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SYRLIN

BY

OUIDA,

AUTHOR OF

"UNDER TWO FLAGS," "SIGNA," "A HOUSE PARTY," ETC.

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SYRLIN.

CHAPTER I.

"I ENVY anyone who has a home," Syrlin said, as they strolled through the gardens after luncheon, and looked back with admiring eyes at the old and noble house, parquetted black and white, with tea-roses and banksia climbing all over it, where the ivy, centuries their senior, had left them any space.

"I haven't a home, if you mean that," said Beaufront moodily. "I have no more got a home than a travelling bagman has; I am always being hustled from one place to another."

"A man can always make a home, M. de Syrlin," said one of the ladies with a smile.

"No. One can make an *intérieur,* not a home as I understand the meaning of the word. That must be inherited, and time and tradition must have consecrated it."

"There are both time and tradition, surely, at your old tower at St. Germains?"

"But neither belongs to me; only the shell

which they haunt belongs to me. It is a different matter."

"You are the most discontented man on earth," said Beaufront.

"I should be, were you not living," said Syrlin.

"Discontent," said Lorraine Iona, "is the malady of our time. It is a mental anæmia. You, Syrlin, have enjoyed so much, and possessed so much so early, that you, in addition to that anæmia, suffer from mental repletion, and the fatigue of society."

"I do not know that," said Syrlin. "I doubt if I have ever had the most enviable gift of all, the faculty of simple enjoyment."

"If that be so, you are to be pitied," said Iona. "I am old, I am ill, I am poor, I am solitary; but I enjoy, I enjoy all things, whether it be the glory of sunrise on Sinai, or only a song at the Lyric Club."

"Then you are happy indeed, and have found the true philosophy," said Syrlin. "I fear my temperament is too much in extremes; it is like those climates which are now burning and now are freezing; in those lands there is little comfort."

"There is little comfort in this land," muttered Beaufront, "whether personal, financial, or climatic!"

"Don't talk such nonsense, Ralph," said his cousin; "the climate here is enchanting. I am sure the air was quite delightful this morning."

"Well, yes; it's only just about midsummer that we get *quite* sure of a fall of snow," said Beaufront in an explanatory and apologetic tone. "Then on the top of the snow comes a drought and 120°

Fahrenheit, and then after a little bit come Kingsley's nor'easters; and then again, after them, come nice sea-fogs, mixed up with smoke-fogs, and so on *da capo*. That's *our* climate. Perhaps Syrlin may like it; some people do. So there are some who like the House of Commons."

"I like it," said his cousin. "I like a walk on a spring or a summer morning in England as well as Coleridge or Wordsworth did. The country may not be grand, or picturesque, or beautiful in outline, or in sunlight, but the shadowy leafy ways, and the moss and the grass and the fern-brakes are all dim, and dewy, and green, and there is a twilight in the woods that is delicious, and one would not be surprised to meet Comus there, and find Sabrina by the brook where the forget-me-nots grow."

"But it is not Comus whom you meet," said Beaufront grimly, in whose mind the words of John Kitson were brooding. "It's your keeper, with a dead jay or owl in one hand, and a lot of brutal traps in the other, and it isn't Sabrina's tresses which are reflected in the stream, but a lot of discharged dye or white lead refuse that has floated down from a factory twenty miles away, and still has power in it to poison your trout. That's why one longs to get away from England, because the whole million of curses which are the spawn of artificial life are all packed up in it as tightly as herrings in a barrel. Elsewhere you can forget 'em, but in England you can't, not for a moment. It's

over-populated, over-built, over-cultivated, and 'the new man' is its prophet."

"Perhaps I haven't any taste."

"My dear Freda, your worst enemy couldn't deny your good taste."

"But good taste or bad taste, I like London," reiterated his cousin. "I know it is cruelly ugly, I know it is murky and melancholy, and spreads a film of greyness over one's silk embroideries and one's painted satins, and that one's Greek Venus is obliged to be washed all over every week; I know all that, but I like it, *quand même;* and when I get into the brougham at Victoria or King's Cross and drive home after the country or the Continent, I am glad to be there. I know I shall know everything almost before the Queen knows it, and always, certainly, a day before the papers do, if they ever do, which they probably never will, if it is anything really true or in the very least interesting."

"Oh yes, London's the biggest news-market in the universe, that I grant, and has the best of all news, the secret news, the kind that only gets into print fifty years afterwards in memoirs; but that *quid novi* passion isn't very wholesome, it's a sort of dram-drinking and curry-eating, and one gets longing for fresh sensations, till one would offer up one's bosom friend to eternal ignominy for sake of a scandal and eat up a ministry like an anchovy. When I am down here by the river, or riding along a pass in the Himalayas, I think what bosh that sort of false feverish appetite for news is; but the minute

one sets foot in a club one can't resist the atmosphere, one must have one's social anchovies and political pick-me-ups."

"Well, I don't go to clubs, but they bring me the anchovies."

"You should never eat anything less poetic than peaches. You look like a portrait which has blent together Titian and Gainsborough; you should be, by whole leagues of taste and sentiment, far away from the gossip of London, and the wire-pullers of Downing Street should repeat the echoes of their telephones in vain to your ear."

"I shall have grown deaf indeed when I shall cease to listen with interest to things of interest."

"But are they things of interest? That the Premier doesn't digest his dinner, that the Russian ambassador's gout is only sulks, that Tommy Goodchild is going to be thrown over to save the Party, and the *enfant terrible* has turned head over heels into all the choicest principles of the Cabinet; that a letter did go to Hatfield in the middle of the night, though they all deny it, and that a private secretary did come up from Hawarden to Devonshire House, though they all declare he didn't—is that sort of thing interesting?"

"It is at least the best we have," said Lady Avillion, a little angered, "and it will all seem intensely interesting to our grandchildren when they read it fifty years hence in memoirs, as you said."

"Lord! What fools our grandchildren will be

then! And what a very dull game is the science of history!"

"I suppose you read memoirs yourself."

"Only French ones."

Lady Avillion was angered. Her century, her contemporaries, and her country were all of interest to her.

"I feel the same pleasure in coming back to London that the Parisian and the Parisienne feel in their *rentrée,*" she declared, though no one seconded her.

"It isn't the same thing. We don't *rentrer,*" said Beaufront gloomily, "we only perch for a week or two, a month or two, wishing the time over, taking flight whenever we can, and leaving our rooms muffled up in calico and our households on board wages. We're never at home in London. We're only perching. In June and July the whole flock perch altogether and caw in chorus—how dull! how full! what a crowd! what a bore!—caw, caw, caw! —and then off we all go pell-mell."

"Well, I am very fond of London," she reiterated, with the sense that she was saying an odd thing, as if she had said that she liked Ireland, or boiled mutton, or the Salvation Army.

"What a confession for a lady of light and leading!" said Beaufront.

CHAPTER II.

The weather was much warmer, and the blossoming earth much more advanced in its apparelling at Heronsmere, where the waters of the Gulf Stream washed the green shores shelving to the sea. It was another temperature, another climate, another season, another mental atmosphere, which were all refreshing to Lady Avillion in her cousin's quiet manor house.

She had brought Ina d'Esterre there with her. She had always wished greatly that the girl should please Beaufront. It would have been one of those admirable marriages which gratify everyone, and it would have effectually checked those designs which she attributed to Mrs. Laurence. But Beaufront, although he thought the child charming, had seen so many charming children whom he could have had for the asking, and felt no inclination to fulfil the dreams of his cousin as regarded her. In marriage, as in other matters of moment in life, we seldom think that good for us which seems so good to our friends. Ina d'Esterre, in her white frocks, with their wide sashes, looking like a young damsel out of the Récamier or the Talleyrand salons, with her big bright eyes and her curling ribbon-bound hair,

accorded very well with the old-fashioned romantic house and gardens of Heronsmere, but he felt no inclination to invite her to become its mistress.

"He only likes jaded and compromised women, with a long list of adventures behind them streaming in fire like a comet's tail," thought Lady Avillion with impatience.

And she said aloud to him one morning:

"If Lord Flodden and Ina liked each other, it would be an ideal union; age, fortune, character, tastes, everything in sympathy. I always meant her for you, you know, but you are hopeless."

"So many thanks," said Beaufront. "I am sorry to appear ungrateful. Ina is very delightful, but—"

"Oh, one knows you only admire married women; or—or women who have been too much married."

"Too much married for their own happiness, perhaps!" muttered Beaufront, angered at the innuendo.

"Ina is all that would suit you," continued his cousin. "She is gentle and generous in temper; she is very noble in her impulses; and she has been so trained that she would fill any position that she accepted to perfection. What more can you possibly want?"

Beaufront grew impatient.

"If your arguments mean anything, they mean that a man should marry the first decent and virtuous young woman that he happens to see! All the lovely and serious qualities in the world cannot give

happiness in any position without that sort of sympathy which to you seems wholly unnecessary in any scheme of life. Ina is entirely charming, and as she grows older will be something more. I appreciate her completely; but I should no more dream of marrying her than of bringing home one of the white swans off the mere to bed and board."

"You like black swans," said his cousin coldly. "It is a perverted taste."

Beaufront understood her meaning, and his face flushed angrily.

"You are very unjust," he said curtly. "Your perpetual hostility to Mrs. Laurence is an affront to me. It is an affront in two ways: the one because you disbelieve my word; the other because, in disbelieving it, you show that you consider me capable of endeavouring to force on you, under false colours, an acquaintance which I know to be unworthy of you. It is one of those insults which a man is forced to put up with from a woman. But I should like you to tell me which of the two it is that you think: do you consider that I am myself fooled by Mrs. Laurence, or that I deliberately try to deceive you about her?"

Lady Avillion smiled; with a certain mingling of pity and of contempt for the obtuseness and the bungling of man which irritated him intensely.

"If you ask me, both."

"Both! Both would be impossible."

"Oh no; the lady has persuaded you to accept a certain aspect of her, and that aspect you, for

your own reasons, wish me to accept also. But it does not follow that you really believe in it, although you accept it."

Beaufront stifled an angry and profane word, and tore open with an irritated gesture a telegram, which was at that minute brought him from Lord Greatorex concerning Wharfpool.

The great excitement of the moment, down at Heronsmere as all over England, was the approaching election at Wharfpool, the great shipping and commercial city, which had never been Conservative since its first chimney had peeped up from the marshes on which it was built, but which, by subtle and involuted calculations of the Conservative Whip, was now supposed to be won over to the true cause. The senior member for one of the divisions of Wharfpool had died suddenly on the steps of its Exchange, kindly furnishing, in a dull recess, a welcome occasion for speculation, turmoil, endeavour, and excitement.

The Irish element was strong in Wharfpool, and the merchants were mostly Radicals, still a change had come over the spirit of its dream. The Sovereign had visited its docks and warehouses, the Premier had shown it his massive brow and his lofty logic, and it had been more than rumoured in the Carlton that one seat at least in this stronghold of the enemy might be successfully won and held.

Everybody at Heronsmere talked Wharfpool all day long, and telegrams rained in on the Guernseys

and the Queenstowns, who were essentially what is called "political people."

"Qu'est-ce que ça peut vous faire, un homme de plus ou de moins?" said Syrlin, to whom this unending agitation over a bye-election in a dead season seemed wholly unaccountable.

"I'm sure I don't know what it matters," said Beaufront drearily. "We shall have an agrarian revolution anyhow, and a dead-set against all property, whoever is in or out; only with our people in we ought to die hard and decently, and with those other fellows in we shall slobber our butchers and kiss their boots."

"A single election in a time like the present has all the force of an example," said Freda; "we all know how contagious example is. Whether it is by the cholera, or by an opinion, one person infected infects fifty, five hundred, five thousand. Victory in Wharfpool is, in a sense, victory all over the country."

"The États Généraux did not prevent the guillotine," said Syrlin.

"No; but perhaps if the émigrés had not flocked over the frontiers they might have prevented it," said Freda. "At any rate, we do not mean to emigrate. They may take away our lands—I dare say they will—and our ground leases in the cities, and our rents and such few privileges as still remain to us—they are few indeed—but I hope that we shall not, to use Ralph's expression, kiss the boots of our butchers."

"Do you seriously think revolution so near in England?"

"Revolution? I do not know;—but the undermining of all property by the pressure of envy and change is certain throughout Europe. I am a Conservative, not because I can hope that Conservatism will materially alter the direction the world is taking, but because, as Ralph says, I wish to die hard; I think one should be true to one's order, to one's traditions, to one's belief, whatever it is."

"When one is happy enough to have one," said Syrlin with a sigh. "And if you care thus about the city of Wharfpool, Madame, I regret that I cannot buy the whole country for you, as your Sir Robert Walpole used to buy his boroughs!"

"Oh, I do not care so greatly about Wharfpool, except as a sign of the times, and I think they talk of it a little too much. It is unwise to tell a few thousand shipwrights and stevedores and warehousemen and counting-house clerks that the whole Empire hangs breathless over their ballot boxes. Government by Parliamentary representation is a very fine thing; but in practice it is not very logical or very satisfactory, and it has very little dignity about it. But I believe you think, do you not, that a woman should have no opinions or influence on politics?"

"Women have usually done mischief whenever they have meddled with public life; look at the Fronde," said Syrlin not very graciously. "I imagine, Lady Avillion, that your Primrose Habitations, and

their Councils, as far as I can comprehend them, will lead to political machinery in England being moulded on American lines. I think one of your clever men, Goldwin Smith, said so."

"A *doctrinaire!*"

"A *doctrinaire* possibly; that is a term of opprobrium so easily cast against any thinker; truly, what are your Primrose meetings except political organisations? And from those to the professional politician there is but a step. It is a pretty play-place this Primrose-pasture at the present; but you are building a scaffolding on it which the demagogue will use to his own ends. I imagine that your Order has never taken into consideration the immense danger to itself from the introduction into your country of political machinery of the kind."

"I really cannot see what you mean," said Freda with great stiffness, for she did see very well, and it was that fact which annoyed her.

"No?" said Syrlin, with a little incredulous smile, which annoyed her still more.

She did not know why it was so, but Syrlin had the power of making all her opinions seem fallacious and all her principles appear mere prejudices. Like all people of her world she was used to a certain theory of life which suited her, and which she did not examine very closely. She had, it is true, occasionally been disturbed in these beliefs by the unsatisfactory aspect which their results often presented; but she had told herself that this meagreness was the constant accompaniment of all human affairs,

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and she had gone on in what now appeared to her horribly like a groove, just as much of a groove as that daily trodden by those Philistines who had nothing on earth in common with her. A groove! that first abhorrence of all great minds.

"What are we to do?" she said, with impatience. "If we do not occupy ourselves with public questions we are looked on as heartless and self-engrossed pleasure-seekers. If we do do our best, as it seems to us, to lighten the misery and better the lot of those who are around us, we are considered to create a proletariate (that is a bad classicism I know, but it is the word in use). What are we to do? Will you tell me that? It is easy to criticise; it is not easy to originate. If we honestly believe that our own faction governs best, most wisely, most disinterestedly, surely we are justified in bringing that belief as forcibly as we can before the people at large? We may be stupid, but I assure you we are honest."

She looked very handsome as she spoke; her fair skin tinged to an unwonted warmth, her eyes deepened in colour and expression by the sincerity of her sentiment. Syrlin looked at her with an admiration he did not attempt to conceal.

"I am quite sure that wherever Lady Avillion passes she makes life sweeter for others if she makes it harder," his eyes said with unconscious eloquence, but with his lips he answered:

"Madame, I have seen in France the Dames du Calvaire forsaking of their own will their boudoirs

and their ball-rooms to go and watch by cancerous and scrofulous bodies, and wash putrid wounds, and soothe yelling maniacs, and lay their white hands on lupus-eaten foreheads. There could be no doubt of their disinterestedness, of their nobility, of their holiness, yet I am sure that were the guillotine again at work in a new Terror, the Dames du Calvaire would be the first sent to feed it; excellence of intention avails nothing against class jealousy. I was once in the Hôpital St.-Louis when the Duchesse de Tours came to pass the night there as *infirmière*. You know how beautiful she is, how young, how courted. Her patient was a man dying of a putrid tumour. He snarled as he saw her, and he said in words too foul to repeat literally, *'Va-t'en, chienne! tu as fait du rigolo—rien que du rigolo—et tu penses que je t'aiderai aussi à sauver ton âme!'* It was base and vile, for she nursed him tenderly through his filthy malady, and she had left a ball that night to take her turn of nursing in that stench and horror. But it serves to show you what is not, what never will be forgiven to your class. You have had *rigolo;* in decent language you have enjoyed. It is no sin, it is often even a virtue; but the hatred of those who have not enjoyed it is not to be appeased. They think your finest and tenderest actions are only another form of self-love; they think you want to make their sick-beds help you as a ladder to heaven. They do not believe in heaven, but they know that you do; and that is why the benevolence of the *heureux de la terre* is always a suspected and despised thing

in the eyes of these wolves who have been hungry and murrained all their lives. They think you use their starved bodies as stepping-stones to your own salvation. It is foolish, it is ungrateful, it is inexact; oh, yes,—but it is perhaps natural. The only charity which is wholly beyond suspicion is the charity of the poor to the poor. The poor are never just to the rich; they never will be so. The envy of the *rigolo* is for ever there."

"You make me very sad," said Lady Avillion simply. "If they only knew how little pleasure we find in it!"

They had been walking in the park that afternoon, through the delicious greenery of a May day, over short turf, sweet as the breath of Hebe, and through soft misty broken sunshine falling through the budding boughs of trees four centuries old. They had by this time come out through the home woods on to the village green; an ideal village green, like those on which Herrick's dairymaids and shepherds, and Shenstone's lads and lasses, danced round the May-pole, in days when England was green and merry, and simple of heart, and undefiled by the curses of soot and trade.

"Is it not an enchanting little place?" said Lady Avillion. "I always envy my cousin this village."

It was a charming village; nothing had probably changed in it since Shakespeare's time; the thatched cottages were bowered in elder, hawthorn, and apple trees, their little gardens sweet with clove pinks, cabbage roses, thrift, lavender, sweetbriar, and

southernwood, and chubby-cheeked children in blue pinafores, and as rosy-cheeked old women in white caps, were in front of their trim privet hedges or behind their wooden wickets. The roads were turf-bordered and tree-shadowed, the whole place ran over with abundance and superabundance of leaf and blossom. The square Saxon tower of the ancient church was embosomed in the deep greenery of sycamore and hornbeam, and the small common had its pond overhung by hazel and willow, and large elms, and flocks of geese and of sheep, each white as snow, were feeding under hawthorn trees which had been aged when Coleridge had been young.

"So English, isn't it? you wouldn't see that anywhere else," said Lady Avillion; "and though there are very beautiful villages in other countries, I grant, they would not be perhaps equal to this."

"Yes, it is very beautiful," said Syrlin. "Even in winter it must be so too, with all that varied growth of branch forms, and those little cottages under the trees, like boats under the shadows of tall masts. Surely no one ever dies here, and when they are born it must be without pain."

"What a pretty idea! There isn't much illness," said Freda, rather prosaically, "but I fear there is rheumatism and bronchitis sometimes. I am glad you like it. None of your villages are such an idyl as this."

"Have you dissent?" asked Violet Guernsey, as

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she might have said, have you the American fly or the potato disease?

"Alas, yes! How they *can*, with that dear old church looking such a picture!—but the poor I think like their religion like their tea; they don't mind it being coarse, so long as it is strong."

"Then dissent is so Radical, and they like that," said Lady Guernsey. "An old man at Foxdene, a day labourer who hasn't laboured for twenty years, has been listening to Radical tracts, read aloud by his son-in-law, who is a cobbler and a furious republican, and he said to me very amiably last week: 'We're going up, and ye're coming down, my lady; but I promise yer I shan't forget the Sunday puddens.' He has some batter pudding and roast beef from the kitchens every week."

"But that is just what they will do; they will forget the puddings if they get the upperhand," said Beaufront. "We have been feeding them on pudding to an inconceivable extent, an idiotic extent perhaps; they always come for their pudding, but they never forgive us for giving it to them. What does your Methuselah expect to be, Lady Guernsey? A millionaire or a Minister?"

"You know they all expect to be landed proprietors. They are told vaguely that if they take the land away from us, every labourer will become at a stroke a small squire, and his farming will be done for him by a supernatural agency, for such trifles as machinery and capital and the laws of

supply and demand are not to stand in the way for a moment."

"It is very odd," murmured Beaufront, "but we are here exactly where they were in France just before the assembling of the States-General. There is the same uneasiness in the nobility, the same useless efforts to conciliate the multitude, the same impoverishment of the landed classes, the same frothy, groundless, dazzling promises put forth by the agitators to allure the people, and nothing real under all the froth except the invitation to pillage."

"An invitation which humanity is always ready to accept."

At the same moment Syrlin was saying to Lady Avillion, "I am very tired, Madame, of the world; will you get Ralph to give me one of those pretty thatched cottages smothered under their roses? It would surely be easy to be philosophic here."

"In summer. The winter would try your philosophy, you would soon go back to the Boulevards. You know what Lorraine Iona thinks the only wise and proper life—four months of Pall Mall and eight months of Lebanon."

"Rather the Lebanon altogether and no Pall Mall or its congeners."

"Is not that only a *pose*, M. Syrlin? After all, you could go to the Lebanon to-morrow if you really wished."

"I suppose I could. I believe that I shall, though perhaps a little later than to-morrow. No; I do not *poser*; nature has made me a misanthrope."

"That you might play Alceste incomparably. Well, I am not a misanthrope. I like life, all forms of life, from the talk of those old women at their garden gates to the news which the Foreign Office men will bring down with them to-night."

"The *nihil humani*, &c. was never taken as a motto by one who could more surely persuade us to see divinity in humanity when we follow her steps!"

"What a compliment! It takes my breath away. An Englishman couldn't have said that. Why are you misanthropical when you can invent such pretty things?"

"I forget my misanthropy when I walk through this vale of roses with Lady Avillion as my guide."

"You must have so many guides through so many vales of roses!"

"Perhaps; but it is you I follow."

"Does he mean to *faire la cour* to me?" thought Freda, with a little offence and a vague apprehension united to a sense of pleasure at a homage which was new and of unusual type.

"Tell me why you would go to the Lebanon," she said aloud.

"Because I have no affinity with artificial life," he replied. "I am a forest animal chained at a banquet, the meats and drinks of the banquet have no savour to me. I want my native solitude."

"And fame? Has that no charm?"

"Fame! I suppose when some student of forgotten things writes in the next century of the French

actors of this, I shall perhaps have a dozen lines, twenty lines less than Frédéric Lemaître, and twelve less than the Coquelins."

"You remind me of the first Consul's discontent. *'J'ai pris Rome, Caire, Milan, et si je meurs demain, je n'aurai qu'une demi-page dans une histoire universelle!'* "

"But his half-page was at least in history. Players have no place in history, any more than shooting stars have a name in astronomy."

"You are very thankless."

"I know what I obtain. Dramatic artists are like the doomed rich man of the Gospel; we *have* our reward. No other artists perhaps have a reward so visible, so material, so gross; our laurel is touched with our own hands as Petrarch touched his on the Capitol; but it is a laurel which is not evergreen; and when we die our very memory dies with those who saw and heard us. Our memories may have interest for a curious scholar like Jules Janin or Arsène Houssaye. Nothing more."

"What is the kind of fame that you would care for, then?"

"I do not know that there is any. There is a kind of life after death which is enviable; such as Apuleius had in the city where I was educated, and all over the cities of the East; the fame which bent down before it alike the Pagan and the Christian world, which united in it all the glories and all the forces of the pontiff, the poet, the orator, the teacher,

the seer. Apuleius lived in the flesh eighteen hundred years ago, but he lives to-day in the spirit, in the mind of every scholar. Can we think of the sweetness of Psyche without remembering her poet? Can we even hear an ass bray in the streets without a vague fancy that the heart of Lucius is beating under his shaggy skin? That is fame, because it is indissoluble attachment with the minds of men by the fine threads of thought which stretch from the Africa of Carthage to the Europe of to-day. When I was very young," he continued after a pause, "I had absurd and gorgeous dreams of all that I should do and be. I had a vague vision of becoming the ruler of France; a mingling of Charlemagne and Lamartine, of Henri Quatre and Vergniaud, of Mirabeau and St. Louis, and God knows what besides. It has always been possible for a man of any talent, if he possessed the audacity, to dominate France, and through France Europe. Gambetta very nearly did it by mere force of words; but he was only a firework, he had not the *feu sacré*, and he would have failed if he had not died. My dream was much more august. I wished to be a Napoleon without slaughter, a Rienzi without weakness, a Danton without blood. I wished to do for humanity what Wagner has done for music. All dreams, dreams, absurd dreams, you will say; absurd indeed, and I have lived to play Alceste and Gaston de Presles!"

"Not absurd; I understand them," said his companion; and knowing the story of his birth she

could comprehend how that vague vision of empire had visited his solitary and romantic youth.

"He is really interesting," she thought. "What a pity he could not be the heir of the Duc d'Alger. It is often so; all the people who are in the line of succession so dull, and all who are out of it so brilliant!"

At last she had met a person who was wholly unlike others; which she had long despaired of doing. The world called Syrlin odd, affected, and bizarre; his indifference to his own successes seemed to them a mere studied attitude, and his very sincere modesty appeared, in one so celebrated, only an elaborate form of vanity. She had been disposed to agree with the world; but she had ceased to do so; she agreed rather with Beaufront, that here was a *nature d'élite,* for whom modern life was too coarse and its triumphs too meagre. He wanted the Rome of Raffaelle, the Ferrara of Lionel d'Este, the Verona of Catullus, the Syracuse of Meleager.

"But surely your life may well satisfy you," she urged. "You have fame, and the most agreeable kind of fame."

"And the most worthless!" said Syrlin, with contempt which was wholly genuine. "A mere puppet that they applaud as they applaud the elephant which plays the cymbals or the horse which dances a minuet! Ah, Madame!—and I who dreamed in my boyhood of such fame as a poet alone enjoys who haunts the memories of minds akin to his, and whose words recur to them whenever 'the moors

are dark beneath the moon' or 'the spring wind unbinds the mountain snow.' That kind of renown is beautiful, and is well worth having. But it is given only to the poets, to rouse in others that joy

> Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

"Do you remember," he said, gathering all the memories of his youthful ideals and adorations as he spoke, "where Apuleius tells us of that which he saw on the threshold of Proserpine at the gates of the grave; at midnight the sun burning in its full glory, face to face with the gods of hell and the gods of heaven? 'But in vain do you hear my words,' he says to the people, 'you cannot understand.' Do they ever understand? 'Because you know me as a poet, must you think me a magician?' he said to them aloud at the tribunal. And to this day the common crowds see an evil enchantment in any genius."

His companion listened in silence; she did not understand any more than the crowds of Œa, for she had no notion of what or of whom he was speaking; but she liked to hear him speak thus, and she had sympathy with his mood without having comprehension of his meaning.

"I am a very ignorant woman," she said after a little while; "we all are ignorant in our world, but I like to listen to you. Tell me a little more; who was your Apuleius?"

"Who was Apuleius?" said Syrlin, a little disconcerted and much surprised. But he overcame his disappointment; after all, why should a great lady know anything except of how many new seats are likely to be won over by her party at the next general election?

With that picturesque suggestion of which he held the secret in conversation, he replied to her question and satisfied her curiosity, until the sorceries of Thessaly, and the troubles of the Golden Ass, and the mysteries of the Pastophares, and the Apuleian adoration of Nature veiled under the Chaldean cultus, became intelligible to her, if they could not have for her anything of the fascination and the eternal and infinite suggestions which they possessed for him by whom they had been studied in boyhood under the stars of Africa.

In the barbaric and romantic city, once the Œa of Apuleius, the boy's imagination had been fed on the mystical lore of the East, and the beauty of its colour and its costume and its rich and luscious vegetation. A half cloistral and half nomad life had made him dreamy and impressionable to excess, yet daring, bold, and taciturn. His Spanish blood and his Moorish home had rendered him proud, visionary, half barbaric, like this city of the sea where Isis had been worshipped in all her mystical and amorous rites.

From his nurse, a Moorish woman, he had even imbibed enough of necromancy and of superstition to believe in the strange legends which are still told

with bated breath at midnight in the town where Apuleius was once adored as a philosopher and denounced as a magician.

"No one ever talks like that in our world, except perhaps Lorraine Iona," she thought, with a sense of something which her life had missed, the loss of which made it poor, ordinary, vacant.

She had been better educated than most of her own order, she could write a letter without grammatical faults in it, and she could write in more than one language grammatically; but she was what Syrlin deemed very ignorant.

She had had little time for mental culture since her marriage; there was so much for a woman of high rank to think of socially and politically, that the "humanities" were able to find but small place in her life. She knew the dates of every creation in the British Peerage; she knew the precise standing of every princeling and dukeling in the Almanach de Gotha; and she knew the relative importance or insignificance of every electoral seat in the United Kingdom; and this kind of knowledge is at variance with the study of arts and letters.

The memories of Apuleius and Œa, and above all of the melodious voice of the artist who had spoken of them, haunted her as she went to her own rooms, and put on a tea-gown which became her admirably, with golden palms and silver lilies embroidered on its pale blue plush.

Her own life, her own opinions and occupations

and interests, seemed to her very poor and pale, and although Queenstown met her on the stairs in a state of loquacious and radiant emotion consequent on a telegram which he showed to her, stating that the Wharfpool election had been won for the Conservative candidate by a majority of twenty-three, she answered with a tepid pleasure in his tidings which cruelly wounded him, and said slightingly that she had always been aware that Wharfpool would prove itself quite sound.

"If you were aware of it, you knew more than the Carlton or the Cabinet," said Queenstown, with much mortification and incredulity, folding up his despised despatch.

She did not answer, but went on down the stairs, drawing the trail of her golden and silver embroideries after her. It was terrible to think so, but—despite herself—the Wharfpool election and the fussy computations over contested polling, seemed very poor, trivial little things beside the mysteries of Osiris and Isis and the symbolic meaning of the sun-god burning in the darkness of the night.

She remembered how Lorraine Iona had once said that modern civilisation was grotesque, insincere, vulgar, and unutterably clumsy, beside the great vanished civilisations of the Asian and African worlds, of which they were merely the ill-executed imitations, and she began to have a perception of what he had meant when he had said it.

"Oh, my dear Freda, have you heard? Won by twenty-three votes, and Fitzurse always said we should

only have a majority of twenty!" cried Violet Guernsey with the utmost animation, as Lady Avillion entered the tea-room a moment later.

Fitzurse, a cousin of Beaufront's, was the Tory Whip; a miracle of exactitude as a calculating machine.

"Of course I have heard," said Freda coldly and impatiently, "and if the calculations of Whips were not so arithmetically correct, elections would be more exciting and even perhaps a little more genuine; foregone conclusions are so suggestive of manipulation."

"Oh!" said Violet Guernsey, too amazed, too horrified, too stupefied to say more.

The ladies and gentlemen gathered there in little groups with their tea-cups in their hands, gazed at her with a similar paralysis of horror, doubting their own senses. Beaufront was the first to recover himself.

"If the sacred institution of Whips is to be assailed, adieu to the Constitution. Blasphemy against the gods was punished by stoning on the Acropolis. My dear Freda, you will be stoned in the halls of the Carlton."

"A second Hypatia? I have not the presumption to fill such a rôle," said Freda, taking her tea-cup. "But I do not consider our electoral system very admirable; I do not see how anyone can, who knows a little what canvassing and the manœuvring machinery of the political clubs really mean in the country."

"You object to wire-pulling?"

"I object to American jargon," replied Freda very rigidly, as she heard sweet cadences of music come from the next room where Syrlin was playing to himself the "In dem Walde" of Schumann.

CHAPTER III.

THE Duchess of Queenstown that night had just fallen asleep when she was awakened by a knock at the door which connected her room with that of the Duke.

"He or his man always drops his brush, or his book, or something just when I am in my first nice sleep," she thought, as she said very irritably, "You are always disturbing me, what do you want?"

The Duke, remaining perforce on the other side of the locked door, said through the keyhole with meekness and humility, "So very sorry, dear; Wootton knocked a chair down. I say, Alex, do tell me, didn't you think Lady Avillion's manner very odd about the Wharfpool election? So cold and so sarcastic, wasn't it?"

"Yes—no—what do I care?" murmured his Duchess stupidly. "Do go to bed and be quiet."

"But if she were to go over to *them?*" whispered Queenstown with unutterable horror bristling through his smothered voice.

"To the Radicals? Freda? Goodness! what rubbish you talk! There isn't a political woman surer and sounder than she in all England. I hate her, but I know that."

"I don't see how *he* could; he got the last Garter," he replied grumbling and with a sigh. The gift of the last vacant Garter under a previous administration, some four years earlier, to Avillion, was a sore point with Queenstown, as he had always expected it to be given to himself and considered that he had a far greater right to it.

When fate, fortune, and position have given a man everything he can dream of except the Garter, the Garter represents to him the sole earthly possession that is worth a straw.

"What nightmare have you been dreaming on the sofas of the smoking-room?" said his wife angrily. "Do go to bed and keep quiet. The Avillions ratting! You might as well talk of the Speaker dancing a Highland fling with the mace! Freda only wasn't interested about Wharfpool because she is so desperately interested in Syrlin. That is the truth, if you want it."

"You don't mean it? A foreign actor! Good Lord!" said the Duke, and withdrew in horror to his couch to render thanks to Providence in his pious meditations that his own wife, however uncomfortably cold towards himself, had none of these vagaries.

Alex Queenstown very crossly buried her handsome, petulant young face under her masses of bronze-hued hair, and tried to recover her banished slumbers.

She had done her best, which was a very brilliant and usually victorious best, to captivate Syrlin

for herself, and having failed, watched her unconscious rival with a curious mingling of envy, anger, and derision. Her own intimate studies of herself told her that a woman may seem very cold to some men, principally because she is the reverse of cold to others. "George is quite right," she thought, as her eyelids closed. "This time last year she would have cared enormously about Wharfpool, and now she doesn't care a straw."

Syrlin had, without seeking it, the fatal gift of attracting women. Even to these English women of fashion, disposed to consider him eccentric, absurd, offensive, the very unconventionality and originality in him which affronted and affrighted them became an irresistible attraction, and made the perpetual monotony of type, the insignificance of appearance, and the conventionality of utterance of other men become very wearisome. After the low bow with uncovered head with which he greeted the entrance of their carriages in the drive, the stiff short jerk of the head which does duty as a bow in modern London, seemed unpolite and grotesque. Manner has so died out in England that there is scarcely even any tradition left of it; it has gone as utterly as the lace ruffles and slender rapiers of costume, and does not even, like them, reappear on a Drawing Room day.

But when it does reappear it has still an irresistible charm; it has the perfume of the dead roses of Marly and of Sceaux, it has the odour of the gardens of Windsor when Vandyke was painter to

the King, and it is still the sorcery which captivates most surely the eye, the ear, and the taste of a woman.

The contrast of the grace and courtliness of his manner to them with the unsparing veracities and the Timon-like rudeness of his expressed opinions, fascinated them as what is new and strange and contradictory always fascinates sated and inquisitive people.

The next day, sitting out under the cedars on the grey stone terraces, they talked of love, as men and women are apt to do when they are together in pleasant idleness. Opinions on the subject differed widely, but for the most part they were the light, ironical, disdainful opinions of modern life, which holds nothing very long or very deeply in it. Syrlin said little, but listened with that frown upon his brows which became him so well, at least in the eyes of women.

"The ideal love was Bona's for Brunaro," he said at last, abruptly.

"And who may Bona and Brunaro be? We are what is by courtesy termed educated people, but we cannot be expected to know everything," said Beaufront.

"Oh, if you do not know—"

"If we do not know, you must tell us. We await instruction."

"Tell us, M. Syrlin," said Freda.

"Brunaro was a condottiere in the only age of true romance that the world has ever seen, the

Renaissance. Brunaro sold his talents and his sword, now to this prince, and now to the other, and in all his wanderings and campaigns and adventures was followed by his mistress Bona, a young girl of Apulia. She even rode into battle with him. He was a victorious free lance for a long while, and very famous; then fortune changed and he was taken prisoner. Bona went to every sovereign and prince whom he had ever served all over Italy, and into France, and for eleven years—think of that!—she passed from court to court, from duchy to duchy, wearying deaf ears with reiterated entreaties for his liberty, and obtaining from every man of power whom he had served credentials in his honour and attestation of his valour and worth. The King of France was touched by her devotion and aided her as far as he could, and after eleven years she succeeded in procuring her lover's release. Brunaro wedded her when he left his prison, and they both died years later on in battle side by side. That is what I call an ideal love. It is a perfectly true story; you can read all about it in Sismondi or in any Italian chronicle of the epoch.

"And only think," he added, "what travelling meant in those days, when there was no conveyance except by litters or mules, when there was not a decent road nor a safe one in any kingdom, and scarcely a hospice on any Alpine pass, and when to ride a mile or two from village to village, or to enter any wood or thicket was to carry your life in your hand at every step. I confess Bona seems to

me the perfect heroine of love, far beyond Gretchen or Héloïse, Juliet or Doña Sol."

"It was a very remarkable constancy," said Lady Avillion. "And how nice of him to marry her!"

Syrlin looked darkly at her from under his brows; it was not the way in which he had expected the story to touch her.

