ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

A STRANGE STORY — COMPLETE

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A Strange Story — Complete

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Содержание

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PREFACE

Of the many illustrious thinkers whom the schools of France have contributed to the intellectual philosophy of our age, Victor Cousin, the most accomplished, assigns to Maine de Biran the rank of the most original.

In the successive developments of his own mind, Maine de Biran may, indeed, be said to represent the change that has been silently at work throughout the general mind of Europe since the close of the last century. He begins his career of philosopher with blind faith in Condillac and Materialism. As an intellect severely conscientious in the pursuit of truth expands amidst the perplexities it revolves, phenomena which cannot be accounted for by Condillac's sensuous theories open to his eye. To the first rudimentary life of man, the animal life, "characterized by impressions, appetites, movements, organic in their origin and ruled by the Law of Necessity,"[1] he is compelled to add, "the second, or human life, from which Free-will and Self-consciousness emerge." He thus arrives at the union of mind and matter; but still a something is wanted,—some key to the

[1] OEuvres inedites de Maine de Biran, vol. i. See introduction.

marvels which neither of these conditions of vital being suffices to explain. And at last the grand self-completing Thinker attains to the Third Life of Man in Man's Soul.

> "There are not," says this philosopher, towards the close of his last and loftiest work,—"there are not only two principles opposed to each other in Man,—there are three. For there are in him three lives and three orders of faculties. Though all should be in accord and in harmony between the sensitive and the active faculties which constitute Man, there would still be a nature superior, a third life which would not be satisfied; which would make felt (ferait sentir) the truth that there is another happiness, another wisdom, another perfection, at once above the greatest human happiness, above the highest wisdom, or intellectual and moral perfection of which the human being is susceptible."[2]

Now, as Philosophy and Romance both take their origin in the Principle of Wonder, so in the "Strange Story" submitted to the Public it will be seen that Romance, through the freest exercise of its wildest vagaries, conducts its bewildered hero towards the same goal to which Philosophy leads its luminous Student, through far grander portents of Nature, far higher visions of Supernatural Power, than Fable can yield to Fancy. That goal is defined in these noble words:—

> "The relations (rapports) which exist between the

[2] OEuvres inedites de Maine de Biran, vol. iii. p. 546 (Anthropologie).

elements and the products of the three lives of Man are the subjects of meditation, the fairest and finest, but also the most difficult. The Stoic Philosophy shows us all which can be most elevated in active life; but it makes abstraction of the animal nature, and absolutely fails to recognize all which belongs to the life of the spirit. Its practical morality is beyond the forces of humanity. Christianity alone embraces the whole Man. It dissimulates none of the sides of his nature, and avails itself of his miseries and his weakness in order to conduct him to his end in showing him all the want that he has of a succor more exalted."[3]

In the passages thus quoted, I imply one of the objects for which this tale has been written; and I cite them, with a wish to acknowledge one of those priceless obligations which writings the lightest and most fantastic often incur to reasoners the most serious and profound.

But I here construct a romance which should have, as a romance, some interest for the general reader. I do not elaborate a treatise submitted to the logic of sages. And it is only when "in fairy fiction drest" that Romance gives admission to "truths severe."

I venture to assume that none will question my privilege to avail myself of the marvellous agencies which have ever been at the legitimate command of the fabulist.

To the highest form of romantic narrative, the Epic, critics, indeed, have declared that a supernatural machinery is

[3] OEuvres inedites de Maine de Biran, vol. iii. p. 524.

indispensable. That the Drama has availed itself of the same license as the Epic, it would be unnecessary to say to the countrymen of Shakspeare, or to the generation that is yet studying the enigmas of Goethe's "Faust." Prose Romance has immemorially asserted, no less than the Epic or the Drama, its heritage in the Realm of the Marvellous. The interest which attaches to the supernatural is sought in the earliest Prose Romance which modern times take from the ancient, and which, perhaps, had its origin in the lost Novels of Miletus;[4] and the right to invoke such interest has, ever since, been maintained by Romance through all varieties of form and fancy,—from the majestic epopee of "Telemaque" to the graceful fantasies of "Undine," or the mighty mockeries of "Gulliver's Travels" down to such comparatively commonplace elements of wonder as yet preserve from oblivion "The Castle of Otranto" and "The Old English Baron."

Now, to my mind, the true reason why a supernatural agency is indispensable to the conception of the Epic, is that the Epic is the highest and the completest form in which Art can express either Man or Nature, and that without some gleams of the supernatural, Man is not man nor Nature, nature.

It is said, by a writer to whom an eminent philosophical critic justly applies the epithets of "pious and profound:"[5]

"Is it unreasonable to confess that we believe in God,

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[4] "The Golden Ass" of Apuleius.

[5] Sir William Hamilton: Lectures on Metaphysics, p. 40.

> not by reason of the Nature which conceals Him, but by reason of the Supernatural in Man which alone reveals and proves Him to exist?... Man reveals God: for Man, by his intelligence, rises above Nature; and in virtue of this intelligence is conscious of himself as a power not only independent of, but opposed to, Nature, and capable of resisting, conquering, and controlling her."[6]

If the meaning involved in the argument, of which I have here made but scanty extracts, be carefully studied, I think that we shall find deeper reasons than the critics who dictated canons of taste to the last century discovered,—why the supernatural is indispensable to the Epic, and why it is allowable to all works of imagination, in which Art looks on Nature with Man's inner sense of a something beyond and above her.

But the Writer who, whether in verse or prose, would avail himself of such sources of pity or terror as flow from the Marvellous, can only attain his object in proportion as the wonders he narrates are of a kind to excite the curiosity of the age he addresses.

In the brains of our time, the faculty of Causation is very markedly developed. People nowadays do not delight in the Marvellous according to the old childlike spirit. They say in one breath, "Very extraordinary!" and in the next breath ask, "How do you account for it?" If the Author of this work has presumed to borrow from science some elements of interest for Romance,

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[6] Jacobi: Von der Gottlichen Dingen; Werke, p. 424-426.

he ventures to hope that no thoughtful reader—and certainly no true son of science—will be disposed to reproach him. In fact, such illustrations from the masters of Thought were essential to the completion of the purpose which pervades the work.

That purpose, I trust, will develop itself in proportion as the story approaches the close; and whatever may appear violent or melodramatic in the catastrophe, will, perhaps, be found, by a reader capable of perceiving the various symbolical meanings conveyed in the story, essential to the end in which those meanings converge, and towards which the incidents that give them the character and interest of of fiction, have been planned and directed from the commencement.

Of course, according to the most obvious principles of art, the narrator of a fiction must be as thoroughly in earnest as if he were the narrator of facts. One could not tell the most extravagant fairy-tale so as to rouse and sustain the attention of the most infantine listener, if the tale were told as if the taleteller did not believe in it. But when the reader lays down this "Strange Story," perhaps he will detect, through all the haze of romance, the outlines of these images suggested to his reason: Firstly, the image of sensuous, soulless Nature, such as the Materialist had conceived it; secondly, the image of Intellect, obstinately separating all its inquiries from the belief in the spiritual essence and destiny of man, and incurring all kinds of perplexity and resorting to all kinds of visionary speculation before it settles at last into the simple faith which unites the philosopher and the

infant; and thirdly, the image of the erring but pure-thoughted visionary, seeking over-much on this earth to separate soul from mind, till innocence itself is led astray by a phantom, and reason is lost in the space between earth and the stars. Whether in these pictures there be any truth worth the implying, every reader must judge for himself; and if he doubt or deny that there be any such truth, still, in the process of thought which the doubt or denial enforces, he may chance on a truth which it pleases himself to discover.

> "Most of the Fables of AEsop,"—thus says Montaigne in his charming essay "Of Books"[7]—"have several senses and meanings, of which the Mythologists choose some one that tallies with the fable. But for the most part 't is only what presents itself at the first view, and is superficial; there being others more lively, essential, and internal, into which they had not been able to penetrate; and"—adds Montaigne —"the case is the very same with me."

[7] Translation, 1776, Yol. ii. p. 103.

CHAPTER I

In the year 18— I settled as a physician at one of the wealthiest of our great English towns, which I will designate by the initial L——. I was yet young, but I had acquired some reputation by a professional work, which is, I believe, still amongst the received authorities on the subject of which it treats. I had studied at Edinburgh and at Paris, and had borne away from both those illustrious schools of medicine whatever guarantees for future distinction the praise of professors may concede to the ambition of students. On becoming a member of the College of Physicians, I made a tour of the principal cities of Europe, taking letters of introduction to eminent medical men, and gathering from many theories and modes of treatment hints to enlarge the foundations of unprejudiced and comprehensive practice. I had resolved to fix my ultimate residence in London. But before this preparatory tour was completed, my resolve was changed by one of those unexpected events which determine the fate man in vain would work out for himself. In passing through the Tyro, on my way into the north of Italy, I found in a small inn, remote from medical attendance, an English traveller seized with acute inflammation of the lungs, and in a state of imminent danger. I devoted myself to him night and day; and, perhaps more through careful nursing than active remedies, I had the happiness to effect his complete recovery. The traveller proved to be Julius Faber,

a physician of great distinction, contented to reside, where he was born, in the provincial city of L——, but whose reputation as a profound and original pathologist was widely spread, and whose writings had formed no unimportant part of my special studies. It was during a short holiday excursion, from which he was about to return with renovated vigour, that he had been thus stricken down. The patient so accidentally met with became the founder of my professional fortunes. He conceived a warm attachment for me,—perhaps the more affectionate because he was a childless bachelor, and the nephew who would succeed to his wealth evinced no desire to succeed to the toils by which the wealth had been acquired. Thus, having an heir for the one, he had long looked about for an heir to the other, and now resolved on finding that heir in me. So when we parted Dr. Faber made me promise to correspond with him regularly, and it was not long before he disclosed by letter the plans he had formed in my favour. He said that he was growing old; his practice was beyond his strength; he needed a partner; he was not disposed to put up to sale the health of patients whom he had learned to regard as his children: money was no object to him, but it was an object close at his heart that the humanity he had served, and the reputation he had acquired, should suffer no loss in his choice of a successor. In fine, he proposed that I should at once come to L—— as his partner, with the view of succeeding to his entire practice at the end of two years, when it was his intention to retire.

The opening into fortune thus afforded to me was one

that rarely presents itself to a young man entering upon an overcrowded profession; and to an aspirant less allured by the desire of fortune than the hope of distinction, the fame of the physician who thus generously offered to me the inestimable benefits of his long experience and his cordial introduction was in itself an assurance that a metropolitan practice is not essential to a national renown.

I went, then, to L——, and before the two years of my partnership had expired, my success justified my kind friend's selection, and far more than realized my own expectations. I was fortunate in effecting some notable cures in the earliest cases submitted to me, and it is everything in the career of a physician when good luck wins betimes for him that confidence which patients rarely accord except to lengthened experience. To the rapid facility with which my way was made, some circumstances apart from professional skill probably contributed. I was saved from the suspicion of a medical adventurer by the accidents of birth and fortune. I belonged to an ancient family (a branch of the once powerful border-clan of the Fenwicks) that had for many generations held a fair estate in the neighbourhood of Windermere. As an only son I had succeeded to that estate on attaining my majority, and had sold it to pay off the debts which had been made by my father, who had the costly tastes of an antiquary and collector. The residue on the sale insured me a modest independence apart from the profits of a profession; and as I had not been legally bound to defray my father's debts, so I

obtained that character for disinterestedness and integrity which always in England tends to propitiate the public to the successes achieved by industry or talent. Perhaps, too, any professional ability I might possess was the more readily conceded, because I had cultivated with assiduity the sciences and the scholarship which are collaterally connected with the study of medicine. Thus, in a word, I established a social position which came in aid of my professional repute, and silenced much of that envy which usually embitters and sometimes impedes success.

Dr. Faber retired at the end of the two years agreed upon. He went abroad; and being, though advanced in years, of a frame still robust, and habits of mind still inquiring and eager, he commenced a lengthened course of foreign travel, during which our correspondence, at first frequent, gradually languished, and finally died away.

I succeeded at once to the larger part of the practice which the labours of thirty years had secured to my predecessor. My chief rival was a Dr. Lloyd, a benevolent, fervid man, not without genius, if genius be present where judgment is absent; not without science, if that may be science which fails in precision,—one of those clever desultory men who, in adopting a profession, do not give up to it the whole force and heat of their minds. Men of that kind habitually accept a mechanical routine, because in the exercise of their ostensible calling their imaginative faculties are drawn away to pursuits more alluring. Therefore, in their proper vocation they are seldom bold or inventive,—out of it

they are sometimes both to excess. And when they do take up a novelty in their own profession they cherish it with an obstinate tenacity, and an extravagant passion, unknown to those quiet philosophers who take up novelties every day, examine them with the sobriety of practised eyes, to lay down altogether, modify in part, or accept in whole, according as inductive experiment supports or destroys conjecture.

Dr. Lloyd had been esteemed a learned naturalist long before he was admitted to be a tolerable physician. Amidst the privations of his youth he had contrived to form, and with each succeeding year he had perseveringly increased, a zoological collection of creatures, not alive, but, happily for the beholder, stuffed or embalmed. From what I have said, it will be truly inferred that Dr. Lloyd's early career as a physician had not been brilliant; but of late years he had gradually rather aged than worked himself into that professional authority and station which time confers on a thoroughly respectable man whom no one is disposed to envy, and all are disposed to like.

Now in L—— there were two distinct social circles,—that of the wealthy merchants and traders, and that of a few privileged families inhabiting a part of the town aloof from the marts of commerce, and called the Abbey Hill. These superb Areopagites exercised over the wives and daughters of the inferior citizens to whom all of L——, except the Abbey Hill, owed its prosperity, the same kind of mysterious influence which the fine ladies of May Fair and Belgravia are reported to hold over the female

denizens of Bloomsbury and Marylebone.

Abbey Hill was not opulent; but it was powerful by a concentration of its resources in all matters of patronage. Abbey Hill had its own milliner and its own draper, its own confectioner, butcher, baker, and tea-dealer; and the patronage of Abbey Hill was like the patronage of royalty,—less lucrative in itself than as a solemn certificate of general merit. The shops on which Abbey Hill conferred its custom were certainly not the cheapest, possibly not the best; but they were undeniably the most imposing. The proprietors were decorously pompous, the shopmen superciliously polite. They could not be more so if they had belonged to the State, and been paid by a public which they benefited and despised. The ladies of Low Town (as the city subjacent to the Hill had been styled from a date remote in the feudal ages) entered those shops with a certain awe, and left them with a certain pride. There they had learned what the Hill approved; there they had bought what the Hill had purchased. It is much in this life to be quite sure that we are in the right, whatever that conviction may cost us. Abbey Hill had been in the habit of appointing, amongst other objects of patronage, its own physician. But that habit had fallen into disuse during the latter years of my predecessor's practice. His superiority over all other medical men in the town had become so incontestable, that, though he was emphatically the doctor of Low Town, the head of its hospitals and infirmaries, and by birth related to its principal traders, still as Abbey Hill was occasionally

subject to the physical infirmities of meaner mortals, so on those occasions it deemed it best not to push the point of honour to the wanton sacrifice of life. Since Low Town possessed one of the most famous physicians in England, Abbey Hill magnanimously resolved not to crush him by a rival. Abbey Hill let him feel its pulse.

When my predecessor retired, I had presumptuously expected that the Hill would have continued to suspend its normal right to a special physician, and shown to me the same generous favour it had shown to him, who had declared me worthy to succeed to his honours. I had the more excuse for this presumption because the Hill had already allowed me to visit a fair proportion of its invalids, had said some very gracious things to me about the great respectability of the Fenwick family, and sent me some invitations to dinner, and a great many invitations to tea.

But my self-conceit received a notable check. Abbey Hill declared that the time had come to reassert its dormant privilege; it must have a doctor of its own choosing,—a doctor who might, indeed, be permitted to visit Low Town from motives of humanity or gain, but who must emphatically assert his special allegiance to Abbey Hill by fixing his home on that venerable promontory. Miss Brabazon, a spinster of uncertain age but undoubted pedigree, with small fortune but high nose, which she would pleasantly observe was a proof of her descent from Humphrey Duke of Gloucester (with whom, indeed, I have no doubt, in spite of chronology, that she very often dined),

was commissioned to inquire of me diplomatically, and without committing Abbey Hill too much by the overture, whether I would take a large and antiquated mansion, in which abbots were said to have lived many centuries ago, and which was still popularly styled Abbots' House, situated on the verge of the Hill, as in that case the "Hill" would think of me.

"It is a large house for a single man, I allow," said Miss Brabazon, candidly; and then added, with a sidelong glance of alarming sweetness, "but when Dr. Fenwick has taken his true position (so old a family!) amongst us, he need not long remain single, unless he prefer it."

I replied, with more asperity than the occasion called for, that I had no thought of changing my residence at present, and if the Hill wanted me, the Hill must send for me.

Two days afterwards Dr. Lloyd took Abbots' House, and in less than a week was proclaimed medical adviser to the Hill. The election had been decided by the fiat of a great lady, who reigned supreme on the sacred eminence, under the name and title of Mrs. Colonel Poyntz.

"Dr. Fenwick," said this lady, "is a clever young man and a gentleman, but he gives himself airs,—the Hill does not allow any airs but its own. Besides, he is a new comer: resistance to new comers, and, indeed, to all things new, except caps and novels, is one of the bonds that keep old established societies together. Accordingly, it is by my advice that Dr. Lloyd has taken Abbots' House; the rent would be too high for his means if the Hill did

not feel bound in honour to justify the trust he has placed in its patronage. I told him that all my friends, when they were in want of a doctor, would send for him; those who are my friends will do so. What the Hill does, plenty of common people down there will do also,—so that question is settled!" And it was settled.

Dr. Lloyd, thus taken by the hand, soon extended the range of his visits beyond the Hill, which was not precisely a mountain of gold to doctors, and shared with myself, though in a comparatively small degree, the much more lucrative practice of Low Town.

I had no cause to grudge his success, nor did I. But to my theories of medicine his diagnosis was shallow, and his prescriptions obsolete. When we were summoned to a joint consultation, our views as to the proper course of treatment seldom agreed. Doubtless he thought I ought to have deferred to his seniority in years; but I held the doctrine which youth deems a truth and age a paradox,—namely, that in science the young men are the practical elders, inasmuch as they are schooled in the latest experiences science has gathered up, while their seniors are cramped by the dogmas they were schooled to believe when the world was some decades the younger.

Meanwhile my reputation continued rapidly to advance; it became more than local; my advice was sought even by patients from the metropolis. That ambition, which, conceived in early youth, had decided my career and sweetened all its labours,—the ambition to take a rank and leave a name as one of the

great pathologists to whom humanity accords a grateful, if calm, renown,—saw before it a level field and a certain goal.

I know not whether a success far beyond that usually attained at the age I had reached served to increase, but it seemed to myself to justify, the main characteristic of my moral organization,—intellectual pride.

Though mild and gentle to the sufferers under my care, as a necessary element of professional duty, I was intolerant of contradiction from those who belonged to my calling, or even from those who, in general opinion, opposed my favourite theories. I had espoused a school of medical philosophy severely rigid in its inductive logic. My creed was that of stern materialism. I had a contempt for the understanding of men who accepted with credulity what they could not explain by reason. My favourite phrase was "common-sense." At the same time I had no prejudice against bold discovery, and discovery necessitates conjecture, but I dismissed as idle all conjecture that could not be brought to a practical test.

As in medicine I had been the pupil of Broussais, so in metaphysics I was the disciple of Condillac. I believed with that philosopher that "all our knowledge we owe to Nature; that in the beginning we can only instruct ourselves through her lessons; and that the whole art of reasoning consists in continuing as she has compelled us to commence." Keeping natural philosophy apart from the doctrines of revelation, I never assailed the last; but I contended that by the first no accurate reasoner could arrive at

the existence of the soul as a third principle of being equally distinct from mind and body. That by a miracle man might live again, was a question of faith and not of understanding. I left faith to religion, and banished it from philosophy. How define with a precision to satisfy the logic of philosophy what was to live again? The body? We know that the body rests in its grave till by the process of decomposition its elemental parts enter into other forms of matter. The mind? But the mind was as clearly the result of the bodily organization as the music of the harpsichord is the result of the instrumental mechanism. The mind shared the decrepitude of the body in extreme old age, and in the full vigour of youth a sudden injury to the brain might forever destroy the intellect of a Plato or a Shakspeare. But the third principle,—the soul,—the something lodged within the body, which yet was to survive it? Where was that soul hidden out of the ken of the anatomist? When philosophers attempted to define it, were they not compelled to confound its nature and its actions with those of the mind? Could they reduce it to the mere moral sense, varying according to education, circumstances, and physical constitution? But even the moral sense in the most virtuous of men may be swept away by a fever. Such at the time I now speak of were the views I held,—views certainly not original nor pleasing; but I cherished them with as fond a tenacity as if they had been consolatory truths of which I was the first discoverer. I was intolerant to those who maintained opposite doctrines,—despised them as irrational, or disliked

them as insincere. Certainly if I had fulfilled the career which my ambition predicted,—become the founder of a new school in pathology, and summed up my theories in academical lectures,—I should have added another authority, however feeble, to the sects which circumscribe the interest of man to the life that has its close in his grave.

Possibly that which I have called my intellectual pride was more nourished than I should have been willing to grant by the self-reliance which an unusual degree of physical power is apt to bestow. Nature had blessed me with the thews of an athlete. Among the hardy youths of the Northern Athens I had been preeminently distinguished for feats of activity and strength. My mental labours, and the anxiety which is inseparable from the conscientious responsibilities of the medical profession, kept my health below the par of keen enjoyment, but had in no way diminished my rare muscular force. I walked through the crowd with the firm step and lofty crest of the mailed knight of old, who felt himself, in his casement of iron, a match against numbers. Thus the sense of a robust individuality, strong alike in disciplined reason and animal vigour, habituated to aid others, needing no aid for itself, contributed to render me imperious in will and arrogant in opinion. Nor were such defects injurious to me in my profession; on the contrary, aided as they were by a calm manner, and a presence not without that kind of dignity which is the livery of self-esteem, they served to impose respect and to inspire trust.

CHAPTER II

I had been about six years at L—— when I became suddenly involved in a controversy with Dr. Lloyd. Just as this ill-fated man appeared at the culminating point of his professional fortunes, he had the imprudence to proclaim himself not only an enthusiastic advocate of mesmerism as a curative process, but an ardent believer of the reality of somnambular clairvoyance as an invaluable gift of certain privileged organizations. To these doctrines I sternly opposed myself,—the more sternly, perhaps, because on these doctrines Dr. Lloyd founded an argument for the existence of soul, independent of mind, as of matter, and built thereon a superstructure of physiological fantasies, which, could it be substantiated, would replace every system of metaphysics on which recognized philosophy condescends to dispute.

About two years before he became a disciple rather of Puysegur than Mesmer (for Mesmer hard little faith in that gift of clairvoyance of which Puysegur was, I believe, at least in modern times, the first audacious asserter), Dr. Lloyd had been afflicted with the loss of a wife many years younger than himself, and to whom he had been tenderly attached. And this bereavement, in directing the hopes that consoled him to a world beyond the grave, had served perhaps to render him more credulous of the phenomena in which he greeted additional proofs of purely spiritual existence. Certainly, if, in controverting the notions

of another physiologist, I had restricted myself to that fair antagonism which belongs to scientific disputants anxious only for the truth, I should need no apology for sincere conviction and honest argument; but when, with condescending good-nature, as if to a man much younger than himself, who was ignorant of the phenomena which he nevertheless denied, Dr. Lloyd invited me to attend his seances and witness his cures, my amour propre became aroused and nettled, and it seemed to me necessary to put down what I asserted to be too gross an outrage on common-sense to justify the ceremony of examination. I wrote, therefore, a small pamphlet on the subject, in which I exhausted all the weapons that irony can lend to contempt. Dr. Lloyd replied; and as he was no very skilful arguer, his reply injured him perhaps more than my assault. Meanwhile, I had made some inquiries as to the moral character of his favourite clairvoyants. I imagined that I had learned enough to justify me in treating them as flagrant cheats, and himself as their egregious dupe.

Low Town soon ranged itself, with very few exceptions, on my side. The Hill at first seemed disposed to rally round its insulted physician, and to make the dispute a party question, in which the Hill would have been signally worsted, when suddenly the same lady paramount, who had secured to Dr. Lloyd the smile of the Eminence, spoke forth against him, and the Eminence frowned.

"Dr. Lloyd," said the Queen of the Hill, "is an amiable creature, but on this subject decidedly cracked. Cracked poets may be all the better for being cracked,—cracked doctors are

dangerous. Besides, in deserting that old-fashioned routine, his adherence to which made his claim to the Hill's approbation, and unsettling the mind of the Hill with wild revolutionary theories, Dr. Lloyd has betrayed the principles on which the Hill itself rests its social foundations. Of those principles Dr. Fenwick has made himself champion; and the Hill is bound to support him. There, the question is settled!"

And it was settled.

