

THE HEARTHSTONE.

Last six months, and like the fishing, the primitive life, and simple friendly people; but I doubt if such an existence in such a climate as this would suit an Anglo-Indian valetudinarian, even supposing I were decent company. I write in all candour, you see, my dear Bengon, and I do not think you will doubt my regard for you because, under the bitter influence of an affliction which happily few men can measure, I shrink even from your companionship.

"And now I have a proposition to make to you. You are home on sick leave, you tell me, and really in need of perfect rest. I have a house in the extreme west of Cornwall—a cottage in a garden of roses, within sight of the sea, which I think would suit you to a nicety. If I could persuade you to make your home there for the next few months, the place is full of better associations to me, and I doubt if there is another living creature to whom I would offer it; but I shall be heartily glad if you will inhabit a spot that was once very dear to me. The climate is almost equal to Madras; and if you have any inclination left for that kind of thing, there is plenty of shooting and hunting to be had in the neighbourhood. I have a couple of old servants in charge of the place, to whom I shall write by this post, telling them to hold themselves ready for your reception; so you will have nothing to do but to put yourself into the train at Paddington any morning you please, and go straight through to Penzance, from which a seven-mile drive will carry you to Trewardell, by which wonderful name my place is known. If you would drop a line to Andrew Johns, Trewardell, near Penzance, beforehand, to announce your coming, he would meet you at the station with a dog-cart. There are a couple of good backs in the stable, and a hunter I used to ride about two years ago, which is, I fancy, about up to your weight."

The offer was a tempting one, and after some hesitation the Colonel decided upon accepting it. Cornwall was a new country to him—a remote and barbarous land, he fancied, still pervaded by the Presbyterians and King Arthur, a land that had been more civilized two thousand years ago than to-day; a land with which Scotland had had trading relations in the way of metal; a land where, at some unknown period, the children of Israel had worked as slaves in the mines; a land of which one might believe anything and everything, in fact. There was some smack of adventure in the idea of going to take possession of his absent friend's house, some faint flavour of romance in the whole business. It would be dull, of course; but the Colonel liked solitude, and local himself year by year less inclined for the kind of life most people consider pleasant. He might have spent his autumn in half a dozen of the old country houses, and received unfeigned praise from their fair inhabitants, if he had desired that kind of thing; but he did not. He only wanted to recover his old health and vigour, and then to go back to India.

He wrote to Mr. Andrew Johns, informing that worthy of the probable time of his arrival; and three days afterwards turned his back upon the great city, and sped away westwards across the fields, where the newly-cut stubble was still bright and yellow, onward through a region where the land was red, then across skirting the edge of the bright blue water, across Isambard Bruce's wonderful bridge at Saltash, and then along a narrow line that rises over deep gorges in the woodland, through a fair and lonely landscape to the little station of Penzance.

It was dusk in the late summer evening when the traveller heard the barbarous name of the place called out with the unfamiliar Cornish accent by a stalwart Cornish porter. The train, which had been about a quarter of a mile long when it left Paddington, had dwindled to a few carriages, and those were for the most part empty. The porter seemed the very end of the world. The Colonel, as he stood upon the platform, looking round about him in the fading evening light. He found himself deep in the heart of a wooded valley, with no sign of human life within sight except the two officials who made up the staff of Penzance station. There was a balmy odour of pines, and a subdued rustle of leaves lightly stirred by the warm west wind. Among the Indian hills he could scarcely remember a scene more lonely. A rabbit ran down a wooded bank and scudded across the lines while he was looking about him. The guard told him afterwards that scores of these vermin might be seen playing about the line at odd times. The trains were not frequent enough to scare them.

Outside the station the Colonel found an elderly man-servant, out of livery, with a smart dog-cart and a capital horse.

This was Andrew Johns. He handed the reins to the traveller, and took his seat behind in charge of Colonel Benyon's portmanteaux; and a few minutes afterwards the Colonel was driving up a hilly road that wound across the twilit woods. That seven miles' drive to Trewardell was all up and down hill. The Colonel had rarely encountered a stiffer road even in the East, but the landscape, dimly seen in that dubious light, seemed to him very beautiful; and he was glad that he had accepted his friend's offer. From the top of one of the hills he caught a glimpse of the distant sea; on the summit of another there was a stretch of cornfield, and a tall obelisk that served as a beacon for all the countryside, a monument tribute to a great Indian soldier.