"Eleven years!" said Beaufront, "and you say they'd been at it campaigning a great many years before that; she must have been 'getting on' by the time she got him out; I suppose he didn't mind that."

"What a brute you can be, Ralph!" said Syrlin with disgust. "If a woman had done as much for you, would you look at her wrinkles?"

"I fear I should; I know my own weaknesses."

"The story is a beautiful one," said Freda, "but it was possible to have beautiful stories in those days; it isn't now. For instance, suppose Bona had lived in this century and Brunaro had been Bazaine, or a Nihilist, or anybody else shut up, what would she have to do? She would rush about in a *coupé-lit,* with a maid carrying her travelling bag and her luncheon basket, and she would go to her own legation in each city, and button-hole her ministers, and beg and pray for private audiences, and all the Legations would say, 'Oh, there is that dreadful woman again!' and all the Silver-sticks at all the courts would hate the very sight of her! I ask you, my dear M. Syrlin, what possible romance would there be in it? And yet the woman's devotion might

be just as true and as great; only she would be mixed up with sleeping-cars, and hotels, and sandwiches, and waterproofs, and telegrams, and newspapers, and all the vulgarity of these times, until she would look perfectly commonplace!"

"That is quite true," said Beaufront. "Even when we go into the heart of Asia or the extreme of the Poles we take Liebig's extract and a pocket filter with us, and contrive to look supremely ridiculous. Comfort and science have killed romance, as they have gone a long way towards killing heroism."

A little later Syrlin found himself alone beside Lady Avillion.

"Why did you say that it was good of him to marry her?" he asked abruptly.

"Who, your Brunaro?" she asked with amusement. "Well I thought it was. Men are not often grateful in that way, nor do they often admit that a woman's constancy is worth much; they would generally rather be without it."

"You judge by the men of your world."

"One must judge most things by one's own generation. I fear my remarks were not *à la hauteur* for your enthusiasm for Bona, but indeed I admire her as much as you could wish."

"All Italian chronicles are full of poems of that sort; one wishes Shakespeare had known more of them. The story of Immelda and Bonifazio, the lovers of Bologna, is more fitted for a poet than the story of Romeo and Juliet. The fault in art of

'Romeo and Juliet' is that it has climax and anti-climax."

"Tell me the Bologna story."

"Some day, when you are alone, if you ever are so. But I think you have *l'esprit gouailleur*, Madame; it is the malady of our society, like dyspepsia."

"Well, we have not any serious or passionate feelings in our day; is it not Taine who says that our sorrows now are all trivial and personal; financial for the most part; that we are worried by a great many things, but are pained by very few?"

Syrlin looked at her and hesitated a moment; then he said abruptly, "Nature meant you to feel very deeply, Lady Avillion."

She was astonished. "How he recurs to personalities!" she thought impatiently; "it is such a fault with all artists."

"Why have you let the world lay your soul asleep?" he pursued.

He seemed to her very rude.

"What can you possibly know of my soul?" she said coldly. "I am not myself the least sure that I have one at all. At all events I have no time to think about it."

"That is your misfortune," said Syrlin, and said no more.

"My dear Ralph, if your hero were not so handsome he would be wholly intolerable," she said that evening to her cousin. "One feels that he is taking the diagnosis of one's mental and moral state the

whole time one is in his society; that is why I detest your friends the artists. They regard every human being as material for a study *d'après nature,* an *étude psychologique,* or something of the sort. People of the world at any rate may like or may dislike you, but they have the decency to conceal the conclusions to which they may have come concerning you."

"Every true artist is candid to imprudence; I like it myself," said Beaufront. "I cannot endure that eternal universal sea of whitewash in which society makes one drown all one's loves and hatreds with equal equanimity. 'Delighted to see you' one has to say to the bore whom we are longing to kick: what more could we say to our brother come home from a campaign?"

"It is always good breeding to seem pleased," said Freda, "and the whitewash, as you call it, is as necessary in society as it is in a hospital. Your friend Syrlin would say to the bore, *'Allez-vous-en, imbécile!'* With the 'delighted to see you' the bore is not hurt in his feelings, and you probably get away from his boredom much quicker by your courtesy."

"It's damnable hypocrisy, like all the bunkum of society."

"My dear Ralph, when you are with me please talk English and do not swear; Mrs. Laurence may indulge you in bad language, I do not."

"I beg your pardon," said Beaufront sulkily, "and in return, let me ask you to leave Mrs.

Laurence's name alone. You are the only person in society who does not respect her."

"She is very rich," said his cousin with an unkind accent. "Money is the supreme purifier. It is like the sacred fires of Asia, it purges all taint. It is the only divine essence that society recognises."

"And we grovel like hogs with our god!" said Iona, as he joined them with Syrlin. "What new things does any rich man do? Perhaps he gives you Tokai at dinner—perhaps he wins the Derby—perhaps he buys a steam yacht with all modern improvements and goes round the world to die of fever at the antipodes—but anything new he never does; he cannot; all the conditions of modern life forbid it; he must content himself with buying old china and growing prize peaches."

"If I were very rich," said Syrlin, "if I were very rich, Lady Avillion, I should search for Carthage and uncover it."

"Would you?" said Iona. "There is something profane in excavations; they disturb the dead, it is like rifling a sepulchre. If I were rich I would buy a large island in the Indian Ocean, and build myself a palace of white marble in the heart of a virgin forest."

"Merchantmen and missionaries would find you out and spoil your Paradise. There is no solitude now where the traders in gin and gospel do not come."

"If the island were mine I would erect on it that seigneurial privilege of the middle ages *une*

bonne petite potence from which intruders could be set swinging."

"There is plenty of work that the *bonne petite potence* could do with advantage at home?" said Beaufront. "But, unfortunately, modern squeamishness forbids the general usage."

"Modern feeling is mawkish over what it sees, and hard as stones to what it does not see," answered Iona. "It sees a child caned by a schoolmaster, and goes into hysterics; tens of thousands of children are dwarfed, poisoned, cretinised, and cursed in factories and mines and engine-rooms, it does not care. A single rioter is killed by a policeman or gendarme, it shrieks and tears its hair; hundreds of soldiers die of disease and miasma in pestilential camps in Egypt or Massowah, Tonkin or Burmah, it does not care. It is not really life or death which moves it, only something which happens to catch its eye."

"Well, we are all like that, you know," said Freda. "I read this morning of a hundred people burnt by a railway accident on the Pacific lines, and it did not make me enjoy my chocolate less; but in the gardens I saw a cat kill a field-mouse, catch it, and claw it, and pull its head off alive, and it made me feel quite wretched. I suppose that is because I am so very modern, my heart is only reachable through my eyes. I was sorry of course, when I thought about it, for the people on the Pacific Railway; but for the field-mouse I could have wept, I could have killed its murderer."

"Your mouse should be immortalised with Lesbia's sparrow and Corinne's parrot," said Guernsey.

"I wish a cat would kill me," said Beaufront, "if you would weep for me. There are large cats called tigers in Lahore. One very nearly ate me up once. You make me wish to seek Lahore again."

Syrlin said nothing at all.

When Lady Avillion went to dress for dinner that night she found an envelope which had not come by post, lying on the table before the mirror. Inside it was a sheet of the Heronsmere note-paper, and on the paper were written some lines of verse.

My Lady weeps! A little mouseling grey,
  Born in the furrow, cradled in the corn,
Content in simple pleasures, dies to-day,
  And by its slaughter dims the joyous morn;
All cold and empty leaves its russet nest,
Where stalk and leaf were folded for its rest.

My Lady weeps! The harvest rodent small
  Has reached a height we never dare to sight,
Has touched a soul removèd from us all
  In its chaste stillness. Ah, dear God! to-night,
Give me death too, if honoured by one sigh
From that calm breast wherein no love doth lie.

The first impression of Freda Avillion on reading the lines was that it was an unwarrantable and intolerable impertinence to have sent them to her; her next was that of a vivid pleasure in this impertinence for which she was angry with herself. Her maid, a Parisienne, looked at her with curiosity as she stood before her mirror with the sheet of note-

paper in her hand; the maid knew that the servant of "le beau Syrlin" had brought that envelope to the door of her apartments, and there was an expression, a changing wave of expression on her mistress's countenance, which, though the woman had been long in her service, she had never seen there.

"If Miladi would only take up a fancy for anyone it would be so much more agreeable for us," thought this maid, who was not by nature a scrupulous or serious person, and found Lady Avillion's service profoundly uninteresting and unromantic.

Freda read the lines once, twice, thrice, then she threw the paper aside, and said curtly to her waiting woman:

"Make haste, the second bell has rung."

Whilst her hair was being brushed out and coiled round about her proud head with a comb of diamonds holding up its abundance, the lines she had read three times and perfectly remembered were in her mind very vividly. She could not dismiss them from it, and she could not decide how to treat them. To have sent them at all was insolent, audacious, altogether wrong; but to keep silence about them would seem to make an accepted secret out of them, and that surely would never do, she said to herself; it would flatter him intolerably, and would misrepresent her own annoyance at them most mischievously. The only way to make them harmless would be to make them public. It was an impertinence, a great piece of audacity and presumption. It was only ex-

cusable because the offender was a man of genius; people of genius are never quite responsible for their actions. There was only one way to treat it, she decided; and that way she took when she went down to dinner.

"M. Syrlin has sent me some verses on my dead mouse," she said with a smile, and in a very audible tone; "but he is as cruel as I am, for he has said nothing whatever about the poor people burnt on the Pacific Railway; the mouse touched his pity too and the passengers did not. Your lines are really charming," she added, and turned to their author. "Thanks so much; how pretty they would be set to music."

Syrlin heard with irritation and mortification; a flush of colour rose for a moment over his face. He had not expected to have his imprudent lines made public in so merciless a manner.

"Auriol shall sing them," she continued, and she held the paper on which they were written to that gifted songster, who was amongst the guests of Heronsmere; "he is so very clever at musical improvisation; he will give them to us after dinner."

Syrlin intercepted the paper before Auriol could take it from her and tore it into fragments.

"Auriol can rhyme for himself," he said coldly, "and I will sing you my own verses."

Auriol looked perplexed, and with the quick instinct of an artist discerned that something was wrong with his friend. Freda Avillion raised her eyebrows with a slight, very slight suggestion of con-

temptuous surprise, and spoke to her cousin about the time the express train passed through the little private station of Heronsmere only pausing there if it had been telegraphed for by him.

"I hoped to stay another day," she added, "but I find I must go to-morrow."

"Have you had any telegrams?" he asked.

She seemed not to hear the question, and they passed into the dining-hall.

Throughout the dinner Syrlin realised the epithet so often given to him of *le beau ténébreux;* he said very little and his great dark eyes were veiled and sombre. It seemed to him that she had put upon him a public affront. The lines had been humble, veiled, delicate, insignificant enough to have escaped such chastisement. He understood that she had inflicted it to make him feel that she would have no private intelligence with him even about a trifle.

"What was in your verses that I might not see them?" asked Auriol of him after dinner when the ladies were gone.

"What is there in any verses?" said Syrlin; "just so much as the reader puts in them—no more."

"What did my lady put into yours?"

"An offence I suppose. But I will sing them myself, and you will see what you think of them."

Beaufront overhearing, looked at him and was about to speak, then checked himself.

They always met after dinner in what was called the Gobelins Room; a long gallery hung with very gay Watteau scenes in Gobelin tapestry and the

furniture covered with embroidered white silk which repeated the light and lively colour of the walls. From the ceiling hung chandeliers of old Murano glass, and the whole apartment was brilliantly gay and smiling, inundated with light in which the fair skins of the handsome women assembled there shone radiantly.

"M. de Syrlin, you said you would sing," said one of them.

"Not here; not yet," said Syrlin almost rudely. Women always liked his rudeness.

"Oh yes, yes, now!" said the Duchess, and all the ladies there except Freda Avillion added their entreaties and commands.

Syrlin looked at her once, then with a reluctance which he did not take the trouble to disguise walked to one of the windows, pushed aside its curtains, opened the shutters, and threw the glass door open to the warm and humid and moonless night without.

"Allow me; I can never sing a note in a room shut up," he said curtly; as he let in the damp sweet-scented hawthorn-haunted fresh air.

The fragrance of the damp gardens and woods was borne into the perfumed gallery; he took up Auriol's lute, seated himself by the open door, with his profile showing pale and clear against the darkness beyond, and after a moment's silence began to tune the chords. Freda Avillion listened with a sense of expectation and offence. Was it possible that he would dare to sing what he had written to her?

But Syrlin, with the dark gardens behind him, sang in his own language some lines which he improvised, as he did the music to which he set them; an air soft and wild and sad, such as he had heard wandering gitanos sing in the lustrous nights of spring in that ruined palace garden of his Moorish home. He had one of those voices which are a melody in their slightest utterance.

Jadis à Holyrood, par un beau jour de mai,
Marie Stuart, suivie de près d'un cortége gai,
Vit souris mignonne, défaillante et blessée,
Tomber sous les griffes d'une chatte cendrée;
Et la Reine pleurait!

L'altière majesté, la dame sans merci,
Sans oncques sourciller, à l'échafaud vouait
Le troubadour français, impétueux, hardi,
Qui follement l'aimait, et le lui dire osait.
Le céladon tomba occis devant ses yeux:
Pauvre rossignol, frappé par l'éclair,
Tué quand il chantait, pour apaiser les feux
Des grands et fiers jaloux, éperdus de la chair
De la belle sorcière!

Son corps sanglant souillait l'hermine du manteau.
Restaient inachevés madrigal et rondeau;
La Reine souriait!

Les jouvenceaux gaillards de ses trois royaumes,
Chevaliers fringants, superbes gentilshommes,
Leur sang tout bleu versaient à flots sans espérance,
Ne briguant qu'un regard royal en récompense.
Amoureux dévoués, fils glorieux des preux,
Tous elle faisait mourir, disant ceci: "Je veux!"

Souriant avec froideur, riant de son beau rire.
Pas un seul n'hésitait, ni pensait la maudire,
Quand la Reine riait.

De sa main un signe les mandait au trépas.
Le triste défilé des morts suivait ses pas.
Ses fols amants tombés, dormaient d'un lourd sommeil.
Du palais nul clairon ne sonnait leur réveil.
Sanglants, meurtris, glacés, ils gisaient oubliés,
Sans larmes ni pitié par elle abandonnés.
Des landes le chardon semé sur leur tombeau,
Leur requiem chanté par le sinistre corbeau:
Et la Reine riait!

Pourtant à Holyrood, par un beau jour de mai,
La Reine, à qui la mort ne fut qu'un jouet gai,
Voyant couler un sang vilain et maigrelet,
Teindre d'écarlate l'odorant serpolet,
Ce jour-là pleurait!

The verses were a mere thought of the moment, unpolished and unstudied, but sung as Syrlin sang them to the lute, with a world of unspoken meaning and suggestions burning through the words, they thrilled every feminine soul amongst his audience with a strange sense of mingled guiltiness, regret, and vague desire.

Everyone present looked at Lady Avillion, but she was conscious of that general scrutiny and was prepared for it. She listened with a slight cold smile, as he had said that Mary Stuart listened to the trampling of armed men. When the last words of the song had died off into air, she was the first to speak.

"What a magician is genius! I said that a cat

killed a mouse this afternoon, and lo! M. Syrlin has built up out of it a whole charming romance. Only I do wish that he would not sing and say unkind things of Mary Stuart; it is not fair; I believe that she was the most calumniated woman who ever suffered from living in an uncongenial atmosphere. Rizzio, we know, was old and ugly, Darnley an idiot, Bothwell a brute, and I dare say, if we really knew, Chastelard was a mere coxcomb who was exceedingly boastful and troublesome. But the song, as a song, is charming, and I am greatly honoured to have been even the indirect means of inspiring it."

In herself she was exceedingly offended. The verses he had sung were not the verses which he had sent to her, and he knew it and she knew it, and she was forced in that way to have some secret in common with him; it was a very slight secret, still it was one, and its existence irritated her.

Syrlin listened with a very dark shadow on his face. He was too utterly an artist to be completely a man of the world; his feelings were unbroken horses which ran away with him, and over which he had little control. He gave the lute to Auriol. "Sing you; it is not my province," he said curtly.

"If Mary Stuart had only lived in our time," said Freda, continuing her subject, "she would have written a diary and told us all about these gentlemen. Perhaps it was not at all her fault that they died or fought. A great many of them hated the Presbyterians and a great many of them hated the Tudors, and if they could have got the English throne

for her, what a 'good time' they would have had themselves! Chastelard I dare say did adore her really, but it might not be her fault; perhaps she was kind to him, and he was conceited, and the scaffold did not mean very much in those days; it was hardly more to them to call the guards than it is to us to tell the servants that we don't receive so-and-so any more."

Everyone laughed except Syrlin and Beaufront; the former was silently turning over Auriol's music, the latter said impatiently:

"Not to be received by you, Freda, would certainly be a sentence of death; still it would be scarcely as irrevocable as the axe. You might yourself repent and relent, or—to suggest it is sacrilege, but it is possible—your exiled one might console himself at some more hospitable door; whereas Chastelard, his head once cut off, could find no compassionate hand to put it on again."

"Of course I know that, but I don't believe that the headsman seemed to them in those days anything more than our groom of the chambers seems to us."

"Certainly he kept the way clear," said Beaufront grimly, "and he cut short all those complications which nowadays get into the newspapers."

Meanwhile the Duchess of Queenstown, with lovely humid eyes, was saying persuasively to Syrlin:

"You must give me a copy of those verses,

and write me down the music — yes, yes — you must!"

"I have already forgotten both words and air," said Syrlin with impatience.

"Forgotten them! Impossible!"

"Very possible; I never remember what I improvise."

"Improvise? The music I suppose? But you sent the verses to Lady Avillion before dinner?"

"I have forgotten both the verses and the music," he repeated obstinately. "They were rubbish; forget likewise that you heard them."

"Mary Stuart," said Iona, "was the *sorcière éternelle,* the type of the woman who magnetises men, for whom they weep, for whom they die, for whom often they perish in a madhouse or find a suicide's grave. I do not believe that she was cruel, as Syrlin thinks; she was merely irresistibly seductive, which comes to the same thing."

"You make me so jealous, Duchess," said Auriol, who was always good-natured and ready to smooth a ruffled temper or bridge over an awkward moment. "Let me sing you some verses of Gérard de Nerval's that I made music for last week. They are very simple, but they embody just the vague kind of indistinct memory that comes to one on a summer afternoon in some warm old château garden."

And he touched a chord or two of the lute and sang in his sweet, sensitive, far-reaching tenor voice:

"Il est un air pour lequel j'offrirais
Tout Rossini, tout Mozart, et tout Weber,
Un air très vieux, languissant et funèbre,
Qui pour moi seul a des charmes secrets.

Or, chaque fois que je viens l'entendre,
De deux cents ans mon âme rajeunit;
C'est sous Louis Treize; et je crois voir s'étendre
Un château vert que le soleil jaunit;

Puis un château de brique aux coins de pierre,
Aux vitraux teints de rougeâtres couleurs,
Ceint de grands parcs, avec une rivière
Baignant ses pieds, qui coule entre des fleurs;

Puis une dame, à sa haute fenêtre,
Blonde, aux yeux noirs, en ses habits anciens,
Que dans une autre existence peut-être
J'ai déjà vue—et dont je me souviens!"

Auriol was celebrated in salons and was a great and even a perfect singer, and well beloved by women; but all the beauty of his voice, and of the half sad, half playful strain of his melody, could not banish from the memories of the ladies listening to him the more sombre and menacing pathos of "La Reine pleurait." Perhaps because Auriol sang to them often and Syrlin had never done so before; perhaps because their curiosity had been excited by the latter, and their sense aroused of something concealed yet suggested, which was to be discovered by those who had the key to it in his verses; perhaps merely because all popular favour is fickle and capricious, the groups in the drawing-room of Herons-

mere listened with diminished interest to the famous tenor.

"You beat me even on my own ground," murmured Auriol to his friend, "and it is not fair, because I cannot act, and so can never rival you in yours."

"You are a great musician, I am only a street-singer," said Syrlin, petulantly.

"A street singer!" repeated Auriol with laughter; "who were your singing masters?"

"Spanish gipsies," said Syrlin, and spoke the truth.

"I wish they had been mine," said the generous artist.

"Sing again; sing us Spanish songs, Moorish songs, French songs, any songs," said the ladies, all the ladies except Freda Avillion.

But Syrlin was obdurate, he would sing no more that night.

He said nothing, but walked through the doorway into the gardens, and closed the door behind him.

"I am glad he has shut the door at last," said Freda with impatience; "for us all to have sore throats would be an excessive payment for the pleasure of hearing his sweet singing. Auriol is more reasonable; he does not require to inhale fogs to receive inspiration."

"You are very ungrateful, Freda," said Violet Guernsey, with a smile.

"Like Mary Stuart? I am not at all like Mary

Stuart; I think if I had been she, I should have won my crown of England."

"I am sure you would," said Beaufront, but his tone robbed the words of any compliment.

"Why are you sure I should?"

"Because you wouldn't have wasted your time on poets and artists, and such small fry; and you would have won over Cecil, and shut up Elizabeth in a Protestant nunnery, and made John Knox hear mass at Westminster and dance a saraband at Windsor, and had your own way altogether from the Hebrides to the Needles."

"Thank you for your flattering estimate," said his cousin, who was displeased at it, and in her own thoughts violently angered at the song which had been sung and at the conjectures and curiosities which she knew it was arousing in the breasts of her discreet and well-bred friends.

"Artists are always affected," she said to herself; "their impromptus are like some people's witticisms, carefully prepared and learnt by heart, and laid up in lavender till occasion arises to use them."

But her conscience smote her at this ungenerous and unjust thought; she did not believe what she tried to cheat herself into the idea that she believed. Syrlin had many faults; he might even have no ordinary arrogance, and some overstrained susceptibilities, and much unwise impulse and quickly irritated temper, but she felt that he was false in nothing; he was transparently and even foolishly sincere both in feeling and expression. She was

angered against him; what he had written and what he had sung was insolent, audacious, romantic, absurd, unwarranted, unjustifiable; but then he was a man of genius: that might be pardoned in him which in another man, made of mere common clay, would have been insufferable.

His words had offended her in every way; by their suggestion, their implication, their presumption; above all by the sort of semi-secrecy which they had created between him and herself, and which he had seemed to claim as a matter of course, so greatly to her indignation.

"And as if I were the least like Mary Stuart!" she thought, as she sat in the silence of her bedroom, whilst the wax candles burned low in their sockets. The want of romance in modern existence had always made her vaguely desire to meet with romance; but now that she did meet with it, it displeased her; it was impetuous, tactless, presuming, embarrassing; it was like the gust of warm west wind from the Channel waters and the dewy woods which had blown into the drawing-room when Syrlin had thrown open the glass door and let in the night air. The wind had been fresh and fragrant, but with suggestions of storm in it; and it had blown out some of the lights, rudely shaken the fragile Murano chandeliers, and stirred the laces and curls of the startled ladies.

Yet it was a pity the verses should be lost; she remembered them now, and she would have forgotten them in the morning; so, after some twenty minutes

of hesitation, she drew some paper to her and wrote them down; both those he had burned and those he had sung. Her memory was retentive, and her attention to political life had trained it to the rapid recollection of what she had heard. When they were written she locked up the sheets in a letter box.

"Et la Reine pleurait!" she murmured with a smile; there was a dimness in her own eyes as she smiled.

CHAPTER IV.

The next day she went to London. There is no better antidote for romance than London: its atmosphere of practical politics and prosaic cares, its hard, keen, breathless intellectuality, its incessant pleasure, which is but a gilded servitude, its press, its worry, its ennui, its *strenua inertia*, its curiously fixed yet false conviction that it is the apex of civilisation and the navel of the civilised world, all these things and many others make the air of London as fatal to romance as it is stimulating to intrigue and to intelligence. In place of Romeo's silken ladder there is a fire-escape leaning against the balcony, and in lieu of Stradella's serenade there is the voice of the news-boy proclaiming monster meetings in Manchester, new murder in Whitechapel, horrible accident on the Great Northern, riots at Belfast and Carrickfergus.

You are exquisitely happy or intensely miserable; but, be you which you will, there are the sixpenny telegrams to answer, there are the hourly letters to look at, there are the bills which you must pass to your factotum to open, there is the division coming on which you would not like to miss, there

is the dinner for which you must dress, there are the people coming in for tea and saying, "What, haven't you heard?" "And would you ever believe?" and you eat an atom of muffin, or smoke a cigarette, and coax some news out of a Cabinet Minister, and in the streets a dull grey rain is falling; and any deep intensity of emotion or any great sweetness of sympathy are alike dulled and out of keeping with the atmosphere, and neither your ecstasy nor your misery can have any kind of poetry about them, and cannot loom large any more than the planets can, which are hidden by the roofs and the smoke-clouds.

When Freda Avillion descended at her own house in Piccadilly, and saw the heaps of visiting cards and unopened notes lying on her hall table, she felt that she was once more safe in the land of prose.

The great fire burning in the hall, though it was May; the canary-coloured liveries of her own footmen, and their powdered heads like great guelder-roses; the faint smell of ever-pervading fog, against which the aromatic odours of burning pastilles struggled in vain; the kindred scent of the damp newspapers and the new books from the libraries, and the presentation to her of various unopened telegrams, all revealed quickly to her, to her sight and her senses, that she was where she had always said she most loved to be; and where, by no possibility, could romance intrude itself.

The shades of Mary Stuart and Chastelard, and the "*triste défilé des morts,*" were left far behind

in the green and blossoming glades of romantic Heronsmere.

"Has my lord come to town yet?" she asked, to add the last confirming touch of prose to the place and the moment.

My lord had come to town last night and taken the morning express to Paris; he had left word that he would be back on Monday week, in time to attend the State Ball.

"How conventional English people are," she thought as she heard and passed up the staircase. "Uther cares not a straw for any laws or commandments, or any kind of public or of private opinion, and yet he will bore himself at a State function which he abhors, though he wants nothing at Court, absolutely nothing; he didn't care even for the Garter when they gave it him, for they make even that so cheap now."

She went to her rooms and changed her clothes, and looked over her engagement list to recall where she had to go that night, and then went to her boudoir for tea, where several men came in to pay her homage, bringing the freshest of gossipry and the deadliest of Cabinet secrets.

But for the first time in her life London seemed dull and insupportably absurd in its pompous fret and frivolity. She thought with regret of the blackbirds singing in the hawthorns down at Heronsmere.

She went to a great dinner at half-past nine

o'clock, where she sat between a very deaf statesman and a very loquacious ambassador. She had heard the endless stories of the one and raised her voice to the ear of the other ever since her first season. After dinner she went to a reception where every kind of notability and two or three European sovereigns were present, and she was told in confidence some wondrous news concerning some startling disaffection in the very heart of the Government, but she was scarcely interested; she felt with a kind of terror that her political passions were slipping their cables and drifting—drifting—who could say where? She had always thought that if you did not care for politics, you might as well be a hedgehog, or an oyster, or a slow-worm.

Why was this artist, whom she had known only a few weeks, and to whom her prejudices were tempted to dispute any place in her world at all, capable of unsettling by a word the solid convictions of a lifetime, and casting into the serene and peaceful waters of her political content the stone of a dull and heavy doubt, which spread around it ever-widening circles of uncomfortable unbelief?

London was quite full; almost everyone had returned from the recess; innumerable broughams and hansoms were flashing through Piccadilly as she went home at two in the morning. Opposite her gates a wretched tramp was sleeping under one of the trees of the Green Park, and a policeman, wet and sullen, was shaking him out of his sleep to "run him in"

at the nearest station. It was raining fast, and the water ran off the glass of the carriage lamps and the waterproof coats of the coachman and footman; the night was very dark, and an east wind blew with the smell of smoke and of gas in its gusts.

She thought of the open window at Heronsmere on the previous night, and of the fresh wild hyacinth-scented breeze from the sea, with which she had found fault, and of the voice of the singer singing:

> Le cadavre souillait l'hermine du manteau,
> Restaient inachevés madrigal et rondeau.

One thing which he had said haunted her persistently. He had told her that nature had intended her to feel very deeply. Was it true? And if it were true, how could he know it? She could not remember that she had ever felt anything very deeply except the death of an old pointer dog when she was twelve years of age. She had known disappointments, disillusion; she remembered, when she had been married a few weeks, suffering a great deal from her discovery that Avillion was not in the least what she had expected him to be; she had suffered also from that unchangeable selfishness and *sécheresse du cœur* which met her in the temperament of her children; but after all these were not intense sorrows—they were at most that kind of disenchantment which accompanies most relations and affections of life.

She slept ill and awoke unrefreshed, with the

refrain of "La Reine pleurait" echoing through her ear, whilst below her windows the discordant cries of cabmen and milksellers and newsvendors, came over the high court-yard walls, and through the plate-glass windows of Avillion House.

CHAPTER V.

All the morning long she had incessant business correspondence, engagements of all sorts; she had a note from Lord Greatorex about a bill which the Government fathered, and which it was feared would be buried still-born by an unfeeling Parliament; and she had telegrams from many parts of the kingdom, all concerning some public interest or another.

It was the kind of thing which had always possessed paramount interest for her; she had always thought that she would start up on her dying bed if she heard of a change of ministry, or shake off scarlet fever itself to go down to the House on the night of a close division. But now it all seemed to her very much like the "rattling of peas in a dry bladder," like the bustling and buzzing of flies in a paper-cage. What would they really change in the history of the world? What would they really alter in the oscillations of nations? *Che sarà, sarà,* despite Downing Street and the Treasury Bench.

Flodden came that day at five o'clock, boring her unconscionably with his wistful bright young eyes, and his trusting, hesitating humility of homage, and she was cold and unkind and disdainful to him. He sat there patiently waiting whilst others came

and went; and when his patience was at last rewarded by being alone in her rooms, he told her, hoping to please her, that he had finally decided and had had his name proposed at the Carlton, and went on to speak of the yearly donation he would give to that acropolis of the Conservative party. But she disconcerted and confused him cruelly; she had no word of praise or pleasure.

"I don't see what else you could do," she said slightingly; "you are not a Socialist, and nobody but a Socialist can possibly go with the other side now."

"I am not at all sure what I am," murmured the lad. "Everything seems to me very false and hollow; it is all formula, nothing else; but I thought you wished me to join your Party, and so I did it as soon as I felt I could do it honestly."

"My dear Lord Flodden," said Freda very unkindly, "I hope you don't say these things anywhere else. I am not a touter for the Tories! You seemed to me very miserable and astray, and so I thought it only right to make you know the proper people, but as to influencing you one way or another I never attempt to influence anyone, I have a horror of influencing others, it always turns out ill, and they always complain that they are *mis là-dedans*. I never attempt to bias a human being; Violet Guernsey does, and gets endlessly abused for it. If your principles lead you to the Carlton go to the Carlton, but pray do not say that I led you there."

"I thought," stammered Flodden, and his blue eyes looked at her with the pained, puzzled look of

a dog who knows that he is being punished, but cannot imagine what fault he has committed.

"You thought very wrongly then," said his Lady coldly. "Of course, as I say, if you are not a *rouge* you can scarcely go to the other people now; but you have always seemed to me to be a little *rouge* at heart; you seem to despise property, and to think your own rank a crime, and to be disposed to find Christ in a crossing-sweeper, and all that sort of socialistic thing. I shall never myself feel the least astonished to hear you have turned Bra-eden into a Phalanstère and given your peer's robes away as St. Martin gave his cloak."

The boy sighed heavily; her words fell like ice on the warmth of his yearning and empty heart.

"If it would do any good I would, but it wouldn't," he murmured. "We might strip our very skin off our flesh for them; they would always hate us."

"Of course, 'oignez vilain, il vous poindra; poignez vilain, il vous oindra;' that is as true now in the days of our Jacquerie as it was in the days of Froissart and Commines."

Flodden looked at her astonished.

"But that is not at all what you say—what your party says—at the Primrose meetings?"

"We talk nonsense there," said Freda coldly. "It is taken at its due valuation. The only surprising thing about it is that we keep our countenances while we talk it."

Then awakening to a sense of her ill-humour

and unwisdom, she said with a return to her kinder tone:

"Still I think you are quite right to come to us. The other side at all events means at this moment the sacrifice of England. As to the absolute duty of patriotism no honest and courageous gentleman can have any doubts. Unless you wish to see Ireland a thirty-third star in the American flag, and India a Russian province, Gibraltar and Malta lost, and Canada annexed to the United States, you must be with us, even if many things are not as they ought to be, or would be in Utopia."

And with this, Flodden, who had hoped for much more, had to be content. He dimly understood that he had offended her in openly expressing his sense of her influence on him, and he sorrowfully realised that what he did or did not do was of no account whatever to the lady of his idolatry.

"She has been kind to me," he thought humbly; "I had no sort of right to expect her to be interested in my life except as it may or may not be of use to the country."

But the calm common-sense of this conclusion hurt him with a pang which came from a feeling much humbler and purer than vanity or any species of self-love.

He was vaguely sensible that what he had thought the sweet compassionate condescension of an angel to a mortal, of an empress to a page, what he had deemed her sympathy with the troubles and perplexities of his conscience and the confusion of his

ideals and disillusions, had been only the mere desire of a woman of the world, of a political woman, to secure to her party a powerful and desired neophyte. Unless she had been momentarily irritated and out of temper with her own life and with its interests she would never have allowed him to perceive this. But she was in one of those moods when a woman is involuntarily and injudiciously disagreeable to the first *souffre-douleur* who comes within her reach; and Guy Flodden, with his bashfulness, his devotion, his wistful boyish eyes, his terrible earnestness of youth at once Scotch and Italian, and his total incapacity of seeing anything in a light or satiric sense, did at that instant incense her greatly, sitting there as he did on the satin *pouf* with the lamplight full on his ruddy, innocent, shepherd-like face.

"The boy is a walking pastoral," she thought petulantly. "He should keep on his Sicilian hills or his Scottish straths; he is ridiculous in London! Who ever sees cheeks like those in London? He is Robin, Corydon, Jock, Strephon, but he is utterly out of place here, where one only wants safe under-secretaries and dancing-men in crimson coats. Then he is so desperately and tediously in love with his duties!—as if that ever ends in anything better than Quarter Sessions, and County Elections, and House of Lords Committees, and an early marriage, and a dozen children!

She had rather admired the boy before, although he had bored her, but now, he seemed to her wholly

insufferable, with his eyes like wet violets and his long fair hair, sitting there on that stool as if he never meant to move any more!

"I am sorry to send you away," she said at last, thoroughly wearied of his presence. "But I must go and dress. I dine early to-night, for I am going to the Commons, and they expect to get through Questions by seven and begin the debate as soon as the House fills after dinner."

Flodden went sadly away, and out into the foggy close air of the evening. He dined in his own house hurriedly and ill, and hastened as quickly as he could to Palace Yard, and getting out of his cab sent it home and walked up and down on the flags of the precincts of the Houses of Parliament.

He had been there half an hour when the well-known Avillion liveries came in sight, and her brougham with two grey horses drove quickly up to the ladies' entrance in the Speaker's Yard. Flodden, who had hoped that she might be alone, and that he might escort her upstairs, saw with a sigh that she was accompanied by two men whom he knew by sight, Lord Glastonbury and Colonel Aymar, one a diplomatist, the other a guardsman—how foolish to suppose that she would ever be alone!

He saw her descend and disappear within the doorway and go up the steep narrow stairs; she wore a long, carmine-coloured fur-lined cloak, and its small fur-edged hood was over her head.

He stood so long gazing blankly into the entrance

that the policeman on duty, who did not know him, questioned him rather roughly. Roused from his reverie, Flodden crossed the court, and went wearily to the gallery above the clock. He might have gone in for a moment where she was, but he did not dare; he felt that he had offended her, felt it with the agonised despair of youth, which magnifies a passing summer-cloud into a tornado's darkness of ruin.

The debate was animated, and was considered interesting, as it was undoubtedly important: but to Flodden it seemed prolixity, inanity, vacuity, mere fruitless and senseless noise of words. The boy told himself in vain that it was the assembly which had heard Burke and Pitt; he could feel no enthusiasm, no veneration. Several hundreds of men sprawling about on the benches in ungraceful attitudes, snoring under the cover of their hats, emitting hilarious or derisive noises which rival the hyena's laugh and the rhinocero's grunt, whilst here and there one of the number jerks himself on to his feet and speaks without rhetoric, elegance, or melody, aided by little bits of oblong papers alternately snatched up and laid down, is not a noble or heroic spectacle looked on from above; and it is difficult to believe that it can ever have been so. Humanity in a mass is always unlovely and insect-like; grotesque when it is not brutal.

At the moment of Guy's entrance, a famous person was speaking, the gas-light shone on his bald pate, and his arms worked vigorously like the

wooden arms of a signal; his voice, although the papers on the morrow described it as the silver trump and the golden clarion, did not travel far beyond the Mace near which he stood, and it was fortunate that the reporters had been supplied beforehand with his speech. Had it been thus in the Areopagus and the Forum? Had not the great orators of old had other than this pump-handle action, these mumbled or screeched periods, this scrambled, tumbled, helter-skelter diction? Was this the same Westminster in which Edmund Burke had lauded Fox in the Latin of Silius Italicus, or in which Pitt, looking up as the morning sun poured its beams through the windows of the House, had quoted:

> Nos ubi primus equis Oriens afflavit anhelis,
> Illic sera rubens accendit lumina Vesper.

