YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

DYNEVOR TERRACE; OR, THE CLUE OF LIFE. VOLUME 1

Charlotte Yonge

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Dynevor Terrace; Or, The Clue of Life – Volume 1:

Содержание

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Who wisdom's sacred prize would win,
Must with the fear of God begin;
Immortal praise and heavenly skill
Have they who know and do His will.

New Version.

CHAPTER I
CHARLOTTE

Farewell rewards and fairies,
Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
May fare as well as they.

BP. CORBET.

An ancient leafless stump of a horse-chesnut stood in the middle of a dusty field, bordered on the south side by a row of houses of some pretension. Against this stump, a pretty delicate fair girl of seventeen, whose short lilac sleeves revealed slender white arms, and her tight, plain cap tresses of flaxen hair that many a beauty might have envied, was banging a cocoa-nut mat, chanting by way of accompaniment in a sort of cadence—

'I have found out a gift for my fur,
I have found where the wood-pigeons breed;
But let me the plunder forbear,
She will say—'

'Hollo, I'll give you a shilling for 'em!' was the unlooked-for conclusion, causing her to start aside with a slight scream, as there

stood beside her a stout, black-eyed, round-faced lad, his ruddy cheeks and loutish air showing more rusticity than agreed with his keen, saucy expression, and mechanic's dress.

'So that's what you call beating a mat,' said he, catching it from her hands, and mimicking the tender clasp of her little fingers. 'D'ye think it's alive, that you use it so gingerly? Look here! Give it him well!' as he made it resound against the tree, and emit a whirlwind of dust. 'Lay it into him with some jolly good song fit to fetch a stroke home with! Why, I heard my young Lord say, when Shakspeare was a butcher, he used to make speeches at the calves, as if they was for a sacrifice, or ever he could lift a knife to 'em.'

'Shakspeare! He as wrote Romeo and Juliet, and all that! He a butcher! Why, he was a poet!' cried the girl, indignantly.

'If you know better than Lord Fitzjocelyn, you may!' said the boy.

'I couldn't have thought it!' sighed the maiden.

'It's the best of it!' cried the lad, eagerly. 'Why, Charlotte, don't ye see, he rose hisself. Anybody may rise hisself as has a mind to it!'

'Yes, I've read that in books said Charlotte. 'You can, men can, Tom, if you would but educate yourself like Edmund! in the *Old English Baron*. But then, you know whose son you are. There can't be no catastrophe—'

'I don't want none,' said Tom. 'We are all equal by birth, so the orator proves without a doubt, and we'll show it one of these

days. A rare lady I'll make of you yet, Charlotte Arnold.'

'O hush, Tom, I can never be a lady—and I can't stand dawdling here—nor you neither. 'Tisn't right to want to be out of our station, though I do wish I lived in an old castle, where the maidens worked tapestry, and heard minstrels, never had no stairs to scour. Come, give me my mats, and thank you kindly!'

'I'll take 'em in,' said Tom, shouldering them. '"Tis breakfast-hour, so I thought I'd just run up and ax you when my young Lord goes up to Oxford.

'He is gone,' said Charlotte; 'he was here yesterday to take leave of missus. Mr. James goes later—'

'Gone!' cried Tom. 'If he didn't say he'd come and see me at Mr. Smith's!'

'Did you want to speak to him?'

'I wanted to see him particular. There's a thing lays heavy on my mind. You see that place down in Ferny dell—there's a steep bank down to the water. Well, my young Lord was very keen about building a kind of steps there in the summer, and he and I settled the stones, and I was to cement 'em. By comes Mr. Frost, and finds faults, what I thought he'd no call to; so I flings down my trowel, and wouldn't go on for he! I was so mortal angry, I would not go back to the work; and I believe my Lord forgot it—and then he went back to college; and Frampton and Gervas, they put on me, and you know how 'twas I come away from Ormersfield. I was not going to say a word to one of that lot! but if I could see Lord Fitzjocelyn, I'd tell him they stones arn't

fixed; and if the frost gets into 'em, there'll be a pretty go next time there's a tolerablish weight! But there—it is his own look-out! If he never thought it worth his while to keep his promise, and come and see me—'

'O Tom! that isn't right! He only forgot—I hear Mrs. Beckett telling him he'd forget his own head if it wasn't fixed on, and Mr. James is always at him.'

'Forget! Aye, there's nothing gentlefolks forget like poor folks. But I've done with he! Let him look out—I kept my promises to him long enough, but if he don't keep his'n—'

'For shame, for shame, Tom! You don't mean it!' cried Charlotte. 'But, oh!' with a different tone, 'give me the mat! There's the old Lord and Mr. Poynings riding down the terrace!'

'I ain't ashamed of nothing!' said the lad, proudly; and as Charlotte snatched away the mats, and vanished like a frightened hare, he stalked along like a village Hampden, muttering, 'The old tyrant shall see whether I'm to be trampled on!' and with both hands in his pockets, he gazed straight up into the face of the grave elderly gentleman, who never even perceived him. He could merely bandy glances with Poynings, the groom, and he was so far from indifferent that he significantly lifted up the end of his whip. Nothing could more have gratified Tom, who retorted with a grimace and murmur, 'Don't you wish you may catch me? You jealous syc—what is the word, sick of uncles or aunts, was it, that the orator called 'em? He'd say I'd a good miss of being one of that sort, and that my young Lord there opened

my eyes in time. No better than the rest of 'em—'

And the clock striking eight, he quickened his pace to return to his work. He had for the two or three previous years been nominally under the gardener at Ormersfield, but really a sort of follower and favourite to the young heir, Lord Fitzjocelyn—a position which had brought on him dislike from the superior servants, who were not propitiated by his independent and insubordinate temper. Faults on every side had led to his dismissal; but Lord Fitzjocelyn had placed him at an ironmonger's shop in the town of Northwold, where he had been just long enough to become accessible to the various temptations of a lad in such a situation.

Charlotte sped hastily round the end of the block of buildings, hurried down the little back garden, and flew breathlessly into her own kitchen, as a haven of refuge, but she found a tall, stiff starched, elderly woman standing just within the door, and heard her last words.

'Well! as I said, 'tis no concern of mine; only I thought it the part of a friend to give you a warning, when I seen it with my own eyes!– Ah! here she is!' as Charlotte dropped into a chair. 'Yes, yes, Miss, you need not think to deceive me; I saw you from Miss Mercy's window—'

'Saw what?' faintly exclaimed Charlotte.

'You know well enough,' was the return. 'You may think to blind Mrs. Beckett here, but I know what over good-nature to young girls comes to. Pretty use to make of your fine scholarship,

to be encouraging followers and sweethearts, at that time in the morning too!'

'Speak up, Charlotte,' said the other occupant of the room, a pleasant little brisk woman, with soft brown, eyes, a clear pale skin, and a face smooth, in spite of nearly sixty years; 'speak up, and tell Mrs. Martha the truth, that you never encouraged no one.'

The girl's face was all one flame, but she rose up, and clasping her hands together, exclaimed—'Me encourage! I never thought of what Mrs. Martha says! I don't know what it is all about!'

'Here, Jane Beckett,' cried Mrs. Martha; 'd'ye see what 'tis to vindicate her! Will you take her word against mine, that she's been gossiping this half hour with that young rogue as was turned off at Ormersfield?'

'Tom Madison! cried the girl, in utter amaze. 'Oh! Mrs. Martha!'

'Well! I can't stop!' said Martha. 'I must get Miss Faithfull's breakfast! but if you was under me, Miss Charlotte, I can tell you it would be better for you! You'll sup sorrow yet, and you'll both recollect my advice, both of you.'

Wherewith the Cassandra departed, and Charlotte, throwing her apron over her face, began to cry and sob piteously.

'My dear! what is it now? exclaimed her kind companion, pulling down her apron, and trying to draw down first one, then the other of the arms which persisted in veiling the crimson face. 'Surely you don't think missus or I would mistrust you, or think you'd take up with the likes of him!'

'How could she be so cruel—so spiteful,' sobbed Charlotte, 'when he only came to ask one question, and did a good turn for me with the mats. I never thought of such a thing. Sweetheart, indeed! So cruel of her!'

'Bless me!' said Jane, 'girls used to think it only civility to say they had a sweetheart!'

'Don't, Mrs. Beckett! I hate the word! I don't want no such thing! I won't never speak to Tom Madison again, if such constructions is to be put on it!'

'Well, after all, Charlotte dear, that will be the safest way. You are young yet, and best not to think of settling, special if you aren't sure of one that is steady and religious, and you'd better keep yourself up, and not get a name for gossiping—though there's no harm done yet, so don't make such a work. Bless me, if I don't hear his lordship's voice! He ain't never come so early!'

'Yes, he is,' said Charlotte, recovering from her sobs; 'he rode up as I came in.'

'Well, to be sure, he is come to breakfast! I hope nothin's amiss with my young Lord! I must run up with a cup and plate, and you, make the place tidy, in case Mr. Poynings comes in. You'd better run into the scullery and wash your face; 'tis all tears! You're a terrible one to cry, Charlotte!' with a kind, cheering smile and caress.

Mrs. Beckett bustled off, leaving Charlotte to restore herself to the little handy piece of household mechanism which kind, patient, motherly training had rendered her.

Charlotte Arnold had been fairly educated at a village school, and tenderly brought up at home till left an orphan, when she had been taken into her present place. She had much native refinement and imagination, which, half cultivated, produced a curious mixture of romance and simplicity. Her insatiable taste for reading was meritorious in the eyes of Mrs. Beckett, who, unlearned herself, thought any book better than 'gadding about,' and, after hearing her daily portion of the Bible, listened to the most adventurous romances, with a sense of pleasure and duty in keeping the girl to her book. She loved the little fragile orphan, taught her, and had patience with her, and trusted the true high sound principle which she recognised in Charlotte, amid much that she could not fathom, and set down alternately to the score of scholarship and youth.

Taste, modesty, and timidity were guards to Charlotte. A broad stare was terror to her, and she had many a fictitious horror, as well as better-founded ones. Truly she said, she hated the broad words Martha had used. One who craved a true knight to be twitted with a sweetheart! Martha and Tom Madison were almost equally distasteful, as connected with such a reproach; and the little maiden drew into herself, promenaded her fancy in castles and tournaments, kept under Jane's wing, and was upheld by her as a sensible, prudent girl.

CHAPTER II
AN OLD SCHOOLMISTRESS

I praise thee, matron, and thy due
Is praise, heroic praise and true;
With admiration I behold
Thy gladness unsubdued and bold.
Thy looks and gestures all present
The picture of a life well spent;
Our human nature throws away
Its second twilight and looks gay.

WORDSWORTH.

Unconscious of Charlotte's flight and Tom's affront, the Earl of Ormersfield rode along Dynevor Terrace—a row of houses with handsome cemented fronts, tragic and comic masks alternating over the downstairs windows, and the centre of the block adorned with a pediment and colonnade; but there was an air as if something ailed the place: the gardens were weedy, the glass doors hazy, the cement stained and scarred, and many of the windows closed and dark, like eyes wanting speculation, or with merely the dreary words 'To be let' enlivening their blank gloom. At the house where Charlotte had vanished, he drew his rein, and opened the gate—not one of the rusty ones—he entered

the garden, where all was trim and fresh, the shadow of the house lying across the sward, and preserving the hoar-frost, which, in the sunshine, was melting into diamond drops on the lingering China roses.

Without ring or knock, he passed into a narrow, carpetless vestibule, unadorned except by a beautiful blue Wedgewood vase, and laying down hat and whip, mounted the bare staircase, long since divested of all paint or polish. Avoiding the door of the principal room, he opened another at the side, and stood in a flood of sunshine, pouring in from the window, which looked over all the roofs of the town, to the coppices and moorlands of Ormersfield. On the bright fire sung a kettle, a white cat purred on the hearth, a canary twittered merrily in the window, and the light smiled on a languishing Dresden shepherdess and her lover on the mantelpiece, and danced on the ceiling, reflected from a beautifully chased silver cream-jug—an inconsistent companion for the homely black teapot and willow-patterned plates, though the two cups of rare Indian porcelain were not unworthy of it. The furniture was the same mixture of the ordinary and the choice, either worn and shabby, or such as would suit a virtuoso, but the whole arranged with taste and care that made the effect bright, pleasant, and comfortable. Lord Ormersfield stood on the hearth-rug waiting. His face was that of one who had learnt to wait, more considerate than acute, and bearing the stamp both of toil and suffering, as if grief had taken away all mobility of expression, and left a stern, thoughtful steadfastness.

Presently a lady entered the room. Her hair was white as snow, and she could not have seen less than seventy-seven years; but beauty was not gone from her features—smiles were still on her lips, brightness in her clear hazel eyes, buoyancy in her tread, and alertness and dignity in her tall, slender, unbent figure. There was nothing so remarkable about her as the elasticity as well as sweetness of her whole look and bearing, as if, while she had something to love, nothing could be capable of crushing her.

'You here!' she exclaimed, holding out her hand to her guest. 'You are come to breakfast.'

'Thank you; I wished to see you without interrupting your day's work. Have you many scholars at present?'

'Only seven, and three go into school at Easter. Jem and Clara, wish me to undertake no more, but I should sorely miss the little fellows. I wish they may do me as much credit as Sydney Calcott. He wrote himself to tell me of his success.'

'I am glad to hear it. He is a very promising young man.'

'I tell him I shall come to honour, as the old dame who taught him to spell. My scholars may make a Dr. Busby of me in history.'

'I am afraid your preferment will depend chiefly on James and young Calcott.'

'Nay, Louis tells me that he is going to read wonderfully hard; and if he chooses, he can do more than even Sydney Calcott.'

'If!' said the Earl.

Jane here entered with another cup and plate, and Lord

Ormersfield sat down to the breakfast-table. After some minutes' pause he said, 'Have you heard from Peru?'

'Not by this mail. Have you?'

'Yes, I have. Mary is coming home.'

'Mary!' she cried, almost springing up—'Mary Ponsonby? This is good news—unless,' as she watched his grave face, 'it is her health that brings her.'

'It is. She has consulted the surgeon of the Libra, a very able man, who tells her that there is absolute need of good advice and a colder climate; and Ponsonby has consented to let her and her daughter come home in the Libra. I expect them in February.'

'My poor Mary! But she will get better away from him. I trust he is not coming!'

'Not he,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Dear, dear Mary! I had scarcely dared to hope to see her again,' cried the old lady, with tears in her eyes. 'I hope she will be allowed to be with us, not kept in London with his sister. London does her no good.'

'The very purport of my visit,' said Lord Ormersfield, 'was to ask whether you could do me the favour to set aside your scholars, and enable me to receive Mrs. Ponsonby at home.'

'Thank you—oh, thank you. There is nothing I should like better, but I must consider—'

'Clara would find a companion in the younger Mary in the holidays, and if James would make Fitzjocelyn his charge, it would complete the obligation. It would be by far the best

arrangement for Mary's comfort, and it would be the greatest satisfaction to me to see her with you at Ormersfield.'

'I believe it would indeed,' said the old lady, more touched than the outward manner of the Earl seemed to warrant. 'I would —you know I would do my very best that you and Mary should be comfortable together'—and her voice trembled—'but you see I cannot promise all at once. I must see about these little boys. I must talk to Jem. In short, you must not be disappointed'—and she put her hands before her face, trying to laugh, but almost overcome.

'Nay, I did not mean to press you,' said Lord Ormersfield, gently; 'but I thought, since James has had the fellowship and Clara has been at school, that you wished to give up your pupils.'

'So I do,' said the lady, but still not yielding absolutely.

'For the rest, I am very anxious that James should accept Fitzjocelyn as his pupil. I have always considered their friendship as the best hope, and other plans have had so little success, that —'

'I'm not going to hear Louis abused!' she exclaimed, gaily.

'Yes,' said Lord Ormersfield, with a look nearly approaching a smile, 'you are the last person I ought to invite, if I wish to keep your nephew unspoiled.'

'I wish there were any one else to spoil him!'

'For his sake, then, come and make Ormersfield cheerful. It will be far better for him.'

'And for you, to see more of Jem,' she added. 'If he were yours,

what would you say to such hours?'

The last words were aimed at a young man who came briskly into the room, and as he kissed her, and shook hands with the Earl, answered in a quick, bright tone, 'Shocking, aye. All owing to sitting up till one!'

'Reading?' said the Earl.

'Reading,' he answered, with a sort of laughing satisfaction in dashing aside the approval expressed in the query, 'but not quite as you suppose. See here,' as he held up maliciously a railway novel.

'I am afraid I know where it came from,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Exactly so,' said James. 'It was Fitzjocelyn's desertion of it that excited my curiosity.'

'Indeed. I should have thought his desertions far too common to excite any curiosity.'

