GEORGE MEREDITH

SANDRA BELLONI (ORIGINALLY EMILIA IN ENGLAND). COMPLETE

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

We are to make acquaintance with some serious damsels, as this English generation knows them, and at a season verging upon May. The ladies of Brookfield, Arabella, Cornelia, and Adela Pole, daughters of a flourishing City-of-London merchant, had been told of a singular thing: that in the neighbouring fir-wood a voice was to be heard by night, so wonderfully sweet and richly toned, that it required their strong sense to correct strange imaginings concerning it. Adela was herself the chief witness to its unearthly sweetness, and her testimony was confirmed by Edward Buxley, whose ear had likewise taken in the notes, though not on the same night, as the pair publicly proved by dates. Both declared that the voice belonged to an opera-singer or a spirit. The ladies of Brookfield, declining the alternative, perceived that this was a surprise furnished for their amusement by the latest celebrity of their circle, Mr. Pericles, their father's

business ally and fellow-speculator; Mr. Pericles, the Greek, the man who held millions of money as dust compared to a human voice. Fortified by this exquisite supposition, their strong sense at once dismissed with scorn the idea of anything unearthly, however divine, being heard at night, in the nineteenth century, within sixteen miles of London City. They agreed that Mr. Pericles had hired some charming cantatrice to draw them into the woods and delightfully bewilder them. It was to be expected of his princely nature, they said. The Tinleys, of Bloxholme, worshipped him for his wealth; the ladies of Brookfield assured their friends that the fact of his being a money-maker was redeemed in their sight by his devotion to music. Music was now the Art in the ascendant at Brookfield. The ladies (for it is as well to know at once that they were not of that poor order of women who yield their admiration to a thing for its abstract virtue only) —the ladies were scaling society by the help of the Arts. To this laudable end sacrifices were now made to Euterpe to assist them. As mere daughters of a merchant, they were compelled to make their house not simply attractive, but enticing; and, seeing that they liked music, it seemed a very agreeable device. The Tinleys of Bloxholme still kept to dancing, and had effectually driven away Mr. Pericles from their gatherings. For Mr. Pericles said: "If that they will go 'so,' I will be amused." He presented a top-like triangular appearance for one staggering second. The Tinleys did not go `so' at all, and consequently they lost the satirical man, and were called 'the ballet-dancers' by Adela which thorny scoff

her sisters permitted to pass about for a single day, and no more. The Tinleys were their match at epithets, and any low contention of this kind obscured for them the social summit they hoped to attain; the dream whereof was their prime nourishment.

That the Tinleys really were their match, they acknowledged, upon the admission of the despicable nature of the game. The Tinleys had winged a dreadful shaft at them; not in itself to be dreaded, but that it struck a weak point; it was a common shot that exploded a magazine; and for a time it quite upset their social policy, causing them to act like simple young ladies who feel things and resent them. The ladies of Brookfield had let it be known that, in their privacy together, they were Pole, Polar, and North Pole. Pole, Polar, and North Pole were designations of the three shades of distance which they could convey in a bow: a form of salute they cherished as peculiarly their own; being a method they had invented to rebuke the intrusiveness of the outer world, and hold away all strangers until approved worthy. Even friends had occasionally to submit to it in a softened form. Arabella, the eldest, and Adela, the youngest, alternated Pole and Polar; but North Pole was shared by Cornelia with none. She was the fairest of the three; a nobly-built person; her eyes not vacant of tenderness when she put off her armour. In her war-panoply before unhappy strangers, she was a Britomart. They bowed to an iceberg, which replied to them with the freezing indifference of the floating colossus, when the Winter sun despatches a feeble greeting messenger-beam from his miserable Arctic wallet. The

simile must be accepted in its might, for no lesser one will express the scornfulness toward men displayed by this strikingly well-favoured, formal lady, whose heart of hearts demanded for her as spouse, a lord, a philosopher, and a Christian, in one: and he must be a member of Parliament. Hence her isolated air.

Now, when the ladies of Brookfield heard that their Pole, Polar, and North Pole, the splendid image of themselves, had been transformed by the Tinleys, and defiled by them to Pole, Polony, and Maypole, they should have laughed contemptuously; but the terrible nerve of ridicule quivered in witness against them, and was not to be stilled. They could not understand why so coarse a thing should affect them. It stuck in their flesh. It gave them the idea that they saw their features hideous, but real, in a magnifying mirror.

There was therefore a feud between the Tinleys and the Poles; and when Mr. Pericles entirely gave up the former, the latter rewarded him by spreading abroad every possible kind interpretation of his atrocious bad manners. He was a Greek, of Parisian gilding, whose Parisian hat flew off at a moment's notice, and whose savage snarl was heard at the slightest vexation. His talk of renowned prime-donne by their Christian names, and the way that he would catalogue emperors, statesmen, and noblemen known to him, with familiar indifference, as things below the musical Art, gave a distinguishing tone to Brookfield, from which his French accentuation of our tongue did not detract.

Mr. Pericles grimaced bitterly at any claim to excellence being set up for the mysterious voice in the woods. Tapping one forefinger on the uplifted point of the other, he observed that to sing abroad in the night air of an English Spring month was conclusive of imbecility; and that no imbecile sang at all. Because, to sing, involved the highest accomplishment of which the human spirit could boast. Did the ladies see? he asked. They thought they saw that he carried on a deception admirably. In return, they inquired whether he would come with them and hunt the voice, saying that they would catch it for him. "I shall catch a cold for myself," said Mr. Pericles, from the elevation of a shrug, feeling that he was doomed to go forth. He acted reluctance so well that the ladies affected a pretty imperiousness; and when at last he consented to join the party, they thanked him with a nicely simulated warmth, believing that they had pleased him thoroughly.

Their brother Wilfrid was at Brookfield. Six months earlier he had returned from India, an invalided cornet of light cavalry, with a reputation for military dash and the prospect of a medal. Then he was their heroic brother he was now their guard. They love him tenderly, and admired him when it was necessary; but they had exhausted their own sensations concerning his deeds of arms, and fancied that he had served their purpose. And besides, valour is not an intellectual quality, they said. They were ladies so aspiring, these daughters of the merchant Samuel Bolton Pole, that, if Napoleon had been their brother, their imaginations

would have overtopped him after his six months' inaction in the Tuileries. They would by that time have made a stepping-stone of the emperor. 'Mounting' was the title given to this proceeding. They went on perpetually mounting. It is still a good way from the head of the tallest of men to the stars; so they had their work before them; but, as they observed, they were young. To be brief, they were very ambitious damsels, aiming at they knew not exactly what, save that it was something so wide that it had not a name, and so high in the air that no one could see it. They knew assuredly that their circle did not please them. So, therefore, they were constantly extending and refining it: extending it perhaps for the purpose of refining it. Their susceptibilities demanded that they should escape from a city circle. Having no mother, they ruled their father's house and him, and were at least commanders of whatsoever forces they could summon for the task.

It may be seen that they were sentimentalists. That is to say, they supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings, and exclusively comprehended the Fine Shades. Whereof more will be said; but in the meantime it will explain their propensity to mount; it will account for their irritation at the material obstructions surrounding them; and possibly the philosopher will now have his eye on the source of that extraordinary sense of superiority to mankind which was the crown of their complacent brows. Eclipsed as they may be in the gross appreciation of the world by other people, who excel in this and that accomplishment, persons that nourish Nice Feelings and

are intimate with the Fine Shades carry their own test of intrinsic value.

Nor let the philosopher venture hastily to despise them as pipers to dilettante life. Such persons come to us in the order of civilization. In their way they help to civilize us. Sentimentalists are a perfectly natural growth of a fat soil. Wealthy communities must engender them. If with attentive minds we mark the origin of classes, we shall discern that the Nice Feelings and the Fine Shades play a principal part in our human development and social history. I dare not say that civilized man is to be studied with the eye of a naturalist; but my vulgar meaning might almost be twisted to convey: that our sentimentalists are a variety owing their existence to a certain prolonged term of comfortable feeding. The pig, it will be retorted, passes likewise through this training. He does. But in him it is not combined with an indigestion of high German romances. Here is so notable a difference, that he cannot possibly be said to be of the family. And I maintain it against him, who have nevertheless listened attentively to the eulogies pronounced by the vendors of prize bacon.

After thus stating to you the vast pretensions of the ladies of Brookfield, it would be unfair to sketch their portraits. Nothing but comedy bordering on burlesque could issue from the contrast, though they graced a drawing-room or a pew, and had properly elegant habits and taste in dress, and were all fair to the sight. Moreover, Adela had not long quitted school. Outwardly they

were not unlike other young ladies with wits alert. They were at the commencement of their labours on this night of the expedition when they were fated to meet something greatly confusing them.

CHAPTER II

Half of a rosy mounting full moon was on the verge of the East as the ladies, with attendant cavaliers, passed, humming softly, through the garden-gates. Arabella had, by right of birth, made claim to Mr. Pericles: not without an unwontedly fretful remonstrance from Cornelia, who said, “My dear, you must allow that I have some talent for drawing men out.”

And Arabella replied: “Certainly, dear, you have; and I think I have some too.”

The gentle altercation lasted half-an-hour, but they got no farther than this. Mr. Pericles was either hopeless of protecting himself from such shrewd assailants, or indifferent to their attacks, for all his defensive measures were against the cold. He was muffled in a superbly mounted bearskin, which came up so closely about his ears that Arabella had to repeat to him all her questions, and as it were force a way for her voice through the hide. This was provoking, since it not only stemmed the natural flow of conversation, but prevented her imagination from decorating the reminiscence of it subsequently (which was her profound secret pleasure), besides letting in the outer world upon her. Take it as an axiom, when you utter a sentimentalism, that more than one pair of ears makes a cynical critic. A sentimentalism requires secresy. I can enjoy it, and shall treat it respectfully if you will confide it to me alone; but I and my

friends must laugh at it outright.

"Does there not seem a soul in the moonlight?" for instance. Arabella, after a rapturous glance at the rosy orb, put it to Mr. Pericles, in subdued impressive tones. She had to repeat her phrase; Mr. Pericles then echoing, with provoking monotony of tone, "Sol?"—whereupon "Soul!" was reiterated, somewhat sharply: and Mr. Pericles, peering over the collar of the bear, with half an eye, continued the sentence, in the manner of one sent thereby farther from its meaning: "Ze moonlight?" Despairing and exasperated, Arabella commenced afresh: "I said, there seems a soul in it"; and Mr. Pericles assented bluntly: "In ze light!"—which sounded so little satisfactory that Arabella explained, "I mean the aspect;" and having said three times distinctly what she meant, in answer to a terrific glare from the unsubmerged whites of the eyes of Mr. Pericles, this was his comment, almost roared forth:

"Sol! you say so-whole—in ze moonlight—Luna? Hein? Ze aspect is of Sol!—Yez."

And Mr. Pericles sank into his bear again, while Wilfrid Pole, who was swinging his long cavalry legs to rearward, shouted; and Mr. Sumner, a rising young barrister, walking beside Cornelia, smiled a smile of extreme rigidity. Arabella was punished for claiming rights of birth. She heard the murmuring course of the dialogue between Cornelia and Mr. Sumner, sufficiently clear to tell her it was not fictitious and was well sustained, while her heart was kept thirsting for the key to it. In advance were

Adela and Edward Buxley, who was only a rich alderman's only son, but had the virtue of an extraordinary power of drawing caricatures, and was therefore useful in exaggerating the features of disagreeable people, and showing how odious they were: besides endearing pleasant ones exhibiting how comic they could be. Gossips averred that before Mr. Pole had been worried by his daughters into giving that mighty sum for Brookfield, Arabella had accepted Edward as her suitor; but for some reason or other he had apparently fallen from his high estate. To tell the truth, Arabella conceived that he had simply obeyed her wishes, while he knew he was naughtily following his own; and Adela, without introspection at all, was making her virgin effort at the caricaturing of our sex in his person: an art for which she promised well.

Out of the long black shadows of the solitary trees of the park, and through low yellow moonlight, they passed suddenly into the muffed ways of the wood. Mr. Pericles was ineffably provoking. He had come for gallantry's sake, and was not to be rallied, and would echo every question in a roar, and there was no drawing of the man out at all. He knocked against branches, and tripped over stumps, and ejaculated with energy; but though he gave no heed or help to his fair associate, she thought not the worse of him, so heroic can women be toward any creature that will permit himself to be clothed by a mystery. At times the party hung still, fancying the voice aloft, and then, after listening to the unrelieved stillness, they laughed, and trod the stiff dry

ferns and soft mosses once more. At last they came to a decided halt, when the proposition to return caused Adela to come up to Mr. Pericles and say to him, "Now, you must confess! You have prohibited her from singing to-night so that we may continue to be mystified. I call this quite shameful of you!"

And even as Mr. Pericles was protesting that he was the most mystified of the company, his neck lengthened, and his head went round, and his ear was turned to the sky, while he breathed an elaborate "Ah!" And sure enough that was the voice of the woods, cleaving the night air, not distant. A sleepy fire of early moonlight hung through the dusky fir-branches. The voice had the woods to itself, and seemed to fill them and soar over them, it was so full and rich, so light and sweet. And now, to add to the marvel, they heard a harp accompaniment, the strings being faintly touched, but with firm fingers. A woman's voice: on that could be no dispute. Tell me, what opens heaven more flamingly to heart and mind, than the voice of a woman, pouring clear accordant notes to the blue night sky, that grows light blue to the moon? There was no flourish in her singing. All the notes were firm, and rounded, and sovereignly distinct. She seemed to have caught the ear of Night, and sang confident of her charm. It was a grand old Italian air, requiring severity of tone and power. Now into great mournful hollows the voice sank steadfastly. One soft sweep of the strings succeeded a deep final note, and the hearers breathed freely.

"Stradella!" said the Greek, folding his arms.

The ladies were too deeply impressed to pursue their play with him. Real emotions at once set aside the semi-credence they had given to their own suggestions.

"Hush! she will sing again," whispered Adela. "It is the most delicious contralto." Murmurs of objection to the voice being characterized at all by any technical word, or even for a human quality, were heard.

"Let me find zis woman!" cried the prose enthusiast Mr. Pericles, imperiously, with his bearskin thrown back on his shoulders, and forth they stepped, following him.

In the middle of the wood there was a sandy mound, rising half the height of the lesser firs, bounded by a green-grown vallum, where once an old woman, hopelessly a witch, had squatted, and defied the authorities to make her budge: nor could they accomplish the task before her witch-soul had taken wing in the form of a black night-bird, often to be heard jarring above the spot. Lank dry weeds and nettles, and great lumps of green and gray moss, now stood on the poor old creature's place of habitation, and the moon, slanting through the fir-clumps, was scattered on the blossoms of twisted orchard-trees, gone wild again. Amid this desolation, a dwarfed pine, whose roots were partially bared as they grasped the broken bank that was its perch, threw far out a cedar-like hand. In the shadow of it sat the fair singer. A musing touch of her harp-strings drew the intruders to the charmed circle, though they could discern nothing save the glimmer of the instrument and one set of fingers caressing

it. How she viewed their rather impertinent advance toward her, till they had ranged in a half-circle nearer and nearer, could not be guessed. She did not seem abashed in any way, for, having preluded, she threw herself into another song.

The charm was now more human, though scarcely less powerful. This was a different song from the last: it was not the sculptured music of the old school, but had the richness and fulness of passionate blood that marks the modern Italian, where there is much dallying with beauty in the thick of sweet anguish. Here, at a certain passage of the song, she gathered herself up and pitched a nervous note, so shrewdly triumphing, that, as her voice sank to rest, her hearers could not restrain a deep murmur of admiration.

Then came an awkward moment. The ladies did not wish to go, and they were not justified in stopping. They were anxious to speak, and they could not choose the word to utter. Mr. Pericles relieved them by moving forward and doffing his hat, at the same time begging excuse for the rudeness they were guilty of.

The fair singer answered, with the quickness that showed a girl: "Oh, stay; do stay, if I please you!" A singular form of speech, it was thought by the ladies.

She added: "I feel that I sing better when I have people to listen to me."

"You find it more sympathetic, do you not?" remarked Cornelia.

"I don't know," responded the unknown, with a very honest

smile. “I like it.”

She was evidently uneducated. “A professional?” whispered Adela to Arabella. She wanted little invitation to exhibit her skill, at all events, for, at a word, the clear, bold, but finely nervous voice, was pealing to a brisker measure, that would have been joyous but for one fall it had, coming unexpectedly, without harshness, and winding up the song in a ringing melancholy.

After a few bars had been sung, Mr. Pericles was seen tapping his forehead perplexedly. The moment it ended, he cried out, in a tone of vexed apology for strange ignorance: “But I know not it? It is Italian—yes, I swear it is Italian! But—who then? It is superbe! But I know not it!”

“It is mine,” said the young person.

“Your music, miss?”

“I mean, I composed it.”

“Permit me to say, Brava!”

The ladies instantly petitioned to have it sung to them again; and whether or not they thought more of it, or less, now that the authorship was known to them, they were louder in their applause, which seemed to make the little person very happy.

“You are sure it pleases you?” she exclaimed.

They were very sure it pleased them. Somehow the ladies were growing gracious toward her, from having previously felt too humble, it may be. She was girlish in her manner, and not imposing in her figure. She would be a sweet mystery to talk about, they thought: but she had ceased to be quite the same

mystery to them.

"I would go on singing to you," she said; "I could sing all night long: but my people at the farm will not keep supper for me, when it's late, and I shall have to go hungry to bed, if I wait."

"Have you far to go?" ventured Adela.

"Only to Wilson's farm; about ten minutes' walk through the wood," she answered unhesitatingly.

Arabella wished to know whether she came frequently to this lovely spot.

"When it does not rain, every evening," was the reply.

"You feel that the place inspires you?" said Cornelia.

"I am obliged to come," she explained. "The good old dame at the farm is ill, and she says that music all day is enough for her, and I must come here, or I should get no chance of playing at all at night."

"But surely you feel an inspiration in the place, do you not?" Cornelia persisted.

She looked at this lady as if she had got a hard word given her to crack, and muttered: "I feel it quite warm here. And I do begin to love the place."

The stately Cornelia fell back a step.

The moon was now a silver ball on the edge of the circle of grey blue above the ring of firs, and by the light falling on the strange little person, as she stood out of the shadow to muffle up her harp, it could be seen that she was simply clad, and that her bonnet was not of the newest fashion. The sisters remarked

a boot-lace hanging loose. The peculiar black lustre of her hair, and thickness of her long black eyebrows, struck them likewise. Her harp being now comfortably mantled, Cornet Wilfrid Pole, who had been watching her and balancing repeatedly on his forward foot, made a stride, and "really could not allow her to carry it herself," and begged her permission that he might assist her. "It's very heavy, you know," he added.

"Too heavy for me," she said, favouring him with a thankful smile. "I have some one who does that. Where is Jim?"

She called for Jim, and from the back of the sandy hillock, where he had been reclining, a broad-shouldered rustic came lurching round to them.

"Now, take my harp, if you please, and be as careful as possible of branches, and don't stumble." She uttered this as if she were giving Jim his evening lesson: and then with a sudden cry she laughed out: "Oh! but I haven't played you your tune, and you must have your tune!"

Forthwith she stript the harp half bare, and throwing a propitiatory bright glance at her audience on the other side of her, she commenced thrumming a kind of Giles Scroggins, native British, beer-begotten air, while Jim smeared his mouth and grinned, as one who sees his love dragged into public view, and is not the man to be ashamed of her, though he hopes you will hardly put him to the trial.

"This is his favourite tune, that he taught me," she emphasized to the company. "I play to him every night, for a finish; and then

he takes care not to knock my poor harp to pieces and tumble about."

The gentlemen were amused by the Giles Scroggins air, which she had delivered with a sufficient sense of its lumping fun and leg-for-leg jollity, and they laughed and applauded; but the ladies were silent after the performance, until the moment came to thank her for the entertainment she had afforded them: and then they broke into gentle smiles, and trusted they might have the pleasure of hearing her another night.

"Oh! just as often and as much as you like," she said, and first held her hand to Arabella, next to Cornelia, and then to Adela. She seemed to be hesitating before the gentlemen, and when Wilfrid raised his hat, she was put to some confusion, and bowed rather awkwardly, and retired.

"Good night, miss!" called Mr. Pericles.

"Good night, sir!" she answered from a little distance, and they could see that she was there emboldened to drop a proper curtsey in accompaniment.

Then the ladies stood together and talked of her, not with absolute enthusiasm. For, "Was it not divine?" said Adela; and Cornelia asked her if she meant the last piece; and, "Oh, gracious! not that!" Adela exclaimed. And then it was discovered how their common observation had fastened on the boot-lace; and this vagrant article became the key to certain speculations on her condition and character.

"I wish I'd had a dozen bouquets, that's all!" cried Wilfrid,

“she deserved them.”

“Has she sentiment for what she sings? or is it only faculty?” Cornelia put it to Mr. Sumner.

That gentleman faintly defended the stranger for the intrusion of the bumpkin tune. “She did it so well!” he said.

“I complain that she did it too well,” uttered Cornelia, whose use of emphasis customarily implied that the argument remained with her.

Talking in this manner, and leisurely marching homeward, they were startled to hear Mr. Pericles, who had wrapped himself impenetrably in the bear, burst from his cogitation suddenly to cry out, in his harshest foreign accent: “Yeaz!” And thereupon he threw open the folds, and laid out a forefinger, and delivered himself: “I am made my mind! I send her abroad to ze Academie for one, two, tree year. She shall be instructed as was not before. Zen a noise at La Scala. No—Paris! No—London! She shall astonish London fairst.—Yez! if I take a theatre! Yez! if I buy a newspaper! Yez! if I pay feefty-sossand pound!”

His singular outlandish vehemence, and the sweeping grandeur of a determination that lightly assumed the corruptibility of our Press, sent a smile circling among the ladies and gentlemen. The youth who had wished to throw the fair unknown a dozen bouquets, caught himself frowning at this brilliant prospect for her, which was to give him his opportunity.

CHAPTER III

The next morning there were many “tra-las” and “tum-te-turns” over the family breakfast-table; a constant humming and crying, “I have it”; and after two or three bars, baffled pauses and confusion of mind. Mr. Pericles was almost abusive at the impotent efforts of the sisters to revive in his memory that particular delicious melody, the composition of the fair singer herself. At last he grew so impatient as to arrest their opening notes, and even to interrupt their unmusical consultations, with “No: it is no use; it is no use: no, no, I say!” But instantly he would plunge his forehead into the palm of his hand, and rub it red, and work his eyebrows frightfully, until tender humanity led the sisters to resume. Adela’s, “I’m sure it began low down —tum!” Cornelia’s: “The key-note, I am positive, was B flat —ta!” and Arabella’s putting of these two assertions together, and promise to combine them at the piano when breakfast was at an end, though it was Sunday morning, were exasperating to the exquisite lover of music. Mr. Pericles was really suffering torments. Do you know what it is to pursue the sylph, and touch her flying skirts, think you have caught her, and are sure of her —that she is yours, the rapturous evanescent darling! when some well-meaning earthly wretch interposes and trips you, and off she flies and leaves you floundering? A lovely melody nearly grasped and lost in this fashion, tries the temper. Apollo chasing

Daphne could have been barely polite to the wood-nymphs in his path, and Mr. Pericles was rude to the daughters of his host. Smoothing his clean square chin and thick moustache hastily, with outspread thumb and fingers, he implored them to spare his nerves. Smiling rigidly, he trusted they would be merciful to a sensitive ear. Mr. Pole—who, as an Englishman, could not understand anyone being so serious in the pursuit of a tune—laughed, and asked questions, and almost drove Mr. Pericles mad. On a sudden the Greek's sallow visage lightened. "It is to you! it is to you!" he cried, stretching his finger at Wilfrid. The young officer, having apparently waited till he had finished with his knife and fork, was leaning his cheek on his fist, looking at nobody, and quietly humming a part of the air. Mr. Pericles complimented and thanked him.

"But you have ear for music extraordinaire!" he said.

Adela patted her brother fondly, remarking—"Yes, when his feelings are concerned."

"Will you repeat zat?" asked the Greek. "'To-to-ri:' hein? I lose it. 'To-to-ru:' bah! I lose it; 'To-ri:—to—ru—ri ro:' it is no use: I lose it."

Neither his persuasions, nor his sneer, "Because it is Sunday, perhaps!" would induce Wilfrid to be guilty of another attempt. The ladies tried sisterly cajoleries on him fruitlessly, until Mr. Pole, seeing the desperation of his guest, said: "Why not have her up here, toon and all, some week-day? Sunday birds won't suit us, you know. We've got a piano for her that's good enough for

the first of 'em, if money means anything."

The ladies murmured meekly: "Yes, papa."

"I shall find her for you while you go to your charch," said Mr. Pericles. And here Wilfrid was seized with a yawn, and rose, and asked his eldest sister if she meant to attend the service that morning.

"Undoubtedly," she answered; and Mr. Pole took it up: "That's our discipline, my boy. Must set an example: do our duty. All the house goes to worship in the country."

"Why, in ze country?" queried Mr. Pericles.

"Because"—Cornelia came to the rescue of her sire; but her impetuosity was either unsupported by a reason, or she stooped to fit one to the comprehension of the interrogator: "Oh, because—do you know, we have very select music at our church?"

"We have a highly-paid organist," added Arabella.

"Recently elected," said Adela.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" Mr. Pericles ejaculated. "Some music sound well at afar—mellow, you say. I prefer your charch music mellow."

"Won't you come?" cried Wilfrid, with wonderful briskness.

"No. Mellow for me!"

