AS IN A LOOKING GLASS.

BY [illegible]

CHAPTER VI.—*(Continued.)*

"But as I didn't care to have a scene, and make an exhibition of myself before all those people. You have no fact."

[If there is one thing a foreigner prides himself upon, it is upon an unlimited possession of that most desirable article, and I could see the hot blood rush up to poor little Bois Crevé's cheeks when I openly accused him of his want of it.]

"I have never been told so before," he said, evidently much hurt, "but then, perhaps, it is because I have never cared for anyone as I have cared for you. I suppose that is why one forgets everything and everybody, and makes endless mistakes and blunders Mrs. Despard, you cannot tell how miserable you make me; how devotedly, how passionately I adore you!"

"My dear Vicomte," I said, freezingly, "I know one thing and that is, that it is perfectly impossible to be entertained in this weather. To begin with, I can't heat half you say with the rear of the sex, and secondly, I am far too wet and cold to think of anything so inappropriate as love. Let us retrace our steps."

And we did retrace our steps, and I endeavored to keep him on conventional topics as far as I could, until we had nearly reached the hotel, and then he burst forth again

"Might he come to my little salon as soon as we had both changed our wet things?"

"No!"

Might he not tip the waiter to let him sit next to me at the table d'hôte?"

"No!"

And finally, with amazing effrontery, "Might he wait for me on the sands, and would I come to him after the Kursaal dance was over, about half-past eleven."

"The "No!" to this request was far more vigorous and emphatic than either of the other two had been, and I sent him away cursing his fate and the prudery of English women in general, and my own self in particular.

The game really isn't worth the candle. It is true Lady Damer has been very rude to me at times since I have been here, and that I could thoroughly repay her by arranging from her then enterprising little *Flamand*; but I think, all things considered, it is more advisable for me to present the other cheek to be slapped, and to continue in my usual *rôle* of Humility. Lady Damer will be very useful to me in London, and I really can't afford to quarrel with her, moreover, as Bois Crevé is as perfectly indifferent to me as the paper on which I am writing, I make up my mind to lay aside all my little arts and seductions as far as he is concerned and go in heavily for sisterly affection with Lady Damer. With this virtuous resolution strongly imprinted on my mind, I rush upstairs and change my dress, and go forth in search of her ladyship, determined to regain her affection or friendship, or whatever she may call the feeling she once had for me. I am told she is in her salon, and I knock somewhat timidly, opening the door at the same time, saying—

"May I come in?"

She looks up from a French book she is reading, and appears anything but pleased at the sight of me.

"Oh, is it you," she says with a yawn, "I thought it was the waiter; I had ordered some tea."

This is not encouraging, but I persevere nevertheless.

CHAPTER VII.

There are certain periods in the life of those most expert in what—for want of a better term—I will call duplicity, when they cannot help feeling nervous and demoralized, and when in fact a sort of mental paralysis sets in. As a rule, I am not a sufferer in this way, and am certainly not in the habit of being put down by clumsy, but on the present occasion, seeing as I do the cold, grey eye of Lady Damer fixed on me, and instinctively knowing that a fracas is about to take place, in which I shall probably get the worst of it, I must candidly admit that my sensations are most unpleasant.

Lady Damer resumes the conversation "I am glad, however, that you have come," she says, "because it is necessary that you should have a few moments conversation with as little delay as possible."

"Indeed!" say I, with wounded affection of innocence as my shattered nerves will allow me to mutter "Whatever do you mean, dear?"

"Simply this," she replies "You will have to leave Ostend to-morrow, or else put up with the consequences."

"I fail to understand you, dear."

"You are growing very dense, I fear, Mrs. Despard," says Lady Damer, "but, to save time, I will enlighten you."

"Pray do so," say coldly; "really my nerves are not strong enough to bear these checks."

"Ever since I introduced you to him," pursues Lady Damer, "you have done your utmost to rob me of the affection of the only man in the world that I care a rap about; and you have pretty nearly succeeded, but not quite. Now I don't intend that you shall succeed. I know enough of your past life to gibbet you as high as Haman. I am perfectly acquainted with many little episodes that never came out when your interesting legal difficulties were discussed in the Divorce Court. Now I am perfectly ready to make a bargain with you. Your departure for my sake—As long as you don't cross my path, nor interfere with my plans, I shall in the future, as I have done in the past, keep my information to myself."

Feeling myself entirely at her mercy, and knowing, as I do perfectly well, that Lady Damer is in a position to bite as well as bark, there is nothing left for me but to capitulate. This I do with as good grace as possible.