From the moment Mrs. Colonel Poyntz thus issued the word of command, Dr. Lloyd was demolished. His practice was gone, as well as his repute. Mortification or anger brought on a stroke of paralysis which, disabling my opponent, put an end to our controversy. An obscure Dr. Jones, who had been the special pupil and protege of Dr. Lloyd, offered himself as a candidate for the Hill's tongues and pulses. The Hill gave him little encouragement. It once more suspended its electoral privileges, and, without insisting on calling me up to it, the Hill quietly called me in whenever its health needed other advice than that of its visiting apothecary. Again it invited me, sometimes to dinner, often to tea; and again Miss Brabazon assured me by a sidelong glance that it was no fault of hers if I were still single.

I had almost forgotten the dispute which had obtained for me so conspicuous a triumph, when one winter's night I was roused from sleep by a summons to attend Dr Lloyd, who, attacked by a second stroke a few hours previously, had, on recovering sense, expressed a vehement desire to consult the rival by whom he had

suffered so severely. I dressed myself in haste and hurried to his house.

A February night, sharp and bitter; an iron-gray frost below, a spectral melancholy moon above. I had to ascend the Abbey Hill by a steep, blind lane between high walls. I passed through stately gates, which stood wide open, into the garden ground that surrounded the old Abbots' House. At the end of a short carriage-drive the dark and gloomy building cleared itself from leafless skeleton trees,—the moon resting keen and cold on its abrupt gables and lofty chimney-stacks. An old woman-servant received me at the door, and, without saying a word, led me through a long low hall, and up dreary oak stairs, to a broad landing, at which she paused for a moment, listening. Round and about hall, staircase, and landing were ranged the dead specimens of the savage world which it had been the pride of the naturalist's life to collect. Close where I stood yawned the open jaws of the fell anaconda, its lower coils hidden, as they rested on the floor below, by the winding of the massive stairs. Against the dull wainscot walls were pendent cases stored with grotesque unfamiliar mummies, seen imperfectly by the moon that shot through the window-panes, and the candle in the old woman's hand. And as now she turned towards me, nodding her signal to follow, and went on up the shadowy passage, rows of gigantic birds—ibis and vulture, and huge sea glaucus—glared at me in the false light of their hungry eyes.

So I entered the sick-room, and the first glance told me that

my art was powerless there.

The children of the stricken widower were grouped round his bed, the eldest apparently about fifteen, the youngest four; one little girl—the only female child—was clinging to her father's neck, her face pressed to his bosom, and in that room her sobs alone were loud.

As I passed the threshold, Dr. Lloyd lifted his face, which had been bent over the weeping child, and gazed on me with an aspect of strange glee, which I failed to interpret. Then as I stole towards him softly and slowly, he pressed his lips on the long fair tresses that streamed wild over his breast, motioned to a nurse who stood beside his pillow to take the child away, and in a voice clearer than I could have expected in one on whose brow lay the unmistakable hand of death, he bade the nurse and the children quit the room. All went sorrowfully, but silently, save the little girl, who, borne off in the nurse's arms, continued to sob as if her heart were breaking.

I was not prepared for a scene so affecting; it moved me to the quick. My eyes wistfully followed the children so soon to be orphans, as one after one went out into the dark chill shadow, and amidst the bloodless forms of the dumb brute nature, ranged in grisly vista beyond the death-room of man. And when the last infant shape had vanished, and the door closed with a jarring click, my sight wandered loiteringly around the chamber before I could bring myself to fix it on the broken form, beside which I now stood in all that glorious vigour of frame which had

fostered the pride of my mind. In the moment consumed by my mournful survey, the whole aspect of the place impressed itself ineffaceably on lifelong remembrance. Through the high, deepsunken casement, across which the thin, faded curtain was but half drawn, the moonlight rushed, and then settled on the floor in one shroud of white glimmer, lost under the gloom of the death-bed. The roof was low, and seemed lower still by heavy intersecting beams, which I might have touched with my lifted hand. And the tall guttering candle by the bedside, and the flicker from the fire struggling out through the fuel but newly heaped on it, threw their reflection on the ceiling just over my head in a reek of quivering blackness, like an angry cloud.

Suddenly I felt my arm grasped; with his left hand (the right side was already lifeless) the dying man drew me towards him nearer and nearer, till his lips almost touched my ear, and, in a voice now firm, now splitting into gasp and hiss, thus he said, "I have summoned you to gaze on your own work! You have stricken down my life at the moment when it was most needed by my children, and most serviceable to mankind. Had I lived a few years longer, my children would have entered on manhood, safe from the temptations of want and undejected by the charity of strangers. Thanks to you, they will be penniless orphans. Fellow-creatures afflicted by maladies your pharmacopoeia had failed to reach came to me for relief, and they found it. 'The effect of imagination,' you say. What matters, if I directed the imagination to cure? Now you have mocked the unhappy ones out of their last

chance of life. They will suffer and perish. Did you believe me in error? Still you knew that my object was research into truth. You employed against your brother in art venomous drugs and a poisoned probe. Look at me! Are you satisfied with your work?"

I sought to draw back and pluck my arm from the dying man's grasp. I could not do so without using a force that would have been inhuman. His lips drew nearer still to my ear.

"Vain pretender, do not boast that you brought a genius for epigram to the service of science. Science is lenient to all who offer experiment as the test of conjecture. You are of the stuff of which inquisitors are made. You cry that truth is profaned when your dogmas are questioned. In your shallow presumption you have meted the dominions of nature, and where your eye halts its vision, you say, 'There nature must close;' in the bigotry which adds crime to presumption, you would stone the discoverer who, in annexing new realms to her chart, unsettles your arbitrary landmarks. Verily, retribution shall await you! In those spaces which your sight has disdained to explore you shall yourself be a lost and bewildered straggler. Hist! I see them already! The gibbering phantoms are gathering round you!"

The man's voice stopped abruptly; his eye fixed in a glazing stare; his hand relaxed its hold; he fell back on his pillow. I stole from the room; on the landing-place I met the nurse and the old woman-servant. Happily the children were not there. But I heard the wail of the female child from some room not far distant.

I whispered hurriedly to the nurse, "All is over!" passed again

under the jaws of the vast anaconda, and on through the blind lane between the dead walls, on through the ghastly streets, under the ghastly moon, went back to my solitary home.

CHAPTER III

It was some time before I could shake off the impression made on me by the words and the look of that dying man.

It was not that my conscience upbraided me. What had I done? Denounced that which I held, in common with most men of sense in or out of my profession, to be one of those illusions by which quackery draws profit from the wonder of ignorance. Was I to blame if I refused to treat with the grave respect due to asserted discovery in legitimate science pretensions to powers akin to the fables of wizards? Was I to descend from the Academe of decorous science to examine whether a slumbering sibyl could read from a book placed at her back, or tell me at L—— what at that moment was being done by my friend at the Antipodes?

And what though Dr. Lloyd himself might be a worthy and honest man, and a sincere believer in the extravagances for which he demanded an equal credulity in others, do not honest men every day incur the penalty of ridicule if, from a defect of good sense, they make themselves ridiculous? Could I have foreseen that a satire so justly provoked would inflict so deadly a wound? Was I inhumanly barbarous because the antagonist destroyed was morbidly sensitive? My conscience, therefore, made me no reproach, and the public was as little severe as my conscience. The public had been with me in our contest; the public knew nothing of my opponent's deathbed accusations; the public knew

only that I had attended him in his last moments; it saw me walk beside the bier that bore him to his grave; it admired the respect to his memory which I evinced in the simple tomb that I placed over his remains, inscribed with an epitaph that did justice to his unquestionable benevolence and integrity; above all, it praised the energy with which I set on foot a subscription for his orphan children, and the generosity with which I headed that subscription by a sum that was large in proportion to my means.

To that sum I did not, indeed, limit my contribution. The sobs of the poor female child rang still on my heart. As her grief had been keener than that of her brothers, so she might be subjected to sharper trials than they, when the time came for her to fight her own way through the world; therefore I secured to her, but with such precautions that the gift could not be traced to my hand, a sum to accumulate till she was of marriageable age, and which then might suffice for a small wedding portion; or if she remained single, for an income that would place her beyond the temptation of want, or the bitterness of a servile dependence.

That Dr. Lloyd should have died in poverty was a matter of surprise at first, for his profits during the last few years had been considerable, and his mode of life far from extravagant. But just before the date of our controversy he had been induced to assist the brother of his lost wife, who was a junior partner in a London bank, with the loan of his accumulated savings. This man proved dishonest; he embezzled that and other sums intrusted to him, and fled the country. The same sentiment of conjugal affection

which had cost Dr. Lloyd his fortune kept him silent as to the cause of the loss. It was reserved for his executors to discover the treachery of the brother-in-law whom he, poor man, would have generously screened from additional disgrace.

The Mayor of L——, a wealthy and public-spirited merchant, purchased the museum, which Dr. Lloyd's passion for natural history had induced him to form; and the sum thus obtained, together with that raised by subscription, sufficed not only to discharge all debts due by the deceased, but to insure to the orphans the benefits of an education that might fit at least the boys to enter fairly armed into that game, more of skill than of chance, in which Fortune is really so little blinded that we see, in each turn of her wheel, wealth and its honours pass away from the lax fingers of ignorance and sloth, to the resolute grasp of labour and knowledge.

Meanwhile a relation in a distant county undertook the charge of the orphans; they disappeared from the scene, and the tides of life in a commercial community soon flowed over the place which the dead man had occupied in the thoughts of his bustling townsfolk.

One person at L——, and only one, appeared to share and inherit the rancour with which the poor physician had denounced me on his death-bed. It was a gentleman named Vigors, distantly related to the deceased, and who had been, in point of station, the most eminent of Dr. Lloyd's partisans in the controversy with myself, a man of no great scholastic acquirements, but

of respectable abilities. He had that kind of power which the world concedes to respectable abilities when accompanied with a temper more than usually stern, and a moral character more than usually austere. His ruling passion was to sit in judgment upon others; and being a magistrate, he was the most active and the most rigid of all the magistrates L—— had ever known.

Mr. Vigors at first spoke of me with great bitterness, as having ruined, and in fact killed, his friend, by the uncharitable and unfair acerbity which he declared I had brought into what ought to have been an unprejudiced examination of simple matter of fact. But finding no sympathy in these charges, he had the discretion to cease from making them, contenting himself with a solemn shake of his head if he heard my name mentioned in terms of praise, and an oracular sentence or two, such as "Time will show," "All's well that ends well," etc. Mr. Vigors, however, mixed very little in the more convivial intercourse of the townspeople. He called himself domestic; but, in truth, he was ungenial,—a stiff man, starched with self-esteem. He thought that his dignity of station was not sufficiently acknowledged by the merchants of Low Town, and his superiority of intellect not sufficiently recognized by the exclusives of the Hill. His visits were, therefore, chiefly confined to the houses of neighbouring squires, to whom his reputation as a magistrate, conjoined with his solemn exterior, made him one of those oracles by which men consent to be awed on condition that the awe is not often inflicted. And though he opened his house three times a week, it

was only to a select few, whom he first fed and then biologized. Electro-biology was very naturally the special entertainment of a man whom no intercourse ever pleased in which his will was not imposed upon others. Therefore he only invited to his table persons whom he could stare into the abnegation of their senses, willing to say that beef was lamb, or brandy was coffee, according as he willed them to say. And, no doubt, the persons asked would have said anything he willed, so long as they had, in substance, as well as in idea, the beef and the brandy, the lamb and the coffee. I did not, then, often meet Mr. Vigors at the houses in which I occasionally spent my evenings. I heard of his enmity as a man safe in his home hears the sough of a wind on a common without. If now and then we chanced to pass in the streets, he looked up at me (he was a small man walking on tiptoe) with a sullen scowl of dislike; and from the height of my stature, I dropped upon the small man and sullen scowl the affable smile of supreme indifference.

CHAPTER IV

I had now arrived at that age when an ambitious man, satisfied with his progress in the world without, begins to feel in the cravings of unsatisfied affection the void of a solitary hearth. I resolved to marry, and looked out for a wife. I had never hitherto admitted into my life the passion of love. In fact, I had regarded that passion, even in my earlier youth, with a certain superb contempt,—as a malady engendered by an effeminate idleness, and fostered by a sickly imagination.

I wished to find in a wife a rational companion, an affectionate and trustworthy friend. No views of matrimony could be less romantic, more soberly sensible, than those which I conceived. Nor were my requirements mercenary or presumptuous. I cared not for fortune; I asked nothing from connections. My ambition was exclusively professional; it could be served by no titled kindred, accelerated by no wealthy dower. I was no slave to beauty. I did not seek in a wife the accomplishments of a finishing-school teacher.

Having decided that the time had come to select my helpmate, I imagined that I should find no difficulty in a choice that my reason would approve. But day upon day, week upon week, passed away, and though among the families I visited there were many young ladies who possessed more than the qualifications with which I conceived that I should be amply contented, and

by whom I might flatter myself that my proposals would not be disdained, I saw not one to whose lifelong companionship I should not infinitely have preferred the solitude I found so irksome.

One evening, in returning home from visiting a poor female patient whom I attended gratuitously, and whose case demanded more thought than that of any other in my list,—for though it had been considered hopeless in the hospital, and she had come home to die, I felt certain that I could save her, and she seemed recovering under my care,—one evening—it was the fifteenth of May—I found myself just before the gates of the house that had been inhabited by Dr. Lloyd. Since his death the house had been unoccupied; the rent asked for it by the proprietor was considered high; and from the sacred Hill on which it was situated, shyness or pride banished the wealthier traders. The garden gates stood wide open, as they had stood on the winter night on which I had passed through them to the chamber of death. The remembrance of that deathbed came vividly before me, and the dying man's fantastic threat rang again in my startled ears. An irresistible impulse, which I could not then account for, and which I cannot account for now,—an impulse the reverse of that which usually makes us turn away with quickened step from a spot that recalls associations of pain,—urged me on through the open gates up the neglected grass-grown road, urged me to look, under the weltering sun of the joyous spring, at that house which I had never seen but in the gloom of a winter

night, under the melancholy moon. As the building came in sight, with dark-red bricks, partially overgrown with ivy, I perceived that it was no longer unoccupied. I saw forms passing athwart the open windows; a van laden with articles of furniture stood before the door; a servant in livery was beside it giving directions to the men who were unloading. Evidently some family was just entering into possession. I felt somewhat ashamed of my trespass, and turned round quickly to retrace my steps. I had retreated but a few yards, when I saw before me, at the entrance gates, Mr. Vigors, walking beside a lady apparently of middle age; while, just at hand, a path cut through the shrubs gave view of a small wicketgate at the end of the grounds. I felt unwilling not only to meet the lady, whom I guessed to be the new occupier, and to whom I should have to make a somewhat awkward apology for intrusion, but still more to encounter the scornful look of Mr. Vigors in what appeared to my pride a false or undignified position. Involuntarily, therefore, I turned down the path which would favour my escape unobserved. When about half way between the house and the wicket-gate, the shrubs that had clothed the path on either side suddenly opened to the left, bringing into view a circle of sward, surrounded by irregular fragments of old brickwork partially covered with ferns, creepers, or rockplants, weeds, or wild flowers; and, in the centre of the circle, a fountain, or rather well, over which was built a Gothic monastic dome, or canopy, resting on small Norman columns, time-worn, dilapidated. A large willow overhung this

unmistakable relic of the ancient abbey. There was an air of antiquity, romance, legend about this spot, so abruptly disclosed amidst the delicate green of the young shrubberies. But it was not the ruined wall nor the Gothic well that chained my footstep and charmed my eye.

It was a solitary human form, seated amidst the mournful ruins.

The form was so slight, the face so young, that at the first glance I murmured to myself, "What a lovely child!" But as my eye lingered it recognized in the upturned thoughtful brow, in the sweet, serious aspect, in the rounded outlines of that slender shape, the inexpressible dignity of virgin woman.

A book was on her lap, at her feet a little basket, half-filled with violets and blossoms culled from the rock-plants that nestled amidst the ruins. Behind her, the willow, like an emerald waterfall, showered down its arching abundant green, bough after bough, from the tree-top to the sward, descending in wavy verdure, bright towards the summit, in the smile of the setting sun, and darkening into shadow as it neared the earth.

She did not notice, she did not see me; her eyes were fixed upon the horizon, where it sloped farthest into space, above the treetops and the ruins,—fixed so intently that mechanically I turned my own gaze to follow the flight of hers. It was as if she watched for some expected, familiar sign to grow out from the depths of heaven; perhaps to greet, before other eyes beheld it, the ray of the earliest star.

The birds dropped from the boughs on the turf around her so fearlessly that one alighted amidst the flowers in the little basket at her feet. There is a famous German poem, which I had read in my youth, called the Maiden from Abroad, variously supposed to be an allegory of Spring, or of Poetry, according to the choice of commentators: it seemed to me as if the poem had been made for her. Verily, indeed, in her, poet or painter might have seen an image equally true to either of those adornments of the earth; both outwardly a delight to sense, yet both wakening up thoughts within us, not sad, but akin to sadness.

I heard now a step behind me, and a voice which I recognized to be that of Mr. Vigors. I broke from the charm by which I had been so lingeringly spell-bound, hurried on confusedly, gained the wicket-gate, from which a short flight of stairs descended into the common thoroughfare. And there the every-day life lay again before me. On the opposite side, houses, shops, church-spires; a few steps more, and the bustling streets! How immeasurably far from, yet how familiarly near to, the world in which we move and have being is that fairy-land of romance which opens out from the hard earth before us, when Love steals at first to our side, fading back into the hard earth again as Love smiles or sighs its farewell!

CHAPTER V

And before that evening I had looked on Mr. Vigors with supreme indifference! What importance he now assumed in my eyes! The lady with whom I had seen him was doubtless the new tenant of that house in which the young creature by whom my heart was so strangely moved evidently had her home. Most probably the relation between the two ladies was that of mother and daughter. Mr. Vigors, the friend of one, might himself be related to both, might prejudice them against me, might—Here, starting up, I snapped the thread of conjecture, for right before my eyes, on the table beside which I had seated myself on entering my room, lay a card of invitation:—

MRS. POYNTZ

At Home,

Wednesday, May 15th

Early

Mrs. Poyntz,—Mrs. Colonel Poyntz, the Queen of the Hill? There, at her house, I could not fail to learn all about the new comers, who could never without her sanction have settled on her domain.

I hastily changed my dress, and, with beating heart, wound my way up the venerable eminence.

I did not pass through the lane which led direct to Abbots' House (for that old building stood solitary amidst its grounds a little apart from the spacious platform on which the society of the Hill was concentrated), but up the broad causeway, with vistaed gaslamps; the gayer shops still-unclosed, the tide of busy life only slowly ebbing from the still-animated street, on to a square, in which the four main thoroughfares of the city converged,

and which formed the boundary of Low Town. A huge dark archway, popularly called Monk's Gate, at the angle of this square, made the entrance to Abbey Hill. When the arch was passed, one felt at once that one was in the town of a former day. The pavement was narrow and rugged; the shops small, their upper stories projecting, with here and there plastered fronts, quaintly arabesque. An ascent, short, but steep and tortuous, conducted at once to the old Abbey Church, nobly situated in a vast quadrangle, round which were the genteel and gloomy dwellings of the Areopagites of the Hill. More genteel and less gloomy than the rest—lights at the windows and flowers on the balcony—stood forth, flanked by a garden wall at either side, the mansion of Mrs. Colonel Poyntz.

As I entered the drawing-room, I heard the voice of the hostess; it was a voice clear, decided, metallic, bell-like, uttering these words: "Taken Abbots' House? I will tell you."

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Poyntz was seated on the sofa; at her right sat fat Mrs. Bruce, who was a Scotch lord's grand-daughter; at her left thin Miss Brabazon, who was an Irish baronet's niece. Around her—a few seated, many standing—had grouped all the guests, save two old gentlemen, who had remained aloof with Colonel Poyntz near the whist-table, waiting for the fourth old gentleman who was to make up the rubber, but who was at that moment spell-bound in the magic circle which curiosity, that strongest of social demons, had attracted round the hostess.

"Taken Abbots' House? I will tell you.—Ah, Dr. Fenwick, charmed to see you. You know Abbots' House is let at last? Well, Miss Brabazon, dear, you ask who has taken it. I will inform you,—a particular friend of mine."

"Indeed! Dear me!" said Miss Brabazon, looking confused. "I hope I did not say anything to—"

"Wound my feelings. Not in the least. You said your uncle Sir Phelim employed a coachmaker named Ashleigh, that Ashleigh was an uncommon name, though Ashley was a common one; you intimated an appalling suspicion that the Mrs. Ashleigh who had come to the Hill was the coach maker's widow. I relieve your mind,—she is not; she is the widow of Gilbert Ashleigh, of Kirby Hall."

"Gilbert Ashleigh," said one of the guests, a bachelor, whose

parents had reared him for the Church, but who, like poor Goldsmith, did not think himself good enough for it, a mistake of over-modesty, for he matured into a very harmless creature. "Gilbert Ashleigh? I was at Oxford with him,—a gentleman commoner of Christ Church. Good-looking man, very; sapped —"

"Sapped! what's that?—Oh, studied. That he did all his life. He married young,—Anne Chaloner; she and I were girls together; married the same year. They settled at Kirby Hall —nice place, but dull. Poyntz and I spent a Christmas there. Ashleigh when he talked was charming, but he talked very little. Anne, when she talked, was commonplace, and she talked very much. Naturally, poor thing,—-she was so happy. Poyntz and I did not spend another Christmas there. Friendship is long, but life is short. Gilbert Ashleigh's life was short indeed; he died in the seventh year of his marriage, leaving only one child, a girl. Since then, though I never spent another Christmas at Kirby Hall, I have frequently spent a day there, doing my best to cheer up Anne. She was no longer talkative, poor dear. Wrapped up in her child, who has now grown into a beautiful girl of eighteen—such eyes, her father's—the real dark blue—rare; sweet creature, but delicate; not, I hope, consumptive, but delicate; quiet, wants life. My girl Jane adores her. Jane has life enough for two."

"Is Miss Ashleigh the heiress to Kirby Hall?" asked Mrs. Bruce, who had an unmarried son.

"No. Kirby Hall passed to Ashleigh Sumner, the male heir,

a cousin. And the luckiest of cousins! Gilbert's sister, showy woman (indeed all show), had contrived to marry her kinsman, Sir Walter Ashleigh Haughton, the head of the Ashleigh family, —just the man made to be the reflector of a showy woman! He died years ago, leaving an only son, Sir James, who was killed last winter, by a fall from his horse. And here, again, Ashleigh Summer proved to be the male heir-at-law. During the minority of this fortunate youth, Mrs. Ashleigh had rented Kirby Hall of his guardian. He is now just coming of age, and that is why she leaves. Lilian Ashleigh will have, however, a very good fortune, —is what we genteel paupers call an heiress. Is there anything more you want to know?"

Said thin Miss Brabazon, who took advantage of her thinness to wedge herself into every one's affairs, "A most interesting account. What a nice place Abbots' House could be made with a little taste! So aristocratic! Just what I should like if I could afford it! The drawing-room should be done up in the Moorish style, with geranium-coloured silk curtains, like dear Lady L ——'s boudoir at Twickenham. And Mrs. Ashleigh has taken the house on lease too, I suppose!" Here Miss Brabazon fluttered her fan angrily, and then exclaimed, "But what on earth brings Mrs. Ashleigh here?"

Answered Mrs. Colonel Poyntz, with the military frankness by which she kept her company in good humour, as well as awe,—

"Why do any of us come here? Can any one tell me?"

There was a blank silence, which the hostess herself was the

first to break.

"None of us present can say why we came here. I can tell you why Mrs. Ashleigh came. Our neighbour, Mr. Vigors, is a distant connection of the late Gilbert Ashleigh, one of the executors to his will, and the guardian to the heir-at-law. About ten days ago Mr. Vigors called on me, for the first time since I felt it my duty to express my disapprobation of the strange vagaries so unhappily conceived by our poor dear friend Dr. Lloyd. And when he had taken his chair, just where you now sit, Dr. Fenwick, he said in a sepulchral voice, stretching out two fingers, so,—as if I were one of the what-do-you-call-'ems who go to sleep when he bids them, 'Marm, you know Mrs. Ashleigh? You correspond with her?' 'Yes, Mr. Vigors; is there any crime in that? You look as if there were.' 'No crime, marm,' said the man, quite seriously. 'Mrs. Ashleigh is a lady of amiable temper, and you are a woman of masculine understanding.'"

