YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

DYNEVOR TERRACE; OR, THE CLUE OF LIFE. VOLUME 2

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
THE TRYSTE

One single flash of glad surprise
Just glanced from Isabel's dark eyes,
Then vanished in the blush of shame
That as its penance instant came—
'O thought unworthy of my race!'

The Lord of the Isles.

As little recked Fitzjocelyn of the murmurs which he had provoked, as he guessed the true secret of his victory. In his eyes, it was the triumph of merit over prejudice, and Mrs. Frost espoused the same gratifying view, though ascribing much to her nephew's activity, and James himself, flushed with hope and success, was not likely to dissent.

Next they had to make their conquest available. Apart from Louis's magnificent prognostications, at the lowest computation, the head master's income amounted to a sum which to James appeared affluence; and though there was no house provided, it mattered the less since there were five to choose from in the Terrace, even if his grandmother had not wished that their household should be still the same. With Miss Conway's own fortune and the Terrace settled on herself, where could be any risk?

Would Lady Conway think so? and how should the communication be made? James at first proposed writing to her, enclosing a letter to Isabel; but he changed his mind, unable to satisfy himself that, when absent from restraint, she might not send a refusal without affording her daughter the option. He begged his grandmother to write to Isabel; but she thought her letter might carry too much weight, and, whatever might be her hopes, it was not for her to tell the young lady that such means were sufficient.

Louis begged to be the bearer of the letter. His aunt would certainly keep terms with him, and he could insure that the case was properly laid before Isabel; and, as there could be no doubt at present of his persuasive powers, James caught at the offer. The party were still at Beauchastel, and he devised going to his old quarters at Ebbscreek, and making a descent upon them from thence.

When he came to take up his credentials, he found James and his little black leathern bag, determined to come at least to Ebbscreek with him, and declaring it made him frantic to stay at home and leave his cause in other hands, and that he could not exist anywhere but close to the scene of action.

Captain Hannaford was smoking in his demi-boat, and gave his former lodgers a hearty welcome, but he twinkled knowingly with his eye, and so significantly volunteered to inform them that the ladies were still at Beauchastel, that James's wrath at the old skipper's impudence began to revive, and he walked off to the remotest end of the garden.

The Captain, remaining with Louis, with whom he was always on far more easy terms, looked after the other gentleman, winked again, and confessed that he had suspected one or other of them

might be coming that way this summer, though he could not say he had expected to see them both together.

'Mind, Captain,' said Louis,' it wasn't *I* that made the boat late this time last year.'

'Well! I might be wrong, I fancied you cast an eye that way. Then maybe it ain't true what's all over the place here.'

Louis pressed to hear what. 'Why, that when the French were going on like Robert Spear and them old times, he had convoyed the young lady right through the midst of them, and they would both have been shot, if my Lady's butler hadn't come down with a revolver, killed half-a-dozen of the mob, and rescued them out of it, but that Lord Fitzjocelyn had been desperately wounded in going back to fetch her bracelet, and Mr. Delaford had carried him out in his arms.'

'Well!' said Louis, coolly, without altering a muscle of his face, as the Captain looked for an angry negative.

'And when they got home,—so the story went,—Mr. Frost, the tutor, was so mad with jealousy and rage, that my Lady declared those moorings would not suit her no longer, but had let go, and laid her head right for Beauchastel.'

'Pray what was the young lady supposed to think of the matter?'

'Stories appeared to vary. One version said that Mr. Delaford had found him on his knees to her; and that my Lady had snatched her cruelly away, because she would not have her married before her own daughters, and looked over all the post, for fear there should be a letter for her. Another declared that Miss Conway would not have him at any price, and was set upon the poor tutor, and that he was lying dangerously ill of a low fever. —The women will have it so,' observed the Captain, 'the story's everywhere, except maybe in the parlour at Beauchastel, and I wouldn't wonder if Mrs. Mansell knew it all herself, for her maid has a tongue a yard long. I won't say but I thought there might be some grain of truth at the bottom—'

'And you shall hear it by-and-by, when I know what it is myself.'

'I'd not say I would have believed it the more if that fine gentleman had taken his oath of it—a fellow that ain't to be trusted,' observed the Captain.

This might have led to a revelation, if Louis had had time to attend to it; but he had pity on James's impatient misery, and proceeded to ask the loan of the boat. The tide would not, however, serve; and as waiting till it would was not to be endured, the two cousins set off to walk together through the woods, Louis beguiling the way by chaffing James, as far as he would bear, with the idea of Isabel's name being trifled with by the profane crowd.

He left James at the gate of the park, prowling about like a panther to try for a glimpse of Isabel's window, and feeding his despair and jealousy that Louis should boldly walk up to the door, while he, with so much better a right, was excluded by his unguarded promise to Lady Conway.

All the tumultuary emotions of his mind were endlessly repeated, and many a slow and pealing note of the church-clock had added fuel to his impatience, and spurred him to rush up to the door and claim his rights, before Louis came bounding past the lodge-gates, flourishing his cap, and crying, 'Hurrah, Jem! All right!'

'I'm going to her at once!' cried Jem, beginning to rush off; but Louis caught and imprisoned his arm.

'Not so fast, sir! You are to see her. I promise you shall see her if you wish it, but it must be in my aunt's way.'

'Let me go, I say!'

'When I have walked five miles in your service, you won't afford me an arm to help me back. I am not a horse with wings, and I won't be Cupid's post except on my own terms. Come back.'

'I don't stir till I have heard the state of the case.'

'Yes, you do; for all the sportsmen will be coming home, and my aunt would not for all the world that Mr. Mansell caught you on the forbidden ground.'

'How can you give in to such shuffling nonsense! If I am to claim Isabel openly, why am I not to visit her openly? You have yielded to that woman's crooked policy. I don't trust you!'

'When you are her son, you may manage her as you please. Just now she has us in her power, and can impose conditions. Come on; and if you are good, you shall hear.'

Drawing James along with him through the beechwood glades, he began, 'You would have been more insane still if you had guessed at my luck. I found Isabel alone. Mrs. Mansell had taken the girls to some juvenile fete, and Delaford was discreet enough not to rouse my aunt from her letters. I augured well from the happy conjunction.'

'Go on; don't waste time in stuff.'

'Barkis is willing, then. Is that enough to the point?'

'Fitzjocelyn, you never had any feelings yourself, and therefore you trifle with those of others.'

'I beg your pardon. It was a shame! Jem, you may be proud. She trusts you completely, and whatever you think sufficient, she regards as ample.'

'Like her! Only too like her. Such confidence makes one feel a redoubled responsibility.'

'I thought I had found something at which you could not grumble.'

'How does she look? How do they treat her?'

'Apparently they have not yet fed her on bread and water. No; seriously, I must confess that she looked uncommonly well and lovely! Never mind, Jem; I verily believe that, in spite of absence and all that, she had never been so happy in her life. If any description could convey the sweetness of voice and manner when she spoke of you! I could not look in her face. Those looks can only be for you. We talked it over, but she heeded no ways and means; it was enough that you were satisfied. She says the subject has never been broached since the flight from Northwold, and that Lady Conway's kindness never varies; and she told me she had little fear but that her dear mamma would be prevailed on to give sanction enough to hinder her from feeling as if she were doing wrong, or setting a bad example to her sisters. They know nothing of it; but Walter, who learnt it no one knows how, draws the exemplary moral, that it serves his mother right for inflicting a tutor on him.'

'Has she had my letter? Does she know I am here?'

'Wait! All this settled, and luncheon being ready, down came my Lady, and we played unconsciousness to our best ability. I must confess my aunt beat us hollow! Isabel then left us to our conference, which we conducted with the gravity of a tailor and an old woman making a match in Brittany.'

'You came out with that valuable improvable freehold, the Terrace, I suppose?'

'I told the mere facts! My aunt was rather grand about a grammar-school; she said even a curacy would sound better, and she must talk it over with Isabel. I gave your letter, conjuring her to let Isabel have it, and though she declared that it was no kindness, and would put the poor darling into needless perplexity, she was touched with my forbearance, in not having given it before, when I had such an opportunity. So she went away, and stayed a weary while: but when she came, it was worth the waiting. She said Isabel was old enough to know her own mind, and the attachment being so strong, and you so unexceptionable, she did not think it possible to object: she had great delight in seeing you made happy, and fulfilling the dictates of her own heart, now that it could be done with moderate prudence. They go to Scarborough in a fortnight, and you will be welcome there. There's for you!'

'Louis, you are the best fellow living! But you said I was to see her at once.'

'I asked, why wait for Scarborough?' and depicted you hovering disconsolately round the precincts. Never mind, Jem, I did not make you more ridiculous than human nature must needs paint a lover, and it was all to melt her heart. I was starting off to fetch you, when I found she was in great terror. She had never told the Mansells of the matter, and they must be prepared. She cannot have it transpire while she is in their house, and, in fact, is excessively afraid of Mr. Mansell, and wants to tell her story by letter. Now, I think, considering all things, she has a right to take her own way.'

'You said I was not to go without meeting her!'

'I had assented, and was devising how to march off my lunatic quietly, when the feminine goodnatured heart that is in her began to relent, and she looked up in my face with a smile, and said the poor dears were really exemplary, and if Isabel should walk to the beach and should meet any one there, she need know nothing about it.'

'What says Isabel?'

'She held up her stately head, and thought it would be a better return for Mr. Mansell's kindness to tell him herself before leaving Beauchastel; but Lady Conway entreated her not to be hasty, and protested that her fears were of Mr. Mansell's displeasure with her for not having taken better care of her—she dreaded a break, and so on,—till the end of it was, that though we agree that prudence would carry us off to-morrow morning, yet her ladyship will look the other way, if you happen to be on the southern beach at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. I suppose you were very headlong and peremptory in your note, for I could not imagine Isabel consenting to a secret tryste even so authorized.'

'I never asked for any such thing! I would not for worlds see her led to do anything underhand.'

'She will honour you! That's right, Jem!'

'Neither as a clergyman, nor as a Dynevor, can I consent to trick even those who have no claim to her duty!'

'Neither as a gentleman, nor as a human creature,' added Louis, in the same tone. 'Shall I go back and give your answer?'

'No; you are walking lame enough already.'

'No matter for that.'

'To tell you the truth, I can't stand your being with her again, while I am made a fool of by that woman. If I'm not to see her, I'll be off. I'll send her a note; we will cross to Bickleypool, and start by the mail-train this very night.'

Louis made no objection, and James hurried him into the little parlour, where in ten minutes the note was dashed off:—

> My Own Most Precious One!—(as, thanks to my most unselfish of cousins, I may dare to call you,)—I regret my fervency and urgency for an interview, since it led you to think I could purchase even such happiness by a subterfuge unworthy of my calling, and an ill return of the hospitality to which we owed our first meeting. We will meet when I claim you in the face of day, without the sense of stolen felicity, which is a charm to common-place minds. My glory is in the assurance that you understand my letter, approve, and are relieved. With such sanction, and with ardour before you like mine, I see that you could do no other than consent, and there is not a shadow of censure in my mind; but if, without compromising your sense of obedience, you could openly avow our engagement to Mr. Mansell, I own that I should feel that we were not drawn into a compromise of sincerity. What this costs me I will not say; it will be bare existence till we meet at Scarborough.
> *'Your own, J. E. F. D.'*

Having written this and deposited it in the Ebbscreek post-office, James bethought himself that his submissive cousin had thrown himself on the floor, with his bag for a pillow, trying to make the most of the few moments of rest before the midnight journey. Seized with compunction, James exclaimed, 'There, old fellow, we will stay to-night.'

'Thank you—' He was too sleepy for more.

The delay was recompensed. James was trying to persuade Louis to rouse himself to be revived by bread-and-cheese and beer, and could extort nothing but a drowsy repetition of the rhyme, in old days the war-cry of the Grammar-school against the present headmaster,—

'The Welshman had liked to be choked by a mouse,
But he pulled him out by the tail,'—

when an alarum came in the shape of a little grinning boy from Beauchastel, with a note on which James had nearly laid hands, as he saw the writing, though the address was to the Viscount Fitzjocelyn.

'You may have it,' said Louis. 'If anything were wanting, the coincidence proves that you were cut out for one another. I rejoice that the moon does not stoop from her sphere.'

'My Dear Cousin,—I trust to you to prevent Mr. F. Dynevor from being hurt or disappointed; and, indeed, I scarcely think he will, though I should not avail myself of the permission for meeting him so kindly intended. I saw at once that you felt as I did, and as I know he will. He would not like me to have cause to blush before my kind friends—to know that I had acted a deceit, nor to set an example to my sisters for which they might not understand the justification. I know that you will obtain my pardon, if needed; and to be assured of it, would be all that would be required to complete the grateful happiness of
'Isabel.'

The boy had orders not to wait; and these being seconded by fears of something that 'walked' in Ebbscreek wood after dark, he was gone before an answer could be thought of. It mattered the less, since Isabel must receive James's note early in the morning; and so, in fact, she did—and she was blushing over it, and feeling as if she could never have borne to meet his eye but for the part she had fortunately taken, when Louisa tapped at her door, with a message that Mr. Mansell wished to speak with her, if she were ready.

She went down-stairs still in a glow; and her old friend's first words were a compliment on her roses, so pointed, that she doubted for a moment whether he did not think them suspicious, especially as he put his hands behind his back, and paced up and down the room, for some moments. He then came towards her, and said, in a very kind tone, 'Isabel, my dear, I sent for you first, because I knew your own mother very well, my dear; and though Lady Conway is very kind, and has always done you justice,—that I will always say for her,—yet there are times when it may make a difference to a young woman whether she has her own mother or not.'

Isabel's heart was beating. She was certain that some discovery had been made, and longed to explain; but she was wise enough not to speak in haste, and waited to see how the old gentleman would finally break it to her. He blundered on a little longer, becoming more confused and distressed every minute, and at last came to the point abruptly. 'In short, Isabel, my dear, what can you have done to set people saying that you have been corresponding with the young men at Ebbscreek?'

'I sent a note to my cousin Fitzjocelyn last night,' said Isabel, with such calmness, that the old gentleman fairly stood with his mouth open, looking at her aghast.

'Fitzjocelyn! Then it is Fitzjocelyn, is it?' he exclaimed. 'Then, why could he not set about it openly and honourably? Does his father object? I would not have thought it of you, Isabel, nor of the lad neither!'

'You need not think it, dear Mr. Mansell. There is nothing between Lord Fitzjocelyn and myself but the warmest friendship.'

'Isabel! Isabel! why are you making mysteries? I do not wish to pry into your affairs. I would have trusted you anywhere; but when it comes round to me that you have been sending a private messenger to one of the young gentlemen there, I don't know what to be at! I would not believe Mrs. Mansell at first; but I saw the boy, and he said you had sent him yourself. My dear, you may mean, very rightly—I am sure you do, but you must not set people talking! It is not acting rightly by me,

Isabel; but I would not care for that, if it were acting rightly by yourself.' And he gazed at her with a piteous, perplexed expression.

'Let me call mamma,' said Isabel.

'As you will, my dear, but cannot you let the simple truth come out between you and your own blood-relation, without all her words to come between? Can't you, Isabel? I am sure you and I shall understand each other.'

'That we shall,' replied Isabel, warmly. 'I have given her no promise. Dear Mr. Mansell, I have wished all along that you should know that I am engaged, with her full consent, to Mr. Frost Dynevor.'

'To the little black tutor!' cried Mr. Mansell, recoiling, but recollecting himself. 'I beg your pardon, my dear, he may be a very good man, but what becomes of all this scrambling over barricades with the young Lord?'

Isabel described the true history of her engagement; and it was received with a long, low whistle, by no means too complimentary.

'And what makes him come and hide in holes and corners, if this is all with your mamma's good will?'

'Mamma thought you would be displeased; she insisted on taking her own time for breaking it to you,' said Isabel.

'Was there ever a woman but must have her mystery? Well, I should have liked him better if he had not given into it!'

'He never did!' said Isabel, indignant enough to disclose in full the whole arrangement made by Lady Conway's manoeuvres and lax good-nature. 'I knew it would never do,' she added, 'though I could not say so before her and Fitzjocelyn. My note was to tell them so: and look here, Mr. Mansell, this is what Mr. Dynevor had already written before receiving mine.'

She held it out proudly; and Mr. Mansell, making an unwilling sound between his teeth, took it from her; but, as he read, his countenance changed, and he exclaimed, 'Ha! very well! This is something like! So that's it, is it? You and he would not combine to cheat the old man, like a pair of lovers in a trumpery novel!'