"You are entirely wrong," I say, "in your suspicions They are most cruel and unfounded! Monsieur de Bois Crevé has no earthly fascination, nor should I have permitted him to do so even if he had attempted—but of your mind is the least uneasy, I can specially relieve you I had already determined to go away to morrow, and indeed had come to tell you so."

Then there is nothing more to be said," remarks Lady Damer, "except that since we now understand each other, I have no wish to act in any way inimical to you and I trust that we shall always remain friends."

"Thanks!" I say, coldly; "good night."

"Good-night," she replies, "and *bon voyage*."

And it is in this undignified way that I am driven from Ostend.

I fear that it is not in a very Christian frame of spirit that I return to my hotel. Having vented my annoyance upon the unfortunate Felicie, who, however, bears my little burst of temper with the utmost imperturbability, I order her to get my boxes packed, and tell her that we are going to London to-morrow. I then send her to the chemist's to get a little chloral, being fully satisfied that I shall not sleep without it My prophecy is fulfilled, for the horrid man refuses to supply that most delightful drug without a doctor's prescription. I lay awake all night swearing vengeance on Lady Damer, and vowing that I would be even with her for the annoyance and humiliation she had caused me.

In the morning I am besieged with solicitations from Sir Thomas and Bois Crevé to remain a little longer. They have learned my intention, and do their best to shake it, but without success. There is, however, an unmistakeable look of satisfaction on Lady Gage's bovine countenance; and, as for the coldness of my discomfiture, she does not put in an appearance. Now that I am compelled to go I should not be a woman if I did not inwardly desire to remain a little longer. But this, of course, cannot be, for I am not yet strong enough to defy Lady Damer, and dare her to do her worst.

I loathe the sea at all times (except when on board a really comfortably arrayed yacht, and to day it is very rough, and so the prospect is anything but inviting.

The Vicomte and Sir Thomas both insist on seeing the last of me, and the latter, for once, braves his wife's authority. At the moment of my departure, Lady Gage orders him to take her to see some friends of theirs who have just arrived at Ostend

The little man refuses point-blank, and I scarcely know which of the twain is more astonished—Lady Gage at her lord and master's sudden rebellion, or Sir Thomas at his own temerity.

"I shall manage very well, dear Sir Thomas, I say. "Monsieur de Bois Crevé has kindly offered to see after everything."

"I never heard of such a thing, Mrs. Despard," he replies. "I insist on seeing you off, and I only trust that we shall soon have the pleasure of renewing your charming acquaintance."

Lady Gage glares, and for a moment seems bereft of speech. But I offer no further objection, and so it is settled.

At last I am on board. The Vicomte speaks to the captain, who is very civil and attentive, and does everything in his power to palliate the horrors of that hateful crossing. The Belgian confides to me the fact that he intends to shorten his leave of absence, and return to England. "And you, cruel one, are the cause," he says.

"Pray don't talk nonsense," I reply. "I may as well tell you that I shall only be in London for a day or two."

"Where are you, then, going?" he asks.

"Heaven only knows!" I reply. "My plans are not yet settled."

"I will find you," he says, "if I have to search the furthermost end of the world."

"Thanks," I say; "but don't you think that, instead of distressing me with your foolish chatter, you might help Sir Thomas look after my luggage?"

The tears mounted to his eyes at this somewhat cruel snub. "You cannot mean to wound my feelings," he says. "I would die for you."

"I am sure I hope that you won't," I reply. "I don't wish to have anything so terrible on my conscience."

At this moment the signal is given for all who are not crossing to leave the boat.

"Adieu, mon Ange," says the Vicomte.

"God bless you, dearest Mrs. Despard," says Sir Thomas, and my two admirers scramble up the gangway.

The ropes are loosened, and I huddle into my cabin and await the martyrdom I always suffer on the hateful channel steamers

* * * * *

A tedious sea-voyage—fuming at cold, rheumatic, uncomfortable Dover—and then Victoria Station. What a chill strikes one's heart as the step from the railway carriage is taken!

Once more in the greatest city of the world—the metropolis of wealth and fashion, and the gentlemanly, the paradise of the slaves of fashion, the denizens of the demi-monde, and the smug respectability of the shopkeeper.

A sigh of regret for naughty, frivolous Ostend, and then a feeling of stern determination to play my cards well in the far more serious campaign before me here.

There I was amusing myself with a few harmless episodes I was enjoying a well earned holiday—but now, well—the stakes are high, and the chance of success gains nothing by delay: and if I fail there is scant mercy for me to expect.

At Ostend I was conscious of leaving two hearts despondent—two hearts triumphant Need I say the former were masculine, the latter feminine? Poor Sir Thomas! When the stars looked down on him at 11 p.m. that night, I fancy they witnessed an unusually interesting episode in the history of his connubial happiness

Poor Bois Crevé! Poor dear!

