Braddon Mary Elizabeth

John Marchmont's Legacy. Volumes 1-3

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John Marchmont's Legacy, Volumes 1-3:

Содержание

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VOLUME I

CHAPTER I. THE MAN WITH THE BANNER

The history of Edward Arundel, second son of Christopher Arundel Dangerfield Arundel, of Dangerfield Park, Devonshire, began on a certain dark winter's night upon which the lad, still a schoolboy, went with his cousin, Martin Mostyn, to witness a blank–verse tragedy at one of the London theatres.

There are few men who, looking back at the long story of their lives, cannot point to one page in the record of the past at which the actual history of life began. The page may come in the very middle of the book, perhaps; perhaps almost at the end. But let it come where it will, it is, after all, only the actual commencement. At an appointed hour in man's existence, the overture which has

been going on ever since he was born is brought to a sudden close by the sharp vibration of the prompter's signal–bell; the curtain rises, and the drama of life begins. Very insignificant sometimes are the first scenes of the play,–common–place, trite, wearisome; but watch them closely, and interwoven with every word, dimly recognisable in every action, may be seen the awful hand of Destiny. The story has begun: already we, the spectators, can make vague guesses at the plot, and predicate the solemn climax; it is only the actors who are ignorant of the meaning of their several parts, and who are stupidly reckless of the obvious catastrophe.

The story of young Arundel's life began when he was a light–hearted, heedless lad of seventeen, newly escaped for a brief interval from the care of his pastors and masters.

The lad had come to London on a Christmas visit to his father's sister, a worldly–minded widow, with a great many sons and daughters, and an income only large enough to enable her to keep up the appearances of wealth essential to the family pride of one of the Arundels of Dangerfield.

Laura Arundel had married a Colonel Mostyn, of the East India Company's service, and had returned from India after a wandering life of some years, leaving her dead husband behind her, and bringing away with her five daughters and three sons, most of whom had been born under canvas.

Mrs. Mostyn bore her troubles bravely, and contrived to do more with her pension, and an additional income of four

hundred a year from a small fortune of her own, than the most consummate womanly management can often achieve. Her house in Montague Square was elegantly furnished, her daughters were exquisitely dressed, her sons sensibly educated, her dinners well cooked. She was not an agreeable woman; she was perhaps, if any thing, too sensible,–so very sensible as to be obviously intolerant of anything like folly in others. She was a good mother; but by no means an indulgent one. She expected her sons to succeed in life, and her daughters to marry rich men; and would have had little patience with any disappointment in either of these reasonable expectations. She was attached to her brother Christopher Arundel, and she was very well pleased to spend the autumn months at Dangerfield, where the hunting–breakfasts gave her daughters an excellent platform for the exhibition of charming demi–toilettes and social and domestic graces, perhaps more dangerous to the susceptible hearts of rich young squires than the fascinations of a *valse à deux temps* or an Italian scena.

But the same Mrs. Mostyn, who never forgot to keep up her correspondence with the owner of Dangerfield Park, utterly ignored the existence of another brother, a certain Hubert Arundel, who had, perhaps, much more need of her sisterly friendship than the wealthy Devonshire squire. Heaven knows, the world seemed a lonely place to this younger son, who had been educated for the Church, and was fain to content himself with a scanty living in one of the dullest and dampest towns in fenny Lincolnshire. His sister might have very easily made

life much more pleasant to the Rector of Swampington and his only daughter; but Hubert Arundel was a great deal too proud to remind her of this. If Mrs. Mostyn chose to forget him,–the brother and sister had been loving friends and dear companions long ago, under the beeches at Dangerfield,–she was welcome to do so. She was better off than he was; and it is to be remarked, that if A's income is three hundred a year, and B's a thousand, the chances are as seven to three that B will forget any old intimacy that may have existed between himself and A. Hubert Arundel had been wild at college, and had put his autograph across so many oblong slips of blue paper, acknowledging value received that had been only half received, that by the time the claims of all the holders of these portentous morsels of stamped paper had been satisfied, the younger son's fortune had melted away, leaving its sometime possessor the happy owner of a pair of pointers, a couple of guns by crack makers, a good many foils, single–sticks, boxing–gloves, wire masks, basket helmets, leathern leg–guards, and other paraphernalia, a complete set of the old *Sporting Magazine*, from 1792 to the current year, bound in scarlet morocco, several boxes of very bad cigars, a Scotch terrier, and a pipe of undrinkable port.

Of all these possessions, only the undrinkable port now remained to show that Hubert Arundel had once had a decent younger son's fortune, and had succeeded most admirably in making ducks and drakes of it. The poor about Swampington believed in the sweet red wine, which had been specially

concocted for Israelitish dealers in jewelry, cigars, pictures, wines, and specie. The Rector's pensioners smacked their lips over the mysterious liquid and confidently affirmed that it did them more good than all the doctor's stuff the parish apothecary could send them. Poor Hubert Arundel was well content to find that at least this scanty crop of corn had grown up from the wild oats he had sown at Cambridge. The wine pleased the poor creatures who drank it, and was scarcely likely to do them any harm; and there was a reasonable prospect that the last bottle would by–and–by pass out of the rectory cellars, and with it the last token of that bitterly regretted past.

I have no doubt that Hubert Arundel felt the sting of his only sister's neglect, as only a poor and proud man can feel such an insult; but he never let any confession of this sentiment escape his lips; and when Mrs. Mostyn, being seized with a fancy for doing this forgotten brother a service, wrote him a letter of insolent advice, winding up with an offer to procure his only child a situation as nursery governess, the Rector of Swampington only crushed the missive in his strong hand, and flung it into his study–fire, with a muttered exclamation that sounded terribly like an oath.

"A *nursery* governess!" he repeated, savagely; "yes; an underpaid drudge, to teach children their A B C, and mend their frocks and make their pinafores. I should like Mrs. Mostyn to talk to my little Livy for half an hour. I think my girl would have put the lady down so completely by the end of that time, that we

should never hear any more about nursery governesses."

He laughed bitterly as he repeated the obnoxious phrase; but his laugh changed to a sigh.

Was it strange that the father should sigh as he remembered how he had seen the awful hand of Death fall suddenly upon younger and stronger men than himself? What if he were to die, and leave his only child unmarried? What would become of her, with her dangerous gifts, with her fatal dowry of beauty and intellect and pride?

"But she would never do any thing wrong," the father thought. "Her religious principles are strong enough to keep her right under any circumstances, in spite of any temptation. Her sense of duty is more powerful than any other sentiment. She would never be false to that; she would never be false to that."

In return for the hospitality of Dangerfield Park, Mrs. Mostyn was in the habit of opening her doors to either Christopher Arundel or his sons, whenever any one of the three came to London. Of course she infinitely preferred seeing Arthur Arundel, the eldest son and heir, seated at her well–spread table, and flirting with one of his pretty cousins, than to be bored with his rackety younger brother, a noisy lad of seventeen, with no better prospects than a commission in her Majesty's service, and a hundred and fifty pounds a year to eke out his pay; but she was, notwithstanding, graciously pleased to invite Edward to spend his Christmas holidays in her comfortable household; and it was thus it came to pass that on the 29th of December, in the year

1838, the story of Edward Arundel's life began in a stage–box at Drury Lane Theatre.

The box had been sent to Mrs. Mostyn by the fashionable editor of a fashionable newspaper; but that lady and her daughters being previously engaged, had permitted the two boys to avail themselves of the editorial privilege.

The tragedy was the dull production of a distinguished literary amateur, and even the great actor who played the principal character could not make the performance particularly enlivening. He certainly failed in impressing Mr. Edward Arundel, who flung himself back in his chair and yawned dolefully during the earlier part of the entertainment.

"It ain't particularly jolly, is it, Martin?" he said naïvely, "Let's go out and have some oysters, and come in again just before the pantomime begins."

"Mamma made me promise that we wouldn't leave the theatre till we left for good, Ned," his cousin answered; "and then we're to go straight home in a cab."

Edward Arundel sighed.

"I wish we hadn't come till half–price, old fellow," he said drearily. "If I'd known it was to be a tragedy, I wouldn't have come away from the Square in such a hurry. I wonder why people write tragedies, when nobody likes them."

He turned his back to the stage, and folded his arms upon the velvet cushion of the box preparatory to indulging himself in a deliberate inspection of the audience. Perhaps no brighter

face looked upward that night towards the glare and glitter of the great chandelier than that of the fair–haired lad in the stage–box. His candid blue eyes beamed with a more radiant sparkle than any of the myriad lights in the theatre; a nimbus of golden hair shone about his broad white forehead; glowing health, careless happiness, truth, good–nature, honesty, boyish vivacity, and the courage of a young lion,–all were expressed in the fearless smile, the frank yet half–defiant gaze. Above all, this lad of seventeen looked especially what he was,–a thorough gentleman. Martin Mostyn was prim and effeminate, precociously tired of life, precociously indifferent to everything but his own advantage; but the Devonshire boy's talk was still fragrant with the fresh perfume of youth and innocence, still gay with the joyous recklessness of early boyhood. He was as impatient for the noisy pantomime overture, and the bright troops of fairies in petticoats of spangled muslin, as the most inveterate cockney cooling his snub–nose against the iron railing of the gallery. He was as ready to fall in love with the painted beauty of the ill–paid ballet–girls, as the veriest child in the wide circle of humanity about him. Fresh, untainted, unsuspicious, he looked out at the world, ready to believe in everything and everybody.

"How you do fidget, Edward!" whispered Martin Mostyn peevishly; "why don't you look at the stage? It's capital fun."

"Fun!"

"Yes; I don't mean the tragedy you know, but the supernumeraries. Did you ever see such an awkward set of

fellows in all your life? There's a man there with weak legs and a heavy banner, that I've been watching all the evening. He's more fun than all the rest of it put together."

Mr. Mostyn, being of course much too polite to point out the man in question, indicated him with a twitch of his light eyebrows; and Edward Arundel, following that indication, singled out the banner–holder from a group of soldiers in medieval dress, who had been standing wearily enough upon one side of the stage during a long, strictly private and confidential dialogue between the princely hero of the tragedy and one of his accommodating satellites. The lad uttered a cry of surprise as he looked at the weak–legged banner–holder.

Mr. Mostyn turned upon his cousin with some vexation.

"I can't help it, Martin," exclaimed young Arundel; "I can't be mistaken–yes–poor fellow, to think that he should come to this!–you haven't forgotten him, Martin, surely?"

"Forgotten what–forgotten whom? My dear Edward, what *do* you mean?"

"John Marchmont, the poor fellow who used to teach us mathematics at Vernon's; the fellow the governor sacked because–"

"Well, what of him?"

"The poor chap with the banner!" exclaimed the boy, in a breathless whisper; "don't you see, Martin? didn't you recognise him? It's Marchmont, poor old Marchmont, that we used to chaff, and that the governor sacked because he had a

constitutional cough, and wasn't strong enough for his work."

"Oh, yes, I remember him well enough," Mr. Mostyn answered, indifferently. "Nobody could stand his cough, you know; and he was a vulgar fellow, into the bargain."

"He wasn't a vulgar fellow," said Edward indignantly;–"there, there's the curtain down again;–he belonged to a good family in Lincolnshire, and was heir–presumptive to a stunning fortune. I've heard him say so twenty times."

Martin Mostyn did not attempt to repress an involuntary sneer, which curled his lips as his cousin spoke.

"Oh, I dare say you've heard *him* say so, my dear boy," he murmured superciliously.

"Ah, and it was true," cried Edward; "he wasn't a fellow to tell lies; perhaps he'd have suited Mr. Vernon better if he had been. He had bad health, and was weak, and all that sort of thing; but he wasn't a snob. He showed me a signet–ring once that he used to wear on his watch–chain–"

"A *silver* watch–chain," simpered Mr. Mostyn, "just like a carpenter's."

"Don't be such a supercilious cad, Martin. He was very kind to me, poor Marchmont; and I know I was always a nuisance to him, poor old fellow; for you know I never could get on with Euclid. I'm sorry to see him here. Think, Martin, what an occupation for him! I don't suppose he gets more than nine or ten shillings a week for it."

"A shilling a night is, I believe, the ordinary remuneration of

a stage–soldier. They pay as much for the real thing as for the sham, you see; the defenders of our country risk their lives for about the same consideration. Where are you going, Ned?"

Edward Arundel had left his place, and was trying to undo the door of the box.

"To see if I can get at this poor fellow."

"You persist in declaring, then, that the man with the weak legs is our old mathematical drudge? Well, I shouldn't wonder. The fellow was coughing all through the five acts, and that's uncommonly like Marchmont. You're surely not going to renew your acquaintance with him?"

But young Arundel had just succeeded in opening the door, and he left the box without waiting to answer his cousin's question. He made his way very rapidly out of the theatre, and fought manfully through the crowds who were waiting about the pit and gallery doors, until he found himself at the stage–entrance. He had often looked with reverent wonder at the dark portal; but he had never before essayed to cross the sacred threshold. But the guardian of the gate to this theatrical paradise, inhabited by fairies at a guinea a week, and baronial retainers at a shilling a night, is ordinarily a very inflexible individual, not to be corrupted by any mortal persuasion, and scarcely corruptible by the more potent influence of gold or silver. Poor Edward's half–a–crown had no effect whatever upon the stern door–keeper, who thanked him for his donation, but told him that it was against his orders to let anybody go up–stairs.

"But I want to see some one so particularly," the boy said eagerly. "Don't you think you could manage it for me, you know? He's an old friend of mine,–one of the supernu–what's–its–names?" added Edward, stumbling over the word. "He carried a banner in the tragedy, you know; and he's got such an awful cough, poor chap."

"Ze man who garried ze panner vith a gough," said the door–keeper reflectively. He was an elderly German, and had kept guard at that classic doorway for half–a–century or so; "Parking Cheremiah."

"Barking Jeremiah!"

"Yes, sir. They gall him Parking pecause he's berbetually goughin' his poor veag head off; and they gall him Cheremiah pecause he's alvays belangholy."

"Oh, do let me see him," cried Mr. Edward Arundel. "I know you can manage it; so do, that's a good fellow. I tell you he's a friend of mine, and quite a gentleman too. Bless you, there isn't a move in mathematics he isn't up to; and he'll come into a fortune some of these days–"

"Yaase," interrupted the door–keeper, sarcastically, "Zey bake von of him pegause off dad."

"And can I see him?"

"I phill dry and vind him vor you. Here, you Chim," said the door–keeper, addressing a dirty youth, who had just nailed an official announcement of the next morning's rehearsal upon the back of a stony–hearted swing–door, which was apt to jam the

fingers of the uninitiated,–"vot is ze name off zat zuber vith ze pad gough, ze man zay gall Parking."

"Oh, that's Mortimore."

"To you know if he's on in ze virsd zene?"

"Yes. He's one of the demons; but the scene's just over. Do you want him?"

"You gan dake ub zis young chendleman's gard do him, and dell him to slib town here if he has kod a vaid," said the door–keeper.

Mr. Arundel handed his card to the dirty boy.

"He'll come to me fast enough, poor fellow," he muttered. "I usen't to chaff him as the others did, and I'm glad I didn't, now."

Edward Arundel could not easily forget that one brief scrutiny in which he had recognised the wasted face of the schoolmaster's hack, who had taught him mathematics only two years before. Could there be anything more piteous than that degrading spectacle? The feeble frame, scarcely able to sustain that paltry one–sided banner of calico and tinsel; the two rude daubs of coarse vermilion upon the hollow cheeks; the black smudges that were meant for eyebrows; the wretched scrap of horsehair glued upon the pinched chin in dismal mockery of a beard; and through all this the pathetic pleading of large hazel eyes, bright with the unnatural lustre of disease, and saying perpetually, more plainly than words can speak, "Do not look at me; do not despise me; do not even pity me. It won't last long."

That fresh–hearted schoolboy was still thinking of this, when

a wasted hand was laid lightly and tremulously on his arm, and looking up he saw a man in a hideous mask and a tight–fitting suit of scarlet and gold standing by his side.

"I'll take off my mask in a minute, Arundel," said a faint voice, that sounded hollow and muffled within a cavern of pasteboard and wickerwork. "It was very good of you to come round; very, very good!"

"I was so sorry to see you here, Marchmont; I knew you in a moment, in spite of the disguise."

The supernumerary had struggled out of his huge head–gear by this time, and laid the fabric of papier–mâché and tinsel carefully aside upon a shelf. He had washed his face before putting on the mask, for he was not called upon to appear before a British public in martial semblance any more upon that evening. The pale wasted face was interesting and gentlemanly, not by any means handsome, but almost womanly in its softness of expression. It was the face of a man who had not yet seen his thirtieth birthday; who might never live to see it, Edward Arundel thought mournfully.

"Why do you do this, Marchmont?" the boy asked bluntly.

"Because there was nothing else left for me to do," the stage–demon answered with a sad smile. "I can't get a situation in a school, for my health won't suffer me to take one; or it won't suffer any employer to take me, for fear of my falling ill upon his hands, which comes to the same thing; so I do a little copying for the law–stationers, and this helps out that, and I get on as well as

I can. I wouldn't so much mind if it wasn't for–"

He stopped suddenly, interrupted by a paroxysm of coughing.

"If it wasn't for whom, old fellow?"

"My poor little girl; my poor little motherless Mary."

Edward Arundel looked grave, and perhaps a little ashamed of himself. He had forgotten until this moment that his old tutor had been left a widower at four–and–twenty, with a little daughter to support out of his scanty stipend.

"Don't be down–hearted, old fellow," the lad whispered, tenderly; "perhaps I shall be able to help you, you know. And the little girl can go down to Dangerfield; I know my mother would take care of her, and will keep her there till you get strong and well. And then you might start a fencing–room, or a shooting–gallery, or something of that sort, at the West End; and I'd come to you, and bring lots of fellows to you, and you'd get on capitally, you know."

Poor John Marchmont, the asthmatic supernumerary, looked perhaps the very last person in the world whom it could be possible to associate with a pair of foils, or a pistol and a target; but he smiled faintly at his old pupil's enthusiastic talk.

"You were always a good fellow, Arundel," he said, gravely. "I don't suppose I shall ever ask you to do me a service; but if, by–and–by, this cough makes me knock under, and my little Polly should be left–I–I think you'd get your mother to be kind to her,–wouldn't you, Arundel?"

A picture rose before the supernumerary's weary eyes as he

said this; the picture of a pleasant lady whose description he had often heard from the lips of a loving son, a rambling old mansion, wide–spreading lawns, and long arcades of oak and beeches leading away to the blue distance. If this Mrs. Arundel, who was so tender and compassionate and gentle to every red–cheeked cottage–girl who crossed her pathway,–Edward had told him this very often,–would take compassion also upon this little one! If she would only condescend to see the child, the poor pale neglected flower, the fragile lily, the frail exotic blossom, that was so cruelly out of place upon the bleak pathways of life!

"If that's all that troubles you," young Arundel cried eagerly, "you may make your mind easy, and come and have some oysters. We'll take care of the child. I'll adopt her, and my mother shall educate her, and she shall marry a duke. Run away, now, old fellow, and change your clothes, and come and have oysters, and stout out of the pewter."

Mr. Marchmont shook his head.

"My time's just up," he said; "I'm on in the next scene. It was very kind of you to come round, Arundel; but this isn't exactly the best place for you. Go back to your friends, my dear boy, and don't think any more of me. I'll write to you some day about little Mary."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," exclaimed the boy. "You'll give me your address instanter, and I'll come to see you the first thing to–morrow morning, and you'll introduce me to little Mary; and if she and I are not the best friends in the world, I shall

never again boast of my successes with lovely woman. What's the number, old fellow?"

Mr. Arundel had pulled out a smart morocco pocket–book and a gold pencil–case.

"Twenty–seven, Oakley Street, Lambeth. But I'd rather you wouldn't come, Arundel; your friends wouldn't like it."

"My friends may go hang themselves. I shall do as I like, and I'll be with you to breakfast, sharp ten."

The supernumerary had no time to remonstrate. The progress of the music, faintly audible from the lobby in which this conversation had taken place, told him that his scene was nearly on.

"I can't stop another moment. Go back to your friends, Arundel. Good night. God bless you!"

"Stay; one word. The Lincolnshire property–"

"Will never come to me, my boy," the demon answered sadly, through his mask; for he had been busy re–investing himself in that demoniac guise. "I tried to sell my reversion, but the Jews almost laughed in my face when they heard me cough. Good night."

He was gone, and the swing–door slammed in Edward Arundel's face. The boy hurried back to his cousin, who was cross and dissatisfied at his absence. Martin Mostyn had discovered that the ballet–girls were all either old or ugly, the music badly chosen, the pantomime stupid, the scenery a failure. He asked a few supercilious questions about his old tutor,

but scarcely listened to Edward's answers; and was intensely aggravated with his companion's pertinacity in sitting out the comic business–in which poor John Marchmont appeared and re–appeared; now as a well–dressed passenger carrying a parcel, which he deliberately sacrificed to the felonious propensities of the clown; now as a policeman, now as a barber, now as a chemist, now as a ghost; but always buffeted, or cajoled, or bonneted, or imposed upon; always piteous, miserable, and long–suffering; with arms that ached from carrying a banner through five acts of blank–verse weariness, with a head that had throbbed under the weight of a ponderous edifice of pasteboard and wicker, with eyes that were sore with the evil influence of blue–fire and gunpowder smoke, with a throat that had been poisoned by sulphurous vapours, with bones that were stiff with the playful pummelling of clown and pantaloon; and all for–a shilling a night!

CHAPTER II. LITTLE MARY

Poor John Marchmont had given his address unwillingly enough to his old pupil. The lodging in Oakley Street was a wretched back–room upon the second–floor of a house whose lower regions were devoted to that species of establishment commonly called a "ladies' wardrobe." The poor gentleman, the teacher of mathematics, the law–writer, the Drury–Lane supernumerary, had shrunk from any exposure of his poverty; but his pupil's imperious good–nature had overridden every objection, and John Marchmont awoke upon the morning after the meeting at Drury–Lane to the rather embarrassing recollection that he was to expect a visitor to breakfast with him.

How was he to entertain this dashing, high–spirited young schoolboy, whose lot was cast in the pleasant pathways of life, and who was no doubt accustomed to see at his matutinal meal such luxuries as John Marchmont had only beheld in the fairy–like realms of comestible beauty exhibited to hungry foot–passengers behind the plate–glass windows of Italian warehouses?

"He has hams stewed in Madeira, and Perigord pies, I dare say, at his Aunt Mostyn's," John thought, despairingly. "What can I give him to eat?"

But John Marchmont, after the manner of the poor, was apt to over–estimate the extravagance of the rich. If he could

have seen the Mostyn breakfast then preparing in the lower regions of Montague Square, he might have been considerably relieved; for he would have only beheld mild infusions of tea and coffee–in silver vessels, certainly–four French rolls hidden under a glistening damask napkin, six triangular fragments of dry toast, cut from a stale half–quartern, four new–laid eggs, and about half a pound of bacon cut into rashers of transcendental delicacy. Widow ladies who have daughters to marry do not plunge very deep into the books of Messrs. Fortnum and Mason.

"He used to like hot rolls when I was at Vernon's," John thought, rather more hopefully; "I wonder whether he likes hot rolls still?"

Pondering thus, Mr. Marchmont dressed himself,–very neatly, very carefully; for he was one of those men whom even poverty cannot rob of man's proudest attribute, his individuality. He made no noisy protest against the humiliations to which he was compelled to submit; he uttered no boisterous assertions of his own merit; he urged no clamorous demand to be treated as a gentleman in his day of misfortune; but in his own mild, undemonstrative way he did assert himself, quite as effectually as if he had raved all day upon the hardship of his lot, and drunk himself mad and blind under the pressure of his calamities. He never abandoned the habits which had been peculiar to him from his childhood. He was as neat and orderly in his second–floor–back as he had been seven or eight years before in his simple apartments at Cambridge. He did not recognise that

association which most men perceive between poverty and shirt–sleeves, or poverty and beer. He was content to wear threadbare cloth, but adhered most obstinately to a prejudice in favour of clean linen. He never acquired those lounging vagabond habits peculiar to some men in the day of trouble. Even amongst the supernumeraries of Drury Lane, he contrived to preserve his self–respect; if they nicknamed him Barking Jeremiah, they took care only to pronounce that playful sobriquet when the gentleman–super was safely out of hearing. He was so polite in the midst of his reserve, that the person who could wilfully have offended him must have been more unkindly than any of her Majesty's servants. It is true, that the great tragedian, on more than one occasion, apostrophised the weak–kneed banner–holder as "BEAST" when the super's cough had peculiarly disturbed his composure; but the same great man gave poor John Marchmont a letter to a distinguished physician, compassionately desiring the relief of the same pulmonary affection. If John Marchmont had not been prompted by his own instincts to struggle against the evil influences of poverty, he would have done battle sturdily for the sake of one who was ten times dearer to him than himself.

If he *could* have become a swindler or a reprobate,–it would have been about as easy for him to become either as to have burst at once, and without an hour's practice, into a full–blown Léotard or Olmar,–his daughter's influence would have held him back as securely as if the slender arms twined tenderly about him had

been chains of adamant forged by an enchanter's power.

How could he be false to his little one, this helpless child, who had been confided to him in the darkest hour of his existence; the hour in which his wife had yielded to the many forces arrayed against her in life's battle, and had left him alone in the world to fight for his little girl?

"If I were to die, I think Arundel's mother would be kind to her," John Marchmont thought, as he finished his careful toilet. "Heaven knows, I have no right to ask or expect such a thing; but Polly will be rich by–and–by, perhaps, and will be able to repay them."

A little hand knocked lightly at the door of his room while he was thinking this, and a childish voice said,

"May I come in, papa?"