The boy whose head and heart were full of the stately memories of the polished rhetoric or burning eloquence of another age than his own, listened as the debate went on with that ever increasing disappointment, depression, and disgust which the speeches of the House of Commons inspire in those who come thither with any expectations based on studies of the past.

For a moment he forgot his personal sorrow in wonder over the scene beneath him, and at the platitudes which arose upon his ear. Was this the scene in which harmonious Greek and sonorous Latin had once been rolled out in voices like the

swell of the organ, and every classical allusion and historical parallel had been understood and enjoyed by an assembly of scholars and of gentlemen?

Flodden, seated there above the clock, leaned forward with his arms on the ledge of the gallery and his face on his hands; and as the dreary verbose periods rolled on, and the motes of dust and the haze of breath rose in vapour from the floor, he felt his eyes grow wet with tears and hid them on his sleeve. If the House of Commons were the typical representative of England, to what depths had not England descended!

Freda Avillion, leaning forward also, in her crimson satin wrapper, against the gilded grating, with her opera glass held to her eyes, was thinking much the same thing, more coldly, more selfishly, with an irritated sense of impatience against her generation and her country.

As the monotonous hum from the Treasury Bench, the hissing screech of the Irish members, the shrill or gruff tones of some Ministerial or Opposition orator, varied by the brief, impressive, dignified remarks of the Speaker, rose up to her from the sea of heads below, she heard through all that pother of vain words and degraded bellowing of brazen lungs the sound of the chords of a lute, and the refrain of a song:

> Le cadavre souillait l'ermine du manteau;
> Restaient inachevés madrigal et rondeau;
> Mais la Reine souriait!

The melody of the lute, the scent of the humid spring night, the thrill in the singer's voice—they all came back to her as she sat in the vitiated and heated air of the House of Commons. For a moment that artistic life which she had always despised looked to her both wise and beautiful.

CHAPTER VI.

When Flodden left Palace Yard that night, which he did on foot, for there was a clear and starry sky above the tall clock tower, he encountered Lorraine Iona, and they walked on together, pausing by common consent to look at the Abbey as it rose against the moonlit clouds.

"A relic of a greater day than ours," said Iona sadly, as the moon swam high above its beautiful pinnacles. "The Abbey is the only august, the only noble, the only spiritual thing in the whole city."

"I wish that I had lived then," said Flodden with an answering sigh.

"Who knows that you did not live then?" said Iona. "I believe in a series of existences for the soul; in some of us the memories of them are wholly obscured, in others vaguely felt, in some, again, almost startlingly clear. It was once said that genius was only clearer memory. I think it was very truly said."

"Do you mean that the soul sleeps between each life and forgets?"

"In persons who are hypnotised, the mind dies wholly for a time, yet the mind is there, and when the benumbing influence is removed it awakes and

remembers. Before the mental phenomena that Charcot and the other hypnotiseurs have recorded, all things seem possible."

"Where is the soul in all those hundreds?" said Flodden, with a motion of his hand backward to the House of Commons.

Lorraine Iona smiled.

"Certainly one could wish that the soul, if there be one, lost its voice before the Mace," he replied. "You were present to-night? It was a sorry exhibition of party temper and false logic."

Flodden assented absently; he was drawn toward the dreamy and serious solitary of Mount Hermon, yet he longed to be alone to wander round the haunted cloisters of the moonlit pile, and think exclusively and uninterruptedly of Lady Avillion.

"You feel no inclination towards public life?" asked Iona.

"I should have no talent for it," said Flodden humbly.

"The men who have best served it in this country have not been men of any great talents; they have been men of strong character, of high principles, of keen common sense. The most alarming feature in English public life at this period is that character, in the sense of veracity, of consistency, has ceased to be necessary in it. It is the sure mark of decay. For the genius of Disraeli, as genius, I have the greatest admiration; but public acceptance of him as a public leader could only

have been possible in a nation which could be caught by mere tinsel, and did not resent being harangued by an orator who had his tongue in his cheek and *faisait un pied de nez* all the time. Nothing is odder than that the Country, the Crown, the Aristocracy, and the People never once perceived that he was making game of them the whole time."

"But you say he was a genius?"

"A genius certainly; he had all its splendid audacity and its sublime disdain. But it was the genius of David, who humoured Saul and piped to him only to get his kingdom and his crown. A great genius certainly; Mirabeau dashed with Molière, Bolingbroke mingled with Fielding, Cicero combined with Cheap Jack; genius certainly, but too often mounted on the char-à-banc of Dulcamara."

"But for England?"

"But for England I prefer Mr. Pitt or Mr. Windham."

Flodden sighed and paused, to look once again at the now distant Abbey.

"Yes, it is beautiful," said Iona, "and the English people can surround it with railway viaducts, telegraph wires, monster hotels, cabstands, gin palaces, and newspaper offices. In that grey nook by the cloisters where an Erasmus or a Thomas a Kempis should dwell, there is even a lawyer's den; the offices, heaven help us, of the Solicitor to the School Board! An attorney fronting Cœur de Lion's statue! How should ever any nation, with such absolute

absence of artistic feeling, have detected that Disraeli was laughing at them?"

The boy did not answer, his heart seemed heavy as lead in his breast. All the great city around him would have been but one vast box of toys for him had he chosen to play, one orchestra for him had he chosen to dance, one festive board for him had he chosen to feast; but his heart was heavy in his breast, it seemed to him that he had no friends and no future.

Lorraine Iona looked at him curiously.

"Child, you are unhappy in London," he said abruptly. "Why do you stay here? It is accursed."

Flodden lifted his head in wonder, yet in vague assent.

"You feel that?" he said timidly, yet with the gladness of one who finds a thought shared which he had deemed too strange for any possible sympathy.

"Surely," said Iona, whose deep-set eyes grew brilliant with a strange light. "Accursed as were Jerusalem and Rome. Paris is a sink of filth, a volcano of crime, a Bedlam of folly, but she is saved by that which she never loses, the *soif inassouvie de l'idéal.* Paris is constantly absurd, and led away by false prophets, and is drunk with the madness of war, and gives herself to gods with clay feet, but she dreams even in her orgies of the future. London wallows in the pigsty of the present, and deems it a paradise of perfection; whilst the cancer of centralisation eats away the health and the heart of the

country. This huge and spreading furnace draws the lives of the people to it as the spirit flame the clouds of summer moths. There is no peace in it, no light, no health. The sun shines neither on the eyes nor on the souls of those who dwell in it. Little by little, villages and woods and fields and pleasant streams are absorbed into it and turned into deserts of brick, into sloughs of dirt. Beside the desolation of London, Sahara smiles, and Gobi is a garden. Every year that passes sees tens and hundreds and thousands of peasants who leave the heather smell, and the fresh-turned earth, and the blossoming hedge, to come and starve upon these stones, or who, if they do not starve, do worse, and soak in gin, and chatter borrowed Socialism, and stew in bitter hatreds which have neither root nor end. Hatred is the growth of the cities. When men cannot see the sky they stare through rich men's windows and curse all those who dwell within. Yes; here we generate the electric light, and pour it in full effulgence on the beggar's rags and the usurer's carriage panels; but of any other light we generate nothing. We make no laws save such as terror wrings from us. We create nothing; we absorb everything, from the muscular strength of the labourer to the philosophy of Germany and the wit of France, but we create nothing; we have lost the power to create. We have our chairs from Vienna, our cruisers from the Elbe, our drama from the Boulevards, our machines from America, our corn from Russia, our matches from Sweden; our magazine-articles from

the 'Nuova Antologia,' the 'Nouvelle Revue,' or the 'Deutsche Rundschau'; we create nothing. We have a borrowed Fourierism spread on thin bread and butter, which we offer to starving multitudes. We have even lost the old national sense of humour. Goldsmith and Fielding would see how absurd we are, but we do not see it. Our fashionable women sing and fiddle to the East End, and never perceive that the haughtiest dame who ever ordered her lackeys to use their wands on the shoulders of a crowd was less truly impertinent to poverty than they, and besides, *she* had at least one virtue, she was not afraid! Courage, even in its scorn, always commands the respect of the mob. But the fashionable fiddlers fiddle out of fear, and the East End knows it."

Iona paused in his torrent of words, the brilliancy in his eyes faded, and he sighed as one who beholds a world of woe into which he can bring no light; he had been speaking his own thoughts aloud rather than addressing his companion, but he caught the wistful earnest gaze of the lad turned on him as they went slowly through St. James's Park.

"Whatever you do, Lord Flodden," he said with a smile, "do not join the sentimental-socialistic school, which preaches plunder with scriptural texts jumbled up with quotations from Marx and Bakounine, by gentlemen who dine comfortably at their clubs and expect to get a C.B. apiece through their philanthropic projects. They use the poor as the angler

uses the worm or the fly. They are the gangrene which grows on every democracy. No; I am not a Radical, nor am I either what is called a Conservative; all the political schemes of the world are worthless and unworkable, because nothing on earth can reconcile property and poverty. The scarcely peopled Wessex and Anglia of Alfred, the sparsely populated Bretagne of Anne, the feudal Burgundy of Charles the Rash, the small Savoy of the first Humbert, could be ruled by the genius and the character of one person. But in a world as full as ours the teeming spawn of the innumerable multitudes of our time is making all government impossible except a despotism, with its harsh, crushing, machine-like routine rolling into one shapeless mass all liberties and all character. The nominal Republic of the United States is a despotism reconciled to some men by its facilities for corruption, and imposed on the people by the farce of elective forms. But wait, we are at my door. I have a few rooms here which are always ready for me when I leave the lands of the sunrise. Will you come in and have some coffee or sherbet, made by my Arab boy, and a whiff or two from a water pipe? No doubt you have a dozen pleasant houses waiting you, but still young men are good enough sometimes to waste their hours on me, old and prolix hermit though I be."

Flodden accepted the invitation thankfully. He was dull, depressed, feverish, indisposed for society, and in the sort of mood, as Iona saw, to become an easy prey to all the temptations with which London

could assail a youth, so guileless, so rich, and so ignorant of the vices around him.

"Welcome to my sanctum," said the elder man as he led the way up a narrow staircase to the fourth floor, and opened the door of the ante-chamber leading to a small suite of three rooms hung with Indian silks, carpeted with Smyrna rugs, lighted by silver lamps from a mosque, filled with ivories, porcelains, and weapons of Asia, and perfumed with the choicest Turkish tobacco.

"Here I come once in two or three years for a few months, to *retremper la langue* and contemplate the ungodliness and ugliness of civilised life. Some day, perhaps, I shall welcome you in what they call my cave, which is not a cave at all, but a one-storied adobe house set by a running stream and under a group of palms," said Iona, as he clapped his hands and was answered by his Arab boy bringing a Turkish coffee service of inlaid brass, with pots and cups of Persian porcelain, a glass ewer of water, and some uncut limes.

Not many in number were they who were bidden within these little chambers high above the traffic of the fashionable street. But those who came there once were always eager to come again, and in the smoke-clouded atmosphere hung reverently on the often mystical, but ever eloquent utterances of a man who in other days and other climes would have been worshipped as a seer, a saint, a sage, a prophet, but in the London of the nineteenth century's

latest days was only called "so clever, but so queer!" London has no place for such men. It wants the bustling politician, the breathless financier, the unscrupulous agitator, the astute leader-writer, the scheming inventor, the railway director, the bubble-blower, the promoter of land companies, and insurance offices, and giant schemes of working ruby mines in virgin forests and taking traction engines into pathless jungles; these are the men it needs, to these its arms are stretched, its ears are opened, its monster riches are displayed and given, oftentimes as Moses Primrose gave the mare for the green spectacles in a shagreen case. But for such a one as Lorraine Iona, London has no place. It will look at him with languid curiosity at an Academy soirée. It will listen to him at a dinner table with mingled impatience and amusement. Now and then, in a way, he is as acceptable from his oddity as a monster sturgeon from the Baltic, or an unusually large pine-apple from the Regent's Park show. But it has no place in its ranks for a prophet, no patience with a physician of the soul. He would only make it highly uncomfortable if it ever took him seriously. He speaks of Utopia, of the New Jerusalem, of the youth of the earth renewed by sacrifice, by love, by liberty, by nature: London only wants its wine-lists, its share-lists and its visiting lists, its stall at its favourite theatre, and its opinions all sorted and packed up for it by its morning papers. It does not believe it is either diseased or in danger; it continues calmly to buy its hothouse fruit and truffled

chickens, and if the mob is swarming against its iron-shuttered shops, a mob hideous as hunger, ravenous as wolves, more brutal than any brute not born of woman, it abuses the Home Secretary and opens a fresh bottle of Cos d'Estournel.

CHAPTER VII.

Lorraine Iona had taken a great fancy to the poor "new Lothair." He had met the boy first at a dinner-party in Eaton Square; a dinner like a thousand others, of various great people, fashionable, illustrious, or celebrated, who had muttered anathemas on their engagements to it as they dressed for it in violent haste, and who throughout its services were impatiently counting the minutes until they should be free to rush away from its white truffles, its sauterne-stewed quails, its American oysters, its Scotch salmon, and its hothouse grapes, ungratefully devoured, with scarce a moment's reflection upon their excellence.

"People always eat in this mad fashion in London, and then they wonder they die of typhoid!" said Iona to the lady next him, who smiled angrily and followed up her *mousse aux mandarines* with a bit of caviare toast, in that horrible jumble which is a law of the most polished gastronomy.

"Typhoid desolates English country houses as the plague does an Eastern city," continued Iona, "and we have only ourselves to thank for it. We are eating all day long and half the night in England; we pretend that the damp of the climate re-

quires it; nobody ever gorged as we do since the days of the Roman Empire. I say 'we' because it sounds more polite than 'you.' But personally I restrict myself, as you see, to a portion of fish and a slice of the *rôti;* it is all that a reasonable being can possibly take without injury. And to spoil these delicious fruits by putting them on the top of a hotly seasoned *hors d'œuvre!* It is monstrous! Noon is the time to eat fruit; to eat it and make a meal of it with a glass or two of good claret. To taste it only at the tail of pastry, ices, wild duck, venison, Russian salad, sturgeon, and prawn soup, is frightful; and yet we are astonished that strong guardsmen of five-and-twenty die in a week's illness of fever, and that dyspepsia 'sicklies o'er' the vision of every man who slumbers on the Treasury Bench and legislates for the nation."

The lady smiled with a constrained expression; she had been eating her caviare and was then enjoying a peach.

"Between the ten o'clock breakfast, the two o'clock luncheon, the five o'clock tea, the eight o'clock dinner, what time remains unmutilated?" said Iona, who was started on one of his favourite subjects, and saw that people were leaving off their conversation to listen to him up and down the table. "Everyone eats and most people drink too much in England. They are always taking something or other, and all these rich and heavy dishes, and all these various wines, ruin their digestions and their tempers. Half their incomes go into the *bain-marie*

of their cooks and the wine-bins of their butlers. High feeding and as little thinking as possible is the order of the day in modern life."

The lady, who was a *gourmande,* as many ladies are, felt too disgusted at such a sermon to reply to him; she was now enjoying some bonbons, and was wholly indifferent as to how her digestive organs might receive them. Stomachs have to get used to such a pell-mell confusion as best they can; there are always the waters to be taken later on at Homburg or Karlsbad if things have gone wrong.

But Flodden, who from the other side of the lady had been listening interestedly to the accents of one whose works and travels he knew by heart, looked aside at the eloquent speaker over a gold knight on horseback and a basket of rose-coloured azaleas, and had an expression of such reverential interest in his eyes, that when the women had gone upstairs Iona said to their host "Introduce me to Lord Flodden," and drew his chair nearer to Guy's.

All which seemed to Freda Avillion and her world tiresome and absurd in this boy, who was so simple and ignorant and timid, and yet had the elaborately good manners of a century ago, interested Iona, who was at once a student of human nature, and a visionary, a satirist, and a solitary.

He was touched by the sadness of a youth who had all that rank, position, health, and rich possessions could bestow, and yet was in a world of parasites, as absolutely alone as any penniless poet wandering in these heartless streets.

Iona did not know the reason of his melancholy, but he divined easily that some first passion in all its timidity and despair was partly at the root of it, and also that the high aspirations and the ingenuous candour of the lad's temperament were at every turn rudely jostled and painfully offended by the views and principles which confronted him in society. Iona's grave and tender soul yearned towards him as it did towards all whom the world as it was failed to satisfy.

"And how does our civilisation strike *you?*" he said with a smile to the young man. "I believe you have lived out of it entirely, have you not? In Sicily, I think?"

Flodden assented timidly.

"And what does it seem to you? Do you like it or not?"

"People are kind; but—well,—if it is not ungrateful to say so, it seems so chaotic, so heartless, so uncomfortable."

"Pre-eminently uncomfortable! and we pride ourselves on our comfort. It ought not, however, to be so; we have riches, intellect, all that the arts can give us, and every invention which can gratify indolence; and yet society here is but a chaos, as you say, a scramble, a fever, a yawn, all in one. It is the numbers which make society, in the real sense of the word, impossible, like any intellectual government."

"But cannot one lead one's own life?" asked Flodden shyly. Iona smiled.

"Yes, if you do not mind being called a madman. I don't mind it in the least, but then I have no great position to renounce; I have always been a wanderer. You, I fear, will find it very difficult now you have come to Rome to avoid doing like the Romans, even in the matter of a thousand nightingales' tongues to one pasty."

"But why should everyone merely imitate others?" asked Flodden, still shy, but gathering courage under the kind glance of those luminous clairvoyant eyes of the solitary. "And surely London has the elements of a finer society in it?"

"Perhaps; but there are many obstacles in the way of London life becoming socially what it might be; the exodus of the best people to country-house visits from Saturday to Monday, the interruptions of Easter and Whitsuntide, and the various race-weeks, the frequent absence of so many of its most agreeable people who are gone to Cannes or to Canada, to Sorrento or to Siberia, to Australia or to Algiers, rather than stay in their own country, gives a jerkiness, and uncertainty, and a *décousu* character to its social relations which may have advantages in some ways but which deprives those relations of that solidarity and continuity which are the requisite qualities for a very harmonious and courtly social intercourse. When your best-assorted dinner-party may be spoilt by a telegram half an hour before dinner to say that your most interesting guest is unfortunately gone on a picnic to Timbuctoo, or a ride through Asiatic Russia, an element of uncertainty is brought into

your social arrangements which makes them resemble a Harlequin quilt of patchwork satins rather than the smooth shining embroidered robe fit for graceful ceremonies. People take their London in intervals between things they like better; between their Nice and their Rome, their house-parties in the country, their yachting in the Solent, and their weeks at Newmarket and Ascot, and all this gives a temporary and unsettled character to their residence in their town houses which is not without its effect upon the society which they lead or frequent. It is a pity; for there are, as you observed, in London the possibilities of a varied and brilliant intellectual life were there only the leisure and the inclination to lead it. Nowhere in all the world do so many people of the highest forms of distinction come together as in London. But alas! we all know the old story of the passengers on board a ship who made a matchless plum-pudding which only was not *réussi* because they unfortunately forgot the pudding-bag. So in London there are the richest and most abundant materials for a social life which might be very nearly perfection, but that which should bind them all together and make them a success is lacking, and they stray about unamalgamated in the lukewarm water of ennui. The forces which should amalgamate them into one harmonious whole are at present lacking. It is perhaps incapable of existing under a democracy; and a democracy very thinly veiled by constitutional pretences and formulas English social and political life has become. London society is far

too easily entered, too easily pleased, too easily captured. It is not exclusive enough to preserve even a semblance of aristocracy. It is still capricious, and will keep out one financier and let in another, worship one actress and turn its back on another, for no reason on earth except its own whim and fancy. But it has no fixed rules for either its admissions or its exclusions, and in its laudable desire to be civil to talent it overwhelms itself with mediocrity of all kinds. To the Roman of the old imperial world there was but one city; all outside the gates of Rome was exile. There is nothing of this exclusive passion about all these people who appear in London as surely as whitebait and truffles do; but there is a vague sense that all outside their world is nothing. It is not the poetical devotion of an Ovid, nor the sense of a modern Parisian that all outside the asphalte is darkness; it is the force of habit of a member of a set. One reason also why it is a failure is that it is monotonous. The life of London is taken into the country houses, on to the yachts, and to the winter and summer play-places; the scene is changed, but the life is the same; and people are tired without knowing what is the matter with them just as they would starve if they ate nothing but *foie gras* all the year round. There are brilliant wits in London, clever men, great artists, learned statesmen; but they do not associate harmoniously. They are bored, or they are in a hurry, or they are too absorbed in what they eat; there is a great deal of good conversation in different parts,

but it is scattered, *éparpillé,* wasted, as if you broke a string of pearls and diamonds and let them roll about in the dust in all directions. Social amusement in London is as purely mechanical as the action of the ploughman when he takes up the handles of his plough to cut one furrow after another along the familiar fields. Yet unconsciously you are all held by, and saturated with, the influences of London; it is its social life which makes you unhappy, if you do not find your world and its tittle-tattle wherever you go. Whether you are under the palm-trees of Hyères, the pine-trees of Homburg, the ilex-trees of Rome, the acacia-trees of Florence, or the fir-trees of the Scotch Highlands, you carry the London talk, the London atmosphere, the London ways with you. You may hate London, or think that you do, but London has its revenge and accompanies you all wherever you go all your lives long."

"It will not accompany me," said Flodden with resolve. Laurence Iona smiled with approval.

"Well, lead your own life if you can; it is the one act of heroism left to the modern man, and it is the most difficult of all."

After that evening's conversation, Lorraine Iona had sought the boy's society and pitied his loneliness. To everyone except himself such loneliness would have seemed ridiculous and incomprehensible in a youth who had hundreds of invitations lying disregarded on his tables, who was nodded to by all the best people as he went through the Park, who would have been welcomed in the best houses in

England and Scotland, and who could have filled his own Highland castle and Lowland hall and forest-lodge with agreeable men and charming women had he chosen. But lonely he was; that saddest of all loneliness which isolates in a crowd and forces on the soul the truth that to be sought for one's position is not the same thing as to be cared for through one's sympathies.

Flodden knew very well that if he died on the morrow nobody would miss him save his dogs; and that his next heir would rejoice, a hard, rude, unpleasant soldier, commanding in a hill district in Northern India, who had seen him once as a child, and had said with a strong accent and as strong a contempt:

"Weel ye're a puir saft laddie to stand between me and my luck."

No doubt he could have made ties for himself; few families would have refused to take to their bosoms the young Marquis of Flodden; but the sense that he had only to ask and have alienated him, and simple as he was he was observant, and he saw through all the pretty poses, the studied carelessness, the various manners, of all those aristocratic maidens whose sole object in life was to make a great marriage, to be foremost in the race for position, to crown their first or second season with the best match of the year.

A kind of disgust came over him for all those highbred and delicately nurtured young women of his own rank, who were, with more or less veiled

motives, thrown continually in his way and offered to his admiration.

He shrank so visibly from them that his shyness grew greater every day, and became almost sullenness.

The romantic and hopeless adoration he had conceived for Lady Avillion was an ægis to his innocence; and as he was unassailable through his susceptibilities, his natural good sense had fair play, and was a lens under which all the true colours of the flatteries and temptations and bewitcheries displayed for him were seen in their unloveliest light.

He knew that those scornful, handsome, worldly-wise daughters of England ridiculed, behind his back, his simplicity, his ignorance, his want of *aplomb,* and all his defects in social education; he knew that they had a score of impolite nicknames for him of which the Shepherd, the Simpleton, the Ploughboy, Moses, Jock, and Lothair were the least offensive.

Yet he saw them all spread the most finely-woven network of attractions for him, and he was given broadly to understand that anyone of them would accept his hand with delight.

"He is such a hopeless idiot," he had overheard the one unmarried sister of Queenstown, Lady Gwendolen Norris, say with a grimace, behind her fan at a ball; and five minutes later there was no sweeter entreaty and admiration possible to human eyes than were in hers as she murmured to him amongst the electric-lighted orchids: "You have led such a beautiful poetic life in Sicily, Lord Flodden,

you must feel all our vulgar, noisy, chattering society so tiresome; you can't think how often I long to have the wings of a dove to get away from it all!"

Lady Gwendolen was a young lady who was never endurable to herself or others unless she was "in it" everywhere, wherever the tide of the world was for the moment flowing its fastest. She was at the covert-side in a Melton coat when the shooting was wildest, she smoked, betted, rode in gaiters, chaffed the Prince at Cowes and Sandringham and Homburg, got deeply in debt and trusted to her brother's good nature to pull her through, and crushed a lifetime into a single London day, from her morning galop on the tan to her most compromising flirtation after the last figure of the cotillon.

"Gwen is a one-er for pace," said her brother very often in wrapt admiration of her; but no one was ever gentler, sweeter, softer of glance and voice and gesture, as she turned her gaze on Flodden and sighed for the wings of a dove.

"He was such a bumpkin," she thought, "no form in him, and no fun;" but then he was the biggest thing of the year, and Queenstown had said to her that very day in the library as he shook his head over a bill of Redfern's: "Upon my word I can't do it any more, Gwen, and Alex can't help you; she wants a lot of stiff herself. Why don't you marry one of those fellows and get your little bills paid; it's uncommonly hard upon me to have you on my hands like this. I'm very fond of you, as you know, and I hate to be disagreeable, but I must draw a

line somewhere, and you may just as well marry at once; you must do it next year if you don't this."

"None of the nice men have any money," said Lady Gwendolen, irritable, provoked at the contradictions of Providence.

"No, they haven't," said her brother. "You mustn't expect to get what you like altogether, nobody ever does, especially now when rents are the very devil. But there's always some big *coup* to be made if you look for it. By the bye there's that young Flodden; somebody 'll marry him; why don't you?"

So Lady Gwendolen that evening drooped her handsome profile against the electric light, and played pensively with an orchid and sighed for the wings of a dove.

But she received no response from Flodden; he only smiled rather vacantly and said "Indeed!" with that apparent absence of comprehension which made all the "smart people" think him such a simple boy. The fashionable girl of his world did not commend herself to him; the sharp incisive sayings, the premature experience, the contemptuous disrespect for every opinion of others, the keen-eyed sense of self-interest, the intimate acquaintance with coarse jokes, allusions, and insinuations, and the clever, mannish, satirical attitude of the young English gentlewoman of his world did not attract him, it jarred on and alarmed him; he did not know how much of it was real, how much assumed, but whether

reality or assumption he thought it supremely repellent.

"Yes, I think with you, it is bad form. But they are all like that; I, you see, am an old woman, and have an old woman's prejudices," said Freda Avillion to him one day when he had timidly confided to her his dislike for the cover-coats, the cricketer caps, the wasp waists, the shoulder-handshakes, the fashionable jargon, the cynical satire, the abrupt familiarity, the immeasurable self-admiration, and the absolute self-concentration of the young women of his period and of his nation.

"But—but—" stammered Flodden, "were they all that they are not, still beside you—beside you——"

"Oh, my dear lord, spare me your compliments!" said Freda, with a little smile which cut him to the quick.

"If they were Syrlin's compliments they would be acceptable and accepted," he muttered timidly and desperately.

"You have not the smallest authority for supposing so," she said coldly; "I dislike all compliments. They are a flattery to one's appearance at the expense of one's understanding."

The boy's jealousy of Syrlin was bitter and boundless. When Flodden saw him in the afternoons of the fine ladies' houses surrounded, fêted, visibly adored, the lad could scarcely bring himself decently to return the good-natured words with which Syrlin

addressed him. *"C'est un si bon jeune homme,"* said Syrlin once to a group of ladies who were making a jest of the lad's shyness and simplicity. He meant what he said in seriousness, and with no thought of derision, but all his words were repeated and exaggerated like all the sayings of a popular idol, and *"Ce bon jeune homme"* became another nickname for Flodden in this gay and merciless society in which he was so helplessly astray, much to the regret of the man who had unintentionally given it to him.

To Flodden it was repeated by one of those kind friends who are never lacking even to the friendless, and it fed the detestation with which he regarded the originator of it. If Avillion had ever deigned to give more than a nod to the youth, he might have found his own feelings against Syrlin magnified by brooding over them in Guy's young breast.

"You are nurturing a very bad feeling," said Lorraine Iona to the boy, seeing the expression of his eyes one day when in the Queenstown drawing-room Syrlin was reading aloud some parts of "Olivier" to the Duchess Alex and a few other women of whom Freda was one.

"My feelings only concern myself, I suppose," said Flodden sulkily.

"None of our feelings concern only ourselves," replied Iona; "they always re-act upon others. If we are out of temper something suffers, if it be but our horse or our dog. Why do you look so evilly

at Syrlin? I have known him intimately long, and there are few characters of a more noble type."

"I should have thought you of all people would have loathed his affectations," said the boy, as despite himself he acknowledged the charm of the beautiful far-reaching voice which had a few minutes previously been reading,

> "Mais dans ses liaisons dont on prévoit le terme
> Il n'avait rencontré qu'un amour d'épiderme,
> Dans lequel il avait plus donné que reçu
> Et qu'il trouvait parfois, cœur sceptique et deçu,
> Pareil au piano de valse et de quadrille,
> Décor banal, ornant le salon d'une fille,
> Et sur lequel, pendant un instant, par hasard
> Un bon musicien vient jouer du Mozart."

"There are no affectations to perceive," replied Iona. "Contrary to the vulgar general impression, the truly artistic nature is never affected, because it is too completely and unconsciously abandoned to its own impressions and its own instincts. Mere talent poses often; true genius never."

"Not even when it reads licentious French poems as if they were hymns to the Madonna!" said Flodden.

Iona laughed.

"My dear boy, if you think 'Olivier' a licentious poem you can never have read it yourself. It is as truly a sermon as if Jeremy Taylor had written it, though I grant the 'phrasing,' as musicians say, is different. But do not cherish causeless animosities.

Too many animosities with cause are forced upon us as we go through life."

Flodden said nothing, but his monitor perceived that it was of no use to reason with what was unreasonable.

The boy, with his rank, his possessions, his old and honoured name, passionately envied a man who was nameless, envied him for his beauty, for his grace, for his genius, for his empire over women, and for that supreme ease and charm of manner which fascinated men as well as women.

Manner is the most envied of all gifts by those who do not possess its talisman to the hearts of others.

The conversation around them turned upon "Olivier."

"'Amour d'épiderme.' That is very expressive," said Alex Queenstown meditatively.

"It is a delicate name for a gross thing," said Syrlin.

"But do you think it natural that Olivier should flee from his happiness? Surely not."

"I think Olivier was a pitiful coward," stammered Flodden, growing very red at the sound of his own voice.

Syrlin turned and looked at him.

"Life makes cowards of us all, be we brave as Hotspur," said Iona.

"Lord Flodden is right," said Syrlin gravely. "The essential of love is supreme courage and the obliteration of self. Passion without that love is only a furious or a frivolous egotism."

Flodden shrank back from the attention he had drawn to himself, and hated this expression of approval more even than he would have hated contradiction.

"Passion is always egotism," said Iona, "and you cannot make it otherwise."

"But passion is strong and your Olivier was weak."

"He was weak because he had frittered away his strength, as you may spend a sovereign in small silver pieces."

"The conclusion of the poem is at all events very true," said Syrlin; "it is the only way in which a love can live for ever to be broken off in the bud like that."

"What a sad thought! And I don't think it is a true one," said Iona. "Olivier was afraid of the possibilities that he saw in what he loved, and in the future: that is, he was more a philosopher than a lover. Myself, I always finish the poem my own way. I am sure that after *boudant un peu* he returned some sweet springtime and found the cherry trees in flower, and the primroses in the grass, and Suzanne a little older, a little graver, with many wistful dreams in her blue eyes, waiting for him."

"Then he was more a poet than a philosopher."

"We are told he was so, and that is why I am sure that, wisely or unwisely, he went back."

"I do not think so; he was too selfish," said Syrlin. "You only see an idyl in 'Olivier': I see a sermon; a sermon on the cruel fact that satiety

pursues and extinguishes hope, that faith is necessary to love, and that all our careless pleasures become whips to scourge us."

"Yes," said Iona, "and I wholly agree with you, that in that sense, Olivier is a sermon; but I prefer to take it as an idyl and to give it a sequel in my own fancy. Indeed, I am convinced that Olivier went back. No man long resists a happiness which is untried but is possible. It is an experiment too alluring to be left untested. I hope Coppée will some day write 'Le Retour."

"Nay, if he do, and wish to be true to life, he must make Olivier find Suzanne wedded to a *bel hobereau* of the district, and putting the necklace of sequins on the fat neck of her first child."

"What a horrible idea!" said the ladies.

"But your sequel, which you would call Olivier's 'happiness,' would it not be very commonplace in fact?" said Freda, speaking for the first time. "The *vie d'intérieur,* the monotony, the disillusion; in it all would the poet be distinguishable from the bourgeois? I fear not."

"Certainly not," said the other ladies.

Syrlin sighed a little impatiently.

"Ah, mesdames, then Olivier himself would only have been a *bourgeois au fond.* In these feelings the breath of our own souls makes our atmosphere, and if love grow commonplace with us it is because we are of the common herd ourselves. Love is an alchemy. But we must be alchemists to use its spells."

"He talks of love as if he alone could ever love!" hought Flodden, envying that power of eloquent expression which was as natural to the man whom he envied as speech itself.

"I am sure you are wrong," said Freda. "If Olivier had married Suzanne he would have been unutterably bored after a summer or two, and would have written nothing worth reading out of fear of displeasing his wife."

"You do not believe in love," said Syrlin rather harshly and coldly, and then conscious that his reply might sound strange to others, he took up his volume again.

"I will read you the 'Orgueil d'Aimer,' he said, and he read it aloud, with those intonations of his voice which gave to his recitations of any poem the thrill, the intensity, the far-reaching meaning of music itself:

> Meurent pour avoir palpité
> A votre lampe aux soirs d'été
> Les papillons couleur de souffre.
> Ainsi mon cœur, comme un gouffre,
> M'entraîne, et je vais m'engloutir;
> Ne me plaignez pas si j'en souffre,
> Car je ne puis me repentir,
> Et dans la torture subie
> J'ai la volupté du martyr.
> Et s'il faut y laisser ma vie,
> Ce sera sans lâches clameurs.
> J'aime! J'aime! et veux qu'on m'envie.
> Ne me plaignez pas si j'en meurs.

As he recited the lines his eyes involuntarily sought

those of the woman to whom in his thoughts and heart he dedicated them.

There was considerable distance between them, a distance of soft light, of delicate colour, of flowers, of the pretty groups of a fashionable gathering; but the look in his eyes sank into her soul, smote her with a sudden sense of her own vast influence over him.

Those present only heard the "Orgueil d'Aimer" of an exquisite poet exquisitely rendered; but she understood that it was a personal declaration, a personal dedication to herself, so veiled, so delicate, that in saying all, it asked and hoped for nothing. She did not feel the same anger and astonishment with which the song at Heronsmere had filled her, she was troubled but not offended; she sat still, looking down on the little watch in her bracelet, but her heart was quickened by an unaccustomed warmth.

Many men had loved her and all hopelessly; but none with this union of silence and eloquence, none with this power to compel her to feel what she would not allow to be uttered. It never occurred to her that this power came from the genius of the man who loved her. She belonged to a world in which genius is caressed, but caressed as a clever monkey or a dog who could play cards would be welcomed by it in a moment of ennui. With all her admiration for talent, "those people," as her world called the elect who were distinguished by that gift of the gods, always seemed to her a singular and

remote race, and without being aware of it she had always considered them of a kind which it was best to avoid in any kind of intimacy. "Was it possible," she asked herself with some anxiety and some contempt for herself, "that one of this despised race had influence enough over her to force his memory and his magic upon her whether she would or no?"

CHAPTER VIII.

From Heronsmere Syrlin had returned to London, and although the row and rout of Piccadilly are not favourable to fancy and invention, had begun to write a short drama in verse called "Le Glaive," after the manner of Musset. He had had quantities of flowers brought into his apartments, which with an Erard pianoforte, two or three good pictures bought at Christie's, and some few bronzes which had taken his fancy, gave to the commonplace luxury of his hotel drawing-room that look of art and of home without which a man of his temperament is wretched, and which men and women of cultured tastes can give to any temporary interior which they occupy. He was writing with ardour this drama of the Renaissance in verse, a slight thing as yet, but one into which he could put something of his heart and soul; and Auriol was composing the music for the songs in it.

"If ever I play again, I will play in this, and before her," Syrlin said to himself, feeling the forces of new talents rising warm and quick within him as the sap rises in young trees in spring. For the true artist passion always takes some crystallisation in art; verse is the natural language of the lover and

of the poet, and becoming the one he became the other.

"For the first time in my life I am glad my old friend made me rich," he said to his friend Auriol one morning when they had tried over together the music for "Le Glaive." "I can let my real self, idle, passionate, or foolish, have its own way, I need not live any longer in the skin of Alceste, of Gérard, of Hypolite. The stage is a terrible slavery, and when it is pursued too long it sinks into an *abrutissement* like all slavery. I may never become a poet or a dramatist, but I am at least a man."

