

The Young Step-Mother

Charlotte M. Yonge

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or

A CHRONICLE OF MISTAKES.

By CHARLOTTE M YONGE

Fail--yet rejoice, because no less
The failure that makes thy distress
May teach another full success.

Nor with thy share of work be vexed
Though incomplete and even perplexed
It fits exactly to the next.

ADELAIDE A PROCTOR

CHAPTER I.

'Have you talked it over with her?' said Mr. Ferrars, as his little slender wife met him under the beeches that made an avenue of the lane leading to Fairmead vicarage.

'Yes!' was the answer, which the vicar was not slow to understand.

'I cannot say I expected much from your conversation, and perhaps we ought not to wish it. We are likely to see with selfish eyes, for what shall we do without her?'

'Dear Albinia! You always taunted me with having married your sister as much as yourself.'

'So I shall again, if you cannot give her up with a good grace.'

'If I could have had my own way in disposing of her.'

'Perhaps the hero of your own composition might be less satisfactory to her than is Kendal.'

'At least he should be minus the children!'

'I fancy the children are one great attraction. Do you know how many there are?'

'Three; but if Albinia knows their ages she involves them in a discreet haze. I imagine some are in their teens.'

'Impossible, Winifred, he is hardly five-and-thirty.'

'Thirty-eight, he said yesterday, and he married very early. I asked

Albinia if her son would be in tail-coats; but she thought I was laughing at her, and would not say. She is quite eager at the notion of being governess to the girls.'

'She has wanted scope for her energies,' said Mr. Ferrars. 'Even spoiling her nephew, and being my curate, have not afforded field enough for her spirit of usefulness.'

'That is what I am afraid of.'

'Of what, Winifred?'

'That it is my fault. Before our marriage, you and she were the whole world to each other; but since I came, I have seen, as you say, that the craving for work was strong, and I fear it actuates her more than she knows.'

'No such thing. It is a case of good hearty love. What, are you afraid of that, too?'

'Yes, I am. I grudge her giving her fresh whole young heart away to a man who has no return to make. His heart is in his first wife's grave. Yes, you may smile, Maurice, as if I were talking romance; but only look at him, poor man! Did you ever see any one so utterly broken down? She can hardly beguile a smile from him.'

'His melancholy is one of his charms in her eyes.'

'So it may be, as a sort of interesting romance. I am sure I pity the poor man heartily, but to see her at three-and-twenty, with her sweet face and high spirits, give herself away to a man who looks but half alive, and cannot, if he would, return that full first love--have the charge of a tribe of children, be spied and commented on by the first wife's relations--Maurice, I cannot bear it.'

'It is not what we should have chosen,' said her husband, 'but it has a bright side. Kendal is a most right-minded, superior man, and she appreciates him thoroughly. She has great energy and cheerfulness, and if she can comfort him, and rouse him into activity, and be the kind mother she will be to his poor children, I do not think we ought to grudge her from our own home.'

'You and she have so strong a feeling for motherless children!'

'Thinking of Kendal as I do, I have but one fear for her.'

'I have many--the chief being the grandmother.'

'Mine will make you angry, but it is my only one. You, who have only known her since she has subdued it, have probably never guessed that she has that sort of quick sensitive temper--'

'Maurice, Maurice! as if I had not been a most provoking, presuming sister-in-law. As if I had not acted so that if Albinia ever had a temper, she must have shown it.'

'I knew you would not believe me, and I really am not afraid of her doing any harm by it, if that is what you suspect me of. No, indeed; but I fear it may make her feel any trials of her position more

acutely than a placid person would.'

'Oho! so you own there will be trials!'

'My dear Winifred, as if I had not sat up till twelve last night laying them before Albinia. How sick the poor child must be of our arguments, when there is no real objection, and she is so much attached! Have you heard anything about these connexions of his? Did you not write to Mrs. Nugent? I wish she were at home.'

'I had her answer by this afternoon's post, but there is nothing to tell. Mr. Kendal has only been settled at Bayford Bridge a few years, and she never visited any one there, though Mr. Nugent had met Mr. Kendal several times before his wife's death, and liked him. Emily is charmed to have Albinia for a neighbour.'

'Does she know nothing of the Meadows' family?'

'Nothing but that old Mrs. Meadows lives in the town with one unmarried daughter. She speaks highly of the clergyman.'

'John Dusautoy? Ay, he is admirable--not that I have done more than see him at visitations when he was curate at Lauriston.'

'Is he married?'

'I fancy he is, but I am not sure. There is one good friend for Albinia any way!'

'And now for your investigations. Did you see Colonel Bury?'

'I did, but he could say little more than we knew. He says nothing could be more exemplary than Kendal's whole conduct in India, he only regretted that he kept so much aloof from others, that his principle and gentlemanly feeling did not tell as much as could have been wished. He has always been wrapped up in his own pursuits--a perfect dictionary of information.'

'We had found out that, though he is so silent. I should think him a most elegant scholar.'

'And a deep one. He has studied and polished his acquirements to the utmost. I assure you, Winifred, I mean to be proud of my brother-in-law.'

'What did you hear of the first wife?'

'It was an early marriage. He went home as soon as he had sufficient salary, married her, and brought her out. She was a brilliant dark beauty, who became quickly a motherly, housewifely, common-place person--I should think there had been a poet's love, never awakened from.'

'The very thing that has always struck me when, poor man, he has tried to be civil to me. Here is a man, sensible himself, but who has never had the hap to live with sensible women.'

'When their children grew too old for India, she came into some little property at Bayford Bridge, which enabled him to retire. Colonel Bury came home in the same ship, and saw much of them, liked

him better and better, and seems to have been rather wearied by her. A very good woman, he says, and Kendal most fondly attached; but as to comparing her with Miss Ferrars, he could not think of it for a moment. So they settled at Bayford, and there, about two years ago, came this terrible visitation of typhus fever.'

'I remember how Colonel Bury used to come and sigh over his friend's illness and trouble.'

'He could not help going over it again. The children all fell ill together--the two eldest were twin boys, one puny, the other a very fine fellow, and his father's especial pride and delight. As so often happens, the sickly one was spared, the healthy one was taken.'

'Then Albinia will have an invalid on her hands!'

'The Colonel says this Edmund was a particularly promising boy, and poor Kendal felt the loss dreadfully. He sickened after that, and his wife was worn out with nursing and grief, and sank under the fever at once. Poor Kendal has never held up his head since; he had a terrible relapse.'

'And,' said Winifred, 'he no sooner recovers than he goes and marries our Albinia!'

'Two years, my dear.'

'Pray explain to me, Maurice, why, when people become widowed in any unusually lamentable way, they always are the first to marry again.'

'Incorrigible. I meant to make you pity him.'

'I did, till I found I had wasted my pity. Why could not these Meadowses look after his children! Why must the Colonel bring him here? I believe it was with malice prepense!'

'The Colonel went to see after him, and found him so drooping and wretched, that he insisted on bringing him home with him, and old Mrs. Meadows and her daughter almost forced him to accept the invitation.'

'They little guessed what the Colonel would be at!'

'You will be better now you have the Colonel to abuse,' said her husband.

'And pray what do you mean to say to the General?'

'Exactly what I think.'

'And to the aunts?' slyly asked the wife.

'I think I shall leave you all that correspondence. It will be too edifying to see you making common cause with the aunts.'

'That comes of trying to threaten one's husband; and here they come,' said Winifred. 'Well, Maurice, what can't be cured must be endured. Albinia's heart is gone, he is a very good man, and spite of India, first wife, and melancholy, he does not look amiss!'

Mr. Ferrars smiled at the chary, grudging commendation of the tall, handsome man who advanced through the beech-wood, but it was too true that his clear olive complexion had not the line of health, that there was a world of oppression on his broad brow and deep hazel eyes, and that it was a dim, dreamy, reluctant smile that was awakened by the voice of the lady who walked by his side, as if reverencing his grave mood.

She was rather tall, very graceful, and well made, but her features were less handsome than sweet, bright, and sensible. Her hair was nut-brown, in long curled waves; her eyes, deep soft grey, and though downcast under the new sympathies, new feelings, and responsibilities that crowded on her, the smile and sparkle that lighted them as she blushed and nodded to her brother and sister, showed that liveliness was the natural expression of that engaging face.

Say what they would, it was evident that Albinia Ferrars had cast in her lot with Edmund Kendal, and that her energetic spirit and love of children animated her to embrace joyfully the cares which such a choice must impose on her.

As might have been perceived by one glance at the figure, step, and bearing of Mr. Ferrars, perfectly clerical though they were, he belonged to a military family. His father had been a distinguished Peninsular officer, and his brother, older by many years, held a command in Canada. Maurice and Albinia, early left orphans, had, with a young cousin, been chiefly under the charge of their aunts, Mrs. Annesley and Miss Ferrars, and had found a kind home in their house in Mayfair, until Maurice had been ordained to the family living of Fairmead, and his sister had gone to live with him there, extorting the consent of her elder brother to her spending a more real and active life than her aunts' round of society could offer her.

The aunts lamented, but they could seldom win their darling to them for more than a few weeks at a time, even after their nephew Maurice had--as they considered--thrown himself away on a little lively lady of Irish parentage, no equal in birth or fortune, in their opinion, for the grandson of Lord Belraven.

They had been very friendly to the young wife, but their hopes had all the more been fixed on Albinia; and even Winifred could afford them some generous pity in the engagement of their favourite niece to a retired East India Company's servant--a widower with three children.

CHAPTER II.

The equinoctial sun had long set, and the blue haze of March east wind had deepened into twilight and darkness when Albinia Kendal found herself driving down the steep hilly street of Bayford. The town was not large nor modern enough for gas, and the dark street was only lighted here and there by a shop of more pretension; the plate-glass

of the enterprising draper, with the light veiled by shawls and ribbons, the 'purple jars,' green, ruby, and crimson of the chemist; and the modest ray of the grocer, revealing busy heads driving Saturday-night bargains.

'How well I soon shall know them all,' said Albinia, looking at her husband, though she knew she could not see his face, as he leant back silently in his corner, and she tried to say no more. She was sure that coming home was painful to him; he had been so willing to put it off, and to prolong those pleasant seaside days, when there had been such pleasant reading, walking, musing, and a great deal of happy silence.

Down the hill, and a little way on level ground--houses on one side, something like hedge or shrubbery on the other--a stop--a gate opened--a hollow sound beneath the carriage, as though crossing a wooden bridge--trees--bright windows--an open door--and light streaming from it.

'Here is your home, Albinia,' said that deep musical voice that she loved the better for the subdued melancholy of the tones, and the suppressed sigh that could not be hidden.

'And my children,' she eagerly said, as he handed her out, and, springing to the ground, she hurried to the open door opposite, where, in the lamp-light, she saw, moving about in shy curiosity and embarrassment, two girls in white frocks and broad scarlet sashes, and a boy, who, as she advanced, retreated with his younger sister to the fireplace, while the elder one, a pretty, and rather formal looking girl of twelve, stood forward.

Albinia held out her arms, saying, 'You are Lucy, I am sure,' and eagerly kissed the girl's smiling, bright face.

'Yes, I am Lucy,' was the well-pleased answer, 'I am glad you are come.'

'I hope we shall be very good friends,' said Albinia, with the sweet smile that few, young or old, could resist. 'And this is Gilbert,' as she kissed the blushing cheek of a thin boy of thirteen--'and Sophia.'

Sophia, who was eleven, had not stirred to meet her. She alone inherited her father's fine straight profile, and large black eyes, but she had the heaviness of feature that sometimes goes with very dark complexions. The white frock did not become her brown neck and arms, her thick black hair was arranged in too womanly a manner, and her head and face looked too large; moreover, there was no lighting-up to answer the greeting, and Albinia was disappointed.

Poor child, she thought, she is feeling deeply that I am an interloper, it will be different now her father is coming.

Mr. Kendal was crossing the hall, and as he entered he took the hand and kissed the forehead of each of the three, but Sophia stood with the same half sullen indifference--it might be shyness, or sensibility.

'How much you are grown!' he said, looking at the children with some

surprise.

In fact, though Albinia knew their ages, they were all on a larger scale than she had expected, and looked too old for the children of a man of his youthful appearance. Gilbert had the slight look of rapid growth; Lucy, though not so tall, and with a small, clear, bright face, had the air of a little woman, and Sophia's face might have befitted any age.

'Yes, papa,' said Lucy; 'Gilbert has grown an inch-and-a-half since October, for we measured him.'

'Have you been well, Gilbert?' continued Mr. Kendal, anxiously.

'I have the toothache, said Gilbert, piteously.

'Happily, nothing more serious,' thrust in Lucy; 'Mr. Bowles told Aunt Maria that he considers Gilbert's health much improved.'

Albinia asked some kind questions about the delinquent tooth, but the answers were short; and, to put an end to the general constraint, she asked Lucy to show her to her room.

It was a pretty bay-windowed room, and looked cheerful in the firelight. Lucy's tongue was at once unloosed, telling that Gilbert's tutor, Mr. Salsted, had insisted on his having his tooth extracted, and that he had refused, saying it was quite well; but Lucy gave it as her opinion that he much preferred the toothache to his lessons.

'Where does Mr. Salsted live?'

'At Tremblam, about two miles off; Gilbert rides the pony over there every day, except when he has the toothache, and then he stays at home.'

'And what do you do?'

'We went to Miss Belmarche till the end of our quarter, and since that we have been at home, or with grandmamma. Do you really mean that we are to study with you?'

'I should like it, my dear. I have been looking forward very much to teaching you and Sophia.'

'Thank you, mamma.'

The word was said with an effort as if it came strangely, but it thrilled Albinia's heart, and she kissed Lucy, who clung to her, and returned the caress.

'I shall tell Gilbert and Sophy what a dear mamma you are,' she said. 'Do you know, Sophy says she shall never call you anything but Mrs. Kendal; and I know Gilbert means the same.'

'Let them call me whatever suits them best,' said Albinia; 'I had rather they waited till they feel that they like to call me as you have done--thank you for it, dear Lucy. You must not fancy I shall be at all hurt at your thinking of times past. I shall want you to

tell me of them, and of your own dear mother, and what will suit papa best.'

Lucy looked highly gratified, and eagerly said, 'I am sure I shall love you just like my own mamma.'

'No,' said Albinia, kindly; 'I do not expect that, my dear. I don't ask for any more than you can freely give, dear child. You must bear with having me in that place, and we will try and help each other to make your papa comfortable; and, Lucy, you will forgive me, if I am impetuous, and make mistakes.'

Lucy's little clear black eyes looked as if nothing like this had ever come within her range of observation, and Albinia could sympathize with her difficulty of reply.

Mr. Kendal was not in the drawing-room when they re-entered, there was only Gilbert nursing his toothache by the fire, and Sophy sitting in the middle of the rug, holding up a screen. She said something good-natured to each, but neither responded graciously, and Lucy went on talking, showing off the room, the chiffonieres, the ornaments, and some pretty Indian ivory carvings. There was a great ottoman of Aunt Maria's work, and a huge cushion with an Arab horseman, that Lucy would uncover, whispering, 'Poor mamma worked it,' while Sophy visibly winced, and Albinia hurried it into the chintz cover again, lest Mr. Kendal should come. But Lucy had full time to be communicative about the household with such a satisfied, capable manner, that Albinia asked if she had been keeping house all this time.

'No; old Nurse kept the keys, and managed till now; but she went this morning.'

Sophy's mouth twitched.

'She was so very fond--' continued Lucy.

'Don't!' burst out Sophy, almost the first word Albinia had heard from her; but no more passed, for Mr. Kendal came in, and Lucy's conversation instantly was at an end.'

Before him she was almost as silent as the others, and he seldom addressed himself to her, only inquiring once after her grandmamma's health, and once calling Sophy out of the way when she was standing between the fire and--He finished with the gesture of command, whether he said 'Your mamma,' none could tell.

It was late, and the meal was not over before bed-time, when Albinia lingered to find remedies for Gilbert's toothache, pleased to feel herself making a commencement of motherly care, and to meet an affectionate glance of thanks from Mr. Kendal's eye. Gilbert, too, thanked her with less shyness than before, and was hopeful about the remedy; and with the feeling of having made a beginning, she ran down to tell Mr. Kendal that she thought he had hardly done justice to the children--they were fine creatures--something so sweet and winning about Lucy--she liked Gilbert's countenance--Sophy must have something deep and noble in her.

He lifted his head to look at her bright face, and said, 'They are

very much obliged to you.'

'You must not say that, they are my own.'

'I will not say it again, but as I look at you, and the home to which I have brought you, I feel that I have acted selfishly.'

Albinia timidly pressed his hand, 'Work was always what I wished,' she said, 'if only I could do anything to lighten your grief and care.'

He gave a deep, heavy sigh. Albinia felt that if he had hoped to have lessened the sadness, he had surely found it again at his own door. He roused himself, however, to say, 'This is using you ill, Albinia; no one is more sensible of it than I am.'

'I never sought more than you can give,' she murmured; 'I only wish to do what I can for you, and you will not let me disturb you.'

'I am very grateful to you,' was his answer; a sad welcome for a bride. 'And these poor children will owe everything to you.'

'I wish I may do right by them,' said Albinia, fervently.

'The flower of the flock'--began Mr. Kendal, but he broke off at once.

Albinia had told Winifred that she could bear to have his wife's memory first with him, and that she knew that she could not compensate to him for his loss, but the actual sight of his dejection came on her with a chill, and she had to call up all her energies and hopes, and, still better, the thought of strength not her own, to enable her to look cheerfully on the prospect. Sleep revived her elastic spirits, and with eager curiosity she drew up her blind in the morning, for the first view of her new home.

But there was a veil--moisture made the panes resemble ground glass, and when she had rubbed that away, and secured a clear corner, her range of vision was not much more extensive. She could only see the grey outline of trees and shrubs, obscured by the heavy mist; and on the lawn below, a thick cloud that seemed to hang over a dark space which she suspected to be a large pond.

'There is very little to be gained by looking out here!' Albinia soliloquized. 'It is not doing the place justice to study it on a misty, moisty morning. It looks now as if that fever might have come bodily out of the pond. I'll have no more to say to it till the sun has licked up the fog, and made it bright! Sunday morning--my last Sunday without school-teaching I hope! I fainish to begin again--and I will make time for that, and the girls too! I am glad he consents to my doing whatever I please in that way! I hope Mr. Dusautoy will! I wish Edmund knew him better--but oh! what a shy man it is!'

With a light step she went down-stairs, and found Mr Kendal waiting for her in the dining-room, his face brightening as she entered.

'I am sorry Bayford should wear this heavy cloud to receive you,' he said.

'It will soon clear,' she answered, cheerfully. 'Have you heard of poor Gilbert this morning?'

'Not yet.' Then, after a pause, 'I have generally gone to Mrs. Meadows after the morning service,' he said, speaking with constraint.

'You will take me?' said Albinia. 'I wish it, I assure you.'

It was evidently what he wished her to propose, and he added, 'She must never feel herself neglected, and it will be better at once.'

'So much more cordial,' said Albinia. 'Pray let us go!'

They were interrupted by the voices of the girls--not unpleasing voices, but loud and unsubdued, and with a slight tone of provincialism, which seemed to hurt Mr. Kendal's ears, for he said, 'I hope you will tune those voices to something less unlike your own.'

As he spoke, the sisters appeared in the full and conscious rustling of new lilac silk dresses, which seemed to have happily carried off all Sophy's sullenness, for she made much more brisk and civil answers, and ran across the room in a boisterous manner, when her father sent her to see whether Gilbert were up.

There was a great clatter, and Gilbert chased her in, breathless and scolding, but the tongues were hushed before papa, and no more was heard than that the tooth was better, and had not kept him awake. Lucy seemed disposed to make conversation, overwhelming Albinia with needless repetitions of 'Mamma dear,' and plunging into what Mrs. Bowles and Miss Goldsmith had said of Mr. Dusautoy, and how he kept so few servants, and the butcher had no orders last time he called. Aunt Maria thought he starved and tyrannized over that poor little sickly Mrs. Dusautoy.

Mr. Kendal said not one word, and seemed not to hear. Albinia felt as if she had fallen into a whirlpool of gossip; she looked towards him, and hoped to let the conversation drop, but Sophy answered her sister, and, at last, when it came to something about what Jane heard from Mrs. Osborn's Susan, Albinia gently whispered, 'I do not think this entertains your papa, my dear,' and silence sank upon them all.

Albinia's next venture was to ask about that which had been her Sunday pleasure from childhood, and she turned to Sophy, and said, 'I suppose you have not begun to teach at the school yet!'

Sophy's great eyes expanded, and Lucy said, 'Oh dear mamma! nobody does that but Genevieve Durant and the monitors. Miss Wolte did till Mr. Dusautoy came, but she does not approve of him.'

'Lucy, you do not know what you are saying,' said Mr. Kendal, and again there was an annihilating silence, which Albinia did not attempt to disturb.

At church time, she met the young ladies in the hall, in pink bonnets and sea-green mantillas over the lilac silks, all evidently put on for the first time in her honour, an honour of which she felt herself the less deserving, as, sensible that this was no case for bridal

display, she wore a quiet dark silk, a Cashmere shawl, and plain straw bonnet, trimmed with white.

With manifest wish for reciprocity, Lucy fell into transports over the shawl, but gaining nothing by this, Sophy asked if she did not like the mantillas? Albinia could only make civility compatible with truth by saying that the colour was pretty, but where was Gilbert? He was on a stool before the dining-room fire, looking piteous, and pronouncing his tooth far too bad for going to church, and she had just time for a fresh administration of camphor before Mr. Kendal came forth from his study, and gave her his arm.

The front door opened on a narrow sweep, the river cutting it off from the road, and crossed by two wooden bridges, beside each of which stood a weeping-willow, budding with fresh spring foliage. Opposite were houses of various pretentious, and sheer behind them rose the steep hill, with the church nearly at the summit, the noble spire tapering high above, and the bells ringing out a cheerful chime. The mist had drawn up, and all was fresh and clear.

'There go Lizzie and Loo!' cried Lucy, 'and the Admiral and Mrs. Osborn. I'll run and tell them papa is come home.'

Sophy was setting off also, but Mr. Kendal stopped them, and lingered a moment or two, making an excuse of looking for a needless umbrella, but in fact to avoid the general gaze. As if making a desperate plunge, however, and looking up and down the broad street, so as to be secure that no acquaintance was near, he emerged with Albinia from the gate, and crossed the road as the chime of the bells changed.

'We are late,' he said. 'You will prefer the speediest way, though it is somewhat steep.'

The most private way, Albinia understood, and could also perceive that the girls would have liked the street which sloped up the hill, and thought the lilac and green insulted by being conducted up the steep, irregular, and not very clean bye-lane that led directly up the ascent, between houses, some meanly modern, some picturesquely ancient, with stone steps outside to the upper story, but all with far too much of pig-stye about them for beauty or fragrance. Lucy held up her skirts, and daintily picked her way, and Albinia looked with kindly eyes at the doors and windows, secretly wondering what friends she should find there.

The lane ended in a long flight of more than a hundred shallow steps cut out in the soft stone of the hill, with landing-places here and there, whence views were seen of the rich meadow-landscape beyond, with villages, orchards, and farms, and the blue winding river Baye in the midst, woods rising on the opposite side under the soft haze of distance. On the other side, the wall of rock was bordered by gardens, with streamers of ivy or periwinkle here and there hanging down.

The ascent ended in an old-fashioned stone stile; and here Sophy, standing on the step, proclaimed, with unnecessary loudness, that Mr. Dusautoy was carrying Mrs. Dusautoy across the churchyard. This had the effect of making a pause, but Albinia saw the rector, a tall, powerful man, rather supporting than actually carrying, a little fragile form to the low-browed door leading into the chancel on the

north side. The church was handsome, though in the late style, and a good deal misused by eighteenth-century taste; and Albinia was full of admiration as Mr. Kendal conducted her along the flagged path.

She was rather dismayed to find herself mounting the gallery stairs, and to emerge into a well-cushioned abode, with the shield-bearing angel of the corbel of an arch all to herself, and a very good view of the cobwebs over Mr. Dusautoy's sounding-board. It seemed to suit all parties, however, for Lucy and Sophia took possession of the forefront, and their father had the inmost corner, where certainly nobody could see him.

Just opposite to Albinia was a mural tablet, on which she read what revealed to her more of the sorrows of her household than she had guessed before:

'To the memory of Lucy, the beloved wife of Edmund Kendal.
Died February 18th, 1845, aged 35 years.

Edmund Meadows Kendal, born January 20th, 1834.
Died February 10th, 1845.

Maria Kendal, born September 5th, 1840.
Died September 14th, 1840.

Sarah Anne Kendal, born October 3rd, 1841.
Died November 20th, 1843.

John Augustus Kendal, born January 4th, 1842.
Died July 6th, 1842.

Anne Maria Kendal, born June 12th, 1844.
Died June 19th, 1844.'

Then followed, in the original Greek, the words, 'Because I live, ye shall live also.'

Four infants! how many hopes laid here! All the English-born children of the family had died in their cradles, and not only did compassion for the past affect Albinia, as she thought of her husband's world of hidden grief, but a shudder for the future came over her, as she remembered having read that such mortality is a test of the healthiness of a locality. What could she think of Willow Lawn? It was with a strong effort that she brought her attention back to Him Who controlleth the sickness that destroyeth at noon-day.

But Mr. Dusautoy's deep, powerful intonations roused her wandering thoughts, and she was calmed and reassured by the holy Feast, in which she joined with her husband.

Mr. Kendal's fine face was calm and placid, as best she loved to look upon it, when they came out of church, and she was too happy to disturb the quiet by one word. Lively and animated as she was, there was a sort of repose and enjoyment in the species of respect exacted by his grave silent demeanour.

If this could only have lasted longer! but he was taking her along an

irregular street, and too soon she saw a slight colour flit across his cheek, and his eyebrows contract, as he unlatched a green door in a high wall, and entered a little flagged court, decorated by a stand destined for flowers.

Albinia caught the blush, and felt more bashful than she had believed was in her nature, but she had a warm-hearted determination that she would work down prejudices, and like and be liked by all that concerned him and his children. So she smiled at him, and went bravely on into the matted hall and up the narrow stairs, and made a laughing sign when he looked back at her ere he tapped at the sitting-room door.

It was opened from within before he could turn the handle, and a shrill voice, exaggerating those of the girls, showered welcomes with such rapidity, that Albinia was seated at the table, and had been helped to cold chicken, before she could look round, or make much answer to reiterations of 'so very kind.'

It was a small room, loaded with knickknacks and cushions, like a repository of every species of female ornamental handiwork in vogue for the last half century, and the luncheon-tray in the middle of all, ready for six people, for the two girls were there, and though Mr. Kendal stood up by the fire, and would not eat, he and his black image, reflected backwards and forwards in the looking-glass and in the little round mirror, seemed to take up more room than if he had been seated.

Mrs. Meadows was slight, shrunken, and gentle-looking, with a sweet tone in her voice, great softness of manner, and pretty blue eyes. Albinia only wished that she had worn mourning, it would have been so much more becoming than bright colours, but that was soon overlooked in gratitude for her affectionate reception, and in the warmth of feeling excited by her evident fondness and solicitude for Mr. Kendal.

Miss Meadows was gaily dressed in youthful fashion, such as evidently had set her off to advantage when she had been a bright, dark, handsome girl; but her hair was thin, her cheeks haggard, the colour hardened, and her forty years apparent, above all, in an uncomfortable furrow on the brow and round the mouth; her voice had a sharp distressed tone that grated even in her lowest key, and though she did not stammer, she could never finish a sentence, but made half-a-dozen disjointed commencements whenever she spoke. Albinia pitied her, and thought her nervous, for she was painfully assiduous in waiting on every one, scarcely sitting down for a minute before she was sure that pepper, or pickle, or new bread, or stale bread, or something was wanted, and squeezing round the table to help some one, or to ring the bell every third minute, and all in a dress that had a teasing stiff silken rustle. She offered Mr. Kendal everything in the shape of food, till he purchased peace by submitting to take a hard biscuit, while Albinia was not allowed her glass of water till all manner of wines, foreign and domestic, had been tried upon her in vain.

Conversation was not easy. Gilbert was inquired after, and his aunt spoke in her shrill, injured note, as she declared that she had done her utmost to persuade him to have the tooth extracted, and began a history of what the dentist ought to have done five years ago.

His grandmother softly pitied him, saying poor little Gibbie was such a delicate boy, and required such careful treatment; and when Albinia hoped that he was outgrowing his ill-health, she was amused to find that desponding compassion would have been more pleasing.

There had been a transaction about a servant in her behalf: and Miss Meadows insisted on hunting up a note, searching all about the room, and making her mother and Sophy move from the front of two table-drawers, a disturbance which Sophy did not take with such placid looks as did her grandmother.

The name of the maid was Eweretta Dobson, at which there was a general exclamation.

'I wonder what is the history of the name,' said Albinia; 'it sounds like nothing but the diminutive of ewer. I hope she will not be the little pitcher with long ears.'

Mr. Kendal looked as much amused as he ever did, but no one else gave the least token of so much as knowing what she meant, and she felt as if she had been making a foolish attempt at wit.

'You need not call her so,' was all that Mrs. Meadows said.

'I do not like calling servants by anything but their true names,' answered Albinia; 'it does not seem to me treating them with proper respect to change their names, as if we thought them too good for them. It is using them like slaves.'

Lucy exclaimed, 'Why! grandmamma's Betty is really named Philadelphia.'

Albinia laughed, but was disconcerted by finding that she had really given annoyance. 'I beg your pardon,' she said. 'It is only a fancy of my own. I am afraid that I have many fancies for my friends to bear with. You see I have so fine a name of my own, that I have a fellow-feeling for those under the same affliction; and I believe some servants like an alias rather than be teased for their finery, so I shall give Miss Eweretta her choice between that and her surname.'

The old lady looked good-natured, and that matter blew over; but Miss Meadows fell into another complication of pros and cons about writing for the woman's character, looking miserably harassed whether she should write, or Mrs. Kendal, before she had been called upon.

Albinia supposed that Mrs. Wolfe might call in the course of the week; but this Miss Meadows did not know, and she embarked in so many half speeches, and looked so mysterious and significant at her mother, that Albinia began to suspect that some dreadful truth was behind.

'Perhaps,' said the old lady, 'perhaps Mrs. Kendal might make it understood through you, my dear Maria, that she is ready to receive visits.'

'I suppose they must be!' said Albinia.

'You see, my dear, people would be most happy, but they do not know whether you have arrived. You have not appeared at church, as I may say.'

'Indeed,' said Albinia, much diverted by her new discoveries in the realms of etiquette, 'I was rather in a cupboard, I must allow. Ought we to have sailed up the aisle in state in the Grandison pattern? Are you ready?' and she glanced up at her husband, but he only half heard.

'No,' said Miss Meadows, fretfully; 'but you have not appeared as a bride. The straw bonnet--you see people cannot tell whether you are not incog, as yet--'

To refrain from laughing was impossible. 'My tarn cap,' she exclaimed; 'I am invisible in it! What shall I do? I fear I shall never be producible, for indeed it is my very best, my veritable wedding-bonnet!'

Lucy looked as if she thought it not worth while to be married for no better a bonnet than that.

'Absurdity!' said Mr. Kendal.

If he would but have given a good hearty laugh, thought Albinia, what a consolation it would be! but she considered herself to have had a lesson against laughing in that house, and was very glad when he proposed going home. He took a kind, affectionate leave of the old lady, who again looked fondly in big face, and rejoiced in his having recovered his looks.

As they arrived at home, Lucy announced that she was just going to speak to Lizzie Osborn, and Sophy ran after her to a house of about the same degree as their own, but dignified as Mount Lodge, because it stood on the hill side of the street, while Mr. Kendal's house was for more gentility called 'Willow Lawn.' Gilbert was not to be found; but at four o'clock the whole party met at dinner, before the evening service.

Gilbert could eat little, and on going back to the fire to roast his cheek instead of going to church, was told by his father, 'I cannot have this going on. You must go to Mr. Bowles directly after breakfast to-morrow, have the tooth drawn, and then go on to Mr. Salsted's.'

The tone was one that admitted of no rebellion. If Mr. Kendal interfered little, his authority was absolute where he did interfere, and Albinia could only speak a few kind words of encouragement, but the boy was vexed and moody, seemed half asleep when they came home, and went to bed as soon as tea was over.

Sophy went to bed too, Mr. Kendal went to his study, and Albinia, after this day of novelty and excitement, drew her chair to the fire, and as Lucy was hanging wearily about, called her to her side, and made her talk, believing that there was more use in studying the girl's character than even in suggesting some occupation, though that was apparently the great want of the whole family on Sunday.

Lucy's first confidence was that Gilbert had not been out alone, but

with that Archibald Tritton. Mr. Tritton had a great farm, and was a sort of gentleman, and Gilbert was always after that Archy. She thought it 'very undesirable,' and Aunt Maria had talked to him about it, but he never listened to Aunt Maria.

Albinia privately thought that it must be a severe penance to listen to Aunt Maria, and took Gilbert's part. She supposed that he must be very solitary; it must be a melancholy thing to be a twin left alone.

'And Edmund, dear Edmund, was always so kind and so fond of Gilbert!' said Lucy. 'You would not have thought they were twins, Edmund was so much the tallest and strongest. It seemed so odd that Gilbert should have got over it, when he did not. Should you like to hear all about it, mamma?'

It was Albinia's great wish to lift that dark veil, and Lucy began, with as much seriousness and sadness as could co-exist with the satisfaction and importance of having to give such a narration, and exciting emotion and pity. It was remarkable how she managed to make herself the heroine of the story, though she had been sent out of the house, and had escaped the infection. She spoke in phrases that showed that she had so often told the story as to have a set form, caught from her elders, but still it had a deep and intrinsic interest for the bride, that made her sit gazing into the fire, pressing Lucy's hand, and now and then sighing and shuddering slightly as she heard how there had been a bad fever prevailing in that lower part of the town, and how the two boys were both unwell one damp, hot autumn morning, and Lucy dwelt on the escape it had been that she had not kissed them before going to school. Sophy had sickened the same day, and after the tedious three weeks, when father and mother were spent with attendance on the three, Edmund, after long delirium, had suddenly sunk, just as they had hopes of him; and the same message that told Lucy of her brother's death, told her of the severe illness of both parents.

The disease had done the work rapidly on the mother's exhausted frame, and she was buried a week after her boy. Lucy had seen the procession from the window, and thought it necessary to tell how she had cried.

Mr. Kendal's had been a long illness; the first knowledge of his loss had caused a relapse, and his recovery had long been doubtful. As soon as the children were able to move, they were sent with Miss Meadows to Ramsgate, and Lucy had joined them there.

'The day before I went, I saw papa,' she said. 'I had gone home for some things that I was to take, and his room door was open, so he saw me on the stairs, and called me, for there was no fear of infection then. Oh, he was so changed! his hair all cut off, and his cheeks hollow, and he was quite trembling, as he lay back on pillows in the great arm-chair. You can't think what a shock it was to me to see him in such a state. He held out his arms, and I flung mine round his neck, and sobbed and cried. And he just said, so faintly, "Take her away, Maria, I cannot bear it." I assure you I was quite hysterical.'

'You must have wished for more self-command,' said Albinia, disturbed by Lucy's evident pleasure in having made a scene.

'Oh, but it was such a shock, and such a thing to see the house all empty and forlorn, with the windows open, and everything so still! Miss Belmarche cried too, and said she did not wonder my feelings overcame me, and _she_ did not see papa.'

'Ah! Lucy,' said Albinia, fervently, 'how we must try to make him happy after all that he has gone through!'

'That is what grandmamma said when she got his letter. "I would be glad of anything," she said, "that would bring back a smile to him." And Aunt Maria said she had done her best for him, but he must consult his own happiness; and so I say. When people talk to me, I say that papa is quite at liberty to consult his own happiness.'

'Thank you.'

Lucy did not understand the tone, and went on patronizing. 'And if they say you look younger than they expected, I don't object to that at all. I had rather you were not as old as Aunt Maria, or Miss Belmarche.'

'Who thinks me so young?'

'Oh! Aunt Maria, and grandmamma, and Mrs. Osborn, and all; but I don't mind that, it is only Sophy who says you look like a girl. Aunt Maria says Sophy has an unmanageable temper.'

'Don't you think you can let me find that out for myself?'

'I thought you wanted me to tell you about everybody.'

'Ah! but tell me of the good in your brother and sister.'

'I don't know how,' said Lucy. 'Gilbert is so tiresome, and so is Sophy. I heard Mary telling Jane, "I'm sure the new missus will have a heavy handful of those two."''

'And what of yourself?' said Albinia.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Lucy, modestly.

Mr. Kendal came in, and as Albinia looked at his pensive brow, she was oppressed by the thought of his sufferings in that dreary convalescence. At night, when she looked from her window, the fog hung white, like mildew over the pond, and she could not reason herself out of a spectral haunting fancy that sickness lurked in the heavy, misty atmosphere. She dreamt of it and the four babies, started, awoke, and had to recall all her higher trust to enable her vigour to chase off the oppressive imagination.

CHAPTER III.

Fog greeted Mrs. Kendal's eyes as she rose, and she resolved to make an attack on the pond without loss of time. But Mr. Kendal was

absorbed nearly all breakfast-time in a letter from India, containing a scrap in some uncouth character. As he finished his last cup of tea, he looked up and said, 'A letter from my old friend Penrose, of Bombay--an inscription in the Salsette caves.'

'Have you seen the Salsette caves?'

'Yes.'

She was longing to hear about them, but his horse was announced.

'You said you would be engaged in the morning while I ride out, Albinia?' he said, 'I shall return before luncheon. Gilbert, you had better go at once to Mr. Bowles. I shall order your pony to be ready when you come back.'

There was not a word of remonstrance, though the boy looked very disconsolate, and began to murmur the moment his father had gone. Albinia, who had regarded protection at a dentist's one of the offices of the head of a family, though dismayed at the task, told Gilbert that she would come with him in a moment. The girls exclaimed that no one thought of going with him, and fearing she had put an affront on his manliness, she asked what he would like, but could get no answer, only when Lucy scolded him for lingering, he said, 'I thought _she_ was going with me.'

'Amiable,' thought Albinia, as she ran up to put on her bonnet; 'but I suppose toothache puts people out of the pale of civilization. And if he is thankless, is not that treating me more like a mother?'

Perhaps he had accepted her escort in hopes of deferring the evil hour, for he seemed discomfited to see her so quickly ready, and not grateful to his sisters, who hurried them by saying that Mr. Bowles would be gone out upon his rounds.

Mr. Bowles was amazed at the sight of Mrs. Kendal, and so elaborate in compliments and assurances that Mrs. Bowles would do herself the honour of calling, that Albinia, pitying Gilbert, called his attention back.

With him the apothecary was peremptory and facetious. 'He had expected that he should soon see him after his papa's return!' And with a 'soon be over,' he set him down, and Albinia bravely stood a desperate wringing of her hand at the tug of war. She was glad she had come, for the boy suffered a good deal, and was faint, and Mr. Bowles pronounced his mouth in no state for a ride to Tremblam.

'I must go,' said Gilbert, as they walked home, 'I wish papa would listen to anything.'

'He would not wish you to hurt yourself.'

'When papa says a thing--' began Gilbert.

'Well, Gilbert, you are quite right, and I hope you don't think I mean to teach you disobedience. But I do desire you, on my own responsibility, not to go and catch an inflammation in your jaw. I'll undertake papa.'

Gilbert at once became quite another creature. He discoursed so much, that she had to make him restore the handkerchief to his mouth; he held open the gate, showed her a shoal of minnows, and tried to persuade her to come round the garden before going in, but she clapped her hands at him, and hunted him back into the warm room, much impressed and delighted by his implicit obedience to his father. With Lucy and Sophy, his remaining seemed likewise to make a great sensation; they looked at Mrs. Kendal and whispered, and were evidently curious as to the result of her audacity. Albinia, who had grown up with her brother Maurice and cousin Frederick, was more used to boys than to girls, and was already more at ease with her son than her daughters.

Gilbert lent a ready hand with hammer and chisel, and boxes were opened, to the great delight and admiration of the girls. They were all very happy and busy setting things to rights, but Albinia was in difficulty how to bestow her books. There was an unaccountable scarcity both of books and book-cases; none were to be seen except that, in a chiffoniere in the drawing-room, there was a row in gilded bindings, chiefly Pope, Gray, and the like; and one which Albinia took out had pages which stuck together, a little pale blue string, faded at the end, and in the garlanded fly-leaf the inscription, 'To Miss Lucy Meadows, the reward of good conduct, December 20th, 1822.' The book seemed rather surprised at being opened, and Albinia let it close itself as Lucy said, 'Those are poor mamma's books, all the others are in the study. Come in, and I'll show you.'

She threw open the door, and Albinia entered. The study was shaded with a mass of laurels that kept out the sun, and made it look chill and sad, and the air in it was close. The round library-table was loaded with desks, pocket-books, and papers, the mantelpiece was covered with letters, and book-shelves mounted to the ceiling, filled with the learned and the poetical of new and old times.

Over the fireplace hung what it needed not Lucy's whisper to point out, as 'Poor mamma's picture.' It represented a very pretty girl, with dark eyes, brilliant colour, and small cherry mouth, painted in the exaggerated style usually called 'ridiculously like.'

Albinia's first feeling was that there was nothing in herself that could atone for the loss of so fair a creature, and the thought became more oppressive as she looked at a niche in the wall, holding a carved sandal-wood work-box, with a silver watch lying on it.

'Poor Edmund's watch,' said Lucy. 'It was given to him for a reward just before he was ill.'

Albinia tried to recover composure by reading the titles of the books. Suddenly, Lucy started and exclaimed, 'Come away. There he is!'

'Why come away?' said Albinia.

'I would not have him find me there for all the world.'

In all her vexation and dismay, Albinia could not help thinking of Bluebeard's closet. Her inclination was to stay where she was, and take her chance of losing her head, yet she felt as if she could not bear to be found invading a sanctuary of past recollections, and was

relieved to find that it was a false alarm, though not relieved by the announcement that Admiral and Mrs. Osborn and the Miss Osborns were in the drawing-room.

'Before luncheon--too bad!' she exclaimed, as she hurried upstairs to wash off the dust of unpacking.

Ere she could hurry down, there was another inundation streaming across the hall, Mrs. Drury and three Miss Drurys, who, as she remembered, when they began to kiss her, were some kind of cousins.

There was talk, but Albinia could not give entire attention; she was watching for Mr. Kendal's return, that she might guard Gilbert from his displeasure, and the instant she heard him, she sprang up, and flew into the hall. He could not help brightening at the eager welcome, but when she told him of Mr. Bowles' opinion, he looked graver, and said, 'I fear you must not always attach credit to all Gilbert's reports.'

'Mr. Bowles told me himself that he must run no risk of inflammation.'

'You saw Mr. Bowles?'

'I went with Gilbert.'

'You? I never thought of your imposing so unpleasant a task on yourself. I fear the boy has been trespassing on your kindness.'

'No, indeed, he never asked me, but--' with a sort of laugh to hide the warmth excited by his pleased, grateful look, 'I thought it all in the day's work, only natural--'

She would have given anything to have had time to enjoy his *epanchement de coeur* at those words, but she was obliged to add, 'Alas! there's all the world in the drawing-room!'

'Who?'

'Osborns and Drurys.'

'Do you want me?'

'I ran away on the plea of calling you.'

'I'll never do so again,' was her inward addition, as his countenance settled into the accustomed fixed look of abstraction, and as an unwilling victim he entered the room with her, and the visitors were 'dreadful enough' to congratulate him.

Albinia knew that it must be so unpleasant to him, that she blushed up to the roots of her hair, and could not look at anybody.

When she recovered, the first comers were taking leave, but the second set stayed on and on till past luncheon-time, and far past her patience, before the room was at last cleared.

Gilbert hurried in, and was received by his father with, 'You are very much obliged to her!'

'Indeed I am,' said Gilbert, in a winning, pleasant manner.

'I don't want you to be,' said Albinia, affectionately laying her arm on his shoulder. 'And now for luncheon--I pitied you, poor fellow; I thought you must have been famished.'

'Anything not to have all the Drurys at luncheon,' said Gilbert, confidentially, 'I had begun to wish myself at Tremblam.'

'By the bye,' said Mr. Kendal, waking as he sat down at the bottom of the table, 'how was it that the Drurys did not stay to luncheon?'

'Was that what they were waiting for?' exclaimed Albinia. 'Poor people, I had no notion of that.'

'They do have luncheon here in general,' said Mr. Kendal, as if not knowing exactly how it came to pass.

'O yes,' said Lucy; 'Sarah Anne asked me whether we ate wedding-cake every day.'

'Poor Miss Sarah Anne!' said Albinia, laughing. 'But one cannot help feeling inhospitable when people come so unconscionably early, and cut up all one's morning.'

The door was again besieged by visitors, just as they were all going out to make the round of the garden, and it was not till half-past four that the succession ceased, and Albinia was left to breathe freely, and remember how often Maurice had called her to order for intolerance of morning calls.

'And not the only people I cared to see,' she said, 'the Dusautoys and Nugents. But they have too much mercy to call the first day.'

Mr. Kendal looked as if his instinct were drawing him study-wards, but Albinia hung on his arm, and made him come into the garden. Though devoid of Winifred's gardening tastes, she was dismayed at the untended look of the flower-beds. The laurels were too high, and seemed to choke the narrow space, and the turf owed its verdant appearance to damp moss. She had made but few steps before the water squished under her feet, and impelled her to exclaim, 'What a pity this pond should not be filled up!'

'Filled up!--'

'Yes, it would be so much less damp. One might drain it off into the river, and then we should get rid of the fog.'

And she began actively to demonstrate the convenient slope, and the beautiful flower-bed that might be made in its place. Mr. Kendal answered with a few assenting sounds and complacent looks, and Albinia, accustomed to a brother with whom to assent was to act, believed the matter was in train, and that pond and fever would be annihilated.

The garden opened into a meadow with a causeway leading to a canal bank, where there was a promising country walk, but the cruel visitors had left no time for exploring, and Albinia had to return

home and hurry up her arrangements before there was space to turn round in her room--even then it was not what Winifred could have seen without making a face.

Mr. Kendal had read aloud to his wife in the evening during the stay at the sea-side, and she was anxious not to let the habit drop. He liked it, and read beautifully, and she thought it good for the children. She therefore begged him to read, catching him on the way to his study, and coaxing him to stay no longer than to find a book. He brought Schlegel's Philosophy of History. She feared that it was above the young ones, but it was delightful to herself, and the custom had better be established before it was perilled by attempts to adapt it to the children. Lucy and Sophy seemed astonished and displeased, and their whispers had to be silenced, Gilbert learnt his lessons apart. Albinia rallied her spirits, and insisted to herself that she did not feel discouraged.

Monday had gone, or rather Albinia had been robbed of it by visitors--now for a vigorous Tuesday. Her unpacking and her setting to rights were not half over, but as the surface was habitable, she resolved to finish at her leisure, and sacrifice no more mornings of study.

So after she had lingered at the door, to delight Gilbert by admiring his pony, she returned to the dining-room, where the girls were loading a small table in the window with piles of books and exercises, and Lucy was standing, looking all eagerness to show off her drawings.

'Yes, my dear, but first we had better read. I have been talking to your papa, and we have settled that on Wednesdays and Fridays we will go to church; but on these days we will begin by reading the Psalms and Lessons.'

'Oh,' said Lucy, 'we never do that, except when we are at grandmamma's.'

'Pray are you too old or too young for it?' said Albinia.

'We did it to please grandmamma,' said Sophy.

'Now you will do it to please me,' said Albinia, 'if for no better reason. Fetch your Bibles and Prayerbooks.'

'We shall never have time for our studies, I assure you, mamma,' objected Lucy.

'That is not your concern,' said Albinia, her spirit rising at the girls' opposition. 'I wish for obedience.'

Lucy went, Sophy leant against the table like a post. Albinia regretted that the first shot should have been fired for such a cause, and sat perplexing herself whether it were worse to give way, or to force the girls to read Holy Scripture in such a mood.

Lucy came flying down with the four books in her hands, and began officiously opening them before her sister, and exhorting her not to give way to sullenness--she ought to like to read the Bible--which of course made Sophy look crosser. The desire to establish her

authority conquered the scruple about reverence. Albinia set them to read, and suffered for it. Lucy read flippantly; Sophy in the hoarse, dull, dogged voice of a naughty boy. She did not dare to expostulate, lest she should exasperate the tempers that she had roused.

'Never mind,' she thought, 'when the institution is fixed, they will be more amenable.'

She tried a little examination afterwards, but not one answer was to be extracted from Sophy, and Lucy knew far less than the first class at Fairmead, and made her replies wide of the mark, with an air of satisfaction that nearly overthrew the young step-mother's patience.

When Albinia took her Bible upstairs, she gave Sophy time to say what Lucy reported instantly on her entrance.

'Dear me, mamma, here is Sophy declaring that you ought to be a charity-schoolmistress. You wont be angry with her, but it is so funny!'

'If you were at my charity school, Lucy,' said Albinia, 'the first lesson I should give you would be against telling tales.'

Lucy subsided.

Albinia turned to Sophy. 'My dear,' she said, 'perhaps I pressed this on when you were not prepared for it, but I have always been used to think of it as a duty.'

Sophy made no answer, but her moody attitude relaxed, and Albinia took comfort in the hope that she might have been gracious if she had known how to set about it.

'I suppose Miss Belmarche is a Roman Catholic,' she said, wishing to account for this wonderful ignorance, and addressing herself to Sophy; but Lucy, whom she thought she had effectually put down, was up again in a moment like a Jack-in-a-box.

'O yes, but not Genevieve. Her papa made it his desire that she should be brought up a Protestant. Wasn't it funny? You know Genevieve is Madame Belmarche's grand-daughter, and Mr. Durant was a dancing-master.'

'Madame Belmarche's father and brother were guillotined,' continued Sophy.

'Ah! then she is an emigrant?'

'Yes. Miss Belmarche has always kept school here. Our own mamma, and Aunt Maria went to school to her, and Miss Celeste Belmarche married Mr. Durant, a dancing-master--she was French teacher in a school in London where he taught, and Madame Belmarche did not approve, for she and her husband were something very grand in France, so they waited and waited ever so long, and when at last they did marry, they were quite old, and she died very soon; and they say he never was happy again, and pined away till he really did die of grief, and so Genevieve came to her grandmamma to be brought up.'

'Poor child! How old is she?'

'Fifteen,' said Lucy. 'She teaches in the school. She is not at all pretty, and such a queer little thing.'

'Was her father French?'

'No,' said Sophy.

'Yes,' said Lucy. 'You know nothing about it, Sophy. He was French, but of the Protestant French sort, that came to England a great many years ago, when they ran away from the Sicilian Vespers, or the Edict of Nantes, I don't remember which; only the Spitalfields weavers have something to do with it. However, at any rate Genevieve has got something in a drawer up in her own room that she is very secret about, and wont show to anybody.'

'I think it is something that somebody was killed with,' said Sophy, in a low voice.

'Dear me, if it is, I am sure it is quite wicked to keep it. I shall be quite afraid to go into her room, and you know I slept there all the time of the fever.'

'It did not hurt you,' said Sophy.

Albinia had been strongly interested by the touching facts, so untouchingly narrated, and by the characteristic account of the Huguenot emigration, but it suddenly occurred to her that she was promoting gossip, and she returned to business. Lucy showed off her attainments with her usual self-satisfaction. They were what might be expected from a second-rate old-fashioned young ladies' school, where nothing was good but the French pronunciation. She was evidently considered a great proficient, and her glib mediocrity was even more disheartening than the ungracious carelessness or dulness--there was no knowing which--that made her sister figure wretchedly in the examination. However, there was little time--the door-bell rang at a quarter to twelve, and Mrs. Wolfe was in the drawing-room.

'I told you so,' whispered Lucy, exultingly.

'This is unbearable,' cried Albinia. 'I shall give notice that I am always engaged in the morning.'

She desired each young lady to work a sum in her absence, and left them to murmur, if they were so disposed. Perhaps it was Lucy's speech that made her inflict the employment; at any rate, her spirit was not as serene as she could have desired.

Mr. Kendal was quite willing that she should henceforth shut her door against company in the morning; that is to say, he bowed his head assentingly. She was begging him to take a walk with her, when, at another sound of the bell, he made a precipitate retreat into his study. The visitors were the Belmarche family. The old lady was dark and withered, small, yet in look and air, with a certain nobility and grandeur that carried Albinia back in a moment to the days of hoops and trains, of powder and high-heeled shoes, and made her feel that the sweeping courtesy had come straight from the days of Marie Antoinette, and that it was an honour and distinction

conferred by a superior--superior, indeed, in all the dignity of age, suffering, and constancy.

Albinia blushed, and took her hand with respect very unlike the patronizing airs of Bayford Bridge towards 'poor old Madame Belmarche,' and with downcast eyes, and pretty embarrassment, heard the stately compliments of the ancien regime.

Miss Belmarche was not such a fine specimen of Sevres porcelain as her mother. She was a brown, dried, small woman, having lost, or never possessed, her country's taste in dress, and with a rusty bonnet over the tight, frizzly curls of her front, too thin and too scantily robed to have any waist, and speaking English too well for the piquant grace of her mother's speech. Poor lady! born an exile, she had toiled, and struggled for a whole lifetime to support her mother; but though care had worn her down, there was still vivacity in her quick little black eyes, and though her teeth were of a dreadful colour, her laugh was so full of life and sweetness, that Albinia felt drawn towards her in a moment.

Silent and demure, plainly dressed in an old dark merino, and a white-ribboned faded bonnet, sat a little figure almost behind her grandmother. Her face had the French want of complexion, but the eyes were of the deepest, most lustrous hue of grey, almost as dark as the pupils, and with the softness of long dark eyelashes--beautiful eyes, full of light and expression--and as she moved towards the table, there was a finish and delicacy about the whole form and movements, that made her a most pleasing object.

But Albinia could not improve her acquaintance, for in flowed another party of visitors, and Madame curtsied herself out again, Albinia volunteering that she would soon come to see her, and being answered, 'You will do me too much honour.'

Another afternoon devoured by visitors! Every one seemed to have come except the persons who would have been most welcome, Mr. Dusautoy, and Winifred's friends, the Nugents.

When, at four o'clock, she had shaken hands with the last guest, she gave a hearty yawn, jumped up and shook herself, as she exclaimed, 'There! There! that is done! I wonder whether your papa would come out now?'

'He is in his study,' said the girls.

Albinia thought of knocking and calling at the door, but somehow it seemed impossible, and she decided on promenading past his window to show that she was ready for him. But alas! those evergreens! She could not see in, and probably he could not see out.

'Ha!' cried Lucy, as they pursued their walk into the kitchen garden, 'here are some asparagus coming up. Grandmamma always has our first asparagus.'

Albinia was delighted to find such an opening. Out came her knife--they would cut the heads and take them up at once; but when the tempting white-stalked, pink-tipped bundle had been made up and put into a basket, a difficulty arose.

'I'll call the boy to take it,' said Lucy.

'What, when we are going ourselves?' said Albinia.

'Oh! but we can't.'

'Why? Do you think we shall break down under the weight?'

'O no, but people will stare.'

'Why--what should they stare at?'

'It looks so to carry a basket--'

Albinia burst into one of her merriest peals of laughing.

'Not carry a basket! My dear, I have looked so all the days of my life. Bayford must endure the spectacle, so it may as well begin at once.'

'But, dear mamma--'

'I'm not asking you to carry it. O no, I only hope you don't think it too ungenteeled to walk with me. But the notion of calling a boy away from his work, to carry a couple of dozen asparagus when an able-bodied woman is going that way herself!'

Albinia was so tickled that she could hardly check herself, even when she saw Lucy looking distressed and hurt, and little laughs would break out every moment as she beheld the young lady keeping aloof, as if ashamed of her company, turning towards the steep church steps, willing at least to hide the dreadful sight from the High Street.

Just as they had entered the narrow alley, they heard a hasty tread, and almost running over them with his long strides, came Mr. Dusautoy. He brought himself up short, just in time, and exclaimed, 'I beg your pardon--Mrs. Kendal, I believe. Could you be kind enough to give me a glass of brandy?'

Albinia gave a great start, as well she might.

'I was going to fetch one,' quickly proceeded Mr. Dusautoy, 'but your house is nearer. A poor man--there--just come home--been on the tramp for work--quite exhausted--' and he pointed to one of the cottages.

'I'll fetch it at once,' cried Albinia.

'Thank you,' he said, as they crossed the street. 'This poor fellow has had nothing all day, has walked from Hadminster--just got home, sank down quite worn out, and there is nothing in the house but dry bread. His wife wants something nearly as much as he does.'

In the excitement, Albinia utterly forgot all scruples about 'Bluebeard's closet.' She hurried into the house, and made but one dash, standing before her astonished husband's dreamy eyes, exclaiming, 'Pray give me the key of the cellaret; there's a poor man just come home, fainting with exhaustion, Mr. Dusautoy wants some brandy for him.'

Like a man but half awake, obeying an apparition, Mr. Kendal put his hand into his pocket and gave her the key. She was instantly opening the cellaret, seeking among the bottles, and asking questions all the time. She proposed taking a jug of the kitchen-tea then in operation, and Mr. Dusautoy caught at the idea, so that poor Lucy beheld the dreadful spectacle of the vicar bearing a can full of steaming tea, and Mrs. Kendal a small cup with the 'spirituous liquor.' What was the asparagus to this?

Albinia told her to go on to Mrs. Meadows', and that she should soon follow. She intended to have gone the moment that she had carried in the cup, leaving Mr. Dusautoy in the cottage, but the poor trembling frightened wife needed woman's sympathy and soothing, and she waited to comfort her, and to see the pair more able to enjoy the meeting, in their tidy, but bare and damp-looking cottage. She promised broth for the morrow, and took her leave, the vicar coming away at the same time.

'Thank you,' he said, warmly, as they came out, and turned to mount the hill together.

'May I go and call on them again?'

'It will be very kind in you. Poor Simkins is a steady, good sort of fellow, but a clumsy workman, down-hearted, and with poor health, and things have been untoward with him.'

'People, who do not prosper in the world are not always the worst,' said Albinia.

'No, indeed, and these are grateful, warm-hearted people that you will like, if you can get over the poor woman's lackadaisical manner. But you are used to all that,' he added, smiling. 'I see you know what poor folk are made of.'

'I have been living among them nearly all my days,' said Albinia. 'I hope you will give me something to do, I should be quite forlorn without it;' and she looked up to his kind, open face, as much at home with him as if she had known, him for years.

'Fanny--my wife--shall find work for you,' he said. 'You must excuse her calling on you, she is never off the sofa, but--' And what a bright look he gave! as much as to say that his wife on the sofa was better than any one else off. 'I was hoping to call some of these afternoons,' he continued, 'but I have had little time, and Fanny thought your door was besieged enough already.'

'Thank you,' said Albinia; 'I own I thought it was your kindness in leaving me a little breathing time. And would Mrs. Dusautoy be able to see me if I were to call?'

'She would be delighted. Suppose you were to come in at once.'

'I wish I could, but I must go on to Mrs. Meadows'. If I were to come to-morrow?'

'Any time--any time,' he said. 'She is always at home, and she has been much better since we came here. We were too much in the town at

Lauriston.'

Mr. Dusautoy, having a year ago come out of the diocese where had been Albinia's home, they had many common friends, and plunged into 'ecclesiastical intelligence,' with a mutual understanding of the topics most often under discussion, that made Albinia quite in her element. 'A great Newfoundland dog of a man in size, and countenance, and kindness,' thought she. 'If his wife be worthy of him, I shall reckon little of all the rest.'

Her tread the gayer for this resumption of old habits, she proceeded to Mrs. Meadows', where the sensation created by her poor little basket justified Lucy's remonstrance. There were regrets, and assurances that the girl could have come in a moment, and that she need not have troubled herself, and her laughing declarations that it was no trouble were disregarded, except that the old lady said, in gentle excuse to her daughter, that Mrs. Kendal had always lived in the country, where people could do as they pleased.

'I mean to do as I please here,' said Albinia, laughing; but the speech was received with silent discomfiture that made her heartily regret it. She disdained to explain it away; she was beginning to hold Mrs. and Miss Meadows too cheap to think it worth while.

'Well,' said Mrs. Meadows, as if yielding up the subject, 'things may be different from what they were in my time.'

'Oh! mamma--Mrs. Kendal--I am sure--' Albinia let Maria flounder, but she only found her way out of the speech with 'Well! and is not it the most extraordinary!--Mr. Dusautoy--so rude--'

'I should not wonder if you found me almost as extraordinary as Mr. Dusautoy,' said Albinia.

Why would Miss Meadows always nettle her into saying exactly the wrong thing, so as to alarm and distress the old lady? That want of comprehension of playfulness was a strangely hard trial. She turned to Mrs. Meadows and tried to reassure her by saying, 'You know I have been always in the clerical line myself, so I naturally take the part of the parson.'

'Yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Meadows. 'I dare say Mr. Dusautoy is a very good man, but I wish he would allow his poor delicate wife more butcher's meat, and I don't think it looks well to see the vicarage without a man-servant.'

Albinia finally made her escape, and while wondering whether she should ever visit that house without tingling with irritation with herself and with the inmates, Lucy exclaimed, 'There, you see I was right. Grandmamma and Aunt Maria were surprised when I told them that you said you were an able-bodied woman.'

What would not Albinia have given for Winifred to laugh with her? What to do now she did not know, so she thought it best not to hear, and to ask the way to a carpenter's shop to order some book-shelves.

She was more uncomfortable after she came home, for by the sounds when Mr. Kendal next emerged from his study, she found that he had locked himself in, to guard against further intrusion. And when she

offered to return to him the key of the cellaret, he quietly replied that he should prefer her retaining it,—not a formidable answer in itself, but one which, coupled with the locking of the door, proved to her that she might do anything rather than invade his privacy.

Now Maurice's study was the thoroughfare of the household, the place for all parish preparations unpresentable in the drawing-room, and Albinia was taken by surprise. She grew hot and cold. Had she done anything wrong? Could he care for her if he could lock her out?

'I will not be morbid, I will not be absurd,' said she to herself, though the tears stood in her eyes. 'Some men do not like to be rushed in upon! It may be only habit. It may have been needful here. It is base to take petty offences, and set up doubts.'

And Mr. Kendal's tender manner when they were again together, his gentle way of addressing her, and a sort of shy caress, proved that he was far from all thought of displeasure; nay, he might be repenting of his momentary annoyance, though he said nothing.

Albinia went to inquire after the sick man at her first leisure moment, and while talking kindly to the wife, and hearing her troubles, was surprised at the forlorn rickety state of the building, the broken pavement, damp walls, and door that would not shut, because the frame had sunk out of the perpendicular.

'Can't you ask your landlord to do something to the house?'

'It is of no use, ma'am, Mr. Pettilove never will do nothing. Perhaps if you would be kind enough to say a word to him, ma'am--'

'Mr. Pettilove, the lawyer? I'll try if Mr. Kendal can say anything to him. It really is a shame to leave a house in this condition.'

Thanks were so profuse, that she feared that she was supposed to possess some power of amelioration. The poor woman even insisted on conducting her up a break-neck staircase to see the broken ceiling, whence water often streamed in plentifully from the roof.

Her mind full of designs against the cruel landlord, she speeded up the hill, exhilarated by each step she took into the fresh air, to the garden-gate, which she was just unhasping when the hearty voice of the Vicar was heard behind her. 'Mrs. Kendal! I told Fanny you would come.'

Instead of taking her to the front door he conducted her across a sloping lawn towards a French window open to the bright afternoon sunshine.

'Here she is, here is Mrs. Kendal!' he said, sending his voice before him, as they came in sight of the pretty little drawing-room, where through the gay chintz curtains, she saw the clear fire shining upon half-a-dozen school girls, ranged opposite to a couch. 'Ah!' as he perceived them, 'shall I take her for a turn in the garden while you finish your lesson?'

'One moment, if you please. I did not know it was so late,' and a face as bright as all the rest was turned towards the window.

'Ah! give her her scholars, and she never knows how time passes,' said Mr. Dusautoy. 'But step this way, and I'll show you the best view in Bayford.' He took her up a step or two, to a little turfed mound, where there was a rustic seat commanding the whole exquisite view of river, vale, and woodland, with the church tower rising in the foreground. The wind blew pleasantly, chasing the shadows of the clouds across the open space. Albinia was delighted to feel it fan her brow, and her eager exclamations contented Mr. Dusautoy. 'Yes,' he said, 'it was all Fanny's notion. She planned it all last summer when I took her round the garden. It is wonderful what an eye she has! I only hope when the dry weather comes, that I shall be able to get her up there to enjoy it.'

On coming down they found that Mrs. Dusautoy had dismissed her class, and come out to a low, long-backed sloping garden-seat at the window. She was very little and slight, a mere doll in proportion to her great husband, who could lift her as easily and tenderly as a baby, paying her a sort of reverential deference and fond admiration that rendered them a beautiful sight, in such full, redoubled measure was his fondness repaid by the little, clever, fairy-looking woman, with her playful manner, high spirits, keen wit, and the active habits that even confirmed invalidism could not destroy. She had small deadly white hands, a fair complexion, that varied more than was good for her, pretty, though rather sharp and irregular features, and hazel eyes dancing with merriment, and face and figure at some years above thirty, would have suited a girl of twenty. To see Mr. Dusautoy bringing her footstools, shawls, and cushions, and to remember the accusation of starvation, was almost irresistibly ludicrous.

'Now, John, you had better have been giving Mrs. Kendal a chair all this time.'

'Mrs. Kendal will excuse,' said Mr. Dusautoy, as he brought her a seat.

'Mrs. Kendal has excused,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, bursting into a merry fit of laughter. 'Oh, I never heard anything more charming than your introduction! I beg your pardon, but I laughed last evening till I was worn out, and waked in the night laughing again.'

It was exhilarating to find that any one laughed at Bayford, and Albinia partook of the mirth with all her heart. 'Never was an address more gratifying to me!' she said.

'It was like him! so unlike Bayford! So bold a venture!' continued Mrs. Dusautoy amid peals of laughter.

'What is there to laugh at?' said Mr. Dusautoy, putting on a look between merriment and simplicity. 'What else could I have done? I should have done the same whoever I had met.'

'Ah! now he is afraid of your taking it as too great a compliment! To do him justice I believe he would, but the question is, what answer he would have had.'

'Nobody could have refused--' began Albinia.

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Dusautoy. 'Little you know Bayford.'

'Fanny! Fanny! this is too bad. Madame Belmarche--'

'Would have had nothing but eau sucre! No, John, decidedly you and Simkins fell upon your legs, and you had better take credit for your "admirable sagacity."'

'I like the people,' said Albinia, 'but they never can be well while they live in such a shocking place. It is quite a disgrace to Bayford.'

'It is in a sad state,' said Mr. Dusautoy.

'I know I should like to set my brother upon that Mr. Pettilove, who they say will do nothing,' exclaimed Albinia.

The Vicar was going to have said something, but a look from his wife checked him. Albinia was sorry for it, as she detected a look of suppressed amusement on Mrs. Dusautoy's face. 'I mean to ask Mr. Kendal what can be done,' she said; 'and in the meantime, to descend from what we can't do to what we can. Mr. Dusautoy told me to come to you for orders.'

'And I told Mr. Dusautoy that I should give you none.'

'Oh! that is hard.'

'If you could have heard him! He thought he had got a working lady at last, and he would have had no mercy upon you. One would have imagined that Mr. Kendal had brought you here for his sole behoof!'

'Then I shall look to you, Mr. Dusautoy.'

'No, I believe she is quite right,' he said. 'She says you ought to undertake nothing till you have had time to see what leisure you have to give us.'

'Nay, I have been used to think the parish my business, home my leisure.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'but then you were the womankind of the clergy, now you are a laywoman.'

'I think you have work at home,' said the Vicar.

'Work, but not work enough!' cried Albinia. 'The girls will help me; only tell me what I may do.'

'I say, "what you can,"' said Mrs. Dusautoy. 'You see before you a single-handed man. Only two of the ladies here can be called coadjutors, one being poor little Genevieve Durant, the other the bookseller's daughter, Clarissa Richardson, who made all the rest fly off. All the others do what good they mean to do according to their own sweet will, free and independent women, and we can't have any district system, so I think you can only do what just comes to hand.'

Most heartily did Albinia undertake all that Mrs. Dusautoy would let her husband assign to her.

'Yes, John is a strong temptation,' said the bright little invalid, 'but you must let Mrs. Kendal find out in a month's time whether she has work enough.'

'I could think my wise brother Maurice had been cautioning you,' said Albinia, taking leave as of an old friend, for indeed she felt more at home with Mrs. Dusautoy than with any acquaintance she had made in Bayford.

Albinia told her husband of the state of the cottages, and railed at Mr. Pettilove much to her own satisfaction. Mr. Kendal answered, 'He would see about it,' an answer of which Albinia had yet to learn the import.

CHAPTER IV.

There are some characters so constituted, that of them the old proverb, that Love is blind, is perfectly true; they can see no imperfection in the mind or body of those dear to them. There are others in whom the strongest affections do not destroy clearness of vision, who see their friends on all sides, and perceive their faults and foibles, without loving them the less.

Albinia Kendal was a person of the latter description. It might almost be called her temptation, that her mind beheld all that came before it in a clear, and a humorous light, such as only a disposition overflowing with warm affection and with the energy of kindness, could have prevented from bordering upon censoriousness. She had imagination, but it was not such as to make an illusion of the present, or to interfere with her almost satirical good sense. Happily, religion and its earthly manifestation--charity regulated her, taught her to fear to judge lest she should be judged, strengthened her naturally fond affections, and tempered the keenness that disappointment might soon have turned to sourness. The tongue, the temper, and the judgment knew their own tendencies, and a guard was set over them; and if the sentinel were ever torpid or deceived, repentance paid the penalty.

She had not long seen her husband at home before she had involuntarily completed her view of his character. Nature must have designed him for a fellow of a college, where, apart from all cares, he might have collected fragments of forgotten authors, and immortalized his name by some edition of a Greek Lyric poet, known by four poems and a half, and two-thirds of a line quoted somewhere else. In such a controversy, lightened by perpetually polished poems, by a fair amount of modern literature, select college friendships, and methodical habits, Edmund Kendal would have been in his congenial element, lived and died, and had his portrait hung up as one of the glories of his college.

But he had been carried off from school, before he had done more than prove his unusual capacity. All his connexions were Indian, and his father, who had not seen him since his earliest childhood, offered him no choice but an appointment in the civil service. He had one

stimulus; he had seen Lucy Meadows in the radiant glory of girlish beauty, and had fastened on her all a poet's dreams, deepening and becoming more fervid in the recesses of a reserved heart, which did not easily admit new sensations. That stimulus carried him out cheerfully to India, and quickened his abilities, so that he exerted himself sufficiently to obtain a lucrative situation early in life. He married, and his household must have been on the German system, all the learning on one side, all the domestic cares on the other. The understanding and refinement wanting in his wife, he believed to be wanting in all women. As resident at a small remote native court in India, he saw no female society such as could undeceive him; and subsequently his Bayford life had not raised his standard of womankind. A perfect gentleman, his superiority was his own work, rather than that of station or education, and so he had never missed intercourse with really ladylike or cultivated, female minds, expected little from wife, or daughters, or neighbours; had a few learned friends, but lived within himself. He had acquired a competence too soon, and had the great misfortune of property without duties to present themselves obviously. He had nothing to do but to indulge his naturally indolent scholarly tastes, which, directed as they had been to Eastern languages, had even less chance of sympathy among his neighbours than if they had been classical. Always reserved, and seldom or never meeting with persons who could converse with him, he had lapsed into secluded habits, and learnt to shut himself up in his study and exclude every one, that he might have at least a refuge from the gossip and petty cares that reigned everywhere else. So seldom was anything said worth his attention, that he never listened to what was passing, and had learnt to say 'very well'--'I'll see about it,' without even knowing what was said to him.

But though his wife had been no companion, the illusion had never died away, he had always loved her devotedly, and her loss had shattered all his present rest and comfort; as entirely as the death of his son had taken from him hope and companionship.

What a home it must have been, with Lucy reigning over it in her pert self-sufficiency, Gilbert and Sophy running riot and squabbling, and Maria Meadows coming in on them with her well-meant worries and persecutions!

When taken away from the scene of his troubles, his spirits revived; afraid to encounter his own household alone, he had thought Albinia the cure for everything. But at home, habit and association had proved too strong for her presence--the grief, which he had tried to leave behind, had waited ready to meet him on the threshold, and the very sense that it was a melancholy welcome added to his depression, and made him less able to exert himself. The old sorrows haunted the walls of the house, and above all the study, and tarried not in seizing on their unresisting victim. Melancholy was in his nature, his indolence gave it force, and his habits were almost ineffaceable, and they were habits of quiet selfishness, formed by a resolute, though inert will, and fostered by an adoring wife. A youth spent in India had not given him ideas of responsibilities beyond his own family, and his principles, though sound, had not expanded the views of duty with which he had started in life.

It was a positive pleasure to Albinia to discover that there had been an inefficient clergyman at Bayford before Mr. Dusautoy, and to know

that during half the time that the present vicar had held the living, Mr. Kendal had been absent, so that his influence had had no time to work. She began to understand her line of action. It must be her effort, in all loving patience and gentleness, to raise her husband's spirits and rouse his faculties; to make his powers available for the good of his fellow-creatures, to make him an active and happy man, and to draw him and his children together. This was truly a task to make her heart throb high with hope and energy. Strong and brave was that young heart, and not self-confident--the difficulty made her only the more hopeful, because she saw it was her duty. She was secure of her influence with him. If he did exclude her from his study, he left her supreme elsewhere, and though she would have given the world that their sovereignty might be a joint one _everywhere_, still she allowed much for the morbid inveterate habit of dreading disturbance. When he began by silence and not listening, she could always rouse him, and give him animation, and he was so much surprised and pleased whenever she entered into any of his pursuits, that she had full hope of drawing him out.

One day when the fog, instead of clearing off had turned to violent rain, Albinia had been out on parish work, and afterwards enlivening old Mrs. Meadows by dutifully spending an hour with her, while Maria was nursing a nervous headache--she had been subject to headaches ever since...an ominous sigh supplied the rest.

But all the effect of Albinia's bright kindness was undone, when the grandmother learnt that Gilbert was gone to his tutor, and would have to come home in the rain, and she gave such an account of his exceeding delicacy, that Albinia became alarmed, and set off at once that she might consult his father about sending for him.

Her opening of the hall door was answered by Mr. Kendal emerging from his study. He was looking restless and anxious, came to meet her, and uncloaked her, while he affectionately scolded her for being so venturesome. She told him where she had been, and he smiled, saying, 'You are a busy spirit! But you must not be too imprudent.'

'Oh, nothing hurts me. It is poor Gilbert that I am anxious about.'

'So am I. Gilbert has not a constitution fit for exposure. I wish he were come home.'

'Could we not send for him? Suppose we sent a fly.'

He was consenting with a pleased smile, when the door opened, and there stood the dripping Gilbert, completely wet through, pale and chilled, with his hair plastered down, and his coat stuck all over with the horse's short hair.

'You must go to bed at once, Gilbert,' said his father. 'Are you cold?'

'Very. It was such a horrid driving wind, and I rode so fast,' said Gilbert; violently shivering, as they helped to pull him out of his great coat; he put his hand to his mouth, and said that his face ached. Mr. Kendal was very anxious, and Albinia hurried the boy up to bed, and meantime ordered quickly a basin of the soup preparing for dinner, warmed some worsted socks at the fire, and ran upstairs with them.

He seemed to have no substance in him; he had hardly had energy to undress himself, and she found him with his face hidden on the pillow, shivering audibly, and actually crying. She was aghast.

The boys with whom she had been brought up, would never have given way so entirely without resistance; but between laughing, cheering, scolding, covering him up close, and rubbing his hands with her own, she comforted him, so that he could be grateful and cheerful when his father himself came up with the soup. Albinia noticed a sort of shudder pass over Mr. Kendal as he entered, and he stood close by Gilbert, turning his back on everything else, while he watched the boy eat the soup, as if restored by every spoonful. 'That was a good thought,' was his comment to his wife, and the look of gratitude brought a flush of pleasure into her cheek.

Of all the dinners, this was the most pleasant; he was more gentle and affectionate, and she made him tell her about the Persian poets, and promise to show her some specimens of the Rose Garden of Saadi--she had never before been so near having his pursuits opened to her.

'What a favourite Gilbert is!' Lucy said to Sophia, as Albinia lighted a candle and went up to his room.

'He makes such a fuss,' said Sophy. 'What is there in being wet through to cry about?'

Albinia heard a little shuffle as she opened the door, and Gilbert pushed a book under his pillow. She asked him what he had been reading. 'Oh,' he said, 'he had not been doing it long, for the flickering of the candle hurt his eyes.'

'Yes, you had better not,' said Albinia, moving the flaring light to a less draughty part of the dingy whitewashed attic. 'Or shall I read to you?'

'Are you come to stay with me?' cried the boy, raising himself up to look after her, as she moved about the room and stood looking from the window over the trees at the water meadows, now flooded into a lake, and lighted by the beams of a young moon.

'I can stay till your father is ready for tea,' said Albinia, coming nearer. 'Let me see whether your hands are hot.'

She found her own hand suddenly clasped, and pressed to his lips, and then, as if ashamed, he turned his face away; nor would she betray her pleasure in it, but merely said, 'Shall I go on with your book!'

'No,' said he, wearily turning his reddened cheek to the other side. 'I only took it because it is so horrid lying here thinking.'

'I am very sorry to hear it. Do you know, Gibbie, that it is said there is nothing more lamentable than for a man not to like to have his own thoughts for his company,' said she, gaily.

'Ah! but--!' said Gilbert. 'If I lie here alone, I'm always looking out there,' and he pointed to the opposite recess. She looked, but saw nothing. 'Don't you know?' he said.

'Edmund?' she asked.

He grasped her hands in both his own. 'Aye! Ned used to sleep there. I always look for him there.'

'Do you mean that you would rather have another room? I would manage it directly.'

'O no, thank you, I like it for some things. Take the candle--look by the shutter--cut out in the wood.'

The boys' scoring of 'E. & G. K.,' was visible there.

'Papa has taken all be could of Edmund's,' said Gilbert, 'but he could not take that! No, I would not have any other room if you were to give me the best in the house.'

'I am sure not! But, my dear, considering what Edmund was, surely they should be gentle, happy thoughts that the room should give you.'

He shuddered, and presently said, 'Do you know what?' and paused; then continued, with an effort, getting tight hold of her hand, 'Just before Edmund died--he lay out there--I lay here--he sat up all white in bed, and he called out, clear and loud, "Mamma, Gilbert"--I saw him--and then--he was dead! And you know mamma did die--and I'm sure I shall!' He had worked himself into a trembling fit, hid his face and sobbed.

'But you have not died of the fever.'

'Yes--but I know it means that I shall die young! I am sure it does! It was a call! I heard Nurse say it was a call!'

What was to be done with such a superstition? Albinia did not think it would be right to argue it away. It might be in truth a warning to him to guard his ways--a voice from the twin-brother, to be with him through life. She knelt down by him, and kissed his forehead.

'Dear Gilbert,' she said, 'we all shall die.'

'Yes, but I shall die young.'

'And if you should. Those are happy who die young. How much pain your baby-brother and sisters have missed! How happy Edmund is now!'

'Then you really think it meant that I shall' he cried, tremblingly. 'O don't! I can't die!'

'Your brother called on what he loved best,' said Albinia. 'It may mean nothing. Or rather, it may mean that your dear twin-brother is watching for you, I am sure he is, to have you with him, for what makes your mortal life, however long, seem as nothing. It was a call to you to be as pure on earth as he is in heaven. O Gilbert, how good you should be!'

Gilbert did not know whether it frightened him or soothed him to see his superstition treated with respect--neither denied, nor reasoned away. But the ghastliness was not in the mere fear that death might

not be far off.

The pillow had turned a little on one side--Albinia tried to smooth it--the corner of a book peeped out. It was a translation of *The Three Musketeers*, one of the worst and most fascinating of Dumas' romances.

'You wont tell papa!' cried Gilbert, raising himself, in far more real and present terror than he had previously shown.

'How did you get it? Whose is it?'

'It is my own. I bought it at Richardson's. It is very funny. But you wont tell papa? I never was told not; indeed I was not.'

'Now, Gilbert dear, will you tell me a few things? I do only wish what is good for you. Why don't you wish that papa should hear of this book?'

Gilbert writhed himself.

'You know he would not like it?'

'Then why did you take to reading it?'

