whom she will drag with her in her rapid course downwards; think of the unhappiness, of the misery, you will cause—of the families ruined, of the wives deserted, of the children left fatherless—think of the dreadful consequence of sin!”

Alfredo, although in a low and rapid voice, had spoken so earnestly, with such a strong self-felt conviction of the truth of the words he uttered, that the handsome Juan could not but look at him in mute bewilderment before he was able to answer—

“It is easy to preach, very easy; I could do so too, quite as well as you can, I dare say; but it won’t pay. Priests starve, my dear fellow, while rogues feast. But I shall try to reason with you for Consuelo’s sake, for I know she loves you, and I love *her* better than anything else in the whole world.” And his lips quivered and his large almond-shaped black eyes grew moist as he spoke of his sister, for she endeavoured to be the guardian angel of this wicked young man. “Do look at this girl. I have christened her Stella—it sounds pretty. Now do you think that if I had not taken her by the hand, and pointed to her the right road to fortune, she would not have taken that very road of her own accord one of these days, and then, instead of taking at once to the bright path, ten to one that she would have started through all sorts of narrow, dirty, crooked lanes, which would have spoiled her beauty and ruined her complexion? Do you think she would have been one particle more pure at the end, than she will be now—even if she were to ruin half England in one year? No—these sort

of girls are born for this sort of thing. They hate work, they love pleasure, and, like the clever little things they are, they prefer noise, fun, pretty dresses, champagne, and casino flirtations, to sweeping, washing, scrubbing, cooking, and being nagged at and beaten by some cruel step-mother, or stern severe mistress. Can you blame them for this? Blame rather the gentlemen who encourage the trade, or the cruel old women who drive them to it, or hard Fate who makes these things so. Besides, do you think that because a girl comes to places like this, in fine tawdry clothes, and sips brandy and soda, and smokes cigarettes, and spouts slang with men, and every now and then curses and swears like a young soldier, she is not a good girl at heart, and capable of as great a self-devotion as her less wise but more moral sisters who starve in the gutter? You may say that vice hardens the heart, but do misery and poverty not harden it much more?"

"Oh, Juan, it is horrible the way you talk! To think that you should encourage poor girls like this—to think that you should show them the way to perdition in this way!"

"Well, as to that, old man, it strikes me that *you* are as bad if not worse. You patronize them too; if not, why should you come here? Yes, I see now you are like the goody-goody lot—you would smell and pluck all the best flowers and at the same time scold the gardener who rears them, and pretend to be shocked when you hear, that to bring out all their colours, and to make them yield their sweetest perfume, that poor gardener is obliged to force them in a hot-house!"

"I am not one of those, Fernandez. You mistake me. I only came here to accompany my friend."

Juan's attention was now drawn towards Lord Belgrave and Stella, who were still talking together.

"Ah—so that's Lord Belgrave, is it? Well, I see my pretty fly has caught a big fish already. I must see which is the best way of bringing him to land; once out of his own element he will be in my power. I suppose it is useless to ask *you* to help me?"

"Fernandez! you forget that that man is my friend—that he is one of the noblest and richest men in England!"

"Oh, no—I am fully aware of his value."

"One last appeal, Juan. Think twice before you go too far. What prospect can you offer this poor deluded girl for the future? While she is young and pretty she'll have plenty of admirers, I dare say, and foolish young men will not be wanting who will give her a comfortable house and plenty of champagne, but, like that wine, her life will all be froth. When she gets old and infirm who will provide for her? What will become of her? Think of *that*, Juan—think of *that*!"

"That's not my business! If the girl is a fool and can't save some money it is not my fault, and no one can blame me. I suppose she'll end in a workhouse—it sounds bad, doesn't it? But then if you only take into consideration that, after all, that is the end to which, sooner or later, a whole lot of innocent women, virtuous maids, religious cottagers, and clever governesses who never did a naughty thing, and who never thought of cursing or swearing, come to, you will not think it so hard for a girl like this, who at least will have had a jolly time through one part of her life."

At that moment some Spanish friends of his came up, and he turned round to speak to them. Alfredo recog-

nized in one that Glaria of infamous memory, who broke the bank at Hamburg, and who afterwards nearly ruined half Europe. The others were men of the same stamp—sharpers, from whose society he would have shrunk as from that of lepers.

As he was making these observations, and watching the bright eyes of Juan as he listened to Glaria's—evidently to him highly-interesting—conversation, he received a gentle tap on the shoulder, and turning round he found himself face to face with Lord Twickenham.

“I wish you would introduce me to that fellow,” he said, addressing him in a tone which until then he had not used when speaking to his friend's friend. Alfredo stared at him surprised, and the young nobleman repeated, fearing he had not understood, “I wish you would introduce me to that tall man there with the black moustache. I saw you speaking to him—he is a countryman of yours, I believe.”

“Yes, he is Spanish; Juan Fernandez by name——” Alfredo hesitated—yet—

“Very well, I wish you would be so kind as to introduce me to him.” He coloured suddenly, and then he added, making a violent effort over himself, “I don't mind telling you; you know he is a great friend of that pretty girl with the golden hair—Stella. He has some influence over her, I hear, and I fear I shall never get anything out of her if I don't begin by propitiating him.”

Alfredo could make no objection, though he hardly liked the idea of making these two young men acquainted with each other; and, calling Juan's attention, he introduced to him in due form the Earl of Twickenham.

The handsome Spaniard looked up in some surprise,

and began talking to the young lord without paying any more attention to Alfredo.

It was with pain and not without some secret misgivings that our hero noticed the pleasant impression produced upon the young Earl by Juan's open and frank manner, and that he listened to him, yielding far more attention, and, indeed, seeming infinitely more amused, than he had seen him when listening to the most brilliant conversations of the wittiest men of his own class.

Just at that moment Lord Belgrave came up to Alfredo, and said a few hurried words in his ear.

"You are really going with her?"

"Yes," he answered, shaking hands with him in a hurried way, which was foreign to his usual calm and self-possessed manner. "She is the sweetest girl I ever saw, and the prettiest. Never mind me, I'll see you to-morrow."

And without saying another word he left him standing there—alone in the midst of that immense room, lighted by the flames of a thousand gas-burners, all gold and colours, crowded with lovely women in gaudy but brilliant attire; with the entrancing strains of the splendid band vibrating in his ears, and the still softer music of a hundred words of half-revealed love burning in his heart. He walked up the gorgeous room, watched the dancers for a second, cast his eyes upon the many pretty faces there assembled, felt the perspiration beginning to run down his back, and a cold shiver taking possession of his whole frame; but the image of Consuelo came to his mind, and, without casting so much as a parting glance at all these things, he left the Terpsichore and walked silently home, lost in deep meditation.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

(*Not by Fennimore Cooper.*)

AFTER a short conversation Lord Twickenham and Juan began to look for Stella amongst the crowds of people now assembled around the dancers, but she was nowhere to be found; her bright blue dress and her dazzling golden hair were not to be seen anywhere. "She must have gone," whispered the handsome Spaniard; "yet I wonder at her going without letting me know."

The young Earl muttered something between his teeth which sounded dreadfully like a curse; and, turning his back upon his new friend, began to walk in the the opposite direction, but Juan was not a man to allow such an opportunity to escape. He ran after him, and, putting his arm familiarly into that of Lord Twickenham, whispered something in his ear which brought an instant change of manner over him.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do; trust me, and all your wishes will be amply gratified."

At that moment the hour of twelve was struck by the immense clock under the gallery occupied by the band. The lights were subdued as if by magic, and all

that gay company began to disperse, some in one direction, some in another. Lord Twickenham and his new friend walked arm-in-arm out of the room and soon found themselves in the street, where a great crowd had already congregated, and a dozen policemen were making violent endeavours to keep the peace. Some of the most elegantly-attired ladies, who had created the greatest sensation in the Terpsichore, had broughams waiting for them; others no less beautiful took the arm of gentlemen and walked on, their costly dresses trailing in the mud. Several came up and spoke to the two young men, but they gave little attention to them and walked on talking and laughing as if they had been the oldest of friends. As they were turning into Regent Street, a wretched, haggard, painted phantom of a woman, who might once have been pretty, but whose good looks seemed to have vanished long ago, accosted them. Juan put her aside with his stick.

"Get along with you! Have a weed, my Lord?"

Lord Twickenham declined the cigar and threw a silver coin into the shrivelled, wrinkled hand stretched out to him. The hungry eyes of the woman, which had something ghastly in their expression, cast a wolfish, leering glance upon the Spaniard while her dried-up lips muttered a few incoherent words of thanks to the Englishman.

"Poor wretch!" said the latter, quickening his pace. "It makes me shudder to look at her, and to think that there are thousands like her."

Juan, with his usual dexterity, soon managed to turn his companion's thoughts, and two minutes later all recollection of the poor woman had vanished from his mind. Such is human nature!

I have already said that Juan Fernandez was a very handsome man; I must now add, that he was, when he chose, an exceedingly agreeable and amusing one. That he was clever may be easily inferred from the prodigious rapidity with which he had made himself such a complete master of the English language; which is by no means one of the easiest, as I can myself testify. He possessed, moreover, what is often more useful in this world even than talent, certainly infinitely more productive than genius—a powerful and most acute mind. He had that animation of manner, those high physical spirits, and that witty, odd, racy vein of conversation which so pleases other men, particularly when they are young. He knew how to flatter without giving offence; and he knew how to amuse without pretending to take any special pains to do so. Altogether he was a young man whose society few could help finding agreeable, and he usually obtained an astonishing influence over those with whom he was brought in contact. His high spirits, his gentlemanly manners, his sweet smile, his bright eyes, and his happy, devil-may-care frankness of bearing, carried off and disguised the leading vices of his character, which, as we know already, were—callousness to whatever was affectionate or true, and insensibility to whatever was grand or noble.

To a young man of Lord Twickenham's easy and highly-impressionable temperament the society of a man like this could not but be fatal; but the young nobleman was too inexperienced and too volatile to see the danger. Like many young men, he was too reckless ever to think, too careless of the future to stop and consider. Life lay before him like a beautiful garden full of the most precious and sweetest of flowers, and he ran laughing and

singing with boyish pleasure through its many paths, stopping only every now and then to pluck a flower that struck his fancy and to lay it within his bosom to die forgotten, or to cut a twig that might stand in his way, without thinking that he was in a maze, and that at the very next turn it would already be too late to retrace his steps.

I often think, with Wilkie Collins, that Nature has so much to do in this world, and is engaged in generating such a vast variety of co-existent productions, that she must surely be now and then too flurried and confused to distinguish between the different processes that she is carrying on at the same time. Now, starting from this point of view, it has always been my private conviction that good *Dame Nature* was absorbed in making butterflies when she created the greater part of our modern young men, and that the poor fellows suffer in consequence for the volatile pre-occupation of mind of the mother of us all.

Lord Twickenham was a butterfly in more ways than one. While at school at Brighton he had been a dull boy; his school-fellows could make nothing of him; his masters gave up the idea, from the first week, of ever getting anything into him—it was the caterpillar stage of his existence. His mother soon took him away from that school, and, after passing a year at home, she sent him away, shortly after her marriage with the rich banker (who soon afterwards died, leaving her all his money), to a private tutor, where he was voted by all to be a dull boy, without a second idea, supposing there was even one in that head of his—this was the chrysalis period of his life. It had been Cambridge which awakened him to real life, developed his dormant mind, and formed his

bright, gaily-painted wings. On the occasion of his mother's fourth marriage he was already a gay butterfly; since then he had enjoyed life in every imaginable way, yet he was a butterfly still; as gay and thoughtless as ever, as bright and handsome as he could well be, as reckless and innocent as butterflies generally are. What his next stage would be it was difficult to imagine. Would he get his wings burnt in some dazzling flame, or would he end by being caught in a young lady's fascinating net?

His friends wondered, but did not care. He was "a jolly good fellow," his society amused them for the time, but they hardly cared enough for him to think of the future.

Arm-in-arm, the two young men, as different in disposition as in the positions they occupied in life, had walked up the lower end of Regent Street, and were turning the corner of Piccadilly (for Lord Twickenham was on his way to Green's, and Juan pretended that that was also his road) when their attention was attracted by a carriage which was coming full gallop down that wide street. It was a brougham drawn by a spirited pair of bays, and the coachman, who sat on the box all on one side and without a hat on his head, was evidently intoxicated.

The young men, seized with a natural impulse, rushed forward and tried to stop the runaway horses, the young Earl bravely stepping into the middle of the road, while the less rash Spaniard ran to the side of it.

The horses, seeing an obstacle in their way, turned sharply to the right, and in so doing one of the wheels of the brougham caught against the kerb-stone and caused the whole concern to upset.

The drunken coachman was thrown with some violence on to the pavement, and two distinct cries of terror proceeded from the inside of the brougham.

Juan opened the door, and with some difficulty he extricated from the carriage, in due succession, two ladies, who were at first too frightened to speak, but who seemed to have been little hurt by the fall. One of them was very tall; she was dressed in a beautiful costume of crimson velvet embroidered in gold; the front breadth was of gold brocade, and was covered with jewels; the body was high, with long sleeves, and of an old-fashioned make; round her neck she wore a large stiff ruff of white lace, and just below it, a beautiful necklace of diamonds and rubies. On her head she had a wig, which by the upsetting of the carriage had become sadly displaced; it was of a light reddish hue, and upon it rested a crimson-coloured velvet cap, surmounted by a tiara of diamonds and rubies, but from under the wig a few loose curls of black hair were seen escaping. The face of this young lady was a perfect picture; her features and complexion were beautiful, and her black eyes were of wondrous brilliancy.

The other lady was young and also tall, though not by any means so handsome as the first. She was dressed in black velvet, but had no ornaments whatever except a row of large pearls round her throat, from which hung a handsome diamond cross; she had no wig, but wore her own hair, which was light, in coils, under a black velvet cap which, like her sister's wig, was also very much on one side.

A crowd had now collected round them, and a policeman was already busy pushing the curious back, whilst a couple of men were seen in the distance running after

the horses, which had fortunately broken loose when the carriage upset.

Lord Twickenham made his way through the crowd to where the ladies stood, the one dressed in black still clinging to Juan's arm, and both of them still evidently much frightened, when he recognised in them his two step-sisters, Sibyl and Geraldine Fetherstone.

When they in their turn recognised him they began to recover their self-possession, and, as soon as they could speak, assured him that they were not hurt, only shaken and frightened; and that they would like to get home as quickly as possible, as Lady Twickenham would be anxious about them, "and especially about her jewels!" added the beautiful Sibyl, casting a loving glance at the many precious stones which covered her dress, and which belonged to that lady, and had only been lent for the occasion.

Lord Twickenham sent two or three men in different directions for a cab, but it was not easy to find one at that hour in the morning, for it was already nearly two o'clock; so after waiting for some time the young ladies said they would not mind walking home, as they were then only a few yards from their house in Carlton House Terrace, and Sibyl, taking her step-brother's arm, led the way with her usual decision of character. Geraldine looked around her in mute dismay, but her eyes met those of the handsome Spaniard, and taking the arm which he politely offered her, followed her sister in silence.

She had only cast one glance at Juan, but that one glance had been enough. Her eyes had never before rested upon such a handsome manly face, she felt this more than she dared confess even to herself, and as she

took his arm her heart beat violently, she felt her whole frame tremble, and she was forced to rest heavily upon that arm to prevent herself from falling.

Could it be fright that she still experienced? or was it another feeling — a feeling which she dared not acknowledge even to herself—that had suddenly taken possession of her?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PRIVATE THEATRICALS.

(Not by Thomas Hailes Lacy.)

A LONG line of carriages, which reached nearly to Piccadilly, announced to the inhabitants of Mayfair that a great party was going on in its neighbourhood. If we had followed this line we should have arrived at a large Square, in which, before a stately mansion, these fashionable equipages all stopped in turn. From the door, across the wide pavement, an awning of striped canvas, resting upon temporary supports of iron, was drawn to protect the distinguished visitors from any sudden freak of the weather, which is a rather unsteady fellow in this country, and on the pavement a carpet had been laid to preserve the satin-covered feet of the fair ladies from the dampness of the stones. This, together with a double line of footmen on either side, a couple of men with lanterns, a few policemen, and behind all these a curious crowd of maids, shopwomen, and idlers bent upon seeing a little of the fun, was all that could be discerned from the outside, of the revels going on inside that splendid mansion.

But if you had been fortunate enough to receive an invitation, then you would step upon that carpet with a due sense of your own importance, and, passing the

dazzled crowd on either side with proud disdain, enter through the large door, which some half-dozen powdered footmen, strongly scented, and in gorgeous liveries, take great care to shut the moment you have passed, and, divesting yourself of your hat and cloak, penetrate into that *sanctum sanctorum* of the fashionable world—Lady Tottenham's drawing-room.

Before doing this, however, I should strongly advise you to see for yourself that the *Morning Post* reporter, seated at a table in the inner hall, takes down your name accurately, and spells it properly.

After performing this little business you may enter the great drawing-room. I shall suppose that you have gone through it in due form, and that you have made your bow to the mistress of the house, who stands at the door surperbly attired in a Parisian toilette, and to her daughter, Miss Tottenham, who, I must confess, looked infinitely more at home there than she would ever have done upon any stage, though perhaps on the stage distance might have lent enchantment to the view.

A dense crowd of people fills the rest of the immense room, at the extreme end of which is seen a pretty stage of painted canvas, lighted by a hundred gas burners. The doorways are filled, of course, with men—young men perfectly meek and solemn, with long whiskers and eye-glasses; Indian Princes, all velvet and gold; clever politicians, in oddly-cut coats; antediluvian Lords; foreign Ministers, covered with Orders; young Guardsmen, supremely tall and stiff; influential Members, with flowers in their button-holes; rich bankers, who look for all the world as if they had feasted all their lives upon the Lord Mayor's turtle—all bored to death, read to faint at any moment from exhaustion and heat, yet prompt to

split their white kid gloves, with a most praiseworthy regard for dramatic talent, at the least provocation.

The centre of the room is filled with very closely-packed cane chairs of the smallest dimensions, which have been hired by the dozen for the occasion, and which are by this time filled with Countesses and Marchionesses and their many daughters, attired in wondrous dresses, each of which must have required four chairs to hold them before these ladies put them on. The two front rows are taken up by the Ambassadors and Duchesses and by the Royalty, for, of course, Lady Tottenham's parties are always "patronised by the Royal Family," as a tradesman would say.

In the front seat of all is a Royal lady, of rather large proportions, who, on account of her rank, has been permitted to occupy one of the ordinary arm-chairs belonging to the room, which, however, has completely disappeared beneath the many folds of her dress. Near her sits her husband, a handsome German Prince, who is said to be of a volatile nature and not over-fond of his wife. On the other side of this Royal lady stands the master of the house, Lord Tottenham, whom many people believe to this day to be a myth, so seldom is he seen even at his own parties. Next to him, on the other side, sits another Royal lady, who also possesses the characteristics of the illustrious family—Fat, Fair, and Forty.

A lady comes next who is to be seen wherever Royalty go. I mean, of course, Mary, Marchioness of Bury. Seen from behind, this lady would be taken for the most beautiful young lady that ever came out. Her figure is the perfection of symmetry and grace—her shoulders white and beautifully modelled; her dress in the very last fashion; her jewels, some of the best in

London. A profusion of light curls hang on either side of her face, a face which might have been pretty some years ago, but which now, alas! has lost much of its freshness and beauty; yet this woman possesses that magic charm which results from intuitive high breeding polished by habit to the utmost, and is consequently a great favourite with everybody, particularly so with the great, who know her noble virtues and appreciate them; besides, she always looks and moves, the *grande dame* she is, as if Nature had been employed by rank to make her so.

A foreign lady sits beside her, the wife of a Minister long accredited to the Court of St. James, also a great favourite with Royalty, and although by no means handsome, yet always one of the best-dressed women in any room. Upon her dark hair, which is plastered down over her brows in wavy masses, she wears a crown of roses, and across her shoulders the illustrious Order of Noble Ladies of Maria Louisa, lately sent to her by the young King of Spain.

Other Ambassadors and noble ladies are grouped around, and sit on the rows immediately behind; the handsome Duchess of London, of transparent beauty, wearing her diamond coronet with the three immense stones so justly famous, being on account of her size and her charms conspicuous amongst them; while Elizabeth, Countess of Twickenham, all lace and satin, with lustrous eyes and highly-coloured cheeks, sits on one side near the stage, looking down the room as if from a throne.

But I need not give a list of the numerous guests; if you only look back at the number of the *Morning Post* which appeared the next day you will find it there duly recorded; my business lies entirely with the actors, and I have only mentioned the spectators *en passant*. I

shall now pass behind the scenes for the rest of the evening.

People take to private theatricals generally for "distraction," as the French would say, but almost always end in the English acceptation of that contradictory word. This, however, was not the case with Lady Tottenham's theatricals. In this particular instance all the troubles had come at the beginning, and the performance was a decided success.

The scenery and the dresses were pronounced perfection, and the play, which had been shortened a great deal, was interesting enough not to send people to sleep, as the pieces amateurs choose, as a rule, have the peculiar habit of doing.

Lady Brightly, as was to be expected, made a beautiful Marie Stuart, and acted with all the grace and animation which even her greatest enemies are forced to admit she possesses to such a high degree.

Sibyl Fetherstone looked supremely handsome in the character of Queen Elizabeth. I have already described her dress, so I need only add that the numerous jewels which her good-natured step-mother had lent her for the occasion looked as if they were her birthright. She moved with a proud haughty step, devoid of all restraint, and she spoke with a clear voice, which betrayed no signs either of shyness or stage fright, a rare thing in an amateur who had never acted in her life before.

When she was on the stage, everybody remarked, "How beautiful Miss Fetherstone looks to-night!" "How cleverly she acts her part!" "What a handsome woman she is!"

But then when Lady Brightly entered no one ever thought of saying how beautiful she looked, or how well

she acted, for the individuality of that lady had vanished and people only saw upon that stage the unfortunate Scotch Queen, whose sorrows they all shared—Marie Stuart herself.

Like a true artist, Lady Brightly had sacrificed herself to her part. She had forgotten, for once, that she was the coquettish lady of fashion, whose smiles men covet, whose witty saying everybody quotes; and, putting on a grey wig, which after all was anything but unbecoming to her, and wearing a simple black dress, she stepped upon the boards—what that poor Queen must have been at the time of her imprisonment at Fotheringay—a worn-out woman, who still retained the traces of a once marvellous beauty, but haggard and pulled down by many long years of continual misery, yet still the proud daughter of the Stuarts and the Guises; a woman who must have felt deeply and suffered greatly—highly interesting, and nothing more.

Geraldine, who had to begin the play in the character of Anna Kennedy—Marie's companion—looked very well in her black velvet dress, which suited her fair complexion and light hair; but, unfortunately, she was very nervous, forgot all the directions she had received from the professional manager, and left half her dialogue with Paulet unspoken.

Paulet was a young Guardsman, who looked exceedingly well in his red satin trunks and white hose, but who had never acted before and possessed not the slightest idea of who Paulet was, or what was expected from him. He smiled blandly at Anna when he should have looked daggers at her, and very politely offered her a chair when that ill-used woman said that if he treated her with so much cruelty she should die!

But both of them were greatly applauded, though the ladies seated comfortably in their chairs remarked, in but too-audible whispers, that Miss Geraldine Fetherstone was the worst actress they had ever been forced to look upon, and the young men in the doorways exclaimed aloud, "What a confounded fool that fellow Sinclair has made of himself!"

Lord Edwin Beauville looked exceedingly well as Lord Leicester. He had two beautiful dresses, the one all white and silver, such as Sir Walter Scott describes him to have worn, the other mauve satin and black velvet. I have already said that he was very handsome, and that he possessed a very sweet face. I say sweet, for I can hardly call it anything else, seeing that it was by no means a classical one, yet it possessed a certain charm peculiar to itself, almost feminine. He was very fair, and he usually wore his short light hair plastered down over his forehead, which was not very becoming; but on this occasion it had been curled by the practised hands of a theatrical hair-dresser, and it now covered his head with tight little curls quite appropriate to the period, and highly becoming to the wearer. He was closely shaved excepting on the upper lip, where a tiny moustache had been allowed to grow, but even this he had reduced to the smallest possible proportions, so as not to hide his mouth, of which he was justly proud, for it was small and of a perfect shape, and when half open with a sweet smile, in which he often indulged, disclosed a double row of little white teeth which any woman might have envied. His eyes were by no means large, but they were almond-shaped, and, though of a light greyish hue, possessed a wondrous power of expression. As he spoke he closed them continually, and what in another would have

looked a conceited affectation, in him only passed for supreme elegance. In one word, Lord Edwin was a sweet youth, and he looked quite splendid in the gorgeous dress of the sixteenth century, that was so well calculated to show off his lithe tall figure, that bent gracefully with the supple agility and playfulness of a young fawn, and his well-formed limbs, of which he was not a little proud.

Altogether Lord Edwin made a charming and fascinating Lord Leicester, and when people saw him appearing on the stage for the first time, dressed in white satin embroidered with silver, with silk tights and lace ruffles, no one wondered that the two rival Queens should have been so desperately in love with him. But unfortunately he had quite forgotten his part, and his good looks and sweet manners availed him little when first one jealous Queen and then the other taxed him with infidelity to their love. On these occasions a responsive titter arose among the gentlemen in the doorways, but it was checked immediately by the frantic applause of the ladies.

This is all that the fashionable company assembled in the drawing-room saw, but, as I dare say is generally the case in such performances, a second play was being enacted all the while behind the scenes, and I need scarcely inform my readers that of this also the sweet Lord Edwin was the hero.

I suppose those gentle Readers of mine who have followed me so faithfully thus far have not forgotten that Sibyl Fetherstone was not the only young lady who had been struck by this young man's numerous charms and sweet ways. If they kindly refresh their memory by looking back at the close of my sixth chapter, they will

find that Lady Juliet Standish, the youngest daughter of the Countess of Cowes, had also fallen a victim to these same allurements, and that the two young ladies had discovered each other's secret the night of Lady Twickenham's "Small and Early."

They had been great friends before, and they were great friends still; though, of course, the same degree of confidence that had before existed between them could hardly be continued. Each one felt that the other knew her secret predilection for the handsome Lord Edwin, yet neither of them ever spoke of it, and when their conversation forced them to pronounce his name, they both went round the point and calculated the exact distance at which the other was from it, without ever coming too close to it, with all the dexterity of feminine diplomacy.

Lord Belgrave was right, when, speaking of Sibyl Fetherstone, he said that she did not really love his brother. At first his good looks and gentle manners had attracted her notice. She could not help admiring his graceful figure and the sweet expression of his countenance, though she was forced to confess to herself at the same time, that it was by no means the manly figure and the handsome face that she had always dreamt of, and that the sweet Lord Edwin, though decidedly a handsome and fascinating young fellow, was far from resembling the *beau idéal* she had pictured to herself of what the man she should love would be.

When she discovered that her dearest friend had also been fascinated by him, and that he was not indifferent to her charms, her natural sense of self-esteem took full possession of her. She would not be cut out by Lady Juliet — she could never allow a woman whom she

believed her inferior in every way to supplant her in a man's affections—she must have his heart come what might! Her honour was now concerned more even than her heart. Lord Edwin must propose to her first—of course she never meant to accept him. A second son without a fortune was not the match either she or her family would ever think of; but it would be a great triumph to win his affections, and it would be sweet to tell Lady Juliet afterwards that the man *she* loved had proposed to *her*, and that she had refused him.

Thus it came about that, from the beginning of that season, Sibyl Fetherstone's one all-absorbing object had been to fascinate the sweet Lord Edwin, and to entangle him in her net.

We have seen them since that conversation between the young ladies in which his name was first pronounced in these pages, often in each other's society, indulging in flirtations under the stairs, and half-secret love meetings in her father's home. The rehearsals, which the play they were now acting had necessitated, had been a very good excuse, and had greatly aided Sibyl's plans; but, in spite of all this, that young lady knew very well that Lord Edwin as yet was not in love with her—that he even shared the general restraint which young men as a rule experienced when in her presence, and that the gentler manners of Lady Juliet, and her soft tender beauty, possessed charms for him which all her wondrous allurements were unable to overcome.

In one word, Lord Edwin admired her greatly, but he was afraid of her. She possessed such overflowing physical strength, such a never-ceasing flow of spirits, such a determined, all-commanding mind, that his soft gentle nature was confused, and in her presence he felt

himself powerless and weak—a feeling hateful to any man, and especially so to him, who had been accustomed to rule supreme in his father's house, and to be the brilliant and wayward leader of all the young men he had ever known.

As for Lady Juliet, she really looked upon Lord Edwin with a true feeling of undisguised admiration. She admired his lithe figure and tall stature and his fine open face, and she admired his gentle winning ways and his sweet disposition. Besides, she knew—what Sibyl, with all her talents and natural gifts of penetration, could never even have guessed—that behind that exterior, so gentle and so sweet, there dwelt a strong and true heart which could feel keenly and deeply, and which, if the occasion ever presented itself, would not lack the strength of mind to conquer all obstacles, and, rising superior to all petty weaknesses, assert the nobleness of his real nature.

I will not say that she loved him. Love is a wild flower which seldom is allowed to grow in the prim and highly-cultivated gardens of Mayfair; and which, if it sometimes springs up unawares in some corner of those artificial groves, is soon uprooted and cast away, like a pretty but pernicious weed that might disfigure the general symmetry of the scientifically-laid-out beds. I shall not go so far therefore as to say that the feeling that young lady experienced for the handsome Lord Edwin was actually love, but yet I have no hesitation in saying that it was a far nobler and far less selfish passion than any which the more beautiful Sibyl could ever have entertained for a man like Lord Edwin.

When Lady Juliet heard of the private theatricals, and that her friend and Lord Edwin were going to take

part in them, her heart sank within her, but, mustering her courage, she drove to Lady Brightly, whom she had heard was managing the whole affair, and who was also a great friend of hers, and confessed to her that she would very much like to take a part in them. Lady Brightly told her plainly that all the parts were filled up, and that consequently there was no *rôle* left for her. But Lady Juliet was not going to give in so easily to her rival; and she insisted that the Queen of England ought to have a lady-in-waiting always near her, although Schiller had not seen the necessity of it, being only a German unacquainted with the customs of the English Court; and that she would be that lady gladly enough, even if she had not a single word to utter, provided that she should be permitted to come on the stage whenever Queen Elizabeth made her appearance. Lady Brightly was struck with the force of the argument, and promised to speak to Lady Tottenham about it. Lady Tottenham saw no objection; on the contrary, it would be an advantage, she said, to be able to print Lady Juliet Standish's high-sounding name in the programmes, and consequently a part was made up for that young lady, in which, although she was often to appear, she would have very little to say.

Sibyl detected her friend's secret reasons as soon as she heard of this; but as she could hardly object she wisely determined to take it in a friendly spirit and pretend to be very pleased with the idea.

"You will give me courage, dear," she said to her; "I shall not be so much afraid of breaking down if you are near me, and I shall be able to look at Lord Edwin without laughing."

The night of the performance arrived, and when-

ever Sibyl entered the scene in the character of Queen Elizabeth, Lady Juliet always appeared behind her, acting the part of her confidential lady-in-waiting. By these means that young lady was enabled to be present at all the love scenes between the Queen and Lord Leicester, and to see for herself what took place behind the scenes when the curtain went down.

At the end of the second act, when Elizabeth and Leicester had had their first great scene—a scene which by-the-bye Lord Edwin cut exceedingly short, for he had forgotten the half of it—Sibyl said to him, as he threw himself apparently quite exhausted upon one of the sofas in the green-room—

“I suppose, Lord Leicester, you have been thinking of the fair Amy Robsart all this time?—no wonder that you should have forgotten all you had to say to the poor Elizabeth!”

There was a strange look of supreme scorn in her eyes as she said this, and her lips quivered; if it had not been for the rouge, I feel convinced her cheeks would have been deadly pale, for she always turned pale when angry.

“What a dreadful bore!” answered Lord Edwin, without looking at her; “can’t you leave a fellow alone when he has made a fool of himself? I am sure if Lord Leicester was as bored and tired as I am, he must have hated Amy, Marie, Queen Elizabeth, and the whole lot of them!”

Sibyl flushed deeply under the thick paint which covered her face, and bit her lips. When she turned round, her eyes met Lady Juliet’s, who stood just behind her. She cast a look of mute contempt upon her, and, addressing herself to Lady Brightly, who also stood

near, she said, in a tone that was heard all over the room—

"I do not think, Sister Marie, that our friend Leicester here, is, after all, worth the trouble and torment we impose upon one another. I, for one, am ready to give him up—what say you?"

Lady Brightly, who did not understand the deep meaning hidden in these words, took it for a joke and laughed heartily.

At that moment Sibyl's maid came to inform her that it was time to put on her hunting-dress, for the park scene, and she was forced to quit the green-room. Lady Brightly resumed her conversation with the tall Guardsman who acted the part of Paulet.

"Will you take six to one on the field then, Sinclair?"

"Yes, if you let me have Rob Roy besides the favourite; I intend to back that horse, for he is a stunner."

"Very well; now put it down in your betting-book, and mind you don't forget. By-the-bye, you really must get me introduced to this African Sultan before the Derby; I want to speak to him in his own language before the Royalties."

"You speak Arabic?"

"Oh, yes; it is true I only know one word, and it is also true that that means 'Go to the devil!' yet it is cheerful to give it an airing now and then, you know."

And the unfortunate Marie, Queen of Scots, who had drawn tears of sympathy from the proudest ladies of Mayfair only a moment before, laughed merrily and displayed a pretty row of small white teeth.

Lord Edwin in the meantime had risen from the sofa, and was talking in a corner of the room with Lady

Juliet, who seemed very happy, and who laughed gaily at his misfortunes, and advised him to read over his next love scene with the Queen, if he did not wish to incur her anger a second time.

The third and fourth acts passed off very well. Lady Brightly achieved new successes, and Sibyl appeared in a green velvet hunting-dress, which was pronounced a triumph of millinery art. It was embroidered with gold, and lifted up on one side over a pale rose-coloured satin petticoat; the body, which fitted closely and showed off her figure to perfection, was also of green velvet, and was trimmed with fur; the sleeves were of pink satin, like the petticoat, and so was the hat, which had a long white feather, fastened with a handsome diamond bow.

The fifth act arrived, in which Lady Brightly of course received great applause. Towards the end, when leaning on Anna Kennedy's arm she is preparing for her execution, she turned round upon Leicester, who stood beside her, and in a truly pathetic tone pronounced the famous words—

“Farewell! and, if you can, live happy! You have dared aspire to the hand of two Queens; you have despised a tender and loving heart; you have betrayed it to gain a proud and haughty one! Go, fall at Elizabeth's feet, and may your recompense not turn into a punishment! Farewell!”

Sibyl and Lady Juliet, who stood on opposite sides of the stage, hidden behind the walls of the Castle of Fotheringay, trembled at these words. With a mutual feeling they looked up and their eyes met. Lady Juliet's were moistened with tears; in Sibyl's there was an expression of scorn and haughty cynicism horrible to behold.

The next scene disclosed Queen Elizabeth in the dress she had worn in the first act—crimson velvet and gold brocade, covered with jewels, and wearing a diamond crown on her head. Sibyl had never looked so handsome; but there she stood—alone in the great hall of her Royal Palace of Greenwich. Her Ministers had betrayed her; her dearest friends had left her—there she stood in all her wondrous beauty, with all her riches and her unbounded power—alone—reaping the fruits of her harvest of blood. When Kent came and informed her of Lord Leicester's departure for France after Mary's death, her face quivered, her frame trembled all over, her bosom rose and fell convulsively, and her eyes were bent on the ground. The intelligent spectators said they had never seen such a wonderful piece of acting before; the Royal lady in the front row turned round, saying it was too horribly real; but Elizabeth remained, as firm as a rock, upon the throne, silent and conscience-stricken, as if lost in deep all-absorbing thoughts, until the curtain went down.

While this last scene was going on Lord Edwin and Lady Juliet were standing side by side in one of the side-scenes. Their eyes were fixed intently upon Sibyl, and when Kent told her the dreadful news, and she staggered and trembled with such horrible reality, their hands met and remained clasped for some minutes before either could speak.

"Look!—look at her," he said at last, pressing the lady's hand, "can this be acting?"

"No," answered his companion, withdrawing her hand suddenly from his.

A second afterwards the curtain was down, and a thrilling burst of applause sent it up once more, and

obliged the whole troupe to appear again before the public to receive new and more general marks of approbation. As Sibyl stepped forward between the tall Guardsman and Lord Edwin, she took the latter's hand and pressed it, while her eyes sought his. She looked at him as if she would have read the state of his heart through his eyes, but he was bowing low at that moment before the audience, and she could learn nothing from them.

Once behind the scenes, a servant approached the elder Miss Fetherstone, bearing a message from Lady Twickenham. Her ladyship had got tired and had gone home; she requested the young ladies to come as soon as possible and to undress at home. She had sent Mr. Fetherstone's brougham for them to the back door; their maids might follow afterwards with the rest of the dresses.

"She is anxious about her jewels," Sibyl said, when she received the message. "I can understand it, for they are worth loving, if anything is in this world." And she cast a loving look upon them.

"They become you so well; it is a pity you cannot always wear them," Lord Edwin said, looking at her with undisguised admiration.

"I hope to do so when I am married," she answered, looking away from him. "That is to say," she added, turning suddenly and fixing her eyes upon him, "if I marry a man who can afford to give me such jewels as these."

Lord Edwin understood the hint and bit his lips with an involuntary movement of mortification, which he soon managed to conceal by putting the lace handkerchief he held in his hand to his face.

The Misses Fetherstone would not wait to have any

supper, but preferred going home as soon as possible to rejoin their step-mother.

Lord Edwin and Mr. Sinclair conducted them therefore to the back door, and saw them safely into their carriage.

"You will excuse us to Lady Tottenham, Lord Edwin, and tell her what has happened. Good-bye."

Just as Sibyl said this, Mr. Sinclair looked up at the coachman, and noticed that he was very flushed and sat all on one side.

"I am afraid your man is not very sober. I hardly think it safe to let you go," he said.

"Oh, there is no fear; he is papa's coachman, and I believe he is a little more fond of the public-house than he should be; but the distance is so short I am not afraid. Good-bye."

The footman shut the door of the carriage and mounted the box. A second afterwards, Lord Edwin and Mr. Sinclair had rejoined the other actors in the large dining-room, where the whole of the company had now assembled before a sumptuous supper, when they were complimented on all sides and by everyone for their charming acting. Lady Tottenham was in the seventh heaven. Her theatricals had proved a great success, and the Royal lady who had sat in the front row had told her that she had seldom spent a more enjoyable evening.

CHAPTER XIX.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY.

(Not by Miss Austen.)

LADY TWICKENHAM sat in the library of her handsome mansion in Carlton House Terrace, anxiously awaiting the arrival of her step-daughters.

Her husband, Mr. Fetherstone, was also there, and was walking impatiently up and down the room.

Silence had reigned for some time between them. The clock on the mantel-piece went on its round with a prodigious rapidity, and its tick-tack could be heard distinctly all over the apartment.

It was Lady Twickenham who spoke first.

"I am afraid, Gerald, something must have happened."

"What can have happened, dear Elizabeth?—what can have happened?—it is absurd to be anxious!"

He said this in a nervous manner, which was certainly not calculated to inspire anyone with confidence. He then sat down near the lamp, and, taking a paper from the large round table in the centre of the room, turned to the leading article and read a very eloquent attack on his last speech. Mr. Fetherstone was accustomed to these attacks, but on the present occasion such an article was

not the most calculated to quiet his nerves. He threw down the paper and again paced the room with an uncertain step and uneasy mind.

Lady Twickenham again looked up at the clock on the mantle-piece.

"Past two, and not back yet; I wish I had not let her have my jewels!"

"Don't be uneasy, they will be here presently. Shall—shall I ring for sup—sup—per, my dear?"

"If she should lose them . . . !"

"Nonsense, Elizabeth; I hope—that is to say, I am sure—that—I trust that will not be the ca—ca—se."

Lady Twickenham took no notice of her husband's words, but again muttered, as the clock pointed to a quarter-past two—

"I do wish I had not lent her my best jewels!"

At that moment a loud double knock was heard—a knock which resounded all through the silent house, and caused the heart of its mistress to beat violently.

The steps of a man were heard in the passage; it was one of the footmen who was going to open the door.

Lady Twickenham felt so excited that she would have gladly flung open the library door and rushed into the hall had not etiquette checked the impulse.

A profound silence reigned again for a few seconds, during which the tick-tack of the clock seemed more distinct than ever.

Presently the door opened, and Sibyl and Geraldine, accompanied by Lord Twickenham and followed by Juan Fernandez, entered the apartment.

One glance sufficed for the Countess to ascertain that none of her priceless jewels were missing; and her feeling of relief knew no bounds.

Lord Twickenham explained what had occurred, and in so doing, was forced to mention the valuable assistance rendered by Juan.

"A friend of yours?" inquired Mr. Fetherstone.

"Yes, certainly—of course, a friend of mine," he answered rather confused, for he would hardly have liked to tell his mother and his step-father, and before his step-sisters too, where he had made his acquaintance.

Lady Twickenham looked up. "You are a foreigner?" she said.

"Yes, I am Spanish; my name is Juan Fernandez," he hastened to inform them, fearing that perhaps his noble friend might have forgotten it, and if asked would have been forced to explain the nature of their acquaintance.

Lady Twickenham looked at him again, and was highly satisfied with the inspection. She could not help being struck with his handsome face and tall stalwart figure. His manners, too, seemed high bred, and there was an ease and self-possession about him which only a gentleman could possess. Altogether, the handsome Spaniard pleased her fancy, and she, who was so cold and distant with the greatest men in England, became all at once amiable and patronizing to this foreigner. Of her own accord she took his arm to go in to supper, which the butler had now announced as being served in the breakfast-room, and she talked to him incessantly in a kind amiable manner about Spain and Spaniards, of whom she confessed herself to be particularly partial.

"I always have my own supper at home," she said, in the course of conversation; "I cannot eat what one generally gets at balls and concerts, and I always make a point of coming home early and having my supper comfortably."

Juan admired her forethought, and in high-flown language praised her for her good taste.

"Do you come from Lady Tottenham's theatricals?—but of course I need not ask you, I see you are not in evening dress."

"No, I did not go; I have not the honour of being known to her ladyship. I went to my club instead, where I had the pleasure of meeting your son, with whom I was walking home when the accident took place which has afforded me the opportunity of making the acquaintance of these young ladies." As he said this his eyes met those of the younger Miss Fetherstone, who sat opposite to him. She blushed and looked down. Juan, with the great penetration he had acquired into human nature, guessed immediately what Geraldine's thoughts were, and from that moment determined to turn the good impression he had produced upon that young lady to good account. "So, so," he said to himself, "I have made a conquest; take care, Miss Fetherstone, I am a dangerous playmate!"

Geraldine, in the meantime, kept repeating to herself, "Juan, Don Juan, what a lovely name! I am sure Lord Byron must have intended his hero to be something like this man. When I get upstairs I'll read the description he gives of him; but I am convinced that not even Byron could have imagined a man so handsome and so superior in every way as this Spaniard. How happy his Haidée must be!"

Shortly afterwards the young ladies rose to retire to their rooms, and Juan, seeing that he would endanger the good impression he had made if he remained much longer, took his departure, but not before receiving the most hearty thanks from Mr. Fetherstone for his courage

and dexterity in saving his daughters. Lady Twickenham also felt very grateful to him, for she thought of the risk her diamonds had run, and that it was, perhaps, thanks to him that she had got them back all safe; and she invited him to call and see her again soon.

Geraldine sat up half the night reading Lord Byron's poems, of which she was particularly fond; and when at last she lay down to sleep it was to dream of the handsome Spaniard to whom she was under the false delusion she owed her life. She dreamt that he was the gay Don Juan who had been wrecked and cast by the sea on the shores of her island, and that she herself was the lovely Greek girl for whom, of course, he had conceived at once the most violent passion.

The next day she tried to question her step-brother about him, but Lord Twickenham could have told her very little, and that little he took very good care not to mention. He simply said that he was a Spanish gentleman whom he had met at a club, and agreed with her that he was altogether "a capital fellow."

Two days later, Juan called upon the young Earl in his chambers at the Albany, and went with him to his mother's house to inquire how the young ladies were after the accident. Sibyl had gone to a morning party with her aunt, but Lady Twickenham and Geraldine were at home, and the Countess received him with her usual grace, and was again very patronising and affable in her manner towards him. Geraldine said very little, but she watched him closely, and he lost no opportunity, you may be sure, of looking at her and trying to win her affections.

After this they frequently saw each other. They met almost every morning in the Park, and he always

managed to find out when they were going to the theatre or to the opera, and took very good care to go too. Lord Twickenham was delighted with him, for Juan made himself as agreeable and amusing as he could; Lady Twickenham was pleased with him, for he also knew how to please and flatter her; and Geraldine was every day more and more in love with him.

Thus it came about, that, through the partiality of a coachman for a certain public-house, Juan Fernandez—whom Alfredo had so hesitated to introduce to Lord Twickenham, whom that young nobleman himself would never have even thought of introducing into his mother's house—became installed in it in the character of an intimate and ever-welcome friend.

CHAPTER XX.

BELGRAVIA.

(Not by Miss Braddon.)

THE gaieties of the London season were now at their highest: balls, concerts and receptions succeeded each other with marvellous rapidity. Alfredo often wondered how his friend could ever remember all his engagements, in spite of the three books which he always kept at hand to remind him of what he had engaged himself to do. "It is, indeed, hard work," that nobleman once remarked, "and very little pleasure, and yet I do not go to one-fourth of the places I am invited to."

Alfredo often accompanied his noble friend to these parties, but, as he knew very little of the people he met there and cared still less, he was not over anxious to go, and often *excused* himself by saying that all these gaieties fatigued him and that he required rest now and then.

He had thus been able to pay long and frequent visits to his friends in Bull Street, Soho, for his Consuelo was was never out of his mind.

There he had learnt—not I must confess without a secret feeling of pleasure and sense of relief—of the cold, and, as Mr. Fernandez expressed it, "ungentlemanly"

reception which Mr. Jobkin had accorded them. Mr. Fernandez of course was now always in a bad humour, for he missed his old companions of the *café*, and felt convinced that his rich nephew would do nothing for them, although, as he repeated over and over again to everybody, he had only come to England to see him and console him for the death of his mother. I shall not say how much Alfredo believed of this, but of one thing he was certain—that his Consuelo loved him, and he cared but little for the rest.

Things however were in a far worse state than he knew of, for the Fernandez were fast spending their little store of money, and there seemed to be no chance whatever of their procuring any more. Mr. Fernandez would not have hesitated to ask Mr. Jobkin openly for assistance. "*A quiet baby gets no milk,*" he had said to his daughter, remembering one of his favourite proverbs; but Consuelo shrank from this last resource with a feeling of pride which seemed too natural to her to be questioned even by her unscrupulous father. "I would rather work than beg," she had said, and though the miserable man failed to understand her noble sentiment, yet he had agreed to postpone that resource to the last.

During one of Alfredo's visits to the dingy old lodging-house in Bull Street, the conversation had turned, as it often did, on Lord Belgrave. Consuelo felt naturally very curious to know what her lover's friend was like, and she confessed at the same time a strong desire to see the beautiful house in which he lived. * Alfredo, always afraid of introducing her to the Marquis, for he knew but too well what an impression she was sure to produce upon him, though of course the thought of doubting his friend never entered into his head for a moment, refused to let

her see him; but he could hardly refuse in the same way to allow her to see his house, so he agreed to show her over it himself one day that he was sure its owner would be absent, and so it was agreed between them that he should write her a line and let her know the first day an opportunity presented itself.

That opportunity occurred much sooner than he had expected. One fine morning in May, Lord Belgrave announced during breakfast that he intended driving in his drag to Raspberry Dale—Lady Twickenham's house on the banks of the Thames—to see his friend Charlie Twickenham, who had gone there for the Whitsuntide recess, and that he would not be back till late that evening. He asked Alfredo to accompany him, but the latter excused himself, saying he had a previous engagement, and no sooner had Lord Belgrave driven off in his four-in-hand than he despatched a messenger to Bull Street to inform Mr. Fernandez and his daughter that if they had nothing better to do he would be glad to show them over Beauville House.

He waited for them all the morning, but, finding they did not come, concluded that they had never received his note and drove off in a hansom to fetch them himself. Arrived in Bull Street, old Mrs. Potts informed him that her lodgers had left some time ago and had gone, as well as she could remember, in the direction of Mayfair. He therefore drove back again to Belgrave Square, and, when he arrived at the door of Beauville House, discovered to his dismay that Consuelo and her father had arrived there during his absence, and that the stately butler and the superfine footmen, who ruled supreme there, as they generally do in a bachelor's house, had dismissed them in an off-hand sort of way. "A beggarly

lot they seemed, sir," was the description which the supercilious *major domo* gave of them.

Alfredo was naturally furious, and informed him that they were particular friends of his, whom he had asked to come and see the house. The butler was a little astonished at this, and, fearing to offend his master's great friend, offered to send a servant after them. "They can't be far off, for they only left the house a few minutes before you arrived, sir. I am sure if I had known them to be friends of yours, sir," he added, "I should never have sent them away, but who could ever have thought it?"

A man was immediately despatched after them, who soon returned with them, for Consuelo had had the happy thought of walking round the Square once or twice, in the hope of catching a glimpse of her Alfredo.

Mr. Fernandez was exceedingly indignant at the reception he had received. "I have been insulted, sir—I have been basely insulted by a couple of servants—and I am a gentleman, a true Castillian gentleman, sir; and my feelings are hurt, sir—you understand that my feelings are hurt.—'Stabs may heal, but wounds from bad words never.'"

His daughter tried to pacify him. "We must expect these things, papa," she said, in the presence of her lover. "We are only poor insignificant people remember, and this is the Palace of a Marquis. These men are only accustomed to receive Lords and Ladies. How can you expect them to treat such poorly-dressed visitors as we are with anything but haughty disrespect?"

There was a bitterness in her tone which seemed sad and painful in one so young and so beautiful, and her words went straight to Alfredo's heart and caused him a secret pang. He did his best, however, to atone for

the servants' rude conduct, and he pressed her hand tenderly to his heart as they mounted the stately staircase towards the state apartments on the first-floor.

These rooms, as I have already said, were never used now, and were consequently cold-looking and sadly out of order. They were large and handsome, but they had little to recommend them excepting some fine pictures, mostly family portraits, and their grand old-fashioned furniture.

Consuelo had never seen such splendid apartments before, and was enchanted with them; though she was obliged to agree with Alfredo that all idea of comfort had been sacrificed to costly glitter and showy magnificence. Those gorgeous saloons, with their silk-covered walls, their old tapestry, and the long array of gilt chairs, seemed haunted by the demon of *ennui*, and to a man of Alfredo's mind seemed like so many gilt cages in which the unhappy birds who were forced to inhabit them must necessarily pine for the liberty and beauty of the green fields.

"It is a grand house, nevertheless," Consuelo exclaimed, seating herself on one of the immense gilt arm-chairs which stood along the wall like so many thrones. "How happy the women must be who can live in such rooms as these and defy the miseries of the world! And to think that while great ladies idle their time away in houses like this, thousands are famishing in the streets outside!"

She looked so beautiful as she sat in that old arm-chair in that gorgeous drawing-room, with nothing but gold and velvet around her, and the portraits of proud dames and gallant knights on the walls, that Alfredo soon forgot the distress which her words had caused him,

and, sitting down on a stool at her feet, was soon lost in mute admiration of her.

She had never looked so beautiful. All the splendour around only seemed to set off her beauty; her noble brow, her commanding figure, her classical features, the very turn of her matchless head, all seemed made to be seen in such a place as this. Anyone coming into the room at that moment would have taken her at once for the proud mistress of the house, so fitted did she appear in every respect to dwell in marble halls and become the admiration of a Court. Yet there was something so sweet and so lovable about her, that the handsomest drawing-room in the finest palace would have seemed poor, and unworthy of her; for it was love that added that matchless grace to her person—love that made of that girl at once a goddess and a saint, and added to her many charms the greatest charm of all—supreme happiness.

Yes, love smiled its irresistible smile in her lovely eyes, on her sweet lips and dimpled cheeks; it reposed on her lofty brow, it played on her beautiful dark hair; love—in all its tenderness, in all its passion, in all its unmistakable truth. Love coloured every feature, all the symmetry of her matchless form, and swelled her swan-like neck—love found expression in her low melodious voice that went straight to the heart.

She seemed born to captivate and command the world—not, like the passionate Sibyl, by means of her beauty alone, or like the worldly Lady Brightly, through her grace and wit—but by her pure virgin soul, by her thoughtful noble spirit, by her almost superhuman yet intensely womanly charms. It was a beauty that came from the heart and went to the heart.

How—in the obscure garret on the third floor in Madrid, where she had been brought up, or in the poor wretched lodging-house in Soho, in which she then lived—she had learnt all the arts of pleasing—how she had acquired this unmistakable superiority—it would indeed be difficult to say. It would seem as if Heaven had destined her for a high and lofty station, and then, fearing that the splendours and temptations of a fashionable life might endanger her noble soul, had condemned her to dwell in poverty and obscurity.

Alfredo thought of all this as he sat at her feet lost in mute admiration of her, while her father examined the various pictures and calculated in his mind the value of every article he saw. He thought of all this, and then he thought, that perhaps he was doing wrong in loving her as he did. “She is born to be a Duchess, and I am longing to make her the wife of a poor man. I would shut her up in a small lodging—she who is so well fitted to shine in palaces and win the admiration of the whole world. Is it not selfish of me—is it not wrong and sinful—to love her and wish to win her when I can offer her nothing in exchange for the priceless boon she will give me?”

But one look of hers dispersed all these sad thoughts, for that look revealed all the intensity of the love she bore him—a love that he well knew only love would repay—and in that he was rich.

They passed in due succession through all the apartments. In one a full-length portrait of Lord Belgrave, taken only a few years before, struck Consuelo’s fancy.

“How handsome he is!” she said, looking at it attentively. “What a noble head! What a calm, gentlemanly self-possession rests upon the whole figure—what a proud

yet kind smile plays about those firm lips—what a look of power and command is in those eyes, which yet seem to encourage rather than to repel! Is he really as good-looking as that?"

"Ah, yes, Consuelo, he is a very, very handsome man, and as good and noble as he is handsome. He deserves to be happy."

"Happy!—why, is he not happy?—he, the rich owner of a palace like this?"

"Palaces and riches do not constitute happiness, Consuelo. I am a far happier man than he is—for I have you!"

"Ah, the proverb is but too true," muttered old Fernandez to himself, "*God gives plenty of almonds to the toothless.*"

When they were once more on the ground-floor, Consuelo insisted on seeing the private apartments he generally occupied, though Alfredo informed her that there was little to see in them, and that they were plainly furnished. "Never mind," she answered; "I should like to see the rooms in which you live—besides there is the garden. Oh, do let me see them, Alfredo, do?"

He opened the door of communication which led from the hall, and showed her into the little library and the morning room, which had windows opening into the garden at the back. The garden was at its best—a perfect glow of flowers—for Lord Belgrave was very fond of flowers and liked his garden to look pretty. Consuelo admired the taste with which the different beds were laid out, and then examined attentively the inside of the rooms. On a table there was a cabinet-sized photograph that caught her attention. She took it up and carried it

to the window to see it properly. It was the portrait of a woman, a very young woman; the features were small and rounded like those of a child, and a profusion of light hair hung round the face. As she examined it she could not repress a cry of surprise.

"Why, Alfredo," she exclaimed, "this is a portrait of Polly—Mrs. Potts' step-daughter! I am sure of it. Look at it! It is Polly Potts, is it not?"

Alfredo coloured deeply, and turned his face away from the light to hide his confusion.

"What nonsense you are talking, dear Consuelo. How can you ever imagine that Lord Belgrave could possess such a thing? Polly Potts, poor girl, was most likely never photographed in her life. This is, no doubt, some young lady-friend of his—some actress, perhaps. But look at this oil portrait here. This was his mother, the late Lady Belgrave, a very handsome woman if the painter did not flatter her."

Consuelo turned round to look at the portrait, and left the photograph where she had found it, but the first impression that it was a portrait of Polly Potts still remained unshaken; for indeed it would have been difficult to mistake the likeness, though the girl in the photo was dressed in velvet and lace, and she had never seen Polly in anything but the shabbiest print gowns, all torn and dirty, but she had only seen her during the first weeks of her stay there, for lately the girl had disappeared, and no one knew anything of her. Mrs. Potts seemed rather pleased than otherwise at her departure, though she had now to pay a girl to do all the work which her step-daughter did before for nothing.

Shortly afterwards they left Beauville House, and Alfredo walked back with them to Bull Street. On the

way Mr. Fernandez complained to him bitterly of their miserable situation—" *We have nothing left for God to rain on,*" and informed him that if some one did not do something for them they would be obliged to return to Spain, "and very soon too, or else all our money will be gone, and we shall have literally to beg our way back. ' *Daylight comes no sooner for our early rising.*'"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LADDER OF GOLD.

(Not by Mr. Bell.)

MR. JOBKIN had reached the pinnacle of earthly happiness. He was installed in his handsome new house in Grosvenor Square. He had had a new floor put in the two large drawing-rooms—a *parquet* over which it was quite impossible to walk. The boudoir at the back of these had been entirely re-decorated, and its walls had been covered with blue silk; all the tables and small chairs which had been in it before, when the house belonged to the old dowager Countess, from whom he had hired it, had been taken away, and a divan of blue silk like the walls had been placed round them, thus leaving the centre of the room perfectly empty so as to accommodate more people. Altogether it had been made as uncomfortable a boudoir as decorators and upholsterers could well make it. The dining-room had also been in the hands of the decorators ever since he first took the house, and they had only just left it to allow Gunter's men to take full possession. The library at the back had also been given up to the workmen, who were going to transform it into a cloak-room as well as the two principal bedrooms upstairs. Mr. Jobkin had been forced

to take up his abode, with all his goods and chattels—the bust of Wellington and all—on the third floor—the rooms previously occupied by the servants of the house; and he often thought, with a sigh of regret, of the comfortable house he had left in Montague Place, Russell Square.

Yet he was as happy as any man could well be, for the great ambition of his life—the one object of his whole existence, the fond dream of his youth, and the desire of his manhood—was at last about to be fulfilled.

The invitations for his great ball had been sent out all over Mayfair, and he was to be launched upon its waters by the skilful and practised hands of Mrs. Boston Gilbert to run his happy course, and to enter, at the end of a short and triumphant trial-trip, into that haven of supreme bliss—Fashion.

Mrs. Boston Gilbert had fulfilled her promise. She had sent Mr. Jobkin's invitations to all her friends and acquaintances with her "compliments," and had so managed that, by a judicious system of puffing, she had excited a great interest in him. She had talked so much of his unbounded wealth, good looks, and great talent, that people were actually anxious to make his acquaintance, and consequently a great many accepted his invitation.

Cyril Scholl, too, talked a great deal about it, and had got all his friends to ask everybody they met if they were going to Mr. Jobkin's ball—the best way of inducing people to go. He had been morally bill-sticking this ball in all the clubs for weeks past, and some young men had actually asked him to procure them invitations.

Mrs. Boston Gilbert had particularly insisted on his not inviting any of his own friends. "In our set we

cannot bear to meet people we don't know and don't care to know," she had said. "We don't mind going to a man's house even if he is not in society provided everybody who is, goes too, but it would be an insult to introduce us into a room full of people we have never seen before. Remember that you have plenty of things against you without that. There is that election of yours at Brightborough, which seems to be going altogether to the dogs, as Lord Twiston is determined his son shall come in; and then there is that unfortunate ball you gave at Willis's Rooms, which seems to have frightened people from having anything to do with you. Bear this in mind, Mr. Jobkin, that if you wish your ball to be a success you must leave it entirely to me and invite no one without my permission."

Mr. Jobkin remonstrated for some time; there were two or three families to whom he felt greatly indebted, and whom he thought himself in honour bound to invite. But Mrs. Boston Gilbert was inflexible. "When you enter the world of fashion, Mr. Jobkin," she said, "you must forget that you have a heart. Fashion is business, and you have not been a business man all these years not to have learnt that in business transactions the heart is only a drag. As for honour—honour westward of Temple Bar is very different to that you indulge in in the City. You may forget your City friends, Mr. Jobkin; you will not require them in future."

In this way poor Mr. Jobkin was induced to cut his best and dearest friends. I must say for him that this was quite contrary to his sentiments, and that the man really felt sorry to do it, but "*la mode oblige*," as he had learnt to say in Paris.

There was, however, one person he would not cut, and

this was a half-cousin of his, a certain Thomson, also a City man, the eldest son of a great banker, with whom he had been very intimate since his earliest campaigns on the Stock Exchange. Mrs. Boston Gilbert was of course very much against this man at first; but when she saw how determined her *protégé* was to invite him to the ball, she gave her gracious permission, provided, she stipulated, that he should not ask to be introduced to anyone there.

Two days before the ball, Mr. Fernandez and his daughter called for the third time upon him. He was getting rather tired of their visits, and began to think them a great bore, but as he felt that he should do something for them, he thought for one moment of inviting them to the ball, this being the cheapest way he could imagine of doing them a favour; but this time Mrs. Boston Gilbert was immovable. In vain did he remonstrate and explain that they were his cousins, and that, being foreigners, no one would ever notice them. She would not be talked over, and he had to give up his idea of inviting them. "They are a 'orrible, gushing, 'ungry-looking people," he said to himself that evening. "I really must get rid of them some'ow. The girl is pretty enough, but that father is too dreadful. I am glad now I did not ask them. The best way is to be very distant the next time I see them. I wonder if they really are my cousins, after all."

The great night arrived. An awning had been erected in front of the door. Six footmen in powder and bran-new liveries stood in the hall ready to receive the company. The staircase was a perfect bower of flowers. On the first landing stood Mr. Jobkin, supported on one side by Mrs. Boston Gilbert, and on the other by Cyril

Scholl, and ready to be introduced by them to his guests. Sweet melodious strains from the band, stationed in the principal drawing-room, filled the house, and were heard even in the street outside, where a crowd of linkmen and idlers were already collected.

The guests now began to arrive in rapid succession, and, after depositing their hats and cloaks in the cloak-room downstairs, were ushered up the staircase by the stately butler, who was very careful to have their names taken down in full, to be inserted in the *Morning Post* on the following morning. Arrived at the first landing, they shook hands with Mrs. Boston Gilbert, who introduced them in due succession to Mr. Jobkin, who bowed low as they passed, staring at him, never even offering to shake hands, and seldom acknowledging his bow.

"I did not come to make his acquaintance," said Lord Claridge, the young Catholic Peer who is said to be so partial to Don Carlos, in a loud whisper to the Honble. Mrs. Chataine, who passed him as he mounted the staircase; "I only came to see what fools some men can make of themselves!"

Mrs. Chataine laughed and took his arm to enter the ball-room, where Miss Bird—that pretty girl she generally chaperones, God knows why!—followed them on the arm of Colonel Rich, who is said to be a greater admirer of the chaperone than of the pretty young lady.

Mrs. Dickson came next—that charming lady who is so very fond of dear Fanny Chataine, and therefore takes such particular pains to watch all her movements, to be able to relate them afterwards to her other dear friends. This lady actually bowed to Mr. Jobkin; but who could wonder at it? She is always so very kind!

Immediately behind her came Lady Paul, with her

four handsome daughters, who also bowed to Mr. Jobkin, and who introduced her young ladies to him. She had heard that he had some intentions of becoming a Catholic, and perhaps he might fall in love with one of her daughters. The Honble. Misses Paul also bowed to him. "He is a horrible snob, no doubt, but anything is better than a convent!" they said to each other and passed on.

A lady now ascended the stairs who seemed the very essence of everything that is sweet and mellifluous—a perfect hive of honey and a precious large one too—round which hovered many industrious bees, foremost amongst whom was seen Lord Beacon, who followed her closely. This lady was introduced to the gentleman of the house by Mrs. Boston Gilbert as Mrs. Percy Frere. She was all sugar to Mrs. Boston Gilbert, who, as a rule, hardly thinks her good enough to invite to her own house, but whom she thought would help to fill up nicely in Mr. Jobkin's; but she passed her host without even looking at him. It is true that Lord Beacon was close behind her, and she liked people to imagine that she was engaged to him, so she hardly dared to talk to other men in his presence.

Other ladies followed one after the other and were introduced to Mr. Jobkin. Whenever the lady in question possessed a handle to her name he made a bow lower than usual, and tried to smile, but *these* ladies seldom acknowledged his bows.

The drawing-rooms were now full, and dancing had begun in both rooms. There was, of course, the ordinary mob of good society: the pretty Miss Howard and the stately Miss Dorkins, whom one sees everywhere; the usual number of young men who, as a rule, think themselves too grand to dance, but will stand in the doorways inter-

cepting all communication, and preventing the free circulation of air, which, by-the-bye, was already beginning to get very suffocating. There were also a few dancing men, who dance because they know that if they did not no one would ever invite them, generally small, fair, freckled men, who get very hot and are constantly rubbing their foreheads with their pocket-handkerchiefs as if to produce ideas with which to enliven their partners and compensate for their bad dancing. There was Lord Kilmore, whose presence is always felt right across a room on account of the violent noise he makes stamping with his feet during the quadrilles and lancers; and there were also those two pretty American girls, who have been christened Giroflé Girofla, and who seldom care to dance except when a certain Royal personage is near enough to notice their pretty little figures.

Altogether it was a very fair assemblage of fashionable people, though there were few of the really great, and none of the *crème de la crème* set.

But, of course, the ladder of fashion must be climbed slowly, and step by step. Mrs. Boston Gilbert had been able to give Mr. Jobkin a good "lift," and had placed him at once on one of the steps, but it was *his* business to keep firm on it, and the rest he would be obliged to climb unaided, for no person could lend him a helping hand after the first few steps.

People are not particularly fond of making new acquaintances, and especially acquaintances of this description, which must always be more or less questionable, though I have heard of a man who managed to climb up the social ladder somehow—on which, by-the-bye, this same Mrs. Boston Gilbert had placed him—and made love and even proposed to a Duke's daughter, whom, I

dare say, he would have married if he had not "come to smash"—as they say in the City, from whence he originally came—which had forced him to give up his fine house and ambitious dreams.

Mr. Jobkin had a great many things in his favour. He was comparatively young, and even in some respects good-looking; he was a bachelor, and his wealth was a reality which no one could question, and was safely invested, as every mother in Mayfair knew by this time. It is true that his education had been greatly neglected, and that, when he got excited, his English was not perfect; but then as long as he remained silent—which the poor man, knowing his weak points, generally contrived to do—he looked very gentlemanly and behaved like other people.

But he was exceedingly nervous, and this was another great point against him. He never seemed to know what to do with his arms and legs; and as for his hands, they were always in and out of his pockets, and flying in every direction, in a manner distressing to behold. He was so very nervous that when he did not feel quite at his ease—which was very often the case west of Temple Bar—he kept up what might fairly be called a constant play of countenance, which was also most painful to witness. When any one spoke to him whom he did not know well and whom he was anxious to please, he first smiled, and then looked grave, stammered something you could not precisely understand, and then he grinned in the most provoking manner. All this made many people jump to the conclusion that he was an utter fool.

In one word, Mr. Jobkin possessed all the great disadvantages of a painfully shy man, which was the more

strange as he had a great reputation for enterprise and even audacity in the City, and in all business matters was a very shrewd and clear-headed man.

But to-night Mr. Jobkin was at the height of his ambition. He was in a room filled with real Lords and Ladies, all of whom were his guests and would be forced to leave their cards upon him on the morrow. This thought was highly pleasing to his vanity. It is true that he had never seen any of these people before, and that if he met them the next day he would not recognise them, and they would most likely pass him without the least sign of recognition; but then they were his friends nevertheless, and the cards they would leave upon him would be a substantial evidence of that fact, which no one could deny.

As he knew nobody in the room, and hardly dared to speak to anyone for fear of making some mistake, he walked to the corner where his friend Thomson stood, as soon as all the company had arrived, and sat himself down beside him.

"This is a grand sight, Thomson," he said, "ain't it? I told you that the world would at last appreciate me, and would end by being only too glad to flock to my 'ouse."

His less sanguine friend shook his head. "I do not understand what you mean by appreciating you. It seems to me that all these people are utterly indifferent to you, and would go just as gladly to any man's house who gave them a good supper and provided them with a good floor."

Jobkin thought—not without a secret feeling of pleasure—that his friend was jealous of his success; while this friend was saying to himself, "What a fool you have been, Jobkin, to give up your comfortable

house and the true friends you had, who thoroughly appreciated you and looked up to you with reverent upturned eyes, for these bare walls and this indifferent crowd of strangers, who look down upon you with irreverent upturned noses, and are laughing at you all the time !”

At that moment a young man came up to Mr. Jobkin and saluted him. Jobkin started, for he recognised in him his cousin Juan—the man he had determined in future to cut.

“You here !” he exclaimed, with little politeness. “Who invited you to this ’ouse ?”

Juan smiled. “Mrs. Boston Gilbert, of course ; is it not her ball ?”

Jobkin stared in utter bewilderment, and Juan went away laughing. “I have laughed at him in his own house,” he thought ; “our wrongs are avenged now !”

As soon as Mr. Jobkin had recovered from his astonishment he flew to Mrs. Boston Gilbert, and in his hurry pushed his guests right and left, which caused Lady Paul, who stood by the side of her daughters, who were engaged for every dance, to exclaim, “Just what one deserves for coming to such a man ! My dears, let us go !”

“Mrs. Boston Gilbert,” exclaimed Jobkin, as soon as he found that lady, “you asked me not to hinvite those beggarly cousins of mine from Spain, and now I find you have gone and hinvited them yourself.”

“What do you mean ? I wish you would not speak so loud. What is the matter ?”

“The matter !—look, do you see that young man—the tall one with the black moustache ; did you ask him ?”

“Ask him ! why, of course, and you should be very

glad he came. He is a Spanish nobleman, Don Juan of something or other, I am sure I forget just now; but he goes everywhere, and it was Lord Twickenham who asked me for an invitation for him; he would not have come if I had not sent it, and he is the only Earl we have as it is."

Jobkin could not repress his indignation. To think that his "beggarly cousin," as he called him, should have jumped over his head in this way; and to think that the principal man at his ball should have come through *him*! It was too mortifying. "Insolent puppy! I will never see any of them again," he said to himself. "I will show them that I can get on in the world as well as they can, though they are the friends of Earls."

In the meantime Juan, the object of his indignation, had joined his friend Lord Twickenham, and was laughing with him at "the vanity of these good City millionaires who make such violent efforts to get into society." Since the night of the carriage accident, Juan had made himself most agreeable to the young Earl. He had "put him up"—as he expressed it—to all sorts of fun, and had consequently become a great favourite of his. At first Lord Twickenham had been rather ashamed and frightened of his new friend, whose acquaintance he had made in such a strange manner, but when he saw how pleasant he was, and how charmed everybody seemed with him—even to his proud exclusive mother—he began to think more of him. Juan, who was an utter egotist, never asked him to give him his confidence. He did not seem to trouble himself about his motives or actions, and this was pleasing to the young man, who would have been the first to resent anything like an open interference, though he was the very last to

notice how blindly he was falling day after day into his ways. Every day the stranger became more and more necessary to him, and acquired more and more influence over him; yet Lord Twickenham, feeling himself as free as ever, encouraged him and longed for his visits, which had now become of daily occurrence. It had been *his* idea entirely to introduce him into the world of fashion, though the first hint most likely came unperceived from the Spaniard.

With such an introduction, and with his good looks to recommend him, his success was great. Everybody was charmed with him, and he acquired the designation of the "handsome Don Juan," which, indeed, suited him to perfection, for he was a Don Juan perhaps even with his heart, but certainly with a great deal more head than Byron's hero.

His presence at Jobkin's ball was, as society stands, a great honour conferred upon that poor man, for he belonged to a set superior even than the greater part of the people there, and this distinction was fully recognised by everybody, excepting, of course, the master of the house, who still persisted in calling him his "beggarly cousin."

The Misses Fetherstone were also there. They had gone with their aunt, Mrs. Lovel, who had consented to accompany them. Lady Twickenham would no more have thought of going to a *parvenu's* ball than of flying—for she still remembered the days when she was a *parvenue* herself, and the very thought made her shudder—but Sibyl and Geraldine were young; they loved balls, and everyone said Mr. Jobkin's would be a good one—so they went. Sibyl found it exceedingly slow and stupid, for Lord Edwin was not there, and she saw no

one she would have cared to captivate, but Geraldine enjoyed it very much, for she met Juan, and danced and flirted with him the whole evening.

Juan was still talking with Lord Twickenham when a tall thin lady, gaily dressed, came up to them, and, addressing herself to the young nobleman, inquired why he never asked her to dance now. This lady is one of the Mayfairian characters I could hardly pass by without mentioning. She goes by the name of the "self-protecting young lady," not that she is by any means young, but because she once wrote a book with that title. It was a book of travels, in which she described herself as riding on horseback like a man with red knickerbockers; but independently of this she is a self-protecting woman, and there is no doubt of that, for, if people speak truly, she knows very well how to take care of herself. She is now Mrs. Stanhope Clifton, and the way she married Mr. Clifton is a strong proof of that fact. It seems she took him up to the top of Vesuvius and told him he must propose to her. The poor little man was so frightened and so out of breath that he did propose then and there! —at least so the story goes. Her name before she married was Miss Mean, and his father when he heard of the marriage is said to have exclaimed—"Mean by name and mean by nature!"

Lord Twickenham excused himself as well as he could, saying that he was engaged for the whole of the evening, but Mrs. Stanhope Clifton was not going to let him off so easily. She has one rule in life; and it is this—to make all things and all persons subservient to herself. She sees no use in friends unless they are useful to her, and, like the clever woman she is, she always manages to make everybody do more or less what she wishes.

"Are you going to Lady Reynolds' garden party at Wimbledon the day after to-morrow? But I need not ask; of course you know her, and are going. You must take me, you know. It will be awfully jolly! I want to make her acquaintance. Your brougham will do for me; don't you trouble yourself to get a carriage. At what o'clock will you come for me? By-the-bye, you won't mind taking my friend Miss Lopes too; I am stopping with her, you know?"

Lord Twickenham was too bewildered to answer immediately, but when he did he told her that he was engaged that day to go to the pigeon-shooting at Hurlingham, and that he could not therefore take her to the Camp. It was not true—but it was the only way of getting rid of her, and a very disagreeable way to him, for he had made up his mind to go and pass a very agreeable day at Wimbledon, and now he would be forced to deprive himself of that pleasure. As he turned round very much displeased, Mrs. Dickson came up and in her gushing way began to speak to him. I am afraid he was rather rude to her, for he was sadly put out, but she took no notice of this and went on talking, for he was the greatest man in the room and she liked to be seen talking to him.

"Horrible woman!—the Stanhope Clifton! She is indeed a 'self-protecting' female. I do abominate her! I saw her talking to you just now. Ah, she only cares to talk to people with titles. Horrible vulgarity!—is it not? But she is a *parvenue*, so I suppose we must excuse her. How is the dear Countess?—as lovely as ever? Give her my love when you see her. I am so fond of her! By-the-bye, tell her that I have not received my invitation yet for her party next week—a mistake I

suppose. She could never think of leaving *me* out, for she is the best and dearest!" Thus she went on for nearly half an hour, casting occasionally side looks of triumph at the various young ladies who envied her too much not to look daggers at her in return. Lord Twickenham was very much bored, yet he saw no means of getting rid of this good lady until Mrs. Stanhope Clifton, who had been the entire round of the room, came back and again approached him, when Mrs. Dickson immediately accosted her with—"My dear Mrs. Clifton! so glad to meet you; Lord Twickenham and I were just speaking of you. Lord Twickenham was admiring your dress—he has such good taste! We both pronounced you to be *la plus belle des belles*!"

The young Earl took this opportunity of slipping away and joining Juan, who was standing near the music. "Come along, old fellow," he said; "I won't stop here a second more, not if I am hanged—these old women are too much for me. Let's go to Evan's; it is early yet, we can have some supper and a quiet chat—come along."

"I am very sorry, my dear boy, but I am engaged for the next dance to Miss Fetherstone, and I cannot leave her in the lurch."

"Oh bother, never mind *that*! I am engaged too for ever so many dances and I am going; a fellow can't be expected to remember everything."

"Ah, but *I* could not forget Miss Geraldine!"

"The devil! Are you in love with her?"

Juan did not answer, but Lord Twickenham saw by his looks that he was, or that he pretended to be—but how could *he* know the difference? And after looking at him in silence, he burst out laughing and left the room.

Juan returned to Geraldine's side, muttering to himself, "He has guessed it at last, but what a time the fool has been about it! I wonder how the family will take it?"

He danced a waltz with her, and then they went together to the boudoir to cool themselves.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?" he asked, as soon as they were seated on the blue-silk divan that, as I have said before, went round the room.

"Believe in it! Look—just before you is an unquestionable proof of it," and she pointed to a young lady in white and a man with red whiskers, who were snugly ensconced in a recess and seemed quite indifferent to what went on around them.

"That girl is Miss Manvers Sturton, a friend of mine. She has been out two years, and no one was ever seen flirting with her. The other day she met that man, Lord St. Edmonds, at a dinner party, and ever since then they are always together as you see them now. He proposed to her that very evening, I believe, and she accepted him. They were engaged for two weeks, and during that time you might have seen them driving about in cabs together all over London; but when it came to the drawing up of the settlements their parents could not agree; for, as you know, the late lord being a lawyer died of course without a will, and his affairs are consequently in rather an unsettled state, you see. Money!—always money matters!—I wish there was not such a thing in the world. If it were not for that dreadful money those two might now be man and wife. I do pity them; don't you, Don Juan? Look how sad she looks—and he—poor fellow!"

Juan agreed with her that it was "awfully sad," and

then in passionate tones, which were quite new to her, he gave her his ideas on love and matrimony.

At a ball! How commonplace!—you will say. How hackneyed in novels; how trite in ordinary life; what an insignificant event in one's existence! And yet how often has not a ball changed the whole course of men's lives?—how many fates have not been decided upon those polished floors, and to the sound of that entrancing music?—how many destinies have not been sealed there—sealed for ever?

The very air seems redolent with love! How many girls have not first fallen victims to that youthful god amidst the pleasure and excitement of such a scene, where every word and look and smile seem to make an impression on the heart, and but too often contaminates it for ever? Ah, a ball-room indeed!—how many of our gentlest, dearest recollections are not connected with thee! But I have promised not to philosophise.

Let us quit the ball-room: it is a scene too painfully gay, and, descending to the dining-room, partake—this time I am sorry to say only in spirit—of the delicious dishes which the clever cooks of Gunter have prepared for Mr. Jobkin's guests; and contemplate that happy mortal as he offers the daintiest dishes, with flushed face and trembling hand, to the Dowager Marchioness of Headmoore (the principal lady in the room, and the one Mrs. Boston Gilbert asked him to take down to supper), while her ladyship stares at him, half-amused half-indignant, and listens to his would-be fashionable conversation.

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER DARK.

(Not by Wilkie Collins.)

ON the banks of the fair Thames stands a villa covered over with creepers—it has low-windows and verandahs and flowers and statues—a villa which, though small and unpretending, yet contains everything that is most calculated to render life a paradise.

A small but tastefully-laid-out garden surrounds it, and descends in a gentle slope towards the bright waters of the river, which at this point of their course glide quietly along between green banks, drooping willows, and evergreen trees, quite unconscious of the noise and bustle of the ever-busy crowd that awaits them a little lower down.

It was in this villa, and in one of the prettiest rooms which modern art could furnish, that one fine night in the month of May were assembled our friends Lord Belgrave, his brother, Lord Twickenham, the handsome Spaniard Don Juan, and one lady—the young and beautiful mistress of this fair domain, the presiding fairy of this earthly Paradise—Stella!

Those who had known Polly Potts, when, with hair uncombed and ill-dressed, she scrubbed the dirty floor

of her step-mother's miserable lodging-house in Soho, would hardly have recognized her in the lovely girl who now reclined on a sofa in the centre of that room, leaning her round white arm upon that table covered with precious china and gold and silver plate, and who, with jewelled hand, raised from time to time the champagne glass to her pretty red lips.

She was dressed entirely in blue, the colour that suited her best. She had a long dress of dark blue velvet, over which she wore a tunic of pale blue satin, trimmed with the blue feathers from the breast of the peacock; the body, which was also of pale blue satin, was cut square and disclosed her neck and throat, round which she wore blue velvet, fastened in front with one large diamond of surpassing lustre; her white arms were adorned with handsome bracelets; and her hands which were plump and small, were also glittering with jewels.

She wore her golden hair cut straight over the forehead and hanging loose behind, simply tied with a blue velvet as a child might have worn it, but in the centre of this velvet there shone a large star in diamonds, which now she generally wore as a badge appropriate to her name.

Altogether she looked exceedingly pretty and *piquante*. Her beauty, indeed, was nothing so very transcendental. It was merely a *figure chiffonné* such as you might see anywhere, and which is very common amongst the lower classes in England—a pretty, fair face, with golden hair, with irregular features, and with nothing intellectual or refined about her; but she looked so very young, so very innocent—there was such a strange mixture of bashfulness and familiarity, half awkward and half graceful about her—that no one could have helped admiring her.

The supper lasted a long time, the guests felt so comfortable seated round that splendid board—which seemed literally ablaze with gold and silver, and over which three large golden candelabra threw a dazzling light—that they hardly liked to quit it. Eating indeed seemed to have ceased long ago, and now it was only the champagne glass and the cigarette box that went round.

There was a great deal of laughter and talk; Stella, however, seldom spoke. She reclined on the velvet cushions of the sofa, and laid her hand caressingly upon the shoulder of Lord Belgrave, who sat by her, but her eyes were almost all the time intently fixed upon Juan, who sat opposite, and who was the gayest and the merriest of the whole party.

He seemed to talk and laugh for everybody, and Lord Twickenham and Lord Edwin, who sat on either side of him, seemed highly amused by his conversation, so much so that at times they almost forgot the presence of the lady, who merely smiled now and then, showing her pretty little teeth, and played with Lord Belgrave's watch-chain.

Juan talked a great deal and talked well. He talked about women and pleasure, about horses and sport. He told stories and recounted anecdotes which, if perhaps not over-decorous, were intensely amusing and witty. The other men laughed but said little; such men seldom take the trouble to be amusing in the society of Stellas; and, in truth, that young lady herself would hardly have expected it from them, and if they had tried she would most likely not have understood what they said.

Later in the evening the servants removed the table, but the guests remained in the same room. Juan brought out a guitar and played and sang. He played well, and

possessed a fine baritone voice, which seemed highly suited to the lively Spanish airs which he sang. The gentlemen were charmed with him and made him repeat every song. Stella simply looked at him with supreme admiration, and laughed at Lord Twickenham's jokes without taking her eyes off the handsome Spaniard.

Later on still, a small table was brought out and a *roulette* board placed upon it. Stella seated herself in an arm-chair near it, and amused herself by tossing the little ivory ball upon it and making it spin, stopping it every now and then with her pretty little plump hands, whose rings seemed to blaze forth rays of light in every direction.

The gentlemen collected round the table and began to play, and still Juan seemed to be the ever gay leader. The stakes, at first small, were soon doubled, and the betting became general. Stella merely laughed, and encouraged them to play more, with a few slang phrases, which sounded pretty coming from her sweet mouth.

Lord Edwin, the youngest of the men, grew excited; his eyes were intently fixed upon that little ball, which seemed to have a strange fascination for him, and he placed a handful of bank-notes on the table. Stella laughed all the more at this, and Juan's eyes sparkled as they met her's with an indescribable expression of almost infernal joy.

The ball had already been thrown upon the turning *roulette* by Stella's pretty jewelled fingers, when Lord Belgrave suddenly rose from the sofa on which he had been lying, and, with a rapid movement, stopped the fatal toy with one hand, while with the other he took the bank-notes.

"Stop," he said, "this is not a gaming-house! I won't

have gambling in my house. If you must gamble, go somewhere else. I forbid it here, you understand?"

Lord Edwin had risen from his chair, and, with flashing eyes and pale cheeks, muttered something between his teeth that sounded very much like a curse.

"Brother, forgive me," said Lord Belgrave in a softer tone. "I did not mean to offend you, but you know I hate gambling; and *you* of all people, remember, should be the very last one to do it. What would you have done if you had lost all this money?" he added, while he gave it back to him. "And if you had lost it, ten to one you would have lost three times more to try and get it back. No, Edwin, you cannot afford it. Unfortunately, I am not always near you to prevent your ruining yourself, but in my presence you shall not gamble."

There was something so very tender and fatherly in his tone and manner while saying this, that Lord Edwin could hardly be offended. Besides, he was far too good-natured to have been so in any case, and his excitement having now somewhat subsided, he threw himself down on a sofa near the window, which was open and from which the moonlit river could be seen between the trees, looking very much ashamed of himself.

Lord Belgrave now took the *roulette* in his hand, and inquired in a commanding voice—

"Who brought this infernal machine into my house?"

Stella looked at him with a face expressive of speechless amazement. "I," she said after a short pause, during which Juan and Lord Twickenham stared at each other in mute astonishment. "I saw it at a shop the other day. It looked so awfully pretty that I bought it. Don't be angry with me, now, Bel—it only cost a guinea."

"A guinea! And fools would stake thousands upon it! I forgive you, Stella; you are a child still, and know nothing of these things. I'll be bound to say somebody else put the idea into your head," and his penetrating cold grey eyes fixed themselves upon Juan, who returned his look with a smile of cynic scorn. "It was not your idea; let me never see it again. There, take it away."

Stella took it from him and hid it behind the cushions of the sofa.

"This room is oppressively warm; let us go into the garden, Stella."

Stella threw a white burnous over her shoulders, and, taking his arm, went out through the open window into the garden.

"What a confounded jackass!" burst out Lord Twickenham as soon as they had gone. "Why couldn't he let us go on with our little game?"

Edwin, who heard these words from the sofa on which he lay, rose suddenly to his feet.

"Charlie," he said, in a voice that betrayed great emotion, "I won't have you call my brother such names—my good, my noble-hearted brother! You should be the very last man to insult him and in his own house, too!"

"This is not his house. We are Stella's guests."

"But who pays for everything, I should like to know? Not that insinuating fellow who stands there like Mephistopheles, laughing at us!"

Juan bit his lips, and a look of hatred flashed from his eyes, for though he had lost the conscience, he still retained the consciousness, of a gentleman. Lord Twickenham was thunder-struck. When he turned round Lord Edwin had disappeared through the open window.

"Juan," he said, "he has insulted you—you, my friend. I'll avenge you!"

"Bah! I have already forgotten it. The poor fellow was so put out by his brother's interference that he did not know what he said."

"What a confounded nuisance it is that one must expose oneself to be insulted every time one comes to see this woman. Why should Belgrave rule supreme over her? Confound the fellow! Ah! Stella—Stella, he is not worthy of you."

Juan looked at him for some time in silence.

"Do you love her very much?" he asked, taking hold of his hand.

"Love her! Why I adore her ever since I saw her in the Terpsichore that night. I have done nothing but dream of her. By Jove! you ask me if I love her!"

"Can you trust me?"

"Of course, old fellow."

"Very well, then; hope!"

It was now the young Earl's turn to take hold of the Spaniard's hand.

"Do you mean it? Do you really—really think she cares for me?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Well, you see, Belgrave is a handsome man; he is a deal cleverer and richer than I am. He can talk and all that, which I find such a confounded bore; yet I suppose I am not half a bad fellow—eh! What do you think? If I had that girl I would do anything for her! I would give her a house ten times finer than this—that I would!"

"Very well; then Charlie, my boy, trust to me. She shall be yours. But you must do something for me too, you know."

"Oh, anything you like! Are you hard-up? Do you want cash? Remember that I am your friend."

Juan smiled, and put his arm through that of the young man.

"No, it is not money. I owe you enough of that already. Come into the garden and I'll tell you." And he drew him through the open window into the moonlit garden.

"She is a lovely creature—the devil she is! Juan, old fellow, I'll lay you a pony that she'll end by loving me after all."

"Of course she will." And they disappeared amongst the trees.

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNDER THE SPELL.

(Not by Mr. F. Robinson.)

AN hour later Stella and Juan were alone in the same room.

The candles were burning low in the golden candelabra, and the atmosphere was heavily laden with the smoke of tobacco, which the stillness of the warm evening had not yet dissipated, though the window was still open.

Juan was lying lazily upon the sofa and seemed lost in profound thought. Stella—more lovely than she had looked yet that evening—stood beside him; her pretty dimpled cheeks seemed unusually flushed, and her pretty plump hands were playing nervously with the tassels of the sofa.

"I don't believe you, Jack," she said suddenly, as if answering an inward question often repeated. "You say you love me, and you treat me like this!"

Juan, whom these words seemed to awaken as if from a dream, looked up at her.

"What makes you think so, Stella? Do you not see me devoted always to your interest—ready to serve you at any moment?"

Stella shook her head.

"If you loved me *really*, Jack, you would not allow me to go on like this, cheating that poor man!"

Why, girl, is not that a proof of my love? I must love you very much when I permit others to make love to you without being jealous. I trust you, Stella! Can't you trust me?"

"You ain't in love, Jack; and the worst of it is that I can't help loving you somehow or other," and the tears started to her eyes as she said this.

"Calm yourself, Polly—calm yourself! If it were not for me do you think you would be living now in this beautiful house, with that pretty garden to stroll about in, and real Lords for your friends?"

"Well, I s'pose not; leastways I would not wear these fine clothes, and live like a lady. But you ain't in love with me for all that. Do you think as I can't see through your little game? You only think o' making money; tin's your love! You don't care for me."

"We must have money to live. This is as good a way of making it as any other." As he said this his hand came upon the *roulette*, which had been hidden behind the sofa cushions in disgrace. "What a pity," he said, taking it up in his hand, "that your man stopped this. There is a fortune to be made with this. If you had not been a silly little fool you would have stood your ground against him, and, fifty to one, he would have permitted us to go on. As it is, there is an end of it, I suppose," and he threw it out of window.

Stella looked confused.

"I can't be hard with him, poor man!—it ain't in my 'eart. I cheat him enough as it is. He loves me so, Jack! —he loves me so!"

"More fool he! And you love him?" he added carelessly.

"Love him? I wish I could—he's so good to me!—but I can't; even when you treat me the 'ardest I love you better. You know that; and you take a mean advantage of me—that you do!"

"I am glad his fine speeches have no effect upon you. He is a fool, like the rest; but, unfortunately, he has a head as well as a heart; and I am afraid he is not good for much. A fellow like Charlie Twickenham, now, would be far easier to deal with. You could make him do what you liked."

"Who?—Lord Twickenham?"

"He is madly in love with you. Take my advice—leave that serious prig, and take up with the young one. Between you and me, we'll squeeze him to a penny. He's a jolly chap!"

"What! leave Bel, after all he has done for me? Oh, Jack!"

"Are you troubled with scruples now? If you take to that sort of thing you'll never get on in the world, my girl. Now let's see what you have managed to get lately out of him."

And rising from the sofa he sat down at the table and wrote on a piece of paper, from her dictation, the different articles of jewellery, dresses, laces, and small works of art, which it would seem Lord Belgrave had given her during the last few days.

From this conversation, which I blush to write, yet which I believe it necessary to record—for it affords such a true specimen of what goes on every day in Mayfair amongst the class, which unfortunately is growing larger every day, whose sole aim in life is the amassing

of gold and the betraying of men—it will be seen how utterly corrupt and depraved our handsome Spaniard had become since his arrival in London.

He did not love Stella more than he loved the poor deluded Geraldine—for he was a man incapable of any lofty sentiment, of any holy feeling—but he was so wondrously handsome, so very fascinating—there was something so very irresistible in his manly bearing, in his frank open countenance, in his quick smile, in those large black eyes of his, even in his devil-may-care spirit—that even men felt drawn towards him, and women could hardly help loving him.

Stella was not a bad girl; she had some good sentiments still left in her, though the hardships and miseries she had gone through, and the ill-treatment she had undergone from her cruel step-mother, would have been enough to have stifled all good feelings. But she had fallen desperately in love with this great tempter; she had fallen into his power like the innocent fly falls into the spider's web, and she had become his tool. He was fully aware of the sentiments he inspired; he was fully aware of the love she felt for him, and that the more harshly he treated her the more tenderly would she cling to him; and he determined to make her useful to him—to make her subservient to his miserable aims, to turn her into the pretty bait with which he could fish for men, and, drawing them out of their element, enrich himself with their gold.

Ah, can there be anything more horrible than this?

Stella was a poor weak creature; she did not know that she was doing wrong, though her heart at times told her that she was ungrateful to the poor deceived man who spent his money upon her, and bought her villas

and carriages, and showy dresses ; but she had no idea of the greatness of her sin—how could she ? What lessons of morality could she have learnt in the wretched hole down in Soho, where hard work and starvation had been her lot. What ideas could she have acquired during her miserable youth of what was good and noble ? Imprisoned in a cage of wretchedness and poverty from her birth, surrounded by vice and misery from her earliest years, could a poor ignorant girl like her have behaved better when the door had suddenly been thrown open, and a garden, full of bright and dazzling flowers ready to offer her their sweetest perfume, lay before her like a new world, in which she was told that she was free to take what she pleased and enjoy life as she liked ?

She was a second Gretchen—lovely and innocent, like Goethe's heroine ; and she had fallen a victim to the arch-tempter's magic art, like the sweet German girl in the play ; only that in this case the Faust and the Mephistopheles had been one and the same man, and the fall consequently all the greater.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEVER TOO LATE TO MEND.

(Not by Charles Reade.)

DESPITE all his foibles, Lord Edwin Beauville possessed many high and generous qualities. Accustomed from his earliest youth to mix only with the fast and the gay, dissipation had almost become a habit with him, yet he was still a noble-minded young man, who could appreciate the highest and loftiest sentiments, and even at times share them.

Mayfair had done its best to spoil a fine candid disposition, with abilities far above mediocrity, but Mayfair had only partially succeeded.

Though the darling of ladies, and the spoiled favourite with men, he was still capable of becoming essentially a man and rendering himself superior to many; yet at his age it was but natural that he should be content to be the favourite in boudoirs and at the clubs.

He loved society; it was his world—his element; taken out of it, like the fish when out of water, he would soon have perished. Scandal was his delight—the society of the reckless and thoughtless his passion.

The effect which the wondrous beauty of Sibyl had produced upon him had been of a most contradictory

nature. He felt himself attracted towards her by her radiant smile and her numerous allurements, which had attracted so many men before him, and at the same time something within him whispered, as it had whispered to so many before him, that there was danger in her gaze, death in her smile—that her charms were of the most material sort—that her beauty was the beauty of a Satanella, not the beauty of an angel.

Like his brother, he too noticed the cruel sensuality that smiled in her coral lips—the cold cynic look that lurked in her splendid eyes—and comprehended that the matchless brow so dazlingly fair had all the low brutal passions of the animal impressed upon it. He too, like Lord Belgrave, could not help remarking that Sibyl Fetherstone was a woman of the strongest passions, a woman whose love would turn life into a paradise or a hell! But at the same time he felt that something stronger than his reason drew him towards her—something against which it would have been useless for him to contend. When he was away from her he could discuss her in his mind calmly enough; he could reason and think about her as he might have done about any other woman; but when in her presence he felt himself spell-bound. He could only look at her, and admire her beauty.

He therefore fought shy of her as much as he possibly could, and seldom went to the houses where he was likely to meet her. The theatricals at Lady Tottenham's had thrown them a great deal together. He had then been two or three times on the point of declaring himself to her; but now the reaction had come, and it was by the side of the gentle Lady Juliet that he sought to forget the matchless charms of the modern Cleopatra.

One afternoon towards the end of May, soon after that memorable supper at Stella's, when his brother had made him half promise never to gamble again, he went to Prince's skating rink to see Lady Juliet, who had told him the night before at Lady Paul's ball that she intended going there.

He walked along the asphalt pavement, upon which several pretty little children were gliding gracefully about on their wheeled skates, and at last met that young lady near the band, sitting under one of the canvas umbrellas by the side of her mother, Lady Cowes, and her sister, Lady Maude. The ladies immediately made room for him, and he sat down beside them. The conversation became general, and, of course, it turned on the affairs of others. Edwin, I have said before, was fond of scandal, and he amused himself at intervals by making shrewd criticisms on the dresses and characters of their various friends around them.

Lady Windermere was one of the party. This lady, who went by the name of "Castor-oil," because her words were so soft and smooth, and their effects so peristaltic—probably the consequence of her early education, her father having been a doctor—was an amazing prude in her judgment of others, and there was nothing she delighted in so much as in setting everybody to rights. She and Lord Edwin were therefore a good match; they seemed to have all the talk to themselves; it was a playful tournament of tongues.

Lady Juliet hated scandal, and seldom indulged in it. She was sorry to see the man she loved take to it with so much *amore*, but she could not help being amused at their conversation, and cast glances of undisguised admiration at his bright face that seemed to sparkle all

over with youth and fun, while he closed his eyes with a languid movement which seemed too natural to him to be called affectation. It is said that nobody is ever brighter or happier than when he is making fun of his neighbour. Certainly Lord Edwin had never looked so handsome as he did that day.

"See that woman," he was saying at that moment, "how charming, how sweet! Who would think that her poor husband has been forced to leave London on account of her temper? Lady Windermere, do observe those two men—I mean Lord Dublin and that very tall dark man by his side, with the sunburnt face? Look at them—are they not tell-tale faces? They should never walk together—it is bad for our morals!"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know that the Vicomte de St. Jacques—his father, you know—ran away with Lady Dublin; but, unfortunately, Lord and Lady Dublin were in the same boat, and neither of them could divorce the other—the present Lord Dublin is therefore De St. Jacques' brother; you can understand the resemblance now, I hope."

"By-the-bye, Lady Windermere, have you heard anything more of Baroness de Writtenham's daughter?"

"No; I only know that she ran away from her husband—a profligate, I believe. Can you tell me anything more?"

Lord Edwin raised his shoulders and shut his eyes, with the air of a man who could say a great deal but fears to shock people. Lady Windermere smiled, and thought she understood a great deal. The good lady, however, was mistaken, for Edwin knew nothing about the lady in question; if he had known anything he would only have been too glad to tell it.

"Here come the Misses Fetherstone. The dark one seems sad, I suppose she is thinking of somebody," Lady Windermere said, casting a side glance at Lord Edwin, for she knew how much he admired her. "The fair one has always that handsome Spaniard by her side; I wonder what he sees to admire in her?"

"Do you admire *him*?"

"Who?—the handsome Don Juan—'Look and Die,' as they call him, I believe, at the clubs? Of course!—don't you?—he is so very handsome and so clever! I believe he plays the guitar divinely. But, of course, I shouldn't ask *you*! All the men are said to be jealous of him; I suppose you are no exception?"

Edwin bit his lips and hid the colour which had suddenly flown to his face with his pocket-handkerchief.

Sibyl, who was walking with her aunt, came straight to their group and began talking to Lady Juliet, with whom she still pretended to be great friends. Whether, if Lord Edwin had not formed part of the group, she would have come up so cordially to shake hands with her, is a problematical question.

In the meantime, at the other end of the lawn, Lord Twickenham, who had come with Juan, and had only left him when Geraldine came in, stood talking with Mrs. Dickson.

"Look at her!" that lady was saying, "always flirting with some one; at her age, too! Colonel Rich seems greatly bored with Miss Bird; I see him casting side glances at Mrs. Chataine. Strange partnership that, is it not?"

"Which do you mean?"

"Why, Mrs. Chataine and Miss Bird's, of course. You did not think I would talk of *the other*—I, her best friend!

Oh, you naughty man! No, I mean the one that exists between the two ladies—don't you know? Mrs. Chataine goes everywhere; she has the magic H.O.N. before her name, and people rather admire her *entourage*, for, if you observe, they always invite her Rich or her Claridge whenever they ask her. But she is married—as Miss Bird would have no objection to be—and her husband is not generous enough to allow her to be admired unattended, neither will he accompany her himself, so Miss Bird is generally useful, they say; and, at all events, while serving herself, she serves to chaperone her chaperone. You understand now."

As she said this they passed before the umbrella under which sat Sibyl and Lady Juliet with Lord Edwin.

"There is Miss Fetherstone flirting again with Lord Edwin," she said, calling Lord Twickenham's attention to them. "After all her experience in angling, it is odd that she should only throw in for small fish—I suppose she finds that big ones won't bite—but I must not speak about her to you; she is your sister, I forgot. By-the-bye, the dear Countess must find it very nice to have her in the house this hot weather—she is such a refrigerator, *mon chér!*"

Lord Twickenham smiled, but walked on in silence; and Mrs. Dickson went on chatting in the same strain. She was not a young woman, but she still retained the traces of beauty, and though by no means "clever," yet she possessed a certain social wit—if I may so call it—that the young Earl found at times highly amusing.

Mrs. Dickson was a woman who lived for society, and though she was not one of the upper ten, as her friends who were took very good care to let her know, she liked

to be thought one by those who did not belong to that magic circle. She had the Peerage—that Bible of the *lordolatrous* country—at her fingers' ends, and would tell you everything she knew—and a great deal more besides—about everybody.

"I am off now," she said, when in the course of their walk they came to the entrance gate. "I am going to Mrs. Ascot Griffin's reception. Poor dear, she is always so very anxious to have me; will you come? I can take you in my carriage."

Lord Twickenham excused himself.

"Ah!" she said, "I forgot that Lady Isobel will not be there" (this was said with much archness and he-he-ing). "Never mind, I always make allowances for people in love. You know I like Lady Isobel Clanfyne; I wish you'd introduce me to her the next time we meet. Good-bye!" And she added, as he saw her into her carriage, "I suppose you won't be induced to come with me, but mind you don't go after the Chataine. Take my advice. I am her dearest friend, so you may imagine how well I know she is dangerous." Then tripping into the carriage like an elderly fairy, she said to the footman, "Drive on to Mrs. Ascot Griffin's as quickly as possible." "Lord Twickenham, good-bye again, and mind what I tell you."

The footman got on the box and a second afterwards her carriage had disappeared through the iron gates into Hans' Place.

As Lord Twickenham was once more entering the skating rink Lord Malise came up to him.

I have already introduced this man to my readers, and as everybody in London knows him, I did not think it necessary to say much about him; but as, now I think of

it, there may be people who read this book who have never been in London, and who perhaps have never heard of the Earl of Malise, I think it will be better to devote a few words to him, though unfortunately his rôle in this work is not quite so important as it is in the Mayfairian world I am trying to depict.

He is a sporting young nobleman, and, though his family is poor, and his sisters the Ladies Morley are only allowed one ball dress a year, manages to spend a pretty considerable sum on the turf. He has horses entered at half the races in the country. According to *Bell's Life* he is an invariable attender at all races, and an actor in most of them; and he is an *habitué* at the Corner, where he compiles a libretto which might do credit even to Lady Brightly, and where he has lost and won such sums of money as Lady Bury herself might be proud of. He does not care much for society as a rule, and he carefully avoids young ladies and especially their mammas; though he is "no great catch," as these poor ladies console themselves by saying. He is always to be seen with Captain Stunner, that notorious turf-robber, who knows all the stables and all the jockeys and has all the "information," who prides himself in being a match for the best Leg at Newmarket, and who is said to put him up to many a "rummish plant." The men of his own station do not amuse him much, and it is chiefly amongst the Captain Stunner set that he likes to shine; but he has lived so much with that clever rogue that he has begun at last to learn the value of money, and, tired of being swindled, would rather like to try his hand at swindling for a change—(so much for the consequences of living in such company!)—and he is now therefore trying to get into Lord Twickenham's good graces, whom he knows to be

rich, young, and foolish—three qualifications which are invaluable for the turf.

On the present occasion our noble friend was however rather tired, and Lord Malise's horsey conversation had few attractions for him; so he listened in silence to his Jockey Club anecdotes, and soon let him see that he was not "available" that day; upon which the sporting young Earl left him, and, assailing the Duke of Melrose, another man rich, young, and foolish, he repeated to him the same anecdotes, which it is to be hoped, for his sake, had no better effect with him, though I am afraid such may not have been the case, for the young Duke had already tasted the intoxication of winning money at Monte Carlo last winter, and from the *rouge-et-noir* table to the turf there is but one step, though a fellow must needs be even greener than either to take it.

Lord Twickenham, heartily glad of having got rid of him, made his way to the umbrella under which his step-sisters now sat.

The band was playing a waltz at the time, and as he approached the group, Cyril Scholl came up with Mr. Jobkin, who had been elected a member of the Club only the day before, and introduced him to Lady Cowes and her daughters. He took a seat near Lady Juliet and began talking about Cowes and yachting. "I am fond of the sea," he said. "I intend buying a yacht myself—nice amusement, ain't it?" Lady Juliet was forced to answer him, and he went on talking about the sea and the various things he intended doing with his money, to the great discomfiture of the poor girl, who would have given anything at that moment to have got rid of him and to have heard what Lord Edwin was saying to Sibyl at the other side of the table.