The Greek's grinders flashed, and Wilfrid turned off from him sulkily. He saw in fancy the robber-Greek prowling about Wilson's farm, setting snares for the marvellous night-bird, and it was with more than his customary inattention to his sisters' refined conversation that he formed part of their male escort to

the place of worship.

Mr. Pericles met the church-goers on their return in one of the green bowery lanes leading up to Brookfield. Cold as he was to English scenes and sentiments, his alien ideas were not unimpressed by the picture of those daintily-clad young women demurely stepping homeward, while the air held a revel of skylarks, and the scented hedgeways quickened with sunshine.

"You have missed a treat!" Arabella greeted him.

"A sermon?" said he.

The ladies would not tell him, until his complacent cynicism at the notion of his having missed a sermon, spurred them to reveal that the organ had been handled in a masterly manner; and that the voluntary played at the close of the service was most exquisite.

"Even papa was in raptures."

"Very good indeed," said Mr. Pole. "I'm no judge; but you might listen to that sort of playing after dinner."

Mr. Pericles seemed to think that was scarcely a critical period, but he merely grimaced, and inquired: "Did you see ze player?"

"Oh, no: they are hidden," Arabella explained to him, "behind a curtain."

"But, what!" shouted the impetuous Greek: "have you no curiosity? A woman! And zen, you saw not her?"

"No," remarked Cornelia, in the same aggravating sing-song voice of utter indifference: "we don't know whether it was not a

man. Our usual organist is a man, I believe."

The eyes of the Greek whitened savagely, and he relapsed into frigid politeness.

Wilfrid was not present to point their apprehensions. He had loitered behind; but when he joined them in the house subsequently, he was cheerful, and had a look of triumph about him which made his sisters say, "So, you have been with the Copleys:" and he allowed them to suppose it, if they pleased; the Copleys being young ladies of position in the neighbourhood, of much higher standing than the Tinleys, who, though very wealthy, could not have given their brother such an air, the sisters imagined.

At lunch, Wilfrid remarked carelessly: "By the way, I met that little girl we saw last night."

"The singer! where?" asked his sisters, with one voice.

"Coming out of church."

"She goes to church, then!"

This exclamation showed the heathen they took her to be.

"Why, she played the organ," said Wilfrid.

"And how does she look by day? How does she dress?"

"Oh! very jolly little woman! Dresses quiet enough."

"She played the organ! It was she, then! An organist! Is there anything approaching to gentility in her appearance?"

"I—really I'm no judge," said Wilfrid. "You had better ask Laura Tinley. She was talking to her when I went up."

The sisters exchanged looks. Presently they stood together in

consultation. Then they spoke with their aunt, Mrs. Lupin, and went to their papa. The rapacity of those Tinleys for anything extraordinary was known to them, but they would not have conceived that their own discovery, their own treasure, could have been caught up so quickly. If the Tinleys got possession of her, the defection of Mr. Pericles might be counted on, and the display of a phenomenon would be lost to them. They decided to go down to Wilson's farm that very day, and forestall their rivals by having her up to Brookfield. The idea of doing this had been in a corner of their minds all the morning: it seemed now the most sensible plan in the world. It was patronage, in its right sense. And they might be of great service to her, by giving a proper elevation and tone to her genius; while she might amuse them, and their guests, and be let off, in fact, as a firework for the nonce. Among the queenly cases of women who are designing to become the heads of a circle (if I may use the term), an accurate admeasurement of reciprocal advantages can scarcely be expected to rank; but the knowledge that an act, depending upon us for execution, is capable of benefiting both sides, will make the proceeding appear so unselfish, that its wisdom is overlooked as well as its motives. The sisters felt they were the patronesses of the little obscure genius whom they longed for to illumine their household, before they knew her name. Cornet Wilfrid Pole must have chuckled mightily to see them depart on their mission. These ladies, who managed everybody, had themselves been very cleverly managed. It is doubtful whether

the scheme to surprise and delight Mr. Pericles would have actuated the step they took, but for the dread of seeing the rapacious Tinleys snatch up their lawful prey. The Tinleys were known to be quite capable of doing so. They had, on a particular occasion, made transparent overtures to a celebrity belonging to the Poles, whom they had first met at Brookfield: could never have hoped to have seen had they not met him at Brookfield; and girls who behaved in this way would do anything. The resolution was taken to steal a march on them; nor did it seem at all odd to people naturally so hospitable as the denizens of Brookfield, that the stranger of yesterday should be the guest of to-day. Kindness of heart, combined with a great scheme in the brain, easily put aside conventional rules.

"But we don't know her name," they said, when they had taken the advice of the gentlemen on what they had already decided to do: all excepting Mr. Pericles, for whom the surprise was in store.

"Belloni—Miss Belloni," said Wilfrid.

"Are you sure? How do you know—?"

"She told Laura Tinley."

Within five minutes of the receipt of this intelligence the ladies were on their way to Wilson's farm.

CHAPTER IV

The circle which the ladies of Brookfield were designing to establish just now, was of this receipt:—Celebrities, London residents, and County notables, all in their severally due proportions, were to meet, mix, and revolve: the Celebrities to shine; the Metropolitans to act as satellites; the County ignoramuses to feel flattered in knowing that all stood forth for their amusement: they being the butts of the quick-witted Metropolitans, whom they despised, while the sons of renown were encouraged to be conscious of their magnanimous superiority over both sets, for whose entertainment they were ticketed.

This is a pudding indeed! And the contemplation of the skill and energy required to get together and compound such a Brookfield Pudding, well-nigh leads one to think the work that is done out of doors a very inferior business, and, as it were, mere gathering of fuel for the fire inside. It was known in the neighbourhood that the ladies were preparing one; and moreover that they had a new kind of plum; in other words, that they intended to exhibit a prodigy of genius, who would flow upon the world from Brookfield. To announce her with the invitations, rejecting the idea of a surprise in the assembly, had been necessary, because there was no other way of securing Lady Gosstre, who led the society of the district. The great lady gave

her promise to attend: “though,” as she said to Arabella, “you must know I abominate musical parties, and think them the most absurd of entertainments possible; but if you have anything to show, that’s another matter.”

Two or three chosen friends were invited down beforehand to inspect the strange girl, and say what they thought of her; for the ladies themselves were perplexed. They had found her to be commonplace: a creature without ideas and with a decided appetite. So when Tracy Runningbrook, who had also been a plum in his day, and was still a poet, said that she was exquisitely comic, they were induced to take the humorous view of the inexplicable side in the character of Miss Belloni, and tried to laugh at her eccentricities. Seeing that Mr. Pericles approved of her voice as a singer, and Tracy Runningbrook let pass her behaviour as a girl, they conceived that on the whole they were safe in sounding a trumpet loudly. These gentlemen were connoisseurs, each in his walk.

Concerning her position and parentage, nothing was known. She had met Adela’s delicately-searching touches in that direction with a marked reserve. It was impossible to ask her point-blank, after probing her with a dozen suggestions, for the ingenuousness of an indifferent inquiry could not then be assumed, so that Adela was constantly baked and felt that she must some day be excessively ‘fond with her,’ which was annoying. The girl lit up at any sign of affection. A kind look gave Summer depths to her dark eyes. Otherwise she maintained

a simple discretion and walked in her own path, content to look quietly pleased on everybody, as one who had plenty to think of and a voice in her ear.

Apparently she was not to be taught to understand 'limits': which must be explained as a sort of magnetic submissiveness to the variations of Polar caprice; so that she should move about with ease, be cheerful, friendly, and, at a signal, affectionate; still not failing to recognize the particular nooks where the family chalk had traced a line. As the day of exhibition approached, Adela thought she would give her a lesson in limits. She ventured to bestow a small caress on the girl, after a compliment; thinking that the compliment would be a check: but the compliment was passed, and the caress instantly replied to with two arms and a tender mouth. At which, Adela took fright and was glad to slip away.

At last the pudding flowed into the bag.

Emilia was posted by the ladies in a corner of the room. Receiving her assurance that she was not hungry, they felt satisfied that she wanted nothing. Wilfrid came up to her to console her for her loneliness, until Mr. Pericles had stationed himself at the back of her chair, and then Wilfrid nodded languidly and attended to his graver duties. Who would have imagined that she had hurt him? But she certainly looked with greater animation on Mr. Pericles; and when Tracy Runningbrook sat down by her, a perfect little carol of chatter sprang up between them. These two presented such a noticeable

contrast, side by side, that the ladies had to send a message to separate them. She was perhaps a little the taller of the two; with smoothed hair that had the gloss of black briony leaves, and eyes like burning brands in a cave; while Tracy's hair was red as blown flame, with eyes of a grey-green hue, that may be seen glistening over wet sunset. People, who knew him, asked: "Who is she?" and it was not in the design of the ladies to have her noted just yet.

Lady Gosstre's exclamation on entering the room was presently heard. "Well! and where's our extraordinary genius? Pray, let me see her immediately."

Thereat Laura Tinley, with gross ill-breeding, rushed up to Arabella, who was receiving her ladyship, and touching her arm, as if privileges were permitted her, cried: "I'm dying to see her. Has she come?"

Arabella embraced the offensive girl in a hostess's smile, and talked flowingly to the great lady.

Laura Tinley was punished by being requested to lead off with a favourite song in a buzz. She acceded, quite aware of the honour intended, and sat at the piano, taming as much as possible her pantomime of one that would be audible. Lady Gosstre scanned the room, while Adela, following her ladyship's eyeglass, named the guests.

"You get together a quaint set of men," said Lady Gosstre.

"Women!" was on Adela's tongue's tip. She had really thought well of her men. Her heart sank.

"In the country!" she began.

"Yes, yes!" went my lady.

These were the lessons that made the ladies of Brookfield put a check upon youth's tendency to feel delightful satisfaction with its immediate work, and speedily conceive a discontented suspicion of anything whatsoever that served them.

Two other sacrifices were offered at the piano after Laura Tinley. Poor victims of ambition, they arranged their dresses, smiled at the leaves, and deliberately gave utterance to the dreadful nonsense of the laureates of our drawing-rooms. Mr. Pericles and Emilia exchanged scientific glances during the performance. She was merciless to indifferent music. Wilfrid saw the glances pass. So, now, when Emilia was beckoned to the piano, she passed by Wilfrid, and had a cold look in return for beaming eyes.

According to directions, Emilia sang a simple Neapolitan air. The singer was unknown, and was generally taken for another sacrifice.

"Come; that's rather pretty," Lady Gosstre hailed the close.

"It is of ze people—such as zat," assented Mr. Pericles.

Adela heard my lady ask for the singer's name. She made her way to her sisters. Adela was ordinarily the promoter, Cornelia the sifter, and Arabella the director, of schemes in this management. The ladies had a moment for counsel over a music-book, for Arabella was about to do duty at the piano. During a pause, Mr. Pole lifting his white waistcoat with the effort, sent a word abroad, loudly and heartily, regardless of its guardian

aspirate, like a bold-faced hoyden flying from her chaperon. They had dreaded it. They loved their father, but declined to think his grammar parental. Hushing together, they agreed that it had been a false move to invite Lady Gosstre, who did not care a bit for music, until the success of their Genius was assured by persons who did. To suppose that she would recognize a Genius, failing a special introduction, was absurd. The ladies could turn upon aristocracy too, when it suited them.

Arabella had now to go through a quartett. The fever of ill-luck had seized the violin. He would not tune. Then his string broke; and while he was arranging it the footman came up to Arabella. Misfortunes, we know, are the most united family on earth. The news brought to her was that a lady of the name of Mrs. Chump was below. Holding her features rigidly bound, not to betray perturbation, Arabella confided the fact to Cornelia, who, with a similar mental and muscular compression, said instantly, "Manoeuvre her." Adela remarked, "If you tell her the company is grand, she will come, and her Irish once heard here will destroy us. The very name of Chump!"

Mrs. Chump was the wealthy Irish widow of an alderman, whose unaccountable bad taste in going to Ireland for a wife, yet filled the ladies with astonishment. She pretended to be in difficulties with her lawyers; for which reason she strove to be perpetually in consultation with her old flame and present trustee Mr. Pole. The ladies had fought against her in London, and since their installation at Brookfield they had announced to their father

that she was not to be endured there. Mr. Pole had plaintively attempted to dilate on the virtues of Martha Chump. “In her place,” said the ladies, and illustrated to him that amid a nosegay of flowers there was no fit room for an exuberant vegetable. The old man had sighed and seemed to surrender. One thing was certain: Mrs. Chump had never been seen at Brookfield. “She never shall be, save by the servants,” said the ladies.

Emilia, not unmarked of Mr. Pericles, had gone over to Wilfrid once or twice, to ask him if haply he disapproved of anything she had done. Mr. Pericles shrugged, and went “Ah!” as who should say, “This must be stopped.” Adela now came to her and caught her hand, showering sweet whispers on her, and bidding her go to her harp and do her best. “We love you; we all love you!” was her parting instigation.

The quartett was abandoned. Arabella had departed with a firm countenance to combat Mrs. Chump.

Emilia sat by her harp. The saloon was critically still; so still that Adela fancied she heard a faint Irish protest from the parlour. Wilfrid was perhaps the most critical auditor present: for he doubted whether she could renew that singular charm of her singing in the pale lighted woods. The first smooth contralto notes took him captive. He scarcely believed that this could be the raw girl whom his sisters delicately pitied.

A murmur of plaudits, the low thunder of gathering acclamation, went round. Lady Gosstre looked a satisfied, “This will do.” Wilfrid saw Emilia’s eyes appeal hopefully to Mr.

Pericles. The connoisseur shrugged. A pain lodged visibly on her black eyebrows. She gripped her harp, and her eyelids appeared to quiver as she took the notes. Again, and still singing, she turned her head to him. The eyes of Mr. Pericles were white, as if upraised to intercede for her with the Powers of Harmony. Her voice grew unnerved. On a sudden she excited herself to pitch and give volume to that note which had been the enchantment of the night in the woods. It quavered. One might have thought her caught by the throat.

Emilia gazed at no one now. She rose, without a word or an apology, keeping her eyes down.

"Fiasco!" cruelly cried Mr. Pericles.

That was better to her than the silly kindness of the people who deemed it well to encourage her with applause. Emilia could not bear the clapping of hands, and fled.

CHAPTER V

The night was warm under a slowly-floating moon. Full of compassion for the poor girl, who had moved him if she had failed in winning the assembly, Wilfrid stepped into the garden, where he expected to find her, and to be the first to pet and console her. Threading the scented shrubs, he came upon a turn in one of the alleys, from which point he had a view of her figure, as she stood near a Portugal laurel on the lawn. Mr. Pericles was by her side. Wilfrid's intention was to join them. A loud sob from Emilia checked his foot.

"You are cruel," he heard her say.

"If it is good, I tell it you; if it is bad; abominable, I tell it you, juste ze same," responded Mr. Pericles.

"The others did not think it very bad."

"Ah! bah!" Mr. Pericles cut her short.

Had they been talking of matters secret and too sweet, Wilfrid would have retired, like a man of honour. As it was, he continued to listen. The tears of his poor little friend, moreover, seemed to hold him there in the hope that he might afford some help.

"Yes; I do not care for the others," she resumed. "You praised me the night I first saw you."

"It is perhaps zat you can sing to z' moon," returned Mr. Pericles. "But, what! a singer, she must sing in a house. To-night it is warm, to-morrow it is cold. If you sing through a cold, what

noise do we hear? It is a nose, not a voice. It is a trompet."

Emilia, with a whimpering firmness, replied: "You said I am lazy. I am not."

"Not lazy," Mr. Pericles assented.

"Do I care for praise from people who do not understand music? It is not true. I only like to please them."

"Be a street-organ," Mr. Pericles retorted.

"I must like to see them pleased when I sing," said Emilia desperately.

"And you like ze clap of ze hands. Yez. It is quite natural. Yess. You are a good child, it is clear. But, look. You are a voice uncultivated, sauvage. You go wrong: I hear you: and dese claps of zese noodels send you into squeaks and shrills, and false! false away you go. It is a gallop ze wrong way."

Here Mr. Pericles attempted the most horrible reproduction of Emilia's failure. She cried out as if she had been bitten.

"What am I to do?" she asked sadly.

"Not now," Mr. Pericles answered. "You live in London?—at where?"

"Must I tell you?"

"Certainly, you must tell me."

"But, I am not going there; I mean, not yet."

"You are going to sing to z' moon through z' nose. Yez. For how long?"

"These ladies have asked me to stay with them. They make me so happy. When I leave them—then!"

Emilia sighed.

"And zen?" quoth Mr. Pericles.

"Then, while my money lasts, I shall stay in the country."

"How much money?"

"How much money have I?" Emilia frankly and accurately summed up the condition of her treasury. "Four pounds and nineteen shillings."

"Hom! it is spent, and you go to your father again?"

"Yes."

"To ze old Belloni?"

"My father."

"No!" cried Mr. Pericles, upon Emilia's melancholy utterance. He bent to her ear and rapidly spoke, in an undertone, what seemed to be a vivid sketch of a new course of fortune for her. Emilia gave one joyful outcry; and now Wilfrid retreated, questioning within himself whether he should have remained so long. But, as he argued, if he was convinced that the rascally Greek fellow meant mischief to her, was he not bound to employ every stratagem to be her safeguard? The influence of Mr. Pericles already exercised over her was immense and mysterious. Within ten minutes she was singing triumphantly indoors. Wilfrid could hear that her voice was firm and assured. She was singing the song of the woods. He found to his surprise that his heart dropped under some burden, as if he had no longer force to sustain it.

By-and-by some of the members of the company issued forth.

Carriages were heard on the gravel, and young men in couples, preparing to light the ensign of happy release from the ladies (or of indemnification for their absence, if you please), strolled about the grounds.

"Did you see that little passage between Laura Tinley and Bella Pole?" said one, and forthwith mimicked them: "Laura commencing:-'We must have her over to us.' 'I fear we have pre-engaged her.'—'Oh, but you, dear, will do us the favour to come, too?' 'I fear, dear, our immediate engagements will preclude the possibility.'—'Surely, dear Miss Pole, we may hope that you have not abandoned us?'—'That, my dear Miss Tinley, is out of the question.'—'May we not name a day?'—'If it depends upon us, frankly, we cannot bid you do so.'"

The other joined him in laughter, adding: "'Frankly' 's capital! What absurd creatures women are! How the deuce did you manage to remember it all?"

"My sister was at my elbow. She repeated it, word for word."

"Pon my honour, women are wonderful creatures!"

The two young men continued their remarks, with a sense of perfect consistency.

Lady Gosstre, as she was being conducted to her carriage, had pronounced aloud that Emilia was decidedly worth hearing.

"She's better worth knowing," said Tracy Runningbrook. "I see you are all bent on spoiling her. If you were to sit and talk with her, you would perceive that she's meant for more than to make a machine of her throat. What a throat it is! She has the

most comical notion of things. I fancy I'm looking at the budding of my own brain. She's a born artist, but I'm afraid everybody's conspiring to ruin her."

"Surely," said Adela, "we shall not do that, if we encourage her in her Art."

"He means another kind of art," said Lady Gosstre. "The term 'artist,' applied to our sex, signifies 'Frenchwoman' with him. He does not allow us to be anything but women. As artists then we are largely privileged, I assure you."

"Are we placed under a professor to learn the art?" Adela inquired, pleased with the subject under such high patronage.

"Each new experience is your accomplished professor," said Tracy. "One I'll call Cleopatra a professor: she's but an illustrious example."

"Imp! you are corrupt." With which my lady tapped farewell on his shoulder. Leaning from the carriage window, she said: "I suppose I shall see you at Richford? Merthyr Powys is coming this week. And that reminds me: he would be the man to appreciate your 'born artist.' Bring her to me. We will have a dinner. I will despatch a formal invitation to-morrow. The season's bad out of town for getting decent people to meet you. I will do my best."

She bowed to Adela and Tracy. Mr. Pole, who had hovered around the unfamiliar dialogue to attend the great lady to the door, here came in for a recognition, and bowed obsequiously to the back of the carriage.

Arabella did not tell her sisters what weapons she had employed to effect the rout of Mrs. Chump. She gravely remarked that the woman had consented to go, and her sisters thanked her. They were mystified by Laura's non-recognition of Emilia, and only suspected Wilfrid so faintly that they were able to think they did not suspect him at all. On the whole, the evening had been a success. It justified the ladies in repeating a well-known Brookfield phrase: "We may be wrong in many things, but never in our judgement of the merits of any given person." In the case of Tracy Runningbrook, they had furnished a signal instance of their discernment. Him they had met at the house of a friend of the Tinleys (a Colonel's wife distantly connected with great houses). The Tinleys laughed at his flaming head and him, but the ladies of Brookfield had ears and eyes for a certain tone and style about him, before they learnt that he was of the blood of dukes, and would be a famous poet. When this was mentioned, after his departure, they had made him theirs, and the Tinleys had no chance. Through Tracy, they achieved their introduction to Lady Gosstre. And now they were to dine with her. They did not say that this was through Emilia. In fact, they felt a little that they had this evening been a sort of background to their prodigy: which was not in the design. Having observed, "She sang deliciously," they dismissed her, and referred to dresses, gaucheries of members of the company, pretensions here and there, Lady Gosstre's walk, the way to shuffle men and women, how to start themes for them to converse upon, and so forth. Not

Juno and her Court surveying our mortal requirements in divine independence of fatigue, could have been more considerate for the shortcomings of humanity. And while they were legislating this and that for others, they still accepted hints for their own improvement, as those who have Perfection in view may do. Lady Gosstre's carriage of her shoulders, and general manner, were admitted to be worthy of study. "And did you notice when Laura Tinley interrupted her conversation with Tracy Runningbrook, how quietly she replied to the fact and nothing else, so that Laura had not another word?"—"And did you observe her deference to papa, as host?"—"And did you not see, on more than one occasion, with what consummate ease she would turn a current of dialogue when it had gone far enough?" They had all noticed, seen, and observed. They agreed that there was a quality beyond art, beyond genius, beyond any special cleverness; and that was, the great social quality of taking, as by nature, without assumption, a queenly position in a circle, and making harmony of all the instruments to be found in it. High praise of Lady Gosstre ensued. The ladies of Brookfield allowed themselves to bow to her with the greater humility, owing to the secret sense they nursed of overtopping her still in that ineffable Something which they alone possessed: a casket little people will be wise in not hurrying our Father Time to open for them, if they would continue to enjoy the jewel they suppose it to contain. Finally, these energetic young ladies said their prayers by the morning twitter of the birds, and went to their beds, less from a desire for

rest than because custom demanded it.

Three days later Emilia was a resident in the house, receiving lessons in demeanour from Cornelia, and in horsemanship from Wilfrid. She expressed no gratitude for kindnesses or wonder at the change in her fortune, save that pleasure sat like an inextinguishable light on her face. A splendid new harp arrived one day, ticketed, "For Miss Emilia Belloni."

"He does not know I have a second Christian name," was her first remark, after an examination of the instrument.

"'He?'" quoth Adela. "May it not have been a lady's gift?"

Emilia clearly thought not.

"And to whom do you ascribe it?"

"Who sent it to me? Mr. Pericles, of course."

She touched the strings immediately, and sighed.

"Are you discontented with the tone, child?" asked Adela.

"No. I—I'll guess what it cost!"

Surely the ladies had reason to think her commonplace!

She explained herself better to Wilfrid, when he returned to Brookfield after a short absence. Showing the harp, "See what Mr. Pericles thinks me worth!" she said.

"Not more than that?" was his gallant rejoinder. "Does it suit you?"

"Yes; in every way."

This was all she said about it.

In the morning after breakfast, she sat at harp or piano, and then ran out to gather wild flowers and learn the names of trees

and birds. On almost all occasions Wilfrid was her companion. He laughed at the little sisterly revelations the ladies confided concerning her too heartily for them to have any fear that she was other than a toy to him. Few women are aware with how much ease sentimental men can laugh outwardly at what is internal torment. They had apprised him of their wish to know what her origin was, and of her peculiar reserve on that topic: whereat he assured them that she would have no secrets from him. His conduct of affairs was so open that none could have supposed the gallant cornet entangled in a maze of sentiment. For, veritably, this girl was the last sort of girl to please his fancy; and he saw not a little of fair ladies: by virtue of his heroic antecedents, he was himself well seen of them. The gallant cornet adored delicacy and a gilded refinement. The female flower could not be too exquisitely cultivated to satisfy him. And here he was, running after a little unformed girl, who had no care to conceal the fact that she was an animal, nor any notion of the necessity for doing so! He had good reason to laugh when his sisters talked of her. It was not a pleasant note which came from the gallant cornet then. But, in the meadows, or kindly conducting Emilia's horse, he yielded pretty music. Emilia wore Arabella's riding-habit, Adela's hat, and Cornelia's gloves. Politic as the ladies of Brookfield were, they were full of natural kindness; and Wilfrid, albeit a diplomatist, was not yet mature enough to control and guide a very sentimental heart. There was an element of dim imagination in all the family: and it was this that

consciously elevated them over the world in prospect, and made them unconsciously subject to what I must call the spell of the poetic power.

Wilfrid in his soul wished that Emilia should date from the day she had entered Brookfield. But at times it seemed to him that a knowledge of her antecedents might relieve him from his ridiculous perplexity of feeling. Besides though her voice struck emotion, she herself was unimpressionable. "Cold by nature," he said; looking at the unkindled fire. She shook hands like a boy. If her fingers were touched and retained, they continued to be fingers for as long as you pleased. Murmurs and whispers passed by her like the breeze. She appeared also to have no enthusiasm for her Art, so that not even there could Wilfrid find common ground. Italy, however, he discovered to be the subject that made her light up. Of Italy he would speak frequently, and with much simulated fervour.