'Oh!' cried the boy, 'if you only did know how stupid and how miserable it has been! More than half myself gone, and Sophy always glum, and Lucy always plaguing, and Aunt Maria always being a torment, you would not wonder at one's doing anything to forget it!'

'Yes, but why do what you knew to be wrong?'

'Nobody told me not.'

'Disobedience to the spirit, then, if not to the letter. It was not the way to be happier, my poor boy, nor nearer to your brother and mother.'

'Things didn't use to be stupid when Ned was there!' sobbed Gilbert, bursting into a fresh flood of tears.

'Ah! Gilbert, I grieved most of all for you when first I heard your story, before I thought I should ever have anything to do with you,' said Albinia, hanging over him fondly. 'I always thought it must be so forlorn to be a twin left solitary. But it is sadder still than I knew, if grief has made you put yourself farther from him instead of nearer.'

'I shall be good again now that I have you,' said Gilbert, as he looked up into that sweet face.

'And you will begin by making a free confession to your father, and giving up the book.'

'I don't see what I have to confess. He would be so angry, and he never told me not. Oh! I cannot tell him.'

She felt that this was not the right way to begin a reformation, and

yet she feared to press the point, knowing that the one was thought severe, the other timid.

'At least you will give up the book,' she said.

'O dear! if you would let me see whether d'Artagnan got to England. I must know that! I'm sure there can't be any harm in that. Do you know what it is about?'

'Yes, I do. My brother got it by some mistake among some French books. He read some of the droll unobjectionable parts to my sister and me, but the rest was so bad, that he threw it into the fire.'

'Then you think it funny?'

'To be sure I do.'

'Do you remember the three duels all at once, and the three valets? Oh! what fun it is. But do let me see if d'Artagnan got the diamonds.'

'Yes, he did. But will this satisfy you, Gilbert? You know there are some exciting pleasures that we must turn our backs on resolutely. I think this book is one of them. Now you will let me take it? I will tell your father about it in private, and he cannot blame you. Then, if he will give his consent, whenever you can come home early, come to my dressing-room, out of your sisters' way, and I will read to you the innocent part, so as to get the story out of your brain.'

'Very well,' said Gilbert, slowly. 'Yes, if you will not let papa be angry with me. And, oh dear! must you go?'

'I think you had better dress yourself and come down to tea. There is nothing the matter with you now, is there?'

He was delighted with the suggestion, and promised to come directly; and Albinia carried off her prize, exceedingly hopeful and puzzled, and wondering whether her compromise had been a right one, or a mere tampering with temptation--delighted with the confidence and affection bestowed on her so freely, but awe-struck by the impression which the boy had avowed, and marvelling how it should be treated, so as to render it a blessed and salutary restraint, rather than the dim superstitious terror that it was at present. At least there was hope of influencing him, his heart was affectionate, his will on the side of right, and in consideration of feeble health and timid character, she would overlook the fact that he had not made one voluntary open confession, and that the partial renunciation had been wrung from him as a choice of evils. She could only feel how much he was to be pitied, and how he responded to her affection.

She was crossing the hall next day, when she heard a confusion of tongues through the open door of the dining-room, and above all, Gilbert's. 'Well, I say there are but two ladies in Bayford. One is Mrs. Kendal, and the other is Genevieve Durant!'

'A dancing-master's daughter!' Lucy's scornful tone was unmistakeable, and so was the ensuing high-pitched querulous voice, 'Well, to be sure, Gilbert might be a little more--a little more

civil. Not that I've a word to say against--against your--your mamma. Oh, no!--glad to see--but Gilbert might be more civil.'

'I think so indeed,' said Albinia. 'Good morning, Miss Meadows. You see Gilbert has come home quite alive enough for mischief.'

'Ah! I thought I might be excused. Mamma was so uneasy--though I know you don't admit visitors--my just coming to see--We've been always so anxious about Gilbert. Gibbie dear, where is that flannel I gave you for your throat?'

She advanced to put her finger within his neck-tie and feel for it. Gilbert stuck his chin down, and snapped with his teeth like a gin. Lucy exclaimed, 'Now, Gilbert, I know mamma will say that is wrong.'

'Ah! we are used to Gilbert's tricks. Always bear with a boy's antics,' said Miss Meadows, preventing whatever she thought was coming out of Mrs. Kendal's mouth. Albinia took the unwise step of laughing, for her sympathies were decidedly with resistance both to flannels and to the insertion of that hooked finger.

'Mr. Bowles has always said it was a case for great care. Flannel next the skin--no exposure,' continued Miss Meadows, tartly. 'I am sure--I know I am the last person to wish to interfere--but so delicate--You'll excuse--but my mother was uneasy; and people who go out in all weathers--'

'I hope Mrs. Meadows had my note this morning.'

'O yes! I am perfectly aware. Thank you. Yes, I know the rule, but you'll excuse--My mother was still anxious--I know you exclude visitors in lesson-time. I'm going. Only grandmamma would be glad--not that she wishes to interfere--but if Gilbert had on his piece of flannel--'

'Have you, Gilbert?' said Albinia, becoming tormented.

'I have been flannel all over all my life,' said Gilbert, sulkily, 'one bit more or less can make no odds.'

'Then you have not that piece?' said Albinia.

'Oh, my dear! Think of that! New Saxony! I begged it of Mr. Holland. A new remnant--pink list, and all! I said it was just what I wanted for Master Gilbert. Mr. Holland is always a civil, feeling man. New Saxony--three shillings the yard--and trimmed with blue sarsenet! Where is it, Gilbert?'

'In a soup dish, with a crop of mustard and cress on it,' said Gilbert, with a wicked wink at Albinia, who was unable to resist joining in the girls' shout of laughing, but she became alarmed when she found that poor Miss Meadows was very near crying, and that her incoherency became so lachrymose as to be utterly incomprehensible.

Lucy, ashamed of her laughter, solemnly declared that it was very wrong of Gilbert, and she hoped he would not suffer from it, and Albinia, trying to become grave, judicial, and conciliatory, contrived to pronounce that it was very silly to leave anything off in an east wind, and hoping to put an end to the matter, asked Aunt

Maria to sit down, and judge how they went on with their lessons.

O no, she could not interrupt. Her mother would want her. She knew Mrs. Kendal never admitted visitors. She had no doubt she was quite right. She hoped it would be understood. She would not intrude. In fact, she could neither go nor stay. She would not resume her seat, nor let anything go on, and it was full twenty minutes before a series of little vibrating motions and fragmentary phrases had borne her out of the house.

'Well!' cried Gilbert, 'I hoped Aunt Maria had left off coming down upon us.'

'O, mamma!' exclaimed Lucy, 'you never sent your love to grandmamma.'

'Depend upon it she was waiting for that,' said Gilbert.

'I'm sure I wish I had known it,' said Albinia, not in the most judicious manner. 'Half-past eleven!'

'Aunt Maria says she can't think how you can find time for church when you can't see visitors in the morning,' said Lucy. 'And oh! dear mamma, grandmamma says gravy soup was enough to throw Gilbert into a fever.'

'At any rate, it did not,' said Albinia.

'Oh! and, dear mamma, Mrs. Osborn is so hurt that you called on Mrs. Dusautoy before returning her visit; and Aunt Maria says if you don't call to-day you will never get over it, and she says that--'

'What business has Mrs. Osborn to ask whom I called on?' exclaimed Albinia, impatiently.

'Because Mrs. Osborn is the leading lady in the town,' said Lucy. 'She told Miss Goldsmith that she had no notion of not being respected.'

'And she can't bear the Dusautoys. She left off subscribing to anything when they came; and he behaved very ill to the Admiral and everybody at a vestry-meeting.'

'I shall ask your papa before I am in any hurry to call on the Osborns!' cried Albinia. 'I have no desire to be intimate with people who treat their clergyman in that way.'

'But Mrs. Osborn is quite the leader!' exclaimed Lucy. 'They keep the best society here. So many families in the county come and call on them.'

'Very likely--'

'Ah! Mrs. Osborn told Aunt Maria that as the Nugents called on you, and you had such connexions, she supposed you would be high. But you wont make me separate from Lizzie, will you? I suppose Miss Nugent is a fashionable young lady.'

'Miss Nugent is five years old. Don't let us have any more of this nonsense.'

'But you wont part me from Lizzie Osborn,' said Lucy, hanging her head pathetically on one side.

'I shall talk to your father. He said, the other day, he did not wish you to be so much with her.'

Lucy melted into tears, and Albinia was conscious of having been first indiscreet and then sharp, hurt at the comments, feeling injured by Lucy's evident habit of reporting whatever she said, and at the failure of the attempt to please Mrs. Meadows. She was so uneasy about the Osborn question, that she waylaid Mr. Kendal on his return from riding, and laid it before him.

'My dear Albinia,' he said, as if he would fain have avoided the appeal, 'you must manage your own visiting affairs your own way. I do not wish to offend my neighbours, nor would I desire to be very intimate with any one. I suppose you must pay them ordinary civility, and you know what that amounts to. As to the leadership in society here, she is a noisy woman, full of pretension, and thus always arrogates the distinction to herself. Your claims will establish themselves.'

'Oh, you don't imagine me thinking of that!' cried Albinia, laughing. 'I meant their behaving ill to Mr. Dusautoy.'

'I know nothing about that. Mr. Dusautoy once called to ask for my support for a vestry meeting, but I make it a rule never to meddle with parish skirmishes. I believe there was a very unbecoming scene, and that Mr. Dusautoy was in the minority.'

'Ah, Edmund, next time you'll see if a parson's sister can sit quietly by to see the parson beaten!'

He smiled, and moved towards his study.

'Then I am to be civil?'

'Certainly.'

'But is it necessary to call to-day?'

'I should suppose not;' and there he was, shut up in his den. Albinia went back, between laughing and vexation, and Lucy looked up from her exercise to say, 'Does papa say you must call on the Osborns?'

It was undignified! She bit her lip, and felt her false position, as with a quiver of the voice she replied, 'We shall make nothing but mischief if we talk now. Go on with your business.'

The sharp, curious eyes did not take themselves off her face. She leant over Sophy, who was copying a house, told her the lines were slanting, took the pencil from her hand, and tried to correct them, but found herself making them over-black, and shaky. She had not seen such a line since the days of her childhood's ill-temper. She walked to the fireplace and said, 'I am going to call on Mrs. Osborn to-day. Not that your father desires it, but because I have been indulging in a wrong feeling.'

'I'm sure you needn't,' cried Gilbert. 'It is very impertinent of Mrs. Osborn. Why, if he is an admiral, she was the daughter of an old lieutenant of the Marines, and you are General Sir Maurice Ferrars' first cousin.'

'Hush, hush, Gilbert!' said Albinia, blushing and distressed. 'Mrs. Osborn's standing in the place entitles her to all attention. I was thinking of nothing of the kind. It was because I gave way to a wrong feeling that I mean to go this afternoon.'

On the Sunday, when Mr. and Mrs. Kendal went to pay their weekly visit to Mrs. Meadows, they found the old lady taking a turn in the garden. And as they were passing by the screen of laurels, Gilbert's voice was heard very loud, 'That's too bad, Lucy! Grandmamma, don't believe one word of it!'

'Gilbert, you--you are, I'm sure, very rude to your sister.'

'I'll not stand to hear false stories of Mrs. Kendal!'

'What is all this?' said Mr. Kendal, suddenly appearing, and discovering Gilbert pirouetting with indignation before Lucy.

Miss Meadows burst out with a shower of half sentences, grandmamma begged that no notice might be taken of the children's nonsense, Lucy put on an air of injured innocence, and Gilbert was beginning to speak, but his father put him aside, saying, 'Tell me what has happened, Sophia. From you I am certain of hearing the exact truth.'

'Only,' growled Sophy, in her hoarse boy's voice, 'Lucy said mamma said she would not call on Mrs. Osborn unless you ordered her, and when you did, she cried and flew into a tremendous passion.'

'Sophy, what a story,' exclaimed Lucy, but Gilbert was ready to corroborate his younger sister's report.

'You know Lucy too well to attach any importance to her misrepresentations,' said Mr. Kendal, turning to Mrs. Meadows, 'but I know not what amends she can make for this most unprovoked slander. Speak, Lucy, have you no apology to make?'

For Lucy, in self-defence, had begun to cry, and her grandmother seemed much disposed to do the same. Miss Meadows had tears in her eyes, and incoherencies on her lips. The distress drove away all Albinia's inclination to laugh, and clasping her two hands over her husband's arm, she said, 'Don't, Edmund, it is only a misunderstanding of what really happened. I did have a silly fit, you know, so it is my fault.'

'I cannot forgive for you as you do for yourself,' said Mr. Kendal, with a look that was precious to her, though it might have given a pang to the Meadowses. 'I did not imagine that my daughter could be so lost to the sense of your kindness and forbearance. Have you nothing to say, Lucy?'

'Poor child! she cannot speak,' said her grandmother. 'You see she is very sorry, and Mrs. Kendal is too kind to wish to say any more about it.'

'Go home at once, Lucy,' said her father. 'Perhaps solitude may bring you to a better state of feeling. Go!'

Direct resistance to Mr. Kendal was never thought of, and Lucy turned to go. Her aunt chose to accompany her, and though this was a decided relief to the company she left, it was not likely to be the best thing for the young lady herself.

Mr. Kendal gave his arm to Mrs. Meadows, saying gravely that Lucy must not be encouraged in her habit of gossiping and inaccuracy. Mrs. Meadows quite agreed with him, it was a very bad habit for a girl, she was very sorry for it, she wished she could have attended to the dear children better, but she was sure dear Mrs. Kendal would make them everything desirable. She only hoped that she would remember their disadvantages, have patience, and not recollect this against poor Lucy.

The warm indignation and championship of her husband and his son were what Albinia chiefly wished to recollect; but it was impossible to free herself from a sense of pain and injury in the knowledge that she lived with a spy who would exaggerate and colour every careless word.

Mr. Kendal returned to the subject as they walked home.

'I hope you will talk seriously to Lucy about her intolerable gossiping,' he said. 'There is no safety in mentioning any subject before her; and Maria Meadows makes her worse. Some stop must be put to it.'

'I should like to wait till next time,' said Albinia.

'What do you mean?'

'Because this is too personal to myself.'

'Nay, your own candour is an example to which Lucy can hardly be insensible. Besides, it is a nuisance which must be abated.'

Albinia could not help thinking that he suffered from it as little as most people, and wondering whether it were this which had taught him silence.

They met Miss Meadows at their own gate, and she told them that dear Lucy was very sorry, and she hoped they would take no more notice of a little nonsense that could do no one any harm; she would be more on her guard next time.

Mr. Kendal made no answer. Albinia ventured to ask him whether it would not be better to leave it, since her aunt had talked to her.

'No,' he said; 'Maria has no influence whatever with the children. She frets them by using too many words about everything. One quiet remonstrance from you would have far more effect.'

Albinia called the culprit and tried to reason with her. Lucy tried at first to battle it off by saying that she had made a mistake, and Aunt Maria had said that she should hear no more about it. 'But, my

dear, I am afraid you must hear more. It is not that I am hurt, but your papa has desired me to talk to you. You would be frightened to hear what he says.'

Lucy chose to hear, and seemed somewhat struck, but she was sure that she meant no harm; and she had a great deal to say for herself, so voluble and so inconsequent, that argument was breath spent in vain; and Albinia was obliged to wind up, as an ultimatum, with warning her, that till she should prove herself trustworthy, nothing interesting would be talked of before her.

The atmosphere of gossip certainly had done its part in cultivating Mr. Kendal's talent for silence. When Albinia had him all to herself, he was like another person, and the long drives to return visits in the country were thoroughly enjoyable. So, too, were the walks home from the dinner parties in the town, when the husband and wife lingered in the starlight or moonlight, and felt that the weary gaiety of the constrained evening was made up for.

Great was the offence they gave by not taking out the carriage!

It was disrespect to Bayford, and one of the airs of which Mrs. Kendal was accused. As granddaughter of a Baron, daughter of one General Officer and sister of another, and presented at Court, the Bayford ladies were prepared to consider her a fine lady, and when they found her peculiarly simple, were the more aggrieved, as if her contempt were ironically veiled. Her walks, her dress, her intercourse with the clergy, were all airs, and Lucy spared her none of the remarks. Albinia might say, 'Don't tell me all Aunt Maria says,' but it was impossible not to listen; and whether in mirth or vexation, she was sure to be harmed by what she heard.

And yet, except for the tale-bearing, Lucy was really giving less trouble than her sister, she was quick, observant, and obliging, and under Albinia's example, the more salient vulgarities of speech and manner were falling off. There had seldom been any collision, since it had become evident that Mrs. Kendal could and would hold her own; and that her address and air, even while criticised, were regarded as something superior, so that it was a distinction to belong to her. How many of poor Albinia's so-called airs should justly have been laid to Lucy's account?

On the other hand, Sophy would attend to a word from her father, where she had obstinately opposed her step-mother's wishes, making her obedience marked, as if for the very purpose of enforcing the contrast. It was a character that Albinia could not as yet fathom. In all occupations and amusements, Sophy followed the lead of her elder sister, and in her lessons, her sole object seemed to be to get things done with as little trouble as possible, and especially without setting her mind to work, and yet in the very effort to escape diligence or exertion, she sometimes showed signs of so much ability as to excite a longing desire to know of what she would be capable when once aroused and interested; but the surly, ungracious temper rendered this apparently impossible, and whatever Albinia attempted, was sure, as if for the very reason that it came from her, to be answered with a redoubling of the growl of that odd hoarse voice.

On Lucy's birthday, there was an afternoon party of her young

friends, including Miss Durant. Albinia, who, among the girlhood of Fairmead and its neighbourhood, had been so acceptable a playmate, that her marriage had caused the outcry that 'there would never be any fun again without Miss Ferrars,' came out on the lawn with the girls, in hopes of setting them to enjoy themselves. But they looked at her almost suspiciously, retained their cold, stiff, company manners, and drew apart into giggling knots. She relieved them of her presence, and sitting by the window, watched Genevieve walking up and down alone, as if no one cared to join her. Presently Lucy and Lizzie Osborn spoke to her, and she went in. Albinia went to meet her in the hall; she coloured and said, 'She was only come to fetch Miss Osborn's cloak.'

Albinia saw her disposing it over Lizzie's shoulders, and then running in again. This time it was for Miss Louisa's cloak, and a third time for Miss Drury's shawl, which Albinia chose to take out herself, and encountering Sophia, said, 'Next time, you had better run on errands yourself instead of sending your guests.'

Sophy gave a black look, and she retreated, but presently the groups coalesced, and Maria Drury and Sophy ran out to call Genevieve into the midst. Albinia hoped they were going to play, but soon she beheld Genevieve trying to draw back, but evidently imprisoned, there was an echo of a laugh that she did not like; the younger girls were skipping up in the victim's face in a rude way; she hastily turned round as in indignation, one hand raised to her eyes, but it was instantly snatched down by Maria Drury, and the pitiless ring closed in. Albinia sprang to her feet, exclaiming aloud, 'They are teasing her!' and rushed into the garden, hearing on her way, 'No, we won't let you go!--you shall tell us--you shall promise to show us--my papa is a magistrate, you know--he'll come and search--Jenny, you shall tell!'

'Come with me, Genevieve,' said Albinia, standing in the midst of the tormentors, and launching a look of wrath around her, as she saw tears in the young girl's eyes, and taking her hand, found it trembling with agitation. Fondling it with both her own, she led Genevieve away, turning her back upon Lucy and her, 'We were only--'

The poor girl shook more and more, and when they reached the shelter of the house, gave way to a tightened, oppressed sob, and at the first kind words a shower of tears followed, and she took Albinia's hand, and clasped it to her breast in a manner embarrassing to English feelings, though perfectly natural and sincere in her. 'Ah! si bonne! si bonne! pardonnez-moi, Madame!' she exclaimed, sobbing, and probably not knowing that she was speaking French; 'but, oh, Madame, you will tell me! Is it true--can he?'

'Can who? What do you mean, my dear?'

'The Admiral,' said Genevieve, looking about frightened, and sinking her voice to a whisper. 'Miss Louisa said so, that he could send and search--'

'Search for what, my dear?'

'For my poor little secret. Ah, Madame, assuredly I may tell you. It is but a French Bible, it belonged to my martyred ancestor, Francois Durant, who perished at the St. Barthelemi--it is stained

with his blood--it has been handed on, from one to the other--it was all that Jacques Durant rescued when he fled from the Dragonnades--it was given to me by my own dear father on his death-bed, with a charge to keep it from my grandmother, and not to speak of it--but to guard it as my greatest treasure. And now--Oh, I am not disobeying him,' cried Genevieve, with a fresh burst of tears. 'You can feel for me, Madame, you can counsel me. Can the magistrates come and search, unless I confess to those young ladies?'

'Most decidedly not,' said Albinia. 'Set your mind at rest, my poor child; whoever threatened you played you a most base, cruel trick.'

'Ah, do not be angry with them, Madame; no doubt they were in sport. They could not know how precious that treasure was to me, and they will say much in their gaiety of heart.'

'I do not like such gaiety,' said Albinia. 'What, they wished to make you confess your secret?'

'Yes. They had learnt by some means that I keep one of my drawers locked, and they had figured to themselves that in it was some relic of my Huguenot ancestors. They thought it was some instrument of death, and they said that unless I would tell them the whole, the Admiral had the right of search, and, oh! it was foolish of me to believe them for a moment, but I only thought that the fright would, kill my grandmother. Oh, you were so good, Madame, I shall never forget; no, not to the end of my life, how you rescued me!'

'We did not bring you here to be teased,' said Albinia, caressing her. 'I should like to ask your pardon for what they have made you undergo.'

'Ah, Madame!' said Genevieve, smiling, 'it is nothing. I am well used to the like, and I heed it little, except when it falls on such subjects as these.'

She was easily drawn into telling the full history of her treasure, as she had learnt from her father's lips, the Huguenot shot down by the persecutors, and the son who had fled into the mountains and returned to bury the corpse, and take the prized, blood-stained Bible from the breast; the escapes and dangers of the two next generations; the few succeeding days of peace; and, finally, the Dragonnade, when the children had been snatched from the Durant family, and the father and mother had been driven at length to fly in utter destitution, and had made their way to England in a wretched, unprovisioned open boat. The child for whose sake they fled, was the only one rescued from the hands of these enemies, and the tradition of their sufferings had been handed on with the faithfully preserved relic, down to the slender girl, their sole descendant, and who in early childhood had drunk in the tale from the lips of her father. The child of the persecutors and of the persecuted, Genevieve Durant did indeed represent strangely the history of her ancestral country; and as Albinia said to her, surely it might be hoped that the faith in which she had been bred up, united what was true and sound in the religion of both Reformed and Romanist.

The words made the brown cheek glow. 'Ah, Madame, did I not say I could talk with you? You, who do not think me a heretic, as my dear grandmother's friends do, and who yet can respect my grandmother's

Church.'

Assuredly little Genevieve was one of the most interesting and engaging persons that Albinia had ever met, and she listened earnestly to her artless history, and pretty enthusiasms, and the story which she could not tell without tears, of her father's care, when the reward of her good behaviour had been the reading one verse in the quaint black letter of the old French Bible.

The conversation lasted till Gilbert made his appearance, and Albinia was glad to find that his greeting to Genevieve was cordial and affectionate, and free from all that was unpleasant in his sisters' manner, and he joined himself to their company when Albinia proposed a walk along the broad causeway through the meadows. It was one of the pleasantest walks that she had taken at Bayford, with both her companions so bright and merry, and the scene around in all the beauty of spring. Gilbert, with the courtesy that Albinia's very presence had infused into him, gathered a pretty wild bouquet for each, and Albinia talked of cowslip-balls, and found that neither Gilbert nor Genevieve had ever seen one; then she pitied them, and owned that she did not know how to get through a spring without one; and Gilbert having of course a pocketful of string, a delicious ball was constructed, over which Genevieve went into an inexpressible ecstasy.

All the evening, Gilbert devoted himself to Genevieve, though more than one of the others tried to attract him, playing off the follies of more advanced girlhood, to the vexation of Albinia, who could not bear to see him the centre of attention to silly girls, when he ought to have been finding his level among boys.

'Gilbert makes himself so ridiculous about Jenny Durant,' said his sisters, when he insisted on escorting her home, and thus they brought on themselves Albinia's pent-up indignation at their usage of their guest. Lucy argued in unsatisfactory self-defence, but Sophy, when shown how ungenerous her conduct had been, crimsoned deeply, and though uttering no word of apology, wore a look that gave her step-mother for the first time a hope that her sullenness might not be so much from want of compunction, as from want of power to express it.

Oh! for a consultation with her brother. But he and his wife were taking a holiday among their kindred in Ireland, and for once Albinia could have echoed the aunts' lamentation that Winifred had so many relations!

CHAPTER V.

Albinia needed patience to keep alive hope and energy, for a sore disappointment awaited her. Whatever had been her annoyances with the girls, she had always been on happy and comfortable terms with Gilbert, he had responded to her advances, accommodated himself to her wishes, adopted her tastes, and returned her affection. She had early perceived that his father and sisters looked on him as the naughty one of the family, but when she saw Lucy's fretting

interference, and, Sophia's wrangling contempt, she did not wonder that an unjust degree of blame had often fallen to his share; and under her management, he scarcely ever gave cause for complaint. That he was evidently happier and better for her presence, was compensation for many a vexation; she loved him with all her heart, made fun with him, told legends of the freaks of her brother Maurice and cousin Fred, and grudged no trouble for his pleasure.

As long as The Three Musketeers lasted, he had come constantly to her dressing-room, and afterwards she promised to find other pleasant reading; but after such excitement, it was not easy to find anything that did not appear dry. As the daughter of a Peninsular man, she thought nothing so charming as the Subaltern, and Gilbert seemed to enjoy it; but by the time he had heard all her oral traditions of the war by way of notes, his attendance began to slacken; he stayed out later, and always brought excuses--Mr. Salsted had kept him, he had been with a fellow, or his pony had lost a shoe. Albinia did not care to question, the evenings were light and warm, and the one thing she desired for him was manly exercise: she thought it much better for him to be at play with his fellow-pupils, and she could not regret the gain of another hour to her hurried day.

One morning, however, Mr. Kendal called her, and his look was so grave and perturbed, that she hardly waited till the door was shut to ask in terror, what could be the matter.

'Nothing to alarm you,' he said. 'It is only that I am vexed about Gilbert. I have reason to fear that he is deceiving us again; and I want you to help us to recollect on which days he should have been at Tremblam. My dear, do not look so pale!'

For Albinia had turned quite white at hearing that the boy, on whom she had fixed her warm affection, had been carrying on a course of falsehood; but a moment's hope restored her. 'I did keep him at home on Tuesday,' she said, 'it was so very hot, and he had a headache. I thought I might. You told me not to send him on doubtful days.'

'I hope you may be able to make out that it is right,' said Mr. Kendal, 'but I am afraid that Mr. Salsted has too much cause of complaint. It is the old story!'

And so indeed it proved, when Albinia heard what the tutor had come to say. The boy was seldom in time, often altogether missing, excusing himself by saying he was kept at home by fears of the weather; but Mr. Salsted was certain that his father could not know how he disposed of his time, namely, in a low style of sporting with young Tritton, the son of a rich farmer or half-gentleman, who was the pest of Mr. Salsted's parish. Ill-learnt, slurred-over lessons, with lame excuses, were nothing as compared with this, and the amount of petty deceit, subterfuge, and falsehood, was frightful, especially when Albinia recollected the tone of thought which the boy had seemed to be catching from her. Unused to duplicity, except from mere ignorant, unmanageable school-children, she was excessively shocked, and felt as if he must be utterly lost to all good, and had been acting a lie from first to last. After the conviction had broken on her, she hardly spoke, while Mr. Kendal was promising to talk to his son, threaten him with severe punishment, and keep a strict account of his comings and goings, to be compared weekly with Mr. Salsted's notes of his arrival. This settled, the tutor departed, and no

sooner was he gone, than Albinia, hiding her face in her hands, shed tears of bitter grief and disappointment. 'My dearest,' said her husband, fondly, 'you must not let my boy's doings grieve you in this manner. You have been doing your utmost for him, if any one could do him good, it would be you.'

'O no, surely I must have made some dreadful mistake, to have promoted such faults.'

'No, I have long known him not to be trustworthy. It is an evil of long standing.'

'Was it always so?'

'I cannot tell,' said he, sitting down beside her, and shading his brow with one hand; 'I have only been aware of it since he has been left alone. When the twins were together, they were led by one soul of truth and generosity. What this poor fellow was separately no one could know, while he had his brother to guide and shield him. The first time I noticed the evil was when we were recovering. Gilbert and Sophia were left together, and in one of their quarrels injured some papers of mine. I was very weak, and had little power of self-control; I believe I terrified him too much. There was absolute falsehood, and the truth was only known by Sophia's coming forward and confessing the whole. It was ill managed. I was not equal to dealing with him, and whether the mischief began then or earlier, it has gone on ever since, breaking out every now and then. I had hoped that with your care--But oh! how different it would have been with his brother! Albinia, what would I not give that you had but seen him! Not a fault was there; not a moment's grief did he give us, till--O what an overthrow of hope! And he gave way to an excess of grief that quite appalled her, and made her feel herself powerless to comfort. She only ventured a few words of peace and hope; but the contrast between the brothers, was just then keen agony, and he could not help exclaiming how strange it was, that Edmund should be the one to be taken.

'Nay,' he said, 'was not he ripe for better things? May not poor Gilbert have been spared that longer life may train him to be like his brother?'

'He never will be like him,' cried Mr. Kendal. 'No! no! The difference is evident in the very countenance and features.'

'Was he like you?'

'They said so, but you could not gather an idea of him from me,' said Mr. Kendal, smiling mournfully, as he met her gaze. 'It was the most beautiful countenance I ever saw, full of life and joy; and there were wonderful expressions in the eyes when he was thinking or listening. He used to read the Greek Testament with me every morning, and his questions and remarks rise up before me again. That text--You have seen it in church.'

'Because I live, ye shall live also,' Albinia repeated.

'Yes. A little before his illness we came to that. He rested on it, as he used to do on anything that struck him, and asked me, "whether it meant the life hereafter, or the life that is hidden here?" We went over it with such comments as I could find, but his mind was not

satisfied; and it must have gone on working on it, for one night, when I had been thinking him delirious, he called me, and the light shone out of those bright dark eyes of his as he said, joyfully, "It is both, papa! It is hidden here, but it will shine out there," and as I did not catch his meaning, he repeated the Greek words.'

'Dear boy! Some day we shall be glad that the full life and glory came so soon.'

He shook his head, the parting was still too recent, and it was the first time he had been able to speak of his son. It was a great satisfaction to her that the reserve had once been broken; it seemed like compensation for the present trouble, though that was acutely felt, and not softened by the curious eyes and leading questions of the sisters, when she returned to give what attention she could to their interrupted lessons.

Gilbert returned, unsuspecting of the storm, till his father's stern gravity, and her depressed, pre-occupied manner, excited his attention, and he asked her anxiously whether anything were the matter. A sad gesture replied, and perhaps revealed the state of the case, for he became absolutely silent. Albinia left them together. She watched anxiously, and hurried after Mr. Kendal into the study, where his manner showed her not to be unwelcome as the sharer of his trouble. 'I do not know what to do,' he said, dejectedly. 'I can make nothing of him. It is all prevarication and sulkiness! I do not think he felt one word that I said.'

'People often feel more than they show.'

He groaned.

'Will you go to him?' he presently added. 'Perhaps I grew too angry at last, and I believe he loves you. At least, if he does not, he must be more unfeeling than I can think him. You do not dislike it, dearest.'

'O no, no! If I only knew what would be best for him!'

'He may be more unreserved with you,' said Mr. Kendal; and as he was anxious for her to make the attempt, she moved away, though in perplexity, and in the revulsion of feeling, with a sort of disgust towards the boy who had deceived her so long.

She found him seated on a wheelbarrow by the pond, chucking pebbles into the still black water, and disturbing the duckweed on the surface. His colour was gone, and his face was dark and moody, and strove not to relax, as she said, 'O Gilbert, how could you?'

He turned sharply away, muttering, 'She is coming to bother, now!'

It cut her to the heart. 'Gilbert!' was all she could exclaim, but the tone of pain made him look at her, as if in spite of himself, and as he saw the tears he exclaimed in an impatient voice of rude consolation, 'There's nothing to take so much to heart. No one thinks anything of it!'

'What would Edmund have thought?' said Albinia; but the appeal came too soon, he made an angry gesture and said, 'He was nearly three

years younger than I am now! He would not have been kept in these abominable leading-strings.'

She was too much shocked to find an answer, and Gilbert went on, 'Watched and examined wherever I go--not a minute to myself--nothing but lessons at Tremblam, and bother at home; driven about hither and thither, and not allowed a friend of my own, nor to do one single thing! There's no standing it, and I won't!'

'I am very sorry,' said Albinia, struggling with choking tears. 'It has been my great wish to make things pleasant to you. I hope I have not teased or driven you to--'

'Nonsense!' exclaimed Gilbert, disrespectfully indeed, but from the bottom of his heart, and breaking at once into a flood of tears. 'You are the only creature that has been kind to me since I lost my mother and Ned, and now they have been and turned you against me too;' and he sobbed violently.

'I don't know what you mean, Gilbert. If I stand in your mother's place, I can't be turned against you, any more than she could,' and she stroked his brow, which she found so throbbing as to account for his paleness. 'You can grieve and hurt me, but you can't prevent me from feeling for you, nor for your dear father's grief.'

He declared that people at home knew nothing about boys, and made an uproar about nothing.

'Do you call falsehood nothing?'

'Falsehood! A mere trifle now and then, when I am driven to it by being kept so strictly.'

'I don't know how to talk to you, Gilbert,' said Albinia, rising; 'your conscience knows better than your tongue.'

'Don't go;' and he went off into another paroxysm of crying, as he caught hold of her dress; and when he spoke again his mood was changed; he was very miserable, nobody cared for him, he did not know what to do; he wanted to do right, and to please her, but Archie Tritton would not let him alone; he wished he had never seen Archie Tritton. At last, walking up and down with him, she drew from him a full confidence, and began to understand how, when health and strength had come back to him in greater measure than he had ever before enjoyed, the craving for boyish sports had awakened, just after he had been deprived of his brother, and was debarred from almost every wholesome manner of gratifying it. To fall in with young Tritton was as great a misfortune as could well have befallen a boy, with a dreary home, melancholy, reserved father, and wearisome aunt. Tritton was a youth of seventeen, who had newly finished his education at an inferior commercial school, and lived on his father's farm, giving himself the airs of a sporting character, and fast hurrying into dissipation.

He was really good-natured, and Gilbert dwelt on his kindness with warmth and gratitude, and on his prowess in all sporting accomplishments with a perfect effervescence of admiration. He evidently patronized Gilbert, partly from good-natured pity, and partly as flattered by the adherence of a boy of a grade above him; and Gilbert was proud

of the notice of one who seemed to him a man, and an adept in all athletic games. It was a dangerous intimacy, and her heart sank as she found that the pleasures to which he had been introducing Gilbert, were not merely the free exercise, the rabbit-shooting and rat-hunting of the farm, nor even the village cricket-match, all of which, in other company, would have had her full sympathy. But there had been such low and cruel sports that she turned her head away sickened at the notion of any one dear to her having been engaged in such amusements, and when Gilbert in excuse said that every one did it, she answered indignantly, 'My brothers never!'

'It is no use talking about what swells do that hunt and shoot and go to school,' answered Gilbert.

'Do you wish you went to school?' asked Albinia.

'I wish I was out of it all!'

He was in a very different frame. He owned that he knew how wrong it had been to deceive, but he seemed to look upon it as a sort of fate; he wished he could help it, but could not, he was so much afraid of his father that he did not know what he said; Archie Tritton said no one could get on without.--There was an utter bewilderment in his notions, here and there showing a better tone, but obscured by the fancies imbibed from his companion, that the knowledge and practice of evil were manly. At one moment he cried bitterly, and declared that he was wretched; at another he defended each particular case with all his might, changing and slipping away so that she did not know where to take him. However, the conclusion was far more in pity than anger, and after receiving many promises that if she would shield him from his father and bear with him, he would abstain from all she disapproved, she caressed and soothed the aching head, and returned to his father hopeful and encouraged, certain that the evil had been chiefly caused by weakness and neglect and believing that here was a beginning of repentance. Since there was sorrow and confession, there surely must be reformation.

For a week Gilbert went on steadily, but at the end of that time his arrivals at home became irregular, and one day there was another great aberration. On a doubtful day, when it had been decided that he might go safely between the showers, he never came to Tremblam at all, and Mr. Salsted sent a note to Mr. Kendal to let him know that his son had been at the races--village races, managed by the sporting farmers of the neighbourhood. There was a sense of despair, and again a talk, bringing at once those ever-ready tears and protestations, sorrow genuine, but fruitless. 'It was all Archie's fault, he had overtaken him, persuaded him that Mr. Salsted would not expect him, promised him that he should see the celebrated 'Blunderbuss,' Sam Shepherd's horse, that won the race last year. Gilbert had gone 'because he could not help it.'

'Not help it!' cried Albinia, looking at him with her clear indignant eyes. 'How can you be such a poor creature, Gilbert?'

'It is very hard!' exclaimed Gilbert; 'I must go past Robble's Leigh twice every day of my life, and Archie will come out and be at me.'

'That is the very temptation you have to resist,' said Albinia. 'Fight against it, pray against it, resolve against it; ride fast,

and don't linger and look after him.'

He looked desponding and miserable. If she could only have put a spirit into him!

'Shall I walk and meet you sometimes before you get to Robbie's Leigh!'

His face cleared up, but the cloud returned in a moment.

'What is it?' she asked. 'Only tell me. You know I wish for nothing so much as to help you.'

He did confess that there was nothing he should like better, if Archie would not be all the worse another time, whenever he should catch him alone.

'But surely, Gilbert, he is not always lying in ambush for you, like a cat for a mouse. You can't be his sole game.'

'No, but he is coming or going, or out with his gun, and he will often come part of the way with me, and he is such a droll fellow!'

Albinia thought that there was but one cure. To leave Gilbert daily exposed to the temptation must be wrong, and she laid the case before Mr. Kendal with so much earnestness, that he allowed that it would be better to send the boy from home; and in the meantime, Albinia obtained that Mr. Kendal should ride some way on the Tremblam road with his son in the morning, so as to convoy him out of reach of the tempter; whilst she tried to meet him in the afternoon, and managed so that he should be seldom without the hope of meeting her.

Albinia's likings had taken a current absolutely contrary to all her preconceived notions; Sophia, with her sullen truth, was respected, but it was not easy to like her even as well as Lucy, who, though pert and empty, had much good-nature and good-temper, and was not indocile; while Gilbert, in spite of a weak, shallow character, habits of deception, and low ungentlemanly tastes, had won her affection, and occupied the chief of her time and thoughts; and she dreaded the moment of parting with him, as removing the most available and agreeable of her young companions.

That moment of parting, though acknowledged to be expedient, did not approach. Gilbert, could not be sent to a public school without risk and anxiety which his father did not like, and which would have been horror to his grandmother; and Albinia herself did not feel certain that he was fit for it, nor that it was her part to enforce it. She wrote to her brother, and found that he likewise thought a tutor would be a safe alternative; but then he must be a perfect man in a perfect climate, and Mr. Kendal was not the man to make researches. Mr. Dusautoy mentioned one clergyman who took pupils, Maurice Ferrars another, but there was something against each. Mr. Kendal wrote four letters, and was undecided--a third was heard of, but the locality was doubtful, and the plan went off, because Mr. Kendal could not make up his mind to go thirty miles to see the place, and talk to a stranger.

Albinia found that her power did not extend beyond driving him from 'I'll see about it,' to 'Yes, by all means.' Action was a length to

which he could not be brought. Mr. Nugent was very anxious that he should qualify as a magistrate since a sensible, highly-principled man was much wanted counterbalance Admiral Osborn's misdirected, restless activity and the lower parts of the town were in a dreadful state. Mrs. Nugent talked to Albinia, and she urged it in vain. To come out of his study, examine felons, contend with the Admiral, and to meet all the world at the quarter sessions, was abhorrent to him, and he silenced her almost with sternness.

She was really hurt and vexed, and scarcely less so by a discovery that she made shortly after. The hot weather had made the houses beneath the hill more close and unwholesome than ever, Simkins's wife had fallen into a lingering illness, and Albinia, visiting her constantly, was painfully sensible of the dreadful atmosphere in which she lived, under the roof, with a window that would not open. She offered to have the house improved at her own expense, but was told that Mr. Pettilove would raise the rent if anything were laid out on it. She went about talking indignantly of Mr. Pettilove's cruelty and rapacity, and when Mr. Dusautoy hinted that Pettilove was only agent, she exclaimed that the owner was worse, since ignorance alone could be excused. Who was the wretch? Some one, no doubt, who never came near the place, and only thought of it as money.

'Fanny,' said Mr. Dusautoy, 'I really think we ought to tell her.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'I think it would be better. The houses belonged to old Mr. Meadows.'

'Oh, if they are Mrs. Meadows's, I don't wonder at anything.'

'I believe they are Gilbert Kendal's.'

They were very kind; Mr. Dusautoy strode out at the window, and his wife would not look at Albinia during the minute's struggle to regain her composure, under the mortification that her husband should have let her rave so much and so long about what must be in his own power. Her only comfort was the hope that he had never heard what she said, and she knew that he so extremely disliked a conference with Pettilove, that he would consent to anything rather than have a discussion.

She was, for the first time in her life, out of spirits. Gilbert was always upon her mind; and the daily walk to meet him was a burthen, consuming a great deal of time, and becoming trying on hot summer afternoons, the more so as she seldom ventured to rest after it, lest dullness should drive Gilbert into mischief, or, if nothing worse, into quarrelling with Sophia. If she could not send him safely out fishing, she must be at hand to invent pleasures and occupations for him; and the worst of it was, that the girls grudged her attention to their brother, and were becoming jealous. They hated the walk to Robble's Leigh, and she knew that it was hard on them that their pleasure should be sacrificed, but it was all-important to preserve him from evil. She had wished to keep the tutor-negotiations a secret, but they had oozed out, and she found that Mrs. and Miss Meadows had been declaring that they had known how it would be-- whatever people said beforehand, it always came to the, same thing in the end, and as to its being necessary, poor dear Gibbie was very different before the change at home.

Albinia could not help shedding a few bitter tears. Why was she to be always misjudged, even when she meant the best? And, oh! how hard, well-nigh impossible, to forgive and candidly to believe that, in the old lady, at least, it was partiality, and not spite.

In September, Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars returned from their journey. Albinia was anxious to see them, for if there was a sense that she had fallen short of her confident hopes of doing prosperously, there was also a great desire for their sympathy and advice. But Maurice had been too long away from his parish to be able to spare another day, and begged that the Kendals would come to Fairmead. Seeing that Albinia's heart was set on it, Mr. Kendal allowed himself to be stirred up to appoint a time for driving her over to spend a long day at Fairmead.

For her own pleasure and ease of mind, Albinia made a point of taking Gilbert, and the girls were to spend the day with their grandmother.

'Pretty old Fairmead!' she cried, as the beech-trees rose before her; and she was turning round every minute to point out to Gilbert some of the spots of which she had told him, and nodding to the few scattered children who were not at school, and who looked up with mouths from ear to ear, and flushed cheeks, as they curtsied to 'Miss Ferrars.' The 'Miss Ferrars' life seemed long ago.

They came to the little green gate that led to what had been 'home' for the happiest years of Albinia's life, and from the ivy porch there was a rush of little Willie and Mary, and close at hand their mamma, and Maurice emerging from the school. It was very joyous and natural. But there were two more figures, not youthful, but of decided style and air, and quiet but fashionable dress, and Albinia had only time to say quickly to her husband, 'my aunts,' before she was fondly embraced.

It was not at all what she had intended. Mrs. Annesley and Miss Ferrars were very kind aunts, and she had much affection for them; but there was an end of the hope of the unreserve and confidence that she wanted. She could get plenty of compassion and plenty of advice, but her whole object would be to avoid these; and, besides, Mr. Kendal had not bargained for strangers. What would become of his opportunity of getting better acquainted with Maurice and Winifred, and of all the pleasures that she had promised Gilbert?

At least, however, she was proud that her aunts should see what a fine-looking man her husband was, and they were evidently struck with his appearance and manner. Gilbert, too was in very good looks, and was altogether a bright, gentlemanly boy, well made, though with the air of growing too fast, and with something of uncertainty about his expression.

It was quickly explained that the aunts had only decided, two days before, on coming to Fairmead at once, some other engagement having failed them, and they were delighted to find that they should meet their dear Albinia, and be introduced to Mr. Kendal. Setting off before the post came in, Albinia had missed Winifred's note to tell her of their arrival.

'And,' said Winifred, as she took Albinia upstairs, 'if I did suspect

that would be the case, I won't say I regretted it. I did not wish to afford Mr. Kendal the pleasures of anticipation.'

'Perhaps it was better,' said Albinia, smiling, 'especially as I suppose they will stay for the next six weeks, so that the days will be short before you will be free.'

'And now let me see you, my pretty one,' said Winifred, fondly. 'Are you well, are you strong? No, don't wriggle your head away, I shall believe nothing but what I read for myself.'

'Don't believe anything you read without the notes,' said Albinia. 'I have a great deal to say to you, but I don't expect much opportunity thereof.'

Certainly not, for Miss Ferrars was knocking at the door. She had never been able to suppose that the sisters-in-law could be more to each other than she was to her own niece.

So it became a regular specimen of a 'long day' spent together by relations, who, intending to be very happy, make themselves very weary of each other, by discarding ordinary occupations, and reducing themselves to needlework and small talk. Albinia was bent on liveliness, and excelled herself in her droll observations; but to Winifred, who knew her so well, this brilliancy did not seem like perfect ease; it was more like effort than natural spirits. This was no wonder, for not only had the sight of new people thrown Mr. Kendal into a severe access of shyness and silence, but he was revolving in fear and dread the expediency of asking them to Willow Lawn, and considering whether Albinia and propriety could make the effort bearable. Silent he sat, while the aunts talked of their wishes that one nephew would marry, and that the other would not, and no one presumed to address him, except little Mary, who would keep trotting up to him, to make him drink out of her doll's tea-cups.

Mr. Ferrars took pity on him, and took him and Gilbert out to call upon Colonel Bury; but this did not lessen his wife's difficulties, for there was a general expectation that she would proceed to confidences; whereas she would do nothing but praise the Dusautoys, ask after all the parishioners of Fairmead one by one, and consult about French reading-books and Italian grammars. Mrs. Annesley began a gentle warning against overtaxing her strength, and Miss Ferrars enforced it with such vehemence, that Winifred, who had been rather on that side, began to take Albinia's part, but perceived, with some anxiety, that her sister's attempts to laugh off the admonition almost amounted to an admission that she was working very hard. As to the step-daughters, no intelligence was attainable, except that Lucy would be pleased with a new crochet pattern, and that Sophy was like her father, but not so handsome.

The next division of time passed better. Albinia walked out at the window to meet the gentlemen when they came home, and materially relieved Mr. Kendal's mind by saying to him, 'The aunts are settled in here till they go to Knutsford. I hope you don't think--there is not the least occasion for asking them to stay with us.'

'Are you sure you do not wish it?' said Mr. Kendal, with great kindness, but an evident weight removed.

'Most certain!' she exclaimed, with full sincerity; 'I am not at all ready for them. What should I do with them to entertain?'

'Very well,' said Mr. Kendal, 'you must be the judge. If there be no necessity, I shall be glad to avoid unsettling our habits, and probably Bayford would hardly afford much enjoyment to your aunts.'

Albinia glanced in his face, and in that of her brother, with her own arch fun. It was the first time that day that Maurice had seen that peculiarly merry look, and he rejoiced, but he was not without fear that she was fostering Mr. Kendal's retiring habits more than was good for him. But it was not only on his account that she avoided the invitation, she by no means wished to show Bayford to her fastidious aunts, and felt as if to keep them satisfied and comfortable would be beyond her power.

Set free from this dread, and his familiarity with his brother-in-law renewed, Mr. Kendal came out to great advantage at the early dinner. Miss Ferrars was well read and used to literary society, and she started subjects on which he was at home, and they discussed new books and criticised critics, so that his deep reading showed itself, and even a grave, quiet tone of satire, such as was seldom developed, except under the most favourable circumstances. He and Aunt Gertrude were evidently so well pleased with each other, that Albinia almost thought she had been precipitate in letting him off the visit.

Gilbert had, fortunately, a turn for small children, and submitted to be led about the garden by little Willie; and as far as moderate enjoyment went, the visit was not unsuccessful; but as for what Albinia came for, it was unattainable, except for one little space alone with her brother.

'I meant to have asked a great deal,' she said, sighing.

'If you, want me, I would contrive to ride over,' said Maurice.

'No, it is not worth that. But, Maurice, what is to be done when one sees one's duty, and yet fails for ever for want of tact and temper! Ah, I know what you will say, and I often say it to myself, but whatever I propose, I always do either the wrong thing or in the wrong way!'

'You fall a hundred times a day, but are raised up again,' said Maurice.

'Maurice, tell me one thing. Is it wrong to do, not the best, but only the best one can?'

'It is the wrong common to us all,' said Maurice.

'I used to believe in "whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well." Now, I do everything ill, rather than do nothing at all.'

'There are only two ways of avoiding that.'

'And they are--?'

'Either doing nothing, or admiring all your own doings.'

'Which do you recommend?' said Albinia, smiling, but not far from tears.

'My dear,' said Maurice, 'all I can dare to recommend, is patience and self-control. Don't fret and agitate yourself about what you can't do, but do your best to do calmly what you can. It will be made up, depend upon it.'

There was no time for more, but the sound counsel, the sympathy, and playfulness had done Albinia wonderful good, and she was almost glad there had been no more privacy, or her friends might have guessed that she had not quite found a counsellor at home.

CHAPTER VI.

The Christmas holidays did indeed put an end to the walks to meet Gilbert, but only so as to make Albinia feel responsible for him all day long, and uneasy whenever he was not accounted for. She played chess with him, found books, and racked her brains to seek amusements for him; but knowing all the time that it was hopeless to expect a boy of fourteen to be satisfied with them. One or two boys of his age had come home for the holidays, and she tried to be relieved by being told that he was going out with Dick Wolfe or Harry Osborn, but it was not quite satisfactory, and she began to look fagged and unwell, and had lost so much of her playfulness, that even Mr. Kendal was alarmed.

Sophia's birthday fell in the last week before Christmas, and it had always been the family custom to drink tea with Mrs. Meadows. Albinia made the engagement with a sense of virtuous resignation, though not feeling well enough for the infliction, but Mr. Kendal put a stop to all notion of her going. She expected to enjoy her quiet solitary evening, but the result was beyond her hopes, for as she was wishing Gilbert good-bye, she heard the click of the study lock, and in came Mr. Kendal.

'I thought you were gone,' she said.

'No. I did not like to leave you alone for a whole evening.'

If it were only an excuse to himself for avoiding the Meadows' party, it was too prettily done for the notion to occur to his wife, and never had she spent a happier evening. He was so unusually tender and unreserved, so desirous to make her comfortable, and, what was far more to her, growing into so much confidence, that it was even better than what she used last year to picture to herself as her future life with him. It even came to what he had probably never done for any one. She spoke of a beautiful old Latin hymn, which she had once read with her brother, and had never seen adequately translated, and he fetched a manuscript book, where, written out with unrivalled neatness, stood a translation of his own, made many years ago, full of scholarly polish. She ventured to ask leave to copy it. 'I will copy it for you,' he said, 'but it must be for yourself alone.'

She was grateful for the concession, and happy in the promise. She begged to turn the page, and it was granted. There were other translations, chiefly from curious oriental sources, and there were about twenty original poems, elaborated in the same exquisite manner, and with a deep melancholy strain of thought, and power of beautiful description, that she thought finer and more touching than almost anything she had read.

'And these are all locked up for ever. No one has seen them.'

'So. When I was a young lad, my poor father put some lines of mine into a newspaper. That sufficed me,' and he shut the clasped book as if repenting of having revealed the contents.

'No, I was not thinking of anything you would dislike with regard to those verses. I don't like to let in the world on things precious, but (how could she venture so far!) I was thinking how many powers and talents are shut up in that study! and whether they might not have been meant for more. I beg your pardon if I ought not to say so.'

'The time is past,' he replied, without displeasure; 'my youth is gone, and with it the enterprise and hopefulness that can press forward, insensible to annoyance. You should have married a man with freshness and energy more responsive to your own.'

'Oh, Edmund, that is a severe reproach for my impertinent speech.'

'You must not expect too much from me,' he continued. 'I told you that I was a broken, grief-stricken man, and you were content to be my comforter.'

'Would that I could be so!' exclaimed Albinia, 'but to try faithfully, I must say what is on my mind. Dear Edmund, if you would only look out of your books, and see how much good you could do, here in your own sphere, how much the right wants strengthening, how much evil cries out to be repressed, how sadly your own poor suffer--oh! if you once began, you would be so much happier!'

She trembled with earnestness, and with fear of her own audacity, but a resounding knock at the door prevented her from even discovering whether he were offended. He started away to secure his book, and the two girls came in. Albinia could hardly believe it late enough for their return, but they accounted for having come rather earlier by saying that Gilbert had been making himself so ridiculous when he had come at last, that grandmamma had sent him home.

'At last!' said Albinia. 'He set off only ten minutes after you, as soon as he found that papa was not coming.'

'All I know,' said Lucy, 'is, that he did not come till half-past nine, and said he had come from home.'

'And where can he be now?'

'Gone to bed,' growled Sophy.

'I don't know what he has been doing,' said Lucy, who since the

suspicion of favouritism, had seemed to find especial pleasure in bringing forward her brother's faults; 'but he came in laughing like a plough-boy, and talking perfect nonsense. And when Aunt Maria spoke to him, he answered quite rudely, that he wasn't going to be questioned and called to order, he had enough of petticoat government at home.'

'No,' said Sophy, breaking in with ungracious reluctance, as if against her will conveying some comfort to her step-mother for the sake of truth, 'what he said was, that if he bore with petticoat government at home, it was because Mrs. Kendal was pretty and kind, and didn't torment him out of his life for nothing, and what he stood from her, he would not stand from any other woman.'

'But, Sophy, I am sure he did say Mrs. Kendal knew what she was going to say, and said it, and it was worth hearing, and he laughed in Aunt Maria's face, and told her not to make so many bites at a cherry.'

'He must have been beside himself,' said Albinia, in a bewilderment of consternation, but Mr. Kendal's return put a stop to all, for the sisters never told tales before him, and she would not bring the subject under his notice until she should be better informed. His suffering was too great, his wrath too stern, to be excited without serious cause; but she spent a wakeful, anxious night, revolving all imaginable evils into which the boy could have fallen, and perplexing herself what measures to take, feeling all the more grieved and bound to him by the preference that, even in this dreadful mood, he had expressed for her. She fell into a restless sleep in the morning, from which she wakened so late as to have no time to question Gilbert before breakfast. On coming down, she found that he had not made his appearance, and had sent word that he had a bad headache, and wanted no breakfast. His father, who had made a visit of inspection, said he thought it was passing off, smiling as he observed upon Mrs. Meadows's mince-pie suppers and home-made wine.

Lucy said nothing, but glanced knowingly at her sister and at Albinia, from neither of whom did she get any response.

Albinia did not dare to take any measures till Mr. Kendal had ridden out, and then she went up and knocked at Gilbert's door. He was better, he said, and was getting up, he would be down-stairs presently. She watched for him as he came down, looking still very pale and unwell. She took him into her room, made him sit by the fire, and get a little life and warmth into his chilled hands before she spoke. 'Yes, Gilbert, I don't wonder you cannot lift up your head while so much is on your mind.'

Gilbert started and hid his face.

'Did you think I did not know, and was not grieved?'

'Well,' he cried, peevishly, 'I'm sure I have the most ill-natured pair of sisters in the world.'

'Then you meant to deceive us again, Gilbert.'

He had relapsed into the old habit--as usual, a burst of tears and a declaration that no one was ever so badly off, and he did not know what to do.

'You do know perfectly well what to do, Gilbert. There is nothing for it but to tell me the whole meaning of this terrible affair, and I will see whether I can help you.'

It was always the same round, a few words would always bring the confession, and that pitiful kind of helpless repentance, which had only too often given her hope.

Gilbert assured her that he had fully purposed following his sisters, but that on the way he had unluckily fallen in with Archie Tritton and a friend, who had driven in to hear a man from London singing comic songs at the King's Head, and they had persuaded him to come in. He had been uneasy and tried to get away, but the dread of being laughed at about his grandmother's tea had prevailed, and he had been supping on oysters and porter, and trying to believe himself a fast man, till Archie, who had assured him that he was himself going home in 'no time,' had found it expedient to set off, and it had been agreed that he should put a bold face on it, and profess that he had never intended to do more than come and fetch his sisters home.

That the porter had anything to do with his extraordinary manner to his grandmother and aunt, was so shocking a notion, and the very hint made him cry so bitterly, and protest so earnestly that he had only had one pint, which he did not like, and only drank because he was afraid of being teased, that Albinia was ready to believe that he had been so elevated by excitement as to forget himself, and continue the style of the company he had left. It was bad enough, and she felt almost overpowered by the contemplation of the lamentable weakness of the poor boy, of the consequences, and of what was incumbent on her.

She leant back and considered a little while, then sighed heavily, and said, 'Gilbert, two things must be done. You must make an apology to your grandmother and aunt, and you must confess the whole to your father.'

He gave a sort of howl, as if she were misusing his confidence.

'It must be,' she said. 'If you are really sorry, you will not shrink. I do not believe that it could fail to come to your father's knowledge, even if I did not know it was my duty to tell him, and how much better to confess it yourself.'

For this, however, Gilbert seemed to have no force; he cried piteously, bewailed himself, vowed incoherently that he would never do so again, and if she had not pitied him so much, would have made her think him contemptible.

She was inexorable as to having the whole told, though dreading the confession scarcely less than he did; and he finally made a virtue of necessity, and promised to tell, if only she would not desert him, declaring, with a fresh flood of tears, that he should never do wrong when she was by. Then came the apology. It was most necessary, and he owned that it would be much better to be able to tell his father that his grandmother had forgiven him; but he really had not nerve to set out alone, and Albinia, who had begun to dread having him out of sight, consented to go and protect him.

He shrank behind her, and she had to bear the flood of Maria's

surprises and regrets, before she could succeed in saying that he was very sorry for yesterday's improper behaviour, and had come to ask pardon.

Grandmamma was placable; Gilbert's white face and red eyes were pleading enough, and she was distressed at Mrs. Kendal having come out, looking pale and tired. If she had been alone, the only danger would have been that the offence would be lost in petting; but Maria had been personally wounded, and the jealousy she already felt of the step-mother, had been excited to the utmost by Gilbert's foolish words. She was excessively grieved, and a great deal more angry with Mrs. Kendal than with Gilbert; and the want of justification for this feeling, together with her great excitement, distress, and embarrassment, made her attempts to be dry and dignified ludicrously abortive. She really seemed to have lost the power of knowing what she said. She was glad Mrs. Kendal could walk up this morning, since she could not come at night.

'It was not my fault,' said Albinia, earnestly; 'Mr. Kendal forbade me. I am sure I wish we had come.'

The old lady would have said something kind about not reproaching herself, but Miss Meadows interposed with, 'It was very unlucky, to be sure--Mr. Kendal never failed them before, not that she would wish--but she had always understood that to let young people run about late in the evening by themselves--not that she meant anything, but it was very unfortunate--if she had only been aware--Betty should have come down to walk up with them.'

Gilbert could not forbear an ashamed smile of intense affront at this reproach to his manliness.

'It was exceedingly unfortunate,' said Albinia, trying to repress her vexation; 'but Gilbert must learn to have resolution to guard himself. And now that he is come to ask your forgiveness, will you not grant it to him?'

'Oh, yes, yes, certainly, I forgive him from my heart. Yes, Gilbert, I do, only you must mind and beware--it is a very shocking thing--low company and all that--you've made yourself look as ill--and if you knew what a cake Betty had made--almond and citron both--"but it's for Master Gilbert," she said, "and I don't grudge"--and then to think--oh, dear!'

Albinia tried to express for him some becoming sorrow at having disappointed so much kindness, but she brought Miss Meadows down on her again.

'Oh, yes--she grudged nothing--but she never expected to meet with gratitude--she was quite prepared--' and she swallowed and almost sobbed, 'there had been changes. She was ready to make every excuse--she was sure she had done her best--but she understood--she didn't want to be assured. It always happened so--she knew her homely ways were not what Mrs. Kendal had been used to--and she didn't wonder--she only hoped the dear children--' and she was absolutely crying.

'My dear Maria,' said her mother, soothingly, 'you have worked yourself into such a state, that you don't know what you are saying. You must not let Mrs. Kendal think that we don't know that she is

leading the dear children to all that is right and kind towards as.'

'Oh, no, I don't accuse any one. Only if they like to put me down under their feet and trample on me, they are welcome. That's all I have to say.'

Albinia was too much annoyed to be amused, and said, as she rose to take leave, 'I think it would be better for Gilbert, as well as for ourselves, if we were to say no more till some more cool and reasonable moment.'

'I am as cool as possible,' said Miss Meadows, convulsively clutching her hand; 'I'm not excited. Don't excite yourself, Mrs. Kendal--it is very bad for you. Tell her not, Mamma--oh! no, don't be excited--I mean nothing--I forgive poor dear Gibbie whatever little matters--I know there was excuse--boys with unsettled homes--but pray don't go and excite yourself--you see how cool I am--'

And she pursued Albinia to the garden-gate, recommending her at every step not to be excited, for she was as cool as possible, trembling and stammering all the time, with flushed cheeks, and tears in her eyes.

'I wonder who she thinks is excited?' exclaimed Albinia, as they finally turned their backs on her.

It was hardly in human nature to help making the observation, but it was not prudent. Gilbert took licence to laugh, and say, 'Aunt Maria is beside herself.'

'I never heard anything so absurd or unjust!' cried Albinia, too much irritated to remember anything but the sympathy of her auditor. 'If I am to be treated in this manner, I have done striving to please them. Due respect shall be shown, but as to intimacy and confidence--'

'I'm glad you see it so at last!' cried Gilbert. 'Aunt Maria has been the plague of my life, and I'm glad I told her a bit of my mind!'

What was Albinia's consternation! Her moment's petulance had undone her morning's work.

'Gilbert,' she said, 'we are both speaking very wrongly. I especially, who ought to have helped you.'

Spite of all succeeding humility the outburst had been fatal, and argue and plead as she might, she could not restore the boy to anything like the half satisfactory state of penitence in which she had led him from home. The giving way to her worse nature had awakened his, and though he still allowed that she should prepare the way for his confession to his father, all real sense of his outrageous conduct towards his aunt was gone.

Disheartened and worn out, Albinia did not feel equal even to going to take off her walking things, but sat down in the drawing-room on the sofa, and tried to silence the girls' questions and chatter, by desiring Lucy to read aloud.

By-and-by Mr. Kendal was heard returning, and she rose to arrest him in the hall. Her looks began the story, for he exclaimed, 'My dear Albinia, what is the matter?'

'Oh, Edmund, I have such things to tell you! I have been doing so wrong.'

She was almost sobbing, and he spoke fondly. 'No, Albinia, I can hardly believe that. Something has vexed you, and you must take time to compose yourself.'

He led her up to her own room, tried to soothe her, and would not listen to a word till she should be calm. After lying still for a little while, she thought she had recovered, but the very word 'Gilbert' brought such an expression of anxiety and sternness over his brow as overcame her again, and she could not speak without so much emotion that he silenced her; and finding that she could neither leave the subject, nor mention it without violent agitation, he said he would leave her for a little while, and perhaps she might sleep, and then be better able to speak to him. Still she held him, and begged that he would say nothing to Gilbert till he had heard her, and to pacify her he yielded, passed his promise, and quitted her with a kiss.

CHAPTER VII.

There was a messenger at Fairmead Parsonage by sunrise the next morning, and by twelve o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Ferrars were at Willow Lawn.

Mr. Kendal's grave brow and depressed manner did not reassure Winifred as he met her in the hall, although his words were, 'I hope she is doing well.'

He said no more, for the drawing-room door was moving to and fro, as if uneasy on the hinges, and as he made a step towards it, it disclosed a lady with black eyes and pinched features, whom he presented as 'Miss Meadows.'

'Well, now--I think--since more efficient--since I leave Mrs. Kendal to better--only pray tell her--my love and my mother's--if I could have been of any use--or shall I remain?--could I be of any service, Edmund?--I would not intrude when--but in the house--if I could be of any further use.'

'Of none, thank you,' said Mr. Kendal, 'unless you would be kind enough to take home the girls.'

'Oh, papa!' cried Lucy, 'I've got the keys. You won't be able to get on at all without me. Sophy may go, but I could not be spared.'

'Let it be as you will,' said Mr. Kendal; 'I only desire quiet, and that you should not inconvenience Mrs. Ferrars.'

'You will help me, will you not!' said Winifred, smiling, though she did not augur well from this opening scene. 'May I go soon to Albinia?'

'Presently, I hope,' said Mr. Kendal, with an uneasy glance towards Miss Meadows, 'she has seen no one as yet, and she is so determined that you cannot come till after Christmas, that she does not expect you.'

Miss Meadows began one of her tangled skeins of words, the most tangible of which was excitement; and Mr. Kendal, knowing by long experience that the only chance of a conclusion was to let her run herself down, held his tongue, and she finally departed.

Then he breathed more freely, and said he would go and prepare Albinia to see her sister, desiring Lucy to show Mrs. Ferrars to her room, and to take care not to talk upon the stairs.

This, Lucy, who was in high glory, obeyed by walking upon creaking tip-toe, apparently borrowed from her aunt, and whispering at a wonderful rate about her eagerness to see dear, dear mamma, and the darling little brother.

The spare room did not look expectant of guests, and felt still less so. It struck Winifred as very like the mouth of a well, and the paper showed patches of ancient damp. One maid was hastily laying the fire, the other shaking out the curtains, in the endeavour to render it habitable, and Lucy began saying, 'I must apologize. If papa had only given us notice that we were to have the pleasure of seeing you,' and then she dashed at the maid in all the pleasure of authority. 'Eweretta, go and bring up Mrs. Ferrars's trunks directly, and some water, and some towels.'

Winifred thought the greatest mercy to the hunted maid would be to withdraw as soon as she had hastily thrown off bonnet and cloak, and Lucy followed her into the passage, repeating that papa was so absent and forgetful, that it was very inconvenient in making arrangements. Whatever was ordinarily repressed in her, was repaying itself with interest in the pleasure of acting as mistress of the house.

Mrs. Ferrars beheld Gilbert sitting listlessly on the deep window-seat at the end of the passage, resting his head on his hand.

'Well!' exclaimed Lucy, 'if he is not there still! He has hardly stirred since breakfast! Come and speak to Mrs. Ferrars, Gilbert. Or,' and she simpered, 'shall it be Aunt Winifred?'

'As you please,' said Mrs. Ferrars, advancing towards her old acquaintance, whom she would hardly have recognised, so different was the pale, downcast, slouching figure, from the bright, handsome lad she remembered.

'How cold your hand is!' she exclaimed; 'you should not sit in this cold passage.'

'As I have been telling him all this morning,' said Lucy.

'How is she?' whispered the boy, rousing himself to look imploringly in Winifred's face.

'Your father seems satisfied about her.'

At that moment a door at some distance was opened, and Gilbert seemed to thrill all over as for the moment ere it closed a baby's cry was heard. He turned his face away, and rested it on the window. 'My brother! my brother!' he murmured, but at that moment his father turned the corner of the passage, saying that Albinia had heard their arrival, and was very eager to see her sister.

Still Winifred could not leave the boy without saying, 'You can make Gilbert happy about her, can you not? He is waiting here, watching anxiously for news of her.'

'Gilbert himself best knows whether he has a right to be made happy,' said Mr. Kendal, gravely. 'I promised to ask no questions till she is able to explain, but I much fear that he has been causing her great grief and distress.'

He fixed his eyes on his son, and Winifred, in the belief that she was better out of their way, hurried to Albinia's room, and was seen very little all the rest of the day.

She was spared, however, to walk to church the next morning with her husband, Lucy showing them the way, and being quiet and agreeable when repressed by Mr. Ferrars's presence. After church, Mr. Dusautoy overtook them to inquire after Mrs. Kendal, and to make a kind proposal of exchanging Sunday duty. He undertook to drive the ponies home on the morrow, begged for credentials for the clerk, and messages for Willie and Mary, and seemed highly pleased with the prospect of the holiday, as he called it, only entreating that Mrs. Ferrars would be so kind as to look in on 'Fanny,' if Mrs. Kendal could spare her.

'I thought,' said Winifred to her husband, 'that you would rather have exchanged a Sunday when Albinia is better able to enjoy you?'

'That may yet be, but poor Kendal is so much depressed, that I do not like to leave him.'

'I have no patience with him!' cried Winifred; 'he does not seem to take the slightest pleasure in his baby, and he will hardly let poor Albinia do so either! Do you know, Maurice, it is as bad as I ever feared it would be. No, don't stop me, I must have it out. I always said he had no business to victimize her, and I am sure of it now! I believe this gloom of his has broken down her own dear sunny spirits! There she is--so unlike herself--so anxious and fidgety about her baby--will hardly take any one's word for his being as healthy and stout a child as I ever saw! And then, every other moment, she is restless about that boy--always asking where he is, or what he is doing. I don't see how she is ever to get well, while it goes on in this way! Mr. Kendal told me that Gilbert had been worrying and distressing her; and as to those girls, the eldest of them is intolerable with her airs, and the youngest--I asked her if she liked babies, and she growled, "No." Lucy said Gilbert was waiting in the passage for news of mamma, and she grunted, "All sham!" and that's the whole I have heard of her! He is bad enough in himself, but with such a train! My poor Albinia! If they are not the death of her, it will be lucky!'

'Well done, Winifred!'

'But, Maurice,' said his impetuous wife, in a curiously altered tone, 'are not you very unhappy about Albinia?'

'I shall leave you to find that out for me.'

'Then you are not?'

'I think Kendal thoroughly values and appreciates her, and is very uncomfortable without her.'

'I suppose so. People do miss a maid-of-all-work. I should not so much mind it, if she had been only his slave, but to be so to all those disagreeable children of his too! And with so little effect. Why can't he send them all to school?'

'Propose that to Albinia.'

'She did want the boy to go somewhere. I should not care where, so it were out of her way. What creatures they must be for her to have produced no more effect on them!'

'Poor Albinia! I am afraid it is a hard task: but these are still early days, and we see things at a disadvantage. We shall be able to judge whether there be really too great a strain on her spirits, and if so, I would talk to Kendal.'

'And I wonder what is to come of that. It seems to me like what John Smith calls singing psalms to a dead horse.'

'John Smith! I am glad you mentioned him; I shall desire Dusautoy to bring him here on Monday.'

'What! as poor Albinia would say, you can't exist a week without John Smith.'

'Even so. I want him to lay out a plan for draining the garden. That pond is intolerable. I suspect that all, yourself included, will become far more good-tempered in consequence.'

'A capital measure, but do you mean that Edmund Kendal is going to let you and John Smith drain his pond under his very nose, and never find it out? I did not imagine him quite come to that.'

'Not quite,' said Maurice; 'it is with his free consent, and I believe he will be very glad to have it done without any trouble to himself. He said that Albinia thought it damp, and when I put a few sanitary facts before him, thanked me heartily, and seemed quite relieved. If they had only been in Sanscrit, they would have made the greater impression.'

'One comfort is, Maurice, that however provoking you are at first, you generally prove yourself reasonable at last, I am glad you are not Mr. Kendal.'

'Ah! it will have a fine effect on you to spend your Christmas-day tete-a-tete with him.'

Mrs. Ferrars's views underwent various modifications, like all hasty yet candid judgments. She took Mr. Kendal into favour when she found him placidly submitting to Miss Meadows's showers of words, in order to prevent her gaining access to his wife.

'Maria Meadows is a very well-meaning person,' he said afterwards; 'but I know of no worse infliction in a sick-room.'

'I wonder,' thought Winifred, 'whether he married to get rid of her. I should have thought it justifiable had it been any one but Albinia!'

The call on Mrs. Dusautoy was consoling. It was delightful to find how Albinia was loved and valued at the vicarage. Mrs. Dusautoy began by sending her as a message, John's first exclamation on hearing of the event. 'Then she will never be of any more use.' In fact, she said, it was much to him like having a curate disabled, and she believed he could only be consoled by the hopes of a pattern christening, and of a nursery for his school-girls; but there Winifred shook her head, Fairmead had a prior claim, and Albinia had long had her eye upon a scholar of her own.

'I told John that she would! and he must bear it as he can,' laughed Mrs. Dusautoy; and she went on more seriously to say that her gratitude was beyond expression, not merely for the actual help, though that was much, but for the sympathy, the first encouragement they had met among their richer parishioners, and she spoke of the refreshment of the mirthfulness and playful manner, so as to convince Winifred that they had neither died away nor been everywhere wasted.

Winifred had no amenable patient. Weak and depressed as Albinia was, her restlessness and air of anxiety could not be appeased. There was a look of being constantly on the watch, and once, when her door was ajar, before Winifred was aware she exerted her voice to call Gilbert!

Pushing the door just wide enough to enter, and treading almost noiselessly, he came forward, looking from side to side as with a sense of guilt. She stretched out her hand and smiled, and he obeyed the movement that asked him to bend and kiss her, but still durst not speak.

'Let me have the baby,' she said.

Mrs. Ferrars laid it beside her, and held aloof. Gilbert's eyes were fixed intently on it.

'Yes, Gilbert,' Albinia said, 'I know what you will feel for him. He can't be what you once had--but oh, Gilbert, you will do all that an elder brother can to make him like Edmund!'

Gilbert wrung her fingers, and ventured to stoop down to kiss the little red forehead. The tears were running down his cheeks, and he could not speak.

'If your father might only say the same of him! that he never grieved him!' said Albinia; 'but oh, Gilbert--example,' and then, pausing and gazing searchingly in his face, 'You have not told papa.'

'No,' whispered Gilbert.

'Winifred,' said Albinia, 'would you be so kind as to ask papa to come?'

Winifred was forced to obey, though feeling much to blame as Mr. Kendal rose with a sigh of uneasiness. Gilbert still stood with his hand clasped in Albinia's, and she held it while her weak voice made the full confession for him, and assured his father of his shame and sorrow. There needed no such assurance, his whole demeanour had been sorrow all these dreary days, and Mr. Kendal could not but forgive, though his eye spoke deep grief.

'I could not refuse pardon thus asked,' he said. 'Oh, Gilbert, that I could hope this were the beginning of a new course!'

Albinia looked from Gilbert to his little brother, and back again to Gilbert.

'It _shall_ be,' she said, and Gilbert's resolution was perhaps the more sincere that he spoke no word.

'Poor boy,' said Albinia, half to herself and half aloud, 'I think I feel more strong to love and to help him!'

That interview was a dangerous experiment, and she suffered for it. As her brother said, instead of having too little life, she had too much, and could not let herself rest; she had never cultivated the art of being still, and when she was weak, she could not be calm.

Still the strength of her constitution staved off the nervous fever of her spirits, and though she was not at all a comfortable patient, she made a certain degree of progress, so that though it was not easy to call her better, she was not quite so ill, and grew less irrational in her solicitude, and more open to other ideas. 'Do you know, Winifred,' she said one day, 'I have been thinking myself at Fairmead till I almost believed I heard John Smith's voice under the window.'

Winifred was obliged to look out at the window to hide her smile. Maurice, who was standing on the lawn with the very John Smith, beckoned to her, and she went down to hear his plans. He was wanted at home the next day, and asked whether she thought he had better take Gilbert with him. 'It is the wisest thing that has been said yet!' exclaimed she. 'Now I shall have a chance for Albinia!' and accordingly, Mr. Kendal having given a gracious and grateful consent, Albinia was informed; but Winifred thought her almost perverse when a perturbed look came over her, and she said, 'It is very kind in Maurice, but I must speak to him.'

He was struck by the worn, restless expression of her features, so unlike the calm contented repose of a young mother, and when she spoke to him, her first word was of Gilbert. 'Maurice, it is so kind, I know you will make him happy--but oh! take care--he is so delicate--indeed, he is--don't let him get wet through.'

Maurice promised, but Albinia resumed with minutiae of directions, ending with, 'Oh! if he should get hurt or into any mischief, what

should we do? Pray, take care, Maurice, you are not used to such delicate boys.'

'My dear, I think you may rely on me.'

'Yes, but you will not be too strict with him--' and more was following, when her brother said, 'I promise you to make him my special charge. I like the boy very much. I think you may be reasonable, and trust him with me, without so much agitation. You have not let me see my own nephew yet.'

Albinia looked with her wistful piteous face at her brother as he took in his arms her noble-looking fair infant.

'You are a great fellow indeed, sir,' said his uncle. 'Now if I were your mamma, I would be proud of you, rather than--'

'I am afraid!' said Albinia, in a sudden low whisper.

He looked at her anxiously.

'Let me have him,' she said; then as Maurice bent over her, and she hastily gathered the babe into her arms, she whispered in quick, low, faint accents, 'Do you know how many children have been born in this house?'

Mr. Ferrars understood her, he too had seen the catalogue in the church, and guessed that the phantoms of her boy's dead brethren dwelt on her imagination, forbidding her to rejoice in him hopefully. He tried to say something encouraging of the child's appearance, but she would not let him go on. 'I know,' she said, 'he is so now--but--' then catching her breath again and speaking very low, 'his father does not dare look at him--I see that he is sorry for me--Oh, Maurice, it will come, and I shall be able to do nothing!'

Maurice felt his lip quivering as his sister's voice became choked--the sister to whom he had once been the whole world, and who still could pour out her inmost heart more freely to him than to any other. But it was a time for grave authority, and though he spoke gently, it was almost sternly.

'Albinia, this is not right. It is not thankful or trustful. No, do not cry, but listen to me. Your child is as likely to do well as any child in the world, but nothing is so likely to do him harm as your want of composure.'

'I tell myself so,' said Albinia, 'but there is no helping it.'

'Yes, there is. Make it your duty to keep yourself still, and not be troubled about what may or may not happen, but be glad of the present pleasure.'

'Don't you think I am?' said Albinia, half smiling; 'so glad, that I grow frightened at myself, and--' As if fain to leave the subject, she added, 'And it is what you don't understand, Maurice, but he can't be the first to Edmund as he is to me--never--and when I get almost jealous for him, I think of Gilbert and the girls--and oh! there is so much to do for them--they want a mother so much--and Winifred won't let me see them, or tell me about them!'

She had grown piteous and incoherent, and a glance from Winifred told him, 'this is always the way.'

'My dear,' he said, 'you will never be fit to attend to them if you do not use this present time rightly. You may hurt your health, and still more certainly, you will go to work fretfully and impetuously. If you have a busy life, the more reason to learn to be tranquil. Calm is forced on you now, and if you give way to useless nervous brooding over the work you are obliged to lay aside for a time, you have no right to hope that you will either have judgment or temper for your tasks.'

'But how am I to keep from thinking, Maurice? The weaker I am, the more I think.'

'Are you dutiful as to what Winifred there thinks wisest? Ah! Albinia, you want to learn, as poor Queen Anne of Austria did, that docility in illness may be self-resignation into higher Hands. Perhaps you despise it, but it is no mean exercise of strength and resolution to be still.'

Albinia looked at him as if receiving a new idea.

'And,' he added, bending nearer her face, and speaking lower, 'when you pray, let them be hearty faithful prayers that God's hand may be over your child--your children, not half-hearted faithless ones, that He may work out your will in them.'

'Oh, Maurice, how did you know? But you are not going? I have so much to talk over with you.'

'Yes, I must go; and you must be still. Indeed I will watch over Gilbert as though he were mine. Yes, even more. Don't speak again, Albinia, I desire you will not. Good-bye.'

That lecture had been the most wholesome treatment she had yet received; she ceased to give way without effort to restless thoughts and cares, and was much less refractory.

When at last Lucy and Sophia were admitted, Winifred found perils that she had not anticipated. Lucy was indeed supremely and girlishly happy: but it was Sophy whose eye Albinia sought with anxiety, and that eye was averted. Her cheek was cold like that of a doll when Albinia touched it eagerly with her lips; and when Lucy admonished her to kiss the dear little brother, she fairly turned and ran out of the room.

'Poor Sophy!' said Lucy. 'Never mind her, mamma, but she is odder than ever, since baby has been born. When Eweretta came up and told us, she hid her face and cried; and when grandmamma wanted to make us promise to love him with all our hearts, and not make any difference, she would only say, "I wont!"'