Lord Twickenham sat down beside Lady Windermere and began talking to her; while Geraldine and Juan listened to the music and sipped their tea side by side, saying very little but looking unutterable things at each other.

Thus the afternoon passed on. When it grew late, and it was time to go, the whole party rose, the ladies shook hands, and, while they were saying good-bye, Lord Twickenham approached Lord Edwin, and asked him in a careless tone if he was going to the Argyle that evening.

"Perhaps; though you know I am a Terpsichorean. I prefer the Terpsichore, but if you are going I shall go too. Good-bye, then; we'll meet at the Argyle."

Lord Twickenham gave his arm to Lady Windermere and conducted her to her carriage; the other ladies also got into theirs, and the party was soon dispersed. Lord Edwin mounted his horse and rode in the direction of Belgrave Square, lost in profound thought. He had seen Sibyl and Juliet side by side, and though it had been in a public place, where a thousand things stood in the way, yet he had been able to draw certain comparisons and his heart was bewildered with harassing emotions.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOST AND WON.

(Not by Miss Craik.)

LORD EDWIN dined with his brother that evening. Alfredo and Percy Ferrers were also of the party, but they left directly after that meal, for they were going to the theatre, and the two brothers remained alone.

Edwin, who had been more silent than usual that evening, now became entirely so. Lord Belgrave could not help remarking his pre-occupation, and, seating himself on the sofa beside him, asked him in an affectionate tone what was weighing on his mind that made him so morose who was usually the life and soul of a party.

Edwin was sincerely attached to his brother, and, encouraged by his words, acknowledged to him how greatly perplexed he felt. He confessed his admiration for the stately Sibyl, and at the same time imparted to him his doubts and misgivings. "What do you think of her?" he finished by saying.

"That I never saw a woman I could admire more, or love less."

"She is wondrously handsome!"

"She is a perfect beauty, I agree with you; but beware of her, Edwin. I know how greatly you admire

her. I have been watching, not without some secret misgivings, the progress of the passion with which she has inspired you ; and I must confess that often I have thought of warning you against her, but I dared not speak. I know how little influence one man's opinions can possibly have on another man's feelings in affairs of the heart, but now that you approach the subject yourself, I do not mind speaking. Do you really ask me for my advice ? ”

“ I always looked up to you as to a superior mind, Bel. I do indeed ask you for your advice ; give it to me now, before it is too late ; I promise to abide by it, for as yet my heart is free.”

“ Do not think that I am prejudiced against her, Edwin ; I admire her too much for that—for I nearly fell a victim to her fascinations myself last season ; but I am afraid of her. She is a woman of the strongest passions—the style of woman we seldom see in this cold and matter-of-fact country of ours ; she is made of the stuff of such women as Semiramis, Zenobia, Cleopatra, and so many others of that sort. In her, passion will be life. In men, you know, there are many things which help to form and direct our minds ; in women, when passion takes possession of them, it rules them completely. In them, passion is like a mighty river which, while it flows calmly on between high and strong banks, fertilises and enriches the country it traverses, but when it rolls over low marshy ground it grows impetuous and unruly, and soon carries everything before it in its mighty course which nothing can hinder, and ends by destroying those precious crops to which it might have been so serviceable if it had only been kept from its source within its proper bounds. In our present state of society

only one passion is possible for women—love!—at once the tenderest and the most dangerous of all passions. Sibyl is a woman that will love with all the intensity, with all the fire, of an Eastern nature. If the man she loves is able to control her, to direct her mind, she will make the best, the most devoted of wives; but do you think that you could be that man?"

Edwin remained silent for some time, as if lost in profound thought. At last he said—

"No; for even now I feel that she exercises a power over me from which I can hardly free myself. I could love her—love her to distraction—but I fear I could never have the strength of mind to rule her."

"You speak feelingly, Edwin. I thought you were already too blinded by her charms to be able to see the dangers that are attached to them; but I see with pleasure that you are still able to reason, and reason with a cool head. Take my advice, Edwin; have nothing to do with her. If she were to love you, as you suppose she feels inclined to do, you will become perhaps the beloved toy of an hour, the cherished plaything that will amuse for a while, and then is thrown on one side in disgust. You might become, perhaps, a useful tool which she would mould to her pleasure and love accordingly, but her master—never!"

"You know, Bel, that I begin to think that women are dangerous playthings, and that the less one has to do with them the better."

"Ah! all women are not like Sibyl! There are women of a weaker, gentler nature, whom we can cherish and love without incurring the danger of becoming their slaves."

"There is Stella, for instance."

"Ah; Stella, yes. I suppose you blame me for loving her; it is a weakness to which you may have thought me superior. Ah! it was an evil hour that brought us together! I believed myself proof against temptation, but, you see, I am only a man like the rest! Ah, speak not of her, or rather, let me confess all to you. You know my nature, Edwin; I cannot live alone—I must have someone to cherish, to love, to protect. If I had been born a poor man I might have met a woman poor like myself, whom misfortune would have drawn towards me. The same trials would have been before us, and our lot would have been naturally the same. Sympathy would have united us; love would have rendered us superior to all trials; and I might have been a happy man. But as it is, I am above such things. I stand as it were upon a pedestal from which I can see the troubles of others, hear their cries, feel for them acutely, but never mingle with them. I long for a woman to love, and when I cast my eyes around on the women of our class, the only one from which I am allowed to choose a wife, I see nothing but the spoiled children of fashion—girls who would become my wife gladly enough it is true, but only because I am a Marquis! The glitter of my coronet seems to blind them to all else. I do not know one who would love me for myself. I do not blame them—it is the way in which they have been brought up. Their mothers encourage them—their mothers point me out and ask them to love me. They try to obey, but only succeed in loving the Marquis—never the man! There are a few women it is true, like Sibyl, who might perhaps love me for myself—but I dread them; and there are plenty of silly romantic girls, like her sister Geraldine, whose ideas of life are

taken from novels and poems, and who think themselves in love with the first man that flatters them—dress him up in fabrications of their own fancy, fall down and worship him; and when they get bored—that is to say directly after the marriage—pull the tinsel off him as quickly as they put it on; for being their own, they think they may do what they like with it, and find another man who pleases their fancy for a moment, and deck him in the same trappings. No—I do not know one single young lady that I could love! This is why when I saw Stella, who seemed so pure, so innocent, so unsophisticated, I took her to my heart and made her Ah, Edwin, society forbids me to make her my wife, and I am glad now, for I begin to discover that what I believed to be love was only the passing longings of an hour. Stella is pretty; she is a good girl—ah! so different from the rest of her class—that she deserves to be happy—to become the wife of an honest man who will make her so, but not mine. She is not the woman I thought she was. I am afraid I shall soon get tired of her. You may condemn me—I have behaved like a fool—but it is best as it is.”

Lord Belgrave seemed greatly moved as he said this, and while he spoke the colour came and went repeatedly upon his manly cheeks. That usual air of cold and indifferent *hauteur* which so characterised him seemed to have vanished. He spoke with an earnestness which rendered his words highly impressive. Edwin was greatly moved by them; he had seldom before had an opportunity of appreciating so fully his brother's noble nature and high sentiments.

“And that man who is always there,” he said, when Lord Belgrave had finished, “that Spaniard—Juan—what is he to her?”

"Who? Don Juan, as they call him? Nothing; he is a friend of Charlie Twickenham's, and he goes there with him. Charlie admires her very much, and I hardly like to prevent his going to see her. You know my partiality for that boy."

"Yes, I know that he is one of your dearest friends. I like him too. He is a fine open-hearted youth; but that friend of his—that Juan—Bel, beware of him! I have noticed certain looks pass between them I much fear that Stella is not quite as unconscious of his good looks as you may think. Take care, Bel—he is a deep fellow that! I am sorry to see Charlie so thick with him."

Lord Belgrave remained silent for a moment. "He is a handsome man, highly amusing, clever, and she is attracted towards him, as we all are, by a strange, perhaps unfounded, fascination. She admires him, but I believe that's all."

"He is always there, though. You don't notice that?"

"Well, no; I had not remarked it; but now I think of it I am sure it was his idea buying that confounded *roulette* that almost caused us to quarrel. He certainly was with her when she bought it—but I am not afraid. She is a nice girl, a good little girl, there is no harm in her. Would that I could find a wife whom I could trust as much as I can trust her!"

"That wouldn't be difficult for you, Bel—but for me! I suppose I shall have to die a bachelor, for what have I to recommend me?"

"Do not talk like that, Edwin. It would be an idle compliment for me to say that you are not likely to love in vain. Why, you are one of the nicest men I know; and I do not say this because you are my brother, but

because everybody thinks it. Men all agree in calling you 'a devilish jolly fellow,' and amongst the ladies you go by the name of 'Sweet Edwin.' At times even *I* have felt jealous of you ; and then you come and tell me to my face that you have nothing to recommend you !”

“Yes, but I am poor, you know. My income seems only just large enough to allow me to get handsomely into debt. With a few hundreds a year and my expensive tastes what can a fellow do ? Do you know that at times I have strong thoughts of emigrating to Ceylon, or one of those places where one can have good sport and a chance of making some money ?”

“It would not be half a bad thing for you, really ; but I am afraid you are not the man to make money anywhere. I wish you were me and I you ; you would have made a much better Marquis, and I a much more useful working man. But something must certainly be done—you cannot go on like this. To begin with—I should advise you to break with those fast racing friends of yours, who plunge you into a sea of extravagance and then refuse to throw you a rope to save you from drowning.”

“Ah, you think me frivolous and weak. Perhaps I am ; but do not judge me by what I am. I feel that if I tried I could easily rise superior to all these things that now make up my life—a useless, meaningless life, as you call it. Yet I flatter myself that I am not quite so devoid of steadiness of character and firmness of purpose as not to be able, some day, to become a useful member of society.”

“You speak like a true Englishman. I see there is the stuff in you to make a fine fellow after all. You deserve to be happy. If you could only settle down

and become the father of a family. Is there not any other young lady who you think admires you besides Sibyl Fetherstone?"

Edwin coloured as his brother said this.

"I see you blush. Perhaps it is premature of me to speak; yet I cannot but fancy that I have discovered your secret, and that you are not insensible to the charms of a certain Lady Juliet!"

"She is a nice girl!"

"Ah! you admire her—and she likes you too! I know it. I have often watched you together when you least thought it. What would you say to becoming her husband?"

Edwin's cheeks flushed still more. "I fear," he muttered, "that her family would never consent. How are we to live on a few hundreds a year?"

"That's my business! If you love her and she loves you nothing shall stand in the way, believe me. Her father, you know, only came into the title the other day, and quite unexpectedly, for the previous Earl was a young man who seemed to have a long life before him, and *he* was but a distant cousin. They were quite poor until lately, and the girls have been used to live upon slender means. Their expectations won't be great; and whatever *they are* I will satisfy them!"

"You!"

"Yes! Although my estates are all entailed, the income is all mine to dispose of as I will. I shall not grudge a few thousands every year, Edwin, if they enable me to make your happiness; but if they are to be spent in useless extravagances, or gambled away on a race course, Edwin, it would be wrong of me to give them to you, for it would only be encouraging you in your bad

propensities. It had always been my intention to provide for you; but I shall not do it until I see you settled, with a pretty wife to take care of you."

"Ah, Bel, you always were the best of brothers! How shall I ever thank you enough!"

"Not another word. To-morrow I shall call upon Lord Cowes, and see what I can do for you. Lady Juliet loves you, believe me, and I feel convinced that my demand will meet with the approval of her father."

After this their conversation turned upon indifferent subjects, and soon afterwards Lord Belgrave left him to go to Lady Birmingham's ball. As he went out of the room, he said, taking his brother's hand affectionately—

"Mind you make me 'Best-man,' old fellow."

When Lord Belgrave had gone, Edwin remained for some time lost in profound thought in the library, in which their conversation had taken place.

"It is for the best," he thought. "Juliet is a nice girl, and loves me truly. I was always rather afraid of Sibyl, though she is by far the handsomest of the two."

He then recollected that he had promised Lord Twickenham to meet him in the Argyle Rooms, and, calling a passing hansom, he betook himself to that resort of the idle and the gay.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HE COMETH NOT, SHE SAID.

(Not by Annie Thomas.)

WHILE the conversation I have narrated in the last chapter was going on between the two brothers, Sibyl sat alone by the open window in her room.

It was a fine evening. The sun had gone down some time ago, and its last rays had disappeared, but the room was still dark, and the lamps stood on the table unlighted.

Sibyl had not gone down to dinner; she had sent an excuse, saying that she had a headache and preferred remaining in her room.

There she sat by the open window, her eyes fixed vacantly on the distant towers of the grand old Abbey, which they saw not, for her spirit seemed to be far away, lost in all-absorbing thoughts. The carriages rolled on the Mall beneath her; the peasants, with their cows, eulogised their fresh milk, and syllabub, at the top of their voices; and the numerous children who played around these poor animals laughed and cried by turns; but she heard them not—she seemed lost in a deep and profound reverie.

"Do I love him? Can this be love?" were the questions which she put to herself for the hundredth time that day.

Edwin was paramount in her mind. She could think of nothing else.

That day she had watched him when talking to her friend Lady Juliet, at Prince's. A pang of jealousy had run through her. He looked so handsome; his manners were so sweet; Juliet seemed so happy by his side. She was unable to resist the temptation; she had joined the group; she had employed her greatest fascinations to attract Edwin's attention, and to draw him from Juliet's side to bring him to hers, and she had succeeded. He had been unable to resist her look, her smile. He had left the girl he had gone to Prince's expressly to meet, and had come and sat down beside her!

As he did so her eyes had met Lady Juliet's, and again she had discovered in them that look of intense love and jealousy which she had surprised in her in the boudoir the night of Lady Twickenham's "Small and Early." There was no doubt Juliet loved Edwin, and loved him with all her heart. The joy which Sibyl felt at that moment would be difficult to analyze. It was the joy of secret triumph—the joy of self-love—the joy of gratified ambition—which the loftiest natures can hardly help feeling at times. It was then that she had discovered the greatness of her power; it was then that she had learnt to appreciate to its full extent the mysterious influence which she was able to exercise over Lord Edwin.

When Mr. Jobkin had taken a seat near Juliet, and had begun to talk to her, her heart had bounded with joy. Retreat was now cut off. Edwin, even if he had

wished, could not have returned to Juliet's side, as the only vacant place beside her was now taken. From that moment he had remained as if spell-bound near her. Her happiness had been supreme; yet even at that moment she had asked herself, "Do I really love him as I dreamt I could love?" Her heart had remained silent; but her eyes told her that of the many men there assembled, the very flower of London society, he was by far the handsomest, the most courted, the most run after. It was something to be admired by him, to be the one object of his ambition, to be able to make him the slave of her simplest caprice.

"Could I sacrifice all my fondly-dreamt visions of ambition for him?" she now asked herself, as she sat beside the open window, inhaling the soft warm breeze of the evening, and dreaming of him. "Could his love satisfy me—*me!*—the woman who had sworn never to marry anyone below a Duke?"

"He is so handsome, so gentle, so refined!" Then a new train of ideas coming to her mind she exclaimed, "Can it be I—I!—Sibyl Fetherstone—who have dreamt of distinguished heroes or stalwart knights as the only men worth loving, who am now pining for the pretty sweet face of a boy, with his gentle, almost feminine, smile? And yet where could I find a better or a nobler man? I might find plenty of stern handsome men, who might love me with all the passion I once longed for; but would that make me happy? I—I—who was born to command, could I willingly submit to be the devoted love-blinded slave of a man? Ah, no! The joy of being loved by such a man would soon vanish when I found that I was only his slave. With Edwin I should always be mistress; his gentle sweet nature would always yield

to mine. I could command him as I liked, and he would love me all the more."

Thus Sibyl began to question the truth of her early visions of romance—for Sybil was romantic too, though not like her sister; and her mind was too well trained, and her nature too passionate, to permit her to fall a victim, as Geraldine had done, to its wild dreams.

"But then, he is only a second son; he has no money—no position; and I—who dreamt of becoming a Duchess, and of possessing unbounded wealth! No! I must not think of him—I must not!"

But her good resolution did not last long, for very soon the image of Lord Edwin would again present itself almost unperceived before her, and unconsciously she would find herself again thinking of him—"He is so handsome!"

Her sister came in at that moment to dress for the evening. She was going with her step-mother to Lady Birmingham's ball.

"How is your headache?" she inquired, when she perceived her.

"Better, my dear; the fresh air has done me good."

"Are you coming to the ball?"

"No; I hardly feel well enough for that."

"It is a pity, for the Duke of Melrose is sure to be there."

Sibyl sighed. "*You* must captivate him," she said after a short pause; "I should like you to be a Duchess."

"I! No—you would make a much better Duchess than I should; besides I am not good-looking enough to captivate *him*, and they say he only admires dark women. Come, Sibyl, never mind your headache, the dancing will soon make you forget it. Come along."

"Would that I could forget!" was all she muttered, and again fixed her eyes vacantly on the towers of the old Abbey, and gave way to thoughts of Edwin.

Geraldine retired to her dressing-room and put on her ball dress—a lovely white tulle covered with sea weeds, which had only arrived the day before from Paris. When an hour later she again entered the boudoir, looking like a water nymph, she found Sibyl still in the same place, always in the same meditative attitude.

"Come, Sibyl," she said, "this will never do. Fancy *you* of all people giving in like this to a headache, and when there is a young Duke waiting for you in Park Lane!"

Sibyl shook her head, and her sister, who was really desirous that she should go to the ball, sent her maid for the dress which she should have worn—a lovely blue tulle covered with white roses—a *chef d'œuvre* of Worth's art, which had come in the same box with hers.

"Look, Sibyl; did you ever see anything *si comme il faut*—*si bien-porté*—*si chic*, as Worth would say?"

"Even if it were *chien* it would not tempt me at this moment; take it away! I shall not go to Lady Birmingham's ball."

There was so much decision in her words that Geraldine insisted no more, and soon afterwards Lady Twickenham's maid knocked at the door to say that her ladyship was ready and waiting for the young lady in the library. Geraldine kissed her sister and left the boudoir.

Once more Sibyl was alone with her thoughts, and once more the thought of Edwin was the only one that could find a home for any length of time in her mind.

If there ever was love in the world this was love! It

is true that it was not the high, lofty, unselfish affection which existed between Alfredo and Consuelo, nor yet the passionate all-consuming love which she might have experienced for a man such as until then she had dreamt her lover would be. It was a love inspired simply by purely physical attractions and increased by self-love. Not a lofty motive for a passion, you will say. Well, perhaps not. A great many of our motives are not lofty, and Sibyl was by no means a perfect woman, of which I am sure my readers must be very glad, for perfect women, in novels especially, are dreadful bores.

Suddenly she remembered the appointment which Edwin had made with her step-brother to meet him at the Argyle Rooms that evening.

Like most young ladies she had always entertained an intense secret desire to see those places where men so love to go, and where they are forbidden by the established rules of society to follow them. Now she began to think of him there. She wondered what he was doing; what he was saying—saying perhaps of her; to whom he would speak; if he would speak of love to any one she did not know, and whose fascinations even she would be unable to overpower. A dreadful jealousy took possession of her. She tried to reason against it;—impossible! With her warm passionate nature it was impossible to reason.

What at any other time she would have scorned to do—what in another she would have condemned—what no young lady ever dreamt of before—this newly-awakened jealousy, this irresistible curiosity to know what he was doing, now caused her to undertake. She put on an old gown and an old black bonnet which she seldom wore, and covered her face with a thick veil

through which no one could recognise her features, and, throwing an old-fashioned Scotch shawl over her shoulders, she descended with a hurried step the back staircase, crossed the passage that led from it at the back of the house under the garden terrace unperceived, opened the door which led to the Park with a firm hand, traversed the green avenues, emerging on the other side into Spring Gardens, and, calling the first cab she saw, in a voice that betrayed her emotion directed the cabman to take her to the Argyle Rooms!

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WHIM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

(Not by G. P. R. Grant.)

THE cab stopped in Great Windmill Street, before the gates of a building from which the soft strains of dance music issued, and in front of which a row of brilliant gas-lamps was burning.

She paid the cabman his fare, and with a hurried step crossed the threshold.

She found herself in a long passage. On one side of it an opening like the box-office of a theatre, behind which a man sat, having a table before him covered with money, attracted her attention. She did not know whether it was necessary to pay to go in or not. The fear of doing anything that would make her conspicuous caused her to stop for a minute before she proceeded any further, but seeing a lady gorgeously attired in satin and laces pass her and go through without paying, she followed her example, and entered through a small door into the ball room.

At first her eyes could discern nothing; a heavy atmosphere of tobacco smoke, to which she was unaccustomed, and the dazzling brilliancy of countless gas jets, prevented her from seeing anything, and caused her to

close her eyes. She stopped a moment to recover herself, and it was then, and then only, that the thought struck her of the danger that surrounded her. If anyone should recognise her! If it were to be found out that she was there! The mere thought made her tremble, and she cast one longing glance towards the door. Her courage seemed to have left her; she would have given anything not to have been there; but once there it would be almost as foolish, she thought, to go away without seeing him. No, she would stay and see with her own eyes what he was doing; she would stay and brave the consequences.

As these thoughts passed through her mind she drew the shawl more closely around her, and lowered the veil that concealed her features still more over her face.

As she did this a woman approached her. "Why do you cover your face, girl?" she said, in a harsh tone of voice. "Do you think as any one will care a damn for the like of yer?"

These words made her tremble. She went on through the room as if she had been in a dream—a stranger to everything around her. There might have been a hundred men there she knew, and she would not have recognised any of them; her eyes only looked for one—they would have been blind to any other.

She wandered round and round that room for some time. No one seemed to notice, or, if they did, no one seemed to trouble themselves about her. A man once came near and said something about her veil. She did not understand his words, and took no notice of him. Another one came up to her and asked if she would like to "liquor up;" she shook her head in silence and passed him by.

When she was making the tour of the room for the

third time, her eyes at last discerned amongst the crowd the figure of her Edwin. She immediately went towards him, and stopped at a short distance from him. He was with Lord Twickenham, who had a woman on his arm, a pretty *brunette*, dressed in pink silk, with a white tulle bonnet covered with moss roses. Lord Edwin was talking to them at the time, but when he saw the tall dark figure so closely veiled, whose eyes seemed so intensely fixed on him, he stopped and turned round.

"Look at that woman; mysterious, by Jove!"

Lord Twickenham laughed. "A poor devil, I suppose!"

"I wonder. I'll speak to her; she seems to stare at me especially." And he walked straight to her and said a few words, which she, in the excitement of the moment, failed to understand.

"Cheer up, my girl," he said then; "don't give a fellow the dumps."

"Let me go," she burst out, "I don't detain you."

"But why do you want to go?"

Sibyl stared at him. At that moment she would have given anything not to be there.

"Come, come. I see you are new here; you do not know the usages of the place; let me be your *chaperon*." And he added, in a softer tone, "You need fear nothing with me."

He offered her his arm, which she involuntarily took, and before she knew what she was doing she found herself walking with him up the room.

"It is a strange place, is it not? Not half so pretty as the Terpsichore though; I am a Terpsichorean, you know. Have you ever been there?"

Sibyl shook her head in silence.

"Come, my dear girl, I won't hurt you. Won't you tell me your name?"

"My name!"

"Yes."

Sibyl thought for a moment.

"Miss Roberts," she said.

"Miss Roberts! Why, you don't expect *me* to call you Miss Roberts. Haven't you got a Christian name?"

"Yes—Nelly."

"Nelly! I like it. I am sure we shall become great friends. Won't you take off that veil and let me see your face? Ah, you are afraid to dazzle me with your beauty; but give me some idea?—it won't take me so much by surprise, you know. Are you fair or dark?"

"Fair," she said almost mechanically.

"Fair! I like fair women—long golden hair, pink and white complexion, blue eyes—that style—he! You are an awfully nice girl, you know; you must give me a kiss."

Sibyl started. "A kiss!" she repeated. "Neyer—never! I am not what you think. I am an honest girl! I only came here by mistake!"

"Who ever doubted that, Nelly? But now you are here, you know, you must accustom yourself to the ways of the house. You must give me a kiss. Who ever heard of a girl refusing a kiss at the Argyle? Come, come, be reasonable, and I'll give you some champagne. Do you know what that is! Yes—very well, then give me a kiss."

And he kissed her almost by force. When his lips touched hers, those lips which she had so often longed to kiss, her whole frame quivered, her own lips trembled, and she could not help kissing him in return. He laughed,

and, drawing her towards an ottoman that stood near them in a corner, sat himself down beside her.

The band was playing the Manolo Waltz—that same waltz to the entrancing strains of which she had so often listened to his soft passionate words in the fashionable drawing-rooms of Mayfair. She now had to listen to the very same words, uttered in still more passionate tones, and to the tune of the same maddening waltz. But these words she felt were intended for another, and the thought made her turn cold. How little could he care for *her* when he could say the very same things he said to her to the very first woman he met—to a woman whose face he had not even seen!

And his loving words fell softly upon her ear between the notes of that mysterious waltz. Like some irresistible poison, his mouth came close to hers, and she could feel his warm soft breath upon her cheek, every minute coming nearer and nearer!

“If he only knew who I am! Ah, no, no!—the traitor! the villian!—he shall never, never know! He is but a gay deceiver after all! And I—who thought that he loved me!”

At twelve o'clock a bell rang; the music stopped, and the lights were gradually put out. They were obliged to quit the place.

“Where do you live, Nelly?” he asked.

“Not far.”

“Shall I call a hansom?”

“No. I can walk. Good-bye!”

“Do you think I will leave you so easily? No, Nelly. I must take you to the door of your house at least. Will you lead the way?”

Sibyl, too confused to know what she was doing, took

the first turning, and walked on, only too glad to get out of the crowd that had collected in front of the Argyle Rooms. Edwin walked beside her in silence.

She did not know the locality, and she went up one street and down another, still preserving a silence that she thought would end by driving him away.

"Nelly," he said, after a time, "you have lost yourself. Tell me where you live? I will take you. Why do you fear me?"

She did not answer him; but, turning a corner sharply, ran across the street. Just at that moment a carriage passed and, in her anxiety to get rid of him and to escape the carriage, the veil slipped off. She gave a cry, and hid her face with her shawl. He was some paces behind, and could not have seen her face; but he heard the cry, and, coming to her, he said in a different voice than he had used until now—

"It is useless to wander through the streets all night like this, Miss Fetherstone. Do you think that I have not known who you were all along?"

If a thunderbolt had fallen at her feet Sibyl could not have been more thunderstruck.

"You knew me! You knew who I was! and you have treated me like this! You have been laughing at me! Ah!"

"Why, as I met you at the Argyle Rooms, I concluded that you wanted to be taken for a *cocotte*—so I have treated you like one!"

"Oh, great God! What must you think of me!"

"That you are the most beautiful woman I know, and the bravest!"

As he said this she allowed the shawl to fall from her hands, and it was then for the first time that night that he saw her face.

He had never before been so impressed with her beauty. She had never looked so wondrously handsome in his eyes.

The light of a neighbouring gas-lamp fell full upon her, and illuminated those handsome features of hers, which she no longer thought necessary to conceal.

Her bewilderment and confusion only increased her beauty, for it added colour to her face, brilliancy to her eyes. Edwin could not take his from her face. She seemed to exercise over him the fascination of a serpent which he dreaded, yet which he could not resist.

"Leave me, leave me!" she said after a few seconds, as if seized suddenly with an overpowering sense of the awkwardness of her situation, and again drawing the shawl about her. "Leave me—leave, Lord Edwin! I shall be ruined! . . . If my father were to know! . . . If it should ever get about! . . . Oh, you have me in your power. . . . I am at your mercy; one word from you will ruin me for ever!"

"Do you believe me capable of speaking it?"

"No, not you! I can trust you—but my step-brother, Charlie? Do you think he recognized me?"

"I should say not; he only saw you for a minute. I should not have recognized you if you had not spoken. But what possessed you to go to such a place—what made you go?"

Sibyl looked at him—her lustrous eyes fixed on his, her cheeks flushed, her lips tremulous.

"Can you ask me!" she said at last.

The whole truth flashed suddenly upon him. The thought that she had gone after him had never entered his head before. He had merely believed that she had gone in search of a new sensation, prompted only by

curiosity, and he had thought that a lesson would have done her no harm. But now that he knew—for her words, her looks, told him so, only too plainly—that she had gone solely to see him, his entire conduct changed. He took her hand in his, and, kissing it devotedly, said in a trembling voice—

“Forgive me, Miss Fetherstone. Sibyl, forgive me!”

“Ah no—it is I who am to blame, Edwin. Edwin, I did not know what I was doing. I was mad!—mad with love!”

“Love!—love for me! You love me, Miss Fetherstone—Sibyl—let me call you so. You love me—you!”

Sibyl hid her face in her hands and said nothing, but hot tears fell fast from her eyes, and she sobbed aloud.

“What must you think of me!” she again said. “Was there ever a girl in such a position?”

“Ah, Sibyl, you make me so happy! Don’t cry; for God’s sake don’t cry! I love you, Sibyl! Sibyl, I love you! Do you think I could have spoken to you as I did if I had not felt what I said? Sibyl, Sibyl, say again that you love me!”

She said nothing, but continued to sob.

“Let us leave this accursed place,” he said; “this street is not a place for you to be in. Come, come, they will take you for a *cocotte*. Come, let us go.”

“Do you think I am better than one?”

“Sibyl!”

“Ah, I should never have confessed that I loved you; never, never.”

“Sibyl, I spoke of love first.”

“But you did not mean it—you were laughing, while I—I am crying!”

And the tears kept rolling down her cheeks.

"Let us go. I will take you home. No one shall ever know what has happened."

"Will you forget it? Oh, promise me that you will forget it."

"I forget it; when it has made me the happiest of men—when it has taught me the extent of your love! Ask not that, Sibyl. I could not forget this night."

"You love me, then?"

"Love you! Ah, Sibyl, Sibyl, can you doubt it?"

Sibyl looked at him in silence for a moment. The next they were clasped in each other's arms, and their lips once more touched; but this time it was hers that sought his.

They said no more; in fact, what more could they have said? They walked in silence to the nearest cabstand, and got into a four-wheeler, which he directed to go to Waterloo Place. Arrived near the Duke of York's Column they descended, and he paid the cabman and sent him away.

He walked with her to Carlton House Terrace, and only left her at her own door-step.

"Will you forgive me?" he then said, taking her hand in his.

"Forgive you! I love you, Edwin; I love you;" and she pressed it.

Edwin walked straight to his chambers at the Albany. He walked as if in a dream. He could hardly yet realize the events of that night. He sat up for many hours trying to analyse his feelings; he hardly knew what to think or do; but one thing was evident—he loved Sibyl, and Sibyl loved him!

FASHION AND PASSION;

OR,

LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HONEYMOON" AND "THROUGH THE AGES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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FIRST PART.

(Continued.)

FASHION AND PASSION;

OR,

LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

CHAPTER I.

A GOLDEN HEART.

(Not by Tom Hood.)

A FORTNIGHT had elapsed since the night of the supper at the villa on the banks of the Thames—a fortnight which had passed for the fairy-queen of that fairy domain like one long uninterrupted day of enjoyment.

I say enjoyment, and not happiness; for though Stella no doubt found new pleasures every day in that miserable worldly life she had chosen for herself, and enjoyed all the luxuries and festivities which it procured her, yet she could hardly be called happy, for she was not yet depraved enough to avoid feeling occasionally secret misgivings, and not to be troubled sorely at times by her awakening conscience; for the sense of good and evil is innate in our hearts, and even the most ignorant and the most wicked possess it.

Besides, she loved Juan. He was her god—the evil deity at whose altar she worshipped, and for

whom, like the Indian maiden for the cruel, blood-thirsty Siva, she would have sacrificed everything. She loved him with all the ardour of her untrained, wild nature; and she was jealous of him.

Not indeed that she had any apparent cause for jealousy, for she was ignorant even of Geraldine Fetherstone's existence; but her heart told her that the handsome Spaniard was not really in love with her, that he probably cared for her only as a means of getting money, and that he only prized her great beauty and her many charms—for she now knew that she was beautiful, and that her charms were irresistible—as so many tools that were to make gold for him.

She would have given anything not to love him—to have been able to forget him altogether; but she could not—her love was stronger than herself. Lord Belgrave she could not love. She could not understand his high sentiments; his noble nature was beyond her comprehension; besides, he took no pains to win her love, and in her eyes he always appeared like some being of another world, altogether different and superior to the general run of mortals she had known down in Soho.

It was Juan who had first awakened in her the feelings of womanhood, and she could not easily free herself from the invisible yet all-powerful chains that bound her, as it were, to him.

She had known him now for some time, yet she knew as little of him as she did that first day when, accompanied by his serious, sour-looking father and his lovely, sweet-looking sister, he had come to take up his quarters in her step-mother's first-floor-front in Bull Street.

Juan Fernandez was a man who never spoke of his own affairs. There are men of whom everybody knows all

about their belongings—where they live, whither they go, what are their means, and how they spend them. But there are others of whom nobody knows anything—one meets them everywhere, they seem to know everybody, and to go where everyone else goes, and yet we never know anything certain about them. Juan Fernandez was one of these men.

Neither his father nor his sister knew what he did with himself all day long—it had ever been his custom, even in Madrid, to keep them in the dark as to his movements. If they had not seen him for a month—an event which was by no means uncommon—and they asked him on his return where he had been, he either answered the question falsely, or left it unanswered. They knew this, and consequently never asked him now how he spent his time, or how he managed to live. That was his peculiarity, and even Stella remained for whole weeks ignorant of his whereabouts.

She, however, found this uncertainty was hard to bear, for she loved him with all her heart, and, as I have said before, was very jealous of him. It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that one day, exasperated by the cool indifference with which he answered her questions, and mistrusting what he said, she should have followed him, disguised in an old shawl and a thick veil, through which no one would ever have recognized her, and, tracking his steps from one street to another, tried her best to discover where he went when he left her pretty little villa by the river-side.

To her surprise, and I must add to her great relief, she discovered that the house to which he directed his steps was the one in Soho in which she had first made his acquaintance. She had held that house in horror, for

it had been the scene of her miserable, wretched youth. She had hated the place and all its inmates, who had treated her so unkindly; she had loathed the very air, which always had that peculiar smell which is attached to the houses of the poor, and which now so forcibly reminded her of her former condition; she had hated even the voice of her Irish step-mother, who never opened her mouth but to scold and nag. But now she almost loved the old place; she could almost forgive the cruel old woman, and forget the misery she had undergone in that house—for she knew that Juan's sister lived there, and that he came to see her, and not a rival, as she had feared—and the sight of that wretched hovel now made her heart glad.

She would have trusted him now, convinced as she was of his fidelity to her, and would have returned home, for she knew Lord Belgrave was coming for her to take her in his drag to Richmond, where they proposed dining that day, had not an almost irresistible curiosity seized her of revisiting her old home—though she had so hated it—and of seeing once more the scenes of her former life, which was so very different to her present one, that at times she even doubted that such things could have really been.

It was Sunday morning, and noisy children were playing in the wretched street, while half-a-dozen half-starved hens were picking the dust heaps which no one thought of removing. Stella passed by these and approached Mrs. Potts' shop, which was open, although it was Sunday, the inhabitants of Bull Street not being over-religious. There stood the eternal bottles with the brandy balls and jumbles, in their accustomed places; and there, beside the door, was the last number of the *Police News*.

Stella cast one passing glance at it, and crossing the shop, which was empty, she ascended the dark staircase with a light step. How often had she mounted those slippery stairs exhausted with fatigue—panting for breath! How often had she washed them and scrubbed them until she had grown to know every knot in them, every grease stain which no amount of water seemed to take out! She!—the lovely Stella, who now drove in a four-in-hand by the side of a Marquis, dressed in velvet and lace, and could command as many servants as she chose!

She stopped on the first landing, at the door of what in a more conventional state of society would have been called the drawing-room, but which in Mrs. Potts' house went by the name of the first-floor-front. The sound of voices inside attracted her attention. The door was old and, like everything in that house, sadly out of repair; in fact, everything seemed fast going to ruin, and no carpenter or mason was ever called in to repair the ravages made by time; the door was so rotten indeed, that through the cracks Stella was able to discern the lovely form of Consuelo standing near the window opposite, near her brother, who held one of her hands in his, and seemed in the act of making a request that needed some extra display of affection.

She put her ear to the keyhole and listened.

Consuelo was speaking, and her soft gentle accents fell like the notes of a sweet melody upon her ear—a melody to which she was unaccustomed—a melody the merits of which she could not comprehend, but whose sentiment she felt to be soul-stirring. Consuelo was speaking in English, and she was therefore able to understand what she said.

"You are ill, Juan—you are dreadfully pale; something is weighing on your mind—could I not assist you?"

"Ah, Consuelo, you could if you liked—you could save me from utter ruin . . . from . . ."

"How? Oh, speak, speak; if there is anything in the world I can do for you I will do it—you know *that!*"

"Yes; that is why I have come to you. Consuelo, if I have not a hundred pounds before to-night, I shall have to run away—to hide myself for ever—or . . ."

"Juan!—brother!"

"It is a debt of honour, Consuelo—I must pay."

"One hundred pounds! ten thousand reals! Oh, Juan, Juan, it is quite a fortune! And we are so poor, so very poor!"

"I have come to you as my last resource. I know we are poor, and that a hundred pounds is a great sum, but, Consuelo, I only ask you to lend it to me. You have the care of all our money—father trusts everything to you—you can lend me the money to-day easily enough, and I promise to bring you back double one of these days."

"Juan, how often have I entreated of you not to gamble! Juan, Juan, for *my* sake—for God's sake—promise me never to touch a card again!"

"Consuelo!"

"Think of the misery, the shame that it brings, not only upon us, but upon so many others. Oh, it is too horrible! and you—you, the brother I so love—our father's hope!—my darling!—*you* turn out a gambler! Oh, I had no idea we had fallen so low! Until now I had entertained great hopes—hopes that made me almost happy

again; but now—oh, Juan, Juan!” and she burst into tears.

Juan remained silent for some time. At last he whispered something in her ear which seemed to pacify her a little; she raised her head and looked at him in silence.

“Consuelo,” he then added aloud, “believe me; I promise.”

She answered something which Stella, though she listened attentively, could not understand—it was said in Spanish.

They talked on for a long time in their own language. Consuelo still seemed to entreat, and her words were often broken by sobs and half-suppressed tears. After this she walked towards a table which stood at the other end of the room, and taking something out of the drawer, of which she had the key, she returned to the window, where Juan had remained standing, with a roll of bank notes in her hand, which she seemed to clasp convulsively.

“Juan,” she then said, once more in English, “here is almost the whole of what we have left. A few pounds alone remain to us in the whole world; but father need not know what I have done—I will work. I am young, strong—I can make money for him. You have promised me never to play again; it is under this understanding alone that I give you these bank-notes. Take them, Juan, and may they bring you back to the path of virtue and honour!”

Juan took the money, and said something in Spanish. He then embraced his sister and prepared to go.

Stella, who had been near the door at this time, was so moved by this scene that she had not the presence of

mind to hide herself before Juan opened the door and emerged on to the staircase; but fortunately it was so dark that he passed by without noticing her, and descended the stairs without looking back.

Stella now prepared to go. She had seen quite enough to sadden even *her* heart, and she knew that Lord Belgrave would be waiting for her at her villa; but as she began to descend the staircase, she heard the noise of approaching footsteps on the flight below, and, being afraid to encounter her step-mother, she ran up to the second landing instead, and hid herself behind a door.

It was, as she had thought, Mrs. Potts herself who was coming up the stairs. She had lived for so many years in such mortal terror of that woman that her ear had got sharpened to the dreaded sound of her footsteps.

The gaunt, shrivelled hag stopped at the first landing, and threw open the door without any ceremony. Her high-pitched tone of voice caused her words to be distinctly heard on the upper landing, where her step-daughter had hidden herself—in fact, they resounded all over the house, like a clap of thunder.

“On yer knees!—well, gal, I’ve no patience with such muck as you!—where’s my rent?”

Consuelo, who had evidently been surprised on her knees (praying for her wretched brother, most likely) by the cruel virago, muttered something which Stella could not catch.

“Fine, very fine!” shouted the old woman, at the top of her voice. “Patience, indeed! Give me what you owe me, or I’ll send for the police this minute—by the powers I will! A nice lot you are, a-comin’ into a honest lone woman’s house without a shilling to bless yerselves with—a-takin’ bed and board, like thieves, a-knowin’ ye can’t

pay! I should never have trusted furrin folks, as won't work, to be sure——"

"Oh, Mrs. Potts, how can you speak like that!—you know that we have paid you every farthing till this week. I intend getting some work—do you know of any lady who requires a woman to sew for her? I can do *that*, if I cannot do anything else. It is not that I *won't* work;—I am ready to work, Mrs. Potts—indeed I am; and you will wait a couple of days—won't you?—and I promise to pay you all."

"No; I ain't to be done no more by the likes of you. Out ye shall pack, you and your sour-looking pa, as looks like a bottle of sour wine—out ye shall pack, both of you, if ye can't give me my money now, this very minnit!"

Consuelo remained silent. "Hark ye, girl; don't stand staring at me like a stuck pig that's a-going to the fair, or by the powers I'll Why don't ye make money like my gal Polly does? . . . Shure, ye are pretty enough!"

"I will not be insulted, Mrs. Potts," answered the Spanish girl, with a dignity of tone strange in one so young and friendless. "Take your money—here it is; I won't deprive you of what is yours, if I and my poor father have to starve!—there, let me alone now."

Mrs. Potts said something in a gentler tone of voice, and left the room, banging the door behind her; but instead of going again downstairs to her shop, she proceeded up to the second floor, and there, to her great surprise, met her step-daughter, who, being unprepared for this meeting, looked as confused and bewildered as she might have done in the days gone by.

"Polly! to be sure, by holy St. Patrick!—why, girl,

what do you do here? You have brought your poor old mother some money, eh? What a nice girl!"

Stella looked at her, still greatly bewildered, and but little reassured by the soft tone which the old woman had adopted when speaking to her since she had left her house for good, and since she was able to send her money every month.

"Mighty grand, by the powers!" she added, seeing that Stella stared at her in silence, and did not seem inclined to speak.

"Mother," she said at last, "mother, you are hard upon that poor girl as has no money, and can't pay your rent."

"Hard, indeed! I think it a deal harder for me—a poor lone woman like me! The idea o' comin' and using of honest victuals, and honest folks' beds and cheers and tables, and then refusing to pay! I'll send for the police, that I will, next time."

"Poor girl!"

"Poor girl! why does she not work, and get money, like ye do?"

Stella started. "Like me!" she exclaimed. "Work like me!" and the colour rose to her cheeks and tears started to her eyes.

She looked at the old woman before her, then cast one glance around her, and shuddered as her eyes met those well-known unpapered walls, and that steep, hated staircase, and she thought of her pretty villa by the river, and her flowers, and her dresses.

She had not the courage to say one single word, but taking her purse from her pocket, and throwing it at Mrs. Potts' feet, she hurried past her, and disappeared down the staircase.

Mrs. Potts stooped to pick it up, and by the time she got downstairs and into the shop, her step-daughter had gone, nor could she see any trace of her down the street, when she looked out. She banged the door to, with a Satanic laugh, and retired to the back shop, to put in order her parcels of tobacco, and her bottles of sweets, muttering to herself—

“I always said no good would come of them furriners. I must stick up for my rights, that I must! The idea of Polly interfering!”

Poor Consuelo! What was going to become of her? She had given away her last sovereign, and there seemed no chance, however remote, of her getting any more!

CHAPTER II.

BIRDS OF PREY.

(*Not by Miss Braddon.*)

IT was a fine Sunday afternoon, strange to say—for in England fine days are scarce, and Sundays are generally about the worst in the week—so much so, that it would almost seem as if Heaven disapproved of the manner in which that day is kept in this country, and would show its displeasure in tears; but this particular Sunday had been a truly glorious day; the trees were at their greenest, the flowers at their brightest, the water of the rivers and lakes at their purest, the sky at its bluest. The birds sang merrily in the bushes, and the entire earth seemed to rejoice. On such a day what heart could be heavy, what mind oppressed? Everything in nature preached of happiness and joy, and the hearts of men responded to the call, and took part in the general rejoicing.

Along the well-kept drives of Richmond Park a noble drag, drawn by four spirited horses, was making its way from Robin Hood Gate down towards the river.

On the box-seat sat the owner, Lord Belgrave, who with a well-trained hand managed the reins, and beside him sat Stella, radiant in all the wondrous charms of youth and beauty. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes

half closed, and the fresh breeze of the approaching evening played amongst her golden curls, which hung loose behind, under a white straw hat, covered with pink and white roses, and tied with black velvet—a toilette, simple, and yet perfect in its simplicity, and which suited her style of beauty to perfection.

She wore a pink satin dress, and over it a second skirt of white lace, looped up behind with broad black velvet bows. The body was cut square and disclosed her alabaster throat, round which she had tied a black velvet covered with diamonds, from which hung a single large diamond star. Her pretty little plump hands were gloved in soft *gants de Suède*, which reached almost to her elbows, and over them, round her wrists, she had black velvet bracelets, also covered with diamonds.

In this dress she looked wondrously pretty; the pink satin hung round her in rich folds, which here and there were softened by the delicate lace that fell over them, and looked almost a part of herself.

Who would ever have thought that this same woman had, only a couple of months before, scrubbed the floors of a miserable lodging-house in Soho, in a dirty, torn print gown, without stockings, and with coarse leather shoes, and thought herself supremely happy at being able to run down on a Sunday afternoon to the neighbouring park, and escape for a few minutes the continual nagging and scolding of a cruel mistress!

Yet Polly Potts was not happy at that moment. She was naturally languishing and lazy, and the motion of the carriage was highly agreeable to her. She also cast side glances at her costly dress and sparkling jewels, and felt a secret pleasure in the certainty that no one could be better dressed than she was, or look fresher or prettier;

yet her soul was troubled. The scene she had witnessed that morning was still before her mind's eye; in vain she tried to forget it—to think of something else; but she could not. Perhaps it was because Juan, the man she loved, had been the hero of it; perhaps because it reminded her of the days when she had lived in that wretched house in Bull Street, and toiled and starved like the poor Consuelo would have now to toil and starve in her turn—she, the beautiful young lady, whose gentle words had been like balm of Gilead for her suffering spirit in the days of her trials—she, the noble-minded girl who had first pitied, and consoled her in her misery, and at whose side she had always experienced a sense of safety and happiness, even when old Mrs. Potts had been scolding and finding fault with her more than usual.

Stella was a good girl at heart, though she was ignorant, and hardly knew good from evil; and the sorrows of Consuelo weighed heavily on her mind, so heavily indeed that not even the amusing stories of Lord Twickenham—who sat behind her on the drag, together with Lord Edwin and Alfredo—or the witty sayings of Lord Belgrave, who also seemed influenced by the weather, and had for a wonder forgotten his usual cold cynicism, could drive these sad thoughts from her mind.

Lord Belgrave noticed her pre-occupation, and wondered at it; but it did not trouble him much, for she was never violently lively, and the soft caressing air of that warm day was not calculated to make any one boisterous or gay, but rather to soften all feelings, and subdue all sensations.

Presently they dashed past the iron gates of the park, and drew up before the Star and Garter.

Their arrival would seem to have been expected for some time, for two waiters rushed immediately to the door, and conducted the noble Marquis and his guests, when once they had descended from the drag, into a pretty sitting-room overlooking the Thames, where a large party of ladies and gentlemen were already assembled, who greeted them with a cordial and noisy reception.

Most conspicuous of all, attired in the very latest of Parisian toilettes, stood the celebrated Mlle. Sclavage, the woman who is said to have invented breakdowns, and who prides herself rather more on her *chic* than her elegance—the woman who boasts of being able to ruin a man in a week, and who possesses the sweetest of smiles and yet can say the bitterest things.

In another part of the room, leaning on the back of an arm-chair, equally conspicuous, and also wondrously attired, stood Eglantine Rosefield, the English Sclavage, who, although she imitates the famous Frenchwoman in everything, hates her with all the hatred of which stage rivalry is capable.

Amy Danshery, another queen of burlesque, sat near her, and Cornélie de Colté, the stately amazon of the Christmas pantomimes, resplendent in diamonds and rubies, was talking to her. It was these ladies—or rather, their friends Lord Carisbrooke, Capt. Haliburton, and Mr. Deanshome, together with Lord Belgrave—who were giving the dinner; the rest of the party—composed almost entirely of the intimate friends of these gentlemen, and of a few actresses more celebrated for their charms than for their good acting—having been invited by them.

Shortly after our friends' arrival, dinner was announced,

and the whole party walked in solemn procession to the dining-room, another handsome apartment, also overlooking the river, and in which a tastefully-arranged table had been spread. Lord Carisbrooke, having been the originator of the party, took the head of the table, and placed Stella and Sclavage on either side of him, while Eglantine Rosefield—his lady—sat beside Lord Belgrave at the other end.

I think, before going any further, that I ought to say a word or two about Lord Carisbrooke—or rather “Charlie,” as he is generally known amongst the class of friends in whose society we first meet him—for fear that I may not have another opportunity; and this book would hardly be the perfect *tableau* of life in Mayfair I should like it to be, if I did not describe at least the principal characteristics of a man so well known and so much run after as “Charlie.” Besides, he is a very good sample of a class which, though perhaps not large, is yet very conspicuous in Mayfair, and may therefore be taken as a good specimen of it, without going any further in search of one, which, if I do not take this opportunity, I shall certainly have to do sooner or later.

Lord Carisbrooke is essentially what is called “a jolly good fellow.” He is very good-looking, very good-tempered and very *debonnaire*, in addition to which priceless qualities he is an unrivalled horseman, a famous shot, a superb billiard player, and a capital driver—he is, in fact, one of those fortunate mortals who do everything so “devilish well,” and therefore ruin all hearts; and no one wonders that they should become such general favourites. He made his *début* in London society as a gay cornet in the Blues, in which character he is said to have broken many hearts; but “Charlie” was none the less popular for *this*, and

when his father died and he came into his title and his property, his society was courted by all, even by Royalty, some of whose members are very partial to him; and though once he went a little too far in a certain affair of honour which it would perhaps have been more honourable for him not to have meddled with, yet he is still as much in fashion as ever, and if scandal-mongers say that he plays a trifle too high, or leads a rather faster life than is good for him, why, all I can say is, that it is very malicious of them, and that I should like to know the proud Duchess who would not take her daughter to his balls if she happened to receive an invitation.

He was very brilliant that day at the Star and Garter, and he and Mlle. Scavage talked and laughed enough for half-a-dozen—so much so, that no one noticed the silence and pre-occupation of “the Star of the East,” as Stella had been christened by Eglantine Rosefield, who, though herself speaking a horrible Yorkshire brogue, laughed at her Cockney accent.

“*Allons, Charlie, becquetons—tu me fais rire trop,*” Scavage said, as she drained her champagne glass. She then turned to Alfredo, who sat next to her on the other side, and began speaking to him.

Alfredo was unaccustomed to this sort of society, and he always found himself completely out of his element when in it; yet he could not help admiring the jewels which this woman wore, if he admired nothing else about her, so to say something complimentary he began to talk about them.

“I do not think I have ever seen such beautiful stones,” he said; “they put one in mind of those jewels one reads of in the ‘Arabian Nights.’”

Mlle. Scavage turned round suddenly. “*Sapristi!*”

she exclaimed; "dey may well—*ce sont les contes des mille et une nuit, monsieur.*"

A loud roar of laughter followed these words, and the conversation then became loud at that end of the table, to Alfredo's delight, who was thus relieved from having to pay compliments to the fascinating French-woman—a lot which any other man would have thought a great privilege, but one which the thought of Consuelo, always paramount in his mind, prevented him from enjoying.

Strange to say, on the other side of the brilliant Lord Carisbrooke, Stella was also thinking of Consuelo. It was indeed curious that the image of that pure, chaste girl should have been so very distinct in those two minds, so different in every respect, in the midst of a party so boisterous and so brilliant as the one assembled in that room.

Lord Belgrave, at the other end of the table, was also serious and thoughtful now. The fresh air and the excitement of the drive had made him gay and even light-hearted for a moment; but now, in this hot room, surrounded by people whose society he could hardly care for, and whose words sounded in his ears like the discordant notes of a beautiful instrument out of tune, he had once more regained the cold air of indifference and *hauteur* which so characterised him amongst the rest, and which made him distant and reserved even to his greatest friends.

Besides, such a dinner as this could have no attraction for him. He had been at similar entertainments hundreds of times, intensely bored with the whole thing, yet coming to them again and again, perhaps more from habit than from anything else. He knew precisely

when Amy Danshery would burst out with her peacock-like laugh, when Eglantine Rosefield would smile, and when Selavage would come in with her oft-repeated *bon-mots*. He knew by heart every story that would be told, every joke that would be made, every look that he would receive. He knew how false every story, and every smile, and every look would be, and yet he sat there, as he had sat a hundred times before, talking nonsense with women who had never possessed a second idea—with women he could not but despise and condemn—he, the talented, noble-minded man, who might have become a pillar of the State, or a shining light in the path of science, had society not condemned him to be a Lord, and nothing more!

As the champagne and hock passed round, the party became more and more gay and riotous, the laughter and the noise increased, the gentlemen becoming excited and the actresses more familiar. Indeed, they all talked and joked together as if they had been the oldest and most intimate of friends—when the greater part of them had only met that evening for the first time—and as if they did not know very well that if perchance they crossed each other in the park the next day they would not even bow or make any sign of recognition!

Yet here they sat, these haughty aristocrats, who laugh *at* the pretty young ladies in society, laughing *with* the daughters of their own washerwomen and stablemen, as if they were their equals in every way!

And yet people say that Englishmen are proud and exclusive, and very difficult and refined in their tastes!

After dinner the whole party went out on the terraces. The sun had now set for some time, and the stars had begun to pierce the azure vault of heaven; the river

below looked like a sheet of silver, and many boats were upon it, gliding over its smooth surface in the cool of the evening.

It would have been difficult to find a finer evening or a prettier spot; and yet, of the many persons assembled on that terrace, only one or two looked upon it with a little more than mere curiosity, and felt at all influenced by its sylvan charms.

For Scavage and her set, nature possessed no beauties; and no landscape, however lovely, would have made them think of anything beyond the fulfilment of their own mercenary ends.

They told silly stories and well-known anecdotes, laughing at the faintest provocation and at the smallest imaginable jokes—inexhaustible nothings, vapid utterances, which only filled the soul of Lord Belgrave with greater melancholy. And yet these common, ignorant women—who a few months before would have been content to eat black bread and turnips in some poor cottage, and to joke and idle away their time with labourers—now ruled supreme over these men, the representatives of long and illustrious lines of knights and nobles, and set the fashions for their wives and daughters.

But then—whose fault is it? Surely not theirs? It is not their fault that men should prefer them to the women of their own class; it is not their fault that these proud dames, who a month before would have thrown a penny to them from their carriages, should now try to imitate their style, and should follow their lead in everything—as indeed they must do, if they do not wish to be altogether out of the fashion.

Perhaps, after all, it is the fault of the ladies; if they



will bore men with their exclusiveness, and be so difficult to please, who can wonder that the men should leave them and go off to amuse themselves with Sclavage and her set? If mothers will pester men, and force their daughters upon them, or if young ladies will run after young men, and try so hard to induce them to make a proposal which they will repent all the rest of their lives—who can blame them for preferring the society of Sclavage and her set, where everything at least is straightforward, and amusement the only aim, and from which the demon of matrimony has been exorcised long ago?

As long as society is what it is at present, Sclavage and her set will rule the world. There seems no help for it. It is a horrible thing, I agree with you; but if you want the final sum to alter, you will have to change the figures that compose it, otherwise the end will always be the same, twist the figures as much as ever you like.

But I am neglecting our friends at Richmond. I cannot alter the ways of the world, however much I may condemn them; therefore, gentle reader, if you would have it otherwise, please to shut the book which treats of this wicked state of society before the consequences grow too awful, for I intend to describe the life in Mayfair as it really is, not as I should like it to be.

So let us once more return to the Star and Garter.

As the party there assembled were standing on the upper terrace, talking and laughing and smoking cigarettes, Lord Carisbrooke approached Lord Belgrave, and, addressing himself half to him and half to Stella, who stood beside him, said—

“I hear, Belgrave, that you have a lovely villa on the

banks of the Thames, not very far from here. Can we see it from this terrace?"

"No," answered the Marquis, in his usual cold tone; "it is nearer London, and I do not think it can be seen from Richmond; but it does not belong to me, it belongs to Mlle. Stella here."

"Indeed!"

Lord Carisbrooke looked at Stella, who coloured deeply, and lowered her eyes. Lord Belgrave continued—

"Yes; but I am sure that she will be charmed to receive my friends there, and that I may invite you to it in her name. When will you come and dine at Stella's villa?"

Scavage, who was near, talking with Mr. Deanshome—that rich little banker, who is said only to frequent this sort of society that fashionable young men may go to his house, where the haughty Mrs. Deanshome does the honours in a queenly style—heard these last words, and immediately joined in the conversation.

"I shall be charmed to dine with you, Belgrave," she said, "provided you fix on a day when I do not act."

"Very well," answered Lord Belgrave, turning his head. "I shall be charmed to see you all—all, you understand. Will you come next Sunday, that is, to-day week?"

Scavage was enchanted with the idea, and so were all the rest, when they heard of the invitation, which they eagerly accepted; for they were all very curious to see what sort of a home the rich Marquis had provided for "the Star of the East," as they called her, and of whom—if the truth must be told—they were not a little jealous.

After this the party separated, and they walked down the gardens in couples.

Lord Belgrave gave his arm to Stella, and took her to a little arbour at the extreme end of the terrace, whence a beautiful view of the fair valley below could be obtained, with the river running through it, and the meadows beyond, now illumined by the silver rays of the rising moon.

"You are serious, Stella," he said, "and seem sad. Has anything happened to displease you? Perhaps you are sorry that I asked these people to dine with us at your villa? If you like, I can put them off yet."

Stella regarded him with a look of mingled gratitude and fear. "You are always good, Bel," she said, leaning on his arm, and with her blue eyes still fixed on his. "You are a great deal too good for me. What have I done—I—a poor hignorant girl like me, to deserve such a fate?"

Belgrave looked at her in mute astonishment. These were the very last words he would have expected to hear in such a place, and from a girl of that sort. He was too surprised to answer, and after a short silence it was again Stella who spoke.

"It seems hard-like, don't it," she said, as if talking to herself, "that while I feast here in splendour, and wear fine clothes, and ride in grand carriages, other girls should toil and work and starve."

"What are you thinking about, Stella?" he said, taking her hand affectionately in his; "what is weighing on your mind? Tell me all about it—perhaps I can help you to banish these sad thoughts."

Stella, encouraged and reassured by these words, told him of her visit to her old home that morning, and what

she had heard there. She told the sad tale without any eloquence save that of nature; but human nature is always eloquent when it feels, and Stella, although she spoke in broken accents, and in her untaught English, by reason of her ardent and honest sympathy with the subject, managed to render her story most interesting, and at the same time most pathetic. Lord Belgrave listened to her attentively, and although his habitual cold smile still remained on his lips, he felt in his heart a secret pleasure in listening to her words; for they revealed to him that even in a girl like Stella there could be some sparks of true sentiment. When she had told him about the brother (whom, by-the-bye, she took very good care not to say was Juan), she finished by saying—

“It seems hard, yet I suppose it is nothing so very uncommon after all. There may be thousands of girls in the same position in London; yet it seems hard-like for her, for she’s a lady, if ever I see one, and she’s so proud and so lovely, and so delicate-like. Mother said as she should do what I do, but she is too good, too pure. Bel, she’d just go mad with the—the shamefulness, as one may say. Poor girl, I can think of nothing but her to-day!—funny, ain’t it?”

Lord Belgrave shuddered as she said this, for it showed him that Stella was not quite so indifferent to the shame of her mode of life as he had hoped, and the thought that he had contributed to her ruin made him turn cold; yet he was a man who could feel deeply without showing it, and when she had finished speaking he said, with his usual half-incredulous smile—

“You are a good girl, Stella, and I like you for thinking in this way of another, while others would only

think of themselves; but how do you know that this girl you talk about—the Spanish girl who lives at your step-mother's—how do you know that she is so good and so much to be pitied?"

"Oh, Bel, if you could see her you wouldn't ask that. If ever you see a face as was all innocence and loveliness, and pride and virtue-like, you see it in hers. I knew her before I went to the Terpsichore, you know. I knew her before I knew you; and while mother and the lodgers, and the neighbours and all the rest of them, were scolding me and finding fault with everything I did, she always was sweet and kind to me. And now—now there's that about her as do seem to make me feel so common, and so coarse, and so hignorant beside her. She's a lady, I am sure; and the poor thing, I suppose, will end by starving—perhaps by dying!—who knows?"

Lord Belgrave remained silent for some time; at last he said—

"Do you think I could do anything for her, Stella?"

"You! Ah yes, Bel, if you liked you could, indeed. You might know some rich lady as might give her some honest work to do; she is ready enough to work—indeed she is—and she is not a good-for-naught sort of girl, as I always was, as never could do anything for myself—no; she would work gladly enough, and like it."

"I like to hear you, Stella; it is good and generous of you to speak like this. Give me the address. I will go and see the girl myself, and see what I can do for her."

"Oh, thank you, Bel; thank you! I shall sleep better to-night; but remember as she is a lady born, and honest though poor."

Lord Belgrave bit his lips, and the blood rose to his face; but he managed to hide the blush, which would have

been so out of place on his cold handsome face, by stooping down to write, by the light of the moon, in his notebook the name of the street and the number of Consuelo's home.

It was thus that Lord Belgrave was made acquainted with Consuelo Fernandez, the girl whom his friend Alfredo loved and had decided never to introduce to him, so sure was he that the Marquis would fall in love with her, and so afraid was he of the consequences, though at the same time he was sure of her love for him, and would have trusted everything to his friend.

Alfredo, in the meantime, unconscious of what was going on in the arbour at the end of the terrace, was walking by the side of Lord Edwin, listening to the florid description the latter was giving him of a dress Sibyl had worn at a party the night before, and laughing with him at Lord Twickenham's distress, who, more taken than ever with Stella's charms, had been telling them what he would do for her if she consented to love him and to abandon the Marquis.

A couple of hours later Lord Belgrave was driving his friends back to town in his drag, and Stella, once more light-hearted and merry, was laughing at Lord Twickenham's jokes as she leaned back on the front seat and cast occasional side-glances at him.

CHAPTER III.

QUITS.

(Not by the Baroness Tautphæus.)

WHEN Lord Belgrave, in the solitude of his own room, began to think of what Stella had told him that night, he wondered greatly, that if this Spanish girl who lived in her step-mother's lodging-house—this Consuelo—were indeed as beautiful as Stella said, why the latter should have been so anxious that he should see her. "I wonder Stella is not afraid that I should fall in love with her," he said to himself. "If she really is as lovely as she seems to think, it is strange she should have asked me to go and see her."

Perhaps if he had known all Stella's thoughts, he would not have wondered at her conduct. But then—how could he have known that she was thinking of leaving him altogether, and that the idea of his falling in love with Consuelo would have given her the greatest satisfaction?

A great change had been taking place lately in Stella's feelings. She had never loved Lord Belgrave, and, indeed, his high-bred, weary-looking, contemptuous air had always frightened more than pleased her; she knew the great difference between them, and could never

feel thoroughly at home with him. With Lord Twickenham it was a very different thing;—he was young and reckless; it was easy enough to chaff him, and to laugh at his jokes; and ever since the night of that supper at her villa, when the Marquis had forbidden gambling in his house, Juan had done nothing but talk of Lord Twickenham, and had neglected no opportunity of advising her to leave Lord Belgrave—who always knew what Juan was about rather better than he would have wished—and go off with the young Earl, whom he was sure it would be easy enough to manage between them.

The handsome Spaniard still retained all the influence over her which he had exercised from the beginning; and although she had already begun to doubt the sincerity of his love for her, yet she could hardly free herself from his power and fascinations.

She had therefore almost made up her mind to run away from Lord Belgrave; yet the thought of proving herself so ungrateful to him, after all he had done for her, made her hesitate, for she still possessed a few good sentiments, though Juan had tried so hard to stifle them all. She was ready to leave the Marquis, but she would have liked to do so without causing him any very great pain. It was this sentiment of compunction, joined to that pity she felt for Consuelo's sad fate, that had caused her to tell Lord Belgrave about her, and to induce him to go and see her.

Another man would perhaps have forgotten the whole affair before the next morning, but Lord Belgrave was a man of his word. He had promised Stella that he would go and see this *protégée* of hers, and he did go, though the next day proved horribly wet, and Bull Street, Soho, was decidedly very much out of his way.

He went, and he saw Consuelo.

Being such a bad day, both she and her father were at home, and he was able to stay and talk with her for nearly an hour—to which, most likely, she would never have consented had Mr. Fernandez been out.

Lord Belgrave had come in a hansom, and had decided before entering the house not to reveal his name. When Mr. Fernandez had asked him at the beginning of their interview who he was, he had said that his name was Lucas, and that he was partly Spanish, making this the excuse for his visit.

I have already said that he spoke that language fluently, so that neither Consuelo nor her father doubted for a moment his sincerity. Besides, poor people cannot be very particular on occasions of this kind, and, as old Fernandez said to himself, quoting one of his favourite proverbs, "*He who has nothing to lose need not fear the robbers.*"

Yet before the visit was half over, Lord Belgrave was sorry he had not told them who he really was; for he saw at once how greatly they were in need of assistance, and at the same time how impossible it would be for him—particularly under an assumed name—to help them in their difficulties; for he was but too well acquainted with the false pride that is called "honour" in Spain, and which he justly feared would greatly stand in the way of their accepting his assistance.

The wondrous beauty and grace of the poor Spanish girl had quite taken him by surprise. Though he had been prepared, by Stella's description of her, to see a very pretty woman, yet he never could have imagined so much grace and elegance amidst so much poverty and misery; and he was obliged to confess to himself, as he

looked at her large liquid eyes, that gazed at him from out of their great depths with such an honest, inquiring expression, that he had never met such a beautiful woman before. Even the stately Sibyl, with her raven locks and large black eyes, was nothing to her: no; he had never seen such a handsome face, such a perfect figure, such a noble brow. And yet, when he remembered who he was, and who she was, and the awkwardness of the situation in which he found her, he was able to conquer his feelings, and to look upon her almost with the eyes of a cold and indifferent philanthropist—and that proud, all-powerful, contemptuous, sensual man of fashion possessed such a wonderful power of self-control that at that moment even the jealous Alfredo need not have been afraid of him.

Would it always be the same? Ah, who could tell? Alfredo knew nothing of Lord Belgrave's visit to Bull Street, and the latter could have no possible idea that this lovely girl was the plighted wife of his dearest friend.

The Marquis knew the Spanish character too well to offer the Fernandezes money, which he knew they would be sure to refuse; besides, he feared to offend them, and this he would not have done for any possible consideration; so all he could do was to promise Miss Fernandez to speak to a few ladies of his acquaintance, who he thought would be able to give her some work, as she seemed so very anxious to do something to obtain a living for herself and her father, who was too old and delicate to work—a praiseworthy determination, which he could not but admire, though the mere thought of one so lovely working for her bread made him shudder. Yet he could hardly help admiring her courage; and the few

earnest words she said concerning herself raised her at once highly in his estimation. No ; he was sure he had never seen such a beautiful, such a virtuous girl before. After seeing her, how could he ever again admire Stella, or, indeed, any one ? Yet Consuelo seemed so pure, so angelic, so superior altogether to the general run of women, that he could hardly bring himself to think of her as a woman at all !

It was thus that Consuelo and Lord Belgrave met, as it was destined they should meet, in spite of Alfredo, who had determined that they should never know one another ; and that night the noble Marquis dreamt of the poor Spanish girl, and from that day her image remained engraved on his heart as the personification of everything that was true and good and lovely in womanhood.

CHAPTER IV.

SHE AND I.

(*Not by T. C. Hutcheson.*)

THE following morning Alfredo called at Bull Street to say "Farewell" to his Consuelo: he was going to leave England for America the next day.

Let it not be supposed that this was a resolution he had suddenly come to; he had been thinking of it for a long time past, and he had judiciously weighed in his mind all the advantages and disadvantages attached to this important step, that would inevitably influence all his future life.

He had come to England fully impressed with the idea of soon making his fortune; he had quitted his country and his friends for this praiseworthy object; he would no longer be a cause of anxiety to his family; he would live no more upon his poor father, who was now old and infirm, or upon his brothers, who had already families of their own to provide for: no; he would go to England—to England, the land of commerce and business—and make his fortune.

He had now been nearly four months in London, and what money had he made—what chances had he had of making any? On the contrary, although he had been

Lord Belgrave's guest all this time, and had seldom been allowed to pay for anything, yet he had managed to spend in little nothings sums that to him were of vital importance.

He had dropped, so to speak, into the midst of a set where the art of making money seemed to be altogether unknown, and where the art of spending it was practised with a prodigality altogether alarming to one possessed of his small means.

He knew that there was a place—somewhere beyond Temple Bar—where men did a great deal of business, and made large fortunes; but neither Lord Belgrave, nor any of the men he met at his house, could tell him much about it, and seemed greatly surprised when he began to ask them questions as to the best way of making money.

Lord Belgrave, though he loved him truly, and entertained a sincere friendship for him, and would have gladly done anything in his power to serve him, was not the man best calculated to give him advice on this subject. He would have wished Alfredo to have remained always near him. "You never need want for anything, you know, whilst you have me," he had often said. But all this was highly unsatisfactory. Alfredo, though he really liked the Marquis very much, and felt very grateful to him, could deceive himself with no vain illusions; he knew the immense gulf that divided all their aims and interests in life, though their feelings and sentiments were so very akin, and their tastes so similar.

As long as he remained in England he would have to be Lord Belgrave's guest—he could hardly leave his house when he prayed him to remain; and he knew very well that instead of increasing the little capital he had brought with him from Spain—all he possessed in the

whole world—he was only wasting it in the pleasures of an idle existence that for him could have no attractions, for he saw but too plainly how false and vain was this great world in which his friend would have had him live all his life.

He had therefore determined on leaving England, as he had before left Spain, to try if he would have more success in America.

Lord Belgrave rather approved of this move, though he was very sorry to lose his friend; yet, as he knew that it would be for his good, and that he could hardly oppose it, he gave him a few letters of introduction to men he knew in the States—men of business, who would be able to help him, and who he knew would be glad to do so to please him; for the worthy citizens of the great Republic are not quite as indifferent to the members of the aristocracy of the old country as one might suppose.

It had been therefore decided between them that he should go to New York for four years, and enter some business house in that city. Alfredo was pleased with the idea, and the only thing that caused him uneasiness or regret was the thought of having to leave his Consuelo. But then, as he knew very well, even if he remained in England he could not marry her. The very love he bore her only made him the more anxious to become a rich man. He had therefore determined to go; and when, on the day following Lord Belgrave's visit to Bull Street, he made his appearance there, it was to say "Good-bye" to Consuelo for the last time before leaving England.

Our lovely heroine had known his plans from the first, and though it was a great trial to part from him, yet she hardly dared to persuade him to stop; for she

knew only too well what his present position was, and how impossible it would be for him to marry her under such circumstances. She had dwelt so much on this sad subject that she had overshadowed her whole existence with a dark cloud of doubts, which even the sunshine of love was unable to drive from her heaven.

She never doubted his love for a moment—she loved him herself too much for that—but it seemed hard that they should be obliged to part, though it would be only for four years; and the more she thought of this, the more dreadful it seemed to her.

She was not therefore taken by surprise when he came to say "Good-bye" that Tuesday morning, for she knew that the vessel that was to bear him across the Atlantic was to leave Liverpool on the following day; but he found her in a state bordering on despair, and their interview, therefore, was a great trial to both of them, though they had been preparing themselves for it for some time past.

"The fatal hour has come at last, my Consuelo," he said; "I must bid you Good-bye."

After a preliminary interchange of everyday questions and answers, they had seated themselves by the window that looked out upon the poor cheerless street outside. Neither of them had dared to approach the dreaded subject until now;—one waited to speak, the other waited to hear. There had been a long oppressive silence between them—a silence during which the noises of the street below, the cries of the women, the laughter of the children, the chuckling of the poultry that were running about its uneven pavement, the tramp of a heavy-footed cart-horse, and the noise of a few distant carriages, even the humming of the flies on the

dirty panes of glass, had been plainly audible in the stillness—in the horrible stillness of their long silence.

When Alfredo at last mustered courage to speak, his words fell upon her ear like the reading of a death-warrant.

"A long good-bye!" she murmured, her eyes, dim with watching, weary with grief, yet still soft and beautiful as only Spanish eyes can be, bent sorrowfully upon her lover's troubled countenance.

He turned his head away—he could not bear to meet those entreating eyes; he pushed his black locks from his temples, and, struggling with the sickness of heart he felt, he murmured—

"I must go."

Then the thoughts that had rent her bosom for the last few days, and which had deprived her of sleep and rest, burst forth in a wild, incoherent speech.

"Alfredo, Alfredo!" she cried, forgetting all the promises she had made to herself to keep up her courage to the last; "if you knew how I love you, you would not leave me thus! Oh, I shall die if you leave me! Alfredo, don't go—stay with me—let us be happy together! Oh, Alfredo, I do not mind being poor; I can work. I am strong—indeed I am; but stay, stay! Oh, if you only knew how much I love you!"

It was not that she doubted him—oh, no!—but she believed him to be as much the master of his love as he was the master of all other feelings, and that their separation would not cause him half so much grief as it would cause her. In that she utterly misunderstood his character. He felt their separation quite as keenly as she felt it; but it was the fear of increasing *her* grief that kept him from showing his.

"If you knew how much it costs me to leave you—if you knew what I have suffered before I could take this resolution—oh, if you only knew the long days and sleepless nights I have passed, thinking of you and of our future—oh, Consuelo, dearest, you would encourage my departure; nay, you would yourself bid me go."

"I bid you go! Oh, never! I am a poor unhappy woman, though I once prided myself on my strength of character. . . . I cannot bid you go; no, darling, stay!—if you love me at all—stay with me!"

Alfredo took her hands in his, and pressed them convulsively against his beating heart.

"Do not talk so; for pity's sake do not speak so despondingly. If you go on like this I shall be obliged to stay, and that will be the ruin of us both. If you love me as you say you do, let me go. It is for your good that I leave you for a few years. I may make money enough to marry you in America; I shall never make it here. If I stay in London we shall remain forever in the same position we are now. Your father will never consent to our marriage."

Consuelo shuddered. She had not told her lover to what a state of misery they were reduced. Her pride—her natural Spanish pride—had caused her to hide from him the sad truth, and when he recalled to her memory her father's words—the words he had uttered on board the ship, when the hope of receiving assistance from his rich sister seemed almost a certainty—she could not help shuddering to think how greatly their position had altered since then, and how her father would certainly be the last to oppose her marriage, though it should be with a man as poor as Alfredo.

"Alfredo," she said, "you are greatly mistaken. Papa likes you, and I am sure he would not now disapprove of our marriage."

"You are hoping against all hope," he answered. "I spoke to him on the subject the other day, and he was as determined as ever. As long as I am poor I cannot aspire to your hand; but let me once come back with money, and then he has promised me that you shall be mine."

Consuelo had not told her father of the one hundred pounds she had given to Juan, partly because she dared not brave his anger, partly because she wished to hide from him as long as possible the faults of his beloved son. She was sure that had he known how little money they had left, he would not have been so hard on Alfredo, but would have gladly consented to her marriage with him; yet she dared not tell her lover all this, so she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

"Ah, Consuelo, do not cry, do not despair thus—you, who should be the one to offer me consolation! After all, what are four years? They will soon be over, and then we shall be for ever happy."

"It will be too late! No, Alfredo; let us be married now at once. I have a dreadful presentiment that if I do not marry you now I shall never be your wife! Let me be yours before you go; let me call you husband, and then go—I shall die, but I shall die happy!"

"Oh, my love!"

"You will marry me now?"

"No; it would be too bad to leave you, once we are married. Four years, Consuelo, might make a great change in your mind: your love for me might cool; you might forget me, or meet somebody you like better. No;

it is better we should part as we are—lovers, but nothing more. You have nothing to fear. I leave you in safe hands: your father loves you; he will take care of you. Remember that I hold myself engaged to you, though at the same time I leave *you* free to marry another if you find that you could be happier with him than with me.”

“Oh, Alfredo! Do you think I could ever be happy with another?”

“My darling! Ah, Consuelo, you are too lovely! I think that if I stay a moment longer I shall lose all my good resolutions and remain. No, I *must* go! I have not only to work for my own fortune, but for yours. In America I shall soon make a little money that will enable us to live happy. Our tastes are simple, you know, and in Spain a little money can be made to go a long way. Lord Belgrave has given me letters that almost assure me success; all I need is perseverance, and *that* I shall have, now that I have such a priceless treasure to toil for!”

“Lord Belgrave!” murmured Consuelo, half aloud. “Why don’t you introduce us to him before you go? He might be useful to us. You know he is rich, he is powerful. . . .”

“Useful to you! Ah, no; you do not know the world! He belongs to another class altogether. He is rich and powerful, it is true; but you, too, have rich friends. There is Mr. Jobkin, your cousin—he, too, is rich and powerful, and you see how much he cares for you, though you are his relatives!”

“But Lord Belgrave is kind and good, and has a noble heart, you say.”

“Ah, yes!” Alfredo replied; “he has indeed a noble heart and he is the best of men, the kindest of friends,

though the world calls him proud and selfish, and he seems so cold and so bitter at times. But do not think of him, Consuelo dear! The time is drawing near. I must leave you soon; do not let us talk of strangers at this, perhaps our last, meeting. I will write to you, often, and I shall expect you to answer all my letters. It will be such a great source of happiness to receive letters from you."

"But if I were your wife I might go with you," she said; the thought that was paramount in her mind again finding expression in words.

"Oh, my Consuelo! you—so delicate, so frail, so tender—you would perish! Remember that the life I shall have to lead will not be one of pleasure. I might have to go to California, or one of those uncivilized regions, and how could I leave you alone in a strange city? No; you must remain here with your father. Do not look at me. . . . Take this ring, and never part with it. If anything happens to you, look at it—it will remind you of me, who will always be thinking of you. As its circlet is without end, so without end will be my love for you."

As he said this he placed a little gold ring on her finger.

"It will never, never leave me—only with my last breath will it be taken off my finger!" she said, casting a long loving look at him through her tears; then, taking a little gold locket which hung round her neck with the smallest of gold chains—the only ornament she had left, for she had sold all the rest before this—she placed it inside his waistcoat, throwing the chain over his head.

"If you must go—if you must leave me—take this locket. It contains a lock of my own hair—my mother cut it off when I was a child, and wore it round her

neck until her death. It is the only *souvenir* I have left of her; take it; let it never leave you; let it hear every pulsation of your noble heart, every longing of your nature, that when you come back it may tell me all that you have suffered for me! Let it rest there where my hand has placed it. . . . It will give you hope and it will remind you of me of your Consuelo, who loves you!"

He was so moved that he could not answer her. He bent his noble head over her, and pressed his lips to hers. Neither of them could utter a word, but they remained for a long time with hands clasped, until it was time to go.

And thus Consuelo and Alfredo parted—perhaps never to meet again.

CHAPTER V.

LES MYSTÈRES MONDAINS.

(*Not by Adolphe Belot.*)

THAT night there was a great assembly at the Foreign Office, at which all the beauty and fashion of London were congregated; and the proud matrons of Mayfair wore their best jewels, and their clever husbands all their Orders, and the young ladies appeared in their prettiest dresses, and flirted with the young men, and talked delightful meaningless nonsense on the stately staircase, listening to the inspiring melodies of the band below; eating ices, and laughing and joking as if this world were a place where sorrow was unknown, and joy and pleasure the sole business of life.

There you might have seen the proud Duchess of London, with her great diamond coronet, and the lovely Duchess of Northland, with her large diamond cross, and a dazzling shower of brilliants in her hair.

There you might also have seen Mary, Marchioness of Bury, with her curls and her jewels, more tightly laced than ever, talking "City" with that modern Croesus, Lord Birmingham, while his pretty wife looked at her Ladyship's bright jewels, and sighed as she thought of hers, "the wonder of the world," which were shut up in a glass case in some distant exhibition.

And Miss Stefano, the great American belle, looking out for young Peers, and Giroflé-Girofla, the Transatlantic sisters, dressed exactly alike, and also on the look-out for elder sons, while those gentlemen glanced at them through their eye-glasses from over the banisters above, and wondered, with a "how?" and an "eh?" whether their ten thousand a year could be depended upon.

There, also, you might have seen Lady Tottenham, with her daughter—the poor Failure looking almost as supercilious and forbidding as her worthy mother, though I dare say she would have become as soft and amiable as you could have wished if any young man of fortune had condescended to speak to her. And Lady Windermere and her friend Lady Pencarlin (that lady who once is said to have sung comic songs in some third-rate provincial theatre, and now gets Royal Dukes and Royal Duchesses to dine with her), both of them ready to stand up for their friends' characters. They are so very careful of their reputation that they always discuss it in a superfine Mrs. Candour style that might have done honour to Sheridan himself.

Not to mention the lovely Mrs. Muleta, who, of course, is "not to be mentioned," nor the almost as lovely Mrs. Deanshome, whose worthy husband we met the other day at the Star and Garter, and who is said to be herself so highly respectable.

By-the-bye, all sorts of strange stories are told of the desperate efforts formerly made by this lady to gain the place she now occupies in the Mayfairian world—frantic struggles, desperate charges, wicked feuds, constant assaults, intrigues, cabals, and machinations, that would have done honour to the greatest General that ever lived had he been storming the most impregnable of fortresses

—which, *entre nous*, Mayfair society is not, though it looks so frowning and imposing to those outside. Yet, to get within the pale of this magic circle, people recur daily to the most desperate and costly of warfares. And I dare say the intrigues set afoot by Mrs. Deanshome to get into its outer courts alone would inspire even a Prince Bismarck with admiration.

Only the other day Lady Tottenham was talking to me about her, and her Ladyship said—of course in the strictest confidence (that's why I venture to give the story to the public)—

“When that odious Jewish woman, Mrs. Deanshome, was struggling to get into society—she had only mixed with tradespeople before, I believe—she was most anxious to be patronized by me, and asked Frank Howard—before my very face, at one of the Boston Gilbert parties, to which that lady told me she had been invited by a mistake—to introduce her to me, which he did, the silly fool! without so much as asking my permission. I was cold and distant, as I know how to be, though you would scarcely believe it, but I hate *parvenus*—when she had the impudence to ask me point-blank whether it was true that I received every Monday.

“‘Yes, madam,’ I said; ‘I am at home on that day to my friends.’

“I thought my answer would have told her that I did not want her; but imagine my indignation when on the following Monday I saw her coming into my drawing-room in a horrible red dress, that put my pretty pink satin—(one of Madame Tournure's last—I patronize no other dressmaker, I assure you) quite into the shade. I never even bowed to her, and kept all the time at the other end of the room, without deigning even to glance at

her, as if I were quite unconscious of her presence; but—would you believe it?—if she did not go and push up against Lady Verysopht, and make the poor silly old woman upset her tea over her flaming red dress! Lady Verysopht was obliged to beg her pardon and make excuses to her, and the odious Jewish woman graciously forgave her, after which they sat down together on the same sofa, and talked as if they had been the best of friends, when they had never even been introduced!

"The next evening I met her at Lady Verysopht's house! She had got an invitation from her, *bon gré, mal gré*, and she bowed to me with an air of triumph.

"This was three years ago—and now," said the poor lady, looking at me through her gold-rimmed eye-glass, and almost screaming with indignation—"and now—what do you think that wicked, impertinent, vulgar, odious upstart of a pawnbroker's daughter has done, after getting introduced into society *entirely* through me? She cut me two days ago at Chiswick, and never sent me a card for her ball last night, though the Prince of Wales was to be there, and she knows how fond my dear girl is of him!"

Yes; such is the strange truth. In the race of fashion, the resolute and enterprising Jewess has passed poor Totty! She, the daughter of a Marquis and the wife of a Peer, can only get second-class Royalty, as it were, to attend her parties, whilst the pretty wife of the little banker actually gets the Heir-Apparent to dance at her balls!

Her successes in the Mayfairian world may be traced by the sets of friends whom she has courted, beset, made, patronized, cut, and left behind her there. She has struggled so gallantly to get to the top of the ladder, that

she has almost reached the top steps now, pitilessly setting her little high-heeled foot upon the heads of those who stood in her way as she advanced past them, step by step.

She is so powerful now that she is said to have actually insulted Amy Danshery, for whom her husband leased a theatre, and sent her—after a scene with the little man—about her business to Paris. She would gladly, I dare say, send Mr. Deanshome thither likewise, for she has grown so refined and sensitive that the poor man must appear almost vulgar and common in her eyes—though it is not so long ago that she was only too glad to marry him to escape going upon the stage herself—but that he is a peg on which she still hopes to hang a few more honours, and is, after all, her banker. He is meek and content enough, so long as she lets him amuse himself with the young ladies of the ballet, and buy strange little pictures and old china, which he hangs over tapestry until he makes his house look like an old curiosity shop.

He is very rich, and his fall will be great, when he *does* fall, which I suppose he will one of these days; for I hear people are already taking their precautions to cut them before they do collapse, with their tapestry, and pictures, and old china, and all the rest of it; but at present she goes to all the parties and balls, exhibiting her family jewels (her father was a jeweller, I believe), and looking like a stately, proud, beautiful, dethroned queen.

Her daughters are quite grown up—at least, so the world says; but she is wise, and keeps them in the nursery upstairs, where all the old pictures and broken china go when they disappear from her drawing-rooms. I

wonder where she herself will go when Mr. Deanshome does break down!

But, to return to the party at the Foreign Office, I must not forget to mention Elizabeth, Countess of Twickenham, who, this being a Ministerial assembly, appeared there in all her glory, her damask rose cheeks becoming almost dazzling in the gas-light.

Sibyl and Geraldine were with her, the former looking as handsome as ever in a golden tulle dress, with corn-flowers amongst her raven tresses—the younger sister rather pensive, and evidently thinking of her handsome Don Juan, who was not there, though she had bothered her father until he had written for an invitation for him to Lord Villegrande, who, strange to say, had never received the letter—though Lady Villegrande could have told a very different story did we take the trouble to ask *her*.

Lord Edwin, of course, was there, and devoted to Miss Fetherstone, from whose side he could not now tear himself away; and Lord Clare—the young Irish Peer we met at Lady Twickenham's "Small and Early"—was almost as devoted to the younger Miss Fetherstone, in whom he had lately discovered an ardent, poetical, romantic nature, almost as sublime as his own. He has written a volume of spooney poems, with ink contained in an inkstand cut out of stone from Juliet's tomb at Verona, and with a pen, the holder of which is said to have been made of wood grown at Mount Ida, from the precise tree, he believes, under which the three goddesses appeared to Paris! He is as soft and sweet as any young nobleman can be who is yet able to bow to the fastest turf company in the park, and can drive a good bargain in horse-flesh down at Tattersall's. Yet Geraldine seems hardly

to enjoy his society, and while she talks to him about Lord Byron and his heroes, her thoughts are wandering in the direction of *her own* Don Juan.

These five individuals had been making their way slowly through the crowded saloons, and had now emerged on to the great staircase, under which the band was playing tantalizing waltzes, when just at that moment Lady Twickenham's searching eyes caught a passing glimpse of her beloved son, and her heart was gladdened, for she noticed that he was talking to Lady Isobel Clanfyne, and that the proud young lady seemed to listen to his words with a little more interest than she generally displayed when talking to strangers—especially since her brother married into the Royal Family.

Lady Isobel, the eldest unmarried daughter of the Duke of the Isles—that ambitious nobleman who writes theological treatises, and would fain be a Duke amongst the philosophers, as he certainly is *the* philosopher amongst the Dukes—is a striking, statuesque, antique-looking young lady, with a mouth always suggestive of prunes and prisms, and a profile fit for an ancient Venus that has not been too much repaired. She is amiable enough and lively enough when she is amongst her equals—but then—who are her equals? The nobility whom she cuts—or the Royalty who cut *her*? This is the question the poor girl is always asking herself; no wonder that at times she should be as solemn and silent as the precious antique statue she so resembles.

Her younger sister is certainly prettier and more amusing, and the question, whom she should consider her equals, does not seem to trouble her so much; yet one cannot help thinking that if she could be induced to forget whose daughter she is, and whose sister-in-law she

has become, and would dance round dances like other girls, and not look over people's heads who happen to be taller than she is, she would be one of the nicest young ladies in London.

But our business—or, rather, our hero's—is with the elder sister, and it was with a weary heart and a careless tone that he talked to her that evening. He thought of the pretty Stella, who knew nothing about rank and precedence, and who had never in her life spoken to a Royal personage, with whom he could chaff and crack jokes as he would with a school chum, and say and do anything that came into his head without fearing to incur her displeasure. Lady Isobel was grandly condescending to him, and certainly was statuesque, and refined, and highly bred, and all that, and yet he could not help thinking her a confounded bore all the same, and wishing himself in Stella's villa by the river, instead of in Downing Street amongst Dukes and Princes and their proud daughters.

But his mother had begged of him to pay his court to Lady Isobel, so he was doing his best to please her—though, at the same time, he had made up his mind not to marry her.

Lady Brightly, who was coming up the staircase as he and that young lady were going down, remarked to Lord Malise, on whose arm she was leaning—

“Look at Charlie Twickenham trying to make people believe that he is making love to Lady Isobel Clanfyne. I wonder what her father, the pew-opener, will say to that.”

“The pew-opener!”

“Yes; don't you know? Isn't he the Lord of the Isles; and, on the other hand, doesn't he write treatises

on *isms* and *ologies* to induce clever folks to go to church?"

Lord Malise laughed at the joke and then went on with the interesting conversation which Lord Twickenham's appearance had interrupted—viz., whether Harlequin would or would not run at Goodwood.

Lady Twickenham and her step-daughters were also coming down the staircase at that moment. The Countess was leaning on Lord Belgrave's arm, who was talking to her about Consuelo, and trying to interest her in the poor girl.

"She is very pretty, you say?"

"Yes, very."

"Ah!" and her ladyship looked at him with a malicious smile playing in her expressive Jewish eyes.

Lord Belgrave coloured. "Yes, she is pretty, certainly; but I believe her to be a good, honest girl, ready to work for her bread."

"She is Spanish, you say?"

"Yes. I wish you would do something for her. You see, I can hardly give her my coats and trowsers to make, and it would insult her to offer her money as a charity."

The Countess again looked at him maliciously, but seeing how seriously in earnest he seemed, she replied—

"Very well; send her to me to-morrow, any time after lunch. I'll try to be at home. Of course, you know, I have all my dresses from Paris; but yet, as you say she is Spanish, she might make a mantilla for me, or something of that sort, you know. I'll give her something to do, at all events, to please you, Lord Belgrave." Then, looking at him once more and smiling, she exclaimed, "Oh, you wicked men!" and then changed the subject.

Their carriage was called at the park door, and a few minutes afterward the three ladies were taking their places in it, encouraged and complimented by a familiar linkman, to whom the Marquis gave a shilling as he told the coachman to drive on to Preston House.

The two young men—Lord Clare and Edwin—followed them in their respective broughams.

CHAPTER VI.

FASHION AND PASSION.

(Not by the Duke Oh yes ; this time it is by him.)

It was a great ball at Preston House. The entire set of state apartments had been opened for the occasion, and everybody was there—at least, everybody that was anybody.

The immense ball-room was full of people when Lady Twickenham entered it with the Misses Fetherstone, and the crowd was so great that they soon got divided, and Sibyl, who had taken Lord Edwin's arm, found herself alone with him in a distant corner, from which it was difficult to see precisely where Lady Twickenham and her sister were.

Sibyl was as much in love with Edwin as ever she had been. He had never seemed fairer or gentler in her eyes ; during the last fortnight he had been her devoted slave—he had dedicated himself entirely to her—but, somehow or other, his love, which she had once thought the most precious thing the world could offer, had lost much of its value in her eyes.

He had been her constant attendant. Not once had he spoken to Lady Juliet Standish during that fortnight, and yet she was not quite pleased with him. She had

never spoken of their adventure in the Argyle Rooms, where she had first declared her love for him ; and he, with natural delicacy of feeling, had of course shrunk from approaching the subject, though it was always in his mind, and he could hardly think of aught else.

She, too, often thought of that night ; but to her it was always an unpleasant thought, one that she would have given anything to forget. She accused herself of having gone too far ; she accused herself of having shown her own weakness to a man whose great merit in her eyes lay precisely in his weakness.

Her vanity, which at first had been aroused, and the desire she had then felt of cutting out her friend and rival, had now been completely satisfied—all London knew that she had only to say one word to become Lady Edwin Beauville, and make the man she loved her slave for life.

But would the honour of being his wife be indeed so great ? she asked herself. And, after all, did she really love him as she thought herself capable of loving ?

These were two questions difficult indeed to answer.

Since her childhood she had felt (and this feeling had been encouraged by all her relations) an unexpressed but all-consuming ambition, that made her restless without giving her any real food for her mind.

She was the beauty of the family, and she knew that great things were expected of her. Now, could a marriage with Lord Edwin, a second son, with only a few hundreds a year, and no career or expectations of any kind, be considered a good marriage ? No ; there could not be two words about it. It was not the match which her family, or indeed she herself, would have wished, and yet she tried hard to think that it would be grand and

noble to marry a man, without any regard for his position or his means, simply because she loved him. But then the question again arose, did she really love him? Of course she loved him; but did she love him enough to make such a sacrifice?

She was a woman of a strong mind, though by no means a strong-minded woman—that is to say, that she did not think, like so many American young ladies, that women should be doctors and surgeons and lawyers, nor did she even wish to have the privilege of voting at general elections; but she was a woman who, had she been born in the days of old, would have plotted and conspired with all-consuming zeal—a woman who would have led a party, and intrigued, and even fought, if necessary, to obtain her object. Had she been born in the days of Nimrod, she would have been a second Semiramis. Had she been born in Imperial Rome, Emperors would have trembled on their thrones at her gaze. She might have conspired with the Ghibelines, and done honour to the cause; or she would have joined the Fronde, and intrigued at Versailles or the Escorial, in the days of the great monarchs who ruled supreme in those glorious palaces. Prince Charlie or Don Carlos would have found in her a devoted partisan, one ready to die for them.

She was a woman who would have made any “cause”—provided she could fully sympathise with it—her own, and lived for it, died for it, and at her death left a glorious name behind her. Her true lover should have been a hero. Could she have found such a man she would have devoted herself to him body and soul: she would have kept up for him his seditious correspondence while he lay in the Bastille; she would have carried on his conspiracy, had he been shut up in the Chatelet itself; she

would have accompanied him to the Tower, and deemed herself happy to have mounted a scaffold by his side! She would have liked to have gathered around her ardent spirits, men who could have sympathised with her, and who would have talked of "the cause," and have kept alive in her the flame of the political fire that had become her life.

As it was, she had no "cause;" in steady-going, prosperous, matter-of-fact, cautious, commercial England, she could have none. Her father was a Minister, yet his political views were very mild; she herself scarcely knew what they were. All she knew was that they had no interest for her, and whether the Liberal-Conservatives or the Conservative-Liberals were in power, seemed to her altogether of the smallest possible importance. Edwin had, so to speak, no politics; he had sat as Member for the Beauville boroughs when almost a lad, and had been defeated at the first election after his father's death by a rising brewer, who bought over all the publicans, and declared himself an out-and-out Liberal, while *he* was only a Moderate-Liberal. He knew no more, and cared less; he had thought the House a great bore, and was not sorry, if the truth must be told, to get out of it.

In what enthusiasm could she indulge with such a man? "I dare say he will make a devoted husband, and never cross or contradict me in anything, but what on earth are we to do with ourselves once we *are* married?" She had put that question to herself that very morning; perhaps she thought too much of these things, and, I dare say, was over prudent in calculating the chances of happiness she would enjoy as Edwin's wife, for she knew she would be poor, and that if she married him she

could never hope to become the queen of fashion she had once so longed to be.

As she stood beside him that night, in that great ball-room, surrounded by the wives and daughters of the rich and powerful aristocracy of the land, she kept thinking of these things in spite of herself. Had any one told her that she was afraid of having to quit these saloons, in which, since her coming out, she had been one of the reigning belles, she would have declared that she despised them too much to care for them. Had it been whispered to her that she loved fine dresses and precious jewels, she would have scorned the whisper. Had any one suggested to her that the flattery and the compliments of men, and the continual excitement and noise of society, were necessary to her happiness, she would have said that that person knew very little of her character. And yet, at that moment her eyes were fixed upon the lovely Lady Birmingham, and she almost envied her her position, and her laces, and her jewels, although she had so often laughed at her husband, and had accused her over and over again of having sold herself, to obtain those paltry things, to a man whom no woman could possibly look up to or respect.

The band at that moment struck up the *Manolo waltz*, and a cold shiver ran both through her and her companion as those entrancing strains reached their ears. Lord Edwin was so impressed that he said, almost involuntarily—

“Doesn't that air bring sweet reflections to your mind, Sibyl?”

It was the first allusion he had dared to make to their adventure at the Argyle Rooms. Sibyl flushed scarlet as he said this, and turned her head another way not to encounter his gaze.

"Forgive me if I have offended you. I never intended to remind you of that night; but, you know, as I date my present happiness from it, I can hardly forget it."

"Even if *I* were to ask you to forget it?"

"Ah, Sibyl, you could not be so cruel. You know how happy you *then* made me—do not make me miserable *now*."

"Oh, that horrible waltz!"

"You used to love it, once!"

"Yes—once!"

"Come, you love *me* still—you know you do—you confessed it yourself; and I always loved you—always shall love you. When will you let me call you mine?"

"Don't speak so loud—remember we are not alone," and her voice faltered.

"But if we love each other, why should you wish to hide it from the world. Everybody must know it one of these days, when we are married."

"Married!"

"Oh, Sibyl, does that idea make you shudder?"

"No; but don't let us speak of it now. See, there is my aunt, Mrs. Lovel, I must go to her; we are not dancing, and people will wonder that I should go about without a chaperon."

She left him to join her aunt, and soon afterwards he saw her dancing with a man he did not know; he was, in a general way, gentle and peace-loving, but at that moment he could have killed the man.

When that dance was over he again approached her, and asked her for the next, but she had already engaged herself for it, and Lady Twickenham had told her that she would leave immediately afterwards. Edwin turned round on hearing this, and went away in a huff.

That night the two sisters were sitting in their dressing-gowns, having a little chat before going to bed. Their conversation was naturally all about the ball they had just left. Geraldine, who had done nothing but sigh for her Juan—who had not been there—was rather low-spirited.

"Do you know, Sibyl," she said, "that I am beginning to hate society?"

"Nonsense!"

"Yes; it seems strange, my first season too; but you must agree with me that all these parties and assemblies and balls are most unsatisfactory."

"I suppose they are; yet I rather enjoy a good ball."

"Ah, yes, when Edwin is there!"

"Edwin! Why, I never once danced with him the whole night!"

"And you pretend to love him, Sibyl!"

Sibyl remained silent, and unfastened the heavy coils of her jet black hair, which fell over her beautiful shoulders in wild disorder.

"I cannot bring myself to believe," continued Geraldine, as if pursuing her own thoughts aloud, "that the highest aim in life is to shine in ball-rooms, and attract the attention of men whom we have never even seen before, and whom we do not care in the least about."

"Indeed! that thought never struck me before!"

"Papa thinks that the least I am made for is to become a peeress!"

"And pray what *was* Geraldine Fetherstone made for?"

Geraldine remained silent for a second. "I cannot answer the question," she faltered, rising, and walking towards her sister. "I fear—only for discontent and

old-maidism—and yet, I could make such a devoted wife, such a good mother!”

Sibyl rose now in her turn, and taking her sister's hands in hers, she sighed; then, looking straight into her eyes, she said, in a hurried voice—

“Geraldine, I think you are wrong in dwelling so much on these subjects. I wish I could forget them. Love—love—what is love? A deity that requires continual sacrifices, and can give us nothing in return! I am sure we should be much happier without it. I cannot help thinking that we have, both of us, given too much thought to the subject. As girls even, we dreamt of love; our books, our conversations, our plays, were full of it. We considered it the aim of our existence; we grew up to dream of nothing sweeter or dearer, and yet the moment we come to the actual experience of this much-longed-for passion, what do we find? That if we wish to obtain, if we desire to enjoy, its pleasures, we must sacrifice every thing else to it, every thing that we had been taught to look up to as the blessings of life. We find ourselves between the two great attractions, Fashion and Passion, and nine times out of ten we end by being wretched and miserable for life. Ah, believe me, Geraldine, this is not the world in which we should preach up too highly the felicity or the philosophy of love!”

Geraldine had been listening intently to her sister's words, gazing earnestly upon her changing countenance as she spoke. When the last sentence had left her lips, she smiled scornfully, and answered, with an ill-disguised tone of contempt—

“That is because you have never really loved. You have no idea what love is, and therefore cannot give an opinion. You judge of the whole world by the narrow

conventional circle in which we live, and you say that we are happier without love! What can you know of the world—of the wide, great, beautiful world, where everything is love, and joy, and happiness, and where the pettinesses and cant of society are drowned in the universal harmony and the general whirlpool of love!"

"I suppose it is that precious Juan who has put those ideas into your head."

"No—the ideas were always there; but it is he who has taught me to give them expression."

"And you love him?"

"As you will never love, Sibyl—nay, as you will never be loved, though you are so beautiful, and so accomplished, and so fascinating!"

"Geraldine, Geraldine! mind what you are about. You know nothing of that man, he may be an adventurer, an impostor . . ."

"An impostor! *he*—my Juan?"

"Love has blinded you. I shall say no more; I know it will be of no use, and that were I to prove to you that he is a base impostor, a mere fortune-hunter, you would not believe me; but I shall take very good care not to become blind myself in the same way. I have only one hand to give; I shall think twice before I give it to any man, however much I may love him. Passion is all very well, but as we live in society we cannot afford to break through all the rules of Fashion. Good-night, Geraldine; I hope you may not wake to find how mistaken you have been in your choice, though Fashion is a slave and Passion a god. You have chosen to sacrifice yourself to the god, give *me* the slave I can command."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISOWNED.

(Not by Lord Lytton.)

JUAN was not in love with Geraldine. It was perhaps that very fact that gave him such wonderful power over her. He did not love her; he was not a man capable of ever feeling such a noble, tender, unselfish passion; but she loved him with heart and soul, and she was the daughter of a Minister, and at his death would inherit the half of his property, and he was only, as Sibyl had rightly guessed, a penniless adventurer, a fortune-hunter, who had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

But he was handsome, wondrously handsome, and he possessed that kind of dark manly beauty which most women admire: not the soft, gentle, sweet fascination of a Lord Edwin, but the stalwart, muscular frame of a strong, powerful man—the clearly cut, perfect features, the dark, deep-set, keen eyes, and the dare-devil expression of a man at whose will everything and everybody must give way, though that will would most likely be expressed in a soft tone and with an irresistible smile.

Never had Geraldine seen such a handsome man; and when he devoted himself to her, and spoke in those rich

soft accents of the South, pouring all the entrancing poetry of romantic Spain into her enchanted ear, she believed herself the happiest of girls, and all her dreams of love and romance seemed realised.

Never had Juan burnt incense on the flimsy altar of maiden vanity to better purpose than he was burning it at present.

Geraldine was not a beauty; she had nothing to attract the attention of most men, and few even took the trouble to render themselves pleasant to her; so Juan had no rivals. Her family, too, seemed to take little care of her, and hardly seemed to notice the decided marks of preference she showed for him on every occasion; so he had everything in his favour, and was left undisturbed to the easy task of gaining her love.

Geraldine, I must add, though she was by no means a great prize in the London matrimonial market, where alone heiresses and beauties can hope to obtain great matches, was always the daughter of one of her gracious Majesty's Ministers, and at his death would come into a very nice little fortune, so that for Juan she was a great catch, and one for which he might well toil and exert himself during a whole London season.

The morning after the ball at Preston House, of which I spoke in the last chapter, Juan met Geraldine riding in the park. He was living now almost altogether with her step-brother, Lord Twickenham, to whom he had contrived of late to render himself indispensable, and it was one of his horses he was riding. He rode well, and looked exceedingly graceful and handsome on horseback; besides, on this occasion his natural colour had been increased by the exercise, and his eyes seemed to have acquired a deeper and more brilliant expression.