"Mr. Pericles is going to take me there," said Emilia. "He told me to keep it secret. I have no secrets from my friends. I am to learn in the academy at Milan."

"Would you not rather let me take you?"

"Not quite." She shook her head. "No; because you do not understand music as he does. And are you as rich? I cost a great deal of money even for eating alone. But you will be glad when you hear me when I come back. Do you hear that nightingale? It must be a nightingale."

She listened. "What things he makes us feel!"

Bending her head, she walked on silently. Wilfrid, he knew not why, had got a sudden hunger for all the days of her life. He caught her hand and, drawing her to a garden seat, said: “Come; now tell me all about yourself before I knew you. Do you mind?”

“I’ll tell you anything you want to hear,” said Emilia.

He enjoined her to begin from the beginning.

“Everything about myself?” she asked.

“Everything. I have your permission to smoke?”

Emilia smiled. “I wish I had some Italian cigars to give you. My father sometimes has plenty given to him.”

Wilfrid did not contemplate his havannah with less favour.

“Now,” said Emilia, taking a last sniff of the flowers before surrendering her nostril to the invading smoke. She looked at the scene fronting her under a blue sky with slow flocks of clouds: “How I like this!” she exclaimed. “I almost forget that I long for Italy, here.”

Beyond a plot of flowers, a gold-green meadow dipped to a ridge of gorse bordered by dark firs and the tips of greenest larches.

CHAPTER VI

"My father is one of the most wonderful men in the whole world!"

Wilfrid lifted an eyelid.

"He is one of the first-violins at the Italian Opera!"

The gallant cornet's critical appreciation of this impressive announcement was expressed in a spiral ebullition of smoke from his mouth.

"He is such a proud man! And I don't wonder at that: he has reason to be proud."

Again Wilfrid lifted an eyelid, and there is no knowing but that ideas of a connection with foreign Counts, Cardinals, and Princes passed hopefully through him.

"Would you believe that he is really the own nephew of Andronizetti!"

"Deuce he is!" said Wilfrid, in a mist. "Which one?"

"The composer!"

Wilfrid emitted more smoke.

"Who composed—how I love him!—that lovely 'la, la, la, la,' and the 'te-de, ta-da, te-dio,' that pleases you, out of 'Il Maladetto.' And I am descended from him! Let me hope I shall

not be unworthy of him. You will never tell it till people think as much of me, or nearly. My father says I shall never be so great, because I am half English. It's not my fault. My mother was English. But I feel that I am much more Italian than English. How I long for Italy—like a thing underground! My father did something against the Austrians, when he was a young man. Would not I have done it? I am sure I would—I don't know what. Whenever I think of Italy, night or day, pant-pant goes my heart. The name of Italy is my nightingale: I feel that somebody lives that I love, and is ill-treated shamefully, crying out to me for help. My father had to run away to save his life. He was fifteen days lying in the rice-fields to escape from the soldiers—which makes me hate a white coat. There was my father; and at night he used to steal out to one of the villages, where was a good, true woman—so they are, most, in Italy! She gave him food; maize-bread and wine, sometimes meat; sometimes a bottle of good wine. When my father thinks of it he cries, if there is gin smelling near him. At last my father had to stop there day and night. Then that good woman's daughter came to him to keep him from starving; she risked being stripped naked and beaten with rods, to keep my father from starving. When my father speaks of Sandra now, it makes my mother—she does not like it. I am named after her: Emilia Alessandra Belloni. 'Sandra' is short for it. She did not know why I was christened that, and will never call me anything but Emilia, though my father says Sandra, always. My father never speaks of that dear Sandra herself, except when

he is tipsy. Once I used to wish him to be tipsy; for then I used to sit at my piano while he talked, and I made all his words go into music. One night I did it so well, my father jumped right up from his chair, shouting 'Italia!' and he caught his wig off his head, and threw it into the fire, and rushed out into the street quite bald, and people thought him mad.

"It was the beginning of all our misfortunes! My father was taken and locked up in a place as a tipsy man. That he has never forgiven the English for! It has made me and my mother miserable ever since. My mother is sure it is all since that night. Do you know, I remember, though I was so young, that I felt the music—oh! like a devil in my bosom? Perhaps it was, and it passed out of me into him. Do you think it was?"

Wilfrid answered: "Well, no! I shouldn't think you had anything to do with the devil." Indeed, he was beginning to think her one of the smallest of frocked female essences.

"I lost my piano through it," she went on. "I could not practise. I was the most miserable creature in all the world till I fell in love with my harp. My father would not play to get money. He sat in his chair, and only spoke to ask about meal-time, and we had no money for food, except by selling everything we had. Then my piano went. So then I said to my mother, I will advertize to give lessons, as other people do, and make money for us all, myself. So we paid money for a brass-plate, and our landlady's kind son put it up on the door for nothing, and we waited for pupils to come. I used to pray to the Virgin that she would blessedly send

me pupils, for my poor mother's complaints were so shrill and out of tune it's impossible to tell you what I suffered. But by-and-by my father saw the brass-plate. He fell into one of his dreadful passions. We had to buy him another wig. His passions were so expensive: my mother used to say, 'There goes our poor dinner out of the window!' But, well! he went to get employment now. He can, always, when he pleases; for such a touch on the violin as my father has, you never heard. You feel yourself from top to toe, when my father plays. I feel as if I breathed music like air. One day came news from Italy, all in the newspaper, of my father's friends and old companions shot and murdered by the Austrians. He read it in the evening, after we had a quiet day. I thought he did not mind it much, for he read it out to us quite quietly; and then he made me sit on his knee and read it out. I cried with rage, and he called to me, 'Sandra! Peace!' and began walking up and down the room, while my mother got the bread and cheese and spread it on the table, for we were beginning to be richer. I saw my father take out his violin. He put it on the cloth and looked at it. Then he took it up, and laid his chin on it like a man full of love, and drew the bow across just once. He whirled away the bow, and knocked down our candle, and in the darkness I heard something snap and break with a hollow sound. When I could see, he had broken it, the neck from the body—the dear old violin! I could cry still. I—I was too late to save it. I saw it broken, and the empty belly, and the loose strings! It was murdering a spirit—that was! My father sat in a corner

one whole week, moping like such an old man! I was nearly dead with my mother's voice. By-and-by we were all silent, for there was nothing to eat. So I said to my mother, 'I will earn money.' My mother cried. I proposed to take a lodging for myself, all by myself; go there in the morning and return at night, and give lessons, and get money for them. My landlady's good son gave me the brass-plate again. Emilia Alessandra Belloni! I was glad to see my name. I got two pupils very quickly one, an old lady, and one, a young one. The old lady—I mean, she was not grey—wanted a gentleman to marry her, and the landlady told me—I mean my pupil—it makes me laugh—asked him what he thought of her voice: for I had been singing. I earned a great deal of money: two pounds ten shillings a week. I could afford to pay for lessons myself, I thought. What an expense! I had to pay ten shillings for one lesson! Some have to pay twenty; but I would pay it to learn from the best masters;—and I had to make my father and mother live on potatoes, and myself too, of course. If you buy potatoes carefully, they are extremely cheap things to live upon, and make you forget your hunger more than anything else.

"I suppose," added Emilia, "you have never lived upon potatoes entirely? Oh, no!"

Wilfrid gave a quiet negative.

"But I was pining to learn, and was obliged to keep them low. I could pitch any notes, and I was clear but I was always ornamenting, and what I want is to be an accurate singer. My music-master was a German—not an Austrian—oh, no!—I'm

sure he was not. At least, I don't think so, for I liked him. He was harsh with me, but sometimes he did stretch his fingers on my head, and turn it round, and say words that I pretended not to think of, though they sent me home burning. I began to compose, and this gentleman tore up the whole sheet in a rage, when I showed it him; but he gave me a dinner, and left off charging me ten shillings—only seven, and then five—and he gave me more time than he gave others. He also did something which I don't know yet whether I can thank him for. He made me know the music of the great German. I used to listen: I could not believe such music could come from a German. He followed me about, telling me I was his slave. For some time I could not sleep. I laughed at myself for composing. He was not an Austrian: but when he was alive he lived in Vienna, the capital of Austria. He ate Austrian bread, and why God gave him such a soul of music I never can think!—Well, by-and-by my father wanted to know what I did in the day, and why they never had anything but potatoes for dinner. My mother came to me, and I told her to say, I took walks. My father said I was an idle girl, and like my mother—who was a slave to work. People are often unjust! So my father said he would watch me. I had to cross the park to give a lesson to a lady who had a husband, and she wanted to sing to him to keep him at home in the evening. I used to pray he might not have much ear for music. One day a gentleman came behind me in the park. He showed me a handkerchief, and asked me if it was mine. I felt for my own and found it in my

pocket. He was certain I had dropped it. He looked in the corners for the name, I told him my name—Emilia Alessandra Belloni. He found A.F.G. there. It was a beautiful cambric handkerchief, white and smooth. I told him it must be a gentleman's, as it was so large; but he said he had picked it up close by me, and he could not take it, and I must; and I was obliged to keep it, though I would much rather not. Near the end of the park he left me."

At this point Wilfrid roused up. "You met him the next day near the same place?" he remarked.

She turned to him with astonishment on her features. "How did you know that? How could you know?"

"Sort of thing that generally happens," said Wilfrid.

"Yes; he was there," Emilia slowly pursued, controlling her inclination to question further. "He had forgotten about the handkerchief, for when I saw him, I fancied he might have found the owner. We talked together. He told me he was in the Army, and I spoke of my father's playing and my singing. He was so fond of music that I promised him he should hear us both. He used to examine my hand, and said they were sensitive fingers for playing. I knew that. He had great hopes of me. He said he would give me a box at the Opera, now and then. I was mad with joy; and so delighted to have made a friend. I had never before made a rich friend. I sang to him in the park. His eyes looked beautiful with pleasure. I know I enchanted him."

"How old were you then?" inquired Wilfrid.

"Sixteen. I can sing better now, I know; but I had voice then,

and he felt that I had. I forgot where we were, till people stood round us, and he hurried me away from them, and said I must sing to him in some quiet place. I promised to, and he promised he would have dinner for me at Richmond Hill, in the country, and he would bring friends to hear me."

"Go on," said Wilfrid, rather sharply.

She sighed. "I only saw him once after that. It was such a miserable day! It rained. It was Saturday. I did not expect to find him in the rain; but there he stood, exactly where he had given me the handkerchief. He smiled kindly, as I came up. I dislike gloomy people! His face was always fresh and nice. His moustache reminded me of Italy. I used to think of him under a great warm sky, with olives and vine-trees and mulberries like my father used to speak of. I could have flung my arms about his neck."

"Did you?" The cornet gave a strangled note.

"Oh, no!" said Emilia seriously. "But I told him how happy the thought of going into the country made me, and that it was almost like going to Italy. He told me he would take me to Italy, if I liked. I could have knelt at his feet. Unfortunately his friends could not come. Still, I was to go, and dine, and float on the water, plucking flowers. I determined to fancy myself in Venice, which is the place my husband must take me to, when I am married to him. I will give him my whole body and soul for his love, when I am there!"

Here the cornet was capable of articulate music for a moment,

but it resolved itself into: “Well, well! Yes, go on!”

“I took his arm this time. It gave me my first timid feeling that I remember, and he laughed at me, and drove it quite away, telling me his name: Augustus Frederick what was it? Augustus Frederick—it began with G something. O me! have I really forgotten? Christian names are always easier to remember. A captain he was—a riding one; just like you. I think you are all kind!”

“Extremely,” muttered the ironical cornet. “A.F.G.;—those are the initials on the handkerchief!”

“They are!” cried Emilia. “It must have been his own handkerchief!”

“You have achieved the discovery,” quoth Wilfrid. “He dropped it there overnight, and found it just as you were passing in the morning.”

“That must be impossible,” said Emilia, and dismissed the subject forthwith, in a feminine power of resolve to be blind to it.

“I am afraid,” she took up her narrative, “my father is sometimes really almost mad. He does such things! I had walked under this gentleman’s umbrella to the bridge between the park and the gardens with the sheep, and beautiful flowers in beds. In an instant my father came up right in our faces. He caught hold of my left hand. I thought he wanted to shake it, for he imitates English ways at times, even with us at home, and shakes our hands when he comes in. But he swung me round. He stood looking angrily at this gentleman, and cried ‘Yes! yes!’ to every

word he spoke. The gentleman bowed to me, and asked me to take his umbrella; but I was afraid to; and my father came to me,—oh, Madonna, think of what he did! I saw that his pockets were very big. He snatched out potatoes, and began throwing them as hard as he could throw them at the gentleman, and struck him with some of them. He threw nine large potatoes! I begged him to think of our dinner; but he cried 'Yes! it is our dinner we give to your head, vagabond!' in his English. I could not help running up to the gentleman to beg for his pardon. He told me not to cry, and put some potatoes he had been picking up all into my hand. They were muddy, but he wiped them first; and he said it was not the first time he had stood fire, and then said good-bye; and I slipped the potatoes into my pocket immediately, thankful that they were not wasted. My father pulled me away roughly from the laughing and staring people on the bridge. But I knew the potatoes were only bruised. Even three potatoes will prevent you from starving. They were very fine ones, for I always took care to buy them good. When I reached home—"

Wilfrid had risen, and was yawning with a desperate grimace. He bade her continue, and pitched back heavily into his seat.

"When I reached home and could be alone with my mother, she told me my father had been out watching me the day before, and that he had filled his pockets that morning. She thought he was going to walk out in the country and get people on the road to cook them for him. That is what he has done when he was miserable,—to make himself quite miserable, I think, for he

loves streets best. Guess my surprise! My mother was making my head ache with her complaints, when, as I drew out the potatoes to show her we had some food, there was a purse at the bottom of my pocket,—a beautiful green purse! O that kind gentleman! He must have put it in my hand with the potatoes that my father flung at him! How I have cried to think that I may never sing to him my best to please him! My mother and I opened the purse eagerly. It had ten pounds in paper money, and five sovereigns, and silver, —I think four shillings. We determined to keep it a secret; and then we thought of the best way of spending it, and decided not to spend it all, but to keep some for when we wanted it dreadfully, and for a lesson or two for me now and then, and a music-score, and perhaps a good violin for my father, and new strings for him and me, and meat dinners now and then, and perhaps a day in the country: for that was always one of my dreams as I watched the clouds flying over London. They seemed to be always coming from happy places and going to happy places, never stopping where I was! I cannot be sorrowful long. You know that song of mine that you like so much—my own composing? It was a song about that kind gentleman. I got words to suit it as well as I could, from a penny paper, but they don't mean anything that I mean, and they are only words."

She did not appear to hear the gallant cornet's denial that he cared particularly for that song.

"What I meant was,—that gentleman speaks—I have fought for Italy; I am an English hero and have fought for Italy, because

of an Italian child; but now I am wounded and a prisoner. When you shoot me, cruel Austrians, I shall hear her voice and think of nothing else, so you cannot hurt me."

Emilia turned spitefully on herself at this close. "How I spoil it! My words are always stupid, when I feel.—Well, now my mother and I were quite peaceful, and my father was better fed. One night he brought home a Jew gentleman, beautifully dressed, with diamonds all over him. He sparkled like the Christmas cakes in pastry-cooks' windows. I sang to him, and he made quite a noise about me. But the man made me so uncomfortable, touching my shoulders, and I could not bear his hands, even when he was praising me. I sang to him till the landlady made me leave off, because of the other lodgers who wanted to sleep. He came every evening; and then said I should sing at a concert. It turned out to be a public-house, and my father would not let me go; but I was sorry; for in public the man could not touch me as he did. It damped the voice!"

"I should like to know where that fellow lives," cried the cornet.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she said. "He lends money. Do you want any? I heard your sisters say something, one day. You can always have all that I have, you know."

A quick spirit of pity and honest kindness went through Wilfrid's veins and threatened to play the woman with his eyes, for a moment. He took her hand and pressed it. She put her lips to his fingers.

"Once," she continued, "when the Jew gentleman had left, I spoke to my father of his way with me, and then my father took me on his knee, and the things he told me of what that man felt for me made my mother come and tear me away to bed. I was obliged to submit to the Jew gentleman patting and touching me always. He used to crush my dreams afterwards! I know my voice was going. My father was so eager for me to please him, I did my best; but I felt dull, and used to sit and shake my head at my harp, crying; or else I felt like an angry animal, and could have torn the strings.

"Think how astonished I was when my mother came to me to say my father had money in his pockets!—one pound, seventeen shillings, she counted: and he had not been playing! Then he brought home a new violin, and he said to me, 'I shall go; I shall play; I am Orphee, and dinners shall rise!' I was glad, and kissed him; and he said, 'This is Sandra's gift to me,' showing the violin. I only knew what that meant two days afterwards. Is a girl not seventeen fit to be married?"

With this abrupt and singular question she had taken an indignant figure, and her eyes were fiery: so that Wilfrid thought her much fitter than a minute before.

"Married!" she exclaimed. "My mother told me about that. You do not belong to yourself: you are tied down. You are a slave, a drudge; mustn't dream, mustn't think! I hate it. By-and-by, I suppose it will happen. Not yet! And yet that man offered to take me to Italy. It was the Jew gentleman. He said I should

make money, if he took me, and grow as rich as princesses. He brought a friend to hear me, another Jew gentleman; and he was delighted, and he met me near our door the very next morning, and offered me a ring with blue stones, and he proposed to marry me also, and take me to Italy, if I would give up his friend and choose him instead. This man did not touch me, and, do you know, for some time I really thought I almost, very nearly, might, —if it had not been for his face! It was impossible to go to Italy —yes, to go to heaven! through that face of his! That face of his was just like the pictures of dancing men with animals' hairy legs and hoofs in an old thick poetry book belonging to my mother. Just fancy a nose that seemed to be pecking at great fat red lips! He met me and pressed me to go continually, till all of a sudden up came the first Jew gentleman, and he cried out quite loud in the street that he was being robbed by the other; and they stood and made a noise in the street, and I ran away. But then I heard that my father had borrowed money from the one who came first, and that his violin came from that man; and my father told me the violin would be taken from him, and he would have to go to prison, if I did not marry that man. I went and cried in my mother's arms. I shall never forget her kindness; for though she could never see anybody crying without crying herself, she did not, and was quiet as a mouse, because she knew how her voice hurt me. There's a large print-shop in one of the great streets of London, with coloured views of Italy. I used to go there once, and stand there for I don't know how long, looking at them, and

trying to get those Jew gentlemen—"

"Call them Jews—they're not gentlemen," interposed Wilfrid.

"Jews," she obeyed the dictate, "out of my mind. When I saw the views of Italy they danced and grinned up and down the pictures. Oh, horrible! There was no singing for me then. My music died. At last that oldish lady gave up her lessons, and said to me, 'You little rogue! you will do what I do, some day;' for she was going to be married to that young man who thought her voice so much improved; and she paid me three pounds, and gave me one pound more, and some ribbons and gloves. I went at once to my mother, and made her give me five pounds out of the gentleman's purse. I took my harp and music-scores. I did not know where I was going, but only that I could not stop. My mother cried: but she helped to pack my things. If she disobeys me I act my father, and tower over her, and frown, and make her mild. She was such a poor good slave to me that day! but I trusted her no farther than the door. There I kissed her, full of love, and reached the railway. They asked me where I was going, and named places to me: I did not know one. I shut my eyes, and prayed to be directed, and chose Hillford. In the train I was full of music in a moment. There I met farmer Wilson, of the farm near us—where your sisters found me; and he was kind, and asked me about myself; and I mentioned lodgings, and that I longed for woods and meadows. Just as we were getting out of the train, he said I was to come with him; and I did, very gladly. Then I met you; and I am here. All because I prayed to be directed—

I do think that!"

Emilia clasped her hands, and looked pensively at the horizon sky, with a face of calm gratefulness.

The cornet was on his legs. "So!" he said. "And you never saw anything more of that fellow you kissed in the park?"

"Kissed?—that gentleman?" returned Emilia. "I have not kissed him. He did not want it. Men kiss us when we are happy, and we kiss them when they are unhappy."

Wilfrid was perhaps incompetent to test the truth of this profound aphoristic remark, delivered with the simplicity of natural conviction. The narrative had, to his thinking, quite released from him his temporary subjection to this little lady's sway. All that he felt for her personally now was pity. It speaks something for the strength of the sentiment with which he had first conceived her, that it was not pelted to death, and turned to infinite disgust, by her potatoes. For sentiment is a dainty, delicate thing, incapable of bearing much: revengeful, too, when it is outraged. Bruised and disfigured, it stood up still, and fought against them. They were very fine ones, as Emilia said, and they hit him hard. However, he pitied her, and that protected him like a shield. He told his sisters a tale of his own concerning the strange damsel, humorously enough to make them see that he enjoyed her presence as that of no common oddity.

CHAPTER VII

While Emilia was giving Wilfrid her history in the garden, the ladies of Brookfield were holding consultation over a matter which was well calculated to perplex and irritate them excessively. Mr. Pole had received a curious short epistle from Mrs. Chump, informing him of the atrocious treatment she had met with at the hands of his daughter; and instead of reviewing the orthography, incoherence, and deliberate vulgarity of the said piece of writing with the contempt it deserved, he had taken the unwonted course of telling Arabella that she had done a thing she must necessarily repent of, or in any case make apology for. An Eastern Queen, thus addressed by her Minister of the treasury, could not have felt greater indignation. Arabella had never seen her father show such perturbation of mind. He spoke violently and imperiously. The apology was ordered to be despatched by that night's post, after having been submitted to his inspection. Mr. Pole had uttered mysterious phrases: "You don't know what you've been doing:—You think the ship'll go on sailing without wind: You'll drive the horse till he drops," and such like; together with mutterings. The words were of no import whatsoever to the ladies. They were writings on the wall; untranslateable. But, as when the earth quakes our noble edifices totter, their Palace of the Fine Shades and the Nice Feelings groaned and creaked, and for a moment they thought: "Where are we?" Very soon they

concluded, that the speech Arabella had heard was due to their darling papa's defective education.

In the Council of Three, with reference to the letter of apology to Mrs. Chump, Adela proposed, if it pleased Arabella, to fight the battle of the Republic. She was young, and wished both to fight and to lead, as Arabella knew. She was checked. "It must be left to me," said Arabella.

"Of course you resist, dear?" Cornelia carelessly questioned.

"Assuredly I do."

"Better humiliation! better anything! better marriage! than to submit in such a case," cried Adela.

For, so united were the ladies of Brookfield, and so bent on their grand hazy object, that they looked upon married life unfavourably: and they had besides an idea that Wedlock, until 'late in life' (the age of thirty, say), was the burial alive of woman intellectual.

Toward midday the ladies put on their garden hats and went into the grounds together, for no particular purpose. Near the West copse they beheld Mr. Pole with Wilfrid and Emilia talking to a strange gentleman. Assuming a proper dignity, they advanced, when, to their horror, Emilia ran up to them crying: "This is Mr. Purcell Barrett, the gentleman who plays the organ at church. I met him in the woods before I knew you. I played for him the other Sunday, and I want you to know him."

She had hold of Arabella's hand and was drawing her on. There was no opportunity for retreat. Wilfrid looked as if he had

already swallowed the dose. Almost precipitated into the arms of the ladies, Mr. Barrett bowed. He was a tolerably youthful man, as decently attired as old black cloth could help him to be. A sharp inspection satisfied the ladies that his hat and boots were inoffensive: whereupon they gave him the three shades of distance, tempered so as not to wound his susceptible poverty.

The superlative Polar degree appeared to invigorate Mr. Barrett. He devoted his remarks mainly to Cornelia, and cheerfully received her frozen monosyllables in exchange. The ladies talked of Organs and Art, Emilia and Opera. He knew this and that great organ, and all the operas; but he amazed the ladies by talking as if he knew great people likewise. This brought out Mr. Pole, who, since he had purchased Brookfield, had been extinguished by them and had not once thoroughly enjoyed his money's worth. A courtly poor man was a real pleasure to him.

Giving a semicircular sweep of his arm: "Here you see my little estate, sir," he said. "You've seen plenty bigger in Germany, and England too. We can't get more than this handful in our tight little island. Unless born to it, of course. Well! we must be grateful that all our nobility don't go to the dogs. We must preserve our great names. I speak against my own interest."

He lifted Adela's chin on his forefinger. She kept her eyes demurely downward, and then gazed at her sisters with gravity. These ladies took a view of Mr. Barrett. His features wore an admirable expression of simple interest. "Well, sir; suppose you dine with us to-day?" Mr. Pole bounced out. "Neighbours should

be neighbourly."

This abrupt invitation was decorously accepted.

"Plain dinner, you know. Nothing like what you get at the tables of those Erzhogs, as you call 'em, over in Germany. Simple fare; sound wine! At all events, it won't hurt you. You'll come?"

Mr. Barrett bowed, murmuring thanks. This was the very man Mr. Pole wanted to have at his board occasionally: one who had known great people, and would be thankful for a dinner. He could depreciate himself as a mere wealthy British merchant imposingly before such a man. His daughters had completely cut him off from his cronies; and the sense of restriction, and compression, and that his own house was fast becoming alien territory to him, made him pounce upon the gentlemanly organist. His daughters wondered why he should, in the presence of this stranger, exaggerate his peculiar style of speech. But the worthy merchant's consciousness of his identity was vanishing under the iron social rule of the ladies. His perishing individuality prompted the inexplicable invitation, and the form of it.

