

**LEVER
CHARLES
JAMES**

THE DALTONS; OR, THREE
ROADS IN LIFE. VOLUME I

Charles Lever

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Charles James Lever

The Daltons; Or, Three Roads In Life. Volume I (of II)

PREFACE

IF the original conception of this tale was owing to the story of an old and valued schoolfellow who took service in Austria, and rose to rank and honors there, all the rest was purely fictitious. My friend had made a deep impression on my mind by his narratives of that strange life, wherein, in the very midst of our modern civilization, an old-world tradition still has its influence, making the army of to-day the veritable sons and descendants of those who grouped around the bivouac fires in Wallenstein's camp. Of that more than Oriental submission that graduated deference to military rank that chivalrous devotion to the "Kaiser" which enter into the soldier heart of Austria, I have been unable to reproduce any but the very faintest outlines, and yet these were the traits which, pervaded all my friend's stories and gave them character and distinctiveness.

Many of the other characters in this tale were drawn from the life, with such changes added and omitted features as might rescue them from any charge of personality. With all my care on this score, one or two have been believed to be recognizable; and if so I have only to hope that I have touched on peculiarities of disposition inoffensively, and only depicted such traits as may "point a moral," without wounding the possessor.

The last portion of the story includes some scenes from the Italian campaign, which had just come to a close while I was writing. If a better experience of Italy than I then possessed might modify some of the opinions I entertained at that time, and induce me to form some conclusions at least at variance with those I then expressed, I still prefer to leave the whole unaltered, lest in changing I might injure the impression under which the fulness of my once conviction had impelled me to pronounce.

Writing these lines now, while men's hearts are throbbing anxiously for the tidings any day may produce, and when the earth is already tremulous under the march of distant squadrons, I own that even the faint, weak picture of that struggle in this story appeals to myself with a more than common interest. I have no more to add than my grateful acknowledgments to such as still hold me in their favor, and to write myself their devoted servant,

CHARLES LEVER.

CHAPTER I. BADEN OUT OF SEASON

A THEATRE by daylight, a great historical picture in the process of cleaning, a ballet-dancer of a wet day hastening to rehearsal, the favorite for the Oaks dead-lame in a straw-yard, are scarcely more stripped of their legitimate illusions than is a fashionable watering-place on the approach of winter. The gay shops and stalls of flaunting wares are closed; the promenades, lately kept in trimmest order, are weed-grown and neglected; the “sear and yellow leaves” are fluttering and rustling along the alleys where “Beauty’s step was wont to tread.” Both music and fountains have ceased to play; the very statues are putting on great overcoats of snow, while the orange-trees file off like a sad funeral procession to hide themselves in dusky sheds till the coming spring.

You see as you look around you that nature has been as unreal as art itself, and that all the bright hues of foliage and flower, all the odors that floated from bed and parterre, all the rippling flow of stream and fountain, have been just as artistically devised, and as much “got up,” as the transparencies or the Tyrolese singers, the fireworks or the fancy fair, or any other of those ingenious “spectacles” which amuse the grown children of fashion. The few who yet linger seem to have undergone a strange transmutation.

The smiling landlord of the “Adler” we refer particularly to Germany as the very land of watering-places is a half-sulky, farmer-looking personage, busily engaged in storing up his Indian corn and his firewood and his forage, against the season of snows. The bland “croupier,” on whose impassive countenance no shade of fortune was able to mark even a passing emotion, is now seen higgling with a peasant for a sack of charcoal, in all the eagerness of avarice. The trim maiden, whose golden locks and soft blue eyes made the bouquets she sold seem fairer to look on, is a stout wench, whose uncouth fur cap and wooden shoes are the very antidotes to romance. All the transformations take the same sad colors. It is a pantomime read backwards.

Such was Baden-Baden in the November of 182-. Some weeks of bad and broken weather had scattered and dispersed all the gay company. The hotels and assembly-rooms were closed for the winter. The ball-room, which so lately was alight with a thousand tapers, was now barricaded like a jail. The very post-office, around which each morning an eager and pressing crowd used to gather, was shut up, one small aperture alone remaining, as if to show to what a fraction all correspondence had been reduced. The Hotel de Russie was the only house open in the little town; but although the door lay ajar, no busy throng of waiters, no lamps, invited the traveller to believe a hospitable reception might await him within. A very brief glance inside would soon have dispelled any such illusion, had it ever existed. The wide staircase, formerly lined with orange-trees and camellias, was stripped of all its bright foliage; the marble statues were removed; the great thermometer, whose crystal decorations had arrested many a passing look, was now encased within a wooden box, as if its tell-tale face might reveal unpleasant truths, if left exposed.

The spacious “Saal,” where some eighty guests assembled every day, was denuded of all its furniture, mirrors, and lustres; bronzes and pictures were gone, and nothing remained but a huge earthenware stove, within whose grating a faded nosegay left there in summer defied all speculations as to a fire.

In this comfortless chamber three persons now paraded with that quick step and brisk motion that bespeak a walk for warmth and exercise; for dismal as it was within doors, it was still preferable to the scene without, where a cold incessant rain was falling, that, on the hills around, took the form of snow. The last lingerers at a watering-place, like those who cling on to a wreck, have usually something peculiarly sad in their aspect. Unable, as it were, to brave the waves like strong swimmers, they hold on to the last with some vague hope of escape, and, like a shipwrecked crew, drawing closer to each other in adversity than in more prosperous times, they condescend now to acquaintance, and even intimacy, where, before, a mere nod of recognition was alone interchanged. Such were the three

who now, buttoned up to the chin, and with hands deeply thrust into side-pockets, paced backwards and forwards, sometimes exchanging a few words, but in that broken and discursive fashion that showed that no tie of mutual taste or companionship had bound them together.

The youngest of the party was a small and very slightly made man of about five or six-and-twenty, whose face, voice, and figure were almost feminine, and, only for a very slight line of black moustache, might have warranted the suspicion of a disguise. His lacquered boots and spotless yellow gloves appeared somewhat out of season, as well as the very light textured coat which he wore; but Mr. Albert Jekyl had been accidentally detained at Baden, waiting for that cruel remittance which, whether the sin be that of agent or relative, is ever so slow of coming. That he bore the inconvenience admirably (and without the slightest show of impatience) it is but fair to confess; and whatever chagrin either the detention, the bad weather, or the solitude may have occasioned, no vestige of discontent appeared upon features where a look of practised courtesy, and a most bland smile, gave the predominant expression. "Who he was," or, in other words, whence he came, of what family, with what fortune, pursuits, or expectations, we are not ashamed to confess our utter ignorance, seeing that it was shared by all those that tarried that season at Baden, with whom, however, he lived on terms of easy and familiar intercourse.

The next to him was a bilious-looking man, somewhat past the middle of life, with that hard and severe cast of features that rather repels than invites intimacy. In figure he was compactly and stoutly built, his step as he walked, and his air as he stood, showed one whose military training had given the whole tone to his character. Certain strong lines about the mouth, and a peculiar puckering of the angles of the eyes, boded a turn for sarcasm, which all his instincts, and they were Scotch ones, could not completely repress. His voice was loud, sharp, and ringing, the voice of a man who, when he said a thing, would not brook being asked to repeat it. That Colonel Haggerstone knew how to be sapling as well as oak, was a tradition among those who had served with him; still it is right to add, that his more congenial mood was the imperative, and that which he usually practised. The accidental lameness of one of his horses had detained him some weeks at Baden, a duration which assuredly appeared to push his temper to its very last intrenchments.

The third representative of forlorn humanity was a very tall, muscular man, whose jockey-cut green coat and wide-brimmed hat contrasted oddly with a pair of huge white moustaches, that would have done credit to a captain of the Old Guard. On features, originally handsome, time, poverty, and dissipation had left many a mark; but still the half-droll, half-truculent twinkle of his clear gray eyes showed him one whom no turn of fortune could thoroughly subdue, and who, even in the very hardest of his trials, could find heart to indulge his humor for Peter Dalton was an Irishman; and although many years an absentee, held the dear island and its prejudices as green in his memory as though he had left it but a week before.

Such were the three, who, without one sympathy in common, without a point of contact in character, were now drawn into a chance acquaintance by the mere accident of bad weather. Their conversation if such it could be called showed how little progress could be made in intimacy by those whose roads in life lie apart. The bygone season, the company, the play-table and its adventures, were all discussed so often, that nothing remained but the weather. That topic, so inexhaustible to Englishmen, however, offered little variety now, for it had been uniformly bad for some weeks past.

"Where do you propose to pass the winter, sir?" said Haggerstone to Jekyl, after a somewhat lengthy lamentation over the probable condition of all the Alpine passes.

"I 've scarcely thought of it yet," simpered out the other, with his habitual smile. "There's no saying where one ought to pitch his tent till the Carnival opens."

"And you, sir?" asked Haggerstone of his companion on the other side.

"Upon my honor, I don't know then," said Dalton; "but I would n't wonder if I stayed here, or hereabouts."

"Here! why, this is Tobolsk, sir! You surely couldn't mean to pass a winter here?"

“I once knew a man who did it,” interposed Jekyl, blandly. “They cleaned him out at ‘the tables;’ and so he had nothing for it but to remain. He made rather a good thing of it, too; for it seems these worthy people, however conversant with the great arts of ruin, had never seen the royal game of thimble-rig; and Frank Mathews walked into them all, and contrived to keep himself in beet-root and boiled beef by his little talents.”

“Was n’t that the fellow who was broke at Kilmagund?” croaked Haggerstone.

“Something happened to him in India; I never well knew what,” simpered Jekyl. “Some said he had caught the cholera; others, that he had got into the Company’s service.”

“By way of a mishap, sir, I suppose,” said the Colonel, tartly.

“He would n’t have minded it, in the least. For certain,” resumed the other, coolly, “he was a sharp-witted fellow; always ready to take the tone of any society.”

The Colonel’s cheek grew yellower, and his eyes sparkled with an angrier lustre; but he made no rejoinder.

“That’s the place to make a fortune, I’m told,” said Dalton. “I hear there’s not the like of it all the world over.”

“Or to spend one,” added Haggerstone, curtly.

“Well, and why not?” replied Dalton. “I ‘m sure it ‘s as pleasant as saving barring a man ‘s a Scotchman.”

“And if he should be, sir? and if he were one that now stands before you?” said Haggerstone, drawing himself proudly up, and looking the other sternly in the face.

“No offence no offence in life. I did n’t mean to hurt your feelings. Sure, a man can’t help where he ‘s going to be born.”

“I fancy we’d all have booked ourselves for a cradle in Buckingham Palace,” interposed Jekyl, “if the matter were optional.”

“Faith! I don’t think so,” broke in Dalton. “Give me back Corrig-O’Neal, as my grandfather Pearce had it, with the whole barony of Kilmurray-O’Mahon, two packs of hounds, and the first cellar in the county, and to the devil I’d fling all the royal residences ever I seen.”

“The sentiment is scarcely a loyal one, sir,” said Haggerstone, “and, as one wearing his Majesty’s cloth, I beg to take the liberty of reminding you of it.”

“Maybe it isn’t; and what then?” said Dalton, over whose good-natured countenance a passing cloud of displeasure lowered.

“Simply, sir, that it shouldn’t be uttered in my presence,” said Haggerstone.

“Phew!” said Dalton, with a long whistle, “is that what you ‘re at? See, now” here he turned fully round, so as to face the Colonel “see, now, I ‘m the dullest fellow in the world at what is called ‘taking a thing up;’ but make it clear for me let me only see what is pleasing to the company, and it is n’t Peter Dalton will balk your fancy.”

“May I venture to remark,” said Jekyl, blandly, “that you are both in error, and however I may (the cold of the season being considered) envy your warmth, it is after all only so much caloric needlessly expended.”

“I was n’t choleric at all,” broke in Dalton, mistaking the word, and thus happily, by the hearty laugh his blunder created, bringing the silly altercation to an end.

“Well,” said Haggerstone, “since we are all so perfectly agreed in our sentiments, we could n’t do better than dine together, and have a bumper to the King’s health.”

“I always dine at two, or half-past,” simpered Jekyl; “besides, I’m on a regimen, and never drink wine.”

“There ‘s nobody likes a bit of conviviality better than myself,” said Dalton; “but I ‘ve a kind of engagement, a promise I made this morning.”

There was an evident confusion in the way these words were uttered, which did not escape either of the others, who exchanged the most significant glances as he spoke.

“What have we here?” cried Jekyl, as he sprang to the window and looked out. “A courier, by all that’s muddy! Who could have expected such an apparition at this time?”

“What can bring people here now?” said Haggerstone, as with his glass to his eye he surveyed the little well-fed figure, who, in his tawdry jacket all slashed with gold, and heavy jack-boots, was closely locked in the embraces of the landlord.

Jekyl at once issued forth to learn the news, and, although not fully three minutes absent, returned to his companions with a full account of the expected arrivals.

“It’s that rich banker, Sir Stafford Onslow, with his family. They were on their way to Italy, and made a mess of it somehow in the Black Forest they got swept away by a torrent, or crushed by an avalanche, or something of the kind, and Sir Stafford was seized with the gout, and so they ‘ve put back, glad even to make such a port as Baden.”

“If it’s the gout’s the matter with him,” said Dalton, “I ‘ve the finest receipt in the world. Take a pint of spirits poteen if you can get it beat up two eggs and a pat of butter in it; throw in a clove of garlic and a few scrapings of horseradish, let it simmer over the fire for a minute or two, stir it with a sprig of rosemary to give it a flavor, and then drink it off.”

“Gracious Heaven! what a dose!” exclaimed Jekyl, in horror.

“Well, then, I never knew it fail. My father took it for forty years, and there wasn’t a haler man in the country. If it was n’t that he gave up the horseradish for he did n’t like the taste of it he ‘d, maybe, be alive at this hour.”

“The cure was rather slow of operation,” said Haggerstone, with a sneer.

“Twas only the more like all remedies for Irish grievances, then,” observed Dalton, and his face grew a shade graver as he spoke.

“Who was it this Onslow married?” said the Colonel, turning to Jekyl.

“One of the Headworths, I think.”

“Ah, to be sure; Lady Hester. She was a handsome woman when I saw her first, but she fell off sadly; and indeed, if she had not, she ‘d scarcely have condescended to an alliance with a man in trade, even though he were Sir Gilbert Stafford.”

“Sir Gilbert Stafford!” repeated Dalton.

“Yes, sir; and now Sir Gilbert Stafford Onslow. He took the name from that estate in Warwickshire; Skepton Park, I believe they call it.”

“By my conscience, I wish that was the only thing he took,” ejaculated Dalton, with a degree of fervor that astonished the others, “for he took an elegant estate that belonged by right to my wife. Maybe you have heard tell of Corrig-O’Neal?”

Haggerstone shook his head, while with his elbow he nudged his companion, to intimate his total disbelief in the whole narrative.

“Surely you must have heard of the murder of Arthur Godfrey, of Corrig-O’Neal; was n’t the whole world ringing with it?”

Another negative sign answered this appeal.

“Well, well, that beats all ever I heard! but so it is, sorrow bit they care in England if we all murdered each other! Arthur Godfrey, as I was saying, was my wife’s brother, there were just the two of them, Arthur and Jane; she was my wife.”

“Ah! here they come!” exclaimed Jekyl, not sorry for the event which so opportunely interrupted Dalton’s unpromising history. And now a heavy travelling-carriage, loaded with imperials and beset with boxes, was dragged up to the door by six smoking horses. The courier and the landlord were immediately in attendance, and after a brief delay the steps were lowered, and a short, stout man, with a very red face and a very yellow wig, descended, and assisted a lady to alight. She was a tall woman, whose figure and carriage were characterized by an air of fashion. After her came a younger lady; and lastly, moving with great difficulty, and showing by his worn looks and enfeebled frame the suffering he had endured, came a very thin, mild-looking man of about sixty. Leaning upon

the arm of the courier at one side, and of his stout companion, whom he called Doctor, at the other, he slowly followed the ladies into the house. They had scarcely disappeared when a caleche, drawn by three horses at a sharp gallop, drew up, and a young fellow sprang out, whose easy gestures and active movements showed that all the enjoyments of wealth and all the blandishments of fashion had not undermined the elastic vigor of body which young Englishmen owe to the practice of field sports.

“This place quite deserted, I suppose,” cried he, addressing the landlord. “No one here?”

“No one, sir. All gone,” was the reply.

Haggerstone’s head shook with a movement of impatience as he heard this remark, disparaging as it was, to his own importance; but he said nothing, and resumed his walk as before.

“Our Irish friend is gone away, I perceive,” said Jekyl, as he looked around in vain for Dalton. “Do you believe all that story of the estate he told us?”

“Not a syllable of it, sir. I never yet met an Irishman and it has been my lot to know some scores of them who had not been cheated out of a magnificent property, and was not related to half the peerage to boot. Now, I take it that our highly connected friend is rather out at elbows!” And he laughed his own peculiar hard laugh, as though the mere fancy of another man’s poverty was something inconceivably pleasant and amusing.

“Dinner, sir,” said the waiter, entering and addressing the Colonel.

“Glad of it,” cried he; “it’s the only way to kill time in this cursed place;” and so saying, and without the ceremony of a good-bye to his companion, the Colonel bustled out of the room with a step intended to represent extreme youth and activity. “That gentleman dines at two?” asked he of the waiter, as he followed him up the stairs.

“He has not dined at all, sir, for some days back,” said the waiter. “A cup of coffee in the morning, and a biscuit, are all that he takes.”

The Colonel made an expressive gesture by turning out the lining of his pocket.

“Yes, sir,” replied the other, significantly; “very much that way, I believe.” And with that he uncovered the soup, and the Colonel arranged his napkin and prepared to dine.

CHAPTER II. AN HUMBLE INTERIOR

WHEN Dalton parted from his companions at the “Russie,” it was to proceed by many an intricate and narrow passage to a remote part of the upper town, where close to the garden wall of the Ducal Palace stood, and still stands, a little solitary two-storied house, framed in wood, and the partitions displaying some very faded traces of fresco painting. Here was the well-known shop of a toy-maker; and although now closely barred and shuttered, in summer many a gay and merry troop of children devoured with eager eyes the treasures of Hans Roeckle.

Entering a dark and narrow passage beside the shop, Dalton ascended the little creaking stairs which led to the second story. The landing place was covered with firewood, great branches of newly-hewn beech and oak, in the midst of which stood a youth, hatchet in hand, busily engaged in chopping and splitting the heavy masses around him. The flush of exercise upon his cheek suited well the character of a figure which, clothed only in shirt and trousers, presented a perfect picture of youthful health and symmetry.

“Tired, Frank?” asked the old man, as he came up.

“Tired, father! not a bit of it. I only wish I had as much more to split for you, since the winter will be a cold one.”

“Come in and sit down, boy, now,” said the father, with a slight tremor as he spoke. “We cannot have many more opportunities of talking together. To-morrow is the 28th of November.”

“Yes; and I must be in Vienna by the fourth, so Uncle Stephen writes.”

“You must not call him uncle, Frank, he forbids it himself; besides, he is my uncle, and not yours. My father and he were brothers, but never saw each other after fifteen years of age, when the Count that ‘s what we always called him entered the Austrian service, so that we are all strangers to each other.”

“His letter does n’t show any lively desire for a closer intimacy,” said the boy, laughing. “A droll composition it is, spelling and all.”

“He left Ireland when he was a child, and lucky he was to do so,” sighed Dalton, heavily. “I wish I had done the same.”

The chamber into which they entered was, although scrupulously clean and neat, marked by every sign of poverty. The furniture was scanty and of the humblest kind; the table linen, such as used by the peasantry, while the great jug of water that stood on the board seemed the very climax of narrow fortune in a land where the very poorest are wine-drinkers.

A small knapsack with a light travelling-cap on it, and a staff beside it, seemed to attract Dalton’s eyes as he sat down. “It is but a poor equipment, that yonder. Frank,” said he at last, with a forced smile.

“The easier carried,” replied the lad, gayly.

“Very true,” sighed the other. “You must make the journey on foot.”

“And why not, father? Of what use all this good blood, of which I have been told so often and so much, if it will not enable a man to compete with the low-born peasant. And see how well this knapsack sits,” cried he, as he threw it on his shoulder. “I doubt if the Emperor’s pack will be as pleasant to carry.”

“So long as you haven’t to carry a heavy heart, boy,” said Dalton, with deep emotion, “I believe no load is too much.”

“If it were not for leaving you and the girls, I never could be happier, never more full of hope, father. Why should not *I* win my way upward as Count Stephen has done? Loyalty and courage are not the birthright of only one of our name!”

“Bad luck was all the birthright ever I inherited,” said the old man, passionately; “bad luck in everything I touched through life! Where others grew rich, I became a beggar; where they found

happiness, *I met misery and ruin!* But it's not of this I ought to be thinking now," cried he, changing his tone. "Let us see, where are the girls?" And so saying, he entered a little kitchen which adjoined the room, and where, engaged in the task of preparing the dinner, was a girl, who, though several years older, bore a striking resemblance to the boy. Over features that must once have been the very type of buoyant gayety, years of sorrow and suffering had left their deep traces, and the dark circles around the eyes betrayed how deeply she had known affliction. Ellen Dalton's figure was faulty for want of height in proportion to her size, but had another and more grievous defect in a lameness, which made her walk with the greatest difficulty. This was the consequence of an accident when riding, a horse having fallen upon her and fractured the hip-bone. It was said, too, that she had been engaged to be married at the time, but that her lover, shocked by the disfigurement, had broken off the match, and thus made this calamity the sorrow of a life long.

"Where's Kate?" said the father, as he cast a glance around the chamber.

Ellen drew near, and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Not in this dreadful weather; surely, Ellen, you didn't let her go out in such a night as this?"

"Hush!" murmured she, "Frank will hear you; and remember, father, it is his last night with us."

"Could n't old Andy have found the place?" asked Daiton; and as he spoke, he turned his eyes to a corner of the kitchen, where a little old man sat in a straw chair peeling turnips, while he croned a ditty to himself in a low singsong tone; his thin, wizened features, browned by years and smoke, his small scratch wig, and the remains of an old scarlet hunting-coat that he wore, giving him the strongest resemblance to one of the monkeys one sees in a street exhibition.

"Poor Andy!" cried Ellen, "he'd have lost his way twenty times before he got to the bridge."

"Faith, then, he must be greatly altered," said Dalton, "for I 've seen him track a fox for twenty miles of ground, when not a dog of the pack could come on the trace. Eh, Andy!" cried he, aloud, and stooping down so as to be heard by the old man, "do you remember the cover at Corralin?"

"Don't ask him, father," said Ellen, eagerly; "he cannot sleep for the whole night after his old memories have been awakened."