Geraldine was riding with her sister, and, on seeing him, checked her horse, when Juan, observing her desire to speak to him, left the men to whom he had been talking—friends of Lord Twickenham, who wanted to know all about Stella, of whom they had heard him speak so much—and, joining Geraldine and her sister, rode the rest of the morning with them.

About one they returned home, and Juan accompanied the young ladies to Carlton House Terrace. Having gone so far with them, it would have been rude not to have invited him in, and it was Sibyl who asked him to come in and rest, an invitation which he was not likely to refuse. He accordingly left his horse with their groom, and went into the house with them.

Sibyl went immediately upstairs to take off her habit; but Geraldine said she would lunch as she was, and, opening the door of the library, led the way into that room, where Juan followed her.

There was a piano there, and without any ceremony he sat down and commenced the celebrated duet from *Faust*. He played with a great deal of taste, if not brilliancy, and could throw much expression into what he played. Geraldine was fond of music, and loved to hear him, so she drew a chair close to the piano and listened to the music almost enraptured.

"How lovely that is!" she murmured to herself. "How sweet, how melodious, how full of expression and sentiment. I can hardly wonder at Marguerite's love for *Faust* when he sang such lovely things."

"You like it?"

"Do I like it? Could anything be more lovely?"

"Then I'll sing it for you."

Knowing well that the Italian words would be lost

upon her, he improvised some English verses which he thought would go well with the melody, and sang them, throwing all the pathos and passion of which he was master into his rich baritone voice.

"How lovely—how lovely!" repeated Geraldine as he sung.

At the end of the first verse Juan stopped singing, but went on playing, and while he played he said, in a voice whose soft cadence adapted itself to the music so that his words seemed almost part of it—

"Love is like a beautiful melody, which delights our hearts while it lasts, but when it is ended leaves us sad and melancholy."

"And why should it ever end?"

"Ah—why? Real love should be immortal; but it requires a great soul to love thus. Do you think you could love—love for ever?"

Geraldine flushed as she bent over the piano, and said, in a low but laughing voice—

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I think I should die if I thought you would one day forget me. My first, my last, my only love!" he added, turning from the piano and encircling her gently with his arms. "Geraldine, I love you! I love you! What more can I say? All the poetry of Goethe or Byron could not say more."

Geraldine remained silent, but allowed him to press his lips to her forehead.

"Geraldine, my angel—my all in all—do you think you could love me as I love you? They say the cold daughters of your country cannot love. Do you think you could prove the contrary?"

Geraldine replied an inaudible something, as she hung half fainting with confusion on his breast.

"And you will be mine—mine for ever?"

"Oh yes, for ever!" she whispered; and he pressed her passionately and repeatedly to his heart—to that heart that was able to remain cold and unmoved, even at the sight of so much innocence and maidenly devotion!

A slight noise was heard in the next room, which was Lady Twickenham's morning-room. Juan started, and, fearing to be surprised by the Countess in such a position, hurriedly led Geraldine to a seat, and seating himself once more at the piano commenced another song. But he had scarcely played the first chords when a cry was heard from the next room, a stifled exclamation, which seemed to come from one in distress, and caused them both to stare and turn cold.

Juan rose, and, walking straight to the curtains, which alone divided the two rooms, with a firm hand quietly drew them aside and disclosed—to his intense horror and amazement—his sister Consuelo, who, deeply affected by what she had overheard, and trembling with excitement, flung herself into his arms.

Geraldine started back in her chair, and in a trembling voice exclaimed—

"Juan—Juan! Great God! what does this mean?"

Consuelo was the first to recover her self-possession.

"Young lady," she said, advancing towards her, "this is my brother."

"Your brother!" faltered the bewildered girl, casting an anxious look of inquiry upon her lover.

Juan could neither see nor hear at that moment. All his nervous energy seemed to have given way in one minute, and he stood there pale and mute as a statue.

"This cannot be—it must be a mistake! How came you here?"

"This is Lady Twickenham's house, is it not?"

"Yes. How dare you come to it?"

"Her Ladyship sent for me. I was to come at half-past one. I came, and was asked to wait in that room, when I heard my brother's voice, and could not restrain an exclamation—I was so surprised, so startled. Lady Twickenham was to give me some needlework to do."

"A sempstress! and you call yourself—presumptuous girl!—you call yourself my Juan's sister!"

"Your Juan?"

"Yes, *mine*! I care not who knows it—I love him!" she exclaimed, rushing to him and taking hold of his arm. At that moment she would have done anything, if it had been only to prove to her sister how she could love. "Juan, Juan," she then added, "speak to me; say you do not know her; say you have never seen her."

Consuelo, on her side, also very much excited, took hold of his other arm, and, shaking him convulsively, she cried in an agonized tone of voice—

"Juan!—brother!—do you not recognise me?"

The Spaniard looked at one and then at the other; his heart was sorely tried. At last he gathered courage, and muttered, half to himself, half to his unfortunate sister—

"Who the devil are you? Let me go; what do you want with me?"

Geraldine cast a look of triumph upon Consuelo.

"You see, girl," she cried, "he does not know you!"

Consuelo was too much overcome to hear her; she took her brother's hand in hers, and cried—

"Oh, Juan!—dear Juan!—do you not know me? Are you indeed fallen so low that you can deny your own

sister?—the sister who loves you, the sister whom you once so dearly loved!”

Juan suffered greatly all this time, for though he had little heart, yet the little he had belonged to his sister. She had always been so good to him, and he had always looked up to her as to the one being superior to all the rest, whom he could almost have worshipped. Yet he dared not fall into her arms now, as he would so gladly have done, for he knew how he would sink in Miss Fetherstone's estimation if he acknowledged her as his sister.

There was a silence of a second or two, but it was a silence that seemed to last a whole century to the three, bewildered as they were by such contrary emotions.

“Tell me, Juan, tell me the truth—is this woman really your sister?”

The Spaniard looked first at his sister, who, poorly, nay, shabbily dressed, stood beside him, tremulous and anxious; and then at Geraldine, who was standing before him in her riding-habit, with her large grey eyes fixed inquiringly on his face, with a look which told him how much she loved him, how ready she would be to sacrifice everything for his love; and turning towards her he exclaimed—

“No, no; I do not know her!”

Geraldine uttered a cry of joy, and Consuelo one of despair. The poor Spanish girl covered her face with her hands and wept silently, while the now radiant English young lady, taking Juan's hand, said to her in a cold, pitiless voice—

“Go; leave the house this minute—go!”

Consuelo's pale, care-worn cheeks grew paler still; but she left off crying, and looked calmly at the disdainful

face turned towards her, though her voice trembled a little as she spoke, and she was obliged to lean on a chair for support.

"I go. Juan, I forgive you," she added, looking at him with more pity and compassion in her look than contempt. "Vanity has blinded you. You do not love this young lady—I know it; I can see it in your eyes. May God forgive you as I forgive you!"

"Go, I tell you, or I shall call the servants that they may turn you out!"

Consuelo grew ashen pale and her limbs shook; but her eyes did not lose their resolute, frank clearness of expression, and she replied, with a dignity almost unexpected in one so young and sorely tried—

"I go. I have nothing to forgive *you*. You love him. May God have more pity for you than you have for me!"

Geraldine could contain herself no longer. She left Juan, at whose side she had remained all this time, and approaching the fireplace, rang the bell with such violence that a footman rushed into the apartment almost immediately, thinking that something dreadful had happened.

"Show this girl out, James," was all Geraldine said, and she turned her back upon them.

Consuelo walked straight to the door with a firm step, though the tears were once more gathering fast in her large liquid eyes, and almost prevented her seeing.

At that moment Lady Twickenham and Sibyl appeared at the door; the furious ringing of the bell had alarmed them, and they came in anxious to know what was the matter.

Consuelo never even noticed them. She passed by them, and opening for herself the hall door, left the house without looking back.

"Who is that woman?" inquired the Countess of the younger Miss Fetherstone. "How came she here?"

"I don't know. It seems she came to see you. She is a sempstress, I believe."

"A workwoman! Why, that must be the poor Spanish girl whom Lord Belgrave wanted me to employ. James, run after her. I must see her."

Geraldine would have stopped the servant if she had dared, but Lady Twickenham's will was law in that house, and she dared not say a word in opposition to it.

The footman, however, came back saying that the girl was nowhere to be seen, and Geraldine once more breathed freely.

"Strange! strange!" muttered the Countess. "How very extraordinary to run away like that, without even saying a single word to me! Ah, Mr. Fernandez! Glad to see you! You will stop and lunch with us?"

Juan was so overcome with the scene he had gone through that he would not accept this invitation for fear of betraying himself; and so, making the best excuse he could, he left the room, and soon afterwards the house.

When he had gone, Lady Twickenham again remarked how strange it was that the Spanish girl Lord Belgrave had so recommended to her, and begged her to employ, should have gone away without even speaking to her.

Geraldine, who dared not tell what had happened, but who yet felt a great wish to know something about her, inquired of the Countess, in as careless a tone as

she could command, if she had any idea what her name was.

"Yes," she answered, "he told me that her name was Consuelo—Consuelo Fernandez. Strange! it is the same name as that of Don Juan. I had not thought of this before—but I believe it is a common name in Spain."

Geraldine turned deadly pale, but remained silent.

CHAPTER VIII.

DON JUAN.

(Not by Lord Byron.)

AND this was the brother for whom she had sacrificed so much !

Consuelo had now reached the climax of her misfortunes. She could indulge in no more hopes of ever reclaiming her brother, of ever bringing him back to the paths of honour and virtue. After the scene at Carlton House Terrace, she knew that he was lost to her for ever, and, what was still worse, lost to his better self.

Her grief for him was so great that the noble girl even forgot her own sorrows thinking of him, and the image of her Alfredo faded for the first time from her mind.

In her despair she actually accused herself of having contributed to his fall. "Perhaps I was too hard with him," she cried. "I ought to have been a mother to him, instead of a younger sister ; I should have guided him, instead of allowing myself always to be guided by him ;" and then she exclaimed, "I should never have given him those notes ; it was that that finished him. If we had never come to England ; if we had remained in Madrid, where we were so happy, he would still have been the noble-hearted man he was there, instead of" She dared not say the word, even to herself.

The poor girl believed that if Juan had never come to London, that centre of everything that is wicked, as her father called it, he would not have imbibed that passion for gambling which she saw only too clearly had now taken entire possession of his existence.

She was mistaken, however; the evil seeds were already in his heart before he left Spain. Had he remained in Madrid, had he never left the little circle in which he had first begun his wicked career, he would have certainly done less harm, because his sphere of action would have been more circumscribed; but would he have been one particle less guilty? Ah, no! men with evil instincts will always be wicked men—let them be born peasants or kings—let them live in a desert or in the cities of the world. No surroundings, no education, no amount of good example, or affection, or love, can ever give a heart to the man who was born without one, though they can influence greatly those who have one.

And yet Juan was not devoid of all feeling. He loved his sister—at least, he respected her, which is the nearest approach to affection such a man could feel for any one—and he had had a hard struggle in his mind before denying her as he had done; but he had set his mind upon winning Geraldine's hand, and he knew that if she even suspected the poor shabbily-dressed girl who had come to ask Lady Twickenham for employment to be his sister, he would have fallen so much in her estimation that it would have been quite useless to have pressed his suit. "It is another case of the Lady of Lyons," he said to himself; "the proud and rich Pauline must not know that the fascinating Prince of Como is only a poor man until she has married him."

At the time of this adventure—which so nearly upset all his plans and ruined his cause for ever with Geraldine Fetherstone—Juan was living with Lord Twickenham in his rooms at the Albany, those gorgeous oriental chambers which that young nobleman had taken from an Indian Prince. He had now become his bosom friend; in fact, he had played his cards so well that the youthful Earl hardly dared to choose a coat or buy a horse without consulting him first.

Lord Twickenham was not a bad sort of fellow, but he was very weak, or rather, he found it too much trouble to make up his mind for himself, so he always liked some one to decide for him, fondly imagining that this relieved him from all responsibility, and left him free to amuse himself as he liked; but this very disposition made him at once the slave and the tool of the first man who took the trouble to flatter him. Now Juan understood him thoroughly, and could turn him round his little finger; so he managed to live almost entirely upon him, to borrow his money, and win enormous sums from him at cards and billiards, pretending all the time that he sacrificed himself to give his friend pleasure; and only giving him in return that off-hand sort of flattery which men can give with so hearty an appearance of cordial admiration, and which young men prize perhaps more than any other. "You certainly are the best-dressed man in London, Twickenham. You are an awfully nice fellow, you know. Oh, do you know, Charlie, what Stella said of you the other night?—she said she thought you 'a devilish handsome chap!' You have certainly turned the girl's head; and she is beautiful, by Jove!—the prettiest girl in London, there is no doubt of *that!*"

Stella was Lord Twickenham's one great passion. He was a gay butterfly, as I have said before, and he flew from flower to flower, sucking the sweets of each without caring much for any one in particular. He had tasted all the pleasures which the world could offer to one in his station, and his means; he had enjoyed every one of them thoroughly, and had got rather tired of them—but Stella had been the fatal flame round which he had hovered so closely that he had finished by getting his wings scorched, and was now really very much in love.

The very day of Juan's unfortunate *rencontre* with his sister, Lord Twickenham, driving with him in his tandem to Hurlingham, began as usual to talk to him of Stella.

"What a cursed bore it is," he said, "that my mother wants me to make love to that statue of a woman, Lady Isobel, who doesn't care a straw for me, any more than I care for her. It seems such bosh altogether; and yet I suppose I shall end by marrying her!"

"Why need you, if you do not love her?"

"Love her! How could I love her? No; it is Stella I love—Stella, and no one else. I wish I were rich enough to be altogether independent of my mother!"

"Ah, by-the-bye, you will want the five hundred pounds you lent me, one of these days," Juan said, in a careless tone.

"Why, yes, whenever it is convenient to you."

"Say no more; I had no idea you were hard up, old man. Do you know that Stella took me aside the other day, and asked me to tell you that she had received the brooch you sent her, and that she will wear it always, as it will remind her of you; but that she dared not write to thank you, for fear of Lord Belgrave, you know."

"Confound that fellow! How can she care for him!"

"But she doesn't; I am sure she does not care a pin about him."

"Then why does she look so cold and serious whenever I speak to her?"

They had entered the narrow winding lane that leads from the road to Hurlingham, and Lord Twickenham, who was not very much accustomed to drive tandem, was forced to go slowly, for fear of accidents. Juan leant over and whispered in his ear—

"Charlie, if you will help me in my love affairs I'll help you in yours; and, trust me, Stella shall listen to you, and with pleasure."

The young Earl's face brightened. It was one of those fair open faces that one smile could light up, and render almost beautiful.

"Charlie, I love Geraldine!"

"I know it; I guessed it from the first."

"If you speak to your step-father, he may consent to our marriage. You might influence him through your mother, you know; if not, I am afraid he will never consent, and both Geraldine and I will be miserable for ever."

"Nice girl, Geraldine, is she not?"

"Ah, yes, a charming girl. And you have her happiness in your hands, Twickenham—her happiness and mine," he added, pressing his hand.

"And you think Stella will love me?"

"Yes; I promise you that before the week is over she shall be yours."

"Why, there is Lord Carisbrooke and Scavage, and Eglantine Rosefield, and a lot of others, going to dine with her next Sunday!"

"Would you prefer to dine with her alone, instead, on that day, in a comfortable little boudoir at Duran's?"

"Rather!"

"Very well, then; you agree to the bargain?"

"Yes; I'll do all in my power to help you to marry my step-sister—but here we are."

The carriage drew up before the door of the clubhouse, and the two men entered it arm-in-arm.

"By-the-bye, old fellow," Lord Twickenham was saying, "don't distress yourself about that trifle, you know—a few months hence will suit me just as well. I say, hadn't we better look in at Stella's villa on our way home; we might find her alone, you know."

"No," answered the Spaniard, as they disappeared inside the house; "leave it all to me—I'll speak to her."

CHAPTER IX.

GOLDEN FETTERS.

(Not by Mark Lemon.)

IT is a long time since I have spoken of Mr. Jobkin, and, though not a highly interesting man in himself, the part he plays in this book is so important that I think I had better say something about him before my readers forget him altogether.

In spite of all Lord Twiston's endeavours to get his son elected Member for Brightborough—and in spite of that wonderful plan of Ferrers-Stoneleigh, which was to ruin Mr. Jobkin's prospects by weakening his party and splitting the votes of his constituents—the millionaire had managed to get elected for that fashionable watering-place, and was now what he had so longed to be—a Member of Parliament.

The *Gazette* had announced Mr. Jobkin's election, after a sharp but decisive contest. "The Ministerial journals" had rung with exulting pæans; the Opposition ones had called the electors of Brightborough "garrulous old fools," "meandering cockaboos," "unworthy citizens," and all the other hard names which they usually employ on such occasions, and had declared that Mr. Jobkin had bought over all the electors—which, after all, was not so very untrue—and that Mr. Twiston would

petition. But he never did, and Jobkin remained an Honourable Member, though, perhaps, in not a very honourable way.

His great ambition had not yet been realised. With his large handsome house in Grosvenor Square, and in his position as Member of Parliament, he could command any society he liked—at least so he fondly imagined—yet his rank in the world was hardly defined. He knew this; he felt it at every party he went to. People invited him because he was rich, and gave balls and receptions to which it had become the fashion to go; but this did not prevent their snubbing him whenever they got the chance, and Jobkin was a proud man in his way, and felt their conduct, yet dared not complain.

"It is a pity," he remarked one day to Mr. Thomson, the only one of his old friends he had not cut; "it is a pity that in this liberal and go-a-head country personal merit should be so much overlooked; it seems to me that a man who has risen from the ranks by his own talents, and enriched himself honourably and honestly, as I have done, and is ready to employ his wealth to the best advantage of his fellow-citizens, should be despised and over-looked, while a little insignificant boy, who never even pays his tailor's bills, and who has only a few acres of moor somewhere in the north—and even those mortgaged—is looked up to and courted, simply because he 'appens to be a Lord."

Thomson smiled; he knew his friend's weakness, and pitied more than condemned him.

"Mrs. Boston Gilbert advises me to marry a woman of high rank. What do you think, Thomson—Lady Hethelbreda Gwendoline Berengaria Jobkin would not sound at all bad, eh?"

"It certainly sounds well, but I wonder what it would feel like."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, that I do not think it can be very pleasant to be married to a woman one has to look up to, and who most likely scorns one, and laughs at one behind one's back."

"Do you think any woman would scorn *me*, or laugh at me if she were my wife?"

"Well, I suppose not; and since rank can be bought for money, I certainly don't see why you should not have a wife with a title as well as other people."

"There is that snob Schletter—see what airs he gives himself because he married an Earl's daughter—he is always put before me at all the dinner parties, and he is not half so rich as I am!"

"Well, Jobkin, you can always marry a peer's daughter, if you like. I dare say there are plenty who would be only too glad to have you."

"I should say so!" Mr. Jobkin replied, with all the supreme dignity and pomposity of a City magnate; and he opened the Peerage which lay on his drawing-room table, and began to look through it in search of a wife with a high-sounding name.

What a wonderful book that is! I really do believe England owes all her grandeur to it. To have their names inscribed in its pages seems to be the aim of its greatest men, if seldom their beginning; and the old English cry of "Death, or Westminster Abbey!" seems to have changed into the more general one of "Ruin, or a Peerage!" It is altogether a "noble book," and perhaps that is the reason why it sells almost as well as the Bible in this Lordolatrous country.

Mr. Jobkin was particularly fond of the Peerage. No novel, however sensational, possessed for him the attraction of that book, and I really believe that he would have given half his fortune—so much did he think of it—to see his name in its sacred pages.

Mrs. Boston Gilbert—the pious lady to whom he owed his entrance into society—wanted him to marry the daughter of a Catholic peer, and tried hard to convince him that they were the oldest and most distinguished families—but Mr. Jobkin was not very anxious to be converted, and preferred seeking a wife amongst the Protestant nobility.

He had often met the Cowes's in society, and ever since that day when little Cyril Scholl introduced him to Lady Cowes at Prince's, Lady Juliet Standish had been first in his thoughts. She was a very elegant-looking girl, with the manners of the best world, and the daughter of an Earl, to use his own words. She had quite won his fancy—perhaps because, being essentially a good-natured girl, and unfortunate in her little love affair, she had not made as much fun of him as young ladies generally did; and he was conscious of this, though he would not have admitted it—no, not even to his friend Thomson.

He took a long time to consider all the advantages he might gain by such a marriage, and to calculate its exact cost, for he was a very cautious man in all commercial transactions, and matrimony with him was quite a business matter. At last he came to the conclusion that he could not do better than marry Lady Juliet. One of his great ambitions was to have a yacht, and become a member of the Yacht Club at Cowes. Now Lord Cowes was all-powerful there, and would naturally help him on if he became his son-in-law; so this scheme seemed to him

a great point in the young lady's favour. Besides, though not so very rich as to despise his wealth, the family was free enough from debt, as he had taken very good care to ascertain, and he need not be afraid of having to pay off any mortgages for them. Altogether, he came to the conclusion that he could not do better than marry Lady Juliet Standish.

The thought that she might refuse him, never, of course, entered his head—but how should he manage to propose to her? That was the difficulty. He was not a very expansive man at the best of times, and he was too well aware of the great disadvantages of his speaking powers to trust himself entirely to them in such a serious and important matter as this. He might express himself so badly that the young lady would think herself compelled to refuse him, though she might be dying to marry him all the while. It must be difficult, under the most advantageous circumstances, to propose to a girl whom we scarcely know, and for whom we do not feel the least love; but Mr. Jobkin found it especially so, and after turning the subject over and over again in his mind, he decided to speak to Lady Cowes first, and ask her to tell her daughter.

Accordingly he called upon the Countess one afternoon, and made his proposal *en règle*.

Lady Cowes was rather taken by surprise, but was certainly more pleased than otherwise; she knew how rich Mr. Jobkin was, and how much he was thought of in the City, where she herself transacted some small business in a quiet way from time to time; and, after the usual questions and answers, she asked him in a business-like manner, which quite won his heart, what settlements he was prepared to make. "You know," she said, "that we

are not very rich, and what with having to keep up three country houses and a town house, and two yachts, and horses and carriages, together with travelling expenses and servants, and all the other innumerable things expected of people in our station, our income dwindles down at the end of the year to a very small sum indeed—so you see that much as we should wish it, it will be utterly impossible for Lord Cowes to give his daughters any marriage portion.”

“I do not ask it,” Mr. Jobkin answered. “I am prepared to make the most liberal settlements, I assure you, Lady Cowes. If Lady Juliet Standish condescends to become my wife, she shall have my house in Grosvenor Square, and five thousand pounds a year settled on her, and I shall make a will on my marriage-day leaving her everything I possess—if I die without children. I have no family of my own, and am therefore quite at liberty to dispose of my fortune as I think best.”

This was said in such a pompous manner that Lady Cowes could not help smiling; but the settlements seemed so splendid that she promised to tell her daughter of his generous offer, and to do all in her power to influence her to accept it.

What Lady Juliet's answer was, my readers will see in a subsequent chapter. I must now return to my other heroes.

CHAPTER X.

A RENT IN A CLOUD.

(Not by Charles Lever.)

THE Sunday on which the dinner at Stella's villa was to take place arrived in the course of time.

Lord Belgrave repaired to that fairy-like retreat with his brother early in the evening—for he wanted to be there before any of his guests arrived, as he knew that Stella was little used to receive much less to entertain company—when, to his great surprise, he found that she was not at home.

"She went out early in the afternoon in her brougham, carrying a few parcels with her, and she've a-bin out ever since, my Lord," the servant informed him.

"Strange," he muttered, "that she should stay out so late, and especially when she knows so many people are coming to dinner."

He entered the dining-room to inspect the table and see that everything was in its proper place. The plates were all of the oldest Dresden china, and the centre-pieces were of cut glass, and so were the candelabra; altogether, it would have been difficult to see a prettier dinner table—though of course there were none of those monstrous silver dishes and that old family plate which

would have been displayed upon his dinner-table at Beauville House. Lord Belgrave was pleased with the arrangements—which, by-the-bye, in his own home he would have left entirely to the good taste of his butler—and taking his brother's arm, went out through the open window into the garden, and lighting a cigar, walked down the terraces towards the river.

It was a fine summer evening, but the sky was clouded, and the heat was so oppressive that a storm seemed imminent. Since the setting of the sun a few streaks of lightning had rent the fast-closing darkness—they might be only caused by heat—but yet they looked threatening on such a close dark night. The river was perfectly smooth—not a ripple was to be seen anywhere upon its wide surface; and, for a wonder, there were hardly any boats upon it, though it was Sunday evening, and the heat of the long summer day must have drawn many persons from their houses in the City towards the green fields on the banks of the Thames.

Lord Belgrave and his brother walked silently along the terrace which overlooked the river. They, too, seemed oppressed, as if by the presentiment of an approaching storm, and felt little inclined for conversation. Yet this was the first time they had been alone since that night when they had dined together, several weeks ago; and since the letter which the elder brother had received on the following morning from the younger, asking him not to call upon Lord Cowes, as had been arranged between them the previous evening he should do, thanking him for his generosity in offering to provide for him, but at the same time declining it, which letter had not yet been mentioned by either of them. Lord Belgrave had guessed that something had happened to his brother,

and that it must have occurred that very night, too, which had caused him thus suddenly to change his mind; yet he hardly liked to ask him, and indeed he had only met him in company with other men, when it would have been impossible to have had any private conversation; and now the time seemed to have passed altogether for explanation, and he hardly liked to approach the subject at all. In all probability something of the same kind was passing through Lord Edwin's mind at that moment, and it was this, perhaps, that made them both so silent.

"What must he think of me?" Lord Edwin was saying to himself. "I dare say he considers me a confounded fool—and so I am, perhaps; and yet at this very moment I would refuse a thousand fortunes to have such an adventure as I had that night, and hear Sibyl confess her love for me."

Yes; he would gladly have given up even, as he thought at that moment, "a thousand fortunes" to hear Sibyl's passionate avowal again—for he was a disinterested man, though a poor one; and yet I hardly think he would have been so ready to give up Lady Juliet's hand now, should it have been proposed to him. No, perhaps not even for Sibyl's love; for he knew her better by this time, and was able to appreciate at its true value that love which he had once considered beyond all price.

"No; I shall never have the courage to tell him all," he said to himself; and yet he would have gladly opened his whole heart to his brother, and asked him again for his advice—the good advice which he had so soon forgotten that night.

Lord Belgrave was also thoughtful—he was troubled

with profound doubts about Stella. This night he was going to introduce her openly to his friends as his acknowledged mistress. He had taken her to dinners at the Star and Garter and at the Trafalgar before, but merely as a friend. In the eyes of men she was not his until he had openly told the fact to all his friends, and received them in her house. This night he was going to entertain them in her villa for the first time. He was going, so to speak, to throw open its doors to the criticisms of the scandal-mongers of the whole world, and this idea made him thoughtful and almost sad. Yet he could not but confess to himself that his love for her had vanished. Indeed, had he cared for her as he had done at the beginning, he would never have dreamed of inviting his friends to sit at her table. It was precisely because his love had cooled that he cared less whom she saw, and had consequently consented to introduce her to that fast set which has constituted itself the centre (at least in its own opinion) of the fashionable world, to which he belonged perhaps more by his rank and fortune than by any natural inclination.

Circumstances had made him a man of pleasure, and as such he was almost forced to do as the others did; but in his heart he could feel no sympathy for such society, and consequently derived but little pleasure from it. In the great world where he lived—I say great world, because it is emphatically called so in our state of society, though in reality it forms but a very small portion indeed of the world—women are divided into two classes: those whom men must amuse, and those who must amuse men. He had been so besieged and disgusted ever since his first appearance in society by the former, that he had lately been compelled to turn,

when he wanted female society, to the ranks of the latter, almost against his wish, and certainly against his natural inclinations.

Stella he had admired at first for her innocence and natural grace. Her child-like beauty had attracted his attention, and her simple unaffected manners had won his admiration. But he was scarcely a man on whom such allurements could exercise more than a mere passing attraction; he felt now that his heart had been always free. Stella had pleased his fancy, but certainly had not touched his heart. "I shall never love as men should love," he thought; and, strange to say, whenever he said this, the chaste, pure, most supremely beautiful image of the poor Spanish girl he had seen in the squalid lodging-house at Bull Street, Soho, appeared before him. Could it be that he loved her? No; he would not even entertain such a thought. She was too pure, too innocent, too good to become his mistress; too obscure and low-born to make his wife. He would think no more of her; and yet, in spite of all his good resolutions, in spite of his usual strength of character, in spite of the great power over himself which he possessed to such an extent, and which he exercised so mercilessly, he could not banish that girl from his mind—perhaps from his heart.

As he walked slowly up and down the terrace with his brother that evening, his thoughts, strange to say, were oftener with Consuelo than with Stella, though everything around him must have reminded him of the latter, and his imagination must necessarily have been troubled with the thought of her absence, which was, indeed, most unaccountable.

Time passed and she came not. Eight o'clock had

struck some time ago on the great clock of the neighbouring church, and she had not made her appearance, nor yet sent any message, which she would most likely have done had anything happened to her.

"The people will be here now directly," Lord Belgrave said, speaking for the first time. "She won't have any time to dress. What can make her so late?"

"I can't imagine," his brother answered suddenly and stopping his walk, for his thoughts had been with Sibyl and Juliet all this time—"provided she has not come to grief," he continued, thinking that his brother would expect him to say something under the circumstances.

"She would have sent some message if anything had happened; and yet perhaps not—she is so careless, and her horses are very spirited: I told her so only the other day; but she would have thoroughbreds!" he answered, his feelings, strange to say, hardly disturbed by the suggestion of an accident.

A bell rang at that moment, and through the trees Lord Belgrave saw that a carriage had drawn up to the front door. "There she is at last," he said to his brother, and he walked towards it.

It was not Stella, however, but Lord Carisbrooke and Eglantine Rosefield. Lord Belgrave was very much put out, but gave his arm to the actress and entered the house, for heavy drops of rain had begun to fall, and a storm was every moment more imminent.

The other guests now rapidly arrived one after the other, and the whole party had assembled, but no Stella!

Lord Belgrave explained how matters stood, and asked what he should do. They only looked at each other in astonishment and laughed.

Mlle. Sclavage, who had arrived the last, and wore a most wonderful dress, all yellow satin and gold, seemed very impatient.

"*Allons, becqueter,*" she said, in her usual *argot*; "*ou je me la brise moi.* I can't wait any more for my dinner, *détalons.* I dare say the 'Star of the East' won't come this half hour; and I am used up—*parbleu!*"

"I think it will be more polite to wait, though, for the lady of the house—it is early yet," Lord Carisbrooke suggested, with his usual politeness. But the ladies said they could wait no longer, and insisted on going into the dining-room at once. So in they went, and sat down at the table. Lord Belgrave ordered the dinner to be served without waiting any longer, and they were soon all talking and laughing as if the principal person had not been missing. In fact she was so little missed that Lord Belgrave had almost forgotten about her when one of the servants handed him a little note.

He took it hastily, for he knew what it must contain, opened it, and read it through. It must have been very short, for he was but half a minute reading it; yet, as he glanced at it, a great change came over his handsome face—his fair features seemed suddenly to darken terribly; his eyes, generally so cold and indifferent, shot fire; his lofty brow frowned, his cheeks flushed, and his lips became deadly pale under his light moustache; but he soon recovered his self-possession, though not before every one had noticed the change, even those who had not seen the servant hand him the letter.

Lord Belgrave crushed the note in his hand, and thrust it into his coat-pocket.

"Is it from her?" Sclavage said to him, breaking the oppressive silence which the arrival of the note had caused.

"No," he answered calmly; and then, turning round so that all his guests should hear him, he said, with that air of indifferent hauteur which he could at times so well command, and in a loud clear voice, "something *has* happened however, and she will not be here to-night. I beg of you to excuse her presence, and to make yourselves as comfortable as if she had been here to entertain you."

He seemed easy in his mind, tranquil and self-possessed; yet so forbidding and serious in his manner that no one dared to ask him any questions; and to hide their own curiosity, each one began talking aloud to his neighbour, and the noise and laughter were soon more general than before.

"You look like a Raphael to-night," Mr. Deanshome said to Eglantine Rosefield, who was sitting next to him, and who was dressed in a picturesque costume, in which the dressmaker had evidently tried to imitate some old Italian picture.

"Raphael!—who's he?"

The little banker started in his chair.

"A painter—don't you know?"

"No. I dare say *he* knows me, but I don't think I know *him*."

"Why, he is one of the Old Masters, Eglantine, you little fool," shouted Lord Carisbrooke, from the other end of the table.

"Indeed; the Duke de Saisons promised to take me last winter to Rome, to be painted by one of them 'old masters,' as you call them, but he never kept his promise."

I should almost be induced to believe that Eglantine feigned an ignorance of which she was not really

guilty, in order to make people laugh, and perhaps with a view of restoring the gaiety of the party. However the case may be, her little *bêtise* proved highly successful, for it produced a general roar of laughter, and the incident of the letter was soon forgotten.

The party was a very merry one, and was kept up until a late hour. Scavage was as brilliant as ever, and every one tried to out-do the other in amusing the company. Lord Belgrave alone was rather silent, and at times seemed altogether unconscious of what was going on; but no one noticed this—at least, if they did, they pretended not to—and when, at a late hour in the morning, they said good-bye, they all assured him that Stella had not been missed at all, and that the dinner could not have been a more jolly one had she been present—a fact which seemed also to strike him forcibly and dissipate some of his gloom.

When Mr. Deanshome approached him to say good-bye, he remarked what a pretty house it was, and how much he liked the decoration of the rooms.

"Do you really like it?" Lord Belgrave said, with an inquiring look.

"Exceedingly; I have long been in search of a villa in this style, but I am afraid I shall not easily be so fortunate as you have been, Belgrave."

"If you really admire this villa, and would like to have it for what I gave for it at the beginning of the season, you may have it to-morrow."

"How?—what do you mean? You don't mean to say you would sell it?"

"Yes, even at a loss—I am tired of it!"

"But Stella?"

"Stella is tired of it, and I am tired of her!"

"But you may want it for some one else."

"No; I do not intend to offer it to any one else; so if you like it you may have it. Send your man to my agent's to-morrow, and let them arrange it between them. Good-night."

Mr. Deanshome looked at the Marquis inquiringly, but seeing that he would get nothing more from him, shook hands, and went away with Amy Danshery, whom he had promised to drive home.

The weather had now cleared; much rain had fallen during the night, and there had been a great storm; but now the clouds were fast breaking, a cool fresh breeze had sprung up, and the sun's first rays were seen gilding the fast-dispersing clouds in the direction of the open fields beyond the waters of the Thames.

When all his guests had departed, Lord Belgrave opened the French window of the pretty little drawing-room and went out into the garden. The fresh air was most grateful to him, and an expression of relief and happiness stole over his handsome countenance. "Thank God," he murmured, "they have all gone, now I can once more breathe freely."

His brother, the only one who had remained, had followed him through the open window, and heard these words.

"Bel," he said, coming up to him, "what's amiss with Stella?"

Lord Belgrave turned round towards him. There was already enough day-light to allow Edwin to see that a great change had come over his brother's face, but this time it was a change that seemed to soften his expression, and rendered his handsome features more pleasing than ever.

"Don't speak to me about her, Edwin," he said. "You'll never see her any more."

Edwin started. "Why?—what has happened?" he exclaimed.

His brother said nothing, but took out of his pocket the letter he had received during dinner, and handed it to him. Edwin unfolded and read it. It ran thus—

"You need not wait for Stella—she won't dine with you to-night. If you want to see her, you will have to go to Lord Twickenham's house in future."

It bore no signature. Edwin's pulse beat furiously as he read this, and when he had finished the laconic epistle he looked up at his brother with an expression of mingled amazement and indignation; but Lord Belgrave was perfectly cool and calm, his features seemed carved in alabaster, and were as impenetrable, by that pale uncertain light. Edwin looked once more at the strange note in his hand, and read it through a second time. It was more than his brother had done.

"Bel," he cried in a tremulous voice, when he had perused it again attentively, "this has been written by that fellow—that Spaniard, Juan! I know his handwriting."

"Very likely," answered Lord Belgrave coldly.

"I always was afraid of him. If you remember, Bel, I cautioned you against him long ago. So she has run away, and with a friend of yours, too!"

"Yes; with my best friend—the man for whom I entertained the greatest esteem! I suppose it is the way of the world."

"You take it philosophically, by Jove! I wonder you can be so indifferent."

"Edwin, I assure you that I am by no means indifferent, but heartily glad."

"Glad! Glad that she is gone—after you have done so much for her, after all the money you have spent upon her! I cannot understand you."

"Yes, I am glad. It has been a lesson I shan't forget in a hurry. It was wrong of me to have loved her at all. I wish I had followed Alfredo's advice. I deserve what has happened; he predicted it. Henceforward I shall shun such society, and turn to the higher, truer paths of life. Believe me, I pity Charlie Twickenham more than I condemn him. I bear him no ill-will; nor do I even to that scoundrel Juan, who has been at the bottom of the whole affair. I feel much happier this morning than I have felt for a long time! Ah, Edwin, never again will I sink so low in my own esteem. I have sinned, but I shall do so no more. See, the bright, pure sun of a new day is rising—the darkness and the storm fly before it. Believe me, I shall do my best to render my life in future as pure and cloudless as the day it announces!"

CHAPTER XI.

A LIFE'S ROMANCE.

(Not by Charles Lever, either.)

LADY COWES lost no time in informing her daughter of Mr. Jobkin's proposal.

She enumerated all the advantages such a marriage would give her. She left nothing unsaid that might have induced her to accept him, and yet Lady Juliet remained unmoved.

"I do not care in the least for Mr. Jobkin. I cannot love him!" was all she answered.

"But, my child, think of the position he offers you; think of his wealth, and of his generous settlements."

"I do not care for money."

"I am glad to hear you say so, my dear; but yet you can hardly be indifferent to the things money can procure."

"It cannot procure happiness."

"Well, perhaps not, but it can increase it." She remonstrated in vain, for Juliet was determined not to marry Mr. Jobkin, though he was so immensely rich, and had offered to make her such splendid settlements.

"I could not marry a snob!" she said the next day, when her mother again broached the subject.

"How often have I told you, Juliet, not to use that common, vulgar word!" she cried indignantly.

"Very well, mamma dear, I shall never say it again; but, believe me, by any other name Mr. Jobkin will be equally snobbish!"

Her sister, Lady Maude, also tried hard to convince her of her folly. "You will never have such a chance again," she said.

"What a chance! You seem to have forgotten how you laughed at him the day he was introduced to us at Prince's, and said you wondered how they could have elected him."

"Did I say so?"

"Yes, you did, indeed; and I even recollect the pun you attempted to make on the occasion. 'I suppose,' you said to Lady Windermere, 'he has slid so much and so successfully upon thin ice in the City, that now he has got up in the world he wants to try his luck at rinking in Belgravia.'"

"Ah, I remember now; and, by-the-bye, I also remember how you defended him, and said that you thought him very gentlemanly, and not half so common as people pretended."

"You know I hate to hear people abused. I would not speak ill of any man, nor yet make fun of people whose sole fault lies in being unaccustomed to the usages of society; but *that* is not a reason why I must marry the very first *parvenu* who proposes to me!"

"Mr. Jobkin is a *parvenu*; but I suppose so at first were all our ancestors, of whom we are now so proud. I assure you, I, for one, do not think the worse of him for *that*!"

"Jobkin! what a name!"

"He can change it, you know," Lady Maude suggested, who was anxious that her sister should get married.

"Oh, yes; and become a Lord too, I dare say; but that won't make him a gentleman!"

"Well, he is wonderfully refined, considering—and I am sure he looks like a gentleman, and behaves like one."

"A man has no business to look like a gentleman if he is not one at heart; and I am sure no one ever thought of calling a gentleman's behaviour gentlemanly: it is a proof that the man is not a gentleman when his actions strike one as gentlemanlike. I never heard any one say that Lord Edwin behaved like a gentleman!"

"Always thinking of him!"

"Well, if you speak of a gentleman, I am sure you can hardly help thinking of him."

As will be seen by this, Juliet still believed Lord Edwin to be the one perfect model by which all men should be judged. Although she was now almost convinced not only that he did not love her, but that he loved Sibyl Fetherstone, her heart was still his. She had made no effort to forget him—perhaps because she felt that such a thing would have been impossible—and she still entertained a lingering hope, such a hope as true love alone can give, that he would some day discover her love for him, and forget even the beautiful Sibyl for her.

But it is difficult to hope against hope, and the poor girl grew thin and pale and miserable, thinking of him; yet there was still in her enough of the pride so natural to her sex to recoil from acknowledging her weakness—though in her eyes it was by no means a weakness, but rather a passion to be proud of—this hopeless, yet ever hopeful, love of hers. Had any one asked her if she

loved, she would have answered that she did not; but had any one spoken of Edwin Beauville, they would soon have guessed by her confusion, by her blushes, by the tone of her voice, more perhaps than by her words, how much she loved him.

Of course, her mother and her sister were fully aware of this. They had watched the passion as it grew in her breast from the very first; and though Lady Cowes knew but too well—like the good mother and wise chaperon she was—that Lord Edwin would be a very poor *parti* for her daughter, yet she had not the heart to forbid her thinking of him, or still less for taking any active measures to prevent it, but preferred allowing things to take their course, fondly hoping that the girl would see her own folly, and, when the time and the opportunity came, would marry according to her wishes.

This opportunity had now arrived; but things had been allowed to go too far. Juliet would not be persuaded to forget her Edwin, even though her sister assured her that he had forgotten her; and, in spite of prayers, persuasions, and even threats, declined the hand and the fortune which Mr. Jobkin had so generously offered her.

"You will never have such a chance again!" said her mother, sighing as she folded the note which Juliet herself had written to Mr. Jobkin, thanking him for his offer, but declining it.

"Then I shall remain for ever an old maid! I can't understand the prejudices people have against old maids. I am sure all the old maids I know seem as happy as the day is long, and have nothing to trouble them or give them any anxiety."

"Yes; but they also have no one to care for them."

"Do you think Mr. Jobkin cares for me? Ah, no! He has never seen me except in company, and even then he has only spoken to me half-a-dozen times altogether. No; he only cares for my title!—for my title, just think, mamma dear!—for a thing that is hardly a part of myself, and that four years ago belonged to some one else! Ah, no, he does not care for me! If I had thought that he loved me, I would have sacrificed myself and married him, and even pretended to love him, because I know what it is to love, and can pity one who loves without being loved in return!"—and the lovely girl sighed deeply—"but as it is," she added, rapidly passing her hand over her large blue eyes, which were full of tears, as if she would have banished a painful thought from her mind—"but as it is, he will soon forget me, and marry another girl who may happen to be a Peer's daughter, and who will suit him just as well. I do not pity him—he does not really love!"

It was now the eyes of Lady Cowes that were filled with tears.

"My child," she said affectionately, taking her hand in hers, "you are sad—you suffer—can you not forget that boy?"

Lady Juliet said nothing, but burst into tears.

"A penniless young fellow like that! And yet you love him?"

"I do not; who said that I loved Edwin?"

"Edwin! Your own words condemn you; what made you conclude that I was thinking of him? Ah, Juliet, it is useless to try and deceive me; you love Edwin Beauville!"

"And is that a reason why you should abuse him, and call him a penniless young fellow, as if it were his

fault that he is but a younger son? Boy, indeed! He is a man, and has proved himself a hundred times a man!"

"He is but a boy, all the same, though he seems so grand in your eyes."

"Oh, mother, mother, between you and Maude you will end by killing me! Let us speak of something else."

The letter was sent to Mr. Jobkin—though Lady Cowes tried hard once more to alter her daughter's decision—and from that day his name was only mentioned in the house as that of a mere acquaintance; but Juliet often thought of him in silence, and wondered what her family would say if Lord Edwin were to make a similar proposal, and what she herself would feel!

Time, however, passed, and Edwin rarely made his appearance in their house, and when they met at parties kept away from her, and hardly ever spoke. It seemed as if he did this purposely. "Perhaps Sibyl has asked him not to come near me, and he fears to displease her," she thought; and the mere thought made her suffer intensely.

She grew pale and thin, she hardly ate at all, and seemed to take no pleasure in anything she did; she went to balls to please her mother, but she seldom danced—she said it was too hot to dance—and when she did, she hardly spoke to her partner.

Oh, how often, when we are dancing with a lovely girl, to whom we have perhaps longed to be introduced, are we half-disgusted to find that she has nothing whatever to say, and pronounce her at once a namby-pamby school-girl, without a second idea in that lovely head of hers! Ah, how little do we think that perhaps while she is dancing with us she is thinking

of some one else—perhaps watching him as he whirls past her, holding in his arms a hated rival !

Perhaps those “budding misses” cited by Byron, who seemed to him so shy and awkward, and so much alarmed that they were quite alarming, and cared so little for what he said to them that he accused them of a nursery odour of bread and butter, were at the time lost in sweet reveries of a more passionate, more vehement nature than even he could have imagined ; and their giggling, blushing, half-pertness and half-pout, was only a mask put on to hide the deeper, all-absorbing feelings that were burning in their hearts.

Oh, how little we know, what even those we pride ourselves on knowing best, really are, and feel, and think. How little we know what passes in the hearts of those lovely young maidens we meet every night in the ball-rooms of Mayfair, or every afternoon under the trees of Belgravia. We set them down at once as clever or stupid, slow or fast, when we have not spoken half-a-dozen words to them, and, perhaps—nay, most likely—they were thinking of something else, or looking at some one else, all the time !

The men who were introduced to Lady Juliet Standish about this time, and who had the privilege of speaking to her and dancing with her, found her, I dare say, a very silent and uninteresting partner, and went off to their clubs or their mess, to tell everybody that she was a silly girl, who had nothing to say for herself. “Ah—well, yes—pretty enough, but confoundedly slow, you know !” And yet Juliet was anything but a silly girl ; she was as clever as any, and as well read and as instructed as most—but she was in love ! And though she did not roam through the woods in white satin, or rave through the

streets calling down the vengeance of heaven upon her rival's head, nor yet make any frantic scenes in the ball-room, as jealous heroines are apt to do in novels, she suffered all the pangs of jealousy, perhaps the more intensely because she had to suffer them in secret.

Her mother became anxious about her—and who could wonder at this? Poor Juliet had lately grown so thin, so pale, and so nervous, that she determined to call in a doctor—the usual resource of mothers in such cases, I believe. The medical man came, but of course could do nothing for her; though, being more of a man of the world than such men generally are in novels, he was not long in discovering the cause of her malady, and told the truth to her anxious mother, who, rather than lose her daughter, consented to do anything, even to speak to Edwin herself, and propose to him that he should marry Juliet!

“We must see what we can do for her,” she said to her husband, who had always been against a marriage with Lord Edwin. “If not, she will slip through our hands like the Juliet in the play, and before long she will get married to him without any settlement whatever, or else she will—die! I should not be surprised at anything now, since I have lived long enough to see a girl refuse a man who proposed settling five thousand pounds a year upon her to spend on her dress alone, and a handsome house in Grosvenor Square, with sixty thousand a year to keep it up, as I believe Mr. Jobkin has.”

Had Juliet been consulted, she would never have consented to her mother's speaking to Lord Edwin about her. She was too proud to submit to any such humiliation, as she would have considered it; but she was not consulted on the subject, and before she was aware of

any such arrangement, Lady Cowes had seen Lord Edwin and asked him *his* intentions respecting her daughter—putting the question in such a delicate, ladylike manner, that no man could have been offended.

Lord Edwin, who, of course, ignored the state of the case, and merely imagined that the Countess wanted to catch him—though he was such a small prize that no one, with the exception of a rich American banker, whom he had once met travelling in Italy, with three plain daughters, had ever tried to capture him—answered in an evasive manner, and told her, what was only too true, that there had never been anything serious between himself and Lady Juliet.

He liked her very much; a something indescribable, but yet always apparent, in her voice, in her looks, in her general manner, told him that she was not indifferent to his merits, and that his graceful figure and fair features, and languid, gentle, almost affected, yet at the same time reckless, manner, had pleased her fancy, perhaps touched her heart. Yet he believed himself engaged to Sibyl Fetherstone, and he would have considered himself the greatest wretch that ever lived, if, after that adventure at the Argyle Rooms, he had dared to speak of love to any other woman; so he promised Lady Cowes never to speak to her daughter again, so as not to give people room to talk (the plea on which the Countess had based her inquiries), and assured her that he did not love Lady Juliet, and never had loved her. After which he drank another cup of tea and left the house.

Lady Cowes was greatly pleased and yet greatly displeased, if I may be allowed to express myself in such a contradictory manner. She was pleased at the idea of having put an end to such a foolish affair, as she still

persisted in considering a marriage between her prettiest and youngest daughter and a second son without fortune; and at the same time she was much piqued to think that this very man had actually refused her daughter's hand. Besides, she was perplexed to know what to do. She must break the news to Juliet, for, as long as she believed it was only her parents who opposed the match, she would go on loving him, and the consequences might be fatal. So that night she told her eldest daughter, Lady Maude, what she had done, and asked her to break it to her sister, which she did as gently as she could—yet the blow was a heavy one. All Juliet's hopes and longings came suddenly to the ground, and the fall was so great that it quite stunned her.

Then the words uttered by the unhappy Mary Stuart, and addressed to Edwin as the fickle Earl of Leicester, in the play they had acted at the beginning of the season, came back to her mind with all their awful meaning:—"Farewell, and, if you can—live happy! You have dared to aspire to the hand of two Queens; you have despised a tender and loving heart; you have betrayed it to gain a heart proud and haughty. Go, fall at her feet, and may your recompense not turn into a punishment!"

But she could not again repeat the word "Farewell," and, uttering a cry of despair, she fell half-fainting into her sister's arms.

From that day a great change came over her. She never smiled—she rarely spoke—she never complained, but fell into a slow yet alarming decline, that made all her family despair of her life, and obliged them to quit England for a milder climate, where the doctors said she might perhaps recover.

CHAPTER XII.

DAMES OF HIGH ESTATE.

(Not by Madame de Witt.)

MR. JOBKIN had never in the whole course of his life been so put out—not even when the great American house of Bull and Thunder had fallen, and put all his affairs into such a mess—not even when his monstrous ball at Willis's Rooms proved such a failure that he actually read in the newspapers people boasted of not having been there—no, he had experienced many reverses, but none like this! His hand had never been refused before—never; and he would take very good care, as he informed his friend Mr. Thomson—who unfortunately knew of his intended proposal to Lady Juliet—that it should never be refused again.

“But I must show those people that I can get a wife without them,” he exclaimed, soon after reading Lady Juliet's letter. “I must be married before the end of the season, and to a woman more worth having than that washed-out girl, who seems half-consumptive, and dares to write this school-girl nonsense to me!—to a Member of Parliament!—to a man of my wealth!”

With a despairing air, he once more turned his attention to that valuable catalogue of fashionable and eligible

young ladies—the Peerage. But, unfortunately, he hardly knew any of the young ladies mentioned there who, by their age, rank, and personal charms, might suit him—for Mr. Jobkin was not going to put up with a plain wife, even if she were a Duke's daughter.

There was the Lady Flora—the pretty daughter of the Duke of Northlands—who was pronounced charming by everybody, and would do capitally; but then, he had never been introduced to her—he had never even seen her, though once he had gone to a ball at Preston House, to which Mrs. Boston Gilbert, after no end of difficulties, had managed to get him an invitation.

There were the two daughters of the Duke of London, who were also said to be very pretty, and who would do in every respect; but then, he did not know them.

There were also the two daughters of the Marchioness of Kilkenny, whom he had seen once at a concert, and thought very pretty; but he had never been introduced to them.

Amongst those he did know were plenty of Peers' daughters, and some of them exceedingly pretty too; but, somehow or other, none of them seemed so much struck with him as he might have desired, and he was afraid of exposing himself to another refusal like the one he had received from the daughter of Lady Cowes, a young lady of whom he had thought himself perfectly sure.

As he recalled to mind the faces of the numerous young ladies he had been introduced to that season, the stately figure and handsome countenance of Sibyl Fetherstone, with its perfect features, wondrous colouring, matchless hair, and proud smile, appeared suddenly before him in a peculiarly distinct manner.

"She is not a Peer's daughter," he said to himself, and

endeavoured to think of some one else ; but this he found rather more difficult than he had expected, for Sibyl was indeed a woman whose image no other could easily efface. "She is not a Peer's daughter," he repeated, when he again found himself thinking of her ; "but her father is a Minister. He may be Premier one of these days, and he might prove very useful to his son-in-law." Mr. Jobkin was ambitious, and the idea of being in office certainly possessed great attractions for his aspiring yet commonplace spirit.

Although he had promised himself not to let his friend into his secrets again, he consulted with Thomson that very evening about the possibilities of his becoming a Secretary of State or a Lord of the Admiralty.

"But you know nothing about politics, and next to nothing about ships, though you are always talking of buying a yacht."

"That does not matter in the least—I am an M.P. ; that is enough. Do you suppose any of the Lords of the Admiralty know anything about ships ? Besides, supposing I was married to the Premier's daughter, I should have the greatest influence in my favour."

"The Premier's daughter !—but the Premier has no children !"

"No ; not the present one, but Mr. Fetherstone *might* become Prime Minister any day."

"Ah !—so you are thinking of marrying the stately Sibyl ?"

Jobkin would have preferred not to tell his friend his plans, but as Thomson, with his usual penetration, had discovered them, and as he really needed some advice, he did not deny that he *had* thought of that young lady as a wife. "She is beautiful—eh ?"

"Oh, yes!—really very handsome. I do think she would make a capital wife for you, Jobkin."

Jobkin thought so too, and when he went to bed that night, he dreamt that he was Prime Minister, and that he was dining at Windsor Castle, seated next to the Queen, while Dukes and Marquisses changed his plate and filled his glass with splendid old port (for such he believed to be the office of the Lords-in-Waiting, who, he read in the papers, *attended* her Majesty).

"A Minister is better than a Lord any day," he said to himself the next morning. "I really must think seriously of Miss Fetherstone."

Three days afterwards he met her father in the House of Commons, and, drawing him aside into one of the deserted lobbies, he told him how much he *admired* his daughter, and asked her hand, offering to make the same handsome settlements upon her which he had offered only a few days before to Lady Juliet.

Mr. Fetherstone was struck by the brilliancy of the proposal. He was not a rich man himself, and consequently could appreciate to its full value the advantage of money; in fact, his appreciation of the advantages to be obtained by it was so great that it had perhaps alone induced him to marry the thrice-widowed Lady Twickenham. He therefore promised Mr. Jobkin to speak to his daughter, and to do everything in his power to induce her to marry him.

These were the very same words which Lady Cowes had used, and Mr. Jobkin, who dreaded greatly another refusal, inquired whether he thought Miss Fetherstone would view his suit as favourably as he did.

"Sibyl is a clear-headed, well-principled girl, who knows what is good for her, and will be guided, I am sure,

by my advice in such a serious matter. She is a good, high-principled young woman, and will make any man happy who is fortunate enough to win her. And now I think we have sufficiently discussed this subject. Will you come and dine with me to-morrow? There are several questions I should like to ask you, when we are both at leisure."

Mr. Jobkin felt relieved after this encouraging speech, but he was still troubled with doubts.

"Do you think Miss Fetherstone's affections are disengaged?" he asked.

"You mean, if I think she is in love with any one else? It seems to me that *you* should know this better than I. You know that the affairs of State take up all my time, and that I am seldom at home."

Jobkin hesitated before he spoke again.

"Well, you see, I do not know her intimately enough to have found out whether she may not already admire some one."

"No, I do not think so; her sister, now, I believe is what you call 'in love,' and with a man I don't half like—a Spaniard—a Mr. Fernandez, a great friend of my step-son Lord Twickenham. Do you know him?"

"Mr. Fernandez! Why, he is my cousin!"

"Your cousin!"

"Well, no; but he calls himself so—as great a scamp as I know!"

"Indeed!" Mr. Fetherstone exclaimed, very much alarmed. "What do you know about him—who is he? I know nothing, save that he is a friend of Lord Twickenham's, and that it was he who told me of their attachment, and begged my consent to their marriage."

"Their marriage! You do not mean to say that you

would allow your daughter to marry a penniless wretch like *that* !”

“A penniless wretch ! You don’t say so !”

“He is indeed a confounded adventurer, who tried to pass himself off as my cousin, and who, I believe, has swindled and half-ruined Lord Twickenham !”

“Lord Twickenham ! By-the-bye, where is he ? His poor mother is in a sad state ! It seems he has gone off with a ballet-dancer, or something of the kind, and no one knows where to find him.”

“Well, you have only this Mr. Fernandez to thank for it all. Mr. Fetherstone, he is a scoundrel—a villainous, penniless scamp—that’s what he is, take my word for it !”

Mr. Fetherstone felt greatly alarmed.

“You don’t say so ! But there is the bell. I must leave you now ; come to dinner to-morrow—we dine at eight, you know—and you can tell me all about it. A scamp !—a penniless scamp !” he repeated to himself, as he hurried away to listen to the debate that had just commenced.

That night he informed his wife of Mr. Jobkin’s proposal, but Lady Twickenham was too much excited to pay much attention to what he said.

“I have found out where my son is at last,” she said.

“Indeed ! And where is he ?”

“In Paris, Gerald—in Paris !”

“In Paris !”

“Yes ; and you must go and bring him back—immediately !”

“I go to Paris now !—in the middle of the session ! Impossible, Elizabeth—impossible !”

“But you must !”

"I tell you it is impossible. I could not be absent from the House for a single night just now—it is as much as my place is worth."

"Then I will go myself."

"You!"

"Yes; I will go and bring him back, and in future I won't let him out of my sight. What will the Duke of the Isles think when he hears of this! Oh, Gerald! Gerald! there is no time to be lost—he might marry that girl."

"Marry her! Oh no, he is not such a fool."

"I tell you, you don't know Charlie—he is so generous—such a noble, warm-hearted boy! He will marry her, I tell you, if I don't go and bring him back at once."

"Then go."

"Yes, I'll start to-morrow morning by the tidal train."

"But do you know where to find him in Paris?"

"Yes," she answered; and, taking a French newspaper from the table, she showed him a paragraph, which ran more or less like this—

"We hear that at the Hôtel d'Alve there are stopping at present a Russian Prince, with a hundred retainers, and an English Lord with *one* detainer. The Prince is, we believe, the distinguished R.S.K——off; the Lord, the Earl of Tw——ham."

The next morning Lady Twickenham left by the first train for Paris. It was not until she had gone that Mr. Fetherstone found an opportunity of speaking to Sibyl of Mr. Jobkin's proposal.

CHAPTER XIII.

SECOND TO NONE.

(Not by James Grant.)

SINCE that first visit of Lord Belgrave to Bull Street, he had done nothing but think of the lovely vision he had seen there. Consuelo was always before his eyes. Ah! how well Alfredo had understood his friend, when he had feared to introduce him to her he so worshipped! How well had he foreseen what would happen, and tried to prevent it, even at the greatest cost to himself! So much had he dreaded the effects of her beauty on his friend's heart that he had preferred to quit London, and to leave the only woman he loved in the whole world, rather than introduce her to his friend, who, had he confided in him, would, no doubt, have helped him, and perhaps facilitated their marriage. And yet, in spite of all his care never to speak of her—never even to allude to her in any way—Lord Belgrave and Consuelo had been brought together—brought together!—and by Stella, the girl he had so despised!

It was strange how alike were these two men, born in such different spheres, brought up in such a different manner. Alike—not in personal appearance, for indeed it would have been difficult to find two men more unlike,

though both were, in their own way, exceedingly handsome; but alike in their ways of thinking, in all their tastes and ideas, and even in their manner of speaking.

It was, perhaps, this strange peculiarity, which Consuelo could not help noticing, that attracted her to him. When Lord Belgrave spoke, she could imagine she heard her Alfredo. His ideas and opinions on almost all subjects were so very similar to his, and so very different to those of everyone else she knew, that when he came to see her she could not help feeling a certain amount of pleasure in his visits. He reminded her of Alfredo—he was to her like the picture or reflection of his mind, if I may so express myself; and as she could not have the beloved original, she was only too happy to be able at times to admire the likeness.

But this feeling was not love. Oh, no! It was, on the contrary, a feeling so thoroughly opposed to any real liking for the man himself, that it could never turn into love; it did but serve to increase the affection she bore Alfredo, of whom alone she thought when she spoke to this stranger.

Lord Belgrave, on his side, was falling desperately in love. He had never seen such a beautiful woman before, and, what was more, he had never seen a woman he could admire more. She was actually the realization of the ideal he had formed in his mind of female beauty—the realization of that ideal, but with all the unimaginable charms which only a reality can possess. And then, over and above her mere physical beauty, which had at first alone attracted him, he now discovered the still greater beauties of her moral nature—beauties which for him exercised a still greater charm, as he met with them so rarely.

There must necessarily have been an inexpressible something about Consuelo, singularly captivating, that (associated as she was with such poor and sordid surroundings) left her still the very personification of everything that was pure and lovely and noble, both in the eyes of a man as fastidious as Alfredo, and of a man as influenced by all the thoughts and theories of the world, as disenchanted with the things most men rave about, as disgusted with everything he saw and did, as Lord Belgrave.

Her innocence and guilelessness, her wondrous sense and clear understanding, attracted him more perhaps than her personal charms—though it had certainly been the latter that had at first won his admiration; and he often went to that poor house in that squalid back street, through a part of the town which was for him almost another world, and passed long hours at her side—hours that seemed like minutes to them both—for he spent them lost in admiration of her, and she in thoughts of her absent lover, whom this Mr. Lucas (for she was still under the idea that this was the name of their new friend) so resembled.

As he sat near her, watching her sewing busily at the work by which she gained her own and her father's living, he often noticed her abstraction, and thought that she was not quite indifferent to his society, as indeed she was not, and that she was more impressed than she liked to show with his personal appearance.

This idea was flattering to the Marquis, though unfortunately it was not a true one, for he knew that she ignored his real rank and wealth, and believed that all the admiration she might feel for him was due entirely to his own merits.

Since Stella's betrayal and flight he had sworn never to love another woman as he had loved her. He had declared this, and he was under the impression that he was keeping his word, and yet he already found himself in love. He tried, however, to convince himself that the love he bore Consuelo was not the same kind of love he had entertained for Stella, and that this passion could never end, like the other, in sin and dishonour.

But Lord Belgrave, though a good man at heart, a man incapable of committing a mean or ungentlemanly action, had lived all his life in a world where public opinion with respect to *some actions* is neither strong in its influence nor rigid in its morality. Moreover, thrown almost from his youth—with unbounded wealth at his disposal, and a position that placed him almost beyond the criticism of other men—amidst the temptations that make the first ordeal of youth—with ardent passions, and with an intellectual superiority of which he could not be ignorant—he had been led from one error into another, almost before he was himself aware of his fault: he had led, in fact, an almost profligate life—against his own inclinations, it is true—but still to the great detriment of his heart, whose surface it had hardened and iced, though the springs still ran fresh and pure below.

His good sense and thorough appreciation of manners had made him a profound philosopher of the great world in which he lived: I say the great world, for of the world without the circle of the great, Belgrave naturally knew but little. He knew exactly what people felt, and how they felt, and could not help seeing—though he was not, perhaps, really a conceited man—how infinitely superior he was, with all his faults, to the greater part of them.

He had begun life with high and noble ideas respecting men and women ; but he had now lost almost all his sympathy for men, and much of his chivalrous veneration for women—for he had seen them less often deceived than deceiving.

His life, moreover—perhaps owing to his birth, perhaps still more to his education—had been spent without any high aims or fixed pursuits.

It is always a bad thing for a man with a superior mind, and an ardent and passionate nature, not to have from the outset of his career some paramount object in life.

He had drifted about all his life in the immense whirlpool called Society, making plenty of friends—going to balls and parties, to theatres and casinos, to great dinner parties and midnight suppers, during the London season, and travelling on the Continent and stopping at different country houses during the rest of the year—always more or less bored, always more or less disgusted, both with himself and with everything he saw, as men must be who have no object in life. His life was made up of amusements, but of amusements that did not amuse him, and which he therefore considered duties. These were objects, it is true, in their way ; but objects that soon lose their attraction, and even with the most frivolous are not calculated to satisfy the mind and heart, in which there is generally an inborn aspiration after something useful.

If we take into consideration all these things, we can scarcely wonder that Lord Belgrave should have fallen into an involuntary system of gratifying his own tastes, following his favourite pursuits, and indulging his own passions, without much thought of the harm or the

misery they might bring to others, or even to himself. And if his passions sometimes caused him to act as no God-fearing man ever should act, I do not think we should be right in blaming him, but should rather pity him for his blindness (for the moment we lose forethought, we lose sight of the duties we owe to God and to man, and we become, as it were, blind to everything but our own desires); though, of course, as the author of the book that depicts his character, I should be the very last person who should try to excuse his conduct.

Lord Belgrave loved Consuelo: he could not deny it, though he tried hard to fight against it, for he knew the dreadful consequences of indulging such a passion. Yet he loved her, and his love was stronger than himself. If Stella had not left him, if she had remained in his villa by the Thames—which, by-the-bye, he had just sold to Mr. Deanshome—most likely he would have succeeded in banishing the lovely Spanish girl from his thoughts. But now he was alone: Stella had gone—there was no other woman he cared for in the least, and his steps wandered every day to where his imagination always carried him, and that was—to Bull Street, to see Consuelo.

Poor Alfredo! if he had but known! But perhaps it was a good thing that he did not know, as things had turned out.

Had he but have taken the Marquis to Bull Street himself, and introduced Consuelo to him as his betrothed wife, Lord Belgrave would have looked upon her with such different eyes that most likely the feelings with which she had inspired him would have been of a very different nature. But as it was . . . who could tell what would come of it all?

Lord Belgrave trembled at the mere thought, and yet he went almost daily to her. It is strange that what we long for the most, should so often be precisely that which we most fear. We wish a thing, and yet we dread it.

What a contradiction!—or, rather, what a problem!

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE'S CONFLICT.

(Not by Mrs. Ross Church.)

SIBYL and Geraldine Fetherstone are seated in their little boudoir in Carlton House Terrace.

Their father has just informed them of Mr. Jobkin's proposal.

Sibyl is sitting by the window where she sat that night she went to the Argyle Rooms, and seems again lost in deep thought, as her large black eyes wander over the trees of the Park and seek the old Abbey beyond.

Geraldine is sitting near her, but she seems occupied only in watching her sister, and her eyes are fixed on her face.

A long silence would seem to have reigned between the sisters, for Geraldine hesitates before she speaks, and when at last she does so, she seems almost frightened at the sound of her own voice.

"So you would give up Edwin, who loves you, and whom you love, to marry this Mr. Jobkin!"

Sibyl seemed as if suddenly awakened from a dream by these words, for she turned sharply round, and looked for a moment at her sister before she answered—

"No; I would do nothing of the kind, Geraldine. But who told you that I loved Edwin?"

"Who? Do you think I am blind?"

"Geraldine, you are a silly, foolish girl. You are in love, and therefore everybody must be in love. Your eyes are so full of love, that you think I am in love only because you look at me through them. Geraldine, you are mistaken—thank God!" she added, rising. "Thank God, you are mistaken."

"And you are going to marry that snob?"

"That snob! I hope you do not mean Mr. Jobkin?"

"Do *you* mean to say you don't think him a snob?"

"Well, no; he is a snob, perhaps. But, then, so are you—so am I—so are we all, and ever shall be, as long as we live in what is called Society."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that there are snobs in every set—amongst the highest, as amongst the lowest, if you mean by 'snob' a person who pretends to be what he is not. Our society is a beautiful inlaid cup of the purest gold, which contains a strange compound of nobility and snobbism, the peculiarity of which is that you find it in equal parts and in the same perfection—though in different forms—where it sinks to the bottom and becomes dregs, as when it rises to the top and becomes *crème*."

Geraldine looked at her sister in mute astonishment. Her words often puzzled her, and she knew by experience that it was useless to ask for an explanation.

"And you admire that man?" she said, after a pause.

"Admire him! No; but I admire his money! Do not look at me so, Geraldine. I know it is very wicked to talk like that; but, then, if you come to think of it, I only say openly what thousands of others think, and try to hide even from themselves. My great fault is that of being too honest. I cannot hide my feelings, like

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most people; but I am not worse than they for all that believe me."

"A man without *h's*!" muttered Geraldine to herself.

"Oh, well, as to *that* you are wrong; he has plenty of *h's*, only I must admit he does not always put them in the right place. No; I think his fault is that of having too many; but, you see, he is so rich that he can afford to have *h's* to all his words if he likes."

"A man without a soul!"

"Oh, that is a blessing, I am sure. I hate men with 'souls.'"

"A man without education!"

"Well, that is a pity, certainly; but then, it is his misfortune, not his fault."

"A man without manners!"

Sibyl remained silent for a few seconds this time.

"He certainly is dreadfully common," she muttered to herself.

"Common!" exclaimed Geraldine. "I should say he *was* common."

"It is a great pity. I am afraid not all the money in the world would make up for that."

"Nor for any of his other faults."

"He is not bad-looking."

"Well, he is big and strong, if you call that beauty."

"And he has sixty thousand a year!"

"Are you sure of that?"

"People say he has as much as that. I do not see why it should not be true."

"People always exaggerate. If you take my advice, you'll reduce that sum to the half, and then, perhaps, you will be nearer the truth."

"Well, thank God, I shall have nothing to do with

money matters. Papa will see to that; and you may be sure that he won't let me marry such a man if he is not very rich, and if he does not settle something upon me worth the sacrifice I am making."

"Ah! so you agree that it will be a sacrifice?"

"That it *would*, if this marriage ever takes place. But why should we bother ourselves thinking about it? I dare say I shall refuse him."

"I wonder what Lady Twickenham will say to such a marriage. Do you think that papa mentioned it to her before she went away?"

"I dare say he did."

"She will never approve of such a *mésalliance*—she, who has such grand ideas!"

"Then I shall do without her Ladyship's approval—but no, Geraldine, she will be the first to approve of it. Remember how she married a City man herself, not so very long ago."

"Ah, but that was as her third husband; she had an Earl for the first."

"Never mind. I am sure we ought to be very glad that she did, for I believe we are at this moment living upon the money he left her, and I am sure no one thinks the worse of us for that. Money is money, you know. What does it matter, whether it comes from the City or from the country, from banks or from fields, provided the hands that spend it are clean?"

"You only think of the frivolities of life! Sibyl, I pity you!"

"Thank you; but believe me, I pity you a great deal more for only caring for romantic nonsense. But I dare say I wrong you. I see Lord Clare is quite devoted to you now; I am glad to see that you encourage him."

"I encourage him!"

"He is only an Irish Peer, it is true, and his estates are not worth much; but one can hardly call him an adventurer, and that is certainly more than can be said for all your admirers."

Geraldine blushed as her sister said this, and answered hurriedly, as if anxious to conceal any emotion which her voice might have betrayed—

"Why will you always plague me so? It is wrong, Sibyl, very wrong."

"Because you deserve it; and you resent it because you know you do. What can that Spaniard possess, who has so won your heart?"

"A heart!—and that is more than any of your admirers ever had!"

"What a treasure!—and do you intend to live upon *that*?"

"Sibyl, I won't be teased by you," Geraldine replied, blushing still more deeply.

"A tender point, I see," the beautiful Sibyl exclaimed, pouting her coral lips, while a smile of scorn passed over her handsome face. "Geraldine, I understand you now. It is all pretence, this love of yours. You believe it makes you interesting, but you are wrong, as usual. It does nothing of the kind—it only makes you look a greater fool than you are. I don't believe you love this Juan at all!"

"Not love him! Ah, Sibyl, I would do anything to prove my love—anything! I wish he were a poor peasant and I a Princess, that I might show the world how I love him, and shame you all, cold-hearted, frivolous girls that you are!"

"I am sure I hope you will do nothing of the kind,

for you will only be laughed at for your pains. No, Geraldine, my dear sister, you will marry Lord Clare and become a very happy little Peeress—that's what you will do, believe me."

"Marry Lord Clare! He has never proposed to me."

"No; but you know very well that you can make him do so whenever you like. He loves you, I am sure he does. I can't imagine why, but I think your silly romantic ways have pleased him. Geraldine, you have only to throw down your glove to become Lady Clare. We can be married on the same day, you know. It would be awfully nice."

"Yes, we may be married on the same day, but *mine*, at least, shall not be a *mariage de convenance*."

"Then who will you marry?"

Geraldine was going to answer, but the door was opened at that moment by a servant who took the very words she was going to say out of her mouth—

"Mr. Fernandez!"

The two girls looked at each other in silence. At last, Sibyl, turning to the footman, asked into which room he had been shown.

"Mr. Fernandez," he repeated, "is down stairs. He came to call upon her Ladyship; but when I told him as she had left for Paris, he said that he would like to see Miss Geraldine if she would kindly come down to him for a few seconds. I hardly knew what to do, so I showed him into the library."

"You did wrong, James," Sibyl answered; "we cannot receive gentlemen visitors during Lady Twickenham's absence. Tell Mr. Fernandez that Miss Geraldine is very sorry, but cannot see him to-day."

The footman was going to deliver the message to

Juan, who was waiting in the library, and had already shut the door behind him, when Geraldine rose from her seat and walked straight to it.

"Sibyl," she said, "you have no right to give orders for me. He has asked for *me*, and I must see him. It would be very rude of me to send such a message as you have sent."

"Papa is at home, remember—he will not approve, I am sure, of your receiving visits from gentlemen."

"I don't care. He already knows that I love Juan. Charlie told him the whole truth, at Juan's express desire."

"Charlie! What a fine advocate you have found for your wild love! Go and make a fool of yourself, as he has done!"

Geraldine did not hear the last words, for she was already on the staircase, and the noise which the door made in closing completely drowned them.

Sibyl was left alone, and she once more resumed her seat by the window, and began thinking for the hundredth time that day of Edwin and of Jobkin; of the man she loved, and of the man whose money she wanted to possess. Which should she choose?

Had she loved Edwin with all the intensity of her ardent nature, such a question would never have presented itself to her mind; she would have scorned the idea of sacrificing her Passion for the sake of Fashion. But the love she bore Edwin was not a love capable of making great sacrifices. She felt that she was capable of an attachment infinitely more vehement and passionate than the one she felt for Lord Edwin; and therefore it was, that at times she even doubted if she really loved him after all, and that when Mr. Jobkin's tempting pro-

posal was made known to her by her father—who she knew was a good judge on worldly matters, and who certainly advised her to accept him—she began to think whether it would not be a wise thing to try and forget Lord Edwin.

Though Sibyl was exceedingly beautiful, and for more than one season had been the acknowledged *belle* of London, she had not had many proposals. Hers was a grand, stately beauty which no one could help admiring, but which very few men could love. She had therefore gone to numberless parties and balls, receiving the undisguised admiration of all, but seldom, if ever, the hidden love of any.

Yet proposals, if I must speak truthfully, had not been wanting—but that she had received none she had cared to accept was easy to see, from the fact of her still being unmarried at her age.

Perhaps it was that, like so many young ladies who count too much on their personal attractions and their social position, she had begun by expecting too much, by looking too high. (I know a certain very pretty young lady who determined on coming out to marry nothing under a Duke, and consequently refused three Lords; her second season she consented to extend her choice to Marquisses and Earls; her third season she would have been glad enough to accept any one of the three Lords who first proposed to her, but these gentlemen did not repeat their offer, and she ended by marrying a plain Mister, and not a very rich one either, at the end of her fifth season.) It is certainly a great mistake for a girl to think that because she is pretty, and comes of good family, every man in England will be at her feet—for, as a rule, half these men pass her by, saying, "A handsome girl, by

Jove! but stuck up!" or "Good-looking; but a confounded coquette! don't you know?"—and end by marrying women not half so good-looking, and perhaps of a lower extraction.

This was the case with Sibyl Fetherstone. She was too confident of her beauty, and this was perhaps the reason why, after having been out so long, Mr. Jobkin's was actually the best proposal she had ever had.

Should she accept him? Should she accept him—should she become plain Mrs. Jobkin—she, who had dreamt of being Marchioness of Belgrave?

Lord Edwin, though poor, would give her a good old name and a title; but then, what would be the use of a title with only five hundred a year? It was better to be plain Mrs. Jobkin and have five thousand a year at her own absolute disposal.

Yet she loved Edwin. She could not convince herself that she did not, though she tried hard to do so, you may be sure, for she had lived too long in the world not to be fully aware of the value of sixty thousand a year, which Mr. Jobkin was said to possess. But she loved Edwin, and it was not an easy matter to forget him.

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE'S VICTORY.

(*Not by Mr. Farjeon.*)

IN the spacious library of Lady Twickenham's house in Carlton House Terrace we now find Geraldine Fetherstone and Juan Fernandez.

Geraldine was dressed in a pretty light silk morning costume, and looked exceedingly pretty, as she always did when in the company of Juan, for then her cheeks acquired a fresh rose colour, that added beauty to her not very bright complexion, and her eyes seemed to enlarge and sparkle with a brilliancy that lighted up her whole face.

Juan sat opposite to her on a very low chair. He was always handsome, but an acute observer would have noticed that his complexion, though still healthy, had lost much of the brilliancy which distinguished him only a few months before. His features, always rather marked, had now grown yet more sharp, almost too much so to be any longer called classical; his brows seemed to project more broodingly over his eyes, which had certainly sunk deeper into their sockets, but his eyes still sparkled with great brilliancy, and were now, strange to say, the only feature that reminded one of his sister.

The character of the man had begun to stamp itself upon his face, as our characters will in spite of all our care. His was now a face more striking for acute intelligence, for concentrated energy, for great cunning, than for mere physical beauty. But there was a something written in that face which said "Beware!" It would seem as if the hand of Providence had stamped that word on his countenance to warn people against the man. It was undoubtedly a something which would have struck any one—who had mixed much amongst men, and had made a point of studying the expression of their faces—with a sense of suspicion and distrust not easily to be overcome.

But then, how seldom do men or women pay any attention to these little characteristics; though many of them know full well that they must exist, and are only too reliable!

Certainly Geraldine did not, as she sat opposite to Juan in the arm-chair that summer afternoon, listening to the passionate words, and lost in admiration of his manly beauty, which, in her eyes, had lost nothing of that wondrous charm which had at first attracted her.

She thought she read in those large black eyes—which he could render so expressive when he gazed upon her—what only true and devoted love could utter. She had read all this and more in his burning glances; and at that moment, as she looked at him, a new sensation of joy and triumph filled her heart. The experienced Spaniard was fully aware that the fair citadel was tottering to its fall; so, with all the knowledge of a brave yet cautious general, he determined to make the decided attack that very day; but it must be an attack in which he could employ all his forces, and spare none of

his artillery—by force or by ruse, she must that day surrender to him.

"Loveliest Geraldine," he said in his softest voice, and with that peculiar southern accent which renders any language soft and dulcet, "never was there a love more pure and more devoted than mine! Ravenswood could not have loved as I love. Even the far-famed Romeo had loved another before he loved Juliet; but you—you are my first, my last, my only love; for, after having loved *you*, do you think I could ever love another?"

Geraldine coloured still more, and bent her head with a graceful inclination, casting down her eyes.

"Oh, my love, my love!" exclaimed the amorous Spaniard, taking her hand in his, and pressing it to his heart, while he looked at her so intensely that she felt compelled to lower her eyes again, which, for one moment, she had raised at the sound of his voice. "I have loved you for a long, long time—long before you were aware even of my existence. It was the fame of thy beauty—angel of light!—that brought me over from the sunny shores of my country to the gloomy streets of London. I saw thee, and I loved thee. I feel that we were made for each other—something in my heart tells me that it must be so—otherwise, why should we both have fallen in love so quickly? Ah! it must be so. I loved thee from the first. I love thee with a passion which is seldom felt in this cold northern island, and which, therefore, your friends—what can they know of love?—will tell you is too exaggerated to be true."

"Do you really love me so intensely?"

"Do I love you? Ah, would to God I did not love you as wildly as I do!"

"You wish you did not love me? Oh, Don Juan, Don Juan, I fear you are but a gay deceiver after all!"

"If I have been a Don Juan, it was only before I saw you; since I have seen you, and know what love really is, I could not pretend to love another woman."

"Ah! now you confess that this is not the first time that you have sworn love."

"Forgive me, Geraldine. My Geraldine, see here at thy feet all the power, all the pride, of this heart, which once had boasted of being able to conquer without being conquered. I own myself conquered at last—you are the *victa victrix*. You have me in your power—one word from you might kill me, but another would make me the happiest of men. You would not be so cruel as to utter the first—you, who are so good, so fair, so angelic!" And the fascinating Spaniard threw himself at her feet.

"Oh, rise, rise, Juan," Geraldine said, moving her chair away from him.

"Yes; but not until you have forgiven me."

"Very well, I forgive you," she said coquettishly, drawing near to him again. "I forgive you, but on the condition that you make me a full confession, and tell me all your adventures."

The new Don Juan arose, but only to kneel down again closer to her, when, taking her hands in his, and looking up at her with eyes that seemed almost to set her very heart on fire, he said—

"Why need I speak of the past? What matters to you whether the Duchess of Vallumbroso should have gone mad because she could not succeed in making me love her; or how the lovely Countess Rosario de Fuenteclarisima, the greatest heiress in Spain, should have gone into a convent because I refused to marry her?—Ah,

Geraldine, I could not bring myself to love her! No; in spite of all her wealth, of all her beauty, I could not marry her;—or how, when I was at Seville, the Infanta Berenguela well-nigh brought me to death's door with her villainous love-philters? No, Geraldine, do not let us speak of the past, which does not exist for me, but of the present, of the future, which is all in all, because thou art to be for ever its guiding star!"

"Oh fie, Don Juan! I do not believe you love me at all. I dare say you spoke in the same way to all those ladies, and then"

"Ah, no, Geraldine, I could not refuse to marry you. I never knew what love was till now, and yet all those ladies believed in my words, which were not true; and now that I utter what I really do feel—for the first time—I cannot get the one I love to believe me. It seems like the old fable of the man who had cried 'Fire' so often that when his house was really on fire no one would come to put it out. You see, I make a clean confession to you of all my sins. I do not pretend to deny that I have often feigned to love; but I swear to you, by all that is most holy in the world—by my honour as a Castillian knight—that you are the first woman who ever inspired me with real love!"

"Oh, Juan!"

"Yes, Geraldine—my own, my beautiful Geraldine!—I loved you from the first time I saw you! I could not help it. Love is not a thing we can command, I assure you. I tried—and tried hard too—to forget you, for I knew that there was a great barrier between us, which the prejudices and the narrow-minded views of the heartless society in which you live had erected. I endeavoured to crush this passion as it grew in my

breast, for I perceived the gulf that lay between us. But, Geraldine, I could not. The accident which was the means of bringing us together, and which afforded me the blessed opportunity of saving you from a horrible death, must, I think, have been brought about by the express orders of the Providence that watches over us; for, Geraldine, had it not been for that accident, you would never have known me, though many mutual friends had often wished to introduce me to you. But I had preferred suffering in silence; for though the representative of an old family, as brave and as noble as any in Castille—you know I am descended in a straight line from Fernando de Cordova, and that the Duke de Medinaceli and the Duke de Feria are my first cousins, indeed I am nearly connected with half the nobility of Europe—my race and my estates have gradually decayed and fallen like my old and proud country, once the first in the world, and I am but a poor and obscure knight to wed such a rich and beautiful lady! I knew this; I knew that thy father—one of the rulers of this prosperous country, enriched by commerce—had been ennobled but recently by his grateful sovereign—a sovereign whose ancestors trembled at the name of mine; but those times are past, Geraldine! Ah, Geraldine, as these convictions came home to my heart, I strove to crush the newly-born passion, to shun thee, to avoid thy presence, and vowed never to speak to thee, never to listen to the sound of thy melodious voice, which I knew would only increase my madness. But this was worse than death, and I think I should have died of a broken heart had not that accident happened, and had you not yourself, dearest, opened paradise to me with thy lips, whilst slaying me with thine eyes!"

Geraldine faltered an inaudible something as she hung, half-fainting with confusion, on his breast; for Juan, in his apparently uncontrollable passion, had thrown his arms around her waist, and pressed her to his heart.

"Can you doubt my love, now?" he said, pressing her still closer to him.

"No, no!" she answered, tears of happiness flowing down her blushing cheeks; "I could not doubt thee, my faithful knight, my Don Juan; but one doubt still troubles my mind—that girl, that woman who called herself your sister—she is nothing to you, is she? I am sure of it, but, you know, we women are so weak, so suspicious, perhaps so jealous, that I would fain ask you to repeat to me again that she is nothing to you."

Juan shuddered as the thought of his sister was suggested to his mind—of his sister, whom he had basely forsaken—and, for the first time since they had been together, lowered his eyes, so as not to encounter her steady gaze, that had in it all the irresistible penetration of truth.

"She is nothing to you, Juan—oh, tell me that she is nothing to you!"

"She is nothing; I do not know her!"

Geraldine gave a sigh, as if of relief, but remained silent, and seemed still lost in deep thought.

"Strange," she muttered, "that she should have the same name."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know her name?"

"How can I—I never saw her in my life before!"

"Consuelo Fernandez!"

Juan started back, and rising from the ground walked towards the window which looked upon the gardens at the back of the house.

"How do you know *that*, Geraldine?" he said, with a strange tremor in his voice. "But, of course," he added with a laugh, still from the window, "as she wanted to pass for my sister, it is only natural that she should have taken my name."

"It was not she who told me; it was Lord Belgrave."

"Lord Belgrave!"

"Yes; it was he who recommended her to Lady Twickenham. It seems that she is a *protégée* of his."

"She a *protégée* of Lord Belgrave!" There was something so strange in the tone in which he said this, that Geraldine, though she was unable to see his face, was convinced at last that he knew more about the girl than he liked to confess. Her jealousy was instantly aroused, and, rising from her chair, she went straight to him.

"You seem surprised!" she said, placing herself between the light and her lover, and endeavouring to see his face.

"I surprised! No; yet certainly it seems strange for the Marquis to force his *protégées* upon his lady friends. Don't *you* think it strange?"

"No, I see nothing strange in that."

"Indeed? Well, perhaps it is because I am not used to the customs of this country, but it does surprise me. Tell me all about it, Geraldine, my love. How did he come to know her?"

Geraldine, still remaining in the aperture of the window, between the light and Juan, told him all she knew about Consuelo—that is to say, what Lord Belgrave had told Lady Twickenham, and what Lady Twickenham had told her, watching anxiously all the time the effects her words had upon him; but this time Juan managed to preserve his composure, and she was unable to detect the

smallest trace of a more than passing interest in her story.

Juan allowed her to say all she had to say about his sister in silence; but when she had finished, he took her hand in his, and, pressing it to his lips, he exclaimed once more in the passionate tone he had used before—

“Why do we talk about people who are nothing to us—people whom we hardly know—when we can talk of ourselves? Ah, Geraldine, Geraldine, if you knew how I love you!”

“Do you doubt my love?” she said, forgetting all her doubts and misgivings.

“Far from it—no, I cannot doubt your love; for if I did, I could not love you as I do. But do you think that your love is as love should be—all-absorbing? Tell me all, my darling!”

“Juan, I love thee!—can I say more?”

“No, not more; but you can say that a thousand times. It is a music that enraptures my heart—a music that would make hell itself a paradise to me.”

And the great tempter fixed his large black eyes upon her, imparting at the same time to them that strange magnetic look which all the women at whom he gazed thus, were wont to mistake for one of unbounded admiration, and which, on this occasion, the innocent, unsophisticated Geraldine found almost as irresistible as the ignorant and misguided Polly Potts. Perhaps the nickname given to him at the clubs of “Look and Die!” was not quite so undeserved as some of those gentlemen thought.

He bent over her, and whispered something in her ear which made her blush, but which, from the effect it produced, would have seemed to have been far from

displeasing to her, for she allowed him to encircle her with his arms, and to approach his mouth to her lips.

Just at that moment the door at the other end of the apartment was flung open, and Mr. Fetherstone walked into the room.

One look sufficed to show how matters stood; with a quiet slow step he advanced to where his daughter stood, still clasped in the arms of the Spaniard, who had not heard the noise caused by the opening door, and who had not noticed his entrance, as he stood with his back to it.

Mr. Fetherstone walked straight towards them and placed his hand, which to her seemed almost like a block of ice, upon his daughter's shoulder.

Geraldine, who had seen him approach, but who had been too much taken aback to free herself from her lover's arms, now uttered a cry of anguish, and fell half-fainting upon the sofa which stood against the window.

"Sir, you have taken a mean advantage of the kind hospitality accorded to you in this house by my wife and myself—go! I say no more—go!"

Both Mr. Fetherstone and Juan were calm, almost painfully so, and their strange self-command at such a crisis was even more appalling than Geraldine's hysterics.

"Sir, I love your daughter, your daughter loves me," the Spaniard said, rising to the full height of his commanding figure, and brushing his raven locks from off his forehead. "I ask her hand of you."

"You!—you ask her hand!—the hand of Miss Geraldine Fetherstone?"

"I do."

Mr. Fetherstone smiled a cold sarcastic smile, which would have frozen the blood of most men, but which

Juan Fernandez was able to meet with a smile even more cynical.

"Go! Go! You have deceived my daughter, but you cannot deceive me! I know who you are; I know all about you; be thankful that I allow you to leave my house quietly, for by rights I should have called a couple of policemen to show you the way."

"Sir, do you mean to insult me?"

"No, I could not, if I would. This young lady is my daughter, remember. She is not a woman like——" and Mr. Fetherstone shuddered as he pronounced, in an almost inaudible whisper, the name which Juan himself had given to Polly Potts. "You see that I know more about you than you would care to hear at this moment, and that I should be justified in giving you into the hands of the police; but I forbear from so doing on account of the scandal which such proceedings would be sure to create. I prefer that my step-son, who will be here in a day or two, should prosecute you, and that the crime for which you should be ultimately condemned should be one in connection with which my daughter's good name would not be brought forward. Go! Let me not have to repeat that word to you again; and remember that this is the last time you see my daughter!"

Juan cast one long look of hate upon him, and then, taking his hat and his gloves, he placed the former on his head, and began putting on the latter very slowly. When he had finished, he walked to the door, which had remained open, and with a slow step, and without even turning his head to look back, he left the room and the house.

CHAPTER XVI

A PLOT IN PRIVATE LIFE.

(Not by Wilkie Collins.)

I MUST have drawn the character of Juan Fernandez very badly indeed if my readers have not found out before this that he was not a man to be easily daunted, and that he would not hesitate in employing desperate resources under desperate circumstances.

On the present occasion, as he left Carlton House Terrace, expelled from Geraldine's house by Mr. Fetherstone, all hopes of ever becoming her husband seemed at an end; but when any other man would have despaired, Juan was more hopeful than ever. Perhaps he counted too much on her love for him; perhaps he thought too lightly of her father's threats; but as he quietly walked up Regent Street that afternoon, the idea of winning her hand and fortune was still as deeply rooted in his mind as ever.

But this was not the only idea that troubled him. He had learned that day, for the first time, that Lord Belgrave had made the acquaintance of his sister, and that he had taken her under his protection. This was news indeed for him, and he was not a man to allow such an opportunity to escape him; so,

forgetting for the moment Mr. Fetherstone's threats, he directed his steps towards Soho, and, for the first time for more than two months, entered his father's house.

The fear of seeing Consuelo made him pause at the door. How could he meet her after what had happened; how could he approach and kiss her in his usual brotherly way after having so basely denied and repudiated her? He thought of this, but his desire to see his father and to find out something about the Marquis's relations with his sister caused him to banish all scruples and boldly to enter the house.

Mrs. Potts was in the shop, busily engaged, as usual, in arranging her jars and newspapers, and he passed her without speaking, for he feared lest she should ask him news of her step-daughter, which he was unable at that moment to give.

He found Mr. Fernandez in the old room quietly smoking a cigar, and he was alone, Consuelo having gone out to do some shopping, as Juan took good care to ascertain.

Mr. Fernandez was accustomed to his son's ways. His long absence did not surprise him, as he seldom knew his whereabouts; but he was always happy to see him, especially when he had not done so for some time, and on this occasion he was perhaps more pleased than usual to welcome him, for he hoped to get some money out of him, the want of which he was now beginning to feel, in spite of all his daughter's care to conceal the dreadful truth from his knowledge.

Juan sat down on a three-legged stool, which seemed to be the safest seat in the room after the chair on which Mr. Fernandez himself was seated, and asked him point-

blank how he had made the acquaintance of the Marquis of Belgrave?

His father was greatly surprised. He did not know the Marquis, excepting by name, and since Alfredo's departure his name had not once been pronounced in that house.

"Yet it seems that this Marquis has taken Consuelo under his protection! Strange!"

"Very."

"Do you think the girl has gone wrong?"

"Juan!" the old man exclaimed, rising in his chair and looking his son full in the face, "remember that she is my daughter!" and then, when his indignation had subsided, he shook his head and quoted one of his favourite Spanish proverbs, "*Vineyards and maidens are difficult to guard.*"

"Particularly so," Juan added, "when the grapes are fine and ripe, and the owner has no money to pay the law that alone can prosecute the robbers."

*"Women and wine are things that can
Take the wit out of the wisest man,"*

Mr. Fernandez muttered, again recurring to an old refrain.

"Then, father, the best way is to make the best of it, and be friends with this Marquis, as we cannot afford to be his enemies."

Mr. Fernandez answered sententiously with another proverb—

*"A peach that is spotted
Will never be potted."*

Juan lost all patience. "Hang your proverbs, father

can't you talk sense for once? Those old sayings are all very well for Spain, where everything is three centuries behind time; but remember that we are now in England, the country of commerce and business. I am sure we might do a pretty business with this Lord Belgrave, if you only played your cards properly. Now try to think if you have ever seen him. Who comes to the house to see Consuelo?"

"No one that I know of, excepting Mr. Lucas."

"Mr. Lucas! Who is he?"

"A gentleman who comes sometimes to see us. He is an Englishman, but he speaks Castillian well."

"What is he like?"

"He is very handsome, tall, very tall, rather large, with dark grey eyes, light hair, and reddish whiskers and beard; he is a thorough gentleman in all his ways, though rather stiff in manner, and evidently out of his element in this house."

"You need not go any further. That is the man I recognize the portrait."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Lucas is Lord Belgrave?"

"Yes. He has taken a false name, the better, I suppose, to play his little game. Father, we must show him that we can play as good a game as he can, though we have not his cards. He is in love with Consuelo, I suppose."

"I believe he is."

"I thought as much, from the first."

He then bent over his father, and talked to him for a long time with an earnest manner, but so low that had there been any one in the room at that moment he would have found it impossible to hear a single word.

When he had finished what he had to say, he rose and prepared to depart, which he did soon afterwards, leaving his father more bewildered than enlightened, yet not wholly displeased with him.

Poor Consuelo! she little knew the plot that was being woven against her by her own family!

CHAPTER XVII.

NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.

(*Not by Rhoda Broughton.*)

THE next day, towards the afternoon, Consuelo was sitting by the window, working as usual for her daily bread. A fresh tulle dress, evidently a ball-dress, lay on her lap, and caused the old and poor print gown she wore to look still more dingy and shabby than usual.

She was pale, very pale; her large dark violet eyes were sunken, yet at times they sparkled from under the long eyelashes that half concealed them with a languid fire, which alone revealed the ardour of her soul—for otherwise she seemed composed and resigned.

Ah, Alfredo! Why did you not take her with you? Ah, yes! he had said he feared dangers for her—dangers of the wide sea; dangers of wild beasts; and the dangers of still wilder men. But these dangers, what were they? She would have thought nothing of them with him! Who would pause to think of danger when in paradise? Danger!—what danger could there be by his side in any country, however distant, compared with the dull misery of living apart?

Danger!—and was there no danger in his leaving her thus behind? He thought that with her father she must

needs be safe: safe, when he was far away! He had thought that as he had not introduced her to his friend—that friend whom his heart told him he should fear above all others, though he had been so good to him, and loved him so well—he would never get to know her—and that she would never become his prey! Ah, how mistaken he had been!

Poor Consuelo! your lot was hard to bear! It was indeed hard to think of his loving looks and still more precious words; of the soft, firm clasp of his strong arm; of his stout heart and noble nature; of looks and words and kisses that had been; and of the vacant eyes and meaningless words and cold lips that now alone surrounded her.

As she sat, that long summer afternoon, alone in that poor miserable little room, in that out-of-the-way dingy little street, where the fresh breeze of the evening and the refreshing smell of the summer flowers never could come, she kept thinking of him who was far away—of him who perhaps was thinking of her at that very moment—while she stitched, stitched, stitched—and hot tears fell upon the ball-dress she was making.

The uproar of the dirty children in the street was so great, and she was so lost in thoughts of him, that she did not notice the noise which the door made as it turned upon its rusty hinges, and was not aware for some minutes of the presence of a stranger in the room.

It was Lord Belgrave, who had come to seek in that poverty-stricken house the happiness which the luxuriant gardens of Belgravia—so cool, so bright, so gay, that fine afternoon—where the most beautiful ladies of Mayfair, in their most gorgeous costumes, flocked to laugh and flirt, and enjoy themselves under the trees, listening to

entrancing music, and sweeping the tender moss with their satin trains—had not succeeded in giving him.

She looked so solemnly beautiful, as she sat by that window, so utterly forgetful of herself, that some minutes passed before he dared to make his presence known to her, and break the charm which seemed to render her at that moment almost sacred in his eyes.

"Mr. Lucas!" she exclaimed, much surprised, when at last she looked up and met his admiring gaze—"Mr. Lucas, I had no idea you were here!"

"I have only just come. I—I hope I do not disturb you," the proud nobleman stammered; for the first time in his life feeling that his usual self-command was forsaking him, and that words failed him with which to express his thoughts.

"Disturb me! Oh no, you do not disturb me; but I am sorry to say papa is out. You came to see him, no doubt, and . . ."

Her words gave him courage; he came close to her, and took her hand in his.

"No, Miss Fernandez," he said, looking at her for the first time with the eyes of a lover; "you are mistaken. I came not to see your father, but yourself! Consuelo—will you permit me to call you by that sweet name?"

"Sir!"

"Ah, Consuelo, does your heart not tell you what mine feels?"

"Oh, Mr. Lucas! Who has given you permission to address me thus?" She looked at him straight in the face, with that clear, earnest, penetrating gaze which only innocence of heart can command; and, as she saw his features plainly in the light for the first time, strange recollections came back to her troubled mind. She was

sure she had seen that man before. There was no mistaking those straight features, that fine open brow, that aristocratic mouth, that light beard, and those penetrating grey eyes; but at the moment she could not remember where she had seen him. Yet there was such an expression of power in that countenance, that, as she looked at him, she smiled bitterly, and said, sitting back in the chair, from which she had risen for one moment—"I forgot; you have the right of the powerful, the right of the wealthy—I am only a poor working girl, and you—you are, no doubt, a rich, powerful man."

"Miss Fernandez," cried Lord Belgrave indignantly, "it is your very poverty—your very weakness—that forces me to respect you, even more than if I found you a rich and courted young lady in the proudest mansion in England! But, Consuelo—you will not deprive me of the happiness of calling you thus! Surely you will not deprive me of the privilege which you would . . ."

"Your words are strange. . . . I do not understand you."

Lord Belgrave bent over her then, and, taking her hand once more in his, he declared his love. Before she had time to make any reply, her father stood before her, and in a harsh voice—which, after the warm, passionate accents of Lord Belgrave, fell upon her ear cold as a stormy March wind—he informed her of his displeasure.

"Papa, you are angry with me? Angry!—why? What have I done?"

"Done? You ask me what you have done—ask, rather, your friend Mr. Lucas."

Consuelo looked at the Marquis in mute dismay.

"And this from you!" her father continued in his usual blunt manner. "Consuelo, you have forfeited all my esteem; if the gentleman loves you as he says, let him provide for you!"

"Oh, father!"

"Remember the proverb, Consuelo—

'A woman or hen that's given to roam,
One of these nights will not come home.'

"Sir," Lord Belgrave now said, thinking that under the circumstances he ought to interfere; "are you mad or drunk? What do you mean by using such language to a lady—to your own daughter?"

"Father, father!" Consuelo cried, with piteous appeal, and in a tone which rose almost to a shriek; "I swear to you that this is the very first time that Mr. Lucas has spoken to me of love—the very first time—and that had you not entered the room at the moment I would have answered him"

"Never mind what you would have answered. If Mr. Lucas loves you, let him marry you—you have my blessing. I won't be too hard upon you, my girl, for, after all, I love you; but this is indeed the last thing I would have expected from you."

Lord Belgrave, perhaps not over-pleased at having the girl he loved thus thrown, as it were, at him, muttered something to himself as he heard this, and moved back.

"Papa, papa, you do not mean what you say! Mr. Lucas, oh, do not take him at his word!" and she covered her face with her hands.

"I do, though. Let Mr. Lucas, who I believe is a rich man, provide a home for you till the day of your

marriage. I am a poor man, and cannot afford to keep you any longer."

He left the room as he said this, but so staggered were both Consuelo and Belgrave that it was some time before they were able to realise his departure.

"Oh, Mr. Lucas!" the poor girl exclaimed, throwing herself once more into the chair by the window; "to think that papa should turn against me like this!"

"Never mind him, Consuelo; I dare say he did not know what he said."

"No; he was not drunk, if that is what you mean—my father is not a man who drinks. I have never seen him drunk—never! I wish he had been, for then I might still entertain the hope that he said what he did not mean; but, as it is, what can I do?"

"I will protect you, Consuelo; you need not fear."

"Oh, impossible!—my own father, whom I have loved so!—I cannot leave him—I cannot!"

"He cannot love you, after what he said just now. Forget him, as he will soon forget you. Come with me: I will take lodgings for you, and furnish you with a home that will be more fitting for you than this horrible hole!"

"Yes, I dare say; and give me a carriage too, and a box at the opera, and servants in livery, and diamonds and laces. Sir, I thank you, but you seem to forget that I am an honest woman; but then, is it to be wondered at, when my own father—the father for whom I have toiled day and night ever since I was a child—treats me before strangers as he has done just now?"

Lord Belgrave shuddered as he heard this, and his thoughts wandered to the villa he had taken on the banks of the Thames for Stella. He could not bear to

think of these two women at the same moment—these two, so different in every respect, save one. Consuelo's words brought before his mind all the joys and all the miseries he had experienced with his mistress, and also served to remind him of the good resolutions he had taken the night of her flight.

"Consuelo," he cried, putting his arm round her, "do you think I could mean to insult you? Do you suppose I could be guilty of one unworthy thought in such a moment as this? No, Consuelo; I have confessed my love to you. Do you think that a love inspired by you could be an unholy love?"

His words were so like those which Alfredo would have used on such an occasion, that she could not refrain from lifting her eyes and looking him again full in the face, and then, for the first time, it flashed upon her who he was. She remembered the portrait which she had seen in Beauville House that day when Alfredo had taken her to see it, and now her only surprise was that she had not recognised him before.

Belgrave, in the passion of his love for her, had knelt by the side of her chair, and was trying to attract her attention. She rose slowly, but with a calm dignity that made her look like a queen, and begged him to rise.

"This is a strange place for you!" she said, with a sweet smile playing on her delicate lips. "Rise, rise—I recognise you now. Ah, what would the world say if it knew? What would the world say if it saw you, the Marquis of Belgrave, at the feet of a poor girl like me!"

Lord Belgrave started to his feet, both surprised and bewildered. "You know me!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, my Lord, my Lord, it was wrong of you to try and deceive me thus."

"How do you know who I am?" he again exclaimed. It was now Consuelo's turn to feel confused.

"A friend, a friend of mine," she murmured, "once showed me your portrait; but I only recognised the likeness just now, when you knelt before me and I looked down upon your face."

"Indeed?"

"Yes," she proceeded, regaining courage; "and that friend told me, as he showed me your portrait, that you were the best and noblest of men!"

There was a strange sarcasm in those words which stung the Marquis to his very soul.

"Your friend exaggerated when he told you that of me, beautiful Consuelo; but to prove to you that I am not quite as false and wicked as you at this moment seem to think me, I offer you, as an atonement, all I can offer—my heart and my hand!" And the proud nobleman again flung himself at her feet.

"You think I have tried to deceive you—to win your affection under false pretences—to wed you, perhaps, under an assumed name; believe me, Consuelo, such has never been my intention. As the Marquis of Belgrave, I ask you now to be my wife! Say, beautiful Consuelo, will you be the Marchioness of Belgrave?"

Consuelo covered her eyes, which were full of tears, with her hands, but remained silent and motionless.

"Speak, Consuelo, speak!—my life hangs upon your words at this moment!"

"This is nonsense, my Lord," she said, after a long pause, moving away towards the window. "You cannot mean what you say. I should be almost as foolish, were I to take you at your word now, as you are in saying what you have just said."