'No, indeed!' said Isabel, 'that would be a bad way of beginning.'

'Where is the young fellow?—at Ebbscreek, did you say? I'll tell you what, Isabel,' with his hand on the bell, 'I'll have out the dogcart this minute, and fetch him home to breakfast, to meet my Lady when she comes down stairs, if it be only for the sake of showing that I like plain dealing!'

'Isabel could only blush, smile, look doubtful, and yet so very happy and grateful, that Mr. Mansell became cautious, lest his impulse should have carried him too far, and, after having ordered the vehicle to be prepared, he caught her by the hand, and detained her, saying, 'Mind you, Miss, you are not to take this for over-much. I'm afraid it is a silly business, and I did not want you to throw yourself away on a schoolmaster. I must see and talk to the man myself; but I won't have anything that's not open and above-board, and that my Lady shall see for once in her life!'

'I'm not afraid,' said Isabel, smiling. 'James will make his own way with you.'

Isabel ran away to excuse and explain her confession to Lady Conway; while Mr. Mansell indulged in another whistle, and then went to inform his wife that he was afraid the girl had been making a fool of herself; but it was not Lady Conway's fault that she was nothing worse, and he was resolved, whatever he did, to show that honesty was the only thing that would go down with him.

The boat was rocking on the green waves, and Louis was in the act of waving an adieu to deaf Mrs. Hannaford, when a huntsman's halloo caused James to look round and behold Mr. Mansell standing up in his dogcart, making energetic signals with his whip.

He had meant to be very guarded, and wait to judge of James before showing that he approved, but the excitement of the chase betrayed him into a glow of cordiality, and he shook hands with vehemence.

'That's right!—just in time! Jump in, and come home to breakfast. So you wouldn't be a party to my Lady's tricks!—just like her—just as she wheedled poor Conway. I will let her see how I esteem plain dealing! I don't say that I see my way through this business; but we'll talk it over together, and settle matters without my Lady.'

James hardly knew where he was, between joy and surprise. The invitation was extended to his companion; but Fitzjocelyn discerned that both James and Mr. Mansell would prefer being left to themselves; he had a repugnance to an immediate discussion with the one aunt, and was in haste to carry the tidings to the other: and besides, it was becoming possible that letters might arrive from the travellers. Actuated by all these motives, he declined the offer of hospitality, and rowed across to Bickleypool, enlightening the Captain on the state of affairs as far as he desired.

CHAPTER II
THE THIRD TIME

Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And you the toast of all the town,
I sighed and said, amang them a',
Ye are not Mary Morison.

BURNS.

Mrs. Frost and Louis were very merry over the result of Lady Conway's stratagems, and sat up indulging in bright anticipations until so late an hour, that Louis was compelled to relinquish his purpose of going home that night, but he persisted in walking to Ormersfield before breakfast, that he might satisfy himself whether there were any letters.

It was a brisk October morning, the sportsman's gun and whistle re-echoing from the hill sides; where here and there appeared the dogs careering along over green turnip-fields or across amber stubble. The Little Northwold trees, in dark, sober tints of brown and purple, hung over the grey wall, tinted by hoary lichen; and as Louis entered the Ormersfield field paths, and plunged into his own Ferny dell, the long grass and brackens hung over the path, weighed down with silvery dew, and the large cavernous web of the autumnal spider was all one thick flake of wet.

If he could not enter the ravine without thankfulness for his past escape, neither could he forget gratitude to her who had come to his relief from hopeless agony! He quickened his pace, in the earnest longing for tidings, which had seized him, even to heart sickness.

It was the reaction of the ardour and excitement that had so long possessed him. The victory had been gained—he had been obliged to leave James to work in his own cause, and would be no longer wanted in the same manner by his cousin. The sense of loneliness, and of the want of an object, came strongly upon him as he walked through the prim old solitary garden, and looked up at the dreary windows of the house, almost reluctant to enter, as long as it was without Mary's own serene atmosphere of sympathy and good sense, her precious offices of love, her clear steady eyes, even in babyhood his trustworthy counsellors.

Was it a delusion of fancy, acting on reflections in the glass, that, as he mounted the steps from the lawn, depicted Mary's figure through the dining-room windows? Nay, the table was really laid for breakfast—a female figure was actually standing over the tea-chest.

'A scene from the Vicar of Wakefield deluding me,' decided Louis, advancing to the third window, which was open.

It was Mary Ponsonby.

'Mary!'

'You here?—They said you were not at home!'

'My father!—Where?'

'He is not come down. He is as well as possible. We came at eleven last night. I found I was not wanted,' added Mary, with a degree of agitation, that made him conclude that she had lost her father.

One step he made to find the Earl, but too much excited to move away or to stand still, he came towards her, wrung her hand in a more real way than in his first bewildered surprise, and exclaimed in transport, 'O Mary! Mary! to have you back again!' then, remembering his inference, added, low and gravely, 'It makes me selfish—I was not thinking of your grief.'

'Never mind,' said Mary, smiling, though her eyes overflowed, 'I must be glad to be at home again, and such a welcome as this—'

'O Mary, Mary!' he cried, nearly beside himself, 'I have not known what to do without you! You will believe it now, won't you?'—oh, won't you?'

Mary would have been a wonderful person had she not instantly and utterly forgotten all her conclusions from Frampton's having declared him gone to Beauchastel for an unlimited time; but all she did was to turn away her crimson tearful face, and reply, 'Your father would not wish it now.'

'Then the speculations have failed? So much the better!'

'No, no! he must tell you—'

She was trying to withdraw her hand, when Lord Ormersfield opened the door, and in the moment of his amazed 'Louis!' Mary had fled.

'What is it? oh! what is it, father? cried Louis for all greeting, 'why can she say you would not wish it now?'

'Wish it? wish what?' asked the Earl, without the intuitive perception of the meaning of the pronoun.

'What you have always wished—Mary and me—What is the only happiness that life can offer me!'

'If I wished it a year ago, I could only wish it the more now,' said the Earl. 'But how is this?—I fully believed you committed to Miss Conway.'

'Miss Conway! Miss Conway!' burst out Louis, in a frenzy. 'Because Jem Frost was in love with her himself, he fancied every one else must be the same, and now he will be married to her before Christmas, so that's disposed of. As to my feeling for her a particle, a shred of what I do for Mary, it was a mere fiction—a romance, an impossibility.'

'I do not understand you, Louis. Why did you not find this out before?'

'Mrs. Ponsonby called it my duty to test my feelings, and I have tested them. That one is a beautiful poet's dream. Mary is a woman, the only woman I can ever love. Not an hour but I have felt it, and now, father, what does she mean?'

'She means, poor girl, what only her own scrupulous delicacy could regard as an objection, but what renders me still more desirous to have a right to protect her. The cause of our return—'

'How? I thought her father was dead.'

'Far worse. At Valparaiso we met Robson, the confidential agent. I learnt from him that Mr. Ponsonby had hardly waited for her mother's death to marry a Limenian, a person whom everything pointed out as unfit to associate with his daughter. Even Robson, cautious as he was, said he could not undertake to recommend Miss Ponsonby to continue her journey.'

'And this was all?' exclaimed Louis, too intent on his own views for anything but relief.

'All? Is it not enough to set her free? She acquiesced in my judgment that she could do no otherwise than return. She wrote to her father, and I sent three lines to inform him that, under the circumstances, I fulfilled my promise to her mother by taking her home. I had nearly made her promise that, should we find you about to form an establishment of your own, she would consider herself as my child; but—'

'Oh, father! how shall we make her believe you care nothing for her scruple? The wretched man! But—oh! where is she?'

'It does not amount to a scruple in her case,' deliberately resumed the Earl. 'I always knew what Ponsonby was, and nothing from him could surprise me—even such an outrage on feeling and decency. Besides, he has effectually shut himself out of society, and degraded himself beyond the power of interfering with you. For the rest, Mary is already, in feeling, so entirely my child, that to have the right to call her so has always been my fondest wish. And, Louis, the months I have spent with her have not diminished my regard. My Mary! she will have a happier lot than her mother!'

The end of the speech rewarded Louis for the conflict by which he had kept himself still to listen to the beginning. Lord Ormersfield had pity on him, and went in search of Mary; while he,

remembering former passages, felt that his father might be less startling and more persuasive, but began to understand what James must have suffered in committing his affairs to another.

The Earl found Mary in what had been her mother's sitting-room, striving to brace her resolution by recalling the conversation that had taken place there on a like occasion. But alas! how much more the heart had now to say! How much it felt as if the only shelter or rest in the desolate world was in the light of the blue eyes whose tender sunshine had been on her for one instant!

Yet she began firmly—'If you please, would you be so kind as to let me go to Aunt Melicent?'

'By-and-by, my dear, when you think fit.'

'Oh, then, at once, and without seeing any one, please!'

'Nay, Mary,' with redoubled gentleness, 'there is one who cannot let you go without seeing him. Mary, you will not disappoint my poor boy again. You will let him be an amendment in my scheme.'

'You have been always most kind to me, but you cannot really like this.'

'You forget that it has been my most ardent wish from the moment I saw you what only your mother's child could be.'

'That was before— No, I ought not! Yours is not a family to bring disgrace into.'

'I cannot allow you to speak thus. I knew your trials at home when first I wished you to be my son's wife, and my opinion is unchanged, except by my increased wish to have the first claim to you.'

'Lord Ormersfield,' said Mary, collecting herself 'only one thing. Tell me, as if we were indifferent persons, is this a connexion such as would do Louis any harm? I trust you to answer.'

He paced along the room, and she tried to control her trembling. He came back and spoke: No, Mary. If he were a stranger, I should give the same advice. Your father's own family is unexceptionable; and those kind of things, so far off—few will ever hear of them, and no one will attach consequence to them. If that be your only scruple, it does you infinite credit; but I can entirely remove it. What might be an injury to you, single, would be of comparatively little importance to him.'

'Miss Conway,' faltered Mary, who could never remember her, when in Louis's presence.

'A mere delusion, of our own. There was nothing in it. He calls you the only woman who can make him happy, as I always knew you were. He must explain all. You will come to him, my dear child.'

Mary resisted no more; he led her down stairs, and left her within the dining-room door.

'Mary, you will now—' was all Louis said; but she let him draw her into his arms, and she rested against his breast, as when he had come to comfort her in the great thunderstorm in auld lang-syne. She felt herself come at length to the shelter and repose for which her heart had so long yearned, in spite of her efforts, and as if the world had nothing more to offer of peace or joy.

'Oh, Mary, how I have wanted you! You believe in me now!'

'I am sure mamma would!' murmured Mary.

He could have poured forth a torrent of affection, but the suspicion of a footstep made her start from him; and the next moment she was herself, glowing, indeed, and half crying with happiness, but alarmed at her own agitation, and struggling to resume her common-place manner.

'There's your father not had a morsel of breakfast!' she exclaimed, hurrying back to her teacups, whose ringing betrayed her trembling hand. 'Call him, Louis.'

'Must I go?' said Louis, coming to assist in a manner that threatened deluge and destruction.

'Oh yes, go! I shall be able to speak to you when you come back.'

He had only to go into the verandah. His father was watching at the library window, and they wrung each other's hand in gladness beyond utterance.

Mary had seated herself in the solid stately chair, with the whole entrenchment of tea equipage before her. They knew it signified that she was to be unmolested; they took their places, and the Earl carved ham, and Louis cut bread, and Mary poured out tea in the most matter-of-fact manner, hazarding nothing beyond such questions as, 'May I give you an egg?'

Then curiosity began to revive: Louis ventured, 'Where did you land?' and his father made answer, 'At Liverpool, yesterday,' and how the Custom-house had detained them, and he had, therefore, brought Mary straight home, instead of stopping with her at Northwold, at eleven o'clock, to disturb Mrs. Frost.

'You would have found us up,' said Louis.

'You were sleeping at the Terrace?'

'Yes, I walked here this morning.'

'Then your ankle must be pretty well,' was Mary's first contribution to the conversation.

'Quite well for all useful purposes,' said Louis, availing himself of the implied permission to turn towards her.

'But, Louis,' suddenly exclaimed the Earl, 'did you not tell me something extraordinary about James Frost? Whom did you say he was going to marry?'

'Isabel Conway.'

Never was his love of electrifying more fully gratified! Lord Ormersfield was surprised into an emphatic interjection, and inquiry whether they were all gone mad.

'Not that I am aware of,' said Louis. 'Perhaps you have not heard that Mr. Lester is going to retire, and Jem has the school?'

'Then, it must be Calcott and the trustees who are out of their senses.'

'Do you not consider it an excellent appointment?'

'It might be so some years hence,' said the Earl. 'I am afraid it will tie him down to a second-rate affair, when he might be doing better; and the choice is the last thing I should have expected from Calcott.'

'He opposed it. He wanted to bring in a very ordinary style of person, from – School, but Jem's superiority and the general esteem for my aunt carried the day.'

'What did Ramsbotham and his set do?'

'They were better than could have been hoped; they gave us their votes when they found their man could not get in.'

'Ha? As long as that fellow is against Calcott, he cares little whom he supports. I am sorry that Calcott should be defeated, even for James's sake. How did Richardson vote?'

'He was doubtful at first, but I brought him over.'

Lord Ormersfield gave a quick, searching glance as he said,' James Frost did not make use of our interest in this matter.'

'Jem never did. He and my aunt held back, and were unwilling to oppose the Squire. They would have given it up, but for me. Father, I never supposed you could be averse to my doing my utmost for Jem, when all his prospects were at stake.'

'I should have imagined that James was too well aware of my sentiments to allow it.'

What a cloud on the happy morning!

Louis eagerly exclaimed: 'James is the last person to be blamed! He and my aunt were always trying to stop me, but I would not listen to their scruples. I knew his happiness depended on his success, and I worked for him, in spite of himself. If I did wrong, I can only be very sorry; but I cannot readily believe that I transgressed by setting the question before people in a right light. Only, whose fault soever it was, it was not Jem's.'

Lord Ormersfield had not the heart to see one error in his son on such a day as this, more especially as Mary peeped out behind the urn to judge of his countenance, and he met her pleading eyes, swimming in tears.

'No, I find no fault,' he kindly said. 'Young, ardent spirits may be excused for outrunning the bounds that their elders might impose. But you have not removed my amazement. James intending to marry on the grammar-school!—it cannot be worth 300 pounds a year.'

'Isabel is satisfied. She never desired anything but a quiet, simple, useful life.'

'Your Aunt Catharine delighted, of course? No doubt of that; but what has come to Lady Conway?'

'She cannot help it, and makes the best of it. She gave us very little trouble.'

'Ah! her own daughter is growing up,' said the Earl, significantly.

'Isabel is very fond of Northwold,' said Mary, feeling that Louis was wanting her sympathy. 'She used to wish she could settle there—with how little consciousness!'

'If I had to judge in such a case,' said Lord Ormersfield, thoughtfully, 'I should hesitate to risk a woman's happiness with a temper such as that of James Frost.'

'Oh, father!' cried Louis, indignantly.

'I suspect,' said Lord Ormersfield, smiling, 'that of late years, James's temper has been more often displayed towards me than towards you.'

'A certain proof how safe his wife will be,' returned Louis.

His father shook his head, and looking from one to the other of the young people, congratulated himself that here, at least, there were no perils of that description. He asked how long the attachment had existed.

'From the moment of first sight,' said Louis; 'the fine spark was lighted on the Euston Square platform; and it was not much later with her. He filled up her beau ideal of goodness—'

'And, in effect, all Lady Conway's pursuit of you threw them together,' said Lord Ormersfield, much entertained.

'Lady Conway has been their very best friend, without intending it. It would not have come to a crisis by this time, if she had not taken me to Paris. It would have been a pity if the catastrophe of the barricades had been all for nothing.'

Lord Ormersfield and Mary here broke out in amazement at themselves, for having hitherto been oblivious of the intelligence that had greeted them on their first arrival, when Frampton had informed them of Lord Fitzjocelyn's wound and gallant conduct, and his father had listened to the story like the fastening of a rivet in Miss Conway's chains, and Mary with a flush of unselfish pride that Isabel had been taught to value her hero. They both claimed the true and detailed account, as if they had hitherto been defrauded of it, and insisted on hearing what had happened to him.

'I dare say you know best,' said Louis, lazily. 'I have heard so many different accounts of late, that I really am beginning to forget which is the right one, and rather incline to the belief that Delaford brought a rescue or two with his revolver, and carried us into a fortress where my aunt had secured the windows with feather-beds—'

'You had better make haste and tell, that the true edition may be preserved,' said Mary, rallying her spirits in her eagerness.