'We will leave him to take care of that, Lucy,' said Albinia. But though she spoke cheerfully, Winifred was not surprised, after a little interval, to hear sounds like stifled weeping.

Almost every home subject was so dangerous, that whenever Mrs.

Ferrars wanted to make cheerful, innocent conversation, she began to talk of her visit to Ireland and the beautiful Galway coast, and the O'Mores of Ballymakilty, till Albinia grew quite sick of the names of the whole clan of thirty-six cousins, and thought, with her aunts, that Winifred was too Irish. Yet, at any other time, the histories would have made her sometimes laugh, and sometimes cry, but the world was sadly out of joint with her.

There was a sudden change when, for the first time her eye rested on the lawn, and she beheld the work of drainage. The light glanced in her eye, the colour rose on her cheek, and she exclaimed, 'How kind of Edmund!'

Winifred must needs give her husband his share. 'Ah! you would never have had it done without Maurice.'

'Yes,' said Albinia, 'Edmund has been out of the way of such things, but he consented, you know.' Then as her eyes grew liquid, 'A duck pond is a funny subject for sentiment, but oh! if you knew what that place has been to my imagination from the first, and how the wreaths of mist have wound themselves into spectres in my dreams, and stretched out white shrouds now for one, now for the other!' and she shuddered.

'And you have gone through all this and never spoken. No wonder your nerves and spirits were tried.'

'I did speak at first,' said Albinia; 'but I thought Edmund did not hear, or thought it nonsense, and so did I at times. But you see he did attend; he always does, you see, at the right time. It was only my impatience.'

'I suspect Maurice and John Smith had more to do with it,' said Winifred.

'Well, we wont quarrel about that,' said Albinia. 'I only know that whoever brought it about has taken the heaviest weight off my mind that has been there yet.'

In truth, the terror, half real, half imaginary, had been a sorer burthen than all the positive cares for those unruly children, or their silent, melancholy father; and the relief told in all ways--above all, in the peace with which she began to regard her child. Still she would provoke Winifred by bestowing all her gratitude on Mr. Kendal, who began to be persuaded that he had made an heroic exertion.

Winifred had been somewhat scandalized by discovering Albinia's deficiencies in the furniture development. She was too active and stirring, and too fond of out-of-door occupation, to regard interior decoration as one of the domestic graces, 'her nest was rather that of the ostrich than the chaffinch,' as Winifred told her on the discovery that her morning-room had been used for no other purpose than as a deposit for all the books, wedding presents, lumber, etc., which she had never had leisure to arrange.

'You might be more civil,' answered Albinia. 'Remember that the ringdove never made half such a fuss about her nest as the magpie.'

'Well, I am glad you have found some likeness in yourself to a dove,' rejoined Winifred.

Mrs. Ferrars set vigorously to work with Lucy, and rendered the room so pretty and pleasant, that Lucy pronounced that it must be called nothing but the boudoir, for it was a perfect little bijou.

Albinia was laid on the sofa by the sparkling fire, by her side the little cot, and in her hand a most happy affectionate letter from Gilbert, detailing the Fairmead Christmas festivities. She felt the invigoration of change of room, admired and was grateful for Winifred's work, and looked so fair and bright, so tranquil and so contented, that her sister and husband could not help pausing to contemplate her as an absolutely new creature in a state of quiescence.

It did not last long, and Mrs. Ferrars felt herself the unwilling culprit. Attracted by sounds in the hall, she found the two girls receiving from the hands of Genevieve Durant a pretty basket choicely adorned with sprays of myrtle, saying mamma would be much obliged, and they would take it up at once; Genevieve should take home her basket, and down plunged their hands regardless of the garniture.

Genevieve's disappointed look caught Winifred's attention, and springing forward she exclaimed, 'You shall come to Mrs. Kendal yourself, my dear. She must see your pretty basket,' and yourself, she could have added, as she met the grateful glitter of the dark eyes.

Lucy remonstrated that mamma had seen no one yet, not even Aunt Maria, but Mrs. Ferrars would not listen, and treading airily, yet with reverence that would have befitted a royal palace, Genevieve was ushered upstairs, and with heartfelt sweetness, and timid grace, presented her etrennes.

Under the fragrant sprays lay a small white-paper parcel, tied with narrow blue satin bows, such as no English fingers could accomplish, and within was a little frock-body, exquisitely embroidered, with a breastplate of actual point lace in a pattern like frostwork on the windows. It was such work as Madame Belmarche had learnt in a convent in times of history, and poor little Genevieve had almost worn out her black eyes on this piece of homage to her dear Mrs. Kendal, grieving only that she had not been able to add the length of robe needed to complete her gift.

Albinia's kiss was recompense beyond her dreams, and she fairly cried for joy when she was told that she should come and help to dress the babe in it for his christening. Mrs. Ferrars would walk out with her at once to buy a sufficiency of cambric for the mighty skirts.

That visit was indeed nothing but pleasure, but Mrs. Ferrars had not calculated on contingencies and family punctilios. She forgot that it would be a mortal offence to let in any one rather than Miss Meadows; but the rest of the family were so well aware of it, that when she returned she heard a perfect sparrow's-nest of voices--Lucy's pert and eager, Miss Meadows's injured and shrill, and Albinia's, alas! thin and loud, half sarcasm, half fret.

There sat Aunt Maria fidgeting in the arm-chair; Lucy stood by the

fire; Albinia's countenance sadly different from what it had been in the morning--weary, impatient, and excited, all that it ought not to be!

Winifred would have cleared the room at once, but this was not easy, and poor Albinia was so far gone as to be determined on finishing that endless thing, an altercation, so all three began explaining and appealing at once.

It seemed that Mrs. Osborn was requiting Mrs. Kendal's neglect in not having inquired after her when the Admiral's sister's husband died, by the omission of inquiries at present; whereat Albinia laughed a feeble, overdone giggle, and observed that she believed Mrs. Osborn knew all that passed in Willow Lawn better than the inmates; and Lucy deposed that Sophy and Loo were together every day, though Sophy knew mamma did not like it. Miss Meadows said if reparation were not made, the Osborns had expressed their intention of omitting Lucy and Sophy from their Twelfth-day party.

To this Albinia pettishly replied that the girls were to go to no Christmas parties without her; Miss Meadows had taken it very much to heart, and Lucy was declaiming against mamma making any condescension to Mrs. Osborn, or herself being supposed to care for 'the Osborn's parties,' where the boys were so rude and vulgar, the girls so boisterous, and the dancing a mere romp. Sophy might like it, but she never did!

Miss Meadows was hurt by her niece's defection, and had come to 'Oh, very well,' and 'things were altered,' and 'people used to be grateful to old friends, but there were changes.' And thereby Lucy grew personal as to the manners of the Osborns, while Albinia defended herself against the being grand or exclusive, but it was her duty to do what she thought right for the children! Yes, Miss Meadows was quite aware--only grandmamma was so nervous about poor dear Gibbie missing his Christmas dinner for the first time--being absent--Mrs. Ferrars would take great care, but damp stockings and all--

Winifred endeavoured to stem the tide of words, but in vain, between the meandering incoherency of the one, and the nervous rapidity of the other, and they had both set off again on this fresh score, when in despair she ran downstairs, rapped at the study door, and cried, 'Mr. Kendal, Mr. Kendal, will you not come! I can't get Miss Meadows out of Albinia's room.'

Forth came Mr. Kendal, walked straight upstairs, and stood in full majesty on the threshold. Holding out his hand to Maria with grave courtesy, he thanked her for coming to see his wife, but at the same time handed her down, saw her out safely at the hall door, and Lucy into the drawing-room.

It was a pity that he had not returned to Albinia's room, for she was too much excited to be composed without authority. First, she scolded Winifred; 'it was the thing she most wished to avoid, that he should fancy her teased by anything the Meadowses could say,' and she laughed, and protested she never was vexed, such absurdity did not hurt her in the least.

'It has tired you, though,' said Winifred. 'Lie quite down and

sleep.'

Of course, however, Albinia would not believe that she was tired, and began to talk of the Osborns and their party--she was annoyed at the being thought too fine. 'If it were not such a penance, and if you would not be gone home, I really would ask you to take the girls, Winifred.'

'I shall not be gone home.'

'Yes, you will. I am well, and every one wants you.'

'Did you not hear Willie's complimentary message, that he is never naughty now, because Gilbert makes him so happy?'

'But, Winifred, the penny club! The people must have their things.'

'They can wait, or--'

'It is very well for us to talk of waiting,' cried Albinia, 'but how should we like a frosty night without cloaks, or blankets, or fire? I did not think it of you, Winifred. It is the first winter I have been away from my poor old dames, and I did think you would have cared for them.'

And thereupon her overwrought spirits gave way in a flood of tears, as she angrily averted her face from her sister, who could have cried too, not at the injustice, but with compassion and perplexity lest there should be an equally violent reaction either of remorse or of mirth.

It must be confessed that Albinia was very much the creature of health. Never having been ill before, the depression had been so new that it broke her completely down; convalescence made her fractious.

Recovery, however, filled her with such an ecstasy of animal spirits that her time seemed to be entirely passed in happiness or in sleep, and cares appeared to have lost all power. It was so sudden a change that Winifred was startled, though it was a very pleasant one, and she did not reflect that this was as far from the calm, self-restrained, meditative tranquillity enjoined by Maurice, as had been the previous restless, querulous state. Both were body more than mind, but Mrs. Ferrars was much more ready to be merry with Albinia than to moralize about her. And it was droll that the penny club was one of the first stages in her revival.

'Oh, mamma,' cried Lucy, flying in, 'Mr. Dusautoy is at the door. There is such a to do. All the women have been getting gin with their penny club tickets, and Mrs. Brock has been stealing the money, and Mr. Dusautoy wants to know if you paid up three-and-fourpence for the Hancock children.'

Albinia instantly invited Mr. Dusautoy to explain in person, and he entered, hearty and pleasant as ever, but in great haste, for he had left his Fanny keeping the peace between five angry women, while he came out to collect evidence.

The Bayford clothing-club payments were collected by Mrs. Brock, the sexton's wife, and distributed by tickets to be produced at the

various shops in the town. Mrs. Brock had detected some women exchanging their tickets for gin, and the offending parties retaliated by accusing her of embezzling the subscriptions, both parties launching into the usual amount of personalities and exaggerations.

Albinia's testimony cleared Mrs. Brock as to the three-and-fourpence, but she 'snuffed the battle from afar,' and rushed into a scheme of taking the clothing-club into her own hands, collecting the pence, having the goods from London, and selling them herself--she would propose it on the very first opportunity to the Dusautoys. Winifred asked if she had not a good deal on her hands already.

'My dear, I have the work in me of a young giant.'

'And will Mr. Kendal like it?'

'He would never find it out unless I told him, and very possibly not then. Six months hence, perhaps, he may tell me he is glad that Lucy is inclined to useful pursuits, and that is approval, Winifred, much more than if I went and worried him about every little petty woman's matter.'

'Every one to her taste,' thought Winifred, who had begun to regard Mr. and Mrs. Kendal in the same relation as the king and queen at chess.

The day before the christening, Mr. Ferrars brought back Gilbert and his own little Willie.

Through all the interchange of greetings, Gilbert would hardly let go Albinia's hand, and the moment her attention was free, he earnestly whispered, 'May I see my brother?'

She took him upstairs at once. 'Let me look a little while,' he said, hanging over the child with a sort of hungry fondness and curiosity. 'My brother! my brother!' he repeated. 'It has rung in my ears every morning that I can say my brother once more, till I have feared it was a dream.'

It was the sympathy Albinia cared for, come back again! 'I hope he will be a good brother to you,' she said.

'He must be good! he can't help it! He has you!' said Gilbert. 'See, he is opening his eyes--oh! how blue! May I touch him?'

'To be sure you may. He is not sugar,' said Albinia, laughing. 'There--make an arm; you may have him if you like. Your left arm, you awkward man. Yes, that is right. You will do quite as well as I, who never touched a baby till Willie was born. There, sir, how do you like your brother Gilbert?'

Gilbert held him reverently, and gave him back with a sigh when he seemed to have satiated his gaze and touch, and convinced himself that his new possession was substantial. 'I say,' he added wistfully, 'did you think that name would bring ill-luck?'

She knew the name he meant, and answered, 'No, but your father could not have borne it. Besides, Gibbie, we would not think him instead

of Edmund. No, he shall learn, to look up to his other brother as you do, and look to meeting and knowing him some day.'

Gilbert shivered at this, and made no opposition to her carrying him downstairs to his uncle, and then Gilbert hurried off for the basket of snowdrops that he had gathered early, from a favourite spot at Fairmead. That short absence seemed to have added double force to his affection; he could hardly bear to be away from her, and every moment when he could gain her ear, poured histories of the delights of Fairmead, where Mr. Ferrars had devoted himself to his amusement, and had made him happier than perhaps he had ever been in his life--he had had a taste of shooting, of skating, of snowballing--he had been useful and important in the village feasts, had dined twice at Colonel Bury's, and felt himself many degrees nearer manhood.

To hear of her old haunts and friends from such enthusiastic lips, delighted Albinia, and her felicity with her baby, with Mr. Kendal, with her brother and his little son, was one of the brightest things in all the world--the fresh young loving bloom of her matronhood was even sweeter and more beautiful than her girlish days.

Poor little frail, blighted Mrs. Dusautoy! Winifred could not help wondering if the contrast pained her, when in all the glory of her motherly thankfulness, Albinia carried her beautiful newly-christened Maurice Ferrars Kendal to the vicarage to show him off, lying so open-chested and dignified, in Genevieve's pretty work, with a sort of manly serenity already dawning on his baby brow.

Winifred need not have pitied the little lady. She would not have changed with Mrs. Kendal--no, not for that perfect health, usefulness, value--nor even for such a baby as that. No, indeed! She loved--she rejoiced in all her friend's sweet and precious gifts--but Mrs. Dusautoy had one gift that she prized above all.

Even grandmamma and Aunt Maria did justice to Master Maurice's attractions, at least in public, though it came round that Miss Meadows did not admire fat children, and when he had once been seen in Lucy's arms, an alarm arose that Mrs. Kendal would allow the girls to carry him about, till his weight made them crooked, but Albinia was too joyous to take their displeasure to heart, and it only served her for something to laugh at.

They had a very happy christening party, chiefly juvenile, in honour of little Willie and of Francis and Emily Nugent. Albinia was so radiantly lively and good-natured, and her assistants, Winifred, Maurice, and Mr. Dusautoy, so kind, so droll, so inventive, that even Aunt Maria forgot herself in enjoyment and novelty, and was like a different person. Mr. Kendal looked at her with a pleased sad wonder, and told his wife it reminded him of what she had been when she was nearly the prettiest girl at Bayford. Gilbert devoted himself as usual to making Genevieve feel welcome; and she had likewise Willie Ferrars and Francis Nugent at her feet. Neither urchin would sit two inches away from her all the evening, and in all games she was obliged to obviate jealousies by being partner to both at once. Where there was no one to oppress her, she came out with all her natural grace and vivacity, and people of a larger growth than her little admirers were charmed with her.

Lucy was obliging, ready, and useful, and looked very pretty, the

only blot was the heavy dulness of poor Sophy, who seemed resolved to take pleasure in nothing. Winifred varied in opinion whether her moodiness arose from ill-health, or from jealousy of her little brother. This latter Albinia would not believe, especially as she saw that little Maurice's blue eyes were magnets that held the silent Sophy fast, but surly denials silenced her interrogations as to illness, and made her content to acquiesce in Lucy's explanation that Sophy was only cross because the Osborns and Drurys were not asked.

Albinia did her duty handsomely by the two families a day or two after, for whatever reports might come round, they were always ready to receive her advances, and she only took notice of what she saw, instead of what she heard. Her brother helped Mr. Kendal through the party, and Winifred made a discovery that excited her more than Albinia thought warranted by any fact relating to the horde of Irish cousins.

'Only think, Albinia, I have found out that poor Ellen O'More is Mr. Goldsmith's sister!'

'Indeed! But I am afraid I don't remember which Ellen O'More is. You know I never undertake to recollect any but your real cousins out of the thirty-six.'

'For shame, Albinia, I have so often told you about Ellen. I'm sure you can't forget. Her husband is my sister's brother-in-law's cousin.'

'Oh, Winifred, Winifred!'

'But I tell you, her husband is the third son of old Mr. O'More of Ballymakilty, and was in the army.'

'Oh! the half-pay officer with the twelve children in the cottage on the estate.'

'There now, I did think you would care when I told you of a soldier, a Waterloo man too, and you only call him a half-pay officer!'

'I do remember,' said Albinia, taking a little pity, 'that you used to be sorry for his good little English wife.'

'Of course. I knew she had married him very imprudently, but she has struggled gallantly with ill-health, and poverty, and Irish recklessness. I quite venerate her, and it seems these Goldsmiths had so far cast her off that they had no notion of the extent of her troubles.'

'Just like them,' said Albinia. 'Is that the reason you wish me to make the most of the connexion? Let me see, my sister-in-law's sister's wife--no, husband's brother's uncle, eh?'

'I don't want you to do anything,' said Winifred, a little hurt, 'only if you had seen Ellen's patient face you would be interested in her.'

'Well, I am interested, you know I am, Winifred. I hope you interested our respected banker, which would be more to the purpose.'

'I think I did,' said Winifred; 'at least he said "poor Ellen" once or twice. I don't want him to do anything for the captain, you might give him a thousand pounds and he would never be the better for it: but that fourth, boy, Ulick, is without exception the nicest fellow I ever saw in my life--so devoted to his mother, so much more considerate and self-denying than any of the others, and very clever. Maurice examined him and was quite astonished. We did get him sent to St. Columba for the present, but whether they will keep him there no one can guess, and it is the greatest pity he should run to waste. I told Mr. Goldsmith all this, and I really think he seemed to attend. I wonder if it will work.'

Albinia was by this time anxious that it should take effect, and they agreed that an old bachelor banker and his sister, both past sixty, were the very people to adopt a promising nephew.

What had become of the multitude of things which Albinia had to discuss with her brother? The floodtide of bliss had floated her over all the stumbling-blocks and shoals that the ebb had disclosed, and she had absolutely forgotten all the perplexities that had seemed so trying. Even when she sought a private interview to talk to him about Gilbert, it was in full security of hearing the praises of her darling.

'A nice boy, a very nice boy,' returned Maurice; 'most amiable and intelligent, and particularly engaging, from his feeling being so much on the surface.'

'Nothing can be more sincere and genuine,' she cried, as if this fell a little flat.

'Certainly not, at the time.'

'Always!' exclaimed Albinia. 'You must not distrust him because he is not like you or Fred, and has never been hardened and taught reserve by rude boys. Nothing was ever more real than his affection, poor dear boy,' and the tears thrilled to her eyes.

'No, and it is much to his credit. His love and gratitude to you are quite touching, poor fellow; but the worst of it is that I am afraid he is very timid, both physically and morally.'

Often as she had experienced this truth, the soldier's daughter could not bear to avow it, and she answered hastily, 'He has never been braced or trained; he was always ill till within the last few years--coddling at first, neglect afterwards, he has it all to learn, and it is too late for school.'

'Yes, he is too old to be laughed at or bullied out of cowardice. Indeed, I doubt whether there ever would have been substance enough for much wear and tear.'

'I know you have a turn for riotous, obstinate boys! You want Willie to be another Fred,' said Albinia, like an old hen, ruffling up her feathers. 'You think a boy can't be good for anything unless he is a universal plague!'

'I wonder what you will do with your own son,' said Maurice, amused, 'since you take Gilbert's part so fiercely.'

'I trust my boy will never be as much to be pitied as his brother,' said Albinia, with tenderness that accused her petulance. 'At least he can never be a lonely twin with that sore spot in his heart. Oh, Maurice, how can any one help dealing gently with my poor Gibbie?'

'Gentle dealing is the very thing he wants,' said Mr. Ferrars; 'and I am thinking how to find it for him. How did his going to Traversham fail?'

'I don't know; Edmund did not like to send him without having seen Traversham, and I could not go. But I don't think there is any need for his going away. His father has been quite enough tormented about it, and I can manage him very well now. He is always good and happy with me. I mean to try to ride with him, and I have promised to teach him music, and we shall garden. Never fear, I will employ him and keep him out of mischief--it is all pleasure to me.'

'And pray what are your daughters and baby to do, while you are galloping after Gilbert?'

'Oh! I'll manage. We can all do things together. Come, Maurice, I won't have Edmund teased, and I can't bear parting with any of them, or think that any strange man can treat Gibbie as I should.'

Maurice was edified by his sister's warm-hearted weakness, but not at all inclined to let 'Edmund' escape a 'teasing.'

Mr. Kendal's first impulse always was to find a sufficient plea for doing nothing. If Gilbert was to go to India, it was not worth while to give him a classical education.

'Is he to go to India? Albinia had not told me so.'

'I thought she was aware of it; but possibly I may not have mentioned it. It has been an understood thing ever since I came home. He will have a good deal of the property in this place, but he had better have seen something of the world. Bayford is no place for a man to settle down in too young.'

'Certainly,' said Mr. Ferrars, repressing a smile. 'Then are you thinking of sending him to Haileybury?'

He was pronounced too young, besides, it was explained that his destination in India was unfixed. On going home it had been a kind of promise that one of the twin brothers should have an appointment in the civil service, the other should enter the bank of Kendal and Kendal, and the survivor was unconsciously suspended between these alternatives, while the doubt served as a convenient protection to his father from making up his mind to prepare him for either of these or for anything else.

The prompt Ferrars temper could bear it no longer, and Maurice spoke out. 'I'll tell you what, Kendal, it is time to attend to your own concerns. If you choose to let your son run to ruin, because you will not exert yourself to remove him from temptation, I shall not stand by to see my sister worn out with making efforts to save him. She is willing and devoted, she fancies she could work day and night to preserve him, and she does it with all her heart; but it is not

woman's work, she cannot do it, and it is not fit to leave it to her. When Gilbert has broken her heart as well as yours, and left an evil example to his brother, then you will feel what it is to have kept a lad whom you know to be well disposed, but weak as water, in the very midst of contamination, and to have left your young, inexperienced wife to struggle alone to save him. If you are unwarned by the experience of last autumn and winter, I could not pity you, whatever might happen.'

Maurice, who had run on the longer because Mr. Kendal did not answer immediately, was shocked at his own impetuosity; but a rattling peal of thunder was not more than was requisite.

'I believe you are right,' Mr. Kendal said. 'I was to blame for leaving him so entirely to Albinia; but she is very fond of him, and is one who will never be induced to spare herself, and there were considerations. However, she shall be relieved at once. What do you recommend?'

Mr. Ferrars actually made Mr. Kendal promise to set out for Traversham with him next morning, thirty miles by the railway, to inspect Mr. Downton and his pupils.

Albinia had just sense enough not to object, though the discovery of the Indian plans was such a blow to her that she could not be consoled by all her husband's representations of the advantages Gilbert would derive there, and of his belief that the Kendal constitution always derived strength from a hot climate, and that to himself going to India seemed going home. She took refuge in the hope that between the two Indian stools Gilbert might fall upon one of the professions which she thought alone worthy of man's attention, the clerical or the military.

Under Maurice's escort, Mr. Kendal greatly enjoyed his expedition; liked Traversham, was satisfied with the looks of the pupils, and very much pleased with the tutor, whom he even begged to come to Bayford for a conference with Mrs. Kendal, and this was received by her as no small kindness. She was delighted with Mr. Downton, and felt as if Gilbert could be safely trusted in his charge; nor was Gilbert himself reluctant. He was glad to escape from his tempter, and to begin a new life, and though he hung about Mrs. Kendal, and implored her to write often, and always tell him about his little brother--nay, though he cried like a child at the last, yet still he was happy and satisfied to go, and to break the painful fetters which had held him so long.

And though Albinia likewise shed some parting tears, she could not but own that she was glad to have him in trustworthy hands; and as to the additional time thus gained, it was disposed of in a million of bright plans for every one's service--daughters, baby, parish, school, classes, clubs, neighbours. It almost made Winifred giddy to hear how much she had undertaken, and yet with what zest she talked and acted.

'There's your victim, Winifred,' said Maurice, as they drove away, and looked back at Albinia, scandalizing Bayford by standing in the open gateway, her face all smiles of cheerful parting, the sun and wind making merry with her chestnut curls, her baby in one arm, the other held up to wave her farewell.

'That child will catch cold,' began Winifred, turning to sign her to go in. 'Well,' she continued, 'after all, I believe some people like an idol that sits quiet to be worshipped! To be sure she must want to beat him sometimes, as the Africans do their gods. But, on the whole, her sentiment of reverence is satisfied, and she likes the acting for herself, and reigning absolute. Yes, she is quite happy--why do you look doubtful? Don't you admire her?'

'From my heart.'

'Then why do you doubt? Do you expect her to do anything?'

'A little too much of everything.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Yes! Albinia was excessively happy. Her naturally high spirits were enhanced by the enjoyment of recovery, and reaction, from her former depression. Since the great stroke of the drainage, every one looked better, and her pride in her babe was without a drawback. He seemed to have inherited her vigour and superabundance of life, and 'that first wondrous spring to all but babes unknown,' was in him unusually rapid, so that he was a marvel of fair stateliness, size, strength, and intelligence, so unlike the little blighted buds which had been wont to fade at Willow Lawn, that his father watched him with silent, wondering affection, and his eldest sister was unmerciful in her descriptions of his progress; while even Sophia had not been proof against his smiles, and was proud to be allowed to carry him about and fondle him.

Neither was Mr. Kendal's reserve the trial that it had once been. After having become habituated to it as a necessary idiosyncrasy, she had become rather proud of his lofty inaccessibility. Besides, her brother's visit, her recovery, and the renewed hope and joy in this promising child, had not been without effect in rousing him from his apathy. He was less inclined to shun his fellow-creatures, had become friendly with the Vicar, and had even let Albinia take him into Mrs. Dusautoy's drawing-room, where he had been fairly happy. Having once begun taking his wife out in the carriage, he found this much more agreeable than his solitary ride, and was in the condition to which Albinia had once imagined it possible to bring him, in which gentle means and wholesome influence might lead him imperceptibly out of his morbid habits of self-absorption.

Unfortunately, in the flush of blitheness and whirl of activity, Albinia failed to perceive the relative importance of objects, and he had taught her to believe herself so little necessary to him that she had not learnt to make her pursuits and occupations subservient to his convenience. As long as the drive took place regularly, all was well, but he caught a severe cold, which lasted even to the setting in of the east winds, the yearly misery of a man who hardly granted that India was over-hot. Though Albinia had removed much listing, and opened various doors and windows, he made no complaints, but did

his best to keep the obnoxious fresh air out of his study, and seldom crossed the threshold thereof but with a shiver.

His favourite atmosphere was quite enough to account for a return of the old mood, but Albinia had no time to perceive that it might have been prevented, or at least mitigated.

Few even of the wisest women are fit for authority and liberty so little restrained, and happily it seldom falls to the lot of such as have not previously been chastened by a life-long affliction. But Mrs. Kendal, at twenty-four, with the consequence conferred by marriage, and by her superiority of manners and birth, was left as unchecked and almost as irresponsible as if she had been single or a widow, and was solely guided by the impulses of her own character, noble and highly principled, but like most zealous dispositions, without balance and without repose.

Ballast had been given at first by bashfulness, disappointment, and anxiety, but she had been freed from her troubles with Gilbert, had gained confidence in herself, and had taken her position at Bayford. She was beloved, esteemed, and trusted in her own set, and though elsewhere she might not be liked, yet she was deferred to, could not easily be quarrelled with, so that she met with little opposition, and did not care for such as she did meet. In fact, very few persons had so much of their own way as Mrs. Kendal.

She was generally in her nursery at a much earlier hour than an old-established nurse would have tolerated, but the little Susan, promoted from Fairmead school and nursery, was trained in energetic habits. In passing the doors of the young ladies' rooms, Albinia gave a call which she had taught them not to resist, for, like all strong persons, she thought 'early to rise' the only way to health, wealth, or wisdom. Much work had been despatched before breakfast, after which, on two days in the week, Albinia and Lucy went to church. Sophy never volunteered to accompany them, and Albinia was the less inclined to press her, because her attitudes and attention on Sunday were far from satisfactory. On Tuesday and Thursday Albinia had a class at school, and so, likewise, had Lucy, who kept a jealous watch over every stray necklace and curl, and had begun thoroughly to enjoy the importance and bustle of charity. She was a useful assistant in the penny club and lending library, which occupied Albinia on other mornings in the week, until the hour when she came in for the girls' studies. After luncheon, she enjoyed the company of little Maurice, who indeed pervaded all her home doings and thoughts, for she had a great gift of doing everything at once.

A sharp constitutional walk was taken in the afternoon. She thought no one could look drooping or dejected but from the air of the valley, and that no cure was equal to rushing straight up one hill and on to the next, always walking rapidly, with a springy buoyant step, and surprised at any one who lagged behind. Parochial cares, visits, singing classes, lessons to Sunday-school teachers, &c., filled up the rest of the day. She had an endless number of 'excellent plans,' on which she always acted instantly, and which kept her in a state of perpetual haste. Poor Mrs. Dusautoy had almost learnt to dread her flashing into the room, full of some parish matter, and flashing out again before the invalid felt as if the subject had been fairly entered on, or her sitting down to impress some project with overpowering eagerness that generally

carried away the Vicar into grateful consent and admiring approval, while his wife was feeling doubtful, suspecting her hesitation of being ungracious, or blaming herself for not liking the little she could do to be taken out of her hands.

There was nothing more hateful to Albinia than dawdling. She left the girls' choice of employments, but insisted on their being veritably occupied, and many a time did she encounter a killing glance from Sophia for attacking her listless, moody position in her chair, or saying, in clear, alert tones, 'My dear, when you read, read, when you work, work. When you fix your eye in that way, you are doing neither.'

Lucy's brisk, active disposition, and great good-humour, had responded to this treatment; she had been obliging, instead of officious; repeated checks had improved her taste; her love of petty bustle was directed to better objects, and though nothing could make her intellectual or deep, she was a really pleasant assistant and companion, and no one, except grandmamma, who thought her perfect before, could fail to perceive how much more lady-like her tones, manners, and appearance had become.

The results with Sophy had been directly the reverse. At first she had followed her sister's lead, except that she was always sincere, and often sulky; but the more Lucy had yielded to Albinia's moulding, the more had Sophy diverged from her, as if out of the very spirit of contradiction. Her intervals of childish nonsense had well nigh disappeared; her indifference to lessons was greater than ever, though she devoured every book that came in her way in a silent, but absorbed manner, a good deal like her father. Tales and stories were not often within her reach, but her appetite seemed to be universal, and Albinia saw her reading old-fashioned standard poetry--such as she had never herself assailed--and books of history, travels, or metaphysics. She wondered whether the girl derived any pleasure from them, or whether they were only a shield for doing nothing; but no inquiry produced an answer, and if Sophy remembered anything of them, it was not with the memory used in lesson-time. The attachment to Louisa Osborn was pertinacious and unaccountable in a person who could have so little in common with that young lady, and there was nothing comfortable about her except her fondness for her little brother, and that really seemed to be against her will. Her voice was less hoarse and gruff since the pond had been no more, and she had acquired an expression, so suffering, so concentrated, so thoughtful, that, together with her heavy black eyebrows, large face, profuse black hair, and unlustrous eyes, it gave her almost a dwarfish air, increased by her awkward deportment, which concealed that she was in reality tall, and on a large scale. She looked to so little advantage in bright delicate colours, that Albinia was often incurring her displeasure, and risking that of Lucy, by the deep blues and sober browns which alone looked fit to be seen with those beetle brows and sallow features. Her face looked many years older than that of her fair, fresh, rosy stepmother; nay, her father's clear olive complexion and handsome countenance had hardly so aged an aspect; and Gilbert, when he came home at Midsummer, declared that Sophy had grown as old as grandmamma.

The compliment could not be returned; Gilbert was much more boy-like in a good sense. He had brought home an excellent character, and showed it in every look and gesture. His father was pleased to have

him again, took the trouble to talk to him, and received such sensible answers, that the habit of conversing was actually established, and the dinners were enlivened, instead of oppressed, by his presence. Towards his sisters he had become courteous, he was fairly amiable to Aunt Maria, very attentive to grandmamma, overflowing with affection to Mrs. Kendal, and as to little Maurice, he almost adored him, and awakened a reciprocity which was the delight of his heart.

At Midsummer came the grand penny-club distribution, the triumph for which Albinia had so long been preparing. One of Mrs. Dusautoy's hints as to Bayford tradesmen had been overruled, and goods had been ordered from a house in London, after Albinia and Lucy had made an incredible agitation over their patterns of calico and flannel. Mr. Kendal was just aware that there was a prodigious commotion, but he knew that all ladies were subject to linen-drapery epidemics, and Albinia's took a more endurable form than a pull on his purse for the sweetest silk in the world, and above all, it neither came into his study nor even into his house.

It was a grand spectacle, when Mr. Dusautoy looked in on Mrs. Kendal and her staff, armed with their yard-wands.

A pile of calico was heaped in wild masses like avalanches in one corner, rapidly diminishing under the measurements of Gilbert, who looked as if he took thorough good-natured delight in the frolic. Brown, inodorous materials for petticoats, blouses, and trowsers were dealt out by the dextrous hands of Genevieve, a mountain of lilac print was folded off by Clarissa Richardson, Lucy was presiding joyously over the various blue, buff, brown, and pink Sunday frocks, the schoolmistress helping with the other goods, the customers--some pleased with novelty, or hoping to get more for their money, others suspicious of the gentry, and secretly resentful for favourite dealers, but, except the desperate grumblers, satisfied with the quality and quantity of the wares--and extremely taken with the sellers, especially with Gilbert's wit, and with Miss Durant's ready, lively persuasions, varied to each one's taste, and extracting a smile and 'thank you, Miss,' from the surliest. And the presiding figure, with the light on her sunny hair, and good-natured, unfailing interest in her countenance, was at her central table, calculating, giving advice, considering of complaints, measuring, folding--here, there, and everywhere--always bright, lively, forbearing, however complaining or unreasonable her clients might be.

Mr. Dusautoy went home to tell his Fanny that Mrs. Kendal was worth her weight in gold; and the workers toiled till luncheon, when Albinia took them home for food and wine, to restore them for the labours of the afternoon.

'What have you been about all the morning, Sophy? Yes, I see your translation--very well--I wish you would come up and help this afternoon, Miss Richardson is looking so pale and tired that I want to relieve her.'

'I can't,' said Sophy,

'I don't order you, but you are losing a great deal of fun. Suppose you came to look on, at least.'

'I hate poor people.'

'I hope you will change your mind some day, but you must do something this afternoon. You had better take a walk with Susan and baby; I told her to go by the meadows to Horton.'

'I don't want to walk.'

'Have you anything to do instead? No, I thought not, and it is not at all hot to signify.--It will do you much more good. Yes, you must go.'

In the course of the summer an old Indian friend was staying at Fairmead Park, and Colonel Bury wrote to beg for a week's visit from the whole Kendal family. Even Sophy vouchsafed to be pleased, and Lucy threw all her ardour into the completion of a blue braided cape, which was to add immensely to little Maurice's charms; she declared that she should work at it the whole of the last evening, while Mr. and Mrs. Kendal were at the dinner that old Mr. and Mrs. Bowles annually inflicted on themselves and their neighbours, a dinner which it would have been as cruel to refuse as it was irksome to accept.

There was a great similarity in those Bayford parties, inasmuch as the same cook dressed them all, and the same waiters waited at them, and the same guests met each other, and the principal variety on this occasion was, that the Osborns did not come, because the Admiral was in London.

The ladies had left the dining-room, when Albinia's ear caught a sound of hurried opening of doors, and sound of steps, and saw Mrs. and Miss Bowles look as if they heard something unexpected. She paused, and forgot the end of what she was saying. The room door was pushed a little way open, but then seemed to hesitate. Miss Bowles hastened forward, and opening it, admitted a voice that made Albinia hurry breathlessly from the other side of the room, and push so that the door yielded, and she saw it had been Mr. Dusautoy who had been holding it while there was some kind of consultation round Gilbert. The instant he saw her, he exclaimed, 'Come to the baby, Sophy has fallen down with him.'

People pressed about her, trying to speak cheerfully, but she understood nothing but that her husband and Mr. Bowles were gone on, and she had a sense that there had been hardness and cruelty in hesitating to summon her. Without knowing that a shawl was thrown round her, or seeing Mr. Dusautoy's offered arm, she clutched Gilbert's wrist in her hand, and flew down the street.

The gates and front door were open, and there was a throng of people in the hall. Lucy caught hold of her with a sobbing, 'Oh, Mamma!' but she only framed the words with her lips--'where?'

They pointed to the study. The door was shut, but Albinia broke from Lucy, and pushed through it, in too much haste to dwell on the sickening doubt what it might conceal.

Two figures stood under the window. Mr. Kendal, who was holding the little inanimate form in his arms for the doctor to examine, looking up as she entered, cast on her a look of mute, pleading, despairing agony, that was as the bitterness of death. She sprang forward herself to

clasp her child, and her husband yielded him in broken-hearted pity, but at that moment the little limbs moved, the features worked, the eyes unclosed, and clinging tightly to her, as she strained him to her bosom, the little fellow proclaimed himself alive by lusty roars, more welcome than any music. Partly stunned, and far more terrified, he had been in a sort of swoon, without breath to cry, till recalled to himself by feeling his mother's arms around him. Every attempt of Mr. Bowles to ascertain whether he were uninjured produced such a fresh panic and renewal of screams, that she begged that he might be left to her. Mr. Kendal took the doctor away, and gradually the terror subsided, though the long convulsive sobs still quivered up through the little frame, and as the twilight darkened on her, she had time to realize the past alarm, and rejoice in trembling over the treasure still her own.

The opening of the door and the gleaming of a light had nearly brought on a fresh access of crying, but it was his father who entered, and Maurice knew the low deep sweetness of his voice, and was hushed. 'I believe there is no harm done,' Albinia said; and the smile that she fain would have made reassuring gave way as her eyes filled with tears, on feeling the trembling of the strong arm that was put round her, when Mr. Kendal bent to look into the child's eyes.

'I thought my blight had fallen on you,' was all he said.

'Oh! the thankfulness--' she said; but she could not go on, she must stifle all that swelled within her, for the babe felt each throb of her beating heart; and she could barely keep from bursting into tears as his father kissed him; then, as he marked the still sobbing breath, said, 'Bowles must see him again.'

'I don't know how to make him cry again! I suppose he must be looked at, but indeed I think him safe.--See, this little bruise on his forehead is the only mark I can find. What was it? How did it happen?'

'Sophia thought proper to take him herself from the nursery to show him to Mrs. Osborn. In crossing the street, she was frightened by a party of men coming out of a public-house in Tibbs's Alley, and in avoiding them, slipped down and struck the child's head against a gate-post. He was perfectly insensible when I took him--I thought him gone. Albinia, you must let Bowles see him again!'

'Is any one there?' she said.

'Every one, I think,' he replied, looking oppressed--'Maria, and Mrs. Osborn, and Dusautoy--but I will call Bowles.'

Apparently the little boy had escaped entirely unhurt, but the surgeon still spoke of the morrow, and he was so startled and restless, that Albinia feared to move, and felt the dark study a refuge from the voices and sounds that she feared to encounter, lest they should again occasion the dreadful screaming. 'Oh, if they would only go home!' she said.

'I will send them,' said Mr. Kendal; and presently she heard sounds of leave-taking, and he came back, as if he had been dispersing a riot, announcing that the house was clear.

Gilbert and Lucy were watching at the foot of the stairs, the one pale, and casting anxious, imploring looks at her; the other with eyes red and swollen with crying, neither venturing near till she spoke to them, when they advanced noiselessly to look at their little brother, and it was not till they had caught his eye and made him smile, that Lucy bethought herself of saying she had known nothing of his adventure, and Albinia, thus recalled to the thought of the culprit, asked where Sophy was.

'In her own room,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I could not bear the sight of her obduracy. Even her aunt was shocked at her want of feeling.'

Low as he spoke, the sternness of his voice frightened the baby, and she was obliged to run away to the nursery, where she listened to the contrition of the little nursemaid, who had never suspected Miss Sophy's intention of taking him out of the house.

'And indeed, ma'am,' she said, 'there is not one of us servants who dares cross Miss Sophy.'

It was long before Albinia ventured to lay him in his cot, and longer still before she could feel any security that if she ceased her low, monotonous lullaby, the little fellow would not wake again in terror, but the thankfulness and prayer, that, as she grew more calm, gained fuller possession of her heart, made her recur the more to pity and forgiveness for the poor girl who had caused the alarm. Yet there was strong indignation likewise, and she could not easily resolve on meeting the hard defiance and sullen indifference which would wound her more than ever. She was much inclined to leave Sophy to herself till morning, but suspecting that this would be vindictive, she unclasped the arm that Lucy had wound round her waist, whispered to her to go on singing, and moved to Sophy's door. It was fastened, but before she could call, it was thrown violently back, and Sophy stood straight up before her, striving for her usual rigidity, but shaking from head to foot; and though there were no signs of tears, she looked with wistful terror at her step-mother's face, and her lips moved as if she wished to speak.

'Baby is gone quietly to sleep,' began Albinia in a low voice, beginning in displeasure; but as she spoke, the harshness of Sophy's face gave way, she sank down on the floor, and fell into the most overpowering fit of weeping that Albinia had ever witnessed. Kneeling beside her, she would have drawn the girl close to her, but a sharp cry of pain startled her, and she found the right arm, from elbow to wrist, all one purple bruise, the skin grazed, and the blood starting.

'My poor child! how you have hurt yourself!'

Sophy turned away pettishly.

'Let me look! I am sure it must be very bad. Have you done anything to it?'

'No, never mind. Go back to baby.'

'Baby does not want me. You shall come and see how comfortably he is asleep, if you will leave off crying, and let me see that poor arm.'

Did you hurt it in the fall?'

'The corner of the wall,' said Sophy. 'Oh! did it not hurt him?' but then, just as it seemed that she was sinking on that kind breast in exhaustion, she collected herself, and pushing Albinia off, exclaimed, 'I did it, I took him out, I fell down with him, I hurt his head, I've killed him, or made him an idiot for life. I did.'

'Who said so?' cried Albinia, transfixed.

'Aunt Maria said so. She said I did not feel. Oh, if I could only die before he grows up to let one see it. Why wont you begin to hate me?'

'My dear,' said Albinia, consoled on hearing the authority, 'people often say angry things when they are shocked. Your aunt had not seen Mr. Bowles, and we all think he was not in the least hurt, only terribly frightened. Dear, dear child, I am more distressed for you than for him!'

Sophy could hold out no longer, she let her head drop on the kind shoulder, and seemed to collapse, with burning brow, throbbing pulses, and sobs as deep and convulsive as had been those of her little brother. Hastily calling Lucy, who was frightened, subdued, and helpful, Albinia undressed the poor child, put her to bed, and applied lily leaves and spirits to her arm. The smart seemed to refresh her, but there had been a violent strain, as well as bruise, and each touch visibly gave severe pain, though she never complained. Lucy insisted on hearing exactly how the accident had happened, and pressed her with questions, which Albinia would have shunned in her present condition, and it was thus elicited that she had taken Maurice across the street to how him to Mrs. Osborn. He had resented the strange place, and strange people, and had cried so much that she was obliged to run home with him at once. A knot of bawling men came reeling out of one of the many beer shops in Tibbs's Alley, and in her haste to avoid them, she tripped, close to the gate-post of Willow Lawn, and fell, with only time to interpose her arm between Maurice's head and the sharp corner. She was lifted up at once, in the horror of seeing him neither cry nor move, for, in fact, he had been almost stifled under her weight, and all had since been to her a frightful phantom dream. Albinia was infinitely relieved by this history, showing that Maurice could hardly have received any real injury, and in her declarations that Sophy's presence of mind had saved him, was forgetting to whom the accident was owing. Lucy wanted to know why her sister could have taken him out of the house at all, but Albinia could not bear to have this pressed at such a moment, and sent the inquirer down to order some tea, which she shared with Sophy, and then was forced to bid her good-night, without drawing out any further confessions. But when the girl raised herself to receive her kiss, it was the first real embrace that had passed between them.

In the very early morning, Albinia was in the nursery, and found her little boy bright and healthy. As she left him in glad hope and gratitude, Sophy's door was pushed ajar, and her wan face peeped out. 'My dear child, you have not been asleep all night!' exclaimed Albinia, after having satisfied her about the baby.

'No.'

'Does your arm hurt you?'

'Yes.'

'Does your head ache?'

'Rather.'

But they were not the old sulky answers, and she seemed glad to have her arm freely bathed, her brow cooled, her tossed bed composed, and her window opened, so that she might make a fresh attempt at closing her weary eyes.

She was evidently far too much shaken to be fit for the intended expedition, even if her father had not decreed that she should be deprived of it. Albinia had never seen him so much incensed, for nothing makes a man so angry as to have been alarmed; and he was doubly annoyed when he found that she thought Sophy too unwell to be left, as he intended, to solitary confinement.

He would gladly have given up the visit, for his repugnance to society was in full force on the eve of a party; but Albinia, by representing that it would be wrong to disappoint Colonel Bury, and very hard on the unoffending Gilbert and Lucy, succeeded in prevailing on him to accept his melancholy destiny, and to allow her to remain at home with Sophy and the baby--one of the greatest sacrifices he or she had yet made. He was exceedingly vexed, and therefore the less disposed to be lenient. The more Albinia told him of Sophy's unhappiness, the more he hoped it would do her good, and he could not be induced to see her, nor to send her any message of forgiveness, for in truth it was less the baby's accident that he resented, than the eighteen months of surly resistance to the baby's mother, and at present he was more unrelenting than the generous, forgiving spirit of his wife could understand, though she tried to believe it manly severity and firmness.

'It would be time to pardon,' he said, 'when pardon was asked.'

And Albinia could not say that it had been asked, except by misery.

'She has the best advocate in you,' said Mr. Kendal, affectionately, 'and if there be any feeling in her, such forbearance cannot fail to bring it out. I am more grieved than I can tell you at your present disappointment, but it shall not happen again. If you can bring her to a better mind, I shall be the more satisfied in sending her from home.'

'Edmund! you do not think of it!'

'My mind is made up. Do you think I have not watched your patient care, and the manner in which it has been repaid? You have sufficient occupation without being the slave of those children's misconduct.'

'Sophy would be miserable. Oh! you must not! She is the last girl in the world fit to be sent to school.'

'I will not have you made miserable at home. This has been a long

trial, and nothing has softened her.'

'Suppose this was the very thing.'

'If it were, what is past should not go unrequited, and the change will teach her what she has rejected. Hush, dearest, it is not that I do not think that you have done all for her that tenderness or good sense could devise, but your time is too much occupied, and I cannot see you overtaken by this poor child's headstrong temper. It is decided, Albinia; say no more.'

'I have failed,' thought Albinia, as he left the room. 'He decides that I have failed in bringing up his children. What have I done? Have I been mistaken? have I been careless? have I not prayed enough? Oh! my poor, poor Sophy! What will she do among strange girls? Oh! how wretched, how harsh, how misunderstood she will be! She will grow worse and worse, and just when I do think I might have begun to get at her! And it is for my sake! For me that her father is set against her, and is driving her out from her home! Oh! what shall I do? Winifred will promote it, because they all think I am doing too much! I wonder what put that in Edmund's head? But when he speaks in that way, I have no hope!'

Mr. Kendal's anger took a direction with which she better sympathized when he walked down Tibbs's Alley, and counted the nine beer shops, which had never dawned on his imagination, and which so greatly shocked it, that he went straight to the astonished Pettilove, and gave him a severe reprimand for allowing the houses to be made dens of iniquity and disorder.

He was at home in time to meet the doctor, and hear that Maurice had suffered not the smallest damage; and then to make another ineffectual attempt to persuade Albinia to consign Sophy to imprisonment with Aunt Maria; after which he drove off very much against his will with Lucy and Gilbert, both declaring that they did not care a rush to go to Fairmead under the present circumstances.

Albinia had a sad, sore sense of failure, and almost of guilt, as she lingered on the door-step after seeing them set off. The education of 'Edmund's children' had been a cherished vision, and it had resulted so differently from her expectations, that her heart sank. With Gilbert there was indeed no lack of love and confidence, but there was a sad lurking sense of his want of force of character, and she had avowedly been insufficient to preserve him from temptation; Lucy, whom externally she had the most altered, was not of a nature accordant enough with her own for her to believe the effects deep or permanent; and Sophia--poor Sophia! Had what was kindly called forbearance been really neglect and want of moral courage? Would a gentler, less eager person have won instead of repelling confidence? Had her multiplicity of occupations made her give but divided attention to the more important home duty. Alas! alas! she only knew that her husband thought his daughter beyond her management, and for that very reason she would have given worlds to retain the uncouth, perverse girl under her charge.

She stood loitering, for the sound of the river and the shade of the willows were pleasant on the glowing July day, and having made all her arrangements for going from home, she had no pressing employment, and thus she waited, musing as she seldom allowed herself time to do,

and thinking over each phase of her conduct towards Sophy, in the endeavour to detect the mistake; and throughout came, not exactly answering her query, but throwing a light upon it, her brother's warning, that if she did not resign herself to rest quietly when rest was forced upon her, she would work amiss when she did work.

Just then came a swinging of the gate, a step on the walk, and Miss Meadows made her appearance. A message had been sent up in the morning, but grandmamma was so nervous, that Maria had trotted down in the heat so satisfy her.

Albinia was surprised to find that womanhood had thrown all their instincts on the baby's side, and was gratified by the first truly kind fellow-feeling they had shown her. She took Maria into the morning room, where she had left Sophy lying on the sofa, and ran up to fetch Maurice from the nursery.

When she came down, having left the nurse adorning him, she found that she had acted cruelly. Sophy was standing up with her hardest face on, listening to her aunt's well-meant rebukes on her want of feeling, and hopes that she did regret the having endangered her brother, and deprived 'her dear mamma of the party of pleasure at Fairmead; but Aunt Maria knew it was of no use to talk to Sophy, none--!'

'Pray don't, Aunt Maria,' said Albinia, gently drawing Sophy down on the sofa again; 'this poor child is in no state to be scolded.'

'You are a great deal too good to her, Mrs. Kendal--after such wilfulness as last night--carrying the dear baby out in the street--I never heard of such a thing--But what made you do it, Sophy, wont you tell me that? No, I know you won't; no one ever can get a word from her. Ah! that sulky disposition--it is a very nasty temper--can't you break through it, Sophy, and confess it all to your dear mamma? You would be so much better. But I know it is of no use, poor child, it is just like her father.'

Albinia was growing very angry, and it was well that Maurice's merry crowings were heard approaching. Miss Meadows was delighted to see him, but as he had a great aversion to her, the interview was not prolonged, since he could not be persuaded to keep the peace by being held up to watch a buzzing fly, as much out of sight of her as possible, wrinkling up his nose, and preparing to cry whenever he caught sight of her white bonnet and pink roses.

Miss Meadows bethought her that grandmamma was anxious, so she only waited to give an invitation to tea, but merely to Mrs. Kendal; she would say nothing about Sophy since disgrace--well-merited--if they could only see some feeling.

'Thank you,' said Albinia, 'some evening perhaps I may come, since you are so kind, but I don't think I can leave this poor twisted arm to itself.'

Miss Meadows evaporated in hopes that Sophy would be sensible of--and assurances that Mrs. Kendal was a great deal too--with finally, 'Good-bye, Sophy, I wish I could have told grandmamma that you had shown some feeling.'

'I believe,' said Albinia, 'that you would only be too glad if you knew how.'

Sophy gasped.

Albinia could not help feeling indignant at the misjudged persecution; and yet it seemed to render the poor child more entirely her own, since all the world besides had turned against her. 'Kiss her, Maurice,' she said, holding the little fellow towards her. That scratched arm of hers has spared your small brains from more than you guess.'

Sophy's first impulse was to hide her face, but he thought it was bo-peep, caught hold of her fingers, and laughed; then came to a sudden surprised stop, and looked up to his mother, when the countenance behind the screen proved sad instead of laughing.

'Ah! baby, you had better have done with me,' Sophy said, bitterly; 'you are the only one that does not hate me yet, and you don't know what I have done to you.'

'I know some one else that cares for you, my poor Sophy,' said Albinia, 'and who would do anything to make you feel it without distressing you. If you knew how I wish I knew what to do for you!'

'It is no use,' said Sophy, moodily; 'I was born to be a misery to myself and every one else.'

'What has put such a fancy in your head, my dear?' said Albinia, nearly smiling.

'Grandmamma's Betty said so, she used to call me Peter Grievous, and I know it is so. It is of no good to bother yourself about me. It can't be helped, and there's an end of it.'

'There is not an end of it, indeed!' cried Albinia. 'Why, Sophy, do you suppose I could bear to leave you so?'

'I'm sure I don't see why not.'

'Why not?' continued Albinia, in her bright, tender voice. 'Why, because I must love you with all my heart. You are your own dear papa's child, and this little man's sister. Yes, and you are yourself, my poor, sad, lonely child, who does not know how to bring out the thoughts that prey on her, and who thinks it very hard to have a stranger instead of her own mother. I know I should have felt so.'

'But I have behaved so ill to you,' cried Sophy, as if bent on repelling the proffered affection. 'I would not like you, and I did not like you. Never! and I have gone against you every way I could.'

'And now I love you because you are sorry for it.'

'I'm not'--Sophy had begun, but the words turned into 'Am I?'

'I think you are,' and with the sweetest of tearful smiles, she put an arm round the no longer resisting Sophy, and laying her cheek against the little brother's, she kissed first one and then the

other.

'I can't think why you are so,' said Sophy, still struggling against the undeserved love, though far more feebly. 'I shall never deserve it.'

'See if you don't, when we pull together instead of contrary ways.'

'But,' cried Sophy, with a sudden start from her, as if remembering a mortal offence, 'you drained the pond!'

'I own I earnestly wished it to be drained; but had you any reason for regretting it, my dear?'

'Ah! you did not know,' said Sophy. 'He and I used to be always there.'

'He--?'

'Why, will you make me say it?' cried Sophy. 'Edmund! I mean Edmund! We always called it his pond. He made the little quay for his boats--he used to catch the minnows there. I could go and stand by it, and think he was coming out to play; and now you have had it dried up, and his dear little minnows are all dead,' and she burst into a passion of tears, that made Maurice cry till Albinia hastily carried him off and returned.

'My dear, I am sorry it seemed so unkind. I do not think we could have let the pond stay, for it was making the house unhealthy; but if we had talked over it together, it need not have appeared so very cruel and spiteful.'

'I don't believe you are spiteful,' said Sophy, 'though I sometimes think so.'

The filial compliment was highly gratifying.

'And now, Sophy,' she said, 'that I have told you why we were obliged to have the pond drained, will you tell me what you wanted with baby at Mrs. Osborn's?'

'I will tell,' said Sophy, 'but you wont like it.'

'I like anything better than concealment.'

'Mrs. Osborn said she never saw him. She said you kept him close, and that nobody was good enough to touch him; so I promised I would bring him over, and I kept my word. I know it was wrong--and--I did not think you would ever forgive me.'

'But how could you do it?'

'Mrs. Osborn and all used to be so kind to us when there was nobody else. I wont cast them off because we are too fine and grand for them.'

'I never thought of that. I only was afraid of your getting into silly ways, and your papa did not wish us to be intimate there. And now you see he was right, for good friends would not have led you to

such disobedience--and by stealth, too, what I should have thought you would most have hated.'

Albinia had been far from intending these last words to have been taken as they were. Sophy hid her face, and cried piteously with an utter self-abandonment of grief, that Albinia could scarcely understand; but at last she extracted some broken words. 'False! shabby! yes--Oh! I have been false! Oh! Edmund! Edmund! Edmund! the only thing I thought I still was! I thought I was true! Oh, by stealth! Why couldn't I die when I tried, when Edmund did?'

'And has life been a blank ever since?'

'Off and on,' said Sophy. 'Well, why not? I am sure papa is melancholy enough. I don't like people that are always making fun, I can't see any sense in it.'

'Some sorts of merriment are sad, and hollow, and wrong, indeed,' said Albinia, 'but not all, I hope. You know there is so much love and mercy all round us, that it is unthankful not to have a cheerful spirit. I wish I could give you one, Sophy.'

Sophy shook her head. 'I can't understand about mercy and love, when Edmund was all I cared for.'

'But, Sophy, if life is so sad and hard to you, don't you see the mercy that took Edmund away to perfect joy? Remember, not cutting you off from him, but keeping him safe for you.'

'No, no,' cried Sophy, 'I have never been good since he went. I have got worse and worse, but I did think I was true still, that that one thing was left me--but now--' The sense of having acted a deception seemed to produce grief under which the stubborn pride was melting away, and it was most affecting to see the child weeping over the lost jewel of truth, which she seemed to feel the last link with the remarkable boy whose impress had been left so strongly on all connected with him.

'My dear, the truth is in you still, or you could not grieve thus over your failure,' said Albinia. 'I know you erred, because it did not occur to you that it was not acting openly by me; but oh! Sophy, there is something that would bring you nearer to Edmund than hard truth in your own strength.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Sophy.

'Did you ever think what Edmund is about now?'

'I don't know,' said Sophy.

'I only know that the one thing which is carried with us to the other world is love, Sophy, and love that becomes greater than we can yet imagine. If you would think of Him who redeemed and saved your dear Edmund, and who is his happiness, his exceeding great reward, your heart would warm, and, oh! what hope and peace would come!'

'Edmund was good,' said Sophy, in a tone as if to mark the hopeless gulf between.

'And you are sorry. All human goodness begins from sorrow. It had even to be promised first for baby at his christening, you know. Oh, Sophy, God's blessing can make all these tears come to joy.'

Albinia's own tears were flowing so fast, that she broke off to hide them in her own room, her heart panting with hope, and yet with grief and pity for the piteous disclosure of so dreary a girlhood. After all, childhood, if not the happiest, is the saddest period of life--pains, griefs, petty tyrannies, neglects, and terrors have not the alleviation of the experience that 'this also shall pass away;' time moves with a tardier pace, and in the narrower sphere of interests, there is less to distract the attention from the load of grievances. Hereditary low spirits, a precocious mind, a reserved temper, a motherless home, the loss of her only congenial companion, and the long-enduring effect of her illness upon her health, had all conspired to weigh down the poor girl, and bring on an almost morbid state of gloomy discontent. Her father's second marriage, by enlivening the house, had rendered her peculiarities even more painful to herself and others, and the cultivation of mind that was forced upon her, made her more averse to the trifling and playfulness, which, while she was younger, had sometimes brightened and softened her. And this was the girl whom her father had resolved upon sending to the selfish, inconsiderate, frivolous world of school-girls, just when the first opening had been made, the first real insight gained into her feelings, the first appearance of having touched her heart! Albinia felt baffled, disappointed, almost despairing. His stern decree, once made, was, she knew, well-nigh unalterable; and though resolved to use her utmost influence, she doubted its power after having seen that look of decision. Nay, she tried to think he might be right. There might be those who would manage Sophy better. Eighteen months had been a fair trial, and she had failed. She prayed earnestly for whatever might be best for the child, and for herself, that she might take it patiently and submissively.

Sophy felt the heat of the day a good deal, but towards the evening she revived, and seemed so much cheered and refreshed by her tea, that, as the sound of the church bell came sweetly down in the soft air, Albinia said, 'Sophy, I am going to take advantage of my holiday and go to the evening service. I suppose you had rather not come?'

'I think I will,' returned Sophy, somewhat glumly, but Albinia hailed the answer joyfully, as the first shamefaced effort of a reserved character wishing to make a new beginning, and she took care that no remark, not even a look, should rouse the sullen sensitiveness that could so easily be driven back for ever.

Slowly they crept up the steps on the shady side of the hill, watching how, beyond the long shadow it cast over the town and the meadows, the trees revelled in the sunset light, and windows glittered like great diamonds, where in the ordinary daylight the distance was too great for distinct vision.

The church was cool and quiet, and there was something in Sophy's countenance and reverent attitude that seemed as if she were consecrating a newly-formed resolution; her eye was often raised, as though in spite of herself, to the name of the brother whose short life seemed inseparably interwoven with all the higher aspirations of his home.

In the midst of the Thanksgiving, a sudden movement attracted Albinia, and she saw Sophy resting her head, and looking excessively pale. She put her arm round her, and would have led her out, but could not persuade her to move, and by the time the Blessing was given, the power was gone, and she had almost fainted away, when a tall strong form stooped over her, and Mr. Dusautoy gathered her up in his arms, and bore her off as if she had been a baby, to the open window of his own drawing-room.

'Put me down! The floor, please!' said Sophy, feebly, for all her remaining faculties were absorbed in dislike to the mode of conveyance.

'Yes, flat on the floor,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, rising with full energy, and laying a cushion under Sophy's head, reaching a scent-bottle, and sending her husband for cold water and sal volatile; with readiness that astonished Albinia, unused to illness, and especially to faintings, and remorseful at having taken Sophy out. 'Was it the pain of her arm that had overcome her?'

'No,' said Sophy, 'it was only my back.'

'Indeed! you never told me you had hurt your back;' and Albinia began describing the fall, and declaring there must be a sprain.

'Oh, no,' said Sophy, 'kneeling always does it.'

'Does what, my dear?' said Albinia, sitting on the floor by her, and looking up to Mrs. Dusautoy, exceedingly frightened.

'Makes me feel sick,' said Sophy; 'I thought it would go off, as it always does, it didn't; but it is better now.'

'No, don't get up yet,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, as she was trying to move; 'I would offer you the sofa, it would be more hospitable, but I think the floor is the most comfortable place.'

'Thank you, _much_,' said Sophy, with an emphasis.

'Do you ever lie down on it when you are tired?' asked the lady, looking anxiously at Sophy.

'I always wish I might.'

Albinia was surprised at the interrogations that followed; she did not understand what Mrs. Dusautoy was aiming at, in the close questioning, which to her amazement did not seem to offend, but rather to be gratifying by the curious divination of all sensations. It made Albinia feel as if she had been carrying on a deliberate system of torture, when she heard of a pain in the back, hardly ever ceasing, aggravated by sitting upright, growing severe with the least fatigue, and unless favoured by day, becoming so bad at night as to take away many hours of sleep.

'Oh! Sophy, Sophy,' she cried, with tears in her eyes, 'how could you go on so? Why did you never tell me?'

'I did not like,' began Sophy, 'I was used to it.'

Oh, that barrier! Albinia was in uncontrollable distress, that the girl should have chosen to undergo so much suffering rather than bestow any confidence. Sophy stole her hand into hers, and said in her odd, short way, 'Never mind, it did not signify.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'those things are just what one does get so much used to, that it seems much easier to bear them than to speak about them.'

'But to let oneself be so driven about,' cried Albinia. 'Oh! Sophy, you will never do so again! If I had ever guessed--'

'Please hush! Never mind!' said Sophy, almost crossly, and getting up from the floor quickly, as though resolved to be well.

'I have never minded long enough,' sighed Albinia. 'What shall I do, Mrs. Dusautoy? What do you think it is?'

This was the last question Mrs. Dusautoy wished to be asked in Sophy's presence. She had little doubt that it was spine complaint like her own, but she had not intended to let her perceive the impression, till after having seen Mrs. Kendal alone. However, Albinia's impetuosity disconcerted all precautions, and Sophy's two great black eyes were rounded with suppressed terror, as if expecting her doom. 'I think that a doctor ought to answer that question,' Mrs. Dusautoy began.

'Yes, yes,' exclaimed Albinia, 'but I never had any faith in old Mr. Bowles, I had rather go to a thorough good man at once.'

'Yes, certainly, by all means.'

'And then to whom! I will write to my Aunt Mary. It seems exactly like you. Do you think it is the spine?'

'I am afraid so. But, my dear,' holding out her hand caressingly to Sophy, 'you need not be frightened--you need not look at me as an example of what you will come to--I am only an example of what comes of never speaking of one's ailments.'

'And of having no mother to find them out!' cried Albinia.

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, anxious to console and encourage, as well as to talk the young step-mother out of her self-reproach, 'I do not think that if I had been my good aunt's own child, she would have been more likely to find out that anything was amiss. It was the fashion to be strong and healthy in that house, and I was never really ill--but I came as a little stunted, dwindling cockney, and so I was considered ever after--never quite comfortable, often forgetting myself in enjoyment, paying for it afterwards, but quite used to it. We all thought it was "only Fanny," and part of my London breeding. Yes, we thought so in good faith, even after the largest half of my life had been spent in Yorkshire.'

'And what brought it to a crisis? Did they go on neglecting you?' exclaimed Albinia.

'Why, my dear,' said the little lady, a glow lighting on her cheek,

and a smile awakening, 'my uncle took a new curate, whom it was the family custom to call "the good-natured giant," and whose approach put all of us young ladies in a state of great excitement. It was all in character with his good-nature, you know, to think of dragging the poor little shrimp up the hill to church, and I believe he did not know how she would get on without his strong arm; for do you know, when he had the curacy of Lauriston given him, he chose to carry the starveling off with him, instead of any of those fine, handsome prosperous girls. Dear Mary and Bessie! how good they were, and how kind and proud for me! I never could complain of not having sisters.'

'Well, and Mr. Dusautoy made you have advice?'

'Not he! Why, we all believed it cockneyism, you know, and besides, I was so happy and so well, that when we went to Scotland, I fairly walked myself off my legs, and ended the honeymoon laid up in a little inn on Loch Katrine, where John used regularly to knock his head whenever he came into the room. It was a fortnight before I could get to Edinburgh, and the journey made me as bad as ever. So the doctors were called in, and poor John learnt what a crooked stick he had chosen; but they all said that if I had been taken in hand as a child, most likely I should have been a sound woman. The worst of it was, that I was so thoroughly knocked up that I could not bear the motion of a carriage; besides, I suppose the doctors wanted a little amusement out of me, for they would not hear of my going home. So poor John had to go to Lauriston by himself, and those were the longest, dreariest six months I ever spent in my life, though Bessie was so good as to come and take care of me. But at last, when I had nearly made up my mind to defy the whole doctorhood, they gave leave, and between water and steam, John brought me to Lauriston, and ever since that, I don't see that a backbone would have made us a bit happier.'

Sophy had been intently reading Mrs. Dusautoy's face all through the narration, from under her thick black eyelashes, and at the end she drew a sigh of relief, and seemed to catch the smile of glad gratitude and affection. There was a precedent, which afforded incredible food to the tumultuous cravings of a heart that had been sinking in sullen gloom under the consciousness of an unpleasing exterior. The possibility of a 'good-natured giant' was far more present to her mind than the present probability of future suffering and restraint.

Ever rapid and eager, Albinia could think of nothing but immediate measures for Sophy's good, and the satisfaction of her own conscience. She could not bear even to wait for Mr. Kendal's return, but, as her aunts were still in London, she resolved on carrying Sophy to their house on the following day for the best advice. It was already late, and she knelt at the table to dash off two notes to put into the post-office as she went home. One to Mrs. Annesley, to announce her coming with Sophy, baby, and Susan, the other as follows:--

'July 10th, 9 p.m.

'Dearest Edmund,

'I find I have been cruelly neglectful. I have hunted and driven

that poor child about till it has brought on spine complaint. The only thing I can do, is to take her to have the best advice without loss of time, so I am going to-morrow to my aunt's. It would take too long to write and ask your leave. You must forgive this, as indeed each word I have to say is, forgive! She is so generous and kind! You know I meant to do my best, but they were right, I was too young.

'Forgive yours,
'A. K.'

The Dusautoys were somewhat taken by surprise, but they knew too well the need of promptitude to dissuade her; and Sophia herself sat aghast at the commotion, excited by the habitual discomfort of which she had thought so little. The vicar, when he found Mrs. Kendal in earnest, offered to go with them and protect them; but Albinia was a veteran in independent railway travelling, and was rather affronted by being treated as a helpless female. Mrs. Dusautoy, better aware of what the journey might be to one at least of the travellers, gave advice, and lent air cushions, and Albinia bade her good night with an almost sobbing 'thank you,' and an entreaty that if Mr. Kendal came home before them, she would tell him all about it.

At home, she instantly sent the stupefied Sophy to bed, astonished the little nurse, ordered down boxes and bags, and spent half the night in packing, glad to be stirring and to tire herself into sleeping, for her remorse and her anticipations were so painful, that, but for fatigue, her bed would have been no resting-place.

CHAPTER IX.

Winifred Ferrars was surprised by Mr. Kendal's walking into her garden, with a perturbed countenance, begging her to help him to make out what could be the meaning of a note which he had just received. He was afraid that there was much amiss with the baby, and heartily wished that he had not been persuaded to leave home; but poor Albinia wrote in so much distress, that he could not understand her letter.

More accustomed to Albinia's epistolary habits, Winifred exclaimed at the first glance, 'What can you mean? There is not one word of the little one! It is only Sophy!'

The immediate clearing of his face was not complimentary to poor Sophy, as he said, 'Can you be quite sure? I had begun to hope that Albinia might at least have the comfort of seeing this little fellow healthy; but let me see--she says nursed and--and danced--is it? this poor child--'

'No, no; it is hunted and driven; that's the way she always will make her h's; besides, what nonsense the other would be.'

'This poor child--' repeated Mr. Kendal, 'Going up to London for advice. She would hardly do that with Sophia.'

'Who ever heard of a baby of six months old having a spine complaint?' cried Mrs. Ferrars almost angrily.

'I have lost one in that way,' he replied.

A dead silence ensued, till Winifred, to her great relief, spied the feminine pronoun, but could not fully satisfy Mr. Kendal that the ups and downs were insufficient for the word _him_; and each scrawl was discussed as though it had been a cuneiform inscription, until he had been nearly argued into believing in the lesser evil. He then was persuaded that the Meadowses had been harassing and frightening Albinia into this startling measure. It was so contrary to his own nature, that he hardly believed that it had actually taken place, and that she must be in London by this time, but at any rate, he must join her there, and know the worst. He would take the whole party to an hotel, if it were too great a liberty to quarter themselves upon Mrs. Annesley.

Winifred was as much surprised as if the chess-king had taken a knight's move, but she encouraged his resolution, assured him of a welcome at what the cousinhood were wont to call the Family Office, and undertook the charge of Gilbert and Lucy. The sorrowful, almost supplicating tone of his wife's letter, would have sufficed to bring him to her, even without his disquietude for his child, whichever of them it might be; and though Albinia's merry blue-eyed boy had brought a renewed spring of hope and life, his crashed spirits trembled at the least alarm.

Thus, though the cheerful Winifred had convinced his reason, his gloomy anticipations revived before he reached London; and with the stern composure of one accustomed to bend to the heaviest blows, he knocked at Mrs. Annesley's door. He was told that Mrs. Kendal was out; but on further inquiry, learnt that Sophy was in the drawing-room, where he found her curled up in the corner of the sofa, reading intently.

She sprang to her feet with a cry of surprise, but did not approach, though he held out his arms, saying in a voice husky with anxiety, 'Is the baby well, Sophia?'

'Yes,' she cried, 'quite well; he is out in the carriage with them.' Then shrinking as he was stooping to kiss her, she reddened, reddening deeply, 'Papa, I did very wrong; I was sly and disobedient, and I might have killed him.'

'Do not let us speak of that now, my dear, I want to hear of--' and again he would have drawn her into his embrace, but she held out her hand, with her repelling gesture, and burst forth in her rude honesty, 'I can't be forgiven only because I am ill. Hear all about it, papa, and then say you forgive me if you can. I always was cross to mamma, because I was determined I would be; and I did not think she had any business with us. The more she was kind, the more I did not like it; and I thought it was mean in Gilbert and Lucy to be fond of her. No! I have not done yet! I grew naughtier and naughtier, till at last I have been false and sly, and--have done this to baby--and I would not have cared then--if--if she would not have been--oh! so good!'

Sophy made no farther resistance to the arm that was thrown round her, as her father said, 'So good, that she has overcome evil with good. My child, how should I not forgive when you are sensible of your mistake, and when she has so freely forgiven?'

Sophy did not speak, but she pressed his arm closer round her, and laid her cheek gratefully on his shoulder. She only wished it could last for ever; but he soon lifted her, that he might look anxiously at her face, while he said, 'And what is all this, my dear! I am afraid you are not well.'

Her energies were recalled; and, squeezing his hand, she said, 'Mind, you will not let them say it was mamma's fault.'

'Who is accusing her, my dear?' What is the matter?'

'It is only my back,' said Sophy; 'there always was a stupid pain there; but grandmamma's Betty said I made a fuss, and that it was all laziness, and I would not let any one say so again, and I never told of it, and it went on till the other night I grew faint at church, and Mrs. Dusautoy put mamma in such a fright, that we all came here yesterday; and there came a doctor this morning, who says my spine is not straight, and that I must lie on my back for a long time; but never mind, papa, it will be very comfortable to lie still and read, and I shall not be cross now,' she added reassuringly, as his grasp pressed her close, with a start of dismay.

'My dear, I am afraid you hardly know what you may have to go through, but I am glad you meet it bravely.'

'But you wont let them say mamma did it?'

'Who should say so?'

'Aunt Maria will, and mamma will go and say so herself,' cried Sophy; 'she will say it was taking walks and carrying baby, and it's not true. I told the doctor how my back ached long before baby came or she either, and he said that most likely the weakness had been left by the fever. So if it is any one's mismanagement, it is Aunt Maria's, and if you wont tell her so, I will.'

'Gently, Sophy, that would hardly be grateful, after the pains that she has taken with you, and the care she meant to give.'

'Her care was all worry,' said Sophy, 'and it will be very lucky if I don't tell her so, if she says her provoking things to mamma. But you wont believe them, papa.'

'Most certainly not.'

'Yes, you must tell her to be happy again,' continued Sophy; 'I cannot bear to see her looking sorrowful! Last night, when she fancied me asleep, she cried--oh! till it made me miserable! And to-day I heard Miss Ferrars say to Mrs. Annesley, that her fine spirits were quite gone. You know it is very silly, for I am the last person in all the world she ought to cry for.'

'She has an infinite treasure of love,' said Mr. Kendal, 'and we have done very little that we should be blessed with it.'

'There, they are come home!' exclaimed Sophy, starting up as sounds were heard on the stairs, and almost at the same moment Albinia was in the room, overflowing with contrition, gladness, and anxiety; but something of sweetness in the first hasty greeting made the trust overcome all the rest; and, understanding his uppermost wish, she stepped back to the staircase, and in another second had put Maurice into his arms, blooming and contented, and with a wide-mouthed smile for his papa. Mr. Kendal held him fondly through all the hospitable welcomes of the aunts, and his own explanations; but to Albinia it was all confusion, and almost annoyance, till she could take him upstairs, and tell her own story.

'I am afraid you have been very much alarmed,' were his first words.

'I have done everything wrong from beginning to end,' said Albinia. 'Oh, Edmund, I am so glad you are come! Now you will see the doctor, and know whether it was as bad as all the rest to bring her to London.'

'My dearest, you must calm yourself, and try to explain. You know I understand nothing yet, except from your resolute little advocate downstairs, and your own note, which I could scarcely make out, except that you were in great trouble.'

'Ah, that note; I wrote it in one of my impetuous fits. Maurice used to say I ran frantic, and grew irrational, and so I did not know what I was saying to you; and I brought that poor patient girl up here in all the heat, and the journey hurt her so much, that I don't know how we shall ever get her home again. Oh, Edmund, I am the worst wife and mother in the world; and I undertook it all with such foolish confidence.'

Mr. Kendal liked her impetuous fits as little as her brother did, and was not so much used to them; but he dealt with her in his quiet, straightforward way. 'You are exaggerating now, Albinia, and I do not wonder at it, for you have had a great deal to startle and to try you. Walking up and down is only heating and agitating you more; sit down here, and let me hear what gave you this alarm.'

The grave affection of his manner restrained her, and his presence soothed the flutter of spirits; though she still devoted herself with a sort of wilfulness to bear all the blame, until he said, 'This is foolish, Albinia; it is of no use to look at anything but the simple truth. This affection of the spine must be constitutional, and if neglect have aggravated the evil, it must date from a much earlier period than since she has been under your charge. If any one be to blame, it is myself, for the apathy that prevented me from placing the poor things under proper care, but I was hardly then aware that Maria's solicitude is always in the wrong place.'

'But everybody declares that it was always visible, and that no one could look at her without seeing that she was crooked.'

'Après le coup,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I grant you that a person of more experience might perhaps have detected what was amiss sooner than you did, but you have only to regret the ignorance you shared with us all; and you did your utmost according to your judgment.'

'And a cruel utmost it was,' said Albinia; 'it is frightful to think what I inflicted, and she endured in silence, because I had not treated her so that she could bear to speak to me.'

'That is over now,' said Mr. Kendal, 'you have conquered her at last. Pride could not hold out against such sweetness.'

'It is her generosity,' said Albinia; 'I always knew she was the best of them all, if one could but get at her.'

'What have you done to her? I never heard her say half so much as she voluntarily said to me just now.'

'Poor dear! I believe the key of her heart was lost when Edmund died, and so all within was starved,' said Albinia. 'Yes,' as his eyes were suddenly raised and fixed on her, 'I got to that at last. No one has ever understood her, since she lost her brother.'

'She has a certain likeness to him. I knew she was his favourite sister; but such a child as she was--'

'Children have deeper souls than you give them credit for,' said Albinia. 'Yes, Edmund, you and Sophy are very much alike! You had your study, and poor Sophy enclosed herself in a perpetual cocoon of study atmosphere, and so you never found each other out till to-day.'

Perhaps it was the influence of the frantic fit that caused her to make so direct a thrust; but Mr. Kendal was not offended. There was a good deal in the mere absence from habitual scenes and associations; he always left a great deal of reserve behind him at Bayford.

'You may be right, Albinia,' he said; 'I sometimes think that amongst us you are like the old poet's "star confined into a tomb."'

Such a compliment was a pretty reward for her temerity.

Returning to business, she found that her journey was treated as more judicious than she deserved. The consequences had justified her decision. Mr. Kendal knew it was the right thing to be done, and was glad to have been spared the dreadful task of making up his mind to it. He sat down of his own accord to write a note to Winifred, beginning, 'Albinia was right, as she always is,' and though his wife interlined, 'Albinia had no right to be right, for she was inconsiderate, as she always is,' she looked so brilliantly pretty and bright, and was so full of sunny liveliness, that she occasioned one of the very few disputes between her good aunts. Miss Ferrars declared that poor Albinia was quite revived by the return to her old home, and absence of care, while Mrs. Annesley insisted on giving the credit to Mr. Kendal. They were perfectly agreed in unwillingness to part with their guests; and as the doctor wished to see more of his patient, the visit was prolonged, to the enjoyment of all parties.

Sophy had received her sentence so easily, that it was suspected that she did not realize the tedium of confinement, and was relieved by being allowed to be inactive. Until she should go home, she might do whatever did not fatigue her; but most sights, and even the motion of the carriage, were so fatiguing, that she was much more inclined to remain at home and revel in the delightful world of books. The kind,

unobtrusive petting; the absence of customary irritations; the quiet high-bred tone of the family, so acted upon her, as to render her something as agreeably new to herself as to other people. The glum mask was cast aside, she responded amiably to kindness and attention, allowed herself to be drawn into conversation, and developed much more intelligence and depth than even Albinia had given her credit for.

One day, when Miss Ferrars was showing Mr. Kendal some illustrations of Indian scenery, a question arose upon the date of the native sovereign to whom the buildings were ascribed. Mr. Kendal could not recollect; but Sophia, looking up, quietly pronounced the date, and gave her reasons for it. Miss Ferrars asked how she could have learnt so much on an out-of-the-way topic.

'I read a book of the History of India, up in the loft,' said Sophy.

'That book!' exclaimed her father; 'I wish you joy! I never could get through it! It is the driest chronicle I ever read--a mere book of reference. What could induce you to read that?'

'I would read anything about India;' and her tone, though low and subdued, betrayed such enthusiasm as could find nothing dry, and this in a girl who had read aloud the reign of Edward III. with stolid indifference!

'Well, I think I can promise you more interesting reading about India when we go home,' said Mr. Kendal.

The colour rose on Sophy's cheek. Books out of papa's study! Could the world offer a greater privilege?' She could scarcely pronounce, 'Thank you.'

'Very faithful to her birth-place,' said Miss Ferrars; 'but she must have been very young when she came home.'

'About five years old, I believe,' said her father. 'You surely can remember nothing of Talloon.'

'I don't know,' said Sophy, mournfully; 'I used--'

'I thought Indian children usually lost their eastern recollections very early,' said Miss Ferrars; 'I never heard of one who could remember the sound of Hindostanee a year after coming home.'