The spell, however, had begun to work; and the old man, letting fall both knife and turnip, placed his hands on his knees, and in a weak, reedy treble began a strange, monotonous kind of air, as if to remind himself of the words, which, after a minute or two, he remembered thus.

"There was old Tom Whaley,
And Anthony Baillie,
And Fitzgerald, the Knight of Glynn,
And Father Clare,
On his big brown mare,
That moruin' at Corralin!"

"Well done, Andy! well done!" exclaimed Dalton. "You 're as fresh as a four-year-old."

"Iss!" said Andy, and went on with his song.

"And Miles O'Shea,
On his cropped tail bay,
Was soon seen ridin' in.
He was vexed and crossed
At the light hoar frost,
That mornin' at Corralin."

"Go on, Andy! go on, my boy!" exclaimed Dalton, in a rapture at the words that reminded him of many a day in the field and many a night's carouse. "What comes next?"

“Ay!” cried Andy.

“Says he, ‘When the wind
Laves no scent behind,
To keep the dogs out ‘s a sin;
I ‘ll be d – d if I stay,
To lose my day,
This mornin’ at Corralin.’”

But ye see he was out in his reck’nin’!” cried Andy; “for, as if

“To give him the lie,
There rose a cry,
As the hounds came yelpin’ in;
And from every throat
There swelled one note,
That moruin’ at Corralin.’”

A fit of coughing, brought on by a vigorous attempt to imitate the cry of a pack, here closed Andy’s minstrelsy; and Ellen, who seemed to have anticipated some such catastrophe, now induced her father to return to the sitting-room, while she proceeded to use those principles of domestic medicine clapping on the back and cold water usually deemed of efficacy in like cases.

“There now, no more singing, but take up your knife and do what I bade you,” said she, affecting an air of rebuke; while the old man, whose perceptions did not rise above those of a spaniel, hung down his head in silence. At the same moment the outer door of the kitchen opened, and Kate Dalton entered. Taller and several years younger than her sister, she was in the full pride of that beauty of which blue eyes and dark hair are the chief characteristics, and is deemed by many as peculiarly Irish. Delicately fair, and with features regular as a Grecian model, there was a look of brilliant, almost of haughty, defiance about her, to which her gait and carriage seemed to contribute; nor could the humble character of her dress, where strictest poverty declared itself, disguise the sentiment.

“How soon you’re back, dearest!” said Ellen, as she took off the dripping cloak from her sister’s shoulders.

“And only think, Ellen, I was obliged to go to Lichtenthal, where little Hans spends all his evenings in the winter season, at the ‘Hahn!’ And just fancy his gallantry! He would see me home, and would hold up the umbrella, too, over my head, although it kept his own arm at full stretch; while, by the pace we walked, I did as much for his legs. It is very ungrateful to laugh at him, for he said a hundred pretty things to me, about my courage to venture out in such weather, about my accent as I spoke German, and lastly, in praise of my skill as a sculptor. Only fancy, Ellen, what a humiliation for me to confess that these pretty devices were yours, and not mine; and that my craft went no further than seeking for the material which your genius was to fashion.”

“Genius, Kate!” exclaimed Ellen, laughing. “Has Master Hans been giving you a lesson in flattery; but tell me of your success which has he taken?”

“All everything!” cried Kate; “for although at the beginning the little fellow would select one figure and then change it for another, it was easy to see that he could not bring himself to part with any of them: now sitting down in rapture before the ‘Travelling Student,’ now gazing delightedly at the ‘Charcoal-Burners,’ but all his warmest enthusiasm bursting forth as I produced the ‘Forest Maiden at the Well.’ He did, indeed, think the ‘Pedler’ too handsome, but he found no such fault with the Maiden: and here, dearest, here are the proceeds, for I told him that we must have ducats in shining

gold for Frank's new crimson purse; and here they are;" and she held up a purse of gay colors, through whose meshes the bright metal glittered.

"Poor Hans!" said Ellen, feelingly. "It is seldom that so humble an artist meets so generous a patron."

"He's coming to-night," said Kate, as she smoothed down the braids of her glossy hair before a little glass, "he's coming to say good-bye to Frank."

"He is so fond of Frank."

"And of Frank's sister Nelly; nay, no blushing, dearest; for myself, I am free to own admiration never comes amiss, even when offered by as humble a creature as the dwarf, Hans Roeckle."

"For shame, Kate, for shame! It is this idle vanity that stifles honest pride, as rank weeds destroy the soil for wholesome plants to live in."

"It is very well for you, Nelly, to talk of pride, but poor things like myself are fain to content themselves with the baser metal, and even put up with vanity! There, now, no sermons, no seriousness; I'll listen to nothing to-day that savors of sadness, and, as I hear pa and Frank laughing, I'll be of the party."

The glance of affection and admiration which Ellen bestowed upon her sister was not unmixed with an expression of painful anxiety, and the sigh that escaped her told with what tender interest she watched over her.

The little dinner, prepared with more than usual care, at length appeared, and the family sat around the humble board with a sense of happiness dashed by one only reflection, that on the morrow Frank's place would be vacant.

Still each exerted himself to overcome the sadness of that thought, or even to dally with it, as one suggestive of pleasure; and when Ellen placed unexpectedly a great flask of Margraer before them to drink the young soldier's health, the zest and merriment rose to the highest. Nor was old Andy forgotten in the general joy. A large bumper of wine was put before him, and the door of the sitting-room left open, as if to let him participate in the merry noises that prevailed there. How naturally, and instinctively, too, their hopes gave color to all they said, as they told each other that the occasion was a happy one! that dear Frank would soon be an officer, and of course distinguished by the favor of some one high in power; and lastly, they dwelt with such complacency on the affectionate regard and influence of "Count Stephen" as certain to secure the youth's advancement. They had often heard of the Count's great military fame, and the esteem in which he was held by the Court of Vienna; and now they speculated on the delight it would afford the old warrior who had never been married himself to have one like Frank, to assist by his patronage, and promote by his influence, and with such enthusiasm did they discuss the point, that at last they actually persuaded themselves that Frank's entering the service was a species of devotion to his relative's interest, by affording him an object worthy of his regard and affection.

While Ellen loved to dwell upon the great advantages of one who should be like a father to the boy, aiding him by wise counsel, and guiding him in every difficulty, Kate preferred to fancy the Count introducing Frank into all the brilliant society of the splendid capital, presenting him to those whose acquaintance was distinction, and at once launching him into the world of fashion and enjoyment. The promptitude with which he acceded to their father's application on Frank's behalf, was constantly referred to as the evidence of his affectionate feeling for the family; and if his one solitary letter was of the very briefest and driest of all epistolary essays, they accounted for this very naturally by the length of time which had elapsed since he had either spoken or written his native language.

In the midst of these self-gratulations and pleasant fancies the door opened, and Hans Roeckle appeared, covered from head to foot by a light hoar-frost, that made him look like the figure with which an ingenious confectioner sometimes decorates a cake. The dwarf stood staring at the signs of a conviviality so new and unexpected.

“Is this Christmas time, or Holy Monday, or the Three Kings’ festival, or what is it, that I see you all feasting?” cried Hans, shaking the snow off his hat, and proceeding to remove a cloak which he had draped over his shoulder in most artistic folds.

“We were drinking Frank’s health, Master Hans,” said Dalton, “before he leaves us. Come over and pledge him too, and wish him all success, and that he may live to be a good and valued soldier of the Emperor.”

Hans had by this time taken off his cloak, which, by mounting on a chair, he contrived to hang up, and now approached the table with great solemnity, a pair of immense boots of Russian leather, that reached to his hips, giving him a peculiarly cumbrous and heavy gait; but these, as well as a long vest of rabbit skins that buttoned close to the neck, made his invariable costume in the winter.

“I drink,” said the dwarf, as, filling a bumper, he turned to each of the company severally “I drink to the venerable father and the fair maidens, and the promising youth of this good family, and I wish them every blessing good Christians ought to ask for; but as for killing and slaying, for burning villages and laying waste cities, I’ve no sympathy with these.”

“But you are speaking of barbarous times, Master Hans,” said Kate, whose cheek mantled into scarlet as she spoke, “when to be strong was to be cruel, and when ill-disciplined hordes tyrannized over good citizens.”

“I am talking of soldiers, such as the world has ever seen them,” cried Hans, passionately; but of whose military experiences, it is but fair to say, his own little toyshop supplied all the source. “What are they?” cried he, “but toys that never last, whether he who plays with them be child or kaiser! always getting smashed, heads knocked off here, arms and legs astray there; ay, and strangest of all, thought most of when most disabled! and then at last packed up in a box or a barrack, it matters not which, to be forgotten and seen no more! Hadst thou thought of something useful, boy some good craft, a Jager with a corkscrew inside of him, a tailor that turns into a pair of snuffers, a Dutch lady that makes a pin-cushion, these are toys people don’t weary of but a soldier! to stand ever thus” and Hans shouldered the fire-shovel, and stood “at the present.” “To wheel about so walk ten steps here ten back there never so much as a glance at the pretty girl who is passing close beside you.” Here he gave a look of such indescribable tenderness towards Kate, that the whole party burst into a fit of laughter. “They would have drawn me for the conscription,” said Hans, proudly, “but I was the only son of a widow, and they could not.”

“And are you never grieved to think what glorious opportunities of distinction have been thus lost to you?” said Kate, who, notwithstanding Ellen’s imploring looks, could not resist the temptation of amusing herself with the dwarf’s vanity.

“I have never suffered that thought to weigh upon me,” cried Hans, with the most unsuspecting simplicity. “It is true, I might have risen to rank and honors; but how would they have suited me, or I them? Or how should I have made those dearest to me sharers in a fortune so unbecoming to us? Think of poor Hans’s old mother, if her son were to ask her blessing with a coat all glittering with stars and crosses; and then think of her as I have seen her, when I go, as I do every year, to visit her in the Bregentzer Wald, when she comes out to meet me with our whole village, proud of her son, and yet not ashamed of herself. That is glory that is distinction enough for Hans Roeckle.”

The earnestness of his voice, and the honest manliness of his sentiments, were more than enough to cover the venial errors of a vanity that was all simplicity. It is true that Hans saw the world only through the medium of his own calling, and that not a very exalted one; but still there went through all the narrowness of his views a tone of kindness a hearty spirit of benevolence, that made his simplicity at times rise into something almost akin to wisdom. He had known the Daltons as his tenants, and soon perceived that they were not like those rich English, from whom his countrymen derive such abundant gains. He saw them arrive at a season when all others were taking their departure, and detected in all their efforts at economy, not alone that they were poor, but, sadder still, that they were of those who seem never to accustom themselves to the privations of narrow fortune; for, while some

submit in patience to their humble lot, with others life is one long and hard-fought struggle, wherein health, hope, and temper are expended in vain. That the Daltons maintained a distance and reserve towards others of like fortune did, indeed, puzzle honest Hans, perhaps it displeased him, too, for he thought it might be pride; but then their treatment of himself disarmed that suspicion, for they not only received him ever cordially, but with every sign of real affection; and what was he to expect such? Nor were these the only traits that fascinated him; for all the rugged shell the kernel was a heart as tender, as warm, and as full of generous emotions as ever beat within an ampler breast. The two sisters, in Hans's eyes, were alike beautiful; each had some grace or charm that he had never met with before, nor could he ever satisfy himself whether his fancy was more taken by Kate's wit or by Ellen's gentleness.

If anything were needed to complete the measure of his admiration, their skill in carving those wooden figures, which he sold, would have been sufficient. These were in his eyes nor was he a mean connoisseur high efforts of genius; and Hans saw in them a poetry and a truthfulness to nature that such productions rarely, if ever, possess. To sell, such things as mere toys, he regarded as little short of a sacrilege, while even to part with them at all cost him a pang like that the gold-worker of Florence experienced when he saw some treasure of Benvenuto's chisel leave his possession. Not, indeed, that honest Hans had to struggle against that criminal passion which prompted the jeweller, even by deeds of assassination, to repossess himself of the coveted objects; nay, on the contrary, he felt a kindness and a degree of interest towards those in whose keeping they were, as if some secret sympathy united them to each other.

Is it any wonder if poor Hans forgot himself in such pleasant company, and sat a full hour and a half longer than he ought? To him the little intervals of silence that were occasionally suffered to intervene were but moments of dreamy and delicious revery, wherein his fancy wandered away in a thousand pleasant paths; and when at last the watchman for remember, good reader, they were in that primitive Germany where customs change not too abruptly announced two o'clock, little Hans did not vouchsafe a grateful response to the quaint old rhyme that was chanted beneath the window.

"That little chap would sit to the day of judgment, and never ask to wet his lips," said Dalton, as Frank accompanied the dwarf downstairs to the street door.

"I believe he not only forgot the hour, but where he was, and everything else," said Kate.

"And poor Frank! who should have been in bed some hours ago," sighed Nelly.

"Gone at last, girls!" exclaimed Frank, as he entered, laughing. "If it hadn't been a gust of wind that caught him at the door, and carried him clean away, our leave-taking might have lasted till morning. Poor fellow! he had so many cautions to give me, such mountains of good counsel; and see, here is a holy medal he made me accept. He told me the 'Swedes' would never harm me so long as I wore it; he still fancies that we are in the Thirty Years' War."

In a hearty laugh over Hans Roeckle's political knowledge, they wished each other an affectionate good-night, and separated. Frank was to have his breakfast by daybreak, and each sister affected to leave the care of that meal to the other, secretly resolving to be up and stirring first.

Save old Andy, there was not one disposed to sleep that night. All were too full of their own cares. Even Dalton himself, blunted as were his feelings by a long life of suffering, his mind was tortured by anxieties; and one sad question arose again and again before him, without an answer ever occurring: "What is to become of the girls when I am gone? Without a home, they will soon be without a protector!" The bright fancies, the hopeful visions in which the evening had been passed, made the revulsion to these gloomy thoughts the darker. He lay with his hands pressed upon his face, while the hot tears gushed from eyes that never before knew weeping.

At moments he half resolved not to let Frank depart, but an instant's thought showed him how futile would be the change. It would be but leaving him to share the poverty, to depend upon the scanty pittance already too little for themselves. "Would Count Stephen befriend the poor girls?" he

asked himself over and over; and in his difficulty he turned to the strange epistle in which the old general announced Frank's appointment as a cadet.

The paper, the square folding, the straight, stiff letters, well suited a style which plainly proclaimed how many years his English had lain at rest. The note ran thus:

GRABEN-WIEN, Octobre 9, 18 —

WORTHY SIR AND NEPHEW, Your kindly greeting, but long-time on-the-road-coming letter is in my hands. It is to me pleasure that I announce the appointment of your son as a Cadet in the seventh battalion of the Carl-Franz Infanterie. So with, let him in all speed of time report himself here at Wien, before the War's Minister, bringing his Tauf schein Baptism's sign as proof of Individualism.

I am yours, well to command, and much-loving kinsman,

GRAF DALTON VON AUERSBERG, Lieut. – General and
Feldzeugmeister, K.K.A.

To the high and well-born, the Freiherr v. Dalton, in Baden Baden.

CHAPTER III. THE FOREST ROAD

THIS dry epistle Dalton read and re-read, trying, if not to discover some touch of kindness or interest, to detect, at least, some clew to its writer's nature; but to no use, its quaint formalism baffled all speculation, and he gave up the pursuit in despair. That "the Count" was his father's only brother, and a "Dalton," were the only grains of comfort he could extract from his meditations; but he had lived long enough in the world to know how little binding were the ties of kindred when once slackened by years and distance. The Count might, therefore, regard them in the light of intruders, and feel the very reverse of pleasure at the revival of a relationship which had slept for more than half a century. Dalton's pride or what he thought his pride revolted against this thought; for, although this same pride would not have withheld him from asking a favor of the Count, it would have assumed a most indignant attitude if refused, or even grudgingly accorded.

When the thought first occurred to him of applying to his uncle in Frank's behalf, he never hesitated about the propriety of addressing a request to one with whom he had never interchanged a line in all his life; and now he was quite ready to take offence, if all the warmth of blood relationship should not fill the heart of him who had been an exile from home and family since his earliest boyhood.

An easy, indolent selfishness had been the spirit of Dalton's whole life. He liked to keep a good house, and to see company about him; and this obtained for him the reputation of hospitality. He disliked unpopularity, and dreaded the "bad word" of the people; and hence he suffered his tenantry to fall into arrears and his estate into ruin. A vain rivalry with wealthier neighbors prevented retrenchment when his means were lessened. The unthinking selfishness of his nature was apparent even in his marriage, since it was in obedience to an old pledge extracted years before that Miss Godfrey accepted him, and parted in anger with her brother, who had ever loved her with the warmest affection. Mr. Godfrey never forgave his sister; and at his death, the mysterious' circumstances of which were never cleared up, his estate passed to a distant relative, the rick Sir Gilbert Stafford.

Dalton, who long cherished the hope of a reconciliation, saw all prospect vanish when his wife died, which she did, it was said, of a broken heart. His debts were already considerable, and all the resources of borrowing and mortgage had been long since exhausted; nothing was then left for him but an arrangement with his creditors, which, giving him a pittance scarcely above the very closest poverty, enabled him to drag out life in the cheap places of the Continent; and thus, for nigh twenty years, had he wandered about from Dieppe to Ostend, to Bruges, to Dusseldorf, to Coblenz, and so on, among the small Ducal cities, till, with still failing fortune, he was fain to seek a residence for the winter in Baden, where house-rent, at least, would be almost saved to him.

The same apathy that had brought on his ruin enabled him to bear it. Nothing has such a mock resemblance to wisdom as utter heartlessness; with all the seeming of true philosophy, it assumes a port and bearing above the trials of the world; holds on "the even tenor of its way," undeterred by the reverses which overwhelm others, and even meets the sternest frowns of fortune with the bland smile of equanimity.

In this way Dalton had deceived many who had known him in better days, and who now saw him, even in his adversity, with the same careless, good-natured look, as when he took the field with his own hounds, or passed round the claret at his own table. Even his own children were sharers in this delusion, and heard him with wondering admiration, as he told of the life he used to lead, and the style he once kept up at Mount Dalton. These were his favorite topics; and, as he grew older, he seemed to find a kind of consolation in contrasting all the hard rubs of present adversity with his once splendor.

Upon Ellen Dalton, who had known and could still remember her mother, these recitals produced an impression of profound grief, associated as they were with the sufferings of a sick-bed and the closing sorrows of a life; while, in the others, they served to keep up a species of pride of birth,

and an assumption of superiority to others of like fortune, which their father gloried in, representing, as he used to say, “the old spirit of the Dal tons.”

As for Kate, she felt it a compensation for present poverty to know that they were of gentle blood, and that if fortune, at some distant future, would deal kindly by them, to think that they should not obtrude themselves like upstarts on the world, but resume, as it were, the place that was long their own.

In Frank the evil had taken a deeper root. Taught from his earliest infancy to believe himself the heir of an ancient house, pride of birth and station instilled into his mind by old Andy, the huntsman, the only dependant, whom, with characteristic wisdom, they had carried with them from Ireland, he never ceased to ponder on the subject, and wonder within himself if he should live to have “his own” again.

Such a hold had this passion taken of him, that, even as a child, he would wander away for days long into lonely and unfrequented spots, thinking over the stories he had heard, and trying to conjure up before his eyes some resemblance to that ancient house and venerable domain which had been so long in his family. It was no part of his teaching to know by what spendthrift and reckless waste, by what a long career of folly, extravagance, and dissipation, the fortune of his family had been wrecked; or rather, many vague and shadowy suspicions had been left to fester in his mind of wrongs and injuries done them; of severe laws imposed by English ignorance or cruelty; of injustice, on this hand heartless indifference of friends on the other; the unrelenting anger of his uncle Godfrey filling up the measure of their calamities. Frank Dalton’s education went very little further than this; but, bad as it was, its effect was blunted by the natural frankness and generosity of his character, its worst fruits being an over-estimate of himself and his pretensions, errors which the world has always the watchful kindness to correct in those who wear threadbare coats and patched boots.

He was warmly and devotedly attached to his father and sisters, and whatever bitterness found its way into his heart was from seeing them enduring the many trials of poverty.

All his enthusiasm for the service in which he was about to enter was, therefore, barely sufficient to overcome the sorrow of parting with those, whom alone of all the world he loved; and when the moment drew nigh for his departure, he forgot the bright illusions by which he had so often fed his hopes, and could only think of the grief of separation.

His candle had burned down nearly to the socket, when he arose and looked at his watch. It was all dark as midnight without, although nigh six o’clock. He opened the window, and a thin snowdrift came slanting in, borne on a cutting north wind; he closed it hastily, and shuddered as he thought of the long and lonely march before him. All was silent in the house as he dressed himself and prepared for the road. With noiseless step he drew near his father’s door and listened; everything was still. He could not bring himself to disturb him, so he passed on to the room where his sisters slept. The door lay ajar, and a candle was burning on the table. Frank entered on tiptoe and drew near the bed, but it was empty and had not been lain in. As he turned round he beheld Kate asleep in a chair, dressed as he had last seen her. She had never lain down, and the prayer-book, which had dropped from her hand, told how her last waking moments were passed.

He kissed her twice, but even the hot tears that fell from his eyes upon her cheek did not break her slumber. He looked about him for some token to leave, that might tell he had been there, but there was nothing, and, with a low sigh, he stole from the room.

As he passed out into the kitchen, Ellen was there. She had already prepared his breakfast, and was spreading the table when he entered.

“How good of you how kind, Ellen,” said he, as he passed his arm around her neck.

“Hush, Frank, they are both sleeping. Poor papa never closed his eyes till half an hour ago, and Kate was fairly overcome ere she yielded.”

“You will say that I kissed them, Nelly, kissed them twice,” said he, in a low, broken voice, “and that I could n’t bear to awake them. Leave-taking is so sorrowful. Oh, Ellen, if I knew that you were all happy, that there were no hardships before you, when I ‘m away!”

“And why should we not, Frank?” said she, firmly. “There is no dishonor in this poverty, so long as there are no straits to make it seem other than it is. Let us rather pray for the spirit that may befit any lot we are thrown in, than for a fortune to which we might be unsuited.”

“Would you forget who we are, Ellen?” said he, half reproachfully.

“I would remember it, Frank, in a temper less of pride than humility.”

“I do not see much of the family spirit in all this,” rejoined he, almost angrily.