'I have begun to understand why there never yet has been an authentic account of a great battle,' said Louis. 'Life would make me coincide with Sir Robert Walpole's judgment on history. All I am clear about is, that even a Red Republican is less red than he is painted; that Isabel Conway is fit to visit the sentinels in a beleaguered castle—a noble being— But oh, Mary! did I not long sorely after you when it came to the wounded knight part of the affair! I am more sure of that than of anything else!'

Mary blushed, but her tender heart was chiefly caring to know how much he had been hurt, and so the whole story was unfolded by due questioning; and the Earl had full and secret enjoyment of the signal defeat of his dear sister-in-law, the one satisfaction on which every one seemed agreed.

It was a melancholy certainty that Mary must go to Mrs. Frost, but the Earl deferred the moment by sending the carriage with an entreaty that she would come herself to fetch her guest. Mary talked of writing a note; but the autumn sun shone cheerily on the steps, and Louis wiled her into seating herself on the upper step, while he reclined on the lower ones, as they had so often been placed when this was his only way of enjoying the air. The sky was clear, the air had the still calm of autumn, the evergreens and the yellow-fringed elms did not stir a leaf—only a large heavy yellow plane leaf now and then detached itself by its own weight and silently floated downwards. Mary sat, without

wishing to utter a word to disturb the unwonted tranquillity, the rest so precious after her months of sea-voyage, her journey, her agitations. But Louis wanted her seal of approval to all his past doings, and soon began on their inner and deeper story, ending with, 'Tell me whether you think I was right, my own dear governess—'

'Oh no, you must never call me that any more.'

'It is a name belonging to my happiest days.'

'It was only in play. It reverses the order of things. I must look up to you.'

'If you can!' said Louis, playfully, slipping down to a lower step.

A tear burst out as Mary said, 'Mamma said it must never be that way.' Then recovering, she added, 'I beg your pardon, Louis; I was treating it as earnest. I think I am not quite myself to-day, I will go to my room!'

'No, no, don't,' he said; 'I will not harass you with my gladness, dearest.' He stepped in-doors, brought out a book, and when Mrs. Frost arrived to congratulate and be congratulated, she found Mary still on the step, gazing on without seeing the trees and flowers, listening without attending to the rich, soothing flow of Lope de Vega's beautiful devotional sonnets, in majestic Spanish, in Louis's low, sweet voice.

CHAPTER III
MISTS

Therefore thine eye through mist of many days
Shines bright; and beauty, like a lingering rose,
Sits on thy cheek, and in thy laughter plays;
While wintry frosts have fallen on thy foes,
And, like a vale that breathes the western sky,
Thy heart is green, though summer is gone by.

F. TENNYSON.

Happy Aunt Kitty!—the centre, the confidante of so much love! Perhaps her enjoyment was the most keen and pure of all, because the most free from self—the most devoid of those cares for the morrow, which, after besetting middle life, often so desert old age as to render it as free and fresh as childhood. She had known the worst: she had been borne through by heart-whole faith and love, she had seen how often frettings for the future were vain, and experienced that anticipation is worse than reality. Where there was true affection and sound trust, she could not, would not, and did not fear for those she loved.

James went backwards and forwards in stormy happiness. He had come to a comfortable understanding with old Mr. Mansell, who had treated him with respect and cordiality from the first, giving him to understand that Isabel's further expectations only amounted to a legacy of a couple of thousands on his own death, and that meantime he had little or no hope of helping him in his profession. He spoke of Isabel's expensive habits, and the danger of her finding it difficult to adapt herself to a small income; and though, of course, he might as well have talked to the wind as to either of the lovers, his remonstrance was so evidently conscientious as not to be in the least offensive, and Mr. Frost Dynevor was graciously pleased to accept him as a worthy relation.

All was smooth likewise with Lady Conway. She and Mr. Mansell outwardly appeared utterly unconscious of each other's proceedings, remained on the most civil terms, and committed their comments and explanations to Mrs. Mansell, who administered them according to her own goodnatured, gossiping humour, and sided with whichever was speaking to her. There was in Lady Conway much kindness and good-humour, always ready to find satisfaction in what was inevitable, and willing to see all at ease and happy around her—a quality which she shared with Louis, and which rendered her as warm and even caressing to 'our dear James' as if he had been the most welcome suitor in the world; and she often sincerely congratulated herself on the acquisition of a sensible gentleman to consult on business, and so excellent a brother for Walter. It was not falsehood, it was real amiability; and it was an infinite comfort in the courtship, especially the courtship of a Pendragon. As to the two young sisters, their ecstasy was beyond description, only alloyed by the grief of losing Isabel, and this greatly mitigated by schemes of visits to Northwold.

The marriage was fixed for the end of November, so as to give time for a little tranquillity before the commencement of James's new duties. As soon as this intelligence arrived, Mrs. Frost removed herself, Mary, and her goods into the House Beautiful, that No. 5 might undergo the renovations which, poor thing! had been planned twenty years since, when poor Henry's increasing family and growing difficulties had decided her that she could 'do without them' one year more.

'Even should Miss Conway not like to keep house with the old woman,' said she, by way of persuading herself she had no such expectation, 'it was her duty to keep the place in repair.'

That question was soon at rest: Isabel would be but too happy to be allowed to share her home, and truly James would hardly have attached himself to a woman who could not regard it as a privilege to be with the noble old lady. Clara was likewise to be taken home; Isabel undertook to complete her education, and school and tuition were both to be removed from the contemplation of the happy girl, whose letters had become an unintelligible rhapsody of joy and affection.

Isabel had three thousand pounds of her own, which, with that valuable freehold, Dynevor Terrace, James resolved should be settled on herself, speaking of it with such solemn importance as to provoke the gravity of those accustomed to deal with larger sums. With the interest of her fortune he meant to insure his life, that, as he told Louis, with gratified prudence, there might be no repetition of his own case, and his family might never be a burden on any one.

The income of the school, with their former well-husbanded means, was affluence for the style to which he aspired; and his grandmother, though her menus plaisirs had once doubled her present revenue, regarded it as the same magnificent advance, and was ready to launch into the extravagance of an additional servant, and of fitting up the long-disused drawing-room, and the dining-parlour, hitherto called the school-room, and kicked and hacked by thirty years of boys. She and Clara would betake themselves to their present little sitting-room, and make the drawing-room pleasant and beautiful for the bride.

And in what a world of upholstery did not the dear old lady spend the autumn months! How surpassingly happy was Jane, and how communicative about Cheveleigh! and how pleased and delighted in little Charlotte's promotion!

And Charlotte! She ought to have been happy, with her higher wages and emancipation from the more unpleasant work, with the expectation of one whom she admired so enthusiastically as Miss Conway, and, above all, with the long, open-hearted, affectionate letter, which Miss Ponsonby had put into her hand with so kind a smile. Somehow, it made her do nothing but cry; she felt unwilling to sit down and answer it; and, as if it were out of perverseness, when she was in Mrs. Martha's very house, and when there was so much to be done, she took the most violent fit of novel-reading that had ever been known; and when engaged in working or cleaning alone, chanted dismal ballads of the type of 'Alonzo the brave and the fair Imogens,' till Mrs. Martha declared that she was just as bad as an old dumbledore, and not worth half so much.

One day, however, Miss Ponsonby called her into her room, to tell her that a parcel was going to Lima, in case she wished to send anything by it. Miss Ponsonby spoke so kindly, and yet so delicately, and Charlotte blushed and faltered, and felt that she must write now!

'I have been wishing to tell you, Charlotte,' added Mary, kindly, 'how much we like Mr. Madison. There were some very undesirable people among the passengers, who might easily have led him astray; but the captain and mate both spoke to Lord Ormersfield in the highest terms of his behaviour. He never missed attending prayers on the Sundays; and, from all I could see, I do fully believe that he is a sincerely good, religions man; and, if he keeps on as he has begun, I think you are very happy in belonging to him.'

Charlotte only curtsied and thanked; but it was wonderful how those kind, sympathizing words blew off at once the whole mists of nonsense and fancy. Tom was the sound, good, religious man to whom her heart and her troth were given; the other was no such thing, a mere flatterer, and she had known it all along. She would never think of him again, and she was sure he would not think of her. Truth had dispelled all the fancied sense of hypocrisy and double-dealing: she sat down and wrote to Tom as if Delaford had never existed, and forthwith returned to be herself again, at least for the present.

Poor Mary! she might speak cheerfully, but her despatches were made up with a trembling heart. Louis and Mary missed the security and felicity that seemed so perfect with James and Isabel. In the first place, nothing could be fixed without further letters, although the Earl had tried to persuade Mary that her father had virtually forfeited all claim to her obedience, and that she ought to proceed

as if in fact an orphan, and secure herself from being harassed by him, by hastening her marriage. Of this she would not hear, and she was exceedingly grateful to Louis for abstaining from pressing her, as well as for writing to Mr. Ponsonby in terms against which no exception could be taken.

Till secure of his consent, she would not consider her engagement as more than conditional, nor consent to its being mentioned to any one. If Isabel knew it, that was James's fault. Even the Faithfull sisters were kept in ignorance; and she trusted thus to diminish the wrong that she felt her secrecy to be doing to Aunt Melicent, who was so much vexed and annoyed at her return, that she dreaded exceedingly the effect of the knowledge of her engagement. Miss Ponsonby was convinced that the news had been exaggerated, and insisted that but for Lord Ormersfield's dislike, it would have been further sifted; and she wrote to Mary to urge her coming to her to await the full tidings, instead of delaying among her father's avowed enemies.

Mary settled this point by mentioning her promise to Mrs. Frost to remain with her until her grandchildren should be with her; and Miss Ponsonby's correspondence ceased after a dry, though still kind letter, which did not make Mary more willing to bestow her confidence, but left her feeling in her honest heart as if she were dealing insincerely by Aunt Melicent.

The discretion and reserve rendered requisite by the concealment were such as to be very tormenting even to so gentle a temper as that of Louis, since they took from him all the privileges openly granted to the cousin, and scarcely left him those of the friend. She, on whose arm he had leant all last summer, would not now walk with him without an escort, and, even with Mrs. Frost beside her, shrank from Ormersfield like forbidden ground. Her lively, frank tone of playful command had passed away; nay, she almost shrank from his confidence, withheld her counsel, and discouraged his constant visits. He could not win from her one of her broad, fearless comments on his past doings; and in his present business, the taking possession of Inglewood, the choice of stock, and the appointment of a bailiff, though she listened and sympathized, and answered questions, she volunteered no opinions, ahe expressed no wishes, she would not come to see.

Poor Louis was often mortified into doubts of his own ability to interest or make her happy; but he was very patient. If disappointed one day, he was equally eager the next; he submitted obediently to her restrictions, and was remorseful when he forgot or transgressed; and they had real, soothing, comforting talks just often enough to be tantalizing, and yet to convince him that all the other unsatisfactory meetings and partings were either his own fault, or that of some untoward circumstance.

He saw, as did the rest, that Mary's spirits had received a shock not easily to be recovered. The loss of her mother was weighing on her more painfully than in the first excitement; and the step her father had taken, insulting her mother, degrading himself, and rending away her veil of filial honour, had exceedingly overwhelmed and depressed her; while sorrow hung upon her with the greater permanence and oppression from her strong self-control, and dislike to manifestation.

All this he well understood; and, reverent to her feeling, he laid aside all trifling, and waited on her mood with the tenderest watchfulness. When she could bear it, they would dwell together on the precious recollections of her mother; and sometimes she could even speak of her father, and relate instances of his affection for herself, and all his other redeeming traits of character; most thankful to Louis for accepting him on her word, and never uttering one word of him which she could wish unsaid.

What Louis did not see, was that the very force of her own affection was what alarmed Mary, and caused her reserve. To a mind used to balance and regulation, any sensation so mighty and engrossing appeared wrong; and repressed as her attachment had been, it was the more absorbing now that he was all that was left to her. Admiration, honour, gratitude, old childish affection, and caressing elder-sisterly protection, all flowed in one deep, strong current; but the very depth made her diffident. She could imagine the whole reciprocated, and she feared to be importunate. If the day was no better than a weary turmoil, save when his voice was in her ear, his eyes wistfully bent on her, the more carefully did she restrain all expression of hope of seeing him to-morrow, lest she should be exacting and detain him from projects of his own. If it was pride and delight to her to watch his

graceful, agile figure spring on horseback, she would keep herself from the window, lest he should feel oppressed by her pursuing him; and when she found her advice sought after as his law, she did not venture to proffer it. She was uncomfortable in finding the rule committed to her, and all the more because Lord Ormersfield, who had learnt to talk to her so openly that she sometimes thought he confounded her with her mother, used in all his schemes to appear to take it for granted that she should share with him in the managing, consulting headship of the house, leaving Louis as something to be cared for and petted like a child, without a voice in their decisions. These conversations used to make her almost jealous on Louis's account, and painfully recall some of her mother's apprehensions.

That was the real secret source of all her discomfort—namely, the misgiving lest she had been too ready to follow the dictates of her own heart. Would her mother have been satisfied? Had not her fondness and her desolation prevailed, where, for Louis's own sake, she should have held back! Every time she felt herself the elder in heart, every time she feared to have disappointed him, every time she saw that his liveliness was repressed by her mournfulness, she feared that she was letting him sacrifice himself. And still more did she question her conduct towards her father. She had only gradually become aware of the extent of the mutual aversion between him and the Earl; and Miss Ponsonby's reproaches awakened her to the fear that she had too lightly given credence to hostile evidence. Her affection would fain have justified him; and, forgetting the difficulties of personal investigation in such a case, she blamed herself for having omitted herself to question the confidential clerk, and having left all to Lord Ormersfield, who, cool and wary as he ordinarily was, would be less likely to palliate Mr. Ponsonby's errors than those of any other person. Her heart grew sick as she counted the weeks ere she could hear from Lima.

None of her troubles were allowed to interfere with Mrs. Frost's peace. Outwardly, she was cheerful and helpful; equable, though less lively. Those carpets and curtains, tables and chairs, which were the grand topics at the House Beautiful, were neither neglected nor treated with resigned impatience. Mary's taste, counsel, and needle did good service; her hearty interest and consideration were given to the often-turned volume of designs for bedsteads, sofas, and window-curtains; and Miss Mercy herself had hardly so many resources for making old furniture new. Many of her happiest half-hours with Louis were spent as she sewed the stiff slippery chintz, and he held the curtain rings, while Aunt Catharine went to inspect the workmen, and many a time were her cares forgotten, and her active spirits resumed, while Louis acted carpenter under her directions, and rectified errors of the workmen. It might not be poetical, but the French sky-blue paper, covered with silvery fern-leaves, that Louis took such pains to procure, and the china door-handles that he brought over in his pockets, and the great map which Mary pasted over the obstinate spot of damp in the vestibule, were the occasions of the greatest blitheness and merriment that they shared together. Much did they enjoy the prediction that James would not know his own house; greatly did they delight in sowing surprises, and in obtaining Aunt Catharine's never-failing start of well-pleased astonishment. Each wedding present was an event;—Mr. Mansell's piano, which disconcerted all previous designs; Lord Ormersfield's handsome plate; and many a minor gift from old scholars, delighted to find an occasion when an offering would not be an offence. Even Mr. Calcott gave a valuable inkstand, in which Mrs. Frost and Louis beheld something of forgiveness.

Isabel had expressed a wish that Mary should be one of her bridesmaids. A wedding was not the scene which poor Mary wished to witness at present; but she saw Louis bent on having her with him, and would not vex him by reluctance. He had also prevailed on his father to be present, though the Earl was much afraid of establishing a precedent, and being asked to act the part of father on future contingencies. There was only one bride, as he told Louis, whom he could ever wish to give away. However, that trouble was spared him by Mr. Mansell; but still Louis would not let him off, on the plea that James's side of the house should make as imposing a demonstration as possible.

Mrs. Frost was less manageable. Though warmly invited by the Conways, and fondly entreated by her grandson, she shook her head, and said she was past those things, and that the old mother always

stayed at home to cook the wedding dinner. She should hear all when Clara came home the next day, and should be ready for the happy pair when they would return for Christmas, after a brief stay at Thornton Conway, which Isabel wished James to see, that he might share in all her old associations.

All the rest of the party journeyed to London on a November day; and, in gaslight and gloom, they deposited Mary at her aunt's house in Bryanston Square.

Gaslight was the staple of Hymen's torch the next morning. London was under one of the fogs, of which it is popularly said you may cut them with a knife. The church was in dim twilight; the bride and bridegroom loomed through the haze, and the indistinctness made Clara's fine tall figure appear quite majestic above the heads of the other bridesmaids.

