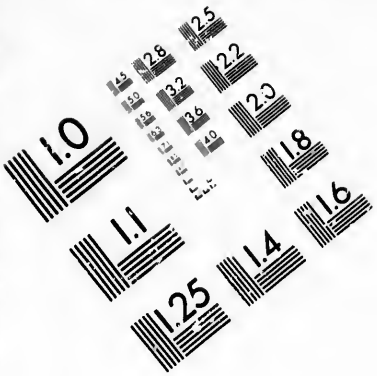
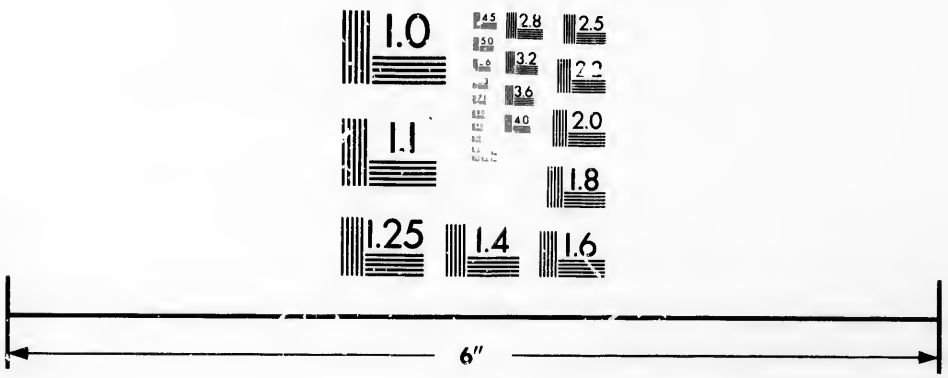
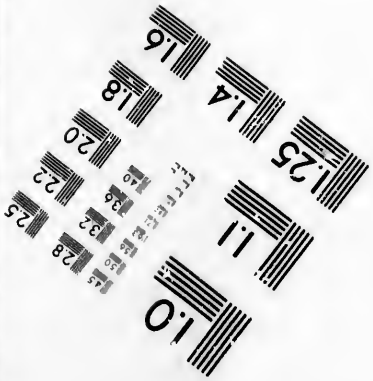
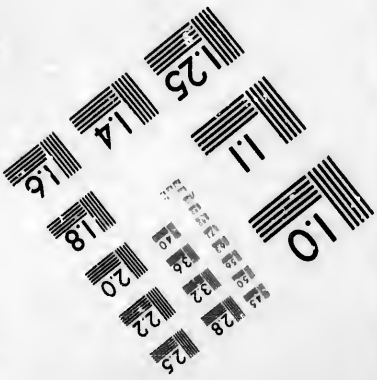


IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (MT-3)







Photographic
Sciences
Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 372-4503

CIHM/ICMH
Microfiche
Series.

CIHM/ICMH
Collection de
microfiches.

Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques

Technical and Bibliographic Notes/Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The Institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming, are checked below.

- ☐ Coloured covers/ Couverture de couleur
- ☐ Covers damaged/ Couverture endommagée
- ☐ Covers restored and/or laminated/ Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée
- ☐ Cover title missing/ Le titre de couverture manque
- ☐ Coloured maps/ Cartes géographiques en couleur
- ☐ Coloured ink (i.e. other than blue or black)/ Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)
- ☐ Coloured plates and/or illustrations/ Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur
- ☐ Bound with other material/ Relié avec d'autres documents
- ☐ Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin/ La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distortion le long de la marge intérieure
- ☐ Blank leaves added during restoration may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming/ il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.
- ☐ Additional comments:/ Commentaires supplémentaires:

L'Institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- ☐ Coloured pages/ Pages de couleur
- ☐ Pages damaged/ Pages endommagées
- ☐ Pages restored and/or laminated/ Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées
- ☑ Pages discoloured, stained or foxed/ Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées
- ☐ Pages detached/ Pages détachées
- ☑ Showthrough/ Transparence
- ☐ Quality of print varies/ Qualité inégale de l'impression
- ☐ Includes supplementary material/ Comprend du matériel supplémentaire
- ☐ Only edition available/ Seule édition disponible
- ☐ Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image/ Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below/
Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

10X	12X	14X	16X	18X	20X	22X	24X	26X	28X	30X	32X
				✓							

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

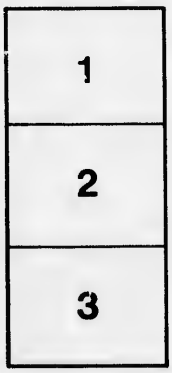
National Library of Canada

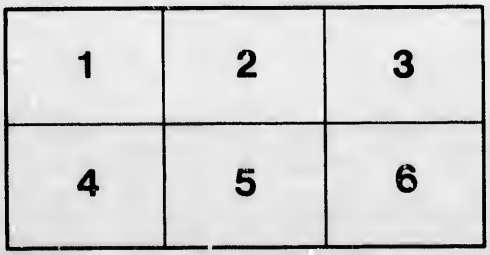
The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shall contain the symbol → (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol ▽ (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:





L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon le cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaîtra sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole → signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole ▽ signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaire. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.

COMEDY OF A COUNTRY HOUSE.

A NOVEL.

BY

JULIAN STURGIS,

Author of "Thraldom," "John Maidment," etc.

MONTREAL:

JOHN LOVELL & SON,

23 ST. NICHOLAS STREET.

COMEDY OF A COUNTRY HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG man came over the hill. He was walking on one of those public field-paths which lead the landless wayfarer through the homely beauties of England, and make him too for his little hour a lord of the happy land. He went with long strides and with the vigor of youth, but without the elasticity of the first morning hours. One would have known from his gait that he had been walking all day. His strong, hob-nailed boots went steadily forward; his stick was no longer swung in careless fashion; his slouched hat was pushed a little back from his forehead. He tramped along in business-like way, like a vagabond to the manner born. Over his left shoulder and under his right arm a thick red blanket was rolled and fastened. Invisible in the inner pocket of his old shooting-coat were lighter luxuries—a comb, a clasp-knife, and finally that tried companion of the English gentleman in every climate and all circumstances of life, his for richer for poorer, the last thing from which he parts except his life—the tooth-brush.

The young man came over the hill, and followed his little path across the wide, shallow valley; but where the path began to rise again he left it, and climbing more quickly through a little hanging wood, came out above the trees on to a bare grassy knoll, which gave a wide view of all the country round. There he sat down with an inarticulate murmur of satisfaction, stretched his tired legs before him, and raised his eyebrows at the view. It was a brown landscape, for the month was brown November; but no monotony of color could hide the beauty of the land. A wide plain lay open at his feet, a plain to him who sat so high above it, but really a wide stretch of

gently swelling land, of fertile but not heavy soil, of curves and lines delightful to the eye; an open country, but with copses and coverts not a few, with grass and ploughed fields in fair proportion. The ploughed fields were of a warm, reddish brown; the bare hedges of a colder, darker hue; and the brightest specks were seen where the yellow-brown leaves of the young oaks still clung to the boughs. The pomp of summer had gone, with its dark deep leaves and yellow corn; but if the scene of its splendor was now bare and brown, the brown was varied enough, and there was no look of bareness in the woods, which seemed to clothe the gentle slopes like the fur of some soft brown beast.

The traveller was fond of the face of nature and of the face of England. He looked with much contentment across the wide expanse. His eyes wandered with enjoyment, but they came back again and again to one place, where, miles away, the tower of an unseen castle rose above its more majestic trees. He regarded this tower with a whimsical air, half annoyed and half amused. He had walked all day for a sight of it, and, when he saw it, he burst out laughing. It was his. His was that castle which seemed to raise its head, that it might announce its presence and its importance to the world. His were all these well-tilled fields and pleasant woods, so far as and farther than his eye could see. And much of the land through which he had tramped since dawn was his too. He looked at the good country dirt upon his boots, and laughed again, thinking that even that was his, and again that the solid earth on which he sat was his to its very centre. He was young and fanciful, and he liked to amuse himself with such fancies. And then he remembered another large estate in another county, with its appropriate residence, and reports of landed properties comparatively unimportant, and a yacht which was lying somewhere. And then too in London there was the family mansion, majestic in a majestic square; and somewhere in less lordly districts a lot of land, on which houses were thickly built, and which, as he had heard, would enable him to smile at the lowest possible prices of agricultural produce. But it was not at low prices that he smiled like a Cheshire cat or a member of the Cobden Club. He smiled at himself and at the strange part which he was called upon to

play. He was young and fanciful, and easily moved to laughter; and he could not but be interested and amused by the new, and in its way brilliant, part which he was expected to play. But here lay the element of boredom. He was expected to play the part, and to play it according to the well-known traditions. Nothing was more firmly fixed than the proper rules of conduct for the young heir; and, as he looked at the tower, which seemed to be peering over the trees and on its side solemnly looking for him, he felt an unmistakable repulsion and an unseemly levity arising within him. Were the days of his freedom over and the boyhood to which he clung for its simplicity and joy? It amused him to think of himself competing with that castle in dignity; it amused him, but it vexed him too; and, even while he laughed, there was vexation in the sound of his laughter. He knew that in that stately abode was a country-house party gathered in his honor; he knew that he ought to have been at home to receive them twenty-four hours before; he knew that his uncle was there prepared to point out certain duties for his doing, and that his aunt was there to urge him perhaps to duties even more important. He was by no means sure that he objected to these duties, and yet—and yet—— Over the wide landscape the tender light of evening was diffused. It was time to go down and encounter that country house party, and to surrender himself to the appointed duties of his position. There were people there whom he would like to see, but the people were a country-house party. "A country-house party," he said to himself; "it is terrific."

All the vagabond in the boy rose against the momentous words. He would have another night of freedom, come what would. He kissed his hand to the expectant tower, and went down the further slope of the knoll. He whistled as he walked back to the village, where he had dined at midday. Nobody in the village knew him, though, for aught he knew to the contrary, he might be owner of it all. He supped well as he had dined well; and he amused himself by trying to excite the curiosity of the landlady, who was evidently surprised at seeing neither a bicycle nor a tricycle, neither a photographic camera nor a closely-strapped bundle of samples. He encouraged in her a dawning belief that he was something "in the de-

tective line,"—a belief which was due to a happy notion that detectives went about in disguise, and that to attract universal attention by a slouched hat and a Rocky-mountain blanket was but the natural conduct of a member of the secret police, a tribute to the dramatic necessity of disguise. A brother of an Anglican Order, who had recently visited the village, clad in a brown robe and with a rope round his waist, had excited in the good lady a like lively suspicion.

After supper the vagabond took to the road again. If the end of his liberty were near at hand, he would have a deep draught for the last. The night was fair, the wind was light and westerly, and for a November night there was but little cold. He turned away into the fields, trespassing boldly on his own tenants' land, skirted a little wood, lest some officious keeper of his own might seize him as a poacher, and soon found the suitable hay-stack which he sought. He got over the hurdles which surrounded it, rolled himself close in his thick red blanket, and lay down to leeward of the stack. There he would sleep, as he had slept before, close to the kindly earth, beneath whose bare surface the life of the next year was stirring now. He liked to be so close to his mother earth. He pulled some handfuls of hay and rolled them in his cashmere scarf for a pillow; and so he lay and watched the watching stars. And then he fell asleep, and slept soundly till the first chill of dawn.

CHAPTER II.

One of the dreaded country-house party, and perhaps the most terrible of all, was Lady Jane Lock. On the morning after that night, which her disappointing host had spent beside the haystack, Lady Jane was in a pleasant room on the first floor of the Castle, but not in a pleasant humor. She was cross; and when she was cross, few things annoyed her more than her dear friend Susan Dormer's habit of smiling. Mrs. Dormer now lay on the sofa with her most provoking air of placidity. The sofa suited her; the room suited her. Indeed, she had chosen the room for her boudoir on account of its double

doors and its southern aspect; and, since she was the aunt of this absurdly rich young man, and had determined to keep house for him until he married, these seemed good reasons for choosing the best room in the house as her own. Southern aspects and double doors were recommended by her doctor; and to see her friend Jane "a little put out" did her good too, though this was no part of the doctor's prescription.

Lady Jane stood exceedingly erect, and stared out of the window without any apparent pleasure in the south; and indeed the pleasant light, which came in, was not becoming to her, for her high color, tempered by a liberal supply of violet powder, would have produced a better effect had she turned her back to the window. This great truth was very clear to Susan Dormer, whose own skin retained to a remarkable degree the clearness and softness of girlhood. But Lady Jane was not thinking of her own looks, but rather of the broad acres which stretched away before her eyes. She was a judge of parks; she had married two daughters to them; but there was no park so much to her taste as this of Langleydale. What timber and what a ring-fence? She knew the length of that fence.

"I'd better have gone to Bolitho," she said, still staring out of the window. "The Duke was most pressing," she added after a minute, since Mrs. Dormer kept silence.

"Dukes are never pressing," murmured Mrs. Dormer from the sofa.

"It is no good at all," said Lady Jane.

"What is no good, dear?" asked Susan innocently.

"No one has been in more country-houses than I have," said Lady Jane, as if she challenged contradiction.

But her friend only sighed. "How bored you must have been, poor dear!" she said with a soothing tone.

"But never, never before has such a thing happened to me. My host never appearing at all, and not a word of explanation, let alone apology!"

"I know it is very disappointing, dear," said her friend, as if she sought to comfort her, "when all your plans were so nicely laid too."

"My plans!" cried Lady Jane, starting as if at the flick of a whip. "I have told you before, Susan, that I will allow nobody to speak to me as if I were a worldly

match-making mother. There is no character of which I have such a horror."

"Did I say anything, dear, about match-making?" asked her friend. "We all know you are not worldly, I am sure. Your poor dear Delia's marriage showed that."

It was evident that this instance of her unworldliness failed to comfort Lady Jane Lock. She turned and looked straight at her friend, who met her with a candid smile. "No one could say that it was worldly of you, Jane," said Susan Dormer, "to marry your poor dear Delia to a scrub of a curate."

"You know as well as I do, Susan, that Delia's husband is a Vicar. It is exceedingly likely that he will be made a rural dean."

"How charming!" murmured Susan; "a rural dean! It's quite Arcadian. But it was nice of you, dear," she continued with gentle emphasis, "to marry her to somebody who was—who was nobody."

"Adolphus' family is one of the oldest in England."

"Really? How very nice! And is it really true that they only have mutton twice a week?"

"Certainly not," said Lady Jane Lock; "it is a detail, a ridiculous detail; but the vicarage, a most lovely vicarage embowered in roses, is in the heart of a famous sheep country. I see nothing to laugh at."

"Nor I, dear."

"Delia does not require much butcher's meat."

"She is so right," said Mrs. Dormer, with a marked access of seriousness; "my doctor says so. Twice a week is quite enough."

"My daughter can have mutton every day, if she wishes."

"Yes, dear Jane; but who would wish to have mutton every day? You know, dear, I was only saying how nice and unworldly it was of you to marry poor dear Delia to a penniless nobody?"

"I have told you again and again, Susan, that, if Adolphus' mother had been a man, she would have been fifteenth baronet."

"Yes, dear; but if she had been a man, she wouldn't have been his mother."

Lady Jane Lock was taken aback. Her friend's remark appeared to her equally indelicate and unanswerable. She

sat down abruptly with a movement of disapproval, and took up the *Morning Post*.

"Any way, Jane," said Susan Dormer presently. "I think we can do better for Elizabeth."

Lady Jane Lock perceptibly concentrated her attention on her paper.

"Of course things suit me very well as they are," continued Susan, looking comfortably around her," but I know very well that they can't stay like this. The poor dear boy is so absurdly rich, and he is not at all clever except at books and that sort of thing—he can't escape long."

The *Morning Post* rustled in Lady Jane's hands, and a sound came from behind the paper, which was suspiciously like the word "coarse."

"Of course, dear, as you say," continued Mrs. Dormer placidly, "of course the poor dear boy is sure to be married by somebody. So why not Elizabeth? I am all for Elizabeth. I do like her so much; she is so like her dear father."

"Not in the least," said Lady Jane, who had intended, like Iago, to speak no more. Mrs. Dormer ignored the contradiction. She smiled and said, "Elizabeth has real beauty; she is not like poor Delia."

"Many people," said Lady Jane, emphatically, "admired Delia more than any of her sisters."

"Did they, dear?"

"I cannot help it," continued the other loftily, "if the general taste of the day is inexpressibly vulgar."

"Oh, poor dear Elizabeth!" murmured Susan Dormer; "that is too bad, Jane. I should never think of saying that Elizabeth looked vulgar. Perhaps she is not in the *most* refined style; I go with you as far as that; but not vulgar—oh, no, I really think not."

Lady Jane Lock laid down the paper and looked at the friend. She opened her mouth, but shut it again with determination. After a time she asked this question: "Susan, do you think that Lord Lorrilaire is coming here at all?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dormer, "I am sure that the poor boy will come. He is odd, but he really would have let me know if he was not coming at all; he knows that I asked people."

"Does he know that I am here?"

Mrs. Dormer smiled. "I think that he suspects, poor dear," she said; "he is not suspicious, but really after London—well, I for one hope that we shall make the match."

She reposed, smiling. On her large fair face there was no sign that she was aware that she was not making the most agreeable speeches to her friend. And yet she knew Jane so well that she knew exactly where to touch her with effect; and, when she was administering a little wholesome dig, then she smiled. Her smile was peculiar, for her mouth was so small in comparison with her smooth calm countenance, that a smile produced hardly any effect on her expression. A little extra amiability was suggested, as she smiled and said that she hoped that they would make the match.

"I cannot tell you," said Lady Jane, stiffening herself like a grenadier, "how much I detest this talk of making matches. I regard it as little better than impiety."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Dormer, faintly.

"Some marriages are made in heaven," said Lady Jane Lock, with due solemnity.

"And others in country-houses," said her friend. She was rather shocked when she had said it, and added promptly—"that is what Clara Chauncey says."

"It is worthy of her," said Lady Jane, sharply.

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Dormer; "she is so clever."

"Clever, yes! You know my opinion of Mrs. Chauncey."

"Oh! yes, dear."

"A most dangerous woman!"

"Oh! yes, dear," said Mrs. Dormer, smiling; "but not dangerous to us. Poor dear Clara cannot interfere with our little plan."

Lady Jane made no comment but an impatient snort.

It was really an unlucky morning for Lady Jane Lock. There were many questions which she was eager to ask; but on the other hand she felt that she could not open her mouth without a fresh sacrifice of dignity. Here was such a good opportunity of a really useful talk with her friend; but it seemed to her, as it often seemed to her, that her friend was either so stupid or so perverse that she could get nothing from her but annoyance. She was not even sure that Susan really believed that young Lord Lorrilaire

would really come; and if he were not coming, she knew that she ought to be angling for a renewed invitation to Bolitho; she wondered if the Duke would ask her again. She was just making up her mind to start afresh with Susan, and to try to lead up by a new path to those questions which she longed to ask, mere careless questions about the disposition of the property and such matters, when she heard the outer of the two doors opened, and the voice of Sir Villiers Hickory asking if he might come in.

"Oh! yes, do come in and a use us," said Mrs. Dormer; "we are so dull. I am told to be amused after breakfast." The voice of Susan Dormer had no other tone so solemn as that in which she always referred to the advice of her doctor. Sir Villiers came in, looking brisk and business-like. He was a very good-looking man of his years. He had preserved his light figure and his clear eyes, which were almost colorless. For the rest, he was fresh-colored, with that rather mottled look which ruddy men acquire with time, thin-lipped and firm of jaw and chin. He was a slender, erect and alert elderly gentleman, and he was admirably dressed. He gave thought to his dress, determined that as an old man he would be neither fop nor sloven, and determined too that his clothes should not look as if he thought about them. He was now dressed, as he held that a man ten years younger than himself should be dressed in a country-house on a week day; he had allowed himself the benefit of those ten years after due deliberation, having decided, and quite rightly, that he looked at least ten years younger than his contemporaries at the Club.

If Mrs. Dormer received Sir Villiers graciously, Lady Jane made no great effort to hide her annoyance.

"I never expect to see men in the morning," she said; "why ain't you killing something?"

"We can't always be killing," replied the gentleman sharply; "we leave that to the ladies." It was a pretty speech, but not without a slight tartness, a mere suspicion of irony. Lady Jane only acknowledged it by a sniff; but Mrs. Dormer was charmed.

"You are a dear man!" she said.

"Never mind that," said he. "I have come to ask if you haven't heard anything of the boy."

"Not a word," said Susan, smiling.

"It'll be awkward if he don't turn up," he said.

"He always turns up," said she placidly.

"It is settled," said Sir Villiers, "that Palfrey is to make a big speech at Langstone, and I have asked him in Archie's name to stay here for the affair."

"But, my dear Villiers, I thought that the poor dear boy was a Radical or a Republican, or something."

"It doesn't matter a fig what he *was*. He was nobody, and might have been a Shaker or a Peculiar Person for what anybody cared. But now he is somebody, and now it does matter. Langley Castle has always been the centre of the Tory party in the county, and Archie must give his money, and entertain the spouters and stumpers like other people. Palfrey will certainly come, and Archie must not only entertain him here, but must preside at his meeting." He went to the fireplace and put his hand on the bell. "May I ring?" he asked.

"Of course, Villiers; and we will see if anybody comes."

"They come when I ring," he said.

The bell was pulled with decision, and answered with promptitude.

"Has Hawkins heard from Lord Lorrilaire?" asked Sir Villiers.

"No, Sir Villiers," said the footman, "but his Lordship have arrived."

"What?" cried Sir Villiers.

Lady Jane leapt in her seat, and even Mrs. Dormer turned her head.

"Yes, Sir Villiers, he came in this morning through the window of the long drawing-room, when the housemaids were doing it. His Lordship went straight to the bath-room."

"Well? Where is he now?"

"His Lordship is asleep."

"In his room?"

"Yes, Sir Villiers."

"Did he bring his luggage?"

"His Lordship's luggage is at Langstone, at the Blue Boar."

"The wrong house!" said Sir Villiers sharply; "a Radical pot-house! Tell Blake to send a cart for the luggage at once—at once!"

"Yes, Sir Villiers;" and the man departed.

When the two doors had been closed, Sir Villiers looked sharply from one lady to the other.

"We've got him," he said.

"Yes," said Mrs. Dormer softly, smiling on Lady Jane Lock, "*we* have got him."

Lady Jane wished not to understand, wished to be indignant, but before she could decide what it were best to express, she, much to her own surprise, gave vent to an abrupt crude laugh.

CHAPTER III.

PRESENTLY young Lord Lorrilaire would wake from his dream of the sheep-fold and of the patient stars to find himself stretched on his patent bedstead, and under his own majestic roof. It seemed almost as likely that he would wake a little later from his dreams of freedom and of happy friendship to find himself an engaged man and a patent conversative politician. His uncle, Sir Villiers Hickory, if his view was somewhat narrow, saw all which it included, with a remarkable keenness. He was not embarrassed by doubts; he was a man of decision; he had established the useful habit of having his own way. His aunt, Mrs. Dormer, had a large store of that immovable obstinacy, which is only found in women, and in women of a lethargic and most amiable temperament. And, finally, Lady Jane Lock, though she disliked the reputation of a successful matchmaker, was at least a most fortunate mother-in-law.

Nevertheless, it was not the wishes of these relations and friends which were the chief danger of the young man, but rather the mood which now possessed him—a mood dangerously acquiescent. He was not deficient in character, as the popular phrase is. On the contrary, he had more character than could be set forth in pieces by a few sentences of even the most cunning analyst. He had always been a clever boy, clever and kind-hearted. His mother, who had lost her husband soon after the birth of this their only child, had retired to a small place in the country. There she had become by degrees, and in spite of her gentle methods, the leading philanthropist of the

neighborhood; and thence she had sent to London at long intervals certain works of fiction, which betrayed on every page her tenderness of heart, her timid love of religion, her delicate literary taste, and her sublime ignorance of the world. By the side of this gentle mother her little boy had trotted into cottages, and ceased his cheerful babble for a moment, wondering that there was sorrow in the world. His mother had loved to soften the little heart, which did not need it. The first money which the little hand had held was put into it that it might be given to the poor. So Archie Rayner had learned, before he was breeched, that he must look about for those who needed help, and help them as well as he could. This seemed an uncommonly simple affair to the little boy, and, so long as it went no further than carrying half his pudding to the little lame boy at the lodge, it was simple enough.

Archie went straight from home to a public school, and after the first night, when he cried himself to sleep, he found a pleasure quickly growing in the companionship of other little boys. Playing with zeal, working without lassitude, and idling less than most of his fellows, he had not much time to remember that there were any less fortunate lads in the world; and, as his intelligence grew rapidly and he began to question this and that, the village and its wants, of which he read in his mother's letters, seemed so small in the distance that he could scarcely help laughing at his mother's seriousness. It was like the little scraps of good advice which she put in her postscripts, and for which he loved her, though he laughed. Indeed, he laughed a great deal, being given to laughter, and a popular and pleasant person. And then, when he was sixteen years old, his tutor, who was what was called in those days a Philosophical Radical, was struck by one of his questions, which sounded intelligent, invited him to join his Debating Society, lent him some books, and administered to him an occasional sententious maxim as a stimulant to youthful thought. Thereupon a new world seemed to open before the boy, who had not caught the true scholar's interest in the structure of the Greek and Latin languages. He read eagerly, and, as he read and thought, his childhood's philanthropy rose strong again within him; and the questions, religious and political, which he asked

himself and his tutor, tended more and more to take the practical shape—how to help the poor. It became apparent at once that this was no such simple affair as it had seemed in the far-off days of pennies and pudding. Presently he wrote home a boyish pompous letter to his mother, questioning her methods, and more than hinting that his researches were likely to lead to the conclusion that she was pauperizing the parish. His mother was immensely proud of his letter, and not at all disturbed by the criticism, having that power, so common in mothers, of combining an excessive admiration of the cleverness of her child with complete indifference to his opinions.

But the Debating Society and the stimulating tutor soon showed this young scholar that there were other interesting political questions besides that of helping the poor. What was the object of politics? He asked his tutor this question; and his tutor put into his hands for answer, Mills' "Essay on Liberty." This delighted the boy, for it brought simplicity again into matters which had seemed chaotic, and provided a touchstone by which he could try all Acts of Parliaments, and all suggestions of Reformers. It was clear to him that Government had nothing to do with the poor, except to secure their liberty as it secured that of other citizens; he maintained in debate that even workhouses were contrary to right reason, though it might be inexpedient to level them at one stroke to the ground; he recommended charity with all the approved safeguards to his fellow members as a matter of private enterprise. It says much for Archie Rayner that these fellow-members liked him, in spite of his long speeches; but then all his little world liked him. If he, who had not yet learned the meaning of Philosophy, philosophized at too great length, he philosophized without effeminacy; for he loved the river in summer and the foot-ball field in winter, and, like the Athenians, he did much of his living, and even some of his debating, in fairest places and in the happy outer air.

When Archie went up to Oxford, he thought that he knew a great deal about many things, and he was confident at least that he carried with him the right foundation of the right political faith. He turned eagerly to the other Freshmen to see what their views were; and, since he had gone up to an eminently intellectual College, he found no lack of opinions. He may be said to have run straight

into the arms of a young Mazzinist, and within twenty-four hours his radicalism had lost what now seemed to him its insular character; his zeal for Liberty had extended as far as the Sclavs, of whose existence he had been previously unaware; and his dry political maxims had been flooded by a new enthusiasm, and glorified by all the sacred emotions of religion. With this young Mazzinist, Thomas Beck, who had been the prize boy of a great town in the North, and who was supported at Oxford by contributions of his wealthier townsfolk, Archie Rayner struck up a warm friendship. With him and with other youths he exchanged ideas, as if ideas were inexhaustible. It was a splendid time; but not much of it was exhausted before all their little opinions, which had seemed to be so firmly based, were crumbling. They discussed everything; nothing was to be accepted without discussion; and the result was that Beck began to admit that Mazzini had expected too much from average people, and that men were hungry and wicked even in Republics; while Archie was delighted with his new talent for paradox, and began to make light of that Liberty which included the liberty to be drunk daily, to starve in peace, and to spread disease by the foul condition of the house, which was, as freemen loved to say, an Englishman's castle.

These happy and inquiring young men devoured the volumes of Carlyle, and attended in due course lectures on Philosophy. From Carlyle and from the metaphysicians, as from their own growth and from their own discussions, they learned that the universe was yet deeper and higher than they had thought, more mysterious, more complicated. It was no longer so simple a matter for a young man to decide what he should do with his life. To this practical question Archie Rayner, who was at bottom a very practical person, was for ever returning, to the vexation of some of his more brilliant comrades, who preferred wider and less personal considerations. The universe alone was wide enough for them; but Archie stuck firmly to his intention of being of some use in the world. Only it had become hard for him to tell how he could be of most use, or indeed of any use at all. From Carlyle, for example, he learned that he should do that work which lay nearest to his hands; but this was small help to Archie, who declared with conviction that he could see no work close

to his hands. He was an only child; he had enough money; he objected to be rich. Since he could not believe that it was his duty to make money, he could see no reason for embracing any one of the obvious professions. He regarded lawyers as a necessary evil; his success at the Bar would take work from men who needed it more, and who would serve the public at least as well. He did not wish to compete with his mother in spinning delicate sentences; he had at that time an amused contempt for novels. He might take a good degree and might get a Fellowship; but the idea of eternal Oxford did not please him; it seemed like the prolonging of youth without remaining young. He was not a poet. Finally, he could not give his life to the service of the poor, for he did not know how best to serve them. His beliefs had got loose; his opinions were changing under each new influence which he met; he was but twenty-three years old. When he had taken his degree with credit, the only fact, of which he felt certain, was that it would be well for him to go away alone for a while, and to consider in solitude that same old question, what work he should do in the world. So he made up his mind to go straight from Balliol to the Rocky Mountains, and for all his solemn doubts he felt a boyish joy in the contrast. His mother shed some natural tears; she dreamed of bears and of Indians, and woke sobbing. She would rather have seen him safe in studious chambers, or, and this would have been best of all, in some such delightful vicarage as she had described in more than one of her novels. But he was determined to go, and, though he was very kind to his mother, he went.

Archie had gone to think among the mountains. He found a silent mate, who knew them well, and he and this new friend camped out together. The eternal snow, the canons cut deep in the mountains as if with one stroke of a knife of preternatural sharpness, above all the keen pure air, delighted the boy. Perhaps he thought; it is certain that he walked long distances in search of black-tailed deer, and was less eager for a time to decide upon a life's career than to attain to a high degree of accuracy with the rifle. He once saw a bear and missed him clean, and the depression, from which he suffered for the next twenty-four hours, brought back on him in a flood

his doubts of the nature of the universe and of his mission therein. But he could not be down-hearted in that delightful air; his breath quickened, his ears tingled, and he seemed within a little of flying; at night he lay in his blankets reading Schwegler's "History of Philosophy," while his comrade smoked in silence. Whether this life would have led the boy to a definite decision about his future, it is impossible to say; for it was cut short, before its first charm had begun to fail, by the most amazing news. One day he had been forced to journey down to Colorado Springs for a few necessaries of life, and he found there some letters, which told him that he had become Lord Lorrilaire, and had acquired, as heir of the late lord, lands and houses and a great fortune in money.

Archie had not completed his University education without being asked if he were one of the Rayners of Langley; he had answered generally that he believed so, and, if in his most communicative mood, he had added the information that the Rayners of Langley had done very well without him. Indeed, the late Lord Lorrilaire, who was the head of the family, had never shown that he was aware that there was a widowed Mrs. Rayner, who was connected with his family. The title and estates had gone from father to son for many generations; and it had not occurred to this particular father that there was any doubt that the title and estates would pass in due course from him to his son. He was by no means an old man, and his son was strong and active, and sure to marry soon, as was the plain duty of an only son. Now, it happened that Lord Lorrilaire paid a visit to the house of a friend, and that this house, though it combined great dignity and antiquity with all the modern luxuries, was in a state by no means satisfactory to sanitary inspectors. Lord Lorrilaire carried home from this visit the seeds of typhoid fever; he was stout and ruddy and too much inclined to fever; it was presently known that he was in great danger. They telegraphed to his son, who was travelling in India; and on the next day they were forced to telegraph again that Lord Lorrilaire was dead. The second telegram crossed another sent from India, which brought news that his son had had an accident while riding through a river and had been drowned, before help could be given. It was a question which interested Society at the moment

whether the father or the son had died first. A question which interested them more, was the question, who was the heir; but the people best informed were at a loss. Even Lady Jane Lock did not know, nor could she find the right man in the Peerage. It was reserved for the family lawyers, not without a moment's doubt, to declare that the title and estates in Limeshire, Loamshire, and the Parish of St. Mary-la-Bonne, passed to Archibald, only son of the late Captain Rayner of the Royal Artillery. Thus Archie had become a lord. He blushed in Colorado Springs as he learned it. He felt a fool; that was his first feeling. He rode back to camp, and blushed again as he told his mate. "How's that?" said the mate, who had come West from Chicago. "What in thunder are you?"

"I'm a lord," said Archie; "and I've got to go home and learn the business."

He presented the History of Philosophy to his friend, and would have given him the rifle too, had he not been so quietly confident of the superiority of American weapons. He felt that he could give away things with an easy hand: that was one advantage any way. He said good-bye to his mate and to the mountains, which he loved; went down to Pueblo and took the train; and he did not rest from travelling till he reached London.

It is not surprising that Archie Rayner was confused by this strange stroke of fortune. Before he was sure of his own religion, he found that he had church-livings to give away. Discontented with both the parties, which monopolize the field of politics, he was placed in a position, which had always been one of great political influence. Ignorant of society, and especially of women, he was received by society with a simple friendliness, and with a frank curiosity which was hardly impertinent. On the whole he enjoyed himself immensely, almost as in his first days in the Rockies. And he began to wonder if his practical question were not answered. Family lawyers, men of the world, charming women, seemed all to agree that his course in life was clear. Nobody even asked him what he meant to do. Certainly now there was work to his hand, if he chose to do it. To do the work nearest to him was perhaps the best answer which he got at all to his old questioning. There were clear duties attached to

this new position of his; this ought to content him. What if he should let himself go and see what would happen to him? It was easy; it would be great fun. If he found himself the prop of the Conservative party, was it not perhaps the party of the most real and practical reforms? If he found himself in love, that might be delightful. Heretofore he had been in love with phantoms. Now these young girls in society were charming, with their little airs and fashions, and their belief that they knew the world; and there was not one of them handsomer or more interesting than Elizabeth Lock. In her he fancied that there was something deeper than in the others; and certainly her hair was of the most beautiful color. So he had let himself drift through the London season, and had gone down safe to his mother in her quiet home. And then the time had come, when his uncle Sir Villiers Hickory, and his aunt Mrs. Dormer (for his mother was dismayed at the idea of leaving her own studio and her own neighborhood), had decreed that he must entertain a party, a very little one for a beginning, at Langley Castle. Thither he went as to a comedy, and laughed when he thought that the chief player would be himself. Perhaps he was but a dancing doll, and others would pull the strings; but even that thought made him laugh. He had let himself go for a while; he could always pull up when he liked; he was sure of that. So partly by train and partly on foot the heir had come to his own, and now lay asleep under the imposing roof of Langley Castle, drawing his breath with happiness, and yet, it seems, in truly parlous state.

CHAPTER IV.

"I AM the most unlucky devil in the world," said Leonard Vale. If he were unlucky, he did not seem to be uncomfortable. He was in the pleasant morning-room of Langley Castle; he had pulled the biggest arm-chair near to the fire, and he almost lay in it with his long legs stretched far on to the rug before him. His long white hands, each weighed with a single heavy ring, lay limp along the arms of the chair; his great dark eyes were half

closed, as if it were too much trouble to raise the lids; he seemed to be speaking to his long, slender feet.

Mrs. Chauncey, who was the only other person in the room, made no comment on the speech of the young man. She had heard it before. Indeed, in the early hours of the day Leonard Vale was apt to take this view of himself, and to mention it to anybody to whom he spoke at all; and Clara Chauncey, who was an old friend, paid no more attention to his speeches of this sort, if spoken before luncheon, than she would have paid to the natural expressions of a sleepy cat. However, she was inclined at that moment to talk. She too had made herself comfortable in a feminine fashion. For a woman who is well dressed for the day there was no comfort in a large arm-chair.

She had seated herself in an armless chair with a convenient back, and placed her feet, which were two of her best points, on a puffy footstool. Her eyes were not half closed. On the contrary, they were wide open, and they regarded the young man opposite with that innocent inquiring gaze which Mrs. Chauncey used often and often with effect. She would have laughed at the idea that she wished to produce an effect on this youth, whom she chose to regard as a boy and as a fit object for lectures; but these little arts of charming women naturally become habits in time, so that it is no rare thing to see an habitually fascinating lady making eyes at her housekeeper, while her mind is wholly busy with the important question of the day's dinner.

"My dear boy," said Mrs. Chauncey, fixing her round candid eyes upon Leonard, "you smoke too many cigarettes. That's what's the matter with you."

"I like that from you," he said without moving or turning his eyes.

"Oh, I have given up smoking," she said, feeling a keener interest in the talk as it turned on herself.

"Since when?"

"Since so many women took to it," she said; "it is commonplace now. Lady J. smokes; her maid told mine; she says it is for asthma; it is so droll to have a reason." All this she said with her pretty surprised air. Pretty she still was beyond all question, although she was always telling people with her delightful simplicity that she was no longer young. It is true that her face was now

pale and a little too thin, but the brown eyes were all the more effective. "Ah, you boys!" she said again after a minute; "you do ask so much of life. Look at me." He turned a lack-lustre eye upon her, as she continued. "Suppose I were to begin complaining. What a tale I could tell! Married to a—to my husband, to a man who cared for nothing but yachting, I who couldn't go on a river without qualms!" He began to laugh in spite of himself. She regarded him gravely; her talk was like the artless prattle of a child. "All on account of that yachting, and because I really could not spend my life at all sorts of angles, I have been cruelly abused and talked about, and——"

"You don't mind that much."

"That shows how much you know. I used to think that I didn't mind what women said; I was very foolish and defiant; I know a great deal better now." She emitted a little sigh. He could not help showing that he was a little amused; he thought her the cleverest woman in the world. She needed very little encouragement to induce her to continue to talk about herself.

"I lost the privilege," she said gravely, "of going to many of the dullest country houses in England." He laughed. "You need not laugh," she said; "all my energies, my whole being is now directed to the one purpose of creeping back."

"Of what?"

"Of creeping back into those houses. Dear Susan Dormer! She has never turned her back, her broad back, upon me. I cannot tell you how full of peace and gratitude I feel now when I am staying at Langley. Did you see the little paragraph in the paper?"

"I can't say I did."

"'Mrs. Chauncey has left town for Langley Castle,'" she murmured; "how peaceful it sounds, and how prosperous! The one thing," she continued presently, "which all women find absolutely necessary is to be able to look down on some other women. I am assured you find that among the lowest. I am now able to look down on women who do not stay at Langley."

"You will be able to look down on me pretty soon," he said, relapsing into sullenness.

"My dear boy," she said, "I always have looked down

upon you; but you are not a woman, if you are a little womanish."

"You needn't abuse me; I am down enough on my luck, heaven knows!"

"Does it?" she asked with her innocent gravity. "What is the matter, if it is not cigarettes?"

He moved in his chair and grumbled inarticulately; at last with a voice full of injury he said—

"I used to come to you to help me."

"Ah, if it had been a bad habit, you wouldn't have given it up!"

"Oh! I don't suppose you'll care; I don't see why you should," he muttered.

"About what?" she asked.

"About my getting the sack."

"The sack! What for?" she asked again.

"You ain't generally so stupid, Clara; you must know that these women are going to marry Archie."

"Are you so fond of your cousin Archie," she asked after a minute, "that you cannot bear the idea of his belonging to another?"

"Well," he answered defiantly, "it is uncommon hard on him; he hasn't had a bit of fun; and it's deuced hard on *me*. Here am I, older than he, and quite as near to the late lord, only it happened to be through a woman instead of a man."

"Ah, that makes a difference," she said; "women don't count; they never do."

"Well, it does seem hard lines," he said, aroused to a preceptibly higher level of animation, "that he should have every blessed thing which a man can want, and that I, who used to come here all the time and make myself useful——"

"Useful?" she asked with an air of surprise; "my dear boy! Useful?"

"Well, it is deuced hard. He was never near the place in his life till he came to take possession."

"But why the sack?" she asked. "I thought that he had done the handsome thing by you. I hear that you've taken the best rooms in the house for yourself."

"Who told you that?"

"My maid. She had it from your man."

"Well, I really shouldn't go listening to the servants' gossip," he said sulkily.

"Wouldn't you? You are so wrong. I always do. I learn everything from my maid. It is such a good plan; it amuses her so much that she doesn't bother about her wages; she is like a friend, you know; she adores me."

As he made no comment on these frank statements, she continued—

"My maid says that you have taken the whole Tower wing for yourself and made it charming."

"It's only three rooms," he said; "and nobody used them. They were given up to mouldy targets and broken bird cages—and black-beetles, I dare say."

"Ugh!" she said with a shudder.

"I thought I was more worthy than a black-beetle. Perhaps I flattered myself." He said this with more pleasure, feeling as if he too could be witty.

"Perhaps," she said with gravity; "one never knows. And you have done the rooms well?"

"I think I've made 'em nice," he answered comfortably. "Archie told me to do what I liked with them, you know."

"And to send the bill to him," she said, as if completing his sentence.

"It wouldn't be much good their sending it to me," he said. "Of course he felt that I'd been devilishly badly treated—oh, I don't complain of Archie."

"Don't you? But you don't want him to be married and to live happy ever after; and you do want to stay in your nice rooms, curled up like a gorged fox in a rabbit-warren."

"You needn't call names," he muttered.

"My dear boy," she said, "you are quite right; of course you want to stay where you are, and to drink his wine and to shoot his coverts and to ride his horses——"

"When I'm not too jumpy," he said, as she paused at a loss for the next luxury "You know all about me, Clara," he continued; "I always told you everything. You know I'm a nervous subject; and you know I can't do without the luxuries of life. How can I?"

"Nerves and luxuries," she remarked thoughtfully, as if to herself. "How can I help you?" she asked him presently.

"You might advise me."

"You don't want me to flirt with the boy," she said slowly, looking at him gravely with her round artless eyes; "I am old enough to be his mother."

"Clara, what nonsense——" he began.

"It can't be done," she said; "you forget that I am creeping back. It might have amused me once, just to cut out the girl, and no harm done; but now—my dear boy, *I* should get the sack; I would much rather it was you who got the sack."

"Thank you!"

"I am just trembling in the balance with Lady J. now," she said; "I am truckling to her, grovelling; she was dreadfully annoyed at finding me here; she wanted Susan Dormer to give me warning on the spot. Expect nothing from me. I have no energies left except for creeping back."

Leonard Vale did not expostulate with his friend. He only shifted himself a little in his chair, pulled his sleek black moustache into a point, and bit his under lip. Mrs. Chauncey knew in a moment that he had not yet said what he wished to say, and that she had been wrong in thinking that he wished her to divert young Lord Lorrilaire from the dangers of matrimony.

"There's somebody else, you know," he said at last, "who might save Archie—I wanted to ask your advice, you know—if she were to come down, you know——"

"Who?"

"You see, she's the only woman in London who knew Archie before. She was the parson's daughter down at his home, wherever it was."

A slight change of expression came into Mrs. Chauncey's eyes, and the thin sensitive lips, which had been so long schooled in the concealment of feeling, pressed each other a little more tightly. She knew well of whom he was speaking, but she chose to keep her look of inquiry.

"It's Mrs. Rutherford," he said, still looking at his boots. Then, as her continued silence made him nervous, he gave one glance in her direction, looked away again, and went on speaking.

"You see, she don't want Archie to marry yet; she thinks he do'nt know anything of the world, and that she knows all about it; she thinks she's his only friend, and has got a sort of mission to save him from match-making mothers; she was furious with Lady J. in London."

"She is very pretty," said Mrs. Chauncey.

"I wish you'd advise me," he said; "I wish you'd tell me if it would do for her to come down here."

"You have asked her to come already," she said quietly.

He opened his mouth as if he were going to lie, but he shut it again and pulled himself into a more upright position. "It's no good trying to humbug you," he said; "I've not asked her, for I've no right to ask anybody; but I have written to her and told her who are here."

"And that will bring her without committing you to anything."