Mr. Kendal, entertained and gratified, turned to his daughter; and, by way of experiment, began a short sentence in Hindostanee; but the first sound brought a glow to her cheeks, and, with a hurried gesture, she murmured, 'Please don't, papa.'

Albinia saw that feelings were here concerned which must not be played on in public; and she hastily plunged into the discussion, and drew it away from Sophy. Following her up-stairs at bed-time, she contrived to win from her an explanation.

Edmund had been seven years old at the time of the return to England. Fondly attached to some of the Hindoo servants, and with unusual intelligence and observation, the gorgeous scenery and oriental habits of his first home had dwelt vividly in his imagination, and he

had always considered himself as only taken to England for a time, to return again to India. Thus, he had been fond of romancing of the past and of the future, and had never let his little sister's recollections fade entirely away. His father had likewise thought that it would save future trouble to keep up the boys' knowledge of the language, which would by-and-by be so important to them. Gilbert's health had caused his studies to be often intermitted, but Edmund had constantly received instructions in the Indian languages, and whatever he learnt had been imparted to Sophia. It was piteous to discover how much time the poor forlorn little girl had spent sitting on the floor in the loft, poring over old grammars, and phrase-books, and translations of missionary or government school-books there accumulated--anything that related to India, or that seemed to carry on what she had done with Edmund: and she had acquired just enough to give her a keen appetite for all the higher class of lore, which she knew to reside in the unapproachable study. Those few familiar words from her father had overcome her, because, a trivial greeting in themselves, they had been a kind of password between her and her brother.

Mr. Kendal was greatly touched, and very remorseful for having left such a heart to pine in solitude, while he was absorbed in his own lonely grief; and Albinia ventured to say, 'I believe the greatest pleasure you could give her would be to help her to keep up the language.'

He smiled, but said, 'Of what possible use could it be to her?'

'I was not thinking of future use. It would be of immense present use to her to do anything with you, and I can see that nothing would gratify her so much. Besides, I have been trying to think of all the new things I could set her to do. She must have lessons to fill up the day, and I want to make fresh beginnings, and not go back to the blots and scars of our old misunderstandings.'

'You want me to teach her Sanscrit because you cannot teach her Italian.'

'Exactly so,' said Albinia; 'and the Italian will spring all the better from the venerable root, when we have forgotten how cross we used to be to each other over our relative pronouns.'

'But there is hardly anything which I could let her read in those languages.'

'Very likely not; but you can pick out what there is. Do you remember the fable of the treasure that was to be gained by digging under the apple-tree, and which turned out not to be gold, but the fruit, the consequence of digging? Now, I want you to dig Sophy; a Sanscrit, or a Hindostanee, or a Persian treasure will do equally well as a pretext. If she had announced a taste for the differential calculus, I should have said the same. Only dig her, as Maurice dug me apropos to Homer. I wouldn't bother you, only you see no one else could either do it, or be the same to Sophy.'

'We will see how it is,' said Mr. Kendal.

With which Albinia was obliged to be content; but in the meantime she saw the two making daily progress in intimacy, and Mr. Kendal

beginning to take a pride in his daughter's understanding and information, which he ascribed to Albinia, in spite of all her disclaimers. It was as if she had evoked the spirit of his lost son, which had lain hidden under the sullen demeanour of the girl, devoid indeed of many of Edmund's charms, but yet with the same sterling qualities, and with resemblance enough to afford infinite and unexpected joy and compensation.

Mr. Kendal enjoyed his stay in town. He visited libraries, saw pictures, and heard music, with the new zest of having a wife able to enter into his tastes. He met old friends, and did not shrink immoderately from those of his wife; nay, he found them extremely agreeable, and was pleased to see Albinia welcomed. Indeed, his sojourn in her former sphere served to make him wonder that she could be contented with Bayford, and to find her, of the whole party, by far the most ready to return home. Both he himself and Sophy had an unavowed dread of the influence of Willow Lawn; but Albinia had a spring of spirits, independent of place, and though happy, was craving for her duties, anxious to have the journey over, and afraid that London was making her little Maurice pale.

Miss Meadows was the first person whom they saw at Willow Lawn. Two letters had passed, both so conventionally civil, that her state of mind could not be gathered from them, but her first tones proved that coherence was more than ever wanting, and no one attempted to understand anything she said, while she enfolded Sophy in an agitated embrace, and marshalled them to the drawing-room, where the chief of the apologies were spent upon Sophy's new couch, which had been sent down the day before by the luggage-train, and which she and Eweretta had attempted to put together in an impossible way, failing which, they had called in the carpenter, who had made it worse.

It was an untold advantage that she had to take the initiative in excuses. Sophy was so meek with weariness, that she took pretty well all the kind fidgeting that could not be averted from her, and Miss Meadows's discourse chiefly tended to assurances that Mrs. Kendal was right, and grandmamma was nervous--and poor Mr. Bowles--it could not be expected--with hints of the wonderful commotion the sudden flight to London had excited at Bayford. As soon as Mr. Kendal quitted the room, these hints were converted into something between expostulation, condolence, and congratulation.

It was so very fortunate--so very lucky that dear Mr. Kendal had come home with her, for--she had said she would let Mrs. Kendal hear, if only that she might be on her guard--people were so ill-natured--there never was such a place for gossip--not that she heard it from any one but Mrs. Drury, who really now had driven in--not that she believed it, but to ascertain.--For Mrs. Drury had been told--mentioning no names--oh, no! for fear of making mischief--she had been told that Mrs. Kendal had actually been into Mr. Kendal's study, which was always kept locked up, and there she had found something which had distressed her so much that she had gone to Mr. Dusautoy, and by his advice had fled from home to the protection of her brother in Canada.

'Without waiting for Bluebeard's asking for the key! Oh, Maria!' cried Albinia, in a fit of laughter, while Sophia sat up on the sofa in speechless indignation.

'You may laugh, Mrs. Kendal, if you please,' said Maria, with tart dignity; 'I have told you nothing but the truth. I should have thought for my part, but that's of no consequence, it was as well to be on one's guard in a nest of vipers, for Edmund's sake, if not for your own.' And as this last speech convulsed Albinia, and rendered her incapable of reply, Miss Meadows became pathetic. 'I am sure the pains I have taken to trace out and contradict--and so nervous as grandmamma has been--"I'm sure, Mrs. Drury," said I, "that though Edmund Kendal does lock his study door, nobody ever thought anything--the housemaids go in to clean it--and I've been in myself when the whitewashers were about the house--I'm sure Mrs. Kendal is a most amiable young woman, and you wouldn't raise reports." "No," she said, "but Mrs. Osborn was positive that Mrs. Kendal was nearly an hour shut up alone in the study the night of Sophy's accident--and so sudden," she said, "the carriage being sent for--not a servant knew of it--and then," she said, "it was always the talk among the girls, that Mr. Kendal kept his study a forbidden place.'"

'Then,' said Sophia, slowly, as she looked full at her aunt, 'it was the Osborns who dared to say such wicked things.'

'There now, I never meant you to be there. You ought to be gone to bed, child. It is not a thing for you to know anything about.'

'I only want to know whether it was the Osborns who invented these stories,' said Sophy.

'My dear,' exclaimed Albinia, 'what can it signify? They are only a very good joke. I did not think there had been so much imagination in Bayford.' And off she went laughing again.

'They are very wicked,' said Sophy, 'Aunt Maria, I will know if it was Mrs. Osborn who told the story.'

Sophy's will was too potent for Miss Meadows, and the admission was extracted in a burst of other odds and ends, in the midst of which Albinia beheld Sophy cross the room with a deliberate, determined step. Flying after her, she found her in the hall, wrapping herself up.

'Sophy, what is this? What are you about?'

'Let me alone,' said Sophy, straining against her detaining hand, 'I do not know when I shall recover again, and I will go at once to tell the Osborns that I have done with them. I stuck to them because I thought they were my mother's friends; I did not guess that they would make an unworthy use of my friendship, and invent wicked stories of my father and you.'

'Please don't make me laugh, Sophy, for I don't want to affront you. Yes, it is generous feeling; I don't wonder you are angry; but indeed silly nonsense like this is not worth it. It will die away of itself, it must be dead already, now they have seen we have not run away to Canada. Your heroics only make it more ridiculous.'

'I must tell Loo never to come here with her hypocrisy,' repeated Sophy, standing still, but not yielding an inch.

Miss Meadows pursued them at the same moment with broken

protestations that they must forget it, she never meant to make mischief, &c., and the confusion was becoming worse confounded when Mr. Kendal emerged from the study, demanding what was the matter, to the great discomfiture of Maria, who began hushing Sophy, and making signs to Albinia that it would be dangerous for him to know anything about it.

But Albinia was already exclaiming, 'Here's a champion wanting to do battle with Louisa Osborn in our cause. Oh, Edmund! our neighbours could find no way of accounting for my taking French leave, but by supposing that I took advantage of being shut in there, while poor little Maurice was squalling so furiously, to rifle your secrets, and detect something so shocking, that away I was fleeing to William in Canada.'

'Obliging,' quietly said Mr. Kendal.

'Now, dear Edmund--I know--for my sake--for everything's sake, remember you are a family man, don't take any notice.'

'I certainly shall take no notice of such folly,' said Mr. Kendal, 'and I wish that no one else should. What are you about, Sophia?'

'Tell mamma to let me go, papa,' she exclaimed, 'I must and will tell Louisa that I hate her baseness and hypocrisy, and then I'll never speak to her again. Why will mamma laugh? It is very wicked of them.'

'Wrong in them, but laughing is the only way to treat it,' said Mr. Kendal. 'Go back to your sofa and forget it. Your aunt and I have heard Bayford reports before.'

Sophy obeyed unwillingly, she was far too much incensed to forget. On her aunt's taking leave, and Mr. Kendal offering his escort up the hill, she rose up again, and would have perpetrated a denunciation by letter, had not Albinia seriously argued with her, and finding ridicule, expediency, and Christian forgiveness all fail of hitting the mark, said, 'I don't know with what face you could attack Louisa, when you helped her to persecute poor Genevieve because you thought she had an instrument of torture in her drawer.'

'It was not I who said that,' said Sophy, blushing.

'You took part with those who did. And poor Genevieve was a much more defenceless victim than papa or myself.'

'I would not do so now.'

'It does not take much individual blackness of heart to work up a fine promising slander. A surmise made in jest is repeated in earnest, and all the other tale-bearers think they are telling simple facts. Depend upon it, the story did not get off from the Osborns by any means as it came back to Aunt Maria.'

'I should like to know.'

'Don't let us make it any worse; and above all, do not let us tell Lucy.'

'Oh, no!' said Sophy, emphatically.

To Albinia's surprise no innuendo from Mrs. or Miss Meadows ever referred to her management having caused Sophy's misfortune, and she secretly attributed this silence to Mr. Kendal's having escorted his sister-in-law to her own house.

Sophy's chief abode became the morning-room, and she seemed very happy and tranquil there--shrinking from visitors, but grateful for the kindness of parents, brother and sister.

Mr. Kendal, finding her really eager to learn of him, began teaching her Persian, and was astonished at her promptness and intelligence. He took increasing pleasure in her company, gave her books to read, and would sometimes tell the others not to stay at home for her sake, as he should be 'about the house.'

He really gave up much time to her, and used to carry her, when the weather served, to a couch in the garden, for she could not bear the motion of wheels, and was forbidden to attempt walking, though she was to be in the air as much as possible, so that Albinia spent more time at home. The charge of Sophy was evidently her business, and after talking the matter over with Mrs. Dusautoy, she resigned, though not without a pang, the offices she had undertaken in the time of her superfluous activity, and limited herself to occasional superintendence, instead of undertaking constant employment in the parish. Though she felt grieved and humiliated, Willow Lawn threw the better for it, and so did her own mind, yes, and even her temper, which was far less often driven by over-haste into quick censure, or unconsidered reply.

Her mistakes about Sophia had been a lesson against one-sided government. At first, running into the other extreme, she was ready to imagine that all the past ill-humour had been the effect of her neglect and cruelty; and Sophy's amiability almost warranted the notion. The poor girl herself had promised 'never to be cross again,' and fancied all temptation was over, since she had 'found out mamma,' and papa was so kind to her. But all on a sudden, down came the cloud again. Nobody could detect any reason. Affronts abounded--not received with an explosion that would have been combated, laughed at, and disposed of, but treated with silence, and each sinking down to be added to the weight of cruel injuries. There was no complaint; Sophy obeyed all orders with her old form of dismal submission, but everything proposed to her was distasteful, and her answers were in the ancient surly style. If attempts were made to probe the malady, her reserve was impenetrable--nothing was the matter, she wanted nothing, was vexed at nothing. She pursued her usual occupations, but as if they were hardships; she was sullen towards her mamma, snappishly brief with her aunt and sister, and so ungracious and indifferent even with her father, that Albinia trembled lest he might withdraw the attention so improperly received. When this dreary state of things had lasted more than a week, he did tell her that if she were tired of the lessons, it was not worth while to proceed; but that he had hoped for more perseverance.

The fear of losing these, her great pride and pleasure, overcame her. She maintained her grim composure till he had left her, but then fell into a violent fit of crying, in which Albinia found her, and which dissolved the reserve into complaints that every one was very cruel

and unkind, and she was the most miserable girl in all the world; papa was going to take away from her the only one thing that made it tolerable!

Reasoning was of no use; to try to show her that it was her own behaviour that had annoyed him, only made her mamma appear equally hard-hearted, and she continued wretched all the rest of the day, refusing consolation, and only so far improved that avowed discontent was better than sullenness. The next morning, she found out that it was not the world that was in league against her, but that she had fallen into the condition which she had thought past for ever. This was worst of all, and her disappointment and dejection lasted not only all that long day, but all the next, making her receive all kindnesses with a broken-down, woebegone manner, and reply to all cheerful encouragements with despair about anything ever making her good. Albinia tried to put her in mind of the Source of all goodness; but any visible acceptance of personal applications of religious teaching had not yet been accomplished.

Gradually all cleared up again, and things went well till for some fresh trivial cause or no cause, the whole process was repeated--sulking, injured innocence, and bitter repentance. This time, Mr. Kendal pronounced, 'This is low spirits, far more than temper,' and he thenceforth dealt with these moods with a tender consideration that Albinia admired, though she thought at times that to treat them more like temper than spirits might be better for Sophy; but it was evident that the poor child herself had at present little if any power either of averting such an access, or of shaking it off. The danger of her father's treatment seemed to be, that the humours would be acquiesced in, like changes in the weather, and that she might be encouraged neither to repent, nor to struggle; while her captivity made her much more liable to the tedium and sinking of heart that predisposed her to them.

There seemed to be nothing to be done but to bear patiently with them while they lasted, to console the victim afterwards, lead her to prayer and resolute efforts, and above all to pray for her, as well as to avoid occasions of bringing them on; but this was not possible, since no one could live without occasional contradiction, and Sophy could sometimes bear a strong remonstrance or great disappointment, when at others a hint, or an almost imperceptible vexation, destroyed her peace for days.

Mr. Kendal bore patiently with her variations, and did his best to amuse away her gloom. It was wonderful how much of his own was gone, and how much more alive he was. He had set himself to attack the five public-houses and seven beer-shops in Tibbs's Alley, and since his eyes had been once opened, it seemed as if the disorders became more flagrant every day. At last, he pounced on a misdemeanour which he took care should come before the magistrates, and he was much annoyed to find the case dismissed for want of evidence. One Sunday he beheld the end of a fray begun during service-time; he caused an information to be laid, and went himself to the petty sessions to represent the case, but the result was a nominal penalty. The Admiral was a seeker of popularity, and though owning that the town was in a shocking state, and making great promises when talked to on general points, yet he could never make up his mind to punish any 'poor fellow,' unless he himself were in a passion, when he would go any length. The other magistrates would not interfere; and all the

satisfaction Mr. Kendal obtained was being told how much he was wanted on the bench.

One of the few respectable Tibbs's Alleyites told him that it was of no use to complain, for the publicans boasted of their impunity, snapped their fingers at him, and drank Admiral Osborn's health as their friend. The consequence was, that Mr. Kendal took a magnanimous resolution, ordered a copy of Burn's Justice, and at the September Quarter Sessions actually rode over to Hadminster, and took the oaths.

On the whole, the expectation was more formidable than the reality. However much he disliked applying himself to business, no one understood it better. The value of his good sense, judgment, and acuteness was speedily felt. Mr. Nugent, the chairman, depended on him as his ally, and often as his adviser; and as he was thus made to feel himself of weight and importance, his aversion subsided, and he almost learnt to look forward to a chat with Mr. Nugent; or whether he looked forward to it or not, there could be no doubt that he enjoyed it. Though still shy, grave, silent, and inert, there was a great alteration in him since the time when he had had no friends, no interests, no pursuits beyond his study; and there was every reason to think that, in spite of the many severe shocks to his mauvaise honte, he was a much happier man.

His wife could not regret that his magisterial proceedings led to a coolness with the Osborns, augmented by a vestry-meeting, at which Mr. Dusautoy had begged him to be present. The Admiral and his party surpassed themselves in their virulence against whatever the vicar proposed, until they fairly roused Mr. Kendal's ire, and 'he came out upon them all like a lion;' and with force appearing the greater from being so seldom exerted, he represented Mr. Dusautoy's conduct in appropriate terms, showing full appreciation of his merits, and holding up their own course before them in its true light, till they had nothing to say for themselves. It was the vicar's first visible victory. The increased congregation showed how much way he had made with the poor, and Mr. Kendal taking his part openly, drew over many of the tradespeople, who had begun to feel the influence of his hearty nature and consistent uprightness, and had become used to what had at first appeared innovations. Mr. Dusautoy, in thanking Mr. Kendal, begged him to allow himself to be nominated his churchwarden next Easter, and having consented while his blood was up, there was no danger that, however he might dislike the prospect, he would falter when the time should come.

CHAPTER X.

It was 'a green Yule,' a Christmas like an April day, and even the lengthening days and strengthening cold of January attaining to nothing more than three slight hoar-frosts, each quickly melting into mud, and the last concluding in rain and fog.

'What would Willow Lawn have been without the drainage?' Albinia often thought when she paddled down the wet streets, and saw the

fields flooded. The damp had such an effect upon Sophy's throat, temper, and whole nervous system, that her moods had few intervals, and Albinia wrote to the surgeon a detail of her symptoms, asking if she had not better be removed into a more favourable air. But he pronounced that the injury of the transport would outbalance the casual evils of the bad weather, and as the rain and fog mitigated, she improved; but there were others on whom the heavy moist air had a more fatal effect.

One morning, Mr. Kendal saw his wife descending the picturesque rugged stone staircase that led outside the house to the upper stories of the old block of buildings under the hill, nearly opposite to Willow Lawn. She came towards him with tears still in her eyes as she said, 'Poor Mrs. Simkins has just lost her little girl, and I am afraid the two boys are sickening.'

'What do you mean? Is the fever there again?' exclaimed Mr. Kendal in the utmost consternation.

'Did you not know it? Lucy has been very anxious about the child, who was in her class.'

'You have not taken Lucy to a house with a fever!'

'No, I thought it safer not, though she wanted very much to go.'

'But you have been going yourself!'

'It was a low, lingering fever. I had not thought it infectious, and even now I believe it is only one of those that run through an over-crowded family. The only wonder is, that they are ever well in such a place. Dear Edmund, don't be angry; it is what I used to do continually at Fairmead. I never caught anything; and there is plenty of chloride of lime, and all that. I never imagined you would disapprove.'

'It is the very place where the fever began before!' said Mr. Kendal, almost under his breath.

Instead of going into the house, he made her turn into the garden, where little Maurice was being promenaded in the sun. He stretched out from his nurse's arms to go to them, and Albinia was going towards him, but her husband held her fast, and said, 'I beg you will not take the child till you have changed your dress.'

Albinia was quite subdued, alarmed at the effect on him.

'You must go away at once,' he said presently. 'How soon can you be ready? You had better take Lucy and Maurice at once to your brother's. They will excuse the liberty when they know the cause.'

'And pray what is to become of poor Sophy?'

'Never going out, there may be the less risk for her. I will take care of her myself.'

'As if I was going to endure that!' cried Albinia. 'No, no, Edmund, I am not likely to run away from you and Sophy! You may send Lucy off, if you like, but certainly not me, or if you do I shall come

back the same evening.'

'I should be much happier if you were gone.'

'Thank you, but what should I be? No, if it were to be caught here, which I don't believe, now the pond is gone, it would be of no use to send me away, after I have been into the house with it.'

Her resolution and Sophy's need prevailed, and most unwillingly Mr. Kendal gave up the point. She was persuaded that he was acting on a panic, the less to be wondered at after all he had suffered. She thought the chief danger was from the effect of his fears, and would fain have persuaded him to remain at Fairmead with Lucy, but she was not prepared to hear him insist on likewise removing Maurice. She had promised not to enter the sick room again, and pleaded that the little boy need never be taken into the street--that the fever was not likely to come across the running stream--that the Fairmead nursery was full enough already.

Mr. Kendal was inexorable. 'I hope you may never see what I have seen,' he said gravely, and Albinia was silenced.

A man who had lost so many children might be allowed to be morbidly jealous of the health of the rest. But it was a cruel stroke to her to be obliged to part with her noble little boy, just when his daily advances in walking and talking made him more charming than ever. Her eyes were full of tears, and she struggled to choke back some pettish rebellious words.

'You do not like to trust him with Susan,' said Mr. Kendal; 'you had better come with him.'

'No,' said Albinia, 'I ought to stay here, and if you judge it right, Maurice must go. I'll go and speak to Susan.'

And away she ran, for she had no power just then to speak in a wifely manner. It was not easy to respect a man in a panic so extremely inconvenient.

He was resolved on an immediate start, and the next few hours were spent in busy preparation, and in watching lest the excited Lucy should frighten her sister. Albinia tried to persuade Mr. Kendal at least to sleep at Fairmead that night, and after watching him drive off, she hurried, dashing away the tears that would gather again and again in her eyes, to hold council with the Dusautoys on the best means of stopping the course of the malady, by depriving it of its victims.

She had a quiet snug evening with Sophy, whom she had so much interested in the destitution of the sick children as to set her to work at some night-gear for them, and she afterwards sat long over the fire trying to read to silence the longing after the little soft cheek that had never yet been laid to rest without her caress, and foreboding that Mr. Kendal would return from his dark solitary drive with his spirits at the lowest ebb.

So late that she had begun to hope that Winifred had obeyed her behest and detained him, she heard his step, and before she could run to meet him, he had already shut himself into the study.

She was at the door in a moment; she feared he had thought her self-willed in the morning, and she was the more bent on rousing him. She knocked--she opened the door. He had thrown himself into his arm-chair, and was bending over the dreary, smouldering, sulky log and white ashes, and his face, as he raised his head, was as if the whole load of care and sorrow had suddenly descended again.

'I am sorry you sat up,' was of course his beginning, conveying anything but welcome; but she knew that this only meant that he was in a state of depression. She took hold of his hand, chilled with holding the reins, told him of the good fire in the morning-room, and fairly drew him up-stairs.

There the lamp burnt brightly, and the red fire cast a merry glow over the shining chintz curtains, and the two chairs drawn so cosily towards the fire, the kettle puffing on the hearth, and Albinia's choice little bed-room set of tea-china ready on the small table. The cheerfulness seemed visibly to diffuse itself over his face, but he still struggled to cherish his gloom, 'Thank you, but I would not have had you take all this trouble, my dear.'

'It would be a great deal more trouble if you caught a bad cold. I meant you to sleep at Fairmead.'

'Yes, they pressed me very kindly, but I could not bear not to come home.'

'And how did Maurice comport himself?'

'He talked to the horse and then went to sleep, and he was not at all shy with his aunt after the first. He watched the children, but had not begun to play with them. Still I think he will be quite happy with Lucy there, and I hope it will not be for long.'

It was a favourable sign that Mr. Kendal communicated all these particulars without being plied with questions, and Albinia went on with the more spirit.

'No, I hope it may not be for long. We have been holding a great council against the enemy, and I do hope that we have really done something. No, you need not be afraid, I have not been there again, but we have been routing out the nucleus, and hope we may starve out the fever for want of victims. You never saw such a swarm as we had to turn out. There were twenty-three people to be considered for.'

'Twenty-three! Have you turned out the whole block?'

'No, I wish we had; but that would have been seventy-five. This is only from those two tenements with one door!'

'Impossible!'

'I should have thought so; but the lawful inhabitants make up sixteen, and there were seven lodgers.'

Mr. Kendal gave a kind of groan, and asked what she had done; she detailed the measures.

'Twenty-three people in those two houses, and seventy-five in the whole block of building?'

'Too true. And if you could only see the rooms! The windows that wont open; the roofs that open too much; the dirt on the staircases, and, oh! the horrible smells!'

'It shall not go on,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I will look over the place.'

'Not till the fever is out of it,' hastily interposed Albinia.

He made a sign of assent, and went on: 'I will certainly talk to Pettilove, and have the place repaired, if it be at my own expense.'

Albinia lifted up her eyes, not understanding at whose expense it should be.

'The fact is,' continued Mr. Kendal, 'that there has been little to induce me to take interest in the property. Old Mr. Meadows was, as you know, a successful solicitor, and purchased these various town tenements bit by bit, and then settled them very strictly on his grandson. He charged the property with life incomes to his widow and daughters, and to me; but the land is in the hands of trustees until my son's majority, and Pettilove is the only surviving trustee.'

The burning colour mantled in Albinia's face, and almost inaudibly she said, 'I beg your pardon, Edmund; I have done you moat grievous injustice. I thought you would not see--'

'You did not think unjustly, my dear. I ought to have paid more attention to the state of affairs, and have kept Pettilove in order. But I knew nothing of English affairs, and was glad to be spared the unpleasant charge. The consequence of leaving a man like that irresponsible never occurred to me. His whole conscience in the matter is to have a large sum to put into Gilbert's hands when he comes of age. Why, he upholds those dens of iniquity in Tibbs's Alley on that very ground!'

'Poor Gilbert! I am afraid a large sum so collected is not likely to do him much good! and at one-and-twenty--! But that is one notion of faithfulness!'

Albinia was much happier after that conversation. She could better endure to regret her own injustice than to believe her husband the cruel landlord; and it was no small advance that he had afforded her an explanation which once he would have deemed beyond the reach of female capacity.

In spite of the lack of little Maurice's bright presence, which, to Albinia's great delight, his father missed as much as she did, the period of quarantine sped by cheerfully. Sophy had not a single sullen fit the whole time, and Albinia having persuaded Mr. Kendal that it would be a sanitary measure to whitewash the study ceiling, he was absolutely forced to turn out of it and live in the morning-room, with all his books piled up in the dining-room. And on that great occasion Albinia abstracted two fusty, faded, green canvas blinds from the windows, carried them off with a pair of tongs, and pushed them into a bonfire in the garden, persuaded they were the last relics of the old fever. She had the laurels cut, the curtains

changed, the windows cleaned, and altogether made the room so much lighter, that when Mr. Kendal again took possession, he did not look at all sure whether he liked it; and though he was courteously grateful, he did not avail himself of the den half so much as when it had more congenial gloom. But then he had the morning-room as a resort, and it was one of Albinia's bargains with herself, that as far as her own influence could prevent it, neither he nor Sophy should ever render it a literal boudoir.

The sense of snugness that the small numbers produced was one great charm, and made Mr. Kendal come unusually far out of his shell. His chief sanitary precaution was to take Albinia out for a drive or walk every day, and these expeditions were greatly enjoyed.

One day, after a visit from her old nurse, Sophy received Albinia with the words,--

'Oh, mamma,' she said, 'old nurse has been telling me such things. I shall never be cross with Aunt Maria again. It is such a sad story, just like one in a book, if she was but that kind of person.'

'Aunt Maria! I remember Mrs. Dusautoy once saying she gave her the idea of happiness shattered, but--'

'Did she?' exclaimed Sophy. 'I never thought Aunt Maria could have done anything but fidget everybody that came near her; but old nurse says a gentleman was once in love with her, and a very handsome young gentleman too. Old Mr. Pringle's nephew it was, a very fine young officer in the army. I want you to ask papa if it is true. Nurse says that he wrote to make an offer for her, very handsomely, but grandpapa did not choose that both his daughters should go quite away; so he locked the letter up, and said no, and never told her, and she thought the captain had been trifling and playing her false, and pined and fretted, till she got into this nervous way, and fairly wore herself out, nurse says, and came to be what she is now, instead of the prettiest young lady in the town! And then, mamma, when grandpapa died, she found the letter in his papers, and one inside for her, that had never been given to her; and by that time there was no hope, for Captain Pringle had gone out with his regiment, and married a rich young lady in the Indies! Oh, mamma! you see she really is deserted, and it is all man's treachery that has broken her heart. I thought people always died or went into convents--I don't mean that Aunt Maria could have done that, but I did not think that way of hers was a broken heart!'

'If she has had such troubles, it should indeed make us try to be very forbearing with her,' said Albinia.

'Will you ask papa about it?' entreated Sophy.

'Yes, certainly; but you must not make sure whether he will think it right to tell us. Poor Aunt Maria; I do think some part of it must be true!'

'But, mamma, is that really like deserted love?'

'My dear, I don't think I ever saw deserted love,' said Albinia, rather amused. 'I suppose troubles of any kind, if not--I mean, I suppose, vexations--make people show their want of spirits in the way

most accordant with their natural dispositions, and so your poor aunt has grown querulous and anxious.'

'If she has such a real grand reason for being unhappy, I shall not be cross about it now, except--'

Sophy gave a sigh, and Albinia bade her good night.

Mr. Kendal had never heard the story before, but he remembered many circumstances in corroboration. He knew that Mr. Pringle had a nephew in the army, he recollected that he had made a figure in Maria's letters to India; and that he had subsequently married a lady in the Mauritius, and settled down on her father's estate. He testified also to the bright gay youth of poor Maria, and his surprise at the premature loss of beauty and spirits; and from his knowledge of old Mr. Meadows, he believed him capable of such an act of domestic tyranny. Maria had always been looked upon as a mere child, and if her father did not choose to part with her, he would think it for her good, and his own peace, for her not to be aware of the proposal. He was much struck, for he had not suspected his sister-in-law to be capable of such permanent feeling.

'There was little to help her in driving it away,' said Albinia. 'Few occupations or interests, and very little change, to prevent it from preying on her spirits.'

'True,' said Mr. Kendal; 'a narrow education and limited sphere are sad evils in such cases.'

'Do you think anything can be a cure for disappointment?' asked Sophy, in such a solemn, earnest tone, that Albinia was disposed to laugh; but she knew that this would be a dire offence, and was much surprised that Sophy had so far broken through her reserve, as to mingle in their conversation on such a subject.

'Occupation,' said Mr. Kendal, but speaking rather as if from duty than from conviction. 'There are many sources of happiness, even if shipwreck have been made on one venture. Your aunt had few resources to which to turn her mind. Every pursuit or study is a help stored up against the vacuity which renders every care more corroding.'

'Well!' said Sophy, in her blunt, downright way, 'I think it would take all the spirit out of everything.'

'I hope you will never be tried,' said Mr. Kendal, with a mournful smile, as if he did not choose to confess that she had divined too rightly the probable effect of trouble upon her own temperament.

'I suppose,' said Albinia, 'that the real cure can be but one thing for that, as for any other trouble. I mean, "Thy will be done." I don't suppose anything else would give energy to turn to other duties. But it would be more to the purpose to resolve to be more considerate to poor Maria.'

'I shall never be impatient with her again,' said Sophy.

And though at first the discovery of so romantic a cause for poor Miss Meadows's fretfulness dignified it in Sophy's eyes, yet it did not prove sufficient to make it tolerable when she tormented the

window-blinds, teased the fire, was shocked at Sophy's favourite studies, or insisting on her wishing to see Maria Drury. Nay, the bathos often rendered her petty unconscious provocations the more harassing, and Sophy often felt, in an agony of self-reproach, that she ought to have known herself too well to expect to show forbearance with any one when she was under the influence of ill-temper.

In Easter week Mr. Ferrars brought Lucy and Maurice home, and Gilbert came for a short holiday.

Gilbert was pleased when he was called to go over the empty houses with his father, Mr. Ferrars, and a mason.

Back they came, horrified at the dreadful disrepair, at the narrow area into which such numbers were crowded, and still more at the ill odours which Mr. Ferrars and the mason had gallantly investigated, till they detected the absence of drains, as well as convinced themselves that mending roofs, floors, or windows, would be a mere mockery unless the whole were pulled down.

Mr. Ferrars was more than ever thankful to be a country parson, and mused on the retribution that the miasma, fostered by the avarice of the grandfather and the neglect of the father, had brought on the family. Dives cannot always scorn Lazarus without suffering even in this life.

Gilbert, in the glory of castle-building, was talking eagerly of the thorough renovation that should take place, the sweep that should be made of all the old tenements, and the wide healthy streets and model cottages that should give a new aspect to the town.

Mr. Kendal prepared for the encounter with Pettilove, and his son begged to go with him, to which he consented, saying that it was time Gilbert should have an opinion in a matter that affected him so nearly.

Gilbert's opinion of the interview was thus announced on his return: 'If there ever was a brute in the world, it is that Pettilove!'

'Then he wont consent to do anything?'

'No, indeed! Say what my father or I would to him, it was all of not the slightest use. He smiled, and made little intolerable nods, and regretted--but there were the settlements, and his late lamented partner! A parcel of stuff. Not so much as a broken window will he mend! He says he is not authorized!'

'Quite true,' said Mr. Kendal. 'The man is warranted in his proceedings, and thinks them his duty, though I believe he has a satisfaction in the power of thwarting me.'

'I'm sure he has!' cried Gilbert. 'I am sure there was spite in his grin when he pulled out that horrid old parchment, with the lines a yard long, and read us out the abominable old crabbed writing, all about the houses, messuages, and tenements thereupon, and a lot of lawyer's jargon. I'm sure I thought it was left to Peter Pettilove himself. And when I came to understand it, one would have thought it took my father to be the worst enemy we had in the world, bent on cheating us!'

'That is the assumption on which settlements are drawn up, Gilbert,' said his father.

'Can nothing be done, then?' said Albinia.

'Thus much,' said Mr. Kendal. 'Pettilove will not object to our putting the houses somewhat in repair, as, in fact, that will be making a present to Gilbert; but he will not spend a farthing on them of the trust, except to hinder their absolute falling, nor will he make any regulation on the number of lodgers. As to taking them down, that is, as I always supposed, out of the question, though I think the trustees might have stretched a point, being certain of both my wishes and Gilbert's.'

'Don't you think,' said Mr. Ferrars, looking up from his book, 'that a sanatory commission might be got to over-ride Gilbert's guardian?'

'My guardian! do not call him so!' muttered Gilbert.

'I am afraid,' said Mr. Kendal, 'that unless your commission emulated of Albinia and Dusautoy they would have little perception of the evils. Our local authorities are obtuse in such matters.'

'Agitate! agitate!' murmured Mr. Ferrars, going on with his book.

'Well,' said Albinia, 'at least there is one beer-shop less in Tibbs's Alley. And if there are tolerable seasons, I daresay paint, whitewash, and windows to open, may keep the place moderately wholesome till--Are you sixteen yet, Gilbert? Five years.'

'Yes, and then--'

Gilbert came and sat down beside her, and they built a scheme for the almshouses so much wanted. Gilbert was sure the accumulation would easily cover the expense, and Albinia had many an old woman, who it was hoped might live to enjoy the intended paradise there.

'Yes, yes, I promise,' cried Gilbert, warming with the subject, 'the first thing I shall do--'

'No, don't promise,' said Albinia. 'Do it from your heart, or not at all.'

'No, don't promise, Gilbert,' said Sophy.

'Why not, Sophy?' he said good-humouredly.

'Because you are just what you feel at the moment,' said Sophy.

'You don't think I should keep it?'

'No.'

The grave answer fell like lead, and Albinia told her she was not kind or just to her brother. But she still looked steadily at him, and answered, 'I cannot help it. What is truth, is truth, and Gilbert cares only for what he sees at the moment.'

'What is truth need not always be fully uttered,' said Albinia. 'I hope you may find it untrue.'

But Sophy's words would recur, and weigh on her painfully.

CHAPTER XI.

The summer had just begun, when notice was given that a Confirmation would take place in the autumn; and Lucy's name was one of the first sent in to Mr. Dusautoy. His plan was to collect his candidates in weekly classes of a few at a time, and likewise to see as much as he could of them in private.

'Oh! mamma!' exclaimed Lucy, returning from her first class, 'Mr. Dusautoy has given us each a paper, where we are to set down our christening days, and our godfathers and godmothers. And only think, I had not the least notion when I was christened. I could tell nothing but that Mr. Wenlock was my godfather! It made me feel quite foolish not to know my godmothers.'

'We were in no situation to have things done in order,' said Mr. Kendal, gravely. 'If I recollect rightly, one of your godmothers was Captain Lee's pretty young wife, who died a few weeks after.'

'And the other?' said Lucy.

'Your mother, I believe,' he said.

Lucy employed herself in filling up her paper, and exclaimed, 'Now I do not know the date! Can you tell me that, papa?'

'It was the Christmas-day next after your birth,' he said. 'I remember that, for we took you to spend Christmas at the nearest station of troops, and the chaplain christened you.'

Lucy wrote down the particulars, and exclaimed, 'What an old baby I must have been! Six months old! And I wonder when Sophy was christened. I never knew who any of her godfathers and godmothers were. Did you, Sophy?'

'No--' she was looking up at her father.

A sudden flush of colour came over his face, and he left the room in haste.

'Why, Sophy!' exclaimed Lucy, 'one would think you had not been christened at all!'

Even the light Lucy was alarmed at the sound of her own words. The same idea had thrilled across Albinia; but on turning her eyes on Sophy, she saw a countenance flushed, anxious, but full rather of trembling hope than of dismay.

In a few seconds Mr. Kendal came back with a thick red pocket-book in

his hand, and produced the certificate of the private baptism of Sophia, daughter of Edmund and Lucy Kendal, at Talloon, March 17th, 1838.

Sophy's face had more disappointment in it than satisfaction.

'I can explain the circumstances to you now,' said her father. 'At Talloon we were almost out of reach of any chaplains, and, as you know, were almost the only English. We always intended to take you to the nearest station, as had been done with Lucy, but your dear mother was never well enough to bear the journey; and when our next little one was born, it was so plain that he could not live, that I sent in haste to beg that the chaplain would come to us. It was then that you were both baptized, and before the week was over, he buried little Henry. It was the first of our troubles. We never again had health or spirits for any festive occasion while we continued in India, and thus the ceremony was never completed. In fact, I take shame to myself for having entirely forgotten that you had never been received into the congregation.'

'Then I have told a falsehood whenever I said the Catechism!' burst out Sophy. Lucy would have laughed, and Albinia could almost have been amused at the turn her displeasure had taken.

'It was not your fault,' said Mr. Kendal, quietly.

He evidently wished the subject to be at an end, excepting that in silence he laid before Albinia's eyes the certificate of the baptism of the twin-brothers, not long after the first arrival in India. He then put the book in his pocket, and began, as usual, to read aloud.

'Oh, don't go, mamma,' said Sophy, when she had been carried to her own room at bed-time, and made ready for the night.

Albinia was only too glad to linger, in the hope to be admitted into some of the recesses of that untransparent nature, and by way of assistance, said, 'I was not at all prepared for this discovery.'

Sophy drew a long sigh, and said, 'If I had never been christened, I should have thought there was some hope for me.'

'That would have been too dreadful. How could you imagine your papa capable--?'

'I thought I had found out why I am so horrid! exclaimed Sophy. 'Oh, if I could only make a fresh beginning! Mamma, do pray give me a Prayer Book.'

Albinia gave it to her, and she hastily turned the pages to the Order for Private Baptism.

'At least I have not made the promises and vows!' she said, as if her stern conscientiousness obtained some relief.

'Not formally made them,' said Albinia; 'but you cannot have a right to the baptismal blessings, except on those conditions.'

'Mamma, then I never had the sign of the cross on my forehead! It does not feel blest!' And then, hastily and low, she muttered, 'Oh!

is that why I never could bear the cross in all my life!

'Nay, my poor Sophy, you must not think of it like a spell. Many bear the cross no better, who have had it marked on their brows.'

'Can it be done now?' cried Sophy, eagerly.

'Certainly; I think it ought to be done. We will see what your father says.'

'Oh, mamma, beg him, pray him!' exclaimed Sophy. 'I know it will make me begin to be good! I can't bear not to be one of those marked and sealed. Oh! and, mamma, you will be my godmother? Can't you? If the gleams of goodness and brightness do find me out, they are always from you.'

'I think I might be, dear child,' said Albinia, 'but Mr. Dusautoy must tell us whether I may. But, indeed, I am afraid to see you reckon too much on this. The essential, the regenerating grace, is yours already, and can save you from yourself, and Confirmation adds the rest--but you must not think of any of these like a charm, which will save you all further trouble with yourself. They do not kill the faults, but they enable you to deal with them. Even baptism itself, you know, has destroyed the guilt of past sin, but does not hinder subsequent temptation.'

Albinia hardly knew how far Sophy attended to this caution, for all she said was to reiterate the entreaty that the omitted ceremony might be supplied.

Mr. Kendal gave a ready consent, as soon as he was told that Sophy so ardently wished for it--so willing, indeed, that Albinia was surprised, until he went on to say, 'No one need be aware of the matter beyond ourselves. Your brother and sister would, I have no doubt, act as sponsors. Nay, if Ferrars would officiate, we need hardly mention it even to Dusautoy. It could take place in your sitting-room.'

'But, Edmund!' began Albinia, aghast, 'would that be the right thing? I hardly think Maurice would consent.'

'You are not imagining anything so preposterous or inexpedient as to wish to bring Sophia forward in church,' said Mr. Kendal; 'even if she were physically capable of it, I should not choose to expose her to anything so painful or undesirable.'

'I am afraid, then,' said Albinia, 'that it will not be done at all. It is not receiving her into the congregation to have this service read before half-a-dozen people in my sitting-room.'

'Better not have it done at all, then,' said Mr. Kendal. 'It is not essential. I will not have her made a spectacle.'

'Will you only consult Mr. Dusautoy?'

'I do not wish Mr. Dusautoy to interfere in my family regulations. I mean, that I have a great respect for him, but as a clergyman, and one wedded to form, he would not take into account the great evil of making a public display, and attracting attention to a girl of her

age, station, and disposition. And, in fact,' added Mr. Kendal, with the same scrupulous candour as his daughter always showed, 'for the sake of my own position, and the effect of example, I should not wish this unfortunate omission to be known.'

'I suspect,' said Albinia, 'that the example of repairing it would speak volumes of good.'

'It is mere absurdity to speak of it!' said Mr. Kendal. 'The poor child is not to leave her couch yet for weeks.'

Sophy was told in the morning that the question was under consideration, and Lucy was strictly forbidden to mention the subject.

When next Mr. Kendal came to read with Sophy, she said imploringly, 'Papa, have you thought?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I have done so; but your mamma thinks, and, on examination of the subject, I perceive she is right, that the service has no meaning unless it take place in the church.'

'Yes,' said Sophy; 'but you know I am to be allowed to go about in July.'

'You will hardly be equal to any fatigue even then, I fear, my dear; and you would find this publicity extremely trying and unpleasant.'

'It would not last ten minutes,' said Sophy, 'and I am sure I should not care! I should have something else to think about. Oh! papa, when my forehead aches with surliness, it does feel so unblest, so uncrossed!' and she put her hand over it, 'and all the books and hymns seem not to belong to me. I think I shall be able to keep off the tempers when I have a right in the cross.'

'Ah! my child, I am afraid the tempers are a part of your physical constitution,' he returned, mournfully.

'You mean that I am like you, papa,' said Sophy. 'I think I might at least learn to be really like you, and if I must feel miserable, not to be unkind and sulky! And then I should leave off even the being unhappy about nothing.'

Her eyes brightened, but her father shook his head sadly, and said, 'You would not be like me, my dear, if depression never made you selfish. But,' he added, with an effort, 'you will not suffer so much from low spirits when you are in better health, and able to move about.'

'Oh, no!' exclaimed Sophy; 'I often feel so sick of lying here, that I feel as if I never could be sulky if only I might walk about, and go from one room to another when I please! But papa, you will let me be admitted into the Church when I am able, will you not?'

'It shall be well weighed, Sophy.'

Sophy knew her father too well, and had too much reticence to say any more. He was certainly meditating deeply, and reading too, indeed he would almost have appeared to have a fit of the study, but for little

Maurice, a tyrannical little gentleman, who domineered over the entire household, and would have been grievously spoilt, if his mother had not taken all the crossing the stout little will upon herself. He had a gallant pair of legs, and the disposition of a young Centaur, he seemed to divide the world into things that could be ridden on, and that could not; and when he bounced at the study door, with 'Papa! gee! gee!' and lifted up his round, rosy face, and despotic blue eyes, Mr. Kendal's foot was at his service, and the study was brown no longer.

The result of Mr. Kendal's meditations was an invitation to his wife to drive with him to Fairmead.

That was a most enjoyable drive, the weather too hot and sunny, perhaps, for Albinia's preferences, but thoroughly penetrating, and giving energy to, her East-Indian husband, and making the whole country radiant with sunny beauty--the waving hay-fields falling before the mower's scythe, the ranks of hay-makers tossing the fragrant grass, the growing corn softly waving in the summer breeze, the river blue with reflected sky, the hedges glowing with stately fox-gloves, or with blushing wreaths of eglantine. And how cool, fresh, and fair was the beech-avenue at Fairmead.

Yet though Albinia came to it with the fond tenderness of old association, it was not with the regretful clinging of the first visit, when it seemed to her the natural home to which she still really belonged. Nor had she the least thought about producing an impression of her own happiness, and scarcely any whether 'Edmund' would be amused and at ease, though knowing he had a stranger to encounter in the person of Winifred's sister, Mary Reid.

That was not a long day. It was only too short, though Mr. and Mrs. Kendal stayed three hours longer than on the last occasion. Mr. Kendal faced Mary Reid without flinching, and she, having been previously informed that Albinia's husband was the most silent and shy man in existence, began to doubt her sister's veracity. And Albinia, instead of dealing out a shower of fireworks, to hide what, if not gloom, was at least twilight, was now 'temperately bright,' talking naturally of what most concerned her with the sprightliness of her happy temper, but without effort; and gratifying Winifred by a great deal more notice of the new niece and namesake than she had ever bestowed on either of her predecessors in their infant days. Moreover, Lucy's two long visits had made Mrs. Ferrars feel a strong interest in her, and, with a sort of maternal affection, she inquired after the cuttings of the myrtle which she had given her.

'Ah!' said Albinia, 'I never honoured gardening so much.'

'I know you would never respect it in me.'

'As you know, I love a walk with an object, and never could abide breaking my back, pottering over a pink with a stem that wont support it, and a calyx that wont hold it.'

'And Lucy converted you when I could not!'

'If you had known my longing for some wholesome occupation for her, such as could hurt neither herself nor any one else, and the pleasure of seeing her engrossed by anything innocent, making it so easy to

gratify her. Why, a new geranium is a constant fund of ecstasy, and I do not believe she was ever so grateful to her father in her life as when he gave her a forcing-frame. Anything is a blessing that makes people contented at home, and takes them out of themselves.'

'Lucy is a very nice, pleasant inmate; her ready obligingness and facility of adapting herself make her very agreeable.'

'Yes,' said Albinia, 'she is the "very woman," taking her complexion from things around, and so she will go smoothly through the world, and be always preferred to my poor turbid, deep-souled Sophy.'

'Are you going to be very angry with me?'

'Ah! you do not know Sophy! Poor, dear child! I do so long that she could have--if it were but one day, one hour, of real, free, glowing happiness! I think it would sweeten and open her heart wonderfully just to have known it! If I could but see any chance of it, but I am afraid her health will always be against her, and oh! that dreadful sense of depression! Do you know, Winifred, I do think love would be the best chance. Now, don't laugh; I do assure you there is no reason Sophy should not be very handsome.'

'Quite as handsome as the owl's children, my dear.'

'Well, the owls are the only young birds fit to be seen. But I tell you, Sophy's profile is as regular as her father's, and animation makes her eyes beautiful, and she has grown immensely since she has been lying down, so that she will come out without that disproportioned look. If her eyebrows were rather less marked, and her complexion--but that will clear.'

'Yes, we will make her a beauty when we are about it.'

'And, after all, affection is the great charm, and if she were attached, it would, be so intensely--and happiness would develop so much that is glorious, only hidden down so deep.'

'I hope you may find her a male Albinia,' said Winifred, a little wickedly, 'but take care. It might be kill or cure, and I fancy when sunshine is attracted by shadow, it is more often as it was in your case than vice versa.'

'Take care!' repeated Albinia, affronted. 'You don't fancy I am going beyond a vague wish, do you?'

'And rather a premature one. How old is Sophy?'

'Towards fourteen, but years older in thought and in suffering.'

Albinia did not hear the result of the conference with her brother till she had resumed her seat in the carriage, after having been surprised by Mr. Kendal handing in three tall theological tomes. They both had much to think over as they drove home in the lengthening shadows. Albinia was greatly concerned that Winifred's health had become affected, and that her ordinary home duties were beyond her strength. Albinia had formerly thought Fairmead parsonage did not give her enough to do, but now she saw the gap that she had left; and she had fallen into a maze of musings over schemes for

helping Winifred, before Mr. Kendal spoke, telling her that he had resolved that Sophia's admission into the Church should take place as soon as she was equal to the exertion.

Albinia asked if she should speak to Mr. Dusautoy, but the manliness of Mr. Kendal's character revolted from putting off a confession upon his wife; so he went to church the next morning, and saw the vicar afterwards.

Mr. Dusautoy's first thought was gratitude for the effort that the resolution must have cost both Mr. Kendal and his daughter; his next, how to make the occasion as little trying to their feelings as was consistent with his duty and theirs. He saw Sophy, and tried to draw her out, but, though far from sullen, she did not reply freely. However, he was satisfied, and he wished her, likewise, to consider herself under preparation for Confirmation in the autumn. She did all that he wished quietly and earnestly, but without much remark, her confidence only came forth when her feelings were strongly stirred, and it was remarkable that throughout this time of preparation there was not the remotest shadow of ill-temper.

Mr. Kendal insisted that her London doctor should come to see her at the year's end. The improvement had not been all that had been hoped, but it was decided that though several hours of each day must still be spent on her back, she might move about, join the meals, and do whatever she could without over-fatigue. It seemed a great release, but it was a shock to find how very little she could do at first, now that she had lost the habit of exertion, and of disregard of her discomforts. She had quite shot up to more than the ordinary woman's height, and was much taller than her sister--but this hardly gave the advantage Albinia had hoped, for she had a weak, overgrown look, and could not help stooping. A number of people in a room, or even the sitting upright during a morning call, seemed quite to overcome and exhaust her: but still the return to ordinary life was such great enjoyment, that she endured all with good temper.

But now the church-going was possible, a fit of exceeding dread came upon her. Albinia found her with the tears silently rolling down her cheeks, almost as if she were unconscious of them.

'Oh, mamma, I can never do it! I know what I am. I can't let them say I will keep all the commandments always! It will not be true!'

'It will be true that you have the steadfast purpose, my dear.'

'How can it be steadfast when I know I can't?'

It was the old story, and all had to be argued through again how the obligation was already incurred at her baptism, and how it was needful that she should be sworn to her own side of the great covenant--how the power would be given, and the grace supplied, but that the will and purpose to obey was required--and then Sophy recurred to that blessing of the cross for which she longed so earnestly, and which again Albinia feared she was regarding in the light of a talisman.

Mr. Ferrars was to be her godfather. Mr. Kendal had wished Aunt Winifred, as Lucy called her, to be the godmother, but Sophy had begged earnestly for Mrs. Dusautoy, whose kindness had made a great

impression.

There was not much liking between Mrs. Ferrars and Sophy. Perhaps Sophy had been fretted and angered by her quick, decided ways, and rather disgusted by the enthusiasm of her brother and sister about Fairmead; and she was not gratified by hearing that Winifred was to accompany her husband in order to try the experiment of a short absence from cares and children.

Albinia, on the contrary, was highly pleased to have Winifred to nurse, and desirous of showing off Sophy's reformation. Winifred arrived late in the day, with an invalid look, and a great inclination to pine for her baby. She was so much tired, that Albinia took her upstairs very soon, and put her to bed, sitting with her almost all the evening, hoping that downstairs all was going on well.

The next morning, too, went off very well. Mr. Ferrars sought a private talk with his old godchild, and though Sophy scarcely answered, she liked his kind, frank, affectionate manner, and showed such feeling as he wished, so that he fully credited all that his sister thought of her.

Otherwise, Sophy was kept quiet, to give her strength and collect her thoughts.

At seven o'clock in the evening, there was not a formidable congregation. Miss Meadows, who had been informed as late as could save offence, had treated it as a freak of Mrs. Kendal, resented the injunction of secrecy, and would neither be present herself, nor let her mother come out. Genevieve, three old men, and a child or two, were the whole number present. The daily service at Bayford was an offering made in faith by the vicar, for as yet there was very little attendance. 'But,' said Mr. Dusautoy, 'it is the worship of God, not an entertainment to please man--it is all nonsense to talk of its answering or not answering.'

Mr. Kendal was in a state of far greater suffering from shame than his daughter, as indeed he deserved, but he endured it with a gallant, almost touching resignation. He was the only witness of her baptism, and it seemed like a confession, when he had to reply to the questions, by whom, and with what words this child had been baptized, when she stood beside him overtopping her little godmother. She stood with tightly-locked hands, and ebbing colour, which came back in a flood when Mr. Dusautoy took her by the hand, and said, 'We receive this child into the congregation,' and when he traced the cross on her brow, she stood tremblingly, her lips squeezed close together, and after she returned to her place no one saw her face.

Albinia, with her brother and Lucy, were at home by the short cut before the carriage could return. She met Sophy at the hall-door, kissed her, and said, 'Now, my dear, you had better lie down, and be quite quiet;' then followed Winifred into the drawing-room, and took her shawl and bonnet from her, lingering for a happy twilight conversation. Lucy came down, and went to water her flowers, and by-and-by tea was brought, the gentlemen came in from their walk, and Mr. Kendal asked whether Sophy was tired. Albinia went up to see. She found her on her couch in the morning room, and told her that tea was ready. There was something not promising in the voice that

replied; and she said,

'No, don't move, my dear, I will bring it to you; you are tired.'

'No--I'll go down, thank you.' It was the gruff voice!

'Indeed you had much better not, my dear. It is only an hour to bed-time, and you would only tire yourself for nothing.'

'I'll go.'

'You are tired, Sophy,' said her father. 'You had better lie down while you have your tea.'

'No, thank you,' growled Sophy, as though hurt by being told to lie down before company.

Her father put a sofa-cushion behind her, but though she mumbled some acknowledgment, it was so surly, that Mrs. Ferrars looked up in surprise, and she would not lean back till fatigue gained the ascendancy. Mr. Kendal asking her, got little in reply but such a grunt, that Mrs. Ferrars longed to shake her, but her father fetched a footstool, and put it under her feet, and grew a little abstracted in his talk, as if watching her, and his eye had something of the old habitual melancholy.

So it went on. The night's rest did not carry off the temper. Sophy was monosyllabic, displeased if not attended to, but receiving attention like an affront, wanting nothing, but offended if it were not offered. Albinia was exceedingly grieved. She had some suspicion that Sophy might have been hurt by her going to Mrs. Ferrars instead of to her on their return from church, and made an attempt at an apology, but this was snubbed like an additional affront, and she could only bide the time, and be greatly disappointed at such an exhibition before the guests.

Winifred looked on, forbearing to hurt Albinia's feelings by remarks, but in private compensating by little outbreaks with her husband, teasing him about his hopeful goddaughter, laughing at Albinia's infatuation, and railing at Mr. Kendal's endurance of the ill-humour, which she declared he promoted.

Maurice, as usual, was provoking. He had no notion of giving up his godchild, he said, and he had no doubt that Edmund Kendal could manage his own child his own way.

'Because of his great success in that line.'

'He is not what he was. He uses his sense and principle now, and when they are fairly brought to bear, I know no one whom I would more entirely trust.'

'Well! it will be great good luck if I do not fall foul of Miss Sophy one of these days, if no one else will!'

Winifred was slightly irritable herself from weakness, and on the last morning of her stay she could bear the sight no longer. Sophy had twice been surly to Lucy's good offices, had given Albinia a look like thunder, and answered her father with a sulky displeasure that

made Mrs. Ferrars exclaim, as soon as he had left the room, 'I should never allow a child of mine to speak to her father in that manner!'

Sophy swelled. She did not think Mrs. Ferrars had any right to interfere between her and her father. Her silence provoked Winifred to continue, 'I wonder if you have any compunction for having spoilt all your--all Mrs. Kendal's enjoyment of our visit.'

'I am not of consequence enough to spoil any one's pleasure.'

That was the last effort. Albinia came into the room, with little Maurice holding her hand, and flourishing a whip. He trotted up to the sofa, and began instantly to 'whip sister Sophy;' serve her right, if I had but the whip, thought Mrs. Ferrars, as his mother hurried to snatch him off. Leaning over Sophy's averted face, she saw a tear under her eyelashes, but took no notice.

Three seconds after, Sophy reared herself up, and with a rigid face and slow step walked out of the room.

'Have you said anything to her?' asked Albinia.

'I could not help it,' said Winifred, narrating what had past. 'Have I done wrong?'

'Edmund cannot bear to have anything harsh said to her in these moods, especially about her behaviour to himself. He thinks she cannot help it--but it may be well that she should know how it appears to other people, for I cannot bear to see his patient kindness spurned. Only, you know, she values it in her heart. I am afraid we shall have a terrible agony now.'

Albinia was right. It was the worst agony poor Sophy had ever undergone. She had been all this time ignorant that it was a cross fit, only imagining herself cruelly neglected and cast aside for the sake of Mrs. Ferrars; but the wakening time had either arrived, or had been brought by that reproach, and she beheld her conduct in the most abhorrent light. After having desired to be pledged to her share of the covenant, and earnestly longed to bear the cross, to be sworn in as soldier and servant, to have put her neck under the yoke of her old master ere the cross had dried upon her brow, to have been meanly jealous, ungrateful, disrespectful, vindictive!! oh! misery, misery! hopeless misery! She would take no word of comfort when Albinia tried to persuade her that it had been partly the reaction of a mind wrought up to an occasion very simple in its externals, and of a body fatigued by exertion; and then in warm-hearted candour professed that she herself had been thoughtless in neglecting Sophy for Winifred. Still less comfort would she take in her father's free forgiveness, and his sad entreaties that she would not treat these fits of low spirits as a crime, for they were not her fault, but that of her constitution.

'Then one can't help being hateful and wicked! Nothing is of any use! I had rather you had told me I was mad!' said poor Sophy.

She was so spent and exhausted with weeping, that she could not come down--indeed, between grief and nervousness she would not eat; and Albinia found Mr. Kendal mournfully persuading her, when a stern command would have done more good. Albinia spoke it: 'Sophy, you

have put your father to a great deal of pain already; if you are really grieving over it, you will not hurt him more by making yourself ill.'

The strong will came into action on the right side, and Sophy sat up, took what was offered, but what was she that they should care for her, when she had spoilt mamma's pleasure? Better go and be happy with Mrs. Ferrars.

Sophy's next visitor came up with a manly tread, and she almost feared that she had made herself ill enough for the doctor; but it was Mr. Ferrars, with a kind face of pitying sympathy.

'May I come to wish my godchild good-bye?' he said.

Sophy did not speak, and he looked compassionately at the prone dejection of the whole figure, and the pale, sallow face, so piteously mournful. He took her hand, and began to tell her of the godfather's present, that he had brought her--a little book of devotions intended for the time when she should be confirmed. Sophy uttered a feeble 'thank you,' but a hopeless one.

'Ah! you are feeling as if nothing would do you any good,' said Mr. Ferrars.

'Papa says so!' she answered.

'Not quite,' said Mr. Ferrars. 'He knows that your low spirits are the effect of temperament and health, and that you are not able to prevent yourself from feeling unhappy and aggrieved. And perhaps you reckoned on too much sensible effect from Church ordinances. Now joy, help, all these blessings are seldom revealed to our consciousness, but are matters of faith; and you must be content to work on in faith in the dark, before you feel comfort. I cannot but hope that if you will struggle, even when you are hurt and annoyed, to avoid the expression of vexation, the morbid temper will wear out, and you will both be tempted and suffer less, as you grow older. And, Sophy--forgive me for asking--do you pray in this unhappy state?'

'I cannot. It is not true.'

'Make it true. Take some verse of a Psalm. Shall I mark you some? Repeat them, even if you seem to yourself not to feel them. There is a holy power that will work on you at last; and when you can truly pray, the dark hour will pass.'

'Mark them,' said Sophy.

There was some space, while she gave him the book, and he showed her the verses. Then he rose to go.

'I wish I had not spoilt the visit,' she said, wistfully, at last.

'We shall see you again, and we shall know each other better,' he said, kindly. 'You are my godchild now, Sophy, and you know that I must remember you constantly in prayer.'

'Yes,' she faintly said.

'And will you promise me to try my remedy? I think it will soften your heart to the graces of the Blessed Comforter. And even if all seems gloom within, look out, see others happy, try to rejoice with them, and peace will come in! Now, goodbye, my dear godchild, and the God of Peace bless you, and give you rest.

CHAPTER XII.

Mr. Dusautoy had given notice of the day of the Confirmation, when Mr. Kendal called his wife.

'I wonder,' he said, 'my dear, whether Sophia can spare you to take a walk with me before church.'

Sophy, who was well aware that a walk with him was the greatest and rarest treat to his wife, gave gracious permission, and in a few minutes they were walking by the bright canal-side, under the calm evening sunshine and deep blue sky of early autumn.

Mr. Kendal said not a word, and Albinia, leaning on his arm, listened, as it were, to the stillness, or rather to the sounds that marked it--the gurgling of the little streams let off into the water-courses in the meadows; the occasional plunge of the rat from the banks, the sounds from the town, softened by distance, and the far-off cawings of the rooks, which she could just see wheeling about as little black specks over the plantations of Woodside, or watching the swallows assembling for departure sitting in long ranks, like an ornament along the roof of a neighbouring barn.

Long, long it was before Mr. Kendal broke silence, but when at length he did speak, his words amazed her extremely.

'Albinia, poor Sophia's admission into the Church has not been the only neglect. I have never been confirmed. I intend to speak to Dusautoy this evening, but I thought you would wish to know it first.'

'Thank you. I suppose you went out to India too young.'

'Poor Maria says truly that no one thought of these things in our day, at least so far as we were concerned. I must explain to you, Albinia, how it is that I see things very differently now from the light in which I once viewed them. I was sent home from India, at six years old, to correspondents and relations to whom I was a burthen. I was placed at a private school, where the treatment was of the harsh style so common in those days. The boys always had more tasks than they could accomplish, and were kept employed by being always in arrears with their lessons. This pressed less heavily upon me than on most; but though I seldom incurred punishment, there was a sort of hard distrust of me, I believe because the master could not easily overwhelm me with work, so as to have me in his power. I know I was often unjustly treated, and I never was popular.'

'Yes, I can imagine you extremely miserable.'

'You can understand my resolution that my boys should not be sent to England to be homeless, and how I judged all schools by my own experience. I stayed there too late, till I was beyond both tormentors and masters, and was left to an unlimited appetite for books, chiefly poetry. Our religious instruction was a nullity, and I am only surprised that the results were not worse. India was not likely to supply what education had omitted. Looking back on old journals and the like, I am astonished to see how unsettled my notions were--my sublimity, which was really ignorant childishness, and yet my perfect unconsciousness of my want of Christianity.'

'I dare say you cannot believe it was yourself, any more than I can. What brought other thoughts!'

'Practical obligations made me somewhat less dreamy, and my dear boy, Edmund, did much for me, but all so insensibly, that I can remember no marked change. I do not know whether you will understand me, when I say that I had attained to somewhat of what I should call personal religion, such as we often find apart from the Church.'

'But, Edmund, you always were a Churchman.'

'I was; but I viewed the Church merely as an establishment--human, not divine. I had learnt faith from Holy Scripture, from my boy, from the infants who passed away so quickly, and I better understood how to direct the devotional tendencies that I had never been without, but the sacramental system had never dawned on my comprehension, nor the real meaning of Christian fellowship. Thence my isolation.'

'You had never fairly seen the Church.'

'Never. It might have made a great difference to me if Dusautoy had been here at the time of my trouble. When he did come, I had sunk into a state whence I could not rouse myself to understand his principles. I can hardly describe how intolerable my life had become. I was almost resolved on returning to India. I believe I should have done so if you had not come to my rescue.'

'What would you have done with the children?'

'To say the truth I had idolized their brother to such an exclusive degree, that I could not turn to the others when he was taken from me. I deserved to lose him; and since I have seen this unfortunate strain of melancholy developed in poor Sophia, who so much resembles him, I have been the more reconciled to his having been removed. I never understood what the others might be until you drew them out.'

Albinia paused, afraid to press his reserve too far; and the next thing she said was, 'I think I understand your distinction between personal religion and sacramental truth. It explains what has often puzzled me about good devout people who did not belong to the Church. The Visible Church cannot save without this individual personal religion but without having recourse to the Church, there is--' she could not find the word.

'There is a loss of external aid,' he said; 'nay, of much more.'

There is no certainty of receiving the benefits linked by Divine Power to her ordinances. Faith, in fact, while acknowledging the great Object of Faith, refuses or neglects to exercise herself upon the very subjects which He has set before her; and, in effect, would accept Him on her terms, not on His own.'

'It was not refusal on your part,' said Albinia.

'No, it was rather indifference and imaginary superiority. But I have read and thought much of late, and see more clearly. If I thought of this rite of Confirmation at all, it was only as a means of impressing young minds. I now see every evidence that it is the completion of Baptismal grace, and without, like poor Sophia, expecting that effects would ever have been perceptible, I think that had I known how to seek after the Spirit of Counsel and Ghostly Strength, I might have given way less to the infirmities of my character, and have been less wilfully insensible to obvious duties.'

'Then you have made up your mind?'

'Yes. I shall speak to Mr. Dusautoy at once.'

'And,' she said, feeling for his sensitive shyness, 'no one else need know it--at least--'

'I should not wish to conceal it from the children,' he answered, with his scrupulous candour. He was supine when thought more ill of than he deserved, but he always defended himself from undeserved credit.

'Whom do you think I have for a candidate?' said Mr. Dusautoy that evening.

'Another now! I thought you were talking to Mr. Kendal about the onslaught on the Pringle pew.'

'What do you think of my churchwarden himself?'

'You don't mean that he has never been confirmed!'

'So he tells me. He went out to India young, and was never in the way of such things. Well, it will be a great example.'

'Take care what you do. He will never endure having it talked of.'

'I think he has made up his mind, and is above all nonsense. I am sure it is well that I need not examine him. I should soon get beyond my depth.'

'And what good did his depth ever do to him,' indignantly cried Mrs. Dusautoy, 'till that dear good wife of his took him in hand? Don't you remember what a log he was when first we came--how I used to say he gave you subscriptions to get rid of you.'

'Well, well, Fanny, what's the use of recollecting all our foolish first impressions. I always told you he was the most able man in the parish.'

'Fanny' laughed merrily at this piece of sagacity, as she said 'Ay,

the most able and the least practicable; and the best of it is, that his wife has not the most distant idea that she has been the making of him. She nearly quarrelled with me for hinting it. She would have it that "Edmund" had it all in him, and had only recovered his health and spirits.'

And, indeed, it was no wonder she was happy. This step taken of free will by Mr. Kendal, was an evidence not only of a powerful reasoning intellect bowed to an act of simple faith but of a victory over the false shame that had always been a part of his nature. Nor did it apparently cost him as much as his consent to Sophy's admission into the Church; the first effort had been the greatest, and he was now too much taken up with deep thoughts of devotion to be sensitive as to the eyes and remarks of the world. The very resolution to bend in faithful obedience to a rite usually belonging to early youth and not obviously enforced to human reason, nor made an express condition of salvation, was as a pledge that he would strive to walk for the future in the path of self-denying obedience. Who that saw the manly well-knit form kneeling among the slight youthful ones around, and the thoughtful, sorrow-marked brow bowed down beneath the Apostolic hand, could doubt that such faith and such humble obedience would surely be endowed with a full measure of the Spirit of Ghostly Might, to lead him on in his battle with himself? Those young ones needed the 'sevenfold veil between them and the fires of youth,' but surely the freshening and renewing came most blessedly to the man weary already with sin and woe, and tired out alike with himself and the world, because he had lived to himself alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

Old Mr. Pringle never stirred beyond his parlour, and was invisible to every one, except his housekeeper and doctor, but his tall, square, curtained pew was jealously locked up, and was a grievance to the vicar, who having been foiled in several attempts, was meditating a fresh one, if, as he told his wife, he could bring his churchwarden up to the scratch, when one Sunday morning the congregation was electrified by the sound of a creak and a shake, and beheld a stout hale sunburnt gentleman, fighting with the disused door, and finally gaining the victory by strength of hand, admitting himself and a boy among the dust and the cobwebs.

Had Mr. Pringle, or rather his housekeeper, made a virtue of necessity? and if so, who could it be?

Albinia hailed the event as a fertile source of conjecture which might stave off dangerous subjects in the Sunday call, but there was no opportunity for any discussion, for Maria was popping about, settling and unsettling everything and everybody, in a state of greater confusion than ever, inextricably entangling her inquiries for Sophy with her explanations about the rheumatism which had kept grandmamma from church, and jumping up to pull down the Venetian blind, which descended awry, and went up worse. The lines got into such a hopeless complication, that Albinia came to help her, while

Mr. Kendal stood dutifully by the fire, in the sentry-like manner in which he always passed that hour, bending now and then to listen and respond to some meek remark of old Mrs. Meadows, and now and then originating one. As to assisting Maria in any pother, he well knew that would be a vain act of chivalry, and he generally contrived to be insensible to her turmoils.

'Who could that have been in old Pringle's seat?' he presently began, appropriating Albinia's cherished morsel of gossip; but he was not allowed to enjoy it, for Miss Meadows broke out,

'Oh, Edmund! this blind, I beg your pardon, but if you would help--'

He was obliged to move to the window, and nervously clutching his arm, she whispered, 'You'll excuse it, I know, but don't mention it--not a word to mamma.' Mr. Kendal looked at Albinia to gather what could be this dreadful subject, but the next words made it no longer doubtful. 'Ah, you were away, there's no use in explaining--but not a word of Sam Pringle. It would only make her uneasy--' she gasped in a floundering whisper, stopping suddenly short, for at that moment the stranger and his son were entering the garden, so near them, that they might have seen the three pairs of eyes levelled on them, through the wide open end of the unfortunate blind, which was now in the shape of a fan.

Albinia's cheeks glowed with sympathy, and she longed for the power of helping her, marvelling how a being so nervously restless and devoid of self-command could pass through a scene likely to be so trying. The bell sounded, and the loud hearty tones of a manly voice were heard. Albinia looked to see whether her help were needed, but Miss Meadows's whole face was brightened, and moving across the room with unusually even steps, she leant on the arm of her mother's chair, saying, 'Mamma, it is Captain Pringle. You remember Samuel Pringle? He settled in the Mauritius, you know, and he was at church this morning with his little boy.'

There was something piteous in the searching look of inquiry that Mrs. Meadows cast at her daughter's face, but Maria had put it aside with an attempt at a smile, as 'Captain Pringle' was announced.

He trod hard, and spoke loud, and his curly grizzled hair was thrown back from a bronzed open face, full of broad heartiness, as he walked in with outstretched hand, exclaiming, 'Well, and how do you do?' shaking with all his might the hand that Maria held out. 'And how are you, Mrs. Meadows? You see I could not help coming back to see old friends.'

'Old friends are always welcome, sir,' said the old lady, warmly. 'My son, Mr. Kendal, sir--Mrs. Kendal,' she added, with a becoming old-fashioned movement of introduction.

'Very glad to meet you,' said the captain, extending to each such a hearty shake of the hand, that Albinia suspected he was taking her on trust for Maria's sister.

'Your little boy?' asked Mrs. Meadows.

'Ay--Arthur, come and make the most of yourself, my man,' said he, thumping the shy boy on the back to give him courage. 'I've brought

him home for his schooling--quite time, you see, though what on earth I'm to do without him--'

The boy looked miserable at the words. 'Ay, ay,' continued his father, 'you'll do well enough. I'm not afraid for you, master, but that you'll be happy as your father was before you, when once you have fellows to play with you. Here is Mr. Kendal will tell you so.'

It was an unfortunate appeal, but Mr. Kendal made the best of it, saying that his boy was very happy at his tutor's.

'A private tutor, eh?' said the rough captain, 'I'd not thought of that--neither home nor school. I had rather do it thoroughly, and trust to numbers to choose friends from, and be licked into shape.'

Poor little Arthur looked as if the process would be severe; and by way of consolation, Mrs. Meadows suggested, a piece of cake. Maria moved to ring the bell. It was the first time she had stirred since the visitor came in, and he getting up at the same time, that she might not trouble herself, their eyes met. 'I'm very glad to see you again,' he exclaimed, catching hold of her hand for another shake; 'but, bless me! you are sadly altered! I'm sorry to see you looking so ill.'

'We all grow old, you know,' said Maria, endeavouring to smile, but half strangled by a tear, and looking at that moment as she might have done long ago. 'You find many changes.'

'I hope you find Mr. Pringle pretty well,' said Albinia, thinking this might be a relief, and accordingly, the kind-hearted captain began, ruefully to describe the sad alterations that time had wrought. Then he explained that he had had little correspondence with home, and had only landed three days since, so that he was ignorant of all Bayford tidings, and began asking after a multitude of old friends and acquaintance.

The Kendals thought all would go on the better in their absence, and escaped from the record of deaths and marriages, each observing to the other as they left the house, that there could be little doubt that nurse's story was true, but both amazed by the effect on Maria, who had never been seen before to sit so long quiet in her chair. Was his wife alive? Albinia thought not, but could not be certain. His presence was evidently happiness to Miss Meadows, but would this last? Would this renewal soothe her, or only make her more restless and unhappy?

Albinia found that Sophy's imagination had been quicker than her own. Lucy had brought home the great news of the stranger, and she had leapt at once to the conclusion that it must be the hero of nurse's story, but she had had the resolution to keep the secret from her sister, who was found reproaching her with making mysteries. When Lucy heard that it was Captain Pringle, she was quite provoked.

'Only Mr. Pringle's nephew?' she said, disdainfully. 'What was the use of making a fuss? I thought it was some one interesting!'

Sophy was able to walk to church in the evening, but was made to go in to rest at the vicarage before returning home. While this was being discussed before the porch, Albinia felt a pressure on her arm,

and looking round, saw Maria Meadows.

'Can you spare me a few moments?' she said; and Albinia turned aside with her to the flagged terrace path between the churchyard and vicarage garden, in the light of a half-moon.

'You were so kind this morning,' began Maria, 'that I thought--you see it is very awkward--not that I have any idea--but if you would speak to Edmund--I know he is not in the habit--morning visits and--'

'Do you wish him to call? He had been thinking of it.'

Maria would have been unbounded in her gratitude, but catching herself up, she disclaimed all personal interest--only she said Edmund knew nothing of anything that had passed--if he did, he would see they would feel--

'I think,' said Albinia, kindly, 'that we do know that you had some troubles on that score. Old nurse said something to Sophy, but no other creature knows it.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Maria, 'that is what comes of trusting any one. I was so ill when I found out how it had been, that I could not keep it from nurse, but from mamma I did--my poor father being just gone and all--I could not have had her know how much I felt it--the discovery I mean--and it is what I wish her never to do. But oh! Mrs. Kendal, think what it was to find out that when I had been thinking he had been only trifling with me all those years, to find that he had been so unkindly treated. There was his own dear letter to me never unsealed; and there was another to my father saying in a proud-spirited way that he did not know what he had done to be so served, and he wished I might find happiness, for I would never find one that loved me as well. I who had turned against him in my heart!'

'It was cruel indeed! And you kept it from your mother!' said Albinia, beginning to honour her.

'My poor father was just gone, you know, and I could not be grieving her with what was passed and over, and letting her know that my father had broken my heart, as indeed I think he did, though he meant it all for the best. But oh! I thought it hard when Lucy had married the handsomest man in the country, and gone out to India, without a word against it, that I might not please myself, because I was papa's favourite.'

'It was very hard not to be made aware of his intentions.'

'Yea,' said Maria; 'for it gave me such a bitter, restless feeling against him--though I ought to have known him better than to think he would give one minute's pain he could help; and then when I knew the truth, the bitterness all went to poor papa's memory, and yet perhaps he never meant to be unkind either.'

Albinia said some kind words, and Maria went on:

'But what I wanted to say was this--Please don't let mamma suspect one bit about it; and next, if Edmund would not mind showing him a little attention. Do you think he would, my dear? I do so wish that he should not think we were hurt by his marriage, and you see, two

lone women can do nothing to make it agreeable; besides that, it would not be proper.'

'Is his wife living?'

'My dear, I could not make up my tongue to ask--the poor dear boy there and all--but it is all the same. I hope she is, for I would not see him unhappy, and you don't imagine I have any folly in my head--oh, no! for I know what a fright the fret and the wear of this have made me; and besides, I never could leave mamma. So I trust his wife is living to make him happy, and I shall be more at peace now I have seen him again, since he turned his horse at Bobble's Leigh, and said I should soon hear from him again.'

'Indeed I think you will be happier. There is something very soothing in taking up old feelings and laying them to rest. I hope even now there is less pain than pleasure.'

'I can't help it,' said Maria. 'I do hope it is not wrong; but his very voice has got the old tone in it, as if it were the old lullaby that my poor heart has been beating for all these years.'

Who would have thought of Maria speaking poetically? But her words did indeed seem to be the truth. In spite of the embarrassment of her situation and the flutter of her feelings, she was in a state of composure unexampled. Albinia had just gratified her greatly by a few words on Captain Pringle's evident good-nature, when a tread came behind them.

'Ha! you here?' exclaimed the loud honest voice.

'We were taking a turn in the moonlight,' said Albinia. 'A beautiful night.'

'Beautiful! Arthur and I have been a bit of the way home with old Goldsmith. There's an evergreen, to be sure; and now--are you bound homewards, Maria?'

Maria clung to Albinia's arm. Perhaps in the days of the last parting, she had been less careful to be with a chaperon.

'Ah! I forgot,' said the captain; 'your way lies the other side of the hill. I had very nearly walked into Willow Lawn this morning, only luckily I bethought me of asking.'

'I hope you will yet walk into Willow Lawn,' said Albinia.

'Ah! thank you; I should like to see the old place. I dare say it may be transmogrified now, but I think I could find my way blindfold about the old garden. I say, Maria, do you remember that jolly tea-party on the lawn, when the frog made one too many?'

'That I do--' Maria could not utter more, and Albinia said she was afraid he would miss a great deal.

'I reckoned on that when I came home. Changes everywhere; but after the one great change,' he added, mournfully, 'the others tell less. One has the less heart to care for an old tree or an old path.'

Albinia felt sure he could mean only one great change, but they were now at Mrs. Meadows's door, and Maria wished them good night, giving a most grateful squeeze of the hand to Mrs. Kendal.

'Where are you bound now?' asked the captain.

'Back to the vicarage, to take up my husband and the girls,' said Albinia, 'but good night. I am not afraid.'

The captain, however, chose to continue a squire of dames, and walked at her side, presently giving utterance to a sound of commiseration. 'Ah! well, poor Maria, I never thought to see her so altered. Why, she had the prettiest bloom--I dare say you remember--but, I beg your pardon, somehow I thought you were her elder sister.'

'Mr. Kendal's first wife was,' said Albinia, pitying the poor man; but Captain Pringle was not a man for awkwardness, and the short whistle with which he received her answer set her off laughing.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, recovering himself; 'but you see I am all astray, like a man buried and dug up again, so no wonder I make strange blunders; and my poor uncle is grown so childish, that he does not know one person from another, and began by telling me Maria Meadows had married and gone out to India. I had not had a letter these seven years, so I thought it was high time to bring my boy home, and renew old times, though how I am ever to go back without him--'

'Is he your only one?'

'Yes. I lost his mother when he was six years old, and we have been all the world to each other since, till I began to think I was spoiling him outright, and it was time he should see what Old England was made of.'

Albinia had something like a discovery to impart now; but she hated the sense of speculating on the poor man's intentions. He talked so much, that he saved her trouble in replying, and presently resumed the subject of Maria's looks.