Dearest Lady Damer although for the moment you have defeated me you had better bow to the inevitable Isn't it true to think about a canary Shall I kick down the last ladder I have made use of, or can it still be of any use to me? Will further friendship help or hinder me

Do people here still believe in her? This I must find out without delay

Felicie, has brought me my letters and my chocolate, and a sense of homelessness comes over me for a moment

Yet it gives way to the feeling that always recurs to me the instant I set foot in London, the feeling that I have lost my independence, that I must submit to a stronger will than my own.

Perhaps it is the knowledge that I must be more cautious in my behavior, more quiet in my demeanor

Perhaps it is not that—why should I conceal from myself and you the real, the only reason? It is Jack

Of course one of these letters is from him It will tell me what I am to do, and where I am to go, whom I am to conciliate, whom to cajole, whom to entice. Ah, God! the term of slavery comes back—I mean how useful it is to have a man like Jack to help one.

What is the good of saying to myself that I will go to him like this no longer; what use making up my mind to shake off the yoke and dissolve the partnership, to work independently, and follow my own scheme and obtain my own ends?

I have made these resolutions twenty times before—twenty times have I given in and gone back to the old slavery

But at any rate I will insist that some alteration shall be made—at any rate I will

I will open Jack's letter.

"I shall be in to-morrow morning till twelve o'clock. You had better come about half-past ten. Much to tell you

I will not go. If he wants to see me, let him come here.

But perhaps, after all, it would be more prudent to go to him.

* * * *

Now for my visit to Jack.

Punctually at a quarter past ten, therefore, this morning I emerged from my quarters in Mayfair, and got into my pillbox of a brougham to be whisked off to Jack's chambers in the Albany

Brougham and house are both part of my stock-in trade—expensive but necessary.

I am dressed entirely in black, with a very dark veil, like a Catholic lady going to confession. An appropriate costume, in good sooth, for is not Jack my father confessor? But it is certainly not from any respect for the confessional whatever I am rattling to his rooms, so soberly clad, but rather from prudential motives.

It is true nobody is in town, but I do not wish to run the risk of being recognized by any chance—Shame of virtue as I know it the door of a row of chambers, never at ten a.m. It certainly is rather thoughtless of Jack to expose his partner to danger like this I must remember to take him to task about it.

Here we are at last. Rat-a-tat! Tat! Jack's valet is at the door in a moment. We are old acquaintances.

"Good morning, madam," he says, deferentially; "will you please walk up? The captain is expecting you."

This is a most valuable servant. He has travelled all over the world. He can do everything, from varnishing a patent leather to sailing a boat—from shaving a chin to cleaning a breech-loader. But his forte, his specialty, his chief recommendation in Jack's eyes, is that as a cool, unblushing, systematic liar, he stands simply unrivalled, even in his own meritorious profession

Whether he is blowing his master's trumpet at a fresh watering-place, or foiling the machinations of a justly indignant creditor, his collossal falsehoods are proof against my wile of the enemy, and able to cope with the horns of any dilemma

When Jack is in a good temper he is wont to substitute for the gentle souls patronymic of Norton names of a more playful fancy, such as Baron Munchausen, Ananias, Polonius, Sinbad, which occasions Norton will smile deprecatingly, and bow a little, as though receiving a well merited compliment. A very good valet is Norton.

"Excuse me madam, for saying so," he says suavely, as he opens the outer door of the first floor suite, "but I do rejoice to see that your voyage has done you so much good. Then with a gentle knock he throws open the inner door, announces me, and is gone.

"Well, Jack: here I am, you see," say I.

"Well, Lena: and how are you?" says Jack

Captain Fortinbras, late of the 5th Queen's Own Musketeers Dragoons, occupies a spacious set of rooms, which are luxuriously but unostentatiously furnished Everything is in the best form, but "looks like money."

There are evidences of a refined artistic taste on all sides, as well as the usual appurtenances of a man about-town's chambers. Any one calling here for the first time must of necessity be very favorably impressed Here are obviously the *Penates* of a man of means

All these, however, as well as the captain's faultless get up under all circumstances, his most placidly, his pretty park back, his opera stall, and, indeed, all his surroundings are nothing but a judicious investment of capital.