"What do you mean?"

"That people say things in moments of excitement which they would be very sorry to repeat when they are in their right senses."

"You mistake me; I am as much master of myself at this moment as I ever was in my life. Do not think for a moment that I am not fully aware of the sacrifice I am making to your love. I know well that there is scarcely a woman in England who would not at this moment wish herself in your place; I know full well what it is to be a Marchioness, and how many have staked everything to gain such a position; and I am glad that you, too, are able to appreciate the sacrifice I make to you when I offer you my hand and my coronet."

"Is it indeed such a great sacrifice that you would make to love?"

"It is the greatest a man in my position can make, Consuelo."

"Very well. Then I can make a sacrifice greater still to *my* love! My Lord, take back your hand—take back your coronet. They were never meant for me—I could not appreciate them enough. I quite agree with you; your love for me must indeed be great when it prompts you to make such a sacrifice; but think how much more intense must be my love when I am able to decline your title and your fortune for the heart of a poor man!—and this without a single pang," she added, again fixing her eyes upon him—her large violet eyes, which now shone with triumphant love.

Belgrave rose from the ground, and looked at her with a mingled expression of astonishment, displeasure, and admiration. He had been refused! He could hardly realize the fact. *He*—to win whose affections every woman

he had ever known had almost gone down on her knees before him—had been refused by the very first woman to whom he offered his coronet, and this a penniless girl too, who was obliged to work for her living!

To any other man such a rebuff would have been decisive; to Lord Belgrave, her strange unselfishness only increased his regard.

He looked at her for some time in silence. He then approached her, and said in a low tone—

“You love another, then?”

“Yes,” she murmured.

“And that other . . . ?”

“You shall never know his name from my lips.”

She said this because, knowing as she did how intimate Alfredo had been with this man, she concluded that when he had not told him of their love it must have been because he had the strongest reasons for doing so.

“Ah, Consuelo!” the Marquis exclaimed, “would to heaven I were that man!”

There was something so sad, so heart-rending, in the tone in which he said this, that Consuelo was moved. She came closer to him and took his hand, but any words of consolation which she would have liked to have uttered refused to come to her lips.

“You do not despise me for this, Consuelo?” he asked, seeing that her emotion prevented her from speaking. “You do not think badly of me?”

“Despise you! Think badly of you! Oh, no, no; but . . .” She dared not say that she pitied him. Such a word would have seemed so strange for a poor girl like her to have used to a man like him! And yet at that moment there was not a man in the whole of London who needed more pity than did the Marquis!

"You will not deny me your friendship, as you cannot give me your love?"

"No; I cannot refuse you *that*! Would that I could give you more!"

"Ah, you are sorry—sorry for yourself—sorry for me, perhaps?"

"Yes, for both, perhaps. I am not so perfect as you believe me to be. I was wrong when I said that I refused you and your coronet and your fortune without a pang."

"Consuelo, it is not too late yet; recall your words! Think of the position I offer you, and think of *me*!"

"And the other?—the other who loves me—the other who has gone far, far away, across the sea, to work for me?"

"He cannot love you more than I love you. He is away, you say. Perhaps he has forgotten you—perhaps he will never come back."

"Would you advise me to forget a man who loves me, and who has gone far away to obtain a competency for me—to forget him for another man, simply because he happens to be wealthy and a Marquis, and says he loves me?"

"No, I could not advise you to do that. I dare say that man deserves you more than I do. I thought I was making a great sacrifice to my love, when, forgetting all the precepts of Society, I was ready to marry you; but you have convinced me that that poor man whom you love has actually done more—for he has left you to procure a fortune for you, and *that* is more than I could ever have done."

"Ah, Lord Belgrave!"

"Shall we remain friends?"

"Yes—friends."

"I might be useful to you—who knows?—perhaps useful to *him*."

"With what a tone you say that!"

"Oh, if you knew how I hate him!"

"You hate him! You don't even know who he is."

"Even if he were my greatest friend, I should hate him."

"Do not let us speak of him," she said. "Oh," she thought, "how well you knew what would happen, Alfredo, when you asked me never to seek to know this man. How right you were never to introduce us. But what you took such pains to prevent, fatality or Providence, has brought about, in spite of you—and in such a way, too!"

Mrs. Potts entered the room at that moment, and prevented Lord Belgrave, who had again taken her hand, from answering.

"Miss—Sir," the old woman exclaimed, as she entered the room, out of breath, "something dreadful-like has happened—your Pa"

"Well, what?"

"Speak, speak!—what has happened?"—Consuelo cried, rushing to her.

"Well, as I was a-coming upstairs, yer Honour I saw Don't you be frightened, Miss—it ain't so bad, after all"

"For God's sake, tell me all! Papa—where is he?"

"Your Pa? Well, shure, yes, as I was a-saying, when I came upstairs just now, I saw him stretched on the floor, dead-like. . . ."

"Dead!"

"La, Miss!—no, not dead!"

"Oh!—But where is he?"

"I took him up to his room—that wasn't very far ; but I am a poor weak creature, I am."

"I must see him at once," cried Consuelo, pushing past the Marquis, who had kept himself between her and the old woman all this time.

"Remember what he said just now," Lord Belgrave said, trying to detain her.

"Never mind ; he is in a fit, no doubt. Oh, great God !—once before he was taken ill like this, and I thought he would have died. Let me go—there is not a moment to lose !" And saying this, she hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LOST FOR GOLD.

(*Not by Miss King.*)

SIBYL'S mind was made up. She had decided to marry Mr. Jobkin!

She had not decided in a hurry. She had taken a long time to consider this, to her all-important, question, and had calmly weighed in her mind—fairly enough and certainly with wonderfully few prejudices for a girl like her—all the *pros* and *cons* of such a marriage.

She had decided to marry the rich City man—and yet she still loved Lord Edwin!

She loved Edwin—at least she still liked him better than any other man she knew. But then, during the last two months, since she had been so much with him, and seen so much of him, she had been able to convince herself that what she felt for him was not the all-powerful passion that can prompt to great sacrifices. She liked him, she admired him, she would have been very happy to have married him; but was he worth the sacrifice of everything else that she loved besides?

She had asked herself this question a thousand times, and at last she had come to the conclusion that he was a charming man—a most pleasing, sweet, and winning

man—a most lovable man in every respect; but that to be his wife, and to be obliged to give up Society, and to live all her life quietly in some cheap out-of-the-way half-cottage, half-villa, in the country, though it should be always with him, would be, to say the least of it, “slow.”

No; she would give him up—she would renounce his love. It was the wisest thing she could do, there was no doubt about that; it was by far the most sensible thing to do—just what her father, or her step-mother, or any one of her friends would advise her to do, were she to ask them—and she would do it—though so contradictory was her nature that if they had indeed given her such advice, she would have been the first to exclaim against and object to follow it.

It was at Lady Twickenham’s villa by the Thames—the lovely fairy-like retreat of Raspberry Dale—where everything is poetic and sylvan, and where the azaleas and the roses and the jasmine and the tropical flowers in the verandahs were in full bloom.

She had gone there with her father to pass the day, and she knew that Lord Edwin intended riding over to see her. The time had now come when the fatal news must be broken to him. She was anxious—perhaps nervous—certainly more agitated than she cared to show; and as she wandered alone through the shady paths by the river, her heart beat faster than it was wont to beat, and the gloved hand which held the silk parasol trembled at the slightest noise.

She was beginning to realize that she was about to be guilty of a great iniquity. “I have encouraged him too much,” she said to herself. “That dreadful adventure in those horrible Argyle Rooms! I went too far; I think I must have been mad at the time. What could have

possessed me to follow him to such a place? Why, oh why, did I confess to him my love! And he loves me. Oh yes, he loves me, and I love him, too! But I must not be foolish; I must have the courage to break it off. It is for the best—best for him, as well as for myself. And yet!” In vain she tried to reason thus; in vain she tried to convince herself that it was now too late to go back.

Give up Mr. Jobkin and all his money for this boy, for whom she merely entertained a passing fancy! It would be absurd, unworthy of a woman of the world, as she prided herself on being—superior to the weaknesses of ordinary girls. Oh no, she could never pardon herself such foolishness!

She heard footsteps on the gravel behind her.

She was conscious of his presence!

She turned and met the man she loved face to face—the man whom she was now going coldly to reject!

“My dearest Sibyl!” he said, advancing towards her with that sweet smile playing round his delicate mouth which had first won her fancy. “My dearest Sibyl!” he repeated, throwing such emphasis into his words as no woman could fail to notice, arising, as it evidently did, from a profound sense of admiration on the man’s part; “what joy to see you again!” And before she could stop him, he had taken her in his arms.

“It is not so long since we parted though, is it?”

“Well, perhaps not—only a few hours; but time seems so long for me when I am not with you! And then, seeing you in a ball-room amidst a crowd of strangers is not like being with you here alone.”

Sibyl had regained all her courage, and now she felt ready to speak. The palpitations of her heart had

subsided, and she was determined to tell him all—then and there.

“I am glad you have come. I want to speak to you—to speak to you alone.”

“Ah! my love!”

“Do not look at me in that way. Come, let us sit down here on the grass; there is no fear of any one interrupting us. Papa is busy in the house, and the walks are deserted at this hour. There, you may hold my parasol, if you like.”

They sat down on the grassy bank overlooking the bend of the river, under the long drooping branches of a large willow, and for a second or two neither of them spoke.

Sibyl was the first to break the silence. “You accused me of being cold to you last night at the ball,” she said, leaning on her right elbow, and mechanically pulling up the tufts of grass which grew under her hand.

“Cold!—*you* cold! Ah, no Sibyl: perhaps at times I may think you so, but, believe me, to me you will always be perfection.”

Sibyl shuddered. “Perfection!—I perfection!” she repeated dreamily. “Edwin, no one is perfect in this world.”

“I beg your pardon, dearest. To me everything seems perfect, in its way, you know. The very grass under our feet is lovely—don’t you think so?”

“And yet see how we tread it under-foot, and how we scatter it to the winds.”

For a few seconds she continued pulling the tender moss, and scattering it about; suddenly she turned round to him, and in a hurried low tone said—

“I am afraid that nothing will seem to you either

perfect or lovely after what I am going to tell you. I am sorry to destroy your illusions, Edwin—very, very sorry; but I must do so before it is too late."

"Oh, love! what *do* you mean?"

She again turned her head away from him. "All that you have ever heard of women's heartlessness, faithlessness, fickleness, will seem to you tame compared with what I am now forced to do. Edwin, we must part! Do you hear me? We must part—part for ever!"

"Sibyl!"

"It is but too true. Believe that I am fickle, false, heartless, perfidious—that a whim has changed me—if you will. My mind is made up: I can never be your wife!"

"Why? For Heaven's sake tell me why? Don't I love you?—don't you love me? You are my promised wife, before Heaven, Sibyl!—my own, my dearest, my beloved wife! You are all that I value in the world—my treasure and my comfort, my earthly happiness and my gleam of the something better that is to come hereafter! Do you think that we can part thus? Do you think that I shall let you go from me in that way? No, love; that night in the solitary street—away from all your friends, away from the gaping crowd that at times half turns your head and makes you cold even to me—you confessed your love . . ."

"It was in a moment of temporary insanity. Calmly, coldly, and with all my senses, I now tell you that we must part, that I can never, never be yours!"

"Your language is cruel—too cruel, Sibyl. You have no right to say this to me."

"Time will teach you to look upon me as one wholly unworthy even of resentment."

"Sibyl, surely you do not despise me simply because I am poor?"

"I do not despise you. I do not say that. I love you now as much as I ever loved you—that is to say, when I am in my right senses. Edwin, we both live in 'the world;' we belong to it, we are a part of it, and we neither of us can act in defiance of it. We are both poor—poor in comparison with others. Common sense should teach you that you ought to marry an heiress; common sense teaches me that I should marry a rich man."

"Oh, hang common sense! hang the world! and the half-a-dozen old women who constitute its tribunal, and set themselves up over their afternoon tea to rule us all! I won't be ruled by them. I love you—you love me—who, who on earth can prevent our being married?"

"Do you think my father will ever consent to such a marriage?"

"Your father! You are of age, and do you intend to sacrifice your happiness to please him?"

"My happiness!"

"You do not think I shall be able to make you happy?"

"Edwin, a great many things are required to make our happiness; different people have different ideas of what happiness ought to be. I cannot say that 'love in a cottage' is my idea of earthly happiness!"

"Love in a cottage! Ah, what do we care for palaces and cities!—such things were made for those who are not happy, that they may, in the hurry and bustle of the world, forget the sadness of their hearts; but for those who love—for those whose hearts will always be full of the true joy—the joy that comes from the soul—do you think we

shall need those vain and empty amusements to complete our happiness?"

Sibyl smiled.

"You can preach a charming sermon on rustic felicity, I see; but how do you think you would like to practise what you preach? You—the gay, the frivolous, the elegant young nobleman, born to shine in drawing-rooms and courts—whose delight is to talk scandal with the ladies over their five o'clock tea, and to bet and play billiards with men until fabulous hours in the morning—who are too lazy to rise to ring a bell, and who would go to the confines of the earth for a good day's sport—you!—the dandy, the charming, the exquisite Lord Edwin, the very flower of the *jeunesse dorée*!—how would *you* like to live in a miserable cottage in some out-of-the-way village, without hunting, without sport, without balls, and without clubs?"

"You speak only of me as you have known me; believe me, Sibyl, I can rise superior to all such things."

"Indeed! For how long?"

"Ah, Sibyl, you do not love me when you believe so little in me!"

"No, Edwin, you are mistaken; it is not because I do not love you, but because I love you too well, that I will not make my love a curse to you! We cannot wrestle with the world. I should be accused of having destroyed your career—you would be accused of having buried me alive, as it were, in the very prime of my life, in the zenith of my hopes."

"I cannot reason with you," Edwin said, rising. "You know the strange empire you have obtained over me; I only wish now that we had never met—I only wish I had never fallen in love with you. But, whatever

happens, Sibyl, believe me, *the world* shall never reproach me of having sacrificed its darling to my selfish love, or of having robbed it of its most precious gem to adorn my poor home; though *there* it might have made the life-happiness of one man, who would have cherished it like a miser, while here, it can only please for a few seconds the careless eyes of a reckless, indifferent crowd."

He took his hat, which he had thrown down on the grass, and placed it on his head.

"Sibyl, farewell! I see you do not care for me, so I conclude you will be happy without me; I shall try to be happy without you, but I do not think I shall succeed. Ah, I was so full of bright hopes when I came into this garden—my heart was so light! . . . It has been a happy dream, this love of ours—a happy dream, nothing more! But how cold and frivolous the world will seem to me now I am once more awake!" As he said this, the first events of that season, the events that had led to this love, came back to his mind, and with them the pale, fragile image of Lady Juliet Standish—of that poor girl whose hand he had refused, though he knew but too well how she loved him—and he could not help exclaiming to himself, "I deserve this—it is only just that I should suffer in my turn! I might have married her and been very happy, but I was dazzled by this woman's beauty, and, like the thoughtless butterfly, I left the lovely flower that offered me all its sweetness, for the dazzling light of the all-consuming flame, and have ended by getting my wings burnt—perhaps my heart broken!" . . . He then turned towards Sibyl, who was still reclining on the grassy bank with her eyes fixed on the river, which flowed close beside her. "Sibyl, are we indeed to part thus?—will you not even give me your hand, *as a friend*?"

These words roused her from the reverie into which she seemed to have fallen.

"My hand!" she replied. "Ah, yes; good-bye. . . . You will think of me sometimes . . . and try not to think too badly of me. Believe me, it is for the best."

He took her hand in his—it was hot and dry; evidently she was in a fever, though she seemed so calm, and her words sounded so cold. He retained it in his own for some moments, and then, without looking at her again, quietly walked away; and soon the noise of his footsteps upon the gravel ceased, and the low murmur of the river and the music made by the breeze, as it played amongst the leaves in the trees around, were the only sounds which reached Sibyl's ear.

She then rose and cast one long lingering glance in the direction in which Edwin had disappeared—sighed deeply—then, sinking down on the grass once more, she wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST FOR LOVE.

(Not by Miss Braddon.)

THREE days later, in the same garden, the handsome Sibyl was reclining in a comfortable arm-chair on the terrace overlooking the river; and by her side sat her accepted lover, Mr. Jobkin, while at a short distance from them Mr. Fetherstone and his younger daughter were sipping their coffee at a little rustic table.

It was night, and the moon shone brightly, rendering every object distinct and clear; yet that pale, colourless, cold tinge of melancholy which the moon always gives, and that is so delightful to lovers, seemed to oppress them all, and Sibyl, at times, was even forced to shut her eyes not to encounter the lovely view before her, which this night looked so cheerless and lonely.

The last time she had beheld this scene had been in the afternoon, when the rich warm glow of a summer sunset had rendered every object brilliant and dazzling. She had sat then in that garden by the side of the man she loved, and everything had seemed bright and glorious to her, though the words that had passed between them had been colder and more bitter than the coldest December night. It had been the last struggle of

light against darkness in her heart ; but now night had come, and the dark cold shades of evening had closed thickly around her.

Yet it had been her choice ; she could not complain—she did not complain. It was night, but a clear splendid night, illumined by a thousand stars, presided over by a silver moon ; yet even on such a glorious night she could not help thinking sometimes of the warm life-giving sun which had now set on the horizon of her young life, perhaps for ever, and she thought of it with a sigh.

She was dressed in a long flowing dressing-gown of white cachemire, which fitted closely, and defined with a few chaste but clear outlines the beautiful contour of her person.

Her hair was unfastened, and hung in long rich masses down her back.

Her feet were clad in white satin slippers, and rested upon a red velvet cushion.

Three days before, when she came to pay that afternoon visit to this fairy-like retreat of Lady Twickenham with her father, she had been found fainting on the wet grass by the river, just under the long drooping branches of a willow, which almost concealed her from view.

Mr. Fetherstone had taken her in his arms to the house, and had sent for a doctor immediately.

She had soon recovered from her fainting fit, but the doctor had advised her to remain that night at the villa, though she had assured them all that it was nothing—that she had never felt better in her life—and that she had merely fallen asleep.

Her father insisted on her sleeping that night at Raspberry Dale, and the next morning, when the doctor came from Hampton Court to inquire how she had passed

the night, he found her in a violent fever, and said she must on no account think of getting up on that day at least.

She was delirious in the evening, and her maid, who had come from her home in London that morning, told the doctor when he called again at seven o'clock that night, that she had talked a great deal to herself, and that at times it had been frightful to see her convulsions.

The next day she was better, but the doctor still advised her to keep her bed.

That morning she had risen for the first time, and as her now engaged husband, Mr. Jobkin, was coming to dinner, she had been brought down in the evening to the garden; for the doctor had said that the cool refreshing air of the evening would do her good, and this is why she was in her dressing-gown, and why her raven locks hung loosely about her swan-like neck.

Yet she still looked wonderfully handsome, though her eyes were sunken, and her cheeks were pale—and so Mr. Jobkin thought as he sat beside her, and tried his best every now and then to interest her with his conversation.

But all he said could not interest Sibyl, even had she tried hard to give her attention to it. She did not want to be interested by it—she thought his words ill chosen, and his sentiments too commonplace, to be even listened to, and all the answer she gave to what he no doubt considered his gentleman-like style of love-making, was a passing glance from her large languid eyes now and then—a glance expressive more of wonder than of love.

Her sister Geraldine, in the meantime, sat near her

father, a short distance from them, and never took her eyes off the pair.

In the stillness of the night it was easy to hear everything they said, and Mr. Jobkin's would-be poetical remarks often drew a smile from her.

Geraldine had come to Raspberry Dale directly she had heard of her sister's illness, and had seen enough of her since she had been there to guess that something had happened, and that Sibyl had not parted with Edwin as easily as she had at first imagined she would.

This is why she looked at her so attentively that night, and why there was so much sympathetic pity conveyed in her looks.

She, too, had suffered greatly ; she, too, had pined and cried ; for her father had told her that all must be at an end between her and her lover, and the thought of never seeing Juan again had afflicted her beyond measure.

But Geraldine had a poetic temperament, and therefore was never without hope. Besides, she was convinced of Juan's love for her, and she was sure of her own love for him, which was more than poor Sibyl had ever been, and therefore any sufferings were almost sweet to bear if they were borne for his sake.

She had sat for long, long hours in the night writing verses about him and herself and their sad fate, and thus relieving her sorrows, while her less romantic sister lay in bed, thinking of Edwin, and trying to convince herself that what she felt for him was not love.

She had not seen Juan since that day when her father had so cruelly sent him out of the house ; she had not seen him since then, but she had received numerous letters from him—letters which were so full of passionate tenderness, and vows of devotion and love, that even his

words, aided by his looks and the expression of his eyes, could not have had a more maddening effect upon her.

She had written to him, too, and even sent him some of her poetry, which she, in her blind innocence, thought would console him in his banishment; and in her last letter she had informed him that she was stopping at Raspberry Dale, near Twickenham, and that the Thames ran close under her windows—the Thames, which was open to all, and that any one in a boat could easily speak to those on shore.

He had answered this last effusion without loss of time, and had hailed the intelligence it contained with words which I am afraid only a girl in love would have been able to read without laughter. But his reply contained something more precious to her even than these wondrous words of love, and this was the prospect of a meeting; for he told her that that evening, a little after ten, when he supposed the grounds would be deserted, he would come to see her in a boat, and would expect her to meet him by the old boat-house at the end of the lower terrace—a spot which he had seen that morning as he went past Raspberry Dale in his boat, trying to catch a glance of the beautiful Hourî whom the cruel Sultan, her father, would fain hide from the eyes of the Giaour.

The hour was fast approaching, and her faithful lover must be near at hand. Geraldine grew more and more excited as the minutes passed; and when at last the great clock over the coach-house struck ten, she was unable to contain herself any longer, and, muttering some excuse to her father, who still sat by the little table smoking his cigar, she hurried down the terrace, descended the marble steps at the foot of it, and a few seconds

afterwards was standing by the old boat-house, anxiously watching the few boats that still lingered on the moonlit river.

She had not long to wait. One of these boats approached the shore close under where she stood, and a light was thrice raised from it. It was the signal. She answered it, and then, going down the few steps of the old landing-place, which was now never used, a new one having been erected by the Countess nearer the house, she was able to receive Juan in her arms as he landed from the little boat in which he had come alone from Hampton Court.

Of course, a long and tender love scene ensued, which I shall spare my readers, as I do not want to make them laugh at this critical point of my story; and then the lovers ascended the steps, and entered the summer-house, which was close by, and where, as Geraldine remarked, no one would ever think of looking for her. Indeed, the night was so clear, and the light of the moon so brilliant, that had they remained on the terrace by the side of the water, where but few trees grew, they would most certainly have been seen from the upper terrace, where the others still sat.

"Your father hates me, Geraldine," Juan said, kneeling beside her in his favourite attitude. "He hates me for certain political reasons, which just at present I am unable to disclose even to you, my love, having given my sacred word of honour; but, believe me, dearest, they are only reasons of State: personally he has nothing against me; but, you see, being a Minister, he could hardly give his consent to our marriage. Yet, if we were once married, I am sure he would be the very last man to refuse me admittance to his house."

"Oh, my Juan!" she cried, putting her arms round his neck; "I shall die if I am not allowed to see you!"

"Do you really, really love me?"

"I do, my Juan!"

"Do you love me enough to give up your home, your father, your friends, even society, for my sake?"

"Can you ask me?"

"Do you love me enough to run away with me and become my wife in secret?"

"As Juliet became Romeo's wife in the cell of the old friar! Oh yes!"

"And if you were my wife, would you not pine for the world you give up for my sake?"

"The world! Ah, you do not know how I hate it, and all its selfish, narrow-minded ideas! If I were your wife I should never even think of such a thing as fashion."

"No?"

"Oh no; I should be quite content to live for ever with you in that old castle of yours by the waters of the blue Guadalquivir, and to wander by the light of the moon through the ever-fragrant woods of vine and olive trees, listening to the song of the nightingale and to the still sweeter music of thy voice, my Juan! Do you remember the picture you drew of that old fine castle of your ancestors, which has stood so many sieges, when I asked you to describe to me the home in which you had passed your youth? You are poor, you say—what do we want with money, we who love?" I can sell my jewels—they will give us enough money to go to fair Andalusia; and once in thy beloved country—that country of eternal spring, where the trees are ever verdant, the sky ever blue, the women ever beautiful, the men

ever brave—we shall live for ever happy, ‘the world forgetting, by the world forgot.’ We’ll see no strangers; we’ll shun the world; we’ll be the whole world to each other; and whilst in London men and women are wasting their existence in frivolous pastimes and learning best how to hate each other, we shall be wandering beneath the spreading vines and through the citron groves, and wondering how men can choose to be unhappy whilst the earth is so fair, and hearts can love so well. Oh, my Juan!”

The Spaniard could not help smiling to himself when he heard this glowing description of the *château en Espagne*, which he had built one day for her amusement, and of the romantic life which she expected to lead in it; but, though a highly poetical idea, he thought it better to soften it a little before things went too far, so that the truth should not come too abruptly upon her.

“Your description is charming,” he said. “Sweet Geraldine, how well you express my thoughts! Such a life as you have pictured would indeed be the life I should love to lead; but I have already told you that I am not a free agent. I must devote a part of my life to my country; and Spain, you know, expects great things from me. Just at present it would be impossible for me to leave England.”

“Ah! but if we run away?”

“I will take lodgings for you, either in London or here at Twickenham; then, when once we are married, you will write to your father, and beg of him to give us his blessing.”

“That will not be at all romantic!”

“No, perhaps not; but it will be the wisest thing to do.”

"My father will never forgive me."

"Oh yes, he will. Leave it all to me. Shall we say to-morrow, at this time?"

"So soon!"

"Yes. I can have everything ready by then. I will bring a boat, which I shall row myself, here to this old landing-place. At about ten you can come down, bringing with you your jewels, and anything else you like to take away with you: you step into the boat, and I shall row you across to Hampton Court, where we can take the train for London. You see it will be as easy as possible."

"Can you not give me more time to think it over?"

"No; you must decide, at once, my love; we do not know what time may bring forth. Your father may take you back to London, and then it will be more difficult—perhaps impossible."

"Do you really love me, Juan?"

"Do I love you! Do you think that if I did not love you I would endanger my position thus—my life—even my honour? Ah, Geraldine, it is because I love you that I am able to sacrifice myself without a sigh."

Geraldine gave him her hand, and tears of joy rose to her eyes and moistened her blushing cheeks. "I'll do it!" she said to herself. "I'll run away with him, if it is only to show them all how little I care for what they are pleased to call the world, and how I despise fashion. Sibyl, Sibyl, if you had not been hard-hearted and ambitious, you, too, might have been happy, almost as happy as I am—but no; you have chosen Fashion in preference to Passion, and prefer a City snob to a faithful though poor lover. Sibyl, you have often laughed at what you call my silly romantic nonsense—I shall live

to be envied by you, though my husband will be but a poor man and yours a millionaire!" Then, turning to Juan, she said aloud, "I shall be ready to-morrow at ten—at ten, remember!"

"Oh, my beloved!"

"Good-bye now, good-bye. I must not be missed, or I shall be watched to-morrow. Good-bye, my Juan, good-bye till to-morrow—ah, to-morrow!"

And saying this she hurried out of the summer-house allowing him to return to his boat alone, while she ascended the marble steps of the upper terrace, and rejoined her sister, who, with her father and Mr. Jobkin, was still sitting there, and had only just noticed her absence. As my readers have perceived, Geraldine was only too ready to fall blindly into the scoundrel's net, and to run away with him, for love had completely blinded her; and Juan was a man who, when he chose, could exercise a supreme empire over the minds of those who fell victims to his vile machinations, as we have had already occasion to see in the case of the poor misguided Stella.

But, fortunately for Geraldine, on this particular occasion Juan's wicked plans were not destined to be carried into effect. When he reached his lodgings in London late that night, he found the following strange epistle awaiting him—

"Oh jack come quick I am alone he is going i am alone his ma came i am misserable very misserable if you come all can be mended come do come I am here at the otel dalve as they calls it charlie goes to-morrow early come your own girl who loves you.

"MARY POTTS."

He read this letter over two or three times. It had evidently been written in a hurry, and in a moment of great excitement; it was incoherent and badly spelt, and in the scrawling hand which one would expect such a girl as Stella to write; but it told him that something had happened, and that his presence in Paris was absolutely necessary.

Should he go? Should he go, and leave Geraldine just at the moment when she was ready to fly with him? It seemed, to say the least of it, dangerous; yet he knew that something dreadful must have happened in Paris, or Stella would not have written to him. Besides, after all, he could write a line to Geraldine and postpone their intended flight for a day or two. In three days he could be back from Paris, and he should be free to run away with her then. Should she have gone back to London—well, after all, there was no more difficulty in leaving a house in Carlton House Terrace than in leaving a villa at Twickenham, though to induce her to decide at once he had that night told her that such a thing would be impossible.

So he passed the rest of that night in writing a long letter to Geraldine, telling her, in the most poetic language he could command, that, all things considered, it would be better to wait a day or two longer, and asking her, if she was still at Raspberry Dale four days hence, to go down to the old boat-house at ten o'clock, and to hold herself ready to fly with him then; but in the meantime to be as discreet as possible with her father and sister, and to make no inquiries after him, which might lead to a fatal discovery.

The next morning he posted this letter, and left London for Paris by the earliest train.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE.

(Not by Wilkie Collins.)

LADY TWICKENHAM arrived in Paris late in the afternoon, and she drove straight from the station to the Hôtel d'Alve, in the Champs Elysées, where her first inquiries were for her son.

Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse, she was informed, had gone out to drive in the Bois.

Horrible thoughts took possession of her mind as she heard this. Could it be possible that he had actually married her? Married *her*—a common theatrical girl like that! The idea was too horrible. Surely her son could not so far have forgotten himself. Her darling Charlie, the hope of the Twickenham family, that grand old family of brave knights and patrician ladies, could not have made such a *mésalliance*. In her horror for everything plebeian, her Ladyship often forgot that her own father had been an actor, and that her late beloved husband had been accused of having committed a great *mésalliance* when he married *her*. But such are the ways of the world—the proud Countess, though very gracious and patronising in her behaviour to Lords and Ladies, would not have condescended to speak to an actor now.

Although, according to her ideas, the Hôtel d'Alve was rather fast and *mauvais ton*, she determined to remain there that night, in order to be near her son, and chose a small *appartement* next to the rooms occupied by "Monsieur le Comte et Madame la Comtesse de Tuitenam."

It was now late, and the lamps were already lighted in the gardens below, but the cloudless sky still reflected the last rays of that day's sun, and the twilight was almost as clear as the daylight one is generally accustomed to see in England.

Lady Twickenham allowed her maid to unpack the few things she had brought with her, and, sitting down in a large arm-chair, gave herself up to her anxious thoughts.

Had she looked out of her window at that moment, she would have seen a handsome carriage, drawn by two splendid black horses, going down the Champs Elysées, which attracted the attention of all the passers-by—chiefly small tradespeople—who were not a little surprised to see such a fine turn-out at a season of the year when fashion is supposed to have deserted its capital.

Had Lady Twickenham looked out of her window, the carriage would no doubt have also attracted her attention, and perhaps she would have recognized the fair-haired gentleman seated in it, with the white frock-coat and the tall white hat, as her son.

It was indeed the hope of the noble House of Twickenham who reclined in that landau by the side of Stella, and, if truth must be known, his thoughts at that moment were certainly a little further from the proud Lady Isobel Clanfyne, his destined bride, than his good mother would have wished.

Yet he seemed happy—very happy—and so seemed his companion, the lovely Stella; but of course I shall not enter into *such details*, as it would perhaps be thought wicked of me even to hint that people could be happy under such equivocal circumstances.

Stella was dressed all in white. She wore a white silk dress, covered with rich point lace, and a pretty little white chip hat, encircled by a long white feather, which hung down at the back, mingling with the dazzling profusion of her golden curls.

Since her arrival in Paris she had dressed almost always in white, to please Lord Twickenham, who loved to see her thus, and this strange fancy had won for her the name of "the woman in white" from the numerous persons who watched her every day as she took her afternoon drives through the Bois. They sat side by side in the carriage, but they very seldom spoke, and any passing remarks which either of them might have made during these long drives, would not, I fear, have been of sufficient brilliancy to deserve recording, even in these pages, where so much nonsense has already been written.

The sky was beginning to lose its warmer tints, and here and there an early star began to appear in the azure vault; the double line of gas lamps which runs from the Place de la Concorde to the Triumphal Arch at the end of the Grand Avenue, and which is the object of never-ending admiration to all foreigners, had commenced to sparkle amongst the dark trees on either side; and the Cafés-chantants, and the Cirque, and the ever popular Guignol, were beginning to fill. It was the hour when all the cares of life, all the business of the day, come to a temporary close, and the Parisian bourgeois, and the few foreigners who at this dead season of the year are the

sole masters of that gay city, give themselves over to the many amusements which those short but refreshing nights of midsummer can offer after the heat and fatigue of the day.

Many were the carriages that came down that evening from the Bois, through the Champs Elysées, winding their way towards the heart of the city; but amongst them none attracted so much attention as the equipage of the young English "Milor;" and it would seem as if neither Lord Twickenham nor his fair companion were quite indifferent to the general admiration they excited; for often the pretty little mouth of "the woman in white" betrayed a smile, and her eyes sparkled, as she looked around her and met everywhere looks of undisguised admiration and unbounded curiosity. Her plump rosy cheeks met the refreshing breeze of the evening, and her golden curls floated on it; her bosom trembled at its contact, and she shut her eyes now and then with an inexpressible feeling of mingled pleasure and pain.

Did she ever think of Lord Belgrave? Most likely not. The dazzling scenes around her, ever brilliant and attractive—the new and exciting life she had led since she had been in Paris—in Paris!—that *paradis des femmes*!—which she now visited for the first time, must have soon dispersed any sense of remorse or compunction she might at first have felt for the man whose trust she had so basely betrayed. No, she did not think of Lord Belgrave; but of the one man she really loved—of Juan, who still retained all his unbounded empire over her soul—she often, often thought.

Ah! how little did the thoughtless Twickenham know what was passing through the mind of his com-

panion when he fancied he discovered a tinge of melancholy in her usually but too bright face, and, with all the conceit of a lover, imagined she was thinking of him !

They traversed the stately Place de la Concorde, and ascended the Rue Royale towards the Madeleine at a brisk trot ; but here the crowd of carriages obliged them to go slower, and it was some time before they reached the top of the Boulevart, and stopped at the Café Anglais, where they intended dining that evening.

The dinner was a long one, though they were alone, and it was late before they arrived at the theatre, where their courier had previously engaged a box for them.

It was the Théâtre de la Gaîté, and the piece was a long *féerie*, of which Stella understood not a word, nor, I dare say, did Lord Twickenham either ; yet they sat it out, side by side, happy to have been able to go to the theatre without dressing, and happy to be able to have a box of their own from which to look down upon everybody else.

After the play, they got into their open carriage, which had returned for them shortly after twelve, and drove through the crowded streets to the Maison Dorée, where, in company of a few "friends," they sat down to one of those charming *petits soupers* for which this house is so celebrated throughout Europe.

At that moment Lady Twickenham, tired of waiting for her son's return, and fearing to lose her night's rest—so essential to the beauty of her complexion—was retiring to her bed, having previously given orders to be called early on the morrow, so as to be able to see her young hopeful the first thing in the morning.

The next day arrived only too soon; but when the Countess inquired for her son, she was informed that he had gone out for a walk before breakfast, and that "Milady" was still in her bed.

No false scruples detained her now. She entered their sitting-room, and seated herself there to await his return.

I shall not attempt to paint Lord Twickenham's surprise and vexation when, on coming in from his early 'constitutional,' he saw his mother sitting at his breakfast table instead of Stella, nor yet the thrilling scene which ensued. I fear I should never be able to do justice to anything half so melodramatic.

Lady Twickenham had just succeeded, by means of mingled threats and entreaties, in convincing him of the unpardonable sin and wickedness of his conduct, when Stella's bedroom-door opened, and that young lady herself entered the apartment.

The Countess was indignant; Stella was too much bewildered to be able to realise the awkwardness of the situation (which, perhaps, was a good thing for them all); and Charlie felt too much ashamed of himself to say much; so his mother had it all her own way, and made him promise to return with her that very night to London.

Stella understood this much of the dispute, and hurried to her room to write to Juan, whom she still looked upon as her real protector, to tell him what had happened, and to ask him to come to her without delay.

How this letter reached its destination, and what effect it produced, my readers already know—that is supposing they have not skipped the last chapter. And

now it only remains for me to say how Lady Twickenham carried off her son triumphantly back to England, and how the unfortunate Stella was left alone in Paris with only a few pounds, which Lord Twickenham had given her on leaving, to pay her expenses at the hotel.

I must not forget to mention that just before leaving Paris, Lady Twickenham received a long letter from her husband, in which he told her of the startling events which had taken place since her departure.

Mr. Fetherstone had accidentally opened a letter, addressed to Geraldine, and he had discovered, to his horror, how far her passion for Juan had caused her to forget herself. Mr. Fetherstone's letter finished with the following paragraph—

"I am afraid all our hopes with regard to our children have come to an end now. It is strange that both your son and my daughter should have thwarted all our plans for their future happiness in this way. I fear, dear Elizabeth, that neither of them will be able, after this, to make the grand marriages we had hoped for them. I saw the Duke of the Isles yesterday, and he seemed very much shocked at Charlie's conduct. He told me that all projects for a marriage between him and Lady Isobel must now be at an end. You know how strict and serious he is, and how proud all his family are, so I am afraid that what he told me is only too true—all hopes of a marriage between Charlie and his daughter must now be given up.

"As I was coming home from Twickenham this morning, where, as I have told you, both Sibyl and Geraldine have been staying these last three days—a

plan struck me, which the more I think of the more it pleases my fancy, and that is—to marry Charlie to my daughter. Has the idea never struck you? It seems to me that after what has happened it will be the wisest thing to do. It is necessary for both of them to settle down; they are fond of each other, and it will be nice for us to be able to keep them near us.

“Pray consider this, dear Elizabeth, and tell me what you think of it when we meet. I shall send the carriage to Victoria as soon as I receive a telegram from you saying by what train you will come back to your devoted husband,

“GERALD FETHERSTONE.”

When Juan arrived in Paris the next evening, Lord Twickenham had already left with his mother, and he then learnt, for the first time, what had taken place.

“We must return to London immediately,” he said.

“What!—leave delightful Paris?” Stella exclaimed. “Oh, Jack, now you have come we might have such a jolly time here. I assure you I never cared for Charlie any more than I cared for Bel. I am sorry that he has gone; but now that I have *you*, I am sure I shan’t miss him.”

“Stella, this is not a time to think of amusements; I have business of the greatest importance in England; I must return there without loss of time.”

“And I?”

“If you do not want to remain here alone, you must come with me.”

“And what will you do with me? Surely, Jack, you won’t go and take me back to Bull Street?”

“No; I’ll see what I can do with you, when we get

to London ; but now we have no time to waste in talk—pack up all your things as quickly as you can. I suppose that fellow has given you no end of pretty things, eh ? Pack up everything as well as you can to-night, and to-morrow morning we'll start for London."

I need not add that "the woman in white" was seen no more in the Bois de Boulogne.

CHAPTER XXI.

THROWN TOGETHER.

(Not by its Author.)

BUT I think it is time we should return to our friends in Bull Street, and speak of the beautiful Consuelo again.

Heavily and thickly had the dark clouds of affliction gathered over that house.

My readers will remember that when we last saw the poor Spanish girl she had been called away by the landlady to attend her father, whom the latter had discovered lying in a fit at his bedroom door.

Such had indeed been the case. Mr. Fernandez, over-excited by what his son had told him, and over-anxious that his daughter should marry the Marquis, had succumbed under the weight of responsibility which he imagined devolved upon him, and his excitable nature gave way.

The many trials and disappointments he had undergone since his arrival in London had greatly weakened his health, and this last excitement had been too much for him.

A long and painful illness ensued, during which the unfortunate Consuelo was obliged to nurse him day and night. Being constantly wanted at the bedside of her

poor father, she was unable to do any work ; and God alone knows what would have become of them both, had not Lord Belgrave come to their rescue.

His name and position were now no longer a mystery to them, so he was able to help them in a manner which otherwise would have been strange. It was not pleasant to Consuelo to feel that she was under an obligation to him, and to know that they were indebted for everything they had to his unbounded generosity ; but under the circumstances she could not possibly refuse. She would not have minded any deprivation herself ; but she could not allow her poor old father to remain without the necessary assistance which his dangerous illness rendered quite indispensable.

Lord Belgrave, too, did not offer assistance as if he were performing an ordinary act of charity, but quite as if he had been an old friend of the family. He not only sent his own doctor, and paid for all the things required, but he came himself regularly every day, and sat for hours with her by the side of the poor man's bed.

It was easy to see that he found a pleasure in so doing ; yet Consuelo could hardly realize this, and in her mind persisted in attributing it all to the goodness of his heart.

The influence of the Marquis over her increased every day in their new and more familiar position. They were thrown together as people even of the same class are seldom brought together in the ordinary course of events, and their esteem for each other increased with this intimacy.

The more Belgrave saw of Consuelo, the more he admired her, the more he felt assured that he had at last found a heart suited to his own. In her unselfish be-

haviour to her infirm father—who was as troublesome a patient as could be well imagined; in the equal temper she showed on all occasions—always cheerful and sweet, never fretful or desponding; in the strange courage she displayed on the most trying occasions; he was able to realize how grand and noble her heart was.

Ah, it was indeed an inexpressible charm to him—weary of the selfish commonplace women he met in Society—to be able to sit near this beautiful young girl, and to watch the ever fresh, ever noble, inspirations and sentiments which came from her virgin soul, so foreign to all the guile and prejudices of the world. It was indeed an inexpressible pleasure for a man so painfully fastidious in what relates to the true nobility of character, to notice that, however various the subjects discussed, however trying the events of the day, no low or mean sentiments ever sullied those beautiful lips.

"She is perfection," he repeated daily to himself, as he left that dingy poverty-stricken hole in Bull Street, and returned to the gorgeous halls of his palace in that part of the town to which his family had given its name. "Such are the natures that alone can preserve through years the poetry of life; such are the women who alone are able to render marriage the seal that confirms affection, and not the vain mockery of a ceremonial that severs the hearts while it unites the hands."

And he was right. Consuelo was perfection, in mind as in body. It was, perhaps, not so much the mere innocence of inexperience that rendered her so superior to others, as it was not the unusual beauty of her features that made her one of the handsomest women that ever lived; but a something beyond—a something impossible to describe: it was a sort of moral superiority

to everything and everybody, that no one, when in her presence, could help feeling she possessed, yet which away from her it would have been impossible to realize.

Yet Lord Belgrave was not happy; he could not be happy; for he knew that this lovely creature—this perfect woman, at whose side alone he experienced the joy which nothing until then had been able to give to his heart—belonged to another, and could never be his.

It is true that she never mentioned this other favoured one, that even his name had not once passed her lips; yet he could not but feel that her thoughts must often wander across the sea to where he no doubt was working and toiling for her sake.

Yet she preserved such an unaccountable silence on this subject that at times he fondly imagined her love for his hated rival was not quite so intense as it might once have been, and that probably time, distance, perhaps even his own presence, were beginning to cause her to think less of him, and might in time—who knows?—end by making her forget him altogether.

Poets say that love cannot live without hope. If such be indeed the case, Belgrave must have entertained great hopes, for his love grew stronger every day.

One day, as they were sitting by the bedside of old Fernandez, who, after a few hours of delirium, had now fallen into a comparatively quiet sleep, something was said that forced Consuelo to speak of her absent lover.

"Ah, Consuelo, if you knew how I hate that man, I do not think you would speak of him," Lord Belgrave said, rising from his chair.

"This is nonsense," Consuelo replied, as she thought of the man she loved so well. "You do not even know his name."

"Never mind what his name is, or who he is; were he my very dearest friend, Consuelo, I should hate him just as much."

"Oh! do not speak like that."

"Promise me, then, never to mention that man to me. Ah, Consuelo, if you knew how I suffer, you would have compassion on me."

"You forget, Lord Belgrave, that you promised me never to speak of love—never even to allude to it—and that it is merely upon this understanding that I consent to see you so often. Let us change the subject; let us speak of your friends since you will not have me speak of mine."

"Friends!—I have no friends!"

"You have no friends?"

"No; in the world where I live there are no friends—at least, none that you could call by that name. If you mean acquaintances, I can count them by hundreds."

"No, I do not mean acquaintances; but is there really no one for whom you entertain more than a passing regard?"

"No, not in 'the world.' There good taste requires that our affections should be as shallow as our lives—in fact, as everything that pretends to be fashionable—and must be ready, at the shortest notice, to change. No, I have no fashionable friends; but there is one man whom I may really call my friend, who has indeed proved himself to be so on more than one occasion. He is a countryman of yours, Consuelo, a Spaniard; I think I have spoken of him before to you. He saved my life once, when out boar-hunting in the mountains of Andalusia, he is away now."

"Do you miss him?"

"Very much indeed. He was in London the early part of this season. He was staying with me, and it was then chiefly that I had opportunities of studying his noble character; it is only since he left me that I have been able to realize how much I like him. I wish he were here now, that I might bring him to see you. I am sure you would enchant him—you are just the sort of woman he would like."

"Would you not be afraid of his falling in love with me?"

"Oh, impossible; for he would know beforehand how much I love you, and such a thing would never enter his head, however much he might admire you."

"You think not?"

"Consuelo, we are bosom friends. If he introduced me to the woman he loved, I would shoot myself rather than fall in love with her myself, and I am sure he would do the same. Any feelings of love with which you might inspire him he would smother in his heart before they grew into real love. I feel convinced of that, for, remember, he is not a man of fashion. Ah, Consuelo, it would not be every man that I would introduce to you!"

"And supposing *I* were to fall in love with him?"

"For God's sake do not suppose such a thing—it would be too horrible!"

"Perhaps; yet I know your generous nature, and cannot help fancying that were such to be the case, you would not hesitate a moment but would give me up to him."

"Ah, Consuelo! you do not know what love is. Were I the best, the noblest, the most unselfish of men—which I am not, God knows—I could not do such a thing. Do not let us speak of this any more. I fear that I could

hate even Alfredo, as much as I hate that man you say you love, if you were to love him."

Consuelo trembled as she heard this, and, to hide her emotion, busied herself with the medicine bottles which stood upon the table beside her father's bed, and bent over them as if looking for some particular one.

The subject of this unknown lover of hers was not again mentioned in that house; and Belgrave, in the course of time, began really to hope that she had forgotten him. He was as devoted to her as he could well be, and, though he was not allowed to speak of love, he neglected no opportunity of showing his affection for her.

Consuelo, too, feeling how much he suffered, and how truly he loved her—perhaps even for the very reason that she was unable to return this love—was kind and amiable to him—dangerously kind, fatally amiable, for she inflamed his passion to fever-point. But she was so innocent herself as to be utterly ignorant of the ways of the world.

Thus the time passed in that wretched street in Soho; thus the time passed, until at length the fatal crisis arrived—and arrived only too soon.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO MARRIAGES.

(Not by the Author of John Halifax, Gentleman.)

THE first thing Lady Twickenham did on her arrival in London, accompanied by her son, was to take the train straight to Twickenham, her pretext being her anxiety to see her step-daughter Sibyl, who was still staying there, though by this time almost completely recovered; but her real motive was to take her son away from town, so as to keep a closer watch upon his movements than she might have been able to do in London.

Mr. Fetherstone, who had gone to Victoria Station to meet her, accompanied her to Raspberry Dale, and the House having by this time adjourned, he had plenty of time to discuss with her all the numerous advantages of that plan which he had first mentioned to her in his letter.

Lady Twickenham at first did not like the idea at all. It seemed such a come-down for her son to marry a Miss Fetherstone, after she had for a long time looked forward to an alliance with the noble, almost Royal, house of Clanfyne; but then, it was true she herself was married to a Fetherstone, and no one thought any the less of her for that—in fact, it even gave her a certain standing in

Society, which, had her husband not belonged to the Government, most likely she would not have been so easily able to command.

Elizabeth, Countess of Twickenham, was altogether a very remarkable woman—I only wish I had the space to write a whole chapter about her. I would call it after that charming novel of Miss Broughton's, *Red as a Rose is She*, and which, I think, all who had ever seen her would have agreed with me in thinking very appropriate—and I am sure I could have made it highly interesting; besides, such a capital moral of worldly philosophy might be drawn from the history of her life—but I fear both space and time would fail me, so I must give up the idea for the present, and content myself with recounting only those events which bear most directly upon my present story.

“Yes, to my tale—for I find
 Digression is a sin, that by degrees
 Becomes exceedingly tedious to my mind,
 And, therefore, may the reader, too, displease—
 The gentle reader, who may wax unkind,
 And, caring little for the author's ease,
 Insist on knowing what he means; a hard
 And hapless situation for a bard.”

Even Lady Twickenham—though she was as blind to her son's faults as most mothers—was forced now to confess that all ideas of a grand marriage for Lord Twickenham must be given up. His recent escapade had created the greatest scandal. That season had been particularly devoid of excitements—there had only been one trial for murder at the Old Bailey, and as the murderess was an ugly old woman, she could hardly be expected to interest the fair and gentle ladies who attended her trial,

though they flocked in hundreds to see her, having nothing better to do; strange to say, no lady of any social standing had eloped; no young Marquis had blown his brains out; there had been wondrously few divorces and conversions—so the fashionable world of Mayfair, having nothing more interesting to talk about, discussed the conduct of our young Earl in every possible and impossible way, and made him and Stella the subject of general conversation.

In fact, this young lady awoke one fine day to find herself famous; and, on her return to London with Juan, was not a little surprised to see her portrait stuck up at all the photographers, and, in the windows of the most fashionable modistes and milliners, hats and cloaks ticketed "*à la Stella*," which every respectable young lady in England thought it her duty to buy at once.

When the report got about that Lady Twickenham had gone herself to Paris after her son, Society was happy. Such a good story had not been heard for many a day, and you may be very sure that improvements and additions were not wanting, even to this "capital story."

Some "kind friends," of course, were not wanting either, who took very good care to inform that Lady herself of all these stories, and to give her the very latest version of them too; and, such is the marvellous constitution of our society, that the proud Countess of Twickenham—to get an invitation to whose house ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have gone down on their knees—was powerless to contradict those reports, and anyone, however much "in Society," or "out of Society" he might be, was free to discuss her conduct and make fun of it.

"Such a thing must never happen again," she said to her husband, when she heard all this on her return to England. "Charlie shall wed your daughter, and they shall be married the same day as Sibyl. We must lose no time about it, or he will soon be getting into another scrape. No; I must do anything—never mind how much it costs me—to prove to the world that I am still able to hold my own."

It was easy enough for Mr. Fetherstone and his wife to arrange this marriage between themselves, but when it came to telling Lord Twickenham and Geraldine about it, it did not appear such an easy matter, as the two latter looked at it in quite a different light.

Lord Twickenham laughed heartily at the idea when it was first mentioned to him—which certainly was not a good beginning.

And Geraldine, of course, shed copious tears, and swore by this, and swore by that, and by everything besides,—as her favourite heroines would have done in a similar situation—that nothing on earth or out of it would induce her to consent to such a marriage.

But Mr. Fetherstone was not going to be thwarted in his plans. With all the caution and skill of a professed politician, he undertook to convince his daughter of the advantages she would gain from such a marriage, taking very good care to inform her at the same time that he would never consent to her marrying Juan, whom he knew to be a miserable adventurer, who only loved her for her money.

Lady Twickenham, in the meantime, talked her son over; and Charlie, who, as my readers most likely have already discovered, was very weak-minded, and who, by this time, having had quite enough of the fair Stella,

felt very much ashamed of himself for his late disreputable conduct, at last agreed to marry his step-sister.

They did not dislike each other; this they were both obliged to confess—they had now lived so long together that they were accustomed to each other's ways; and Geraldine agreed that she would just as soon marry him as any other man she knew—Juan, of course, excepted.

The night arranged by the handsome Spaniard for Miss Fetherstone's flight with him had arrived.

He went by train to Hampton Court, near which the Twickenhams' villa was situated. He hired a small boat, and at the hour agreed upon between them rowed towards Raspberry Dale.

It was a fine starry night, but there was no moon, and the river, shaded at this point on each side by tall trees, looked very dark. It was in every respect a night fitted for such an adventure; but in vain did he wait by the stairs of the old boat-house—Geraldine never made her appearance.

The letter in which he had informed her of his plans had been intercepted by her zealous father, and the poor girl, fortunately for herself, had no idea that her lover was waiting there for her.

After waiting two hours, Juan, very much disappointed, rowed back to Hampton Court, and went to the hotel there, where he remained the night.

The next morning the first thing he did was to go to the lodge at Raspberry Dale—for he dared not approach the house itself after what had happened—and inquire if anything was the matter with the younger Miss Fetherstone.

No; the eldest Miss Fetherstone had been unwell

lately, he was informed by the gardener, who lived in the lodge; but Miss Geraldine Fetherstone was quite well, and had gone out for a drive to Bushy Park with Lady Twickenham and her son.

He hardly knew what to think. He received no letter from her, although he had written informing her of his vicinity, and requesting her to fix a day for their flight. He remained a whole week at Hampton Court, in the hope of either seeing her or receiving a message from her. But he was doomed to be disappointed. Could she have forgotten him? Impossible! He was sure of her love; he knew but too well the influence he exercised over her. She could not be so indifferent to the "inexpressible sufferings of his heart," as he styled his anxiety in his letters to her; but yet he could not remain for ever at that little hotel, so he returned to London, where Stella was awaiting him in his lodgings, and began to think seriously of giving up all hopes of ever marrying the Right Honourable Gerald Fetherstone's daughter.

One day, about a month later, as he was passing by Hanover Square, a great crowd of carriages attracted his attention. Evidently a grand wedding was going on at the fashionable Church of St. George's. A crowd of idlers had collected on either side of the steps of the portico, and as the company were coming out at the time, and it was impossible to pass by, or yet to cross the street, on account of the crowd, he stopped and waited for the guests to enter their respective carriages.

Eight young ladies, all dressed alike in pretty dresses of blue and white silk, were coming out at the time, and remained standing in the entrance, where eight more

young ladies, also dressed alike, but in white and pink, joined them.

This unusual number of bridesmaids seemed to produce a great effect upon the crowd outside, until some one whispered that there had been two marriages, and that consequently there were two sets of bridesmaids.

A great rush was now made, as a young lady, dressed all in white, and wearing a wreath of orange blossoms, appeared. She was very tall, and of a stately and commanding figure, such as is rarely seen now-a-days. Her hair was black, and showed off to perfection the splendid diamonds she wore in it. Juan had no difficulty in recognizing this lady, and he was horrified when he thought *who* the other bride might be.

Mr. Jobkin was walking just behind her with Lady Twickenham. A large close carriage drove up to the door at that moment, the coachman looking very important in his powdered wig and showy livery, with an immense bouquet of white flowers on his breast. Sibyl and Mr. Jobkin entered it, and were driven away at a brisk pace, amidst the cheering of the street boys.

While this carriage was attracting the attention of the crowd, Juan's eyes were directed towards the church; and it was with mingled feelings of rage and disappointment that he saw Geraldine advancing through the crowd, resting on the arm of Lord Twickenham, and attired as a bride.

She was dressed very much like her sister. A rich veil of duchesse lace fell from under her wreath of orange blossoms, above which shone a countess's small coronet in diamonds. She also wore beautiful jewels on her neck and arms; but, not possessing the personal

advantages of her sister, either in figure or face, the crowd of idlers did not bestow half as much attention upon her as they had done upon the first bride.

"She seems ill," whispered an old woman who stood near to Juan. "I am sure the poor thing has been crying."

"Umph! Girls always cry when they are married," a man said behind her.

"She is not half so handsome as the first one," remarked the old woman.

"Well, I don't know," said another man, so loud that a policeman requested him to "shut up!"—"I wouldn't like to be that dark woman's husband, myself. I am sure she is one of those women who will have her own way in everything, come what may."

"Nor I the husband of this one," observed another man close by, who, by his dress, it was easy to recognize for a pastrycook. "I hate these milk-and-water women, who are that soft that they generally end by running away altogether, just like blanc-mange."

Juan, however, hardly heard these rude remarks, although they were made close to him. His whole attention was fixed upon the girl he had for so long hoped to make his wife, and who had now already become another's.

Geraldine was very pale, and her eyes showed but too plainly that she had been crying; but, as this is a luxury often indulged in by brides, no one attached much importance to these evident marks of sorrow. But she seemed quite composed now, and was able to enter the carriage, which had driven up to the church, with a light, firm step.

Lord Twickenham entered it after her. He, too, was

pale, and had certainly not the look of a happy bridegroom.

The rest of the company entered their respective carriages, and also drove off; and soon afterwards the crowd had dispersed, and Juan was left alone standing on the steps of the church, lost in profound thought.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAN YOU FORGIVE HER?

(Not by Anthony Trollope.)

How long Juan remained standing there he himself could not have told, but he must certainly have remained a long time, for a policeman came up to him at last and requested him to "move off," which he mechanically did.

I dare not enter into his thoughts. I fear they were a little too worldly, even for this book, and I must not forget that I am writing for the innocent and virtuous daughters of Mayfair.

And, indeed, who could have told what was passing through his mind at that moment?—though, by the dark shade which had come over his face, and by his distended nostrils and quivering lips, it would not have taken much penetration to guess that his thoughts were anything but pleasant.

That nameless expression written on his handsome countenance, which said "beware!" in a language which, though plain, so few understood, came out with a wondrous clearness this day; and few and sadly inexperienced must have been the men who would have trusted him had they seen him at that moment.

The fond hope he had nourished in his wicked heart

for so many months had fallen to the ground with a crash; the girl he had longed to make the stepping-stone to his vile ambition could now never be his. Yet she might still love him—but what could that matter to him now? She could never be his wife; he could no longer hope to inherit Mr. Fetherstone's wealth. He never even thought of her feelings: what was she to him now?—a stranger—less than a stranger; as he had never cared for her, such a thing as pity for her unfortunate fate could not enter his heart. No; all his pity, all his sorrow, all his thoughts were for himself; and yet, of all men in the world, he was the only one who could have known what Geraldine's feelings must have been at that moment, and how much she should have been pitied—though, according to "the world," she had made one of the most brilliant matches of the season.

As he walked through Hanover Square with his hands thrust into his pockets, and his eyes bent upon the pavement, an idea seemed suddenly to strike him; he raised his head and smiled—a cold cynical smile, horrible to behold even upon his handsome face; he quickened his steps, crossed the Square with a determined air, and entered Oxford Street, along which he walked until he arrived at the turning, past the bazaar, which leads into Soho Square.

A few minutes later he had entered Mrs. Potts' little shop, in the always dirty, but anything but silent, Bull Street, and was asking that highly respectable old lady if his father was in the house.

"Your Pa! Shure, no! Why, don't ye know as the poor man died a fortnight ago, thereabouts?"

"My father dead!" Juan exclaimed, covering his face with both his hands.

"Faix, by the powers, don't ye know it?"

"Dead!—my poor old father dead!" he kept repeating, unable to realize the dreadful news.

"And my sister—Consuelo—what has become of her?" he asked in a faltering voice, when he had sufficiently mastered his emotion to be able to speak to the old woman.

"She is gone, sir; she left two days afterwards, she did."

"Gone!—But where?"

"I don't know. The tall, proud-looking gentleman as was always a-coming to see her, took her away, I believe."

"The . . . Great God! Did you know who he was?"

"No, sir; I don't think as I ever heard his name. He looked like a foreigner though, and always spoke some foreign lingo to them. I am really sorry, sir, but shure I can't tell ye where they have gone. They paid me my rent all right, so I can't complain; but I much fear as the poor girl felt very miserable, and now I remember she often asked me about you, and wanted to know if I had seen you."

Juan stayed to hear no more, but with a wild, low cry, which resembled greatly that of a wild beast at the Zoo, as Mrs. Potts afterwards informed her neighbours, he left the house never to enter it again.

It was only too true. Old Fernandez had died—died after a long and painful illness, in the arms of his loving daughter—of that daughter he would have sacrificed to win a few pounds for himself.

Lord Belgrave had been with him to the last, helping the delicate Consuelo to nurse him, happy to be able to pass his time by the side of her he loved so well.

As long as her father lived, Consuelo saw no harm in the Marquis's visits, but once dead, his presence began to alarm her. She felt that she had done wrong to allow him to come so frequently; she also felt, now, that without intending it she had encouraged him in what she still considered his mad infatuation for her, and that now only two paths remained open to her—to fly from him, or to marry him.

To fly from him! Where could she go? Her brother, the only person whose protection she might have claimed, had disowned her—denied her; besides, where was he?

She had no other relatives in England. Away from her country, without friends or relatives, without money, what could she do?

If Alfredo had been there to take care of her—but where was he? She knew not; he had never even written to her since his hasty departure. Could he have forgotten her? Impossible!—she was too sure of his love; and yet during the last two months strange thoughts had come into her mind—thoughts which true love should always ignore, for sooner or later they are sure to cause its death.

Why had he not written? Of course, a thousand reasons might have prevented him, and one of these reasons—when she thought of it quietly, the only one that would really have prevented *him* from writing—might be death!

Oh, such a thing was too horrible to think of, for she still loved him as she could never hope to love any one else; and to forget, to try and forget, for a time at least, these harassing thoughts, she encouraged the visits of Lord Belgrave—the man she knew he loved best—and

talked to him as if her heart were free, until he began to think that she had forgotten her absent lover.

Lord Belgrave, under the influence of this sweet, innocent girl, was a changed man; he was no longer the cold, heartless, indifferent man of the world, but a passionate, ardent, impulsive lover.

He felt the change which had come over him, and he was not sorry for it; for he knew that she, for whom he would have gladly sacrificed everything, was really worthy of him.

He admired her, and respected her, perhaps even more than he loved her, and this was the reason why he felt so anxious to make her his wife.

Yet, he was not blind to the consequences of the step he was contemplating. There was no denying that such a match would be a very poor alliance for him to make—an alliance that would bring him neither advantageous connections nor additional fortune. But then he needed neither, and Society had taught him to give an exaggerated importance to his own merits, and to the value of his position and surroundings.

He prided himself on despising the world, and yet he was but its spoiled child, after all, and he would not have despised it, nor wilfully shocked its opinion, for any possible consideration. Public opinion he believed to be generally a good judge of good and evil, but he also knew that, if you indulge it, it becomes a most pernicious gossip, that will meddle in things with which it should have no business; and in those things where public opinion is impertinent, Belgrave scorned and resisted its interference as haughtily as he would have done the interference of any insolent member of the insolent whole. "The world is like a nettle," he used to say; "if

you come in its way, it stings, however slightly; but if you at once grasp it firmly with a bold hand, it has no power to inflict any pain." "The world is like a dog," he had heard his father say; "let a man once show that he feels afraid of its bark, and it will fly at his heels; but if he fearlessly faces it, it will leave him alone, and even fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone."

The Belgraves had always been a very proud and exclusive race, and Lord Belgrave himself was especially noted for his natural haughty and serious manner. What in his brother seemed only indolence and langour, perhaps at times even affectation, in him looked more like pride and hauteur; yet we know that this was only a mask which he assumed before the world, for in reality no kinder or warmer-hearted man ever lived. But with such a character as he loved the world to believe he possessed, he would not have liked to give the lie direct to his past life by marrying a woman so inferior in position to himself.

He thought all this over long and seriously, for he really loved Consuelo as few could have loved; and the more he thought about it the more convinced was he that a marriage with her could never be thought a *mésalliance* by any one. To begin with, no one in England knew who Miss Fernandez was—she might be a Duke's daughter for all that his friends knew or would most likely ever know. Her name, it is true, was common enough; yet, strange to say, it was the name of some of the proudest families of Europe. The Duke of Arion, the Duke de Feria, the Duke de Medinaceli, the Duke of Frias, the Duke de Hajar, the Duke de San Lorenzo, the Duchess de Uceda, the Marquis del Arco, the Marquis de Javalquinto, the Marquis de Malpica, the Marquis de Villalba

the Count de Lugne, the Count del Viro, the Baron de Salillas, and several other grandees of Spain, whom he had known while in Madrid, were proud to bear the name of Fernandez, which, like the name of Howard in England, perhaps on account of its very antiquity, has become almost a common one. The Miss Fernandez he was going to marry might be a near relation of one of these grand families—in England who could tell? The Peerage alone could inform them, and it was easy enough for him to make her name sound grand there; besides, once Marchioness of Belgrave, who would ever dream of questioning her descent?

I mention all this to show that Lord Belgrave was not acting blindly when he, for a second time, proposed for Consuelo's hand, but that he knew well what he was about, and only did so after mature and thoughtful consideration.

But Consuelo could not make up her mind to marry him so easily as he had made up his mind to marry her.

It was on the day of her poor father's funeral, when, in the lowest of spirits and with tears in her eyes, she had exclaimed in anguish that now she had no one in the whole world to protect her.

"You have me," Lord Belgrave had said, taking her hand affectionately. "Will you not give me a right to protect you?"

She had trembled, and answered nothing, but she had not withdrawn her hand from his.

Three days afterwards she had left the house early in the morning, and, mustering all her courage, had gone to Mr. Jobkin's house at last. "He hates me," she thought; "at least, I know he dislikes me very much; but he is my cousin, after all, and perhaps he will take care of me now that I am alone in the world."

Strange that she should have sought protection against the man who loved her, from the man who hated her; but such was the state of her mind at that time that she hardly knew what she did.

Mr. Jobkin, she was informed by the footman, who looked at her worn-out clothes and at her tearful face rather suspiciously, was at Twickenham, on a visit to Mr. Fetherstone, the Minister, whose eldest daughter he was going to marry.

She inquired no more. How could Mr. Jobkin take any interest in her case, now he was going to be married and most likely to leave the country for a happy honeymoon trip?

She returned to her wretched home, which looked in her eyes even more miserable and desolate than ever after seeing the house of the rich banker, and that evening, in a fit of desperation, she accepted Lord Belgrave.

Here must end the First Part of this book—my three heroines being married at last; and, as is the case but too often in this world, none of them having married the man she loves, my readers will, therefore, be right in concluding that the eventful part of their history can hardly end thus. I would recommend those amongst them who still feel an interest in the stately Sibyl, the romantic Geraldine, or the beautiful Consuelo, to read the Second Part, and find out how they each fared in the fashionable world in which they were now fated to live—perhaps more by circumstance than by choice.

SECOND PART.

FASHION AND PASSION.

SECOND PART.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VANITY FAIR.

(Not by Thackeray.)

A YEAR later, and towards the end of another London season, several of our old acquaintances were assembled one fine summer evening in one of the pleasantest drawing-rooms in Mayfair.

It was Sunday, and most of the guests there had passed the afternoon at Elizabeth Countess of Twickenham's villa by the Thames, admiring the freshest of flowers, and discussing the freshest of news. The day had now come to an end, but the chit-chat and the ices had not, and the smooth sunny lawn of Raspberry Dale had been abandoned for the picturesque drawing-room of Lady Windermere, in the most fashionable of London squares.

It was one of those small but most delightful of all dinner parties, which only the most successful leaders of the fashionable world are able to give; dinners at which

all is as refined, brilliant, and *couleur de rose*, as is the soft light which is diffused through rose-coloured shades from a hundred wax candles upon the well-spread table, adorned with ruby-coloured glass.

Amongst the guests we notice especially Lady Tottenham and her daughter—the latter, we are sorry to say, still unmarried—Lady Cowes and her two daughters, and Lord Edwin Beauville; of the rest we need not speak—they are, and most likely will for ever remain, strangers to our story.

Lady Juliet Standish is undoubtedly the belle of the evening. She has but lately returned to London, and this is her very first appearance since her return. Sad misgivings had been entertained concerning her during the last winter by her numerous friends and admirers, for it was whispered that the poor girl was in the last stage of consumption; and they who had seen her at Cannes, where she had been with her mother ever since she first left London, now nearly two years ago, said that it would be a miracle if she ever made her appearance again in a London ball-room. And when the next season came, and Lady Cowes' pretty daughter was missed by all, people came to the conclusion that their worst fears had been realized.

But, fortunately, these people were mistaken. Lady Juliet, though she had not cared to undergo the fatigues of a London season so soon after her illness, was now completely recovered, and—save for the loss of her long auburn curls, which the doctor had sacrificed on the altar of health—she was once more the charming young lady of two seasons ago.

She had grown thinner, and her cheeks were no longer rosy, as they had been before, but her eyes seemed to

have acquired a depth of expression, and, altogether, she looked, if I may be permitted so to express myself, more spiritual. She wore her hair, which had grown rather darker, cut short, and on the top of it a pretty little cap of white tulle, not unlike those we see in the portraits of Charlotte Corday, and which became her greatly. People who before had never even thought of casting a second glance at her, were now the first to confess that she was a very pretty girl; besides, her late illness had made her quite interesting, and this was the reason why Lady Windermere—who, like all the leaders of fashion, delighted in bringing around her all interesting people—from Pumpsuff, the wondrous new pianist, to the young Marquis of Man, whose late conversion was creating such a sensation—seized upon the circumstance of Lady Cowes being in town for a day or two, on her way from the Continent to her marine home in the Isle of Wight, to give a little dinner-party in her honour, and to ask a few of her dearest friends to see this highly interesting young lady.

To make the entertainment still more interesting, she had also invited Lord Edwin Beauville, who every one knew by this time to have been the cause of Lady Juliet's alarming illness.

It was thus that they met for the first time after a year's separation; and though the motives which had prompted this meeting in the worldly mind of their hostess were not the best in the world, yet both of them rejoiced at having the opportunity once more of seeing each other, though in a room full of strangers.

Indeed, I doubt very much if Lady Juliet would have accepted Lady Windermere's invitation had she not known that Lord Edwin was to be there, or whether

Lord Edwin himself, who had lately rather shunned the very elevated set in society to which the Viscountess belonged, would have condescended to dine with her, had he not been informed that the Lady Cowes and her daughter would be there.

We have seen nothing of him since that day, now thirteen months ago, when, under the cool shade of the trees of Raspberry Dale, Sibyl Fetherstone had in so few words destroyed all his hopes and longings, and altered the entire purpose of his life. We have not spoken of him since then, but my readers will no doubt have imagined what he suffered in that interview, for he had loved Sibyl dearly, and he still loved her with all the passion of which a nature like his was capable. But he was not a man to give himself up either to the excess of joy or despair; even his most intimate friends were ignorant of what had taken place for weeks afterwards; and though he felt the blow as deeply as any man could possibly have done, still he managed to hide his disappointment from the world.

He left London the day after his visit to Twickenham, and only returned after a long absence, during which he had been amusing himself with a few intimate friends of rather wild character, with whom he had frequented the most fashionable casinos and spas on the Continent. But in vain did he try in the midst of the wildest dissipation to forget the sufferings of his soul. Sibyl, or rather the passion which she represented in his heart, was always before him; he could not forget what he had felt—nay, he would not have forgotten it for worlds, though he did try so hard to forget the cruel-hearted woman who had inspired such feelings in his warm heart.

Tired of Continental life, he had returned to England, where he certainly was not destined to recover his peace of mind.

Of the details of his "fast life" I shall say but little, a piece of forbearance for which I consider myself entitled to the everlasting gratitude of my readers, who, if they have not had their curiosity on this subject more than satisfied by the innumerable novels of the last four years, must indeed be insatiable. Suffice it, therefore, to say that Lord Edwin gave himself up to all sorts of dissipation, in hopes of recovering his lost happiness, but without any marked success; and that towards the end of that London season he had voted town life altogether "a bore," and had accepted an invitation from the Duke of Northland to go and shoot over his extensive moors in the north of Scotland.

Lord Edwin was fond of sport, but he had heard that a grander sport than even the far-famed grouse-shooting was to be had at the Duke's princely castle. An Italian heiress, a youthful Countess of surpassing beauty, was stopping there; he had already met her in London two or three times, and he had private reasons for believing that the lovely daughter of the Duchess de St. Gennaro had not been quite indifferent to the few passing attentions he had been able to pay her in the crowded London ball-rooms where they had met.

Never before had he been so fully aware of the necessity of mending his fortunes as at that particular time, for since his brother's marriage all chance of receiving an addition to his slender income from him seemed to have vanished, and the life he had been leading lately was not the most suited to make that income go very far. Careless and indolent as he was in all

matters belonging to business, he could no longer shut his eyes to the sad reality of his condition—creditors surrounded him on all sides, and he was already over head and ears in debt. Something he must do, and do at once—but what, he knew not. A son of the noble house of Belgrave could not think of going into business, and yet he was expected to live like men who possessed princely incomes, and pay his bills as readily as they did.

Under the circumstances, only one course was open to him—he must make a good marriage, that is to say, buy a fortune by means of his rank, as so many others buy rank every day by means of their fortune.

But the idea of marrying a provincial heiress, the vulgar daughter of some wealthy manufacturer, was most revolting to him; the very names of Manchester and Birmingham sounded horrible in his ears, and he could not make up his mind to go there in search of a wife.

Such was the state of his mind, when he met the Countess Idalia at a ball at Preston House. She was the only daughter of the Duke de St. Gennaro, a wealthy Neapolitan nobleman, who had married an English lady. Besides being a great heiress, she was very pretty, and, what is more, exceedingly elegant. Lord Edwin could not hesitate for one moment. Here was the woman that he wanted—she had everything that he needed—she seemed made for him; but yet there were great obstacles in the way. Was it likely that one so beautiful, so rich, so much sought after, would condescend to marry him, a poor second son, who had nothing to offer in exchange except his good name and his handsome face? The more he thought of this, the more convinced was he of the impossibility of such a thing.

Her mother, who it was whispered did not get on as well with her Italian husband as might be desired, had brought her to England, evidently with the idea of her marrying an Englishman; but she was an ambitious woman, and Lord Edwin knew already by experience how low he was valued in the London fashionable marriage market. It was not likely, therefore, that the proud Duchess of St. Gennaro would ever think of him as a desirable son-in-law; yet he had danced half a dozen times with the lovely Idalia, and he had, as I have before hinted, some reasons—though, in truth, based on rather slight grounds—to believe that she herself was not quite indifferent to the attentions he had shown her from time to time.

Such being the case, it is not to be wondered at that he should have so readily accepted the Duke of Northland's invitation to his castle in Scotland, where he knew the Countess Idalia had also been invited.

He was making his preparations for leaving town once more, when Lady Windermere's dinner invitation arrived. Her dinner was to have been on the Sunday following, and he had decided to leave London the previous day; so most likely he would have refused it had he not been informed at the same time, in the charming little note which had brought the invitation, written upon maize-coloured paper with brown borders, and surmounted by an artistic monogram, that Lady Cowes and her daughters would be of the party.

The mere name of Juliet brought to his mind a crowd of recollections whose course he could not well restrain. "Here I am going to the north of Scotland after a girl who does not care in the least for me, and who most likely would laugh me to scorn were I to

propose to her; when near me, in this very town, is a girl who would be only too glad to become my wife. But does she still love me?" he asked himself. "Oh no," he thought, "impossible! Oh! how foolish, how mistaken I have been. What a confounded ass I have made of myself! Had it not been for that woman, for that Sibyl, whom I now almost hate, I might have been the husband of this girl. I might have been comfortably off with a settled future, whilst now——?"

If he had never loved Juliet as he had loved Sibyl, at least he had always been fully aware that what he felt for her was of a purer, nobler nature than anything he could ever feel for the beautiful siren to whose allurements he had so blindly sacrificed his happiness and welfare; for my readers no doubt remember the handsome offer which his brother had made him if he agreed to marry the Lady Juliet. Now all this was at an end; Lord Belgrave was himself married, and had ceased to take much interest in Edwin's private affairs; yet he felt he owed something to the girl whom he knew had once loved him so well, and so he put off his journey and accepted Lady Windermere's invitation.

Never before had Juliet seemed so lovely in his eyes. Now that the scorching rays of Sibyl's glances were out of sight, he could behold the purer, clearer light of the star-like Juliet, and discover charms in her, which, until then, he had passed over unnoticed.

Certainly, her illness had improved her greatly, and her short hair only added a new charm to her graceful well-proportioned head. Lord Edwin was charmed with her, yet he dared not express his admiration, not even by his looks, for the very reason that he had once told Lady Cowes plainly that he could never love her

daughter. Yet what he felt for her at that moment, if not love, was, at least, that wondrous all-absorbing admiration which only too soon turns into love.

Had she been a stranger to him—had he never seen her before, never admired her before—he would not have hesitated to sit near her, perhaps to conduct her to the quiet conservatory, where he might have expressed his admiration in terms as warm as the rules of good society would have permitted; but knowing her as well as he did, and remembering what had taken place between them, he dared not approach her—he even felt afraid of looking at her too much; while she—she, on her side, was too proud to come to him and say she forgave him without being asked, though well she could see at that moment how he longed for her forgiveness.

The poor Juliet had suffered greatly. Sibyl Fetherstone—the girl she had been led to consider her best and dearest friend, the girl in whom she had put all her confidence, all her trust—had taken from her the man she loved, though Sibyl was fully aware how great that love was; and, what was more, after making of him her tool and her plaything for a couple of months, she had heartlessly cast him aside as a child throws away a doll of which it has got tired, and married a man Juliet herself had refused only a few weeks before! Thus, Sibyl had not only broken Juliet's heart, but also broken the heart, she greatly feared, of the man she loved even better than herself; and all for what?—for the senseless amusement of an hour! Ah! Juliet had indeed been sadly tried, and it is a wonder that my readers see her still alive.

Lady Windermere's guests sat watching them with that cold-hearted, half-cynical, half-compassionate smile of indifferent curiosity which so characterises the spoiled

children of Fashion, and casting side glances of mute intelligence now and then at each other, all through the dinner. For their clever hostess had had the "happy idea," as she herself boasted afterwards to her dear friend Lady Tottenham, of placing them side by side.

Juliet and Edwin, however, talked and laughed together as if they had always been the best friends in the world, and never more than friends. They knew very well that everybody's eyes were upon them, and felt so much the awkwardness of the situation, and the necessity of appearing to look indifferent, that they talked with animation of a thousand things which neither of them cared the least about.

After dinner the ladies retired to the back drawing-room—a long room elegantly decorated and furnished in the Louis XIV. style, which opened upon a pretty little conservatory, at the end of which a lovely landscape, lighted up by an artificial moon, with a castle and a distant view of a lake, which looked tantalisingly real, had been painted by the artistic hand of the accomplished mistress of the house.

"It is all nonsense, my dear," said Lady Tottenham, sitting down beside Lady Windermere, on a sofa near the conservatory. The other ladies having gone into the front drawing-room to inspect some new games which had just arrived from Paris, they were alone, and could talk without fear of being overheard—not that I believe for a moment such a consideration would have had any weight with them. "It is all nonsense; I do not believe they care for each other at all. I watched them narrowly throughout dinner, and when I tell you that I did not surprise one smile, or even one look, between them that might have led me to suppose there existed any

secret understanding between them, you may be very sure that they do not care for each other any longer."

"And yet," Lady Windermere remarked, thoughtfully, "that girl has been at death's door, and they say it was because Lord Edwin had refused to marry her!"

"Who told you that pretty story?"

"Who?—nobody, that is to say, everybody. It went the round of London last season, and everybody believed it."

"Then you may be very sure, dear Lady Windermere, that it was not true. But never mind—thank you very much, all the same, for your clever idea of inviting them together, and especially of asking me to see the meeting. You are always so good, so kind-hearted!"

Lady Windermere bowed, highly pleased with herself, for, fortunately, she did not hear the muttered epithet which Totty thought fit to add to her remark, and which was not exactly calculated to flatter her Ladyship's vanity.

"By-the-bye," said Lady Tottenham, with a smile that she tried very hard to render sweet and innocent, but which the peculiar formation of her mouth transformed into a rather cynical grin, anything but pleasant to behold; "what have you heard lately of that new woman, Lady Belgrave?"

"Lady Belgrave! Oh, don't ask me, my dear; is it possible you have not heard the stories which are told of her?"

"You don't say so! Nothing against her conduct, I hope?"

"Well, no; people do not talk scandal of her yet; but, believe me, they *will* soon."

"Do tell me; you know something?"

"No, I cannot tell you; but, *entre nous*, she is not a woman to be visited."

"Indeed!" And this time Lady Windermere really smiled a smile of pleasure, for she had tried in vain during the whole of that season to get an introduction to the young Marchioness, and it was consoling to her outraged feelings to learn that after all Lady Belgrave was not worth knowing. "What is there against her?"

"Nothing and everything," was her friend's startling but rather contradictory answer. "To begin with—who is she?"

"I do not know any more than you do."

"Well, no more does any one."

"Wait a moment. Here is Lord Edwin, who of course will be able to tell us everything," she said, beckoning to Lord Edwin to approach; he had just entered the room with the other gentlemen. "Dear Lord Edwin, come and sit here, and tell us what you know of your charming sister-in-law."

Lord Edwin approached the two old ladies, and took a seat near them; the harassing emotions he had experienced at the dinner-table had unmanned him, and he hardly knew what he was doing.

"Of Lady Belgrave?"

"Yes."

"What do you know about her?"

He looked at them in mute surprise.

"I know nothing about her," he answered, stretching out his long legs.

"Why, don't you know who she was before her marriage?"

"I did not know her before she married my brother."

"You don't mean to tell us that you don't know even her name?"

"Oh yes, I know her name; it is easy enough to know *that*—does not the Peerage tell everybody?"

"And you know no more than the Peerage?"

"No, nothing more."

Lady Windermere took from the table that Bible of the English nation, which always lies upon the drawing-room table of every self-respecting family in her Majesty's dominions, and also on those in President Grant's. The book opened, strange to say, precisely at the page where Lord Belgrave's name appeared in full. "Here it is—let us see what it says about her," she continued, as if this was the first time she had ever looked at that particular paragraph, and read aloud—

"Married on the, &c., &c., to the Señorita Doña Maria de la Consolacion Fernandez de Sevilla y Montero, daughter of Don Jose Carlos Fernandez de Sevilla, and of Doña Maria Montero."

There was a silence after Lady Windermere had finished, when two ladies joined the circle, and having been informed what was the subject they were discussing, they glanced over the page to read the interesting fact for themselves.

"That certainly sounds very grand, but it does not tell us much," Lady Tottenham remarked.

"I wonder if she is a relation of the Medinacelis?" said Lady Pencarlin, who was one of the ladies who had just joined the group, taking a seat by the table. "I met the Duchess de Medinaceli when I was last in Paris. The Medinacelis are one of the principal families in Spain, and their family name is Fernandez, I believe."

"I do not think, though, that my beautiful sister-in-law belongs to that family—at least, I have never heard that she did," said Lord Edwin, rising.

"My private opinion is that she is a *parvenue*," Lady Windermere (who was herself only the daughter of a chemist) said with supreme contempt.

"I don't think she ought to be visited until it is well ascertained who she was before her marriage," added Lady Pencarlin, who had been a public singer of doubtful merit, and still more doubtful conduct, before she married old Sir James Pencarlin.

"You are right, Lucia; I shall certainly not call until I have found out all about her."

"You are speaking of Lady Belgrave?" said a gentleman who had heard Lady Windermere's last words, joining in the conversation. "How beautiful she is!"

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Lady Tottenham; "fie, Lord Charles, I had no idea you could have such bad taste."

"Why, don't you think her pretty?"

"Oh dear me, no! I cannot say I admire those quiet women who pose for being statuesque."

"Well, you see, the poor thing is afraid of moving or saying a single word, for fear of disclosing her ignorance. I am sure she should be excused."

"Nay, nay, I'll hear nothing against her," said another lady; "I think her really pretty, and for a Spaniard you must allow that her complexion is wonderfully fresh."

"Yes, when it is freshly put on, I dare say."

"Unfortunately I have never seen her, excepting in the evening, so I can't judge, but I thought I detected paint upon her face."

"Oh, Lady Windermere, an artist like you could not be mistaken."

Lord Edwin, in the meantime, thoroughly disgusted with the turn the conversation had taken, had retired

to the front drawing-room, and had seated himself on an ottoman in the centre of the room, near Lady Juliet.

"They seem to be having some fun in the next room," she remarked when she saw him.

"Yes," he replied; "at the expense of their neighbours, as usual."

"Oh, I might have known that you were talking scandal," she said with a sweet smile; "but how is it that you have deserted them—you, who are such a master of the art?"

"I, Lady Juliet!"

"Yes; have I not heard you say plainly, a hundred times, that there was nothing you loved so much as scandal?"

Lord Edwin bit his lip until the blood almost came. "Oh, she cannot love me when she can believe this of me!" he thought; and to change the conversation he informed her that he was leaving town the following day for Scotland.

"Ah, you are going to the Northland's?" she said. "I hear that the Countess Idalia Corricolo is stopping with them; you know her, no doubt; is she really as beautiful as people say? You know I have not been in London for two seasons, so I have not had a chance of seeing any of the new beauties."

"Yes, she is very beautiful, and as rich as she is handsome, and as aimable as she is rich," he answered, looking her straight in the face, to see if he could detect any signs of annoyance or jealousy; but he was not enough of a physiognomist to discover her thoughts through the smile which, like most young girls, Lady Juliet could command when she wished to hide her real feelings.

"I met her several times this last season," he added, after a short pause. "I think her mother, too, very handsome. I am glad they are to be at the Northland's while I am there."

It was now Lady Juliet's turn to look at him; but Lord Edwin was prepared for this, and managed to turn his head away just in time to hide the blush which he felt was burning on his cheek.

"No; he does not care any more for me now than he did last year," she thought, with a sigh. "It was silly of me to think that it might be otherwise. At all events, I am glad to see he has been able to forget Sibyl," and the poor girl turned very pale.

Miss Tottenham entered the room at that moment, and went straight to a looking-glass, in front of which she remained for some time, arranging her curls. Lady Juliet, in order to hide her confusion, drew Lord Edwin's attention to her.

"Look at Miss Tottenham: any one would say her future depended upon the way her hair was arranged."

Lord Edwin laughed. "Well, you can't condemn her for looking at herself in a glass; it shows that she knows her difficulties, and can face them."

"Ah, Lord Edwin, when will you give up making puns? But see, my mother is saying good-bye to Lady Windermere. We are leaving town to-morrow morning; so I dare say she wants to get home early."

"So you leave town to-morrow!"

"Yes; and so do you: how strange!"

"But you go south, while I go north. Ah, such is life! We meet but to part! When shall I see you again?"

"I can't tell; most probably next summer—that is to

say, if I am strong enough to bear the fatigue of another London season."

"A year, then, to wait! A whole year before I see you again."

"It seems a long time, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it does."

"To look forward; but to look back it is quite another thing. It seems to me only yesterday that we acted that piece at Lady Tottenham's: do you remember it?"

"Oh, yes. How well Lady Brightly acted the part of Mary Stuart."

"Yes. Do you remember that last scene? I recollect every word. I don't think I ever heard anything which made such an impression upon me—particularly her last words: 'Farewell, and, if you can, live happy! You have dared aspire to the hand of two Queens; you have despised a tender and loving heart; you have betrayed it to gain a proud and haughty one. Go, fall at her feet, and may your recompense not turn into a punishment!' Ah, it was grand!"

Lord Edwin was much moved, for, strange to say, Schiller's words had turned out only too true in his case, and his thoughts wandered immediately towards Sibyl.

"How well Miss Fetherstone acted her part too," he said, more like a man who is thinking aloud than as if he were speaking.

"Yes; she is a born actress. Have you seen much of her lately?"

"I? Yes—perhaps—no—what am I saying!" he muttered, much confused. "No, not since her marriage."

Lady Juliet looked at him in silence. "He cannot

think of her even without feeling confused," she thought; "no, he cannot love me—he will never love me;" and after a short pause she added aloud, "Mamma is calling me. Good-bye, good-bye till next season;" and she hurried out of the room, leaving Lord Edwin more dead than alive, for his last hope was shattered. He was sure now that Juliet must despise him too much to love him any longer, he felt himself so despicable in his own eyes.

CHAPTER XXV.

CASTLE DANGEROUS.

(Not by Sir Walter Scott.)

IN one of the most northern counties of Scotland, on the shores of the German Ocean, on a well-wooded hill of commanding height, stood the grand old castle of the ancient Earls of Northland, which the distinguished family of English origin now bearing that name had obtained, and succeeded in raising to a Dukedom.

Little, if anything, remains of the original structure, but the numerous alterations and additions have been so well designed and so magnificently carried out, that on seeing the beautiful modern chateau-like edifice, no one would ever think of regretting the grim old towers and frowning battlements of the ancient fortress.

It was at this castle that Lord Edwin Beauville arrived one fine summer afternoon, a couple of days after we last saw him, at Lady Windermere's.

The sun was setting beyond the restless waves that rolled blue and cold in that northern sea, only here and there dashing in grand majestic breakers, crested with silver surf, upon the shining rocks, when he alighted from the train which had conveyed him thus far—almost to the very gates of the castle.

A carriage met him here, which in a few minutes bore him down the approach to the stately pile which was destined to be his home for some days.

He did not see any of the inhabitants of this princely castle however, until the gong had sounded for dinner, when they all met in the grand saloon.

The graceful Duchess of Northland received him with all that suavity and refinement of manner which so characterised her, and, as was to be expected, deputed him to take down to dinner the youthful Countess Idalia, who stood by the side of her handsome mother, the Duchess of St. Gennaro, looking the very picture of loveliness.

She was not tall, but beautifully proportioned; neither was she particularly bright or lively, but her manner was so refined, and her movements so graceful, that it would indeed have been difficult to find any one more charming. But Edwin was too full of the image of Juliet to be able properly to appreciate the charms of the lovely Italian. Throughout the dinner he was rather too much absorbed in his own sad thoughts to care to make himself agreeable to the spoiled daughter of Fashion, as he would have done had he been more in the mood; yet such was the power of his winning address that the young Countess hardly noticed his pre-occupation, and when the ladies retired to the drawing-room, she observed to Lady Florence, the daughter of the house, who was about her own age, that Lord Edwin was one of the most agreeable men she had ever met, which made the English young lady smile.

There was a large party stopping at the castle at the time; amongst others, the Earl and Countess of Cloperton, Colonel and Mrs. Major, Lady Barkington, and her husband, Mr. Stick, besides four or five engineers,

friends of the Duke, who had come to view his last experiments in coal-mining and engine-driving, and his two sons, the Marquis of Preston and Lord Robin. So that it would have been impossible for any one to have found the time long, for in this mixed company surely there was enough to gratify the greatest diversity of taste. Lord Edwin, however, was not yet himself, and not even the prospect of winning the great heiress, and making her his wife, was brilliant enough to enable him at that moment to forget the girl he now feared to have lost for ever, though he was convinced she had once loved him dearly.

After dinner he again found himself by the charming Idalia's side. The Duchess of Northland was sitting near her, so he did not hesitate to draw his chair up and begin talking to them, as being the two persons most sympathetic to him in that room. For the Duke had retired into a distant corner, to talk over machinery with his engineering friends; and the younger people were playing a noisy game in the next room, which could have no attractions for him in his present frame of mind, while the Duchess de St. Gennaro was talking in a low voice with Mrs. Major at the other end of the long saloon.

The Duchess looked as elegant and gracious as ever. She was dressed entirely in white, and from her neck hung a large cross made of five immense diamonds, joined by long stems of white enamel. The Countess Idalia was also dressed in white, but her slender waist was encircled by a broad blue satin riband, and a velvet to match encircled her swan-like throat. Her glossy chestnut hair was coiled in massive twists above her fair brow, and behind was permitted to fall gracefully over her lovely shoulders.

I shall not repeat their conversation, for it was meaningless and uninteresting enough, as such conversations will be, in spite of all our endeavours to render them amusing, and would certainly bore my readers too much; besides, my plot is so extensive that I can well afford to dispense with a great deal of useless padding, which, of course, everybody would skip.

When the ladies retired for the night, and the men descended to the smoking-room, Lord Edwin was made the object of many jokes with respect to the charming young lady to whom, almost without knowing it, he had dedicated himself the entire evening.

"Never mind, Beauville," Lord Preston said, offering him a cigar; "you are right, she is a lovely creature, and I should advise you to persevere."

"She is immensely rich, is she not?" some one asked.

"Yes, very rich indeed; at least, her father is, and she is his only child, so I suppose it will all be hers. They have a magnificent palace on the Chiaja, at Naples," Colonel Major said, "and another at Rome, besides no end of villas."

"How is it, though, that the Duchess does not live with her husband?"

"I believe they do not get on very well together; but she has a large fortune of her own, and some of the finest jewels in the world."

"When I met the Duchess and her daughter at Rome last winter," one of the gentlemen remarked, "she called herself simply Donna Idalia Corricolo, and now I see that you all call her Countess—how is that?"

"I believe it is because she is afraid we should mistake her rank. You know that the Italian Donna

is very different from the Spanish Doña, and that in Italy, as in England, the daughter of a Duke ranks as high as a Countess, so I suppose that is the reason why she calls herself Countess Idalia."

When they were retiring in their turn, the Duke came up to Edwin and gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder, saying, as he did this, in his usual blunt but amiable tone, "Never mind what these youngsters say, Beauville. You had better go in for the charming Italian; she is as pretty a girl as you will ever see, and will be immensely rich. I do not think you can do better."

The Duke, though anything but a courtier of that fickle goddess Fashion, at whose altar the greater part of the men of his rank daily sacrifice their happiness to win a few smiles, was well aware of the pecuniary necessities which position forces upon one, and the sacrifice which it implies, and had himself married a rich heiress, as people said, more from family reasons than from love.

"But do you think that she cares enough for me?" Lord Edwin asked, rather bewildered.

"Care for you!—of course she does, or if she does not yet, she soon will, and it will be your own fault then if you do not succeed in winning her hand."

"But her mother. . . ."

"Oh, leave her to me. Win the daughter's love, and don't trouble yourself about the mother, and it will be your own fault if you do not become ere long one of the wealthiest men in England."

With these words still ringing in his ears, Lord Edwin retired to his room, and was soon asleep, dreaming of the beautiful Idalia, and of the great things he would do with her money.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IDALIA.

(Not by Ouida.)

ON the following morning the breakfast-bell brought them again together in the spacious saloon, where that meal was served, the dining-room being considered too dark in the day-time.

Idalia looked even prettier in her light summer morning-dress than she had done the previous night, but her mother the Duchess seemed to have entertained some secret misgivings of what was going on, for she took a seat next to her daughter, so that as the chair on her other side was occupied already, Lord Edwin was forced to content himself with a seat on the opposite side of the table, from whence he could indeed admire her as much as he liked, but could not possibly hold any conversation with her.

After breakfast the Duke started with his engineering friends in the train, of which he himself drove the engine, to inspect his newly-found coal mines; and Lord Preston and his friends went off shooting; but Lord Edwin, though very much pressed by both parties to accompany them, preferred remaining with the ladies, and escorting them in their morning walk to the neighbouring wood.

It would have been only too easy to see how greatly displeased the Duchess de St. Gennaro was at this unexpected arrangement; but Lord Edwin paid little attention to her not very polite remarks, and prepared to accompany the young ladies, to the great delight of at least one of them, who said, with a sweet smile, as he opened the hall-door for them—

“I am so glad, Lord Edwin, to find you are not as uncivilized as our other gentlemen, who prefer shooting poor birds to ladies’ society.”

“Indeed, Lady Idalia,” he answered, colouring with pleasure, “I, too, am very fond of sport.”

“Then I suppose we ought to appreciate your conduct all the more.” And allowing the other ladies to walk on a little in front, she continued talking to him in that half-playful, half-serious tone, which young ladies only employ with those they particularly like, until they reached a sequestered dell through which, overhung by beautiful trees, ran a little stream that, gliding from one stone to another, lost itself a few yards further on in the ever-rolling sea.

“What a lovely spot this is!” Idalia exclaimed, sitting down upon a moss-covered rock which overhung the little stream, while Edwin, shutting his eyes in his old languid way, flung himself on the grass at her feet.

Beneath them the brook ran swiftly, branching out here and there into little streams, dashing over rocks and stones, foaming here, gliding there; always singing in that sweet dreamy way that makes one long to sleep for a while and dream sweet dreams. The trees rose high on all sides, tall dark firs and pines, and graceful shrubs, and, beneath these, huge lichened rocks, dark shale cliffs, and crags of white sandstone rising up every-

where, the foliage rustling between them, below them, above them, fresh and green. The vegetation seemed, indeed, almost southern, and even the rocks were covered with richly-tinted mosses. The birds sung merrily in the trees and their sweet carol mingled with the music caused by the waters, while the sun gleamed through the feathery leaves which waved gently overhead, lighting up this rare luxuriance of woodland flowers and ferns, greatly enhancing the beauty of that lovely spot.

"What a charming place for a *siesta*!" Idalia exclaimed after a time, casting a side glance at his handsome manly form, as it lay stretched full length at her feet. "If I were alone, I think I should not be long before I imitated you, Lord Edwin. It would be difficult to imagine a lovelier spot for an afternoon's sleep."

"Who would think of sleeping, though, in such a place as this, where there is so much to see, so much to admire; and surely, Countess, you would not like to be alone in such a spot, for if there is anything which could render this lovely place dull, it would be solitude."

"I don't think so. I love nature too much ever to feel dull. I should be perfectly happy, could I live all by myself in such a place as this."

"Ah, it is easy to see you have never been in love. Do you think Virginia would have uttered such a sentiment?—and surely no one could have been a greater admirer of nature than she was."

Idalia's cheeks flushed visibly, as Edwin said this.

"You see, Lord Edwin," she answered, after a short pause, "I have not yet found my Paul. But how funny you should have hit upon Bernardin de St. Pierre's story, for, strange to say, it happens to be my favourite."

"Really!"

"Yes."

"I think it must have been sympathy then, for I too am very fond of it. Charming story, is it not? And then," he added, to change the subject—for to say the truth, he had never read and consequently felt rather afraid of having to pass an examination in it—"I am so glad you like the country: I am awfully fond of it too."

"I like the country in England. There is nothing I enjoy more than staying in an English country-house."

"Do you intend to stay here long?"

"I do not know; but I hope we shall stop until the Duke goes south."

"Then that will not be till the end of the autumn."

"How long do you think of staying here?"

"I had thought of paying some other visits in Scotland, but I think I shall give them up and remain here, that is to say, if you do not all get tired of me before then."

"Oh, Lord Edwin!"

The rest of the party, wandering amongst the trees, had gradually left the banks of the stream, and when Edwin looked round he discovered, to his intense delight, that they were quite alone. I shall not repeat what he said then; I am afraid it would be unfair to him—for you may be very sure, dear reader, that he only meant it for the pretty ear of the lovely girl at his side, who, although she pretended to be rather shocked, and evidently felt not a little confused, could not have the cruelty to be angry with such a charming worshipper as the sweet Lord Edwin. When the rest of the party joined them, a perfect understanding existed between them, and Idalia

did not hesitate to take the arm Edwin offered her, and to walk with him all the way back to the castle.

That evening the Duchess de St. Gennaro sent for her daughter to her room, and scolded her for what she was pleased to call her silly flirtation with Lord Edwin.

"Nay, mamma, do not scold me," she answered in the sweet language of Petrarch; "Lord Edwin is such a charming fellow!"

"A charming fellow! And what business have you with charming fellows? You seem to have forgotten what you promised me before coming here."

"Oh no, mamma, I assure you I have tried my best to gain Lord Preston's regard. It is not my fault if he does not care for me."

"Yes it is; a girl like you ought to be able to fascinate any one."

"Ah, but Lord Preston won't be fascinated," she answered, with great innocence.

"That is because he can see only too plainly that you do not really care for him."

"Well, and supposing I do not, what then?" she replied, with an arch smile.

"Oh, Idalia, you silly girl, how can you let such a chance slip through your fingers!"

"Now, mamma dear, do be reasonable," she said, sitting down beside her and taking her hand. "Lord Preston and I like each other pretty well, but I assure you he will never love me any more than I shall be able to love him. You know very well that of all people in the world you should be the very last to advise me to make a *mariage de convenance*." The Duchess's brow clouded over as her daughter said this, but a smile soon appeared on her finely-chiselled lips when her daughter

added, with an irresistible smile, "You know you wish me to be happy."

"And so you love this young man?"

Idalia blushed, but said nothing.

"And the imprudent fellow has already had the audacity to propose to you?"

"Oh no, mamma; he has not done that yet, but he will soon, I dare say, supposing I were to give him just a little encouragement."

"Which you will, of course?"

"Oh, mamma dearest, he is so nice; you have no idea how well he speaks, and he admires me so much!"

"Are you sure it is yourself he admires?"

"Oh!"

"I did not want to offend you; but, you see, being an heiress, it is but natural that I should be cautious—not that I think for a moment that Lord Edwin Beauville would be a man to marry only for money."

"Oh no, he is too noble for that."

"Very well, I shall not stand in the way of your happiness; but think well before you say anything decided to him. Remember that you are taking a step which you will never be able to retrace. I can say nothing against him, but consider the splendid chance you are throwing away."

"I really do not see why I should be made a victim to Fashion, like so many other girls; it seems to me that one of the privileges of being an heiress ought to be that one can marry whom one likes. I shall be a Duchess one of these days, without the trouble of marrying a Duke, and as for money, I shall always have more than I shall well know what to do with. Of course, I could understand your objection to my marrying a nobody

or an adventurer, but Lord Edwin is a gentleman, if ever there was one, and he comes, as you know, of one of the oldest families in England—it is not his fault that he was not born before his brother.”

The following afternoon the greater part of the Duke of Northland's guests were walking on the terraces which overlooked the sea, talking in groups, and watching the many ships which, with their white sails spread, were making their way through the tranquil waters of the bay.

The sun was high on the horizon, but dark threatening clouds were fast gathering overhead; the storm was near, yet the waters presented a surface as of liquid gold, upon which the numerous fishing-boats looked like so many black specks, while the white crests of the waves of the distant ocean, like wavelets of silver, were seen rising and falling, afar off upon the tranquil waters of the golden bay.

The trees on the other side, and the numerous towers and turrets of the castle which rose behind them, were in deep shadow, and over the neighbouring hills the dark thunderclouds rolled, impelled by the force of the approaching storm.

It was a curious sight, this struggle between the elements, this strange mixture of light and shade, and every one felt more or less influenced by it; so much so, that they still lingered upon the terraces though they knew that at any moment the clouds might break and the rain descend in torrents upon them.

The Duke was walking with Mrs. Major, and seemed much interested in her conversation. The two Duchesses were standing side by side, leaning over the stone parapet, and the other guests were walking up and down in groups, watching alternately the dazzling sea,

and the clouds gathering over the hills. Lord Edwin, of course, had found his way to the young heiress's side, and was talking to her in his usual winning way, when Lord Preston suddenly exclaimed that a yacht was in sight, and seemed to be making for the pier below the castle.

A general cry was raised as to whose it might be, and glasses and telescopes were instantly produced to gratify curiosity.

It was a large sailing yacht, and its white sails were fully set to catch the wind, which, however, was not very favourable.

"Whoever it is will have to remain in the bay to-night," the Duke said, coming up to where the Duchess stood, and offering her the glass through which he had been looking.

"Have you any idea, Pres, who it can be?" asked Mrs. Major.

"No. I do not know that yacht, but whoever is on board will be welcome here."

A messenger was instantly despatched to the pier to wait until he had learned whose yacht it was, and who was on board. It was not long before he returned with the news that a boat from the yacht had just come on shore, and he had learned from the men in it that she was the *Romola*, and that her owner, Mr. Jobkin, the M.P. for Brightborough, with his wife and a few friends, were on board.

The rain was now beginning to fall, and several claps of thunder announced that the storm was fast approaching, so every one sought refuge in the castle, but not before the Duke, in his usual blunt but hospitable way, had sent word to the owner of the yacht that he would

be happy to see him and all his party at dinner that evening.

When the gong sounded for that meal a few hours later, and Lord Edwin entered the drawing-room, the visitors had already arrived, and he found himself once more face to face with Sibyl Fetherstone !

CHAPTER XXVII.

SIBYL.

(*Not by Mr. Disraeli.*)

EDWIN and Sibyl thus met once more.

Sibyl!—but no longer the young lady he had known before, lovely and fascinating, it is true, but still only a girl. The year which had elapsed since he had last seen her had sufficed to develop the lovely bud into a beautiful flower.

Yes, there she stood before him, more beautiful than ever; there she stood, with that well-known look in her large black eyes which he had found so irresistible in times gone by, and a smile, as of defiance, on her full coral lips; there she stood once more in his path, but the wife of another!

She was plainly though richly attired, and her long black velvet dress, without any trimming, had evidently been made by one of the first of Parisian dressmakers.

The body was high, but the rich fabric, which fitted closely to the figure, only served to reveal the unsurpassed beauty of her slender waist, and lovely form. Round her throat she wore a black lace ruffle, and black Chantilly lace fell over her delicate hands, on the fingers of which sparkled many precious rings.

