

men—the proudest, he sometimes thought—and he felt convinced that she was herself unconscious of them. But slight as they were, they were sufficient to kindle hope in Herbert Benson's breast, and he fancied that he had only to wait the fitness of time for the hour of his confession and the certainty of his happiness.

He was not eager to speak. There was time enough. This tranquil daily intercourse was so sweet to him, that he almost feared to end it by assuming a new relation to his gentle nurse. He did not want to scare her away just yet, even if she left him only to come back to him later as his wife. He wanted to have her all to himself a little longer in this easy undisturbed companionship.

So the days and weeks went on. The Colonel grew so much stronger, that Dr. Matson bade him good-bye, and even Mr. Borlase began to talk of releasing him. He was able to take a short stroll in the sunniest hour of the autumn day, leaning on his cane, and occasionally getting a little help from his nurse's supporting arm. He was very fond of Penjalah: the scattered houses on the sea-shore—the curious old-fashioned high-street straggling up a hill—the sheltered nook upon the grassy hill-side, that served as a burial-ground for the population of Penjalah—the rustic lanes, from which one looked right out upon the broad Atlantic—all these things grew very dear to the Colonel, and it seemed to him that he could be content to live in this remote western region for ever with this one woman for his companion.

It was very nearly the end of November, but the weather was wonderfully mild in this region, the days bright and balmy, the evenings clear and calm. The Colonel stopped to rest sometimes in the burial-ground, seated on a moss-grown granite tomb, with his face towards the sea, and Mrs. Chapman by his side. He told her all the story of his past life, even that ignominious episode of Lady Julia Hamersley's fit-treatment. It was his delight to talk to her. He confided in her as he had never done in any one else. He had such unbounded faith in her integrity, such a fixed belief in her good sense. He had talked to her of his friend Hamersley, and had told her the story of the guilty mistress of Treadwell.

"Strange that we should both have come to grief about a woman, isn't it?" he asked; and Mrs. Chapman owned that it was very strange. "You'd heard the story before, I daresay," remarked the Colonel. "I suppose all the gossip of Penjalah know it by heart?"

"Yes," she answered, "everybody in Cornwall knows it."

It was the last day of November. Mr. Borlase had again talked of taking leave of his patient, and the Colonel was sitting on his favourite tomb, the memorial of some race whose grandeur was a memory of the past. He began to think the time was drawing near when he must make his confession and hear his fate. He was no coxcomb, yet he had no fear of the result; indeed, he was certain that she loved him. While he was meditating this in a dreamy way, in no hurry to speak, and quite satisfied with the happiness of having the woman he loved by his side, Mrs. Chapman suddenly broke the silence.

"You are so much better, Colonel Benson," she began—"almost well, indeed, Mr. Borlase says—that I think you can afford to spare me now. I have stayed with you already much longer than I felt to be really necessary, only"—she hesitated just for a moment, and then went rapidly on—"only yours was a critical case, and I did not wish to leave you while there was the faintest chance of relapse. There is no fear of that now, and I am wanted elsewhere. There is a little boy in one of the cottages up the hill dying of consumption. His mother came to the hotel to speak to me last night, and I have promised her to go to him this evening."

"This evening!" cried the Colonel, against. "You mean to leave me this evening?"

"To go to a dying child, yes, Colonel Benson," the nurse answered reproachfully. "There is so little that I can do for you now—for I suppose you may be trusted to take your medicines regularly—you really do not want me any longer."

"I do not want you any longer!" repeated the Colonel. "I want you all my life. I want you for my wife!" he went on, laying his hand upon her shoulder. "I cannot live without you. You must stay with me, dearest, or only leave me to come back to me as my wife. We have no need of a long courtship. I think we know each other thoroughly as it is."

"You think you know me thoroughly as it is!" the woman echoed, shrinking away from him, and standing with her face turned towards the sea, only the profile visible to the Colonel, and upon that the impress of misery that struck him to the soul.

"My dear love, what is this?" he asked. "Have I distressed you so much by my avowal? Am I so utterly repugnant to you?"

"Your wife," she murmured, as if she had scarcely heard his last words, "your wife!"

"Yes, dearest, my beloved and honoured wife. I did not believe it was in my nature to love any one as I love you."

"That any man upon this earth should care for me!" she murmured; "you above all other men!" And then turning to him with a calmer face, she said decisively, "That can never be, Colonel Benson. You and I can never be more to one another than we have been. The wisest thing you can do is to wish me good-bye, here where we stand, and forget that you have ever known me."