In other words, it is a trade For Jack is a *Merchant Industrier*, "fakir," as the Yankees call it. He is Jack's stock-in-trade. For Jack is a solo and only income the yearly hundreds go to his lock) which is 252 per annum. Jack knows nothing about this particular source of revenue They *do* say (people will say nasty things, you know, sometimes that it merely represents the sum of £1 a week left to him by his late father, but this is rather the order that he may have to exercise for putting his hands into other people's pockets

But this is a base, and cruel calumny I know He may be very clever at cards and billiards and he may be able once or twice to sell a horse to advantage but as regards anything *approaching* dishonesty—well you had better suggest such a possibility in his presence He would most certainly receive you pointblank on a shooting-gallery, or on Bude quicksands And he shoots very straight as some people know to their cost As he rises from the sofa to greet me, I notice that whether or not my little trip has improved my looks I cannot say, but he seems to have done *him* much good It is the same tall soldierly form, the same clean-cut, aristocratic face, with its fierce black moustache and pale blue eyes under heavy brows, but with this difference Whereas before my departure, his age might have been anything between thirty-five and forty-five (I never did exactly know his age), this morning he looks forty five. And I flattered at that as the Irishman says. There is an uneasy glitter in the eye that he takes such care to keep soft and benevolent, there is an unusual pale haggardness on the placid, bronzed features. There is a dejected stoop in the shoulders, and a dragging of the legs that ages him wonderfully

The breakfast here on the table in its silver covers untasted On a sideboard by the sofa stands the spirit case, and two or three empty soda water bottles are lying about on the floor.

These to me who know Jack so thoroughly are signs of great mental disturbance. He, who generally is so abstemious—who takes the morning meal as if his night had been spent in the slumbers of innocence—must indeed have had something serious to upset him lately.

"I'm very well indeed, thank old man," I answer in response to his kind greeting "But I need not ask how you are Very chippy, I'm afraid

He passes his hand over his forehead, as though to chase away some evil recollection

"Very chippy indeed, Mrs. Despard," he says, putting forward an armchair for me. "I scarcely thought when I wrote to you to call here this morning that you'd find me like this.

"Talking of that," I say, leaning back luxuriously, "and without suggesting for a moment that you ought to have been polite enough to spare me the trouble, how *could* you have been so rash as to bring me here when you know *how* all-important it is for me to respect the conventionalities—especially just now!"

"For God's sake, Lena," he growls irritably, "spare me your allectations this morning, at all events. I know well enough that I never do anything without good cause."

"Like the rooks," I mutter, in an undertone, afraid of rousing his wrath, and yet wickedly enjoying the satisfaction of seeing my unmanageable partner for once where I have so often been—in the blues.

Jacks pours himself out another brandy-and soda, and then, with an unsteady hand, takes a deep draught of the fiery sparkling nectar. Then he leans on a deep sigh of relief and subsides on to the sofa Then he selects a big cigar, and having brought it to a good glow, takes up his parable.

"Look here, Lena, I've sent for you last, I told you to come here this morning because, first, I had something to say to you on two or three points; secondly, I couldn't come round to you last night as I had important business here, and thirdly morning, as I expected, I was called away from London on the same business at a moment's notice. Does that satisfy your ladyship?

"Perfectly," I answer coldly. I don't like the way Jack says "I *told* you to come" Is he my master, pray, as well as my partner?

"Well," he continues, amid vicious puffs, "my important business was this

I have been very much bothered last week or so with that young idiot, Lord Slumberton, and I've spent a lot of money over him in one way or another."

"Invested it, you mean, I interpose, satirically.

"And as he told me he meant to stay on here some time"—disdaining my little stab—"I never even alluded to the subject of cards, though he has been up in these rooms several times at night as a drum But yesterday afternoon he informed me that he was off to-day to St Petersburg in pursuit of his beloved Catarina, who has had a sudden fit of home sickness."

"So you invited him to dinner last night of course, you kind man!" Another stab I am still chafing under Jack's curb

"So he came to dinner"—flushing an angry lock in me, and stuffing an oath—"and we went to the Hilarity together After the theatre we came back here for a broiled bone, and then we sat down to a quiet rubber of *écarté*. I lost at first pretty heavily

"Of course," I said viciously.

"Will you hear me out?"—springing to his feet—"and then *he*, Lord Slumberton *himself* proposed to increase the stakes

This time I laughed out loud

"By God! Lena, I swear it. You *must* believe me. He proposed to play me twenty one games at £50 the game, and £1,000 the rub Well I agreed after some demur, and we were just playing the second game when in walks Charley Hicks with a friend whom he wished to introduce to me Who should the man be of all men in the world but Algy Balfour"

"And what of him?" I inquire, now thoroughly interested "The Vicomte de Bois Crevé introduced him to me last week at Ostend" [I have known him, by the way, for some time But I must have forgotten to tell Jack.]