The little girl slept with one of the landlady's children, in a room above her father's. John opened the door, and let her in. The pale wintry sunshine, creeping in at the curtainless window near which Mr. Marchmont sat, shone full upon the child's face as she came towards him. It was a small, pale face, with singularly delicate features, a tiny straight nose, a pensive mouth, and large thoughtful hazel eyes. The child's hair fell loosely upon her shoulders; not in those corkscrew curls so much affected by mothers in the humbler walks of life, nor yet in those crisp undulations lately adopted in Belgravian nurseries; but in soft silken masses, only curling at the extreme end of each tress. Miss Marchmont–she was always called Miss Marchmont in

that Oakley Street household–wore her brown–stuff frock and scanty diaper pinafore as neatly as her father wore his threadbare coat and darned linen. She was very pretty, very lady–like, very interesting; but it was impossible to look at her without a vague feeling of pain, that was difficult to understand. You knew, by–and–by, why you were sorry for this little girl. She had never been a child. That divine period of perfect innocence,–innocence of all sorrow and trouble, falsehood and wrong,–that bright holiday–time of the soul, had never been hers. The ruthless hand of poverty had snatched away from her the gift which God had given her in her cradle; and at eight years old she was a woman,–a woman invested with all that is most beautiful amongst womanly attributes–love, tenderness, compassion, carefulness for others, unselfish devotion, uncomplaining patience, heroic endurance. She was a woman by reason of all these virtues; but she was no longer a child. At three years old she had bidden farewell for ever to the ignorant selfishness, the animal enjoyment of childhood, and had learned what it was to be sorry for poor papa and mamma; and from that first time of awakening to the sense of pity and love, she had never ceased to be the comforter of the helpless young husband who was so soon to be left wifeless.

John had been compelled to leave his child, in order to get a living for her and for himself in the hard service of Mr. Laurence Vernon, the principal of the highly select and expensive academy at which Edward Arundel and Martin Mostyn had been educated. But he had left her in good hands; and when the bitter day

of his dismissal came, he was scarcely as sorry as he ought to have been for the calamity which brought him back to his little Mary. It is impossible for any words of mine to tell how much he loved the child; but take into consideration his hopeless poverty, his sensitive and reserved nature, his utter loneliness, the bereavement that had cast a shadow upon his youth, and you will perhaps understand an affection that was almost morbid in its intensity, and which was reciprocated most fully by its object. The little girl loved her father *too much*. When he was with her, she was content to sit by his side, watching him as he wrote; proud to help him, if even by so much as wiping his pens or handing him his blotting–paper; happy to wait upon him, to go out marketing for him, to prepare his scanty meals, to make his tea, and arrange and re–arrange every object in the slenderly furnished second–floor back–room. They talked sometimes of the Lincolnshire fortune,–the fortune which *might* come to Mr. Marchmont, if three people, whose lives when Mary's father had last heard of them, were each worth three times his own feeble existence, would be so obliging as to clear the way for the heir–at–law, by taking an early departure to the churchyard. A more practical man than John Marchmont would have kept a sharp eye upon these three lives, and by some means or other contrived to find out whether number one was consumptive, or number two dropsical, or number three apoplectic; but John was utterly incapable of any such Machiavellian proceeding. I think he sometimes beguiled his weary walks between Oakley

Street and Drury Lane by the dreaming of such childish day–dreams as I should be almost ashamed to set down upon this sober page. The three lives might all happen to be riding in the same express upon the occasion of a terrible collision; but the poor fellow's gentle nature shrank appalled before the vision he had invoked. He could not sacrifice a whole train–full of victims, even for little Mary. He contented himself with borrowing a "Times" newspaper now and then, and looking at the top of the second column, with the faint hope that he should see his own name in large capitals, coupled with the announcement that by applying somewhere he might hear of something to his advantage. He contented himself with this, and with talking about the future to little Mary in the dim firelight. They spent long hours in the shadowy room, only lighted by the faint flicker of a pitiful handful of coals; for the commonest dip–candles are sevenpence–halfpenny a pound, and were dearer, I dare say, in the year '38. Heaven knows what splendid castles in the air these two simple–hearted creatures built for each other's pleasure by that comfortless hearth. I believe that, though the father made a pretence of talking of these things only for the amusement of his child, he was actually the more childish of the two. It was only when he left that fire–lit room, and went back into the hard, reasonable, commonplace world, that he remembered how foolish the talk was, and how it was impossible–yes, impossible–that he, the law–writer and supernumerary, could ever come to be master of Marchmont Towers.

Poor little Mary was in this less practical than her father. She carried her day–dreams into the street, until all Lambeth was made glorious by their supernal radiance. Her imagination ran riot in a vision of a happy future, in which her father would be rich and powerful. I am sorry to say that she derived most of her ideas of grandeur from the New Cut. She furnished the drawing–room at Marchmont Towers from the splendid stores of an upholsterer in that thoroughfare. She laid flaming Brussels carpets upon the polished oaken floors which her father had described to her, and hung cheap satin damask of gorgeous colours before the great oriel windows. She put gilded vases of gaudy artificial flowers on the high carved mantel–pieces in the old rooms, and hung a disreputable gray parrot–for sale at a greengrocer's, and given to the use of bad language–under the stone colonnnade at the end of the western wing. She appointed the tradespeople who should serve the far–away Lincolnshire household; the small matter of distance would, of course, never stand in the way of her gratitude and benevolence. Her papa would employ the civil greengrocer who gave such excellent halfpennyworths of watercresses; the kind butterman who took such pains to wrap up a quarter of a pound of the best eighteenpenny fresh butter for the customer whom he always called "little lady;" the considerate butcher who never cut *more* than the three–quarters of a pound of rump–steak, which made an excellent dinner for Mr. Marchmont and his little girl. Yes, all these people should be rewarded when the

Lincolnshire property came to Mary's papa. Miss Marchmont had some thoughts of building a shop close to Marchmont Towers for the accommodating butcher, and of adopting the greengrocer's eldest daughter for her confidante and companion. Heaven knows how many times the little girl narrowly escaped being run over while walking the material streets in some ecstatic reverie such as this; but Providence was very careful of the motherless girl, and she always returned safely to Oakley Street with her pitiful little purchases of tea and sugar, butter and meat. You will say, perhaps, that at least these foolish day–dreams were childish; but I maintain still, that Mary's soul had long ago bade adieu to infancy, and that even in these visions she was womanly; for she was always thoughtful of others rather than of herself, and there was a great deal more of the practical business of life mingled with the silvery web of her fancies than there should have been so soon after her eighth birthday. At times, too, an awful horror would quicken the pulses of her loving heart as she heard the hacking sound of her father's cough; and a terrible dread would seize her,–the fear that John Marchmont might never live to inherit the Lincolnshire fortune. The child never said her prayers without adding a little extempore supplication, that she might die when her father died. It was a wicked prayer, perhaps; and a clergyman might have taught her that her life was in the hands of Providence; and that it might please Him who had created her to doom her to many desolate years of loneliness; and that it was not for her, in her wretched and helpless ignorance,

to rebel against His divine will. I think if the Archbishop of Canterbury had driven from Lambeth Palace to Oakley Street to tell little Mary this, he would have taught her in vain; and that she would have fallen asleep that night with the old prayer upon her lips, the fond foolish prayer that the bonds which love had woven so firmly might never be roughly broken by death.

Miss Marchmont heard the story of last night's meeting with great pleasure, though it must be owned she looked a little grave when she was told that the generous–hearted school–boy was coming to breakfast; but her gravity was only that of a thoughtful housekeeper, who ponders ways and means, and even while you are telling her the number and quality of your guests, sketches out a rough ground–plan of her dishes, considers the fish in season, and the soups most fitting to precede them, and balances the contending advantages of Palestine and Julienne or Hare and Italian.

"A 'nice' breakfast you say, papa," she said, when her father had finished speaking; "then we must have watercresses, *of course*."

"And hot rolls, Polly dear. Arundel was always fond of hot rolls."

"And hot rolls, four for threepence–halfpenny in the Cut."–(I am ashamed to say that this benighted child talked as deliberately of the "Cut" as she might have done of the "Row.")–"There'll be one left for tea, papa; for we could never eat four rolls. They'll take *such* a lot of butter, though."

The little housekeeper took out an antediluvian bead–purse, and began to examine her treasury. Her father handed all his money to her, as he would have done to his wife; and Mary doled him out the little sums he wanted,–money for half an ounce of tobacco, money for a pint of beer. There were no penny papers in those days, or what a treat an occasional "Telegraph" would have been to poor John Marchmont!

Mary had only one personal extravagance. She read novels,–dirty, bloated, ungainly volumes,–which she borrowed from a snuffy old woman in a little back street, who charged her the smallest hire ever known in the circulating–library business, and who admired her as a wonder of precocious erudition. The only pleasure the child knew in her father's absence was the perusal of these dingy pages; she neglected no duty, she forgot no tender office of ministering care for the loved one who was absent; but when all the little duties had been finished, how delicious it was to sit down to "Madeleine the Deserted," or "Cosmo the Pirate," and to lose herself far away in illimitable regions, peopled by wandering princesses in white satin, and gentlemanly bandits, who had been stolen from their royal fathers' halls by vengeful hordes of gipsies. During these early years of poverty and loneliness, John Marchmont's daughter stored up, in a mind that was morbidly sensitive rather than strong, a terrible amount of dim poetic sentiment; the possession of which is scarcely, perhaps, the best or safest dower for a young lady who has life's journey all before her.

At half–past nine o'clock, all the simple preparations necessary for the reception of a visitor had been completed by Mr. Marchmont and his daughter. All vestiges of John's bed had disappeared; leaving, it is true, rather a suspicious–looking mahogany chest of drawers to mark the spot where once a bed had been. The window had been opened, the room aired and dusted, a bright little fire burned in the shining grate, and the most brilliant of tin tea–kettles hissed upon the hob. The white table–cloth was darned in several places; but it was a remnant of the small stock of linen with which John had begun married life; and the Irish damask asserted its superior quality, in spite of many darns, as positively as Mr. Marchmont's good blood asserted itself in spite of his shabby coat. A brown teapot full of strong tea, a plate of French rolls, a pat of fresh butter, and a broiled haddock, do not compose a very epicurean repast; but Mary Marchmont looked at the humble breakfast as a prospective success.

"We could have haddocks every day at Marchmont Towers, couldn't we, papa?" she said naïvely.

But the little girl was more than delighted when Edward Arundel dashed up the narrow staircase, and burst into the room, fresh, radiant, noisy, splendid, better dressed even than the waxen preparations of elegant young gentlemen exhibited at the portal of a great outfitter in the New Cut, and yet not at all like either of those red–lipped types of fashion. How delighted the boy declared himself with every thing! He had driven over in a

cabriolet, and he was awfully hungry, he informed his host. The rolls and watercresses disappeared before him as if by magic; little Mary shivered at the slashing cuts he made at the butter; the haddock had scarcely left the gridiron before it was no more.

"This is ten times better than Aunt Mostyn's skinny breakfasts," the young gentleman observed candidly. "You never get enough with her. Why does she say, 'You won't take another egg, will you, Edward?' if she wants me to have one? You should see our hunting–breakfasts at Dangerfield, Marchmont. Four sorts of claret, and no end of Moselle and champagne. You shall go to Dangerfield some day, to see my mother, Miss Mary."

He called her "Miss Mary," and seemed rather shy of speaking to her. Her womanliness impressed him in spite of himself. He had a fancy that she was old enough to feel the humiliation of her father's position, and to be sensitive upon the matter of the two–pair back; and he was sorry the moment after he had spoken of Dangerfield.

"What a snob I am!" he thought; "always bragging of home."

But Mr. Arundel was not able to stop very long in Oakley Street, for the supernumerary had to attend a rehearsal at twelve o'clock; so at half–past eleven John Marchmont and his pupil went out together, and little Mary was left alone to clear away the breakfast, and perform the rest of her household duties.

She had plenty of time before her, so she did not begin at once, but sat upon a stool near the fender, gazing dreamily at the low fire.

"How good and kind he is!" she thought; "just like Cosmo,–only Cosmo was dark; or like Reginald Ravenscroft,–but then he was dark too. I wonder why the people in novels are always dark? How kind he is to papa! Shall we ever go to Dangerfield, I wonder, papa and I? Of course I wouldn't go without papa."

CHAPTER III. ABOUT THE LINCOLNSHIRE PROPERTY

While Mary sat absorbed in such idle visions as these, Mr. Marchmont and his old pupil walked towards Waterloo Bridge together.

"I'll go as far as the theatre with you, Marchmont," the boy said; "it's my holidays now, you know, and I can do as I like. I am going to a private tutor in another month, and he's to prepare me for the army. I want you to tell me all about that Lincolnshire property, old boy. Is it anywhere near Swampington?"

"Yes; within nine miles."

"Goodness gracious me! Lord bless my soul! what an extraordinary coincidence! My uncle Hubert's Rector of Swampington–such a hole! I go there sometimes to see him and my cousin Olivia. Isn't she a stunner, though! Knows more Greek and Latin than I, and more mathematics than you. Could eat our heads off at any thing."

John Marchmont did not seem very much impressed by the coincidence that appeared so extraordinary to Edward Arundel; but, in order to oblige his friend, he explained very patiently and lucidly how it was that only three lives stood between him and the possession of Marchmont Towers, and all lands and tenements appertaining thereto.

"The estate's a very large one," he said finally; "but the idea

of *my* ever getting it is, of course, too preposterous."

"Good gracious me! I don't see that at all," exclaimed Edward with extraordinary vivacity. "Let me see, old fellow; if I understand your story right, this is how the case stands: your first cousin is the present possessor of Marchmont Towers; he has a son, fifteen years of age, who may or may not marry; only one son, remember. But he has also an uncle–a bachelor uncle, and your uncle, too–who, by the terms of your grandfather's will, must get the property before you can succeed to it. Now, this uncle is an old man: so of course *he'll* die soon. The present possessor himself is a middle–aged man; so I shouldn't think *he* can be likely to last long. I dare say he drinks too much port, or hunts, or something of that sort; goes to sleep after dinner, and does all manner of apoplectic things, I'll be bound. Then there's the son, only fifteen, and not yet marriageable; consumptive, I dare say. Now, will you tell me the chances are not six to six he dies unmarried? So you see, my dear old boy, you're sure to get the fortune; for there's nothing to keep you out of it, except–"

"Except three lives, the worst of which is better than mine. It's kind of you to look at it in this sanguine way, Arundel; but I wasn't born to be a rich man. Perhaps, after all, Providence has used me better than I think. I mightn't have been happy at Marchmont Towers. I'm a shy, awkward, humdrum fellow. If it wasn't for Mary's sake–"

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Edward Arundel. "You're not going to forget all about–Miss Marchmont!" He was going to say

"little Mary," but had checked himself abruptly at the sudden recollection of the earnest hazel eyes that had kept wondering watch upon his ravages at the breakfast–table. "I'm sure Miss Marchmont's born to be an heiress. I never saw such a little princess."

"What!" demanded John Marchmont sadly, "in a darned pinafore and a threadbare frock?"

The boy's face flushed, almost indignantly, as his old master said this.

"You don't think I'm such a snob as to admire a lady"–he spoke thus of Miss Mary Marchmont, yet midway between her eighth and ninth birthday–"the less because she isn't rich? But of course your daughter will have the fortune by–and–by, even if–"

He stopped, ashamed of his want of tact; for he knew John would divine the meaning of that sudden pause.

"Even if I should die before Philip Marchmont," the teacher of mathematics answered, quietly. "As far as that goes, Mary's chance is as remote as my own. The fortune can only come to her in the event of Arthur dying without issue, or, having issue, failing to cut off the entail, I believe they call it."

"Arthur! that's the son of the present possessor?"

"Yes. If I and my poor little girl, who is delicate like her mother, should die before either of these three men, there is another who will stand in my shoes, and will look out perhaps more eagerly than I have done for his chances of getting the property."

"Another!" exclaimed Mr. Arundel. "By Jove, Marchmont, it's the most complicated affair I ever heard of. It's worse than those sums you used to set me in barter: 'If A. sells B. 999 Stilton cheeses at 9 1/2*d* a pound,' and all that sort of thing, you know. Do make me understand it, old fellow, if you can."

John Marchmont sighed.

"It's a wearisome story, Arundel," he said. "I don't know why I should bore you with it."

"But you don't bore me with it," cried the boy energetically. "I'm awfully interested in it, you know; and I could walk up and down here all day talking about it."

The two gentlemen had passed the Surrey toll–gate of Waterloo Bridge by this time. The South–Western Terminus had not been built in the year '38, and the bridge was about the quietest thoroughfare any two companions confidentially inclined could have chosen. The shareholders knew this, to their cost.

Perhaps Mr. Marchmont might have been beguiled into repeating the old story, which he had told so often in the dim firelight to his little girl; but the great clock of St. Paul's boomed forth the twelve ponderous strokes that told the hour of noon, and a hundred other steeples upon either side of the water made themselves clamorous with the same announcement.

"I must leave you, Arundel," the supernumerary said hurriedly; he had just remembered that it was time for him to go and be browbeaten by a truculent stage–manager. "God bless

you, my dear boy! It was very good of you to want to see me, and the sight of your fresh face has made me very happy. I *should* like you to understand all about the Lincolnshire property. God knows there's small chance of its ever coming to me or to my child; but when I am dead and gone, Mary will be left alone in the world, and it would be some comfort to me to know that she was not without *one* friend–generous and disinterested like you, Arundel,–who, if the chance *did* come, would see her righted."

"And so I would," cried the boy eagerly. His face flushed, and his eyes fired. He was a preux chevalier already, in thought, going forth to do battle for a hazel–eyed mistress.

"I'll *write* the story, Arundel," John Marchmont said; "I've no time to tell it, and you mightn't remember it either. Once more, good–bye; once more, God bless you!"

"Stop!" exclaimed Edward Arundel, flushing a deeper red than before,–he had a very boyish habit of blushing,–"stop, dear old boy. You must borrow this of me, please. I've lots of them. I should only spend it on all sorts of bilious things; or stop out late and get tipsy. You shall pay me with interest when you get Marchmont Towers. I shall come and see you again soon. Good–bye."

The lad forced some crumpled scrap of paper into his old tutor's hand, bolted through the toll–bar, and jumped into a cabriolet, whose high–stepping charger was dawdling along Lancaster Place.

The supernumerary hurried on to Drury Lane as fast as his

weak legs could carry him. He was obliged to wait for a pause in the rehearsal before he could find an opportunity of looking at the parting gift which his old pupil had forced upon him. It was a crumpled and rather dirty five–pound note, wrapped round two half–crowns, a shilling, and half–a–sovereign.

The boy had given his friend the last remnant of his slender stock of pocket–money. John Marchmont turned his face to the dark wing that sheltered him, and wept silently. He was of a gentle and rather womanly disposition, be it remembered; and he was in that weak state of health in which a man's eyes are apt to moisten, in spite of himself, under the influence of any unwonted emotion.

He employed a part of that afternoon in writing the letter which he had promised to send to his boyish friend:–

"MY DEAR ARUNDEL,

"My purpose in writing to you to–day is so entirely connected with the future welfare of my beloved and only child, that I shall carefully abstain from any subject not connected with her interests. I say nothing, therefore, respecting your conduct of this morning, which, together with my previous knowledge of your character, has decided me upon confiding to you the doubts and fears which have long tormented me upon the subject of my darling's future.

"I am a doomed man, Arundel! The doctors have told me this; but they have told me also that, though I can never escape the sentence of death which was passed upon me long ago, I may

live for some years if I live the careful life which only a rich man can lead. If I go on carrying banners and breathing sulphur, I cannot last long. My little girl will be left penniless, but not quite friendless; for there are humble people, relatives of her poor mother, who would help her kindly, I am sure, in their own humble way. The trials which I fear for my orphan girl are not so much the trials of poverty as the dangers of wealth. If the three men who, on my death, would alone stand between Mary and the Lincolnshire property die childless, my poor darling will become the only obstacle in the pathway of a man whom, I will freely own to you, I distrust.

"My father, John Marchmont, was the third of four brothers. The eldest, Philip, died leaving one son, also called Philip, and the present possessor of Marchmont Towers. The second, Marmaduke, is still alive, a bachelor. The third, John, left four children, of whom I alone survive. The fourth, Paul, left a son and two daughters. The son is an artist, exercising his profession now in London; one of the daughters is married to a parish surgeon, who practises at Stanfield, in Lincolnshire; the other is an old maid, and entirely dependent upon her brother.

"It is this man, Paul Marchmont the artist, whom I fear.

"Do not think me weak, or foolishly suspicious, Arundel, when I tell you that the very thought of this man brings the cold sweat upon my forehead, and seems to stop the beating of my heart. I know that this is a prejudice, and an unworthy one. I do not believe Paul Marchmont is a good man; but I can assign no

sufficient reason for my hatred and terror of him. It is impossible for you, a frank and careless boy, to realise the feelings of a man who looks at his only child, and remembers that she may soon be left, helpless and defenceless, to fight the battle of life with a bad man. Sometimes I pray to God that the Marchmont property may never come to my child after my death; for I cannot rid myself of the thought–may Heaven forgive me for its unworthiness!–that Paul Marchmont would leave no means untried, however foul, to wrest the fortune from her. I dare say worldly people would laugh at me for writing this letter to you, my dear Arundel; but I address myself to the best friend I have,–the only creature I know whom the influence of a bad man is never likely to corrupt. *Noblesse oblige!* I am not afraid that Edward Dangerfield Arundel will betray any trust, however foolish, that may have been confided to him.

"Perhaps, in writing to you thus, I may feel something of that blind hopefulness–amid the shipwreck of all that commonly gives birth to hope–which the mariner cast away upon some desert island feels, when he seals his simple story in a bottle, and launches it upon the waste of waters that close him in on every side. Before my little girl is four years older, you will be a man, Arundel–with a man's intellect, a man's courage, and, above all, a man's keen sense of honour. So long as my darling remains poor, her humble friends will be strong enough to protect her; but if ever Providence should think fit to place her in a position of antagonism to Paul Marchmont,–for he would look upon any

one as an enemy who stood between him and fortune,–she would need a far more powerful protector than any she could find amongst her poor mother's relatives. Will *you* be that protector, Edward Arundel? I am a drowning man, you see, and catch at the frailest straw that floats past me. I believe in you, Edward, as much as I distrust Paul Marchmont. If the day ever comes in which my little girl should have to struggle with this man, will you help her to fight the battle? It will not be an easy one.

"Subjoined to this letter I send you an extract from the copy of my grandfather's will, which will explain to you how he left his property. Do not lose either the letter or the extract. If you are willing to undertake the trust which I confide to you to–day, you may have need to refer to them after my death. The legacy of a child's helplessness is the only bequest which I can leave to the only friend I have.

"JOHN MARCHMONT.

"27, OAKLEY STREET, LAMBETH,

"*December* 30*th*, 1838.

* * * * *

"EXTRACT FROM THE WILL OF PHILIP MARCHMONT, SENIOR, OF MARCHMONT TOWERS

"'I give and devise all that my estate known as Marchmont Towers and appurtenances thereto belonging to the use of my eldest son Philip Marchmont during his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson Philip the first son of my said son Philip during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and after the decease of my said grandson Philip to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said grandson Philip as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson Philip except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said eldest son severally and successively according to his

respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said eldest son Philip as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and in default of such issue to the use of my second son Marmaduke and his assigns during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and after his decease to the use of the first and every son of my said son Marmaduke severally and successively according to their respective seniorities in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said son Marmaduke as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said son Marmaduke except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of my third son John during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson John the first son of my said son John during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and after the decease of my said grandson John to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson John severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said grandson John as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or among them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson John except one shall die

without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter' [*This, you will see, is my little Mary*] 'then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said third son John severally and successively according to his respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said third son John as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and in default of such issue to the use of my fourth son Paul during the term of his natural life without impeachment of waste and from and after his decease then to the use of my grandson Paul the son of my said son Paul during his natural life without impeachment of waste and after the decease of my said grandson Paul to the use of the first and every other son of my said grandson severally and successively according to their respective seniority in tail and for default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said grandson Paul as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between or amongst them in tail and if all the daughters of my said grandson Paul except one shall die without issue or if there shall be but one such daughter then to the use of such one or only daughter in tail and in default of such issue then to the use of the second and every other son of my said fourth son Paul severally and successively according to his respective seniority in tail and in default of such issue to the use of all and every the daughters and daughter of my said fourth son Paul as tenants in common in tail with cross remainders between

or amongst them in tail,' &c. &c.

"P.S.–Then comes what the lawyers call a general devise to trustees, to preserve the contingent remainders before devised from being destroyed; but what that means, perhaps you can get somebody to tell you. I hope it may be some legal jargon to preserve my *very* contingent remainder."

* * * * *

The tone of Edward Arundel's answer to this letter was more characteristic of the writer than in harmony with poor John's solemn appeal.

"You dear, foolish old Marchmont," the lad wrote, "of course I shall take care of Miss Mary; and my mother shall adopt her, and she shall live at Dangerfield, and be educated with my sister Letitia, who has the jolliest French governess, and a German maid for conversation; and don't let Paul Marchmont try on any of his games with me, that's all! But what do you mean, you ridiculous old boy, by talking about dying, and drowning, and shipwrecked mariners, and catching at straws, and all that sort of humbug, when you know very well that you'll live to inherit the Lincolnshire property, and that I'm coming to you every year to shoot, and that you're going to build a tennis–court,–of course there *is* a billiard–room,–and that you're going to have a stud of hunters, and be master of the hounds, and no end of bricks to

"Your ever devoted Roman countryman and lover,

"EDWARD

"42, MONTAGUE SQUARE,

"*December* 3l*st*, 1838.

"P.S.–By–the–bye, don't you think a situation in a lawyer's office would suit you better than the T. R. D. L.? If you do, I think I could manage it. A happy new year to Miss Mary!"

* * * * *

It was thus that Mr. Edward Arundel accepted the solemn trust which his friend confided to him in all simplicity and good faith. Mary Marchmont herself was not more innocent in the ways of the world outside Oakley Street, the Waterloo Road, and the New Cut, than was the little girl's father; nothing seemed more natural to him than to intrust the doubtful future of his only child to the bright–faced handsome boy, whose early boyhood had been unblemished by a mean sentiment or a dishonourable action. John Marchmont had spent three years in the Berkshire Academy at which Edward and his cousin, Martin Mostyn, had been educated; and young Arundel, who was far behind his kinsman in the comprehension of a problem in algebra, had been wise enough to recognise that paradox which Martin Mostyn could not understand–a gentleman in a shabby coat. It was thus that a friendship had arisen between the teacher of mathematics and his handsome pupil; and it was thus that an unreasoning belief in Edward Arundel had sprung up in John's simple mind.