"That is just the last thing possible to me," he answered impetuously. "There is nothing upon this earth I care to live for, if I cannot have you for my wife. You must have known that I loved you. You had no right to stay with me so long; you had no right to let me love you, if you meant to treat me like this at the last. But you do not mean to be so cruel; you are only trying me; you are only playing with your victim. O, my darling, for pity's sake, tell me that I am not quite indifferent to you!"

"This is not the question," the woman replied quietly. "Have you thought of what you are doing, Colonel Benson? Have you counted the cost? Have you thought what it is to intrust your name and your honour to the keeping of a woman of whom you know nothing?"

"I know that you are an angel," he said, putting his arm round the slender figure, trying to draw her to his breast.

Again she shrunk from him—this time with a gesture so repellent, that he drew back involuntarily, chilled to the heart.

"Do not touch me," she said. "You do not know who and what I am."

"I ask to know nothing," he cried vehemently. "If there is any secret in your past life that might divide us, hide it from me. Do you think I am going to bring the scrutiny of a detective to bear upon the antecedents of the woman I love? Blindly I give my happiness and my honour into your keeping. I see you, and love you for what you are—not for what evil fortune may have made you in the past."

"You do not know the weight of your words," she answered sadly. "I thank you with all my heart for your confidence, for your love; but which you think you wish can never be. It is best for us to part this very day, this very

moment. Let us shake hands, Colonel Benson, and say farewell!"

"Not till you have told me your reasons," the Colonel cried impudently. "I may know those, at least."

"I do not recognize your right to question me. I cannot explain my reasons."

"But I will know them," he cried, seizing her wrist. "I have been fooled by one woman; I will not be trifled with by another. I will know why you refuse to be my wife. Is it because you hate or despise me?"

"No, no, no; you know that it is not that!" she looked at him piteously, with a look that said as plainly as any words she could have spoken, "You know that I love you."

"Is it from any mistaken notion of fidelity to the dead?"

"No, it is not that. Yet, Heaven knows, I have reason to be faithful to the dead."

"What is it, then? You must and shall tell me."

"For pity's sake, spare me. You are torturing me, Colonel Benson."

"Give me your promise to be my wife, then, and I will not ask a question. There can be no reason strong enough to divide us, if you love me; and I think you do."

"Heaven help me!" she sobbed, clasping her hands with a piteous gesture.

To Herbert Benson those three words sounded like a confession. He was sure that she loved him, sure that his will must conquer hers in the end.

"Yes," she cried passionately, "I do love you. Nothing could excuse such an admission from my lips but the knowledge that in this hour we part for ever. I do love you, Colonel Benson, but there is nothing in this world that would induce me to become your wife, even if you knew the worst I can tell, and were yet willing to take me, which you would not be."

"You are wrong," he exclaimed with an oath. "There is nothing you can tell me that change my resolution, or diminish my love."

"Do not promise so rashly," she answered, ashy pale, and with tremulous lips.

He drew her to the old granite tomb, and persuaded her to sit down beside him, seeing that she was nearly fainting.

"My love, I do not wish to be cruel," he said tenderly. "I do not seek to lift the veil of the past. I am content to love you blindly, foolishly, if you like. I will do anything to prove my devotion, will shape the whole course of my future life for your happiness. There is nothing in the world I would not sacrifice for your sake. Be generous, for your part, dearest. Say that you will be my wife, or give me some adequate reason for your denial."

She did not answer him immediately. There was a silence of some moments, and then she said in a low voice:

"You have a friend to whom you are very much attached, Colonel Benson, a friend who is almost as dear to you as a brother. I have heard you say that."

"What, Hamersley? Yes, certainly; Hamersley is a dear good fellow; but what has he to do with my marrying as I please? I should not consult him about that."

"You were talking the other night of that guilty creature—his wife."

"Yes, I have spoken to you about his wife."

"You have—in terms of reprobation, which were well deserved. Have pity upon me, Colonel Benson—I am that wretched woman!"

She had slipped from the tombstone to the turf beside it, and remained there, half crouching, half kneeling, in her utter abasement, with her face hidden.

"You!" exclaimed the Colonel, in a thick voice. "You!"

The blow seemed almost to crush him. He felt for the moment stupefied, stunned. He had been prepared for anything but this.