Her raven locks were coiled round her beautifully-formed head in thick braids, and drawn off her forehead, leaving it uncovered, a peculiarity which suited her, and gave her a distinguished look amongst the other ladies, who all wore their hair low over their foreheads, according to the ugly fashion of the day.

Her face was pale, but her full red lips were redder than ever, and her large lustrous eyes shone with an unnatural brightness.

Twisted in her black hair, and only here and there visible, lay coiled an emerald serpent, looking wondrously natural, whose large head, with its immense ruby eyes, stood up as if ready to spring.

Thus, though her dress was by far the plainest and simplest in the room—for all the other ladies were in low bodies and short sleeves—Sibyl looked the most elegant, and every eye was fixed upon her with admiration, not unmixed with dread—for there was something horrible in that cold smile of hers—something almost devilish in her look.

Lord Edwin remained for a few seconds like a statue; he could not have moved one step either backwards or forwards, and when he attempted to speak he found he could not utter a word. He felt (I fear the comparison will only make my readers smile, and yet it is the only one I can find that can describe his sensations at that moment) very like the poor dove which is introduced into the box of the boa-constrictor, and would fain fly away from it, yet feels irresistibly attracted, by a fascination it can neither comprehend nor resist, towards the animal, whose bite is death. Perhaps the dark green coils of the emerald serpent which Sibyl wore in her hair, and whose red eyes sparkled with such a fiery glare, had something

to do with this strange feeling which for a few moments so completely overpowered him.

When the dinner was announced, he succeeded in rousing himself from this state of stupor, and, making a great effort to recover his self-possession, he went up to the Countess Idalia as usual, and offered her his arm.

He sat next to her at table, and tried his best to appear interested in her conversation—perhaps never before had he taken such pains to please the charming heiress; but Sibyl was sitting opposite to him, and every time he raised his eyes he met the fiery ruby orbs of the serpent, and the still more dreaded eyes of this modern Cleopatra.

Idalia could not help noticing the effect this strange woman seemed to exercise over Edwin, and felt so uneasy and nervous that she could hardly think of anything else.

When dinner was over, and the gentlemen had joined the ladies in the drawing-room, Edwin again sought the side of Idalia, and, with the pretext of seeing the storm, which was now raging with intense fury, he conducted her to another room which happened to be less brilliantly lighted, and there, standing at one of the large windows out of Sibyl's sight, he was once more able to talk to her as he had done on the previous days.

In the meantime, the Duke, uneasy about the safety of the yacht, and also fearing Mrs. Jobkin would get wet through going on board in the little open boat, was trying hard to persuade her to remain for the night at the castle.

"Oh, she doesn't mind the sea; oh Lord! no—not she," Mr. Jobkin was saying at that moment.

"Let me add my persuasions to those of my husband," said the Duchess, "and prevail upon you to stop here for the night. It is as nasty a sea as I have seen for many years. It would be folly of you to attempt going back to the yacht on such a night as this, Mrs. Jobkin."

"I don't mind the sea one bit," Mr. Jobkin exclaimed once more; "I shall go back, hany'ow—I am accustomed to it."

Sibyl smiled, and said in a calm tone, "It is really charming to hear you, *mon ami*; it really does one good in these days of cowardice and laziness." And then, turning towards the Duke, she said with a little laugh, "When you consider that the poor fellow is as sea-sick as any one can possibly be whenever it is the least rough, it is really wonderful to think what an amount of moral courage he must have."

Mr. Jobkin flushed crimson, and his eyes shot one glance of fury and anger at his wife, who, however, met it with a cold cynical smile, and a look of supreme contempt.

"You know, Mrs. Jobkin," he said, in vain trying to speak calmly, "everybody cannot be a born-sailor like you. . . ."

"No," she answered coolly; "no more than everybody can be a born-gentleman."

The Duke and his wife exchanged glances and smiled.

"You will stop, Mrs. Jobkin?" said the Duchess.

"No, thank you very much, Duchess," Mr. Jobkin answered for his wife; "we prefer returning to the yacht."

"Answer for yourself, *mon ami*," said Sibyl, rising. "You can return with your friends; I shall certainly

avail myself of the Duchess's kind offer, and will remain here to-night."

Once more Jobkin cast a look of anger at his wife; but this time Sibyl did not even deign to notice it, and, without saying another word, swept past him as if she considered him unworthy of a look, while her long black velvet train almost carried him off his feet.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Jobkin and his friends, three gentlemen who were cruising with him, returned to the yacht, which was rolling about in the bay; and Mrs. Jobkin was conducted by the Duchess herself to the room she was to occupy that night, which was situated in one of the towers of the castle.

When the gentlemen descended to the smoking-room, of course all the conversation was about the Jobkins. Many funny stories, more or less improbable, were told of him, and all agreed in laughing at him and admiring his beautiful wife.

"I wonder how she could marry such a confounded snob as that!" Lord Preston said.

"Some people would do anything for money," Colonel Major answered, casting a side glance at Edwin, which made the blood rush to his face, the allusion seemed so very pointed.

"He is very rich, is he not?"

"Oh yes, immensely rich, or she would not have married him."

"It is strange she did so, notwithstanding his money, added Lord Preston; "I should say a woman like that could have married anyone she pleased."

"I believe the marriage was entirely made up by her step-mother," said the Duke, coming up and joining in the conversation. "You know she married her son, Lord Twickenham, to the other Miss Fetherstone."

"That was another silly marriage; I don't believe they either of them cared a bit for each other."

"And why should they?" the Duke answered. "Do you think, Pres, that people marry only for love?"

"No; I know that they generally marry for money," Lord Preston said, looking in the direction of Edwin; "but I suppose it is the right thing to do."

Edwin, who was lying half-asleep on an ottoman near, heard the young man's words and saw the look, and again he flushed. "How they all despise me," he said to himself; "but they cannot despise me more than I despise myself; I do not love this Idalia, and why should I lower myself by trying to win her love?"

As they were leaving the smoking-room that evening, the Duke again approached him, and said—

"I am glad to see you are getting on so well; I am almost sure you will win her now."

"No, I shall not," Edwin said, with rather more spirit than he usually displayed; "for I do not intend to persevere. I shall never be able to love her."

"And you would give her up now?"

"Yes."

"Let me advise you to consider before you do anything so rash; think of her wealth, and think of your prospects. I am sure if your brother were here he would be the first to advise you to marry her."

"And yet he himself has married a woman rich only in beauty!"

"Ah, but Lord Belgrave is a rich man, remember."

"And I am not yet a beggar. I thank your Grace very much, but until I am, I shall take very good care to preserve my self-esteem."

"You speak like a boy, Beauville. You know very

well that the Countess Idalia is as pretty and as pleasing as any woman could possibly be."

"I wonder, Duke, you do not persuade your own son to marry her then, as she is so rich, and so accomplished, and so noble, and so beautiful!"

The open brow of the Duke clouded over for a moment, and after a short silence he answered in an undertone—

"Between ourselves, I believe that is what her mother wants; she is a clever plotter, and has laid her plans well, but the Marquis of Preston is not to be caught by such vulgar means."

"So," thought Lord Edwin, as he proceeded through the long corridor to his bed-room, "I have discovered now why the Duke is so anxious I should marry the rich Italian: he is afraid his son should fall in love with her; I thought there must be something of this kind, or he would not have been so generous with his advice."

As he walked along the dimly-lighted corridor, full of these thoughts, he was not a little startled to see in front of him, standing by one of the windows, a tall dark figure, that looked more like a spectre than a living person, so motionless and silent it stood there.

Edwin, however, was not a man to be frightened by ghosts; so, springing forward, he almost caught hold of the figure. What was his surprise, however, when by the lurid glare of a flash of lightning, which suddenly illumined the corridor and for one moment rendered the entire scene as clear as day, he recognized Sibyl, the woman he had once so loved.

He remained speechless, and as if thunderstruck. Any one who had seen him at that moment would have

thought that the lightning had paralyzed him for the time being.

When he had first seen Juliet after more than a year's absence, at Lady Windermere's dinner, the sensation he had experienced had been one of happiness and pleasure: all the softer feelings of his loving nature had been awakened, and he felt a peaceful joy, such as he had not felt for many years.

But the sensations he had experienced that night at the sight of Sibyl had been of a very different and wondrously complicated nature: all the love, all the passion with which she had formerly inspired him had returned to his soul, but in such a way as to render him more miserable than happy. Her large black eyes, so intensely fixed upon him, burnt his heart. He could feel the pressure of those lips upon his own trembling ones; the very sight of her caused him at once supreme joy, and an indescribable terror.

For one moment he remained motionless; when at last he was able to speak, he muttered more than exclaimed—

“You, Mrs. Jobkin!”

Sibyl, who had also been startled by his unexpected appearance, was some time before she could answer.

“Ah, you frightened me,” she said. “I felt so anxious about the safety of the yacht in this horrible storm that I could not make up my mind to go to bed, and as I could not see the sea from my room, I came here to this window . . . that I might catch a glimpse of it, as it is tossed about by the infuriated waves.”

“I confess I was frightened, too,” Edwin said, recovering his self-possession. “I never dreamt it could be you, Mrs. Jobkin.”

A slight tremor ran through her frame, and she sighed.

"Ah, I was Sibyl once!" said she, but so low that Edwin only just caught the words; but even this was enough to bring back to his mind all the love he had once felt for her, and in trembling accents he cried—

"Ah, Sibyl, to think that we should meet thus!"

Sibyl was too much moved to answer, for she, too, could not help recalling the transports of joy she had experienced in his company in the days that were gone never to return; and, as she thought of the past, hot passionate tears started to her eyes, and almost hid him from her sight.

"Ah, Sibyl, I loved you so!"

"Enough! enough!" she cried, making a great effort over herself; "the past is past. I am his wife now."

"His wife!"

"With what a groan you say that."

"And you love him?"

"Love him! How can you ask me such a thing? Do you think *I* could love *him*?"

"Oh, my Sibyl!"

"Oh no, no; what am I saying? He is my husband, and of course I love him."

"You are trying to deceive yourself. No, Sibyl, you do not love him."

"And what right have you to say so, Lord Edwin?"

"Oh, I forgot! I forgot! Forgive me! You are no longer free to love whom you like."

"Do not let us speak of that, or I shall go mad. I hear that you, too, are about to be married."

"I!"

"Yes; to the Countess Idalia Corricolo."

"Sibyl!"

"I trust you love her, for if not, I fear you are more to be pitied than congratulated."

"No; I am not going to marry her. I do not love her, and I am not a man who would sell his happiness for riches."

"You do not love her! Yet I saw you flirting with her the whole evening. You do not love her! Yet you conduct her to a distant corner, and remain alone with her for hours at a time!"

"Do not condemn me——"

"I do not condemn you; but let me beg of you, if my advice still has any influence with you, not to marry simply for money, not to sacrifice your whole existence to Fashion—as I have done."

"Then I must quit this house immediately. I have gone too far to stop now."

"Come with us in our yacht, and to-morrow by this time you will already be far away from the fascinating Italian."

"Go with you in your yacht?"

"Yes."

"But Mr. Jobkin: what would he say?"

"Oh, you forget that you are a Lord," she replied, with a little laugh. "He will be only too pleased to have you. Have we not been bothered, ever since we set out on our cruise, with the greatest bore of a man that ever lived, simply because he calls himself a Prince?"

"You mean Prince Dacaraca, who is travelling with you?"

"Yes; I do believe my—Mr. Jobkin would put up with anybody if he happened to have a title."

"Your offer is too tempting; but what excuse could I make to the Duke?"

"Oh, excuses will not be wanting. Say, for instance, that you have long been wanting to see the Orkney Islands, and that perhaps such a good opportunity may never present itself again."

"Oh, Sibyl!"

"You must not call me Sibyl—at least, not before people. Consider what they would think—and what Mr. Jobkin would say!"

"Oh, it is too horrible to think that such a man can be the arbiter of your destiny, of all your actions, and that he can dictate whom you should know and whom you should not know."

"He cannot force me to like those I dislike, or to hate those I love."

A loud clap of thunder, accompanied by another flash of lightning, completely drowned Edwin's reply. Sibyl shuddered, and with an involuntary movement put out her hand towards him, as if to seek shelter in his arms from the storm which was raging outside with renewed violence; but she checked herself, and leaned instead against the casement of the window.

"How small the *Romola* looks!" she exclaimed. "See how she tosses about in the bay at our feet! Ah! it is fearful to think that any one of those waves might sweep her to the bottom of the sea, and drown all on board!"

Edwin shuddered, too, as she said this. "Yes," he answered; "we seem to hang over our graves by a single thread—by a thin thread that the weakest hand might cut!"

There was an awful but unpremeditated suggestion in these words—a suggestion, however, which Sibyl either did not see, or did not choose to notice; for after

a short pause she said, folding her shawl about her and preparing to depart—

“Good-bye, Lord Edwin, till to-morrow. You have the whole night to prepare a suitable excuse. Remember that I shall expect you on board early, as I fear we shall have to set sail soon after breakfast.”

“Well, I shall go with you,” he said, and then he remained standing alone by that window for nearly another hour, watching the progress of the storm, and wondering whether what he had decided to do was for the best.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?

(Not by Mrs. Edwardes.)

I THINK it is time I should speak of our other heroine—Consuelo—or my readers will begin to forget her.

What had become of her since her marriage to Lord Belgrave is a question which no doubt those who have taken any interest in her have already put to themselves many times, and I dare say have blamed me for not telling them before this.

The truth is that there is very little indeed to tell, although it is true I might well fill three volumes with a detailed description of everything she did and saw during the time she has been out of our sight, and, perhaps, even three more if I were to give a minute account of her various impressions during that time, for everything was strange to her in her new life. But I will spare my readers all this, as I know by experience how dull and uninteresting all such accounts must necessarily be; and, after all, of what little consequence could the impressions of a poor foreign girl like our heroine, dropped suddenly into the very heart of the world of fashion, be to the general run of people born and bred within its sacred precincts.

Of course, everybody was very much surprised when they learnt that the Marquis of Belgrave, whom people had long looked upon as a confirmed bachelor, had quietly gone and married an unknown foreigner.

The first question which everybody asked at the time was naturally, *Who was she?* And the inevitable and all-important one then followed, *Ought we to visit her?*

As was to be expected, a great and influential party rose against her from the well-filled ranks of the anxious chaperons and tender-hearted mothers who had for so many years tried in vain to induce him to marry one of their innumerable young ladies. But the name of Marchioness of Belgrave carried a weight with it which not even the wrathful machinations of the virtuous matrons of Mayfair could counterbalance; besides, as nothing could be said against her, even by her most disappointed rivals, the question of *Ought we to visit her?* was soon settled in the affirmative.

One very powerful reason was, that the London world of fashion had not yet forgotten the brilliant entertainments which had been given in former days at Beauville House, and now that Lord Belgrave had at last married, there seemed to be a chance of that great mansion being once more thrown open to society. There were very few who lost the opportunity of leaving their cards upon the young Marchioness as soon as they heard of her arrival in town early the next season from the Continent, where she and her husband had been travelling since their marriage.

Yet there was still a great number of people who, not caring much for parties, or not having daughters they were anxious to take to as many balls as possible,

or who considered themselves too grand to call upon an utter stranger, hesitated about leaving their cards at Beauville House. But these were few, I must confess, and very high and mighty indeed they thought themselves.

There were several others too, who, having called at the beginning of the season, and their cards having been mislaid, or perhaps through Lord Belgrave's advice their visits not having been returned, were now up in arms, and there was hardly anything bad enough they could say against her. Amongst these were, for instance, Lady Windermere and her friend Lady Tottenham, and we have already seen how these good ladies discussed her. But, after all, these were but very insignificant stumbling-stones in Consuelo's fashionable career—though in the world of fashion the mice can at times cause more mischief than the lions; and, taking it altogether, Lord Belgrave had few reasons to be dissatisfied with the reception accorded by his friends to his young and beautiful wife.

Directly after the marriage, which had taken place very quietly in London, Consuelo had started with the Marquis for the Continent, where they had remained until the commencement of the following season, travelling from place to place, and visiting the principal cities of France and Italy, without remaining long in any of them.

The life they led during those eight months was indeed delightful. They had everything that could make travelling pleasant and entertaining; and for Consuelo, who had seen so little of the world, and had until then only known the monotonous routine of middle-class life, the new one she had entered upon possessed enchant-

ments which, perhaps, few other women could have appreciated as she did.

She had read a great deal, and was very intelligent, although she was by no means a clever woman, so the wondrous sights she saw were not thrown away upon her, as they would have been upon many girls of the sphere from which she came; and Lord Belgrave experienced every day the satisfaction of discovering new qualities to admire in the woman he had chosen to be his wife.

On their return to England, early in the spring, they took up their residence in the princely mansion of the Belgraves, in the Square to which that illustrious family had given its name, and in which, during their absence, a magnificent suite of apartments on the first floor, which had not been inhabited since the late Lady Belgrave's death, had been re-decorated and re-furnished for Consuelo's accommodation.

I shall not describe her feelings as she took possession of them. It seemed so strange to her, even after having been more than eight months Lord Belgrave's wife, to enter that house as its mistress from which one short year ago she had been dismissed with scorn by a contemptuous butler and a laughing footman! She could hardly realize her position, and when, conducted by that same butler, who was now all bows and civility, to the principal saloon, she sat down in the same gilt arm-chair she had occupied the day she had first visited the house with her poor father, she could almost fancy herself the poor Spanish girl once more, and, what is still more strange, almost wished that she still were so.

Great curiosity reigned in the higher circles of the London world as to what the new Marchioness of Belgrave

was like; for although every one had heard long and more or less exaggerated accounts from the few who had seen her, and the *Graphic* had published a portrait of her at the time of her marriage, hardly any one had even an idea of what she would really be like. Besides, as Lord Belgrave had been a man whom the feminine world had found it impossible to marry, it was only too natural that this world—which, after all, is, par excellence, “the world”—should have been anxious to see the woman who had at last succeeded in winning his coveted hand.

The day when she was formally presented to the Queen at Buckingham Palace was the first time their curiosity was gratified.

It was an unusually large “Drawing-room,” and the crowd on the staircase and in the ante-rooms was so great that many ladies, anxious for the preservation of their dresses, had retired to the further end of the comparatively empty ball-room. Amongst these, and forming a little group apart from the rest, stood our friends—Lady Tottenham and her daughter, Lady Brightly, Mary Marchioness of Bury, and a few others, together with Lord Clare, and three other men. Lady Brightly was sitting on the highest bench, from which she could command a full view of everybody as they came through the gallery door and crossed the ball-room to take up their station near the as yet closed door at the other end, which was to admit them, through a long succession of rooms, to the presence of her Majesty. Lady Tottenham and Lady Bury, who looked charming in her best diamonds and curls, were discussing the probabilities of the Sultan ever paying his debt, and lamenting the ill-luck they had had in buying so much Turkish stock, when Lady Brightly, with her merry voice, called their

attention to a lady who was at that moment entering the ball-room. Immediately all eyes were fixed upon her, and even Lady Tottenham, raising her gold-rimmed eyeglass, cast her eyes, with a supercilious air, towards that end of the room.

And the lady who entered the ball-room at that moment was indeed worth looking at, so much so that every one turned round, and even the people near her made way for her to pass.

She was tall with a slight but graceful figure, attired in a most beautiful and costly Court dress. Her train, which she carried, according to the approved fashion, over her arm, was of white satin, and hung gracefully over a dress made entirely of cloth of silver, embroidered with large stars in diamonds. Round the body, which was also of white satin, and cut low, disclosing her beautiful shoulders and finely-rounded arms, a deep fringe of diamonds and sapphires fell like a cascade of icicles; splendid diamonds shone on her shapely neck and in her ears; and upon her dark brown hair, which was simply but becomingly dressed, shone a large tiara of diamonds and sapphires, whilst at the back, and placed amongst the blue and white feathers which hung gracefully behind, could be seen the small coronet of a Marchioness, in precious stones.

But even this splendid toilette was thrown into the shade by the wondrous beauty of the face of the wearer. It was the face of an angel rather than of a woman. Those large dark violet eyes, which flashed through their long black eyelashes; that small mouth, with its delicate red lips; those features, so perfect, and so devoid of all harshness; that pale but almost transparent complexion; seemed indeed to belong more to the representations

we see of some fair saint than to a mere woman; yet there was such a sweet smile on her lips, such a languid sympathetic look in her eyes, that, in spite of the extreme beauty of the face, it was easy to see that it was indeed a woman's heart which beat under that snowy bosom, and beneath those glittering diamonds, which almost dazzled the eyes and bewildered the senses of the beholders.

Who can she be? was the question whispered on all sides—a question which, however, was soon solved when the gentleman, wearing the Lord-Lieutenant's uniform, who was walking by her side was recognized to be Lord Belgrave.

Yes; this woman, so beautiful, so elegant, so wondrously attired, was no other than Consuelo—the poor girl who had come to London one year previously without a friend, without a protector, save a weak selfish old father and a rascally brother—who had been almost on the point of perishing from hunger and privation in one of the poorest quarters of the metropolis!

Of course, all conversation turned immediately upon her, and Lady Bury even forgot her Turkish Bonds, and spoke no more of them that day. The sensation she had created was indeed greater than even her proud husband could have expected, and when later on, in the Presence-chamber, before all the Court, her Majesty stooped to kiss her, a prolonged murmur was heard, which was more than a suppressed whisper, and which was proof sufficient that her beauty and grace had not passed unperceived by the English Court.

After that, the London world had plenty of opportunities of beholding and admiring the new Peeress. Several grand balls were given at Beauville House that

year, and, as was to be expected, Consuelo was the centre of general attraction until the close of the season.

Her fondest dreams were more than realized. How many times during her youth, like the poor Cinderella, had she fallen asleep and dreamt of balls and theatres, and beautiful dresses and costly jewels, which, on awaking in the cold cheerless light of a winter morning which announced to her a long and tedious day of labour and privation, she had been forced to dismiss from her mind, with many a sigh, as visions too fair ever to be realised! How often, too, while hurrying through the crowded streets to some distant shop to obtain a few of the necessaries of daily life, had she envied the proud ladies who passed by in their carriages, enveloped in rich furs, and wearing sparkling jewels in their ears, while she stood there, poorly clad, weary, and cold!

But I shall not speak any more of those times. All this was over now; her fondest, wildest dreams had been more than fully realized; she was now rich and noble; no one could have a finer house than the one she lived in; no one could possess finer dresses or more expensive jewels, and no woman could have a kinder, more indulgent, husband than she had. But amidst all this splendour, with all these luxuries, was she happy?

Ah, this is a question difficult indeed to answer! The world deemed her happy, and had every reason for doing so; but she herself was too true a woman to feel really satisfied with her brilliant lot, though I must do her the justice to say that she did try her very best to forget the man she had so loved—the man who had gone away to a far distant country to toil and win a fortune for her, and whom she could not forgive herself for having jilted.

Lord Belgrave was so good and devoted to her, that

the very fact of feeling herself unable to give him any real love in return for all his kindness to her made her low-spirited and miserable.

Besides, Belgrave was a man she could hardly understand. His cold, reserved, patrician languor chilled her, and stopped any advances which she would have wished at times to make; for he still loved her as much as ever, though, the first passion having now cooled down, his love was too deeply hidden in his heart to be displayed at all times.

The strange fact, too, that Lord Belgrave and Alfredo should have resembled each other in so many respects, and yet be withal so very dissimilar, was a great misfortune for her, for she could not speak to her husband without being reminded of Alfredo.

When she was in society, amidst all the splendour which was so new and so strange to her, and surrounded by so many people whose gay agreeable conversation could not but amuse her, she forgot her former lover and could be as light-hearted and bright as any other woman, though a certain tinge of melancholy always hung over her and rendered her still more charming; but when talking alone with her husband, Alfredo immediately came back to her mind, and she could hardly refrain from comparing the proud, scornful man of the world she had married, with the warm-hearted, noble-minded man she had jilted.

Thus we see, gentle readers, that no one in this world should be envied merely for their worldly position, for it is not always the richest and the most powerful that are the happiest.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE "ROMOLA."

(Not by George Eliot.)

THE summer sun was setting one fine evening in August on the northern seas. The impetuous waves from the ocean, which the rapid tide swept through the Pentland Firth, could be seen breaking in seething foam on the bold rocks of the Caithness coast; the distant hills of Pomona and the peaks of Hoy were bathed in golden light, mellowed by the great distance, while the purity of the atmosphere, which I believe is clearer in these northern regions than in any other place, threw a charm over the whole scene.

Upon this ocean, like a beautiful white bird floating on the diaphanous ether of the clear blue sky, a little yacht was making its way towards the largest of these islands, the one which bears the lovely name of the fair Goddess of Fruits, and which is also known as the mainland of Orkney.

On the deck of this yacht, seated in low and comfortable arm-chairs, made of wicker-work, were a lady and five gentlemen. The lady wore a yachting costume of blue serge, and a glazed hat, round which was tied a blue ribbon, with the name of the yacht, *Romola*,

written on it in golden letters. Could my readers see her as she sits there, with her eyes closed, half-awake, half-asleep, with an uncut novel on her lap, they would have no difficulty in recognizing her, by her handsome face, and the abundant dark hair which fell in thick masses from under her sailor's hat, to be no other than the beautiful Sibyl.

The gentlemen were—her husband Mr. Jobkin, the owner of the yacht; and his guests, the Prince Dacaraca, Mr. Thomson, Doctor Grant, and lastly, Lord Edwin Beauville, who had only joined them the previous day, when they left the princely castle of the Duke of Northland.

The conversation was general, though neither Sibyl nor Edwin took a very active part in it, for both of them seemed lost in deep thought.

The Prince, who was a tall Russian of no small pretensions, and whom Mr. Jobkin, with his violent love for titles, had picked up in London the previous season, was speaking at the time with an earnestness of manner and a solemnity of countenance which greatly contrasted with the smiling faces of his listeners, who were evidently very much amused with his discourse.

"I tell you that such a thing never happened to me before."

"I quite believe that, nor to any one else either," the Doctor said, casting a side glance towards Sibyl, who, however, was too absorbed in her own thoughts to notice it.

"It is a shame! Here am I brought into a case of—what do you call it?—breach of promise of marriage! when I never even proposed to the girl!"

"Do tell us all about it, Prince," said Mr. Thomson, who was Jobkin's greatest and most intimate friend.

"Oh, Mr. Thomson," exclaimed Sibyl, casting one long glance of displeasure towards her husband's friend, "how can you ask to hear that long and silly story all over again? If I have heard it once, I think I have heard it a thousand times. Can't you find anything more interesting to talk about?"

"Lord Edwin has not heard it yet," Mr. Jobkin said, in his usual pompous manner, and without paying any attention to his wife's remark. "Let me persuade your Imperial 'Ighness to tell it."

"Oh, I have been shamefully treated," burst out the Prince, as soon as Mr. Jobkin had ceased speaking. "You must know, Lord Edwin, that last season, in London, I met a young lady—a very pretty young lady, who fell in love with me."

"You mean with your title," interposed the Doctor.

"Well, it is the same thing. I did not love her, oh no; but she was big and pretty, and I did not dislike her, until one day I saw in the papers that his Imperial Highness the Prince Dacaraca—that's me—was engaged to be married to Miss Jessie Pendennis. Of course, I was furious—I rushed to her house, and asked to see the young lady; she received me alone in the drawing-room, and when I told her what I had read, and asked her the meaning of it, she burst into tears and fell at my feet—yes, at my feet! She then told me that she had put it in herself, but that I must not say anything about it to her father, or contradict it in any way, for if he found it out he would be dreadfully angry and punish her much. She also told me that she would have four thousand a year when she married, and as she was big and pretty, and as I did not want to get her into trouble with her father, poor thing, I consented to become her husband.

Her family—a very good family—were enchanted, and that very day I went with her to order the dresses and the writing-paper, which she said she should like to have with her name, Jessie, in gold, surmounted by a princely crown. We were engaged for nearly a week, and several of my friends made her fine and costly presents—amongst others, Mr. Jobkin here. . . ."

"Yes, I bought her one of those beautiful bracelets in gold and diamonds, that cost me several 'undreds," interposed Mr. Jobkin.

"But when we came to arrange about money matters the whole thing collapsed. Oh, we could not agree at all, by no means; for, just think, I found out that she would only have four hundred pounds a year, instead of four thousand, as she had told me! But after no end of bother, as I had said I would marry her, I consented to take her with that. 'You know I do not love you,' I told her, 'and that you do not love me, but as we have got accustomed to each other, I don't mind marrying you.'"

"Now, if that wasn't generous and gallant," said the Doctor, "I should like to know what is generosity and gallantry?"

"Ah! but listen. That girl, though she was so big and so pretty, turned out to be a greater cheat than she was a beauty, for the next day I learnt that although she would have four hundred pounds a year, it would only be at the death of her father; so I told her that, as we could hardly live upon nothing, we had better not marry at all."

"That was wise of you!"

"Yes; but she would not listen to anything of the kind, but insisted on marrying me; and now you see her family are going to bring me in for a case of breach of

promise of marriage, and the law tells me that I must either marry her or pay two thousand pounds to her father. Oh, your laws are abominable !”

He said this with such a tragical air that it was quite impossible to keep a serious countenance, and every one of them burst out laughing, even the serious Sibyl, who had not heard half the Prince had said so absorbed had she been in her own thoughts.

Soon after this the Captain came to inform Mr. Jobkin that they were approaching Kirkwall, and to inquire whether he would like to anchor there for the night.

“Yes, certainly,” he answered, “it will be quiet in the ‘arbour, anyhow, and we shall have a chance of sleeping comfortably for one night, at least.”

“There are some sights in the town worth visiting, I believe; and some curious old Druidical stones a few miles inland—you could easily drive over to see them to-morrow, sir.”

“I ‘ate sight-seeing,” Mr. Jobkin answered; “but my friends can land and see what there is to be seen, if they like.”

“Oh, how unselfish !” Sibyl said rising; “since when have you learnt to be so polite ?”

“I am always polite, but I do not like to be put upon, for, after all, I am the master here.”

“And don’t you let everybody know it, too !” the Doctor muttered between his teeth, as he descended the companion ladder.

The *Romola* anchored in Kirkwall harbour, and the next morning, in spite of what he had said the previous day, Mr. Jobkin accompanied his wife and guests on shore, and visited with them the fine old cathedral and famed ruins of the Bishop’s and Earl’s palaces.

After doing this, and after having walked through some of the quaint streets of the old town with their little shops where the celebrated Shetland shawls are sold, they hired a small waggonette to convey them to the stones of Stennis.

These justly-famed relics of the ancient inhabitants of the country are situated at some distance from Kirk-wall, about half-way between that town and Stromness, which is the second largest town in the island; so that the drive was a long one, and, the springs of the carriage not being very good, and the roads rather out of repair, anything but a pleasant one.

Having arrived at the borders of the lake, on the other side of which the stones stand, they were obliged to get out and walk the rest of the way, the road not going any further. The day was oppressively warm, and the grass being still wet from the recent heavy rains, this walk was exceedingly disagreeable, and was rendered even more so by Mr. Jobkin, who kept complaining all the way, accusing his wife of having forced him to undertake the excursion against his wish, which was not the case, for Sibyl seldom interfered with her husband, and would certainly have been the very last person in the party to have wished for his company on this occasion.

The celebrated stones of Stennis—or, as they used to be called, of Stenhouse—stand upon a little promontory which rises between two large lochs, and that can only be approached by a bridge, very primitive, but picturesque; the whole sight is imposing, for the stones, which are indeed of immense size, form a perfect circle, similar to the still more famed relics on Salisbury Plain; and the scenery around, with the waters of the lochs and the dark mountains beyond, which stretch for miles in a

sort of panorama, devoid of trees or houses, or anything which could remind one of civilization, is exceedingly wild and romantic.

Our party, however, were not precisely the persons best calculated to appreciate such a scene. For them the stern, bleak, forbidding aspect of the country around could have no charms, and the mighty ruins before them, erected by a race of which they knew so little, possessed no interest for them; so, after resting for a little while on some of the fallen stones, they were preparing to return to the waggonette, which had been left at the other side of the lake, nearly three miles across the grass, when the guide they had brought with them from Kirkwall informed them that there yet remained to be seen the old Pict's House, which had only been discovered a few years before, and which everyone who came to the island ought to see; so, very much against their wish, they directed their steps to this house, which was said to be about a mile and a bittoch from the lake, the bittoch, as I believe is generally the case in Scotland, proving to be somehow or other longer than the mile.

The old Pict's House was certainly a very interesting relic of the former inhabitants of the island, though the question of whether it was really a house or merely a burial-place has not yet been decided; but Mr. Jobkin, who was tired out with the long walk, was furious with the guide for bringing him all that way to see what he considered not worth going two steps to behold, and swore that the whole thing was a snare and a delusion, the house having been built up on purpose to take in English tourists.

Here, however, the waggonette met them, and the whole party, very much out of humour, and Mr. Jobkin

scolding all the way, arrived two hours afterwards at the quaint little town of Stromness, and found the *Romola* already waiting for them in the harbour, and, after walking through the one long street which constitutes the town, they returned on board for the night.

CHAPTER XXX,

A TERRIBLE TEMPTATION.

(Not by Charles Reade.)

THE next day the *Romola* left Stromness harbour early in the morning, for it had been decided that they would dine in Caithness; but unfortunately it was a very rough day, and the waves of the Atlantic kept rolling through the stormy Pentland, tossing the yacht backwards and forwards in a manner anything but pleasant for those on board.

Mr. Jobkin, who really suffered greatly from seasickness whenever it was the least rough, was lying in his luxurious berth in his cabin, which had been swung upon double springs, so as to render it as comfortable as possible. His guests—the Prince, the Doctor, and Mr. Thomson—all felt more or less uncomfortable, and were lying on the sofas in the saloon below, while Sibyl, who was never sea-sick, and who loved to watch the waves as they rose and fell around the vessel, had gone up on deck, and was reclining in one of the arm-chairs, which the captain had lashed to the mast for safety.

She had been sitting there since early morn, and the motion of the ship had rocked her, if I may so express myself, into a sort of half sleepy reverie, when Lord

Edwin, who was generally very lazy in the morning, and hated early rising, but who was, however, a very good sailor, stepped on deck.

The scenery around them at that moment was grand in the extreme, for on one side rose the high cliffs of Hoy, almost perpendicularly out of the water; while on the other side the lofty ridges of Rausay, bathed in the full light of a mid-day sun, rose behind the dark and frowning rocks of the mainland of Orkney.

For some minutes he remained watching the lovely scene; for although Edwin was not an enthusiastic lover of nature, yet such scenery as this could hardly fail to impress any one with a profound, however fleeting, sense of admiration. And then, turning round, he beheld, sitting close to him and with her eyes half closed, the beautiful woman he had once so loved, and for whom he felt, almost against his own will, all the old tenderness was but too fast returning.

It was the first time they had been alone since he had come on board; for Sibyl, with unusual care, had always managed to avoid such an occurrence, dreading, perhaps, her own weakness, for she felt but too well that she still loved him.

Edwin, who had many times cursed the presence of strangers, now trembled, for the continual restraint he imposed upon his feelings made him sensible of the danger in which he stood. Should he not shun this dark temptation, that was gradually drifting him, like a rudderless ship, on the shoals of destruction? Should he not fly the witcheries of this woman, whom he knew but too well to be fatal to his happiness, and shun the charm of her presence while he yet had the power? Ah, even at that moment he would gladly have done so, for he

felt that almost insensibly she was gradually acquiring that strange influence over him, which had already proved so fatal to his happiness ; but suddenly, as he was turning round to leave the deck, she opened her large languid eyes, and, raising her beautiful head, cast a long and passionate glance of tenderness towards him—a glance which he could not resist, and which brought him again to her side.

"You are up at last, Lord Edwin!" she said, with a bright smile, which lighted up her face in a moment, as the sun brightens a flower which before had looked pale and drooping. "I had no idea you could be so lazy. Why, I do not believe you can even give me the excuse of having been ill, for you look fresher and brighter than ever. Oh fie, Lord Edwin! fie! to lie in bed when we are passing through such lovely scenery as this!"

"Perhaps all of us cannot appreciate the beauties of nature as highly as you do, Mrs. Jobkin. Everybody, you know, cannot be born with such a superior soul!"

"True, true," Sibyl replied, lowering her eyes, and the bright smile leaving her face as suddenly as it had come, and again looking downcast and sad. Strange to say, Edwin guessed that she was thinking of the uninteresting plain-matter-of-fact City man on whom, to gratify her mistaken ambition, she had thrown herself away ; and, sitting down beside her, he said, in a low but melodious voice, which made her tremble all over—

"Ah, how you must suffer, having to live always with a man whose matter-of-fact sentiments can never appreciate your noble and high-minded ideas!"

"It certainly is trying at times," she answered thoughtfully ; "very trying. But he is kind and warm-hearted, and I should not complain ; and though at times rather

rough and ungentlemanly, he means well, I assure you. But let us change the subject, as this one can hardly be pleasant to either of us—let us talk of whatever is most pleasing to yourself.”

“Then I must talk of—you!”

“Ah!” rejoined Sibyl, with one of those artless smiles which no woman can restrain when she receives a compliment; “you are unusually gallant this morning!”

“Oh, Sibyl! do you think I have ceased to love you?”

“Lord Edwin!” she said, with a *hauteur* that almost froze him; “Lord Edwin, you seem to forget that I am now a married woman!”

“Ah, would that I could forget it,” he replied, turning pale.

“I never shall, I can tell you,” she said in a low voice, but with a crimsoned cheek and flashing eye.

“Oh, Sibyl! surely you cannot love this man! I want no more—nothing more—but tell me you do not love him!”

Sibyl shook back her hair, which hung loosely over her shoulders, and with flashing eyes, and nostrils curled with scorn, she gazed upon him. “How dare you ask me such a question?” she exclaimed; and then, when she saw his pale face, his downcast eyes, and trembling lips, she added, in a softer tone of voice, “You are dreaming, Lord Edwin: wake! wake!” and, with her old raillery, “remember you are no longer in your berth.”

“Ah no,” he replied, while his colour came and went, and he could hear his heart beating; “I am not asleep—though I fear I am dreaming!”

“Then you must have lost your head.”

“Nay, Sibyl, say rather my heart!”

"That is very serious ; but search for another."

The voice of the young man trembled as he answered,
"I want no other but—*thine* !"

At this daring avowal, a deep blush crimsoned Sibyl's cheek ; but, having made up her mind to take anything he might say as a joke, she replied—

"I thought you told me once that I had no heart."

"I did, I believe, once—that is to say when I thought I possessed it ; but you have a heart—and what a heart !"

"Well," she said, with a cold and scornful smile, as she thought of her husband, "unfortunately it is already lost and won."

"Sold and bought, you mean."

A dark shade crossed her proud brow, a haughty smile curled her beautiful lips, and she said, somewhat peremptorily—

"I began to talk in jest, but I see that you want me to end in earnest."

"So it is ever with love."

"Enough—that word must never be uttered between us again—you understand me—never !" And turning round so as not to see his imploring eyes, which she felt were fixed upon her, and which she feared she perhaps might not have the power to resist, and pressing her hand to her beating and agitated heart, she rose, and with a quick step swept past him, and disappeared down the ladder which led to her private cabin.

Once there—where no one could see her and watch her movements, she flung herself on the sofa, and gave vent to the feelings which had so oppressed her during her interview with Edwin by bursting into a flood of tears, which she allowed to flow unchecked, as she had

done that evening—now more than a year ago—when at Raspberry Dale she had so basely jilted that very man for whom she now felt all the love of which her passionate nature was capable.

“I have been playing with fire,” she cried, when she felt a little more composed. “I have been playing with fire, and I have been burnt. Oh, why did I invite him! Why?”

The fact of the matter was, that the sight of Lord Edwin flirting with another woman, and that woman a noble and beautiful heiress, had been more than she had been able to bear; and feeling at the time no real love for him of which she need have been afraid, she had asked him to accompany her in the yacht merely to prevent his falling in love with Idalia—for women, I believe, are jealous of their old lovers, even when they have ceased to love them. But now she could deceive herself no longer, for she felt within her *that* which made even the sight of that man a sin, and she wanted to be good; yes, with all her faults and failings, she had tried hard to preserve her innocence—her innocence, which she felt now fast flying away from her with the swift wings of this returning love, which had once been so pure and so holy, but which now the bonds that united her to a man she could neither love nor respect—though she had sworn to do so at the foot of the altar—had rendered wicked and sinful.

Edwin saw no more of her that day, for she kept below purposely, fearing to find herself again alone with him. He, too, was much agitated, for the old mysterious influence which Sibyl had exercised over him the previous year was again tormenting him. Alone and down-cast, he paced the deck of the *Romola* with an uneasy step and a still more uneasy mind.

Thus the day passed, until the imposing cliffs of Pomona, which towered up against the dark blue sky in rugged outline, began to fade in the fast-approaching gloom. The sky was cloudless, the evening serene and beautiful, though the waters were still greatly agitated, and rose and fell like the pulsations of his beating heart. Afar off, amid a blaze of light, the flaming orb of day seemed to rest on the western flush of the Rausay hills, which were still bathed in light, while everything between was already veiled in shadow, and the waters of the Atlantic, dotted with the white sails of the herring-fishing boats, grew gradually darker as the light died away behind the distant island.

Edwin stood on the deck watching the sunset, and the gradual fading of light amidst those grand solitary seas seemed to soothe and sadden him; for the earth felt sad and lonely to him at that moment, and his happiness appeared to fly from him like the wild sea-gulls, that alone could be said to live amidst these rugged crags.

The darkness became every moment greater, and the lofty cliffs alone lighted by the sun's last rays stood out against the cloudless sky. As he watched the growing shadows, Edwin experienced an agitation and a regret hitherto unknown to him; and as the day faded away into the mists of evening, he felt that his sun too was setting, and that henceforward his life would be sunless and cheerless, like the approaching night.

Thus the yacht made its way through those northern seas, passed the lofty cliffs of Pomona, and the famous Old Man of Hoy—a colossal rock which rises from the sea to a height of several hundred feet on the western coast of the island of that name, and which was the last to reflect the declining sun, and seemed to stand

there alone in the ocean, detached from the other rocks, as Edwin, who watched it with intense anxiety, felt himself to stand alone on the ocean of life—and, after leaving the Orkneys, crossed the stormy Pentland, and anchored in Broila harbour, on the coast of Caithness, near which rose the stately castle of the Forsinard family.

Sir Ronald Forsinard sent a messenger on board, as soon as he heard of their arrival, to invite them all to dinner that evening—an invitation which Mr. Jobkin readily accepted for himself and all his party.

It was a very dark and rough night, and a heavy sea was running when the party left the yacht, about seven o'clock, in a little boat, to proceed to the castle where they were to dine. Mr. Jobkin and his guests were sitting at the stern of the boat, and as Mrs. Jobkin, in her usual half-playful, half-cynical mood—which, however, on this occasion was only assumed to conceal from Edwin, who was sitting near her, how deeply what he had said that morning had affected her—was joking her husband, and accusing him of being the very worst sailor she had ever seen, Mr. Jobkin, in a moment of anger, had insisted upon steering the boat himself, to prove that though he was a bad sailor in one sense of the word, he was a good one in the other.

On an ordinary occasion he might have steered well enough, as indeed he had often done before; but on this night his doing so was incurring a risk which might but too easily prove fatal both to him and his friends, for, as I have said before, a heavy sea was running at the time, and he was totally unacquainted with this coast.

Instead of steering towards the port in the town, which lay at some distance from the castle, he made

direct for the castle itself, which stood at the entrance of the harbour upon the rocks. Fortunately for them all, the sailors managed to row them safely enough to these rocks, and but for Sibyl getting her feet wet in stepping on shore, the danger seemed to be all over, when Mr. Jobkin, who was exceedingly heavy and awkward, in getting out of the boat slipped upon the sea-weed-covered rocks, and, missing his footing, fell into the water.

A cry of horror rose from the entire party, for a heavy wave, sweeping back at that moment, carried him in an instant some distance from the shore, and the poor man, being almost unable to swim with his great coat on, was with great difficulty trying to make his way back to the rocks.

"Great God, he'll be drowned!" cried Sibyl, pale and horror-stricken, covering her face with her trembling hands.

"Save him, save him!" his friend Mr. Thomson exclaimed, out of breath, and addressing himself to the sailors. "A hundred pounds to the man who rescues him! A hundred pounds! Oh that I could swim!"

But nobody seemed inclined to respond to this appeal, for the sea looked dark and dangerous, and large infuriated waves kept dashing in, and then falling back further and further with the fast-descending tide.

Again Thomson's voice was heard amidst the roaring of the sea and the whistling of the wind, which was rapidly increasing; "Two hundred pounds to the first man who jumps into the sea!"

No time was to be lost. Edwin, who still stood upon the rock on which he had landed, looked towards the terrified Sibyl, who, leaning on the Doctor's arm, had her large black eyes fixed on him. This one look was

enough to decide him. He divested himself of his coat and waistcoat with wondrous rapidity, and approached the edge of the rocks.

He cast a rapid glance round him, and the appalling fury of the storm made even his gallant heart tremble and waver for a moment in its generous purpose; then, looking back, he again met Sibyl's imploring gaze, and he thought he detected in it an avowal of her love. A terrible temptation then took possession of him. Why should he expose his life to save that of a man he had now grown almost to hate? Should he not rather allow him to perish? Once Jobkin dead, what could prevent his marrying Sibyl, the woman he had loved so long, so passionately? He wavered for a few seconds, but his noble heart prevailed, his good angel won the contest which for one moment had waged in his soul and had almost conquered his good resolution; and exclaiming, almost aloud, "What is the use of my wretched life to me now!" he plunged into the boiling surf.

A shrill cry that expressed even more horror than the one before uttered escaped from Sibyl, and she fell unconscious into the Doctor's arms.

Edwin was a bold and practised swimmer, and the next wave brought both him and the terrified Jobkin again to land.

A short discussion now ensued as to what could be done under the circumstances; for, of course, both Lord Edwin and Mr. Jobkin were wet through, and the latter was much exhausted; but as it would have been folly to have thought of returning to the yacht in such a sea, they decided to go up to the castle, which was not many yards distant.

As they made their way over the rocks, Sibyl, who

had now recovered from her fainting fit, approached Edwin, who was walking slowly up the rocks like a man in a dream, and who seemed stunned and bewildered—perhaps more worn out by the struggle he had undergone in his heart than by the one he had experienced in the sea—and, in a voice which betrayed the deepest emotion, she whispered in his ear, in a tone which was destined to haunt him for many months afterwards—

“Thank you, Edwin; thank you for saving his life! Oh, would that I could thank God as easily for having spared yours; but I dare not utter such a thought to Him!”

CHAPTER XXXI.

HE WOULD BE A GENTLEMAN.

(Not by Samuel Lover.)

THE Castle of Broila stood at the mouth of the harbour of the same name, and fronting the town, which rose on the other side of it, with its dark slate roofs and white church spires, behind the forest of masts of the numerous herring-boats which generally crowded the port.

The site was an old and historic one, for a castle had stood there for many centuries, braving the storms of the furious Pentland Firth and the gales of the neighbouring ocean ; and many and bloody had been the sieges which it had stood in the old days of war and strife. But the present castle was a new structure, and had been erected upon the foundations of the ancient building by the present baronet, whose love for building and whose architectural taste are so well known both in England and France.

At the time of my story, the new castle of Broila was scarcely finished, yet it already presented an imposing appearance, as it rose upon the steep rocks at the harbour's mouth, with its many turrets, its clustered gables, its lofty roofs, and its frowning tower, from which waved the white flag of the Forsinards.

The sun was shining brightly, and making the now comparatively calm waters of the Pentland glint and sparkle in its rays, which were also reflected upon the gilt pinnacles of the castle's turrets, and upon the red cannon on its façade, two days after the accident which had so forcibly marked the first landing of our friends on board the *Romola* on the Caithness shore.

The Duke of Northland had telegraphed that he and some of the party staying at the castle would come over and lunch with Sir Ronald and Lady Forsinard; and Mr. and Mrs. Jobkin and their friends had been invited to meet them.

The row from the yacht to the castle on this occasion proved a very agreeable one, for it was a fine bright day, and a fresh breeze was blowing from the south, which only caused just enough movement upon the waters to make the motion of the boat pleasant. As they neared the shore, however, and saw the rocks upon which they were to land, an indefinable sense of dread took possession of the whole party, for it had been on these very rocks that two nights before they had had such a narrow escape, and it was in silence that they landed this time.

To climb the steep ascent to the castle, Sibyl again took Lord Edwin's arm; but her heart was too full to allow her to utter the sentiments which she felt at that moment, and Edwin, noticing her embarrassment, in the usual half-careless, half-playful manner which was so natural to him, yet which many who did not know him would have attributed to conceit or affectation, made a few passing remarks, which, though insignificant enough in themselves, had the intended effect of restoring her self-possession.

Edwin was one of those men of the world who, perhaps because they feel sadness more intensely than their neighbours, are always so anxious to banish from their minds all thoughts which might remind them that life, after all, is not the amusing pastime which they would like it to be. He was one of that large class of Englishmen whom we see every day staking their money on cards, making up their books at Newmarket, lounging down their club steps, smoking their cigars in all proper and improper places, and swearing good-humouredly in all the gay places of Europe where amusement can be found—from Monaco to St. Petersburg; one of those men with the handsome pale face and gentle quiet ways that seem to vary so little, be they in love, in anger, in pleasure, or in pain; with the contemptuous ring in their voices, and the easy, indolent, devil-may-care insolence, at which, however, no one could ever take offence; who wear the tightly-fitting Poole-cut coats, with dainty flowers in their button-hole, and speak in that careless, half-fashionable, half-slangish jargon which no outsider can imitate; he was one of those men who dare to laugh at all created things, and who hold that easy, languid, convenient philosophy which has as its first thesis that nothing on earth is of any importance; one of those men who always seem light-hearted and gay, for whom life would appear to contain nothing but pleasures, and whom, however, so little ever really succeeds in amusing.

He was one of these men, and he possessed nothing besides to recommend him, excepting his good looks, fair complexion, tall graceful figure, delicate hands, and a good-natured, and, at times, most unselfish, heart. Yet, such was the fascination of his manner that at that moment Sibyl—who was always comparing him with the

big, burly, plain-matter-of-fact, and decidedly pompous, husband she had chosen—could not but lament that she had not married him instead, and this thought alone was sufficient to make her despise both her husband and herself.

When they arrived at the castle—which, I must not forget to remark, had two doors in its principal façade both exactly alike, making it very difficult to know which was the door one should go in at—they found that the Duke and his party had already arrived, but, instead of bringing only a few friends with him, as he had telegraphed, he had brought upwards of forty people, for whom there was scarcely room in the temporary drawing-room, for the real drawing-room was still in the hands of the decorators.

Lady Forsinard, however, received them with her usual careless grace, and conducted them to the room where the rest of the company were already assembled.

The Duke, who had only come to Caithness to inspect the new railway, in which he had taken such an active part, had driven the engine all the way, and his hands were consequently anything but clean; for he good-humouredly refused to go upstairs and wash them, when asked by his host if he would not like to do so; he however, offered his arm to Lady Forsinard, and they entered the dining-room, which fortunately happened to be large and spacious, the rest of the party following without any special order.

The Duchess de St. Gennaro had come with her pretty daughter, and while the Duchess of Northland and Sibyl absorbed everyone's attention, Edwin had managed to approach her and linger by her side. However, when lunch was announced, Mr. Hopestone, Sir Ronald's

nephew, came up to her and offered his arm to conduct her into the dining-room in such a way that she could hardly refuse. Mr. Hopestone, or as he generally was called in that castle, "Sweet Willie," was a very sweet youth indeed, exceedingly handsome, and with all the ways of a man of the world; and it was consequently with a deep sigh of vexation that Edwin was compelled to relinquish the lovely Idalia to him, and escort instead the Countess of Clopperton, for whom he had formed quite an aversion during his late stay with the Northlands.

The luncheon, as was to be expected, was a very long affair, though the Duke was in a great hurry, as he was anxious to go on to Wick, and kept sending little notes to his wife at the end of the table, begging her to make haste.

Edwin had found a place near the Duchess, but unfortunately far away from the Countess Idalia, whom he could see across the table flirting and laughing with "Sweet Willie." He did not love Idalia, and since he had seen so much of Sibyl he was fully convinced that he would never be able to love her as she undoubtedly deserved to be loved; yet it was not pleasing to him to see her so gay and animated by the side of another, and that other a handsome young man; besides, during the few words he had been able to exchange with her in the other room, he had fancied that she was piqued with him, perhaps displeased with the way he had left her after saying that if she remained with the Northlands till the end of the season he would remain too; anyhow, she had been cold and reserved—altogether very different from what she had been before, and now seemed to have forgotten him altogether.

Sibyl sat on the other side of Mr. Hopestone, and she, too, could see Edwin across the table, and, her eyes meeting his from time to time, would seem to have guessed what was passing through his mind, for a cold smile curled her beautiful lips—a smile of pleasure—and she took very good care not to interrupt the Countess Idalia's flirtation with "Sweet Willie" by saying anything to him; though the previous evening she had sat side by side, and also flirted the whole evening, for Mr. Hopestone was a great talker, and could make himself very agreeable.

After lunch the Duke started by rail for Wick, accompanied by his engineering friends, Mrs. Major, and a few other ladies; and Sir Ronald insisted on showing the two Duchesses the various beauties of his place, taking them down to the rocks to show them the castle from the sea, and up to the top of the tower to admire the view.

In the meantime, the rest of the party went for a walk over the cliffs to a point known as the Lady Johannah's Seat, from whence a lovely view could be obtained of the sea and the Pentland Firth, with the bold Dunnet Head on the right and the distant cliffs of the Orkneys beyond. The ladies sat down on a couple of benches which had been placed there some time before, and some of the men lay down on the grass at their feet, while others went on to inspect the old mausoleum of the Forsinard family, which stands at a short distance from the shores.

Sibyl, to whom the sea-breeze and the exercise of walking had given additional colour, while the beauty of the scenery and the freshness of the air had raised her vivacity and increased the brilliancy of her eyes, sat down beside the Countess Idalia, whose appearance had

hardly been improved by the walk, for she seemed fatigued, and, having risen very early that morning, felt too tired to be particularly bright or cheerful. It would seem as if this had been a pre-arranged plan of Sibyl's, for she knew but too well how greatly in her favour any comparison made between her and the Italian at that moment must needs be, and she also knew that Edwin would not be the last to notice and appreciate her advantages.

Thoughtful and quiet, he sat at their feet, his languid eyes, concealed by their long lashes, wandering from one to the other; and I must confess that it was with a sense of deep emotion that he at last convinced himself of the fact that had for so long weighed upon his heart—that near Sibyl no other woman could ever hold her own.

The conversation was, of course, mostly about the place, as many of those present had never been there before. Idalia admired the view greatly, and asked Mr. Jobkin what was the name of the island opposite, and he readily afforded the information, that could not but draw a smile from all listeners, that it was the "Island of 'Oy."

Then they began to talk of the storms and gales that were so common to those northern shores, and Mr. Forsinard, Sir Ronald's eldest son, said that hardly a month passed without hearing of some dreadful wreck on the coast. This, of course, led them to speak of the accident they had themselves experienced two nights before; and Mr. Thomson described in full detail the risk they had all run, Mr. Jobkin's fall into the water, and Lord Edwin's gallant act, at the mention of which Sibyl's eyes filled with tears.

"You must have been very frightened," the young Italian said to the Prince Dacaraca, who, hearing that she was a great heiress, had hung about her the whole day, and now sat near her.

"Me! Oh no, not me!" exclaimed the Russian, rolling his large black eyes.

"Oh dear me, no, Countess," said the Doctor, who was standing near them, perhaps for the same reason. "He was not in the least afraid; why, would you believe it, when we struck against the rocks and were nearly upset into the water, he only said, calmly as any Athenian philosopher might have done, 'What will they say in the papers if we are drowned?'"

Of course, everybody laughed at this, and the Prince having been brought into notice, Mr. Jobkin insisted on his recounting the whole of his adventures with Miss Pendennis, to the great disgust of Mrs. Jobkin, who cast glances of supreme displeasure towards her husband. But the Russian once started, it was not so easy to stop him, and the disgusted Sibyl had to listen to the whole story over again, and also to a long discussion which followed upon it.

Lord Edwin, who had also had enough of it, for on board the yacht Mr. Jobkin and his friends scarcely talked of anything else, had begun a conversation, in the meantime, with Mr. Forsinard and Mr. Hopestone on different kinds of sport. When the Prince had at last ended his long tale of woes, Miss Forsinard, Sir Ronald's unmarried daughter, a pretty girl of nineteen, with a handsome figure, lovely flaxen hair, and blue eyes, who had been listening to them, asked her cousin to tell the story of the man who, the previous year, had gone, with his two sons, over the cliffs of Hoy in search of sea-gulls' eggs. Mr. Hope-

stone did not want much pressing, for this was a favourite story of his, and there was nothing he loved more than being listened to, so after begging the ladies to pay attention to this sad tale, he began :—

“A fisherman of Stromness went out to get sea-gulls’ eggs, which are esteemed a great delicacy in Orkney. The sea-gulls, however, build their nests in the rocks near the sea, and to get at them the fishermen are obliged to let themselves down from the cliffs above by means of ropes. On this occasion our man had taken his two sons with him, and, as the sea-gulls’ nests were very low down, he tied his youngest son to the end of the rope, attaching himself to the same rope about half way down, and the eldest son remained at the top to steady the rope, which they had fixed to a projecting rock, and they then let themselves down over the rocks. They had been down but a very short time, when the eldest boy called out to his father, ‘The rope is giving way!—cut away Jamie, or you will both be destroyed!’ Without hesitation the father followed his son’s advice and cut the rope below him, and in another instant poor Jamie lay a shapeless mass on the stones beneath.” Having said this much in a half-joking, half-melodramatic tone, he added, suddenly changing his voice, and addressing himself to his audience with extreme earnestness, “This is the story as it is recounted by the Stromness fishermen; but don’t you agree with me that the man was little less than a murderer?”

“But why?” was asked on all sides; “if the rope was giving way, the poor boy must necessarily have died, whether the father had cut it or not.”

“Yes, but perhaps the rope would not have given way so soon, and both might after all have had time to reach the top in safety.”

"But then it was risking his own life too," the Countess Idalia remarked.

"That is true," said Mr. Thomson; "but I for one would rather die myself than cause the death of another person. Just think what the poor man must have felt afterwards!"

"That is nonsense," said Sibyl, who had listened in silence to the story, rising. "It would have been a double crime not to have cut the rope, for then he would have committed suicide as well as murder."

The rest of the party now also rose to return to the castle, but the discussion as to whether the fisherman should have cut the rope or not was continued all the way to Broila, for Mr. Hopstone—perhaps to show off the tender feelings of his heart, as his cousin, Mr. Forsinard, afterwards remarked to his sister—would insist that the man should have risked the probability of dying with his son, rather than cut the rope which held them both. Sibyl walked in silence by the side of the lovely Idalia, and seemed lost in deep thought; for, strange to say, the story of the Stromness fisherman had produced a deep impression upon her, and she only raised her eyes now and then to cast sinister looks at her husband, who, with a florid face, and awkward gestures, was describing to the Countess of Clopperton the pleasures of yachting, and the beauties and comforts of his own particular yacht, which at that moment lay just below them at anchor in the bay.

The Countess seemed interested, yet Sibyl could see plainly that in spite of her habitual self-control she was forced at times to put up her fan to hide her laughter; for Mr. Jobkin, when excited, said things which she would have preferred he should not say, and many and

frequent were the glances which Lady Clopperton cast towards her Lord, who, though walking at some distance, was listening attentively to his wondrous discourse, and bursting out at times into violent fits of laughter, which he took little pains to conceal. This could not but be exceedingly painful to Sibyl, and, although she pretended not to notice it, a cold shiver ran through her every time her husband said anything out of the common, which was pretty often, for he had made up his mind to win the good opinion of the Countess, whom he was dying to invite to his yacht.

It was almost martyrdom to a sensitive nature like that of Sibyl, who had been brought up with all the prejudices of Fashion, and accustomed from her earliest youth to the usages of good society, to have to live with such a man.

When alone they got on pretty well, though, as they had not one single idea in common, they seldom spoke; but when they were before people, especially before strangers, Sibyl was kept in a perpetual state of fever, if I may so express myself, for she felt that her husband might commit himself at any moment, and she knew but too well what people would afterwards say of them.

When she had decided to marry him, she had known beforehand what to expect; but she then only laughed at his unpolished manners and would-be polite speeches, as other people did, and could hardly imagine that his vulgarity would in time become the bane of her existence.

I need not say, therefore, that her life was not one of the happiest, for if there is anything painful in matrimony it is when the wife despises her husband: hatred, resentment, even indifference, may be overcome, but scorn

never. Any other woman would, perhaps, have excused his want of *savoir-faire* in consideration of his many good qualities; for Mr. Jobkin really possessed a good heart, and could be very good-natured, though his constant desire to produce an effect rarely permitted him to be natural; and Sibyl, the spoiled child of Fashion, could never forgive him this (in her eyes) most unpardonable fault. She did not hate him, she had never thought enough of him for that, but every day she grew to despise him more and more; while Mr. Jobkin, on his side, having married a woman of good family, the daughter of a Secretary of State, having become a Member of Parliament, and moving, as he now did, in the best society, thought himself quite a gentleman, and therefore incapable of doing or saying anything wrong.

He did not love his wife, and even his admiration for her beauty had long since vanished, for they had now been married more than a year; yet, as he gave her everything she asked for, and treated her with marked respect, he verily believed that she was the happiest of women, and often spoke of her as being so to his friends, for he was one of those men who boast of everything, even of the happiness they are able to impart to others.

After a short walk, which, however, seemed eternal to poor Sibyl, they reached the castle, where tea had been prepared for them, and where, soon afterwards, Sir Ronald joined them with the two Duchesses, whom he had taken to see everything in and about the castle, and who, bored to death, for neither of them understood or cared anything about architecture or art, and very tired and covered with dust, flung themselves down on sofas at opposite ends of the room, and refused to move another step.

The indefatigable Sir Ronald, who was very anxious that every one should admire the beauties of his castle, now asked Lady Clopperton and the Countess Idalia if, in their turn, they would accompany him to the top to see the view, which, after a little persuasion, they consented to do.

When they came down, it was time to go; and thanking Sir Ronald and Lady Forsinard again and again for their kind hospitality, the Duchess of Northland and her party took their departure.

Mr. and Mrs. Jobkin and their friends were invited to remain to dinner, to which Sibyl consented, "Provided," she said, "that I am permitted to dine as I am, for I really cannot go all the way back to the yacht to change my dress."

After dinner—which was a very merry one, for both Mr. Forsinard and his cousin, Willie Hopestone, were in high spirits, and did their very best to amuse the company, and even succeeded in drawing an occasional smile from the usually serious Sibyl—they began to talk of the different national costumes, at which the Russian Prince remarking that the national costume of his country was something like that of the Highlanders, the young men insisted on dressing him up in a kilt, in which guise he was afterwards brought down for the ladies to admire, to the great discomfiture of Mr. Jobkin, who pronounced the dress "ighly hindecent," and who was, perhaps, even still more shocked at the way they treated a real live Prince, but to the immense delight of that gentleman himself, who, thinking he was quite irresistible in this costume, smiled and bowed to the ladies in a way which made even Sibyl laugh and forget for a time the absurd remarks her husband had made during dinner.

It was late when Mr. Jobkin and his party returned to the yacht; and before leaving the castle they had promised to accompany the Forsinards to a picnic they had arranged for the next day to the cliffs on the other side of the bay, to see the famous Clett Rock.

When they had gone, the party at Broila Castle remained for some time in the drawing-room—from the large plate-glass windows of which the bay could be seen—watching the progress of the little boat as it conveyed their friends to the *Romola*, which lay at a short distance from the shore, like a large sea-bird resting upon the moonlit waters, for it was a beautiful night, and the light of the moon, which was shining brightly, rendered every object clear and distinct.

"How nice it must be to cruise about in a yacht like that!" the fair Miss Forsinard remarked.

"I don't believe, though, that they lead the pleasantest of lives on board the *Romola*, for, from what I heard, I should say they were not exactly the people best calculated to live together, much less to travel together."

"What makes you say that, Willie?"

"What the Doctor and the Prince have told me respecting Mr. Jobkin."

"Yes," Miss Forsinard added; "it is easy enough to see how cordially they all dislike each other."

"But don't you think it is wrong," Lady Forsinard said, "to partake of a man's hospitality like that for so many months, and then to go and abuse him and make fun of him all the time?"

"Well, perhaps so, but you must agree, mamma, that he is an extraordinary man, to say the very least of it."

"I don't believe he and that proud handsome wife of his get on at all well together."

"How could they," Miss Forsinard replied. "It must be horrible to be married to a man like *that*."

"He is a downright snob, in spite of all his money!"

"Did you see how coldly the Duchess of Northland received his advances when he tried to talk to her?"

"Yes, and how Lady Clopperton laughed with the other ladies at what he had told her as we came back from our walk."

"It was rude, though, to do so in his wife's presence," Sir Ronald said, now taking part in the conversation for the first time.

"Do you think, uncle, that ladies mind *that*?" Mr. Hopstone replied.

"I wonder at his making such a fool of himself," Sir Ronald went on, without taking any notice of his nephew's remark. "I believe he is a clever man, and very shrewd in business matters. I am sure he cannot be ignorant of what the world says of him, and it is folly on his part to force himself into Society, when he knows Society does not want him. If he had remained east of Temple Bar, he might have been an alderman by this time, perhaps a Lord Mayor, and eaten turtle, respected and looked up to by everybody for the rest of his life; while now he will never be anything but the self-made butt of Fashion's laughter!"

"What can you expect?" his son replied; "he would be a gentleman!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

TOO STRANGE NOT TO BE TRUE.

(*Not by Lady G. Fullerton.*)

THE sun was high in the heavens when the party left Broila Castle the following day for their picnic on the Clett Rock.

It seemed a day made purposely for an expedition of this kind; for, although the sun shone brightly in the cloudless sky, a fresh breeze from the sea rendered the air cool and invigorating.

Mr. Jobkin and his party had arrived from the yacht early that morning at the castle, where they had breakfasted, and they now all started together in a couple of waggonettes.

Sibyl looked handsome, as she always did; but her brow was knit, and her eyes had lost some of that wondrous lustre that so much contributed to her attractions. She was serious and reserved, and not even the beauty of the scenery, nor the intense sunshine and buoyancy of the air, succeeded in restoring her depressed spirits. She was attired in a yachting costume of dark blue serge, which fitted closely, and set off to great advantage her perfect figure. On her head she wore the sailor-hat we have already mentioned.

Her husband had a hat exactly like hers, and was also dressed in a sailor costume, only that his was all white, which was certainly not the colour best calculated to set off his very portly figure and florid complexion.

Having arrived at the other side of the bay, they got out of the carriages and ascended the hill, at the top of which they deposited the provisions they had brought with them, and from which a magnificent view could be commanded on all sides.

Below them lay the sea, on the surface of which floated countless fishing boats, whose white sails reflected the sun and shone like so many opals.

On the right were the Orkney Islands, with their many cliffs and lofty peaks; and the bold point of the Old Man of Hoy could be distinctly seen, rising high above the other cliffs against the clear blue sky. Further, on the same side, the great headland of Dunnet, which looked dark and frowning, rose between the Caithness shore and the lovely islands beyond, intercepting the view of the Skerries and the not very distant beach of John O'Groat, but yet adding beauty to the scene by reason of the great contrast its dark red sandstone rocks presented to the pale blue of the sea, and the still paler pink and grey of the distant islands.

The town of Broila lay at their feet, with the imposing castle of the Forsinards rising upon the opposite shore of the bay, with its many turrets and lofty towers; while to their left, at a short distance, was the Clett Rock itself, which they were going to visit, and which stood out all by itself in the sea, whose blue waters, extending westward as far as the eye could reach, were lost in the still bluer sky.

It was indeed a beautiful panorama, and one which

seemed to impress every one with a deep sense of sadness as well as of admiration—for there is always a certain tinge of melancholy in all these northern scenes—for not a tree, not a shrub, could be seen anywhere to relieve the eye, and even the heather upon which they sat looked as if blasted by the fury of the dreadful storms which so frequently pass over these coasts.

However, the fair Miss Forsinard, her brother, and her cousin, tried their best to keep up the spirits of the party; and as the greater part of them had gone there to be amused, and with the intention of spending a happy day, I need not add how well they succeeded.

After luncheon, which was served upon the heather, they began talking, as was natural, of the peculiar beauties of the spot.

"There is a very curious cave just below these cliffs," said young Mr. Forsinard, "which, to my mind, is the most beautiful of all the sights about here."

"Is there, indeed!" exclaimed the Prince.

"Yes; and I think that no one should leave Caithness without seeing it."

"I should like to see it very much," Mr. Jobkin then said. "Is it very difficult to get down to it?"

"Oh dear me, no. I have often been—only, you know, you must be let down from the top by means of a rope."

"And then is it easy to get inside it?"

"Oh yes; Willie and I have often been, and in bad weather too, when the wind was blowing a perfect gale, and the sea running up high into the cave, breaking into froth and foam upon the rocks."

"What do you say to going down, Thomson?" Mr. Jobkin asked his friend.

"Nonsense, *mon ami*," his wife said with a laugh; "the idea of *your* going down these rocks!"

"And why not? I am as strong as anybody, and as brave, too, I hope."

"And you would be let down by a rope—*you*!"

"Of course, Mr. Forsinard says he has often been."

"I should like to see *you* do it though!"

Mr. Jobkin, whom Sibyl's words had greatly exasperated, now rose from the heather, where he had been reclining and said, with the tone of a man who had fully made up his mind, "By Jingo, I will do it, if it be only to prove to you that I can do more than you give me credit for!"

The young men, who evidently were only making fun of him, and who were but too anxious to have a laugh at his expense, also rose, and offered to go and get a rope from the lighthouse, which was quite close at hand.

"I think it is very dangerous, though," said Lady Forsinard; "do you think they will have a rope strong enough in the lighthouse?"

"Yes, they have the rope we used the last time we went down," Mr. Hopestone answered. "It is strong enough to hold the weight of three men, at least." And without waiting for more, they hurried off to fetch the rope, casting side glances at the young ladies as they went, and evidently in the highest state of glee, for they thought they would be able to have a good laugh at poor Mr. Jobkin and his friend.

All the party now rose and started off to admire the view from every point. Edwin, who had been unusually silent during the pic-nic, and who had done nothing but look at Sibyl, now approached her and offered her his arm, which she reluctantly took, for she was every day more and more afraid of being left alone with him.

They walked side by side to the extreme edge of the steep bank, and stood there for some time contemplating the view; then they began talking on indifferent subjects, for both now dreaded any approach to intimacy.

"What a strange thing this is about the Prince," remarked Edwin, for he felt that he ought to say something.

"What, that silly affair of his with Miss Pendennis?"

"Yes."

"Surely you are not going to begin about that, too. Ah, if you knew how tired I am of the subject! I really cannot understand what pleasure my husband and his friends can find in it, that they are always talking about it."

"But it seems to me a very serious thing."

"Serious! Why, have you not guessed by this time that the whole thing is a story, a practical joke!"

"A practical joke! Why, do you mean to say that this precious Miss Pendennis does not exist at all—is a sort of myth! By Jove, that's the funniest thing I have ever heard."

"No, I do not mean that exactly. I believe there is a Miss Pendennis somewhere, and I also believe that there has been something between her and Prince Dacaraca, though if the story he tells be true or not is a point very much to be doubted; but what I mean is, that this lawyer's letter which he has received, and this case of breach of promise which he believes he is threatened with, and of which he hears so much, is merely a practical joke which my husband has thought proper to play upon his guest. He got a friend of his in London to write to the Prince in the name of a lawyer, and to forward his official-looking letter to him on board the *Romola*."

"How awfully silly!"

"You may well say so: I do wonder that any one should take a pleasure in doing such silly, nonsensical things—one must have very little to think about. . . ."

"Or a very commonplace mind."

"Perhaps both; but look, look, I do believe that fool of a man is going down to see this horrible cave! Look, he is actually tying himself to the rope!"

She put her hand, which felt like ice, upon his, and directed his attention to a spot not very far from where they stood, where, as she had remarked, Mr. Jobkin was fastening the rope round his waist, evidently preparing to go down the face of the cliffs to explore the rocks below.

Edwin turned round to look at Sibyl. She stood beside him, cold and erect as a marble statue, but her large eyes were fixed upon the group of which her husband was the most conspicuous figure, and there was a smile horrible to behold on her full red lips. Edwin grew cold as he watched the expression of her face, and, turning round, walked slowly towards the rest of the party, Sibyl following him in silence.

"I think I shall be able to go down much better if I am not fastened to the rope," Mr. Jobkin was saying when they came up to him.

"Certainly, if you are accustomed to go down a rope," Mr. Hopestone replied.

"I have not been down one for some time, but I used to be famous for that once," Mr. Jobkin said, divesting himself of his loose sailor's jacket, and preparing to go down.

One end of the rope was fastened to a projecting rock at the edge of the cliff, and the other was thrown over

into the precipice below, where it remained, hanging perpendicularly. It was a strong rope, and it had large knots at short intervals all the way down, for the pilots at the lighthouse often used it for descending to the bottom of the cliff, so that it was as safe as any rope could well be.

Mr. Jobkin, after seeing for himself that it was properly fastened, stepped over the edge of the cliff, and very soon was out of sight, displaying in his gradual descent a great deal more agility and dexterity than one might have given such a heavy man credit to possess, and not a little astonishing the young men, who had thought to have had a good laugh at his expense.

Mr. Thomson, who had agreed to accompany him—though the expedition was not very much to his taste, now prepared to follow, and also took off his coat; just as he was stepping over the edge, Mr. Hopestone came forward and handed him a knife.

"I forgot," he said, "to give one to Mr. Jobkin; but you had better take this—you may find it useful when you get to the bottom, to make your way through the reeds—we never go without good knives."

Mr. Thomson made some remonstrance, but as the young man assured him he would be glad of it, he placed the knife between his teeth, and began descending the rope, but in a slower and less sailor-like way than Mr. Jobkin had done.

The rest of the party remained for some time watching him, but after a while he, too, was out of sight, the cliff just there being perpendicular. They then went off, Lady Forsinard saying, as she did so, "I do trust they will be able to get back safe. It is a perilous undertaking, and I do not like it much, but I suppose men will be men."

They again dispersed in various groups, and Sibyl was left alone on the top of the cliff, close by that rock from which her husband hung. Then the words uttered by Edwin the night they had watched the storm from the windows of the Northlands' castle came back to her mind—" *We hang over our graves by a single thread—by a thin thread that the weakest hand might cut.*" And their horrible application in the present instance seemed to stun her. She grew gradually colder and colder, and was obliged to step back a few paces not to fall down the precipice which opened before her, and which seemed to have such a painful attraction for her.

She recollected the story which Mr. Hopestone had recounted the previous day, of the man who had gone down the rocks to get sea-gulls' eggs, and she thought how very like that cliff must have been to this one, and she could not help wondering whether this rope was very much stronger than the one that the fisherman had used.

A cold perspiration came over her—her lips trembled, and her bosom rose and fell with a sensation she had never before experienced; everything about her seemed to turn round and round, she closed her eyes and seemed to lose consciousness.

Then, suddenly rousing herself, she saw the heather-covered slippery sward that edged the cliff—the rock to which the rope was fastened—which rope she saw suddenly disappear over the verge. A horrible idea then took possession of her: she sank upon her knees, and leaning over the cliff, in a voice which trembled with emotion, but which the stillness of the air made horribly distinct, she cried—

"For God's sake come back, come back!—the rope is

breaking! It may yet bear the weight of one man, but it is sure to break with two."

A cry was immediately heard from below—a piercing shriek of horror and dread, then a sharp noise, like that produced by a knife when cutting a rope—then a splash in the water, and everything was again silent.

Sibyl—reeling backwards from the edge of the cliff, backwards and backwards, with her large eyes almost starting from their sockets, and her hands clenched—fell senseless on the ground.

When she recovered from her brief fainting fit, strange confused cries reached her ears. She opened her eyes, and saw that the whole party were assembled round her. At a short distance she saw a man examining the rope, which still hung over the verge of the cliff—it was Thomson. With a slow step and downcast face he approached her; then, in tones which she was never destined to forget, he said—

"The rope was not breaking at all. You have been the wilful cause of your husband's death!"

END OF VOL. II.

FASHION AND PASSION;

OR,

LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE HONEYMOON" AND "THROUGH THE AGES."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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SECOND PART.

(Continued.)

FASHION AND PASSION;

OR,

LIFE IN MAYFAIR.

CHAPTER I.

THE WAY WE LIVE NOW.

(Not by Anthony Trollope.)

ONE afternoon towards the end of the London season, when the heat begins to send people out of town to seek for quiet and rest in the country or at the sea-side, the two Countesses of Twickenham were seated in the back drawing-room of Mr. Fetherstone's house, the large bay windows of which looked upon St. James's Park.

The Dowager, or, as she was still called, Countess Elizabeth, looked as fresh and as blooming as when we saw her last, but a great change had come over Geraldine.

The year which had now elapsed since her marriage to the gay young Earl, to whom she had been united so much against her own will, had hardly improved her appearance.

She had grown fuller in figure, and her face had now completely lost all traces of the beauty she might once have been said to possess ; her eyes had lost much of that

brilliancy of expression, which, as a girl, had been almost sufficient to entitle her to be called pretty; and her complexion of lilies and roses, which had contributed so largely to her good looks, was now very much faded.

As we see her again for the first time after one short year of married life, in the same room where we first made her acquaintance, sitting perhaps in the very same arm-chair, it would be difficult to discover in her any trace of the sentimental, romantic girl whose blind passion for the handsome Don Juan has taken up so many pages in the early part of our story.

Certainly Geraldine now looked anything but an interesting heroine, yet Fashion had done its very best to make her attractive. She wore a dress of pink satin, embroidered in flowers, and covered with costly lace—a dress, however, which looked more like a *toilette de bal* than a morning costume, and which any one would have mistaken for such had she not also worn a small bonnet of the same material trimmed with a wreath of roses. The body of the dress was open a little in front, disclosing her neck, upon which a large diamond locket hung from a black velvet, which, together with a full ruffle of white lace and pink satin, went round her throat in the dog-collar fashion.

She was sitting, as I have said before, in a low arm-chair, looking, with an air of *ennui*, through the open window towards the trees in the Park, while her step-mother sat on the other side, near the little table on which stood the tea things, with a cup in her hand, but with her eyes earnestly fixed on Geraldine.

“I tell you, Geraldine, that you will be Charley’s ruin,” her Ladyship was saying.

“His ruin!”

"Yes; you are the very worst wife I could have chosen for him; you do not know how to manage him at all."

"Then why did you choose me to be his wife? I am sure I never wanted to marry him; and, as for managing him, if you wanted somebody to take care of him and see that he did not get into mischief, why, you should have got him a governess, not a wife!"

"Geraldine, is this the language of a dutiful daughter, of a devoted wife?"

"I never knew that I was either."

"Geraldine!"

"I think I proved my obedience to my father quite sufficiently when I consented to marry a man I did not love; and as for my devotion as a wife, Charley never even expected such a thing from me; and I should be a fool were I to feel any for him—a wayward, reckless boy like that! The idea of my being devoted to him!"

The Countess Elizabeth remained silent for a few seconds, during which she favoured her daughter-in-law with a cold critical stare, which, though Geraldine pretended not to notice and kept looking steadily out of the window, made her blood boil with anger and indignation. At last Lady Twickenham said, in a softer tone of voice, and as if she were speaking to herself, "You are right; Charley is still but a wayward boy. But, Geraldine, don't you think that it is your duty as his wife to try to keep him in order? Every day I hear of some new escapade of his, and every day I have to listen to more and more annoying accounts of his wild goings on. Geraldine, this would not be the case if he were happy at home."

"At home!" Geraldine repeated bitterly. "Home!—

home is the English synonym for the French word *ennui*! I forget who said that, but it is only too true. Why, Lady Twickenham, you would not have us remain always at home boring ourselves to death or quarrelling from morning till night? No, I assure you we are much happier as we are; we get on capitally I assure you. Why, we have not quarrelled once since our marriage, and I am sure that is more than most married people can say."

"Yes, because you have not once been alone together long enough to do so."

"And I sincerely hope we never may be!"

"Geraldine, you do not love your husband."

"I never said I did."

"And this is the wife I have chosen for my son! Ah, Geraldine, Geraldine!" Lady Twickenham added, the tears starting to her eyes, to those eyes which were usually so cold and scornful; "I who thought that by marrying him to you I might be able to watch over him, and that you would help me to guide him; but it was all your father's fault—he was so anxious for his daughter to be a Countess."

"It is all very well to say that *now*; I should like to know who first thought of it."

"Not Charley, you may be very sure."

Geraldine bit her lips but said nothing.

"Your father tells me," said the Countess after a short pause, "that Charley has only been once to the House the whole of this session; why don't you make him go and attend to his Parliamentary duties?"

Geraldine burst out laughing. "I make him go! Oh, I must tell him that the first time I see him. It will make him laugh."

"I am afraid you will have forgotten it before you see him," Lady Twickenham replied bitterly.

"No, because I shall meet him to-night at Lady Belgrave's ball. I know he admires her very much, and he is sure to be there."

"So you only see your husband at other people's houses?"

"I also see him in mine at times. He always dines at home when I have a dinner party, and he generally makes a point, too, of attending all my 'At Homes.'"

"Indeed; what a devoted husband! No wonder you never quarrel."

"Now I think this is too bad. Why should you be constantly scolding me and finding fault with everything I do? I am sure no one can say anything against me; and as for Charley and me, we get on capitally together; and, as he says himself, no one has a right to interfere in our domestic arrangements."

"Your domestic arrangements! Very well, I shall say no more to you. I see you know nothing about your husband's whereabouts, and care still less. When I want information concerning him I shall apply to some other person, though it be even to this horrible Spaniard who is always with him, and who, I believe, is the villain who leads him into mischief."

"You mean Don Juan, and you call him a villain! You forget he is a great friend of mine."

"Oh, I forgot. I remember now that this is the very man with whom you were, or pretended to be, so desperately in love before your marriage."

"Pretended to be, indeed!"

"Surely you are not going to boast now of that silly infatuation. But I must tell Charley, for I don't think

he is aware that this very man who is now his greatest friend was once his wife's lover."

"Oh, he knows it already! Why it was he himself who begged papa to consent to my marrying him. I wish he had consented; I should have been a very different woman in that case."

"That you would. You would not have been a Countess, and you would not have worn such fine dresses, nor such beautiful diamonds, nor would you have been invited to ducal houses."

"Ah, that would have been a great loss, no doubt! But this reminds me that I am going to the Duchess of the Isles' afternoon party. Sweetest of mothers, farewell!"

A cloud passed over Lady Twickenham's brow as she thought that, had it not been for her son's going off to Paris with Stella, he might now have been the husband of the Lady Isobel Clanfyne; but she tried to hide her mortification, and coldly kissed her daughter-in-law, who, casting a glance in the mirror to see if her dress was all right, went out of the room, and, descending the staircase, stepped into the luxurious chariot which was waiting at the door to take her to the Duchess of the Isles' garden-party.

As might be seen from the foregoing conversation, Geraldine was not really unhappy in her present mode of life. It is true that, like the celebrated French novelist, she was married, but so little, that it was hardly worth mentioning. And Lady Twickenham, who was a devoted mother, and who had arranged this marriage against her own inclinations, and solely with the idea of seeing her son settled down with a quiet, gentle wife who would take care of him, was anything but satisfied, although before her marriage Geraldine had been a very steady and thoughtful girl.

It was only too evident that neither of them cared in the least for the other, and as she could hardly, under the circumstances, have expected otherwise, she did not so much mind this. But, unfortunately, they agreed beautifully on one point, and that was to differ in everything; so that although they lived together in a charming little house, all verandahs and balconies, fronting the Park, each went his own way and troubled the other as little as possible.

Lady Twickenham had thus lost all control over her son, who, in search of the happiness which was denied to him at home, plunged each day into greater and greater dissipations, until the name of Charley Twickenham had become quite a by-word in the fastest circles of London society.

The Duke of the Isles had a charming residence in the suburbs of London, just a little way beyond Kensington Gardens; and the afternoon garden-parties or breakfasts given at his house were generally attended by all the *élite* and fashion of Mayfair; so it is not to be wondered at that Geraldine should have soon forgotten all the advice she had just received from her worldly-wise mother-in-law, and wandered over the smooth lawn, sweeping the grass with her magnificent dress, and listening either to the lively strains of Godfrey's band, or to the still more entertaining speeches of the *jeunesse dorée*, who hovered about her paying her all sorts of attentions — not because they found her pretty or amusing, but because she happened to be the fashion that year.

And so passed the afternoon, pleasantly and agreeably enough, though utterly devoid of interest for Geraldine, who had spent too many of the same kind to find them

particularly amusing, until it was time to go and dress for Lady Purecliff's dinner-party, and for the half-dozen "At Homes" to which she would have to go, if only for a few minutes so as to put in an appearance, before going to the ball at Beauville House, at the thought of which her heart beat violently, and her eyes sparkled once more with their old brilliancy, for she knew that Juan would be there.

Her husband, in the meantime, was at another garden-party at the other end of London, flirting away with young actresses, and whispering sweet nothings in their ears, feeling greatly bored, and thinking all the time of the money he had just lost to Ralph Erroll, and wondering what he would have to sell to pay him, that is to say unless he could win it back that evening, as he certainly hoped to do, before going to the ball at Lady Belgrave's—a ball he would not have missed for anything, for he made a point of being seen a great deal with the Marchioness, as she was the most fashionable woman of the season, and he liked people to think that he was intimate with her.

CHAPTER II.

FASHIONABLE LIFE.

(Not by Mrs. Trollope.)

LORD BELGRAVE'S surprise and dismay, when he heard for the first time that Juan Fernandez was his wife's brother, can better be imagined than described.

At first, like the rest, he had been taken in by Juan's good looks, winning ways, and brilliant conversation; but gradually the distrust which his brother Edwin had from the first felt towards him began also to take possession of his own mind; and when at last Stella ran away with Lord Twickenham, he had felt convinced that it had been all Juan's doing, and that he had been but his dupe all this time. Yet, as he possessed no proofs against him, it was impossible to show his indignation in any very marked way.

His marriage had taken place soon after this, and the lovely and innocent Consuelo had soon made him forget the heartless *coquette*, or, rather, *cocotte*, who had so vilely deceived him; but what his feelings were, when, soon after his arrival in London, Juan had forced his way into his home, claiming to be his brother-in-law, I would rather not attempt to describe in these pages.

He was still too much in love with Consuelo to quarrel with her, and as he dared not tell *her* the reason why he so disliked her brother, he was forced to allow him to come to the house as often as he liked, taking, however, very good care to be as distant and reserved with him as possible. But as time went on his insolence and familiarity increased, until at last Lord Belgrave confessed to his wife his great dislike to her brother, and begged of her to see him as seldom as possible.

Consuelo, however, ignorant of Juan's real character, and blind as most sisters are to her brother's faults, though he had behaved so badly to her in the days of her misery, still clung to him with a strong sisterly affection, feeling that he was now the only one in the whole world left her to love; for she could not transfer her affections to her husband, and she knew that it would be a sin to encourage her passion for Alfredo.

She had tried hard to love her husband, but his cold reserved manner, which seemed to become colder and more reserved every day, chilled her and completely paralysed any outburst of affection which his great kindness to her at times awakened in her sensitive heart. She was convinced of his love; indeed, how could she doubt it when she thought of all his attention and devotion during her poor father's illness; besides, would he have married her if he had not loved her? But it was a cold passionless love which her warm southern nature failed to understand, and at times she felt convinced that he was a man who could never know what love really was. She was, however, very much mistaken; if she had broken the ice she would have found that the waters below were neither shallow nor still.

But this ice she could not break—for only love such

as he felt for her could have done it—and therefore Lord Belgrave—who was a very proud man, now the first excitement of his passion was over and he had won what he most wanted—her hand—would have scorned to display the feelings which still burnt in his heart.

But if Lord Belgrave had by this time given up all hope of ever winning her love, he still looked for and claimed her blind obedience and the complete resignation of her will to his. He strove earnestly and with infinite patience—though apparently with that careless, indolent, half-contemptuous, half-cynical manner, which so characterized both himself and his brother, though in every other respect they were so different—to change her from a dreamy, impressionable, impulsive girl—full of strange wild moods, capricious, and yet easily touched either to laughter or tears—into a stately and unimpressible woman of the world, colourless and formal, proud and dignified, as a lady of fashion ought to be; such, indeed, as he almost had a right to expect his wife to become.

He had now given up his first idea of leading a life of unbounded felicity—a life consecrated alone to love and its pleasures, apart from the world, and indifferent to society. Most likely this romantic existence, even if it had ever been realised, would have ended by boring him, and no doubt he would have longed before many months were over for his club and his London friends. But this poetical dream was never destined to be realised, for in Consuelo he missed precisely what was absolutely necessary to complete the idyl that he had most longed for. He had now, therefore, given up all such sentimental ideas, and, convinced that he should never find in Consuelo the companionship and love

which he had fondly hoped to obtain, he had determined to convert her into a proud stately Marchioness, who would take the troubles of rank off his hands, do him much honour, and bring him an heir whom he might flatter himself would be his own.

But it was not so easy to change a poor Spanish girl, with no knowledge whatever of the world and but little education, into the queen of fashion he had now set his ambitious heart on her becoming. Consuelo, though fond of show, and able now to gratify her wildest dreams of splendour and extravagance, felt herself at times sadly out of place in those magnificent saloons for which she had once so longed; and often, when alone in her room, she flung herself on her couch and cried bitterly, for she knew how disenchanted her husband must be with her, and she despised herself for having ever accepted him and forsaken Alfredo, whom she still loved with all the fervour of her warm southern nature.

Lord Belgrave, however, was not disappointed on the whole, for Consuelo was certainly the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and the very fittest, in spite of her natural shyness, which just at first seemed almost disheartening, to lend a grace and glory to his life in the eyes of his fellow-men. She certainly was a wife he might be proud to see pointed out as his own at race-courses, balls, and theatres, and one whom he could hardly regret having married.

Many and brilliant were the entertainments given that year at Beauville House, the gorgeous saloons of which, newly decorated and re-gilt, looked once more the finest in London. But none of these entertainments had been either as magnificent or on such a large scale as this great ball at the end of the season was intended

to be, which was destined to crown all the rest and leave a lasting and dazzling impression in the minds of all who were invited to it.

It was a beautiful night towards the end of July; the whole of the garden had been illuminated with Venetian lamps which surrounded the flower-beds and sparkled amidst the countless flowers like so many glow-worms, and with large Chinese lanterns which hung from the trees in every imaginable direction; while the front of the mansion, with its many Ionic pillars, terraces, steps, and marble statues, was lighted up with electric lights.

The entire house was thrown open that night; and from the ball-room, the large windows of which opened on to a marble terrace, the garden could be seen in all its splendour. The sight of this garden, however, was too tempting, and many were the couples who, under the pretence of seeing the grounds or breathing a little fresh air, found their way down the marble steps to the smooth lawn, and, after a time, wandered on to the more distant walks, where the lights were not quite so numerous.

Amongst these promenaders was one couple who seemed to linger longer than the others in these groves. The gentleman, as far as he could be seen through the trees, was tall and dark; the lady, though of rather large contour, seemed very young, and had it not been for the many diamonds she wore we should certainly have taken her for an unmarried lady. Let us approach them, and, though on account of the darkness of this part of the garden it is difficult to see them distinctly, let us listen to their conversation, which seems interesting, for the gentleman bends every now and then to whisper in the ear of his fair companion, and the young lady, apparently greatly interested, is leaning languidly upon his arm.

"I tell you that such a thing is impossible."

"Ah!" answered the lady, with a sigh, "you would not have said that last year!"

"Last year! last year!—that time is passed; you were then free to love whom you pleased."

"And am I not so now?"

"No, Geraldine; you forget that you are married now."

A slight tremor seemed to pass over the lady, while the man, whom my readers have no doubt before this recognised to be no other than the handsome Spaniard Don Juan, muttered something to himself.

"Ah, Juan, Juan, I assure you that I do not love him."

"Hush, hush!" he replied to this bold confession, as he might have done to an indiscreet child. "If any one were to hear you!"

"It is no secret; I never pretended to love him."

"Yet you swore to do so before the altar!"

"Ah, Juan, why were you not there; for before the altar I would have left him for you!"

"And do you think you would not have regretted the rank, the money, the pleasures you would have lost if you had married me?"

"Regretted them! Perhaps I should; but not half so much, I assure you, as I regret the love I have lost to obtain them."

"See, some one approaches. Do not lean so heavily on my arm. Take care, they may hear what we say."

Another couple was now seen approaching along that same sequestered path. The gentleman this time was slight and fair, and Geraldine had no difficulty in recognising him as her husband. The lady who leant on his arm had her face turned away, so that she did not at first recog-

nise her, but she was very tall, and upon her dark glossy hair, which hung in heavy curls over her alabaster shoulders, shone a magnificent coronet in diamonds. She was dressed entirely in white tulle, and a scarf of the same aerial fabric was thrown carelessly over her shoulders.

Lord Twickenham, who was walking by her side, and on whose arm she leant, carried her fan and bouquet, and was so lost in admiration of her that he did not notice the presence of strangers until he was almost close upon them.

"So you like London, beautiful Circe! So you do not pine and fret for your lovely woods, and warm sun, and all that, you know, in this damp and foggy island?" he was saying.

"No, no," the lady replied, evidently greatly confused, and with a foreign accent. "I like England very much, particularly in the summer."

"It is pretty in the summer, now, is it not? I always thought it was, only, you know, I didn't like to say so before; but now I see that you admire it too, why, I don't mind confessing it. By-the-bye, are you going to Goodwood?"

"Goodwood? Where is that?"

"Oh, don't you know? How awfully funny! I thought everybody knew Goodwood. I beg your pardon, beautiful syren!—of course a goddess like you cannot be expected to know all the haunts of us poor miserable devils."

"Lord Twickenham!—such language!"

"Forgive me; did I say anything wrong? You know I never was a great swell at classics; that's not my line. Now I could tell you pretty well all the points of a horse. Do you care for riding?"

"Who is that?" Geraldine asked of her companion.

"Why, don't you know? My sister, Lady Belgrave."

"Lady Belgrave!—the mistress of this house! Oh, introduce me to her; I do so want to know her."

Juan then approached his sister and introduced Geraldine to her.

"As I meet the Countess of Twickenham in your own house, I suppose it is not necessary for me to ask your permission beforehand, as I should otherwise most certainly have done," he added, and then made way for Geraldine, who advanced a few steps, and bowed to Lady Belgrave.

But when she raised her eyes to speak to her, she saw before her, not the proud Marchioness of Belgrave of whom she had heard so much, but the poor girl who a year before had so startled her by claiming relationship with her lover. Yes, this beautiful Marchioness, whom she had so longed to know, and to whose house at last she had been invited through her mother-in-law—for, strange to say, she had not yet met her—was no other than that poor foreign girl who had come to ask for employment from that step-mother, and who had had the impudence to call herself Juan's sister! There was no mistaking that tall graceful figure, those classical features, that clear pale complexion, and she could not help starting back, so surprised that her voice failed her, and she was obliged to lean upon Juan for support.

Consuelo, who had also been greatly taken by surprise, for she had believed herself alone with Lord Twickenham, cast one glance towards Geraldine and recognised her immediately. She too started back, more surprised even than Geraldine had been by this strange meeting, and, after returning her bow, hurried past her in the direction of the house.

"Who was that lady?" she asked of her companion, who, not a little astonished, answered her in a confused tone.

"Your wife! Is she, indeed! Dear me, how rude she must have thought me! I ought to have said something. But, you see, I was in such haste to get back to my other guests; and Lord Belgrave has so often told me that it is not necessary to enter into a conversation with people directly you are introduced to them. I hope you will explain all this to her, Lord Twickenham. But here we are once more in the ball-room. It was wrong of me, I am sure, to stroll about the gardens with you when I dare say my presence is wanted here."

"Do you think you could ever do anything wrong?" Lord Twickenham asked, forgetting the late adventure.

Consuelo smiled—a sweet gentle smile which seemed to light up her lovely face.

"Oh yes," she answered, with her artless raillery; "I should not have taken a midnight walk with you all alone, for instance."

"Juan, Juan!" Geraldine exclaimed, taking hold of the Spaniard's arm as soon as Consuelo and Lord Twickenham had quitted the grove, and she in her turn had recovered from her surprise enough to speak. "Are you sure that that is Lady Belgrave, your sister?"

"Of course; did you never see her before?"

"Yes, once—long ago—one morning in Carlton House Terrace; don't you remember?"

A shade passed over Juan's face, which in one moment assumed that dark sinister frown which caused him at times to look almost diabolical. "What do you mean?" he said, turning his face from her to hide his confusion.

"That this woman is no other than that poor girl who

called herself your sister, and whom you swore to me was no relation whatever of yours!"

Juan laughed. "The idea!" he cried, pretending to be exceedingly amused, but feeling within him a pang of remorse as the recollection of that day came back to his memory. "How can you say such a thing? Fancy, comparing that poor miserable girl to my beautiful and fascinating sister! I recollect now what you are alluding to; but really I cannot say I see any resemblance whatever between them."

"I do though; and, what is more, I am sure she recognised me. Did you see how quickly she turned away, and how confused she seemed? If this woman be really your sister, Juan, you must have lied to me that day!"

Later on, in the supper-room, Consuelo approached her husband, and, pointing with her mother-of-pearl fan towards Geraldine, said, in an agitated voice which greatly surprised Lord Belgrave, "Bel, you must never invite that lady again to this house."

"Why, that's the Countess of Twickenham!"

"Yes; but don't you remember that you once gave me a letter to her—before we were married."

"No, you are mistaken, it was to her mother-in-law—I remember it now."

"Never mind, I saw her there, and I am sure she has recognised me. As a favour to me, pray do not ask her to come here again."

CHAPTER III.

TRUE LOVE.

(Not by Lady Di Beauclerk.)

It had been decided that a few days after the ball Consuelo and her husband should leave town for Holm Abbey—Lord Belgrave's principal seat in England—which she had not yet visited. Juan was aware of this, and though he inwardly felt very much disgusted at not having been asked to accompany them, yet as it was now his interest to keep well with his sister, he came to say good-bye to her on the afternoon of the day before their departure.

He was shown into her boudoir, which was upstairs, and communicated with her private apartments. He found her busily engaged in arranging her jewels in their velvet cases previous to their being sent to the bank; for, although they were kept during the season in a strong iron safe in her dressing-room, Lord Belgrave thought it would be safer to send them to his banker while they were in the country.

Juan's eyes were dazzled at the sight of these precious stones, for the Belgrave diamonds were amongst the finest, not only in England, but in all Europe. He remained for some time gazing at them, and was

hardly able to answer Consuelo's questions when she spoke to him. After vainly trying to talk on indifferent subjects, he at last said, in tremulous accents, "Ah, Consuelo, to think that all these beautiful jewels should be yours!"

Consuelo smiled. "Yes," she replied, "who would have thought a year ago, when we were nearly starving, that I should so soon possess such treasures; and, what is more, that I should think so little of them," she added, with a sigh.

"You were always a generous, disinterested girl, Consuelo. Do you remember, since you allude yourself to those miserable days that now, thank God, are passed for ever, and which I hoped you had long since forgotten, how you gave me a hundred pounds out of your slender means?"

"Oh yes, I remember it quite well, and I do hope, Juan dear, that you have kept the promise you made me at the time and have never gambled since."

Again that cynical smile, which so changed the whole expression of his countenance, spread over the Spaniard's face. "I have kept it religiously, Consuelo. I swear to you that I have not touched a card since that day. Ah, you little know how much good that money did me. Had it not been for that, Consuelo, I might have been in prison to-day. It is a horrible thing to be without money. Now, at this moment, while you are throwing away thousands to gratify your slightest whim, I am obliged to live, to use a common expression, 'from hand to mouth.'"

"Poor Juan!"

"Ah! you may well say that, dearest sister; but you see every one does not get the first prize in the lottery of life, as you have done."

"How selfish I have been! I had almost forgotten that you were poor, and have actually made a display of my riches before you. Forgive me."

"Do you remember that proverb of our poor father:

Por dinero

Baila el perro?

How true it is! There is really, after all, nothing like money!"

Consuelo's beautiful eyes filled with tears at this allusion to her father, whom she had so loved. When Juan saw how moved she was, he began telling her, without further preface, of his pecuniary difficulties, and at last ended, as was to be expected, by asking her for money.

"I really should like to assist you," said the generous girl, "but, unfortunately, it is not in my power to give you much; for, although I have everything I desire, and I have only to enter a shop and order anything I like, the bills are all paid by my husband, and very little money ever passes through my hands. I wish, though, I had the disposal of the money I spend, for I assure you, Juan, that I would then make a very different use of it."

"Why don't you ask Lord Belgrave?"

"You forget that I did ask him once for some money for you, and how angry he was. No, Juan, I fear very much that, with all my good wishes, it is quite out of my power to assist you."

Juan's eyes again rested upon the diamonds on the table, and a new idea seemed to strike him, for, drawing his chair closer to the one occupied by his sister, he said in a low tone, "You have all these diamonds: they are yours. I suppose they are worth any amount of money."

"Yes," she answered, at first failing to understand the dark meaning of his words; "I have heard Bel say that they are worth something like three hundred thousand pounds."

"Ah!"

"It sounds tremendous, doesn't it; and to think that these magnificent things should always live in a case—for it is only three or four times a year that Bel allows me to wear them, and even then I can only put on a part of them! I believe there is hardly any one in London who has seen the whole of the sets, for it seems his mother seldom wore diamonds, and he won't send them to the exhibition, as Lord Birmingham does; for he says, and perhaps he is right, that it looks very much as if one wanted to make a show of one's wealth."

"You might very well sell some of these sets. It seems absurd to have so much money lying dead in this way. Consuelo, you tell me you have no money—and these jewels?—they are yours—yours, do you hear? But I suppose you would not part with one of these many necklaces—though perhaps you will never put them all on—even if you saw your poor brother starving in the street!"

His cruel words touched her to the quick, and she cried, in faltering accents, "Oh, Juan, I wish I could give you the half of them, but they are not mine; you know that as well as I do. They belong to my husband's family, and I am only permitted to have them during his life, as he took very good care to tell me himself the day he handed them over to me."

"And do you think he would miss one of these bracelets, for instance; there seems to be almost any number of them?"

Consuelo started back, and her pale cheeks flushed. "That would be robbery, Juan—robbery!"

"No, no. I see plainly what it is—you love these trinkets better than you love your poor brother!"

"Oh, Juan, how can you say that!"

Because it is only too plain. For you could save me at this very moment from shame and dishonour, by merely parting with some of these ornaments which you do not want, which at all events you will not see for more than nine months, and yet you refuse to do it."

The same generous weakness which had made the poor girl give him almost the whole of her small store the previous year now seized her. She forgot everything but the love she bore him. She forgot even how basely he had disowned her when she was poor and unprotected, and how he would have allowed her to perish alone in that horrible lodging-house in Soho, without once going to see her. She forgot everything but that he was her brother, the only being now left to her whom she could really love, and, rising from her chair, she fell upon his neck and burst into a flood of tears.

"I cannot give you any of these jewels," she said, when she had regained a little of her self-possession, "but I have a few that are really my own, those which I had decided to take with me to the country; those shall be yours, Juan."

"Now I recognise you once more, Consuelo, and I see you are still the generous, unselfish little sister you were before we came to England."

Consuelo then rose, and walking towards a large wardrobe opened it and took out a red morocco dressing-case, on the top of which had been engraved in gold the letters C. B., surmounted by a Marchioness's coronet.

"See," she said, opening it, and displaying its precious contents to the covetous eyes of her brother, "they were already packed to take to Holm Abbey!"

She then took out a few of the things, which were mostly articles of modern jewellery in gold and precious stones. "These were given to me by Bel at the time of my marriage—these I must keep."

"And this diamond and pearl necklace?"

"That the tenantry of the Holm estates sent to me soon after my marriage."

"Then I suppose you do not care much for it. I shall take it."

"In this way they went through the entire contents of the case, of which Juan appropriated to himself the greater part, his poor sister not having the courage to prevent him. Amongst other things, he insisted upon taking a curious ring, which had in the centre an engraved emerald surrounded by small diamonds.

"I would rather you should not take that, Juan," she said; "it was the first present Bel ever gave me."

"It looks more like a man's ring."

"Yes, it was his own ring, which he took off and gave to me one day when I chanced to admire it."