After Mr. Barrett had departed, the ladies ventured to remonstrate with their papa. He at once replied by asking whether the letter to Mrs. Chump had been written; and hearing that it had not, he desired that Arabella should go into the house and compose it straightway. The ladies coloured. To Adela's astonishment, she found that Arabella had turned. Joining her, she said, "Dearest, what a moment you have lost! We could have stood firm, continually changing the theme from Chump to

Barrett, Barrett to Chump, till papa's head would have twirled. He would have begun to think Mr. Barrett the Irish widow, and Mrs. Chump the organist."

Arabella rejoined: "Your wit misleads you, darling. I know what I am about. I decline a wordy contest. To approach to a quarrel, or, say dispute, with one's parent apropos of such a person, is something worse than evil policy, don't you think?"

So strongly did the sisters admire this delicate way of masking a piece of rank cowardice, that they forgave her. The craven feeling was common to them all, which made it still more difficult to forgive her.

"Of course, we resist?" said Cornelia.

"Undoubtedly."

"We retire and retire," Adela remarked. "We waste the royal forces. But, dear me, that makes us insurgents!"

She laughed, being slightly frivolous. Her elders had the proper sentimental worship of youth and its supposed quality of innocence, and caressed her.

At the ringing of the second dinner-bell, Mr. Pole ran to the foot of the stairs and shouted for Arabella, who returned no answer, and was late in her appearance at table. Grace concluded, Mr. Pole said, "Letter gone? I wanted to see it, you know."

"It was as well not, papa," Arabella replied.

Mr. Pole shook his head seriously. The ladies were thankful for the presence of Mr. Barrett. And lo! this man was in perfect evening uniform. He looked as gentlemanly a visitor as one might

wish to see. There was no trace of the poor organist. Poverty seemed rather a gold-edge to his tail-coat than a rebuke to it; just as, contrariwise, great wealth is, to the imagination, really set off by a careless costume. One need not explain how the mind acts in such cases: the fact, as I have put it, is indisputable. And let the young men of our generation mark the present chapter, that they may know the virtue residing in a tail-coat, and cling to it, whether buffeted by the waves, or burnt out by the fire, of evil angry fortune. His tail-coat safe, the youthful Briton is always ready for any change in the mind of the moody Goddess. And it is an almost certain thing that, presuming her to have a damsel of condition in view for him as a compensation for the slaps he has received, he must lose her, he cannot enter a mutual path with her, if he shall have failed to retain this article of a black tail, his social passport. I mean of course that he retain respect for the article in question. Respect for it firmly seated in his mind, the tail may be said to be always handy. It is fortune's uniform in Britain: the candlestick, if I may dare to say so, to the candle; nor need any young islander despair of getting to himself her best gifts, while he has her uniform at command, as glossy as may be.

The ladies of Brookfield were really stormed by Mr. Barrett's elegant tail. When, the first glass of wine nodded over, Mr. Pole continued the discourse of the morning, with allusions to French cooks, and his cook, their sympathies were taken captive by Mr. Barrett's tact: the door to their sympathies having been opened to him as it were by his attire. They could not guess what necessity

urged Mr. Pole to assert his locked-up self so vehemently; but it certainly made the stranger shine with a beautiful mild lustre. Their spirits partly succumbed to him by a process too lengthened to explain here. Indeed, I dare do no more than hint at these mysteries of feminine emotion. I beg you to believe that when we are dealing with that wonder, the human heart female, the part played by a tail-coat and a composed demeanour is not insignificant. No doubt the ladies of Brookfield would have rebutted the idea of a tail-coat influencing them in any way as monstrous. But why was it, when Mr. Pole again harped on his cook, in almost similar words, that they were drawn to meet the eyes of the stranger, on whom they printed one of the most fabulously faint fleeting looks imaginable, with a proportionately big meaning for him that might read it? It must have been that this uniform of a tail had laid a basis of equality for the hour, otherwise they never would have done so; nor would he have enjoyed the chance of showing them that he could respond to the remotest mystic indications, with a muffled adroitness equal to their own, and so encouraged them to commence a language leading to intimacy with a rapidity that may well appear magical to the uninitiated. In short, the man really had the language of the very elect of polite society. If you are not versed in this alphabet of mute intelligence, you are in the ranks with waiters and linen-drapers, and are, as far as ladies are concerned, tail-coated to no purpose.

Mr. Pole's fresh allusion to his cook: "I hope you don't think

I keep a man! No; no; not in the country. Wouldn't do. Plays the deuce, you know. My opinion is, Mrs. Mallow's as clever as any man-cook going. I'd back her:" and Mr. Barrett's speech: "She is an excellent person!" delivered briefly, with no obtrusion of weariness, confirmed the triumph of the latter; a triumph all the greater, that he seemed unconscious of it. They leaped at one bound to the conclusion that there was a romance attached to him. Do not be startled. An attested tail-coat, clearly out of its element, must contain a story: that story must be interesting; until its secret is divulged, the subtle essence of it spreads an aureole around the tail. The ladies declared, in their subsequent midnight conference, that Mr. Barrett was fit for any society. They had visions of a great family reduced; of a proud son choosing to earn his bread honourably and humbly, by turning an exquisite taste to account. Many visions of him they had, and were pleased.

Patronage of those beneath, much more than the courting of those above them, delighted the ladies of Brookfield. They allowed Emilia to give Mr. Barrett invitations, and he became a frequent visitor; always neat, pathetically well-brushed, and a pleasanter pet than Emilia, because he never shocked their niceties. He was an excellent talker, and was very soon engaged in regular contests with the argumentative Cornelia. Their political views were not always the same, as Cornelia sometimes had read the paper before he arrived. Happily, on questions of religion, they coincided. Theories of education occupied them mainly. In these contests Mr. Barrett did not fail to acknowledge his errors,

when convicted, and his acknowledgment was hearty and ample. She had many clear triumphs. Still, he could be positive; a very great charm in him. Women cannot repose on a man who is not positive; nor have they much gratification in confounding him. Wouldst thou, man, amorously inclining! attract to thee superior women, be positive. Be stupidly positive, rather than dubious at all. Face fearful questions with a vizor of brass. Array thyself in dogmas. Show thy decisive judgement on the side of established power, or thy enthusiasm in the rebel ranks, if it must be so; but be firm. Waver not. If women could tolerate waverings and weakness, and did not rush to the adoration of decision of mind, we should not behold them turning contemptuously from philosophers in their agony, to find refuge in the arms of smirking orthodoxy. I do not say that Mr. Barrett ventured to play the intelligent Cornelia like a fish; but such a fish was best secured by the method he adopted: that of giving her signal victory in trifles, while on vital matters he held his own.

Very pleasant evenings now passed at Brookfield, which were not at all disturbed by the wonder expressed from time to time by Mr. Pole, that he had not heard from Martha, meaning Mrs. Chump. “You have Emilia,” the ladies said; this being equivalent to “She is one of that sort;” and Mr. Pole understood it so, and fastened Emilia in one arm, with “Now, a kiss, my dear, and then a toon.” Emilia readily gave both. As often as he heard instances of her want of ladylike training, he would say, “Keep her here; we’ll better her.” Mr. Barrett assisted the ladies to see that there

was more in Emilia than even Mr. Pericles had perceived. Her story had become partially known to them; and with two friendly dependents of the household, one a gentleman and the other a genius, they felt that they had really attained a certain eminence, which is a thing to be felt only when we have something under our feet. Flying about with a desperate grip on the extreme skirts of aristocracy, the ladies knew to be the elevation of dependency, not true eminence; and though they admired the kite, they by no means wished to form a part of its tail. They had brains. A circle was what they wanted, and they had not to learn that this is to be found or made only in the liberally-educated class, into the atmosphere of which they pressed like dungeoned plants. The parasite completes the animal, and a dependent assures us of our position. The ladies of Brookfield, therefore, let Emilia cling to them, remarking, that it seemed to be their papa's settled wish that she should reside among them for a time. Consequently, if the indulgence had ever to be regretted, they would not be to blame. In their hearts they were aware that it was Emilia who had obtained for them their first invitation to Lady Gosstre's. Gratitude was not a part of their policy, but when it assisted a recognition of material facts they did not repress it. "And if," they said, "we can succeed in polishing her and toning her, she may have something to thank us for, in the event of her ultimately making a name." That event being of course necessary for the development of so proper a sentiment. Thus the rides with Wilfrid continued, and the sweet quiet evenings when she sang.

CHAPTER VIII

The windows of Brookfield were thrown open to the air of May, and bees wandered into the rooms, gold spots of sunshine danced along the floors. The garden-walks were dazzling, and the ladies went from flower-bed to flower-bed in broad garden hats that were, as an occasional light glance flung at a window-pane assured Adela, becoming. Sunshine had burst on them suddenly, and there was no hat to be found for Emilia, so Wilfrid placed his gold-laced foraging-cap on her head, and the ladies, after a moment's misgiving, allowed her to wear it, and turned to observe her now and then. There was never pertness in Emilia's look, which on the contrary was singularly large and calm when it reposed: perhaps her dramatic instinct prompted her half-jaunty manner of leaning against the sunny corner of the house where the Chinese honeysuckle climbed. She was talking to Wilfrid. Her laughter seemed careless and easy, and in keeping with the Southern litheness of her attitude.

"To suit the cap; it's all to suit the cap," said Adela, the keen of eye. Yet, critical as was this lady, she acknowledged that it was no mere acting effort to suit the cap.

The philosopher (I would keep him back if I could) bids us mark that the crown and flower of the nervous system, the head, is necessarily sensitive, and to that degree that whatsoever we place on it, does, for a certain period, change and shape us. Of

course the instant we call up the forces of the brain, much of the impression departs but what remains is powerful, and fine-nerved. Woman is especially subject to it. A girl may put on her brother's boots, and they will not affect her spirit strongly; but as soon as she puts on her brother's hat, she gives him a manly nod. The same philosopher who fathers his dulness on me, asserts that the modern vice or fastness ('Trotting on the Epicene Border,' he has it) is bred by apparently harmless practices of this description. He offers to turn the current of a Republican's brain, by resting a coronet on his forehead for just five seconds.

Howsoever these things be, it was true that Emilia's feet presently crossed, and she was soon to be seen with her right elbow doubled against her head as she leaned to the wall, and the little left fist stuck at her belt. And I maintain that she had no sense at all of acting Spanish prince disguised as page. Nor had she an idea that she was making her friend Wilfrid's heart perform to her lightest words and actions, like any trained milk-white steed in a circus. Sunlight, as well as Wilfrid's braided cap, had some magical influence on her. He assured her that she looked a charming boy, and she said, "Do I?" just lifting her chin.

A gardener was shaving the lawn.

"Please, spare those daisies," cried Emilia. "Why do you cut away daisies?"

The gardener objected that he really must make the lawn smooth. Emilia called to Adela, who came, and hearing the case, said: "Now this is nice of you. I like you to love daisies and wish

to protect them. They disfigure a lawn, you know." And Adela stooped, and picked one, and called it a pet name, and dropped it.

She returned to her sisters in the conservatory, and meeting Mr. Barren at the door, made the incident a topic. "You know how greatly our Emilia rejoices us when she shows sentiment, and our thirst is to direct her to appreciate Nature in its humility as well as its grandeur."

"One expects her to have all poetical feelings," said Mr. Barrett, while they walked forth to the lawn sloping to the tufted park grass.

Cornelia said: "You have read Mr. Runningbrook's story?"

"Yes."

But the man had not brought it back, and her name was in it, written with her own hand.

"Are you of my opinion in the matter?"

"In the matter of the style? I am and I am not. Your condemnation may be correct in itself; but you say, 'He coins words'; and he certainly forces the phrase here and there, I must admit. The point to be considered is, whether friction demands a perfectly smooth surface. Undoubtedly a scientific work does, and a philosophical treatise should. When we ask for facts simply, we feel the intrusion of a style. Of fiction it is part. In the one case the classical robe, in the other any mediaeval phantasy of clothing."

"Yes; true;" said Cornelia, hesitating over her argument. "Well, I must conclude that I am not imaginative."

"On the contrary, permit me to say that you are. But your imagination is unpractised, and asks to be fed with a spoon. We English are more imaginative than most nations."

"Then, why is it not manifested?"

"We are still fighting against the Puritan element, in literature as elsewhere."

"Your old bugbear, Mr. Barrett!"

"And more than this: our language is not rich in subtleties for prose. A writer who is not servile and has insight, must coin from his own mint. In poetry we are rich enough; but in prose also we owe everything to the licence our poets have taken in the teeth of critics. Shall I give you examples? It is not necessary. Our simplest prose style is nearer to poetry with us, for this reason, that the poets have made it. Read French poetry. With the first couplet the sails are full, and you have left the shores of prose far behind. Mr. Runningbrook coins words and risks expressions because an imaginative Englishman, pen in hand, is the cadet and vagabond of the family—an exploring adventurer; whereas to a Frenchman it all comes inherited like a well filled purse. The audacity of the French mind, and the French habit of quick social intercourse, have made them nationally far richer in language. Let me add, individually as much poorer. Read their stereotyped descriptions. They all say the same things. They have one big Gallic trumpet. Wonderfully eloquent: we feel that: but the person does not speak. And now, you will be surprised to learn that, notwithstanding what I have said, I should

still side with Mr. Runningbrook's fair critic, rather than with him. The reason is, that the necessity to write as he does is so great that a strong barrier—a chevaux-de-frise of pen points—must be raised against every newly minted word and hazardous coiner, or we shall be inundated. If he can leap the barrier he and his goods must be admitted. So it has been with our greatest, so it must be with the rest of them, or we shall have a Transatlantic literature. By no means desirable, I think. Yet, see: when a piece of Transatlantic slang happens to be tellingly true—something coined from an absolute experience; from a fight with the elements—we cannot resist it: it invades us. In the same way poetic rashness of the right quality enriches the language. I would make it prove its quality."

Cornelia walked on gravely. His excuse for dilating on the theme, prompted her to say: "You give me new views": while all her reflections sounded from the depths: "And yet, the man who talks thus is a hired organ-player!"

This recurring thought, more than the cogency of the new views, kept her from combating certain fallacies in them which had struck her.

"Why do you not write yourself, Mr. Barrett?"

"I have not the habit."

"The habit!"

"I have not heard the call."

"Should it not come from within?"

"And how are we to know it?"

"If it calls to you loudly!"

"Then I know it to be vanity."

"But the wish to make a name is not vanity."

"The wish to conceal a name may exist."

Cornelia took one of those little sly glances at his features which print them on the brain. The melancholy of his words threw a somber hue about him, and she began to think with mournfulness of those firm thin lips fronting misfortune: those sunken blue eyes under its shadow.

They walked up to Mr. Pole, who was standing with Wilfrid and Emilia on the lawn; giving ear to a noise in the distance.

A big drum sounded on the confines of the Brookfield estate. Soon it was seen entering the precincts at one of the principal gates, followed by trombone, and horn, and fife. In the rear trooped a regiment of Sunday-garmented villagers, with a rambling tail of loose-minded boys and girls. Blue and yellow ribands dangled from broad beaver hats, and there were rosettes of the true-blue mingled with yellow at buttonholes; and there was fun on the line of march. Jokes plumped deep into the ribs, and were answered with intelligent vivacity in the shape of hearty thwacks, delivered wherever a surface was favourable: a mode of repartee worthy of general adoption, inasmuch as it can be passed on, and so with certainty made to strike your neighbour as forcibly as yourself: of which felicity of propagation verbal wit cannot always boast. In the line of procession, the hat of a member of the corps shot sheer into the sky from the compressed

energy of his brain; for he and all his comrades vociferously denied having cast it up, and no other solution was possible. This mysterious incident may tell you that beer was thus early in the morning abroad. In fact, it was the procession day of a provincial Club-feast or celebration of the nuptials of Beef and Beer; whereof later you shall behold the illustrious offspring.

All the Brookfield household were now upon the lawn, awaiting the attack. Mr. Pole would have liked to impound the impouring host, drum and all, for the audacity of the trespass, and then to have fed them liberally, as a return for the compliment. Aware that he was being treated to the honours of a great man of the neighbourhood, he determined to take it cheerfully.

"Come; no laughing!" he said, directing a glance at the maids who were ranged behind their mistresses. "'Hem! we must look pleased: we mustn't mind their music, if they mean well."

Emilia, whose face was dismally screwed up at the nerve-searching discord, said: "Why do they try to play anything but a drum?"

"In the country, in the country;" Mr. Pole emphasized. "We put up with this kind of thing in the country. Different in town; but we—a—say nothing in the country. We must encourage respect for the gentry, in the country. One of the penalties of a country life. Not much harm in it. New duties in the country."

He continued to speak to himself. In proportion as he grew aware of the unnecessary nervous agitation into which the drum

was throwing him, he assumed an air of repose, and said to Wilfrid: "Read the paper to-day?" and to Arabella, "Quiet family dinner, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," he remarked to Mr. Barrett, as if resuming an old conversation: "I dare say, you've seen better marching in foreign parts. Right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! And not so bad, not so bad, I call it! with their right—left; right—left. Ha! ha! You've seen better. No need to tell me that. But, in England, we look to the meaning of things. We're a practical people. What's more, we're volunteers. Volunteers in everything. We can't make a regiment of ploughmen march like clock-work in a minute; and we don't want to. But, give me the choice; I'll back a body of volunteers any day."

"I would rather be backed by them, sir," said Mr. Barrett.

"Very good. I mean that. Honest intelligent industry backing rank and wealth! That makes a nation strong. Look at England!"

Mr. Barrett observed him stand out largely, as if filled by the spirit of the big drum.

That instrument now gave a final flourish and bang whereat Sound, as if knocked on the head, died languishingly.

And behold, a spokesman was seen in relief upon a background of grins, that were oddly intermixed with countenances of extraordinary solemnity.

The same commenced his propitiatory remarks by assuring the proprietor of Brookfield that he, the spokesman, and every man present, knew they had taken a liberty in coming upon

Squire Pole's grounds without leave or warning. They knew likewise that Squire Pole excused them.

Chorus of shouts from the divining brethren.

Right glad they were to have such a gentleman as Squire Pole among them: and if nobody gave him a welcome last year, that was not the fault of the Yellow-and-Blues. Eh, my boys?

Groans and cheers.

Right sure was spokesman that Squire Pole was the friend of the poor man, and liked nothing better than to see him enjoy his holiday. As why shouldn't he enjoy his holiday now and then, and have a bit of relaxation as well as other men?

Acquiescent token on the part of the new dignitary, Squire Pole.

Spokesman was hereby encouraged to put it boldly, whether a man was not a man all the world over.

"For a' that!" was sung out by some rare bookworm to rearward: but no Scot being present, no frenzy followed the quotation.

It was announced that the Club had come to do homage to Squire Pole and ladies: the Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford. What did Junction mean? Junction meant Harmony. Harmonious they were, to be sure: so they joined to good purpose.

Mr. Barrett sought Emilia's eyes smilingly, but she was intent on the proceedings.

A cry of "Bundle o' sticks, Tom Breeks. Don't let slip 'bout bundle o' sticks," pulled spokesman up short. He turned

hurriedly to say, “All right,” and inflated his chest to do justice to the illustration of the faggots of Aesop: but Mr. Tom Breeks had either taken in too much air, or the ale that had hitherto successfully prompted him was antipathetic to the nice delicacy of an apologue; for now his arm began to work and his forehead had to be mopped, and he lashed the words “Union and Harmony” right and left, until, coming on a sentence that sounded in his ears like the close of his speech, he stared ahead, with a dim idea that he had missed a point. “Bundle o’ sticks,” lustily shouted, revived his apprehension; but the sole effect was to make him look on the ground and lift his hat on the point of a perplexed finger. He could not conceive how the bundle of sticks was to be brought in now; or what to say concerning them. Union and Harmony:—what more could be said? Mr. Tom Breeks tried a remonstrance with his backers. He declared to them that he had finished, and had brought in the Bundle. They replied that they had not heard it; that the Bundle was the foundation—sentiment of the Club; the first toast, after the Crown; and that he must go on until the Bundle had been brought in. Hereat, the unhappy man faced Squire Pole again. It was too abject a position for an Englishman to endure. Tom Breeks cast his hat to earth. “I’m dashed if I can bring in the bundle!”

There was no telling how conduct like this might have been received by the Yellow-and-Blues if Mr. Barrett had not spoken. “You mean everything when you say ‘Union,’ and you’re quite right not to be tautological. You can’t give such a blow with your

fingers as you can with your fists, can you?"

Up went a score of fists. "We've the fists: we've the fists," was shouted.

Cornelia, smiling on Mr. Barrett, asked him why he had confused the poor people with the long word "tautological."

"I threw it as a bone," said he. "I think you will observe that they are already quieter. They are reflecting on what it signifies, and will by-and-by quarrel as to the spelling of it. At any rate it occupies them."

Cornelia laughed inwardly, and marked with pain that his own humour gave him no merriment.

At the subsiding of the echoes that coupled Squire Pole and the Junction Club together, Squire Pole replied. He wished them well. He was glad to see them, and sorry he had not ale enough on the premises to regale every man of them. Clubs were great institutions. One fist was stronger than a thousand fingers—"as my friend here said just now." Hereat the eyelids of Cornelia shed another queenly smile on the happy originator of the remark.

Squire Pole then descended to business. He named the amount of his donation. At this practical sign of his support, heaven heard the gratitude of the good fellows. The drum awoke from its torpor, and summoned its brethren of the band to give their various versions of the National Anthem.

"Can't they be stopped?" Emilia murmured, clenching her little hands.

The patriotic melody, delivered in sturdy democratic fashion,

had to be endured. It died hard, but did come to an end, piecemeal. Tom Breeks then retired from the front, and became a unit once more. There were flourishes that indicated a termination of the proceedings, when another fellow was propelled in advance, and he, shuffling and ducking his head, to the cries of "Out wi' it, Jim!" and, "Where's your stomach?" came still further forward, and showed a most obsequious grin.

"Why, it's Jim!" exclaimed Emilia, on whom Jim's eyes were fastened. Stepping nearer, she said, "Do you want to speak to me?"

Jim had this to say: which, divested of his petition for pardon on the strength of his perfect knowledge that he took a liberty, was, that the young lady had promised, while staying at Wilson's farm, that she would sing to the Club-fellows on the night of their feast.

"I towl'd 'em they'd have a rare treat, miss," mumbled Jim, "and they're all right mad for 't, that they be—bain't ye, boys?"

That they were! with not a few of the gesticulations of madness too.

Emilia said: "I promised I would sing to them. I remember it quite well. Of course I will keep my promise."

A tumult of acclamation welcomed her words, and Jim looked immensely delighted.

She was informed by several voices that they were the Yellow-and-Blues, and not the Blues: that she must not go to the wrong set: and that their booth was on Ipley Common: and that they,

the Junction Club, only would honour her rightly for the honour she was going to do them: all of which Emilia said she would bear in mind.

Jim then retired hastily, having done something that stout morning ale would alone have qualified him to perform. The drum, in the noble belief that it was leading, announced the return march, and with three cheers for Squire Pole, and a crowning one for the ladies, away trooped the procession.

CHAPTER IX

Hardly had the last sound of the drum passed out of hearing, when the elastic thunder of a fresh one claimed attention. The truth being, that the Junction Club of Ipley and Hillford, whose colours were yellow and blue, was a seceder from the old-established Hillford Club, on which it had this day shamefully stolen a march by parading everywhere in the place of it, and disputing not only its pasture-grounds but its identity.

There is no instrument the sound of which proclaims such a vast internal satisfaction as the drum. I know not whether it be that the sense we have of the corpulency of this instrument predisposes us to imagine it supremely content: as when an alderman is heard snoring the world is assured that it listens to the voice of its own exceeding gratulation. A light heart in a fat body ravishes not only the world but the philosopher. If monotonous, the one note of the drum is very correct. Like the speaking of great Nature, what it means is implied by the measure. When the drum beats to the measure of a common human pulsation it has a conquering power: inspiring us neither to dance nor to trail the members, but to march as life does, regularly, and in hearty good order, and with a not exhaustive jollity. It is a sacred instrument.

Now the drum which is heard to play in this cheerful fashion, while at the same time we know that discomfiture is cruelly harrying it: that its inmost feelings are wounded, and that

worse is in store for it, affects the contemplative mind with an inexpressibly grotesque commiseration. Do but listen to this one, which is the joint corporate voice of the men of Hillford. Outgeneraled, plundered, turned to ridicule, it thumps with unabated briskness. Here indeed might Sentimentalism shed a fertile tear!

Anticipating that it will eventually be hung up among our national symbols, I proceed. The drum of Hillford entered the Brookfield grounds as Ipley had done, and with a similar body of decorated Clubmen; sounding along until it faced the astonished proprietor, who held up his hand and requested to know the purpose of the visit. One sentence of explanation sufficed.

"What!" cried Mr. Pole, "do you think you can milk a cow twice in ten minutes?"

Several of the Hillford men acknowledged that it would be rather sharp work.

Their case was stated: whereupon Mr. Pole told them that he had just been 'milked,' and regretted it, but requested them to see that he could not possibly be equal to any second proceeding of the sort. On their turning to consult together, he advised them to bear it with fortitude. "All right, sir!" they said: and a voice from the ranks informed him that their word was 'Jolly.' Then a signal was given, and these indomitable fellows cheered the lord of Brookfield as lustily as if they had accomplished the feat of milking him twice in an hour. Their lively hurrahs set him blinking in extreme discomposure of spirit, and he was fumbling

at his pocket, when the drum a little precipitately thumped: the ranks fell into order, and the departure was led by the tune of the 'King of the Cannibal islands:' a tune that is certain to create a chorus on the march. On this occasion, the line:—

"Oh! didn't you know you were done, sir?"

became general at the winding up of the tune. Boys with their elders frisked as they chimed it, casting an emphasis of infinite relish on the declaration 'done'; as if they delighted in applying it to Mr. Pole, though at their own expense.