"If my little girl were certain of inheriting the fortune," Mr. Marchmont thought, "I might find many who would be glad to accept my trust, and to serve her well and faithfully. But the chance is such a remote one. I cannot forget how the Jews laughed at me two years ago, when I tried to borrow money upon my reversionary interest. No! I must trust this brave–hearted boy, for I have no one else to confide in; and who else is there who would not ridicule my fear of my cousin Paul?"

Indeed, Mr. Marchmont had some reason to be considerably ashamed of his antipathy to the young artist working for his bread, and for the bread of his invalid mother and unmarried sister, in that bitter winter of '38; working patiently and hopefully, in despite of all discouragement, and content to live a joyless and monotonous life in a dingy lodging near Fitzroy Square. I can find no excuse for John Marchmont's prejudice against an industrious and indefatigable young man, who was the sole support of two helpless women. Heaven knows, if to be adored by two women is any evidence of a man's virtue, Paul must have been the best of men; for Stephanie Marchmont, and her daughter Clarisse, regarded the artist with a reverential idolatry that was not without a tinge of romance. I can assign no reason, then, for John's dislike of his cousin. They had been schoolfellows at a wretched suburban school, where the children of poor people were boarded, lodged, and educated all the year round for a pitiful stipend of something under twenty pounds. One of the special points of the prospectus was

the announcement that there were no holidays; for the jovial Christmas gatherings of merry faces, which are so delightful to the wealthy citizens of Bloomsbury or Tyburnia, take another complexion in poverty–stricken households, whose scantily–stocked larders can ill support the raids of rawboned lads clamorous for provender. The two boys had met at a school of this calibre, and had never met since. They may not have been the best friends, perhaps, at the classical academy; but their quarrels were by no means desperate. They may have rather freely discussed their several chances of the Lincolnshire property; but I have no romantic story to tell of a stirring scene in the humble schoolroom–no exciting record of deadly insult and deep vows of vengeance. No inkstand was ever flung by one boy into the face of the other; no savage blow from a horsewhip ever cut a fatal scar across the brow of either of the cousins. John Marchmont would have been almost as puzzled to account for his objection to his kinsman, as was the nameless gentleman who so naïvely confessed his dislike of Dr. Fell. I fear that a great many of our likings and dislikings are too apt to be upon the Dr. Fell principle. Mr. Wilkie Collins's Basil could not tell *why* he fell madly in love with the lady whom it was his evil fortune to meet in an omnibus; nor why he entertained an uncomfortable feeling about the gentleman who was to be her destroyer. David Copperfield disliked Uriah Heep even before he had any substantial reason for objecting to the evil genius of Agnes Wickfield's father. The boy disliked the snake–like schemer of Canterbury because his eyes

were round and red, and his hands clammy and unpleasant to the touch. Perhaps John Marchmont's reasons for his aversion to his cousin were about as substantial as those of Master Copperfield. It may be that the schoolboy disliked his comrade because Paul Marchmont's handsome grey eyes were a little too near together; because his thin and delicately chiselled lips were a thought too tightly compressed; because his cheeks would fade to an awful corpse–like whiteness under circumstances which would have brought the rushing life–blood, hot and red, into another boy's face; because he was silent and suppressed when it would have been more natural to be loud and clamorous; because he could smile under provocations that would have made another frown; because, in short, there was that about him which, let it be found where it will, always gives birth to suspicion,–MYSTERY!

So the cousins had parted, neither friends nor foes, to tread their separate roads in the unknown country, which is apt to seem barren and desolate enough to travellers who foot it in hobnailed boots considerably the worse for wear; and as the iron hand of poverty held John Marchmont even further back than Paul upon the hard road which each had to tread, the quiet pride of the teacher of mathematics most effectually kept him out of his kinsman's way. He had only heard enough of Paul to know that he was living in London, and working hard for a living; working as hard as John himself, perhaps; but at least able to keep afloat in a higher social position than the law–stationer's hack and the banner–holder of Drury Lane.

But Edward Arundel did not forget his friends in Oakley Street. The boy made a morning call upon his father's solicitors, Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was so extremely eloquent in his needy friend's cause, as to provoke the good–natured laughter of one of the junior partners, who declared that Mr. Edward Arundel ought to wear a silk gown before he was thirty. The result of this interview was, that before the first month of the new year was out, John Marchmont had abandoned the classic banner and the demoniac mask to a fortunate successor, and had taken possession of a hard–seated, slim–legged stool in one of the offices of Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, as copying and out–door clerk, at a salary of thirty shillings a week.

So little Mary entered now upon a golden age, in which her evenings were no longer desolate and lonely, but spent pleasantly with her father in the study of such learning as was suited to her years, or perhaps rather to her capacity, which was far beyond her years; and on certain delicious nights, to be remembered ever afterwards, John Marchmont took his little girl to the gallery of one or other of the transpontine theatres; and I am sorry to say that my heroine–for she is to be my heroine by–and–by–sucked oranges, ate Abernethy biscuits, and cooled her delicate nose against the iron railing of the gallery, after the manner of the masses when they enjoy the British Drama.

But all this time John Marchmont was utterly ignorant of one rather important fact in the history of those three lives which he

was apt to speak of as standing between him and Marchmont Towers. Young Arthur Marchmont, the immediate heir of the estate, had been shot to death upon the 1st of September, 1838, without blame to anyone or anything but his own boyish carelessness, which had induced him to scramble through a hedge with his fowling–piece, the costly present of a doating father, loaded and on full–cock. This melancholy event, which had been briefly recorded in all the newspapers, had never reached the knowledge of poor John Marchmont, who had no friends to busy themselves about his interests, or to rush eagerly to carry him any intelligence affecting his prosperity. Nor had he read the obituary notice respecting Marmaduke Marchmont, the bachelor, who had breathed his last stertorous breath in a fit of apoplexy exactly one twelvemonth before the day upon which Edward Arundel breakfasted in Oakley Street.

CHAPTER IV. GOING AWAY

Edward Arundel went from Montague Square straight into the household of the private tutor of whom he had spoken, there to complete his education, and to be prepared for the onerous duties of a military life. From the household of this private tutor he went at once into a cavalry regiment; after sundry examinations, which were not nearly so stringent in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty, as they have since become. Indeed, I think the unfortunate young cadets who are educated upon the high–pressure system, and who are expected to give a synopsis of Portuguese political intrigue during the eighteenth century, a scientific account of the currents of the Red Sea, and a critical disquisition upon the comedies of Aristophanes as compared with those of Pedro Calderon de la Barca, not forgetting to glance at the effect of different ages and nationalities upon the respective minds of the two playwrights, within a given period of, say half–an–hour,–would have envied Mr. Arundel for the easy manner in which he obtained his commission in a distinguished cavalry regiment. Mr. Edward Arundel therefore inaugurated the commencement of the year 1840 by plunging very deeply into the books of a crack military–tailor in New Burlington Street, and by a visit to Dangerfield Park; where he went to make his adieux before sailing for India, whither his regiment had just been ordered.

I do not doubt that Mrs Arundel was very sorrowful at this sudden parting with her yellow–haired younger son. The boy and his mother walked together in the wintry sunset under the leafless beeches at Dangerfield, and talked of the dreary voyage that lay before the lad; the arid plains and cruel jungles far away; perils by sea and perils by land; but across them all, Fame waving her white beckoning arms to the young soldier, and crying, "Come, conqueror that shall be! come, through trial and danger, through fever and famine,–come to your rest upon my bloodstained lap!" Surely this boy, being only just eighteen years of age, may be forgiven if he is a little romantic, a little over eager and impressionable, a little too confident that the next thing to going out to India as a sea–sick subaltern in a great transport–ship is coming home with the reputation of a Clive. Perhaps he may be forgiven, too, if, in his fresh enthusiasm, he sometimes forgot the shabby friend whom he had helped little better than a twelvemonth before, and the earnest hazel eyes that had shone upon him in the pitiful Oakley Street chamber. I do not say that he was utterly unmindful of his old teacher of mathematics. It was not in his nature to forget anyone who had need of his services; for this boy, so eager to be a soldier, was of the chivalrous temperament, and would have gone out to die for his mistress, or his friend, if need had been. He had received two or three grateful letters from John Marchmont; and in these letters the lawyer's clerk had spoken pleasantly of his new life, and hopefully of his health, which had improved

considerably, he said, since his resignation of the tragic banner and the pantomimic mask. Neither had Edward quite forgotten his promise of enlisting Mrs. Arundel's sympathies in aid of the motherless little girl. In one of these wintry walks beneath the black branches at Dangerfield, the lad had told the sorrowful story of his well–born tutor's poverty and humiliation.

"Only think, mother!" he cried at the end of the little history. "I saw the poor fellow carrying a great calico flag, and marching about at the heel of a procession, to be laughed at by the costermongers in the gallery; and I know that he belongs to a capital Lincolnshire family, and will come in for no end of money if he only lives long enough. But if he should die, mother, and leave his little girl destitute, you'll look after her, won't you?"

I don't know whether Mrs. Arundel quite entered into her son's ideas upon the subject of adopting Mary Marchmont, or whether she had any definite notion of bringing the little girl home to Dangerfield for the natural term of her life, in the event of the child being left an orphan. But she was a kind and charitable lady, and she scarcely cared to damp her boy's spirits by holding forth upon the doubtful wisdom of his adopting, or promising to adopt, any stray orphans who might cross his pathway.

"I hope the little girl may not lose her father, Edward," she said gently. "Besides, dear, you say that Mr. Marchmont tells you he has humble friends, who would take the child if anything happened to him. He does not wish us to adopt the little girl; he only asks us to interest ourselves in her fate."

"And you will do that, mother darling?" cried the boy. "You will take an interest in her, won't you? You couldn't help doing so, if you were to see her. She's not like a child, you know,–not a bit like Letitia. She's as grave and quiet as you are, mother,–or graver, I think; and she looks like a lady, in spite of her poor, shabby pinafore and frock."

"Does she wear shabby frocks?" said the mother. "I could help her in that matter, at all events, Ned. I might send her a great trunk–full of Letitia's things: she outgrows them before they have been worn long enough to be shabby."

The boy coloured, and shook his head.

"It's very kind of you to think of it, mother dear; but I don't think that would quite answer," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because, you see, John Marchmont is a gentleman; and, you know, though he's so dreadfully poor now, he *is* heir to Marchmont Towers. And though he didn't mind doing any thing in the world to earn a few shillings a week, he mightn't like to take cast–off clothes."

So nothing more was to be said or done upon the subject.

Edward Arundel wrote his humble friend a pleasant letter, in which he told John that he had enlisted his mother's sympathy in Mary's cause, and in which he spoke in very glowing terms of the Indian expedition that lay before him.

"I wish I could come to say good–bye to you and Miss Mary before I go," he wrote; "but that's impossible. I go straight from

here to Southampton by coach at the end of this month, and the *Auckland* sails on the 2nd of February. Tell Miss Mary I shall bring her home all kinds of pretty presents from Affghanistan,–ivory fans, and Cashmere shawls, and Chinese puzzles, and embroidered slippers with turned–up toes, and diamonds, and attar–of–roses, and suchlike; and remember that I expect you to write to me, and to give me the earliest news of your coming into the Lincolnshire property."

John Marchmont received this letter in the middle of January. He gave a despondent sigh as he refolded the boyish epistle, after reading it to his little girl.

"We haven't so many friends, Polly," he said, "that we should be indifferent to the loss of this one."

Mary Marchmont's cheek grew paler at her father's sorrowful speech. That imaginative temperament, which was, as I have said, almost morbid in its intensity, presented every object to the little girl in a light in which things are looked at by very few children. Only these few words, and her fancy roamed far away to that cruel land whose perils her father had described to her. Only these few words, and she was away in the rocky Bolan Pass, under hurricanes of drifting snow; she saw the hungry soldiers fighting with savage dogs for the possession of foul carrion. She had heard all the perils and difficulties which had befallen the Army of the Indus in the year '39, and the womanly heart ached with the pain of those cruel memories.

"He will go to India and be killed, papa dear," she said. "Oh!

why, why do they let him go? His mother can't love him, can she? She would never let him go, if she did."

John Marchmont was obliged to explain to his daughter that motherly love must not go so far as to deprive a nation of its defenders; and that the richest jewels which Cornelia can give to her country are those ruby life–drops which flow from the hearts of her bravest and brightest sons. Mary was no political economist; she could not reason upon the necessity of chastising Persian insolence, or checking Russian encroachments upon the far–away shores of the Indus. Was Edward Arundel's bright head, with its aureola of yellow hair, to be cloven asunder by an Affghan renegade's sabre, because the young Shah of Persia had been contumacious?

Mary Marchmont wept silently that day over a three–volume novel, while her father was away serving writs upon wretched insolvents, in his capacity of out–door clerk to Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson.

The young lady no longer spent her quiet days in the two–pair back. Mr. Marchmont and his daughter had remained faithful to Oakley Street and the proprietress of the ladies' wardrobe, who was a good, motherly creature; but they had descended to the grandeur of the first floor, whose gorgeous decorations Mary had glanced at furtively in the days gone by, when the splendid chambers were occupied by an elderly and reprobate commission–agent, who seemed utterly indifferent to the delights of a convex mirror, surmounted by a maimed eagle,

whose dignity was somewhat impaired by the loss of a wing; but which bijou appeared, to Mary, to be a fitting adornment for the young Queen's palace in St. James's Park.

But neither the eagle nor the third volume of a thrilling romance could comfort Mary upon this bleak January day. She shut her book, and stood by the window, looking out into the dreary street, that seemed so blotted and dim under the falling snow.

"It snowed in the Pass of Bolan," she thought; "and the treacherous Indians harassed the brave soldiers, and killed their camels. What will become of him in that dreadful country? Shall we ever see him again?"

Yes, Mary, to your sorrow! Indian scimitars will let him go scatheless; famine and fever will pass him by; but the hand which points to that far–away day on which you and he are to meet, will never fail or falter in its purpose until the hour of your meeting comes.

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We have no need to dwell upon the preparations which were made for the young soldier's departure from home, nor on the tender farewells between the mother and her son.

Mr. Arundel was a country gentleman *pur et simple*; a hearty, broad–shouldered squire, who had no thought above his farm and his dog–kennel, or the hunting of the red deer with which

his neighbourhood abounded. He sent his younger son to India as coolly as he had sent the elder to Oxford. The boy had little to inherit, and must be provided for in a gentlemanly manner. Other younger sons of the House of Arundel had fought and conquered in the Honourable East India Company's service; and was Edward any better than they, that there should be sentimental whining because the lad was going away to fight his way to fortune, if he could? Mr. Arundel went even further than this, and declared that Master Edward was a lucky dog to be going out at such a time, when there was plenty of fighting, and a very fair chance of speedy promotion for a good soldier.

He gave the young cadet his blessing, reminded him of the limit of such supplies as he was to expect from home, bade him keep clear of the brandy–bottle and the dice–box; and having done this, believed that he had performed his duty as an Englishman and a father.

If Mrs. Arundel wept, she wept in secret, loth to discourage her son by the sight of those natural, womanly tears. If Miss Letitia Arundel was sorry to lose her brother, she mourned with most praiseworthy discretion, and did not forget to remind the young traveller that she expected to receive a muslin frock, embroidered with beetle–wings, by an early mail. And as Algernon Fairfax Dangerfield Arundel, the heir, was away at college, there was no one else to mourn. So Edward left the home of his forefathers by a branch–coach, which started from the "Arundel Arms" in time to meet the "Telegraph" at Exeter; and

no noisy lamentations shook the sky above Dangerfield Park–no mourning voices echoed through the spacious rooms. The old servants were sorry to lose the younger–born, whose easy, genial temperament had made him an especial favourite; but there was a certain admixture of joviality with their sorrow, as there generally is with all mourning in the basement; and the strong ale, the famous Dangerfield October, went faster upon that 31st of January than on any day since Christmas.

I doubt if any one at Dangerfield Park sorrowed as bitterly for the departure of the boyish soldier as a romantic young lady, of nine years old, in Oakley Street, Lambeth; whose one sentimental day–dream–half–childish, half–womanly–owned Edward Arundel as its centre figure.

So the curtain falls on the picture of a brave ship sailing eastward, her white canvas strained against the cold grey February sky, and a little girl weeping over the tattered pages of a stupid novel in a shabby London lodging.

CHAPTER V.
MARCHMONT TOWERS

There is a lapse of three years and a half between the acts; and the curtain rises to reveal a widely–different picture:–the picture of a noble mansion in the flat Lincolnshire country; a stately pile of building, standing proudly forth against a background of black woodland; a noble building, supported upon either side by an octagon tower, whose solid masonry is half–hidden by the ivy which clings about the stonework, trailing here and there, and flapping restlessly with every breath of wind against the narrow casements.

A broad stone terrace stretches the entire length of the grim façade, from tower to tower; and three flights of steps lead from the terrace to the broad lawn, which loses itself in a vast grassy flat, only broken by a few clumps of trees and a dismal pool of black water, but called by courtesy a park. Grim stone griffins surmount the terrace–steps, and griffins' heads and other architectural monstrosities, worn and moss–grown, keep watch and ward over every door and window, every archway and abutment–frowning threat and defiance upon the daring visitor who approaches the great house by this, the formidable chief entrance.

The mansion looks westward: but there is another approach, a low archway on the southern side, which leads into a quadrangle,

where there is a quaint little door under a stone portico, ivy–covered like the rest; a comfortable little door of massive oak, studded with knobs of rusty iron,–a door generally affected by visitors familiar with the house.

This is Marchmont Towers,–a grand and stately mansion, which had been a monastery in the days when England and the Pope were friends and allies; and which had been bestowed upon Hugh Marchmont, gentleman, by his Sovereign Lord and Most Christian Majesty the King Henry VIII, of blessed memory, and by that gentleman–commoner extended and improved at considerable outlay. This is Marchmont Towers,–a splendid and a princely habitation truly, but perhaps scarcely the kind of dwelling one would choose for the holy resting–place we call home. The great mansion is a little too dismal in its lonely grandeur: it lacks shelter when the dreary winds come sweeping across the grassy flats in the bleak winter weather; it lacks shade when the western sun blazes on every window–pane in the stifling summer evening. It is at all times rather too stony in its aspect; and is apt to remind one almost painfully of every weird and sorrowful story treasured in the storehouse of memory. Ancient tales of enchantment, dark German legends, wild Scottish fancies, grim fragments of half–forgotten demonology, strange stories of murder, violence, mystery, and wrong, vaguely intermingle in the stranger's mind as he looks, for the first time, at Marchmont Towers.

But of course these feelings wear off in time. So invincible is

the power of custom, that we might make ourselves comfortable in the Castle of Otranto, after a reasonable sojourn within its mysterious walls: familiarity would breed contempt for the giant helmet, and all the other grim apparitions of the haunted dwelling. The commonplace and ignoble wants of every–day life must surely bring disenchantment with them. The ghost and the butcher's boy cannot well exist contemporaneously; and the avenging shade can scarcely continue to lurk beneath the portal which is visited by the matutinal milkman. Indeed, this is doubtless the reason that the most restless and impatient spirit, bent on early vengeance and immediate retribution, will yet wait until the shades of night have fallen before he reveals himself, rather than run the risk of an ignominious encounter with the postman or the parlour–maid. Be it how it might, the phantoms of Marchmont Towers were not intrusive. They may have perambulated the long tapestried corridors, the tenantless chambers, the broad black staircase of shining oak; but, happily, no dweller in the mansion was ever scared by the sight of their pale faces. All the dead–and–gone beauties, and soldiers, and lawyers, and parsons, and simple country–squires of the Marchmont race may have descended from their picture–frames to hold a witches' sabbath in the old mansion; but as the Lincolnshire servants were hearty eaters and heavy sleepers, the ghosts had it all to themselves. I believe there was one dismal story attached to the house,–the story of a Marchmont of the time of Charles I, who had murdered his coachman in a fit

of insensate rage; and it was even asserted, upon the authority of an old housekeeper, that John Marchmont's grandmother, when a young woman and lately come as a bride to the Towers, had beheld the murdered coachman stalk into her chamber, ghastly and blood–bedabbled, in the dim summer twilight. But as this story was not particularly romantic, and possessed none of the elements likely to insure popularity,–such as love, jealousy, revenge, mystery, youth, and beauty,–it had never been very widely disseminated.

I should think that the new owner of Marchmont Towers–new within the last six months–was about the last person in Christendom to be hypercritical, or to raise fanciful objections to his dwelling; for inasmuch as he had come straight from a wretched transpontine lodging to this splendid Lincolnshire mansion, and had at the same time exchanged a stipend of thirty shillings a week for an income of eleven thousand a year (derivable from lands that spread far away, over fenny flats and low–lying farms, to the solitary seashore), he had ample reason to be grateful to Providence, and well pleased with his new abode.

Yes; Philip Marchmont, the childless widower, had died six months before, at the close of the year '43, of a broken heart,–his old servants said, broken by the loss of his only and idolised son; after which loss he had never been known to smile. He was one of those undemonstrative men who can take a great sorrow quietly, and only–die of it. Philip Marchmont lay in a velvet–covered coffin, above his son's, in the stone recess set apart for them in the

Marchmont vault beneath Kemberling Church, three miles from the Towers; and John reigned in his stead. John Marchmont, the supernumerary, the banner–holder of Drury Lane, the patient, conscientious copying and outdoor clerk of Lincoln's Inn, was now sole owner of the Lincolnshire estate, sole master of a household of well–trained old servants, sole proprietor of a very decent country–gentleman's stud, and of chariots, barouches, chaises, phaetons, and other vehicles–a little shabby and out of date it may be, but very comfortable to a man for whom an omnibus ride had long been a treat and a rarity. Nothing had been touched or disturbed since Philip Marchmont's death. The rooms he had used were still the occupied apartments; the chambers he had chosen to shut up were still kept with locked doors; the servants who had served him waited upon his successor, whom they declared to be a quiet, easy gentleman, far too wise to interfere with old servants, every one of whom knew the ways of the house a great deal better than he did, though he was the master of it.

There was, therefore, no shadow of change in the stately mansion. The dinner–bell still rang at the same hour; the same tradespeople left the same species of wares at the low oaken door; the old housekeeper, arranging her simple *menu*, planned her narrow round of soups and roasts, sweets and made–dishes, exactly as she had been wont to do, and had no new tastes to consult. A grey–haired bachelor, who had been own–man to Philip, was now own–man to John. The carriage which had

conveyed the late lord every Sunday to morning and afternoon service at Kemberling conveyed the new lord, who sat in the same seat that his predecessor had occupied in the great family–pew, and read his prayers out of the same book,–a noble crimson, morocco–covered volume, in which George, our most gracious King and Governor, and all manner of dead–and–gone princes and princesses were prayed for.

The presence of Mary Marchmont made the only change in the old house; and even that change was a very trifling one. Mary and her father were as closely united at Marchmont Towers as they had been in Oakley Street. The little girl clung to her father as tenderly as ever–more tenderly than ever perhaps; for she knew something of that which the physicians had said, and she knew that John Marchmont's lease of life was not a long one. Perhaps it would be better to say that he had no lease at all. His soul was a tenant on sufferance in its frail earthly habitation, receiving a respite now and again, when the flicker of the lamp was very low–every chance breath of wind threatening to extinguish it for ever. It was only those who knew John Marchmont very intimately who were fully acquainted with the extent of his danger. He no longer bore any of those fatal outward signs of consumption, which fatigue and deprivation had once made painfully conspicuous. The hectic flush and the unnatural brightness of the eyes had subsided; indeed, John seemed much stronger and heartier than of old; and it is only great medical practitioners who can tell to a nicety what is going on *inside* a

man, when he presents a very fair exterior to the unprofessional eye. But John was decidedly better than he had been. He might live three years, five, seven, possibly even ten years; but he must live the life of a man who holds himself perpetually upon his defence against death; and he must recognise in every bleak current of wind, in every chilling damp, or perilous heat, or over–exertion, or ill–chosen morsel of food, or hasty emotion, or sudden passion, an insidious ally of his dismal enemy.

Mary Marchmont knew all this,–or divined it, perhaps, rather than knew it, with the child–woman's subtle power of divination, which is even stronger than the actual woman's; for her father had done his best to keep all sorrowful knowledge from her. She knew that he was in danger; and she loved him all the more dearly, as the one precious thing which was in constant peril of being snatched away. The child's love for her father has not grown any less morbid in its intensity since Edward Arundel's departure for India; nor has Mary become more childlike since her coming to Marchmont Towers, and her abandonment of all those sordid cares, those pitiful every–day duties, which had made her womanly.

It may be that the last lingering glamour of childhood had for ever faded away with the realisation of the day–dream which she had carried about with her so often in the dingy transpontine thoroughfares around Oakley Street. Marchmont Towers, that fairy palace, whose lighted windows had shone upon her far away across a cruel forest of poverty and trouble, like the enchanted

castle which appears to the lost wanderer of the child's story, was now the home of the father she loved. The grim enchanter Death, the only magician of our modern histories, had waved his skeleton hand, more powerful than the star–gemmed wand of any fairy godmother, and the obstacles which had stood between John Marchmont and his inheritance had one by one been swept away.

But was Marchmont Towers quite as beautiful as that fairy palace of Mary's day–dream? No, not quite–not quite. The rooms were handsome,–handsomer and larger, even, than the rooms she had dreamed of; but perhaps none the better for that. They were grand and gloomy and magnificent; but they were not the sunlit chambers which her fancy had built up, and decorated with such shreds and patches of splendour as her narrow experience enabled her to devise. Perhaps it was rather a disappointment to Miss Marchmont to discover that the mansion was completely furnished, and that there was no room in it for any of those splendours which she had so often contemplated in the New Cut. The parrot at the greengrocer's was a vulgar bird, and not by any means admissible in Lincolnshire. The carrying away and providing for Mary's favourite tradespeople was not practicable; and John Marchmont had demurred to her proposal of adopting the butcher's daughter.

There is always something to be given up even when our brightest visions are realised; there is always some one figure (a low one perhaps) missing in the fullest sum of earthly happiness. I

dare say if Alnaschar had married the Vizier's daughter, he would have found her a shrew, and would have looked back yearningly to the humble days in which he had been an itinerant vendor of crockery–ware.