"My dear Syrlin," said Auriol, "you can be whatever you like; you are charged with genius to your fingers' ends as with electricity. Genius is always many-sided; it is talent, its pale imitator, which is limited, which is stationary, which runs only on one line. But then mankind, in general, does not perceive this distinction; it hardly even understands why talent is not genius, or how genius can exercise its amazing and various faculties. You may become a great poet, a great dramatist, but I fear the world will never admit it, merely because it has known you as a great actor."

"The world is welcome to think what it likes. I can print my poems if I write them in a private printing press, and I can play my dramas if I compose them for my personal friends. That is why I tell you that I am glad I have this fortune, which at first irritated, burdened, and annoyed me. It enables

me to keep my own individuality—'a poor thing, but my own.' And," he added, caressingly, "it will enable us to have a great pleasure; we can give your cantata when you will without appeal to any-one."

"Alas!" said Auriol mournfully, "I am but one of those of whom I speak, the imitators of genius. I have talent, but nothing more. Besides, they have killed what I had in their drawing-rooms. I am a piping bullfinch in a conservatory. I sing one tune, you have your wood notes wild. They have never caged or tamed you; you have been too strong for them, because you are charged with that electricity which comes from the gods."

"You flatter me, dear friend," said Syrlin. "I have always been at heart a semi-savage, a Moor of Morocco; that has been my strength, if strength I have; I doubt it."

"Oh you must have it," said Auriol. "You have escaped the *succès des salons*, the most terrible and insidious foe that the artist ever has. Fame may be bracing. It is like the open sea. If one knows how to swim, it bears us without hurt on its highest billows. But the *succès des salons* is suffocation; one is asphyxiated. The brazier is perfumed, but it is none the less deadly for that."

"Assuredly," said Syrlin; "why do you waste your gifts and your years in it then?"

"I have said, I have only talent. Oh, a fair enough talent, but nothing more. A trick of song.

A knack of composition. The drawing-rooms have been my prison, my cage; nothing enervates and wastes time like being the fashion in them when one is also an artist and born for better things."

"It is not too late to withdraw from them."

"Ah, pardon!" said Auriol, with a sweep of the hand over the notes eloquent of a despairing negation. "When the bullfinch has learned his air for the conservatory it is all over with his hedgerow and orchard songs. If he were to fly out to the meadows and woods his tribe would peck and mock at him. Social success is a species of emasculation. When one has become a mere favourite, one ceases to be an artist, almost to be a man!"

"Play me something from the 'Damnation de Faust,'" said Syrlin in lieu of argument.

He agreed too much with Auriol to be able sincerely to dispute what had been said, but he believed in the beauty and in the originality of his friend's gifts, and in their power to console and stimulate their creator. Auriol was a very handsome man of Syrlin's age, fair, with lustrous brown eyes, and hair of the deep red gold the Venetian masters loved; he had the blood of various nationalities in him, making one of those hybrids which are so frequently fertile in talent and in charm. His people had been artists always; his father a Greek violinist, his mother a German singer; they were dead, and he was a fashionable artist with the personal habits and the mental bias of a man of the world who is

also an amateur. His melodious, far reaching voice, exquisitely and accurately trained, brought him in a fortune. Whenever he opened his lips he was paid fantastic prices, but for the opera houses he had no inclination or ambition, and he remained the singer of society, a perilous pre-eminence which gained him the ill will of both artists and amateurs. His real name was Ernst Koriolis, but to the world and to his friends and to himself, he was only Auriol; that one name comprising in itself familiarity and renown, affection and admiration, and bringing to all those who heard or spoke it ten thousand memories of a voice as sweet as the south wind in the month of May.

"If it has a fault it is too sweet," a critic once said of him, and the fault, if it were a fault, was repeated in his character. He was too gentle, too generous, too easily forgiving, and too lavishly prodigal. His tender smile and his graceful presence were the delight of women, and his life seemed one fair voyage to Cytherea. If deep down in his heart there was an unuttered and unanalysed bitterness, born of unrealised ideals and of the unsatisfying food given by a success which dazed whilst it did not satisfy him, nor content him, Auriol kept that disappointment to himself, or at most only allowed it to be suspected by those most intimate with him.

"They send me hundreds of these, but there is no bay-leaf amongst them, and they forget that I can only wear one a night," he said once, more bored than gratified, before the multitude of hot-

house flowers for his coat which women sent him daily by the score.

Beside the worldwide celebrity of Syrlin and two or three other celebrated men with whom he was intimate, his own merely ephemeral celebrity seemed to him but a poor plaything. He had not a grain of envy or of meanness in his nature, but there were times when he felt that he had not done justice to the gifts he possessed, that he had been too easily attracted by an inferior kind of success, and that he had followed an *ignis fatuus* over rose fields. Now that he was still young he could gather the roses with both hands, but he knew that when age should approach him, those fields, now smiling and perfumed, would seem to him barren as unploughed lands where brambles alone would grow. It would have been better for him, he knew now, to have chosen the garret and bare bread of a Berlioz in his early years than the ephemeral triumphs of the London and Paris drawing-rooms.

"Car j'avais quelque chose là!" he said once, in the words of André Chénier, striking his forehead with his hand.

"Ce quelque chose sortira," said Syrlin to him consolingly, but Auriol only shook his head with a sigh. Fragments beautiful and spiritual haunted his brain, and found their audible expression on the keys of his pianoforte, but he never found time or courage to consolidate them in an entire work. The world charmed him, women tempted him, life was smooth,

gay, and agreeable to him, his compositions were dreamed of and never written.

He and Syrlin had taken life in a wholly different way. The latter had resisted the flatteries and caresses of society with a strong and almost fierce disdain for them; the former had been allured by and had accepted them, until they had gradually supplanted for him all other ideals, all other ambitions; he was bound by them hand and foot, whilst he was sensible of their impotence to satisfy or benefit him. Syrlin had drunk the great fiery draught of supreme fame itself, and had not become intoxicated; had seen clearly through its fumes the withered leaves of laurel and the dry roses of dead delights. Auriol in his earlier years allowed himself to be led away by the deleterious sweetness of mere social applause, and partly from necessity, partly from indolence, had been content to remain a darling of society, a tame nightingale, uneasy in captivity but never seriously trying to escape. Auriol had no vanity, he was disposed to underrate rather than to overrate his powers or position, but chance had decided for him that he should take this easier, idler, lower form of art, and he had succumbed to the influences of it, and to the anodyne of a too quickly gained success.

"You are unhappy," said Syrlin abruptly to him this day, as, after playing the "Faust, seul aux champs au lever du soleil," the musician paused with his hands on the keys and a look of pain and abstraction on his face.

"I am extremely unhappy," said Auriol simply.

"I love a woman; a child who is as far removed from me as though she belonged to another planet."

"Lady Ina?" said Syrlin.

Auriol coloured: "How did you know it?

"You are not difficult to read, for me at least; and you were her shadow at Heronsmere. My dear Auriol, have you lived amongst these people all these years only to become their prey at last? What a misfortune!"

"You consider it a misfortune? Then you think it also a madness. And yet, if I may dare to say so of a creature so innocent, I think—I think—she is not indifferent to me."

"But she is the ward of that triple brute Avillion!"

"Is he a brute? He is surely a very polished person, and he is sensitive to all art."

"His ear is sensitive, and his eye is appreciative. All the rest is egotism, hardness, brutality, and pride. He would sooner see all the women belonging to him dead at his feet than he would allow that any one of them could feel a single instant of interest in any artist. My dearest friend, have you lived amongst all these people all these years and do not know them yet as they are?"

Auriol coloured again.

"I know that I am a fool; you cannot be more convinced of it than I."

"You are not a fool; you are the prey of fatal opportunities. These people invite us, they adore us, they fawn on us when they want us to grace their

fêtes or amuse their royalties, they associate us with their private life, surround us with their families, tell their wives and daughters and sisters to smile on us and welcome us, and then, if by chance we forget our place, forget that we may be their idols as artists but as mere men are mere mud in their sight, they tell their footmen to show us to the door. 'Hath not a Jew eyes?'—has not an artist the passions of a man and the heart of one and the nerves of one? Shall he endure to be caressed as a deity one moment, and the next refused even as an equal? We may be good enough to eat with, to drink with, to make music with, but we are no more fit, in their opinion, to be the lover or the lord of their women than the sweeper in the streets, the ragpicker in the dust heaps. You have forgotten this, though, surely, you must know it well. If you doubt it, ask Lord Avillion for the hand of Lady Ina d'Esterre, and you will see what he will answer you."

He spoke with fiery vehemence, all his personal feelings lending force and emotion to his words. His thoughts were not so much of Avillion's ward as of Avillion's wife. He wished for the moment that all the great world which cursed his friend and him had but one neck that he might set his foot upon it.

Auriol was too absorbed in his own sentiments to notice the note of personal indignation and protest which rang through the eloquence of his friend.

"Alas!" he said wearily with a sigh. "It is an insanity I know; she is a lovely child with a tender

heart, but she is not for me. Let us talk of something else."

"And why is she not for you?" said Syrlin abruptly. "You are made to please women; you are handsome, young, gifted, you have never soiled your life with cowardice or vice; you are admired and esteemed by all just men; but you are an artist, and so though you may waltz with her, laugh with her, ride with her, you must no more presume to care for her or pay court to her than if you were a defaulter or a forger! It is monstrous; it is absurd; it is beyond all reason, but it is so; and we are such miserable creatures that we submit to it. Yet it were better for us to cut our heart out of our breasts and throw it on the steps of their houses than to waste it, living and throbbing, on any one of their women."

"Perhaps," said Auriol with a sigh; and his hands strayed mechanically over the ivory keys in a low mournful *andante*. He was aware of the utter futility of his own desires; he knew that there was no precedent, no possibility, for such an union as he dreamed of; he felt the truth of Syrlin's violent utterances, which, however exaggerated in expression, were entirely true in fact; he offered no opposition to them; again and again had the rude contrast between the idolatry which is lavished on an artist by the world and the social scorn with which his pretensions as a man are visited, struck him in the most sensitive and delicate fibres of his nature. And yet he vaguely hoped against hope. Ina d'Esterre was of a strong and uncommon character; she was

poor, she was an artist herself at heart. As years went on and gave her legal freedom, who could tell what might not happen? He would not have dared to formulate this immature fancy in plain words, but it haunted him and solaced him, and unconsciously his hands changed the sad *andante* into a tender and joyous *Lied*.

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU know Auriol?" said Syrlin abruptly, when he was alone in the morning room of Avillion House one day in the same week.

"Certainly!" replied the mistress of the house, looking at him with a little astonishment, for his tone had a kind of menace and challenge in it.

"You admire him, I believe?"

"A charming singer, a charming person; yes."

"Will you give him the hand of Lady Ina d'Esterre?"

Freda was too amazed, too stupefied to reply. What could he mean? What could be the drift of this extraordinary preface? She was accustomed to his saying strange things, things which no one else could have imagined, much less have uttered, but this passed the limits even of extravagance.

"Will you?" repeated Syrlin.

"I suppose it is some jest that I am too dull to see," she answered. "But I do not like jests into which the names of young girls enter; you must pardon me for saying so."

"It is not a jest," said Syrlin, half amused, half incensed. "I speak as seriously as it is possible to do; Auriol is a dear and old friend of mine. He

has a great admiration for Lady Ina. I ask you, for want of a worthier person to make the demand, whether you would object to such an alliance."

"Alliance!" echoed Lady Avillion faintly.

She raised herself in her chair, sat erect and looked at him, doubting whether he was out of his senses or she in hers. Alliance!—the *gros mot* of princely and ducal houses! The sense of the utter and grotesque absurdity of the expression in connection with the subject overcame her gravity and her hauteur; she broke into uncontrollable, inextinguishable laughter; she laughed as she had hardly ever laughed since her childhood at Bellingham.

Syrlin watched her with an anger as great as her mirth. His eyes dwelt on her with passionate admiration, and as violent a reproach burning in those dusky fires.

He waited until she had ceased to laugh; chafing all the while with more irritation than he could utter.

"It is an absurdity which only merits your ridicule, Madame? I expected as much. What is it that appears to you so intolerably absurd? Auriol is not a hunchback, or a beggar, or a dwarf, he is not a gambler, or a drunkard, or a bankrupt. He is of unblemished character, and of his talents you can judge yourself. What do you see so ridiculous in the fact that he should aspire to the hand of a little maiden, scarcely fledged, who is almost, if not wholly, portionless I believe?"

"Really!" said Lady Avillion with a sense of

despair before his extraordinary perversity. Words failed her for the first time in her life. She could not find anything whatever to say in the face of such naked disregard of every rule of existence.

"You who know the world so well," she said at last, "you who have always been with us, you to whom all the *bienséances* of the time are so familiar, how can you speak like that even in joke?"

"I do not speak in joke. I see no jest," said Syrlin sternly. "Did Auriol stay at Heronsmere, at Brakespeare, at Clouds, at Mote?"

"Certainly, and at a hundred other houses too. What has that to do with it?"

"Does he dine at your house in town, and a hundred other great London houses?"

"Certainly. What has that to do with it?"

"You regard him as your equal then?"

"What has that to do with it? Dinners and house parties are one thing, marriages are another. Marriage—Ina's marriage with Auriol!—you must be dreaming, you have some midsummer madness in you both, but I assure you we are not dwelling in realms of Shakespearian fable where singing swains can wed with landless princesses."

She spoke with all the impatience and intolerance which she felt. It was so preposterous an imagination; not to be treated or talked of seriously for an instant. The suggestion of it even offended her more profoundly than she cared to express to the offender.

"That is your last word?"

"My first and last word in relation to this, most unmistakably."

Syrlin looked down on her in silence. It was this side of her character which he hated; yet his partial hatred served to inflame and intensify his admiration of her. He seated himself on a chair some yards away from her.

"Your Lord Marquis of Nantwich," he said slowly, "was examined yesterday in the Bankruptcy Court; his debts are half a million, his assets are three hundred pounds; he married an American, and she has an allowance from her father, and they live on that, four thousand dollars a year. She is the best dressed woman in London, she has toilettes that cost ten thousand pounds a year. He never inquires how they are procured."

"Oh, if you are going to rake up scandals!——"

"They are not scandals; they are facts. One moment more. Another gentleman of your world, the Earl of Ouse, who is, I believe, heir to the dukedom of Sedgemoor, appeared in the same court a month ago; his expenditure has been precisely three thousand times in excess of his income. The Duke has paid debts for him till he can pay no more; his paper is so worthless that no usurer will take it at any percentage; he has appeared as a clown at a circus, he is now travelling with some negro minstrels; his wife, also an American, goes to the same *faiseurs* as her cousin Lady Nantwich, and pays, or is paid for, in the same manner."

"They are dreadful women! What has that to do with it?"

"I do not know that they are dreadful. They live by their wits; but they go to both Buckingham Palace and Sandringham; and, as I have observed, they are always admirably dressed. But it is not of their dresses I was thinking. I merely want you to tell me if you consider Auriol the inferior of Lord Nantwich and Lord Ouse?"

She was silent. The anger of any woman who is required to be consistent kept her mute.

"I do not receive either the Nantwiches or the Ouses," she said, and was conscious of an evasive and feeble reply.

"That is not an answer to my question. Is Lord Nantwich or Lord Ouse the superior of Auriol?"

"I do not see the connection. These unhappy gentlemen are a disgrace to their order; they were probably ill brought up in childhood."

"But, were they unmarried, you would not be offended if either of them demanded the hand of Lady Ina?"

"I should probably refuse it. I cannot perceive in the least whither your interrogations tend."

"What they prove is very simple. A man of blameless character, of great gifts, who is received by you and by your friends, is considered beneath contempt or consideration if he lifts his eyes to one of your maidens; a man of poor character, of vile habits, of common intelligence, and of senseless prodigality, remains on an equality with her because he pos-

sesses a nobility which he disgraces. Where is the sense of that? Where is the justice? Your admiration of the Arts is fictitious; all your respect for talent is a mere shibboleth. Your whole estimate of life is conventional and false. Artists are classed by you with doctors and curates, and stewards and house decorators. They are useful; they may be even ornamental. But they must always sit, metaphorically, below the salt at your table. In the old days, the lord bid the Jongleur sit with the varlets. So do you in your hearts. The Jongleur may flatter himself that you call him up amongst princes; you see in him only a serf; you will give him a gold chain, but you will never allow him knighthood. Lord Nantwich in the Bankruptcy Court is noble, Lord Ouse in the Police Court is noble, Lord Isis warned off Newmarket Heath and struck off every club in London, is noble; Lord Orwell, found in a gambling-hell, after midnight and fined before magistrates, is noble; but Auriol is not noble, he is only a Jongleur; you like him as a singer, but you scorn him as a man; he is loyal, sincere, and gentle, he owes no one a sou, he has a soul attuned to fine issues; but all that is nothing. To suppose that he has any thought of love for a niece of yours is as insulting, as intolerable, to you as if he were one of the footmen in your antechambers. Oh, do not deny it; it is not to be denied. You are only true to your traditions. It is Auriol who is to blame, to imagine that because he makes music for great ladies and fine gentlemen he is esteemed their

equal by them. When the artist once listens to the world he is lost. He is only the Trouvère who is caressed that he may enliven the feast, and then is run through the body and pushed under the rushes as mere vermin!"

He spoke with the vehemence he felt, personal sentiment lending intensity to his words and fire to his glance. He was so unlike any other man whom she had ever seen or heard, when he was deeply moved, that she listened to him fascinated into oblivion of the insulting invective poured out against herself and her world; charmed against her will by the eloquence of his reproaches and the beauty of his voice.

Syrlin alone had the power to make her feel dissatisfied and mortified. With her husband she was always conscious of at least a fair share of success on the not rare occasions when their opinions were at variance. With her family and her society she had supreme ascendency. The correctness of her judgment and the excellence of her understanding had made her approval and her censure of great weight amongst her friends and associates. She unconsciously prided herself upon her intelligence and her authority. Syrlin alone made her doubtful of these. His unsparing truths pierced the embroidered veils of those agreeable sophisms and received opinions which she was accustomed to see strewn over all subjects which were unpleasant in their nudity.

"What you say is very picturesque," she said

after a pause. "You have an extraordinary talent for antithesis. But why will you exaggerate things so? I did not intend to insult either you or your friend. There is so much that one cannot define, that one feels through knowledge of the world, but cannot put into precise words. If you do not see why what you have said of Auriol and Lady Ina strikes me as so extraordinary, I cannot explain it to you; or at least I could not without offence."

"I have explained it to you and to myself," said Syrlin coldly. "You continue to close your eyes to the contradictions of your theories and your practice. Your views are like Voltaire's, who said that he had no wish for artists to be abused in this world and damned in the next, but that the idea of letting one of us marry a Mlle. de la Tour du Pin was revolting. In old Rome if a slave sang or rhymed well nothing was too good for him; he had fine linen and golden sandals, he might feed on nightingales' tongues and honey; but he was always a slave, a freed slave, perhaps, but outside the pale, enriched lavishly, but not esteemed. Artists are to your society what slaves were to the Romans. It is their own fault. They like to be bidden to your banquets."

"You exaggerate extraordinarily."

"Do I? Then will you sanction the aspirations of Auriol?"

"Good heavens, no! Cannot you see the impossibility, the grotesqueness, the incongruity? Why, Auriol is not even his real name!"

"Syrlin is not even my real name," he said with

a deep flush upon his forehead. "I have no name whatever. Probably you know that. It does not matter to me."

"It does not matter to anyone," said Lady Avillion hurriedly. "You are a great genius; that sanctions everything. Auriol has not genius; he has an ephemeral renown in drawing-rooms. And you are not seeking to marry anyone."

"If I were?"—said Syrlin abruptly. "Let us suppose for the whim of it that it is I who admire Lady Ina. What would you say to me? You know very well, Madame, that you would say precisely what you have said as to Auriol."

"It is not I who say it; it is Society."

"The voice of Delphi. The oracle is not always infallible."

"It is reasonable in this instance at least. You cannot think how you distress me. Pray never allude to this idea again. My niece will marry in her own world, and your friend will forget all about this illusion if he have ever really nourished it."

"Am I to tell him that?"

"Tell him nothing. I cannot admit that I have ever had such an idea suggested to me."

"That is ruder than is necessary. I hope myself that it is a freak of fancy which may pass with time. But if it do not, if Lady Ina be essential to his happiness and he to hers, I shall endeavour to advance their wishes, and I shall be forced to disregard yours."

"You cannot do so!" she was startled and

deeply angered. "You must deal with Lord Avillion."

"That will give me much pleasure," said Syrlin with a smile. "I will do so as soon as my friend authorises me."

"I should think your friend would scarcely thank you for your present indiscretion," said Freda coldly. "However, as you certainly cannot have spoken seriously, I shall endeavour to forget that you have spoken at all."

CHAPTER X.

SHE did not however quickly forgive or forget this passage at arms.

That he should have dared to speak to her in such a manner, and on such a theme, filled her with resentment, and with a misgiving that she must have lowered herself in some way in his sight, to have enabled him thus to presume on his intimacy with her and her relatives. Thinking over all that he had said, she was forced to admit to herself that, although couched in that exaggerated antithesis and hyperbole in which people of genius delighted, there had been profound truths and correct inductions in his arguments, preposterous though they had appeared.

The implication of a young girl under her charge in such an argument was extremely disagreeable to her, and made her feel as if she had herself been lacking, somehow or somewhere, in her duty and vigilance as regarded Ina d'Esterre. But in these days, without absolutely shutting a girl up in a cupboard, it was impossible to prevent her from seeing and meeting these brilliant and attractive people who had no social right to be in the drawing-rooms which they frequented.

If she had no innate sense of the fitness of the thing, if she did not perceive of herself that these agreeable companions were beyond the pale of all serious thought or acquaintance, she was not fit to be out in the world at all, and had better be sent back to her schoolroom. But it is not easy to send back to her schoolroom a young lady who has been presented and has made her mark in London society. Ina would, she knew, be delighted to live alone with her fiddle and her sober governesses in some romantic, solitary neighbourhood, like Llangollen or Lynton, but she also knew that a débutante could not be exiled there without very injurious inferences and comments being excited by so odd a step. "Heaven knows what they would say!" she thought with much irritation, "and Heaven knows what she would not do!"

Her manner became very cold to Syrlin and to his friend whenever she encountered either; and she avoided both as far as it was possible to do so in a London June or July, when they crossed her path inevitably in some house or another every day and every evening.

"I believe that the Evil One himself invented music. It was a duet, not an apple, that did the mischief in Eden," she said angrily to the girl herself, taking her away from an afternoon of music at Lady Greatorex's, where Auriol had been singing the "Aimez! disait-il," of Hugo and Liszt.

Ina looked shyly at her, like a startled bird surprised on a cherry branch, and coloured vividly

as she was led away captive to the Avillion carriage.

"It *is* true that she cares for him! Goodness me! How very dreadful, how inconceivable, how altogether intolerable!" thought Freda, as the landau rolled along the drive amongst a compact mass of fashionable equipages, which Beaufront had once irreverently compared to a phalanx of Egyptian flies advancing over a battle-field. And she blamed Syrlin in her own thoughts: he should have foreseen this complication and have averted it.

When the party at Heronsmere had broken up, Lady Avillion had sent her husband's ward to Helena Ilfracombe's house in Belgrave Square, though the girl had petitioned to be left in some country seclusion.

"It is impossible," had said Freda rather severely. "I dare say Fontaine's country mouse is very wise, but we cannot unfortunately follow his wisdom. What excuse could I possibly make for leaving you down at Brakespeare in the midst of the season? Besides, you dream over your music and your German poetry there a good deal too much: and if you are not at the second Drawing Room, the Queen will be sure to ask about it, and it is I who shall be blamed. No; you must go to Helena's for a few days, and then you shall come to me and I will take you everywhere."

So the girl had been carried off despite herself, a shy and serious young vestal, to be offered up on the altars of fashion and custom. She had never

heard harsh or irritable words from Lady Avillion before, and they oppressed her with a sense of pain and of wrongdoing on her own part, besides which she was conscious of nourishing dreams, memories, and sympathies of which all her people would have utterly disapproved.

Ina was accustomed to think for herself; she was a studious, imaginative girl, and the loaves and fishes of the world seemed to her less precious than more spiritual food. She had great talent for music, and a passionate devotion to it; Gluck, Spohr, and Beethoven were her familiar friends. She was a violinist of no mean capacity, and had a voice which was very sympathetic and accurately trained. Since the time that she had been in the world at all, she had heard and seen Auriol everywhere; he seemed to her the very incarnation of music, and when at Heronsmere he had deigned to be accompanied by her and to sing with her, she had been almost paralysed and silenced by her emotion.

His seductive manners and his personal beauty had completed the charm which his talent had begun: before either of them was aware of it they had learned to take a dangerous delight in each other's presence, and the music-room was a mutual ground where their tastes and sympathies could meet and expand unhindered. No words of love had been spoken between them; but Auriol, who had deemed himself proof against such innocent temptations, felt that his life would be valueless to him without her, and she, too young to be conscious of her own

sentiments, yet knew that the world had no beauty for her unless she could hear in it the sweet, sonorous cadences of that all-eloquent voice.

Meantime, no one except Syrlin had guessed the secret which they mutually cherished.

For years Auriol had been the favourite of the best society of England, and no one had ever seen any possible peril from him for those patrician maidens with whom he laughed, talked, played and sang, in the country houses and in London drawing-rooms.

The best society of England is that worst form of democracy, an aristocracy afraid of asserting its own existence. It has abdicated abjectly, and ceased, out of fear, to exercise its privileges; it is purchasable, it is unsound, it is indifferent, it is without principles, political and moral; but it has still sufficient self-respect not to marry its maidens to men of mere genius; it still clings fondly to certain opinions and forms of proper pride, and amongst these the most ineradicable, the most tenacious, is the way in which it looks at Art. Art it knows is a pretty thing in the abstract, but the professors of it are not, never can be, in its sight, eligible and acceptable to it as are the *arrivés* of other professions, the usurers, the politicians, the silver-kings, the nitrate-kings, and the manipulators of boom and bourse.

"It is useless! It is impossible!" Auriol said to himself a hundred times; but love thrives upon the impossible.

"He would never think of me," thought Lady Ina, with that profound humility and unworldliness which accompany all great attachments; but she knew that he did think of her, and his gaze told her so whenever it met hers.

Two or three offers for her hand had been already made; her wild-rose complexion, her great height, and her high-bred look, attracted suitors, especially those who were most alive to the advantages and attractions of connections with the Avillions and other great families to which she belonged; but all these proposals had been rejected without discussion, and none of them had been so brilliant as to make her guardians deem it necessary to urge them on her attention.

But whilst she had stayed at the Ilfracombes a young man had laid his heart and his title at her feet, and the one was so good and the other so excellent that all her relatives decided that his proposal must be urged upon her.

"Lord Woodbridge has spoken to me again about Ina," said Avillion one day, entering his wife's presence.

"I know," said Freda with weariness. "The very marriage for her!—so admirable a character, so excellent a son and brother—but she will not hear of it; what can one do?"

"Why will she not hear of it?"

"Who can explain a girl's caprices? They have all kinds of romantic ideas."

Avillion laughed.

"I don't think romance is much in vogue now. All they want is to establish themselves well. Why should Ina be different to her generation?"

"I cannot tell you, but she is. Lord Woodbridge does not take her fancy; neither did that good creature Dorsetshire. She does not care the least about any marriage; she is quite happy as she is."

"You should not have made her happy; she would have been more reasonable. What must I answer Woodbridge? He is very pressing."

"You must tell him it is of no use. One cannot force her inclinations."

"What an infinite bore!" said Avillion peevishly: then he looked at his wife with keen scrutiny. "Her brother says she has some artist or another in her head. Is it true?"

"Auriol?" said Freda incautiously. "Oh, no!—impossible! Of course she admires his music and his voice, but she would never—"

"Don't trust to that," said Avillion. "We have let all those people in amongst us, and we can never tell to what lengths they won't go. Is it Auriol? I did not know who it was. Well, if there is that danger I shall not give Woodbridge a decisive answer; I shall tell him to wait and try his luck another time. You know these good-looking Bohemians are all over the place, and we can't tell the lackeys to thrash them as we could have done a century ago. It is our own fault; instead of having fiddlers and rhymsters and painters in our pay, and sitting below the salt, as we used to do, we have

made them welcome and mixed them up with ourselves till they have forgotten where they come from and where they are. Because they are allowed to dine with us, they think they may make love to our women,—damn them!"

And with that expletive, murmured so softly that it ceased to offend, he took a bud of tea-rose out of a vase standing near, put it in his buttonhole, and sauntered away.

His wife felt an unreasonable and unexamined anger rise in her at his slighting words; she understood that they were aimed not so much at Auriol as at Auriol's friend.

A little later in the day she took occasion to be alone a little while with Ina.

"My dear child," she said gently, "why will you insist on sending away Lord Woodbridge? He is all we could possibly desire for you, and you know how excellent he is in all relations of life. Why are you so obstinate?"

"If Lord Woodbridge is so good, it would be very wrong to marry him without caring for him, and I do not care for him," replied the girl.

"Do you care, as you call it, for anyone else?"

Ina d'Esterre hesitated and coloured.

"I think I do; I might."

"And might one ask the name of this favoured person?"

Ina was silent. She looked on the ground, and her distress was so great and manifest that Freda's heart failed her to press the question home.

"Perhaps it is not Auriol, perhaps it is his friend, and he mistakes," she thought with a sense of anxiety and alarm, which she hastened to thrust from her as unworthy; it had in it the germ, the tinge of jealousy.

"I, jealous of a child!" she thought with bitter self-censure; "and jealous of what?—of whom?"

"I would not force your confidence for worlds, my love," she said kindly, but despite herself, coldly. "But I hope that you will give it me some time unasked. I am sure that we can trust you to be wise and prudent. At your age the imagination is easily taken captive, and I am afraid you dream over your music too much. We do not live in fairyland, my dear, but in a very dreary world of needs, and forms, and rules in which a good and safe marriage has great value for a woman. I would ask you to think over that."

Ina was silent for a while.

"Do we not shut out our fairies," she said timidly, "because we think so very much of what is safe and wise and valuable, so very much of just those needs, and forms, and rules of which you speak?"

"Well, that is possible," replied Freda, surprised, "though I do not think that I ought to admit it to you."

Ina smiled faintly.

"Why not? It is true. And your own marriage, Aunt Freda, that the world thinks so admirable, do you feel that it is all that you would wish?"

"Never bring personalities into an argument," said Lady Avillion coldly. "I have at least never given anyone the right to suppose that I am in the very least dissatisfied with my life as it is. We live for other things than happiness, my dear."

"If more people were happy they would be better," said the girl wistfully.

"That is certainly true, but we must not look for happiness outside our duties, our position, our circumstances. Wild fruit snatched from the hedges stains the hands."

Ina smiled again more gaily. "I have been very happy sometimes gathering bilberries on the moors."

"Yes," said Freda a little harshly. "But we shall not let you roam after bilberries now that you are out and are eighteen years old."

Ina sighed; she knew what the figure of speech foreshadowed. She knew that however generous, thoughtful, and even indulgent her monitress had always been to her, that there was in her a love of authority and aversion to unusual opinions which would make Lady Avillion by no means merciful to whatever might seem to her derogatory and unbecoming. She was not a woman to whom the timid pale spring buds of youthful sentiment could be successfully carried for sympathy in their unclosing; she was herself in the full summer of her power and her charm, and had reached that maturity without ever having harboured such vague, shy, poetic impulses as haunted Ina's maidenhood.

Ina had now come from the Ilfracombes' to

Avillion House, and its mistress felt with vexation that the girl's presence was inopportune and unwelcome. When a woman's mind is occupied with new interests which she is conscious are unwise, and when new emotions which she is desirous to repulse are stirring in her, the vicinity of a young girl, and the cares of chaperonage, are an irritation and a burden. With every desire and effort to be just and to be kind she only succeeded in being capricious and slightly irritable. Why had she had this *corvée* put upon her? Avillion's sisters were the proper persons to introduce their niece and his. She was always generous, always thoughtful for the girl's interests, but she could not help wishing a dozen times a day that Lord Naseby had made a different kind of will.

"Is it not tiresome that she will not accept Lord Woodbridge?" she said with great vexation to Beaufront. "The most perfect marriage! So good a man, and his tastes exactly like her own!"

"You thought her exactly fitted for me," said Beaufront. "Now I am as unlike that good little Woodbridge as a glass of Kümmel is unlike a cup of tea. My impression is that Ina does not appreciate either myself or Woodbridge; she seemed to me to admire Syrlin more than anyone."

He looked keenly at his cousin as he spoke.

"You have Syrlin on the brain; I have often told you so," said Freda impatiently.

"You have not forgiven 'La Reine pleurait'?" said Beaufront.

"'La Reine pleurait' was a piece of impertinence; but genius is allowed to be impertinent. What is more to be regretted is that people do not wait to have the quality before they assume the privilege."

"You mean that I am a blockhead and yet am rude?"

"You can think so if you like."

"Thanks."

There was a long silence.

Beaufront was the most good-natured man in England, but he was provoked at his cousin's tone towards him, and he was sensible that he deserved better treatment from her.

"He certainly made you too conspicuous at Heronsmere," he said gloomily after awhile. "I had half a mind to tell him so, but I didn't know whether it would offend you if I did."

"It would have done so extremely. I should be sorry if any relative of mine admitted that it was in the power of anyone to make me—what is it you said?—conspicuous."

"Why will you split straws and quarrel with words? Of course a song couldn't hurt *you*, however notorious it became. Only people talk—"

"They talk certainly, and they never listen, and they never care in the very least whether they talk accurately or inaccurately. One meets the 'three black crows' of the fable at every instant in society; and if the three crows are three vultures, so much the better. People are only the more amused."

"That's *so,*" said Beaufront.

"How fearfully American you grow! It is certainly the fact that no one tells a tale correctly or listens to the end of one. It is said that there is no conversation nowadays. How can there be when there are no listeners?"

"You are severe, but you are true. When one speaks of orchids one's hearer says something about sardines. You don't get through a whole sentence without somebody cantering across it and cutting up your grass. I only know one perfect listener whose whole countenance listens and waits—"

"It is Mrs. Laurence, of course."

"Well, I meant Consuelo Laurence. Why do you always speak of her with that chilly intonation?"

"I was not aware that I had any unusual intonation. But I confess I do not care to hear it said so often in society that you will marry her."

"Do they say that? Neither she nor I ever said it."

"She may not say it, but I suppose she expects it."

Beaufront reddened with anger.

"You are mistaken in your inference, Freda, I assure you. You are always so unjust to anyone whom you call an American woman!"

"Oh no; I know them so well; they call all our princes by their *petits noms,* and yet never can master details of precedence; they give one peaches at a guinea apiece and sell their old gowns and bonnets; oh, I know them so well! They are our

dictators nowadays because they 'reverse' better than we can, and take an endless amount of trouble to amuse men who only bore us, and know how to flirt outrageously without getting into any serious entanglement, which makes them so safe and so popular. But I never found any one of them who could do anything more than this, and I never dine with any one of them without wondering who pays for the early peas."

"Consuelo Laurence certainly pays for her own early peas, and everything else that she has, and as for knowledge!—I think she knows every language and every science and every art under the sun," said Beaufront, with indiscreet warmth and anger.

"Dear Ralph, nobody would believe you about the early peas, and nobody would care a straw about the arts and sciences! Your friend is a very graceful and a very clever woman, and knows how to manage princes who find us stiff by comparison. But all that is no reason why I need ask her to dinner. She dines at every house in London."

"Except this," said Beaufront angrily.

"Except this," replied his cousin, "and if Lord Avillion ever fall in love with her, as he may do, then I shall have to ask her here too. I know my conjugal duties to him, and I am never disagreeable about them."

"Freda, I want you to tell me one thing honestly," said Beaufront. "You are always hinting at something—well, something dubious—in Consuelo Lau-

rence. Will you tell me simply what it is you think?"

"I think," replied Lady Avillion very coldly, "that you need not ask me the question."

Beaufront coloured with anger.

"You mean that—that—*cela saute aux yeux?*"

"Certainly."

"You would not take my word about her?"

"My dear Ralph, I would take your word implicitly about anything else, but not about a woman, because I know when you speak of women, you are bound by all the laws of honour to say what is not true."

Beaufront with great difficulty controlled his anger.

"That is why," she continued serenely, "even when women are jealous they are so foolish to ask questions. A man can't say the truth if he is dying to say it."

"You are right in a general rule, but to all rules there are exceptions. In this instance I can swear to you—"

"Oh, please do not persist. I always bow to Mrs. Laurence very pleasantly, and at the last Drawing Room I even said something nice to her about her gown, which was a very beautiful creation and quite unique; but I do not wish to know more of her and I do not wish to talk to you, or hear you talk about her. It would pain me so much to quarrel with you!"

Beaufront rose impetuously, and paced the carpet

in a silent rage which was sufficiently expressed upon his countenance.

"I never would have believed," he said at last, with emotion, "that you—*you*—would have been so unjust, or so cruel, or so insolent to me, as to throw discredit on my word."

"Dear Ralph! When a signature is written under undue influence the law does not think it valid; when a man speaks about a woman with whom he is known to be intimate, no one in his senses believes what he says. It is so very simple!"

"It may be simple, but it is offensive," said Beaufront with violence.

Freda smiled; the smile was very slight, but it could not be said to be inoffensive.