Soon a verse grew up:—

"We march'd and call'd on Mister Pole,
Who hadn't a penny, upon his soul,
For Ipley came and took the whole,
And didn't you know you were done, sir!"

I need not point out to the sagacious that Hillford and not Mr. Pole had been 'done;' but this was the genius of the men who transferred the opprobrium to him. Nevertheless, though their manner of welcoming misfortune was such, I, knowing that there was not a deadlier animal than a 'done' Briton, have shudders for Ipley.

We relinquished the stream of an epic in turning away from these mighty drums.

Mr. Pole stood questioning all who surrounded him: "What

could I do? I couldn't subscribe to both. They don't expect that of a lord, and I'm a commoner. If these fellows quarrel and split, are we to suffer for it? They can't agree, and want us to pay double fines. This is how they serve us."

Mr. Barrett, rather at a loss to account for his excitement, said, that it must be admitted they had borne the trick played upon them, with remarkable good humour.

"Yes, but," Mr. Pole fumed, "I don't. They put me in the wrong, between them. They make me uncomfortable. I've a good mind to withdraw my subscription to those rascals who came first, and have nothing to do with any of them. Then, you see, down I go for a niggardly fellow. That's the reputation I get. Nothing of this in London! you make your money, pay your rates, and nobody bothers a man."

"You should have done as our darling here did, papa," said Adela. "You should have hinted something that might be construed a promise or not, as we please to read it."

"If I promise I perform," returned Mr. Pole.

"Our Hillford people have cause for complaint," Mr. Barrett observed. And to Emilia: "You will hardly favour one party more than another, will you?"

"I am for that poor man Jim," said Emilia, "He carried my harp evening after evening, and would not even take sixpence for the trouble."

"Are you really going to sing there?"

"Didn't you hear? I promised."

"To-night?"

"Yes; certainly."

"Do you know what it is you have promised?"

"To sing."

Adela glided to her sisters near at hand, and these ladies presently hemmed Emilia in. They had a method of treating matters they did not countenance, as if nature had never conceived them, and such were the monstrous issue of diseased imaginations. It was hard for Emilia to hear that what she designed to do was "utterly out of the question and not to be for one moment thought of." She reiterated, with the same interpreting stress, that she had given her promise.

"Do you know, I praised you for putting them off so cleverly," said Adela in tones of gentle reproach that bewildered Emilia.

"Must we remind you, then, that you are bound by a previous promise?" Cornelia made a counter-demonstration with the word. "Have you not promised to dine with us at Lady Gosstre's to-night?"

"Oh, of course I shall keep that," replied Emilia. "I intend to. I will sing there, and then I will go and sing to those poor people, who never hear anything but dreadful music—not music at all, but something that seems to tear your flesh!"

"Never mind our flesh," said Adela pettishly: melodiously remonstrating the next instant: "I really thought you could not be in earnest."

"But," said Arabella, "can you find pleasure in wasting your

voice and really great capabilities on such people?"

Emilia caught her up—"This poor man? But he loves music: he really knows the good from the bad. He never looks proud but when I sing to him."

The situation was one that Cornelia particularly enjoyed. Here was a low form of intellect to be instructed as to the precise meaning of a word, the nature of a pledge. "There can be no harm that I see, in your singing to this man," she commenced. "You can bid him come to one of the out-houses here, if you desire, and sing to him. In the evening, after his labour, will be the fit time. But, as your friends, we cannot permit you to demean yourself by going from our house to a public booth, where vulgar men are smoking and drinking beer. I wonder you have the courage to contemplate such an act! You have pledged your word. But if you had pledged your word, child, to swing upon that tree, suspended by your arms, for an hour, could you keep it? I think not; and to recognize an impossibility economizes time and is one of the virtues of a clear understanding. It is incompatible that you should dine with Lady Gosstre, and then run away to a drinking booth. Society will never tolerate one who is familiar with boors. If you are to succeed in life, as we, your friends, can conscientiously say that we most earnestly hope and trust you will do, you must be on good terms with Society. You must! You pledge your word to a piece of folly. Emancipate yourself from it as quickly as possible. Do you see? This is foolish: it, therefore, cannot be. Decide, as a sensible creature."

At the close of this harangue, Cornelia, who had stooped slightly to deliver it, regained her stately posture, beautified in Mr. Barrett's sight by the flush which an unwonted exercise in speech had thrown upon her cheeks.

Emilia stood blinking like one sensible of having been chidden in a strange tongue.

"Does it offend you—my going?" she faltered.

"Offend!—our concern is entirely for you," observed Cornelia.

The explanation drew out a happy sparkle from Emilia's eyes. She seized her hand, kissed it, and cried: "I do thank you. I know I promised, but indeed I am quite pleased to go!"

Mr. Barrett swung hurriedly round and walked some paces away with his head downward. The ladies remained in a tolerant attitude for a minute or so, silent. They then wheeled with one accord, and Emilia was left to herself.

CHAPTER X

Richford was an easy drive from Brookfield, through lanes of elm and white hawthorn.

The ladies never acted so well as when they were in the presence of a fact which they acknowledged, but did not recognize. Albeit constrained to admit that this was the first occasion of their ever being on their way to the dinner-table of a person of quality, they could refuse to look the admission in the face. A peculiar lightness of heart beset them; for brooding ambition is richer in that first realizing step it takes, insignificant though it seem, than in any subsequent achievement. I fear to say that the hearts of the ladies boiled, because visages so sedate, and voices so monotonously indifferent, would witness decidedly against me. The common avoidance of any allusion to Richford testified to the direction of their thoughts; and the absence of a sign of exultation may be accepted as a proof of the magnitude of that happiness of which they might not exhibit a feature. The effort to repress it must have cost them horrible pain. Adela, the youngest of the three, transferred her inward joy to the cottage children, whose staring faces from garden porch and gate flashed by the carriage windows. “How delighted they look!” she exclaimed more than once, and informed her sisters that a country life was surely the next thing to Paradise. “Those children do look so happy!” Thus did the weak one cunningly

relieve herself. Arabella occupied her mind by giving Emilia leading hints for conduct in the great house. “On the whole, though there is no harm in your praising particular dishes, as you do at home, it is better in society to say nothing on those subjects until your opinion is asked: and when you speak, it should be as one who passes the subject by. Appreciate flavours, but no dwelling on them! The degrees of an expression of approbation, naturally enough, vary with age. Did my instinct prompt me to the discussion of these themes, I should be allowed greater licence than you.” And here Arabella was unable to resist a little bit of the indulgence Adela had taken: “You are sure to pass a most agreeable evening, and one that you will remember.”

North Pole sat high above such petty consolation; seldom speaking, save just to show that her ideas ranged at liberty, and could be spontaneously sympathetic on selected topics.

Their ceremonious entrance to the state-room of Richford accomplished, the ladies received the greeting of the affable hostess; quietly perturbed, but not enough so to disorder their artistic contemplation of her open actions, choice of phrase, and by-play. Without communication or pre-arrangement, each knew that the other would not let slip the opportunity, and, after the first five minutes of languid general converse; they were mentally at work comparing notes with one another’s imaginary conversations, while they said “Yes,” and “Indeed,” and “I think so,” and appeared to belong to the world about them.

“Merthyr, I do you the honour to hand this young lady to your

charge," said Lady Gosstre, putting on equal terms with Emilia a gentleman of perhaps five-and-thirty years; who reminded her of Mr. Barrett, but was unclouded by that look of firm sadness which characterized the poor organist. Mr. Powys was a travelled Welsh squire, Lady Gosstre's best talker, on whom, as Brookfield learnt to see, she could perfectly rely to preserve the child from any little drawing-room sins or dinner-table misadventures. This gentleman had made sacrifices for the cause of Italy, in money, and, it was said, in blood. He knew the country and loved the people. Brookfield remarked that there was just a foreign tinge in his manner; and that his smile, though social to a degree unknown to the run of English faces, did not give him all to you, and at a second glance seemed plainly to say that he reserved much.

Adela fell to the lot of a hussar-captain: a celebrated beauty, not too foolish. She thought it proper to punish him for his good looks till propitiated by his good temper.

Nobody at Brookfield could remember afterwards who took Arabella down to dinner; she declaring that she had forgotten. Her sisters, not unwilling to see insignificance banished to annihilation, said that it must have been nobody in person, and that he was a very useful guest when ladies were engaged. Cornelia had a different lot. She leaned on the right arm of the Member for Hillford, the statistical debate, Sir Twickenham Pryme, who had twice before, as he ventured to remind her, enjoyed the honour of conversing, if not of dining, with her. Nay, more, he revived their topics. "And I have come round to your

way of thinking as regards hustings addresses," he said. "In nine cases out of ten—at least, nineteen-twentieths of the House will furnish instances—one can only, as you justly observed, appeal to the comprehension of the mob by pledging oneself either to their appetites or passions, and it is better plainly to state the case and put it to them in figures." Whether the Baronet knew what he was saying is one matter: he knew what he meant.

Wilfrid was cavalier to Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, of Stornley, about ten miles distant from Hillford; ninth daughter of a nobleman who passed current as the Poor Marquis; he having been ruined when almost a boy in Paris, by the late illustrious Lord Dartford. Her sisters had married captains in the army and navy, lawyers, and parsons, impartially. Lady Charlotte was nine-and-twenty years of age; with clear and telling stone-blue eyes, firm but not unsweet lips, slightly hollowed cheeks, and a jaw that certainly tended to be square. Her colour was healthy. Walking or standing her figure was firmly poised. Her chief attraction was a bell-toned laugh, fresh as a meadow spring. She had met Wilfrid once in the hunting-field, so they soon had common ground to run on.

Mr. Powys made Emilia happy by talking to her of Italy, in the intervals of table anecdotes.

"Why did you leave it?" she said.

"I found I had more shadows than the one allotted me by nature; and as I was accustomed to a black one, and not half a dozen white, I was fairly frightened out of the country."

"You mean, Austrians."

"I do."

"Do you hate them?"

"Not at all."

"Then, how can you love the Italians?"

"They themselves have taught me to do both; to love them and not to hate their enemies. Your Italians are the least vindictive of all races of men."

"Merthyr, Merthyr!" went Lady Gosstre; Lady Charlotte murmuring aloud: "And in the third chapter of the Book of Paradox you will find these words."

"We afford a practical example and forgive them, do we not?" Mr. Powys smiled at Emilia.

She looked round her, and reddened a little.

"So long as you do not write that Christian word with the point of a stiletto!" said Lady Charlotte.

"You are not mad about the Italians?" Wilfrid addressed her.

"Not mad about anything, I hope. If I am to choose, I prefer the Austrians. A very gentlemanly set of men! At least, so I find them always. Capital horsemen!"

"I will explain to you how it must be," said Mr. Powys to Emilia. "An artistic people cannot hate long. Hotly for the time, but the oppression gone, and even in the dream of its going, they are too human to be revengeful."

"Do we understand such very deep things?" said Lady Gosstre, who was near enough to hear clearly.

"Yes: for if I ask her whether she can hate when her mind is given to music, she knows that she cannot. She can love."

"Yet I think I have heard some Italian operatic spitfires, and of some!" said Lady Charlotte.

"What opinion do you pronounce in this controversy?" Cornelia made appeal to Sir Twickenham.

"There are multitudes of cases," he began: and took up another end of his statement: "It has been computed that five-and-twenty murders per month to a population…to a population of ninety thousand souls, is a fair reckoning in a Southern latitude."

"Then we must allow for the latitude?"

"I think so."

"And also for the space into which the ninety thousand souls are packed," quoth Tracy Runningbrook.

"Well! well!" went Sir Twickenham.

"The knife is the law to an Italian of the South," said Mr. Powys. "He distrusts any other, because he never gets it. Where law is established, or tolerably secure, the knife is not used. Duels are rare. There is too much bonhomie for the point of honour."

"I should like to believe that all men are as just to their mistresses," Lady Charlotte sighed, mock-earnestly.

Presently Emilia touched the arm of Mr. Powys. She looked agitated. "I want to be told the name of that gentleman." His eyes were led to rest on the handsome hussar-captain.

"Do you know him?"

"But his name!"

"Do me the favour to look at me. Captain Gambier."

"It is!"

Captain Gambier's face was resolutely kept in profile to her.

"I hear a rumour," said Lady Gosstre to Arabella, "that you think of bidding for the Besworth estate. Are you tired of Brookfield?"

"Not tired; but Brookfield is modern, and I confess that Besworth has won my heart."

"I shall congratulate myself on having you nearer neighbours. Have you many, or any rivals?"

"There is some talk of the Tinleys wishing to purchase it. I cannot see why."

"What people are they?" asked Lady Charlotte. "Do they hunt?"

"Oh, dear, no! They are to society what Dissenters are to religion. I can't describe them otherwise."

"They pass before me in that description," said Lady Gosstre.

"Besworth's an excellent centre for hunting," Lady Charlotte remarked to Wilfrid. "I've always had an affection for that place. The house is on gravel; the river has trout; there's a splendid sweep of grass for the horses to exercise. I think there must be sixteen spare beds. At all events, I know that number can be made up; so that if you're too poor to live much in London, you can always have your set about you."

The eyes of the fair economist sparkled as she dwelt on these

particular advantages of Besworth.

Richford boasted a show of flowers that might tempt its guests to parade the grounds on balmy evenings. Wilfrid kept by the side of Lady Charlotte. She did not win his taste a bit. Had she been younger, less decided in tone, and without a title, it is very possible that she would have offended his native, secret, and dominating fastidiousness as much as did Emilia. Then, what made him subject at all to her influence, as he felt himself beginning to be? She supplied a deficiency in the youth. He was growing and uncertain: she was set and decisive. In his soul he adored the extreme refinement of woman; even up to the thin edge of inanity (which neighbours what the philosopher could tell him if he would, and would, if it were permitted to him). Nothing was too white, too saintly, or too misty, for his conception of abstract woman. But the practical wants of our nature guide us best. Conversation with Lady Charlotte seemed to strengthen and ripen him. He blushed with pleasure when she said: "I remember reading your name in the account of that last cavalry charge on the Dewan. You slew a chief, I think. That was creditable, for they are swordmen. Cavalry in Europe can't win much honour—not individual honour, I mean. I suppose being part of a victorious machine is exhilarating. I confess I should not think much of wearing that sort of feather. It's right to do one's duty, comforting to trample down opposition, and agreeable to shed blood, but when you have matched yourself man to man, and beaten—why, then, I dub you knight."

Wilfrid bowed, half-laughing, in a luxurious abandonment to his sensations. Possibly because of their rule over him then, the change in him was so instant from flattered delight to vexed perplexity. Rounding one of the rhododendron banks, just as he lifted his head from that acknowledgment of the lady's commendation, he had sight of Emilia with her hand in the hand of Captain Gambier. What could it mean? what right had he to hold her hand? Even if he knew her, what right?

The words between Emilia and Captain Gambier were few.

"Why did I not look at you during dinner?" said he. "Was it not better to wait till we could meet?"

"Then you will walk with me and talk to me all the evening?"

"No: but I will try and come down here next week and meet you again."

"Are you going to-night?"

"Yes."

"To-night? To-night before it strikes a quarter to ten, I am going to leave here alone. If you would come with me! I want a companion. I know they will not hurt me, but I don't like being alone. I have given my promise to sing to some poor people. My friends say I must not go. I must go. I can't break a promise to poor people. And you have never heard me really sing my best. Come with me, and I will."

Captain Gambier required certain explanations. He saw that a companion and protection would be needed by his curious little friend, and as she was resolved not to break her word, he engaged

to take her in the carriage that was to drive him to the station.

"You make me give up an appointment in town," he said.

"Ah, but you will hear me sing," returned Emilia. "We will drive to Brookfield and get my harp, and then to Ipley Common. I am to be sure you will be ready with the carriage at just a quarter to ten?"

The Captain gave her his assurance, and they separated; he to seek out Adela, she to wander about, the calmest of conspirators against the serenity of a household.

Meeting Wilfrid and Lady Charlotte, Emilia was asked by him, who it was she had quitted so abruptly.

"That is the gentleman I told you of. Now I know his name. It is Captain Gambier."

She was allowed to pass on.

"What is this she says?" Lady Charlotte asked.

"It appears…something about a meeting somewhere accidentally, in the park, in London, I think; I really don't know. She had forgotten his name."

Lady Charlotte spurred him with an interrogative "Yes?"

"She wanted to remember his name. That's all. He was kind to her."

"But, after all," remonstrated Lady Charlotte, "that's only a characteristic of young men, is it not? no special distinction. You are all kind to girls, to women, to anything!"

Captain Gambier and Adela crossed their path. He spoke a passing word, Lady Charlotte returned no answer, and was silent

to her companion for some minutes. Then she said, “If you feel any responsibility about this little person, take my advice, and don’t let her have appointments and meetings. They’re bad in any case, and for a girl who has no brother—has she? no:—well then, you should make the best provision you can against the cowardice of men. Most men are cowards.”

Emilia sang in the drawing-room. Brookfield knew perfectly why she looked indifferent to the plaudits, and was not dissatisfied at hearing Lady Gosstre say that she was a little below the mark. The kindly lady brought Emilia between herself and Mr. Powys, saying, “I don’t intend to let you be the star of the evening and outshine us all.” After which, conversation commenced, and Brookfield had reason to admire her ladyship’s practised play upon the social instrument, surely the grandest of all, the chords being men and women. Consider what an accomplishment this is!

Albeit Brookfield knew itself a student at Richford, Adela was of too impatient a wit to refrain from little ventures toward independence, if not rivalry. “What we do,” she uttered distinctively once or twice. Among other things she spoke of “our discovery,” to attest her declaration that, to wakeful eyes, neither Hillford nor any other place on earth was dull. Cornelia flushed at hearing the name of Mr. Barrett pronounced publicly by her sister.

“An organist an accomplished man!” Lady Gosstre repeated Adela’s words. “Well, I suppose it is possible, but it rather upsets

one's notions, does it not?"

"Yes, but agreeably," said Adela, with boldness; and related how he had been introduced, and hinted that he was going to be patronized.

"The man cannot maintain himself on the income that sort of office brings him," Lady Gosstre observed.

"Oh, no," said Adela. "I fancy he does it simply for some sort of occupation. One cannot help imagining a disguise."

"Personally I confess to an objection to gentlemen in disguise," said Lady Gosstre. "Barrett!—do you know the man?"

She addressed Mr. Powys.

"There used to be good quartett evenings given by the Barretts of Bursey," he said. "Sir Justinian Barrett married a Miss Purcell, who subsequently preferred the musical accomplishments of a foreign professor of the Art."

"Purcell Barrett is his name," said Adela. "Our Emilia brought him to us. Where is she? But, where can she be?"

Adela rose.

"She pressed my hand just now," said Lady Gosstre.

"She was here when Captain Gambler quitted the room," Arabella remarked.

"Good heaven!"

The exclamation came from Adela.

"Oh, Lady Gosstre! I fear to tell you what I think she has done."

The scene of the rival Clubs was hurriedly related, together

with the preposterous pledge given by Emilia, that she would sing at the Ipley Booth: "Among those dreadful men!"

"They will treat her respectfully," said Mr. Powys.

"Worship her, I should imagine, Merthyr," said Lady Gosstre. "For all that, she had better be away. Beer is not a respectful spirit."

"I trust you will pardon her," Arabella pleaded. "Everything that explanations of the impropriety of such a thing could do, we have done. We thought that at last we had convinced her. She is quite untamed."

Mr. Powys now asked where this place was that she had hurried to.

The unhappy ladies of Brookfield, quick as they were to read every sign surrounding them, were for the moment too completely thrown off their balance by Emilia's extraordinary exhibition of will, to see that no reflex of her shameful and hideous proceeding had really fallen upon them. Their exclamations were increasing, until Adela, who had been the noisiest, suddenly adopted Lady Gosstre's tone. "If she has gone, I suppose she must be simply fetched away."

"Do you see what has happened?" Lady Charlotte murmured to Wilfrid, between a phrase.

He stumbled over a little piece of gallantry.

"Excellent! But, say those things in French.—Your dark-eyed maid has eloped. She left the room five minutes after Captain Gambier."

Wilfrid sprang to his feet, looking eagerly to the corners of the room.

"Pardon me," he said, and moved up to Lady Gosstre. On the way he questioned himself why his heart should be beating at such a pace. Standing at her ladyship's feet, he could scarcely speak.

"Yes, Wilfrid; go after her," said Adela, divining his object.

"By all means go," added Lady Gosstre. "Now she is there, you may as well let her keep her promise; and then hurry her home. They will saddle you a horse down below, if you care to have one."

Wilfrid thanked her ladyship, and declined the horse. He was soon walking rapidly under a rough sky in the direction of Ipley, with no firm thought that he would find Emilia there.

CHAPTER XI

At half-past nine of the clock on the evening of this memorable day, a body of five-and-twenty stout young fellows, prize-winners, wrestlers, boxers, and topers, of the Hillford Club, set forth on a march to Ipley Common.

Now, a foreigner, hearing of their destination and the provocation they had endured, would have supposed that they were bent upon deeds of vengeance; and it requires knowledge of our countrymen to take it as a fact that the idea and aim of the expedition were simply to furnish the offending Ipley boys a little music. Such were the idea and the aim. Hillford had nothing to do with consequences: no more than our England is responsible when she sails out among the empires and hemispheres, saying, 'buy' and 'sell,' and they clamour to be eaten up entire. Foreigners pertinaciously misunderstand us. They have the barbarous habit of judging by results. Let us know ourselves better. It is melancholy to contemplate the intrigues, and vile designs, and vengeances of other nations; and still more so, after we have written so many pages of intelligible history, to see them attributed to us. Will it never be perceived that we do not sow the thing that happens? The source of the flooding stream which drinks up those rich acres of low flat land is not more innocent than we. If, as does seem possible, we are in a sort of alliance with Destiny, we have signed no compact, and accomplish our

work as solidly and merrily as a wood-hatchet in the hands of the woodman. This arrangement to give Ipley a little music, was projected as a return for the favours of the morning: nor have I in my time heard anything comparable to it in charity of sentiment, when I consider the detestable outrage Hillford suffered under.

The parading of the drum, the trombone, a horn, two whistles, and a fife, in front of Hillford booth, caught the fancy of the Clubmen, who roared out parting adjurations that the music was not to be spared; and that Tom Breeks was a musical fellow, with a fine empty pate, if any one of the instruments should fail perchance. They were to give Ipley plenty of music: for Ipley wanted to be taught harmony. Harmony was Ipley's weak point. "Gie 'em," said one jolly ruddy Hillford man, "gie 'em whack fol, lol!" And he smacked himself, and set toward an invisible partner. Nor, as recent renowned historians have proved, are observations of this nature beneath the dignity of chronicle. They vindicate, as they localize, the sincerity of Hillford.

Really, to be an islander full of ale, is to be the kindest creature on or off two legs. For that very reason, it may be, his wrath at bad blood is so easily aroused. In our hot moods we would desire things like unto ourselves, and object violently to whatsoever is unlike. And also we desire that the benefits we shed be appreciated. If Ipley understands neither our music nor our intent, haply we must hold a performance on the impenetrable sconce of Ipley.

At the hour named, the expedition, with many a promise that

the music should be sweet, departed hilariously: Will Burdock, the left-handed cricketer and hard-hitter, being leader; with Peter Bartholomew, potboy, John Girling, miller's man, and Ned Thewk, gardener's assistant, for lieutenants. On the march, silence was proclaimed, and partially enforced, after two fights against authority. Near the sign of King William's Head, General Burdock called a halt, and betrayed irresolution with reference to the route to be adopted; but as none of his troop could at all share such a condition of mind in the neighbourhood of an inn, he was permitted to debate peacefully with his lieutenants, while the rest burst through the doors and hailed the landlord: a proceeding he was quickly induced to imitate. Thus, when the tail shows strongest decision of purpose, the head must follow.

An accurate oinometer, or method of determining what shall be the condition of the spirit of man according to the degrees of wine or beer in him, were surely of priceless service to us. For now must we, to be certain of our sanity and dignity, abstain, which is to clip, impoverish, imprison the soul: or else, taking wings of wine, we go aloft over capes, and islands, and seas, but are even as balloons that cannot make for any line, and are at the mercy of the winds—without a choice, save to come down by virtue of a collapse. Could we say to ourselves, in the great style, This is the point where desire to embrace humanity is merged in vindictiveness toward individuals: where radiant sweet temper culminates in tremendous wrath: where the treasures of anticipation, waxing riotous, arouse the memory of wrongs: in

plain words, could we know positively, and from the hand of science, when we have had enough, we should stop. There is not a doubt that we should stop. It is so true we should stop, that, I am ready to say, ladies have no right to call us horrid names, and complain of us, till they have helped us to some such trustworthy scientific instrument as this which I have called for. In its absence, I am persuaded that the true natural oinometer is the hat. Were the hat always worn during potation; were ladies when they retire to place it on our heads, or, better still, chaplets of flowers; then, like the wise ancients, we should be able to tell to a nicety how far we had advanced in our dithyramb to the theme of fuddle and muddle. Unhappily the hat does not forewarn: it is simply indicative. I believe, nevertheless, that science might set to work upon it forthwith, and found a system. When you mark men drinking who wear their hats, and those hats are seen gradually beginning to hang on the backs of their heads, as from pegs, in the fashion of a fez, the bald projection of forehead looks jolly and frank: distrust that sign: the may-fly of the soul is then about to be gobbled up by the chub of the passions. A hat worn fez-fashion is a dangerous hat. A hat on the brows shows a man who can take more, but thinks he will go home instead, and does so, peaceably. That is his determination. He may look like Macduff, but he is a lamb. The vinous reverses the non-vinous passionate expression of the hat. If I am discredited, I appeal to history, which tells us that the hats of the Hillford five-and-twenty were all exceedingly hind-

ward-set when the march was resumed. It followed that Peter Bartholomew, potboy, made irritable objections to that old joke which finished his name as though it were a cat calling, and the offence being repeated, he dealt an impartial swing of his stick at divers heads, and told them to take that, which they assured him they had done by sending him flying into a hedge. Peter, being reprimanded by his commanding officer, acknowledged a hot desire to try his mettle, and the latter responsible person had to be restrained from granting the wish he cherished by John Girling, whom he threw for his trouble and as Burdock was the soundest hitter, numbers cried out against Girling, revolting him with a sense of overwhelming injustice that could be appeased only by his prostrating two stout lads and squaring against a third, who came up from a cross-road. This one knocked him down with the gentleness of a fist that knows how Beer should be treated, and then sang out, in the voice of Wilfrid Pole: "Which is the nearest way to Ipley, you fellows?"