If, therefore, Mary Marchmont found her sunlit fancies not quite realised by the great stony mansion that frowned upon the fenny countryside, the wide grassy flat, the black pool, with its dismal shelter of weird pollard–willows, whose ugly reflections, distorted on the bosom of the quiet water, looked like the shadows of hump–backed men;–if these things did not compose as beautiful a picture as that which the little girl had carried so long in her mind, she had no more reason to be sorry than the rest of us, and had been no more foolish than other dreamers. I think she had built her airy castle too much after the model of a last scene in a pantomime, and that she expected to find spangled waters twinkling in perpetual sunshine, revolving fountains, ever–expanding sunflowers, and gilded clouds of rose–coloured gauze,–every thing except the fairies, in short,–at Marchmont Towers. Well, the dream was over: and she was quite a woman now, and very grateful to Providence when she remembered that her father had no longer need to toil for his daily bread, and that he was luxuriously lodged, and could have the first physicians in the land at his beck and call.

"Oh, papa, it is so nice to be rich!" the young lady would exclaim now and then, in a fleeting transport of enthusiasm.

"How good we ought to be to the poor people, when we remember how poor we once were!"

And the little girl did not forget to be good to the poor about Kemberling and Marchmont Towers. There were plenty of poor, of course–free–and–easy pensioners, who came to the Towers for brandy, and wine, and milk, and woollen stuffs, and grocery, precisely as they would have gone to a shop, except that there was to be no bill. The housekeeper doled out her bounties with many short homilies upon the depravity and ingratitude of the recipients, and gave tracts of an awful and denunciatory nature to the pitiful petitioners–tracts interrogatory, and tracts fiercely imperative; tracts that asked, "Where are you going?" "Why are you wicked?" "What will become of you?" and other tracts which cried, "Stop, and think!" "Pause, while there is time!" "Sinner, consider!" "Evil–doer, beware!" Perhaps it may not be the wisest possible plan to begin the work of reformation by frightening, threatening, and otherwise disheartening the wretched sinner to be reformed. There is a certain sermon in the New Testament, containing sacred and comforting words which were spoken upon a mountain near at hand to Jerusalem, and spoken to an auditory amongst which there must have been many sinful creatures; but there is more of blessing than cursing in that sublime discourse, and it might be rather a tender father pleading gently with his wayward children than an offended Deity dealing out denunciation upon a stubborn and refractory race. But the authors of the tracts may have never read this

sermon, perhaps; and they may take their ideas of composition from that comforting service which we read on Ash–Wednesday, cowering in fear and trembling in our pews, and calling down curses upon ourselves and our neighbours. Be it as it might, the tracts were not popular amongst the pensioners of Marchmont Towers. They infinitely preferred to hear Mary read a chapter in the New Testament, or some pretty patriarchal story of primitive obedience and faith. The little girl would discourse upon the Scripture histories in her simple, old–fashioned manner; and many a stout Lincolnshire farm–labourer was content to sit over his hearth, with a pipe of shag–tobacco and a mug of fettled beer, while Miss Marchmont read and expounded the history of Abraham and Isaac, or Joseph and his brethren.

"It's joost loike a story–book to hear her," the man would say to his wife; "and yet she brings it all hoame, too, loike. If she reads about Abraham, she'll say, maybe, 'That's joost how you gave your only son to be a soldier, you know, Muster Moggins;'–she allus says Muster Moggins;–'you gave un into God's hands, and you troosted God would take care of un; and whatever cam' to un would be the best, even if it was death.' That's what she'll say, bless her little heart! so gentle and tender loike. The wust o' chaps couldn't but listen to her."

Mary Marchmont's morbidly sensitive nature adapted her to all charitable offices. No chance word in her simple talk ever inflicted a wound upon the listener. She had a subtle and intuitive comprehension of other people's feelings, derived from the

extreme susceptibility of her own. She had never been vulgarised by the associations of poverty; for her self–contained nature took no colour from the things that surrounded her, and she was only at Marchmont Towers that which she had been from the age of six–a little lady, grave and gentle, dignified, discreet, and wise.

There was one bright figure missing out of the picture which Mary had been wont of late years to make of the Lincolnshire mansion, and that was the figure of the yellow–haired boy who had breakfasted upon haddocks and hot rolls in Oakley Street. She had imagined Edward Arundel an inhabitant of that fair Utopia. He would live with them; or, if he could not live with them, he would be with them as a visitor,–often–almost always. He would leave off being a soldier, for of course her papa could give him more money than he could get by being a soldier–(you see that Mary's experience of poverty had taught her to take a mercantile and sordid view of military life)–and he would come to Marchmont Towers, and ride, and drive, and play tennis (what was tennis? she wondered), and read three–volume novels all day long. But that part of the dream was at least broken. Marchmont Towers was Mary's home, but the young soldier was far away; in the Pass of Bolan, perhaps,–Mary had a picture of that cruel rocky pass almost always in her mind,–or cutting his way through a black jungle, with the yellow eyes of hungry tigers glaring out at him through the rank tropical foliage; or dying of thirst and fever under a scorching sun, with no better pillow than the neck of a dead camel, with no more tender watcher than the impatient

vulture flapping her wings above his head, and waiting till he, too, should be carrion. What was the good of wealth, if it could not bring this young soldier home to a safe shelter in his native land? John Marchmont smiled when his daughter asked this question, and implored her father to write to Edward Arundel, recalling him to England.

"God knows how glad I should be to have the boy here, Polly!" John said, as he drew his little girl closer to his breast,–she sat on his knee still, though she was thirteen years of age. "But Edward has a career before him, my dear, and could not give it up for an inglorious life in this rambling old house. It isn't as if I could hold out any inducement to him: you know, Polly, I can't; for I mustn't leave any money away from my little girl."

"But he might have half my money, papa, or all of it," Mary added piteously. "What could I do with money, if–"

She didn't finish the sentence; she never could complete any such sentence as this; but her father knew what she meant.

So six months had passed since a dreary January day upon which John Marchmont had read, in the second column of the "Times," that he could hear of something greatly to his advantage by applying to a certain solicitor, whose offices were next door but one to those of Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson's. His heart began to beat very violently when he read that advertisement in the supplement, which it was one of his duties to air before the fire in the clerks' office; but he showed no other sign of emotion. He waited until he took the papers to

his employer; and as he laid them at Mr. Mathewson's elbow, murmured a respectful request to be allowed to go out for half–an–hour, upon his own business.

"Good gracious me, Marchmont!" cried the lawyer; "what can you want to go out for at this time in the morning? You've only just come; and there's that agreement between Higgs and Sandyman must be copied before–"

"Yes, I know, sir. I'll be back in time to attend to it; but I–I think I've come into a fortune, sir; and I should like to go and see about it."

The solicitor turned in his revolving library–chair, and looked aghast at his clerk. Had this Marchmont–always rather unnaturally reserved and eccentric–gone suddenly mad? No; the copying–clerk stood by his employer's side, grave, self–possessed as ever, with his forefinger upon the advertisement.

"Marchmont–John–call–Messrs. Tindal and Trollam–" gasped Mr. Mathewson. "Do you mean to tell me it's *you*?"

"Yes, sir."

"Egad, I'll go with you!" cried the solicitor, hooking his arm through that of his clerk, snatching his hat from an adjacent stand, and dashing through the outer office, down the great staircase, and into the next door but one before John Marchmont knew where he was.

John had not deceived his employer. Marchmont Towers was his, with all its appurtenances. Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson took him in hand, much to the chagrin of Messrs.

Tindal and Trollam, and proved his identity in less than a week. On a shelf above the high wooden desk at which John had sat, copying law–papers, with a weary hand and an aching spine, appeared two bran–new deed–boxes, inscribed, in white letters, with the name and address of JOHN MARCHMONT, ESQ., MARCHMONT TOWERS. The copying–clerk's sudden accession to fortune was the talk of all the *employés* in "The Fields." Marchmont Towers was exaggerated into half Lincolnshire, and a tidy slice of Yorkshire; eleven thousand a year was expanded into an annual million. Everybody expected largesse from the legatee. How fond people had been of the quiet clerk, and how magnanimously they had concealed their sentiments during his poverty, lest they should wound him, as they urged, "which" they knew he was sensitive; and how expansively they now dilated on their long–suppressed emotions! Of course, under these circumstances, it is hardly likely that everybody could be satisfied; so it is a small thing to say that the dinner which John gave–by his late employers' suggestion (he was about the last man to think of giving a dinner)–at the "Albion Tavern," to the legal staff of Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, and such acquaintance of the legal profession as they should choose to invite, was a failure; and that gentlemen who were pretty well used to dine upon liver and bacon, or beefsteak and onions, or the joint, vegetables, bread, cheese, and celery for a shilling, turned up their noses at the turbot, murmured at the paucity of green fat in the soup, made light of red mullet

and ortolans, objected to the flavour of the truffles, and were contemptuous about the wines.

John knew nothing of this. He had lived a separate and secluded existence; and his only thought now was of getting away to Marchmont Towers, which had been familiar to him in his boyhood, when he had been wont to go there on occasional visits to his grandfather. He wanted to get away from the turmoil and confusion of the big, heartless city, in which he had endured so much; he wanted to carry away his little girl to a quiet country home, and live and die there in peace. He liberally rewarded all the good people about Oakley Street who had been kind to little Mary; and there was weeping in the regions of the Ladies' Wardrobe when Mr. Marchmont and his daughter went away one bitter winter's morning in a cab, which was to carry them to the hostelry whence the coach started for Lincoln.

It is strange to think how far those Oakley–street days of privation and endurance seem to have receded in the memories of both father and daughter. The impalpable past fades away, and it is difficult for John and his little girl to believe that they were once so poor and desolate. It is Oakley Street now that is visionary and unreal. The stately county families bear down upon Marchmont Towers in great lumbering chariots, with brazen crests upon the hammer–cloths, and sulky coachmen in Brown–George wigs. The county mammas patronise and caress Miss Marchmont–what a match she will be for one of the county sons by–and–by!–the county daughters discourse with Mary about

her poor, and her fancy–work, and her piano. She is getting on slowly enough with her piano, poor little girl! under the tuition of the organist of Swampington, who gives lessons to that part of the county. And there are solemn dinners now and then at Marchmont Towers–dinners at which Miss Mary appears when the cloth has been removed, and reflects in silent wonder upon the change that has come to her father and herself. Can it be true that she has ever lived in Oakley Street, whither came no more aristocratic visitors than her Aunt Sophia, who was the wife of a Berkshire farmer, and always brought hogs' puddings, and butter, and home–made bread, and other rustic delicacies to her brother–in–law; or Mrs. Brigsome, the washer–woman, who made a morning–call every Monday, to fetch John Marchmont's shabby shirts? The shirts were not shabby now; and it was no longer Mary's duty to watch them day by day, and manipulate them tenderly when the linen grew frayed at the sharp edges of the folds, or the buttonholes gave signs of weakness. Corson, Mr. Marchmont's own–man, had care of the shirts now: and John wore diamond–studs and a black–satin waistcoat, when he gave a dinner–party. They were not very lively, those Lincolnshire dinner–parties; though the dessert was a sight to look upon, in Mary's eyes. The long shining table, the red and gold and purple Indian china, the fluffy woollen d'oyleys, the sparkling cut–glass, the sticky preserved ginger and guava–jelly, and dried orange rings and chips, and all the stereotyped sweetmeats, were very grand and beautiful, no doubt; but Mary had seen livelier desserts

in Oakley Street, though there had been nothing better than a brown–paper bag of oranges from the Westminster Road, and a bottle of two–and–twopenny Marsala from a licensed victualler's in the Borough, to promote conviviality.

CHAPTER VI. THE YOUNG SOLDIER'S RETURN

The rain beats down upon the battlemented roof of Marchmont Towers this July day, as if it had a mind to flood the old mansion. The flat waste of grass, and the lonely clumps of trees, are almost blotted out by the falling rain. The low grey sky shuts out the distance. This part of Lincolnshire–fenny, misty, and flat always–seems flatter and mistier than usual to–day. The rain beats hopelessly upon the leaves in the wood behind Marchmont Towers, and splashes into great pools beneath the trees, until the ground is almost hidden by the fallen water, and the trees seem to be growing out of a black lake. The land is lower behind Marchmont Towers, and slopes down gradually to the bank of a dismal river, which straggles through the Marchmont property at a snail's pace, to gain an impetus farther on, until it hurries into the sea somewhere northward of Grimsby. The wood is not held in any great favour by the household at the Towers; and it has been a pet project of several Marchmonts to level and drain it, but a project not very easily to be carried out. Marchmont Towers is said to be unhealthy, as a dwelling–house, by reason of this wood, from which miasmas rise in certain states of the weather; and it is on this account that the back of the house–the eastern front, at least, as it is called–looking to the wood is very little used.

Mary Marchmont sits at a window in the western drawing–room, watching the ceaseless falling of the rain upon this dreary summer afternoon. She is little changed since the day upon which Edward Arundel saw her in Oakley Street. She is taller, of course, but her figure is as slender and childish as ever: it is only her face in which the earnestness of premature womanhood reveals itself in a grave and sweet serenity very beautiful to contemplate. Her soft brown eyes have a pensive shadow in their gentle light; her mouth is even more pensive. It has been said of Jane Grey, of Mary Stuart, of Marie Antoinette, Charlotte Corday, and other fated women, that in the gayest hours of their youth they bore upon some feature, or in some expression, the shadow of the End–an impalpable, indescribable presage of an awful future, vaguely felt by those who looked upon them.

Is it thus with Mary Marchmont? Has the solemn hand of Destiny set that shadowy brand upon the face of this child, that even in her prosperity, as in her adversity, she should be so utterly different from all other children? Is she already marked out for some womanly martyrdom–already set apart for more than common suffering?

She sits alone this afternoon, for her father is busy with his agent. Wealth does not mean immunity from all care and trouble; and Mr. Marchmont has plenty of work to get through, in conjunction with his land–steward, a hard–headed Yorkshireman, who lives at Kemberling, and insists on doing his duty with pertinacious honesty.

The large brown eyes looked wistfully out at the dismal waste and the falling rain. There was a wretched equestrian making his way along the carriage–drive.

"Who can come to see us on such a day?" Mary thought. "It must be Mr. Gormby, I suppose;"–the agent's name was Gormby. "Mr. Gormby never cares about the wet; but then I thought he was with papa. Oh, I hope it isn't anybody coming to call."

But Mary forgot all about the struggling equestrian the next moment. She had some morsel of fancy–work upon her lap, and picked it up and went on with it, setting slow stitches, and letting her thoughts wander far away from Marchmont Towers–to India, I am afraid; or to that imaginary India which she had created for herself out of such images as were to be picked up in the "Arabian Nights." She was roused suddenly by the opening of a door at the farther end of the room, and by the voice of a servant, who mumbled a name which sounded something like Mr. Armenger.

She rose, blushing a little, to do honour to one of her father's county acquaintance, as she thought; when a fair–haired gentleman dashed in, very much excited and very wet, and made his way towards her.

"I *would* come, Miss Marchmont," he said,–"I would come, though the day was so wet. Everybody vowed I was mad to think of it, and it was as much as my poor brute of a horse could do to get over the ten miles of swamp between this and my uncle's house; but I would come! Where's John? I want to see

John. Didn't I always tell him he'd come into the Lincolnshire property? Didn't I always say so, now? You should have seen Martin Mostyn's face–he's got a capital berth in the War Office, and he's such a snob!–when I told him the news: it was as long as my arm! But I must see John, dear old fellow! I long to congratulate him."

Mary stood with her hands clasped, and her breath coming quickly. The blush had quite faded out, and left her unusually pale. But Edward Arundel did not see this: young gentlemen of four–and–twenty are not very attentive to every change of expression in little girls of thirteen.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Arundel? Is it really you?"

She spoke in a low voice, and it was almost difficult to keep the rushing tears back while she did so. She had pictured him so often in peril, in famine, in sickness, in death, that to see him here, well, happy, light–hearted, cordial, handsome, and brave, as she had seen him four–and–a–half years before in the two–pair back in Oakley Street, was almost too much for her to bear without the relief of tears. But she controlled her emotion as bravely as if she had been a woman of twenty.

"I am so glad to see you," she said quietly; "and papa will be so glad too! It is the only thing we want, now we are rich; to have you with us. We have talked of you so often; and I–we–have been so unhappy sometimes, thinking that–"

"That I should be killed, I suppose?"

"Yes; or wounded very, very badly. The battles in India have

been dreadful, have they not?"

Mr. Arundel smiled at her earnestness.

"They have not been exactly child's play," he said, shaking back his chesnut hair and smoothing his thick moustache. He was a man now, and a very handsome one; something of that type which is known in this year of grace as "swell"; but brave and chivalrous withal, and not afflicted with any impediment in his speech. "The men who talk of the Affghans as a chicken–hearted set of fellows are rather out of their reckoning. The Indians can fight, Miss Mary, and fight like the devil; but we can lick 'em!"

He walked over to the fireplace, where–upon this chilly wet day, there was a fire burning–and began to shake himself dry. Mary, following him with her eyes, wondered if there was such another soldier in all Her Majesty's dominions, and how soon he would be made General–in–Chief of the Army of the Indus.

"Then you've not been wounded at all, Mr. Arundel?" she said, after a pause.

"Oh, yes, I've been wounded; I got a bullet in my shoulder from an Affghan musket, and I'm home on sick–leave."

This time he saw the expression of her face, and interpreted her look of alarm.

"But I'm not ill, you know, Miss Marchmont," he said, laughing. "Our fellows are very glad of a wound when they feel home–sick. The 8th come home before long, all of 'em; and I've a twelvemonth's leave of absence; and we're pretty sure to be ordered out again by the end of that time, as I don't believe there's

much chance of quiet over there."

"You will go out again!–"

Edward Arundel smiled at her mournful tone.

"To be sure, Miss Mary. I have my captaincy to win, you know; I'm only a lieutenant, as yet."

It was only a twelvemonth's reprieve, after all, then, Mary thought. He would go back again–to suffer, and to be wounded, and to die, perhaps. But then, on the other hand, there was a twelvemonth's respite; and her father might in that time prevail upon the young soldier to stay at Marchmont Towers. It was such inexpressible happiness to see him once more, to know that he was safe and well, that Mary could scarcely do otherwise than see all things in a sunny light just now.

She ran to John Marchmont's study to tell him of the coming of this welcome visitor; but she wept upon her father's shoulder before she could explain who it was whose coming had made her so glad. Very few friendships had broken the monotony of her solitary existence; and Edward Arundel was the only chivalrous image she had ever known, out of her books.

John Marchmont was scarcely less pleased than his child to see the man who had befriended him in his poverty. Never has more heartfelt welcome been given than that which greeted Edward Arundel at Marchmont Towers.

"You will stay with us, of course, my dear Arundel," John said; "you will stop for September and the shooting. You know you promised you'd make this your shooting–box; and we'll build the

tennis–court. Heaven knows, there's room enough for it in the great quadrangle; and there's a billiard–room over this, though I'm afraid the table is out of order. But we can soon set that right, can't we, Polly?"

"Yes, yes, papa; out of my pocket–money, if you like."

Mary Marchmont said this in all good faith. It was sometimes difficult for her to remember that her father was really rich, and had no need of help out of her pocket–money. The slender savings in her little purse had often given him some luxury that he would not otherwise have had, in the time gone by.

"You got my letter, then?" John said; "the letter in which I told you–"

"That Marchmont Towers was yours. Yes, my dear old boy. That letter was amongst a packet my agent brought me half–an–hour before I left Calcutta. God bless you, dear old fellow; how glad I was to hear of it! I've only been in England a fortnight. I went straight from Southampton to Dangerfield to see my father and mother, stayed there little over ten days, and then offended them all by running away. I reached Swampington yesterday, slept at my uncle Hubert's, paid my respects to my cousin Olivia, who is,–well, I've told you what she is,–and rode over here this morning, much to the annoyance of the inhabitants of the Rectory. So, you see, I've been doing nothing but offending people for your sake, John; and for yours, Miss Mary. By–the–by, I've brought you such a doll!"

A doll! Mary's pale face flushed a faint crimson. Did he think

her still a child, then, this soldier; did he think her only a silly child, with no thought above a doll, when she would have gone out to India, and braved every peril of that cruel country, to be his nurse and comfort in fever and sickness, like the brave Sisters of Mercy she had read of in some of her novels?

Edward Arundel saw that faint crimson glow lighting up in her face.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Marchmont," he said. "I was only joking; of course you are a young lady now, almost grown up, you know. Can you play chess?"

"No, Mr. Arundel."

"I am sorry for that; for I have brought you a set of chessmen that once belonged to Dost Mahommed Khan. But I'll teach you the game, if you like?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Arundel; I should like it very, very much."

The young soldier could not help being amused by the little girl's earnestness. She was about the same age as his sister Letitia; but, oh, how widely different to that bouncing and rather wayward young lady, who tore the pillow–lace upon her muslin frocks, rumpled her long ringlets, rasped the skin off the sharp points of her elbows, by repeated falls upon the gravel–paths at Dangerfield, and tormented a long–suffering Swiss attendant, half–lady's–maid, half–governess, from morning till night. No fold was awry in Mary Marchmont's simple black–silk frock; no plait disarranged in the neat cambric tucker that encircled the slender white throat. Intellect here reigned

supreme. Instead of the animal spirits of a thoughtless child, there was a woman's loving carefulness for others, a woman's unselfishness and devotion.

Edward Arundel did not understand all this, but I think he had a dim comprehension of the greater part of it.

"She is a dear little thing," he thought, as he watched her clinging to her father's arm; and then he began to talk about Marchmont Towers, and insisted upon being shown over the house; and, perhaps for the first time since the young heir had shot himself to death upon a bright September morning in a stubble–field within earshot of the park, the sound of merry laughter echoed through the long corridors, and resounded in the unoccupied rooms.

Edward Arundel was in raptures with everything. "There never was such a dear old place," he said. "'Gloomy?' 'dreary?' 'draughty?' pshaw! Cut a few logs out of that wood at the back there, pile 'em up in the wide chimneys, and set a light to 'em, and Marchmont Towers would be like a baronial mansion at Christmas–time." He declared that every dingy portrait he looked at was a Rubens or a Velasquez, or a Vandyke, a Holbein, or a Lely.

"Look at that fur border to the old woman's black–velvet gown, John; look at the colouring of the hands! Do you think anybody but Peter Paul could have painted that? Do you see that girl with the blue–satin stomacher and the flaxen ringlets?–one of your ancestresses, Miss Mary, and very like you. If that isn't

in Sir Peter Lely's best style,–his earlier style, you know, before he was spoiled by royal patronage, and got lazy,–I know nothing of painting."

The young soldier ran on in this manner, as he hurried his host from room to room; now throwing open windows to look out at the wet prospect; now rapping against the wainscot to find secret hiding–places behind sliding panels; now stamping on the oak–flooring in the hope of discovering a trap–door. He pointed out at least ten eligible sites for the building of the tennis–court; he suggested more alterations and improvements than a builder could have completed in a lifetime. The place brightened under the influence of his presence, as a landscape lights up under a burst of sudden sunshine breaking through a dull grey sky.

Mary Marchmont did not wait for the removal of the table–cloth that evening, but dined with her father and his friend in a snug oak–panelled chamber, half–breakfast–room, half–library, which opened out of the western drawing–room. How different Edward Arundel was to all the rest of the world, Miss Marchmont thought; how gay, how bright, how genial, how happy! The county families, mustered in their fullest force, couldn't make such mirth amongst them as this young soldier created in his single person.

The evening was an evening in fairy–land. Life was sometimes like the last scene in a pantomime, after all, with rose–coloured cloud and golden sunlight.

One of the Marchmont servants went over to Swampington

early the next day to fetch Mr. Arundel's portmanteaus from the Rectory; and after dinner upon that second evening, Mary Marchmont took her seat opposite Edward, and listened reverently while he explained to her the moves upon the chessboard.

"So you don't know my cousin Olivia?" the young soldier said by–and–by. "That's odd! I should have thought she would have called upon you long before this."

Mary Marchmont shook her head.

"No," she said; "Miss Arundel has never been to see us; and I should so like to have seen her, because she would have told me about you. Mr. Arundel has called one or twice upon papa; but I have never seen him. He is not our clergyman, you know; Marchmont Towers belongs to Kemberling parish."

"To be sure; and Swampington is ten miles off. But, for all that, I should have thought Olivia would have called upon you. I'll drive you over to–morrow, if John thinks me whip enough to trust you with me, and you shall see Livy. The Rectory's such a queer old place!"

Perhaps Mr. Marchmont was rather doubtful as to the propriety of committing his little girl to Edward Arundel's charioteership for a ten–mile drive upon a wretched road. Be it as it might, a lumbering barouche, with a pair of over–fed horses, was ordered next morning, instead of the high, old–fashioned gig which the soldier had proposed driving; and the safety of the two young people was confided to a sober old coachman, rather sulky

at the prospect of a drive to Swampington so soon after the rainy weather.

It does not rain always, even in this part of Lincolnshire; and the July morning was bright and pleasant, the low hedges fragrant with starry opal–tinted wild roses and waxen honeysuckle, the yellowing corn waving in the light summer breeze. Mary assured her companion that she had no objection whatever to the odour of cigar–smoke; so Mr. Arundel lolled upon the comfortable cushions of the barouche, with his back to the horses, smoking cheroots, and talking gaily, while Miss Marchmont sat in the place of state opposite to him. A happy drive; a drive in a fairy chariot through regions of fairyland, for ever and for ever to be remembered by Mary Marchmont.

They left the straggling hedges and the yellowing corn behind them by–and–by, as they drew near the outskirts of Swampington. The town lies lower even than the surrounding country, flat and low as that country is. A narrow river crawls at the base of a half–ruined wall, which once formed part of the defences of the place. Black barges lie at anchor here; and a stone bridge, guarded by a toll–house, spans the river. Mr. Marchmont's carriage lumbered across this bridge, and under an archway, low, dark, stony, and grim, into a narrow street of solid, well–built houses, low, dark, stony, and grim, like the archway, but bearing the stamp of reputable occupation. I believe the grass grew, and still grows, in this street, as it does in all the other streets and in the market–place of Swampington. They are all

pretty much in the same style, these streets,–all stony, narrow, dark, and grim; and they wind and twist hither and thither, and in and out, in a manner utterly bewildering to the luckless stranger, who, seeing that they are all alike, has no landmarks for his guidance.

