

CORRODING GOLD

things is, to say the least of it, highly injurious and improper."

One or two members of the party guiltily flushed, because "Days-at-home," however skilfully managed, present a difficulty in moderate households, where the quantity of tea to be consumed has to be taken into consideration.

Presently she looked round with a comprehensive smile, which, however, she quickly quenched.

"Ah, yes, life is a very strange thing; and even the most commonplace destiny is capable of being filled with romance! I have just heard something astonishing, almost overwhelming. I had a brother. He emigrated to Australia—let me see, it must be quite thirty years ago—and nothing has ever been heard of him since——"

Mrs. Rodney paused there, not caring to add that an immediate departure from his own country had become necessary, if he wished to continue a free man.

"He was my only brother—not particularly brilliant, a plodder rather than a meteor," she continued grandly. "But the way in which he has got on just shows that the parable of the hare and the tortoise still holds good."

"He has done well, dear Mrs. Rodney? How gratifying!" murmured Mrs. Craddock excitedly.

"Ah, yes, he has done splendidly; but, unfortunately, he has not been spared to reap the harvest of his labour and his success. The gentleman who called this afternoon was a lawyer come to announce his death and other very important matters in connection with his estate."

"How interesting!" "How sad!" "How strange!" were some of the murmured comments on this announcement, which Estelle listened to with a growing impatience.

She wanted the visitors to go away; she had the feeling that it was even indecent for them to linger,