Here there was a general titter. Mrs. Colonel Poyntz hushed it with a look of severe surprise. "What is there to laugh at? All women would be men if they could. If my understanding is masculine, so much the better for me. I thanked Mr. Vigors for his very handsome compliment, and he then went on to say that though Mrs. Ashleigh would now have to leave Kirby Hall in a very few weeks, she seemed quite unable to make up her mind where to go; that it had occurred to him that, as Miss Ashleigh was of an age to see a little of the world, she ought not to remain buried in the country; while, being of quiet mind, she

recoiled from the dissipation of London. Between the seclusion of the one and the turmoil of the other, the society of L—— was a happy medium. He should be glad of my opinion. He had put off asking for it, because he owned his belief that I had behaved unkindly to his lamented friend, Dr. Lloyd; but he now found himself in rather an awkward position. His ward, young Sumner, had prudently resolved on fixing his country residence at Kirby Hall, rather than at Haughton Park, the much larger seat which had so suddenly passed to his inheritance, and which he could not occupy without a vast establishment, that to a single man, so young, would be but a cumbersome and costly trouble. Mr. Vigors was pledged to his ward to obtain him possession of Kirby Hall, the precise day agreed upon, but Mrs. Ashleigh did not seem disposed to stir,—could not decide where else to go. Mr. Vigors was loth to press hard on his old friend's widow and child. It was a thousand pities Mrs Ashleigh could not make up her mind; she had had ample time for preparation. A word from me at this moment would be an effective kindness. Abbots' House was vacant, with a garden so extensive that the ladies would not miss the country. Another party was after it, but —'Say no more,' I cried; 'no party but my dear old friend Anne Ashleigh shall have Abbots' House. So that question is settled.' I dismissed Mr. Vigors, sent for my carriage, that is, for Mr. Barker's yellow fly and his best horses,—and drove that very day to Kirby Hall, which, though not in this county, is only twenty-five miles distant. I slept there that night. By nine o'clock the next

morning I had secured Mrs. Ashleigh's consent, on the promise to save her all trouble; came back, sent for the landlord, settled the rent, lease, agreement; engaged Forbes' vans to remove the furniture from Kirby Hall; told Forbes to begin with the beds. When her own bed came, which was last night, Anne Ashleigh came too. I have seen her this morning. She likes the place, so does Lilian. I asked them to meet you all here to-night; but Mrs. Ashleigh was tired. The last of the furniture was to arrive today; and though dear Mrs. Ashleigh is an undecided character, she is not inactive. But it is not only the planning where to put tables and chairs that would have tried her today: she has had Mr. Vigors on her hands all the afternoon, and he has been—here's her little note—what are the words? No doubt 'most overpowering and oppressive;' no, 'most kind and attentive,'—different words, but, as applied to Mr. Vigors, they mean the same thing.

"And now, next Monday—-we must leave them in peace till then—you will all call on the Ashleighs. The Hill knows what is due to itself; it cannot delegate to Mr. Vigors, a respectable man indeed, but who does not belong to its set, its own proper course of action towards those who would shelter themselves on its bosom. The Hill cannot be kind and attentive, overpowering or oppressive by proxy. To those newborn into its family circle it cannot be an indifferent godmother; it has towards them all the feelings of a mother,—or of a stepmother, as the case may be. Where it says 'This can be no child of mine,' it is a stepmother indeed; but in all those whom I have presented to its arms, it has

hitherto, I am proud to say, recognized desirable acquaintances, and to them the Hill has been a mother. And now, my dear Mr. Sloman, go to your rubber; Poyntz is impatient, though he don't show it. Miss Brabazon, love, we all long to see you seated at the piano,—you play so divinely! Something gay, if you please; something gay, but not very noisy,—Mr. Leopold Symthe will turn the leaves for you. Mrs. Bruce, your own favourite set at vingt-un, with four new recruits. Dr. Fenwick, you are like me, don't play cards, and don't care for music; sit here, and talk or not, as you please, while I knit."

The other guests thus disposed of, some at the card-tables, some round the piano, I placed myself at Mrs. Poyntz's side, on a seat niched in the recess of a window which an evening unusually warm for the month of May permitted to be left open. I was next to one who had known Lilian as a child, one from whom I had learned by what sweet name to call the image which my thoughts had already shrined. How much that I still longed to know she could tell me! But in what form of question could I lead to the subject, yet not betray my absorbing interest in it? Longing to speak, I felt as if stricken dumb; stealing an unquiet glance towards the face beside me, and deeply impressed with that truth which the Hill had long ago reverently acknowledged, —namely, that Mrs. Colonel Poyntz was a very superior woman, a very powerful creature.

And there she sat knitting, rapidly, firmly; a woman somewhat on the other side of forty, complexion a bronze paleness,

hair a bronze brown, in strong ringlets cropped short behind,—handsome hair for a man; lips that, when closed, showed inflexible decision, when speaking, became supple and flexible with an easy humour and a vigilant finesse; eyes of a red hazel, quick but steady,—observing, piercing, dauntless eyes; altogether a fine countenance,—would have been a very fine countenance in a man; profile sharp, straight, clear-cut, with an expression, when in repose, like that of a sphinx; a frame robust, not corpulent; of middle height, but with an air and carriage that made her appear tall; peculiarly white firm hands, indicative of vigorous health, not a vein visible on the surface.

There she sat knitting, knitting, and I by her side, gazing now on herself, now on her work, with a vague idea that the threads in the skein of my own web of love or of life were passing quick through those noiseless fingers. And, indeed, in every web of romance, the fondest, one of the Parcae is sure to be some matter-of-fact She, Social Destiny, as little akin to romance herself as was this worldly Queen of the Hill.

CHAPTER VII

I have given a sketch of the outward woman of Mrs. Colonel Poyntz. The inner woman was a recondite mystery deep as that of the sphinx, whose features her own resembled. But between the outward and the inward woman there is ever a third woman,—the conventional woman,—such as the whole human being appears to the world,—always mantled, sometimes masked.

I am told that the fine people of London do not recognize the title of "Mrs. Colonel." If that be true, the fine people of London must be clearly in the wrong, for no people in the universe could be finer than the fine people of Abbey Hill; and they considered their sovereign had as good a right to the title of Mrs. Colonel as the Queen of England has to that of "our Gracious Lady." But Mrs. Poyntz herself never assumed the title of Mrs. Colonel; it never appeared on her cards,—any more than the title of "Gracious Lady" appears on the cards which convey the invitation that a Lord Steward or Lord Chamberlain is commanded by her Majesty to issue. To titles, indeed, Mrs. Poyntz evinced no superstitious reverence. Two peeresses, related to her, not distantly, were in the habit of paying her a yearly visit which lasted two or three days. The Hill considered these visits an honour to its eminence. Mrs. Poyntz never seemed to esteem them an honour to herself; never boasted of them; never sought to show off her grand relations,

nor put herself the least out of the way to receive them. Her mode of life was free from ostentation. She had the advantage of being a few hundreds a year richer than any other inhabitant of the Hill; but she did not devote her superior resources to the invidious exhibition of superior splendour. Like a wise sovereign, the revenues of her exchequer were applied to the benefit of her subjects, and not to the vanity of egotistical parade. As no one else on the Hill kept a carriage, she declined to keep one. Her entertainments were simple, but numerous. Twice a week she received the Hill, and was genuinely at home to it. She contrived to make her parties proverbially agreeable. The refreshments were of the same kind as those which the poorest of her old maids of honour might proffer; but they were better of their kind, the best of their kind,—the best tea, the best lemonade, the best cakes. Her rooms had an air of comfort, which was peculiar to them. They looked like rooms accustomed to receive, and receive in a friendly way; well warmed, well lighted, card-tables and piano each in the place that made cards and music inviting; on the walls a few old family portraits, and three or four other pictures said to be valuable and certainly pleasing,—two Watteaus, a Canaletti, a Weenix; plenty of easy-chairs and settees covered with a cheerful chintz,—in the arrangement of the furniture generally an indescribable careless elegance. She herself was studiously plain in dress, more conspicuously free from jewelry and trinkets than any married lady on the Hill. But I have heard from those who were authorities on such a subject

that she was never seen in a dress of the last year's fashion. She adopted the mode as it came out, just enough to show that she was aware it was out; but with a sober reserve, as much as to say, "I adopt the fashion as far as it suits myself; I do not permit the fashion to adopt me." In short, Mrs. Colonel Poyntz was sometimes rough, sometimes coarse, always masculine, and yet somehow or other masculine in a womanly way; but she was never vulgar because never affected. It was impossible not to allow that she was a thorough gentlewoman, and she could do things that lower other gentlewomen, without any loss of dignity. Thus she was an admirable mimic, certainly in itself the least ladylike condescension of humour. But when she mimicked, it was with so tranquil a gravity, or so royal a good humour, that one could only say, "What talents for society dear Mrs. Colonel has!" As she was a gentlewoman emphatically, so the other colonel, the he-colonel, was emphatically a gentleman; rather shy, but not cold; hating trouble of every kind, pleased to seem a cipher in his own house. If the sole study of Mrs. Colonel had been to make her husband comfortable, she could not have succeeded better than by bringing friends about him and then taking them off his hands. Colonel Poyntz, the he-colonel, had seen, in his youth, actual service; but had retired from his profession many years ago, shortly after his marriage. He was a younger brother of one of the principal squires in the country; inherited the house he lived in, with some other valuable property in and about L——, from an uncle; was considered a good landlord;

and popular in Low Town, though he never interfered in its affairs. He was punctiliously neat in his dress; a thin youthful figure, crowned with a thick youthful wig. He never seemed to read anything but the newspapers and the "Meteorological Journal:" was supposed to be the most weatherwise man in all L——. He had another intellectual predilection,—whist; but in that he had less reputation for wisdom. Perhaps it requires a rarer combination of mental faculties to win an odd trick than to divine a fall in the glass. For the rest, the he-colonel, many years older than his wife, despite the thin youthful figure, was an admirable aid-de-camp to the general in command, Mrs. Colonel; and she could not have found one more obedient, more devoted, or more proud of a distinguished chief.

In giving to Mrs. Colonel Poyntz the appellation of Queen of the Hill, let there be no mistake. She was not a constitutional sovereign; her monarchy was absolute. All her proclamations had the force of laws.

Such ascendancy could not have been attained without considerable talents for acquiring and keeping it. Amidst all her off-hand, brisk, imperious frankness, she had the ineffable discrimination of tact. Whether civil or rude, she was never civil or rude but what she carried public opinion along with her. Her knowledge of general society must have been limited, as must be that of all female sovereigns; but she seemed gifted with an intuitive knowledge of human nature, which she applied to her special ambition of ruling it. I have not a doubt that if she had

been suddenly transferred, a perfect stranger, to the world of London, she would have soon forced her way to its selectest circles, and, when once there, held her own against a duchess.

I have said that she was not affected: this might be one cause of her sway over a set in which nearly every other woman was trying rather to seem, than to be, a somebody.

But if Mrs. Colonel Poyntz was not artificial, she was artful, or perhaps I might more justly say artistic. In all she said and did there were conduct, system, plan. She could be a most serviceable friend, a most damaging enemy; yet I believe she seldom indulged in strong likings or strong hatreds. All was policy,—a policy akin to that of a grand party chief, determined to raise up those whom, for any reason of state, it was prudent to favour, and to put down those whom, for any reason of state, it was expedient to humble or to crush.

Ever since the controversy with Dr. Lloyd, this lady had honoured me with her benignest countenance; and nothing could be more adroit than the manner in which, while imposing me on others as an oracular authority, she sought to subject to her will the oracle itself.

She was in the habit of addressing me in a sort of motherly way, as if she had the deepest interest in my welfare, happiness, and reputation. And thus, in every compliment, in every seeming mark of respect, she maintained the superior dignity of one who takes from responsible station the duty to encourage rising merit; so that, somehow or other, despite all that pride which made me

believe that I needed no helping hand to advance or to clear my way through the world, I could not shake off from my mind the impression that I was mysteriously patronized by Mrs. Colonel Poyntz.

We might have sat together five minutes, side by side in silence as complete as if in the cave of Trophonius—when without looking up from her work, Mrs. Poyntz said abruptly,—

"I am thinking about you, Dr. Fenwick. And you—are thinking about some other woman. Ungrateful man!"

"Unjust accusation! My very silence should prove how intently my thoughts were fixed on you, and on the weird web which springs under your hand in meshes that bewilder the gaze and snare the attention."

Mrs. Poyntz looked up at me for a moment—one rapid glance of the bright red hazel eye—and said,—

"Was I really in your thoughts? Answer truly."

"Truly, I answer, you were."

"That is strange! Who can it be?"

"Who can it be? What do you mean?"

"If you were thinking of me, it was in connection with some other person,—some other person of my own sex. It is certainly not poor dear Miss Brabazon. Who else can it be?"

Again the red eye shot over me, and I felt my cheek redden beneath it.

"Hush!" she said, lowering her voice; "you are in love!"

"In love!—I! Permit me to ask you why you think so?"

"The signs are unmistakable; you are altered in your manner, even in the expression of your face, since I last saw you; your manner is generally quiet and observant,—it is now restless and distracted; your expression of face is generally proud and serene,—it is now humbled and troubled. You have something on your mind! It is not anxiety for your reputation,—that is established; nor for your fortune,—that is made; it is not anxiety for a patient or you would scarcely be here. But anxiety it is,—an anxiety that is remote from your profession, that touches your heart and is new to it!"

I was startled, almost awed; but I tried to cover my confusion with a forced laugh.

"Profound observer! Subtle analyst! You have convinced me that I must be in love, though I did not suspect it before. But when I strive to conjecture the object, I am as much perplexed as yourself; and with you, I ask, who can it be?"

"Whoever it be," said Mrs. Poyntz, who had paused, while I spoke, from her knitting, and now resumed it very slowly and very carefully, as if her mind and her knitting worked in unison together,—"whoever it be, love in you would be serious; and, with or without love, marriage is a serious thing to us all. It is not every pretty girl that would suit Allen Fenwick."

"Alas! is there any pretty girl whom Allen Fenwick would suit?"

"Tut! You should be above the fretful vanity that lays traps for a compliment. Yes; the time has come in your life and your

career when you would do well to marry. I give my consent to that," she added with a smile as if in jest, and a slight nod as if in earnest. The knitting here went on more decidedly, more quickly. "But I do not yet see the person. No! 'T is a pity, Allen Fenwick" (whenever Mrs. Poyntz called me by my Christian name, she always assumed her majestic motherly manner),—"a pity that, with your birth, energies, perseverance, talents, and, let me add, your advantages of manner and person,—a pity that you did not choose a career that might achieve higher fortunes and louder fame than the most brilliant success can give to a provincial physician. But in that very choice you interest me. My choice has been much the same,—a small circle, but the first in it. Yet, had I been a man, or had my dear Colonel been a man whom it was in the power of a woman's art to raise one step higher in that metaphorical ladder which is not the ladder of the angels, why, then—what then? No matter! I am contented. I transfer my ambition to Jane. Do you not think her handsome?"

"There can be no doubt of that," said I, carelessly and naturally.

"I have settled Jane's lot in my own mind," resumed Mrs. Poyntz, striking firm into another row of knitting. "She will marry a country gentleman of large estate. He will go into parliament. She will study his advancement as I study Poyntz's comfort. If he be clever, she will help to make him a minister; if he be not clever, his wealth will make her a personage, and lift him into a personage's husband. And, now that you see I have

no matrimonial designs on you, Allen Fenwick, think if it will be worth while to confide in me. Possibly I may be useful—"

"I know not how to thank you; but, as yet, I have nothing to confide."

While thus saying, I turned my eyes towards the open window beside which I sat. It was a beautiful soft night, the May moon in all her splendour. The town stretched, far and wide, below with all its numberless lights,—below, but somewhat distant; an intervening space was covered, here, by the broad quadrangle (in the midst of which stood, massive and lonely, the grand old church), and, there, by the gardens and scattered cottages or mansions that clothed the sides of the hill.

"Is not that house," I said, after a short pause, "yonder with the three gables, the one in which—in which poor Dr. Lloyd lived —Abbots' House?"

I spoke abruptly, as if to intimate my desire to change the subject of conversation. My hostess stopped her knitting, half rose, looked forth.

"Yes. But what a lovely night! How is it that the moon blends into harmony things of which the sun only marks the contrast? That stately old church tower, gray with its thousand years, those vulgar tile-roofs and chimney-pots raw in the freshness of yesterday,—now, under the moonlight, all melt into one indivisible charm!"

As my hostess thus spoke, she had left her seat, taking her work with her, and passed from the window into the balcony. It

was not often that Mrs. Poyntz condescended to admit what is called "sentiment" into the range of her sharp, practical, worldly talk; but she did so at times,—always, when she did, giving me the notion of an intellect much too comprehensive not to allow that sentiment has a place in this life, but keeping it in its proper place, by that mixture of affability and indifference with which some high-born beauty allows the genius, but checks the presumption, of a charming and penniless poet. For a few minutes her eyes roved over the scene in evident enjoyment; then, as they slowly settled upon the three gables of Abbots' House, her face regained that something of hardness which belonged to its decided character; her fingers again mechanically resumed her knitting, and she said, in her clear, unsoftened, metallic chime of voice, "Can you guess why I took so much trouble to oblige Mr. Vigors and locate Mrs. Ashleigh yonder?"

"You favoured us with a full explanation of your reasons."

"Some of my reasons; not the main one. People who undertake the task of governing others, as I do, be their rule a kingdom or a hamlet, must adopt a principle of government and adhere to it. The principle that suits best with the Hill is Respect for the Proprieties. We have not much money; entre nous, we have no great rank. Our policy is, then, to set up the Proprieties as an influence which money must court and rank is afraid of. I had learned just before Mr. Vigors called on me that Lady Sarah Bellasis entertained the idea of hiring Abbots' House. London has set its face against her; a provincial town would be more

charitable. An earl's daughter, with a good income and an awfully bad name, of the best manners and of the worst morals, would have made sad havoc among the Proprieties. How many of our primmest old maids would have deserted tea and Mrs. Poyntz for champagne and her ladyship! The Hill was never in so imminent a danger. Rather than Lady Sarah Bellasis should have had that house, I would have taken it myself, and stocked it with owls.

"Mrs. Ashleigh turned up just in the critical moment. Lady Sarah is foiled, the Proprieties safe, and so that question is settled."

"And it will be pleasant to have your early friend so near you."

Mrs. Poyntz lifted her eyes full upon me.

"Do you know Mrs. Ashleigh?"

"Not in the least."

"She has many virtues and few ideas. She is commonplace weak, as I am commonplace strong. But commonplace weak can be very lovable. Her husband, a man of genius and learning, gave her his whole heart,—a heart worth having; but he was not ambitious, and he despised the world."

"I think you said your daughter was very much attached to Miss Ashleigh? Does her character resemble her mother's?"

I was afraid while I spoke that I should again meet Mrs. Poyntz's searching gaze, but she did not this time look up from her work.

"No; Lilian is anything but commonplace."

"You described her as having delicate health; you implied a

hope that she was not consumptive. I trust that there is no serious reason for apprehending a constitutional tendency which at her age would require the most careful watching!"

"I trust not. If she were to die—Dr. Fenwick, what is the matter?"

So terrible had been the picture which this woman's words had brought before me, that I started as if my own life had received a shock.

"I beg pardon," I said falteringly, pressing my hand to my heart; "a sudden spasm here,—it is over now. You were saying that—that—"

"I was about to say-" and here Mrs. Poyntz laid her hand lightly on mine,—"I was about to say that if Lilian Ashleigh were to die, I should mourn for her less than I might for one who valued the things of the earth more. But I believe there is no cause for the alarm my words so inconsiderately excited in you. Her mother is watchful and devoted; and if the least thing ailed Lilian, she would call in medical advice. Mr. Vigors would, I know, recommend Dr. Jones."

Closing our conference with those stinging words, Mrs. Poyntz here turned back into the drawing-room.

I remained some minutes on the balcony, disconcerted, enraged. With what consummate art had this practised diplomatist wound herself into my secret! That she had read my heart better than myself was evident from that Parthian shaft, barbed with Dr. Jones, which she had shot over her shoulder in

retreat. That from the first moment in which she had decoyed me to her side, she had detected "the something" on my mind, was perhaps but the ordinary quickness of female penetration. But it was with no ordinary craft that the whole conversation afterwards had been so shaped as to learn the something, and lead me to reveal the some one to whom the something was linked. For what purpose? What was it to her? What motive could she have beyond the mere gratification of curiosity? Perhaps, at first, she thought I had been caught by her daughter's showy beauty, and hence the half-friendly, half-cynical frankness with which she had avowed her ambitious projects for that young lady's matrimonial advancement. Satisfied by my manner that I cherished no presumptuous hopes in that quarter, her scrutiny was doubtless continued from that pleasure in the exercise of a wily intellect which impels schemers and politicians to an activity for which, without that pleasure itself, there would seem no adequate inducement. And besides, the ruling passion of this petty sovereign was power; and if knowledge be power, there is no better instrument of power over a contumacious subject than that hold on his heart which is gained in the knowledge of its secret.

But "secret"! Had it really come to this? Was it possible that the mere sight of a human face, never beheld before, could disturb the whole tenor of my life,—a stranger of whose mind and character I knew nothing, whose very voice I had never heard? It was only by the intolerable pang of anguish that had

rent my heart in the words, carelessly, abruptly spoken, “if she were to die,” that I had felt how the world would be changed to me, if indeed that face were seen in it no more! Yes, secret it was no longer to myself, I loved! And like all on whom love descends, sometimes softly, slowly, with the gradual wing of the cushat settling down into its nest, sometimes with the swoop of the eagle on his unsuspecting quarry, I believed that none ever before loved as I loved; that such love was an abnormal wonder, made solely for me, and I for it. Then my mind insensibly hushed its angrier and more turbulent thoughts, as my gaze rested upon the roof-tops of Lilian’s home, and the shimmering silver of the moonlit willow, under which I had seen her gazing into the roseate heavens.

CHAPTER VIII

When I returned to the drawing-room, the party was evidently about to break up. Those who had grouped round the piano were now assembled round the refreshment-table. The cardplayers had risen, and were settling or discussing gains and losses. While I was searching for my hat, which I had somewhere mislaid, a poor gentleman, tormented by tic-doloureux, crept timidly up to me,—the proudest and the poorest of all the hidalgos settled on the Hill. He could not afford a fee for a physician's advice; but pain had humbled his pride, and I saw at a glance that he was considering how to take a surreptitious advantage of social intercourse, and obtain the advice without paying the fee. The old man discovered the hat before I did, stooped, took it up, extended it to me with the profound bow of the old school, while the other hand, clenched and quivering, was pressed into the hollow of his cheek, and his eyes met mine with wistful mute entreaty. The instinct of my profession seized me at once. I could never behold suffering without forgetting all else in the desire to relieve it.

"You are in pain," said I, softly. "Sit down and describe the symptoms. Here, it is true, I am no professional doctor, but I am a friend who is fond of doctoring, and knows something about it."

So we sat down a little apart from the other guests, and after a few questions and answers, I was pleased to find that his "tic" did not belong to the less curable kind of that agonizing neuralgia. I

was especially successful in my treatment of similar sufferings, for which I had discovered an anodyne that was almost specific. I wrote on a leaf of my pocketbook a prescription which I felt sure would be efficacious, and as I tore it out and placed it in his hand, I chanced to look up, and saw the hazel eyes of my hostess fixed upon me with a kinder and softer expression than they often condescended to admit into their cold and penetrating lustre. At that moment, however, her attention was drawn from me to a servant, who entered with a note, and I heard him say, though in an undertone, "From Mrs. Ashleigh."

She opened the note, read it hastily, ordered the servant to wait without the door, retired to her writing-table, which stood near the place at which I still lingered, rested her face on her hand, and seemed musing. Her meditation was very soon over. She turned her head, and to my surprise, beckoned to me. I approached.

"Sit here," she whispered: "turn your back towards those people, who are no doubt watching us. Read this."

She placed in my hand the note she had just received. It contained but a few words, to this effect:—

> DEAR MARGARET,—I am so distressed. Since I wrote to you a few hours ago, Lilian is taken suddenly ill, and I fear seriously. What medical man should I send for? Let my servant have his name and address.
>
> *A. A.*

I sprang from my seat.

"Stay," said Mrs. Poyntz. "Would you much care if I sent the

servant to Dr. Jones?"

"Ah, madam, you are cruel! What have I done that you should become my enemy?"

"Enemy! No. You have just befriended one of my friends. In this world of fools intellect should ally itself with intellect. No; I am not your enemy! But you have not yet asked me to be your friend."

Here she put into my hands a note she had written while thus speaking. "Receive your credentials. If there be any cause for alarm, or if I can be of use, send for me." Resuming the work she had suspended, but with lingering, uncertain fingers, she added, "So far, then, this is settled. Nay, no thanks; it is but little that is settled as yet."

CHAPTER IX

In a very few minutes I was once more in the grounds of that old gable house; the servant, who went before me, entered them by the stairs and the wicket-gate of the private entrance; that way was the shortest. So again I passed by the circling glade and the monastic well,—sward, trees, and ruins all suffused in the limpid moonlight.

And now I was in the house; the servant took up-stairs the note with which I was charged, and a minute or two afterwards returned and conducted me to the corridor above, in which Mrs. Ashleigh received me. I was the first to speak.

"Your daughter—is—is—not seriously ill, I hope. What is it?"

"Hush!" she said, under her breath. "Will you step this way for a moment?" She passed through a doorway to the right. I followed her, and as she placed on the table the light she had been holding, I looked round with a chill at the heart,—it was the room in which Dr. Lloyd had died. Impossible to mistake. The furniture indeed was changed, there was no bed in the chamber; but the shape of the room, the position of the high casement, which was now wide open, and through which the moonlight streamed more softly than on that drear winter night, the great square beams intersecting the low ceiling,—all were impressed vividly on my memory. The chair to which Mrs. Ashleigh beckoned me was placed just on the spot where I had

stood by the bedhead of the dying man.

I shrank back,—I could not have seated myself there. So I remained leaning against the chimney-piece, while Mrs. Ashleigh told her story.