'She has had a harassed life, I fear,' said Albinia.

'Eh! old Meadows was a terrible old tyrant, I believe; but she was his pet. I thought he refused her nothing--but there's no trusting such a Turk! Oh! ah! I dare say,' as if replying to something within. And then having come to the vicarage wicket, Albinia took leave of him and ran indoors, answering the astonished queries as to how she had been employed, 'Walking home with Aunt Maria and Captain Pringle !'

It was rather a relief at such a juncture that Lucy's curious eyes should be removed. Mr. Ferrars came to talk his wife's state over with his sister. Her children were too much for Winifred, and he wished to borrow Lucy for a few weeks, till a governess could be found for them.

It struck Albinia that this would be an excellent thing for Genevieve Durant, and she at once contrived to ask her to tea, and privately propound the plan.

Genevieve faltered much of thanks, and said that Madame was very good; but the next morning a note was brought in, which caused a sudden change of countenance:

'My dear Madame,

'I was so overwhelmed with your kindness last night, and so unwilling to appear ungrateful, that perhaps I left you under a false impression. I entreat you not to enter on the subject with my grandmamma or my aunt. They would grieve to prevent what they would think for my advantage, and would, I am but too sure, make any sacrifice on my account; but they are no longer young, and though my aunt does not perceive it, I know that the real work of the school depends on me, and that she could not support the fatigue if left unassisted. They need their little Genevieve, likewise, to amuse them in their evenings; and, forgive me, madame, I could not, without ingratitude, forsake them now. Thus, though with the utmost sense of your kindness, I must beg of you to pardon me, and not to think me ungrateful if I decline the situation so kindly offered to me by Mr. Ferrars, thanking you ten thousand times for your too partial recommendation, and entreating you to pardon

'Your most grateful and humble servant,
GENEVIEVE CELESTE DURANT.'

'There!' said Albinia, tossing the note to her brother, who was the only person present excepting Gilbert.

'Poor Albinia,' he said, 'it is hard to be disappointed in a bit of patronage.'

'I never meant it as patronage,' said Albinia, slightly hurt. 'I thought it would help you, and rescue her from that school. There will she spend the best years of her life in giving a second-rate education to third-rate girls, not one of whose parents can appreciate her, till she will grow as wizened and as wooden as Mademoiselle herself.'

'Happily,' said Mr. Ferrars, 'there are worse things than being spent in one's duty. She may be doing an important work in her sphere.'

'So does a horse in a mill,' exclaimed Albinia; 'but you would not put a hunter there. Yes, yes, I know, education, and these girls wanting right teaching; but she, poor child, has been but half educated herself, and has not time to improve herself. If she does good, it is by force of sheer goodness, for they all look down upon her, as much as vulgarity can upon refinement.'

'I told her so,' exclaimed Gilbert; 'I told her it was the only way to teach them what she was worth.'

'What did you know of the matter?' asked Albinia; and the colour mounted in the boy's face as he muttered, 'She was overcome when she came down, she said you had been so kind, and we were obliged to walk up and down before she could compose herself, for she did not want the old ladies to know anything about it.'

'And did she not wish to go?'

'No, though I did the best I could. I told her what a jolly place it was, and that the children would be a perfect holiday to her. And I showed her it would not be like going away, for she might come over here whenever she pleased; and when I have my horse, I would come and bring her word of the old ladies once a week.'

'Inducements, indeed!' said Mr. Ferrars. 'And she could not be incited by any of these?'

'No,' said Gilbert, 'she would not hear of leaving the old women. She was only afraid it would vex Mrs. Kendal, and she could not bear not to take the advice of so kind a friend, she said. You are not going to be angry with her,' he added.

'No,' said Albinia, 'one cannot but honour her motives, though I think she is mistaken; and I am sorry for her; but she knows better than to be afraid of me.'

With which assurance Gilbert quitted the room, and the next moment, hearing the front door, she exclaimed, 'I do believe he is gone to tell her how I took the announcement.'

Maurice gave a significant 'Hem!' to which his sister replied, 'Nonsense!'

'Very romantic consolations and confidences.'

'Not at all. They have been used to each other all their lives, and he used to be the only person who knew how to behave to her, so no wonder they are great friends. As to anything else, she is nineteen, and he not sixteen.'

'One great use of going to school is to save lads from that silly pastime. I advise you to look to these moonlight escortings!'

'One would think you were an old dowager, Maurice. I suppose Colonel Bury may not escort Miss Mary.'

'Ah, Albinia, you are a very naughty child still.'

'Of course, when you are here to keep me in order, I wish I never were so at other times when it is not so safe.'

Mr. Kendal was kind and civil to Captain Pringle, and though the boisterous manner seemed to affect him like a thunderstorm, Maria imagined they were delighted with one another.

Maria was strangely serene and happy; her querulous, nervous manner smoothed away, as if rest had come to her at last; and even if the renewed intercourse were only to result in a friendship, there was hope that the troubled spirit had found repose now that misunderstandings were over, and the sore sense of ill-usage appeased.

Yet Albinia was startled when one day Mr. Kendal summoned her, saying, 'It is all over, she has refused him!'

'Impossible; she could only have left half her sentence unsaid.'

'Too certain. She will not leave her mother.'

'Is that all?'

'Of course it is. He told me the whole affair, and certainly Mr. Meadows was greatly to blame. He let Maria give this man every encouragement, believing his property larger, and his expectations more secure than was the case; and when the proposal was made, having discovered his mistake, he sent a peremptory refusal, giving him reason to suppose her a party to the rejection. Captain Pringle sailed in anger; but it appears that his return has revived his former feelings, and that he has found out that poor Maria was a greater sufferer than himself.'

'Why does he come to you?'

'To consult me. He wishes me to persuade poor old Mrs. Meadows to go out to the Mauritius, which is clearly impossible, but Maria must not be sacrificed again. Would the Drurys make her comfortable? Or could she not live alone with her maid?'

'She might live here.'

'Albinia! Think a little.'

'I can think of nothing else. Let her have the morning room, and Sophy's little room, and Lucy and I would do our best for her.'

'No, that is out of the question. I would not impose such charge upon you on any consideration!'

Albinia's face became humble and remorseful. 'Yes,' she said, 'perhaps I am too impatient and flighty.'

'That was not what I meant,' he said; 'but I do not think it right that a person with no claims of relationship should be made a burthen on you.'

'No claims, Edmund,' said she, softly. 'In whose place have you put me?'

He was silent: then said, 'No, it must not be, my kind Albinia. She is a very good old lady, but Sophy and she would clash, and I cannot expose the child to such a trial.'

'I dare say you are right,' pensively said Albinia, perceiving that her plan had been inconsiderate, and that it would require the wisdom, tact, and gentleness of a model woman to deal with such discordant elements. 'What are you going to do?' as he took up his hat. 'Are you going to see Maria? May I come with you?'

'If you please; but do not mention this notion. There is no necessity for such a tax on you; and such arrangement should never be rashly made.'

He asked whether Miss Meadows could see him, and awaited her alone in

the dining-room, somewhat to the surprise of his wife; but either he felt that there was a long arrear of kindness owing, or feared to trust Albinia's impulsive generosity.

Meantime Albinia found the poor old lady in much uneasiness and distress. Her daughter fancied it right to keep her in ignorance of the crisis; but Maria was not the woman to conceal her feelings, and her nervous misery had revealed all that she most wished to hide. Too timid to take her confidence by storm, her mother had only exchanged surmises and observations with Betty, and was in a troubled condition of affectionate curiosity and anxiety. Albinia was a welcome visitor since it was a great relief to hear what had really taken place and to know that Mr. Kendal was with Maria.

'Ah! that is kind,' she said; 'but he must tell her not to think of me. I am an old woman, good for nothing but to be put out of the way, and she has gone through quite enough! You will not let her give it up! Tell her I have not many more years to live, and anything is good enough for me.'

'That would hardly comfort her,' said Albinia, affectionately; 'but indeed, dear grandmamma, I hope we shall convince her that we can do something to supply her place.'

'Ah! my dear, you are very kind, but nobody can be like a daughter! But don't tell Maria so--poor dear love--she may never have another chance. Such a beautiful place out there, and Mr. Pringle's property must come to him at last! Bless me, what will Sarah Drury say? And such a good attentive man--besides, she never would hear of any one else--her poor papa never knew--Oh! she must have him! it is all nonsense to think of me! I only wish I was dead out of the way!'

There was a strong mixture of unselfish love, and fear of solitude; of the triumph of marrying a daughter, and dread of separation; of affection, and of implanted worldliness; touching Albinia at one moment, and paining her at another; but she soothed and caressed the old lady, and was a willing listener to what was meant for a history of the former transaction; but as it started from old Mr. Pringle's grandfather, it had only proceeded as far as the wedding of the Captain's father and mother, when it was broken off by Mr. Kendal's entrance.

'Oh! my dear Mr. Kendal, and what does poor Maria say? It is so kind in you. I hope you have taken her in hand, and told her it is quite another thing now, and her poor dear papa would think so. She must not let this opportunity pass, for she may never have another. Did you tell her so?'

'I told her that, under the circumstances, she has no alternative but to accept Captain Pringle.'

'Oh! thank you. And does she?'

'She has given me leave to send him to her.'

'I am so much obliged. I knew that nobody but you could settle it for her, poor dear girl; she is so young and inexperienced, and one is so much at a loss without a gentleman. But this is very kind; I did not expect it in you, Mr. Kendal. And will you see Mr.'

Pettilove, and do all that is proper about settlements, as her poor dear papa would have done. Poor Pettilove, he was once very much in love with Maria!

In this mood of triumph and felicity, the old lady was left to herself and her daughter. Albinia, on the way home, begged to hear how Mr. Kendal had managed Maria; and found that he had simply told her, in an authoritative tone, that after all that had passed, she had no choice but to accept Captain Pringle, and that he had added a promise, equally vague and reassuring, of being a son to Mrs. Meadows. Such injunctions from such a quarter had infused new life into Maria; and in the course of the afternoon, Albinia met the Captain with the mother and daughter, one on each arm, Maria in recovered bloom and brilliancy, and Mrs. Meadows's rheumatism forgotten in the glory of exhibiting her daughter engaged.

For form's sake, secrecy had been mentioned; but the world of Bayford had known of the engagement a fortnight before took place. Sophy had been questioned upon it by Mary Wolfe two hours ere she was officially informed, and was sore with the recollection of her own ungracious professions of ignorance.

'So it is true,' she said. 'I don't mind, since Arthur is not a girl.'

Mr. Kendal laughed so heartily, that Sophy looked to Albinia for explanation; but even on the repetition of her words, she failed to perceive anything ridiculous in them.

'Why, mamma,' she said, impressively, 'if you had been like Aunt Maria, I should--' she paused and panted for sufficient strength of phrase--'I should have run away and begged! Papa laughs, but I am sure he remembers when grandmamma and Aunt Maria wanted to come and live here!'

He looked as if he remembered it only too well.

'Well, papa,' pursued Sophy, 'we heard the maids saying that they knew it would not do, for all Mr. Kendal was so still and steady, for Miss Meadows would worret the life out of a lead pincushion.'

'Hem!' said Mr. Kendal. 'Albinia, do you think after all we are doing Captain Pringle any kindness?'

'He is the best judge.'

'Nay, he may think himself bound in honour and compassion--he may be returning to an old ideal.'

'People like Captain Pringle are not apt to have ideals,' said Albinia; 'nor do I think Maria will be so trying. Do you remember that creeper of Lucy's, all tendrils and catching leaves, which used to lie sprawling about, entangling everything till she gave it a prop, when it instantly found its proper development, and offered no further molestation?'

All was not, however, smooth water as yet. The Captain invaded Mr. Kendal the next morning in despair at Maria having recurred to the impossibility of leaving her mother, and wanting him to wait till he

could reside in England. This could not be till his son was grown up, and ten years were a serious delay. Mr. Kendal suspected her of a latent hope that the Captain would end by remaining at home; but he was a man sense and determination, who would have thought it unjustifiable weakness to sacrifice his son's interests and his own usefulness. He would promise, that if all were alive and well, he would bring Maria back in ten or twelve years' time; but he would not sooner relinquish his duties, and he was very reluctant to become engaged on such terms.

'No one less silly than poor Maria would have thought of such a proposal,' was Mr. Kendal's comment afterwards to his wife. 'Twelve years! No one would be able to live with her by that time!'

'I cannot help respecting the unselfishness,' said Albinia.

'One sided unselfishness,' quoth Mr. Kendal. 'I am sick of the whole business, I wish I had never interfered. I cannot get an hour to myself.'

He might be excused for the complaint on that day of negotiations and counter-negotiations, which gave no one any rest, especially after Mrs. Drury arrived with all the rights of a relation, set on making it evident, that whoever was to be charged with Mrs. Meadows, it was not herself; and enforcing that nothing could be more comfortable than that Lucy Kendal should set up housekeeping with her dear grandmamma. Every one gave advice, and nobody took it; Mrs. Meadows cried, Maria grew hysterical, the Captain took up his hat and walked out of the house; and Albinia thought it would be very good in him ever to venture into it again.

The next morning Mr. Kendal ordered his horse early, and hastened his breakfast; told Albinia not to wait dinner for him, and rode off by one gate, without looking behind him, as the other opened to admit Captain Pringle. She marvelled whither he had fled, and thought herself fortunate in having only two fruitless discussions in his absence. Not till eight o'clock did he make his appearance, and then it was in an unhearing, unseeing mood, so that nothing could be extracted, except that he did not want any dinner; and it was not till late in the evening that he abruptly announced, 'Lucy is coming home on Wednesday. Colonel Bury will bring her to Woodside.'

'What? have you heard from Maurice?'

'No; I have been at Fairmead.'

'You! To-day! How was Winifred?'

'Better--I believe.'

'How does she like the governess?'

'I did not hear.'

Gradually something oozed out about Lucy having been happy and valuable, and after Sophy had gone to bed, he inquired how the courtship was going on?

'Worse than ever,' Albinia said.

'I suppose it must end in this?'

'In what!'

'If there is no more satisfactory arrangement, I suppose we must receive Mrs. Meadows.'

If Albinia could but have heard what a scolding her brother was undergoing from his vivacious wife!

'As if poor Albinia had not enough on her hands! Of all inmates in the world! When Mr. Kendal himself did not like it! Well! Maurice would certainly have advised Sinbad to request the honour of taking the Old Man of the Sea for a promenade a cheval. There was an end of Albinia. There would never be any room in her house, and she would never be able to come from home. And after having seen her worked to death, he to advise--'

'I did not advise, I only listened. What he came for was to silence his conscience and his wife by saying, "Your brother thinks it out of the question." Now to this my conscience would not consent.'

'More shame for it, then!'

'I could not say I thought these two people's happiness should be sacrificed, or the poor old woman left desolate. Albinia has spirits and energy for a worse infliction, and Edmund Kendal himself is the better for every shock to his secluded habits. If it is a step I would never dare advise, still less would I dare dissuade.'

'Well! I thought Mr. Kendal at least had more sense.'

'Ay, nothing is so provoking as to see others more unselfish than ourselves.'

'All I have to say,' concluded Mrs. Ferrars, walking off, 'is, I wish there was a law against people going and marrying two wives.'

Albinia was in no haste to profit by her husband's consent to her proposal. The more she revolved it, the more she foresaw the discomfort for all parties. She made every effort to devise the 'more satisfactory arrangement,' but nothing would occur. The Drurys would not help, and the poor old lady could not be left alone. Her maid Betty, who had become necessary to her comfort, was not a trustworthy person, and could not be relied on, either for honesty, or for not leaving her mistress too long alone; and when the notion was broached of boarding Mrs. Meadows with some family in the place, the conviction arose, that when she had grandchildren, there was no reason for leaving her to strangers.

Finally, the proposal was made, and as instantly rejected by Maria. It was very kind, but her mother could never be happy at Willow Lawn, never; and the tone betrayed some injury at such a thing being thought possible. But just as the Kendals had begun to rejoice at having cleared their conscience at so slight a cost, Captain Pringle and Miss Meadows made their appearance, and Maria presently requested that Mrs. Kendal would allow her to say a few words.

'I am afraid you thought me very rude and ungrateful,' she began, 'but the truth was, I did not think dear mamma would ever bear to live here, my poor dear sister and all; but since that, I have been talking it over with the dear Captain--thinks that since you are so kind, and dear Edmund--more than I could ever have dared to expect--that I could not do better than just to sound mamma.'

There was still another vicissitude. Mrs. Meadows would not hear of being thrust on any one, and was certain that Maria had extorted an invitation; she would never be a burden upon any one; young people liked company and amusement, and she was an old woman in every one's way; she wished she were in her coffin with poor dear Mr. Meadows, who would have settled it all. Maria fell back into the depths of despair, and all was lugubrious, till Mr. Kendal, in the most tender and gentle manner, expressed his hopes that Mrs. Meadows would consider the matter, telling her that his wife and children would esteem it a great privilege to attend on her, and that he should be very grateful if she would allow them to try to supply Maria's place. And Albinia, in her coaxing tone, described the arrangement; how the old furniture should stand in the sitting-room, and how Lucy would attend to her carpet-work, and what nice walks the sunny garden would afford, and how pleasant it would be not to have the long hill between them, till grandmamma forgot all her scruples in the fascination of that sweet face and caressing manner, she owned that poor old Willow Lawn always was like home, and finally promised to come. Before the evening was over the wedding-day was fixed.

What Sophy briefly termed 'the fuss about Aunt Maria,' had been so tedious, that it almost dispelled all poetical ideas of courtship. If Captain Pringle had been drowned at sea, and Aunt Maria pined herself into her grave, it would have been much more proper and affecting.

Sophy heard of the arrangement without remark, and quietly listened to Albinia's explanation that she was not to be sent up to the attics, but was to inhabit the spare room, which was large enough to serve her for a sitting-room. But in the evening Mr. Kendal happened in her absence to take up the book which she had been reading, and did not perceive at once on her entrance that she wanted it. When he did so, he yielded it with a few kind words of apology, but this vexation had been sufficient to bring down the thunder-cloud which had been lowering since the morning. There were no signs of clearance the next day; but Albinia had too much upon her hands to watch the symptoms, and was busy making measurements for the furniture in the morning-room when Mr. Kendal came in.

'I have been thinking,' he said, 'that it is a pity to disturb this room. I dare say Mrs. Meadows would prefer that below-stairs. It used to be her parlour, where she always sat when I first knew the house.'

'The dining-room? How could we spare that?'

'No, the study.'

Albinia remained transfixed.

'We could put the books here and in the dining-room,' he continued, 'until next spring, when, as your brother said, we can build a new

wing on the drawing-room side.'

'And what is to become of you?' she continued.

'Perhaps you will admit me here,' he said, smiling, for he was pleased with himself. 'Turn me out when I am in the way.'

'Oh! Edmund, how delightful! See, we shall put your high desk under the window, and your chair in your own corner. This will be the pleasantest place in the house, with you and your books! Dear Winifred! she did me one of her greatest services when she made me keep this room habitable!'

'And I think Sophy will not object to give up her present little room for my dressing-room. Shall you, my dear?' said he, anxious to judge of her temper by her reply.

'I don't care,' she said; 'I don't want any difference made to please me; I think that weak.'

'Sophy!' began Albinia, indignantly, but Mr. Kendal stopped her, and made her come down, to consider of the proposal in the study.

That study, once an oppressive rival to the bride, now not merely vanquished, but absolutely abandoned by its former captive!

'Don't say anything to her,' said Mr. Kendal, as they went downstairs. 'Of course her spirits are one consideration, but were it otherwise, I could not see you give up your private room.'

'It is very kind in you, but indeed I can spare mine better than you can,' said Albinia. 'I am afraid you will never feel out of the whirl.'

'Yours would be a loss to us all,' said Mr. Kendal. 'The more inmates there are in a house, the more needful to have them well assorted.'

'Just so; and that makes me afraid--'

'Of me? No, Albinia, I will try not to be a check on your spirits.'

'You! Oh! I meant that we should disturb you.'

'You never disturb me, Albinia; and it is not what it was when the children's voices were untrained and unsubdued.'

'I can't say much for Master Maurice's voice.'

He smiled, he had never yet found those joyous notes de trop, and he continued, 'Your room is of value and use to us all; mine has been of little benefit to me, and none to any one else. I wish I could as easily leave behind me all the habits I have fostered there.'

'Edmund, it is too good! When poor Sophy recovers her senses she will feel it, for I believe that morning room would have been a great loss to her.'

'It was too much to ask in her present state. I should have come to the same conclusion without her showing how much this plan cost her, for nothing can be plainer than that while she continues subject to these attacks, she must have some retreat.'

'Yet,' ventured Albinia, 'if you think solitude did you no good, do you think letting these fits have their swing is good for Sophy?'

'I _cannot_ drive her about! They must not be harshly treated,' he answered quickly. 'Resistance can only come from within; compulsion is worse than useless. Poor child, it is piteous to watch that state of dull misery! On other grounds, I am convinced this is the best plan. The communication with the offices will prevent that maid from being always on the stairs. Mrs. Meadows will have her own visitors more easily, and will get out of doors sooner, and I think she will be better pleased.'

'Yes, it will be a much better plan for every one but Mr. Kendal himself,' said Albinia; 'and if he can be happy with us, we shall be all the happier. So this was the old sitting-room!' 'Yes, I knew them first here,' he said. 'It used to be cheerful then, and I dare say you can make it the same again. We must dismantle it before Mrs. Meadows or Maria come to see it, or it will remind them of nothing but the days when I was recovering, and anything but grateful for their attention. Yes,' he added, 'poor Mrs. Meadows bore most gently and tenderly with a long course of moroseness. I am glad to have it in my power to make any sort of amends, though it is chiefly through you.'

Albinia might well be very happy! It was her moment of triumph, and whatever might be her fears for the future, and uneasiness at Sophy's discontent, nothing could take away the pleasure of finding herself deliberately preferred to the study.

Sophy did not fail to make another protest, and when told that 'it was not solely on her account,' the shame of having fancied herself so important, rendered her ill-humour still more painful and deplorable. It was vain to consult her about the arrangements, she would not care about anything, except that by some remarkable effect of her perverse condition, she had been seized with a penchant for maize colour and blue for the bridesmaids, and was deeply offended when Albinia represented that they would look like a procession of macaws, and her aunt declared that Sophy herself would be the most sacrificed by such colours. She made herself so grim that Maria broke up the consultation by saying good-humouredly, 'Yes, we will settle it when Lucy comes home.'

'Yes,' muttered Sophy, 'Lucy is ready for any sort of nonsense.'

Mr. and Mrs. Kendal went to Woodside to meet Lucy, hoping that solitude would be beneficial. Albinia grieved at the manifestations of these, her sullen fits, if only because they made Lucy feel herself superior. In truth, Lucy was superior in temper, amiability, and all the qualities that smooth the course of life, and it was very pleasant to greet her pretty bright face, so full of animation.

'Dear grandmamma going to live with us? Oh, how nice! I can always take care of her when you are busy, mamma.'

That accommodating spirit was absolute refreshment, and long before Albinia reached home the task of keeping the household contented seemed many degrees easier.

A grand wedding was 'expected,' so all the Bayford flies were bespoken three deep, a cake was ordered from Gunter, and so many invitations sent out, that Albinia speculated how all were to come alive out of the little dining-room.

And Mr. Kendal the presiding gentleman!

He had hardly seemed aware of his impending fate till the last evening, when, as the family were separating at night, he sighed disconsolately, and said, 'I am as bad as you are, Sophy.'

It awoke her first comfortable smile.

Experience had, however, shown him that such occasions might be survived, and he was less to be pitied than his daughter, who felt as if she and her great brown face would be the mark of all beholders. Poor Sophy! all scenes were to her like daguerreotypes in a bad light, she saw nothing but herself distorted!

And yet she was glad that the period of anticipation had consumed itself and its own horrors, and found herself not insensible to the excitement of the occasion. Lucy was joyous beyond description, looking very pretty, and solicitously decorating her sister, while both bestowed the utmost rapture on their step-mother's appearance.

Having learnt at last what Bayford esteemed a compliment, she had commissioned her London aunts to send her what she called 'an unexceptionable garment,' and so well did they fulfil their orders, that not only did her little son scream, 'Mamma, pretty, pretty!' and Gilbert stand transfixed with admiration, but it called forth Mr. Kendal's first personal remark, 'Albinia, you look remarkably well;' and Mrs. Meadows reckoned among the honours done to her Maria, that Mrs. Kendal wore a beautiful silk dress, and a lace bonnet, sent down on purpose from London!

Maria Meadows made a very nice bride, leaning on her brother-in-law, and not more agitated than became her well. The haggard restless look had long been gone, repose had taken away the lean sharpness of countenance, the really pretty features had fair play, and she was astonishingly like her niece Lucy, and did not look much older. Her bridegroom was so beaming and benignant, that it might fairly be hoped that even if force of habit should bring back fretfulness, he had a stock of happiness sufficient for both. The chairs were jammed so tight round the table, that it was by a desperate struggle that people took their seats, and Mr. Dusautoy's conversation was a series of apologies for being unable to keep his elbows out of his neighbours' way while carving, and poor Sophy, whose back was not two feet from the fire, was soon obliged to retreat. She had gained the door before any one perceived her, and then her brother and sister both followed; Albinia was obliged to leave her to their care, being in the innermost recesses, where moving was impossible.

There was not much the matter, she only wanted rest, and Gilbert undertook to see her safely home.

'I shall be heartily glad to get away,' he said. 'There is no breathing in there, and they'll begin talking the most intolerable nonsense presently. Besides, I want to be at home to take baby down to the gate to halloo at the four white horses from the King's Head. Come along, Sophy.'

'Mind you don't make her walk too fast,' said the careful Lucy, 'and take care how you take off your muslin, Sophy, you had better go to the nursery for help.'

Gilbert did not seem inclined to hurry his sister as they came near Madame Belmarche's. He lingered, and presently said, 'Should you be too tired to come in here for a moment? it was an intolerable shame that none of them were asked.'

'Mamma did beg for Genevieve, but there was so little room, and the Drurys did not like it. Mrs. Drury said it would only be giving her a taste for things above her station.'

'Then Mrs. Drury should never come out of the scullery. I am sure she looks as if her station was to black the kettles!' cried Gilbert, with some domestic confusion in his indignation. 'Didn't she look like a housekeeper with her mistress's things on by mistake?'

'She did not look like mamma, certainly,' said Sophy. 'Mamma looked no more aware that she had on those pretty things than if she had been in her old grey--'

'Mamma--yes--Mrs. Drury might try seventy years to look like mamma, or Genevieve either! Put Genevieve into satin or into brown holland, you couldn't help her looking ten times more the lady than Mrs. Drury ever will! But come in, I have got a bit of the cake for them here, and they will like to see you all figged out, as they have missed all the rest of the show. Aunt Maria might have cared for her old mistress!'

Sophy wished to be amiable, and refrained from objecting.

It was a holiday in honour of cette chere eleve of five-and-twenty years since, and the present pupils were from their several homes watching for the first apparition of the four greys from the King's Head, with the eight white satin rosettes at their eight ears.

Madame Belmarche and her daughter were discovered in the parlour, cooking with a stew pan over the fire a concoction which Sophy guessed to be a conserve of the rose-leaves yearly begged of the pupils, which were chiefly useful as serving to be boiled up at any leisure moment, to make a cosmetic for Mademoiselle's complexion. She had diligently used it these forty-five years, but the effect was not encouraging, as brown, wrinkled, with her frizzled front awry, with not stainless white apron, and a long pewter spoon, she turned round to confront the visitors in their wedding finery.

But what Frenchwoman ever was disconcerted? Away went the spoon, forward she sprang, both hands outstretched, and her little black eyes twinkling with pleasure. 'Ah! but this is goodness itself,' said she, in the English wherein she flattered herself no French idiom appeared. 'You are come to let us participate in your rejoicing. Let me but summon Genevieve, the poor child is at every

free moment trying to perfectionate her music in the school-room.'

Madame Belmarche had arisen to receive the guests with her dignified courtesy and heartfelt felicitations, which were not over when Genevieve tripped in, all freshness and grace, with her neat little collar, and the dainty black apron that so prettily marked her slender waist. One moment, and she had arranged a resting-place for Sophy, and as she understood Gilbert's errand, quickly produced from a corner-cupboard a plate, on which he handed it to the two other ladies, who meanwhile paid their compliments in the most perfect style.

The history of the morning was discussed, and Madame Belmarche described her sister's wedding, and the curiosity which she had shared with the bride for the first sight of 'le futur,' when the two sisters had been brought from their convent for the marriage.

'But how could she get to like him?' cried Sophy.

'My sister was too well brought up a young girl to acknowledge a preference,' replied Madame Belmarche. 'Ah! my dear, you are English; you do not understand these things.'

'No,' said Sophy, 'I can't understand how people can marry without loving. How miserable they must be!'

'On the contrary, my dear, especially if one continued to live with one's mother. It is far better to earn the friendship and esteem of a husband than to see his love grow cold.'

'And was your sister happy?' asked Sophy, abruptly.

'Ah, my dear, never were husband and wife more attached. My brother-in-law joined the army of the Prince de Conde, and never was seen after the day of Valmy; and my sister pined away and died of grief. My daughter and granddaughter go to the Catholic burying-ground at Hadminster on her fete day, to dress her grave with immortelles.'

Now Sophy knew why the strip of garden grew so many of the grey-leaved, woolly-stemmed, little yellow-and-white everlasting flowers. Good madame began to regret having saddened her on this day of joy.

'Oh! no,' said Sophy, 'I like sad things best.'

'Mais, non, my child, that is not the way to go through life,' said the old lady, affectionately. 'Look at me; how could I have lived had I not always turned to the bright side? Do not think of sorrow, it, is always near enough.'

This conversation had made an impression on Sophy, who took the first opportunity of expressing her indignation at the system of mariages de convenance.

'And, mamma, she said if people began with love, it always grew cold. Now, has not papa loved you better and better every day?'

Albinia could not be displeased, though it made her blush, and she could not answer such a home push. 'We don't quite mean the same things,' she said evasively. 'Madame is thinking of passion

independent of esteem or confidence. But, Sophy, this is enough even for a wedding-day. Let us leave it off with our finery, and resume daily life.'

'Only tell me one thing, mamma.'

'Well?'

She paused and brought it out with an effort. It had evidently occupied her for a long time. 'Mamma, must not every one with feeling be in love once in their life?'

'Well done, reserve!' thought Albinia--'but she is only a child, after all; not a blush, only those great eyes seeming ready to devour my answer. What ought it to be? Whatever it is, she will brood on it till her time comes. I must begin, or I shall grow nervous: "Dear Sophy, these are not things good to think upon. There is quite enough to occupy a Christian woman's heart and soul without that--no need for her feelings to shrivel up for want of exercise. No, I don't believe in the passion once in the life being a fate, and pray don't you, my Sophy, or you may make yourself very silly, or very unhappy, or both."' "

Sophy drew up her head, and her brown skin glowed. Albinia feared that she had said the wrong thing, and affronted her, but it was all working in the dark.

At any rate the sullenness was dissipated, and there were no tokens of a recurrence. Sophy set herself to find ways of making amends for the past, and as soon as she had begun to do little services for grandmamma, she seemed to have forgotten her gloomy anticipations, even while some of them were partly realized. For as it would be more than justice to human nature to say that Mrs. Meadows's residence at Willow Lawn was a perfect success, so it would be less than justice to call it a failure.

To put the darker side first. Grandmamma's interest in life was to know the proceedings of the whole household, and comment on each. Now Albinia could endure housewifely advice, some espionage on her servants, and even counsel about her child; but she could not away with the anxiety that would never leave Sophy alone, tried to force her sociability, and regretted all extra studies, unable to perceive the delicate treatment her disposition needed. And Sophy, in the intolerance of early girlhood, was wretched at hearing poor grandmamma's petty views, and narrow, ignorant prejudices. She might resolve to be filial and agreeable, but too often found herself just achieving a moody, disgusted silence, or else bursting out with some true but unbecoming reproof.

On the whole, all did well. Mrs. Meadows was happy; she enjoyed the animation of the larger party, liked their cheerful faces, grew fond of Maurice, and daily more dependent on Lucy and Mrs. Kendal. Probably she had never before had so much of her own way, and her gentle placid nature was left to rest, instead of being constantly worried. Her son-in-law was kind and gracious, though few words passed between them, and he gave her a sense of protection. Indeed, his patience and good-humour were exemplary; he never complained even when he was driven from the dining-room by the table-cloth, to find Maurice rioting in the morning-room, and a music lesson in the

drawing-room, or still worse, when he heard the Drurys everywhere; and he probably would have submitted quietly for the rest of his life, had not Albinia insisted on bringing forward the plan of building.

When Captain and Mrs. Pringle returned to Bayford to take leave, they found grandmamma so thoroughly at home, that Maria could find no words to express her gratitude. Maria herself could hardly have been recognised, she had grown so like her husband in look and manner! If her sentences did not always come to their legitimate development, they no longer seemed blown away by a frosty wind, but pushed aside by fresh kindly impulses, and her pride in the Captain, and the rest in his support, had set her at peace with all the world and with herself. A comfortable, comely, happy matron was she, and even her few weeks beyond the precincts of Bayford had done something to enlarge her mind.

It was as if her education had newly begun. The fixed aim, and the union with a practical man, had opened her faculties, not deficient in themselves, but contracted and nipped by the circumstances which she had not known how to turn to good account. Such a fresh stage in middle life comes to some few, like the midsummer shoot to repair the foliage that has suffered a spring blight; but it cannot be reckoned on, and Mrs. Pringle would have been a more effective and self-possessed woman, a better companion to her husband, and with more root in herself, had Maria Meadows learnt to tune her nerves and her temper in the overthrow of her early hopes.

CHAPTER XIV.

Maurice Ferrars was a born architect, with such a love of brick and mortar, that it was meritorious in him not to have overbuilt Fairmead parsonage. With the sense of giving him an agreeable holiday, his sister wrote to him in February that Gilbert's little attic was at his service if he would come and give his counsel as to the building project.

Mr. Kendal disliked the trouble and disturbance as much as Maurice loved it; but he quite approved and submitted, provided they asked him no questions; he gave them free leave to ruin him, and set out to take Sophy for a drive, leaving the brother and sister to their calculations. Of ruin, there was not much danger, Mr. Kendal had a handsome income, and had always lived within it; and Albinia's fortune had not appeared to her a reason for increased expense, so there was a sufficient sum in hand to enable Mr. Ferrars to plan with freedom.

A new drawing-room, looking southwards, with bedrooms over it, was the matter of necessity; and Albinia wished for a bay-window, and would like to indulge Lucy by a conservatory, filling up the angle to the east with glass doors opening into the drawing-room and hall. Maurice drew, and she admired, and thought all so delightful, that she began to be taken with scruples as to luxury.

'No,' said Maurice, 'these are not mere luxuries. You have full means, and it is a duty to keep your household fairly comfortable and at ease. Crowded as you are with rather incongruous elements, you are bound to give them space enough not to clash.'

'They don't clash, except poor Sophy. Gilbert and Lucy are elements of union, with more plaster of Paris than stone in their nature.'

'Pray, has Kendal made up his mind what to do with Gilbert?'

'I have heard nothing lately; I hope he is grown too old for India.'

'Gilbert is rather too well off for his good,' said Mr. Ferrars; 'the benefit of a profession is not evident enough.'

'I know what I wish! If he could but be Mr. Dusautoy's curate, in five or six years' time, what glorious things we might do with the parish!'

'Eh! is that his wish?'

'I have sometimes hoped that his mind is taking that turn. He is ready to help in anything for the poor people. Once he told me he never wished to look beyond Bayford for happiness or occupation; but I did not like to draw him out, because of his father's plans. Why, what have you drawn? The alms-houses?'

'I could do no other when I was improving Gilbert's house for him.'

'That would be the real improvement! How pretty! I will keep them for him.'

The second post came in, bringing a letter from Gilbert to his father, and Albinia was so much surprised, that her brother asked whether Gilbert were one of the boys who only write to their father with a reason.

'He can write more freely to me,' said Albinia; 'and it comes to the same thing. I am not in the least afraid of anything wrong, but perhaps he may be making some proposal for the future. I want to know how he is. Fancy his being so foolish as to go out bathing. I am afraid of his colds.'

Many times during the consultation did Mr. Ferrars detect Albinia's eye stealing wistfully towards that 'E. Kendal, Esq.:' and when the proper owner came in, he was evidently as much struck, for he paused, as if in dread of opening the letter. Her eyes were on his countenance as he read, and did not gather much consolation. 'I am afraid this is serious,' at last he said.

'His cold?' exclaimed Albinia.

'Yes,' said Mr. Kendal, reading aloud sentence by sentence, with gravity and consideration.

'I do not wish to alarm Mrs. Kendal, and therefore address myself at once to you, for I do not think it right to keep you in ignorance that I have had some of the old symptoms. I do not wish to make any one uneasy about

me, and I may have made light of the cold I caught a month since; but I cannot conceal from myself that I have much painful cough, an inclination to shortness of breath, and pain in the back and shoulders, especially after long reading or writing. I thought it right to speak to Mr. Downton, but people in high health can understand nothing short of a raging fever; however, at last he called in the parish surgeon, a stupid, ignorant fellow, who understands my case no more than his horse, and treats me with hyoscyamus, as if it were a mere throat-cough. I thought it my duty to speak openly, since, though I am quite aware that circumstances make little difference in constitutional cases, I know you and dear Mrs. Kendal will wish that all possible means should be used, and I think it--'

Mr. Kendal broke down, and handed the letter to his wife, who proceeded,

'I think it best you should be prepared for the worst, as I wish and endeavour to be; and truly I see so much trial and disappointment in the course of life before me, that it would hardly be the worst to me, except--'

That sentence finished Albinia's voice, and stealing her hand into her husband's, she read on in silence,

'for the additional sorrow to you, and my grief at bringing pain to my more than mother, but she has long known of the presentiment that has always hung over me, and will be the better prepared for its realization. If it would be any satisfaction to you, I could easily take a ticket, and go up to London to see any physician you would prefer. I could go with Price, who is going for his sister's birthday, and I could sleep at his father's house; but, in that case, I should want three pounds journey money, and I should be very glad if you would be so kind as to let me have a sovereign in advance of my allowance, as Price knows of a capital secondhand bow and arrows. With my best love to all,

'Your affectionate son,
'GILBERT KENDAL.'

Albinia held the letter to her brother, to whom she looked for something cheering, but, behold! a smile was gaining uncontrollably on the muscles of his cheeks, though his lips strove hard to keep closely shut. She would not look at him, and turning to her husband, exclaimed, 'We will take him to London ourselves!'

'I am afraid that would be inconvenient,' observed Maurice.

'That would not signify,' continued Albinia; 'I must hear myself what is thought of him, and how I am to nurse him. Oh! taking it in time, dear Edmund, we need not be so much afraid! Maurice will not mind making his visit another time.'

'I only meant inconvenient to the birthday party,' drily said her brother.

'Maurice!' cried she, 'you don't know the boy!'

'I have no doubt that he has a cold.'

'And I know there is a great deal more the matter!' cried Albinia. 'We have let him go away to be neglected and badly treated! My poor, dear boy! Edmund, I will fetch him home to-morrow.'

'You had better send me,' said Maurice, mischievously, for he saw he was diminishing Mr. Kendal's alarm, and had a brotherly love of teasing Albinia, and seeing how pretty she looked with her eyes flashing through wrathful tears, and her foot patting impetuously on the carpet.

'You!' she cried; 'you don't believe in him! You fancy all boys are made of iron and steel--you would only laugh at him--you made us send him there--I wish--'

'Gently, gently, my dear Albinia,' said her husband, dismayed at her vehemence, just when it most amused her brother. 'You cannot expect Maurice to feel exactly as we do, and I confess that I have much hope that this alarm may be more than adequate.'

'He thinks it all a scheme!' said Albinia, in a tone of great injury.

'No, indeed, Albinia,' answered her brother, seriously, 'I fully believe that Gilbert imagines all that he tells you, but you cannot suppose that either the tutor or doctor could fail to see if he were so very ill.'

'Certainly not,' assented Mr. Kendal.

'And low spirits are more apt to accompany a slight ailment, than such an illness as you apprehend.'

'I believe you are right,' said Mr. Kendal. 'Where is the letter?'

Albinia did not like it to come under discussion, but could not withhold it, and as she read it again, she felt that neither Maurice nor her cousin Fred could have written the like, but she was only the more impelled to do battle, and when she came to the unlucky conclusion, she exclaimed, 'I am sure that was an afterthought. I dare say Price asked him while he was writing.'

'What's this?' asked Mr. Kendal, coming to the 'presentiment.'

She hesitated, afraid both of him and of Maurice, but there was no alternative. 'Poor Gilbert!' she said. 'It was a cry or call from his brother just at last. It has left a very deep impression.'

'Indeed!' said his father, much moved. 'Yes. Edmund gave a cry such as was not to be forgotten,' and the sigh told how it had haunted his own pillow; 'but I had not thought that Gilbert was in a condition to notice it. Did he mention it to you?'

'Yes, not long after I came, he thinks it was a call, and I have never known exactly how to deal with it.'

'It is a case for very tender handling,' said Maurice.

'I should have desired him never to think of it again,' said Mr. Kendal, decidedly. 'Mere nonsense to dwell on it. Their names were always in Edmund's mouth, and it was nothing but accident. You should have told him so, Albinia.'

And he walked out of the room.

'Ah! it will prey upon him now,' said Albinia.

'Yes, I thought he only spoke of driving it away because it was what he would like to be able to do. But things do not prey on people of his age as they do on younger ones.'

'I wonder if I did right,' said Albinia. 'I never liked to ask you, though I wished it. I could not bear to treat it as a fancy. How was I to know, if it may not have been intended to do him good? And you see his father says it was very remarkable.'

'Do you imagine that it dwells much upon his mind?'

'Not when he is well--not when it would do him good,' said Albinia; 'it rather haunts him the instant he is unwell.'

'He makes it a superstition, then, poor boy! You thought me hard on him, Albinia; but really I could not help being angry with him for so lamentably frightening his father and you.'

'Let us see how he is before you find fault with him,' said Albinia.

'You're as bad as if you were his mother, or worse!' exclaimed Maurice.

'Oh! Maurice, I can't help it! He had no one to care for him till I came, and he is such a very dear fellow--he wants me so much!'

Mr. Ferrars agreed to go with Mr. Kendal to Traversham. He thought his father would be encouraged by his presence, and he was not devoid of curiosity. Albinia would not hear of staying at home; in fact, Maurice suspected her of being afraid to trust Gilbert to his mercy.

With a trembling heart she left the train at the little Traversham station, making resolutions neither to be too angry with the negligent tutor, nor to show Gilbert how much importance she attached to his illness.

As they walked into the village, they heard a merry clamour of tongue, and presently met five or six boys, and, a few paces behind them, Mr. Downton.

'Ah!' he exclaimed, 'I am glad you are come. I would have written yesterday, but that I found your boy had done so. I shall be very glad to have him cheered up about himself. I will turn back with you. You go on, Price. They are setting out for one of Hullah's classes, so we shall have the house clear.'

'I hope there is not much amiss?' said Mr. Kendal.

'A tedious cold,' said the tutor; 'but the doctor assures me that there is nothing wrong with his chest, and I do believe he would not

cough half so much, if he were not always watching himself.'

'Who has been attending him?'

'Lee, the union doctor, a very good man, with a large family,' (Albinia could have beaten him). 'Indeed,' he continued perceiving some dissatisfied looks, 'I think you will find that a little change is all that he wants.'

'I hope you can give a good account of him in other respects?' said Mr. Kendal.

'Oh! yes, in every way; he is the most good-natured lad in the world, and quite the small boys' friend. Perhaps he has been a little more sentimental of late, but that may be only from being rather out of order. I'll call him.'

The last words were spoken as they entered the parsonage, where opening a door, he said, 'Here, Kendal, here's a new prescription for you.'

Albinia had a momentary view of a tabby-cat and kitten, a volume of poetry, a wiry-haired terrier, and Gilbert, all lying promiscuously on the hearth-rug, before the two last leaped up, the one to bark, and the other to come forward with outstretched hand, and glad countenance.

He looked flushed and languid, but the roaring fire and close room might account for that, and though, when the subject was mentioned, he gave a short uncomfortable cough, Albinia's mind was so far relieved, that she was in doubt with whom to be angry, and prepared to stand on the defensive, should her brother think him too well.

The gentlemen went away together, and Gilbert, grasping her hand, gave way to one of his effusions of affection--'So kind to come to him--he knew he had her to trust to, whatever happened'--and he leant his cheek on his hand in a melancholy mood.

'Don't be so piteous, Gibbie,' she said. 'You were quite right to tell us you were not well, only you need not have been so very doleful, I don't like papa to be frightened.'

'I thought it was no use to go on in this way,' said Gilbert, with a cough: 'it was the old thing over again, and nobody would believe I had anything the matter with me.'

And he commenced a formidable catalogue of symptoms which satisfied her that Maurice would think him fully justified. Just at a point where it was not easy to know what next to say, the kitten began to play tricks with her mother's tail, and a happy diversion was made; Gilbert began to exhibit the various drolleries of the animals, to explain the friendship between dog and cat, and to leave off coughing as he related anecdotes of their sagacity; and finally, when the gentlemen returned, laughing was the first sound they heard, and Mrs. Kendal was found sitting on the floor at play with the livestock.

They had come to fetch her to see the church and schools, and on going out, she found that Mr. Ferrars had moved and carried that Gilbert should be taken home at once, and, on the way, be shown to a

physician at the county town. From this she gathered that Maurice was compassionate, and though, of course, he would make no such admission, she had reason afterwards to believe that he had shown Mr. Downton that the pupil's health ought to have met with a shade more attention.

With Gilbert wrapped up to the tip of his nose, they set off, and found the doctor at home. Nothing could have been more satisfactory to Albinia, for it gave her a triumph over her brother, without too much anxiety for the future. The physician detected the injury to the lungs left by an attack that the boy had suffered from in his first English winter, and had scarcely outgrown when Albinia first knew him. The recent cold had so far renewed the evil, that though no disease actually existed, the cough must be watched, and exposure avoided; in fact, a licence for petting to any extent was bestowed, and therewith every hope of recovery.

Albinia and her son sat in their corners of the carriage in secret satisfaction, while Mr. Kendal related the doctor's opinion to Mr. Ferrars, but one of them, at least, was unprepared for the summing-up. 'Under the circumstances, Gilbert is most fortunate. A few years in his native climate will quite set him up.'

'Oh! but he is too old for Haileybury,' burst out Albinia, in her consternation.

'Nearly old enough for John Kendal's bank, eh, Gilbert?'

'Oh!' cried Albinia, 'pray don't let us talk of that while poor Gilbert is so ill.'

'Hm!' said Mr. Kendal with interrogative surprise, almost displeasure, and no more was said.

Albinia felt guilty, as she remembered that she had no more intended to betray her dislike to the scheme, than to gratify Gilbert by calling him 'so ill.' Aristocratic and military, she had no love for the monied interest, and had so sedulously impressed on her friends that Mr. Kendal had been in the Civil Service, and quite unconnected with the bank, that Mr. Ferrars had told her she thought his respectability depended on it, and she was ashamed that her brother should hear her give way again so foolishly to the weakness.

Gilbert became the most talkative as they drew near home, and was the first to spring out and open the hall door, displaying his two sisters harnessed tandem-fashion with packthread, and driven at full speed by little Maurice, armed with the veritable carriage whip! The next moment it was thrown down, with a rapturous shout, and Maurice was lost to everything but his brother!

'Oh! girls, how could you let him serve you so?' began the horrified Albinia. 'Sophy will be laid up for a week!'

'Never mind,' said Sophy, dropping on a chair. 'Poor little fellow, he wished it so much!'

'I tried to stop her, mamma,' said Lucy, 'but she will do as Maurice pleases.'

'See, this is the way they will spoil my boy, the instant my back is turned!' said Albinia. 'What's the use of all I can do with him, if every one else will go and be his bond-slave! I do believe Sophy would let him kill her, if he asked her!'

'It is no real kindness,' said Mr. Kendal. 'Their good-nature ought not to go beyond reason.'

The elder Maurice could hardly help shrugging his shoulders. Well did he know that Mr. Kendal would have joined the team if such had been the will of that sovereign in scarlet merino, who stood with one hand in Gilbert's, and the whip in the other.

'Come here, Maurice,' quoth Albinia; 'put down the whip,' and she extracted it from his grasp, with grave resolution, against which he made no struggle, gave it to Lucy to be put away, and seated him on her knee. 'Now listen, Maurice; poor sister Sophy is tired, and you are never to make a horse of her. Do you hear?'

'Yes,' said Maurice, fidgeting.

'Mind, if ever you make a horse of Sophy, mamma will put you into the black cupboard. You understand?'

'Sophy shan't be horse,' said Maurice. 'Sophy naughty, lazy horse. Boy has Gibbie--'

'There's gratitude,' said Mr. Ferrars, as 'Boy' slid off his mamma's knee, stood on tiptoe to pull the door open, and ran after Gilbert to grandmamma's room.

'Yes,' said Albinia, 'no one is grateful for services beyond all reason. So, Sophy, mind, into the cupboard he goes, the very next time you are so silly as to be a horse.'

'To punish which of them?' asked her brother.

'Sophy knows,' said Albinia.

Sophy was too miserable to smile. Sarah Anne Drury had been calling, and on hearing of Gilbert's indisposition, had favoured them with 'mamma's remarks,' and when Mrs. Kendal was blamed, Sophy had indignantly told Sarah Anne that she knew nothing about it, and had no business to interfere. Then followed the accusation, that Mrs. Kendal had set the whole family against their old friends, and Sophy had found all her own besetting sins charged upon her step-mother.

'My dear!' said Albinia, 'don't you know that if a royal tiger were to eat up your cousin John in India, the Drurys would say Mrs. Kendal always let the tigers run about loose! Nor am I sure that your faults are not my fault. I helped you to be more exclusive and intolerant, and I am sure I tried your temper, when I did not know what was the matter with you--'

'No--no,' said the choked voice. It would have been an immense comfort to cry, or even to be able to return the kiss; but she was a great deal too wretched to be capable of any demonstration; physically exhausted by being driven about by Maurice; mentally worn out by the attempts to be amiable, which had degenerated into

wrangling, full of remorse for having made light of her brother's illness, and, for that reason, persuaded that she was to be punished by seeing it become fatal. Not a word of all this did she say, but,

dejected and silent, she spent the evening in a lonely corner of the drawing-room, while her brother, in the full pleasure of returning home, and greatly enjoying his invalid privileges, was discussing the projected improvements.

Talking at last brought back his cough with real violence, and he was sent to bed; Albinia went up with him to see that his fire burnt. He set Mr. Ferrars's drawing of the alms-houses over his mantelshelf. 'I shall nail it up to-morrow,' he said. 'I always wanted a picture here, and that's a jolly one to look to.'

'It would be a beautiful beginning,' she said. 'I think your life would go the better for it, Gibbie.'

'I suppose old nurse would be too grand for one,' he said, 'but I should like to have her so near! And you must mind and keep old Mrs. Baker out of the Union for it. And that famous old blind sailor! I shall put him up a bench to sit in the sun, and spin his yarns on, and tell him to think himself at Greenwich.'

Albinia went down, only afraid that his being so very good was a dangerous symptom.

Sophy was far from well in the morning, and Albinia kept her upstairs, and sent her godfather to make her a visit. He always did her good; he knew how to probe deeply, and help her to speak, and he gave her advice with more experience than his sister, and more encouragement than her father.

Sophy said little, but her eyes had a softened look.

'One good thing about Sophy,' said he afterwards to his sister, 'is, that she will never talk her feelings to death.'

'That reserve is my great pain. I don't get at the real being once in six months.'

'So much the better for people living together.'

'Well, I was thinking that you and I are a great deal more intimate and confidential when we meet now, than we used to be when we were always together.'

'People can't be often confidential from the innermost when they live together,' said Maurice.

'Since I have been a Kendal, such has been my experience.'

'It was the same before, only we concealed it by an upper surface of chatter,' said Maurice. "'As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth a man the countenance of his friend;" but if the mutual sharpening went on without intermission, both irons would wear away, and no work would be done. Aren't you coming with me? Edmund is going to drive me to Woodside to meet the pony-carriage from home.'

'I wish I could; but you see what happens when I go out pleasuring!'

'Well, you can take one element of mischief with you--that imp, Maurice.'

'Ye--es. Papa would like it, if you do.'

'I should like you to come on worse terms.'

'Very well, then; and Sophy is safe; I had already asked Genevieve to come and read to her this afternoon. If Gilbert can spare me, I will go.'

Gilbert did not want her, and begged Lucy not to think of staying indoors on his account. He was presently left in solitary possession of the drawing-room, whereupon he rose, settled his brown locks at the glass, arranged his tie, brushed his cuffs, leisurely walked upstairs, and tapped at the door of the morning-room, meekly asking, 'May I come in?' with a cough at each end of the sentence.

'Oh! Gilbert!' cried his anxious sister, starting up. 'Are you come to see me?' and she would have wheeled round her father's arm-chair for him, but Genevieve was beforehand with her, and he sank into it, saying pathetically, 'Ah! thank you, Miss Durant; you are come to a perfect hospital. Oh! this is too much,' as she further gave him a footstool. 'Oh! no, thank you, Sophy,' for she would have handed Genevieve her own pillow for his further support; 'this is delightful!' reclining pathetically in his chair. 'This is not like Traversham.'

'Where they would not believe he was ill!' said Sophy.

'I hope he does not look so very ill,' said Genevieve, cheerfully, but this rather hurt the feelings of both; the one said, 'Oh! but he is terribly pale,' the other coughed, and said, 'Looks are deceitful.'

'That is the very reason,' said Genevieve. 'You don't look deceitful enough to be so ill--so ill as Miss Sophie fears; now you are at home, and well cared for, you will soon be well.'

'Care would have prevented it all,' said Sophy.

'And not brought me home!' said Gilbert. 'Home is home on any terms. No one there had the least idea a fellow could ever be unwell or out of spirits!'

'Ah! you must have been ill,' cried his sister, 'you who never used to be miserable!'

Gilbert gave a sigh. 'They were such mere boys,' he said.

'Monsieur votre Precepteur?' asked Genevieve.

'Ah! he was otherwise occupied!'

'There is some mystery beneath,' said Genevieve, turning to Sophy, who exclaimed abruptly, 'Oh! is he in love?'

'Sophy goes to the point,' said Gilbert, smiling, the picture of languid comfort; 'but I own there are suspicious circumstances. He always has a photograph in his pocket, and Price has seen him looking at it.'

'Ah! depend upon it, Miss Sophy, it is all a romance of these young gentlemen,' said Genevieve, turning to her with a droll provoking air of confidence; 'ce pauvre Monsieur had the portrait of his sister!'

'Catch me carrying Sophy's face in my waistcoat pocket, cried Gilbert, forgetting his languor.

'Speak for yourself, Mr. Gilbert,' laughed Genevieve.

'And he writes letters every day, and wont let any of us put them into the post for him; but we know the direction begins with Miss--'

'Oh! the curious boys!' cried Genevieve. 'If I could only hint to this poor tutor to let them read Miss Downton on one!'

'I assure you,' cried Gilbert, 'Price has laid a bet that she's an heiress with forty thousand pounds and red hair.'

'Mr. Price is an impertinent! I hope you will inform me how he looks when he is the loser.'

'But he has seen her! He met Mr. Downton last Christmas in Regent Street, in a swell carriage, with a lady with such carrots, he thought her bonnet was on fire; and Mr. Downton never saw Price, though he bowed to him, and you know nobody would marry a woman with red hair unless she was an heiress.'

'Miss Sophy,' whispered Genevieve, 'prepare for a red-haired sister-in-law. I predict that every one of the pupils of the respectable Mr. Downton will marry ladies with lively chestnut locks.'

'What, you think me so mercenary, Genevieve?' said Gilbert.

'I only hope to see this school-boy logic well revenged!' said Genevieve. 'Mrs. Price shall have locks of orange red, and for Mrs. Gilbert Kendal--ah! we will content ourselves with her having a paler shade--sandy gold.'

'No,' said Gilbert, speaking slowly, turning round his eyes. 'I could tell you what Mrs. G. Kendal's hair will be--'

Genevieve let this drop, and said, 'You do not want me: good-bye, Miss Sophie.'

'Going! why, you came to read to me, Genevieve,' exclaimed Sophy.

'Ah! I beg your pardon, I have been interrupting you all this time,' cried Gilbert; 'I never meant to disturb you. Pray let me listen.'

And Genevieve read while Gilbert resumed his reclining attitude, with half-closed eyes, listening to the sweet intonations and pretty refined accent of the ancien regime.

Sophy enjoyed this exceedingly, she made it her especial occupation

to take care of Gilbert, and enter into his fireside amusements. This indisposition had drawn the two nearer together, and essentially unlike as they were, their two characters seemed to be fitting well one into the other. His sentiment accorded with her strain of romance, and they read poetry and had discussions as they sat over the fire, growing constantly into greater intimacy and confidence. Sophy waited on him, and watched him perpetually, and her assiduity was imparting a softness and warmth quite new to her, while the constant occupation kept affronts and vexations out of her sight, and made her amiable.

Gilbert's health improved, though with vicissitudes that enforced the necessity of prudence. Rash when well, and desponding at each renewal of illness, he was not easy to manage, but he was always so gentle, grateful, and obliging, that he endeared himself to the whole household. It was no novelty for him to be devoted to his step-mother and his little brother, but he was likewise very kind to Lucy, and spent much time in helping in her pursuits; he was becoming companionable to his father, and could play at chess sufficiently well to be a worthy antagonist in Mr. Kendal's scientific and interminable games. He would likewise play at backgammon with grandmamma, and could entertain her for hours together by listening to her long stories of the old Bayford world. He was a favourite in her little society, and would often take a hand at cards to make up a rubber, nay, even when not absolutely required, he was very apt to bestow his countenance upon the little parties, where he had the pleasure of being treated as a great man, and which, at least, had the advantage of making a variation in his imprisonment during the east winds.

Madame Belmarche and her daughter and grandchild were sometimes of the party, and on these occasions, Sophy always claimed Genevieve, and usually succeeded in carrying her off when Gilbert would often join them. Their books and prints were a great treat to her; Gilbert had a beautiful illustrated copy of Longfellow's poems, and the engravings and 'Evangeline' were their enjoyment; Gilbert regularly proffering the loan of the book, and she as regularly refusing it, and turning a deaf ear to gentle insinuations of the pleasure of knowing that an book of his was in her hands. Gilbert had never had much of the schoolboy manner, and he was adopting a gentle, pathetic tone, at which Albinia was apt to laugh, but in her absence was often verged upon tendresse, especially with Genevieve. She, however, by her perfect simplicity and lively banter, always nipped the bud of his sentiment, she had known him from a child, and never lost the sense of being his elder, treating him somewhat as a boy to be played with. Perfectly aware of her own position, her demeanour, frank and gracious as it was, had something in it which kept in check other Bayford youths less gentlemanlike than Gilbert Kendal. If she never forgot that she was dancing-master's daughter, she never let any one else forget that she was a lady.

When the building began, Gilbert had a wholesome occupation, saving his father some trouble and--not quite so much expense by overlooking the workmen. Mr. Kendal was glad to be spared giving orders and speaking to people, and would always rather be overcharged than be at the pains of bargaining or inquiring. 'It was Gilbert's own house,' he said, 'and it was good for the boy to take an interest in it, and not to be too much interfered with.' So the bay window and the conservatory were some degrees grander than Mr. Ferrars had proposed

but all was excused by the pleasure and experience they afforded Gilbert, and it was very droll to see Maurice following him about after the workmen, watching them most knowingly, and deep in mischief at every opportunity. Once he had been up to his knees in a tempting blancmanger-like lake of lime, many times had he hammered or cut his fingers, and once his legs had gone through the new drawing-room ceiling, where he hung by the petticoats screaming till rescued by his brother. The room was under these auspices finished, and was a very successful affair--the conservatory, in which the hall terminated, and into which a side door of the drawing-room opened, gave a bright fragrant, flowery air to the whole house; and the low fireplace and comfortable fan-shaped fender made the room very cheerful. Fresh delicately-tinted furniture, chosen con amore by the London aunts, had made the apartment very unlike old Willow-Lawn, and Albinia had so much enjoyed setting it off to the best advantage, that she sent word to Winifred that she was really becoming a furniture fancier.

It was a very pretty paper, and some choice prints hung on it, but Albinia and Sophy had laid violent hands on all the best-looking books, and kept them for the equipment of one of the walls. The rest were disposed, for Mr. Kendal's delectation, in the old drawing-room, henceforth to be named the library. Lucy thought it sounded better, and he was quite as willing as Albinia was that the name of study should be extinct. Meantime Mr. Downton had verified the boys' prediction by writing to announce that he was about to marry and give up pupils.

Gilbert was past seventeen, and it was time to decide on his profession. Albinia had virtuously abstained from any hint adverse to the house of Kendal and Kendal, for she knew it hurt her husband's feelings to hear any disparagement of the country where he had spent some of his happiest years. He was fond of his cousins, and knew that they would give his son a safe and happy home, and he believed that the climate was exactly what his health needed.

Sophy fired at the idea. Her constant study of the subject and her vivid imagination had taken the place of memory, which could supply nothing but the glow of colouring and the dazzling haze which enveloped all the forms that she would fain believe that she remembered. She and her father would discuss Indian scenery as if they had been only absent from it a year, she envied Gilbert his return thither, but owned that it was the next thing to going herself, and was already beginning to amass a hoard of English gifts for the old ayahs and bearers who still lived in her recollection, in preparation for the visit which on his first holiday her brother must pay to her birthplace and first home.

Gilbert, however, took no part in this enthusiasm, he made no opposition, but showed no alacrity; and at last his father asked Albinia whether she knew of any objection on his part, or any design which he might be unwilling to put forward. With a beating heart she avowed her cherished scheme.

'Is this his own proposal?' asked Mr. Kendal.

'No; he has never spoken of it, but your plan has always seemed so decided that perhaps he thinks he has no choice.'

'That is not what I wish,' said his father. 'If his inclinations be otherwise, he has only to speak, and I will consider.'

'Shall I sound him?' suggested Albinia, dreading the timidity that always stood between the boy and his father.

'Do not inspire him with the wish and then imagine it his own,' said Mr. Kendal; and then thinking he had spoken sternly, added 'I know you would be the last to wish him to take holy orders inconsiderately, but you have such power over him, that I question whether he would know his wishes from yours.'

Albinia began to disavow the desire of actuating him.

'You would not intend it, but he would catch the desire from you, and I own I would rather he were not inspired with it. If he now should express it, I should fear it was the unconscious effort to escape from India. If it had been his brother Edmund, I would have made any sacrifice, but I do not think Gilbert has the energy or force of character I should wish to see in a clergyman, nor do I feel willing to risk him at the university.'

'Oh! Edmund, why will you distrust Oxford? Why will you not believe what I know through Maurice and his friends?'

'If my poor boy had either the disposition or the discipline of your brother, I should not feel the same doubt.'

'Maurice had no discipline except at school and when William licked him,' cried Albinia. 'You know he was but eleven years old when my father died, and my aunts spoilt us without mitigation.'

'I said the disposition,' repeated Mr. Kendal; 'I can see nothing in Gilbert marking him for a clergyman, and I think him susceptible to the temptations that you cannot deny to exist at any college. Nor would I desire to see him fixed here, until he has seen something of life and of business, for which this bank affords the greatest facilities with the least amount of temptation. He would also be doing something for his own support; and with the life-interests upon his property, he must be dependent on his own exertions, unless I were to do more for him than would be right by the other children.'

'Then I am to say nothing to him?'

'I will speak to him myself. He is quite old enough to understand his prospects and decide for himself.'

'But, Edmund,' cried Albinia, with sudden vehemence, 'you are not sacrificing Gilbert for Maurice's sake?'

She had more nearly displeased him than she had ever done before, though he looked up quietly, saying, 'Certainly not. I am not sacrificing Gilbert, and I should do the same if Maurice were not in existence.'

She was too much ashamed of her foolish fancy to say more, and she cooled into candour sufficient to perceive that he was wise in distrusting her tact where her preference was so strong. But she

foresaw that Gilbert would shrink and falter before his father, and that the conference would lead to no discovery of his views, and she was not surprised when her husband told her that he could not understand the boy, and believed that the truth was, that he would like to do nothing at all. It had ended by Mr. Kendal, in a sort of despair, undertaking to write to his cousin John for a statement of

what would be required, after which the decision was to be made.

Meantime Mr. Kendal advised Gilbert to attend to arithmetic and book-keeping, and offered to instruct him in his long-forgotten Hindostanee. Sophy learnt all these with all her heart, but Gilbert always had a pain in his chest if he sat still at any kind of study!

CHAPTER XV.

Colonel Bury was the most open-hearted old bachelor in the country. His imagination never could conceive the possibility of everybody not being glad to meet everybody, his house could never be too full, his dinner-parties of 'a few friends' overflowed the dining-room, and his 'nobody' meant always at least six bodies. Every season was fertile in occasions of gathering old and young together to be made happy, and little Mary Ferrars, at five years old, had told her mamma that 'the Colonel's parties made her quite dissipated.'

One bright summer day, his beaming face appeared at Willow-Lawn with a peremptory invitation. His nephew and heir had newly married a friend of Albinia's girlhood, and was about to pay his wedding visit. Too happy to keep his guests to himself, the Colonel had fixed the next Thursday for a fete, and wanted all the world to come to it--the Kendals, every one of them--if they could only sleep there--but Albinia brought him to confession that he had promised to lodge five people more than the house would hold; and the aunts were at the parsonage, where nobody ventured to crowd their servants.

But there was a moon--and though Mr. Kendal would not allow that she was the harvest moon, the hospitable Colonel dilated on her as if she had been bed, board, and lodging, and he did not find much difficulty in his persuasions.

Few invitations ever gave more delight; Albinia appreciated a holiday to the utmost, and the whole family was happy at Sophy's chance of at length seeing Fairmead, and taking part in a little gaiety. And if Mr. Kendal's expectations of pleasure were less high, he submitted very well, smiled benignantly at the felicity around him, and was not once seen to shudder.

Sarah Anne Drury had been invited to enliven grandmamma, and every one augured a beautiful day and perfect enjoyment. The morning was beautiful, but alas! Sophy was hors de combat, far too unwell to think of making one of the party. She bore the disappointment magnanimously, and even the pity. Every one was sorry, and Gilbert wanted her to go and wait at Fairmead Parsonage for the chance of improving, promising to come and fetch her for any part of the

entertainment; and her father told her that he had looked to her as his chief companion while the gay people were taking their pleasure. No one was uncomfortably generous enough to offer to stay at home with her; but Lucy suggested asking Genevieve to come and take care of her.

'Nay,' said Sophy, 'it would be much better if she were to go in my stead.'

Gilbert and Lucy both uttered an exclamation; and Sophy added, 'She would have so much more enjoyment than I could! Oh, it would quite make up for my missing it!'

'My dear,' said grandmamma, 'you don't know what you are talking of. It would be taking such a liberty.'

'There need be no scruples on that score,' said Albinia; 'the Colonel would only thank me if I brought him half Bayford.'

'Then,' cried Sophy, 'you think we may ask her? Oh, I should like to run up myself;--and a look of congratulation and gratitude passed between her and her brother.'

'No, indeed, you must not, let me go,' said Lucy, 'I'll just finish this cup of tea--'

'My dear, my dear,' interposed Mrs. Meadows, 'pray consider. She is a very good little girl in her way, but it is only giving her a taste for things out of her station'

'Oh! don't say that, dear grandmamma,' interposed Albinia, 'one good festival does carry one so much better through days of toil!'

'Ah, well! my dear, you will do as you think proper; but considering who the poor child is, I should call it no kindness to bring her forward in company.'

Something passed between the indignant Gilbert and Sophy about French counts and marquises, but Lucy managed much better. 'Dear me, grandmamma, nobody wishes to bring her forward. She will only play with the children, and see the fireworks, and no one will speak to her.'

Albinia averted further discussion till grandmamma had left the breakfast-table, when all four appealed with one voice to Mr. Kendal, who saw no objection, whereupon Lucy ran off, while Albinia finished her arrangements for the well-being of grandmamma, Sophy, and Maurice, who were as difficult to manage as the fox, goose, and cabbage. At every turn she encountered Gilbert, touching up his toilette at each glass, and seriously consulting her and Sophy upon the choice between lilac and lemon-coloured gloves, and upon the bows of his fringed neck-tie.

'My dear Gilbert,' said Albinia, on the fifth anxious alternative, 'it is of no use. No living creature will be the wiser, and do what you will, you will never look half so well as your father.'

Gilbert flung aside, muttering something about 'fit to be seen,' but just then Lucy hurried in. 'Oh! mamma, she wont go--she is very much

obliged, but she can't go.'

'Can't! she must,' cried Albinia and Gilbert together.

'She says you are very kind, but that she cannot. I said everything I could; I told her she should wear Sophy's muslin mantle, or my second best polka.'

'No doubt you went and made a great favour of it,' said Gilbert.

'No, I assure you I did not; I persuaded her with all my might; I said mamma wished it, and we all wished it; and I am sure she would really have been very glad if she could have gone.'

'It can't be the school, it is holiday time,' said Gilbert. 'I'll go and see what is the matter.'

'No, I will go,' said Albinia, 'I will ask the old ladies to luncheon here, and that will make her happy, and make it easier for Sophy to get on with Sarah Anne Drury.'

Lucy had seen Genevieve alone; Albinia took her by storm before Madame Belmarche, whose little black eyes sparkled as she assured Mrs. Kendal that the child merited that and every other pleasure; and when Genevieve attempted to whisper objections, silenced her with an embrace, saying, 'Ah! my love, where is your gratitude to Madame? Have no fears for us. Your pleasure will be ours for months to come.'

The liquid sweetness of Genevieve's eyes spoke of no want of gratitude, and with glee which she no longer strove to repress, she tripped away to equip herself, and Albinia heard her clear young voice upstairs, singing away the burthen of some queer old French ditty.

Albinia found Gilbert and Sophy in disgrace with Lucy for having gathered the choicest flowers, which they were eagerly making up into bouquets. Genevieve's was ready before she arrived in the prettiest tremor of gratitude and anticipation, and presented to her by Gilbert, whilst Sophy looked on, and blushed crimson, face, neck, and all, as Genevieve smelt and admired the white roses that had so cruelly been reft from Lucy's beloved tree.

With every advantage of pretty features, good complexion, and nice figure, the English Lucy, in her blue-and-white checked silk, worked muslin mantle, and white chip bonnet with blue ribbons, was eclipsed by the small swarthy French girl, in that very old black silk dress, and white trimmed coarse straw bonnet, just enlivened by little pink bows at the neck and wrists. It had long been acknowledged that Genevieve was unrivalled in the art of tying bows, and those pink ones were paragons, redolent of all her own fresh sprightly archness and refinement. Albinia herself was the best representative of English good looks, and never had she been more brilliant, her rich chestnut hair waving so prettily on the rounded contour of her happy face, her fair cheek tinted with such a healthy fresh bloom, her grey eyes laughing with merry softness, her whole person so alert and elastic with exuberant life and enjoyment, that grandmamma was as happy in watching her as if she had been her own daughter, and stroked down the broad flounces of her changeable silk, and admired

her black lace, as if she felt the whole family exalted by Mrs. Kendal's appearance.

It was a merry journey, through the meadows and corn-fields, laughing in the summer sunshine, and in due time they saw the flag upon Fairmead steeple, and Albinia nodded to curtsying old friends at the cottage doors. The lodge gate swung open wide, and the well-known striped marquee was seen among the trees in the distance, as they went up the carriage road; but at the little iron gate leading to the shrubbery there was a halt; Mr. Ferrars called to the carriage to stop, and opened the door. At the same moment Albinia gave a cry of wonder, and exclaimed, 'Why, Fred? is William here?'

'No; at Montreal, but very well,' was the answer, with a hearty shake of the hand.

'Edmund, it is Fred Ferrars,' said Albinia. 'Why, Maurice, you never told us.'

'He took us by surprise yesterday.'

'Yes; I landed yesterday morning, went to the Family Office, found Belraven was nowhere, and the aunts at Fairmead, and so came on here,' explained Fred, as he finished shaking hands with all the party, and walked on beside Albinia. He was tall, fresh-coloured, a good deal like her, with a long fair moustache, and light, handsome figure; and Lucy, though rather disconcerted at Genevieve being taken for one of themselves, began eagerly to whisper her conviction that he was Lord Belraven's brother, mamma's first cousin, captain in the 25th Lancers, and aide-de-camp to General Ferrars.

It was the first meeting since an awkward parting. The only son of a foolish second marriage, and early left an orphan, Frederick Ferrars had grown up under the good aunts' charge, somewhat neglected by his half-brother, by many years his senior. He was little older than Albinia, and a merry, bantering affection had always subsisted between them, till he had begun to give it the air of something more than friendship. Albinia was, however, of a nature to seek for something of depth and repose, on which to rely for support and anchorage. Fred's vivacious disposition had never for a moment won her serious attachment; she was 'very fond of him,' but no more; her heart was set on sharing her brother's life as a country pastor. She went to Fairmead, Fred was carried off by the General to Canada, and she presently heard of his hopeless attachment to a lovely Yankee, whom he met on board the steamer. All this was now cast behind the seven most eventful years of Albinia's life; and in the dignity of her matronhood, she looked more than ever on 'poor Fred' as a boy, and was delighted to see him again, and to hear of her brother William.

A few steps brought them to the shade of the large cedar-tree, where was seated Winifred, and Mrs. Annesley was with her. The greetings had hardly been exchanged before the Colonel came upon them in all his glory, with his pretty shy bride niece on his arm, looking very like the Alice Percy of the old times, when Fred used to tease the two girls.

Genevieve was made heartily welcome, and Sophia's absence deplored, and then the Colonel carried off the younger ones to the archery,

giving his arm to the much-flattered Lucy, and followed by Gilbert and Genevieve, with Willie and Mary adhering to them closely, and their governess in sight.

Mr. Ferrars and Mr. Kendal fell into one of their discussions, and paced up and down the shady walk, while Albinia sat, in the complete contentment, between Alice and Winifred, with Fred Ferrars on the turf at their feet, living over again the bygone days, laughing over ancient jokes, resuscitating past scrapes, tracing the lot of old companions, or telling mischievous anecdotes of each other, for the very purpose of being contradicted. They were much too light-hearted to note the lapse of time, till Maurice came to take his wife home, thinking she had had fatigue enough. Mrs. Annesley went with her, and Albinia, on looking for her husband, was told that he had fallen in with some old Indian acquaintances; and Charles Bury presently came to find his wife, and conduct the party to luncheon. There was no formal meal, but a perpetual refection laid out in the dining-room, for relays of guests. Fred took care of Albinia and here they met Miss Ferrars, who had been with one of her old friends, to whom she was delighted to exhibit her nephew and niece in their prime of good looks.

'But I must go,' said Albinia; 'having found the provisions, I must secure that Mr. Kendal and the children are not famished.'

Fred came with her, and she turned down the long alley leading to the archery-ground. He felt old times so far renewed as to resume their habits of confidence, and began, 'I suppose the General has not told you what has brought me home?'

'He has not so much as told me you were coming.'

'Ay, ay, of course you know how he treats those things.'

'Oh--h!' said Albinia, perfectly understanding.

'But,' continued Frederick, eagerly, 'even he confesses that she is the very sweetest--I mean,' as Albinia smiled at this evident embellishment, 'even he has not a word of objection to make except the old story about married officers.'

'And who is she, Fred?'

'Oh, mamma, there you are!' and Lucy joined them as they emerged on the bowling-green, where stood the two bright targets, and the groups of archers, whose shafts, for the most part, flew far and wide.

'Where are the rest, my dear? are they shooting?'

'Yes; Gilbert has been teaching Genevieve--there, she is shooting now.'

The little light figure stood in advance. Gilbert held her arrows, and another gentleman appeared to be counselling her. There seemed to be general exultation when one of her arrows touched the white ring outside the target.

'That has been her best shot,' said Lucy. 'I am sure I would not shoot in public unless I knew how!'

'Do you not like shooting?' asked Captain Ferrars; and Lucy smiled, and lost her discontented air.

'It hurts my fingers, she said; 'and I have always so much to do in the garden.'

Albinia asked if she had had anything to eat.

'Oh, yes; the Colonel asked Gilbert to carve in the tent there, for the children and governesses,' said Lucy, 'he and Genevieve were very busy there, but I found I was not of much use so, I came away with the Miss Bartons to look at the flowers, but now they are shooting, and I could not think what had become of you.'

And Lucy bestowed her company on Albinia and the Captain, reducing him to dashing, disconnected talk, till they met Mr. Kendal, searching for them in the same fear that they were starving, and anxious to introduce his wife to his Indian friends. When at the end of the path, Albinia looked round, the Lancer had disappeared, and Lucy was walking by her father, trying to look serenely amused by a discussion on the annexation of the Punjaub.

The afternoon was spent in pleasant loitering, chiefly with Miss Ferrars, who asked much after Sophy, lamented greatly over Winifred's delicate health, and was very anxious to know what could have brought Fred home, being much afraid it was some fresh foolish attachment.

Ominous notes were heard from the band, and the Colonel came to tell them that there was to be dancing till it was dark enough for the fireworks, his little Alice had promised him her first country-dance. Fred Ferrars emerged again with a half-laughing, half-imploring, 'For the sake of old times, Albinia! We've been partners before!'

'You'll take care of Lucy,' said Albinia, turning to her aunt; but Mr. Winthrop had already taken pity on her, and Albinia was led off by her cousin to her place in the fast lengthening rank. How she enjoyed it! She had cared little for London balls after the first novelty, but these Fairmead dances on the turf had always had an Arcadian charm to her fancy, and were the more delightful after so long an interval, in the renewal of the old scene, and the recognition of so many familiar faces.

With bounding step and laughing lips, she flew down the middle, more exhilarated every moment, exchanging merry scraps of talk with her partner or bright fragments as she pousetted with pair after pair; and when the dance was over, with glowing complexion and eyes still dancing, she took Fred's arm, and heard the renewal of his broken story--the praise of his Emily, the fairest of Canadians, whom even the General could not dislike, though, thorough soldier as he was, he would fain have had all military men as devoid of encumbrances as himself, and thought an officer's wife one of the most misplaced articles in the world. Poor Fred had been in love so often, that he laboured under the great vexation of not being able to persuade any of his friends to regard his passion seriously, but Albinia was quite sisterly enough to believe him this time, and give full sympathy to his hopes and fears. Far less wealth had fallen to his lot than to that of his cousins, and his marriage must depend on what his brother would 'do for him,' a point on which he tried to be sanguine, and

Albinia encouraged him against probability, for Lord Belraven was never liberal towards his relations, and had lately married an expensive wife, with whom he lived chiefly abroad.

This topic was not exhausted when Fred fell a prey to the Colonel, who insisted on his dancing again, and Albinia telling him to do his duty, he turned towards a group that had coalesced round Miss Ferrars, consisting of Lucy, Gilbert, Genevieve, and the children from the parsonage, and at once bore off the little Frenchwoman, leaving more than one countenance blank. Lucy and Willie did their best for mutual consolation, while Albinia undertook to preside over her niece and a still smaller partner in red velvet, in a quadrille. It was amusing to watch the puzzled downright motions of the sturdy little bluff King Hal, and the earnest precision of the prim little damsel, and Albinia hovering round, now handing one, now pointing to the other, keeping lightly out of every one's way, and far more playful than either of the small performers in this solemn undertaking. As it concluded she found that Mr. Kendal had been watching her, with much entertainment, and she was glad to take his arm, and assure herself that he had not been miserable, but had been down to the parsonage, where he had read the newspaper in peace, and had enjoyed a cup of tea in quiet with Winifred and Mrs. Annesley.

The dancing had been transferred to the tent, which presented a very pretty scene from without, looking through the drooping festoons of evergreens at the lamps and the figures flitting to and fro in their measured movements, while the shrubs and dark foliage of the trees fell into gloom around; and above, the sky assumed the deep tranquil blue of night, the pale bright stars shining out one by one. The Kendals were alone in the terrace, far enough from the gay tumult to be sensible of the contrast.

'How beautiful!' said Albinia: 'it is like a poem.'

'I was just thinking so,' he answered.

'This is the best part of all,' she said, feeling, though hardly expressing to herself the repose of his lofty, silent serenity, standing aloof from gaiety and noise. She could have compared him and her lively cousin to the evening stillness contrasted with the mirthful scene in the tent; and though her nature seemed to belong to the busy world, her best enjoyment lay with what calmed and raised her above herself; and she was perfectly happy, standing still with her arm upon that of her silent husband.