"I am that wretched woman. I do not know if there is the shadow of excuse for my sin in the story of my life; but, at any rate, it is best that you should know it. George Champney and I were engaged to be married long before I saw Mr. Hamersley; and when he went to India, we were pledged to wait till he should come back and make me his wife. We had known each other from childhood; and I cannot tell you how dearly I loved him. It seems a mockery now to speak of this when I have not even been faithful to his memory; but I did love him. I have mourned him as truly as ever my first father was opposed to our engagement, and my stepmother, a very worldly woman, set her face against it, not resolutely, but we braved their displeasure, and held our own in spite of them. It was only when George was gone that their persecution became almost unendurable to me. I need not enter into details. Captain Champney had been away more than two years when I first met Mr. Hamersley. We were forbidden to write to each other; and I had suffered unspeakable anxiety about him in that time. It was only in some indirect manner that I ever had news of him. When Mr. Hamersley first proposed to me, I refused him decisively; but then followed a weary time in which I was tormented by my stepmother, and even by my father, who was influenced by her in the business. I do not think any man can understand the kind of domestic persecution which women are subject to—the daily reproaches, the incessant worry. But I went through this ordeal. It was only when my father brought home a newspaper containing the announcement of George Champney's death that my courage gave way. They let me alone for some time after this, let me indulge my grief unmolested; and then, one day, the old arguments, the familiar reproaches began again; and in an hour of fatal weakness, worn out in body and mind—for I had been very ill for a long time after that bitter blow—I yielded."

She paused for a little; but the Colonel did not speak. He sat upon the granite tomb, looking seaward with haggard eyes, motionless as a statue, the living image of despair. He could have borne anything but this.

"You know the rest. No, you can never know how I suffered. The false announcement in the paper had been an error, common enough in those days, Captain Champney told me, when he came upon me one summer morning near Treadwell like a ghost. He had heard of the report in India, and had written to a common friend of ours, entreating her to let me know the truth; whether she had attempted to do so, and had been in some manner prevented by my father or my stepmother, I cannot tell. Another Champney had been killed. The mistake was only the insertion of the wrong initials; but it was a fatal error for us two. He came to me to remind me of my promise; came determined to take me away from my husband. I cannot speak of the events that came afterwards. There was no such thing as happiness possible for either of us. We were not wicked enough to be happy in spite of our sin. You know how they found George Champney lying dead upon the sands at Blankenburg one bright September morning. After that I had a dangerous illness, during which I was taken to Beldin convent, by my husband's influence, I believe, where I was tenderly nursed till I recovered. They knew my story, those spotless nuns, and yet were kind to me. I stayed with them as a boarder for a year after—after Mr. Hamersley obtain-

ed his divorce; and it was there I learned to nurse the sick. I was not destitute; a sister of my mother's, knowing my position, settled a small annuity upon me; and on that I have lived ever since. Six months ago I was seized with a yearning to see the place where the most tranquil days of my life had been spent. I knew that Mr. Hamersley was living abroad; and I fancied that I ran no risk of recognition in returning to this neighbourhood. I knew how much misery and illness had changed me since I left Treadwell. It was a foolish fancy, no doubt; but I, who have nothing human left to love, may be forgiven for a weak attachment to family places. I came to Penjalah, thinking that I should find plenty of work here of the kind I wanted. I had no intention of coming any nearer to Treadwell, where I must, of course, run considerable risk of being recognized; but when Dr. Matson urged me to come to you the temptation was too strong for me, and I came to see the dear old place once more. That is the end of my story; and now, Colonel Benson, I have but one word more to say—Farewell!"

She rose from the ground, and was going to leave him; but he detained her.

"You have almost broken my heart," he said; "but there is nothing in this world can change my love for you. I still ask you to be my wife. I promise to cherish you with a love that shall blot out the memory of your past."

She shook her head sadly.

"It can never be," she answered; "I am not vile enough to trade upon your weakness or your generosity. Let me be faithful to the dead, and loyal to you. Once more, good-bye."

"Will nothing I can say prevail with you?"

"Nothing. I shall always honour and revere you as the most generous of men; but you and I must never meet after to-day."

He pleaded with her a little longer, trying by every possible argument to vanquish her resolution; but his endeavours were all in vain. He knew that she loved him; he felt that he was doomed to lose her.