She said that on their arrival the day before, Lilian had been in more than usually good health and spirits, delighted with the old house, the grounds, and especially the nook by the Monk's Well, at which Mrs. Ashleigh had left her that evening in order to make some purchases in the town, in company with Mr. Vigors. When Mrs. Ashleigh returned, she and Mr. Vigors had sought Lilian in that nook, and Mrs. Ashleigh then detected, with a mother's eye, some change in Lilian which alarmed her. She seemed listless and dejected, and was very pale; but she denied that she felt unwell. On regaining the house she had sat down in the room in which we then were,—"which," said Mrs. Ashleigh, "as it is not required for a sleeping-room, my daughter, who is fond of reading, wished to fit up as her own morning-room, or study. I left her here and went into the drawing-room below with Mr. Vigors. When he quitted me, which he did very soon, I remained for nearly an hour giving directions about the placing of furniture, which had just arrived, from our late residence. I then went up-stairs to join my daughter, and to my terror found her apparently lifeless in her chair. She had fainted away."

I interrupted Mrs. Ashleigh here. "Has Miss Ashleigh been subject to fainting fits?"

"No, never. When she recovered she seemed bewildered,

disinclined to speak. I got her to bed, and as she then fell quietly to sleep, my mind was relieved. I thought it only a passing effect of excitement, in a change of abode; or caused by something like malaria in the atmosphere of that part of the grounds in which I had found her seated."

"Very likely. The hour of sunset at this time of year is trying to delicate constitutions. Go on."

"About three quarters of an hour ago she woke up with a loud cry, and has been ever since in a state of great agitation, weeping violently, and answering none of my questions. Yet she does not seem light-headed, but rather what we call hysterical."

"You will permit me now to see her. Take comfort; in all you tell me I see nothing to warrant serious alarm."

CHAPTER X

To the true physician there is an inexpressible sanctity in the sick chamber. At its threshold the more human passions quit their hold on his heart. Love there would be profanation; even the grief permitted to others he must put aside. He must enter that room—a calm intelligence. He is disabled for his mission if he suffer aught to obscure the keen quiet glance of his science. Age or youth, beauty or deformity, innocence or guilt, merge their distinctions in one common attribute—human suffering appealing to human skill.

Woe to the households in which the trusted Healer feels not on his conscience the solemn obligations of his glorious art! Reverently as in a temple, I stood in the virgin's chamber. When her mother placed her hand in mine, and I felt the throb of its pulse, I was aware of no quicker beat of my own heart. I looked with a steady eye on the face more beautiful from the flush that deepened the delicate hues of the young cheek, and the lustre that brightened the dark blue of the wandering eyes. She did not at first heed me, did not seem aware of my presence; but kept murmuring to herself words which I could not distinguish.

At length, when I spoke to her, in that low, soothing tone which we learn at the sick-bed, the expression of her face altered suddenly; she passed the hand I did not hold over her forehead, turned round, looked at me full and long, with unmistakable

surprise, yet not as if the surprise displeased her,—less the surprise which recoils from the sight of a stranger than that which seems doubtfully to recognize an unexpected friend. Yet on the surprise there seemed to creep something of apprehension, of fear; her hand trembled, her voice quivered, as she said,—

"Can it be, can it be? Am I awake? Mother, who is this?"

"Only a kind visitor, Dr. Fenwick, sent by Mrs. Poyntz, for I was uneasy about you, darling. How are you now?"

"Better. Strangely better."

She removed her hand gently from mine, and with an involuntary modest shrinking turned towards Mrs. Ashleigh, drawing her mother towards herself, so that she became at once hidden from me.

Satisfied that there was here no delirium, nor even more than the slight and temporary fever which often accompanies a sudden nervous attack in constitutions peculiarly sensitive, I retired noiselessly from the room, and went, not into that which had been occupied by the ill-fated Naturalist, but down-stairs into the drawing-room, to write my prescription. I had already sent the servant off with it to the chemist's before Mrs. Ashleigh joined me.

"She seems recovering surprisingly; her forehead is cooler; she is perfectly self-possessed, only she cannot account for her own seizure,—cannot account either for the fainting or the agitation with which she awoke from sleep."

"I think I can account for both. The first room in which she

entered—that in which she fainted—had its window open; the sides of the window are overgrown with rank creeping plants in full blossom. Miss Ashleigh had already predisposed herself to injurious effects from the effluvia by fatigue, excitement, imprudence in sitting out at the fall of a heavy dew. The sleep after the fainting fit was the more disturbed, because Nature, always alert and active in subjects so young, was making its own effort to right itself from an injury. Nature has nearly succeeded. What I have prescribed will a little aid and accelerate that which Nature has yet to do, and in a day or two I do not doubt that your daughter will be perfectly restored. Only let me recommend care to avoid exposure to the open air during the close of the day. Let her avoid also the room in which she was first seized, for it is a strange phenomenon in nervous temperaments that a nervous attack may, without visible cause, be repeated in the same place where it was first experienced. You had better shut up the chamber for at least some weeks, burn fires in it, repaint and paper it, sprinkle chloroform. You are not, perhaps, aware that Dr. Lloyd died in that room after a prolonged illness. Suffer me to wait till your servant returns with the medicine, and let me employ the interval in asking you a few questions. Miss Ashleigh, you say, never had a fainting fit before. I should presume that she is not what we call strong. But has she ever had any illness that alarmed you?"

"Never."

"No great liability to cold and cough, to attacks of the chest

or lungs?"

"Certainly not. Still I have feared that she may have a tendency to consumption. Do you think so? Your questions alarm me!"

"I do not think so; but before I pronounce a positive opinion, one question more. You say you have feared a tendency to consumption. Is that disease in her family? She certainly did not inherit it from you. But on her father's side?"

"Her father," said Mrs. Ashleigh, with tears in her eyes, "died young, but of brain fever, which the medical men said was brought on by over study."

"Enough, my dear madam. What you say confirms my belief that your daughter's constitution is the very opposite to that in which the seeds of consumption lurk. It is rather that far nobler constitution, which the keenness of the nervous susceptibility renders delicate but elastic,—as quick to recover as it is to suffer."

"Thank you, thank you, Dr. Fenwick, for what you say. You take a load from my heart; for Mr. Vigors, I know, thinks Lilian consumptive, and Mrs. Poyntz has rather frightened me at times by hints to the same effect. But when you speak of nervous susceptibility, I do not quite understand you. My daughter is not what is commonly called nervous. Her temper is singularly even."

"But if not excitable, should you also say that she is not impressionable? The things which do not disturb her temper may, perhaps, deject her spirits. Do I make myself understood?"

"Yes, I think I understand your distinction; but I am not quite

sure if it applies. To most things that affect the spirits she is not more sensitive than other girls, perhaps less so; but she is certainly very impressionable in some things."

"In what?"

"She is more moved than any one I ever knew by objects in external nature, rural scenery, rural sounds, by music, by the books that she reads,—even books that are not works of imagination. Perhaps in all this she takes after her poor father, but in a more marked degree,—at least, I observe it more in her; for he was very silent and reserved. And perhaps also her peculiarities have been fostered by the seclusion in which she has been brought up. It was with a view to make her a little more like girls of her own age that our friend, Mrs. Poyntz, induced me to come here. Lilian was reconciled to this change; but she shrank from the thoughts of London, which I should have preferred. Her poor father could not endure London."

"Miss Ashleigh is fond of reading?"

"Yes, she is fond of reading, but more fond of musing. She will sit by herself for hours without book or work, and seem as abstracted as if in a dream. She was so even in her earliest childhood. Then she would tell me what she had been conjuring up to herself. She would say that she had seen—positively seen—beautiful lands far away from earth; flowers and trees not like ours. As she grew older this visionary talk displeased me, and I scolded her, and said that if others heard her, they would think that she was not only silly but very untruthful. So of late years

she never ventures to tell me what, in such dreamy moments, she suffers herself to imagine; but the habit of musing continues still. Do you not agree with Mrs. Poyntz that the best cure would be a little cheerful society amongst other young people?"

"Certainly," said I, honestly, though with a jealous pang. "But here comes the medicine. Will you take it up to her, and then sit with her half an hour or so? By that time I expect she will be asleep. I will wait here till you return. Oh, I can amuse myself with the newspapers and books on your table. Stay! one caution: be sure there are no flowers in Miss Ashleigh's sleeping-room. I think I saw a treacherous rose-tree in a stand by the window. If so, banish it."

Left alone, I examined the room in which, oh, thought of joy! I had surely now won the claim to become a privileged guest. I touched the books Lilian must have touched; in the articles of furniture, as yet so hastily disposed that the settled look of home was not about them, I still knew that I was gazing on things which her mind must associate with the history of her young life. That luteharp must be surely hers, and the scarf, with a girl's favourite colours,—pure white and pale blue,—and the bird-cage, and the childish ivory work-case, with implements too pretty for use,—all spoke of her.

It was a blissful, intoxicating revery, which Mrs. Ashleigh's entrance disturbed.

Lilian was sleeping calmly. I had no excuse to linger there any longer.

"I leave you, I trust, with your mind quite at ease," said I. "You will allow me to call to-morrow, in the afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, gratefully."

Mrs. Ashleigh held out her hand as I made towards the door.

Is there a physician who has not felt at times how that ceremonious fee throws him back from the garden-land of humanity into the market-place of money,—seems to put him out of the pale of equal friendship, and say, "True, you have given health and life. Adieu! there, you are paid for it!" With a poor person there would have been no dilemma, but Mrs. Ashleigh was affluent: to depart from custom here was almost impertinence. But had the penalty of my refusal been the doom of never again beholding Lilian, I could not have taken her mother's gold. So I did not appear to notice the hand held out to me, and passed by with a quickened step.

"But, Dr. Fenwick, stop!"

"No, ma'am, no! Miss Ashleigh would have recovered as soon without me. Whenever my aid is really wanted, then—but Heaven grant that time may never come! We will talk again about her to-morrow."

I was gone,—now in the garden ground, odorous with blossoms; now in the lane, inclosed by the narrow walls; now in the deserted streets, over which the moon shone full as in that winter night when I hurried from the chamber of death. But the streets were not ghastly now, and the moon was no longer Hecate, that dreary goddess of awe and spectres, but the sweet,

simple Lady of the Stars, on whose gentle face lovers have gazed ever since (if that guess of astronomers be true) she was parted from earth to rule the tides of its deeps from afar, even as love, from love divided, rules the heart that yearns towards it with mysterious law.

CHAPTER XI

With what increased benignity I listened to the patients who visited me the next morning! The whole human race seemed to be worthier of love, and I longed to diffuse amongst all some rays of the glorious hope that had dawned upon my heart. My first call, when I went forth, was on the poor young woman from whom I had been returning the day before, when an impulse, which seemed like a fate, had lured me into the grounds where I had first seen Lilian. I felt grateful to this poor patient; without her Lilian herself might be yet unknown to me.

The girl's brother, a young man employed in the police, and whose pay supported a widowed mother and the suffering sister, received me at the threshold of the cottage.

"Oh, sir, she is so much better to-day; almost free from pain. Will she live now; can she live?"

"If my treatment has really done the good you say; if she be really better under it, I think her recovery may be pronounced. But I must first see her."

The girl was indeed wonderfully better. I felt that my skill was achieving a signal triumph; but that day even my intellectual pride was forgotten in the luxurious unfolding of that sense of heart which had so newly waked into blossom.

As I recrossed the threshold, I smiled on the brother, who was still lingering there,—

"Your sister is saved, Wady. She needs now chiefly wine, and good though light nourishment; these you will find at my house; call there for them every day."

"God bless you, sir! If ever I can serve you—" His tongue faltered, he could say no more.

Serve me, Allen Fenwick—that poor policeman! Me, whom a king could not serve! What did I ask from earth but Fame and Lilian's heart? Thrones and bread man wins from the aid of others; fame and woman's heart he can only gain through himself.

So I strode gayly up the hill, through the iron gates, into the fairy ground, and stood before Lilian's home.

The man-servant, on opening the door, seemed somewhat confused, and said hastily before I spoke,—

"Not at home, sir; a note for you."

I turned the note mechanically in my hand; I felt stunned.

"Not at home! Miss Ashleigh cannot be out. How is she?"

"Better, sir, thank you."

I still could not open the note; my eyes turned wistfully towards the windows of the house, and there—at the drawing-room window—I encountered the scowl of Mr. Vigors. I coloured with resentment, divined that I was dismissed, and walked away with a proud crest and a firm step.

When I was out of the gates, in the blind lane, I opened the note. It began formally. "Mrs. Ashleigh presents her compliments," and went on to thank me, civilly enough, for my attendance the night before, would not give me the trouble to

repeat my visit, and inclosed a fee, double the amount of the fee prescribed by custom. I flung the money, as an asp that had stung me, over the high wall, and tore the note into shreds. Having thus idly vented my rage, a dull gnawing sorrow came heavily down upon all other emotions, stifling and replacing them. At the mouth of the lane I halted. I shrank from the thought of the crowded streets beyond; I shrank yet more from the routine of duties, which stretched before me in the desert into which daily life was so suddenly smitten. I sat down by the roadside, shading my dejected face with a nervous hand. I looked up as the sound of steps reached my ear, and saw Dr. Jones coming briskly along the lane, evidently from Abbots' House. He must have been there at the very time I had called. I was not only dismissed but supplanted. I rose before he reached the spot on which I had seated myself, and went my way into the town, went through my allotted round of professional visits; but my attentions were not so tenderly devoted, my skill so genially quickened by the glow of benevolence, as my poorer patients had found them in the morning. I have said how the physician should enter the sick-room. "A Calm Intelligence!" But if you strike a blow on the heart, the intellect suffers. Little worth, I suspect, was my "calm intelligence" that day. Bichat, in his famous book upon Life and Death, divides life into two classes,—animal and organic. Man's intellect, with the brain for its centre, belongs to life animal; his passions to life organic, centred in the heart, in the viscera. Alas! if the noblest passions through which alone we lift ourselves into

the moral realm of the sublime and beautiful really have their centre in the life which the very vegetable, that lives organically, shares with us! And, alas! if it be that life which we share with the vegetable, that can cloud, obstruct, suspend, annul that life centred in the brain, which we share with every being howsoever angelic, in every star howsoever remote, on whom the Creator bestows the faculty of thought!

CHAPTER XII

But suddenly I remembered Mrs. Poyntz. I ought to call on her. So I closed my round of visits at her door. The day was then far advanced, and the servant politely informed me that Mrs. Poyntz was at dinner. I could only leave my card, with a message that I would pay my respects to her the next day. That evening I received from her this note:—

> Dear Dr. Fenwick,—I regret much that I cannot have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow. Poyntz and I are going to visit his brother, at the other end of the county, and we start early. We shall be away some days. Sorry to hear from Mrs. Ashleigh that she has been persuaded by Mr. Vigors to consult Dr. Jones about Lilian. Vigors and Jones both frighten the poor mother, and insist upon consumptive tendencies. Unluckily, you seem to have said there was little the matter. Some doctors train their practice as some preachers fill their churches,—by adroit use of the appeals to terror. You do not want patients, Dr. Jones does.
>
> And, after all, better perhaps as it is.
>
> Yours, etc.
>
> *M. Poyntz.*

To my more selfish grief, anxiety for Lilian was now added. I had seen many more patients die from being mistreated for consumption than from consumption itself. And Dr. Jones was

a mercenary, cunning, needy man, with much crafty knowledge of human foibles, but very little skill in the treatment of human maladies. My fears were soon confirmed. A few days after I heard from Miss Brabazon that Miss Ashleigh was seriously ill, kept her room. Mrs. Ashleigh made this excuse for not immediately returning the visits which the Hill had showered upon her. Miss Brabazon had seen Dr. Jones, who had shaken his head, said it was a serious case; but that time and care (his time and his care!) might effect wonders.

How stealthily at the dead of the night I would climb the Hill and look towards the windows of the old sombre house,—one window, in which a light burned dim and mournful, the light of a sick-room,—of hers!

At length Mrs. Poyntz came back, and I entered her house, having fully resolved beforehand on the line of policy to be adopted towards the potentate whom I hoped to secure as an ally. It was clear that neither disguise nor half-confidence would baffle the penetration of so keen an intellect, nor propitiate the good will of so imperious and resolute a temper. Perfect frankness here was the wisest prudence; and after all, it was most agreeable to my own nature, and most worthy of my own honour.

Luckily, I found Mrs. Poyntz alone, and taking in both mine the hand she somewhat coldly extended to me, I said, with the earnestness of suppressed emotion,—

"You observed when I last saw you, that I had not yet asked you to be my friend. I ask it now. Listen to me with all the

indulgence you can vouchsafe, and let me at least profit by your counsel if you refuse to give me your aid."

Rapidly, briefly, I went on to say how I had first seen Lilian, and how sudden, how strange to myself, had been the impression which that first sight of her had produced.

"You remarked the change that had come over me," said I; "you divined the cause before I divined it myself,—divined it as I sat there beside you, thinking that through you I might see, in the freedom of social intercourse, the face that was then haunting me. You know what has since passed. Miss Ashleigh is ill; her case is, I am convinced, wholly misunderstood. All other feelings are merged in one sense of anxiety,—of alarm. But it has become due to me, due to all, to incur the risk of your ridicule even more than of your reproof, by stating to you thus candidly, plainly, bluntly, the sentiment which renders alarm so poignant, and which, if scarcely admissible to the romance of some wild dreamy boy, may seem an unpardonable folly in a man of my years and my sober calling,—due to me, to you, to Mrs. Ashleigh, because still the dearest thing in life to me is honour. And if you, who know Mrs. Ashleigh so intimately, who must be more or less aware of her plans or wishes for her daughter's future,—if you believe that those plans or wishes lead to a lot far more ambitious than an alliance with me could offer to Miss Ashleigh, then aid Mr. Vigors in excluding me from the house; aid me in suppressing a presumptuous, visionary passion. I cannot enter that house without love and hope at my heart; and the threshold

of that house I must not cross if such love and such hope would be a sin and a treachery in the eyes of its owner. I might restore Miss Ashleigh to health; her gratitude might—I cannot continue. This danger must not be to me nor to her, if her mother has views far above such a son-in-law. And I am the more bound to consider all this while it is yet time, because I heard you state that Miss Ashleigh had a fortune, was what would be here termed an heiress. And the full consciousness that whatever fame one in my profession may live to acquire, does not open those vistas of social power and grandeur which are opened by professions to my eyes less noble in themselves,—that full consciousness, I say, was forced upon me by certain words of your own. For the rest, you know my descent is sufficiently recognized as that amidst well-born gentry to have rendered me no mesalliance to families the most proud of their ancestry, if I had kept my hereditary estate and avoided the career that makes me useful to man. But I acknowledge that on entering a profession such as mine—entering any profession except that of arms or the senate —all leave their pedigree at its door, an erased or dead letter. All must come as equals, high-born or low-born, into that arena in which men ask aid from a man as he makes himself; to them his dead forefathers are idle dust. Therefore, to the advantage of birth I cease to have a claim. I am but a provincial physician, whose station would be the same had he been a cobbler's son. But gold retains its grand privilege in all ranks. He who has gold is removed from the suspicion that attaches to the greedy fortune-

hunter. My private fortune, swelled by my savings, is sufficient to secure to any one I married a larger settlement than many a wealthy squire can make. I need no fortune with a wife; if she have one, it would be settled on herself. Pardon these vulgar details. Now, have I made myself understood?"

"Fully," answered the Queen of the Hill, who had listened to me quietly, watchfully, and without one interruption, "fully; and you have done well to confide in me with so generous an unreserve. But before I say further, let me ask, what would be your advice for Lilian, supposing that you ought not to attend her? You have no trust in Dr. Jones; neither have I. And Annie Ashleigh's note received to-day, begging me to call, justifies your alarm. Still you think there is no tendency to consumption?"

"Of that I am certain so far as my slight glimpse of a case that to me, however, seems a simple and not uncommon one, will permit. But in the alternative you put—that my own skill, whatever its worth, is forbidden—my earnest advice is that Mrs. Ashleigh should take her daughter at once to London, and consult there those great authorities to whom I cannot compare my own opinion or experience; and by their counsel abide."

Mrs. Poyntz shaded her eyes with her hand for a few moments, and seemed in deliberation with herself. Then she said, with her peculiar smile, half grave, half ironical,—

"In matters more ordinary you would have won me to your side long ago. That Mr. Vigors should have presumed to cancel my recommendation to a settler on the Hill was an act of rebellion,

and involved the honour of my prerogative; but I suppressed my indignation at an affront so unusual, partly out of pique against yourself, but much more, I think, out of regard for you."

"I understand. You detected the secret of my heart; you knew that Mrs. Ashleigh would not wish to see her daughter the wife of a provincial physician."

"Am I sure, or are you sure, that the daughter herself would accept that fate; or if she accepted it, would not repent?"

"Do you not think me the vainest of men when I say this,—that I cannot believe I should be so enthralled by a feeling at war with my reason, unfavoured by anything I can detect in my habits of mind, or even by the dreams of a youth which exalted science and excluded love, unless I was intimately convinced that Miss Ashleigh's heart was free, that I could win, and that I could keep it! Ask me why I am convinced of this, and I can tell you no more why I think that she could love me than I can tell you why I love her!"

"I am of the world, worldly; but I am a woman, womanly,—though I may not care to be thought it. And, therefore, though what you say is, regarded in a worldly point of view, sheer nonsense, regarded in a womanly point of view, it is logically sound. But still you cannot know Lilian as I do. Your nature and hers are in strong contrast. I do not think she is a safe wife for you. The purest, the most innocent creature imaginable, certainly that, but always in the seventh heaven; and you in the seventh heaven just at this moment, but with an irresistible gravitation to the solid

earth, which will have its way again when the honeymoon is over —I do not believe you two would harmonize by intercourse. I do not believe Lilian would sympathize with you, and I am sure you could not sympathize with her throughout the long dull course of this workday life. And, therefore, for your sake, as well as hers, I was not displeased to find that Dr. Jones had replaced you; and now, in return for your frankness, I say frankly, do not go again to that house. Conquer this sentiment, fancy, passion, whatever it be. And I will advise Mrs. Ashleigh to take Lilian to town. Shall it be so settled?"

I could not speak. I buried my face in my hands—misery, misery, desolation!

I know not how long I remained thus silent, perhaps many minutes. At length I felt a cold, firm, but not ungentle hand placed upon mine; and a clear, full, but not discouraging voice said to me,—

"Leave me to think well over this conversation, and to ponder well the value of all you have shown that you so deeply feel. The interests of life do not fill both scales of the balance. The heart, which does not always go in the same scale with the interests, still has its weight in the scale opposed to them. I have heard a few wise men say, as many a silly woman says, 'Better be unhappy with one we love, than be happy with one we love not.' Do you say that too?"

"With every thought of my brain, every beat of my pulse, I say it."

“After that answer, all my questionings cease. You shall hear from me to-morrow. By that time, I shall have seen Annie and Lilian. I shall have weighed both scales of the balance,—and the heart here, Allen Fenwick, seems very heavy. Go, now. I hear feet on the stairs, Poyntz bringing up some friendly gossiper; gossipers are spies.”

I passed my hand over my eyes, tearless, but how tears would have relieved the anguish that burdened them! and, without a word, went down the stairs, meeting at the landing-place Colonel Poyntz and the old man whose pain my prescription had cured. The old man was whistling a merry tune, perhaps first learned on the playground. He broke from it to thank, almost to embrace me, as I slid by him. I seized his jocund blessing as a good omen, and carried it with me as I passed into the broad sunlight. Solitary —solitary! Should I be so evermore?

CHAPTER XIII

The next day I had just dismissed the last of my visiting patients, and was about to enter my carriage and commence my round, when I received a twisted note containing but these words: —

> Call on me to-day, as soon as you can.
> *M. Poyntz.*

A few minutes afterwards I was in Mrs. Poyntz's drawing-room.

"Well, Allen Fenwick" said she, "I do not serve friends by halves. No thanks! I but adhere to a principle I have laid down for myself. I spent last evening with the Ashleighs. Lilian is certainly much altered,—very weak, I fear very ill, and I believe very unskillfully treated by Dr. Jones. I felt that it was my duty to insist on a change of physician; but there was something else to consider before deciding who that physician should be. I was bound, as your confidante, to consult your own scruples of honour. Of course I could not say point-blank to Mrs. Ashleigh, 'Dr. Fenwick admires your daughter, would you object to him as a son-in-law?' Of course I could not touch at all on the secret with which you intrusted me; but I have not the less arrived at a conclusion, in agreement with my previous belief, that not being a woman of the world, Annie Ashleigh has none of the ambition

which women of the world would conceive for a daughter who has a good fortune and considerable beauty; that her predominant anxiety is for her child's happiness, and her predominant fear is that her child will die. She would never oppose any attachment which Lilian might form; and if that attachment were for one who had preserved her daughter's life, I believe her own heart would gratefully go with her daughter's. So far, then, as honour is concerned, all scruples vanish."