There are two handsome churches, both bearing an early date in the history of Norman supremacy: one crowded into an inconvenient corner of a back street, and choked by the houses built up round about it; the other lying a little out of the town, upon a swampy waste looking towards the sea, which flows within a mile of Swampington. Indeed, there is no lack of water in that Lincolnshire borough. The river winds about the outskirts of the town; unexpected creeks and inlets meet you at every angle; shallow pools lie here and there about the marshy suburbs; and in the dim distance the low line of the grey sea meets the horizon.

But perhaps the positive ugliness of the town is something redeemed by a vague air of romance and old–world mystery which pervades it. It is an exceptional place, and somewhat interesting thereby. The great Norman church upon the swampy waste, the scattered tombstones, bordered by the low and moss–grown walls, make a picture which is apt to dwell in the minds of those who look upon it, although it is by no means a pretty picture. The Rectory lies close to the churchyard; and a wicket–gate opens from Mr. Arundel's garden into a narrow pathway, leading across a patch of tangled grass and

through a lane of sunken and lopsided tombstones, to the low vestry door. The Rectory itself is a long irregular building, to which one incumbent after another has built the additional chamber, or chimney, or porch, or bow–window, necessary for his accommodation. There is very little garden in front of the house, but a patch of lawn and shrubbery and a clump of old trees at the back.

"It's not a pretty house, is it, Miss Marchmont?" asked Edward, as he lifted his companion out of the carriage.

"No, not very pretty," Mary answered; "but I don't think any thing is pretty in Lincolnshire. Oh, there's the sea!" she cried, looking suddenly across the marshes to the low grey line in the distance. "How I wish we were as near the sea at Marchmont Towers!"

The young lady had something of a romantic passion for the wide–spreading ocean. It was an unknown region, that stretched far away, and was wonderful and beautiful by reason of its solemn mystery. All her Corsair stories were allied to that far, fathomless deep. The white sail in the distance was Conrad's, perhaps; and he was speeding homeward to find Medora dead in her lonely watch–tower, with fading flowers upon her breast. The black hull yonder, with dirty canvas spread to the faint breeze, was the bark of some terrible pirate bound on rapine and ravage. (She was a coal–barge, I have no doubt, sailing Londonward with her black burden.) Nymphs and Lurleis, Mermaids and Mermen, and tiny water–babies with silvery tails, for ever splashing in the sunshine,

were all more or less associated with the long grey line towards which Mary Marchmont looked with solemn, yearning eyes.

"We'll drive down to the seashore some morning, Polly," said Mr. Arundel. He was beginning to call her Polly, now and then, in the easy familiarity of their intercourse. "We'll spend a long day on the sands, and I'll smoke cheroots while you pick up shells and seaweed."

Miss Marchmont clasped her hands in silent rapture. Her face was irradiated by the new light of happiness. How good he was to her, this brave soldier, who must undoubtedly be made Commander–in–Chief of the Army of the Indus in a year or so!

Edward Arundel led his companion across the flagged way between the iron gate of the Rectory garden and a half–glass door leading into the hall. Out of this simple hall, only furnished with a couple of chairs, a barometer, and an umbrella–stand, they went, without announcement, into a low, old–fashioned room, half–study, half–parlour, where a young lady was sitting at a table writing.

She rose as Edward opened the door, and came to meet him.

"At last!" she said; "I thought your rich friends engrossed all your attention."

She paused, seeing Mary.

"This is Miss Marchmont, Olivia," said Edward; "the only daughter of my old friend. You must be very fond of her, please; for she is a dear little girl, and I know she means to love you."

Mary lifted her soft brown eyes to the face of the young lady,

and then dropped her eyelids suddenly, as if half–frightened by what she had seen there.

What was it? What was it in Olivia Arundel's handsome face from which those who looked at her so often shrank, repelled and disappointed? Every line in those perfectly–modelled features was beautiful to look at; but, as a whole, the face was not beautiful. Perhaps it was too much like a marble mask, exquisitely chiselled, but wanting in variety of expression. The handsome mouth was rigid; the dark grey eyes had a cold light in them. The thick bands of raven–black hair were drawn tightly off a square forehead, which was the brow of an intellectual and determined man rather than of a woman. Yes; womanhood was the something wanted in Olivia Arundel's face. Intellect, resolution, courage, are rare gifts; but they are not the gifts whose tokens we look for most anxiously in a woman's face. If Miss Arundel had been a queen, her diadem would have become her nobly; and she might have been a very great queen: but Heaven help the wretched creature who had appealed from minor tribunals to *her* mercy! Heaven help delinquents of every kind whose last lingering hope had been in her compassion!

Perhaps Mary Marchmont vaguely felt something of all this. At any rate, the enthusiasm with which she had been ready to regard Edward Arundel's cousin cooled suddenly beneath the winter in that pale, quiet face.

Miss Arundel said a few words to her guest; kindly enough; but rather too much as if she had been addressing a child of

six. Mary, who was accustomed to be treated as a woman, was wounded by her manner.

"How different she is from Edward!" thought Miss Marchmont. "I shall never like her as I like him."

"So this is the pale–faced child who is to have Marchmont Towers by–and–by," thought Miss Arundel; "and these rich friends are the people for whom Edward stays away from us."

The lines about the rigid mouth grew harder, the cold light in the grey eyes grew colder, as the young lady thought this.

It was thus that these two women met: while one was but a child in years; while the other was yet in the early bloom of womanhood: these two, who were predestined to hate each other, and inflict suffering upon each other in the days that were to come. It was thus that they thought of one another; each with an unreasonable dread, an undefined aversion gathering in her breast.

* * * * *

Six weeks passed, and Edward Arundel kept his promise of shooting the partridges on the Marchmont preserves. The wood behind the Towers, and the stubbled corn–fields on the home–farm, bristled with game. The young soldier heartily enjoyed himself through that delicious first week in September; and came home every afternoon, with a heavy game–bag and a light heart, to boast of his prowess before Mary and her father.

The young man was by this time familiar with every nook and corner of Marchmont Towers; and the builders were already at work at the tennis–court which John had promised to erect for his friend's pleasure. The site ultimately chosen was a bleak corner of the eastern front, looking to the wood; but as Edward declared the spot in every way eligible, John had no inclination to find fault with his friend's choice. There was other work for the builders; for Mr. Arundel had taken a wonderful fancy to a ruined boat–house upon the brink of the river; and this boat–house was to be rebuilt and restored, and made into a delightful pavilion, in the upper chambers of which Mary might sit with her father in the hot summer weather, while Mr. Arundel kept a couple of trim wherries in the recesses below.

So, you see, the young man made himself very much at home, in his own innocent, boyish fashion, at Marchmont Towers. But as he had brought life and light to the old Lincolnshire mansion, nobody was inclined to quarrel with him for any liberties which he might choose to take: and every one looked forward sorrowfully to the dark days before Christmas, at which time he was under a promise to return to Dangerfield Park; there to spend the remainder of his leave of absence.

CHAPTER VII. OLIVIA

While busy workmen were employed at Marchmont Towers, hammering at the fragile wooden walls of the tennis–court,–while Mary Marchmont and Edward Arundel wandered, with the dogs at their heels, amongst the rustle of the fallen leaves in the wood behind the great gaunt Lincolnshire mansion,–Olivia, the Rector's daughter, sat in her father's quiet study, or walked to and fro in the gloomy streets of Swampington, doing her duty day by day.

Yes, the life of this woman is told in these few words: she did her duty. From the earliest age at which responsibility can begin, she had done her duty, uncomplainingly, unswervingly, as it seemed to those who watched her.

She was a good woman. The bishop of the diocese had specially complimented her for her active devotion to that holy work which falls somewhat heavily upon the only daughter of a widowed rector. All the stately dowagers about Swampington were loud in their praises of Olivia Arundel. Such devotion, such untiring zeal in a young person of three–and–twenty years of age, were really most laudable, these solemn elders said, in tones of supreme patronage; for the young saint of whom they spoke wore shabby gowns, and was the portionless daughter of a poor man who had let the world slip by him, and who sat now amid the dreary ruins of a wasted life, looking yearningly backward,

with hollow regretful eyes, and bewailing the chances he had lost. Hubert Arundel loved his daughter; loved her with that sorrowful affection we feel for those who suffer for our sins, whose lives have been blighted by our follies.

Every shabby garment which Olivia wore was a separate reproach to her father; every deprivation she endured stung him as cruelly as if she had turned upon him and loudly upbraided him for his wasted life and his squandered patrimony. He loved her; and he watched her day after day, doing her duty to him as to all others; doing her duty for ever and for ever; but when he most yearned to take her to his heart, her own cold perfections arose, and separated him from the child he loved. What was he but a poor, vacillating, erring creature; weak, supine, idle, epicurean; unworthy to approach this girl, who never seemed to sicken of the hardness of her life, who never grew weary of well–doing?

But how was it that, for all her goodness, Olivia Arundel won so small a share of earthly reward? I do not allude to the gold and jewels and other worldly benefits with which the fairies in our children's story–books reward the benevolent mortals who take compassion upon them when they experimentalise with human nature in the guise of old women; but I speak rather of the love and gratitude, the tenderness and blessings, which usually wait upon the footsteps of those who do good deeds. Olivia Arundel's charities were never ceasing; her life was one perpetual sacrifice to her father's parishioners. There was no natural womanly vanity, no simple girlish fancy, which this

woman had not trodden under foot, and trampled out in the hard pathway she had chosen for herself.

The poor people knew this. Rheumatic men and women, crippled and bed–ridden, knew that the blankets which covered them had been bought out of money that would have purchased silk dresses for the Rector's handsome daughter, or luxuries for the frugal table at the Rectory. They knew this. They knew that, through frost and snow, through storm and rain, Olivia Arundel would come to sit beside their dreary hearths, their desolate sick–beds, and read holy books to them; sublimely indifferent to the foul weather without, to the stifling atmosphere within, to dirt, discomfort, poverty, inconvenience; heedless of all, except the performance of the task she had set herself.

People knew this; and they were grateful to Miss Arundel, and submissive and attentive in her presence; they gave her such return as they were able to give for the benefits, spiritual and temporal, which she bestowed upon them: but they did not love her.

They spoke of her in reverential accents, and praised her whenever her name was mentioned; but they spoke with tearless eyes and unfaltering voices. Her virtues were beautiful, of course, as virtue in the abstract must always be; but I think there was a want of individuality in her goodness, a lack of personal tenderness in her kindness, which separated her from the people she benefited.

Perhaps there was something almost chilling in the dull

monotony of Miss Arundel's benevolence. There was no blemish of mortal weakness upon the good deeds she performed; and the recipients of her bounties, seeing her so far off, grew afraid of her, even by reason of her goodness, and *could* not love her.

She made no favourites amongst her father's parishioners. Of all the school–children she had taught, she had never chosen one curly–headed urchin for a pet. She had no good days and bad days; she was never foolishly indulgent or extravagantly cordial. She was always the same,–Church–of–England charity personified; meting out all mercies by line and rule; doing good with a note–book and a pencil in her hand; looking on every side with calm, scrutinising eyes; rigidly just, terribly perfect.

It was a fearfully monotonous, narrow, and uneventful life which Olivia Arundel led at Swampington Rectory. At three–and–twenty years of age she could have written her history upon a few pages. The world outside that dull Lincolnshire town might be shaken by convulsions, and made irrecognisable by repeated change; but all those outer changes and revolutions made themselves but little felt in the quiet grass–grown streets, and the flat surrounding swamps, within whose narrow boundary Olivia Arundel had lived from infancy to womanhood; performing and repeating the same duties from day to day, with no other progress to mark the lapse of her existence than the slow alternation of the seasons, and the dark hollow circles which had lately deepened beneath her grey eyes, and the depressed lines about the corners of her firm lower–lip.

These outward tokens, beyond her own control, alone betrayed this woman's secret. She was weary of her life. She sickened under the dull burden which she had borne so long, and carried so patiently. The slow round of duty was loathsome to her. The horrible, narrow, unchanging existence, shut in by cruel walls, which bounded her on every side and kept her prisoner to herself, was odious to her. The powerful intellect revolted against the fetters that bound and galled it. The proud heart beat with murderous violence against the bonds that kept it captive.

"Is my life always to be this–always, always, always?" The passionate nature burst forth sometimes, and the voice that had so long been stifled cried aloud in the black stillness of the night, "Is it to go on for ever and for ever; like the slow river that creeps under the broken wall? O my God! is the lot of other women never to be mine? Am I never to be loved and admired; never to be sought and chosen? Is my life to be all of one dull, grey, colourless monotony; without one sudden gleam of sunshine, without one burst of rainbow–light?"

How shall I anatomise this woman, who, gifted with no womanly tenderness of nature, unendowed with that pitiful and unreasoning affection which makes womanhood beautiful, yet tried, and tried unceasingly, to do her duty, and to be good; clinging, in the very blindness of her soul, to the rigid formulas of her faith, but unable to seize upon its spirit? Some latent comprehension of the want in her nature made her only the more scrupulous in the performance of those duties which she had

meted out for herself. The holy sentences she had heard, Sunday after Sunday, feebly read by her father, haunted her perpetually, and would not be put away from her. The tenderness in every word of those familiar gospels was a reproach to the want of tenderness in her own heart. She could be good to her father's parishioners, and she could make sacrifices for them; but she could not love them, any more than they could love her.

That divine and universal pity, that spontaneous and boundless affection, which is the chief loveliness of womanhood and Christianity, had no part in her nature. She could understand Judith with the Assyrian general's gory head held aloft in her uplifted hand; but she could not comprehend that diviner mystery of sinful Magdalene sitting at her Master's feet, with the shame and love in her face half hidden by a veil of drooping hair.

No; Olivia Arundel was not a good woman, in the commoner sense we attach to the phrase. It was not natural to her to be gentle and tender, to be beneficent, compassionate, and kind, as it is to the women we are accustomed to call "good." She was a woman who was for ever fighting against her nature; who was for ever striving to do right; for ever walking painfully upon the difficult road mapped out for her; for ever measuring herself by the standard she had set up for her self–abasement. And who shall say that such a woman as this, if she persevere unto the end, shall not wear a brighter crown than her more gentle sisters,–the starry circlet of a martyr?

If she persevere unto the end! But was Olivia Arundel the

woman to do this? The deepening circles about her eyes, the hollowing cheeks, and the feverish restlessness of manner which she could not always control, told how terrible the long struggle had become to her. If she could have died then,–if she had fallen beneath the weight of her burden,–what a record of sin and anguish might have remained unwritten in the history of woman's life! But this woman was one of those who can suffer, and yet not die. She bore her burden a little longer; only to fling it down by–and–by, and to abandon herself to the eager devils who had been watching for her so untiringly.

Hubert Arundel was afraid of his daughter. The knowledge that he had wronged her,–wronged her even before her birth by the foolish waste of his patrimony, and wronged her through life by his lack of energy in seeking such advancement as a more ambitious man might have won,–the knowledge of this, and of his daughter's superior virtues, combined to render the father ashamed and humiliated by the presence of his only child. The struggle between this fear and his remorseful love of her was a very painful one; but fear had the mastery, and the Rector of Swampington was content to stand aloof, mutely watchful of his daughter, wondering feebly whether she was happy, striving vainly to discover that one secret, that keystone of the soul, which must exist in every nature, however outwardly commonplace.

Mr. Arundel had hoped that his daughter would marry, and marry well, even at Swampington; for there were rich young landowners who visited at the Rectory. But Olivia's

handsome face won her few admirers, and at three–and–twenty Miss Arundel had received no offer of marriage. The father reproached himself for this. It was he who had blighted the life of his penniless girl; it was his fault that no suitors came to woo his motherless child. Yet many dowerless maidens have been sought and loved; and I do not think it was Olivia's lack of fortune which kept admirers at bay. I believe it was rather that inherent want of tenderness which chilled and dispirited the timid young Lincolnshire squires.

Had Olivia ever been in love? Hubert Arundel constantly asked himself this question. He did so because he saw that some blighting influence, even beyond the poverty and dulness of her home, had fallen upon the life of his only child. What was it? What was it? Was it some hopeless attachment, some secret tenderness, which had never won the sweet return of love for love?

He would no more have ventured to question his daughter upon this subject than he would have dared to ask his fair young Queen, newly married in those days, whether she was happy with her handsome husband.

Miss Arundel stood by the Rectory gate in the early September evening, watching the western sunlight on the low sea–line beyond the marshes. She was wearied and worn out by a long day devoted to visiting amongst her parishioners; and she stood with her elbow leaning on the gate, and her head resting on her hand, in an attitude peculiarly expressive of fatigue. She had

thrown off her bonnet, and her black hair was pushed carelessly from her forehead. Those masses of hair had not that purple lustre, nor yet that wandering glimmer of red gold, which gives peculiar beauty to some raven tresses. Olivia's hair was long and luxuriant; but it was of that dead, inky blackness, which is all shadow. It was dark, fathomless, inscrutable, like herself. The cold grey eyes looked thoughtfully seaward. Another day's duty had been done. Long chapters of Holy Writ had been read to troublesome old women afflicted with perpetual coughs; stifling, airless cottages had been visited; the dull, unvarying track had been beaten by the patient feet, and the yellow sun was going down upon another joyless day. But did the still evening hour bring peace to that restless spirit? No; by the rigid compression of the lips, by the feverish lustre in the eyes, by the faint hectic flush in the oval cheeks, by every outward sign of inward unrest, Olivia Arundel was not at peace! The listlessness of her attitude was merely the listlessness of physical fatigue. The mental struggle was not finished with the close of the day's work.

The young lady looked up suddenly as the tramp of a horse's hoofs, slow and lazy–sounding on the smooth road, met her ear. Her eyes dilated, and her breath went and came more rapidly; but she did not stir from her weary attitude.

The horse was from the stables at Marchmont Towers, and the rider was Mr. Arundel. He came smiling to the Rectory gate, with the low sunshine glittering in his chesnut hair, and the light of careless, indifferent happiness irradiating his handsome face.

"You must have thought I'd forgotten you and my uncle, my dear Livy," he said, as he sprang lightly from his horse. "We've been so busy with the tennis–court, and the boat–house, and the partridges, and goodness knows what besides at the Towers, that I couldn't get the time to ride over till this evening. But to–day we dined early, on purpose that I might have the chance of getting here. I come upon an important mission, Livy, I assure you."

"What do you mean?"

There was no change in Miss Arundel's voice when she spoke to her cousin; but there was a change, not easily to be defined, in her face when she looked at him. It seemed as if that weary hopelessness of expression which had settled on her countenance lately grew more weary, more hopeless, as she turned towards this bright young soldier, glorious in the beauty of his own light–heartedness. It may have been merely the sharpness of contrast which produced this effect. It may have been an actual change arising out of some secret hidden in Olivia's breast.

"What do you mean by an important mission, Edward?" she said.

She had need to repeat the question; for the young man's attention had wandered from her, and he was watching his horse as the animal cropped the tangled herbage about the Rectory gate.

"Why, I've come with an invitation to a dinner at Marchmont Towers. There's to be a dinner–party; and, in point of fact, it's to be given on purpose for you and my uncle. John and Polly are

full of it. You'll come, won't you, Livy?"

Miss Arundel shrugged her shoulders, with an impatient sigh.

"I hate dinner–parties," she said; "but, of course, if papa accepts Mr. Marchmont's invitation, I cannot refuse to go. Papa must choose for himself."

There had been some interchange of civilities between Marchmont Towers and Swampington Rectory during the six weeks which had passed since Mary's introduction to Olivia Arundel; and this dinner–party was the result of John's simple desire to do honour to his friend's kindred.

"Oh, you must come, Livy," Mr. Arundel exclaimed. "The tennis–court is going on capitally. I want you to give us your opinion again. Shall I take my horse round to the stables? I am going to stop an hour or two, and ride back by moonlight."

Edward Arundel took the bridle in his hand, and the cousins walked slowly round by the low garden–wall to a dismal and rather dilapidated stable–yard at the back of the Rectory, where Hubert Arundel kept a wall–eyed white horse, long–legged, shallow–chested, and large–headed, and a fearfully and wonderfully made phaëton, with high wheels and a mouldy leathern hood.

Olivia walked by the young soldier's side with that air of hopeless indifference that had so grown upon her very lately. Her eyelids drooped with a look of sullen disdain; but the grey eyes glanced furtively now and again at her companion's handsome face. He was very handsome. The glitter of reddish gold in his

hair, and the light in his fearless blue eyes; the careless grace peculiar to the kind of man we call "a swell;" the gay *insouciance* of an easy, candid, generous nature,–all combined to make Edward Arundel singularly attractive. These spoiled children of nature demand our admiration, in very spite of ourselves. These beautiful, useless creatures call upon us to rejoice in their valueless beauty, like the flaunting poppies in the cornfield, and the gaudy wild–flowers in the grass.

The darkness of Olivia's face deepened after each furtive glance she cast at her cousin. Could it be that this girl, to whom nature had given strength but denied grace, envied the superficial attractions of the young man at her side? She did envy him; she envied him that sunny temperament which was so unlike her own; she envied him that wondrous power of taking life lightly. Why should existence be so bright and careless to him; while to her it was a terrible fever–dream, a long sickness, a never–ceasing battle?

"Is my uncle in the house?" Mr. Arundel asked, as he strolled from the stable into the garden with his cousin by his side.

"No; he has been out since dinner," Olivia answered; "but I expect him back every minute. I came out into the garden,–the house seemed so hot and stifling to–night, and I have been sitting in close cottages all day."

"Sitting in close cottages!" repeated Edward. "Ah, to be sure; visiting your rheumatic old pensioners, I suppose. How good you are, Olivia!"

"Good!"

She echoed the word in the very bitterness of a scorn that could not be repressed.

"Yes; everybody says so. The Millwards were at Marchmont Towers the other day, and they were talking of you, and praising your goodness, and speaking of your schools, and your blanket–associations, and your invalid–societies, and your mutual–help clubs, and all your plans for the parish. Why, you must work as hard as a prime–minister, Livy, by their account; you, who are only a few years older than I."

Only a few years! She started at the phrase, and bit her lip.

"I was three–and–twenty last month," she said.

"Ah, yes; to be sure. And I'm one–and–twenty. Then you're only two years older than I, Livy. But, then, you see, you're so clever, that you seem much older than you are. You'd make a fellow feel rather afraid of you, you know. Upon my word you do, Livy."

Miss Arundel did not reply to this speech of her cousin's. She was walking by his side up and down a narrow gravelled pathway, bordered by a hazel–hedge; she had gathered one of the slender twigs, and was idly stripping away the fluffy buds.

"What do you think, Livy?" cried Edward suddenly, bursting out laughing at the end of the question. "What do you think? It's my belief you've made a conquest."

"What do you mean?"

"There you go; turning upon a fellow as if you could eat

him. Yes, Livy; it's no use your looking savage. You've made a conquest; and of one of the best fellows in the world, too. John Marchmont's in love with you."

Olivia Arundel's face flushed a vivid crimson to the roots of her black hair.

"How dare you come here to insult me, Edward Arundel?" she cried passionately.

"Insult you? Now, Livy dear, that's too bad, upon my word," remonstrated the young man. "I come and tell you that as good a man as ever breathed is over head and ears in love with you, and that you may be mistress of one of the finest estates in Lincolnshire if you please, and you turn round upon me like no end of furies."

"Because I hate to hear you talk nonsense," answered Olivia, her bosom still heaving with that first outburst of emotion, but her voice suppressed and cold. "Am I so beautiful, or so admired or beloved, that a man who has not seen me half a dozen times should fall in love with me? Do those who know me estimate me so much, or prize me so highly, that a stranger should think of me? You *do* insult me, Edward Arundel, when you talk as you have talked to–night."

She looked out towards the low yellow light in the sky with a black gloom upon her face, which no reflected glimmer of the sinking sun could illumine; a settled darkness, near akin to the utter blackness of despair.

"But, good heavens, Olivia, what do you mean?" cried the

young man. "I tell you something that I think a good joke, and you go and make a tragedy out of it. If I'd told Letitia that a rich widower had fallen in love with her, she'd think it the finest fun in the world."

"I'm not your sister Letitia."

"No; but I wish you'd half as good a temper as she has, Livy. However, never mind; I'll say no more. If poor old Marchmont has fallen in love with you, that's his look–out. Poor dear old boy, he's let out the secret of his weakness half a dozen ways within these last few days. It's Miss Arundel this, and Miss Arundel the other; so unselfish, so accomplished, so ladylike, so good! That's the way he goes on, poor simple old dear; without having the remotest notion that he's making a confounded fool of himself."

Olivia tossed the rumpled hair from her forehead with an impatient gesture of her hand.

"Why should this Mr. Marchmont think all this of me?" she said, "when–" she stopped abruptly.

"When–what, Livy?"

"When other people don't think it."

"How do you know what other people think? You haven't asked them, I suppose?"

The young soldier treated his cousin in very much the same free–and–easy manner which he displayed towards his sister Letitia. It would have been almost difficult for him to recognise any degree in his relationship to the two girls. He loved Letitia better than Olivia; but his affection for both was of exactly the

same character.

Hubert Arundel came into the garden, wearied out, like his daughter, while the two cousins were walking under the shadow of the neglected hazels. He declared his willingness to accept the invitation to Marchmont Towers, and promised to answer John's ceremonious note the next day.

"Cookson, from Kemberling, will be there, I suppose," he said, alluding to a brother parson, "and the usual set? Well, I'll come, Ned, if you wish it. You'd like to go, Olivia?"

"If you like, papa."

There was a duty to be performed now–the duty of placid obedience to her father; and Miss Arundel's manner changed from angry impatience to grave respect. She owed no special duty, be it remembered, to her cousin. She had no line or rule by which to measure her conduct to him.

She stood at the gate nearly an hour later, and watched the young man ride away in the dim moonlight. If every separate tramp of his horse's hoofs had struck upon her heart, it could scarcely have given her more pain than she felt as the sound of those slow footfalls died away in the distance.

"O my God," she cried, "is this madness to undo all that I have done? Is this folly to be the climax of my dismal life? Am I to die for the love of a frivolous, fair–haired boy, who laughs in my face when he tells me that his friend has pleased to 'take a fancy to me'?"

She walked away towards the house; then stopping, with a

sudden shiver, she turned, and went back to the hazel–alley she had paced with Edward Arundel.

