

TERRIBLY FULFILLED.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

"I can't stand it any longer, and I won't! It isn't so much that he jeers at me and ill-treats me, perhaps I could manage to put up with that, if he gave me a kind word now and then, and didn't leave me so much alone. But he is away sometimes for days and nights together; and where he goes to I don't know, though of course I can guess pretty well; and he will never tell me anything except to mind my own business. And when he is at home, he never speaks except to taunt and sneer at me because I'm not a lady, as he says. He hates me, and I've come to hate him, and I'm afraid of my life with him. You can't imagine what he's like when he's in a temper. I cannot, indeed, bring myself to tell you of all the shame and the infamy he puts upon me." And the Honourable Mrs. Ferrard buried her face in her hands and sobbed despairingly.

Mr. Cross, auctioneer, rested his great square chin on his hands, and gazed across his library table at the flushed and weeping figure before him. "So it has come to this at last, Amy?" he said. "You deceived and disobeyed your old father, that loved you, and deserted him, and pretty well broke his heart, all for the sake of this grand husband of yours; and now you have to come to me to help you against him. Well, well; I'm not a bit surprised, my girl. I've been expecting you. I wasn't coming to you, you know; I knew you would have to come to me, sooner or later. Now, sit still and quiet yourself, while I think a bit."

He continued to gaze across his writing-table, but with eyes that saw nothing. This was his only child, all that was left to him of her dead mother; and he had loved her, and still loved her, with an intensity which her insignificant little intelligence was far from comprehending. It had been his study from her childhood to gratify every fancy which entered her shallow pate; all that money could buy had been lavished upon her—except the training and education of a lady. "I'm not going to have my girl," said he, "brought up so that she'll be ashamed of her father and her father's friends. No; let her learn to play the piano, if she cares to—I always liked a good tune—and to draw and paint and talk French, so that it don't worry her. But none of your fine finishing schools for me, where she'll mix with a lot of stuck-up fools and get all sorts of notions into her head."

So Amy Cross went to a very respectable establishment in North London, where she acquired, to a limited extent, all the above accomplishments; and was sent back to her home very pretty, vala, and vulgar, very proud of her piano and her French, and without a single useful or graceful idea in her head.

This being so, it was not perhaps to be wondered at that Miss Amy Cross should fall an easy victim to the wiles of Lord Englethorpe's youngest son, the Honourable James Ferrard. That gentleman was at Canterbury, attending the races at Barham Downs with a kindred spirit of his former regiment (then quartered in that city); his commission in which he had been permitted—and only just permitted—to resign; and it had occurred to him that it would be amusing to run over to Margate and contend for a time with humbler Don Juans for the smiles of the Cockney beauties of the place. It so happened that he was just then staying there with some relations; and the two met on the jetty, and were mutually attracted by one another's good looks. The gallant captain found no difficulty in introducing himself both to the girl and her friends; on all of whom his appearance and manner—so different from those of the gentlemen of their society—made a most favorable impression. They met frequently; and he soon succeeded in captivating the heart of poor Amy.

It is due to the captain's pride of birth and ancestry to say that, at first, flirtation and not marriage was in his thoughts. But when he discovered that the girl's father was a man of very great wealth, and that she was an only child, he began to think that the game might be worth keeping up in London, with a view to honourable matrimony, immediate comfort, and succession in the future to the old man's money. For it would have been difficult for Captain Ferrard to have indicated with any precision his present means of existence. It was notorious that his family had long declined to hold any communication with him, further than that the earl allowed him the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, which indeed was all that he could afford, being—for a peer—almost penniless, with a good many children to provide for. The sum named was about enough to keep the young gentleman in gloves and cigars. The balance of his expenditure had to be made up by means of credit, the turf, billiards, pigeon-shooting, and cards. But the first was nearly at an end; the second required capital; the next two are not improved by overmuch tobacco and brandy; and at the fifth the captain was becoming a little too skillful. He was in a desperate state. Why should he not betake himself to his last weapon? He was twenty-eight, with a manly and well-made figure, smooth-faced as a boy of eighteen, brilliant of complexion, with eyes of a peculiar dark blue. It was more the face of a beautiful woman than that of a man; but there was something wrong about it. The forehead was too retreating, the mouth too hard, and too often expanded in a smile. His manner and bearing were extremely pleasant and ingratiatory. How should an ignorant little girl, fresh from a North London seminary, or her auctioneering papa, detect the festering vices and the cruel heart beneath that fair outside? So he asked permission to call on Miss Cross in London, and readily obtained it.