At that moment some people were ushered in, and Beaufront took his departure a few moments later, and walked down Piccadilly in a towering rage; he was not only deeply offended, but he was pained. Freda Avillion had power to hurt him such as no other woman possessed, and her serene unconsciousness of her influence over him, which was quite genuine, irritated him at all times. Besides this, he was exceedingly angered at her hostility to Consuelo Laurence, and the opinion she held of his intimacy with her.

"Beau is in one of his black moods," said one of his friends to another, as they passed him in Piccadilly, walking quickly with his head bent and a heavy frown on his face.

"He was as light-hearted as a ploughboy when

he was only Ralph Fitzurse and had not a shilling to bless himself with," replied the other man.

Beaufront, unwitting of the comments made on him, walked on to the beginning of St. James's Street, and then abruptly turned back and retraced his steps towards Hyde Park. A sudden thought, a sudden resolution had come to him, and he went on his way through the now rapidly increasing gloom of the late afternoon, and bent his steps towards the well-known corner of Wilton Street, where the sparrows were going to sleep on the boughs of the church trees.

"Why not?" he said to himself. He was greatly attached to Consuelo Laurence; she pleased his taste, beguiled his time; in her society he felt that pleasant sense of *bien-être* which soothes and caresses a man like a soft south wind; he admired her, he liked her, he did not feel any passion for her, but much sympathy, pity, and regard. Since people thought ill of her through him, it seemed to him that it was only common honour to stop their tongues in the only way which could do so effectually. Cynical in expression, and sometimes rough in manner, and unfeeling as he had the credit of being, he was generous to quixotism, and very tender of heart towards those he liked. "Why not?" he said to himself as he walked towards St. Paul's Church. He was surprised that he had never thought of this course before. Chivalry, good feeling, and honest indignation, all moved him to it, and in the most secret corner of his heart there was an inclination

to do what would displease and mortify his cousin. She would not care very much, perhaps, but she would dislike such a consequence of her words.

He did not even ask if Mrs. Laurence was at home; she always was so at this hour; but he passed through the warm and fragrant hall perfumed by big bowls of lilies of the valley, and up the staircase with its pleasant scent of hothouse flowers and of burning pastilles, and entered the presence of Consuelo as he had done so many times at that hour for six years and more.

There were several persons there taking their tea out of little Japanese lotus-cups, with their morsels of cut cake on the accompanying lily-leaf plate. Consuelo Laurence, in a tea-gown which was a cloud of lace with glimpses of daffodil satin in it here and there, looked as she always did, cool and sweet and smiling, and serene as a balmy summer's eve.

Beaufront greeted her briefly, and nodded with scanty politeness to the people he knew, then cast himself down on a long low chair to wait until the place should be clear. He was so constantly seen there that the rooms would have seemed scarcely furnished without him. Some American girls, to whom the sound of his title was as a Mayfly to a trout, challenged his attention, and tried their best to rouse him from his silence; but they failed, and sadly agreed with each other afterwards that trying to get a word out of that dumb Duke was like creeping across the Dismal Swamp with a lame bullock-team and your axle broke.

After what appeared to him to be interminable ages, every one at last went away, and the pretty palm-shadowed, lamp-lit room was left to himself and her.

Consuelo Laurence looked at him curiously.

"What is the matter with you to-day?" she said, standing by her tea-table. "Won't you have some tea? or a cigarette? How cross you were to my poor little maidens! They are great heiresses from Arkansas; they are as pale and as pretty as wood-anemones, and they know about as much of life. Your historical name sounded to them like a clarion-call out of 'Ivanhoe.'"

"Will you have the name, Consuelo?" he said abruptly as he rose.

"What?" she stared at him, wondering what he could possibly mean.

"I mean what I say—will you marry me?" said Beaufront abruptly.

Mrs. Laurence turned pale; a wave of strong emotion passed over her, but whether of pleasure or of pain he did not know. After a pause in which she moved some tea-roses in their china bucket, she answered very gently:

"Dear Ralph, no; I will not."

Beaufront coloured as though some one had insulted him. He had not anticipated the reply.

"Why not?" he said angrily.

"For many reasons. First, because you do not love me."

"I do love you."

"No; you admire me, you have befriended me, you are even fond of me, but all that is not love. The woman you do love is Lady Avillion."

"I never gave you the slightest right to imagine such a thing."

"Oh, my dear friend, a woman's intuitions do not wait for such a commonplace thing as right. I have always seen that you loved your cousin."

"I might with as much wisdom love the moon!"

"What has wisdom to do with it?"

"You only beg the question, Consuelo. I have asked you to be my wife. I do not know what greater proof a man can give of his affection and esteem."

He spoke with pain and with mortification; he was moved by a chivalrous and generous emotion, and he was hurt to find his expression of it thus received.

Consuelo Laurence left off rearranging the roses and pushed the basket from her. She felt the contagion of his emotion gain upon her, and she was surprised, touched, agitated, although she retained her usual aspect of serene and dreamy quietude; it had so long served her so well as a cloak to all that she felt.

"Do not suppose that I am ungrateful," she said in a low voice. "It is noble in you and very generous. But it would be very base of me to take advantage of a moment's rashness. I am not the kind of woman whom you should marry. The great

world has accepted me because it will accept anyone who has audacity enough to take it by the throat, but I am a *femme tarée* all the same. Ask Lady Avillion."

Beaufront rose to his feet with an exclamation which was almost an oath.

"Why will you bring her name into the question?" he said with violence, "and why will you do dishonour to yourself? The world admires you and courts you. But if it threw stones at you, that would not matter to me. I know your character, and I know that of half the London fine ladies. It is not yours which suffers by the comparison. Once again, Consuelo, I say in all deliberation and sincerity, if you will become my wife I shall be honoured."

A faint rose tint came for a moment over the transparent colourless beauty of her face. A great temptation assailed her. The thing she most desired was here if she chose, and she had a moment of longing, of indecision, of weakness.

"Answer me," said Beaufront imperiously and entreatingly.

She raised her eyelids, and rested on him the full, pensive, mysterious regard of her creole eyes.

"I have answered you, dear," she said firmly. "I will never give you any other answer. Let us forget this moment of unreason, and do not let it disturb our intercourse or make any hesitation in our friendship. What would society say," she added with a little laugh which was not quite real, "if they

only knew that an adventuress refuses to become a Duchess? To be sure I am a creole, which may explain my madness!"

Beaufront unloosed her hands, which he had taken, and turned away with a dark and ominous frown upon his face. He was deeply offended, deeply mortified, and her little jest grated on his ear.

"At all events you may spare me your ridicule," he said sternly. "I spoke to you in all sincerity and honour."

"Do not be angry, dear," she said with a little timidity very unusual in her. "It must be as I say. One day you will thank me when you marry some innocent child who will have known no touch but yours."

"I shall never marry," said Beaufront harshly; and with no expression or gesture of farewell he went out of the little rose-scented room which had so often seemed to him a haven of refuge from the fret of the world, the satin curtains of its doorway closed behind him, and in another moment he was passing with rapid and uncertain steps down Wilton Street.

"Say that I am not at home," said Consuelo Laurence to her head-servant, and then she went into her own chamber, locked the door, and wept bitterly.

She was scarcely more than an adventuress, she had won the world by audacity as she had said, she

had a past behind her, short still in years, but dark in tragedy, yet she had found heroism enough to do a generous, a magnanimous, and an unselfish action. She had refused the hand of the only man whom she had ever loved.

CHAPTER XI.

"You told me the other day that I should marry Mrs. Laurence," he said abruptly to his cousin the next morning.

She looked at him with disquietude.

"I said Society thought you ought," she said coldly and with significance.

Beaufront frowned with that dark anger which had the power of holding very bold men in check, but did not in any degree daunt his cousin.

"There is no 'ought' in the matter," he said curtly. "But I acted on your suggestion, I offered to marry her."

Lady Avillion turned and looked at him with a profound aversion, and half rose as though to remove herself from contamination.

"You needn't move; I am not polluted yet," he said with some bitterness. "I have offered to marry her, and she has refused me."

"Refused you!" The audacity of this adventuress in refusing such an alliance seemed almost more intolerable to her than if she had heard that the union was to be concluded on the morrow. "*Reculant pour mieux sauter*, I suppose?" she said in those icy and gentle tones which always made the heart

of her hearer thrill with divided adoration and detestation of her.

"You are unjust and you are ungenerous," he said with violence. "There is no necessity to *reculer*, she could have taken me at my word if she had chosen. She has not so chosen. She is the most generous of women, as you have become the most ungenerous."

Lady Avillion was too astonished and absorbed in her astonishment to notice the censure of herself.

"Certainly if she have refused you, she shows some good feeling," she replied with disbelief in her tone. "Yet one would have to know her motive to be able to judge."

"It seemed to me that you have judged her long ago without waiting to know her motives or her history," said Beaufront, with a violent anger which he did his best to conceal.

"Her history?" said Freda in her sweetest serenity of tone. "Oh, you know, dear, I never read any *chronique scandaleuse.*"

Beaufront stifled an oath, and rose to take his departure; he would possibly have said words which it would have been impossible to efface and difficult to recall, had not Avillion at that moment pushed the portière aside and entered his wife's room; a very unusual act on his part.

"You here, Beau?" he said carelessly, whilst he nodded good-morning to his wife. "My dear Freda, will you look at these letters? One is from your Bournemouth architect, who says we must give him

more definite orders about your whims before he can begin to do anything, and the other is from your brother, who wants me to buy his racing stable. How preposterous, isn't it, when you know he has scarcely a bit of good blood amongst 'em all? Do tell him they are all screws, and couldn't win a Suburban Selling Plate the whole lot of them. If he can't afford to keep a good trainer, why the deuce will he race?"

"But he is not going to race any more!"

"Very well, then he can send the whole lot up to Tattersall's, and not bother me. Do write and tell him so. Tell him that I am so worried by fifty thousand things that I really can't attend to his troubles. I can send Dawson to him, if Dawson would do any good."

Dawson was his own trainer; one of the celebrities of Newmarket Heath.

"Is Fulke in more difficulties?" asked Beaufront.

"He is always up to his eyes in them," said Avillion pettishly. "You know, Ralph, in these days, the landed gentlemen must come to grief. They all of 'em, practically, live on borrowed money at enormous interest, and how long does that sort of thing ever go on? I marvel myself that it lasts as long as it does. If you and I had only land, where should we be?"

Avillion threw his cigarette away impatiently and lighted another; he disliked speaking or thinking of any disagreeable subjects, and people were always forcing them on to him so cruelly.

"There is nothing safe in this country," he added. "I have had bought for me a good many hundred square miles of cornland in Missouri, and I have had also bought for me some salt mines in Siberia. With those perhaps we shall get along, but here we shall go to pieces like a rotten boat at the very first shock of an European war."

"There are wars on the cards which would effectually prevent your getting either your corn or your salt," said Freda. "There is only one entirely safe investment, and that is diamonds. With a few really great diamonds your carry your bank on your back like a snail, and can defy both war and revolution."

"That depends. To realise, you must be in a society which wants and wears diamonds. Socialists certainly will not tolerate them except for glass-cutting and watchsprings. By the way, Beau," he added, "I have just been talking in the Park to your friend Mrs. Laurence. She was resting her ponies. What an interesting woman she is, I never thought her so interesting before, and extraordinarily pretty too, with that tea-rose skin and those southern eyes!"

Beaufront muttered angrily some words to the effect that she was good-looking certainly.

"My dear Uther," said Freda in her sweetest tones, "I hope *you* won't take a caprice for Mrs. Laurence, because if you do you will compel me to ask her to my parties, and that is what I have been

resisting doing ever since her star rose in view upon our horizon. Besides, you should not interfere with Ralph's friendships."

Avillion laughed.

"Oh, no, I know the rules of play too well to be the *terzo incommodo*. But she is really a very interesting woman, and out of the common way."

Beaufront very rudely, without a farewell to either of them, went out of the room and out of the house.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Avillion.

"He is always *entiché* about Mrs. Laurence, you know that," replied his wife. "He wishes us to believe her a sort of Madonna, who has lived in a sanctuary and never known but the angels."

"Whew!" said Avillion dubiously. "That looks as if he meant to marry her some day. I dare say she'll get it out of him. Those soft, sweet, indolent women are the very deuce and all for clinging tooth and claw to what they want."

"I am sure I never get what I want," said his wife.

"You always do when you know what you want," said Avillion. "But you don't always know, and besides, you show a little bit too much that you mean to have your own way. The *celare artem* is necessary in getting one's own way."

"You never conceal that you desire yours!"

"Because I always take it," said Avillion naïvely. "A woman is different. To achieve her ends she must go in endless circles in an apparently totally

opposite direction, just as you have to go, they say, when you stalk moose."

"That is what Mrs. Laurence is doing now with Ralph," thought his wife; but she did not say so. She did not desire to increase her husband's interest in that lady. To her Consuelo Laurence represented the most objectionable class of women, come no one knew whence, going no one knew whither, their sovereignty an usurpation, their fashion an accident, their position an imposture.

Once or twice Beaufront had felt tempted to tell his cousin of the cause which had first drawn him and Mrs. Laurence together. But he never did: he doubted her reception of it. She was incredulous and cold where her hostilities were concerned, and he felt that it was quite possible that she would disbelieve him and think something worse than she now did.

Consuelo Laurence had been the bastard daughter of a planter of Martinique by a youthful quadroon. Her father, immensely rich and passionately attached to her, had brought her up in luxury and culture; life in the beautiful tropical wilderness had been to her, up to the time she was fifteen years old, much what it was to any one of the gorgeous flowers blooming in the rank and humid woods. When she was nearly sixteen, her father was killed by a bite from a yellow snake. He had been a careless, thoughtless, indolent creole, who in the full vigour of manhood and flower of prosperity had never given a moment's reflection to the uncertainty of life. He

had made no kind of provision for his daughter, whom he had brought up like an oriental princess, and whose loveliness had unfolded itself before his eyes day by day in the hot sunlight like the blossoms of the tulip-trees before his verandah. He died unmarried and intestate, and his heirs did not recognise in Consuelo any legal title to share their heritage. They expelled her from the paradise of her childhood with the woman who had been her nurse, a negress named Miriam. The child was too delirious with grief to know what happened to her; Miriam, as stunned as herself and ignorant of all which lay outside the forest swamps of her birthplace, being offered a free passage to Charlestown by a ship-owner whom she knew, went thither with her charge, not knowing where else to go or what to do in the future. In Charlestown the few thousand dollars given them by the heirs were soon spent, and the ignorant woman and her charge, who had deemed herself born only to command and to enjoy, lived miserably, and would have starved but for the negress's little gains made by any hard work that she could obtain in the poor quarter where they had taken refuge.

Consuelo accepted apathetically all that was given to her for many weeks. Then one day, when her nurse brought her some delicate food, she said suddenly:

"Where does this come from? How is it got?"

"It comes from the ravens, my treasure," said the negress: but the girl looked at her and coloured scarlet.

"Do *you* keep *me?*" she said with an awakening sense of shame.

It was then six months since her expulsion from her home. Her life had been like that flower which only grows on the shores of the Mexican Gulf which is snow-white at sunrise, ruby red at noon, and is by evening dead.

The next day when the negress was out at work, Consuelo went down into the streets and wandered about in them, a black shawl folded over her head. She saw a place above which was written its name in large letters in French: "Salle de Concert. Café Chantant." Her thoughts were still very confused, but she understood that the words meant music of some sort. She went inside and asked for the director: when he came he was struck by her unusual beauty, and asked her kindly what she wanted.

"I want to earn money," she said to him. "I can sing; I know languages; I can play the guitar; will you let me sing here and pay me?"

The director, who was a Frenchman with a travelling troupe of third-rate music-hall singers, was quick to perceive the use she might be to him; he engaged her without even caring whether she could sing or not, and set her behind the flaring gas-jets of his stage, between some shabby singing-women in gaudy attire and with painted cheeks, whose bold eyes and stereotyped simpers made her heart grow sick.

She could not sing a note, from nervousness, terror, and the sobs which choked her throat; but

she stood there in her black frock holding her mute guitar, and her beauty bewitched the audience. Her first appearance, though she neither sang nor played a note, was successful: all the city wanted to see her, and the music-hall was night after night crowded to overflowing. Before then, it had been scarcely more than a gathering place for the lower kind of loafers; it now became the resort of all the best men of Charlestown. "Have you seen Consuelo?" was the one question on all their tongues. There would have been but one issue to this had not the negress been there; but Miriam stood like a rock between her nursling and the crowd of adorers who offered up to her bouquets, jewels, verses, serenades, and all the gamut of homage except one thing, the one thing for which the negress stood out. "If you want her, marry her," she said always, but no one would do that; the old woman was obdurate, and so contrived to be for ever beside her charge, and to screen her perpetually from all her suitors, that the child passed through this winter of danger and of degradation without harm, or even any suspicion of her own peril.

One man alone fell so madly in love with her that he threw all prejudices to the winds and offered her marriage. He was Horace Laurence, an Englishman, who had come for shooting to the South. He was good-looking and well-born; he appeared rich; Miriam was won over to his side at once, and by her entreaties, joined to his importunities, the girl's reluctance was overcome and she became his wife.

Six months later he took her to Europe. There she bore him a child, and before she was eighteen years old had discovered that her husband was an adventurer, a spendthrift, and a gamester; that his social position was dubious, his means precarious, and his passion for herself a sensual self-gratification united to a callous self-interest. He had a small showy apartment in Paris, and there as at any of the fashionable watering-places to which they went, he desired that his wife's beauty should attract young men of rank and riches whose knowledge of play would not be equal to his own. She spent years of a cruel and humiliating struggle beside which the music-hall of Charlestown seemed in her memory like a haven of peace.

As Laurence sank from bad to worse, and grew deeper and deeper in the mire of debt, he made no scruple of bidding his wife get money for him in any way she could.

"I am a *mari complaisant,* why don't you profit by my goodnature? What a fortunate woman you should think yourself!" he said with a brutal laugh.

Violent scenes followed on her refusal to be led into what he wished; and her efforts to warn off those whom he decoyed. She had a small apartment in the Rue Rouget de Lisle, very high up, but giving her a glimpse from the balconies of the trees of the Tuileries, and made attractive by her own taste and the flowers which all the men she knew sent her in all seasons. There Laurence, throughout the season, brought his acquaintances to play bac-

carat and écarté and chemin de fer; there she filled a position which she abhorred, and strove as far as she could to diminish the evil he did; there her little child lived for three short years, a pretty baby, tumbling on the grass of the Tuileries, and giving her the only joyous moments of her existence; and there one evening came Ralph Fitzurse, a man of higher rank and emptier purse than the other associates of Colonel Laurence.

At the time of his first visit there the child, little Margot, was ill, wasting sadly and silently away, and one afternoon he entered the salon unannounced and found her alone there with the dying child in her lap, while the sunny air was sweet with the scent of lilac, and the noise of the carriages going down the Rue de Rivoli came up to the silent room.

Laurence was away at Chantilly, her servants were out, the child was dying; he did all that its father should have done, and stayed beside her while the dusk deepened, and the roar of the traffic went on, and the puff-ball of daisies with which she had tried to call a smile from the dim drowsy eyes, rolled from the baby's hand on to the floor, and with a cooing sound its small breath sighed itself away.

His accidental presence there that day, at such a moment, laid the foundation of an unchangeable friendship between them. He had seen the true nature of this woman who was deemed a cold-hearted adventuress, and she had found how much of tenderness, of delicacy, and of sympathy there existed

under the reckless and cynical exterior of a man who at that period of his life was classed as a patrician *décavé*.

Never afterwards did Beaufront smell the odour of the Paris lilac on an Easter day, or see the children throw their balls across the daisies in the Tuileries gardens, without thinking of little Margot lying dead and dumb in her mother's arms, while all the movement and gaiety of Paris stirred in the April air.

It was he, and not Laurence, who had gone down with her to put the small white coffin away under the green earth of a little village burial-ground on the edge of the great Fontainbleau woods. When the whole world of London gossiped its heart out and tortured its brains to imagine what the secret could be which united the Duke of Beaufront and Consuelo Laurence, it little dreamed that it was nothing more or less than the remembrance of a little grave under an old oak tree, planted thick with snowdrops in memory of a child.

He pitied her intensely, he admired her greatly, he defended her chivalrously; but he was never for a single instant in love with her, and his kindly and dispassionate friendship for her first formed a sweet and welcome contrast to the passions which surrounded her and the desires which filled her with loathing.

One night at Nice, almost before her eyes, Laurence was shot dead in a duel in an hotel room after a gambling quarrel. Beaufront, who was then

at Monte Carlo, devoted himself to her in that ghastly moment, and did all for her that forethought, delicacy, and consideration could compass. She was left almost penniless, she sold the few jewels remaining to her, and went to a little dull town in the north of France. There she lived for eighteen months, gaining her bread by music and singing lessons.

Beaufront had at that period entered into his great and unlooked for inheritance; by letter and in person he entreated her with the utmost delicacy and generosity to be permitted to do all kinds of good services for her. "Do you mistrust me that you cannot treat me as a friend?" he asked her again and again. But she was not to be persuaded into acceptance of any of his offers. He understood that she had been so profoundly steeped in degradation during the few years of her married life, that she needed to devote herself to poverty and hard work to regain any self-respect. He ceased to importune her, but he never ceased to correspond with her, and occasionally he visited her in the quaint old street of the town of Dol in which mere accident had led her to find her retreat.

During that time her father's brother died childless, and having been through long illness haunted by the consciousness of his own cruelty to her, and wholly ignorant of her fate, left her one half of his enormous fortune. The West Indian men of law were long in tracing her steps, and when they did trace them, slow in being satisfied of her identity.

She was discovered living in a gloomy old wooden house in Dol, gaining the barest livelihood, and to her unspeakable amazement learned that she had become mistress of more than a million of money.

She was young enough for life to seem still alluring and sweet to her, and she knew the world well enough to know that no one who is rich will long be friendless. But Beaufront had remained her friend in all adversity; he only. She wrote and told him of her change of fortunes, and he persuaded her to make her residence in England.

"But with such a past as mine!" she urged strenuously.

"Your past had no sins of your own in it," said Beaufront. "I wish half the London women could say as much for themselves."

"But you know who I was, and that it is only sixteen years ago that I sang in Charlestown?"

"My dear Consuelo, you don't know our world. It is a very queer world, but it only wants management. Society is a raree-show nowadays; only bring it something unusual and you are the talk of the town. Leave all that to me, and only do as I tell you."

"I shall look like an adventuress," she objected to him. "Indeed, what else hardly have I been?"

"You will look like a thoroughbred woman, and you will be the idol of London in a year if you like," he answered. "Trust me and come. I will pilot you through our society. With Paris you have horrible memories; put them aside for ever and come."

"It will be gross audacity."

"Well, if it will, so much the better," said her friend, "for nothing gets on in London like audacity. We are a shy people, you know, and so like to be taken by storm. Come, at your age you want to be happy; you cannot have done with life yet."

And so she came to London, and it was known that the Duke of Beaufront's people had taken the house in Wilton Street for her, and for a time all her own sex shook their heads and would not go there.

"Wait a bit; I know them," said Beaufront. "Next season you will find them all crowding up your staircase like a flock of sheep; *he's* coming to see you to-morrow."

"He" was the first gentleman in England, *qui fait la pluie et le beau temps* for that very varying weather-chart, Society.

Beaufront did know his London, and the result was what he had predicted. Mrs. Laurence at once became the fashion; but of course London, behind his back and hers, said that it could never forgive him for bringing her there.

Her own perfect propriety of conduct, combined with the terrific impropriety of what they believed about her, was exactly that union of conventional appearances with sagacious suspicions which makes the very deepest joy of the innermost soul of modern society. A woman who does nothing which is not "proper," and yet is known to have done everything which is "improper," is the most cherished heroine

of modern ethics; she is not compromising to others and yet she has compromised herself. You can visit her without thereby losing a hair's-breadth of caste, and yet you can abuse her with the most satisfactory and comforting completeness. She is at once the sugared beignet and the pungent caviare of your dinner, its sweet champagne and its salted olives.

Beaufront had never been in love with her. The pity, the admiration, the affection which in time he came to feel for her had been entirely passionless; and he had understood how surfeited by undesired passions she was, and how glad of absence of passion in her relations with any man. Little by little he had grown very intimate with her, and took a warm fraternal interest in all which concerned her, but he had never even wished to become her lover.

But since her rejection of his offer of everything which it was in his power to bestow, she had a different attraction for him. He seemed to see her with different eyes, to find in her a wholly different personality. He was mortified, astonished, irritated at her refusal, but it made her far more interesting in his sight than she had been before. Attached to her he had always been, but with a serene fraternal kindness, containing full appreciation of her charms without desire to make them his own. But ever since the day that she had so decidedly and disinterestedly rejected him she grew far higher in his estimation and much deeper into his affections.

Without any vanity, he knew well that there were very few women in Europe who would not

have been tempted by his social position; and that it had no power to move her from her decision raised her to a very high place in his esteem.

"Either she cares for me and saves me from what she views as a sacrifice," he thought, "or else she does not care and is not to be won by the mere gratification of her ambition."

Either way, after the first mortification of it, it seemed to him that her choice was very noble. He had watched her success in society with good-humoured amusement, feeling that it was chiefly his own work, and he had seen her surrounded with adorers without the faintest sentiment of jealousy. But since her rejection of him, new and warmer and more uneasy feelings entered into him towards her. She had said, as women will, "Do not let this incident disturb our friendship;" but it was beyond her power to command that. When a single drop of brandy has been poured into a glass of water, the water cannot ever be pure spring water again any more.

The slightest hint of love or desire dropped into the calmness of a man and woman's friendship disturbs and colours it for evermore.

Consuelo Laurence knew very well that he might still come and go up her staircase five hundred times in the season, but that her friend nevertheless was lost to her for all time. And the disinterested, passionless, unchanging affection of Beaufront had been very precious to her in that unstable world, a fast-anchored buoy in the changing tides and shift-

ing shallows of society. Should she exchange it for the restless passions, the exacting jealousies, the cruel descent from worship to indifference or worse, which marriage would almost certainly bring with it?

"We are a thousand times better and wiser as we are," she thought, and yet she sighed as she thought so. For she was persuaded that it was for no other than chivalrous and generous desire that he offered her his name and rank. He had heard something, perhaps, unkinder than usual said of her, and so had hastened to atone to her for what was no fault of his own. But she was not to be outdone in generosity, nor would she allow him to be hurried by his impetuosity into an irrevocable self-surrender. To live through her life with only his friendship was very possible to her; she had grown so used to it; but to risk seeing in him a perpetual and concealed regret for an unalterable step was to risk entering upon a torture for which she was certain she would have no strength. In the past she had owed him kindness and consolation; in the present she owed him position and social power and most of the enjoyment of her life. She would not pay her debts to him so ill as to accept his sacrifice.

"What would the world say if he married me?" she thought bitterly. "Only that he had done it *at last!* Oh, the vile *dénigrement*, the cruel false constructions, the eternal malevolence and injustice of the society we court as if its doors opened into paradise!"

How sweet and rash and generous it was of him

to wish it, she repeated to herself a hundred times. How like his nature to look neither to the right nor left, but only straightforward to what seems just and kind.

No arguments which he could use availed to move her, because she was steadfast in that purpose of self-sacrifice which to some women is a kind of second nature.

"If I were his wife and he even *looked* a doubt of me, I should pray for the earth to cover me," she thought, with that passionate feeling which was in her creole blood, although the repose and languor of her habitual manner so entirely concealed it that no one suspected its existence.

She was convinced that she would not have been his wife a week before he would have begun to think restlessly of the comments of the world. He believed in her now entirely, because he had nothing at stake in such a belief; but she had no proof to give him of the innocence of her past life, and she felt that suspicion, self-sown and hydra-headed, would inevitably spring up in him, and embitter his peace of mind, if once the honour of his name were to repose in her.

CHAPTER XII.

Whilst the season was at its height, and the routine of pleasure was followed by day and by night, the metropolis was agitated in its lower depths by a movement neither gay nor agreeable. The socialists were busy, the mob was troublesome, and the sovereign people were climbing on the backs of the Trafalgar lions and trampling down the grass in the Parks, agitating for various matters which served them as pretexts for bellowing at the top of their voices, and impeding the traffic of the squares and streets. In such moments the subterranean forces of London life display themselves, as snakes pour out of their holes in drought; and the spectacle is not an exhilarating or comforting one to the most sanguine or the most indolent administration.

These demonstrations had of late been frequent, and Avillion was not in error when he pettishly declared that a Conservative Government was undistinguishable from a Radical one.

"Matters were never worse in the Gordon riots or the agitations of Tom Paine," he said with much contempt, and although he exaggerated in saying so, his party was uneasily conscious that there was a germ of truth in the unpleasant parallels which he

was constantly citing from the reigns of the Georges. However thickly they strewed their primroses, the brambles showed underneath, and whatever sweet words they lavished on the people, the booing of the Rough was heard above them.

It is considered a safety-valve to popular feeling for all the scum of London to be allowed to pour itself out over the pleasure grounds of the capital; it is thought to be a sanitary process, like pouring out sewage over green fields; and therefore one day in mid-June, when the great Plebs had announced their intention of coming out in their millions into Hyde Park, the Cabinet did not dream of preventing the demonstration. The flower-beds of the Park had been planted at vast cost and were in full beauty; the turf was green, the trees were in full leaf, the water was sunny. The demonstration would ruin the flowers, break the trees, tread the turf into barren dust, and prevent the boating on the Serpentine; but no one dared to declare that this kind of freedom was only an outrage and a tyranny, and courage and common sense hid their diminished heads before the sovereign will of the Gutter and the Slums.

> Demos was lord and master,
> Supreme in bower and town,
> With a firebrand for a sceptre
> And a fool's-cap for a crown.

Freda Avillion had been warned by ministers and friends to keep within her own gates that day;

but she was not a woman to be moved by warnings of the kind. She wanted to go across the Park, and she went across it in her coupé, although, even then, there were ominous-looking groups of roughs gathered under the Reformers' tree and about the Marble Arch.

She thought as she looked at them of old Queen Charlotte, assaulted in her sedan chair and saying: "I am seventy years old; I have been fifty years Queen of England, and I never was insulted before."

"That old woman knew how to answer them," she thought. "Nowadays we don't know how. We build gigantic toyshops and cucumber frames for them, and we entreat dear Cerberus to wash himself and come and hear Beethoven and Bach, and when Cerberus will prefer to smash glass and bawl the 'Marseillaise' we get frightened, and send for the police or the Guards."

And she sighed; for she had been in earnest with her primroses and her other pretty playthings, but she was clear-sighted despite her prejudices, and she saw that you cannot clear the mud out of the gutter with a feather-duster, and she was a proud and courageous woman; and on proud and courageous people the mere menace of a mob acts like sulphur on flame, like the indignity of a shaken whip to the haughty spirit of a mastiff.

She drove placidly along the Park and down the Bayswater road to her destination; a small house in a retired place, with some of the old green country

look about it, where the French governess who had educated her from seven to seventeen years old, was dying slowly of an internal malady.

Mme. Beriot had been a person of unusual culture, tact, and wisdom, and she had inspired in her pupil a grateful and enduring attachment.

In the little dusky evergreen-shaded rooms, where the little left to her of life was passing painfully away, the apparition of Lady Avillion in all her beauty and grace, bearing with her hothouse flowers and fruits, new books and new engravings, was a precious privilege and consolation.

The poor lady wanted for no material comforts, but she had no relatives in the world except a nephew who was a priest in Pondicherry, and her affection for the lovely Wilfreda Damer had been the chief interest and consolation of her later years. She read with eagerness and preserved with care every printed line from the newspapers in which Lady Avillion's movements, entertainments, costumes, house parties, or sojourns in foreign places, were chronicled, and every night and morning prayed for her peace, health, and welfare with a devotion far more maternal than anything ever felt by Lady Blanche, who was occupied with a hundred thousand social, political, amatory interests of her own.

Mme. Beriot was far more discriminating also than was Lady Blanche, she never offered Freda any felicitations on her happiness, neither did she offer her any condolences on the shortcomings of her existence. She was a very wise woman, and she

knew that to suggest to a person that their fate is not what they would desire, is to make them dissatisfied with Paradise itself. And she could easily believe, without being told it, that Lady Avillion had never even had any perception of what Paradise might be.

Stretched on her couch of pain and knowing that her days were numbered, she yet retained her quickness of intelligence and sympathy, and her interest in her late pupil's career sustained her interest also in that great world of which she had seen something, if only through the chink of a schoolroom door.

"You had Syrlin at Brakespeare I saw by the papers last month," she said whilst her visitor sat beside her near the small glass door which opened into a suburban grass plot, shady with clumps of laurel and sweet with heliotrope and stocks and jessamines, which Freda had caused to be planted and cultivated there.

"Yes; and he was what the men call in good form; he amused Lord Avillion, which is difficult enough."

"Ah! How much I should like to see him!"

"Would you?"

"Indeed I should. He is of my country, and I used to be so fond of the theatre in Paris—*dans mes beaux jours.*"

"I might bring him some day; that is if he would come; I dare say he would come here."

Mme. Beriot smiled.

"Most men would come where you asked them! But pray do not think of such a thing for a moment. I never dreamed of it. I only said so without thinking, because he is French, and such a genius they say."

"I believe he has genius, and they tell me he is very good-natured when he is not out of humour. He was very good-natured to us at Brakespeare."

"Pray do not think of it! It would only inconvenience you, and why should a brilliant artist waste half-an-hour on a paralytic old woman?"

"The paralytic old woman is my dear and honoured friend," said Freda, laying her hand on that of Mme. Beriot. "Oh, yes, I will bring Syrlin some day. He must have something admirable in him or he would not have my cousin Ralph and Lorraine Iona for his friends. At least, about Ralph I don't know," she added, with a passing remembrance of the bad taste he showed in his regard for Mrs. Laurence. "When he takes a fancy to anyone he is absurd and wrong-headed; but Mr. Iona is a genius too, and has never been known to bestow his sympathies unworthily. Oh, certainly I will bring you your countryman some day, if he is your countryman; I believe he is more Moorish-Spanish than anything."

When she had left Mme. Beriot, to whom it seemed as though she took with her a flood of sunshine and left the shaded little room to darkness, she drove to see an artist who dwelt in the neighbourhood; that most melancholy and prosaic of

neighbourhoods which calls itself Maida Vale, where it is marvellous that the great singer of Sordello, who knew the light there is on Lido and had seen the sun set behind the wind-vexed Apennine, can ever have made his home.

"How ever can they paint here?" she thought, as her carriage passed through the dreary terraces which had no vestige of a terrace, the villas which were only ugly cottages crammed on to one another like sardines in a box, and the avenues which possessed nothing more like a tree than the metal column of a lamp-post or the withered geranium upon a window-sill. No capital on earth is surrounded by suburbs so agonising as London. "How can anybody paint here! How can anybody breathe here! If I were an artist, and had not a shilling in my pocket, I would work my way out on board a brig to Venice, or beg my way inch by inch across France to the Pyrenees," she thought as her horses stopped at her young painter's dwelling, a high number in a long and narrow street which was called Isandula Avenue.

The very soul withers up like the geraniums in the breast of the stranger who passes down these hopeless, endless, meaningless roads and streets which have not an idea in all their acres of bricks and mortar, and which show nothing of civilisation except its manifold curses.

Freda Avillion loved her London well and was not willing to see its faults and shortcomings; but when she came into its suburbs she was always

overcome by their dull dreary uniformity of horror, their monotonous deadliness of vulgarity, their universal incarnation of Philistinism and frightfulness.

And how sad it was to think that this horror, this vulgarity, was every year spreading and spreading, like the scales of lupus on a human face, over the sweet green features of the country, effacing the England of Chaucer and Milton, of Cowper and Evelyn, of Herbert and Herrick; swallowing up the shady rural lanes, the gorse-grown heaths, the pleasant manor-houses, the manorial woods, and planting in their place gasworks, and soap-factories, and sewer-deposits, and chemical works, and brick-fields, and steam laundries, and miles on miles of these frightful lath and plaster and stucco houses which served as homes to those strange people who know nothing of "Faust" but what they hear at the Lyceum, and believe that "Charles the First" is a poetic tragedy!

In the street there was waiting a private hansom with a very fine thoroughbred in the shafts and a coronet on its panel; inside it was a fair-faced and very young man who had been in waiting there an hour, though his watch still wanted five minutes of the time at which he had been told to come.

"Punctuality is a very unfashionable virtue, Lord Flodden, but it is a very good one," said Freda, as he sprang out of his cab and came to the door of her brougham.

"So kind to allow me to come," murmured Flodden, with that flush of bashfulness which he could never control in her presence.

"It is you who are going to be kind to this man upstairs; at least if you really think he has talent. Don't buy anything or do anything merely because I tell you," she said as she alighted before the housefront, with its staring sash windows, its area railings, its steep doorsteps, its slate roof, its mean light, its featureless vacancy, which were repeated in all its fellows, up and down and on both sides of the way, as far as the eye could reach.

A dreary old woman before an applestall, a mangy cat stealing between two of the area bars, the fat back of a far-off policeman with his tight belt making his corpulence more conspicuous, and a hand-cart with tin milk-cans pushed by a consumptive-looking boy, were all that there was to be seen there. From somewhere out of sight a cracked voice was bawling "Monster Meetin' to-day! People's rights! People's rights! 'Spected sack o' London! Latest news! People's rights! Nottin' 'Ill Gazette! Maida Wale Chronicle! A 'alfpenny! A 'alfpenny!"