"Come along with us, sir, and we'll show you," said Burdock.

"Are you going there?"

"Well, that's pretty clear."

"Hillford men, are you?"

"We've left the women behind."

"I'm in a hurry, so, good night."

"And so are we in a hurry, sir. But, you're a gentleman, and we want to give them chaps at Ipley a little surprise, d'ye see, in the way of a dollop o' music: and if you won't go givin' 'em

warning, you may trot; and that road'll take you."

"All right," said Wilfrid, now fairly divided between his jealousy of Gambier and anxiety for Emilia.

Could her artist nature, of which he had heard perplexing talk, excuse her and make her heart absolutely guiltless (what he called 'innocent'), in trusting herself to any man's honour? I regret to say that the dainty adorers of the sex are even thus grossly suspicious of all women when their sentiment is ever so triflingly offended.

Lights on Ipley Common were seen from a rise of the hilly road. The moon was climbing through drifts of torn black cloud. Hastening his pace, for a double reason now, Wilfrid had the booth within hearing, listened a moment; and then stood fast. His unconscious gasp of the words: "Thank God; there she is!" might have betrayed him to another.

She was sitting near one end of the booth, singing as Wilfrid had never yet heard her sing: her dark eyes flashing. Behind her stood Captain Gambier, keeping guard with all the composure of a gentleman-usher at a royal presentation. Along the tables, men and women were ranged facing her; open-mouthed, some of them but for the most part wearing a predetermined expression of applausive judgement, as who should say, "Queer, but good." They gave Emilia their faces, which was all she wanted! and silence, save for an intermingling soft snore, here and there, the elfin trumpet of silence. To tell truth, certain heads had bowed low to the majesty of beer, and were down on the table between sprawling doubled arms. No essay on the power of beer

could exhibit it more convincingly than, the happy indifference with which they received admonishing blows from quart-pots, salutes from hot pipe-bowls, pricks from pipe-ends, on nose, and cheek, and pate; as if to vindicate for their beloved beverage a right to rank with that old classic drink wherewith the fairest of women vanquished human ills. The majority, however, had been snatched out of this bliss by the intrusion of their wives, who sat beside them like Consciences in petticoats; and it must be said that Emilia was in favour with the married men, for one reason, because she gave these broad-ribboned ladies a good excuse for allowing their lords to stop where they were so comfortable, a continually-extending five minutes longer.

Yet, though the words were foreign and the style of the song and the singer were strange, many of the older fellows' eyes twinkled, and their mouths pursed with a kind of half-protesting pleasure. All were reverent to the compliment paid them by Emilia's presence. The general expression was much like that seen when the popular ear is given to the national anthem. Wilfrid hung at the opening of the booth, a cynical spectator. For what on earth made her throw such energy, and glory of music, into a song before fellows like these? He laughed dolorously, "she hasn't a particle of any sense of ridicule," he said to himself. Forthwith her voice took hold of him, and led him as heroes of old were led unwillingly into enchanted woods. If she had been singing things holy, a hymn, a hallelujah, in this company, it struck him that somehow it would have seemed appropriate; not objectionable; at

any rate, not ridiculous. Dr. Watts would have put a girdle about her; but a song of romance sung in this atmosphere of pipes and beer and boozy heads, chagrined Wilfrid in proportion as the softer half of him began to succumb to the deliciousness of her voice.

Emilia may have had some warning sense that admiration is only one ingredient of homage, that to make it fast and true affection must be won. Now, poor people, yokels, clods, cannot love what is incomprehensible to them. An idol must have their attributes: a king must show his face now and then: a song must appeal to their intelligence, to subdue them quite. This, as we know, is not the case in the higher circles. Emilia may have divined it: possibly from the very great respect with which her finale was greeted. Vigorous as the "Brayvos" were, they sounded abashed: they lacked abandonment. In fact, it was gratitude that applauded, and not enthusiasm. "Hillford don't hear stuff like that, do 'em?" which was the main verbal encomium passed, may be taken testificatorily as to this point.

"Dame! dame!" cried Emilia, finding her way quickly to one of the more decently-bonneted women; "am I not glad to see you here! Did I please you? And you, dear Farmer Wilson? I caught sight of you just as I was finishing. I remember the song you like, and I want to sing it. I know the tune, but the words! the words! what are the words? Humming won't do."

"Ah, now!" quoth Farmer Wilson, pointing out the end of his pipe, "that's what they'll swallow down; that's the song to make

‘em kick. Sing that, miss. Furrin songs ‘s all right enough; but ‘Ale it is my tipple, and England is my nation!’ Let’s have something plain and flat on the surface, miss.”

Dame Wilson jogged her husband’s arm, to make him remember that talking was his dangerous pastime, and sent abroad a petition for a song-book; and after a space a very doggy-eared book, resembling a poodle of that genus, was handed to her. Then uprose a shout for this song and that; but Emilia fixed upon the one she had in view, and walked back to her harp, with her head bent, perusing it attentively all the way. There, she gave the book to Captain Gambier, and begged him to hold it open before her, with a passing light of eyes likely to be rather disturbing to a jealous spectator. The Captain seized the book without wincing, and displayed a remarkable equanimity of countenance as he held it out, according to direction. No sooner had Emilia struck a prelude of the well-known air, than the interior of the booth was transfigured; legs began to move, elbows jerked upward, fingers fillipped: the whole body of them were ready to duck and bow, dance, and do her bidding she had fairly caught their hearts. For, besides the pleasure they had in their own familiar tune, it was wonderful to them that Emilia should know what they knew. This was the marvel, this the inspiration. She smiled to see how true she had struck, and seemed to swim on the pleasure she excited. Once, as her voice dropped, she looked up at Captain Gambier, so very archly, with the curving line of her bare throat, that Wilfrid was

dragged down from his cynical observatory, and made to feel as a common man among them all.

At the "thrum-thrum" on the harp-strings, which wound up the song, frenzied shouts were raised for a repetition. Emilia was perfectly willing to gratify them; Captain Gambier appeared to be remonstrating with her, but she put up her joined hands, mock-petitioningly, and he with great affability held out the book anew. Wilfrid was thinking of moving to her to take her forcibly away when she recommenced.

At the same instant—but who, knowing that a house of glass is about to be shattered, can refrain from admiring its glitter in the beams?—Ipley crooned a ready accompaniment: the sleepers had been awakened: the women and the men were alive, half-dancing, half-chorusing here a baby was tossed, and there an old fellow's elbow worked mutely, expressive of the rollicking gaiety within him: the whole length of the booth was in a pleasing simmer, ready to overboil with shouts humane and cheerful, while Emilia pitched her note and led; archly, and quite one with them all, and yet in a way that critical Wilfrid could not object to, so plainly did she sing to give happiness.

I cannot delay; but I request you, that are here privileged to soar aloft with the Muse, to fix your minds upon one point in this flight. Let not the heat and dust of the ensuing fray divert your attention from the magnanimity of Beer. It will be vindicated in the end but be worthy of your seat beside the Muse, who alone of us all can take one view of the inevitable two that perplex mortal

judgements.

For, if Ipley had jumped jovially up, and met the Hillford alarum with laughter,—how then? Why, then I maintain that the magnanimity of Beer would have blazed effulgent on the spot: there would have been louder laughter and fraternal greetings. As it was, the fire on the altar of Wisdom was again kindled by Folly, and the steps to the altar were broken heads, after the antique fashion.

In dismay, Ipley started. The members of the Club stared. Emilia faltered in horror.

A moment her voice swam stemming the execrable concert, but it was overwhelmed. Wilfrid pressed forward to her. They could hear nothing but the din. The booth raged like an insurgent menagerie. Outside it sounded of brazen beasts, and beasts that whistled, beasts that boomed. A whirlwind huddled them, and at last a cry, "We've got a visit from Hillford," told a tale. At once the stoutest hearts pressed to the opening. "My harp!" Emilia made her voice reach Wilfrid's ear. Unprovided with weapons, Ipley parleyed. Hillford howled in reply. The trombone brayed an interminable note, that would have driven to madness quiescent cats by steaming kettles, and quick, like the springing pulse of battle, the drum thumped and thumped. Blood could not hear it and keep from boiling. The booth shook violently. Wilfrid and Gambier threw over half-a-dozen chairs, forms, and tables, to make a barrier for the protection of the women.

"Come," Wilfrid said to Emilia, "leave the harp, I will get you

another. Come."

"No, no," she cried in her nervous fright.

"For God's sake, come!" he reiterated, she, stamping her foot, as to emphasize "No! no! no!"

"But I will buy you another harp;" he made audible to her through the hubbub.

"This one!" she gasped with her hand on it. "What will he think if he finds that I forsook it?"

Wilfrid knew her to allude to the unknown person who had given it to her.

"There—there," said he. "I sent it, and I can get you another. So, come. Be good, and come."

"It was you!"

Emilia looked at him. She seemed to have no senses for the uproar about her.

But now the outer barricade was broken through, and the rout pressed on the second line. Tom Breeks, the orator, and Jim, transformed from a lurching yokel to a lithe dog of battle, kept the retreat of Ipley, challenging any two of Hillford to settle the dispute. Captain Gambier attempted an authoritative parley, in the midst of which a Hillford man made a long arm and struck Emilia's harp, till the strings jarred loose and horrid. The noise would have been enough to irritate Wilfrid beyond endurance. When he saw the fellow continuing to strike the harp-frame while Emilia clutched it, in a feeble defence, against her bosom, he caught a thick stick from a neighbouring hand and knocked that

Hillford man so clean to earth that Hillford murmured at the blow. Wilfrid then joined the front array.

"Half-a-dozen hits like that a-piece, sir," nodded Tom Breeks.

"There goes another!" Jim shouted.

"Not quite, my lad," interposed Ned Thewk, though Peter Bartholomew was reeling in confirmation.

His blow at Jim missed, but came sharply in the swing on Wilfrid's cheek-bone.

Maddened at the immediate vision of that feature swollen, purple, even as a plum with an assiduous fly on it, certifying to ripeness:—Says the philosopher, "We are never up to the mark of any position, if we are in a position beneath our own mark;" and it is true that no hero in conflict should think of his face, but Wilfrid was all the while protesting wrathfully against the folly of his having set foot in such a place:—Maddened, I say, Wilfrid, a keen swordman, cleared a space. John Girling fell to him: Ned Thewk fell to him, and the sconce of Will Burdock rang.

"A rascally absurd business!" said Gambier, letting his stick do the part of a damnatory verb on one of the enemy, while he added, "The drunken vagabonds!"

All the Hillford party were now in the booth. Ipley, meantime, was not sleeping. Farmer Wilson and a set of the Ipley men whom age had sagaciously instructed to prefer stratagem to force, had slipped outside, and were labouring as busily as their comrades within: stooping to the tent-pegs, sending emissaries to the tent-poles.

“Drunk!” roared Will Burdock. “Did you happen to say ‘drunk?’” And looking all the while at Gambier, he, with infernal cunning, swung at Wilfrid’s fated cheekbone. The latter rushed furiously into the press of them, and there was a charge from Ipley, and a lock, from which Wilfrid extricated himself to hurry off Emilia. He perceived that bad blood was boiling up.

“Forward!” cried Will Burdock, and Hillford in turn made a tide.

As they came on in numbers too great for Ipley to stand against, an obscuration fell over all. The fight paused. Then a sensation as of some fellows smoothing their polls and their cheeks, and leaning on their shoulders with obtrusive affection, inspirited them to lash about indiscriminately. Whoops and yells arose; then peals of laughter. Homage to the cleverness of Ipley was paid in hurrahs, the moment Hillford understood the stratagem by which its men of valour were lamed and imprisoned. The truth was, that the booth was down on them, and they were struggling entangled in an enormous bag of canvas.

Wilfrid drew Emilia from under the drooping folds of the tent. He was allowed, on inspection of features, to pass. The men of Hillford were captured one by one like wild geese, as with difficulty they emerged, roaring, rolling with laughter, all.

Yea; to such an extent did they laugh that they can scarce be said to have done less than make the joke of the foe their own. And this proves the great and amazing magnanimity of Beer.

CHAPTER XII

A pillar of dim silver rain fronted the moon on the hills. Emilia walked hurriedly, with her head bent, like a penitent: now and then peeping up and breathing to the keen scent of the tender ferns. Wilfrid still grasped her hand, and led her across the common, away from the rout.

When the uproar behind them had sunk, he said "You'll get your feet wet. I'm sorry you should have to walk. How did you come here?"

She answered: "I forget."

"You must have come here in some conveyance. Did you walk?"

Again she answered: "I forget;" a little querulously; perhaps wilfully.

"Well!" he persisted: "You must have got your harp to this place by some means or other?"

"Yes, my harp!" a sob checked her voice.

Wilfrid tried to soothe her. "Never mind the harp. It's easily replaced."

"Not that one!" she moaned.

"We will get you another."

"I shall never love any but that."

"Perhaps we may hear good news of it to-morrow."

"No; for I felt it die in my hands. The third blow was the one

that killed it. It's broken."

Wilfrid could not reproach her, and he had not any desire to preach. So, as no idea of having done amiss in coming to the booth to sing illumined her, and she yet knew that she was in some way guilty, she accused herself of disregard for that dear harp while it was brilliant and serviceable. "Now I remember what poor music I made of it! I touched it with cold fingers. The sound was thin, as if it had no heart. Tick-tick!—I fancy I touched it with a dead man's finger-nails."

She crossed her wrists tight at the clasp of her waist, and letting her chin fall on her throat, shook her body fretfully, much as a pettish little girl might do. Wilfrid grimaced. "Tick-tick" was not a pathetic elegy in his ears.

"The only thing is, not to think about it," said he. "It's only an instrument, after all."

"It's the second one I've seen killed like a living creature," replied Emilia.

They walked on silently, till Wilfrid remarked, that he wondered where Gambier was. She gave no heed to the name. The little quiet footing and the bowed head by his side, moved him to entreat her not to be unhappy. Her voice had another tone when she answered that she was not unhappy.

"No tears at all?" Wilfrid stooped to get a close view of her face. "I thought I saw one. If it's about the harp, look!—you shall go into that cottage where the light is, sit there, and wait for me, and I will bring you what remains of it. I dare say we can have

it mended."

Emilia lifted her eyes. "I am not crying for the harp. If you go back I must go with you."

"That's out of the question. You must never be found in that sort of place again."

"Let us leave the harp," she murmured. "You cannot go without me. Let me sit here for a minute. Sit with me."

She pointed to a place beside herself on the fork of a dry log under flowering hawthorn. A pale shadowy blue centre of light among the clouds told where the moon was. Rain had ceased, and the refreshed earth smelt all of flowers, as if each breeze going by held a nosegay to their nostrils.

Wilfrid was sensible of a sudden marked change in her. His blood was quicker than his brain in feeling it. Her voice now, even in common speaking, had that vibrating richness which in her singing swept his nerves.

"If you cry, there must be a cause, you know," he said, for the sake of keeping the conversation in a safe channel.

"How brave you are!" was Emilia's sedate exclamation, in reply.

Her cheeks glowed, as if she had just uttered a great confession, but while the colour mounted to her eyes, they kept their affectionate intentness upon him without a quiver of the lids.

"Do you think me a coward?" she relieved him by asking sharply, like one whom the thought had turned into a darker path.

"I am not. I hung my head while you were fighting, because, what could I do? I would not have left you. Girls can only say, 'I will perish with him.'"

"But," Wilfrid tried to laugh, "there was no necessity for that sort of devotion. What are you thinking of? It was half in good-humour, all through. Part of their fun!"

Clearly Emilia's conception of the recent fray was unchangeable.

"And the place for girls is at home; that's certain," he added.

"I should always like to be where…" Her voice flowed on with singular gravity to that stop.

Wilfrid's hand travelled mechanically to his pricking cheek-bone.

Was it possible that a love-scene was coming on as a pendant to that monstrously ridiculous affair of half-an-hour back? To know that she had sufficient sensibility was gratifying, and flattering that it aimed at him. She was really a darling little woman: only too absurd! Had she been on the point of saying that she would always like to be where he, Wilfrid, was? An odd touch of curiosity, peculiar to the languid emotions, made him ask her this: and to her soft "Yes," he continued briskly, and in the style of condescending fellowship: "Of course we're not going to part!"

"I wonder," said Emilia.

There she sat, evidently sounding right through the future with her young brain, to hear what Destiny might have to say.

The 'I wonder' rang sweetly in his head. It was as delicate a way of confessing, "I love you with all my soul," as could be imagined. Extremely refined young ladies could hardly have improved upon it, saving with the angelic shades of sentiment familiar to them.

Convinced that he had now heard enough for his vanity, Wilfrid returned emphatically to the tone of the world's highroad.

"By the way," he said, "you mustn't have any exaggerated idea of this night's work. Remember, also, I have to share the honours with Captain Gambier."

"I did not see him," said Emilia.

"Are you not cold?" he asked, for a diversion, though he had one of her hands.

She gave him the other.

He could not quit them abruptly: nor could he hold both without being drawn to her.

"What is it you say?" Wilfrid whispered: "men kiss us when we are happy. Is that right? and are you happy?"

She lifted a clear full face, to which he bent his mouth. Over the flowering hawthorn the moon stood like a windblown white rose of the heavens. The kiss was given and taken. Strange to tell, it was he who drew away from it almost bashfully, and with new feelings.

Quite unaware that he played the feminine part, Wilfrid alluded to her flight from Richford, with the instinct to sting his heart by a revival of his jealous sensations previously

experienced, and so taste the luxury of present satisfaction.

"Why did you run away from me?" he said, semi-reproachfully.

"I promised."

"Would you not break a promise to stay with me?"

"Now I would!"

"You promised Captain Gambier?"

"No: those poor people."

"You are sorry that you went?"

No: she was happy.

"You have lost your harp by it," said Wilfrid.

"What do you think of me for not guessing—not knowing who sent it?" she returned. "I feel guilty of something all those days that I touched it, not thinking of you. Wicked, filthy little creature that I was! I despise ungrateful girls."

"I detest anything that has to do with gratitude," Wilfrid appended, "pray give me none. Why did you go away with Captain Gambier?"

"I was very fond of him," she replied unhesitatingly, but speaking as it were with numbed lips. "I wanted to tell him, to thank him and hold his hand. I told him of my promise. He spoke to me a moment in the garden, you know. He said he was leaving to go to London early, and would wait for me in the carriage: then we might talk. He did not wish to talk to me in the garden."

"And you went with him in the carriage, and told him you were so grateful?"

"Yes; but men do not like us to be grateful."

"So, he said he would do all sorts of things on condition that you were not grateful?"

"He said—yes: I forget: I do forget! How can I tell what he said?" Emilia added piteously. "I feel as if I had been emptied out of a sack!"

Wilfrid was pierced with laughter; and then the plainspoken simile gave him a chilling sensation while he was rising to the jealous pitch.

"Did he talk about taking you to Italy? Put your head into the sack, and think!"

"Yes," she answered blandly, an affirmative that caused him some astonishment, for he had struck at once to the farthest end of his suspicions.

"He feels as I do about the Italian Schools," said Emilia. "He wishes me to owe my learning to him. He says it will make him happy, and I thought so too." She threw in a "then."

Wilfrid looked moodily into the opposite hedge.

"Did he name the day for your going?" he asked presently, little anticipating another "Yes": but it came: and her rather faltering manner showed her to be conscious too that the word was getting to be a black one to him.

"Did you say you would go?"

"I did."

Question and answer crossed like two rapiers.

Wilfrid jumped up.

"The smell of this tree's detestable," he said, glancing at the shadowing hawthorn.

Emilia rose quietly, plucked a flower off the tree, and put it in her bosom.

Their way was down a green lane and across long meadow-paths dim in the moonlight. A nightingale was heard on this side and on that. Overhead they had a great space of sky with broken cloud full of the glory of the moon. The meadows dipped to a brook, slenderly spanned by a plank. Then there was an ascent through a cornfield to a copse. Rounding this they had sight of Brookfield. But while they were yet at the brook, Wilfrid said, "When is it you're going to Italy?"

In return he had an eager look, so that he was half-ashamed to add, "With Captain Gambier, I mean." He was suffering, and by being brutal he expected to draw balm on himself; nor was he deceived.

Emilia just then gave him her hand to be led over, and answered, as she neared him, "I am never to leave you."

"You never shall!" Wilfrid caught her in his arms, quite conquered by her, proud of her. He reflected with a loving rapture that her manner at that moment was equal to any lady's; and the phantom of her with her hand out, and her frank look, and trustful footing, while she spoke those words, kept on advancing to him all the way to Brookfield, at the same time that the sober reality murmured at his elbow.

Love, with his accustomed cunning, managed thus to lift her

out of the mire and array her in his golden dress to idealize her, as we say. Reconciled for the hour were the contesting instincts in the nature of this youth the adoration of feminine refinement and the susceptibility to sensuous impressions. But Emilia walked with a hero: the dream of all her days! one, generous and gentle, as well as brave: who had fought for her, had thought of her tenderly, was with her now, having raised her to his level with a touch! How much might they not accomplish together: he with sword, she with harp? Through shadowy alleys in the clouds, Emilia saw the bright Italian plains opening out to her: the cities of marble, such as her imagination had fashioned them, porticos of stately palaces, and towers, and statues white among cypresses; and farther, minutely-radiant in the vista as a shining star, Venice of the sea. Fancy made the flying minutes hours. Now they marched with the regiments of Italy, under the folds of her free banner; now she sang to the victorious army, waving the banner over them; and now she floated in a gondola, and turning to him, the dear home of her heart, yet pale with the bleeding of his wound for Italy, said softly, in the tone that had power with him, "Only let me please you!"

"When? Where? What with?" came the blunt response from England, with electric speed, and Emilia fell from the clouds.

"I meant my singing; I thought of how I sang to you. Oh, happy time!" she exclaimed, to cut through the mist of vision in her mind.

"To me? down at the booth?" muttered Wilfrid, perplexed.

"Oh, no! I mean, just now—" and languid with the burden of so full a heart, she did not attempt to explain herself further, though he said, invitingly, "I thought I heard you humming?"

Then he was seized with a desire to have the force of her spirit upon him, for Brookfield was in view; and with the sight of Brookfield, the natural fascination waxed a shade fainter, and he feared it might be going. This (he was happily as ignorant as any other youth of the working of his machinery) prompted him to bid her sing before they parted. Emilia checked her steps at once to do as he desired. Her throat filled, but the voice quavered down again, like a fainting creature sick unto death. She made another effort and ended with a sorrowful look at his narrowly-watching eyes.

"I can't," she said; and, in fear of his anger, took his hand to beg forgiveness, while her eyelids drooped.

Wilfrid locked her fingers in a strong pressure, and walked on, silent as a man who has faced one of the veiled mysteries of life. It struck a full human blow on his heart, dragging him out of his sentimental pastures precipitately. He felt her fainting voice to be the intensest love-cry that could be uttered. The sound of it coursed through his blood, striking a rare illumination of sparks in his not commonly brilliant brain. In truth, that little episode showed an image of nature weak with the burden of new love. I do not charge the young cavalry officer with the power of perceiving images. He saw no more than that she could not sing because of what was in her heart toward him; but

such a physical revelation was a divine love-confession, coming involuntarily from one whose lips had not formed the name of love; and Wilfrid felt it so deeply, that the exquisite flattery was almost lost, in a certain awed sense of his being in the presence of an absolute fact: a thing real, though it was much talked about, and visible, though it did not wear a hat or a petticoat.

It searched him thoroughly enough to keep him from any further pledges in that direction, propitious as the moment was, while the moon slipped over banks of marble into fields of blue, and all the midnight promised silence. They passed quickly through the laurel shrubs, and round the lawn. Lights were in the sleepless ladies' bed-room windows.

"Do I love her?" thought Wilfrid, as he was about to pull at the bell, and the thought that he should feel pain at being separated from her for half-a-dozen hours, persuaded him that he did. The self-restraint which withheld him from protesting that he did, confirmed it.

"To-morrow morning," he whispered.

"I shall be down by daylight," answered Emilia.

"You are in the shade—I cannot see you," said he.

The door opened as Emilia was moving out of the line of shadow.

CHAPTER XIII

On the morrow Wilfrid was gone. No one had seen him go. Emilia, while she touched the keys of a muted piano softly in the morning quiet of the house, had heard the front-door close. At that hour one attributes every noise to the servants. She played on and waited patiently, till the housemaid expelled her into the dewy air.

The report from his bedchamber, telling the ladies of his absence, added that he had taken linen for a lengthened journey.

This curious retreat of my hero belongs to the order of things that are done 'None know why;' a curtain which drops conveniently upon either the bewilderment of the showman or the infirmities of the puppet.