"Oh, you will never wear it; it is a great deal too big for your little hand, and would look clumsy upon it—let me have it."

"But what shall I tell him if he asks me for it?"

"Tell him? Oh I can tell you of a grand way of accounting for the disappearance of all these jewels. You must say they have been stolen. If you tell your husband that you have given them to me, he will dislike me more than ever, and I dare say he will be very angry with you; but if they have been stolen . . . why, it is not your fault, and he can't say anything."

"But how can I say that they have been stolen?"

"Oh, that is the easiest thing in the world. You have only to leave the case behind to-morrow when you start for Holm Abbey, or, better still, leave it at the station, and when it is found, and found empty, of course everyone will think that the contents have been stolen."

After pocketing all the jewels he could get his poor sister to give him, he prepared to go, highly pleased with himself for the clever stroke of business he had accomplished that day. As he was going away, he remembered that he had in his pocket a parcel of letters for her, and he went back to her boudoir to give them to her.

"As I was passing through Soho Square the other day," he said, "I went to take a look at our old house in Bull Street. The old woman—do you remember her?—that horrible Mrs. Potts—recognised me, and gave me these letters, which she said had come at different times for you. I wonder who they are from? I thought you might find it amusing to look over them, so I brought them to you. Good-bye again, dearest sister! Thank you, thank you a thousand times for what you have done! Good-bye!"

When Consuelo was left alone, she remained for some time as if stunned, leaning back half-unconscious in the easy-chair in which she had been sitting when her brother had first entered the room. When she had a little recovered from the excitement she had undergone, she saw lying upon the table before her the packet of letters which Juan had left there. With a trembling hand she took them up and glanced over them; they bore a foreign post-mark, and were all in the same handwriting. When Consuelo saw this handwriting she uttered an exclamation and almost fainted.

She had recognised the hand of her lover!—of Alfredo who wrote to her from the far West—of Alfredo whom she had so loved—who had loved her so tenderly—who, no doubt, loved her still!

Her first sensation was one of supreme happiness. "He loves me still," she cried. "He has not forgotten me; oh my dear, dearest Alfredo!" But when she remembered all that had happened since his departure, a feeling of deep anguish took possession of her.

"Alfredo, Alfredo!" she muttered, burying her face in her hands, "I am no longer free to love you; I am never, never to be yours!"

What she suffered that day would be impossible to describe. She longed to read the letters—those letters which she held for hours together in her hands, and at intervals pressed to her lips—those letters which seemed to burn her—yet she dared not, for she feared that reading them now might be a sin.

At last, after a great struggle with herself, she mustered sufficient courage to put them aside unread. She would have destroyed them, burnt them, but she had not the heart to do *that*; she merely put them aside, and, imprinting one long, last, passionate kiss upon them, she locked them up in her private dressing-case.

"Alfredo," she said, speaking to them as if they had been her lover himself, as she put them out of sight with tearful eyes and flushed cheeks, "I have been untrue to your love, but I will not be untrue to my husband. Now I am the wife of another, let me at least remain faithful to him. I did not swear to love Belgrave at the foot of the altar, as the clergyman bid me do, but I made a solemn vow—a vow before God Himself—which I shall not break, to endeavour to forget my love for you. My husband

loves me. He would not have married me if he had not felt a true unselfish love for me ; and, though I fear every day that I shall be less able to return that love, I will at least never give him occasion to utter one word of complaint against me."

CHAPTER IV.

AN OPEN QUESTION.

(*Not by James De Mile.*)

THE next day Consuelo was anything but well, for the events of the previous day had shaken her very much, yet she pretended that nothing was the matter with her, and, as everything had been prepared for their journey, insisted upon undertaking it.

It was a hot and very oppressive morning in town, and the rain, which fell at intervals, seemed only to render the atmosphere still more depressing; so Consuelo was able to attribute her languor to the state of the weather, and to make her husband believe that once out of town she would soon be all right.

A saloon carriage had been engaged for them at King's Cross, the station from which they were to start, but before entering it Consuelo repaired to the waiting-room, as she said she would rather remain there until the train was ready to start.

Lord Belgrave had given the dressing-case, which he supposed still contained her jewels, to her maid; but, once in the waiting-room, Consuelo, following the instructions her brother had given her, asked her for it and insisted on holding it herself.

The train, as is generally the case, was very late in starting, partly on account of their luggage, of which they had a great quantity, and partly on account of the Prince of Wales, who was going by the same train in a "slip carriage" as far as Peterborough. The train was on the point of starting when Lord Belgrave went himself into the waiting-room for his wife. She rose and, taking his arm, hurried out of the room, the maid following her hastily for fear of being left behind.

Her *ruse* succeeded, as her brother had expected it would. When they were about half-way on their journey Lord Belgrave remembered the jewel-case, and, finding it was not in the carriage with them, got out at the first station and inquired of the maid, who with his valet and the other servants was in another carriage, if she had it with her.

The maid searched everywhere but in vain, and at last, greatly confused, she was obliged to confess that it must have been left behind somewhere.

The Marquis telegraphed at once to the station-master at King's Cross, asking him to look everywhere for the dressing-case and to telegraph back the result to Holm Abbey. However, when they arrived there, the excitement of their reception soon caused them to forget for a time the loss of the jewels.

The station was at some distance from the house, but a great crowd had assembled even there to see the new Marchioness; for this was Consuelo's first visit to Holm Abbey. At the gates of the park the tenantry had erected a triumphal arch, and insisted on taking the horses out of the carriage and drawing it themselves all the way to the house, where another triumphal arch, tastefully decorated with flowers from the hothouses, had been erected.

It had fortunately turned out a beautiful afternoon, and the sun was now shining brightly, so that all the decorations appeared to the best advantage, and Consuelo's entrance into her new home was quite like a triumphal procession.

The house was immensely large, and, having been built at two different periods, might almost be called two houses.

The entrance front had formed part of the old abbey (the monks of which, in the days of Henry VIII., had been sent away) and had been allowed to go to ruin until, a few years later, the Marquis of Belgrave of those days, to whom the lands had been given, thought fit to transform the abbey into a mansion. The old door of the church still served as the entrance to the house; and on the right hand side rose a lofty wing with large Gothic windows of quaint stained glass, which had been the refectory in former times, and which now served as a hall. On either side the old cloisters, with their low stone arches, spread out until they formed a sort of quadrangle, only open on one side, where a handsome iron railing divided it from the park. A curious archway, beautifully carved and surmounted by several statues which had been saved from the destructive hands of the Reformers, and later on from the still more sacrilegious hands of Cromwell's Ironsides, gave entrance to this sort of *cour d'honneur*, and fronted the stately avenue.

Over this door a device had been written in white camellias, which shone like snow upon the old time-worn stone, on which the word "Welcome" could be read with the initials C. B. on either side, surmounted by a Marchioness's coronet.

I must here remark that Consuelo's eyes were filled with tears when they first rested upon this ancestral home of her husband's noble race, and she thought how little she deserved this brilliant reception, although her heart did warm towards all these good people who seemed so pleased to see her, and whose reception almost caused her to forget her secret troubles.

Stepping out of the carriage, under the old doorway, she entered the large hall, where, besides the servants, a great number of people were assembled to pay their respects to her—the clergyman of the parish with his wife and daughters, Lord Belgrave's private chaplain and secretary, and several farmers with their families, all more or less connected with the Belgrave estates.

This hall was very large and exceedingly lofty, but, coming from the brilliant sunshine outside, one could not help thinking it both cold and gloomy, even on this warm summer's day. The light was only admitted through stained-glass windows, and around it were ranged men in armour, mostly on horseback, who held the old flags and banners of the family.

This spacious hall formed the entrance into a long corridor, lighted from the top, which served as a picture-gallery, on either side of which opened the library and the dining-room. The first of these rooms, and the one into which Consuelo was shown, was a large oak room, the walls of which from top to bottom were completely lined with books, and near the top a little gallery went round it to enable the reader to obtain those books which otherwise would have been out of his reach, for the room was very lofty. Three large oriel windows gave light to this room, and from them could be seen the grand old ruins of the eastern transept of the old

church, which, half covered with ivy, rose in picturesque perspective against the blue sky at no great distance.

Consuelo, however, did not remain long in this room, for the Marquis was anxious to show her her own private apartments, which he had had re-decorated and entirely re-furnished for her accommodation.

At the end of the picture gallery, which, as I have said before, was a very long one, and lighted by means of a skylight from the top, was a large glass door, which gave entrance to the great staircase.

Here the old part of the house ended, and the more modern part, which had been erected in the days of Queen Anne, began, and resembled in its architecture most of the buildings of that date.

The staircase was a very handsome one, and its walls and ceiling were beautifully painted *al fresco*. A noble flight of steps, which at the first turning divided into two, conducted to the upper story, where the principal reception-rooms were situated. The State drawing-room, however, as well as the billiard-room, breakfast and morning rooms, were downstairs. All these apartments, which were large and lofty, looked upon the garden, which, with its smooth lawns, many terraces, bright flower-beds, and conservatories, seemed to stretch in every direction as far as the eye could see.

After ascending the stately staircase, and traversing a long suite of saloons, all more or less gorgeously furnished, and from the velvet-covered walls of which the portraits of countless dead Belgraves seemed to look down with supreme contempt upon her, Consuelo entered her own private portion of the house.

The first room she saw was a little blue satin boudoir, in which Lord Belgrave, knowing her tastes, had ordered

to be hung a few pictures by Watteau and Bouchier—soft pleasing groups of children and angels, which accorded very well with the light French furniture and pale blue satin walls.

The next room, which was her drawing-room, was hung with modern gobelin tapestry, and the room beyond that was her bed-room. Opening out of this was Lord Belgrave's dressing-room, then his own private room, which had not been altered, and, lastly, a smoking-room. This was a small circular apartment, with a low-cushioned divan of some curious Persian stuff running completely round it, except where broken by the doorways; the floor was an arabesque of different coloured tiles, covered here and there with tiny squares of bright-hued Turkish carpet. The walls were also lined with coloured tiles to the height of four feet from the ground, above which they were panelled with curiously-inlaid stucco, painted in various colours, with here and there a maxim or a motto from the Koran in Arabic characters, picked out with gold, in imitation of the Alhambra. This room was lighted from the top, different panes of coloured glass having been let into the ceiling, which was richly gilt, and from which hung a Moorish lamp, suspended by gilt chains. At the other end of this lovely little room, in the decoration of which Lord Belgrave had taken an unusual interest, was a door which, like the other one, was of cedar wood inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, and gold, and which led to a little staircase terminating in the billiard-room.

All these rooms opened at the back upon a long gallery, the large plate glass windows of which looked upon the ruins of the old Abbey. At one end of this gallery was the great staircase, and at the other end another

staircase which led to the occupied apartments downstairs, so that Consuelo could go in and out of her own private suite of rooms without having to pass either through the saloons, or down the great staircase, which indeed were only used when the house was full of company.

The poor Spanish girl was too dazzled by all this grandeur, which far surpassed anything she had as yet seen even in Italian palaces or French chateaux, to be able to express her admiration; but she was particularly delighted with her own rooms, in which she saw plainly that Lord Belgrave, with his usual gallantry, had tried to gratify all her tastes. And she looked towards him with such an angelic smile of gratitude that the noble Marquis felt himself more than repaid for all the trouble he had taken and for the immense expense he had incurred.

That evening a telegram arrived from the station-master at King's Cross, to say that the jewel-case had been found and would be forwarded without delay.

When it arrived next day, it was found to have been opened and its precious contents abstracted. Lord Belgrave's state of mind may be easily imagined; however, he was glad to see how coolly his wife took it, and how completely resigned she seemed, after the first few moments, to the loss of her diamonds.

"You shall have them back, my dear," he said, perhaps excited all the more by her apparent indifference. "Cost what it may, you shall have them again. These were precisely the jewels I had given you, and you shall not lose them so easily, though I am happy to see how little you are affected by their loss."

The following morning the papers were full of the supposed robbery; and people throughout the country talked of nothing else; for at first it was believed that Lady Belgrave had lost the whole of her diamonds.

Lord Belgrave returned that day to London, and drove immediately to his jewellers in New Bond Street, where the police from Scotland Yard were summoned to meet him, and, according to their advice a detailed list of the lost jewels was prepared and sent to the leading metropolitan and local pawnbrokers, and a copy of it was also sent to the different diamond merchants in London.

CHAPTER V.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD.

(Not by Thomas Hardy.)

ONE fine evening towards the end of autumn the train from the North reached Paddington unusually crowded, for it brought from Liverpool many of the passengers of one of the large Cunard steamers which had arrived that morning from America.

The crowd at the station was great. There were many people: mostly Americans with large families and immense trunks, who came to England for the first time, and looked about them with that sharp supercilious air which is peculiar to Yankees, ordering the porters about as if they were so many negroes, and saying farewell to their fellow-travellers, with whom they had lived on terms of the greatest intimacy during the last ten days, and whom most likely they would never see again.

Amongst the passengers, however, who had come by the American steamer, there was one man who appeared to be alone, and, what was still better for him, seemed blessed with little luggage. A mere passing glance at him would have been sufficient to convince any one that he was not an American. He was tall and slight, but his complexion was dark, his hair black, and his perfect

noble features stamped him at once as the descendant of a Latin race. His eyes were wondrously brilliant, and he seemed in even a greater state of excitement than any of the others.

Shaking hands for the last time with the few fellow-passengers with whom he had been the most intimate while on board, he jumped into a hansom, and seeing that his modest portmanteau was placed on the top of it, he ordered the cabman to drive to the Langham Hotel.

Arrived there, he dismissed the cab and asked to be shown a room, after taking possession of which he went downstairs to see what he could get to eat. When the portmanteau was safely deposited in his room, which was a very small one, at the top of the house, his name could be read by every one, for it had been written by himself in full before leaving New York.

That name was—Alfredo Villafranca.

Yes; he was no other than the hero of this story, who had come back to England, after a year and a half's absence, if not quite a rich man, at least richer than when he left it.

My readers must not suppose, however, that this fortune, small though it was after all, had actually been made by him during his short stay in the United States. Oh dear me, no; for not even in that go-ahead country can money be accumulated so quickly. This small fortune, which now at last made him independent, had been left him by an old aunt, who had unexpectedly died in Spain a few months previously, and who, to the great surprise of all her family, himself included, had left him everything she possessed.

This old lady lived in Madrid, and during his residence there he had seen a great deal of her, and, I suppose,

gained her good-will, for she had preferred him to his brothers, and at her death left him the owner of a little estate in Andalusia, not far from that of his father, and of a few thousand pounds in the Funds.

His first thought on hearing this good news had been to return to Europe at once, give up his schemes of money-making, in which art he had proved but a very indifferent aspirant—(for not even the business atmosphere of Wall Street had been sufficient to clear his head of European prejudices)—marry Consuelo, and take her back with him to his new estate in Spain, where he would live happy and beloved, a stranger to the world beyond those beautiful mountains of his native land.

Since his departure from London he had done nothing but think of his lovely Consuelo, and wish himself again at her side. He only discovered how essential she was to his happiness when he realized how widely they were separated; then at last he confessed to himself that he had been wrong in leaving her—not that he ever thought for a moment that she would go and marry another in his absence; he was too sure of her sincerity and love for that. She had given him her word that she would never marry any one else, and he felt convinced that she would keep that solemn promise. But when he had time and leisure to reason with himself, he began to perceive how dangerous it was to leave her in a strange land, without friends or money, and with only a selfish old father and a brother whom he knew to be a swindler and a villain, to take care of her. The perils to which she might be daily exposed he shuddered even to think of; and then the dreadful thought entered his head and preyed upon his mind day and night, as he paced the deck with a weary step, or as he lay awake for hours and

hours together during the night in his little cabin—that perhaps absence would cool her love for him; that perhaps she would forget him; and that, on his return, after many long years of toil and work, he would find, not the loving Consuelo he had left behind him, but a woman who would have grown almost to dislike him for having kept her waiting so long to give her—what?—a poor man she no longer loved for a husband!

But it was now too late to go back. The steamer proceeded on its slow course in spite of the weary longings of his heart; and when he had once landed in America he dared not return. What would his friends, his family, Consuelo herself, think of him if he returned a poorer man even than he had started, without having so much as tried to make that fortune he had gone in search of?

When at last the little property left him by the old aunt in Madrid came as a godsend, he was not long in making up his mind what to do. Nothing could now prevent his marrying Consuelo; so he took a berth in the first steamer leaving New York for England, and here he was at last once more in London.

He would have liked to go that very night to Bull Street to see his love, but he thought it would be cruel to disturb her at such an untimely hour, for it was very late when he arrived at the hotel. No, he would wait till the morrow and then go. She must be prepared to receive him, for just before leaving the United States he had written to her announcing his speedy arrival in London, and informing her of the little fortune which his aunt had left him, and which would enable them at last to realize the fondest dream of their lives—that of being united as man and wife, when they would be able to lead a quiet but happy existence in that country of the sun

and the flowers, where everything is so beautiful, and which they both loved so much.

With all the impatience of a spoiled child—for love seemed to have transported him once more to that thoughtless period of existence—he awoke the next morning at break of day, and as soon as a reasonable hour had arrived he hurried out of the hotel, jumped into a hansom, and drove to Bull Street.

A few moments later he found himself in Mrs. Potts' little shop, inquiring of that highly respectable old woman if Miss Fernandez was up and would see him.

He then heard for the first time of old Fernandez' death and Consuelo's departure. A horrible sickening dread took possession of him. He staggered to a chair and fell rather than sat down upon it, his face like that of a corpse, pale and expressionless.

Mrs. Potts however told him that, though she ignored Miss Fernandez' present address, her brother had called a few days ago, and that she had given him the letters that had come for her as he said he knew where she lived.

The only hope therefore left him was to wait patiently until he happened to meet either Consuelo or her brother, who was said to be in town, or until one of them chanced to call at Mrs. Potts's shop, with whom he left his address and a message begging of them to communicate with him as soon as possible. He was sure of one thing—that Consuelo had received his letter, telling her of his departure from New York, and he felt almost sure that she would inquire shortly of Mrs. Potts if he had called there, for she could not but be aware that this was the only address of hers he knew.

With downcast eyes, yet still full of hope, he went back to the Langham and waited patiently for nearly three weeks, hoping every day to hear from her.

He took long walks through the most crowded streets to see if he could meet her or her brother anywhere, but all his search seemed unavailing, and his patience was nearly exhausted before the end of those three long weary weeks.

Poor Alfredo was in a perfect maze of perplexity. What could have become of his Consuelo? He could not think; he dared not think. He felt too bewildered to institute a regular search after her, or set any detectives on her track; besides, he was utterly at a loss as to how to go about these things; so he contented himself with calling every day at Bull Street and inquiring of Mrs. Potts if she had heard any news of their whereabouts, for she actually was the only person he could think of as at all likely to hear anything of them.

Once the thought struck him, that perhaps Mr. Jobkin might know something of her. He remembered that he was her cousin, and that they had come to England on purpose to see him; what more likely than that on Mr. Fernandez' death he should have taken Consuelo to live with him? At all events he would be sure to know her address; so he called at his house in Grosvenor Square; but there he learnt that Mr. Jobkin had lately died in Scotland, and that his widow had gone on a visit to her father, who lived somewhere in the North; so even this last chance proved vain like the rest.

He now began to fear that he should never hear of her again, and was in despair. He went about town like a man walking in his sleep—searching everywhere for his lost love. Another man would have given up this hopeless search long before, but the passionate love which burned in his heart kept him alive. The thought never entered his head that she had deceived and for-

saken him. He felt sure that Consuelo must still love him, and that she was waiting for him somewhere; but where, he was completely at a loss how to find out.

At this time, when he had already been in London about three weeks, he received a letter from his old friend Lord Belgrave, to whom he had written on his arrival, asking Alfredo to come down to see him at Holm Abbey. His first impulse was to decline the invitation, for he was too anxious to find out his lost Consuelo to think of anything else; but, when he began to reason calmly with himself, he arrived at the conclusion that after all he could do no good by remaining in town, while perhaps his friend, with the knowledge he must necessarily possess of English customs and institutions, might show him the way to institute a systematic search for her. Besides, an inward impulse he could not well explain even to himself, urged him to run down to Holm Abbey. He had a dim sort of presentiment that he would find her if he went there; and so, after leaving his new address with Mrs. Potts in case she heard anything of Consuelo during his absence, he left London for Holm Abbey, where he was at last destined to meet his lost love—but in a manner he had never even dreamt of.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR EVER AND EVER.

(Not by Florence Marryat.)

CONSUELO had been now two months at Holm Abbey. The first weeks she had passed almost entirely alone, for her husband was continually going backwards and forwards to town trying all he could to recover the lost jewels. However, it was impossible to feel lonely or dull in that magnificent mansion, for every day she discovered fresh objects to admire. The weather was beautiful, and she passed a great deal of her time in the gardens and park, wandering amongst the flower-beds, which glowed with a thousand colours in every direction, upon the smooth lawns, or under the trees in the shrubberies during the warm hours of the day, or at other times through the park, where the magnificent trees were the objects of her continual admiration. In the afternoons she would take long drives through the country, when her husband, if at home, generally accompanied her. Yet amidst all this magnificence, surrounded as she was by lovely and beautiful objects, and in spite of the wondrous luxury in which she lived, she could not help feeling at times exceedingly miserable.

Every day she felt more and more how little she

deserved all this. What had she done, she asked herself at every moment of the day, that so many beautiful things should be given to her?—that every one around her should take so much pains to please and amuse her—a penniless foreign girl—who, in return for all she had received from this man, who loved her so well and who had given her so much, could not even give him her love, and had actually robbed him of his jewels!

The thought of these jewels haunted her. It was the skeleton in her closet which day and night was ever before her. Every time her husband spoke about them, or alluded to them in any way, a new pang came like a knife to inflict a fresh wound in her already sore conscience. She could hardly take up a newspaper without reading something which referred to the robbery. She did not see a person, from the cottagers to the numerous visitors who daily flocked to pay their respects to the new Marchioness, who did not condole with her on the loss of her jewels—people seemed to talk and think of nothing else—and then to know that she herself had stolen them!

It is true that she had done it to save her brother from ruin and shame, that it had been entirely at his instigation, yet it seemed such a wrong way of helping him, that, with reflection, what in a moment of unselfish generosity she had consented to do became in her eyes a hideous crime.

The thought also that her brother might attempt to sell the jewels and be caught in the fact—for she knew well that a minute description of them had been given to all the jewellers and pawnbrokers in London—only added another subject of dread to her already troubled mind.

When they had been about a week at Holm Abbey, Lord Belgrave, who was going to town that morning, and who intended remaining there a few days, came into Consuelo's boudoir, and finding her sad and melancholy, and thinking that perhaps it was the thought of his absence that made her so, suggested a plan which at first she hardly found very much to her taste, but to which she was at last obliged to consent—this was to get Miss Ducie to come and live with her.

"You will find it very dull when I am away, Consuelo," he said; "and I am sure when you know Laura Ducie you will like her very much and quite enjoy her society."

Laura Ducie, or, as she was generally called at Holm Abbey, Miss Ducie, was a young lady who had been companion to Lord Belgrave's mother for several years before her death. She was a distant relation of the family. Lord Belgrave always called her his Scotch cousin, for her father, a certain Captain Ducie, who had married a second cousin of his father, had been of that nation. She was rather pretty, though her beauty, perhaps, consisted almost entirely in the freshness of her complexion and light-reddish hair. She had been educated at a school in France, where her father's family had sent her soon after his death with the idea of making a governess or lady's companion of her. She possessed great natural abilities, and had profited greatly by the opportunities afforded her; thus she not only played and sang beautifully, and could speak several languages fluently, but she had also acquired great proficiency in business matters.

The late Lady Belgrave had taken her as a companion, and during the latter years of her life it was Miss Ducie

who had managed all her affairs and taken entire charge of the house, and she had proved herself so clever, that, at the Marchioness's death, her son had arranged to keep her as a sort of superior lady-housekeeper. Thus during all the years which Lord Belgrave had remained unmarried, Miss Ducie had been sole mistress of Holm Abbey; she had not lived, however, in the house itself, but in a small villa in the grounds, which had been furnished especially for her.

On Consuelo's arrival, she had of course been one of the first to pay her respects to the new Marchioness; but, somehow or other, Consuelo had not been very pleased with her, and had received her rather coldly, although, as with artless innocence she afterwards confessed to her husband, she could not say why it was that she felt a dislike to her.

However, agreeably to Lord Belgrave's wishes, which Consuelo dared not dispute, Miss Ducie now came to live in the house, where she was received more as a relation of the family than a paid housekeeper. And Consuelo, who desired to atone for the robbery of the jewels, tried hard to overcome her natural antipathy to her, and even inconvenienced herself to entertain her, thinking that by doing her honour she pleased her husband.

Laura Ducie was one of those women whose chief business in life is to please, and so when once the opportunity was given her, she did not find it very difficult to enter into Consuelo's artless, simple, unprejudiced ways, and eventually to win her good opinion.

She talked Spanish to her—a language she had learnt in France when at school, and which she afterwards had thought advisable to cultivate, knowing how fond Lord Belgrave was of it. She would sit and read to her for

hours out of some favourite book of poetry in that sweet melodious language ; and then she would go to the piano and play and sing to Consuelo those national melodies which she had not heard for so long, and which seemed to take her back to the home of her childhood and to the land she so loved.

Yet, in spite of all this, Consuelo was not quite sure of her feelings towards Miss Ducie ; and so she was not sorry when, on Lord Belgrave's return, he informed her that if she had no objection he thought of inviting a few friends to come and stay with them.

These few friends soon grew into a great many, and before a month had elapsed the house was full of visitors, and Consuelo saw but little of Laura Ducie.

I need not describe the way in which the time passed at Holm Abbey, nor what amusements were prepared to entertain the company ; neither shall I give a list of the numerous guests who, in rapid succession, came and went during the first two months. The daily papers took very good care to keep the world informed of what was going on at the Marquis of Belgrave's princely seat, and every now and then gave a detailed list of the visitors staying there.

But for Consuelo all these people appeared only like so many spirits, who seemed to possess no reality at all for her, or, rather, like the figures in a dissolving view, which appear and disappear with such wondrous rapidity as to confuse the beholder. After a time she ceased to take any interest in them, and often actually forgot the names of her guests, for, unfortunately for her, she possessed a very bad memory for names, and in spite of the careful study of "*The Peerage*," recommended to her by her husband, she was continually making absurd

mistakes, which afterwards weighed heavily on her mind, and during the night kept her awake for hours together, wondering what people must think of her.

Consuelo's life during this part of her existence might well be compared to that of some of those beautiful tropical flowers we see in hot-houses and conservatories, which, although they are watered and tended daily, with a care which they never experienced in their native country, and are constantly kept in a warm pleasant atmosphere, and where not a breath of air, not an insect nor a fly, is permitted to get near them, yet never grow nor prosper, but seem to fade and gradually decay, as if pining for their own country and for their native soil, where they grew uncared for and unknown, yet were ever fragrant and blooming.

Consuelo, like these flowers, was not yet acclimatized to the artificial world which is known as the world of Fashion—the great world *par excellence*. She, like them, had everything given to her that could help to make life a paradise; her tastes were carefully studied and gratified in every way; she also, like them, had a warm-hearted and wise guardian, who was exceedingly proud of her, to look after her and to see that nothing was ever wanting to complete her happiness and comfort; and yet she, like these beautiful flowers, faded and drooped and grew sadder every day, and in her secret heart pined for that land of the sun where she had been born, and where she had lived happily for so many years though uncared for and unknown; and she also pined for that one warm, unselfish, noble heart, which was at once above the weaknesses and the grandeurs of life, which had cherished and loved her, and which she felt was the only one in the whole world she could really love and cherish in return.

One day Lord Belgrave told her that Mrs. Jobkin was coming to stay with them—that her husband had been killed by an accident while yachting in the north of Scotland some few months before—and that she was now a widow, and a very rich widow too, for by the will of Mr. Jobkin, made at the time of their marriage, he had left her all he possessed. Being still in the deepest of mourning she had at first declined his invitation, but having since received another letter from him, in which he informed her that they would be almost alone, she had at last agreed to come, and would arrive the following day.

Consuelo had as yet never seen Mrs. Jobkin. During the previous summer her husband had tried hard to make the acquaintance of the Belgraves, and had even had the imprudence of recalling to the Marchioness's mind their relationship; for the poor girl whom he had once so despised had now become almost a divinity in his eyes. Such indeed is the world! But Lord Belgrave particularly objected to Mr. Jobkin, and Consuelo herself was not over-anxious to see much of him; for she could hardly forget the way in which he had treated her when she was poor and friendless. So they had only exchanged cards once or twice, and Consuelo had never been formally introduced to the proud and beautiful Sibyl.

But now that the objectionable Jobkin was dead, Lord Belgrave was really anxious to see once more the handsome widow whom he had so admired as Miss Fetherstone, and in connection with whom he still had some pleasant recollections of delightful flirtations two seasons ago.

When Sibyl arrived at Holm Abbey, Sir John and Lady Brightly, Lord Edwin, and Lord Twickenham, who had come without his wife just for a week's hunting, were the only guests stopping at that princely mansion.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INNOCENTS AT HOME.

(Not by Mark Twain.)

SIBYL had now completely got over the effects of the tragical end of her husband. At first the prominent part which she had taken in it had quite paralysed her, if I may so express myself. She could neither think nor dream of anything else; and in her own heart she often accused herself of having caused his death.

But all these distressing thoughts had now vanished from her mind; for Sibyl was one of those women morally strong-minded, who can force their hearts to feel more or less what they like, and what they find most convenient; and every day seemed to increase this strange power of self-command she possessed.

If public opinion was impertinent enough to accuse any one of helping her husband out of the world, it would certainly be his friend Mr. Thomson, who, after all, had been the man who had cut the rope, which had precipitated Mr. Jobkin from a height of more than fifty feet into the water below. She was the disconsolate widow, whom no one could possibly even suspect of having had anything whatever to do with it. Besides, poor Mr. Jobkin had never been a favourite with the world of

Fashion, whose opinion was the only one she cared about, and she knew very well that she could command all its sympathies, especially now that she was a young, beautiful, and rich widow, who might bestow her hand and her money on whom she pleased, or, rather, whoever pleased her.

Of course there had been an inquiry raised as to the exact cause of Mr. Jobkin's death—a coroner's inquest could hardly be held as the body was not found—and at last a verdict was given of "accidental death;" and Mr. Thomson, who had had a narrow escape of being accused of wilfully murdering his best friend, was glad enough to have the whole business hushed up, and to avoid further annoyance, by going off to America as soon as he thought he might do so without exciting suspicion.

Mr. Jobkin's body was never discovered, in spite of the strict search which, at Sibyl's desire, had been made for it. The tide must have taken it out to sea, or perhaps cast it on some northern island; but Sibyl did not trouble herself very much about this.

Immediately after her husband's death she had gone to her father's house, who, like the man of business that he was, sold for her her husband's share in the bank, realised his fortune, and thus, breaking at once the link that until then had connected her with the City, and which had always been a great trouble to this spoiled child of Fashion, made his handsome daughter a wealthy and independent woman.

Sibyl, the superb, was at last what she had all her life longed to be; and if any uncomfortable thought connected with her husband's sudden death, and the way in which she had obtained sole possession of his money, ever crossed her mind, she dismissed it with

scorn, for the stately Sibyl was not a woman to allow her conscience to trouble her respecting any transaction the results of which had proved prosperous to herself. Besides, of what could her conscience accuse her? Only of having long desired her husband's death; and was it her fault that her wishes had been so soon realised?

Certainly her conscience did not seem to trouble her very much when she arrived at Holm Abbey. It is true that she was dressed in deep mourning, and that a widow's cap rested on her lovely tresses; but then her mourning was of the richest, and her black silk so thick that it might have stood by itself; and as for her widow's cap, it was such a coquettish little white crape affair, with its stiff little frill at the top, and its long ends which hung gracefully behind over her shoulders, that it quite added to her beauty.

The body of her black silk dress was quite a triumph of dressmaking art. It fitted almost without a wrinkle, and one could see that her sorrow had not caused her to become indifferent to fashion, for it was cut after the very latest Parisian model. Her tall stately figure had perhaps never looked to greater advantage. As to her face, it was as lovely as ever. Her dark almond-shaped eyes shone from beneath their long lashes with the same fire as of old, and her full coral lips smiled still with that half-scornful, half-voluptuous expression that might dare men to do anything for her.

No one could have been more conscious of her good looks than Sibyl herself. That day, just before starting for Holm Abbey, she had cast one long enraptured glance in her looking-glass, and had set off on her journey fully convinced that no other woman could compete with her: however, before the close of that day she was forced, to

her great annoyance, to confess that she had been very much mistaken. It was true that her figure was perfect, her face beautiful, her colouring wondrous, but what were all these charms compared with those of her hostess?

Beside the lovely Consuelo even Sibyl was obliged to confess that her beauty paled.

Sibyl perceived all this at a glance, and from that moment she hated the beautiful Spaniard, and determined in her heart to ruin her. But the bewitching widow possessed all the cunning as well as all the fascination of the serpent, and was far too worldly-wise to allow her annoyance or her dislike for Consuelo to show itself in any way; on the contrary, she even took great pains to gain her esteem and regard, and before a week had elapsed she had won—what no other person had as yet been able to obtain of the lovely and innocent young Marchioness—her entire confidence.

But it was not only of her beauty and natural grace that Sibyl was jealous; she also envied her her position, her titles, her splendid home, and her matchless jewels; for she could not easily forget that at one time she had hoped to make them all her own, and that Lord Belgrave had once even appeared to be in love with her. Her hatred therefore was not only against Consuelo, but also against the Marquis.

She was a very ambitious as well as a very passionate woman, and Lord Belgrave had read her character only too well when he told Alfredo—"She is a regular Cleopatra, who will shrink from nothing, who will surmount all obstacles, whose pride and ambition will be satisfied at any cost. She is a woman capable of intense, all-absorbing, all-consuming passions—a woman who, if well governed by the superior mind of a good and wise man, could

love to distraction, or, if exposed to the cruel changes of fate, could hate without mercy !”

With her, love was now quite a secondary consideration. Edwin was there at her feet; nothing prevented her from marrying him. She had only to say one word to secure her long-indulged dream, but, strange to say, her love for Edwin seemed, since her husband's death, to have lost its charm; perhaps it was because this charm had consisted in the very difficulties that stood in the way of its gratification. Be this as it may, all her thoughts were now taken up with Consuelo, whom every day she grew to envy and, consequently, to hate more and more.

With her great knowledge of men, and of men of Lord Belgrave's class especially, she saw plainly from the first moment how devotedly he loved his sweet gentle wife. Her penetrating eyes could see through the cold careless mask of indifference which his pride had caused him to assume, and which for Consuelo still remained impenetrable. And she also guessed rightly, with her usual quickness, that nothing in the whole world would so wound his pride as the idea that the woman he loved so well, and to whom he had given his name, was untrue to him.

It was not long, either, before Sibyl discovered how little husband and wife understood each other; and, with her usual cleverness, she even extorted from Consuelo a confession of her inability to love Lord Belgrave.

Her mind was soon made up. She would gratify her revengeful feelings by rendering them both miserable. Lord Belgrave had dared to prefer another to her. He had dared to marry another after he had almost formally declared his love for her. He should suffer now. She did not love him; if she had, perhaps this idea would never

have entered her head. No, she did not love him, but she felt it very hard to be plain Mrs. Jobkin when she might have been Marchioness of Belgrave; and it seemed even harder still to her that the woman he had made Marchioness of Belgrave should be more beautiful and more charming than she was herself.

I shall not dwell much on this part of my story, for my readers can imagine how exceedingly easy it was for her to accomplish her dark object, and the abominable machinations she employed to win her own selfish ends; for, on one side, she had an innocent weak girl, unused to the ways of the world, who, with artless simplicity, placed entire confidence in her; and, on the other, a proud man of the world, jealous of his honour and of the name he bore, and deeply in love with a wife who he knew had no love for him.

Lord Belgrave, incapable of any mean action, could not even suspect for a moment that a woman like the stately Sibyl would descend so low as basely to mislead him; besides, it needed but little to awaken in him the strongest feelings of jealousy of his wife—of this wife whom he loved so well, for whom he had sacrificed so much, and who in return refused him even her confidence.

Sibyl grew bolder as time went on and as she became conscious of the secret influence which she still exercised over Lord Belgrave, for she was one of those women who seem born to govern mankind. One afternoon, towards the end of the autumn, she was playing a game of billiards with him downstairs, when a man was announced who had brought some pistols from London for his Lordship to look at. Their game was just finished, and Lord Belgrave asked her permission to go into the grounds and try them at once; as he did not

wish to keep the man waiting. She not only granted it but insisted on accompanying him, and so, throwing a shawl carelessly over her shoulders, and without a hat, she followed him into the garden.

Selecting a retired spot at some distance from the house, so that the noise of the pistols should not frighten any one, he proceeded to try them one after the other, aiming at a scrap of paper, which he had attached to a neighbouring tree, as a mark. When he had tried them all, Sibyl, who had complimented him several times on his good aim, said she would like to try a shot. "I have fired a pistol before," she said, "so you see I am not afraid; do let me try one."

Lord Belgrave could not resist her sweet coaxing smile. He loaded one of the pistols, the one he thought the best, and presented it to her. She took it from him and, taking aim, fired; the bullet went whizzing through the air and struck the white paper mark on the tree. Lord Belgrave was quite astonished at her performance, and could not find words enough to compliment her.

"By Jove, what a wonderful shot! I should not like to fight a duel with you, Mrs. Jobkin."

Sibyl smiled as she returned him the pistol. "Yes," she replied, "I would not give much for any one's life if he stood within the range of my arm."

"I could never have given any woman credit for such a true aim, and so much courage too, for the mere act of pulling the trigger requires some courage."

"I do not think," she said, looking at him half-scornfully, half-sadly, "I do not think that I ever could be afraid of anything."

Lord Belgrave looked at her in astonishment and admiration, and, giving the pistols to the man to take

back to the house, he offered her his arm. "It seems a pity," he said, "to go in just yet, it is so fine, and I much fear our good weather is now fast coming to an end. Shall we take a turn in the garden?"

"Yes, certainly," Sibyl answered readily; "I love the fresh air."

"But perhaps you will take cold. Had you not better go in and put on your bonnet?"

"Oh no, I never catch cold. I leave that for the pretty interesting women whom men admire so much."

Belgrave laughed. "Do you think then," he said, "that men do not admire you?"

"Ah, Lord Belgrave, you would not have asked me such a question three years ago!"

Lord Belgrave, in spite of his usual self-possession, blushed, and Sibyl, who noticed his confusion, determined to take advantage of it, and began talking of the past, not forgetting to make several more or less pointed allusions to the long flirtations she had had with him during her first season. Gradually, all feeling of restraint seemed to cease, and they went on talking as if they had been once more as they were then.

"You must have loved Lady Belgrave very much to have married her," she at last ventured to say.

"Oh yes, very much."

"Don't you think, though, that it was rather rash on your part to go and marry a girl like that—a girl unaccustomed to Society, and a foreigner too? I have never ceased wondering how *you* of all men could ever have done such a thing."

"I do not understand," Lord Belgrave answered, much confused. "Forgive me if I fail to see your meaning. Lady Belgrave, you know, though a foreigner, comes of a very good family."

"Indeed! No, Lord Belgrave, you cannot make *me* believe that! If she had been of such a very good family, as she pretends, she would scarcely have been obliged to gain her own livelihood in a foreign country."

"What do you know about her?"

"You forget that you once sent her to our house, that you even recommended her to my step-mother as a needlewoman!" (Her sister had, no doubt, told her of the discovery). "Ah!" she added, with satirical gravity, which in a man might have been almost offensive; "I suppose you had no idea *then* of making her your wife?"

Lord Belgrave bit his lips. This allusion to his wife's past life was almost more than he could stand.

"Ah, ah!" Sibyl went on, pretending not to notice the effect her words had produced upon him; "You see it is not so easy as you think to cheat the world."

"Mrs. Jobkin, you are one of the very few who know this. Promise me never to mention it; not that I am ashamed of having married a poor girl, for in my eyes her very poverty was a virtue, but because all do not think as I do, and the world may misinterpret her past life."

"I am afraid, Lord Belgrave, it has done that already."

"What do you mean? What does the world say?"

"That you have married a girl greatly inferior to you in position, and that you have to abide by the consequences."

Lord Belgrave uttered a suppressed oath. A long silence ensued, during which he remained like a statue, cold and motionless, while Sibyl stood watching attentively every movement of his handsome but now almost distorted features.

"Society dares to say that!" he muttered at last. "So

it dares to enter into my private affairs. Ah!—so it says I shall have to suffer the consequences of having married out of its charmed circle! I might have guessed as much. But, Sibyl, do you think *I* care for the world's opinion? I can brave it—I *will* brave it!"

"You cannot prevent people talking, though."

"Let them talk; they will never be able to say anything against her character, so let them talk as much as they like."

Sibyl coughed maliciously, and a cruel smile flashed across her handsome face.

"How!—dare they even speak against my wife's character?"

"Oh, Lord Belgrave, you must not take these things so much to heart. You know very well people *will* talk, and the world is too apt to convert mole-hills into mountains; there may be nothing in it after all. Believe me, I should be the very last person to take any notice of the world's scandals, and, as for Lady Belgrave, why I like her very much, and certainly think her one of the handsomest women I have ever met; but you must allow it was rather rash to marry her!"

"Any one would think that you take a delight in wounding me. Now, tell me plainly, *what* does the world say?"

"Oh, if you take it like that I would rather not tell you any more. I thought it would be better for you to hear from the mouth of a friend like me—whom you can trust—what the world says about you and your wife; but if you prefer to remain ignorant of what is going on, I am sure I should like nothing better than to drop the subject altogether. I hope, though, that you may not awaken to the truth one day when it is too late!"

Sibyl had now gone too far to recede, even if she had wished to do so; yet as she dared not openly accuse Consuelo, she merely contented herself in giving various hints which were, however, quite enough to awaken Lord Belgrave's suspicions.

"I am sorry, Lord Belgrave," she said, as they returned to the house, "that I have told you all this. It may be merely *on dits*, you know, without any foundation, yet it seemed to me, who have your interests so much at heart, that it was as well you should know what is said. I should therefore advise you to watch her, and find out for yourself the falseness of these reports, so as better to contradict them in time to come."

Lord Belgrave was too bewildered to speak, but he pressed her hands as they entered the house together, and his looks told her sufficiently that the train had now been laid, and that a very small spark would soon cause the mine to explode.

A few days later, they were all playing pool after dinner in the billiard-room. Both Lady Brightly and Sibyl were very fond of this game, and even Consuelo liked it, so they often played it in the evening when they were alone.

Since the conversation with Sibyl, Lord Belgrave had done nothing but watch his wife; and now that his jealousy had been aroused, he thought he perceived a secret understanding between her and Lord Twickenham. Certainly, that thoughtless young nobleman treated Lady Belgrave with more than mere civility, and at times appeared quite intimate with her. It was easy enough to see how he admired her, and Lord Belgrave, to his horror, noticed that Consuelo, instead of meeting his advances with distant disdain, contented herself with

blushing and smiling in a way which could only serve to encourage him all the more.

That evening, as they stood round the billiard-table taking their coffee, he saw that Lord Twickenham was hardly ever away from her side, and that she actually seemed to take delight in his conversation. The truth of the matter was that Charley's frank, easy, half-foreign manner amused her, and that being innocence itself Consuelo never imagined for a single moment that any one—much less her husband, who always allowed her to do just as she liked—could possibly suppose that she had any particular regard for Lord Twickenham, who in her eyes seemed more like a precocious boy than anything else.

And most certainly Lord Belgrave would not have thought anything of it had it not been for the hints he had received at various times from Sibyl. That night during the game many were the looks of mutual understanding that passed between him and Sibyl as they discovered each other watching Consuelo and Lord Twickenham, who seemed to be very much interested in each other's conversation.

Lord Edwin was standing near the door at the end of the room talking with Laura Ducie, whom he had known since a child, and with whom he had always been very intimate. Lady Brightly and Mrs. Jobkin were discussing the last new play, but the brilliant criticisms of the great amateur actress seemed to offer little attractions for the superb Sibyl, for her eyes were fixed on Lord Belgrave, and she hardly seemed to hear what Lady Brightly was saying.

It was Lord Twickenham's turn to play, but he, too, seemed to have lost all interest in the game, and care-

lessly played upon the wrong ball, thus losing a life to the great amusement of Consuelo, who burst out laughing and clapped her hands as a child might have done.

Lord Twickenham, rather disconcerted, was taking his hand off the table, when Lord Belgrave stopped him by saying—

“Why, Charley, what a beautiful ring you have there! That’s something new, I am sure.”

This drew everybody’s attention to the ring, which was indeed a very handsome one—a large emerald, beautifully engraved and surrounded by diamonds, evidently an antique—and Lord Twickenham, flattered at its being so admired, took it off and handed it round for inspection.

When Lord Belgrave took it in his hand, his brow darkened and his pulse beat quickly, for he recognised it at once as the ring he had given to his wife before their marriage. His eyes immediately sought those of Consuelo, and his suspicions were at once confirmed when he noticed how bewildered and confused she looked, for she too had recognised the ring immediately.

“How did you manage to pick up such a ring as this, Charley?” he asked, without taking his eyes off his wife, who felt ready to sink under that cold suspicious gaze of his.

“I’ll be bound to say it was a present,” Lady Brightly said, with her usual raillery. “No doubt a present from some charming lady!”

Lord Twickenham, whose vanity was flattered by Lady Brightly’s suggestion, and who hardly liked to confess after this that he had bought it from his friend Juan the day before leaving town, merely smiled and said nothing.

"From your wife, perhaps," suggested Sir John Brightly, who was anything but romantic in his ideas.

"Oh no; I am sure it was not Lady Twickenham who gave it to him. Why, John, I should have thought that by this time you would have known that wives are not in the habit of giving presents to their husbands," said his ever bright better-half, with a toss of the head and a charming smile. And turning round to the young Lord, she said—

"Now, Lord Twickenham, deny, if you can, that it was not your wife who gave you this ring."

Lord Twickenham blushed. "You are right, Lady Brightly," he said, "it was not my wife."

"I hope, though, that it was a beautiful lady who gave it to you," said Lord Belgrave, returning it to him, but without taking his eyes off Consuelo, who, speechless and motionless, stood trembling opposite him, fearing that at any moment the whole truth as to the fate of the jewels might be discovered by this unlucky accident.

"Yes, a very beautiful one, I assure you," Lord Twickenham replied, highly pleased with himself, and smilingly looking towards Consuelo.

"Do we know her?" some one asked.

"Oh yes, very well indeed; but you must not ask me to tell her name, you know."

Lord Belgrave's worst suspicions now seemed more than realised, and when his eyes met Sibyl's steady gaze, he thought he detected in it a look of triumph most painful for him to encounter, for she had evidently guessed his thoughts from the expression of his face.

"Ah, it is easy enough to understand why Consuelo was so opposed to my inviting Lady Twickenham here!" he thought that evening, as he retired with his brother and Sir John Brightly to the smoking-room.

That same night, before retiring to bed, he wrote a letter to Alfredo, of whose arrival in London he had just heard, begging him to come and see him as soon as he possibly could.

"Alfredo is perhaps the only man whose advice I can ask in such a case, and whose opinion I could really rely upon. I would not reveal my suspicions to any of my English friends; but Alfredo I know I can trust to keep my secret; and, being a gentleman and a Spaniard, he can best know what my sullied honour demands in such an emergency."

At that moment all the love he had borne the poor Consuelo had vanished—he only thought of her with scorn and contempt—as the woman who had dared to trifle with his affections, and bring dishonour on his noble name.

To Lord Twickenham he could now hardly speak with common politeness. He had forgiven his running away with Stella, but he could not forgive his having fallen in love with his wife. Fortunately for Charley Twickenham, he received a letter from Stella, with whom he had renewed acquaintance soon after his marriage—no doubt at Juan's instigation—a note, the contents of which he could not all understand, and which took him to London that very afternoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRST LOVE AND LAST LOVE.

(Not by James Grant.)

HER marriage had not altered Geraldine's passionate and romantic nature in the least, as her father and her step-mother—the wise politician and the great lady of fashion—had hoped it would. She was still the excitable thoughtless girl she had always been; and the seventeen months of married life she had passed with the horse-racing, gambling young scapegrace of a husband, whom fate and fashion had provided her with, had only increased her love for the handsome Don Juan.

I must do her the justice, though, to say that for some time after her marriage she had tried hard to forget him, and it was perhaps to accomplish this that she had plunged headlong into the hollow but exciting pleasures which Society holds out to one in her high position. But in the midst of its amusements she still sighed for the happiness which she fondly imagined would have been hers had she married her first lover.

To a girl brought up, as she had been, amongst people more careful of their complexion than of their morals, this romantic passion seemed something above and beyond the common run of love affairs, and she almost

considered it a virtue to think that not even the dazzling position and wealth she now commanded had been able to make her forget.

She did not dislike her husband ; indeed, she hardly saw enough of him to find out his faults, and she still looked upon him more as a sort of half-brother than as a husband ; so that in her heart she considered herself still free to bestow her love on whom she pleased.

Juan was often in her house, though his visits were more to her husband than to herself ; and every day she grew more and more convinced that he alone appreciated her as she deemed herself worthy of being appreciated, and that, though the wife of another, she was still at liberty to respond to his love ; for she could not imagine that this love had ceased the moment she had become Charley's wife.

During the London season she had seen a great deal of him, though almost always in the presence of others ; but then her time and her mind had been occupied with races, and balls, and parties, and she had hardly had leisure to think much of him. After the season she had accompanied her father to his country house in the North of England, where she had remained for some time while her husband was shooting in Scotland ; and it was there that, being once more alone with her favourite novels and poems, she had begun to think that it was almost a crime to forget her first lover, merely because he was poor, and because she had been married against her will to a man she did not love.

After a visit of three months to the home of her girlhood—to that home where she had first conceived those wild romantic ideas which still influenced her so much—she returned to London to meet her husband. But Lord .

Twickenham had gone off on a visit to Lord Belgrave, and thus she found herself alone in London, sole mistress of herself, perhaps for the first time in her life.

London seemed deserted at this dead season of the year. It was the month of November—that month in which (French authors tell us) Englishmen commit suicide and their wives run away. There was nothing doing, nothing to do; no parties, no balls, no opera, no races; and thus, left alone to her own romantic thoughts, it is hardly to be wondered at that one day she should have ordered her brougham earlier than usual, and, quitting her house in a moment of spleen and *ennui*, repaired to the house where she knew her Don Juan was living at the time.

Juan was more than astonished at her visit—he was horrified. In vain did he try to make her understand the folly of her conduct; in vain did he try to convince her of the impropriety of coming to see him; in vain did he try to awaken her to the dangers and perils of the situation. Geraldine said she had now gone too far to recede—that she had made up her mind to leave her husband, whom she did not like, whom she could never love, and she declared that nothing on earth should now part her from her beloved Juan.

“But think of the scandal to which your conduct will give rise,” he vainly urged.

“Scandal! Do you think Juliet, Lucia, Marguerite, or any of those heroines would have had any such considerations?”

“But you forget you are married.”

“I can be divorced to-morrow, and then what can prevent our marrying.”

But Juan did not see this at all. He had never loved

Geraldine for herself; he had merely courted her for her money and her position; and he knew well enough that if she ran away with him now that she was another man's wife—although he might marry her after a time—her father would disown and disinherit her, and that she could never again hope to take her position in the world whose rules she would have so shockingly violated.

Besides, he would not for worlds have lost Lord Twickenham's friendship, which had proved so very useful to him, and from which he still hoped to obtain a great deal more.

Yet he had great difficulty in persuading her to return quietly to her house, for Geraldine was almost mad at the time, and his words only seemed to excite her more and more. At last, after vainly trying to convince her that her conduct was wrong in every way, and that even if he ran away with her he had not the means necessary to keep her in the style she had been accustomed to all her life, he resorted to the last and most desperate of all means, which, though really disagreeable to him, he could hardly avoid now—and this was to confess to her plainly that he no longer loved her; and, indeed, that he loved another.

This confession came upon her like a thunderbolt; it seemed to strike her with a sort of moral paralysis. At last, when the whole truth flashed upon her troubled mind, she threw herself on a sofa and, burying her face in her hands, burst into a passionate flood of tears, and gave free vent to her emotion.

Juan remained for some time watching her, while a smile, a curious mixture of pity and scorn, played upon his thin lips and was reflected in his large expressive eyes. But Geraldine showed no signs of recovering her

self-possession, and he was beginning to wonder how this strange interview would end, when a servant came up to inform him that a gentleman was waiting downstairs to see him. When he inquired his name he learnt to his horror that this gentleman was no other than Lord Twickenham himself!

CHAPTER IX.

SPIDERS AND FLIES.

(Not by Mrs. Hartley.)

JUAN FERNANDEZ was living in a small furnished house in Jermyn Street, in which he had hired a couple of floors, one for himself and the other for Stella, who was at the time living with him.

Although by rights these apartments belonged to Lord Twickenham, for he paid for them, yet Juan made quite a virtue of permitting Stella to live in the same house with him and, as it were, under his special protection.

Charley Twickenham was one of those easy-going young men who like any one provided he will humour them; and Juan's chief aim in life was to humour people, and to ride their hobbies for them, provided he was well paid for his jockeyship. Charley was not by nature a profligate, but circumstances and evil example had made him one; and though he no longer loved Stella as he had once done, yet, as it was to Juan's personal interest that he should still keep up a clandestine connection with her, he had allowed himself to be influenced by his friend to do so.

But lately Stella had grown rather tired of an

admirer who now admired her so little, and within the last three weeks had made up her mind to go off to Italy with a certain Russian Prince, who was said to be immensely rich, and whom, although he was old and infirm, she had learnt, by means of numerous and costly presents, to prefer greatly to the youthful Earl. So, acting on the advice of the Spaniard, who was always at her side like her evil genius, she had written a letter to Lord Twickenham at Holm Abbey, informing him of her determination to quit England with the Russian.

The effect this letter had upon our young friend we have already seen. Though he no longer cared for this girl as he had once done, especially since he had seen the more lovely Consuelo, he did not at all like the idea of losing Stella entirely; so, taking the first train to London, he repaired at once to the house in Jermyn Street.

Juan occupied the lower floor, which was the most suited to a bachelor; and the upper apartments, which were beautifully and even luxuriously furnished, had been set apart for Stella. Unfortunately the servants, who were not unaccustomed to receive ladies, had shown Geraldine into the first-floor drawing-room, thinking, of course, that her visit must be for Stella, though she had asked for Mr. Fernandez.

As chance would have it, Lord Twickenham called while his wife was in this house. There was but one staircase, and Juan, being afraid of their meeting either there or in the passage if he attempted to conduct her downstairs, and yet not daring to refuse him admittance, was forced, as a last resource, to beg of Geraldine to step into the back drawing-room, which was divided from the other by heavy velvet curtains, hoping,

when her husband entered the front room, to be able to conduct her downstairs.

But this plan was easier to imagine than to carry out; for Geraldine, although she consented to go into the back room with Juan, directly she heard a woman's voice in the room she had just quitted, refused to leave, and insisted, in spite of Juan's entreaties and even threats, on remaining there to hear what was said by this woman whom her heart told her must be her rival.

"You no longer love me!" she said, with a strange look of resolution sparkling in her eyes. "You have vilely deceived me; but I shall not leave this house without knowing who is my rival—who has robbed me of your love. No power on earth shall make me stir from this room. If you come one step nearer to me I scream."

Stella, on hearing of Lord Twickenham's arrival, had rushed into the drawing-room, heedless of the promise which she had given Juan not to see him again, and, once there, throwing herself on the very sofa from which Geraldine had risen a wiser but a sadder woman only a few seconds before, listened in scornful silence to Lord Twickenham's reproaches.

"I do not love you, Charley," was all she said in excuse. "I do not love you; and I do not think you love me much either, now."

"And you are ready to leave me like this, Stella?"

"Did you not leave me in Paris?—alone and penniless in a strange country, where I knew no one, and where I could not even make myself understood?"

"You know very well that it was my mother who took me away."

"Very well; and this time it is my father who take

me away. I am sure the fellow is old enough to be my grandfather."

"Never mind how old he is, I hate him."

As he said this he happened to notice the velvet curtains which divided the two drawing-rooms move, and he guessed at once that some one was concealed behind them.

"By Jove! he is there!" he cried, rushing to the curtains and drawing them back with fury; "I'll tell him what I think of him!"

The heavy curtains when drawn back disclosed to his astonished gaze, not, as he had expected, the Russian Prince, but his own wife Geraldine, struggling in the grasp of his friend Juan, who, to prevent her from rushing forward into the next room, had thrown his powerful arms round her and was holding her back.

A cry of horror and surprise burst from every one of them.

Geraldine, freeing herself from the Spaniard, walked straight up to her husband. Strange to say, she seemed the least affected of the whole party by the awkwardness of the *situation*; and in a voice that she struggled to render calm and firm, with a wild look of desperation in her eye, she said—

"Yes, it is I, your wife, and that I did not come here to see *you* you will easily believe. I am glad I came, nevertheless, for this adventure has taught me what otherwise I should never have known—what perhaps I might have been infinitely happier had I never learnt" Tears came into her eyes as she said this in a trembling voice, but she brushed them away with a movement of weary determination, as if she had thought that tears would be out of place now. "Never mind,"

she continued, looking at her husband, "had I ever loved you, I might have hated you for this; as it is, it will only teach me to look upon you with even greater indifference than ever, for you can well understand that after *this* I could not live any longer in your house. Lord Twickenham, I go to my father's, and that shall be my home for the future." Then turning to Juan, she said in a lower tone, but in accents that conveyed a whole world of scorn—"As for this handsome deceiver and smooth-tongued hypocrite, I behold him now in a light so truly despicable that I shall never again respect myself for having loved him. My Lord, Farewell! I forgive you, for I see you have, like myself, been but a tool in this man's hands. We have both, like foolish flies dazzled by the light beyond, fallen blindly into the cleverly-woven webs of these human spiders. I forgive you, though I dare not ask for your forgiveness."

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

(*Not by Mrs. Trollope.*)

SUSPICION and Lord Belgrave having once shaken hands they became inseparable friends.

Every day he perceived, or rather his jealousy, assisted by Sibyl's repeated hints, caused him to imagine he perceived, new proofs of his wife's guilt; while poor Consuelo, ignorant of what her husband had been led to believe, confided implicitly in all Sibyl's stories and opened her heart to her, imagining her to be a true friend.

Lord Belgrave's confidence in the bewitching widow remained unshaken, yet he did not open his heart to her, for he was still in a certain sense afraid of her; besides, he felt that he needed some one of his own sex to advise him. It is true that his brother was staying with him; and, in whom could he have more naturally confided than in his own brother? Yet, though he loved Edwin dearly, their characters were so different, and they had seen so little of each other until quite lately, that they had none of those childish remembrances in common which serve more powerfully than all else in later life to cement and soften affection.

He therefore longed for Alfredo's arrival, for with him he sympathised perhaps more than with any one else, and to him he felt he could confide his secret troubles better than to any man of his own country and class, before whom he would not for the world have so humiliated himself.

Alfredo arrived at last, and Consuelo's state of mind may be better imagined than described when Lord Belgrave told her one morning that his great friend, Alfredo Villafranca, who had recently returned from America, had just arrived at the Abbey.

Although she had received his letters containing the news of his speedy departure for England, of his aunt's death, and of the little fortune she had left him, she had not dared to open them for fear of reviving remembrances that would be sure to embitter her present existence and was therefore in complete ignorance of his return; the sudden news consequently put her in such a state of mind that her frightened husband sent immediately for the doctor, who begged of her to remain quietly in her bed for a day or two, as he feared that from her symptoms she was threatened with a violent fever.

Alfredo was installed in Holm Abbey, in the rooms just vacated by Lord Twickenham; and that very night, in the Moorish smoking-room, after Lord Edwin and Sir John Brightly had retired for the night, Lord Belgrave confided to him his sad case, over a glass of brandy and soda and an Havana cigar.

Alfredo had heard of his friend's marriage, but as he little dreamt that it had been his own love, his own lovely Consuelo, whom Lord Belgrave had married, he had not thought much on the subject; he now, however, although he was still ignorant of Lady Belgrave's maiden

name, heard all the particulars of this marriage for the first time, and his noble heart at once sympathised with his friend.

"Ah, Alfredo!" Lord Belgrave exclaimed, after he had related to him all his suspicions, not forgetting the adventure of the ring which he had discovered on Lord Twickenham's finger, and which to him seemed proof positive of his wife's guilt; "Ah, Alfredo!" he exclaimed, "if you knew how I have loved this woman! She has been the first woman whom I have ever loved enough to make my wife; and now—now that I have raised her from the low, miserable condition in which I found her, and placed her so high that every other woman must bow before her, what do I find? That she is not even faithful to me, but that she listens with a ready ear to the very first coxcomb who pays his court to her! I know well enough that 'the world' will have no sympathy with me, for I braved it when I chose a wife outside its magic circle; but you, Alfredo, can understand why I did it. I have longed for so many years for some object more worthy of my love than the stereotyped young ladies of Fashion, or the yet more ignoble minions of the senses. The *coquettes* of the *grande monde* and the *cocottes* of the *demi monde* were equally distasteful to me. I craved a vent for enthusiasm, for devotion, for real love, for a thousand subtle and secret streams of unuttered and unutterable feelings; for I often felt—pray do not laugh—that I bear within me the desire and the sentiment of poetry, though I certainly enjoy not the faculty of expressing it; and that desire and that sentiment, denied legitimate egress, centred and condensed itself into one absorbing passion—love! But where could I find the object to satisfy this want? Surely not in the drawing-rooms of Mayfair, nor

yet in the green-rooms of theatres. I looked round these great circles of gaiety, which are the only 'worlds' known to the men of my class ; I sent forth my heart as a wanderer over their smooth, dazzling, polished, but shallow surfaces, and it returned sated and palled back to me again. At last, in a moment of despair, I flew from these gay circles and I sought outside of them for a woman really worthy of my love. This woman I thought I had at last found, and I made her my wife ; and now, this woman, whom I believed so pure, so innocent, that not even I was good enough for her, once introduced into the world of Fashion, is contaminated by its bad example, and at the end of a year I find that she has become as frivolous and heartless as any of the women I so despised before ! Ah, my friend, you know me as perhaps no one else knows me, and you can pity—yes, pity—me from the bottom of your heart, for you are the only man whose pity I shall not scorn."

Alfredo was much moved by this speech, which seemed so strange in the mouth of such a haughty aristocrat as the Marquis of Belgrave. "Your words," he said, "seem to express my own sentiments. I too have longed for such a being as you describe. I read once, I forget where now, that in the very hour and instant of our birth one exactly similar to ourselves in spirit and character is also born, and that a secret and unintelligible sympathy preserves that likeness, even through the vicissitudes of fortune and circumstances, until these beings meet and become one through matrimony. It is no doubt for this being, this second half of yourself, as it were, that you have pined so long. I have also longed for it, and, Bel, I have been more fortunate than you have, for I have found it. This ideal being for whom,

strange to say, we both sought so long, I have discovered at last, and I hope soon to present her to you as my wife."

"Ah, Alfredo! you have been lucky indeed. I only hope your dream of happiness may not prove a deception as mine has done, for I too thought I had won that perfect being! Do not despise me, do not forget your old friend even in your happiness, for I never needed your friendship more than in this crisis. And do not think of me as of one whose heart echoed all that was uttered by the lip. Do not believe that irony and sarcasm and pride and hauteur flowed from an unmanly or evil source. That disposition, which to you, I dare say, seems alternately so frivolous and worldly, had perhaps its origin in a mind too strong in its affections, and too exacting in having this affection properly returned. Till I met you I had never seen any one with whom I could have any thing in common, or who really cared for me, though several pretended to do so. But you commenced by saving my life, and thus I began your acquaintance by being your debtor, and your debtor I have remained ever since, for I have ever looked upon you as my best, my only friend. Since the day we first met amongst your native mountains I opened my heart to you, and you were the first to understand me. I blame not the world for being deceived in my nature, for I was too proud to show them what I really was; but blame *me* not if my temper suffered from my mistaken pride. Your friendship, Alfredo, came to me, not too late to save me from a premature misanthropy, but too late to eradicate every morbid feeling from my mind. Something of family pride on the one hand, and of general scorn for my fellow-men on the other, has mingled so long with my

better feelings that the taint and the stream have become now inseparable."

Alfredo's countenance testified how deeply he felt for his friend. "Bel," he said, "believe me, none can sympathise with you so well as I can, for I too love at this very moment, even as you tell me you have loved this woman who has proved herself so unworthy of your affection; yet, although the evidence of the ring seems almost conclusive, I do not think it sufficient to leave you no loophole of doubt; for I cannot possibly believe that any woman, particularly one so pure as Lady Belgrave, and so perfect as you describe her, as to inspire you with such intense love, would be so very ungrateful for all you have done for her. No, Bel, you may yet be mistaken; let me advise you to wait a little longer and not to judge too rashly in such a case as this."

"You speak, Alfredo, like a man who is in love, as I should perhaps have spoken before my marriage, but I have conquered my affection now. She is no longer my love—she is my wife, and, as such, my honour and that of my family is in her hands. That name which has been handed down to me so bright, so stainless, I must preserve the same for my descendants. I would forgive any offence against myself, but I cannot allow my good name to be thus dishonoured. If you knew how I have suffered, and suffered in silence, when, loving her so tenderly, so passionately as I did, I saw but too plainly that she did not return my affection, you would not accuse me of selfishness. I was aware all the time that she was perfectly indifferent to my love, but I hid my sorrow in my heart, and, although I suffered bitterly on her account, I managed to conquer my despair; but now that I see she is ready to give that heart which she denied to me, her husband,

to another, Alfredo, I must speak, I must avenge my honour if not my despised heart."

The next day Consuelo was still too unwell to come down, and Miss Ducie took her place at table, at which, I must confess, she was not very much missed. Alfredo, therefore, still remained ignorant that the Lady Belgrave, of whom he had heard so much, was his lost Consuelo.

The following morning he went out for a walk through the grounds with Sibyl, while the others were playing billiards in the house. It was a pleasant morning, though the ground was white with frost, and a cold icy wind swept from the neighbouring park. To seek shelter from this wind they entered a little arbour, which stood at the end of one of the terraces not far from the house, and here they sat down to talk.

Alfredo had always entertained a great admiration for Sibyl, and she had been one of the very few who had won his regard during the short season he had passed in the London fashionable world. Sibyl, too, could not help interesting herself in this handsome Spaniard, whose bright eyes beamed with so much intelligence, and on whose noble brow a modest assurance seemed to reign supreme, adding greatly to his manly beauty.

Alfredo could think of little else at the time than his lost Consuelo, and so, as he longed to open his oppressed heart to some sympathetic friend, and as he found that Lord Belgrave was too much taken up with his own misfortunes to lend a ready ear to those of any one else, he began gradually to confide in the stately Sibyl, and ended at last in recounting to her the whole story, and also his present anxiety to discover the home of the woman he loved so dearly.

"Ah, Mr. Villafranca!" exclaimed the bewitching

widow, when she had listened, with a willing ear and a beating heart, to the story of his courtship; "How fortunate the woman must deem herself who can inspire a man with such a love as this young lady seems to have inspired you!"

"If you knew her, Mrs. Jobkin," he answered, "you would not be surprised; but I am wearying you. In my selfishness I forget that my love affairs must be quite indifferent to you."

"Oh no, I like to hear you talk. It is so seldom that one hears of such a true and noble passion as yours that my heart quite warms towards this woman, though I am ignorant even of her name."

"You are very kind to say so."

"I only wish I knew where she is. May I ask you her name?"

"I am afraid that would tell you very little. It is a foreign name."

"Never mind; if you have no objection to telling me, perhaps I might help you in finding her out when I go to town."

"Objection to telling you! Oh, there can be none. Her name is Consuelo Fernandez."

Sibyl turned pale, and, in spite of her usual self-possession, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What is the matter?" asked Alfredo rising; "have you hurt yourself?"

"I have pinched my finger; but it was not much. See, there is Lord Belgrave looking for you; he is calling you."

Alfredo turned round, and, seeing that his friend was indeed calling him, he muttered some excuse to the lovely widow, and went to join him.

"Consuelo! Consuelo Fernandez!" Sibyl kept repeating to herself. "How very, very strange! Can it be? Yes, it is the same name; it must be the same. But how very curious that this woman he so loves should have married his best friend, and he remain ignorant of it! How strange that this girl, for whom he is looking everywhere, should be at this moment under the very same roof!" Her lips trembled but after a few moments were compressed as with some sudden resolve. They say that the worst passions are softened by triumph. Her dark plans had succeeded so well that now she was almost sorry for what she had done, and had even begun to pity Consuelo in her heart; but at this moment all such soft feelings suddenly vanished, and hatred and jealousy towards her alone reigned supreme in her heart.

"To think," she cried, clenching her hands, "that this woman should inspire such love! Ah, lucky, happy Consuelo! what would I not give to be in your place? I envied you your beauty, your title, your wealth, your horses, your jewels; but now I envy you ten thousand times more this lover whom you seem to have despised. Ah, if I could be loved like that! But, no, no. I shall crush you yet. Heaven has denied me those gifts which it has so bountifully bestowed upon you; what if hell should give me the means to wrench them from you!"

For a long time she remained seated in that arbour, apparently half asleep, braving the cold and the snow, which had now begun to fall, as if she were perfectly unconscious of everything; but her mind was at work, and her pulses beat rapidly, though she was apparently so calm and motionless.

"Yes," she muttered after a while, between her firmly-

set teeth, "much may be accomplished through this discovery. Consuelo, I have your secret! Ah, proud Marquis; handsome Spaniard; envied beauty; I have you all—all in my power!"

CHAPTER XI.

AT LAST!

(Not by Charles Kingsley.)

THE game of billiards which had been played between Lady Brightly, Lord Edwin, Lord Belgrave, and Sir John Brightly, was finished ; and on their return to the drawing-room, where they usually sat in the morning, they missed Mrs. Jobkin. Lord Edwin was immediately sent in search of her, with an umbrella, to the garden, where no doubt she had taken refuge from the snow in one of the summer-houses.

Lord Edwin Beauville had not changed much since we saw him last. He was still the same fair-complexioned, closely-shaven, ever-pleasing youth, with the fascinating yet languid manners of the fashionable world, whose appearance on board the *Romola* had so moved Mrs. Jobkin, and for a moment had revived in her the intense love she had once felt for him.

Sibyl was a woman capable of feeling, as she was of inspiring, the strongest passion, and it was a pity that, with a powerful nature like hers, she had not more diligently cultivated those softer affections that alone would have controlled her proud ambitious spirit and rendered her happy. The seeds of good were not want-

ing, but they had been neglected, and even despised. From her earliest youth she had been taught that it was incompatible with good breeding to display, or even to experience, much feeling. The worldly lessons of her father and step-mother had produced their intended effect upon her, though they had only served to increase the romantic longings of her sister Geraldine's passionate heart, and to plunge her into the opposite extreme. But Sibyl, instead of giving way to her impulsive nature, had so long and so carefully repressed in her heart every attempt of that unfashionable fruit to put forth a single blossom, that the soil seemed at last to have become hardened and incapable of bearing any. Yet, in one corner of this barren, cold, and worldly heart, a small oasis still existed—a sort of inward yearning for a love which, though she dreaded, she could not help feeling at times was longing to burst out within her.

Thus we have seen her one day, heedless of consequences herself, confessing her love to one man, and another day consenting, with all the cold, calculating determination of a woman of the world, to marry another, for whom she did not care in the least, merely because he happened to be rich.

With Mr. Jobkin she could never be happy; all their ideas, all their feelings were, in complete opposition; and when she saw Edwin again after her marriage, his easy, gentlemanly, languid style of looking at things formed such a contrast to the vulgar, calculating, matter-of-fact way of considering the same things, which had made Mr. Jobkin almost an object of detestation in Sibyl's eyes, that this alone was enough to re-awaken in her heart all the love she had once felt for him; but when, in addition

to this, she considered his handsome face, tall elegant figure, graceful manners, and noble name, she could no longer doubt that this was the man she ought to have married.

Then came her husband's tragic death, when she found herself a rich widow, free to marry any one she chose, with Edwin once more at her feet!

Edwin, as my readers already know, loved the superb Sibyl ardently and passionately, for she exercised a power over him which he could not resist; yet in his heart of hearts he felt that this woman would never make him happy, and that the gentle, more amiable Juliet, who, he knew, loved him so dearly, would make him by far the best wife. But Juliet was far away, and had perhaps forgotten him by this time—he had behaved so badly to her!—while Sibyl was always near, exercising her full powers of fascination upon him, and blinding him to the virtues even of Juliet. Besides, Juliet was poor, and he was poor too, and could not afford to marry her; while Sibyl was now immensely rich, and all her money might become his.

His loyal nature had made him shrink from marrying solely for money. "I would rather go off to the colonies and work for my bread," he had often said to his brother, "than marry a girl solely for her money. It would not be half a bad thing for a fellow like me to be a chief amongst the Hottentots or Red Indians!—with them my want of cash would be no bar to success. I can swim, and shoot, and ride, although I cannot keep books and work out mathematical calculations. As for the so-called pleasures of civilization, they are no pleasure to me; besides, what is the use of them when one can't afford them?"

His brother used to laugh at him and tell him that he forgot the allowance he made him yearly.

"Oh no, I am very grateful to you—it is awfully kind of you, Bel. But, don't you know, the allowance you make me, although enough to keep me afloat in the world, only makes me the slave of Society, for it is not enough, do what I will, to pay for gilding its fetters. Yet I would rather remain, even as I am, a noble pauper, than marry a woman whom I do not love, and who would despise me for having sold her my name for money."

Such were the reasonings which had prevented him from marrying many a rich heiress, amongst others the lovely Countess Idalia, with whom we saw him flirting so much at the Duke of Northland's castle in Scotland. With the great pride natural to his family, and with his own peculiar ideas of honour and liberty, he would sooner have perished of hunger than have married for money alone. But with Sibyl no one could possibly accuse him of such a thing, for everybody knew that he would have married her before, when she had nothing; and thus, ever since her arrival at Holm Abbey, he had tried his best to win back her love.

That morning, as he went through the garden looking for Sibyl, these thoughts seemed to occupy his mind more than usual. "By Jove!" he thought, "if she would have me now, wouldn't it be a jolly thing! That fellow Jobkin has left her no end of money, and she is even more beautiful than she was two years ago, when she herself almost proposed to me. I wonder if she still loves me?" Speaking of love reminded him of Juliet, and he sighed as he thought of her. "Poor Juliet!" he said almost aloud, "I wish you were here

and had as much money as Sibyl; but what am I thinking about? Sibyl is by far the most beautiful, and only a fool could prefer a sickly sentimental girl like Juliet Standish to a handsome woman like Sibyl.

When he arrived at the little arbour in which Sibyl had remained alone after Alfredo's departure, he uttered an exclamation of terror, for she lay so motionless and stiff upon the wooden bench that at first he thought she must have fainted, and rushing forward he raised her in his arms.

Sibyl seemed to recover from her reverie only slowly and by degrees. Astonished at finding herself lifted suddenly from the bench on which she had been reclining so long, she opened her eyes and saw Edwin; the blood rushed suddenly to her cheeks and as suddenly departed, leaving her face colourless as before, though her large dark eyes remained fixed on him.

She rose from his embrace as soon as she had recovered her self-possession, but he still extended his arms towards her. She had never, never before, looked so beautiful and interesting in his eyes, and words over which he seemed to have no control rushed from his lips.

Trembling from head to foot, pale and with a beating heart, Sibyl, leaning against the side of the arbour for support, heard that incoherent, confused, impetuous, unexpected, but still, to her, intelligible declaration of love. "No one loves me, no one cares for me!" she had cried in her anger only a few minutes before; and now Edwin, the man to whom she had once herself confessed more than ordinary love, came to give the lie to her words and to offer his love at her feet! She remembered all that she had once felt for him—her jealousy of Juliet, her anxiety for him, her adventure of the Argyle

Rooms, the full confession of love which she unasked had made him on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Her whole frame seemed now sinking under her deep emotion. She raised her head and, looking up, saw Edwin standing close beside her, looking perhaps handsomer than she ever remembered him, for his emotion added a charm to his fair countenance which she had never before noticed. She did not know what to do. "Ah!" she muttered to herself, "if I could but love him now as I loved him then!"

Edwin, seeing that she remained silent, took her hand in his, and in a voice that betrayed the deep anguish which he felt at that moment, and which was depicted in every feature of his face, he said—

"Ah, Sibyl! you loved me once; try to love me again. See how faithful I have remained to that love which you once gave me of your own accord. I might have married a hundred times but I have not, for I could not bring myself to love another woman after having once possessed your love. The other day in Scotland I might probably have married the lovely, the rich heiress, for whom half the men in England would sacrifice everything. You know that very well, but I did not even propose to her, for I would not have broken my promise to you, though you had broken yours to me, and were then another man's wife. Ah, Sibyl! surely you could not reject me now!"

Sibyl smiled. "What a strange place you have chosen to make me this declaration!" she said, no doubt wishing to gain time; and casting a careless glance upon the ground outside, which was already white with snow. "Methinks, neither this weather nor this spot is the most appropriate for speaking of love."

"Can you talk of the cold or the snow outside when my heart is burning?"

"Oh, Edwin!"

"Do you love another? Can it be that your affections are already engaged?" His voice faltered. "Oh, you could not again be so cruel to me! Ah, well! I was born to be unlucky. Perhaps I have no right to complain; only Sibyl, for the sake of our old love, tell me with your own lips that you love another, and I will never again speak to you of love. I would rather know the worst at once; indeed I would rather, for anything is better than this incertitude."

Sibyl turned her eyes away from him, and seemed to look into her own heart and ask herself the question, perhaps for the hundredth time since she had been at Holm Abbey, if she still loved him. She turned her eyes from him, but she did not withdraw her hand, which he still held in his and pressed with a nervous tremor to his heart.

"You love another?" he again asked; and from her lips, which seemed scarcely to move as she spoke, came a single word which thrilled Edwin's heart:

"No!"

"No!" he repeated with a cry of joy, "then you will be mine?"

"Yes!" she faltered; and scarcely had she said the word when he held her in his arms and pressed her trembling form to his beating heart.

When the first transports of joy were over, she took his arm to return to the house, and then, in a low voice, she said: "Say nothing of this, Edwin dear, to your brother, or to any one here. It would seem strange coming so soon after my husband's death. Until my

mourning is over I would rather no one should know of what has passed between us to-day. When the time for my mourning is over I will be your wife ; till then I hold myself engaged to you."

And thus they entered his ancestral home engaged once more.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE EDGE OF THE STORM.

(Not by the Author of Mlle. Mori.)

LORD BELGRAVE had not been the only one whom Sibyl had mystified by her dark sinister hints. - While she had been so busily engaged in arousing his jealousy, she had not been idle with his wife, and the innocent Consuelo, who had never before doubted, or even dared to question, her husband's love, had lately been induced by Sibyl to believe that, not only did he no longer care for her, but that he loved another.

At first her pure and noble heart refused to give credence to the stories which Sibyl thought necessary to tell her in order to accomplish her own vile ends.

"It cannot be," Consuelo used to say; "it cannot be. Lord Belgrave would never have married me if he had not loved me. He could have no other motive for marrying a poor unknown girl like me. What did he gain by making me his wife?"

"You are very innocent, my dear Consuelo," Sibyl, who had now become very intimate with her, would answer. "I wish you could pass your life always in this happy state of ignorance, but I fear some day you will learn the sad truth, and then you will be all the more

miserable for not having learnt it before. It rends my heart—indeed it does; yet, as your best friend, I think it my duty to tell you all.”

One afternoon they were sitting together alone in the old library I described a few chapters back. The ruins of the old Abbey, which could be seen through the large oriel windows, were covered with snow and looked even more picturesque than usual. Consuelo loved to sit in this quaint old room, for it reminded her of the ancient monasteries she had seen in her own country, and brought dear memories back to her mind.

Gradually the conversation turned on Society and its habits and ways, and Sibyl began enlarging on the evils thereof, not forgetting to recount to her the latest scandals of the fashionable world.

Consuelo was greatly shocked at some of these stories, which, according to her friend, were only too common. “Sibyl, you make me shudder!” she said.

“And well you may!” Sibyl replied. “I will tell you what happened the other day to a friend of mine; perhaps it will open your eyes, as it will show you how little one can depend on the affection of the men of Fashion. She was a sweet girl, very young and pretty; she was poor but she lived with her father, and she was very happy with him, for she loved a young man of her own age and station, who in return loved her with all his heart. One day, however, a rich nobleman came to her house and, fascinated for a time with her beauty, made love to her and proposed to her. My poor friend, dazzled with the magnificence of the position which this man offered her, forgot, in a moment of excitement, her true lover, and accepted him. They were happy enough for some time after their marriage, but he soon got tired of her, and she of him.

He, unprincipled, as such men generally are, returned to his old lover, while she on her side tried to seek amusement elsewhere. Before his marriage this man had loved very dearly a certain young lady who had resided in his house as a sort of companion to his lady mother; when he began to get tired of his wife, he repaired to his country house, where this woman still lived, and there he once more fell a slave to her fascinations, and soon managed to forget his poor wife altogether."

Consuelo was greatly excited. "Can this be true?" she cried. "No, no; impossible! And this woman is . . . yes, it must be, it is just my story. This woman is myself!"

Sibyl remained silent.

"And the woman he loves is . . . Laura Ducie! Oh no, no; tell me not that!"

"Ah, Consuelo, Consuelo! my heart bleeds for you."

"Laura Ducie! Laura Ducie! Ah! I see it all now. Now I know why he was so anxious to have her living in the house; now I know why he came here so often while we were living in London—the heartless traitor! He said he came to see after the preparations he was making for my reception—to give orders about the furnishing of the rooms I was to occupy!"

"Oh, Consuelo, dearest Consuelo! you must not take it so to heart."

"No!"

"You must not blame me for telling you. . . . I assure you I have done it for the best!"

"Thank you, thank you, Sibyl. I am glad you have told me, for I shall know what to expect in future; but leave me now, leave me. I never loved him—no, never; but I thought he loved me! Ah! it was all false; his love

was as false as everything else in this world of his. He has proved no better than the rest. Leave me now! I must be alone—alone.”

Thus poor Consuelo was robbed of her last hope; after this happiness seemed for ever lost to her.

The day following that on which Edwin had declared his love for Sibyl, and in which she had formally engaged herself to become his wife, she rushed into Consuelo's boudoir in a great state of excitement, holding a letter which she had just that moment received in her hand.

Consuelo was better now; the fever had greatly subsided, and she was sitting up in her own private sitting-room meditating on her sad fate, for the doctor had advised her to keep her room for a few days longer, at which she was not sorry, for she dreaded every day more and more the meeting with Alfredo, whom she knew all the time to be in the house.

She was greatly alarmed at Sibyl's manner, and her heart told her that something serious must have happened for her to enter her boudoir so early in the morning and without even being announced.

“What I dreaded has come to pass,” she cried, out of breath. “My worst fears have been realized.”

“What has happened? Oh, tell me, Sibyl; what is the matter?”

“See,” she said, handing her the letter. “My sister has found out her husband's love for you, and has left him. She writes from my father's place in the country. She says that she has discovered that Lord Twickenham is untrue to her, and swears she will never return to him . . . Oh, Consuelo, this is all your doing!”

“My doing?” cried the poor girl, greatly bewildered.

“Yes. You have encouraged him, and led him to believe that you loved him.”

"I?—I have *encouraged* him!"

"Yes!"

"I love Lord Twickenham! Sibyl, what do you mean?"

"I do not say that you love him, but there is no doubt that he loves you, and everybody thinks you respond to his love. Ah, Geraldine, Geraldine, my poor sister!"

"Sibyl, I swear to you by all that is most holy—by the Blessed Virgin herself—that I am innocent of this; that I am quite ignorant at this very time that Lord Twickenham cares in the least for me!"

"Really?"

"Sibyl, can you doubt my words?"

"No, I believe you; yes, I believe you—but the world! Ah! the world will never believe you."

"Oh, Sibyl!"

"Every one thinks you love my brother-in-law!"

"I!—I love Lord Twickenham! Why, the thought never even entered my head! And my husband, does he, too, think that this man loves me, and that—that I respond to his love?"

"Yes!"

"Great God! And what does he say?"

"Say!—nothing."

"Where is he? Let me go at once to him and assure him of my innocence."

"Will he believe you?"

"Oh yes; he won't doubt my word. I am sure he will not doubt my word. Where, where is he?"

"He is in Miss Ducie's room."

Consuelo uttered a low cry and fell half-senseless upon a chair. Sibyl profited by her emotion to rush out of the

room, which she did as abruptly as she had entered it, leaving her poor rival a prey to the most painful emotion.

The clouds had gradually gathered over her head, and now the fatal storm was near at hand.

Consuelo, desolate and broken-hearted, with dishevelled hair, and pallid cheeks, and eyes full of tears, sat for many hours motionless in the arm-chair in which Sibyl had left her.

Her face was blistered by weeping, her lips were pale and tremulous, her lovely head hung listlessly on one side, and her snow-white hands were clasped before her. She felt as if she had even lost the strength to keep her eyes open—her beautiful dark orbs were closely shut, as if oppressed by an ocean of heavy thought. The very stupor of despair seemed have settled upon her soul. She sat still, motionless, and only the heaving of her bosom indicated that she still lived.

All her spirits seemed to have abandoned her, and her natural courage, the courage of the weak, which had sustained her until then, had now at last deserted her, bowing her noble spirit prostrate, and leaving her nothing but her gentle nature and the always soul-inspiring confidence of her innocence.

“What have I done that this should happen to me? Great God! what—what have I done to deserve this? Have I not tried to love my husband, and when I found that my heart would not respond to my wishes, have I not religiously watched over his honour, that not one look, not one sigh, should tell him that I did not love him, that I loved another? And he does not love me any longer! He loves another, Laura Ducie, whom he himself asked me to consider as my best friend! Ah, this is too horrible, too horrible! Now I am alone—I am alone in

the world," she cried, "without one single heart to love me, to pity me. I am not even allowed to be a true wife. The world takes away everything from me, even my husband's love! Oh, Alfredo, Alfredo! why did I ever forget thee?—why did I ever doubt thy love? Oh, why did you leave me, leave me to die, or worse still to marry another? Oh, Alfredo, my own beloved! come, come to me! you are here! come, save me from this vampire which sucks my blood drop by drop, and will one day kill me—this vampire which the world calls Society! You perhaps love me still? Yes, you have come all the way from America, where you went for my sake, to marry me—to marry the Consuelo you so loved, and for whom you have worked and toiled and suffered. . . . But you are too late, I am already another's! Ah! how little you know what has become of that innocent simple-minded girl who loved you so much when she was free to love whom she pleased, when you left America to return to her arms! Ah! it has all been a dream, a dream! I was forced—yes, forced—to marry this man. Ah! why at that moment did I not feel a foretaste of the coming woe? I would then have preferred dying—aye, dying even of hunger, in the streets of London—a friendless outcast! But no, I thought that perhaps I might be happy with this man, though never—ah, never—for one moment did I think that I could be so happy as with you! I was to be a Marchioness, rich, powerful. I was to shine in Society, and possess at last the things I had all my life coveted—wealth and rank. I dreamt that these might compensate me for your love. Oh, horrible, horrible!—how could I ever have hoped to be happy without you? Experience has taught me that that was impossible. Since my marriage I have

not had one happy day—no, not one! How happy we might have been together! how happy—oh, how happy! You loved me, and I loved you—ah, yes, better than I ever imagined. But we can be happy still. . . . He is here, in this house; I will run to him, throw myself down at his feet, tell him all—all—and he will forgive me. Yes, he will forgive me, and will forget all the past. We can be happy again—ah, so happy!—and not once will I ever regret these pomps and vanities which have proved so empty for me. But I am Lord Belgrave's wife!—I don't belong to myself. I am his! . . . and he does not even care for me now: he prefers this governess, this house-keeper! He loves Laura Ducie, not me!"

Shame crimsoned her cheeks, and in her despair she rose from her chair and, going to her dressing-case, opened it with a trembling hand, and drew from it a packet of letters, the packet which her brother Juan had given her before leaving London, and which she had not yet had the courage to open, for she knew that it contained the letters from her former lover.

"Here are the letters he has written to me at different times since he left me," she said, kissing them. "I have not yet read them . . . I wanted so to be a good wife, and to forget the past. I wanted to hide from myself that I loved a man who was not my husband. I thought I owed this to him, at least; but what does that matter now, since he no longer cares for me? He thinks I love this Lord Twickenham, and he does not even feel jealous! He forgets even his wife's honour in the arms of a mistress!" She shuddered as this thought crossed her mind. "Why should I make myself unhappy about him?" she asked herself. "Why?—he does not deserve my pity. I owe him nothing now, for he has proved himself unworthy

even of my esteem. I can read these letters now. I can read them and think of Alfredo, who perhaps loves me still."

With a trembling hand she opened the packet, and began reading the letters it contained with eyes full of tears.

As she went on reading her heart filled more and more with anguish, and at last, allowing them to fall on the ground, she threw herself on a sofa and burst into tears which she no longer endeavoured to suppress.

"I can read no more," she cried; "no more. Ah, Alfredo! I never thought that I loved you so much! . . . Ah! why did you ever leave me?—why did I ever marry another?"

How long she remained lying on that sofa, thinking of her lost Alfredo, she never knew. The noise which the door made in opening brought her at last to herself; she raised her head, the heavy tapestry curtain rose and fell, and her husband pale and with gleaming eyes stood before her.

CHAPTER XIII.

FAIR, BUT NOT FALSE.

(*Not by Edward Campbell.*)

LORD Belgrave's look was enough to bring her at once to herself. She rose, and gathering up her dishevelled locks, which hung about her in luxuriant profusion, with her slender and trembling fingers, tried hard to recover herself.

"Madame," he said, advancing towards her in a threatening manner, "Madame, all must now be at an end between us!"

BICHV.

Consuelo dried her tears in a moment, and her large dark eyes shone with a sad and wild expression.

Lord Belgrave stammered, for at that supreme moment he felt himself alike attracted and repelled by this woman he had once so loved, and whom he now believed to have dishonoured his name.

"And why?" Consuelo asked, with all the courage of an innocent heart.

"You have, no doubt, heard of Lady Twickenham's discovery, and her flight to her father's house; *that*, I suppose, will tell you plainly enough why we *too* must part."

"Sibyl has told you this?"

"Yes—but what does it matter? Every one knows that you love this man."

"I?"

"Yes. Have I not seen the proof of your love on his finger?"

Consuelo started. "The ring, that fatal ring!" she muttered.

"Yes, that fatal ring!"

"Bel, you forget that it was amongst the jewels that were stolen; no doubt he bought it."

"Consuelo," he said, fixing his eyes steadily upon her, "Consuelo, those jewels were never stolen by robbers; say they were if you can."

Consuelo shuddered and looked down, for she could not meet his penetrating gaze.

"*You—you* stole them; and you stole them in order to give them to your lover!"

"Ah, Bel! I swear to you that such is not the case."

"Indeed! In vain you try to deceive me; your own looks condemn you. You love Lord Twickenham!"

"Bel, Bel," she cried in great alarm, for even in such a moment as this she dared not tell him that her brother had taken the jewels from her, yet with a certain determination stamped upon her features; "hear me!" Then, taking from her bosom a little gold crucifix, which she wore suspended from a chain round her neck, she said: "Upon this cross, whose sanctity we both acknowledge, though we may have nothing now in common, not even religion—upon this cross which my dying mother clasped to her bosom when she committed me, an infant, to the care of that God who hears and records our lightest words—upon this cross which is the only memento left to me of those I loved, I swear that I am innocent of the crime of which you accuse me!"

"Consuelo," Lord Belgrave said, awed and startled, yet struggling against the impression her energy and the innocence which beamed in every feature of her lovely face had made upon him; "Consuelo, I wish to that God whose presence you invoke that I could believe you!"

At that moment he perceived the letters which lay scattered on the ground, and, picking one up, he was not a little astounded when he read its contents: when he turned to the last page and saw the signature, he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You . . . you loved this man, Alfredo Villafranca! You knew him—he loved you!—*he* whom I considered my best friend. Great God, great God! does he know who you are now?"

"No, he does not know that I am your wife. But know all the truth at last: I loved Alfredo before I knew you; when he left for America, it was for my sake that he went, and we were engaged to be married as soon as he returned."

"And you married me! Oh false, false woman! you have no heart; you sacrificed his love for my rank and my money. You are unworthy of the name that in a moment of infatuation I bestowed upon you—of that name which you have now dishonoured."

"I have not. I have been faithful to you, and that is more than *you* have been to me."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, ah! Do you think that I do not see your love for Laura Ducie!"

"Do not insult me, or I summon all the household and tell everybody what you are."

Consuelo at last, losing all command over herself,

rushed to the door and flung it open. "Yes," she cried, "let every one know *what* we both are. Let them judge between us; let them judge who should be punished and who should be pitied. I at least—remember, my Lord—have been faithful to the promise I made you before God, though I have loved another in secret all the time, while your love has been false—false as everything in this world of yours."

"Stop, Consuelo, stop!" he said, rushing forward to prevent her running away and creating a scandal in the house; "stop, not a step further shall you go!" and with a powerful arm he caught hold of her and kept her back.

But her screams had already been heard below, and before Lord Belgrave had time to close the door, Sibyl, Lord Edwin, and Alfredo, who had heard the cries from the billiard-room, in which they were playing at the time, rushed up the staircase to inquire what was the matter.

Alfredo and Consuelo were at last brought face to face.

The Spaniard recognised her at once, and uttering an exclamation of surprise, rushed to her.

"Consuelo, Consuelo!" he exclaimed, "you here in this house!" Then turning to Lord Belgrave, who still held her in his arms, from which she vainly endeavoured to free herself: "Bel, what are you doing?" he cried; "what right have you to hold this young lady?"

Consuelo, making a violent attempt, freed herself from the Marquis's powerful arms, and flew into those of Alfredo, as if she would fain have sought for protection there.

"Alfredo, Alfredo, save me, save me from this man!" she cried, clasping him round the neck.

"What does this mean, my Lord?" said Alfredo, more and more bewildered. "What right have you over this young lady?"

"The best in the world," Lord Belgrave answered; "she is my wife."

"Your wife! your wife!" he repeated, failing at first to realise the full meaning of these, to him, awful words. "Oh, Consuelo, Consuelo, say that this is not true! Oh, it cannot, it cannot be, my own beloved Consuelo!" and his eyes filled with tears.

Consuelo shuddered. "It is but too true, Alfredo, I am his wife."

"The Marchioness of Belgrave!—you!" Uttering a low but heart-rending cry, he flung her from him, and the poor Consuelo, half-senseless and stunned, went reeling backwards, until Sibyl received her in her arms, where she remained for some time as motionless as if she were dead.

Lord Belgrave came forward, and, addressing himself to his friend, who had covered his face with his hands, and felt as if suffering from a horrible nightmare, too horrible to be actually true, "Forgive me, Alfredo," he said; "forgive me! I had no idea when I married this woman that she was your promised wife. I loved her—ah, God alone knows how I loved her!—but we have both been deceived by a heartless coquette—she has deceived us both. I can have no pity for her. Believe me, Alfredo, she is not worthy of compassion!"

Alfredo raised his head at these words. "No, no," he cried, "it cannot be! Consuelo, Consuelo, my own, my dearest, my love! Oh no, no; she cannot be your wife!"

Belgrave was greatly touched by the deep grief of his friend, which was almost too heart-rending to witness (so

much so that even the tiger-hearted Sibyl was moved almost to tears) and in a trembling voice said to him: "Only last night you were telling me that the woman you loved would never deceive you; only last night you were boasting to me of her goodness and truth, and while I envied you, you pitied me. Now it is my turn to pity you, though I wish to Heaven you could envy *me*. We have both been deceived in the same way, and by the same woman. . . ."

"I always had a presentiment that we two should end by falling in love with the same woman. That is the reason why I was so careful never even to speak of her to you."

"You did wrong, Alfredo. Had I known that it was you she loved, I would certainly not have allowed myself to love her," Belgrave answered, forgetting what he had told Consuelo before their marriage, in the first days of his love for her, that not even the thought that she was engaged to his best friend would have detained him.

"How true it is that we cannot control our fate!" Alfredo said, recovering gradually his self-possession. "After this, however, you will understand, Bel, that I cannot stay in your house any longer. I shall go away this very afternoon. I shall go to London, and there try and forget what has happened, though I much fear I shall never succeed in forgetting Consuelo."—"Consuelo," he repeated, approaching her, "I believed you true. . . . I have worked hard for you in another land, where I went for your sake. . . . and now that I come back at last able to make you my wife . . . now that, after a short year and a half of absence, I come back more loving than ever, to marry you, I find you the wife of another! You were not worthy of my love . . . but I forgive

you ! Consuelo, do you hear me ? Perhaps these are the last words you will ever hear from me. I forgive you, for I have loved you, ah ! as one can only love once !” Taking then the small medallion which she had given him at the time of his departure, and which he had worn ever since, he flung it at her feet, saying in broken accents as he did so, “There is the locket you gave me with your hair ; that hair which I have so often kissed ; that hair which has been so often moistened with my tears. It has never left me. You told me to keep it next to my heart, so that it might hear its every pulsation. . . . There it is ; let it remain there, where all my hopes of happiness now are. Let it tell you what I have suffered for you. Let it remind you of my love—of my true honest love you have so basely despised—of your perjury ! Now, good-bye for ever ! Farewell, be happy if you can ! Ah, Bel, try and make her happy if it is only in memory of the love we have both felt for her. Farewell, farewell ! Let God in his mercy forgive thee as I do, for not even *He* could have loved thee more !”

Casting one long last look at her, a look in which was expressed a whole world of grief, he rushed from the room, and, ordering a carriage to be got ready, soon afterwards left the house.

Consuelo only heard part of his last speech to her, for the pulsations of her heart prevented her from hearing the whole of it, and ere he had done she had fainted in Sibyl's arms—in the arms of her bitterest enemy.

CHAPTER XIV.

LONDON SOCIETY.

(Not by Mrs. Ross-Church.)

THE fatal storm had come and was over. Two years had elapsed since the scene I have just described, and things had once more resumed their usual course.

Sibyl was at last married to Lord Edwin; and if the thought that she had married the man she loved, and that she had rendered her rival and her unfortunate husband miserable, could have made her happy, she must indeed have been supremely so. Yet Sibyl, in spite of her proud, ambitious, revengeful nature, and her passionate yet hardened heart, was not a bad woman, and at times she felt more than sorry for what she had done, though she tried hard to convince herself that, even if she had never spoken a single word to either Consuelo or Lord Belgrave, all happiness for them must necessarily have been at an end after Alfredo's return.

But Sibyl was one of the very few who knew of this; for Lord Belgrave had done his utmost to keep up appearances, and before the world he and his wife were still objects of the greatest envy.

They seldom met in private now, and when they did so never alluded, by word or look, to that tragic scene in

her boudoir, which had, so to speak, severed their lives for ever, though they both often thought of Alfredo, and pitied him while pitying themselves.

Holm Abbey had become once more one of the gayest country houses in England, and hundreds of people were entertained there annually in a more than princely style. In London, Beauville House was thrown open during the season, and balls and concerts and receptions succeeded each other with greater rapidity than they had ever done before. The world saw the lovely Lady Belgrave everywhere, looking brighter and more beautiful perhaps than she had done during the first season; for she, too, tried hard to forget the sorrows of her heart in the mad pursuit of Fashion, and the world admired and envied her more than ever. Whether the world would have envied her quite so much had it known her secret history and the sufferings of her heart is more than I can say; but beauty and rank and wealth are so very dazzling that I verily believe most people would still have envied her, and would not have minded putting up with her misfortunes could they have had her money and her position.

Consuelo, however, was greatly changed. She was no longer the innocent young girl she had been when she first arrived in England, who loved show and pleasure, and coveted wealth and titles; experience had taught her to despise these things and she would gladly—ah! how gladly no one can tell!—have exchanged all these for the love of Alfredo and the peace of mind which she had now for ever lost.

Lord Belgrave had now learnt to respect her, though all his love for her had gone; for he knew how good a wife she had tried to be to him, and was at last convinced of her innocence with regard to Lord Twickenham.

Yet all happiness for him in his married life was now at an end, for he felt that love was out of the question between them. And he, too, to try and forget the past, had plunged headlong into the pleasures of the world, seeking excitement on the turf and in the betting-ring.

It is about the middle of an exceedingly gay and brilliant London season that I again resume my story.

Parties, balls, breakfasts, and races succeeded each other with most bewildering rapidity; and our friends went from one to the other without allowing themselves even breathing time, and with that careless *empressement* which is so often allied to despair.

And, indeed, I often think when I see the way people go about nowadays, and "do the London season," as it were, with a vengeance, that they merely rush from one party to another, and from one amusement to another, to forget in the excitement of the moment the sad thoughts which devour them in secret and the horrors of an unhappy home!

What can people enjoy, or even find entertaining, in this bewildering succession of amusements that cannot possibly amuse, and in crowded and over-heated rooms in which one only meets people one does not care in the least about? I often ask myself, Could the horrors of Dante's *Inferno* be considered so delightful that people in London should seek to emulate them in the dog-days? No, I verily believe that people merely go to London and "do the season" to try and forget their wretchedness at home, and to escape the skeleton in their private closets! They rush madly to crowded assemblies, and court the society of people to whom in their hearts they are utterly indifferent. Of course, there are plenty of mothers who find it necessary to go up to town to get husbands for their

daughters, and there are, I dare say, men—though I must confess I never meet any—who frequent balls to get wives, but these, after all, must necessarily be the exception; and, as I have said before, I actually believe that most people merely “do the season” to murder time and drown thought.

I will endeavour to give a sketch of how Londoners dispose of their time, for the benefit of those of my happy readers who have not yet had occasion (pray Heaven they may never need it!) of resorting to London to forget their troubles, or dispose of their daughters, or seek for a wife, or to look after their wives, or to hang about somebody else’s wife; which are, indeed, the only reasons I can imagine for people going to London.

Hardly risen from your bed, where you have only rested for a few brief hours from the fatigues of the previous night, you fly to the Row, to have an hour’s canter, in a place so crowded that even to walk seems an impossibility. Yet everybody goes, so you must go too, and bow right and left to those of your friends whose eyes you chance to catch; that is to say, supposing they are pleased to bestow a passing look upon you. At two o’clock you must fly off to a luncheon party; this may be a very pleasant, or it may be a very stupid one—generally they prove to be worthy only of the latter qualification—anyhow, you are obliged to be squeezed up for a good hour or two between two ladies, afraid even to move in case of upsetting something over their dresses; while the perspiration runs down your face, and you try hard to amuse the company, who, at this early hour in the day, are very hard indeed to amuse, being as yet, I suppose, only half awake.

The meal over, you go upstairs to the drawing-room,

but only for a few seconds, for it is not the fashion to remain long after a lunch, and you are only expected to make a bow and withdraw. In some houses cigarettes are passed round after luncheon; but these, I believe, are considered rather "fast" houses; anyhow, as it is no easy matter to smoke a cigarette with gloves on, while you are expected to talk all the time to the ladies, and when you are holding a hat and a stick in one hand, and a cup of coffee in another, I think you can go away very satisfied without the cigarette.

Immediately after lunch the time for morning parties begins. There are certain ladies who receive on certain days of the week, and to whom you must not forget to pay your respects, unless you don't object to being left out of the list of friends invited to their great evening parties.

There is Lady Tottenham, for instance, who always receives on Fridays. I do not care a straw for her Ladyship; I know what she thinks about me, and I am perfectly well aware what she says of my last book (indeed I had it from a dear mutual friend); yet I go to her receptions, and try to smile when I get a look from her—a look, by-the-bye, compared to which the smile of Jezebel must have been quite cheerful.

But everybody goes to her house, and of course you must go too, and drink her hot water, and talk with her charming and juvenile daughter, and be patronized by her if she happen to be in the mood. You must also listen to the music she is good enough to provide for you—a couple of aged Italian tenors with cracked voices, and a pianoforte player, who quite deafens you with the noise he makes upon that poor old instrument, which, like everything in the house—the ladies included—has seen

its best days. Lady Tottenham is a great patroness of art. The way she pays for her music, however, is rather original. She never gives the artistes themselves anything, but she introduces them to her friends, and persuades them to have them at their houses; thus her friends have, in an indirect way, to pay for her music.

If you remain long enough at Lady Tottenham's you may chance to meet some nice people, and, perhaps, actually be introduced to them. There are the Clodwells, and the Morleys, and the Toppertons, who are always going there; and also old Lady Poverville and Lady Windermere, who goes there every Friday regularly. This lady has her Wednesdays, as Lady Tottenham has her Fridays, and they rush into each others arms calling each other, "My dear Lady Windermere!" and "Dearest Lady Tottenham!" and hate each other, as women hate who give parties on Fridays and Wednesdays, and call each other behind each other's backs, "Castor Oil!" and "Old Totty!"