I sprang from my seat, radiant with joy. Mrs. Poyntz dryly continued: "You value yourself on your common-sense, and to that I address a few words of counsel which may not be welcome to your romance. I said that I did not think you and Lilian would suit each other in the long run; reflection confirms me in that supposition. Do not look at me so incredulously and so sadly. Listen, and take heed. Ask yourself what, as a man whose days are devoted to a laborious profession, whose ambition is entwined with its success, whose mind must be absorbed in its pursuits,—ask yourself what kind of a wife you would have sought to win; had not this sudden fancy for a charming face rushed over your better reason, and obliterated all previous plans and resolutions. Surely some one with whom your heart would have been quite at rest; by whom your thoughts would have been undistracted from the channels into which your calling should concentrate their flow; in short, a serene companion in the quiet holiday of a trustful home! Is it not so?"

"You interpret my own thoughts when they have turned

towards marriage. But what is there in Lilian Ashleigh that should mar the picture you have drawn?"

"What is there in Lilian Ashleigh which in the least accords with the picture? In the first place, the wife of a young physician should not be his perpetual patient. The more he loves her, and the more worthy she may be of love, the more her case will haunt him wherever he goes. When he returns home, it is not to a holiday; the patient he most cares for, the anxiety that most gnaws him, awaits him there."

"But, good heavens! why should Lilian Ashleigh be a perpetual patient? The sanitary resources of youth are incalculable. And—"

"Let me stop you; I cannot argue against a physician in love! I will give up that point in dispute, remaining convinced that there is something in Lilian's constitution which will perplex, torment, and baffle you. It was so with her father, whom she resembles in face and in character. He showed no symptoms of any grave malady. His outward form was, like Lilian's, a model of symmetry, except in this, that, like hers, it was too exquisitely delicate; but when seemingly in the midst of perfect health, at any slight jar on the nerves he would become alarmingly ill. I was sure that he would die young, and he did so."

"Ay, but Mrs. Ashleigh said that his death was from brain-fever, brought on by over-study. Rarely, indeed, do women so fatigue the brain. No female patient, in the range of my practice, ever died of purely mental exertion."

"Of purely mental exertion, no; but of heart emotion, many female patients, perhaps? Oh, you own that! I know nothing about nerves; but I suppose that, whether they act on the brain or the heart, the result to life is much the same if the nerves be too finely strung for life's daily wear and tear. And this is what I mean, when I say you and Lilian will not suit. As yet, she is a mere child; her nature undeveloped, and her affections therefore untried. You might suppose that you had won her heart; she might believe that she gave it to you, and both be deceived. If fairies nowadays condescended to exchange their offspring with those of mortals, and if the popular tradition did not represent a fairy changeling as an ugly peevish creature, with none of the grace of its parents, I should be half inclined to suspect that Lilian was one of the elfin people. She never seems at home on earth; and I do not think she will ever be contented with a prosaic earthly lot. Now I have told you why I do not think she will suit you. I must leave it to yourself to conjecture how far you would suit her. I say this in due season, while you may set a guard upon your impulse; while you may yet watch, and weigh, and meditate; and from this moment on that subject I say no more. I lend advice, but I never throw it away."

She came here to a dead pause, and began putting on her bonnet and scarf, which lay on the table beside her. I was a little chilled by her words, and yet more by the blunt, shrewd, hard look and manner which aided the effect of their delivery; but the chill melted away in the sudden glow of my heart when she again

turned towards me and said,—

"Of course you guess, from these preliminary cautions, that you are going into danger? Mrs. Ashleigh wishes to consult you about Lilian, and I propose to take you to her house."

"Oh, my friend, my dear friend, how can I ever repay you?" I caught her hand, the white firm hand, and lifted it to my lips.

She drew it somewhat hastily away, and laying it gently on my shoulder, said, in a soft voice, "Poor Allen, how little the world knows either of us! But how little perhaps we know ourselves! Come, your carriage is here? That is right; we must put down Dr. Jones publicly and in all our state."

In the carriage Mrs. Poyntz told me the purport of that conversation with Mrs. Ashleigh to which I owed my re-introduction to Abbots' House. It seems that Mr. Vigors had called early the morning after my first visit! had evinced much discomposure on hearing that I had been summoned! dwelt much on my injurious treatment of Dr. Lloyd, whom, as distantly related to himself, and he (Mr. Vigors) being distantly connected with the late Gilbert Ashleigh, he endeavoured to fasten upon his listener as one of her husband's family, whose quarrel she was bound in honour to take up. He spoke of me as an infidel "tainted with French doctrines," and as a practitioner rash and presumptuous; proving his own freedom from presumption and rashness by flatly deciding that my opinion must be wrong. Previously to Mrs. Ashleigh's migration to L——, Mr. Vigors had interested her in the pretended phenomena of mesmerism.

He had consulted a clairvoyante, much esteemed by poor Dr. Lloyd, as to Lilian's health, and the clairvoyante had declared her to be constitutionally predisposed to consumption. Mr. Vigors persuaded Mrs. Ashleigh to come at once with him and see this clairvoyante herself, armed with a lock of Lilian's hair and a glove she had worn, as the media of mesmerical rapport.

The clairvoyante, one of those I had publicly denounced as an impostor, naturally enough denounced me in return. On being asked solemnly by Mr. Vigors "to look at Dr. Fenwick and see if his influence would be beneficial to the subject," the sibyl had become violently agitated, and said that, "when she looked at us together, we were enveloped in a black cloud; that this portended affliction and sinister consequences; that our rapport was antagonistic." Mr. Vigors then told her to dismiss my image, and conjure up that of Dr. Jones. Therewith the somnambule became more tranquil, and said: "Dr. Jones would do well if he would be guided by higher lights than his own skill, and consult herself daily as to the proper remedies. The best remedy of all would be mesmerism. But since Dr. Lloyd's death, she did not know of a mesmerist, sufficiently gifted, in affinity with the patient." In fine, she impressed and awed Mrs. Ashleigh, who returned in haste, summoned Dr. Jones, and dismissed myself.

"I could not have conceived Mrs. Ashleigh to be so utterly wanting in common-sense," said I. "She talked rationally enough when I saw her."

"She has common-sense in general, and plenty of the sense

most common," answered Mrs. Poyntz; "but she is easily led and easily frightened wherever her affections are concerned, and therefore, just as easily as she had been persuaded by Mr. Vigors and terrified by the somnambule, I persuaded her against the one, and terrified her against the other. I had positive experience on my side, since it was clear that Lilian had been getting rapidly worse under Dr. Jones's care. The main obstacles I had to encounter in inducing Mrs. Ashleigh to consult you again were, first, her reluctance to disoblige Mr. Vigors, as a friend and connection of Lilian's father; and, secondly, her sentiment of shame in re-inviting your opinion after having treated you with so little respect. Both these difficulties I took on myself. I bring you to her house, and, on leaving you, I shall go on to Mr. Vigors, and tell him what is done is my doing, and not to be undone by him; so that matter is settled. Indeed, if you were out of the question, I should not suffer Mr. Vigors to re-introduce all these mummeries of clairvoyance and mesmerism into the precincts of the Hill. I did not demolish a man I really liked in Dr. Lloyd, to set up a Dr. Jones, whom I despise, in his stead. Clairvoyance on Abbey Hill, indeed! I saw enough of it before."

"True; your strong intellect detected at once the absurdity of the whole pretence,—the falsity of mesmerism, the impossibility of clairvoyance."

"No, my strong intellect did nothing of the kind. I do not know whether mesmerism be false or clairvoyance impossible; and I don't wish to know. All I do know is, that I saw the Hill in great

danger,—young ladies allowing themselves to be put to sleep by gentlemen, and pretending they had no will of their own against such fascination! Improper and shocking! And Miss Brabazon beginning to prophesy, and Mrs. Leopold Smythe questioning her maid (whom Dr. Lloyd declared to be highly gifted) as to all the secrets of her friends. When I saw this, I said, 'The Hill is becoming demoralized; the Hill is making itself ridiculous; the Hill must be saved!' I remonstrated with Dr. Lloyd as a friend; he remained obdurate. I annihilated him as an enemy, not to me but to the State. I slew my best lover for the good of Rome. Now you know why I took your part,—not because I have any opinion, one way or the other, as to the truth or falsehood of what Dr. Lloyd asserted; but I have a strong opinion that, whether they be true or false, his notions were those which are not to be allowed on the Hill. And so, Allen Fenwick, that matter was settled."

Perhaps at another time I might have felt some little humiliation to learn that I had been honoured with the influence of this great potentate not as a champion of truth, but as an instrument of policy; and I might have owned to some twinge of conscience in having assisted to sacrifice a fellow-seeker after science—misled, no doubt, but preferring his independent belief to his worldly interest—and sacrifice him to those deities with whom science is ever at war,—the Prejudices of a Clique sanctified into the Proprieties of the World. But at that moment the words I heard made no perceptible impression on my mind. The gables of Abbots' House were visible above the evergreens

and lilacs; another moment, and the carriage stopped at the door.

CHAPTER XIV

Mrs. Ashleigh received us in the dining-room. Her manner to me, at first, was a little confused and shy. But my companion soon communicated something of her own happy ease to her gentler friend. After a short conversation we all three went to Lilian, who was in a little room on the ground-floor, fitted up as her study. I was glad to perceive that my interdict of the deathchamber had been respected.

She reclined on a sofa near the window, which was, however, jealously closed; the light of the bright May-day obscured by blinds and curtains; a large fire on the hearth; the air of the room that of a hot-house,—the ignorant, senseless, exploded system of nursing into consumption those who are confined on suspicion of it! She did not heed us as we entered noiselessly; her eyes were drooped languidly on the floor, and with difficulty I suppressed the exclamation that rose to my lips on seeing her. She seemed within the last few days so changed, and on the aspect of the countenance there was so profound a melancholy! But as she slowly turned at the sound of our footsteps, and her eyes met mine, a quick blush came into the wan cheek, and she half rose, but sank back as if the effort exhausted her. There was a struggle for breath, and a low hollow cough. Was it possible that I had been mistaken, and that in that cough was heard the warning knell of the most insidious enemy to youthful life?

I sat down by her side; I lured her on to talk of indifferent subjects,—the weather, the gardens, the bird in the cage, which was placed on the table near her. Her voice, at first low and feeble, became gradually stronger, and her face lighted up with a child's innocent, playful smile. No, I had not been mistaken! That was no lymphatic, nerveless temperament, on which consumption fastens as its lawful prey; here there was no hectic pulse, no hurried waste of the vital flame. Quietly and gently I made my observations, addressed my questions, applied my stethoscope; and when I turned my face towards her mother's anxious, eager eyes, that face told my opinion; for her mother sprang forward, clasped my hand, and said, through her struggling tears,—

"You smile! You see nothing to fear?"

"Fear! No, indeed! You will soon be again yourself, Miss Ashleigh, will you not?"

"Yes," she said, with her sweet laugh, "I shall be well now very soon. But may I not have the window open; may I not go into the garden? I so long for fresh air."

"No, no, darling," exclaimed Mrs. Ashleigh, "not while the east winds last. Dr. Jones said on no account. On no account, Dr. Fenwick, eh?"

"Will you take my arm, Miss Ashleigh, for a few turns up and down the room?" said I. "We will then see how far we may rebel against Dr. Jones."

She rose with some little effort, but there was no cough. At

first her step was languid; it became lighter and more elastic after a few moments.

"Let her come out," said I to Mrs. Ashleigh. "The wind is not in the east, and, while we are out, pray bid your servant lower to the last bar in the grate that fire,—only fit for Christmas."

"But—"

"Ah, no buts! He is a poor doctor who is not a stern despot."

So the straw hat and mantle were sent for. Lilian was wrapped with unnecessary care, and we all went forth into the garden. Involuntarily we took the way to the Monk's Well, and at every step Lilian seemed to revive under the bracing air and temperate sun. We paused by the well.

"You do not feel fatigued, Miss Ashleigh?"

"No."

"But your face seems changed. It is grown sadder."

"Not sadder."

"Sadder than when I first saw it,—saw it when you were seated here!" I said this in a whisper. I felt her hand tremble as it lay on my arm.

"You saw me seated here!"

"Yes. I will tell you how some day."

Lilian lifted her eyes to mine, and there was in them that same surprise which I had noticed on my first visit,—a surprise that perplexed me, blended with no displeasure, but yet with a something of vague alarm.

We soon returned to the house.

Mrs. Ashleigh made me a sign to follow her into the drawing-room, leaving Mrs. Poyntz with Lilian.

"Well?" said she, tremblingly.

"Permit me to see Dr. Jones's prescriptions. Thank you. Ay, I thought so. My dear madam, the mistake here has been in depressing nature instead of strengthening; in narcotics instead of stimulants. The main stimulants which leave no reaction are air and light. Promise me that I may have my own way for a week,—that all I recommend will be implicitly heeded?"

"I promise. But that cough,—you noticed it?"

"Yes. The nervous system is terribly lowered, and nervous exhaustion is a strange impostor; it imitates all manner of complaints with which it has no connection. The cough will soon disappear! But pardon my question. Mrs. Poyntz tells me that you consulted a clairvoyants about your daughter. Does Miss Ashleigh know that you did so?"

"No; I did not tell her."

"I am glad of that. And pray, for Heaven's sake, guard her against all that may set her thinking on such subjects. Above all, guard her against concentring attention on any malady that your fears erroneously ascribe to her. It is amongst the phenomena of our organization that you cannot closely rivet your consciousness on any part of the frame, however healthy, but it will soon begin to exhibit morbid sensibility. Try to fix all your attention on your little finger for half an hour, and before the half hour is over the little finger will be uneasy, probably even painful. How serious,

then, is the danger to a young girl, at the age in which imagination is most active, most intense, if you force upon her a belief that she is in danger of a mortal disease! It is a peculiarity of youth to brood over the thought of early death much more resignedly, much more complacently, than we do in maturer years. Impress on a young imaginative girl, as free from pulmonary tendencies as you and I are, the conviction that she must fade away into the grave, and though she may not actually die of consumption, you instil slow poison into her system. Hope is the natural aliment of youth. You impoverish nourishment where you discourage hope. As soon as this temporary illness is over, reject for your daughter the melancholy care which seems to her own mind to mark her out from others of her age. Rear her for the air, which is the kindest life-giver; to sleep with open windows: to be out at sunrise. Nature will do more for her than all our drugs can do. You have been hitherto fearing Nature; now trust to her."

Here Mrs. Poyntz joined us, and having, while I had been speaking, written my prescription and some general injunctions, I closed my advice with an appeal to that powerful protectress.

"This, my dear madam, is a case in which I need your aid, and I ask it. Miss Ashleigh should not be left with no other companion than her mother. A change of faces is often as salutary as a change of air. If you could devote an hour or two this very evening to sit with Miss Ashleigh, to talk to her with your usual cheerfulness, and—"

"Annie," interrupted Mrs. Poyntz, "I will come and drink tea

with you at half-past seven, and bring my knitting; and perhaps, if you ask him, Dr. Fenwick will come too! He can be tolerably entertaining when he likes it."

"It is too great a tax on his kindness, I fear," said Mrs. Ashleigh. "But," she added cordially, "I should be grateful indeed if he would spare us an hour of his time."

I murmured an assent which I endeavoured to make not too joyous.

"So that matter is settled," said Mrs. Poyntz; "and now I shall go to Mr. Vigors and prevent his further interference."

"Oh, but, Margaret, pray don't offend him,—a connection of my poor dear Gilbert's. And so tetchy! I am sure I do not know how you'll manage to—"

"To get rid of him? Never fear. As I manage everything and everybody," said Mrs. Poyntz, bluntly. So she kissed her friend on the forehead, gave me a gracious nod, and, declining the offer of my carriage, walked with her usual brisk, decided tread down the short path towards the town.

Mrs. Ashleigh timidly approached me, and again the furtive hand bashfully insinuated the hateful fee.

"Stay," said I; "this is a case which needs the most constant watching. I wish to call so often that I should seem the most greedy of doctors if my visits were to be computed at guineas. Let me be at ease to effect my cure; my pride of science is involved in it. And when amongst all the young ladies of the Hill you can point to none with a fresher bloom, or a fairer promise

of healthful life, than the patient you intrust to my care, why, then the fee and the dismissal. Nay, nay; I must refer you to our friend Mrs. Poyntz. It was so settled with her before she brought me here to displace Dr. Jones." Therewith I escaped.

CHAPTER XV

In less than a week Lilian was convalescent; in less than a fortnight she regained her usual health,—nay, Mrs. Ashleigh declared that she had never known her daughter appear so cheerful and look so well. I had established a familiar intimacy at Abbots' House; most of my evenings were spent there. As horse exercise formed an important part of my advice, Mrs. Ashleigh had purchased a pretty and quiet horse for her daughter; and, except the weather was very unfavourable, Lilian now rode daily with Colonel Poyntz, who was a notable equestrian, and often accompanied by Miss Jane Poyntz, and other young ladies of the Hill. I was generally relieved from my duties in time to join her as she returned homewards. Thus we made innocent appointments, openly, frankly, in her mother's presence, she telling me beforehand in what direction excursions had been planned with Colonel Poyntz, and I promising to fall in with the party—if my avocations would permit. At my suggestion, Mrs. Ashleigh now opened her house almost every evening to some of the neighbouring families; Lilian was thus habituated to the intercourse of young persons of her own age. Music and dancing and childlike games made the old house gay. And the Hill gratefully acknowledged to Mrs. Poyntz, "that the Ashleighs were indeed a great acquisition."

But my happiness was not uncheckered. In thus unselfishly

surrounding Lilian with others, I felt the anguish of that jealousy which is inseparable from those earlier stages of love, when the lover as yet has won no right to that self-confidence which can only spring from the assurance that he is loved.

In these social reunions I remained aloof from Lilian. I saw her courted by the gay young admirers whom her beauty and her fortune drew around her,—her soft face brightening in the exercise of the dance, which the gravity of my profession rather than my years forbade to join; and her laugh, so musically subdued, ravishing my ear and fretting my heart as if the laugh were a mockery on my sombre self and my presumptuous dreams. But no, suddenly, shyly, her eyes would steal away from those about her, steal to the corner in which I sat, as if they missed me, and, meeting my own gaze, their light softened before they turned away; and the colour on her cheek would deepen, and to her lip there came a smile different from the smile that it shed on others. And then—and then—all jealousy, all sadness vanished, and I felt the glory which blends with the growing belief that we are loved.

In that diviner epoch of man's mysterious passion, when ideas of perfection and purity, vague and fugitive before, start forth and concentre themselves round one virgin shape,—that rises out from the sea of creation, welcomed by the Hours and adorned by the Graces,—how the thought that this archetype of sweetness and beauty singles himself from the millions, singles himself for her choice, ennobles and lifts up his being! Though after-

experience may rebuke the mortal's illusion, that mistook for a daughter of Heaven a creature of clay like himself, yet for a while the illusion has grandeur. Though it comes from the senses which shall later oppress and profane it, the senses at first shrink into shade, awed and hushed by the presence that charms them. All that is brightest and best in the man has soared up like long-dormant instincts of Heaven, to greet and to hallow what to him seems life's fairest dream of the heavenly! Take the wings from the image of Love, and the god disappears from the form!

Thus, if at moments jealous doubt made my torture, so the moment's relief from it sufficed for my rapture. But I had a cause for disquiet less acute but less varying than jealousy.

Despite Lilian's recovery from the special illness which had more immediately absorbed my care, I remained perplexed as to its cause and true nature. To her mother I gave it the convenient epithet of "nervous;" but the epithet did not explain to myself all the symptoms I classified by it. There was still, at times, when no cause was apparent or conjecturable, a sudden change in the expression of her countenance, in the beat of her pulse; the eye would become fixed, the bloom would vanish, the pulse would sink feebler and feebler till it could be scarcely felt; yet there was no indication of heart disease, of which such sudden lowering of life is in itself sometimes a warning indication. The change would pass away after a few minutes, during which she seemed unconscious, or, at least, never spoke—never appeared to heed what was said to her. But in the expression of her countenance

there was no character of suffering or distress; on the contrary, a wondrous serenity, that made her beauty more beauteous, her very youthfulness younger; and when this spurious or partial kind of syncope passed, she recovered at once without effort, without acknowledging that she had felt faint or unwell, but rather with a sense of recruited vitality, as the weary obtain from a sleep. For the rest her spirits were more generally light and joyous than I should have premised from her mother's previous description. She would enter mirthfully into the mirth of young companions round her: she had evidently quick perception of the sunny sides of life; an infantine gratitude for kindness; an infantine joy in the trifles that amuse only those who delight in tastes pure and simple. But when talk rose into graver and more contemplative topics, her attention became earnest and absorbed; and sometimes a rich eloquence, such as I have never before nor since heard from lips so young, would startle me first into a wondering silence, and soon into a disapproving alarm: for the thoughts she then uttered seemed to me too fantastic, too visionary, too much akin to the vagaries of a wild though beautiful imagination. And then I would seek to check, to sober, to distract fancies with which my reason had no sympathy, and the indulgence of which I regarded as injurious to the normal functions of the brain.

When thus, sometimes with a chilling sentence, sometimes with a half-sarcastic laugh, I would repress outpourings frank and musical as the songs of a forest-bird, she would look at me with

a kind of plaintive sorrow,—often sigh and shiver as she turned away. Only in those modes did she show displeasure; otherwise ever sweet and docile, and ever, if, seeing that I had pained her, I asked forgiveness, humbling herself rather to ask mine, and brightening our reconciliation with her angel smile. As yet I had not dared to speak of love; as yet I gazed on her as the captive gazes on the flowers and the stars through the gratings of his cell, murmuring to himself, “When shall the doors unclose?”

CHAPTER XVI

It was with a wrath suppressed in the presence of the fair ambassadress, that Mr. Vigors had received from Mrs. Poyntz the intelligence that I had replaced Dr. Jones at Abbots' House not less abruptly than Dr. Jones had previously supplanted me. As Mrs. Poyntz took upon herself the whole responsibility of this change, Mr. Vigors did not venture to condemn it to her face; for the Administrator of Laws was at heart no little in awe of the Autocrat of Proprieties; as Authority, howsoever established, is in awe of Opinion, howsoever capricious.

To the mild Mrs. Ashleigh the magistrate's anger was more decidedly manifested. He ceased his visits; and in answer to a long and deprecatory letter with which she endeavoured to soften his resentment and win him back to the house, he replied by an elaborate combination of homily and satire. He began by excusing himself from accepting her invitations, on the ground that his time was valuable, his habits domestic; and though ever willing to sacrifice both time and habits where he could do good, he owed it to himself and to mankind to sacrifice neither where his advice was rejected and his opinion contemned. He glanced briefly, but not hastily, at the respect with which her late husband had deferred to his judgment, and the benefits which that deference had enabled him to bestow. He contrasted the husband's deference with the widow's contumely, and hinted at

the evils which the contumely would not permit him to prevent. He could not presume to say what women of the world might think due to deceased husbands, but even women of the world generally allowed the claims of living children, and did not act with levity where their interests were concerned, still less where their lives were at stake. As to Dr. Jones, he, Mr. Vigors, had the fullest confidence in his skill. Mrs. Ashleigh must judge for herself whether Mrs. Poyntz was as good an authority upon medical science as he had no doubt she was upon shawls and ribbons. Dr. Jones was a man of caution and modesty; he did not indulge in the hollow boasts by which charlatans decoy their dupes; but Dr. Jones had privately assured him that though the case was one that admitted of no rash experiments, he had no fear of the result if his own prudent system were persevered in. What might be the consequences of any other system, Dr. Jones would not say, because he was too high-minded to express his distrust of the rival who had made use of underhand arts to supplant him. But Mr. Vigors was convinced, from other sources of information (meaning, I presume, the oracular prescience of his clairvoyants), that the time would come when the poor young lady would herself insist on discarding Dr. Fenwick, and when "that person" would appear in a very different light to many who now so fondly admired and so reverentially trusted him. When that time arrived, he, Mr. Vigors, might again be of use; but, meanwhile, though he declined to renew his intimacy at Abbots' House, or to pay unavailing visits of mere ceremony, his interest

in the daughter of his old friend remained undiminished, nay, was rather increased by compassion; that he should silently keep his eye upon her; and whenever anything to her advantage suggested itself to him, he should not be deterred by the slight with which Mrs. Ashleigh had treated his judgment from calling on her, and placing before her conscience as a mother his ideas for her child's benefit, leaving to herself then, as now, the entire responsibility of rejecting the advice which he might say, without vanity, was deemed of some value by those who could distinguish between sterling qualities and specious pretences.

