

gether in bright-coloured groups, waiting till the bride should be ready. The bridegroom was already in the hall, looking at his watch, and hearing gibes about the putting on of bonnets, and the putting up of baggage, which was henceforward to be his accompaniment through life ;—his kind eyes shone as if they had been ten years younger,—you could scarcely guess that he was getting bald about the temples, so glorified was the man with that wonderful glow of happiness which has a certain pathos in it when it comes a little later than usual. And yet it was not late ; he was quite a young man still, even the bridesmaids said,—and his two young brothers-in-law, and his old sister, all clustering about him at this moment in the hall, were ready, at a moment's notice, all three of them, to have gone to the stake for John Vane. It speaks well for a man when he is thus supported on both sides. A great deal of talk was coming from the drawing-room, where the friends of the family, left to themselves, were discussing the matter, as people say our friends always discuss us when our backs are turned. There was nobody to keep this crowd in order. Mrs. Eastwood was upstairs with the bride. The rest of the domestic party were in the hall, as I have said, consoling the bridegroom. Mrs. Everard, who rather took it upon her to do the honours of the place when the head of the house was absent, was herself the ringleader in this talk. Perhaps the gentle reader would like to know what they were saying, before Nelly, in her grey gown,—Nelly sobered out of her white into walking costume,—Nelly with her eyes rather red, and her lip trembling a little,—comes down-stairs.

"I never believed in the other business, for my part," said Mrs. Everard, dropping her voice. "Of course, we must not so much as allude to it now, but you remember as well as I do when Nelly was supposed to be going to do something very different. I never believed in it, not even when we met him here continually, and the poor dear mother, who is too good for this world, let it all go on without taking the most ordinary preventives——"

"But, dear me !" said Mrs. Brotherton, the clergyman's wife, "we heard that every arrangement was made, and that the judge and his family went into it quite as heartily as the Eastwoods did. Indeed, my husband met them here at dinner when the engagement was declared."

"Oh yes, exactly ; so did I," said Mrs. Everard, "but there are wheels within wheels. I don't mean to say I approve of that sort of thing, for I've known it to spoil a girl's prospects, and cause a great deal of unhappiness ; but, if you don't care about feelings, acquiescing in an engagement is a great deal better than opposing it, and often comes to exactly the same thing."

"I always understood," said Mrs. Brotherton, indignantly, "that the Eastwoods broke it off in consequence of the way in which he behaved when poor Innocent was in trouble."