The breakfast was by lamp-light, and the mist looked lurid and grim over the white cake, and no one talked of anything but the comparative density of fogs; and Mr. Mansell's asthma had come on, and his speech was devolved upon Lord Ormersfield, to whom Louis had imprudently promised exemption.

What was worse, Lady Conway had paired them off in the order of precedence; and Louis was a victim to two dowagers, between whom he could neither see nor speak to Mary. He was the more concerned, because he had thought her looking depressed and avoiding his eye.

He tried to believe this caution, but he thought she was also eluding his father, and her whole air gave him a vague uneasiness. The whole party were to dine with Lady Conway; and, trusting in the meantime to discover what was on her spirits, he tried to resign himself to the order of the day, without a farther glimpse of her.

When the married pair took leave, Walter gave his sister a great hug, but had no perception of his office of handing her downstairs; and it was Fitzjocelyn who gave her his arm, and put her into the carriage, with an augury that the weather would be beautiful when once they had left the fog in London.

She smiled dreamily, and repeated, 'beautiful,' as though all were so beautiful already to her that she did not so much as perceive the fog.

James pressed his hand, saying, 'I am glad you are to be the one to be happy next.'

'You do not look so,' said Clara, earnestly.

The two sisters had come partly downstairs, but their London habits had restrained them from following to the street-door, as Clara had done; and now they had rushed up again, while Clara, with one foot on the staircase, looked in her cousin's face, as he tried to smile in answer, and repeated, 'Louis, I hoped you were quite happy.'

'I am,' said Louis, quickly.

'Then why do you look so grave and uneasy?'

'Louis!' said an entreating voice above, and there stood Mary—'Pray say nothing, but call a cab for me, please. No, I am not ill—indeed, I am not—but I cannot stay!'

'You look ill! It has been too much for you! Clara, take her—let her lie down quietly,' cried Louis, springing to her side.

'Oh no, thank you-no,' said Mary, decidedly, though very low; 'I told Lady Conway that I could not stay. I settled it with Aunt Melicent.'

'That aunt of yours—'

'Hush! No, it is for my own sake—my own doing. I cannot bear it any longer! Please let me go!'

'Then I will take you. I saw the brougham waiting. We will go quietly together.'

'No, that must not be.'

'I was thoughtless in urging you to come. The turmoil has been too much. My poor Mary! That is what comes of doing what I like instead of what you like. Why don't you always have your own way? Let me come; nay, if you will not, at least let Clara go with you, and come back.'

Mary roused herself at last to speak, as she moved downstairs—'You need not think of me; there is nothing the matter with me. I promised Aunt Melicent to come home. She is very kind—it is not that.'

'You must not tell me not to think. I shall come to inquire. I shall be with you the first thing tomorrow.'

'Yes, you must come to-morrow,' said Mary, in a tone he could not interpret, and a tight lingering grasp on his hand, as he put her into his father's carriage.

He stood hesitating for a moment as it drove off; then, instead of entering the house, walked off quickly in the same direction.

Clara had stood all the time like a statue on the stairs, waiting to see if she were wanted, and gazing intently, with her fingers clasped. When both were gone she drew a long breath, and nodded with her head, whispering to herself, in a grave and critical voice—'That is love!'

She did not see Fitzjocelyn again till nearly dinner-time; and, as he caught her anxious interrogating eye, he came to her and said, very low, 'I was not let in; Miss Ponsonby was engaged. Miss Mary lying down—I believe they never told her I was there.'

'It is all that aunt—horrid woman!'

'Don't talk of it now. I *will* see her to-morrow.'

Clara grieved for him whenever she saw him called on to exert himself to talk; and she even guarded him from the sallies of his young cousins. Once, when much music and talk was going on, he came and sat by her, and made her tell him how fondly and affectionately she had parted with her schoolfellows; and how some of her old foes had become, as she hoped, friends for life; but she saw his eye fixed and absent even while she spoke, and she left off suddenly. 'Go on,' he said, 'I like to hear;' and with a manifest effort he bent his mind to attend.

'Oh!' thought Clara, as she went up that night—'why will the days one most expects to be happy turn out so much otherwise? However, he will manage to tell me all about it when he and his father take me home to-morrow.'

CHAPTER IV
OUTWARD BOUND

The voice which I did more esteem
    Than music in her sweetest key—
Those eyes which unto me did seem
    More comfortable than the day—
Those now by me, as they have been,
Shall never more be heard or seen.

GEORGE WITHER.

In suspense and impatience, Fitzjocelyn awaited the end of his father's breakfast, that he might hasten to learn what ailed Mary. The post came in, vexing him at first merely as an additional delay, but presently a sound of dissatisfaction attracted his notice to the foreign air of two envelopes which had been forwarded from home.

'Hem!' said the Earl, gravely, 'I am afraid this fellow Ponsonby will give us some trouble.'

'Then Mary had heard from him!' cried Louis. 'She was keeping it from me, not to spoil the day. I must go to her this moment—'but pausing again, 'What is it? He cannot have had my letter!'

'No, but he seems to have anticipated it. Puffed up as they are about these speculations, he imagines me to have brought Mary home for no purpose but to repair our fortunes; and informs me that, in the event of your marriage, she will receive not a farthing beyond her mother's settlements. I am much obliged! It is all I ever thought you would receive; and but for me, it would have been in the bottom of some mine long ago! Do you wish to see what he says?'

Louis caught up the missive. It was the letter of a very angry man, too violent to retain the cold formality which he tried to assume. 'He was beholden to his lordship for his solicitude about his daughter. It was of a piece with other assistance formerly rendered to him in his domestic arrangements, for which he was equally obliged. He was happy to inform his lordship that, in this instance, his precautions had been uncalled for; and referred him to a letter which he would receive from Mr. Dynevor by the same mail, for an explanation of the circumstances to which he referred. He had been informed, by undoubted authority, that Lord Fitzjocelyn had done his daughter the honour of soliciting her hand. It might console his lordship to learn that, should the union take place, the whole of his property would be secured to Mrs. Ponsonby, and his daughter's sole fortune would be that which she inherited by her mother's marriage settlements. Possibly this intelligence might lead to a cessation of these flattering attentions.'

'Mrs. Ponsonby! he can mention her in the same sentence with Mary's mother!' said the Earl.

Louis turned pale as he read, and scarcely breathed as he looked up at his father, dreading that he might so resent the studied affronts as to wish to break off the connexion, and that he might have him likewise to contend with; but on that score he was set at rest. The Earl replied to his exclamation of angry dismay, 'It is little more than I looked for. It is not the first letter I have had from him. I find he has some just cause for offence. The marriage is less disgraceful than I had been led to believe. Here is Oliver Dynevor's testimony.'

Oliver Dynevor's was a succinct business-like letter, certifying his cousin that he had been mistaken in his view of the marriage. Dona Rosita de Guzman was an orphan of a very respectable family, who had come to spend the year before her intended noviciate at the house of an uncle. She was very young, and Mr. Dynevor believed that the marriage had been hastened by her relations making her feel herself unwelcome, and her own reluctance to return to her convent, and that she

might not be aware how very recently Mr. Ponsonby had become a widower. For his own part, he was little used to ladies' society, and could form no judgment of the bride; but he could assure Lord Ormersfield that she had been guilty of no impropriety; she was visited by every one; and that there was no reason against Mary Ponsonby associating with her.

'What could the clerk be thinking of?' exclaimed Louis.

'My first impression was not taken from the clerk. What I heard first, and in the strongest terms, was from the captain of a ship at Valparaiso. In fact, it was in the mouth of all who had known the family. Robson neither confirmed nor contradicted, and gave me the notion of withholding much from regard for his employer. He lamented the precipitation, but seemed willing to make excuses. He distinctly said, he would not take it on himself to recommend Miss Ponsonby's continuing her journey. He was right. If I had known all this, I should still have brought her home. I must write an apology, as far as her character is concerned; but, be that as it may, the marriage is atrocious—an insult—a disgrace! He could not have waited six weeks—'

'But I must go to Mary!' cried Louis, as though reproaching himself for the delay. 'Oh! that she should have forced herself to that wedding, and spared me!'

'I am coming with you,' said the Earl. 'She will require my personal assurance that all this makes no difference to me.'

'I am more afraid of the difference it may make to her,' said Louis. 'You have never believed how fond she is of her father.'

On arriving, they were ushered into the room where Miss Ponsonby was at breakfast, and a cup of tea and untasted roll showed where her niece had been. She received them with stiff, upright chillness; and to their hope that Mary was not unwell, replied—'Not very well. She had been over-fatigued yesterday, and had followed her advice in going to lie down.'

Louis began to imagine a determination to exclude him, and was eagerly beginning to say that she had asked him to come that morning—could she not see him? when the lady continued, with the same severity—'Until yesterday, I was not aware how much concern Lord Fitzjocelyn had taken in what related to my niece.'

At that moment, when Louis's face was crimson with confusion and impatience, the door was softly pushed ajar, and he heard himself called in low, hoarse tones. Miss Ponsonby was rising with an air of vexed surprise, but he never saw her, and, hastily crossing the room, he shut the door behind him, and followed the form that flitted up the stairs so fast, that he did not come up with her till she had entered the drawing-room, and stood leaning against a chair to gather breath. She was very pale, and her eyes looked as if she had cried all night, but she controlled her voice to say, 'I could not bear that you should hear it from Aunt Melicent.'

'We had letters this morning, dearest. Always thinking for me! But I must think for you. You can hardly stand—'

He would have supported her to the sofa, but she shrank from him; and, leaning more heavily on the chair, said—'Do you not know, Louis, all that must be at an end?'

'I know no such thing. My father is here on purpose to assure you that it makes not the slightest difference to him.'

'Yours! Yes! But oh, Louis!' with a voice that, in its faintness and steadiness, had a sound of anguish—'only think what I allowed him to make me do! To insult my father and his choice! It was a mistake, I know,' she continued, fearing to be unjust and to grieve Louis; 'but a most dreadful one!'

'He says he should have brought you home all the same—' began Louis. 'Mary, you must sit down!' he cried, interrupting himself to come nearer; and she obeyed, sinking into the chair. 'What a state you are in! How could you go through yesterday? How could you be distressed, and not let me know?'

'I could not spoil their wedding-day, that we had wished for so long.'

'Then you had the letter?'

'In the morning. Oh, that I had examined farther! Oh, that I had never come home!'

'Mary! I cannot hear you say so.'

'You would have been spared all this. You were doing very well without me—as you will—'

He cried out with deprecating horror.

'Louis!' she said, imploringly. 'Oh, Louis! do not make it harder for me to do right.'

'Why—what? I don't understand! Your father has not so much as heard how we stand together. He cannot be desiring you to give me up.'

'He—he forbids me to enter on anything of the sort with you. I don't know what made him think it possible, but he does. And—' again Mary waited for the power of utterance, 'he orders me to come out with Mrs. Willis, in the Valdivia, and it sails on the 12th of December!'

'But Mary, Mary! you cannot be bound by this. It is only fair towards him, towards all of us, to give him time to answer our letters.'

Mary shook her head. 'The only condition, he says, on which he could allow me to remain, would be if I were engaged to James Frost.'

'Too late for that, certainly,' said Louis; and the smile was a relief to both. 'At any rate, it shows that he can spare you. Only give him time. When he has my father's explanation—and my father is certain to be so concerned at having cast any imputation on a lady. His first thought was to apologize —'

'That is not all! I remember now that dear mamma always said she did not know whether he would consent. Oh! how weak I was ever to listen—'

'No, Mary, that must not be said. It was my presumptuous, inveterate folly that prevented you from trusting my affection when she might have helped us.'

'I don't know. It would have caused her anxiety and distress when she was in no state for them. I don't think it did,' said Mary, considering; 'I don't think she ever knew how much I cared.'

The admission could only do Louis's heart good, and he recurred to his arguments that her father could be persuaded by such a letter as he felt it in him to write.

'You do not know all,' said Mary. 'I could not show you his letter; but, from it and from my aunt, I better understand what impressions he has of you all, and how hopeless it is.'

'Tell me!'

She could not help giving herself the relief, when that most loving, sympathizing face was pleading with her to let him comfort her. She knew there was no fiery nor rancorous temper to take umbrage, and it was best for him to know the completeness of the death-blow.

'Oh, Louis! he fancies that my dear mother's fondness for her own family destroyed his domestic peace. He says their pride and narrow notions poisoned—yes, that is the word—poisoned her mind against him; and that was the reason he insisted on my being brought up here, and kept from you all.'

'But I don't understand why he let you come straight home to us, and live in Dynevor Terrace?'

'Then he was really sorry mamma was so ill; and—and for all that was past; I am sure he felt it was the last parting, and only wished to do anything that could make up to her. He freely gave her leave to go wherever she pleased, and said not a word against Northwold. It was one of her great comforts that he never seemed in the least vexed at anything she had done since we went home. Besides, my aunt says that he and Mr. Dynevor had some plans about James and me.'

'He will have that out of his head. He will come to reason. Fond of you, and sorry for the past, he will listen. No wonder he was in a passion; but just imagine what it would be to heed half Jem Frost says when he is well worked up!'

'Papa is not like James,' said Mary; 'things go deeper with him. He never forgets! I shall never forgive myself for not having spoken to Robson! I know his manner, seeming to assent and never committing himself, and I ought to have gone through anything rather than have taken such an accusation for granted.'

To hinder his pleading against her self-conviction, she re-opened her letter to prove the cruelty of the injustice. Mr. Ponsonby professed to have been unwilling to enter so speedily on the new tie; but to have been compelled, by the species of persecution which was exercised on Rosita, in order to make her return to her nunnery. He dwelt on her timid affection and simplicity, and her exceeding mortification at the slur which Mary had been induced to cast upon her; though, he said, her innocent mind could not comprehend the full extent of the injury; since the step his daughter had taken would, when known, seriously affect the lady's reception into society, in a manner only to be repaired by Mary's immediately joining them at Lima. He peremptorily indicated the ship and the escort—a merchant's wife, well known to her and charged her, on her duty, as the only proof of obedience or affection which could remedy the past, to allow no influence nor consideration whatever to detain her. 'You see?' said Mary.

'I see!' was the answer. 'Mary, you are right, you must go.'

The words restored her confiding look, and her face lost almost all the restless wretchedness which had so transformed it. 'Thank you,' she said, with a long breath; 'I knew you would see it so.'

'It will be a very pretty new style of wedding tour. Andes for Alps! No, Mary, you need not suspect me of trifling now! I really mean it, and, seriously, our going in that way would set this Rosita straight with society much more handsomely and effectually. Don't doubt my father—I will fetch him.'

'Stop, Louis! You forget! Did I not tell you that he expressly warns me against you? He must have heard of what happened before: he says I had prudence once to withstand, and he trusts to my spirit and discretion to—' Mary stopped short of the phrase before her eyes—to resist the interested solicitations of necessitous nobility, and the allurements of a beggarly coronet. 'No,' she concluded; 'he says that you are the last person whom he could think of allowing me to accept.' She hid her face in her hands, and her voice died away.

'Happily that is done,' said Louis, not yet disconcerted; 'but if you go, as I own you must, it shall be with a letter of mine, explaining all. You will plead for me—I think you will, and when he is satisfied that we are no rebels, then the first ship that sails for Peru—Say that will do, Mary.'

'No, Louis, I know my father.' She roused herself and sat upright, speaking resolutely, but not daring to look at him—'I made up my mind last night. It was weak and selfish in me to enter into this engagement, and it must be broken off. You must be left free—not bound for years and years.'

'Oh, Mary! Mary! this is too much. I deserved distrust by my wretched folly and fickleness last year, but I did not know what you were to me then—my most precious one! Can you not trust me! Do you not know how I would wait?'

'You would wait,' said poor Mary, striving with choking tears, 'and be sorry you had waited.'

'Are you talking madness, Mary? I should live for the moment to compensate for all.'

'You would waste your best years, and when the time came, you would still be young, and I grown into an old careworn woman. You would find you had waited for what was nothing worth!'

'How can you talk so!' cried Louis, wounded, 'when you know that to cherish and make up to you would be my dearest, fondest wish! No, don't shake your head! You know it is not a young rose and lily beauty that I love,—it is the honest, earnest glance in my Mary's eyes, the rest, and trust, and peace, whenever I do but come near her. Time can't take that away!'