And so at last she left him, sitting in the quiet burial-ground, in the pale winter sunshine, with all the glory of the Atlantic before him, and the stillness of a desert round about. Even after she had left him he determined upon making one more attempt to win her. He found out the place where she lived, and went to that humble alley in the early dusk, bent upon seeing her once more, upon pleading his cause more calmly, more logically than it had been possible for him to do in the first heat of his passion. He found the house, and a very civil good-natured woman, who told him that Mrs. Chapman had left Penjalah two hours before, for good. She had gone abroad, the woman said.

"To Belgium, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, that was the name of the place."

As soon as he was strong enough Colonel Benson went to Belgium, where he spent a couple of months searching for Flora Hamersley in all the convents. It was a long wearisome search; but he went through it patiently to the end, persevering until he found a quiet little convent retreat six miles from Louvain, where boarders were admitted. It was the place where she had been. His search was ended; and the woman who loved him had been buried in that tiny convent cemetery just a week before he came there. After this there was nothing left for the Colonel but to go back to India to the old familiar life. It was only his closest friends who ever perceived the change in him; but, although he never spoke of his trouble, those who did thoroughly know him, knew that he had suffered some recent heart-wound, and that the stroke had been a heavy one.

THE END.

LET IT PASS.

Do not swift to take offense;
Let it pass!
Anger is a foe to sense;
Let it pass!

Brood not darkly o'er a wrong
Which will disappear ere long,
Rethinking this dreary song,
Let it pass! Let it pass!

Echo not angry word;
Let it pass!
Think how often you have erred;
Let it pass!

Since our joys must pass away
Like the dew-drops on the spray,
Wherefore should our sorrows stay?
Let them pass! Let them pass!

If for good you've taken ill,
Let it pass!
Oh! be kind and gentle still;
Let it pass!

Time at least makes all things straight;
Let us not resent, but wait,
And our triumph shall be great;
Let it pass! Let it pass!

REGISTERED in accordance with the Copyright Act of 1908.

TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

AUTHOR OF 'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,' ETC.

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

Mrs. Harcross had usually plenty to say for herself, in a certain commonplace way; but to-night she was silent, though the drive to the Tyburn district, where the widowed Lady Basingstoke had set up her tent, was rather a long one. Mr. Harcross was tired, and leaned back in the carriage, without any disturbing considerations about his "back hair," and closed his eyes. He was not offended by his wife's silence, nor did it inspire him with those vague apprehensions which some men are apt to feel under such circumstances, a foreboding of certain lectures to come. He concluded that "the herd" had been troublesome, and this particular Wednesday afternoon a failure.

The evening at Lady Basingstoke's was as other evenings. Mr. Harcross talked a good deal and talked well. In the brief pauses of his life, between the day's labour and the evening's pleasure, a man may reflect upon the emptiness of this kind of existence, and tell himself that it is all vanity; but once in the ring, with all the light and sweetness of society around him, his spirits are apt to rise. The intoxication is of the highest, perhaps, but pleasant enough while it lasts. Nobody at Lady Basingstoke's could have supposed that Mr. Harcross was tired of life.

Dear Julia thanked her dear Augusta with effusion at parting.

"So good of you to come. I never saw Sir

Thomas Henvitree so agreeable; he and Mr. Harcross seem to get on so well together. It was quite a relief to see him so much amused."

"I'm very glad we were able to come, Julia. Hubert had a committee before the Lords to-day. I was half afraid he would be too much exhausted to dine out."

"But he is so wonderfully clever, and takes everything so coolly. I should fancy he could hardly know what fatigue means. But you are not looking well to-night, Augusta. I observed it at dinner. I never saw you so pale."

"I daresay it's the colour of my dress—rather an old colour, isn't it? I told Bonifante so, but she insisted upon my having it."

"Your dress is lovely, dear, as it always is. But you really are not looking well."

With these and many other expressions of sympathy the friends parted, and Mrs. Harcross went off, with Hubert in her wake, feeling tolerably satisfied with this evening. The party had been rather a dull business perhaps, but he had been the source and centre of any brief flashes of brilliancy that had enlivened it. This kind of social success was one of the prizes that he had set himself to win, or rather an appendage of his professional position. He had nothing better to look forward to, only to mount a little higher upon the ladder which he had been slowly ascending from his youth upwards, and every rung of which was familiar to him. Were he to become Lord Chancellor, life could give him very little more than it gave him now. He had reason to be content.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. AND MRS. HARCROSS BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.