"Do you think she'll come?" he asked almost deferentially.

"You ought to know best," she said frankly; "she certainly is very pretty."

"What's that got to do with it?"

Clara Chauncey knew that she was vexed, and did not mean to show it. It has been said that there is no love without jealousy; however that may be, there is plenty of jealousy without love. She was jealous now. She knew perfectly well that this boy was trying to break to her diplomatically that a younger and prettier woman was coming, and that he thought it necessary to be diplomatic because he thought that she would be jealous of his devotion to the new-comer. She would have liked to impress upon him with something more convincing than words, with the fire-irons perhaps, how very little she cared or ever had cared about him. But, though it is perfectly true that her warmest feeling for Leonard had been a mild amusement in forming, as she called it, a handsome boy, who came to tea and could be sent for theatre tickets, yet it is no less true that it annoyed her to think of his devoting himself to anybody else. It annoyed her that she would no longer be the pretty married woman of the party; it annoyed her that this other woman was so young and looked so happy; it annoyed her most of all that this sulky youth was trying to manage her, and thought that she would be jealous on his account. His side-long looks annoyed her.

"Of course she will come," she said; "she will propose herself to Lord Lorrilaire; she will think it great fun to invite herself. She is an absurd little creature, married out of a parson's schoolroom, and thinks she knows the world; but it is a pretty absurdity. She will come down full of importance to save the friend of her childhood. You admire her very much, don't you?" She asked this with a delightful frankness and one of her rare smiles.

"Oh, of course I admire Mrs. Tom," he said with a clumsy masculine effort to answer her in the same tone; "everybody admired her; it was the thing this year."

"And I do not wonder," she said; "she is so pretty and so fresh, so refreshingly fresh. It will be very pleasant for you if she comes."

"It will save my place for me," he said with a happy inspiration; "that's what matters to me."

She sat looking at him with her air of quiet study. "Yes," she said, "that is what will always matter most to you. Of course it is too late to stop this plot of yours."

"There's no plot of mine," he said; "I just told her who were here. If she likes to propose herself, it's her own look-out."

"If she gets into a scrape," she said, "that is her own look-out too. She need not look to you to help her." She made these statements with the coolness and certainty of a mathematical professor; and they stung Leonard Vale to some show of temper.

"Upon my word, Clara," he said, "you seem to be trying to say the most disagreeable things you can."

"Who? I?" She seemed to be truly surprised.

"Yes, you," he answered; "but never mind! I'm so down that any one may hit me—and you most of all, of course." He slipped back to his depressed and dependent air.

"Of course," she said, "you told me nothing of this until it was too late to stop her coming."

"Oh, I dare say you can stop it, if you like," he said, "and leave poor Archie to be married, and set me adrift again just when I have a chance of pulling up and staying quiet and paying my debts——"

"And living on your rich bachelor cousin," she added for him, as he paused. "And the husband?" she asked presently; "has Mr. Rutherford no say in the matter?"

"Not much," answered Leonard, with a short laugh.

"Really?" she said; "I used to know him a little. I should not have thought that he was that sort of man."

"She'll come if she likes," said he, nodding his head.

His knowing air exasperated Mrs. Chauncey. She had a great power of self-control, but she knew that, if she continued to sit opposite to Leonard, she would presently say more than she meant to, show her annoyance, and

then, angry with herself for showing annoyance, say yet more, and finally have several rash speeches of which to repent at leisure. So she rose from her chair, and looked at the clock, and said, "I cannot waste any more of my morning in talking to you;" and so walked out of the room.

Leonard Vale, left alone, let himself slide even lower down in his low arm-chair, and pushed his hands deep down into his trousers' pockets. He felt ill-used by fortune and by friends; he doubted if he had any friends. He could not tell if this Clara Chauncey, who had pretended to be his friend, and to lecture him for his good, meant to help him or to hinder him at this crisis. He told himself that after such a series of bad things, as only an unlucky chap experiences, he had at last come in for a good thing; and that now it was at least ten to one that he would lose it. He recalled his first annoyance when he found that he was not to be a penny the better for the death of the late lord, and his amazement when the present man, fresh from Colorado, had burst in upon him in his lodgings, sympathized warmly with his sense of ill-usage, and asked as a matter of course to be allowed to pay his debts, and to set him on his legs again. Since that astonishing visit Lenny had been wondering at odd times what this prosperous cousin (for Archie had insisted on the cousinship, which was none of the nearest) expected to get out of him in return. He had made a half-hearted suggestion that he should be an agent or sub-agent, or something, but Archie had received it as a joke. He had a great many acquaintances whom it was considered a treat to know, male and female, of all shades; but his cousin did not seem even to wish for introductions. He knew a man, who was one of the few men who knew a horse; but his cousin had already commissioned his uncle Sir Villiers to fill his stables. He knew the correct place to go to for cigarettes and the champagne which it was right to drink that year; and Archie received his information on these points, but rather as if he humored him.

Lenny, recumbent in the big arm-chair, wondered once more if this new Lord Lorrilaire could be such a flat as to have paid his debts and filled his pockets for nothing. He could not believe that anybody would encumber himself unasked and at the very start of his life with poor

relations. He assured himself with a knowing nod that if he had come in for all this, he would have had no hangers-on. If he did not imagine himself kicking himself out of Langley Castle, it was only because his imagination was limited. Nevertheless, he felt that he would be injured more deeply than ever, if he were made to lose his hold now. And this hanging-on was so uncertain a business for any one who was not quite a prehensile ape. Before luncheon and in his dejected mood he was half inclined to give the whole thing up. The difficulties seemed enormous; he felt chilly, in spite of the good fire, as he thought of all the trouble; he would have to walk among egg-shells. He had seen the suspicion of him in the eyes of Lady Jane Lock within half an hour of her arrival. Mrs. Dormer was always kind, and Sir Villiers had been a friend of his father; but Sir Villiers had a keen eye, and Mrs. Dormer saw so much more than she seemed to. And then his thoughts passed again to Clara Chauncey, and stirred him to fresh annoyance. Why in the world could not she say if she would help him or not? If not, he might as well be packing his portmanteau. And Dora Rutherford? Would she come? If she came, would it be known that he had brought her? He hoped that she would come, and yet he feared. He feared his very hope, for it surprised him by his strength. If he could not trust his friends, he could not trust himself either. He knew that his nerves might fail him at any time; he dared not answer for his self-control at a critical moment. Already he felt feverish and good for nothing. Again he pronounced himself, with something like a smothered howl, to be the most unlucky brute in the world.

CHAPTER V.

YOUNG Lord Lorrilaire was grumbling too, as he got himself into his clothes with unusual difficulty on the morning after his return to Langleydale. He had plunged into his country-house party, and risen to the surface again and felt the better. And then the rest of his day had been full of amusing discoveries, which had made it almost as fascinating as a young adventurer's first day in a new

world. And yet he grumbled, as he dressed himself. He did not like to spend so much time in the adornment of his person, it seemed absurd; and yet for that day at least he was bound to be particular about each wrinkle, and each button. He had grown so warm while he strove so conscientiously for accuracy, that he had opened his windows to their utmost width, and the room, in which he still felt a stranger and explorer, was full of the clear cool air. A little too clear and cool it was for the ideal hunting morning; but to Archie it seemed on that portentous day the hunting was of small importance. He was to display himself, as his uncle had arranged, to the members of the Hunt; he felt as if he were the object of the chase, and as if landlords, farmers, the town contingent from Langstone, even horses and hounds were coming out to find him instead of the fox. His hat, his tie, his spurs, every detail of his appearance would be criticised, and his seat and his hands, about which no one had cared in happy days gone by. Severe eyes would be on his back as he rode at a hedge, mark him if he deviated from a rigid line across country, betray amazement if he grew bored and went home. Of his clothes he felt confident, for he had gone to him, whom Lenny had described tersely as the only breeches-maker; but this putting them on was a tiresome business. It was only better than yielding himself to the hand of his body-servant; for he had not had a body-servant since he had grown too big for a nurse, and he never breathed freely now till he had dismissed this most oppressive burden of his state. He would much rather help his valet into his clothes than be helped into his own.

As Archie tugged and buttoned, he remembered other days, some at Oxford, and some in his mother's neighborhood at home, when after duly counting the cost he had treated himself to a day's hunting. Much fun he had enjoyed upon hardly-worked strange-looking beasts, and, as they were always ready to go and his treats in this kind were rare, he had ridden his hardest and seen what he could. Much fun he had enjoyed; and now memory, as is her happy way, smoothed away the little mishaps and discomforts, the unexpected cropper, and the long ride home upon a tired screw, and showed him the pleasure only. Nobody cared then what he wore, or how he rode;

he did not feel as if he were clad in pasteboard, and he rode to please himself. Now it seemed to him that he must ride to satisfy his neighbors; his uncle was evidently anxious, lest he should not show off the horses which he had chosen. Archie thought of that row of animals in prime condition, and imagined each one of them expecting to be taken out in turn. It seemed as if it would take all his life, be the life's business of which he had dreamed, a business as distinct from pleasure as any other business, a truly British amusement solemn as affairs of State, affording occupation to the unemployed, and with as little to show for it in the end as the exercise of the treadmill. Having arrived at this thought, he began to smile again, partly because he was nearly dressed, partly because the thought itself was extravagant. After all, he would presently feel a good horse moving under him, and that was pleasure; and, if the neighbors were critical, it was probably an exaggeration to assert that they would value him more than the fox; the fox, though probably he was better known in the county, would after all excite the keener interest. He began to smile at his own folly in taking himself as seriously as if he were an Under-Secretary, or the manager of a theatre. And the air kept coming in at the open window, bringing health and good spirits, if it were by a touch too keen to satisfy the exigent sportsman; and presently, when his glass showed him a cheerful young Englishman blushing at his own splendor, he even felt a slight pleasure in being properly turned out for the first time in his life. He restrained a tendency to fright his castle from its tremendous propriety with a "view halloa!" and descended happy, if stiff, to meet his guests at breakfast.

In dangerously easy mood was young Lord Lorrilaire, as he descended the staircase somewhat stiffly in his admirable breeches. It even seemed the best fun possible to let things slide, and himself slide with them. It was likely that all things, his very life itself, would be settled for him, before he had done saying to himself that there was time to spare, and that he could assert himself on any future day. In the meantime it was pleasant and easy to please everybody.

Lady Jane Lock did not approve of girls going out hunting. It was opposed to her theories of female educa-

tion; and the success of her daughters so far had given her no cause to doubt the wisdom of her theories. But she knew that Elizabeth was different; she was not quite sure that she understood Elizabeth, though it seemed monstrous that she should not understand her own child. Elizabeth was never so happy as when she was on a horse; and, when she longed for a day's hunting and an absolutely fit and proper guardian was at hand, her mother did not always prevent her. She did not prevent her on this day. She had asked her usual questions on the previous evening, and had been assured that it was an easy sociable country with convenient gates and lanes, and further, that the meet was not one of the best. So she entrusted her precious child to Sir Villiers, who was the most trustworthy of pioneers; and she contented herself by making her usual statement that Elizabeth did not hunt, and so sent her out hunting.

The meet was so near that they all mounted their hunters at the door; and Archie observed with a smile that after all a good many of his new possessions would be exercised on that day. He was mounting Sir Villiers of course, and Lenny, and the best and kindest of the lot was brought round with a side-saddle for Miss Lock. And there was Tony Fotheringham, too, who completed this country-house party. Tony was one of Archie's new friends, and one who amused him always by a seriousness, which seemed highly comical in one so young and so rosy. Tony was two years younger than his host, and was as smooth and ruddy as the advertisement of a patent food; but he took great care of himself, and gave a great deal of thought to his health. Even now, as he sat on a horse which seemed distinctly too big for him, he looked seriously at the dining-room window, through which Mrs. Dormer was gazing at the group, and was inclined to repent that he had not remained at home, and had a good long talk with that sympathetic lady about his symptoms. However, it was too late for repentance, and he rode away with the rest, while Lady Jane stood on a step, defiant of the crisp air, and watched her girl, and approved the fit of her habit. The girl was riding with Sir Villiers, as she ought; but her mother thought she need not have talked so eagerly to him, that it was as good as a hint to Lord Lorrilaire not to interrupt the conversation. She said to

herself with some vexation that it was just like Elizabeth, whose notorious fault was want of animation, to be animated at the wrong moment; but then a day's hunting was always becoming to Elizabeth, and gave her a color and made her eyes sparkle. So after all this might be a most fortunate day. Lady Jane watched them, till they had ridden out of sight, with her usual desire to re-arrange them and to order them all to do her will, but not without good hope. She did not spare a single thought for Bolitho.

Archie's spirits rose with the movements of his horse, and they did not even fall when he was introduced to member after member of the Hunt. These members were cordial and brief; he forgot to think of their criticisms; he began to feel the old ardor of the chase. Nor did his pleasant spirits fail, though the morning was spent in jogging from covert to covert. It was pleasant to be out on such a day, to receive friendly greetings, to see hounds again after a long interval, and to ride by the side of a handsome girl who was flushed with excitement and the eager hope of a run. And after luncheon they did have a short run, and the country was easy and pleasant, and both Archie and Elizabeth went as well as anybody; and, when they pulled up, the girl turned on her young host a face transfigured by new life and light. Her red lips were parted, her eyes were shining, and little wandering hairs from her glossy head were curling above her ears. As she leaned forward to caress the neck of the good horse, she looked at his owner with gratitude and triumph, and Archie smiled back upon her with the frankest admiration. Was he not happy that he could give to this radiant being so glorious a gallop? There was some use in wealth. The radiant being lost much of her radiance when she found that there was to be no more hunting on that day. She rebelled promptly, and murmured against the Master, who had sent the hounds home so early. But she recovered her temper and became happy again, as they rode slowly homewards. She discussed the run with Archie, who still rode beside her; and when that subject was exhausted, and soon, for after all it had been a very short run, she went on talking with a want of reserve which she never showed except after excitement and quick exercise. She had been expressing such love of the country and its

pleasures, that Archie reminded her that she had seemed very happy sometimes in the London ball-rooms, which she now held cheap.

"Oh, yes," she said, "I liked this last season; I hated my first season, but I liked this; I began to know people, and I made some friends, and I wasn't always thinking if I was standing right or going into rooms properly, and I didn't feel obliged to agree with what everybody said to me."

Archie laughed.

"I shouldn't have thought that you would ever have agreed with everybody," he said.

"But I did," she said emphatically, "and I used to be ashamed of myself; I used to go home and hate myself! But in my second season I didn't care, and, if I didn't agree with people, I said so, or I didn't answer and let them think me dull. That is what many people think me."

"Do they?" he asked; "they must be dull, I think; you are silent sometimes."

"What is the good of talking?" she asked.

"Well," he said, "it is supposed to convey ideas, when there are any. And what about your third season?"

"I shall like that better still," she answered. "You see, I don't care now what anybody says of me."

"Isn't that a trifle strong?" said Archie.

"No," she said. "I shall enjoy this next season," she continued after a minute, "as much as possible, and after that——"

She made so long a pause that he thought that she had forgotten that she had left her sentence unfinished. After all in these days no person of any pretension to fashion is expected to finish a sentence, and polite conversation is no more than an interchange of hints, generally about nothing. But Miss Lock had an unequivocal end for her sentence. "After that," she said, "I shall hate it."

Archie was much amused by her decision.

"Isn't it rather unnecessary," he asked, "to make up your mind so long before? You see you've a whole season before you, which you've decided to enjoy very much indeed; perhaps when that is over you will look forward to the next."

"No," she said with even more decision, and looking straight between her horse's ears. "No," she said; "I don't want to spend my life in going about to balls."

"It must be a bore," he said with prompt conviction; "I should hate it myself. What would you rather do?" He felt a real curiosity; it was a new idea to him that girls also could be tired of ball-going and such amusements. "What would you like to do?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered,—"hunt."

"Oh!" he said, disappointed; "but perhaps you would be tired of that after your three seasons; and besides, you can't do it in summer."

"Do you suppose that I don't know when people hunt?" she asked with scorn. Then, for they had turned into a road which had a nice broad border of grass, she touched her willing horse and set off at a canter. Archie followed her, and, when she had stopped and he was once more at her side, she said to him with superb unreasonableness, "Of course you think no woman can care for anything but dancing and hunting."

"I thought it was you," he said, "who wanted to spend your life in hunting."

"Not at all," she said; "I should like to do something useful!"

"Useful?" he repeated. She nodded slightly, as if she did not care whether he believed her or not. She had certainly surprised him. He had held it most natural that a boy, whose ideas were not wholly confined to horses, should wish to be useful in the world; but that a girl, and a fashionable girl, should have such a wish, was a new fact for him. He had seen little of such girls, and thought little about them. Was this a fact at all? He was not suspicious, but all the suspicion of which he was capable was ready to arise in him when he considered girls. He knew his ignorance of them; and he wondered now if this girl who, under the influence of excitement and the healthy day, was really beautiful, had any real desire of anything but amusement; he supposed that girls practised the art of being agreeable, and he wondered if this girl were assuming a more serious view that she might please him, who had been ticketed without doubt by her world as a prig. She looked beautiful; he dismissed his uneasy doubt, as he looked at her. Moreover he asked himself why he should trouble himself, if she did care to pose a little for his benefit?

"Well?" she asked, since he kept silence; "you think

that's humbug, I suppose? I suppose that you think that no woman can do any good? Delia, my sister—she married a parson—a clergyman, I mean—I promised not to call him a parson."

"Is that what you mean?" he asked, laughing. "Do you mean that you would marry a pars—clergyman, I mean?"

"No."

"Why not? Oh, I beg your pardon if I am asking too many questions."

"I don't mind," she said. "I am not good enough; that's why."

"As good as lots of parsons," he responded quickly—"well, clergymen, then."

"Why do you talk as if everybody ought to marry somebody?" she asked.

"Isn't it the best thing for most people?" he asked in his turn.

"I don't pretend to know," she said. She gave a little laugh, which had a touch of malice in it. "It's a bad look-out," she said, "if it is so; our men friends don't marry—they can't afford it, or it's not the thing. Ask Mr. Fotheringham."

"Tony!" called out Lord Lorrilaire, turning in his saddle. Everybody called him "Tony," though there seemed to be no better reason than that his name was "Francis Algernon." Tony rode up to them. He was glad to join them, for he had been jogging in the rear with Leonard Vale, who had been the most gloomy of companions. Leonard had been looking at the backs of his cousin and the young lady, and had fallen into deep despondency, declaring to himself that all was over, and that his days in Langleydale were numbered. Perhaps he would never again ride this beast, which suited him so well; and at this thought he jerked the mouth of the beast which suited him so well, and gave him the spur. He was apt to hurt the nearest creature which felt, when he was annoyed. From this and other signs Tony had gathered that Lenny was out of temper; and so he left him without regret and joined the pair in front. "Is it true," asked Archie, "that men don't marry now-a-days?"

Tony considered the question with due gravity. It was even repeated before he answered it. "Well," he asked

then, "what can a chap do? What with huntin' and goin' racin' it's hard enough to live now anyway! Most chaps are stone-broke without marryin'."

"What did I tell you?" asked Miss Lock of Archie. "Mr. Tony knows. He knows everything."

"Not quite," said Tony, regarding her in the evening light with frank admiration. He often declared that Elizabeth Lock was "about as handsome as they make 'em." "The nicest chaps can't afford to marry," he said, beaming amiably upon her.

"How sad!" she answered. "What a pity that only poor men are nice!" So saying, she cantered suddenly forward away from the young men, who began to jog on in pursuit side by side.

"I say," said Tony, when he had been for some time in deep thought, "wasn't that rather a nasty one for you?"

"What?" asked Archie.

"That about only poor men being nice."

Archie only laughed; and then Tony laughed too, and cried out "Good old Archie!" which was one of his favorite phrases, kindly and encouraging, and coming in well at almost all times.

CHAPTER VI.

In the meantime, while her daughter was riding in the happy air, Lady Jane Lock was in full enjoyment at home of that flattering excitement which immediately precedes complete success, and is even more delightful. She had written her morning's letters; she had eaten her substantial luncheon; and, when she returned from her afternoon's walk (she was a great believer in "the constitutional"), she was in a fine glow of virtue. She had taken as her companion by the way Tony Fotheringham's umbrella, which its careful owner never allowed to touch the ground, and with this for her walking-stick she had stumped valiantly through the lanes, which after the slight frost of the night had been growing softer all day long under the genial influences of sun and thaw. She had left in the hall the precious umbrella with its ferule muddy, battered, and knocked to one side like the hat of a drunken man; but

she still wore her plain felt hat and her braided black jacket, as she stood with her straight back to the cheerful fire with the air of a man, if not of a field-marshal. However it may be with a commander in the field, it is certain that almost every woman, when the fortunes of the day incline distinctly to her side, while yet enough of doubt remains to feed the excitement of her spirit, finds it hard to keep silence. Policy may still prevent her from announcing her game and prematurely singing her song of victory; but her choice of subjects will indicate the direction of her thoughts, and it will be hard for her to keep out of her voice the sound of exultation. Lady Jane knew that the tea, for which she had conscientiously prepared herself by solitary exercise, would soon be there, and that the young people would soon be back from hunting; and in the meantime she could relieve herself by making a few general remarks. It was a good time for talk, for it was growing too dark for reading, and the lights had not yet been brought in. Mrs. Dormer had put down her novel with a tiny comical yawn; and Mrs. Chauncey, for her part, was ready at this time to give the most complimentary attention to all the observations of Lady Jane Lock.

"What I have always said to my girls," said Lady Jane, "is this. When you marry, make up your mind to have a house that people care to come to. It isn't the size of the house or the place; it's the people you meet there; that's what people care about."

"How true!" pronounced Clara Chauncey, from the shadows among which she sat.

"If you mean to have the right sort of house," continued Lady Jane, "you must be firm at first. That is what I tell my girls. There is no sense in choking up your houses with a lot of dull people, just because they happen to be old friends of the family, or because your aunt Deborah married their uncle What's-his-name. There's no sense in it; and, if you do it, you never will get the right people to come to stay with you."

"How interesting!" murmured Mrs. Chauncey. "Cut off old friends and poor relations!"

"There is no need to be rude or disagreeable," said Lady Jane; "when you do meet these people about, you can always be *most* kind. It is a very nice trait to be just the same to people when you meet them, though you may not have met for years. Everybody says that."

"And it is so true," said Clara.

"When you do meet, be as affectionate and nice as possible, and ask after all their children and everything. Only be sure never to go to see them. If they *will* come to see you, never be at home. Some people let them in once and try to be so disagreeable that they won't come again; that is unladylike and unnecessary. The simple thing is never to be at home, and never to return their calls."

"Admirable! You have such a talent for making things clear. But the husband's friends? Ain't they a difficulty?"

"Always be nice to your husband's friends," said Lady Jane promptly; "that is the very first thing which I tell my girls."

"But men do collect such strange friends," said Mrs. Chauncey; "I don't mean those whom they can't expect their wives to know; they present no difficulties whatever. I mean the friends who are respectable but impossible. What *do* you do with them?"

"Don't call," said Lady Jane; "that's all; it's just the same with them as with the others."

"But don't they make a fuss?—the husbands, I mean; husbands are so touchy."

"Yes," said Lady Jane; "they are touchy; but they are very forgetful. I tell my girls never to dispute with their husbands, always seem to yield. If a man tells his wife to call on the What's-his-names, she can put it off, till he forgets all about it. He'll soon forget all about it—or pretend to. I know what men are. They like to have the right people in their houses just as much as we do; but they like us to do the unpleasant part, and to pretend to know nothing about it."

"Oh, Lady Jane," said Mrs. Chauncey, as if she were in a sort of respectful ecstasy, "what knowledge of the world —and of men! They leave the dirty work to us, and look the other way, and profit by it. That is the whole duty of man."

"A husband is so easily managed," said Lady Jane, "if you don't argue with him. Of course he blusters. Some day he'll come home and say that he has met his old friend What's-his-name in the street, and can't think what's the matter with him; he'll pretend to be annoyed with him and

to wonder why he never comes near him; but he will know in his heart. All that you have got to do is to smile sympathetically. Always meet your husband with a smile! That is what I tell my girls."

"Lucky girls!" murmured Mrs. Chauncey. "Don't they say that to marry a Lock is a liberal education? I am sure that I have heard some such saying. When I look at a place like this, and think of all the dangers, to which rich young men are exposed, I am tempted to say that there is no hope of safety for them but in a well-trained wife."

"They don't know what is good for them," said Lady Jane, shortly.

"Oh, but they do," said Clara—"at least, some of them do—don't they?" Her question was so earnest and so innocent. "But then," she added, "they are so rare, these model wives."

"Not at all," said Lady Jane; "there are lots of nice well-brought-up English girls, if the men would only look at them, instead of going after Americans and things."

"Ah! but for a great position surely something more is wanted—a something, a——"

"Distinction," said Lady Jane, "the air noble—that is a matter of course."

"Or a matter of corsets," quickly said Mrs. Chauncey. Here Susan Dormer, who had been listening to the conversation with much placid enjoyment, began to shake with laughter, and Lady Jane, stung by the sudden idea that she was being trifled with, uttered a quick sound which can only be described as a not unladylike snort.

"Oh, do forgive me!" cried Clara Chauncey; "it is unpardonable, I know; but really and truly it is often that, isn't it? I have known such common dumpy women gain quite an air from really good stays. Nothing is more important."

To snort like the war-horse was in Lady Jane a sure sign of awakened suspicion, and it is by no means likely that she would have continued to express her views with so much freedom, even if the words "dumpy women" had not been for her a new note of alarm. She could not but know that she did not stand much over five feet high, and that, though she was very straight, active, and energetic, she had acquired a certain solidity. She had never approv-

ed of Mrs. Chauncey; and it is likely that she already repented of having favored her with so many valuable hints on the art of living. Whether she would have contributed any further words of wisdom will remain for ever uncertain; for, with a pleasant sound of young voices and some shutting of doors, the people came in from hunting, and brought a quite new atmosphere into the fire-lit rooms. Archie reported that Sir Villiers and Tony had gone straight to the smoking-room, but that he and Lenny wanted tea; and almost immediately tea was brought, and lamps so fully shaded, that they made mere small oases of light in the soft warm dusk.

It was a pleasant hour, with fragrant tea and chastened light, good rest after brisk exercise, and liberal space. Perhaps nothing is so expressive of luxury as the combination of space and warmth. Even in most wintry weather it is easy for the most modest of men to make himself snug, by shutting himself up with a good fire in a tiny room; but a large house brought to one warmth from ground-floor to garret, whose inmates pass without chill from lofty rooms to spacious passages, is filled likewise with the very atmosphere of prosperity. It was this atmosphere which Lady Jane Lock, who had divested herself with an effort of the tight jacket, breathed with satisfaction; and a sense of mingled motherhood and ownership stole over her active spirit, as her eyes looked from the moderate room in which they sat, and saw between the heavy *portières*, which had been drawn widely open, the great, dimly-lighted space of handsome rooms beyond. The merest fraction, more or less, of nose; the merest shade, more or less, of natural yellow in the hair; and all, of which this warm spaciousness was a sign, might be for one sister, while another was counting coal in a chilly vicarage.

Lady Jane Lock was in a mood of unusual softness, as she sipped her tea, when suddenly she seemed to hear a sound of wheels. It was very faint and far, but her alert spirit sprang, as it were, to arms. Nobody else seemed to hear anything; and she gave no sign, old compaigner as she was. She finished her tea and asked for a second cup; only her spirit was attentive. The front door was on the other side of the house, and at the further end. She could hear no more. She had just decided that her ears had played her false, or that some untimely trades-

man's cart had come; she was just thinking that in the reign of a new mistress such irregularities of untimely tradesmen should not be, when she saw figures advancing through the obscurity of the farther room. The first figure was unmistakable, the rounded shape and noiseless amble of the butler; but who was following him? Lady Jane looked with a quick eye of inquiry at Mrs. Dormer, who had assured her unnecessarily often that no other guests were expected. Mrs. Dormer was looking too; and in a moment more the butler emerged into the less uncertain light, and announced in his usual level tone—"Mrs. Rutherford."

She came in beaming, wrapped in handsome furs, bringing her own charm into the commonplace, as Venus leads her Graces. Her bright color was the brighter for the evening cold; her eyes were sparkling; and even under the weight of fur, her tall, slender, and beautiful figure moved with the ease of an active woodland creature.

"Dora!" cried Archie, leaping from his chair—"hurrah!"

They were but two words, but they administered two separate stabs to Lady Jane Lock. He went forward with both hands outstretched. "How awfully nice of you!" he cried. "Of course you have come to stay—and where's your husband?"

"He's in London," she answered, as Archie took her long cloak from her shoulders; "he's tremendously hard at work; and besides, you know, nowadays one doesn't pay country-house visits with one's husband." She laughed at this pertness, but stopped rather abruptly, aware by this time of the contrast between her host's effusive welcome and the general coolness. Leonard Vale had risen when Archie rose, but had stepped backward instead of forward, and was gazing at her with his large black eyes from the obscurity which lay around the lighted tea-table. She felt that he was looking at her with a world of meaning, and with a sudden impatience she turned from him to Mrs. Dormer, who had not moved.

"Won't you have some tea?" asked Mrs. Dormer.

"I am afraid I've done a dreadful thing," said Mrs. Rutherford, "coming unannounced like a ghost."

"Oh no," said Mrs. Dormer blandly. "Do you take cream and sugar?"

"I was so bored in London, and I thought—but you can pack me off to-morrow, if I am in the way."

"Nonsense!" cried out Archie; "it's the most delightful thing in the world, and a thousand times better than if we had known about it beforehand. Aunt Susan, you'll see to Dora's room, and her maid and her luggage and things, and—and—oh yes, you know Lady Jane Lock, don't you, Dora?"

"Elizabeth," said Lady Jane, who seemed not to have heard the reference to herself, "go and lie down before dinner."

"But I am not tired," said her daughter.

"Nonsense!" said Lady Jane, sharply; "you never know when you are tired."

"How d'ye do, Lady Jane?" said Mrs. Rutherford.

"Oh! How d'ye do? Such a surprise! I do envy people who have the courage to do these odd amusing things. Come, Elizabeth."

"I've plenty of courage," said Dora. She held out her hand with a smile to Miss Lock, who was obediently following her mother from the room; and the girl put her hand in hers for a moment. In that moment Dora perceived that Elizabeth's hand was larger than her own, and came to a decision also about her air, her figure, and the cut of her habit. She was extremely quick. As she let her hand fall, she came to a further decision on less obvious matters. "Sulky girl!" she said to herself; "but how handsome—how dangerously handsome!"

"I think that I am really the last," said Mrs. Chauncey, advancing from the shadows, and looking straight at Archie with a set smile.

"Oh yes, Dora," he said, "you know Mrs. Chauncey?"

It was now Mrs. Rutherford's turn to freeze a little. "Oh! How d'ye do?" she said, extending her slender fingers.

Mrs. Chauncey pressed the slender fingers slightly, and smiled the more sweetly as she was conscious of a tendency to wring them with all her nervous force. She knew then beyond all possibility of doubt that she hated Dora Rutherford; she would like to wring her neck too, or at least her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

THE news of Archie's danger had come to Dora Rutherford at a happy moment, for she was looking about eagerly, almost anxiously, for something to do. She had been spending the autumn months in the home of her childhood, the quiet comfortable rectory, which was so near to the home of Archie's mother, Mrs. Rayner. There she had been living a most domestic life with her parents and her husband. Her husband had been quite happy, working daily and steadily at that great report which was to enlighten the world, or at least a part of it; but she, for her part, had found a strange want of occupation. She could not even take up again the little duties of her girlhood. Quick, clever, and energetic, she had taken each year, as she grew up at home, more and more of the little daily duties of the house, garden, and village, from the hands of her mother; but when she married, her mother had been obliged to take them back again, and this good lady was wise enough to know that she would gain nothing by relinquishing them for a few months, but the trouble of again acquiring the useful habits, of which she was now mistress. So Dora had nothing to do but to visit Mrs. Rayner, and talk of Archie and his wonderful change of fortune; or to ride with her husband, when he took his afternoon's exercise; or to drive her mother in the pony carriage. Her father, her mother, and her husband more than all, were busy; but she was idle. She did not like to be idle. She did not like to feel herself useless. Before the end of the visit, during which she had seemed to others a happy presence indeed, bringing sunshine every day into the shady corners of that quiet world, she had accumulated so much spare energy, that she could scarcely help crying out when she woke in the morning at the thought of the long hours before her, in which she would have nothing to do.

Nevertheless Dora did not allow her parents to suspect that she grew weary of this idle life, nor did she shorten

a single day the long visit which she had promised to them. Unluckily, when the change came, it was no change for the better. When she went up to London with her husband, she found their house and their establishment in excellent condition, and nothing for her to do but to order the daily dinner. Of London in November she had had no experience; and now she did not like it. Her friends were all out of town; and her husband was more busy than he had been in the country. The work which he had undertaken, first for his own enlightenment, and secondly for the instruction of others, was no less than the examination of all the kinds of land-tenure which are to be found on this small earth, and the setting forth of the merits and defects of each. Luckily there is not very much earth to be held in any way; and railways and telegraphs have made our little world so small, that any little holiday-taker can run round it and be back before he is missed. And yet there is enough solid surface to show various forms of ownership; and to know all these forms, and all the effects of each, is no small work for a man who has a passion for thoroughness and a deep respect for truth.

Such a man was Tom Rutherford. He was up to his knees in reports official and unofficial, in books written in many languages, in a growing flood of letters from all parts of the world; and he set his teeth and worked through the mass of matter, carefully and steadily dividing the relevant from the irrelevant, and bringing the former to shape and clearness with a patience and sturdy determination which was all his own. In this work of her husband, who shut himself up alone morning after morning, Dora Rutherford had no share. When she had ordered dinner, she felt that she had nothing to do for the rest of the day. She was restless and uneasy; and so it happened that when she received Leonard Vale's letter, and learned that Archie, the only friend of her childhood, the innocent unworldly being whom she had taken under her protection throughout the last London season, was in imminent danger of matrimony, she awoke with delight as from a weary dream. Here was something for her to do; she could be of some use after all; she heard the sound of trumpets, and her eyes sparkled with desire of battle. She ran to try on her armor, and already she saw with her mind's eye

the redoubtable Lady Jane Lock roll helpless in the dust. Her husband noted the new light in her eyes, and he did not refuse to let her go. He said that he could not leave his work at present, but would try to join her later; and if he was hurt by her clear joy at going, he only showed it by renewing the attack on his work with a fresh pugnacity.

Dora Rutherford, when she came into the breakfast-room on the morning after her startling appearance at Langley Castle, was keen as frosty air. She was rather late, for she ran out of doors, glancing about the immediate neighborhood of the house with all the feelings of a strategist casting an eager eye over a new country. She came in fresh and smiling, kissed Mrs. Dormer, as if she had never a doubt of her welcome, and seated herself with her face to all the windows. Thus she confronted the enemy, for Lady Jane Lock always sat with her back to the light at breakfast-time. Mrs. Chauncey too, whom Dora preferred to regard as a foe, had this same habit, which indeed is not uncommon in ladies who are undergoing the ordeal of a country-house visit.

All the men were present at breakfast except Leonard Vale, who after a day's hunting was apt to be even later than usual. Of his absence Dora was instantly aware, for she had decided that her first object must be to gain from him a clear statement of the present state of affairs. Until she could secure a private conversation with Mr. Vale, she could do nothing but keep a friendly eye on her dear Archie, and be ready to make a third if necessary. Even this light task was denied her, for, when she asked Archie, as they were breakfasting, what he was going to do, he raised his eyebrows with a look both humorous and pathetic, and said, "My agent has come for me."

"Poor little boy!" she said; "but you must go like a good boy and not cry."

"You don't know how I am bullied," he said; "here is Uncle Villiers with a list of people whom I must see, and the agent with a list of other sort of people, besides horses and farmhouses and pigs——"

"And guests," said Dora; "don't leave us out—especially self-invited guests like me."

"Don't call yourself names," he said; "you know that you have a standing invitation from me, so long as one stone of this ancestral dungeon stands upon another, and Aunt Susan provides a crust for dinner."

"There, Mrs. Rutherford," said Lady Jane, "you can't ask for anything more than that."

There was a slight accent on the word "you;" but Dora answered smiling—

"I didn't ask for that; but I accept it all. I'll never leave you, Archie."

"And Mr. Rutherford?" asked Lady Jane, with a snort, which she had intended to be a laugh.

"He is as fond of Archie as I am," said Dora; "he will never leave him either. Let us all swear never to leave him! He has such big houses and so many of them; it would be a kindness to him; and we are such a pleasant party. We will all run after him wherever he goes. Let us all swear it! You began, Lady Jane."

"Thank you," said Lady Jane, rising from table; "but I never run after people."

"I do," said Dora; "may I run after you and the agent this morning, Archie? I will promise to be good, and not to speak unless I am spoken to."

"No," answered Archie. "You'd be too distracting. You will see what is left of me at luncheon,"

This was useful information for Mrs. Rutherford, and she made a mental note of it, as she finished her coffee. It made her wish the more for the coming of Leonard Vale, for here was a nice open morning, during which Archie would be safe with his agent, and which she could devote to the necessary interview with the ally, who had called her to his aid, and who alone could tell her how imminent was the young lord's danger, and what was the present state of the campaign. She was burning to take command.

When she had seen Archie walk away with the agent and had loitered for some time, and had observed that Lady Jane, whose diplomacy lacked delicacy, was keeping a most obvious eye upon her, Dora went upstairs to her room and dressed herself for a walk. Then she went downstairs again very quietly, and slipped out of the house, seen by nobody but Mrs. Chauncey, who was of a more delicate order of diplomatists than Lady Jane Lock.

Dora went straight to the kitchen-garden, which she had discovered in her hasty tour before breakfast. She was sure that, when Leonard Vale had once emerged

from his own rooms, he would look for her; and she decided that he should find her in the place most fit for confidential talk; and so she chose her ground in the smaller kitchen-garden, where she was enclosed by high walls, and could see from any part both of the entrances. Walking up and down beside the most sunny of the walls she became more and more impatient; but she had not long to wait. She saw one of the green doors pushed open; and Mr. Vale came in. She noted his dejected air. before he caught sight of her, and the quick change which came over him when he saw her. He came up the straight path between the borders of old-fashioned flowers with unusual briskness.

"At last," he said, "I've found you."

"I've been waiting for you for the last hour," she said.

"Waiting for me?" he asked as if it were impossible than she should wait for such an one as he. There was a nice blending of humility and reverence and tenderness in his tone.

"Of course I was waiting for you," she answered impatiently. "How can I move until I know how things are now? Is there immediate danger?"

"Immediate danger?" he repeated vaguely.

"To Archie?" she said.

He had forgotten all about Archie. "Oh, yes," he said, "of course—what a fool I am! I am afraid things are going about as badly as usual."

"Don't talk like that," she said, "you promised me in London that you would give up talking like a victim of Fate. It is so tiresome."

"I'll try," he said humbly.

"Come on," she said, beginning to walk up the path; "tell me why you think things are going badly for Archie."

He told her of trifling events which he had noticed since Lord Lorrilaire had joined his party, and especially of yesterday's hunting.

"He was with her all day long," he said.

She nodded gravely.

"We must stop that sort of day," she said; "the girl looks well in a habit. Does she look well on a horse?"

"Not bad," he answered; "she is not like you."

This compliment touched Dora Rutherford where her guard was weak; she was proud of her horsemanship; she could not help smiling nor keep her eyes from shining.

"You must keep up your courage," she said; "I see nothing to be afraid of. Archie cannot be thinking of a serious step; he is so natural, so entirely unembarrassed."

"But isn't that his danger?" he asked; "he might be on the very edge and never know it. Another day like yesterday, and Lady J. would be capable of asking him his intentions."

"The next move is mine," said Dora with glad confidence.

Lenny looked at her with admiration. He thought again that there was nobody like her—no woman so brilliant and so charming; his desire to interest her in himself was stronger than ever before.

"I wish I could hope," he said with a sigh; "and I do hope when you tell me to. You remember what you promised me in London? You said you would be my friend."

"Yes," she said; "I promised to be your friend if you would give up bemoaning your fate."

"I have had hard luck," he said sadly; "you won't mind my saying that. I know it has been a great deal my own fault; I have thrown away my chances. I have tried to be different since you advised me and promised to be my friend."

"And I will be your friend," she said; "I am here to help you as well as Archie."

"Thank you," he said eagerly—"thank you." Then he added sadly, "Nobody ever needed your help so much. This is my last chance and I owe it to you. It was you who told Archie of my existence, and that I—what may I say?—had not been treated well. I owe everything to you."

"Oh, no," she said, but she liked the sound of the words. Of all the men who had paid her compliments during her short experience of the London Society, which had received her so cordially as the most charming bride of the day, this man alone had appealed to her pity, and shown faith in her ability and helpfulness. The frank compliments to her looks, which our somewhat uncouth

Society permits, she had put aside half-pleased and half-embarrassed, and had promptly forgotten ; but the respect for her opinion and the wish for her advice, which had been constantly and delicately shown by this handsome ill-starred youth, had been compliments which she did not put aside nor forget. There are men, and not stupid men, whose cleverness is never roused to anything like its highest activity, but by the wish to please the other sex. A man of this sort, who in the other relations of life has shown but small ability, if he once desire to arouse the interest of a woman, will exercise an amazing instinct in his choice of flattery and a tact in its use, which are denied to woman themselves, or to all but the most rarely gifted. Such a man was Leonard Vale. He bent his head as he walked beside her, and assured her with an air which was almost one of veneration, and with the sound of truth in his voice, that but for her he would have been an outcast.

"And if I lose this chance," he said, "I shall have to go now. It isn't the luxuries and things I care about ; I can do without them ; I am not quite such a wretched creature that I can't do without that sort of thing. But this is my last chance of saving myself—of being saved by you, if you will save me."

"Don't talk of saving," she said quickly ; "you will stay here ; I feel sure of it ; and you will find better things to do than playing and betting, and running into debt."

"I will try," he said ; "but it's a bad world."

"No, no, no," she cried ; "its a good world, and most amusing, and I don't believe that there is half so much harm in it as people say."

"You always say that," he said, smiling sadly ; "and it is so right that you should believe that. It would be a vile world that wasn't good to you ; you are not like other women."

"Yes, I am," she said ; "but we all like to think we are different, and it is a mercy to think that one can be of some use to somebody."

"You needn't say that," he said ; "everybody knows that your husband is one of the fortunate ones, bound to rise, to make a mark in the world, to do everything which a man ought——"

Here he stopped short, but his eloquent silence pointed the contrast.

"What has that got to do with it?" she asked.

"He can interest you," he said; "lay his plans before you, consult with you, ask your advice."

"And do you suppose," she asked, "that Tom talks to me of his plans and would listen to my advice? He might listen to me if I were a peasant proprietor or a professor of political economy. As it is——" She stopped short.

"I am awfully sorry," he said after a minute; "I've said the wrong thing; I had no idea that——"

"That what?" she asked, standing still and looking at him. He only answered her with his sympathetic eyes. "I am not complaining of my husband," she said shortly.

It was at this moment, when they were standing together in front of the northern wall of the garden, that Mrs. Chauncey pushed open one of the doors for the admission of herself and Lady Jane Lock. Neither Dora Rutherford nor Leonard Vale saw her, and she drew back and shut the door again, when Lady Jane had had time for one good look.

"Let us go back to the house by another way," suggested Clara Chauncey.

"What does it mean," asked Lady Jane authoritatively.

"Oh, surely," began Clara, and stopped with a little laugh. "No," she began again, "it really is not ill-natured. Surely you must have noticed it in London: I go out so little myself, but I thought that it was common talk. Surely you know?"

"I know that he is a most dangerous and scandalous young man," said Lady Jane.

"And penniless," said Mrs. Chauncey.

"What was that skocking story about him?" asked Lady Jane.

"Oh, you mean the year before last," said Clara; "poor Mr. Vale! Nobody remembers a scandal which is more than a year old."

"I know that it was dreadfully disgraceful."

"Oh, yes!" said Clara; "but he was so young; they said he didn't know!"

"Old enough to know better," said Lady Jane, as she stumped sturdily towards the house; "it was cards or a

horse, or something. I never can remember those stupid male scandals."