I must own (though I need not be told what odium frowns on such a pretension to excess of cleverness) that I do know why. I know why, and, unfortunately for me, I have to tell what I know. If I do not tell, this narrative is so constituted that there will be no moral to it.

One who studies man in puppets (in which purpose lies the chief value of this amusing species), must think that we are degenerating rapidly. The puppet hero, for instance, is a changed being. We know what he was; but now he takes shelter in his wits. His organs affect his destiny. Careless of the fact that the hero's achievement is to conquer nature, he seems rather to boast of his

subservience to her.

Still, up to this day, the fixture of a nose upon the puppet-hero's frontispiece has not been attempted. Some one does it at last. When the alternative came: "No nose to the hero, no moral to the tale;" could there be hesitation?

And I would warn our sentimentalists to admit the nose among the features proper to heroes, otherwise the race will become extinct. There is already an amount of dropping of the curtain that is positively wearisome, even to extremely refined persons, in order to save him from apparent misconduct. He will have to go altogether, unless we boldly figure him as other men. Manifestly the moment his career as a fairy prince was at end, he was on the high road to a nose. The beneficent Power that discriminated for him having vanished utterly, he was, like a bankrupt gentleman, obliged to do all the work for himself. This is nothing more than the tendency of the generations downward from the ideal.

The springs that moved Wilfrid upon the present occasion were simple. We will strip him of his heroic trappings for one fleeting instant, and show them.

Jumping briskly from a restless bed, his first act was to address his features to the looking-glass: and he saw surely the most glorious sight for a hero of the knightly age that could possibly have been offered. The battle of the previous night was written there in one eloquent big lump, which would have passed him current as hero from end to end of the land in the great days

of old. These are the tea-table days. His preference was for the visage of Wilfrid Pole, which he saw not. At the aspect of the fearful mask, this young man stared, and then cursed; and then, by an odd transition, he was reminded, as by the force of a sudden gust, that Emilia's hair was redolent of pipe-smoke.

His remark was, "I can't be seen in this state." His thought (a dim reminiscence of poetical readings): "Ambrosial locks indeed!" A sad irony, which told that much gold-leaf had peeled away from her image in his heart.

Wilfrid was a gallant fellow, with good stuff in him. But, he was young. Ponder on that pregnant word, for you are about to see him grow. He was less a coxcomb than shamefaced and sentimental; and one may have these qualities, and be a coxcomb to boot, and yet be a gallant fellow. One may also be a gallant fellow, and harsh, exacting, double-dealing, and I know not what besides, in youth. The question asked by nature is, "Has he the heart to take and keep an impression?" For, if he has, circumstances will force him on and carve the figure of a brave man out of that mass of contradictions. In return for such benefits, he pays forfeit commonly of the dearest of the things prized by him in this terrestrial life. Whereat, albeit created man by her, he reproaches nature, and the sculptor, circumstance; forgetting that to make him man is their sole duty, and that what betrayed him was the difficulty thrown in their way by his quondam self—the pleasant boonfellow!

He forgets, in fact, that he was formerly led by his nose, and

sacrificed his deeper feeling to a low disgust.

When the youth is called upon to look up, he can adore devoutly and ardently; but when it is his chance to look down on a fair head, he is, if not worse, a sentimental despot.

Wilfrid was young, and under the dominion of his senses; which can be, if the sentimentalists will believe me, as tyrannous and misleading when super-refined as when ultra-bestial. He made a good stout effort to resist the pipe-smoke. Emilia's voice, her growing beauty, her simplicity, her peculiar charms of feature, were all conjured up to combat the dismal images suggested by that fatal, dragging-down smell. It was vain. Horrible pipe-smoke pervaded the memory of her. It seemed to his offended dainty fancy that he could never dissociate her from smoking-booths and abominably bad tobacco; and, let us add (for this was part of the secret), that it never could dwell on her without the companionship of a hideous disfigured countenance, claiming to be Wilfrid Pole. He shuddered to think that he had virtually almost engaged himself to this girl. Or, had he? Was his honour bound? Distance appeared to answer the question favourably. There was safety in being distant from her. She possessed an incomprehensible attractiveness. She was at once powerful and pitiable: so that while he feared her, and was running from her spell, he said, from time to time, "Poor little thing!" and deeply hoped she would not be unhappy.

A showman once (a novice in his art, or ambitious beyond the mark), after a successful exhibition of his dolls, handed them

to the company, with the observation, “satisfy yourselves, ladies and gentlemen.” The latter, having satisfied themselves that the capacity of the lower limbs was extraordinary, returned them, disenchanted. That showman did ill. But I am not imitating him. I do not wait till after the performance, when it is too late to revive illusion. To avoid having to drop the curtain, I choose to explain an act on which the story hinges, while it is advancing: which is, in truth, an impulse of character. Instead of his being more of a puppet, this hero is less wooden than he was. Certainly I am much more in awe of him.

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Pole was one of those men whose characters are read off at a glance. He was neat, insignificant, and nervously cheerful; with the eyes of a bird, that let you into no interior. His friends knew him thoroughly. His daughters were never in doubt about him. At the period of the purchase of Brookfield he had been excitable and feverish, but that was ascribed to the projected change in his habits, and the stern necessity for an occasional family intercommunication on the subject of money. He had a remarkable shyness of this theme, and reversed its general treatment; for he would pay, but would not talk of it. If it had to be discussed with the ladies, he puffed, and blinked, and looked so much like a culprit that, though they rather admired him for what seemed to them the germ of a sense delicate above his condition, they would have said of any man they had not known so perfectly, that he had painful reasons for wishing to avoid it. Now that they spoke to him of Besworth, assuring him that they were serious in their desire to change their residence, the fit of shyness was manifested, first in outrageous praise of Brookfield, which was speedily and inexplicably followed by a sort of implied assent to the proposition to depart from it. For Besworth displayed numerous advantages over Brookfield, and to contest one was to plunge headlong into the money question. He ventured to ask his daughters what good they expected from

the change. They replied that it was simply this: that one might live fifty years at Brookfield and not get such a circle as in two might be established at Besworth. They were restricted. They had gathering friends, and no means of bringing them together. And the beauty of the site of Besworth made them enthusiastic.

"Well, but," said Mr. Pole: "what does it lead to? Is there nothing to come after?"

He explained: "You're girls, you know. You won't always stop with me. You may do just as well at Brookfield for yourselves, as over there."

The ladies blushed demurely.

"You forecast very kindly for us, papa," said Cornelia. "Our object is entirely different."

"I wish I could see it," he returned.

"But, you do see, papa, you do see," interposed Adela, "that a select life is preferable to that higgledy-piggledy city-square existence so many poor creatures are condemned to!"

"Select!" said Mr. Pole, thinking that he had hit upon a weakness in their argument; "how can it be select when you want to go to a place where you may have a crowd about you?"

"Selection can only be made from a crowd," remarked Arabella, with terrible placidity. "It is where we see few that we are at the mercy of kind fortune for our acquaintances."

"Don't you see, papa, that the difference between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie is, that the former choose their sets, and the latter are obliged to take what comes to them?" said

Adela.

This was the first domestic discussion upon Besworth. The visit to Richford had produced the usual effect on the ladies, who were now looking to other heights from that level. The ladies said: "We have only to press it with papa, and we shall quit this place." But at the second discussion they found that they had not advanced. The only change was in the emphasis that their father added to the interrogations already uttered. "What does it lead to? What's to come after? I see your object. But, am I to go into a new house for the sake of getting you out of it, and then be left there alone? It's against your interests, too. Never mind how. Leave that to a business man. If your brother had proposed it… but he's too reasonable."

The ladies, upon this hint, wrote to Wilfrid to obtain his concurrence and assistance. He laughed when he read the simple sentence: "We hope you will not fancy that we have any peculiar personal interest in view;" and replied to them that he was sure they had none: that he looked upon Besworth with favour, "and I may inform you," he pursued, "that your taste is heartily applauded by Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, she bids me tell you." The letter was dated from Stornley, the estate of the marquis, Lady Charlotte's father. Her ladyship's brother was a member of Wilfrid's Club. "He calls Besworth the most habitable place in the county, and promises to be there as many months out of the twelve as you like to have him. I agree with him that Stornley can't hold a candle to it. There are three residences in

England that might be preferred to it, and, of those, two are ducal."

The letter was a piece of that easy diplomacy which comes from habit. The "of those, two are ducal," was masterly. It affected the imagination of Brookfield. "Which two?" And could Besworth be brought to rival them? Ultimately, it might be! The neighbourhood to London, too, gave it noble advantages. Rapid relays of guests, and a metropolitan reputation for country attractions, would distinguish Besworth above most English houses. A house where all the chief celebrities might be encountered: a house under suave feminine rule; a house, a home, to a chosen set, and a refreshing fountain to a widening circle!

"We have a dispute," they wrote playfully to Wilfrid "a dispute we wish you or Lady Charlotte to settle. I, Arabella, know nothing of trout. I, Cornelia, know nothing of river-beds. I, Adela, know nothing of engineering. But, we are persuaded, the latter, that the river running for a mile through Besworth grounds may be deepened: we are persuaded, the intermediate, that the attempt will damage the channel: we are persuaded, the first, that all the fish will go."

In reply, Wilfrid appeared to have taken them in earnest. "I rode over yesterday with Lady Charlotte," he said. "We think something might be done, without at all endangering the fish or spoiling the channel. At all events, the idea of making the mile of broad water serviceable for boats is too good to give up in a hurry. How about the dining-hall? I told Lady Charlotte you

were sure to insist upon a balcony for musicians. She laughed. You will like her when you know her."

Thus the ladies of Brookfield were led on to be more serious concerning Besworth than they had thought of being, and began to feel that their honour was pledged to purchase this surpassing family seat. In a household where every want is supplied, and money as a topic utterly banished, it is not surprising that they should have had imperial views.

Adela was Wilfrid's favoured correspondent. She described to him gaily the struggle with their papa. "But, if you care for Besworth, you may calculate on it.—Or is it only for our sakes, as I sometimes think?—Besworth is won. Nothing but the cost of the place (to be considered you know!) could withhold it from us; and of that papa has not uttered a syllable, though he conjures up every possible objection to a change of abode, and will not (perhaps, poor dear, cannot) see what we intend doing in the world. Now, you know that rich men invariably make the question of the cost their first and loudest outcry. I know that to be the case. They call it their blood. Papa seems indifferent to this part of the affair. He does not even allude to it. Still, we do not progress. It is just possible that the Tinleys have an eye on beautiful Besworth. Their own place is bad enough, but good enough for them. Give them Besworth, and they will sit upon the neighbourhood. We shall be invaded by everything that is mean and low, and a great chance will be gone for us. I think I may say, for the county. The country? Our advice is, that you write to

papa one of your cleverest letters. We know, darling, what you can do with the pen as well as the sword. Write word that you have written."

Wilfrid's reply stated that he considered it unadviseable that he should add his voice to the request, for the present.

The ladies submitted to this quietly until they heard from their father one evening at dinner that he had seen Wilfrid in the city.

"He doesn't waste his time like some young people I know," said Mr. Pole, with a wink.

"Papa; is it possible?" cried Adela.

"Everything's possible, my dear."

"Lady Charlotte?"

"There is a Lady Charlotte."

"Who would be Lady Charlotte still, whatever occurred!"

Mr. Pole laughed. "No, no. You get nothing out of me. All I say is, be practical. The sun isn't always shining."

He appeared to be elated with some secret good news.

"Have you been over to Besworth, the last two or three days?" he asked.

The ladies smiled radiantly, acknowledging Wilfrid's wonderful persuasive powers, in their hearts.

"No, papa; we have not been," said Adela. "We are always anxious to go, as I think you know."

The merchant chirped over his glass. "Well, well! There's a way."

"Straight?"

"Over a gate; ha, ha!"

His gaiety would have been perplexing, but for the allusion to Lady Charlotte.

The sisters, in their unfailing midnight consultation, persuaded one another that Wilfrid had become engaged to that lady. They wrote forthwith Fine Shades to him on the subject. His answer was Boeotian, and all about Besworth. "Press it now," he said, "if you really want it. The iron is hot. And above all things, let me beg you not to be inconsiderate to the squire, when he and I are doing all we can for you. I mean, we are bound to consider him, if there should happen to be anything he wishes us to do."

What could the word 'inconsiderate' imply? The ladies were unable to summon an idea to solve it. They were sure that no daughters could be more perfectly considerate and ready to sacrifice everything to their father. In the end, they deputed the volunteering Adela to sit with him in the library, and put the question of Besworth decisively, in the name of all. They, meantime, who had a contempt for sleep, waited aloft to hold debate over the result of the interview.

An hour after midnight, Adela came to them, looking pale and uncertain: her curls seeming to drip, and her blue eyes wandering about the room, as if she had seen a thing that kept her in a quiver between belief and doubt.

The two ladies drew near to her, expressing no verbal impatience, from which the habit of government and great views naturally saved them, but singularly curious.

Adela's first exclamation: "I wish I had not gone," alarmed them.

"Has any change come to papa?" breathed Arabella.

Cornelia smiled. "Do you not know him too well?"

An acute glance from Adela made her ask whether Besworth was to be surrendered.

"Oh, no! my dear. We may have Besworth."

"Then, surely!"

"But, there are conditions?" said Arabella.

"Yes. Wilfrid's enigma is explained. Bella, that woman has seen papa."

"What woman?"

"Mrs. Chump."

"She has our permission to see him in town, if that is any consolation to her."

"She has told him," continued Adela, "that no explanation, or whatever it may be, was received by her."

"Certainly not, if it was not sent."

"Papa," and Adela's voice trembled, "papa will not think of Besworth,—not a word of it!-until—until we consent to welcome that woman here as our guest."

Cornelia was the first to break the silence that followed this astounding intelligence. "Then," she said, "Besworth is not to be thought of. You told him so?"

Adela's head drooped. "Oh!" she cried, "what shall we do? We shall be a laughing-stock to the neighbourhood. The house

will have to be locked up. We shall live like hermits worried by a demon. Her brogue! Do you remember it? It is not simply Irish. It's Irish steeped in brine. It's pickled Irish!"

She feigned the bursting into tears of real vexation.

"You speak," said Cornelia contemptuously, "as if we had very humbly bowed our heads to the infection."

"Papa making terms with us!" murmured Arabella.

"Pray, repeat his words."

Adela tossed her curls. "I will, as well as I can. I began by speaking of Besworth cheerfully; saying, that if he really had no strong affection for Brookfield, that would make him regret quitting it, we saw innumerable advantages in the change of residence proposed. Predilection,—not affection—that was what I said. He replied that Besworth was a large place, and I pointed out that therein lay one of its principal merits. I expected what would come. He alluded to the possibility of our changing our condition. You know that idea haunts him. I told him our opinion of the folly of the thing. I noticed that he grew red in the face, and I said that of course marriage was a thing ordained, but that we objected to being submerged in matrimony until we knew who and what we were. I confess he did not make a bad reply, of its kind. 'You're like a youngster playing truant that he may gain knowledge.' What do you think of it?"

"A smart piece of City-speech," was Arabella's remark: Cornelia placidly observing, "Vulgarity never contains more than a minimum of the truth."

"I said," Adela went on, "Think as you will, papa, we know we are right. He looked really angry. He said, that we have the absurdest ideas—you tell me to repeat his words—of any girls that ever existed; and then he put a question: listen: I give it without comment: 'I dare say, you all object to widows marrying again.' I kept myself quiet. 'Marrying again, papa! If they marry once they might as well marry a dozen times.' It was the best way to irritate him. I did not intend it; that is all I can say. He jumped from his chair, rubbed his hair, and almost ran up and down the library floor, telling me that I prevaricated. 'You object to a widow marrying at all—that's my question!' he cried out loud. Of course I contained my voice all the more. 'Distinctly, papa.' When I had spoken, I could scarcely help laughing. He went like a pony that is being broken in, crying, I don't know how many times, 'Why? What's your reason?' You may suppose, darlings, that I decline to enter upon explanation. If a person is dense upon a matter of pure sentiment, there is no ground between us: he has simply a sense wanting. 'What has all this to do with Besworth?' I asked. 'A great deal more than you fancy,' was his answer. He seemed to speak every word at me in capital letters. Then, as if a little ashamed, he sat down, and reached out his hand to mine, and I saw his eyes were moist. I drew my chair nearer to him. Now, whether I did right or wrong in this, I do not know I leave it entirely to your judgement. If you consider how I was placed, you will at all events excuse me. What I did was—you know, the very farthest suspicion one has of an extreme possibility one

does not mind mentioning: I said 'Papa, if it should so happen that money is the objection to Besworth, we will not trouble you.' At this, I can only say that he behaved like an insane person. He denounced me as wilfully insulting him that I might avoid one subject."

"And what on earth can that be?" interposed Arabella.

"You may well ask. Could a genie have guessed that Mrs. Chump was at the bottom of it all? The conclusion of the dreadful discussion is this, that papa offers to take the purchase of Besworth into his consideration, if we, as I said before, will receive Mrs. Chump as our honoured guest. I am bound to say, poor dear old man, he spoke kindly, as he always does, and kissed me, and offered to give me anything I might want. I came from him stupefied. I have hardly got my senses about me yet."

The ladies caressed her, with grave looks; but neither of them showed a perturbation of spirit like that which distressed Adela.

"Wilfrid's meaning is now explained," said Cornelia. "He is in league with papa; or has given in his adhesion to papa's demands, at least. He is another example of the constant tendency in men to be what they call 'practical' at the expense of honour and sincerity."

"I hope not," said Arabella. "In any case, that need not depress you so seriously, darling."

She addressed Adela.

"Do you not see?" Adela cried, in response. "What! are you both blind to the real significance of papa's words? I could not

have believed it! Or am I this time too acute? I pray to heaven it may be so!"

Both ladies desired her to be explicit; Arabella, eagerly; Cornelia with distrust.

"The question of a widow marrying! What is this woman, whom papa wishes to force on us as our guest? Why should he do that? Why should he evince anxiety with regard to our opinion of the decency of widows contemplating re-union? Remember previous words and hints when we lived in the city!"

"This at least you may spare us," said Cornelia, ruffling offended.

Adela smiled in tenderness for her beauty.

"But, it is important, if we are following a track, dear. Think over it."

"No!" cried Arabella. "It cannot be true. We might easily have guessed this, if we ever dreamed of impossibilities."

"In such cases, when appearances lean in one direction, set principles in the opposite balance," added Cornelia. "What Adela apprehends may seem to impend, but we know that papa is incapable of doing it. To know that, shuts the gates of suspicion. She has allowed herself to be troubled by a ghastly nightmare."

Adela believed in her own judgement too completely not to be sure that her sisters were, perhaps unknowingly, disguising a slowness of perception they were ashamed of, by thus partially accusing her of giddiness. She bit her lip.

"Very well; if you have no fears whatever, you need not

abandon the idea of Besworth."

"I abandon nothing," said Arabella. "If I have to make a choice, I take that which is least objectionable. I am chagrined, most, at the idea that Wilfrid has been treacherous."

"Practical," Cornelia suggested. "You are not speaking of one of our sex."

Questions were then put to Adela, whether Mr. Pole had spoken in the manner of one who was prompted: whether he hesitated as he spoke: whether, in short, Wilfrid was seen behind his tongue. Adela resolved that Wilfrid should have one protectress.

"You are entirely mistaken in ascribing treachery to him," she said. "It is papa that is changed. You may suppose it to be without any reason, if you please. I would tell you to study him for yourselves, only I am convinced that these special private interviews are anything but good policy, and are strictly to be avoided, unless of course, as in the present instance, we have something directly to do."

Toward dawn the ladies had decreed that it was policy to be quite passive, and provoke no word of Mrs. Chump by making any allusion to Besworth, and by fencing with the mention of the place.

As they rarely failed to carry out any plan deliberately conceived by them, Mr. Pole was astonished to find that Besworth was altogether dropped. After certain scattered attempts to bring them upon Besworth, he shrugged, and resigned

himself, but without looking happy.

Indeed he looked so dismal that the ladies began to think he had a great longing for Besworth. And yet he did not go there, or even praise it to the discredit of Brookfield! They were perplexed.

"Let me ask you how it is," said Cornelia to Mr. Barrett, "that a person whom we know—whose actions and motives are as plain to us as though discerned through a glass, should at times produce a completer mystification than any other creature? Or have you not observed it?"

"I have had better opportunities of observing it than most people," Mr. Barren replied, with one of his saddest amused smiles. "I have come to the conclusion that the person we know best is the one whom we never understand."

"You answer me with a paradox."

"Is it not the natural attendant on an assumption?"

"What assumption?"

"That you know a person thoroughly."

"May we not?"

"Do you, when you acknowledge this 'complete mystification'?"

"Yes." Cornelia smiled when she had said it. "And no."

Mr. Barrett, with his eyes on her, laughed softly. "Which is paradox at the fountain-head! But, when we say we know any one, we mean commonly that we are accustomed to his ways and habits of mind; or, that we can reckon on the predominant

influence of his appetites. Sometimes we can tell which impulse is likely to be the most active, and which principle the least restraining. The only knowledge to be trusted is a grounded or scientific study of the springs that move him, side by side with his method of moving the springs. If you fail to do this, you have two classes under your eyes: you have sane and madman: and it will seem to you that the ranks of the latter are constantly being swollen in an extraordinary manner. The customary impression, as we get older, is that our friends are the maddest people in the world. You see, we have grown accustomed to them; and now, if they bewilder us, our judgement, in self-defence, is compelled to set them down lunatic."

Cornelia bowed her stately head with gentle approving laughter.

"They must go, or they despatch us thither," she said, while her fair face dimpled into serenity. The remark was of a lower nature than an intellectual discussion ordinarily drew from her: but could Mr. Barrett have read in her heart, he might have seen that his words were beginning to rob that organ of its native sobriety. So that when he spoke a cogent phrase, she was silenced, and became aware of a strange exultation in her blood that obscured grave thought. Cornelia attributed this display of mental weakness altogether to Mr. Barrett's mental force. The interposition of a fresh agency was undreamt of by the lady.

Meanwhile, it was evident that Mr. Pole was a victim to one of his fevers of shyness. He would thrum on the table, frowning;

and then, as he met the look of one of the ladies, try to disguise the thought in his head with a forced laugh. Occasionally, he would turn toward them, as if he had just caught a lost idea that was peculiarly precious. The ladies drawing up to attend to the communication, had a most trivial matter imparted to them, and away he went. Several times he said to them "You don't make friends, as you ought;" and their repudiation of the charge made him repeat: "You don't make friends—home friends."

"The house can be as full as we care to have it, papa."

"Yes, acquaintances! All very well, but I mean friends—rich friends."

"We will think of it, papa," said Adela, "when we want money."

"It isn't that," he murmured.

Adela had written to Wilfrid a full account of her interview with her father. Wilfrid's reply was laconic. "If you cannot stand a week of the brogue, give up Besworth, by all means." He made no further allusion to the place. They engaged an opera-box, for the purpose of holding a consultation with him in town. He wrote evasively, but did not appear, and the ladies, with Emilia between them, listened to every foot-fall by the box-door, and were too much preoccupied to marvel that Emilia was just as inattentive to the music as they were. When the curtain dropped they noticed her dejection.

"What ails you?" they asked.

"Let us go out of London to-night," she whispered, and it was

difficult to persuade her that she would see Brookfield again.

"Remember," said Adela, "it is you that run away from us, not we from you."

Soft chidings of this description were the only reproaches for her naughty conduct. She seemed contrite very still and timid, since that night of adventure. The ladies were glad to observe it, seeing that it lent her an air of refinement, and proved her sensible to correction.

At last Mr. Pole broke the silence. He had returned from business, humming and rubbing his hands, like one newly primed with a suggestion that was the key of a knotty problem. Observant Adela said: "Have you seen Wilfrid, papa?"

"Saw him in the morning," Mr. Pole replied carelessly.

Mr. Barrett was at the table.

"By the way, what do you think of our law of primogeniture?" Mr. Pole addressed him.

He replied with the usual allusion to a basis of aristocracy.

"Well, it's the English system," said Mr. Pole. "That's always in its favour at starting. I'm Englishman enough to think that. There ought to be an entail of every decent bit of property, eh?"

It was observed that Mr. Barrett reddened as he said, "I certainly think that a young man should not be subject to his father's caprice."

"Father's caprice! That isn't common. But, if you're founding a family, you must entail."

"We agree, sir, from my point of view, and from yours."

"Knits the family bond, don't you think? I mean, makes the trunk of the tree firm. It makes the girls poor, though!"

Mr. Barrett saw that he had some confused legal ideas in his head, and that possibly there were personal considerations in the background; so he let the subject pass.

When the guest had departed, Mr. Pole grew demonstrative in his paternal caresses. He folded Adela in one arm, and framed her chin in his fingers: marks of affection dear to her before she had outgrown them.

"So!" he said, "you've given up Besworth, have you?"

At the name, Arabella and Cornelia drew nearer to his chair.

"Given up Besworth, papa? It is not we who have given it up," said Adela.

"Yes, you have; and quite right too. You say, 'What's the use of it, for that's a sort of thing that always goes to the son.'"

"You suppose, papa, that we indulge in ulterior calculations?" came from Cornelia.

"Well, you see, my love!—no, I don't suppose it at all. But to buy a place and split it up after two or three years—I dare say they wouldn't insure me for more, that's nonsense. And it seems unfair to you, as you must think—"

"Darling papa! we are not selfish!" it rejoiced Adela to exclaim.

His face expressed a transparent simple-mindedness that won the confidence of the ladies and awakened their ideal of generosity.

"I know what you mean, papa," said Arabella. "But, we love Besworth; and if we may enjoy the place for the time that we are all together, I shall think it sufficient. I do not look beyond."