"If they would sack these suburbs, I don't think I would try to restrain them," said Freda, as she entered the narrow passage of the house and went up the still narrower stair.

Then she added in a lower tone:

"Now this boy upstairs, Hugh Murray, has great gifts I think, but if you do not think so, don't say so; buy a *pochade* for two sovereigns, and come away. But if you find him clever send him to Italy or Germany. Only remember he isn't the least interesting; he is plain and squat, and bristly looking;

quite a cub altogether; I dare say you will be horribly disappointed, used as you are to your romantic Italian students with their curling hair and their long cloaks, and those delicious *botteghe* in the Via Margutta with the capsicums curling round the balconies, and the fountains splashing in the court below, and the little children like so many baby Christs and St. Johns, and those delightful earthenware pitchers which have mouths like cocks' heads or lions' faces. But if you find him dreadfully commonplace you won't mind, will you, if the pictures are rather good?"

Flodden answered incoherently that he was convinced without seeing anything that her protégé was a Giotto, a Lionardo, a Michael Angelo in embryo, he scarcely knew what he said, so close to her as he was on this narrow staircase, with the faint lily of the valley perfume which was her preference wafted to him through the atmosphere of the house.

But his heart quaked within him; he knew art and its meaning, and if these paintings should seem to him bad, as most English paintings did, what should he say to her?

Flodden could not lie even to please her.

"But I can buy them all," he thought with a consolatory reflection.

Freda went rapidly up the steep ill-smelling stair, with that step which had once made Iona apply to her Ben Jonson's lines:

> Her treading would not bend a blade of grass,
> Or shake the downy blow-ball from his stalk.

The young artist lived in one of the attics.

He was waiting for them at the top of the stairs, shy, awkward, uncouth, with a rough beard, and the complexion and stature of a man who has never had enough to eat; but in his grey eyes, under their bushy brows, there was a light as though they saw other things than this narrow and dingy street could show to him; they were fine eyes, wistful, pathetic, penetrating, luminous.

Freda had seen some sketches of his at a dealer's in the Haymarket, and being struck with their talent she had traced him out, and found him very nearly starving; the little he made by his sketches and canvases being sent away by him to his mother, who lived humbly and hardly in a little hamlet hidden under the tors and moors of northern Derbyshire.

It was the old, old story. A peasant lad who would not stick to the plough, and was for ever drawing heads of cattle and sheep, and bits of landscape, and who had educated himself, and come to London with his village parson's help and counsel. The parson's sister, married to a banker's clerk, had given him a garret in this house of hers, and he had studied and toiled and chafed his heart out for three years with no prospect but of becoming a dealer's slave for life, when this beautiful and great lady suddenly changed his fortunes for him at a touch.

Freda, whose taste was fine and highly cultured, had not been mistaken in recognising in this Derbyshire youth the making of a Troyon, of a Rousseau,

whilst his studies of children had the gentle grace of Edmond Frère.

Flodden, enraptured to be able to praise with sincerity, would have bought every sketch in the attic if she had not restrained him, gave the artist a commission to finish for him a series of views of Dovedale, and purchased a finished picture of Tansley Moor in a summer storm, whilst he offered to send the young man to Paris, Dresden, or Rome, as he preferred.

"*Mais vous allez trop vite!*" murmured Freda in his ear to check his impetuous donations; but Flodden murmured back with a terrible Italian accent: "*Peut-on aller trop vite quand le génie a besoin de soi?*"

Ten minutes later they left the young painter, pale, tremulous, breathless, speechless with amazement and joy, whilst the vicar's sister, to whom the house belonged, crept out of her sitting-room to gaze at the great lady, and said timidly: "O madam, how delighted my brother will be! I must write and tell him to-night. He has always believed in Hugh's talent, only we could do so little; and the boy is too modest; he does not know how to push himself."

"Then we must push him," said Freda, with her most charming smile and a low curtsey to the poor lady as though she were a queen.

"Oh, what an angel you are!" murmured Flodden as he took her to her coupé.

She smiled.

"If I be an angel, you must be an archangel by

the magnificence of your gifts. You know how to give, Lord Flodden; it is a rare accomplishment. Only take care they do not use you and abuse you too much. This young man is good and honest, and will be grateful even if he do not become famous as we expect. But there is a wholesome Eastern proverb which you would do well to write on the fly-leaf of your cheque-book: 'Make yourself honey and the flies will eat you.'"

"Somebody said once," murmured Flodden, "that he would rather be cheated by twenty scoundrels than wrongly suspect one honest man, and that is just what I feel myself."

"I am sure you do. Nevertheless, I would avoid the scoundrels as much as possible. And, Lord Flodden, why don't you go and stay a year in Paris and get rid of that Italian accent? You said *pout* for *peut* and *söa* for *soi,* just like an Italian."

The dingy and forlorn street which had a moment before seemed to Guy like a golden-paved highway of heaven, wore in an instant all its own colours.

"You wish me to go away?" he said wofully.

Lady Avillion laughed. "Not in the least, but I think a year in Paris would do you good; it is such a pity that almost all Englishmen speak French so horribly, and you have the double disadvantage of your Italian o's and a's. But good-day; it is growing late."

The boy's heart was heavy as lead; she thought him good enough to buy pictures and send poor

students to art capitals, but she did not care a straw whither he went himself.

At that moment the newspaper seller, who was now in view, set up his hideous howl afresh: "People's rights! People's rights! 'Spected sack of London!"

"I don't think the Park will be quite safe," murmured Flodden. "The Home Secretary told me they expect a great row, and the Guards are all ready in their barracks. Would you, won't you, allow me to come with you or to follow you quite closely in case of anything wrong?"

"Certainly not," said Freda. "Pray do not do such an absurd thing as to follow me quite closely. The Park is safe enough. They will ruin its grass and trample down its flowers, but the sack of London won't go farther than that for the present. Good-day; you have got to pack up all your *pochades* in your cab, or will you send a waggon for them in the morning?"

Her light, kindly, half-derisive laughter cut to the very soul of her despondent adorer. He had done all he could to please her, and this was his sole reward!

Then she drove away and left him alone to face the dreary street, and a blousy maid-servant who had her bare red arms full of the *pochades,* and the poor young painter of them standing, humbly and bareheaded, waiting to murmur his last words of gratitude, while the mangy cat mewed forlornly, and the newsvendor bawled as dolorously; and for Flodden all beauty, hope, and sweetness had vanished

with the rapidly trotting horses of Lady Avillion's brougham.

"These people all expect a sack of London, or the sack of the shops, at any rate, and yet they go about their business quite comfortably. But then so they did in Paris in the Terror when the guillotine was falling every day," she thought, as she drove into Bayswater Road and saw the laden omnibuses, the dragging cabs, the plodding men and women, the laughing children, the busy dogs, all going to and fro as usual.

Few carriages, however, were out; the afternoon was rainless but dull.

As they drew near the Park she saw that the crowds in it were much increased since she had passed through three hours before.

At Lancaster Gate the footman got down and said with a pallid face: "Beilby thinks we had better not go through the Park at all, my lady, for the roughs are out, but try and get home by Park Lane or by the by-streets if your ladyship permits."

Beilby was the second coachman, who was driving her that day.

Freda was annoyed.

"What liberty!" she thought. "To be forbidden to drive in the Park because people are making a bear garden of it!"

Aloud she said:

"Tell Beilby not to change the route. I am going home."

The footman dared not urge his point, but Beilby

hurried his horses, and, risking his mistress's after anger, drove very rapidly along the road outside the Park, and turned down Park Lane instead of going in at the Marble Arch.

The Park looked black with people; out of the blackness there rose here and there the figure of an orator gesticulating wildly, or of a blood-red banner with bloodthirsty inscription swayed to and fro in the hands of its supporters.

The Park was at that moment gay with its first lobelias, calceolarias, geraniums, petunias; the pretty little lodge at Stanhope Gate was buried in creepers; the trees were in full foliage, and the mob were let loose in it to tear it down and trample it underfoot and make it a wilderness of broken flowers and torn branches.

As Freda Avillion looked and saw, her features grew very cold and stern. She would have looked just the same if they had been taking her to a scaffold under the Reformers' Tree.

At Hamilton Place the footman, knowing that it was as much as his situation was worth to make the suggestion, got down once more, by the coachman's orders.

"If you please, my lady," he said in a shaking voice, "Beilby says it would be better if your ladyship would allow him to set you down at Lady Guernsey's or at the Bachelors'. The roughs are out, my lady, in their thousands and tens of thousands, and wrecking carriages and coming up Piccadilly, half a million, my lady, all of the worst sort."

And to give emphasis to his words the air grew full of a hoarse ominous sound like the roaring of wild animals, only shriller and more uneven.

Beyond the shrubs which were between her and the Park, she could see that the crowds were great and tumultuous, whilst a carriage flew past her towards Oxford Street, the coachman with bleeding face trying to rein in runaway horses, and the panels and windows showing signs of ill-usage.

"You see, my lady," said the young footman, shaking in his shoes.

With clear unaltered tones his mistress answered:

"Yes, I see. Tell Beilby to drive home."

The footman grew livid with despair.

"But if you would only get out, my lady, the Bachelors' would be safe enough; and we could drive the carriage into Lord Guernsey's mews in Green Street."

"Do not make me repeat an order. Tell Beilby to drive home."

Her voice was not raised even half a tone, but the servant, and Beilby also, knew that resistance was useless. They had to meet their fate, whatever that might prove.

By Apsley Gate the mob was dense, and of the lowest sort; all Lambeth, Poplar, Whitechapel, Shoreditch, and the many other haunts where misery and sottishness and crime live and move and multiply unseen, seemed to have issued forth into the light of day and to be pouring themselves over patrician London

as the foul tide of an emptied sewer may be poured over a smooth grass meadow.

But her spirit was too high to allow her to take refuge behind the shutters of Guernsey House or the windows of the Bachelors' Club, where many members were gathered.

A mob might kill her if it liked; but a mob should never prevent her from reaching her own house by its natural road, if they left her alive. There was a vein of obstinacy no doubt in her courage; but, without obstinacy, Leonidas would not have been immortal, Leyden, Derry, and Moscow would not have become glorious, and the First Consul would never have passed over the St. Bernhard.

Freda saw the mob; and her heart grew cold though her courage remained unshaken. She wished that she had taken the counsels of her friends in the Cabinet and stayed behind the iron gates of Avillion House; she realised, though a high-spirited woman is always reluctant to admit it, that there are moments in life when discretion is the better part of valour.

Perhaps, though she had the right to risk her own sacrifice, she had no right to risk that of Beilby and the footman and the horses. But she had not thought of that any more than the First Consul thought of the conscripts and the invalids and the baggage mules and the artillery-teams.

A moment later the sleek bays were fretting and rearing and plunging at the noise wafted to their sensitive ears, and were in the thick of the crowd, jammed fast, with a sea of heads around them, while the iron

shutters of Apsley House seemed to gaze down on the tumult with the calm eyes of the Iron Duke and ask in compassionate derison "Where has the Reform Bill brought you?"

At that moment Syrlin was standing in one of the windows of the Bachelors' Club, of which he had been made free; he was curious to see a London émeute, having seen Paris and Madrid in such moments of popular excitement. He was just thinking to himself how ugly and black the thing looked, how dismal too, as if it were a funeral wake on a large scale, when his heart quickened its pulsations as he gazed down on the road beneath and recognised the Avillion liveries.

"She is in that crowd!" he thought with a pang of terror; he said nothing to his companions, but left the window.

"Are you going into the street?" said the others. "You had better not. They will stone you, or bonnet you, or something. They won't be quiet to-day till the Blues have trotted through them."

"I want to study *vos mœurs,*" replied Syrlin, "and one can study nothing unless one descends to its level. I shall not be harmed."

And he went out alone and followed the carriage into Piccadilly. He could see the cream-coloured coats of the coachman and footman above the seething turmoil of the crowds, he could see a legion of roughs closing round the body of the carriage, and he could hear their shouts and yells. He had only a slender cane in his hand; but with this he struck so pas-

sionately right and left that he forced a passage through the living wall which separated him from Freda Avillion.

Her horses were plunging like demons, the young footman had sprung from his seat and fled; Beilby, stout of heart as of form, sat where his duty bade him, but his hat had been knocked off by a stone, his bald head was bleeding, and he was every instant growing more and more powerless to control his horses, which, unable to advance, and maddened by the noise, the pressure, and the sticks of the mob, threatened each moment to upset the brougham and scatter death in all directions.

Two roughs had seized the handle of each door and had dragged them open, and were yelling and mouthing and booing at the lady within. None of them knew who she was, but all of them could see the coronet on the panels.

"Get down and dance a jig on the stones, my missis!" shouted one of them. "Your fine times is over for all of ye. We're a goin' to ride in the coaches now."

"Git out, or we'll drag ye out pretty quick," yelled another. "I'll strip you and give yer fine feathers to my old 'ooman. Git out, I say, yer huzzy. Ain't yer ashamed o' yerself, gorging, and crammin', and stuffin' all day on the sweat of the brows o' the pore workin' man?"

"Don't ye go for to hurt her; she's a rare un to look at," said a third, softer hearted, whose interposition was received by that "Yah" of the London

rough which is the most hideous sound that was ever heard in nature, and beside which the hyena's voice is melody. Some one of them farther back in the crowd threw a stone at her where she sat; the signal was enough, and a storm of stones hurtled through the air, hitting the brougham, the horses, the coachman, and falling about herself, for the glass of the windows had been smashed and the doors nearly wrenched off their hinges.

She sat quite erect, and to all appearance wholly unmoved. She might have been sitting at a State concert at Buckingham Palace for any sign of agitation that she betrayed. Only an immense scorn was in her grand regard, and on her proud mute lips.

She was thinking to herself:

"I wonder if they will kill me? I half think they will, and there does not seem to be any policeman. But I am afraid if they do the Cabinet will be so dreadfully frightened that it will bring in a Bill for Universal Suffrage the day after, and tell their Whips to pass it at all costs!"

"Git out!" yelled the roughs. They did not know why they wanted her to get out, but they had said that she should, and that was enough, and they meant to strip her fine clothes off her. One of them seized her by the wrist, but she flung off his grip with such strength and loathing that he recoiled for a moment subdued and frightened.

"You can kill me if you wish it," she said coldly, and so clearly that her low tones dominated the horrible roar of lungs around her. "But I shall not

obey you, and you cannot make me afraid of you. You are the shame of England."

"Pull her out and slit her pipe!" yelled a brute a yard off, wrestling to get nearer, whilst another shower of stones shook the carriage and struck the coachman upon the box, and in all likelihood the advice would have been quickly followed, for the constables were all busied with the park and the clubs and the shops, and the Guards were pent up behind their barrack gates ready but forbidden to move, had not Syrlin at that moment reached the spot, and with two blows which succeeded one another with the rapidity of lightning felled the two men nearest to her to the ground.

"Sacrée canaille!" he shouted in a voice of thunder which rose above and dominated all the hissing, yelling, roaring noise.

His appearance, with his uncovered head, his blazing eyes, and his rich hair rising in the wind, was so beautiful and terrible and so utterly unlike any mortal form which the London mob had ever seen alight amongst it, that an utter stupefaction and silence of awe and amazement fell upon the crowd. He seized that one propitious moment of fear and inaction, threw the doors to as well as he could for their strained hinges, sprang on the box, seized the reins from the now palsied hands of Beilby, and, striking right and left amongst the masses with the whip, forced a passage open through the close packed multitude which scattered before him as before the triumphal passage of some avenging god.

In another minute or two he had driven the steaming, plunging, panic-stricken horses in at the gates of Avillion House, which were thrown eagerly open to the carriage the moment it was recognised, and which were closed as rapidly against the teeming crowd.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE was very pale; but she was not otherwise agitated as she got down from the brougham at her own door. Had the mob been there to see, it could not have flattered itself that her breath came in the least more quickly or that her pulse was in the least uneven.

"I am sorry you are hurt, Beilby," she said to the coachman. "I was wrong not to take your advice." Then she turned to the hall-porter. "Where is the gentleman who brought the horses home?"

"He jumped off, my lady," said Beilby, in a faint voice, "as soon as we drove to the door, and he's gone out into the streets again. My mind misgives me he'll be murdered. These blackguards will all know him again."

"Go out, one of you, and beg him to come here to me; he is M. de Syrlin, who stayed with us in the country," she said to the half-dozen powdered footmen who had crowded together at the entrance.

A great alarm had now seized her; how could he have been mad enough to go out to meet that mob! The horses, bruised and wounded in places

by the stones flung at them, were unharnessed and taken away by a seldom used side walk which led round to the stables in the rear of the gardens, the carriage was dragged and the coachman was assisted after them, and she herself traversed the great hall and went slowly up the staircase to her own rooms. The departure of Syrlin distressed and harassed her; she knew that he must run great danger from the mob which was then tearing up Piccadilly to reinforce their friends in the Park who were being worsted by the mounted police.

The heavy shutters of Avillion House were all closed, and the high wall of the courtyard would have prevented her from seeing into the street even had the windows been open. She could hear, made faint by the thickness of the walls of the house, the horrid howls of the multitudes without her gates. Good heavens! why had he gone back to them?

She had only had time to recognise him; not a moment in which to say a word to him. She allowed herself to be undressed, replying not a syllable to the questions and condolences which her maids allowed themselves to put to her in this hour of peril in which all the relations of rank seemed obliterated. She put on a tea-gown and went into her own room, which with its silence, its fragrance of flowers, its burning wax lights, its beautiful harmonies of colour, and its little dogs jumping up about her in joyous welcome, looked as though there could be no such things anywhere as distress and hatred and uproar and riot and shame.

It was only five o'clock and broad daylight in the streets without, but the whole house being barred and bolted and shuttered, the artificial lights had been lighted everywhere in readiness for her return there. Avillion himself was comfortably installed in his pavilion at St. Germains; he had known that rows were expected, and he was too wise a connoisseur in the art of life to stay for any such senseless and offensive exhibition of the great unwashed.

"I would stay of course if I could do any good, but I couldn't do any good," he had said to Lord Greatorex, who had thought to himself, "If you could save the United Kingdom from a universal cataclysm by staying anywhere where you were uncomfortable for five seconds, I am quite sure you wouldn't do it!"

Freda, alone in her room, walked up and down with a sickness of apprehension upon her which she would never have felt for any personal danger. He had saved her from death probably, from outrage and insult certainly, and he was gone into the seething horror from which his quick courage and resolute action had extricated her. She felt weak, helpless, and cowardly, safe there behind her bolts and bars and walls of stone and gates of iron. A dreadful humiliating sense of powerlessness came over her for the first time in her life. This man had rendered her an immense, an inestimable service, and she could do nothing for him in return! She could not

even tell what was happening to him in those streets outside her gates.

She had bade the footmen go out: but how could they show themselves with their canary-coloured coats and their powdered heads without being stoned? And if the other men, the servants in plain clothes, the grooms, the gardeners, the kitchen men, had all gone out, what could they do unarmed against that multitude?

The stately and polished person called Mr. Walters, whose duty it was to attend to that room came in, followed by a liveried satellite, bringing in the tea which marks that hour for its own.

"Is there any news from the streets?" she asked him.

"None, my lady," said Mr. Walters, with polite indifference. He stood awhile whilst his underlings set in due order the Queen Anne service, and the old Worcester cups, and the cakes and hot cakes and anchovy sandwiches. London might be in the hands of the mob and be doomed to fire, pillage, and carnage, the Prime Minister might be hanging from his own door-lamp, and the Home Secretary be swinging from a tree in Carlton Gardens, but Mr. Walters knew his duty too well to make her ladyship's tea five minutes later than it ought to be on account of any such trivial events.

"Is Beilby much hurt?" she inquired, after a pause.

"I have not heard, my lady," replied the great man, who could not be supposed to interest himself in the broken head of a second coachman.

The tea was hot and bubbling and its pot was set atop of the silver samovar, and he withdrew with the same dignity and discretion which had marked his entrance. But she did not touch the tea, she paced up and down the room in the strongest disquietude and keenest apprehension that she had ever felt.

If only Beaufront had been in town! she thought; but he was down at Delamere for a week entertaining some royal princes *en garçon*, and it was wholly impossible for anyone to call; blocked as the streets and besieged as the clubs were, she knew no way in which she could learn the fate of Syrlin.

There was a dinner to which she was engaged at eight, and two receptions at which she had to show herself, and these engagements would have to be kept if the streets were by that time passable; and a little shudder of sick apprehension passed over her as she thought of the news she might hear at these entertainments. "If I could only learn what has become of him!" she thought again and again; it was the first time in her life that she had ever felt powerless to effect anything.

Ten minutes later her stately attendant inquired if she would receive Lord Flodden?

She replied gladly in the affirmative. "He will know something," she thought.

The samovar was smoking indecorously, and Mr. Walters eyed it with pain, but it would have been beneath his dignity to touch it. Caste is as strong in London as in Hindostan; and he withdrew to send his subordinate to correct its indiscretions before he introduced Lord Flodden, who, very flushed and tumbled looking and very breathless, precipitated himself across the chamber, and would if he had dared have fallen at her feet.

"Ah! why would you not let me follow you?" he gasped. "I did follow, but too far off, the mob separated you from me; tell me, pray—pray—for God's sake that you are not hurt?"

"I am not hurt in the least," said Freda coldly, for his boyish ardours always irritated her. "Are you? You seem very much agitated."

"Hurt? no," said Guy absently and with discomfiture. "But it has been a rough time, and I was in such tortures of terror for you."

"Very kind," replied Lady Avillion chillily. "But you know an English mob never really hurts one; it is hideous but good-natured; if I had had any beer to give them they would have drunk my health as boisterously as they yelled for my blood. One must carry a cask of ale in one's carriage if these gathering are to be the order of the day. What are they doing now? Are they quiet? There seems to be less noise."

"They are thinning a little, and the Blues have just come out and ridden down Piccadilly. It will be all over I daresay before dark. But—but—do

tell me is it true? Did that French actor really have the ecstasy of saving you?"

"He had the ecstasy of having his hat knocked off his head; so had my coachman," replied Freda without any answering enthusiasm. "My dear Lord Flodden, we take everything quietly in London, and send the bill in to the ratepayers next week. M. Syrlin came at an opportune moment and managed the horses very well. But pray do not go and make a romance of it all over the town. By-the-way, I have not an idea what became of him. Suppose you go round to the Bachelors' and ask; you can go out by my gardens. They have a side gate into Hamilton Place."

The warm boyish face of Flodden grew grey and dark with anger and with "envy, eldest born of hell."

"I could have done what he did," he muttered. "You would not let me come with you."

"No doubt you could have done what he did. But unfortunately you were five hundred yards farther off, or five thousand. You see what is necessary in life is to be *juste à l'heure.*"

"But you forbade me to follow you!" cried Flodden, stung almost to tears by this rank injustice.

"Well, I bid you now go to the Bachelors' and inquire what has become of the person who did what you might have done."

Flodden was silent.

If he had been a girl his nerves would have

found relief in a fit of sobbing. His fury of envy, his sense of her glaring injustice, his wild regret for all that he had lost by his too innocent and literal obedience to her commands, all filled his heart to bursting. Lady Avillion passed by him and went to the tea-table and filled a cup with tea and drank it thirstily. Then she looked at him.

"Why do you not go?" she said imperiously. "Go when I tell you."

"Why do you not send your servants?" he was about to say; but his courage failed him; he had not temerity enough to say anything, however just, which would offend her and close her doors to him.

"There is no need for me to go," he said sullenly. "I can tell you what you care to know. Syrlin is safe enough. The roughs cheered him when he came out of your gates and opened a way for him to the St. James's Hotel, where he resides I believe. I saw Queenstown just now and he told me all about it."

"I am very glad," said Freda, and he saw in the colour which returned to her cheek, the smile which shone in her eyes, the softness and warmth which came over her like sunshine over a landscape, that his tidings had brought her an immense relief.

"And he is very fortunate," muttered Flodden bitterly between his teeth.

"And the mob cheered him?" she said. "They were not *all* brutes then. They could understand a fine action."

"It is well for him they did not understand French," said Flodden sullenly. "I believe he called them *'sacrée canaille'!*"

"He called them what they deserved," said Freda coldly. "Will you have any tea? You look very dusty and fatigued."

"I know I am not fit for your drawing-room," murmured the poor boy. "Syrlin was wise enough to disappear before the disorder of his clothes could spoil in your eyes the poetry of his actions! Pray pardon me. I feared—I hoped—I thought you might be hurt. I ought not to have come. I will go away."

The tears were fairly in his eyes now, and he turned away to hide them.

"Are you sure you will not have any tea?" said Freda, wholly indifferent to his agitation. "Good-day then. I dare say we shall meet somewhere this evening, at least if the streets are passable."

Flodden hurried from the room, so passionately and profoundly wretched that he forgot to bow or touch her hand; and the little throng of young footmen gathered in the hall sniggered audibly behind him as he hurried past them out to reach that garden entrance towards which the porter, taking pity on his youth and confusion, guided his steps that he might escape the crowds and pass out unmolested into Hamilton Place.

Freda, left alone, stood still beside the tea-table with a smile upon her lips, soft, dreamy, meditative. She had the luxury of admiring an heroic action,

and of knowing that it had been done for her; no greater sweetness can be given to a woman.

And how graceful it had been, how modest, how delicate, how unselfish of him to escape from imposing on her any expression of her gratitude, how truly and completely *preux chevalier* to disappear from her sight lest he should seem by his presence to lay any claim upon her thanks!

"One can believe that he is a *fils de St. Louis,*" she thought, "and a son of whom St. Louis might be proud moreover, despite the bar sinister."

She stood lost in thought for some time whilst the noise from without grew less and less with every moment, and soon little was to be heard in that placid chamber except the ticking of its clocks, and the occasional barks of her little Malteses and Pomeranians. Then she went to her writing table, and on that notepaper which was only used for her intimate friends, with its familiar monogram of "Freda," she wrote hurriedly a few words.

"I hear that the mob cheered you to-day. I am glad that there was some English sympathy with courage left in them. I do not ask you to accept my thanks, because your service to me is one which passes all acknowledgment in words; but I do offer you now and for ever the admiration, the gratitude, and the friendship of myself and of my family."

Then she signed the lines simply F. A., as she only signed herself when writing to those for whom she had affection and intimacy, and addressing it to Syrlin, she gave it at once to her most trusted ser-

vant to be sent as soon as the streets were clear to his hotel.

She was proud to arrogance in some things, cold and unimpressionable in others, but her heart had never failed to give response to a noble action and her generosity had never allowed itself to be outdone.

CHAPTER XIV.

We live in a moment when, if we have the misfortune to possess names in any way notable, we cannot sneeze without a certain class of public journals telling every one that we have bronchitis, and we cannot drive out once with any person without having it hinted more or less ambiguously in conspicuous type that we are about to fly from this world for ever in his or her company.

Therefore, one morning, in his cosy retreat at St. Germains, Avillion, who never read newspapers and abhorred them, had one thrown at him gaily by a lady who was breakfasting opposite his couch, and who cried to him, "*Tiens, Bibi! Madame s'amuse!*"

Avillion had fallen in love with this young lady only thirty-six hours before; she was excessively pretty and was greatly admired, and although only twenty years old, was a very famous actress of the Judic type.

As she was a great novelty to him, and was furiously envied to him by all masculine Paris, he did not openly resent being called Bibi, though he secretly disliked it, and he deigned to pick up the

paper she threw at him. It was the *Figaro*, and contained on its first page a literal translation from an English paper of the class which chronicles our colds before we catch them, and our passions before we feel them; and in this sensational paragraph was related the incident of Lady Avillion's rescue from the mob. A very English oath escaped his lips as he read it. It was the kind of thing which he hated beyond all others. He did not know which to hate the most, the mob for causing it, Syrlin for being the hero of it, or his wife for having driven out at such an inauspicious moment. The incident was related with more accuracy than is often observed in such chronicles, but it was over-coloured and made more theatrical than it had been; whilst the three sentences which his wife had spoken to the roughs were expanded into an oration.

"All a blackguard lie of course!" he said, as he crumpled up the offending sheet and cast it behind him.

"*Sacrée canaille!*" repeated his companion with a laugh. "*C'est bien Syrlin ça, gredin de réactionnaire! Dis donc, Bibi! qu'est-ce que tu as? Qu'est-ce que ça te fait si l'on se déchire ou s'adore là-bas?*"

"*Tu ne peux pas comprendre,*" muttered Avillion, who could not exactly have explained even to himself why it was so intensely irritating to him, or why, though his wife was an uninteresting woman who bored him, he did not choose to talk about her

with this charming creature whom he really, for thirty-six hours, had adored.

When the young actress, an hour later, much against her will, went to Paris in his coupé for her indispensable noon rehearsal at the Folies Dramatiques, Avillion took up the offending sheet from the corner to which he had cast it, and read the narrative slowly again.

It was in every way calculated to inspire him with the strongest possible irritation. He hated a newspaper, he hated a mob, he hated to see his name in print; and, above all, he hated Syrlin since the memorable scene of the ring at Brakespeare, as much as it was possible for an indolent, philosophic, and contemptuous person to hate at all.

"What horrible imprudence of her! What idiotic melodrama! What intolerable absurdity!" he thought. "And then how very odd that Syrlin should have been there just in the nick of time!" Avillion was too experienced a man to believe easily in accidents and coincidences.

He sat down and wrote several angry telegrams to his wife, and then tore them up. What was the use of them? The thing was done, and all London was laughing over it.

This idea was really odious to him because the dignity of his own name was suffering by it. Was it not exactly like a cold and immaculate woman, after years of the most admirable character, to go

and do something which gave her over to the united laughter and malice of her world?

It never occurred to him that she had been in any real danger; he did not believe it; it had been a mere melodramatic incident got up by Syrlin to *se faire beau* before her, and it had no doubt failed in its effect because she was a cold irresponsive woman, not likely to be touched by that sort of sensationalism. Still he was desperately annoyed.

If he had not been so enamoured of Rosaline Fusée he would have gone to London that morning, but it usually took him a week to get tired of a new and strong passion. And Rosaline was very entrancing, with the face of a Botticelli cherub and the tongue of a Gavroche.

On reflection he could not go to London just when he was so happy at St. Germains merely because his wife had for the first time in her life made herself ridiculous. But he wrote to her a very short but a very impressive letter.

"I am exceedingly annoyed and amazed at this absurd story which drags your name into the newspapers. I cannot possibly conceive how you could venture out on a day when disturbances were fully expected by the Government and the police. I must beg of you to be more careful of similar circumstances, and if such scandalous spectacles become the chronic malady of London, I shall withdraw my support from those whose administrative weakness proves

unequal to their control. Meantime you will find some pretext not to receive M. de Syrlin during my absence."

This, when he had read it over, pleased him greatly, and he signed it, and sent a servant with it to London by the noon tidal train, with instructions to the man to bring back with him her ladyship's answer, and also to bring back with him a sidesaddle from Bond Street, the biggest salmon in Billingsgate, and some pots of Devonshire cream, three articles which Rosaline Fusée had expressed a desire to have direct from England, though they could all be procured quite as perfectly in Paris.

When the man returned the next morning, the sidesaddle, the salmon, and the Devonshire cream were brought with exactitude, but "where is Lady Avillion's answer?" asked the French majordomo who received them.

The messenger replied:

"Her ladyship bade me tell his lordship there was no answer."

When the fact was stated to their master he said nothing, but his eye grew very angry. No answer! —when he had asked for one!—when he had signified to her his displeasure and his commands! And the person who does not answer a letter is like the person who checks with a bishop at chess. Avillion relieved his feelings by writing a very sarcastic and unpleasant epistle to the Marquis of Greatorex, in

which he likened the ministerial conduct of affairs to Lord Aberdeen's, collected many ominous presages and disagreeable parallels from the administrations of Lord Liverpool and the Duke of Wellington, and quoted Benjamin Constant's "S'il faut périr, périssons bien!"

CHAPTER XV.

When Beaufront heard the story of the mob he felt as much displeasure as Avillion did, but more generously and for other motives.

"He cares about her already," he thought, "and of course he will care about her ten thousand times more. Such a scene with such a woman as Freda would make an anchorite lose his head."

When he spoke about it to the chief actor in it on his return to London, Syrlin was taciturn and indisposed to discuss the matter.

"A revolution in your London will be very ugly," he said. "It will be absolutely unredeemed. It will be a debauch of plunder and beer. In Paris we get drunk on the 'Marseillaise;' here, your patriots will soak themselves in porter and gin. At the bottom of our folly there is an ideal; at the bottom of yours there is only the pewter of a drinking measure."

Beaufront did not reply; he was not concerned to defend the Hyde Park rioters. He looked steadfastly at his friend for a few moments.

"You admire my cousin very much?" he said, with a certain sound of jealousy in the words which were rather an affirmation than an interrogation.

The great dark eyes of Syrlin, which could be absolutely expressionless when he chose, looked at him in return.

"Yes," he said coldly, and there was a tone in his answer which made it difficult for Beaufront to continue the subject. With Syrlin, despite a great candour in him which at times broke through all conventional restraints, his most intimate associates felt that he resembled Olivier in this:

> Comme on donne sa main, mais sans ôter son gant,
> Même au plus cher ami qui de lui la réclame,
> Il ne dit qu'à moitié le secret de son âme,
> Il jette la réserve entre le monde et lui.

Beaufront, who was sincerely attached to him although he had become so keenly jealous of him, left him and went into the Marlborough Club with a sense of irritation and contrition at war within him.

"I am afraid we have behaved like cads," he thought. "He did her an inestimable service, certainly, and we have all of us almost turned our backs upon him for it. But to have such a woman talked about!—good heavens! it would make one throttle one's own brothers."

Her own family and that of Avillion were unanimous in their censure of her imprudence in facing the mob.

"Really, Freda, there can't be any sense in trying to do the Princesse de Lamballe business," said her brother, Fulke Damer, who was especially out of

temper because Avillion would neither buy his racers and blood-mares nor lend him any more money to keep his stud together.

"It was foolhardy," murmured her mother, Lady Blanche, who was a soft-voiced, languid woman, of a type which is rarely seen in the drawing-rooms of to-day, caressing, Madonna-like, sweet as the south wind, the kind of woman who can saunter noiselessly through millions of money and scatter ruin around her with the smiling grace of a child scattering rose-leaves.

"It was madness!" said the Dowager Lady Avillion, who was always ill and fretful, and had built herself a sanatorium at Bournemouth where she dwelt in a constant state of suspension between life and death, but who travelled up to town on purpose to express her opinion. They could none of them understand it; Freda had always been so wise, so temperate in action, so serenely dispassionate, so guarded in conduct.

"And nowadays, when there is the pillory of the press for everyone, with no respect for sex, or age, or rank," said the Dowager Lady Avillion, "who in their senses would risk exposure to such a scene? Who with any consideration for their position would incur the possibility of such notoriety? It was not as if the riots had been unforeseen; the Government, the police, the journals, had all prepared people for them. Could she not have stayed in her own rooms, or gone into the country? Was she going to be a platform woman like Violet Guernsey?"

These strictures on her conduct had the usual effect upon her that such censure has on most high-spirited temperaments. She did not make a pretext to go to Aix or Carlsbad, as she would probably have done if they had let her alone, and she admitted Syrlin to a greater habit of intimacy than she would have accorded to him had they not all treated his courageous action as a kind of insult to their pride and their Order.

"If little Flodden had done it how they would all have admired it," she thought with contempt and impatience. She said very little to her family, and nothing to Avillion's people, but in her innermost soul she was deeply offended and incensed by their blame. The publicity inevitable to an incident was extremely disagreeable to herself, but she would not sacrifice to her displeasure the man who had saved her life.

Syrlin, on his own side, felt that the service which he had rendered her imposed on him the greatest obligation of self-control; since he had a right to her gratitude he must not presume on her indulgence. He knew that it would be ungenerous and indelicate were he now to say to her even as much as he had hinted in the song of Mary Stuart, and the poem of the mouse. He was conscious that the highest chivalry would be to go away out of her presence, and out of her country, and his was a nature for which chivalry and sacrifice had a painful fascination. But on him, as on her, the enmity and misconstruction of her husband and her

friends produced the inevitable effect of giving depth and tenacity to what might without them have been brief in duration, and rather sentiment than feelings. To become her friend was a privilege and a charm too full of irresistible sweetness for a man of his age and of his romantic imagination to reject the position such a privilege gave to him. The hostility, scarcely concealed, of Avillion, lent it that savour of menace, that thrill of danger, that provocation of challenge, which is irresistible to men of poetic temperament and of natural arrogance.

Even Beaufront, whom he had associated with in intimacy and regard for years, did not scruple to show him that he was envious of the service rendered to his cousin, and readier to resent than to applaud it.

"I may dine with them, sup with them, jest for them, pipe for them, and make merry with them," he thought, again contemptuously paraphrasing a famous passage; "but I may not presume to save their ladies from outrage without their leave. The jongleur must not assume the place of a knight. But if my lady call me, what matter whether they will or no?"

"You are annoyed that I dared to rescue Lady Avillion from the roughs?" he said bluntly one day to Beaufront, being tired of the chillness and restraint which had come between them, and hating at all times to ignore that which was obvious or to pass over that which was offensive.