Lady Jane Lock was a moralist. She disapproved of married women's flirtations, however harmless; but she could not help thinking that, if Mrs. Rutherford must have an attentive cavalier, it was well that it should not be young Lord Lorrilaire. She had just completed an arrangement of Lord Lorrilaire's afternoon, which gave her the liveliest satisfaction, and the only thing which she had feared had been the interference of Dora Rutherford.

"It must be time for luncheon," she said, and perceived with satisfaction that she had an appetite.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Jane was patiently absorbing a liberal portion of roly-poly pudding, a dish of which she was particularly fond, when Dora Rutherford came in, still equipped with hat and jacket, and very late for luncheon. "So sorry to be late," she said to Mrs. Dormer; "and who's the pony cart for?"

"Is there a pony cart?" asked Mrs Dormer absently.

"Yes, and there it goes," said Dora, whose quick ears caught the sound of the wheels.

Lady Jane looked up from her roly-poly, and Susan Dormer began to laugh a little in her silent comfortable manner. "Jane wanted Elizabeth to see the ruined Abbey," she said, "and poor dear Archie——"

"Archie! The Abbey! I must see it!" cried Dora.

In a moment she was out of the room, flying down the passage and out of the front door. Down the Avenue she sped like a deer or the lightest of Diana's nymphs. Lady Jane gripped her spoon and fork and breathed hard. How could she go on calmly with that pudding in the presence of such extraordinary conduct? She looked with indignation at her friend Susan, who would only shake her head and laugh.

"Good old Mrs. Rutherford," murmured Tony Fotheringham at the window; "what a constitution she must have!"

Ten minutes later Lord Lorrilaire entered his dining-room laughing, and blushing a little; but he met the inquiring stare of the speechless Lady Jane without other sign of shame. "It's all right," he said; "there hasn't been an accident; it's Dora."

"What's Dora?" asked Lady Jane hotly.

"What isn't Dora?" he said, laughing; "there never was any one like her."

Lady Jane bit her tongue, that she might not say that she devoutedly hoped not.

"We pulled up at the first gate," said Archie, "and I jumped out to open it, and I happened to look back, and there was Dora coming like a racer. She does run beautifully."

"Nice feminine accomplishment!" said Lady Jane sharply.

"Yes," said Archie; "isn't it pretty to see a girl run really well?"

"Where's Elizabeth?" asked Lady Jane.

"Oh, they've gone on together."

"Gone on together!"

"Yes," said Archie; "that was what Dora wanted. As soon as she could speak plainly, she said that she was dying to see the old Abbey; and so she turned me out and took the reins."

"And you let her?" cried Lady Jane, who found it hard to hide the contempt which she felt for this rich young man.

"She is perfectly safe," said Archie; "I assure you you needn't be a bit afraid; she drives a great deal better than I do."

"But she hasn't had any luncheon," said Mrs. Dormer.

"She said she didn't want any."

"She'll never find the way," said Sir Villiers.

"I didn't think of that," said Archie; "but at least she is as likely to find it as I was; you know I'm a stranger in these parts."

His invincible good-humor annoyed Lady Jane Lock, who could not perceive in him any signs of disappointment. She had a speech on the tip of her tongue, which she had tried hard to restrain, but now she could hold it no longer.

"It is not as a whip that I distrust Mrs. Rutherford," she said with decision.

Archie turned quickly and looked at her.

"That's all very well as a joke," he said, with a slight laugh; "but of course everybody knows that there's nobody who can be trusted as Dora can. I give you my word you may be perfectly easy about Miss Lock."

"Thank you! I am not at all uneasy about my daughter," said Lady Jane as she walked stiffly out of the room. She was exceedingly annoyed; she had not even had the heart to finish that good pudding. She took herself roundly to task for having lost her temper and offended her host; she, who prided herself on being a good mother, had failed to do her duty as a mother. She went out for one of her solitary walks, and came back full of good resolutions. She was able to receive her daughter with a smile, and to thank Mrs. Rutherford in Archie's presence for having taken such good care of her. "I was rather nervous," she admitted with her straight-forward air, "till Lord Lorrilaire assured me that you were a safe whip."

"I can drive anything," said Dora cheerfully; "I enjoyed it enormously."

"And the Abbey?" asked Mrs. Chauncey, looking up innocently from her low chair by the tea-table; "is it really such a splendid ruin?"

"The Abbey?" repeated Dora, vaguely.

"Yes—the Abbey which you were dying to see."

"Oh, yes," said Dora, "the Abbey—we didn't find the Abbey."

"What a disappointment!" said Clara, with her round eyes gravely sympathetic.

"Terrible!" said Dora; "do give me some tea, Mrs. Dormer! It's awfully rude, but I am so hungry; I had no luncheon, you know."

In that afternoon's skirmish the victory had been with Dora Rutherford; and yet she was not wholly happy. She had had a walk and a run and a drive, and she had missed her luncheon; and so it happened that even she was a little tired, and when she had finished her tea, she was glad to go to her room and rest a little before dinner. The curtains had been drawn across the windows, and the room, with its big bed and handsome old-fashioned furniture, was lighted only, but most agreeably lighted, by the cheerful wood-fire on the hearth. Wrapped in her dress-

ing-gown and reclining in an arm-chair, Dora looked lazily into the fire, and was glad for once to rest. She could venture to repose for an hour after her first success; she had seen the girl go to her room before she had yielded to her own feeling of weariness. Resting now in that pleasant place and at that pleasant hour, she ought to have been wholly happy; but she was not. She could not help a feeling of uneasiness about this girl, whom she was bound to defeat. During their drive she had tried to study her, but she had been baffled by her apparent stolidity. Elizabeth had shown no sign of disappointment, when her attendant cavalier had been banished from the pony-cart; and for the rest of the afternoon she had shown no emotion of any kind. To Dora's questions about indifferent matters she had answered briefly, and with the air of giving the expected answers to matter-of-course questions. It appeared that she liked London, that she liked the country, that she liked riding, that she should like to go abroad but liked to stay at home, that she liked dogs but did not dislike cats, and that she did not know if she liked parrots or not; she did not hesitate to say where she got her dresses and her jackets. Dora felt no wiser at the end of their drive, and said to herself with conviction that this was a handsome, heavy, stupid girl; but yet a doubt remained. She had an uneasy feeling that Elizabeth might be more deep than stupid, and that she did not understand her. Now Dora Rutherford thought that she could read girls at a glance, and she was impatient under the suspicion that this girl baffled her legitimate curiosity. She would have liked to be perfectly certain that she knew all about Miss Lock, and knew that she was in all ways unworthy of her dear Archie; for then she would have fought her campaign with a heart as light as her courage was undoubted. However, fight she must, and conquer she would.

Her heart was not light as she sat before that cheerful fire, or at least not so light as usual. She felt lonely; she was accustomed to be popular, and she did not like the thought that not a woman in the house was glad of her presence. She took it as a matter of course that all the men were glad, and especially Archie, the friend of her childhood. And Leonard Vale too was more glad than the others; she was important to him; he needed her

help; he respected her opinions. His admiration and respect soothed her as she sat thinking.

And yet she felt lonely. She missed her husband. That was a fact which she recognized with some surprise. She made a little face at the fire, prompting herself to be aggrieved at her husband's absence, as if he had left her and not she him. She even said to herself that he might have come too, if he had wished; and that the land of this habitable globe would not have run away while his report thereon was suspended for a day or two. Yet she could not feel comfortably aggrieved. She could not help thinking of her husband with tenderness, with melancholy. She put down this uncommon mood to going without luncheon; but she was not content with this explanation. She missed her husband. This was a fact; and, as she considered this fact again, she began to feel pleasure in it. She did not care to go beyond it. She sat curled up in the big chair, and allowed herself to dwell upon the fact that she missed her husband. It was another proof, where none was necessary, how deeply she loved her husband. She had married him because she loved him. Whenever she had felt disappointment in her life as a married woman, she had always gone back to her love of her husband and to his love of her. These twin facts are the important facts of married life; and Dora Rutherford was wise enough to know this. Looking into the wood-fire and thinking of Tom, she warmed her heart once again with the assurance that they loved each other; she missed her husband very much indeed, and was glad of it, though it made her melancholy.

And yet, when Dora told herself so truly that, where husband and wife love each other, and each is sure of the other's love, all disappointments in their life are in comparison as nothing, she began straightway to slip, as she was apt to do, into unprofitable consideration of a certain disappointment. Dora had married for love; but she had not married, as no loving fool, however foolish and however deep in love, has ever married in this world, with an empty head. She had promised to marry Tom Rutherford because she loved him; but it was impossible for this clever, well-taught, and energetic girl to have but one thought. As a fact, she had had many thoughts when she promised to marry Tom. She had known well that

she was marrying a man of uncommon ability, a strong man whom his elders, if wise, respected, and whom the best of the younger men looked to as a likely leader. He was some fifteen years older than she, and had given proofs of his ability, which all might read. She knew that he had given his time to study of the state of the world, and of the theory and practice of politics; that he had made his studies in no amateur's mood, but with steady industry and dogged perseverance; that he had shown great powers of accumulating and using knowledge. He had travelled round the world, too, and had used his eyes for looking on life as well as on books. The occasional papers which he had published had shown mastery of the subjects on which he wrote, clearness of thought and of expression; and they had never failed to attract attention. He had spoken now and then on the political questions of the day; and he had lectured in towns in the North, and had firmly held the attention of North-country miners and artizans. He had made haste to go into Parliament; but it was generally understood that he could go in at his own time. Party leaders were well aware of his existence, and even careful to show him no discourtesy. In any crisis of more than common interest many sensible people looked for the expression of his opinion. It was known that at the next general election many constituencies would be candidates for his favor, and that some at least would be willing to pay his election expenses. In short Tom Rutherford, when he was thirty-five years old, was a rising man, and moreover conspicuous among rising men, on account of an unusual accuracy of information and the possession of certain settled opinions, which were the result of much study and thought, and which would not be changed, as those who knew him knew well, for the sake of any office or the gain of any votes. He was not only a rising man; he was a strong man too.

Looking into the fire, and thinking of her husband and of the place which he was winning in the world, Dora felt the usual pride; but it was accompanied, as usual, by regret. Alone in her room, she blushed and bit her lip for shame when she remembered her girlish confidence and her girlish dreams. She remembered her love and admiration for her husband, her certainty of his future

greatness, and her certainty that she, the girl who felt old because she was out of her teens, would be his chief helper. Once more she thought how absurd that girl had been with her belief in herself; and how like a spoiled child she must have looked in her husband's eyes. She admitted to herself that she had been spoiled at home. Her mother was so fond of yielding, and her father so full of admiration of her daughter's cleverness; it was not her own fault if she had been a spoiled child. And yet, if they had thought too well of her, that was no reason why her husband should hold her too cheap. She said to herself again that her husband did undervalue her. She knew that she was clever; and she knew that she was well-taught. To doubt this latter fact was to doubt her father, who had been her chief teacher. Did not everybody know that her father had been one of the cleverest men of his day at Oxford, a brilliant scholar, and a sound historian too? Did not she know that, when for love and marriage he had settled down into a country rectory and a life of little cares, he had found in time one of the greatest pleasures of his quiet life in teaching his only child to use her mind? She thought of her father with a peculiar tenderness, and remembered without a smile how often he had set forth for her benefit the true theory of education. "I would teach you to use your mind," he would say, "as an athlete is taught to use his muscles; I do not wish to cram you like a pullet." She recalled this and other wise sayings of her parent, and declared to herself again that filial piety forbade her to regard herself as an ignorant and ill-taught woman. And yet had she not over-valued herself and her ability, and over-valued herself to a ridiculous degree? Back came the blush to her cheeks as she remembered again that, mere child as she was, she had held herself fit to help her husband in his life's work. She blushed as she remembered her folly, that sublime self-confidence which her husband had not even suspected. She had made pompous plans, and had imagined herself a sort of glorified secretary; and he had never held her higher than a petted child. It was unfair; she was rightly aggrieved. So she sat vexing herself again with this, which was the disappointment of her married life. Alone in the firelight and in melancholy mood, she felt much pity for the young girl,

who so few years ago had gone proudly to be married in the familiar church at home. She recalled her folly and her pride, and then the keenness of the disappointment when she had felt it first. She was full of self-pity. The poor young bride waking to the fact that she was to be only loved like any other wife, seemed to her infinitely pathetic. And now she told herself that she had never advanced beyond this. Unfailing love and kindness she had found. She knew that her husband was a quick-tempered man—she had seen him angry with other people; but she had never found him even impatient with her, except when in their early days she had come into his study during his hours of work. Her offers of help he had treated as a joke, not even to be refused in words; he had kissed her and laughed. She had realized so soon (she was clever enough for that) what he expected from her. She was to have as many pretty things as he could afford to give her; and she was to have plenty of good society, which he, who was connected with many potent families, could give her without undue trouble. She had found soon that it was no use to beg him not to bore himself with so many dinners and dances, for he had made up his mind that these things were due to her; and, when he had made up his mind, he went through amusements with the same dogged perseverance which he brought to his graver labors. And she had enjoyed herself, having a fine capacity for enjoyment, making friends of men and women, thinking the best of everybody. She did not deny that she had had great fun; but she was at least as sure that she had not got over, and never would get over, her great disappointment. She was sorry for herself and half-angry with her husband; she knew that she was no fool; and it was her husband's fault that she appeared to the world to be no more than a silly young married woman. For silly young married women she had a supreme contempt. Then Dora thought that it was well that everybody did not think her a fool. Her rapid mind was in search for comfort for her wounded vanity. Other people, even men, cared to listen to her opinions, and even to ask her advice. And so her mind came round again to Leonard Vale. She sat musing for a while, and then suddenly jumped up, looked at the clock on the mantle-piece, dashed off a note to her husband merely to say that she missed him, rang for her maid, and

dressed with great speed. When she entered the dining-room, she looked even more radiant than usual, with a deeper flush on her cheek, and her eyes dancing. All the evening she was in the highest spirits.

CHAPTER IX.

"Do you know," said Dora to Archie on the next morning, "that I quite like your friend, Mrs. Chauncey?"

"Eh? What?" said Archie absently. He was standing with one foot on the fender opening the morning's letters, pocketing some with a rueful look, and throwing others into the fire with manifest relief. Dora was standing near. These two were alone in the dining-room before breakfast. It was natural enough that they should be the first to come downstairs in the morning, to begin as it were the life of the day. They both had a happy morning look.

"I was saying," said Dora emphatically, "that I quite like your friend Mrs. Chauncey."

"My friend?" asked Archie, throwing the last letters into the fire, and pressing them down with the poker. "I didn't know she existed till I found her here. Who is she?"

Dora laughed. "It's too funny of you," she said, "to know nothing of your own guests. Have you no curiosity?"

"Lots," he answered; "but somehow I haven't thought of Mrs. Chauncey. Who is she?"

"Wife of Mr. Chauncey," said Dora drily.

"She's not a widow, then? I took her for a little quiet sort of widow."

"Quiet!" repeated Dora, with a slight peculiar emphasis.

"She seems to me to make eyes, rather," remarked Archie sagely. "Doesn't she?"

"No; there you wrong her," said Dora; "she has the sort of eyes that make themselves—men can't discriminate in these things. Of course she knows that her eyes are effective."

"Well? What's the matter with her, anyway?" asked Archie.

"Nothing that I know of," said Dora; "but of course one can't have been about in London for the last two years, as I have, without hearing stories."

"Oh, never listen to stories," said Archie bluntly.

"That's what I mean," said Dora. "I like her much better than I thought I should. I always do find people, when I come to know them, a great deal better than people say."

"You are quite right there," said Archie cordially. "People never are half so bad as they are said to be. As for Mrs. Chauncey, she is a little mousie kind of woman, there's no harm in her."

Dora pursed her lips; she felt that it was absurd of Archie to think that he knew. "Anyway," she said, "I choose to like her. She came and talked to me last night after dinner, before you men came in; she quite touched me. She didn't complain; but I am quite sure that her husband is a horrid drinking, gambling sort of man."

"Oh, you haven't come to know Chauncey," said Archie, smiling; "when you do come to know Chauncey, perhaps you will find him too a great deal better than people say. You always do, you know."

"Never," said Dora; "I detest Chauncey, and I hope I shall never set eyes on him."

"That's not fair," said Archie.

"I don't care, and I wish you would not argue before breakfast," said Dora.

"Are you hungry?" asked Archie; "let's ring and have up breakfast. I suppose I may?"

She laughed for answer, and he rang the bell.

While she was being discussed in the dining-room, Mrs. Chauncey in the privacy of her own apartment was putting careful finishing touches to her appearance. That clear pallor, which she accepted from Nature, required nevertheless some skilful management; and about the expressive eyes there was delicate work to be done, that they might be the more expressive. She had, too, a reputation for wearing clothes well, and this reputation makes necessary many careful looks and artful touches. All had not gone quite well that morning, and Clara's docile middle-aged maid was pink about the eyes, and sniffed occasionally, as if oppressed by unshed tears. Clara was thinking of Dora. She was well aware that she had advanced in her favor on

the previous evening. She congratulated herself on this gain. She was able even to feel a little virtuous for having been so nice to a woman whom she cordially disliked; and yet at bottom she knew well that she only cared to win Mrs. Rutherford's confidence that she might have a better chance of hurting her. She was surprised by the liveliness of her own aversion. Dora's happiness affronted her. Her careless glance seemed to tell her that she was a faded woman, and unimportant. She longed to make this brilliant young creature in all her insolence of freshness and youth feel that she too was somebody. Besides, she had another cause of dislike, of which Dora was entirely ignorant. She had met Tom Rutherford some years before his marriage, and had practised on him her artless fascinations; and of these fascinations Mr. Rutherford had remained unconscious to this day, as unconscious as his wife. And now these Rutherfords exasperated her, and stung her where she was most tender. The man was a rising man, whose career was full of interest; and she thought of her husband drifting about on the Mediterranean, and in doubtful company. The woman had been welcomed with delight into that particular circle of society to which Clara in more sanguine days had determined to belong. Political and social success seemed to her jealous eyes to be made flesh in these Rutherfords. She had formed no plan for injuring Dora. She was of that modern school of diplomatists, who achieve their ends by refusing to look beyond the next step. For Clara the next step was to win Dora's confidence; on this she concentrated all her powers. She refused to consider what the next step would be; she did not even confess to herself that it would be necessarily injurious to Dora; she was able, as has been said, to feel that it did her some credit to be agreeable to a woman whom she disliked so bitterly. And yet she knew in her heart that her purpose was to do Dora Rutherford as bad a turn as might be.

In the comedy, which was being played in the house, Mrs. Chauncey was determined to take no part; for consideration had only strengthened her first impression, and she saw clearly that it would be folly in her to run the risk of being condemned by Mrs. Dormer and Lady Jane Lock, that she might help to save one young man from matrimony and another from losing his good quarters. Leonard

Vale, though he was an old friend, must take care of himself; she would take no part in that contest. But now she had a little game of her own to play; she would go on step by step; her life had become suddenly more interesting. She smiled at herself in the glass, a timid, sad, sweet smile, and noted its effect; and then with the smile on her lips, she went lightly down the stairs, leaving her maid behind her, now sniffling with greater freedom, and dropping by mischance a large tear on the gown which had failed to give satisfaction.

Dora Rutherford looked up from her breakfast as each man entered the room, and noticed certain trifles at a glance which would have escaped a duller eye. She decided from their clothes that no form of sport was purposed on that day; and she knew the full importance of this fact. She was well aware that in a country-house party, where no definite occupation is provided, the danger of matrimony is at least doubled. There had been a day's hunting, but it had been an easy sociable day, and the young lady had joined in the chase; and now it seemed as if day after day there was to be nothing to do. If it be true that Hymen finds mischief for idle hearts to do, here was too fair a field. If this had been a shooting party, Dora knew, though she had seen so little of the world, that competition would be for something other than the smiles of women, and jealousy caused by something other than a girl's kindness. She had seen men silent and moody, when they were expected to be attentive, for reasons which seemed to her to show the unreasonableness of men; they had not shot up to their form forsooth, or more pheasants had gone over to somebody else. But this party was of the most perilous kind. Not only was it full of daily dangers, and each hour given up to both the sexes, but it seemed also to have no necessary end. Dora without direct inquiry had discovered that no one of the guests had been asked for a definite period. Not one had been asked from Tuesday to a Saturday; nor was a word said by any one of them, which tended to show that he or she was on a round of visits. Such a party seemed to Dora as if, like a novel, it could only end in an engagement. She saw all the danger; but the keener her perception of the danger, the more gallant arose her spirit. Noting the signs of this perilous idleness in the men, she only felt the joy of battle.

"What are you going to do to-day?" she asked Archie, as if she had no care but to end one of those periods of silence, which are too common at the breakfast-table.

"Nothing," he answered pleasantly, "unless you can suggest something."

"How is it that you are not shooting at all?" she asked again.

"My keeper won't let me," he said.

She laughed and looked about her.

"He doesn't mean me," said Sir Villiers drily, as her eye met his; "he refers to the gamekeeper."

"A most alarming man," said Archie, "from Yorkshire, of few words, but very emphatic. He has decreed that we are not to shoot this week."

"But why?" asked Dora.

"I didn't dare to ask," answered Archie; "I suppose the pheasants prefer it. They might give us a chance—or me, at least. I never had much shooting, as you know."

"Good old Archie!" said Tony Fotheringham kindly; and he added thoughtfully, "All that business with the rifle in America will have made you more out of it still."

"It's very hard on Mr. Tony, isn't it?" said Dora to Archie.

"Oh, never mind me," said Tony.

"Oh, but I am sure it is so bad for you," she said; "I am sure you need a great deal of air and exercise."

"Do you think so too?" he asked, with a sudden accession of gravity. He looked earnestly from Mrs. Rutherford to his well filled plate. "That's what my doctor says," he added.

"Your doctor!" said Dora; "have you got a doctor?" Looking at the smooth rosy face before her, she could not help laughing.

"You bet I have," said Tony gravely. "I go to Moody."

"Dr. Moody is a very clever man," said Mrs. Dormer, who had become deeply interested at the moment when the conversation touched health; "he was my doctor once—no, not my last doctor; he was the last but two; I can't remember why I left him; I know he is extremely clever."

"He is extremely clever," said Sir Villiers Hickory; "he has made a large fortune by telling people not to overeat themselves; that's clever."

"It's most important," said Mrs. Dormer.

"Well, I am all for shooting," said Dora; "I am sure that Mr. Tony's health requires it."

"Then you must ask the keeper," said Archie, laughing.

"Well," said Mrs. Dormer, who thought it time to put a gentle end to this plan, "I am sure that I for one am glad that there is to be no shooting this week. One either doesn't see a man all day, or else one has to stand outside a damp clump, with poor little rabbits bolting under one's petticoats and great pheasants falling on one's hat, and explosions going on; and one lunches in a draughty place with guns in all the corners, and a horrid man on each side of you with pockets full of cartridges."

The expression of Mrs. Dormer's views ended the discussion. Dora discreetly said no more; and Mrs. Dormer did not think it necessary to add that the keeper's decision about the shooting had been made after her last friendly visit to the keeper's wife. The Yorkshire keeper had married a little woman, who had been born and bred in a southern county; and, if he were inclined to issue orders to the rest of the world, she was able for the most part to provide him with directions. She and Mrs. Dormer were very old friends, and, if they agreed that not a gun should be fired, the interests of neither owner, keeper, nor pheasants were of much weight in comparison.

CHAPTER X.

SOON after breakfast Dora was standing on the terrace, and looking over the fine expanse of park. It was a broad terrace, stretched in front of the long Italian wing, which was the most modern part of the Castle; and from this raised plateau she looked far away over land, which looked as if every clump of trees, almost every tree, had been planted to make the best possible effect, and as if the land itself had been curved and hollowed in strict agreement with some pedant's rules of beauty.

Since there was to be no shooting, Dora had asserted promptly that, when she was in the country, she liked to be out of doors all day long, and had asked Archie to show her the place; and she now waited for him with some im-

patience. After a few minutes he came; and she saw that a small company was coming with him. There was Leonard Vale, and Tony Fotheringham, and Mrs. Chauncey, and finally Elizabeth Lock. Miss Lock had said that she had letters to write, but her mother had said "Nonsense!" and had added that a walk was just what she wanted. As they came towards her, Dora again said to herself that this was a sulky girl.

"I wondered if I might come to," said Clara Chauncey, as if she looked to Dora Rutherford for permission.

"Of course you may," said Dora, pleasantly; "that is, you have as much right anywhere as I have—or more, for you didn't invite yourself." Then she took possession of Archie, giving a little shake to his arm. "Now, Archie," she said, "you are to tell us all about it—the house and the park and everything."

"All I know," said Archie blandly; he too stood and looked across this well-kept park. "It must be rather jolly in summer," he said; "it looks as if it had been all done with a spade and a foot-rule, and yet I saw a bit of land high up in the Rocky Mountains which looked like this, though of course it was just as Nature placed the grass and trees. I suppose this has been pretty well groomed, though."

"And the house?" asked Dora, giving his arm a little pull that he might be brought to regard his stately dwelling-place. "I know this part; this is the newest; but which is the oldest?"

"How should I know?" asked Archie.

"You are bound to," she answered.

"But I give you my word I don't," he said; "it all looks to me old enough. That's the good of this old English climate of ours. Now I dare say this place was built at a dozen different times, and of different stone too; and then comes our rare old climate and damps and stains, and sets the ivy growing, and sticks on the lichen, and there you are—it looks as if it had grown!" He regarded his castle with a dawning affection.

"But you ought to know more about it," said Dora, as they began to move.

"I think that I know something about it," said Clara Chauncey modestly, "if I may venture to instruct its owner. I have been reading about it in the county book. The tower is the oldest part."

They had come down from the terrace, and they now stopped again and looked at the tower, which was connected by a short wing with the rest of the building.

"How old?" asked Dora.

"Well," said Clara, "it has been much restored; but they say in the book that some of this tower is so old that nobody knows to what period it belongs; they talk about ancient Romans and people of that kind; and the walls are tremendously thick; and there is a staircase in one of them."

"Oh!" cried Dora, delighted, "a secret staircase!"

"Yes," said Clara, "and in behind that shrubbery must be the door. Isn't it, Mr. Vale?"

They all looked at Leonard Vale, who had not spoken. He had been looking very cross, but at this appeal to him he smiled on all the party. "I'm afraid I don't know much about it," he said.

"But of course—I never thought of it," said Archie—"of course the upper end of the staircase must come out in your rooms. You ought to see Lenny's rooms," he said to the others. "He has such good taste; he has made them charming."

"They are on view at any time," said Leonard, beginning to move away.

"But does the secret staircase really come out in your rooms?" asked Clara Chauncey, with her innocent air of curiosity.

"I never looked," he said shortly.

"It is really so interesting in the book," she said to the others; "all sorts of people have escaped down it—fugitive priests and cavaliers, and a lady eloping, and—oh, it's really most interesting."

By this time they had passed the other wing and turned the corner of the house.

"This is the side which I like best," said Archie; "it doesn't look so much as if a hundred gardeners had been at work on it a hundred years."

They stopped again and looked. Luckily for them it was one of those soft days in November. There was a feeling of moisture and fertility in the air, a gentle wind and a cloudy sky. Under the influences of the day the landscape had a look of gentle melancholy, and of promise also; one seemed to feel the secret work of Nature in the

ground, and to anticipate the far-off spring. On this sid of the Castle there was no terrace nor formal flower-bed The park began at the wall and sloped downwards, wit no great steepness, but showing a more broken surfac everywhere, until it ended in a line of willows, whic marked the little brook in the bottom. Beyond the broo the land rose with less steepness, but that more gent slope was covered with all which the improvements o many owners had left of an ancient wood. There wer trim coverts in many parts of the property, which wer better adapted for sporting purposes; but this old bit o woodland pleased the new lord the best.

They descended into the dell.

"May we go over?" asked Dora, with her foot on th end of a tree-trunk, which lay across the little stream.

"If you ain't afraid," said Archie.

"Afraid of what?" she asked. "Of your awful keeper or of a log of wood, or what? Don't you know that I ar afraid of nothing?"

"Ah, how I envy you!" said Clara Chauncey, with devout look in the expressive eyes. "I am afraid o everything. To look at that log gives me a vertigo."

"Then look at me!" said Dora, and she ran along th trunk as safely as a squirrel. "I must go up into th wood," she said from beyond the brook; "it smells s good."

"Stick to the path," said Archie; "and I hope yo won't be seized as a poacher. There's a better bridg higher up, and we'll join you."

Dora had begun already to mount the path which le up through the wood. It was a rough track, half-choke with dead leaves, and squelchy, as Dora described it t herself, underfoot. She had not gone far when she wa aware of someone following her, and, turning, saw Le nard Vale. "Oh, you came over, too," she said.

This is one of those remarks on which comment i superfluous. Lenny, who had not put on boots fit for th country, had been picking his way behind her in a ratho comical fashion; but, when she turned, he came to he more quickly. "I hope you don't mind," he said.

"Mind? Why should I?" she asked. "Only," sh added, "isn't it rather rash for us both to leave them?"

"That's all right for a few minutes," he said; "Tom

and Mrs. Chauncey are there, and they are all together. It's only for a few minutes, and a few minutes are so much to me."

She looked at him quickly, and began to walk on again.

"I am always so awfully afraid of offending you," he said. "If I were to say half of what I feel about you and your friendship, you would laugh at me."

"No," said Dora; "I told you I liked to make friends. I have always said that it is all nonsense to say that men and women can't be friends."

"And you will be my friend?" he said.

"Yes, yes," she answered; "I told you so."

They walked on together for a time in silence.

"I wonder," he began presently, "if I am enough of a friend to say something?" He paused as if for permission.

"How can I tell," she asked, "till you say it?"

He smiled, to show his admiration of her readiness. "I can't help thinking," he said, "of something which you said yesterday. I want so much to tell you that I understand and sympathize; and then I think that it is impossible that you should care whether I care or not. I am disheartened when I think of you and of myself."

"What was it I said?"

"It was about your husband, and his not consulting you, and——"

She stopped him with her laughter.

"I don't wonder that you laugh at me," he said. "It didn't seem a laughing matter to me."

"At least it is not tragical," she said; "it does not do, I can assure you, to look at these things tragically. One can't expect to be understood by one's husband."

He sighed as he walked beside her. "Of course," he said after a time, "you are right, as you always are. It is brave of you to feel that—and wise, too, I suppose. But, after all, it does seem tragic enough to me. You'll laugh at me, of course; but I can't help thinking of something, which I read somewhere, about an Indian throwing away a pearl richer than all his tribe."

Dora laughed, but not quite naturally. "Alas, poor Indian!" she said lightly; "after all it was better than hanging it in his nose."

Leonard sighed instead of laughing. "How can one

help cursing fate," he said suddenly and almost angrily, "when one sees a man who has got the best thing in the world and doesn't half value it, and when one knows that to another it would be light and life and everything?—of course you laugh; I know I am a fool; but I can't help it."

Dora was not at all inclined to laugh. She was uncomfortable, but interested. She had had no intention of discussing her husband with another man; and yet she had slipped into a half-veiled criticism of her husband. She felt that she was wrong; and yet she was interested. There was a relief in allowing the grievance of her life, which she had so long kept close, to emerge a little into the light, not so far but that she could clap it under lock and key again in a moment. And then this young man, this friend, was so tactful and so careful of her feelings, that she could venture to discuss with him a matter, which she would discuss with nobody else; and, moreover—and it was this which made her most bold—she was certain of her power over him, certain that she could stop him in a moment, if he said or even looked too much. Her power over the young man made her bold, and it pleased her, too, and flattered her. She suspected that many women had flattered him; and he flattered her. Other women had admired his looks; she knew that she did not care at all for his regular features and languid grace. This spoiled young man came humbly to her for advice and assistance; and this pleased her very much indeed. But, although she was pleased, she was uncomfortable too. She felt a quality in his adoration which made her uneasy. She realized that it was time to use her power over him, and to stop him now. "Is it far to the top of the wood?" she asked.

He did not know; and Dora, who having once begun to ascend a thing could not be happy till she had reached the top, and seen what was beyond, began to hurry up the path. And so they came to the upper boundary of the wood, and found a country road beyond which was rough open common.

No sooner had Dora seen this than she turned and hurried down again. "We have left them too long," she said.

He smiled as he followed her; it gave him exquisite

pleasure to hear her speak, as if he and she were partners in a plot. This pleased him so much, that he almost forgot to care whether Lord Lorrilaire married or not, or only cared because the decision of his cousin's fate would put a stop to this delightful partnership. He was wise enough to say no more at this time about himself or about her. As they went quickly down through the wood, he only made a few remarks about Archie, speaking to her as to a superior officer, who kindly allowed him an inkling of her plans. Her uneasiness vanished; her spirits rose; she hurried downward over the fallen leaves to rescue that other young man, who might be running into danger.

It seemed as if this sage protector of young men was not a moment too soon. When Dora and Leonard Vale had disappeared in the wood, the rest of the party had walked along the bank of the little stream. When they had reached the little rustic bridge, Mrs. Chauncey had declared that it looked no safer than the log below, and had invited Tony Fotheringham to walk further up the stream with her. So Archie and Elizabeth had crossed with no other companions and had walked slowly back to where the little track ran up into the wood. There they had waited for Dora's return; and presently, since she did not come, Elizabeth had suggested that they should return to the house. She would not go back to the bridge again; she chose to walk the tree-trunk, as Mrs. Rutherford had done. So she had stepped boldly on to the log and walked half-way across, and there had been seized with a sudden panic, had stood still, shut her eyes, and, before Archie had seen that anything was the matter, she had slipped from the uncertain bridge and splashed in the stream.

When Dora emerged, keen-eyed and anxious, from the wood, the sight which she saw was this. On the top of the opposite bank was Archie, wet almost to the shoulders. He had just scrambled up, and was now helping Miss Lock to climb out of the water. The girl's hat was floating down the brook, and a great strand of her splendid hair was hanging loose. When Archie had brought her safe to the top of the bank, she covered her face with both her hands and seemed to sway, and would have fallen, perhaps, had not Archie held her in his arms. This was the sight which Dora saw; this was the sight which lent her wings. She darted along the log, and, as she gained the farther side, uttered a shrill cry and fell.

At the sound of Dora's cry Elizabeth awoke to her position; with one hand she pushed back her fallen hair, and with the other pushed her supporter almost angrily away. Archie, seeing in a moment that Elizabeth could stand alone, left her and ran to Dora. Almost at the same moment Leonard Vale, who had stood speechless and sick with fear, appeared at her other side; he seemed to have lost control of himself; he sank down beside her babbling and trembling. "Oh, oh!" he gasped, "she'll die—she'll die, I tell you!" he was ghastly white, and his fine teeth were chattering. Archie looked quickly at him with surprise, annoyance, a new dislike. He stooped and lifted Dora from the ground, and by the same movement drew her away from the youth who was grovelling at her side.

As she felt herself raised from the earth Dora opened her eyes and saw that it was Archie, as she hoped, who had raised her. "Thank you," she said feebly, but holding his arm most tightly; "it's better now."

"What's better?" he asked.

"My ankle. You must help me to the house. Oh, thank you, Archie; how good you are!"

She turned her face from his to smile upon Elizabeth, who now drew near to offer aid. "I will take an arm of each of you," she said; and, so supported, she limped up to the house.

CHAPTER XI.

On the next morning there was sound of determined knocking at a door in the tower wing. Tony Fotheringham was there, grave and business-like, arrayed for the chase. He listened, but could hear no sound; and so, after a fit interval, he opened the door and went in.

The room, which he entered, was the middle one of the three, which Leonard Vale had rescued from disused targets, broken bird-cages, and all the strange worthless lumber which a great house must push into some corner. This had been no incomplete conversion. Chairs of divers shapes, each an experiment in comfort, filled much of the floor, and small tables were so placed among them that the most lazy of loungers need move nothing but an arm, and

hat not far, to the desired tumbler or box of cigarettes. t was, in short, the most luxurious of smoking-rooms; but n the mantelpiece, instead of pipes or tobacco-jars, were its of fine china, and here and there against the wall stood piece of valuable old furniture. Opposite the door was large window; and in the thickness of the wall a deep indow-seat had been made, that the amateur might recline t ease, and please his eye with easy seeing of one of the nest views which Langley Castle could give. Leonard ale had a pretty taste. The smaller room on the right of is was more distinctly a cabinet of curiosities; and in s bedroom on the left, which was under the empty open partment at the top of the tower, such commonplace things a young man's washing-stand and chest of drawers were ch a bit of cabinet-work, which challenged the attention the earnest inquirer, and made simple folk wonder here the basin could be.

Tony was in no mood to linger over works of art. He alked across the sitting-room, and knocked again upon e door of the bed-room. This time a sound of some sort as heard, and, after waiting for a minute to consider its eaning, Tony opened the door and entered. A silken *rtière* opened with the door, and, by the light thus ad-tted from the outer room, the visitor was able to see the d, at the foot of which hung a piece of needle-work, rked in a harem, sold in the bazaar of Smyrna, and now otecting by day the couch of Mr. Leonard Vale.

Leonard was awake. Without moving his head on the low he turned a lack-lustre but hostile eye on the intru-r; he said nothing.

"Oh! old chap, I say!" said good Mr. Fotheringham, the sight grieved him. "It is so awfully bad for you, u know," he added sadly. As Mr. Vale made no com-ent on this speech, Tony spoke again. "I said I'd come d look you up," he said. "You ought to have breakfasted, u know; the trap is just coming round, and Archie told to remind you that a horse had gone on for you."

"I wish you had gone on!" said Leonard malevolently. Ring, will you?"

"What for?" asked Tony, suspiciously.

Leonard growled. His friend regarded him sadly. He hed and shook his round head before he spoke again.

"I say, Lenny, old chap, I do wish you wouldn't go on this. You go too fast, you know; you can't last."

"Who wants to last?" cried out Lenny, with sudden liveliness and a more audible malediction. "Do you think I want to save myself up like a pound in an old woman's stocking? *Will* you ring that bell?"

"You drink too much and you smoke too much. My doctor——"

"Hang your doctor!"

"Oh! no, I say, don't say that. He is a tremendously clever chap, and he knows."

"Oh, go to——"

"No, I shan't. I shall tell you what my doctor says. He says you ought not to smoke more than two cigars a day, or their equivalent in cigarettes." The word "equivalent" was invested with an extraordinary solemnity by Mr. Fotheringham. He paused that his friend might have time to digest this golden rule, and then said, "you know, old man, there's nothing more important than health. Do you know my exercise?"

As no answer was returned, Tony gravely inclined his body forward from the hips, and with his shoulders forced backwards to an unnatural extent, uttered in a deep tone the words "ninety-nine!"

Leonard Vale looked at him with amazement and anger.

"Ninety-nine, ninety-nine, ninety-nine," said Tony Fotheringham, absorbed by this enchanting occupation.

"Great Scot!" said Leonard, when at last the other paused, and looked at him with beaming face, expecting sympathy. "By George, you are a fool!"

"Good old Lenny!" said Tony amiably in answer. "But really and truly, if you will do that exercise for an hour a day, you will be a different man. And as to drink, my doctor says——"

"Confound you! Will you ring that bell?" cried Leonard.

Mr. Fotheringham rang the bell with a protesting air; and with the same air he heard Mr. Vale's man ordered to prepare the usual pick-me-up. When Leonard had swallowed this dram, he felt more equal to the duties of the day, and listened, while Tony told him again that they were just going to start, and that among the horses which had been sent on was one for him.

"Am I fit to go hunting?" asked Leonard plaintively. He put his arm out of bed, and held it up and watched it tremble.

"It would do you good, old chap," cried Tony heartily.

"It's a funking day with me," said Leonard; "my nerves are all over the place; I couldn't sit on for shaking."

"Well, are you coming?" asked Tony; "we can't wait. Archie told me to remind you, if you weren't ready, that you could order the dog-cart, and come after us and take your chance."

"Who's going?"

"Well, there's me, and Archie, and good old Hickory and Mrs. Rutherford."

Leonard Vale threw off the clothes and brought his feet to the floor. "Oh, I am bad," he said miserably, as he sat on the bed—"I can't go; it's no good; it's just my vile luck." He turned into bed again, stretched down a long left arm to pull up the bedclothes, and lay with his face to the wall.

Tony waited a moment, regarding his prostrate friend with a pathetic expression on his rosy face.

"Oh, do get out, can't you?" growled the friend; and Tony went.

Tony, descending sadly from the tower wing, found the rest of the party assembled near the fire in the hall. Had he been quick at perceiving the moods of others, he would have seen that Lady Jane Lock was but little happier than the friend, whom he left cursing destiny upon his bed. The lady was very stiff in the back and very red in the face, and, do what she could, she could not restrain her tongue entirely from speeeh. The sight of Mrs. Rutherford descending the majestic staircase, wearing a perfect habit, and moreover displaying on each step the neatest of riding-boots, had filled Lady Jane with a wrath, for which some vent was merely necessary. A sprained ankle on one day, and such a boot on the next! She had tried hard not to speak, but at last she was forced to say something, This something took the form of congratulation. "I cannot help congratulating you," she said, with a sort of strangled laugh, "on your wonderful recovery, or rather on your wonderful ankle."

Dora smiled sweetly upon her, and looked down at her foot with an exasperating approval.

"I should think there never was such a case," continued Lady Jane, who was hurried away by her own

words; "a miraculous cure of a sprain—it really ought to go to the medical journals."

"To tell you the truth," said Dora, with enchanting candor, "it was really nothing at all."

"Really?" asked Lady Jane, with concentrated scorn.

"I was more frightened than hurt," said Dora; "and I am so glad it was no worse, for I wouldn't have missed to-day for anything. I do hope that Miss Lock will be all right when we get back."

It was beyond the power of Miss Lock's mother to express gratitude for this kind wish. While Dora, radiant and in closely-fitting boots, was about to start with the men for a day's hunting, poor Elizabeth was in her room, suffering from a chill. Her mother had stood beside her bed, regarding her with the eye of an army doctor who suspects a recruit of shamming. She had rated her for her clumsiness, as if she had fallen from a bridge edged by high parapets for the safety of passers. She had administered a dose, which she had brought many times to the bedside of every one of her daughters; and finally she had stoutly declared that the best remedy for this chill, which ought never to have been taken, was a day's exercise in the open air. Not a word had Lady Jane Lock said of her objection to girls hunting; she was ready to pocket her prejudices for the good of her child; she was eager to hoist her into the saddle. But Elizabeth would not. She would not hunt—she would not even get up. Is it to be wondered at that Lady Jane was unable to refrain from bitter speech, when she saw Mrs. Rutherford radiant, attractive, admirably equipped for the chase, and thought of her own child, who positively rejected her advice? "Elizabeth is obstinate as a mule," she had said, not for the first time, to her friend Susan Dormer. "Elizabeth has so much character," she was apt to say confidentially to less intimate acquaintances. Express it as she would, she was well aware that this girl was able to meet her will with a passive opposition which she had not found in any of her elder daughters. She had not encountered this opposition often; but, when she had encountered it, she had found, as she found on this day, that Elizabeth had her way. This element, so little expected in a daughter of hers, embarrassed Lady Jane more than all the other obstacles which barred her path. She was like a skilful

chess-player, who has suddenly found to his amazement that the most important of his pieces may refuse to move. Imagine the attitude of a player, who awakes the doubt if his queen have not a will of her own! To such a doubt Lady Jane had been growing more and more alive since the day on which she had presented at Court the youngest and handsomest of her daughters.

The day's hunting was better than the last; and Dora, happy in the country air and glowing with the ardor of the chase, forgot, save at brief moments, all plots and counter-plots, and the important duty of saving the young men, her contemporaries. She enjoyed herself like a child, and could not believe that the sun was not sloping to the west before his time. Archie was not joyous enough to please her; and she again and again demanded from him more expressions of his happiness. When they were riding homeward together, she attacked him on this subject.

"Why so glum?" she asked.

He laughed, and denied that he was not jolly.

"You are not half such good company as you used to be," she said.

"Perhaps I'm growing old," said Archie.

As she considered his unusual solemnity, the full perception of his danger came back to her. She was half inclined to follow up her attack, to put this matter to the touch, to ask him suddenly then and there if he were not glum because Elizabeth was not there. The question was on the point of her tongue; but it came no further. She decided that it would be rash; she gave full weight to the fact that, in spite of all their old friendship and old interchange of thoughts, he said not a word to her about this girl. She could not believe that he did not think about her, especially since he had pulled her out of the brook, and seen half her hair down; and yet he did not speak about her. This fact appeared to Dora significant of much; and she made up her mind not to begin discussion of this perilous subject. She was not too much elated by her little victories; for she knew full well that, if the mischief were already done, to carry off the young man day after day, was but to feed the flame. The absence, which makes the heart grow fonder, is generally a short absence. So Dora thought and determined to check her natural impetuosity, to be cautious, to say nothing yet about Elizabeth.