Something over half an hour brought them into a valley, where there was a church with a square tower surmounted with stone pinnacles, a church of some pretension for a parish which consisted of about half a dozen houses. Close to the church were the gates of Trewardell. They stood open to receive the stranger; and after a winding drive through the straggery, the Colonel saw the lighted windows of a long low white-walled cottage half smothered in foliage and flowers.

Mrs. Johns and a fat-faced housemaid were waiting in the hall, and a male hanger-on in corduroy and a stable-jacket was in attendance to receive the horse. Everything within looked bright and homelike; one might have fancied the house in full occupation. The hall was low and wide, with paneled walls painted white, and hung with water-coloured sketches prettily framed. The dining-room was a comfortable square apartment, with light oak furniture of the modern mediæval order, and dark-blue silk hangings. The drawing-room opened out of it, and was more of a boudoir or lady's morning-room than an actual drawing-room. Every-where, in the dining-room, and even in the entrance-hall, there were books, from ponderous folios (choice edition on elephant-paper) to the daintiest duodecimos in white-velum binding. There was a brightness and prettiness about everything which the Colonel never remembered to have noticed in any house before. It looked like a home that had been made beautiful by the hands of a lover preparing a power for his bride.

"A woman must have been hard to please who could not make herself happy here, and with so good a fellow as Fred Hammonsley," he said to himself.

An excellent dinner had been prepared for him, at which reposed the versatile Mr. Johns waited, and proved himself an admirable butler. The Colonel asked him a good many questions about the neighbourhood in the course of the

meal, to all of which Mr. Johns replied with considerable intelligence; but he uttered no word about his absent master, or of the kind of existence that he had led there in the brief period of his wedded life.

It was ten o'clock when Colonel Benyon had finished dinner, a warm moonlight night; so he went out to explore the gardens and enjoy his evening smoke. It might be very long before any feminine presence would lend its grace to those bright-looking rooms; but Herbert Benyon would as soon have thought of committing sacrilege as of deserting his friend's house with the odour of tobacco. A woman had left the impress of her individuality upon everything. Those water-coloured sketches in the hall were signed by a woman's hand; in the drawing-room there were easels and writing-cases, work-books and photographic albums—immense trinkets that were unmistakably a woman's belongings. It seemed as if everything had been religiously preserved exactly as the trappings had left it. Colonel Benyon could fancy her last look round this room, or fancied that he could fancy it. There was a low arm-chair on one side of the fireplace, with a gem of a work-table beside it—her seat, of course. How often had she sat there meditating treason, with her husband sitting opposite to her perhaps, watching her fondly all the while, and thanking God for having given him so sweet a wife!

"Comfounded the woman!" muttered the Colonel impatiently; "I can't get her out of my mind!"

It did indeed seem to him to-night as if that false wife had left an evil influence upon the scene of her iniquity. He could not feel at ease in the house; he could not help wondering and speculating about that lost creature.

"Where is she now?" he asked himself; and then there arose before him an image of her sitting alone in some sordid continental lodging, poor, friendless, desolate; or worse flouting on a Parisian boulevard, in the livery of sin. How would he would, he could not help thinking of her.

"It will wear off in time, I suppose," he said; "but upon my word, if I were her husband, I could scarcely worry myself more about her." He went out into the gardens, and rambled about amongst the flower-beds, and in the dark some shrubbery-paths, smoking and communing with himself for more than an hour. The grounds of Trewardell were spacious and lovely, quite out of proportion with the humble pretensions of the house. There was a lake on one side of the lawn, on the other a group of fine old plane-trees; beyond these a short avenue of elms leading to a meadow that looked almost a park. The soft night air was heavy with the perfume of myrtle and mugwort.

"The place is a perfect Eden," said the Colonel; "but I wish I had not been told the history of Eve and the Serpent."

(To be continued.)

PUT DOWN THE BRAKES.

No matter how well the track is laid,
No matter how strong the engine is made,
When you find it running the downward grade,
Put down the brakes!

If the demon of drink has entered the soul,
And his power is getting beyond your control,
And dragging you on to a terrific goal,
Put down the brakes!

Remember the adage, "Don't trifle with fire,"
Temptation you know is always a liar;
If you want to crush out the burning desire,
Put down the brakes!

Are you running in debt by living too fast?
Do you look back with shame on a profligate past,
And feel that your ruin is coming at last?
Put down the brakes!

Whether for weariness, or for honor and gain,
You are fast wearing out your body and brain,
Till nature no longer can bear the strain,
Put down the brakes!