“The family spirit,” echoed she, feelingly. “What has it ever done for us, save injury? Has it suggested a high-bearing courage against the ills of narrow fortune? Has it told us how to bear poverty with dignity, or taught us one single lesson of patience and submission? Or has it, on the contrary, been ever present to whisper the changes in our condition how altered our lot making us ashamed of that companionship which our station rendered possible for us, and leaving us in the isolation of friendlessness for the sake of I blush to abuse the word our Pride! Oh, Frank, my dear, dear brother, take it not ill of me, that in our last moments together, perhaps for years, I speak what may jar upon your ears to hear; but remember that I am much older, that I have seen far more of the world, at least of its sorrows and cares, than you have. I have indeed known affliction in many ways, but have never found a poorer comforter in its troubles than what we call our Pride!”

“You would have me forget I am a Dalton, then?” said the boy, in a tone of sorrowful meaning.

“Never! when the recollection could prompt a generous or a noble action, a manly ambition, or a high-hearted thought; but the name will have no spell in it, if used to instil an imperious, discontented spirit, a regretful contrast of what we are, with what we might have been, or what, in a worldly sense, is more destructive still, a false reliance on the distinction of a family to which we have contributed nothing.”

“You do not know, Nelly dearest, of what a comfort you have robbed me,” said Frank, sorrowfully.

“Do not say so, my dearest brother,” cried she, passing her arm around him; “a deception, a mere illusion, is unworthy of that name. Look above the gratification of mere vanity, and you will become steeled against the many wounds self-love is sure to receive in intercourse with the world. I cannot tell how, or with what associates, you are about to live, but I feel certain that in every station a man of truth and honor will make himself respected. Be such, dearest Frank. If family pride if the name of Dalton have value in your eyes, remember that upon you it rests to assert its right to distinction. If, as I would fondly hope, your heart dwells here with us, bethink ye what joy what holy gratitude you will diffuse around our humble hearth to know that our brother is a good man.”

It was some moments ere either could speak again. Emotions, very different ones, perhaps, filled their hearts, and each was too deeply moved for words. Frank’s eyes were full of tears, and his cheek quivering, as he threw his knapsack on his shoulder.

“You will write from Innspruck, Frank; but how many days will it take ere you reach that city?”

“Twelve or fourteen at least, if I go on foot. There, Nelly, do not help me, dearest; I shall not have you tomorrow to fasten these straps.”

“This is not to be forgotten, Frank; it’s Kate’s present. How sorry she will be not to have given it with her own hands!” And so saying, she gave him the purse her sister had worked.

“But there is gold in it,” said the boy, growing pale with emotion.

“Very little, Frank dearest,” replied she, smiling. “A cadet must always have gold in his purse, so little Hans tells us; and you know how wise he is in all these matters.”

“And is it from a home like this that I am to take gold away!” cried he, passionately.

“Nay, Frank, you must not persuade us that we are so very poor. I will not consent to any sense of martyrdom, I promise you.” It was not without difficulty she could overcome his scruples; nor,

perhaps, had she succeeded at all, if his thoughts had not been diverted into another channel by a light tapping at the door. It was Hans Roeckle come to awake him.

Again and again the brother and sister embraced; and in a very agony of tears Frank tore himself away, and hastened down the stairs. The next moment the heavy house door banged loudly, and he was gone.

Oh, the loneliness of mind in which he threaded his way through the dark and narrow streets, where the snow already lay deeply! With what sinking of the heart he turned to look for the last time at the window where the light the only one to be seen still glimmered. How little could all the promptings of hope suffice against the sad and dark reality that he was leaving all he loved, and all who loved him, to adventure upon a world where all was bleak and friendless!

But not all his dark forebodings could equal hers from whom he had just parted. Loving her brother with an affection more like that of mother than sister, she had often thought over the traits of his character, where, with many a noble gift, the evil seeds of wrong teaching had left, like tall weeds among flowers, the baneful errors of inordinate self-esteem and pride. Ignorant of the career on which he was about to enter, Ellen could but speculate vaguely how such a character would be esteemed, and whether his native frankness and generosity would cover over, or make appear as foibles, these graver faults. Their own narrow fortunes, the very straits and privations of poverty, with all their cruel wounds to honest pride, and all their sore trials of temper, she could bear up against with an undaunted courage. She had learned her lesson in the only school wherein it is taught, and daily habit had instilled its own powers of endurance; but, for Frank, her ambition hoped a higher and brighter destiny, and now, in her solitude, and with a swelling heart, she knelt down and prayed for him. And, oh! if the utter ings of such devotion never rise to Heaven or meet acceptance there, they at least bring balm to the spirit of him who syllables them, building up a hope whose foundations are above the casualties of humanity, and giving a courage that mere self-reliance never gave.

Little Hans not only came to awaken Frank, but to give him companionship for some miles of his way, a thoughtful kindness, for which the youth's deep preoccupation seemed to offer but a poor return. Indeed, Frank scarcely knew that he was not travelling in utter solitude, and all the skilful devices of the worthy dwarf to turn the channel of his thoughts were fruitless. Had there been sufficient light to have surveyed the equipment of his companion, it is more than probable that the sight would have done more to produce this diversion of gloom than any arguments which could have been used. Master Roeckle, whose mind was a perfect storehouse of German horrors, earthly and unearthly, and who imagined that a great majority of the human population of the globe were either bandits or witches, had surrounded himself with a whole museum of amulets and charms of various kinds. In his cap he wore the tail of a black squirrel, as a safeguard against the "Forest Imp;" a large dried toad hung around his neck, like an order, to protect him from the evil eye; a duck's foot was fastened to the tassel of his boot, as a talisman against drowning; while strings of medals, coins, precious stones, blessed beads, and dried insects, hung round and about him in every direction. Of all the portions of his equipment, however, what seemed the most absurd was a huge pole-axe of the fifteenth century, and which he carried as a defence against mere mortal foes, but which, from its weight and size, appeared far more likely to lay its bearer low than inflict injury upon others. It had been originally stored up in the Rust Kammer, at Prague, and was said to be the identical weapon with which Conrad slew the giant at Leutmeritz, a fact which warranted Hans in expending two hundred florins in purchasing it; as, to use his own emphatic words, "it was not every day one knew where to find the weapon to bring down a giant."

As Hans, encumbered by his various adjuncts, trotted along beside his stalwart companion, he soon discovered that all his conversational ability to exert which cost him so dearly was utterly unattended to; he fell into a moody silence, and thus they journeyed for miles of way without interchanging a word. At last they came in sight of the little village of Hernitz Kretschen, whence

by a by road Frank was to reach the regular line that leads through the Hohlen Thai to the Lake of Constance, and where they were to part.

“I feel as though I could almost go all the way with you,” said Hans, as they stopped to gaze upon the little valley where lay the village, and beyond which stretched a deep forest of dark pine-trees, traversed by a single road.

“Nay, Hans,” said Frank, smiling, as for the first time he beheld the strange figure beside him; “you must go back to your pleasant little village and live happily, to do many a kindness to others, as you have done to me to-day!”

“I would like to take service with the Empress myself,” said Hans, “if it were for some good and great cause, like the defence of the Church against the Turks, or the extermination of the race of dragons that infest the Lower Danube.”

“But you forget, Hans, it is an Emperor, rules over Austria now,” said Frank, preferring to offer a correction to the less startling of his hallucinations.

“No, no, Master Frank, they have not deposed the good Maria Teresa, they would never do that. I saw her picture over the doorway of the Burgermeister the last time I went to visit my mother in the Bregertzer Wald, and by the same token her crown and sceptre were just newly gilt, a thing they would not have done if she were not on the throne.”

“What if she were dead, and her son too?” said Frank; but his words were scarce uttered when he regretted to have said them, so striking was the change that came over the dwarf’s features.

“If that were indeed true, Heaven have mercy on us!” exclaimed he, piously. “Old Frederick will have but little pity for good Catholics! But no, Master Frank, this cannot be. The last time I received soldiers from Nuremberg they wore the same uniforms as ever, and the ‘Moriatur pro Rege nostro, M. T.’ was in gold letters on every banner as before.”

Frank was in no humor to disturb so innocent and so pleasing a delusion, and he gave no further opposition; and now they both descended the path which led to the little inn of the village. Here Hans insisted on performing the part of host, and soon the table was covered with brown bread and hard eggs, and those great massive sausages which Germans love, together with various flasks of Margrafler and other “Badisch” wines.

“Who knows,” said Hans, as he pledged his guest by ringing his wine-glass against the other’s, “if, when we meet again, thou wouldst sit down at the table with such as me?”

“How so, Hanserl?” asked the boy, in astonishment.

“I mean, Master Franz, that you may become a colonel, or perhaps a general, with, mayhap, the ‘St. Joseph’ at your button-hole, or the ‘Maria Teresa’ around your neck; and if so, how could you take your place at the board with the poor toy-maker?”

“I am not ashamed to do so now,” said Frank, haughtily; “and the Emperor cannot make me more a gentleman than my birth has done. Were I to be ashamed of those who befriended me, I should both disgrace my rank and name together.”

“These are good words, albeit too proud ones,” said Hans, thoughtfully. “As a guide through life, pride will do well enough when the roads are good and your equipage costly; but when you come upon mountain-paths and stony tracts, with many a wild torrent to cross, and many a dark glen to traverse, humility even a child’s humility will give better teaching.”

“I have no right to be other than humble!” said the boy; but the flashing brightness of his eyes, and the heightened color of his cheek, seemed to contradict his words.

For a while the conversation flagged, or was maintained in short and broken sentences, when at length Frank said,

“You will often go to see them, Hanserl, won’t you? You’ll sit with them, too, of an evening? for they will feel lonely now; and my father will like to tell you his stories about home, as he calls it still.”

“That will I,” said Hans; “they are the happiest hours of my life when I sit beside that hearth.”

Frank drew his hand across his eyes, and his lips quivered as he tried to speak.

“You’ll be kind to poor Ellen, too; she is so timid, Hans. You cannot believe how anxious she is, lest her little carvings should be thought unworthy of praise.”

“They are gems! they are treasures of art!” cried Hans, enthusiastically.

“And my sweet Kate!” cried the boy, as his eyes ran over, while a throng of emotions seemed to stop his utterance.

“She is so beautiful!” exclaimed Hans, fervently. “Except the Blessed Maria at the Holy Cross, I never beheld such loveliness. There is the Angelus ringing; let us pray a blessing on them;” and they both knelt down in deep devotion. Frank’s lips never moved, but with swelling heart and clasped hands he remained fixed as a statue; while Hanserl in some quaint old rhyme uttered his devotions.

“And yonder is the dog-star, bright and splendid,” said Hans, as he arose. “There never was a happier omen for the beginning of a journey. You ’ll be lucky, boy; there is the earnest of good fortune. That same star was shining along the path as I entered Baden, eighteen years ago; and see what a lucky life has mine been!”

Frank could not but smile at the poor dwarf’s appreciation of his fortune; but Hanserl’s features wore a look that betokened a happy and contented nature.

“And yours has been a lucky life, Hanserl?” said he, half in question.

“Lucky? ay, that has it. I was a poor boy, barefooted and hungry in my native forest deformed, and stunted, too a thing to pity too weak to work, and with none to teach me, and yet even I was not forgotten by Him who made the world so fair and beautiful; but in my heart was planted a desire to be something to do something, that others might benefit by. The children used to mock me as I passed along the road; but a voice whispered within me, ‘Be of courage, Hanserl, they will bless thee yet, they will greet thee with many a merry laugh and joyous cry, and call thee their own kind Hanserl!’ and so have I lived to see it! My name is far and wide over Germany. Little boys and girls know and speak of me amongst the first words they syllable; and from the palace to the bauer’s hut, Hans Roeckle has his friends; and who knows that when this poor clay is mingled with the earth, but that my spirit will hover around the Christmas-tree when glad voices call upon me! I often think it will be so.”

Frank’s eyes glistened as he gazed upon the dwarf, who spoke with a degree of emotion and feeling very different from his wont.

“So you see, Master Franz,” said he, smiling, “there are ambitions of every hue, and this of mine you may deem of the very faintest, but it is enough for me. Had I been a great painter, or a poet, I would have revelled in the thought that my genius adorned the walls of many a noble palace, and that my verses kindled emotions in many a heart that felt like my own; but as one whom nature has not gifted, poor, ignoble, and unlettered, am I not lucky to have found a little world of joyous hearts and merry voices, who care for me % and speak of me, ay, and who would give me a higher place in their esteem than to Jean Paul, or Goethe himself?”

The friends had but time to pledge each other in a parting glass, when the stage drove up by which Hans was to return to Baden. A few hurried words, half cheering, half sorrowful, a close embrace, one long and lingering squeeze of the hand,

“Farewell, kind Hanserl!”

“God guide thee, Franz!” and they parted.

Frank stood in the little “Platz,” where the crowd yet lingered, watching the retiring “Post,” uncertain which, way to turn him. He dreaded to find himself all alone, and yet he shrank from new companionship. The newly risen moon and the calm air invited him to pursue his road; so he set out once more, the very exercise being a relief against his sad thoughts.

Few words are more easily spoken than “He went to seek his fortune;” and what a whole world lies within the narrow compass! A world of high-hearted hopes and doubting fear, of noble ambition to be won, and glorious paths to be trod, mingled with tender thoughts of home and those who made it such. What sustaining courage must be his who dares this course and braves that terrible conflict the toughest that ever man fought between his own bright coloring of life and the stern reality of the

world! How many hopes has he to abandon, how many illusions to give up! How often is his faith to be falsified and his trustfulness betrayed; and, worst of all, what a fatal change do these trials impress upon himself, how different is he from what he had been!

Young and untried as Frank Dalton was in life, he was not altogether unprepared for the vicissitudes that awaited him; his sister Nelly's teachings had done much to temper the over-buoyant spirit of his nature, and make him feel that he must draw upon that same courage to sustain the present, rather than to gild the future.

His heart was sorrowful, too, at leaving a home where unitedly they had, perhaps, borne up better against poverty. He felt for his own heart revealed it how much can be endured in companionship, and how the burden of misfortune like every other load is light when many bear it. Now thinking of these things, now fancying the kind of life that might lie before him, he marched along. Then he wondered whether the Count would resemble his father. The Daltons were remarkable for strong traits of family likeness, not alone in feature, but in character; and what a comfort Frank felt in fancying that the old general would be a thorough Dalton in frankness and kindness of nature, easy in disposition, with all the careless freedom of his own father! How he should love him, as one of themselves!

It is a well-known fact, that certain families are remarkable above others for the importance that they attach to the ties of kindred, making the boast of relationship always superior to the claims of self-formed friendships. This is perhaps more peculiarly the case among those who live little in the world, and whose daily sayings and doings are chiefly confined to the narrow circle of home. But yet it is singular how long this prejudice for perhaps it deserves no better name can stand the conflict of actual life. The Daltons were a special instance of what we mean. Certain characteristics of look and feature distinguished them all, and they all agreed in maintaining the claim of relationship as the strongest bond of union; and it was strange into how many minor channels this stream meandered. Every old ruin, every monument, every fragment of armor, or ancient volume associated with their name, assumed a kind of religious value in their eyes, and the word Dalton was a talisman to exalt the veriest trifle into the rank of relic. From his earliest infancy Frank had been taught these lessons. They were the traditions of the parlor and the kitchen, and by the mere force of repetition became a part of his very nature. Corrig-O'Neal was the theme of every story. The ancient house of the family, and which, although by time's changes it had fallen into the hands of the Godfreys from whom his mother came was yet regarded with all the feelings of ancient pride. Over and over again was he told of the once princely state that his ancestors held there, the troops of retainers, the mounted followers that ever accompanied them. The old house itself was exalted to the rank of a palace, and its wide-spreading but neglected grounds spoken of like the park of royalty.

To see this old house of his fathers, to behold with his own eyes the seat of their once greatness, became the passion of the boy's heart. Never did the Bedouin of the Desert long after Mecca with more heart-straining desire. To such a pitch had this passion gained on him, that, unable any longer to resist an impulse that neither left his thoughts by day nor his dreams by night, he fled from his school at Bruges, and when only ten years old made his way to Ostend, and under pretence of seeking a return to his family, persuaded the skipper of a trading-vessel to give him a passage to Limerick. It would take us too far from our road already a long one were we to follow his wanderings and tell of all the difficulties that beset the little fellow on his lonely journey. Enough that we say, he did at last reach the goal, of his hopes, and, after a journey of eight long days, find himself at the ancient gate of Corrig-O'Neal.

At first the disappointment was dreadful. The proud mansion, of whose glorious splendor his imagination had created an Oriental palace, was an antiquated brick edifice, in front of which ran a long terrace, once adorned with statues, but of which the pedestals alone remained. A few hedges of yew, with here and there the fragments of a marble figure or fountain, showed that the old French chateau taste had once prevailed there; and of this a quaint straight avenue of lime-trees,

reaching directly from the door to the river, also bore evidence. The tone of sadness and desertion was on everything; many of the lower windows were walled up; the great door itself was fastened and barricaded in such a way as to show it had been long disused. Not a creature was to be seen stirring about the place, and save that at night the flickering light of a candle might be descried from a small casement that looked upon the garden, the house might have been deemed uninhabited. Perhaps something in the mysterious desolation of the scene had its influence over the boy's mind; but as hour by hour he lingered in those silent woods, and lay in the deep grass, watching the cloud shadows as they stole along, he grew fondly attached to the place; now losing himself in some revery of the long past, now following out some half-remembered narrative of his mother's childhood, when she herself dwelt there.

All his little resources of pocket-money expended, his clothes, save such as he wore, sold, he could scarcely tear himself from a scene that filled every avenue of his heart. The time, however, came, when a ship, about to sail for the Scheldt, gave him the opportunity of returning home; and now this was to be his last day at Corrig-O'Neal.

And what a day of conflicting thought was it! now half resolved to approach the house, and ask to see his uncle, and now repelled by remembering all his unkindness to his father. Then marvelling whether some change might not have taken place in the old man's mind, and whether in his lonely desolation he might not wish once more to see his kindred near him.

He knew not what to do, and evening found him still undecided, and sitting on a little rising spot, from which the view extended over the garden at the back of the house, and whence he had often watched the solitary light that marked the old man's vigils.

Wearied by long watching and thought, he fell asleep; and when he awoke the light was gone, the light which hitherto had always burned till daybreak! and from the darkness it must now be far from that hour. While Frank wondered what this might mean, he was startled by hearing footsteps near him at least so they sounded on the gravel-walk of the garden, and in a few minutes after the grating sound of a key, and the opening of a small door which led out into the wood. He now perceived that a man was standing at the foot of the knoll, who seemed irresolute and undecided; for he twice returned to the door, once introduced the key, and again withdrew it, as if with a changed purpose. Suddenly he appeared to have made up his mind, for, stooping down, he began to dig with the greatest energy, stopping at intervals to listen, and again continuing his work when satisfied that he was unobserved.

The hour the scene itself the evident secrecy of the man, almost paralyzed the boy with terror; nor was it till long after the turf was replaced, dry leaves and dead branches were strewn over the spot, and the man himself gone, that Frank gained courage to move away. This he did at first cautiously and timidly, and then with a speed that soon carried him far away from the spot. The following day he was at sea; and if at first the strange scene never left his thoughts, with time the impression faded away, till at length it assumed the indistinctness of a vision, or of some picture created by mere imagination.

When he did return home, he never revealed, except to Nelly, where he had been, and the object for which he went; but, even to her, from some strange love of mystery, he told nothing of the last night's experience: this was a secret, which he hoarded like a miser's treasure, and loved to think that he only knew of. The stirring events of a schoolboy's life, at first, and subsequently the changeful scenes of opening manhood, gradually effaced the impression of what he had seen, or merely left it to all the indistinctness of a dream.

And thus are thoughts often sealed up in the memory for years unnoticed and unknown till, after a long interval, they are all called forth, and become the very pivots on which turns our destiny.

CHAPTER IV. THE ONSLOWS

THE little town of Baden was thrown into a state of considerable excitement by the unexpected arrival we have chronicled in a preceding chapter, and the host of the "Russie" reduced to the most uncommon straits to restore the effective of a staff, now brought down to the closest economy of retrenchment. Cooks, waiters, and housemaids were sought after in every quarter, while emissaries were despatched right and left to replenish the larder and provide for the wants of the mighty "Englander." Nor was all the bustle and commotion limited to within the hotel, but extended throughout the village itself, where many a rustic pony, laid up in ordinary for the winter, was again trimmed and curried and shod, to be paraded before the windows with a scarlet saddle-cloth and a worsted tassel to the bridle, in all the seductive attraction of a palfrey. Even flower-girls made their appearance again with a few frost-nipped buds and leaves; while a bassoon and a triangle, voting themselves a band, gave horrid signs of their means of persecution.

Meanwhile were the fortunate individuals for whose benefit these exertions were evoked, in the most blissful ignorance of all the interest they were awakening. From the first moment of their arrival none had even seen them. Waited upon by their own servants, scarcely heard, not even appearing at the windows, they were unconsciously ministering to a mystery that now engaged every tongue and ear around them. As, however, nothing of secrecy had any share in their proceedings, we have no scruple in invading the presence and introducing the reader to the company.

Sir Stafford Onslow was an immensely rich London banker, who in his capacity of borough member had voted steadily with the Whigs for some five-and-twenty years; supporting them by all the influence of his wealth and family, and who now came abroad, in a pet of sulk with his party, on being refused the peerage. By nature generous, kind-hearted, and affectionate, the constant pressure of a more ambitious wife had involved him in a career to which neither his tastes nor habits suited him. The fortune which he would have dispensed with dignity and munificence he was eternally taught to believe should be the stepping-stone to something higher in rank. All his influence in the City, of which he was justly proud, he was told was a mere vulgar ambition in comparison with that a coronet would bestow on him; and, in fact, having believed himself the leading man of a great section in society, he was led to look upon his position with discontent, and fancy that his just claims were disregarded and denied. Lady Hester Onslow, who having once been a beauty and the admired belle of royalty itself, had accepted the banker in a moment of pique, and never forgave him afterwards the unhappy preference.

Belonging to a very ancient but poor family, few were surprised at her accepting a husband some thirty-odd years her senior; and it is probable that she would fully have recognized the prudence of her choice if, by the death of a distant relative in India, which occurred a few months after her marriage, she had not acquired a very large fortune. This sudden accession of wealth coming, as she herself said, "too late," embittered every hour of her after-life.

Had she been but wealthy a few months back, she had married the man she loved, or whom she thought she loved, the heartless, handsome, well-mannered Lord Norwood, a penniless viscount, ruined before he came of age, and with no other means of support than the faculties which knavery had sharpened into talent.

Miss Onslow and her brother, both the children of a former marriage, were strikingly like their father, not alone in feature, but in the traits of his frank and generous character. They were devotedly attached to him, not the less, perhaps, from the circumstances of a marriage to which they were strongly opposed, and whose results they now saw in many a passage of discord and disagreement.