"I was thinking of old Palfrey," said Archie presently; "I was wondering how one entertains a man who is going to be in a Cabinet."

"What? Mr. Palfrey? The great Mr. Palfrey? Is he coming here?"

"We shall find him when we get back," said Archie, nodding.

"But who asked him? What's he coming for? Do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him," said Archie; "how should I? He's to speak at Langstone next week."

"But who asked him to stay with you?"

"Uncle Villiers. Do you object, Dora?" Shall I thrust him from my gates?"

Now, Dora was busily thinking whether she objected or not. So far as the danger of matrimony was concerned, the infusion of a lively political element was a thing to be welcomed. And yet it vexed her that the friend of her youth, her dear Archie, the potent young Lord Lorrilaire, should be nobody in his own house.

"They say that an Englishman's house is his castle," she said, with her chin in the air.

"Well?" asked Archie.

"Your castle seems to be everybody else's house," she said; "that's all."

He laughed in the best humor. "They take all the trouble," he said.

"And besides," she went on, "you are a Liberal. Why should you entertain one of the rising lights of the other people?"

"They are much of a muchness," said young Lord Lorrilaire; "I'd about as soon feed one as the other."

"No, no, no," cried out Dora; "that's nothing in the world but laziness. I thought you'd say that sort of thing, and it's only laziness! You ought to take a side. There must be more right on one side than another. You can't not care about politics; and you are a power in the land; you must take a side and stick to it."

"Is that necessary, nowadays?" asked Archie, laughing; "I mean the sticking to it?"

"Of course you can be flippant," said Dora; "but of course I am right. A man ought not to let other people make him into just what they like."

She said this with decision, and she paused when she said it, that he might take from it as much profit as he would.

"There's no fear," said Archie after a time; but she shook her head.

"One can put one's foot down at any time," he said again; but again she shook her head.

"Well," he said laughing, "let us float a little way! I assure you, Dora, I don't feel yet as if my life was real. Sometimes all this sort of thing seems a dream; and sometimes all the old time seems a dream; but I can never believe in both at once. You must give me time to feel my feet. Feeding Mr. Palfrey for a few days can't make me a Tory, if there are any Tories; and——"

"And what?" asked Dora quickly.

If Archie had been on the point of adding a statement even more interesting to the lady, he thought better of it. He laughed instead; he always found it so easy to laugh, and to laugh is often the least compromising end of a sentence.

"Well, there's the Castle," he said presently, as they came within sight of it; "is it all real or a dream—all this imposing existence?"

Dora answered with a little sound of contempt.

"You'll find it real enough," she said, "when you've floated too far to get back."

"One can always get back," he said, laughing again.

CHAPTER XII.

"FEEDING Mr. Palfrey for a few days can't make me a Tory," Archie had said; and then he had said "and;" and then he had stopped, adding nothing but laughter. Dora, when she was alone in her room, resting and thinking before the dressing-bell, wondered much what words had nearly followed that suggestive "and." She completed the sentence for her own satisfaction in this way:—"Feeding Mr. Palfrey for a few days can't make me a Tory, and admiring a girl's back hair, also for a few days only, can't make me a husband."

Was this what Archie had so nearly said? If so, why

had he stopped? Had chivalry stopped his tongue, or a sudden doubt if he were not really falling in love? She tried to analyze his laughter, which had come in the place of words. Was it mere careless laughter, or was there in it some element of tenderness? Had he laughed as a young man laughs, detecting in himself a hidden weakness of love?

Dora recumbent after the fatigues of the hunting day tried to determine the state of her gallant young host; but she failed to satisfy herself. Only of one thing did she grow more sure; the introduction of the political question into Langley Castle was a decided good. Politics, as she told herself, are as good an antidote to love as shooting is. If the one makes men silent and moody, the other makes them argumentative and garrulous. Both turn the minds of men upon each other, and divert them from the dangerous consideration of the other sex. So a young man turns from a lady's eyes to discuss local government, of which he probably knows much less.

Dora felt sure then that she might welcome the advent of politics and of the politician. She made up her mind to receive Mr. Palfrey as an ally. For her own sake, too, she felt a pleasant excitement at his coming. She liked to meet eminent people; this had been among her most favored dreams in her girlhood's days at the rectory. To meet eminent people, to feel the currents of political life, to be in and of the movement—these had been among the visions of the little daughter of the country clergyman. Many of her dreams had come true; but not the dearest dream of all. Other politicians had listened to her with apparent interest, but not her husband. This, as has been said, was the disappointment of her life. And this disappointment gave a peculiar excitement to each new introduction to an eminent man. She was eager to impress each impressive person; she felt like an Indian with yet another scalp in prospect; and her heart fluttered at the hidden thought that, when all men had acknowledged that she was worth hearing, perhaps her husband last of all might awake to the amazing fact that he had not married a fool.

Now, it happened that Mrs. Rutherford had never met Mr. Palfrey, or, if she had met him at some large official party, she had not known it. She would not have known

him by sight but for the shop-windows. Mr. Palfrey had attained to that stage in the life of the politician, which is marked by the sudden appearance of his photograph in shop-windows. The actors, whose likenesses adorn the same windows, appear truculent or benevolent, tender or sinister, according to the characters which they represent; but the statesmen all wear the same expression. Among them the countenance of Mr. Palfrey had lately appeared. Mr. Palfrey was recognized as one of the rising men of his party.

Dora allowed herself more time that she usually gave to her toilet. When this was well advanced, she sent her maid with kind inquiries about the health of Miss Lock; and the maid returned with the thanks of the young lady and the news that she was much better, but would not leave her room that evening. This too was satisfactory to Dora. She had no wish that Elizabeth should be ill; but yet a free evening was something for which to be grateful. Of course, if the girl were really ill, Lord Lorrilaire would feel pity, and, where there is pity, there is danger. But still, as Dora put the last touches to her charming toilet, she felt a sense of freedom, the anticipation of a pleasant evening, of a new success.

As she looked at herself in the big glass, she admitted with her natural frankness that Elizabeth was according to rule a handsomer woman than herself; but fascination cannot be reduced to rules; she was content with her appearance. She was altogether sanguine. For that night at least all promised well. With a fine flood of politics and the girl away, a real victory might be won, and the rich young lord swept clear beyond the reach of danger. So down went Dora in her most becoming gown and most agreeable mood.

If Dora had suspected that there was a deliberate purpose of penning Lord Lorrilaire in the Conservative fold, she was sure of it when she entered the drawing-room. She recognized Mr. Palfrey in a moment. He was standing by the fire with his head a little bent, and the expression which a prominent politician wears when he is pretending to listen courteously to an outsider, and is thinking of something else. She at once drew his attention to herself, but at the same moment she was aware of the presence of another and an even more remarkable

man. She saw Lord Hackbut. Archie had said not a word of the coming of Lord Hackbut; and Dora at once doubted if Archie had known of his coming. It was as likely as not that Sir Villiers had not mentioned it; and yet Dora knew that, if Mr. Palfrey were a sign of an intended capture of Archie, the presence of Lord Hackbut was a sign ten times as serious. Lord Hackbut always meant business.

Lord Hackbut was at least ten years older than the rising Palfrey, and, so far as the public knew, he had not yet begun to rise. Nevertheless he was a man of great strength, both bodily and mental. If the public knew little of him, and had never seen his harsh old face grinning from the windows of stationers and fancy repositories, he was well known to the few who were proud of knowing the inner mechanism of the Conservative party. With these initiated persons he enjoyed the reputation of having refused all the things which public men as a rule impatiently demand. He was said to have refused the highest places about the Court, many special missions, all sorts of ribands; and many years ago, in the days of his youth, to have declined those subordinate offices in Governments, through which the able man rises in due course to a seat in the Cabinet. The decorative side of public affairs had never tempted him, nor to be pointed at by the vacillating finger of the man in the street; the magic words, "That's 'im," had never thrilled his soul. It was organization which attracted him. From the first he had but one great aim in meddling with politics—to be admitted freely behind the scenes, to learn how the puppets are worked, and in due time to work them. He had become the most powerful of party managers. He had assisted in the formation of Cabinets; he had conducted negotiations between doubtful colleagues. He knew more than any man in England of the strength of the party in this place or that, and how far that strength would be increased or diminished by any given policy. Therefore he was consulted with eagerness both as to measures and men. Before the Caucus had appeared in England, or the American weed in English rivers, Lord Hackbut had been a sort of Caucus in trousers, standing on legs rather bowed and of extraordinary strength, with massive head a little pushed forward, and keen humorous eyes. A nose, which

looked as if it had been broken, and a front tooth which certainly had been broken, added a certain fierceness to the appearance of this remarkable man.

Lord Hackbut was well aware of the services which he had rendered to his party. He owed them nothing, and he held that they owed him much; but he asked no compensation but the free indulgence of a somewhat sardonic humor. He worked hard for his party, and loved to mock the party leaders. It was of course in private life that he thus played the mocker. On the rare occasions, when in his own county he felt bound to speak in public, he would so load his leaders with eulogy so extravagant, that his audience cheered him and them to the echo, while the eminent person, who happened to be present as the representative of the body eulogized, would wear the constrained and rather painful smile of one who suspects irony. Irony is understood by very few Englishmen, and liked by fewer.

So soon as Dora, entering the drawing-room, saw the marked countenance of the great party manager, she knew that a serious effort was about to be made to brand a doubtful sheep with the right party mark. It was a work after Lord Hackbut's heart to secure for his party the influence and wealth of a family which was in danger of transfer. Dora was sure that he had learned all about Archie, and that he would lose no time in fixing him, where he should be, at the head of the Conservative party in the county. She felt indignation for Archie; but yet she saw, or thought that she saw, more clearly than ever that a definite plot against the young lord's political preferences made the other plot, which was directed against his heart, more likely to fail.

It was clear that the formidable Lord Hackbut was in the highest spirits. The broken tooth was visible each moment. He took much delight in the society of pretty women; and he had been surprised and pleased at meeting his friend Mrs. Chauncey in that place. She for her part faced him bravely but warily; she was a little afraid of the old lord, and of his piercing eyes and voice. "And where is my friend Jack Chauncey?" he asked in his clearest tones—"yachting, is he? Yachting! I thought that punting was more in his line." He laughed stridently at his own jest; and Clara laughed too, though with effort.

She was glad of the entrance of Dora, even though she knew with her fatal perception that Lord Hackbut recognized at a glance the appearance of a beauty fresher and more novel than her own. It was always the next thing that this alarming peer might say, which made people nervous in his society.

Lord Hackbut regarded Mrs. Rutherford with obvious admiration. He took Mrs. Dormer in to dinner, but he found Dora on his right hand, and he frankly expressed his pleasure at the arrangement. It was to Dora that he addressed the greater part of his talk, and he was in a very talkative humor. He informed her at the outset that to talk to a pretty woman was always pleasant; but that to talk to a pretty woman who occasionally understood what one meant, was one of the rarest pleasures of life. He was outspoken as usual, and amused Dora immensely with his rash speeches.

"I am here," he said, in an interval of his very hearty dinner, "as a hanger-on of the eminent man on the other side of the table. Do you know him? No? You won't hear much from him now. He has a tremendous speech on his chest, which he has got to get off next week at Langstone. Besides, he won't talk before me; he knows that I know what a humbug he is. Look at him now! He knows we are talking about him."

"It is you who are talking about him," said Dora.

"So it is," said Lord Hackbut. "I love to talk about him. Look at him! Now he is trying to look impressive, like an engraving of Pitt; now he is curtseying and condescending, and pretending to listen. I can tell you he looks quite different when he's listening to a Whip or to one of his local Three Hundred. He's one of the biggest humbugs in Europe. He tossed up at Oxford to see if he should be Liberal or Tory. It came down tails (the heads belong to the other party) and we got him, and much good may he do us. Shall you go and hear him speak?"

"Of course," said Dora; "especially now when I know all about him."

"Yes, my dear," said the old lord, "you come to me when you want to know about these fellows. It's all a fraud, and we are all in it. Do you believe in popular votes and all that?"

"Yes," said Dora; "I'm a Liberal."

Lord Hackbut laughed aloud; and Palfrey looked across the table with a startled eye and an uneasy smile.

"He believes in all that," said Lord Hackbut, nodding at Mr. Palfrey, "or pretends that he does. It's the biggest humbug in Europe. We wouldn't give any fellows votes if we could help it. Do you mean to tell me that I shouldn't govern my county a blanked sight better than the hat-in-hand nominees of a lot of agricultural laborers? Better have given votes to foxes any day—far more intelligent. Palfrey pretends to believe in the people; if he's anything, he's the biggest Radical in Europe. I bet you he says 'democracy' in the next ten minutes; and I'll lay you ten to one he says it in the last ten minutes of his speech at Langstone—in public speeches it comes in the peroration."

"Oh, Lord Hackbut," said Dora, "I do hope you'll make a speech! That's what I should like to hear!"

"Only a word or two," he said, "just to tell 'em what an honor and privilege they enjoy in listening to the words of wisdom of the persuasive Palfrey."

Dora was very much amused by her neighbor. Before dinner was over, he asked her a few su[illegible]n questions about their young host, which she answered so diplomatically, that he burst out laughing again, and declared with emphasis that she was an uncommonly clever little lady. When she rose with the rest of the ladies, he made her a low bow, and expressed a hope that they might be friends.

"Yes," said Dora, with a quick look, "and allies too, perhaps, if we can come to terms."

"I ask nothing better," said the old lord gallantly, and displaying his broken tooth.

One thing, and one thing only interfered with Dora's pleasure on that evening. She was disagreeably conscious of the eyes of Mr. Leonard Vale. She had not seen Leonard on that day until she came down to dinner; and then he had been unable to speak to her. At dinner he had sat far down on the opposite side of the table; but she had felt that he was continually looking at her, and with variations of expression which annoyed her. Entreaty, expostulation, and even rebuke seemed to her to be directed at her from those expressive eyes. She was annoyed; she condemned him for silliness; she feared that the keen-eyed old man beside her would notice those

persistent looks. She made up her mind to speak very plainly to Mr. Vale when the next opportunity of speaking should come. Yet, when she had left the dining-room, she at once rebuked herself for making mountains out of molehills. She reminded herself that the young man had confessed himself a very weak creature, and that she had promised to befriend him. It was certain that his looks meant no more than a longing for another tonic dose of good advice. If she must find fault with him for staring, she determined not to speak as if she suspected an excess of devotion. She declared to herself that that would be foolish indeed, and would be in short like the behavior of one of the silly women, who thought all men in love with them, and whom she had always and unequivocally condemned.

And yet, when the men joined them, Dora was vexed again by the airs of this young man. He looked pale and dark under the eyes, aggressively interesting. He made no determined effort to come to her; but he continued to stare, till Dora felt as if all the world must notice his staring. She gave him not a glance in return, and tried not to think of him. She had almost succeeded in this effort, and the evening was drawing to a close, when she rose with some of the others to go into the next room, that they might look at a picture there. As they passed through the archway from one room to the other, Dora felt a hand touch hers and a scrap of paper left in her fingers. She started and looked a quick and angry question, but she only saw the back of Mr. Vale, as he moved away. Clara Chauncey, who was close beside her, began to ask questions with great interest about the picture; and the others stopped before it, while Dora moved on alone to the mantelpiece at the end of the room. There she looked at the piece of paper with marked disfavor, and almost instantly allowed it to drop from her fingers on to the coals. When she said good night to the gentlemen, she was careful to make no reply of any kind to the mute appeal of Leonard's eyes. He ground his heel into the carpet, and swore under his breath, as he saw her vanish up the staircase.

A little later another female figure, equally light, flitted down the staircase. The gentlemen had disappeared, and the footmen were removing the lights from the drawing-

room. Mrs. Chauncey came in quickly and went straight to the fireplace in the further room. "One moment," she said to the man who was moving the nearest lamp; "I won't keep you a moment, but I am afraid I threw a paper into the fireplace by mistake."

The footman held the lamp conveniently near. "I am so sorry to trouble you," said Clara, who was always polite to other people's servants, "but I foolishly threw a little paper into the fire. Ah, there it is! Yes, that's it; thank you! A little burnt? Yes, so it is; but not much. So lucky that it stuck on the black coals! Thank you!"

Half of the little paper was burnt away; but enough remained. Clara folded it carefully and held it hidden in her little hand as she sped up-stairs for the second time. Safe in her room, she locked up the little note in a safe place, and then prepared herself for that repose which chloral, even more surely than innocence, can afford to the nervous female temperament.

CHAPTER XIII.

TONY FOTHERINGHAM slept in a room on the ground floor; and as a rule he slept like a good little boy, breathing steadily from the moment when his round cheek touched the pillow to the moment when he was called to resume the diet of the day. But on the night which followed the arrival of Mr. Palfrey and Lord Hackbut, Mr. Fotheringham was somewhat disturbed. He turned over more than once; he even dreamed; half-awake he thought uneasily of his precious health. Something he feared, had disagreed with him. He wondered, as he moved his hot cheek on the pillow, if he had been upset by the somewhat lurid talk in the smoking-room, where "good old" Hackbut had denounced the age with savage speech and much robust enjoyment. Tony had listened open-mouthed to the awful pleasantries of the old and critical peer; and now he lay wondering if he had gone to bed with his head too hot. It was either Lord Hackbut's picture of his times, or the chestnuts of which he had imprudently partaken after dinner, which was the cause of the rosy boy's disquiet. The light was long in coming. At last he awoke

again from uneasy slumber, and there was the morning rosy too.

It was Sunday. Tony left his bed, drew his curtains open, and pulled up his blind; and looking at his watch, he found that there was still more than an hour to be passed before his usual time of waking. It was now clear to him that something was wrong with him. He examined his fresh young face in the glass with solemn interest, and he imagined that he saw therein signs of the commencement of various maladies. Something must be done. He looked out of the window again, and felt the temptation of the morning. Air and exercise were the cheapest and easiest remedies within reach. He would go out into the air, and return to his bath when the man had put it ready. Quickly dressing himself in white flannel, with a cashmere scarf across his throat, and over all a warm pea-jacket with its collar turned up to his ears, he opened the window and jumped down on to the terrace. From the terrace he descended into the park. A light hoar-frost was on the grass; the sky was clear but cold; the freshness of the air set the boy's tennis-shoes in motion. Mr. Tony began to trot steadily (he was there for his health) across the grass in the direction of the main avenue.

Tony paused when he reached the road and considered his condition. He found with pleasure that he was better already; he congratulated himself on the means which he had taken to baffle the insidious enemy; he thought no more of the treacherous maladies which had seemed close upon him. He walked briskly along the road and away from the house, until presently he remembered how wise it is to vary the form of exercise, and on the instant his mind jumped to his own favorite little exercise. He glanced this way and that; nobody was in sight. So early in the Sunday morning rest was everywhere; it was wonderfully still; not even a twig was stirring. Tony moved on to the rough grass by the side of one of the great trees which formed the avenue, and under its protecting arms commenced his strange and imposing performance. With his feet firmly planted a little apart, his body bent slightly forward from the hips, and his shoulders braced tightly backward, he began to bend his knees and straighten them with a regular rhythmical movement, while as an accompaniment to the exercise he uttered again and again in his deepest tones the suggestive words "ninety-nine."

Tony was alone with Mother Nature, but not for long. Scarcely had he begun to repeat "ninety-nine" with an unvarying regularity, when another person appeared upon the road, advancing rapidly towards the house. This was a slight young man, but little older than Tony himself, in a great hurry, walking quickly though with short steps. The skirts of his black frock-coat, which was open, floated and fluttered behind him as he came; and his breast-pocket was so full of papers, that it hung heavily away from him, and seemed to draw him from the straight line as he hurried forward. His appearance was out of sympathy with the freshness of the morning and the clean air of the country. London was in his looks; and he seemed to have been up all night. His high hat, which was distinctly too large, had not been brushed since yesterday, nor had his clothes, which were otherwise so respectable. A thick little mat of black hair appeared on his forehead below his hat, and beneath the mat and from the keen, pale, nervous face a pair of black eyes looked, eager, restless, and feverishly given to observation. It seemed to be of importance to the universe that nothing should escape those eyes. About the whole man there was an air of earnest purpose and of self-confidence. Indeed, Mr. Beck was always hurrying to put something right; and so many other things were in need of his correcting influence, that it is no wonder that he did not find time to brush his hat.

To Mr. Beck hurrying up the road there was no sign of any less important presence, until, suddenly passing one of the large trees, he came close upon a boyish-looking individual conscientiously exercising himself on the grass. Mr. Beck stopped short with a nervous start, but with no sound; he had taught his nerves not to betray their sudden shock by noise; as an observer, he had found this education of his excitable nerves strictly necessary. He now stood still staring, and the interest which he had encouraged himself to find in all exhibitions of humanity grew strong within him. Here was something the like of which he had never yet seen. His fingers went of themselves to the bulging coat-pocket in which his note-book was buried; but, when he had dragged it out, he only twisted it about unopened in those same lean, and at present dirty, fingers, while he continued to look and look. He was indeed an observer of life.

Tony had not heard a sound. Any noise which the light tripping feet of the other had made on the road had been lost for Tony in the unceasing repetition of his great formula. "Ninety-nine, ninety-nine, ninety-nine!" he said, deepening his innocent tones as became the importance of the ceremony, and solemnly rising and sinking with the rhythmical bending and straightening of the knees. It was a rule of Radley Beck never to interrupt the progress of a phenomenon which might lead to more interesting developments. He stood watching with the liveliest interest, till Mr. Fotheringham, at length conscious of this strenuous and compelling observation, stopped between a "ninety" and a "nine," straightened his knees for the last time, and turned and stared in turn.

"Hah!" cried Mr. Beck in a high voice.

"Eh?" said Tony, rather shame-faced.

"May I ask the meaning?" asked Radley Beck, speaking quickly and with a certain precise pronunciation of words, which he had brought from Oxford and had not yet lost in London. "Is it a local form of religion? Survival of some country superstition? Sunday morning—by the roadside—sun-worship still to the fore—Ninety-nine what?" He seemed to be murmuring the headings of some paper. "Ninety-nine what?" he asked of Tony, smiling friendly, and inquiring.

"Oh, it's only a little sort of an exercise," said Tony, abashed by the extreme interest displayed in those eyes; then, as enthusiasm rose again within him, he added, "It's wonderfully good for you, you know—for the lungs and that."

"It is extremely interesting," said Mr. Beck, with his head on one side; "doubtless you are a guest at Langley Castle?"

"Yes," said Tony.

"Is Lord Lorrilaire there?"

"Oh! yes, he's there right enough," said Tony.

"Names of other guests?" said the stranger, inclining his head again towards his left shoulder.

"What?" asked Tony.

"Will you favor me with the names of the other guests at the Castle? So glad I met you."

"Thanks," said Tony; "but what do you want their names for? Are you a reporter?"

Mr. Beck smiled a smile full of meaning.

"Yes and no," he answered, "as we used to say at Balliol. I am a friend of Lord Lorrilaire."

Tony Fotheringham looked at the other with surprise, which was hardly complimentary.

"Well," he said, with some hesitation, "if you are a friend of Archie, of course—well, there's Mrs. Dormer for one, and there's good old Hickory for another—Sir Villiers Hickory, you know—and Mrs. Chauncey, and me, and Lenny——"

Mr. Beck, who had received each name with a little nod, here interrupted to ask who Lenny was; and hearing that it was Leonard Vale, he asked again with keener interest if it was the Leonard Vale about whom there had been a story.

"It was hushed up," he said; "yes; kept with some difficulty from the press."

"Oh, that was last year," said Tony.

"Quite true," said Mr. Beck; "no further public interest." After a moment he added, "And Lady Jane Lock is of the party with a daughter?"

"Yes," said Tony.

"Is a marriage probable?"

"Can't say," said Tony.

Mr. Beck wagged his head at him with a knowing manner.

"Is that all the party?" he asked, peering keenly at Mr. Fotheringham.

"That was all," said Tony; "but now there's old Hackbut and Mr. Palfrey."

"Hah!" cried out Mr. Beck with his highest note.

"What's the matter?" asked Tony rather crossly.

"And Lord Lorrilaire?" asked Mr. Beck; "what are his politics now?"

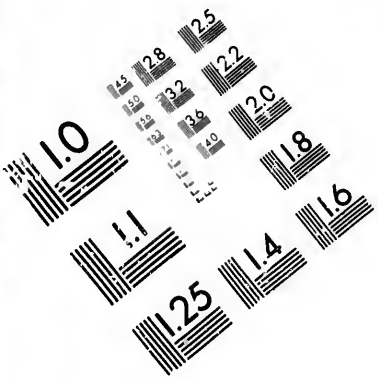
"Don't know," said Tony.

"You don't know!" echoed the other; "oh!" He shook his head archly. "You are very deep," he said. "There's a Tory meeting at Langstone this week; does Lord Lorrilaire take part?"

"Don't know," said Tony.

"Then after all," said Mr. Beck, as if to himself, "after all, Lord Lorrilaire is not a Conservative."

"Oh! yes, he is," said Tony; "all decent chaps are."



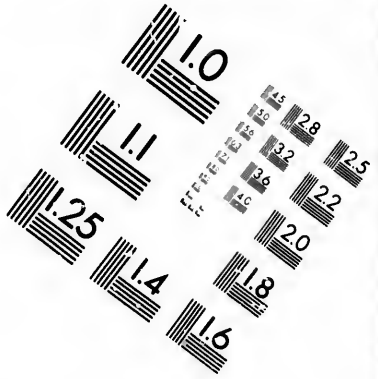
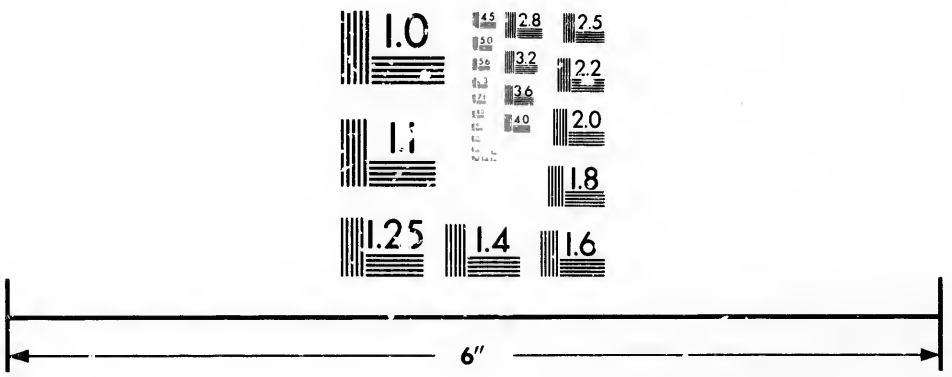
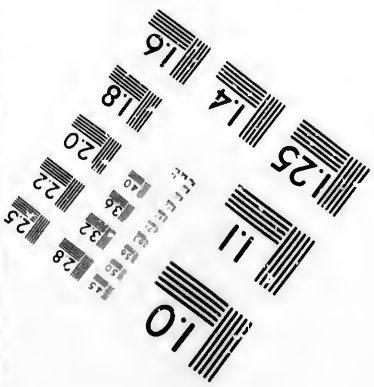
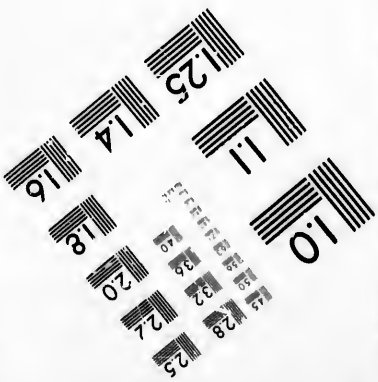


IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (MT-3)







Photographic
Sciences
Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

2.8
2.5
3.2
2.2
3.6
2.0
1.8
1.0

"Perhaps I am an indecent chap," said Mr. Beck—"most interesting! Now that exercise of yours? Would you repeat it once for me?"

This request at once softened the heart of Tony, and lulled to sleep his incipient suspicions. He began solemnly to rise and fall again, and to accompany the movement with his mystic numbers. Suddenly he stopped short; something in the motions had brought back all his doubts. "I say," he said, "what have you been pumping me for? It's all private, you know."

"Nothing is private nowadays," said Mr. Beck, smiling, and with soft emphasis.

"Oh, but I say," said Tony, with a look as if he would collar him.

"I will come without a struggle," said Mr. Beck setting out briskly again towards the house.

"Oh, but, you know," said Tony; "what are you going to do?"

"I am going to see Lord Lorrilaire."

"Yes; but what do you want with him?"

"I want to save him."

"Eh!"

"To save him. I am Beck." He stood still on the road and faced Tony. "I am Beck," he repeated.

"Good old Beck!" murmured Tony under his breath; but as he continued to stare with the same amazement, the other young man said again with his mild emphasis—

"I am Beck, of the *Rising Sun*."

"Do you keep a public?" asked Tony, still wondering.

"Keep a public? Hah! Ho, ho, hah! Yes, by Heaven, I do! That is what I do. I keep a public, the great British public; and I keep them straight. Is it possible that you do not know the *Rising Sun*—the rising journal—the most influential (mark the word!) circulation in the world? I'll put you in it—with a sketch—here you are!"

During Tony's repetition of his performance Radley Beck had been busy with his note-book, and he now displayed to the eyes of the astonished youth a lively sketch of a figure with bent knees, done with a few strokes of the pencil, and some notes added by the same instrument. "Modern masher—morning worship of goddess Hygeia—Ninety-nine—the mystic number and the expanded lung."

"Oh, by George! but——" began Tony.

"My other notes," continued Mr. Beck—"here they are—Approaching Marriage."

"But I never said there would be a marriage," cried Tony.

"It doesn't matter," said Beck; "it brings the matter to a point; it makes or mars. I am a nineteenth-century Providence. And it makes a paragraph too, and its contradiction makes another."

"Good old Beck!" murmured Tony again, with rising wonder.

They had begun again to move quickly towards the house, and Tony, without thinking, led the way towards the window of his room and began to enter. Mr. Beck watched him with interest, and no sooner had his leader got in, than he followed him nimbly over the window-sill.

"A nice room," said Mr. Beck, when he had entered; "a bath? H—m—m!"

He looked at it with interest.

"It's for me," said Tony anxiously.

"All right!" said Beck cheerfully; "I don't want it. But look sharp; and, when you have done, I'll put myself to rights."

He seated himself easily on Tony's bed, and regarded him critically with his head on one side and from beneath the unruly forelock which almost touched his thin black eyebrows.

Tony was much embarrassed. In spite of his experience of the world, he was essentially a modest boy, and he blushed at the thought of taking his bath under the aggressively observant eyes of this stranger. What if he were to see an account of his skin or figure in a number of the *Rising Sun*, or even a rude sketch of himself, sponge in hand? On the other hand, to make a fuss about the attendance of this person seemed to him absurd. He looked from his bath to his bed and back again with comical discomposure.

"Precisely," said the keen-eyed stranger; "I see; I will walk up and down on the terrace."

He slipped out of the window in a moment; but Tony was hardly out of his bath before his visitor was in again, and again seated on the bed. Tony was annoyed, and the more annoyed to feel himself blushing.

"You must forgive me," said Beck crisply; "it is such a chance to study the toilet of a masher."

"But I ain't a masher," said Tony, hurrying himself into some garments.

"That is what they all say," said Beck; "that is the sign of the masher. If you were not one, you would be flattered at being called a masher—but those flannel underclothes? Surely they are peculiar."

"Oh, yes," said Tony, zeal triumphing over modesty; "they're medicated."

"Whose patent?" asked Beck, and he made some rapid notes of Mr. Fotheringham's answers, purposing in some spare hour to interview the ingenious patentee. Then the soap caught his eye, and he made a note of that and of the valuable properties which Mr. Fotheringham ascribed to it. Indeed, nothing escaped him; he tried the springs of the bed while he sat on it, and then crept under it to examine its mechanism from below. For very hurry Tony was slower than usual in his dressing. He felt as if all the furniture, his very clothes and even himself, were about to be put up to auction; and, when at last he was dressed, he escaped with intense relief, though he left the stranger nimbly tripping about his room, and using his favorite hair-brushes.

CHAPTER XIV.

No sooner had Tony escaped from the inquiring stranger than he made haste to find his host, and to warn him of his extraordinary visitor.

"Never saw such a chap in my life," he said; but when Archie heard that the newcomer was Beck, he was vastly delighted, and laughed aloud for joy. That Beck should have hit on Fotheringham seemed to him a delightful chance, and full of humorous suggestions; and he knew in a moment, moreover, the cause of Beck's coming, and that seemed to him a joke even more amusing.

"He's all right," he said; "he was a friend of mine at Oxford; at least, we used to have tremendous discussions. And now he is sub-editor of a brand-new paper, which is to show up everybody for his good and put everything to

rights for the good of the universe. You never saw such a fellow, Tony? No, I'll bet you didn't. He used to tell us at Oxford that his hat covered half the cleverness in England."

"Good old Beck!" cried Tony cheerfully. After a minute he added thoughtfully, "His hat's a doosid sight too big for him."

"Ah, but you see, his head grows so quick," said Archie; "the hat will fit him before night."

"Oh, that's nonsense, you know," said Tony, wagging his close-cropped head wisely.

Archie was going at once to greet his former friend in Tony's room; but Tony assured him that he would interrupt Mr. Beck's toilet. They therefore went straight to breakfast; and, when they entered the breakfast-room, there was Mr. Radley Beck with his back to the fire, and his head on one side, looking wiser than a magpie. His toilet had not detained him long.

The rest of the guests assembled at Langley Castle were just settling themselves down to breakfast, some seated, others standing and inspecting the dishes on the side-table, but all obviously conscious of the presence of the remarkable stranger, who stood silent and smiling, and enchanted with the certainty that he was producing his effect. He loved to impress. He stood still silent and smiling when Archie came in, and did not go forward to meet him. He only looked at him, as if he would instantly see through him without an effort.

"Well, Becky," said Archie, coming to him and shaking his limp hand heartily, "this is capital!"

"I hope so," said Beck, breaking his impressive silence with speech like a bird's chirping; "I had an hour or two to spare, and I came to say something to you."

"Out with it, then," said Archie; "or have your breakfast first;" and he propelled Mr. Beck towards the table, introducing him by name, as he did so, to his other guests. Mr. Beck gave little bows and quick glances to right and left, and there was a general movement of interest; but the little gentleman would have been genuinely surprised, had he known that there was only one person present, besides his host, to whom his name suggested anything at all. This person was Mr. Palfrey, who after a good look rose from his chair and offered his large white hand with

a bland smile of comradeship, while he said, as if in search of complete certainty, "Mr Beck, of the——" and here he coughed, for he could not remember the name of the particular organ of public opinion with which the new-comer was connected.

"Yes," said Mr. Beck, looking sideways and upwards at the eminent politician; "Yes, Mr. Palfrey, I am Beck, of the *Rising Sun*."

"I am delighted to meet you at last," said Mr. Palfrey; I need not say that I have long known you in print."

Mr. Beck emitted a slight purring noise.

Young Lord Lorrilaire was delighted by the coming of this old acquaintance. He had guessed in a moment that Beck, hearing of the arrival of Lord Hackbut and Mr. Palfrey, had started on the instant to prevent him from being captured by the Conservative party. It was so like Beck. Archie foresaw much amusement in eluding both Lord Hackbut and Mr. Beck. It was a joke which suited his present humor; and there was only one person with whom he would share it. He seized the first chance of speaking to Dora alone, and was made even more happy by her ready sympathy. Indeed, Dora was content with the whole aspect of the game. Elizabeth still kept her room, though her mother stated curtly and with ill-concealed chagrin that there was nothing the matter with her. Lady Jane Lock's grimness was itself strong evidence that Dora's side was winning; and Lady Jane seemed to think it hardly worth while, even in answer to her host's questions, to try to make her child's indisposition interesting. The truth is, that Lady Jane was astounded by Elizabeth's obstinacy, and half inclined to say that she would not try to do a mother's duty to a daughter so ungrateful. She was very red and very straight; and she would allow nothing but arrowroot and nourishment of a like kind to be sent up to Elizabeth, who was a young lady of most healthy appetite; but, though she maintained an appearance of firmness, she was evidently despondent. And so Dora Rutherford was well content, seeing that the dangerous girl was sulking, as she said, in her room, and that Archie for his part showed no depression of spirits. And so too she listened with rising pleasure to Archie's quick sketch of the intentions of his political friends. It all suited her game admirably well. The young man's mind would be

busy with politics for that day at least; and therein was the day's safety. She encouraged him to amuse himself by dexterous evasions, and foresaw amusement for herself too in the sight of the sport and in the society of these interesting men.

Lord Hackbut did not appear at breakfast; but when he came downstairs he at once asked for Lord Lorrilaire; and for a staunch and uncompromising supporter of the establishment, he showed a most strange annoyance at hearing that his young host had gone to church. "What did he go there for?" he said with a growl, which may have been an oath. He was in a somewhat fiery humor, not certain that there was not a threatening of gout. At the sight of Mr. Beck regarding him with his jackdaw air and his mysterious smile, he uttered another growl, which may have been a greeting, turned his back, and shut himself for the morning in the smoking room, of which he locked the door. He pretended to be deaf, when Beck soon afterwards came and shook the handle.

Returning from church, Archie saw Beck awaiting him on the terrace and Lord Hackbut's man at the front door. Beck came hurrying, but had scarcely opened his mouth, when the servant presented Lord Hackbut's compliments and said that his lordship would take it as a kindness if his lordship would come and see his lordship in the smoking-room. With cheerful friendliness and an air of pleasing all parties, Archie passed his arm through Beck's, and with a nod to Dora, led his friend away to the smoking-room. He talked, as he led him, with a fine flow of words; and when they were now close to the door of the smoking-room, he made a remark which he knew to be what he called a sure draw for Beck. So they entered the room both talking at once; and Archie, shaking hands with Lord Hackbut, appealed to him to judge between them. The old lord remained silent, and looked at Mr. Beck with a very obvious intention; and Radley Beck for his part hung his head on one side, smiled and remained. Archie, ignoring the desire of each, continued to chatter for a few minutes, and then seeming to remember suddenly a forgotten duty, uttered some words of apology as he fled, shut the door behind him, and left his two pursuers together.

At luncheon both Lord Hackbut and Mr. Beck appeared; but neither of them took part in the general conversation.

Only, as the meal drew to a close, the old lord filled a pause by asking incisively across the table—"Mr. Peek, do you go back to town to-day?" And, as the other gentleman smiled and murmured "Beck," he added, "I hear that you brought no luggage with you."

"Oh, never mind," cried Archie to Beck, for he, like everybody else, had stopped to listen; "I am sure Tony will lend you any amount of clothes."

Tony turned a face of amazement and comical indignation on his friend; and Beck began to shake his head.

"I am bound to be back to-night," he said, moving his little shoulders as if he were suddenly reminded of the weight of the world.

"But at least you'll stay to dinner," said Archie; "I am sure that Tony——"

"Oh, I say," said Tony; "yes, of course; I should be awfully glad," he added, "but really and truly I've only one dress suit, you know."

Nevertheless Archie insisted that Mr. Beck should return to the office of the *Rising Sun* by the latest train; and Mrs. Dormer's permission having been asked and obtained, it was settled that the sub-editor should dine in his morning clothes.

It now seemed as if Lord Hackbut had made up his mind to defer operations until after the departure of the irritating little man, whose presence increased the likelihood of an attack of gout, for, when luncheon was done, he betook himself again to solitude and an old volume of "Baily's Magazine," and made no further attempt to secure an interview with his host.

Beck, on the contrary, aware that his time was short, came straight to Lord Lorrilaire and said, without preamble, that he had come for a short talk and must have it. Archie laughed and did not refuse; but he led Mr. Beck with other of his guests through all the gardens and hot-houses, and showed him every horse in the stables, before he would allow him to begin the confidential talk; and when he did allow him to begin, he displayed the most provoking flippancy, making paradoxical excuses for the Conservative party, maintaining that it was more liberal than the Liberal, and arguing that it was absurd of the *Rising Sun*, or any other organ or organist, to care a jot whether he, Lord Lorrilaire, enrolled himself with

"the Ins" or "the Outs." Finally he attacked Beck with great good-humor, reminding him that he used to be an avowed disciple of Mazzini, and asking him with what eyes the great Italian patriot, the preacher of the highest motives in political affairs, would regard the methods and manners of the new catch-penny or catch-halfpenny journalism. Radley Beck shook his head but kept his temper, and made a few neat remarks in defence of his business; but he gained no knowledge whatever of Lord Lorrilaire's present position or future intentions.

When the party met in the drawing-room before dinner, Archie found an opportunity and told Dora Rutherford of the success of his day; but Dora was not so sure that his success was final. "Look!" she said, directing his attention first to Lord Hackbut and then to Mr. Beck; "neither of them looks a bit crestfallen; they are both as pleased as Punch."

"That's because it's time for dinner," said Archie, and he went away smiling to offer his arm to Lady Jane Lock, and to ask after her daughter.

When they entered the dining-room, Dora found with keen pleasure that her place was between Lord Hackbut and Mr. Beck, who had taken her in. She found, as she had guessed, that both men were in great good-humor, and she promptly set herself the task of increasing their amiability. She knew by instinct that this was to be done by listening with intelligence and charm. Of the two men Lord Hackbut was by far the more attentive to his dinner; and Mr. Beck, whose favorite food and drink were bloaters and soda-water, was able to favor his charming neighbor with a little series of his choicest remarks. Naturally the first topic was the surprising fortune of Lord Lorrilaire, and Mr. Beck spoke neatly and tersely of the Archie Rayner of their Oxford days. Dora tried to draw from him his opinion of the transformed Lord Lorrilaire; but he slipped over the subject with a few general remarks. "What he needs now," he said, "is advertisement. He should hand himself over to me. With his wealth and name he only needs to be forced on the attention of the public, and there he is—or rather where isn't he? To blush unseen is an anachronism—it is contrary to the spirit of Democracy. Even the modest primrose has come out from the river's brim; it is a badge, a power; it is a great deal more than a primrose."

Dora murmured her doubt whether Archie would ever care to become prominent, and asked with an enchanting deference "if perhaps Archie would not do well to content himself with the duties and pleasures of a country gentleman." The sub-editor scouted the idea of a man of ability contenting himself with pottering about his property and riding after a fox. "All out of date," he said. "He must accept the democracy, and exterminate the fox."

Dora gave a little cry of horror.

"Horses are an anachonism," said Beck, "at least as a means of locomotion. They will be the food of the democracy. To kill your own food for fun is atrocious in these days. Archie must give up the monotonous pheasant, and let the children go nutting in his woods."

"And mustn't a country gentleman shoot or ride any more?" asked Dora.

"Certainly, if he wish to," said Mr. Beck, smiling upon the fair questioner; "he can shoot glass balls and ride a tricycle."

"Oh!" cried Dora; and "What's that?" asked Lord Hackbut, turning towards her with his most amiable grin.

"Mr. Beck says that the democracy will eat horses," she said.

"I should not wonder," said the old lord, who was as famous for his knowledge of horses as of the political situation; "and asses too," he added, with a most carnivorous grin.

Mr. Beck was enchanted by the fair lady, who listened to him with so keen an interest. Her manner of listening gave him a higher opinion of her cleverness than if she had dazed him with epigrams, and increased also with every moment his admiration of her beauty. He pressed upon her the names of his favorite photographers, and shook his head gravely at her contempt of a purely chemical notoriety.

"It is out of date," he said; "my dear lady; it is an anachronism, this absurd fear of the public, the generous, warm-hearted, inquisitive, enormous public. The Democracy wants beauty in the shop-windows. Be photographed! let me draw attention to you—a line—a paragraph. Permit the public to be interested in your personality."

He eyed her askance like a snake-charmer; but Dora would only laugh and shake her head in her turn.

"Write for me too," he said to her, when the moment had come for the ladies to go. "An occasional paragraph or sketch—'The world as seen by a woman of fashion!'—It would be enormous."

"Oh, no! rather small, I think," said Dora, as she moved towards the door.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was no doubt that Lord Hackbut had dined well; he seemed to show it in every crease of his face and of his clothing. He had clean forgotten the threatening gout; he felt expansive; he put a great arm on the back of his chair and looked down the table at Sir Villiers Hickory.