'By no means. He always has a reason.'

'A plausible one.'

'More than plausible,' cried James, excitement sparkling in his vivid black eyes. 'It happens that this is the very book that you would most rejoice to see distasteful to him—low morality, false principles, morbid excitement, not a line that ought to please a healthy mind.'—

'Yet it has interest enough for you.'

'I am not Fitzjocelyn.'

'You know how to plead for him.'

'I speak simple truth,' bluntly answered James, running his hand through his black hair, to the ruin of the morning smoothness, so that it, as well as the whole of his quick, dark countenance seemed to have undergone a change from sunny south to stormy north in the few moments since his first appearance.

After a short silence, Lord Ormersfield turned to him, saying 'I have been begging a favour of my aunt, and I have another to ask of you,' and repeating his explanation, begged him to undertake the tutorship of his son.

'I shall not be at liberty at Easter,' said James, 'I have all but undertaken some men at Oxford.'

'Oh, my dear Jem!' exclaimed the old lady, 'is that settled beyond alteration?'

'I'm not going to throw them over.'

'Then I shall hope for you at Midsummer,' said the Earl.

'We shall see how things stand,' he returned, ungraciously.

'I shall write to you,' said Lord Ormersfield, still undaunted, and soon after taking his leave.

'Cool!' cried James, as soon as he was gone. 'To expect you to give up your school at his beck, to come and keep house for him as long as it may suit him!'

'Nay, Jem, he knew how few boys I have, and that I intended to give them up. You don't mean to refuse Louis?' she said, imploringly.

'I shall certainly not take him at Easter. It would be a mere

farce intended to compensate to us for giving up the school, and I'll not lend myself to it while I can have real work.'

'At Midsummer, then. You know he will never let Louis spend a long vacation without a tutor.'

'I hate to be at Ormersfield,' proceeded James, vehemently, 'to see Fitzjocelyn browbeaten and contradicted every moment, and myself set up for a model. I may steal a horse, while he may not look over the wall! Did you observe the inconsistency?—angry with the poor fellow first for having the book, and then for not reading the whole, while it became amiable and praiseworthy in me to burn out a candle over it!'

'Ah! that was my concern. I tell him he would sing another note if you were his son.'

'I'd soon make him! I would not stand what Louis does. The more he is set down and sneered at, the more debonnaire he looks, till I could rave at him for taking it so easily.'

'I hoped you might have hindered them from fretting each other, as they do so often.'

'I should only be a fresh element of discord, while his lordship will persist in making me his pattern young man. It makes me hate myself, especially as Louis is such an unaccountable fellow that he won't.'

'I am sorry you dislike the plan so much.'

'Do you mean that you wish for it, grandmamma? cried he, turning full round on her with an air of extreme amazement. 'If you do, there's an end of it; but I thought you valued nothing

more than an independent home.'

'Nor would I give it up on any account,' said she. 'I do not imagine this could possibly last for more than a few months, or a year at the utmost. But you know, dear Jem, I would do nothing you did not like.'

'That's nothing to the purpose,' replied James. 'Though it is to be considered whether Ormersfield is likely to be the best preparation for Clara's future life. However, I see you wish it—'

'I confess that I do, for a few months at least, which need interfere neither with Clara nor with you. I have not seen Lord Ormersfield so eager for many years, and I should be very sorry to prevent those two from being comfortably together in the old home—'

'And can't that be without a chaperon?' exclaimed James, laughing. 'Why, his lordship is fifty-five, and she can't be much less. That is a good joke.'

'It is not punctilio,' said his grandmother, looking distressed. 'It is needful to be on the safe side with such a man as Mr. Ponsonby. My fear is that he may send her home with orders not to come near us.'

'She used to be always at Ormersfield in the old times.'

'Yes, when my sister was alive. Ah! you were too young to know about those matters then. The fact was, that things had come to such a pass from Mr. Ponsonby's neglect and unkindness, that Lord Ormersfield, standing in the place of her brother, thought it right to interfere. His mother went to

London with him, to bring poor Mary and her little girl back to Ormersfield, and there they were till my sister's death, when of course they could not remain. Mr. Ponsonby had just got his appointment as British envoy in Peru, and wished her to go with him. It was much against Lord Ormersfield's advice, but she thought it her duty, poor dear. I believe he positively hates Lord Ormersfield; and as if for a parting unkindness, he left his little girl at school with orders to spend her holidays with his sister, and never to be with us.'

'That accounts for it!' said James. 'I never knew all this! nor why we were so entirely cut off from Mary Ponsonby. I wonder what she is now! She was a droll sturdy child in those days! We used to call her Downright Dunstable! She was almost of the same age as Louis, and a great deal stouter, and used to fight for him and herself too. Has not she been out in Peru?'

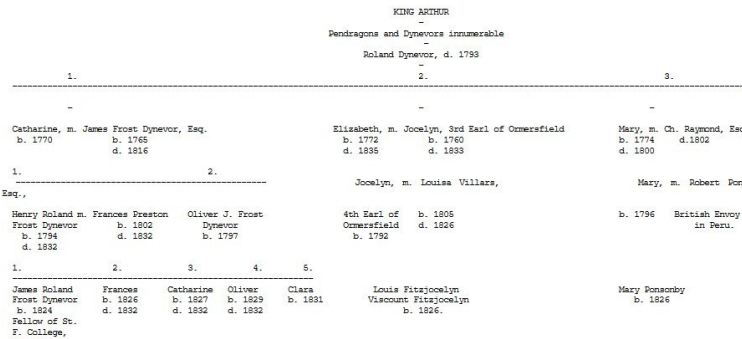
'Yes, she went out at seventeen. I believe she is an infinite comfort to her mother.'

'Poor Mary! Well, we children lived in the middle of a tragedy, and little suspected it! By the bye, what relation are the Ponsonbys to us?'

'Mrs. Ponsonby is my niece. My dear sister, Mary—'

'Married Mr. Raymond—yes, I know! I'll make the whole lucid; I'll draw up a pedigree, and Louis shall learn it.' And with elaborate neatness he wrote as follows, filling in the dates from the first leaf of an old Bible, after his grandmother had left the room. The task, lightly undertaken, became a mournful one, and

as he read over his performance, his countenance varied from the gentleness of regret to a look of sarcastic pride, as though he felt that the world had dealt hardly by him, and yet disdained to complain.



'Since 1816,' muttered James, as he finished. 'Thirty years of drudgery! When shall I be able to relieve her? Ha! O. J. F. Dynevor, Esquire, if it were you who were coming from Peru, you would find a score to settle!'

He ran down stairs to assist his grandmother in the Latin lessons of her little school, the usual employment of his vacations.

Catharine Dynevor had begun life with little prospect of spending nearly half of it as mistress of a school.

Her father was the last male of the Dynevors of Cheveleigh —a family mounting up to the days of the Pendragons—and

she had been made to take the place of an eldest son, inheriting the extensive landed property on condition that her name and arms should be assumed in case of her marriage. Her choice was one of the instances in which her affections had the mastery over her next strongest characteristic, family pride. She married a highly-educated and wealthy gentleman, of good family, but of mercantile connexions, such as her father, if living, would have disdained. Her married life was, however, perfectly unclouded, her ample means gave her the power of dispensing joy, and her temperament was so blithe and unselfish that no pleasure ever palled upon her. Cheveleigh was a proverb for hospitality, affording unfailing fetes for all ages, full of a graceful ease and freedom that inspired enjoyment.

Mr. Frost Dynevor was a man of refined taste, open-handed even to extravagance, liberal in all his appointments, and gratifying to the utmost his love of art and decoration, while his charities and generous actions were hearty and lavish enough to satisfy even his warm-hearted wife.

Joined with all this was a strong turn for speculations. When the mind has once become absorbed in earthly visions of wealth and prosperity, the excitement exercises such a fascination over the senses that the judgment loses balance. Bold assumptions are taken as certainties, and made the foundation of fresh fabrics —the very power of discerning between fact and possibility departs, and, in mere good-will, men, honest and honourable at heart, risk their own and their neighbours' property, and ruin their

character and good name, by the very actions most foreign to to their nature, ere it had fallen under the strong delusion.

Mr. Frost Dynevor had the misfortune to live in a country rich in mineral wealth, and to have a brother-in-law easily guided, and with more love of figures than power of investigating estimates on a large scale. Mines were set on foot, companies established, and buildings commenced, and the results were only to be paralleled by those of the chalybeate springs discovered by Mr. Dynevor at the little town of Northwold, which were pronounced by his favourite hanger-on to be destined 'literally to cut the throat of Bath and Cheltenham.'

Some towns are said to have required the life of a child ere their foundations could be laid. Many a speculation has swallowed a life and fortune before its time for thriving has come. Mr. Frost Dynevor and Lord Ormersfield were the foremost victims to the Cheveleigh iron foundries and the Northwold baths. The close of the war brought a commercial crisis that their companies could not stand; and Mr. Dynevor's death spared him from the sight of the crash, which his talent and sagacity might possibly have averted. He had shown no misgivings, but, no sooner was he removed from the helm, than the vessel was found on the brink of destruction. Enormous sums had been sunk without tangible return, and the liabilities of the companies far surpassed anything that they had realized.

Lord Ormersfield was stunned and helpless. Mrs. Dynevor had but one idea—namely, to sacrifice everything to clear

her husband's name. Her sons were mere boys, and the only person who proved himself able to act or judge was the heir of Ormersfield, then about four-and-twenty, who came forward with sound judgment and upright dispassionate sense of justice to cope with the difficulties and clear away the involvements.

He joined his father in mortgaging land, sacrificing timber, and reducing the establishment, so as to set the estate in the way of finally becoming free, though at the expense of rigid economy and self-denial.

Cheveleigh could not have been saved, even had the heiress not been willing to yield everything to satisfy the just claims of the creditors. She was happy when she heard that it would suffice, and that no one would be able to accuse her husband of having wronged him. But for this, she would hardly have submitted to retain what her nephew succeeded in securing for her—namely, an income of about 150 pounds per annum, and the row of houses called Dynevor Terrace, one of the building ventures at Northwold. This was the sole dependence with which she and her sons quitted the home of their forefathers. 'Never mind, mother,' said Henry, kissing her, to prevent the tears from springing, 'home is wherever we are together!' 'Never fear, mother,' echoed Oliver, with knitted brow and clenched hands, 'I will win it back.'

Oliver was a quiet lad, of diligent, methodical habits, and willingly accepted a clerkship in a mercantile house, which owed some obligations to his father. At the end of a couple of years he was sent to reside in South America; and his parting words

to his mother were—'When you see me again, Cheveleigh shall be yours.'

'Oh, my boy, take care. Remember, 'They that haste to be rich shall not be innocent.''

That was the last time she had seen Oliver.

Her great object was to maintain herself independently and to complete Henry's education as a gentleman. With this view she took up her abode in the least eligible of her houses at Northwold, and, dropping the aristocratic name which alone remained of her heiress-ship, opened a school for little boys, declaring that she was rejoiced to recall the days when Henry and Oliver wore frocks and learnt to spell. If any human being could sweeten the Latin Grammar, it was Mrs. Frost, with the motherliness of a dame, and the refinement of a lady, unfailing sympathy and buoyant spirits, she loved each urchin, and each urchin loved her, till she had become a sort of adopted grandmamma to all Northwold and the neighbourhood.

Henry went to Oxford. He gained no scholarship, took no honours, but he fell neither into debt nor disgrace; he led a goodnatured easy life, and made a vast number of friends; and when he was not staying with them, he and his mother were supremely happy together. He walked with her, read to her, sang to her, and played with her pupils. He had always been brought up as the heir—petted, humoured, and waited on—a post which he filled with goodhumoured easy grace, and which he continued to fill in the same manner, though he had no one to wait on

him but his mother, and her faithful servant Jane Beckett. Years passed on, and they seemed perfectly satisfied with their division of labour,—Mrs. Frost kept school, and Henry played the flute, or shot over the Ormersfield property.

If any one remonstrated, Henry was always said to be waiting for a government appointment, which was to be procured by the Ormersfield interest. More for the sake of his mother than of himself, the Ormersfield interest was at length exerted, and the appointment was conferred on him. The immediate consequence was his marriage with the first pretty girl he met, poorer than himself, and all the Ormersfield interest failed to make his mother angry with him.

The cholera of 1832 put an end to poor Henry's desultory life. His house, in a crowded part of London, was especially doomed by the deadly sickness; and out of the whole family the sole survivors were a little girl of ten months old, and a boy of seven years, the latter of whom was with his grandmother at Northwold.

Mrs. Frost was one of the women of whom affection makes unconscious heroines. She could never sink, as long as there was aught to need her love and care; and though Henry had been her darling, the very knowledge that his orphans had no one but herself to depend on, seemed to brace her energies with fresh life. They were left entirely on her hands, her son Oliver made no offers of assistance. He had risen, so as to be a prosperous merchant at Lima, and he wrote with regularity and dutifulness,

but he had never proposed coming to England, and did not proffer any aid in the charge of his brother's children. If she had expected anything from him, she did not say so; she seldom spoke of him, but never without tenderness, and usually as her 'poor Oliver,' and she abstained from teaching her grandchildren either to look to their rich uncle or to mourn over their lost inheritance. Cheveleigh was a winter evening's romance with no one but Jane Beckett; and the grandmother always answered the children's inquiries by bidding them prove their ancient blood by resolute independence, and by that true dignity which wealth could neither give nor take away.

Of that dignity, Mrs. Frost was a perfect model. A singular compound of the gentle and the lofty, of tenderness and independence, she had never ceased to be the Northwold standard of the 'real lady,' too mild and gracious to be regarded as proud and poor, and yet too dignified for any liberty to be attempted, her only fault, that touch of pride, so ladylike and refined that it was kept out of sight, and never offended, and everything else so sweet and winning that there was scarcely a being who did not love, as well as honour her, for the cheerfulness and resignation that had borne her through her many trials. Her trustful spirit and warm heart had been an elixir of youth, and had preserved her freshness and elasticity long after her sister and brother-in-law at Ormersfield had grown aged and sunk into the grave, and even her nephew was fast verging upon more than middle age.

CHAPTER III
LOUIS LE DEBONNAIRE

I walked by his garden and saw the wild brier,
The thorn and the thistle grow broader and higher.

ISC WATTS.

Ormersfield Park was extensive, ranging into fine broken ground, rocky and overgrown with brushwood; but it bore the marks of retrenchment; there was hardly a large timber tree on the estate, enclosures had been begun and deserted, and the deer had been sold off to make room for farmers' cattle, which grazed up to the very front door.

The house was of the stately era of Anne, with a heavy portico and clumsy pediment on the garden side, all the windows of the suite of rooms opening on a broad stone terrace, whence steps descended to the lawn, neatly kept, but sombre, for want of openings in the surrounding evergreens.

It was early March, and a lady wrapped in a shawl was seated on the terrace, enjoying the mild gleam of spring, and the freshness of the sun-warmed air, which awoke a smile of welcome as it breathed on her faded cheek, and her eyes gazed on the scene, in fond recognition.

It had been the home of Mrs. Ponsonby's childhood; and the

slopes of turf and belts of dark ilex were fraught with many a recollection of girlish musings, youthful visions, and later, intervals of tranquillity and repose. After fourteen years spent in South America, how many threads she had to take up again! She had been as a sister to her cousin, Lord Ormersfield, and had shared more of his confidence than any other person during their earlier years, but afterwards their intercourse had necessarily been confined to brief and guarded letters. She had found him unchanged in his kindness to herself, and she was the more led to ponder on the grave, stern impassiveness of his manner to others, and to try to understand the tone of mind that it indicated.

She recalled him as he had been in his first youth—reserved, sensible, thoughtful, but with the fire of ambition burning strongly within, and ever and anon flashing forth vividly, repressed at once as too demonstrative, but filling her with enthusiastic admiration. She remembered him calmly and manfully meeting the shock of the failure, that would, he knew, fetter and encumber him through life—how resolutely he had faced the difficulties, how unselfishly he had put himself out of the question, how uprightly he had dealt by the creditors, how considerately by his father and aunt, how wise and moderate his proceedings had been throughout. She recollected how she had shared his aspirations, and gloried in his consistent and prudent course, without perceiving what sorrow had since taught her-that ambition was to him what pleasure was to other young men. What had it not been to her when that ambition began to be gratified!

when he had become a leading man in Parliament, and by-and-by held office.