George and Sydney Onslow were both dark-complexioned and black-eyed, and had many traits of Spanish origin in appearance, their mother having been from that country. Lady Hester was a blonde, and affected to think that the Southern tint was but an approximation to the negro. Nor was

she less critical on their manners, whose joyous freedom she pronounced essentially vulgar. Such, in a few words, were the discordant elements which Fate had bound up as a family, and who now, by the sudden illness of Sir Stafford, were driven to seek refuge in the deserted town of Baden. Nor can we omit another who, although not tied to the rest by kindred, had been long a member of the circle. This was Dr. Grounsell, an old college friend of Sir Stafford's, and who, having lost every shilling of his fortune by a speculation, had taken up his home at the banker's many years previous to his second marriage. Lady Hester's dislike to him amounted to actual hatred. She detested him for the influence he possessed over her husband, for the sturdiness of a character that resisted every blandishment, for a quaintness that certainly verged upon vulgarity, and, most of all, for the open and undisguised manner he always declared against every scheme for the attainment of a title.

As Sir Stafford's physician, the only one in whom he had confidence, the doctor was enabled to stand his ground against attacks which must have conquered him; and by dint of long resistance and a certain obstinacy of character, he had grown to take pleasure in an opposition which, to a man of more refinement and feeling, must have proved intolerable; and although decidedly attached to Sir Stafford and his children, it is probable that he was still more bound to them by hate to "my Lady," than by all his affection for themselves.

Grounsell detested the Continent, yet he followed them abroad, resolved never to give up an inch of ground uncontested; and although assailed by a thousand slights and petty insults, he stood stoutly up against them all, defying every effort of fine-ladyism, French cookery, homoeopathy, puppyism, and the water-cure, to dislodge him from his position. There was very possibly more of dogged malice in all this than amiability or attachment to his friends; but it is due to the doctor to say that he was no hypocrite, and would never have blinked the acknowledgment if fairly confronted with the charge.

Although, if it had not been for my Lady's resentful notice of the ministerial neglect, the whole family would have been snugly domesticated in their beautiful villa beside the Thames at Richmond, she artfully contrived to throw the whole weight of every annoyance they experienced upon every one's shoulders rather than her own; and as she certainly called to her aid no remarkable philosophy against the inconveniences of travel, the budget of her grievances assumed a most imposing bulk.

Dressed in the very perfection of a morning costume, her cap, her gloves, her embroidered slippers, all in the most accurate keeping with that assumed air of seclusion by which fine ladies compliment the visitor fortunate enough to be admitted to their presence, Lady Hester sat at a window, occasionally looking from the deep lace that bordered her handkerchief to the picturesque scene of mountain and river that lay before her. A fastidious taste might have found something to be pleased with in either, but assuredly her handsome features evinced no agreeable emotion, and her expression was that of utter ennui and listlessness.

At another window sat Sydney Onslow drawing; her brother standing behind her chair, and from time to time adding his counsels, but in a tone studiously low and whispered. "Get that shadow in something deeper, Syd, and you 'll have more effect in the distance."

"What is that I hear about effect and distance?" sighed out my Lady. "You surely are not drawing?"

"Only sketching; making a hurried note of that wheel, and the quaint old-fashioned house beside it," said Sydney, diffidently.

"What a refinement of cruelty! The detestable noise of that mill kept me awake all night, and you mean to perpetuate the remembrance by a picture. Pray, be a good child and throw it out of the window."

Sydney looked up in her brother's face, where already a crimson flush of anger was gathering, but before she could reply he spoke for her. "The drawing is for me, Lady Onslow. You 'll excuse me if I do not consent to the fate you propose for it."

"Let me look at it," said she, languidly; and the young girl arose and presented the drawing to her. "How droll!" said she, laughing; "I suppose it is peculiar to Germany that water can run up hill."

“The shadow will correct that,” said Sydney, smiling; “and when the foreground is darker.” A violent slam of the door cut short the explanation. It was George Onslow, who, too indignant at the practised impertinence toward his sister, dashed out of the room in a passion.

“How underbred your brother will persist in being, my love,” said she, calmly; “that vile trick of slamming a door, they learn, I ‘m told, in the Guards’ Club. I ‘m sure I always thought it was confined to the melodramas one sees at the Porte St. Martin.”

At this moment a servant appeared at the door. “Colonel Haggerstone’s compliments, my Lady, and begs to know how Sir Stafford is to-day.”

“Something better,” replied she, curtly; and as the man disappeared, she added, “Whose compliments did he say?”

“I did not hear the name; it sounded like Haggerstone.”

“Impossible, child; we know of no such person. What hour is it?”

“A few minutes past two.”

“Oh dear! I fancied it had been four or five or six,” sighed she, drearily. “The amiable doctor has not made his report to-day of your papa, and he went to see him immediately after breakfast.”

“He told George that there was no amendment,” said Sydney, gravely.

“He told George! Then he did not deign to tell me.”

“You were not here at the moment. It was as he passed through the room hurriedly.”

“I conclude that I was in my dressing-room. But it is only in keeping with Mr. Grounsell’s studied disrespect, a line of conduct I grieve to see him supported in by members of this family.”

“Mr. Alfred Jekyl, my Lady,” said a servant, “with inquiry for Sir Stafford.”

“You appear to know best, my dear, how your papa is. Pray answer thai inquiry.”

“Sir Stafford is not better,” said Sydney to the servant.

“Who can all these people be, my dear?” said Lady Hester, with more animation of manner than she had yet exhibited. “Jekyl is a name one knows. There are Northamptonshire Jekyls, and, if I mistake not, it was a Jekyl married Lady Olivia Drossmore, was it not? Oh, what a fool I am to ask you, who never know anything of family or connection! And yet I ‘m certain I ‘ve told you over and over the importance the actual necessity of this knowledge. If you only bestowed upon Burke a tithe of the patience and time I have seen you devote to Lyell, you ‘d not commit the shocking mistake you fell into t’ other day of discussing the Duchess of Dartley’s character with Lord Brandford, from whom she was divorced. Now you ‘d never offend quartz and sandstone by miscalling their affinities. But here comes the doctor.”

If Dr. Grounsell had been intended by nature to outrage all ultra-refined notions regarding personal appearance, he could not possibly have been more cunningly fashioned. Somewhat below the middle size, and squarely formed, his legs did not occupy more than a third of his height; his head was preternaturally large, and seemed even larger from a crop of curly yellowish hair, whose flaring ochre only rescued it from the imputation of being a wig. His hands and feet were enormous, requiring a muscular effort to move them that made all his gestures grotesque and uncouth. In addition to these native graces, his clothes were always made much too large for him, from his avowed dislike to the over-tightening and squeezing of modern fashion.

As his whole life had been passed in the superintendence of a great military hospital in the East, wherein all his conversations with his brethren were maintained in technicalities, he had never converted the professional jargon into a popular currency, but used the terms of art upon all occasions, regardless of the inability of the unmedical world to understand him.

“Well, sir, what is your report to-day?” said Lady Onslow, assuming her very stateliest of manners.

“Better, and worse, madam. The arthritis relieved, the cardiac symptoms more imminent.”

“Please to bear in mind, sir, that I have not studied at Apothecaries’ Hall.”

“Nor I, madam; but at Edinburgh and Aberdeen, in the faculties of medicine and surgery,” said Grounsell, drawing down his waistcoat, and arranging himself in what he considered an order of battle.

“Is papa better, doctor?” said Sydney, mildly.

“The articular affection is certainly alleviated, but there is mischief here,” said Grounsell, placing his hand over his heart; “fibrous tissues, my dear Miss Onslow, fibrous tissues are ticklish affairs.”

“Is this advice to be construed in a moral rather than a medical sense?” said Lady Onslow, with a malicious smile.

“Either or both,” replied the doctor. “The heart will always be highly susceptible of nervous influence.”

“But papa” broke in Sydney, eagerly.

“Is suffering under metastasis migratory gout, it may be termed changing from articular to large organic structures.”

“And, of course, you are giving him the old poisons that were in use fifty years ago?”

“What do you mean, madam?” said Grounsell, sternly.

“That shocking thing that drives people mad colocynth, or colchicum, or something like that. You know what I mean?”

“Happily for me, madam, I can guess it.”

“And are you still as obstinate as ever about the globules?”

“The homoeopathic humbug?”

“If you are polite enough so to designate what I put the most implicit trust in. But I warn you, sir, I mean to exert my just and rightful influence with Sir Stafford; and in case a very great change does not appear to-morrow, I shall insist upon his trying the aconite.”

“If you do, madam, the insurance offices shall hear of it!” said Grounsell, with a sternness that made the threat most significant.

“I ‘ll send for that man from Heidelberg at once, Sydney,” said Lady Hester, as, pale with passion, she seated herself at her writing-table.

“Take care what you do, madam,” said Grounsell, approaching where she sat, and speaking in a low and solemn voice. “Let not any feeling of displeasure with me induce you to an act of rashness or imprudence. My old friend’s state is critical; it may at any moment become dangerous. I am convinced that what I am doing offers the most reasonable hope of serving him. Take care lest you weaken his confidence in me, when he may not be prepared to repose it in another.”

“Here, Sydney, you write German; and it is possible he may not read French. This is his name, I got it in Paris Graeffnell. Tell him to come at once in fact, let Francois take a carriage for him.”

Sydney Onslow looked at her mother and then at the doctor. At the latter her glance was almost imploring, but he never noticed it, turning abruptly toward the window without uttering a word.

“Can you consult with him, doctor?” asked Sydney, timidly.

“Of course not; he ‘s a mountebank.”

“Write, as I bade you, Miss Onslow,” said Lady Hester. “Dr. Graeffnell is one of the first men in Germany. Lady Heskisson sent for him when the Earl fell ill at Wiesbaden.”

“And the Countess was a widow in four days after. Don’t forget the denouement of the story, madam.”

Sydney dropped the pen, and her hands fell powerless to her side. There was something in the sternness of the doctor that seemed to awe even Lady Onslow, for she made no reply; while Grounsell, seeing his advantage, left the room at once, without further parley.

Our readers will probably forgive us if we follow his example, and not remain to listen to the eloquent monologue in which Lady Onslow lamented her sad condition in life. Not only did she bewail her destiny, but, like one of those classic personages the Greek Chorus presents us to, she proceeded

to speculate upon every possible mischance futurity might have in store for her, ingeniously inventing “situations,” and devising “predicaments” that nothing less gifted than a self-tormenting imagination can conceive. Leaving her to all the pleasure such a pastime can give, we shall quit the house, and, although a cold, raw evening is closing in, wander out into the street.

CHAPTER V. THE PATIENT

ALONG the dark and narrow street, over which the coming night cast a dreary shadow, a single lamp was seen to shine at the door of Ludwig Kraus, the apothecary; a beacon, it is but fair to add, lighted less with the hope of attracting custom than in obedience to the requirements of the law, for Herr Kraus was a "state" official, and bound to conform to the dictates of the government. His shop was a small triangular space, in which there was barely room for the learned dispenser and a single client at the same moment, thus giving to all his interviews the secrecy of the confessional itself. Jars, phials, flasks, and drawers rose on every side, not inscribed with the vulgar nomenclature of modern physic, but bearing the enigmatical marks and hieroglyphics known to Galen and Paracelsus. Arabic letters, dragons, strange monsters, and zodiacal signs met the eye everywhere, and did not consort ill with the spare form and high bald head of the proprietor, whose quaint-figured dressing-gown and black velvet cap gave him a kind of resemblance to an alchemist in his workshop. As Grounsell approached the glass door and peeped in, the scene that presented itself rather assisted this illusion, for straight in front of the little counter over which Kraus was leaning, sat the dwarf, Hans Roeckle, talking away with considerable animation, and from time to time seeming to expatiate upon the merits of a wooden figure which he held carefully in his hands. The small, half-lighted chamber, the passive, motionless features of the chemist, the strange wild gestures of little Hans, as, in his tongue of mysterious gutturals he poured out a flood of words, amazed Grounsell, and excited his curiosity to the utmost. He continued to gaze in for a considerable time, without being able to guess what it might mean, and at last abandoning all conjecture he resolved to enter. Scarcely had he touched the handle of the door, however, than the dwarf, seizing the figure, concealed it beneath the skirt of his fur mantle, and retired to a corner of the shop. Dr. Grounsell's errand was to obtain certain medicines for his patient, which, from his ignorance of German, he had taken the precaution to write down in Latin. He passed the paper in silence over the counter, and waited patiently as the chemist spelt out the words. Having read it through, he handed back the paper with a few dry words, which, being in his native tongue, were totally incomprehensible.

"You must have these things, surely," exclaimed Grounsell; "they are the commonest of all medicines;" and then remembering himself, he made signs in the direction of the drawers and phials to express his meaning. Again the chemist uttered some dozen words.

The doctor produced his purse, where certain gold pieces glittered, as though to imply that he was willing to pay handsomely for his ignorance; but the other pushed it away, and shook his head in resolute refusal.

"This is too bad," muttered Grounsell, angrily. "I 'll be sworn he has the things, and will not give them." The chemist motioned Hans to approach, and whispered a few words in his hearing, on which the dwarf, removing his cap in courteous salutation, addressed Grounsell: "High-born and much-learned Saar. De laws make no oder that doctoren have recht to write physics."

"What!" cried Grounsell, not understanding the meaning of this speech. Hans repeated it more slowly, and at length succeeded in conveying the fact that physicians alone were qualified to procure medicines.

"But I am a doctor, my worthy friend, a physician of long standing."

"Das ist possible who knows?"

"I know, and I say it," rejoined the other, tersely.

"Ja! ja!" responded Hans, as though to say the theme were not worth being warm about, one way or t' other.

"Come, my dear sir," said Grounsell, coaxingly; "pray be good enough to explain that I want these medicines for a sick friend, who is now at the hotel here, dangerously ill of gout."

"Podagra gout!" exclaimed Hans, with sudden animation, "and dese are de cure for gout?"

“They will, I hope, be of service against it.”

“You shall have dem Saar on one condition. That ist, you will visit anoder sick man mit gout an Englessman, too verh ill verb sick; and no rich you understan’.”

“Yes, yes; I understand perfectly; I’ll see him with pleasure. Tell this worthy man to make up these for me, and I ‘ll go along with you now.”

“Gut! verh good,” said Hans, as in a few words of German he expressed to the apothecary that he might venture to transgress the law in the present case when the season was over, and no one to be the wiser.

As Hans issued forth to show the way, he never ceased to insist upon the fact that the present was not a case for a fee, and that the doctor should well understand the condition upon which his visit was to be paid; and still inveighing on this theme, he arrived at the house where the Daltons dwelt. “Remember, too,” said Hans, “that, though they are poor, they are of guten stamm how say you, noble?” Grounsell listened with due attention to all Hanserl’s cautions, following, not without difficulty, his strange and guttural utterances.

“I will go before. Stay here,” said Hans, as they gained the landing-place; and so saying, he pushed open the door and disappeared.

As Grounsell stood alone and in the dark, he wondered within himself what strange chances should have brought a fellow-countryman into this companionship, for there was something so grotesque in Hans’s appearance and manner, that it routed all notion of his being admitted to any footing of friendly equality.

The door at length opened, and the doctor followed Hans into a dimly lighted room, where Dalton lay, half dressed, upon his bed. Before Grounsell had well passed the entrance, the sick man said, “I am afraid, sir, that my little friend here has taken a bit of liberty with both of us, since I believe you wanted a patient just as little as I did a doctor.”

The anxious, lustrous eye, the flushed cheek, and tremulous lip of the speaker gave, at the same time, a striking contradiction to his words. Grounsell’s practised glance read these signs rapidly, and drawing near the bed, he seated himself beside it, saying, “It is quite clear, sir, that you are not well, and although, if we were both of us in our own country, this visit of mine would, as you observe, be a considerable liberty, seeing that we are in a foreign land, I hope you will not deem my intrusion of this nature, but suffer me, if I can, to be of some service to you.”

Less the words themselves than a certain purpose-like kindness in the speaker’s manner, induced Dalton to accept the offer, and reply to the questions which the other proposed to him. “No, no, doctor,” said he, after a few moments; “there is no great mischief brewing after all. The truth is, I was fretted harassed a little. It was about a boy of mine I have only one and he ‘s gone away to be a soldier with the Austrians. You know, of course as who does n’t? how hard it is to do anything for a young man now-a-days. If family or high connection could do it, we ‘d be as well off as our neighbors. We belong to the Daltons of Garrimore, that you know are full blood with the O’Neals of Cappagh. But what ‘s the use of blood now? devil a good it does a man. It would be better to have your father a cotton-spinner, or an iron-master, than the descendant of Shane Mohr na Manna.”

“I believe you are right,” observed the doctor, dryly.

“I know I am; I feel it myself, and I ‘m almost ashamed to tell it. Here am I, Peter Dalton, the last of them now; and may I never leave this bed, if I could make a barony constable in the county where the king’s writ could n’t run once without our leave.”

“But Ireland herself has changed more than your own fortunes,” remarked Grounsell.

“That’s true, that ‘s true,” sighed the sick man. “I don’t remember the best days of it, but I ‘ve heard of them often and often from my father. The fine old times, when Mount Dalton was filled with company from the ground to the slates, and two lords in the granary; a pipe of port wine in the hall, with a silver cup beside it; the Modereen hounds, huntsmen and all, living at rack and manger, as many

as fifty sitting down in the parlor, and I won't say how many in the servants' hall; the finest hunters in the west country in the stables, there was life for you! Show me the equal of that in the wide world."

"And what is the present condition of the scene of those festivities?" said Grounsell, with a calm but searching look.

"The present condition?" echoed Dalton, starting up to a sitting posture, and grasping the curtain with a convulsive grip; "I can't tell you what it is to-day, this ninth of November, but I'll tell what it was when I left it, eighteen years ago. The house was a ruin; the lawn a common; the timber cut down; the garden a waste; the tenants beggared; the landlord an exile. That 's a pleasant catalogue, is n't it?"

"But there must come a remedy for all this," remarked Grounsell, whose ideas were following out a very different channel.

"Do you mean by a poor-law? Is it by taxing the half ruined to feed the lazy? or by rooting out all that once was a gentry, to fill their places by greedy speculators from Manchester and Leeds? Is that your remedy? It 's wishing it well I am! No; if you want to do good to the country, leave Ireland to be Ireland, and don't try to make Norfolk of her. Let her have her own Parliament, that knows the people and their wants. Teach her to have a pride in her own nationality, and not to be always looking at herself in shame beside her rich sister. Give her a word of kindness now and then, as you do the Scotch; but, above all, leave us to ourselves. We understand one another; you never did, nor never will. We quarrelled, and made friends again, and all went right with us; you came over with your Chancery Courts, and your police, and whenever we differed, you never stopped till we were beggared or hanged."

"You take a very original view of our efforts at civilization, I confess," said Grounsell, smiling. "Civilization! Civilization! I hate the very sound of the word; it brings to my mind nothing but county jails, bridewells, turnpikes, and ministers' money. If it was n't for civilization, would there be a receiver over my estate of Mount Dalton? Would the poor tenants be racked for the rent that I always gave time for? Would there be a big poor-house, with its ugly front staring to the highway, as they tell me there is, and a police barrack to keep it company, opposite? I tell you again, sir, that your meddling has done nothing but mischief. Our little quarrels you converted into serious animosities; our estrangements into the feuds of two opposing races; our very poverty, that we had grown accustomed to, you taught us to regard as a 'national disgrace,' without ever instructing us how to relieve it; and there we are now on your hands, neither English in industry, nor Irish in submission, neither willing to work, nor content to be hungry!"

The doctor saw by the agitated look and tone of the sick man that the subject was one of too much excitement for him, and hastened to change the topic by jocularly expressing a hope that he might prove more successful with him than England had been with his countrymen.

"I doubt it, sir," said Dalton, gravely; "not thanking you the less for your kindness. I believe, like my poor country, that I 'm past doctoring." He paused for a few seconds, and then added: "It's all fretting. It's thinking about the girls. Frank there is no fear of. That 's what ails me."

Grounsell saw that to prolong his visit would be but to encourage a tone of depression that must prove injurious; so promising to return to see him in the morning, he shook Dalton's hand cordially, and followed Hans into the adjoining room, where writing materials were prepared for him.

The two girls were standing at the fire as he entered; and simple as was their dress, homely even to poverty, every trait of their costume, their looks, bespoke them of gentle blood. Their anxious glances as he came forward showed their eagerness to hear his tidings; but they did not speak a word.

"Do not be uneasy, young ladies," said he, hastening to relieve their fears. "Your father's illness has nothing serious about it. A few days will, I trust, see him perfectly restored to health. Meanwhile you are his best physicians, who can minister to his spirits and cheer him up."

"Since my brother left us, sir, he appeared to sink hour by hour; he cannot get over the shock," said Ellen.

“I never knew him to give way before,” interposed Kate. “He used to say, when anything grieved him, ‘he ‘d pay some one to fret for him.’”

“With better health you ‘ll see his old courage return,” said the doctor, as he hastily wrote a few lines of prescription, and then laying his head in his hand, seemed for some minutes lost in thought. There were little comforts, mat-’ ters of trifling luxury he wished to order, and yet he hesitated, for he did not know how far they were compatible with their means; nor could he venture upon the hazard of offending by questioning them. As in his uncertainty he raised his eyes, they fell upon the wooden figure which the dwarf had exhibited in the apothecary’s shop, and which now stood upon a table near. It was a child sleeping at the foot of a cross, around which its arms were entwined. The emaciated limbs and wasted cheek portrayed fasting and exhaustion, while in the attitude itself, sleep seemed verging upon death.

“What is that?” asked he, hastily, as he pointed with his pen to the object.

“A poor child was found thus, frozen to death upon the Arlberg,” said Kate; “and my sister carved that figure from a description of the event.”

“Your sister! This was done by you,” said Grounsell, slowly, as he turned his gaze from the work to the artist.

“Yes,” cried Hans, whose face beamed with delight; “is it not ‘lieblich?’ is it not vonderful? Dass, I say, alway; none have taste now none have de love to admire!”

Stooping down to examine it better, Grounsell was struck by the expression of the face, whereon a smile of trustfulness and hope seemed warring with the rigid lines of coming death; so that the impression conveyed was more of a victory over suffering than of a terrible fate.

“She is self-taught, sir; none even so much as assisted Ler by advice,” said Kate, proudly.

“That will be perhaps but too apparent from my efforts,” said Ellen, smiling faintly.

“I’m no artist, young lady,” said Grounsell, bluntly, “but I am well versed in every variety of the human expression in suffering, and of mere truth to nature I can speak confidently. This is a fine work! nay, do not blush, I am not a flatterer. May I take it with me, and show it to others more conversant with art than I am?”

“Upon one condition you may,” said the girl, in a low, deep voice.

“Be it so; on any condition you wish.”

“We are agreed, then?”