The human is weak, since Adam's fall,
Beware how you yield to appetite's call,
"Be temperate in all things," says practical Paul,
Put down the brakes!

Ah, a terrible thing is human life!
Its track with many a danger is rife;
Do you seek for the victor's crown in the strife?
Put down the brakes!

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TO THE BITTER END.

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

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CHAPTER XXIV. GEORGIE'S SETTLEMENT.

The Colonel was delighted. Of course he had seen, from an early stage, which way matters were drifting; and he had suffered them to drift, without interference or hindrance from him, proving himself the very wisest of match-makers by that judicious quiescence. He had lived his own life, consuming much Latakah, or mild Turkish, in his armchair; conversing with his cook; scheming various alterations and improvements in the Bungalow; educating Pedro, the monkey, in those polite arts which make a monkey a gentleman; and otherwise enjoying himself in the serene manner; always ready to join the young people in any excursion or party they might choose to plan, and leaning upon them with a countenance which was the very spiritual light and sunshine of a jovial mind.

When that solemn question came to be asked, which is somewhat awful for the briefest barrister or the fledgling curate, but easy enough for a man with a lauded estate, and seven thousand per annum in shares, debentures, consols, Egyptian bonds, and so on, the Colonel behaved with an airy grace that was charming.

"My dear fellow, if I must part with my little girl—and I needn't say that it's a hard thing for a man in my position to do it—my only tie to life, sir, except the mungoose; if I must part with Georgie, I'd rather it should be to you than to any one else. First and foremost, you're a good fellow, and I've a very great respect for you. Secondly, my little girl will be near me. You're not like those fellows in the service, who have come proposing for her, coolly informing me that as there was every prospect of their regiment being ordered off to Japan, or Cochinchina, or Timbuctoo, as the case might be, early in the spring they would like the wedding to come off soon, if I pleased. I did not please, and luckily for me Georgie didn't please either; for a tear or

two from her would have knocked me over at once."

Thus, and in many more words, with the mungoose promenading about his capacious chest and shoulders the while, did the Colonel give his consent. Then came a little talk about settlements; Francis eager to lavish the chief part of his wealth on his betrothed, the Colonel protesting against that quixotic generosity.

"We will do what is right, sir, and no more. I'm not a man of business myself; but we'll put ourselves in the hands of some conscientious fellow who is a man of business, and he shall decide what is fair and equitable in the case. Rolling-stone as I have been, I have not gone through life without gathering some small amount of moss. I can give my girl a few thousands, and at my death she will inherit—the Colonel paused, and seemed to swell with importance at this point—"THE BUNGALOW! I think, although it may not suit her convenience to occupy it, my child will value the work of her old father's hands when he is under the turf. She will take care that the roof is kept in repair, and that the fountain works daily."

The marriage was not to take place until early in the following spring. Francis would have had it sooner; but the Colonel and Georgie both declared that even this interval would make a very brief engagement.

"You can know so little of me," she said to her lover. "How can I, feel sure that I am really the sort of person you think me? Suppose, when we are married, you should find that you have made quite a mistake after all. Wouldn't that be dreadful! Sibly tells me you were in love over so many times abroad, and that you always ended by finding out that the young lady didn't suit you in the least. How can I tell that you may not find out the same thing about me?"

"My darling, I have known and loved you from the first time I saw you, and I never loved any one before in my life."

"O Frank! after all Sibly has told me—"

"Sibly's statements are true and false, dear. I have had a sort of—kind of—a predilection for two or three young women in the course of my life; have, perhaps, flirted—I suppose you would call it, and have gone so far as to fancy myself in love; but from the moment I loved you I knew that those other affairs were the merest fancies. In short I have had a series of escapades, Georgie, and my fate has always been waiting for me here; and if it comes to any examination of antecedents, Miss Davenant, I shall be glad to receive some information about that Captain Bangle, who wanted you to accompany him to Timbuctoo, and Major Hawkins, who was anxious to export you to Japan."

"O Frank! I never gave either of them the faintest encouragement. They were friends of papa's, and used to dine with us very often, and were always extremely polite, asking me to sing and play, and pretending to be interested in Pedro and Tuffo, and even to admire the mungoose; and then all at once they broke out in a desperate way, asking me to marry them. But indeed, Frank, it wasn't my fault."

"And that's not my fault that I love you to distraction, darling?"