'Pray,' said Mary, feebly, 'don't let us discuss it now. I know it is right. I was determined to say it to-day, that the worst might be over, but I can't argue, nor bear your kindness now. Please let it wait.'

'Yes, let it wait. It is depression. You will see it in a true light when you have recovered the shock, and don't fancy all must be given up together. Lie down and rest; I am sure you have been awake all night.'

'I may rest now I have told you, and seen you not angry with poor papa, nor with me. Oh! Louis—the gratitude to you, the weight off my mind!'

'I don't think any one could help taking the same view,' said Louis. 'It seems to me one of the cases where the immediate duty is the more clear because it is so very painful. Mary, I think that you are committing your way unto the Lord, and you know 'He shall bring it to pass.''

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and Miss Ponsonby, stiffly entering, said, 'Excuse my interruption, but I hope Lord Fitzjocelyn will be considerate enough not to harass you any longer with solicitations to act against your conscience.'

'He is not persuading me,' said Mary, turning towards her aunt a face which, through all her dejection, proved her peace in his support and approval, 'he is helping me.'

'Yes,' said Louis to the astonished aunt; 'since I have heard the true state of the case, I have been convinced that there is no choice for her but to go out, to repair the injustice so unfortunately done to this poor lady. It is a noble resolution, and I perfectly concur with her.'

'I am glad you think so properly, sir,' returned Miss Ponsonby. 'Lord Ormersfield seems quite of another opinion. He was desirous of seeing you, Mary; but I have been telling him I could permit no more interviews to-day.'

'Oh no,' said Mary, putting her hand to her head, as if it could bear no more; 'not to-day! Louis, tell him how it is. Make him forgive me; but do not let me see him yet.'

'You shall see no one,' said Louis, tenderly; 'you shall rest. There—' and, as if he had the sole right to her, he arranged the cushions, placed her on the sofa, and hung over her to chafe her hands, and bathe her forehead with eau de Cologne; while, as he detected signs of hasty preparations about the room, he added, 'Don't trouble yourself with your arrangements; I will see about all I can to help you. Only rest, and cure your head.'

'Say that one thing to me again,' whispered Mary, ere letting his hand go.

Again he murmured the words, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and He shall bring it to pass.'

Then Mary felt her hand pressed to his lips, but she would not unclose her burning eyes; she would fain sleep beneath the impress of that spell of patient confidence.

The gentle authority of his manner had deprived Miss Ponsonby of all notion of interfering. This 'odious, frivolous young man of fashion,' so entirely disconcerted her ideas of ardent lovers, or of self-interested puppies, that she gazed at him, surprised and softened; and when he looked at her anxiously, to judge whether Mary would find in her a kind comforter, her eyes were full of tears, and she said as they left the room, 'It must be a great relief to my poor Mary that you see it so sensibly. She has been suffering much in anticipation of this meeting.'

'Her unselfishness goes to one's heart!' said Louis, almost overcome. 'If she would but have spared herself yesterday!'

'Ah! she said she could not bear that you should be pained on your friend's wedding-day. I am much comforted to find that you appreciate the effort.'

This was not what Miss Ponsonby had intended to say, but there was something about the young man that touched her exceedingly; even when fresh from a very civil and decorous combat with his father, and a ripping-up of all the ancient grievances of the married life of their two relations, rendering wider than ever the breach between the houses of Ponsonby and Fitzjocelyn.

Lord Ormersfield came forward to learn whether he might see Mary, and was met by assurances that she must be kept as quiet as possible; upon which he took leave, making a stately bend of the head, while Louis shook Miss Ponsonby's hand, and said he should come to the door to inquire before the day was over.

'I never saw her so broken down,' he said, in answer to his father's compassionate but indignant exclamation as they walked home. 'Yesterday was a terrible strain on her.'

'I wish we had never brought her here,' said Lord Ormersfield. 'The aunt is your enemy, as she always was that of Mary's mother. She nearly avowed that she set her brother on making this premature prohibition.'

'I do not think she is unkind to Mary,' said Louis; 'I could be almost glad that the dear Aunt Kitty is spared all this worry. It would make her so very miserable.'

'Her influence would be in your favour, whereas this woman is perfectly unreasonable. She justifies her brother in everything, and is actually working on that poor girl's scruples of conscience to send her out by this ship.'

'Nay,' said Louis, 'after hearing her father's letter, I do not see that it is possible for her to do otherwise.'

Lord Ormersfield hastily turned to look at his son's countenance,—it was flushed and melancholy, but fully in earnest; nevertheless the Earl would not believe his ears, and made a sound as if he had missed the words.

'I am grieved enough to say so,' repeated Louis; 'but, as he puts it, I do not see how Mary can refuse to obey him.'

'I declare, Fitzjocelyn,' exclaimed his father, with some anger, 'any one who takes the trouble, may talk you into anything imaginable!'

'Not into believing her wrong.'

'I did not think you so weak!' continued his father. 'It is the very case where a woman's exaggerated notions of right may be wrought on to do her infinite harm! They become quite ridiculous without some one to show that such things may be carried too far! I must say, I did expect strength of mind and common sense for your own interest. I esteem it a mere matter of duty to put an end to such nonsense.'

'My dear father,' said Louis, 'it was Mary and her mother who first taught me my own obligations. I should never dare to interfere with any one's filial duty—above all, where my own happiness is so deeply concerned.'

'Yours! I am not talking of yours. What is to become of Mary with such a man as that? and this Spanish woman, who, if she does not deserve all that has been said of her, no doubt soon will?—no education, no principles, breaking out of her convent! And you let yourself be drawn into calling it Mary's duty to run into such company as that! You are not fit to protect her.'

'From all I have heard of Mr. Ponsonby, I am convinced he has too much regard for his daughter to summon her into any improper society. I do not hear that he has been to blame as a father. I wish I could see it as you do; but not only do I know that Mary could not have an instant's peace under the sense of his displeasure, but it seems to me that this is one of the express commands which could not be disobeyed without setting aside the law of Heaven. If I gave my voice against it, I should fear to bring on us a curse, and not a blessing.'

'Fitzjocelyn, I always knew how it would be if you took to being one of those very good people. Nothing is so weak, and yet so unmanageable. Any rational being would look on it as a duty to rescue her from such a man as that; but that is too ordinary a virtue for you. You must go higher.'

Louis made no answer. Never had his father pained him so much, and he could ill brook additional suffering.

'However,' said the Earl, recovering, 'I shall see her. I shall put the matter in a just light. She is a sensible girl, and will understand me when she has recovered the shock. On one head I shall give warning. She must choose between us and her father. If she persist in going out to join this establishment, I will have your engagement given up.'

'Father! father! you would not be so cruel!'

'I know what I am saying. Am I to allow you to be encumbered all the time she is on the other side of the world, waiting Ponsonby's pleasure, to come home at last, in ten or fifteen years' time, worried and fretted to death, like her poor mother? No, Louis, it must be now or never.'

'You are only saying what I would not hear from her. She has been insisting on breaking off, and all my hope was in you.'

'She has? That is like her! The only reasonable thing I have heard yet.'

'Then you will not help me? You, who I thought loved her like your own daughter, and wished for nothing so much!'

'So I might; but that is a different thing from allowing you to wear out your life in a hopeless engagement. If she cast off her family, nothing could be better, otherwise, I would never connect you with them.'

It did not occur to his lordship that he was straining pretty hard the filial duty of his own son, while he was arguing that Mary should snap asunder the same towards her father.

The fresh discomfiture made poor Louis feel utterly dejected and almost hopeless, but lest silence should seem to consent, he said, 'When you see Mary, you will be willing for me to do anything rather than lose what is so dear and so noble.'

'Yes, I will see Mary. We will settle it between us, and have it right yet; but we must give her to-day to think it over, and get over the first shock. When she has had a little time for reflection, a few cool arguments from me will bring her to reason.'

So it was all to be settled over Louis's passive head; and thus satisfied, his father, who was exceedingly sorry for him, forgot his anger, and offered to go home alone as Clara's escort, promising to return on the Monday, to bring the full force of his remonstrances to bear down Mary's scruples.

Lord Ormersfield believed Clara too much of a child to have any ideas on what was passing; and had it depended on him, she must have gone home in an agony of ignorance on the cause of her cousin's trouble, but Louis came with them to the station, and contrived to say to her while walking up and down the platform, 'Her father is bitter against me. He has sent for her, and she is going!'

Clara looked mutely in his face, with a sort of inquiring dismay.

'You'll hear all about it when my father has told Aunt Kitty,' said Louis. 'Clara,'—he paused, and spoke lower—'tell her I see what is right now; tell her to—to pray for me, that I may not be talked into tampering with my conscience or with hers. Don't let it dwell on you or on my aunt,' he added, cheerfully. 'No, it won't; you will be thinking of Jem and Isabel.' And as his father came up, his last words were, in his own bright tone, 'Tell granny from me that giraffes ought always to be seen by gaslight.'

Clara's countenance returned him a look of sorrowful reproach, for thinking her capable of being amused when he was in distress; and she sat in silent musings all the way home—pondering over his words, speculating on his future, wondering what Mary felt, and becoming blunt and almost angry, when her grave escort in the opposite corner consulted civility by addressing some indifferent remark to her, as if, she said to herself, 'she were no better than a stuffed giraffe, and knew and cared nothing about anybody!'

He might have guessed that she understood something by the sudden way in which she curtailed her grandmother's rapturous and affectionate inquiries about the wedding, ran upstairs on the plea of taking off her bonnet, and appeared no more till he had gone home; when, coming down, she found granny, with tearful eyes, lamenting that Mr. Ponsonby was so harsh and unkind, and fully possessed with the rational view which her nephew had been impressing on her.

'Ha!' said Clara, 'that is what Louis meant. I'll tell you what, granny, Lord Ormersfield never knew in his life what was right, half as well as Louis does. I wish he would let him alone. If Mary is good enough for him, she will go out and wait till her father comes round. If she is not, she won't; and Lord Ormersfield has no business to tease her.'

'Then you would like her to go out?' said Mrs. Frost.

'I like anything that makes Louis happy. I thought it would have been delightful to have him married—one could be so much more at Ormersfield, and Mary would be so nice; but as to their being over-persuaded, and thinking themselves half wrong! why, they would never be happy in their lives; and Louis would be always half-asleep or half mad, to save himself the trouble of thinking. But he'll never do it!'

On the Saturday morning Mary's healthy and vigorous spirit had quite resumed its tone. The worst was over when she had inflicted the stroke on Louis, and seen him ready to support instead of adding to her distress. He found her pale and sorrowful, but calm, collected, and ready for exertion. By tacit consent, they avoided all discussion of the terms on which they were to stand. Greatly touched by her consideration for him on the wedding-day, he would not torture her with pleadings, and was only too grateful for every service that he was allowed to render her without protest, as still her chief and most natural dependence.

She did not scruple to allow him to assist her; she understood the gratification to him, and it was only too sweet to her to be still his object. She could trust him not to presume, his approval made her almost happy; and yet it was hard that his very patience and acquiescence should endear him so much as to render the parting so much the more painful. The day was spent in business. He facilitated much that would have been arduous for two solitary women, and did little all day but go about for Mary, fulfilling the commissions which her father had sent home; and though he did it with a sore heart, it was still a privilege to be at work for Mary.

Rigid as Miss Ponsonby was, she began to be touched. There was a doubt as to his admission when he came on Sunday morning—'Mistress saw no one on Sunday,' but when his name was carried in, Miss Ponsonby could not withstand Mary's face. She took care to tell him her rule; but that, considering the circumstances, she had made an exception in his favour, on the understanding that nothing was to break in upon the observance of the Sabbath.

Louis bent his head, with the heartfelt answer that he was but too glad to be permitted to go to church once more with Mary.

Aunt Melicent's Sunday was not quite their own Sunday, but all that they could desire was to be quietly together, and restricted from all those agitating topics and arrangements. It was a day of rest, and they valued it accordingly. In fact, Miss Ponsonby found the young Lord so good and inoffensive, that she broke her morning's resolution, invited him to partake of the cold dinner, let him go to church with them again in the evening, and remain to tea; and when he took leave, she expressed such surprised admiration at his having come and gone on his own feet, his church-going, and his conduct generally, that Mary could not help suspecting that her good aunt had supposed that he had never heard of the Fourth Commandment.

Miss Ponsonby was one of the many good women given to hard judgments on slight grounds, and to sudden reactions still more violent; and the sight of Lord Fitzjocelyn spending a quiet, respectable Sunday, had such an effect on her, that she transgressed her own mandate, and broached 'the distressing subject.'

'Mary, my dear, I suppose this young gentleman is an improved character?'

'He is always improving,' said Mary.

'I mean, that an important change must have taken place since I understood you to say you had refused him. I thought you acted most properly then; and, as I see him now, I think you equally right in accepting him.'

'He was very much what he is now,' said Mary.

'Then it was from no doubt of his being a serious character?'

'None whatever,' said Mary, emphatically.

'Well, my dear, I must confess his appearance, his family, and your refusal, misled me. I fear I did him great injustice.'

A silence, and then Miss Ponsonby said, 'After all, my dear, though I thought quite otherwise at first, I do believe that, considering what the youth is, and how much attached he seems, you might safely continue the engagement.'

Mary's heart glowed to her aunt for having been thus conquered by Louis—she who, three nights back, had been so severely incredulous, so deeply disappointed in her niece for having been deluded into endurance of him. But her resolution was fixed. 'It would not be right,' she said; 'his

father would not allow it. There is so little chance of papa's relenting, or of my coming home, that it would be wrong to keep him in suspense. He had better turn his thoughts elsewhere while he is young enough to begin again.'

'It might save him from marrying some mere fine lady.'

'That will never be, whatever woman he chooses will—' She could not go on, but presently cleared her voice—'No; I should like to leave him quite free. I was less his choice than his father's; and, though I thought we should have been very happy, it does not seem to be the leading of Heaven. I am so far his inferior in cleverness, and everything attractive, and have been made so like his elder sister, that it might not have been best for him. I want him to feel that, in beginning afresh, he is doing me no injury; and then in time, whenever I come home, it may be such a friendship as there was between our elders. That is what I try to look forward to,—no, I don't think I look forward to anything. Good night, Aunt Melicent—I am so glad you like him!'

In this mind Mary met Lord Ormersfield. The delay had been an advantage, for he was less irritated, and she had regained self-possession. Her passage had been taken, and this was an argument that told on the Earl, though he refused to call it irrevocable. He found that there was no staggering her on the score of the life that awaited her; she knew more on that subject than he did, had confidence in her father, and no dread of Rosita; and she was too much ashamed and grieved at the former effect of his persuasions to attend to any more of a like description. He found her sense of duty more stubborn than he had anticipated, and soon had no more to say. She might carry it too far; but the principle was sound, and a father could not well controvert it. He had designed the rupture with Louis as a penalty to drive her into his measures; but he could not so propound it, and was wondering how to bring it in, when Mary relieved him by beginning herself, and stating the grounds with such sensible, unselfish, almost motherly care of Louis's happiness, that he was more unwilling than ever to let him resign her, and was on the point of begging her to re-consider, and let Louis wait for ever rather than lose her. But he knew they ought not to be bound, under such uncertainties, and his conviction was too strong to give way to emotion. He thanked her, and praised her with unwonted agitation, and regretted more than ever; and so they closed the conference by deciding that, unless Mr. Ponsonby should be induced to relent by his daughter's representations on her arrival, Mary and Louis must consider themselves as mutually released.

That loophole—forlorn, most forlorn hope, as they knew it to be—was an infinite solace to the young people, by sparing them a formal parting, and permitting them still to feel that they belonged to each other. If he began declaring that nothing would ever make him feel disconnected with Mary, he was told that it was not time to think of that, and they must not waste their time. And once Mary reminded him how much worse it would be if they had been separated by a quarrel. 'Anger might give one spirits,' he said, smiling mournfully.

'At the time; but think what it would be not to be able to remember happy times without remorse.'

'Then you do mean to recollect, Mary?'

'I trust to bring myself to remember rightly and wisely. I shall try to set it for a reward for myself to cure me of repinings,' said Mary, looking into his face, as if the remembrance of it must bring cheerfulness and refreshment.

'And when shall I not think, Mary! When I leave off work, I shall want you for a companion; when I go to work, the thought must stir me up. Your judgment must try my own.'

'Oh, hush, Louis! this is not good. Be yourself, and be more than yourself, and only think of the past as a time when we had a great deal of pleasantness, and you did me much good.'

'Did I?'

'Yes; I see it now I am with Aunt Melicent. You put so many more thoughts in my head, and showed me that so much more was good and wholesome than I used to fancy. Dear mamma once said you were educating me; and I hope to go on, and not let your lessons waste away.'