“Perfectly.”

“The figure is yours Nay, sir your promise!”

Groimsell stammered, and blushed, and looked confused; indeed, no man was less able to extricate himself from any position of embarrassment; and here the difficulties pressed on every side, for while he scrupled to accept what he deemed a gift of real value, he felt that they too had a right to free themselves from the obligation that his presence as a doctor imposed. At last he saw nothing better than to yield; and in all the confusion of a bashfully awkward man, he mumbled out his acknowledgments and catching up the figure, departed.

Hans alone seemed dissatisfied at the result, for as he cast his wistful looks after the wooden image, his eyes swam with his tears, and he muttered as he went some words of deep desponding cadence.

CHAPTER VI. A FIRST VISIT

THE dreary weather of November showed no signs of “taking up.” Lowering days of fog and gloom alternated with cold winds and sleet, so that all out-door occupation was utterly denied to that imprisoned party, who were left with so few resources to pass the time within. It is true they did not make the best of the bad. Lady Hester grew hourly more irritable and peevish. Sydney Onslow seldom left her room. George took to the hills every morning, and never returned before a late dinner; while the doctor, when not with Sir Stafford, spent all his time at the Daltons’, with whom he had already established a close intimacy.

Lady Hester had exhausted every possible means she could imagine to while away the hours; she had spent whole days in letter-writing folios of “tirades” to every one she could think of. She had all the carriages inspected, and the imperials searched, for books she well knew had been left behind. She had sent for the landlord’s daughter to give her lessons in German, which she thought of learning during the week. She had given a morning to the Italian boy with his white mice, and pored for hours long over the “Livre des Voyageurs,” reading the names of friends who, with better fortune, had taken their departure for Italy. But at last there came an end even to these frail resources, and she was left utterly without an occupation to engage, or even a thought to employ her. The five minutes of morning altercation with Grounsell over, the dreary time was unbroken by a single event, or unchecked by a single hope. Sir Stafford was indeed recovering, but so slowly that weeks might be required ere he could proceed on his journey. How were they to be passed? was the fearful question to which she could find no answer. She looked with actual envy at the party of boors who played at dominos in the beer-house opposite, and followed with longing eyes the little mail-cart as it left the village. If she could read German, there were scores of books at her service. If she could but take a charitable turn, there was poverty enough to give her occupation from morn till night. She never knew what it was to think seriously, for meditation is the manufacture that cannot work without its raw material, and with this her mind was not stored.

It was in this pitiable frame of mind she was walking up and down the drawing-room one morning, just as the doctor had taken his departure, and with him the last little scene that was to relieve the day, when the servant entered with the card of Colonel Haggerstone, and the daily repeated inquiry for Sir Stafford’s health.

Had the gallant colonel presented himself at Wilton Crescent, or the Villa, it is more than likely that the well-instructed porter had not vided his passport, but at once consigned a name of such unimposing consonants to gentle obscurity, while such an entry in the visiting-book had been coolly set down as a mistake. Not so now, however. Lady Hester took up the card, and, instead of the habitual curt rejoinder, “Sir Stafford is better,” said, “You may tell Colonel Haggerstone that Lady Hester will receive him.”

The gallant colonel, who was negligently slapping his boots with his riding-whip below stairs, was not a little amazed at the message. There had been a time when he would have interpreted the favor most flatteringly. He would have whispered to himself, “She has seen me passing the window, she was struck with me as I rode by.” Time had, however, toned down these bright illusions, and he read the permission with a nearer approach to truth, as a fine-lady caprice in a moment of ennui. “I thought as much,” muttered he to himself as he slowly ascended the stairs; “the blockade was too strictly enforced not to tell at last. No newspapers, no books ha! ha! Could n’t help surrendering!”

The colonel had by this time given his whiskers and moustaches the last curl, thrown back his head into a position of calm dignity, as the servant, throwing wide the folding-doors, announced him. Advancing two paces, and bowing low, Colonel Haggerstone said, “Your Ladyship will pardon the liberty the very great liberty I have taken in my respectful inquiries for some days past; but although

probably not remembered by Sir Stafford, I once did enjoy the honor of his acquaintance, we met at Lord Kerrison's, in Scotland.”

Lady Onslow cut short this very uninteresting explanation by a bland but somewhat supercilious smile, that seemed to say, “What possible matter can it be?” while at the same time she motioned him to be seated.

“May I hope that Sir Stafford continues to improve?” said he, bowing again.

“He's better to-day,” said Lady Onslow, languidly. “Perhaps as well as anyone can be in this wretched place. You heard, I suppose, of the series of misfortunes that befell us, and compelled us to return here?”

The colonel looked mildly compassionate and inquisitive. He anticipated the possible pleasure her Ladyship might feel in a personal narrative, and he was an accomplished listener. This time, however, he was wrong. Lady Onslow either did not think the occasion or the audience worth the trouble of the exertion, and merely said, “We had a break-down somewhere with an odious name. Sir Stafford would travel by that road through the Hohlen Thai, where somebody made his famous march. Who was it?”

“Massena, I think,” said the colonel, at a haphazard, thinking that at least the name was ben trovato, just as Sunday-school children father everything remarkable on John the Baptist.

“Oh dear, no; it was Moreau. We stopped to breakfast at the little inn where he held his headquarters, and in the garden of which he amused himself in pistol-shooting, strange, was it not? Are you a good shot, Colonel?”

“Good among bad ones,” said the colonel, modestly.

“Then we must have a match. I am so fond of it! You have pistols, of course?”

“I am fortunate enough to have a case of Schlessinger's best, and at your Ladyship's disposal.”

“Well, that is agreed upon. You 'll be kind enough to select a suitable spot in the garden, and if to-morrow be fine By the way what is to-morrow not Sunday I hope?”

The colonel relieved her anxieties by the assurance that the next day would be Monday, consequently that the present one was Sunday.

“How strange! One does make sad confusion in these things abroad,” said she, sighing. “I think we are better in England in that respect, don't you?”

The question was not a very clear one, but the colonel never hesitated to give in his adhesion.

“Sir Stafford always took that view in the House, and consequently differed from his party, as well as about Ireland. Poor dear Ireland! what is to be done for her?”

This was a rather more embarrassing demand than the previous one, and the colonel hemmed and coughed, and prepared for a speech of subtle generalities; but the dexterity was all unnecessary, for her Ladyship had already forgotten the theme, and everything about it, as she went on. “How I pity those dear Wreckingtons, who are condemned to live there! The Earl, you know, had promised solemnly that he would go any lengths for the party when he got his blue riband; and so they took him at his word, and actually named him to the viceroyalty. It was a very cruel thing, but I hear nothing could be better than his conduct on hearing it: and dear Lady Wreckington insisted upon accompanying him. It was exactly like the story of what was that man's name, who assisted in the murder of the Emperor Paul Geroboffskoi, or something like that, and whose wife followed him to the mines.”

The colonel avowed that the cases were precisely alike, and now the conversation if the word can be degraded to mean that bald disjointed chat ran upon London people and events their marriages, their dinners, their separations, coalitions, divorces, and departures; on all which themes Haggerstone affected a considerable degree of knowledge, although, to any one less occupied with herself than her Ladyship, it would have been at once apparent that all his information was derived from the newspapers. It was at the close of a lamentation on the utter stupidity of everything and everywhere, that he adroitly asked where she meant to pass the winter.

“I wish I knew,” said she, languidly. “The Dollingtons say Naples; the Upsleys tell us Rome; and, for my part, I pronounce for neither. Lady Dollingtou is my aversion, and the three Upsley girls, with their pink noses and red hair, are insufferable.”

“What does your Ladyship think of Florence?” asked the colonel, soothingly.

“Pretty much what I might of one of the Tonga Islands. I know nothing of the place, the people, or the climate. Pray tell me about it.”

“There is very little to say,” said Haggerstone, shrugging his shoulders; “not but the place might be very agreeable, if there were some one of really fashionable standing to take the lead and give a tone to the society; some one who would unite indispensable rank and wealth with personal graces, and thus, as it were, by prescriptive right, assume the first place. Then, I say, Florence would be second to no city of Italy. Would that your Ladyship would condescend to accept the vacant throne!”

“I!” said she, affecting astonishment; and then laughingly added: “Oh no! I detest mock sovereignty. I actually shudder at the idea of the lady-patroness part; besides, whom should one have to reign over? Not the Browns and Smiths and Perkinses; not the full-pensioned East Indians, the half-pay colonels, and the no-pay Irish gentilities, that form the staple of small city society. You surely would not recommend me to such a sad pre-eminence.”

The colonel smiled flatteringly at her Ladyship’s smartness, and hastened to assure her that such heresy was far from his thoughts; and then with a practised readiness ran over a list of foreign celebrities French, Russian, and German whose names, at least, clinked like the true metal.

This looked promisingly; it was very like cutting all English society, and had the appearance of something very exclusive, very impertinent, and very ungenerous; and now she lent a willing ear as Haggerstone revealed a plan of operations for a whole winter campaign. According to his account, it was a perfect terra incognita, where the territorial limits and laws might be laid down at will; it was a state which called for a great dictatorship, and the sway of unlimited authority.

Now, Lady Hester had never at least since her marriage, and very rarely even before it been more than on the periphery of fashionable society. When she did obtain a footing within the charmed circle, it was by no prescriptive right, but rather on some ground of patronage, or some accidental political crisis, which made Sir Stafford’s influence a matter of moment. There was, therefore, a flattery in the thought of thus becoming a leader in society; and she shrewdly remembered, that though there might be little real power, there would be all the tyranny of a larger sovereignty.

It is true she suffered no symptom of this satisfaction to escape her; on the contrary, she compassionated the “poor dear things,” that thought themselves “the world,” in such a place, and smiled with angelic pity at their sweet simplicity; but Haggerstone saw through all these disguises, and read her real sentiments, as a practised toadeater never fails to do, where only affectation is the pretence. Adroitly avoiding to press the question, he adverted to Baden and its dreary weather; offered his books, his newspapers, his horses, his phaeton, and everything that was his, even his companionship as a guide to the best riding or walking roads, and, like a clever actor, made his exit at the very moment when his presence became most desirable.

Lady Hester looked out of the window, and saw, in the street beneath, the saddle-horses of the colonel, which were led up and down by a groom in the most accurate of costumes. The nags themselves, too, were handsome and in top condition. It was a little gleam of civilization, in the midst of universal barrenness, that brought up memories, some of which at least were not devoid of pain, so far as the expression of her features might be trusted. “I wonder who he can be?” said she, musing. “It’s a shocking name! Haggerstone. Perhaps Sir Stafford may remember him. It’s very sad to think that one should be reduced to such people.” So, with a slight sigh, she sat down to indulge in a mood of deep and sincere commiseration for herself and her sorrows.

From these reveries she was aroused by the arrival of a package of books and papers from the colonel. They included some of the latest things of the day, both French and English, and were exactly the kind of reading she cared for, that half-gossipry that revolves around a certain set, and busies itself

about the people and incidents of one very small world. There were books of travel by noble authors, and novels by titled authoresses; the one as tamely well bred and tiresome as the others were warm and impassioned, no bad corroborative evidence, by the way, of the French maxim, that the “safety of the Lady Georginas has an immense relation to the coldness of the Lord Georges.” There were books of beauty, wherein loveliness was most aristocratic; and annuals where nobility condescended to write twaddle. There were analyses of new operas, wherein the list of the spectators was the only matter of interest, and better than these were the last fashions of “Longchamps,” the newest bulletins of that great campaign which began in Adam’s garden, and will endure to the “very crack of doom.”

Lady Hester’s spirits rallied at once from these well-timed stimulants; and when the party gathered together before dinner, George and his sister were amazed at the happy change in her manner.

“I have had a visitor,” said she, after a short mystification; “a certain colonel, who assumes to be known to your father, but I fancy will scarcely be remembered by him, he calls himself Haggerstone.”

“Haggerstone!” said George, repeating the name twice or thrice. “Is not that the name of the man who was always with Arlington, and of whom all the stories are told?”

“As I never heard of Arlington’s companion, nor the stories in question, I can’t say. Pray enlighten us,” said Lady Hester, tartly.

“Haggerstone sounds so like the name,” repeated George to himself.

“So like what name? Do be good enough to explain.”

“I am unwilling to tell a story which, if not justly attributable to the man, will certainly attach unpleasantly to his name hereafter.”

“And in your excessive caution for yourself, you are pleased to forget me, Mr. Onslow. Pray remember that if I admit him to acquaintance – ”

“But surely you don’t mean to do so?”

“And why not?”

“In the first place, you know nothing about him.”

“Which is your fault.”

“Be it so. I have at least told you enough to inspire reserve and caution.”

“Quite enough to suggest curiosity and give a degree of interest to a very commonplace character.”

“Is he young, may I ask?” said George, with a half smile.

“No, far from it.”

“Good-looking?”

“Just as little.”

“Very agreeable and well-mannered?”

“Rather prosy, and too military in tone for my taste.”

“Does he come under the recommendatory ‘firman’ of any dear friend or acquaintance?”

“Nothing of the kind. There is his passport,” said she, pointing to his visiting ticket.

“Your Ladyship used to be more difficult of access,” said George, dryly.

“Very true; and so I may possibly become again. To make selections from the world of one’s acquaintance is a very necessary duty; but, as my father used to say, no one thinks of using a sieve for chaff.”

“This gentleman is, then, fortunate in his obscurity.”

“Here comes Miss Onslow,” said Lady Hester, “who will probably be more grateful to me when she learns that our solitude is to be enlivened by the gallant colonel.”

Sydney scanned over the books and journals on the table, and then quietly remarked, “If a man is to be judged of by his associates, these do not augur very favorably for the gentleman’s taste.”

“I see that you are both bent on making him a favorite of mine,” said Lady Hester, pettishly; “and if Dr. Grounsell will only discover some atrocious circumstance in his history or character, I shall be prepared to call him ‘charming.’”

The announcement of dinner fortunately broke up a discussion that already promised unfavorably; nor were any of the party sorry at the interruption.

CHAPTER VII. A LESSON IN PISTOL-SHOOTING

THERE are two great currents which divide public opinion in the whole world, and all mankind may be classed into one or other of these wide categories, “the people who praise, and the people who abuse everything.” In certain sets, all is as it ought to be, in this life. Everybody is good, dear, and amiable. All the men are gifted and agreeable; all the women fascinating and pretty. An indiscriminate shower of laudations falls upon everything or everybody, and the only surprise the bearer feels is how a world, so chuck full of excellence, can possibly consist with what one reads occasionally in the “Times” and the “Chronicle.”

The second category is the Roland to this Oliver, and embraces those who have a good word for nobody, and in whose estimation the globe is one great penal settlement, the overseers being neither more nor less than the best-conducted among the convicts. The chief business of these people in life is to chronicle family disgraces and misfortunes, to store their memories with defalcations, frauds, suicides, disreputable transactions at play, unfair duels, seductions, and the like, and to be always prepared, on the first mention of a name, to connect its owner, or his grandmother, with some memorable blot, or some unfortunate event of years before. If the everlasting laudations of the one set make life too sweet to be wholesome, the eternal disparagement of the other renders it too bitter to be enjoyable; nor would it be easy to say whether society suffers more from the exercise of this mock charity on the one side, or the practice of universal malevolence on the other.

Perhaps our readers will feel grateful when we assure them that we are not intent upon pushing the investigation further. The consideration was forced upon us by thinking of Colonel Haggerstone, who was a distinguished member of class No. 2. His mind was a police sheet, or rather like a page of that celebrated “Livre Noir,” wherein all the unexpiated offences of a nation are registered. He knew the family disasters of all Europe, and not a name could be mentioned in society to which he could not tag either a seduction, a fraud, a swindle, or a poltroonery; and when such revelations are given prosaically, with all the circumstances of date, time, and place, unrelieved by the slightest spice of wit or imagination, but simply narrated as “Memoires pour servir a l’Histoire” of an individual, the world is very apt to accept them as evidences of knowledge of life, rather than what they really are, proofs of a malignant disposition. In this way, Haggerstone seemed to many the mere “old soldier,” and nothing more; whereas, if nature had given him either fancy or epigrammatic smartness, he would have been set down for the incarnation of slander.

It may seem strange that Lady Hester, who had lived a good deal in the world, should never have met a character of this type, but so it was; she belonged to a certain “fast set” in society, who seem to ask for a kind of indemnity for all they do, by never, on any occasion, stopping to criticise their neighbors. This semblance of good nature is a better defensive armor than the uninitiated know of, enlisting all loose sympathies with its possessor, and even gaining for its advocates that great floating majority who speak much and think little.

In London, Haggerstone would have at once appeared the very worst “ton,” and she would have avoided the acquaintance of a man so unhappily gifted; but here, at Baden, with nothing to do, none to speak to, he became actually a prize, and she listened to him for hours with pleasure as he recounted all the misdeeds of those “dear, dear friends” who had made up her own “world.” There was at heart, too, the soothing flattery that whispered, “He can say nothing of me; the worst he can hint is, that I married a man old enough to be my father, and if I did, I am heartily sorry for the mistake.”

He was shrewd enough soon to detect the family differences that prevailed, and to take advantage of them, not by any imprudent or ill-advised allusion to what would have enlisted her Ladyship’s pride in opposition, but by suggesting occupations and amusements that he saw would be distasteful to the others, and thus alienate her more and more from their companionship. In fact, his great object was to make Lady Hester a disciple of that new school which owns Georges Sand for its

patron, “and calls itself Lionue.” It would be foreign to our purpose here were we to stop and seek to what social causes this new sect owes existence. In a great measure it may be traced to the prevailing taste of men for club life, to that lounging ease which exacts no tribute of respect or even attention, but suffers men to indulge their caprices to any extent of selfishness; thus unfitting them for ladies’ society, or only such society as that of ladies condescending enough to unsex themselves, and to talk upon themes and discuss subjects that usually are reserved for other audiences.

Certain clever men liked this liberty, these receptions were a kind of free port, where all could be admitted duty free. Nothing was forbidden in this wide tariff, and so conversation, emancipated from the restriction of better society, permitted a thousand occasions of display, that gradually attracted people to these reunions, and made all other society appear cold, formal, and hypocritical by contrast. This new invention had not reached England when Lady Hester quitted it, but she listened to a description of its merits with considerable interest. There were many points, too, in which it chimed in with her notions. It had novelty, liberty, and unbounded caprice amongst its recommendations; and lastly, it was certain to outrage the “Onslows.” It was a “part” which admitted of any amount of interpolations. Under its sanction she would be free to say anything, know any one, and go anywhere. Blessed immunity that permitted all and denied nothing!

With all the vulgar requirements of “Lionism” she was already sufficiently conversant. She could ride, drive, shoot, and fence; was a very tolerable billiard-player, and could row a little. But with the higher walks of the craft she had made no acquaintance; she had not learned to swim, had never smoked, and was in dark ignorance of that form of language which, half mystical and all-mischievous, is in vogue with the members of this sect. That she could acquire all these things rapidly and easily the colonel assured her, and, by way of “matriculating,” reminded her of her challenge respecting the pistol-shooting, for which he had made every preparation in the garden of the hotel.

True to his word, he had selected a very pretty alley, at the end of which rose a wall sufficiently high to guard against accidents from stray shots. On a table were displayed, in all the dandyism such objects are capable of, a handsome case of pistols, with all the varied appliances of kid leather for wadding, bullet-moulds, rammers, hammers, screws, and rests, even to a russia-leather bound note-book, to record the successes, nothing had been forgotten; and Lady Hester surveyed with pleasure preparations which at least implied an anxious attention to her wishes.

“Only fancy the barbarism of the land we live in,” said he; “I have sent emissaries on every side to seek for some of those plaster images so common in every city of Europe, but in vain. Instead of your ladyship cutting off Joan of Arc’s head, or sending your bullet through some redoubtable enemy of England, you must waste your prowess and skill upon an ignoble jar of porcelain, or a vase of Bohemian glass; unless, indeed, my last messenger shall have proved more fortunate, and I believe such is the case.” As he spoke, his servant came up with a small parcel carefully enveloped in paper.

“I have got this figure, sir,” said he, “with the greatest difficulty, and only indeed by pretending we wanted it as an ornamental statue. The little fellow of the toy-shop parted with it in tears, as if it had been his brother.”

“It is very beautiful!” said Lady Hester, as she surveyed a small wooden statue of Goethe’s “Marguerite,” in the attitude of plucking the petals of a flower to decide upon her lover’s fidelity.

“A mere toy!” said Haggerstone. “These things are carved by every child in the Black Forest. Does your Ladyship think you could hit the feather of her cap without hurting the head?”

“I couldn’t think of such profanation,” replied she; “there is really something very pretty in the attitude and expression. Pray let us reserve her for some less terrible destiny.”

But the colonel persisted in assuring her that these were the commonest knick-knacks that adorned every peasant’s cabin, that every boor with a rusty knife carved similar figures, and in the midst of his explanations he placed the statue upon a little stone pillar about twenty paces off.

Lady Hester’s objection had been little more than a caprice; indeed, had she been convinced that the figure was a valuable work of art, she would have felt rather flattered than otherwise at the

costliness of the entertainment provided for her. Like Cleopatra's pearl, it would have had the charm of extravagance at least; but she never gave the colonel credit for such gallantry, and the more readily believed all he said on the subject.

Colonel Haggerstone proceeded to load the pistols with all that pomp and circumstance so amusingly displayed by certain people on like occasions. The bullets, encased in little globes of chamois, carefully powdered with emery, were forced down the barrels by a hammer, the hair trigger adjusted, and the weapon delivered to Lady Hester with due solemnity.

"If I go wide of the mark, Colonel, I beg you to remember that I have not had a pistol in my hand for above three years; indeed, it must be nearly four years since I shot a match with Lord Norwood."

"Lord Norwood! indeed!" said Haggerstone. "I wasn't aware that your Ladyship had ever been his antagonist."

Had not Lady Hester been herself anxious to hide the confusion the allusion to the viscount always occasioned her, she could not have failed to remark how uncomfortably astonished was Haggerstone at the mention of that name. Nervously eager to do something anything that might relieve her embarrassment she pulled the trigger; but the aim was an erring one, and no trace of the bullet to be seen.

"There 's no use in looking for it, Colonel Haggerstone," said she, pettishly; "I'm certain I was very wide of the mark."

"I 'm positive I saw the plaster drop from the wall somewhere hereabouts," said the complaisant Colonel, pointing to a spot close beside the figure. "Yes, and the twigs are broken here."

"No matter; I certainly missed, and that's quite enough. I told you I should, before I fired; and when one has the anticipation of failure, it is so easy to vindicate the impression."