That was a happy Christmas at Clevedon Hall, an innocent Arcadian Christmas; very different from the gourmandism and curagobbling and whist and cards playing, which had reigned there when Sir Lucas was in his prime; a Christmas festival, with much pampering and petting of the humble tenants, and pleasant party-giving in the servants' hall. Sir Francis began like a prince who meant to be popular. They had plenty of friends already in the neighbourhood; everybody had been eager to know them; ancient squires, who remembered Sir Lucas in his best days, stretched out the hand of friendship to his son; matrons and daughters vied with one another in civilities to Sibly.

There was a shade of disappointment when, about November, it began to be patent to the world within a twenty-mile radius of Clevedon that Sir Francis and Miss Davenant were engaged to be married. "Not one of the county families, you know, my dear, and altogether a poor match for him," the Kentish dunces told one another. It did seem rather a hard thing that the baronet had been so prompt in his wooing, that there should have been no clear course open to those fair young thoroughbreds, who would fain have entered themselves for the Clevedon Stakes.

Happy days and nights, thrice happy youth! Christmas and the New Year fled like a dream—skating on the great pond in the Chase, sleighing on the snow-bound roads; dinners, and carpet-dances, and acted charades. Sir Francis spent his money royally, but in simple pleasures, in which seven thousand a year would go a long way. He had no idea of following in the footsteps of his father.

Spring came; a warm spring, with cloudless blue skies. Sir Francis and Miss Davenant were to be married when the Hawthorn was in flower. The Colonel was to take his daughter to London in April to complete her trousseau, and pay duty visits to numerous relations, who had a right to her confidence on such an occasion. Sir Francis could hardly be expected to exist in Kent while Georgie was staying at Westbourne-terrace; so he went up to town with the Colonel and his daughter, and established himself at a West-end hotel, within a ten minutes' cab drive of his betrothed. There were the settlements to be arranged; and the question of trustees, being propounded to the Colonel, sorely puzzled that gallant officer.

"I'm an old man myself," he said, "and never was a man of business, so I'm no good. I know plenty of men—men whom I could trust—but the mistake is, they're most of them about my own age, so they're no good. A trustee to a marriage settlement ought to be younger than the husband and wife, by rights. I'll talk it over with old Vallory."

To talk things over with old Vallory—the great William Vallory, of the firm of Harcross, Vallory, and Vally—was one of the Colonel's reasons for being in London. His wife had been a Miss Harcross, niece of that very Stephen Harcross who left all his money to Augusta Vallory, much to the indignation of his relatives. His brother, George Harcross, married the girl whom he, Stephen, had desired to marry; whereby the lawyer had adjudged all kindred with his rival, and refused to see Georgie, his niece, the sole offspring of this marriage, until some time after her father's death, when he relented so far as to show some small kindness to her widowed mother. He was tolerably civil to this cunning young lawyer,

Captain Davenant, who fell in love with Georgie Harcross and married her within the space of three months. The marriage settlement—a very small matter, the late George Harcross having failed ignominiously in the silk trade, and the Captain having little more than his sword to bestow on his wife—had been drawn up by Harcross and Vallory, and from that time forward Harcross and Vallory had been Thomas Davenant's solicitors. He had an unbounded confidence in their learning and sagacity, and it was to them he came naturally for counsel in his present difficulty.

He was admitted to a conference in that sacred chamber wherein William Vallory in his own person communicated the words of wisdom to his most distinguished—or most profitable—clients, a chamber almost as unapproachable as that inmost temple where the Mikado of Japan shrouds his glory from the vulgar eye. Here he found the chief of the firm trimming his nails meditatively before a table covered with papers, and with three clerks in attendance, who vanished quietly on the entrance of the client.

"Come and dine with me this evening," said the solicitor, in his most cordial tone; "come to Acropolis-square, and we can talk the business over after dinner. Delighted to hear your daughter is going to make such a good match. I know something of the Clevedon estate; we had Sir Lucas in our hands, in point of fact, when he was a young man, and a duced slipper customer he was. The property is clear, I hope, by this time?"

"The estate is as clear—as clear, as—the Bungalow," exclaimed the Colonel triumphantly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"The Bungalow—my little place at Tisbury Wells. Enlarged and improved it with my own hands, sir; can buy a hundred of stocks or plaster a wall with any bricklayer in England. You ought to come down and see me, Vallory; I can give you a good bed, a good dinner, and a good bottle of wine."

"You are excessively kind—I should be most happy; but I have really so little time for relaxation, and when I can get a week or so, I run down to Ryde. Is Sir Francis in town?"

"Sir Francis is at the Levantian."

