

in life were in her own hands ; that is, that they lay in her making a good marriage ; and they had been discussed without reserve. She was no flirt, nor even what is called "forward," either in ideas or behaviour ; yet, perhaps, no man had ever paid her any marked attention without her having reflected to herself, "perhaps this person will be my husband." It was not her fault that it was so ; extreme delicacy of mind was as impossible to one in her circumstances as modesty is to the offspring of some agricultural labourer who has but one room for the accommodation of his grown-up family. What was possible to her of good the girl had acquired or retained ; she possessed all its solidities, if circumstances had denied to her those graces which embellish goodness. A dissenting chapel may not have the external attractions of a cathedral, simply from want of funds, and yet be equally sacred. Up to that time, for example, Gracie had regarded the marriage question from a point of view that was, for one of her years and sex, somewhat calculating and matter-of-fact. It was, unhappily, no longer possible for her to do so, now that she had seen Hugh Darall.

For the future something would have to be given up as well as acquired ; and that something, for the present, seemed immeasurably precious, not willingly to be bartered for much gold.

"What was he like—this Mr. Darall—Gracie?" continued the invalid, with gentle sadness, but with a touch of curiosity too. Even when a pretty thing is not to be got, one likes to hear all about it.

"Oh, so handsome, dear mamma, and so kind, and I am sure so good !"

Mrs. Ray's pale lips twitched with a painful smile—an accident of her infirmity, perhaps ; or was she thinking of some far back time, when she had given some one credit for being "good" upon too short an acquaintance.

"That does not give one a very distinct idea of him, Gracie. Is he dark or fair?"

"Oh, fair, mamma. He has blue eyes."

"Like Captain Walters?" inquired the old lady, with affected indifference.

"Oh, not at all like Captain Walters," answered the girl, in a tone of indignation. "They are beautiful eyes, very frank and——"

"Tender," suggested the invalid, smiling.

"Yes, that is the word—tender," answered the girl, simply. "I don't think Mr Darall would hurt a fly ; and yet, when one saw him waiting to meet those wicked men, they looked hard and shining, like drawn swords."

"Do you mean the men did?"

"No, no ; his eyes. There were a hundred of them—I mean of the