'These things are well imagined,' said he. 'The freedom and absence of formality give space for being alone and quiet.'

'Yes,' said Albinia, saucily, 'when that is what you go into society for.'

'You have me there,' he said, smiling; 'but I must own how much I enjoyed coming back from the parsonage by myself. I am glad we brought that little Genevieve; she seems to be so perfectly in her element. I saw her amusing a set of little children in the prettiest, most animated way; and afterwards, when the young people were playing at some game, her gestures were so sprightly and graceful, that no one could look at the English girls beside her. Indeed I think she was making quite a sensation; your cousin seemed

to admire her very much. If she were but in another station, she would shine anywhere.'

'How much you have seen, Edmund!'

'I have been a spectator, you an actor,' he said, smiling.

Her quiescence did not long continue, for the poor people had begun to assemble on the gravel road before the front door to see the fireworks, and she hurried away to renew her acquaintance with her village friends, guessing at them in the dark, asking after old mothers and daughters at service, inquiring the names of new babies, and whether the old ones were at school, and excusing herself for having become 'quite a stranger.'

In the midst--whish--hiss, with steady swiftness, up shot in the dark purple air the first rocket, bursting and scattering a rain of stars. There was an audible gasp in the surrounding homely world, a few little cries, and a big boy clutched tight hold of her arm, saying, 'I be afeard.' She was explaining away his alarms, when she heard her brother's voice, and found her arm drawn into his.

'Here you are, then,' he said; 'I thought I heard your voice.'

'Oh! Maurice, I have hardly seen you. Let us have a nice quiet turn in the park together.'

He resisted, saying, 'I don't approve of parents and guardians losing themselves. What have you done with all your children?'

'What have you done with yours?' retorted she.

'I left Willie and Mary at the window with their governess, I came to see that these other children of mine were orderly.'

'Most proper, prudential, and exemplary Maurice!' his sister laughed. 'Now I have an equally hearty belief in my children being somewhere, sure to turn up when wanted. Come, I want to get out from the trees to look for Colonel Bury's harvest moon, for I believe she is an imposition.'

'No, I'm not coming. You, don't understand your duties. Your young ladies ought always to know where to find you, and you where to find them.'

'Oh! Maurice, what must you have suffered before you imported Winifred to chaperon me!'

'You are in so mad a mood that I shall attempt only one moral maxim, and that is, that no one should set up for a chaperon, till she has retired from business on her own account.'

'That's a stroke at my dancing with poor Fred, but it was his only chance of speaking to me.'

'Not particularly at the dancing.'

'Well, then--'

'You'll see, by-and-bye. It was not your fault if those girls were not in all sorts of predicaments.'

'I believe you think life is made up of predicaments. And I want to hear whether William has written to you anything about poor Fred.'

'Only that he is more mad than ever, and that he let him go, thinking that there is no chance of Belraven helping him, but that it may wear itself out on the journey.'

A revolving circle shedding festoons of purple and crimson jets of fire made all their talk interjectional, and they had by this time reached the terrace, where all the company were assembled, the open windows at regular intervals casting bewildering lights on the heads and shoulders in front of them. Then out burst a grand wheat-sheaf of yellow flame with crimson ears and beards, by whose light Albinia recognised Gilbert standing close to her in the shadow, and asked him where the rest were.'

'I can't tell; Lucy and my father were here just now.'

'Are you feeling the chill, Gilbert?' asked Albinia, struck by something in his tone. 'You had better look from the window.'

He neither moved nor made answer, but a great illumination of Colonel Bury's coat-of-arms, with Roman candles and Chinese trees at the four corners, engrossed every eye, and flashing on every face, enabled Albinia to join Mr. Kendal, who was with Lucy and Miss Ferrars. No one knew where Genevieve was, but Albinia was confident that she could take good care of herself, and was not too uneasy to enjoy the grand representation of Windsor Castle, and the finale of interlaced ciphers amidst a multitude of little fretful sputtering tongues of flame. Then it was, amid good nights, donning of shawls, and announcing of carriages, that Captain Ferrars and Miss Durant made their appearance together, having been 'looking everywhere for Mrs. Kendal,' and it was not in the nature of a brother not to look a little arch, though Albinia returned him as resolute and satisfied a glance as could express 'Well, what of that?'

In consideration of the night air, Mr. Kendal put Gilbert inside the carriage, and mounted the box, to revel in the pleasures of silence. The four within talked incessantly and compared adventures. Lucy had been gratified by being patronized by Miss Ferrars, and likewise had much to say of the smaller fry, and went into raptures about many a 'dear little thing,' none of whom would, however, stand a comparison with Maurice; Gilbert was critical upon every one's beauty; and Genevieve was more animated than all, telling anecdotes with great piquancy, and rehearsing the comical Yankee stories she had heard from Captain Ferrars. She had enjoyed with the zest and intensity of a peculiarly congenial temperament, and she seemed not to be able to cease from working off her excitement in repetitions of her thanks, and in discussing the endless delights the day had afforded.

But the day had begun early, and the way was long, so remarks became scanty, and answers were brief and went astray, and Albinia thought she was travelling for ever to Montreal, when she was startled by a pettish exclamation from Lucy, 'Is that all! It was not worth while to wake me only to see the moon.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Genevieve, 'but I thought Mrs. Kendal wished to see it rise.'

'Thank you, Genevieve,' said Albinia, opening her sleepy eyes; 'she is as little worth seeing as a moon can well be, a waning moon does well to keep untimely hours.'

'Why do you think she is so much more beautiful in the crescent, Mrs. Kendal?' said Genevieve, in the most wakeful manner.

'I'm sure I don't know,' said Albinia, subsiding into her corner.

'Is it from the situation of the mountains in the moon?' continued the pertinacious damsel.

'In Africa!' said Albinia, well-nigh asleep, but Genevieve's laugh roused her again, partly because she thought it less mannerly than accorded with the girl's usual politeness. No mere sleep was allowed her; an astronomical passion seemed to have possessed the young lady, and she dashed into the tides, and the causes of the harvest-moon, and volcanoes, and thunderbolts, and Lord Rosse's telescope, forcing her tired friend to reply by direct appeals, till Albinia almost wished her in the moon herself; and was rejoiced when in the dim greyness of the early summer dawn, the carriage drew up at Madame Belmarche's house. As the light from the weary maid's candle flashed on Genevieve's face, it revealed such a glow of deep crimson on each brown cheek, that Albinia perceived that the excitement must have been almost fever, and went to bed speculating on the strange effects of a touch of gaiety on the hereditary French nature, startling her at once from her graceful propriety and humility of demeanour, into such extraordinary obtrusive talkativeness.

She heard more the next morning that vexed her. Lucy was seriously of opinion that Genevieve had not been sufficiently retiring. She herself had heedfully kept under the wing of Mary's governess, mamma, or Miss Ferrars, and nobody had paid her any particular attention; but Genevieve had been with Gilbert half the day, had had all the gentlemen round her at the archery and in the games, had no end of partners in the dances, and had walked about in the dark with Captain Ferrars. Lucy was sure she was taken for her sister, and whenever she had told people the truth, they had said how pretty she was.

'You are jealous, Lucy,' Sophy said.

Lucy protested that it was quite the reverse. She was glad poor little Jenny should meet with any notice, there was no cause for jealousy of her, and she threw back her head in conscious beauty; 'only she was sorry for Jenny, for they were quite turning her head, and laughing at her all the time.'

Albinia's candour burst out as usual, 'Say no more about it, my dear; it was a mistake from beginning to end. I was too much taken up with my own diversion to attend to you, and now you are punishing me for it. I left you to take care of yourselves, and exposed poor little Genevieve to unkind remarks.'

'I don't know what I said,' began Lucy. 'I don't mean to blame her; it was just as she always is with Gilbert, so very French.'

That word settled it--Lucy pronounced it with ineffable pity and contempt--she was far less able to forgive another for being attractive, than for trying to attract.

Sophy looked excessively hurt and grieved, and in private asked her step-mother what she thought of Genevieve's behaviour.

'My dear, I cannot tell; I think she was off her guard with excitement; but all was very new to her, and there was every excuse. I was too happy to be wise, so no wonder she was.'

'And do you think Captain Ferrars was laughing at her? I wish you would tell her, mamma. Gilbert says he is a fine, flourishing officer in moustaches, who, he is sure, flirts with and breaks the heart of every girl he meets. If he is right, mamma, it would cure Genevieve to tell her so, and you would not mind it, though he is your cousin.'

'Poor Fred!' said Albinia. 'I am sorry Gilbert conceived such a notion. But Genevieve's heart is too sensible to break in that way, even if Fred wished it, and I can acquit him of such savage intentions. I never should have seen any harm in all that Genevieve did last night if she had not talked us to death coming home! Still I think she was off her balance, and I own I am disappointed. But we don't know what it is to be born French!'

CHAPTER XVI.

'Mrs. Kendal, dear Madame, a great favour, could you spare me a few moments?'

A blushing face was raised with such an expression of contrite timidity, that Albinia felt sure that the poor little Frenchwoman had recovered from her brief intoxication, and wanted to apologize and be comforted, so she said kindly,

'I was wishing to see you, my dear; I was afraid the day had been too much for you; I was certain you were feverish.'

'Ah! you were so good to make excuses for me. I am so ashamed when I think how tedious, how disagreeable I must have been. It was why I wished to speak to you.'

'Never mind apologies, my dear; I have felt and done the like many a time--it is the worst of enjoying oneself.'

'Oh! that was not all--I could not help it--enjoyment--no!' stammered Genevieve. 'If you would be kind enough to come this way.'

She opened her grandmother's back gate, the entrance to a slip of garden smothered in laurels, and led the way to a small green arbour, containing a round table, transformed by calico hangings into what the embroidered inscription called 'Autel a l'Amour filial et maternel,' bearing a plaster vase full of fresh flowers, but ere

Albinia had time to admire this achievement of French sentiment, Genevieve exclaimed, clasping her hands, 'Oh, madame, pardon me, you who are so good! You will tell no one, you will bring on him no trouble, but you will tell him it is too foolish--you will give him back his billet, and forbid him ever to send another.'

Spite of the confidence about Emily, spite of all unreason, such was the family opinion of Fred's propensity to fall in love, that Albinia's first suspicion lighted upon him, but as her eye fell on the pink envelope the handwriting concerned her even more nearly.

'Gilbert!' she cried. 'My dear, what is this? Do you wish me to read it?'

'Yes, for I cannot.' Genevieve turned away, as in his best hand, and bad it was, Albinia read the commencement--

"My hope, my joy, my Genevieve!"

In mute astonishment Albinia looked up, and met Genevieve's eyes. 'Oh, madame, you are displeased with me!' she cried in despair, misinterpreting the look, 'but indeed I could not help it.'

'My dear child,' said Albinia, affectionately putting her arm round her waist, and drawing her down on the seat beside her, 'indeed I am not displeased with you; you are doing the very best thing possible by us all. Think I am your sister, and tell me what is the meaning of all this, and then I will try to help you.'

'Oh, madame, you are too good,' said Genevieve, weeping; and kindly holding the trembling hand, Albinia finished the letter, herself. 'Silly boy! Genevieve, dear girl, you must set my mind at rest; this is too childish--this is not the kind of thing that would touch your affections, I am sure.'

'Oh! pour cela non,' said Genevieve. 'Oh! no; I am grateful to Mr. Gilbert Kendal, for, even as a little boy, he was always kind to me, but for the rest--he is so young, madame, even if I could forget--'

'I see,' said Albinia. 'I am sure that you are much too good and sensible at your age to waste a moment's thought or pain on such a foolish boy, as he certainly is, Genevieve, though not so foolish in liking you, whatever he may be in the way of expressing it. Though of course--' Albinia had floundered into a dreadful bewilderment between her sense of Genevieve's merits and of the incompatibility of their station, and she plunged out by asking, 'And how long has this been going on?'

Genevieve hesitated. 'To speak the truth, madame, I have long seen that, like many other youths, he would be--very attentive if one were not guarded; but I had known him so long, that perhaps I did not soon enough begin, to treat him en jeune homme.'

'And this is his first letter?'

'Oh! yes, madame.'

'He complains that you will not hear him? Do you dislike to tell me if anything had passed previously?'

'Thursday,' was slightly whispered.

'Thursday! ah! now I begin to understand the cause of your being suddenly moon-struck.'

'Ah! madame, pardon me!'

'I see--it was the only way to avoid a tete-a-tete!' said Albinia.
'Well done, Genevieve. What had he been saying to you, my dear?'

Poor Genevieve cast about for a word, and finally faltered out, 'Des sottises, Madame.'

'That I can well believe,' said Albinia. 'Well, my dear--'

'I think,' pursued Genevieve, 'that he was vexed because I would not let him absorb me exclusively at Fairmead; and began to reproach me, and protest--'

'And like a wise woman you waked the sleeping dragon,' said Albinia.
'Was this all?'

'No, madame; so little had passed, that I hoped it was only the excitement, and that he would forget; but on Saturday he met me in the flagged path, and oh! he said a great deal, though I did my best to convince him that he could only make himself be laughed at. I hoped even then that he was silenced, and that I need not mention it, but I see he has been watching me, and I dare not go out alone lest I should meet him. He called this morning, and not seeing me left this note.'

'Do your grandmother and aunt know?'

'Oh, no! I would far rather not tell them. Need I? Oh! madame, surely you can speak to him, and no one need ever hear of it?' implored Genevieve. 'You have promised me that no one shall be told!'

'No one shall, my dear. I hope soon to tell you that he is heartily ashamed of having teased you. No one need be ashamed of thinking you very dear and good--you can't help being loveable, but Master Gibbie has no right to tell you so, and we'll put an end to it. He will soon be in India out of your way. Good-bye!'

Albinia kissed the confused and blushing maiden, and walked away, provoked, yet diverted.

She found Gilbert alone, and was not slow in coming to the point, endeavouring to model her treatment on that of her brother, the General, towards his aide-de-camp in the like predicaments.

'Gilbert, I want to speak to you. I am afraid you have been making yourself troublesome to Miss Durant. You are old enough to know better than to write such a note as this.'

He was all one blush, made an inarticulate exclamation, and burst

out, 'That abominable treacherous old wooden doll of a mademoiselle.'

'No, Miss Belmarche knows nothing of it. No one ever shall if you will promise to drive this nonsense out of your head.'

'Nonsense! Mrs. Kendal!' with a gesture of misery.

'Gilbert, you are making yourself absurd.'

He turned about, and would have marched out of the room, but she pursued him. 'You must listen to me. It is not fit that you should carry on this silly importunity. It is exceedingly distressing to her, and might lead to very unpleasant and hurtful remarks.' Seeing him look sullen, she took breath, and considered. 'She came to me in great trouble, and begged me to restore your letter, and tell you never to repeat the liberty.'

He struck his hand on his brow, crying vehemently, 'Cruel girl! She little knows me--you little know me, if you think I am to be silenced thus. I tell you I will never cease! I am not bound by your pride, which has sneered down and crushed the loveliest--'

'Not mine,' said Albinia, disconcerted at his unexpected violence.

'Yes!' he exclaimed. 'I know you could patronize! but a step beyond, and it is all the same with you as with the rest--you despise the jewel without the setting.'

'No,' said Albinia, 'so far from depreciating her, I want to convince you that it is an insult to pursue her in this ridiculous underhand way.'

'You do me no justice,' said Gilbert loftily; 'you little understand what you are pleased to make game of,' and with one of his sudden alternations, he dropped into a chair, calling himself the most miserable fellow in the world, unpitied where he would gladly offer his life, and his tenderest feelings derided, and he was so nearly ready to cry, that Albinia pitied him, and said, 'I'll laugh no more if I can help it, Gibbie, but indeed you are too young for all this misery to be real. I don't mean that you are pretending, but only that this is your own fancy.'

'Fancy!' said the boy solemnly. 'The happiness of my life is at stake. She shall be the sharer of all that is mine, the moment my property is in my own hands.'

'And do you think so high-minded a girl would listen to you, and take advantage of a fancy in a boy so much younger, and of a different class?'

'It would be ecstasy to raise her, and lay all at her feet!'

'So it might, if it were worthy of her to accept it. Gilbert, if you knew what love is, you would never wish her to lower herself by encouraging you now. She would be called artful--designing--'

'If she loved me--' he said disconsolately.

'I wish I could bring you to see how unlikely it is that a sensible,

superior woman could really attach herself to a mere lad. An unprincipled person might pretend it for the sake of your property--a silly one might like you because you are good-looking and well-mannered; but neither would be Genevieve.'

'There is no use in saying any more,' he said, rising in offended dignity.

'I cannot let you go till you have given me your word never to obtrude your folly on Miss Durant again.'

'Have you anything else to ask me?' cried Gilbert in a melodramatic tone.

'Yes, how would you like your father to know of this? It is her secret, and I shall keep it, unless you are so selfish as to continue the pursuit, and if so, I must have recourse to his authority.'

'Oh! Mrs. Kendal,' he said, actually weeping, 'you have always pitied me hitherto.'

'A man should not ask for pity,' said Albinia; 'but I am sorry for you, for she is an admirable person, and I see you are very unhappy; but I will do all I can to help you, and you will get over it, if you are reasonable. Now understand me, I will and must protect Genevieve, and I shall appeal to your father unless you promise me to desist from this persecution.'

The debate might have been endless, if Mr. Kendal had not been heard coming in. 'You promise?' she said. 'Yes,' was the faint reply, in nervous terror of immediate reference to his father; and they hurried different ways, trying to look unconcerned.

'Never mind,' said Albinia to herself. 'Was not Fred quite as bad about me, and look at him now! Yes, Gilbert must go to India, it will cure him, or if it should not, his affection will be respectable, and worth consideration. If he were but older, and this were the genuine article, I would fight for him, but--'

And she sat down to write a loving note to Genevieve. Her sanguine disposition made her trust that all would blow over, but her experience of the cheerful buoyant Ferrars temperament was no guide to the morbid Kendal disposition, Gilbert lay on the grass limp and doleful till the fall of the dew, when he betook himself to a sofa; and in the morning turned up his eyes reproachfully at her instead of eating his breakfast.

About eleven o'clock the Fairmead pony-carriage stopped at the door, containing Mr. Ferrars, the Captain, Aunt Gertrude, and little Willie. Albinia, her husband, and Lucy, were soon in the drawing-room welcoming them; and Lucy fetched her little brother, who had been vociferous for three days about Cousin Fred, the real soldier, but now, struck with awe at the mighty personage, stood by his mamma, profoundly silent, and staring. He was ungracious to his aunt, and still more so to Willie, the latter of whom was despatched under Lucy's charge to find Gilbert, but they came back unsuccessful. Nor did Sophy make her appearance; she was reported to be reading to grandmamma--Mrs. Meadows preferred to Miss Ferrars! there was more in

this than Albinia could make out, and she sat uneasily till she could exchange a few words with Lucy. 'My dear, what is become of the other two?'

'I am sure I don't know what is the matter with them,' said Lucy. 'Gilbert is gone out--nobody knows where--and when I told Sophy who was here, she said Captain Ferrars was an empty-headed coxcomb, and she did not want to see him!'

'Oh! the geese!' murmured Albinia to herself, till the comical suspicion crossed her mind that Gilbert was jealous, and that Sophy was afraid of falling a victim to the redoubtable lady killer.

Luncheon-time produced Sophy, grave and silent, but no Gilbert, and Mr. Kendal, receiving no satisfactory account of his absence, said, 'Very strange,' and looked annoyed.

Captain Ferrars seemed to have expected to see his bright little partner of Thursday, for he inquired for her, and Willie imparted the information that Fred had taken her for Sophy all the time! Fred laughed, and owned it, but asked if she were not really the governess? 'A governess,' said Albinia, 'but not ours,' and an explanation followed, during which Sophy blushed violently, and held up her head as if she had an iron bar in her neck.

'A pity,' said the Lancer, when he had heard who she was, and under his moustache he murmured to Albinia, 'She is rather in Emily's style.'

'Oh, Fred,' thought Albinia, 'after all, it may be lucky that you aren't going to stay here!'

When Albinia was alone with her brother, she could not help saying, 'Maurice, you were right to scold me; I reproached you with thinking life made up of predicaments. I think mine is made of blunders!'

'Ah! I saw you were harassed to-day,' said her brother kindly.

'Whenever one is happy, one does something wrong!'

'I guess--'

'You are generous not to say you warned me months ago. Mind, it is no fault of hers, she is behaving beautifully; but oh! the absurdity, and the worst of it is, I have promised not to tell Edmund.'

'Then don't tell me. You have a judgment quite good enough for use.'

'No, I have not. I have only sense, and that only serves me for what other people ought to do.'

'Then ask Albinia what Mrs. Kendal ought to do.'

Gilbert came in soon after their departure, with an odd, dishevelled, abstracted look, and muttering something inaudible about not knowing the time. His depression absolutely courted notice, but as a slight cough would at any time reduce him to despair, he obtained no particular observation, except from Sophy, who made much of him, flushed at Genevieve's name, and looked reproachful, that it was

evident that she was his confidante. Several times did Albinia try to lead her to enter on the subject, but she set up her screen of silence. It was disappointing, for Albinia had believed better things of her sense, and hardly made allowance for the different aspect of the love-sorrows of seventeen, viewed from fifteen or twenty-six--vexatious, too, to be treated with dry reserve, and probably viewed as a rock in the course of true love; and provoking to see perpetual tete-a-tetes that could hardly fail to fill Sophy's romantic head with folly.

At the end of another week, Albinia received the following note:--

'Dear and most kind Madame,

'I would not trouble you again, but this is the third within four days. I returned the two former ones to himself, but he continues to write. May I ask your permission to speak to my relatives, for I feel that I ought to hide this no longer from them, and that we must take some measures for ending it. He does me the honour to wait near the house, and I never dare go out, since--for I will confess all to you, madame--he met me by the river on Monday. I am beginning to fear that his assiduities have been observed, and I should be much obliged if you would tell me how to act. Your kind perseverance in your goodness towards me is my greatest comfort, and I hope that you will still continue it, for indeed it is most unwillingly that I am a cause of perplexity and vexation to you. Entreating your pardon,

'Your most faithful and obliged servant,
Genevieve Celeste Durant.'

What was to be done? That broken pledge overpowered Albinia with a personal sense of shame, and though it set her free to tell all to her husband, she shrank from provoking his stern displeasure towards his son, and feared he might involve Genevieve in his anger. She dashed off a note to her poor little friend, telling her to do as she thought fit by her aunt and grandmother, and then sought another interview with the reluctant Gilbert, to whom she returned the letter, saying, 'Oh, Gilbert, at least I thought you would keep your word.'

'I think,' he said, angrily, trying for dignity, though betrayed by his restless eyes and hands--'I think it is too much to accuse me of--of--when I never said--What word did I ever give?'

'You promised never to persecute her again.'

'There may be two opinions as to what persecution means,' said Gilbert.

'I little thought of subterfuges. I trusted you.'

'Mrs. Kendal! hear me,' he passionately cried. 'You knew not the misery you imposed. To live so near, and not a word, not a look! I bore it as long as I could; but when Sophy would not so much as take one message, human nature could not endure.'

'Well, if you cannot restrain yourself like a rational creature, some

means must be taken to free Miss Durant from a pursuit so injurious and disagreeable to her.'

'Ay,' he cried, 'you have filled her with your own prejudices, and inspired her with such a dread of the hateful fences of society, that she does not dare to confess--'

'For shame, Gilbert, you are accusing her of acting a part.'

'No!' he exclaimed, 'all I say is, that she has been so thrust down and forced back, that she cannot venture to avow her feelings even to herself!'

'Oh!' said Albinia, 'you conceited person!'

'Well!' cried the boy, so much nettled by her sarcasm that he did not know what he said, 'I think--considering--considering our situations, I might be worth her consideration!'

'Who put that in your head?' asked Albinia. 'You are too much a gentleman for it to have come there of its own accord.'

He blushed excessively, and retracted. 'No, no! I did not mean that! No, I only mean I have no fair play--she will not even think. Oh! if I had but been born in the same station of life!'

Gilbert making entrechats with a little fiddle! It had nearly overthrown her gravity, and she made no direct answer, only saying, 'Well, Gilbert, these talks are useless. I only thought it right to give you notice that you have released me from my engagement not to make your father aware of your folly.'

He went into an agony of entreaties, and proffers of promises, but no more treaties of secrecy could he obtain, she would only say that she should not speak immediately, she should wait and see how things turned out. By which she meant, how soon it might be hoped that he would be safe in the Calcutta bank, where she heartily wished him.

She sought a conference with Genevieve, and took her out walking in the meadows, for the poor child really needed change and exercise, the fear of Gilbert had made her imprison herself within the little garden, till she looked sallow and worn. She said that her grandmother and aunt had decided that she should go in a couple of days to the Convent at Hadminster, to remain there till Mr. Gilbert went to India--the superior was an old friend of her aunt, and Genevieve had often been there, and knew all the nuns.

Albinia was startled by this project. 'My dear, I had much rather send you to stay at my brother's, or--anywhere. Are you sure you are not running into temptation?'

'Not of that kind,' said Genevieve. 'The priest, Mr. O'Hara, is a good-natured old gentleman, not in the least disposed to trouble himself about my conversion.'

'And the sisters?'

'Good old ladies, they have always been very kind to me, and petted me exceedingly when I was a little child, but for the rest--' still

seeing Albinia's anxious look--'Oh! they would not think of it; I don't believe they could argue; they are not like the new-fashioned Roman Catholics of whom you are thinking, madame.'

'And are there no enthusiastic young novices?'

'I should think no one would ever be a novice there,' said Genevieve.

'You seem to be bent on destroying all the romance of convents, Genevieve!'

'I never thought of anything romantic connected with the reverend mothers,' rejoined Genevieve, 'and yet when I recollect how they came to Hadminster, I think you will be interested. You know the family at Hadminster Hall in the last century were Roman Catholics, and a daughter had professed at a convent in France. At the time of the revolution, her brother, the esquire, wrote to offer her an asylum at his house. The day of her arrival was fixed--behold! a stage-coach draws up to the door--black veils inside--black veils clustered on the roof--a black veil beside the coachman, on the box--eighteen nuns alight, and the poor old infirm abbess is lifted out. They had not even figured to themselves that the invitation could be to one without the whole sisterhood!'

'And what did the esquire do with the good ladies?'

'He took them as a gift from Providence, he raised a subscription among his friends, and they were lodged in the house at Hadminster, where something like a sisterhood had striven to exist ever since the days of James II.'

'Are any of these sisters living still?'

'Only poor old Mother Therese, who was a little pensionnaire when they came, and now is blind, and never quits her bed. There are only seven sisters at present, and none of them are less than five-and-forty.'

'And what shall you do there, Genevieve?'

'If they have any pupils from the town, perhaps I may help to teach them French. And I shall have plenty of time for my music. Oh! madame, would you lend me a little of your music to copy?'

'With all my heart. Any books?'

'Oh! that would be the greatest kindness of all! And if it were not presuming too much, if madame would let me take the pattern of that beautiful point lace that she sometimes wears in the evening, then I should make myself welcome!'

'And put out your eyes, my dear! But you may turn out my whole lace-drawer if you think anything there will be a pleasure to the old ladies.'

'Ah! you do not guess the pleasure, madame. Needlework and embroidery is their excitement and delight. They will ask me closely about all I have seen and done for months past, and the history of the day at Fairmead will be a fete in itself.'

'Well! my dear, it is very right of you; and I do feel very thankful to you for treating the matter thus. Pray tell your grandmamma and aunt to pardon the sad revolution we have made in their comfort, and that I hope it will soon be over!'

Genevieve took no leave. Albinia sent her a goodly parcel of books and work-patterns, and she returned an affectionate note; but did not attempt to see Lucy and Sophy.

The next Indian mail brought the expected letter, giving an exact account of the acquirements and habits that would be required of Gilbert, with a promise of a home where he would be treated as a son, and of admission to the firm after due probation. The letter was so sensible and affectionate, that Mr. Kendal congratulated his son upon such an advantageous outset in life.

Gilbert made slight reply, but the next morning Sophy sought Albinia out, and with some hesitation began to tell her that Gilbert was very anxious that she would intercede with papa not to send him to Calcutta.

'You now, Sophy!' cried Albinia. 'You who used to think nothing equal to India!'

'I wish it were I,' said Sophy, 'but you know--'

'Well,' said Albinia, coldly.

Sophy was too shy to begin on that tack, and dashed off on another.

'Oh, mamma, he is so wretched. He can't bear to thwart papa, but he says it would break his heart to go so far away, and that he knows it would kill him to be confined to a desk in that climate.'

'You know papa thinks that nothing would confirm his health so much as a few years without an English winter.'

'One's own instinct--' began Sophy; then breaking off, she added, 'Mamma, you never were for the bank.'

'I used not to see the expediency, and I did not like the parting; but now I understand your father's wishes, and the sort of allegiance he feels towards India, so that Gilbert's reluctance will be a great mortification to him.'

'So it will,' said Sophy, mournfully, 'I am sure it is to me. I always looked forward to Gilbert's going to Talloon, and seeing the dear old bearer, and taking all my presents there, but you see, of course, mamma, he cannot bear to go--'

'Sophy, dear,' said Albinia, 'you have been thinking me a very hard-hearted woman this last month. I have been longing to have it out.'

'Not hard-hearted,' said Sophy, looking down, 'only I had always thought you different from other people.'

'And you considered that I was worldly, and not romantic enough. Is that it, Sophy?'

'I thought you knew how to value her for herself, so good and so admirable--a lady in everything--with such perfect manners. I thought you would have been pleased and proud that Gilbert's choice was so much nobler than beauty, or rank, or fashion could make it,' said Sophy, growing enthusiastic as she went on.

'Well, my dear, perhaps I am.'

'But, mamma, you have done all you could to separate them: you have shut Genevieve up in a convent, and you want to banish him.'

'It sounds very grand, and worthy of a cruel step-dame,' said Albinia; 'but, my dear, though I do think Genevieve in herself an admirable creature, worthy of any one's love, what am I to think of the way Gilbert has taken to show his admiration?'

'And is it not very hard,' cried Sophy, 'that even you, who own all her excellences, should turn against him, and give in to all this miserable conventionality, that wants riches and station, and trumpery worldly things, and crushes down true love in two young hearts?'

'Sophy dear, I am afraid the love is not proved to be true in the one heart, and I am sure there is none in the other!'

'Mamma! 'Tis her self-command--'

'Nonsense! His attentions are nothing but distress to her! Sensible grown-up young women are not apt to be flattered by importunity from silly boys. Has he told you otherwise?'

'He thinks--he hopes, at least--and I am sure--it is all stifled by her sense of duty, and fear of offending you, or appearing mercenary.'

'All delusion!' said Albinia; 'there's not a spark of consciousness about her! I see you don't like to believe it, but it is my great comfort. Think how she would suffer if she did love him! Nay, think, before you are angry with me for not promoting it, how it would bring them into trouble and disgrace with all the world, even if your father consented. Have you once thought how it would appear to him?'

'You can persuade papa to anything !'

'Sophy! you ought to know your father better than to say that!' cried Albinia, as if it had been disrespect to him.

'Then you think he would never allow it! You really think that such a creature as Genevieve, as perfect a lady as ever existed, must always be a victim to these hateful rules about station.'

'No,' said Albinia, 'certainly not; but if she were in the very same rank, if all else were suitable, Gilbert's age would make the pursuit ridiculous.'

'Only three years younger,' sighed Sophy. 'But if they were the same age? Do you mean that no one ever ought to marry, if they love ever so much, where the station is different?'

'No, but that they must not do so lightly, but try the love first to see whether it be worth the sacrifice. If an attachment last through many years of adverse circumstances, I think the happiness of the people has been shown to depend on each other, but I don't think it safe to disregard disparities till there has been some test that the love is the right stuff, or else they may produce ill-temper, regrets, and unhappiness, all the rest of their lives.'

'If Gilbert went on for years, mamma?'

'I did not say that, Sophy.'

'Suppose,' continued the eager girl, 'he went out to Calcutta, and worked these five years, and was made a partner. Then he would be two-and-twenty, nobody could call him too young, and he would come home, and ask papa's consent, and you--'

'I _should_ call that constancy,' said Albinia.

'And he would take her out to Calcutta, and have no Drurys and Osborns to bother her! Oh! It would be beautiful! I would watch over her while he was gone! I'll go and tell him!'

'Stop, Sophy, not from me--that would never do. I don't think papa would think twenty-two such a great age--'

'But he would have loved her five years!' said Sophy. 'And you said yourself that would be constancy!'

'True, but, Sophy, I have known a youth who sailed broken-hearted, and met a lady "just in the style" of the former one, on board the steamer--'

Sophy made a gesture of impatient disdain, and repeated, 'Do you allow me to tell Gilbert that this is the way?'

'Not from me. I hold out no hope. I don't believe Genevieve cares for him, and I don't know whether his father would consent--' but seeing Sophy's look of disappointment, 'I see no harm in your suggesting it, for it is his only chance with either of them, and would be the proof that his affection was good for something.'

'And you think her worth it?'

'I think her worth anything in the world--the more for her behaviour in this matter. I only doubt if Gilbert have any conception how much she is worth.'

Away went Sophy in a glow that made her almost handsome, while Albinia, as usual, wondered at her own imprudence.

At luncheon Sophy avoided her eye, and looked crestfallen, and when afterwards she gave a mute inquiring address, shook her head impatiently. It was plain that she had failed, and was too much pained and shamed by his poorness of spirit to be able as yet to speak of it.

Next came Gilbert, who pursued Albinia to the morning-room to entreat

her interference in his behalf, appealing piteously to her kindness; but she was obdurate. If any remonstrance were offered to his father, it must be by himself.

Gilbert fell into a state of misery, threw himself about upon the chairs, and muttered in the fretfulness of childish despair something about its being very hard, when he was owner of half the town, to be sent into exile--it was like jealousy of his growing up and being master.

'Take care, Gilbert!' said Albinia, with a flash of her eye that he felt to his backbone.

'I don't mean it,' cried Gilbert, springing towards her in supplication. 'I've heard it said, that's all, and was as angry as you, but when a fellow is beside himself with misery at being driven away from all he loves--not a friend to help him--how can he keep from thinking all sorts of things?'

'I wonder what people dare to say it!' cried Albinia wrathfully; but he did not heed, he was picturing his own future misfortunes--toil--climate--fevers--choleras--Thugs--coups de soleil--genuine dread and repugnance working him up to positive agony.

'Gilbert,' said Albinia, 'this is trumpery self-torture! You know this is a mere farrago that you have conjured up. Your father would neither thrust you into danger, nor compel you to do anything to which you had a reasonable aversion. Go and be a man about it in one way or the other! Either accept or refuse, but don't make these childish lamentations. They are cowardly! I should be ashamed of little Maurice if he behaved so!'

'And you will not speak a word for me!'

'No! Speak for yourself!' and she left the room.

Days passed on, till she began to think that, after all, Gilbert preferred Calcutta, cholera, Thugs, and all, to facing his father; but at last, he must have taken heart from his extremity, for Mr. Kendal said, with less vexation than she had anticipated, 'So our plans are overthrown. Gilbert tells me he has an invincible dislike to Calcutta. Had you any such idea?'

'Not till your cousin's letter arrived. What did you say to him?'

'He was so much afraid of vexing me that I was obliged to encourage him to speak freely, and I found that he had always had a strong distaste to and dread of India. I told him I wished he had made me aware of it sooner, and desired to know what profession he really preferred. He spoke of Oxford and the Bar, and so I suppose it must be. I do not wonder that he wishes to follow his Traversham friends, and as they are a good set, I hope there may not be much temptation. I see you are not satisfied, Albinia, yet your wishes were one of my motives.'

'Thank you--once I should,' said Albinia; 'but, Edmund, I see how wrong it was to have concealed anything from you;' and thereupon she informed him of Gilbert's passion for Genevieve Durant, which astonished him greatly, though he took it far less seriously than she

had expected, and was not displeased at having been kept in ignorance and spared the trouble of taking notice of it, and thus giving it importance.

'It will pass off,' he said. 'She has too much sense and principle to encourage him, and if you can get her out of Bayford for a few years he will be glad to have it forgotten.'

'Poor Genevieve! She must break up her grandmother's home after all!'

'It will be a great advantage to her. You used to say that it would be most desirable for her to see more of the world. Away from this place she might marry well.'

'Any one's son but yours,' said Albinia, smiling.

'The connexion would be worse here than anywhere else; but I was not thinking of any one in our rank of life. There are many superior men in trade with whom she might be very happy.'

'Poor child!' sighed Albinia. 'I cannot feel that it is fair that she should be banished for Gilbert's faults; and I am sorry for the school; you cannot think how much the tone was improving.'

'If it could be done without hurting her feelings, I should gladly give her a year at some superior finishing school, which might either qualify her for a governess, or enable her to make this one more profitable.'

'Oh! thank you!' cried Albinia; 'yet I doubt. However, her services would be quite equivalent in any school to the lessons she wants. I'll write to Mrs. Elwood--' and she was absorbed in the register-office in her brain, when Mr. Kendal continued--

'This is quite unexpected. I could not have supposed the boy so foolish! However, if you please, I will speak to him, tell him that I was unaware of his folly, and insist on his giving it up.'

'I should be very glad if you would.'

Gilbert was called, and the result was more satisfactory than Albinia thought that Genevieve deserved. His frenzy had tended to wear itself out, and he had been so dreadfully alarmed about India and his father, that in his relief, gratitude, and fear of being sent out, he was ready to promise anything. Before his father he could go into no rhapsodies, and could only be miserably confused.

'Personally,' said Mr. Kendal, 'it is creditable that you should be attracted by such estimable qualities, but these are not the sole consideration. Equality of station is almost as great a requisite as these for producing comfort or respectability, and nothing but your youth and ignorance could excuse your besetting any young woman with importunities which she had shown to be disagreeable to her.'

There was no outcry of despair, only a melancholy muttering. Then Mr. Kendal pronounced his decree in terms more explicit than those in which Albinia had exacted the promise. He said nothing about persecution, nor was he unreasonable enough to command an instant

immolation of the passion; he only insisted that Gilbert should pay no marked attention, and attempt no unsanctioned or underhand communication. Unless he thought he had sufficient self-command to abstain, his father must take 'further measures.'

As if fearing that this must mean 'Kendal and Kendal,' he raised his head, and with a deep sigh undertook for his own self-command. Mr. Kendal laid his hand on his shoulder with kind pity, told him he was doing right, and that while he acted openly and obediently, he should always meet with sympathy and consideration.

Two difficult points remained--the disposing of the young people. Gilbert was still over young for the university, as well as very backward and ill-prepared, and the obstinate remains of the cough made his father unwilling to send him from home. And his presence made Genevieve's absence necessary.

The place had begun to loom in the distance. A former governess of Albinia's, who would have done almost anything to please her, had lately been left a widow, and established herself in a suburb of London, with a small party of pupils. She had just begun to feel the need of an additional teacher, and should gladly receive Genevieve, provided she fulfilled certain requisites, of which, luckily, French pronunciation stood the foremost. The terms were left to Albinia, who could scarcely believe her good fortune, and went in haste to discuss the matter with the Belmarches.

It almost consoled her for what she had been exceedingly ashamed to announce, the change of purpose with regard to Gilbert, which was a sentence of banishment to the object of his folly. Nothing pained her more than the great courtesy and kindness of the two old ladies to whom it was such a cruel stroke, they evidently felt for her, and appeared to catch at Mrs. Elwood's offer, and when Albinia proposed that her salary should be a share in the instructions of the masters, agreed that this was the very thing they had felt it their duty to provide for her, if they had been able to bring themselves to part with her.

'So,' said good Madame Belmarche, smiling sadly, 'you see it has been for the dear child's real good that our weakness has been conquered.'

Genevieve was written to, and consented to everything, and when Mr. Kendal took Gilbert away to visit an old friend, his wife called for Genevieve at the convent to bring her home. Albinia could not divest herself of some curiosity and excitement in driving up to the old-fashioned red brick house, with two tall wings projecting towards the street, and the front door in the centre between them, with steps down to it. She had not been without hopes of a parlour with a grille, or at least that a lay sister would open the door; but she saw nothing but a very ordinary-looking old maid-servant, and close behind her was Genevieve, with her little box, quite ready--no excuse for seeing anything or anybody else.

If Genevieve were sad at the proposal of leaving home and going among strangers, she took care to hide all that could pain Mrs. Kendal, and her cheerful French spirit really enjoyed the prospect of new scenes, and bounded with enterprise at the hope of a new life and fresh field of exertion.

'Perhaps, after all,' she said, smiling, 'they may make of me something really useful and valuable, and it will all be owing to you, dear madame. Drawing and Italian! When I can teach them, I shall be able to make grandmamma easy for life!'

Genevieve skipped out of the carriage and into her aunt's arms, as if alive only to the present delight of being at home again. It was a contrast to Sophy's dolorous visage. Poor Sophy! she was living in a perpetual strife with the outward tokens of sulkiness, forcing herself against the grain to make civil answers, and pretend to be interested when she felt wretched and morose. That Gilbert, after so many ravings, should have relinquished, from mere cowardice, that one hope of earning Genevieve by honourable exertion, had absolutely lowered her trust in the exalting power of love, and her sense of justice revolted against the decision that visited the follies of the guilty upon the innocent. She was yearning over her friend with all her heart, pained at the separation, and longing fervently to make some demonstration, but the greater her wish, the worse was her reserve. She spent all her money upon a beautiful book as a parting gift, and kept it beside her, missing occasion after occasion of presenting it, and falling at each into a perfect agony behind that impalpable, yet impassable, barrier of embarrassment.

It was not till the very last evening, when Genevieve had actually wished her good-bye and left the house, that she grew desperate. She hastily put on bonnet and cloak, and pursued Genevieve up the street, overtaking her at last, and causing her to look round close to her own door.

'My dear Miss Sophy,' cried Genevieve, 'what is the matter? You are quite overcome.'

'This book--' said Sophy--it was all she could say.

'Love--yes,' said Genevieve. 'Admiration--no.'

'You shall not say that,' cried Sophy. 'I have found what is really dignified and disinterested, and you must let me admire you, Jenny, it makes me comfortable.'

Genevieve smiled. 'I would not commit an egoism,' she said; but if the sense of admiration do you good, I wish it had a worthier cause.'

'There's no one to admire but you,' said Sophy. 'I think it very unfair to send you away, and though it is nobody's fault, I hate good sense and the way of the world!'

'Oh! do not talk so. I am only overwhelmed with wonder at the goodness I have experienced. If it had happened with any other family, oh! how differently I should have been judged! Oh! when I think of Mrs. Kendal, I am ready to weep with gratitude!'

'Yes, mamma is mamma, and not like any one else, but even she is obliged to be rational, and do the injustice, whatever she feels,' said Sophy.

'Oh! not injustice--kindness! I shall be able to earn more for grandmamma!'

'It is injustice!' said Sophy, 'not hers, perhaps, but of the world! It makes me so angry, to think that you--you should never do anything but wear yourself out in drudging over tiresome little children--'

'Little children are my brothers and sisters, as I never had any,' said Genevieve. 'Oh! I always loved them, they make a home wherever they are. I am thankful that my vocation is among them.'

In dread of a token from Gilbert, Genevieve would not notice it, but pursued, 'You must come in and rest--you must have my aunt's salts.'

'No--no--' said Sophy, 'not there--' as Genevieve would have taken her to the little parlour, but opening the door of the school-room, she sank breathless into a sitting position on the carpetless boards.

Genevieve shut the door, and kneeling down, found Sophy's arms thrown round her, pressing her almost to strangulation.

'Oh! I wanted to do it--I never could. wont you have the book, Genevieve? It is my keepsake--only I could not give it because--'

'Is it your keepsake, indeed, dear Miss Sophy?' said Genevieve. 'Oh! if it is yours--how I shall value it--but it is too beautiful--'

'Nothing is too beautiful for you, Genevieve,' said Sophy fervently.

'And it is your gift! But I am frightened--it must have cost--!' began Genevieve, still a little on her guard. 'Dear, dear Miss Sophy, forgive me if I do seem ungrateful, but indeed I ought to ask--if--if it is all your own gift?'

'Mine? yes!' said Sophy, on the borders of offence. 'I know what you mean, Genevieve, but you may trust me. I would not take you in.'

Genevieve was blushing intensely, but taking courage she bestowed a shower of ardent embraces and expressions of gratitude, mingled with excuses for her precaution. 'Oh! it was so very kind in Miss Sophy,' she said; 'it would be such a comfort to remember, she had feared she too was angry with her.'

'Angry? oh, no!' cried Sophy, her heart quite unlocked; 'but the more I loved and admired, the more I could not speak. And if they drive you to be a governess? If you had a situation like what we read of?'

'Perhaps I shall not,' said Genevieve, laughing. 'Every one has been so good to me hitherto! And then I am not reduced from anything grander. I shall always have the children, you know.'

'How I should hate them!' quoth Sophy.

'They are my pleasure. Besides I have always thought it a blessing that my business in life, though so humble, should be what may do direct good. If only I do not set them a bad example, or teach them any harm.'

'Not much danger of that,' said Sophy, smiling. 'Well, I can't believe it will be your lot all your life. You will find some one who will know how to love you.'

'No,' said Genevieve, 'I am not in a position for marriage--grandmamma has often told me so!'

'Things sometimes happen,' pursued Sophy. 'Mamma said if Gilbert had been older, or even if--if he had been in earnest and steady enough to work for you in India, then it might--And surely if Gilbert could care for you--people higher and deeper than he would like you better still.'

'Hush,' said Genevieve; 'they would only see the objections more strongly. No, do not put these things in my head. I know that unless a teacher hold her business as her mission, and put all other schemes out of her mind, she will work with an absent, distracted, half-hearted attention, and fail of the task that the good God has committed to her.'

'Then you would never even wish--'

'It would be seeking pomps and vanities to wish,' said Genevieve; 'a school-room is a good safe cloister, probably less dull than the convent. If I wish at all, it will be that I may be well shut up there, for I know that in spite of myself my manners are different from your English ones. I cannot make them otherwise, and that amuses people; and I cannot help liking to please, and so I become excited. I enjoy society so much that it is not safe for me! So don't be sorry, dear Sophy, it is a fit penance for the vanity that elated me too much that evening at Fairmead!'

Mademoiselle Belmarche was here attracted by the voices. Sophy started up from the ground, made some unintelligible excuse, and while Mademoiselle was confounded with admiration at the sight of the book, inflicted another boa-constrictor embrace, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XVII.

Planets hostile to the tender passion must have been in the ascendant, for the result of Captain Ferrars's pursuit of his brother to Italy was the wholesome certainty that his own slender portion was all he had to reckon upon. Before returning to Canada, he came to Bayford to pour out his troubles to his cousin, and to induce her, if he could induce no one else, to advise his immediate marriage. It was the first time he had been really engaged, and his affection had not only stood three months' absence, but had so much elevated his shatter-brained though frank and honest temperament, that Albinia conceived a high opinion of 'Emily,' and did her best to persuade him to be patient, and wait for promotion.

Sophy likewise approved of him this time, perhaps because he was so opposite a specimen of the genus lover from that presented by her brother. Gilbert had not been able to help enjoying himself while from home, but his spirits sank on his return; he lay about on the grass in doleful dejection, studied little but L. E. L., lost appetite, and reproachfully fondled his cough; but Albinia was now more compassionate than Sophy, whom she was obliged to rebuke for an

unsisterly disregard toward his woes.

'I can't help it,' said Sophy; 'I can't believe in him now!'

'Yes, you ought to believe that he is really unhappy, and be more gentle and considerate with him.'

'If it had been earnest, he would have sacrificed himself instead of Genevieve.'

'Ah! Sophy, some day you will learn to make excuses for other people, and not be so intolerant.'

'I never make excuses.'

'Except for Maurice,' said Albinia. 'If you viewed other people as you do him, your judgments would be gentler.'

Sophy's conscientiousness, like her romance, was hard, high, and strict; but while she had as little mercy on herself as on others, and while there were some soft spots in her adamant judgment, there was hope that these would spread, and, without lowering her tone, make her more merciful.

She corresponded constantly with Genevieve, who seemed very happily placed; Mrs. Elwood was delighted with her, and she with Mrs. Elwood; and her lively letters showed no signs of pining for home. Sophy felt as if it were a duty to her friend, to do what in her lay to prevent the two old ladies from being dull, and spent an hour with them every week, not herself contributing much to their amusement, but pleasing them by the attention, and hearing much that was very curious of their old-world recollections.

Ever since that unlucky penny-club-day, when she had declared that she hated poor people, she had been let alone on that subject; and though principle had made her use her needle in their behalf, shyness and reserve had kept her back from all intercourse with them; but in her wish to compensate for Genevieve's absence, she volunteered to take charge of her vacant Sunday-school class, and obtained leave to have the girls at home on the afternoons for an hour and a half. This was enough for one who worked as she did, making a conscience of every word, and toiling to prepare her lessons, writing out her questions beforehand, and begging for advice upon them.

'My dear,' said Albinia, 'you must alter this--you see this question does not grow out of the last answer.'

'Yes,' said Sophy, 'that must have been what puzzled them last Sunday: they want connexion.'

'Nothing like logic to teach one to be simple,' said Albinia.

'I can't see the use of all this trouble,' put in Lucy. 'Why can't you ask them just what comes into your head, as I always do?'

'Suppose mistakes came into my head.'

'Oh! they would not find it out if they did! I declare!--what's this--Persian? Are you going to teach them Persian?'

'No; it is Greek. You see it is a piece of a Psalm, a quotation rather different in the New Testament. I wrote it down to ask papa what it is in Hebrew.'

'By-the-bye, Sophy,' continued Lucy, 'how could you let Susan Price come to church with lace sleeves--absolute lace sleeves!'

'Had she?'

'There--you never see anything! Mamma, would not it be more sensible to keep their dress in order, than to go poking into Hebrew, which can't be of use to any one?'

There was more reason than might appear in what Lucy said: the girls of her class were more orderly, and fonder of her than Sophy's of the grave young lady whose earnestness oppressed them, and whose shyness looked dislike and pride. As to finding fault with their dress, she privately told Albinia that she could not commit such a discourtesy, and was answered that no one but Mrs. Dusautoy need interfere.

'I will go and ask Mrs. Dusautoy what she wishes,' said Albinia. 'I should be glad if she would modify Lucy's sumptuary laws. To fall foul of every trifle only makes the girls think of their, dress.'

Albinia found Mrs. Dusautoy busied in writing notes on mourning paper.

'Here is a note I had written to you,' she said. 'I am sending over to Hadminster to see if any of the curates can take the services to-morrow.'

Albinia looked at the note while Mrs. Dusautoy wrote on hurriedly. She read that there could be no daily services at present, the Vicar having been summoned to Paris by the sudden death of Mrs. Cavendish Dusautoy. As the image of a well-endowed widow, always trying to force her way into higher society, arose before Albinia, she could hardly wait till the letter was despatched, to break out in amazement,

'Was she a relation of yours? Even the name never made me think of it!'

'It is a pity she cannot have the gratification of hearing it, poor woman,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, 'but it is a fact that she did poor George Dusautoy the honour to marry him.'

'Mr. Dusautoy's brother?'

'Ay--he was a young surgeon, just set up in practice, exactly like John--nay, some people thought him still finer-looking. She was a Miss Greenaway Cavendish, a stock-broker's heiress of a certain age.'

'Oh!' expressively cried Albinia.

'You may say so,' returned Mrs. Dusautoy. 'She made him put away his profession, and set up for taste and elegant idleness.'

'And he submitted?'

'There was a great deal of the meek giant in him, and he believed implicitly in the honour she had done him. It would have been very touching, if it had not been so provoking, to see how patiently and humbly that fine young man gave up all that would have made him happy, to bend to her caprices and pretensions.'

'Did you ever see them together?'

'No, I never saw her at all, and him only once. I never knew John really savage but once, and that was at her not letting him come to our wedding; but she did give him leave of absence for one fortnight, when we were at Lauriston. How happy the brothers were! It did one good to hear their great voices about the house; and they were like boys on a stolen frolic, when John took him to prescribe for some of our poor people. He used to talk of bringing us his little son--the one pleasure of his life--but he never was allowed. Oh, how I used to long to stir up a mutiny!' cried Mrs. Dusautoy, quite unknowing that she ruled her own lion with a leash of silk. 'If she had appreciated him, it would have been bearable; but to her he was no more than the handsome young doctor, whom she had made a gentleman, and not a very good piece of work of it either! Little she recked of the great loving heart that had thrown itself away on her, and the patience that bore with her; and she tried to hinder all the liberal bountiful actions that were all he cared to do with his means! I wish the boy may remember him!'

'How long has he been dead?'

'These ten years. He was drowned in a lake storm in Switzerland--people clung to him, and he could not swim. It was John's one great grief--he cannot mention him even now. And really,' she added, smiling, 'I do believe he has brought himself to fancy it was a very happy marriage. She has always been very civil; but she has been chiefly abroad, and never would take his advice about sending her boy to school.'

'What becomes of him now?'

'He is our charge. She was on the way home from Italy, when she was taken ill at Paris, and died at the end of the week.'

'How old is he?'

'About nineteen, I fancy. He must have had an odd sort of education; but if he is a nice lad, it will be a great pleasure to John to have something young about the house.'

'I was thinking that Mr. Dusautoy hardly wanted more cares.'

'So have I,' said her friend, smiling, 'and I have been laying a plot against him. You see, he is as strong as a lion, and never yet was too tired to sleep; but it is rather a tempting of Providence to keep 3589 people and fourteen services in a week resting upon one man!'

'Exactly what his churchwarden has preached to him.'

'Moreover, he cannot be in two places at once, let alone half-a-dozen. Now, my Lancashire people have written in quest of a title for holy orders for a young man who has just gone through Cambridge with

great credit, and it strikes me that he might at once help John, and cram Master Algernon.'

'And Gilbert!' cried Albinia. 'Oh, if you will import a tutor for Gilbert, we shall be for ever beholden to you!'

'I had thought of him. I have no doubt that he is much better taught than Algernon; but I am not afraid of this poor fellow bringing home bad habits, and they will be good companions. I reckon upon you and Mr. Kendal as great auxiliaries, and I don't think John will be able to withstand our united forces.'

On the way home, on emerging from the alley, Albinia encountered Gilbert, just parting with another youth, who walked off quickly on the Tremblam road, while she inquired who it was.

'That?' said Gilbert; 'oh! that was young Tritton. He has been away learning farming in Scotland. We speak when we meet, for old acquaintance sake and that.'

The Bayford mind was diverted from the romance of Genevieve, by the enormous fortune of the Vicar's nephew, whose capital was in their mouths and imaginations swelled into his yearly income. Swarms of cards of inquiry were left at the vicarage; and Mrs. Meadows and Lucy enjoyed the reflected dignity of being able to say that Mrs. Kendal was continually there. And so she was, for Mrs. Dusautoy was drooping, though more in body than visibly in spirit, and needed both companionship and assistance in supporting the charge left by her absent Atlas.

He was not gone a moment longer than necessary, and took her by surprise at last, while Albinia and Sophy were sitting on the lawn with her, when she welcomed the nephew and the Vicar, holding out a hand to each, and thanked them for taking care of 'Fanny.' 'Here, Algernon,' he continued, 'here are two of our best friends, Mrs. Kendal and Miss Sophy.'

There was a stiff bow from a stiff altitude. The youth was on the gigantic Dusautoy scale, looking taller even than his uncle, from his manner of holding himself with his chin somewhat elevated. He had a good ruddy sun-burnt complexion, shining brown hair, and regular features; and Albinia could respond heartily to the good Vicar's exclamation, as he followed her down to the gate for the sake of saying,

'Well-grown lad, isn't that? And a very good-hearted fellow too, poor boy--the very picture of his dear father. Well, and how has Fanny been?'

He stayed to be reassured that his return was all his Fanny wanted, and then hurried back to her, while Albinia and Sophy pursued their way down the hill.

'News for grandmamma. We must give her a particular description of the hero.'

'How ugly he thought me!' said Sophy, quaintly.

'My dear, I believe that is the first thing you think of when you

meet a stranger!'

'I saw it this time,' returned Sophy. 'His chin went up in the air at once. He set me down for Mrs. Kendal, and you for Miss Sophy.'

'Nonsense,' said Albinia, for the inveterate youthfulness of her bright complexion and sunny hair was almost a sore subject with her. 'Your always fancying that every one is disgusted with you, is as silly as if you imagined yourself transcendently beautiful. It is mere self-occupation, and helps to make you blunt and shy.'

'Mamma,' said Sophy, 'tell me one thing. Did you ever think yourself pretty?'

'I have thought myself looking so, under favourable circumstances, but that's all. You are as far from ugliness as I am, and have as little need to think of it. As far as features go, there's the making of a much handsomer woman in you than in me.'

Sophy laughed. A certain yearning for personal beauty was a curious part of her character, and she would have been ashamed to own the pleasure those few words had given her, or how much serenity and forbearance they were worth; and her good-humour was put to the proof that evening, for grandmamma had a tea-party, bent on extracting the full description of the great Algernon Greenaway Cavendish Dusautoy, Esquire. Lucy's first sight was less at her ease. Elizabeth Osborn, with whom she kept up a fitful intimacy, summoned her mysteriously into her garden, to show her a peep-hole through a little dusty window in the tool-house, whence could be descried the vicarage garden, and Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy, as, with a cigar in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets,

'Stately stept he east the wa', and stately stept he west.'

Lucy was so much amused, that she could not help reporting it at home, where Gilbert forgot his sorrows, in building up a mischievous romance in honour of the hole in the 'sweet and lovely wall.'

But the parents' feud did not seem likely to hold out. A hundred thousand pounds on one side of the wall, and three single daughters on the other, Mrs. Osborn was not the woman to trust to the 'wall's hole;' and so Mr. Dusautoy's enemy laid down her colours; and he was too kind-hearted to trace her sudden politeness to the source.

Mr. Dusautoy acceded to the scheme devised by his wife, and measures were at once taken for engaging the curate. When Albinia went to talk the matter over at the parsonage, Lucy accompanied her; but the object of her curiosity was not in the room; and when she had heard that he was fond of drawing, and that his horses were to be kept at the King's Head stables, the conversation drifted away, and she grew restless, and begged Mrs. Dusautoy to allow her to replenish the faded bouquets on the table. No sooner was she in the garden, than Mrs. Dusautoy put on an arch look, and lowering her voice, said,

'Oh! it is such fun! He does despise us so immensely.'

'Despise--you?'

'He is a good, boy, faithful to his training. Now his poor mother's axioms were, that the English are vulgar, country English more vulgar, Fanny Dusautoy the most vulgar! I wish we always as heartily accepted what we are taught.'

'He must be intolerable.'

'No, he is very condescending and patronizing to the savages. He really is fond of his uncle; and John is so much hurt it I notice his peculiarities, that I have been dying to have my laugh out.'

'Can Mr. Dusautoy bear with pretension?'

'It is not pretension, only calm faith in the lessons of his youth. Look,' she added, becoming less personal at Lucy's re-entrance, and pointing to a small highly-varnished oil-painting of a red terra cotta vase, holding a rose, a rhododendron before it, and half a water-melon grinning behind, newly severed by a knife.

'Is that what people bring home from Italy now-a-days?' said Albinia.

'That is an original production.'

'Did Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy do that?' cried Lucy.

'Genre is his style,' was the reply. 'His mother was resolved he should be an amateur, and I give his master great credit.'

'Especially for that not being a Madonna,' said Albinia. 'I congratulate you on his having so safe an amusement.'

'Yes; it disposes of him and of the spare room. He cannot exist without an atelier.'

Just then the Vicar entered.

'Ah! Algernon's picture,' began he, who had never been known to look at one, except the fat cattle in the Illustrated News. 'What do you think of it? Has he not made a good hand of the pitcher?'

Albinia gratified him by owning that the pitcher was round; and Lucy was in perfect rapture at the 'dear little spots' in the rhododendron.

'A poor way of spending a lad's time,' said the uncle; 'but it is better than nothing; and I call the knife very good: I declare you might take it up,' and he squeezed up his eyes to enhance the illusion.

A slow and wide opening of the door admitted the lofty presence of Algernon Cavendish Dusautoy, with another small picture in his hand. Becoming aware of the visitors, he saluted them with a dignified movement of his head, and erecting his chin, gazed at them over it.

'So you have brought us another picture, Algernon,' said his uncle. 'Mrs. Kendal has just been admiring your red jar.'

'Have you a taste for art?' demanded Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy, turning

to her with magnificent suavity.

'I used to be very fond of drawing.'

'Genre is my style,' he pursued, almost overthrowing her gravity by the original of his aunt's imitation. 'I took lessons of old Barbouille--excellent master. Truth and nature, those were his maxims; and from the moment I heard them, I said, "This is my man." We used positively to live in the Borghese. There!' as he walked backwards, after adjusting his production in the best light.

'A snipe,' said Albinia.

'A snipe that I killed in the Pontine marshes.'

'There is very good shooting about Anxur,' said Albinia.

'You have been at Rome?' He permitted himself a little animation at discovering any one within the pale of civilization.

'For one fortnight in the course of a galloping tour with my two brothers,' said Albinia. 'All the Continent in one long vacation!'

'That was much to be regretted. It is my maxim to go through every museum thoroughly.'

'I can't regret,' said Albinia. 'I should be very sorry to give up my bright indistinct haze of glorious memories, though I was too young to appreciate all I saw.'

'For my part, I have grown up among works of art. My whole existence has been moulded on them, and I feel an inexpressible void without them. I shall be most happy to introduce you into my atelier, and show you my notes on the various Musees. I preserved them merely as a trifling memorial; but many connoisseurs have told me that I ought to print them as a Catalogue raisonnee, for private circulation, of course. I should be sorry to interfere with Murray, but on the whole I decided otherwise: I should be so much bored with applications.'

Mrs. Dusautoy's wicked glance had so nearly demolished the restraint on her friend's dimples, that she turned her back on her, and commended the finish of a solitary downy feather that lay detached beside the bird.

'My maxim is truth to nature, at any cost of pains,' said the youth, not exactly gratified, for homage was his native element, but graciously proceeding to point out the merits of the composition.

Albinia's composure could endure no more, and she took her leave, Mr. Dusautoy coming down the hill with her to repeat, and this time somewhat wistfully,

'A fine lad, is he not, poor fellow?'

With perfect sincerity, she could praise his good looks.

'He has had a quantity of sad stuff thrust on him by the people who have been about his poor mother,' said Mr. Dusautoy. 'She could never bear to part with him, and no wonder, poor thing; and she must

have let a very odd sort of people get about her abroad--they've flattered that poor lad to the top of his bent, you see, but he's a very good boy for all that, very warm-hearted.'

'He must be very amiable for his mother to have been able to manage him all this while.'

'Just what I say!' cried the Vicar, his honest face clearing. 'Many youths would have run into all that is bad, brought up in that way; but only consider what disadvantages he has had! When we get him to see his real standing a little better--I say, could not you let us have your young people to come up this evening, have a little music, and make it lively? I suppose Fanny and I are growing old, though I never thought so before. Will you come, Lucy, there's a good girl, and bring your brother and sister? The lads must be capital friends.'

Lucy promised with sparkling eyes, and the Vicar strode off, saying he should depend on the three.

Gilbert 'supposed he was in for it,' but 'did not see the use of it,' he was sick of the name of 'that polysyllable,' and 'should see enough of him when Mr. Hope came, worse luck.'

The result of the evening was, that Lacy was enraptured at the discovery that this most accomplished hero sang Italian songs to the loveliest guitar in the world, and was very much offended with Sophy for wishing to know whether mamma really thought him so very clever.

Immediately after the Ordination arrived Mr. Hope, a very youthful, small, and delicate-looking man, whom Mr. Dusautoy could have lifted as easily as his own Fanny, with short sight, timid nature, scholarly habits, weak nerves, and an inaudible voice.

Of great intellect, having read deeply, and reading still more deeply, he had the utmost dread of ladies, and not even his countrywoman, Mrs. Dusautoy, could draw him out. He threw his whole soul into the work, winning the hearts of the infant-school and the old women, but discomfiting the congregation by the weakness of his voice, and the length and depth of his sermons. There was one in especial which very few heard, and no one entered into except Sophy, who held an hour's argument over it with her father, till they arrived at such lengthy names of heresies, that poor grandmamma asked if it were right to talk Persian on a Sunday evening.

He conscientiously tutored his two pupils, but there was no common ground between him and them. Excepting his extra intellect, there was no boyhood in him. A town-bred scholar, a straight constitutional upon a clean road was his wildest dream of exercise; he had never mounted a horse, did not know a chicken from a partridge, except on the table, was too short-sighted for pictures, and esteemed no music except Gregorians.

The two youths were far more alive to his deficiencies than to his endowments: Algernon contemned him for being a book-seller's son, with nothing to live on but his fellowship and curacy, and Gilbert looked down on his ignorance of every matter of common life, and excessive bashfulness. Mr. Dusautoy would have had less satisfaction in the growing intimacy between the lads, had he known that it had

been cemented by inveigling poor Mr. Hope into a marsh in search of cotton-grass, which, at Gilbert's instigation, Algernon avouched to be a new sort of Indian corn, grown in Italy for feeding silkworms.

An intimacy there was, rather from constant intercourse than from positive liking. Gilbert saw through and disdained young Dusautoy's dulness and self-consequence; but good-natured, kindly, and unoccupied, he had no objection to associate with him, showing him English ways, trying to hinder him from needlessly exposing himself, and secretly amused with his pretension. Algernon, with his fine horses, expensive appointments, and lofty air, was neither a discreditable nor displeasing companion. Mr. Kendal had given his son a horse, which, without costing the guineas that Algernon had 'refused' for each of his steeds, was a very respectable-looking animal, and the two young gentlemen, starting on their daily ride, were a grand spectacle for more than little Maurice.

Gilbert had suffered some eclipse. Once he had been the grand parti, the only indisputable gentleman, but now Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy had entirely surpassed him both in self-assertion and in the grounds for it. His incipient dandyisms faded into insignificance beside the splendours of the heir of thousands; and he, who among all his faults had never numbered conceit or forwardness, had little chance beside such an implicit believer in his own greatness.

Nor was Bayford likely to diminish that faith. The non-adorers might be easily enumerated--his uncle and aunt, his tutor, his groom, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Gilbert and Sophy; the rest all believed in him as thoroughly as he did in himself. His wealth was undoubted, his accomplishments were rated at his own advertisement, and his magnanimous condescension was esteemed at full value. Really handsome, good-natured and sociable, he delighted to instruct his worshippers by his maxims, and to bend graciously to their homage. The young ladies had but one cynosure! Few eyes were there that did not pursue his every movement, few hearts that did not bound at his approach, few tongues that did not chronicle his daily comings and goings.

'It would save much trouble,' said Albinia, 'if a court circular could be put into the Bayford paper.'

The Kendals were the only persons whom Algernon regarded as in any way on a footing with him. Finding that the lady was a Ferrars, and had been in Italy, he regarded her as fit company, and whenever they met, favoured her with the chief and choicest of his maxims, little knowing how she and his aunt presumed to discuss him in private.

Without being ill-disposed, he had been exceedingly ill taught; his mother, the child of a grasping vulgar father, had little religious impression, and that little had not been fostered by the lax habits of a self-expatriated Englishwoman, and very soon after his arrival at Bayford his disregard of ordinary English proprieties had made itself apparent. On the first Sunday he went to church in the morning, but spent the evening in pacing the garden with a cigar; and on the afternoon of that day week his aunt was startled by the sound of horse's hoofs on the road. Mr. Dusautoy was at school, and she started up, met the young gentleman, and asked him what strange mistake could have been made. He made her a slight bow, and loftily said he was always accustomed to ride at that hour! 'But not on

Sunday!' she exclaimed. He was not aware of any objection. She told him his uncle would be much displeased, he replied politely that he would account to his uncle for his conduct, begged her pardon, but he could not keep his horse waiting.

Mrs. Dusautoy went back, fairly cried at the thought of her husband's vexation, and the scandal to the whole town.

The Vicar was, of course, intensely annoyed, though he still could make excuses for the poor boy, and laid all to the score of ignorance and foreign education. He made Algernon clearly understand that the Sunday ride must not be repeated. Algernon mumbled something about compromising his uncle and offending English prejudices, by which he reserved to himself the belief that he yielded out of magnanimity, not because he could not help it; but he could not forgive his aunt for her peremptory opposition; he became unpleasantly sullen and morose as regularly as the Sunday came round, and revenged himself by pacing the verandah with his cigar, or practising anything but sacred music on his key-bugle in his painting-room.

The youth was really fond of his uncle, but he had imbibed all his mother's contempt for her sister-in-law. Used to be wheedled by an idolizing mother, and to reign over her court of parasites, he had no notion of obeying, and a direct command or opposition roused his sullen temper of passive resistance. When he found 'that little nobody of a Mrs. John Dusautoy' so far from being a flatterer, or an adorer of his perfections, inclined to laugh at him, and bent on keeping him in order, all the enmity of which he was capable arose in his mind, and though in general good-natured and not aggressive, he had a decided pleasure in doing what she disapproved, and thus asserting the dignity of a Greenaway Cavendish Dusautoy.

The atelier was a happy invention. Certainly wearisome noises, and an aroma of Havannahs would now and then proceed therefrom, but he was employed there the chief part of the day, and fortunately his pictures were of small size, and took an infinite quantity of labour, so that they could not speedily outrun all the Vicarage walls.

He favoured the University of Oxford by going up with Gilbert for matriculation, when, to the surprise of Mr. Hope, he was not plucked. They were to begin their residence at the Easter term. Mrs. Dusautoy did not confess even to Albinia how much she looked forward to Easter.

In early spring, a sudden and short illness took away Madame Belmarche's brave spirit to its rest, after sixty years of exile and poverty, cheerfully borne.

There had been no time to summon Genevieve, and her aunt would not send for her, but decided on breaking up the school, which could no longer be carried on, and going to live in the Hadminster convent. And thus, as Mr. Kendal hoped, all danger of renewed intercourse between his son and Genevieve ended. Gilbert looked pale and wretched, and Sophy hoped it was with compunction at having banished Genevieve at such a moment, but not a word was said--and that page of early romance was turned!

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was a beautiful July afternoon, the air musical with midsummer hum, the flowers basking in the sunshine, the turf cool and green in the shade, and the breeze redolent of indescribable freshness and sweetness compounded of all fragrant odours, the present legacy of a past day's shower. Like the flowers themselves, Albinia was feeling the delicious repose of refreshed nature, as in her pretty pink muslin, her white drapery folded round her, and her bright hair unbonnetted, she sat reclining in a low garden chair, at the door of the conservatory, a little pale, a little weak, but with a sweet happy languor, a soft tender bloom.

There was a step in the conservatory, and before she could turn round, her brother Maurice bent over her, and kissed her.

'Maurice! you have come after all!'

'Yes, the school inspection is put off. How are you?' as he sat down on the grass by her side.

'Oh, quite well! What a delicious afternoon we shall have! Edmund will be at home directly. Mrs. Meadows has absolutely let Gilbert take her to drink tea at the Drurys! Only I am sorry Sophy should miss you, for she was so good about going, because Lucy wanted to do something to her fernery. Of course you are come for Sunday, and the christening?'

'Yes,--that is, to throw myself on Dusautoy's mercy.'

'We will send Mr. Hope to Fairmead,' said Albinia, 'and see whether Winifred can make him speak. We can't spare the Vicar, for he is our godfather, and you must christen the little maiden.'

'I thought the three elder ones were to be sponsors.'

'Gilbert is shy,' said Albinia, 'afraid of the responsibility, and perhaps he is almost too near, the very next to ourselves. His father would have preferred Mr. Dusautoy from the first, and only yielded to my wish. I wish you had come two minutes sooner, she was being paraded under that wall, but now she is gone in asleep.'

'Her father writes grand things of her.'

'Does he?' said Albinia, colouring and smiling at what could not be heard too often; 'he is tolerably satisfied with the young woman! And he thinks her like Edmund, and so she must be, for she is just like him. She will have such beautiful eyes. It is very good of her to take after him, since Maurice won't!'

'And she is to be another Albinia.'

'I represented the confusion, and how I always meant my daughter to be Winifred, but there's no doing anything with him! It is only to be a second name. A. W. K.! Think if she should marry a Mr. Ward!'

'No, she would not be awkward, if she were so a-warded.'

'It wont spell, Maurice,' cried Albinia, laughing as their nonsense, as usual, rose to the surface, 'but how is Winifred?'

'As well as could be hoped under the affliction of not being able to come and keep you in order.'

'She fancied me according to the former pattern,' said Albinia, smiling, 'I could have shown her a better specimen, not that it was any merit, for there were no worries, and Edmund was so happy, that it was pleasure enough to watch him.'

'I was coming every day to judge for myself, but I thought things could not be very bad, while he wrote such flourishing accounts.'

'No, there were no more ponds!' said Albinia, 'and grandmamma happily was quite well, cured, I believe, by the excitement. Lucy took care of her, and Sophy read to me--how we have enjoyed those readings! Oh! and Aunt Gertrude has found a delightful situation for Genevieve, a barrister's family, with lots of little children--eighty pounds a year, and quite ready to value her, so she is off my mind.'

'Maurice, boy! come here,' she called, as she caught sight of a creature prancing astride on one stick, and waving another. On perceiving a visitor, the urchin came careering up, bouncing full tilt upon her, and clasping her round with both his stalwart arms. 'Gently, gently, boy,' she said, bending down, and looking with proud delight at her brother, as she held between her hands a face much like her own, as fair and freshly tinted, but with a peculiar squareness of contour, large blue eyes, with dark fringes, brimming over with mischief and fun, a bold, broad brow, and thick, light curls. There was a spring and vigour as of perpetual irrepressible life about the whole being, and the moment he had accepted his uncle's kiss, he poised his lance, and exclaimed, 'You are Bonaparte, I'm the Duke!'

'Indeed,' said Mr. Ferrars, at once seizing a wand, and bestriding the nearest bench. Two or three charges rendered the boy so uproarious, that presently he was ordered off, and to use the old apple tree as Bonaparte.

'What a stout fellow!' said Mr. Ferrars, as he went off at a plunging gallop, 'I should have taken him for at least five years old!'

'So he might be,' said Albinia, 'for strength and spirit--he is utterly fearless, and never cries, much as he knocks himself about! He will do anything but learn. The rogue! he once knew all his letters, but no sooner did he find they were the work of life, than he forgot every one, and was never so obstreperous as when called upon to say them. I gave up the point, but I foresee some fine scenes.'

'His minding no one but you is an old story. I hope at least the exception continues.'

'I have avoided testing it. I want all my forces for a decisive battle. I never heard of such a masterful imp,' she continued, with much more exultation than anxiety, 'his sisters have no chance with

him, he rules them like a young Turk. There's the pony! Sophy will let him have it as a right, and it is the work of my life to see that she is not defrauded of her rides.'

'You don't mean that that child rides anything but a stick.'

'One would think he had been born in boots and spurs. Legitimately he only rides with some one leading the pony, but I have my suspicions that by some preternatural means he has been on the pony's back, and round the yard alone, and that papa prudentially concealed it from me!'

'I confess I should not like it,' said her brother gravely.

'Oh! I don't mind that kind of thing. A real boy can't be hurt, and I don't care how wild he runs, so long as he is obedient and truthful. And true I think he is to the backbone, and I know he is reverend. We had such a disturbance because he would not say his prayers.'

'Proof positive!'

'Yes, it was,' said Albinia. 'It did not seem to him orthodox without me, and when he was let into my room again, it was the prettiest sight! When he had been told of his little sister, all he said was that he did not want little girls--girls were stupid--'

'Ah! that came of your premature introduction to my Albinia,'

'Not at all. It was partly as William's own nephew, and partly because pleasure was expected from him. But when he actually saw the little thing, that sturdy face grew so very soft and sweet, and when we told him he was her protector, he put both his hands tight together, and said, "I'll be so good!" When he is with her, another child seems to shine out under the bluff pickle he generally is--he walks so quietly, and thinks it such an honour to touch her.'

'She will be his best tutor,' said Maurice, smiling, but breaking off--

A sudden shriek of deadly terror rang out over the garden from the river! A second or two sufficed to show them Lucy at the other end of the foot-bridge, that led across the canal to the towing-path. She did not look round, till Albinia, clutching her, demanded, 'Where is he?'

Unable to speak, Lucy pointed down the towing-path, along which a horse was seen rushing wildly--a figure pursuing it. 'It was hitched up here--he must have scrambled up by the gate! Oh! mamma! mamma! He has run after him, but oh!'

Mr. Ferrars gave Lucy's arm a squeeze, a hint not to augment the horror. Something he said of 'Let me--and you had better--' but Albinia heard nothing, and was only bent on pressing forward.

The canal and path took a wide sweep round the meadow, and the horse was still in sight, galloping at full speed, with a small heap on its back, as they trusted, but the rapid motion, and their eyes strained and misty with alarm, caused an agony of uncertainty.

Albinia pointed across the meadows in anguish at not being able to make herself understood, and hoarsely said, 'The gate!'

Mr. Ferrars caught her meaning, and the next moment had leaped over the gutter, and splashed into the water meadow, but in utter hopelessness of being beforehand with the runaway steed! How could that gate be other than fatal? The horse was nearing it--the pursuer far behind--Mr. Ferrars not half way over the fields.

There was a loud cry from Lucy.--'He is caught! caught!'

A loud shout came back, was caught up, and sent on by both the pursuers, 'All right!'

Albinia had stood in an almost annihilation of conscious feeling. Even when her brother strode back to her repeating 'All safe, thanks be to God,' she neither spoke nor relaxed that intensity of watching. A few seconds more, and she sprang forward again as the horse was led up by a young man at his side; and on his back, laughing and chattering, sat Master Maurice. Algernon Dusautoy strode a few steps behind, somewhat aggrieved, but that no one saw.

The elder Maurice lifted down the younger one, who, as he was clasped by his mother, exclaimed, 'Oh! mamma, Bamfylde went so fast! I am to ride home again! He said so--he's my cousin!'

Albinia scarcely heard; her brother however had turned to thank the stranger for her, and exclaimed, 'I should say you were an O'More.'

'I'm Ulick, from the Loughside Lodge,' was the answer. 'Is cousin Winifred here?'

'No, this is my sister, Mrs. Kendal, but--'

Albinia held out her hand, and grasped his; 'I can't--Maurice, speak,' she said.

The little Maurice persisted in his demand to be remounted for the twelve yards to their own gate, but nobody heard him; his uncle was saying a few words of explanation to the stranger, and Algernon Dusautoy was enunciating something intended as a gracious reception of the apologies which no one was making. All Albinia thought of was that the little unruly hand was warm and struggling, prisoned in her own; all her brother cared for was to have her safely at home. He led her across the bridge, and into the garden, where they met Mr. Kendal, who had taken alarm from her absence; Lucy ran up with her story, and almost at the same moment, Albinia, springing to him, murmured, 'Oh! Edmund, the great mercy--Maurice;' but there she found herself making a hoarse shriek; with a mingled sense of fright and shame, she smothered it, but there was an agony of suffocation, she felt her husband's arms round her, heard his voice, and her boy's scream of terror--felt them all unable to help her, and sank into unconsciousness.

Mr. Ferrars helped Mr. Kendal to carry his wife's inanimate form to her room. They used all means of restoration, but it was a long, heavy swoon, and a slow, painful revival. Mr. Kendal would have been in utter despair at hearing that the doctor was out, but for his

brother, with his ready resources and cheerful encouragement; and finally, she lifted her eyelids, and as she felt the presence of her two dearest guardians, whispered, 'Where is he?'

Lucy reported that he was with Susan, and Albinia, after hearing her husband again assure her that he was quite safe, lay still from exhaustion, but so calm, that her brother thought them best alone, and drew Lucy away.

In about a quarter of an hour Mr. Kendal came down, saying that she was quietly asleep, and he had left the nurse with her. He had yet to hear the story, and when he understood that the child had been madly careering along the towing-path, on the back of young Dusautoy's most spirited hunter, and had been only stopped when the horse was just about to leap the tall gate, he was completely overcome. When he spoke again, it was with the abrupt exclamation, 'That child! Lucy, bring him down!'

In marched the boy, full of life and mischief, though with a large red spot beneath each eye.

'Maurice!' Gilbert had often heard that tone, but Maurice never, and he tossed back his head with an innocent look of fearless wonder. 'Maurice, I find you have been a very naughty, disobedient boy. When you rode the pony round the yard, did not I order you never to do so again?'

'I did not do it again,' boldly rejoined Maurice.