'Nay, Mary, you won good everywhere. If you had not been Mary, I might have made you a great goose. But you taught me all the perseverance I ever had. And oh! Mary, I don't wonder you do not trust it.'

'There is the forbidden subject,' said Mary, firmly.

That was the sort of conversation into which they fell now and then during those last days of busy sadness.

Truly it could have been worse. Suffering by their own fault would have rent them asunder more harshly, and Louis's freedom from all fierceness and violence softened all ineffably to Mary. James Frost's letter of fiery indignation, almost of denunciation, made her thankful that he was not the party concerned; and Louis made her smile at Isabel's copy of all his sentiments in ladylike phrases.

The last day came. Louis would not be denied seeing Mary on board the Valdivia; and, in spite of all Miss Ponsonby's horror of railways, he persuaded her to trust herself under his care to Liverpool. She augured great things from the letter which she had entrusted to Mary, and in which she had spoken of Lord Fitzjocelyn in the highest terms her vocabulary could furnish.

They parted bravely. Spectators hindered all display of feeling, and no one cried, except Miss Ponsonby.

'Good-bye, Louis; I will not forget your messages to Tom Madison. My love to your father and Aunt Catharine.'

'Good-bye, Mary; I shall see Tom and Chimborazo yet.'

CHAPTER V
THE NEW WORLD

Still onward, as to southern skies,
We spread our sails, new stars arise,
New lights upon the glancing tide,
Fresh hues where pearl and coral hide:
What are they all but tokens true
Of grace for ever fresh and new!

Prayers for Emigrants.

There are some days in the early year, devoid indeed of spring brilliance, but full of soft, heavy, steaming fragrance, pervading the grey air with sweet odours, and fostering the growth of tender bud and fragile stem with an unseen influence, more mild and kindly than even the smiling sunbeam or the gushing shower. 'A growing day,' as the country-people term such genial, gentle weather, might not be without analogy to the brief betrothal of Louis and Mary.

Subdued and anxious, there had been little of the ordinary light of joy, hope, or gaiety, and their pleasures had been less their own than in preparing the happiness of their two friends. It was a time such as to be more sweet in memory than it was in the present; and the shade which had hung over it, the self-restraint and the forbearance which it had elicited, had unconsciously conduced to the development of the characters of both, preparing them to endure the parting far more effectually than unmixed enjoyment could have done. The check upon Louis's love of trifling, the restraint on his spirits, the being thrown back on his own judgment when he wanted to lean upon Mary, had given him a habit of controlling his boyish ways.

It was a call to train himself in manliness and self-reliance. It changed him from the unstable reed he once had been, and helped him to take one steady and consistent view of the trial required of him and of Mary, and then to act upon it resolutely and submissively. With Mary gone, he cared little what became of him until her letters could arrive; and his father, with more attention to his supposed benefit than to his wishes, carried him at once, without returning home, to a round of visits among all his acquaintance most likely to furnish a distracting amount of Christmas gaieties. In the midst of these, there occurred a vacancy in the representation of a borough chiefly under the influence of Sir Miles Oakstead; and, as it was considered expedient that he should be brought into Parliament, his father repaired with him at once to Oakstead, and involved him in all the business of the election. On his success, he went with his father to London for the session, and this was all that his friends at Northwold knew of him. He wrote hurried notes to James or to Mr. Holdsworth on necessary affairs connected with his farm and improvements, mentioning facts instead of feelings, and promising to write to Aunt Catharine when he should have time; but the time did not seem to come, and it was easy to believe that his passiveness of will, increased by the recent stroke, had caused him to be hurried into a condition of involuntary practical activity.

Mary, meanwhile, was retracing her voyage, in the lull of spirits which, after long straining, had nothing to do but to wait in patience, bracing themselves for a fresh trial. Never suffering herself, at sea, her first feelings, after the final wrench of parting, were interrupted by the necessity of attending to her friend, a young mother, with children enough to require all the services that the indefatigable Mary could perform. If Mrs. Willis always averred that she never could have gone through the voyage without Miss Ponsonby, Mary felt, in return, that the little fretful boy and girl, who would never let her sit and think, except when both were asleep, had been no small blessing to her.

Yet Mary was not so much absorbed and satisfied with the visible and practical as had once been the case. The growth had not been all on Louis's side. If her steadfast spirit had strengthened his wavering resolution, the intercourse and sympathy with him had opened and unfolded many a perception and quality in her, which had been as tightly and hardly cased up as leaf-buds in their gummy envelopes. A wider range had been given to her thoughts; there was a swelling of heart, a vividness of sensation, such as she had not known in earlier times; she had been taught the mystery of creation, the strange connexion with the Unseen, and even with her fellow-men. Beyond the ordinary practical kind offices, for which she had been always ready, there was now mingled something of Louis's more comprehensive spirit of questioning what would do them good, and drawing food for reflection from their diverse ways.

She was sensible of the change again and again, when sights recurred which once had only spoken to her eye. That luminous sea, sparkling like floods of stars, had been little more than 'How pretty! how funny!' at her first voyage. Now, it was not only 'How Louis would admire it!' but 'How profusely, how gloriously has the Creator spread the globe with mysterious beauty! how marvellously has He caused His creatures to hold forth this light, to attract others to their needful food!' And the furrow of fire left by their vessel's wake spoke to her of that path 'like a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day.' If with it came the remembrance of his vision of the threads of light, it was not a recollection which would lead to repining.

And when at Cape Horn, a mighty ice mountain drifted within view, spired, pinnacled, encrusted with whiteness, rivalled only by the glory of the summer cloud, caverned here and there into hollows of sapphire blue, too deeply dazzling to behold, or rising into peaks of clear, hard, chill green; the wild fantastic points sometimes glimmering with fragments of the rainbow arch; the rich variety, endless beyond measure in form and colouring, and not only magnificent and terrible in the whole mass, but lovely beyond imagination in each crystal too minute for the eye. Mary had once, on a like occasion, only said, 'it was very cold;' and looked to see whether the captain expected the monster to bear down on the ship. But the present iceberg put her in mind of the sublime aspirations which gothic cathedrals seem as if they would fain embody. And then, she thought of the marvellous interminable waste of beauty of those untrodden regions, whence yonder enormous iceberg was but a small fragment—a petty messenger—regions unseen by human eye—beauty untouched by human hand-the glory, the sameness, yet the infinite variety of perfect purity. Did it not seem, with all the associations of cold, of peril, of dreariness, to be a visible token that indeed He who fashioned it could prepare 'good things past man's understanding!'

It was well for Mary that southern constellations, snowy, white-winged albatross, leaping flying-fish, and white-capped mountain-coast, had been joined in her mind with something higher, deeper, and less personal, or their recurrence would have brought her nothing but pain unmitigated in the contrast with the time when first she had beheld them six years ago.

Then she was full of hope and eager ardour to arrive, longing for the parental presence of which she had so long been deprived, hailing every novel scene as a proof that she was nearer home, and without the anticipation of one cloud, only expecting to be loved, to love, and to be useful. And now, all fond illusions as to her father had been snatched away, her very love for him rendering the perception doubly cruel; her mother, her precious mother, far away in Ormersfield churchyard—her life probably shortened by his harshness—her place occupied by a young girl, differing in language, in Church, in everything—Mary's own pardon uncertain, after all her sacrifices—A sense of having deeply offended, hung upon her; and her heart was so entirely in England, that had her home been perfect, her voyage must still have been a cruel effort. That one anticipation of being set at rest by her father's forgiveness, and the forlorn despairing hope of his relenting towards Louis, were all she dared to dwell on; and when Mrs. Willis counted the days till she could arrive and meet her husband, poor Mary felt as if, but for these two chances of comfort, she could gladly have prolonged the voyage for the rest of her life.

But one burning tropical noon, the Valdivia was entering Callao harbour, and Mary, sick and faint at heart, was arraying herself in a coloured dress, lest her mourning should seem to upbraid her father. The voyage was over, the ship was anchored, boats were coming offshore, the luggage was being hoisted out of the hold, the passengers were congregated on deck, eager to land, some gazing with curious and enterprising eyes on the new country, others scanning every boat in hopes of meeting a familiar face. Mrs. Willis stood trembling with hope, excitement, and the strange dread often rushing in upon the last moment of expectation. She clung to Mary for support, and once said—

'Oh, Miss Ponsonby, how composed you are!' Mary's feelings were too deep—too much concentrated for trembling. She calmed and soothed the wife's sudden fright, lest 'something should have happened to George;' and she even smiled when the children's scream of ecstacy infected their mother, when the papa and uncle they had been watching for with straining eyes proved to be standing on deck close beside them.

Mary cast her eyes round, and saw nothing of her own. She stood apart, while the Willis family were in all the rapture of the meeting; she saw them moving off, too happy and sufficient for themselves even to remember her. She had a dull, heavy sensation that she must bear all, and this was the beginning; and she was about to begin her arrangements for her dreary landing, when Mrs. Willis's brother, Mr. Ward, turned back. He was a middle-aged merchant, whom her mother had much liked and esteemed, and there was something cheering in his frank, hearty greeting, and satisfaction in seeing her. It was more like a welcome, and it brought the Willises back, shocked at having forgotten her in the selfishness of their own joy; but they had made sure that she had been met. Mr. Ward did not think that she was expected by the Valdivia; Mr. Ponsonby had not mentioned it as likely. So they were all seated in the boat, with the black rowers; and while the Willises fondled their children, and exchanged home-news, Mr. Ward sat by Mary, and spoke to her kindly, not openly referring to the state of her home, but showing a warmth and consideration which evinced much delicate sympathy.

They all drove together in the Willises' carriage up the sloping road from Callao to Lima, and Mary heard astonishment, such as she had once felt, breaking out in screams from the children at the sight of omnibuses filled with gaily-dressed negroes, and brown horsewomen in Panama hats and lace-edged trousers careering down the road. But then, her father had come and fetched her from on board, and that dear mamma was waiting in the carriage! They entered the old walled town when twilight had already closed in, and Mrs. Willis was anxious to take her tired little ones home at once. They were set down at their own door; but Mr. Ward, with protecting anxious kindness, insisted on seeing Miss Ponsonby safely home before he would join them. As they drove through the dark streets, Mary heard a little restless movement, betraying some embarrassment; and at last, with an evident desire of reassuring her, he said, 'Senora Rosita is thought very pleasing and engaging;' and then, as if willing to change the subject, he hastily added, 'I suppose you did not speak the Pizarro?'

'No.'

'She has sailed about three weeks. She takes home your cousin, Mr. Dynevor.'

Mary cried out with surprise.

'I thought him a complete fixture, but he is gone home for a year. It seems his family property was in the market, and he was anxious to secure it.'

'How glad his mother will be!' was all Mary could say, as there rushed over her the thought of the wonderful changes this would make in Dynevor Terrace. Her first feeling was that she must tell Louis; her second, that two oceans were between them; and then she thought of Aunt Catharine having lived, after all, to see her son.

She had forgotten to expect the turn when the carriage wheeled under the arched entry of her father's house. All was gloom and stillness, except where a little light shone in a sort of porter's lodge upon the eager negro features of two blacks, with much gesticulation, playing at dice. They came out hastily at the sound of the carriage; and as Mr. Ward handed out Mary, and inquired for Mr. Ponsonby, she recognised and addressed the white-woolled old Xavier, the mayor domo. Poor old

Xavier! Often had she hunted and teased him, and tried to make him understand 'cosas de Inglaterra,' and to make him cease from his beloved dice; but no sooner did he see her face than, with a cry of joy, 'La Senorita Maria! la Senorita Maria!' down he went upon his knees, and began kissing the hem of her dress.

All the rest of the negro establishment came round, capering and chattering Spanish; and, in the confusion, Mary could not get her question heard—Where was her father? and Xavier's vehement threats and commands to the others to be silent, did not produce a calm. At last, bearing a light, there came forward a faded, sallow dame, with a candle in her hand, who might have sat for the picture of the Duena Rodriguez, and at her appearance the negroes subsided. She was an addition to the establishment since Mary's departure; but in her might be easily recognised the Tia, the individual who in Limenian households holds a position between companion and housekeeper. She introduced herself by the lugubrious appellation of Senora Dolores, and, receiving Mary with obsequious courtesy, explained that the Senor and Senora were at a tertulia, or evening party. She lighted Mary and Mr. Ward into the quadra; and there Mr. Ward, shaking hands with her as if he would thereby compensate for all that was wanting in her welcome, promised to go and inform her father of her arrival.

Mary stood in the large dark room, with the soft matted floor, and the windows high up near the carved timbered ceiling, the single lamp, burning in rum, casting a dim gleam over the well-known furniture, by which her mother had striven to give an English appearance to the room. It was very dreary, and she would have given the world to be alone with her throbbing head, her dull heartache, and the weariness of spirits over-long wound up for the meeting; but her own apartment could be no refuge until it had been cleansed and made ready, and Dolores and Xavier were persecuting her every moment with their hospitality and their inquiries. Then came a quick, manly tread, and for a moment her heart almost seemed to stand still, in the belief that it was her father; but it was only Robson, hurrying in to offer his services and apologies. Perhaps he was the very last person she could bear to see, feeling, as she did, that if he had been more explicit all the offence would have been spared. He was so much aware of all family matters, and was accustomed to so much confidence from her father, that she could not believe him unconscious; and there was something hateful to her in the plausible frankness and deferential familiarity of his manners, as, brushing up his sandy hair upon his forehead, he poured forth explanations that Mr. Ponsonby would be delighted, but grieved that no one had met her—Valdivia not expected so soon—not anticipated the pleasure—if they had imagined that Miss Ponsonby was a passenger—

'My father desired that I would come out by her,' said Mary.

'Ay, true—so he informed me; but since later intelligence'—and he cast a glance at Mary, to judge how much further to go; but meeting with nothing but severity, he covered the impertinence by saying, 'In fact, though the Valdivia was mentioned, and Mrs. Willis, Mr. Ponsonby had reason to suppose you would not receive his letters in time to avail yourself of the escort.'

'I did so, however,' said Mary, coldly.

'Most gratifying. Mr. and Mrs. Ponsonby will be highly gratified. In fact, Miss Ponsonby, I must confess that was a most unfortunate blunder of mine last August. I should not have fallen into the error had I not been so long absent at Guayaquil that I had had no opportunity of judging of the amiable lady; and I will own to much natural surprise and some indignation, before I had had the pleasure of personal acquaintance with the charms and the graces—Hem! In effect, it was a step that no one could have recommended; and when your noble relative put it to me in so many words whether I would counsel your continuing your journey, I could not take it on me to urge a measure so painful to your feelings, unaware as I was then of the amiable qualities of the lady who occupies the situation of the highly beloved and esteemed—'

Mary could not bear to hear her mother's name in his mouth, so she cut him short by saying, 'I suppose you thought you acted for the best, Mr. Robson; it was very unfortunate, but it cannot be

helped. Pray can you tell me where the lad Madison is?' she added, resolved to show him that she would not discuss these matters with him; 'I have a parcel for him.'

'He is at the San Benito mine, Miss Ponsonby.'

'How does he go on?'

'Well—I may say very well, allowing for inexperience. He appears a steady, intelligent lad, and I have no doubt will answer the purpose well.'

There was one gratification for Mary, at least, in the pleasure this would afford at home; but Robson continued making conversation about Mr. Dynevor's visit to England, and the quantity of work this temporary absence entailed on him; and then on the surprise it would be to his patron to find her, and Senora Rosita's interest in her, and the numerous gaieties of the bride, and the admiration she excited, and his own desire to be useful. This afforded Mary an opportunity for getting rid of him at last, by sending him to make arrangements for her baggage to be sent from Callao the next morning.

Ten minutes more, half spent in conquering her disgust, half in sick anticipation, and other feet were crossing the matted sala, the curtain over the doorway was drawn aside, and there stood her father, and a lady, all white and diamonds, by his side. He held out his arms, Mary fell into them, and it was the same kind rough kiss which had greeted her six years back. It seemed to be forgiveness, consolation, strength, all at once; and their words mingled—'Papa, you forgive me'—'Mary, my good girl, I did not think they would have let you come back to me. This was but a dreary coming home for you, my dear.' And then, instantly changing his language to Spanish, he added, appealing to his wife, that had they guessed she was on board, they would have come to meet her.