There, a change came over the spirit of her dream; and though she sighed, she could not but smile at the fair picture that rose before her, of a young girl of radiant loveliness, her golden curls drooping over her neck, and her eyes blue as the starry veronica by the hedge side, smiling in the sunshine. She thought of the glances of proud delight that her cousin had stolen at her, to read in her face, that his Louisa was more than all he had told her. Little was needed to make her love the sweet, caressing young creature who had thrown her arms round her, and told her that she saw it was all nonsense to tell her she was such a good, grave, dreadful cousin Mary! Yet there had been some few misgivings! So short an acquaintance! Her cousin too busy for more than being bewitched by the lovely face! The Villiers family, so gay and fashionable! Might not all have been foreseen? And yet, of what use would foresight have been? The gentleman was deeply attached, and the lady's family courted the match, the distinction he had won, atoning for his encumbered fortune.

Other scenes arose on her memory—Louisa, a triumphant beauty, living on the homage she received, all brilliance, grace, and enjoyment. But there was a darkening background which grew more prominent. Poor Louisa had little wisdom by nature, and her education had been solely directed to enable her to shine in the world, not to render her fit for the companionship of a man of domestic tastes, accustomed to the society of superior

women. There was nothing to fall back upon, nothing to make a home, she was listless and weary whenever gaiety failed her—and he, disappointed and baffled, too unbending to draw her out, too much occupied to watch over her, yielded to her tastes, and let her pursue her favourite enjoyments unchecked.

A time had come when childish vanity and frivolity were verging on levity and imprudence. Expostulations fell powerless on her shallowness. Painful was the remembrance of the deprecating roguish glance of the beautiful eyes, and the coaxing caresses with which she kissed away the lecture, and made promises, only to forget them. She was like the soulless Undine, with her reckless gaiety and sweetness, so loving and childish that there was no being displeased with her, so innocent and devoid of all art or guile in her wilfulness, that her faults could hardly bear a harsher name than follies.

Again, Mrs. Ponsonby thought of the days when she herself had been left to stay with her old uncle and aunt. In this very house while her husband was absent abroad, when she had assisted them to receive the poor young wife, sent home in failing health. She thought of the sad weeks, so melancholy in the impossibility of making an impression, or of leading poor Louisa from her frivolities, she recalled the sorrow of hearing her build on future schemes of pleasure, the dead blank when her prattle on them failed, the tedium of deeper subjects, and yet the bewitching sweetness overpowering all vexation at her exceeding silliness. Though full one-and-twenty years had passed, still the

tears thrilled warm into Mrs. Ponsonby's eyes at the thought of Louisa's fond clinging to her, in spite of many an admonition and even exertion of authority, for she alone dared to control the spoilt child's self-will; and had far more power than the husband, who seemed to act as a check and restraint, and whose presence rendered her no longer easy and natural. One confidence had explained the whole.

'You know, Mary dear, I always was so much afraid of him! If I had had my own way, I know who it would have been; but there were mamma and Anna Maria always saying how fortunate I was, and that he would be Prime Minister, and all the rest. Oh! I was far too young and foolish for him. He should have married a sober body, such as you, Mary! Why did he not? She wished she had never teased him by going out so much, and letting people talk nonsense; he had been very kind, and she was not half good enough for him. That confession, made to him, would have been balm for ever; but she had not resolution for the effort, and the days slid away till the worst fears were fulfilled. Nay, were they the worst fears? Was there not an unavowed sense that it was safer that she should die, while innocent of all but wayward folly, than be left to perils which she was so little able to resist?

The iron expression of grief on her husband's face had forbidden all sympathy, all attempt at consolation. He had returned at once to his business in London, there to find that poor Louisa's extravagance had equalled her folly, and that he, whose pride it had been to redeem his paternal property, was thrown

back by heavy debts on his own account. This had been known to Mrs. Ponsonby, but by no word from him; he had never permitted the most distant reference to his wife, and yet, with inconsistency betraying his passionate love, he had ordered one of the most beautiful and costly monuments that art could execute, for her grave at Ormersfield, and had sent brief but explicit orders that, contrary to all family precedent, his infant should bear no name but Louis.

On this boy Mrs. Ponsonby had founded all her hopes of a renewal of happiness for her cousin; but when she had left England there had been little amalgamation between the volatile animated boy, and his grave unbending father. She could not conjure up any more comfortable picture of them than the child uneasily perched on his papa's knee, looking wistfully for a way of escape, and his father with an air of having lifted him up as a duty, without knowing what to do with him or to say to him.

At her earnest advice, the little fellow had been placed as a boarder with his great aunt, Mrs. Frost, when his grandmother's death had deprived him of all that was homelike at Ormersfield, He had been with her till he was old enough for a public school, and she spoke of him as if he were no less dear to her than her own grandchildren; but she was one who saw no fault in those whom she loved, and Mrs. Ponsonby had been rendered a little anxious by a certain tone of dissatisfaction in Lord Ormersfield's curt mention of his son, and above all by his cold manner of announcing that this was the day when he would return from

Oxford for the Easter vacation.

Could it be that the son was unworthy, or had the father's feelings been too much chilled ever to warm again, and all home affections lost in the strife of politics? These had ever since engaged him, whether in or out of office, leaving little time for society or for any domestic pursuit.

Her reflections were interrupted by a call of 'Mamma!' and her daughter came running up the steps. Mary Ponsonby had too wide a face for beauty, and not slightness enough for symmetry, but nothing could be more pleasing and trustworthy than the open countenance, the steady, clear, greenish-brown eyes, the kind, sensible mouth, the firm chin, broad though rather short forehead, and healthy though not highly-coloured cheek; and the voice—full, soft, and cheerful—well agreed with the expression, and always brought gladness and promise of sympathy.

'See, mamma, what we have found for you.'

'Violets! The very purple ones that used to grow on the orchard bank!'

'So they did. Mary knew exactly where to look for them,' said Mrs. Frost, who had followed her up the steps.

'And there is Gervas,' continued Mary; 'so charmed to hear of you, that we had almost brought him to see you.'

Mrs. Ponsonby declared herself so much invigorated by Ormersfield air, that she would go to see her old friend the gardener. Mary hurried to fetch her bonnet, and returned while a panegyric was going on upon her abilities as maid-of-all-work,

in her mother's difficulties with male housemaids—black and brown—and washerwomen who rode on horseback in white satin shoes. She looked as if it were hardly natural that any one but herself should support her mother, when Mrs. Frost tenderly drew Mrs. Ponsonby's arm into her own; and it was indeed strange to see the younger lady so frail and broken, and the elder so strong, vigorous, and active; as they moved along in the sunshine, pausing to note each spring blossom that bordered the gravel, and entered the walled kitchen-garden, where espaliers ran parallel with the walks, dividing the vegetables from the narrow flower-beds, illuminated by crocuses opening the depths of their golden hearts to the sunbeams and the revelling bees. Old Gervas, in a patriarchal red waistcoat, welcomed Mrs. Ponsonby with more warmth than flattery. Bless me, ma'am, I'm right glad to see you; but how old you be!'

'I must come home to learn how to grow young, Gervas,' said she, smiling; 'I hear Betty is as youthful as my aunt here.'

'Ay, ma'am, Betty do fight it out tolerablish,' was the reply to this compliment.

'Why, Gervas, what's all that wilderness? Surely those used to be strawberry beds.'

'Yes, ma'am, the earliest hautboys; don't ye mind? My young Lord came and begged it of me, and, bless the lad, I can't refuse him nothing.'

'He seems to be no gardener!'

'He said he wanted to make a Botany Bay sort of garden,' said

the old man; 'and sure enough 'tis a garden of weeds he's made of it, and mine into the bargain! He has a great big thistle here, and the down blows right over my beds, thick as snow, so that it is three women's work to be a match for the weeds; but speak to him of pulling it up, ye'd think 'twas the heart out of him.'

'Does he ever work here?'

'At first it was nought else; he and that young chap, Madison, always bringing docks and darnel out of the hedges, and plants from the nursery gardens, and bringing rockwork, and letting water in to make a swamp. There's no saying what's in the lad's head! But, of late, he's not done much but by times lying on the bank, reading or speaking verses out loud to himself, or getting young Madison off his work to listen to him. Once he got me to hear; but, ma'am, 'twas all about fairies and such like, putting an ass's head on an honest body as had lost his way. I told him 'twas no good for him or the boy to read such stuff, and I'd ha' none of it; but, if he chose to read me some good book, he'd be welcome —for the candles baint so good as they used, and I can't get no spectacles to suit me.'

'And did he read to you?'

'A bit or two, ma'am, if the humour took him. But he's young, you see, ma'am. I'm right glad he'll find you here. My old woman says he do want a lady about the place to make him comfortable like.'

'And who is this young Madison?' asked Mrs. Ponsonby, when they had turned from the old gardener.

'To hear Jem, you would believe that he is the most promising plant rearing for Botany Bay!' said Mrs. Frost. 'He is a boy from that wild place Marksedge, whom Louis took interest in, and made more familiar than Jem liked, or than, perhaps, was good for him. It did not answer; the servants did not like it, and it ended in his being sent to work with Smith, the ironmonger. Poor Louis! he took it sadly to heart, for he had taken great pains with the boy.'

'I like to hear the old name, Louis!'

'I can't help it,' said Mrs. Frost. 'He must be his old aunt Kitty's Louis le Debonnaire! Don't you, remember your calling him so when he was a baby?'

'Oh yes, it has exactly recalled to me the sort of gracious look that he used to have—half sly, half sweet-and so very pretty!'

'It suits him as well now. He is the kind of being who must have a pet name;' and Mrs. Frost, hoping he might be already arrived, could hardly slacken her eager step so as to keep pace with her niece's feeble movements. She was disappointed; the carriage had returned without Lord Fitzjocelyn. His hat and luggage were come, but he himself was missing. Mrs. Frost was very uneasy, but his father silenced conjectures by saying, that it was his usual way, and he would make his appearance before the evening. He would not send to meet another train, saying, that the penalty of irregularity must be borne, and the horses should not suffer for such freaks; and he would fain have been utterly indifferent, but he was evidently listening to every sound, and betrayed his

anxiety by the decision with which he checked all expression of his aunt's fears.

There was no arrival all that evening, no explanation in the morning; and Betty Gervas, whom Mary went to visit in the course of the day, began to wonder whether the young Lord could be gone for a soldier—the usual fate of all missing village lads.

Mary was on her way home, through the park, along a path skirting the top of a wooded ravine, a dashing rivulet making a pleasant murmur among the rocks below, and glancing here and there through the brushwood that clothed the precipitous banks, when, with a sudden rustling and crackling, a man leaped upon the path with a stone in each hand.

Mary started, but she did not lose her presence of mind, and her next glance showed her that the apparition was not alarming, and was nearly as much amazed as herself. It was a tall slight young man, in a suit of shepherd's plaid, with a fair face and graceful agile form, recalling the word debonnaire as she had yesterday heard it applied. In instant conviction that this was the truant, she put out her hand by the same impulse that lighted his features with a smile of welcome, and the years of separation seemed annihilated as he exclaimed, 'My cousin Mary!' and grasped her hand, adding, 'I hope I did not frighten you—'

'Oh no; but where did you come from?'

'Up a hill perpendicular, like Hotspur,' he replied, in soft low quiet tones, which were a strange contrast to the words. 'No, see here,' and parting the bushes he showed some rude steps, half

nature, half art, leading between the ferns and mountain-ash, and looking very inviting.

'How delightful!' cried Mary.

'I am glad you appreciate it,' he exclaimed; 'I will finish it off now, and put a rail. I did not care to go on when I had lost the poor fellow who helped me, but it saves a world of distance.'

'It must be very pretty amongst those beautiful ferns!'

'You can't conceive anything more charming,' he continued, with the same low distinct utterance, but an earnestness that almost took away her breath. 'There are nine ferns on this bank —that is, if we have the Scolopendrium Loevigatum, as I am persuaded. Do you know anything of ferns? Ah! you come from the land of tree ferns.'

'Oh! I am so glad to exchange them for our home flowers. Primroses look so friendly and natural.'

'These rocks are perfect nests for them, and they even overhang the river. This is the best bit of the stream, so rapid and foaming that I must throw a bridge across for Aunt Catharine. Which would be most appropriate? I was weighing it as I came up—a simple stone, or a rustic performance in wood?'

'I should like stone,' said Mary, amused by his eagerness.

'A rough Druidical stone! That's it! The idea of rude negligent strength accords with such places, and this is a stone country. I know the very stone! Do come down and see!'

'To-morrow, if you please,' said Mary. 'Mamma must want me, and—but I suppose they know of your return at home.'

'No, they don't. They have learnt by experience that the right time is the one never to expect me.'

Mary's eyes were all astonishment, as she said, between wonder and reproof, 'Is that on purpose?'

'Adventures are thrust on some people,' was the nonchalant reply, with shoulders depressed, and a twinkle of the eye, as if he purposed amazing his auditor.'

'I hope you have had an adventure, for nothing else could justify you,' said Mary, with some humour, but more gravity.

'Only a stray infant-errant, cast on my mercy at the junction station. Nurse, between eating and gossiping left behind—bell rings—engine squeaks—train starts—Fitzjocelyn and infant vis-a-vis.'

'You don't mean a baby?'

'A child of five years old, who soon ceased howling, and confided his history to me. He had been visiting grandmamma in London, and was going home to Illershall; so I found the best plan would be to leave the train at the next station, and take him home.'

'Oh, that was quite another thing!' exclaimed Mary, gratified at being able to like him. 'Could you find his home?'

'Yes; he knew his name and address too well to be lost or mislaid. I would have come home as soon as I had seen him in at the door; but the whole family rushed out on me, and conjured me first to dine and then to sleep. They are capital people. Dobbs is superintendent of the copper and tin works—a thoroughly

right-minded man, with a nice, ladylike wife, the right sort of sound stuff that old England's heart is made of. It was worth anything to have seen it! They do incalculable good with their work-people. I saw the whole concern.'

He launched into an explanation of the process, producing from his pocket, papers of the ore, in every stage of manufacture, and twisting them up so carelessly, that they would have become a mass of confusion, had not Mary undertaken the repacking.

As they approached the house, the library window was thrown up, and Mrs. Frost came hurrying down with outstretched arms. She was met by her young nephew with an overflow of fond affection, before he looked up and beheld his father standing upright and motionless on the highest step. His excuses were made more lightly and easily than seemed to suit such rigid looks; but Lord Ormersfield bent his head as if resigning himself perforce to the explanation, and, with the softened voice in which he always spoke to Mrs. Ponsonby, said, 'Here he is—Louis, you remember your cousin.'

She was positively startled; for it was as if his mother's deep blue eyes were raised to hers, and there were the same regular delicate features, fair, transparent complexion, and glossy light-brown hair tinted with gold—the same careless yet deprecating glance, the same engaging smile that warmed her heart to him at once, in spite of an air which was not that of wisdom.

'How little altered you are!' she exclaimed. 'If you were not taller than your father, I should say you were the same Louis that

I left fourteen years ago.'

'I fear that is the chief change,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'A boy that would be a boy all his life, like Sir Thomas More's son!' said Louis, coolly and simply, but with a twinkle in the corner of his eye, as if he said it on purpose to be provoking; and Mrs. Frost interposed by asking where the cousins had met, and whether they had known each other.

'I knew him by what you said yesterday,' said Mary.

'Louis le Debonnaire? asked Mrs. Frost, smiling.

'No, Mary; not that name!' he exclaimed. 'It is what Jem calls me, when he has nothing more cutting to say—'

'Aye, because it is exactly what you look when you know you deserve a scolding—with your shoulders pulled down, and your face made up!' said his aunt, patting him.

When Mrs. Ponsonby and Mary had left the room to dress, Louis exclaimed, 'And that is Mrs. Ponsonby! How ill she does look! Her very voice has broken down, though it still has the sweet sound that I could never forget! Has she had advice?'

'Dr. Hastings saw her in London,' said his father. 'He sent her into the country at once, and thinks that there is fair hope that complete rest of spirits may check the disease.'

'Will she stay here?' said Louis, eagerly. 'That would be like old times, and we could make her very comfortable. I would train those two ponies for her drives—'

'I wish she would remain here,' said his father; 'but she is bent on becoming my aunt's tenant.'

'Ha! That is next best! They could do nothing more commendable. Will they be a windfall for the House Beautiful?'

'No,' said Mrs. Frost. 'They wish to have a house of their own, in case Mr. Ponsonby should come home, or Miss Ponsonby to stay with them.'

'The respected aunt who brought Mary up! How long has she been at Lima?'

'Four years.'

'Four years! She has not made use of her opportunities! Alas for the illusion dispelled! The Spanish walk and mantilla melt away; and behold! the primitive wide-mouthed body of fourteen years since!'

Mrs. Frost laughed, but it seemed to be a serious matter with Lord Ormersfield. 'If you could appreciate sterling worth,' he said, 'you would be ashamed to speak of your cousin with such conceited disrespect.'