"Will you come into my room for a few minutes' talk before you go upstairs, Hubert, I want to ask you a question?"

Mrs. Harcross made this request on the threshold of her morning-room, just as her husband was turning towards that secondary staircase which led to his dressing-room.

"I am quite at your service, my dear Augusta. This is just the time in the evening when I have the least possible inclination for sleep. What is it about? Another dinner at home, made up on purpose for Sir Thomas Henvitree? I fancied you were meditating something in the carriage, you were so unusually silent. You didn't even say anything about Lady Henvitree's cheese-coloured moire, with satin upholstery's work about the skirt, which I really thought would provoke your powers of ridicule."

He strolled after his wife into the pretty chintz-draped sitting-room, where a modern lamp shed its chaste light on a table heaped with new books and periodicals. The easiest chairs, the most perfect appliances for writing in all the house, were to be found here. Mr. Harcross dropped into his favourite chair by the fire-place, which was artistically screened at this season by a little grove of ferns.

"I was not thinking of anybody's dress to-night," Mrs. Harcross said moodily.

"Indeed! then I may fairly conjecture that, like Louis XV. when he didn't hunt, your majesty did nothing."

"You are very polite. I hope my ideas do sometimes soar above toilets, even in society, where one is not supposed to think very seriously. But to-night my mind was absorbed by a somewhat painful subject."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I certainly thought you were confoundedly quiet. Is it anything wrong in the house? Does Fluman want to better himself?"

Fluman was a butler of unusual accomplishments, who had assisted Mr. and Mrs. Harcross to maintain their establishments at its high-pressure point of excellence.

"How can you be so absurd, Hubert? As if I should allow myself to be worried by anything of that kind!"

"But I can't conceive a greater loss than Fluman. We should collapse utterly if he left us in the middle of a season. I'm sure at the beginning of a dinner, when things look rather dull, I often say to myself, 'Never mind, we are in the hands of Fluman;' just as in graver affairs one would say, 'We are in the hands of Providence.' I think he has reconducted dining from a more artistic point of view than we have ever attained. I have seen him warm the stupidest people into sprightliness by judicious doses of Chateau d'Yquem; and if conversation flags towards the close of the banquet, he can work wonders with *parfait amour* and dry curries. I should consider it a domestic bereavement if he wanted to leave us. If he were to take it into his head that he was losing caste by living with a professional man, for instance, or anything of that kind."

"When you have done talking nonsense, Hubert, I shall be very glad to speak of serious things. I suppose that is the sort of stuff with which you amuse one another in your arbitration cases?"

"There is a good deal of nonsense talked, I daresay. An Arbitration case is a comfortable free-and-easy kind of affair, that pays uncommonly well. And now, my dear, what is this serious business, and why do you sit staring at me in that moody way?"

"There was something in his wife's face that he had never seen there before—something that set his heart beating a little faster than usual—something that sent his thoughts back to one dreadful day in his life, the day when Grace Redmayne fell dead at his feet."

"Do you remember the day when I called at your chambers, Hubert?"

"Certainly! I remember your coming to the Temple one afternoon, on some important matter. Your visit was not a very startling event; of course my chambers are always open to you."

"I saw a picture there—a portrait—which you told me was a portrait of your mother."

"Yes; I recollect your remarking my mother's portrait. What then?"

"It really is your mother's picture, Hubert?" his wife asked, very earnestly. "It is not an accidental likeness of any one else; of some one of whom you may have thought I should be jealous? You were not deceiving me?"

His dark face had flushed to the brow at this suggestion.

"It is not in the least like any one else," he said; "it is my mother's likeness."

"Indeed! Then I think it would have been to your credit if you had been more explicit on the subject of your antecedents, when you first spoke to my father about our marriage."

He started to his feet with a quick indignant movement; but in the next moment settled himself calmly in his favourite pose against the angle of the mantelpiece.

"I cannot quite follow your line of argument, Mrs. Harcross," he said; "I shall be obliged if you will make it a little clearer."

"I had a print brought me this afternoon; an engraving of the picture in your chambers."

"Indeed! I did not know the picture had been engraved. I shall be very glad to secure a copy."

"Your mother's name is written on the back of the engraving—it is a proof before letters—and the person who brought me the picture told me her history."

"May I inquire the name of the person who took so much trouble about my family affairs?"

"I would rather not tell you that."

"I will not press the question. I think I can make a shrewd guess at the identity of the officious individual."