'Speak the truth, sir. What do you mean by denying what you have done?' exclaimed his father, angrily.

'I didn't ride the pony,' indignantly cried the child, 'I rode a horse, saddled and bridled!'

'Don't answer me in that way!' thundered Mr. Kendal, and much incensed by the nice distinction, and not appreciating the sincerity of it, he gave the child a shake, rough enough to bring the red into his face, but not a tear. 'You knew it was very wrong, and you were as near as possible breaking your neck. You have frightened your mamma, so as to make her very ill, and I am sorry to find you most mischievous and unruly, not to be trusted out of sight. Now, listen to me, I shall punish you very severely if you act in this disobedient way again.'

Papa angry, was a novel spectacle, at which Maurice looked as innocently and steadily as ever, so completely without fear or contrition, that he provoked a stern, 'Do you hear me, sir?' and another shake. Maurice flushed, and his chest heaved, though he did not sob, and his father, uncomfortable at such sharp dealing with so young a child, set him aside, with the words, 'There now, recollect what I have told you!' and walked to the window, where he stood silent for some seconds, while the boy stood with rounded shoulders, perplexed eye, and finger on his pouting lip, and Mr. Ferrars, newspaper in hand, watched him under his eyelids, and speculated what would be the best sort of mediation, or whether the young gentleman yet deserved it. He knew that his own Willie would have been a mere quaking, sobbing mass of terror, under such a shake, and he would like to have been sure whether that sturdy silence were obstinacy or

fortitude.

The sound of the door-bell made Mr. Kendal turn round, and laying his hand on the little fellow's fair head, he said, 'There, Maurice, we'll say no more about it if you will be a good boy. Run away now, but don't go into your mamma's room.'

Maurice looked up, tossed his curls out of his eyes, shook himself, felt the place on his arm where the grip of the hand had been, and galloped off like the young colt that he was.

Albinia awoke, refreshed, though still shaken and feeble, and surprised to find that dinner was going on downstairs. Her own meal presently put such new force into her, that she felt able to speak Maurice's name without bursting into tears, and longing to see both her little ones beside her, she told the nurse to fetch the boy, but received for answer, 'No, Master Maurice said he would not come,' and the manner conveyed that it had been defiantly said. Master Maurice was no favourite in the nursery, and he was still less so, when his mamma, disregarding all mandates, set out to seek him. Already she heard from the stairs the wrangling with Susan that accompanied all his toilettes, and she found him the picture of firm, solid fairness, in his little robe de nuit, growling through the combing of his tangled locks. Though ordinarily scornful of caresses, he sprang to her and hugged her, as she sat down on a low chair, and he knelt in her lap, whispering with his head on her shoulder, and his arms round her neck, 'Mamma, were you dead?'

'No, Maurice,' she answered with something of a sob, 'or I should not have my dear, dear little boy throttling me now! But why would you not come down to me?'

'Papa said I must not.'

Oh, that was quite right, my boy;' and though she unclasped the tight arms, she drew him nestling into her bosom. 'Oh, Maurice, it has been a terrible day! Does my little boy know how good the great God has been to him, and how near he was never seeing mamma nor his little sister again.'

Her great object was to make him thankful for his preservation, but with a child, knowing nothing of death and heedless of fear, this was very difficult. The rapid motion had been delightful excitement, or if there had been any alarm, it was forgotten in the triumph. She had to change her note, and represent how the poor horse might have run into the river, or against a post! Maurice looked serious, and then she came to the high moral tone--mounting strangers' horses without leave--would papa, would Gilbert, think of such a thing? The full lip was put out, as though under conviction, and he hung his head. 'You wont do it again?' said she.

'No.'

She told him to say his prayers, guiding the confession and thanksgiving that she feared he did not fully follow. As he rose up, and saw the tears on her cheeks, he whispered, 'Mamma, did it make you _so_?'

Cause and effect were a great puzzle to him, but that swoon was the

only thing that brought home to him that he had been guilty of something enormous, and when she owned that his danger had been the occasion, he stood and looked; then, standing bolt upright, with clasped hands, and rosy feet pressed close together, he said, with a long breath, 'I'll never get on Bamfylde again till I'm a big boy.'

As he spoke, Mr. Kendal pushed open the half-closed door, and Albinia, looking up, said, 'Here's a boy who knows he has done wrong, papa.'

Never was more welcome excuse for lifting the gallant child to his breast, and lavishing caresses that would have been tender but for the strong spirit of riot which turned them into a game at romps, cut short by Mr. Kendal, as soon as the noise grew very outrageous. 'That's enough to-night; good night.' And when they each had kissed the monkey face tossing about among the clothes, Maurice might have heard more pride than pain in the 'I never saw such a boy!' with which they shut the door.

'This is not prudent!' said Mr. Kendal.

'Do you think I could have rested till I had seen him? and he said you had told him not to come down.'

'I would have brought him to you. You are looking very ill; you had better go to bed at once.'

'No, I should not sleep. Pray let me grow quiet first. Now you know you trust Maurice,--old Maurice, and I'll lie on the sofa like any mouse, if you'll bring him up and let him talk. You know it will be an interesting novelty for you to talk, and me to listen! and he has not seen the baby.'

Albinia gained her point, but Mr. Kendal and Lucy first tucked her up upon the sofa, till she cried out, 'You have swathed me hand and foot. How am I to show off that little Awk?'

'I'll take care of that,' said Mr. Kendal; and so he did, fully doing the honours of the little daughter, who had already fastened on his heart.

'But,' cried Albinia, breaking into the midst, 'who or what are we, ungrateful monsters, never to have thought of the man who caught that dreadful horse!'

'You shall see him as soon as you are strong enough,' said Mr. Kendal; 'your brother and I have been with him.'

'Oh, I am glad; I could not rest if he had not been thanked. And can anything be done for him? What is he? I thought he was a gentleman.'

Maurice smiled, and Mr. Kendal answered, 'Yes, he is Mr. Goldsmith's nephew, and I am pleased to find that he is a connexion of your brother.'

'One of the O'Mores,' cried Albinia. 'Oh, Maurice, is it really one of Winifred's O'Mores?'

'Even so,' replied Mr. Ferrars; the very last person I should have expected to meet on the banks of the Baye! It was that clever son of the captain's for whose education Mr. Goldsmith paid, and it seems had sent for, to consider of his future destination. He only arrived yesterday.'

'A very fine young man,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I was particularly pleased with his manner, and it was an act of great presence of mind and dexterity.'

'It is all a maze and mystery to me,' said Albinia; 'do tell me all about it. I can't make out how the horse came there.'

'I understood that young Dusautoy was calling here,' said Mr. Kendal; 'I wondered at even his coolness in coming in by that way, and at your letting him in.'

'I saw nothing of him,' said Albinia. 'Perhaps he was looking for Gilbert.'

'No,' said Lucy, looking up from her work, with a slight blush, and demure voice of secret importance; 'he had only stepped in for a minute, to bring me a new fern.'

'Indeed,' said her father; 'I was not aware that he took interest in your fernery.'

'He knows everything about ferns,' said Lucy. 'Mrs. Cavendish Dusautoy once had a conservatory filled with the rarest specimens, and he has given me a great many directions how to manage them.'

'Oh! if he could get you to listen to his maxims, I don't wonder at anything,' exclaimed Albinia.

'He had only just come in with the Adiantum, and was telling me how hydraulic power directed a stream of water near the roots among his mother's Fuci,' said Lucy, rather hurt. 'He had fastened up his horse quite securely, and nobody could have guessed that Maurice could have opened that gate to cross the bridge, far less have climbed up the rail to the horse's back. I never shall forget my fright, when we heard the creature's feet, and Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy began to run after it directly.'

'As foolish a thing as he could have done,' said Mr. Kendal, not impressed with Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy's condescension in giving chase. 'It was well poor little Maurice was not abandoned to your discretion, and his resources.'

'It seems,' continued Mr. Ferrars, 'that young O'More was taking a walk on the towing-path, and was just so far off as to see, without being able to prevent it, this little monkey scramble from the gate upon the horse's neck. How it was that he did not go down between, I can't guess; the beast gave a violent start, as well it might, jerked the reins loose, and set off full gallop. Seeing the child clinging on like a young panther, he dashed across the meadow, to cut him off at the turn of the river; and it was a great feat of swiftness, I assure you, to run so lightly through those marshy meadows, so as to get the start of the runaway; then he crept up under cover of the hedge, so as not to startle the horse, and had hold of the bridle,

just as he paused before leaping the gate! He said he could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the urchin safe, and looking more excited than terrified.'

'Yes, he was exceedingly struck with Maurice's spirit,' said Mr. Kendal, who, when the fright and anger were over, could begin to be proud of the exploit.

'They fraternized at once,' said Mr. Ferrars. 'Maurice imparted that his name was Maurice Ferrars Kendal, and Ulick, in all good faith and Irish simplicity, discovered that they were cousins!'

'Oh! Edmund, he must come to the christening dinner!'

'Mind,' said Maurice, 'you, know he is not even my wife's cousin; only nephew to her second cousin's husband.'

'For shame, Maurice, cousin is that cousinly does!'

'Very well, only don't tell the aunts that Winifred saddled all the O'Mores upon you.'

'Not an O'More but should be welcome for his sake!'

'Nor an Irishman,' said Mr. Ferrars.

Albinia suffered so much from the shock, that she could not make her appearance till noon on the following day. Then, after sitting a little while in the old study, to hear that grandmamma had not been able to sleep all night for thinking of Maurice's danger, and being told some terrible stories of accidents with horses, she felt one duty done, and moved on to the drawing-room in search of her brother.

She found herself breaking upon a tete-a-tete. A sweet, full voice, with strong cadences, was saying something about duty and advice, and she would have retreated, but her brother and the stranger both sprang up, and made her understand that she was by no means to go away. No introduction was wanted; she grasped the hand that was extended to her, and would have said something if she could, but she found herself not strong enough to keep from tears, and only said, 'I wish little Maurice were not gone out with his brother, but you will dine with us, and see him to-morrow.'

'With the greatest pleasure, if my uncle and aunt will spare me.'

'They must,' said Albinia, 'you must come to meet your old friend and _cousin_,' she added, mischievously glancing at Maurice, but he did not look inclined to disavow the relationship, and the youth was not a person whom any one would wish to keep at a distance. He seemed about nineteen or twenty years of age, not tall, but well made, and with an air of great ease and agility, rather lounging and careless, yet alert in a moment. The cast of his features at once betrayed his country, by the rounded temples, with the free wavy hair; the circular form of the eyebrow; the fully opened dark blue eye, looking almost black when shaded; the short nose, and the well-cut chin and lips, with their outlines of sweetness and of fun, all thoroughly Irish, but of the best style, and with a good deal of thought and mind on the brow, and determination in the mouth. Albinia had scarcely a minute, however, for observation, for he seemed agitated,

and in haste to take leave, nor did her brother press him to remain, since she was still looking very white and red, and too fragile for anything but rest. With another squeeze of the hand she let him go, while he, with murmured thanks, and head bent in enthusiastic honour to the warm kindness of one so sweet and graceful, took leave. Mr. Ferrars followed him into the hall, leaving the door open, so that she heard the words, 'Good-bye, Ulick; I'll do my best for you. All I can say is, that I respect you.'

'Don't respect me too soon,' he answered; 'maybe you'll have to change your mind. The situation may like me no better than I the situation.'

'No, what you will, you can do; I trust to your perseverance.'

'As my poor mother does! Well, with patience the snail got to Rome, and if it is to lighten her load, I must bear it. Many thanks, Mr. Ferrars. Good morning.'

'Good morning; only, Ulick, excuse me, but let me give you a hint; if the situation is to like you, you must mind your Irish.'

'Then you must not warm my heart with your kindness,' was the answer. 'No, no, never fear, when I'm not with any one who has seen Ballymakilty, I can speak English so that I could not be known for a Galway man. Not that I'm ashamed of my country,' he added; and the next moment the door shut behind him.

'How could you scold him for his Irish?' exclaimed Albinia, as her brother re-entered; 'it sounds so pretty and characteristic.'

'I fear Mr. Goldsmith may think it too characteristic!'

'I am sure Edmund might well call him prepossessing. I hope Mr. Goldsmith is going to do something handsome for him!'

'Poor lad! Mr. Goldsmith considers that he has purchased him for a permanent fixture on a high stool. It is a sad disappointment, for he had been doing his utmost to prepare himself for college, and he has so far distinguished himself at school, that I see that a very little help would soon enable him to maintain himself at the University. I could have found it in my heart to give it to him myself; it would please Winifred.'

'Oh, let us help; I am sure Edmund would be glad.'

'No, no, this is better for all. Remember this is the Goldsmith's only measure of conciliation towards their sister since her marriage, and it ought not to be interfered with. Poor Ulick says he knows this is the readiest chance of being of any use to his family, and that his mother has often said she should be happy if she could but see one of the six launched in a way to be independent! There are those three eldest, little better than squireens, never doing a thing but loafing about with their guns. I used to long for a horse-whip to lay about them, till they spoke to me, and then not one of the rogues but won my heart with his fun and good-nature.'

'Then I suppose it is a great thing to have one in the way of

money-making.'

'Hem! The Celtic blood is all in commotion! This boy's business was to ask my candid opinion whether there were anything ungentlemanlike in a clerkship in a bank. It was well it was not you!'

'Now, Maurice, don't you know how glad I should have been if Gilbert would have been as wise!'

'Yes, you have some common sense after all, which is more than Ulick attributes to his kith and kin. When I had proved the respectability of banking to his conviction, I'll not say satisfaction, he made me promise to write to his father. He is making up his mind to what is not only a great vexation to himself, and very irksome employment, but he knows he shall be looked down upon as having lost caste with all his family!'

'It really is heroism!' cried Albinia.

'It is,' said Mr. Ferrars; 'he does not trust himself to face the clan, and means to get into harness at once, so as to clench his resolution, and relieve his parents from his maintenance immediately.'

'Is he to live with that formal Miss Goldsmith?'

'No. In solitary lodgings, after that noisy family and easy home! I can't think how he will stand it. I should not wonder if the Galwegian was too strong after all.'

'We must do all we can for him,' cried Albinia; 'Edmund likes him already. Can't he dine with us every Sunday?'

'I know you will be kind,' said Mr. Ferrars. 'Only see how things turn out before you commit yourself. Ah! I have said the unlucky word which always makes you fly off!'

There was little fear that Ulick O'More would not win his way with Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, recommended as he was, and with considerable attractions in the frankness and brightness of his manner. He was a very pleasant addition to the party who dined at Willow Lawn, after the christening. No one had time to listen to Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy's maxims, and he retired rather sullenly, to lean against the mantelpiece, and marvel why the Kendals should invite an Irish banker's clerk to meet him. Gilbert likewise commented on the guest with a muttered observation on his sisters' taste; 'Last year it was all the Polysyllable, now it would be all the Irishman!'

CHAPTER XIX.

There was a war of supremacy in the Kendal household. Albinia and her son were Greek to Greek, and if physical force were on her side, her own tenderness was against her. As to allies, Maurice had by far the majority of the household; the much-tormented Susan was her

mistress's sole supporter; Mr. Kendal and Sophy might own it inexpedient to foster his outrecuidance, but they so loved to do his bidding, so hated to thwart him, and so grieved at his being punished, that they were little better than Gilbert, Lucy, grandmamma, or any of the maids or men.

The moral sense was not yet stirred, and the boy seemed to be trying the force of his will like the strength of his limbs. Even as he delighted to lift a weight the moment he saw that it was heavy, so a command was to him a challenge to see how much he would undergo rather than obey, but his resistance was so open, gay, and free, that it could hardly be called obstinacy, and he gloried in disappointing punishment. The dark closet lost all terror for him; he stood there blowing the horn through his hand, content to follow an imaginary chase, and when untimely sent to bed, he stole Susan's scissors, and cut a range of stables in the sheets. The short, sharp infliction of pain answered best, but his father, though he could give a shake when angry, could not strike when cool, and Albinia was forced to turn executioner, though with such tears and trembling that her culprit looked up reassuringly, saying, 'Never mind, mamma, I shan't!' He did, however, mind her tears, they bore in upon him the sense of guilt; and after each transgression, he could not be at peace till he had marched up to her, holding out his hand for the blow, and making up his face not to wince, and then would cling round her neck to feel himself pardoned. Justice came to him in a most fair and motherly shape! The brightest, the merriest of all his playmates was mamma; he loved her passionately, and could endure no cloud between himself and her, so that he was slowly learning that submission to her was peace and pleasure, and rebellion mere pain to both. She established ten minutes of daily lessons, but even she could not reach beyond the capture of his restless person, his mind was out of reach, and keen as he was in everything else, towards "a + b = ab" he was an unmitigated dunce. Nor did he obey any one who did not use authority and force of will, and though perfectly simple and sincere, he was too young to restrain himself without the assistance of the controlling power, so that in his mother's absence he was tyrannical and violent, and she never liked to have him out of her sight, and never was so sure that he was deep in mischief as when she had not heard his voice for a quarter of an hour.

'Albinia,' said Mr. Kendal, one relenting autumn day, when November strove to look like April, 'I thought of walking to pay Farmer Graves for the corn. Will you come with me?'

'Delightful, I want to see what Maurice will say to the turkey-cock.'

'Is it not too far for him?'

'He would run quite as many miles in the garden,' said Albinia, who would have walked in dread of a court of justice on her return, had not the scarlet hose been safely prancing on the road before her.

'This way, then,' said Mr. Kendal; 'I must get this draft changed at the bank. Come, Maurice, you will see a friend there.'

'Do you know, Edmund,' said Albinia, as they set forth, 'my conscience smites me as to that youth; I think we have neglected him.'

'I cannot see what more we could have done. If his uncle does not bring him forward in society, we cannot interfere.'

'It must be a forlorn condition,' said Albinia; 'he is above the other clerks, and he seems to be voted below the Bayford Elite, since the Polysyllable has made it so very refined! One never meets him anywhere now it is too dark to walk after the banking hours. Cannot we ask him to come in some evening?'

'We cannot have our evenings broken up,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I should be glad to show him any kindness, but his uncle seems to have ruled it that he is to be considered more as his clerk than as one of his family, and I doubt if it would be doing him any service to interfere.'

They were now at the respectable old freestone building, with 'Goldsmith' inscribed on the iron window-blinds, and a venerable date carved over the door. Inside, those blinds came high, and let in but little light over the tall desks, at which were placed the black-horsehair perches of the clerks, old Mr. Goldsmith himself occupying a lower throne, more accessible to the clients. One of the high stools stood empty, and Albinia making inquiry, Mr. Goldsmith answered, with a dry, dissatisfied cough, that More, as he called him, had struck work, and gone home with a headache.

'Indeed,' said Albinia, 'I am sorry to hear it. Mr. Hope said he thought him not looking well.'

'He has complained of headache a good deal lately,' said Mr. Goldsmith. 'Young men don't find it easy to settle to business.'

Albinia's heart smote her for not having thought more of her son's rescuer, and she revolved what could or what might have been done. It really was not easy to show him attention, considering Gilbert's prejudice against his accent, and Mr. Kendal's dislike to an interrupted evening, and all she could devise was a future call on Miss Goldsmith. But for Maurice, it would have been a silent walk, and though her mind was a little diverted by his gallant attempt to bestride the largest pig in the farm-yard, she was sure Mr. Kendal was musing on the same topic, and was not surprised when, as they returned, he exclaimed, 'I have a great mind to go and see after that poor lad.'

'This way, then,' said Albinia, turning down a narrow muddy street parallel with the river.

'Impossible!' said Mr. Kendal; 'he can never live at the Wharves?'

'Yes,' said Albinia; 'he told me that he lodged with an old servant of the Goldsmiths, Pratt's wife, at the Lower Wharf.'

She pointed to the name of Pratt over a shop-window in a house that had once seen better days, but which looked so forlorn, that Mr. Kendal would not look the slatternly maid in the face while so absurd a question was asked as whether Mr. O'More lived there.

The girl, without further ceremony, took them up a dark stair, and opened the door of a twilight room, where Albinia's first glimpse showed her the young man with his head bent down on his arms on the

table, as close as possible to the forlorn, black fire, of the grim, dull, sulky coal of the county, which had filled the room with smoke and blacks. The window, opened to clear it, only admitted the sickly scent of decaying weed from the river to compete with the perfume of the cobbler's stock-in-trade. Ulick started up pale and astonished, and Mr. Kendal, struck with consternation, chiefly thought of taking away his wife and child from the infected atmosphere, and made signs to Albinia not to sit down; but she was eagerly compassionate.

'It was nothing,' said Ulick, 'only his head was rather worse than usual, and he thought it time to give in when the threes put lapwings' feathers in their caps just like the fives.'

'Are you subject to these headaches?'

'It is only home-sickness,' he said. 'I'll have got over it soon.'

'I must come and see after you, my good friend,' said Mr. Kendal, with suppressed impatience and anxiety. 'I shall return in a moment or two, but I am sure you are not well enough for so many visitors taking you by surprise. Come.'

He was so peremptory, that Albinia found herself on the staircase before she knew what she was about. The fever panic had seized Mr. Kendal in full force; he believed typhus was in the air, and insisted on her taking Maurice home at once, while he went himself to fetch Mr. Bowles. She did not in the least credit fever to be in the chill touch of that lizard hand, and believed that she could have been the best doctor; but there was no arguing while he was under this alarm, and she knew that she might be thankful not to be ordered to observe a quarantine.

When Mr. Kendal returned home he looked much discomposed, though his first words were, 'Thank Heaven, it is no fever! Albinia, we must look after that poor lad; he is positively poisoned by that pestiferous river and bad living! Bowles said he was sure he was not eating meat enough. I dare say that greasy woman gives him nothing fit to eat! Albinia, you must talk to him--find out whether old Goldsmith gives him a decent salary!'

'He ought not to be in those lodgings another day. I suppose Miss Goldsmith had no notion what they were. I fancy she never saw the Lower Wharf in her life.'

'I never did till to-day,' said Mr. Kendal. 'It was all of a piece--the whole street--the room--the furniture--why the paper was coming off the walls! What could they be dreaming of! And there he was, trying to read a little edition of Prodentius, printed at Salamanca, which he picked up at a bookstall at Galway. It must have belonged to some priest educated in Spain. He says any Latin book was invaluable to him. He is infinitely too good for his situation, and the Goldsmiths are neglecting him infamously. Look out some rooms fit for him, Albinia.'

'I will try. Let me see--if I could only recollect any; but Mr. Hope has the only really nice ones in the place.'

'Somewhere he must be, if it is in this house.'

'There is poor old Madame Belmarche's still empty, with Bridget keeping it. I wish he could have rooms there.'

'Well, why not? Pettilove told me it must be let as two tenements. If the old woman could take half, a lodger would pay her rent,' said Mr. Kendal, promptly. 'You had better propose it.'

'And the Goldsmiths?' asked Albinia.

'I will show him the Lower Wharf.'

The next afternoon Mr. Kendal desired his wife to go to the Bank and borrow young O'More for her walking companion.

'Really I don't know whether I have the impudence.'

'I will come and do it for you. You will do best alone with the lad; I want you to get into his confidence, and find out whether old Goldsmith treats him properly. I declare, but that I know John Kendal so well, this would be enough to make me rejoice that Gilbert is not thrown on the world!'

Albinia knew herself to be so tactless, that she saw little hope other doing anything but setting him against his relations; but her husband was in no frame to hear objections, so she made none, and only trusted she should not be very foolish. At least, the walk would be a positive physical benefit to the slave of the desk.

Ulick O'More was at his post, and said his head was well, but his hair stuck up as if his fingers had been many times run through it; he was much thinner, and the wearied countenance, whitened complexion, and spiritless sunken eyes, were a sad contrast to the glowing freshness and life that had distinguished him in the summer.

Mr. Kendal told the Banker that it had been decided that his nephew needed exercise, and that Mrs. Kendal would be glad of his company in a long walk. Mr. Goldsmith seemed rather surprised, but consented, whereupon the young clerk lighted up into animation, and bounded out of his prison house, with a springy step learnt upon mountain heather. Mr. Kendal only waited to hear whither they were bound.

'Oh! as far as we can go on the Woodside road,' said Albinia. 'I think the prescription I used to inflict on poor Sophy will not be thrown away here. I always fancy there is a whiff of sea air upon the hill there.'

Ulick smiled at such a fond delusion, bred up as he had been upon the wildest sea-coast, exposed to the full sweep of the Atlantic storm! She set him off upon his own scenery, to the destruction of his laborious English, as he dwelt on the glories of his beloved rocks rent by fierce sea winds and waves into fantastic, grotesque, or lovely shapes, with fiords of exquisite blue sea between, the variety of which had been to him as the gentle foliage of tamer countries. Not a tree stood near the 'town' of Ballymakilty, but the wild crags, the sparkling waters, the broad open hills, and the bogs, with their intensely purple horizon, held fast upon his heart; and he told of white sands, reported to be haunted by mermaids, and crevices of rock where the tide roared, and gave rise to legends of sea monsters, and giants turned to stone. He was becoming confidential and intimate

when, in a lowered voice, he mentioned the Banshee's crag, where the shrouded messenger of doom never failed to bewail each dying child of the O'More, and where his own old nurse had actually beheld her keening for the uncle who was killed among the Caffres. Albinia began to know how she ought to respect the O'Mores.

They were skirting the side of the hill, with a dip of green meadow-land below them, rising on the other side into coppices. The twang of the horn, and the babbling cry of the hounds, reminded Albinia that the hunting season had begun, and looking over a gate, she watched the parti-coloured forms of the dogs glancing among the brushwood opposite, and an occasional red coat gleaming out through the hedge above. Just then the cry ceased, the dogs became silent, and scattered hither and thither bewildered. Ulick looked eagerly, then suddenly vaulted over the gate, went forward a few steps, looked again, pointed towards some dark object which she could barely discern, put his finger in his ear, and uttered an unearthly screech, incomprehensible to her, but well understood by the huntsman, and through him by the dogs, which at once simultaneously dashed in one direction, and came pouring into the meadow over towards him, down went their heads, up went their curved tails, the clatter and rushing of hoofs, and the apparition of red coats, showed the hunters all going round the copse, while at the same moment, away with winged steps bounded her companion, flying headlong like the wind, so as to meet the hunt.

'Ask me not what the lady feels,
Left in that dreadful hour alone,'

laughed Albinia to herself. 'Well done, speed! Edmund might be satisfied there's not much amiss! Through the hedge--over the meadow--a flying leap over the stream--it is more like a bird than a man--up again. Does he mean to follow the hunt all the rest of the way? Rather Irish, I must say! And I do believe they will all come down this lane! I must walk on; it won't do to be overtaken here between these high hedges. Ah! I thought he was too much of a gentleman to leave me--here he comes. How much in his way I must be! I never saw such a runner; not a bit does he slacken for the hill--and what bright cheeks and eyes! What good it must have done him!'

'I beg ten thousand pardons!' cried he, as he came up, scarcely out of breath. 'I declare I forgot you, I could not help it, when I saw them at a check!'

'You feel for the hunter as I do for the fox,' said Albinia. 'Is yours one of the great hunting neighbourhoods?'

'That it is!' he cried. 'My grandfather had the grand stud! He and his seven sons were out three times in the week, and there was a mount for whoever wanted it!'

'And this generation is not behind the last?'

'Ah! and why would it be?' exclaimed the boy, the last remnant of English pronunciation forsaking him. 'My Uncle Connel has the best mare on this side the bridge of Athlone! I mean that side.'

'And how is it with you?' asked Albinia.

'We've got no horses--that is, except my father's mare, and the colt, and Fir Darrig--the swish-tailed pony--and the blind donkey that brings in the turf. So we younger ones mostly go hunting on foot; and after all I believe that's the best sport. Bryan always comes in before any of the horses, and we all think it a shame if we don't!'

'I see where you learnt the swiftness of foot that was so useful last July,' said Albinia.

'That? oh! but Bryan would have been up long before me,' said Ulick. 'He'd have made for the lock, not the gate! You should see what sport we have when the fox takes to the Corrig Dearg up among the rocks--and little Rosie upon Fir Darrig, with her hair upon the wind, and her colour like the morning cloud, glancing in and out among the rocks like the fairy of the glen. There are those that think her the best part of the hunt; they say the English officers at Ochlochtimore would never think it worth coming out but for her. I don't believe that, you know,' he added, laughing, 'though I like to fetch a rise out of Ulick at the great house by telling him of it.'

'How old is she?'

'Fifteen last April, and she is like an April wind, when it comes warm and frolicking over the sea! So wild and free, and yet so gentle and soft! Ellen and Mary are grave and steady, and work hard--every stitch of my stockings was poor Mary's knitting, except what poor old Peggy would send up for a compliment; but Rosie--I don't think she does a thing but sing, and ride, and row the boat, and keep the house alive! My mother shakes her head, but I don't know what she'll say when she gets my aunt's letter. My Aunt Goldsmith purses up her lips, and says, "I'll write to advise my sister to send her daughters to some good school." Ellen, maybe, might bear one, but ah! the thought of little Rosie in a good school!'

'Like her brother Ulick in a good bank, eh?'

'Why,' he cried, 'they always called me the steady Englishman!'

Albinia laughed, but at that moment the sounds of the hunt again occupied them, and all were interpreted by Ulick with the keenest interest, but he would not run away again, though she exhorted him not to regard her. Presently it swept on out of hearing, and by-and-bye they reached the summit of the hill, and looked forth on the dark pine plantations on the opposite undulation, standing out in black relief against a sky golden with a pale, pure, pearly November sunset, a 'daffodil sky' flecked with tiny fleeces of soft bright-yellow light, reminding Albinia of Fouque's beautiful dream of Aslauga's golden hair showing the gates of Heaven to her devoted knight. She looked for her companion's sympathy in her admiration, but the woods seemed to oppress him, and his panting sigh showed how real a thing was he-men.

'Oh! my poor sun!' he broke out, 'I pity you for having to go down before your time into these black, stifling woods that rise up to smother you like giants--and not into your own broad, cool Atlantic, laughing up your own sparkles of light.'

'We inland people can hardly appreciate your longing for space.'

'It's a very prison,' said Ulick; 'the horizon is choked all round, and one can't breathe in these staid stiff hedges and enclosures!' And he threw out his arms and flapped them over his breast with a gesture of constraint.

'You seem no friend to cultivation.'

'Why, your meadows would be pretty things if they were a little greener,' said Ulick; 'but one gets tired of them, and of those straight lines of ploughed field. There's no sense of liberty; it is like the man whose prison walls closed in upon him!' And he gave another weary sigh, his step lost elasticity, and he moved on heavily.

'You are tired; I have brought you too far.'

'Tired by a bit of a step like this?' cried the boy, disdainfully, as he straightened himself, and resumed his brisk tread. But it did not last.

'I had forgotten that you had not been well,' she said.

'Pshaw!' muttered Ulick; then resumed, 'Aye, Mr. Kendal brought in the doctor upon me--very kind of him--but I do assure you 'tis nothing but home sickness; I was nearly as bad when I went to St. Columba, but I got over it then, and I will again!'

'It may be so in part,' said Albinia, kindly; 'but let me be impertinent, Ulick, for my sister Winifred told me to look after you; surely you give it every provocation. Such a change of habits is enough to make any one ill. Should you not ask your uncle for a holiday, and go home for a little while?'

'Don't name it, I beg of you,' cried the poor lad in an agitated voice, 'it would only bring it all over again! I've promised my mother to do my part, and with His help I will! Let the columns run out to all eternity, and the figures crook themselves as spitefully as they will, I've vowed to myself not to stir till I've got the better of the villains!'

'Ah!' said Albinia, 'they have blackened your eyes like the bruises of material antagonists! Yes, it is a gallant battle, but indeed you must give yourself all the help you can, for it would be doing your mother no good to fall ill.'

'I've no fears,' said Ulick; 'I know very well what is the matter with me, and that if I don't give way, it will go off in time. You've given it a good shove with your kindness, Mrs. Kendal,' he added, with deep emotion in his sensitive voice; 'only you must not talk of my going home, or you'll undo all you have done.'

'Then I won't; we must try to make you a home here. And in the first place, those lodgings of yours; you can never be comfortable in them.'

'Ah! you saw my fire smoking. I never shall learn to make a coal fire burn.'

'Not only that,' said Albinia, 'but you might easily find rooms much better furnished, and fitter for you.'

'I do assure you,' exclaimed Ulick, 'you scarcely saw it! Why, I don't think there's a room at the big house in better order, or so good!'

'At least,' said Albinia, repressing her deduction as to the big house of Ballymakilty, 'you have no particular love for the locality--the river smell--the stock of good leather, &c.'

'It's all Bayford and town smell together,' said Ulick; 'I never thought one part worse than another, begging your pardon, Mrs. Kendal.'

'And I am sure,' she continued, 'that woman can never make your meals comfortable. Yes, I see I am right, and I assure you hard head-work needs good living, and you will never be a match for the rogues in black and white without good beef-steaks. Now confess whether she gives you dinners of old shoe-leather.'

'A man can't sit down to dinner by himself,' cried Ulick, impatiently. 'Tea with a book are all that is bearable.'

'And you never go out--never see any one.'

'I dine at my uncle's every Sunday,' said Ulick.

'Is that all the variety you have?'

'Why, my uncle told me he would not have me getting into what he calls idle company. I've dined once at the vicarage, and drunk tea twice with Mr. Hope, but it is no use thinking of it--I couldn't afford it, and that's the truth.'

'Have you any books? What can you find to do all the evening?'

'I have a few that bear reading pretty often, and Mr. Hope as lent me some. I've been trying to keep up my Greek, and then I do believe there's some way of simplifying those accounts by logarithms, if I could but work it out. But my mother told me to walk, and I assure you I do take a constitutional as soon as I come out at half-past four every day.'

'Well, I have designs, and mind you don't traverse them, or I shall have to report you at home. I have a lodging in my eye for you, away from the river, and a nice clean, tidy Irishwoman to keep you in order, make your fires, and cram you, if you wont eat, and see if she does not make a man of you--'

'Stop, stop, Mrs. Kendal!' cried Ulick, distressed. 'You are very kind, but it can't be.'

'Excuse me, it is economy of the wrong sort to live in a gutter, and catch agues and fevers. Only think, if it was my boy Gilbert, should I not be obliged to any one that would tyrannize over him for his good! Besides, what I propose is not at all beyond such means as Mr. Kendal tells me are the least Mr. Goldsmith ought to give you. Do you dislike going into particulars with me? You know I am used to

think for Gilbert, and I am a sort of cousin.'

'You are kindness itself,' said Ulick; 'and there! I suppose I must go to the bottom of it, and it is no news that pence are not plenty among the O'Mores, though it is no fault of my uncle. See there what my poor dear mother says.'

He drew a letter from his pocket, and gave a page to her.

'I miss you sorely, my boy,' it said; 'I know the more what a support and friend you have been to me now that you are so far away; but all is made up to me in knowing you to be among my own people, and the instrument of reconciliation with my brother, as you well know how great has been the pain of the estrangement caused by my own pride and wilfulness. I cannot tell you how glad I am that he approves of you, and that you are beginning to get used to the work that was my own poor father's for so long. Bred up as you have been, my mountain lad, I scarcely dared to hope that you would be able to sit down quietly to it, with all our hopes of making you a scholar so suddenly frustrated; but I might have put faith in your loving heart and sense of duty to carry you through anything. I feel as if a load were off my mind since you and Bryan are so happily launched. The boy has not once applied for money since he joined; and if you write to him, pray beg him to be careful, for it would well-nigh drive your father mad to be pressed any more--the poor mare has been sold at a dead loss and the Carrick-humbug quarry company pays no dividends, so how we are to meet the Christmas bills I cannot guess. But, as you remember, we have won over worse times, and now Providence has been so good to you and Bryan, what have I to do but be thankful and hope the best.'

Ulick watched her face, and gave her another note, saying mournfully, 'You see they all, but my mother, think, that if I am dragging our family honour through the mire, I've got something by it. Poor Bryan, he knows no better--he's younger than me by two years.'

The young ensign made a piteous confession of the first debt he had been able to contract, for twenty pounds, with a promise that if his brother would help him out of this one scrape, he would never run into another.

'I am very sorry for you, Ulick,' said Albinia, 'and I hate to advise you to be selfish, but it really is quite impossible for you to be paymaster for all your brothers' debts.'

'If it were Connel, I know it would be of no use,' said Ulick. 'But Bryan--you see he has got a start--they gave him a commission, and he is the finest fellow of us all, and knows what his word is, and keeps it! Maybe, if I get on, I may be able to save, and help him to his next step, and then if Redmond could get to college, my mother would be a happy woman, and all thanks to my uncle.'

'Then it is this twenty pounds that is pinching you now? Is that it?'

'You see my uncle said he would give me enough to keep me as a gentleman and his nephew, but not enough to keep all the family, as

he said. After my Christmas quarter I shall be up in the world again, and then there will be time to think of the woman you spoke of--a Connaught woman, did you say?

When Albinia reported this dialogue to her husband, he was much moved by this simple self-abnegation.

'There is nothing for it,' he said, 'but to bring him here till Christmas, and by that time we will take care that the new lodgings are cheap enough for him. He must not be left to the mercy of old Goldsmith and his sister!'

Even Albinia was astonished, but Mr. Kendal carried out his intentions, and went in quest of his new friend; while no one thought of objecting except grandmamma.

'I suppose, my dear,' she said, 'that you know what Mr. Goldsmith means to do for this young man.'

'I am sure I don't,' said Albinia.

'Really! Ah! well, I'm an old woman, and I may be wrong, but my poor dear Mr. Meadows would never encourage a banker's clerk about the house unless he knew what were his expectations. Irish too! If there was a thing Mr. Meadows disliked more than another, it was an Irishman! He said they were all adventurers.'

However, Ulick's first evening at Willow Lawn was on what he called 'a headache day.' He could not have taken a better measure for overcoming grandmamma's objections. Poor dear Mr. Meadows' worldly wisdom was not sufficiently native to her to withstand the sight of anything so pale and suffering, especially as he did not rebel against answering her close examination, which concluded in her pronouncing these intermitting attacks to be agueish, and prescribing quinine. To take medicines is an effectual way of gaining an old lady's love. Ulick was soon established in her mind as 'a very pretty behaved young gentleman.'

In the evenings, when Mr. Kendal read aloud, Ulick listened, and enjoyed it from the corner where he sheltered his eyes from the light. He was told that he ought to go to bed quickly, but after the ladies were in their rooms, a long buzzing murmur was heard in the passage, and judicious peeping revealed the two gentlemen, each, candle in hand, the one with his back against the wall at the top of the stairs, the other leaning upon the balusters three steps below, and there they stayed, till the clock struck one, and Ulick's candle burnt out.

'What could you be talking about?' asked the aggrieved Albinia.

'Prometheus Vincitus,' composedly returned Mr. Kendal.

Ulick's eagerness in collecting every crumb of scholarship was a great bond of union; but there was still more in the bright, open, demonstrative nature of the youth, which had a great attraction for the reserved, serious Mr. Kendal, and scarcely a day had passed before they were on terms of intimacy, almost like an elder and younger brother. Admitted into the family as a connexion, Ulick at once viewed the girls as cousins, and treated them with the same easy

grace of good-natured familiarity as if they had been any of the nineteen Miss O'Mores around Ballymakilty.

'How is your head now?' asked Mr. Kendal. 'You are late this evening.'

'Yes,' said Ulick, entering the drawing-room, which was ruddy with firelight, and fragrant with the breath of the conservatory, and leaning over an arm-chair, as he tried to rub the aching out of his brow; 'there were some accounts to finish up and my additions came out different every time.'

'A sure sign that you ought to have left off.'

'I was just going to have told my uncle I was good for nothing to-day, when I heard old Johns mumbling something to him about Mr. More being unwell, and looking up, I saw that cold grey eye twinkling at me, as much as to say he was proud to see how soon an Irishman could be beaten. So what could I do but give him look for look, and go on with eight and seven, and five and two, as unconcerned as he was.'

'Well,' said Mr. Kendal, 'you know I think that your uncle's apparent indifference may be his fashion of being your best friend.'

'I'd take it like sunshine in May from a stranger, and be proud to disappoint him,' said Ulick, 'but to call himself my uncle, and use my mother's own eyes to look at me that way, that's the stroke! and to think that I'm only striving to harden myself by force of habit to be exactly like him! I'd rather enlist to-morrow, if that would not be his greatest triumph!' he cried, pressing his hands hard on his temple. 'It is very childish, but I could forgive him anything but using my mother's eyes that way!'

'You will yet rejoice in the likeness,' said Mr. Kendal. 'You must believe in more than you can trace, and when your perseverance has conquered his esteem, the rest will follow.'

'Follow? The rest, as you call it, would go before at home,' sighed Ulick, wearily. 'Esteem is like fame! what I want begins without it, and lives as well with or without it!'

'Perhaps,' said his friend, 'Mr. Goldsmith would think it weakness to show preference to a relation before it was earned.'

'Ah then,' cried Ulick, in a quaint Irish tone, 'Heaven have mercy on the little children!'

'Yes, the doctrine can only be consistently held by a solitary man.'

'Where would we be but for inconsistency?' exclaimed Ulick.

'I do not like to hear you talk in that manner,' said Sophy. 'Inconsistency is mere weakness.'

'Ah! then you are the dangerous character,' said Ulick, with a droll gesture of sheltering himself behind the chair.

'I did not call myself consistent, I wish I were,' she said, gravely.

'How she must love the French!' returned Ulick, confidentially turning to her father.

'Not at all, I detest them.'

'Then you are inconsistent, for they're the very models of uncompromising consistency.'

'Yes, to bad principles,' said Sophy.

'Robespierre was a prime specimen of consistency to good principle!'

Sophy turned to her father, and with an odd dubious look, asked him, 'Is he teasing me?'

'He'd be proud to have the honour,' Ulick made answer, so that Mr. Kendal's smile grew broad. It was the funniest thing to see Ulick sporting with Sophy's gravity, constraining her to playfulness, with something of the compulsion exercised by a large frolicsome puppy upon a sober old dog of less size and strength.

'I do not like to see powers wasted on paradox,' she said, even as the grave senior might roll up his lip and snarl.

'I'm in earnest, Sophy,' pursued Ulick, changing his note to eagerness. 'La grande nation herself finds that logic was her bane. Consistency was never made for man! Why where would this world be if it did not go two ways at once?'

Sophy did laugh at this Irish version of the centripetal and centrifugal forces, but she held out. 'The earth describes a circle; I like straight lines.'

'Much we shall have of the right direction, unless we are content to turn right about face,' said Ulick. 'The best path of life is but a herring-bone pattern.'

'What does he know of herring-boning?' asked Mrs. Kendal, coming in at the moment, with a white cashmere cloak folded picturesquely over her delicate blue silk. Ulick in a moment assumed a less careless attitude, as he answered--

'I found my poetical illustration on the motion of the earth too much for her, so I descended to the herring-bone as more suited to her capacity.'

'There he is, mamma,' said Sophy, 'pleading that consistency is the most ruinous thing in the world.'

'I thought as much,' said Albinia. 'Prometheus and his kin do most abound when Ulick's head is worst, and papa is in greatest danger of being late.'

Mr. Kendal turned round, looked at the time-piece, and marched off.

'But mamma!' continued Sophy, driving straight at her point, 'what do you think of consistency?'

'Oh, mamma!' cried Lucy, coming into the room in a flutter of white;

'there you are in your beautiful blue! Have you really put it on for the Drurys?'

Sophy bit her lip, neither pleased at the interruption, nor at the taste.

'Have you a graduated scale of dresses for all your friends, Lucy?' asked Ulick.

'Everybody has, I suppose,' said Lucy.

'Ah! then I shall know how to judge how I stand in your favour. I never knew so well what the garb of friendship meant.'

'You must know which way her scale goes,' said Albinia, laughing at Sophy's evident affront at the frivolous turn the conversation had taken.

'That needs no asking,' quoth Ulick, 'Unadorned, adorned the most for the nearest the hearth.'

'That's all conceit,' said Lucy. 'Maybe familiarity breeds contempt.'

'No, no, when young ladies despise, they use a precision that says, "'Tis myself I care for, and not you.'"

'What an observer!' cried Lucy. 'Now then, interpret my dress to-night!'

'How can you, Lucy!' muttered the scandalized Sophy.

'Well, Sophy, as you will have him to torment with philosophy this whole evening, I think you might give him a little respite,' said Lucy, good-humouredly. 'I want to know what my dress reveals to him!' and drawing up her head, where two coral pins contrasted with her dark braids, and spreading out her full white skirts and cerise trimmings, she threw her figure into an attitude, and darted a merry challenge from her lively black eyes, while Ulick availed himself of the permission to look critically, and Sophy sank back disgusted.

'Miss Kendal can, when she is inclined, produce as much effect with her beams of the second order as with all her splendours displayed.'

'Stuff,' said Lucy.

'Stuff indeed,' more sincerely murmured Sophy.

'Say something in earnest,' said Lucy. 'You professed to tell what I thought of the people.'

'I hope you'll never put on such new white gloves where I'm the party chiefly concerned.'

'What do you mean?'

'They are a great deal too unexceptionable.'

If there were something coquettish in the manner of these two, it did not give Albinia much concern. It was in him 'only Irish;' and Fred

Ferrars had made her believe that it was rather a sign of the absence of love than of its presence. She saw much more respect and interest in his mischievous attacks on Sophy's gravity, and though Lucy both pitied him and liked chattering with him, it was all the while under the secret protest that he was only a banker's clerk.

Sophy was glad of the presence of a third person to obviate the perils of her evenings with grandmamma, and she beheld the trio set off to their dinner-party, without the usual dread of being betrayed into wrangling. Mr. O'More devoted himself to the old lady's entertainment, he amused her with droll stories, and played backgammon with her. Then she composed herself to her knitting, and desired them not to mind her, she liked to hear young people talk cheerfully; whereupon Sophy, by way of light and cheerful conversation, renewed the battle of consistency with a whole broadside of heavy metal.

When the diners-out came home, they found the war raging as hotly as ever; a great many historical facts and wise sayings having been fired off on both sides, and neither having found out that each meant the same thing.

However, the hours had gone imperceptibly past them, which could not be said for the others. The half-yearly dinners at Mr. Drury's were Albinia's dread nearly as much as Mr. Kendal's aversion. He was certain, whatever he might intend, to fall into a fit of absence, and she was almost equally sure to hear something unpleasant, and to regret her own reply. On the whole, however, Mr. Kendal came away on this evening the least dissatisfied, for Mr. Goldsmith had asked him with some solicitude, whether he thought 'that lad, young More,' positively unwell; and had gone the length of expressing that he seemed to be fairly sharp, and stuck to his work. Mr. Kendal seized the moment for telling his opinion, of Ulick, and though Mr. Goldsmith coughed and looked dry and almost contemptuous, he was perceptibly gratified, and replied with a maxim evidently intended both as an excuse for himself and as a warning to the Kendals, that young men were always spoilt by being made too much of--in his younger days--&c.

Lucy, meantime, was undergoing the broad banter of her unrefined cousins on the subject of the Irish clerk. A very little grace in the perpetration would have made it grateful to her vanity, but this was far too broad raillery, and made her hold up her head with protestations of her perfect indifference, to which her cousins manifested incredulity, visiting on her with some petty spite their small jealousies of her higher pretensions, and of the attention which had been paid to her by Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy.

'Not that he will ever look at you again, Lucy, you need not flatter yourself,' said the amiable Sarah Anne. 'Harry Wolfe writes that he was flirting with a beautiful young lady who came to see Oxford, and that he is spending quantities of money.'

'It is nothing to me, I am sure,' retorted Lucy. 'Besides, Gilbert says no such thing.'

'Gilbert! oh, no!' exclaimed Miss Drury; 'why, he is just as bad himself. Papa said, from what Mrs. Wolfe told him, he would not take 500 pounds to pay Mr. Gilbert's bills.'

Albinia had been hearing much the same story from Mrs. Drury, though not so much exaggerated, and administered with more condolence. She did not absolutely believe, and yet she could not utterly disbelieve, so the result was a letter to Gilbert, with an anxious exhortation to be careful, and not to be deluded into foolish expenditure in imitation of the Polysyllable; and as no special answer was returned, she dismissed the whole from her mind as a Drury allegation.

The horse chanced to be lame, so that Gilbert could not be met at Hadminster on his return from Oxford, but much earlier than the omnibus usually lumbered into Bayford, he astonished Sophy, who was lying on the sofa in the morning-room, by marching in with a free and easy step, and a loose coat of the most novel device.

'No one else at home?' he asked.

'Only grandmamma. We did not think the omnibus would come in so soon, but I suppose you took a fly, as there were three of you.'

'As if we were going to stand six miles of bus with the Wolfe cub! No, Dusautoy brought his horse down with him, and I took a fly!' said Gilbert. 'Well, and what's the matter with Captain; has the Irishman been riding him?'

Sophy bit her lip to prevent an angry answer, and was glad that Maurice rushed in, full of uproarious joy. 'Hollo! boy, how you grow! What have you got there?'

'It's my new pop-gun, that Ulick made me, I'll shoot you,' cried Maurice, retiring to a suitable distance.

'I declare the child has caught the brogue! Is the fellow here still?'

'What fellow?' coldly asked Sophy.

'Why, this pet of my father's.'

'Bang!' cried Maurice, and a pellet passed perilously close to Gilbert's eyes.

'Don't, child. Pray is this banker's clerk one of our fixtures, Sophy?'

'I don't know why you despise him, unless it is because it is what you ought to be yourself,' Sophy was provoked into retorting.

'Apparently my father has a monomania for the article.' Gilbert intended to speak with provoking coolness; but another fraternal pellet hit him full in the nose, and the accompanying shout of glee was too much for an already irritated temper. With passion most unusual in him, he caught hold of the child, and exclaiming, 'You little imp, what do you mean by it?' he wrenched the weapon out of his hand, and dashed it into the fire, in the midst of an energetic 'For shame!' from his sister. Maurice, with a furious 'Naughty Gilbert,' struck at him with both his little fists clenched, and then precipitated himself over the fender to snatch his treasure from the grate, but was instantly captured and pulled back, struggling,

kicking, and fighting with all his might, till, to the equal relief of both brothers, Sophy held up the pop-gun in the tongs, one end still tinged with a red glow, smoky, blackened, and perfumed. Maurice made one bound, she lowered it into his grasp as the last red spark died out, and he clasped it as Siegfried did the magic sword!

'There, Maurice, I didn't mean it,' said Gilbert, heartily ashamed and sorry; 'kiss and make it up, and then put on your hat, and we'll come up to old Smith's and get such a jolly one!'

The forgiving child had already given the kiss, glad to atone for his aggressions, but then was absorbed in rubbing the charred wood, amazed that while so much black came off on his fingers, the effect on the weapon was not proportionate, and then tried another shot in a safer direction. 'Come,' said Gilbert, 'put that black affair into the fire, and come along.'

'No!' said Maurice; 'it is my dear gun that Ulick made me, and it shan't be burnt.'

'What, not if I give you a famous one--like a real one, with a stock and barrel?' said Gilbert, anxious to be freed from the tokens of his ebullition.

'No! no!' still stoutly said the constant Maurice. 'I don't want new guns; I've got my dear old one, and I'll keep him to the end of his days and mine!' and he crossed his arms over it.

'That's right, Maurice,' said Sophy; 'stick to old friends that have borne wounds in your service!'

'Well, it's his concern if he likes such a trumpery old thing,' said Gilbert. 'Come here, boy; you don't bear malice! Come and have a ride on my back.'

The practical lesson, 'don't shoot at your brother's nose,' would never have been impressed, had not mamma, on coming in, found Maurice and his pop-gun nearly equally black, and by gradual unfolding of cause and effect, learnt his forgotten offence. She reminded him of ancient promises never to aim at human creatures, assured him that Gilbert was very kind not to have burnt it outright; and to the great displeasure, and temporary relief of all the family, sequestered the weapon for the rest of the evening.

Sophy told her in confidence that Gilbert had been the most to blame, which she took as merely an instance of Sophy's blindness to Maurice's errors; for the explosion had so completely worked off the Oxford dash, that he was perfectly meek and amiable. Considering the antecedents, such a contrast to himself as young O'More could hardly fail to be an eyesore, walking tame about the home, and specially recommended to his friendship; but so good-natured was he, and so attractive was the Irishman, that it took much influence from Algernon Dusautoy to keep up a thriving aversion. Albinia marvelled at the power exercised over Gilbert by one whose intellect and pretensions he openly contemned, but perceived that obstinacy and undoubting self-satisfaction overmastered his superior intelligence and principle, and that while perceiving all the follies of the Polysyllable, Gilbert had a strange propensity for his company, and therein always resumed the fast man, disdainful of the clerk. He did

not like Ulick better for being the immediate cause of the removal of the last traces of the Belmarche family from their old abode, which had been renovated by pretty shamrock chintz furniture, the pride of the two Irish hearts. Indeed it was to be feared that Bridget would assist in the perpetuation of those rolling R's which caused Mr. Goldsmith's brow to contract whenever his nephew careered along upon one.

His departure from Willow Lawn was to take place at Christmas. The Ferrars party were coming to keep the two consecutive birthdays of Sophy and Maurice at Bayford, would take him back for Christmas-day to Fairmead, and on his return he would take possession of his new rooms.

Maurice's fete was to serve as the occasion of paying off civilities to a miscellaneous young party; but as grandmamma's feelings would have been hurt, had not Sophy's been equally distinguished, it was arranged that Mrs. Nugent should then bring her eldest girl to meet the Ferrarses at an early tea.

Just as Albinia had descended to await her guests, Gilbert came down, and presently said, with would-be indifference, 'Oh, by-the-by, Dusautoy said he would look in.'

'The Polysyllable!' cried Albinia, thunderstruck; 'what possessed you to ask him, when you knew I sacrificed Mr. Dusautoy rather than have him to spoil it all?'

'I didn't ask him exactly,' replied Gilbert; 'it was old Bowles, who met us, and tried to nail us to eat our mutton with him, as he called it. I had my answer, and Dusautoy got off by saying he was engaged to us, and desired me to tell you he would make his excuses in person.'

'He can make no excuse for downright falsehood.'

'Hem!' quoth Gilbert. 'You wouldn't have him done into drinking old Bowles's surgery champagne.'

'One comfort is that he wont get any dinner,' said Albinia, vindictively. 'I hope he'll be ravenously hungry.'

'He may not come after all,' said Gilbert; and Albinia, laying hold of that hope, had nearly forgotten the threatened disaster, as her party appeared by instalments, and Winifred owned to her that Sophy had grown better-looking than could have been expected. Her eyes had brightened, the cloudy brown of her cheeks was enlivened, she held herself better, and the less childish dress was much to her advantage. But above all, the moody look of suffering was gone, and her face had something of the grave sweetness and regular beauty of that of her father.

'Seventeen,' said Mrs. Ferrars; 'by the time she is seventy, she may be a remarkably handsome woman!'

The tea-drinking was in lively operation, when after a thundering knock, Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy was ushered in, with the air of a prince honouring the banquet of his vassals, saying, 'I told Kendal I should presume on your hospitality, I beg you will make no difference

on my account.'

Of which gracious permission Albinia was resolved to avail herself. She left all the insincerity to her husband, and would by no means allow grandmamma to abdicate the warm corner. She suspected that he wanted an introduction to Mrs. Nugent, and was resolved to defeat this object, unless he should condescend to make the request, so she was well satisfied to see him wedged in between papa and Sophy, while a prodigious quantity of Irish talk was going on between Mrs. Nugent and Mr. O'More, with contributions of satire from Mr. Ferrars which kept every one laughing except little Nora Nugent and Mary Ferrars, who were deep in the preliminaries of an eternal friendship, and held the ends of each other's crackers like a pair of doves. Lucy, however, was ill at ease at the obscurity which shrouded the illustrious guest, and in her anxiety, gave so little attention to her two neighbours, that Willie Ferrars, affronted at some neglect, exclaimed, 'Why, Lucy, what makes you screw your eyes about so! you can't attend to any one.'

'It is because Polly Silly is there,' shouted Master Maurice from his throne beside his mamma.

To the infinite relief of the half-choked Albinia, little Mary Ferrars, with whom her cousin had been carrying on a direful warfare all day, fitted on the cap, shook her head gravely at him, and after an appealing look of indignation, first at his mamma, then at her own, was overheard confiding to Nora Nugent that Maurice was a very naughty boy--she was sorry to say, a regular spoilt child.

'But how should you hinder Miss Kendal from attending?'

'I'll tell you, darling. Poor Lucy! she is very fond of me, and I dare say she wanted me to sit next to her, but you know she will have me for three days, and I have you only this one evening. I'll go and speak to her after tea, when we go into the drawing-room, and then she wont mind.'

Lucy, after an agony of blushes, had somewhat recovered on finding that no one seemed to apply her brother's speech, and when the benevolent Mary made her way to her, and thrust a hand into hers, only a feeble pressure replied to these romantic blandishments, so anxious was she to carry to Mrs. Kendal the information that Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy had been so obliging as to desire his servant to bring his guitar and key-bugle.

'We are much obliged,' said Albinia, 'but look at that face!' and she turned Lucy towards Willie's open-mouthed, dismayed countenance. You must tell him the company are not sufficiently advanced in musical science.'

'But mamma, it would gratify him!'

'Very likely'--and without listening further, Albinia turned to Willie, who had all day been insisting that papa should introduce her to the new game of the Showman.

Infinitely delighted to be relieved from the fear of the guitar, Willie hunted all who would play into another room; whence they were to be summoned, one by one, back to the drawing-room by the showman,

Mr. Ferrars, who shrugged his shoulders at the task, but undertook it, and first called for Mrs. Kendal.

She found him stationed before the red curtains, which were closely drawn, and her husband and the three elder ladies sitting by as audience.

'Pray, madam, may I ask what animal you would desire to have exhibited to you, out of the vast resources that my menagerie contains. Choose freely, I undertake that whatever you may select, you shall not be disappointed.'

'What, not if I were to ask for a black spider monkey?' said Albinia, to whom it was very charming to be playing with Maurice again.

Mr. Kendal looked up in entertained curiosity, Mrs. Nugent smiled as if she thought the showman's task impossible, and Winifred stretched out to gain a full view.

'A black spider monkey,' he said, slowly. 'Allow me to ask, madam, if you are acquainted with the character of the beast?'

'It doesn't scratch, does it?' said she, quickly.

'That is for you to answer.'

'I never knew it do so. It does chatter a great deal, but it never scratched that I knew of.'

'Nor I,' said the showman, 'since it was young. Do you think age renders it graver and steadier?'

'Not a bit. It is always frisky and troublesome, and I never knew it get a bit better as it grew older.'

Winifred laughed outright. Mr. Kendal's lips were parted by his smile. 'I wonder what sort of a mother it would make?' said the showman.

'All animals are good mothers, of course.'

'I meant, is it a good disciplinarian?'

'If you mean cuffing its young one for playing exactly the same tricks as itself.'

'Exactly; and what would be the effect of letting it and its young one loose in a great scholar's study?'

'There wouldn't be much study left.'

'And would it be for his good?'

'Really, Mr. Showman, you ask very odd questions. Shall we try?' said Albinia, with a skip backward, so as to lay her hand on the shoulder of her own great scholar, while the showman drew back the curtain, observing--'I wish, ma'am, I could show "it and its young one" together, but the young specimen is unfortunately asleep. Behold the original black spider monkey!'

There stood the monkey, with sunny brown locks round the laughing glowing face, and one white paw still lying on the scholar's shoulder--while his face made no assurance needful that it was very good for him! The mirror concealed behind the curtains was the menagerie! Albinia clapped her hands with delight, and pronounced it the most perfect of games.

'And now let us have Willie,' said Mrs. Ferrars; 'it will conduce to the harmony of the next room.'

Willie, already initiated, hoped to puzzle papa as a platypus ornithoryncus, but was driven to allow that it was a nondescript animal, neither fish, flesh, nor good red-herring, useless, and very fond of grubbing in the mud; and if it were not at Botany Bay, it ought to be! The laughter that hailed his defence of its nose as 'well, nothing particular,' precipitated the drawing up of the curtain and his apparition in the glass: and then Nora Nugent being called, the inseparable Mary accompanied her, arm-in-arm, simpering an announcement that they liked nothing so well as a pair of dear little love-birds.

Oh, un pitying papa! to draw from the unsuspecting Nora the admission that they were very dull little birds, of no shape at all, who always sat hunched up in a corner without any fun, and people said their love was all stupidity and pretence; in fact, if she had one she should call it Silly Polly or Polly Silly!

To silence Willie's exultation in his sister's discomfiture, he was sent to fetch Lucy, whose impersonation of an argus pheasant would not have answered well but for a suggestion of Albinia, that she was eyes all over for any delinquency in school. Ulick O'More, owning with a sigh that he should like to see no beast better than a snipe, gave rise to much ingenuity by being led to describe it as of a class migratory, hard to catch, food for powder, given to long bills. There he guessed something, and stood on the defensive, but could not deny that its element was bogs, but that it had been seen skimming over water meadows, and finding sustenance in banks, whereupon the curtain rose. Ulick rushed upon the battles of his nation, and was only reduced to quiescence by the entrance of Sophy, who expressed a desire to see a coral worm, apparently perplexing the showman, who, to gain time, hemmed, and said, 'A very unusual species, ma'am,' which set all the younger ones in a double giggle, such as confused Sophy, to find herself standing up, with every one looking at her, and listening for her words. 'I thought you undertook for any impossibility in earth air or water.'

'Well, ma'am, do you take me for a mere mountebank? But when ladies and gentlemen take such unusual fancies--and for an animal that--you would not aver that it is often found from home?'

'Never, I should say.'

'Nor that it is accessible?'

'Certainly not.'

'And why is it so, ma'am?'

'Why,' said Sophy, bewildered into forgetting her natural history, 'it lives at the bottom of the sea; that's one thing.'

'Where Truth lives,' said a voice behind.

'I beg to differ,' observed Albinia. 'Truth is a fresh water fish at the bottom of a well; besides, I thought coral worms were always close to the surface.'

'But below it--not in everybody's view,' said Sophy--an answer which seemed much to the satisfaction of the audience, but the showman insisted on knowing why, and whether it did not conceal itself. 'It makes stony caves for itself, out of sight,' said Sophy, almost doubting whether she spoke correctly. 'Well, surely it does so.'

'Most surely,' said an acclamation so general that she did not like it. If she had been younger, she would have turned sulky upon the spot, and Mr. Ferrars almost doubted whether to bring ont his final query. 'Pray, ma'am, do you think this creature out of reach in its self-made cave, at the bottom--no, below the surface of the sea, would be popular enough to repay the cost of procuring it.'

'Ah! that's too bad,' burst out the Hibernian tones. 'Why, is not the best of everything hidden away from the common eye? Out of sight--stony cave--It is the secret worker that lays the true solid foundation, raises the new realms, and forms the precious jewels.' The torrent of r's was irresistible!

'Police! order!' cried the showman. 'An Irish mob has got in, and there's an end of everything.' So up went the curtain, and the polyp appeared, becoming rapidly red coral as she perceived what the exhibition was, and why the politeness of the Green Isle revolted from her proclaiming her own unpopularity. But all she did was to turn gruffly aside, and say, 'It is lucky there are no more ladies to come, Mr. Showman, or the mob would turn everything to a compliment.'

Gilbert's curiosity was directed to the Laughing Jackass, and with too much truth he admitted that it took its tone from whatever it associated with, and caught every note, from the song of the lark to the bray of the donkey; then laughed good-humouredly when the character was fitted upon himself.

'That is all, is it not?' asked the showman. 'I may retire into private life.'

'Oh no,' cried Willie; 'you have forgotten Mr. Dusautoy.'

'I was afraid you had,' said Lucy, 'or you could not have left him to the last.'

'I am tempted to abdicate,' said Mr. Ferrars.

'No,' Albinia said. 'He must have his share, and no one but you can do it. Where can he be? the pause becomes awful!'

'Willie is making suggestions,' said Gilbert; 'his imagination would never stretch farther than a lion. It's what he thinks himself and no mistake.'

'He is big enough to be the elephant,' said little Mary.

'The half-reasoning!' said Ulick, softly; 'and I can answer for his trunk, I saw it come off the omnibus.'

'Ladies and gentlemen, if you persist in such disorderly conduct, the exhibition will close,' cried the showman, waving his wand as Willie trumpeted Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy in, and on the demand what animal he wanted to see, twitched him as Flibbertigibbet did the giant warder, and caused him to respond--'The Giraffe.'

'Has it not another name, sir? A short or a long one, more or less syllables!'

'Camelopard. A polysyllabic word, certainly,' said Algernon, looking with a puzzled expression at the laughs behind; and almost imagining it possible that he could have made an error, he repeated, 'Camel-le-o-pard. Yes, it is a polysyllable'--as, indeed, he had added an unnecessary syllable.

'Most assuredly,' said the showman, looking daggers at his suffocating sister. 'May I ask you to describe the creature?'

'Seventeen feet from the crown to the hoof, but falls off behind,' said the accurate Mr. Dusautoy; 'beautiful tawny colour.'

'Nearly as good as a Lion,' added Gilbert; but Algernon, fancying the game was by way of giving useful instruction to the children, went on in full swing. 'Handsomely mottled with darker brown; a ruminating animal; so gentle that in spite of its size, none of my little friends need be alarmed at its vicinity. Inhabits the African deserts, but may be bred in more temperate latitudes. I myself saw an individual in the Jardin des Plantes, which was popularly said never to bend its neck to the ground, but I consider this a vulgar delusion, for on offering it food, it mildly inclined its head.'

'Let us hope the present specimen is equally condescending,' said Mr. Ferrars.

'Eh! what! I see myself!' said Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy, with a tone so inappreciably grand in mystification, that the showman had no choice but to share the universal convulsion of laughter, while Willie rolling on the floor with ecstasy, shouted, 'Yes, it is you that are the thing with such a long name that it can't bend its head to the ground!'

'But too good-natured to be annoyed at folly,' said Mr. Ferrars, perceiving that it was no sport to him.

'This is the way my mischievous uncle has served us all in turn,' said Lucy, advancing; 'we have all been shown up, and there was mamma a monkey, and I an argus pheasant--'

'Ah! I see,' said the gentleman. 'These are your rural pastimes of the season. Yes, I can take my share in good part, just as I have pelted the masks at the Carnival.'

'Even a giraffe can bend his head and do at Rome as Rome does,' murmured Ulick. But instead of heeding the audacious Irishman,

Algernon patronized the showman by thanks for his exhibition; and then sitting down by Lucy, asked if he had ever told her of the tricks that he and il Principe Odorico Moretti used to play at Ems on the old Baron Sprawlowsky, while Mr. Ferrars, leaning over his sister's chair, said aside, 'I beg your pardon, Albinia; I should not have yielded to Willie. This "rural pastime" is only in season en famille.'

'Never mind, it served him right.'

'It may have served him right, but had we the right to serve him?'

'I forgive your prudence for the sake of your folly. Could not Oxford have lessened his pomposity?'

'It comes too late,' said Maurice.

Before Ulick went to bed his pen and ink had depicted the entire caravan. The love-birds were pressed up together, with the individual features of the two young ladies, and completely little parrots; the snipe ran along the bars of the cage, looking exactly like all the O'Mores. The monkey showed nothing but the hands, but one held Maurice, and the other was clenched as if to cuff him, and grandest of all was, as in duty bound, *Camelopardelis giraffa*, thrown somewhat backwards, with such a majestic form, such a stalking attitude, loftily ruminating face, and legs so like the Cavendish Dusautoy's last new pair of trousers, that Albinia could not help reserving it for the private delectation of his Aunt Fanny.

'It and its young one,' said Mr. Kendal, as he looked at her portrait; and the name delighted him so much, that he for some time applied it with a smile whenever his wife gave him cause to remember how much there was of the monkey in her composition.

It was the merriest Christmas ever known at Willow Lawn, and the first time there had been anything of the atmosphere of family frolic and fun. The lighting up of Sophy was one great ingredient; hitherto mirth had been merely endured by her, whereas now, improved health and spirits had made her take her share, amuse others and be amused, and cease to be hurt by the jarring of chance words. Lucy was lively as usual, but rather more excited than Albinia altogether liked; she was doubly particular about her dress; more disdainful of the common herd, and had a general air of exaltation that made Albinia rejoice when the Polysyllable, the horses, the key-bugle, and genre painting disappeared from the Bayford horizon.

CHAPTER XX.

If the end of the vacation were a relief on Lucy's account, Albinia would gladly have lengthened it on Gilbert's. Letters from his tutor had disquieted his father; there had been an expostulation followed by promises, and afterwards one of the usual scenes of argument, complaint, excuse, lamentation, and wish to amend; but lastly, a murmur that it was no use to talk to a father who had never been at

the University, and did not know what was expected of a man.

The aspect of Oxford had changed in Albinia's eyes since the days of her brother. Alma Mater had been a vision of pealing bells, chanting voices, cloistered shades, bright waters--the source of her most cherished thoughts, the abode of youth walking in the old paths of pleasantness and peace; and she knew that to faithful hearts, old Oxford was still the same. But to her present anxious gaze it had become a field of snares and temptations, whither she had been the means of sending one, unguarded and unstable.

Once under the influence of a good sound-hearted friend, he might have been easily led right, but his intimacy with young Dusautoy seemed to cancel all hope of this, and to be like a rope about his neck, drawing him into the same career, and keeping aloof all better influences. Algernon, with his pride, pomposity, and false refinement, was more likely to run into ostentations expenditure, than into coarse dissipation, and it might still be hoped that the two youths would drag through without public disgrace; but this was felt to be a very poor hope by those who felt each sin to be a fatal blot, and trembled at the self-indulgent way of life that might be a more fatal injury than even the ban of the authorities.

She saw that the anxiety pressed heavily on Mr. Kendal, and though both shrank from giving their uneasiness force by putting it into words, each felt that it was ever-present with the other. Mr. Kendal was deeply grieving over the effects, for the former state of ignorance and apathy of the evils of which he had only recently become fully sensible. Living for himself alone, without cognizance of his membership in one great universal system, he had needed the sense of churchmanship to make him act up to his duties as father, neighbour, citizen, and man of property; and when aroused, he found that the time of his inaction had bound him about with fetters. A tone of mind had grown up in his family from which only Sophy had been entirely freed; seeds of ineradicable evil had been sown, mischiefs had grown by neglect, abuses been established by custom; and his own personal disadvantages, his mauvaise honte, his reserved, apparently proud manner, his slowness of speech, dislike to interruption, and over-vehemence when excited, had so much increased upon him, as, in spite of his efforts, to be serious hindrances. Kind, liberal, painstaking, and conscientious as he had become, he was still looked upon as hard, stern, and tyrannical. His ten years of inertness had strewn his path with thorns and briars, even beyond his own household; and when he looked back to his neglect of his son, he felt that even the worst consequences would be but just retribution.

Once such feelings would have wrapt him in morbid gloom; now he strove against his disposition to sit inert and hidden, he did his work manfully, and endeavoured not to let his want of spirits sadden the household.

Nor was he insensible to the cheerful healthy atmosphere of animation which had diffused itself there; and the bright discussions of the trifling interests of the day. Ulick O'More was also a care to him, which did him a great deal of good.

That young gentleman now lived at his lodgings, but was equally at home at Willow Lawn, and his knock at the library door, when he

wished to change a book, usually led to some 'Prometheus' discussion, and sometimes to a walk, if Mr. Kendal thought him looking pale; or to dining and to spending the evening.

His scrapes were peculiar. He had thoroughly mastered his work, and his active mind wanted farther scope, so that he threw himself with avidity into deeper studies, and once fell into horrible disgrace for being detected with a little Plato on his desk. Mr. Goldsmith nearly gave him up in despair, and pronounced that he would never make a man of business. He made matters worse by replying that this was the best chance of his not being a man of speculation. If he were allowed to think of nothing but money, he should speculate for the sake of something to do!

Before Mr. Goldsmith had half recovered the shock, Mr. Dusautoy and Mr. Hope laid violent hands upon young O'More for the evening school twice a week, which almost equally discomposed his aunt. She had never got over the first blow of Mr. Dusautoy's innovations, and felt as if her nephew had gone over to the enemy. She was doubly ungracious at the Sunday dinner, and venomously critical of the choir's chanting, Mr. Hope's voice, and the Vicar's sermons.

The worst scrape came in March. The Willow Lawn ladies were in the lower end of the garden, which, towards the river, was separated from the lane that continued Tibb's Alley, by a low wall surmounted by spikes, and with a disused wicket, always locked, and nearly concealed by a growth of laurels; when out brake a horrible hullabaloo in that region of evil report, the shouts and yells coming nearer, and becoming so distinct that they were about to retreat, when suddenly a dark figure leapt over the gate, and into the garden, amid a storm of outcries. As he disappeared among the laurels, Albinia caught up Maurice, Lucy screamed and prepared to fly, and Sophy started forward, exclaiming, 'It is Ulick, mamma; his face is bleeding!' But as he emerged, she retreated, for she had a nervous terror of the canine race, and in his hand, at arm's length he held by the neck a yellow dog, a black pot dangling from its tail.

'Take care,' he shouted, as Albinia set down Maurice, and was running up to him; 'he may be mad.'

Maurice was caught up again, Lucy shrieked, and Sophy, tottering against an apple-tree, faintly said, 'He has bitten you!'

'No, not he; it was only a stone,' said Ulick, as best he might, with a fast bleeding upper lip. 'They were hunting the poor beast to death--I believe he's no more mad than I am--only with the fright--but best make sure.'

'Fetch some milk, Lucy,' said Albinia. 'Take Maurice with you. No, don't take the poor thing down to the river, he'll only think you are going to drown him. Go, Maurice dear.'

Maurice safe, Albinia was able to find ready expedients after Sir Fowell Buxton's celebrated example. She brought Ulick the gardener's thick gauntlets from the tool-house, and supplied him with her knife, with which he set the poor creature free from the instrument of torture, and then let him loose, with a pan of milk before him, in the old-fashioned summer-house, through the window of which he could observe his motions, and if he looked dangerous, shoot him.

Nothing could look less dangerous; the poor creature sank down on the floor and moaned, licked its hind leg, and then dragged itself as if famished to the milk, lapped a little eagerly, but lay down again whining, as if in pain. Ulick and Albinia called to it, and it looked up and tried to wag its tail, whining appealingly. 'My poor brute!' he cried, 'they've treated you worse than a heathen. That's all--let me see what I can do for you.'

'Yes, but yourself, Ulick,' said Albinia, as in his haste he took down his handkerchief from his mouth; 'I do believe your lip is cut through! You had better attend to that first.'

'No, no, thank you,' said Ulick, eagerly, 'they've broken the poor wretch's leg!' and he was the next moment sitting on the summer-house floor, lifting up the animal tenderly, regardless of her expostulation that the injured, frightened creature might not know its friends. But she did it injustice; it wagged its stumpy tail, and licked his fingers.

She offered to fetch rag for his surgery, and he farther begged for some slight bits of wood to serve as splints, he and his brothers had been dog-doctors before. As she hurried into the house, Sophy, who had sunk on a sofa in the drawing-room, looking deadly pale, called out, 'Is he bitten?'

'No, no,' cried Albinia, hurrying on, 'the dog is all safe. It has only got a broken leg.'

Maurice, with whom Lucy had all this time been fighting, came out with her to see the rest of the adventure; and thought it very cruel that he was not permitted to touch the patient, which bore the operation with affecting fortitude and gratitude, and was then consigned to a basket lined with hay, and left in the summer-house, Mr. Kendal being known to have an almost eastern repugnance to dogs.

Then Ulick had leisure to be conducted to the morning-room, and be rendered a less ghastly spectacle, by some very uncomfortable sticking-plaster moustaches, which hardly permitted him to narrate his battle distinctly. He thought the boys, even of Tibb's Alley, would hardly have ventured any violence after he had interfered, but for some young men who ought to have known better; he fancied he had seen young Tritton of Robbles Leigh, and he was sure of an insolent groom whom Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy, to the great vexation of his uncle, had recently sent down with a horse to the King's Head. They had stimulated the boys to a shout of Paddy and a shower of stones, and Ulick expected credit for great discretion, in having fled instead of fought. 'Ah! if Brian and Connel had but been there, wouldn't we have put them to the rout?'

Nothing would then serve him but going back to Tibb's Alley to trace the dog's history, and meantime Lucy, from the end of the passage, beckoned to Albinia, and whispered mysteriously that 'Sophy would not have any one know it for the world--but,' said Lucy, 'I found her absolutely fainting away on the sofa, only she would not let me call you, and ordered that no one should know anything about it. But, mamma, there was a red-hot knitting-needle sticking out of the fire, and I am quite sure that she meant if Ulick was bitten, to burn out the place.'

Albinia believed Sophy capable of both the resolution and its consequence; but she agreed with Lucy that no notice should be taken, and would not seem aware that Sophy was much paler than usual.

The dog, as well as Ulick could make out, was a waif or stray, belonging to a gipsy deported that morning by the police, and on whom its master's sins had been visited. So without scruple he carried the basket home to his lodgings, and on the way, had the misfortune to encounter his uncle, while shirtfront, coat, and waistcoat were fresh from the muddy and bloody fray, and his visage in the height of disfigurement.

Mr. Goldsmith looked on the whole affair as an insult to every Goldsmith of past ages! A mere street row! He ordered Mr. More to his lodgings, and said he should hear from him to-morrow. Ulick came down to Willow Lawn in the dark, almost considering himself as dismissed, not knowing whether to be glad or sorry; and wanting to consult Mr. Kendal whether it would be possible to work his way at college as Mr. Hope had done, or even wondering whether he might venture to beg for a recommendation to 'Kendal and Kendal.'

Mr. Kendal was so strongly affected, that he took up his hat and went straight to Mr. Goldsmith, 'to put the matter before him in a true light.'

True light or false, it was intolerable in the banker's eyes, and it took a great deal of eloquence to persuade him that his nephew was worth a second trial. Fighting in Tibb's Alley over a gipsy's dog, and coming back looking like a ruffian! Mr. Goldsmith wished him no harm, but it would be a disgrace to the concern to keep him on, and Miss Goldsmith, whom Mr. Kendal heartily wished to gag, chimed in with her old predictions of the consequences of her poor sister's foolish marriage. The final argument, was Mr. Kendal's declaration of the testimonials with which he would at once send him out to Calcutta, to take the situation once offered to his own son. No sooner did Mr. Goldsmith hear that his nephew had an alternative, than he promised to be lenient, and finally dispatched a letter to U. More, Esquire, with a very serious rebuke, but a promise that his conduct should be overlooked, provided the scandal were not repeated, and he should not present himself at the bank till his face should be fit to be seen.

Mr. Kendal mounted him the next morning on Gilbert's horse, and sent him to Fairmead. The dog was left in charge of Bridget, who treated it with abundant kindness, but failed to obtain the exclusive affection which the poor thing lavished upon its rescuer. By the time Ulick came home, it had arrived at limping upon three legs, and was bent on following him wherever he went. Disreputable and heinously ugly it was, of tawny currish yellow (whence it was known as the Orange-man), with a bull-dog countenance; and the legs that did not limp were bandy. Albinia called it the Tripod, but somehow it settled into the title of Hyder Ali, to which it was said to 'answer' the most readily, though it would in fact answer anything from Ulick, and nothing from any one else..

Ever at his heels, the 'brazen Tripod' contrived to establish an entrance at Willow Lawn; scratched till Mr. Kendal would interrupt a 'Prometheus talk' to let him in at the library door; and gradually

made it a matter of course to come into the drawing-room, and repose upon Sophy's flounces.

This was by way of compensation for his misadventures elsewhere. He was always bringing Ulick into trouble; shut or tie him up as he might, he was sure to reappear when least wanted. He had been at church, he had been in Miss Goldsmith's drawing-room, he had been found times without number curled up under Ulick's desk. Mr. Goldsmith growled hints about hanging him, and old Mr. Johns, who really was fond of his bright young fellow clerk, gave grave counsel; but Ulick only loved his protegee the better, and after having exhausted an Irish vocabulary of expostulation, succeeded in prevailing on him to come no farther than the street; except on very wet days, when he would sometimes be found on the mat in the entry, looking deplorably beseeching, and bringing on his master an irate, 'Here's that dog again!'

'Would that no one fell into worse scrapes,' sighed Mr. Dusautoy, when he heard of Ulick's disasters with Hyder Ali, and it was a sigh that the house of Kendal re-echoed.