"Oh, my narrow life!" she muttered between her set teeth; "my narrow life! It is that which has made me the slave of this madness. I love him because he is the brightest and fairest thing I have ever seen. I love him because he brings me all I have ever known of a more beautiful world than that I live in. Bah! why do I reason with myself?" she cried, with a sudden change of manner. "I love him because I am mad."

She paced up and down the hazel–shaded pathway till the moonlight grew broad and full, and every ivy–grown gable of the Rectory stood sharply out against the vivid purple of the sky. She paced up and down, trying to trample the folly within her under her feet as she went; a fierce, passionate, impulsive woman, fighting against her mad love for a bright–faced boy.

"Two years older–only two years!" she said; "but he spoke of the difference between us as if it had been half a century. And then I am so clever, that I seem older than I am; and he is afraid of me! Is it for this that I have sat night after night in my father's study, poring over the books that were too difficult for him? What have I made of myself in my pride of intellect? What reward have I won for my patience?"

Olivia Arundel looked back at her long life of duty–a dull, dead level, unbroken by one of those monuments which mark the desert of the past; a desolate flat, unlovely as the marshes between the low Rectory wall and the shimmering grey sea.

CHAPTER VIII. "MY LIFE IS COLD, AND DARK, AND DREARY."

Mr. Richard Paulette, of that eminent legal firm, Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, coming to Marchmont Towers on business, was surprised to behold the quiet ease with which the sometime copying–clerk received the punctilious country gentry who came to sit at his board and do him honour.

Of all the legal fairy–tales, of all the parchment–recorded romances, of all the poetry run into affidavits, in which the solicitor had ever been concerned, this story seemed the strangest. Not so very strange in itself, for such romances are not uncommon in the history of a lawyer's experience; but strange by reason of the tranquil manner in which John Marchmont accepted his new position, and did the honours of his house to his late employer.

"Ah, Paulette," Edward Arundel said, clapping the solicitor on the back, "I don't suppose you believed me when I told you that my friend here was heir–presumptive to a handsome fortune."

The dinner–party at the Towers was conducted with that stately grandeur peculiar to such solemnities. There was the usual round of country–talk and parish–talk; the hunting squires leading the former section of the discourse, the rectors and rectors' wives supporting the latter part of the conversation. You heard on one side that Martha Harris' husband had left off

drinking, and attended church morning and evening; and on the other that the old grey fox that had been hunted nine seasons between Crackbin Bottom and Hollowcraft Gorse had perished ignobly in the poultry–yard of a recusant farmer. While your left ear became conscious of the fact that little Billy Smithers had fallen into a copper of scalding water, your right received the dismal tidings that all the young partridges had been drowned by the rains after St. Swithin, and that there were hardly any of this year's birds, sir, and it would be a very blue look–out for next season.

Mary Marchmont had listened to gayer talk in Oakley Street than any that was to be heard that night in her father's drawing–rooms, except indeed when Edward Arundel left off flirting with some pretty girls in blue, and hovered near her side for a little while, quizzing the company. Heaven knows the young soldier's jokes were commonplace enough; but Mary admired him as the most brilliant and accomplished of wits.

"How do you like my cousin, Polly?" he asked at last.

"Your cousin, Miss Arundel?"

"Yes."

"She is very handsome."

"Yes, I suppose so," the young man answered carelessly. "Everybody says that Livy's handsome; but it's rather a cold style of beauty, isn't it? A little too much of the Pallas Athenë about it for my taste. I like those girls in blue, with the crinkly auburn hair,–there's a touch of red in it in the light,–and the dimples.

You've a dimple, Polly, when you smile."

Miss Marchmont blushed as she received this information, and her brown eyes wandered away, looking very earnestly at the pretty girls in blue. She looked at them with a strange interest, eager to discover what it was that Edward admired.

"But you haven't answered my question, Polly," said Mr. Arundel. "I am afraid you have been drinking too much wine, Miss Marchmont, and muddling that sober little head of yours with the fumes of your papa's tawny port. I asked you how you liked Olivia."

Mary blushed again.

"I don't know Miss Arundel well enough to like her–yet," she answered timidly.

"But shall you like her when you've known her longer? Don't be jesuitical, Polly. Likings and dislikings are instantaneous and instinctive. I liked you before I'd eaten half a dozen mouthfuls of the roll you buttered for me at that breakfast in Oakley Street, Polly. You don't like my cousin Olivia, miss; I can see that very plainly. You're jealous of her."

"Jealous of her!"

The bright colour faded out of Mary Marchmont's face, and left her ashy pale.

"Do *you* like her, then?" she asked.

But Mr. Arundel was not such a coxcomb as to catch at the secret so naïvely betrayed in that breathless question.

"No, Polly," he said, laughing; "she's my cousin, you know,

and I've known her all my life; and cousins are like sisters. One likes to tease and aggravate them, and all that; but one doesn't fall in love with them. But I think I could mention somebody who thinks a great deal of Olivia."

"Who?"

"Your papa."

Mary looked at the young soldier in utter bewilderment.

"Papa!" she echoed.

"Yes, Polly. How would you like a stepmamma? How would you like your papa to marry again?"

Mary Marchmont started to her feet, as if she would have gone to her father in the midst of all those spectators. John was standing near Olivia and her father, talking to them, and playing nervously with his slender watch–chain when he addressed the young lady.

"My papa–marry again!" gasped Mary. "How dare you say such a thing, Mr. Arundel?"

Her childish devotion to her father arose in all its force; a flood of passionate emotion that overwhelmed her sensitive nature. Marry again! marry a woman who would separate him from his only child! Could he ever dream for one brief moment of such a horrible cruelty?

She looked at Olivia's sternly handsome face, and trembled. She could almost picture that very woman standing between her and her father, and putting her away from him. Her indignation quickly melted into grief. Indignation, however intense, was

always short–lived in that gentle nature.

"Oh, Mr Arundel!" she said, piteously appealing to the young man, "papa would never, never, never marry again,–would he?"

"Not if it was to grieve you, Polly, I dare say," Edward answered soothingly.

He had been dumbfounded by Mary's passionate sorrow. He had expected that she would have been rather pleased, than otherwise, at the idea of a young stepmother,–a companion in those vast lonely rooms, an instructress and a friend as she grew to womanhood.

"I was only talking nonsense, Polly darling," he said. "You mustn't make yourself unhappy about any absurd fancies of mine. I think your papa admires my cousin Olivia: and I thought, perhaps, you'd be glad to have a stepmother."

"Glad to have any one who'd take papa's love away from me?" Mary said plaintively. "Oh, Mr. Arundel, how could you think so?"

In all their familiarity the little girl had never learned to call her father's friend by his Christian name, though he had often told her to do so. She trembled to pronounce that simple Saxon name, which was so beautiful and wonderful because it was his: but when she read a very stupid novel, in which the hero was a namesake of Mr. Arundel's, the vapid pages seemed to be phosphorescent with light wherever the name appeared upon them.

I scarcely know why John Marchmont lingered by Miss

Arundel's chair. He had heard her praises from every one. She was a paragon of goodness, an uncanonised saint, for ever sacrificing herself for the benefit of others. Perhaps he was thinking that such a woman as this would be the best friend he could win for his little girl. He turned from the county matrons, the tender, kindly, motherly creatures, who would have been ready to take little Mary to the loving shelter of their arms, and looked to Olivia Arundel–this cold, perfect benefactress of the poor–for help in his difficulty.

"She, who is so good to all her father's parishioners, could not refuse to be kind to my poor Mary?" he thought.

But how was he to win this woman's friendship for his darling? He asked himself this question even in the midst of the frivolous people about him, and with the buzz of their conversation in his ears. He was perpetually tormenting himself about his little girl's future, which seemed more dimly perplexing now than it had ever appeared in Oakley Street, when the Lincolnshire property was a far–away dream, perhaps never to be realised. He felt that his brief lease of life was running out; he felt as if he and Mary had been standing upon a narrow tract of yellow sand; very bright, very pleasant under the sunshine; but with the slow–coming tide rising like a wall about them, and creeping stealthily onward to overwhelm them.

Mary might gather bright–coloured shells and wet seaweed in her childish ignorance; but he, who knew that the flood was coming, could but grow sick at heart with the dull horror of that

hastening doom. If the black waters had been doomed to close over them both, the father might have been content to go down under the sullen waves, with his daughter clasped to his breast. But it was not to be so. He was to sink in that unknown stream while she was left upon the tempest–tossed surface, to be beaten hither and thither, feebly battling with the stormy billows.

Could John Marchmont be a Christian, and yet feel this horrible dread of the death which must separate him from his daughter? I fear this frail, consumptive widower loved his child with an intensity of affection that is scarcely reconcilable with Christianity. Such great passions as these must be put away before the cross can be taken up, and the troublesome path followed. In all love and kindness towards his fellow–creatures, in all patient endurance of the pains and troubles that befel himself, it would have been difficult to find a more single–hearted follower of Gospel–teaching than John Marchmont; but in this affection for his motherless child he was a very Pagan. He set up an idol for himself, and bowed down before it. Doubtful and fearful of the future, he looked hopelessly forward. He *could* not trust his orphan child into the hands of God; and drop away himself into the fathomless darkness, serene in the belief that she would be cared for and protected. No; he could not trust. He could be faithful for himself; simple and confiding as a child; but not for her. He saw the gloomy rocks louring black in the distance; the pitiless waves beating far away yonder, impatient to devour the frail boat that was so soon to be left alone upon the

waters. In the thick darkness of the future he could see no ray of light, except one,–a new hope that had lately risen in his mind; the hope of winning some noble and perfect woman to be the future friend of his daughter.

The days were past in which, in his simplicity, he had looked to Edward Arundel as the future shelter of his child. The generous boy had grown into a stylish young man, a soldier, whose duty lay far away from Marchmont Towers. No; it was to a good woman's guardianship the father must leave his child.

Thus the very intensity of his love was the one motive which led John Marchmont to contemplate the step that Mary thought such a cruel and bitter wrong to her.

* * * * *

It was not till long after the dinner–party at Marchmont Towers that these ideas resolved themselves into any positive form, and that John began to think that for his daughter's sake he might be led to contemplate a second marriage. Edward Arundel had spoken the truth when he told his cousin that John Marchmont had repeatedly mentioned her name; but the careless and impulsive young man had been utterly unable to fathom the feeling lurking in his friend's mind. It was not Olivia Arundel's handsome face which had won John's admiration; it was the constant reiteration of her praises upon every side which had led him to believe that this woman, of all others, was the one whom

he would do well to win for his child's friend and guardian in the dark days that were to come.

The knowledge that Olivia's intellect was of no common order, together with the somewhat imperious dignity of her manner, strengthened this belief in John Marchmont's mind. It was not a good woman only whom he must seek in the friend he needed for his child; it was a woman powerful enough to shield her in the lonely path she would have to tread; a woman strong enough to help her, perhaps, by–and–by to do battle with Paul Marchmont.

So, in the blind paganism of his love, John refused to trust his child into the hands of Providence, and chose for himself a friend and guardian who should shelter his darling. He made his choice with so much deliberation, and after such long nights and days of earnest thought, that he may be forgiven if he believed he had chosen wisely.

Thus it was that in the dark November days, while Edward and Mary played chess by the wide fireplace in the western drawing–room, or ball in the newly–erected tennis–court, John Marchmont sat in his study examining his papers, and calculating the amount of money at his own disposal, in serious contemplation of a second marriage.

Did he love Olivia Arundel? No. He admired her and respected her, and he firmly believed her to be the most perfect of women. No impulse of affection had prompted the step he contemplated taking. He had loved his first wife truly and

tenderly; but he had never suffered very acutely from any of those torturing emotions which form the several stages of the great tragedy called Love.

But had he ever thought of the likelihood of his deliberate offer being rejected by the young lady who had been the object of such careful consideration? Yes; he had thought of this, and was prepared to abide the issue. He should, at least, have tried his uttermost to secure a friend for his darling.

With such unloverlike feelings as these the owner of Marchmont Towers drove into Swampington one morning, deliberately bent upon offering Olivia Arundel his hand. He had consulted with his land–steward, and with Messrs. Paulette, and had ascertained how far he could endow his bride with the goods of this world. It was not much that he could give her, for the estate was strictly entailed; but there would be his own savings for the brief term of his life, and if he lived only a few years these savings might accumulate to a considerable amount, so limited were the expenses of the quiet Lincolnshire household; and there was a sum of money, something over nine thousand pounds, left him by Philip Marchmont, senior. He had something, then, to offer to the woman he sought to make his wife; and, above all, he had a supreme belief in Olivia Arundel's utter disinterestedness. He had seen her frequently since the dinner–party, and had always seen her the same,–grave, reserved, dignified; patiently employed in the strict performance of her duty.

He found Miss Arundel sitting in her father's study, busily

cutting out coarse garments for her poor. A newly–written sermon lay open on the table. Had Mr. Marchmont looked closely at the manuscript, he would have seen that the ink was wet, and that the writing was Olivia's. It was a relief to this strange woman to write sermons sometimes–fierce denunciatory protests against the inherent wickedness of the human heart. Can you imagine a woman with a wicked heart steadfastly trying to do good, and to be good? It is a dark and horrible picture; but it is the only true picture of the woman whom John Marchmont sought to win for his wife.

The interview between Mary's father and Olivia Arundel was not a very sentimental one; but it was certainly the very reverse of commonplace. John was too simple–hearted to disguise the purpose of his wooing. He pleaded, not for a wife for himself, but a mother for his orphan child. He talked of Mary's helplessness in the future, not of his own love in the present. Carried away by the egotism of his one affection, he let his motives appear in all their nakedness. He spoke long and earnestly; he spoke until the blinding tears in his eyes made the face of her he looked at seem blotted and dim.

Miss Arundel watched him as he pleaded; sternly, unflinchingly. But she uttered no word until he had finished; and then, rising suddenly, with a dusky flush upon her face, she began to pace up and down the narrow room. She had forgotten John Marchmont. In the strength and vigour of her intellect, this weak–minded widower, whose one passion was a pitiful love for

his child, appeared to her so utterly insignificant, that for a few moments she had forgotten his presence in that room–his very existence, perhaps. She turned to him presently, and looked him full in the face.

"You do not love me, Mr. Marchmont?" she said.

"Pardon me," John stammered; "believe me, Miss Arundel, I respect, I esteem you so much, that–"

"That you choose me as a fitting friend for your child. I understand. I am not the sort of woman to be loved. I have long comprehended that. My cousin Edward Arundel has often taken the trouble to tell me as much. And you wish me to be your wife in order that you may have a guardian for your child? It is very much the same thing as engaging a governess; only the engagement is to be more binding."

"Miss Arundel," exclaimed John Marchmont, "forgive me! You misunderstand me; indeed you do. Had I thought that I could have offended you–"

"I am not offended. You have spoken the truth where another man would have told a lie. I ought to be flattered by your confidence in me. It pleases me that people should think me good, and worthy of their trust."

She broke into a sigh as she finished speaking.

"And you will not reject my appeal?"

"I scarcely know what to do," answered Olivia, pressing her hand to her forehead.

She leaned against the angle of the deep casement window,

looking out at the garden, desolate and neglected in the bleak winter weather. She was silent for some minutes. John Marchmont did not interrupt her; he was content to wait patiently until she should choose to speak.

"Mr. Marchmont," she said at last, turning upon poor John with an abrupt vehemence that almost startled him, "I am three–and–twenty; and in the long, dull memory of the three–and–twenty years that have made my life, I cannot look back upon one joy–no, so help me Heaven, not one!" she cried passionately. "No prisoner in the Bastille, shut in a cell below the level of the Seine, and making companions of rats and spiders in his misery, ever led a life more hopelessly narrow, more pitifully circumscribed, than mine has been. These grass–grown streets have made the boundary of my existence. The flat fenny country round me is not flatter or more dismal than my life. You will say that I should take an interest in the duties which I do; and that they should be enough for me. Heaven knows I have tried to do so; but my life is hard. Do you think there has been nothing in all this to warp my nature? Do you think after hearing this, that I am the woman to be a second mother to your child?"

She sat down as she finished speaking, and her hands dropped listlessly in her lap. The unquiet spirit raging in her breast had been stronger than herself, and had spoken. She had lifted the dull veil through which the outer world beheld her, and had showed John Marchmont her natural face.

"I think you are a good woman, Miss Arundel," he said

earnestly. "If I had thought otherwise, I should not have come here to–day. I want a good woman to be kind to my child; kind to her when I am dead and gone," he added, in a lower voice.

Olivia Arundel sat silent and motionless, looking straight before her out into the black dulness of the garden. She was trying to think out the dark problem of her life.

Strange as it may seem, there was a certain fascination for her in John Marchmont's offer. He offered her something, no matter what; it would be a change. She had compared herself to a prisoner in the Bastille; and I think she felt very much as such a prisoner might have felt upon his gaoler's offering to remove him to Vincennes. The new prison might be worse than the old one, perhaps; but it would be different. Life at Marchmont Towers might be more monotonous, more desolate, than at Swampington; but it would be a new monotony, another desolation. Have you never felt, when suffering the hideous throes of toothache, that it would be a relief to have the earache or the rheumatism; that variety even in torture would be agreeable?

Then, again, Olivia Arundel, though unblest with many of the charms of womanhood, was not entirely without its weaknesses. To marry John Marchmont would be to avenge herself upon Edward Arundel. Alas! she forgot how impossible it is to inflict a dagger–thrust upon him who is guarded by the impenetrable armour of indifference. She saw herself the mistress of Marchmont Towers, waited upon by liveried servants,

courted, not patronised by the country gentry; avenged upon the mercenary aunt who had slighted her, who had bade her go out and get her living as a nursery governess. She saw this; and all that was ignoble in her nature arose, and urged her to snatch the chance offered her–the one chance of lifting herself out of the horrible obscurity of her life. The ambition which might have made her an empress lowered its crest, and cried, "Take this; at least it is something." But, through all, the better voices which she had enlisted to do battle with the natural voice of her soul cried, "This is a temptation of the devil; put it away from thee."

But this temptation came to her at the very moment when her life had become most intolerable; too intolerable to be borne, she thought. She knew now, fatally, certainly, that Edward Arundel did not love her; that the one only day–dream she had ever made for herself had been a snare and a delusion. The radiance of that foolish dream had been the single light of her life. That taken away from her, the darkness was blacker than the blackness of death; more horrible than the obscurity of the grave.

In all the future she had not one hope: no, not one. She had loved Edward Arundel with all the strength of her soul; she had wasted a world of intellect and passion upon this bright–haired boy. This foolish, grovelling madness had been the blight of her life. But for this, she might have grown out of her natural self by force of her conscientious desire to do right; and might have become, indeed, a good and perfect woman. If her life had been a wider one, this wasted love would, perhaps, have shrunk into

its proper insignificance; she would have loved, and suffered, and recovered; as so many of us recover from this common epidemic. But all the volcanic forces of an impetuous nature, concentrated into one narrow focus, wasted themselves upon this one feeling, until that which should have been a sentiment became a madness.

To think that in some far–away future time she might cease to love Edward Arundel, and learn to love somebody else, would have seemed about as reasonable to Olivia as to hope that she could have new legs and arms in that distant period. She could cut away this fatal passion with a desperate stroke, it may be, just as she could cut off her arm; but to believe that a new love would grow in its place was quite as absurd as to believe in the growing of a new arm. Some cork monstrosity might replace the amputated limb; some sham and simulated affection might succeed the old love.

Olivia Arundel thought of all these things, in about ten minutes by the little skeleton clock upon the mantel–piece, and while John Marchmont fidgeted rather nervously, with a pair of gloves in the crown of his hat, and waited for some definite answer to his appeal. Her mind came back at last, after all its passionate wanderings, to the rigid channel she had so laboriously worn for it,–the narrow groove of duty. Her first words testified this.

"If I accept this responsibility, I will perform it faithfully," she said, rather to herself than to Mr. Marchmont.

"I am sure you will, Miss Arundel," John answered eagerly; "I

am sure you will. You mean to undertake it, then? you mean to consider my offer? May I speak to your father? may I tell him that I have spoken to you? may I say that you have given me a hope of your ultimate consent?"

"Yes, yes," Olivia said, rather impatiently; "speak to my father; tell him anything you please. Let him decide for me; it is my duty to obey him."

There was a terrible cowardice in this. Olivia Arundel shrank from marrying a man she did not love, prompted by no better desire than the mad wish to wrench herself away from her hated life. She wanted to fling the burden of responsibility in this matter away from her. Let another decide, let another urge her to do this wrong; and let the wrong be called a sacrifice.

So for the first time she set to work deliberately to cheat her own conscience. For the first time she put a false mark upon the standard she had made for the measurement of her moral progress.

She sank into a crouching attitude on a low stool by the fire–place, in utter prostration of body and mind, when John Marchmont had left her. She let her weary head fall heavily against the carved oaken shaft that supported the old–fashioned mantel–piece, heedless that her brow struck sharply against the corner of the wood–work.

If she could have died then, with no more sinful secret than a woman's natural weakness hidden in her breast; if she could have died then, while yet the first step upon the dark pathway

of her life was untrodden,–how happy for herself, how happy for others! How miserable a record of sin and suffering might have remained unwritten in the history of woman's life!

* * * * *

She sat long in the same attitude. Once, and once only, two solitary tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled slowly down her pale cheeks.

"Will you be sorry when I am married, Edward Arundel?" she murmured; "will you be sorry?"

CHAPTER IX. "WHEN SHALL I CEASE TO BE ALL ALONE?"

Hubert Arundel was not so much surprised as might have been anticipated at the proposal made him by his wealthy neighbour. Edward had prepared his uncle for the possibility of such a proposal by sundry jocose allusions and arch hints upon the subject of John Marchmont's admiration for Olivia. The frank and rather frivolous young man thought it was his cousin's handsome face that had captivated the master of Marchmont Towers, and was quite unable to fathom the hidden motive underlying all John's talk about Miss Arundel.

The Rector of Swampington, being a simple–hearted and not very far–seeing man, thanked God heartily for the chance that had befallen his daughter. She would be well off and well cared for, then, by the mercy of Providence, in spite of his own shortcomings, which had left her with no better provision for the future than a pitiful Policy of Assurance upon her father's life. She would be well provided for henceforward, and would live in a handsome house; and all those noble qualities which had been dwarfed and crippled in a narrow sphere would now expand, and display themselves in unlooked–for grandeur.

"People have called her a good girl," he thought; "but how could they ever know her goodness, unless they had seen, as I have, the deprivations she has borne so uncomplainingly?"

John Marchmont, being newly instructed by his lawyer, was able to give Mr. Arundel a very clear statement of the provision he could make for his wife's future. He could settle upon her the nine thousand pounds left him by Philip Marchmont. He would allow her five hundred a year pin–money during his lifetime; he would leave her his savings at his death; and he would effect an insurance upon his life for her benefit. The amount of these savings would, of course, depend upon the length of John's life; but the money would accumulate very quickly, as his income was eleven thousand a year, and his expenditure was not likely to exceed three.

The Swampington living was worth little more than three hundred and fifty pounds a year; and out of that sum Hubert Arundel and his daughter had done treble as much good for the numerous poor of the parish as ever had been achieved by any previous Rector or his family. Hubert and his daughter had patiently endured the most grinding poverty, the burden ever falling heavier on Olivia, who had the heroic faculty of endurance as regards all physical discomfort. Can it be wondered, then, that the Rector of Swampington thought the prospect offered to his child a very brilliant one? Can it be wondered that he urged his daughter to accept this altered lot?

He did urge her, pleading John Marchmont's cause a great deal more warmly than the widower had himself pleaded.

"My darling," he said, "my darling girl! if I can live to see you mistress of Marchmont Towers, I shall go to my grave contented

and happy. Think, my dear, of the misery from which this marriage will save you. Oh, my dear girl, I can tell you now what I never dared tell you before; I can tell you of the long, sleepless nights I have passed thinking of you, and of the wicked wrongs I have done you. Not wilful wrongs, my love," the Rector added, with the tears gathering in his eyes; "for you know how dearly I have always loved you. But a father's responsibility towards his children is a very heavy burden. I have only looked at it in this light lately, my dear,–now that I've let the time slip by, and it is too late to redeem the past. I've suffered very much, Olivia; and all this has seemed to separate us, somehow. But that's past now, isn't it, my dear? and you'll marry this Mr. Marchmont. He appears to be a very good, conscientious man, and I think he'll make you happy."

The father and daughter were sitting together after dinner in the dusky November twilight, the room only lighted by the fire, which was low and dim. Hubert Arundel could not see his daughter's face as he talked to her; he could only see the black outline of her figure sharply defined against the grey window behind her, as she sat opposite to him. He could see by her attitude that she was listening to him, with her head drooping and her hands lying idle in her lap.

She was silent for some little time after he had finished speaking; so silent that he feared his words might have touched her too painfully, and that she was crying.

Heaven help this simple–hearted father! She had scarcely

heard three consecutive words that he had spoken, but had only gathered dimly from his speech that he wanted her to accept John Marchmont's offer.

Every great passion is a supreme egotism. It is not the object which we hug so determinedly; it is not the object which coils itself about our weak hearts: it is our own madness we worship and cleave to, our own pitiable folly which we refuse to put away from us. What is Bill Sykes' broken nose or bull–dog visage to Nancy? The creature she loves and will not part from is not Bill, but her own love for Bill,–the one delusion of a barren life; the one grand selfishness of a feeble nature.

Olivia Arundel's thoughts had wandered far away while her father had spoken so piteously to her. She had been thinking of her cousin Edward, and had been asking herself the same question over and over again. Would he be sorry? would he be sorry if she married John Marchmont?

But she understood presently that her father was waiting for her to speak; and, rising from her chair, she went towards him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"I am afraid I have not done my duty to you, papa," she said.

Latterly she had been for ever harping upon this one theme,–her duty! That word was the keynote of her life; and her existence had latterly seemed to her so inharmonious, that it was scarcely strange she should repeatedly strike that leading note in the scale.

"My darling," cried Mr. Arundel, "you have been all that is good!"

"No, no, papa; I have been cold, reserved, silent."

"A little silent, my dear," the Rector answered meekly; "but you have not been happy. I have watched you, my love, and I know you have not been happy. But that is not strange. This place is so dull, and your life has been so fatiguing. How different that would all be at Marchmont Towers!"