Mrs. Ashleigh's was that thoroughly womanly nature which instinctively leans upon others. She was diffident, trustful, meek, affectionate. Not quite justly had Mrs. Poyntz described her as "commonplace weak," for though she might be called weak, it was not because she was commonplace; she had a goodness of heart, a sweetness of disposition, to which that disparaging definition could not apply. She could only be called commonplace inasmuch as in the ordinary daily affairs of life she had a great deal of ordinary daily commonplace good-sense. Give her a routine to follow, and no routine could be better adhered to. In the allotted sphere of a woman's duties she never seemed in fault. No household, not even Mrs. Poyntz's, was more happily managed. The old Abbots' House had merged its original antique gloom in the softer character of pleasing repose. All her servants adored Mrs. Ashleigh; all found it a pleasure to please her; her establishment had the harmony of clockwork;

comfort diffused itself round her like quiet sunshine round a sheltered spot. To gaze on her pleasing countenance, to listen to the simple talk that lapsed from her guileless lips, in even, slow, and lulling murmur, was in itself a respite from "eating cares." She was to the mind what the colour of green is to the eye. She had, therefore, excellent sense in all that relates to every-day life. There, she needed not to consult another; there, the wisest might have consulted her with profit. But the moment anything, however trivial in itself, jarred on the routine to which her mind had grown wedded, the moment an incident hurried her out of the beaten track of woman's daily life, then her confidence forsook her; then she needed a confidant, an adviser; and by that confidant or adviser she could be credulously lured or submissively controlled. Therefore, when she lost, in Mr. Vigors, the guide she had been accustomed to consult whenever she needed guidance, she turned; helplessly and piteously, first to Mrs. Poyntz, and then yet more imploringly to me, because a woman of that character is never quite satisfied without the advice of a man; and where an intimacy more familiar than that of his formal visits is once established with a physician, confidence in him grows fearless and rapid, as the natural result of sympathy concentrated on an object of anxiety in common between himself and the home which opens its sacred recess to his observant but tender eye. Thus Mrs. Ashleigh had shown me Mr. Vigors's letter, and, forgetting that I might not be as amiable as herself, besought me to counsel her how to conciliate and

soften her lost husband's friend and connection. That character clothed him with dignity and awe in her soft forgiving eyes. So, smothering my own resentment, less perhaps at the tone of offensive insinuation against myself than at the arrogance with which this prejudiced intermeddler implied to a mother the necessity of his guardian watch over a child under her own care, I sketched a reply which seemed to me both dignified and placatory, abstaining from all discussion, and conveying the assurance that Mrs. Ashleigh would be at all times glad to hear, and disposed to respect, whatever suggestion so esteemed a friend of her husband would kindly submit to her for the welfare of her daughter.

There all communication had stopped for about a month since the date of my reintroduction to Abbots' House. One afternoon I unexpectedly met Mr. Vigors at the entrance of the blind lane, I on my way to Abbots' House, and my first glance at his face told me that he was coming from it, for the expression of that face was more than usually sinister; the sullen scowl was lit into significant menace by a sneer of unmistakable triumph. I felt at once that he had succeeded in some machination against me, and with ominous misgivings quickened my steps.

I found Mrs. Ashleigh seated alone in front of the house, under a large cedar-tree that formed a natural arbour in the centre of the sunny lawn. She was perceptibly embarrassed as I took my seat beside her.

"I hope," said I, forcing a smile, "that Mr. Vigors has not been

telling you that I shall kill my patient, or that she looks much worse than she did under Dr. Jones's care?"

"No," she said. "He owned cheerfully that Lilian had grown quite strong, and said, without any displeasure, that he had heard how gay she had been, riding out and even dancing,—which is very kind in him, for he disapproves of dancing, on principle."

"But still I can see he has said something to vex or annoy you; and, to judge by his countenance when I met him in the lane, I should conjecture that that something was intended to lower the confidence you so kindly repose in me."

"I assure you not; he did not mention your name, either to me or to Lilian. I never knew him more friendly; quite like old times. He is a good man at heart, very, and was much attached to my poor husband."

"Did Mr. Ashleigh profess a very high opinion of Mr. Vigors?"

"Well, I don't quite know that, because my dear Gilbert never spoke to me much about him. Gilbert was naturally very silent. But he shrank from all trouble—all worldly affairs—and Mr. Vigors managed his estate, and inspected his steward's books, and protected him through a long lawsuit which he had inherited from his father. It killed his father. I don't know what we should have done without Mr. Vigors, and I am so glad he has forgiven me."

"Hem! Where is Miss Ashleigh? Indoors?"

"No; somewhere in the grounds. But, my dear Dr. Fenwick, do not leave me yet; you are so very, very kind, and somehow I

have grown to look upon you quite as an old friend. Something has happened which has put me out, quite put me out."

She said this wearily and feebly, closing her eyes as if she were indeed put out in the sense of extinguished.

"The feeling of friendship you express," said I, with earnestness, "is reciprocal. On my side it is accompanied by a peculiar gratitude. I am a lonely man, by a lonely fireside, no parents, no near kindred, and in this town, since Dr. Faber left it, without cordial intimacy till I knew you. In admitting me so familiarly to your hearth, you have given me what I have never known before since I came to man's estate,—a glimpse of the happy domestic life; the charm and relief to eye, heart, and spirit which is never known but in households cheered by the face of woman. Thus my sentiment for you and yours is indeed that of an old friend; and in any private confidence you show me, I feel as if I were no longer a lonely man, without kindred, without home."

Mrs. Ashleigh seemed much moved by these words, which my heart had forced from my lips; and, after replying to me with simple unaffected warmth of kindness, she rose, took my arm, and continued thus as we walked slowly to and fro the lawn: "You know, perhaps, that my poor husband left a sister, now a widow like myself, Lady Haughton."

"I remember that Mrs. Poyntz said you had such a sister-in-law, but I never heard you mention Lady Haughton till now. Well!"

"Well, Mr. Vigors has brought me a letter from her, and it is

that which has put me out. I dare say you have not heard me speak before of Lady Haughton, for I am ashamed to say I had almost forgotten her existence. She is many years older than my husband was; of a very different character. Only came once to see him after our marriage. Hurt me by ridiculing him as a bookworm; offended him by looking a little down on me, as a nobody without spirit and fashion, which was quite true. And, except by a cold and unfeeling letter of formal condolence after I lost my dear Gilbert, I have never heard from her since I have been a widow, till to-day. But, after all, she is my poor husband's sister, and his eldest sister, and Lilian's aunt; and, as Mr. Vigors says, 'Duty is duty.'"

Had Mrs. Ashleigh said "Duty is torture," she could not have uttered the maxim with more mournful and despondent resignation.

"And what does this lady require of you, which Mr. Vigors deems it your duty to comply with?"

"Dear me! What penetration! You have guessed the exact truth. But I think you will agree with Mr. Vigors. Certainly I have no option; yes, I must do it."

"My penetration is in fault now. Do what? Pray explain."

"Poor Lady Haughton, six months ago, lost her only son, Sir James. Mr. Vigors says he was a very fine young man, of whom any mother would have been proud. I had heard he was wild; Mr. Vigors says, however, that he was just going to reform, and marry a young lady whom his mother chose for him, when, unluckily,

he would ride a steeplechase, not being quite sober at the time, and broke his neck. Lady Haughton has been, of course, in great grief. She has retired to Brighton; and she wrote to me from thence, and Mr. Vigors brought the letter. He will go back to her to-day."

"Will go back to Lady Haughton? What! Has he been to her? Is he, then, as intimate with Lady Haughton as he was with her brother?"

"No; but there has been a long and constant correspondence. She had a settlement on the Kirby Estate,—a sum which was not paid off during Gilbert's life; and a very small part of the property went to Sir James, which part Mr. Ashleigh Sumner, the heir-at-law to the rest of the estate, wished Mr. Vigors, as his guardian, to buy during his minority, and as it was mixed up with Lady Haughton's settlement her consent was necessary as well as Sir James's. So there was much negotiation, and, since then, Ashleigh Sumner has come into the Haughton property, on poor Sir James's decease; so that complicated all affairs between Mr. Vigors and Lady Haughton, and he has just been to Brighton to see her. And poor Lady Haughton, in short, wants me and Lilian to go and visit her. I don't like it at all. But you said the other day you thought sea air might be good for Lilian during the heat of the summer, and she seems well enough now for the change. What do you think?"

"She is well enough, certainly. But Brighton is not the place I would recommend for the summer; it wants shade, and is much

hotter than L——"

"Yes; but unluckily Lady Haughton foresaw that objection, and she has a jointure-house some miles from Brighton, and near the sea. She says the grounds are well wooded, and the place is proverbially cool and healthy, not far from St. Leonard's Forest. And, in short, I have written to say we will come. So we must, unless, indeed, you positively forbid it."

"When do you think of going?"

"Next Monday. Mr. Vigors would make me fix the day. If you knew how I dislike moving when I am once settled; and I do so dread Lady Haughton, she is so fine, and so satirical! But Mr. Vigors says she is very much altered, poor thing! I should like to show you her letter, but I had just sent it to Margaret —Mrs. Poyntz—a minute or two before you came. She knows something of Lady Haughton. Margaret knows everybody. And we shall have to go in mourning for poor Sir James, I suppose; and Margaret will choose it, for I am sure I can't guess to what extent we should be supposed to mourn. I ought to have gone in mourning before—poor Gilbert's nephew—but I am so stupid, and I had never seen him. And—But oh, this is kind! Margaret herself,—my dear Margaret!"

We had just turned away from the house, in our up-and-down walk; and Mrs. Poyntz stood immediately fronting us. "So, Anne, you have actually accepted this invitation—and for Monday next?"

"Yes. Did I do wrong?"

"What does Dr. Fenwick say? Can Lilian go with safety?"

I could not honestly say she might not go with safety, but my heart sank like lead as I answered,—

"Miss Ashleigh does not now need merely medical care; but more than half her cure has depended on keeping her spirits free from depression. She may miss the cheerful companionship of your daughter, and other young ladies of her own age. A very melancholy house, saddened by a recent bereavement, without other guests; a hostess to whom she is a stranger, and whom Mrs. Ashleigh herself appears to deem formidable,—certainly these do not make that change of scene which a physician would recommend. When I spoke of sea air being good for Miss Ashleigh, I thought of our own northern coasts at a later time of the year, when I could escape myself for a few weeks and attend her. The journey to a northern watering-place would be also shorter and less fatiguing; the air there more invigorating."

"No doubt that would be better," said Mrs. Poyntz, dryly; "but so far as your objections to visiting Lady Haughton have been stated, they are groundless. Her house will not be melancholy; she will have other guests, and Lilian will find companions, young like herself,—young ladies—and young gentlemen too!"

There was something ominous, something compassionate, in the look which Mrs. Poyntz cast upon me, in concluding her speech, which in itself was calculated to rouse the fears of a lover. Lilian away from me, in the house of a worldly-fine lady —such as I judged Lady Haughton to be—surrounded by young

gentlemen, as well as young ladies, by admirers, no doubt, of a higher rank and more brilliant fashion than she had yet known! I closed my eyes, and with strong effort suppressed a groan.

"My dear Annie, let me satisfy myself that Dr. Fenwick really does consent to this journey. He will say to me what he may not to you. Pardon me, then, if I take him aside for a few minutes. Let me find you here again under this cedar-tree."

Placing her arm in mine, and without waiting for Mrs. Ashleigh's answer, Mrs. Poyntz drew me into the more sequestered walk that belted the lawn; and when we were out of Mrs. Ashleigh's sight and hearing, said,—

"From what you have now seen of Lilian Ashleigh, do you still desire to gain her as your wife?"

"Still? Oh, with an intensity proportioned to the fear with which I now dread that she is about to pass away from my eyes —from my life!"

"Does your judgment confirm the choice of your heart? Reflect before you answer."

"Such selfish judgment as I had before I knew her would not confirm but oppose it. The nobler judgment that now expands all my reasonings, approves and seconds my heart. No, no; do not smile so sarcastically. This is not the voice of a blind and egotistical passion. Let me explain myself if I can. I concede to you that Lilian's character is undeveloped; I concede to you, that amidst the childlike freshness and innocence of her nature, there is at times a strangeness, a mystery, which I have not yet traced

to its cause. But I am certain that the intellect is organically as sound as the heart, and that intellect and heart will ultimately —if under happy auspices—blend in that felicitous union which constitutes the perfection of woman. But it is because she does, and may for years, may perhaps always, need a more devoted, thoughtful care than natures less tremulously sensitive, that my judgment sanctions my choice; for whatever is best for her is best for me. And who would watch over her as I should?"

"You have never yet spoken to Lilian as lovers speak?"

"Oh, no, indeed."

"And, nevertheless, you believe that your affection would not be unreturned?"

"I thought so once; I doubt now,—yet, in doubting, hope. But why do you alarm me with these questions? You, too, forebode that in this visit I may lose her forever?"

"If you fear that, tell her so, and perhaps her answer may dispel your fear."

"What! now, already, when she has scarcely known me a month. Might I not risk all if too premature?"

"There is no almanac for love. With many women love is born the moment they know they are beloved. All wisdom tells us that a moment once gone is irrevocable. Were I in your place, I should feel that I approached a moment that I must not lose. I have said enough; now I shall rejoin Mrs. Ashleigh."

"Stay—tell me first what Lady Haughton's letter really contains to prompt the advice with which you so transport, and

yet so daunt, me when you proffer it."

"Not now; later, perhaps,—not now. If you wish to see Lilian alone, she is by the Old Monk's Well; I saw her seated there as I passed that way to the house."

"One word more,—only one. Answer this question frankly, for it is one of honour. Do you still believe that my suit to her daughter would not be disapproved of by Mrs. Ashleigh?"

"At this moment I am sure it would not; a week hence I might not give you the same answer."

So she passed on with her quick but measured tread, back through the shady walk, on to the open lawn, till the last glimpse of her pale gray robe disappeared under the boughs of the cedar-tree. Then, with a start, I broke the irresolute, tremulous suspense in which I had vainly endeavoured to analyze my own mind, solve my own doubts, concentrate my own will, and went the opposite way, skirting the circle of that haunted ground,—as now, on one side its lofty terrace, the houses of the neighbouring city came full and close into view, divided from my fairy-land of life but by the trodden murmurous thoroughfare winding low beneath the ivied parapets; and as now, again, the world of men abruptly vanished behind the screening foliage of luxuriant June.

At last the enchanted glade opened out from the verdure, its borders fragrant with syringa and rose and woodbine; and there, by the gray memorial of the gone Gothic age, my eyes seemed to close their unquiet wanderings, resting spell-bound on that image which had become to me the incarnation of earth's bloom and

youth.

She stood amidst the Past, backed by the fragments of walls which man had raised to seclude him from human passion, locking, under those lids so downcast, the secret of the only knowledge I asked from the boundless Future.

Ah! what mockery there is in that grand word, the world's fierce war-cry,—Freedom! Who has not known one period of life, and that so solemn that its shadows may rest over all life hereafter, when one human creature has over him a sovereignty more supreme and absolute than Orient servitude adores in the symbols of diadem and sceptre? What crest so haughty that has not bowed before a hand which could exalt or humble! What heart so dauntless that has not trembled to call forth the voice at whose sound open the gates of rapture or despair! That life alone is free which rules, and suffices for itself. That life we forfeit when we love!

CHAPTER XVII

How did I utter it? By what words did my heart make itself known? I remember not. All was as a dream that falls upon a restless, feverish night, and fades away as the eyes unclose on the peace of a cloudless heaven, on the bliss of a golden sun. A new morrow seemed indeed upon the earth when I woke from a life-long yesterday,—her dear hand in mine, her sweet face bowed upon my breast.

And then there was that melodious silence in which there is no sound audible from without; yet within us there is heard a lulling celestial music, as if our whole being, grown harmonious with the universe, joined from its happy deeps in the hymn that unites the stars.

In that silence our two hearts seemed to make each other understood, to be drawing nearer and nearer, blending by mysterious concord into the completeness of a solemn union, never henceforth to be rent asunder.

At length I said softly: "And it was here on this spot that I first saw you,—here that I for the first time knew what power to change our world and to rule our future goes forth from the charm of a human face!"

Then Lilian asked me timidly, and without lifting her eyes, how I had so seen her, reminding me that I promised to tell her, and had never yet done so.

And then I told her of the strange impulse that had led me into the grounds, and by what chance my steps had been diverted down the path that wound to the glade; how suddenly her form had shone upon my eyes, gathering round itself the rose hues of the setting sun, and how wistfully those eyes had followed her own silent gaze into the distant heaven.

As I spoke, her hand pressed mine eagerly, convulsively, and, raising her face from my breast, she looked at me with an intent, anxious earnestness. That look!—twice before it had thrilled and perplexed me.

"What is there in that look, oh, my Lilian, which tells me that there is something that startles you,—something you wish to confide, and yet shrink from explaining? See how, already, I study the fair book from which the seal has been lifted! but as yet you must aid me to construe its language."

"If I shrink from explaining, it is only because I fear that I cannot explain so as to be understood or believed. But you have a right to know the secrets of a life which you would link to your own. Turn your face aside from me; a reproving look, an incredulous smile, chill—oh, you cannot guess how they chill me, when I would approach that which to me is so serious and so solemnly strange."

I turned my face away, and her voice grew firmer as, after a brief pause, she resumed,—

"As far back as I can remember in my infancy, there have been moments when there seems to fall a soft hazy veil between my

sight and the things around it, thickening and deepening till it has the likeness of one of those white fleecy clouds which gather on the verge of the horizon when the air is yet still, but the winds are about to rise; and then this vapour or veil will suddenly open, as clouds open, and let in the blue sky."

"Go on," I said gently, for here she came to a stop. She continued, speaking somewhat more hurriedly,—

"Then, in that opening, strange appearances present them selves to me, as in a vision. In my childhood these were chiefly landscapes of wonderful beauty. I could but faintly describe them then; I could not attempt to describe them now, for they are almost gone from my memory. My dear mother chid me for telling her what I saw, so I did not impress it on my mind by repeating it. As I grew up, this kind of vision—if I may so call it—became much less frequent, or much less distinct; I still saw the soft veil fall, the pale cloud form and open, but often what may then have appeared was entirely forgotten when I recovered myself, waking as from a sleep. Sometimes, however, the recollection would be vivid and complete; sometimes I saw the face of my lost father; sometimes I heard his very voice, as I had seen and heard him in my early childhood, when he would let me rest for hours beside him as he mused or studied, happy to be so quietly near him, for I loved him, oh, so dearly! and I remember him so distinctly, though I was only in my sixth year when he died. Much more recently—indeed, within the last few months—the images of things to come are reflected on the space

that I gaze into as clearly as in a glass. Thus, for weeks before I came hither, or knew that such a place existed, I saw distinctly the old House, yon trees, this sward, this moss-grown Gothic fount; and, with the sight, an impression was conveyed to me that in the scene before me my old childlike life would pass into some solemn change. So that when I came here, and recognized the picture in my vision, I took an affection for the spot,—an affection not without awe, a powerful, perplexing interest, as one who feels under the influence of a fate of which a prophetic glimpse has been vouchsafed. And in that evening, when you first saw me, seated here—"

"Yes, Lilian, on that evening—"

"I saw you also, but in my vision—yonder, far in the deeps of space,—and—and my heart was stirred as it had never been before; and near where your image grew out from the cloud I saw my father's face, and I heard his voice, not in my ear, but as in my heart, whispering—"

"Yes, Lilian—whispering—what?"

"These words,—only these,—'Ye will need one another.' But then, suddenly, between my upward eyes and the two forms they had beheld, there rose from the earth, obscuring the skies, a vague, dusky vapour, undulous, and coiling like a vast serpent, —nothing, indeed, of its shape and figure definite, but of its face one abrupt glare; a flash from two dread luminous eyes, and a young head, like the Medusa's, changing, more rapidly than I could have drawn breath, into a grinning skull. Then my

terror made me bow my head, and when I raised it again, all that I had seen was vanished. But the terror still remained, even when I felt my mother's arm round me and heard her voice. And then, when I entered the house, and sat down again alone, the recollection of what I had seen—those eyes, that face, that skull—grew on me stronger and stronger till I fainted, and remember no more, until my eyes, opening, saw you by my side, and in my wonder there was not terror. No, a sense of joy, protection, hope, yet still shadowed by a kind of fear or awe, in recognizing the countenance which had gleamed on me from the skies before the dark vapour had risen, and while my father's voice had murmured, 'Ye will need one another.' And now—and now—will you love me less that you know a secret in my being which I have told to no other,—cannot construe to myself? Only—only, at least, do not mock me; do not disbelieve me! Nay, turn from me no longer now: now I ask to meet your eyes. Now, before our hands can join again, tell me that you do not despise me as untruthful, do not pity me as insane."

"Hush, hush!" I said, drawing her to my breast. "Of all you tell me we will talk hereafter. The scales of our science have no weights fine enough for the gossamer threads of a maiden's pure fancies. Enough for me—for us both—if out from all such illusions start one truth, told to you, lovely child, from the heavens; told to me, ruder man, on the earth; repeated by each pulse of this heart that woos you to hear and to trust,—now and henceforth through life unto death, 'Each has need of the

other,'—I of you, I of you! my Lilian! my Lilian!"

CHAPTER XVIII

In spite of the previous assurance of Mrs. Poyntz, it was not without an uneasy apprehension that I approached the cedar-tree, under which Mrs. Ashleigh still sat, her friend beside her. I looked on the fair creature whose arm was linked in mine. So young, so singularly lovely, and with all the gifts of birth and fortune which bend avarice and ambition the more submissively to youth and beauty, I felt as if I had wronged what a parent might justly deem her natural lot.

"Oh, if your mother should disapprove!" said I, falteringly. Lilian leaned on my arm less lightly. "If I had thought so," she said with her soft blush, "should I be thus by your side?"

So we passed under the boughs of the dark tree, and Lilian left me and kissed Mrs. Ashleigh's cheek; then, seating herself on the turf, laid her head on her mother's lap. I looked on the Queen of the Hill, whose keen eye shot over me. I thought there was a momentary expression of pain or displeasure on her countenance; but it passed. Still there seemed to me something of irony, as well as of triumph or congratulation, in the half-smile with which she quitted her seat, and in the tone with which she whispered, as she glided by me to the open sward, "So, then, it is settled."

She walked lightly and quickly down the lawn. When she was out of sight I breathed more freely. I took the seat which she had

left, by Mrs. Ashleigh's side, and said, "A little while ago I spoke of myself as a man without kindred, without home, and now I come to you and ask for both."

Mrs. Ashleigh looked at me benignly, then raised her daughter's face from her lap, and whispered, "Lilian;" and Lilian's lips moved, but I did not hear her answer. Her mother did. She took Lilian's hand, simply placed it in mine, and said, "As she chooses, I choose; whom she loves, I love."

CHAPTER XIX

From that evening till the day Mrs. Ashleigh and Lilian went on the dreaded visit, I was always at their house, when my avocations allowed me to steal to it; and during those few days, the happiest I had ever known, it seemed to me that years could not have more deepened my intimacy with Lilian's exquisite nature, made me more reverential of its purity, or more enamoured of its sweetness. I could detect in her but one fault, and I rebuked myself for believing that it was a fault. We see many who neglect the minor duties of life, who lack watchful forethought and considerate care for others, and we recognize the cause of this failing in levity or egotism. Certainly, neither of those tendencies of character could be ascribed to Lilian. Yet still in daily trifles there was something of that neglect, some lack of that care and forethought. She loved her mother with fondness and devotion, yet it never occurred to her to aid in those petty household cares in which her mother centred so much of habitual interest. She was full of tenderness and pity to all want and suffering, yet many a young lady on the Hill was more actively beneficent,—visiting the poor in their sickness, or instructing their children in the Infant Schools. I was persuaded that her love for me was deep and truthful; it was clearly void of all ambition; doubtless she would have borne, unflinching and contented, whatever the world considers to be a sacrifice

and privation,—yet I should never have expected her to take her share in the troubles of ordinary life. I could never have applied to her the homely but significant name of helpmate. I reproach myself while I write for noticing such defect—if defect it were—in what may be called the practical routine of our positive, trivial, human existence. No doubt it was this that had caused Mrs. Poyntz's harsh judgment against the wisdom of my choice. But such chiller shade upon Lilian's charming nature was reflected from no inert, unamiable self-love. It was but the consequence of that self-absorption which the habit of revery had fostered. I cautiously abstained from all allusion to those visionary deceptions, which she had confided to me as the truthful impressions of spirit, if not of sense. To me any approach to what I termed "superstition" was displeasing; any indulgence of fantasies not within the measured and beaten track of healthful imagination more than displeased me in her,—it alarmed. I would not by a word encourage her in persuasions which I felt it would be at present premature to reason against, and cruel indeed to ridicule. I was convinced that of themselves these mists round her native intelligence, engendered by a solitary and musing childhood, would subside in the fuller daylight of wedded life. She seemed pained when she saw how resolutely I shunned a subject dear to her thoughts. She made one or two timid attempts to renew it, but my grave looks sufficed to check her. Once or twice indeed, on such occasions, she would turn away and leave me, but she soon came back; that gentle heart could not bear one

unkindlier shade between itself and what it loved. It was agreed that our engagement should be, for the present, confided only to Mrs. Poyntz. When Mrs. Ashleigh and Lilian returned, which would be in a few weeks at furthest, it should be proclaimed; and our marriage could take place in the autumn, when I should be most free for a brief holiday from professional toils.

So we parted-as lovers part. I felt none of those jealous fears which, before we were affianced, had made me tremble at the thought of separation, and had conjured up irresistible rivals. But it was with a settled, heavy gloom that I saw her depart. From earth was gone a glory; from life a blessing.