He called accordingly, saw her alone, and made most satisfactory progress. The second time, he was introduced to papa. Papa, in fact, having heard of the former visit, and knowing the visitor well by repute through certain bill-discounting acquaintances, had left instructions with a faithful retainer—the cook—that he was to be fetched from the city immediately on a repetition of the visit. The result was not quite what Captain Ferrard had expected. Papa sat glum and moody through the interview; when it was over, he attended the visitor to the door, and with some coarseness of manner and roughness of tone, requested him to take notice that his attentions were not desired. Not all Captain Ferrard's smoothest explanations and assurances sufficed to appease the auctioneer, who simply replied that he didn't believe a word of them; and that, supposing them to be true, his girl did not want any fine gentleman for a husband, least of all of the stamp of Captain Ferrard, as to whose character and pursuits he further expressed himself pretty roundly. The captain answered with aristocratic contempt and insolence, applied with an ease and absence of emotion which reduced the auctioneer to speechless fury: and so departed.

The only result of this was that the ill-regulated girl, whose lover was the first toy which had been denied to her, became mutinous. She entered, first upon a clandestine correspondence, then upon a series of secret meetings, and ultimately left home one fine day just after she had attained twenty-one, and was married at a suburban church by license. Ferrard calculated that when once the irrevocable step had been taken, a reconciliation with her father and a handsome dowry would be a matter of only a few

weeks, and that the plebeian alliance, gilded with the auctioneer's gold, would be condoned by his family, and would even cause him to be received by them with open arms. But everything went wrong. The bereaved parent, whatever may have been his sufferings in private, did not haste to clasp his erring daughter to his bosom. When at last she wrote him a letter, carefully dictated by her husband, the only reply received was from a lawyer, stating that Mr. Cross declined all communication with Mrs. Ferrard or her husband; but that as he did not desire that his daughter should starve, he proposed to make to her exactly the same allowance as her husband received from the Earl of Englethorpe. That nobleman, who had been waiting to see what would happen before finally committing himself, thereupon wrapped himself with much dignity in his family grandeur, and refused to receive either his son or his son's wife, or to add a farthing to the two hundred and fifty pounds a year.

All this was so far beneath the Honourable James' just expectations, that he became not a little disgusted with his bargain, with the usual results. Indifference and neglect were speedily followed by quarrels, unbraiding, and taunts; at last by covert, yet none the less positive, unmanly cruelty on the part of the husband, and a return to his former mode of life. This, indeed, he had never really abandoned, though he had put some sort of restraint on the open indulgence of his vices so long as it appeared that anything might be got by doing so; and even now, having regard to what the day might bring forth, he was cunning and cautious to the last degree. At length, Amy fled in despair to her father, who received her coldly, but without anger, in the interview with which this tale commences.

Amy sat on the sofa, her wild sobbing becoming less frequent, for she saw that her father was thinking. Weak and foolish as she was, she instinctively appreciated his strength of character enough to know that when Mr. Cross took to thinking, something generally happened in consequence; and she hoped that he would find some means of extricating her from the trouble which she had brought upon herself.

Some time had gone by, and the auctioneer remained in the same vein of thought, seemingly forgetful of his daughter's presence. At last she spoke to him, and he roused himself with a start.

"Ten o'clock," he said, looking at his watch; "time you were home."

"Home, papa? I dare not. I don't know what he won't do, when he finds where I've been, and he's sure to get it out of me. Oh, don't send me back!" and she burst into a fresh fit of hysterical weeping.