"You could do no less, being there," said Beau-

front. "But I confess the whole episode is exceedingly disagreeable to me, to all her people. My cousin is not the sort of woman whom one cares to see made the subject of sensational newspaper paragraphs."

"That I understand," said Syrlin. "But since you have no power to suppress your newspapers you cannot help it. Your whole society is *livré en pâture* to them. That is not my fault. Nor is it my fault that there exists now no Fort l'Évêque to which you can consign me."

"My dear Syrlin—" began Beaufront with some embarrassment.

"My dear Duke," said Syrlin very quietly, "your world is a very nice one, and it is the world which I prefer, because it is only in what is called the great world that one finds any simplicity and good breeding at this epoch, and, wisely or unwisely, it is the one in which I have chiefly lived; but believe me I have never had any illusion whatever as to my status in it. Artists are precisely where they were in the days of Louis XV. They are the idols of society, but they are denied its sacraments. They are driven in the dauphin's carriage, but the carriage is still apt to stop at a prison door."

"I do not understand you," said Beaufront, who, however, did understand very well.

Syrlin smiled; "Oh yes, you do; or you will do if you reflect a little. You are *très bon prince;* but you have the prejudices of princes."

Ever since the song had been sung at Heronsmere there had been a growing coldness between Syrlin and Beaufront; the one penetrated the feelings of the other, and the sense of a vague hostility arose between them in place of the warm regard which had for years been felt on either side.

"If he be such an utter fool as to dare to fall in love with my cousin, he need not display his feelings before all London, as he does on the stage his passion for Doña Sol, or Bérénice," thought Beaufront angrily and unjustly. He had seen many of his friends and acquaintances in love with Lady Avillion, and had felt only amusement at it; unknown to himself, it was his instinctive sense that this new passion for her had something in it much likelier to appeal to the imagination of its object which moved him to anxiety and irritation. Beaufront had all his life been the associate of great artists, and he had been thoroughly sincere when he declared that he regarded only one aristocracy as worth anything, *i.e.* the patriciate of genius. But unconsciously to himself, now that he perceived the nascent passion of Syrlin, all the prejudices and arrogances of his world stirred in him, and seemed to him to have in them more justice and good sense than he had ever admitted. Six months previously he would have pelted with sarcasms the man who should not have regarded Syrlin as high above princes; but since he had seen Syrlin gaze on his cousin he had found that insensibly and ungenerously he was ready to condemn him for intoler-

able presumption, and to regret his own introduction of him into English society.

They were speaking in the reading-room of the Marlborough. Syrlin left the club, and walked on alone up Pall Mall and down Piccadilly. The sun was hot, but the air was misty with dust and the traffic was at its acme of noise and struggle. Piccadilly is alas! as ugly a thoroughfare as can be seen in Europe, and only a shade better than that most frightful of all streets, Oxford Street. It is cramped and mean, its shops are poor and squat, its buildings are most of them wanting in height and in design, its pavements are narrow and insufficient for the innumerable pedestrians, and the ofttimes eminent persons who pace them. It has that oddly provincial look characteristic of London which strikes so forcibly those who come to it fresh from the Champs Elysées, and the Avenue du Bois, the Maximilian-Strasse, and the Piazza della Signoria. Burlington House, which once possessed some dignity, has been ruined, and the Green Park, which might have been made as charming as the Pré Catalan if trouble had been taken with it, is left a mere naked expanse, ill-wooded and ill-kept.

As Syrlin walked down it, people saluting him or turning back to stare at him at every inch of the way, its want of beauty, architectural and atmospheric, oppressed him, and set him thinking how beautiful the young summer now was on blue Lombard lakes, on opaline Venetian waters, in green woods of Vosges or Jura, by the seas of

Western France, or in the pine-forests of Thuringia or Swabia. Even in England it was beautiful in those country houses where all these people went so rarely and so reluctantly. He was wasting his time in this great world which caressed him. He was conscious that he had the powers in him to gain perhaps as great a fame in other arts as he had done in his own, which he half despised. He knew that meditation, solitude, communion with the minds of the dead, were the only sponsors of great thought, and that the breathless excitation of modern life only produces forced and crude growths of the brain in all arts and sciences. He was rich enough to live where and how he chose, and pursue those higher ambitions of which he had given a vague suggestion when he had spoken to Lady Avillion at Heronsmere. He knew that it would be wiser to go away; he knew that the passion which had been awakened in him was the moth's longing for the star, that remaining where she was he could only prepare for himself futile and painful desire, and cause dissension between her and her own people. Syrlin knew enough of love and of life to know that a passion may be uprooted in early growth but not in maturity. He told himself that he would go away—to some Alpine solitude, or some Spanish monastic garden, or some deserted oriental palace, where he could give himself to the lore and the studies which had fascinated his youth and haunted his manhood, leaving for others who might care for such tawdry playthings the applause and the awards

of a worldly celebrity. Lucius had recovered his manhood by eating a crown of roses, but most men only get theirs by throwing away their rose-wreaths. He was almost prepared to throw away his, and such laurels with them as he possessed. He was still young and his life was still in his hands like potter's clay to be made into a statue or kicked aside as worthless.

He walked on alone, along Piccadilly, through the sunny dusty air of the June day. London oppressed him and depressed him as it does all poetic temperaments. He was wasting his time; he was letting the summer-time slip away, the lovely summer which was so beautiful amidst Tyrolean mountains, in Teutonic forests, beside Breton seas, or under green leaves in lovely valleys of Savoy.

"Yes, I will go away," he thought: and as he walked onward, with his eyes looking downwards and his thoughts absorbed in himself, he had reached the great gates of Avillion House before he noticed that he had come so far, and was forced to pause and draw back for a moment as the Avillion carriage drove out of its own courtyard. She was in it, with her sister-in-law, the wife of Fulke Damer, a pretty blonde, with a silly expression and a beautiful toilette. She saw him and smiled, and stopped the horses before they had passed out of the gates.

"We are going down to see Mme. Beriot of whom I spoke to you the other day," she said to him. "Will you come too? You promised to give her the pleasure of a visit from you."

He hesitated a moment, and grew very pale with the intensity of his pleasure; the sweetness of a great basketful of lilies of the valley which was in the carriage was wafted to him on the heavy dusty air.

"Yes or no?" said Lady Avillion a little coldly. "You must decide at once, for we are stopping the way."

"Of course I will come, and you are too good to allow me to do so," he said with an emotion in his voice which he could not control; in another moment he was in her carriage with the basket of lilies of the valley set upon his knee. The noisy and crowded road was as a golden highway of paradise to him, the dust in the air shone like motes of gold, the murmur of all the voices of the streets had music in them, above the trees of the Park the sky was blue, and his visions of solitude, of study of nature, and of immortality, were scattered to the winds by a woman's smile, as the hoofs of her horses scattered the gravel of the Drive right and left as they went through the afternoon sunshine.

She knew very well that she had done what was unwise and imprudent, what would make the town talk, what would irritate her own people and infuriate Avillion. But it was because there was danger in it that it fascinated her courage and attracted her temper. Interference with her had had the effect, which interference always produces on proud and innocent people.

Syrlin, although woman and the world had done

their utmost to make him vain, was not so, and he did not misconstrue her action; he understood the high and generous temper in her which made her desirous to atone and compensate to him for the rudeness and ingratitude of her relatives.

It was that hour in the day when, in the height of the season, the broad road between Apsley House and the Marble Arch is so full of equipages as the Grand Canal is full of gondolas on Ascension Day. There was no publicity more certain to cause remark than his presence in her carriage as it met the equipages of half London driving downwards under the shadows of the elms.

Neither he nor she spoke much, but Laura Damer was one of those loquacious, self-engrossed, self-satisfied, vivacious young women, essentially "smart," and running over with chatter like champagne with froth, who require little response, and are useful companions to those whose hearts are full, and whose thoughts are absent. She, herself, forced to live a good deal down at Bellingham which she hated, was young, lovely, and a flirt, and was pleased to be saved by the presence of a handsome and celebrated man, from the tedium of a *tête-à-tête* drive with her sister-in-law, of whom she stood in some awe; from the censure which her husband and his family were incessantly pouring out upon Syrlin, she was the more disposed to find him delightful.

"There is no mob to-day!" she said as they went through the Park, finding that he responded but little to her flatteries, railleries and provocations.

"It is almost a pity, I should like to have such an adventure, always provided that some picturesque knight-errant always arrived at the opportune moment."

"The evil is, Madame, that the mob is there," said Syrlin. "Out of our sight indeed; gone back to its earth as a polecat goes back to its hole, but there—always there."

"Yes, always there!" said Freda with a slight shiver. "We shall have to do deadlier battle with it some day. We are the pheasants in the preserves, and it is the foumart under the stone and the brambles waiting to drink our blood."

"What a dreadful idea!" said Mrs. Damer. "I am sure there is no danger; we are educating them all."

Syrlin smiled. "With extracts from Dickens's novels and amateur performances on the violin!"

"Oh no, real education," said Mrs. Damer rather angrily, for she took her own mandoline to her own village concerts and chirped to them Tosti's songs in an execrable accent.

"Real education is a very big word, and I am afraid we are very far off it for anybody; for ourselves certainly. Matthew Arnold has always told us so," said Lady Avillion.

The carriage bowled on through the sunshine, past the railings of Kensington Gardens where hundreds of people and children were sauntering; the dust in clouds in the yellow light was all that did duty as an horizon.

"One can see no distance in England," said Syrlin. "I fancy that is the reason why English painters understand little or nothing of perspective."

"We have no perspective in our lives," said Freda impatiently. "We are all absorbed in the immediate moment, just as our artists are absorbed in the dock leaves of their foreground, or the pinafore of the child they are painting."

"I wonder that your painters do not go more to India."

"If they do go they only paint an English prince in a pith-helmet, on an elephant with the Viceroy upon its back. To see the East you must have the eyes of Gerôme and the soul of Pierre Loti."

At that moment a private hansom with a magnificent horse in its shafts passed them coming from the north-west. It was Beaufront's; he took off his hat to his cousin and her sister-in-law and passed them rapidly, in a gossamer cloud of sunlit dust.

"Beau looks in a bad temper," said Mrs. Damer.

"He is very often in one," said Freda. "I never saw anyone so depressed by good fortune."

"That is easily understood," said Syrlin. "He has lost liberty."

"I cannot believe that there is ever liberty in poverty."

"There is freedom from observation and from responsibilities. To an Englishman who at heart is intensely conscientious, as he is, a great position is of necessity a great burden."

"Position is always a burden," said Freda, with

an impatient sigh. Mrs. Damer looked at her in amazement. What an expression to come from a Primrose Dame, a leader of society, a woman who was *grande dame* to the tips of her fingers!

"Position is delightful in itself," she said pettishly. "It is when one hasn't anything to keep it up upon that it becomes so dreadful!"

"It is an obligation," said Lady Avillion coldly. "When we have nothing to keep it up upon, we should lay it down, as sensible people do their carriages."

"How nasty of her to say that!" thought Leila Damer, who had been most strongly in opposition to having the Bellingham stud reduced by so much as a single brood-mare.

"I think position, in its higher sense, depends on no mere externals," said Syrlin. "A truly great lady would always keep hers even though she were beggared and discrowned like Marie Antoinette."

When they returned from their visit to Mme. Beriot, whom Syrlin had charmed and delighted, it was nearly eight o'clock; the lamps were lighted in the streets to scare away the melancholy twilight which hung like a grey pall all over London. Mrs. Damer had been dropped at a house in Park Lane where she was staying, and Syrlin was alone with the idol of his thoughts.

"Will you come back in half an hour to dine with me? You will only find my sister, Lady Hendon," she said, as she entered Avillion House.

Syrlin hesitated a moment; wisdom and prudence told him to decline, but the temptation was greater than his strength. He promised to return at half-past eight, and did so.

Lady Hendon was a silly voluble little beauty, who talked great nonsense and imagined it wit; but that evening her ceaseless airy chatter was welcome to her sister and to Syrlin; for both of them were disposed to silence.

Lady Hendon left early to go to some party, and Syrlin remained alone with his hostess; he rose to go but lingered, loth to leave that magic presence, uncertain whether he should offend or please her if he stayed.

They were in a small drawing-room of the garden suite, which was used generally when there was no great party. It was an oval room, white, with painted panels and deep bay windows opening on the grounds. The night was warm for London, and the shutters were left unclosed; beyond the heavy curtains of white embroidered satin there was a glimpse of ever-greens dusky against the moonlight, of tall elm trees, of high laurels.

"You need not leave yet," said Freda as he stood irresolute, "I am not going anywhere till twelve o'clock. Play me something, will you? *La Reine pleurait* if you like."

Syrlin coloured hotly.

"*La Reine pleurait* was an insolence which you justly resented. Besides, it was an impromptu; I have forgotten it, as you must forget it."

"Genius is always insolent and may be so. Besides, you have atoned for it. Many would have given you knighthood for what you did the other day."

"You make me regret that I have done so little. What can one do in this petty and ignoble time to prove or to express a great devotion—a great adoration—"

He was standing before her; his eyes rested on her with a passion which was but the more intense for its expression. She looked away from him without displeasure; a faint flush came upon her face, she did not rebuke his words. In another moment he would have fallen at her feet, but the door of the drawing-room was thrown open and Beaufront entered with that unceremoniousness which his relationship and his intimacy warranted.

"I met Leila Hendon at your gates, and she told me I should find you alone," he said rather roughly, as he nodded to Syrlin and seated himself beside his cousin. "Of course you are going to the ball? I thought I might have the honour to escort you."

"She told you I was *not* alone!" thought Freda with a deep annoyance which she could not express. What possible right had he to make himself her keeper?

The agitation and emotion of Syrlin were visible on his expressive features, and even hers, used as they were to control all expression, showed the vexation she felt at the interruption, while in her eyes

there lingered that dreamy suffused look which had promised so much to the impassioned interrogation of his own regard.

Unable to master his bitter disappointment enough to trust himself to speak, Syrlin silently took his leave of her and went from the room without even a sign or syllable to Beaufront.

To his astonishment, as soon as the door had closed upon her companion, his cousin rose from her chair and seemed to him to grow into colossal stature as she stood above him, superb in her indignation and offence.

"Has Lord Avillion given me into your charge?" she said, with an intensity of unspoken anger in her voice. "If not, by what possible title do you venture to question or to advise my actions?"

"My dear Freda! Why are you alone with him?" said the latter hotly, and with more zeal than wisdom. "I met you driving with him, and when Leila told me she had left him here I could not believe it. With the scene of Saturday still in everybody's mouth, and in Avillion's absence! My dear Freda!" he cried again, and then paused helplessly. He had come there on an impulse which he had not had time to analyse, and he had not realised the offence which his interference would excite.

"Will you answer me?" said Lady Avillion, still standing above him as grand a figure as though she were literally robed in wrath.

"Well, I don't know why you should speak like that," replied Beaufront uneasily. "Of course that

scene in the Park annoyed all of us dreadfully, and must have infuriated Avillion."

"Why do you make yourself Lord Avillion's champion? Has he requested it?"

"Lord, no! why should you be so rough on one? I merely came . . . well . . . because . . . it seemed to me a great pity for you to be *tête-à-tête* with him now when people are all talking about you both."

"Am I a girl of sixteen that a *tête-à-tête* should compromise me? And if I were compromised, what could it concern you? And are you, or are you not, the person who presented M. Syrlin to me?"

"I knew you would say that! Of course I presented him; and I am extremely fond of him and all that; but nobody could foresee all this damnable . . . I beg your pardon . . . this unfortunate occurrence with the rioters, and I never thought that he would lose his head after you as he is doing. You know as well as I do that it will only make him miserable; you'll play with him and then you'll send him to the right about. Gracious Heavens! it was only a few weeks ago that you were saying all sorts of unkind things about his being in society at all! Of course he bewitches women; I know that; and what he did in the Park was very well done, but that is no reason why you . . . you . . . should make the world talk about you by taking him into your intimacy."

"Is that all?" said Lady Avillion coldly.

"Well, yes, that is all," replied Beaufront, morti-

fied and conscious of failure. "I did present him to you; he is my friend, I am very much attached to him; but if he gets any scandal about your name I will thrash him for it, that is all."

"I can take care of my own name perfectly well," said Freda with icy chilliness. "It is in no jeopardy, and were it in any, it could be no possible concern of yours. In bursting into this room as you did just now, and frowning upon your late friend and myself, you have committed the only ill-bred action of which I have ever known you to be guilty. I think on reflection you will regret it. If you will excuse me now, I must go and dress for the Lansmeres; I will not trouble you to wait and give me your escort. I do not require escorts."

With that she left him, the skirt of her dinner dress sweeping over his feet, and Beaufront quitted the house a few minutes later, feeling as insignificant and as dispirited as he had felt when a lad after a severe and merited birching at Eton.

"The very devil is in women," he thought. "When you are altogether in the right they can put you altogether in the wrong! Confound them!"

His cousin went to her rooms, and was arrayed for the great ball of the Lansmeres with untold anger at work within her breast.

It had cost her much to restrain the expression of it within the limits of the phrases she had used to Beaufront.

The Lansmere ball was almost a political event,

as the Marquis of Lansmere was then Viceroy of Ireland. All London, especially all Tory London, was present. Syrlin was there amongst others; and all the evening she felt that she was followed by those magnetic eyes which knew so well the art of *"brûlant silencieusement le cœur d'une femme."*

CHAPTER XVI.

Some five days later, Rosaline Fusée having called him Bibi once too often, as Brummel said George to his prince once too often, and also having put some strawberries down the back of his neck, thereby jarring alike on his nerves and his dignity, Avillion returned to London for a fortnight. The season was now in full force, and, as the tidal train reached Charing Cross later than usual, owing to an accident, his wife was out at dinner when he reached his own house.

He changed his clothes and went down to the Marlborough to dine. The very first person he saw there was Syrlin.

Avillion knew very well that he must express some sort of acknowledgment to him for his conduct with the mob; and he did so with his habitual grace, though distantly, and with a tone which signified that the action might as well have been left undone, and that the necessity for it had been exaggerated.

Syrlin accepted it with the same distant politeness.

"Pray do not thank me for what has been so high a privilege," he said coldly, and added with a

smile for which Avillion could have kicked him out of the club, "and do not offer me a second ring."

Then he went and sat down alone to his dinner.

Avillion found his own dinner detestable, though it was in truth exceedingly good.

He was so used to being flattered and deferred to by women for his own sake, and by his party for sake of his influence, that this young man who saved his wife's life without his permission, and treated him with what he considered a wholly intolerable insolence, was unendurable to him, and all his early admiration had changed into detestation.

There was a great reception at the Prime Minister's house that night about eleven o'clock; he knew his wife must be there, he had his full dress on with his George and Garter under his overcoat, and he betook himself thither. It was the merest fancy, but he had an idea that his friends looked as if they were laughing at him, as they greeted him one after another on the staircase and in the reception-rooms.

He soon perceived his wife, looking as usual, with her famous sapphires and pearls upon her, bland and serene, with that grand air which belonged to another time than his own.

She saw him in the distance and gave him a little smile and bend of her head; Avillion bowed low but did not approach her for some time.

When he had done what he thought was his

duty to society, and had a few sentences with some half-hundred people of the first eminence, he went up to her and took an opportunity to murmur in her ear, "When you have been here long enough, will you allow me a seat in your carriage home?"

"With pleasure," replied Freda much surprised; "I was just about to go away."

The unwonted spectacle of Avillion putting on his own wife's wraps and taking her to her brougham was the object of much comment amongst those who were leaving at the same time and saw his unusual attentions.

"When a man puts his wife's cloak on, he can't be far off the Divorce Court," said one of the wits. They could not decide what it could possibly mean; some thought the motive must be jealousy, and some fear, and some suspicion.

Some believed that he was afraid of her making a fuss about Rosaline Fusée, and some believed that he was annoyed at her friendship with Syrlin.

Avillion spoke pleasantly of mere nothings until he was inside her carriage and the horses were going full trot up the street. Then in a very unpleasant tone he said abruptly:

"I presume that you have had my letter?"

"I received it certainly," she replied.

"And I presume that you have obeyed my suggestion?" he continued.

"The suggestion at the end?"

"Precisely. There was only one."

"It was a command."

"Well, yes, if you like to call it so. I never employ harsh words."

"I do sometimes," said Freda coldly; "I will employ them now if you like. I considered your command one insulting to me, ungrateful to another person, and indicative of great meanness and unworthy suspicion in yourself. With these opinions I did not and shall not obey it."

Avillion was speechless. The cold strawberries gliding down his back had not given him such a shock, such a chill, as these incredible words from his wife.

He had been married to her ten years, and he had never known in her any covert or overt declaration of a disobedience to any clearly expressed wishes of his own before.

The horses, who had flown over the few streets separating them from their stables, turned in at the gates of Avillion House, and he could say nothing more for the moment, and could only silently follow his wife across the hall and up the staircase to her own apartments.

At the door which led to them she turned and bade him good-night with her usual tone.

"I wish to say a word more to you," said Avillion, greatly annoyed at her serenity and indifference.

"As you please."

The first of her apartments was a boudoir and study in one; it was full of cut roses, and its windows were open to the gardens which were below; the lights were burning low; tea was ready there always at any hour whenever she returned.

"Will you have some?" she asked him quite pleasantly.

Avillion could have sworn at her.

"What I wish you to understand," he said harshly, "is that I intend to be obeyed in this matter. You made yourself absurd in my absence; it annoyed me inexpressibly; all these theatrical, exaggerated, sentimental kind of things are odious to me. I have said what was necessary to your companion in that scene, and there the affair is to end. I do not choose M. de Syrlin to be received in this house."

"Why?" asked his wife calmly.

"Why?"—the question irritated him beyond expression, for he had absolutely no reason to give except his own caprice of animosity, which he could not seriously allege as a reason.

"I do not admit that I am called on to give my reasons," he replied sullenly. "It is sufficient that I desire it."

"It is not sufficient for me," said Freda very calmly. "I can quite understand that it may irritate you a great deal that I am still alive, though I interfere with you so little that it cannot matter much. But I am glad to be alive myself, for the world in-

terests me, with all its defects; and I shall certainly not insult the person to whom I probably owe it that I am so still. I am sorry that the scene offended your taste; it offended mine greatly, but I did not create it. I was foolish to drive out on such a day, but that does not matter now. M. de Syrlin acted with the greatest courage at the time, and has shown the greatest delicacy since. Therefore, please to understand that I shall never slight or wound him to please you. As for what you wrote to me, I burned it at once, for it disgraced you. If you have no admiration for courage aud no regard for me, you should at least affect to feel both."

Then, before he could govern his wrath and recover his amazement enough to answer her, she turned her back upon him, passed into the adjacent chamber, and bolted its door between herself and him.

"She must be in love with him!" thought Avillion as he walked down the corridor to his own apartments, crumpling up the blue ribbon on his breast with his right hand in a gesture of violent anger as he went.

He was so accustomed to order the world to his liking that he could not realise that he might be powerless to command his wife to feel as he chose her to feel.

He had a vast experience in feminine natures, and he ought to have known that nothing is so absolutely unreasonable as a woman's attachments.

But like most other people, his experiences went for nothing with him as soon as his own interests were at stake.

When human nature was in conflict with himself he expected it to change all its characteristics.

With the light of our experience we can shed a full glare on the paths of others, and divert ourselves with their slippings and slidings, their falls and their pit-falls; but it does not light an inch before our own feet if we are out walking in company with any of our favourite prejudices.

One of the favourite convictions of Avillion was that through his own wisdom and prudence his marriage was a most successful imposture on the world at large; and he did not choose to admit that it had only been a mistake.

He certainly was not jealous of his wife in any lover-like sense of jealousy; but his pride was injured and his vanity affronted. She had always seemed to him so admirably to fill her position, and so calculated to suit himself, because she made no demands on his affections or his attentions, and occupied herself solely with the externals of existence.

That after all she might have those warmer emotions and passions common to humanity had never occurred to him as possible; he would as soon have expected to find them in those marble copies of Roman and Neapolitan Venuses which graced the great gallery at Brakespeare.

If she had cared for a man of their own rank,

passe encore; he would have possibly condoned that and found some mutual advantage in it. But to believe that she was attracted by an artist, and an artist whom he hated, was quite another matter; it was an affront direct to his own dignity as vested in her, and by her represented.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day, as it chanced, he and she had been ordered to a dinner at Windsor with the usual night's repose at the Castle. There was no escape possible.

They travelled down together with chill politeness to each other, and behaved during their visit with that admirable acting which is second nature to those who have to pass their lives in the continual glare of the great theatre of society. Anyone seeing them thus would have said that they were admirably mated and mutually content.

Only as the train bore them homewards through the rich green pastures and the stately woods of Berks, Freda, absently gazing out on the flying landscape whilst he glanced over the morning papers, asked herself rather drearily what was the use of the comedy? Position? Self-respect? Duty to society? Obligations of family? Personal and social dignity?

None of these things seemed quite so great and sufficient as they had used to do. They brought with them vague feelings of emptiness, of tedium, of hypocrisy; they were a little too much like the thorns crackling under an empty pot, of those Eastern

figures of speech which Lorraine Iona was so fond of quoting. As the train passed over those hideous wildernesses of roofs and chimneys and furnace shafts and gasometers which make all approaches to London so frightful in this century, Avillion said to her with a little hesitation, but with much stateliness:

"I presume you have reflected on what I said to you two days ago, and are prepared to act in consonance with it?"

She ceased to look out of the window and looked at him instead.

"I have not reflected, because it requires no reflection," she said very coldly. "I do not commit *lâchetés* at the suggestion or dictation of anyone."

"But when I lay my commands upon you? You cannot say that I have often used or ever abused my right to do so," said Avillion with great anger, as the express rushed into Paddington Station.

She raised her eyebrows very slightly with ineffable meaning, and her eyes met his.

"I refuse to discuss your commands which are only your caprices," she said serenely, and passed out from the railway carriage on to the platform.

Her coupé and his cab were waiting for them, and they drove from the station in separate directions; he, to his favourite Club, and she, home to Avillion House, where her little dogs welcomed her with more enthusiasm than her children displayed.

Avillion in high displeasure betook himself to the Lords, where there was an important question coming on at four o'clock. He was conscious with the

most irritating of all consciousness to a man of the world, that he had made a fool of himself in his wife's eyes and his own, and placed himself in the *impasse* of a position in which he could neither retreat nor advance with any dignity.

The measure of his anger overflowed when one of his own friends sitting next to him that afternoon said to him:

"What a narrow escape Lady Avillion had from those blackguards! I was shocked when I heard of it. Mightily well Syrlin behaved, didn't he? And the mob cheered him, that was the best of it. Fancy a set of London bullies cheering a French fellow who called 'em *sacrée canaille!*"

"One of the advantages of a limited education; if they *had* understood I suppose they would have broken his head," replied Avillion, who wished very much at that moment that the London roughs had had courses of Littré and Noël et Chapsal.

"I am not sure of that," replied his friend. "Our fellows always like pluck. Even the worst of the Chartist rioters let old Wellington die in his bed."

Avillion murmured that he devoutly wished that they were all dead in their beds, if they had any beds, or in the gutters if they hadn't; and went in a quarrelsome humour to give his "ay" to a Government measure which he did not approve, but to which the sacred duties of Party compelled his adherence.

He returned from Westminster more fully re-

solved than before to make an end of Syrlin's intimacy at his house. *"Sacrée canaille, lui!"* he muttered, as he walked up St. James's Street, looking so gloomy and fretful that his acquaintances concluded that Rosaline Fusée had not answered his expectations.

Avillion knew that there were shortly to be given a series of *tableaux vivants* under his wife's auspices, which were to take place in his own picture-gallery, and at which Syrlin was destined to be the most poetic and most brilliant figure. The idea of these tableaux was now to him altogether insupportable. What! the man who had been the hero of that preposterous scene in the Park attitudinising in Avillion House as Louis d'Orléans and as Ercole Strozzi!

"One cannot prevent her forgetting her position, but at least one can forbid her to be ridiculous in it!" he thought, as he continued his progress along Piccadilly.

"That's the Hearl whose missus was bonneted t'other day," said a baker's boy to a comrade, with a grin in Avillion's handsome and pensive countenance. He overheard the remark, and it filled up the measure of his wrath. That *he* should be humiliated, degraded, insulted thus! That his wife, a model of the most correct and dignified conduct for so many years, should have drawn down on him all this indignity! The world seemed topsy-turvey to Avillion, and he almost decided to take his name off the Carlton. A Government which could not protect people from outrage in the public streets

should clearly give way to one who better understood the privileges conferred upon and the protection required from it.

Avillion entered his own gates and went to his own rooms to leave there the dust of the polluting pavements, then took his way to his wife's tea-room, having ascertained that she had just counter-ordered her carriage.

"Not going to drive out; I suppose she expects him," thought Avillion, and a faint sense of diversion at his wife having become like everybody else crossed his angry reflections for a moment as a sun ray may fitfully play on a thunder-cloud.

He walked up to her where she was sitting between the tea equipage and her embroidery frame.

"May I give you some tea?" she said serenely, as though the scene of two nights before and the conversation in the railway carriage had never taken place.

Avillion made a gesture of refusal.

"I wish to renew what I said to you yesterday and to-day," he remarked with austerity.

"Indeed?" said Freda with great indifference.

"Yes; and I desire you immediately to abandon those tableaux which are fixed to take place here," said Avillion.

"On what plea?" she inquired.

"Any plea you like. Women can always be ill when they choose."

"But if I do not choose?"

"I choose," he said, keeping his temper with difficulty.

She was silent.

"I suppose you heard me?" he asked after a few moments.

"Oh, yes, I heard you."

"You will be so good then as to give your formal promise as regards this."

"I see no occasion for any formal or informal promise. When I have issued invitations I do not withdraw them for any less cause than a death in one of our families, or in the royal family."

Avillion well knew that his request was absurd and his headstrong insistance still more absurd, but he was a spoiled child and would hear no reason when he was crossed.

"You will postpone them," he said with great anger, "or I shall announce their postponement myself."

"You are, of course, master of your own actions."

"And of my own house, I presume?"

"Yes, to a certain extent."

"To a certain extent! What can you possibly mean by such an extraordinary expression?"

Freda, who had hitherto continued to look out of the window, now looked at him with a scrutiny which he disliked.

"You are wholly and entirely master of your pavilion at St. Germains. But in your English houses I have my place, and I am mistress of them. When I have invited all London I shall receive it. If you

attempt anything which makes me absurd in London I shall not be patient about it as I have been always about other matters. A certain harmony has existed between you and me hitherto because we have been profoundly indifferent to each other. If there be any provocation to alter this indifference into hostility, it is not you who will be the gainer by it. Pray, let us say no more. We come from a Court where prejudice still prescribes an appearance of conjugal unity as a first principle of etiquette."

"And according to that etiquette, you should accept as sufficient reason for anything the knowledge that I desire it."

"It might be possible if we were on terms of great mutual tenderness, though even then I do not think I should do a base thing at your dictation. But as it is we are not on those terms, and I do not accept your dictation at all, except in such matters as regard your household, your children, and your political interests."

"But if I consider my most intimate interests jeopardised by your conduct?"

"What can you possibly mean?"

He was not very sure what he did mean, and with the full pride and splendour of her eyes turned on him in haughty challenge, he could not put easily into words the vague suspicions and rather senseless animosities which actuated him. But he was not a man to admit that he was at fault.

"My dear Wilfreda," he replied with great dignity, "we have I think been always good friends, chiefly

because we have never interfered with each other. I admit that you have been a model of discretion until this unfortunate occurrence with the mob, and this French actor. But since then you have driven with him into the suburbs, you have invited him to dine here in my absence; and inevitably the town has commented on it. After my express injunction to you not to receive him, how can I qualify such conduct except as the greatest offence to me?"

Had any stranger been present as Avillion thus spoke, such a spectator would have admired him as a model of dignity, forbearance, and conjugal courtesy. His wife heard him with a very different sentiment. Impatience, disdain, and anger were portrayed on her countenance as she listened with perfect composure to the end. Then she said coldly:

"It is infinitely good of you to admit that I have been discreet in my conduct until the week before last! I cannot return the compliment. However, I dislike the *tu quoque* form of dispute, and I do not wish to revert to it. I have always been content to accord you a liberty which I do not take. Every woman should accord it to every man. At the same time I will in no way accept you as the judge of my actions. They are all open enough to observation, and I do not believe that the world has put any construction on them of the kind you suggest. Any-how, as I told you last evening, I am not a coward, and I am not ungrateful. I shall not either neglect or insult a man who saved my life, because in your spoilt and wayward caprices you have taken a dis-

like to him. He has long been my cousin's friend, and he is now mine, and if you be as well bred as I have always supposed, you will at least conduct yourself as if he were yours also. If I behaved rudely to you last night, I regret it, but all that I said to you last night I beg to repeat most distinctly this morning."

Avillion was pale with rage as she spoke: he knew well enough that if she chose to call him to account for his own actions they would bear no examination or defence, and he knew also that he owed to her many years of condonation of what less wise (or less indifferent) women would have made the ground for ceaseless private scenes and public scandals. At the same time he was too spoilt a child, as she called him, to admit himself in the wrong, or to abandon a position taken up in caprice. What he had begun as a mere *boutade,* acquired strength and violence from opposition. His common sense told him he was in the wrong, but his vanity, his temper, and his arrogance would not permit him to abandon an attitude he had once taken up, even though he felt it an absurd one.

"Into this house," he said sullenly, "into this house I have said that this man shall not come. You will take heed that I am obeyed. He may be your friend, or he may be much more than your friend, but to such a friendship I shall not lend my countenance."

Then sensible that there was a radical weakness

in his authority because there was no ground in fact for his anger, he turned to leave the room.

The doors opened at that moment and Mr. Walters entered with his noiseless and dignified step.

"Does your ladyship receive M. de Syrlin?"

"Show him in," replied his mistress in a very clear tone, then in a lower tone she said to Avillion: "You have your opportunity. You can announce your intentions."

Avillion, furious and out of countenance, muttered an oath under his breath and escaped by an opposite and nearer door at the same moment as Syrlin entered by that which the groom of the chambers had just opened.

"I fear I have driven my lord away; he does not like me," said Syrlin, as he bowed over her hand.

"Surely he seemed to like you very much at Brakespeare?" replied Freda. "You must pardon him if he is hipped and out of temper in London. He hates it so: it is very dull for him after Paris."

Syrlin could not tell whether she spoke in genuine simplicity or in a matchless imitation of it. On reflection he felt that it was the latter. "Why will she feign like that with me?" he thought in sad and resentful impatience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

She let the arrangements for the *tableaux vivants* stand as they were, and considered that, as her husband had gone out of his way to elaborately construct an absurdly false situation, it was for him to withdraw himself from it as best he chose.

She would not have been a woman if she had not felt that such harmless requital for his many offences to her was well within her right. But Freda, although a very courageous woman, was a woman of infinite self-control and reserve; she was never headstrong, and she was always polite; she knew that he could not desist without being greatly humiliated, and could not insist without rendering the position strained and visible to others—it was one of those difficulties which undo themselves naturally and noiselessly if time is allowed and people are prudent. She was by nature prudent; this quality alone had enabled her to pass blamelessly and peacefully through the many dangers and difficulties which beset the path of a woman young, beautiful, indifferent to her husband, and by nature, in a grand manner, a coquette. Prudence now told her that it would be wise to make some pretext to withdraw

herself from the society of the man to whom her lord was hostile, and whose vicinity was in a sense a disturbance to her own peace. So strongly did she feel this that she would have left London immediately on some excuse or another had Avillion said nothing to her. But his unreasonable demands and his aggressive tone had raised in her not only that instinctive contradiction natural to all human nature under pressure, but had enlisted on behalf of Syrlin all that was most generous and finest in her character.

To repay a heroism by a cowardice was of all things what seemed basest to the frankness and force of her nature. Under the conventionality of habit and usage there were both reserve and strength in her temperament. She was not like the Lady of the Glove; she would have sent no one down into the lion's jaws, but when a knight unbidden had gone there for her of his own accord, she would not slight him publicly.

The rehearsals for the *tableaux* brought Syrlin frequently and inevitably to Avillion House. They were under his direction, and he appeared himself in two scenes: in one as the poet Strozzi with the Duchess of Queenstown as Lucrezia d'Este, and in the other as Louis d'Orléans with Lady Guernsey as the Reine Isabelle; and for the latter scene he had sent for weapons, tapestries, and other accessories from his own tower-house at St. Germains. Flodden, driven to self-torture, as all people are who are in love, was a reluctant spectator of these rehearsals,

the mere thought of them having been agony to him for weeks.

He had bought the landscapes of Hugh Murray recklessly, had sent the artist himself to Dresden munificently provided for, although to do so had been against his own belief in what was good for English art; had even provided liberally for the artist's mother. But all these good acts availed nothing, as he felt bitterly, against the mere charm of a voice like a silver flute and the mere beauty of a poetic and chivalrous figure!