"Oh, you know him, do you?" answers Jack carelessly. "He is simply a cad with whom I had a row.

"Why didn't you refuse to speak to him?" I ask "Why didn't you kick him out?"

"Just because I didn't want a row," I reply, in some confusion—"I think, I bowed and went on with the game. I could have cut all the cards for Sumberton Hands full of trumps passed by the dozen winning last tricks to a trump My lord couldn't lose Ann Hicks was that infernal Balfour, who hates me like poison watching me like a hawk. I had tried to cheat I couldn't have assaged it for my life"

"You mean I say, you didn't dare because he was watching you

Jack turns a scarlet to feel my taunt

"I never would think of cheating he cries—"that is, not unless there was some necessity for it I play fair, on principle, and because I am a first-rate player As for that Slumberton he plays like a cow But if *had* cheated last night it would have been because the lout had the devil's own luck, and I should have considered it only fair to play the devil at his own game As it was Balfour never took his eyes off my fingers The result was I only got six games out of the twenty-one, and so Slumberton had me for £1,400"

"You don't really mean it?" I exclaim in horror

"I wish to God I didn't," groans he, sinking back on the sofa, and burying his face in his hands

"*But how on earth* did you pay Lord Slumberton?" I enquire, more concerned than I care to own If Jack is shown up in town, there is an end to all my hopes of help from him

"I paid him last night, answers my partner, to my astonishment "I had a good week's racing the other days. I knew I had £1,180 odd at the bank Balfour was watching me with a sardonic grin on his ugly mug So I laughed a jolly laugh, pulled out my check book, and gave Slumberton a check for the lot then and there.

"Poor old man," I say, now moved to pity "So you're left with three tenners in the world

"Bah! After all, who cares cries the captain, pulling himself together. Perhaps it's another good investment, now I come to think of it. Nobody will be able to complain if I play Slumberton again for high stakes after this"

A gentle knock at the door Enter the faithful Norton, who bears a face wreathed in smiles

"Mr. Shallman and Lord Udolpho Daysey would like to know if you are up yet, sir!"

"Certainly I am up," answers Jack, beaming with a sudden joy. "Show them into the dining-room, and say I will be with them in five minutes. By the way, ask them what they will take."

Norton departs noiselessly as he had come.

"Now, my dear," taking my hand, "I shall have to send you away. But I *must* see you about your business. Can I call about five this afternoon?"

"No, Jack," I say, "I have some logics coming. Be with me at seven to-morrow if it is all the same to you."

An *ex* it is settled, and I vanish

The thought that struck me was this: Algy Balfour is a nice young man, and probably very dull all alone in town.

He told me he always stayed at Long's. Why not invite *him* to tea to-day instead of Jack?

I think I should like to hear that story about "his row" with Jack *before* I see dear Jack again Because dear Jack knows a great deal about my affairs. And I don't see why I shouldn't know as much as possible about *his!*

He shouldn't be so authoritative with me.

(To be continued.)

THE WRONGS OF WOMEN.

A DEPUTATION of workwomen engaged in the chain-making industry waited recently on Home-Secretary Matthews in order to protest against any State interference with their means of livelihood. "It is highly creditable to these sturdy women, says Paul Campbell in the *Christian Socialist*, "that they should be so eager to maintain themselves and their little ones by honest labor, however arduous and poorly paid. One of them told the Home Secretary that she had begun work at the age of eight, and was now the mother of fourteen children, and had still to keep at the forge for her living She made light of the work however, saying it was pleasant and healthy! All honor to the brave woman and her companions, I say. But, oh, the pity of it! Have we nothing better for our tender maidens to do than to toil at a forge all day, plying with hand and foot a twenty-pound hammer? Is there not something wrong in a woman having only a choice given her between this sort of life and *starvation—or worse!*

"I wonder of the fine, liberty-loving ladies who accompanied the honest chain makers to the Home Office would like even a short spell of the work which they think is good enough for some of their poor sisters to continue all their lives. Would Lady Goldsmid, Mrs Mousely-Bell and Mrs. Home Secretary take to see any daughter of theirs working as these women, whose precious 'liberty' is seeming-ly at stake, have to work? If not, why not? They do not require to work in that way. Ah, that is it. Women only can claim making and other rough trades because they *require* to do it. Otherwise they would much prefer to leave it at sort of work alone. Here then is what we have to put right. We have to change a system under which a Bertha Byng is 'required' to begin making nails before she is into 'her teens,' while a Lady Goldsmid is required to do nothing at all during her whole life"—*Belfast Weekly News.*

The building of statues is a relic of Roman idol worship, where the gods and goddesses were represented in stone.