"Hush, hush, my girl!" he said soothingly. "Nonsense! A married woman oughtn't to be away from her husband. I'm going to write him a letter for you to give him, and you'll find he won't be so angry as you think. I suppose you'll see him to-night?"

"Yes. He said he should be home to-night, and he generally is when he says so."

"That's well," said the auctioneer; and sitting down, he wrote a few lines:

"Sir—I should like a word with you on family matters, and will call on you at eleven o'clock to-morrow.—Yours faithfully,
R. Cross."

"There!" he said; "you give him that, and it will quiet him down. Now, get on your bonnet, and I'll send for a cab."

Captain Ferrard did come home, and in a very queer temper. Before he could proceed to vent it, his trembling wife put the note into his hand; and with a sharp glance at her, he opened and read it. "O ho!" cried he. "So," he said, after musing a little, "you have been to see papa, oh? Singing your husband's praises so well, that our good papa is anxious to make his acquaintance.—Is that it, Mrs. Ferrard?"

She did not answer, but cast down her eyes.

He reflected again. "Well," he said at last, "I don't much care what you have been saying, or what you have not. Perhaps it may turn out to be the best thing you could have done. Anyway, I'll see him to-morrow—comes he in peace, or comes he in war—and on his behaviour, my pet, will depend our future happiness.—Now, get to bed!"

Meanwhile, Mr. Cross had returned to his old position at the table and remained deep in thought far into the night. He was a man strong in his likes and dislikes, but his feelings toward this Ferrard surprised himself. In the first place, the man belonged to a class which the auctioneer, with or without reason, had come to despise or dislike. Secondly, he possessed the three vices which are most hateful to a steady and prosperous man of business—he was an idler, a gambler, and a spendthrift. On the above grounds alone, the very name of Ferrard was obnoxious to Mr. Cross. But this worthless fellow, after coolly insulting him on his own doorstep had succeeded in robbing him of his daughter—his daughter, as to whom the dream of his life had been, that she would repay his tenderness and care by becoming the solace of his age, until she should be honourably and happily married to some prosperous young votary of commerce, and should surround him with a troop of grandchildren, who would recall to him their mother's childhood. To realise such hopes, he had worked like a slave, and had accumulated money until his name was a proverb for wealth. All over now—he was childless and alone with his riches—a gloomy and cheerless old age was coming fast upon him, and he owed it all to this gentleman of long descent, at whose patrician hands ill-usage and shame was his child's portion.

How should he answer her cry for aid? How rescue her? Was it in any way—by any sacrifice—possible to undo the miserable past; to wipe the slate clean, and to start afresh, with the hope of realising the old dreams? This was the problem the auctioneer set himself to work out, sitting there in the silence. And his heart sank, as he bitterly acknowledged to himself that the chances were but of the slenderest. Money would no doubt buy the man off, so that the father might have his girl safe in his home once more—but not to send her from it again as the happy wife of a husband after his own heart. Of course, legal proceedings might be instituted; but their success might be doubtful. The whole of Amy's conversation with her father has not been detailed; but it was clear from what she had said that ill-treatment inflicted upon her had been carefully confined to those petty and spiteful persecutions which a cruel and cunning man is so skilful in inflicting, which cause neither wound nor bruise, elicit no cries of anguish, yet in their power of breaking, by constant repetition, the proudest spirit, are like the continual dropping which wears away the rock.

As he thought of these things, the heart of the auctioneer swelled within him with perplexity and rage. He was not a cruel or revengeful man; he was a church-goer, and would have taken it extremely ill if any one had told him that he was not a Christian. Yet he did most heartily and fervently desire that the worthless and disreputable destroyer of his happiness would take himself with all convenient speed out of the world, so that the distress and difficulty which he had originated might perish with him. "I wish he were dead!" he muttered to himself—"I wish he were dead!" And the wish, once formed, refused to quit his mind, but presented itself again and again as an eminently desirable solution of the whole question.

But Ferrard was young and strong, and not at all likely to oblige Mr. Cross by dying for some time to come; so the auctioneer rose and paced the room, forcing himself to regard the matter in