All the effect was to make Louis walk quietly out of the room; but his shoulder and eyebrow made a secret telegraph of amazement to Mrs. Frost.

The new arrival seemed to have put the Earl into a state of constant restless anxiety, subdued and concealed with a high hand, but still visible to one who knew him so intimately as did Mrs. Ponsonby. She saw that he watched each word and gesture, and studied her looks to judge of the opinion they might create in her. Now the process was much like weighing and balancing the down of Fitzjocelyn's own favourite thistle; the profusion, the

unsubstantiality, and the volatility being far too similar; and there was something positively sad in the solicitous heed taken of such utter heedlessness.

The reigning idea was the expedition to Illershall, and the excellent condition of the work-people under his new friend the superintendent. Forgetful that mines were a tender subject, the eager speaker became certain that copper must exist in the neighbourhood, and what an employment it would afford to all the country round. 'Marksedge must be the very place, the soil promises metallic veins, the discovery would be the utmost boon to the people. It would lead to industry and civilization, and counteract all the evils we have brought on them. Mary, do you remember Marksedge, the place of exile?'

'Not that I know of.'

'No; we were too young to understand the iniquity. In the last generation, it was not the plan to stone Naboth, but to remove him. Great people could not endure little people; so, by way of kindness, our whole population of Ormersfield, except a few necessary retainers, were transported bodily from betwixt the wind and our nobility, located on a moor beyond our confines, a generous gift to the poor-rates of Bletchynden, away from church, away from work, away from superintendence, away from all amenities of the poor man's life!'

This was one of the improvements to which Mr. Dynevor had prompted the last Earl; but Louis did not know whom he was cutting, as he uttered this tirade, with a glow on his cheek and

eye, but with his usual soft, modulated intonation and polished language, the distinctness and deliberation taking off all air of rattle, and rendering his words more impressive.

'Indeed! is there much distress at Marksedge?' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'They have gifts with our own poor at Christmas,' said Lord Ormersfield, 'but they are a defiant, ungrateful set, always in distress by their own fault.'

'What cause have they for gratitude?' exclaimed his son. 'For being turned out of house and home? for the three miles' walk to their daily work! Yes, it is the fact. The dozen families left here, with edicts against lodgers, cannot suffice for the farmer's work; and all Norris's and Beecher's men have to walk six miles every day of their lives, besides the hard day's work. They are still farther from their parish, they are no one's charge, they have neither church nor school, and whom should we blame for their being lawless?'

'It used to be thought a very good thing for the parish,' said Mrs. Frost, looking at her niece. 'I remember being sorry for the poor people, but we did not see things in the light in which Louis puts it.'

'Young men like to find fault with the doings of their elders,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'Nothing can make me regard it otherwise than as a wicked sin!' said Louis.

'Nay, my dear,' mildly said Aunt Catharine, 'if it were

mistaken, I am sure it was not intentionally cruel.'

'What I call wicked is to sacrifice the welfare of dependents to our own selfish convenience! And you would call it cruel too, Aunt Catharine, if you could hear the poor creatures beg as a favour of Mr. Holdsworth to be buried among their kin, and know how it has preyed on the minds of the dying that they might not lie here among their own people.'

'Change the subject, Fitzjocelyn,' said his father: 'the thing is done, and cannot be undone.'

'The undoing is my daily thought,' said Louis. 'If I could have tried my plan of weaving cordage out of cotton-grass and thistle-down, I think I could have contrived for them.'

Mary looked up, and met his merry blue eye. Was he saying it so gravely to try whether he could take her in? 'If you could —' she said, and he went off into a hearty laugh, and finished by saying, so that no one could guess whether it was sport or earnest, 'Even taking into account the depredations of the goldfinches, it would be an admirable speculation, and would confer immeasurable benefits on the owners of waste lands. I mean to take out a patent when I have succeeded in the spinning.'

'A patent for a donkey,' whispered Aunt Catharine. He responded with a deferential bow, and the conversation was changed by the Earl; but copper was still the subject uppermost with Louis, and no sooner was dinner over than he followed the ladies to the library, and began searching every book on metals and minerals, till he had heaped up a pile of volumes,

whence be rang the changes on oxide, pyrites, and carbonate, and octohedron crystals—names which poor Mrs. Frost had heard but too often. At last it came to certainty that he had seen the very masses containing ore; he would send one to-morrow to Illershall to be analysed, and bring his friend Dobbs down to view the spot.

'Not in my time,' interposed Lord Ormersfield. 'I would not wish for a greater misfortune than the discovery of a mine on my property.'

'No wonder,' thought Mrs. Ponsonby, as she recollected Wheal Salamanca and Wheal Catharine, and Wheal Dynevor, and all the other wheals that had wheeled away all Cheveleigh and half Ormersfield, till the last unfortunate wheal failed when the rope broke, and there were no funds to buy a new one. No wonder Lord Ormersfield trembled when he heard his son launch out into those easily-ascending conjectural calculations, freely working sums in his head, so exactly like the old Earl, his grandfather, that she could have laughed, but for sympathy with the father, and anxiety to see how the son would take the damp so vexatiously cast on his projects.

He made the gesture that Mrs. Frost called debonnaire—read on for five minutes in silence, insisted on teaching his aunt the cause of the colours in peacock ores, compared them to a pigeon's neck, and talked of old Betty Gervas's tame pigeons; whence he proceeded to memories of the days that he and Mary had spent together, and asked which of their old haunts she had revisited. Had she been into the nursery?

'Oh yes! but I wondered you had sent the old walnut press into that lumber-room.'

'Is that satire?' said Louis, starting and looking in her face.

'I don't know what you mean.'

'I have a better right to ask what you mean by stigmatizing my apartment as a lumber-room?'

'It was only what I saw from the door,' said Mary, a little confused, but rallying and answering with spirit; 'and I must maintain that, if you mean the room over the garden entrance, it is very like a lumber-room.'

'Ah, Mary! you have not outgrown the delusions of your sex. Is an Englishman's house his castle while housemaids maraud over it, ransacking his possessions, irritating poor peaceful dust that only wants to be let alone, sweeping away cherished cobwebs?'

'Oh, if you cherish cobwebs!' said Mary.

'Did not the fortunes of Scotland hang on a spider's thread? Did not a cobweb save the life of Mahomet, or Ali, or a mediaeval saint—no matter which? Was not a spider the solace of the Bastille? Have not I lain for hours on a summer morning watching the tremulous lines of the beautiful geometrical composition?'

'More shame for you!' said Mary, with a sort of dry humorous bluntness.

'The very answer you would have made in old times,' cried Louis, delighted. 'O Mary, you bring me back the days of my youth! You never would see the giant who used to live in that

press!'

'I remember our great fall from the top of it.'

'Oh yes!' cried Louis; 'Jem Frost had set us up there bolt upright for sentries, and I saw the enemies too soon, when you would not allow that they were there. I was going to fire my musket at them; but you used violence to keep me steady to my duty—pulled my hair, did not you?'

'I know you scratched me, and we both rolled off together! I wonder we were not both killed!'

'That did not trouble Jem! He picked us up, and ordered us into arrest under the bed for breach of discipline.'

'I fear Jem was a martinet,' said Mrs. Frost.

'That he was! A general formed on the model of him who, not contented with assaulting a demi-lune, had taken une lune toute entiere. We had a siege of the Fort Bombadero, inaccessible, and with mortars firing double-hand grenades. They were dandelion clocks, and there were nettles to act the part of poisoned spikes on the breach.'

'I remember the nettles,' said Mary, 'and Jem's driving you to gather them; you standing with your bare legs in the nettle-bed, when he would make me dig, and I could not come to help you!'

'On duty in the trenches. Your sense of duty was exemplary. I remember your digging on, like a very Casablanca, all alone, in the midst of a thunder-storm, because Jem had forgotten to call you in, crying all the time with fear of the lightning!'

'You came to help me,' said Mary. 'You came rushing out from

the nursery to my rescue!'

'I could not make you stir. We were taken prisoners by a sally from the nursery. For once in your life, you were in disgrace!'

'I quite thought I ought to mind Jem,' said Mary, 'and never knew whether it was play or earnest.'

'Only so could you transgress,' said Louis,—'you who never cried, except as my amateur Mungo Malagrowther. Poor Mary! what an amazement it was to me to find you breaking your heart over the utmost penalties of the nursery law, when to me they only afforded agreeable occasions of showing that I did not care! I must have been intolerable till you and Mrs. Ponsonby took me in hand!'

'I am glad you own your obligations,' said Lord Ormersfield.

'I own myself as much obliged to Mary for making me wise, as to Jem for making me foolish.'

'It is not the cause of gratitude I should have expected,' said his father.

'Alas! if he and Clara were but here!' sighed Louis. 'I entreated him in terms that might have moved a pyramid from its base, but the Frost was arctic. An iceberg will move, but he is past all melting!'

'I respect his steadiness of purpose,' said the Earl; 'I know no young man whom I honour more than James.'

His aunt and his son were looking towards each other with glistening eyes of triumph and congratulation, and Mrs. Frost cleared her voice to say that he was making far too much of her

Jemmy; a very good boy, to be sure, but if he said so much of him, the Marys would be disappointed to see nothing but a little fiery Welshman.

CHAPTER IV
THISTLE-DOWN

Lightly soars the thistle-down,
    Lightly does it float—,
Lightly seeds of care are sown,
    Little do we note.
Watch life's thistles bud and blow,
    Oh, 'tis pleasant folly;
But when all life's paths they strew,
    Then comes melancholy.

Poetry Past and Present.

Mary Ponsonby had led a life of change and wandering that had given her few strong local attachments. The period she had spent at Ormersfield, when she was from five to seven years old, had been the most joyous part of her life, and had given her a strong feeling for the place where she had lived with her mother, and in an atmosphere of affection, free from the shadow of that skeleton in the house, which had darkened her childhood more than she understood.

The great weakness of Mrs. Ponsonby's life had been her over-hasty acceptance of a man, whom she did not thoroughly know, because her delicacy had taken alarm at foolish gossip

about herself and her cousin. It was a folly that had been severely visited. Irreligious himself, Mr. Ponsonby disliked his wife's strictness; he resented her affection for her own family, gave way to dissipated habits, and made her miserable both by violence and neglect. Born late of this unhappy marriage, little Mary was his only substantial link to his wife, and he had never been wanting in tenderness to her: but many a storm had raged over the poor child's head; and, though she did not know why the kind old Countess had come to remove her and her mother, and 'papa' was still a loved and honoured title, she was fully sensible of the calm security at Ormersfield.

When Mr. Ponsonby had recalled his wife on his appointment at Lima, Mary had been left in England for education, under the charge of his sister in London. Miss Ponsonby was good and kind, but of narrow views, thinking all titled people fashionable, and all fashionable people reprobate, jealous of her sister-in-law's love for her own family, and, though unable to believe her brother blameless, holding it as an axiom that married people could not fall out without faults on both sides, and charging a large share of their unhappiness on the house of Fitzjocelyn. Principle had prevented her from endeavouring to weaken the little girl's affection to her mother; but it had been her great object to train her up in habits of sober judgment, and freedom from all the romance, poetry, and enthusiasm which she fancied had been injurious to Mrs. Ponsonby. The soil was of the very kind that she would have chosen. Mary was intelligent, but with more

sense than fancy, more practical than intellectual, and preferring the homely to the tasteful. At school, study and accomplishments were mere tasks, her recreation was found in acts of kindness to her companions, and her hopes were all fixed on the going out to Peru, to be useful to her father and mother. At seventeen she went; full of active, housewifely habits, with a clear head, sound heart, and cramped mind, her spirits even and cheerful, but not high nor mirthful, after ten years of evenings spent in needlework beside a dry maiden aunt.

Nor was the home she found at Lima likely to foster the joyousness of early girlhood. Mr. Ponsonby was excessively fond of her; but his affection to her only marked, by contrast, the gulf between him and her mother. There was no longer any open misconduct on his part, and Mrs. Ponsonby was almost tremblingly attentive to his wishes; but he was chill and sarcastic in his manner towards her, and her nervous attacks often betrayed that she had been made to suffer in private for differences of opinion. Health and spirits were breaking down; and, though she never uttered a word of complaint, the sight of her sufferings was trying for a warm-hearted young girl.

Mary's refuge was hearty affection to both parents. She would not reason nor notice where filial tact taught her that it was best to be ignorant; she charged all tracasseries on the Peruvian republic, and set herself simply to ameliorate each vexation as it arose, and divert attention from it without generalizing, even to herself, on the state of the family. The English comfort which

she brought into the Limenian household was one element of peace; and her brisk, energetic habits produced an air of ease and pleasantness that did much to make home agreeable to her father, and removed many cares which oppressed her mother. To her, Mary was all the world-daughter, comforter, friend, and nurse, unfailing in deeds of love or words of cheer, and removing all sense of dreariness and solitude. And Mary had found her mother all, and more than all she remembered, and admired and loved her with a deep, quiet glow of intense affection. There was so much call for Mary's actual exertion of various kinds, that there was little opportunity for cultivating or enlarging her mind by books, though the scenes and circumstances around her could not but take some effect. Still, at twenty-one she was so much what she had been at seventeen—so staid, sensible, and practical, that Miss Ponsonby gladly pronounced her not in the least spoilt.

Fain would her aunt have kept both her and her mother as her guests; but Mrs. Ponsonby had permission to choose whatever residence best suited her, and felt that Bryanston-square and Miss Ponsonby would be fatal to her harassed spirits. She yearned after the home and companions of her youth, and Miss Ponsonby could only look severe, talk of London doctors, and take Mary aside to warn her against temptations from fashionable people.

Mary had been looking for the fashionable people ever since, and the first sign of them she had seen, was the air and figure of her cousin Fitzjocelyn. Probably good Aunt Melicent would distrust him; and yet his odd startling talk, and the arch look

of mischief in the corners of his mouth and eyes, had so much likeness to the little Louis of old times, that she could not look on him as a stranger nor as a formidable being; but was always recurring to the almost monitorial sense of protection, with which she formerly used to regard him, when she shared his nursery.

Her mother had cultivated her love for Ormersfield, and she was charmed by her visits to old haunts, well remembering everything. She gladly recognised the little low-browed church, the dumpy tower, and grave-yard rising so high that it seemed to intend to bury the church itself, and permitted many a view, through the lattices, of the seats, and the Fitzjocelyn hatchments and monuments.

She lingered after church on Sunday afternoon with Mrs. Frost to look at Lady Fitzjocelyn's monument. It was in the chancel, a recumbent figure in white marble, as if newly fallen asleep, and with the lovely features chiselled from a cast taken after death had fixed and ennobled their beauty.

'It is just like Louis's profile!' said Mrs. Frost, as they came out.

'Well,' said Louis, who was nearer than she was aware, 'I hope at least no one will make me the occasion of a lion when I am dead.'

'It is very beautiful,' said Mary.

'May be so; but the sentiment is destroyed by its having been six months in the Royal Academy, number 16,136, and by seeing

it down among the excursions in the Northwold Guide.'

'Louis, my dear, you should not be satirical on this,' said Mrs. Frost.

'I never meant it,' said Louis, 'but I never could love that monument. It used to oppress me with a sense of having a white marble mother! And, seriously, it fills up the chancel as if it were its show-room, according to our family tradition that the church is dedicated to the Fitzjocelyns. Living or dead, we have taken it all to ourselves.'

'It was a very fair, respectable congregation,' said his aunt.

'Exactly so. That is my complaint. Everything belonging to his lordship is respectable—except his son.'

'Take care, Louis; here is Mary looking as if she would take you at your word.'

'Pray, Mary, do they let no one who is not respectable go to church in Peru?'

'I do not think you would change your congregation for the wretched crowds of brown beggars,' said Mary.

'Would I not?' cried Louis. 'Oh! if the analogous class here in England could but feel that the church was for them!—not driven out and thrust aside, by our respectability.'

'Marksedge to wit!' said a good-humoured voice, as Mr. Holdsworth, the young Vicar, appeared at his own wicket, with a hearty greeting. 'I never hear those words without knowing where you are, Fitzjocelyn.'

'I hope to be there literally some day this week,' said Louis.

'Will you walk with me? I want to ask old Madison how his grandson goes on. I missed going to see after the boy last time I was at home.'

'I fear he has not been going on well, and have been sorry for it ever since,' said the Vicar. 'His master told me that he found him very idle and saucy.'

'People of that sort never know how to speak to a lad,' said Louis. 'It is their own rating that they ought to blame.'

'Not Tom Madison, I know,' said Mr. Holdsworth, laughing. 'But I did not come out to combat that point, but to inquire after the commissions you kindly undertook.'