At this house, however, you are sure to meet nothing but *la crème de la crème* of good society, but if perchance you happen to prefer quantity to quality you can go to Mrs. Ascot Griffin, who lives on the other side of Oxford Street, and who has her Thursday morning receptions regularly throughout the season, for which reason she takes every year a large furnished house. Here you will not find empty rooms, I can assure you, nor the amiable lady of the mansion sitting in solitary state at her tea-table; but plenty to eat and drink, and any amount of music. "The great Brioski is playing," she will whisper in your ear, as you make your bow to her at the top of the staircase, which it will be a wonder if you succeed in ascending in less than half-an-hour. However, persever-

ance is rewarded, and you enter the drawing-room, where the crowd is so great that at first you can neither see nor hear anything, for your senses get quite bewildered, and when at last you recover them you begin to think that you must have entered a lunatic asylum by mistake.

All are talking at the top of their voices and apparently trying to make as much noise as possible, while the great Brioski, who of course is a very little man perched upon the top of a very high stool, is working away at the piano with all his might, vainly endeavouring to make himself heard, forcing the guests to shout all the more in order to make *themselves* heard.

The great Brioski finishes at last with a "mighty" crash, as the American belle in the doorway remarks, and politely refuses to play any longer; then, as if by enchantment, all the voices cease, and a great silence succeeds to the previous Babel. It would seem as if they had only been talking to try and put down the music, for as soon as the music ceases people become very subdued indeed, and find they have nothing more to say.

Mrs. Ascot Griffin now walks up to the centre of the room, and introduces two little girls, "a couple of infant prodigies, you know!" who play the violin until moans and sobs issue from the instrument, but their talent is lost upon the audience, who seemed only to have been waiting for the music to begin, to resume their animated conversation.

To the infant prodigies succeeds a charming young lady, who recites in French a little *comédie de salon*; but although the people are forced to stand back, so as to leave her plenty of room to move about, she is not listened to with much more attention than were the great Brioski or the "infant prodigies."

All this time you are being crushed between two heavy old dowagers, and you feel that you are standing on the dress of Lady Petipoint, who is just in front of you, and every now and then turns round to cast upon you a menacing glance, which seems to say, "If you don't move back a few steps, I shall not invite you to my ball next Friday;" and yet you dare not step back, though you would not offend her for the world—especially before her ball—for you know that, as it is, you are completely crushing a fat old Indian Prince, who has come in his velvet robes and diamonds, and who stands just behind you.

At last, more dead than alive, you leave that house; but your martyrdom is not over yet, for as soon as you breathe the fresh air again, you are reminded by the daylight link-boy, who calls your brougham, that you have another "At Home" to go through that morning, for he shouts in your ear, loud enough to be heard in the drawing-room you have just quitted, where the great Brioski has resumed his seat at the poor piano, "Shall I tell the coachman, yer honour, to drive to Lady Howly's?"

Of course, you are obliged to say Yes; for as even the beggars in the street seem to know that everybody is going there from Mrs. Ascot Griffin's, and as England expects every man to do his duty to the last, so you drive to the very other end of the town, to where my Lady Howly holds her afternoon reception, and where you meet exactly the very same people you have just seen at Mrs. Ascot Griffin's; who, of course, rush immediately at you and begin to run down that worthy lady, and everything they saw and heard there, calling the company vulgar, and the artistes who did their best to amuse them, and who had helped them to talk, second-rate and inferior, and the hostess herself a fool!

And so much for poor good-natured Mrs. Ascot Griffin, who, anxious to entertain her friends, feasts them on her best champagne and Gunter's ices, pays for the best artistes she can get to amuse them, puts herself to no end of inconvenience, and turns her house topsy-turvy for them once every week; and all this that they may go afterwards to Lady Howly's and abuse her, and call her a fool for her pains, only because she does not happen to be the Duchess of Northland, or because she does not give herself the airs of a Mrs. Deanshome.

After Lady Howly's reception, if you have time, you go to Prince's for half an hour, where you can fall down in all manner of graceful attitudes, and even break your neck, before the prettiest young ladies in London, if you have the honour of being a member.

If the weather is very hot, and if, for a wonder, it does not rain too heavily, you can go to a garden-party, and drink tea and eat strawberries upon the wet grass, and trample upon beautiful dresses with your muddy boots.

At seven, however, you must return home to dress, after which you again issue forth ready for the evening's campaign.

The first infliction you must undergo is a long and solemn dinner party, for which, three weeks before, you received a formal card, informing you that "Lord and Lady Tarleton request the honour of your company at dinner," and in a moment of thoughtlessness you had the misfortune to send another one in return, accepting "their invitation."

The hall door is opened by four servants, attired in their best liveries (yellow and gold) and with powdered heads, who divest you of your Chesterfield, and pass you over to the care of the stately butler, who conducts you

upstairs, and, throwing the drawing-room door wide open, shouts your name, or rather what he imagines to be your name, at the very top of his voice.

Now, ten to one you happen to be either the first to arrive, or the very last. If you are the first you find the drawing-room empty, and are obliged to wait patiently for the appearance of Lady Tarleton, who has only just returned from a garden-party at Richmond, and is dressing upstairs as fast as she possibly can, poor woman, making no end of mistakes in her toilette and upsetting all the powder over her green velvet dress, and the scent-bottle over her point d'Alençon flounces; while her maid, who feels herself highly offended by this "hunlady-like 'urry," scolds her all the time. At last my Lady makes her appearance, and soon afterwards appears my Lord, who has been detained at the House till the very last moment, and now rushes into the drawing-room most hurriedly dressed to receive the company.

One after another, and at long intervals, the different guests arrive, and you have the satisfaction of hearing their names murdered by the stately butler, and of wondering who you will have to take down to dinner.

If, however, you happen to be the last to arrive, your appearance produces quite a sensation. Lady Tarleton looks daggers at you, and her husband rushes towards you, holding a paper in his hand to give you your orders on that important point, while all the other guests look at you, and smile to see your confusion, and wonder, loud enough for you to hear them, what on earth you have been doing, and say how very unpardonable it is of you to have made them wait so long.

At last all the guests have arrived, and Lord Tarleton, giving his arm to the stout Ambassadress in pink satin

and fine jewellery, marches off to the dining-room, where the rest of the company follow in solemn procession.

If you are a young man, most probably you will be obliged to take down the youngest lady in the room, a charming blonde just out of the schoolroom, who thinks it necessary to blush at everything you say, and who in her heart sets you down before the meal is half over as "awfully slow." Tired at last of talking to this young lady, who seems to have come with her mind made up to blush and smile at everything you tell her, and only answers Yes or No to your questions, you turn to the lady on the other side of you. This is Lady Frances Snobby, and that man opposite, who casts such threatening looks towards her, is her husband; he is a rich *parvenu*, whom she married a few years ago for his money, to the great surprise and displeasure of the fashionable world. She is beautifully dressed, and wears some really fine diamonds, and, as you know by experience, can make herself highly agreeable; but, unfortunately, to-night her Ladyship has been very much put out, and for two very strong reasons: firstly, because having accepted Lady Tarleton's invitation three weeks ago, she has been forced to come to her dinner party, and refuse one at the Marchioness of Hyde's, where she knew she would have met much better people; and, secondly, because by an unpardonable mistake of that young foreigner, who seems to ignore even the *sine quâ non* rules of English society—Count Gourmé—she had been forced to walk into dinner after old Lady Wellman, who, as everybody *ought* to know, is only a Baron's widow, while she is an Earl's daughter, and should consequently always take precedence.

She therefore turns coldly towards you when you address her, and lets you know, in that highly polite

manner peculiar to the highest breeding, that to-night she would rather not talk to you.

In the meanwhile your poor host, whose education at the 'varsity in foreign languages was sadly neglected, is vainly trying to make himself understood in French by the big Ambassadors in pink satin and fine jewellery, who answers him every now and then in broken French, with such a strong German accent that I should doubt very much if even a Frenchman could have understood a word she said; while, at the other end of the table, his Excellency, her husband, who seems at times to disappear altogether behind his decorations, is talking politics in German—right across poor Lady Tarleton—with Lord Otho Fitzwalter, to the great discomfort of her Ladyship, who has not been permitted to open her lips during the whole time of dinner, and who is in mortal terror lest his Excellency with one of his expressive gesticulations should upset his wine over her new velvet dress, which, like the Romans, seems to have crossed the Channel only to meet with misadventures.

At last the ladies retire, the Ambassador leading the way, and the other ladies following in proper order, Lady Frances upsetting a whole row of wine glasses in her anxiety to take the precedence of old Lady Wellman, who, being half blind, has not found out yet that her dearest friend Frances, whom she had often nursed in her arms when a child, is in the room with her.

After the departure of the ladies, Lord Tarleton moves to the other end of the table, so as to sit in the place his wife has just left, between the Ambassador and Lord Otho, who, now that the ladies are gone, talk on in a louder voice than ever, and pay no attention whatever to their poor host, who sits there at the head of his own

table solemn and silent, looking the very picture of a Christian martyr, though, fortunately for the Christian martyrs, high collars and stiff shirt fronts had not been invented in their day to add to their torment.

The conversation becomes less and less animated as the wine goes round, and at last finishes by ceasing altogether. The truth of the matter is, that these men have never seen each other in their lives before, and therefore are utterly at a loss to know what to talk about, so every one welcomes the suggestion which some one is at last bold enough to make, that it would be nice to join the ladies; and, after making many bows at the door, you quit the dining-room, heartily glad that the dinner is at last at an end, and that you can leave the house whenever you choose.

You can hardly say that this dinner has been a success, for I am sure you must have found it "awfully slow," as the favourite phrase is nowadays, yet there seems to be some consolation in the thought that your host and hostess must have found it even more slow, and that they must have been even more bored than you have been yourself, but then, as these good people had no idea either of amusing themselves or their friends when they invited them to dinner, I think they can hardly complain. Their chief reason for giving this dinner had been to "pay off" half a dozen dinners they had been to that season, and perhaps, if they happened to be snobs, as I believe the English themselves confess nine out of ten amongst them are, to occupy a space in the Fashionable Intelligence, in order that the world might say that Lord and Lady Tarleton receive Ambassadors and Marchionesses to dinner.

Yet I wonder it never strikes some people that there

are games for which it is scarcely worth while to purchase such very expensive candles.

Anyhow, I suppose, as long as Society is Society, we shall have to put up with, and even to give, dinners of this sort, so I had better not say any more against them.

When you again enter the drawing-room, you most likely find it crowded with people; because her ladyship holds "a reception" after her dinner-party, as the *Morning Post* would say; in other words, that she has asked those friends whom she had no especial motive for inviting to dinner, to come and eat what is left of the dessert.

Before you have reached the back drawing-room you have shaken hands with more than a dozen friends, who, knowing that you have been one of the privileged few who have dined there, are very anxious indeed to be noticed by you, although some of them actually "cut" you that morning at Prince's when you were rinking with that "fascinating nobody," Miss Bird, whom Mrs. Chataine *will* take there, though she has received more than one polite hint from some of the members of the *comité* not to do so, as the noble dowagers with their countless ugly daughters particularly object to her "ways." And no wonder, for she attracts all the attention of the men, who actually prefer skating with her, simply because she is pretty, and can skate well, and talk still better, than with their very noble but ugly and uninteresting young ladies.

From Lady Tarleton's dinner party you go to Lady Charles Verywyfyne's assembly, where you know you are to have the honour of meeting a Royal Duchess. Accordingly, you find that Royal Lady enthroned on one of the sofas in the front drawing-room, and Lady Charles sitting

beside her, while the numerous friends whom she has asked to meet the Royal lady stand at some little distance forming a respectable circle. Unfortunately, Her Royal Highness, who dined there, has been rather put out that morning by the news she received of her absent husband, who, malicious people whisper, is travelling abroad with a well-known actress, and refuses to be amused; so that poor Lady Charles, who has been sitting next to her for the last two hours, is by this time at her wits' end to know what to say or do, and casts longing glances towards the door, bestowing every now and then a smile of recognition, which is most painful to behold, on her various guests as they enter the room and take their place in the circle.

You remain for a good half-hour jammed in between two large Countesses. All eyes are of course turned towards the Royal lady on the sofa, and a most awkward silence reigns throughout the room, for no one dares to say a word while Her Royal Highness looks so glum, and so, muttering something to yourself, you leave the room, and, jumping once more into your brougham, you drive off to Mrs. Grey's concert, moralising on the way on the snobbishness of people who will entertain Royalty in their houses, and perhaps even on the snobbishness of certain Royal ladies who are condescending enough to accept their invitations, and, thinking they have done quite enough in conferring the high honour of their august presence, refuse to be amused, and thus unintentionally spoil the amusement of everybody else.

This Mrs. Grey, whose house you now enter, is the wife of a rich City merchant. You have never seen her before, nor has any one of the three hundred persons who now crowd her drawing-rooms; for they have all been

invited, as you have been yourself, by Mrs. Boston Gilbert, that amiable lady who has lately taken her in hand, and had promised to introduce her into good London society.

Londoners, as a rule, are not very fond of making new acquaintances, but as Mrs. Boston Gilbert patronises her, and as her concert promises to be a very grand affair, why, every one has come to it; and the *high premium*, as her husband would say, at which her invitations will be valued in future, is easy to know by calculating the time your carriage is in getting to the door of her mansion.

That is Mrs. Grey herself standing at the door of the drawing-room. She is a fine-looking woman, very tall and handsome, and wears beautiful diamonds. She, at least, contrary to Mrs. Ascot Griffin or Lady Tarleton, or even Lady Charles Verywyne, looks exceedingly pleased and happy; and, indeed, she has a very good reason for so doing, for she has at last achieved the greatest object of her ambition in this world, that of entertaining Lords and Ladies. The thought that these high and mighty personages did not come there to see *her* at all, but only to listen to the music she gives them, does not seem to mar her happiness, and as each high-born dame is announced and introduced to her by Mrs. Boston Gilbert, who stands beside her, she smiles and curtsies, until smiling and curtsying become quite painful to her, and turn into vacant grins and mechanical bows. But yet she thinks it is so very delightful to stand at the top of her own ladder while so many Lords and Ladies are trying to climb it, that she still feels perfectly satisfied with herself, and even forgets that every one of these people despises her for entertaining them, and will probably never invite her in return.

The concert is one of those never-ending performances, at which the singers from Covent Garden and Her Majesty's sing a couple of songs each, and are paid as much as if they had sung a whole opera. Sir Flavius Dominique presides at the piano, and the guests, who are so tightly packed that they can hardly breathe, on innumerable rows of cane chairs hired for the occasion, look bored and tired to death, as it is quite the thing they should be, for not one of them cares a straw for music; indeed, if they did, I scarcely think they would have come to a concert of this kind.

If you are a man, of course you must not expect to get a seat, but must be contented to stand in a doorway amongst the other men, from whence you can only see the backs of your neighbours' coats, and hear nothing but the very loudest notes of the sopranos, which reach you at long intervals like so many shrieks of agony, which, by-the-bye, are highly appropriate to your feelings at the time.

Here you may find yourself standing next to your dearest friend, but, although hearing the music is quite out of the question, you are forbidden to speak a single word; so, muttering to yourself that you might just as well have remained at home, you again seek your brougham, for which, I dare say, you will be obliged to wait a good half-hour in the hall, and drive off to your ball.

You have received no less than four invitations to balls this evening, but being a moderate young man, you will try and content yourself with two, and will leave your card with a formal excuse at the other two houses to-morrow, on your way from Lady Windermere's reception to the Duke of the Isles' garden-party.

The first ball you go to is Lady Clementina Southville's.

This is one of the ordinary London balls, of which there are hundreds every night. A narrow staircase, the bannisters of which have been covered with pink tarletan for the occasion, and up and down which a double row of people are frantically trying to make their way the whole night, although on ordinary occasions it is almost impossible for two persons to go down together, leads you to a room capable of containing two hundred people at the most, and where at least double that number have been invited to dance waltzes and quadrilles to a couple of fiddles and a piano.

Lady Clementina, as everybody knows, was the portionless daughter of the Earl of Pimlico. She married the Honourable George Southville, the youngest son of the Earl of St. George, who was almost as poor as she was herself. They have had ever so many children, six of whom, young ladies, are now "out," and consequently expect to come to London for the season and go to as many balls as they can possibly crowd into the three months, for which the father, making every imaginable and unimaginable economy during the rest of the year, hires a house in the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square.

Lady Clementina, also, as every one knows, must necessarily be very hard up for money, being one of "the Fashion," and expected to receive as other people do; in fact, she herself would consider it quite unpardonable if she did not have as fine a house, as comfortable a carriage, and as many servants as her sisters-in-law, the Countesses of Pimlico and St. George, who are rolling in riches. She therefore thinks it necessary to give a couple of balls

every year, to which she invites all her friends, and is very much offended if they do not come to them.

The crowd is so great that dancing seems altogether out of the question; yet, as there are so many pretty young ladies in the room (about three times as many as there are men), you think it almost a duty to ask one of them to dance; in other words, to consent to be jostled, first by one couple and then by another, till you are at last obliged to give up in despair, and offer to take the young lady downstairs to get an ice; that is to say, supposing the prospect of having to go up and down that staircase does not prove fatal to your outburst of gallantry.

A ball is always an amusing sight for me, even in London, where they are "sights" indeed, only in another sense of the world. There are always so many busy chaperons wheedling and manœuvring to get suitable partners for their young ladies; so many pretty girls who really enjoy themselves, and who take all the small misadventures and *contretemps* of the evening with so much good-nature, that they quite make one forget that the rooms are overcrowded, that the band is abominable, the champagne warm, and the floor sticky beyond endurance.

I have met many young ladies of many nations, but I really believe that there exist not in the whole world more charming, sweet, and amiable girls than in England, and this in spite of the vulgar, snobbish, and ridiculous prejudices by which they are surrounded from their earliest youth!

It is two o'clock, however, and I think it is high time to think of going to Abismay House, where the Duchess of Wittington gives to-night a grand ball. Here, although

the crowd is quite as great, the rooms—thank Heaven!—being larger, one can breathe.

Everyone you know, or, at least, whom you should know, is here; yet every one looks so very solemn and grand that anything like fun seems quite out of the question, and after a time you begin to regret that you ever left Lady Clementina's house, where at least you were looked upon as little less than a godsend by a score of pretty young ladies, with whom, if you had waited until some of the people had left, and had grown indifferent to the floor, and forgotten the music, you might have had some very pleasant dances. But now it is too late to go back, and you must finish the evening here.

After all, there is always a great deal to see and admire at a grand ball like this, for it is always pleasant and instructive to an observant man to watch the strange ways of the world. There are also several of your friends, who, when once you get them out of the room where the Royal party are, become at once their ordinary selves, and can be as pleasant as they are in a general way. Anyhow, you can hardly be sorry you have come, for you know that the reporter of the *Morning Post* in the hall took down your name quite accurately, and that, consequently, to-morrow all London will know that you were at the Duchess of Wittington's great ball, where you had the honour of rubbing shoulders with Royalty and all the nobility in the land, and also drinking some of his Grace's rare champagne.

And at last—at six o'clock in the morning, when the sun is already shining brightly over your head, and the common herd, for whom the day is beginning instead of ending, are already abroad—you return home, and tired to death, seek for repose on your couch; but only

for a few brief hours, for at ten o'clock you must be in the Park once more, ready to re-commence this daily round of pleasures.

And thus the days pass during the London season—for such, alas, is London Society!

CHAPTER XV.

ENNUI.

(Not by Miss Edgeworth.)

SUCH is London Society; and am I not right in wondering how people in their senses can think this sort of life pleasant and profitable? Yes, I keep to the conclusion I arrived at in the beginning of my last chapter, that most persons merely come to London to "do the season" to escape the horrors of an unhappy home, and to fly from the miseries of a cold hearth—in fact, to murder time!

But of this murdered time there must necessarily be a ghost—a ghost at times even more ghastly than the fatal skeleton at home. Can the ghost of the time thus murdered be what the French call *ennui*? To see the way this grim spectre haunts those who mostly indulge in this sort of society, one would think that such, indeed, must be the case. At all events, my characters about this period of their lives were all more or less troubled with *ennui*; therefore the Italians at least would say of my conclusion—*Si non è vero è ben trovato*.

The kind of life which I have endeavoured to sketch in my last chapter was exactly the life which most of our friends were leading at the time when I again take

up their story, and I think it is not to be wondered at, that, in spite of all their wealth and their high position, they were not very happy.

It was an evening in the month of June, the most lovely of all months in England, when the grass is greenest, the trees and flowers in full bloom, and the birds singing their sweetest carol. The day in London had been oppressively warm, and many a fair young lady in her first season, and even many a worn-out *roué* in perhaps his last one, sighed in their hearts for the purer and fresher atmosphere of the country, with its liberty and more enjoyable pastimes. But it was the very height of the London season; and who, in Society, would have dreamt of leaving town at such a moment? Besides, that evening Mrs. Holland gave a great ball in her splendid mansion fronting Hyde Park, and Mrs. Holland's balls were considered something sublime in the way of balls.

Her house is indeed one of the largest and finest in London, and it would be almost impossible to imagine anything more magnificent than that grand white marble staircase, or those gorgeously-decorated saloons, with silken and tapestried hangings, gilded cornices, painted ceilings, and grand old pictures, which give one a glimpse of Venetian splendour, most rare in our London houses of the present age.

But though not exactly a *virtuoso*, Mr. Holland had a great taste for art, with tender and inspiring recollections of the matchless Queen of the Adriatic; and, being a man who had made his own fortune, thought, with some reason, that no one had a better right to spend it than he had; so he had devoted himself to the building of this more than gorgeous palace, which was destined to throw

into the shade the mansions of the proudest and wealthiest amongst the nobility, and nearly ruined himself in its wondrous decorations.

He had married some time before a woman of Fashion, who was in every way worthy, by her birth and beauty, to preside over such a magnificent house; but, according to the majority of Londoners, who were, perhaps, a little jealous of her good luck, she had married, not the man, but his house; and *à propos* of this—which let us hope for his sake was not true—it was whispered that, some time before her marriage, an *intimate friend* having asked her when her wedding would take place, she had replied, “You forget that my future husband has got no roof yet!”—a speech which, true or not, her *dearest friend* had taken very good care to repeat to every one.

Mrs. Holland, whose classic style of beauty, and graceful, elegant manners, accorded well with the decorations of her house, stood at the top of the marble staircase receiving her guests with stately dignity and graciousness.

Of course the rooms were filled with the usual crowd of good society which invariably invades every drawing-room of Mayfair:—a few Duchesses, radiant in pearls and diamonds; a bevy of dowagers, all more or less either stout or scraggy; a perfect bevy of lovely young ladies, dressed in the very freshest of tulle ball dresses; a faint sprinkling of old maids; the whole of the *corps diplomatique*; any number of moody-looking young lords perfectly meek and solemn; strange-looking foreigners, wearing wondrous orders; innumerable young dandies, with slim waists, and flowers in their button-holes—for dancing men are never scarce at this sort of ball, however much they may be missed at ordinary dances—poor ante-

diluvian Lord Flasharty, who would not miss one of Mrs. Holland's balls, though no one would miss him if he did; old Mr. Chataine, who is invited on account of his wife, Lord Claridge and Colonel Rich, who must go wherever she goes; and a countless host besides, of whom Mrs. Holland ignores even the names.

All these people were assembled in the great saloon, dancing or criticising the dancers, when Lord and Lady Edwin Beauville, after having shaken hands with the lady of the house, entered it. It was easy to see by the buzz which succeeded their arrival, by the many whispers which were exchanged, and by the general looks that were turned towards them, that Sibyl still produced a sensation wherever she went; and, indeed, who could have produced a sensation in a ball-room if she had not? For who could have looked handsomer or more elegant than she did, as, with the proud step of a haughty queen, she entered a drawing-room?

They had not been many minutes in the room when an Italian Prince invited her to dance. Sibyl seldom danced now that she was married, but at such a ball as Mrs. Holland's, where the music was so entrancing, the floor so good, and with such a partner, how could she resist the temptation? So, taking the Prince's arm, she joined the circle of the dancers and left her husband, as he well knew, for the rest of the evening.

Lord Edwin was not quite as happy in his married life as he had hoped to be. It is true that now he could spend as much money as he wished, for his wife had settled upon him a very handsome allowance, though, like a wise woman, she had placed the bulk of her fortune under the care of trustees; still, although he

had few fancies which he could not at once gratify, he could hardly be considered as completely happy. No one could admire Sibyl more than he did, and he often said to himself that, if he had ever loved her at all, he still loved her; but, somehow or other, now that she was his at last, she seemed very different, and that strange fascination which she had exercised over him before he married her seemed to have vanished. He admired her above all other women, but that was all, and he often said to himself, "I do not think I can ever have really loved her!" which reflection was perhaps even truer than he imagined.

When Sibyl had left him he began to look about to see if he could discover any particular friends amongst the crowd. He had never been very fond of dancing, and this evening he was certainly not in a mood for it. Not far from him he saw the Duchess of Northland, with her pretty daughter, the Lady Florence, and standing near them was the Countess Idalia.

Idalia was now also married. Soon after Lord Edwin's departure in the *Romola* from the Northlands' castle, she had left, with her mother, for Italy, and they had passed that winter in Rome, where the rich heiress had married Prince Paloma, the son of one of Rome's most ancient houses. She had come with her husband on a visit to the Duchess, who was at Preston House for the season. Since her marriage she had become more serious and dignified, as it befitted a Princess to be; but she still looked as lovely as ever, and her smile had lost none of its brightness, though the many diamonds she wore diverted people's attention from it.

Edwin was at their side in a moment. He shook hands with the Duchess and her daughter, and, after

talking for a few minutes with them, turned to the Princess and asked her if she would allow him to take her into the next room to have an ice. Idalia smiled sweetly in answer, and took his arm. That one smile brought back to his memory all that had passed between them in Scotland, and when once they were out of the noisy ball-room he began talking to her about their adventures in the Highlands.

"Do you remember the walk we took through that lovely glen?" he inquired, looking at her earnestly. "I have not forgotten it, and I do not think I ever shall were I to live to be ever so old."

"Yes, I remember it very well," she answered thoughtfully, as if the recollection of it were still pleasant to her. "Yes, I also remember it quite well," she said, and then, bursting into a merry though subdued laugh, she added, looking him full in the face, "We were both young and foolish then; I think we should scarcely behave now as we did then: time has brought many changes to us both, Lord Edwin. But there is my husband looking for me—I must leave you now. He is so anxious that I should not tire myself too much that he has made me promise I would go home with him before one." And smiling once more, she left him and rejoined the Prince, with whom she soon afterwards quitted the house.

Edwin remained for some minutes in the refreshment-room lost in deep thought. "How lovely she is!" he was saying to himself. "How happy I should have been could I have been her husband! It is a pity I could not bring my heart to love her. She was not indifferent to me *then*; but I suppose it has all been for the best—Sibyl is certainly much handsomer." He approached the door of

the ball-room, and he saw his wife as she whirled past him in the arms of her partner. "How beautiful she looks dancing!" he muttered; "she never looks like that at home. It is a pity that her style of beauty should require constant excitement to 'set it off.'"

As he was saying this to himself he caught sight of three ladies who were crossing the room, and, turning round, he recognised immediately Lady Cowes and her daughters, Lady Maude and Lady Juliet. He went up to speak to them, and very soon afterwards he found himself walking along the now almost deserted corridor with the youngest of these ladies on his arm.

The Cowes had come to town for the season for the first time since Juliet's illness, having spent most of their time in the country and in the Isle of Wight, so that Edwin had not seen them since that evening, now two years ago, when he had dined with them at Lady Windermere's. Juliet was still the sweet lovable girl she had always been—quiet and reserved in her manner, but very true and faithful to her sentiments. Although she had now quite recovered from her dangerous illness, she still looked pale and delicate, her lovely face was colourless, and her complexion seemed quite transparent. She wore a dark blue tulle ball-dress, which made her fair shoulders and arms look quite dazzling, and her light brown hair was fastened back with a small wreath of silver flowers. She still wore her hair cut short, and when Edwin noticed this a cold shudder ran through him, for he remembered why she had been obliged to sacrifice her once beautiful hair, and instantly a thousand tender recollections rushed upon him, and so oppressed his heart that for some minutes he could not speak.

Conducting her to the extreme end of the corridor, to

a place so distant from the ball-room that but few people would think of going there, they sat down on a sofa in one of the recesses which overlooked the staircase, and which seemed constructed for the purpose of allowing those occupying it to see the people coming up that most magnificent flight without being seen themselves.

Here they remained for a long time watching the company ascending and descending the staircase, saying but little, yet at times exchanging looks which, perhaps, said a little too much; for the innocent Juliet, knowing Edwin was now married, was no longer afraid of allowing her predilection for him to be perceived, and Edwin, as he had grown older, had also grown more bold. Thus they sat for nearly two hours, though to them time passed so quickly that it seemed much more like two minutes.

Had any one seen them sitting there by themselves apart from the rest, they would most probably have said that they were flirting. Such, however, was not the case. In the few words that passed between them, if there was little love, there was a great deal too much earnestness and feeling for their conversation ever to have been mistaken for a flirtation.

Juliet was very glad to see Edwin again, whom all this time she had not been able to banish from her heart; and, in her innocence, not supposing there could be any harm in talking with a married man, felt no hesitation whatever in so doing, though two years before, her maidenly pride, which seemed only natural in her, had rebelled at the mere thought of permitting him to see how deeply she still loved him, and had caused her to hide her real feelings under an impenetrable mask of ladylike indifference, which, being misunderstood by Edwin, had perhaps deprived her of all earthly happiness,

for it had unconsciously been the means of severing them completely.

When at last, at a late hour in the morning, Lord Edwin left Mrs. Holland's in his own brougham—for his wife had gone home some time before in her carriage—his thoughts were full of the lovely girl whom he had just quitted.

"What a fool I have been!" he said, as he neared home, where he knew Sibyl would receive him with a frown—for she had become a very exacting wife—"I might, if I had chosen, have married this lovely girl, who would have loved me above all things, and who would have been always sweet and gentle, and whom I should have grown to love every day more and more; and, instead of that, I have married a woman who at one moment is all fire, at another as cold as ice, and who is angry with me because I am not her slave instead of her husband. . . . How lovely Juliet looked in that play we acted at Lady Tottenham's! I think she looked prettier to me that night than even Sibyl; though everybody did say Sibyl was the handsomest. It seems all like a dream, but, somehow or other, everything seems like a dream. I hardly know whether life is agony or bliss—anyhow, it is a confounded bore!"

CHAPTER XVI.

LA FEMME DE FEU.

(Not by Adolphe Belot.)

EDWIN was not the only one who had ere this repented of his marriage.

Sibyl by this time had also grown tired of him, and often in her heart reproached herself for having married him. The truth was this: the mild, easy-going, sweet-tempered Edwin was not the husband her own passionate nature required. When a girl, his good looks and gentle manners had won her admiration; and she thought that her friend Juliet loved him, and that he preferred her, had caused her to mistake the admiration she felt for him for love. But had it really been love, I should scarcely think she would have been a woman to sacrifice her Passion for mere Fashion, and to have married Mr. Jobkin of her own free will, as she had done. When she accepted Edwin, that time at Holm Abbey, and at last consented to become his wife, other passions—passions almost more powerful than her love for him—filled her mind: ambition and envy—ambition of having a title and envy of the beautiful Consuelo: two vast whirlpools of passion that had just opened for themselves a channel in her ardent mind, and thither the tides

of her desires were hurried and engulfed. Now these whirlpools had lost their *raison d'être*. She had a title of her own; Consuelo could no longer be an object of envy to her, and consequently inspired her with little if any jealousy; so that these channels being, as it were, filled up, all the force of her passions flowed back upon herself. And then, for the first time, she discovered that she had been mistaken in her feelings for Edwin, and that he could never be to her all that she had expected.

Sibyl, as I have often before remarked, belonged to that class of women whose whole life must be devoted to one passion. She was a modern Cleopatra, and she still sighed for an Antony who would sacrifice everything—empire, wealth, honour, even life—at her feet. Edwin was the very last man in the world capable of sharing such a passion. His thoughts, his feelings, his desires, were those of the many. He could have loved as faithfully as any man, but Sibyl frightened more than attracted him. She possessed none of the sweetness and tenderness which he would have loved in a wife. Her wondrous beauty attracted him at times, but her passionate nature repelled him almost immediately. He could not understand her love, which was so different from what his colder and less passionate heart could ever feel, and therefore imagined that she did not really love him.

In marrying her he had thought to find a sympathetic companion, a helpmate who would love and strive to please him, as he saw the wives of his friends love and study to please their husbands and even enter into their pursuits. He now discovered that he had been greatly mistaken; for Sibyl, instead of troubling herself to please him, or taking an interest in his occupations and amusements, expected him, on the contrary, to become her

devoted slave, and have no thought and no will but hers.

He had married a regular *femme de feu*.

It was this that had turned his thoughts from Sibyl to Juliet, whom most likely, had his wife been to him all that he had expected to find her, he would have completely forgotten long ere this. Remembering now the advice of his brother—a much better judge of character than he was—he asked himself whether he had not indeed been greatly mistaken in preferring the stately Sibyl to the lovely Juliet. In spite of himself his thoughts would often bring before him that sweet young girl, so reserved, so pure, so innocent, who was in every way the opposite to his wife, and who, he knew, had once loved him so well.

At last he met her again, and then all the feelings he had before entertained for her were revived in his heart. He felt at once how superior in every way she was to the woman he had married, and from that moment any love that might have still lingered in his heart for Sybil completely vanished, and he grew irritable and impatient with her, though at the same time he would have thought it a crime to acknowledge his love for Juliet, even to himself.

Sibyl was not long in discovering the great change in her husband. She did not know the exact cause of it, but, with her usual quickness, guessed what it must naturally be, and it was then, and then only, that she gave up all hope of transforming him into the husband she had dreamt of, and sought for another object more worthy, according to her ideas, of her love.

Since that day in the little arbour in the gardens of Holm Abbey, where Alfredo had opened his heart to her

and described his love for Consuelo, whom he then still believed faithful to him, she had often thought of him. "Ah!" she had said to herself, when her now indifferent husband, tired of her society, rushed off to his club, "ah!" she had often said, "what a different husband that Spaniard would have made! These cold phlegmatic Englishmen do not understand the real nature of love; their hearts are always either in their stables or in their clubs, and it is only by fits and starts that they succeed in forgetting them. They have not the soul in them to feel any one very strong passion; they divide their existence into a thousand different ones and thus waste all their energy, reserving for love, which ought to be the main object in life, merely a corner of their heart. How I should like to be loved by a man like this Alfredo! How I should like to be loved by a man who would understand me, and who would consecrate his whole life to me, and think the world well lost for my sake!"

Alfredo was then in town, rushing madly from party to party, trying to banish from his mind, if not from his heart, the image of Consuelo, endeavouring to forget his wrongs in the mad pursuit of pleasure; for the blow he had received at Holm Abbey had so bewildered him that he had completely lost the strong power of self-command which, on any other occasion, would have enabled him to bear his misfortunes with the calmness of a philosopher. Sibyl often met him at balls and assemblies, and to her, the only one besides Consuelo and her husband who knew of his unfortunate love, he often spoke in terms that soon excited her ardent imagination.

The more she saw of him the more she liked him, and his manner to her at times seemed to say to her heart

that he did not look upon her by any means with indifference.

Sibyl was not conceited according to the ordinary meaning of that word ; for it is quite possible to have a strong self-love without possessing, for all that, any self-satisfaction. Sibyl knew her own faults better perhaps than most people, but she had also complete confidence in her charms, and counted on the power they would exercise over men, as a strategic general counts on his artillery.

Her look was like that of the serpent ; it would fascinate and bewilder until the man on whom she deigned to fix it for a time became almost unconsciously her prey. It was this serpent-like gaze—which when in her presence he found irresistible, and when once away from her he almost dreaded—that had caused Edwin to fall a victim to her fascinations. She was well aware of this, although she knew that in reality her beauty was as nought compared with that of Consuelo ; and, perhaps for this reason, she threw all her powers of fascination into her large black eyes, which could not fail to be admired by every one, and by these means she at last succeeded in bringing even Alfredo to her feet.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOST AND SAVED.

(Not by the Honourable Mrs. Norton.)

It was one of the first warm days of summer, when nature seems to become young again, and everything looks blooming and beautiful, and men's dreams naturally turn to feelings of love, that Sibyl and Alfredo found themselves walking side by side through a beautiful and shady grove by the banks of the river. It was at a large garden-party given by the Prince of Wales at Chiswick; but this part of the grounds was comparatively deserted, for most people preferred remaining near the house, in front of which the band was playing, and where the Prince and Princess were standing with their Royal guests.

The turf was dry and mossy, the air soft and balmy, and the strains of the music sounded sweet and fairy-like in the distance. It was a warm pleasant day. To shun the sun's rays they had seated themselves under the shade of the trees which overhung the river, and under which the blue waters swept rapidly by in their never-ceasing course. The thick branches of these large trees protected them from the sun, and their monstrous roots, only half-buried in the mossy bank, served them as seats. Sibyl, attired in a picturesque morning-dress,

looked almost divine, for her face had lost none of its wondrous beauty.

"Do you ever see Consuelo now?" she asked, casting a long languid glance at the handsome face of the Spaniard.

"See her! Oh yes! I saw her just now; she was walking on the lawn in front of the house, leaning on the arm of a Russian Grand-Duke, and listening to the music."

"She seems very happy!"

"Yes, she *seems* very happy. I hope she is so in reality."

"You still love her, then?"

"I try to persuade myself that I don't, but I fear that my heart still clings to her. Ah, Lady Edwin, I have loved her too much to forget her easily."

Casting down her eyes Sibyl sighed deeply. "How heavenly it must be to be loved like this!" she said.

"I fear my love, instead of adding to her happiness, only mars it. I wish for her sake as well as my own that I could cease loving her."

"How generous, how noble of you to say that! Who would think, to hear you, that this woman had jilted you so basely?"

Alfredo remained silent. He would have liked to make excuses for her (for he still loved her too deeply to condemn her conduct even to himself) but he hardly knew how to do so.

"Happy Consuelo!" Sibyl added after a short pause, "what would I not give to be loved like this! From my youth I have longed to inspire such a passion, but I begin to think now that I am not capable of doing so."

"You not capable of inspiring a great passion? Oh, impossible!"

"Yet such is indeed the case," she replied, with a sigh; then, speaking almost to herself, she said, "I was set on a pedestal, as it were, from my cradle, to be worshipped for my beauty, and admired for my wit and precociousness. Perhaps no woman was ever more admired than I have been. I drank admiration as my soul's nourishment from my earliest days, and now I can hardly live without its poison, though by this time I know it to be a poison, for it has been my bane, never my aliment. My heart ever sighed for true love, for the real affection which alone can give true happiness; but I never experienced it, though I have often thought it within my grasp. I have been made an idol, but I have never been beloved!"

She ceased, but her low melodious accents still seemed to sound in his ear, and he felt that her burning glance was upon him.

"What you tell me," he said, taking her hand in his, "sounds almost impossible. Can it be indeed true that you—you of all women—should never have been loved, never have been in love yourself?"

"Indeed, such is the case. I have often thought myself in love, but I have always discovered after a while that my affection had been misplaced, and that it was not returned as I would have wished it to be."

"Nay, as you have a right to expect to be loved."

"Perhaps; but remember, Mr. Villafranca, that I live in a cold matter-of-fact country, where strong passions seldom exist, and where the men hardly know what love really is."

"Then your husband . . . Lord Edwin . . ."

"Likes me very much. . . . I fear his regard for me goes no further; but do not let us talk of ourselves, for we can hardly be judges of our own cases. See my poor sister, for instance, how miserably her marriage has turned out!"

"Where is she now? I have not seen her once since my return; she seems to have disappeared altogether from the world."

"So she has, and I am glad to say she does not miss the world any more than the world misses her. She has become a Sister of Charity."

"A Sister of Charity! I did not know she was a Catholic."

"No, she is not a Catholic; there are Protestant Sisters of Mercy too."

"I ignored that fact, forgive me; and so she has entered a convent?"

"Not exactly. She has taken no vows—indeed she could not, for she is not divorced from Lord Twickenham, although they are formally separated; besides Protestants cannot take vows for life—but she has joined the Society of Sisters of Mercy, and devotes herself to nursing sick people and visiting the poor."

"Poor Lady Twickenham! Who could have imagined that she would ever come to this? I little thought it when I last saw her radiant and happy—the much-admired belle of London ball-rooms!"

"I believe she is happier now, though, than she ever was then—at least, so she says. She was always a peculiar girl, if you remember, different from all other girls. She was married against her will to a man she did not love, and her married life proved most unhappy. I can scarcely wonder at her resolution,

strange though it may seem to you. Do you know that I often think I, too, shall end some day by following her example."

"You?"

"Yes; life is so unsatisfactory—at least this life we lead. But as a Sister of Charity one can do a great deal of good, and perhaps I shall then be loved more than I ever have been loved while in 'the world!'"

"Oh, Sibyl, Sibyl! you need not become a Sister of Charity to be beloved."

"Indeed!" she replied, blushing as she noticed his excitement and heard her Christian name from his lips for the first time.

La Rochefoucauld tells us that when the heart is still disturbed by the remains of a passion it is more prone to take up a new one than when wholly cured. Perhaps there is a great truth in this. Alfredo, though he could not banish the image of Consuelo from his mind, had tried hard of late to fall in love with some one else, for he knew that the only remedy for one love is another love; and at that moment Sibyl's words, which revealed to him for the first time her passionate nature, added to her burning glances and to the many charms of her person—the beauty of her form, the matchless grace of her figure, her brilliant colouring and lovely features, her dark almond-shaped eyes, which looked at him from under her long lashes with an irresistible charm in their glance—all combined to produce upon him a sensation which, if not yet love, he felt would soon become so. Pressing her hand, which he had retained in his all this time, to his heart, he whispered in her ear a short sentence that made her pulse beat faster than ever, and for one moment caused her to lower her eyes.

The duration of our passions is no more dependent upon us than is the duration of our life. At that moment Sibyl entirely forgot all that she had once felt for Edwin, even her adventure at the Argyle Rooms, where her great love for him had taken her. All this vanished from her mind at the sound of this one magical word, and she felt that she at last loved as she had longed to love—as she had never loved before.

For a long time they remained sitting side by side, unconscious of the progress of time, for people never get tired when they are speaking of themselves, and of course their conversation after this could hardly be about anything or any one else."

"And you have never really loved Lord Edwin, my beautiful Sibyl?" he said after a time, already beginning to feel the pangs of jealousy.

"I once thought so, but now I am convinced I never did," she answered, perhaps with more truth than ladies generally speak on such occasions. "Yes," she continued, "I am sure that it is only now I know what love really is, and that I never loved Edwin. The want of some one to love, the natural desire to be loved, the fear of being supplanted by another . . . and a thousand little things which had no connection with real passion, helped to persuade me that I loved Edwin when I did not. Ah, Alfredo! if I had loved him as . . . well, as I am capable of loving, do you think I could have married Mr. Jobkin? That alone ought to prove to you that I never did love, never could have loved him."

Poor Edwin!—he was already forgotten. They say that love, like any other fire, can only subsist when the causes that produce it are continually renewed. Sibyl had already exhausted all her love for Edwin. The

few sparks which he had kindled in the hot furnace of her heart had burnt themselves out long ago, and no new ones had come to take their place. She knew him thoroughly now, so with all the impulse of her passionate nature she threw herself without hesitation into the arms of this new lover.

When she took his arm to return to the house it was already late, and most of the people had left. She was informed by a friend, that her husband, thinking she had gone, had driven back to town with the Countess of Cowes, who had offered him a seat in her carriage. Sibyl heard this without feeling the smallest pang of jealousy, though a year ago the thought of Edwin sitting beside Juliet for an hour would have rendered her frantic.

When Alfredo had called her carriage, and was returning to inform her it was at the door, she saw Lord and Lady Belgrave driving off on their drag, and noticed that the Spaniard followed them with his eyes until they had disappeared down the long avenue.

"Do you still think of that woman?" she said, with a scornful smile playing upon her coral lips.

"Yes!" he answered and sighed, "but I will try and forget her; that is to say," he added, turning round to hand her into her carriage, "if *you* consent to help me."

Her fast-trotting thoroughbreds soon conveyed her back to London. During her drive she thought of nothing but Alfredo. She was a woman who could not well feel remorse when she knew her actions obeyed the impulses of her heart; and she felt at that moment happier perhaps than she had ever done before, for she was convinced that she had found at last the one man she could love above all others.

When she arrived at her house in Grosvenor Square,

the footman who opened the door told her that a gentleman had called to see her, and, being informed that she was shortly expected, had insisted on being shown into the drawing-room to wait her return.

"Did he give his name?"

"No, my Lady."

"Very well, I'll go up and see him. I dare say it is the jeweller whom Lady Birmingham recommended to me the other day, and who was to bring me some jewels to look at," and with a light step and a lighter heart she mounted the staircase.

When she opened the drawing-room door she saw a man standing near the fire-place; his back was towards her, but when he heard the door open he turned round and confronted her. A cold shiver passed over her; she covered her face with both her hands; and, uttering a long piercing cry, fell half-fainting into the nearest chair.

And well she might tremble and scream and faint, for this man was no other than her first husband, Mr. Jobkin!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE STORY.

(Not by Lord Lytton.)

WHEN Mr. Thomson had cut the rope to which his friend Mr. Jobkin was suspended from the cliff above, letting him fall from a height of upwards of fifty feet into the water below, he was not drowned, as every one at the time believed.

The fall had stunned him and he disappeared for a few minutes. When he again came to the surface, he found the tide, which at that point is very rapid, had already carried him some distance from the shore. He was by no means a good swimmer, and, after a short struggle with the waves, he was just giving up in despair when a portion of the mast of some wrecked vessel floated near him; he seized and clung to it with despairing energy. After some hours of agonised suspense he saw a ship in the distance, and, gathering all his remaining strength, he tried to direct his course towards it. For upwards of an hour he made the most desperate efforts to get near her; fortunately the tide helped him a little, and he at last managed to get within a short distance of her; but by that time all his strength was gone, and it was some time before the people on board saw him, for he had

completely lost all power of speech and could not even shout for help.

A boat was instantly lowered and sent to his rescue ; fortunately the sea was very calm, and the men soon got hold of him and conveyed him on board.

When he at last was safely landed on the deck of the ship his reason seemed to have left him altogether ; he could neither speak nor move, but seemed completely paralysed both in body and mind. A doctor on board attended to him at once, and after a time succeeded in restoring him to life ; but his senses had fled, and some days passed before he could utter a single word, and even then he seemed to have lost all recollection of what had happened, and when spoken to he stared about him like a new-born babe, and could not even tell them his name.

The ship was a small trading vessel bound for Quebec ; the people on board were almost all Germans and mostly sailors, so that even if Mr. Jobkin had been able to inform them who he was, it is very doubtful if they would have understood him. As it was, they could make nothing of him, and completely failed in all their attempts to find out his name or the country where he came from. When they arrived in Canada they passed him over to the police authorities there, who had him taken to the hospital, where he recovered by slow degrees.

After a time he regained his strength and also his senses to a certain degree, but the mortal sufferings he had undergone during the long hours he had remained in the water seemed to have quite unsettled his reason. He had forgotten everything, even his name, and when he at last recovered consciousness he could not recall to mind anything that had happened to him before his arrival at the hospital.

Nearly two years had passed thus. He was able to go about like other men, though his health too had greatly suffered, and for weeks he had not even the strength to leave his bed. But his memory seemed gone for ever. He would talk and even discuss various subjects like other men, but all recollections of his past life were still so very vague and indistinct that when he spoke of yachts, and of grand society, and of his beautiful wife, and asked to be taken back to his own country, his guardians shook their heads and thought he was still wandering.

Gradually, however, but very gradually, his reason came back to him, and when at last he was able to give a satisfactory and reasonable account of himself he was permitted to quit the asylum. But even then, as his recollection of things and events was still very indistinct, he could offer no proof of his words; and his tale of having gone down some rocks and fallen into the water seemed altogether so very out of keeping with the account he gave of his position in England that no one would believe him, and it was only after another year had elapsed that he had at last been able to procure the money to pay his expenses back to England.

This was the strange story he told his wife, and to which she listened in mute astonishment and perplexity. He was so changed that few would have recognised him. The sufferings he had undergone had so altered him that it would have been indeed most difficult for any one to have recalled, in this thin, pale, cadaverous-looking being, the stout and strong man whose florid complexion and strong flow of animal spirits had so many times annoyed and disgusted his refined and fashionable wife. Yet Sibyl had known him at once, even before he had spoken, though she had been so

astonished at seeing him that she had sunk into a chair without uttering a single word either of recognition or welcome.

When he had finished speaking she arose. While she had been sitting there, apparently listening to his story, she had been thinking how she could best get out of this difficulty, and trying to form a line of conduct. Her mind was now made up. She rose from her chair with all the dignity of a queen, and, with an almost diabolical smile, that made Jobkin also start to his feet, she said—

“Sir, your story is highly interesting, indeed most amusing; it has only one fault—that of not being true.”

Jobkin uttered a cry of rage. “Sibyl!” he cried, “Sibyl, is it possible that you do not recognise me?”

“Recognise you? No; I never saw you before in my life that I know of.”

“I am your husband, Sibyl!—your husband!”

“My husband!” she said with a bitter smile, raising her eyes to the ceiling. “My poor husband, Mr. Jobkin, died three years ago; he was drowned off the coast of Caithness, as any one in England can tell you. I have mourned him as no wife ever mourned her husband before, and it is only lately, since I married again, that I have at last learnt to bear his loss with Christian fortitude. Mind, sir, how you dare to insult his sacred memory!”

“I was informed of your marriage on my return to England, Mrs. Jobkin. Are you aware that you have committed bigamy?”

“Would you insult me in my own house, sir? Go—there is the door! Go at once, or I summon my servants to turn you out!”

"My house you mean, madam; for every penny you have in the world is mine. You cannot send me out of my own house."

"We shall see," Sibyl exclaimed with perfect coolness, for she had now regained all her usual self-control, and, walking up to the mantelpiece, pulled the bell.

A servant immediately answered it.

"Will you show this gentleman out, George?" she said, sitting down on a low chair and taking up a book with the greatest coolness imaginable.

Her husband stared at her in mute astonishment.

"Madam, I go," he said after a pause; "but, remember, I shall come back, and then it will be *you* who will be sent out of this house. You make a capital actress when once you have decided on your part, but you forget that you recognised me perfectly when you first came into the room. I expected as much, and this is the reason why I did not write to you, but preferred appearing before you suddenly, and before you had time to make up your mind to deny me." His voice faltered once or twice as he said this, as if the effort of self-control were too great for him, and when he had finished he raised both hands to his head, muttering as he did so, "My head! my poor head! I fear I am losing my senses again."

Sibyl watched him narrowly over the book she had taken up, and which she was pretending to read. When at last he had left the apartment, followed by the footman, she rose and, opening the door of the next room, walked straight up to a large full-length portrait of Mr. Jobkin, which still hung there, and remained for a long time with her large penetrating eyes fixed upon it.

"He is very much changed," she muttered. "I

hardly think any one will recognise him ; anyhow, it is worth risking everything to retain my freedom and my position." Then, speaking to the portrait, she said almost aloud, " We shall see, sir, who will have the best of it ; we shall see. If I were but Marchioness of Belgrave ! —ah ! if I were but Marchioness of Belgrave—who would then dare to say that *you* were my husband ? "

With the proud step of a woman who has taken a desperate resolve, and intends to carry it out come what may, Sibyl quitted the drawing-room and went up to her own room.

CHAPTER XIX.

HER FACE WAS HER FORTUNE.

(*Not by F. W. Robinson.*)

THE most lovely spot on earth, as I have often heard people say, and indeed as I have often said myself, is that tiny little principality between France and Italy—the mothers of Fashion and Art respectively—which mirrors itself upon the ever-blue waters of the Mediterranean, and whose name alone seems to awaken a thrill in the heart of every person who has ever visited it. For, in fact, who can ever recall Monaco to his memory without also recalling a thousand pleasant recollections of beautiful sunny days and bright entrancing nights spent amidst its orange groves, marble terraces, and splendid saloons?

It is to this paradise upon earth, whose fatal tree of knowledge has occasioned the fall of so many, that I must now convey my readers.

One afternoon towards the end of the winter, when people in England were complaining bitterly of the cold, and making their way through the deep snow and a yellow fog to their cheerless houses in deserted London, the sun was shining brightly upon the little town of Monaco, and the bluest and clearest of skies was reflected in the bluest and most tranquil of seas.

The trains from Paris, Nice, and Cannes on one side, and from Genoa, San Remo, and Mentone, on the other, were fast speeding through orange groves and olive woods to convey their passengers to the little station under the cliffs of the Corniche-road, which has become, as if by enchantment, the resort of the gay and the fashionable world during the winter months.

The gardens of the palace, the streets, and steep inclines of the little town of Monaco, were alive with people, but the marble terraces and gorgeous pavilions of Monte Carlo were even more crowded.

A band was playing on one of these terraces, and hundreds of people of every nation, race, and class, were listening to its entrancing strains, breathing the buoyant balmy air, and admiring the beautiful view below.

This terrace overlooked the Bay, to which it descended through many a winding walk and marble staircase. On the other side of it rose the rock upon which the old town and castle, built in the Middle Ages, proudly stands, gorgeous with its many turrets and quaint Moorish roofs, while the waters below reflected the pale yet ever-warm tints of the evening sky, and the distant cliffs and rocks of the Riviera beyond seemed bathed in the same violet light which also illumined, though with softer tones, the more distant mountains and the undulating beauty of the ever-lovely coast.

Beautiful orange and lemon trees, resplendent in all the vivid colouring of their wondrous foliage, surrounded them, and tall graceful palms waved over their heads and seemed to scale the very sky.

But if the beauty of the afternoon and the melodious strains of the band had induced many people to quit the

saloons of the casino, by far the greater number still remained in them, for it was not only pleasure and amusement that could be obtained there, but all-absorbing excitement and business of the deepest interest.

In the gorgeous Moorish saloon—with the carved ceiling, enamelled walls, low oriental divans, and strange-coloured glass windows, around three long tables covered with green cloth, and upon which silver and gold glittered in every direction, bewildering the eyes and entrancing the reason of even the least excitable of the spectators—was gathered an immense crowd of human beings, all deeply engrossed in what was going on, and it was easy to see faces which were now clouded with disappointment, now elated with success. Nowhere can human equality be better appreciated than at a gaming-table, for here the noblest as well as the meanest appear engrossed by the same object and to give way to the very same passions.

Here, and perhaps here alone, you can see the proudest ladies of the aristocracy sitting at the same board with people with whom they would elsewhere shrink from coming in contact, watching with equal anxiety the chances of the game. Here alone you can see the haughty English Lord and the still haughtier English Duke, with their usually calm, impassive, or careless faces, flushed with excitement, following with flashing eyes the play of tradesmen whom in London they would not notice; while their long, be-jewelled, taper fingers every now and then pick up from the table a few gold pieces from the same heap from which an old woman with a gaunt shrivelled face, and eyes like those of a bird of prey, whose life has been passed at a gaming-table, and whom one would hardly imagine anywhere else, fills her

pockets at the same moment with a bony, yellow, crab-like hand.

Here also you can see, perhaps for the first time in your life, the famous actresses from Paris and London sitting beside the immaculate and high-born dames of the *beau monde*; and the wondrous dresses and costly laces of celebrated *cocottes* sweeping against the soft filmy gowns of the child-like daughters of these high-born ladies, who cast long innocent glances upon their painted faces and dyed hair, and wonder what manner of women they can be, and what can be their mode of life.

Besides all these various specimens of European life, you will often see the prettiest and most charming daughters of the New World smilingly stretching over these people's heads to deposit a five-franc piece upon the green cloth, just to "calculate," as they would tell you, what the passion of gambling may be like.

Mixed up with this miscellaneous crowd of players, who, though differing so decidedly from one another, seem to be more or less influenced by the same passions, and whose faces appear to express the same desires, you may also discover several people you know. There, for instance, calm and statuesque, watching the chances of the game from the outer row of one of the tables, is Mrs. Rogers, from Nice, the well-known English lady who so ably leads the highest circles in that town, and initiates all new-comers into the mysteries of the place; and, standing beside her, the Baronne Villier, once a celebrated Italian singer, and now the reigning queen of Nice, and therefore her mortal rival.

Sitting at another table, with piles of bank-notes beside him, you see the youthful Duke of Melrose, whose play everybody watches with interest, for he is said to

have nearly broken the bank the other day, but whose friends at home are, however, very much afraid he will one of these days end by breaking himself. He seems to be in luck, though, this evening, and his fine, open, fair English face is elated with success.

Round the *roulette* table the crowd is still greater; and there, near the croupier, sits the lovely Countess Malve, who is said to stake a small fortune every evening upon the *rouge*. She is the daughter of a Russian Prince, and married to a Spanish nobleman, a second son of that ancient branch of the Stuarts which claims its descent direct from the old Kings of Scotland; and near her, but not playing, however, stands her step-daughter, a lovely child of the South, with long almond-shaped eyes and black hair.

On the other side of the croupier sits another lady, who wears a thick veil over her face, and whose features it is impossible to distinguish, but some people will have it that she is a certain Imperial lady who comes every winter to the Riviera, with the excuse of seeking a mild climate, but in reality in search of a little excitement.

If such be the case, however, classes are even more mixed here than I imagined, for next to her is sitting, with our old friend Lord Carisbrooke, resplendent in laces and diamonds, Eglantine Rosefield, the famous English actress, who calls herself "Queen of Burlesque," and who, indeed, on this occasion looks infinitely more Royal than her Imperial neighbour.

But the day, on which I introduce my readers to the casino at Monte Carlo, none of these ladies seemed to attract much attention, for all eyes were fixed on one who was sitting at the head of one of the tables, and who, indeed, by her wondrous toilette, priceless jewels,

and beautiful face, was remarkable enough to distract the attention of even the *habitués* from their all-engrossing game.

This youthful beauty scarcely seemed old enough to be called a woman, though her round, fair little face already showed the unmistakable signs of dissipation. She had rosy cheeks, small features, and beautiful golden hair, which she wore in long curls, falling over her shoulders and fastened behind with a large diamond pin. Her dress was both striking and artistic.

She wore a long underskirt of pale grey satin, over which fell, in graceful folds, a second skirt of the same material, of dark ruby colour, trimmed with bands of velvet of the same rich tint, and the parts of ruby satin which were seen sparkled with rich steel embroidery, resembling chain armour. The body of the dress was very long, cut *à la Jeanne d'Arc*, like a cuirasse, and was made of amber-coloured kid, like her long eighteen-buttoned gloves, and fitted almost as tightly round her small but graceful figure. This cuirasse was cut high in the neck, and round her throat and over her shoulders, where it ended—for it had no sleeves, and those of the dress could be seen just to below the elbow, between the body and the gloves which went over them—she had large plates of steel, such as one sees in the portraits of the old French musketeers, whose picturesque costume her dress was doubtless fashioned to imitate.

On her golden locks she wore an immense Rubens' hat of grey felt, lined with ruby-coloured satin, embroidered in steel like her dress, and turned up on one side with a large bow of dark ruby velvet, fastened

with a magnificent diamond buckle. A long white feather, which proceeded from this bow and went entirely round the hat, hung behind amidst her long golden curls.

It would have been impossible to see this girl without admiring her, and it would have been almost as impossible to have looked at her once and then to have forgotten her—and perhaps this was why so many eyes were turned towards her, until even the excitement of the ever-spinning *roulette* seemed that day to lose half of its engrossing attractions.

If you had asked any one of the numerous servants of the casino, who went about the rooms attending to the wants of the visitors, who this lady was, you would most probably have been informed that she was no less a personage than "Son Altesse La Princesse Nijnikoff;" but you—who, being of course a person of Society, must have often seen that distinguished lady in London or Paris or St. Petersburg, where she always shines at the Court balls with all the reflected splendour of her matchless jewels—feel quite sure that that proud, stately, very formal, and sour-looking old lady can have no connection whatever with this charming little worldling, who talks English slang, and laughs loudly with the men standing around. Yet the man sitting beside her—that serious-looking personage with the dark blue coat and high cravat, and manners of the *diplomate* of the good old school, who does not play, and seems only occupied in handing bank-notes to his fair companion, which she throws carelessly upon the table with a laugh, apparently quite indifferent whether she will ever see them again—is, without a doubt, Prince Nijnikoff, the husband of the distinguished and sour-looking Princess. Who, therefore, can this lovely girl be, whom, by her complexion

and voice, one would take to be English, and English of a less austere class, and yet who wears such a wonderful dress, and is addressed as "Your Highness" by the gay crowd of young men who surround her?

My dear reader, you have been so good and so faithful as to read thus far, so I don't mind letting you into a little secret: this lovely girl is no other than our old acquaintance, the charming Stella—old Mrs. Potts's step-daughter!

I am sorry to have so disappointed your expectations, for no doubt you had imagined I was going to introduce you to a real Russian Princess; but I fear, with the best intentions in the world, I should not have been able to keep the truth from you much longer, for one glance at the man sitting on the other side of her, who keeps a watchful eye upon the game, and who with a pin seems, by some mysterious cabalistic signs, to mark the different numbers upon a little piece of paper, would have enabled you to recognise him as the handsome Spaniard—Consuelo's brother—Juan Fernandez.

But if you are disappointed in your hopes of meeting a grand lady, let me assure you that this poor girl at that moment was as great, as powerful, and as courted, as any grand lady ever could be. For if, indeed, there was a time when it was a great thing to be a lady of rank—that is to say, in the good old days when ladies of high degree ruled Society, set the fashions, and could ban with a frown or elevate with a smile, and ever influence the opinions of men—that time is now past and gone. And it is now, believe me, Stella and the women of her class who lead "the fashion" and govern mankind; for, I assure you, each of them is a Queen in her own way, and the great ladies are forced, whether they like it or not,

to bow before their sway. If these high-born dames weary and bore men with their exclusiveness and formality, they revolt and go off to their Stellas; if, on the contrary, they attempt to rule them only with a light hand, and make concessions, they kick over the traces and fly to laugh at them with their Stellas. If these high and mighty ladies wish to be in the fashion, and not look dowdy and old-fashioned, why, they must follow the modes set by these Stellas; if they want to be admired by men, they must also adopt their style of conversation and their slang. So, if the most respectable woman in the world buys a new bonnet, adopts a new fashion, or tries to be witty and amusing—whether she like it or not, whether she know it or not—she is humbly obeying the laws set by these modern Queens of Fashion; for they are Queens in every sense of the word, and, while they reign, must reign supreme and despotically, pillaging the men right and left, devastating whole countries, winning battles, forgetting their best friends, and adopting new favourites every day. It is true that these Stellas now and then do end in a hovel and die in the gutter, in spite of all their brilliancy, luxury, and conquests, if they happen to lose their charms before they have been wise enough to begin to save their gains—for their pretty faces are their sole fortune; but then, so do Sovereigns if they happen to lose their Crowns; and some of them fare even worse than these Stellas, for sometimes they end by breaking their hearts and losing their heads, which these women never do.

It is not very pleasing for an author to place before his reader these dark passages from the leaves of the book of Fashion, or to introduce him to such unworthy specimens of the human race; but I am narrating the

contest between Fashion and Passion, so I am forced to give specimens from all the various classes of society in which this eternal battle is fought every day of our lives; besides, from the record of all passions, good or bad, there is always a good moral to be derived, and it is to this moral alone that I beg, dear reader, to draw your attention.

CHAPTER XX.

HONOURS DIVIDED.

(Not by Morley Farrow.)

PRINCE NIJNIKOFF had an oval face and pleasing features, large dark brown eyes and lashes, eyebrows delicately but clearly defined, an olive complexion, and hair and moustache which looked too black to be taken for the natural colour. He was past sixty, and in the morning, before his French valet had adorned him for the day, he looked a great deal more.

He was the head of one of the oldest and most powerful Russian families, and his wealth was said to be immense.

Brought up from his earliest youth in the gay and brilliant Court of the Czars, he had spent his life between St. Petersburg and Paris, with no other employment than that of spending his money. When almost a boy he had married a cousin of his, a Princess nearly ten years older than himself, and more celebrated, even at the time of their marriage, for her wealth than for her personal charms—a regular Countess Danicheff. This lady, who had now grown too old to enjoy going out into general society, lived almost entirely at their castle near Nijni-Novgorod, where she reigned over a little Court of her own, while her ever-young husband, with

that persistency which is often seen in old men, still repaired to the various capitals of Europe in search of new amusements, his great delight being to be thought a great *beau*.

It was during one of his visits to London, where, since the marriage of the Grand-Duchess Marie with the Duke of Edinburgh, he often repaired during the spring months, that he had met Stella at one of those gay Richmond parties given by the *jeunesse dorée*, amongst whom he still loved to be counted.

Her pretty face and gentle ways had won his admiration, if not his heart, and he had immediately decided to carry her off with him to Italy, where he intended passing the following winter.

Juan, with his usual clearness of perception, had at once seen what good opportunities of making money this intimacy would afford him, and had lost no time in seizing upon Stella's admirer. His fascinating manners and amusing and flattering conversation had completely won the Russian nobleman's heart, and Juan had not only obtained from him an invitation to accompany him in his travels, but he had even succeeded, through him, in getting rid of Consuelo's jewels, which he had not dared to sell openly, but which he now induced the Prince to buy for Stella.

Their journey through Italy had been an endless round of brilliant dissipation. They had passed the greater part of the winter at Naples, which gay town they had only quitted when the Prince discovered that he had exhausted all its resources, and they had proceeded thence, by easy stages, to Nice, where they intended remaining for the rest of the winter.

Both there and at Monaco, where they often went

for the day, Stella's beauty, added to her wondrous dresses and magnificent jewels, had created quite a sensation, and we saw in our last chapter the surprising way in which she attracted general attention, even at a place like Monaco.

The Prince was charmed. He liked her to be admired, for he thought that some of this general admiration must necessarily be reflected upon himself, and it was with the greatest pleasure in the world that he accompanied her to Monte Carlo, though each of his visits cost him several hundreds, for once there it would have been cruel to have forbidden her to play, and, of course, the roubles that left his pocket never entered them again.

One day, however, while he was sitting by her at the roulette table, watching her play, and listening with pleasure to the many compliments paid her by the numerous train of admirers who always surrounded her, he was seized with a fit.

Juan had him conveyed immediately to the neighbouring hotel; but his strength had at last given way. This fit was but the beginning of a general break-up of his entire system, already overstrained, and a week later he died at the Hôtel de Paris, in the arms of Stella. But some days before his death he had made a will, at the instigation of Juan, in which he left that young lady a sum of money, in different securities and bonds, which would give her an income equal to about five thousand pounds a year in English money, which, I need not say, proved to be more than sufficient to dry her tears.

Of course, the people talked of nothing else for some days, and the scandal was almost European for a time, and persons were not wanting either who swore there must have been foul play; but the will was *en règle*, and

his family, much to their disgust, were obliged to hand over the money to "the young English girl with whom he had so far forgotten himself."

About a month later, that sad affair of Captain Walter Debenham took place, and public attention was too much taken up with the scandal of that honourable gentleman's doings at the Cercle de la Méditerranée to talk any more of this "Star of the East (of London)," as Eglantine Rosefield had nicknamed her, or of the Russian Prince's death, and so this "nine days' wonder" was completely forgotten to give place to the new one, as is generally the case at this gay, pleasure-loving Nice, and Stella was left in undisturbed possession of her newly-acquired wealth.

The day following that on which his Highness's body was despatched by rail to Russia, where it was destined to occupy a place of honour in the mausoleum of his noble family at Nijni-Novgorod, Stella and Juan left the Hôtel de Paris, at Monaco, for Paris.

"We have killed our goose with the golden eggs," that charming young lady remarked, as they were driving to the station at Monte Carlo.

"Yes, but I think we can scarcely be sorry," her companion replied. "You are now a rich woman, Stella!"

"Yes, isn't it jolly! but I think it is a pity we are leaving Monaco. I might perhaps have doubled my fortune if I had remained here."

"Or lost it," he replied philosophically. "No; believe me, it is all very well to gamble when you have nothing to lose and everything to gain, but all the chances are against you now; people suspect us; and as for doubling your money, why, I have studied every calculation imaginable, and I tell you the thing is impossible."

"Oh, Jack! you, who advised the poor Prince to play every day higher and higher stakes!"

"I would not advise *you*, though, to do it."

"And why?"

"Because I love you."

"You love me! Oh, Jack! then you will marry me at last!"

"Well, if you insist upon it," he replied rather peevishly; "I suppose I can hardly refuse anything to a woman who has five thousand a year?"

"Oh, how happy we shall be! how happy! I shall be so good now, oh, so very good! So I shall be your wife!—the dream of my life will be realised at last!"

"Yes, directly we arrive in London. But here is the train; I hope you have not forgotten any of your jewels—you know you are so awfully careless, Stella."

And they entered the carriage, and soon afterwards left the bright, brilliant, dazzling Monaco, never again to return.

CHAPTER XXI.

A WOMAN OF FASHION.

(Not Leah, however.)

I THINK it is high time that I should return to Consuelo—to Consuelo, who, when we left her, had become a complete woman of Fashion, but, unfortunately, as is but too often the case, only after she had lost all hopes of worldly happiness.

The world of pleasure and fashion, which she had once so longed to behold, had grown almost hateful to her; for she was behind the scenes now, and knew the invisible strings which move the puppets acting upon that stage, and could command them if she chose, for the beautiful Marchioness had become one of the leaders of Society, and could, in her turn, snub and put down all those who did not please her fancy.

Yet Consuelo was anything but happy, and often, when, tired to death of the very people she had once so envied and admired, on returning from a ball in the early morning, she would fling herself upon her couch, heedless of her delicate ball-dress and of the priceless jewels which adorned her brow, and burst into floods of tears.

She still longed to ascertain the causes of what she deemed the failure of her life, and of the sorrows and

troubles that were still impending over her. Were those causes to be found in any defects of her character, or merely in the caprices of her unlucky fate? Although her marriage to Lord Belgrave had been, so to speak, forced upon her, yet she could not think of those days without an inward shudder, for her heart told her that, at that time, she had perhaps thought a little more of the wealth and position she would gain, than of the lover she would lose; and she now asked herself repeatedly whether she had not perhaps been a little too much influenced by these things.

If she had then known as much of "the world" as she did now, she was convinced that she would have preferred waiting in misery and poverty—waiting even for a whole life-time—for the return of her Alfredo than to have married the Marquis.

"Perhaps if I had not married Belgrave," she sometimes thought, "I should never have known what luxury and fashion really were, and even in Alfredo's arms I might have longed for wealth and position—vain shadows that vanish as soon as you approach them! But even supposing I had never learnt their true value, I might still have been happy, for Alfredo would have known how to banish all sad thoughts from my mind. And what am I now? Most lonely, most sad!—so lonely and sad that nothing but the moral intoxication in which I live saves me from an overwhelming despondency!"

She no longer cared for Society or its pleasures, but she threw herself headlong into them to escape the solitude of a house that had none of the sacred soul-sustaining influences of a home for her, and thus forgot for a time the miseries of her heart.

Her relations with her husband were more than embarrassing, for she knew what his feelings must now be for her, and she felt in her heart that she had ruined his happiness as well as her own; yet her tender and susceptible nature could not for a moment tolerate the idea of passively submitting to an estrangement from him who had conferred on her so much kindness, and who had loved her so devotedly as to have sacrificed his life to her, and, what was even more to him—his position. So she was kind and amiable to him when they met, though anything like sympathy between them, or pleasure in each other's society, was necessarily for ever at an end.

Lord Belgrave had long ago ceased to love her, and in his heart he not only accused her of having blighted his life and destroyed his happiness, but also of having deprived him of his best, nay, of his only friend—for though he still saw Alfredo occasionally, after what had taken place it was impossible that anything like intimacy or brotherly affection should ever be re-established between them.

Consuelo was nothing to him now. The girl he had married, thinking she would realise the *beau ideal* he had formed to himself of what a beloved wife should be, had never been able to respond to his love, and though he no longer suspected her, or feared that she would be unfaithful to him, yet he could not even hope that she would ever forget her love for Alfredo, which seemed to be the only one bright point in her life, and learn to care for him.

Lord Belgrave was too proud even to hope for this. He respected his wife because she was his wife and bore his name, but he could no longer feel for her or care for

her sufficiently to so lower himself in his own estimation as to sue for her love. Thus, alike disappointed in the ideas of true happiness he had so long nourished in his noble heart, and in the woman he had chosen to realise them, he returned once more to the pleasures he had so despised before, and sought for excitement and forgetfulness of the past, if not for happiness in the present, in all the dissipations which the world can offer to a man in his exalted position. He bought horses and yachts, and spent his days between Newmarket and Cowes, and his nights in riotous suppers and dissipations of all kinds; for, alas! his only friend, whose healthy advice he would have taken, was now estranged from him.

Consuelo no longer felt any jealousy of Laura Ducie. Time and subsequent events had taught her that Sibyl's hints on that subject had been more than unfounded. Miss Ducie still lived at Holm Abbey, and whenever she went there, which was only when a large party of friends had been invited for a week's shooting or hunting, she helped her to do the honours of the place and to entertain them, thus saving her no end of worry and trouble. She knew that this accomplished young lady possessed great influence over her husband, but she was not afraid of this influence now that she had learnt to appreciate its true character, and it was with disgust and vexation that she remembered the unhappy hours Sibyl had occasioned her with her unfounded suspicions.

It was perhaps for this reason, and perhaps also because her own heart told her that she was a dangerous woman, and one whom she should in future avoid, that she had lately seen but little of Sibyl, and that their intimacy was now at an end.

Consuelo felt, though she could not explain her

reasons, that the superb Sibyl was a woman more to be admired than loved. Her queenly mien and stately grace, which at first inspired one with enthusiasm, were too repelling to be agreeable after a longer acquaintance, and the glittering in her eyes, which at first was so fascinating, grew disagreeable after a time, and inspired people with more fear than sympathy. When Consuelo found that her opinion of Sibyl coincided with that which her husband had formed of her from the first, she no longer hesitated, but made up her mind to have as little to do with her as possible.

When we take all this into consideration, together with the harassing emotions which she had occasioned both to Consuelo and her husband during her visit to Holm Abbey, it will not be wondered at that, when Mr. Jobkin, to their great surprise, made his appearance one day at Beauville House, and told them of all his wonderful adventures, all their sympathy should have been enlisted for him instead of for Sibyl.

Consuelo recognised him at once, though indeed he was so very much altered that Sibyl's idea that no one would recognise him was not as ill-founded as one might at first have supposed. When she saw him in his present miserable condition, and thought of all he must have suffered, her heart bled for him, and she forgot how indifferent he had once been to her sorrows, and how proudly and scornfully he had behaved to her when she was poor and friendless.

Lord Belgrave had never cared much for him, but now, partly to please his wife, partly to break off his brother's marriage with Sibyl, to which he had always been greatly opposed, he offered to help him, and to do all in his power to prove his identity.

When he had left them, Consuelo, very much moved by his sad story, and very grateful to her husband for the kind interest he had taken in her cousin, thanked him, expressing herself in warmer terms than she had perhaps done for a long time.

"Yes, we must do something for this poor man. It is really noble of you to exert yourself in his favour. I always knew you had a kind heart, Bel, but this is almost more than I expected from you."

"But you are quite sure that this man is really Jobkin, and not a clever impostor? I must confess I knew him so slightly that I could not in conscience swear to his identity, as perhaps I shall be asked to do one day in a court of law."

"Oh, I am quite sure. He is greatly changed, it is true; but he is Jobkin, I am sure of that!"

"I suppose he will begin by taking the advice of a lawyer, who will put him in the way of getting back his property."

"His property!" and Consuelo shuddered. "It is your brother who has it now. Great God! and he will have to give everything up!"

"So much the better if he has to give up his wife at the same time."

"You do not like Sibyl!"

"I never did; and now that Edwin is at last married to her, I think he too has begun to see through her. I consider her a most dangerous woman to have in one's family."

"Then even for your brother's sake I am glad my poor cousin has returned. I wonder if he will have much difficulty in proving his identity?"

"I fear he will; for, as he told us himself, his memory

has greatly suffered from his long illness in Canada, and even he begins himself to fear that there are many persons whom he will be expected to recognise, and many events that he will be expected to remember, of which he will not have the slightest recollection. However, I will do my very best to help him."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Bel! I shall be for ever grateful to you; for he is my cousin, you know, although we have seen so very little of each other. With your great influence to back him, I am sure he will succeed in establishing his claim."

"The first thing is to see Sibyl and my brother; if they recognise him, of course there will be no occasion for a trial. I wonder what she will do? He has seen her, he told us, but although she was greatly upset at his appearance, it seems she refused to acknowledge him as her husband. This very morning I shall see her, and one look at her face will tell me if she has recognised him or not. Ah, Edwin!" he muttered, as he left the room, "it is for you that I do this, though perhaps you will not thank me for it at first!"

CHAPTER XXII.

SIBYL'S SECOND LOVE.

' (*Not by Miss Kavanagh.*)

"I ALWAYS disliked that man, but now I hate him," were Sibyl's first words when Lord Belgrave left her house a few hours later. He had come to inform her of his interview with Jobkin, and in spite of all she had done and said to persuade him that the man he had seen was only a vile impostor, she was certain that he had gone away not only as fully convinced of his identity as he was when he came, but that he was also aware now that she herself, in spite of all her protestations, believed him to be her husband.

She had never liked Lord Belgrave. His cold haughty manners had often irritated her passionate nature, and she could not easily forget that, after having once almost confessed that he loved her, he had been able to rise superior to that love, which is perhaps an offence which few women are able to forgive.

He had subsequently married Consuelo, whom she hated and envied, both because she had married Lord Belgrave, and had thus obtained the position and the wealth that she had at one time so longed for, and also because she felt that Alfredo—the man she now loved with all her

heart—still regarded her with admiring eyes, and could not succeed in banishing her image from his heart.

"Yes, I always disliked, and now I hate him!" she exclaimed, as soon as she was alone. "I hate him and he hates me. If I do not destroy him he will destroy me! He is determined that I shall give up his brother; ungrateful man, after all I have done for Edwin! He was always against my marrying him. I suppose as he did not marry me, he did not like his brother to do it. But we shall see—we shall see who will be the victor. It is true that just now he holds the best cards, and the game seems to be in his hands, but he little knows with whom he has to deal. I shall stake everything—yes, everything—to outwit him, and we shall see who will have the best of it!"

Sibyl was in the drawing-room of her house in Grosvenor Square—that same house which Mr. Jobkin had taken by the advice of Mrs. Boston Gilbert, and which he had left to her in his will. She was sitting by the window in the same low arm-chair in which Lord Belgrave had left her, motionless, and apparently unconscious; yet her mind was busy, for she felt that the great crisis of her life had come at last.

She held in her hand the dice that were to decide her destiny, and she knew that whatever that last throw chanced to be she would have to stand by it for ever. Each one in his journey through the world comes to a place where two roads meet, and on his turning to the right or to the left depends the whole course of his life, the safety of its end. Sibyl had arrived at this turning-point, and she knew that the first step she took would decide her fate. She was not a woman to be afraid of anything, yet the consciousness of this appalled her.

She could flatter herself with no more illusions, and she was not one of those weak or wilfully blind people who can shut their eyes and let fate decide for them. With a clear head and an almost superhuman coolness, she could weigh every side of the question, and sum up the dangers to be encountered on either side; yet, cool as she usually was, she would gladly have given anything at that moment for some one else to decide for her.

For one moment she thought of her husband. She would seek him, confess everything to him, beg him to protect her, and abide by his decision. But her reason, as well as her heart, told her that Edwin, of all men, was the least calculated either to protect, advise, or guide her through such a crisis. Until that day she had not realised how very unsuited he was to her as a husband. Why had she married him? Ah, why? No, he was the very last man whose advice she would take; and yet, he was the only one of whom she had a right to ask it. She loved him no longer, and she was fully aware that he also no longer cared for her; yet, was he to count for nothing in this nicely-adjusted balance of fair and false, profit and loss, right and wrong, ambition and revenge, love and hatred? She had been false; yes, it was no use trying to excuse herself now—she would call things by their right name. She had been false to her love, she who had sacrificed so much for that love! She loved another now, and that other loved her!

She loved Alfredo, and she felt that he alone could save her from her enemies, save her from the horrible fate that awaited her. He was a strong-minded man, a man with a powerful will and a clear head, who possessed both the will and the power to guide and direct her. She would throw herself into his arms, and beg of him to

help her; yet the memory of the love she had once felt for Edwin was still fresh in her mind. He was her husband, she bore his name, and her honour was his honour. She did not love him now, yet she had not so far forgotten herself as to be able to forget what she owed to him, and what she owed to the illustrious name he had given her.

For a long time she remained there lost in deep thought, unable to arrive at any conclusion; but just at that moment, while she was planning Lord Belgrave's destruction, and making up her mind as to the course she should take now that such a powerful and influential man as the Marquis had espoused her first husband's cause, Alfredo Villafranca was announced.

As if by enchantment, she forgot at once all her troubles, and, running to meet him, threw herself into his arms.

Sibyl had never loved as she loved now; perhaps because she had never before had such a noble object for her passion. She did not pause to analyse the reason for this great love, but she knew that what she felt for him was a passion infinitely stronger than any she had ever felt before.

It is very difficult, not to say impossible, to define love; no doubt because the feelings it inspires are hardly ever the same in two instances; but if, as a great philosopher tells us, it is for the mind a desire to rule, for the soul a desire to be loved, and for the body a desire to possess what we love, then Sibyl at last experienced the true essence of love.

She loved Alfredo with all her heart and soul, and even the thought that he did not respond to her love, which must naturally have often troubled her, hardly

seemed to cool her affection; perhaps it was because, as Lord Byron said—

“In her first passion woman loves her lover,
In all her others what she loves is love;”

or because we are all happier in the passion we feel than in that which we inspire, and derive greater enjoyments from it. I can hardly decide this; all I can say is that Sibyl did not trouble herself much about his love for her; she was convinced of her own love for him, and as the chief pleasure of love is in loving, she felt completely happy, and consequently all other things were necessarily subservient to that happiness.

Alfredo could not help being attracted towards Sibyl. Her wondrous beauty, her matchless charm, and perhaps, too, the undisguised admiration she expressed for himself in both words and looks, drew him towards her; yet his wish to be near her was felt by him more as coercion than as a longing to which the whole being consents.

He was fully aware of her passionate nature, and this—which might have frightened, even disgusted, him at any other time—only added a new charm to his intercourse with her; for he longed to forget Consuelo, whom he still loved in spite of himself, and, as I have said before, he knew full well that the only remedy for one love is another. So he liked to see her, talk with her, listen to her warm passionate words, and fondly imagine that he was in love with her and had forgotten the woman who had jilted him, and who could now never be his.

But on this occasion Sibyl's love got the better of her reason, and he felt, as perhaps he had never felt

before, how wicked and criminal this love was, and how unworthy both of her and of himself. Words failed him with which to reply to her fond professions, and his surprised look might have told her that what she had until that day mistaken for love was but a strong feeling of admiration, only made passionate by his own state of vexation and despair.

"Oh, Alfredo!" she cried, throwing herself into his arms, "I am so glad you have come; you do not know how I have longed for you; I have been so wretched! so miserable! But now I feel once more that I am the happiest woman on earth, for I possess your love!"

Alfredo clasped her in his arms. "Oh, Sibyl!" he said, pressing his lips to hers, "I do love you!"

"Ah! I could listen to you for ever, yet the time for protestations is past; we must act now. Alfredo, dearest Alfredo, I want you to advise me. You are a brave man, a man of courage, both physically and morally, and I feel that whatever you advise me to do will be right. If you were surrounded on all sides by armed enemies, and you stood alone and unarmed, would you be ashamed to fly from them—to run away?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ask me no questions, but for the love you bear me answer me this—would it not be better to fly than to perish ignominiously at their feet?"

"I have never known fear, yet I suppose that if one were unarmed, and, as you say, surrounded on all sides by mortal foes, it could hardly be thought cowardly to run away."

"Alfredo," she then said, fixing her large black eyes on his, "I am just in such a position. I am unarmed. I am surrounded by foes—by mortal foes. I am brave

enough. I, too, have never known fear, and I am not afraid even now; yet I am but a woman after all. Would it not therefore be better for me to retreat while it is time than to offer battle and be defeated?"

"In the name of Heaven, what do you mean?"

"Can you not understand me, Alfredo? Can you not understand that I am ready to fly with you?"

"Fly with me!"

"Yes, I cannot bear this sort of life any longer. I can no longer continue to deceive myself and others. I must quit the world. I am not a woman to join a sisterhood, as my sister Geraldine has done; besides, she only did it because the man she loved proved false to her. I love you and you love me, therefore it is you who must take me away from the world."

Alfredo stood opposite to her, and she noticed that he turned white to his very lips, and that those lips quivered.

"But, Sibyl! think of the consequences that would follow such a step! What would the world say? and what would your husband think!"

"The world! I owe nothing to the world—nothing but vexation of spirit and trouble of mind. I care not what the world says, but, believe me, after a time it will take my part."

"Your part?"

"Yes! Even the world will end by pitying me. It must be the husband's fault when his wife runs away from him."

"In all cases?"

"Yes, in all; the world does not stop to consider; public opinion always gives its sympathies to the woman. Oh, I know the world only too well!"

"Your world, not *the* world."

"I only know one, and in that world when a woman leaves her husband's house it is the husband who is invariably blamed. The woman may be pitied, abused, but she always finds champions, and every excuse is made for her. You have only to read the most popular novels of the day, or go to the theatres and see the latest pieces, to convince you of this fact. The other day, when I was in Paris, I saw that play at the Français which has created such a sensation all over the world, I mean Dumas's last, '*L'Etrangère*.' Well, there a woman, after she is married, finds out that she is in love with a man who is not her husband, and although the husband is a Duke and as good and noble a man as can well be, and the lover is only a penniless selfish fellow, everybody sympathises with him, and when at last the poor husband is killed every one is delighted, and I assure you the public applauded it greatly."

"Are these the morals of your world?"

"I do not know if it be moral or not; I only tell you of what takes place everywhere around me."

"Then your world shall never be my world!"

"That is why I ask you to leave it, to fly from it with me, for I, too, am heartily tired of it. If one cannot see through the veil Society forces one to wear, it is better far to put it aside altogether."

"Great God! are these the lessons we are taught nowadays?—and can you, Sibyl, deem this right and proper?"

"I do not know, I do not care, if it be right or wrong; I only know what the world thinks, and I only tell you this to show you that all its sympathies will be for us if we run away."

"The world may say what it likes, but I, Sibyl, shall never think anything to be right that my conscience tells me is wrong. Are you not afraid of your conscience?"

"Those who have done with hope have done with fear."

"Great God!—and you expect me to love you?"

"But you do love me! Oh, Alfredo, you do love me! I know you do. You could not be insensible to the great love I have for you."

"You love me?"

"Ah! better than my life!"

"You said the same once to another, and not so long ago, either. You loved him, and he loved you, and you were married, and now—now you have forgotten him, and are ready to dishonour his name and render him miserable for life! Ah, Sibyl!" He grew ghastly pale as he said this, and each syllable came distinctly and clearly from his pale lips with a withering emphasis of scorn.

"Edwin! I do not love him!"

"Yet you loved him once!"

"No, I never did; it was not true love that I felt for him, though once I thought it was. I liked him better than I did any other man at the time, and that is why I married him. I did not know you then—that is to say, I did not know you as I know you now. Ah, Alfredo! if I had only known what you really were when I first met you, how very different my lot would have been!"

"You think so now, but you forget that you were then in love with Lord Edwin; and, besides, you would never have consented to marry a poor unknown foreigner

like me—you, who threw *him* over to marry a richer man."

"That ought to prove to you that I never loved Edwin; had I loved him as I love you, do you think I could have married another? Ah no, Alfredo! I would have sacrificed everything for you then, as I am ready to sacrifice it now. It has been my misfortune, not my fault, that I did not learn to love you sooner; and had you not opened your heart to me that day at Holm Abbey, and taught me to appreciate and admire you, I perhaps should not love you now."

"Yet you accepted Lord Edwin's hand that very afternoon!"

"Ah, forgive me! I was half mad at the time—I was piqued—jealous; I hardly knew what I was about. Edwin had loved me for so many years; he had been so faithful to me I felt almost bound to accept him. Besides, you loved Consuelo then, and the thought never entered my head that you would forget her, you seemed so devoted to her at that time."

"Still, you married another."

"Ah, remember that Edwin had loved me before I married Jobkin, that he had waited for me several years, that I was almost engaged to him. . . ."

"Before your first husband's death?"

"Oh, no, no; but let us not speak of either of them. I owed Edwin something for his constancy and fidelity to me. I have married him, my debt to him is more than paid, so I may now forget him."

"Poor man!"

"You pity him? Pity me rather. I need your pity more than he does. But you will take me away from him—away from this world I hate—away, far away!"

"Sibyl!"

"Yes; to that country of yours, where the days are brighter, the nights sweeter; and where all is beautiful, and noble, and fair. Away from Society and all its horrible temptations, we two might be so happy together! We can live on that estate left to you by your aunt, of which you have so often talked to me, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot,' as the poet says. Do you remember the lovely dreams you entertained once, and which you confided to me at Holm, of how you would spend your time in that sequestered vale with the woman you loved, and how happy you intended to be, and how very happy you would make her?"

Alfredo shuddered, for he remembered that in that dream in which he had so fondly indulged, Consuelo was to have been the one who was to realise it—Consuelo, who was so different in every respect to this woman—Consuelo, whom he loved with all his soul; and the mere idea of Sibyl taking her place seemed to him still almost a profanation.

"No, Sibyl," he said, rising, "that dream is over now; I am at last awakened to the realities of life; that sort of happiness will never be realised by me."

"Ah! you still love Consuelo!" she cried with rage, while her large black eyes flashed with indignation.

"No, Sibyl, I love you."

"You do not. If you loved me, Alfredo—if you loved me half as well as I love you—you would save me from my enemies."

"Your enemies!"

"Yes, I am surrounded by them on all sides—everybody is plotting against me. Ah, if you knew, if you only knew!"

"My poor Sibyl! you are excited, you are ill; compose yourself, try and compose yourself. Who are your enemies, tell me?"

"Oh, never."

"Your husband? No, Sibyl, he still loves you too well to wish you any harm. Believe me, your enemies exist only in your own imagination."

"No, they are real. At this very moment there are people plotting against me who have sworn my destruction. Believe me, if you do not save me from them, and from myself, the most horrible events will take place."

"You are raving!—save you from yourself?"

"Alfredo, you do not know me, you do not know me. I am myself perhaps my greatest enemy. I see it all now; I see the dark, miserable, bloody, horrible future before me! I am still myself to-day, and know what is best; to-morrow it may be too late. Alfredo, remember I am placed in such a position that I can stop short of nothing—perhaps the honour, nay, even the life, of your dearest friend may be endangered!"

"Sibyl, let me advise you to retire to your room—to lie down—to see a doctor; you are delirious, you frighten me with your words."

"Ah, I frighten myself even more with my thoughts!"

"You confess yourself that you are raving."

"No, I am not raving; I am quite myself. I never was so self-possessed in my life. If you love me, Alfredo, save me—save me from my enemies, save me from myself!"

"How?"

"By taking me away from England; this very night ought to see us across the Channel."

"You forget yourself."

"Would that I could!"

"People will hate you, despise you."

"They can hardly hate or despise me more than I hate and despise myself!"

"You are ill. My presence only makes you worse; I will leave you. I shall inquire every day from your servants how you are, but I dare not see you again until you are quite recovered;" and he took up his hat and prepared to go.

"And you will leave me thus?" she shrieked in despairing accents. "You abandon me in this my hour of trial?"

"I shall return to you as soon as you have recovered your senses."

And without saying another word he hurried away from her, leaving her alone with the miserable consciousness of having made a fool of herself in vain.

When she saw him leave the room, and heard the door close behind him, she knew that he had passed for ever out of her life, and feeling a sense of supreme desolation coming over her, she threw herself on a sofa, and for several hours lay there as if dead.

Gradually the light of day disappeared; that long summer evening melted into darkness; and as the shades of night were closing over the sky, she felt that clouds of evil and of despair were gathering over her head, and that henceforward darkness alone remained for her, and that only the dreariest paths of life were now left open to her.

At times people are apt to doubt even of the existence of good, because all has become dark and desolate; we wonder whether the light and happiness we remember

was not a mere fantasy of our own imagination; we wonder if we really remember it, or if we only think we do. When it comes to this—ah! and it does sometimes—we are but one step away from hell!

Sibyl was in this condition. Stunned and stupefied, she remained staring at the door through which Alfredo had disappeared, like one in a trance. Yet a mere trifle is at such a crisis enough to restore the brain to its balance; a familiar sound, a homely duty, awakens every nerve and fibre of our nature, and calls us, like Lady Macbeth's fatal bell, to heaven or to hell.

When the footman came in with the lamp, she arose, but she arose a changed woman. Her mind was at last made up; she would hesitate no longer; the future lay before her sunless and cheerless, but she would conquer it. She had not yet decided what course she would take; but on one point she was at last decided, and that was, that she would shrink from nothing to gain her own purpose.

"Ah," she said, pushing her hair from off her brow, "you may climb high if you determine that nothing shall have power to make you giddy or faint-hearted, and now, that I have conquered my love and my feelings, nothing can deter me."

She cast one long glance at the portrait of her first husband, which hung on the wall opposite to her, a glance full of hatred and scorn. "You are cunning and clever, and the other one is even more cunning and more clever, but I shall outwit you both yet," she said.

She then walked to the window and looked upon the deserted Square. "There is a ball to-night at Preston House," she muttered. "I must go—the Belgraves will be there; I must show him how little I allow myself to be moved by his threats. I think the Duchess of North-

land likes me; it is wise to keep on good terms with her; though if the worst were to come, of course she would sympathise with the Marquis more than with me. Ah, if I were Marchioness of Belgrave! If I had married the eldest brother instead of Edwin! Bah! I hate him—I always hated him!—but if I were Marchioness of Belgrave, who would dare to stand against me?—and I might be that yet! . . . I might; stranger things have come to pass. Fortunately that pale-faced wife of his has no children. I sometimes think Providence watches over me, or perhaps some other power, equally powerful, if not so generally invoked. But I have the courage to invoke it—yes! I shall not tremble and waver, like a feeble foolish woman, before my fate. I will be Marchioness of Belgrave, or I will perish in the attempt; but I will never, never again be Mrs. Jobkin!" And her full red lips quivered as she pronounced that hated name.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BY NO FAULT OF THEIR OWN.

(Not by Miss Telfer.)

THAT night's ball at Preston House was a very grand affair indeed. It was given in honour of a Russian Grand-Duke, and the stately staircase and magnificent saloons of that princely mansion were already crowded with people when Lady Edwin made her appearance a few hours later.

Bright entrancing strains of music issued from the ball-room, and it was to this more than gorgeous apartment that she directed her steps.

In the centre of that spacious saloon stood the fair hostess, the graceful and amiable Duchess of Northland, who seemed quite as much in her element doing the honours of her London house, as she had done in her ancestral castle in the Highlands. She stood beside the Princess of Wales, who, with several other members of the Royal family, had honoured the ball with her august presence. Near them were grouped the most distinguished of the guests, and amongst these, standing close to the Royal circle, Sibyl's piercing eyes at once detected Lady Belgrave, attired in a beautiful ball-dress of silver tulle, sparkling all over with precious stones, and looking as lovely as she always did.

She could not take her eyes off her; those wondrous diamonds, which shone upon her neck and brow, seemed to possess an attraction for her that night greater than they had ever done before. Taking up her station behind a large gilt candelabra, which almost concealed her, she was able to remain near the Royal circle for upwards of an hour, watching every movement and every smile of her hated rival, without attracting much notice herself.

"She looks queenly indeed, to-night," she was forced to confess, "I do not think I have ever seen her look so well, yet I am sure she is anything but happy. Her eyes are not so bright as they used to be, her smile is sadder, and her cheeks are pale; she looks around her with an uneasy and anxious expression, as if searching amidst the gay crowd that surrounds her for a sympathetic face. The people near look at her with contemptuous eyes; some gentlemen approach her now and then, and speak to her; but the greater part of these grand ladies look as if they would fain keep aloof from her. I am sure she is very much disliked—she is too beautiful ever to be popular in London Society. Of course, they are obliged to invite her everywhere, and keep well with her, but I am sure the least of these proud dames thinks she is doing her an honour when she condescends to speak to her. I wonder how they would receive *me*, were I in her place? I suppose they would hate and envy me just as much, but I think I could make my way in the world better than she does; at all events they could never accuse *me* of being a *parvenue*! Ah, were I indeed Marchioness of Belgrave, I would soon make them treat me with proper respect."

Several of the people standing near her seemed also very much taken up with the young Marchioness.

"How lovely Lady Belgrave looks to-night!" said one young lady.

"Yes, she is very pretty," replied the gentleman with whom she had evidently just been dancing.

"She must be very happy," continued the young lady.

"They say she is not; but here is your *chaperon*; I must leave you now, as I see Lady Mary Wood is looking daggers at me, for our waltz has just begun."

"By Jove! what a blaze of diamonds!" said another man just behind her. "I thought Lady Belgrave had lost all her jewels."

"Oh no," exclaimed a malicious old lady who stood near him, "only a few—those she did not want, don't you know."

The gentleman laughed. "You are very wicked, Lady Tottenham; but, don't you know, I hear she will soon have to part with the whole lot of them."

"How?"

"Why, don't you know, they say Lord Belgrave is almost ruined."

"Ruined!—Lord Belgrave ruined! I thought he was immensely rich."

"Well, so he was, but he has lost a great deal lately. I always said he would come to ruin; a man who knows nothing about horses should not go in for horse-racing."

"Yet it was one of his horses that won the 'Two Thousand' this year."

"It is not always the horses that win that bring the most money to their owners, and it is not always they who can spell the best that gain the prizes at spelling-bees," the gentleman answered, with a malicious smile.

"Well, I suppose these are secrets of the turf, which a lady had better ignore."

"It is not every woman who would say *that*; there is Lady Bury, for instance, who prides herself on knowing everything that goes on at Newmarket."

"I thought the City was her *forte*."

"Well, the City too; yet I do not think she makes more money by one than she does by the other, in spite of all her deep calculations."

"There are so many sharpers in the world that, somehow or other, one always ends by falling a prey to them," remarked another man, who had been listening to their conversation.

"So Lord Belgrave has gone to the dogs at last!" Sibyl heard another man say, who was talking to a group of men near her.

"Yes; but it was to be expected. I hear his estates are every one of them mortgaged."

"And he was one of the richest men in England!"

"Yes—before he married."

"Why, Erroll, do you mean to hint that it is his wife who has ruined him?"

"I mean only what I say; yet I dare say she has helped him to get through his money, like a good wife."

"She spends fabulous sums every year; and gambles, too, I hear."

"I suppose, having eaten nothing but black bread and onions, and worn only print dresses and imitation-lace mantillas, and never having slept in anything better than a garret in her youth, it is only natural that nothing should be good enough for her now. These sort of women always manage to spend the most money."

"Poor Belgrave!"

"You pity him! I make it a rule never to pity a man when he has once made a fool of himself."

"How will it all end, I wonder?"

"Why, I suppose he will have to break the entail, and sell the estates."

"His brother will never consent."

"He'll be forced to do it—I really don't see what else they can do."

"It is awful to think that our old aristocracy is coming to this."

"One hears of nothing but failures nowadays. Who would ever have thought, a few years ago, that the Marquis of Belgrave would have been a ruined man. I wonder if all our grand old English families will come to this. There is Lord Twickenham, too, I am told he has quite gone to the bow-wows."

"As for Charlie Twickenham, he has always been in the hands of the Jews; but, fortunately, his mother is rich enough, and she is not a woman to go and throw away her money."

"How funny it was of her to let her London house last season."

"Why, I suppose as Mr. Fetherstone is no longer in office, and has no more daughters to marry, she considered a town house a useless expense; besides, she has her villa at Twickenham—that is almost a town house."

"I saw Charlie Twickenham at Green's last night. Poor fellow! he looks twenty years older than he did last season."

"Fortunately for him, he has at least got rid of his wife."

"She has gone over to Rome, has she not, and entered a convent?"

"Something of that sort, I believe. We seem to have lost sight of her altogether."

"Well, *she* is not much of a loss, but I am sure we shall miss Lady Belgrave, when she in her turn disappears—she is as good as a chandelier in a ball-room!"

"I rather like her; she amuses me, don't you know; she says such funny things at times. I shall certainly miss her when she goes, and the parties at Beauville House are quite a godsend nowadays."

"And these are the men who call themselves their best friends!" Sibyl thought, as she heard these different snatches of conversation. "Ah, there is no real friendship, no real love in the world—even Alfredo seems to be no better than the rest." As she said this to herself, her eyes again wandered in the direction of Consuelo. "I wonder what she would do," she thought, "she, whom *he* still considers perfection—I wonder what she would do if she were in my position. Would she quit the arms of a lover to fly back again to those of a hated husband, whom she had long thought dead? Ah, no! not if that husband were Mr. Jobkin! Even she—though she may be perfection itself, as Alfredo says she is—even she could not do *that*."

Looking in another direction, she saw her husband standing at the other end of the ball-room talking to a group of ladies.

"Ah, Edwin, Edwin!" she exclaimed. "Why did heaven make you so fascinating? I wish I had never married you, for I am convinced now that what I felt for you could never have been love; and he is talking to Juliet Standish, but I am not jealous now—I wish I had never been jealous. She is just the sort of woman he should have married—a gentle sweet maiden, all smiles and blushes, who would have considered his graceful manners and pretty face the supreme ideal of manly

perfection till the end of her days. I was a fool to think that *he* could ever be all in all to a woman like me!"

Sibyl was not mistaken; Lord Edwin was talking to Lady Juliet Standish.

He had been dining that evening at his club with some friends of his, and had remained there playing loo until it was time to come to Preston House, so that he had not seen his wife the whole of the evening, which did not trouble him much, for Sibyl was too exacting and wilful a wife to render much of her society agreeable in a general way.

He still thought Sibyl the handsomest woman he knew, but the want of that yielding softness which is after all a woman's greatest and most lasting charm caused him oftener than was good for his happiness to regret having married her. Men like Lord Edwin love most what they can protect, and the haughty beauty who humbles while she conquers little guesses how a man's rude heart warms to the gentler suppliant who clings to him and trusts in him, and looks up to him for protection. Perhaps this was the reason why, in spite of her wondrous charms, stately figure, and natural talents to please, she had received less admiration and fewer attentions while a young lady than she had thought were her due. Edwin had been fascinated by her beauty, and his heart had been warmed towards her by the love which he believed she entertained for him; the many difficulties which had stood in the way of their happiness, and which had severed them for so long, had only increased his desire to possess her; and after her first husband's death he had renewed his suit, and married her. Yet Sibyl was a woman—as his brother, wiser than himself, had rightly described her—whom no one could help admiring,

yet whom it would be very difficult to love; and Edwin had discovered shortly after his marriage that what he felt for her was not really true love. But it was too late now—the die was cast, and whether he liked it or not he was henceforward forced to put up with her.

Instinctively, and almost in spite of himself, he now often sought Juliet's society; and every moment he passed near her made him regret more and more that he had not married her instead of Sibyl. Yet he knew how dangerous these meetings were, both for his happiness and hers, and he had often made up his mind to shun her society for the future; but this was easier said than done. That very night at Preston House, where he was sure she would be, he had decided not to go near her; yet no sooner had he entered the ball-room than his eyes caught sight of her graceful little figure, and, forgetting all his good intentions, he found himself a moment afterwards sitting next to her.

They were not alone, however; her mother, Lady Cowes, was with her, and the lovely Idalia, now the Princess Paloma, who had been dancing with young Hopestone, and with whom Juliet had lately established a great intimacy, had come to sit by her.

The conversation was, of course, general, yet Edwin felt that every word that the sweet girl uttered, every look that she cast around her, every smile that appeared on her pretty dimpled mouth, was meant for him, and for him alone.

Juliet had quite recovered now from her late illness, and the short hair which alone remained as a trace of it seemed only to render her more interesting.

Everything that art could do to render her beautiful had been accomplished by that wonderful Worth. Her

ball-dress of ivory-coloured faille, so gracefully draped about her, with its rich chenille embroidery in brown, and the handsome wreath of variegated china asters which twined round her little waist and fell over her ample train, mingling with its many folds, was simply perfection. And as Edwin sat beside her, the folds of her skirt falling over his knees, he could not help thinking how very lovely she looked, and he longed to clasp her then and there to his heart.