CHAPTER XX

During the busy years of my professional career, I had snatched leisure for some professional treatises, which had made more or less sensation, and one of them, entitled "The Vital Principle; its Waste and Supply," had gained a wide circulation among the general public. This last treatise contained the results of certain experiments, then new in chemistry, which were adduced in support of a theory I entertained as to the re-invigoration of the human system by principles similar to those which Liebig has applied to the replenishment of an exhausted soil,—namely, the giving back to the frame those essentials to its nutrition, which it has lost by the action or accident of time; or supplying that special pabulum or energy in which the individual organism is constitutionally deficient; and neutralizing or counterbalancing that in which it super-abounds, —a theory upon which some eminent physicians have more recently improved with signal success. But on these essays, slight and suggestive, rather than dogmatic, I set no value. I had been for the last two years engaged on a work of much wider range, endeared to me by a far bolder ambition,—a work upon which I fondly hoped to found an enduring reputation as a severe and original physiologist. It was an Inquiry into Organic Life, similar in comprehensiveness of survey to that by which the illustrious Muller, of Berlin, has enriched the science of our age; however

inferior, alas! to that august combination of thought and learning in the judgment which checks presumption, and the genius which adorns speculation. But at that day I was carried away by the ardour of composition, and I admired my performance because I loved my labour. This work had been entirely laid aside for the last agitated month; now that Lilian was gone, I resumed it earnestly, as the sole occupation that had power and charm enough to rouse me from the aching sense of void and loss.

The very night of the day she went, I reopened my manuscript. I had left off at the commencement of a chapter Upon Knowledge as derived from our Senses. As my convictions on this head were founded on the well-known arguments of Locke and Condillac against innate ideas, and on the reasonings by which Hume has resolved the combination of sensations into a general idea to an impulse arising merely out of habit, so I set myself to oppose, as a dangerous concession to the sentimentalities or mysticism of a pseudo-philosophy, the doctrine favoured by most of our recent physiologists, and of which some of the most eminent of German metaphysicians have accepted the substance, though refining into a subtlety its positive form,—I mean the doctrine which Muller himself has expressed in these words:—

> "That innate ideas may exist cannot in the slightest degree be denied: it is, indeed, a fact. All the ideas of animals, which are induced by instinct, are innate and immediate: something presented to the mind, a desire to

attain which is at the same time given. The new-born lamb and foal have such innate ideas, which lead them to follow their mother and suck the teats. Is it not in some measure the same with the intellectual ideas of man?"[8]

To this question I answered with an indignant "No!" A "Yes" would have shaken my creed of materialism to the dust. I wrote on rapidly, warmly. I defined the properties and meted the limits of natural laws, which I would not admit that a Deity himself could alter. I clamped and soldered dogma to dogma in the links of my tinkered logic, till out from my page, to my own complacent eye, grew Intellectual Man, as the pure formation of his material senses; mind, or what is called soul, born from and nurtured by them alone; through them to act, and to perish with the machine they moved. Strange, that at the very time my love for Lilian might have taught me that there are mysteries in the core of the feelings which my analysis of ideas could not solve, I should so stubbornly have opposed as unreal all that could be referred to the spiritual! Strange, that at the very time when the thought that I might lose from this life the being I had known scarce a month had just before so appalled me, I should thus complacently sit down to prove that, according to the laws of the nature which my passion obeyed, I must lose for eternity the blessing I now hoped I had won to my life! But how distinctly dissimilar is man in his conduct from man in his systems! See the poet reclined under forest boughs, conning odes to his mistress;

[8] Muller's "Elements of Physiology," vol. ii. p. 134. Translated by Dr. Baley.

follow him out into the world; no mistress ever lived for him there![9] See the hard man of science, so austere in his passionless problems; follow him now where the brain rests from its toil, where the heart finds its Sabbath—what child is so tender, so yielding, and soft?

But I had proved to my own satisfaction that poet and sage are dust, and no more, when the pulse ceases to beat. And on that consolatory conclusion my pen stopped.

Suddenly, beside me I distinctly heard a sigh,—a compassionate, mournful sigh. The sound was unmistakable. I started from my seat, looked round, amazed to discover no one,—no living thing! The windows were closed, the night was still. That sigh was not the wail of the wind. But there, in the darker angle of the room, what was that? A silvery whiteness, vaguely shaped as a human form, receding, fading, gone! Why, I know not—for no face was visible, no form, if form it were, more distinct than the colourless outline,—why, I know not, but I cried aloud, "Lilian! Lilian!" My voice came strangely back to my own ear; I paused, then smiled and blushed at my folly. "So I, too, have learned what is superstition," I muttered to myself. "And here is an anecdote at my own expense (as Muller frankly tells us anecdotes of the illusions which would haunt his eyes, shut or open),—an anecdote I may quote when I come to my chapter on

[9] Cowley, who wrote so elaborate a series of amatory poems, is said "never to have been in love but once, and then he never had resolution to tell his passion."—Johnson's "Lives of the Poets:" COWLEY.

the Cheats of the Senses and Spectral Phantasms." I went on with my book, and wrote till the lights waned in the gray of the dawn. And I said then, in the triumph of my pride, as I laid myself down to rest, "I have written that which allots with precision man's place in the region of nature; written that which will found a school, form disciples; and race after race of those who cultivate truth through pure reason shall accept my bases if they enlarge my building." And again I heard the sigh, but this time it caused no surprise. "Certainly," I murmured, "a very strange thing is the nervous system!" So I turned on my pillow, and, wearied out, fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

The next day, the last of the visiting patients to whom my forenoons were devoted had just quitted me, when I was summoned in haste to attend the steward of a Sir Philip Derval not residing at his family seat, which was about five miles from L——. It was rarely indeed that persons so far from the town, when of no higher rank than this applicant, asked my services.

But it was my principle to go wherever I was summoned; my profession was not gain, it was healing, to which gain was the incident, not the essential. This case the messenger reported as urgent. I went on horseback, and rode fast; but swiftly as I cantered through the village that skirted the approach to Sir Philip Derval's park, the evident care bestowed on the accommodation of the cottagers forcibly struck me. I felt that I was on the lands of a rich, intelligent, and beneficent proprietor. Entering the park, and passing before the manor-house, the contrast between the neglect and the decay of the absentee's stately Hall and the smiling homes of his villagers was disconsolately mournful.

An imposing pile, built apparently by Vanbrugh, with decorated pilasters, pompous portico, and grand perron (or double flight of stairs to the entrance), enriched with urns and statues, but discoloured, mildewed, chipped, half-hidden with unpruned creepers and ivy. Most of the windows were

closed with shutters, decaying for want of paint; in some of the casements the panes were broken; the peacock perched on the shattered balustrade, that fenced a garden overgrown with weeds. The sun glared hotly on the place, and made its ruinous condition still more painfully apparent. I was glad when a winding in the park-road shut the house from my sight. Suddenly I emerged through a copse of ancient yew-trees, and before me there gleamed, in abrupt whiteness, a building evidently designed for the family mausoleum, classical in its outline, with the blind iron door niched into stone walls of massive thickness, and surrounded by a funereal garden of roses and evergreens, fenced with an iron rail, party-gilt.

The suddenness with which this House of the Dead came upon me heightened almost into pain, if not into awe, the dismal impression which the aspect of the deserted home in its neighbourhood had made. I spurred my horse, and soon arrived at the door of my patient, who lived in a fair brick house at the other extremity of the park.

I found my patient, a man somewhat advanced in years, but of a robust conformation, in bed: he had been seized with a fit, which was supposed to be apoplectic, a few hours before; but was already sensible, and out of immediate danger. After I had prescribed a few simple remedies, I took aside the patient's wife, and went with her to the parlour below stairs, to make some inquiry about her husband's ordinary regimen and habits of life. These seemed sufficiently regular; I could discover no apparent

cause for the attack, which presented symptoms not familiar to my experience. “Has your husband ever had such fits before?”

“Never!”

“Had he experienced any sudden emotion? Had he heard any unexpected news; or had anything happened to put him out?”

The woman looked much disturbed at these inquiries. I pressed them more urgently. At last she burst into tears, and clasping my hand, said, “Oh, doctor, I ought to tell you—I sent for you on purpose—yet I fear you will not believe me: my good man has seen a ghost!”

“A ghost!” said I, repressing a smile. “Well, tell me all, that I may prevent the ghost coming again.”

The woman’s story was prolix. Its substance was this. Her husband, habitually an early riser, had left his bed that morning still earlier than usual, to give directions about some cattle that were to be sent for sale to a neighbouring fair. An hour afterwards he had been found by a shepherd, near the mausoleum, apparently lifeless. On being removed to his own house, he had recovered speech, and bidding all except his wife leave the room, he then told her that on walking across the park towards the cattle-sheds, he had seen what appeared to him at first a pale light by the iron door of the mausoleum. On approaching nearer, this light changed into the distinct and visible form of his master, Sir Philip Derval, who was then abroad,—supposed to be in the East, where he had resided for many years. The impression on the steward’s mind was so

strong, that he called out, “Oh, Sir Philip!” when looking still more intently, he perceived that the face was that of a corpse. As he continued to gaze, the apparition seemed gradually to recede, as if vanishing into the sepulchre itself. He knew no more; he became unconscious. It was the excess of the poor woman’s alarm, on hearing this strange tale, that made her resolve to send for me instead of the parish apothecary. She fancied so astounding a cause for her husband’s seizure could only be properly dealt with by some medical man reputed to have more than ordinary learning; and the steward himself objected to the apothecary in the immediate neighbourhood, as more likely to annoy him by gossip than a physician from a comparative distance.

I took care not to lose the confidence of the good wife by parading too quickly my disbelief in the phantom her husband declared that he had seen; but as the story itself seemed at once to decide the nature of the fit to be epileptic, I began to tell her of similar delusions which, in my experience, had occurred to those subjected to epilepsy, and finally soothed her into the conviction that the apparition was clearly reducible to natural causes. Afterwards, I led her on to talk about Sir Philip Derval, less from any curiosity I felt about the absent proprietor than from a desire to re-familiarize her own mind to his image as a living man. The steward had been in the service of Sir Philip’s father, and had known Sir Philip himself from a child. He was warmly attached to his master, whom the old woman described

as a man of rare benevolence and great eccentricity, which last she imputed to his studious habits. He had succeeded to the title and estates as a minor. For the first few years after attaining his majority, he had mixed much in the world. When at Derval Court his house had been filled with gay companions, and was the scene of lavish hospitality; but the estate was not in proportion to the grandeur of the mansion, still less to the expenditure of the owner. He had become greatly embarrassed; and some love disappointment (so it was rumoured) occurring simultaneously with his pecuniary difficulties, he had suddenly changed his way of life, shut himself up from his old friends, lived in seclusion, taking to books and scientific pursuits, and as the old woman said vaguely and expressively, "to odd ways." He had gradually by an economy that, towards himself, was penurious, but which did not preclude much judicious generosity to others, cleared off his debts; and, once more rich, he had suddenly quitted the country, and taken to a life of travel. He was now about forty-eight years old, and had been eighteen years abroad. He wrote frequently to his steward, giving him minute and thoughtful instructions in regard to the employment, comforts, and homes of the peasantry, but peremptorily ordering him to spend no money on the grounds and mansion, stating as a reason why the latter might be allowed to fall into decay, his intention to pull it down whenever he returned to England.

I stayed some time longer than my engagements well warranted at my patient's house, not leaving till the sufferer, after

a quiet sleep, had removed from his bed to his armchair, taken food, and seemed perfectly recovered from his attack.

Riding homeward, I mused on the difference that education makes, even pathologically, between man and man. Here was a brawny inhabitant of rural fields, leading the healthiest of lives, not conscious of the faculty we call imagination, stricken down almost to Death's door by his fright at an optical illusion, explicable, if examined, by the same simple causes which had impressed me the night before with a moment's belief in a sound and a spectre,—me who, thanks to sublime education, went so quietly to sleep a few minutes after, convinced that no phantom, the ghostliest that ear ever heard or eye ever saw, can be anything else but a nervous phenomenon.

CHAPTER XXII

That evening I went to Mrs. Poyntz's; it was one of her ordinary "reception nights," and I felt that she would naturally expect my attendance as "a proper attention."

I joined a group engaged in general conversation, of which Mrs. Poyntz herself made the centre, knitting as usual,—rapidly while she talked, slowly when she listened.

Without mentioning the visit I had paid that morning, I turned the conversation on the different country places in the neighbourhood, and then incidentally asked, "What sort of a man is Sir Philip Derval? Is it not strange that he should suffer so fine a place to fall into decay?" The answers I received added little to the information I had already obtained. Mrs. Poyntz knew nothing of Sir Philip Derval, except as a man of large estates, whose rental had been greatly increased by a rise in the value of property he possessed in the town of L——, and which lay contiguous to that of her husband. Two or three of the older inhabitants of the Hill had remembered Sir Philip in his early days, when he was gay, high-spirited, hospitable, lavish. One observed that the only person in L—— whom he had admitted to his subsequent seclusion was Dr. Lloyd, who was then without practice, and whom he had employed as an assistant in certain chemical experiments.

Here a gentleman struck into the conversation. He was a stranger to me and to L——, a visitor to one of the dwellers on the Hill, who had asked leave to present him to its queen as a great traveller and an accomplished antiquary.

Said this gentleman: "Sir Philip Derval? I know him. I met him in the East. He was then still, I believe, very fond of chemical science; a clever, odd, philanthropical man; had studied medicine, or at least practised it; was said to have made many marvellous cures. I became acquainted with him in Aleppo. He had come to that town, not much frequented by English travellers, in order to inquire into the murder of two men, of whom one was his friend and the other his countryman."

"This is interesting," said Mrs. Poyntz, dryly. "We who live on this innocent Hill all love stories of crime; murder is the pleasantest subject you could have hit on. Pray give us the details."

"So encouraged," said the traveller, good-humouredly, "I will not hesitate to communicate the little I know. In Aleppo there had lived for some years a man who was held by the natives in great reverence. He had the reputation of extraordinary wisdom, but was difficult of access; the lively imagination of the Orientals invested his character with the fascinations of fable,—in short, Haroun of Aleppo was popularly considered a magician. Wild stories were told of his powers, of his preternatural age, of his hoarded treasures. Apart from such disputable titles to homage, there seemed no question, from all I heard, that his

learning was considerable, his charities extensive, his manner of life irreproachably ascetic. He appears to have resembled those Arabian sages of the Gothic age to whom modern science is largely indebted,—a mystic enthusiast, but an earnest scholar. A wealthy and singular Englishman, long resident in another part of the East, afflicted by some languishing disease, took a journey to Aleppo to consult this sage, who, among his other acquirements, was held to have discovered rare secrets in medicine,—his countrymen said in 'charms.' One morning, not long after the Englishman's arrival, Haroun was found dead in his bed, apparently strangled, and the Englishman, who lodged in another part of the town, had disappeared; but some of his clothes, and a crutch on which he habitually supported himself, were found a few miles distant from Aleppo, near the roadside. There appeared no doubt that he, too, had been murdered, but his corpse could not be discovered. Sir Philip Derval had been a loving disciple of this Sage of Aleppo, to whom he assured me he owed not only that knowledge of medicine which, by report, Sir Philip possessed, but the insight into various truths of nature, on the promulgation of which, it was evident, Sir Philip cherished the ambition to found a philosophical celebrity for himself."

"Of what description were those truths of nature?" I asked, somewhat sarcastically.

"Sir, I am unable to tell you, for Sir Philip did not inform me, nor did I much care to ask; for what may be revered as truths in Asia are usually despised as dreams in Europe. To return to

my story: Sir Philip had been in Aleppo a little time before the murder; had left the Englishman under the care of Haroun. He returned to Aleppo on hearing the tragic events I have related, and was busy in collecting such evidence as could be gleaned, and instituting inquiries after our missing countryman at the time I myself chanced to arrive in the city. I assisted in his researches, but without avail. The assassins remained undiscovered. I do not myself doubt that they were mere vulgar robbers. Sir Philip had a darker suspicion of which he made no secret to me; but as I confess that I thought the suspicion groundless, you will pardon me if I do not repeat it. Whether since I left the East the Englishman's remains have been discovered, I know not. Very probably; for I understand that his heirs have got hold of what fortune he left,—less than was generally supposed. But it was reported that he had buried great treasures, a rumour, however absurd, not altogether inconsistent with his character."

"What was his character?" asked Mrs. Poyntz.

"One of evil and sinister repute. He was regarded with terror by the attendants who had accompanied him to Aleppo. But he had lived in a very remote part of the East, little known to Europeans, and, from all I could learn, had there established an extraordinary power, strengthened by superstitious awe. He was said to have studied deeply that knowledge which the philosophers of old called 'occult,' not, like the Sage of Aleppo, for benevolent, but for malignant ends. He was accused of conferring with evil spirits, and filling his barbaric court (for he

lived in a kind of savage royalty) with charmers and sorcerers. I suspect, after all, that he was only, like myself, an ardent antiquary, and cunningly made use of the fear he inspired in order to secure his authority, and prosecute in safety researches into ancient sepulchres or temples. His great passion was, indeed, in excavating such remains, in his neighbourhood; with what result I know not, never having penetrated so far into regions infested by robbers and pestiferous with malaria. He wore the Eastern dress, and always carried jewels about him. I came to the conclusion that for the sake of these jewels he was murdered, perhaps by some of his own servants (and, indeed, two at least of his suite were missing), who then at once buried his body, and kept their own secret. He was old, very infirm; could never have got far from the town without assistance."

"You have not yet told us his name," said Mrs. Poyntz.

"His name was Grayle."

"Grayle!" exclaimed Mrs. Poyntz, dropping her work. "Louis Grayle?"

"Yes; Louis Grayle. You could not have known him?"

"Known him! No; but I have often heard my father speak of him. Such, then, was the tragic end of that strong dark creature, for whom, as a young girl in the nursery, I used to feel a kind of fearful admiring interest?"

"It is your turn to narrate now," said the traveller.

And we all drew closer round our hostess, who remained silent some moments, her brow thoughtful, her work suspended.

"Well," said she at last, looking round us with a lofty air, which seemed half defying, "force and courage are always fascinating, even when they are quite in the wrong. I go with the world, because the world goes with me; if it did not—" Here she stopped for a moment, clenched the firm white hand, and then scornfully waved it, left the sentence unfinished, and broke into another.

"Going with the world, of course we must march over those who stand against it. But when one man stands single-handed against our march, we do not despise him; it is enough to crush. I am very glad I did not see Louis Grayle when I was a girl of sixteen." Again she paused a moment, and resumed: "Louis Grayle was the only son of a usurer, infamous for the rapacity with which he had acquired enormous wealth. Old Grayle desired to rear his heir as a gentleman; sent him to Eton. Boys are always aristocratic; his birth was soon thrown in his teeth; he was fierce; he struck boys bigger than himself,—fought till he was half killed. My father was at school with him; described him as a tiger-whelp. One day he—still a fag—struck a sixth-form boy. Sixth-form boys do not fight fags; they punish them. Louis Grayle was ordered to hold out his hand to the cane; he received the blow, drew forth his schoolboy knife, and stabbed the punisher. After that, he left Eton. I don't think he was publicly expelled—too mere a child for that honour—but he was taken or sent away; educated with great care under the first masters at home. When he was of age to enter the University, old Grayle was dead. Louis was sent by his guardians to Cambridge,

with acquirements far exceeding the average of young men, and with unlimited command of money. My father was at the same college, and described him again,—haughty, quarrelsome, reckless, handsome, aspiring, brave. Does that kind of creature interest you, my dears?" (appealing to the ladies).

"La!" said Miss Brabazon; "a horrid usurer's son!"

"Ay, true; the vulgar proverb says it is good to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth: so it is when one has one's own family crest on it; but when it is a spoon on which people recognize their family crest, and cry out, 'Stolen from our plate chest,' it is a heritage that outlaws a babe in his cradle. However, young men at college who want money are less scrupulous about descent than boys at Eton are. Louis Grayle found, while at college, plenty of wellborn acquaintances willing to recover from him some of the plunder his father had extorted from theirs. He was too wild to distinguish himself by academical honours, but my father said that the tutors of the college declared there were not six undergraduates in the University who knew as much hard and dry science as wild Louis Grayle. He went into the world, no doubt, hoping to shine; but his father's name was too notorious to admit the son into good society. The Polite World, it is true, does not examine a scutcheon with the nice eye of a herald, nor look upon riches with the stately contempt of a stoic; still the Polite World has its family pride and its moral sentiment. It does not like to be cheated,—I mean, in money matters; and when the son of a man who has emptied its purse and foreclosed on its acres

rides by its club-windows, hand on haunch, and head in the air, no lion has a scowl more awful, no hyena a laugh more dread, than that same easy, good-tempered, tolerant, polite, well-bred World which is so pleasant an acquaintance, so languid a friend, and—so remorseless an—enemy. In short, Louis Grayle claimed the right to be courted,—he was shunned; to be admired,—he was loathed. Even his old college acquaintances were shamed out of knowing him. Perhaps he could have lived through all this had he sought to glide quietly into position; but he wanted the tact of the well-bred, and strove to storm his way, not to steal it. Reduced for companions to needy parasites, he braved and he shocked all decorous opinion by that ostentation of excess, which made Richelieus and Lauzuns the rage. But then Richelieus and Lauzuns were dukes! He now very naturally took the Polite World into hate,—gave it scorn for scorn. He would ally himself with Democracy; his wealth could not get him into a club, but it would buy him into parliament; he could not be a Lauzun, nor, perhaps, a Mirabeau, but he might be a Danton. He had plenty of knowledge and audacity, and with knowledge and audacity a good hater is sure to be eloquent. Possibly, then, this poor Louis Grayle might have made a great figure, left his mark on his age and his name in history; but in contesting the borough, which he was sure to carry, he had to face an opponent in a real fine gentleman whom his father had ruined, cool and highbred, with a tongue like a rapier, a sneer like an adder. A quarrel of course; Louis Grayle sent a challenge. The fine gentleman, known to be

no coward (fine gentlemen never are), was at first disposed to refuse with contempt. But Grayle had made himself the idol of the mob; and at a word from Grayle, the fine gentleman might have been ducked at a pump, or tossed in a blanket,—that would have made him ridiculous; to be shot at is a trifle, to be laughed at is serious. He therefore condescended to accept the challenge, and my father was his second.

"It was settled, of course, according to English custom, that both combatants should fire at the same time, and by signal. The antagonist fired at the right moment; his ball grazed Louis Grayle's temple. Louis Grayle had not fired. He now seemed to the seconds to take slow and deliberate aim. They called out to him not to fire; they were rushing to prevent him, when the trigger was pulled, and his opponent fell dead on the field. The fight was, therefore, considered unfair; Louis Grayle was tried for his life: he did not stand the trial in person.[10] He escaped to the Continent; hurried on to some distant uncivilized lands; could not be traced; reappeared in England no more. The lawyer who conducted his defence pleaded skilfully. He argued that the delay in firing was not intentional, therefore not criminal,—the effect of the stun which the wound in the temple had occasioned. The judge was a gentleman, and summed up the evidence so as to direct the jury to a verdict against the low wretch who had murdered a gentleman; but the jurors were not gentlemen,

[10] Mrs. Poyntz here makes a mistake in law which, though very evident, her listeners do not seem to have noticed. Her mistake will be referred to later.

and Grayle's advocate had of course excited their sympathy for a son of the people, whom a gentleman had wantonly insulted. The verdict was manslaughter; but the sentence emphatically marked the aggravated nature of the homicide,—three years' imprisonment. Grayle eluded the prison, but he was a man disgraced and an exile,—his ambition blasted, his career an outlaw's, and his age not yet twenty-three. My father said that he was supposed to have changed his name; none knew what had become of him. And so this creature, brilliant and daring, whom if born under better auspices we might now be all fawning on, cringing to,—after living to old age, no one knows how,—dies murdered at Aleppo, no one, you say, knows by whom."

"I saw some account of his death in the papers about three years ago," said one of the party; "but the name was misspelled, and I had no idea that it was the same man who had fought the duel which Mrs. Colonel Poyntz has so graphically described. I have a very vague recollection of the trial; it took place when I was a boy, more than forty years since. The affair made a stir at the time, but was soon forgotten."

"Soon forgotten," said Mrs. Poyntz; "ay, what is not? Leave your place in the world for ten minutes, and when you come back somebody else has taken it; but when you leave the world for good, who remembers that you had ever a place even in the parish register?"

"Nevertheless," said I, "a great poet has said, finely and truly,

> "'The sun of Homer shines upon us still.'"

"But it does not shine upon Homer; and learned folks tell me that we know no more who and what Homer was, if there was ever a single Homer at all, or rather, a whole herd of Homers, than we know about the man in the moon,—if there be one man there, or millions of men. Now, my dear Miss Brabazon, it will be very kind in you to divert our thoughts into channels less gloomy. Some pretty French air—Dr. Fenwick, I have something to say to you." She drew me towards the window. "So Annie Ashleigh writes me word that I am not to mention your engagement. Do you think it quite prudent to keep it a secret?"

"I do not see how prudence is concerned in keeping it secret one way or the other,—it is a mere matter of feeling. Most people wish to abridge, as far as they can, the time in which their private arrangements are the topic of public gossip."

"Public gossip is sometimes the best security for the due completion of private arrangements. As long as a girl is not known to be engaged, her betrothed must be prepared for rivals. Announce the engagement, and rivals are warned off."

"I fear no rivals."

"Do you not? Bold man! I suppose you will write to Lilian?"

"Certainly."

"Do so, and constantly. By-the-way, Mrs. Ashleigh, before she went, asked me to send her back Lady Haughton's letter of invitation. What for,—to show to you?"