'I have brought you such a set of prizes! Red rubrics, red margins; and for the apparatus, I have brought a globe with all the mountains in high relief;—yes, and an admirable physical atlas, and a box of instruments and models for applying mathematics to mechanics. We might give evening lectures, and interest the young farmers.'

'Pray,' said the Vicar, with a sound of dismay, 'where may the bill be? I thought the limits were two pounds eighteen.'

'Oh! I take all that on myself.'

'We shall see,' said Mr. Holdsworth, not gratefully. 'Was Origen sent home in time for you to bring?'

'There!' cried Louis, starting, 'Origen is lying on the very chair where I put him last January. I will write to Jem Frost to-morrow to send him to the binder.'

'Is it of any use to ask for the music?'

'I assure you, Mr. Holdsworth, I am very sorry. I'll write at once to Frost.'

'Then I am afraid the parish will not be reformed as you promised last Christmas,' said the Vicar, turning, with a smile, to Mrs. Frost. 'We were to be civilized by weekly concerts in the school.'

'What were you to play, Louis?' said Mrs. Frost, laughing.

'I was to imitate all the birds in the air at once,' said Louis, beginning to chirp like a melee of sparrows, turning it into the croak of a raven, and breaking off suddenly with, 'I beg your pardon—I forgot it was Sunday! Indeed, Mr. Holdsworth, I can say no more than that I was a wretch not to remember. Next time I'll write it all down in the top of my hat, with a pathetic entreaty that if my hat be stolen, the thief shall fulfil the commissions, and punctually send in the bill to the Rev. W. B. Holdsworth!'

'I shall hardly run the risk,' said Mr. Holdsworth, smiling, as he parted with them, and disappeared within his clipped yew hedges.

'Poor, ill-used Mr. Holdsworth!' cried Aunt Catharine.

'Yes, it was base to forget the binding of that book,' said Louis, gravely. 'I wish I knew what amends to make.'

'You owe amends far more for making a present of a commission. I used to do the like, to save myself trouble, till I came down in the world, and then I found it had been a mere air de grand seigneur.'

'I should not dare to serve you or Jem so; but I thought the

school was impersonal, and could receive a favour.'

'It is no favour, unless you clearly define where the commission ended and the gift began. Careless benefits oblige no one.'

Fitzjocelyn received his aunt's scoldings very prettily. His manner to her was a becoming mixture of the chivalrous, the filial, and the playful. Mary watched it as a new and pretty picture. All his confidence, too, seemed to be hers; but who could help pouring out his heart to the ever-indulgent, sympathizing Aunt Catharine? It was evidently the greatest treat to him to have her for his guest, and his attention to her extended even to the reading a sermon to her in the evening, to spare her eyes; a measure so entirely after Aunt Melicent's heart, that Mary decided that even she would not think her cousin so hopelessly fashionable.

Goodnatured he was, without doubt; for as the three ladies were sitting down to a sociable morning of work and reading aloud, he came in to say he was going to see after Tom Madison, and to ask if there were any commands for Northwold, with his checked shooting-jacket pockets so puffed out that his aunt began patting and inquiring. 'Provisions for the House Beautiful,' he said, as forth came on the one side a long rough brown yam. 'I saw it at a shop in London,' he said, 'and thought the Faithfull sisters would like to be reminded of their West Indian feasts.' And, 'to make the balance true,' he had in the other pocket a lambswool shawl of gorgeous dyes, with wools to make the

like, and the receipt, in what he called 'female algebra,' the long knitting-pins under his arm like a riding-whip. He explained that he thought it would be a winter's work for Miss Salome to imitate it, and that she would succour half-a-dozen families with the proceeds; and Mrs. Ponsonby was pleased to hear him speak so affectionately of the two old maiden sisters. They were the nieces of an old gentleman to whom the central and handsomest house of Dynevor Terrace had been let. He had an annuity which had died with him, and they inherited very little but the furniture with which they had lived on in the same house, in hopes of lodgers, and paying rent to Mrs. Frost when they had any. There was a close friendship and perfect understanding between her and them, and, as she truly assured them, full and constant rent could hardly have done her as much good as their neighbourhood. Miss Mercy was the Sister of Charity of all Northwold; Miss Salome, who was confined to her chair by a complaint in her knee, knitted and made fancy-works, the sale of which furnished funds for her charities. She was highly educated, and had a great knowledge of natural history. Fitzjocelyn had given their abode the name of the House Beautiful, as being redolent of the essence of the Pilgrim's Progress; and the title was so fully accepted by their friends, that the very postman would soon know it. He lingered, discoursing on this topic, while Mary repacked his parcels, and his aunt gave him a message to Jane Beckett, to send the carpenter to No. 5 before Mary's visit of inspection; but she prophesied that he would forget; and, in fact, it was no good augury that he left the

knitting-pins behind him on the table, and Mary was only just in time to catch him with them at the front door.

'Thank you, Mary—you are the universal memory,' he said. 'What rest you must give my father's methodical spirit! I saw you pile up all those Blackwoods of mine this morning, just as he was going to fall upon them.'

'If you saw it, I should have expected you to do it yourself,' said Mary, in her quaint downright manner.

'Never expect me to do what is expected,' answered he.

'Do you do that because it is not expected?' said Mary, feeling almost as if he were beyond the pale of reason, as she saw him adjusting a plant of groundsel in his cap.

'It is for the dicky-bird at my aunt's. There's no lack of it at the Terrace; but it is an old habit, and there always was an illusion that Ormersfield groundsel is a superior article.'

'I suppose that is why you grow go much.'

'Are you a gardener? Some day we will go to work, clear the place, and separate the botanical from the intrusive!'

'I should like it, of all things!'

'I'll send the horse round to the stable, and begin at once!' exclaimed Louis, all eagerness; but Mary demurred, as she had promised to read to her mother and aunt some of their old favourites, Madame de Sevigne's letters, and his attention flew off to his restless steed, which he wanted her to admire.

'My Yeomanry charger,' he said. 'We turn out five troopers. I hope you will be here when we go out, for going round to

Northwold brought me into a direful scrape when I went to exhibit myself to the dear old Terrace world. My father said it was an unworthy ambition. What would he have thought, if he had seen Jane stroking me down with the brush on the plea of dust, but really on the principle of stroking a dog! Good old Jane! Have you seen her yet? Has she talked to you about Master Oliver?'

The horse became so impatient, that Mary had no time for more than a monosyllable, before Louis was obliged to mount and ride off; and he was seen no more till just before dinner, when, with a shade of French malice, Mrs. Frost inquired about Jane and the carpenter: she had seen the cap, still decorated with groundsel, lying in the hall, and had a shrewd suspicion, but the answer went beyond her expectations—'Ah!' he said, 'it is all the effect of the Norman mania!'

'What have you been doing? What is the matter?' she cried, alarmed.

'The matter is not with me, but with the magistrates.'

'My dear Louis, don't look so very wise and capable, or I shall think it a very bad scrape indeed! Pray tell me what you have been about.'

'You know Sir Gilbert Brewster and Mr. Shoreland are rabid about the little brook between their estates, of which each wishes to arrogate to himself the exclusive fishing. Their keepers watch like the Austrian guard on the Danube, in a life of perpetual assault and battery. Last Saturday, March 3rd, 1847,

one Benjamin Hodgekin, aged fifteen, had the misfortune to wash his feet in the debateable water; the belligerent powers made common cause, and haled the wretch before the Petty Sessions. His mother met me. She lived in service here till she married a man at Marksedge, now dead. This poor boy is an admirable son, the main stay of the family, who must starve if he were imprisoned, and she declared, with tears in her eyes, that she could not bear for a child of hers to be sent to gaol, and begged me to speak to the gentlemen.' He started up with kindling eyes and vehement manner. 'I went to the Justice-room!'

'My dear! with the groundsel?'

'And the knitting-needles!'

On rushed the narration, unheeding trifles. 'There was the array: Mr. Calcott in the chair, and old Freeman, and Captain Shaw, and fat Sir Gilbert, and all the rest, met to condemn this wretched widow's son for washing his feet in a gutter!'

'Pray what said the indictment?' asked Mrs. Ponsonby.

'Oh, that he had killed an infant trout of the value of three farthings! Three giant keepers made oath to it, but I had his own mother's word that he was washing his feet!'

No one could help laughing, but Fitzjocelyn was far past perceiving any such thing. 'Urge what I would, they fined him. I talked to old Brewster! I appealed to his generosity, if there be room for generosity about a trout no bigger than a gudgeon! I talked to Mr. Calcott, who, I thought, had more sense, but Justice Shallow would have been more practicable! No one

took a rational view but Ramsbotham of the factory, a very sensible man, with excellent feeling. When it is recorded in history, who will believe that seven moral, well-meaning men agreed in condemning a poor lad of fifteen to a fine of five shillings, costs three-and-sixpence—a sum he could no more pay than I the National Debt, and with the alternative of three months' imprisonment, branding and contaminating for life, and destroying all self-respect? I paid the fine, so there is one act of destruction the less on the heads of the English squirearchy.'

'Act of destruction!'

'The worst destruction is to blast a man's character because the love of adventure is strong within him—!'

He was at this point when Lord Ormersfield entered, and after his daily civil ceremonious inquiries of the ladies whether they had walked or driven out, he turned to his son, saying, 'I met Mr. Calcott just now, and heard from him that he had been sorry to convict a person in whom you took interest, a lad from Marksedge. What did you know of him?'

'I was prompted by common justice and humanity,' said Louis. 'My protection was claimed for the poor boy, as the son of an old servant of ours.'

'Indeed! I think you must have been imposed on. Mr. Calcott spoke of the family as notorious poachers.'

'Find a poor fellow on the wrong side of a hedge, and not a squire but will swear that he is a hardened ruffian!'

'Usually with reason,' said the Earl. 'Pray when did this

person's parents allege that they had been in my service?'

'It was his mother. Her name was Blackett, and she left us on her marriage with one of the Hodgekins.'

Lord Ormersfield rang the bell, and Frampton, the butler and confidential servant, formed on his own model, made his appearance.

'Do you know whether a woman of the name of Blackett ever lived in service here?'

'Not that I am aware of, my Lord. I will ascertain the fact.'

In a few moments Frampton returned. 'Yes, my Lord, a girl named Blackett was once engaged to help in the scullery, but was discharged for dishonesty at the end of a month.'

'Did not Frampton know that that related to me?' said Louis, sotto voce, to his aunt. 'Did he not trust that he was reducing me from a sea anemone to a lump of quaking jelly?'

So far from this consummation, Lord Fitzjocelyn looked as triumphant as Don Quixote liberating Gines de Pasamonte. He and his father might have sat for illustrations of

> 'Youth is full of pleasance,
> Age is full of care,'

as they occupied the two ends of the dinner-table; the Earl concealing anxiety and vexation, under more than ordinary punctilious politeness; the Viscount doing his share of the honours with easy, winning grace and attention, and rattling on in

an under-tone of lively conversation with Aunt Catharine. Mary was silently amazed at her encouraging him; but perhaps she could not help spoiling him the more, because there was a storm impending. At least, as soon as she was in the drawing-room, she became restless and nervous, and said that she wished his father could see that speaking sternly to him never did any good; besides, it was mere inconsiderateness, the excess of chivalrous compassion.

Mrs. Ponsonby said she thought young men's ardour more apt to be against than for the poacher.

'I must confess,' said Aunt Catherine, with all the reluctance of a high-spirited Dynevor,—'I must confess that Louis is no sportsman! He was eager about it once, till he had become a good shot; and then it lost all zest for him, and he prefers his own vagaries. He never takes a gun unless James drives him out; and, oddly enough, his father is quite vexed at his indifference, as if it were not manly. If his father would only understand him!'

The specimen of that day had almost made Mrs. Ponsonby fear that there was nothing to understand, and that only dear Aunt Kitty's affection could perceive anything but amiable folly, and it was not much better when the young gentleman reappeared, looking very debonnaire, and, sitting down beside Mrs. Frost, said, in a voice meant for her alone—'Henry IV; Part II., the insult to Chief Justice Gascoigne. My father will presently enter and address you:

'O that it could be proved
That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle-cloths our children as they lay,—
Call'd yours Fitzjocelyn—mine, Frost Dynevor!'

'For shame, Louis! I shall have to call you Fitzjocelyn! You are behaving very ill.'

'Insulting the English constitution in the person of seven squires.'

'Don't, my dear! It was the very thing to vex your father that you should have put yourself in such a position.'

'Bearding the Northwold bench with a groundsel plume and a knitting-needle:

'With a needle for a sword, and a thimble for a hat,
Wilt thou fight a traverse with the Castle cat?'

The proper champion in such a cause, since 'What cat's averse to fish?"

'No, Louis dear,' said his aunt, struggling like a girl to keep her countenance; 'this is no time for nonsense. One would think you had no feeling for your father.'

'My dear aunt, I can't go to gaol like Prince Hal. I do assure you, I did not assault the bench with the knitting-pins. What am I to do?'

'Not set at nought your father's displeasure.'

'I can't help it,' said he, almost sadly, though half smiling.

'What would become of me if I tried to support the full weight? Interfering with institutions, ruining reputation, blasting bulwarks, patronizing poachers, vituperating venerated—'

'Quite true,' cried Aunt Catherine, with spirit. 'You know you had no business there, lecturing a set of men old enough to be your grandfathers, and talking them all to death, no doubt.'

'Well, Aunt Kitty, if oppression maddens the wise, what must it do to the foolish?'

'If you only allow that it was foolish—'

'No; I had rather know whether it was wrong. I believe I was too eager, and not respectful enough to the old squire: and, on reflection, it might have been a matter of obedience to my father, not to interfere with the prejudices of true-born English magistrates. Yes, I was wrong: I would have owned it sooner, but for the shell he fired over my head. And for the rest, I don't know how to repent of having protested against tyranny.'

There was something redeeming in the conclusion, and it was a comfort, for it was impossible to retain anger with one so gently, good-humouredly polite and attentive.

A practical answer to the champion was not long in coming. He volunteered the next day to walk to Northwold with Mrs. Frost and Mary, who wanted to spend the morning in selecting a house in Dynevor Terrace, and to be fetched home by-and-by, when Mrs. Ponsonby took her airing. Two miles seemed nothing to Aunt Catharine, who accepted her nephew's arm for love, and not for need, as he discoursed of all the animals that

might be naturalized in England, obtained from Mary an account of the llamas of the Andes, and rode off upon a scheme of an importation to make the fortune of Marksedge by a manufacture of Alpaca umbrellas.

Meantime, he must show the beautiful American ducks which he hoped to naturalize on the pond near the keeper's lodge: but, whistle and call as he would, nothing showed itself but screaming Canada geese. He ran round, pulled out a boat half full of water, and, with a foot on each side, paddled across to a bushy island in the centre,—but in vain. The keeper's wife, who had the charge over them, came out: 'Oh, my Lord, I am so sorry! They pretty ducks!'

'Ha! the foxes?'

'I wish it was, my Lord; but it is they poachers out at Marksedge that are so daring, they would come anywheres—and you see the ducks would roost up in the trees, and you said I was not to shut 'em up at night. My master was out up by Beech hollow; I heerd a gun, and looked out; I seen a man and a boy—I'd take my oath it was young Hodgekin. They do say Nanny Hodgekin, she as was one of the Blacketts, whose husband was transported, took in two ducks next morning to Northwold. Warren couldn't make nothing of it; but if ever he meets that Hodgekin again, he says he *shall* catch it!'

'Well, Mrs. Warren, it can't be helped—thank you for the good care you took of the poor ducks,' said Louis, kindly; and as he walked on through the gate, he gave a long sigh, and said, 'My

dainty ducks! So there's an end of them, and all their tameness!' But the smile could not but return. 'It is lucky the case does not come before the bench! but really that woman deserves a medal for coolness!'

'I suppose,' said Mary, 'she could have paid the fine with the price of the ducks.'

'Ah! the beauties! I wish Mr. Hodgekin had fallen on the pheasants instead! However, I am thankful he and Warren did not come to a collision about them. I am always expecting that, having made those Marksedge people thieves, murder will be the next consequence.'

A few seconds sufficed to bring the ludicrous back. 'How pat it comes! Mary, did you prime Mrs. Warren, or did Frampton?'

'I believe you had rather laugh at yourself than at any one else,' exclaimed his aunt, who felt baffled at having thrown away her compassion.

'Of course. One knows how much can be borne. Why, Mary, has that set you studying,—do you dissent?'

'I was thinking whether it is the best thing to be always ready to laugh at oneself,' said Mary. 'Does it always help in mending?'

"Don't care' came to a bad end,' said Louis; 'but on the other hand, care killed a cat—so there are two sides to the question.'