"You wish me to many Mr. Marchmont, then, papa?"

"I do, indeed, my love. For your own sake, of course," the Rector added deprecatingly.

"You really wish it?"

"Very, very much, my dear."

"Then I will marry him, papa."

She took her hand from the Rector's shoulder, and walked away from him to the uncurtained window, against which she stood with her back to her father, looking out into the grey obscurity.

I have said that Hubert Arundel was not a very clever or far–seeing person; but he vaguely felt that this was not exactly the way in which a brilliant offer of marriage should be accepted by a young lady who was entirely fancy–free, and he had an uncomfortable apprehension that there was something hidden under his daughter's quiet manner.

"But, my dear Olivia," he said nervously, "you must not for a moment suppose that I would force you into this marriage, if it is in any way repugnant to yourself. You–you may have formed some prior attachment–or, there may be somebody who loves

you, and has loved you longer than Mr. Marchmont, who–"

His daughter turned upon him sharply as he rambled on.

"Somebody who loves me!" she echoed. "What have you ever seen that should make you think any one loved me?"

The harshness of her tone jarred upon Mr. Arundel, and made him still more nervous.

"My love, I beg your pardon, I have seen nothing. I–"

"Nobody loves me, or has ever loved me,–but you," resumed Olivia, taking no heed of her father's feeble interruption. "I am not the sort of woman to be loved; I feel and know that. I have an aquiline nose, and a clear skin, and dark eyes, and people call me handsome; but nobody loves me, or ever will, so long as I live."

"But Mr. Marchmont, my dear,–surely he loves and admires you?" remonstrated the Rector.

"Mr. Marchmont wants a governess and *chaperone* for his daughter, and thinks me a suitable person to fill such a post; that is all the *love* Mr. Marchmont has for me. No, papa; there is no reason I should shrink from this marriage. There is no one who will be sorry for it; no one! I am asked to perform a duty towards this little girl, and I am prepared to perform it faithfully. That is my part of the bargain. Do I commit a sin in marrying John Marchmont in this spirit, papa?"

She asked the question eagerly, almost breathlessly; as if her decision depended upon her father's answer.

"A sin, my dear! How can you ask such a question?"

"Very well, then; if I commit no sin in accepting this offer, I

will accept it."

It was thus Olivia paltered with her conscience, holding back half the truth. The question she should have asked was this, "Do I commit a sin in marrying one man, while my heart is racked by a mad passion for another?"

Miss Arundel could not visit her poor upon the day after this interview with her father. Her monotonous round of duty seemed more than ever abhorrent to her. She wandered across the dreary marshes, down by the lonely seashore, in the grey November fog.

She stood for a long time, shivering with the cold dampness of the atmosphere, but not even conscious that she was cold, looking at a dilapidated boat that lay upon the rugged beach. The waters before her and the land behind her were hidden by a dense veil of mist. It seemed as if she stood alone in the world,–utterly isolated, utterly forgotten.

"O my God!" she murmured, "if this boat at my feet could drift me away to some desert island, I could never be more desolate than I am, amongst the people who do not love me."

Dim lights in distant windows were gleaming across the flats when she returned to Swampington, to find her father sitting alone and dispirited at his frugal dinner. Miss Arundel took her place quietly at the bottom of the table, no trace of emotion upon her face.

"I am sorry I stayed out so long, papa" she said; "I had no idea it was so late."

"Never mind, my dear, I know you have always enough to

occupy you. Mr. Marchmont called while you were out. He seemed very anxious to hear your decision, and was delighted when he found that it was favourable to himself."

Olivia dropped her knife and fork, and rose from her chair suddenly, with a strange look, which was almost terror, in her face.

"It is quite decided, then?" she said.

"Yes, my love. But you are not sorry, are you?"

"Sorry! No; I am glad."

She sank back into her chair with a sigh of relief. She *was* glad. The prospect of this strange marriage offered a relief from the horrible oppression of her life.

"Henceforward to think of Edward Arundel will be a sin," she thought. "I have not won another man's love; but I shall be another man's wife."

CHAPTER X. MARY'S STEPMOTHER

Perhaps there was never a quieter courtship than that which followed Olivia's acceptance of John Marchmont's offer. There had been no pretence of sentiment on either side; yet I doubt if John had been much more sentimental during his early love–making days, though he had very tenderly and truly loved his first wife. There were few sparks of the romantic or emotional fire in his placid nature. His love for his daughter, though it absorbed his whole being, was a silent and undemonstrative affection; a thoughtful and almost fearful devotion, which took the form of intense but hidden anxiety for his child's future, rather than any outward show of tenderness.

Had his love been of a more impulsive and demonstrative character, he would scarcely have thought of taking such a step as that he now contemplated, without first ascertaining whether it would be agreeable to his daughter.

But he never for a moment dreamt of consulting Mary's will upon this important matter. He looked with fearful glances towards the dim future, and saw his darling, a lonely figure upon a barren landscape, beset by enemies eager to devour her; and he snatched at this one chance of securing her a protectress, who would be bound to her by a legal as well as a moral tie; for John Marchmont meant to appoint his second wife the guardian of his child. He thought only of this; and he hurried on his suit at

the Rectory, fearful lest death should come between him and his loveless bride, and thus deprive his darling of a second mother.

This was the history of John Marchmont's marriage. It was not till a week before the day appointed for the wedding that he told his daughter what he was about to do. Edward Arundel knew the secret, but he had been warned not to reveal it to Mary.

The father and daughter sat together late one evening in the first week of December, in the great western drawing–room. Edward had gone to a party at Swampington, and was to sleep at the Rectory; so Mary and her father were alone.

It was nearly eleven o'clock; but Miss Marchmont had insisted upon sitting up until her father should retire to rest. She had always sat up in Oakley Street, she had remonstrated, though she was much younger then. She sat on a velvet–covered hassock at her father's feet, with her loose hair falling over his knee, as her head lay there in loving abandonment. She was not talking to him; for neither John nor Mary were great talkers; but she was with him–that was quite enough.

Mr. Marchmont's thin fingers twined themselves listlessly in and out of the fair curls upon his knee. Mary was thinking of Edward and the party at Swampington. Would he enjoy himself very, very much? Would he be sorry that she was not there? It was a grown–up party, and she wasn't old enough for grown–up parties yet. Would the pretty girls in blue be there? and would he dance with them?

Her father's face was clouded by a troubled expression, as

he looked absently at the red embers in the low fireplace. He spoke presently, but his observation was a very commonplace one. The opening speeches of a tragedy are seldom remarkable for any ominous or solemn meaning. Two gentlemen meet each other in a street very near the footlights, and converse rather flippantly about the aspect of affairs in general; there is no hint of bloodshed and agony till we get deeper into the play.

So Mr. Marchmont, bent upon making rather an important communication to his daughter, and for the first time feeling very fearful as to how she would take it, began thus:

"You really ought to go to bed earlier, Polly dear; you've been looking very pale lately, and I know such hours as these must be bad for you."

"Oh, no, papa dear," cried the young lady; "I'm always pale; that's natural to me. Sitting up late doesn't hurt me, papa. It never did in Oakley Street, you know."

John Marchmont shook his head sadly.

"I don't know that," he said. "My darling had to suffer many evils through her father's poverty. If you had some one who loved you, dear, a lady, you know,–for a man does not understand these sort of things,–your health would be looked after more carefully, and–and–your education–and–in short, you would be altogether happier; wouldn't you, Polly darling?"

He asked the question in an almost piteously appealing tone. A terrible fear was beginning to take possession of him. His daughter might be grieved at this second marriage. The very step

which he had taken for her happiness might cause her loving nature pain and sorrow. In the utter cowardice of his affection he trembled at the thought of causing his darling any distress in the present, even for her own welfare,–even for her future good; and he *knew* that the step he was about to take would secure that. Mary started from her reclining position, and looked up into her father's face.

"You're not going to engage a governess for me, papa?" she cried eagerly. "Oh, please don't. We are so much better as it is. A governess would keep me away from you, papa; I know she would. The Miss Llandels, at Impley Grange, have a governess; and they only come down to dessert for half an hour, or go out for a drive sometimes, so that they very seldom see their papa. Lucy told me so; and they said they'd give the world to be always with their papa, as I am with you. Oh, pray, pray, papa darling, don't let me have a governess."

The tears were in her eyes as she pleaded to him. The sight of those tears made him terribly nervous.

"My own dear Polly," he said, "I'm not going to engage a governess. I–; Polly, Polly dear, you must be reasonable. You mustn't grieve your poor father. You are old enough to understand these things now, dear. You know what the doctors have said. I may die, Polly, and leave you alone in the world."

She clung closely to her father, and looked up, pale and trembling, as she answered him.

"When you die, papa, I shall die too. I could never, never live

without you."

"Yes, yes, my darling, you would. You will live to lead a happy life, please God, and a safe one; but if I die, and leave you very young, very inexperienced, and innocent, as I may do, my dear, you must not be without a friend to watch over you, to advise, to protect you. I have thought of this long and earnestly, Polly; and I believe that what I am going to do is right."

"What you are going to do!" Mary cried, repeating her father's words, and looking at him in sudden terror. "What do you mean, papa? What are you going to do? Nothing that will part us! O papa, papa, you will never do anything to part us!"

"No, Polly darling," answered Mr. Marchmont. "Whatever I do, I do for your sake, and for that alone. I'm going to be married, my dear."

Mary burst into a low wail, more pitiful than any ordinary weeping.

"O papa, papa," she cried, "you never will, you never will!"

The sound of that piteous voice for a few moments quite unmanned John Marchmont; but he armed himself with a desperate courage. He determined not to be influenced by this child to relinquish the purpose which he believed was to achieve her future welfare.

"Mary, Mary dear," he said reproachfully, "this is very cruel of you. Do you think I haven't consulted your happiness before my own? Do you think I shall love you less because I take this step for your sake? You are very cruel to me, Mary."

The little girl rose from her kneeling attitude, and stood before her father, with the tears streaming down her white cheeks, but with a certain air of resolution about her. She had been a child for a few moments; a child, with no power to look beyond the sudden pang of that new sorrow which had come to her. She was a woman now, able to rise superior to her sorrow in the strength of her womanhood.

"I won't be cruel, papa," she said; "I was selfish and wicked to talk like that. If it will make you happy to have another wife, papa, I'll not be sorry. No, I won't be sorry, even if your new wife separates us–a little."

"But, my darling," John remonstrated, "I don't mean that she should separate us at all. I wish you to have a second friend, Polly; some one who can understand you better than I do, who may love you perhaps almost as well." Mary Marchmont shook her head; she could not realise this possibility. "Do you understand me, my dear?" her father continued earnestly. "I want you to have some one who will be a mother to you; and I hope–I am sure that Olivia–"

Mary interrupted him by a sudden exclamation, that was almost like a cry of pain.

"Not Miss Arundel!" she said. "O papa, it is not Miss Arundel you're going to marry!"

Her father bent his head in assent.

"What is the matter with you, Mary?" he said, almost fretfully, as he saw the look of mingled grief and terror in his daughter's

face. "You are really quite unreasonable to–night. If I am to marry at all, who should I choose for a wife? Who could be better than Olivia Arundel? Everybody knows how good she is. Everybody talks of her goodness."

In these two sentences Mr. Marchmont made confession of a fact he had never himself considered. It was not his own impulse, it was no instinctive belief in her goodness, that had led him to choose Olivia Arundel for his wife. He had been influenced solely by the reiterated opinions of other people.

"I know she is very good, papa," Mary cried; "but, oh, why, why do you marry her? Do you love her so very, very much?"

"Love her!" exclaimed Mr. Marchmont naïvely; "no, Polly dear; you know I never loved any one but you."

"Why do you marry her then?"

"For your sake, Polly; for your sake."

"But don't then, papa; oh, pray, pray don't. I don't want her. I don't like her. I could never be happy with her."

"Mary! Mary!"

"Yes, I know it's very wicked to say so, but it's true, papa; I never, never, never could be happy with her. I know she is good, but I don't like her. If I did anything wrong, I should never expect her to forgive me for it; I should never expect her to have mercy upon me. Don't marry her, papa; pray, pray don't marry her."

"Mary," said Mr. Marchmont resolutely, "this is very wrong of you. I have given my word, my dear, and I cannot recall it. I believe that I am acting for the best. You must not be childish

now, Mary. You have been my comfort ever since you were a baby; you mustn't make me unhappy now."

Her father's appeal went straight to her heart. Yes, she had been his help and comfort since her earliest infancy, and she was not unused to self–sacrifice: why should she fail him now? She had read of martyrs, patient and holy creatures, to whom suffering was glory; she would be a martyr, if need were, for his sake. She would stand steadfast amid the blazing fagots, or walk unflinchingly across the white–hot ploughshare, for his sake, for his sake.

"Papa, papa," she cried, flinging herself upon her father's neck, "I will not make you sorry. I will be good and obedient to Miss Arundel, if you wish it."

Mr. Marchmont carried his little girl up to her comfortable bedchamber, close at hand to his own. She was very calm when she bade him good night, and she kissed him with a smile upon her face; but all through the long hours before the late winter morning Mary Marchmont lay awake, weeping silently and incessantly in her new sorrow; and all through the same weary hours the master of that noble Lincolnshire mansion slept a fitful and troubled slumber, rendered hideous by confused and horrible dreams, in which the black shadow that came between him and his child, and the cruel hand that thrust him for ever from his darling, were Olivia Arundel's.

But the morning light brought relief to John Marchmont and his child. Mary arose with the determination to submit patiently

to her father's choice, and to conceal from him all traces of her foolish and unreasoning sorrow. John awoke from troubled dreams to believe in the wisdom of the step he had taken, and to take comfort from the thought that in the far–away future his daughter would have reason to thank and bless him for the choice he had made.

So the few days before the marriage passed away–miserably short days, that flitted by with terrible speed; and the last day of all was made still more dismal by the departure of Edward Arundel, who left Marchmont Towers to go to Dangerfield Park, whence he was most likely to start once more for India.

Mary felt that her narrow world of love was indeed crumbling away from her. Edward was lost, and to–morrow her father would belong to another. Mr. Marchmont dined at the Rectory upon that last evening; for there were settlements to be signed, and other matters to be arranged; and Mary was alone–quite alone–weeping over her lost happiness.

"This would never have happened," she thought, "if we hadn't come to Marchmont Towers. I wish papa had never had the fortune; we were so happy in Oakley Street,–so very happy. I wouldn't mind a bit being poor again, if I could be always with papa."

Mr. Marchmont had not been able to make himself quite comfortable in his mind, after that unpleasant interview with his daughter in which he had broken to her the news of his approaching marriage. Argue with himself as he might upon the

advisability of the step he was about to take, he could not argue away the fact that he had grieved the child he loved so intensely. He could not blot away from his memory the pitiful aspect of her terror–stricken face as she had turned it towards him when he uttered the name of Olivia Arundel.

No; he had grieved and distressed her. The future might reconcile her to that grief, perhaps, as a bygone sorrow which she had been allowed to suffer for her own ultimate advantage. But the future was a long way off: and in the meantime there was Mary's altered face, calm and resigned, but bearing upon it a settled look of sorrow, very close at hand; and John Marchmont could not be otherwise than unhappy in the knowledge of his darling's grief.

I do not believe that any man or woman is ever suffered to take a fatal step upon the roadway of life without receiving ample warning by the way. The stumbling–blocks are placed in the fatal path by a merciful hand; but we insist upon clambering over them, and surmounting them in our blind obstinacy, to reach that shadowy something beyond, which we have in our ignorance appointed to be our goal. A thousand ominous whispers in his own breast warned John Marchmont that the step he considered so wise was not a wise one: and yet, in spite of all these subtle warnings, in spite of the ever–present reproach of his daughter's altered face, this man, who was too weak to trust blindly in his God, went on persistently upon his way, trusting, with a thousand times more fatal blindness, in his own wisdom.

He could not be content to confide his darling and her altered fortunes to the Providence which had watched over her in her poverty, and sheltered her from every harm. He could not trust his child to the mercy of God; but he cast her upon the love of Olivia Arundel.

A new life began for Mary Marchmont after the quiet wedding at Swampington Church. The bride and bridegroom went upon a brief honeymoon excursion far away amongst snow–clad Scottish mountains and frozen streams, upon whose bloomless margins poor John shivered dismally. I fear that Mr. Marchmont, having been, by the hard pressure of poverty, compelled to lead a Cockney life for the better half of his existence, had but slight relish for the grand and sublime in nature. I do not think he looked at the ruined walls which had once sheltered Macbeth and his strong–minded partner with all the enthusiasm which might have been expected of him. He had but one idea about Macbeth, and he was rather glad to get out of the neighbourhood associated with the warlike Thane; for his memories of the past presented King Duncan's murderer as a very stern and uncompromising gentleman, who was utterly intolerant of banners held awry, or turned with the blank and ignoble side towards the audience, and who objected vehemently to a violent fit of coughing on the part of any one of his guests during the blank barmecide feast of pasteboard and Dutch metal with which he was wont to entertain them. No; John Marchmont had had quite enough of Macbeth, and rather wondered at the hot enthusiasm of other red–nosed

tourists, apparently indifferent to the frosty weather.

I fear that the master of Marchmont Towers would have preferred Oakley Street, Lambeth, to Princes Street, Edinburgh; for the nipping and eager airs of the Modern Athens nearly blew him across the gulf between the new town and the old. A visit to the Calton Hill produced an attack of that chronic cough which had so severely tormented the weak–kneed supernumerary in the draughty corridors of Drury Lane. Melrose and Abbotsford fatigued this poor feeble tourist; he tried to be interested in the stereotyped round of associations beloved by other travellers, but he had a weary craving for rest, which was stronger than any hero–worship; and he discovered, before long, that he had done a very foolish thing in coming to Scotland in December and January, without having consulted his physician as to the propriety of such a step.

But above all personal inconvenience, above all personal suffering, there was one feeling ever present in his heart– a sick yearning for the little girl he had left behind him; a mournful longing to be back with his child. Already Mary's sad forebodings had been in some way realised; already his new wife had separated him, unintentionally of course, from his daughter. The aches and pains he endured in the bleak Scottish atmosphere reminded him only too forcibly of the warnings he had received from his physicians. He was seized with a panic, almost, when he remembered his own imprudence. What if he had needlessly curtailed the short span of his life? What if he were to die soon–

before Olivia had learned to love her stepdaughter; before Mary had grown affectionately familiar with her new guardian? Again and again he appealed to his wife, imploring her to be tender to the orphan child, if he should be snatched away suddenly.

"I know you will love her by–and–by, Olivia," he said; "as much as I do, perhaps; for you will discover how good she is, how patient and unselfish. But just at first, and before you know her very well, you will be kind to her, won't you, Olivia? She has been used to great indulgence; she has been spoiled, perhaps; but you'll remember all that, and be very kind to her?"

"I will try and do my duty," Mrs. Marchmont answered. "I pray that I never may do less."

There was no tender yearning in Olivia Marchmont's heart towards the motherless girl. She herself felt that such a sentiment was wanting, and comprehended that it should have been there. She would have loved her stepdaughter in those early days, if she could have done so; but *she could not*– she could not. All that was tender or womanly in her nature had been wasted upon her hopeless love for Edward Arundel. The utter wreck of that small freight of affection had left her nature warped and stunted, soured, disappointed, unwomanly.

How was she to love this child, this hazel–haired, dove–eyed girl, before whom woman's life, with all its natural wealth of affection, stretched far away, a bright and fairy vista? How was *she* to love her,–she, whose black future was unchequered by one ray of light; who stood, dissevered from the past, alone in the

dismal, dreamless monotony of the present?

"No" she thought; "beggars and princes can never love one another. When this girl and I are equals,–when she, like me, stands alone upon a barren rock, far out amid the waste of waters, with not one memory to hold her to the past, with not one hope to lure her onward to the future, with nothing but the black sky above and the black waters around,–*then* we may grow fond of each other."

But always more or less steadfast to the standard she had set up for herself, Olivia Marchmont intended to do her duty to her stepdaughter. She had not failed in other duties, though no glimmer of love had brightened them, no natural affection had made them pleasant. Why should she fail in this?

If this belief in her own power should appear to be somewhat arrogant, let it be remembered that she had set herself hard tasks before now, and had performed them. Would the new furnace through which she was to pass be more terrible than the old fires? She had gone to God's altar with a man for whom she had no more love than she felt for the lowest or most insignificant of the miserable sinners in her father's flock. She had sworn to honour and obey him, meaning at least faithfully to perform that portion of her vow; and on the night before her loveless bridal she had grovelled, white, writhing, mad, and desperate, upon the ground, and had plucked out of her lacerated heart her hopeless love for another man.

Yes; she had done this. Another woman might have spent

that bridal eve in vain tears and lamentations, in feeble prayers, and such weak struggles as might have been evidenced by the destruction of a few letters, a tress of hair, some fragile foolish tokens of a wasted love. She would have burnt five out of six letters, perhaps, that helpless, ordinary sinner, and would have kept the sixth, to hoard away hidden among her matrimonial trousseau; she would have thrown away fifteen–sixteenths of that tress of hair, and would have kept the sixteenth portion,–one delicate curl of gold, slender as the thread by which her shattered hopes had hung,–to be wept over and kissed in the days that were to come. An ordinary woman would have played fast and loose with love and duty; and so would have been true to neither.

But Olivia Arundel did none of these things. She battled with her weakness as St George battled with the fiery dragon. She plucked the rooted serpent from her heart, reckless as to how much of that desperate heart was to be wrenched away with its roots. A cowardly woman would have killed herself, perhaps, rather than endure this mortal agony. Olivia Arundel killed more than herself; she killed the passion that had become stronger than herself.

"Alone she did it;" unaided by any human sympathy or compassion, unsupported by any human counsel, not upheld by her God; for the religion she had made for herself was a hard creed, and the many words of tender comfort which must have been familiar to her were unremembered in that long night of anguish.

It was the Roman's stern endurance, rather than the meek faithfulness of the Christian, which upheld this unhappy girl under her torture. She did not do this thing because it pleased her to be obedient to her God. She did not do it because she believed in the mercy of Him who inflicted the suffering, and looked forward hopefully, even amid her passionate grief, to the day when she should better comprehend that which she now saw so darkly. No; she fought the terrible fight, and she came forth out of it a conqueror, by reason of her own indomitable power of suffering, by reason of her own extraordinary strength of will.

But she did conquer. If her weapon was the classic sword and not the Christian cross, she was nevertheless a conqueror. When she stood before the altar and gave her hand to John Marchmont, Edward Arundel was dead to her. The fatal habit of looking at him as the one centre of her narrow life was cured. In all her Scottish wanderings, her thoughts never once went back to him; though a hundred chance words and associations tempted her, though a thousand memories assailed her, though some trick of his face in the faces of other people, though some tone of his voice in the voices of strangers, perpetually offered to entrap her. No; she was steadfast.

Dutiful as a wife as she had been dutiful as a daughter, she bore with her husband when his feeble health made him a wearisome companion. She waited upon him when pain made him fretful, and her duties became little less arduous than those of a hospital nurse. When, at the bidding of the Scotch physician

who had been called in at Edinburgh, John Marchmont turned homewards, travelling slowly and resting often on the way, his wife was more devoted to him than his experienced servant, more watchful than the best–trained sick–nurse. She recoiled from nothing, she neglected nothing; she gave him full measure of the honour and obedience which she had promised upon her wedding–day. And when she reached Marchmont Towers upon a dreary evening in January, she passed beneath the solemn portal of the western front, carrying in her heart the full determination to hold as steadfastly to the other half of her bargain, and to do her duty to her stepchild.

Mary ran out of the western drawing–room to welcome her father and his wife. She had cast off her black dresses in honour of Mr. Marchmont's marriage, and she wore some soft, silken fabric, of a pale shimmering blue, which contrasted exquisitely with her soft, brown hair, and her fair, tender face. She uttered a cry of mingled alarm and sorrow when she saw her father, and perceived the change that had been made in his looks by the northern journey; but she checked herself at a warning glance from her stepmother, and bade that dear father welcome, clinging about him with an almost desperate fondness. She greeted Olivia gently and respectfully.

"I will try to be very good, mamma," she said, as she took the passive hand of the lady who had come to rule at Marchmont Towers.

"I believe you will, my dear," Olivia answered, kindly.

She had been startled a little as Mary addressed her by that endearing corruption of the holy word mother. The child had been so long motherless, that she felt little of that acute anguish which some orphans suffer when they have to look up in a strange face and say "mamma." She had taught herself the lesson of resignation, and she was prepared to accept this stranger as her new mother, and to look up to her and obey her henceforward. No thought of her own future position, as sole owner of that great house and all appertaining to it, ever crossed Mary Marchmont's mind, womanly as that mind had become in the sharp experiences of poverty. If her father had told her that he had cut off the entail, and settled Marchmont Towers upon his new wife, I think she would have submitted meekly to his will, and would have seen no injustice in the act. She loved him blindly and confidingly. Indeed, she could only love after one fashion. The organ of veneration must have been abnormally developed in Mary Marchmont's head. To believe that any one she loved was otherwise than perfect, would have been, in her creed, an infidelity against love. Had any one told her that Edward Arundel was not eminently qualified for the post of General–in–Chief of the Army of the Indus; or that her father could by any possible chance be guilty of a fault or folly: she would have recoiled in horror from the treasonous slanderer.

A dangerous quality, perhaps, this quality of guilelessness which thinketh no evil, which cannot be induced to see the evil under its very nose. But surely, of all the beautiful and pure

things upon this earth, such blind confidence is the purest and most beautiful. I knew a lady, dead and gone,–alas for this world, which could ill afford to lose so good a Christian!–who carried this trustfulness of spirit, this utter incapacity to believe in wrong, through all the strife and turmoil of a troubled life, unsullied and unlessened, to her grave. She was cheated and imposed upon, robbed and lied to, by people who loved her, perhaps, while they wronged her,–for to know her was to love her. She was robbed systematically by a confidential servant for years, and for years refused to believe those who told her of his delinquencies. She *could* not believe that people were wicked. To the day of her death she had faith in the scoundrels and scamps who had profited by her sweet compassion and untiring benevolence; and indignantly defended them against those who dared to say that they were anything more than "unfortunate." To go to her was to go to a never–failing fountain of love and tenderness. To know her goodness was to understand the goodness of God; for her love approached the Infinite, and might have taught a sceptic the possibility of Divinity. Three–score years and ten of worldly experience left her an accomplished lady, a delightful companion; but in guilelessness a child.