It was in evident chagrin at her want of success that she spoke, and all her companion's flatteries went for nothing. Meanwhile, he presented the second pistol, which, taking hastily, and without giving herself time for an aim, she discharged with a like result.

"I 'll not try again," said she, pettishly. "Either the pistols don't suit me, or the place or the light is bad. Something is wrong, that's certain."

Haggerstone bit his lip in silence, and went on reloading the pistols without trusting himself to reply. A little conflict was going on within him, and all his intended flatteries for her Ladyship were warring with the desire to display his own skill, for he was a celebrated shot, and not a little vain of the accomplishment. Vanity carried the day at last, and taking up the weapon, he raised it slowly to a level with his eye. A second or two he held it thus, his hand steady as a piece of marble.

"I have taken my aim, and now you may give the word for me to fire when you please," said he, turning his eyes from the object, and looking straight at Lady Hester.

She stared at him as if to reassure herself of the direction of his glance, and then called out "Fire!" The shot rang out clear and sharp; with it arose a shrill cry of agony, and straight before them, at the foot of the pillar, lay something which looked like a roll of clothes, only that by its panting motion it indicated life. Haggerstone sprang forward, and to his horror discovered the dwarf, Hans Roeckle, who, with his arm broken, lay actually bathed in blood. With his remaining hand he clasped the little statue to his bosom, while he muttered to himself the words "Gerettet! saved! saved!"

While Lady Hester hurried for assistance, Haggerstone bound up the bleeding vessels with his handkerchief; and in such German as he could command, asked how the accident had befallen.

A few low muttering sounds were all the dwarf uttered, but he kissed the little image with a devotion that seemed like insanity. Meanwhile the colonel's servant, coming up, at once recognized Hans, and exclaimed, "It is the little fellow of the toy-shop, sir. I told you with what reluctance he parted with this figure. He must be mad, I think."

The wild looks and eager expressions of the dwarf, as he clutched the image and pressed it to his heart, seemed to warrant the suspicion; and Haggerstone thought he could read insanity in every line of the poor creature's face. To the crowd that instantaneously gathered around the inn door, and which

included many of his friends and acquaintances, Hans would give no other explanation of the event than that it was a mere accident; that he was passing, and received the shot by chance; nothing more.

“Is he not mad, or a fool?” asked Haggerstone of the innkeeper.

“Neither, sir; Hans Roeckle is an old and respected burgher of our town, and although eccentric and odd in his way, is not wanting for good sense or good nature.”

“Ay! ay!” cried two or three of his townfolk, to whom the landlord translated the Colonel’s question; “Hans is a kind-hearted fellow, and if he loves his dolls and wooden images over-much, he never lacks in affection for living creatures.”

While these and such-like observations were making around him, the dwarf’s wounds were being dressed by his friend, Ludwig Kraus, an operation of considerable pain, that the little fellow bore with heroic tranquillity. Not a word of complaint, not a syllable of impatience escaped him; and while from his half-closed lips a low, muttered exclamation of “Saved! saved!” came forth from time to time, the bystanders deemed it the utterance of gratitude for his own escape with life.

But once only did any expression of irritation burst from him, it was when Haggerstone pulled out his purse, and with an ostentatious display of munificence asked him to name his recompense. “Take me home; take me hence!” said Hans, impatiently. “Tell the rich ‘Englander’ that there are wounds for which sorrow would be an ample cure, but there are others which insult is sure to fester.”

CHAPTER VIII. THE NIGHT EXCURSION

THE remainder of the day after the dwarf's misfortune was passed by Lady Hester in a state of feverish irritability. Sorry as she felt for the "sad accident," her own phrase, she was still more grieved for the effects it produced upon herself; the jar and worry of excited feelings, the uncomfortableness of being anxious about anything or anybody.

Epicurean in her code of manners as of morals, she detested whatever occasioned even a passing sensation of dissatisfaction, and hence upon the luckless colonel, the author of the present evil, fell no measured share of her displeasure. "He should have taken precautions against such a mishap; he ought to have had sufficient presence of mind to have arrested his aim; he should have fired in the air, in fact, he ought to have done anything but what he did do;" which was to agitate the nerves, and irritate the sensibilities, of a fine lady.

The conduct of the family, too, was the very reverse of soothing. Sir Stafford's gout had relapsed on hearing of the event; George Onslow's anger was such that he could not trust himself to speak of the occurrence; and as for Sydney, though full of sorrow for the dwarf, she had not a single sympathy to bestow upon her stepmother. "Were there ever such people?" she asked herself again and again. Not one had taken the trouble to ask how she bore up, or express the slightest anxiety for the consequences the shock might occasion her.

Grounsell was actually insufferable; and even hinted that if anything untoward were to happen, the very grave question might arise as to the guilt of the parties who appeared in arms without a Government permission. He reminded her Ladyship that they were not in England, but in a land beset with its own peculiar prejudices and notions, and in nothing so rigorous as in the penalties on accidents that took their origin in illegality.

As for the wound itself, he informed her that the bullet had "traversed the deltoid, but without dividing the brachial artery; and, for the present, sympathetic fever and subcutaneous inflammation would be the worst consequences." These tidings were neither very reassuring nor intelligible; but all her cross-examination could elicit little better.

"Has Colonel Haggerstone been to see him?" asked she.

"No, madam. His groom called with a present of two florins."

"Oh! impossible, sir."

"Perfectly true, madam. I was present when the money was returned to the man by a young lady, whose attentions to the sufferer saved him the pain this indignity would have cost him."

"A young lady, did you say? How does he happen to be so fortunate in his attendance?"

"Her father chances to be this poor creature's tenant, and many mutual acts of kindness have passed between them."

"Not even scandal could asperse her motives in the present case," said Lady Hester, with an insolent laugh. "It looked hardly human when they lifted it from the ground."

"Scandal has been guilty of as gross things, madam," said Grounsell, sternly, "but I would defy her here, although there is beauty enough to excite all her malevolence." And with this speech, delivered with a pointedness there was no mistaking, the doctor left the room.

Impressions, or what she herself would have called "feelings," chased each other so rapidly through Lady Hester's mind, that her whole attention was now directed to the young lady of whom Grounsell spoke, and whose singular charity excited all her curiosity. There is a strange tendency to imitation among those whose intelligences lie unexercised by any call of duty or necessity. No suggestion coming from within, they look without themselves for occupation and amusement. Lady Hester was a prominent disciple of this school; all her life she had been following, eager to see whether the fashions that became, or the pleasures that beguiled, others, might not suit herself. If such a course of existence inevitably conduces to ennui and discontent, it is no less difficult to strive against;

and they who follow in the track of others' footsteps have all the weariness of the road without the cheering excitement of the journey.

If the young lady found pleasure in charity, why should n't she? Benevolence, too, for aught she knew, might be very becoming. There were a hundred little devices of costume and manner which might be adopted to display it. What a pretty version of the good Samaritan modernized one might give in a Shetland scarf and a cottage bonnet the very thing Chalons would like to paint; and what an effective "interior" might be made of the dwarf's chamber, crowded with rude peasant faces, all abashed and almost awe-struck as she entered.

The longer she dwelt upon the theme the more fascinating it became. "It would be really worth while to realize," said she to herself at last "so amusing and so odd, an actual adventure; besides, in point of fact, it was her duty to look after this poor creature." Just so; there never was a frivolous action, or a notion struck out by passing folly, for which its author could not find a justification in PRINCIPLE! We are everlastingly declaring against the knaveries and deceptions practised on us in life; but if we only took count of the cheats we play off upon ourselves, we should find that there are no such impostors as our own hearts.

Nobody was ever less likely to make this discovery than Lady Hester. She believed herself everything that was good and amiable; she knew that she was handsome. Whatever contrarieties she met with in life, she was quite certain they came not from any fault of hers; and if self-esteem could give happiness, she must have enjoyed it. But it cannot. The wide neutral territory between what we think of ourselves and others think of us is filled with daring enemies to our peace, and it is impossible to venture into it without a wound of self-love.

To make her visit to the dwarf sufficient of an adventure, it must be done in secret; nobody should know it but Celestine, her maid, who should accompany her. Affecting a slight indisposition, she could retire to her room in the evening, and then there would be abundant time to put her plan into execution. Even these few precautions against discovery were needless, for George did not return to dinner on that day, and Sydney made a headache an excuse for not appearing.

Nothing short of the love of adventure and the indulgence of a caprice could have induced Lady Hester to venture out in such a night. The rain fell in torrents, and swooped along the narrow streets in channels swollen to the size of rivulets. The river itself, fed by many a mountain stream, fell tumbling over the rocks with a deafening roar, amid which the crashing branches of the pine-trees were heard at intervals. What would not have been her anxieties and lamentings if exposed to such a storm when travelling, surrounded with all the appliances that wealth can compass! and yet now, of her own free will, she wended her way on foot through the darkness and the hurricane, not only without complaining, but actually excited to a species of pleasure in the notion of her imaginary heroism.

The courier who preceded her, as guide, enjoyed no such agreeable illusions, but muttered to himself, as he went, certain reflections by no means complimentary, to the whims of fine ladies; while Mademoiselle Celestine inwardly protested that anything, "not positively wrong," would be dearly purchased by the dangers of such an excursion.

"Gregoire! Gregoire! where is he now!" exclaimed Lady Hester, as she lost sight of her guide altogether.

"Here, miladi," grunted out the courier, in evident pain; "I fail to break my neck over de stone bench."

"Where 's the lantern, Gregoire?"

"Blowed away, zum Teufel, I believe." "What 's he saying, Celestine? what does he mean?"

But mademoiselle could only answer by a sob of agony over her capote de Paris, flattened to her head like a Highland bonnet.

"Have you no light? You must get a light, Gregoire."

"Impossible, miladi; dere 's nobody livin' in dese houses at all."

“Then you must go back to the inn for one; we ‘ll wait here till you return.”

A faint shriek from Mademoiselle Celestine expressed all the terror such a proposition suggested.

“Miladi will be lost if she remain here all alone.”

“Perdue! sans doute!” exclaimed Celestine.

“I am determined to have my way. Do as I bade you, Gregoire; return for a light, and we’ll take such shelter as this door affords in the meanwhile.”

It was in no spirit of general benevolence that Gregoire tracked his road back to the “Russie,” since, if truth must be told, he himself had extinguished the light, in the hope of forcing Lady Hester to a retreat. Muttering a choice selection of those pleasant phrases with which his native German abounds, he trudged along, secretly resolving that he would allow his mistress a reasonable interval of time to reflect over her madcap expedition. Meanwhile, Lady Hester and her maid stood shivering and storm-beaten beneath the drip of a narrow eave. The spirit of opposition alone sustained her Ladyship at this juncture, for she was wet through, her shoes soaked with rain, and the cold blast that swept along seemed as if it would freeze the very blood in her heart.

Celestine could supply but little of comfort or consolation, and kept repeating the words, “Quelle aventure! quelle aventure!” in every variety of lamentation.

“He could easily have been back by this,” said Lady Hester, after a long pause, and an anxious attention to every sound that might portend his coming: “I ‘m certain it is full half an hour since he left us. What a night!”

“Et quelle aventure!” exclaimed Celestine, anew.

None knew better than Lady Hester the significant depreciation of the Frenchwoman’s phrase, and how differently had she rated all the hazards of the enterprise if any compromise of character were to have followed it. However, it was no time for discussion, and she let it pass.

“If he should have missed the way, and not be able to find us!” she said, after another pause.

“We shall be found dead in the morning,” cried Celestine; “et pour quelle a venture, mon Dieu, pour quelle aventure!”

The possibility that her fears suggested, and the increasing severity of the storm for now the thunder rolled overhead, and the very ground seemed to shake with the reverberation served to alarm Lady Hester, and for the first time she became frightened at their situation.

“We could scarcely find our way back, Celestine!” said she, rather in the tone of one asking for comfort than putting a question.

“Impossible, miladi.”

“And Gregoire says that these houses are all uninhabited.”

“Quelle aventure!” sobbed the maid.

“What can have become of him? It is more than an hour now! What was that, Celestine? was it lightning? there, don’t you see it yonder, towards the end of the street? I declare it is Gregoire; I see the lantern.”

A cry of joy burst from both together, for already hope had begun to wane, and a crowd of fearful anticipations had taken its place.

Lady Hester tried to call his name, but the clattering noise of the storm drowned the weak effort. The light, however, came nearer at each instant, and there was no longer any doubt of their rescue, when suddenly it turned and disappeared at an angle of the street. Lady Hester uttered a piercing cry, and at the instant the lantern was again seen, showing that the bearer had heard the sounds.

“Here, Gregoire, we are here!” exclaimed she, in her loudest voice, and speaking in English.

Whoever carried the lantern seemed for a moment uncertain how to act, for there was no reply, nor any change of position for a few seconds, when at length the light was seen approaching where Lady Hester stood.

“I think I heard an English voice,” said one whose accents proclaimed her to be a woman.

“Oh yes!” cried Lady Hester, passionately, “I am English. We have lost our way. Our courier went back to the inn for a lantern, and has never returned, and we are almost dead with cold and terror. Can you guide us to the Hotel de Russie?”

“The house I live in is only a few yards off. It is better you should take shelter there for the present.”

“Take care, miladi!” whispered Celestine, eagerly. “This may be a plot to rob and murder us.”

“Have no fears on that score, mademoiselle,” said the unknown, laughing, and speaking in French; “we are not very rich, but as surely we are perfectly safe company.”

Few as these words were, there was in their utterance that indescribable tone of good breeding and ease which at once reassured Lady Hester, who now replied to her unseen acquaintance with the observance due to an equal, and willingly accepted the arm she offered for guidance and support.

“At the end of this little street, scarcely two minutes’ walking, and you will be there,” said the unknown.

Lady Hester scarcely heard the remark, as she ran on with voluble levity on the dangers they had run, the terrific storm, the desertion of the courier, her own fortitude, her maid’s cowardice, what must have happened if they had not been discovered, till at last she bethought her of asking by what singular accident the other should have been abroad in such a terrible night.

“A neighbor and a friend of ours is very ill, madam, and I have been to the doctor’s to fetch some medicine for him.”

“And I, too, was bent upon a charitable errand,” said Lady Hester, quite pleased with the opportunity of parading her own merits, “to visit a poor creature who was accidentally wounded this morning.”

“It is Hans Roeckle, our poor neighbor, you mean,” cried the other, eagerly; “and here we are at his house.” And so saying, she pushed open a door, to which a bell, attached on the inside, gave speedy warning of their approach.

“Dearest Kate!” cried a voice from within, “how uneasy I have been at your absence!” And the same moment a young girl appeared with a light, which, as she shaded it with her hand, left her unaware of the presence of strangers.

“Think rather of this lady, and what she must have suffered,” said Kate, as, drawing courteously back, she presented her sister to Lady Hester.

“Or rather, what I might have suffered,” interposed Lady Hester, “but for the fortunate accident of your coming. A few moments back, as I stood shivering beneath the storm, I little thought that I should owe my rescue to a countrywoman. May I learn the name of one to whom I am so deeply indebted?”

“Dalton, madam,” said Nelly; and then with a slight confusion, added, “we ought, perhaps, to tell the circumstances which induced my sister to be abroad at such an hour.”

“She knows it all,” broke in Kate, “and can the more readily forgive it, as it was her own errand. But will not this lady come near the fire?” said she, addressing Mademoiselle Celestine, who, as she followed the rest into the humble chamber, was bestowing a most depreciatory glance upon the place, the furniture, and the people.

“It is only my maid,” said Lady Hester, carelessly. “And now it is time I should introduce myself, and say that Lady Hester Onslow owes you all her gratitude.” Ellen courtesied respectfully at the announcement, but Kate Dalton’s cheek colored slightly, and she bent a look of more than common admiration at the handsome figure of the stranger. An innate reverence for rank and title was rooted in her heart, and she was overjoyed to think that their chance acquaintance should be one of that class so distinctively marked out for honor. Prepared to admire every grace and fascination of the high-born, Kate watched with eager and delighted looks the slightest gestures, the least traits of manner, of the fashionable beauty. They were all attractions to which her heart gave a ready response. The accent in which she spoke, the careless elegance of her attitude as she lay back in her chair, the charming

negligence with which she wore the little portions of dress exchanged for her own, were all inimitable graces in the eye of the simple girl.

As for Lady Hester, accustomed to all the servile offices of her own attendants, to be punctiliously obeyed and waited on, it was yet a new sensation to watch the zealous and eager devotion with which the two sisters ministered to her wants. In utter forgetfulness of themselves, they had brought forth the little resources of their humble wardrobe, too happy, as it seemed, when they saw their services so willingly accepted. Fortunately, they did not perceive the contemptuous looks with which “mademoiselle” regarded their attentions, nor overheard her exclamation of “Mon Dieu! where did they gather together these chiffons?” as she surveyed the somewhat antiquated stores of their toilette.

Even had Lady Hester’s good breeding not prompted a gracious reception of what was so generously offered, the very singularity of the scene would have had its charm in her estimation. She was delighted with everything, even to Kate Dalton’s slippers, which, by a most happy flattery, were a little too large for her. She fancied, too, that her costume, curiously made up of shreds and patches the most incongruous, was the dress of an Irish peasant, and was in an ecstasy at the thought of a similar one at her next fancy ball. Besides all these internal sources of self-satisfaction, the admiration of the two sisters was another and more legitimate cause of pleasure; for even Ellen, with all her natural reserve and caution, was scarcely less impressed than Kate with the charm of those fascinations which, however destined but for one class of society, are equally successful in all.

Ellen Dalton’s life had not been devoid of trials, nor had they failed to teach their own peculiar lessons; and yet her experiences had not shown her how very like right feeling good breeding can be, and how closely good manners may simulate every trait of a high and generous nature.

CHAPTER IX. A FINE LADY'S BLANDISHMENTS

WE left Lady Hester, in our last chapter, employed in the exercise of those fascinations which, however unlike in other respects, have this resemblance to virtue, that they are assuredly their own reward. The charm of courtesy never conferred one half the pleasure on those for whom it was exercised as to him who wielded it. It matters little whether the magician be prince or "charlatan," the art of pleasing is one of the most agreeable faculties human nature can be endowed with. Whether Lady Hester was aware of the theory or not, she felt the fact, as she saw the undisguised admiration in the faces of the two sisters; for while she had won over Nelly by the elevation of her sentiments and the kindness of her expressions, Kate was fascinated by her beauty, her grace, her easy gayety, and a certain voluble lightness that simulates frankness.

Without anything that approached the prying of curiosity, for she was both too well bred and too little interested to have so felt such a motive, she inquired by what accident the Daltons remained at Baden so late in the season, affected to see some similarity between their cases and her own, asked in the most feeling terms for their father, whose ill-health she deplored, and then took such an interest in "dear Frank," that Kate could not resist showing a portrait of him, which, however humble its claims to art, still conveyed a not unfaithful resemblance of the handsome youth.

While thus hearing about them, she was equally communicative about herself, and enlisted all the sympathies of the girls as she recounted their escape from the torrent in the Black Forest, and their subsequent refuge in Baden.

Thence she diverged to Sir Stafford's illness, her own life of seclusion and sadness, and, by an easy transition, came round to poor Hans Roeckle and the accident of that morning.

"Do tell me everything about the poor dear thing," said she, poutingly. "They say it is mad."

"No, madam," said Nelly, gravely; "Hans, with many eccentricities of manner, is very far from deficient in good sense or judgment, and is more than ordinarily endowed with right feeling and kindness of heart."

"He is a dwarf, surely?"

"Yes, but in intelligence –"

"Oh, that, of course," interrupted she; "they are rarely deficient in acuteness, but so spiteful, so full of malice. My dear child, there 's no trusting them. They never forget an injury, nor even an imaginary slight. There was that creature what was his name? that Polish thing, Benywowski, I think you remember, they baked him in a pie, to amuse Charles II. well, he never forgave it after wards, and to the day of his death could never bear the sight of pastry."

"I must except poor Hans from this category," said Nelly, mildly, and with difficulty restraining a smile. "He is amiability itself."

Lady Hester shook her head doubtfully, and went on.

"Their very caprices, my dear, lead them into all kinds of extravagances. For instance, this poor thing, it would seem, is so enamored of these wooden toys that he makes himself, that he cannot bear to part with them. Now, there 's no saying to what excesses he might be carried by this absurd passion. I have read of the most atrocious murders committed under a similar fanaticism."

"I assure you, madam, there need be no fear of such in the present instance. In the first case, Hans is too good; in the second, the objects are too valueless."

"Very true, so they are; but he doesn't think them so, you know."

"Nay, my Lady; nor would you either, were you to regard them with attention," broke in Kate, whose cheek was now one glow of scarlet. "Even this, half finished as it is, may lay claim to merit." And as she spoke, she removed a napkin from a little statue, before which she held the candle.

"For shame, Kate, dearest Kate!" cried Nelly, standing up in bashful discomfiture.

“It is a statuette of poor Frank, madam,” continued Kate, who, totally regardless of her sister’s interruption now exhibited the figure nearer. “You see him just as he left us, his knapsack on his shoulder, his sword fastened across it, his little cap on one side of his head, and that happy smile upon his lips. Poor dear fellow! how sad a heart it covered!”

“And was this his work?” asked Lady Hester, in astonishment.

“No, madam; my sister Nelly was the artist of this, as of all the others. Unaided and untaught, her own ingenuity alone suggesting the means, as her imagination supplied the conception.”

“Kate! dear, dear Kate!” said Ellen, with a voice of almost rebuke. “You forget how unworthy these poor efforts are of such high-sounding epithets.” Then, turning to Lady Hester, she continued: “Were it to ears less charitable than yours, madam, these foolish words were spoken, I should fear the criticism our presumption would seem to call forth. But you will not think harshly of us for ignorance.”

“But this figure is admirable; the attitude is graceful; the character of the head, the features, are in good keeping. I know, of course, nothing of the resemblance to your brother, but, as a work of art, I am competent to say it has high merit. Do tell me how the thought of doing these things first occurred to you.”

“I learned drawing as a child, madam, and was always fond of it,” said Ellen, with a degree of constraint that seemed as if the question were painful to answer.

“Yes, and so have I spent months ay, I believe I might say years at the easel, copying every Giorgione at Venice and every Vandyk at Genoa, and yet such a thought never suggested itself to me.”

“I am happy to think so, madam,” was the low response.

“Why so? how do you mean?” asked Lady Hester, eagerly.

“That the motive in my case never could have been yours, madam.”

“And what was the motive?”

“Poverty, madam. The word is not a pleasant word to syllable, but it is even better than any attempt at disguise. These trifles, while beguiling many a dreary hour, have helped us through a season of more than usual difficulty.”

“Yes, madam,” broke in Kate. “You are aware that papa’s property is in Ireland, and for some years back it has been totally unproductive.”