Rosita replied earnestly to that effect, and warmly embraced Mary, pitying her for such an arrival, and hoping that Dolores had made her comfortable. The rest of the conversation was carried on in the same tongue. Rosita was much what Mary had expected—of a beautiful figure, with fine eyes, and splendid raven hair, but without much feature or expression. She looked almost like a dream to-night, however, with her snowy robes, and the diamonds sparkling with their dewdrop flashes in her hair and on her arms, with the fitful light caught from the insufficient candles. All she ventured to say had a timid gracefulness and simplicity that were very winning; and her husband glanced more than once to see if she were not gaining upon his daughter; and so in truth she was, personally, though it was exceedingly painful to see her where Mary had been used to see that dear suffering face; and it was impossible not to feel the contrast with her father as painfully incongruous. Mr. Ponsonby was a large man, with the jovial manner of one never accustomed to self-restraint; good birth and breeding making him still a gentleman, in spite of his loud voice and the traces of self-indulgence. He was ruddy and bronzed, and his eyebrows and hair looked as if touched by hoar frost; altogether as dissimilar a partner as could be devised for the slender girlish being by his side.

After a little Spanish conversation, all kind on his aide, and thus infinitely relieving Mary, they parted for the night. She laid before him the packet of letters, which she had held all this time as the last link to Louis, and sought his eye as she did so with a look of appeal; but he carefully averted his glance, and she could read nothing.

Weary as she was, Mary heard again and again, through her unglazed windows, the watchman's musical cry of 'Ave Maria purisima, las—es temblado!' 'Viva Peru y sereno!' and chid herself for foolish anticipations that Louis would hear and admire all the strange sounds of the New World. The kindness of her welcome gave her a little hope; and she went over and over again her own part of the discussion which she expected, almost persuading herself, that Louis's own conduct and her aunt's testimony must win the day.

She need not have spent so many hours in preparation for the morning. She was up early, in hopes of seeing her father before he went to his office, but he was gone for a ride. The English breakfast, which had been established, much to his content, by her own exertions, had quite vanished, each of the family had a cup of chocolate in private, and there was no meeting till, late in the morning, Rosita sauntered into her room, embraced her, made inquiries as to her rest, informed her that she was

going to the Opera that night, and begged her to accompany her. To appear in public with Rosita was the tribute for which Mary had come out, so she readily agreed; and thereupon the Senora digressed into the subject of dress, and required of Mary a display of all her robes, and an account of the newest fashions of the English ladies. It was all with such innocent, earnest pleasure, that Mary could not be annoyed, and good-naturedly made all her disappointing display.

The midday meal brought her father—still kind and affectionate, but never dropping the Spanish, nor manifesting any consciousness of her letters. She had hopes of the period allotted to the siesta, to which custom, in old days, she had never acceded, but had always spent the interval on any special occupation—above all, to writing for him; but he went off without any notice of her, and she was in no condition to dispense with the repose, for her frame was tired out, though her hopes and fears could not even let her dreams rest.

Then came a drive with Rosita, resplendent in French millinery, then supper; then the Opera, to which her father accompanied them, still without a word. Another day was nearly the same, only that this time she had to do her best to explain the newest fashions in behalf of a dress of Rosita's, then being made, and in the evening to go to a party at the Consul's, where she met Mr. Ward, and had some talk which she might have enjoyed but for her suspense.

On the third, Rosita was made happy by unpacking an elegant little black papier mache table, a present from Miss Ponsonby. Good Melicent! were ever two sisters-in-law more unlike? But Lord Ormersfield had done Rosita and her husband good service. If Aunt Melicent had first learned the real facts, her wrath would have been extreme—a mere child, a foreigner, a Roman Catholic, a nun! Her horror would have known no bounds, and she would, perhaps, have broken with her brother forever. But by making the newly-married pair victims of injustice, the Earl had made the reality a relief, and Melicent had written civilly to her brother, and a sisterly sort of stiff letter to the bride—of which the Limenian could not understand one word; so that Mary had to render it all into Spanish, even to her good aunt's hopes that Rosita would be kind to her, and use all her influence in favour of her happiness.

Whether Rosita would have comprehended this without Mary's blushes might be questioned, but she did say, 'Ah! yes! you were to have married the Visconde, were you not? El Senor was so angry! Did his father forbid when your father refused your portion?'

'Oh no, he would receive me if I brought nothing.'

'And you wish to marry?' said Rosita.

'If my father would only consent.'

'But why did you come here then?' said Rosita, opening her large eyes.

'My father commanded me.'

'England is a long way off,' said Rosita, languidly, 'he could not have reached you there. You would have been a great lady and noble! How could you come away, if he would still have you?'

'Because it would have been wrong. We could not have been happy in disobeying my father.'

'Ah! but you could have done penance. I had many penances to do for quitting my convent; Padre Inigo was very severe, but they are over at last, and I am free for giving alms twice a week, and the Sisters have forgiven me, and send me so many silver flowers and dulces; I will show them to you some day. Could you not have done penance?'

'I am afraid not.'

'Ah! I forgot you were a heretic, poor thing! How inconvenient! And so you will not come with me to the bull-fight next Sunday?'

Such being Rosita's ideas on the point, Mary gave up much hope in her influence, and tried what a good-humoured announcement of her re-establishment of the English breakfast would effect towards bringing her father to a tete-a-tete, but he never came near it. The waiting in silence was miserable enough for herself, but she would have continued to bear it except for the injustice to Louis, who must not be kept in suspense. The departure of the next English mail should be the limit of her

endurance, and after a day of watching, she finally went up to her father when he would have bidden her good night, and said, in English, 'Papa, if you please, I must speak to you.'

'So you shall, my dear, but we are all tired; we must have our night's rest.'

'No, papa, it must be to-night, if you please. It is necessary for me to know before to-morrow how I am to write to Lord Fitzjocelyn.'

'Pshaw! Mary, I've settled that young fellow!'

'Papa, I don't think you know—'

'I've written him a civil answer, if that's what you mean, much civiller than he or his father deserve,' he said, speaking loud, and trying to fling away from her, but she stood her ground, and spoke calmly and steadily, though her heart beat violently.

'You do not understand the true state of the case, papa; and without doing so, you cannot write such an answer as they deserve.'

'I know this, that old Ormersfield has been the curse of my life!' and out poured one of those torrents of fierce passion which had been slowly but surely the death of his wife. Mary had never heard one in the full tide before, but she stood firm; there were none of the tears, auch as, in her mother, had been wont to exasperate him further, but with pale cheeks, compressed lips, and hands locked together, her heart was one silent entreaty that it might be forgiven him above. Thus she stood while the storm of anger raged, and when at last it had exhausted itself, he said, in a lower voice, 'And so you are still taken with this fellow's son, this young puppy! I thought you had more spirit and sense, Mary, or I never would have trusted you among them.'

'There are very few people in this world half so good or so right-minded as Fitzjocelyn,' said Mary, earnestly and deliberately. 'It was he who bade me come to you, well knowing that we could never be happy without your consent.'

'Oh! he did so, did he? He is deeper than I thought would not risk your fortune. Why, Mary, I did not think a girl of your sense could be so taken in! It is transparent, I tell you. They get you there, flatter you up with their attentions, but when they find you too wise for them the first time, off goes this youth to Miss Conway, finds her a bad speculation, no heiress at all, and disposes of her to his cousin. I wonder if he'll find old Dynevor grateful. Meanwhile the old Lord must needs come out here, finds our gains a better prize than he expected, trumps up this story at Valparaiso, takes you in, and brings you home to this precious youth. And you, and your aunt too, are ready to believe it all! I always knew that women were fools whenever a title came in their way, I see it more than ever now, since you and Melicent are both like the rest of 'em.'

'Papa,' said Mary, again rallying her firmness, 'we have found sadly how easy it is to be deceived when one is not on the spot. Will you listen to me, who saw it all?'

'No, Mary, I will not hear the nonsense they have put into your head, my poor girl. No! I tell you it is of no use! It is my resolute purpose that not one farthing of mine shall go to patch up the broken-down Ormersfield property! The man is my enemy, and has sown dissension in my family from the first moment I connected myself with him. I'll never see my daughter his son's wife. I wonder he had the impudence to propose it! I shall think you lost to all feeling for your father, if you say another word about it.'

'Very well,' said Mary, with steady submission. 'Then I will only write one more letter to Fitzjocelyn, and tell him that your objections are insuperable, and that he must think of it no more.'

'That's right, Mary! you are a good girl, after all! You'll stand by your father, in spite of all the House of Peers! I'm glad to see you hold up your head so bravely. So you did fancy being a Viscountess, did you! but it is not a heartbreaking matter either, my girl!'

This was too much for Mary, and when her father would have kissed her, she laid her head on his shoulder and wept silently but bitterly.

'Ha! what's all this? Why, you don't pretend to care for a young mercenary scamp like that?'

'He is the noblest, most generous, most disinterested man I ever knew!' said Mary, standing apart, and speaking clearly. 'I give him up because—you command me, father, but I will not hear him spoken of unjustly.'

'Ha! ha! so long as you give him up, we won't quarrel. He shall be all that, and more too, if you like; and we'll never fight over the matter again, since I have you safe back, my child.'

'I do not mean to mention him again,' said Mary; 'I wish to obey you.'

'Then there's an end of the matter. You'll get over it, my girl, and we'll find some honest man worth two of your niggardly, proud-spirited earls. There, I know you are a reasonable girl that can be silent, and not go on teasing. So, Mary, you may have a cup of tea for me to-morrow in the sala, like old times. Goodnight, my dear.'

Waiting upon himself! That was the reward that Mr. Ponsonby held out to his daughter for crushing her first love!

But it was a reward. Anything that drew her father nearer to her was received with gratitude by Mary, and the words of kindness in some degree softened the blow. She had never had much hope, though now she found it had been more than she had been willing to believe; and even now she could not absolutely cease to entertain some hopes of the results of Oliver's return, nor silence one lingering fancy that Louis might yet wait unbound; although she told herself of his vacillation between herself and Isabel, of his father's influence, and of the certainty that he would see many more worthy of his love than herself. Not any one who could love him so well—oh no! But when Mary found her thoughts taking this turn, she rose up as she lay, clasped her hands together, and repeated half aloud again and again, 'Be Thou my all!'

And by the morning, though Mary's cheek was very white, and her eyes sunken for want of sleep, she had a cheerful word for her father, and a smile, the very sight of which would have gone to the heart of any one of those from whom he had cut her off.

Then she wrote her letters. It was not so hard to make this final severance as it had been to watch Louis's face, and think of the pain she had to inflict. Many a time had she weighed each phrase she set down, so that it might offend neither against sincerity nor resignation, and yet be soothing and consoling. Some would have thought her letter stiff and laboured, but she had learned to believe that a grave and careful style befitted a serious occasion, and would have thought incoherency childish or affected.

She released him entirely from his engagement, entreating him not to rebel against the decision, but to join her in thankfulness that no shade need be cast over the remembrance of the happy hours spent together; and begging him not to grieve, since she had, after the first pain, been able to acquiesce in the belief that the separation might conduce to his happiness; and she should always regard him as one of those most near and dear to her, and rejoice in whatever was for his welfare, glad that his heart was still young enough to form new ties. 'Forgive me for speaking thus,' she added; 'I know that it may wound you now, but there may come a time when it may make you feel more at ease and unfettered; and I could not endure to imagine that the affection which you brought yourself to lavish on one so unworthy, should stand in the way of your happiness for life.' She desired him to make no answer, but to consider this as the final dissolution: and she concluded by all that she thought would prove most consoling, as to the present state of affairs with her; and with a few affectionate words, to show that he was still a great deal to her, though everything he might not be.

This done, Mary faced her life in the New World. She had to form her habits for herself, for her importance in the house was gone; but she went to work resolutely, and, lonely as she was, she had far more resources than if she had never been at Ormersfield. She had many hours to herself, and she unpacked her books, and set herself courses of study, to which Louis had opened the door. She unveiled her eyes to natural history, and did not find flower or butterfly unsoothing. She undertook the not very hopeful task of teaching a tiny negro imp, who answered the purpose of a bell, to read and work; and she was persevering in her efforts to get Xavier and Dolores to make her father comfortable.

Her father was decidedly glad of her company. He liked conversation, and enjoyed the morning meeting, to which Mr. Ward was often a welcome addition, delighting in anything so English, and finding Miss Ponsonby much improved by her introduction to English society. Sometimes Mary wrote for her father, and now and then was consulted; and she was always grateful for whatever made her feel herself of use. She was on kind and friendly terms with Rosita, but they did not become more intimate than at first. The Senora was swinging in a hammock half-asleep, with a cigarette between her lips, all the morning; and when she emerged from this torpid state, in a splendid toilette, she had too many more congenial friends often to need her step-daughter in her visits, her expeditions to lotteries, and her calls on her old friends the nuns. On a fast-day, or any other occasion that kept her at home, she either arranged her jewels, discussed her dresses, or had some lively chatter, which she called learning English. She coaxed, fondled, and domineered prettily over Mr. Ponsonby; and he looked on amused, gratified her caprices, caressed her, and seemed to regard her as a pretty pet and plaything.

CHAPTER VI
THE TWO PENDRAGONS

The red dragon and the white,
Hard together gan they smite,
With mouth, paw, and tail,
Between hem was full hard batail.

The History of Merlin.

SPRING was on the borders of summer, when one afternoon, as Clara sat writing a note in the drawing-room, she heard a tap at the door of the little sitting-room, and springing to open it, she beheld a welcome sight.

'Louis! How glad I am! Where do you come from?'

'Last from the station,' said Louis.

'What makes you knock at that door, now the drawing-room is alive?'

'I could not venture on an unceremonious invasion of Mrs. James Frost's territory.'

'You'll find no distinction of territory here,' laughed Clara. 'It was a fiction that we were to live in separate rooms, like naughty children. Does not the drawing-room look nice?'

'As much improved as the inhabitant. Where are the other natives?'

'Granny and Isabel are walking, and will end by picking up Jem coming out of school. We used to wait for him so often, that at last he said we should be laughed at, so there's a law against it which no one dares to transgress but granny.'

'So I conclude that you are a happy family.'

'After all, it was worth spending two years at school to enjoy properly the having it over.'

'I give Jem credit for having secured a first-rate governess for you.'

'That she is! Why, with her I really do like reading and drawing all the morning! I almost believe that some day I shall wake up and find myself an accomplished young lady! And, Louis, have you read the last Western Magazine?'

'I have read very little for sport lately.'

'Then I must tell you. Jem was bemoaning himself about having nothing to give to the new Blind Asylum, and the next evening Isabel brought out the prettiest little manuscript book, tied with blue ribbon, and told him to do as he pleased with it. It was a charming account of her expedition to the Hebrides, written out for her sisters, without a notion of anything further; but Jem sent it to this Magazine, and it is accepted, and the first part is out. She will have quite a sum for it, and all is to go to the Blind Asylum!'

'Capital!—Let me take it home to night, Clara, and I will stand an examination on it to-morrow.'

'We ask her whether she projects a sketch of the Paris Revolution,' said Clara, laughing. 'She has a famous heap of manuscripts in her desk, and one long story about a Sir Roland, who had his name before she knew Jem, but it is all unfinished, she tore out a great many pages, and has to make a new finish; and I am afraid the poor knight is going to die of a mortal wound at his lady's feet. Isabel likes sad things best;—but oh! here they come, and I'm talking dreadful treason.'

Three more joyous-looking people could hardly have been found than those who entered the room, welcoming Louis with delight, and asking what good wind had brought him.

'Partly that Inglewood is crying out for the master's eye,' said Louis; 'and partly that my father fancied I looked fagged, and kindly let me run down for a holiday.'

'I am of his mind,' said Mrs. Frost, tenderly; 'there is an M.P. expression gathering on your brows, Louis.'

'For you to dispel, Aunt Kitty. I told him you were the best dissipation, and Virginia was of the same mind. Isabel, she says Dynevor Terrace is the only place she ever wishes to see again.'

'Do you often see Virginia?' asked Isabel.

'Not unless I go early, and beg for her; and then she generally has some master. That last onset of accomplishments is serious!'

'Yes,' said Isabel, 'the sense of leisure and tranquillity here is marvellous!'

'Not leisure in the sense of idleness,' said James.

'No,' said Isabel; 'but formerly idle requirements thronged my time, and for nothing worth doing could I find leisure.'

'There is nothing more exacting than idle requirements,' said James. 'Pray is Clara accepting that invitation? Come to dinner, Louis, and give us an excuse.'

'No, he won't,' said Mrs. Frost, 'he will take my side. These young people want to cast off all their neighbours.'