So Mary Marchmont, trusting implicitly in those she loved, submitted to her father's will, and prepared to obey her stepmother. The new life at the Towers began very peacefully; a perfect harmony reigned in the quiet household. Olivia took the reins of management with so little parade, that the old

housekeeper, who had long been paramount in the Lincolnshire mansion, found herself superseded before she knew where she was. It was Olivia's nature to govern. Her strength of will asserted itself almost unconsciously. She took possession of Mary Marchmont as she had taken possession of her school–children at Swampington, making her own laws for the government of their narrow intellects. She planned a routine of study that was actually terrible to the little girl, whose education had hitherto been conducted in a somewhat slip–slop manner by a weakly–indulgent father. She came between Mary and her one amusement,–the reading of novels. The half–bound romances were snatched ruthlessly from this young devourer of light literature, and sent back to the shabby circulating library at Swampington. Even the gloomy old oak book–cases in the library at the Towers, and the Abbotsford edition of the Waverley Novels, were forbidden to poor Mary; for, though Sir Walter Scott's morality is irreproachable, it will not do for a young lady to be weeping over Lucy Ashton or Amy Robsart when she should be consulting her terrestrial globe, and informing herself as to the latitude and longitude of the Fiji Islands.

So a round of dry and dreary lessons began for poor Miss Marchmont, and her brain grew almost dazed under that continuous and pelting shower of hard facts which many worthy people consider the one sovereign method of education. I have said that her mind was far in advance of her years; Olivia perceived this, and set her tasks in advance of her mind: in

order that the perfection attained by a sort of steeple–chase of instruction might not be lost to her. If Mary learned difficult lessons with surprising rapidity, Mrs. Marchmont plied her with even yet more difficult lessons, thus keeping the spur perpetually in the side of this heavily–weighted racer on the road to learning. But it must not be thought that Olivia wilfully tormented or oppressed her stepdaughter. It was not so. In all this, John Marchmont's second wife implicitly believed that she was doing her duty to the child committed to her care. She fully believed that this dreary routine of education was wise and right, and would be for Mary's ultimate advantage. If she caused Miss Marchmont to get up at abnormal hours on bleak wintry mornings, for the purpose of wrestling with a difficult variation by Hertz or Schubert, she herself rose also, and sat shivering by the piano, counting the time of the music which her stepdaughter played.

Whatever pains and trouble she inflicted on Mary, she most unshrinkingly endured herself. She waded through the dismal slough of learning side by side with the younger sufferer: Roman emperors, medieval schisms, early British manufactures, Philippa of Hainault, Flemish woollen stuffs, Magna Charta, the sidereal heavens, Luther, Newton, Huss, Galileo, Calvin, Loyola, Sir Robert Walpole, Cardinal Wolsey, conchology, Arianism in the Early Church, trial by jury, Habeas Corpus, zoology, Mr. Pitt, the American war, Copernicus, Confucius, Mahomet, Harvey, Jenner, Lycurgus, and Catherine of Arragon; through a very

diabolical dance of history, science, theology, philosophy, and instruction of all kinds, did this devoted priestess lead her hapless victim, struggling onward towards that distant altar at which Pallas Athenë waited, pale and inscrutable, to receive a new disciple.

But Olivia Marchmont did not mean to be unmerciful; she meant to be good to her stepdaughter. She did not love her; but, on the other hand, she did not dislike her. Her feelings were simply negative. Mary understood this, and the submissive obedience she rendered to her stepmother was untempered by affection. So for nearly two years these two people led a monotonous life, unbroken by any more important event than a dinner party at Marchmont Towers, or a brief visit to Harrowgate or Scarborough.

This monotonous existence was not to go on for ever. The fatal day, so horribly feared by John Marchmont, was creeping closer and closer. The sorrow which had been shadowed in every childish dream, in every childish prayer, came at last; and Mary Marchmont was left an orphan.

Poor John had never quite recovered the effects of his winter excursion to Scotland; neither his wife's devoted nursing, nor his physician's care, could avail for ever; and, late in the autumn of the second year of his marriage, he sank, slowly and peacefully enough as regards physical suffering, but not without bitter grief of mind.

In vain Hubert Arundel talked to him; in vain did he himself

pray for faith and comfort in this dark hour of trial. He *could* not bear to leave his child alone in the world. In the foolishness of his love, he would have trusted in the strength of his own arm to shield her in the battle; yet he could not trust her hopefully to the arm of God. He prayed for her night and day during the last week of his illness; while she was praying passionately, almost madly, that he might be spared to her, or that she might die with him. Better for her, according to all mortal reasoning, if she had. Happier for her, a thousand times, if she could have died as she wished to die, clinging to her father's breast.

The blow fell at last upon those two loving hearts. These were the awful shadows of death that shut his child's face from John Marchmont's fading sight. His feeble arms groped here and there for her in that dim and awful obscurity.

Yes, this was death. The narrow tract of yellow sand had little by little grown narrower and narrower. The dark and cruel waters were closing in; the feeble boat went down into the darkness: and Mary stood alone, with her dead father's hand clasped in hers,–the last feeble link which bound her to the Past,–looking blankly forward to an unknown Future.

CHAPTER XI. THE DAY OF DESOLATION

Yes; the terrible day had come. Mary Marchmont roamed hither and thither in the big gaunt rooms, up and down the long dreary corridors, white and ghostlike in her mute anguish, while the undertaker's men were busy in her father's chamber, and while John's widow sat in the study below, writing business letters, and making all necessary arrangements for the funeral.

In those early days no one attempted to comfort the orphan. There was something more terrible than the loudest grief in the awful quiet of the girl's anguish. The wan eyes, looking wearily out of a white haggard face, that seemed drawn and contracted as if by some hideous physical torture, were tearless. Except the one long wail of despair which had burst from her lips in the awful moment of her father's death agony, no cry of sorrow, no utterance of pain, had given relief to Mary Marchmont's suffering.

She suffered, and was still. She shrank away from all human companionship; she seemed specially to avoid the society of her stepmother. She locked the door of her room upon all who would have intruded on her, and flung herself upon the bed, to lie there in a dull stupor for hour after hour. But when the twilight was grey in the desolate corridors, the wretched girl wandered out into the gallery on which her father's room opened, and

hovered near that solemn death–chamber; fearful to go in, fearful to encounter the watchers of the dead, lest they should torture her by their hackneyed expressions of sympathy, lest they should agonise her by their commonplace talk of the lost.

Once during that brief interval, while the coffin still held terrible tenancy of the death–chamber, the girl wandered in the dead of the night, when all but the hired watchers were asleep, to the broad landing of the oaken staircase, and into a deep recess formed by an embayed window that opened over the great stone porch which sheltered the principal entrance to Marchmont Towers.

The window had been left open; for even in the bleak autumn weather the atmosphere of the great house seemed hot and oppressive to its living inmates, whose spirits were weighed down by a vague sense of the Awful Presence in that Lincolnshire mansion. Mary had wandered to this open window, scarcely knowing whither she went, after remaining for a long time on her knees by the threshold of her father's room, with her head resting against the oaken panel of the door,–not praying; why should she pray now, unless her prayers could have restored the dead? She had come out upon the wide staircase, and past the ghostly pictured faces, that looked grimly down upon her from the oaken wainscot against which they hung; she had wandered here in the dim grey light–there was light somewhere in the sky, but only a shadowy and uncertain glimmer of fading starlight or coming dawn–and she stood now with her head resting against

one of the angles of the massive stonework, looking out of the open window.

The morning which was already glimmering dimly in the eastern sky behind Marchmont Towers was to witness poor John's funeral. For nearly six days Mary Marchmont had avoided all human companionship: for nearly six days she had shunned all human sympathy and comfort. During all that time she had never eaten, except when forced to do so by her stepmother; who had visited her from time to time, and had insisted upon sitting by her bedside while she took the food that had been brought to her. Heaven knows how often the girl had slept during those six dreary days; but her feverish slumbers had brought her very little rest or refreshment. They had brought her nothing but cruel dreams, in which her father was still alive; in which she felt his thin arms clasped round her neck, his faint and fitful breath warm upon her cheek.

A great clock in the stables struck five while Mary Marchmont stood looking out of the Tudor window. The broad grey flat before the house stretched far away, melting into the shadowy horizon. The pale stars grew paler as Mary looked at them; the black–water pools began to glimmer faintly under the widening patch of light in the eastern sky. The girl's senses were bewildered by her suffering, and her head was light and dizzy.

Her father's death had made so sudden and terrible a break in her existence, that she could scarcely believe the world had not come to an end, with all the joys and sorrows of its inhabitants.

Would there be anything more after to–morrow? she thought; would the blank days and nights go monotonously on when the story that had given them a meaning and a purpose had come to its dismal end? Surely not; surely, after those gaunt iron gates, far away across the swampy waste that was called a park, had closed upon her father's funeral train, the world would come to an end, and there would be no more time or space. I think she really believed this in the semi–delirium into which she had fallen within the last hour. She believed that all would be over; and that she and her despair would melt away into the emptiness that was to engulf the universe after her father's funeral.

Then suddenly the full reality of her grief flashed upon her with horrible force. She clasped her hands upon her forehead, and a low faint cry broke from her white lips.

It was *not* all over. Time and space would *not* be annihilated. The weary, monotonous, workaday world would still go on upon its course. *Nothing* would be changed. The great gaunt stone mansion would still stand, and the dull machinery of its interior would still go on: the same hours; the same customs; the same inflexible routine. John Marchmont would be carried out of the house that had owned him master, to lie in the dismal vault under Kemberling Church; and the world in which he had made so little stir would go on without him. The easy–chair in which he had been wont to sit would be wheeled away from its corner by the fireplace in the western drawing–room. The papers in his study would be sorted and put away, or taken possession of

by strange hands. Cromwells and Napoleons die, and the earth reels for a moment, only to be "alive and bold" again in the next instant, to the astonishment of poets, and the calm satisfaction of philosophers; and ordinary people eat their breakfasts while the telegram lies beside them upon the table, and while the ink in which Mr. Reuter's message is recorded is still wet from the machine in Printing–house Square.

Anguish and despair more terrible than any of the tortures she had felt yet took possession of Mary Marchmont's breast. For the first time she looked out at her own future. Until now she had thought only of her father's death. She had despaired because he was gone; but she had never contemplated the horror of her future life,–a life in which she was to exist without him. A sudden agony, that was near akin to madness, seized upon this girl, in whose sensitive nature affection had always had a morbid intensity. She shuddered with a wild dread at the prospect of that blank future; and as she looked out at the wide stone steps below the window from which she was leaning, for the first time in her young life the idea of self–destruction flashed across her mind.

She uttered a cry, a shrill, almost unearthly cry, that was notwithstanding low and feeble, and clambered suddenly upon the broad stone sill of the Tudor casement. She wanted to fling herself down and dash her brains out upon the stone steps below; but in the utter prostration of her state she was too feeble to do this, and she fell backwards and dropped in a heap upon the polished oaken flooring of the recess, striking her forehead as she

fell. She lay there unconscious until nearly seven o'clock, when one of the women–servants found her, and carried her off to her own room, where she suffered herself to be undressed and put to bed.

Mary Marchmont did not speak until the good–hearted Lincolnshire housemaid had laid her in her bed, and was going away to tell Olivia of the state in which she had found the orphan girl.

"Don't tell my stepmother anything about me, Susan," she said; "I think I was mad last night."

This speech frightened the housemaid, and she went straight to the widow's room. Mrs. Marchmont, always an early riser, had been up and dressed for some time, and went at once to look at her stepdaughter.

She found Mary very calm and reasonable. There was no trace of bewilderment or delirium now in her manner; and when the principal doctor of Swampington came a couple of hours afterwards to look at the young heiress, he declared that there was no cause for any alarm. The young lady was sensitive, morbidly sensitive, he said, and must be kept very quiet for a few days, and watched by some one whose presence would not annoy her. If there was any girl of her own age whom she had ever shown a predilection for, that girl would be the fittest companion for her just now. After a few days, it would be advisable that she should have change of air and change of scene. She must not be allowed to brood continuously on her father's death. The doctor repeated

this last injunction more than once. It was most important that she should not give way too perpetually to her grief.

So Mary Marchmont lay in her darkened room while her father's funeral train was moving slowly away from the western entrance. It happened that the orphan girl's apartments looked out into the quadrangle; so she heard none of the subdued sounds which attended the departure of that solemn procession. In her weakness she had grown submissive to the will of others. She thought this feebleness and exhaustion gave warning of approaching death. Her prayers would be granted, after all. This anguish and despair would be but of brief duration, and she would ere long be carried to the vault under Kemberling Church, to lie beside her father in the black stillness of that solemn place.

Mrs. Marchmont strictly obeyed the doctor's injunctions. A girl of seventeen, the daughter of a small tenant farmer near the Towers, had been a special favourite with Mary, who was not apt to make friends amongst strangers. This girl, Hester Pollard, was sent for, and came willingly and gladly to watch her young patroness. She brought her needlework with her, and sat near the window busily employed, while Mary lay shrouded by the curtains of the bed. All active services necessary for the comfort of the invalid were performed by Olivia or her own special attendant–an old servant who had lived with the Rector ever since his daughter's birth, and had only left him to follow that daughter to Marchmont Towers after her marriage. So Hester Pollard had nothing to do but to keep very quiet, and patiently await the

time when Mary might be disposed to talk to her. The farmer's daughter was a gentle, unobtrusive creature, very well fitted for the duty imposed upon her.

CHAPTER XII. PAUL

Olivia Marchmont sat in her late husband's study while John's funeral train was moving slowly along under the misty October sky. A long stream of carriages followed the stately hearse, with its four black horses, and its voluminous draperies of rich velvet, and nodding plumes that were damp and heavy with the autumn atmosphere. The unassuming master of Marchmont Towers had won for himself a quiet popularity amongst the simple country gentry, and the best families in Lincolnshire had sent their chiefs to do honour to his burial, or at the least their empty carriages to represent them at that mournful ceremonial. Olivia sat in her dead husband's favourite chamber. Her head lay back upon the cushion of the roomy morocco–covered arm–chair in which he had so often sat. She had been working hard that morning, and indeed every morning since John Marchmont's death, sorting and arranging papers, with the aid of Richard Paulette, the Lincoln's Inn solicitor, and James Gormby, the land–steward. She knew that she had been left sole guardian of her stepdaughter, and executrix to her husband's will; and she had lost no time in making herself acquainted with the business details of the estate, and the full nature of the responsibilities intrusted to her.

She was resting now. She had done all that could be done until after the reading of the will. She had attended to her stepdaughter. She had stood in one of the windows of the western

drawing–room, watching the departure of the funeral *cortège*; and now she abandoned herself for a brief space to that idleness which was so unusual to her.

A fire burned in the low grate at her feet, and a rough cur–half shepherd's dog, half Scotch deer–hound, who had been fond of John, but was not fond of Olivia–lay at the further extremity of the hearth–rug, watching her suspiciously.

Mrs. Marchmont's personal appearance had not altered during the two years of her married life. Her face was thin and haggard; but it had been thin and haggard before her marriage. And yet no one could deny that the face was handsome, and the features beautifully chiselled. But the grey eyes were hard and cold, the line of the faultless eyebrows gave a stern expression to the countenance; the thin lips were rigid and compressed. The face wanted both light and colour. A sculptor copying it line by line would have produced a beautiful head. A painter must have lent his own glowing tints if he wished to represent Olivia Marchmont as a lovely woman.

Her pale face looked paler, and her dead black hair blacker, against the blank whiteness of her widow's cap. Her mourning dress clung closely to her tall, slender figure. She was little more than twenty–five, but she looked a woman of thirty. It had been her misfortune to look older than she was from a very early period in her life.

She had not loved her husband when she married him, nor had she ever felt for him that love which in most womanly natures

grows out of custom and duty. It was not in her nature to love. Her passionate idolatry of her boyish cousin had been the one solitary affection that had ever held a place in her cold heart. All the fire of her nature had been concentrated in this one folly, this one passion, against which only heroic endurance had been able to prevail.

Mrs. Marchmont felt no grief, therefore, at her husband's loss. She had felt the shock of his death, and the painful oppression of his dead presence in the house. She had faithfully nursed him through many illnesses; she had patiently tended him until the very last; she had done her duty. And now, for the first time, she had leisure to contemplate the past, and look forward to the future.

So far this woman had fulfilled the task which she had taken upon herself; she had been true and loyal to the vow she had made before God's altar, in the church of Swampington. And now she was free. No, not quite free; for she had a heavy burden yet upon her hands; the solemn charge of her stepdaughter during the girl's minority. But as regarded marriage–vows and marriage–ties she was free.

She was free to love Edward Arundel again.

The thought came upon her with a rush and an impetus, wild and strong as the sudden uprising of a whirlwind, or the loosing of a mountain–torrent that had long been bound. She was a wife no longer. It was no longer a sin to think of the bright–haired soldier, fighting far away. She was free. When Edward returned

to England by–and–by, he would find her free once more; a young widow,–young, handsome, and rich enough to be no bad prize for a younger son. He would come back and find her thus; and then–and then–!

She flung one of her clenched hands up into the air, and struck it on her forehead in a sudden paroxysm of rage. What then? Would he love her any better then than he had loved her two years ago? No; he would treat her with the same cruel indifference, the same commonplace cousinly friendliness, with which he had mocked and tortured her before. Oh, shame! Oh, misery! Was there no pride in women, that there could be one among them fallen so low as her; ready to grovel at the feet of a fair–haired boy, and to cry aloud, "Love me, love me! or be pitiful, and strike me dead!"

Better that John Marchmont should have lived for ever, better that Edward Arundel should die far away upon some Eastern battle–field, before some Affghan fortress, than that he should return to inflict upon her the same tortures she had writhed under two years before.

"God grant that he may never come back!" she thought. "God grant that he may marry out yonder, and live and die there! God keep him from me for ever and for ever in this weary world!"

And yet in the next moment, with the inconsistency which is the chief attribute of that madness we call love, her thoughts wandered away dreamily into visions of the future; and she pictured Edward Arundel back again at Swampington, at

Marchmont Towers. Her soul burst its bonds and expanded, and drank in the sunlight of gladness: and she dared to think that it *might* be so–there *might* be happiness yet for her. He had been a boy when he went back to India–careless, indifferent. He would return a man,–graver, wiser, altogether changed: changed so much as to love her perhaps.

She knew that, at least, no rival had shut her cousin's heart against her, when she and he had been together two years before. He had been indifferent to her; but he had been indifferent to others also. There was comfort in that recollection. She had questioned him very sharply as to his life in India and at Dangerfield, and she had discovered no trace of any tender memory of the past, no hint of a cherished dream of the future. His heart had been empty: a boyish, unawakened heart: a temple in which the niches were untenanted, the shrine unhallowed by the presence of a goddess.

Olivia Marchmont thought of these things. For a few moments, if only for a few moments, she abandoned herself to such thoughts as these. She let herself go. She released the stern hold which it was her habit to keep upon her own mind; and in those bright moments of delicious abandonment the glorious sunshine streamed in upon her narrow life, and visions of a possible future expanded before her like a fairy panorama, stretching away into realms of vague light and splendour. It was *possible*; it was at least possible.

But, again, in the next moment the magical panorama

collapsed and shrivelled away, like a burning scroll; the fairy picture, whose gorgeous colouring she had looked upon with dazzled eyes, almost blinded by its overpowering glory, shrank into a handful of black ashes, and was gone. The woman's strong nature reasserted itself; the iron will rose up, ready to do battle with the foolish heart.

"I *will* not be fooled a second time," she cried. "Did I suffer so little when I blotted that image out of my heart? Did the destruction of my cruel Juggernaut cost me so small an agony that I must needs be ready to elevate the false god again, and crush out my heart once more under the brazen wheels of his chariot? *He will never love me!*"

She writhed; this self–sustained and resolute woman writhed in her anguish as she uttered those five words, "He will never love me!" She knew that they were true; that of all the changes that Time could bring to pass, it would never bring such a change as that. There was not one element of sympathy between herself and the young soldier; they had not one thought in common. Nay, more; there was an absolute antagonism between them, which, in spite of her love, Olivia fully recognised. Over the gulf that separated them no coincidence of thought or fancy, no sympathetic emotion, ever stretched its electric chain to draw them together in mysterious union. They stood aloof, divided by the width of an intellectual universe. The woman knew this, and hated herself for her folly, scorning alike her love and its object; but her love was not the less because of her scorn. It

was a madness, an isolated madness, which stood alone in her soul, and fought for mastery over her better aspirations, her wiser thoughts. We are all familiar with strange stories of wise and great minds which have been ridden by some hobgoblin fancy, some one horrible monomania; a bleeding head upon a dish, a grinning skeleton playing hide–and–seek in the folds of the bed–curtains; some devilry or other before which the master–spirit shrank and dwindled until the body withered and the victim died.

Had Olivia Marchmont lived a couple of centuries before, she would have gone straight to the nearest old crone, and would have boldly accused the wretched woman of being the author of her misery.

"You harbour a black cat and other noisome vermin, and you prowl about muttering to yourself o' nights" she might have said. "You have been seen to gather herbs, and you make strange and uncanny signs with your palsied old fingers. The black cat is the devil, your colleague; and the rats under your tumble–down roof are his imps, your associates. It is *you* who have instilled this horrible madness into my soul; for it *could* not come of itself."

And Olivia Marchmont, being resolute and strong–minded, would not have rested until her tormentor had paid the penalty of her foul work at a stake in the nearest market–place.

And indeed some of our madnesses are so mad, some of our follies are so foolish, that we might almost be forgiven if we believed that there was a company of horrible crones meeting somewhere on an invisible Brocken, and making incantations

for our destruction. Take up a newspaper and read its hideous revelations of crime and folly; and it will be scarcely strange if you involuntarily wonder whether witchcraft is a dark fable of the middle ages, or a dreadful truth of the nineteenth century. Must not some of these miserable creatures whose stories we read be *possessed*; possessed by eager, relentless demons, who lash and goad them onward, until no black abyss of vice, no hideous gulf of crime, is black or hideous enough to content them?

Olivia Marchmont might have been a good and great woman. She had all the elements of greatness. She had genius, resolution, an indomitable courage, an iron will, perseverance, self–denial, temperance, chastity. But against all these qualities was set a fatal and foolish love for a boy's handsome face and frank and genial manner. If Edward Arundel had never crossed her path, her unfettered soul might have taken the highest and grandest flight; but, chained down, bound, trammelled by her love for him, she grovelled on the earth like some maimed and wounded eagle, who sees his fellows afar off, high in the purple empyrean, and loathes himself for his impotence.

"What do I love him for?" she thought. "Is it because he has blue eyes and chestnut hair, with wandering gleams of golden light in it? Is it because he has gentlemanly manners, and is easy and pleasant, genial and light–hearted? Is it because he has a dashing walk, and the air of a man of fashion? It must be for some of these attributes, surely; for I know nothing more in him. Of all the things he has ever said, I can remember nothing–

and I remember his smallest words, Heaven help me!–that any sensible person could think worth repeating. He is brave, I dare say, and generous; but what of that? He is neither braver nor more generous than other men of his rank and position."

She sat lost in such a reverie as this while her dead husband was being carried to the roomy vault set apart for the owners of Marchmont Towers and their kindred; she was absorbed in some such thoughts as these, when one of the grave, grey–headed old servants brought her a card upon a heavy salver emblazoned with the Marchmont arms.

Olivia took the card almost mechanically. There are some thoughts which carry us a long way from the ordinary occupations of every–day life, and it is not always easy to return to the dull jog–trot routine. The widow passed her left hand across her brow before she looked at the name inscribed upon the card in her right.

"Mr. Paul Marchmont."

She started as she read the name. Paul Marchmont! She remembered what her husband had told her of this man. It was not much; for John's feelings on the subject of his cousin had been of so vague a nature that he had shrunk from expounding them to his stern, practical wife. He had told her, therefore, that he did not very much care for Paul, and that he wished no intimacy ever to arise between the artist and Mary; but he had said nothing more than this.

"The gentleman is waiting to see me, I suppose?" Mrs.

Marchmont said.

"Yes, ma'am. The gentleman came to Kemberling by the 11.5 train from London, and has driven over here in one of Harris's flys."

"Tell him I will come to him immediately. Is he in the drawing–room?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The man bowed and left the room. Olivia rose from her chair and lingered by the fireplace with her foot on the fender, her elbow resting on the carved oak chimneypiece.

"Paul Marchmont! He has come to the funeral, I suppose. And he expects to find himself mentioned in the will, I dare say. I think, from what my husband told me, he will be disappointed in that. Paul Marchmont! If Mary were to die unmarried, this man or his sisters would inherit Marchmont Towers."

There was a looking–glass over the mantelpiece; a narrow, oblong glass, in an old–fashioned carved ebony frame, which was inclined forward. Olivia looked musingly in this glass, and smoothed the heavy bands of dead–black hair under her cap.

"There are people who would call me handsome," she thought, as she looked with a moody frown at her image in the glass; "and yet I have seen Edward Arundel's eyes wander away from my face, even while I have been talking to him, to watch the swallows skimming by in the sun, or the ivy–leaves flapping against the wall."

She turned from the glass with a sigh, and went out into a

dusky corridor. The shutters of all the principal rooms and the windows upon the grand staircase were still closed; the wide hall was dark and gloomy, and drops of rain spattered every now and then upon the logs that smouldered on the wide old–fashioned hearth. The misty October morning had heralded a wet day.

Paul Marchmont was sitting in a low easy–chair before a blazing fire in the western drawing–room, the red light full upon his face. It was a handsome face, or perhaps, to speak more exactly, it was one of those faces that are generally called "interesting." The features were very delicate and refined, the pale greyish–blue eyes were shaded by long brown lashes, and the small and rather feminine mouth was overshadowed by a slender auburn moustache, under which the rosy tint of the lips was very visible. But it was Paul Marchmont's hair which gave a peculiarity to a personal appearance that might otherwise have been in no way out of the common. This hair, fine, silky, and luxuriant, was *white*, although its owner could not have been more than thirty–seven years of age.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.