“How very sad how dreadful!” exclaimed Lady Hester. But whether the expressions referred to the condition of the Daltons or of Ireland, it is not quite clear.

“I doubt, madam, if I should have ventured on the confession,” said Ellen, with a voice of calm firmness, “were it not for the opportunity it offers of bearing testimony to the kindness of our poor friend yonder, Hans Roeckle. These efforts of mine have met such favor in his eyes that he accepts them all, taking them as rapidly as they are finished, and, I need not say, treating me with a generosity that would become a more exalted patron and a better artist.”

“It is quite a romance, I declare!” cried Lady Hester. “The Wood Demon and the Maiden. Only he is not in love with you, I hope?”

“I’m not quite sure of that,” said Kate, laughing; “at least, when some rivalry of her own wooden images does not intervene.”

“Hush! Hans is awaking,” said Ellen, as on tiptoe she crossed the room noiselessly, and opened the door of the chamber where the dwarf lay. Lady Hester and Kate now drew near and peeped in. On a low settle over which an old scarlet saddle-cloth, fringed with tarnished lace, was spread as a quilt lay Hans Roeckle, his wounded arm supported by a pillow at his side; his dark eyes glistened with the bright glare of fever, and his cheeks were flushed and burning, as his lips moved unceasingly, with a low muttering, which he continued, regardless of the presence of those who now approached his bedside.

“What is it he is saying? Does he complain of pain?” asked Lady Hester.

“I cannot understand him,” said Nelly; “for ever since his accident he has spoken in his native dialect the patois of the Bregentzer Wald of which I am utterly ignorant; still he will reply to me in good German when questioned.” Then, stooping down, she asked, “Are you better, Hans?”

Hans looked up steadfastly in her face without speaking; it seemed as if her voice had arrested his wandering faculties, but yet not awakened any intelligence.

“You are thirsty, Hans,” said she, gently, as she lifted a cup of water to his lips. He drank greedily, and then passed his hand across his brow, as if trying to dispel some tormenting fancies. After a second or two, he said: “It was in Nuremberg, in the Oden Gasse, it happened. The Ritter von Ottocar stabbed her as she knelt at the cross; and the dwarf, Der Mohrchen, as they called him, tore off his turban to bind up the wound; and what was his reward, maiden? tell me that! Are ye all so shamed that ye dare not speak it?”

“We know it not, Hans; we never heard of the Ritter nor the Mohrchen before.”

“I ‘ll tell you, then. They burned him as a warlock in the Hohen Platz next morning.” With a wild burst of savage laughter he closed this speech, which he spoke in good German; but immediately after his thoughts seemed to turn to his old Tyrol haunts and the familiar language of his native land, as he sang, in a low voice, the following words:

“A Buchsel zu schiessen,
A Stossring zu schlagen,
A Dienal zu Lieb, n,
Muss a Rue hahn.”

“What does he mean? Do tell me,” said Lady Hester, whose interest in the scene was more that of curiosity than compassion.

“It is a peasant dialect; but means, that a rifle to shoot with, a weapon to wield, and a maiden to love, are all that a good Tyroler needs in life,” said Kate, while Nelly busied herself in arranging the position of the wounded limb, little offices for which the poor dwarf looked his gratitude silently.

“How wild his looks are!” said Lady Hester. “See how his eyes glance along the walls, as if some objects were moving before them!” And so in reality was it. Hanserl’s looks were riveted upon the strange and incongruous assemblage of toys which, either suspended from nails or ranged on shelves, decorated the sides of the chamber. “Ay,” said he at last, with a melancholy smile, “thou ‘lt have to put off all this bravery soon, my pretty damsels, and don the black veil and the hood, for thy master Hans is dying!”

“He is talking to the wax figures,” whispered Kate.

“And ye too, my brave hussars, and ye Uhlancers with your floating banners, must lower your lances as ye march in the funeral procession, when Hanserl is dead! Take down the wine-bush from the door, hostess, and kneel reverently, for the bell is ringing; and here comes the priest in his alb, and with the pix before him. Hush! they are chanting his requiem. Ah! yes. Hanserl is away to the far-off land,

Wo sind die Tage lang genug,
Wo sind die Nachte mild.”

“Come away, we do but excite his mind to wanderings,” said Ellen: “so long as there is light to see these toys, his fancy endows them all with life and feeling, and his poor brain is never at rest.” The sound of voices in the outer room at the same moment caught their attention, and they heard the courier of Lady Hester in deep converse with Mademoiselle Celestine. He, deploring the two hours he had passed in hunting after his mistress through the dark streets of the village; and she, not less eloquently, bewailing the misery of a night spent in that comfortless cabin. “To visit a wretched

dwarf, too! Parbleu! had it been a rendezvous with some one worth while, but an excursion without an object, sans emotion meme, it is too bad!”

“Que voulez-vous!” said Monsieur Gregoire, with a shrug of the shoulders; “she is English!”

“Ah! that is no reason for a vulgar caprice, and I, for one, will not endure it longer. I cannot do so. Such things compromise one’s self. I ‘ll give warning to-morrow. What would my poor dear mistress, la Marquise, say, if she only knew how mes petits talents were employed?”

“Do not be rash, mademoiselle,” interposed the courier; “they are rich, very rich, and we are going to Italy too, the real pays de Cocagne of our profession.”

How far his persuasions might have gone in inducing her to reconsider her determination there is no saying, when they were suddenly interrupted by Lady Hester’s appearance.

Her first care was to ascertain that her absence from the hotel had not been remarked, her secret, as she loved to fancy it, remained sacred. Having learned thus much, she listened with a kind of childish pleasure to the courier’s version of all his unhappy wanderings in search of her, until he at last descried a light, the only one that shone from any window in the whole village.

As Gregoire had provided himself with a sufficient number of shawls, cloaks, and clogs, and as the storm had now passed over, Lady Hester prepared to take her leave, delighted with her whole night’s adventure. There had been excitement enough to make it all she could desire; nor did she well know whether most to admire her heroism during the storm, or the success with which she captivated the two sisters; the courage which planned the expedition, or the grace with which it was executed.

“You’ll come and see me, Miss Dalton; mind, I’m always at home. Remember, Miss Kate Dalton, that they must not deny me to you” said she, in her most winning of manners. The two girls gave their promise in bashful diffidence, while she continued,

“You’ll say to your papa, too, that Sir Stafford will wait on him whenever he is able to leave the house. Mr. Onslow, indeed, ought to call at once; but he is so odd. Never mind, we shall be great friends; and you ‘ll bring all your little carving tools and your models with you, and work in my room. Your sister her embroidery, or her lace, or her crochet, or whatever it is, or you ‘ll read German for me, like a dear child, that will be so delightful. I can’t understand a word of it, but it sounds so soft, and you ‘ll tell me all it ‘s about won’t you? And then this poor thing must want for nothing.”

“Nay, madam, he is in no need of anything but kindness. In a land where such simple habits prevail, Hans Roeckle passes for rich.”

“How strange! how very odd! but I remember that poor Prince of Stolzenheimer. Papa used to say that he had six cordons, but only one coat! I believe it was true.”

“Hanserl is better off, madam,” replied Nelly, smiling; “at least as regards the coats.”

“Tell him, then, that I’ve been to see him, and am so grieved at his accident, but that it was all Colonel Haggerstone’s fault, a bit of silly vanity to show how well he could shoot, and I ‘m certain it just comes of being used to the pistols. I never missed when I fired with Norwood’s!”

The utterance of that name seemed to recall her from the discursive babble. She paused, and for a moment or two she was silent. At last, turning to the sisters, she reiterated her hopes of a speedy meeting, and with a cordial pressure of the hand to each, wished her last good-night, and departed.

CHAPTER X. A FAMILY DISCUSSION

LONG before Lady Hester awoke on the following morning every circumstance of her visit was known to Grounsell. It was the doctor's custom to see Dalton early each day, and before Sir Stafford was stirring, and to chat away an hour or so with the invalid, telling the current news of the time, and cheering his spirits by those little devices which are not among the worst resources of the *Materia Medica*. With all his knowledge of Lady Hester's character, her caprices, her whims, and her insatiable passion for excitement, he was still astonished beyond measure at this step: not that the false air of benevolence or charity deceived him, he was too old a practitioner in medicine, and had seen far too much of the dark side of human nature, to be easily gulled, but his surprise arose from the novelty of her condescending to know, and even propitiate, the good graces of people whom she usually professed to regard as the least interesting of all classes of mankind. The "reduced lady or gentleman" had only presented themselves to Lady Hester's mind by the medium of an occasional curiously worded advertisement in a morning paper, and were invariably associated with a subsequent police report, where the object of charity was sure to be confronted with half a dozen peers or members of parliament, whose sympathies he had put under contribution, to support a life of infamy or extravagance. "A begging impostor" rang in her mind as a phrase whose ingredient words could not be divorced, and she was thoroughly convinced that imposture and poverty were convertible terms. The very notion of any one having once been well off, and being now in embarrassment, was, to her deeming, most satisfactory evidence of past misconduct and present knavery. Grounsell had beard her hold forth on this theme more than once, "embroidering the sentiment" with an occasional sly allusion to himself and his own fortunes, so that he had often thought over the difficulty of serving the Daltons with Sir Stafford, by reflecting on the hostility any project would meet with from "my Lady," and now accident, or something very like it, had done what all his ingenuity could not succeed in discovering.

The announcement at first rendered him perfectly mute; he heard it without power to make the slightest observation; and it was only at the end of a lengthy description from the two sisters, that he exclaimed, in a kind of half soliloquy, "By Jove, it is so like her, after all!"

"I 'm sure of it," said Nelly; "her manner was kindness and gentleness itself. You should have seen the tender way she took poor Hansells hand in her own, and how eagerly she asked us to translate for her the few stray words he uttered."

"Of course she did. I could swear to it all, now that my eyes are opened."

"And with what winning grace she spoke!" cried Kate. "How the least phrase came from her lips with a fascination that still haunts me!"

"Just so, just so!" muttered Grounsell.

"How such traits of benevolence ennoble high station!" said Nelly.

"How easy to credit all that one hears of the charms of intercourse, where manner like hers prevails on every side!" cried Kate, enthusiastically.

"How thoughtful in all her kindness!"

"What elegance in every movement!"

"With what inborn courtesy she accepted the little valueless attentions, which were all we could render her!"

"How beautiful she looked, in all the disorder of a dress so unlike her own splendor! I could almost fancy that old straw chair to be a handsome fauteuil since she sat in it."

"How delightful it must be to be admitted to the freedom of daily intercourse with such a person, to live within the atmosphere of such goodness and such refinement!" And thus they went on ringing the changes upon every gift and grace, from the genial warmth of her heart, to the snowy whiteness of her dimpled hands; while Grounsell fidgeted in his chair, searched for his handkerchief,

his spectacles, his snuff-box, dropped them all in turn, and gathered them up again, in a perfect fever of embarrassment and indecision.

“And you see her every day, doctor?” said Nelly.

“Yes, every day, madam,” said he, hastily, and not noticing nor thinking to whom he was replying.

“And is she always as charming, always as fascinating?”

“Pretty much the same, I think,” said he, with a grunt.

“How delightful! And always in the same buoyancy of spirits?”

“Very little changed in that respect,” said he, with another grunt.

“We have often felt for poor Sir Stafford being taken ill away from his home, and obliged to put up with the miserable resources of a watering-place in winter; but I own, when I think of the companionship of Lady Hester, much of my compassion vanishes.”

“He needs it all, then,” said Grounsell, as, thrusting his hands into the recesses of his pockets, he sat a perfect picture of struggling embarrassment.

“Are his sufferings so very great?”

Grounsell nodded abruptly, for now he was debating within himself what course to take; for while, on one side, he deemed it a point of honor not to divulge to strangers, as were the Daltons, any of the domestic circumstances of those with whom he lived, he felt, on the other, reluctant to suffer Lady Hester’s blandishments to pass for qualities more sterling and praiseworthy.

“She asked the girls to go and see her,” said Dalton, now breaking silence for the first time; for although flattered in the main by what he heard of the fine lady’s manner towards his daughters, he was not without misgivings that what they interpreted as courtesy might just as probably be called condescension, against which his Irish pride of birth and blood most sturdily rebelled. “She asked them to go and see her, and it was running in my head if she mio’ht not have heard something of the family connection.”

“Possibly!” asserted Grounsell, too deep in his own calculations to waste a thought on such a speculation.

“My wife’s uncle, Joe Godfrey, married an Englishwoman. The sister was aunt to some rich city banker; and indeed, to tell the truth, his friends in Ireland never thought much of the connection but you see times are changed. They are up now, and we are down, the way of the world! It ‘s little I ever thought of claiming relationship with the like o’ them!”

“But if it ‘s they who seek us, papa?” whispered Kate.

“Ay, that alters the case, my dear; not but I’d as soon excuse the politeness. Here we are, living in a small way; till matters come round in Ireland, we can’t entertain them, not even give them a dinner-party.”

“Oh, dearest papa,” broke in Nelly, “is not our poverty a blessing if it save us the humiliation of being absurd? Why should we think of such a thing? Why should we, with our straitened means and the habits narrow fortune teaches, presume even to a momentary equality with those so much above us.”

“Faith, it’s true enough!” cried Dalton, his cheek flushed with anger. “We are changed, there’s no doubt of it; or it is not a Dalton would say the words you ‘ve just said. I never knew before that the best in the land wasn’t proud to come under our roof.”

“When we had a roof,” said Nelly, firmly. “And if these ancestors had possessed a true and a higher pride, mayhap we might still have one. Had they felt shame to participate in schemes of extravagance and costly display, had they withheld encouragement from a ruinous mode of living, we might still be dwellers in our own home and our own country.”

Dalton seemed thunderstruck at the boldness of a speech so unlike the gentle character of her who had uttered it. To have attributed any portion of the family calamities to their own misconduct to have laid the blame of their downfall to any score save that of English legislation, acts of parliament,

grand-jury laws, failure of the potato crop, tithes, Terry alts, or smut in the wheat was a heresy he never, in his gloomiest moments, had imagined, and now he was to hear it from the lips of his own child.

“Nelly Nelly Dalton,” said he; “but why do I call you Dalton? Have you a drop of our blood in your veins at all, or is it the Godfreys you take after? Extravagance, ruinous living, waste, what ‘ll you say next?” He could n’t continue, indignation and anger seemed almost to suffocate him.

“Papa, dearest, kindest papa!” cried Nelly, as the tears burst from her eyes, “be not angry with me, nor suppose that any ungenerous repining against our altered lot finds a place in my heart. God knows that I grieve not for myself; in the humble sphere in which I am placed, I have found true contentment, greater, perhaps, than higher fortunes would have given me; for here my duties are better defined, and my sense of them is clearer. If I feel sorrow, it is for you and my dear sister, for you, papa, who suffer from many a privation; for her, who might well adorn a more exalted station. But for me the lame Nelly, as children used to call me” She was not suffered to finish her speech, for already her father had clasped his arms around her, and Kate, in a gush of tears, was sobbing on his shoulder.

“Where’s the doctor? what’s become of him?” said Dalton, as, recovering from his emotion, he wished to give a different direction to their thoughts.

“He went away half an hour ago, papa,” said Kate. “He always goes off without saying good-bye, whenever there is a word said about family.”

“I noticed that, too, my dear,” said Dalton, “and I would n’t wonder if he came of low people; not but he ‘s a kind creature, and mighty good-hearted.”

Nelly could probably have suggested a better reason for the doctor’s conduct, but she prudently forbore from again alluding to a theme already too painful.

With the reader’s permission, we will now follow him as, with a gesture of impatience, he abruptly left the room on the very first mention by Dalton of that genealogical tree in whose branches he loved to perch himself.

“An old fool!” muttered Grounsell, as he passed downstairs, “an old fool, that no experience will ever make wiser! Well may his native country be a stumbling-block to legislators, if his countrymen be all like him, with his family pride and pretension! Confound him! can’t he see that there ‘s no independence for a man in debt, and no true self-respect left for him who can’t pay his tailor? For himself there’s no help; but the poor girls! he’ll be the ruin of them. Kate is already a willing listener to his nonsensical diatribes about blood and family; and poor Nelly’s spirits will be broken in the hopeless conflict with his folly! Just so, that will be the end of it; he will turn the head of one, and break the heart of the other; and yet, all the while, he firmly believes he is leaving a far better heritage behind him in this empty pride, than if he could bequeath every acre that once belonged to them.” Thus soliloquizing, he went on ringing changes over every form of imprudence, waste, vanity, and absurdity, which, by applying to them the simple adjective of “Irish,” he fancied were at once intelligible, and needed no other explanation. In this mood he made his entrance into Sir Stafford’s chamber, and so full of his own thoughts that the worthy baronet could not fail to notice his preoccupation.

“Eh! Grounsel, what ‘s the matter, another row with my Lady, eh?” said he, smiling with his own quiet smile.

“Not to-day. We ‘ve not met this morning, and, consequently, the armistice of yesterday is still unbroken! The fatigue of last night has, doubtless, induced her to sleep a little longer, and so I have contrived to arrive at noon without the risk of an apoplexy.”

“What fatigue do you allude to?”

“Oh, I forgot I have a long story for you. What do you suppose her Ladyship has been performing now?”

“I ‘ve heard all about it,” said Sir Stafford, pettishly. “George has given me the whole narrative of that unlucky business. We must take care of the poor fellow, Grounsell, and see that he wants for nothing.”

“You ‘re thinking of the pistol-shooting; but that ‘s not her Ladyship’s last,” said the doctor, with a malicious laugh. “It is as a Lady Bountiful she has come out, and made her debut last night I am bound to say with infinite success.” And, without further preface, Grounsell related the whole adventure of Lady Hester’s visit to the dwarf, omitting nothing of those details we have already laid before the reader, and dilating with all his own skill upon the possible consequences of the step. “I have told you already about these people: of that old fool, the father, with his Irish pride, his Irish pretensions, his poverty, and his insane notions about family. Well, his head a poor thing in the best of times is gone clean mad about this visit. And then the girls! good, dear, affectionate children as they are, they ‘re in a kind of paroxysm of ecstasy about her Ladyship’s style, her beauty, her dress, the charm of her amiability, the fascination of her manner. Their little round of daily duties will henceforth seem a dreary toil; the very offices of their charity will lose all the glow of zeal when deprived of that elegance which refinement can throw over the veriest trifle. Ay! don’t smile at it, the fact is a stubborn one. They ‘d barter the deepest devotion they ever rendered to assuage pain for one trick of that flattery with which my Lady captivated them. Will all the poetry of poor Nelly’s heart shut out the memory of graces associated with the vanities of fashion? Will all Kate’s dutiful affection exalt those household drudgeries in her esteem, the performances of which will henceforth serve to separate her more and more from one her imagination has already enshrined as an idol?”

“You take the matter too seriously to heart, Grounsell,” said Sir Stafford, smiling.

“Not a bit of it; I ‘ve studied symptoms too long and too carefully not to be ever on the look-out for results. To Lady Hester, this visit is a little episode as easily forgotten as any chance incident of the journey. But what an event is it in the simple story of their lives!”

“Well, well, it cannot be helped now; the thing is done, and there ‘s an end of it,” said Sir Stafford, pettishly; “and I confess I cannot see the matter as you do, for I have been thinking for two days back about these Daltons, and of some mode of being of service to them, and this very accident may suggest the way. I have been looking over some old letters and papers, and I ‘ve no doubt that I have had unintentionally, of course a share in the poor fellow’s ruin. Do you know, Grounsell, that this is the very same Peter Dalton who once wrote to me the most insulting letters, and even a defiance to fight a duel, because a distant relative bequeathed to me a certain estate that more naturally should have descended to him. At first, I treated the epistles as unworthy of any serious attention, they were scarcely intelligible, and not distinguished by anything like a show of reason; but when from insult the writer proceeded to menace, I mentioned the affair to my lawyer, and, indeed, gave him permission to take any steps that might be necessary to rid me of so unpleasant a correspondent. I never heard more of the matter; but now, on looking over some papers, I see that the case went hardly with Dalton, for there was a ‘rule to show cause,’ and an ‘attachment,’ and I don’t know what besides, obtained against him from the King’s Bench, and he was actually imprisoned eight months for this very business; so that, besides having succeeded to this poor fellow’s property, I have also deprived him of his liberty. Quite enough of hardship to have suffered at the hands of any one man and that one, not an enemy.”

“And would you believe it, Onslow, we have talked over you and your affairs a hundred times together, and yet he has never even alluded to this? One would think that such an event would make an impression upon most men; but, assuredly, he is either the most forgetful or the most generous fellow on earth.”

“How very strange! And so you tell me that he remembers my name, and all the circumstances of that singular bequest for singular it was from a man whom I never saw since he was a boy.”

“He remembers it all. It was the last blow fortune dealt him, and, indeed, he seemed scarcely to require so heavy a stroke to fell him, for, by his own account, he had been struggling on, in debt and difficulty, for many a year, putting off creditors by the plausible plea that a considerable estate

must eventually fall in to him. It is quite certain that he believed this himself, but he also maintained a course of expenditure that, were he even in possession of the property, it would have been impossible to keep up. His brother-in-law's parsimony, too, was a constant source of self-gratulation to him, fancying, as he did, that a considerable sum in Bank stock would be among the benefits of this bequest. To find himself cut off, without even a mention of his name, was, then, to know that he was utterly, irretrievably ruined."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Onslow; "I never suspected the case had been so hard a one. His letters you shall see them yourself bore all the evidence of a man more touchy on the score of a point of honor than mindful of a mere money matter. He seemed desirous of imputing to me who, as I have told you, never saw Mr. Godfrey for above forty years something like undue influence, and, in fact, of having prejudiced his brother-in-law against him. He dated his angry epistles from a park or a castle I forget which and they bore a seal of armorial pretensions such as an archduke might acknowledge. All these signs seemed to me so indicative of fortune and standing, that I set my friend down for a very bloodthirsty Irishman, but assuredly never imagined that poverty had contributed its sting to the injury."

"I can easily conceive all that," said Grounsell. "At this very moment, with want staring him on every side, he 'd rather talk of his former style at confound the barbarous place, I never can remember the name of it than he 'd listen to any suggestion for the future benefit of his children."

"I have been a grievous enemy to him," said Sir Stafford, musingly.

"He reckons the loss at something like six thousand a year," said Grounsell.

"Not the half of it, doctor; the estate, when I succeeded to it, was in a ruinous condition. A pauper and rebellious tenantry holding their tenures on nominal rents, and either living in open defiance of all law, or scheming to evade it by a hundred subterfuges. Matters are somewhat better; but if so, it has cost me largely to make them so. Disabuse his mind, I beg you, of this error. His loss was at least not so heavy as he reckoned."