Nobody could be surprised when, towards the long vacation, tidings came to Bayford, that after long forbearance on the part of the authorities, the insubordination and riotous conduct of the two young men could be endured no longer. It appeared that young Dusautoy, with his weak head and obstinate will, had never attempted to bend to rules, but had taken every reproof as an insult and defiance. Young men had not been wanting who were ready to take advantage of his lavish expenditure, and to excite his disdain for authorities. They had promoted the only wit he did understand, broad practical jokes and mischief; and had led him into the riot and gambling to which he was not naturally prone. Gilbert Kendal, with more sense and principle, had been led on by the contagion around him, and at last an outrageous wine party had brought matters to a crisis. The most guilty were the most cunning, and the only two to whom the affair could actually be brought home, were Dusautoy and Kendal. The sentence was rustication, and the tutor wrote to Mr. Dusautoy, as the least immediately affected, to ask him to convey the intelligence to Mr. Kendal.

The vicar was not a man to shrink from any task, however painful, but he felt it the more deeply, as, in spite of his partiality, he was forced to look on his own favourite Algernon as the misleader of Gilbert; and when he overtook the sisters on his melancholy way down the hill, he consulted them how their father would bear it.

'Oh! I don't know,' said Lucy; 'he'll be terribly angry. I should not wonder if he sent Gilbert straight off to India; should you, Sophy?'

'I hope he will do nothing in haste,' exclaimed Mr. Dusautoy. 'I do believe if those two lads were but separated, or even out of such company, they would both do very well.'

'Yes,' exclaimed Lucy; 'and, after all, they are such absurd regulations, treating men like schoolboys, wanting them to keep such regular troublesome hours. Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy told me that there was no enduring the having everything enforced.'

'If things had been enforced on poor Algernon earlier, this might never have been,' sighed his uncle.

'I'm sure I don't see why papa should mind it so much,' continued Lucy. 'Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy told me his friend Lord Reginald Raymond had been rusticated twice, and expelled at last.'

'What do you think of it, Sophy?' asked the vicar, anxiously.

'I don't feel as if any of us could ever look up again,' she answered very low.

'Why, no; not that exactly. It is not quite the right way to take these things, Sophy,' said Mr. Dusautoy. 'Boys may be very foolish and wrong-headed, without disgracing their family.'

Sophy did not answer--it was all too fresh and sore, and she did not find much consolation in the number of youths whom Lucy reckoned up as having incurred the like penalty. When they entered the house, and Mr. Dusautoy knocked at the library door, she followed Lucy into the garden, without knowing where she was going, and threw herself down upon the grass, miserable at the pain which was being inflicted upon her father, and with a hardened resentful feeling, between contempt and anger, against the brother, who, for very weakness, could so dishonour and grieve him. She clenched her hand in the intensity of her passionate thoughts and impulses, and sat like a statue, while Lucy, from time to time, between the tying up of flowers and watering of annuals, came up with inconsistent exhortations not to be so unhappy--for it was not expulsion--it was sure to be unjust--nobody would think the worse of them because young men were foolish--all men of spirit did get into scrapes--

It was lucky for Lucy that all this passed by Sophy's ear as unheeded as the babbling of the brook. She did not move, till roused by Ulick O'More, coming up from the bridge, telling that he had met some Irish haymakers in the meadows, and saying he wanted to beg a frock for one of their children.

'I think I can find you one,' said Lucy, 'if you will wait a minute; but don't go in, Mr. Dusautoy is there.'

'Is anything the matter?' he exclaimed.

'Every one must soon know,' said Lucy; 'it is of no use to keep it back, Sophy. Only my brother and Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy have got into a scrape about a wine party, and are going to be rusticated. But wait, I'll fetch the frock.'

Sophy had almost run away while her sister spoke, but the kind look of consternation and pity on Ulick's face deterred her, he in soliloquy repeated, as if confounded by the greatness of the misfortune, 'Poor Gilbert!'

'Poor Gilbert!' burst from Sophy in irritation at misplaced sympathy; 'I thought it would be papa and mamma you cared for!'

'With reason,' returned Ulick, 'but I was thinking how it must break his heart to have pained such as they.'

'I wish he would feel it thus,' exclaimed Sophy; 'but he never will!'

'Oh! banish that notion, Sophy,' cried Ulick, recoiling at the indignation in her dark eyes, 'next to grieving my mother, I declare nothing could crush me like meeting a look such as that from a sister of mine.'

'How can I help it?' she said, reserve breaking down in her vehemence, 'when I think how much papa has suffered--how much Gilbert has to make up to him--how mamma took him for her own--how they have borne with him, and set their happiness on him, and yielded to his fancies, only for him to disappoint them so cruelly, and just because he can't say No! I hope he wont come home; I shall never know how to speak to him !'

'But all that makes it so much the worse for him,' said Ulick, in a tone of amazement.

'Yes, you can't understand,' she answered; 'if he had had one spark of feeling like you, he would rather have died than have gone on as he has done.'

'Surely many a man may be overtaken in a fault, and never be wrong at heart,' said Ulick. 'There's many a worse sin than what the world sets a blot upon, and I believe that is just why homes were made.'

Lucy came back with the frock, and Ulick, thanking her, sped away; while Sophy slowly went upstairs and hid herself on her couch. For a woman to find a man thinking her over-hard and severe, is sure either to harden or to soften her very decidedly, and it was a hard struggle which would be the effect. There was an inclination at first to attribute his surprise to the lax notions and foolish fondness of his home, where no doubt far worse disorders than Gilbert's were treated as mere matters of course. But such strong pity for the offender did not seem to accord with this; and the more she thought, the more sure she became that it was the fresh charity and sweetness of an innocent spirit, 'believing all things,' and separating the fault from the offender. His words had fallen on her ear in a sense beyond what he meant. Pride and uncharitable resentment might be worse sins than mere weakness and excess. She thought of the elder son in the parable, who, unknowing of his brother's temptation and sorrow, closed his heart against his return; and if her tears would have come, she would have wept that she could not bring herself to look on Gilbert otherwise than as the troubler of her father's peace.

When her mother at last came upstairs, she only ventured to ask gently, 'How does papa bear it?'

'It did not come without preparation,' was the answer; 'and at first we were occupied with comforting Mr. Dusautoy, who takes to himself all the shame his nephew will not feel, for having drawn poor Gilbert into such a set.'

'And papa?' still asked Sophy.

'He is very quiet, and it is not easy to tell. I believe it was a great mistake, though not of his making, to send Gilbert to Oxford at all, and I doubt whether he will ever go back again.'

'Oh, mamma, not conquer this, and live it down!' cried Sophy; but then changing, she sighed and said, 'If he would--'

'Yes, a great deal depends upon how he may take this, and what becomes of Algernon Dusautoy; though I suppose there is no lack of other tempters. Your papa has even spoken of India again; he still thinks he would be more guarded there, but all depends on the spirit in which we find him. One thing I hope, that I shall leave it all to his father's judgment, and not say one word.'

The next post brought a penitent letter from Gilbert, submitting completely to his father; only begging that he might not see any one at home until he should have redeemed his character, and promising to work very hard and deny himself all relaxation if he might only go to a tutor at a distance.

This did not at all accord with Mr. Kendal's views. He had an unavowed distrust of Gilbert's letters, he did not fancy a tutor thus selected, and believed the boy to be physically incapable of the proposed amount of study. So he wrote a very grave but merciful summons to Willow Lawn.

Albinia went to meet the delinquent at Hadminster, and was struck by the different deportment of the two youths. Algernon Dusautoy, whose servant had met him, sauntered up to her as if nothing had happened, carelessly hoped all were well at Bayford, and, in spite of her exceeding coldness, talked on with perfect ease upon the chances of a war with Russia, and had given her three or four maxims, before Gilbert came up with the luggage van, with a bag in his hand, and a hurried bewildered manner, unable to meet her eye. He handed her into the carriage, seated himself beside her, and drove off without one unnecessary word, while Algernon, mounting his horse, waved them a disengaged farewell, and cantered on. Albinia heard a heavy sigh, and saw her companion very wan and sorrowful, dejection in every feature, in the whole stoop of his figure, and in the nervous twitch of his hands. The contrast gave an additional impulse to her love and pity, and the first words she said were, 'Your father is quite ready to forgive.'

'I knew he would be so,' he answered, hardly able to command his voice; 'I knew you would all be a great deal too kind to me, and that is the worst of all.'

'No, Gilbert, not if it gives you resolution to resist the next time.'

He groaned; and it was not long before she drew from him a sincere avowal of his follies and repentance. He had been led on by assurances that 'every one' did the like, by fear of betraying his own timidity, by absurd dread of being disdained as slow; all this working on his natural indolence and love of excitement, had combined to involve him in habits which had brought on him this disgrace. It was a hopeful sign that he admitted its justice, and accused no one of partiality; the reprimand had told upon him, and he was too completely struck down even to attempt to justify himself; exceedingly afraid of his father, and only longing to hide himself. Such was his utter despair, that Albinia had no scruples in encouraging him, and assuring him with all her heart, that if taken rightly, the shock that brought him to his senses, might be the

blessing of his life. He did not take comfort readily, though soothed by her kindness; he could not get over his excessive dread of his father, and each attempt at reassurance fell short. At last it came out that the very core of his misery was this, that he had found himself for part of the journey, in the same train with Miss Durant and two or three children. He could not tell her where he was going nor why, and he had leant back in the carriage, and watched her on the platform by stealth, as she moved about, 'lovelier and more graceful than ever!' but how could he present himself to her in his disgrace and misery? 'Oh, Mrs. Kendal, I forgive my father, but my life was blighted when I was cut off from her!'

'No, Gilbert, you are wrong. There is no blighting in a worthy, disinterested attachment. To be able to love and respect such a woman is a good substantial quality in you, and ought to make you a higher and better man.'

Gilbert turned round a face of extreme amazement. 'I thought,' he said, 'I thought you--' and went no farther.

'I respect your feeling for her more than when it was two years younger,' she said; 'I should respect it doubly if instead of making you ashamed, it had saved you from the need of shame.'

'Do you give me any hope?' cried Gilbert, his face gleaming into sudden eager brightness.

'Things have not become more suitable,' said Albinia; and his look lapsed again into despondency; but she added, 'Each step towards real manhood, force of character, and steadiness, would give you weight which might make your choice worth your father's consideration, and you worth that of Genevieve.'

'Oh! would you but have told me so before!'

'It was evident to your own senses,' said Albinia; and she thought of the suggestion that Sophy had made.

'Too late! too late!' sighed Gilbert.

'No, never too late! You have had a warning; you are very young, and it cannot be too late for winning a character, and redeeming the time!'

'And you tell me I may love her!' repeated Gilbert, so intoxicated with the words, that she became afraid of them.

'I do not tell you that you may importune her, or disobey your father. I only tell you that to look up and work and deny yourself, in honour of one so truly noble, is one of the best and most saving of secondary motives. I shall honour you, Gilbert, if you do so use it as to raise and support you, though of course I cannot promise that she can be earned by it, and even that motive will not do alone, however powerful you may think it.'

Neither of them said more, but Gilbert sighed heavily several times, and would willingly have checked their homeward speed. He grew pale as they entered the town, and groaned as the gates swung back, and they rattled over the wooden bridge. It was about four o'clock, and

he said, hurriedly, as with a sort of hope, 'I suppose they are all out.'

He was answered by a whoop of ecstasy, and before he was well out of the carriage, he was seized by the joyous Maurice, shouting that he had been for a ride with papa, without a leading rein. Happy age for both, too young to know more than that the beloved playfellow was at home again!

Little Albinia studied her brother till the small memory came back, and she made her pretty signs for the well-remembered dancing in his arms. From such greetings, Gilbert's wounded spirit could not shrink, much as he dreaded all others; and, carrying the baby and preceded by Maurice, while he again muttered that of course no one was at home, he went upstairs.

Albinia meantime tapped at the library door. She knew Mr. Kendal to be there, yearning to forgive, but thinking it right to have his pardon sought; and she went in to tell him of his son's keen remorse, and deadly fear. Displeased and mournful, Mr. Kendal sighed. 'He has little to fear from me, would he but believe so! He ought to have come to me, but--'

That 'but' meant repentance for over-sternness in times past.

'Let me send him to you.'

'I will come,' said Mr. Kendal, willing to spare his son the terror of presenting himself.

There was a pretty sight in the morning-room. Gilbert was on the floor with the two children, Maurice intent on showing how nearly little Albinia could run alone, and between ordering and coaxing, drawing her gently on; her beautiful brown eyes opened very seriously to the great undertaking, and her round soft hands, with a mixture of confidence and timidity, trusted within the sturdy ones of her small elder, while Gilbert knelt on one knee, and stretched out a protecting arm, really to grasp the little one, if the more childish brother should fail her, and his countenance, lighted up with interest and affection, was far more prepossessing than when so lately it had been, full of cowering, almost abject apprehension.

Was it a sort of instinctive feeling that the little sister would be his best shelter, that made him gather the child into his arms, and hold her before his deeply blushing face as he rose from the floor? She merrily called out, 'Papa!' Maurice loudly began to recount her exploits, and thus passed the salutation, at the end of which Gilbert found that his father was taking the little one from him, and giving her to her mother, who carried her away, calling Maurice with her.

'Have you nothing to say to me?' said Mr. Kendal, after waiting for some moments; but as Gilbert only looked up to him with a piteous, scared, uncertain glance, he added; 'You need not fear me; I believe you have erred more from weakness than from evil inclinations, and I trust in the sincerity of your repentance.'

These kind words softened Gilbert; he assured his father of his thanks for his kindness, no one could grieve more deeply, or be more anxious to atone in any possible manner for what he had unwittingly

done.

'I believe you, Gilbert,' said his father; 'but you well know that the only way of atoning for the past, as well as of avoiding such wretchedness and disgrace for the future, is to show greater firmness.'

'I know it is,' said Gilbert, sorrowfully.

'I cannot look into your heart,' added Mr. Kendal. 'I can only hope and believe that your grief for the sin is as deep, or deeper, than that for the public stigma, for which comparatively, I care little.'

Gilbert exclaimed that so indeed it was, and this was no more than the truth. Out of sight of temptation, and in that pure atmosphere, the loud revel and coarse witticisms that had led him on, were only loathsome and disgusting, and made him miserable in the recollection.

'I am ready to submit to anything,' he added, fervently. 'As long as you forgive me, I am ready to bear anything.'

'I forgive you from my heart,' said Mr. Kendal, warmly. 'I only wish to consider what may be most expedient for you. I should scarcely like to send you back to Oxford to retrieve your character, unless I were sure that you would be more resolute in resisting temptation. No, do not reply; your actions during this time of penance will be a far more satisfactory answer than any promises. I had thought of again applying to your cousin John, to take you into his bank, though you could not now go on such terms as you might have done when there was no error in the background, and I still sometimes question whether it be not the safer method.'

'Whatever you please,' said Gilbert; 'I deserve it all.'

'Nay, do not look upon my decision, whatever it may be, as punishment, but only as springing from my desire for your real welfare. I will write to your cousin and ask whether he still has a vacancy, but without absolutely proposing you to him, and we will look on the coming months as a period of probation, during which we may judge what may be the wisest course. I will only ask one other question, Gilbert, and you need not be afraid to answer me fully and freely. Have you any debts at Oxford?'

'A few,' stammered Gilbert, with a great effort.

'Can you tell me to whom, and the amount?'

He tried to recollect as well as he could, while completely frightened and confused by the gravity with which his father was jotting them down in his pocket-book.

'Well, Gilbert,' he concluded, 'you have dealt candidly with me, and you shall never have cause to regret having done so. And now we will only feel that you are at home, and dwell no longer on the cause that has brought you. Come out, and see what we have been doing in the meadow.'

Gilbert seemed more overthrown and broken down by kindness than by reproof. He hardly exerted himself even to play with Maurice, or to

amuse his grandmother; and though his sisters treated him as usual, he never once lifted up his eyes to meet Sophy's glance, and scarcely used his voice.

Nothing could be more disarming than such genuine sorrow; and Sophy, pardoning him with all her heart, and mourning for her past want of charity, watched him, longing to do something for his comfort, and to evince her tenderness; but only succeeded in encumbering every petty service or word of intercourse with a weight of sad consciousness.

CHAPTER XXI.

'I had almost written to ask your pardon,' said Mrs. Dusautoy, as Albinia entered her drawing-room on the afternoon following. 'I should like by way of experiment to know what would put that boy out of countenance. He listened with placid graciousness to his uncle's lecture, and then gave us to understand that he was obliged for his solicitude, and that there was a great deal of jealousy and misrepresentation at Oxford; but he thought it best always to submit to authorities, however unreasonable. And this morning, after amiably paying his respects to me, he said he was going to inquire for Gilbert. I intimated that Willow Lawn was the last place where he would be welcome, but he was far above attending to me. Did Gilbert see him?'

'Gilbert was in the garden with us when we were told he was in the house. Poor fellow, he shuddered, and looked as if he wanted me to guard him, so I sent him out walking with Maurice while I went in, and found Lucy entertaining the gentleman. I made myself as cold and inhospitable as I could, but I am afraid he rather relishes a dignified retinue.'

'Poor boy! I wonder what on earth is to be done with him. I never before knew what John's love and patience were.'

'Do you think he will remain here?'

'I cannot tell; we talk of tutors, but John is really, I believe, happier for having him here, and besides one can be sure the worst he is doing is painting a lobster. However, much would depend on what you and Mr. Kendal thought. If he and Gilbert were doing harm to each other, everything must give way.'

'If people of that age will not keep themselves out of harm's way, nobody can do it for them,' said Albinia, 'and as long as Gilbert continues in his present mood, there is more real separation in voluntarily holding aloof, than if they were sent far apart, only to come together again at college.'

Gilbert did continue in the same mood. The tender cherishing of his home restored his spirits; but he was much subdued, and deeply grateful, as he manifested by the most eager and affectionate courtesy, such as made him almost the servant of everybody, without any personal aim or object, except to work up his deficient studies,

and to avoid young Dusautoy. He seemed to cling to his family as his protectors, and to follow the occupations least likely to lead to a meeting with the Polysyllable; he was often at church in the week, rode with his father, went parish visiting with the ladies, and was responsible when Maurice fished for minnows in the meadows. Nothing could be more sincerely desirous to atone for the past and enter on a different course, and no conduct could be more truly humble or endearing.

The imaginary disdain of Ulick O'More was entirely gone, and perceiving that the Irishman's delicacy was keeping him away from Willow Lawn, Gilbert himself met him and brought him home, in the delight of having heard of a naval cadetship having been offered to his brother, and full of such eager joy as longed for sympathy.

'Happy fellow!' Gilbert murmured to himself.

Younger in years, more childish in character, poor Gilbert had managed to make his spirit world-worn and weary, compared with the fresh manly heart of the Irishman, all centered in the kindred 'points of Heaven and home,' and enjoying keenly, for the very reason that he bent dutifully with all his might to a humble and uncongenial task.

Yet somehow, admire and esteem as he would, there arose no intimacy or friendship between Gilbert and Ulick; their manners were frank and easy, but there was no spontaneous approach, no real congeniality, nor exchange of mind and sympathy as between Ulick and Mr. Kendal. Albinia had a theory that the friendship was too much watched to take; Sophy hated herself for the recurring conviction that 'Gilbert was not the kind of stuff,' though she felt day by day how far he excelled her in humility, gentleness, and sweet temper.

When the Goldsmiths gave their annual dinner-party, Albinia felt a sudden glow at the unexpected sight of Ulick O'More.

'I am only deputy for the Orange man,' he said; 'it is Hyder Ali who ought to be dining here! Yes, it is his doing, I'd back him against any detective!'

'What heroism have you been acting together?'

'We had just given Farmer Martin L120 in notes, when as he went out, we heard little Hyder growling and giving tongue, and a fellow swearing as if he was at the fair of Monyveagh, and the farmer hallooing thieves. I found little Hyder had nailed the rascal fast by the leg, just as he had the notes out of the farmer's pouch. I collared him, Johns ran for the police, and the rascal is fast.'

'What a shame to cheat Mr. Kendal of the committal.'

'The policeman said he was gone out, so we had the villain up to the Admiral with the greater satisfaction, as he was a lodger in one of the Admiral's pet public-houses in Tibb's Alley.'

'Ah, when Gilbert is of age,' said Albinia, 'woe to Tibb's! So you are a testimonial to the Tripod?'

'So I suspect, for I found an invitation when I came home, I would

have run down to tell you, but I had been kept late, and one takes some getting up for polite society.'

There was a great deal of talk about Hyder's exploit, and some disposition to make Mr. O'More the hero of the day; but this was quickly nipped by his uncle's dry shortness, and the superciliousness with which Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy turned the conversation to the provision of pistols, couriers, and guards, for travelling through the Abruzzi. The polysyllabic courage, and false alarms on such a scale, completely eclipsed a real pick-pocket, caught by a gipsy's cur and a banker's clerk.

Not that Ulick perceived any disregard until later in the evening, when the young Kendals arrived, and of course he wanted each and all to hear of his Tripod's achievement. He met with ready attention from Sophy and Gilbert, who pronounced that as the cat was to Whittington, so was Hyder to O'More; but when in his overflowing he proceeded to Lucy, she had neither eyes nor ears for him, and when the vicar told her Mr. O'More was speaking to her, she turned with an air of petulance, so that he felt obliged to beg her pardon and retreat.

The Bayford parties never lasted later than a few minutes after ten, but when once Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy and Miss Kendal had possession of the piano and guitar, there was no conclusion. Song succeeded song, they wanted nothing save their own harmony, and hardly waited for Miss Goldsmith's sleepy thanks. The vicar hated late hours, and the Kendals felt every song a trespass upon their hosts, but the musicians had their backs to the world, and gave no interval, so that it was eleven o'clock before Mr. Kendal, in desperation, laid his hand on his daughter, and barbarously carried her off.

The flirtation was so palpable, that Albinia mused on the means of repressing it; but she believed that to remonstrate, would only be to give Lucy pleasure, and held her peace till a passion for riding seized upon the young lady. The old pony had hard service between Sophy's needs and Maurice's exactions, but Lucy's soul soared far above ponies, and fastened upon Gilbert's steed.

'And pray what is Gilbert to ride?'

'Oh! papa does not always want Captain, or Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy would lend him Bamfylde.'

'Thank you,' returned Gilbert, satirically.

Next morning Lucy, radiant with smiles, announced that all was settled. Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy's Lady Elmira would be brought down for her to try this afternoon, so Gilbert might keep his own horse and come too, which permission he received with a long whistle and glance at Mrs. Kendal, and then walked out of the room.

'How disobliging!' said Lucy. 'Well then, Sophy, you must make your old hat look as well as you can, for I suppose it will not quite do to go without anyone.'

Sophy, like her brother, looked at Mrs. Kendal, and with an eye of indignant appeal and entreaty, while Albinia's countenance was so full of displeasure, that Lucy continued earnestly, 'O, mamma, you

can't object. You used to go out riding with papa when he was at Colonel Bury's.'

'Well, Lucy!' exclaimed her sister, 'I did not think even you capable of such a comparison.'

'It's all the same,' said Lucy tartly, blushing a good deal.

Sophy leapt up to look at her, and Albinia trying to be calm and judicious, demanded, 'What is the same as what?'

'Why, Algernon and _me_, ' was the equally precise reply.

In stately horror, Sophy rose and seriously marched away, leaving, by her look and manner, a species of awe upon both parties, and some seconds passed ere, with crimson blushes, Albinia ventured to invite the dreaded admission, by demanding, 'Now, Lucy, will you be so good as to tell me the meaning of this extraordinary allusion?'

'Why, to be sure--I know it was very different. Papa was so old, and _there were us_, ' faltered Lucy, 'but I meant, you would know how it all is--how those things--'

'Stop, Lucy, am I to understand by those things, that you wish me to believe you and Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy are on the same terms as--No, I can't say it.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Lucy, growing frightened, 'I never thought there could be such an uproar about my just going out riding.'

'You have led me to infer so much more, that it becomes my duty to have an explanation, at least,' she added, thinking this sounded cold, 'I should have hoped you would have given me your confidence.'

'O, but you always would make game of him!' cried Lucy.

'Not now; this is much too serious, if you have been led to believe that his attentions are not as I supposed, because you are the only girl about here whom he thinks worthy of his notice.'

'It's a great deal more,' said Lucy, with more feeling and less vanity than had yet been apparent.

'And what has he been making you think, my poor child?' said Albinia. 'I know it is very distressing, but it would be more right and safe if I knew what it amounts to.'

'Not much after all,' said Lucy, her tone implying the reverse, and though her cheeks were crimson, not averse to the triumph of the avowal, nor enduring as much embarrassment as her auditor, 'only he made me sure of it--he said--(now, mamma, you have made me, so I must) that he had changed his opinion of English beauty--you know, mamma. And another time he said he had wandered Europe over to--to find loveliness on the banks of the Baye. Wasn't it absurd? And he says he does not think it half so much that a woman should be accomplished herself, as that she should be able to appreciate other people's talents--and once he said the Principessa Bianca di Moretti would be very much disappointed.'

'Well, my dear,' said Albinia, kindly putting her arm round Lucy's waist, 'perhaps by themselves the things did not so much require to be told. I can hardly blame you, and I wish I had been more on my guard, and helped you more. Only if he seems to care so little about disappointing this lady might he not do the same by you?'

'But she's an Italian, and a Roman Catholic,' exclaimed Lucy.

Albinia could not help smiling, and Lucy, perceiving that this was hardly a valid excuse for her utter indifference towards her Grandison's Clementina, continued, 'I mean--of course there was nothing in it.'

'Very possibly; but how would it be, if by-and-by he told somebody that Miss Kendal would be very much disappointed?'

'O, mamma,' cried Lucy, hastily detaching herself, 'you don't know!'

'I cannot tell, my poor Lucy,' said Albinia. 'I fear there must be grief and trouble any way, if you let yourself attend to him, for you know, even if he were in earnest, it would not be right to think of a person who has shown so little wish to be good.'

Lucy stood for a few moments before the sense reached her mind, then she dropped into a chair, and exclaimed,

'I see how it is! You'll treat him as grandpapa treated Captain Pringle, but I shall break my heart, quite!' and she burst into tears.

'My dear, your father and I will do our best for your happiness, and we would never use concealment. Whatever we do shall be as Christian people working together, not as tyrants with a silly girl.'

Lucy was pleased, and let Albinia take her hand.

'Then I will write to decline the horse. It would be far too marked.'

'But oh, mamma! you wont keep him away!'

'I shall not alter our habits unless I see cause. He is much too young for us to think seriously of what he may have said; and I entreat you to put it out of your mind, for it would be very sad for you to fix your thoughts on him, and then find him not in earnest, and even if he were, you know it would be wrong to let affection grow up where there is no real dependence upon a person's goodness.'

The kindness soothed Lucy, and though she shed some tears, she did not resist the decision. Indeed she was sensible of that calm determination of manner, which all the family had learnt to mean that the measures thus taken were unalterable, whereas the impetuous impulses often were reversed.

Many a woman's will is like the tide, ever fretting at the verge of the boundary, but afraid to overpass it, and only tempting the utmost limit in the certainty of the recall, and Lucy perhaps felt a kind of protection in the curb, even while she treated it as an injury. She

liked to be the object of solicitude, and was pleased with Albinia's extra kindness, while, perhaps, there was some excitement in the belief that Algernon was missing her, so she was particularly amenable, and not much out of spirits.

The original Meadows character, and Bayford breeding, had for a time been surmounted by Albinia's influence and training; but so ingrain was the old disposition, that a touch would at once re-awaken it, and the poor girl was in a neutral state, coloured by whichever impression had been most recent. Albinia's hopes of prevailing in the end increased when Mrs. Dusautoy told her, with a look of intelligence, that Algernon was going to stay with a connexion of his mother, a Mr. Greenaway, with six daughters, very stylish young ladies.

Six stylish young ladies! Albinia could have embraced them all, and actually conferred a cordial nod on Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy when she met him on the way home.

But as she entered the house, so ominous a tone summoned her to the library, that she needed not to be told that Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy had been there.

'I told him,' said Mr. Kendal, 'that he was too young for me to entertain his proposal, and I intimated that he had character to redeem before presenting himself in such capacity.'

'I hope you made the refusal evident to his intellect.'

'He drove me to be more explicit than I intended. I think he was astonished. He stared at me for full three minutes before he could believe in the refusal. Poor lad, it must be real attachment, there could be no other inducement.'

'And Lucy is exceedingly pretty.'

Mr. Kendal glanced at the portrait over the mantelpiece smiled sadly, and shook his head.

'Poor dear,' continued Albinia, 'what a commotion there will be in her head; but she has behaved so well hitherto, that I hope we may steer her safely through, above all, if one of the six cousins will but catch him in the rebound! Have you spoken to her?'

'Is it necessary?'

'So asked her grandfather,' said Albinia, smiling, as he, a little out of countenance, muttered something of 'foolish affair--mere child--and turn her head--'

'That's done!' said Albinia, 'we have only to try to get it straight. Besides, it would hardly be just to let her think he had meant nothing, and I have promised to deal openly with her, otherwise we can hardly hope for plain dealing from her.'

'And you think it will be a serious disappointment?'

'She is highly flattered by his attention, but I don't know how deep it may have gone.'

'I wish people would let one's daughters alone!' exclaimed Mr. Kendal. 'You will talk to her then, Albinia, and don't let her think me more harsh than you can help, and come and tell me how she bears it.'

'Won't you speak to her yourself?'

'Do you think I must?' he said, reluctantly; 'you know so much better how to manage her.'

'I think you must do this, dear Edmund,' she said, between decision and entreaty. 'She knows that I dislike the man, and may fancy it my doing it she only hears it at second hand. If you speak, there will be no appeal, and besides there are moments when the really nearest should have no go-betweens.'

'We were not very near without you,' he said. 'If it were Sophy, I should know better what to be about.'

'Sophy would not put you in such a fix.'

'So I have fancied--' he paused, smiling, while she waited in eager curiosity, such as made him finish as if ashamed. 'I have thought our likings much the same. Have you never observed what I mean?'

'Oh! I never observe anything. I did not find out Maurice and Winifred till he told me. Who do you think it is? I always thought love would be the making of Sophy. I see she is another being. What is your guess, Mr. Hope?'

Mr. Kendal made a face of astonishment at such an improbable guess, and was driven into exclaiming, 'How could any one help thinking of O'More?'

'Oh! only too delightful!' cried Albinia. 'Why didn't I think of it--but then his way is so free and cousinly with us all.'

'There may be nothing in it,' said Mr. Kendal; 'and under present circumstances it would hardly be desirable.'

'If old Mr. Goldsmith acts as he ought,' continued Albinia, 'we should never lose our Sophy--and what a son we should have! he has so exactly the bright temper that she needs.'

'Well, well, that is all in the clouds,' said Mr. Kendal. 'I wish the present were equally satisfactory.'

'Ah, I had better call poor Lucy.'

'Come back with her, pray,' called Mr. Kendal, nervously.

Albinia regretted her superfluous gossip when Lucy appeared with eyes so sparkling, and cheeks so flushed, that it was plain that she had been in all the miseries of suspense. Her countenance glowed with feeling, that lifted her beyond her ordinary doll-like prettiness. Albinia's heart sank with compassion as she held her hand, and her father stood as if struck by something more like the vision of his youth than he had been prepared for; each feeling that something

genuine was present, and respecting it accordingly.

'Lucy,' said Mr. Kendal, tenderly, 'I see I need not tell you why I have sent for you. You are very young, my dear, and you must trust us to care for your happiness.'

'Yes.' Lucy looked up wistfully.

'This gentleman has some qualities such as may make him shine in the eyes of a young lady; but it is our duty to look farther, and I am afraid I know nothing of him that could justify me in trusting him with anything so precious to me.'

Lucy's face became full of consternation, her hand lay unnerved in Albinia's pressure, and Mr. Kendal turned his eyes from her to his wife, as he proceeded,

'I have seen so much wretchedness caused by want of religious principle, that even where the morals appeared unblemished, I should feel no confidence where I saw no evidence of religion, and I should consider it as positively wrong to sanction an engagement with such a person. Now you must perceive that we have every means of forming an opinion of this young man, and that he has given us no reason to think he would show the unselfish care for your welfare that we should wish to secure.'

Albinia tried to make it comprehensible. 'You know, my dear, we have always seen him resolved on his own way, and not caring how he may inconvenience his uncle and aunt. We know his temper is not always amiable, and differently as you see him, you must let us judge.'

Wrenching her hand away, Lucy burst into tears. Her father looked at Albinia, as if she ought to have saved him this infliction, and she began a little whispering about not distressing papa, which checked the sobs, and enabled him to say, 'There, that's right, my dear, I see you are willing to submit patiently to our judgment, and I believe you will find it for the best. We will do all in our power to help you, and make you happy,' and bending down he kissed her, and left her to his wife.

In such family scenes, logic is less useful than the power of coming to a friendly conclusion; Lucy's awe of her father was a great assistance, she was touched with his unwonted softness, and did not apprehend how total was the rejection. But what he was spared, was reserved for Albinia. There was a lamentable scene of sobbing and weeping, beyond all argument, and only ending in physical exhaustion, which laid her on the bed all the rest of the day.

Gilbert and Sophy could not but be aware of the cause of her distress. The former thought it a great waste.

'Tell Lucy,' he said, 'that if she wishes to be miserable for life, she has found the best way! He is a thorough-bred tyrant at heart, pig-headed, and obstinate, and with the very worst temper I ever came across. Not a soul can he feel for, nor admire but himself. His wife will be a perfect slave. I declare I would as soon sell her to Legree.'

Sophy's views of the gentleman were not more favourable, but she was

in terror lest Lucy should have a permanently broken heart, after the precedent of Aunt Maria. And on poor Sophy fell the misfortune of being driven up by grandmamma's inquiries, to own that the proposal had been rejected.

Shade of poor dear Mr. Meadows, didst thou not stand aghast! Five thousand a year refused! Grandmamma would have had a fit if she had not conceived a conviction, that imparted a look of shrewdness to her mild, simple old face. Of course Mr. Kendal was only holding off till the young man was a little older. He could have no intention of letting his daughter miss such a match, and dear Lucy would have her carriage, and be presented at court.

Sophy argued vehemently against this, and poor grandmamma, who had with difficulty been taught worldly wisdom as a duty, and always thought herself good when she talked prudently, began to cry. Sophy, quite overcome, was equally distressing with her apologies; Albinia found them both in tears, and Sophy was placed on the sick-list by one of her peculiar headaches of self-reproach.

It was a time of great perplexity. Lucy cried incessantly, bursting out at every trifle, but making no complaints, and submitting so meekly, that the others were almost as unhappy as herself.

She was first cheered by the long promised visit from Mrs. Annesley and Miss Ferrars. Albinia had now no fears of showing off home or children, and it was a great success.

The little Awk was in high beauty, and graciously winning, and Maurice's likeness to his Uncle William enchanted the aunts, though they were shocked at his mamma's indifference to his constant imperilling of life and limb, and grievously discomfited his sisters by adducing children who talked French and read history, whereas he could not read d-o-g without spelling, and had peculiar views as to b and d, p and q. However, if he could not read he could ride, and Mrs. Annesley scarcely knew the extent of the favour she conferred, when she commissioned Gilbert to procure for him a pony as his private property.

Miss Ferrars had not expected one of the thirty-six O'Mores to turn up here. She gave some good advice about hasty intimacies, and as it was received with a defence of the gentility of the O'Mores, the two good ladies agreed that dear Albinia was quite a child still, not fit for the care of those girls, and it would be only acting kindly to take Lucy to Brighton, and show her something of the world, or Albinia would surely let her fall a prey to that Irish clerk.

They liked Lucy's pretty face and obliging ways, and were fond of having a young lady in their house; they saw her looking ill and depressed, and thought sea air would be good for her, and though Lucy fancied herself past caring for gaiety, and was very sorry to leave home and mamma, she was not insensible to the refreshment of her wardrobe, and the excitement and honour of the invitation. At night she cried lamentably, and clung round Albinia's neck, sobbing, 'Oh, mamma, what will become of me without you?' but in the morning she went off in very fair spirits, and Albinia augured hopefully that soon her type of perfection would be no longer Polysyllabic. Her first letters were deplorable, but they soon became cheerful, as her mornings were occupied by lessons in music and drawing, and her

evenings in quiet parties among the friends whom the aunts met at Brighton. Aunt Gertrude wrote to announce that her charge had recovered her looks and was much admired, and this was corroborated by the prosperous complacency of Lucy's style. Albinia was more relieved than surprised when the letters dwindled in length and number, well knowing that the Family Office was not favourable to leisure; and devoid of the epistolary gift herself, she always wondered more at people's writing than at their silence, and scarcely reciprocated Lucy's effusions by the hurried notes which she enclosed in the well-filled envelopes of Gilbert and Sophy, who, like their father, could cover any amount of sheets of paper.

CHAPTER XXII.

'There!' cried Ulick O'More, 'I may wish you all good-bye. There's an end of it.'

Mr. Kendal stood aghast.

'He's insulted my father and my family,' cried Ulick, 'and does he think I'll write another cipher for him?'

'Your uncle?'

'Don't call him my uncle. I wish I'd never set eyes on his wooden old face, to put the family name and honour in the power of such as he.'

'What has he done to you?'

'He has offered to take me as his partner,' cried Ulick, with flashing eyes; and as an outcry arose, not in sympathy with his resentment, he continued vehemently, 'Stay, you have not heard! 'Twas on condition I'd alter my name, leave out the O that has come down to me from them that were kings and princes before his grandfathers broke stones on the road.'

'He offered to take you into partnership,' repeated Mr. Kendal.

'Do you think I could listen to such terms!' cried the indignant lad. 'Give up the O! Why, I would never be able to face my brothers!'

'But, Ulick--'

'Don't talk to me, Mr. Kendal; I wouldn't sell my name if you were to argue to me like Plato, nor if his bank were the Bank of England. I might as well be an Englishman at once.'

'Then this was the insult?'

'And enough too, but it wasn't all. When I answered, speaking as coolly, I assure you, as I'm doing this minute, what does he do, but call it a folly, and taunt us for a crew of Irish beggars! Beggars we may be, but we'll not be bought by him.'

'Well, this must have been an unexpected reception of such a proposal.'

'You may say that! The English think everything may be bought with money! I'd have overlooked his ignorance, poor old gentleman, if he would not have gone and spoken of my O as vulgar. Vulgar! So when I began to tell him how it began from Tigearnach, the O'More of Ballymakilty, that was Tanist of Connaught, in the time of King Mac Murrough, and that killed Phadrig the O'Donoghoe in single combat at the fight of Shoch-knockmorty, and bit off his nose, calling it a sweet morsel of revenge, what does he do but tell me I was mad, and that he would have none of my nonsensical tales of the savage Irish. So I said I couldn't stand to hear my family insulted, and then--would you believe it? he would have it that it was I that was insolent, and when I was not going to apologize for what I had borne from him, he said he had always known how it would be trying to deal with one of our family, no better than making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. "And I'm obliged for the compliment," said I, quite coolly and politely, "but no Irish pig would sell his ear for a purse;" and so I came away, quite civilly and reasonably. Aye, I see what you would do, Mr. Kendal, but I beg with all my heart you won't. There are some things a gentleman should not put up with, and I'll not take it well of you if you call it my duty to hear my father and his family abused. I'll despise myself if I could. _You_ don't--' cried he, turning round to Albinia.

'Oh, no, but I think you should try to understand Mr. Goldsmith's point of view.'

'I understand it only too well, if that would do any good. Point of view--why, 'tis the farmyard cock's point of view, strutting on the top of that bank of his own, and patronizing the free pheasant out in the woods. More fool I for ever letting him clip my wings, but he's seen the last of me. No, don't ask me to make it up. It can't be done--'

'What can be done to the boy?' asked Albinia; 'how can he be brought to hear reason?'

'Leave him alone,' Mr. Kendal said, aside; while Ulick in a torrent of eager cadences protested his perfect sanity and reason, and Mr. Kendal quietly left the room, again to start on a peace-making mission, but it was unpromising, for Mr. Goldsmith began by declaring he would not hear a single word in favour of the ungrateful young dog.

Mr. Kendal gathered that young O'More had become so valuable, and that cold and indifferent as Mr. Goldsmith appeared, he had been growing so fond and so proud of his nephew, as actually to resolve on giving him a share of the business, and dividing the inheritance which had hitherto been destined to a certain Andrew Goldsmith, brought up in a relation's office at Bristol. Surprised at his own graciousness, and anticipating transports of gratitude, his dismay and indignation at the reception of his proposal were extreme, especially as he had no conception of the offence he had given regarding the unfortunate O as a badge of Hibernianism and vulgarity. 'I put it to you, Mr. Kendal, as a sensible man, whether it would not be enough to destroy the credit of the bank to connect it with such a name as that, looking like an Irish haymaker's. I should be ashamed

of every note I issued.'

'It is unlucky,' said Mr. Kendal, 'and a difficulty the lad could hardly appreciate, since it is a good old name, and the O is a special mark of nobility.'

'And what has a banker to do with nobility? Pretty sort of nobility too, at that dog-kennel of theirs in Ireland, and his father, a mere adventurer if ever there lived one! But I swore when he carried off poor Ellen that his speculation should do him no good, and I've kept my word. I wish I hadn't been fool enough to meddle with one of the concern! No, no, 'tis no use arguing, Mr. Kendal, I have done with him! I would not make him a partner, not if he offered to change his name to John Smith! I never thought to meet with such ingratitude, but it runs in the breed! I might have known better than to make much of one of the crew. Yet it is a pity too, we have not had such a clear-headed, trustworthy fellow about the place since young Bowles died; he has a good deal of the Goldsmith in him when you set him to work, and makes his figures just like my poor father. I thought it was his writing the other day till I looked at the date. Clever lad, very, but it runs in the blood. I shall send for Andrew Goldsmith.'

One secret of Mr. Kendal's power was that he never interrupted, but let people run themselves down and contradict themselves; and all he observed was, 'However it may end, you have done a great deal for him. Even if you parted now, he would be able to find a situation.'

'Why--yes,' said Mr. Goldsmith, 'the lad knew nothing serviceable when he came, we had an infinity of maggots about algebra and logarithms to drive out of his head; but now he really is nearly as good an accountant as old Johns.'

'You would be sorry to part with him, and I cannot help hoping this may be made up.'

'You don't bring me any message! I've said I'll listen to nothing.'

'No; the poor boy's feelings are far too much wounded,' said Mr. Kendal. 'Whether rightly or wrongly, he fancies that his father and family have been slightly spoken of, and he is exceedingly hurt.'

'His father! I'm sure I did not say a tenth part of what the fellow richly deserves. If the young gentleman is so touchy, he had better go back to Ireland again.'

Nothing more favourable could Mr. Kendal obtain, though he thought Mr. Goldsmith uneasy, and perhaps impressed by the independence of his nephew's attitude.

It was an arduous office for a peace-maker, where neither party could comprehend the feelings of the other, but on his return he found that Ulick had stormed himself into comparative tranquillity, and was listening the better to the womankind, because they had paid due honour to the amiable ancestral Tigearnach and all his guttural posterity, whose savage exploits and bloody catastrophes acted as such a sedative, that by the time he had come down to Uncle Bryan of the Kaffir war, he actually owned that as to the mighty 'O,' Mr. Goldsmith might have erred in sheer ignorance.

'After all,' said Albinia, 'U. O'More is rather personal in writing to a creditor'

'It might be worse,' said Ulick, laughing, 'if my name was John. I. O'More would be a dangerous confession. But I'll not be come round even by your fun, Mrs. Kendal, I'll not part with my father's name.'

'No, that would be base,' said Sophy.

'Who would wish to persuade you?' added Albinia. 'I am sure you are right in refusing with your feelings; I only want you to forgive your uncle, and not to break with him.'

'I'd forgive him his ignorance, but my mother herself could not wish me to forgive what he said of my father.'

'And how if he thinks this explosion needs forgiveness?'

'He must do without it,' said Ulick. 'No, I was cool, I assure you, cool and collected, but it was not fit for me to stand by and hear my father insulted.'

Albinia closed the difficult discussion by observing that it was time to dress, and Sophy followed her from the room burning with indignant sympathy. 'It would be meanly subservient to ask pardon for defending a father whom he thought maligned,' said Albinia, and Sophy took exception at the word 'thought.'

'Ah! of course he cannot be deceived!' said Albinia--but no sooner were the words spoken than she was half-startled, half-charmed by finding they had evoked a glow of colour.

'How do you think it will end?' asked Sophy.

'I can hardly fancy he will not be forgiven, and yet--it might be better.'

'Yes, I do think he would get on faster in India,' said Sophy eagerly; 'he could do just as Gilbert might have done.'

Was it possible for Albinia to have kept out of her eyes a significant glance, or to have disarmed her lips of a merry smile of amused encouragement! How she had looked she knew not, but the red deepened on Sophy's whole face, and after one inquiring gaze from the eyes they were cast down, and an ineffable brightness came over the expression, softening and embellishing.

'What have I done?' thought Albinia. 'Never mind--it must have been all there, or it would not have been wakened so easily--if he goes they will have a scene first.'

But when Mr. Kendal came back he only advised Ulick to go to his desk as usual the next day, as if nothing had happened.

And Ulick owned that, turn out as things might, he could not quit his work in the first ardour of his resentment, and with a great exertion of Christian forgiveness, he finally promised not to give notice of his retirement unless his uncle should repeat the offence. This time Albinia durst not look at Sophy.

Rather according to his friend's hopes than his own, he was able to report at the close of the next day, that he had not 'had a word from his uncle, except a nod;' and thus the days passed on, Andrew Goldsmith did not appear, and it became evident that he was to remain on sufferance as a clerk. Nor did Albinia and Sophy venture to renew the subject between themselves. At first there was consciousness in their silence; soon their minds were otherwise engrossed.

Mrs. Meadows was suddenly stricken with paralysis, and was thought to be dying. She recovered partial consciousness in the course of the next day, but was constantly moaning the name of her eldest and favourite granddaughter, and when telegraph and express train brought home the startled and trembling Lucy, she was led at once to the sick bed--where at her name there was the first gleam of anything like pleasure.

'And where have you been, my dear, this long time?'

'I've been at--at Brighton, dear grandmamma,' said Lucy, so much agitated as scarcely to be able to recall the name, or utter the words.

'And--I say, my dear love,' said Mrs. Meadows, earnestly and mysteriously, 'have you seen _him_?'

Poor Lucy turned scarlet with distress and confusion, but she was held fast, and grandmamma pursued, 'I'm sure he has not his equal for handsomeness and stateliness, and there must have been a pair of you.'

'Dear grandmamma, we must let Lucy go and take off her things; she shall come back presently, but she has had a long journey,' interposed Albinia, seeing her ready to sink into the earth.

But Mrs. Meadows had roused into eagerness, and would not let her go. 'I hope you danced with him, dear,' she went on; 'and it's all nonsense about his being high and silent. Your papa is bent on it, and you'll live like a princess in India.'

'She takes you for your mother--she means papa, whispered Albinia, not without a secret flash at once of indignation at perceiving how his first love had been wasted, yet of exultation in finding that no one but herself had known how to love him; but poor Lucy, completely and helplessly overcome, could only exclaim in a faltering voice: 'Oh, grandmamma, don't--' and Albinia was forced to disengage her, support her out of the room, and leaving her to her sister, hasten back to soothe the old lady, who had been terrified by her emotion. It had been a great mistake to bring her in abruptly, when tired with her journey, and not fully aware what awaited her. But there was at that time reason to think all would soon be over, and Albinia was startled and confused.

Albinia had hitherto been the only efficient nurse of the family. Sophy's presence seemed to stir up instincts of the old wrangling habits, and the invalid was always fretful when left to her, so that to her own exceeding distress she was kept almost entirely out of the sick room.

Lucy, on the other hand, was extremely valuable there, her bright manner and unfailing chatter always amused if needful, and her light step and tender hand made her useful, and highly appreciated by the regular nurse.

For the first few days, they watched in awe for the last dread summons, but gradually it was impossible not to become in a manner habituated to the suspense, so that common things resumed their interest, and though Sophy was pained by the incongruity, it could not have been otherwise without the spirits and health giving way under the strain. Nothing could be more trying than to have the mind wrought up to hourly anticipation of the last parting, and then the delay, without the reaction of recovery, the spirit beyond all reach of intercourse, and the mortal frame languishing and drooping. Mr. Kendal had from the first contemplated the possibility of the long duration of such lingering, and did his utmost to promote such enlivenment and change for the attendants as was consistent with their care of the sufferer. They never dared to be all beyond call at once, since a very little agitation might easily suffice to bring on a fatal attack, and Albinia and Lucy were forced to share the hours of exercise and employment between them, and often Albinia could not leave the house and garden at all.

Gilbert was an excellent auxiliary, and would devote many an hour to the cheering of the poor shattered mind. His entrance seldom failed to break the thread of melancholy murmurs, and he had exactly the gentle, bright attentive manner best fitted to rouse and enliven. Nothing could be more irreproachable, than his conduct, and his consideration and gentleness so much endeared him, that he had never been so much at peace. All he dreaded was the leaving what was truly to him the sanctuary of home, he feared alike temptation and the effort of resistance and could not bear to go away when his grandmother was in so precarious a state, and he could so much lighten Mrs. Kendal's cares both by being with her, and by watching over Maurice. His parents were almost equally afraid of trusting him in the world; and the embodiment of the militia for the county offered a quasi profession, which would keep him at home and yet give him employment. He was very anxious to be allowed to apply for a commission, and pleaded so earnestly and humbly that it would be his best hope of avoiding his former errors, that Mr. Kendal yielded, though with doubt whether it would be well to confine him to so narrow a sphere. Meantime the corps was quartered at Bayford, and filled the streets with awkward louts in red jackets, who were inveterate in mistaking the right for the left, Gilbert had a certain shy pride in his soldiership, and Maurice stepped like a young Field Marshal when he saw his brother saluted.

Nothing had so much decided this step as the finding that young Dusautoy was to return to his college after Easter. He was at the Vicarage again, marking his haughty avoidance of the Kendal family, and to their great joy, Lucy did not appear distressed, she was completely absorbed in her grandmother, and shrank from all allusion to her lover. Had the small flutter of vanity been cured by a glimpse beyond her own corner of the world?

But soon Albinia became sensible of an alteration in Gilbert. He had no sooner settled completely into his new employment, than a certain restless dissatisfaction seemed to have possessed him. He was fastidious at his meals, grumbled at his horse, scolded the groom,

had fits of petulance towards his brother, and almost neglected Mrs. Meadows. No one could wonder at a youth growing weary of such attendance, but his tenderness and amiability had been his best points, and it was grievous to find them failing. Albinia would have charged the alteration on his brother officers, if they had not been a very steady and humdrum set, whose society Gilbert certainly did not prefer. She was more uneasy at finding that he sometimes saw Algernon Dusautoy, though for Lucy's sake, he always avoided bringing his name forward.

A woman was ill in the bargeman's cottage by the towing-path, and Albinia had walked to see her. As she came down-stairs, she heard voices, and beheld Mr. Hope evidently on the same errand with herself, talking to Gilbert. She caught the words, ere she could safely descend the rickety staircase, Gilbert was saying,

'Oh! some happy pair from the High Street!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Mr. Hope, 'I am so blind, I really took it for your sister, but our shopkeepers' daughters do dress so!'

Albinia looking in the same direction, beheld in a walk that skirted the meadow towards the wood, two figures, of which only one was clearly visible, it was nearly a quarter of a mile off, but there was something about it that made her exclaim, 'Why, that's Mr. Cavendish Dusautoy! whom can he be walking with?'

Gilbert started violently at hearing her behind him, and a word or two of greeting passed with Mr. Hope, then there was some spying at the pair, but they were getting further off, and disappeared in the wood, while Gilbert, screwing up his eyes, and stammering, declared he did not know; it might be, he did not think any one could be recognised at such a distance; and then saying that he had fallen in with Mr. Hope by chance, he hastened on. The curate made a brief visit, and walked home with her, examining her on her impression that the gentleman was young Dusautoy, and finally consulting her on the expediency of mentioning the suspicion to the vicar, in case he should be deluding some foolish tradesman's daughter. Albinia strongly advised his doing so; she had much faith in her own keen eyesight, and could not mistake the majestic mien of Algernon; she thought the vicar ought at once to be warned, but felt relieved that it was not her part to speak.

She was very glad when Mr. Hope took an opportunity of telling her that young Dusautoy was going to the Greenaways in a day or two.

As to Gilbert, it was as if this departure had relieved him from an incubus; he was in better spirits from that moment, and returned to his habits of kindness to both grandmamma and Maurice.

The manifold duties of head sick-nurse, governess, and housekeeper, were apt to clash, and valiant and unwearied as Albinia was, she was obliged perforce to leave the children more to others than she would have preferred. Little Albinia was all docility and sweetness, and already did such wonders with her ivory letters, that the exulting Sophy tried to abash Maurice by auguring that she would be the first to read; to which, undaunted, he replied, 'She'll never be a boy!' Nevertheless Maurice was developing a species of conscience, rendering him trustworthy and obedient out of sight, better, in fact,

alone with his own honour and his mother's commands, than with any authority that he could defy. He knew when his father meant to be obeyed, and Gilbert managed him easily; but he warred with Lucy, ruled Sophy, and had no chivalry for any one but little Albinia, nor obedience except for his mother, and was a terror to maid-servants and elder children. With much of promise, he was anything but an agreeable child, and whilst no one but herself ever punished, contradicted, or complained of him, Albinia had a task that would have made her very uneasy, had not her mind been too fresh and strong for over-sense of responsibility. Each immediate duty in its turn was sufficient for her.

Maurice's shadow-like pursuit of Gilbert often took him off her hands. It might sometimes be troublesome to the elder brother, and now and then rewarded with a petulant rebuff, but Maurice was only the more pertinacious, and on the whole his allegiance was requited with ardent affection and unbounded indulgence. Nay, once when Maurice and his pony, one or both, were swept on by the whole hunt, and obliged to follow the hounds, Gilbert in his anxiety took leaps that he shuddered to remember, while the urchin sat the first gallantly, and though he fell into the next ditch, scrambled up on the instant, and was borne by his spirited pony over two more, amid universal applause. Mr. Nugent himself rode home with the brothers to tell the story; papa and mamma were too much elated at his prowess to scold.

The eventful year 1854 had begun, and General Ferrars was summoned from Canada to a command in the East. On his arrival in England, he wrote to his brother and sister to meet him in London, and the aunts, delighted to gather their children once more round them, sent pressing invitations, only regretting that there was not room enough in the Family Office for the younger branches.

Mr. Ferrars' first measure was to ride to Willow Lawn. Knocking at the door of his sister's morning-room, he found Maurice with a pouting lip, back rounded, and legs twisted, standing upon his elbows, which were planted upon the table on either side of a calico spelling-book. Mr. Kendal stood up straight before the fire, looking distressed and perplexed, and Albinia sat by, a little worn, a little irritable, and with the expression of a wilful victim.

All greeted the new-comer warmly, and Maurice exclaimed, 'Mamma, I may have a holiday now!'

'Not till you have learnt your spelling.' There was some sharpness in the tone, and Maurice's shoulder-blades looked sulky.

'In consideration of his uncle,' began Mr. Kendal, but she put her hand on the boy, saying, 'You know we agreed there were to be no holidays for a week, because we did not use the last properly.'

He moved off disconsolately, and his father said, 'I hope you are come to arrange the journey to London. Is Winifred coming with you?'

'No; a hurry and confusion, and the good aunts would be too much for her, you will be the only one for inspection.'

'Yes, take him with you, Maurice,' said Albinia, 'he must see William.'

'You must be the exhibitor, then,' her brother replied.

'Now, Maurice, I know what you are come for, but you ought to know better than to persuade me, when you know there are six good reasons against my going.'

'I know of one worth all the six.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Kendal; 'I have been telling her that she is convincing me that I did wrong in allowing her to burthen herself with this charge.'

'That's nothing to the purpose,' said Albinia; 'having undertaken it, when you all saw the necessity, I cannot forsake it now--'

'If Mrs. Meadows were in the same condition as she was in two months ago, there might be a doubt,' said Mr. Kendal; but she is less dependent on your attention, and Lucy and Gilbert are most anxious to devote themselves to her in your absence.'

'I know they all wish to be kind, but if anything went wrong, I should never forgive myself!'

'Not if you went out for pleasure alone,' said her brother; 'but relationship has demands.'

'Of course,' she said, petulantly, 'if Edmund is resolved, I must go, but that does not convince me that it is right to leave everything to run riot here.'

Mr. Kendal looked serious, and Mr. Ferrars feared that the winter cares had so far told on her temper, that perplexity made her wilful in self-sacrifice. There was a pause, but just as she began to perceive she had said something wrong, the lesser Maurice burst out in exultation,

'There, it is not indestructible!'

'What mischief have you been about?' The question was needless, for the table was strewn with snips of calico.

'This nasty spelling-book! Lucy said it was called indestructible, because nobody could destroy it, but I've taken my new knife to it. And see there!'

'And now can you make another?' said his uncle.

'I don't want _to_.'

'Nor _one_ either, sir,' said Mr. Kendal. 'What shall we have to tell Uncle William about you! I'm afraid you are one of the chief causes of mamma not knowing how to go to London.'

Maurice did not appear on the way to penitence, but his mother said, 'Bring me your knife.'

He hung down his head, and obeyed without a word. She closed it, and laid it on the mantel-shelf, which served as a sort of pound for

properties in sequestration.

'Now, then, go,' she said, 'you are too naughty for me to attend to you.'

'But when will you, mamma?' laying a hand on her dress.

'I don't know. Go away now.'

He slowly obeyed, and as the door shut, she said, 'There!' in a tone as if her view was established.

'You must send him to Fairmead,' said the uncle.

'To "terrify" Winifred? No, no, I know better than that; Gilbert can look after him. I don't so much care about that.'

The admission was eagerly hailed, and objection after objection removed, and having recovered her good humour, she was candid, and owned how much she wished to go. 'I really want to make acquaintance with William. I've never seen him since I came to my senses, and have only taken him on trust from you.'

'I wish equally that he should see you,' said her brother. 'It would be good for him, and I doubt whether he has any conception what you are like.'

'I'd better stay at home, to leave you and Edmund to depict for his benefit a model impossible idol--the normal woman.'

Maurice looked at her, and shook his head.

'No--it would be rather--it and its young one, eh?'

Maurice took both her hands. 'I should not like to tell William what I shall believe if you do not come.'

'Well, what--'

'That Edmund is right, and you have been overtaken till you are careful and troubled about many things.'

'Only too much bent on generous self-devotion,' said Mr. Kendal, eagerly; 'too unselfish to cast the balance of duties.'

'Hush, Edmund,' said Albinia. 'I don't deserve fine words. I honestly believe I want to do what is right, but I can't be sure what it is, and I have made quite fuss enough, so you two shall decide, and then I shall be made right anyway. Only do it from your consciences.'

They looked at each other, taken aback by the sudden surrender. Mr. Ferrars waited, and her husband said, 'She ought to see her brother. She needs the change, and there is no sufficient cause to detain her.'

'She must be content sometimes to trust,' said Mr. Ferrars.

'Aye, and all that will go wrong, when my back is turned.'

'Let it,' said her brother. 'The right which depends on a single human eye is not good for much. Let the weeds grow, or you can't pull them up.'

'Let the mice play, that the cat may catch them,' said Albinia, striving to hide her care. 'One good effect is, that Edmund has not begun to groan.'

Indeed, in his anxiety that she should consent to enjoy herself, he had not had time to shrink from the introduction.

Outside the door they found Maurice waiting, his spelling learnt from a fragment of the indestructible spelling-book, and the question followed, 'Now, mamma, you wont say I'm too naughty for you to go to London and see Uncle William?'

'No, my little boy, I mean to trust you, and tell Uncle William that my young soldier is learning the soldier's first duty--obedience.'

'And may I have my knife, mamma?'

Papa had settled that question by himself taking it off the chimney-piece and restoring it. If mamma wished the penance to have been longer, she neither looked it nor said it.

The young people received the decision with acclamation, and the two elder ones vied with one another in attempts to set her mind at rest by undertaking everything, and promising for themselves and the children perfect regularity and harmony. Sophy, with a bluntness that King Lear would have highly disapproved, said, 'She was glad mamma was going, but she knew they should be all at sixes and sevens. She would do her best, and very bad it would be.'

'Not if you don't make up your mind beforehand that it must be bad,' said her uncle.

Sophy smiled, she was much less impervious to cheerful auguries, and spoke with gladness of the pleasure it would give her friend Genevieve to see Mrs. Kendal.

Mr. Ferrars had a short interview with Ulick, and was amused by observing that little Maurice had learnt as much Irish as Ulick had dropped. After the passing fever about his O had subsided, he was parting with some of his ultra-nationality. The whirr of his R's and his Irish idioms were far less perceptible, and though a word of attack on his country would put him on his mettle, and bring out the Kelt in full force, yet in his reasonable state, his good sense and love of order showed an evident development, and instead of contending that Galway was the most perfect county in the world, he only said it might yet be so.

'Isn't he a noble fellow?' cried Albinia, warmly.

'Yes,' said her brother; 'I doubt whether all the O'Mores put together have ever made such a conquest as he has.'

'It was fun to see how the aunts were dismayed to find one of the horde in full force here. I believe it was as a measure of

precaution that they took Lucy away. I was very glad for Lucy to go, but hers was not exactly the danger.'

'Ha!' said Maurice; and Albinia blushed. Whereupon he said interrogatively, 'Hem?' which made her laugh so consciously that he added, 'Don't you go and be romantic about either of your young ladies, or there will be a general burning of fingers.'

'If you knew all our secrets, Maurice, you would think me a model of prudence and forbearance.'

'Ho!' was his next interjection, 'so much the worse. For my own part, I don't expect prudence will come to you naturally till the little Awk has a lover.'

'Won't it come any other way?'

'Yes, in one way,' he said, gravely.

'And that way is not easily found by those who have neither humility nor patience,' she said, sadly, 'who rush on their own will.'

'Nay, Albinia, it is being sought, I do believe; and remember the lines--

"Thine own mild energy bestow,
And deepen while thou bidst it flow,
More calm our stream of love."

Forced to resign herself to her holiday, Albinia did so with a good grace, in imitation of her brother, who assured her that he had brought a bottle of Lethe, and had therein drowned wife, children, and parish. Mr. Kendal's spirits, as usual, rose higher every mile from Bayford, and they were a very lively party when they arrived in Mayfair.

The good aunts were delighted to have round them all those whom they called their children; all except Fred, whom the new arrangements had sent to rejoin his regiment in Ireland.

Sinewy, spare, and wiry, with keen gray eyes under straight brows, narrow temples, a sunburnt face, and alert, upright bearing and quick step, William Ferrars was every inch a soldier; but nothing so much struck Mr. and Mrs. Kendal as the likeness to their little Maurice, though it consisted more in air and gesture than in feature. His speech was brief and to the point, softened into delicately-polished courtesy towards womankind, in the condescension of strength to weakness--the quality he evidently thought their chief characteristic.

Albinia was amused as she watched him with grown-up eyes, and compared present with past impressions. She could now imagine that she had been an inconvenient charge to a young soldier brother, and that he had been glad to make her over to the aunts, only petting and indulging her as a child; looking down on her fancies, and smiling at her sauciness when she was an enthusiastic maiden--treatment which she had so much resented, that she had direfully offended Maurice by pronouncing William a mere martinet, when she was hurt at his neither

reading the Curse of Kehama, nor entering into her plans for Fairmead school.

Having herself become a worker, she could better appreciate a man who had seen and acted instead of reading, recollected herself as an emanation of conceit, and felt shy and anxious, even more for her husband than for herself. How would the scholar and the soldier fare together? and could she and Maurice keep them from wearying of each other? She had little trust in her own fascinations, though she saw the General's eye approvingly fixed on her, and believing herself to be a more pleasing object in her womanly bloom than in her unformed girlhood.

'How does the Montreal affair go on?' she asked.

'What affair?'

'Fred and Miss Kinnaird.'

'I am sorry to say he has not put it out of his head.'

'Surely she is a very nice person.'

'Pshaw! He has no right to think of a wife these dozen years.'

'Not even think? When he is not to have one at any rate till he is a field officer!'

'And he is a fool to have one then. A mere encumbrance to himself and the entire corps.'

'Yes, I know,' said Albinia, 'she always gets the best cabin.'

'And that is no place for her! No man, as I have told Fred over and over again, ought to drag a woman into hardships for which she is not fitted, and where she interferes with his effectiveness and the comfort of every one else.'

The identical lecture of twelve years since, when he had feared Albinia's becoming this inconvenient appendage! If he had repeated it on all like occasions, she did not wonder that it had wearied his aide-de-camp.

'Perhaps,' she said, 'the backwoods may have fitted Miss Emily for the life; and I can't but be glad of Fred's having been steady to anything.'

Considering this speech like the Kehama days, the General went on to dilate on the damage that marriage was to the 'service,' removing the best officers, first from the mess, and then from the army.

'What a pity William was born too late to be a Knight of St. John!' said Albinia.

All laughed, but she doubted whether he were pleased, for he addressed himself to one of the aunts, while Maurice spoke to her in an under tone--'I believe he is quite right. Homes are better for the individual man, but not for the service. How remarkably the analogy holds with this other service!'

'You mean what St. Paul says of the married and unmarried?'

'I always think he and his sayings are the most living lessons I know on the requirements of the other army.'

Albinia mused on the insensible change in Maurice. He had not embraced his profession entirely by choice. It had always been understood that one of the younger branches must take the family living; and as Fred had spurned study, he had been bred up to consider it as his fate, and if he had ever had other wishes, he had entirely accepted his destiny, and sincerely turned to his vocation. The knowledge that he must be a clergyman had ruled him and formed him from his youth, and acting through him on his sister, had rendered her more than the accomplished, prosperous young lady her aunts meant to have made her. Yet, even up to a year or two after his Ordination, there had been a sense of sacrifice; he loved sporting, and even balls, and it had been an effort to renounce them. He had avoided coming to London because his keen enjoyment of society tended to make him discontented with his narrow sphere; she had even known him to hesitate to ride with the staff at a review, lest he should make himself liable to repinings. And now how entirely had all this passed away, not merely by outgrowing the enterprising temper and boyish habits, nor by contentment in a happy home, but by the sufficiency and rest of his service, the engrossment in the charge from his great Captain. Without being himself aware of it, he had ceased to distrust a holiday, because it was no longer a temptation; and his animation and mirth were the more free, because self-regulation was so thoroughly established, that restraint was no longer felt.

Mrs. Annesley was talking of the little Kendals, who she had ruled should be at Fairmead.

'No,' said Maurice, 'Albinia thought her son too mighty for Winifred. Our laudable efforts at cousinly friendship usually produce war-whoops that bring the two mammas each to snatch her own offspring from the fray, with a scolding for the sake of appearances though believing the other the only guilty party.'

'Now, Maurice,' cried Albinia, 'you confess how fond Mary is of setting people to rights.'

'Well--when Maurice bullies Alby.'

'Aye, you talk of the mammas, and you only want to make out poor Maurice the aggressor.'

'Never mind, they will work in better than if they were fabulous children. Ah, you are going to contend that yours is a fabulous child. Take care I don't come on you with the indestructible--'

'Take care I don't come on you with Mary's lessons to Colonel Bury on the game-law.'

'Does it not do one good to see those two quarrelling just like old times?' exclaimed one aunt to the other.

'And William looking on as contemptuous as ever?' said Albinia.

'Not at all. I rejoice to have this week with you. I should like to see your boy. Maurice says he is a thorough young soldier.'

Mr. Kendal looked pleased.

The man of study had a penchant for the man of action, and the brothers-in-law were drawing together. Mars, the great geographical master, was but opening his gloomy school on the Turkish soil, and the world was discovering its ignorance beyond the Pinnock's Catechisms of its youth. Maurice treated Mr. Kendal as a dictionary, and his stores of Byzantine, Othman, and Austrian lore, chimed in with the perceptions of the General, who, going by military maps, described plans of operations which Mr. Kendal could hardly believe he had not found in history, while he could as little credit that Mr. Kendal had neither studied tactics, nor seen the spots of which he could tell such serviceable minutiae.

They had their heads together over the map the whole evening, and the next morning, when the General began to ask questions about Turkish, his sister was proud to hear her husband answering with the directness and precision dear to a military man.

'That's an uncommonly learned man, Albinia's husband,' began the General, as soon as he had started with his brother on a round of errands.

'I never met a man of more profound and universal knowledge.'

'I don't see that he is so grave and unlike other people. Fred reported that he was silence itself, and she might as well have married Hamlet's ghost.'

'Fred saw him at a party,' said Maurice; then remembering that this might not be explanatory, he added, 'He shines most when at ease, and every year since his marriage has improved and enlivened him.'

'I am satisfied. I hardly knew how to judge, though I did not think myself called upon to remonstrate against the marriage, as the aunts wished. I knew I might depend on you, and I thought it high time that she should be settled.'

'I have been constantly admiring her discernment, for I own that at first his reserve stood very much in my way, but since she has raised his spirits, and taught him to exert himself, he has been a most valuable brother to me.'

'Then you think her happy? I was surprised to see her such a fine-looking woman; my aunts had croaked so much about his children and his mother, that I thought she would be worn to a shadow.'

'Very happy. She has casual troubles, and a great deal of work, but that is what she is made for.'

'How does she get on with his children?'

'Hearty love for them has carried her through the first difficulties, which appalled me, for they had been greatly mismanaged. I am afraid that she has not been able to undo some of the past evil; and with

all her good intentions, I am sometimes afraid whether she is old enough to deal with grown-up young people.'

'You don't mean that Kendal's children are grown up? I should think him younger than I am.'

'He is so, but civil servants marry early, and not always wisely; and the son is about twenty. Poor Albinia dotes on him, and has done more for him than ever his father did; but the lad is weak and tender every way, with no stamina, moral or physical, and with just enough property to do him harm. He has been at Oxford and has failed, and now he is in the militia, but what can be expected of a boy in a country town, with nothing to do? I did not like his looks last week, and I don't think his being there, always idle, is good for that little manly scamp of Albinia's own.'

'Why don't they put him into the service?'

'He is too old.'

'Not too old for the cavalry!'

'He can ride, certainly, and is a tall, good-looking fellow; but I should not have thought him the stuff to make a dragoon. He has always been puling and delicate, unfit for school, wanting force.'

'Wanting discipline,' said the General. 'I have seen a year in a good regiment make an excellent officer of that very stamp of youngster, just wanting a mould to give him substance.'

'The regiment should be a very good one,' said Mr. Ferrars; 'he would be only too easily drawn in by the bad style of subaltern.'

'Put him into the 25th Lancers,' said the General, 'and set Fred to look after him. Rattlepate as he is, he can take excellent care of a lad to whom he takes a fancy, and if Albinia asked him, he would do it with all his heart.'

'I wish you would propose it, though I am afraid his father will never consent. I would do a great deal to get him away before he has led little Maurice into harm.'

'This consideration moved the Rector of Fairmead himself to broach the subject, but neither Mr. Kendal nor Albinia could think of venturing their fragile son in the army, though assured that there was little chance that the 25th Lancers would be summoned to the east, and they would only hold out hopes of little Maurice by and by.'

Albinia's martial ardour was revived as she listened with greater grasp of comprehension to subjects familiar in her girlhood. She again met old friends of her father, the lingering glories of the Peninsula and Waterloo, who liked her for her own sake as well as for her father's, while Maurice looked on, amused by her husband's silent pride in her, and her hourly progress in the regard of the General, who began to talk of making a long visit to Fairmead, after what he expected would be a slight demonstration on the Danube. He even began to regret the briefness of the time that he could spend in their society.

Much was crowded into that week, but Albinia contrived to find an hour for a call on her little French friend, to whom she had already forwarded the parcels she had brought from home--a great barm-brack from Biddy, and a store of delicate convent confections from Hadminster.

She was set down at a sober old house in the lawyers' quarter of the world, and conducted to a pretty, though rather littered drawing-room, where she found a delicate-looking young mamma, and various small children.

'I'm so glad,' said little Mrs. Rainsforth, 'that you have been able to come; it will be such a pleasure to dear Miss Durant; and while one of the children was sent to summon the governess, the lady continued, nervously but warmly, 'I hope you will think Miss Durant looking well; I am afraid she shuts herself up too much. I'm sure she is the greatest comfort, the greatest blessing to us.'

Albinia's reply was prevented by a rush of children, followed by the dear little trim, slight figure. There was no fear that Genevieve did not look well or happy. Her olive complexion was healthy; her dark eyes lustrous with gladness; her smile frank and unquelled; her movements full of elastic life.

She led the way to the back parlour, dingy by nature, but bearing living evidence to the charm which she infused into any room. Scratched table, desks, copybooks, and worn grammars, had more the air of a comfortable occupation than of the shabby haunt of irksome taskwork. There were flowers in the window, and the children's treasures were arranged with taste. Genevieve loved her school-room, and showed off its little advantages with pretty exultation. If Mrs. Kendal could only see how well it looked with the curtains down, after tea!

And then came the long, long talk over home affairs, and the history of half the population of Bayford, Genevieve making inquiries, and drinking in the answers as if she could not make enough of her enjoyment.

Not till all the rest had been discussed, did she say, with dropped eyelids, and a little blush, 'Is Mr. Gilbert Kendal quite strong?'

'Thank you, he has been much better this winter, and so useful and kind in nursing grandmamma!'

'Yes, he was always kind.'

'He was going to beg me to remember him to you, but he broke off, and said you would not care.'

'I care for all goodness towards me,' answered Genevieve, lifting her eyes with a flash of inquiry.

'I am afraid he is as bad as ever, poor fellow,' said Albinia, with a little smile and sigh; 'but he has behaved very well. I must tell you that you were in the same train with him on his journey from Oxford, and he was ashamed to meet your eye.'

'Ah, I remember well. I thought I saw him. I was bringing George

and Fanny from a visit to their aunts, and I was sure it must be Mr. Gilbert.'

'As prudent as ever, Genevieve.'

'It would not have been right,' she said, blushing; 'but it was such a treat to see a Bayford face, that I had nearly sprung out of the waiting-room to speak to him at the first impulse.'

'My poor little exile!' said Albinia.

'No, that is not my name. Call me my aunt's bread-winner. That's my pride! I mean my cause of thankfulness. I could not have earned half so much at home.'

'I hope indeed you have a home here.'

'That I have,' she fervently answered. 'Oh, without being a homeless orphan, one does not learn what kind hearts there are. Mr. and Mrs. Rainsforth seemed only to fear that they should not be good enough to me.'

'Do you mean that you found it a little oppressive?'

'Fi donc, Madame! Yet I must own that with her timid uneasy way, and his so perfect courtesy, they did alarm me a little at first. I pitied them, for I saw them so resolved not to let me feel myself de trop, that I knew I was in their way.'

'Did not that vex you?'

'Why, I suppose they set their inconvenience against the needs of their children, and my concern was to do my duty, and be as little troublesome as possible. They pressed me to spend my evenings with them, but I thought that would be too hard on them, so I told them I preferred the last hours alone, and I do not come in unless there are others to prevent their being tete-a-tete.'

'Very wise. And do you not find it lonely?'

'It is my time for reading--my time for letters--my time for being at home!' cried Genevieve. 'Now however that I hope I am no longer a weight on them, Mrs. Rainsforth will sometimes ask me to come and sing to him, or read aloud, when he comes home so tired that he cannot speak, and her voice is weak. Alas! they are both so fragile, so delicate.'

Her soul was evidently with them and with her charges, of whom there was so much to say, that the carriage came all too soon to hurry Albinia away from the sight of that buoyant sweetness and capacity of happiness.

She was rather startled by Miss Ferrars saying, 'By-the-by, Albinia, how was it that you never told us of the development of the Infant prodigy?'

'I don't know what you mean, Aunt Gertrude.'

'Don't you remember that boy, that Mrs. Dusautoy Cavendish's son,

whom that poor little companion of hers used to call l'Enfant prodigue. I did not know he was a neighbour of yours, as I find from Lucy.'

'What did Lucy tell you about him? She did not meet him!' cried Albinia, endeavouring not to betray her alarm. 'I mean, did she meet him?'

'Indeed,' said Miss Ferrars, 'you should have warned us if you had any objection, my dear.'

'Well, but what did happen?'

'Oh, nothing alarming, I assure you. They met at a ball at Brighton; Lucy introduced him, and said he was your vicar's nephew; they danced together. I think only once.'

'I wish you had mentioned it. When did it happen?'

'I can hardly tell. I think she had been about a fortnight with us, but she seemed so indifferent that I should never have thought it worth mentioning. I remember my sister thought of asking him to a little evening party of ours, and Lucy dissuading her. Now, really, Albinia, don't look as if we had been betraying our trust. You never gave us any reason to think--'

'No, no. I beg your pardon, dear aunt. I hope there's no harm done. If I could have thought of his turning up, I would--But I hope it is all right.'

Such good accounts came from both homes, and the General was so unwilling to part with his brother and sister, that he persuaded them to accompany him to Southampton for embarkation. They all felt that these last days, precious now, might be doubly precious by-and-by, and alone with them and free from the kindly scrutiny of the good aunts, William expanded and evinced more warm fraternal feeling than he had ever manifested. He surprised his sister by thanking her warmly for having come to meet him. 'I am glad to have been with you, Albinia; I am glad to have seen your husband. I have told Maurice that I am heartily rejoiced to see you in such excellent hands.'

'You must come and see the children, and know him better.'

'I hope so, when this affair is over, and I expect it will be soon settled. Anyway, I am glad we have been together. If we meet again, we will try to see more of one another.'

He had said much more to his brother, expressing regret that he had been so much separated from his sister. Thorough soldier as he was, and ardent for active service, the sight of her and her husband had renewed gentler thoughts, and he was so far growing old that the idea of home and rest came invitingly before him. He was softened at the parting, and when he wrung their hands for the last time on the deck of the steamer, they were glad that his last words were, 'God bless you.'

There had been some uncertainty as to the time of his sailing, and Fairmead and Bayford had been told that unless their travellers

arrived by the last reasonable train on Friday, they were not to be expected till the same time on Saturday, Maurice having concocted a scheme for crossing by several junction lines, so as to save waiting; but they had not reckoned on the discourtesies of two rival companies whose lines met at the same station, and the southern train was only in time to hear the parting snort of the engine that it professed to catch.

The Ferrars' nature, above all when sore with farewells, was not made to submit to having time wasted by treacherous trains on a cold wintry day, and at a small new station, with an apology for a waiting-room, no bookstall, and nothing to eat but greasy gingerbread and hard apples.

Maurice relieved his feelings by heartily rowing all the officials, but he could obtain no redress, as he knew full well the whole time, nor would any train pick them up for full three hours.

So indignant was he, that amusement rendered Albinia patient, especially when he took to striding up and down the platform, devising cases in which the delay might be actionable, and vituperating the placability of Mr. Kendal, who having wrapt up his wife in plaids and seated her on the top of the luggage, had set his back to the wall, and was lost to the present world in a book.

'Never mind, Maurice,' said Albinia; 'in any other circumstances we should think three hours of each other a great boon.'

'If anything could be an aggravation, it would be to see Albinia philosophical.'

'You make me so on the principle of the Helots and Spartans.'

It was possible to get to Hadminster by half-past seven, and on to Bayford by nine o'clock, but Fairmead lay further from the line, and the next train did not stop at the nearest station, so Maurice agreed to sleep at Bayford that night; and this settled, set out with his sister to explore the neighbourhood for eatables and church architecture. They made an ineffectual attempt to rouse Mr. Kendal to go with them, but he was far too deep in his book, and only muttered something about looking after the luggage. They found a stale loaf of bread, and a hideous church, but it was a merry walk, and brought them back in their liveliest mood, which lasted even to pronouncing it 'great fun' that the Hadminster flies were all at a ball, and that the omnibus must convey them home by the full moonlight.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Slowly the omnibus rumbled over the wooden bridge, and then with a sudden impulse it thundered up to the front door.

Albinia jumped out, and caught Sophy in her arms, exclaiming, 'And how are you all, my dear?'

'We had quite given you up,' Gilbert was saying. 'The fire is in the library,' he added, as Mr. Kendal was opening the drawing-room door, and closing it in haste at the sight of a pale, uninviting patch of moonlight, and the rush of a blast of cold wind.

'And how is grandmamma? and the children? My Sophy, you don't look well, and where's Lucy?'

Ere she could receive an answer, down jumped, two steps at a time, a half-dressed figure, all white stout legs and arms which were speedily hugging mamma.

'There's my man!' said Mr. Kendal, 'a good boy, I know.'

'No!' cried the bold voice.

'No?' (incredulously) what have you been doing?'

'I broke the conservatory with the marble dog, and--' he looked at Gilbert.

'There's my brave boy,' said Mr. Kendal, who had suffered so much from his elder son's equivocation as to be ready to overlook anything for the sake of truth. 'Here, Uncle Maurice, shake hands with your godson, who always tells truth.'

Th

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