"Villiers," he said, "this is good wine. It is too good for these boys."

"It belongs to one of them," said Sir Villiers, drily.

"So it does, by George!" said Lord Hackbut, gazing upon Archie; "what luck the boy has! To be young and to have such wine to drink; to be young and to have as many horses as he wants; and coverts too, where foxes and pheasants breed peacefully side by side, begad! as in the Golden Age. Lorrilaire, I drink your health! I had nearly advised you to leave politics to Palfrey, and to breed horses—not to eat, Mr. Peek." He displayed the broken tooth in a grin of contentment.

"Beck," murmured Beck, mildly persistent.

Archie laughed, but felt uncomfortable; he did not like to be the topic of conversation.

"He has got the best house in the county," continued Lord Hackbut, "and the best stables and the best gardens, and—and the best cook, and——"

"The best cream," said Tony Fotheringham, wagging his head with decision.

"The best what?" cried out the old lord.

"Cream," said Tony; "oh! it's tremendously important; it's so good for the nerves, you know."

"Nerves!" growled Lord Hackbut; "men don't have nerves."

"We've all got 'em," said Tony, "except Archie. Lenny's awfully bad with 'em."

"Eh? what?" said Leonard Vale, starting at the sound of his name. He had been absorbing claret silently, and thinking of other things.

"Look at that," said Tony, triumphantly. "Good old Lenny! Did you see him jump?"

"It is a nervous age," said Radley Beck, sententiously.

"Were we nervous, Villiers?" asked Lord Hackbut with a growl of scorn. "These boys are a puny race, and fit to think of nothing but their digestions."

"It is a tremendously important thing to think about," said Tony, with raised eyebrows.

"We didn't know we had digestions."

"Ah! we know we've got 'em," said Tony—"at least, I mean we know we haven't got 'em."

"Very neat, Mr. Tony!" said Beck, "very neat indeed! I must make use of that."

"You ought to drink," shouted Lord Hackbut, drowning the last words of Mr. Beck; "drink is what you want. Wine like this would make men of you, if anything could. Everything that's worth anything has gone out with drink. Statesmanship has gone out with drink. Strip Palfrey, and you will find a blue ribbon on him somewhere."

It was now Mr. Palfrey's turn to start. He caught Beck's look of keen inquiry, and shook his head with a smile which seemed to say that everybody made allowances for "dear old Hackbut!" It was a smile which Mr. Palfrey was obliged to have always ready when he was in the society of "dear old Hackbut."

"And as for you boys, by George!" said Lord Hackbut, "I do believe that you drink nothing but lemon and soda. Your blood is lemon and soda."

Mr. Palfrey led the general laughter; but Archie expostulated. "We ain't so bad as that," he said; "here's Tony."

"Oh, I say, don't set him on me," said Tony.

"Tony is as strong as a house," said Archie.

"Mr. Tony is very well ribbed up," said Beck, "if I may be allowed the expression." Tony blushed; he felt the penetrating eyes of the little sub-editor and the old lord glowering upon him with terrific eyebrows. "Doubtless," said the latter grimly, "he is as strong as they build houses nowadays."

"Capital! capital!" murmured Beck; "you must let me make use of that."

"Then you must pay me for it," said Lord Hackbut, turning upon him, "a penny a line and sixpence for myself."

"You would be cheap at the price," chirped Beck with animation.

"Or a shilling, because I'm a lord," said Hackbut; "it's a commercial age. And you ought to drink too, Mr. Sub-editor; you ought to drink something better than printer's ink and water. Drink must come in again. Look at these boys! They are all grudging me my bottle of claret because they want to begin pulling at their rubbishy chopped-straw in paper. Drink, you young dogs, and we'll have another bottle! That fellow looks as if it would do him good. Here you, Mr. What's-yer name Vale, fill your glass and drink, as your fathers drank, to Wine and Women."

Leonard, who had been taking but little notice of the old lord's talk, smiled responsive at this direct invitation. He put his unopened cigarette-case back into his pocket, and filled his glass again. "Women and Wine!" he said, and drank.

"No, no!" cried out Lord Hackbut; "Wine and Women, that is the order of merit—and both between twenty and thirty years old!"

"Lord Hackbut is very shocking, Mr. Palfrey," said Beck, smiling sweetly across the table; "it is lucky that we know our age, and know it to be one of progressive temperance. After all, it is an age of progress."

"An age of humbug!" shouted Lord Hackbut; "we are living in an age of decadence, I tell you; and we pretend not to know it. There's not a feature worth mentioning, though I can't mention the worst of 'em. We are all Romans of the worst period, given up to luxury and effeminacy, and caring for nothing but money. Courage is so out of fashion that we boast of cowardice. We care no more for beauty in art, but only for a brutal realism. Sport has lost its manliness, and is a matter of pigeons from a trap, or a mountain of crushed pheasants to sell to your own tradesman. Religion is coming down to jugglers, and table-turnings and philandering with religions brought, like the rites of Isis, from the East; and as for patriotism, it is turned on, by George! like beer, at election times, or worked like a mechanical doll by wire-

pullers! What is our foreign policy except to sit trembling, and trying to think we aren't afraid of the irruption of barbarians from the North? I tell you it is an age of humbug and long-winded talk. Why, if we were not in the plain decadence, Palfrey would be leading a colony to West Australia, instead of sitting here with an undigested speech in his stomach. There is not an ounce of manliness in the country; and as for the women——"

Here he paused, and only Tony was heard murmuring, almost inaudibly, "Good old Hackbut!"

"Oh," said Mr. Beck sweetly; "oh, spare the gentle sex!"

"The gentle sex!" cried out the old lord with his most savage grin. "Nothing draws your gentle sex like a child hanging by its toe-nails to the high trapeze, or the chance of a wounded pigeon in their laps. If there were a Gladiator fight in the Albert Hall next season, and the beaten man went down, the women would be ready with their little thumbs; they'd want his blood. Yes, my young friends, you all have the honor of belonging to one of the most corrupt generations of the human race. To find your equal one must go back to the worst times of the Roman Empire, and look devilish close then."

"I always thought the Romans were a bad lot," said Tony, wagging his head.

"And yet," said Mr. Beck, slily, "we have learned something—something since those days."

"Yes," growled Lord Hackbut, "the use of dynamite. And now," he continued after a minute, "smoke and be—look at that young Vale there," he cried, interrupting himself; "do you mean to say that he would be possible in any other age?" The old lord grinned on Lenny, who smiled without indignation in reply, and lighted his cigarette.

"Oh, Lord Hackbut," said Mr. Beck, expostulating.

"And you too, Mr. Peek," cried Lord Hackbut, who was running a muck with keen enjoyment, "you would be impossible in any but a corrupt age. What do you say, Lorrilaire? I don't know how bad you are; but you agree with me?"

"Not I," said Archie.

"That's flat, any way," said Lord Hackbut, brought to a sudden stand, and grinning not unkindly.

"If I thought we were as bad as that," said Mr. Beck, after a pause, "I should not care to live."

"There you make another mistake," said Lord Hackbut, turning upon him; "it's uncommonly amusing to live in an age of decadence. You see the funniest sights, and you get every conceivable luxury, and you die before the irruption of the barbarians."

"But seriously, Lord Hackbut," said Beck sweetly, "don't you think that the Democracy——"

"Democracy be damned!" said Lord Hackbut.

After this Lord Hackbut, who had had enough of his wild career, fell into a refreshing silence; and presently, as the air was becoming fragrant with the smoke of cigarettes, a footman entered to say that the brougham was at the door.

Radley Beck slipped at once from his chair and looked at his watch. He said good-bye to Lord Hackbut with a pressing manner. "I really do wish," he said softly, "that you would write me some letters—proofs of the Decadence, or some such title."

"Penny a line are my terms," grumbled the old lord in answer. "Go home and wind up your *Rising Sun*, and bring along the Golden Age."

Mr. Palfrey got up to say good-bye to the sub-editor; and Archie went with him to the front-door, and insisted on lending him an ulster which was some sizes too big for him. With his foot on the step of the carriage, Beck took Archie's hand and held it a minute, and said with soft insistance, "I shall save you in spite of yourself."

"All right!" said Archie; and the brougham rolled quickly away.

It seemed as if Lord Hackbut had talked too much. For the rest of that evening he said scarcely an audible word, though an attentive ear might have heard occasional mutterings as of a storm passing away.

"What do you have such a friend as that Peek for?" he asked Archie, as he took his bed-room candle.

"Oh, he's not a bad chap," said Archie.

"He's a little cad!" said the old lord.

"Oh, no; I don't think so," said Archie.

The old lord looked at him again, as if he were surprised at his daring to differ from him. "You have your own opinions it seems," he said, and went muttering and chuckling up the stairs.

On the next morning Archie expected a more serious conversation with Lord Hackbut, and had made up his mind to submit to it with patience and respect; but, though the old lord stared at him at breakfast, and said something about appealing from Philip drunk to Philip sober, which may have referred to his extravagant talk of the day before, and to a purpose of more temperate discussion, he allowed the hours to pass without a further sign. Only later in the day, when Archie, roaming aimlessly about his extensive dwelling-place, which was still so strange to him, wandered into the library, he found Lord Hackbut there with Mr. Palfrey and Sir Villiers Hickory. They were all so much interested in their conversation that they did not notice him for a moment; and, when they saw him, they all smiled upon him divers smiles, but pursued their subject no further until he left them.

And so this Monday passed away uneventfully, a grey doubtful day, and distinguished by a certain dulness which seemed to oppress the whole party, even the young host himself. The novel amusement of abandoning himself to the chances of life was beginning to pall upon him. The desire to will something for himself was stirring again, and made him restless; and he was annoyed at the same time to find that there was nothing for which he cared enough, on that day at least, to make him purpose the attainment of it. He was sick of a slight malady of real indifference, which was unlike, and far less pleasant than letting himself drift with a lively curiosity; he told himself that he was sick, and hoped that it would pass with the day. And, under all, the boyish vagabond was awake in him again; and, as he wandered from room to room of his spacious abode, he was bored with heavy curtains and thick noiseless carpets, which seemed the adjuncts to a padded listless life; and his fancy went a-roving on upland paths, on broad hill-sides, by hanging woods and folded sheep, or tramping on the good high road from country loneliness to the strange city, and to the crowded quays whence ships went sailing to every corner of the world. It seemed better to be a gipsy pedlar than the lord of broad acres, to wander at his will than to yield to a round of dull and doubtful duties which others found for him. However, he must stay and play the host awhile, and only his fancy might go roving.

The only event of the day which was worthy of the name was the reappearance of Miss Lock; and even this excited the most languid interest. Dora Rutherford promptly roused herself to attention; but, noting with satisfaction the apparent indifference of Archie, she yielded again to the prevailing calm. More than once in the course of the day she felt an inclination to scream, but restrained it; and, when the society of the other women became intolerable, she shut herself in her room and wrote a long letter to her husband. Then she felt better, and slipped out of the house for a solitary walk, which probably would have restored her to her wonted state had she not encountered at the very door Lady Jane Lock accoutred for her daily constitutional, who annexed her without more ado, and marched her for the due number of miles, talking to her and at her with unflagging resolution.

Dora submitted with a meekness which surprised herself, and made her think that she was going to be ill; she could find no comfort but in the fact that she had been a good girl, and had written a nice letter to her husband. She felt so meek, that she was inclined to let slip the destinies of all young men whose lives she had determined to arrange for them, to return humbly to her home, and to limit her abilities to varying the daily dinners.

The world became somewhat gayer at dinner-time, though a short return of gloom was caused by some comments of Lord Hackbut, which were more audible than he knew. Becoming aware of the presence of Elizabeth Lock, he remarked to Mrs. Chauncey that women with daughters to marry were lost to all sense of decency, and a moment later, that he hated a girl in a country house, for it stopped all conversation. Of those who heard these opinions, the only one who showed no embarrassment was Elizabeth herself. She looked at Lord Hackbut with a slow wonder, in which contempt was hardly indicated; and she looked so handsome, that the old lord, regarding her with more attention, expressed his approval of her beauty with the same unintentional distinctness with which he had regretted her appearance. It was one of his deaf days, on which he was apt to surprise the world with comments more than usually candid; but there were some who maintained that this deafness was maliciously assumed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE restlessness of young Lord Lorrilaire did not pass with the day. When he had said good-night to his latest guest and was alone in his room, he felt hot, and opened his window wide to view the boundless world of out-of-doors. Out-of-doors had a great charm for Archie; and as he looked now at the wide country, which lay mystical under a rising moon, his fancy went beyond his own park palings, beyond his farms and fields, out on to the common road which had led so many million feet from marvel to marvel. He thought of the untrodden dazzling tops of the Rocky Mountains, and felt his face tingle with their rarest air; but even the next parish offered freedom and adventure. Even in the next parish he would be out of the toils which he fancied closing on him. His place seemed a burden, and politics, and marriage. Surely his boyhood was not ended yet, nor need not be. Surely one more spring might set his heart longing for pilgrimage, as men's hearts longed in Chaucer's smokeless England, and he might tread the road with light pockets, and whistle in the presence of the foot-pad.

Archie was discontented. He thought of the three gentlemen whom he classed all together as old, and whom he had interrupted in the library. What had they been plotting? What leading-string had they been making for his wild colt-blood; he was inclined to kick. And he thought of Lady Jane Lock too with a certain indignation. It was not for himself that he was indignant with this admirable woman, but because her determined prosaic image came between him and another. She withered all the poetry which was in him; she was an embodiment of settlements and things, and of all which the world, that world which to the boy staring at moonlight seemed shallow, jabbering and preposterous, said every day of love and marriage. Some airy hidden fancies of his heart fell dead at the intrusive thought of Lady Jane. Archie felt, instead of the placidity which he had expected to return

to him with night, an increase of disquiet. It was as if some sprite had caught him. He was impelled, as it were, to be out and away, if it were only into his own coverts. The old poaching song came unbidden to his lips; it was a shining night and the season of year; the idea of poaching in his own wood and the chance of being hunted by his own keeper were almost irresistible. He looked and longed; but at last he refrained, and closed the window. Perhaps he could not have made this great renunciation, had he not made up his mind that on the next day he would do something. He would be away from his oppressive castle all day long. He would rise early and be off before his guests were stirring. He would drive himself over to Langstone, catch the early train to London, and have a talk with Tom Rutherford. He had not known Tom Rutherford until he had married Dora; and yet of all his friends he was the one to whom he turned most readily and with the surest trust when he wanted advice. He wanted advice now; he did not wish to be swallowed alive; and even if Rutherford could not help him, a day, a whole blue day, would be his with all its possibilities, and at least sixteen hours in which he could think for himself. Soothed by this purpose of early flight, he lay warm in bed, and promptly fell into a deep and happy sleep.

Among other gifts, Archie had that of waking when he meant to wake; and so, when morning came, he opened his sleepy eyes at the precise hour. He bestirred himself and got the water for his own bath, and he did not ring his bell until he was nearly dressed. Then he summoned his astonished man, and sent him to order some breakfast for him at once and the dog-cart soon after. When he had breakfasted and was driving himself through the keen air, he felt a great elation; he was adrift no more; he felt himself a man with a man's will; he was bound to will something before night. Nevertheless he certainly had not left his boyhood behind him; the cart was well hung and the horse a good goer, and, as he sent him along the good smooth road, he felt as happy as a lord. After all he was one.

A great surprise awaited him at Langstone. As Archie was driving quickly towards the town, a local bill-sticker was employed in pasting fine large bills on all vacant hoardings and other suitable places. He too had risen

early ; and already the waking town was gay with many posters, when Lord Lorrilaire approached its outskirts. Just where the country faded into the town, the first bill posted on a paling met the driver's eye. The paling was uneven and the bill distorted, but Archie saw the name of Mr. Palfrey, and knew that this was a notice of the coming great Conservative meeting. But the strange thing was that when he had passed this notice by, Archie found that he had an impression of having seen his own name. It was impossible, he thought, and yet he looked with startled curiosity for the next bill. He had not long to wait ; here was a hoarding with half a dozen of them, and half a dozen copies of his own name stared back at young Lord Lorrilaire. He had pulled his horse up short, and sat staring. He could not read it otherwise. It was announced that the Rt. Hon. Mr. Palfrey, M.P., would speak to the assembled Conservatives at Langstone, and in letters almost equally impressive it was asserted that the chair would be taken by Lord Lorrilaire.

Archie burst out laughing. He was by no means pleased, and was surprised by his own laughter ; but it was thus that his thronging emotions expressed themselves ; they exploded in laughter. Then he remembered the decorous groom, who was sitting at his back with stiff collar and folded arms, and who only allowed himself to read the bills out of the corner of his eye ; this checked his laughter. He said to himself with decision that this was too bad of his uncle Villiers. He had consented cheerfully to receive Mr. Palfrey as his guest ; but not a word had been said to him about even attending this much-advertised meeting. And here he found himself announced to the universe, or to such part of the universe as it might concern, as chairman, president, patron—ticketed for ever and ever, for it seemed to him to amount to this, as the leading Tory of the countryside. He glanced forward up the street, which was still almost empty, and saw the bill-sticker moving to a new point of vantage ; he started his horse at the sight, half meaning at the moment to rob him of his wares, but, when he came to him, and had called him, he did not know what to say. He put down his hand for a bill and read it slowly through ; and when the man looked as if he expected its return, Archie told him curtly who he was, folded the bill and put it in the inner

pocket of his great-coat. He felt himself blush, as he named himself, and knew that he blushed for this new publicity, this wide cast advertisement. He was indignant with those old rogues at home, who had arranged this plan; his hand was on the rein to turn the horse and urge him back with even greater speed, and his lips were beginning to mutter the protest which he would address to his uncle, and the excuses which he would offer to Mr. Palfrey. He knew now why Lord Hackbut had postponed his confidential talk with him; he laughed again at the thought of the wise old Hackbut. His hand was on the rein, but he did not press it. It became clear to him, thinking quick thoughts, that it was more then ever good to hurry up to town and see Tom Rutherford. He thought that he, if any man, could point to the wise course in these strange circumstances. With sudden anxiety he pulled out his watch and looked at it; he had no time to spare; the station was at the other end of the town. Ten minutes later he was in the quick morning train and speeding to London.

It was among the well-known advantages of Langley Castle that it stood at a convenient distance from London, withdrawn in solitary dignity far beyond the circle of suburban villas, but not so far withdrawn, but that certain good trains could do the journey to or from Langstone in a little more than an hour. After little more than an hour Archie was in a hansom, and driven rapidly through the streets to the Rutherford's house.

CHAPTER XVII.

Tom Rutherford was in his study, but he was neither reading nor writing; he was thinking of his wife. Thoughts of Dora had been more than usually intrusive; and at last he had left his table and stood with his back to the fire, frowning a little, condemning himself for weakness, wishing that his wife would come back to him, determined not to ask her. It was one of his fixed rules not to interfere with his wife's amusements unless he was sure that he had good reason for such interference; it was one of his fixed beliefs that Dora, though she amused herself with the

zeal proper to her years, would always amuse herself with discretion. If she was happy at Langley Castle, he would not call her home; he hardly confessed to himself that he was hurt because she did not come uncalled. He obstinately asserted Dora's right of amusement; and maintained against himself her natural right of flitting, while he was chained to the desk. He had fallen headlong into love of this bright creature, in part of her innocent waywardness, her glancing charm; and he told himself in the plain English, with which he always spoke to himself and to others, that he would be both brute and fool if he limited her happy liberty without sure cause. Thus the rule of his treatment of her was non-interference. If ever he should feel that interference were right, he would act promptly and with decision; but there should be no petty meddling with her wishes. And yet he loved her, as a man of strong feelings loves, who has chosen not to fritter his feelings away but to control them. He loved her; and it hurt him that she had shown no desire yet to come back to him from this holiday visit. When he married, he had pictured her always beside him, the charm and ornament of his industrious life, the Ariel to his toiling Caliban. He told himself roundly that he had been a fool not to foresee the truth. To foresee facts a little less incorrectly than other men was the claim which he silently made for himself, the reason which he gave himself for believing that he would be a more trusty guide than some others for his contemporaries. And now in this matter, this most important matter of the companion of his life, he confessed that he had deceived himself, blinded by love like a school-boy, as he told himself. This was the disappointment of his married life.

As he stood with his back to the fire, he was no bad representative of the race. There was a lack of grace; it was strength and firmness which the face, form, and attitude suggested. He looked strong and well made as the solid old-fashioned furniture, the heavy writing-table and wide book-cases, which he preferred, and as free from useless decorations. He had the fine fair skin, too, of the typical Englishman; and he could lead a life mainly sedentary for months at a time without losing his fresh color. Such men seem to have stored up some impossible supply of healthy air in the days when they excelled on

the river or in the football field, and to refresh themselves therewith in the office or the library. Though he was a man of middle age, he showed no trace of time, unless his figure was a little more set and the brown hair a little thinner on the top of his head. His face was ruddy, his eyes clear and blue, and his nose aquiline, broad in the bridge, a little depressed at the point. His square chin had its firmness emphasized by a deep cleft. The first impression which he made was of a man conspicuously clean-looking, and the next was one of power. As to his temper, the observer would guess in a moment that he was amiable, generous, quick to feel anger, and strong to control it when he chose to control it. Indeed his openness was striking; the most suspicious acquaintance could not suspect his straightforwardness, his plain dealing.

Planted on his hearth-rug and staring at the carpet, with a slight frown on his broad forehead and his sensitive lips pressed firmly together, Tom Rutherford was disturbed by the entrance of his servant. He looked up with prompt inquiry, for his man had a standing order not to come into that room in the morning without adequate cause. He flushed as he heard that Lord Lorrilaire was there; this arrival was in some sort an answer to his wishes; he would hear of Dora. He had to wait, however, for news of his wife.

Archie came in so full of his own affairs, that he had hardly shaken his friend's hand before he unfolded the poster and laid it on his writing-table. "Look at that," he said. Tom came from the fireplace and looked.

"Well?" he said.

"I never was asked," said Archie; "I never heard a word about it; and I am advertised all over Langstone like this." He rapped the offending instrument.

"Do you mean," asked Tom deliberately, while the flush deepened on his cheek, "do you mean that they have announced you to preside at a meeting without asking your permission?"

"Yes," said Archie; "pretty fair cheek, isn't it?"

"And who on earth has had the sublime impertinence to do such a thing?"

"Oh, it must be my uncle Villiers," said Archie, "he and old Hackbut."

Tom laughed. "No, I won't laugh," he said with

decision; "it is monstrous. Why, what are you? I thought you were a Liberal."

"So I am," said Archie; "or at least I was—yes, I am a Liberal!"

"Well, of all——" began Tom Rutherford, but stopped for want of adequate words.

He saw it all. He knew both Lord Hackbut and Sir Villiers Hickory; and it needed no explanation to make it clear to him that this was a bold stroke for the capture of a young politician at a period of doubt. He laughed again, but he was none the less extremely indignant.

"You must stop it," he said, letting his good fist fall on the treacherous bill.

"But can I?" asked Archie; "you see the meeting is for to-morrow night."

"Of course you can," said Tom; "you can go home and tell your uncle that you won't go to the meeting at all!"

This advice agreed admirably with Archie's inclination; but yet he hesitated. He told Tom that he felt under great obligations to his uncle, to whose industry and knowledge of the world it was mainly due that coming into a title and fortune had been so little of a bore. He confessed to him, too, that he was now so little zealous for the interests of the Liberal party, that it often seemed to him absurd to oppose the traditions of a long sequence of Lords Lorrilaire for the sake of the mere lees of a boyish enthusiasm.

"I was beginning to think," he said, with a rather rueful smile, "that I might as well settle down into the groove, and do my duty to the place and to the county; and that, so far as I had to have any politics, I might as well wear the old clothes that are expected of the family."

Tom listened with visible impatience.

"Might as well!" he echoed, "might as well! The worst phrase in the language! As for the Liberal party, I am at two with its leaders myself for the present; and, unless they come to me, I shall take no active part in politics. But I am a Liberal none the less. Liberalism is not the fad of Mr. This or Mr. That; it existed long before they were born, and will exist long after they and their fads are gone. I take the liberty to be a Liberal." He began to walk up and down, as the warlike spirit

increased within him. "People say," he went on, "that one party is as Liberal as the other. That may be true; and, if it is, I prefer to belong to the party which is Liberal by descent—though perhaps that is a Conservative sentiment. The clothes belong to the Liberals, though, by Jove! if they will go bathing for seventeen years or more, they can't wonder at their being stolen by somebody. But all this has nothing to do with your case." Here he stopped opposite to Archie, and became very emphatic. "If you were the bluest old Tory," he said, "who ever wore top-boots in a drawing-room, you should not let yourself be advertised, like a pig for sale, without your own consent. If you take my advice, you will go back to Sir Villiers Hickory and say that you will not attend the meeting, and that he may be chairman himself."

"Yes," said Archie; "that is what I wished to do, but I wanted your advice first."

"I am really glad you cared to ask me," said Tom, with a quick change from righteous wrath to warm affection.

"I shall come often, if you don't look out," said Archie.

"All right," said Tom, who was extremely shy of protestations.

"But look here," said Archie; "here's another question. What excuse shall I give to the good people of Langstone for my non-appearance?"

"Your uncle must see to that," said Tom; "he made the announcement, he must find the excuse. Only of course he must not say anything about your sympathy with the cause. Tell him that if he says that, you will placard Langstone with a confession of Radical faith. My dear boy, you are much too good a fellow to be worked by wires like an automaton doll. A man is bound to choose for himself in all matters."

Archie laughed. He readily consented to stay to luncheon. He already felt a pleasant excitement in the coming interview with his uncle; and he was heartily glad that this matter was settled. He was inclined to talk, and he told Tom Rutherford his first impressions of the county and of his possessions therein, of Langley Castle and the people now assembled there. Only, as the older man did not fail to note, he said next to nothing of

Lady Jane Lock and her daughter; and this omission was the cause of the greater emphasis with which Tom, when he had listened long in silence, expressed his opinion that Archie was acquiring a very dangerous habit of passivity. Archie laughed at his warning; but Tom asserted that he would wake up some morning the slave of this habit, which he had acquired in play, and find that he could only wait till somebody pushed him this way or that, and that he had lost all power in moving whither he chose. "A man should choose for himself in all matters," he repeated with meaning.

A strange shyness prevented Tom Rutherford from talking easily about his wife, even to Archie, who was like a brother of hers, and whom he liked so much. In one or two pauses he nearly asked questions or made remarks about her; but when the time of his guest's departure had nearly come, he had heard nothing of her except the important fact of her good health, and the news, which gave him a more doubtful pleasure, that she was the life of the party. Tom would have liked especially to ask if she had said anything about leaving the place, but he could not put the question to his satisfaction; and at last Archie pressed him to come down and join the party, since it was impossible that they should spare Dora. Tom felt a strong impulse to say that he would go down with him there and then, but he checked it with severity, and only said grimly—"Then you are allowed to ask people to your own house?"

"When I am a good boy," said Archie, laughing.

"You'll find it no laughing matter," said Tom, "when you have formed your fatal habit. You will have many masters, your uncle, your aunt, your cousin——"

"Who?" asked Archie.

"Isn't he a cousin, or sort of cousin, that young Vale?"

"Poor Lenny!" said Archie; "I don't think he could master anybody."

"You are acquiring him with other bad habits," said Tom; "and let me tell you it will be a long time before you lose him. I don't like him—do you mind my saying so?"

"I don't mind," said Archie; "I didn't fancy him at first myself; I like him better now."

"Since you've heaped benefits on him," said Tom; "that's always the way."

"Oh, I've done nothing," said Archie in sudden discomfort; "he had very hard luck."

"My dear boy," said Tom with emphasis, "he deserved no better. I tell you he is a bad lot; he has a bad strain in him; and some day you will find him out—I hope before he does you a mischief."

"Why, I fancied," said Archie, "that he must be a sort of friend of yours. Dora seems to like him."

It was a cold douche to Tom, who felt himself flush.

"Women are bad judges of men," he said shortly, and changed the subject. He could say no more of Leonard Vale. He had refrained from criticising him to Dora in accordance with his rule of not interfering with her likes or dislikes without sure cause. Now this casual statement that Dora seemed to like this young man struck him most unpleasantly, raised sudden tumultuous doubts of the wisdom of his former silence, and a further troublesome doubt whether his present abuse of the young man was wholly the result of his liking for Archie. This stopped his tongue. If he were gratifying, in any degree, a personal prejudice, this abuse of an absent man seemed mean to Mr. Rutherford; he would say no more. He kept silence, but found no comfort therein.

Presently Archie departed, having again pressed his friend to become his guest, and assured him that he might come at any time without notice. There was time to spare, and he determined to walk to the station. The variety of the London streets moved him to interest at every step, as they never failed to move him when he had been long away. The West End was waking from its annual apathy, for most of its inhabitants, whose homes were in London, as distinct from those who came in the summer from country homes, had returned to their dwellings; and, for the afternoon was fair, there was not a few smart carriages in the streets, and a cheerful stir on the pavements. Archie walked along pleased with the passing show and with the pageant of shop windows, and forgetting for a time the spirited action which he purposed. Peaceful and alert he looked about him, noting a thousand trifles, until at the corner of a popular street he paused before a line of posters, laid on their backs in the mud,

and announcing the contents of the various evening papers. Among these so-called evening papers was the *Rising Sun*, which came out so early in the day as almost to justify its title, which had been the cause in its dawn of abundant jocularity. The choice of name had been ascribed to the fact that its editor was an Irishman, and to the fact that, if the sun ever rose in London, it was after midday, and to other causes suggested by the humorist; but it is certain that its name and the debate thereon had been an excellent advertisement before the appearance of the first number, in which, after the addition of many more facetious reasons, which might be the true one, it is suggested, but not asserted, that the title was metaphorical. Anyway it rose; and there under the eye of the happy youth was a table of the contents of the number which had risen on that particular day. Archie stood looking down and smiling at the thought of Beck, the sub-editor. There seemed to be abundant matter in the sheet, and it was more aggressively announced that the contents of any of its rivals. Each line was a piquant incitement of curiosity; but the last few lines caught the attention most quickly, being printed in the largest letters, and suggesting the most entrancing contrasts.

This is what Archie read—

"The Favorite of Fortune." "Radical youth in high places." "The Socialist Peer." "Politics and Hunger." Archie read with a smile and a sigh till he came to the last line, and then he began to wonder. He put a copper into the palm of a hoarse man, who was standing with a pile of *Rising Suns* all open on his arm, and took a copy of the enterprising sheet. Standing there at the street corner he folded it back, and found the exciting headings all set forth in the paper too, and under the headings a brief and picturesque account of his own sudden gain of wealth and title. There was no doubt about it. He looked round him nervously, half-expecting to find a crowd forming around him; he was relieved to see the careless crowd passing both ways, and for the most part not even glancing at the bills. He felt like one slightly bemused with drink; the sound of traffic seemed unreal, and he looked back at the paper with concentrated attention, as if there were a chance that he would find quite different words in it. The words were plain enough, and plainly set forth the story of

his sudden rise in the world. He remembered that to Radley Beck privacy was an anachronism.

But what of these other headings, this Radicalism and Socialism? These also referred to him; and he read with growing confusion that his talents were at least equal to his fortunes; that Oxford in his undergraduate days had rung with his brilliant, audacious and revolutionary doctrines; and that he used to wear a red tie in the streets. Had he worn a red tie? Had sober Oxford rung with his vagaries? He had read no further when he remembered in a moment why "Politics and Hunger" were words so familiar to his ears. In his last year at Oxford, the year of his greatest fermentation, he had joined a little club of the most enlightened, and had written for them a paper called "Politics and Hunger." He remembered that he had been proud of the title; he remembered now clearly that his friend Beck had made a fuss about the paper, and had asked to be allowed to keep it. Archie read on with hasty, anxious eyes. Here was his old boyish extravagant essay, or rather here it was not, but only the most epigrammatic and extravagant bits cut sharply from their context, and snapping like a series of pistol-shots in the face of a scandalized society.

Archie folded the paper and looked at his watch; he looked quite coolly to see if he had time to wring Beck's neck before his train started. In the next moment he perceived that to wring a sub-editor's neck would be no proof of moderation of views; that moreover this was only his friend's way of saving him in spite of himself; and finally that he had only just time to catch his train.

He called a hansom, and, as he was borne away from the prostrate bills, he burst out laughing again; he could see his uncle Villiers' face, as he showed him the paper.

CHAPTER XVIII.

So soon as Archie reached home, he carried the paper straight to his uncle, who was in the library. He expected to produce an effect, and he was not disappointed. The clear keen eyes of Sir Villiers had scarcely fallen on the paper, when he uttered a sound as if somebody had seized

him by the throat, and turned so red that Archie's thoughts flew to apoplexy. But no repetition of the alarming sound nor of any sound more intelligible came from this well-controlled middle-aged gentleman, until his eyes going quickly down the page came to the scraps of the essay. "And this—this," he then said, crumpling the paper and thrusting it at his nephew—"this infernal stuff? Did you write it?"

Archie explained hastily, and with his most soothing manner, for the idea of apoplexy returned with each alternate moment, that they were the worst scraps of a boyish essay written by him at Oxford.

Sir Villiers rose and with trembling hands tore the paper across and across; then he stuffed it into the fireplace, and thrust the poker down upon it as if it could feel his wrath. Archie had hoped for an effect, but this seemed altogether too serious; he had supposed that nothing could move from his propriety this cool, well-appointed man of the world; now in his eyes his uncle banging the poker into the fireplace looked like a furious old man, full ten years older than yesterday. The boy looked at him, open-mouthed and pitiful; he was uncommonly sorry; he knew not what to say. As he saw his uncle turning after a last bang at the grate and making for the door, his wish to offer some comfort made him stammer a lame request for advice.

"Advice!" cried Sir Villiers, not even looking at his nephew; "what good is advice when you have written that?" He made no pause but went straight to the door, fumbling with its handle, uttered an angry exclamation and wrenched it open.

Archie, left alone, felt very unhappy. Here was none of the fun which he had expected from the interview. He sat down in a chair and looked ruefully into the fire, wondering whether the wrath of this good uncle, to whom he felt under decided obligations, would last for ever; whether he would go away and transfer all the troublesome details of stables, cellars, and such things abruptly to him; and whether he would take it for granted that the author of these Radical fragments, now unhappily given to the world, could not preside at a public Conservative meeting. That at least would be a small gain; but it seemed equally likely that he would have to face another scene

equally unpleasant, and state most aggravating reasons for declining to attend this ill-omened meeting. Thus, wondering and uncomfortable, he sat till the door opened and Lord Hackbut came in. The old lord came in with a most sardonic grin on his face.

Archie jumped up to meet him. "You have met my uncle?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lord Hackbut.

"I am afraid he is awfully annoyed," said Archie.

"Villiers takes things too seriously: he always does. Where's this paper he spoke about?"

"There," said Archie pointing, at some black volatile fragments, the remains of his explosive essay.

"Well!" said the old lord. "What was it all about?"

Archie explained as well as he could the substance of the offending article; but the man of long experience cut short his description of the youthful "Politics and Hunger." "I know it," he said with a chuckle; "clever boys all begin with it. It don't matter. The only question is what you must do about it. In my early days it might have been the horsewhip, but that would strike your friend Peek as an anachronism, I'm afraid." Here his broken tooth reappeared with an effect of savage humor. "Besides," he continued, "he would stick it in his paper and make money by an increased circulation, and have you up in court and make more money. You must write to the paper and say it is unauthorized, and does not represent your views. Write to the *Times*—not to your friend's dirty sheet."

"Yes, I can do that," said Archie.

"Yes," said the old lord; "and I will see too that especial notice is taken by the confounded press of the fact that you preside at our meeting to-morrow night. To preside at a Tory meeting is the best answer to a charge of Radicalism."

There was an awkward pause, of which the awkwardness was Archie's, and then he said, "Yes, but the worst of it is that I can't go to your meeting."

"What?" said the old lord, bending his head towards the youth as if he had suddenly grown deaf—"What do you say?"

"I had made up my mind, before I saw that paper, not to go to the meeting."

Lord Hackbut looked at him sideways like a grim inquiring raven. At length he said, "You don't still believe in all that," and he nodded at the charred remnants of the newspaper.

"No," said Archie stoutly; "but I don't believe in the other stuff either. I am rather uncertain what I am, but I know I am not a Conservative; and I know that I won't preside at a meeting because I've been announced to preside without my consent. It seems to me that that was just as unfair as what Beck did." He grew hot as he spoke, and ended with some indignation in his tone.

"No, we ain't as bad as Peek," said the old lord slowly, and still viewing Archie with his curious sidelong look.

"We made a mistake," he said presently; "it was your uncle's fault; he said you agreed to everything which was settled for you."

"It was more my fault than his," said Archie quickly; "I have given him plenty of reason to suppose that I would agree to anything."

Lord Hackbut lowered himself into a large and low arm-chair, and stuck out his great under-lip till it projected beyond his large bent nose. "Well," he said at last, "I am not altogether surprised. I was inclined to think that you were not such a hopeless sawney as your relations supposed."

"Thank you," said Archie softly.

Lord Hackbut seemed to be in deep thought. Presently from his almost prostrate position he looked up queerly at the young man, and said, "Well!"

"Well?" echoed Archie.

"Since it appears," said the old lord, "that after all there is something in you, why shouldn't we make a compact? I will give you my word that you shan't be bothered about this meeting, by your uncle or anybody else, if you will promise to have nothing to do with the other party."

The impulsive youth was on the very point of expressing ready agreement, when, as if he felt the atmosphere of diplomacy which surrounded the older man, he hesitated. So soon as he hesitated, he perceived that he was offered nothing valuable except that non-attendance at the meeting which was already certain, while he on his side was about to pledge himself either to be a Conservative or to

abstain for ever from politics. He then suggested with becoming deference that Lord Hackbut should promise that nothing should be said, either at the meeting or elsewhere, which should connect him in any way with the one party; and that he, on his side, should promise not to join the other party for at least a year.

"Nor to assist them with money?" asked Lord Hackbut promptly.

"All right!" said Archie, after a moment's thought; "I will give no help of any kind to any political object for a full year from to-day."

"Agreed!" said the old lord, hoisting himself out of the chair with surprising alacrity. "The fact is," he then said, "that there is a trumpery cogging sheet in Langstone, which has been three parts dead for the last ten years; and as soon as they see what your friend Peek has printed, they will be down on you to put your money in it. If the editor could pay for a fly, he'd have been over to-day."

Archie looked at his friend with a doubtful eye, but presently he could not help laughing. "I have promised," he said; "but if anything is said which implies that I sympathise with your people, I'll send a cheque to that Langstone paper."

Lord Hackbut was now standing firmly on strong bowed legs with his back to the fire. He chuckled over his own thoughts. "Well," he said at last, "I have more hopes of you. You may grow into some sort of man yet."

"Thank you," said Archie again. "I suppose," he suggested with deference, "that you will persuade my uncle to take the chair to-morrow?"

"No," said Lord Hackbut; "I'll take it myself; it'll annoy Palfrey."

It seemed to Archie as if his day had been unusually full. He had risen early; he had been up to London and come back again; he had been roughly shaken, as it were, into a more adequate conception of his own importance in the world. Who could be blind to the strong desire for his capture when he had witnessed such measures taken for that end? A town placarded by one kind friend, and the streets of London flooded by another! It seemed to Archie, looking back to his leap from bed in the early morning, as if it was a day preternaturally long, and as if he had grown to manhood in its few hours of light. As

he went upstairs to dress for dinner, he thought with satisfaction that he could give some twenty minutes to rest and to quiet consideration of much which Tom Rutherford, and of something which Lord Hackbut had said. He foresaw the comfort of his bedroom, so much larger and more luxurious than any bedroom which he had enjoyed in earlier days, with a novel satisfaction; and the idea of the newly-lit fire, in which heretofore he had acquiesced indifferently as a part of his new splendor, now warmed his imagination while he was yet upon the stair. When with a smile of content he opened the door of his room, a new surprise awaited him. No comfortable firelight was there, nor pleasant warmth. With the aid of one candle his man was emptying a chest of drawers, and a pile of his clothes sat solid on his writing-table.

This little surprise at the end of the day produced in Archie a sharper annoyance than the far more important events of its earlier hours. "What are you doing?" he asked rather sharply.

The man turned and showed a surprise equal to that of his employer. "Doesn't your lordship know?" he asked; "your lordship has been moved into the little buff room."

"And where is the little buff room?" asked Archie, beginning to smile.

"At the far end of the bachelors' passage, my lord. I've put out all the things, and I was just going to put away some of your lordship's things downstairs till after the ball."

"After the ball?" repeated Archie, vaguely.

"Yes, my lord, the ball on Thursday night."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Archie; for the man was looking at him with as much wonder as was compatible with respect.

"Yes, my lord," continued the man, who was made loquacious by the coming event; "Mrs. Dormer told the housekeeper that the house would be quite full from to-morrow till Friday, and that she was sure that your lordship would not mind being moved for three nights; and as this room will be wanted and the little buff room is so very small, I thought that I had better take some of your lordship's things down to my room till the guests had gone."

"Yes, yes, of course, quite right," said Archie; and he went off to look for the little buff room. As he sought this more humble apartment, he remembered that his aunt

had said something to him of dancing after dinner one night, and that he had wondered for a moment if this dancing were to be for the entertainment of Mr. Palfrey; and if that eminent statesman were to sit, like an Oriental politician, cross-legged and contemplative on the drawing-room ottoman, while damsels arose and danced before him. Archie, seeking his room, which was after all quite large enough to be found without undue difficulty, hoped with an easy heart that, if Palfrey waited for the little dance, he would like it. The question of his own enjoyment raised other questions, and not one of them was easy to answer. However, it was easy to say to himself that he generally did enjoy things when they came.

It was certain that he could not prevent this dance from coming. In the first place it was too late to interfere; in the second he felt that he had asserted himself enough for one day, and that it was enough to have offended one near relation; and finally he shrank more from thwarting a woman's scheme than a man's. And after all the scheme seemed harmless enough; or at least it seemed that it would be entirely his own fault, another effect of his own dangerous passivity, if harm came of it to him. Sufficient for the day had been its own adventures and contentions.

Such thoughts occupied Archie, as he dressed himself with more than usual speed, for indeed the fire in the little buff room was no comfort at all. He felt himself being gradually roasted; in despair he pulled back the curtains and dashed the window open, and allowed himself to be alternally cooked and chilled on one side and the other; and soon he emerged flushed and gasping, and inhaled the air of his grand staircase as if it were a highland hill.

"So there is to be a ball," he said to his aunt, when she entered the drawing-room.

"Why, what a dreamy boy you are!" she said, smiling sweetly; "I told you of our little dance."

"I didn't know it was to be a County Ball," said Archie.

Mrs. Dormer laughed low. "It's only a few of the neighbors," she said; "you must do something for the neighbors."

"But there's to be a house full of people, too."

"Oh, one must have some people," she said vaguely; "do go and take Jane into dinner; she looks so alarm-

ingly hungry. I wish I had any appetite. Lord Hackbut! You are to take me."

"Enchanted," said Lord Hackbut, offering his sturdy arm; "we will be happy comparing doctors."

The lady smiled again with the same sweet vagueness. "You are a bad man," she said absently, as she put her hand on his arm and followed her guests into the dining-room;—"you are a bad man, but you do amuse me."

CHAPTER XIX.

ARCHIE could sleep anywhere; and, though the little buff room was small and the bed too short for him, he slept as soundly as if he were in a log-cabin in the heart of a forest of pines, or rolled in his blanket under a hedge in a cool summer night of England. He slept soundly; but, when he was awake again, he was soon aware of the feverish atmosphere of the house. This was the day of his uncle's great Conservative meeting and the day before his aunt's little dance; and almost everybody was affected by the coming events. At his very door he ran against a housemaid unnecessarily moving something from one place to another; and, had he enjoyed any experience of a large establishment, he would have inferred at once from that one housemaid's air that all the household were in a state of unusual commotion. All that day they would be spasmodically busy about unimportant trifles, enjoying a fine fuss and bustle, running against each other in the passages, and coming frequently for orders which they frequently forgot.

The nervous agitation was by no means confined to the servants. Lord Hackbut was perhaps the only man in the house who kept his usual state; or, if there were any change in him it was merely a stronger infusion of irony which was caused by the nervousness of his neighbors.