While Mary was feeling disappointed at his light tone, he changed it to one that was almost mournful. 'The worst of it is, that 'don't care' is my refuge. Whatever I do care about is always thwarted by Frampton or somebody, and being for ever thrown

over, I have only to fall as softly as I can.'

'You know, my dear,' said Mrs. Frost, 'that your father has no command of means to gratify you.'

'There are means enough for ourselves,' said Louis; 'that is the needful duty. What merely personal indulgence did I ever ask for that was refused me?'

'If that is all you have to complain of, I can't pity you,' said Mary.

'Listen, Mary. Let me wish for a horse, there it is! Let me wish for a painted window, we can't afford it, though, after all, it would not eat; but horses are an adjunct of state and propriety. So again, the parish feasted last 18th of January, because I came of age, and it was *proper*; while if I ask that our people may be released from work on Good Friday or Ascension Day, it is thought outrageous.'

'If I remember right, my dear,' interposed his aunt, 'you wanted no work to be done on any saint's-day. Was there not a scheme that Mr. Holdsworth called the cricket cure!'

'That may yet be. No one knows the good a few free days would do the poor. But I developed my plan too rapidly! I'll try again for their church-going on Good Friday.'

'I think you ought to succeed there.'

'I know how it will be. My father will ring, propound the matter to Frampton; the answer will be, 'Quite impracticable, my Lord,' and there will be an end of it.'

'Perhaps not. At least it will have been considered,' said Mary.

'True,' said Louis; 'but you little know what it is to have a Frampton! If he be a fair sample of prime ministers, no wonder Princes of Wales go into the opposition!'

'I thought Frampton was a very valuable superior servant.'

'Exactly so. That is the worst of it. He is supreme authority, and well deserves it. When la Grande Mademoiselle stood before the gates of Orleans calling to the sentinel to open them, he never stirred a step, but replied merely with profound bows. That is my case. I make a request, am answered, 'Yes, my Lord;' find no results, repeat the process, and at the fourth time am silenced with, 'Quite impracticable my Lord."

'Surely Frampton is respectful?'

'It is his very essence. He is a thorough aristocrat, respecting himself, and therefore respecting all others as they deserve. He respects a Viscount Fitzjocelyn as an appendage nearly as needful as the wyverns on each side of the shield; but as to the individual holding that office, he regards him much as he would one of the wyverns with a fool's-cap on.'

And with those words, Fitzjocelyn had sprung into the hedge to gather the earliest willow-catkins, and came down dilating on their silvery, downy buds and golden blossoms, and on the pleasure they would give Miss Faithfull, till Mary, who had been beginning to compassionate him, was almost vexed to think her pity wasted on grievances of mere random talk.

Warm and kindly was his greeting of his aunt's good old servant, Jane Beckett, whom Mary was well pleased to meet as

one of the kind friends of her childhood. The refinement that was like an atmosphere around Mrs. Frost, seemed to have extended even to her servants; for Jane, though she could hardly read, and carried her accounts in her head, had manners of a gentle warmth and propriety that had a grace of their own, even in her racy, bad grammar; and there was no withstanding the merry smile that twitched up one side of her mouth, while her eyes twinkled in the varied moods prompted by an inexhaustible fund of good temper, sympathy, and affection, but the fulness of her love was for the distant 'Master Oliver,' whose young nursery-maid she had been. Her eyes winked between tears and smiles when she heard that Miss Mary had seen him but five months ago, and she inquired after him, gloried in his prosperity, and talked of his coming home, with far less reserve than his mother had done.

Mary was struck, also, with the pretty, modest looks of the little underling, and remarked on them as they proceeded to the inspection of the next house.

'Yes,' said Louis, 'Charlotte is something between a wood sorrel and a five-plume moth. Tom Madison, as usual, shows exquisite taste. She is a perfect Lady of Eschalott.'

'Now, Louis!' said his aunt, standing still, and really looking annoyed, 'you know I cannot encourage any such thing. Poor little Charlotte is an orphan, and I am all the more responsible for her.'

'There's a chivalry in poor Tom—'

'Nonsense!' said his aunt, as if resolved not to hear him out, because afraid of herself. 'Don't say any more about it. I wish I

had never allowed of his bringing your messages.'

'Who set him down in the kitchen to drink a cup of beer?' said Louis, mischievously.

'Ah! well! one comfort is, that girls never care for boys of the same age,' replied Aunt Catharine, as she turned the key, and admitted them into No. 7; when Fitzjocelyn confused Mary's judgment with his recommendations, till Aunt Catharine pointing out the broken shutter, and asking if he would not have been better employed in fetching the carpenter, than in hectoring the magistrates, he promised to make up for it, fetched a piece of wood and James's tools, and was quickly at work, his Aunt only warning him, that if he lost Jem's tools she would not say it was her fault.

By the time Mary's imagination had portrayed what paper, paint, furniture, and habitation might make the house, and had discerned how to arrange a pretty little study in case of her father's return; he had completed the repair in a workmanlike manner, and putting two fingers to his cap, asked, 'Any other little job for me, ma'am?'

Of course, he forgot the tools, till shamed by Mary's turning back for them, and after a merry luncheon, served up in haste by Jane, they betook themselves to Number 8, where the Miss Faithfulls were seated at a dessert of hard biscuits and water, of neither of which they ever partook: they only adhered to the hereditary institution of sitting for twenty minutes after dinner with their red and purple doileys before them.

Mary seemed to herself carried back fourteen years, and to understand why her childish fancy had always believed Christiana's Mercy a living character, when she found herself in the calm, happy little household. The chief change was that she must now bend down, instead of reaching up, to receive the kind embraces. Even the garments seemed unchanged, the dark merino gowns, black silk aprons, white cap-ribbons, the soft little Indian shawl worn by the elder sister, the ribbon bow by the younger, distinctions that used to puzzle her infant speculation, not aware that the coloured bow was Miss Mercy's ensign of youth, and that its absence would have made Miss Salome feel aged indeed. The two sisters were much alike—but the younger was the more spare, shrivelled up into a cheery nonpareil, her bloom changed into something quite as fresh and healthful, and her blithe tripping step always active, except when her fingers were nimbly taking their turn. Miss Salome had become more plump, her cheek was smoother and paler, her eye more placid, her air that of a patient invalid, and her countenance more intellectual than her sister's. She said less about their extreme enjoyment of the yam, and while Mrs. Frost and Mary held counsel with Miss Mercy on servants and furniture, there was a talk on entomology going on between her and Fitzjocelyn.

It was very pretty to see him with the old ladies, so gently attentive, without patronizing, and they, though evidently doting on him, laughing at him, and treating him like a spoilt child. He insisted on Mary's seeing their ordinary sitting room, which

nature had intended for a housekeeper's room, but which ladylike inhabitants had rendered what he called the very 'kernel of the House Beautiful.' There were the stands of flowers in the window; the bullfinch scolding in his cage, the rare old shells and china on the old-fashioned cabinets that Mary so well remembered; and the silk patchwork sofa-cover, the old piano, and Miss Faithfull's arm chair by the fire, her little table with her beautiful knitting, and often a flower or insect that she was copying; for she still drew nicely; and she smiled and consented, as Louis pulled out her portfolios, life-long collections of portraits of birds, flowers, or insects. Her knitting found a sale at the workshop, where the object was well known, and the proceeds were diffused by her sister, and whether she deserved her name might be guessed by the basket of poor people's stores beside her chair.

Miss Mercy was well known in every dusky Northwold lane or alley, where she always found or made a welcome for herself. The kindly counsel and ready hand were more potent than far larger means without them.

Such neighbours were in themselves a host, and Mary and her mother both felt as if they had attained a region of unwonted tranquillity and repose, when they had agreed to rent No. 5, Dynevor Terrace, from the ensuing Lady-day, and to take possession when carpenters and upholsterers should have worked their will.

Louis was half-way home when he exclaimed, 'There! I have

missed Tom Madison a second time. When shall I ever remember him at the right time?'

Little did Louis guess the effect his neglect was taking! Charlotte Arnold might have told, for Mrs. Martha had brought in stories of his unsteadiness and idle habits that confirmed her in her obedience to Jane. She never went out alone in his leisure hours; never looked for him in returning from church—alas! that was not the place to look for him now. And yet she could not believe him such a very bad boy as she was told he had become.

CHAPTER V
THE TWO MINISTERS

'The creature's neither one nor t'other.
I caught the animal last night,
And viewed him o'er by candle-light;
I marked him well, 'twas black as jet.
You stare, but sirs, I've got him yet,
And can produce him.' 'Pray, sir, do;
I'll lay my life the thing is blue.'
'And I'll be sworn, that when you've seen
The reptile, you'll pronounce him green.'
'Well, then, at once to end the doubt,'
Replies the man, 'I'll turn him out;
And when before your eyes I've set him,
If you don't find him black, I'll eat him.'
He said—then, full before their sight
Produced the beast, and lo! 'twas white!

MERRICK.

Mrs. Ponsonby had seen in the tropics birds of brilliant hues, that even, whilst the gazer pronounced them all one beaming tint of gorgeous purple, would give one flutter, and in another light would flash with golden green or fiery scarlet. No less startling and unexpected were the aspects of Lord Fitzjocelyn,

'Every thing by starts, and nothing long;' sometimes absorbed in study, sometimes equally ardent over a childish game; wild about philanthropic plans, and apparently forgetting them the instant a cold word had fallen on them; attempting everything, finishing nothing; dipping into every kind of book, and forsaking it after a cursory glance; ever busy, yet ever idle; full of desultory knowledge, ranging through all kinds of reading and natural history, and still more full of talk. This last was perhaps his most decided gift. To any one, of whatever degree, he would talk, he could hardly have been silent ten minutes with any human being, except Frampton or his father, and whether deep reflections or arrant nonsense came out of his mouth, seemed an even chance, though both alike were in the same soft low voice, and with the same air of quaint pensive simplicity. He was exceedingly provoking, and yet there was no being provoked with him!

He was so sincere, affectionate, and obliging, that not to love him was impossible, yet that love only made his faults more annoying, and Mrs. Ponsonby could well understand his father's perpetual restless anxiety, for his foibles were exactly of the sort most likely to tease such a man as the Earl, and the most positively unsatisfactory part of his character was the insouciance that he displayed when his trifling or his wild projects had given umbrage. Yet, even here, she could not but feel a hope, such as it was, that the carelessness might be the effect of want of sympathy and visible affection from his father, whose very anxiety made him the more unbending; and that, what a worse temper might

have resented, rendered a good one gaily reckless and unheeding.

She often wondered whether she should try to give a hint—but Lord Ormersfield seemed to dread leading to the subject, although on all else that interested him he came to her as in old times, and seemed greatly refreshed and softened by her companionship.

An old friend and former fellow-minister had proposed spending a night at Ormersfield. He was the person whom the Earl most highly esteemed, and, in his own dignified way, he was solicitous that the household should be in more than usually perfect order, holding a long conference with the man of whom he was sure, Frampton. Would that he could have been equally sure of his son! He looked at him almost wistfully several times during breakfast, and at last, as they rose, gave an exhortation 'that he would be punctual to dinner at half-past seven, which would give him ample time, and he hoped he would be—' He paused for a word, and his son supplied it. 'On my good behaviour, I understand.' With that he walked off, leaving Lord Ormersfield telling Mrs. Ponsonby that it was the first introduction, as he had 'for various reasons' thought it undesirable to bring Fitzjocelyn early to London, and betraying his own anxiety as to the impression he might produce on Sir Miles Oakstead. His own perplexity and despondency showed themselves in his desire to view his son with the eyes of others, and he also thought the tenor of Fitzjocelyn's future life might be coloured by his friend's opinion.

Evening brought the guest. Mrs. Ponsonby was not well enough to appear at dinner, but Mary and Mrs. Frost, pleased to see an historical character, were in the drawing-room, enjoying Sir Miles's agreeable conversation, until they caught certain misgivings reflected in each other's looks, as time wore on and nothing had been seen or heard of Louis. The half-hour struck; the Earl waited five minutes, then rang the bell. 'Is Lord Fitzjocelyn come in?'

'No, my Lord.'

'Bring in the dinner.'

Mary longed to fly in search of him, and spare further vexation. She had assumed all an elder sister's feelings, and suffered for him as she used to do, when he was in disgrace and would not heed it. She heard no more of the conversation, and was insensible to the honour of going in to dinner with the late Secretary of State, as she saw the empty place at the table.

The soup was over, when she was aware of a step in the hall, and beside her stood a grey figure, bespattered with mud, shading his eyes with his hand, as if dazzled by the lights. 'I beg your pardon,' were the words, 'but I was obliged to go to Northwold. I have shot a rose-coloured pastor!'

'Shot him!' cried Mary. 'Was he much hurt?'

'Killed! I took him to Miss Faithfull, to be sketched before he is stuffed—'

A clearer view of the company, a wave of the hand from the Earl, and the young gentleman was gone. Next he opened the

library door, saying, 'Here's my pretty behaviour!'

'Louis! what is the matter?' cried Mrs. Ponsonby.

'I entirely forgot the right honourable, and marched into the dining-room to tell Aunt Catharine that I have killed a rose-coloured pastor.'

'Killed what?'

'A bird, hardly ever seen in England. I spied him in the fir-wood, went to Warren for a gun, brought him down, and walked on to the House Beautiful, where Miss Faithfull was enchanted. She will copy him, and send him to the bird-stuffer. I looked in to give directions, and old Jenyns was amazed; he never knew one shot here before, so early in the year too. He says we must send the account to the Ornithological—'

'Do you know how wet you are? exclaimed Mrs. Ponsonby, seeing rivulets dropping from his coat.

'I see. It rained all the way home, and was so dark, I could not see the footpath; and when I came in, my eyes were blinded by the light, and my head so full of the pastor, that the other minister never occurred to me, and remains under the impression that I have confessed a sacrilegious murder.'

'You really are incorrigible!' cried Mrs. Ponsonby. 'Why are you not dressing for dinner?'

'Because you are going to give me a cup of your tea.'

'Certainly not. I shall begin to think you purposely mortified your father, when you know he wanted you to be reasonable.'

'The lower species never show off well to strangers,' said

Fitzjocelyn, coolly; but, as he lighted his candle, he added, with more candour, 'I beg your pardon—indeed I did not do this on purpose, but don't say anything about appearances—there's something in me that is sure to revolt.'

So noiselessly that the moment was unknown, the vacant chair was filled by a gentleman irreproachably attired, his face glowing with exercise, or with what made him very debonnaire and really silent, dining rapidly and unobtrusively, and never raising his eyes even to his aunt, probably intending thus to remain all the evening; but presently Sir Miles turned to him and said, 'Pray satisfy my curiosity. Who is the rose-coloured pastor?'

Louis raised his eyes, and meeting a pleasing, sensible face, out beamed his arch look of suppressed fun as he answered, 'He is not at all clerical. He is otherwise called the rose-coloured ouzel or starling.'

'Whence is that other startling name?'

'From his attending flocks of sheep, on the same mission as jackdaws fulfil here—which likewise have an ecclesiastical reputation—

'A great frequenter of the church."

Fearing alike nonsense and ornithology, Lord Ormersfield changed the subject, and Louis subsided, but when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, Mrs. Ponsonby was surprised to see him taking a fair share, and no more, of the conversation. Some information had been wanted about the terms of labour in the mining districts, and Louis's visit to Illershall enabled him

to throw light on the subject, with much clearness and accuracy. Sir Miles had more literature than Lord Ormersfield, and was more used to young men; and he began to draw Fitzjocelyn out, with complete success. Louis fully responded to the touch, and without a notion that he was showing himself to the best advantage, he yielded to the pleasure, and for once proved of what he was capable—revealing unawares an unusual amount of intelligence and observation, and great power of expression. Not even his aunt had ever seen him appear so much like a superior man, and the only alloy was his father's, ill-repressed dread lest he should fall on dangerous ground, and commit himself either to his wildly philanthropical or extravagantly monarchical views, whichever might happen to be in the ascendant. However, such shoals were not approached, nor did Louis ever plunge out of his depth. The whole of his manner and demeanour were proofs that, in his case, much talk sprang from exuberance of ideas, not from self-conceit.

He was equally good in the morning: he had risen early to hunt up some information which Sir Miles wanted, and the clearness and readiness with which he had found it were wonderful. The guest was delighted with him; gave him a warm invitation to Oakstead, and on being left alone with Mrs. Ponsonby, whom he had formerly known, expressed his admiration of his friend's son—as a fine, promising young man, of great ability and originality, and, what was still more remarkable, of most simple, natural manners, perfectly free from conceit. He seemed the

more amazed, when he found, what he would hardly believe, that Fitzjocelyn was twenty-one, and had nearly finished his university education.

The liking was mutual. No sooner had Sir Miles departed, than Louis came to the library in a rapture, declaring that here was the refreshing sight of a man unspoilt by political life, which usually ate out the hearts of people.