"Then ask him to come with you, and your daughter too. My daughter and her husband are coming to me to-night—Mr. and Mrs. Harcross—he took the name of Harcross when he married, you know; it was one of the conditions of the will."

The Colonel did know, or had at any rate been informed of the fact at the time. A man who cared much for money might have scarcely relished the idea of meeting a lady in the possession of wealth which should by rights have come his way; but Thomas Davenant was not a lover of money, and was quite ready to clasp the hand of any with Mrs. Harcross.

"Your son-in-law is beginning to make rather a figure in the world, isn't he?" said the Colonel, who was an assiduous student of the daily papers.

"My son-in-law is one of the best parliamentary barristers we have," replied Mr. Vallory, with a satisfied air. "The marriage had turned out so much better than he had expected. Three thousand a year, and Mrs. Harcross's visiting-book was becoming almost as aristocratic as the *Almanach de Gotha*."

"If you've a lot of people with you this evening, we shan't have much chance of talking over this settlement business," said the Colonel.

"Well, perhaps not an opportunity for any long talk; but I can think the matter over in the mean time, and give you my opinion in three words. All you want is a good trustee; the settlement itself I can arrange with Sir Francis Clevedon's solicitor in an hour. You want a good man of business as trustee, and I have a man in my eye who'll suit you, if he will undertake the responsibility."

"Who is he?"

"Never mind that; I'd better sound him upon the subject before I mention his name. Half-past seven this evening in Acropolis-square, No. 10."

Colonel Davenant and his daughter were staying with a married sister of the Colonel's in Westbourne-terrace—a lady who had made a very good match in India under the Colonel's guardianship; and who, being childless herself, took an amazing delight in all the details of Georgie's courtship, and the preparation of the trousseau.

At half-past seven o'clock that evening the Acropolis-square drawing-rooms opened their lofty doors to admit Colonel and Miss Davenant, and Sir Francis Clevedon, announced with a grandiose air by Mr. Vallory's butler. There was a subdued murmur of conversation in the room as they entered. The Harcrosses had arrived, and the inevitable Weston Vallory was airing himself before the fireplace. Mrs. Harcross advanced with her father to receive Miss Davenant, and almost crushed poor Georgie with the splendour of her presence. The sparkling coquetish little face seemed well-nigh extinguished by Augusta's regular beauty, expansive figure, and gorgeous attire.

She was as cordial to Miss Davenant as she could be to any one. "I really feel as if we were a sort of consins," she said after the first greeting; "I hope we shall see each other very often while you're in town."

"Sir Francis Clevedon, my daughter, Mrs. Harcross," said Mr. Vallory; and Augusta made the baronet a gracious curtsy, which she had learnt from a French dancing-master; such a curtsy as Marie Antoinette might have made to a courtier in those days when she appeared above the zenith, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy.

But in the very act of acknowledging her father's introduction Mrs. Harcross gave a little cry of surprise.

"What's the matter, my dear?" inquired her father, surprised at this outrage of the proprieties.

"How strange that you never told me, papa?"

"Never told you what, my love?"

"Of the likeness between Sir Francis Clevedon and Hubert."

Mr. Vallory looked at his son-in-law, who was standing on the hearth-rug, listening, with no great appearance of interest, to some remark of Weston's—a tall commanding figure, a dark face which was distinguished-looking rather handsome.

"A likeness between Sir Francis and Harcross," said the solicitor, looking from his son-in-law to the baronet. "Well, yes, there may be something of the kind; but upon my word,

I never remarked it until this moment, and I hardly think that Sir Francis will be flattered by the comparison; Harcross looks ten years older than he does—"

"But the likeness is something wonderful, papa. I beg your pardon, Sir Francis, for talking about it, but I was really taken by surprise; papa ought to have told me—"

"But, my dear, I didn't see the likeness."

"Then, papa, you can have no eyes."

"I really feel honoured by being supposed to resemble any one so distinguished as Mr. Harcross," said Sir Francis good-naturedly. "Will you introduce me to him, Vallory?"

Mr. Vallory called his son-in-law, and Hubert Harcross came forward in his most leisurely manner, with that air of deliberation and absent-mindedness which was apt to be so aggravating to the other side in his parliamentary business; his opponents knowing full well that, after opening a case as if he had forgotten what his brief was about, he would show himself presently a most consummate master of every detail and manipulation of the affair in hand. He saluted the baronet with an almost insolent coolness, and went back to the hearth-rug as soon as the introduction was over, leaving his wife and her father and the Davenant party stranded by the ottoman, as on a green-satin island in a Pacific Ocean of velvet pills.