If Sir Villiers Hickory was agitated, he controlled his agitation well. Archie at least, who met his uncle with manifest anxiety, perceived no change from his usual manner, and no change in his habits, except that he asked him rather formally if he approved of certain orders which he was sending to the stables. It was necessary to make

arrangements for conveying Mr. Palfrey and his speech to and from Langstone, and also for meeting the guests who were coming on that day for the dance of the next evening. All these arrangements Sir Villiers had made as usual; but he was now careful to ask his nephew's approval of them; his nephew hastened to acquiesce. In calculating how many people were likely to attend Mr. Palfrey and his meeting, Sir Villiers made no mention of Archie, and Archie inferred with relief that his uncle had accepted Lord Hackbut's compromise.

In Mr. Palfrey, as was natural, the prevailing fever was more manifest, though in him it showed itself for the most part in an excessive ostentation of ease. He was more talkative, more friendly, at times almost jocular; but he could not sit still for long in one place; his silences were sudden and eyes glazed. When he was walking about, his lips moved; sudden tremulous smiles came and went on his face. "Do you see him?" said Lord Hackbut, when Mr. Palfrey for no reason had wandered out of the room; "he is rehearsing an impromptu. His man has gone into Langstone to arrange for an interruption. You know the sort of thing; you will see it in the paper to-morrow; it costs five shillings—'A voice in brackets asking, How about Whatdyecallem?' and then Mr. Palfrey resuming, 'I think I hear some good friend asking, How about Whatdyecallem? I will tell my good friend all about Whatdyecallem.' Here he stops for laughter; and when the laughing is done, out comes the impromptu."

Archie laughed politely; and Tony would have laughed too, had not his whole attention been given to his pulse, which at the moment he was counting furtively. Tony was conscious of an accession of fever, which was doubtless due also to the general atmosphere of the house.

If the men were nervous, the women were no better. It is true that Miss Lock showed no sign of agitation, but seemed intent upon the fine work which she was doing. It is true also that Mrs. Chauncey sat quiet in her place; but Clara Chauncey at least was in a state so electrical, that it may well be believed that she would have emitted sparks in the dark. She was talking to Dora, talking with deference and with zeal, but forcing herself to talk quietly and in a low tone, that Lady Jane might not hear her words. Presently Dora rose to leave the room, and

Clara, still talking, followed her; and so soon as the door had closed behind them, the pent-up irritability, which was the form which nervousness took in Lady Jane Lock, found vent in words. She had observed, before, the advances which Mrs. Chauncey was making to Mrs. Rutherford, and, though Clara had not become less anxiously civil to herself, she resented these advances to the enemy as mere desertion. In her eyes there was no excuse for the presence of Mrs. Chauncey but obsequious devotion to herself. "Really, Susan," she said to Mrs. Dormer, when the door closed, "I am grateful that some decent women are coming here to-day. I really cannot think how you can sit there smiling."

"You know that I am told to, dear," said Susan Dormer, who showed no sign of any disturbance of the nerves.

"Told to!" echoed Lady Jane, with a voice made hoarse by the desire not to be audible at the further end of the room. "Told to! Told to sit quiet and see such things going on in the house?"

"What things, dear?"

Lady Jane replied with a look full of meaning and a side glance at Elizabeth.

"Shall I go away?" asked the girl calmly.

"Certainly not! What do you mean? You can go on with your work and not listen"

"But I can't work with my fingers in my ears," said Elizabeth with a faint smile, and slipping the work into its silken bag she left the room.

"I can't think what has come to her," said Lady Jane after a short silence; "that is the way she answers me. But who can wonder at it? A nice well-brought-up girl to find herself in the society of such women!"

"Good gracious, Jane!" murmured Mrs. Dormer placidly, "you don't mean me?"

"I mean your guests," said Lady Jane with warmth.

"Well, you know, dear," said Susan unruffled, "I've told you before that I was obliged to ask somebody, and of course you would not have liked another girl, and nowadays when you come to young married women——"

"I can't see the necessity of Mrs. Rutherford."

"I didn't ask her, dear."

"No. Her conduct throughout has been without

excuse. But Mrs. Chauncey? You did ask Mrs. Chauncey. May I ask why I am expected to meet a Mrs. Chauncey?"

"Oh, poor dear Clara!" said Susan blandly; "she was Malingerer. What can you expect from a Malingerer?" Mrs. Dormer's smile, as she thus disposed of a whole noble family, was absolutely seraphic.

To Archie at the further end of the room a word of the women's talk came now and then, and made him uncomfortable. He wished more than ever that there was some definite occupation for the day. At least he could not spend any more of the day in that morning-room trying to find amusement and instruction in the daily paper, and vaguely troubled by suggestions of female gossip and by the feverish atmosphere of the time. Movement in the outer air was always the best cure for his troubles. He put down the unsatisfying journal, and went out from the room and from the house.

So soon as he was out of doors, Archie bethought him of an object, and forthwith he stepped away at a good steady pace to visit an outlying tenant, who had had a difference of opinion with the agent. The difference was slight, and the real object of the walk was that gradual soothing of the ruffled spirits which comes from good walking. It was a sullen day and neutral-tinted; and there was little to turn away the wayfarer's eyes from the road on which he went. He missed his way once or twice, and, since the road were nearly empty, he was forced to rap once with his stick on a cottage door, and a little later to stoop under the porch of a sleepy little alehouse, before he found his doubtful farmer. When at last he did find him, he found that the small difference had been adjusted, and so, when he had sat awhile in the kitchen chatting with the farmer's wife, and had accepted and eaten a big slice of her cake, he set off to trudge home again in a more contented mood.

He walked, and walked with good effect, for temperate sane thoughts seemed to keep time with that temperate sane exercise, which is at once the cheapest, the easiest, and the best. And yet as he drew nearer to his home, his spirits drooped a little. It was an upland farm which he had visited, and he could not help fancying that he was now sloping downward to a laxer atmosphere. He even

wondered, boy though he was, if he had said good-bye for ever to the old liveliness of life. Still he kept his steady pace with the real British faith in doggedness, and chid himself for idle fancies. He thought that a man should keep moving to some good end, and take the ups and downs of spirits as they came. When he was now within the limits of his Park, he was still far from the house; and it was there, in a secluded part of his domain, that he saw a sight which gave him a more real cause for depression.

That which Archie saw, and which made him stop suddenly in his walk, was by no means a remarkable spectacle. In front of him and moving likewise towards the house were Dora Rutherford and Leonard Vale. He looked and wondered why the sight annoyed him. He could not change the fact by the wondering; he was much annoyed. He had known that these two were very great friends; he had told Tom Rutherford in London that Dora seemed to like Lenny; and he had told it then carelessly, with no second thought at all. Perhaps in some idle moment he had wondered why Dora was interested in this man, whom he could not help regarding as a poor creature; but he had thought little about it. But now there was something in the look of the two, as they moved slowly over the short grass, which annoyed him very much. It was hard to say what this something was; but Archie seemed to see in the long thin figure of the youth an air of tenderness and devotion which, as it seemed to him uneasily regarding them, Dora should have resented. He wished to see her quicken her pace and walk with prouder air; but her steps were slow, and she wore the air of one who listens; Archie could even fancy sympathy in the bend of her fine head. The earnest talk, which he imagined between them, vexed him as he was seldom vexed. There came back on him with a sharp vividness a scene, which he had all but forgotten; he saw Dora fall with a cry beside the little stream in the valley, and the strange looks of Leonard Vale as he hurried to her side, the extravagant signs of grief and fear.

"He is a poor creature, anyway," Archie said to himself. He recalled Tom Rutherford's opinion of Lenny, and then it struck him, as it had not struck him at the time, that Tom had said not a word more about Lenny, when he, Archie, had once blurted out the statement that

Dora seemed to like him. What right had Dora to be so friendly intimate with one whom her husband held so unworthy? The sight of Dora walking slowly beside this bending and devoted youth made him for the first time in his life angry with her. He promptly condemned himself for this unreasonable anger; but he was angry. He stood still, till they had walked beyond his ken, and then walked on again also. But now there was no longer any doubt that he was out of sorts; his feet dragged; he felt a most real reluctance to enter his noble portals. It seemed as if that castle of his was an emblem of the elaborate tiresome structure of Society, raised for the purpose of increasing needs and needlessly complicating life, inventing daily duties which did good to nobody, fostering in its hot luxurious rooms mean ambitions and dangerous desires. Had this hot-house air and idleness changed the playmate of his boyhood to a shifty flirting woman of fashion? He was sure not, and yet was not content. Standing there, he had a vision of a fair hill-side above a laughing sea, and feeding sheep, and simple life wherein a chief duty would not be to find something for other men and women to do for him. He saw Tom returning in the evening from the plough, and Dora bringing in the dinner. Where was the Golden Age? Our fathers looked back for it and we correct their error. If he could look forward, might not that be an error also? Or was it not too far away, beyond all dreaming, too far for comfort to the young hopeful heart greedy of a nearer good?

The enormous weariness of little things weighed on him like a nightmare. This monstrous dwelling place, at which he stared, had been added to and adorned by generation after generation of short-lived, toiling men, till now, in the fulness of time, the end of all the care and all the toil was seen to be this colossal and intricate structure which weighed upon its owner's soul. The wasted labors of mankind seemed fixed for ever there; there it stood, a solid, inevitable fact, vast, labyrinthine, and obscure as the laws of England. Thence his thoughts leapt to the speech which Mr. Palfrey would deliver that evening; and he foresaw with a new clearness the clever evasions, brilliant misrepresentations, effective repartees, the whole, too, a monstrous and elaborate erection, and not one useful undistorted fact pressed home to the gaping hearers. All

things seemed to young Lord Lorrilaire at that dark moment to have been made on one pattern; castles, orations, reputations, the fine gradations of social state, the ingenious measures of politicians, all were no better than imposing shams, all the vain product of a dinning universal machinery; and this Mr. Palfrey, who had dedicated himself unasked to the service of his fellow-men, had been building through long weeks a brand-new Langley Castle of deceptive phrases, which, when the next day's papers had gone their way to the dust bin, would straightway vanish into air, with all its shadowy porticoes, its long connected passages and topless towers, and vanishing, leave not a twopenny loaf behind.

CHAPTER XX.

ARCHIE's imagination was capable at times of these amazing feats. He saw two young people returning from an afternoon's short walk, and lo! what a fantastic building he, too, had raised in five minutes on how small a foundation! The universe was a universe of laborious vanities, because a young man and a young woman had walked together in his park, or rather because he could not understand at a glance why they conversed with an earnest air.

The truth is that Archie was not wrong in thinking that the talk of Dora Rutherford and Leonard Vale had been less common-place and more interesting than that which generally accompanies the sober constitutional. Archie had really witnessed the return from an interview of reconciliation. Dora had been much offended on the Saturday evening, when the respectful Mr. Vale had pushed a note into her hand. She had allowed her contemptuous eyes to read the offending scrap, before she dropped it, and she had admitted to herself at once that the words were harmless enough. The writer had merely implored her to give him a chance of speaking to her, and she had decided at once that the prayer was entirely and satisfactorily explained by their league for the saving of Lord Lorrilaire. When she came to argument, Dora could prove to herself in a moment that the incident was

of no importance, but she had not waited to argue before she felt offence. She was offended; and she wished at once to punish the young man for his momentary departure from that humble attitude, which it pleased her to believe was and always would be his attitude towards her. She meant him to know at once that in forcing a clandestine note upon her, he had passed those limits which she ruled so accurately. Of course the note was harmless; she would not even imagine the possibility of his writing to her a note which was not addressed as to a superior being; but nevertheless he had been guilty of stupidity, awkwardness, a marked fault in taste; and he must be made to recognize this fact immediately. Dora had lost no time in teaching Leonard Vale that she disapproved of his conduct, and her method was such that no doubt was left in his mind of the reality of her disapproval. If she had cast at him an indignant glance, or turned on him with flashing eyes, or even swept by him without a look, he would have been but little abashed. His instinctive recognition of the ways of women would have assured him that she was but half offended; and he would have replied to the dramatic display of indignation with the contrite air and the imploring eyes, which, as he would have felt at once, were expected of him. But Dora simply ignored the incident, and Mr. Vale was promptly miserable. He could detect no sign of indignation nor of pardon. She neither averted her eyes. nor seemed to notice his pathetic looks. Only during two whole days he found not a chance to say to her anything more interesting than "Good morning;" the days were tedious beyond all endurance. If she had shown signs of ignoring his existence, it would have been a comfort to him but she seemed to be quite well aware of his existence, and for the rest, to be in her usual health and spirits. With bitter mortification he felt himself of no more weight with her than a grain of dust; at moments he hated her. He went away with a certain ostentation like a spoiled child, and he cursed her under his breath like an ill-governed man.

Then Clara Chauncey had taken her opportunity. For the first time since Dora's coming she had sought the dejected youth, and had treated him to a nice mixture of banter and sympathy. She had examined his wounds with a cool inquiring eye and had pronounced her opinion

on them with her usual frankness; and at last with much dexterity she had won from him that story of the note, which she knew already. Then with all the air of a good comrade she had offered to go to Mrs. Rutherford and make his peace; and Lenny had been effusively grateful. And now Clara Chauncey was able to make use of that better opinion of herself, which she had been building up so craftily in Dora's mind. She could approach Dora now, and be sure of a kind reception, be sure that Dora saw the coming of one who had suffered much from the unkindness of the world, and who came to her for advice and help. So Clara had come to Dora, and with straight gaze of the round brown eyes, and almost blunt directness of speech, had spoken to her of Leonard Vale. Dora had been easily captivated by this frankness, and by the clear perception which Clara showed of the young man's weakness, and of her own paramount influence with him. Mrs. Chauncey spoke with candor of her own old friendship for the boy, but confessed that she had no power over him, and expressed her wonder at Dora's extraordinary influence. All this was very pleasant to Dora, confirming in every point her own theories of the situation; and it was not long before she consented to hear the young delinquent's apologies, and to set him once more in that straight path, in which it seemed that only her direction could keep him. "It is simply life and death to him," Mrs. Chauncey had said, gazing at Dora with the unabashed curiosity of a child; "I can't understand it." Dora had laughed at this exaggeration of her powers, but yet the wonder of this other woman, who was by no means stupid, was like delicate incense to her.

When Leonard Vale after three days of discomfort was permitted at last to plead for pardon, he was very careful to preserve the expected attitude. He offered no excuse except his pitiable weakness, his fatal habit of doing the wrong thing; and he begged for pity and pardon as from a being, whom he knew well he had no right to approach. And yet Dora, though she made light of the affair and cut short his protestations, was not quite happy during the necessary interview. The suppliant seemed more feverish than she liked. She saw in a moment that this feverishness was but another proof, where no other was needed, of utter weakness; she thought him looking ill too, hectic

and dark about the eyes; she was really sorry for him. Since she alone could help him, she must not allow any idle fancies of hers, any shrinking from a somewhat feverish atmosphere which she seemed to feel, to divert her from this interesting duty. And yet she was glad when the interview was over and they had returned to the house, and she could shake off with her neat overcoat the feeling which displeased her. She wished that her pupil would begin to show a little more strength, a little less of this almost abject devotion which made her uncomfortable in spite of her arguments. She felt as if she too caught a little fever from so hectic a creature; and yet he was interesting in his weakness. She had a love of risk, and, though of course there could be no risk here, the idea that others might think that she was playing a risky game thrilled her a little. She knew her own strength; the games, which she was playing there, were not really perilous, but they required courage and skill; she meant to win the games. She was like a confident lady, who has tamed a soft sleek tiger, whom only the spectators think dangerous; she would show them how she could lead him and teach him. Poor human tiger! He did look ill too; she must not be too hard on him; he never showed the merest pin-point of a claw; his education could be conducted wholly by methods of kindness.

And now the day, which had been tiresome for almost all the inmates of Langley Castle, began to slide imperceptibly from its dull greyness to the less dismal shades of evening. The Castle became gay with lights, and fires burned more brightly; and presently carriages arrived bringing the new guests, who came for the next night's ball; and carriages departed carrying Mr. Palfrey and his fortunes, for the orator was to dine with the Mayor of Langstone before unburdening himself for ever of that oppressive speech. And Lord Hackbut went too, with Sir Villiers Hickory and some other gentlemen, who were among the new arrivals, and who, as persons notoriously connected with politics, felt it a duty to show an interest in a leader's speech, if it were to explode anywhere within a measurable distance.

So bustle and animation closed the day which had displayed a want of vitality; and among the young men and young women who had come to dance, no one showed a

kinder spirit or a more innocent-seeming wish to be happy and to make others happy than little Mrs. Chauncey. To the elder women her manner seemed almost to apologize for her presence; and on the younger she looked kindly, a little sadly, as if she could not venture to bring her sorrows near to their young happiness. Only she sought the girl who suffered so much from shyness, and won her mother's heart by inducing her to smile and even to answer once or twice. This mother always said afterwards, when Clara's name was mentioned, as it often was, that she knew that there had been ill-natured stories, but that she must say for her part that she had never known a more good-natured kind-hearted little woman, and that that was something.

About [illegible] the next day, which was Thursday, Tom Rutherford [illegible] standing in his study with a little note in his hand and a dangerous look in his face. His writing-table was covered with papers and signs of work, and on the floor near the fire lay the morning's paper, which contained not only the full report of Mr. Palfrey's speech, but also a short letter from Lord Lorrilaire. Archie had written briefly that he much disliked writing about himself and his opinions, since he was well aware that he had done nothing which should make either him or his opinions a matter of interest to the public; but that he was compelled to say that the fragments of a boyish essay of his which had been published in a popular evening paper, had been published without his consent, and that they did not express his opinions. When Tom Rutherford had read this sort of letter and had sssured himself that the name of Lord Lorrilaire did not occur in the account of the Conservative meeting at Langstone, he had thrown down the paper with cordial approval of his young friend. He had thrown down the paper without even reading the report of Mr. Palfrey's oration; he knew Mr. Palfrey, and the points which he would make in the present state of affairs.

But Rutherford had not been at work long when he was interrupted by his servant, who brought a note, and apologized for his entrance by pointing out that the note was marked "Important." He had found the note in the letter-box; there was no stamp or post-mark on it; had been pushed into the box with no knock or ring to announce it,

Alone in his room Tom held the little scrap of paper with the charred edge; a dark flush was on his face. The words on the scrap of paper were not important; they were even meaningless without the part which had been burnt off. "Pray give me a chance of speaking to you! I must see you. I am most awfully——" and that was all, for fire had made the rest illegible. But this crumpled and charred fragment had been wrappd in the smoother, neater note, which now lay on the writing-table beneath Tom's eyes, a short note too, written in French and in a foreign-loooking hand. The French language is, it is said, more capable than our clumsier tongue of delicate suggestion. This note was suggestive, perhaps delicately suggestive, playful, ironical; it professed to come from a friend, and to convey a poor scrap, which had drifted to him by chance (for it slipped out, as if by accident, that the friend was masculine)—a poor miserable sample of autumn leaves which were flying to and fro, as the writer poetically put it, in gay profusion.

This little note, like the accompanying fragment, had no signature. He dashed his fist down upon the little mean note, which lay open on the table before him. The pain helped him; he saw that one of his nuckles was bleeding, and he wound his handkerchief round his hand. Then he placed the two notes in their envelope, and this envelope in a larger one of his own, sealed it carefully and locked it in a safe drawer. From the tumult of feelings one purpose had already emerged. He would go down to Langley and take his stand by his wife. It was the natural impulse of this man to protect the weak; and, when an attack was made on the woman, whom before all he was bound to protect, there could be no doubt of his first duty. But, though there was relief in having decided on action, Tom Rutherford was still hot with anger. He was angry with himself for having let his wife go alone to Langley. He was angry with this base anonymous writer who was trying to injure his wife. He was angry with Dora, too, who should have taken care that *his* wife gave no excuse, however slight, for vile malicious tongues. And there was yet another against whom his anger turned with sudden flare. He had not a doubt but that it was Leonard Vale, whose tricks and manners had set malice to work; he could see the romantic airs of this profes-

sional philanderer, who had always stirred his wrath; he could imagine the smug complacency with which he enjoyed the chance of being talked about with a charming woman. Tom could not scourge himself for his folly, nor strike the writer of the note, for he had not a doubt that the writer was a woman; but, when he thought of Leonard Vale, his wounded fist clenched itself and his jaw was set like a fighter's. Nothing, it seemed, could allay the heat of his anger but the giving of good blows. He controlled himself with a strong effort, knowing well that, when he went to Langley, he must consider nothing but the interest of his wife, and that there was small hope that her interests would be furthered by a violent attack on the man whom he wished to beat. Forcing himself to calm, he put away his papers and books, each in its place, selected an afternoon's train, and gave orders for the packing of his portmanteau. It was lucky that Archie's pressing invitation to him made his unannounced appearance at Langley sufficiently natural; and he could trust himself to act with sense and sobriety, even under the eyes of his anonymous friend, if she were there.

CHAPTER XXI.

At Langley Castle during all that Thursday there was still fever and fret. It was true that the great orator's speech had been lifted from within and delivered to an expectant world, and that this element of disquiet had passed away. The Right Honorable Palfrey had received the congratulations of those friends who had heard his speech, and yet more hearty congratulations of those who had not heard it, and who had hoped to make up by warmth of admiration for their undeniable absence from the meeting. The Right Honorable gentleman had an air of relief, as one on whom a successful operation has been performed; he was rid of a secret burden; he was breathing freely again. Mr. Palfrey felt a further relief when he said good-bye to Lord Hackbut, who departed in his own carriage for the other side of the county; and, when he was in the London train with his legs comfortably wrapped in his rug, he even whistled a little, a little out of tune, and unfolding

the *Punch* of the day before, smiled superior at the political cartoon. He felt that all speech-making and no play might make even him a dull boy, and that this was one of the moments when, safely delivered of his oration and from the sardonic eye of Lord Hackbut, he might dare to be decorously frivolous.

But, though the fear of the politics thus passed away from Langley, it seemed as if there was no abatement of the whole amount of feverishness. A double portion went into the preparations for the ball. Mrs. Dormer's little dance was assuming vast proportions. A little army of workmen had occupied the house and spread themselves over the adjacent ground. Within was the moving of furniture, the transfer of confused guests from room to room, and putting up and taking down of decorations, collisions in the passages, bustle and dust. Without the whole terrace was being covered by a vast tent-like erection, which sprawled around the house and stretched even to the base of the old tower. Every room in the house was full; and indeed, that all the guests might be taken in, a general shuffling of inmates had been found necessary. Among others Dora had resigned with becoming cheerfulness her spacious and sumptuous apartment, and had taken herself and her ball-gown to a little single room, which was good enough, as she said, for one who had had no invitation. In the tornado of changes only one being remained absolutely serene. Susan Dormer, having unloosed the whirlwinds, sat, as her physician advised, in a state of wholesome placidity. Calm as a contemplative idol sitting cross-legged with the soles of its feet turned up to heaven, she sat with her little mouth delicately ajar, and seemed to smile absently on the confusion which she had made.

The newly arrived guests, who had come for excitement, enjoyed and increased the excitement which they found. They were eager to see everything, and especially their young host, whose sudden comet-like elevation and exaggerated wealth made him the most interesting person of the hour. Archie was very amiable. He was happy in the thought that half his troubles had ended with the delivery of Mr. Palfrey's speech, and that he had secured a respite at least from political difficulties. The politicians had gone and had said no further word on their

topic; Sir Villiers had preserved a like reticence; and Archie, when he had read his own letter in that morning's paper, felt that he could delay a little while all efforts to decide on his future political course. He was amiable then, and he tried hard, even in the wild confusion, to be courteous and cool. He led the way to this and that; he answered all sorts of questions, of which many were personal; he was patient and pleasant.

At last, however, the limits of Archie's patience were reached. He felt that he had earned a respite, that he would stand no more from guests and workmen, until he had gained a short hour of solitude and silence. With alert attention he sought a chance of escape and with prompt decision seized it. He slipped away through a back passage, and fairly ran till he had gained the covert of the nearest trees. Thence he walked straight away, only eager to be beyond the rapping of hammers and clatter of talk. Straight away he walked till he should recover his lost serenity.

Now it happened that a like desire of solitude had taken possession of Dora Rutherford. Dora too was conscious of a fever in her blood, and in time the divers noises of the day made her so restless that she could not sit still and smile at people. So she too had stolen away and set forth alone in quest of her lost serenity.

At the distance of two miles or more from the house, Archie and Dora met. They were on a straight piece of road, and they saw each other some time before their actual meeting. They could not have avoided each other without an appearance of strangeness; and each had time, as they drew nearer, to become more and more critical. Archie on his side recognized a sudden return of his annoyance of yesterday; he viewed the slender figure on the road with the same discontent. He was glad that on this afternoon at least that she had no companion; and yet he was annoyed with her, and sentences formed themselves, which he knew well that he would be wise to keep to himself. What could he say? How could he speak plainly to her of Leonard Vale? Direct speech of this kind could merely offend her, and do no good. And, besides, there was really nothing with which he could find fault, nothing but a mere impression which might have been produced in him by the mere feverishness in the air.

Dora, on her side, was nervous and discontented. She had not been thinking of Archie; and the sudden sight of him reminded her that he was the object of her visit, and that it was strange that he had not been in her thoughts. She was vexed with her intrusive fancies; and her vexation went out to meet the young man who was coming walking alone. So soon as she thought of him, she disapproved of his solitude. This lonely rambling, when his house was full of guests, had too lover-like an air. In her vexation she was inclined to ask him sharply, if he had withdrawn himself to muse upon the sullen lady of his love; but she too was wise enough to keep the question to herself.

When two friends are busy with unspoken mutual criticism, they are apt to talk on general questions, in which the personal criticism finds partial expression. It is often an exasperating form of conversation.

So it happened now that Archie, when he had turned and had walked beside Dora for a little while in silence, said suddenly, "I don't think much of this world of yours."

"World of mine?" said Dora, who felt herself challenged.

"Your fashionable world," said Archie.

"It's no more mine than yours," said Dora.

"Well, I'm out of it for an hour, anyway," said Archie. "It is over there," he added, nodding towards his distant abode; "chattering and clattering and gossiping to its heart's content."

"I have no patience," said Dora, "with commonplace abuse of the world. Country bumpkins, like you and me, grow up outside it, and only read about it in cynical novels; and then, when we do see it, we take every light word seriously, and think that every woman, who paints her eyes, is desperately wicked."

"Well, I prefer clean faces," said Archie.

"So do I; but it doesn't follow that everybody is wicked."

"I never said that everybody was wicked. What strikes me about your world is——"

"It isn't my world," objected Dora.

"Well, what strikes me," continued Archie, "is that the atmosphere is tainted. Now I take it that all the good

people over there," and he nodded again towards Langley, "are eminently respectable; but they don't seem to me to care about anything in the world but other people's vices. They talk about other things as if they were bored to death, and then somebody chucks 'em a reputation, and then they become as lively as—as anything."

Dora could not help laughing; but Archie went on rather quickly, "Now the mischief is," he said, "that you plunge a nice young woman into that sort of air, and she soon learns to breathe it as if there were no better. She finds that it is a matter of course that she should be talked about with somebody, and she knows that she means no harm, and yet——"

He seemed uncertain how to finish his sentence, and Dora, who felt, as is common in such conversations, that these general comments had a personal flavor, hastened with more warmth to a defence of society, which seemed to include a defence of herself. With greater emphasis she repeated her favorite theory that her world, as Archie chose to call it, was not half so bad as it was said to be. She enforced her view with impetuosity; she was enforcing it on herself as well as on her hearer; she could not afford to doubt it, for on its truth rested her whole private defence of her own conduct. If her world were as bad as cynical people said, she felt that the liberty which she allowed herself was indefensible.

Archie replied with a like heat, for to dispute of men and women, while the disputants are thinking of each other, most quickly increases the temperature.

"You may be right about women," he said, "but I know something about men."

"No," she said; "you are a country boy, and how can you know anything about men of the world?"

"Yes, thank Heaven!" said he, "that I am a country boy." He drew a deep breath as if he would inhale the country into his lungs. "But at least," he said, after a minute, "I must know more about men than you do. I am quite certain that there is not one Englishman in a million who can stand leading an utterly idle life, and not one in the whole country who can be idle in that sort of atmosphere," and he nodded again towards his castle—"without going to the—to the dogs."

"And so I suppose," said Dora, with a sudden flush,

which she resented, "that one is to do nothing to help a man, who is idle by no fault of his own, and in danger of going to the—to the dogs?" She gave a little scornful laugh, but she was very uneasy; the discussion was losing its generality.

"Well," said Archie, "if it's a question of helping a chap, I think it had better be left to his mates."

"I don't agree with you at all," said Dora hotly; "a woman has so much more tact."

"She can't know what she is about," retorted Archie; "she is playing with fire."

"Oh, that's the usual talk," said Dora angrily; "it's a mere appeal to women's cowardice. There is nothing which exasperates me more than this mean feminine fear, this perpetual assertion that friendship between a man and a woman is impossible. Do you believe that a man and a woman can't be friends?"

"You and I are a standing proof to the contrary," said Archie; "we always have been friends, and we always will be friends—won't we, Dora?"

He asked this final question with some anxiety, and Dora promptly felt that the conversation was on the very edge of direct personality. His very next words might call in question another and more newly founded friendship of hers.

"We will always be friends," she said lightly, "as we were in our bumpkin days."

"I tell you what it is," he said; "I wish with all my heart, or with more than half my heart at least, that we were back in our village again, and out of all this fuss and rubbish, and eternal gabble about this trumpery person and that trumpery person. Don't you find it refreshing to think of the Rectory dairy, and our orchard, and your mother and mine trotting about with port wine and things, or your mother gardening in her sun-bonnet, and mine in her back drawing-room composing her dear old novels. To me it's like a plunge in running water on a dusty day."

"There is no way back to Arcadia," said Dora, rather pompously; she was apt to be pompous when she quoted her scholarly father."

"Yes, there is," said Archie bluntly; "that's only feminine cowardice, if you like——"

"I don't like," interrupted Dora tartly.

"What's to prevent you and Tom from taking the old Manor House? You can have a long lease, or buy it outright."

"And you think Tom would play Darby to my Joan?"

"Why not? He could work there better than in fusty London, and, when his time came, he could stand for that division of the county."

"Darby, M. P.," she said with mockery; "and you? What would you do? feed sheep?"

"Oh, I——" began Archie.

"Oh, you!" she cried out; "you would be a pedlar; that's what you would like."

He laughed but did not deny it. "It wouldn't be bad," he said.

"Oh, you are sentimental," she said scornfully; "you talk like a man in love." She knew in a moment that she had said more than she meant to say; there was no unsaying the words, and so she made haste to be more jocular, and to pursue the theme, as if there was no danger in it. "I can fancy you on the tramp," she said, "with your wife five yards behind you and laden with the household goods, or the pair of you at luncheon by the roadside with your feet in a dry ditch."

"Well," said Archie calmly, "even a pedlar is the better for a good wife."

"Yes, for a good wife," she said quickly; "that's the rub. How is a man to know which girl will make a good wife? No man should marry until he is at least thirty, and has seen a great deal of the world and women. Then there is some slight chance of his making a sensible choice."

Archie only laughed in his usual provoking way. Perhaps he felt that these general declarations concerning matrimony had a sharply personal direction. "So no man is to marry," he said, "until he has been well soused in this world of yours?"

If this was meant as a counter attack, it was successful, for Dora dropped the marriage question and leapt to the defence of society, repeating again with unnecessary vehemence her belief in the essential innocence of that body. "It's all the fault of the papers," she said; "they publish every scandal; nobody publishes the record of all the decent people who do nothing outrageous. If

there's a row at No. 77 Boodle Street, all the world re-echoes with it; but who hears anything of all the respectable routine of all the numbers from 1 to 76?"

"I give you up Boodle Street," said Archie; "it's not in the Directory; perhaps it's a street in Arcadia."

"Don't be frivolous," she said; "you ought to get your friend Mr. Beck to publish a newspaper of good news, instead of lists of murders and accidents, and all the scandals."

"Upon my word," said Archie, "I think he would like the idea—the villain! His telegrams would tell us that the old bank at Whatdycallit was as far from bankruptcy as ever, that Mr. Wright had given his usual subscriptions to the usual charities, and that all the husbands on the left side of Macassar Place had come home to tea at the usual hour. It is perfectly certain that the posters in the streets of London are the real fountains of Pessimism. I, for one, shall think better of your world to-morrow, if I avoid the papers and survive aunt Susan's little dance."

"It is not my world," said Dora with calm persistence; "and I am sure that I hope you will survive your aunt Susan's little dance."

If there was a deeper meaning in this last wish, Archie ignored it. He looked at his watch. "I ought to be back with my flock," he said, "with your innocent if fashionable sheep. That is the sort of Arcadian shepherd that I am." He began to whistle a fantastic air with his walking-stick held like a flute, and he danced down the road before her.

"Good old Archie!" cried out Dora—"good old Archie! as Mr. Tony would say."

CHAPTER XXII.

By this time Archie and Dora had come in their walk to the upper edge of the old wood, through which Dora had climbed on that eventful day when Archie had helped Elizabeth Lock out of the water. Their homeward way lay through this same wood, but they entered it by a different track; and, as they went quickly down, they came in the very heart of the wood to a small clearing, in

which stood the cottage of one of the underkeepers. It was a low, comfortable cottage, which looked almost as much as if it were a growth of the soil as did the old trees, which grew at a respectful distance around it; for moss and ivy had covered much of its nakedness, and the thatched roof came so low that it left but a narrow strip of stained wall between the eaves and the dead leaves which lay deep at its foot. However in this narrow strip of wall there was a wide old-fashioned window; and Dora Rutherford, when she had emerged from the trees and regarded the little house with ready appreciation, was moved by a moment's curiosity to advance to the window and look in.

Dora peeped in at the window, but immediately turned away again. Archie was passing the cottage without a look, and she moved as if she would go with him. But then she stopped, and looked back, and then, obedient to a sudden impulse, she ran to the young man, caught him by the arm and drew him to the window.

It was a rich glowing picture which the underkeeper's cottage exhibited to the young lord, a deep effect of twilight and ruddy firelight; and in the firelight and illuminated by the warm glow was Elizabeth Lock. She sat on a low three-legged stool with a picture-book spread open on her lap; and by her side and full of wonder stood a small, pale, freckled boy, to whom she showed the picture. Her own splendid tints showed with an imperial sumptuousness in that humble place, and there was a warm smile on her face, as she told a story for each page. Her long fur boa lay on the floor and curled about her feet like a familiar snake. The child was not pretty, was not even interesting in appearance, though his mother turned from the dresser again and again to look at him, and each time said to herself that it was no wonder that a lady, however glorious, should be kind to her Tommy. Tommy was an interesting invalid, hardly yet recovered from some childish malady; and the glorious lady had come several times to see him, and had sent to London for the picture-book, which entranced him.

Archie, looking in upon the dusk and the warmth and the kindness, felt a sort of warm glow about his heart also; but Dora plucked his sleeve impatiently and he yielded.

"For a wonder she didn't look sulky," said Dora still

drawing him away by the arm. She meant to provoke him to speech, but he said nothing.

"Quite the effect of a Madonna!" she said; and then, since he still was obstinately silent, and she felt that she must make him speak, she gave a little laugh and cried out, "That's the sort of girl who ought to marry." No sooner had the words leaped forth irrevocable, than she gasped and perceived all which she had dared. Now she hoped that he would not speak, for his words might tell her that all was over and that he was in love with Elizabeth Lock. She felt rather than saw that he was opening his mouth, and with a convulsive cry she pinched his arm fiercely. "Hullo?" said he; "not your ankle again?"

"Oh no," said she gasping; "it was only a sudden something. We were talking of marriage, weren't we? We were saying that no man should dream of it before he is thirty. It is a tremendous risk." She stopped and looked up at him now, as if she would make the word "tremendous" even more tremendous than itself.

"You ought to think well of marriage, anyway," retorted Archie promptly.

"Oh, I! I!" she cried impatiently; "what have I got to do with it? I am caught and caged. But you? you are a free bird still, and not nearly thirty years old."

"Few birds are," said Archie; "and as to marriage, I'll tell you when I am going to be married."

"Promise me that," cried Dora, and she ran lightly down the path before him, laughing as she ran.

In the small room, to which she had descended, and in that short time before dressing, which she was apt to give to a brief review of the situation, Dora wondered at her folly, and rebuked herself sharply for her rashness. Why had she displayed this dangerous girl in a moment of charm so unusual? She asked herself the question, and could find no answer. Some impulse had moved her, a touch of remorse, a sudden desire of fair play, her love of daring, the sudden temptation of risking all her fine work of days in one thrilling moment. She became very grave as she thought that such are the acts to which men point maintaining the unreasonableness of the other sex. Was she, too, a creature of feminine impulse? How great the mischief which she might have done! As she sat there looking into the fire, grave and critical of herself, she

could imagine Archie, the poor innocent, bursting into that cottage in the wood, kneeling at the knees of that sumptuous being, and begging her to take him and his bag and baggage, lands and houses, messuages, tenements, and hereditaments. This might have been the result of her moment's madness; she trembled as she looked back upon that moment, and imagined herself looking in though that low window, and beholding the simple youth upon his knees. Any fleet, wild acquiescence in this marriage, any flying fancy that it did not matter to her whether it were or were not, had been followed by as quick reaction; she had recoiled as far; she had been aroused again to uncompromising defiance. If her heart had softened to the girl, the girl's mother had made it harder than ever. Indeed, over the feminine tea-table there had been a brisk passage of arms. Some of the new-comers had embarked with vivacity on the common topic of their maids, and Lady Jane had remarked with decision that she knew of a treasure, who wanted a place. Dora had asked a question about the treasure; and "Oh," said Lady Jane Lock in the presence of these women, who were all more or less strangers, "she wouldn't do for you; she is one of the old-fashioned kind, with old-fashioned ideas."

Then Dora had said very sweetly, "that she should never think of taking a maid on Lady Jane's recommendation."

"And why not?" cried Lady Jane, very red and straight.

"Because you could never help speaking too kindly of any woman." Dora had answered, almost tenderly.

There had been quick sword-play among the tea-cups, and Dora felt that she had borne herself well; but yet, when she left the other women after tea, she was more eager than ever that Lord Lorrilaire should remain a bachelor. To see Lady Jane Lock flushed with triumph would be more than she could bear. And the recognition of this recovered zeal brought with it a strange relief. She was delighted to find that she was more interested than ever in this duty which she had set herself. This was the object of her coming. She had come to save Archie from a determined mother-in-law; this demanded all her care, all her energy; she must not waste a thought just now on any other man. An eventful evening was before

her, an opportunity of brilliant tactics, perhaps a serious conflict. At all hazards she would carry Archie out of the press. And she would dance too, dance often, dance with Archie whenever danger threatened; and so combine the duties of a guardian with the pleasures of a happy dancer.

Dora, under the hands of her maid, saw with pleasure in her glass that the new zeal had given new color to her cheek, new brightness to her eyes. A very radiant young creature shone back upon her from the reflecting plane. The last touches were being given to this brave show, when suddenly without a word of warning, without a presentiment which might have come so easily, she heard that her husband was in the house.

"Of course you know, ma'am," said her maid, provoking and discreet, "that Mr. Rutherford has arrived."

"What?" cried out Dora, who could not help a sudden leap under those officious hands, nor suppress a cry as her hair was twitched by the movement.

"Mr. Rutherford has arrived, ma'am; and Lord Lorrilaire is trying to find a room, as the house is so very full."

There was a tone of respectful fault-finding in the maid's voice which annoyed Dora. Indeed, annoyance was her first and strongest feeling, as she heard of her husband's arrival. The sudden news added to her excitement and produced a new irritation. She perceived that he could not have chosen a worse time for his coming. She disliked the idea, which she knew that he disliked also, of his appearing an unexpected guest when there were guests enough already, a trouble more on a troublesome evening. It was ridiculous for a husband to arrive uninvited, where a wife had already intruded without an invitation. This, however, was a small matter. That which vexed her keenly, was the knowledge that his presence on this evening would be an embarrassment to herself. She had decided that this evening was critical for Archie, and that therefore all her skill and all her energy must be devoted to watching, guarding, and, if need were, rescuing by sudden action the friend of her childhood. Now, if Tom had come but a few hours earlier, she could have explained the situation to him; he would have been kind if a little contemptuous of her diplomacy; he would have understood why her attention was engrossed by somebody

else; he would have kept himself in the back ground, and left her to concentrate her attention upon her important duties. If he had only come a few hours earlier, no mischief would have been done; indeed, if he had come and had found the house upside down and scarcely a corner vacant, he would have gone back to London before the ball. Of this Dora was certain; and she was certain too that the best thing of all would be that he had not come at all. She was annoyed with the awkwardness of events. She had wished for his coming, and he had not come. Now, when a few hours were at hand, during which his presence was an embarrassment, he had come too late and too soon. She was vexed with the concurrence of events, vexed with her husband, and vexed with herself for her vexation, for it agreed with no one of her theories that she should be ever vexed by the presence of her husband. If he had only stayed in London for a few more days, she would have gone to him gladly so soon as the Locks had gone, and asked for his sympathy with her victory. Now she was sure that she would be conscious all the evening of her husband's eyes, that her attention would be constantly distracted, and the power of helping Archie reduced by at least half. She foresaw herself nervous and embarrassed, perhaps at the critical moment unconscious of the crisis or rushing to the wrong action.

And all the time another question disturbed Dora. Why had her husband come suddenly and without notice? It was not like him. As she asked herself this question, she felt an anxiety which was almost fear. She told herself that there must be some answer perfectly simple; but deep within her an unacknowledged uneasy doubt of her own conduct made her fear. She saw with disgust in the glass that a deep blush was spreading over face and neck.

"Make haste!" she said impatiently to her maid; but the effect of this impatience was only to delay, for the maid, flurried by her mistress' eagerness and with fingers made tremulous by her mistress' nervousness, was a more clumsy helper than usual.

Dora was now eager to say a few words to her husband, before they were swallowed by the world below; even a hint of the part which she had to play, would be of some use. He would certainly come to her room before he went downstairs, and, if she were dressed and her maid

dismissed, she would be able to tell him in a few words and without offence that she could not spare him much of that momentous evening, She was impatient of his coming.

When at last Tom did come, the door, as he opened it, let in the loud roaring of the gong. It was already late, and Dora's toilette was not quite finished. As she jumped up to greet him a diamond ornament, ill secured, slipped from her bosom, and catching in her lace tore a small rent therein; her maid went down on her knees with muttered expressions of dismay; and Tom came to kiss her. She took no notice of the rent in her lace, as she looked at her husband's face. She was relieved. She saw no sign of catastrophe, nor of ill-humor. And yet, though they met as usual, with the usual few words of welcome and affection, she felt an embarrassment between them. She did not ask why he had come, and he said briefly that he had had no idea that there was a full house and a ball in prospect, and that Archie had found him a corner to sleep in. He said too that they were late, and that he would go down and ask Mrs. Dormer not to wait for her. She agreed quickly; she was hurriedly gathering gloves and fan and handkerchief; the open-eared maid was fluttering and fussing about her; there was no chance of even a word of explanation. When Tom had gone, and in the minute which flew by before she followed him, she was sure that there was something strange in him. She could not have described any difference in look or manner; but her delicate perception assured her of something new, and she wondered again and again with an unpleasant anxiety, what was the real reason of his coming. She ran downstairs, late and disquieted, and foreseeing with annoyance that she would be thinking and wondering through half the evening about her husband and about his thoughts of her, while all her attention should be given to the watching and guarding of Archie.

During dinner she to some extent recovered her equanimity, and she consoled herself with the thought that before the arrival of the ball people she would find a few minutes for private talk with her husband; but it seemed to her that the men sat longer than usual over their wine, and, when some of them came to the drawing-room, they reported that others, among whom was her husband, had gone to the smoking-room, since cigarettes had been for-

bidden on that evening in the dining-room, where the ball supper was to be laid. Dora began to think with renewed anxiety that her husband was avoiding those few moments of private talk. Was there anything between them, which he did not wish to be put into words? The recurrence of such questions proved her nervous state, and showed her the absolute necessity of a supreme effort. She tried hard to postpone all thoughts of her husband to the morrow, and to concentrate herself on her duty as guardian of a rich young man. She tried hard but with only partial success.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN the men, who had gone to the smoking-room, at last appeared, the first of the neighbors had already come and were standing about, waiting for the music to begin, and uncomfortably conscious of the feeling of superiority which distinguished those who had dined in the house. Dora had given up all hope of an explanation with her husband; and, as she awaited the music, her courage was ready to respond. She resolved not to think of her husband during that evening; she would keep her task clear before her; she awaited the trumpets. Quick-eyed and alert, she marked the coming of the smokers and among them her lord, whom she would straightway dismiss from her mind. In the same minute she noted an absence also. There was no Leonard Vale among them. She supposed that he would appear presently with a new flower or some such extravagant explanation of delay; but, when the dancing began and still he did not come, she began to wonder.