Mary smiled at this, and told him that he was talking 'like an old statesman weary of the world.'

'One may be weary of the world beforehand as well as after,' said he.

'That does not seem worth while,' said Mary.

'No,' he said, 'but one's own immediate look-out may not be flattering, whatever the next turn may bring;' and he took up the newspaper, and began to turn it over. ''As butler—as single-handed man—as clerk and accountant.' There, those are the lucky men, with downright work, and some one to work for. Or, just listen to this!' and he plunged into a story of some heroic conduct during a shipwreck. While he was reading it aloud, with kindling eyes and enthusiastic interest, his father opened the door. 'Louis,' he said, 'if you are doing nothing, I should be obliged if you would make two copies of this letter.'

Louis glanced at the end of what he was reading, laid the paper down, and opened a blotting-book.

'You had better come into the study, or you will not write correctly.'

'I can write, whatever goes on.'

'I particularly wish this to be legible and accurate. You have begun too low down.'

Louis took another sheet.

'That pen is not fit to write with.'

'The pens are delusions,' said Louis, trying them round, in an easy, idle way: 'I never could mend a quill! How is this steel one? Refuses to recognise the purpose of his existence. Aunt Catherine, do you still forbid steel pens in your school? If so, it must be the solitary instance. How geese must cackle blessings on the inventor! He should have a testimonial—a silver inkstand representing the goose that laid the golden eggs,—and all writing-masters should subscribe. Ha! where did this pen come from? Mary, were you the bounteous mender! A thousand thanks.'

If Louis fretted his father by loitering and nonsense, his father was no less trying by standing over him with advice and criticisms which would have driven most youths beyond patience, but which he bore with constant good-humour, till his father returned to the study, when he exclaimed, 'Now, Mary, if you like to finish the wreck, it will not interrupt me. This is mere machine-work.'

'Thank you,' said Mary; 'I should like it better afterwards. Do you think I might do one copy for you? Or would it not suit Lord Ormersfield?'

Louis made polite demurs, but she overruled them and began.

He stretched himself, took up his Times, and skimmed the

remaining incidents of the shipwreck, till he was shamed by seeing Mary half-way down the first page, when he resumed his pen, overtook her, and then relapsed into talk, till Mrs. Frost fairly left the room, to silence him.

As the two copies were completed, Lord Ormersfield returned; and Mary, with many apologies, presented her copy, and received most gracious thanks and compliments on her firm, clear writing, a vexation to her rather than otherwise, since 'Fitzjocelyn' was called to account for dubious scrawls, errors, and erasures.

He meekly took another sheet, consoling himself, however, by saying, 'I warn you that pains will only make it Miss Fanny.'

'What do you mean?'

As if glad to be instigated, he replied, 'Did you never hear of my signature being mistaken by an ingenious person, who addressed his answer to 'Miss Fanny Jocelyn? Why, Fanny has been one of Jem's regular names for me ever since! I have the envelope somewhere as a curiosity. I'll show it to you, Mary.'

'You seem to be proud of it!' exclaimed his father, nearly out of patience. 'Pray tell me whether you intend to copy this creditably or not.'

'I will endeavour, but the Fates must decide. I can scrawl, or, with pains, I can imitate Miss Fanny; but the other alternative only comes in happy moments.'

'Do you mean that you cannot write well if you choose?'

'It is like other arts—an inspiration. Dogberry was deep when

he said it came by nature.'

'Then make no more attempts. No. That schoolgirl's niggle is worse than the first.'

'Fanny, as I told you,' said Louis, looking vacantly up in resigned despair, yet not without the lurking expression of amusement, 'I will try again.'

'No, I thank you. I will have no more time wasted.'

Louis passively moved to the window, where he exclaimed that he saw Aunt Catharine sunning herself in the garden, and must go and help her.

'Did you ever see anything like that?' cried Lord Ormersfield, thoroughly moved to displeasure.

'There was at least good-humour,' said Mrs. Ponsonby. 'Pardon me, there was almost as much to try his temper as yours.'

'He is insensible!'

'I think not. A word from Aunt Catharine rules him.'

'Though you counselled it, Mary, I doubt whether her training has answered. Henry Frost should have been a warning.'

Mary found herself blundering in her new copy, and retreated with it to the study, while her mother made answer: 'I do not repent of my advice. The affection between him and Aunt Catherine is the greatest blessing to him.'

'Poor boy!' said his father, forgetting his letters as he stood pondering. Mrs. Ponsonby seized the moment for reporting Sir Miles's opinion, but the Earl did not betray his gratification. 'First sight!' he said. 'Last night and this afternoon he is as unlike

as these are,' and he placed before her Louis's unlucky copies, together with a letter written in a bold, manly hand. 'Three different men might have written these! And he pretends he cannot write like this, if he please!'

'I have no doubt it is to a certain extent true. Yes, absolutely true. You do not conceive the influence that mood has on some characters before they have learnt to master themselves. I do not mean temper, but the mere frame of spirits. Even sense of restraint will often take away the actual power from a child, or where there is not a strong will.'

'You are right!' said he, becoming rigid as if with pain. 'He is a child! You have not yet told me what you think of him. You need not hesitate. No one sees the likeness more plainly than I do.'

'It is strong externally,' she said; 'but I think it is more external than real, more temperament than character.'

'You are too metaphysical for me, Mary;' and he would fain have smiled.

'I want you to be hopeful. Half the object would be attained if you were, and he really deserves that you should.'

'He will not let me. If I hope at one moment, I am disappointed the next.'

'And how? By nothing worse than boyishness. You confirm what my aunt tells me, that there has never been a serious complaint of him.'

'Never. His conduct has always been blameless; but every tutor has said the same—that he has no application, and allows himself

to be surpassed by any one of moderate energy!'

'Blameless conduct! How many fathers would give worlds to be able to give such a character of a son!'

'There are faults that are the very indications of a manly spirit,' began the Earl, impatiently. 'Not that I mean that I wish—he has never given me any trouble—but just look at James Frost, and you would see what I mean! There's energy in him—fire—independence; you feel there is substance in him, and like him the better for having a will and way of his own.'

'So, I think, has Louis; but it is so often thwarted, that it sinks away under the sense of duty and submission.'

'If there were any consistency or reason in his fancies, they would not give way so easily; but it is all talk, all extravagant notions—here one day, gone the next. Not a spark of ambition!'

'Ambition is not so safe a spark that we should wish to see it lighted.'

'A man must wish to see his son hold his proper station, and aim high! No one can be satisfied to see him a trifler.'

'I have been trying to find out why he trifles. As far as I can see, he has no ambition, and I do not think his turn will be for a life like yours. His bent is towards what is to do good to others. He would make an admirable country gentleman.'

'A mere farmer, idling away his time in his fields.'

'No; doing infinite good by example and influence, and coming forward whenever duty required it. Depend upon it, the benefit to others is the impulse which can work on Louis, not

personal ambition. Birth has already given him more than he values.'

'You may be right,' said Lord Ormersfield, 'but it is hard to see so many advantages thrown away, and what sometimes seems like so much ability wasted. But who can tell? he is never the same for an hour together.'

'May it not be for want of a sphere of wholesome action?'

'He is not fit for it, Mary. You know I resolved that the whole burthen of our losses should fall on me; I made it my object that he should not suffer, and should freely have whatever I had at the same age. Everything is cleared at last. I could give him the same income as I started in life with; but he is so reckless of money, that I cannot feel justified in putting it into his hands. Say what I will, not a vacation occurs but he comes to tell me of some paltry debt of ten or fifteen pounds.'

'He comes to tell you! Nay, never say he has no resolution! Such debts as those, what are they compared with other young men's, of which they do not tell their fathers?'

'If he were like other youths, I should know how to deal with him. But you agree with me, he is not fit to have a larger sum in his hands.'

'Perhaps not; he is too impulsive and inexperienced. If you were to ask me how to make it conduce to his happiness, I should say, lay out more on the estate, so as to employ more men, and make improvements in which he would take interest.'

'I cannot make him care for the estate. Last winter, when he

came of age, I tried to explain the state of affairs; but he was utterly indifferent—would not trouble himself to understand the papers he was to sign, and made me quite ashamed of such an exhibition before Richardson.'

'I wish I could defend him! And yet—you will think me unreasonable, but I do believe that if he had thought the welfare of others was concerned, he would have attended more.'

'Umph!'

'I am not sure that it is not his good qualities that make him so hard to deal with. The want of selfishness and vanity seem to take away two common springs of action, but I do believe that patience will bring out something much higher when you have found the way to reach it.'

'That I certainly have not, if it be there!'

'To cultivate his sympathies with you,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, hesitating, and not venturing to look into his face.

'Enough, Mary,' he said, hastily. You said the like to me once before.'

'But,' said Mrs. Ponsonby, firmly, '*here* there is a foundation to work on. There are affections that only need to be drawn out to make you happy, and him—not, perhaps, what you now wish, but better than you wish.'

His face had become hard as he answered, 'Thank you, Mary; you have always meant the best. You have always been kind to me, and to all belonging to me.'

Her heart ached for the father and son, understanding each

other so little, and paining each other so much, and she feared that the Earl's mind had been too much cramped, and his feelings too much chilled, for such softening on his part as could alone, as it seemed, prevent Louis from being estranged, and left to his naturally fickle and indolent disposition.

Mary had in the mean time completed her copies, and left them on the Earl's table; and wishing neither to be thanked nor contrasted with Louis, she put on her bonnet, to go in search of Aunt Catharine. Not finding her in the garden, she decided on visiting old Gervas and his wife, who had gladly caught at her offer of reading to them. The visit over, she returned by the favourite path above Ferny dell, gathering primroses, and meditating how to stir up Louis to finish off his rocky steps, and make one piece of work complete. She paused at the summit of them, and was much inclined to descend and examine what was wanting, when she started at hearing a rustling beneath, then a low moan and an attempt at a call. The bushes and a projecting rock cut off her view; but, in some trepidation, she called out, 'Is any one there?' Little did she expect the answer—

'It is I—Fitzjocelyn. Come!—I have had a fall.'

'I'm coming—are you hurt?' she cried, as with shaking limbs she prepared to begin the descent.

'Not that way,' he called; 'it gave way—go to the left.'

She was almost disobeying; but, recalling herself to thought, she hurried along the top till the bank became practicable, and tore her way through brake and brier, till she could return along

the side of the stream.

Horror-struck, she perceived that a heavy stone had given way and rolled down, bearing Louis with it, to the bottom, where he lay, ghastly and helpless. She called to him; and he tried to raise himself, but sank back. 'Mary! is it you? I thought I should have died here,' he said; as she knelt by him, exclaiming, 'Oh, Louis! Louis! what a dreadful fall!'

'It is my fault,' he eagerly interrupted. 'I am glad it has happened to no one else.'

'And you are terribly hurt! I must go for help! but what can I do for you? Would you like some water?

'Water! Oh! I have heard it all this time gurgling there!'

She filled his cap, and bathed his face, apparently to his great relief, and she ventured to ask if he had been long there.

'Very long!' he said. 'I must have fainted after I got the stone off my foot, so I missed Gervas going by. I thought no one else would come near. Thank God!'

Mary almost grew sick as she saw how dreadfully his left ankle had been crushed by a heavy stone; and her very turning towards it made him shudder, and say, 'Don't touch me! I am shattered all over.'

'I am afraid I should only hurt you,' she said, with difficulty controlling herself. 'I had better fetch some one.'

He did not know how to be left again; but the damp chilliness of his hands made her the more anxious to procure assistance, and, after spreading her shawl over him, she made

the utmost speed out of the thicket. As she emerged, she saw Lord Ormersfield riding with his groom, and her scream and sign arrested him; but, by the time they met, she could utter nothing but 'Louis!'

'Another accident!' was the almost impatient answer.

'He is dreadfully hurt!' she said, sobbing and breathless. 'His foot is crushed! He has been there this hour!'

The alarm was indeed given. The Earl seemed about to rush away without knowing whither; and she had absolutely to withhold him, while, summoning her faculties, she gave directions to Poynings. Then she let him draw her on, too fast for speaking, until they reached the spot where Louis lay, so spent with pain and cold, that he barely opened his eyes at their voices, made no distinct answers as to his hurts, and shrank and moaned when his father would have raised him.

Mary contrived to place his head on her lap, bathed his forehead and chafed his hands, while Lord Ormersfield stood watching him with looks of misery, or paced about, anxiously looking for the servants.

They came at last, all too soon for poor Louis, who suffered terribly in the transport, and gave few tokens of consciousness, except a cry now and then extorted by a rougher movement.

None of the household, scarcely even Mrs. Frost, seemed at first to be able to believe that Lord Fitzjocelyn could really have hurt himself seriously. 'Again!' was the first word of every one, for his many slight accidents were treated like crying 'Wolf;' but

Frampton himself looked perfectly pale and shocked when he perceived how the matter really stood; and neither he nor Lord Ormersfield was half so helpful as Mrs. Frost. The shock only called out her energy in behalf of her darling, and, tender as her nature was, she shrank from nothing that could soothe and alleviate his suffering; and it did infinitely comfort him, as he held her hand and looked with affection into her face, even in the extremity of pain.

Fain would others have been the same support; but his father, though not leaving him, was completely unnerved, and unable to do anything; and Mrs. Ponsonby was suffering under one of the attacks that were brought on by any sudden agitation. Mary, though giddy and throbbing in every pulse, was forced to put a resolute check on herself—brace her limbs, steady her voice, and keep her face composed, while every faculty was absorbed in listening for sounds from her cousin's room, and her heart was quivering with an anguish of prayer and suspense. Could she but hide her burning cheeks for one moment, let out one of the sobs that seemed to be rending her breast, throw herself on her knees and burst into tears, what an infinite relief it would be! But Mary had learnt to spend her life in having no self.

CHAPTER VI
FAREWELLS

What yet is there that I should do,
Lingering in this darksome vale?
Proud and mighty, fair to view,
Are our schemes, and yet they fail,
Like the sand before the wind,
That no power of man can bind.

ARNDT, Lyra Germanica.

Dynevor Terrace was said to have dark, damp kitchens, but by none who had ever been in No. 5, when the little compact fire was compressed to one glowing red crater of cinders, their smile laughing ruddily back from the bright array on the dresser, the drugget laid down, the round oaken table brought forward, and Jane Beckett, in afternoon trim, tending her geraniums, the offspring of the parting Cheveleigh nosegay, or gauffreing her mistress's caps. No wonder that on raw evenings, Master James, Miss Clara, or my young Lord, had often been found gossiping with Jane, toasting their own cheeks as well as the bread, or pinching their fingers in her gauffreing machine.

Yet, poor little Charlotte Arnold learnt that the kitchen could be dreary, when Mrs. Beckett had been summoned to

nurse Lord Fitzjocelyn, and she remained in sole charge, under Mrs. Martha's occasional supervision. She found herself, her household cares over all too soon, on a cold light March afternoon, with the clock ticking loud enough for midnight, the smoke-jack indulging in supernatural groans, and the whole lonely house full of undefined terrors, with an unlimited space of the like solitude before her. She would even have been glad to be sure of an evening of Mrs. Martha's good advice, and of darning stockings! She sat down by the round table to Mr. James's wristbands; but every creak or crack of the furniture made her start, and think of death-watches. She might have learnt to contemn superstition, but that did not prevent it from affecting her nerves.

She spread her favourite study, The Old English Baron, on the table before her; but the hero had some connexion in her mind with Tom Madison, for whom she had always coveted a battle-field in France. What would he feel when he heard how he had filled up his course of evil, being well-nigh the death of his benefactor! If any one ought to be haunted, it would assuredly be no other than Tom!

Chills running over her at the thought, she turned to the fire as the thing nearest life, but at the moment started at a hollow call of her own name. A face was looking in at her through the geraniums! She shrieked aloud, and clasped her hands over her eyes.

'Don't make a row. Open the door!'

It was such a relief to hear something unghostly, that she sprang to the door; but as she undid it, all her scruples seized her, and she tried to hold it, saying, 'Don't come in! You unfortunate boy, do you know what you have done?'

But Tom Madison was in a mood to which her female nature cowered. He pushed the door open, saying authoritatively, 'Tell me how he is!'

'He is as ill as he can be to be alive,' said Charlotte, actuated at once by the importance of being the repository of such tidings, and by the excitement of communicating them to one so deeply concerned. 'Mr. Poynings came in to fetch Mrs. Beckett—he would have no one else to nurse him—and he says the old Lord and Missus have never had their clothes off these two nights.'

'Then, was it along of them stones?' asked the lad, hoarsely.