"Faith, I'll scarcely venture on so very delicate a theme," said Grounsell, dryly. "I 'm not quite so sure how he 'd take it."

"I see, doctor," said Onslow, laughing, "that his duelling tastes have impressed you with a proper degree of respect. Well, let us think of something more to the purpose than rectifying a mere mistaken opinion. How can we serve him? What can be done for him?"

"Ruined gentlemen, like second-hand uniforms, are generally sent to the colonies," said Grounsell; "but Dalton is scarcely fit for export."

"What if we could get him appointed a magistrate in one of the West India Islands?"

"New rum would finish him the first rainy season."

"Is he fit for a consulship?"

"About as much as for Lord Chancellor. I tell you the man's pride would revolt at anything to which a duty was annexed. Whatever you decide on must be untrammelled by any condition of this kind."

"An annuity, then, some moderate sum sufficient to support them in respectability," said Onslow; "that is the only thing I see for it, and I am quite ready to do my part, which, indeed, is full as much a matter of honor as generosity."

"How will you induce him to accept it?"

"We can manage that, I fancy, with a little contrivance. I 'll consult Prichard; he 's coming here this very day about these renewals, and he 'll find a way of doing it."

"You'll have need of great caution," said Grounsell; "without being naturally suspicious, misfortune has rendered him very sensitive as to anything like a slight. To this hour he is ignorant that his daughter sells those little figures; and although he sees, in a hundred appliances to his comfort, signs of resources of which he knows nothing, he never troubles his head how the money comes."

"What a strange character!"

“Strange indeed. True pride and false pride, manly patience, childish petulance, generosity, selfishness, liberality, meanness, even to the spirits alternating between boy-like levity and downright despair! The whole is such a mixture as I never saw before, and yet I can fancy it is as much the national temperament as that of the individual.”

And now Grounsell, launched upon a sea without compass or chart, hurried off to lose himself in vague speculation about questions that have puzzled, and are puzzling, wiser heads than his.

CHAPTER XI. A PEEP BETWEEN THE SHUTTERS AT A NEW CHARACTER

NOT even Mademoiselle Celestine herself, nor the two London footmen now condemned to exhibit their splendid proportions to the untutored gaze of German rustics, could have chafed and fretted under the unhappy detention at Baden with a greater impatience than did George Onslow, a young Guardsman, who often fancied that London, out of season, was a species of Palmyra; who lived but for the life that only one capital affords; who could not credit the fact that people could ride, dress, dine, and drive anywhere else, was lamentably “ill bestowed” among the hills and valleys, the winding glens and dense pine forests of a little corner of Germany.

If he liked the excitement of hard exercise, it was when the pleasure was combined with somewhat of peril, as in a fox-hunt, or heightened by the animation of a contest, in a rowing-match. Scenery, too, he cared for, when it came among the incidents of a deer-stalking day in the Highlands. Even walking, if it were a match against time, was positively not distasteful; but to ride, walk, row, or exert himself, for the mere exercise, was in his philosophy only a degree better than a sentence to the treadmill, the slavery being voluntary not serving to exalt the motive.

To a mind thus constituted, the delay at Baden was intolerable. Lady Hester’s system of small irritations and provocations rendered domesticity and home life out of the question. She was never much given to reading at any time, and now books were not to be had; Sydney was so taken up with studying German, that she was quite uncompanionable. Her father was too weak to bear much conversation; and as for Grounsell, George always set him down for a quiz: good-hearted in his way, but a bit of a bore, and too fond of old stories. Had he been a young lady, in such a predicament, he would have kept a journal, a pretty martyrology of himself and his feelings, and eked out his sorrows between Childe Harold and Werther. Had he been an elderly one, he would have written folios by the post, and covered acres of canvas with dogs in worsted, and tigers in Berlin wool. Alas! he had no such resources. Education had supplied him with but one comfort and consolation, a cigar; and so he smoked away incessantly: sometimes as he lounged out of the window, after breakfast, in all the glory of an embroidered velvet cap, and a gorgeous dressing-gown; sometimes as he sauntered in the empty saloon, or the deserted corridors, in the weed-grown garden, in the dishabille of a many-pocketed shooting-jacket and cork-soled shoes; now, as he lounged along the dreary streets, or passed along the little wooden bridge, wondering within himself how much longer a man could resist the temptation that suggested a spring over the balustrade into the dark pool beneath.

He had come abroad partly for Sydney’s sake, partly because, having “gone somewhat too fast” in town, an absence had become advisable. But now, as he sauntered about the deserted streets of the little village, not knowing how long the duration might last, without an occupation, without a resource, both his brotherly love and prudence began to fail him, and he wished he had remained behind, and taken the chances, whatever they might be, of his creditors’ forbearance. His moneyed embarrassments involved nothing dishonorable; he had done no more than what some score of very well-principled young men have done, and are doing at this very hour, ay, good reader, and will do again, when you and I have gone where all our moralizing will not deceive any more, he had contracted debts, the payment of which must depend upon others; he had borrowed what no efforts of his own could restore; he had gambled, and lost sums totally disproportionate to his fortune; but, in all these things, he was still within the pale of honorable conduct, at least, so said the code under which he lived, and George believed it.

Sir Stafford, who only learned about the half of his son’s liabilities, was thunderstruck at the amount. It was scarcely a year and a half ago that he had paid all George’s debts, and they were then no trifle; and now he saw all the old items revived and magnified, as if there was only one beaten road to

ruin, and that began at Crocky's, and ended at "the Bench." The very names of the dramatis personae were the same. It was Lazarus Levi lent the money, at sixty per cent; it was another patriarch, called Gideon Masham, discounted the same. A lucky viscount had once more "done the trick" at hazard; and if Cribbiter had not broken down in training, why Madame Pompadour had, and so the same result came about. George Onslow had got what Newmarket men call a "squeeze," and was in for about seven thousand pounds.

Nothing is more remarkable in our English code social, than the ingenuity with which we have contrived to divide ranks and classes of men, making distinctions so subtle that only long habit and training are able to appreciate. Not alone are the gradations of our nobility accurately defined, but the same distinctions prevail among the "untitled" classes, and even descend to the professional and trading ranks; so that the dealer in one commodity shall take the pas of another; and he who purveys the glass of port for your dessert, would be outraged if classed with him who contributed the Stilton! These hair-splittings are very unintelligible to foreigners; but, as we hold to them, the presumption is, that they suit us; and I should not have stopped now to bestow a passing notice on the system, if it were not that we see it, in some cases, pushed to a degree of extreme resembling absurdity, making even of the same career in life a sliding-scale of respectability; as, for instance, when a young gentleman of good expectations and fair fortune has outraged his guardians and his friends by extravagance, he is immediately removed from the Guards, and drafted into the Infantry of the Line; if he misbehaves there, they usually send him to India; is he incorrigible, he is compelled to remain in some regiment there; or, in cases of inveterate bad habits, he exchanges into the Cape Rifles, and gets his next removal from the knife of a Caffre.

Ancient geographers have decided, we are not aware on what grounds, that there is a place between "H – ll and Connaught." Modern discovery, with more certitude, has shown one between the Guards and the Line, a species of military purgatory, where, after a due expiation of offences, the sinner may return to the paradise of the Household Brigade without ever transgressing the Inferno of a marching regiment. This half-way stage is the "Rifles." So long as a young fashionable falls no lower, he is safe. There is no impugment of his character, no injury that cannot be repaired. Now, George Onslow had reached so far; he was compelled to exchange into the – th, then quartered in Ireland. It is true he did not join his regiment; his father had interest enough somewhere to obtain a leave of absence for his son, and First Lieutenant Onslow, vice Ridgway promoted, was suffered to amuse himself howsoever and wheresoever he pleased.

The "exchange," and the reasons for which it was effected, were both unpleasant subjects of reflection to George; and as he had few others, these continued to haunt him, till at last he fancied that every one was full of the circumstance, each muttering as he passed, "That 's Onslow, that was in the Coldstreams." Lady Hester, indeed, did not always leave the matter purely imaginary, but threw out occasional hints about soldiers who never served, except at St. James's or Windsor, and who were kept for the wonderment and admiration of foreign sovereigns when visiting England, just as Suffolk breeders exhibit a "punch," or a Berkshire farmer will show a hog, for the delectation of swine fanciers. Where children show toys, kings show soldiers, and ours are considered very creditable productions of the kind; but Lady Hester averred, with more of truth than she believed, that a man of spirit would prefer a somewhat different career. These currents, coming as they did in season and out of season, did not add to the inducements for keeping the house, and so George usually left home each day, and rarely returned to it before nightfall.

It is true he might have associated with Haggerstone, who, on being introduced, made the most courteous advances to his intimacy; but George Onslow was bred in a school whose first lesson is a sensitive shrinking from acquaintance, and whose chief characteristic is distrust. Now he either had heard, or fancied he had heard, something about Haggerstone. "The Colonel was n't all right," somehow or other. There was a story about him, or somebody of his set, and, in fact, it was as well to be cautious; and so the young Guardsman, who would have ventured his neck in a steeplechase,

or his fortune on a “Derby,” exhibited all the deliberative wisdom of a judge as to the formation of a passing acquaintance.

If we have been somewhat prolix in explaining the reasons of the young gentleman’s solitude, our excuse is, that he had thereby conveyed, not alone all that we know, but all that is necessary to be known, of his character. He was one of a class so large in the world that few people could not count some half-dozen, at least, similar amongst their acquaintance; and all of whom would be currently set down as incapables, if it were not that now and then, every ten years or so, one of these well-looking, well-bred, indolent dandies, as if tired of his own weariness, turns out to be either a dashing soldier, with a heart to dare, and a head to devise the boldest achievements, or a politic leader, with resources of knowledge, and a skill in debate, to confront the most polished and practised veteran in “the Commons.”

Our own experiences of our own day show that these are no paradoxical speculations. But we must not pursue the theme further; and have only to add, that the reader is not to believe that George Onslow formed one of these brilliant exceptions. Whether the fault lies more in himself or in us, we must not inquire.

If his lonely walks did not suggest any pleasant reveries, the post did not bring any more agreeable tidings. Dry statements from Mr. Orson, his lawyer, every young man about town has his lawyer nowadays, about the difficulty of arranging his affairs, being the chief intelligence he received, with, from time to time, a short and pithy epistle from a certain noble creditor, Lord Norwood, who, although having won very large sums from Onslow, never seemed in such pressing difficulty as since his good fortune.

The viscount’s style epistolary was neither so marked by originality, nor so worthy of imitation, that it would be worth communicating; but as one of his letters bears slightly upon the interests of our story, we are induced to give it; and being, like all his correspondence, very brief, we will communicate it in extenso.

“Oh, Norwood again!” said Onslow, as he looked at the seal, and read the not very legible autograph in the corner. “My noble friend does not give a very long respite;” and biting his lips in some impatience, he opened the paper, and read:

DEAR ONSLOW, Orson has paid me the two thousand, as you ordered, but positively refuses the seventeen hundred and eighty, the Ascot affair, because I cannot give up the original two bills for twelve hundred passed to me for that debt. I told him that they were thrown into the fire being devilishly tempted to illustrate the process with himself six months ago, when you gave the renewals; but all won’t do, the old prig persists in his demand, to comply with which is clearly impossible, for I have not even preserved the precious ashes of the incrimination. I don’t doubt but that, legally speaking, and in pettifogging parlance, he is all correct but between men of honor such strictness is downright absurdity and, as Dillhurst says, “something more.” Now, my dear boy, you must write to him and at once, too for I ‘m in a bad book about “Chanticleer” who is to win, it seems, after all and say that he is acting in direct opposition to your wishes, as of course he is; that the money must be paid without more chaffing. The delay has already put me to great inconvenience, and I know how you will be provoked at his obstinacy. You ‘ve heard, I suppose, that Brentwood is going to marry Lydia Vaughan. She has thirty thousand pounds, which is exactly what Jack lost last winter. Crosbie says he ought to “run away from her after the start as he carries no weight:” which is somewhat of my own opinion. What any man has to do with a wife nowadays, with the funds at eighty-two, and a dark horse first favorite for the Oaks, is more than I know. Doncaster has levanted, and the Red-House folk will smart for it. He would back Hayes’s lot, and there ‘s nothing can ever set him right again. By the way, Orson hints that if I give him a release, or

something of that sort, with respect to the bills, he 'd pay the cash; but this is only a dodge to make a case for lawyers' parchments, stamps, and so forth; so I won't stand it. Your writing to him will do the whole thing at once. What a jolly world it would be, old fellow, if the whole race of Orsons were carried off by the cholera, or anything akin! They are the greatest enemies to human peace in existence.

Believe me, yours most faithfully, NORWOOD.

P. S. I half fancy Baden is empty by this; but if you chance upon a little fellow Heaven knows to whom he belongs, or whence he comes, called Albert Jekyl, will you tell him that I 'll forward the twenty pounds whenever I win the Oaks, or marry Miss Home Greville, or any other similar piece of good fortune. When he lent me the cash, I don't believe he was the owner of as much more in the world; but it suited him to have a viscount in his debt a devilish bad investment, if he knew but all. The chances, therefore, are that he has foundered long ago, and you will be spared the trouble of the explanation; but if he survive, say something apologetic, for letter-writing and foreign postage are only making bad worse.

Although, unquestionably, the postscript of this elegant epistle was the part which reflected most severely upon the writer's good feeling and sense of honor, George Onslow was more struck by what related to his own affairs, nor was it till after the lapse of some days that he took the trouble of considering the paragraph, or learning the name of the individual referred to. Even then all that he could remember was, that he had seen or heard the name "somewhere," and thus, very possibly, the whole matter would have glided from his memory, if accident had not brought up the recollection.

Returning one evening later than usual from his solitary walk, he found that the hotel was closed, the door strongly secured, and all the usual precautions of the night taken, in the belief that the inmates were already safe within doors. In vain he knocked and thundered at the massive panels; the few servants occupied rooms at a distance, and heard nothing of the uproar. He shouted, he screamed, he threw gravel against the windows, and, in his zeal, smashed them too. All was fruitless; nobody stirred, nor could he detect the slightest sign of human presence in the vast and dreary-looking building before him. The prospect was not a pleasant one, and a December night in the open air was by no means desirable; and yet, where should he turn for shelter? The other hotels were all closed and deserted, and even of the private houses not one in twenty was inhabited. Resolving to give himself one chance more for admission, he scaled the paling of the garden, and reached the rear of the hotel; but here all his efforts proved just as profitless as the former, and he was at last about to abandon all hope, when he caught sight of a faint gleam of light issuing from a small window on the first floor. Having failed to attract notice by all his cries and shouts, he determined to reach the window, to which, fortunately, a large vine, attached to the wall, offered an easy access. George was an expert climber, and in less than a minute found himself seated on the window-sill, and gazing into a room by the aperture between the half-closed shutters. His first impression on looking in was that it was a servant's room. The bare, whitewashed walls; the humble, uncurtained bed; three chairs of coarse wood, all strengthened this suspicion, even to the table, covered by a coarse table-cloth, and on which stood a meal if meal it could be called an anchorite might have eaten on Friday. A plate of the common brown bread of the country was balanced by a little dish of radishes, next to which stood a most diminutive piece of Baden cheese, and a capacious decanter of water, a long-wicked tallow candle throwing its gloomy gleam over the whole. For a moment or two George was unable to detect the owner of this simple repast, as he was engaged in replenishing his fire; but he speedily returned, and took his place at the table, spreading his napkin before him, and surveying the board with an air of self-satisfaction such as a gourmand might bestow upon the most perfect petit diner. In dress, air, and look, he was thoroughly gentlemanlike; a little foppish, perhaps, in the arrangement of his hair, and somewhat too much display in the jewelled ornaments that studded his neckcloth. Even in his attitude, as he sat at the table, there was a certain air of studied elegance that formed a

curious contrast with the miserable meal before him. Helping himself to a small portion of cheese, and filling out a goblet of that element which neither cheers nor inebriates, he proceeded to eat his supper. Onslow looked on with a mingled sense of wonder and ridicule, and while half disposed to laugh at the disparity of the entertainment and him who partook of it, there was something in the scene which repressed his scorn and rendered him even an interested spectator of what went forward.

The piercing cold of the night at length admonished him that he should provide for his own admission into the hotel; and although nothing was now easier than to make his presence known, yet he felt a natural reluctance at the pain he must occasion to the stranger, whose frugal mode of living and humble interior would be thus so unceremoniously exposed. "The chances are," thought George, "that these privations are only endurable because they are practised in secret, and at no sacrifice of worldly estimation. How can I then or what right have I to inflict the torture of an exposure upon this young man, whoever he is!" The conclusion was very rapidly come to, and not less speedily acted upon; for he determined to spend the night, if need be, in the open air, rather than accept an alternative so painful in its consequences. His resolutions had usually not long to await their accomplishment; and, turning his back to the window, and disdaining the slow process by which he had gained the ascent, he sprang with one leap down to the ground: in doing so, however, his elbow struck the window, and at the same instant that he reached the earth, the shivered fragments of a pane of glass came clattering after him. In a moment the sash was thrown open, and a head appeared above. "I have smashed the window," cried George, in French, "as the only means of being heard. They have locked me out of the hotel, and I don't fancy spending a winter's night in walking the streets of Baden."

"You're an Englishman," said the voice from above, in English.

"Yes; but I don't see what that has to do with the matter," replied Onslow, testily; "even a Laplander might prefer shelter in such a season."

"If you 'll have the goodness to come round to the front door," said the voice, one of the very softest and meekest of voices, "I shall have great pleasure in opening it for you." And at the same time the unknown held forth his candle in polite guidance to the other's steps.

"Thanks, thanks; never mind the light. I know the way perfectly," said George, not a little ashamed at the contrast between his own gruffness and the courtesy of the stranger whose window he had broken.

Onslow had barely time to reach the front door of the inn, when it was opened for him, and he saw before him a very dapper little figure, who with a profusion of regrets at not having heard him before, offered his candle a wax one on this occasion for George's accommodation. Protesting that the broken pane was not of the slightest inconvenience, that the room was a small dressing-closet, that it was not worth a moment's thought, and so forth, he permitted Onslow to escort him to the door of his room, and then wished him a good-night. The scene scarcely occupied the time we have taken to relate it, and yet in that very short space George Onslow had opportunity to see that the unknown had all the easy deportment and quiet breeding of one accustomed to good society. There was, perhaps, a little excess of courtesy, at least according to that school of politeness in which Onslow had been taught; but this might be the effect of living abroad, where such a tone usually prevailed. The urbanity was not exactly cold enough for George's notions. "No matter; he 's no snob, that 's clear," thought he; "and even if he were, he's done me good service." And with this blending of selfishness and speculation he went to sleep, and slept soundly, too, not harassed by even a thought of him who passed an hour in the effort to repair his broken window, and shivered the rest of the night through from the insufficiency of his skill.

Blessed immunity theirs, who so easily forget the pain they occasion others, and who deem all things trifles that cost themselves no afterthought of regret. Happy the nature that can, without self-repining, spill the wine over Aunt Betty's one "peach-colored satin," or, in careless mood, pluck the solitary flower of her only geranium. Envidable stoicism that mislays the keepsake of some poor widow, or lames the old curate's cob, the fond companion of many rambles. These, whatever others

think, are very enviable traits, and enable the possessors to wear placid countenances, and talk in most meritorious strain on the blessings of equanimity and the excellent fruits of a well-trained mind.

CHAPTER XII. MR. ALBERT JEKYL

ONSLow'S first thought, on awaking the next morning, was of last night's acquaintance, but all the information he could obtain concerning him was that he was an Englishman who had passed the summer in Baden, and during the season knew and was known by every one. The waiter called him, in the usual formulary, "a very nice gentleman;" and seemed by his manner to infer that any further account might be had by paying for it. Onslow, if he even understood the hint, was not the man to avail himself of it; so he simply ordered him to bring the hotel book, in which the names of all travellers are inscribed, and at once discovered that the proprietor of the humble entresol, No. 6, was a Mr. Albert Jekyl, with the ordinary qualification attached to him of "Rentier Anglais." Searching back in the same instructive volume, he found that, on his arrival in June, Mr. Jekyl had occupied a small apartment on the first floor, from which he had subsequently removed to the second; thence to a single room in the third story, and finally settled down in the quiet seclusion of the small chamber where George had first seen him. These were very small materials from which to compile a history, but at least they conveyed one inference, and that a very common one, that the height of Mr. Jekyl's fortune and that of his dwelling observed to each other an inverse proportion, and that, as his means went down, he went up. If, then, no very valuable contribution to the gentleman's history was contained here, at least the page recorded his name; and George, reopening Norwood's letter, satisfied himself that this was the same confiding individual who had intrusted the noble viscount with a loan of twenty pounds. George now remembered to have seen his card on Lady Hester's table, with inquiry after Sir Stafford. "Poor fellow!" thought he; "another victim of 'trente-et-un.' They have cleared him out at the tables, and he is either ashamed to write home, or his friends have refused to assist him. And Norwood, too the heartlessness of putting to contribution a poor young fellow like this!" Onslow thought worse of this than of fifty other sharp things of the noble Lord's doing, and of some of which he had been himself the victim.

"I'll call upon him this very morning!" said George, half aloud, and with the tone and air of a man who feels he has said a very generous thing, and expressed a sentiment that he is well aware will expose him to a certain amount of reprobation. "Jekyl, after all, is a right good name. Lady Hester said something about Jekyls that she knew, or was related to. Good style of fellow he looked a little tigerish, but that comes of the Continent. If he be really presentable, too, my Lady will be glad to receive him in her present state of destitution. Norwood's ungracious message was a bore, to be sure, but then he need not deliver it there was no necessity of taking trouble to be disagreeable or, better again far better," thought he, and he burst out laughing at the happy notion, "I 'll misunderstand his meaning, and pay the money. An excellent thought; for as I am about to book up a heavy sum to his Lordship, it 's only deducting twenty pounds and handing it to Jekyl, and I 'll be sworn he wants it most of us all."

The more Onslow reflected on it, the more delighted was he with this admirable device; and it is but fair to add, that however gratified at the opportunity of doing a kindness, he was even better pleased at the thought of how their acquaintance at the "Grosvenor" and the "Ultras" would laugh at the "sharp viscount's being sold." There was only one man of all Onslow's set on whom he would have liked to practise this jest, and that man was Norwood. Having decided upon this plan, he next thought of the execution of it, and this he determined should be by letter. A short note, conveying Norwood's message and the twenty pounds, would save all explanation, and spare Jekyl any unpleasant feeling the discussion of a private circumstance might occasion.

Onslow's note concluded with his "thanks for Mr. Jekyl's kindness on the preceding evening," and expressing a wish to know "at what hour Mr. J. would receive a visit from him."

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