Her sisters echoed the sentiment, and sincerely. They were as little sordid as creatures could be. If deeply questioned, it would have been found that their notion of the position Providence had placed them in (in other words, their father's unmentioned wealth), permitted them to be as lavish as they pleased. Mr. Pole had endowed them with a temperament similar to his own; and he had educated it. In feminine earth it flourished wonderfully. Shy as himself, their shyness took other forms, and developed with warm youth. Not only did it shut them up from others (which is the first effect of this disease), but it tyrannized over them internally: so that there were subjects they had no power to bring their minds to consider. Money was in the list. The Besworth question, as at present considered, involved the money question. All of them felt that; father and children. It is not surprising, therefore, that they hurried over it as speedily as they could, and by a most comical exhibition of implied comprehension of meanings and motives.

"Of course, we're only in the opening stage of the business," said Mr. Pole. "There's nothing decided, you know. Lots of things got to be considered. You mean what you say, do you? Very well. And you want me to think of it? So I will. And look, my dears, you know that—" (here his voice grew husky, as was the case with it when touching a shy topic even beneath the veil;

but they were above suspicion) "you know that—a—that we must all give way a little to the other, now and then. Nothing like being kind."

"Pray, have no fear, papa dear!" rang the clear voice of Arabella.

"Well, then, you're all for Besworth, even though it isn't exactly for your own interest? All right."

The ladies kissed him.

"We'll each stretch a point," he continued. "We shall get on better if we do. Much! You're a little hard on people who're not up to the mark. There's an end to that. Even your old father will like you better."

These last remarks were unintelligible to the withdrawing ladies.

On the morning that followed, Mr. Pole expressed a hope that his daughters intended to give him a good dinner that day; and he winked humorously and kindly by which they understood him to be addressing a sort of propitiation to them for the respect he paid to his appetite.

"Papa," said Adela, "I myself will speak to Cook."

She added, with a smile thrown to her sisters, without looking at them, "I dare say, she will know who I am."

Mr. Pole went down to his wine-cellar, and was there busy with bottles till the carriage came for him. A bason was fetched that he might wash off the dust and cobwebs in the passage. Having rubbed his hands briskly with soap, he dipped his head

likewise, in an oblivious fit, and then turning round to the ladies, said, "What have I forgotten?" looking woebegone with his dripping vacant face. "Oh, ah! I remember now;" and he chuckled gladly.

He had just for one moment forgotten that he was acting, and a pang of apprehension had caught him when the water covered his face, to the effect that he must forfeit the natural artistic sequence of speech and conduct which disguised him so perfectly. Away he drove, nodding and waving his hand.

"Dear, simple, innocent old man!" was the pitiful thought in the bosoms of the ladies; and if it was accompanied by the mute exclamation, "How singular that we should descend from him!" it would not have been for the first time.

They passed one of their delightful quiet days, in which they paved the future with gold, and, if I may use so bold a figure, lifted parasols against the great sun that was to shine on them. Now they listened to Emilia, and now strolled in the garden; conversed on the social skill of Lady Gosstre, who was nevertheless narrow in her range; and on the capacities of mansions, on the secret of mixing people in society, and what to do with the women! A terrible problem, this latter one. Not terrible (to hostesses) at a mere rout or drum, or at a dance pure and simple, but terrible when you want good talk to circulate for then they are not, as a body, amused; and when they are not amused, you know, they are not inclined to be harmless; and in this state they are vipers; and where is society then? And yet you

cannot do without them!—which is the revolting mystery. I need not say that I am not responsible for these critical remarks. Such tenderness to the sex comes only from its sisters.

So went a day rich in fair dreams to the ladies; and at the hour of their father's return they walked across the parvenu park, in a state of enthusiasm for Besworth, that threw some portion of its decorative light on the donor of Besworth. When his carriage was heard on the road, they stood fast, and greeted his appearance with a display of pocket-handkerchiefs in the breeze, a proceeding that should have astonished him, being novel; but seemed not to do so, for it was immediately responded to by the vigorous waving of a pair of pocket-handkerchiefs from the carriage-window! The ladies smiled at this piece of simplicity which prompted him to use both his hands, as if one would not have been enough. Complacently they continued waving. Then Adela looked at her sisters; Cornelia's hand dropped and Arabella, the last to wave, was the first to exclaim: "That must be a woman's arm!"

The carriage stopped at the gate, and it was one in the dress of a woman at least, and of the compass of a big woman, who descended by the aid of Mr. Pole. Safely alighted, she waved her pocket-handkerchief afresh. The ladies of Brookfield did not speak to one another; nor did they move their eyes from the object approaching. A simultaneous furtive extinction of three pocket-handkerchiefs might have been noticed. There was no further sign given.

CHAPTER XV

A letter from Brookfield apprised Wilfrid that Mr. Pole had brought Mrs. Chump to the place as a visitor, and that she was now in the house. Formal as a circular, the idea of it appeared to be that the bare fact would tell him enough and inspire him with proper designs. No reply being sent, a second letter arrived, formal too, but pointing out his duty to succour his afflicted family, and furnishing a few tragic particulars. Thus he learnt, that while Mr. Pole was advancing toward the three grouped ladies, on the day of Mrs. Chump's arrival, he called Arabella by name, and Arabella went forward alone, and was engaged in conversation by Mrs. Chump. Mr. Pole left them to make his way to Adela and Cornelia. "Now, mind, I expect you to keep to your agreement," he said. Gradually they were led on to perceive that this simple-minded man had understood their recent talk of Besworth to signify a consent to the stipulation he had previously mentioned to Adela. "Perfect simplicity is as deceiving as the depth of cunning," Adela despairingly wrote, much to Wilfrid's amusement.

A third letter followed. It was of another tenor, and ran thus, in Adela's handwriting:

"My Darling Wilfrid,

"We have always known that some peculiar assistance would never be wanting in our extremity—aid, or comfort, or whatever

you please to call it. At all events, something to show we are not neglected. That old notion of ours must be true. I shall say nothing of our sufferings in the house. They continue. Yesterday, papa came from town, looking important. He had up some of his best wine for dinner. All through the service his eyes were sparkling on Cornelia. I spare you a family picture, while there is this huge blot on it. Naughty brother! But, listen! your place is here, for many reasons, as you will be quick enough to see. After dinner, papa took Cornelia into the library alone, and they were together for ten minutes. She came out very pale. She had been proposed for by Sir Twickenham Pryme, our Member for the borough. I have always been sure that Cornelia was born for Parliament, and he will be lucky if he wins her. We know not yet, of course, what her decision will be. The incident is chiefly remarkable to us as a relief to what I need not recount to you. But I wish to say one thing, dear Wilfrid. You are gazetted to a lieutenancy, and we congratulate you: but what I have to say is apparently much more trifling, and it is, that—will you take it to heart?—it would do Arabella and myself infinite good if we saw a little more of our brother, and just a little less of a very gentlemanly organ-player phenomenon, who talks so exceedingly well. He is a very pleasant man, and appreciates our ideas, and so forth; but it is our duty to love our brother best, and think of him foremost, and we wish him to come and remind us of our duty.

"At our Cornelia's request, with our concurrence, papa is silent in the house as to the purport of the communication made by

Sir T.P.

"By the way, are you at all conscious of a sound-like absurdity in a Christian name of three syllables preceding a surname of one? Sir Twickenham Pryme! Cornelia's pronunciation of the name first gave me the feeling. The 'Twickenham' seems to perform a sort of educated monkey kind of ridiculously decorous pirouette and entrechat before the 'Pryme.' I think that Cornelia feels it also. You seem to fancy elastic limbs bending to the measure of a solemn church-organ. Sir Timothy? But Sir Timothy does not jump with the same grave agility as Sir Twickenham! If she rejects him, it will be half attributable to this.

"My own brother! I expect no confidences, but a whisper warns me that you have not been to Stornley twice without experiencing the truth of our old discovery, that the Poles are magnetic? Why should we conceal it from ourselves, if it be so? I think it a folly, and fraught with danger, for people not to know their characteristics. If they attract, they should keep in a circle where they will have no reason to revolt at, or say, repent of what they attract. My argumentative sister does not coincide. If she did, she would lose her argument.

"Adieu! Such is my dulness, I doubt whether I have made my meaning clear.

"Your thrice affectionate
"Adela.

"P.S.—Lady Gosstre has just taken Emilia to Richford for a

week. Papa starts for Bidport to-morrow."

This short and rather blunt exercise in Fine Shades was read impatiently by Wilfrid. "Why doesn't she write plain to the sense?" he asked, with the usual injustice of men, who demand a statement of facts, forgetting how few there are to feed the post; and that indication and suggestion are the only language for the multitude of facts unborn and possible. Twilight best shows to the eye what may be.

"I suppose I must go down there," he said to himself, keeping a meditative watch on the postscript, as if it possessed the capability of slipping away and deceiving him. "Does she mean that Cornelia sees too much of this man Barrett? or, what does she mean?" And now he saw meanings in the simple passages, and none at all in the intricate ones; and the double-meanings were monsters that ate one another up till nothing remained of them. In the end, however, he made a wrathful guess and came to a resolution, which brought him to the door of the house next day at noon. He took some pains in noting the exact spot where he had last seen Emilia half in moonlight, and then dismissed her image peremptorily. The house was apparently empty. Gainsford, the footman, gave information that he thought the ladies were upstairs, but did not volunteer to send a maid to them. He stood in deferential footman's attitude, with the aspect of a dog who would laugh if he could, but being a footman out of his natural element, cannot.

"Here's a specimen of the new plan of treating servants!"

thought Wilfrid, turning away. “To act a farce for their benefit! That fellow will explode when he gets downstairs. I see how it is. This woman, Chump, is making them behave like schoolgirls.”

He conceived the idea sharply, and forthwith, without any preparation, he was ready to treat these high-aspiring ladies like schoolgirls. Nor was there a lack of justification; for when they came down to his shouts in the passage, they hushed, and held a finger aloft, and looked altogether so unlike what they aimed at being, that Wilfrid’s sense of mastery became almost contempt.

“I know perfectly what you have to tell me,” he said. “Mrs. Chump is here, you have quarrelled with her, and she has shut her door, and you have shut yours. It’s quite intelligible and full of dignity. I really can’t smother my voice in consequence.”

He laughed with unnecessary abandonment. The sensitive young women wanted no other schooling to recover themselves. In a moment they were seen leaning back and contemplating him amusedly, as if he had been the comic spectacle, and were laughing for a wager. There are few things so sour as the swallowing of one’s own forced laugh. Wilfrid got it down, and commenced a lecture to fill the awkward pause. His sisters maintained the opera-stall posture of languid attention, contesting his phrases simply with their eyebrows, and smiling. He was no match for them while they chose to be silent: and indeed if the business of life were conducted in dumb show, women would beat men hollow. They posture admirably. In dumb show they are equally good for attack and defence. But

this is not the case in speech. So, when Arabella explained that their hope was to see Mrs. Chump go that day, owing to the rigorous exclusion of all amusement and the outer world from the house, Wilfrid regained his superior footing and made his lecture tell. In the middle of it, there rang a cry from the doorway that astonished even him, it was so powerfully Irish.

"The lady you have called down is here," said Arabella's cold glance, in answer to his.

They sat with folded hands while Wilfrid turned to Mrs. Chump, who advanced, a shock of blue satin to the eye, crying, on a jump: "Is ut Mr. Wilfrud?"

"It's I, ma'am." Wilfrid bowed, and the censorious ladies could not deny that, his style was good, if his object was to be familiar. And if that was his object, he was paid for it. A great thick kiss was planted on his cheek, with the motto: "Harm to them that thinks ut."

Wilfrid bore the salute like a man who presumes that he is flattered.

"And it's you!" said Mrs. Chump. "I was just off. I'm packed, and bonnutted, and ready for a start; becas, my dear, where there's none but women, I don't think it natural to stop. You're splendid! How a little fella like Pole could go and be father to such a mighty big son, with your bit of moustache and your blue eyes! Are they blue or a bit of grey in 'em?" Mrs. Chump peered closely. "They're kill'n', let their colour be anyhow. And I that knew ye when ye were no bigger than my garter! Oh, sir! don't

talk of ut; I'll be thinkin', of my coffin. Ye're glad to see me? Say, yes. Do!"

"Very glad," quoth Wilfrid.

"Upon your honour, now?"

"Upon my honour!"

"My dears" (Mrs. Chump turned to the ladies), "I'll stop; and just thank your brother for't, though you can't help being garls."

Reduced once more to demonstrate like schoolgirls by this woman, the ladies rose together, and were retiring, when Mrs. Chump swung round and caught Arabella's hand. "See heer," she motioned to Wilfrid. Arabella made a bitter effort to disengage herself. "See, now! It's jeal'sy of me, Mr. Wilfrud, becas I'm a widde and just an abom'nation to garls, poor darlin's! And twenty shindies per dime we've been havin', and me such a placable body, if ye'll onnly let m' explode. I'm all powder, avery bit! and might ha' been christened Saltpetre, if born a boy. She hasn't so much as a shot to kill a goose, says Chump, poor fella! But he went, anyway. I must kiss somebody when I talk of 'm. Mr. Wilfrud, I'll take the girls, and entitle myself to you."

Arabella was the first victim. Her remonstrance was inarticulate. Cornelia's "Madam!" was smothered. Adela behaved better, being more consciously under Wilfrid's eye; she prepared her pocket-handkerchief, received the salute, and deliberately effaced it.

"There!" said Mrs. Chump; "duty to begin with. And now for you, Mr. Wilfrud."

The ladies escaped. Their misery could not be conveyed to the mind. The woman was like a demon come among them. They felt chiefly degraded, not by her vulgarity, but by their inability to cope with it, and by the consequent sickening sense of animal inefficiency—the block that was put to all imaginative delight in the golden hazy future they figured for themselves, and which was their wine of life. An intellectual adversary they could have combated; this huge brogue-burring engine quite overwhelmed them. Wilfrid's worse than shameful behaviour was a common rallying-point; and yet, so absolutely critical were they by nature, their blame of him was held mentally in restraint by the superior ease of his manner as contrasted with their own lamentably silly awkwardness. Highly civilized natures do sometimes, and keen wits must always, feel dissatisfied when they are not on the laughing side: their dread of laughter is an instinctive respect for it.

Dinner brought them all together again. Wilfrid took his father's seat, facing his Aunt Lupin, and increased the distress of his sisters by his observance of every duty of a host to the dreadful intruder, whom he thus established among them. He was incomprehensible. His visit to Stornley had wrought in him a total change. He used to like being petted, and would regard everything as right that his sisters did, before he went there; and was a languid, long-legged, indifferent cavalier, representing men to them: things made to be managed, snubbed, admired, but always virtually subservient and in the background. Now, without

perceptible gradation, his superiority was suddenly manifest; so that, irritated and apprehensive as they were, they could not, by the aid of any of their intricate mental machinery, look down on him. They tried to; they tried hard to think him despicable as well as treacherous. His style was too good. When he informed Mrs. Chump that he had hired a yacht for the season, and added, after enlarging on the merits of the vessel, "I am under your orders," his sisters were as creatures cut in twain—one half abominating his conduct, the other approving his style. The bow, the smile, were perfect. The ladies had to make an effort to recover their condemnatory judgement.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Chump; "and if you've got a yacht, Mr. Wilfrud, won't ye have a great parcel o' the arr'stocracy on board?"

"You may spy a title by the aid of a telescope," said Wilfrid.

"And I'm to come, I am?"

"Are you not elected captain?"

"Oh, if ye've got lords and real ladies on board, I'll come, be sure of ut! I'll be as sick as a cat, I will. But, I'll come, if it's the rroon of my stomach. I'd say to Chump, 'Oh, if ye'd only been born a lord, or would just get yourself struck a knight on one o' your shoulders,—oh, Chump!' I'd say, 'it wouldn't be necessary to be rememberin' always the words of the cerr'mony about lovin' and honourin' and obeyin' of a little whistle of a fella like you.' Poor lad! he couldn't stop for his luck! Did ye ask me to take wine, Mr. Wilfrud? I'll be cryin', else, as a widde should, ye

know!"

Frequent administrations of wine arrested the tears of Mrs. Chump, until it is possible that the fulness of many a checked flow caused her to redden and talk slightly at random. At the first mention of their father's name, the ladies went out from the room. It was foolish, for they might have watched the effect of certain vinous innuendoes addressed to Wilfrid's apprehensiveness; but they were weakened and humbled, and everything they did was foolish. From the fact that they offended their keen critical taste, moreover, they were targets to the shaft that wounds more fatally than all. No ridicule knocks the strength out of us so thoroughly as our own.

Whether or not he guessed their condition favourable for his plans, Wilfrid did not give them time to call back their scattered powers. At the hour of eleven he sent for Arabella to come to him in the library. The council upstairs permitted Arabella to go, on the understanding that she was prepared for hostilities, and ready to tear the mask from Wilfrid's face.

He commenced, without a shadow of circumlocution, and in a matter-of-fact way, as if all respect for the peculiar genius of the house of Pole had vanished: "I sent for you to talk a word or two about this woman, who, I see, troubles you a little. I'm sorry she's in the house."

"Indeed!" said Arabella.

"I'm sorry she's in the house, not for my sake, but for yours, since the proximity does not seem to… I needn't explain. It

comes of your eternal consultations. You are the eldest. Why not act according to your judgement, which is generally sound? You listen to Adela, young as she is; or a look of Cornelia's leads you. The result is the sort of scene I saw this afternoon. I confess it has changed my opinion of you; it has, I grieve to say it. This woman is your father's guest; you can't hurt her so much as you hurt him, if you misbehave to her. You can't openly object to her and not cast a slur upon him. There is the whole case. He has insisted, and you must submit. You should have fought the battle before she came."

"She is here, owing to a miserable misconception," said Arabella.

"Ah! she is here, however. That is the essential, as your old governess Madame Timpan would have said."

"Nor can a protest against coarseness be sweepingly interpreted as a piece of unfilial behaviour," said Arabella.

"She is coarse," Wilfrid nodded his head. "There are some forms of coarseness which dowagers would call it coarseness to notice.

"Not if you find it locked up in the house with you—not if you suffer under a constant repulsion. Pray, do not use these phrases to me, Wilfrid. An accusation of coarseness cannot touch us."

"No, certainly," assented Wilfrid. "And you have a right to protest. I disapprove the form of your protest nothing more. A schoolgirl's…but you complain of the use of comparisons."

"I complain, Wilfrid, of your want of sympathy."

"That for two or three weeks you must hear a brogue at your elbow? The poor creature is not so bad; she is good-hearted. It's hard that you should have to bear with her for that time and receive nothing better than Besworth as your reward."

"Very; seeing that we endure the evil and decline the sop with it."

"How?"

"We have renounced Besworth."

"Have you! And did this renunciation make you all sit on the edge of your chairs, this afternoon, as if Edward Buxley had arranged you? You give up Besworth? I'm afraid it's too late."

"Oh, Wilfrid! can you be ignorant that something more is involved in the purchase of Besworth?"

Arabella gazed at him with distressful eagerness, as one who believes in the lingering of a vestige of candour.

"Do you mean that my father may wish to give this woman his name?" said Wilfrid coolly. "You have sense enough to know that if you make his home disagreeable, you are taking the right method to drive him into such a course. Ha! I don't think it's to be feared, unless you pursue these consultations. And let me say, for my part, we have gone too far about Besworth, and can't recede."

"I have given out everywhere that the place is ours. I did so almost at your instigation. Besworth was nothing to me till you cried it up. And now I won't detain you. I know I can rely on your sense, if you will rely on it. Good night, Bella."

As she was going a faint spark of courage revived Arabella's

wits. Seeing that she was now ready to speak, he opened the door wide, and she kissed him and went forth, feeling driven.

But while Arabella was attempting to give a definite version of the interview to her sisters, a message came requesting Adela to descend. The ladies did not allow her to depart until two or three ingenuous exclamations from her made them share her curiosity.

"Ah?" Wilfrid caught her hand as she came in. "No, I don't intend to let it go. You may be a fine lady, but you're a rogue, you know, and a charming one, as I hear a friend of mine has been saying. Shall I call him out? Shall I fight him with pistols, or swords, and leave him bleeding on the ground, because he thinks you a pretty rogue?"

Adela struggled against the blandishment of this old familiar style of converse—part fun, part flattery—dismissed since the great idea had governed Brookfield.

"Please tell me what you called me down for, dear?"

"To give you a lesson in sitting on chairs. 'Adela, or the Puritan sister,' thus: you sit on the extremest edge, and your eyes peruse the ceiling; and…"

"Oh! will you ever forget that perfectly ridiculous scene?" Adela cried in anguish.

She was led by easy stages to talk of Besworth.

"Understand," said Wilfrid, "that I am indifferent about it. The idea sprang from you—I mean from my pretty sister Adela, who is President of the Council of Three. I hold that young woman responsible for all that they do. Am I wrong? Oh, very well. You

suggested Besworth, at all events. And—if we quarrel, I shall cut off one of your curls."

"We never will quarrel, my darling," quoth Adela softly. "Unless—" she added.

Wilfrid kissed her forehead.

"Unless what?"

"Well, then, you must tell me who it is that talks of me in that objectionable manner; I do not like it."

"Shall I convey that intimation?"

"I choose to ask, simply that I may defend myself."

"I choose to keep him buried, then, simply to save his life."

Adela made a mouth, and Wilfrid went on: "By the way, I want you to know Lady Charlotte; you will take to one another. She likes you, already—says you want dash; but on that point there may be two opinions."

"If dash," said Adela, quite beguiled, "—that is, dash!—what does it mean? But, if Lady Charlotte means by dash—am I really wanting in it? I should define it, the quality of being openly natural without vulgarity; and surely…!"

"Then you two differ a little, and must meet and settle your dispute. You don't differ about Besworth: or, didn't. I never saw a woman so much in love with a place as she is."

"A place?" emphasized Adela.

"Don't be too arch. I comprehend. She won't take me minus Besworth, you may be sure."

"Did you, Wilfrid!—but you did not—offer yourself as owner

of Besworth?"

Wilfrid kept his eyes slanting on the floor.

"Now I see why you should still wish it," continued Adela. "Perhaps you don't know the reason which makes it impossible, or I would say—Bacchus! it must be compassed. You remember your old schoolboy oath which you taught me? We used to swear always, by Bacchus!"

Adela laughed and blushed, like one who petitions pardon for this her utmost sin, that is not regretted as it should be.

"Mrs. Chump again, isn't it?" said Wilfrid. "Pole would be a preferable name. If she has the ambition, it elevates her. And it would be rather amusing to see the dear old boy in love."

Adela gave her under-lip a distressful bite.

"Why do you, Wilfrid—why treat such matters with levity?"

"Levity? I am the last to treat ninety thousand pounds with levity."

"Has she so much?" Adela glanced at him.

"She will be snapped up by some poor nobleman. If I take her down to the yacht, one of Lady Charlotte's brothers or uncles will bite; to a certainty."

"It would be an excellent idea to take her!" cried Adela.

"Excellent! and I'll do it, if you like."

"Could you bear the reflex of the woman?"

"Don't you know that I am not in the habit of sitting on the extreme edge…?"

Adela started, breathing piteously: "Wilfrid, dear! you want

something of me—what is it?"

"Simply that you should behave civilly to your father's guest."

"I had a fear, dear; but I think too well of you to entertain it for a moment. If civility is to win Besworth for you, there is my hand."

"Be civil—that's all," said Wilfrid, pressing the hand given. "These consultations of yours and acting in concert—one tongue for three women—are a sort of missish, unripe nonsense, that one sees only in bourgeoise girls—eh? Give it up. Lady Charlotte hit on it at a glance."

"And I, my chameleon brother, will return her the compliment, some day," Adela said to herself, as she hurried back to her sisters, bearing a message for Cornelia. This lady required strong persuasion. A word from Adela: "He will think you have some good reason to deny him a private interview," sent her straight to the stairs.

Wilfrid was walking up and down, with his arms folded and his brows bent. Cornelia stood in the doorway.

"You desire to speak to me, Wilfrid? And in private?"

"I didn't wish to congratulate you publicly, that's all. I know it's rather against your taste. We'll shut the door, and sit down, if you don't mind. Yes, I congratulate you with all my heart," he said, placing a chair for Cornelia.

"May I ask, wherefore?"

"You don't think marriage a matter for congratulation?"

"Sometimes: as the case may be."

"Well, it's not marriage yet. I congratulate you on your offer."

"I thank you."

"You accept it, of course."

"I reject it, certainly."

After this preliminary passage, Wilfrid remained silent long enough for Cornelia to feel uneasy.

"I want you to congratulate me also," he recommenced. "We poor fellows don't have offers, you know. To be frank, I think Lady Charlotte Chillingworth will have me, if—She's awfully fond of Besworth, and I need not tell you that as she has position in the world, I ought to show something in return. When you wrote about Besworth, I knew it was as good as decided. I told her so and—Well, I fancy there's that sort of understanding between us. She will have me when… You know how the poorer members of the aristocracy are situated. Her father's a peer, and has a little influence. He might push me; but she is one of a large family; she has nothing. I am certain you will not judge of her as common people might. She does me a particular honour."

"Is she not much older than you, Wilfrid?" said Cornelia.

"Or, in other words," he added, "is she not a very mercenary person?"

"That, I did not even imply."

"Honestly, was it not in your head?"

"Now you put it so plainly, I do say, it strikes me disagreeably; I have heard of nothing like it."

"Do you think it unreasonable that I should marry into a noble

family?"

"That is, assuredly, not my meaning."

"Nevertheless, you are, on the whole, in favour of beggarly alliances."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.