'Yourself should know best!' returned Charlotte. 'Mr. Poynings says 'twas a piece of rock as big as that warming-pan as crushed his ankle! and you know—'

'I know nothing,' said Tom. 'Master kept me in all day yesterday, and I only heard just now at Little Northwold, where I've been to take home some knives of Squire Calcott's. Master may blow me up if he likes, but I couldn't come till I'd heard the rights of it. Is he so very bad?'

'They've sent up to London for a doctor,' pursued Charlotte. 'Mr. Walby don't give but little hope of him. Poor young gentleman, I'm sure he had a good word from high and low!'

'Well! I'm gone!' cried Tom, vehemently. 'Goodbye to you,

Charlotte Arnold! You'll never see me in these parts more!'

'Gone! Oh, Tom! what do you mean!'

'D'ye think I'll stay here to have this here cast in my face? Such a one as won't never walk the earth again!' and he burst out into passionate tears. 'I wish I was dead!'

'Oh, hush, Tom!—that is wicked!'

'May be so! I am all that's wicked, and you all turn against me!'

'I don't turn against you,' sobbed Charlotte, moved to the bottom of her gentle heart.

'You! you turned against me long ago. You've been too proud to cast one look at me these three months; and he forgot me; and that's what drew me on, when who cared what became of me—nor I neither now.'

'Don't speak that way! Don't say 'twas pride. Oh no! but I had to behave proper, and how should I keep up acquaintance when they said you went on—unsteady—'

'Aye, aye! I know how it is,' said poor Tom, with broken-down humility: 'I was not fit for you then, and I'm next thing to a murderer now; and you're like a white dove that the very fingers of me would grime. I'll take myself out of your way; but, let what will come of me, I'll never forget you, Charlotte.'

'Oh, wait, Tom! If I could but say it right!—Oh! I know there's something about biding patiently, and getting a blessing—if you'd only stop while I recollect it.'

'I thought I heard voices!' exclaimed Mrs. Martha, suddenly descending on them. 'I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourselves,

and the family in such trouble! Downright owdacious!'

'Be this your house?' said Tom, stepping before Charlotte, his dejection giving way instantly to rude independence.

'Oh, very well,' said Martha, with dignity. 'I know what to expect from such sort of people. The house and young woman is in my charge, sir; and if you don't be off, I'll call the police.'

'Never trouble your old bones!' retorted Tom.

'Good-bye to you, Charlotte;' and, as in defiance of Martha, he took her passive hand. 'You'll remember one as loved you true and faithful, but was drove desperate! Good-bye! I'll not trouble no one no more!'

The three concluding negatives with which he dashed out of the house utterly overwhelmed Charlotte, and made her perfectly insensible to Mrs. Martha's objurgations. She believed in the most horrible and desperate intentions, and sobbed herself into such violent hysterics that Miss Mercy came in to assist—imagined that the rude boy had terrified her, misunderstood her shamefaced attempts at explanation, and left her lying on her bed, crying quietly over her secret terrors, and over that first, strangely-made declaration of love. The white dove! she did not deserve it, but it was so poetical! and poor Tom was so unhappy! She had not time even to think what was become of her own character for wisdom and prudence.

The next morning, between monition and triumph, Martha announced that the good-for-nothing chap was off with a valuable parcel of Mr. Calcott's, and the police were after him;

with much more about his former idle habits,—frequenting of democratic oratory, public-houses, and fondness for bad company and strolling actors. Meek and easily cowed, Charlotte only opened her lips to say she knew that he had taken home Mr. Calcott's parcel. But this brought down a storm on her for being impertinent enough to defend him, and she sat trembling till it had subsided; and Martha retreating, left her to weep unrestrainedly over her wild fancies, and the world's cruelty and injustice towards one whom, as she was now ready to declare, she loved with her whole heart.

The bell rang sharply, knocks rattled at the front door! She was sure that Tom had been just taken out of the river! But instinct to answer the bell awoke at the second furious clattering and double pealing, which allowed no time for her to compose her tear-streaked, swollen face, especially as the hasty sounds suggested 'Mr. James.'

Mr. James it was, but the expected rebuke for keeping him waiting was not spoken. As he saw her sorrowful looks, he only said, low and softly, 'Is it so, Charlotte?' In his eyes, there could be but one cause for grief, and Charlotte's heart smote her for hypocrisy, when she could barely command her voice to reply, 'No, sir; my Lord has had a little better night.'

He spoke with unusual gentleness, as he made more inquiries than she could answer; and when, after a few minutes, he turned to walk on to Ormersfield, he said, kindly, 'Good-bye, Charlotte; I'll send you word if I find him better:' and the tears rose in his

eyes at the thought how every one loved the patient.

He was not wrong. There was everywhere great affection and sympathy for the bright, fantastic being whom all laughed at and liked, and Northwold and the neighbourhood felt that they could have better spared something more valuable.

The danger was hardly exaggerated even by Charlotte. The chill of the long exposure had brought on high fever; and besides the crushed ankle, there had been severe contusions, which had resulted in an acute pain in the side, hitherto untouched by remedies, and beyond the comprehension of the old Northwold surgeon, Mr. Walby. As yet, however, the idea of peril had not presented itself to Louis, though he was perfectly sensible. Severe pain and illness were new to him; and though not fretful nor impatient, he had not the stoicism either of pride or of physical indifference, put little restraint on the expression of suffering, and was to an almost childish degree absorbed in the present. He was always considerate and grateful; and his fond affection for his Aunt Catharine, and for good old Jane, never failed to show itself whenever they did anything for his relief; and they were the best of nurses.

Poor Lord Ormersfield longed to be equally effective; but he was neither handy nor ready, and could only sit hour after hour beside his son, never moving except to help the nurses, or to try to catch the slightest accent of the sufferer. Look up when Louis would, he always saw the same bowed head, and earnest eyes, which, as Mrs. Ponsonby told her daughter, looked as they did

when Louisa was dying.

The coming of the London surgeon was an era to which Louis evidently looked anxiously, with the iteration of sickness, often reckoning the hours till he could arrive; and when at last he came, there was an evident effort to command attention.

When the visit was over, and the surgeon was taking leave after the consultation, Fitzjocelyn calmly desired to know his opinion, and kept his eyes steadily fixed on his face, weighing the import of each word. All depended on the subduing the inflammatory action, in the side; and there was every reason to hope that he would have strength for the severe treatment necessary. There was no reason to despond.

'I understand—thank you,' said Louis.

He shut his eyes, and lay so still that Mrs. Frost trusted that he slept; but when his father came in, they were open, and Lord Ormersfield, bending over him, hoped he was in less pain.

'Thank you, there is not much difference.' But the plaintive sound was gone, the suffering was not the sole thought.

'Walby is coming with the leeches at two o'clock,' said Lord Ormersfield: 'I reckon much on them.'

'Thank you.' Silence again, but his face spoke a wish, and his aunt Catharine said, 'What, my dear?'

'I should like to see Mr. Holdsworth,' said Louis, with eyes appealing to his father.

'He has been here to inquire every day,' said the Earl, choosing neither to refuse nor understand. 'Whenever it is not too much

for you—'

'It must be quickly, before I am weaker,' said Louis. 'Let it be before Walby returns, father.'

'Whatever you wish, my dear—' and Lord Ormersfield, turning towards the table, wrote a note, which Mrs. Frost offered to despatch, thinking that her presence oppressed her elder nephew, who looked bowed down by the intensity of grief, which, unexpressed, seemed to pervade the whole man and weigh him to the earth: and perhaps this also struck Louis for the first time, for, after having lain silent for some minutes, he softly said, 'Father!'

The Earl was instantly beside him, but, instead of speaking, Louis gazed in his face, and sighed, as he murmured, 'I was meant to have been a comfort to you.'

'My dear boy—' began Lord Ormersfield, but he could not trust his voice, as he saw Louis's eyes moist with tears.

'I wish I had!' he continued; 'but I have never been anything but a care and vexation, and I see it all too late.'

'Nay, Louis,' said his father, trying to assume his usual tone of authority, as if to prove his security, 'you must not give way to feelings of illness. It is weak to despond.'

'It is best to face it,' said the young man, with slow and feeble utterance, but with no quailing of eye or voice. 'But oh, father! I did not think you would feel it so much. I am not worth it.'

For the Earl could neither speak nor breathe, as if smothered by one mighty unuttered sob, and holding his son's hand between

both his own, pressed it convulsively.

'I am glad Mrs. Ponsonby is here,' said Louis; 'and you will soon find what a nice fellow Edward Fitzjocelyn is, whom you may make just what—'

'Louis, my own boy, hush! I cannot bear this,' cried his father, in an accent wrung from him by excess of grief.

'I may recover,' said Louis, finding it his turn to comfort, 'and I should like to be longer with you, to try to make up—'

'You will. The leeches must relieve you. Only keep up your spirits: you have many years before you of happiness and success.'

The words brought a look of oppression over Louis's face, but it cleared as he said, 'I am more willing to be spared those years!'

His father positively started. 'Louis, my poor boy,' he said, 'is it really so? I know I have seemed a cold, severe father.'

'Oh, do not say so!' exclaimed Louis; 'I have deserved far less-idle, ungrateful, careless of your wishes. I did not know I could pain you so much, or I would not have done it. You have forgiven often, say you forgive now.'

'You have far more to forgive than I,' said the Earl.

'If I could tell you the half-waywardness, discontent, neglect, levity, wasted time—my treatment of you only three days back. Everything purposed—nothing done! Oh! what a life to bring before the Judge!' And he covered his face, but his father heard long-drawn sobs.

'Compose yourself, my dear boy,' he exclaimed, exceedingly

grieved and perplexed. 'You know there is no cause to despond; and even—even if there were, you have no reason to distress yourself. I can say, from the bottom of my heart, that you have never given me cause for real anxiety, your conduct has been exemplary, and I never saw such attention to religion in any young man. These are mere trifles—'

'Oh, hush, father!' exclaimed Louis. 'You are only making it worse; you little know what I am! If Mr. Holdsworth would come!'

'He could only tell you the same,' said his father. 'You may take every comfort in thinking how blameless you have been, keeping so clear of all the faults of your age. I may not have esteemed you as you deserved, my poor Louis; but, be assured that very few can have so little to reproach themselves with as you have.'

Louis almost smiled. 'Poor comfort that,' he said, 'even if it were true; but oh, father!' and there was a light in his eye, 'I had thought of 'He hath blotted out like a cloud thy transgressions.''

'That is right. One like you must find comfort in thinking.'

'There is comfort ineffable,' said Louis; 'but if I knew what I may dare to take home to myself! It is all so dim and confused. This pain will not let anything come connectedly. Would you give me that little manuscript book!'

It was given; and as the many loose leaves fell under Louis's weak hand, his father was amazed at the mass of copies of prayers, texts, and meditations that he had brought together;

the earlier pages containing childish prayers written in Aunt Catharine's hand. Louis's cheeks coloured at the revelation of his hidden life, as his father put them together for him.

'It is of no use,' he said, sadly; 'I cannot read. Perhaps my aunt would come and read this to me.'

'Let me,' said his father; and Louis looked pleased.

Lord Ormersfield read what was pointed out. To him it was a glimpse of a very new world of contrition, faith, hope, and prayer; but he saw the uneasy expression on Louis's face give place to serenity, as one already at home in that sphere.

'Thank you,' he said. 'That was what I wanted. Mr. Holdsworth will soon come, and then I don't want to say much more. Only don't take this too much to heart—I am not worth it; and but for you and the dear Terrace home, I can be very glad. If I may hope, the hope is so bright! Here there are so many ways of going wrong, and all I do always fails; and yet I always tried to do Him service. Oh, to have all perfect!—no failure—no inconsistency —no self! Can it be?'

'I always tried to do Him service!' Sadly and dejectedly as the words were spoken—mournful as was the contrast between the will and the result, this was the true cause that there was peace with Louis. Unstable, negligent, impetuous, and weak as he had been, the one earnest purpose had been his, guarding the heart, though not yet controlling the judgment. His soul was awake to the unseen, and thus the sense of the reality of bliss ineffable, and power to take comfort in the one great Sacrifice, came with

no novelty nor strangeness. It was a more solemn, more painful preparation, but such as he had habitually made, only now it was for a more perfect Festival.

His father, as much awestruck by his hopes as distressed by his penitence, still gave himself credit for having soothed him, and went to meet and forewarn the Vicar that poor Fitzjocelyn was inclined to despond, and was attaching such importance to the merest, foibles in a most innocent life, that he required the most tender and careful encouragement. He spoke in his usual tone of authoritative courtesy; and then, finding that his son wished to be left alone with Mr. Holdsworth, he went to the library to seek the only person to whom he could bear to talk.

'Mary,' he said, 'you were right. I have done so little to make that poor boy of mine happy, that he does not wish for life.'

Mrs. Ponsonby looked up surprised. 'Are you sure of what he meant?' she said. 'Was it not that this life has nothing to compare with that which is to come?'

'But what can be more unnatural?' said the Earl. 'At his age, with everything before him, nothing but what he felt as my harshness could so have checked hope and enjoyment. My poor Louis!' And, though eye and voice were steady and tearless, no words could express the anguish of his under-tone.

Mrs. Ponsonby adduced instances showing that, to early youth, with heart still untainted by the world, the joys of the Life Everlasting have often so beamed out as to efface all that earth could promise, but he could not be argued out of self-reproach

for his own want of sympathy, and spoke mournfully of his cold manner, sternness to small faults, and denial of gratifications.

Mary the younger could not help rising from her corner to say, 'Indeed, Louis said the other day that you never had denied him any personal indulgence.'

'My dear, he never asked for personal indulgences,' said the Earl. His further speech was interrupted by a quick step, a slow opening of the door, and the entrance of James Frost, who grasped his outstretched hand with a breathless inquiry.

'He is very ill—' Lord Ormersfield paused, too much oppressed to say more.

'No better? What did the London surgeon say? what?'

'He says there is no time to be lost in attacking the inflammation. If we can subdue that, he may recover; but the state of the ankle weakens him severely. I believe myself that he is going fast,' said the Earl, with the same despairing calmness; and James, after gazing at him to collect his meaning, dropped into a chair, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud.

Lord Ormersfield looked on as if he almost envied the relief of the outburst, but James's first movement was to turn on him, as if he were neglecting his son, sharply demanding, 'Who is with him?'

'He wished to be left with Mr. Holdsworth.'

'Is it come to this!' cried James. 'Oh, why did I not come down with him? I might have prevented all this!'

'You could not have acted otherwise,' said the Earl, kindly.

'Your engagement was already formed.'

'I could!' said James. 'I would not. I thought it one of your excuses for helping us.'

'It is vain to lament these things now,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'It is very kind in you to have come down, and it will give him great pleasure if he be able to see you.'

'If!' James stammered between consternation and anger at the doubt, and treated the Earl with a kind of implied resentment as if for injustice suffered by Louis, but it was affecting to see his petulance received with patience, almost with gratitude, as a proof of his affection for Louis. The Earl stood upright and motionless before the fire, answering steadily, but in an almost inward voice, all the detailed questions put by James, who, seated on one chair, with his hands locked on the back of the other, looked keenly up to him with his sharp black eyes, often overflowing with tears, and his voice broken by grief. When he had elicited that Louis had been much excited and distressed by the thought of his failings, he burst out, 'Whatever you may think, Lord Ormersfield, no one ever had less on his conscience!'

'I am sure of it.'

'I know of no one who would have given up his own way again and again without a murmur, only to be called fickle.'

'Yes, it has often been so,' meekly said Lord Ormersfield.

'Fickle!' repeated James, warming with the topic, and pouring out what had been boiling within for years. 'He was only fickle because his standard was too high to be reached! You thought

him weak!'

'There may be weakness by nature strengthened by principle,' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'True,' cried Jem, who, having taken no previous notice of her, had at first on her speaking bent his brows on her as if to extend to her the storm he was inflicting on poor, defenceless Lord Ormersfield, 'he is thought soft because of his easy way; but come to the point where harm displays itself, you can't move him a step farther—though he hangs back in such a quiet, careless fashion, that it seems as if he was only tired of the whole concern, and so it goes down again as changeableness.'

'You always did him justice,' said Lord Ormersfield, laying his hand on his cousin's shoulder, but James retreated ungraciously.

'I suppose, where he saw evil, he actually took a dislike,' said Mrs. Ponsonby.

'It is an absolute repugnance to anything bad. You,' turning again on the Earl, 'had an idea of his being too ready to run into all sorts of company; but I told you there was no danger.'

'You told me I might trust to his disgust to anything unrefined or dissipated. You knew him best.'

'There is that about him which men, not otherwise particular, respect as they might a woman or a child. They never show themselves in their true colours, and I have known him uphold them because he has never seen their worst side!'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.