"Isn't it sad about poor Lenny?" asked a soft voice beside her, and turning, she looked into the sympathetic brown eyes of Mrs. Chauncey.

"What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, he is very seedy," said Clara. "Such a dreadful headache! He could not face the ball. Poor fellow! It is such a disappointment! He was so looking forward to it!"

It was a string of soft emphatic sentences.

"What a pity!" said Dora simply.

"I ran up to see him, poor dear!" said Clara, "just for a minute, and to take him my salts. Are you dreadfully shocked?"

The child-like eyes seemed to ask the question quite seriously.

"Not at all," answered Dora, laughing.

"I thought you would be," said Clara gravely; "but he and I are such old friends; that does make a difference, doesn't it? You would never do such a thing, I am sure."

"Don't be sure of anything," said Dora rather tartly. The soft voice irritated her; it seemed as if it would put her to sleep, when she needed to be very wide awake. As for Lenny's absence, that was a distinct relief. It was an embarrassment the less. She had ignored this cause of embarrassment, when she had considered the presence of her husband; but now, when she was certain that Leonard would not come near her during all that fateful evening, she felt a surprising relief. Suddenly, the presence of her lord and master appeared less troublesome. To some extent he would distract her, but after all not much. There was Archie, the poor boy in danger, the rich boy so hard beset; there before her eyes was her duty, the object of her care. She could give all her mind to this duty, and postpone all thought of her husband till the morrow. This absence of Mr. Vale certainly simplified the situation.

As the rooms filled, her spirit rose; social feeling and the atmosphere of the dance possessed her; and, as the music of the valse penetrated with gaiety and sadness flowed around her, there was pleasure too. Young, brilliant and brave, she was sure of herself and of the future.

Indeed she needed all her confidence. As the rooms filled, a rumor began to move among the people. The man latest from London had brought it in a column of that day's number of the new Society paper. It was a rumor of an engagement. Dora's quick ears were among the first to catch it; half a sentence spoken halfway down the room had told her all, and the expression of a fat lady, who was shaking the hand of her host, confirmed it. One glance at Archie's face showed how serious was the crisis.

"Have you heard it?" asked Clara, who was again at her elbow.

"What?" asked Dora quickly.

"The engagement."

"Whose?"

"Poor young Lord Lorrilaire."

"No; I don't believe it," said Dora stoutly. Her eyes were fixed on Archie; she hoped still; and yet, though her words were bold, she feared.

"Lenny told me," said Clara softly.

"How did he know?"

"I don't know," said Clara innocently; "he had heard it somehow; I think that it was that which made him ill; he is quite knocked over by it; it was a bold stroke of Lady Jane."

"Did she send it to the paper?"

"So Lenny says."

"Lenny!" cried Dora impatiently; "how feeble of him! how weak he is! Why isn't he here instead of lying down with a smelling-bottle?"

"Poor Lenny!" murmured Clara.

"He is the only person who knows anything, and I can't see him."

"I suppose not," murmured Clara.

"If he has any proof that Lady Jane sent the paragraph, I could go straight to Archie and show him this crude trap. He would be ashamed to step into such a thing. Do you know? What did he say to you? Has he any proof?"

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Clara, looking with round innocent eyes; "I never thought of it. If you could only see him for a minute! In an hour it may be too late."

Dora looked across the room and actually trembled. Archie was not with Miss Lock; that was the only comfort; she could not see the girl, who was not one to be hidden in a crowd; but at any moment this eminent maiden might sail back into the room, and Archie might go to her and lead her out again. Dora saw it all almost as clearly as if the scene were there.

"He said," continued Clara, with a little infantine pout, "that nobody but you could do anything; that, if he could see you for one minute, he could tell you."

"Why doesn't he come?"

"He really could not. He looks so dreadfully ill. He would terrify the room. Of course I told him that it was impossible for you to go to him."

"You went," said Dora shortly.

"Oh, I am so different. I said that you would never dare."

"Dare?" cried Dora, as at the sound of a trumpet; "I dare everything."

"Oh, no," objected Clara softly, but firmly, "I really think not."

"How ridiculous!" cried Dora angrily; "what is it? to run up to the Tower Wing for a minute! I would do something really dangerous to save Archie from that woman. To send a paragraph herself about her own daughter! If I could prove that, I would save him even at the last moment."

"Lenny has the proof," murmured Clara.

"Then why don't you fetch it?"

"Really, dear," said Clara with a little laugh, "I can't keep on running up to the Tower Wing. Of course it is nothing, as you say, but the truth is that I have been up twice already; and besides, he won't tell me anything; he is racked with pain, poor fellow! and he won't say anything except that nobody but you can do anything, and that he must see you. I tried to explain to the poor creature that it was out of the question."

"Why is it out of the question?"

"Isn't it out of the question? I thought that you were so conventional."

"Conventional!" cried Dora full of scorn, and with eyes still fixed on Archie.

"Isn't it out of the question?" repeated Clara. Dora answered nothing, but continued to gaze across the room.

"Would you go?" asked Clara, with the tone and air of a child who persists in asking wearisome, innocent questions.

"No," said Dora; "certainly not."

As the words left her lips, she saw Archie move and go towards the door at the further end of the room. She saw that, without obvious intention, she could reach the doorway at the same time; she started from Clara's side, gained her goal, and turning, found Archie's face not two yards away. There was a slight block at the doorway; he could not force a passage; she had time to look at him; she had never seen his face so grave. She felt the imminence of the crisis; she perceived, most momentous sign of all, that he did not even see her.

There was a movement in the little crowd, and Archie, advancing, passed a man, who instantly laid a hand on his arm, and murmured some question with a fatuous friendly smile. There could be no doubt what that question was. "I am afraid I am not so fortunate," said Archie rather stiffly. The mere words were comforting to Dora, but the tone was equivocal, and his looks filled her with uneasiness. He made his way through the doorway, passing close to her, and without a sign of recognition; there was an alarming air of purpose about him. "Is it true?" asked somebody on Dora's other side.

"Oh, I think so," answered another; "it always is true in that family."

Dora set her little teeth, and began to make her way in the wake of the threatened youth. She had scarcely moved, when she was stopped short by a firm impediment. Lady Jane was in the path, firm and strong, like a rock of red sandstone. "Dear Mrs. Rutherford!" she said with frank geniality.

"Yes?" said Dora feebly, fearing lest the next words would announce the awful fact.

"How very ill you are looking!" said Lady Jane.

"Thanks," said Dora, moving as if she would pass. But the crowd remained, and Lady Jane blocked the easiest passage.

"I am quite distressed," said Lady Jane; "you look so flushed and nervous. Perhaps the sudden appearance of your husband." She finished her sympathetic speech with a strident laugh.

"You are, as always, too kind," said Dora quickly, pushing forward as she spoke. But Lady Jane Lock was not an easy woman to pass in a doorway. Low of stature, and very firmly planted on her feet, she barred the way to anybody who was not active enough to leap over her.

"You young married women," she said, "go in a great deal too much for excitement. I shall speak to Mr. Rutherford about you. I shall recommend a good long spell of quiet life in the country."

"With you, I hope," said Dora quickly; "will you let me pass, please?"

"Why, whom are you looking for? I am sure you are very flattering to him. We did not have to run after our partners. How sad about poor Mr. Vale, isn't it?"

"Very," said Dora; "but I must go. I am looking for Archie."

"For Archie!" exclaimed Lady Jane, in apparent surprise; "ain't you afraid of being *de trop?*" The triumph in her eye was maddening. Wild suggestions came to Dora; she was impelled by some memory of pantomime tricks to point to something behind her obstructor, and to slip by, as she turned, or to trip her up, if need were. Prudence, or a sense of the decorum which the world required, prevented the ignominious prostration of Lady Jane Lock.

"I am never afraid of being *de trop* with Archie," Dora said bravely, and was answered by nothing but a laugh full of intention and discord. Dora could stand no more; trembling with indignation, she turned her back on the enemy, and retraced her steps with speed. She went straight to Clara.

"I will go," she said.

"I will go first and tell him," cried Clara promptly.

"Quick then!" cried Dora; "that is better; I shall find you there."

"Yes," said Clara.

"Oh, that woman! Anything to beat her! Quick!" she added, pushing Clara by the arm; "quick! I can only be away two minutes."

Little Mrs. Chauncey slipped away from the room. She had a talent for gliding here and there, through crowds and other obstacles, and always unobserved.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DORA was right in thinking that the face of young Lord Lorrilaire was eloquent of purpose. When he had passed the doorway in which Lady Jane Lock had barred the passage of Mrs. Rutherford, he walked straight and quickly across the room beyond to the opposite door. This door led into one of those smaller rooms which careful ball-givers prepare for conversation; and here Elizabeth Lock was sitting with a young man, who had been her partner in the last dance. Two or three people made way for Archie, as he came, with knowing looks; a young couple

came out from the little room as he reached the door; and, as he entered, the young man rose from beside Miss Lock. Elizabeth rose too, as if she would return with him to the ball room; but Archie went straight to her with so plain a claim on her attention, that the other youth, after a minute's hesitation, smiled and bowed, and went out alone. He had scarcely passed the doorway, when Archie had asked Elizabeth to be his wife. The exact form of words had been settled as he crossed the outer room.

"Oh, thank you," said the girl, with heartfelt gratitude; she held out her hand to him with the frankest cordiality. He took her hand respectfully in his, staring at her with wonder; he had expected success, but not gratitude; he did not know what to say.

"It is so good of you to ask me," she said.

"Good of me?" he asked, still wondering.

"Yes, and I thank you with all my heart," she answered, and she shook his hand before she let it go.

"Then it's all right," he said rather stupidly; "it's agreed then; you will marry me?"

"No, no, no!"

"What?"

"Did you think that I would be so mean?" she asked indignant; "did you think that I would marry a man because he asks me—because people talk? I can't express myself properly, but you know what I mean; you know that you only ask me because people are talking, and you are generous and nice and not like other men, and so you come and say this, and I can never thank you enough. It has been so horrid! I hated to run after you in London, and I hated coming here, and staying, and staying, and getting new gowns at the end of the season, and I almost hated you; I should have hated you if I hadn't liked you; and now there's some horrid gossip in some paper, and so you come to ask me, and it is so awfully good of you and I shall never forget it."

Archie had not a word to say. The girl had spoken quickly and eagerly, as if she had long wished to say the words. She looked so frank, so honest, and so friendly, that he did not doubt her for a moment.

"What can I say?" he said "You must not think that I——" And here he stopped, and she laughed.

"You know that what I say is true," she said; "so do let us say no more, and take me back to the ball-room."

But he still stood looking at her rather foolishly. He was relieved, but yet not much; he was almost offended by her extreme pleasure in refusing him; he was grateful but not gratified; he would have liked to see in her a little regret, a suspicion of tenderness, a shade of doubt.

"What am I to say?" he asked at last. "When I go out of this room people will come to congratulate me."

"Not if we go out together," she said.

"But we can't stay together, since you won't have it so," he said rather gloomily.

"Say there is nothing in it," she said; "and so will I. It will be much harder for me, for women never will let one alone; they are much more curious than men."

"I shall say that you won't take me," said Archie.

"Oh, please don't," she said; "I should have such a dreadful row with mother."

He laughed at the change in her voice, but without much enjoyment. "You will have to tell her," he said.

"Yes," she said; "more or less, to-morrow; I want to be happy now, so take me back, please." She looked so kind and glorious, that he wondered if he were not foolish to yield so easily to her wishes. "I shall have to tell mother to-morrow," she said; "but I shall put most of the blame on you."

"What a shame!" he said, and he began to laugh again.

"It won't hurt you," she said, "and I shall catch it enough any way. I shall only say that you only said what you said because it was expected of you, and that it was impossible for any girl to say 'yes.'"

"But that's not true," he said.

"It was impossible for me to say 'yes.'"

"Why?"

"You mustn't ask that," she said quickly; "you will begin it all over again."

"Well, why not?" This time it was he who held out his hand to her.

"No, no, no," she said again. "You are really glad to be free."

He would have protested, but a voice, or so it seemed, from deep within him said plainly that he would be glad when he woke in the morning. So he kept silence. He was still standing first on one leg and then on the other,

unwilling to go or stay, conscious of the unsatisfactoriness of things, not knowing what to say, when a dancing young man, conscious of nothing but the importance of dancing every dance and each with the proper person, hurried in and claimed Miss Lock. She promptly put her hand on the arm of the new-comer, and with a last look full of friendship and intelligence for the rejected Archie, passed out into the more brilliant light of the ball-room, while her new partner chirped of floors and music.

Archie, flushed, excited, provoked, amused, felt no wish to follow the girl, and a strong wish to avoid the crowd for a few minutes at least. He pushed aside the muslin curtains which draped the long window, and opening the window itself, passed through it into the great tent, which covered the terrace. In the tent too there were some people, and he fancied curious looks and comments; and so he turned again and went out from the tent and down the steps, which led from the terrace to the park. It was a night most wonderfully fair for this late autumn time, and, flushed as he was, Archie felt only an agreeable coolness as he met the air. He drew a deep breath from the sweet night, but the next moment, before he had stepped from the lowest step to the grass, he started. He was close to the shrubbery which concealed the little door of the old secret staircase of the tower wing, and in the shadow of this shrubbery he spied the flutter of white drapery and heard a deep sepulchral tone. Was it the family ghost? With half-attentive ear he had received the tale of the distinguished Rayner ghost. What if, whenever the representative of the family was rejected, the Castle Spectre was condemned to walk?

"Ninety-nine!" said slowly and solemnly the same deep voice, and Archie put his hand on his mouth that he might not stop the ceremony with untimely laughter. Tony had led a partner forth to view the beauty of the night, and then, as he considered the rashness of the act, and the danger of a sudden chill, sentiment had given place to science, and he had begun to demonstrate to the astonished maiden the method of his salutary exercise.

"Ninety-nine, ninety-nine, ninety-nine!" repeated the Castle Spectre in pursuit of health; and Archie now allowed his laughter natural way, but it was stopped at the first note by a scream. The incantation ceased, Tony's

disciple screamed in sympathy, and Archie, leaping through the small shrubbery, found Clara Chauncey leaning against the wall, pale and breathless. The door of the secret staircase was half-open beside her.

"What is it?" asked Clara, gasping, conscious of a human presence.

"It's Tony," said Archie.

"Oh, oh!" gasped Clara; "how silly of me! I thought it was your ghost—the family ghost—they are the only things I am afraid of. A minute, and I shall be all right." Supporting herself against the wall with one hand, she pulled the little door to with the other. "Oh, Mr. Tony," she said, as Mr. Fotheringham and his partner now appeared, "I shall never forgive you. My nerves!"

"If it's your nerves," said Tony, "you can't do anything better than this exercise, which I was just showing to Miss Robertson. You bend a little forward, you see, and go up and down so, and you keep saying, 'Ninety-nine!'"

"It is a comfort to see you," said Clara, "and to know that you are human."

The girl, who now felt herself informally introduced, asked if she could do nothing for Mrs. Chauncey; but Clara declined all help, saying with emphasis that she would be quite well in a minute, and rebuking Tony for allowing his partner to stand about in the open air. Thus aroused to a full sense of his iniquity, Mr. Fotheringham tucked Miss Robertson's hand within his arm and hurried her away to the safer atmosphere of the tent.

"We must go too," said Clara, after a minute, with a smile. She was aware that Archie was regarding her with some curiosity and was wondering how she came there. She stood straight that she might test her steadiness, and Archie offered her his arm; but as they began to move, they heard a stumbling noise behind them, and in another moment the little door was burst open again, and a man rushed out. In his haste he dashed against Archie, who seized him and held him fast. He saw that it was Leonard Vale.

"What is it?" he asked, shaking him not too gently, for Leonard was panting and seemed incapable of speech. He looked from Lenny to Clara, who seemed to have recovered all her strength. "Here! you look after him,"

he cried, pushing him to Clara; "And I'll see what's the matter." Leonard made a clutch at him as if he would prevent him from going, but Archie, striking aside his arm, dashed through the door and up the secret staircase.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN Dora had made up her mind to visit the Tower Wing, she made no long delay. She waited a while that Clara Chauncey might have time to say that she was coming, and then she too slipped away from the ball-room. Upstairs she ran, hurrying, as people hurry who wish to give themselves no time for hesitation. By this time she knew the house well, and she had no need to stop and think before she reached the Tower Wing and stood at the door of Leonard Vale's den. Nor did she stop there; she knocked at once and sharply on the door, and so soon as he had answered, she turned the handle and went in. She caught her breath; she felt the dim luxury of the room, the shaded lights and sumptuous things; she saw Leonard Vale standing opposite, near to the window, his hands on the back of a chair. She looked quickly for another figure.

"Where is Mrs. Chauncey?" she asked.

"Mrs. Chauncey? Clara?" he said vaguely. "What do you want with Clara Chauncey?"

Dora closed the door and came a step nearer, saying eagerly—

"She says that you have some proof that Lady Jane sent that paragraph to the paper; it is my only chance of stopping Archie's marriage; you must tell me quick; I can't stay a minute."

"Not stay?" he murmured.

"Only a minute. Quick!"

"Not stay," he repeated, "when you've done so much for me; when you've come here, here to my rooms, here to me?"

Dora looked at him with growing displeasure. As she saw more clearly in the dim light, his pale face seemed to be flushed unnaturally, and his eyes had a glassy look.

"Tell me at once," she said firmly and distinctly, "what

you know of Lady Jane and the paper; tell me at once, or I shall go."

"Oh, don't go," he said plaintively.

"Will you tell me?" she asked, and she moved backward to the door and put her hand on the handle.

As she went back, he came forward. "Why don't you trust me, Dora?" he asked.

"Dora! How dare you?" she cried out in answer.

"And how dare you!" he cried with sudden anger; "it's too late for these airs. What right have you to be so charming and so cold?"

Dora stamped her foot upon the floor. "Stay where you are," she said, and he stood still. "Now tell me, if you can think and speak, what proof you can give me that Lady Jane Lock sent that paragraph about Archie's engagement to the paper. That is all which I choose to hear. Tell me that, and don't say a word more, and take care how you speak to me."

"And take care how you speak to me," he answered fiercely; "you've gone too far for that. What would your Lady Jane say if she knew that you were here now with me, alone with me?"

"Are you threatening me?"

"No—yes—I don't know what I say; you make me mad." He stumbled over the footstool as he came, and caught the table that he might steady himself.

Dora had turned the handle of the door, but now in the moment's silence she stood still with the door half-open in her hand. "Be still!" she said in a whisper; "there is somebody coming." She peered into the passage, which was almost dark; but a light hung on the wall at the far end, and, if any one were coming, she would see him there. She heard a fatuous laugh behind her, but she could waste no time in scorn; she watched the light. In a minute she drew back into the room with her hand pressed hard against her side. "It's Tom," she said, "my husband."

As she fell back from the door, Lenny rushed at it. "The key's gone," he cried—"here, quick, this way!" He dashed open the door of his bedroom. "There's a way through, a staircase; I'll show you—quick! for God's sake, quick!"

"No," said Dora. "I won't run from my husband."

"Are you mad? Come."

"You must explain," she said.

"Explain! Curse the woman! Will you come?" He caught her by the arm, but she wrenched herself from his hand. "Will you come?" he cried; "do you think I'll stay here to be murdered? Curse you!" He rushed into his bedroom, and in the next moment the door from the passage was opened and Tom Rutherford came in. Dora had retreated further back into the room; tumultuous feeling, shame, scorn, and fear, possessed her; she stood erect with an effort; she would not touch the table on which that man had leant.

"Who was with you here?" asked her husband.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she cried out at him, and then suddenly sank down upon a chair, and was shaken with a dry sobbing, for no tears came.

He did not come a step nearer. "Tell me who was with you," he said.

She made a great effort to control her sobs, and suddenly she sat up listening; she heard sounds of somebody coming from the bedroom; she was in amazement; she could not think that he was coming back. The door, which Lenny had slammed behind him, was opened, and Archie came quickly into the room. He was out of breath; he looked quickly from husband to wife.

Tom stepped towards him with relief plainly written in his face. "It was you who just left Dora?" he said.

"Yes," said Archie.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When the night had passed, reaction came with the morning. The cold light of a day of late November displayed the seamy side of all the bravery of the ball. Without and within men were removing decorations, which adorned no more; on the terrace lay bare poles where the gay pavilion had stood. The hothouse flowers, a little dissipated and weary, had gone back to their hothouses; the hothouse women, their petals also touched here and there by glare of light and too late hours, were sleeping in their beds. In the rooms servants were busy restoring things to their usual place; other servants slipped silently down the pass-

ages with little trays for the late risers. Only the eminently energetic appeared at the breakfast table, and among them the most eminent of the energetic, Lady Jane Lock.

Lady Jane had slept less soundly than she was wont to sleep. Who knows what visions had haunted her admirable pillow? Had she dreamed of the names of dressmakers, staymakers, carriage-makers, or calculated incomes in her sleep, and estimated gems? Doubts, as she lay on this side, hopes, as she lay on that, these were her portion. She had supped well, too, and at a late hour. Is it strange that she was restless? She awoke hot and irritable; she was inclined to linger on her couch, but a sense of duty made her rise, a sense of duty and an overpowering curiosity. She could not believe but that all would be well; and yet she was beset again and again by uneasy doubt. How far did she understand Lord Lorrilaire? and how far did she understand her own child? It was this latter question which exasperated her. She stole across the passage in her dressinggown and slippers to see if Elizabeth were yet awake; but Elizabeth was sleeping like an infant, with a smile upon her lips. She was inclined to shake her, but she knew well how much might depend on her child looking well on. that day, and with admirable self-control she refrained. She would not mar such beauty-sleep which might be worth—what might it not be worth in solid cash? She went back to her own chamber and finished her toilet. Even when she was completely dressed, her daughter was still sleeping; and the good mother descended the staircase, anxious, curious, but summoning all her forces, that she might bear herself with dignity before critical feminine eyes. She only hoped that Susan Dormer would not be there.

Susan Dormer was there. When Lady Jane entered the dining-room, and saw her friend smiling vaguely over the tea-pot, it seemed to her positively malicious in that restful lady to have come down so early on the morning after the ball. There was only one other woman present, and she was a vigorous young lady, who, perhaps for lack of other charms, made a point of proving on all occasions that she needed no female indulgence, and could rough it like a man.

She had trotted backwards and forwards between her place and the side-table, and, as she would have put it,

done herself remarkably well. Two ladies, and not more than three men, of whom one was Mr. Fotheringham, who had risen for health's sake, were dotted here and there at the large table; and it did seem to Lady Jane that Susan could have joined the small party for no other object than her aggravation.

Susan smiled on her too with such provoking amiability, as she poured out her tea and gave it to her, as she always gave it to her, in spite of daily instructions, black and bitter.

"Mr. Tony was telling us such a strange tale as you came in," said Mrs. Dormer; "he was wandering about in the park, and heard a female shriek, and I don't know what; I have not the least idea what it is all about, but I am sure that it is dreadfully improper."

"Who shrieked?" asked Lady Jane, turning upon Tony.

"Oh, it was nothing," said Tony, abashed; "she only took me for the good old ghost."

"You for a ghost!"

"Yes, you see I was just doing my little exercise—you know it, don't you, Lady Jane?"

"No."

"It's awfully good for you, you know; you just bend your body——"

"My dear Mr. Tony," said Mrs. Dormer, "you really must spare us the details; I am sure they are most improper; and besides, poor dear Jane is not good at bending, are you, dear?"

To this Lady Jane returned no answer; and her friend continued: "Well, there was a female shriek, and a lady at the foot of the old tower stairs with her hand on her heart, gasping, and my nephew Archie flying to her support——"

Lady Jane looked up now, and felt herself burning.

"Ah," said Susan Dormer, answering her friend's unspoken question, "Mr. Tony is dreadfully discreet; he won't tell us the lady's name. And I am sure there is a mystery; for now I hear that Leonard Vale has gone to London by the milk train and in his dress-clothes; and no human being ever before travelled by the milk train."

"Has he gone alone?" asked lady Jane, savagely, as she sat down her cup of bitterness.

"Presumably, my dear," said Mrs. Dormer.

"I thought perhaps——" began Lady Jane.

"Oh, naturally, dear," said Mrs. Dormer, suavely.

"And Mr. Tony will not divulge the lady's name?" said Lady Jane again. "Perhaps he knows if the gentleman has gone alone?"

"He hasn't taken his man," said Tony, innocently.

Mrs. Dormer began to laugh.

"But the story is not ended yet, Jane. Lenny went by the milk train——"

"Lenny!" exclaimed Lady Jane, with disapproval.

"And who do you think went by the next?"

"I really can't say," said Lady Jane, "and I do not care to guess."

"Archie," said Mrs. Dormer.

"What?" cried out the other lady. Awful doubts rushed in upon her. What was this? Had Archie fled? Was this the end? She half rose.

"Oh," said her friend Susan, "he has gone an hour ago; you can't catch him."

At this the manly young lady could not suppress a squeak of appreciation; and a minute later Tony, who was rather slow at perceiving the force of a speech, nearly choked over his cup. Then was seen the true strength of an indomitable little woman. Lady Jane controlled herself with an heroic effort. She did not plump down again into her seat, though her knees were loosened. She left her place and walked bravely round to her hostess, with her teacup in her hand.

"I do wish, Susan," she said, "that you would not try to poison me."

"Oh, good gracious!" said Mrs. Dormer.

"Kindly fill my cup with hot water. Has your nephew gone for long?" she asked, as she returned to her place.

It was a sublime example of female courage; her heart was beating wildly as she asked the question. Perhaps Susan Dormer felt a little sorry for her friend. It is certain that after regarding her for a minute with a gentle contemplative air, and with her little mouth innocently ajar, she answered her question with a small dose of encouragement.

"He may come back," she said; "he did change his clothes, but he has taken no others with him, and his man

is to wait for orders. If he dosen't send for luggage, you are safe."

Lady Jane laughed, but the laughter sounded harsh in her own ears.

"I certainly hope to see him come back," she said; "he was not here to receive us, and if he is not here to say good-bye, I shall certainly think him the strangest host that I have ever met."

Her voice almost broke before she reached the end of her sentence; she felt as if she could not speak another word upon the subject. But now, to her great relief, another batch of guests made their appearance, and among them Mr. and Mrs. Rutherford. Dora and her husband came into the room together. Lady Jane Lock looked at them curiously, and with no friendly regard; but if there were any change in either of them, it was too subtle for the somewhat dull perception of this lady. Dora sat down at once at the table, and her husband got her some breakfast.

"We are obliged to be prompt," he said to Mrs. Dormer, "for we go by the 11.30. Oh no, thanks," he added, in answer to a vague murmur of his hostess; "please don't bother Sir Villiers: he has enough to attend to; I have ordered a fly."

Lady Jane, listening, was tormented by new doubts. Was Mrs. Rutherford going because her defence of Lord Lorrilaire was no longer necessary, or because she had given up his defence in despair? Or was her husband taking her away for reasons of his own?

"You know that Archie has gone?" asked Mrs. Dormer.

"Yes," said Tom; "he sent a line to my room to say that he should not be here to say good-bye."

"And Mr. Vale too," said Lady Jane, whom anxiety and irritability would not suffer to be silent; "it appears that Mr. Vale has gone off in his dress-clothes, and in what Susan calls the milk train. Is it not extraordinary? I say there must be some joke in it, and I am sure that Mrs. Rutherford is in the jest."

"No," said Dora.

"Do you mean to say that *you* ain't in the secret?"

Dora looked up as if she were ready to engage, but only shook her head slightly and drank her tea.

"If you have done your breakfast," her husband said to her, "you had better see if your maid has finished the packing; she ought to be off in ten minutes."

He rose, as he spoke, with his watch in his hand, and there was a general rise of those who had breakfasted, among whom Dora left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When Archie reached London, the day was still young; he drove straight to Leonard Vale's lodgings. The sitting-room, into which the visitor was shown, suggested yesterday's atmosphere, a faint smell of dust, a faint smell of patchouli. A blousy house-maid, with her cap awry, who in the absence of the gentleman's gentleman had admitted the visitor to this sanctum, now pounded on the bedroom door. Lenny was lying down within, but, when he had learned who awaited him and a certain time had passed, he came out, clad gorgeously in a silken smoking-suit, but looking white and angry. They exchanged no words of greeting, and there was an awkward pause.

"Well, what is it?" asked Leonard at last, with a forced laugh; "I don't know what right you've got to question me, but fire away."

"I don't want to question you," said Archie; "I know enough."

"Well, then, what do you want? I am deucedly tired, and, if you've nothing to say, I'll go to bed." He spoke with a sickly air of indifference.

"I only come to tell you," said Archie, "that you mustn't live any more in my house."

"Your house! your house!" cried out the other with sudden fury; "I was there before you ever dreamed of owning it; but it's always the way.—Put a beggar on horseback!"

"I never begged," said Archie.

"I suppose you mean that I did?"

"No, not from me, at least," said Archie; "I pressed it on you."

"You needn't remind me that I am in your pay; I know it well enough," said Leonard Vale bitterly.

"Never mind that," said Archie; "we need not go into that; you seem to be comfortable enough here anyway—only would you mind my opening the window? I am a lunatic for fresh air." He waited a minute, and then, as Leonard said nothing, he pushed open the window.

"I may live here, then?" asked Leonard presently, with all the sarcasm which he could command.

"Live where you like, except in any house of mine," said Archie bluntly.

"And I suppose," said Lenny, after a pause, "that you will announce to the world that you have been obliged to turn me out of the house."

"I shall announce nothing to the world," said Archie. "The world is not likely to be violently excited about the matter; nor would the world think it strange that I take my house into my own hands."

"Then we are all to get the sack," said Leonard with his aggravating levity, "the great Sir Villiers and Mrs. Dormer and I."

"No—only you at pres t," said Archie.

"What have I done? What the devil do you——" began Leonard furiously.

"I'll tell you what you have done," said Archie; "you have so behaved yourself in my house——"

"Your house!"

"You have so behaved yourself in my house," repeated Archie, "that you have come near to compromising my dearest friend."

"Behavior! Compromising!" exclaimed Leonard Vale with a sneer. "Where have you lived? What have I done that any man of the world would not think fair?"

"I don't care," said Archie, "what your man of the world would think. I act as I think myself. I think it wrong—for one thing—to make love to another man's wife."

Leonard looked at him with unfeigned astonishment. He was somewhat relieved also, inferring rapidly that his benefactor knew only this part of his conduct. "If I am to hear a sermon," he said, "I should like to sit down; only you will have the room so plaguy cold."

Archie saw that the other's white teeth were almost chattering in his head. He said nothing, but went to the window and shut it. Then Leonard sank into a low chair

doubling his smoking-coat about his chest with his long white hands and huddling himself together as if for warmth.

"And when it comes," said Archie, "to trying to entangle a woman who means no sort of harm——"

Lenny laughed, and Archie turned upon him with sudden anger. "You don't dare to hint any harm of Dora Rutherford," he said.

"No. Curse it! No," said Leonard Vale; "who wants to hint, or to speak either. Why will you take things like that?" he went on plaintively; "it's making a fuss about nothing—about nothing but a little harmless flirtation. She didn't mind."

"Take care what you say," said Archie. "If you ever say a word against her, or annoy her in any way—I'll put it so that your man of the world can understand—payment stops."

"Who wants to say a word against her," said Leonard almost whining; "except that she's a heartless coquette? That's what she is, a heartless coquette. She made me mad, and then she turned on me with her cursed Puritan airs. Yes, I know that I got out of hand. My excuse is that I was drunk."

"Oh, that's your excuse? Is that a good excuse in the eyes of your man of the world? You ought not to be drunk when you talk to a lady!"

"It was bad form," said Lenny lightly.

"And it was bad form to run away," said Archie grimly.

Thereupon Leonard Vale broke into blasphemies. "Oh, my God!" he cried at last, shaking and holding hard to the arms of his chair. "Will you take a challenge to the man? I'll cross to-night by the Calais boat; I'll go anywhere and wait any time if he'll only meet me."

"You would have done better to wait at the time," said Archie.

"Don't I tell you that I was drunk," said Leonard fiercely.

"And so, because you were drunk," said Archie, "and being drunk behaved uncommonly badly, you want my friend to cross the Channel for a chance of being killed."

"I know the fellow's a cow[illegible]," said Lenny between his teeth; "I know he wouldn[illegible]eet me."

"You can say that," said Archie, "if it's any comfort to

you; but you know that you don't believe it. I think he would kill you, if it came to killing, but that's not to the point."

"Well, anyway," cried the recumbent youth, "I wish to Heaven you would go. This room is mine anyway, and I don't see why I should be baited." He spoke with one of his sudden changes of manner, as if he gave everything up, and nothing were important but permission to lie limp in his well-stuffed chair.

"I'll go," said Archie; "I've said what I had to say." He stopped with his hand on the door and looked at his cousin, and, as he looked upon his prostrate feebleness, his ready pity returned. After all, this was so little like a man, so weak, so little dangerous. To be angry with such a one seemed as vain as to be afraid of him. He sprawled there a scarcely responsible product of luxury, indulgence, and corruption. There came back to Archie's mind a warning of John Stuart Mill, who had written somewhere that we had yet to see what a generation would be which had grown up without romance. Here seemed a specimen of this generation to whom romance was absurd as duty, gaping for pleasure, but without energy for its pursuit. It was a comfort to Archie to transfer his indignation from this prostrate youth to the Materialism of the Age.

"By heaven!" he said, with an unusual violence of expression, "it would be better to break stone! Why can't you find something to do?"

Leonard only rolled himself in his place; but then there dawned on him a speech which might give pain, and he said—

"You don't do much."

Archie was rather startled; he frankly recognized a certain element of truth.

"That's true," he said; "but I shall try to do something, and if you'll ever try, come to me, and I'll help you."

Even as he spoke, hopelessness possessed him; his words sounded like mockery. Perhaps the other youth received them in this way. He yawned and groaned as if weary of phrases. It struck Archie that no communication, but that of a fiver, could fix this wandering attention. To take money he would probably put out his hand. Archie regarded him with exasperation and pity. What could he say? His words had that uncomfortable trick,

too common in words, of assuming a character which he did not mean them to assume. He cast about for some new form of speech.

"Anything must be better," he said at last with emphasis, "than spending your life in sneaking about after women."

But Leonard only answered with a sort of howl, in which derision, weariness, remorse, found voice.

"Good-bye," said Archie, feeling that he had been a fool to wait with his hand on the door; and he went out now and shut the door firmly behind him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHEN Archie left Leonard Vale's lodgings, he had good reason to be pleased with his success. He had pursued this doubtful cousin to town, but anxiety had been his comrade on the way. Before he left Langley he had received a little hurriedly-pencilled note from Dora; and from this unhappy little note, and from that which he himself had seen, he had inferred Leonard's conduct of the previous evening with considerable accuracy. Still he had pursued him with great anxiety, for he had been unable to prophesy what this man might or might not say or do; he had felt as if he were advancing on to a quicksand; he had been forced to believe in a weakness which he had nct imagined possible, and which might be harder to deal with than all the resources of consummate strength and courage. To no motive was he certain of being able to appeal but to self-interest alone; and he feared that this shifting soul was capable of forming the most erroneous and inconsistent opinions even of his own interests. He could not rest until he had seen Leonard and said what he had to say, but he had not hoped that the interview would be short and on the whole satisfactory.

As Archie summed up the results of the interview, he confessed himself fortunate. Leonard Vale had accepted his decree of banishment; and that meant the conclusion of a most disagreeable matter. Also he had made no serious attempt to defend his conduct except by the plea of drunkenness. Also—and this was the really important

matter—he had made no serious attempt to blame Dora. He had shown bitterness and spite; he had tried to assume the tiresome, old devil-may-care manner in speaking of women in general, the eternal knowingness of immature youth, the sickly flavor of monotonous second-rate French novels; but all this only emphasized the fact that he did not pretend that any one but himself alone was to blame for the unfortunate situation of the evening before. Archie now felt sure that Lenny had mastered that most obvious view of what was good for him, which was the mere view of cash. If no better motive ruled his tongue, or kept him from annoying Dora Rutherford, the few words about his allowance, which it had cost Archie so desagreeable an effort to say, would be sufficiently effective. Archie himself, as he left behind him the prostrate youth and the faint close odors, began at once to believe in the possibility of the better motives. His persistent optimism began to grow again with its accustomed vigor; he could not help thinking that even Lenny would be capable of some chivalrous feeling for the woman whom his folly and vanity had led into a position so painful. Already he was considering what occupation he could hope to find for this difficult youth, when he had leisure for the search.

At present Archie had not leisure. One task was done, but others no less difficult remained before him. He went to the Rutherfords' house and was told that they would arrive there in time for luncheon. He left a card, having written on it the name of the hotel at which he meant to stay for the next day or two; he thought that he would receive a letter there. He was very unquiet. He walked the pavements, stopping now and then to stare into shop windows with indifferent eyes, thinking many thoughts, and most of them uneasy. He supposed that all the party were melting away from Largley Castle; he imagined their expressions of surprise and regret at his absence; their good opinion seemed more important than usual. This vision of flys and luggage reminded him of something which he must do; he turned into a telegraph-office and telegraphed for a portmanteau of clothes. Then he walked about again; it was as if a gadfly stung him; the gadfly was a little word which he had spoken the night before. The little word was a lie. Had he been right or wrong? The very spring of his faith had always been that no good came of lies.

As he grew tired, he grew more doubtful, more depressed. He remembered that he had been hard on Lenny, and with justice; but was he one who had a right to mete out justice so severe? He almost thought at times that he ought to retun to Lenny, to tell him the conclusion of the story, and let him have his turn at blaming. Walking moodily towards his hotel he met Clara Chauncey driving westward in her rather shabby Victoria; she faced the pleasant sunlight, and her eyes were closed; she looked like a cat, faintly smiling; he could almost fancy that he heard her purring, as she was borne smoothly past.

All through the long evening, which he spent at the hotel, Archie was expecting a note from Dora, or perhaps from Tom; but no note came. In the morning there was no note. He became more and more uneasy. The long morning passed slowly away, and in the early afternoon he went again to the Rutherfords' house.

Archie felt guilty as he rang Tom Rutherford's bell. It was awfully plain to him that he was going unasked to the house of a man whom he had injured. He caught himself walking softly, as he followed the servant to the stairs, lest Tom should hear and recognize his footsteps. Such feelings, such conduct in himself, were unbearable to him; a quick end must be put to them; and yet he must consider Dora and her interests most dearly of all.

When the servant had gone, and Dora and Archie looked each at the other, both were filled with pity. They pressed each other's hands, looking pitifully. If Archie looked weary and out of sorts, Dora appeared in his eyes to be seriously ill. Hers was a beauty, of which much was brilliancy; and now the bright color was faded, and the bright eyes were dull. She sank into a seat, when she had held his hand for a minute, with an air of lassitude which he had never seen in her before.

"Where is Tom?" he asked.

"He's out," she answered, and Archie was ashamed of his feeling of relief. "It is his usual time," she added, with a faint smile; "he always walks or rides in the afternoon; everything is just as usual."

Her tone was inexpressibly dreary.

"I thought you would have written to me at the hotel," said Archie.

"He saw your card when he arrived," said Dora, "and didn't say a word. I dare not write."

"Oh, come!" said Archie, trying to speak less dismally, "things aren't so bad as that."

"Yes, they are," said Dora; "I can't tell you how bad they are. "It's dreadful—every moment is dreadful. I can't bear it. Only one day has gone and I feel as if I had been in prison for years. It sounds pathetic, doesn't it?" She asked it with a feeble smile, as if she tried to mock herself.

Archie said some common words of encouragement, and she continued—

"This morning everything began just as if we had never been away—as if nothing had happened."

"After all, it was nothing," said Archie.

"Nothing, except that I shall never be happy any more."

"Oh, Dora!"

"No," she said, shaking her head; "you can't understand it; no man could understand. When I heard the door of his study shut this morning precisely at the usual time, it was as if the prison-door closed on my life. Every day he will sit there with his papers and blue-books, and every day I shall sit here, wondering every moment what he believes about me, what he thinks of me, if he ever thinks of me at all. Every moment will be like a drop of water falling on my head, till my brain gives way. He has not asked a single question since he held the door open for me to go out of that room—it seems a month ago. He has not said one word of blame; he has been perfectly kind and courteous, and already I have wished again and again that he would break out and curse me, swear at me, as that—that——Have you seen him?"

"Yes, I have seen him," said Archie; "and that ought to be some comfort to you, anyway, for he is heartily ashamed of himself, and I can promise you that he will trouble you no more. He has no excuse except that he was drunk. He has not a word to say against you."

"What could he say against me?" she asked. "Oh yes, he could say things and truly. He could say that I was a conceited fool, who thought myself so worldly-wise that I could do things which other women could not do. Oh, when I think of myself, and my self-sufficiency and ridiculous airs, I could laugh at myself if I did not hate myself so; and when I think of him and remember how he spoke and looked—— He smelt of brandy."

The last words were spoken in a whisper, as if they told of the most awful fact in the world. "I can't get away from it," she said; "I can't smell brandy now. I feel degraded smirched—as if I could never be clean any more."

"No, no," said Archie, "you must not make mountains out of molehills. I tell you that the fellow will never trouble you any more."

"And I thought that I was converting him," said Dora with a tremulous laugh.

After this they sank into an uncomfortable silence for a time. The silence was broken by the ringing of the front-door bell, at which they both started, and then looked guiltily at each other. They heard the front door opened and closed again; but no footsteps but the servant's sounded in the passage. Dora glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. "He won't be home yet," she said; "we needn't be so frightened."

"Look here," said Archie, after another but a shorter silence, "would it be worse for you, Dora, if I told the truth?"

"The truth? What truth? To whom?"

She asked the questions with a slight, a very slight revival of interest.

"You know the lie I told to Tom," he said.

"Yes," she said, relapsing into listlessness; "you meant it well. I never thanked you."

"Well," he said, "what I want to know is this. Would it be worse for you if I told Tom that it was a lie?"

"Nothing can be worse for me," she said.

He walked up and down the room for a turn or two. "Why don't you tell him the whole thing from beginning to end?" he asked.

She shook her head dolefully. "That's so easy to say," she said. "I can't. How can I suddenly begin to blurt out a long story, and such a story, all about my idiotcy, when he never gives a sign of supposing that there is any story at all. I can see his look of surprise, as I began; I can hear him interrupt me, by saying that he needs no explanation. I could as well think of dashing my poor hands against a rock. 'Qui s'excuse, s'accuse:' that would be in his mind, and I should know it. I should stumble and turn red, and tell my tale so badly that he could not

help thinking that it was not true. No, Archie, I can do nothing. That is what I ought always to have known—that I was a weak fool and only safe in doing nothing."

"No, no," said Archie, "that's all stuff. Forgive me, Dora, but you know, we all know how clever you are. Among us we have made a mess of this business; but I am sure that it will all come right, and soon."

If Archie spoke more confidently than he felt, it had but small effect on Dora's depression.

"I am going away now," he said. "I won't take your decision now, for you would say 'yes' to anything. But you must cheer up, Dora, when I have gone, and make up your mind. I will come back to-morrow, and you shall tell me then if I may tell Tom that it was not I who was in that room that night. He will be very angry, but I can't help believing, as I always have believed, that truth is best. I can't think how I lied then; I have no habit of lying. If I tell Tom the truth, I think that the whole story will come out, and I do hope and believe that good will come of it."

Dora listened to him with a most uncertain attention. She was absorbed for the time in the contemplation of her own misfortunes, deep in that abyss of desolation wherein sanguine happy spirits are so amazed to find themselves. A long life of lovelessness lay before her, and down this monotonous vista she gazed and gazed.

Archie took her lifeless hand and pressed it hard.

"Good-bye," he said, "till to-morrow. Then you shall tell me if I may speak."