"Very likely. Have you the letter still? May I see it?"

"Not just at present. When Lilian or Mrs. Ashleigh writes to

you, come and tell me how they like their visit, and what other guests form the party."

Therewith she turned away and conversed apart with the traveller.

Her words disquieted me, and I felt that they were meant to do so, wherefore I could not guess. But there is no language on earth which has more words with a double meaning than that spoken by the Clever Woman, who is never so guarded as when she appears to be frank.

As I walked home thoughtfully, I was accosted by a young man, the son of one of the wealthiest merchants in the town. I had attended him with success some months before, in a rheumatic fever: he and his family were much attached to me.

"Ah, my dear Fenwick, I am so glad to see you; I owe you an obligation of which you are not aware,—an exceedingly pleasant travelling-companion. I came with him to-day from London, where I have been sight-seeing and holidaymaking for the last fortnight."

"I suppose you mean that you kindly bring me a patient?"

"No, only an admirer. I was staying at Fenton's Hotel. It so happened one day that I had left in the coffee-room your last work on the Vital Principle, which, by the by, the bookseller assures me is selling immensely among readers as non-professional as myself. Coming into the coffee-room again, I found a gentleman reading the book. I claimed it politely; he as politely tendered his excuse for taking it. We made acquaintance

on the spot. The next day we were intimate. He expressed great interest and curiosity about your theory and your experiments. I told him I knew you. You may guess if I described you as less clever in your practice than you are in your writings; and, in short, he came with me to L——, partly to see our flourishing town, principally on my promise to introduce him to you. My mother, you know, has what she calls a dejeuner tomorrow,—dejeuner and dance. You will be there?"

"Thank you for reminding me of her invitation. I will avail myself of it if I can. Your new friend will be present? Who and what is he,—a medical student?"

"No, a mere gentleman at ease, but seems to have a good deal of general information. Very young, apparently very rich, wonderfully good-looking. I am sure you will like him; everybody must."

"It is quite enough to prepare me to like him that he is a friend of yours." And so we shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XXIII

It was late in the afternoon of the following day before I was able to join the party assembled at the merchant's house; it was a villa about two miles out of the town, pleasantly situated amidst flower-gardens celebrated in the neighbourhood for their beauty. The breakfast had been long over; the company was scattered over the lawn,—some formed into a dance on the smooth lawn; some seated under shady awnings; others gliding amidst parterres, in which all the glow of colour took a glory yet more vivid under the flush of a brilliant sunshine; and the ripple of a soft western breeze. Music, loud and lively, mingled with the laughter of happy children, who formed much the larger number of the party.

Standing at the entrance of an arched trellis, that led from the hardier flowers of the lawn to a rare collection of tropical plants under a lofty glass dome (connecting, as it were, the familiar vegetation of the North with that of the remotest East), was a form that instantaneously caught and fixed my gaze. The entrance of the arcade was covered with parasite creepers, in prodigal luxuriance, of variegated gorgeous tints,—scarlet, golden, purple; and the form, an idealized picture of man's youth fresh from the hand of Nature, stood literally in a frame of blooms.

Never have I seen human face so radiant as that young man's.

There was in the aspect an indescribable something that literally dazzled. As one continued to gaze, it was with surprise; one was forced to acknowledge that in the features themselves there was no faultless regularity; nor was the young man's stature imposing, about the middle height. But the effect of the whole was not less transcendent. Large eyes, unspeakably lustrous; a most harmonious colouring; an expression of contagious animation and joyousness; and the form itself so critically fine, that the welded strength of its sinews was best shown in the lightness and grace of its movements.

He was resting one hand carelessly on the golden locks of a child that had nestled itself against his knees, looking up to his face in that silent loving wonder with which children regard something too strangely beautiful for noisy admiration; he himself was conversing with the host, an old gray-haired, gouty man, propped on his crutched stick, and listening with a look of mournful envy. To the wealth of the old man all the flowers in that garden owed their renewed delight in the summer air and sun. Oh, that his wealth could renew to himself one hour of the youth whose incarnation stood beside him, Lord, indeed, of Creation; its splendour woven into his crown of beauty, its enjoyments subject to his sceptre of hope and gladness.

I was startled by the hearty voice of the merchant's son. "Ah, my dear Fenwick, I was afraid you would not come,—you are late. There is the new friend of whom I spoke to you last night; let me now make you acquainted with him." He drew my arm

in his, and led me up to the young man, where he stood under the arching flowers, and whom he then introduced to me by the name of Margrave.

Nothing could be more frankly cordial than Mr. Margrave's manner. In a few minutes I found myself conversing with him familiarly, as if we had been reared in the same home, and sported together in the same playground. His vein of talk was peculiar, off-hand, careless, shifting from topic to topic with a bright rapidity.

He said that he liked the place; proposed to stay in it some weeks; asked my address, which I gave to him; promised to call soon at an early hour, while my time was yet free from professional visits. I endeavoured, when I went away, to analyze to myself the fascination which this young stranger so notably exercised over all who approached him; and it seemed to me, ever seeking to find material causes for all moral effects, that it rose from the contagious vitality of that rarest of all rare gifts in highly-civilized circles,—perfect health; that health which is in itself the most exquisite luxury; which, finding happiness in the mere sense of existence, diffuses round it, like an atmosphere, the harmless hilarity of its bright animal being. Health, to the utmost perfection, is seldom known after childhood; health to the utmost cannot be enjoyed by those who overwork the brain, or admit the sure wear and tear of the passions. The creature I had just seen gave me the notion of youth in the golden age of the poets,—the youth of the careless Arcadian, before nymph or

shepherdess had vexed his heart with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXIV

The house I occupied at L—— was a quaint, old-fashioned building, a corner-house. One side, in which was the front entrance, looked upon a street which, as there were no shops in it, and it was no direct thoroughfare to the busy centres of the town, was always quiet, and at some hours of the day almost deserted. The other side of the house fronted a lane; opposite to it was the long and high wall of the garden to a Young Ladies' Boarding-school. My stables adjoined the house, abutting on a row of smaller buildings, with little gardens before them, chiefly occupied by mercantile clerks and retired tradesmen. By the lane there was a short and ready access both to the high turnpike-road, and to some pleasant walks through green meadows and along the banks of a river.

This house I had inhabited since my arrival at L——, and it had to me so many attractions, in a situation sufficiently central to be convenient for patients, and yet free from noise, and favourable to ready outlet into the country for such foot or horse exercise as my professional avocations would allow me to carve for myself out of what the Latin poet calls the "solid day," that I had refused to change it for one better suited to my increased income; but it was not a house which Mrs. Ashleigh would have liked for Lilian. The main objection to it in the eyes of the "genteel" was, that it had formerly belonged to a

member of the healing profession who united the shop of an apothecary to the diploma of a surgeon; but that shop had given the house a special attraction to me; for it had been built out on the side of the house which fronted the lane, occupying the greater portion of a small gravel court, fenced from the road by a low iron palisade, and separated from the body of the house itself by a short and narrow corridor that communicated with the entrance-hall. This shop I turned into a rude study for scientific experiments, in which I generally spent some early hours of the morning, before my visiting patients began to arrive. I enjoyed the stillness of its separation from the rest of the house; I enjoyed the glimpse of the great chestnut-trees, which overtopped the wall of the school-garden; I enjoyed the ease with which, by opening the glazed sash-door, I could get out, if disposed for a short walk, into the pleasant fields; and so completely had I made this sanctuary my own, that not only my man-servant knew that I was never to be disturbed when in it, except by the summons of a patient, but even the housemaid was forbidden to enter it with broom or duster, except upon special invitation. The last thing at night, before retiring to rest, it was the man-servant's business to see that the sash-window was closed, and the gate to the iron palisade locked; but during the daytime I so often went out of the house by that private way that the gate was then very seldom locked, nor the sash-door bolted from within. In the town of L—— there was little apprehension of house-robberies,—especially in the daylight,—and certainly in

this room, cut off from the main building, there was nothing to attract a vulgar cupidity. A few of the apothecary's shelves and cases still remained on the walls, with, here and there, a bottle of some chemical preparation for experiment; two or three worm-eaten, wooden chairs; two or three shabby old tables; an old walnut-tree bureau without a lock, into which odds and ends were confusedly thrust, and sundry ugly-looking inventions of mechanical science, were, assuredly, not the articles which a timid proprietor would guard with jealous care from the chances of robbery. It will be seen later why I have been thus prolix in description. The morning after I had met the young stranger by whom I had been so favourably impressed, I was up as usual, a little before the sun, and long before any of my servants were astir. I went first into the room I have mentioned, and which I shall henceforth designate as my study, opened the window, unlocked the gate, and sauntered for some minutes up and down the silent lane skirting the opposite wall, and overhung by the chestnut-trees rich in the garniture of a glorious summer; then, refreshed for work, I re-entered my study, and was soon absorbed in the examination of that now well-known machine, which was then, to me at least, a novelty,—invented, if I remember right, by Dubois-Reymond, so distinguished by his researches into the mysteries of organic electricity. It is a wooden cylinder fixed against the edge of a table; on the table two vessels filled with salt and water are so placed that, as you close your hands on the cylinder, the forefinger of each hand can drop into the water;

each of the vessels has a metallic plate, and communicates by wires with a galvanometer with its needle. Now the theory is, that if you clutch the cylinder firmly with the right hand, leaving the left perfectly passive, the needle in the galvanometer will move from west to south; if, in like manner, you exert the left arm, leaving the right arm passive, the needle will deflect from west to north. Hence, it is argued that the electric current is induced through the agency of the nervous system, and that, as human Will produces the muscular contraction requisite, so is it human Will that causes the deflection of the needle. I imagine that if this theory were substantiated by experiment, the discovery might lead to some sublime and unconjectured secrets of science. For human Will, thus actively effective on the electric current, and all matter, animate or inanimate, having more or less of electricity, a vast field became opened to conjecture. By what series of patient experimental deduction might not science arrive at the solution of problems which the Newtonian law of gravitation does not suffice to solve; and—But here I halt. At the date which my story has reached, my mind never lost itself long in the Cloudland of Guess.

I was dissatisfied with my experiment. The needle stirred, indeed, but erratically, and not in directions which, according to the theory, should correspond to my movement. I was about to dismiss the trial with some uncharitable contempt of the foreign philosopher's dogmas, when I heard a loud ring at my street-door. While I paused to conjecture whether my servant was yet up to

attend to the door, and which of my patients was the most likely to summon me at so unseasonable an hour, a shadow darkened my window. I looked up, and to my astonishment beheld the brilliant face of Mr. Margrave. The sash to the door was already partially opened; he raised it higher, and walked into the room. "Was it you who rang at the street-door, and at this hour?" said I.

"Yes; and observing, after I had rung, that all the shutters were still closed, I felt ashamed of my own rash action, and made off rather than brave the reproachful face of some injured housemaid, robbed of her morning dreams. I turned down that pretty lane,—lured by the green of the chestnut-trees,—caught sight of you through the window, took courage, and here I am! You forgive me?" While thus speaking, he continued to move along the littered floor of the dingy room, with the undulating restlessness of some wild animal in the confines of its den, and he now went on, in short fragmentary sentences, very slightly linked together, but smoothed, as it were, into harmony by a voice musical and fresh as a sky lark's warble. "Morning dreams, indeed! dreams that waste the life of such a morning. Rosy magnificence of a summer dawn! Do you not pity the fool who prefers to lie a bed, and to dream rather than to live? What! and you, strong man, with those noble limbs, in this den! Do you not long for a rush through the green of the fields, a bath in the blue of the river?"

Here he came to a pause, standing, still in the gray light of the growing day, with eyes whose joyous lustre forestalled the sun's,

and lips which seemed to laugh even in repose.

But presently those eyes, as quick as they were bright, glanced over the walls, the floor, the shelves, the phials, the mechanical inventions, and then rested full on my cylinder fixed to the table. He approached, examined it curiously, asked what it was. I explained. To gratify him I sat down and renewed my experiment, with equally ill success. The needle, which should have moved from west to south, describing an angle of from thirty degrees to forty or even fifty degrees, only made a few troubled, undecided oscillations.

"Tut," cried the young man, "I see what it is; you have a wound in your right hand."

That was true; I had burned my band a few days before in a chemical experiment, and the sore had not healed.

"Well," said I, "and what does that matter?"

"Everything; the least scratch in the skin of the hand produces chemical actions on the electric current, independently of your will. Let me try."

He took my place, and in a moment the needle in the galvanometer responded to his grasp on the cylinder, exactly as the inventive philosopher had stated to be the due result of the experiment.

I was startled.

"But how came you, Mr. Margrave, to be so well acquainted with a scientific process little known, and but recently discovered?"

"I well acquainted! not so. But I am fond of all experiments that relate to animal life. Electricity, especially, is full of interest."

On that I drew him out (as I thought), and he talked volubly. I was amazed to find this young man, in whose brain I had conceived thought kept one careless holiday, was evidently familiar with the physical sciences, and especially with chemistry, which was my own study by predilection. But never had I met with a student in whom a knowledge so extensive was mixed up with notions so obsolete or so crotchety. In one sentence he showed that he had mastered some late discovery by Faraday or Liebig; in the next sentence he was talking the wild fallacies of Cardan or Van Helmont. I burst out laughing at some paradox about sympathetic powders, which he enounced as if it were a recognized truth.

"Pray tell me," said I, "who was your master in physics; for a cleverer pupil never had a more crack-brained teacher."

"No," he answered, with his merry laugh, "it is not the teacher's fault. I am a mere parrot; just cry out a few scraps of learning picked up here and there. But, however, I am fond of all researches into Nature; all guesses at her riddles. To tell you the truth, one reason why I have taken to you so heartily is not only that your published work caught my fancy in the dip which I took into its contents (pardon me if I say dip, I never do more than dip into any book), but also because young —— tells me that which all whom I have met in this town confirm; namely,

that you are one of those few practical chemists who are at once exceedingly cautious and exceedingly bold,—willing to try every new experiment, but submitting experiment to rigid tests. Well, I have an experiment running wild in this giddy head of mine, and I want you, some day when at leisure, to catch it, fix it as you have fixed that cylinder, make something of it. I am sure you can."

"What is it?"

"Something akin to the theories in your work. You would replenish or preserve to each special constitution the special substance that may fail to the equilibrium of its health. But you own that in a large proportion of cases the best cure of disease is less to deal with the disease itself than to support and stimulate the whole system, so as to enable Nature to cure the disease and restore the impaired equilibrium by her own agencies. Thus, if you find that in certain cases of nervous debility a substance like nitric acid is efficacious, it is because the nitric acid has a virtue in locking up, as it were, the nervous energy,—that is, preventing all undue waste. Again, in some cases of what is commonly called feverish cold, stimulants like ammonia assist Nature itself to get rid of the disorder that oppresses its normal action; and, on the same principle, I apprehend, it is contended that a large average of human lives is saved in those hospitals which have adopted the supporting system of ample nourishment and alcoholic stimulants."

"Your medical learning surprises me," said I, smiling; "and without pausing to notice where it deals somewhat superficially

with disputable points in general, and my own theory in particular, I ask you for the deduction you draw from your premises."

"It is simply this: that to all animate bodies, however various, there must be one principle in common,—the vital principle itself. What if there be one certain means of recruiting that principle; and what if that secret can be discovered?"

"Pshaw! The old illusion of the mediaeval empirics."

"Not so. But the mediaeval empirics were great discoverers. You sneer at Van Helmont, who sought, in water, the principle of all things; but Van Helmont discovered in his search those invisible bodies called gases. Now the principle of life must be certainly ascribed to a gas.[11] And what ever is a gas chemistry

[11] "According to the views we have mentioned, we must ascribe life to a gas, that is, to an aeriform body."—Liebig: "Organic Chemistry," Mayfair's translation, p.363.—It is perhaps not less superfluous to add that Liebig does not support the views "according to which life must be ascribed to a gas," than it would be to state, had Dugald Stewart been quoted as writing, "According to the views we have mentioned the mind is but a bundle of impressions," that Dugald Stewart was not supporting, but opposing, the views of David Hume. The quotation is merely meant to show, in the shortest possible compass, that there are views entertained by speculative reasoners of our day which, according to Liebig, would lead to the inference at which Margrave so boldly arrives. Margrave is, however, no doubt, led to his belief by his reminiscences of Van Helmont, to whose discovery of gas he is referring. Van Helmont plainly affirms "that the arterial spirit of our life is of the nature of a gas;" and in the same chapter (on the fiction of elementary complexions and mixtures) says, "Seeing that the spirit of our life, since it is a gas, is most mightily and swiftly affected by any other gas," etc. He repeats the same dogma in his treatise on "Long Life," and indeed very generally throughout his writings, observing, in his chapter on the Vital Air, that the spirit of life is a salt, sharp vapour, made of the arterial blood, etc. Liebig, therefore, in confuting some modern

should not despair of producing! But I can argue no longer now,—never can argue long at a stretch; we are wasting the morning; and, joy! the sun is up! See! Out! come out! out! and greet the great Lifegiver face to face."

I could not resist the young man's invitation. In a few minutes we were in the quiet lane under the glinting chestnut-trees. Margrave was chanting, low, a wild tune,—words in a strange language.

"What words are those,—no European language, I think; for I know a little of most of the languages which are spoken in our quarter of the globe, at least by its more civilized races."

"Civilized race! What is civilization? Those words were uttered by men who founded empires when Europe itself was not civilized! Hush, is it not a grand old air?" and lifting his eyes towards the sun, he gave vent to a voice clear and deep as a mighty

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notions as to the nature of contagion by miasma, is leading their reasonings back to that assumption in the Brawn of physiological science by which the discoverer of gas exalted into the principle of life the substance to which he first gave the name, now so familiarly known. It is nevertheless just to Van Helmont to add that his conception of the vital principle was very far from being as purely materialistic as it would seem to those unacquainted with his writings; for he carefully distinguishes that principle of life which he ascribes to a gas, and by which he means the sensuous animal life, from the intellectual immortal principle of soul. Van Helmont, indeed, was a sincere believer of Divine Revelation. "The Lord Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life," says with earnest humility this daring genius, in that noble chapter "On the completing of the mind by the 'prayer of silence,' and the loving offering tip of the heart, soul, and strength to the obedience of the Divine will," from which some of the most eloquent of recent philosophers, arguing against materialism, have borrowed largely in support and in ornament of their lofty cause.

bell! The air was grand; the words had a sonorous swell that suited it, and they seemed to me jubilant and yet solemn. He stopped abruptly as a path from the lane had led us into the fields, already half-bathed in sunlight, dews glittering on the hedgerows.

"Your song," said I, "would go well with the clash of cymbals or the peal of the organ. I am no judge of melody, but this strikes me as that of a religious hymn."

"I compliment you on the guess. It is a Persian fire-worshipper's hymn to the sun. The dialect is very different from modern Persian. Cyrus the Great might have chanted it on his march upon Babylon."

"And where did you learn it?"

"In Persia itself."

"You have travelled much, learned much,—and are so young and so fresh. Is it an impertinent question if I ask whether your parents are yet living, or are you wholly lord of yourself?"

"Thank you for the question,—pray make my answer known in the town. Parents I have not,—never had."

"Never had parents!"

"Well, I ought rather to say that no parents ever owned me. I am a natural son, a vagabond, a nobody. When I came of age I received an anonymous letter, informing me that a sum—I need not say what, but more than enough for all I need—was lodged at an English banker's in my name; that my mother had died in my infancy; that my father was also dead—but recently; that as I was a child of love, and he was unwilling that the secret of my birth

should ever be traced, he had provided for me, not by will, but in his life, by a sum consigned to the trust of the friend who now wrote to me; I need give myself no trouble to learn more. Faith, I never did! I am young, healthy, rich,—yes, rich! Now you know all, and you had better tell it, that I may win no man's courtesy and no maiden's love upon false pretences. I have not even a right, you see, to the name I bear. Hist! let me catch that squirrel."

With what a panther-like bound he sprang! The squirrel eluded his grasp, and was up the oak-tree; in a moment he was up the oak-tree too. In amazement I saw him rising from bough to bough; saw his bright eyes and glittering teeth through the green leaves. Presently I heard the sharp piteous cry of the squirrel, echoed by the youth's merry laugh; and down, through that maze of green, Hargrave came, dropping on the grass and bounding up, as Mercury might have bounded with his wings at his heels.

"I have caught him. What pretty brown eyes!"

Suddenly the gay expression of his face changed to that of a savage; the squirrel had wrenched itself half-loose, and bitten him. The poor brute! In an instant its neck was wrung, its body dashed on the ground; and that fair young creature, every feature quivering with rage, was stamping his foot on his victim again and again! It was horrible. I caught him by the arm indignantly. He turned round on me like a wild beast disturbed from its prey,—his teeth set, his hand lifted, his eyes like balls of fire.

"Shame!" said I, calmly; "shame on you!"

He continued to gaze on me a moment or so, his eye glaring,

his breath panting; and then, as if mastering himself with an involuntary effort, his arm dropped to his side, and he said quite humbly, "I beg your pardon; indeed I do. I was beside myself for a moment; I cannot bear pain;" and he looked in deep compassion for himself at his wounded hand. "Venomous brute!" And he stamped again on the body of the squirrel, already crushed out of shape.

I moved away in disgust, and walked on.

But presently I felt my arm softly drawn aside, and a voice, dulcet as the coo of a dove, stole its way into my ears. There was no resisting the charm with which this extraordinary mortal could fascinate even the hard and the cold; nor them, perhaps, the least. For as you see in extreme old age, when the heart seems to have shrunk into itself, and to leave but meagre and nipped affections for the nearest relations if grown up, the indurated egotism softens at once towards a playful child; or as you see in middle life, some misanthrope, whose nature has been soured by wrong and sorrow, shrink from his own species, yet make friends with inferior races, and respond to the caress of a dog,—so, for the worldling or the cynic, there was an attraction in the freshness of this joyous favourite of Nature,—an attraction like that of a beautiful child, spoilt and wayward, or of a graceful animal, half docile, half fierce.

"But," said I, with a smile, as I felt all displeasure gone, "such indulgence of passion for such a trifle is surely unworthy a student of philosophy!"

"Trifle," he said dolorously. "But I tell you it is pain; pain is no trifle. I suffer. Look!"

I looked at the hand, which I took in mine. The bite no doubt had been sharp; but the hand that lay in my own was that which the Greek sculptor gives to a gladiator; not large (the extremities are never large in persons whose strength comes from the just proportion of all the members, rather than the factitious and partial force which continued muscular exertion will give to one part of the frame, to the comparative weakening of the rest), but with the firm-knit joints, the solid fingers, the finished nails, the massive palm, the supple polished skin, in which we recognize what Nature designs the human hand to be,—the skilled, swift, mighty doer of all those marvels which win Nature herself from the wilderness.

"It is strange," said I, thoughtfully; "but your susceptibility to suffering confirms my opinion, which is different from the popular belief,—namely, that pain is most acutely felt by those in whom the animal organization being perfect, and the sense of vitality exquisitely keen, every injury or lesion finds the whole system rise, as it were, to repel the mischief and communicate the consciousness of it to all those nerves which are the sentinels to the garrison of life. Yet my theory is scarcely borne out by general fact. The Indian savages must have a health as perfect as yours; a nervous system as fine,—witness their marvellous accuracy of ear, of eye, of scent, probably also of touch; yet they are indifferent to physical pain; or must I mortify your pride by

saying that they have some moral quality defective in you which enables them to rise superior to it?"

"The Indian savages," said Margrave, sullenly, "have not a health as perfect as mine, and in what you call vitality—the blissful consciousness of life—they are as sticks and stones compared to me."

"How do you know?"

"Because I have lived with them. It is a fallacy to suppose that the savage has a health superior to that of the civilized man, —if the civilized man be but temperate; and even if not, he has the stamina that can resist for years the effect of excesses which would destroy the savage in a month. As to the savage's fine perceptions of sense, such do not come from exquisite equilibrium of system, but are hereditary attributes transmitted from race to race, and strengthened by training from infancy. But is a pointer stronger and healthier than a mastiff, because the pointer through long descent and early teaching creeps stealthily to his game and stands to it motionless? I will talk of this later; now I suffer! Pain, pain! Has life any ill but pain?"

It so happened that I had about me some roots of the white lily, which I meant, before returning home, to leave with a patient suffering from one of those acute local inflammations, in which that simple remedy often affords great relief. I cut up one of these roots, and bound the cooling leaves to the wounded hand with my handkerchief.

"There," said I. "Fortunately if you feel pain more sensibly

than others, you will recover from it more quickly." And in a few minutes my companion felt perfectly relieved, and poured out his gratitude with an extravagance of expression and a beaming delight of countenance which positively touched me.

"I almost feel," said I, "as I do when I have stilled an infant's wailing, and restored it smiling to its mother's breast."

"You have done so. I am an infant, and Nature is my mother. Oh, to be restored to the full joy of life, the scent of wild flowers, the song of birds, and this air—summer air—summer air!"

I know not why it was, but at that moment, looking at him and hearing him, I rejoiced that Lilian was not at L——. "But I came out to bathe. Can we not bathe in that stream?"

"No. You would derange the bandage round your hand; and for all bodily ills, from the least to the gravest, there is nothing like leaving Nature at rest the moment we have hit on the means which assist her own efforts at cure."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.