At the moment we approach them it was the handsome Italian Princess who was speaking. "So, according to you, Mr. Hopestone, Lady San-Martin and Sir Reginald are at last going to be divorced?"

"Oh dear me no," that young man answered, while Lord Edwin leant back upon the ottoman and closed his eyes and smiled, as was his custom when he felt supremely happy. "Oh dear me no, Princess; I do not believe that for a moment."

"Has anything happened lately to poor dear Lady San-Martin then?" said the Countess, taking part for the first time in the conversation.

"Why, Lady Cowes, you do not mean to say that you have not heard our latest scandal? I thought it had already gone the round of London."

"About Lady San-Martin? No, I have heard nothing about her except what she says herself—but then I never seem to hear anything. Why, I only learnt about Lady Constance Hopeless's sad affair two days ago, when people seemed to have known all about it for months; but do tell me, Princess, what you have heard about my poor friend Lady San-Martin."

"I suppose you know that her husband has been living for several years past with that horrible woman, Lady Audley, whose husband died the other day."

"Oh yes, I know that; the poor creature takes very good care to inform every one of the fact. She actually told me the whole story the first time I met her."

"Very likely," the Princess answered laughing; "and the funniest part is that she will insist that Sir Reginald only admires Lady Audley because she happens to be so much like herself! But you must hear what took place the other day. Mr. Hopestone, here, who seems to know all the particulars by heart, will tell you."

Mr. Hopestone, who of course was dying to tell his highly-improved version of the story, cast a look of thanks upon the charming Idalia, and tried hard to look as modest as possible. "Well, you see," he began, "I had it from my uncle, Sir Ronald—Sir Ronald Forsinard, don't you know. I think you know him, Princess—yes; did I not have the pleasure of meeting you once at his castle at Broila?"

Edwin shuddered as he heard that name, which brought back to his mind events which he would fain have forgotten.

"That funny place, all towers and minarets painted red and yellow, with gilt cannons at the top!" Idalia exclaimed laughing. "Oh yes, I remember him quite well now; we went over to his castle one day with the Northlands."

"Well," Mr. Hopestone proceeded, "I had the story from my uncle, who had it from a friend who happened to be coming out of a morning performance at the Hay-market at the time, and saw the whole thing."

"Oh—do tell us what happened, I am all curiosity to hear it," said Lady Cowes, coming close to them.

"Well, it seems that Lady San-Martin—'poor dear Lady San-Martin,' as you call her, Countess—had gone to

the Co-operative Stores at the Haymarket, to make some purchases."

"Oh, we don't want to know what she bought there!" exclaimed the Princess, "but go on—to the point, to the point, if you please."

"You are very impatient, Princess, and won't let a fellow tell a story in his own way."

"You see, I have unfortunately heard it so often already; but, never mind, I am sure we can all trust you to make the best of it in the shortest possible time, Mr. Hopstone."

"Well, it seems that coming out of the Stores, Lady San-Martin met Lady Audley, who was stepping out of her carriage—Sir Reginald's carriage, of course. Lady San-Martin could not contain herself when she saw this, but flew into a rage, and after abusing her like a pick-pocket, pulled off her bonnet, and trampled upon it."

"Goodness gracious! And what did Lady Audley do?"

"What could she do? She screamed and shrieked, and, when the men rushed out of the shop to separate them, cried to them to take the little vixen away, which only made Lady San-Martin more furious."

"And your friend saw all this?"

"Oh yes; every one in the place saw it, for the people were coming out of a morning performance at the theatre next door, and a crowd was instantly collected around them."

"I wish I had seen them! Why, it must have been as good as the quarrel-scene in 'Madame Angot'!"

"And how did it all end?" asked Lady Cowes, who, as Mr. Hopstone remarked, hardly seemed to give much credence to the story.

"Lady Audley was furious ; she said that she could not put up with such an insult. And so was Sir Reginald, who sent his lawyer the next day to his wife, asking her to write a formal retraction of the rude words she had used to Lady Audley, and begging her Ladyship to excuse her hasty and scandalous conduct."

"And did Lady San-Martin send the apology?"

"Of course, she was obliged to, for her cruel husband actually threatened to withdraw the yearly allowance he makes her if she refused to do it."

"Poor woman ! She certainly was in the wrong that time, but her behaviour, unladylike as it was, according to your account, was most excusable. I wonder she does not divorce him."

"I assure you, Lady Cowes, that the whole thing happened just as I have told you. But, believe me, Lady San-Martin is too wise a woman to divorce her husband and become once more plain Miss Smith, and be obliged to go out again as governess to earn her livelihood, as she did before she married him. She'll put up with anything, I'll warrant, rather than do that."

"And she sent an apology?"

"Yes, and in it she stated that as she was coming out of the Co-operative Stores her parasol caught accidentally in Lady Audley's bonnet and pulled it off, and that in the excitement of the moment she feared she had been rather rude to that Lady, whom she now begged would forgive her."

The Princess and Lady Cowes laughed a good deal. "And so, after all, they won't be divorced!" said the former still laughing.

"No, but we cannot complain, for there are seven divorces coming on just now, any one of which, I am sure, will afford us enough talk for a whole season."

This was said by Mr. Percy Ferrers, who had lately joined the party, and had heard Mr. Hopestone's last words.

"Seven divorces!" exclaimed Lady Cowes. "Heavens! I wonder what we are coming to! And pray, Mr. Ferrers, who are they?"

"Why, don't you know? There is, first of all, Mrs. Aubreyot?"

"Which? Lady Hawkwood's sister?"

"Yes."

"Well, as for her, I am not surprised; she won't be the first of the family!" the Princess said archly.

"Strange that these sort of things should so run in families!" Lady Cowes remarked.

"Not always; there is Lady Hastonrook; I am sure no one ever said anything against her family."

"Lady Hastonrook! You do not mean to say that she is going to be divorced; a woman of nearly fifty!"

"Yes, it seems that after having lived for upwards of twenty years with her husband without having any children, Lord Hastonrook left her about ten months ago for India, when to his surprise she presents him with a little child a month after his return."

"You don't say so!"

"Lord Hastonrook is going to divorce her, of course; but there are people who say that had the child been a boy instead of a girl he would not have been quite so hasty."

"And pray who else is going to be divorced?"

"Lady Montford, don't you know."

"I might have guessed *that*," the Princess said; "her conduct has been the talk of London for the last six months."

"It seems that it is Lady Strongford who asks for the divorce. The Duke, her father, says he cannot put up with his son-in-law's behaviour any longer."

"If I were her I should become Duchess of Bonborough first. I am sure Lord Strongford's father won't be long in dying."

"I think it is Lady Montford who has the greatest chance of being the Duchess now."

"I don't know *that*."

"Surely he will marry her if his wife obtains the divorce, for Lord Montford could hardly help divorcing her when the whole story is once made public."

"It can hardly be more public than it is already!"

"Anyhow, I won't back Lady Montford for the ducal coronet until the two divorces are pronounced."

"But these are only four divorces, Mr. Ferrers," Lady Cowes said; "you told us there were six."

"Oh, I can easily guess the others," Mr. Hopestone broke in. "I bet you anything that Lady Camworth is one and Mrs. Manvers Slade the other."

"Yes, you are right, Hopestone; but which is the seventh?" I am sure even you cannot know that yet."

"Mrs. Manvers Slade!" Lady Cowes repeated, half-aloud. "A woman with grown-up daughters!"

"It sounds strange; yet you know the Italian proverb, Lady Cowes, 'the older the woman, the greater the sinner,' the Princess, who heard her, remarked in an undertone.

"And which is the seventh?"

"Ah yes! *which* is the seventh? Is it any one we know?"

"Try and guess, Princess."

"Oh, I cannot. My head is quite bewildered already."

"What would you say of a certain charming young lady at whose marriage we were all present about the end of last season?"

"Lady Mouche! Impossible!"

"And why?"

"You do not mean to tell us that she is going to be divorced?"

"The sweet Miss Foster, Lady Subford's daughter? I am sure *that* cannot be true."

"Yet so it is. I had it from very reliable authority. It seems that Lady Mouche left her husband three days ago, and is now living at her father's house."

"I wonder if she intends imitating Lady Twickenham and turning Sister of Charity?"

"But did she run away with any one?"

"I do not know all the particulars yet, but the general impression is that her husband will sue for a divorce. Whether he will be able to obtain it is, however, quite another thing."

"Well, it is to be hoped he will, horrible as it sounds," said Lady Cowes rising; "for if they find they cannot possibly live together any longer, and are to be separated for life, like the Twickenhams, the San-Martins, and so many others, it is far better that each should be allowed to marry again. If not, there will soon be an end to the Mouche peerage . . . and to every other peerage, too, if people do not mend their morals."

"It seems impossible that such a state of things should exist in a civilized country like England, and precisely amongst the people who, by their position and education, should give the example of morality and good behaviour."

"The great mistake, Princess, is that in England people marry in too great a hurry. We English are always in a hurry. We see a girl that pleases our fancy, her family and her dowry are good, and so we marry her, without even attempting to learn if our characters will suit, or if our tastes will agree. It is, then, hardly to be wondered at that before a year is over we are wanting a divorce, or agreeing to live separate."

"I never thought of that, Mr. Ferrers," said the Princess rising, "but now I think of it, I am convinced you are right. I have no doubt *that* is the reason why so many marriages in England turn out so unhappily." Then looking towards Lord Edwin, who, although he had not taken any part in the conversation, had not lost a single word of it, and was now pondering on the sad truth of Mr. Ferrers' last words, she added sarcastically, "At all events, I am glad now I did not choose an English husband, as I was once very near doing. Marriage in this country is a lottery with too many blanks."

Lord Edwin felt himself blushing in spite of his usual self-possession, and he was not sorry when the Princess took Mr. Hopstone's arm and joined the dancers.

When she had gone he turned to Lady Juliet, who, like himself, had remained silent all this time, perhaps occupied with similar thoughts to those which had troubled him during the foregoing conversation, and, trying his best to look composed, asked her to dance.

The young lady smiled and rose, and they, too, were soon afterwards lost amidst the crowd that now filled the immense ball-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EARL'S DAUGHTER.

(*Not by the Rev. W. Sewell.*)

"I AM going to ask you a riddle," said Lady Juliet to Edwin, the first time they stopped dancing. "Do you know why a man who believes all he hears is as bad as one who makes additions to false rumours?"

"No, why? Forgive me, but I am very stupid in guessing riddles."

"Because he *relies* on all that is told him."

Lord Edwin laughed. "You are right. I do not believe a word of the stories we have just heard. I hate scandal!"

"Do you really!—why, I thought you loved nothing better—and pray since when do you dislike talking scandal?"

Edwin looked at her, and after a pause he whispered in her ear: "Since I have learnt to appreciate what is true and noble—since I have known *you*."

Lady Juliet blushed. "Don't you think we ought to go on dancing again," she said in some confusion. "I fear this waltz is coming to an end."

Lord Edwin took the hint and spoke no more about himself that night.

As I have said before, Lady Juliet Standish had never looked so lovely in his eyes as she did that evening.

Hers was a face less beautiful in feature than in expression; strictly speaking, she could hardly have been called pretty, yet she possessed that wistful haunting look of innocence and sweetness which, if a man once stops to admire, he can never forget to his dying day. She was rather short, but slight and beautifully proportioned, and all her movements were graceful and becoming. Her hair, which she still wore short, and in which that night she had fastened a wreath of variegated china asters, like those that adorned her dress, was fair, and so was her complexion. Yet such was her natural grace, and so sweet the expression of her face, that even had she been old, ugly, and deformed, Lady Juliet Standish must still have been lovable.

A gentler disposition or a kinder heart than hers never beat beneath a cuirasse bodice. Utterly unselfish, she was ever ready to sacrifice her own will, her own amusements, her own advantages, to the slightest wish of others. Wherever she heard of a sorrow, however trivial the cause might have been, she was always there to soothe and cheer the sufferers. The poor people on her father's estates loved the very ground she trod on; and although, being the beauty of the family, from her childhood every one had tried his best to spoil her, yet she seemed to be the only person who was insensible to her own attractions.

Gentle, yielding, trusting, and enthusiastic, she seemed as if she were a virgin ready prepared and dressed in her holy vestments of purity for the sacrifice. Need I say that the first victim she offered up to the cruel and heartless goddess she served, was her own heart?

She had fallen in love with Edwin at the very first ball she had been taken to after her presentation, and ever since then the thought had not once entered her head that another man might perhaps be able to fill up equally well the void he had left in her heart.

She had been out several years now, and had been courted, fêted, and run after, as much as any other young lady in London, yet she had ever remained faithful to her first impressions. She did not mind going to balls and parties, because she knew it pleased her mother and sister Maude, whom she dearly loved, to see her at such entertainments, and tried her best to look happy and gay; yet she felt no real pleasure in Society, and as soon as any one attempted to flirt with her she grew distant and serious with him, and soon let him see that she was not a girl like the common run of new-dress and flirtation-loving young-ladyhood of Mayfair.

During the last two years she had had several offers, some of them exceedingly acceptable, as her mother had tried hard to make her believe; for, though she was by no means either an heiress or a beauty, her sweet gentle ways drew all hearts towards her, and there was not a young man in that great husband-hunting preserve called Mayfair who would not have thought himself a happy man had he won Juliet for a wife.

But, sleeping or waking, there was but one man for her in the world. Her love for Edwin was not an attachment, as we generally understand the term; not even a passion, or an infatuation. It was that utter and entire devotion, totally irrespective of self, which it seems sacrilege to offer to a fellow-mortal, who is unworthy of it, but which Heaven cannot but forgive in consideration of the punishment that generally accompanies it—a punishment more than adequate to the offence.

It had been Edwin's misfortune, as well as hers, that he had not seen more of her during that first season which had sealed his fate. "The Earl's Daughter," as he called her, was a girl whom one required to know well in order to appreciate at her true value; and during the hurry and bustle of a London season, when a man only meets a young lady at rare intervals, and even then can only talk to her for a few minutes at a time, it would have been indeed strange had Edwin actually fallen in love with her.

The superb Sibyl, on the contrary, was a woman whose striking charms could not but attract at first sight; and in her love of conquest she blazoned forth and made the most of those advantages which nature had so bountifully bestowed upon her, with all the tact of a practical and finished coquette. Edwin could not help being greatly struck by her, and it is not to be wondered at that he should have preferred her to the innocent and retiring young girl, who actually seemed to be half-ignorant and wholly careless of those advantages which women most prize and cherish. And yet Edwin knew, or rather felt, that this sweet and lovable girl was not quite indifferent to himself and his advantages of person and character; for men, though scarcely so quick-sighted in such matters as women, have also an intuitive perception that they are beloved. In either sex this consciousness produces a kindly feeling towards the loving, if unloved, person, and it seems hard to deny a few gentle words and a few loving looks, where so much is ungrudgingly given. Edwin had thus often indulged in flirtations with Juliet, more perhaps with the desire to please her than to amuse himself. Mistaken compassion! These flirtations, which were not love—which could not have been love—for we

never think of flirting with those whom we really do love—had only increased Juliet's affection for him, and caused her to indulge in hopes which otherwise she would never have entertained.

What the fatal result of all this was, my readers already know. Edwin, blinded by Sibyl's wondrous fascination, which like that of the serpent was only employed to lure men on to destruction, had become every day less and less sensible to Juliet's love, and had ended by marrying this woman when, as a rich and beautiful widow, she again crossed his path; and the gentle Juliet, who had grown every day to love him more and more, had been prostrated by that long and distressing illness, from which only the tender care and loving caresses of a devoted mother and affectionate sister had at last succeeded in saving her.

But things were very much altered now. Juliet had grown older and wiser. Her first disappointment had greatly changed her character; she had now been through that stern school which, after all, turns out the most finished pupils; and she possessed, moreover, unlike that other love-blinded girl, Geraldine Fetherstone, the rare quality of seeing things as they were, and not as she wished them to be; so to all outward appearances Juliet was now a young lady of the world, as self-collected and light-hearted as any other, and only differing from the generality in her own peculiarity of beauty, which time seemed but to have increased, and in her gentle and sweet disposition, which no trials, however hard, could ever change.

Edwin, too, was no longer the highly impressionable, enthusiastic boy he was in former days. The great disappointment he had experienced in his marriage had also

greatly changed his character, and he could now view persons and things in their true light, and not, as before, through the rose-coloured magnifying glass of inexperienced youth, and could judge of them with all the calmness and coolness of a man of the world.

It was now, and perhaps only now, that he learnt to appreciate the many good qualities of the girl who had once so loved him, and to miss them in the woman he had married. But, unfortunately, it was too late; he was married to Sibyl now, and he tried hard to convince himself, though it was very hard to realize it, that Juliet could be nothing to him henceforward.

When their dance was ended, and Strauss's melodious strains had ceased resounding through the stately saloons of Preston House, he offered her his arm and led her back to the sofa, where her mother was still sitting.

"I was at a party at the Dowager Lady Cowes's this afternoon," he said, *à faute de mieux*, as he was making his way through the crowded ball-room, her small hand resting on his arm; "I thought I should have met you there."

"You mean Frances, Countess of Cowes. No, I do not know her; although, by-the-bye, she happens to be my godmother."

"Indeed, how is that?"

"Well, you see," she said unaffectedly, "she thinks us little better than a set of usurpers. Her son, you know, was the Earl, and it was only through his dying accidentally that papa came to the title. We were only distant relatives of theirs, and at the time very poor, and consequently she rather despised us. Poor woman, it must have been a hard blow for her to lose her only son!"

"Indeed, yes; but it was not your fault—and you pity her?"

"Certainly, with all my heart."

"You have a very good heart then."

"Oh no! But, do you know, at times I almost regret that her son died. He was a fine noble-minded young man."

"But, had he lived, your father would never have been an Earl, and you would have held a very different position in Society."

"I should not have minded that, I assure you. I was much happier when we were poor and unknown."

"You dislike Society, then?"

"No; but I fear it is very difficult to be happy in it; while out of it the smallest amusement becomes a great pleasure."

"Perhaps you are right. I also begin to hate Society."

"You!"

"Yes; you may not believe it, and yet at times I feel that our characters are not so very different as you may perhaps imagine."

Juliet looked at him, and a dark shade passed over her face.

"I wish I were a thousand miles away from London at this very moment," he said.

Juliet tried to smile, and, lowering her eyes, said archly, "And would you regret nobody that you would leave behind?"

"Yes; I should regret you, Juliet."

"Oh fie! you know I dislike vain compliments; but here is my mother. Good-bye, Lord Edwin, I am afraid we must go now. Maude, you know, is at home waiting for us. She had a headache and would not come, but she insisted on sitting up for us, as she always likes to hear how I have enjoyed myself."

"And what will you tell her?"

"That this has been a charming ball, and that she has lost a great deal in not coming in spite of her headache."

"And so you have enjoyed yourself?"

"Very much."

Edwin remained silent for a few seconds, and seemed lost in deep thought; at last he said, in a trembling voice—

"When shall I see you again? I should so like to have a quiet talk with you. Do you think I shall find you at home to-morrow after luncheon?"

Juliet looked very much confused. "Perhaps," she answered, looking another way; "at all events, mamma will be at home, and she is always glad to see you."

She then joined her mother, and they soon afterwards left the house.

After Juliet's departure, the ball seemed to have lost all its attractions for Edwin, so descending the great staircase he also prepared to leave. In the lobby he met his wife, who was coming from the supper-room, and who now joined him.

"So you are going, Edwin?" she said, in a low weary voice.

"Yes, I am tired," he answered laconically.

"I think I shall go too, then. Will you call the carriage, please?"

Edwin raised his shoulders and went out into the hall to call the carriage. As Sibyl stood in the cloak-room waiting for her shawl, Consuelo came in leaning on her husband's arm, when he also went to look for hers.

She approached her civilly enough, and shook hands with her, but she did not kiss her, as she had been accustomed to do. Sibyl noticed this change, and the

blood immediately flew to her face. "She is thinking of Jobkin!" she muttered to herself, and she was right. Consuelo *was* thinking of her cousin at that moment, and wondering how any one could be so wicked as Sibyl; for her husband had told her what had passed in his interview with her that morning—no wonder, therefore, that she should be cold and distant to her.

"How I hate this woman!" Sibyl exclaimed to herself, when Consuelo had gone. "She seems to look down upon me from the supreme height of virtue she has chosen to occupy. Ah, but you are as wicked as I am in your heart, my lady, though you have not the courage I have to confess my love for Alfredo, and brave Society and all its conventional rules for his sake, as I have done! I wonder how I should look in your diamonds?" she continued, a new train of thoughts taking possession of her excited mind. "They would become me better than they do you, and I at least was born to wear diamonds."

At that moment her husband came into the room to inform her that their carriage was at the door, and taking his arm she crossed the hall and got into it.

Seeing that Edwin had apparently no intention of accompanying her, she turned round and said to him, "Won't you come with me?"

"No, I am going to Green's, and my brougham is at the door waiting for me."

"I will take you to your club, then. Send away your brougham and come into my carriage, for I want to speak to you."

Edwin looked rather amazed, but he now knew by experience that his wife would have her own way, so he sent away his brougham and stepped into the carriage

with her. When they had started, Sibyl turned round and said reproachfully, "When will you get tired of that club of yours? You are always there! I suppose you are going to play cards again?"

"I shall do whatever pleases me. You have your own way in everything; I don't see why I should not also do as I please sometimes."

"You forget that you are a married man, now."

"Oh dear me, no; for you take every available opportunity to remind me of that fact."

"Sad fact, you were going to say."

"Pray was it for this that you offered to take me in your carriage?"

"No; I wanted to ask you about your brother—I have heard strange things of him lately; is it true that he is nearly ruined?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say it is true; but pray don't you go and tell this to all your *friends*. I tell you the truth, because, being of the family, you must know it sooner or later; but the world must never learn that the Marquis of Belgrave is a bankrupt!"

"And how has this happened?"

"How do such things generally happen? I can't tell you, I am sure—bad management, a rascally factor, horses, racing, betting, cards. I am sure I do not know myself."

"I suppose his wife has helped him?"

"No; you must not say a word against my sister-in-law—she has behaved very well throughout this sad affair."

"And is it true that your brother is going to break the entail?"

"Yes."

"And you give your consent?"

"Of course. How can I help it? It seems it is utterly impossible to raise any more money upon the property, as it stands now, and his debts must be paid."

Sibyl remained silent for some time. "And if your brother were to die," she said, after a long pause, "would you be compelled to pay his debts?"

"I do not know, I am sure; perhaps not by law, yet I should certainly consider myself morally bound to pay them, if it were only for the sake of the honour of our family. But why should you speak of such a calamity? Bel is not going to die; and Consuelo may yet have lots of children. I am sure I am the last man to wish for poor Bel's death—he has always been so good and kind to me! Here we are—good night, Sibyl; I shall see you to-morrow some time; are you going to the ball at the London's?"

"No; I am going to pass the day with papa at Raspberry Dale, and perhaps I shall sleep there."

"By-the-bye, I have heard very funny things of your step-brother Twickenham, lately; he is leading a very rum sort of life."

"Poor fellow! I fear he is very ill; he won't live long."

"Not if he continues as he is going on at present. What news of your sister?"

"Oh, she is very well, and as busy as ever—visiting the hospitals and attending to the poor; she says she has never been so happy in her life."

"Strange taste! Well, good-bye, Sibyl—nice ball that at Preston House—Consuelo looked lovely, did she not?"

"Yes, very pretty, she always does! Good-bye."

Lord Edwin had alighted and was entering his club when his wife re-called him.

"It is only to make you laugh," she said; "for side by side with the serious things of life we are ever meeting with the ridiculous; and so I want to tell you of dear old Totty's last. I remembered when I saw her to-night that I had not attended her party, and offered her my regrets; at which she put up her gold eye-glass, and drawled, 'Ah yes, it is true; I remember now I see you that you did not come; I invited you when Mrs. Smith wrote word that she had a previous engagement, because I could think of no one else.'"

"Ah! ah! ah! ah!" laughed Lord Edwin as the carriage drove off and he turned to enter his club; and thus they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XXV.

MISUNDERSTOOD.

(Not by Miss Montgomery.)

THE Countess of Cowes lived in an old house near the Thames, which had been the town residence of the family for many generations. Once this fine old mansion had been in the centre of London, but now Fashion, in its westward march, had left it far behind, and shops and business houses alone surrounded it. It stood, however, in a quiet little court off one of the principal thoroughfares, so that although in the centre of the busiest part of the town, it was quiet and secluded enough; and its little garden at the back more than compensated for the brighter neighbourhood of the parks.

When Lord Edwin Beauville called there the next day the family had just finished lunch, and he found the Countess and her daughters sitting in the library downstairs, a large pleasant room with oriel windows which looked upon the garden.

Lady Cowes was very pleased to see him, for although he had often left his cards, this was actually the first time this season that he had called to pay her a regular visit; but Juliet, though perhaps not so much surprised as her mother, seemed hardly as pleased, and he saw at

once that his presence there rendered her more than confused.

For a quarter of an hour conversation flowed on in the ordinary channels of stereotyped conventionalities; but seeing that Lady Cowes showed no intention of quitting the room and leaving him alone with Juliet, he began to feel uneasy, and at last, turning the conversation upon flowers, expressed a desire to see the garden, hoping by this means to be able to have a few minutes' talk alone with the young lady. His *ruse* succeeded capitally, for Lady Cowes, who was exceedingly proud of her garden, at once begged Juliet to show Lord Edwin through it, and opening the window herself, told them to take a stroll while she and Maude went upstairs to put on their bonnets, for the carriage was at the door, and she feared they would have to go out very soon, as they had an appointment at the other end of the town.

Juliet dared not decline, yet Edwin saw how confused and ill-at-ease she felt as she stepped out of the window with him.

Seeing there was no time to be lost, he at once directed his steps towards that portion of the little garden which seemed to him the most secluded, and as soon as he found himself concealed from the house by the shrubs, which grew in great profusion about this spot, he turned round to Juliet, and in an earnest and clear voice said to her: "It was to see *you* that I called this morning. I told you last night that I wanted to have a few minutes' private conversation with *you*."

Juliet felt herself blushing deeply, and her confusion visibly increased. "Lord Edwin," she said, "I cannot imagine what you can have to tell *me* that all the world might not hear."

He then said, "Would to God, Juliet, that I could say before every one what I am going to tell you now."

"And what is that?"

"Ah, Juliet, can you not guess it? I love you!" and as he said this he took her little hand in his own, and pressed it tenderly, while he looked up at her with eyes full of tears.

Juliet's bosom heaved, and her colour came and went. She immediately withdrew her hand from his, and drew herself up to the full height of her little figure.

"Lord Edwin," she said, "how dare you tell me this? and pray who has given you a right to address me by my Christian name?"

Edwin grew instantly grave, and all the colour left his face; but his fine open countenance remained unmoved, for it was a peculiarity of his family, and one that we have also observed in Lord Belgrave, that under strong excitement their exterior became unusually cold and composed. "It is true," he muttered bitterly, "I have no right now even to pronounce your name!"

Juliet looked at him, and her soft blue eyes filled at once with tears.

"Ah, but I love you all the same!" he added; "I cannot help it. I love you, Juliet, and I must confess to you what I feel."

Juliet dried her tears at once, and in a firm voice said, "You forget, Lord Edwin, that you are no longer free to bestow your affections on whom you please; you belong to another now—you are a married man."

"You are right, Lady Juliet," he said, speaking very slowly, and with great earnestness. "Do not think I have forgotten that sad fact even for one moment—I am quite aware that I am no longer free to bestow my hand

on whom I best love, though my heart will in spite of myself persist in that love. I came here to-day to say "farewell" to you for ever. I have made up my mind to leave to-morrow morning for America, for I know that it will be better for both of us if we never meet again, at least," he added dreamily, "not in this world—but I could not part from you without an explanation, for, Juliet, it is long since I first loved you."

At that moment he wished for no greater joy than to lay down life and soul at her feet. Yet he was a good man with all his faults, and he dared not say more, for, unlike his wretched wife, he knew that such love as a married man can offer to a woman who is not his wife can only be a sinful love. Juliet also felt this, yet at that moment she could have listened to him for ever, for his words fell like healing balm on her love-sick heart, and she loved to hear his soft loving accents and drink of life in the tones of his rich manly voice. For years she had been living in a morbid state of excitement. She had loved him as only such gentle unselfish natures as hers can love; and, thrown continually of late in the society of the man she loved, and that man so highly gifted with the brilliant, noble qualities which women most admire—handsome as few are, and possessing besides many soft winning peculiarities of his own—never aware of his preference, never quite sure of his sentiments towards her, yet suspecting his admiration from a thousand trifles that she naturally interpreted in her own favour; it was no wonder that this poor girl should have hailed as a blissful relief the certainty which had burst upon her for the first time to-day, even though it was accompanied by the miserable conviction that love between them was now impossible, and that, at the very

moment of gaining the one long-cherished desire of her life, she must perforce bid him a long and a lasting farewell.

Ah! if they had but known at that moment that his marriage with Sibyl was no marriage at all, and that at that very hour her real husband was taking the necessary steps to regain his lost wife, how happy they might have been! But both Edwin and Juliet were ignorant of this, and consequently both perceived the urgent necessity of pronouncing that sword-like word "farewell" which almost rent their hearts.

Juliet felt as if it were all a dream—a dream at once too sweet and too bitter to be a reality, and, leaning her fair head against one of the trees, wept tears of joy and misery.

"Ah, Juliet, Juliet!" Edwin cried, when he beheld her; "do not weep thus, or you will unman me—for pity's sake do not weep!"

Juliet raised her head, and fixing her soft gentle eyes upon him, which were at once all ablaze with fire, and yet all dimmed with tears, muttered aloud, "And you have long loved me?"

"Yes, Juliet dearest," he replied, laying fond stress on her name; "I have loved you almost since I first saw you—though then I hardly knew that what I felt for you was love, for I was too young, too inexperienced, to analyze my feelings. Do you remember our conversation at Lady Windermere's a few years ago?"

"Oh yes; and you loved me then?"

"Yes; but I was not sure of you at that time—I thought you despised—hated me perhaps, and I dared not speak my mind plainly for fear of incurring your displeasure."

"My displeasure! Oh, Lord Edwin! Lord Edwin! we have both greatly misunderstood each other."

"You loved me then?" he asked, with a trembling voice, for he dared not inquire if she loved him *now*.

"What does it matter now?" she answered, with a sigh. "It is too late—too late!" And again she burst into tears.

He again endeavoured to take her hand, but this time she divined his intention and drew it away.

"Do you remember those words of Schiller's play which you repeated to me that night? I shall never forget them:—'Farewell, and, if you can, live happy! You have dared to aspire to the hand of two Queens; you have despised a tender and loving heart; you have betrayed it to gain a heart proud and haughty! Go, fall at her feet, and may your recompense not turn into a punishment!' How true their sad moral has proved for me! I aspired to the hand of two women—and I despised the tender and loving heart to gain a proud and haughty beauty who loved me not—whom I but too soon discovered I did not love!"

Silence reigned for some time between them; it was Edwin who at last broke it. "Enough of this!" he said in a hollow voice; "Juliet, farewell! farewell for ever! Try and forget me—ah! as I have tried to forget you, though in vain; but remember that perhaps some day . . . in a nobler, truer, more consistent world than this, we two shall meet and be able to love each other for evermore!"

He cast one long, long glance of passionate devotion upon her; she felt it penetrate to her very heart, and hid her face in her hands as she fell half-unconscious upon one of the rustic benches that adorned the garden.

When she again opened her eyes Edwin had gone, and she felt more sad and lonely than she had ever before felt in her life.

That night Lord Edwin Beauville left suddenly for Liverpool on his way to America, to the great surprise of every one; and shortly after Lady Cowes and her daughters returned to their country-house in the Isle of Wight.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHARMING FELLOW.

(Not by Mrs. Trollope.)

THE day after the great ball at Preston House, of which I have spoken a few chapters back, Consuelo was sitting in her boudoir, musing over the strange events which had lately taken place, when Lord Twickenham was announced.

Since her arrival in London she had seen a great deal of Charlie, for now that Lord Belgrave was convinced that the suspicions he had once entertained concerning him were entirely unfounded, and that his wife had never felt anything more than a mere passing friendship for him, all his old liking returned, and he once more considered him "a charming fellow," whom he was only too happy to receive in his house.

Consuelo did not care for him more than she cared for any of the other young men who frequented Beauville House, but his visits were always welcome to her, for his light and gay conversation often caused her to forget for the time being her own secret sorrow; and she was glad to be able to banish, if only for a few minutes, the sad thoughts that so greatly troubled her mind. Their friendship had thus gradually grown into an intimacy,

and almost unconsciously she had encouraged in him strong feelings which from the first her great beauty had awakened in his heart.

Since his final separation from his wife, Charlie had thought of nothing but Consuelo, Stella having become almost hateful to him, for he could not think of her without thinking of Juan, the man he had once believed his best friend, and whom he at last saw in his true colours. He loved Consuelo as he had never loved before, and for him, the spoiled child of fortune, to love was to conquer, for never before had he experienced any check to his passions, nor did he believe such a thing possible. Consuelo's conduct, too, seemed to encourage his wild desires, and, being a man without principle, there seemed nothing very wicked in this love for his friend's wife. His own wife had left him; Stella had gone off with the Russian Prince; and every time he saw Consuelo he believed he detected in her fresh signs of affection for him. So his love for her had grown stronger day by day, and he now firmly believed that she was anything but indifferent to this love; while Consuelo was so innocent and unsophisticated that her eyes still remained blinded to what every other person in London had suspected and talked about from the very first. She liked young Twickenham well enough, and was always glad to see him, for, as I have said, his high spirits often caused her to forget her troubles, and his bright conversation amused her; but the thought had never entered her head that he could possibly entertain for her a passion which might one day bring shame and dishonour upon her.

On this occasion she welcomed him warmly, for her mind was troubled with many doubts, and she hoped that

he would perhaps succeed in diverting her thoughts from herself, and in causing her to forget the harrassing emotions which had so greatly disturbed her during the last few days.

Charlie, however, blinded by his love, misunderstood her manner, and at once attributed what in her was in reality but an innocent outburst of mere friendship, to a feeling similar to that he himself felt, and drawing a chair close to the sofa on which she was sitting, he at once began to talk to her, for the first time, in the warm accents of love.

Consuelo was too astonished at first to check him, but when she had sufficiently recovered from the shock to find words with which to express herself, she arose and, looking at him, said in a voice which, though evidently much agitated, was more than sufficient to command respect—

"Enough, Lord Twickenham, enough! I have heard too much already. Go!—leave me at once. I shall try and forget what you have said to me. If your rash words were to reach my husband's ears, he would consider that blood alone could obliterate them."

Twickenham started back greatly surprised.

"You do not love me then, Consuelo?" he faltered, while he rose from his chair, blushing at his own imprudence.

"Love you! I love you!" Consuelo exclaimed, lowering her eyes, and then, throwing herself upon the sofa, she burst into a flood of tears.

Twickenham, again mistaking her emotion, flung himself on his knees beside her, and again took her hand in his.

But Consuelo seemed now unconscious of his presence, and murmured between her sobs—

"Can it be possible that I am destined never to have a friend in this world!"

"Am I not your friend, lovely Consuelo?" Charlie cried, when he heard this, while he imprinted a passionate kiss upon her hand, which he still held.

But Consuelo, once more flushed with anger, drew it from him, and, drying her tears, encountered his loving gaze with her large penetrating eyes, which forced him to lower his.

"You love me! You who thus dare to insult me!"

"I have not insulted you. God knows *that* would be the very last thing I would wish to do."

"Do not invoke the sacred name of God; your lips are not worthy to utter it. Go, go, leave me at once. I never could have believed this of you!"

"By Jove, can it be, Consuelo, that you were ignorant of my love for you? Can it be that your heart has never revealed to you the feelings of mine?"

"Ah!"

"Oh no, you must have known this from the first, or you would not have encouraged me as you have done; you must have known the feelings that made me so often seek your society, and you must have sympathised with them, or you would not have dared to brave the world for me!"

"I encouraged you! Lord Twickenham, pray what do you mean to insinuate by those words—what do you mean when you say that I have dared to brave the world for *you*? Explain yourself."

"Oh, Consuelo, Consuelo! I cannot believe that you have remained ignorant of my love for you, when there is not one of my friends who has not been aware of it long ago."

"Holy Virgin! Can this be? Have I indeed been so misjudged? Oh, impossible, impossible! you are only trying to deceive me."

"Indeed I am not. The world has not been so slow in divining my sentiments for you as you have been."

"And the world believes . . .?"

"That you respond to them, of course, or else you would not speak to me so often in public as you do, or indeed permit me to see you at all."

"I cannot believe what you tell me, I cannot. I know enough of London society now to appreciate at their true value such idle reports."

"By Jove, they are not idle reports. Every one believes"

"What? That you are my lover!"

"Consuelo!"

"God knows that I am innocent, therefore I can speak plainly and without blushing. I, your mistress! for shame, Lord Twickenham—for shame!"

"Forgive me, forgive me. I should never have told you this."

"Do you think for one moment that I believe you? No, my Lord, I can believe nothing from you after what I have heard this morning. Those reports of which you dare to speak have found their origin in your own mad head. You have invented them, thinking thus to frighten me into forgetting myself. I know you now!"

"I wish for your sake such were indeed the case."

"If such scandals had been so much as whispered, do you think my husband would not have refuted them?"

"Perhaps he never heard of them."

"No, Lord Twickenham, in this world *friends* are never wanting to inform us of such things. If these

reports of which you speak had ever really been circulated, Lord Belgrave would have been the first to hear them, the first to contradict them."

"And if Belgrave knew all about them, and preferred, like a wise man, to shut his ears to them?"

"Belgrave! Ah, you do not know him."

"I do, and much better than you do, although you are his wife. I will tell you all now—all! Belgrave is fully aware of my love for you."

"And he allows you to come to his house?"

"I am his best friend."

"Ah! you are indeed a *charming fellow*!"

"He does not love you"

"How do you know that?"

"Do you think I am blind?"

"Ah!"

"And *you* do not love him either; you *never* loved him Can you contradict that?"

Consuelo grew livid but remained silent, for indeed she could not contradict his words, though they wounded her to the very quick.

"You merely married him," Twickenham continued, "to become a Marchioness! You see how plainly I, too, can speak at times; but Consuelo I do not blame you—you did not know me then."

"Enough, I say, enough! If my husband will stand by and see me insulted like this, I must take the honour of his house into my own hands. No, I do not love Lord Belgrave; you are right; but do you think that, being his wife, I could love you, even if your conduct were not more than enough to make me hate you?"

"Your honour!"

"Yes, my honour! No one shall even whisper a

word against it as long as I am Marchioness of Belgrave. Lord Belgrave made a great sacrifice when he married me; I will never give him cause to regret it."

"Are you sure that he has not regretted it already?"

"Ah!"

"Yes, Consuelo, I believe you, for I know how pure, how innocent you are. But, alas! the world does not know you as I know you, and every one does not love you as I love you."

"Your love dishonours me more than anything which a wicked and envious society can ever invent against me."

"And you do not believe what I tell you?"

"What the world says against me? No! for if what you tell me were indeed true, Society would have shunned me long ago."

"You are mistaken there. Ah, how little you know our world! Look around you and see if Society shuns every one of whom scandals are circulated. See, without going any further, my own step-sister, your sister-in-law, Lady Edwin Beauville—does Society shun her? Have *you* ever thought of shunning her? And yet, is not her intimacy with that fellow Alfredo Villafranca open enough?"

"Alfredo Villafranca! What do you mean?"

"Why, is it possible that you do not see what is going on in your very house?"

Consuelo shook convulsively, and was forced to sit down once more. Twickenham's last words had inflicted upon her a harder blow than any which had gone before.

"Mr. Villafranca!" she faltered. "Impossible! Mr. Villafranca in love with Sibyl! Oh no, it cannot be, it cannot be!"

"You look surprised, yet surely you cannot ignore what London has freely discussed for the past three weeks?"

"That Sibyl is in love with Mr. Villafranca?"

"Yes; and you see her husband does not mind, and yet *she* was greatly beloved by him once!"

She did not weep this time, neither did she say any more, for her heart was too full for tears, too oppressed for words. The thought that Alfredo loved another seemed to paralyse her whole being, and now that it had once been suggested to her, a thousand different events recurred to her mind, which seemed to corroborate Charlie's statement, and give it the maddening air of reality. The mere idea of Alfredo loving another caused her suffering too great for expression. At last she rose from the sofa, on to which she had fallen as if struck by lightning; she rose with a spasmodic effort, and, unconscious of Lord Twickenham's presence, and of the words he had dared to utter, and which had so greatly shocked her, unconscious of everything but her own wretchedness, she silently left the boudoir and retired to her bed-room, there to weep in solitude.

Charlie felt that something strange had passed over her, yet, as he supposed it was his own declaration of love which had so impressed her, he allowed her to quit the room in silence, for he, too, now began to feel how infamously he had acted towards this beautiful woman, whom to see was to love, yet to whom any love which he could offer could not fail to be an insult, and for the first time in his life he felt heartily ashamed of himself.

He was now suffering the horrible pangs of self-reproach and hopeless love. He loved this woman as he

had never loved before, as he knew he could never love again, and yet he felt that she could never be his, and that any friendly feeling which she might have entertained for him had now been turned into hatred by his own rashness.

Charlie was not a wicked man at heart, and if circumstances had not made of him a man of pleasure he might, perhaps, have been a very noble-minded one; but even as he was, he could not but feel at this moment how utterly worthless and despicable he had rendered himself in the eyes of the woman he loved above all others, the woman for whom he would gladly have sacrificed his life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEAD MEN'S SHOES.

(Not by Miss Braddon.)

SIBYL, infinitely less noble, and infinitely more passionate than her husband, had not yet given up her idea of eloping with her lover; though she could not help feeling all the time that Alfredo, in spite of the love he pretended to bear her, and of the passionate feelings which she herself felt for him, could hardly be called one.

She was divided between her love for the world and her love for Alfredo—for she adored Society almost as much as she did Alfredo, though, like so many others, she tried hard to persuade herself that she hated and despised it. Yet she felt now that the end was fast approaching. She did not know if her husband had heard of Mr. Jobkin's return; but she was fully aware how very glad he would be of any excuse to break off their marriage; and although she no longer loved Edwin, she could not easily forget that her worldly position and all her hopes of future greatness depended entirely on her remaining Lady Edwin Beauville.

The word "bigamy" certainly does sound very ugly, and even Sibyl turned cold whenever she heard it

mentioned; yet she felt it was not her fault that she had two husbands living at the same time, considering that she had firmly believed the first one to be dead for more than a year before she had married the second; and that even if the worst were to come, and she should have to give up all her money to Mr. Jobkin, and even be obliged to return and live with him, no one could accuse her of having intentionally committed bigamy.

But all these considerations seemed to fade before the one great passion which now engrossed all her thoughts—her love for Alfredo. And she felt that with him she could brave everything, and fear nothing—not even the hated face of her first husband; not even the fatal consequences and disgrace of a public trial.

When on her return from Twickenham she heard of her husband's departure for America, she could hardly conceal her joy—for it was now evident to her that he either knew nothing of Mr. Jobkin's return, or that, not wishing to be mixed up in the trial that would most likely ensue, he had left England; at all events, it was plain that he did not intend to take any part against her, and so the first thing she did on her return to town the following day was to despatch a message to Alfredo Villafranca, asking him to call upon her at his earliest convenience.

His conduct of late had greatly puzzled her. She was sure of his love, for to her the idea that she could ever love in vain seemed more than preposterous; and yet he had been so distant, so unkind, and so cold to her during their last interview, that she hardly knew what to think of him. Indeed, had he been the most experienced Don Juan that ever made love to a woman, instead of an honest, true-hearted, single-minded man,

baffled and disappointed in all his hopes, and only desirous of forgetting in an idle flirtation the real love that still burnt in his true and faithful heart, he could not have adopted a better method of increasing her love for him. Sibyl had never felt so much engrossed with any man in her life. It is hardly fair to fight a woman with her own weapons; but when men are brave enough or free-hearted enough to do it, it almost always insures them the victory, the more so because they are but too well aware that a man's coldness, unlike their own, is the result of real displeasure, and generally the forerunner of a final rupture.

Sibyl was more in love with Alfredo than ever, and she could not rest till the letter had been written, in which, after telling him of her husband's departure, she implored him to return to her arms.

What the results of this letter were, we shall see in some future chapter, for now it is high time we should return to our other friends, Stella and the wretched man Juan Fernandez, who had at last become her husband; and who, as the villain of the story, must, of course, claim some of our attention.

When we last saw Mrs. Potts's step-daughter it was under strange and highly fortunate circumstances. She was then the Queen of that little paradise on earth, Monaco; the reigning belle of a gay, pleasure-loving circle; the sensation of a season; the most courted and admired of all women. But if my readers could see her now, they would find a very different person indeed, and her surroundings would, I fear, be anything but pleasing to them.

Juan and his wife lived in a large house in an unfashionable square near Tottenham Court Road.

The enormous sum left her by the generous and ill-advised Prince Nijnikoff had already been squandered and gambled away by the reckless pair; and now it was Juan's ingenuity and double-dealing which alone supported them from day to day.

I will spare my readers the history of this unworthy couple, for surely they already know enough of the Spaniard's character and unprincipled nature to guess what it must have been. I will therefore only state that as long as the Russian money lasted, Stella and her husband enjoyed as much of this world's good things as it is possible for money to procure, for we may be very sure that the dead man's golden shoes fitted them to perfection.

Yet money cannot always procure happiness, and although the lovely Stella was by this time as lost to all sense of honour or virtue as it is possible for any woman to be, she could not but regret at times the hollow and sinful life she was leading, and in her heart recall the days she had spent in the old house in Bull Street, toiling hard it is true, but virtuous and with an easy conscience, equally ignorant of the pleasures the world can afford, and of the heart-sickening reaction which invariably accompanies them, though at the time she had thought herself the most miserable and unhappy of women.

She had drunk freely enough at this time of that cup of pleasure that appeases thirst but never quenches it, and she had drunk of it till her senses had grown dim and her soul hardened to stone; yet she was still as thirsty as ever; and late in the day, when she rose with a wretched feeling of depression and misery, she instantly flew again and again to the intoxicating cup of pleasure,

and tried to drown in the joy of the moment the stings of conscience that would, in spite of all her endeavours, creep now and then into her heart.

She loved Juan as madly as ever, and was still as blind to his faults; yet, since her marriage, that love had been maintained more perhaps by fear than by real affection, and could be better compared to the blind unreasoning love which we sometimes behold in a poor performing dog for his brutal master, by whom he is constantly beaten and starved, than to that trusting and almost human love which the kindly-treated dogs feel for the gentle and humane master, whose truest friend they so often prove themselves to be.

Stella now feared Juan almost as much as she loved him, for he treated her every day worse and worse; and as the Prince's money rapidly diminished, his temper, not very sweet at the best of times, grew more and more harsh, and vented itself on the poor girl whom he had dragged down to perdition with him in his headlong career.

Consuelo never saw her brother now, for Lord Belgrave, no longer fearing to give her pain, had made her promise not to hold any further communication with him.

Through Stella's attempting one day to sell one of the necklaces given to her by the Prince Nijnikoff—which, as my readers no doubt remember, formed part of the jewels which Juan, imposing on the generous heart of his poor sister, had succeeded in obtaining from her—Lord Belgrave had at last discovered who had taken his wife's diamonds. An explanation had naturally followed, and it had been only at Consuelo's earnest entreaties that he had desisted from prosecuting Juan.

But, though he had graciously allowed Juan to escape punishment, partly because of Consuelo's repeated prayers, and partly because he dreaded the scandal which, had the whole affair become known, would unavoidably have arisen, he had only forgiven Juan on the condition that he would never attempt to set foot in his house again, and that he would thenceforward cease from holding any communication whatever with his sister. Thus Consuelo and Juan never met again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MAN AND WIFE.

(Not by Wilkie Collins.)

ONE night, towards the end of that very London season which was destined to see the end of all Sibyl's long-contemplated dreams of ambition and sensual happiness, Juan returned at a late hour to his house, after a wild orgie, and, flushed and mad with wine, rushed, uttering horrible oaths, into Stella's room.

Could my readers have looked at that moment upon the fearful wreck of what had once been the fine manly form of Juan Fernandez, I wonder very much if they would have been able to recognise in him that graceful, fascinating Don Juan who had produced such a sensation in the London fashionable world a few years before, and so completely turned the head of poor Geraldine Fetherstone.

His face had lost all its beauty, and the horrible and sinister expression which now so completely disfigured it would have frightened those very young ladies who had once looked upon him with such a profound sense of admiration. His dark flashing eyes, which had then been pronounced so wonderfully fascinating, though still bright and glittering, only added to that sinister and,

so to speak, Mephistophelian look of his once handsome countenance.

This night he looked even more threatening than usual, and Stella, who had been sitting up for him, could not help shuddering when he entered.

She rose and with a weary step, but with a smile on her haggard, worn-out face, which it was easy to see was forced, she advanced to meet him.

"So late, Jack!" she said, vainly attempting to caress him. "I suppose you have been playing, as usual?"

"Yes," he replied, in a hollow voice, made hoarse by drinking, "and losing, as usual;" and then, uttering another oath, he added, "My luck is all gone to the devil now. I always lose, somehow or other."

"Do you remember, Jack, your words to me at Monte Carlo—now more than a year ago, when we left for England after the Prince's death—that all the chances are against one at a gaming-table?"

"Yes; but that is no business of yours—do you understand?"

"Oh Jack! I only speak for our good—for your good."

"Shut up!" he cried, pushing her away from him.

The poor girl threw herself down on a chair and began to cry.

"Don't cry!" he shouted; "don't cry, or I'll smash you with this chair!" and as he spoke he took up a chair, which he whirled in the air over his head.

Stella now dried her tears, and rising and going towards him, she addressed him in an earnest voice.

"John," she said, speaking slowly, and with a determined look, "John, so we are ruined?"

"Yes," he answered laconically.

Stella then uttered a piercing cry. "Ruined!" she cried; "ruined! and you have done this—you, whom I loved better than life—better than gold—you, you have ruined me!"

Juan looked up at her. "Ruined *you*?" he said. "No, I have only spent your income, I have not touched your capital."

"My capital? Where is it? Tell me—where is that capital of mine?"

The Spaniard, shrugging his shoulders, and pointing to the looking-glass over the mantel-piece, said, "There! Look in the glass, girl; there is your capital, as fresh as ever. You are yet young, beautiful, active—why should you ever despair? Make money as you did before."

Though a *roué*, he only prized her youth and beauty as so many tools that were to bring gold to himself, and she knew this full well; yet his words to-night were more than she could bear, and so advancing towards him, she exclaimed, looking him full in the face, "Can it be you—*you*, my husband, who dare to propose such a thing to me?"

"Yes," he answered; his temper, rendered only more brutal by the wine he had drunk, getting fast the better of him; "Why not? And can it be you," he added with a sardonic laugh, "*you*, Stella—the beauteous Stella, who once prided herself on being able to ruin the richest man in the world in a fortnight—who now pretend to be shocked at my words?"

"Enough! enough!" she cried. "I leave you, John—I quit this house for ever; I cannot put up with your cruelty any longer."

"You shall not go. You shall not quit this house. You are mine—my property! Do you hear?"

Stella uttered a wild laugh—a laugh of scorn and rage, and opened the door.

Juan, blinded by his anger, and unconscious of what he was doing, once more took up the chair which stood near him, and, without saying another word, hurled it at her head.

Stella uttered a piercing shriek and fell heavily on the threshold.

When her husband, a moment afterwards, approached her and attempted to raise her, he found it was already too late; the blow had killed her!

For a few minutes he remained kneeling beside her, unconscious of everything, and when he again raised his head he found that the room was full of people; the neighbours, hearing the noise and the fearful shriek of the poor girl, had forced open the street door and rushed into the house.

Policemen, too, had been immediately sent for, and before Juan had recovered himself he found that escape was impossible.

Then he realized for the first time that all was over with him, and, driven to the last resource of a coward, he rushed to a table that was standing near, took a pistol out of the drawer, and, pointing it at his breast—fired.

Those in the room rushed forward and seized him from behind, but the trigger had been already pulled, and the bullet, though it missed a vital part, penetrated his body and he fell senseless to the ground.

"To prison with him!" shouted the sergeant of police, a few seconds later, after examining him; "He is not dead, and may have life enough left in him to expiate the horrible crime he has committed."

And shortly afterwards he was removed from the house.

Thus perished that poor girl whom he had seduced and dragged with him ruthlessly and shamelessly into the lowest depths of degradation! Thus she died—this brilliant Stella—and thus set for ever that “Star of the East,” which had shone so brightly for a few years amidst luxury and splendour—the gayest of the gay—ruining so many men, and spreading misery and shame wherever she went;—thus she perished at last, unloved and unregretted by all, as such women always do perish!

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DEATH SHOT.

(*Not by Captain Mayne Reid.*)

SIBYL waited in vain for an answer to her letter to Alfredo, but that answer never came. Whether he had now ceased to love her, or whether his answer had miscarried, she was never able to make out; that her own letter had been safely delivered into his hand she never doubted, for she had ordered her maid to take it to him, and the maid had informed her on her return that she had seen Mr. Villafranca and given the letter into his own hands.

Although she hated the Belgraves every day more and more, yet she thought it necessary to keep well with them for the sake of appearances; and, particularly after her husband's departure, to prevent suspicion, she often went to Beauville House on a Friday evening, when Lady Belgrave was "At Home" to a few intimate friends.

It is at one of these "Small and Early" receptions, as they were called, that I again beg to introduce the beautiful Consuelo to my readers.

That lovely but unhappy woman floated, so to speak, on the surface of all these harrassing events, plots, and counterplots, as the sea-bird floats with unruffled plumage

over the restless waves. Her life was indeed one of constant excitement and variety, yet it could hardly be called a happy one. She lived as if in a dream, and the daily events that occurred around her seemed to belong to a world which had no real existence for her.

Though she still looked as lovely as ever, and invariably displayed that same sweetness and gentleness of disposition, and that true and noble nature which had won for her the love and admiration of Lord Belgrave, she was now cruelly altered.

Even he who loved her no longer, could not live with her and watch the unerring symptoms of a disappointed life which became more and more apparent day by day in her sweet lovable face, without feeling more than a mere passing compassion; and at times he even went the length of accusing himself in his own heart for the sad change which had come over her. But he had too much on his mind just then to devote attention to his poor wife's mental sufferings; for although the strange reports we have heard about the critical state of his affairs were of course greatly exaggerated, yet he had lately suffered heavy losses, and the reckless life he now led was not calculated to improve the impoverished state of his finances—for though still the possessor of immense estates, he was over head and ears in debt, and, what was still more distressing, his difficulties increased day by day.

Yet Consuelo was even more to be pitied than he ever imagined. Though, fortunately for herself, she possessed a brave heart that could strive against difficulties, and would not easily have succumbed to any amount of pain, yet her misery increased day by day, for Alfredo was now almost daily at Beauville House, and although no longer the confidential friend of Bel-

grave, yet he never missed an opportunity of visiting her. Consuelo loved him now perhaps more than she had ever done, for it had only been since the thought had crossed her mind that he might love another that she had fully realised how deeply she loved him; and it was but too easy for her to see, in spite of what Lord Twickenham had told her, that morning when he had declared his own passion for herself, about Alfredo's love for Sibyl, that he had been mistaken, and that Alfredo still dearly loved her; yet she had made up her mind from the first to resist all temptation and be a faithful wife to the man who had loved her so well as to make her a Marchioness, though he had unconsciously rendered her at the same time so unhappy. Her torments may therefore be easily imagined.

Lord Twickenham's declaration of love had shown her how careful she must be in future, and since that fatal morning, when the veil had fallen from her eyes, she had become another woman. Charlie's presumption had been a good lesson to her, and she was now determined not only to remain innocent, but to appear so before the world, which is perhaps the more difficult of the two.

This alone, I think, will show that Consuelo was a true and noble woman in the right and fullest sense of those terms. That she lacked firmness where her affections were concerned, and promptitude of action where her own happiness was threatened, is true; but this only proves that she was a woman and not an angel. She had all the weaknesses and passions peculiar to her sex, and often, in spite of herself, allowed these weaknesses to get the better of her; yet she fought against them as well as she could, and tried hard to atone for the one great

mistake of her life—her marriage to Lord Belgrave—with all the fortitude and perseverance of a heroine, sacrificing over and over again her own happiness to preserve and keep up the honour and dignity of the name she bore.

Yet it was hard to see daily the man she loved better than aught else in this world, and not to be able to confess her love for him; and, while she was suffering tortures, pretend to laugh and be happy in order not to give him pain; when she would have given everything she possessed to have heard one word of consolation from his dear lips, to have received one kind look of encouragement from his beloved eyes.

The night when I again bring her before my readers at one of the small weekly receptions which, to please her husband, she had agreed to hold during the latter and gayest part of that London season, Alfredo had come as usual to pay his respects to her and to have a chat with Lord Belgrave, for whom he still retained a good deal of his old affection.

It is very sad to read in a human face the signs of a breaking heart; to watch the eye of a beautiful woman sinking daily, the cheek falling, and the lines about the sweet mouth deepening; to note the listless step, the morbid craving for solitude, the painful shrinking from all that is bright and joyful, and, above all, the dreary smile, but too evidently forced, which seems to protest patiently against the tortures of Society more than to approve of its pleasures. Ah, it is sad indeed to read all this in the fair face of a lovely woman; but when it is seen in the face of the woman we love, the torture is almost more than a man can well bear.

It is useless to say that Alfredo loved her more than

ever—that in spite of all his endeavours he had not been able to banish her from his heart; and, knowing this, we may easily imagine what his sufferings must have been to watch the daily changes that came over her, and to feel that it was all owing to her love for him, and yet to be unable to offer her any consolation, or to soothe her with any kind words; for the established rules of Society and his own inward sense of honour kept him from offering the first or uttering the last. Yet there were moments when, looking at her, he could hardly control himself, and at such times he would even have proposed to her the abominable alternative which Sibyl, forgetting what she owed to herself and to her kind good-natured husband, had dared more than once to propose to him. He carried in the pocket of his coat the letter in which, careless of the modesty which is the chief charm of her sex, Sibyl had written to him proposing an elopement, and that letter seemed that evening to add fresh fuel to his already burning heart. At last he got so excited that when he perceived Consuelo sitting alone in a corner of the room he approached her, and was on the point of declaring his love and begging her to fly with him; but her sweet pure smile, and the truthful, virtuous look in her eye, stopped the words that were already on his lips. He felt that it was an insult to her even to think of such a thing; his manhood rebelled against the very idea, and rising from the sofa, on which he had for one moment sat beside her, he went to the other end of the drawing-room and challenged Lord Belgrave to a game of cards with him.

He felt desperate, and he determined to place the whole of his fortune on the table, and if he lost it to shoot himself—for what was the use of his life now to himself, or indeed to any one else?

Lord Belgrave was also desperate that night, for he had just received the news that his steward at Holm, who had the entire charge of his affairs, and whom he had for some time past suspected of dishonesty, had bolted with Miss Ducie, the woman he had believed most devoted to his interest, taking with him the whole of the money which his estates had produced that year, and which he was to have delivered to his banker's account that very day. Lord Belgrave had told no one but his wife of this, yet the blow seemed almost more than he could bear, for he well knew that though the detectives sent after the runaway couple to New York might after a time succeed in securing him, the loss would yet be fearful, and he felt that the long-dreaded end had come at last.

So he, too, with all the calm determination of a man who plays the whole for the whole, and who is so desperate as to be careless of the consequences, sat down to play, and thus he and Alfredo played on for many hours, utterly regardless of those around them.

One after another the various guests arose and departed, but these two men still played on.

Sibyl was one of the last to go, and when she approached Lord Belgrave to say good-night to him, he raised his head for the first time from that all-absorbing green cloth, and whispered in her ear: "You will be glad to hear, Mrs. Jobkin, that Mr. Thomson has arrived from America, and that he and your husband had a long interview this morning. Mr. Thomson has taken the whole affair into his own hands; and as he considers himself to have been the cause of all his poor friend's misfortunes, he insists upon being the one who should restore him to his wealth and position. All the chances,

you see, are against you now; such a witness as Mr. Thomson, who has known your husband most intimately since he was a boy, will prove his identity before any jury in England."

Sibyl trembled visibly as she heard this. She had hoped that Mr. Thomson was far away, and would never be able to come back in time to give his evidence in favour of her husband; this news, therefore, was a terrible shock to her. She said nothing, however, but, casting an indignant glance at the Marquis, left the apartment, muttering between her set teeth as she did so, "Ah, my Lord Marquis! the game is not played out yet; we shall see who will have the best of it in the end!"

Lord Belgrave guessed her words, though he heard them not; but, ignoring the old Spanish proverb, "Never drive a woman or a cat into a corner, for you little know how high she will spring and scratch you," which all men should keep in mind who would come out unharmed from those unequal contests in which the rougher and honester nature is almost sure to be worsted, he contented himself with smiling at her anger and dismay, and, giving all his attention once more to the cards, resumed his game with Alfredo, and continued playing for some time, both being as careless as ever of the result.

Alfredo was, perhaps, the most desperate, and would willingly have staked all he possessed, so reckless did he feel; but, as is often the case, Fortune generally favours those who despise her, and, instead of losing, it was he, strange to say, who won every game.

Lord Belgrave grew excited and proposed doubling the stakes, to which, of course, Alfredo consented; and thus, playing higher and higher each time, Lord Belgrave

went on, until he had lost an enormous sum, perhaps even a larger one than he had any possible means of paying at that moment.

He at last rose, and by the expression of his face, Consuelo, who, with the few remaining guests, had now approached the table, and had been watching the game for some time with anxiety, saw that he had lost heavily.

"By St. George, Alfredo," he exclaimed, "you have ruined me!"

Consuelo shuddered as she heard this, for she was well aware of all his difficulties, and with earnest eyes followed her husband, who, sitting down before a *secrétaire* which stood near one of the windows, wrote out a cheque upon his banker for the amount he had just lost to Alfredo.

"Will you not go on playing?" said the latter, taking the piece of paper which his friend handed to him with an unsteady hand.

"I cannot," he answered in a hoarse voice. "I doubt even if my balance at my banker's will be enough to pay what I already owe you. I have lately sustained many heavy losses, Alfredo, and I am no longer the rich man I was!" And with a forced laugh he left the room.

His wife followed him with her eyes, and no sooner had he disappeared through the folding doors which led to his own private rooms—for the drawing-room in which they were was on the ground floor, and formed part of their every day suite of rooms—than she flung herself on a sofa and cried hysterically, "Follow him, follow him! he is going to kill himself! Oh! for mercy's sake, stop him! He does not know what he is doing; the news he got this morning has turned his head. Oh, my heart told me of this! Stop him, stop him!"

Her friends looked at her in mute astonishment, and hardly knew what to do.

Consuelo raised her head, and seeing Alfredo, who stood before her still holding in his hand the paper Lord Belgrave had given him, she rose with one spring, and fell at his feet with such a wild expression on her face that those present thought for one moment that she had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

"Mr. Villafranca!" she cried in an imploring voice, "Mr. Villafranca, give me that paper! Oh, sir, by all that is sacred to you, give me that cheque; my husband does not know what he is doing. . . . Oh, I shall die!"

Alfredo looked at her, greatly bewildered.

"Mr. Villafranca, I implore—I entreat you!"

Alfredo looked at her again, and, forgetting that they were not alone, he at last gave way to the feelings that had for so long burnt in his breast. "Give him back his money! Oh no, never; he has got enough from me. . . . He has taken from me the treasure I most prized in this world. . . . Give him back his money! Why does he not give me back my happiness and my peace of mind!"

Consuelo shuddered. "Have pity on me!" she faltered.

"You had none for me."

"For the love which once I bore you . . . !"

Alfredo started back at these words. "You loved me?" he cried, pushing her from him. "Oh no, you could never have loved me, or you would not have married another. No, you preferred riches, rank, and position, to my poor but devoted love. Shame on you! shame on you!—you have no heart!"

Consuelo rose, and burst into a flood of tears. "Oh Alfredo, Alfredo, if you knew all! . . . but that paper,"

she added, her thoughts returning to her husband, "that paper, give it to me!"

"Consuelo," he said, now trying, though vainly, to speak calmly, "I have forgiven you. You have robbed me of my happiness, of my peace; you have taken away all from me. . . . You have made me miserable, miserable for life—and why? Because I loved you; because I loved you better than myself! And I love you still; but, fear nought, I will hide it even from myself. . . . I love you and I forgive you. I have tried to hate you, to despise you, and I cannot. Your image is still in my heart, and do what I will I cannot tear it away. . . . Oh, Consuelo, Consuelo, ask me no more!"

Consuelo seemed greatly moved. "Forget me, if you like—hate me, despise me; it is all my fault—I plead guilty. I have been false to you, false to my love, false to myself. I know it but too well. But give me that fatal paper which you hold in your hand; punish me, do not punish him who is innocent. You loved him once—he loves you still; believe me, he has never been false to you, for he was ignorant that I even knew you when he married me. I am the only culpable one . . . let me suffer alone!"

"And you will sacrifice yourself again . . . as you pretended to do when you married him! Oh no, no! I have heard it all from him. Ah, you pretended then, to make yourself more interesting—to win his hand. Oh, you loved him then, as you love him now."

"Love him!"

"Yes, is he not my successful rival?"

"Alfredo," she exclaimed, forgetting all her good resolutions, "I do not love him! I love you—you alone! See, here is the ring that you gave me; it has never left

me, though he has often tried to replace it with more costly ones."

And she showed him her hand, on which, as she said, the simple gold ring he had once given her still encircled one of her taper fingers. He looked at it for a moment, and then, taking her hand in his, he said in passionate tones, "Can this be true? . . . Do you really still love me? I, who have suffered so much? . . . Oh, but you married him! . . . You were false to me!"

"I loved you once, Alfredo. You were then everything to me. You were my first, my only love, and you shall be my last. But I was left alone in the world—alone, for my poor father died, and my brother left me," and she shuddered as she remembered those sad days. "I was poor and miserable, and Belgrave was the only one in the whole wide world who seemed to take any interest in me. I was forced to marry him. I loved you still, but you were far away; you might have been dead too, for I had never heard from you, and in my despair I feared I should never see you again; so I married the Marquis, who was all kindness, and seemed devoted to me. I knew him to be your friend too, but I did not love him, and he knew it, for I told him so plainly. I did try to love him once, but Alfredo, I could not; I tried to forget you, but I could not. . . . This ring proves to you that I have never forgotten you, though I was his wife."

"And you love me still, Consuelo?"

"I am his wife!"

"Oh!—and I, who thought you vain, false, fickle, faithless! . . ."

"Oh, Alfredo! remember I am no longer free to love you! Let me be at least true to him. . . . Do not

destroy my happiness hereafter, as you have destroyed it for ever in this world."

"So much virtue!"

"No, I have been very, very criminal—I have embittered the lives of the two men who loved me best in the world. But let us forget each other; let us now say 'farewell' for ever, Alfredo."

"I love you!" he cried, trying to clasp her in his arms.

"No, no! forget me, forget me; in Heaven perhaps I may be yours; on earth I must be his alone!"

"Why do you tell me that you love me, when in the same breath you bid me 'farewell' for ever?"

"Oh, Alfredo, give me that paper!"

"I was miserable before, but now. . . ."

"That paper!—in the name of that Holy Virgin we both adore! Ah, Alfredo, if you love me, can you refuse me the first thing I ever asked of you?"

"No there it is." And he handed her the cheque.

Consuelo took it with a trembling hand, and was going to rush with it into her husband's room, when the loud report of a pistol stopped her and caused her to turn deadly pale.

"Too late! too late!" she shrieked, and fell to the ground as if struck by lightning.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

(*Not by Miss Louisa Parr.*)

THE door which led from the drawing-room into the Marquis's private library was found locked on the inside, and some minutes elapsed before they were able to enter it. When at last they all rushed in, followed by the terrified servants, they found Lord Belgrave lying dead on the ground; beside him was a pistol, with which he had evidently blown out his brains in a moment of temporary insanity.

Consuelo was too stupefied at first to realise the horror of the situation. When, after a time, she recovered from her fainting fit and learnt the dreadful news, she burst into a flood of passionate tears, and fainting fits rapidly succeeded each other.

The doctor, who was immediately summoned, said that she must be taken to her room and kept very quiet for some days, for he feared greatly that the terrible shock she had received might endanger her reason.

The few visitors who still remained, and who had been witnesses of the scene between her and Alfredo which I have narrated in my last chapter, collected immediately around the dead body of Lord Belgrave;

while the servants, who of course always lose their heads completely in events of this nature, rushed frantically about the house, the women uttering piercing cries, and the men running from one room to another as if the end of the world had suddenly come upon them.

Alfredo was perhaps one of the most impressed with the horror of the scene, and, kneeling beside the inanimate body of the Marquis, wept bitter tears as he remembered their old and long-tried friendship.

The police, who of course were summoned without loss of time, soon begged him to go away, and, aided by those of the servants who seemed not quite so bewildered as the rest, removed the corpse to the adjoining bed-room, and, locking the door, there left it to await the inquest, which the sergeant of police said would have to take place on the morrow.

With a weary step, and a bleeding heart, Alfredo was leaving the room—that room in which he had spent so many happy hours with the man who had loved him so well—when he noticed something white lying near the side door which opened into the outer hall. He stooped to pick it up, and discovered that it was a lace handkerchief, which must evidently have belonged to a lady. When he took it to the light and examined it more closely, he discovered in one of the corners the letters *S* and *B*, gracefully interwoven, evidently the initials of the owner, and as he pondered over it a horrible suspicion took possession of his mind—large drops stood upon his brow, and he grew ghastly pale, terrified at his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CAST AWAY.

(*Not by Edmund Yates.*)

WHEN Juan in some degree regained consciousness, he found himself lying on a bed. The room was a large and lofty one, though by no means splendid in any way; on either side of him he could see other beds exactly like his own, on which lay men he had never seen before.

Where was he?

For a long time he was utterly unable to answer this question, which of course was the first that suggested itself to his mind. Gradually he remembered the dispute he had had with Stella, and the dreadful catastrophe that had followed. The whole scene presented itself before him so clearly and with so much distinctness that for a moment he imagined it must have taken place only a few hours before; but when he called to mind the sufferings he had undergone since then, he began to think that weeks, perhaps months, had elapsed since that dreadful night.

He had had a vague impression that he had been lying on that bed for many days, that he had suffered greatly, and that now and then men had come to examine and dress his wounds and arrange his bandages; but

whether he had really wounds, and, if he had, how he had come by them, he knew not, for he was incapable of thought, and memory was an effort under which he always broke down. He had suffered greatly, but all the time he had felt the indefinable and mysterious influence of some unknown being who had cherished and nursed him in his darkest moments, and whose tender care had greatly relieved his sufferings.

But now, as consciousness returned, he began to realise what had happened, and moral sufferings, infinitely harder to bear than the mere physical ones through which he had passed, and for which he felt there could be no balm of consolation, began to torment him night and day.

There are seasons when the whole of our past life rises before us, each scene distinct and clear as when it actually took place. These feelings, I believe, always come upon one at that supreme moment when the spirit is about to leave its dwelling, and often more vividly when that spirit clings to earth, dreading to face the unknown future.

Juan had arrived at the closing point of his earthly career. By degrees he could recall every event of it, and now, perhaps for the first time in his life, he realised how wicked and sinful that career had been.

For one moment it seemed to him that the gloomy walls of the prison hospital, in which he lay on a bed of suffering and agony, had disappeared, and he stood again beneath the clear sunny sky of his native land an innocent child, playing with the sweet little Consuelo—that sister who adored him. But this vision lasted only a second. The next he beheld himself the young profligate he had subsequently become, yielding to every tempta-

tion, and sinking lower and lower day by day in that unfathomable abyss from which he now knew no power could rescue him.

Remorse at last took possession of his soul, but it was too late. He felt that his sins had been so great that a thousand centuries of expiation would not suffice to atone for them. Had he been a less worldly-minded man, perhaps the thought of the all-supreme Deity who can offer means of expiating all sins, would have brought comfort to his soul; but he knew nothing of that God whose mercy he knew not even how to implore, and he died, as he had lived, a stranger to the consolations of the Church.

It was in the midst of his despair that there broke suddenly upon his ear a low sweet voice. He opened his eyes and beheld before him, standing near his bed, the woman he had wronged perhaps more than any other—Geraldine Fetherstone—the girl who had loved him so well, and who had sacrificed her whole life for him; but no longer the proud, capricious, and self-willed daughter of Fashion, worldly even in her romantic ideas of love, but a pale-faced, sweet-looking Sister of Charity, whose presence alone seemed to inspire him with holy feelings.

"Geraldine!" he cried; "Geraldine! can it be really you—you, and in this place!"

"Hush!" she answered, in a voice that sounded soft and melodious to him, perhaps for the first time in his life! "Hush! you must not talk . . . at least, not yet."

"But how did you come here?"

"I heard you were here, and I hastened at once to your side. I have nursed you for the last month."

"You!"

"Hush! the doctors say you must not speak, or it may cost you your life."

"Ah, Geraldine, I am already doomed; if I recover from my wounds it will be but to perish on the scaffold. I am a murderer! . . . a murderer!" And his frame shook convulsively as he said these words.

Geraldine turned even paler than she had been before. "My Juan!" she murmured to herself.

"You love me still?"

"Ah, yes!"

"And you forgive me?"

"It is not for me to forgive; you must pray to God to forgive you—it is He alone who can forgive you."

"God! Ah, God will never, never forgive me; my whole life has been one of sin and crime. I dare not ask Him to forgive me."

"You may do so. We are taught, Juan, that God loves all His children. Ah, if He only loves you half as well as I do, He will forgive you though you had been the greatest criminal that ever lived!"

"My God, my God, have pity on me!" he cried in faltering tones, while Geraldine kneeling beside his bed uttered a fervent prayer.

These were the last word she ever heard him say. When she raised her head he had again lost consciousness, and he only recovered it a few hours later, when his sufferings were already so great that he was not able to speak.

Three days later, after the most terrible agony, he expired. Geraldine never once moved from his bedside, and it was at last in her arms that the soul of this great sinner passed away.

The poor woman was never the same after this. A few weeks later she was forced to give up the good work she had undertaken, for her strength failed her day by

day—the sight of Juan's dreadful sufferings had been too much for her.

She passed the last months of her life in prayer, praying night and day for the soul of the man she had so loved, with all the consoling faith of a Catholic, though she was one only in heart; and it was that heart alone that had taught her the power of prayer. If she ever uttered a petition on her own behalf, it was only that she also might soon be taken, and that she might meet him again. How long and bitter had been her weary pilgrimage through this world of sorrow and trials was only known to herself and to that God to whom she had devoted the last although the best years of her life.

The body grew exhausted, the soul more and more weary, her faith stronger day by day, and so the end drew near at last.

Just before she died she begged to see her husband once more, and with tears in her eyes, and in an earnest though broken voice, entreated him to repent and dedicate the rest of his life to good works.

But Charlie Twickenham, though his wife's appeal moved him more than he cared to show, was yet too young and too heart-whole to think very seriously of a future life.

He had now managed to forget Consuelo, as he had before forgotten Stella, and a new conquest claimed all his attention; so when at last Geraldine died, and he was once more free, he plunged anew into the dissipations he so loved, and wasted his life in pursuing pleasures he never succeeded in enjoying; becoming every day more and more lost to all sense of honour and self-respect the more he drank of that fatal cup that slakes but never quenches thirst, though you drink it to the very dregs.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAW AND THE LADY.

(Not by Wilkie Collins.)

SIBYL'S great ambition was gratified at last—she was now Marchioness of Belgrave.

But she did not long enjoy her triumph. Her first husband, Mr. Jobkin, lost no time in making a formal claim to his property and to her hand.

For a short time she had imagined that, once Lord Belgrave dead, she had but little to fear from Mr. Jobkin; but she had been greatly mistaken, for now Mr. Thomson had taken the entire business into his own hands, and it was not long before she received a summons to appear in the forthcoming trial.

Mr. Thomson, with his usual shrewdness, had secured as counsel for his friend, the celebrated and talented Dr. Kennedy, who pleaded the cause of the claimant with his usual skill, and displayed great ability throughout the whole of the proceedings.

The case was tried at Westminster, and, as may well be imagined, created a great sensation throughout the country. Every one felt more or less interested in this strange affair; and heavy bets were made between the supporters of either party.

Sibyl had been too well-known in the fashionable world for the case not to awaken an unusual amount of interest, even amongst those who troubled themselves the least about such matters, and the illustrious name she now bore was enough to excite the curiosity of the idle; so the papers were full of the trial, and people scarcely talked of anything else during the rest of that season.

The crowd at Westminster was so great that the thoroughfares about the courts were often blocked, and every person in Society considered it his duty to go and listen at least once to this strange case, which was creating such universal excitement.

If Sibyl had imagined that her husband, Edwin, had left England on account of Mr. Jobkin, she now discovered that she had again been greatly mistaken, for no sooner did he hear of the appearance of the claimant than he immediately returned to London. So now it was but too evident to her that whatever course events might take, he was not going to support her.

But Edwin's return might perhaps have been occasioned by his brother's sudden death, the news of which reached him soon after his arrival in New York. No one could have been more grieved than he was when he learnt what had taken place, though this unexpected and terrible event made him a Marquis and the owner of immense estates; for he had loved his brother dearly, and felt, perhaps more than he liked to own, the stain which, by this suicide, had fallen upon the illustrious name of Belgrave.

And, indeed, it was some time before he succeeded in realising the sad event, for it was the very last thing he would have expected his proud and noble-minded brother

to have done, even under a temporary state of insanity, as the coroner who held the inquest over his body had decided it to be.

On his arrival in London his first visit was to his brother's widow; but Consuelo was too ill to see any one, and he was obliged to content himself with writing her a long letter, in which he expressed his sorrow perhaps better than he would have done in person, for he was one of those men who feel too deeply to say much.

His next visit was to Mr. Jobkin, and although he found him so much changed that at first he hardly recognised him, he left his hotel fully convinced that he was indeed the right man, and only wondered at his wife's persistence in denying him.

Dr. Kennedy had many difficulties to surmount before he could prove, to the complete satisfaction of the jury, his client's identity. For Mr. Jobkin was indeed so much altered that but few of the witnesses called to swear to him succeeded in recognising him; and then his memory was so very treacherous that there were days when he was not able to answer one of the numerous questions put to him.

"You should not judge this claimant by the common standard," Dr. Kennedy said in one of his speeches, seeing at once that this would be the great stumbling-block in the case. "Before I proceed any further, I must assure you that it is but a common fallacy that every man must necessarily remember the leading incidents in his past life. That is the basis upon which the defence is founded. They say to the claimant—We have questioned you about incidents in your life which ordinary people would remember, therefore you ought to remember them, and if you do not, you must be an

impostor. I say that that is a fallacy. It is not founded upon truth. It is not universally true. It may be partially so, but no more. There are, of course, some men of great minds and powerful memory who do remember every event in their career. But there are other men, on the contrary, who only remember very few events in their lives, and those only the principal ones”

“A great deal of our recollection of the past,” he said on another occasion, “depends on our powers of perception. Some men go through life almost as if they were blind. The most extraordinary occurrences may have no effect upon the memory of one man, but another man will have a most vivid appreciation of everything that surrounds him or has ever happened to him. The first man, if you speak to him of something which happened two or three years before, will have forgotten it; the other man will remember it as well as if it had happened but two or three days before. It all depends, I assure you, upon the powers of observation of each man. There is as much variety in man as in the infinite beauties of nature. It is one of the greatest attributes of the works of the great and glorious Being who made everything. There is nothing like uniformity in this world, nor in any of those bright worlds around us which fill the universe. And if the human features are also so varied that no one ever saw two men exactly alike in external aspect, how much more so must it not be with the mind? There are not two minds in the world alike, and we must therefore make great allowances as regards the mind, for the powers of the mind depend entirely upon the powers of perception. If this claimant is a man of dull perception, and if all his youth was passed in a monotonous succession of mercantile business, only varied by sensual

and worldly enjoyments, it is only natural that all the events of such a life should have passed away rapidly and left no impression. Besides, you must remember that Mr. Jobkin has been for several years suffering from a mental derangement, the result, no doubt, of his terrible accident, when his sufferings, both mental and physical, were very great, so much so that for a time they completely obscured his reason and caused him to forget even his own name."

I shall not quote any more of the speeches made by the counsel on either side, for fear of tiring my readers. It will be enough to say that Dr. Kennedy spoke so well and so much to the point that he quite won over the sympathies of the jury.

Yet it must not be imagined that Sibyl was idle all this time. She possessed the double *prestige* of a noble name and of wondrous beauty, and it should be confessed that most people sided with the beautiful Marchioness, and firmly believed the vulgar-looking claimant to be an impostor.

Edwin wisely kept himself as much in the background as he could, and gave his evidence in as few and uncompromising words as possible. But not only did Sibyl appear several times as a witness against Mr. Jobkin, but she produced several other witnesses who swore that the real Mr. Jobkin had died long ago, and that he was a very different man to the claimant in every respect. Her counsel also brought forward to give evidence against him his late partners in the bank, to whose interest, of course, it was that he should not be recognised, and they in their turn also produced witnesses to prove that this man was not Mr. Jobkin.

Yet, in spite of all this, Dr. Kennedy conducted the

whole case so well, spoke so eloquently, and produced so many witnesses who swore that his client was the real man, that, according to public opinion at least, for of course neither the judge nor the jury dared as yet to express their opinion, his case was as good as proved.

Mr. Thomson was naturally the chief witness on Mr. Jobkin's side, and his evidence was felt by all to carry great weight, and to be in every respect most convincing. He also succeeded, after no end of trouble and expense, in discovering the captain of the little German vessel which had picked up his poor friend in the Pentland Firth, who came to London and duly recognised him immediately, thus completing the chain of evidence.

Mr. Thomson would have also brought forward Consuelo, who, as Jobkin's first cousin, would have been a very important witness, had he thought it actually necessary; but, recollecting her late bereavement, he wisely abstained from so doing; while on the other hand Mrs. Boston Gilbert presented herself of her own accord to give her evidence in favour of her former *protégé*, and asked the claimant several questions in court which proved highly advantageous to his case.

At last the great day arrived when this all-absorbing case was to be decided, and every one awaited the final verdict of the jury with undisguised impatience. The crowd at Westminster was greater than ever, and every person in London, from the proud Duchess of Northland in her boudoir at Preston House, to the crossing-sweeper before her door, was in the highest state of expectation and excitement.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

(Not by Miss Annie Thomas.)

SIBYL had in vain tried to sleep that night.

She had found it impossible to dismiss the hateful subject from her mind, or to close her eyes for a single moment, during that long tedious night.

She was now sitting in the little boudoir which opened from her bedroom, attired only in the long flowing dressing-gown she had thrown over her shoulders a little before midnight, when she had found that sleep would not come to her relief.

Before her, spread out on her dressing-table, lay in disorder the Belgrave family jewels, which Consuelo had sent her a few weeks before, shortly after her husband's death.

She was pale and haggard, and her large black eyes were sunken, though they had lost none of their brilliancy, and at that moment, while they rested upon those wondrous diamonds she had so long coveted, and which she knew now would only be hers for a few hours longer, were ablaze with a light which was almost infernal.

She had sat there for hours contemplating those long-

coveted jewels, which, even though now in her possession, she felt she still could not call her own. She had sat there for hours, her eyes fixed upon those bright sparkling gems, yet her thoughts far away, and her mind's eye fixed upon a jewel which at that moment was even dearer to her than all the jewels of the earth put together.

She knew that the crisis of her life had come at last. She was fully aware that the fatal trial had gone against her, that in the eyes of the law, as well as in those of the world, this hateful claimant had been proved to be her husband. The high station to which she had bravely clung so long with such tenacity and to which she had only attained after repeated struggles and numerous crimes and sacrifices, was wrenched from under her very feet, and she knew that the fall therefrom must be a fearful one.

Yet at that moment she had almost forgotten all this. She had thought so much about it lately, she had wasted so many hours of the day and passed so many sleepless nights pondering over it, and weighing minutely her daily-decreasing chances of success, that by this time she had almost grown indifferent to the consequences—morally incompetent, as it were, to realise the depths of the abyss that had gradually opened before her, and which now threatened to engulf her.

It was of Alfredo she was thinking, of her love for him, which time and his late indifference towards her had only succeeded in increasing.

Never before had she felt the fierce fire of passion burning so strongly in her heart—never before had this modern Cleopatra loved as she loved now. And the thought that her reign was over, her empire over the

world for ever at an end, only made her cling with greater tenacity to this one man, for whose sake she would now consider the world well lost.

She had seen nothing of Alfredo since that night at Beauville House, and her letter to him still remained unanswered. The strange events which had subsequently followed each other in such rapid succession had rendered anything like an interview between them almost impossible; but even in the midst of the most harassing emotions she had not forgotten him for one moment, and now her heart-rending despair at seeing all her ambitious plans thrown to the ground, and her fate for ever sealed, only added new fire to the one passion, to the one hope that was still left to her.

The day before, on her return from the court, where her own reason and the faces of the jurymen had told her only too plainly that all hope of remaining Marchioness of Belgrave was now at an end, she had written a long letter to Alfredo; a letter in which she at last opened her heart to him, and, bravely confessing the whole truth, begged of him to have pity on her, and to come and rescue her from the cruel fate that awaited her.

It was the answer to this letter that she was now impatiently awaiting; it was the hope of receiving his reply that alone gave her strength at that trying time, and rendered her almost indifferent to the final decision of the judge.

"Accursed be all laws but those of love," she muttered, covering her tearless eyes with her burning hands. "What are rank and riches compared to love? What is freedom compared to the chains of passion? Oh, if I still possess your love, Alfredo, though I have lost everything I once prized and envied, I shall still con-

sider myself richer than all other women, and I shall give up coronet and estates, even these jewels I once so longed for, without a single sigh! Come, my Alfredo!" she then cried, raising her head; "come to me with thy sweet words, thy burning looks, thy warm heart; come and relieve my woes, and let me forget my sad fate in thy arms!"

Her whole frame shook convulsively as she heard steps upon the landing outside, and her heart told her that another second must decide her fate—that her lover's answer had at last arrived.

She had not been mistaken. The door opened quietly, and her maid approached carrying a letter and a small sealed packet in her hand.

She arose, and, taking the former from her, tore it open and eagerly devoured the contents.

It was but a short epistle, and ran thus—

"You make me a free gift of your heart, beautiful Sibyl! Would that I could give you mine in return, but it is no longer mine to bestow on any one. Yet I am not wholly indifferent to your love for me, and, to prove this, I send you what to you will be more precious than my heart—*your own life!* Ah, Sibyl! try and make a good use of it; remember it is *my* gift, and that if it enables you to repent and become a better woman hereafter, and to deserve that heaven where alone henceforth we may hope to meet, you will at least have won the pardon and respect of the man who, as you say, is the only one whose respect and pardon you implore.

"ALFREDO VILLAFRANCA."

She uttered one low piercing cry, and fell half-senseless upon the chair from which she had just risen.

She was only able to realise one thing at that moment—Alfredo loved her not.

When she had somewhat collected her thoughts she took up the little sealed packet which her maid had placed on the table beside her.

She opened it with a trembling hand, and found that it contained one of her own pocket-handkerchiefs. On the piece of paper in which it was enveloped were written these strange, but to her too expressive, words—

"Found in the little library of Beauville House, the night of Lord Belgrave's murder."

She crushed it between her hands, and for some minutes remained motionless, as if stunned.

She then seated herself at her writing-table, and remained for a long while writing rapidly and with an air of deep determination.

An hour later Lord Belgrave entered the room. Edwin was evidently very much excited, and his face wore a wild look of joy which he vainly tried to conceal.

When he beheld the woman whom he had so long loved above all others, and who for the last few years had been his wife, he started back aghast—such was the change which the last few hours had wrought in her once matchless features.

Sibyl rose and looked him straight in the face, as if she would fain have read his very thoughts.

"Is it all over?" she said in a low but clear voice that betrayed no emotion.

Edwin, infinitely more agitated than Sibyl, could not answer.

"I suppose we must part," she then said.

"Yes!" he replied, trembling from head to foot; "the claimant has been fully proved to be Mr. Jobkin, your husband."

Sibyl heard the news without so much as a shudder.

"And the judge?" she said.

"Has given the verdict in his favour."

"So our marriage is then at an end, Edwin?"

The young Marquis turned his head away and looked very much confused.

"Well," she proceeded, in a low tone of voice, a bitter smile playing upon those full red lips of hers, which he had once so admired. "Well," she said, "our married life has not been one of the happiest; it will be useless for either of us to regret that it has so soon come to an end. Edwin, we have both been greatly mistaken in one another."

"Sibyl, Sibyl, I loved you better than life and honour—once!" he cried, remembering all he had felt for her in the days gone by.

"So did I love you, Edwin! And now?"

"I pity you—believe me, I pity you with all my heart—for you are innocent. Yes, you could have had no idea that your first husband was still alive."

"What does that matter now? I certainly thought him dead, but you see *that* does not make our union a real marriage."

"No," he faltered.

"Take these jewels," she said after a long pause; "they are no longer mine. I but received them to hand them over to another . . . for I suppose you will marry Juliet now." And as she said this a shudder ran through her, and for the first time her voice faltered.

"Oh, Sibyl!"

"What is to prevent you? You are free—a Marquis

and a rich man, for the Belgrave estates, as you know, are not so encumbered as we once thought. She will not refuse you!"

"Poor Bel!" Edwin muttered, his thoughts at once going back to the brother he had so lately lost; "I cannot believe that he killed himself. No, I cannot! The more I think about it the less I am able to realise it. He had lost some money, it is true, and his factor had gone off taking away with him the sum with which he was intending to pay his most pressing debts; but surely that was hardly enough to turn his brain—*his* brain, of all others!"

Sibyl looked at him, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Banish those thoughts from your mind, Edwin," she said coldly. "Your brother is dead now—you cannot bring him back to life; remember only that his death has made you Marquis of Belgrave."

"Ah!"

"Take these jewels. Here is the List; you will see by it that not one is missing. May your new wife enjoy having them more than I have done!"

"I shall leave here this afternoon," Edwin said, rousing himself; "my valet is packing up my things. I wonder when Mr. Jobkin will come to take possession of his house?"

"He may come whenever he likes," Sibyl said, averting her face lest he should see the scorn that curled her lips as she spoke.

Edwin looked at her surprised. "How coldly you say that! Ah, Sibyl, Sibyl! what are you going to do?"

"Do?"

"Yes!—surely you can never live with him again?"

"Live with him!" she repeated, as if in a dream.

"No, no—never!"

"But he is your husband."

"My husband! He—my husband!"

"I have not seen him, and I know not what his plans may be; but I hear that he may perhaps have you tried for bigamy, though the lawyers tell me that under the circumstances you are sure to be acquitted of such an infamous charge; but yet he seems to have set his heart on this, and"

Sibyl smiled bitterly, and rising from the arm-chair, in which she had remained half-buried all the time, she exclaimed in a loud clear voice—

"Indeed; then I shall be able to baffle him in one thing, at least. He shall never bring this charge against me."

"Sibyl, what do you mean?" Edwin cried, surprised at the tone of her voice and the strange look in her eyes.

"You will see. Now, farewell, Edwin, farewell—a long farewell!"

"Must we part thus?"

"Yes, perhaps for ever. But before saying good-bye, will you take my hand once more in yours, look me straight in the face, and say you forgive me? That you forgive me for all the sorrow I may have caused you; that you forgive me, if only in remembrance of our old love; and that you will think of me sometimes, and think of me kindly, for the sake of the past?"

Edwin took her hand in his, and, looking her straight in the face, said all that she had asked him.

"Now, there is only one more request I have to make."

"And that is——?"

"This," she replied, taking from her writing-desk a letter which she had only just written; "will you deliver this into Mr. Villafranca's own hands?"

Edwin took the letter, which was sealed, and read the following words written on the envelope:—

"To Don Alfredo Villafranca; to be opened by him on the day of his marriage."

"What does this mean?" he asked, looking at the letter in his hand, apparently much bewildered.

"Ask me no questions, Edwin. I cannot tell you anything about it. If you will not give it to him, I shall ask my maid to take it to his house."

"No; I will perform your last request, Sibyl; Mr. Villafranca shall have this letter this very afternoon."

"And now—farewell; one last kiss and farewell!"

For one minute they remained in each other's arms; then, casting one last glance at her, Edwin left the room in silence.

Thus they parted for ever. Thus they parted, without a sigh on either side—without one pang of regret; though for several years they had been all in all to each other, and had thought it misery to be severed for a day.

When Mr. Jobkin arrived the next morning to take possession of his house, and entered the room which had before been his bedroom, lying upon the bed he discovered the cold corpse of the woman who had once been his wife.

As Sibyl had sworn—when she found that every plan had failed, that resistance was no longer possible, that no power human or infernal could maintain her in that position which she had striven so much to gain, nor win her the heart of the man she loved even more than that position—she had preferred death to becoming once more the wife of Mr. Jobkin.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A LIFE'S SECRET.

(*Not by Mrs. Henry Wood.*)

SIBYL'S death made, of course, a great sensation, and, for nine days or so, it was the one topic which every one discussed. But to those who should have been most afflicted by it, it came rather as a relief than a bereavement, and very few were the mourners who accompanied her body to its last resting-place, and fewer still those who lamented her sudden death.

Her father, Mr. Fetherstone, came to town from Twickenham for the funeral, and was the one who seemed most moved by the mournful ceremony. He had buried his other daughter, Geraldine, only a few months before, and now his last child had followed her to another world ; but his proud and worldly wife soon managed to make him forget this double loss, and the following year a change in the Government brought him once more to the front and placed a coronet on his brow, which highly delighted his better-half, though she still persisted in calling herself Elizabeth, Countess of Twickenham.

Mr. Jobkin also attended his wife's funeral, but it may be easily imagined what his feelings were on that occasion. He soon afterwards sold his luxurious

mansion in Grosvenor Square, and returned to his old house in Russell Square, which he now wished he had never left. Like a wise man, he gave up the world of Fashion, which had afforded him so little happiness ; and after a time married a charming young lady, the daughter of one of his old friends, to whom his mother had often wished to see him united, who, having few *h's* herself, never noticed the want of them in him, and who, believing him perfect in every respect, succeeded in rendering him the happiest of men.

Edwin grieved for Sibyl perhaps more than either her father or her husband ; but having quite lost his old love for her long before this, he, too, soon succeeded in banishing her image from his mind.

That very summer, while in the Isle of Wight, where he had gone yachting with some friends, he met the Countess of Cowes and her daughters, and saw a great deal of them.

One fine afternoon in August he found himself walking alone with Lady Juliet Standish in the gardens of her father's house at Cowes.

It was a fortnight after Edwin's arrival in the lovely island, and the beauty of the scene, the pleasant society, and the novelty of the life he led, had succeeded at last in driving away the very painful impression that his poor brother's tragic death, followed by Sibyl's still stranger end, had made upon his mind.

The sun was setting, and the soft shades of evening had already begun to tint the matchless landscape and gild the peaceful waters of the blue Medina.

Lady Cowes and Maude were sitting under a neighbouring tree, sipping their afternoon tea, and Edwin and Juliet, almost unconsciously, had wandered away through

the mossy paths by the side of the river—lost in a sweet reverie, until they were quite out of sight.

"They will be missing us," said Lady Juliet, suddenly looking round; "I think it is time we should return."

Edwin looked at her for one moment, then he took her hand in his, and whispered, in a low but earnest voice, "Do you remember, Juliet, the last conversation we had together?"

The young lady trembled, and looked down to conceal a blush, but she did not withdraw her hand.

"It was in a garden, too," he proceeded, apparently not noticing her confusion: "In your house in London. Ah! how miserable I was then—and now . . ."

Juliet raised her sweet face. "And now?" she added. "Ah, how happy!"

She turned pale—she stopped—then, turning away from him, she buried her face in her hands.

"Have you forgotten what you told me then?" he said, in a trembling voice.

"Forgotten! ah, could I ever forget?"

"You love me, then?"

She answered nothing, but turning round suddenly hid her face on his breast.

He pressed her to his heart, and sealed her unuttered avowal with a loving embrace.

Then, with soft words and softer looks, he induced her to resume their walk, which both of them now wished might last for ever. She walked beside him, fondly clinging to him, and his eyes were bent down on her smiling face, which seemed to acquire a new charm under that radiant look of pure love.

Thus they wandered for nearly two hours, until the

shades of night had enveloped them in darkness, and the stars began to glitter over their heads.

All this time Edwin was giving her the history of his life since that night of the private theatricals at Lady Tottenham's house, which had marked such an epoch in both their lives. He confessed to her the love he had once entertained for Sibyl, and which he had found to be stronger than himself, though it had appealed to none of his better and nobler feelings. He hid nothing from her, but he begged her to forget the past, and to remember only that she had been his first and would be his last love.

Juliet said little, but when she had heard all this, and felt emboldened by his tender words and still more tender looks, she told him that from the first her heart had been his, though everything had seemed to go against her hopes. That she had never ceased loving him, even when she believed him most indifferent to her, and that she had made up her mind to die unmarried if she did not marry him.

When they returned at last to the house they found that the dinner was ready, and they had to sit down to it as they were.

That very evening Edwin asked her hand of her father, who, with tears in his eyes, readily consented to this marriage, which he well knew would render his beloved daughter so happy.

A few months afterwards, they were married in the pretty little parish church at Cowes, and ever since the Marquis and Marchioness of Belgrave have been the happiest couple in England. They pass most of their time between Holm Abbey and the Isle of Wight; and if the grand old Gothic halls of the ancient Abbey or the

stately saloons of Beauville House do not ring so often as they did in the days of the former Marquis and Marchioness with the strains of Godfrey's band, and the chatter of fashionable visitors, they continually resound with the merry peals of children's laughter, and look far brighter and gayer than they ever did before.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SUNSET.

THE sun is setting; magnificent clouds sweep across the sky, which is lighted by its last bright rays. It is the final struggle of the expiring day—a final struggle with life, and, as it were, a war waged by the spirits of darkness against the celestial angels.

The dark thunderclouds roll heavily over the sky; the sun, the all-consuming monarch of day, is gradually disappearing amidst the blood-red clouds in the western horizon.

The struggle is now over. Yonder, from the east, come the shades of night, growing darker and darker as they advance, but gradually illumined by the soft light of countless stars, which are reflected in the peaceful waters of the still bluer sea—for, kind reader, we are again at sea—and below that now cloudless sky the peaceful waters of the Atlantic Ocean glint and sparkle like the heavens; which, now that the sun has set and the many clouds have dispersed, appear calm and blue, promising a beautiful night.

The tempest has raged all through the long day, and many a strong seafaring ship has been swept against the cruel rocks and there wrecked; but the sky is no longer overcast and the wind has fallen—the storm is over.

In the distance we perceive a ship, a large steamer of no small tonnage, and leaning over its prow are two persons, who, standing side by side with clasped hands, seem to be watching the cloudless horizon with earnest gaze, as if they were endeavouring to look into the future, which at that moment, if the expression in their features can be trusted, would seem as joyful and radiant as that starlit sky.

Their well-known handsome faces reveal to us at once their names. They are Consuelo and Alfredo, who have been married that morning, and are now on their way back to their beloved country.

Let us approach them, and, with the ubiquitous power possessed by authors and their faithful readers, listen for a moment to their conversation.

It is the lovely Consuelo who is speaking.

"Ah, my Alfredo," she says, "what changes have taken place since last we stood looking together upon these waters! Who would have dreamt, when we last stood side by side contemplating this wide expanse of sea, that we should go through so much in so short a time!"

"Oh, my Consuelo," he answers, drawing her lovingly towards him, "try and forget the past!"

"It will not be difficult. It already seems so far away and more like a dream than a reality to me."

"Try and believe, then, that it has only been a dream after all—a horrible nightmare—and that you have awakened at last to find yourself in your lover's arms."

"Ah, my Alfredo!"

"You love me then; you love me as much as you loved me when we first arrived in England?"

"Nay, I love you much more, my own dearest, for

now I have learnt to appreciate the value of true love. Much as I have suffered during my stay in that island which we are now leaving for ever, I do not regret one of the trials through which I have passed, for they have taught me a lesson which I shall never forget."

"And that is?"

"That without love there can be no happiness; that riches, rank, admiration, and fashion, are utterly unable by themselves to make one happy, and that happiness can only be found in true and unselfish affection."

Alfredo's face becomes radiant as she speaks; he seems to drink new life from her words; and when she finishes he draws her closer to his heart and presses his lips to hers.

Then, in soft, tender words, they relate to one another the various events which have taken place since their arrival in England. Alfredo speaks the most, and gives her the complete history not only of his actions but even of his most secret thoughts.

"Ah, Alfredo!" she cries, when he discloses to her the long-concealed feelings of his heart, "how you have suffered on my account!—but believe me, dearest, that I shall now do my best to make you the most devoted of wives, so as to atone for the past."

He again presses her to his heart, and he then speaks to her for the first time of Sibyl. With a trembling voice he narrates to her what had taken place between them. He hides nothing from her now, but boldly confesses how he had once tried to love that woman, whose matchless charms and wondrous beauty rendered her in every respect so fascinating, hoping thus to forget his love for herself, and how he had failed in his endeavours. "Ah, Consuelo! I was mad when I thought that such a

woman could supplant you in my heart!" he exclaims, neither does he hide from her the violent passion which Sibyl had conceived for him, and in a few words tells her the substance of her last letters, which he has long since destroyed.

"Poor woman!" cries the lovely Consuelo, her tender heart overflowing with compassion when she hears the dreadful story.

"Can you forgive her, dearest?" he asks. "Can you forgive that wretched woman, after all the harm she has done you?"

"Yes," she answers, her bright eyes all ablaze with fire, yet all dimmed with tears. "Yes, I forgive her, in spite of all the great wrongs she has done me, and all the miseries she has occasioned me, for her love for you, Alfredo, has quite softened my heart, and I cannot but pity her."

"You are an angel, Consuelo! By-the-bye," he adds, producing from his pocket-book a sealed letter, "this was given to me by the present Lord Belgrave some time ago; it comes from her, but you see by what is written on the envelope she meant me to read it only after I had married. Shall we break the seal now and see what she says, dearest?"

"Yes; no doubt they are her last words; let us read them together."

With a trembling hand he breaks the seal, and then, again clasping each other's hands, they read together Sibyl's last letter, which ran thus—

"When you read this I shall be in my grave, and you will have married Consuelo, for I know you love her still—love her better than you ever loved me. But think of

me sometimes, Alfredo—think of me, and think of me kindly, for I have loved you as few women could love, and few men were ever loved. And believe me when I tell you, though I beg and pray you will never try to fathom this mystery, that if it were not for me you would not be Consuelo's husband at this moment.

"I have been very, very wicked. I know it, and I dare say I shall have to suffer for it in the next world—if indeed there be such a place, which I sometimes doubt; for my life in this world has not been a happy one, and I can hardly look forward to another world with pleasure or hope.

"I have been blinded by mad ambition, and I have succumbed at last—a victim of Fashion and Passion. Had I known you as I now know you at the beginning of my career instead of at its close, and loved you as I now love you, I might have been a very different woman, and would no doubt have been alive and happy now; but perhaps for you it is better as it is.

"I have no right to ask anything from that God to whom I was taught to pray in my youth, and whom I have since forgotten; but if in this my last hour one request is allowed me, believe me, Alfredo, it is that you may be for ever happy, and that your wife may love you even as I have loved.

"Do not forget her who would fain forget herself, and who only hopes for another world to be able to remember you.

"Farewell!—farewell for ever! and when to-morrow the world will condemn me and repeat my name with scorn, remember that she whom they abuse and despise was not indifferent to you once; and try to think with forgiveness of her who loved you better than she loved

herself, and who, in the last and most awful moment of death, signs herself

“YOUR SIBYL.”

Both Consuelo and Alfredo look sadder and more thoughtful after they have read this letter.

For a long time they remain silent; it is Alfredo who at last speaks.

“Perhaps, as she says,” he murmurs, “we do owe our happiness to her—but it is horrible to think that.”

Consuelo shudders; then, coming closer to him, she takes his hand and says in a low tone, “Oh, Alfredo! let us both pray for her—let us pray to God to grant her repentance, and an opportunity to expiate her sins, in that world to which she has gone; but let us never allude to her again; let us try and forget the past, or think of it only as a dream—a horrible nightmare—that has haunted us for a time, but from which we have at last awakened.”

“Yes, my beloved one,” he exclaims, again pressing her tenderly to his heart, “let us thank God that we have sailed safely through the stormy and ever-troubled waters of the life that is led in Mayfair, and that our struggles between Fashion and Passion are at last at an end.”

THE END.

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