'Now, granny,' exclaimed James, 'have we not dutifully dined all round? Did not Isabel conduct Clara to that ball? Is it not hard to reproach us with sighing at an evening immolated at the shrine of the Richardsons?'

'Well, my dears, you must judge.'

'I am ready to do whatever you think right; I leave you to settle it,' said Isabel, moving out of the room, that Louis might be free for a more intimate conversation.

'Now,' cried James, 'is it in the nature of things that she should live in such society as Mrs. Walby's and Mrs. Richardson's? People who call her Mrs. James!'

'Such a queen as she looks among them!' said Clara.

'One comfort is, they don't like that,' said James. 'Even Mrs. Calcott is not flattered by her precedence. I hope we shall soon be dropped out of their parties. As long as I do my duty by their sons, what right have they to impose the penance of their society on my wife? All the irksomeness of what she has left, and none of the compensations!'

'Blissful solitude' said Louis, 'thereto I leave you.'

'You are not going yet! You mean to dine here?' was the cry.

'My dear friends,' he said, holding up his hands, 'if you only knew how I long to have no one to speak to!'

'You crying out for silence!' exclaimed James.

'I am panting for what I have not had these five months—space for my thoughts to turn round.'

'Surely you are at liberty to form your own habits!' said James.

'I am told so whenever my father sees me receive a note,' said Louis, wearily; 'but I see that, habituated as he is to living alone, he is never really at ease unless I am in the way; so I make our hours agree as far as our respective treadmills permit; and though we do not speak much, I can never think in company.'

'Don't you have your rides to yourself?'

'Why, no. My father will never ride enough to do him good, unless he wants to do me good. People are all surprised to see him looking so well; the country lanes make him quite blooming.'

'But not you, my poor boy,' said his aunt; 'I am afraid it is a sad strain.'

'There now, Aunt Kitty, I am gone. I must have the pleasure of looking natural sometimes, without causing any vituperation of any one beyond seas.'

'You shall look just as you please if you will only stay. We are just going to dinner.'

'Thank you, let me come to-morrow. I shall be better company when I have had my sulk out.'

His aunt followed him to the stairs, and he turned to her, saying, anxiously, 'No letter?' She shook her head. 'It would be barely possible,' he said, 'but if it would only come while I am at home in peace!'

'Ah! this is sadly trying!' said she, parting his hair on his brow as he stood some steps below her, and winning a sweet smile from him.

'All for the best,' he said. 'One thing may mitigate another. That political whirlpool might suck me in, if I had any heart or hopes for it. And, on the other hand, it would be very unwholesome to be left to my own inertness—to be as good for nothing as I feel.'

'My poor dear boy, you are very good about it. I wish you could have been spared.'

'I did not come to make you sad, Aunt Kitty,' he replied, smiling; 'no; I get some energy back when I remember that this may be a probation. Her mother would not have thought me man enough, and that is what I have to work for. Whether this end well or not, she is the leading star of my life.' And, with the renewal of spirit with which he had spoken, he pressed his aunt's hand, and ran down stairs.

When he rode to Northwold, the following afternoon, having spent the morning in walking over his fields, he overtook a most comfortable couple—James and Isabel, returning from their holiday stroll, and Louis, leaving his horse at the inn, and joining them, began to hear all their school affairs. James had thrown his whole heart into his work, had been making various reforms, introducing new studies, making a point of religious instruction, and meditating on a course of lectures on history, to be given in the evenings, the attendance to be voluntary, but a prize held out for proficiency. Louis took up the subject eagerly, and Isabel entered into the discussion with all her soul, and the grammar-school did indeed seem to be in a way to become something very superior in tone to anything Northwold had formerly seen, engrossing as it did all the powers of a man of such ability, in the full vigour of youth.

Talking earnestly, the trio had reached the Terrace, and James was unlatching the iron gate, when he interrupted himself in the midst of detailing his views on modern languages to say, 'No, I have nothing for you.'

'Sir, I beg your pardon!' was the quick reply from a withered, small, but not ill-dressed old man, 'I only asked—'

'Let the lady pass,' said James, peremptorily, wishing to save his wife from annoyance, 'it is of no use, I never look at petitions.'

'Surely he is not a beggar!' said Isabel, as he drew her on.

'You may be easy about him, my dear,' said James. 'He has laid hold of Louis, who would swallow the whole Spanish legion of impostors. He will be after us directly with a piteous story.'

Louis was after him, with a face more than half arch fun—'Jem, Jem, it is your uncle!'

'Nonsense! How can you be so taken in! Don't go and disappoint granny—I'll settle him.'

'Take care, Jem—it is Oliver, and no mistake! Why, he is as like you as Pendragon blood can make him! Go and beg his pardon.'

James hastened down stairs, as Louis bounded up—sought Mrs. Frost in the sitting-rooms, and, without ceremony, rushed up and knocked at the bed-room door. Jane opened it.

'He is come!' cried Louis—'Oliver is come.'

Old Jane gave a shriek, and ran back wildly, clapping her hands. Her mistress started forward —'Come!—where?'

'Here!—in the hall with Jem.'

He feared that he had been too precipitate, for she hid her face in her hands; but it was the intensity of thanksgiving; and though her whole frame was in a tremor, she flew rather than ran forward, never even seeing Louis's proffered arm. He had only reached the landing-place, when beneath he heard the greeting—'Mother, I can take you home—Cheveleigh is yours.' But to her the words were drowned in her own breathless cry—'My boy! my boy!' She saw, knew, heard nothing, save that the son, missed and mourned for thirty-four years, was safe within her arms, the longing

void filled up. She saw not that the stripling had become a worn and elderly man,—she recked not how he came. He was Oliver, and she had him again! What was the rest to her?

Those words? They might be out of taste, but Fitzjocelyn guessed that to speak them at the first meeting had been the vision of Oliver's life—the object to which he had sacrificed everything. And yet how chill and unheeded they fell!

Louis could have stood moralizing, but his heart had begun to throb at the chance that Oliver brought tidings of Mary. He felt himself an intrusive spectator, and hastened into the drawing-room, when Clara nearly ran against him, but stood still. 'I beg your pardon, but what is Isabel telling me? Is it really?'

'Really! Kindred blood signally failed to speak.'

Clara took a turn up and down the room. 'I say, Louis, ought I to go down?'

'No; leave him and granny to their happiness,' said Louis; and James, at the same moment running up, threw himself into a chair, with an emphatic 'There!'

'Dear grandmamma!' said Isabel; 'I hope it is not too much for her.'

James made no answer.

'Are you disappointed in him, dear James?' she continued.

'I could not be disappointed,' he answered, shortly.

'Poor man—he has a poor welcome among you,' said Louis.

'Welcome is not to be bought,' said James. 'I could not stand hearing him reply to poor granny's heartfelt rapture with his riches and his Cheveleigh, as if that were all she could prize.'

Steps were mounting the stairs, and the alert, sharp tones of Oliver were heard—'Married then? Should have waited—done it in style.'

James and Isabel glanced at each other in amused indignation; and Mrs. Frost entered, tremulous with joy, and her bright hazel eyes lustrous with tears, as she leant on the arm of her recovered son. He was a little, spare, shrivelled man, drolly like his nephew, but with all the youthfulness dried out of him, the freckles multiplied by scores, and the keen black eyes sunken, sharpened, and surrounded with innumerable shrewd puckers. The movements were even more brisk, as if time were money; and in speech, the small change of particles was omitted, and every word seemed bitten off short at the end; the whole man, in gesture, manner, and voice, an almost grotesque caricature of all James's peculiarities.

'Mrs. Roland Dynevor, I presume? said Oliver, as Isabel came forward to meet him.

'Never so known hitherto,' returned her husband. 'My wife is Mrs. James Frost, if you please.'

'That is over now,' said Oliver, consequentially; and as his mother presented to him 'poor Henry's little Clara,' he kissed her affectionately, saying, 'Well-grown young lady, upon my word! Like her father—that's right.'

'Here is almost another grandchild,' said Mrs. Frost—'Louis Fitzjocelyn—not much like the Fitzjocelyn you remember, but a new M.P. as he was then.'

'Humph!' said Oliver, with a dry sound, apparently expressing, 'So that is what our Parliament is made of. Father well?' he asked.

'Quite well, thank you, sir.'

Oliver levelled his keen eyes on him, as though noting down observations, while he was burning for tidings of Mary, yet held back by reserve and sense of the uncongeniality of the man. His aunt, however, in the midst of her own joy, marked his restless eye, and put the question, whether Mary Ponsonby had arrived?

'Ha! you let her go, did you?' said Oliver, turning on Louis. 'I told her father you'd be no such fool. He was in a proper rage at your letter, but it would have blown over if you had stuck by her, and he is worth enough to set you all on your legs.'

Louis could not bring himself to make any answer, and his mother interrupted by a question as to Dona Rosita.

'Like all the rest. Eyes and feet, that's all. Foolish business! But what possessed Ormersfield to make such a blunder? I never saw Ponsonby in such a tantrum, and his are no trifles.'

'It was all the fault of your clerk, Robson,' said James; 'he would not refute the story.'

'Sharp fellow, Robson,' chuckled Oliver; 'couldn't refute it. No; as he told me, he knew the way Ponsonby had gone on ever since his wife went home, and of late he had sent him to Guayaquil, about the Equatorial Navigation—so he had seen nothing;—and, says he to me, he had no notion of bringing out poor Miss Ponsonby—did not know whether her father would thank him; and yet the best of it is, that he pacifies Ponsonby with talking of difficulty of dealing with preconceived notions. Knows how to get hold of him. Marriage would never have been if he had been there, but it was the less damage. Mary would have had more reason to have turned about, if she had not found him married.'

'But, Oliver,' said his mother, 'I thought this Robson was an honest man, in whom you had entire confidence!'

'Ha! ha! D'ye think I'd put that in *any* man? No, no; he knows how far to go with me. I've plenty of checks on him. Can't get business done but by a wide-awake chap like that.'

'Is Madison under him?' asked Louis, feeling as if he had been apprenticing the boy to a chief of banditti.

'The lad you sent out? Ay. Left him up at the mines. Sharp fellow, but too raw for the office yet.'

'Too scrupulous!' said James, in an undertone, while his uncle was explaining to his mother that he could not have come away without leaving Robson to manage his affairs, and Mr. Ponsonby, and telling exultingly some stories of the favourite clerk's sharp practice.

The party went down together in a not very congenial state.

Next to Mrs. Frost's unalloyed gladness, the most pleasant spectacle was old Jane, who volunteered her services in helping to wait, that she might have the delight of hovering about Master Oliver, to whom she attended exclusively, and would not let Charlotte so much as offer him the potatoes. And Charlotte was in rather an excited state at the presence of a Peruvian production, and the flutter of expecting a letter which would make her repent of the smiles and blushes she had expended over an elaborate Valentine, admired as an original production, and valued the more, alas! because poor Marianne had received none. Charlotte was just beginning to repent of her ungenerous triumph, and agitation made her waiting less deft and pretty than usual; but this mattered the less, since to Oliver any attendance by women-servants was a shock, as were the small table and plain fare; and he looked round uneasily.

'Here is an old friend, Oliver,' said his mother, taking up a curious old soup-ladle.

'I see. It will take some time to get up the stock of plate. I shall give an order as I pass through London. To be engraved with the Dynevor crest as before, or would you prefer the lozenge, ma'am?'

'Oh, my dear, don't talk of it now! I am only sorry this is nothing but mutton-broth; but that's what comes of sudden arrivals, Oliver.'

'It shall be remedied at home,' said Oliver, as if he considered mutton-broth as one degree from famine.

'I know you had it for me,' said Louis. 'If Jane excels in one art before all others, it is in mutton-broth.'

Oliver darted a glance as if he imagined this compliment to be mere derision of his mother and Jane.

Things went on in this style all the evening. Oliver had two ideas—Cheveleigh, and the Equatorial Steam Navigation Company—and on these he rang the changes.

There was something striking in his devotion of a lifetime to redeem his mother's fortunes, but the grandeur was not easily visible in the detail. He came down on Dynevor Terrace as a consequential, moneyed man, contemptuous of the poverty which he might have alleviated, and obtruding tardy and oppressive patronage. He rubbed against the new generation in too many places for charity or gratitude to be easy. He was utterly at variance with taste, and openly broached unworthy sentiments

and opinions, and his kindness and his displeasure were equally irksome. If such repugnance to him were felt even by Louis, the least personally affected, and the best able to sympathize with his aunt; it was far stronger in James, abhorring patronage, sensible that, happen what might, his present perfect felicity must be disturbed, and devoid of any sentiment for Cheveleigh that could make the restoration compensate for the obligation so unpleasantly enforced; and Isabel's fastidious taste made her willing to hold aloof as far as might be without vexing the old lady.

There was no amalgamation. Fitzjocelyn and Isabel were near the window, talking over her former home and her sisters, and all the particulars of the society which she had left, and he had entered; highly interesting to themselves and to the listening Clara, but to the uninitiated sounding rather like 'taste, Shakspeare, and the musical glasses.'

Oliver and his mother, sitting close together, were living in an old world; asking and answering many a melancholy question on friends, dead or lost sight of, and yet these last they always made sure that they should find when they went home to Cheveleigh—that home to which the son reverted with unbroken allegiance; while the whole was interspersed with accounts of his plans, and explanations of his vast designs for the renovation of the old place.

James hovered on the outskirts of both parties, too little at ease to attach himself to either; fretted by his wife's interest in a world to which he was a stranger, impatient of his uncle's plans, and trebly angered by observing the shrewd curious glances which the old man cast from time to time towards the pair by the window. Fortunately, Mrs. Frost was still too absolutely wrapt in maternal transport to mark the clouds that were gathering over her peace. To look at her son, wait on him, and hear his voice, so fully satisfied her, that as yet it made little difference what that voice said, and it never entered her mind to suppose that all her dear ones were not sharing her bliss.

'You were the first to tell me,' she said, as she bade Louis good night with fondness additional to her messenger of good news; but, as he pressed her dear old trembling hand, his heart misgave him whether her joy might not be turned to pain; and when he congratulated Jane, and heard her call it a blessed day, he longed to be certain that it would prove so.

And, before he could sleep that night, he wrote a letter to Tom Madison, warning him to let no temptation nor bad example lead him aside from strict justice and fair dealing; and advising him rather to come home, and give up all prospects of rising, than not preserve his integrity.

James and Isabel were not merciful to their uncle when they could speak of him without restraint; and began to conjecture his intentions with regard to them.

'You don't wish to become an appendage to Cheveleigh?' said James, fondly.

'I! who never knew happiness till I came here!'

'I do not know what my uncle may propose,' said James, 'but I know you coincide in my determination that he shall never interfere with the duties of my office.'

'You do not imagine that he wishes it?'

'I know he wishes I were not in Holy Orders. I knew he disliked it at the time of my ordination; but if he wished me to act according to his views, he should have given himself the right to dictate.'

'By not neglecting you all your youth.'

'Not that I regret or resent what concerns myself; but it was his leaving me a burden on my grandmother that drove me to become a clergyman, and a consistent one I will be, not an idle heir-apparent to this estate, receiving it as his gift, not my own birthright.'

'An idle clergyman! Never! never!' cried Isabel. 'I should not believe it was you! And the school—you could not leave it just as your plans are working, and the boys improving?'

'Certainly not; it would be fatal to abandon it to that stick, Powell. Ah! Isabel,' as he looked at her beautiful countenance, 'how I pity the man who has not a high-minded wife! Suppose you came begging and imploring me not to give any umbrage to the man, because you so doted upon diamonds.'

'The less merit when one has learnt that they are very cold hard stones,' said Isabel, smiling.

Isabel was a high-minded wife, but she would have been a still better one if her loving admiration had allowed her to soften James, or to question whether pride and rancour did not lurk unperceived in the midst of the really high and sound motives that prompted him.

While their grandmother could only see Oliver on the best side, James and Isabel could only see him on the worst, and lost the greatness of the design in the mercenary habits that exclusive perseverance in it had produced. It had been a false greatness, but they could not grant the elevation of mind that had originally conceived it.

The following day was Sunday, and nothing worse took place than little skirmishes, in which the uncle and nephew's retort and rejoinder were so drolly similar, that Clara found herself thinking of Miss Faithfull's two sandy cats over a mouse; but she kept her simile to herself, finding that Isabel regarded the faintest, gentlest comparison of the two gentlemen almost as an affront. All actual debate was staved off by Mrs. Frost's entreaty that business discussion should be deferred. 'Humph!' said Oliver, 'you reign here, ma'am, but that's not the way we get on at Lima.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.