"There was nothing officious in the business. The person who brought the picture—as a rare engraving worth adding to my collection—had no idea of any connection between you and the original of the portrait."

"Innocent person! Those fetchers and carriers are such simple unsuspecting creatures. And so, through the unconscious informer's aid, you have discovered that my mother's name was Mostyn; and that she was an actress, I presume. Was it this appalling discovery that troubled you all the evening?"

"Yes, Hubert. I have been very much disturbed by this discovery; and, painful as it is, still more so by your want of candour."

"Indeed! What would you have wished? That I should tear the plaster from a very old wound, never quite healed? That I should have lifted the curtain from a picture that I made it the business of my life to shroud? Did I ever boast of my antecedents, Mrs. Harcross, or endeavour to exalt myself in your eyes? When I asked you to marry me, I offered you myself, with all my chances in the future. I said nothing about the past, nor can I conceive that you have anything to do with it, or the shadow of a right to call me to question about it."

"The story is quite true, then?" asked Augusta, white to the lips, and with the hand that held a gauzy kerchief round her trembling visibly. "This Mrs. Mostyn was an actress, and your mother?"

"She was both. She died in Italy before I was five years old; but she lived long enough for me to love her tenderly. Be good enough to bear that fact in mind when you are talking of her."

"And the rest of the story is equally correct, I conclude—the lady closed her career by an elopement?"

"She began her career, so far as I am concerned, by an elopement?" Mr. Harcross replied coolly. "She ran away with my father."

"And was married to him, I suppose?" his wife said breathlessly.

"That is a question I have never been in a position to solve," answered Mr. Harcross. "If he did marry her—as I am naturally inclined to believe he did—he never acknowledged the marriage in any public manner, and—he broke her heart."

The last words came slowly, and with an evident effort. "He broke her heart," he repeated to himself as the force of his own words came home to him. It was not the only heart that had been so broken.

"You have not condescended to tell me the name of your father," said Augusta after a little pause.

"O," cried her husband, his face lighting up with a sudden flash of triumph, "your informant—the useful person—did not enlighten you on that point! Then I decline to eke out his information. I refuse to answer the question which you ask so graciously."

"As you please," she said, in an icy tone. "The name could make very little difference. It would not make the dishonour deeper, or less deep; nothing can add to or lessen the shame I have felt to-day."

"What is my birth to you?" cried Hubert Harcross passionately. "Have I failed in one title of my bargain? Have I flattered on your fortune, or wasted your substance, or given myself up to a life of pleasure, as nine men out of ten would have done in my circumstances? Do you presume to call me to account, because there is possibly the burr sinister across my escutcheon? What does it matter to you whose son I am, so long as I perform my part of the transaction which you and I entered upon three years ago? You are ashamed of my mother! Why, in heart, and mind, and everything that makes a woman beautiful, she was immeasurably your superior! She did not dress three times a day, or live only to fulfil the debtor and creditor account in her visiting-book. Indeed, she was a woman who could exist without a visiting-book or a French milliner. At the time I remember her she was the devoted slave of a scoundrel, long-suffering, tender, enduring neglect and hard usage with an angelic patience, made happy by a smile or a careless word of kindness. O God such a life, bitter enough to stamp its cruel details on the brain of a four-year-old child! My mother was a woman of a thousand, Mrs. Harcross, although she sacrificed fame and fortune to a most consummate villain."

For some moments Augusta Harcross sat silent, speechless with passion, and with the fleecy folds of her cloak clasped convulsively across her breast, by a hand which no longer shook—a hand which had grown rigid, as in some mortal convulsion of soul and body.

"I am obliged to you for this sudden burst of candour," she said at last. "It has, at any rate, the merit of novelty, and it is just as well that I should understand your appreciation of my character. I am immeasurably the inferior of an actress—a lady whose first husband was problematical, and about whose second alliance there seems hardly room for doubt; and after marrying me under false pretences, you coolly refuse to tell me your father's name, and insult me when I express my sense of shame on discovering the cruel blot upon your birth. If you had told me this story when you asked me to be your wife, I might have overlooked the disparity of our positions, might have shut my eyes to the past—"

"That is to say, the daughter of Mr. William Vallory, the sage pilot of the perilous straits of Basinghall-street, the guide, philosopher, and friend of insolvent mankind, might have deigned to overlook the want of blue blood in the veins of her suitor. That is what you mean, I suppose. If I had sued very humbly,