"Good-bye," she said sadly, listening, even as she spoke, for her husband's ring.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE was yet a wholesome wilfulness in Dora's depression. She would not admit to herself that hope was any longer possible; and yet all her nature cried out against her decision that she must hope no more. It could not be that she should never know happiness again, she so vivid and alert, she who had done no wrong, unless silliness be a crime. So she was divided, the life within her rebelling

against her obstinate acceptance of abiding grief. She could not help hoping, though she declared that she would not hope, that, when her husband came back from his walk, she would see some change in him, some change from this cruel silence and reserve. If he came back red with anger and stormed at her, she would be thankful.

This little hope of Dora was doomed to disappointment. She could see no change at all; and she said to herself that she had known that there would be no change. She had said that she would be at home to nobody; but Tom Rutherford returning found a carriage before the door and pressed the visitor to come in. So Dora was obliged to sit quiet behind her tea-table and to listen smiling to the prattle of a little lady who was eager to tell her why she was in town at that time, at which great house she had been and to which great house she was presently going. She was all fluffy and shining like a ruffled teal; she seemed like a ball of fur and feathers endowed with chatter and a little high laugh to fill the pauses. Dora said bitterly to herself that her husband classed her with this sort of little ladies, all artificial as the trimming of a hat, and travelling from country house to country house in a bandbox. When this visitor had run down and the little works were eloquent no more, Tom conducted her with great politeness downstairs, and then, as was his wont after five o'clock tea, he shut himself up again in his den. There he would remain, as Dora knew, till it was time to dress for dinner.

The little hope, which Dora now recognized when it was time to snuff it out, had vanished; but promptly another glimmered in the deeps. Against her will she began to think that some comfort might lie in the fact that Tom had avoided being alone with her at tea-time. But this pale gleam went out also when he came into the drawing-room before dinner. Her eager eyes could detect no shade of difference; even his tie was tied as accurately as ever. Not a sign was there of anger, of mockery, nor, most wonderful in her woman's eyes, of curiosity. To dine opposite to her husband was a slow punishment; she fancied that the quiet butler, who conducted the business of the well-ordered meal, was watching her with demure eyes. Ten thousand leisurely dinners lay before her, all with their ghastly mockery of peace, their keeping up of appearances in the butler's eyes.

It was a momentary relief to leave the dining-room, but she had hardly begun to taste the new discomfort of loneliness and to review her troubles, when her husband came upstairs. He never lingered over his wine; she could not even think that he had made more haste than usual to join her; all things were just the same. He sat in his accustomed place and opened the evening paper. Then an awfull stillness began. She sat like the victim of a nightmare, fearing that he would hear the beating of her heart, listening for the turning of his page. At last he laid aside the paper, and it seemed that even so slight a movement broke the spell. She uttered a sound which seemed to herself like the cry of a wounded animal; he looked at her, and from the mere fact that he looked at her she took such measure of encouragement that it seemed possible to speak. "Archie was here to-day," she said; the words were all ready, though she had by no means expected to say them. Her husband looked as if he expected her to say more, and with almost breathless haste she hurried on. "He asked me," she said, "to let him tell you the truth about that night, the night of the ball." The words were out, and she was trembling. Presently she glanced at her husband and saw that his jaw was set and fancied that he ground his teeth.

"He lied then," he said quietly; "I thought so." He rose from his chair and stood by the mantelpiece, looking down.

"Oh, he meant well," she cried out; "oh, let me tell you now; it was all my fault;" and so she rushed into the story which she was sure that she should tell so badly. She told it, if somewhat incoherently, at least better than she had feared; it sounded less artificial, less improbable; and it was a relief to speak. She did not spare herself, her folly, her faith in herself as in a petty providence for young men; but a just instinct kept her from dwelling too much on that. At first she dared not notice if she aroused any sign of sympathy; but, when she looked for such sign, there was none. He listened coldly, and she faltered. Still with an effort she persevered; she could not leave her tale half told. She told how she and Leonard Vale had combined to prevent Archie's engagement; how on the night of the ball she had heard of the paragraph announcing the engagement, and how at the same moment she had

heard that Leonard had proofs that Lady Jane Lock had sent the paragraph. "He was too ill to come down," she said, "and would not or could not send the proofs, but sent to ask me to come up for one moment. At first I said I would not, and then I saw Archie, and I saw that he knew about the paragraph, and I thought that he was just going to ask the girl to marry him, and that nothing could stop him but the proof that Lady Jane herself had forced him to it; and then Lady Jane stopped me when I was going to Archie, and I was furious with her, and made up my mind in a moment that I would go and see if there was any proof that she had written the thing; and so I ran upstairs and into that room, and he was there, and when I saw him like that, and he spoke to me like that——"

She stopped with a strong gesture of disgust. He came a step nearer to her and asked in a low voice—

"How did he speak?"

Then her quick mind detected danger; she feared that he would seek a quarrel with this worthless man.

"The words were nothing," she said eagerly; "it was his looks; he had been drinking; he did not know what he said. Archie has seen him; he is wretched and ashamed; he said that he had been drinking."

"You need not be afraid," said Tom huskily; "I shall not hurt him."

She stood silent for a moment, stunned as if he had struck her; he, with a smothered imprecation, walked out of the room and shut the door behind him.

Then the waters of desolation seemed to close over that fair young head. For the first time she was really hopeless. It seemed clear to her now that he would never believe her any more, and that she must walk through all her long life smiling false smiles, playing the part of happy wife in a ghastly comedy, on which no curtain fell, her husband and she always together, always eyeing each other with suspicion. The little cloud which had shadowed her life seemed to darken all the heaven of her days. For all her woman's cleverness, her knowledge of unkindness was but that of a spoiled child. She was unaccustomed to sorrow.

Tom Rutherford had left the room because a great wave of passion had threatened to shake him from his self-control. The thought of Leonard Vale moved him to fury,

and to the old barbarian hunger of his enemy's life; his fingers itched for his throat. To hear his wife speak words which sounded like a defence of this corrupted and corrupting youth was more than he could bear, and he could not restrain his cruel taunting speech. He went out lest he should say more, and so have more to regret; for he had hardly said the words before he condemned them as unfair. He had never doubted his wife. He had been indignant with her, for that she, his wife, had been so little careful to run no risk of misconception, and so ready to trust a man against whom her instinct should have warned her. And now he did not for a moment doubt the truth of what she said. He was more happy than he had been for days past; for he had been very unhappy in spite of his calm air, doubting Archie's statement, believing that he did not know the true story of the night of the ball, determined to ask no questions. How his wife of her own accord had told him the truth; and he was glad. Only his anger was still fiery hot within him, and, when she spoke of Leonard Vale, he had not held his tongue.

Tom went down stairs and waited till he felt sure of himself. Then he went up again, determined to be quiet and to say quietly to his wife that he was sorry for the words which he had spoken; that he had never thought ill of her, except for the heedlessness which had hurt his pride so deeply. He went upstairs rehearsing the cool clear sentences which he meant to say. He opened the door quietly enough, but, when he was again in the room, there was an end of his coolness and clearness; the sight of his young wife moved him too deeply. She had turned in her chair and leaned her arms upon its back; her fair young head, all ruffled and disordered, lay helpless on her arms; the attitude was girlish, almost childlike; she was abandoned to grief. She was praying inaudibly and crying like a child. Tears in women and children were always intolerable to Tom Rutherford; he knew his weakness well; even the easy pathos of books and plays had often filled his eyes with tears, and made him mock himself for his absurdity. But it was too late to escape this sight. Here was his own wife, woman and child too, or so she seemed, lost in grief, shaken by painful sobs. He came near her quickly. He said what he had meant to

say but vehemently; he blamed himself for leaving her alone, for his cruel words; he had never doubted her for a moment; that young blackguard had turned his blood, but such an one must not be allowed to come between them. His words were not of much importance, for she hardly knew what he said; it was the tone of his voice for which she cared, and the touch of his large hand upon her hair.

"My child," he said; "don't, don't, dear!"

These were the words which she heard most clearly, and these were enough. In his vehemence he knelt down beside the chair and drew her head to his shoulder; then she clasped her arms about his neck.

CHAPTER XXX.

ARCHIE awoke and wondered if it were day or night. He had a slight headache, which surprised him; he lay trying lazily to remember when he had felt a headache before; he felt a disinclination to rise and face the perplexities of the day. The unfortunate mis-statement which he had made grew big in that early dismal hour and seemed to fill the room, and to oppress him. Certainly the room was full of oppression. With an effort he got out of bed, went to the window, and pulled up the dingy yellow blind. The pulling up of the blind made small difference, if any; the world outside was dingy yellow as the blind, and the outer air thicker than the air within. It happened that this was the first London fog which young Lord Lorrilaire had met. He looked at his watch and found that it was half-past eight. It was day then, but a hideous muffled day; to lie abed was to be stifled by heavy reminiscences; to wash and dress was a tiresome prelude to a task which seemed to have grown portentous in the choked hours of the night. As he stood cheerless and in doubt, he heard a rap at his door. He crept back into bed and called to the knocker to come in.

"What's the matter out of doors?" he asked, when the Boots of the hotel came in with a candle.

"It's a thick fog, sir," said the Boots; "the man, as brought your letter, came near to losing his way."

Archie took the letter and looked at it with languid interest, which distinctly increased as he saw that the direction was in Dora's handwriting. With a faint sigh he tore open the envelope, while the Boots discreetly held the candle near, but not too near. It was a short note:—

"DEAR ARCHIE,—Don't come to see us till we come back. We are away this morning out of this horrid fog and all our worries. We are perfectly happy. I told him everything. He sends love. Yours ever,

"DORA."

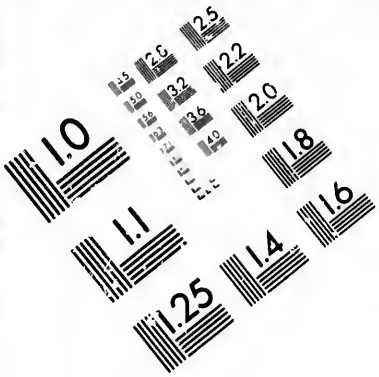
"All right," said Archie to the man; "I'll have my bath." Then the man went away, leaving him in thick darkness again, lying, as it were, in the woollen and breathing hardly. His first clear thought was that it was strange that he was not more elated by Dora's note. What more could he have wished? Had he hoped for any news half so good? Perhaps elation was impossible on such a morning. He was sure that he was extremely glad that Tom and Dora were friends again. Of course they did not want him any more; but that only meant that he need perplex himself no more with their affairs, nor strive to disentangle that most intricate skein. In fact his occupation was gone, the weight was removed; he ought to be amazingly happy. But happiness, shy as a woodland nymph, has small connection with duty; she will not come because she ought; pursued, she eludes us with a thousand wiles, then shines upon us unlooked for, abundant and caressing, at a sound or a gleam, as we plod on unmindful of her. Archie could assure himself that he was glad. He lay blinking, with eyes smarting a little; it did not matter now when he got up or if he lay there all day. The Rutherfords were creeping out of this oppressive city; but why should he? He could get up when he liked, do what he liked, go where he pleased. The weight was removed, and only levity remained. His beloved freedom was his once more; nobody cared where he went; that ought to be delightful. Howbeit he felt lonely.

He dressed himself by candle-light, and breakfasted with small appetite in the blinking coffee-room. Then he advanced so far as to determine that he must go somewhere. He would not go to his mother. He felt himself too restless for her quiet life; he thought that he should

disturb the placid atmosphere in which she imagined her gentle pictures or planned her daily benefactions. He felt a perverse desire to see Dora, but could find no reason for the wish but her command that he should not come. He told himself again how glad he was that all was well with Dora, and straightway slid into dull melancholy thoughts. "Never again," he thought, "shall I be the same to those friends of mine; I shall be associated with an awkward crisis, with uneasy thoughts, with the memory of a lie." He felt an uncommon loneliness.

One thing was certain; he could not stay resting in that hotel. Perhaps the London winter was like this. Somewither he must go, if only to see that the sky still arched over all and air was somewhere sweet and pure. He inspected Bradshaw by the untimely gaslight; he asked the friendly Boots to pack his clothes. Finally a four-wheeler crawled through the muffled streets from lamp-post to lamp-post, and bore the young man and his fortunes to the station, which loomed dark, blurred, and gigantic in the fog.

Even as the train moved slowly out from the station, the young man began to breathe more happily. He had taken a ticket for Langstone, for he had made up his mind to go, for want of a better object, back to his castle. It was at least possible that somebody might want him there. Slowly he was drawn out of the clinging dusky fog, and then on a sudden he was beyond its utmost verge and in a bright frosty world. His heart leaped to meet the gladness of the day; he could scarcely sit still in his place; at a station some miles short of Langstone he left the train, and leaving some directions about his scanty luggage, he took the road with joy. On he walked upon the good high-road, glad of the keen bright air, and wondering at times if it were possible that that great mass of creeping yellow fog were so near. The sound of his feet on the good road was pleasant in his ears, and his blood moved responsive. So he came in due course to the admirable palings of his park, and looked at them as a bird who had been let out to fly about the room might look at the well-set bars of his cage. He a vagabond, light of heart, would be a great man and a land-owner, so soon as he had topped those palings. He topped the palings nimbly and alighted, the most fantastic of all Lord Lorrilaires,



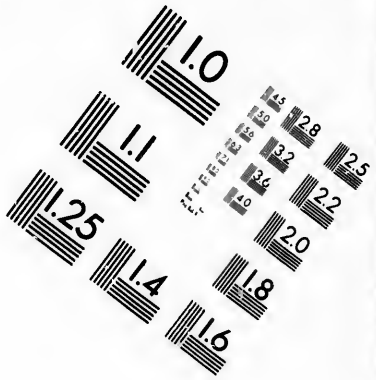
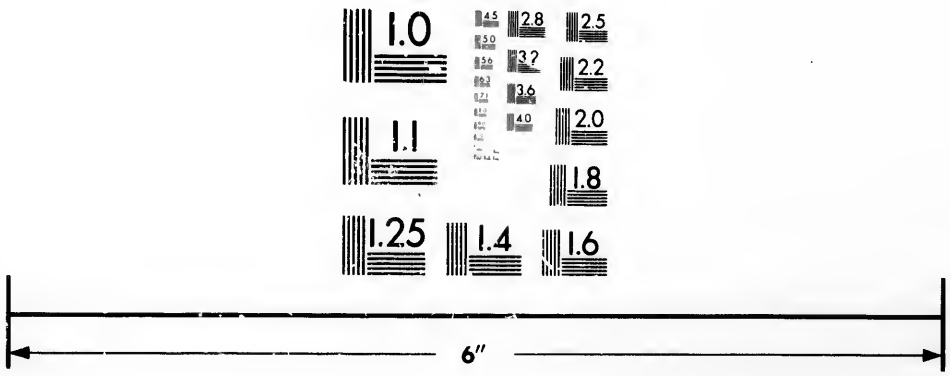
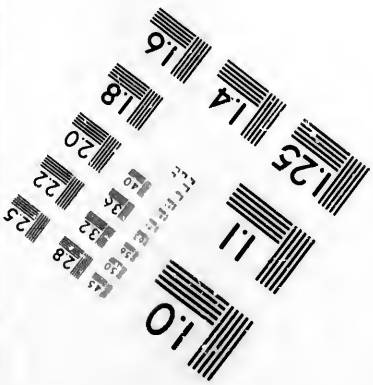
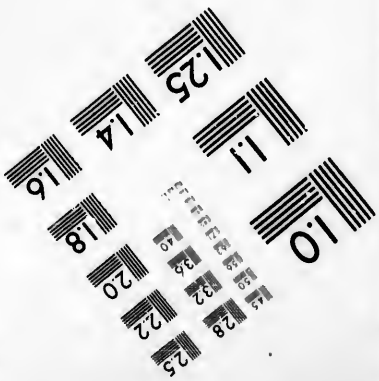


IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (MT-3)







Photographic Sciences Corporation

23 WEST MAIN STREET
WEBSTER, N.Y. 14580
(716) 872-4503

upon the springy turf within. Then he walked forward, still defiant of his own grandeur, across his wide domain. The sun was bright and warm, no wind was stirring, and for all the exhilaration of the frost, Archie was glowing. He came to a little wood, all of silver-stemmed birches standing knee-deep in dry brown fern. Here were delightful autumnal colors under the clear blue sky; the ruddy brown and the silvery slender tree-trunks held him still for a moment; and then, yielding to the charm and tired pleasantly by his long walk, he dropped himself into the crisp clean fern and lay thinking, dreaming.

Lonely he still felt himself to be, but, if he were melancholy in his musing, it was a melancholy which was almost a luxury. From his nest in the fern he could see beyond the wide hollow and the opposite slope the tower of his majestic castle. What a preposterous abode it seemed for one light youth, who asked no more than a crust of bread and liberty, freedom to come and go, fresh air, and elbow room upon the road of life! There stood his dwelling, planted there, solid, oppressive, and there it would stand while owner after owner followed on the same way and a million vagabonds passed by. He could not but feel lonely. When he should rise from his lair and go on to his castle, he would find no welcome more stimulating than that of the calm Mrs. Dormer or of the practical Sir Villiers.

Archie lay thinking lazily, dreaming, stretched at his ease, tenderly pitying himself a little—thinking, dreaming, at last dozing. From this comfort and light haze of sleep he was somewhat roughly awakened. He was lying flat on his stomach, his head had dropped on his arms, and he was dozing comfortably, when suddenly he felt a weight as if a tiger had leapt on to his back and gripped his two shoulders. In that small wood and dry warm fern there were no beasts more dangerous than rabbits; no rabbit could have pinned him thus; and, startled wide awake from his dozing, Archie was sure in a moment that a human animal held him. He heard the deep breathing as of an anxious man; he felt the big fingers on his shoulders, and then a big knee setting itself in his back; and then with a vigorous effort, struggling and writhing like an eel, he wrenched himself to one side, brought his feet to his hands and stood upright. His assailant, amazed by such

unexpected agility, had staggered slightly, but he now recovered his feet and advanced upon Archie, red-faced and angry, muttering dire threats, and with two ponderous fists slowly coming into action. Archie was sore perplexed. To fight a yokel in his own park was plainly unseemly; to announce his name and rank seemed ridiculous, if not cowardly; a natural desire not to be pounded by a rustic contended with a natural desire to give this lout, whose hands he still felt upon his shoulders, a well-deserved lesson. He measured the advancing foe, and saw no way of honor but to leap in upon his superior strength and trust to his activity and the quickness of a few well-planted blows. In a moment he would have been within the yokel's guard, when with fresh surprise he saw a remarkable change in the advancing foe. The great fists dropped and the lower jaw dropped with them; the man stood still; he tried to speak but he could only stare; at last he began, "Well, I'm——" but could advance no further. Archie now warily advanced and shook him.

"Oh, your worship," said the man, trembling at his touch. "Oh, your lordship!"

"What's the matter?" said Archie; "there's no harm done—what did you come at me for?"

"Oh, oh!" said the man, "my word! have I laid hands on the anointed?"

"Don't be a fool," said Archie. "What's the matter? can't you speak?"

"Oh, your lordship! you won't visit it on me," said the man. "I'm a poor man; I thought no more—Heaven help me, I took your lordship for one of them poaching boys."

Archie laughed, and having begun to laugh found it hard to stop; but the man stared with only an added solemnity, as if he feared that this causeless laughter was some effect of his rash act, the beginning perhaps of a form of aristocratic insanity.

"Who are you, anyway?" said Archie, "and what is it to you if boys come poaching?"

"What is it to me?" echoed the other slowly; "doesn't your lordship know me? I am your lordship's underkeeper; I am James Pye, your lordship."

This fact delighted Archie. There was something extremely entertaining to him in the fact that one of his under-

lings had pinned him in his own fern like a hare on her form. It delighted him, and yet Mr. Pye's abject attitude annoyed him. Was it with such eyes that his dependants must regard him? He was vexed with dependant's eyes. "Don't be a fool," he said roughly; "do you think I'd be such a cad as to hurt you for making a mistake in your duty. Only the next time you find a boy on the place, take care not to break his back, or I will be down on you with no mistake; and, if a boy is lying in the fern and doing no harm, let him lie in the fern. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, my lord," said the man humbly, "but——"

"No. You must remember that," said Archie. "Is it you who live in the cottage in the middle of the wood beyond the brook?"

"Yes, your worship—I mean, my lord, and I do hope your lordship——"

"Don't I tell you I won't hurt you?" said Archie impatiently; "show me the way to your cottage without going by the house."

The great man bowed and almost curtsied in his zeal, and Archie had a moment's fear that his guide intended to walk backwards before him to their destination. But James Pye contented himself with occasional half turns and samples of a crab-like progression, which were eloquent of apology. So journeying they came by a roundabout path to the little clearing in the wood, wherein the cottage stood. A sudden fancy had seized Archie, a whimsical desire to enter the cottage, through the window of which he had peeped a few days before.

In the keeper's cottage down among the trees the light was far more dim. The good housewife peered twice at the figure, which was following her lord and master through the low door, before she began to think that it might be the figure of Lord Lorrilaire. Then she promptly dusted a chair, which needed no dusting, and offered it to Archie with apologies, glancing meanwhile with questioning looks at her husband and wondering at his hang-dog air. She for her part had an air of sufficient self-respect, as she awaited his lordship's pleasure. It was not for nothing that she had been an indoor servant at the castle; she was well aware that she knew how to talk to the quality. As for Archie, he was suddenly aware, as he felt that polite inquiring gaze upon him, that he had no reason to

give for his visit. He had not even given a reason to himself. He felt that he was standing there, smiling amiably but absurdly, while James Pye regarded him pitifully and with awe, as if he expected him to pull a black cap out of his shooting-coat pocket and condemn him to be hung on the instant to his own rafter. Suddenly Archie was possessed of an idea, sufficiently obvious, and asked with relief, "How's Tommy?"

It seemed impossible even to Mrs. Pye that the young lord had travelled from London to inquire after Tommy. But it was her duty to answer any question which the quality, whose motives and manners were generally mysterious, chose to ask, and so she answered civilly that Tommy was still ailing, and entered moreover into certain details which surprised the young man, who was not accustomed to the plain speaking and frank enjoyment of medical topics, which is common to such women.

"Tommy!" she cried through the door of the back room, and Tommy emerged and stood staring, till he was told to make his bow.

"He is to go away to-morrow," said Mrs. Pye, with a manner which was almost aggrieved.

"Ah, that'll do him good," said Archie; "there's nothing like a change."

"Indeed, it's a sore trouble to send him, and a sore trouble to be without him," said his mother plaintively. "Here are the directions where he is to be taken to," she added, and she took a sheet of writing-paper from the mantelpiece and handed it respectfully to Lord Lorrilaire.

Archie took the paper from her hand and looked at it, half forgetting, as he looked, where he was. The directions were put briefly, and were written in a strong mannish hand, a good example of that bold hand-writing which the younger ladies of our day affect.

"Be at Langstone with Tommy before 10. Take 3rd return to Darley for yourself, and 3rd single to Strandling for Tommy.

"Train leaves Langstone 10.5 A.M., arrives at Darley Junction 11.15 A.M.

"At Darley ask for right platform for train to Strandling.

"I shall be in that train, and shall look on that platform for Tommy."

That was all which was on the paper; and Archie read it twice, smiling at the strong writing, the minute directions, and the business-like form.

"How kind of her," he said; and having said it, he wondered if it were she.

"Yes, my lord, I am sure it is very kind of the young lady," said Mrs. Pye, with the air of a martyr. "Tommy is to go to a Convalescent Home which is kept by one of the young lady's friends, and I do hope he'll be happy."

"Oh, he'll be happy, right enough," said Archie; "it'll do him a world of good. It *is* kind of her."

On this Mrs. Pye deemed no comment necessary, cherishing her private opinion that Miss Lock was indulging herself in a treat. Tommy was a treat in his mother's eyes. Moreover, it was inconvenient for either herself or her husband to take the boy as far as Darley Junction.

"I don't know how ever we shall get him there," she said.

Archie returned the paper to Mrs. Pye; and, as she stuck it behind the candlestick on the mantelpiece, he observed that there was a glove there, which no stretch of the imagination could fancy on the hand of Mrs. Pye. Yet it was not a small glove.

"Is that," began Archie—"did the—in fact, did Miss Lock leave her glove behind her?" He moved, as he spoke, towards the mantelpiece and delicately picked out the glove.

Mrs. Pye thought it must belong to the young lady, and she hoped to take it to the Junction to-morrow; but she again expressed her wonder how ever she should get there, or James either. James could not trust himself to offer an opinion. He stood clutching his right arm, as if to make sure that it would not assault his liege lord and master.

"Well, good night," said Archie, waking suddenly from a reverie. He had been standing and looking at the glove. It was a long glove, and not even small in the hand, though it looked small where it lay in the young man's palm; it was an old glove too, and had taken the shape of the hand; the shape was fine and free. It was from such thoughts that Archie started. "Well, good night," he said, and returned the glove to Mrs. Pye; he was a little hurt by her manner of rolling it up, and stick-

ing it behind the candlestick. "Good night!" he said again—"Good night, James, and don't forget about the boys—be easy with them."

"Oh, lor!" said James Pye, with a sort of groan.

CHAPTER XXXI.

When Elizabeth Lock looked out of the window of a first-class carriage at Darley Junction, she saw little Tommy Pye, and she also saw another young man whom she had not expected to see. The train had scarcely stopped, when the door of the carriage was opened by Lord Lorrilaire. She gave him her hand as she stepped out, looking at him with wide-open eyes. "What brings you here?" she asked.

"I brought Tommy," he answered; "his parents were busy, and I had nothing to do. I hope you don't mind."

"Oh, no," she said; "it was very kind of you."

"No, I can't allow that," he said.

On this she made no comment, but turned away to greet Master Pye, who was lost in contemplation of the engine. She was conducting her young charge to the carriage, from which she had descended, when Archie said, "We are third-class passengers, you know; we followed your instructions to the letter."

She laughed and blushed as he handed her her paper of directions. "All right!" she said; "here is an empty third, and I will go with him." She opened the door before Archie could reach it.

"And your maid?" asked Archie, for the lady's maid was peering anxiously from her compartment.

"She can stay where she is," said Elizabeth, "with the bags and rugs."

Tommy scrambled into the third-class carriage, and Miss Lock followed him. And now the doors were slamming and the train almost in motion, when Archie, as if there were never a doubt of his intention, followed Miss Lock into the carriage. The train had begun to move out of the station, when the young lady said rather tamely, "Are you coming too?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Archie; "I was to take a return ticket to Darley, wasn't I?"

"You were not to come at all," she said.

Yet Archie thought that she did not look displeased. Indeed, he was vaguely disappointed by the friendliness, the perfect candor of her manner. She began to talk to Tommy as if there where no other specimen of the male sex within miles. He felt a strong desire to interest her; he cast about for an interesting speech. "Here and now," he said with a laugh, "begins the Social Revolution."

This startling statement produced an effect. She looked at him with frank interest.

"You in a third-class carriage and your maid in a first. You can't go further than that."

"What is the Social Revolution?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know.

"Like the French Revolution?" she asked again.

"No, no," he answered laughing; "all that's out of date. The people can't revolt against the people. The people govern now, more or less, and will govern more."

He had gained his point; he had attracted her attention. She sat looking at him with an added flush on her cheek, waiting for more. This was more than enough to set Archie's tongue wagging. He began to pour out views, and glibly to describe the political and social phenomena of the time, as he saw them. From this he slipped naturally to the more personal question, and indirectly claimed her sympathy, as he confessed how hard he had found it to know what part he could best play in the present state of affairs. "You have to accept the main tendencies of the time," he said; "and the difficulty is to know what one can do one's self, being the sort of chap one is, to further what's best or check what's worst."

"Yes, I see that," she said, nodding her head. Her air of interest led him on, and he continued to confide to her the embarrassing question of his Oxford days, the reasons why the ordinary professions of mankind had not tempted him. It was all a little boyish, a little vain-glorious. Finally he was conscious that he might seem to be talking as if there were no course worthy of so fine a fellow as himself. He was suddenly conscious to of the absolutely blank gaze of the freckled mite who sat opposite by the lady's side with thin legs dangling. He looked back again at the handsome girl with a smile, which was meant for an apology, but her face was neither blank nor critical. She

was leaning slightly forward, her lips apart, her hands slightly clasped. He was amazed by her seriousness, half inclined to laugh; but he checked himself and he rebuked himself. How fine it was this power of seriousness, this warm, frank nature! He lost himself for a moment, musing. Then, rousing himself, he said, with the apology which his smile had intended to convey, "I've no right to bore you—talking of myself."

"But it doesn't bore me," she said emphatically; "you can't tell how much it interests me. I am not clever, you know, and I don't know clever people, and I never hear about things which matter."

"I don't know that I matter much," he said.

"Oh, it's not you," she said quickly—"at least I mean," she added, for she saw that he had begun to laugh at the prompt disclaimer, "that it's not only you. It's the whole thing; it's the fact that there is such a thing as being of some real use in the world, and that people are really trying to find the right thing to do, and that doing one's duty is not only a thing one says in one's cathechism in the schoolroom. But you? I can't see why you should have any trouble. It seems to me as if there were so much for you to do."

"Oh, don't begin to talk to me about my position and all that," he said. "You should have seen the Castle last night, when I arrived. Uncle Villiers and Aunt Susan had both vanished, and all the household, save the mark, where on board-wages, and the Groom of the Chambers (I never knew till late last week that there was such a thing as a Groom of the Chambers) was so much annoyed with me for coming, that I couldn't have stopped another hour in the house for a fortune. A fortune! Heaven knows I've enough of that."

"But surely that makes it all plain," said the girl. "You had nothing to do, and now you've got all sorts of things and people to look after."

Archie made a slight grimace. "And you could try experiments and things," she continued: "my brother-in-law, the parson you know, wants all sorts of things tried, allotments and small farms and fruit growing and all sorts of things; but he's not rich and he can't afford experiment's. Now you——" She stopped, and looked at him with eyes wide open and interest almost eager. As he looked

back on her it struck him suddenly as an amazing fact that she should be speaking so calmly to him of his wealth, which she might have shared had she chosen. His face become full of an interest more personal than her own. He wondered that she did not think of this. It was amazing, and as beautiful as it was amazing. She might think herself stupid if she pleased; he was lost in admiration of a simple and beautiful soul. He turned his eyes from hers, and encountered the never-averted gaze of the grave Thomas Pye.

"Now, there is Tommy," said the girl; "if you had interested yourself in the people on your place, you would have found out that Tommy needed a change. You are going to see the sea, Tommy. Won't that be splendid?"

Tommy was of a cautious character. He was not inclined to commit himself to any definite opinion about this unknown illimitable sea. Perhaps he had inherited from his mother a tendency to mistrust, to suspect that even glorious ladies, apparently philanthropic, might get something out of him. Certain it is that Silence held his lips; he reserved his opinion about Ocean, which was compelled to await his verdict.

As Tommy did not speak, Archie made the next remark, and made it with conviction.

"How good you are!" he said.

The girl started, and then grew red and awkward. She moved uneasily, and then said in a low voice, "I wish you would not talk like that; you make me feel a fool and a humbug."

Her embarrassment, her very awkwardness, delighted Archie. He would say nothing to divert her thoughts; and presently she said again, speaking more quickly, "I am not at all good; I am often cross; I am often disagreeable to people—to my mother, for instance." The last words seemed to come with an effort, and they were followed by a period of silence

"Theodosia is good," the girl said suddenly, as if she must break this silence full of thoughts.

"Who is Theodosia?" asked Archie.

"Oh, don't you know about her? I thought you would know because of Tommy. She has built the Convalescent Home, and takes care of it. It is only a small one, but it took most of her money; and she lives in

a cottage near, and I go and stay with her sometimes, and try to be like her."

Words were on Archie's lips which he did not speak. Instead of speaking he turned his head and looked out of the window at the flying fields, the long procession of the hedges. His mind moved quicker than the train, picturing the whole life of Theodosia Grant, seeing it from the somewhat fatuous masculine point of view as the life of a woman with whom love had not prospered—flitting in an instant from Miss Grant to Lady Jane Lock, considering her also, wondering at her and at the contrast between her and her daughter.

Elizabeth Lock, as if she felt the direction of the young man's thoughts, spoke again. "My mother is so good," she said, "about letting me go to Strandling. She does not like my going so much, but she is very kind about it. She has old-fashioned ideas; she thinks that she ought always to have her girls with her and be doing things for them; and now, when there's only me, she would like to keep me always with her, until—unless——"

The girl had spoken so far, anxious only to explain, to approve her mother, and suddenly she had found herself on the brink of words, which died upon her tongue and made her startlingly conscious that she was travelling almost alone with a young man, who but a few days ago had asked her to be his wife.

Archie looked at her for a moment, and for a moment only. He turned his eyes quickly from her flushed, embarrassed face. "Tommy," he cried, giving that self-contained personage a lively shake of the shoulder, "we shall be there in no time. Don't you begin to smell the sea?"

"No," said Thomas Pye.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN he had reached his goal, Archie found himself in a somewhat comical position. No sooner had the train stopped at Strandling, than a bright-eyed lively lady pounced at Miss Lock and embraced her with ardor. Miss Grant was wholly unlike Archie's fancy picture. With bright dark eyes, wavy hair worn in the simplest

mode, and an erect, active figure, she showed an undeniable attraction that would have convinced the most careless of male eyes that, if she were a spinster and could be classed as middle-aged, she was a spinster by choice; she looked like a brillant being playing the part of an old maid.

Archie regarded this lady with eyes which were by no means careless, but, before he could think more of her, he had been introduced, received a hearty shake of the hand, and had seen Elizabeth carried off from his gaze in a little rattling pony-carriage. Elizabeth had said good-bye as if she took it for granted that here they were to part. She had thanked him for his kindness in bringing Tommy, with the frank gratitude of friend to friend, and with an air of finality as if she were leaving him on the edge of a new world. As he looked after the low pony-carriage, which an exceedingly small pony was hurrying away at his own discretion, he saw the two female heads close together, and felt that Elizabeth was listening with interest and sympathy to much talk, with which he had even less to do than had Tommy, who sat on a tiny shelf opposite to the ladies and stared and stared. When the little vehicle had turned the corner, Archie had nothing to look at but the maid, who was setting forth at a dignified pace by the side of the luggage which a porter was wheeling down the road. He looked beyond the maid and down the road to the clustering roofs and high church-tower, and wondered which roof would cover that fair head; it was not of the lady's maid that he was thinking. Depression possessed him. He stood irresolute. His portmanteau had been deposited on the platform, and there lay neglected. The Strandling season had ended many weeks before, and brooding winter quiet held the station and the little town. The young man shook himself and turned to ask what train would carry him and the portmanteau, his only companion, to Langstone, or London, or somewhither. Confronted, as he turned, by the other and more sleepy porter, he suddenly determined to stay there for that night at least, and asked which was the best inn. The porter, with a pardonable prejudice, recommended the Pier Hotel, at which his brother cleaned the boots and knives; he inferred from the cut of his clothes that this idle young gentleman would be peculiarlly beneficial to his brot[illegible]

So Archie told this calm and calculating official to wheel down the portmanteau at his leisure, and so walked away to the Pier Hotel, which was a modest inn for all its name, and ate some luncheon in the silent coffee-room, and felt better for a time.

Having learned that Miss Grant's cottage stood, withdrawn a little from the little town, on his right, Archie after his luncheon walked away towards the left. He felt strangely shy when he thought of meeting those ladies, and most fearful of intruding on the first hours of their renewed conversation. So he walked away from the narrow streets along the edge of the high sandy cliffs, which crumbled daily to the sandy shore below, melancholy, perhaps enjoying a little of this young man's melancholy, sad as night. When the sun was low, he turned and walked back towards Strandling. Between him and the town the cliff sloped down and rose again to a big blunt knoll, on which the whole fishing village clustered, red roofs and narrow twisted streets, and over all the tall grey tower buttressed against the winter winds. Below the knoll and but just above the sea-level stood the little hotel, and close beside it a short old-fashioned wooden pier straddled out into the sea. The Pier Hotel had been attractive at luncheon-time, but, as Archie entered it in the evening, he felt its silence. It no longer looked for holiday folk; it had entered on its dormouse sleep; the two waiters, who had come for its season, were on the Riviera. Only the porter's brother and a couple of girls assisted the landlord and his wife.

Archie dined sadly. The loneliness of his inn was as the loneliness of his castle with all his retainers on board-wages; the intermittent society of the Boots was no more satisfying than that of his Groom of the Chambers. He had not even bought a book or a paper on his journey. For want of other food of thought, he fell to thinking of himself, and was sad. So he sat staring at his boots by the light of one hot gas-burner, and conscious of the fumes of his late dinner and of other dinners of other days, until glancing up through the unshuttered window he saw that the stars were shining. It was better to be out than in. So out he went again, and this time he walked up through the crowded dreamy town, under the tall grey tower, and turned into a narrow path between the houses,

which led him in the direction other than that which he had chosen in the afternoon. He walked briskly, for the night was cold, and the stars, which had called him forth, shone clear. So walking he came soon to a little open paling on his left, with neatly raked gravel behind it and a neatly whitened house with two gables. He knew in a moment that this was the Convalescent Home, and stood still to look at it. It looked like a toy set carefully down in its place by a child's hand, and the paint of its little railings seemed to have had scarcely time to dry. Archie was in a strange mood, the thought of sick children made tears come into his eyes.

If this were the little hospital, as he felt sure it was, then the lady's cottage must be near at hand. But Archie did not wish to look at the cottage, at least not on that evening. He turned back and found another path and followed that, musing, thinking of himself. He wondered what was the matter with him. He wondered why he had come there. He began to blame himself, for had he not been drifting again? Had he not yet learned that to let himself drift and see what came of it was no course for a man? He was a man now, and to spend manhood in sighing for one's lost boyhood—that at least would not do. The happy irresponsible wandering time was done; even if it could please him still, it could content him no longer. The drifter must have no conscience, if he would drift happily for ever and shut his ear to all the little clamorous duties which every day beset him. He had pushed himself off on his new life of Lord Lorrilaire, intent on sliding down and amusing himself with new chances, and at the very outset he had run smack upon the facts of life. He had been shaken rudely from his laziness, forced to bestir himself, to choose unpleasant action, to forbid a kinsman his house, to protect a friend even at the expense of his truth. Ah, that still troubled him; it was no use to mutter to himself of the γενναιον ψευδος; he could not bear that recollection. Howbeit, one thing had been made clear, one thing which it amazed him that he could have doubted ever—that he could not allot to himself, even for a single week, a life of delicate amusements. To determine to amuse one's self is wilfully to invest in disappointment. And now he had been drifting again. He had gone for Tommy in the early morning with no better

purpose than to see what would come of it. He had come on to Strandling with no definite purpose.

Suddenly it came to him with a new conviction that the girl was right, and with the conviction came a thrill of joy that it was the girl who was right. She had said that his sudden transformation into a man of wealth and influence should have ended all his doubts. He had suffered from doubts of himself and of his best career, till he too had been sick of asking what he was and what he ought to be; but the sudden push into fortune ended all that. He had not sought the fortune. He had not wished to be a lord. It did not please him now. He would rather have no distinguishing label. He supposed that had he been born to title, it would have seemed natural; but, as it was, he could not yet give his name in a shop without a sense of absurdity, and a fleeting tendency to apologize. Nevertheless, this label, and with it a command of much money, had been thrust upon him; and with the money and the title there had come to his hand a hundred duties, which made his life's work plain enough. This was clear enough; and it amazed him, as he walked the night, that he had not seen how clear it was till the girl had spoken. He had been in a maze, in a confusion of new claims; he wished to believe entirely that he owed the recognition of his plain task to the girl alone. He longed to do his work well. He was confident that he would use this property, thinking always of its duties rather than of its rights, trying to understand it thoroughly and to use it for the best, ready to lay it down rather than to use it ill. That seemed to him in his hour of insight the whole duty of the rich. He walked fast, thinking, planning, devoting himself; and ever among his quick thoughts beat waves of recurring emotion, flushing his cheek in the darkness, quickening his heart. He walked beyond the little town and cut once more upon the cliff; he stood on the close cropped grass between the faint deep sea and the quiet shining stars; and he grew more quiet as he stood. A spirit of peace was with him. "God helping me," he thought, "if he care to help me, I will try to do honest work in the world." Happy or unhappy, lonely or no, he would face fortune like a man, endure like a man. He walked home more slowly through the silent night, and he fell asleep with a prayer on his lips, a prayer for manhood's strength.

And with the morning came no failure of purpose. He had made up his mind to something most definite; and he had made up his mind too that, should be win or lose, he would take his fate like a man. No long-drawn supplications should there be, nor vain indulged regrets. When it was now time, he walked to Miss Grant's cottage. It stood a little beyond the coast-guard station, which was conspicuous in whitewash and with lordly flag-staff, and its air was the more modest for this official neigborhood. The little garden behind it stretched to the edge of the cliff, and the palings at its sides secured no absolute privacy, for they were not more than four feet high. All lay open to the sea-air and the sun, and to the eyes of mortals if any cared to look. Miss Grant had a comprehensive friendliness.

There, in this little garden, this little strip from the garden of Eve, Archie said what he had to say. He had been welcomed kindly by the ladies; he had stayed to luncheon at the invitation of Miss Grant, who was full of talk, of energy, of happiness; he had asked after Tommy and had received a good report, and also a message for Tommy's anxious mother. From the window of the little dining-room Elizabeth had stepped unthinking into the little garden; and when she turned to come in again Archie filled the window.

Miss Grant had left the room; not even the coast-guardsman, who was on duty, was looking over the palings. Archie came out into the garden. He felt himself trembling; but, as he looked the girl fairly in the face, the trembling ceased. The time had come for decision; that was a great thing of which to be sure. Elizabeth, on her side, was unready; she was not quick, as many women are, with arts of evasion, of postponement; she looked helplessly at the young man who stood between her and the only way of retreat. As he saw her helplessness, he grew more eager for speech; he knew that she was seeking with pain for some speech which might stop his; he pitied her even while he pursued his advantage.

"I have been thinking of what you said yesterday. I think I see plainly enough what I ought to do—will you help me?"

She looked at him with appeal, and then with indignation. No words occurred to her but some which conveyed a

doubt of his meaning; these she would not speak; wretched, prevaricating, conventional words they seemed to her. She actually stammered for a moment. Then she turned from him and looked away across the sea.

He came nearer, and said, "You haven't forgotten what I said that other time—on the night of the ball?"

Then at last she found something to say.

"You know that that was a mistake," she said; "you should not speak of that again." She frowned as she looked at him a moment, and then she looked seaward again.

"It's not a mistake now," he said, "unless my life, all life, everything is a mistake. It's as deep as my life. I know what I want now with all my heart and soul." He moved, trying to see her face, which she disdained to hide. But the sight of her face gave him small comfort; it was full of distress. His heart sank, and he stood silent.

"It was only the other day," she said at last, and almost sullenly.

"Ah, you doubt me?" he cried out passionately.

"And would not you doubt me?" she said with an answering passion. "Don't you know why we came to Langley?"

"What do I care?" he said.

"You would care," she said; "How could you help remembering? Any way, I can't forget that I was brought there to—to catch you."

Archie burst out laughing, and she looked at him with amazement. After all, he was not happy; and his laughter sounded almost as strange to himself. He began to speak again, eagerly, with conviction, asserting that such thoughts were as nothing. "Will you be my wife?" he said. "Elizabeth don't make me wretched for a fad."

"Oh, do go away," she said with a sort of moan.

"All right," he said curtly; he had turned suddenly cold. He looked at her, thinking that he should carry for ever a picture of her grand figure and the fine turn of her head as she looked away to the sea. A white bird turned in the air beyond her at the edge of the cliff. He turned away from her and went a few steps and laid his hand on the window. Even then there was some comfort for him in this test of his strength, of his manhood. At the base of all things is this one thing sure, to bear one's fate like

a man. So Archie would have borne his fate, had it been more unkind. But from the very window, which was about to shut him from his strip of paradise, he looked back once more, his last concession to his weakness. There stood the girl still; it was the same picture, but that the sea-gull was now but a white speck upon the distant sea. Archie could never have said how he knew that Elizabeth was sobbing. He hurried back to her; and she turned at the sound of his coming; even then her face was full of conflicting emotions, and the hands which she stretched towards him seemed hands of repelling; but he caught the hands masterfully in his, though his words were pleading.

"Ah, love me," he murmured passionately; "in pity love me!" and now she could not hide the sobs which shook her as he held her in his arms.

THE END