A week later the *tableaux* themselves took place, and the lord of Avillion House was present, bored, bland, polished, with his blue ribbon on, for there were Royal guests. But in his soul he was profoundly angered, inalienably offended: he had been beaten by the strength of will of his wife. London and England knew nothing about it, but he knew, and the knowledge was gall and wormwood to the vanity and self-will of his temperament. Englishmen, when they are offended or esteem themselves injured, are as much at a loss as the foxes were without tails. They do not know what on earth to do. In similar circumstances the Frenchman flies to his pistol, the Italian to his sabre, the German to his sword, the Russian to all three; but the Englishman has no resource in gun-room or armoury. Law has prescribed that he must not fight, usage has decreed that he must not make a fool of himself; there is really nothing he can do except pocket his discomfiture. Were he to employ the weapons which nature has bestowed on

him it would be esteemed brawling and bad form, and carry him subsequently to the police courts. The Englishman, the most courageous of living men, has been placed by the influence of cant on the society around him in the queer position of being the only person in Europe who, when he is insulted, has to accept it. There is no Court of Honour outside the Jockey Club to which to appeal, and the Jockey Club deals with nothing outside the turf. An Englishman insulted or dishonoured is entirely helpless; his hands are tied, and all the rotten eggs in the world may be flung at him, he cannot move.

Avillion, therefore, who would have liked nothing better than to have had the man whom he hated beaten by his lackeys, had been compelled to control his feelings and acquiesce in his enemy's praises. He was fully persuaded that the anger he felt was the wrath of a gentleman wounded, or at any rate manaced, in his tenderest point of honour; he was of a temperament too intrinsically vain not to give his sentiments credit for being the very finest possible; in truth, his motives were much more mere irritated and baulked dislike than they were anything higher, but they served to incense him just as well as if they had been the magnificent feelings of an Othello. Like many men, he had always taken it for granted that his wife would never have a shade of any emotion that was not entirely what he should approve. Men regard a woman much as a small child does a watch; they never take into account the delicacy of the mechanism, but expect it to tick placidly on however ill-treated.

"She has everything she can possibly wish for," he had been used to say to himself with a perfectly self-satisfied conviction of his own merits towards her. That she—a cold woman, a proud woman, a political woman, an Englishwoman!—could by any chance whatever want more than to be the Countess of Avillion, had never entered his imagination.

"Freda has no nerves," he had remarked a hundred times to his mother and his sisters. Inconvenient emotions were a mere matter of nerves in his opinion. If anyone had suggested to him that she was only seven-and-twenty, and had probably that *besoin d'aimer* which lies in every woman's nature, he would have smiled in a superior way, and murmured, "Oh dear no! she is so very English in the most old-fashioned sense; I assure you, so very English!"

He had often intimated, indeed, to commiserating female friends how much this extreme want of elasticity in his wife bored him; he had often hinted that he would be relieved if she indulged in a little of the amiable leniencies of other ladies in her world; but now that he believed himself gratified in this, his fury was as great as though he had never affected to desire it, and were himself the most virtuous of men. He was ready to credit the worst, simply because the very least, being an affront to his personal dignity, seemed to him so monstrous.

These feelings of anger against his wife deepened into a dislike which only required some additional stimulus to become hatred. His own injuries began

to assume enormous dimensions in his sight. His estimate of all the debt she owed to him for position and wealth had always been absurdly high, but now he altogether forgot that, had he not married her, some-one equally illustrious in all likelihood would have done so, and her ingratitude appeared to him as black as "a black cat in a coal hole," as one of his favourite American beauties suggested behind his back.

He had approved of her, and praised her to his own people continually, because she had been a model of discretion and coldness, two qualities eminently necessary in women of position, and not as common as they should be; and now he was indignant and infuriated to discover that she had sentiments wholly unauthorised by himself. When jealousy is only another form of extreme and wounded vanity, it will be as tenacious in existence as though love were its mainspring.

It was as wholly insufferable to him for the world to talk about his wife as if he had adored her. She had been so long part of his state, of his ceremonious and conventional life, of his magnificent rôle as an English nobleman; all that side of his life bored him horribly, as it bored him to leave or give up a pleasant supper with actors and actresses, to put on his Garter collar and go to a ball at Buck-ingham Palace. But he would not have surrendered his rights to that side of his life for any considera-tion; and in the same way he could not endure that the license of tongues should in any way touch the

lady who represented that life as the Garter collar represented it.

He was that not uncommon creation of riches and pleasure, an entirely selfish person; and he had also that union of intense coldness with extreme sensuality which is by no means uncommon either. He had desired many women; he had never loved one for five minutes. It was therefore with quite as much chill discernment as bitter anger that he roused himself to the necessary task of watching the bearer of his name.

It was of no use to speak to her; he wasted no more words, but he sketched in his meditations an elaborate trap which he would set for her. He reflected that it is always wisest to deceive a woman; for a moment his naturally autocratic and self-willed impulses had led him into the great mistake of being straightforward with her, but he was not a man to make such an error twice. Women invariably deceived you, he reasoned: therefore why not deceive them? *A larron, larron et demi,* was all wise men's maxim.

Therefore, a day or two later, Lord Avillion, with a bud of the Devoniensis rose in his buttonhole, and a sweet half-deprecating smile upon his lips, met his wife "by accident on purpose" in the corridor, as she was going to her apartments, kissed the tips of her fingers, which she very reluctantly accorded to him, and said softly,

"I want a word with you; will you allow a penitent a moment's audience for confession?"

Freda was too surprised to be altogether on her guard.

"Of course you always command my time," she said coldly, but with a certain embarrassment. She was troubled at his unwonted attitude. He walked beside her to the entrance of her favourite room, and opened the door for her with his most gracious grace; rolled a low chair towards her embroidery frame, and seated himself not far from her.

"I wish to tell you quite frankly," he said, in his most melodious voice, "for frankness is always best in such matters, that on reflection I perceive my error in addressing you as I did. I was wrong; wrong in my impressions, wrong in my expressions; it is my duty to tender you my apologies, and I do so most heartily: trusting to your good sense and your amiability to accept them as they are offered."

Complete surprise held her spellbound and mute. If the Achilles from the Park had walked in through her windows and opened his bronze lips, she would have been scarcely more utterly amazed.

She knew the egotism, the hardness, and the arrogance of his nature, and such words as these were only such as would be dictated by a warm, generous, and magnanimous temper. She could not credit her own ears as she heard them. But her own nature was so generous that an appeal of the kind touched her at once, and awakened too quick a response to it for her reason to act. It never for an instant occured to her that it was a ruse, an imposture; it seemed to her so entirely true that it

was his duty to feel thus, and thus to apologise, that the impossibility of such a man as her husband ever being moved thus never dawned on her.

Avillion took advantage of her silence and her evident emotion to carry the position with *éclat:* he was enamoured of his own skill in assuming a part so alien to his character.

"I spoke to you as I had no right to speak, and I regret it infinitely," he continued with a contrite grace which extremely became him. "You are thoroughly right in your perception of what the sense of a great service rendered to you entails on us both. I confess that it has been to me a disagreeable affair, for in these days of publicity anything which draws comment upon us is especially odious, and is cruelly exposed to misconstruction. But that is no fault of yours, nor of M. de Syrlin's. I was to blame to speak to you so rudely and so rashly as I did. We have always been good friends, if not enthusiastically so; may I not hope that such harmony as we have hitherto enjoyed will not be seriously disturbed by this storm in a tea-cup?"

It was charmingly spoken, with an admirable tone of candour and sufficiently easy indifference in it to make it of a piece with his habitual manner towards all things.

Freda was both touched and relieved. She was glad that he had so much high breeding in him as to apologise for a mistake, and she was conscious that her own conduct had created for herself a position from which it would have been impossible to

her pride to retract, and in which it would have have been compromising and difficult to remain. She was offered thus a facile issue from a troublesome dilemma, and a movement of gratitude towards her husband followed on her full comprehension of his words.

"I am glad that you do justice to the circumstances and to myself," she said in a low tone, but with perfect composure. "I was sure that you would have to do so in time, but it is so much better that it should be so thus, at once. There was never the slightest reason that I could see why our *bonne entente* should be ruffled. Only you will allow me to say that I am neither patient nor humble by nature, and that I do not like such misunderstandings. If they often occurred the storm in the saucer would be more than sufficient to shipwreck all dignity."

"They shall never occur," said Avillion with his sweetest smile. "I was absurd; I am morbidly sensitive to comment; and, as you know, all artists are delightful creations of nature, but their impetuosity is often apt to place themselves and others in awkward positions; the world is too positive to have much credence in their innocent enthusiasms. However, I am grateful to you for your amiable response to an apology for which you should not have waited even so long as twenty-four hours; and I must beg you to exercise your full and free judgment in the selection of your personal friendships. I am shocked if, in the haste of anger, I ever seemed to desire

any interference with them or to hint the smallest doubt of your wisdom and delicacy."

"That is more than enough," replied his wife, touched more and more deeply by her sense of his magnanimity and by her own consciousness that she deserved some blame from him; there was a more troubled consciousness also deep down in her heart, which kept her eyes from meeting his, and brought a passing warmth to her cheek which did not escape the gaze of Avillion, so penetrating under the languor of his drooping lids.

"You are a noble woman, Freda," he said, with admirable semblance of candour and respect, whilst to himself he thought: "So!—it is as far as that already; I should never have believed it. But Pope is right, every woman is a rake at heart."

"I confess too," he added after a slight pause, "that M. de Syrlin offended me when he was with us at Brakespeare. Artists are always touchy and tenacious, and we are, I think, at fault, to make them the idols of our drawing-rooms as we do. It spoils them for their art, and nothing ever teaches them, spoilt children as they are, the social obligations of self-control."

"Of duplicity!" said Freda, carried away for an instant by her anger at his tone of patronage.

"Duplicity if you will," assented Avillion good-humouredly. "That science of give and take, of tact and forbearance, which alone makes the world a comfortable neutral ground on which people of

the most difficult and different characters can meet without dispute."

This was an opinion which had been so continually her own, and had so often been declared by her at various times, that it was impossible for her to repudiate its wisdom, or justify to her own mind the exceeding and unreasonable impatience with which she heard it.

Avillion comprehended her difficulty from the expression of her eyes, and was faintly diverted by it.

"I confess that you tried me," he continued with a mingling of half-smiling contrition and conjugal command. "You will do me the justice to allow that I have very seldom committed myself to the impoliteness of a menace, or of a hint of authority, during the decade of years that you have done me the honour to bear my name; and if I were provoked into such bad manners, you will grant that you were not quite fair to me, and met me with a stubbornness and severity which would have incensed a better-tempered man than I have ever been able to boast of being. It is never wise, my dear Freda, to irritate the person who, however little worthy of you he may be, has his interests linked with yours in the sight of the world."

Very severe replies rose to his wife's lips; it would have been easy to reveal to him her acquaintance with many details of his life, but she had always promised herself that nothing should tempt her to the vulgarity of similar recriminations, and

she forbore to make them still. Besides, there was a tone of sincerity in what he had said which moved her to a kindly emotion towards him.

"I admit that I also was, perhaps, in fault," she said, whilst she confessed to herself that he was in the right, and the dignity and temperance of his rebuke humiliated her.

"The 'perhaps' spoils it," he answered, still with perfect temper. "There is no perhaps. You were distinctly in the wrong; but then as I was also to blame, and more to blame probably than you, I owe it to you to apologise, and withdraw the—" he appeared to hesitate, and then added, "the prohibition which I laid on you, and the objection I made to one name in your visiting list. If you have over-estimated genius, it was my own indications which first led you to do so. Let us talk of other things."

His urbanity, his courtesy, his ease, robbed her of all means of reprisal or possibility of quarrel.

He stayed a little while playing with the rose in his buttonhole and chatting of social trifles with that attractiveness which he well knew how to lend, when he pleased, to the little frothy nothings of the hour. Then he took his leave, with a good-humour and a grace wholly his own, when he was in the mood to captivate, but of which his own world did not see so much as did other worlds more to his liking; and he took his way down the staircase and out into the street with the self-satisfied sensations of a man who has not wasted his talents or his time.

"She is a clever woman," he thought as he lighted

a cigarette in his own gateway, "and yet how soon she fell into the trap! They always do if you bait it with sentiment."

Freda, meantime, sat at her embroidery frame absently pulling her silks in and out, troubled, moved, and, in a manner, oppressed by her own conscience. She was, as he said, a clever woman; of no slight experience, knowledge, penetration, and tact, but her own temperament made her completely the dupe of Avillion's pretended penitence. People of generous nature seldom doubt the genuineness of what appears a generous action. It would have been natural to themselves to act so, and therefore they are readily deceived by its plausibility. She had never liked her husband so well as she did in that admirably-acted apology. Moreover, that secret consciousness which haunted her and made her feel herself to blame, rendered her susceptible to all repentant impressions, and misled her with an ease which would not have been possible at any earlier time. Avillion's knowledge of female nature had guided him aright; the "bait of sentiment" had not failed with her.

After all, she thought, he was a high-bred man; and therefore his high breeding supplied what was lacking in feeling of a warmer kind. The grace of a submission, so mortifying to him, so soothing and flattering to herself, was of all means the surest to lull her into perfect security, and move her to a sincere repentance that by any imprudence, however innocent, she had brought about a scene so painful.

A man has never so much power over a generous woman as when he confesses himself in the wrong to her; and though her knowledge of Avillion might well have made her doubt the sincerity of his contrition, she did not doubt it. She was carried away by her willingness to believe in noble motives.

All that a man ought to be he could affect to be, with the most perfect skill, when it was worth his while to do so.

She had been deceived by that inimitable *pose* in the early days of her betrothal and marriage, and had found out its unreality so completely, that it should have had no fascination for her now. Yet, fascination it had; and despite herself she was deluded by it.

Men like Avillion have the knack of getting themselves believed in, even by those to whom their artificiality is most fully known. Simple, candid, single-minded gentlemen will break their hearts uselessly over the incredulity with which their honest asseverations are received by the women to whom they are made, but the accomplished liar can always rely upon creating belief in his very falsest asseverations.

CHAPTER XIX.

"If she thinks that I am satisfied she will become incautious," Avillion said to himself with that ingenuity of reasoning which many intrigues had taught him. His feeling against his wife was very bitter; wounded vanity is crueller than any jealousy into which love has entered; the latter may relent, the former will never pardon. But the effect produced on her was wholly opposite to that which he anticipated. Having, as she imagined, been trusted by him, and having found in him, as she fancied, a generous and chivalrous sentiment, she was angered against herself, and disposed to a still greater irritation against Syrlin. Like most women her feelings moved *per saltum*, and were apt to move in the contrary direction to the one pointed out or permitted. All the stimulus which prohibition, irritation, and injustice had given, suddenly sunk to nothing under the entire liberty and approval which she believed that Avillion accorded her. Conscience makes cowards of the proudest, and for the first time in her life her conscience was uneasy. Under the spur of it she did what he was far from expecting. She left London for Aix-les-Bains, accompanying

her sister, Lady Ilfracombe, whose health was delicate. People were going to Aix every day; it was the middle of July, and there was nothing singular in her departure. Yet, as it was unannounced, Flodden stared helplessly in the porter's face when, at the gates of Avillion House, that functionary said blandly:

"Her ladyship left for Haix by tidal train this morning, my lord. No, we don't know anything as to how long, we have no horders; his lordship's in town still."

Flodden moved from the gates and went down Piccadilly with the stunned sensation of a person who has fallen from a high cliff in the course of a summer day's stroll. Aix was indeed a mere succursale of London; easy of access, and at that moment filled by English invalids of his acquaintance; but the knowledge that she had gone out of England without as much as even a word to him of her intention, brought home to him suddenly and intensely the fact that he was nothing in her life; merely one of the innumerable young men whose name was on her visiting-list, who had not and never could have on her any claim except for cards to her parties and a kind word or two from her lips in the crowds of society.

As he passed the St. James's Hotel he ran against a man who was coming away from it, and, hurriedly apologising, as he did so he recognised Syrlin.

"She is gone away!" said Flodden almost unconsciously; his blue eyes had a dazed strained ex-

pression in them as they looked upward at his brilliant rival.

"Since when is it permitted to speak of a lady without her name?" said Syrlin rudely and haughtily, as without asking who was intended by the pronoun, he pushed Flodden towards the curbstone and went on his way through the streams of people passing to and fro towards Hyde Park Corner.

"It is no news to him," thought the boy with a jealous misery, in which all consciousness of the affront done to himself was drowned. Syrlin had become acquainted with her departure only half-an-hour earlier than himself, and in the same manner, at the gates of her house; but it did not pain or bewilder him; he understood her motives by intuition, and he merely said to his servant, "I go to Paris this evening."

With her away from it, London could not hold him a day.

Flodden went through the dusty mist which obscures Piccadilly on a July afternoon, and looked down over the confused jumble of horses' heads, carriage liveries, omnibus roofs, waggon loads, men's hats, women's bonnets, servants' cockades, opened parasols, and flourished whips which filled to repletion that narrow and popular thoroughfare at such an hour. The trees looked jaded and powdered with dust like the pedestrians, the balcony flowers were a glare of blue lobelia, yellow calceolaria, scarlet geranium; the cab horses and the carriage horses were alike sweating and flinging up in the air their

poor curb-worried jaws; here and there a muzzled dog went sadly with drooped head and tail, and heaving flanks; the basket women held out in vain roses which the noon-heat had blanched, and carnations out of which the heavy heat had sucked the sweetness.

The ladies in the carriages, like the flowers, were languid and pale from the late hours, the hurried pleasures, the too numerous engagements, of the waning season.

It was an epitome of London, with its sharp and cruel contrasts, its oppressive stress, and strain, and din, and crush, its immense wealth, its frightful poverty, its utter and irremediable failure to make civilisation endurable, riches excusable, or luxury beautiful, which was here before him in the choked channel of this narrow street; the boy felt as if the yellow dust, the lurid mist of it, suffocated him.

"Buy a buttonhole, my pretty gentleman," whined a poor woman, standing at the corner of Dover Street with little bunches of rosebuds in her basket; little moss-rosebuds chiefly, homely, pleasant things, smelling of the country-side and the garden hedge, mates for the lark's song, and the bee's hum, and the cricket's chirp, when the day is high. "Buy a buttonhole!" she repeated, holding up the drooping thirsty buds. "I went all the way to Barnet for 'em, and I han't sold one."

It was the professional beggar's whine: no doubt the professional beggar's lie; but verses of Lytton's "Misery," of Rossetti's "Jenny," rose to Flodden's

mind in that lingering influence of verse which makes the poet more potent than the preacher in his generation.

A constable who knew Flodden pushed the girl roughly aside, and threatened her.

"As God lives it's gospel truth," she cried in shrill despair. "I han't had bit nor sup to-day, and th' old woman's dyin'. Come and see if you don't believe—"

"They all tell these tales, my lord," said the policeman slightingly. "I'll run her in if she go on molesting."

"She has done no harm: she only wants to sell her rosebuds," said Flodden; and then turning to the girl, he said gently, "I will come with you and see if it be as bad as you say."

And gravely, without any consciousness that he was doing an unheard of and supremely ridiculous thing, he put a half-sovereign in her hand, and bade her show him where she lived.

"But you won't walk with the likes o' me," she said, breathless and gaping.

"Why not?" said the lad, dreamily, and despite the protests, entreaties, and ejaculations of the constable he persisted in bidding her lead the way to her dwelling-place.

"She'll get you in a slum, and have you hocussed or murdered for your swag, sir," muttered the guardian of law and order, vainly imploring attention.

"I do not think so," said Flodden, with the obstinacy of a gentle temper; and he took her by the

hand. "Take me to your home," he repeated; and the throngs in the streets beheld with wonder a youth of aristocratic appearance, and wearing the clothes of civilisation, pacing calmly by the side of a tatterdemalion with ragged skirts and rough uncombed locks, who carried a dirty basket half full of dead and dying rosebuds.

"If he warn't a peer he'd be clapped in Bedlam," said the constable, with scorn, to a comrade. "Them swells thinks to do the Shaftesbury dodge, and curry favour with the roughs that way, but it's all rot, says I, and won't do 'em a mossel o' good: the people hates 'em."

He looked with deep disgust after the disappearing forms of Flodden and the girl, whom some boys were following with gibes and gestures and antics, while a passing cabman smacked his whip and holloaed out, "Go it, old gal, you've got a bloomin' fancy man!"

"You shouldn't be seed with the likes o' me, sir," said the woman. "It'll hurt you with your friends if you're seed with the likes o' me."

"I have no friends," said Flodden. It seemed to him that he had none: no one really cared! Would anyone even tell him the truth?

The girl perceived, with her town-sharpened senses, the ludicrous incongruity and impropriety of this young gentleman walking by her side in the streets of London, but Flodden did not see it, nor would he have cared if he had done.

"Tell me your history," he said to her, disregarding the jeers and shouts of the boys dancing about them. She complied: telling it with the useless repetition, the bald common wording, the involved and confused phrases of the poor, whose vocabulary is as meagre as their cupboard is empty. It was an ordinary story, of a family which had left its village thinking to better itself in the great wilderness of London; of the ravages made by fever, and of small-pox amongst them, of the difficulty of finding work for the survivors, of the gradual melancholy slipping downward from respectable well-to-do industry to enforced inaction, indigence, and hunger.

"O' all nine o' us there's only me and mother left," she said in conclusion. "And she aren't long for this world, she's that bad. I han't ate anything for a good whiles, but I'm strong I am; mother's racked wi' cough and rheumatis, and she can't stand up against it. If you don't mind, sir, I'll stop at a shop and buy some bread and tea with this here money as you've gived me?"

"Of course; good heavens! how could I forget," said Flodden, contrite and heart-stricken; it is so difficult to realise that there are actually people close at hand to you who want food. The young woman would not stay to eat anywhere herself, but she bought some bread and other things and laid them away beside the dead roses. She had nothing romantic, picturesque, or interesting about her; she had the short broad features, the wide mouth, and the small pale eyes of the common English type,

but the face was honest, and the regard was clear and wistful.

"She is telling me the truth," thought Flodden, and he would have carried the bread and the tea for her if she would have allowed him.

Her miserable home lay Westminster way, and as they went to it, many men who knew Flodden passed them in the streets about the Houses of Parliament.

"The young ass!" said one of them, echoing the sentiments of the constable. "He ought to be put in a strait-waistcoat. That is Lorraine Iona's doing; he makes all those boys as mad as hatters."

"Yes, it is very odd," said another, who was of a more meditative turn. "The Encyclopédistes first set those philanthropic bubbles floating, and the result was the Terror. One would think this generation might take warning, but it doesn't."

"You cannot quench revolutions with rosewater," said a third, "and England is in revolution every whit as much as it was in Charles's time; only it creeps like a slow match, and its Declaration of Right disguises itself under Local Government Bills, and Allotment Bills, and Leaseholders' Bills, and Liability of Owners Bills, and all the rest of the small fry which are eating away the constitution and the capital of the country."

"What is to be done?" said the second speaker. "The people will have these Bills, or something like them."

"It's the d——d philanthropists who put it into their heads," said the first speaker.

"It is the d——d manufacturers who create the cause of it," said the other. "If a revolution were sure to put an end to manufacturers, I would not quarrel with it."

"Railway directors are as bad as manufacturers."

"And brewers worse than either!"

"Oh-ho! And Maltby's peerage?"

"Maltby's peerage makes one agree with William Morris, that there is no longer an aristocracy in Great Britain. Nothing is odder than the fact that in England the very nature and meaning of a nobility has been forgotten, for nobility has been completely smothered under wealth; the once proud heart has lost its power to beat beneath the rolls of fat which have grown up around it."

Meantime, while his critics thus disputed, Flodden went steadily on his way to the wretched tenements which lie south of Westminster, where undaunted he accompanied his companion to her home, and found her tale true in every respect.

The sights, the sounds, the smells, the ghastly needs and woes which he saw and heard of there, where she made her wretched home which yet was dear to her, brought close to him the gigantic and awful meaning of that squalid poverty with which the philanthropy of the drawing-rooms and of the newspapers plays and postures, as a baby might toy with a boa-constrictor.

It increased and intensified the depression of

spirit which was already upon him, but it suited him better than the gossip of the clubs and the frivolity of garden-parties would have done.

The girl was penniless, ignorant, very common, yet she belonged to the class of respectable poor, who even in their deepest depths keep out of vice and cling to honesty, rather from instinct than from deliberate choice. But misery had brought her into one of the most wretched quarters of London, and the house in which she and her mother rented the corner of one damp, raw, naked chamber, shared with others as unhappy as themselves, was the embodiment of that squalid and hideous form of want which London creates and contains in a more absolutely horrible shape than any other city of Europe.

He passed the rest of the day there, careless of any personal danger which he might run from infection or from robbery, and absorbed in the spectacle of this sordid, grovelling, utterly hopeless aggregate of woes.

What a dreadful insanity it is which brings all these poor people from their villages to crowd and starve and perish in the dens of London! he thought. Poverty must be dreadful anywhere, but it must surely be less terrible where the fresh wind blows over the turnip fields or the clover crops than cooped up thus between sooty brick walls without a breath of air!

And he asked her if she would not like to go back to her deserted hamlet on the Berkshire Downs.

"Sure it was main and sweet there," she an-

swered, "and for iver so long, sir, whenever I passed a barrow o' greens and sniffed the cabbages and lettuces that smelt so homelike, I did feel a lump in my throat, and such whiles I'd even thoughts o' settin' off to go back on foot, I was that hungry for the smell o' the soil. But now I donno; I got used to this rattle and row; it's lifelike as 'twere, and I can't say as I wouldn't be dull among the old meadows at home."

Dull! Merciful powers! thought Flodden; dull! this poor wretch dragging her sore feet over the flags with her empty bowels yearning within her could talk of the peaceful heaven of country silence and country freshness as "dull!"—could find in the hell of the streets where she starved unheeded, the same stimulant, the same loadstone, the same fell fascination that the woman of fashion found in the London of pleasure!

Cruel curse of centralisation, drawing the strength of the nation into slums and alleys to press it to death, like rotten, over-crowded, ill-packed fruits! Better the death of a sheep frozen on a snow-covered moor, better even the fate of a shot hare falling on the ferns amongst the bluebell and the foxglove in the grass; better anything, any shape of suffering or of want, of trouble or of travail, in the dew-wet rural fields, and the green combes and valleys, within sound of the mill sluices and within reach of the strong west winds, than that sickening suicide of soul and body, the life of the poor in the city of London!

Flodden heard a great deal talked about the poor. He saw Violet Guernsey going off to the East-end with her Spanish guitar and her baritones and tenors from the Household Brigade; he heard Lady Maltby speak unctuously of her tea parties for her dear brothers and sisters from Limehouse and Shoreditch; he was invited by the Duchess of Worthing to go to her Penny Readings in Mile End, and was offered his choice between a Bab Ballad and an Ingoldsby Legend to be the means whereby he should touch the hearts and awaken the smiles of "those nice queer people," the stevedores and dock labourers and bargees and mudlarks.

He had seen fashion and riches playing at patronage and popularity with the poor as blindly as, but more clumsily than, poor Marie Antoinette had once played at them; and he had seen men of tricky talent riding the hobby-horse of philanthropy to canter upon it up park avenues and through castle doors which they would never have entered had they not bestridden that useful steed. He had seen the poor trotted out and dressed up and held forth as pretence and excuse for everything; used by the great lady's ennui, by the politician's party motives, by the newspaper writer's spleen, by the novelist's need of sensation, by the adventurer's greed and ambition, by the Conservative's desire to appear a benefactor, and the Radical's anxiety to seem a patriot; made by all a toy, a tool, a bone of contention, a stalking horse, a pretext, a weapon, or a boast, from the Primrose dame who wanted a ballot

on earth and a place in heaven, to the Editor who found charity cover a multitude of sins and sell ten thousand copies of a slanderous journal.

But it seemed to him, as he walked sadly homeward in the early evening, that all those who thus traded in and toyed with this gigantic woe, this endless horror, knew not what they did, and mocked at and insulted it when they came, with their cheap nostrums and charlatans' panaceas, to cure this hopeless cancer in the body politic.

CHAPTER XX.

THAT afternoon Beaufront heard a rumour which displeased him highly: he said nothing as he heard it, but walked out of the club in which he was at the time, and went with long swift strides up the staircase of the St. James's Hotel.

"Is it true that you are leaving town?" he asked without preface, as he entered Syrlin's apartments.

"I am leaving England," replied Syrlin equally curtly.

The reply had an aggressive sound in it which grated on his friend's ear.

"I think, under the circumstances, it would be better if you stayed here a little time longer," said Beaufront very slowly, with the tone of a man who desires his words to be marked but not offensive.

"Under what circumstances?"

Beaufront hesitated; his rule, the common rule of society, never to intrude advice, or interfere with any private sentiments, made him doubtful as to his reply. But the candour natural to him, and the irritation which he felt, conquered his habits of neutrality.

"Under the circumstances of your romantic rescue of Lady Avillion," he answered deliberately. "The thing was well done, I do not deny it, but it was perhaps more sensational than it need have been, and my cousin is a very well known person, one of those persons everybody talks about. Under the circumstances, I repeat, it seems to me better that you should stay on and fulfil your social engagements here, as her own health has necessitated her leaving England."

Syrlin looked at him with a sombre insolence brooding in his dark eyes.

"What is your title to say so?"

"Oh, my dear Syrlin, I make no pretensions to any title; but you are an old and dear friend of mine, my cousin is a near and dear relative, and I make no apology whatever for telling you distinctly that I object to an imprudence on your part which will accentuate a series of imprudences which you have committed of late, wholly unintentionally no doubt, but still unwisely."

"You are *plus royaliste que le roi!* I have just seen Lord Avillion at the Marlborough, and he said to me 'how wise you are to get away.' I cannot for a moment admit that my humble personality can possibly be connected with the actions of so great a lady as your cousin."

"I never said that it was," said Beaufront; "but though you did a gallant thing you did it—well,—sensationally, and it was the talk of the town a very

little while ago, and I do not consider that you have any right to recall attention to it by leaving London suddenly just because she has left it."

"Why does not her husband say so?"

"Her husband could not say so, if he thought it."

Syrlin coloured with anger and with the unwelcome sense that what was said was true.

"You do me too much honour in imagining that I have any power to compromise her!"

"You have the power to attract injurious constructions upon her, because you were associated with her in a public scene, in a public danger, and because you have for months, whether you know it or not, made your admiration of her the *secret de Polichinelle* to all London."

Syrlin's face grew red with a hot colour like a woman's.

In the customary blindness of passion he had imagined his feelings to be wholly concealed from others; with the temperament of a poet he had the indiscretion of one, and because his lips were silent never dreamed that his eyes betrayed him. He was humiliated and embarrassed by the reproof which he received; he felt like some immature student rebuked by a man of the world. He was strongly attached to Beaufront, and he knew what Beaufront said was true; at the same time the quickness of his passion and the hauteur of his temper

made him least able of all men to brook such interference from anyone.

"If we were in France—" he muttered.

Beaufront laughed a little.

"My dear boy! you would send me your *témoins?* You would do a useless thing. We should probably kill each other, because we are both of equal force in those amusements, and the world would certainly not talk less, but more. You are not the man I have supposed you if you take roughly what I say. My cousin, Lady Avillion, is a beautiful woman with the glare of the world shed upon her; she is a very noble and innocent person, and I do not think that a friend of mine, a dear friend, and one whom I myself presented to her, should be the means of gathering about her that kind of impertinent scandal from which so few conspicuous people escape nowadays, but which has never approached her hitherto, thanks to her own admirable judgment and consummate discretion. That is all I have to say. I am responsible to myself for having made you acquainted with her."

Syrlin felt the deepest displeasure and the keenest mortification as he listened; the justice of Beaufront's censure was beyond all question, and struck him with a mortifying sense that he who had a few moments before rebuked that raw Scotch lad for his incautious follies, seemed himself as indiscreet and as unwise in another man's sight, and possibly in that of the whole of society.

All the Spanish and semi-Oriental blood of Syrlin was at boiling point; he was a spoilt child of the world; he was habituated to take his own way and never lacked adorers who told him that it was the right way; he had the haughty temper of princes in his veins joined to a morbid susceptibility which had always made him over-ready to resent any slight or slur, even to imagine such when they were not intended. But he had also strong affections, and that willingness to acknowledge error which belongs to mobile and generous temperaments. He was attached to Beaufront; he had had cause to be grateful to him in earlier years; all his knowledge of the world told him that what Beaufront said now was, however unwelcome, wholly true.

Like many men suddenly possessed and swayed by a strong passion he had had no idea that his feelings and sentiments were so visible to others. The recent cordiality of her lord had seemed to him a guarantee that not the faintest suspicion could have entered into the mind of anyone as to the real nature of his feelings for Lady Avillion.

Although impassioned and headstrong, those feelings were so exalted, and so imbued with the noblest kind of devotion, that it hurt him intolerably to realise that they were the subject of observation and remark to anyone. He had been utterly unconscious of the many evidences of his devotion which he had so recklessly given to the world, and the consciousness of his own thoughtlessness was very bitter to him.

"And I repeat," he said now sullenly, "that Lord Avillion is the only person who has the right to object to my acquaintance with her."

"Lord Avillion will not object," replièd Beaufront. "There is such a phrase in English as an event suiting one's book. *I* object; and as I like plain speaking I tell you so in plain words."

"And I deny your authority to use such words or express such objections."

"Your denial will not affect the facts," said Beaufront coldly. "It appears to me that we are approaching something very like a quarrel. I do not want or wish to quarrel with you, but I tell you that you shall not compromise my cousin while I am alive. I took you to her house, and you are responsible to me for any abuse of the privilege of her acquaintance, if you do abuse it."

"You are in love with Lady Avillion yourself!" said Syrlin bitterly.

Beaufront smiled rather mournfully.

"I have long ceased to be; but if I were so I should not carry my heart on my sleeve as you do. There are pecking daws all over the place, why please and feed them?"

Syrlin turned from him, and walked up and down the room with a fury in his heart which he strove to control. What Beaufront asked from him was a sacrifice wholly alien to his natural habits. He was used to follow every impulse as a child

follows a butterfly flying down a sunny road. It was intolerable to him to remain where the idol of his thoughts was not. He had no definite purpose, he did not dare to define his wishes, even to himself, lest, like snow crystals, they should crumble at a touch. He had the deep humility of every great passion. He never presumed to think that he should become greatly necessary to her, but to be near her, to watch her movements, to hear the sound of her voice, to divine her wishes, her sentiments, her sorrows, from her mere chance words, all this had become absolutely necessary to him; he felt that there was a part of her nature which was visible to, which belonged to, himself alone. It was not in his creeds or in his habits to feel thus for a woman and deny himself the sweetness of vicinity to her. He had more honour and less self-indulgence than most men who, in the flower of their age, have the world at their feet, but he was no ascetic and no moralist. What Beaufront asked of him was a simple and plain act of self-denial; and it was one alien to him, and odious, doubly odious because dictated to him by another.

He was jealous of the very air that she breathed, of the trees in whose shade she walked, of the music which fell on her ear, of the dog she caressed, of the flower she wore; it was such love as he had sung of in his song "La Reine pleurait"; romantic, unreasoning, uncalculating, at once spiritual and impassioned, at once a religion and a desire. His position was one in which to persist was disloyal,

and to desist was humiliating; he had no possible right to compromise Lady Avillion, and he knew that had he been in Beaufront's place he would have spoken as Beaufront spoke, and he hated himself for having inadvertently disclosed the closest and deepest sentiment of his life. His habits were self-indulgent and his passions were wilful and capricious; he had in him the intolerance of control and the headstrong impulses of race and of genius, and to endure dictation on such a delicate and sensitive feeling as his secret adoration of a woman was intolerable to him. But he was sincere, and he was very susceptible to any appeal to his honour.

After a few minutes' silence he turned to Beaufront without anger.

"I admit that you are justified in saying what you do. I should probably say the same in your place. If you consider that my departure at this moment could be construed injuriously to Lady Avillion, though I have not the presumption to think so, I will remain in England some weeks longer. I should never have supposed that society would do me the honour to connect my departure with hers, but if you consider there is any fear of this I will defer to your apprehensions."

There was a tone of condescension and a certain amount of insolence in the apparent docility of the reply which grated on Beaufront as he heard it; but he had gained his point, and he did not think it politic to quarrel with how he gained it.

"Thanks," he said briefly, and he held out his hand to Syrlin.

"Ah, pour cela non!" said Syrlin with a strong vibration of indignant emotion in his voice, as he held his hands behind his back. "I defer to your demands because they are just; but you are no longer my friend, although I will never be your enemy."

And with that he left the room before Beaufront could reply or detain him.

"Oh those artists, what froward children they are!" thought Beaufront with mingled amusement and annoyance as, left alone in the apartment, he glanced at the masses of flowers, the litter of costly and artistic objects, the piles of letters, some unopened, some torn in two, the Erard grand pianoforte, the antique weapons, the cabinet pictures, the writing table with panels by Fragonard and bronzes by Gouthière which Syrlin had bought at Christie's to give a look of grace and comfort to the gorgeous but naked hotel drawing-room, with its roar and rattle of Piccadilly, rising up from the stones below.

"What children they are!" he thought again, as he took his hat and left the apartments. He had been ostensibly the victor in this interview, but he had an uneasy sense that success would not ultimately be with him. He believed that Syrlin's estrangement from him would not be of long duration; he considered it rather a petulant insolence than a serious menace and bestowed no thought

upon it. But though he did not regret what he had said, he vaguely felt that the efficacy of any words or acts of his in this matter would be doubtful.

"On ne peut pas être plus royaliste que le roi."

It could not long be possible for him effectually to resent for Avillion what Avillion did not resent for himself.

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