Miss Davenant went down to dinner with Mr. Vallory; the baronet had the honour of escorting Mrs. Harcross; the Colonel gave his arm to a washed-out young lady in ringtons, who had been allowed to fill a corner of the table by reason of a fine contralto voice, which was useful as a second to Mrs. Harcross; and Hubert and Weston struggled in the rear. In so small a party, the conversation to be pleasant should be general; and happily where Colonel Davenant was there was no lack of talk. He plunged into his father the general's Peninsular experiences before the soup was done with; retreated gloriously from Corunna with the salmon; took Balagoy while the whitebat was going round; and had followed Wellington to his tent at Waterloo by the time the last of the entrées had made its solemn circuit, where he kept that great captain wrapped in a profound slumber on the morning of the decisive battle, while he supplied himself with currant-jelly for his final slice of nutton.

Sir Francis and Augusta Harcross talked to each other a little during this campaign. She expressed herself interested in Georgie. "Such a sweet face," and so on—quite the usual style of thing—a concession which delighted the lover. "I'm so glad you like her; but everybody does; she finds friends wherever she goes," he said. "You must come down to Clevedon and see us by and by. We mean to be quite settled by the autumn; we shan't take a long honeymoon; in point of fact, all our life is to be honeymoon; but we shan't stay away very long, making believe to seclude ourselves from our fellow-men. We want to begin life at home as we mean to go on, a country squire and his wife—no pretence to fashion—easy-going comfortable people, with our friends around us."

"You will go into Parliament, I suppose?"

"Must I, do you think? Upon my word, I'd rather not; I don't fancy I've any of the necessary qualities for statecraft, and I want to be so much with Georgie. That sort of thing would keep me away from home, you know; for if one goes in for a thing, at all, one ought to do it thoroughly."

"You'll have a house in town, of course?"

"No. When we want to come to London, we can take a furnished house. But we mean to live the best part of the year at Clevedon."

"Do you think Miss Davenant would like that?"

"I don't think she would like anything else. She has been brought up in the country."

Mrs. Harcross shuddered. What strange Arcadian notions this young man had! She wondered idly what her own life would be like, if she and Hubert were compelled to live in the country. What would they do with themselves? Would the isolation bring them any nearer together? She could fancy her husband yawning over his newspapers, as he yawned sometimes even now in Muston-down, with all the pomps and vanities of London at his elbow.

"Young people who are going to be married have such romantic notions," she said; "I dreamy a year hence we shall hear of your furnishing a house in Mayfair."

"The Colonel had done with Waterloo with the advent of the ice-panning, from which culminating victory he looked back to Sir Arthur Wellesley and his brother the Marquis in India, and so brought himself to the later period of his personal experiences, into which he warmed with the dessert.

"What a nice person the Colonel must be to live with if he always talks in this style!" Weston remarked aside to Mr. Harcross, when the ladies had retired.

Georgie grew quite confidential with Mrs. Harcross in the back drawing-room, while the contralto lady yawned over a volume of Egyptian photographs, and wondered if the banquet of Tiches were as dull as the dinners of Acropolis-square. Encouraged by Augusta's air of interest, Miss Davenant told her a great deal about "Frank's" transcendent merits, and about the things they meant to do when they were married. Then there came music; Mrs. Harcross and Miss Parker the contralto sang "Deh Conte"; Georgie consented shyly to warble one of her lover's favourite ballads, an old song of Haynes Bayley's, set to Sir Henry Bishop's music; and this, with a little desultory straggling talk in couples and trios, ended the evening's entertainment. Just at the last, Mr. Vallory took the Colonel into quiet corner of the back drawing-room for a few confidential words.

"I have found you a trustee," he said. "My son-in-law, Harcross, has no objection to assume that responsibility, if you and Sir Francis would like him. He's a first-rate man of business, and a highly conscientious fellow."

"Nothing could be better," replied the Colonel earnestly, "if he'll take the trouble."

"Well, you know, I consider it a duty; Augusta's obligations to my friend, Stephen Harcross, seem to constitute a kind of connection between her and your daughter, and anything she or her husband can do to be useful, you know."

"So be it," said the Colonel. "Of course I don't pretend to deny that I should have been uncommonly glad if old Harcross had taken it into his head to leave his money to my daughter instead of yours; but he didn't, and I bear no malice, and I'm pleased to see Mrs. Harcross take so kindly to Georgie."