COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3135.

A FIGHT WITH FATE. BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

A SECOND LIFE	3 vols.
BY WOMAN'S WIT	1 vol.
MONA'S CHOICE	2 vols.
A LIFE INTEREST	2 vols.
A CROOKED PATH	2 vols.
BLIND FATE	2 vols.
A WOMAN'S HEART	2 vols.
FOR HIS SAKE	2 vols.
THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER	2 vols
FOUND WANTING	2 vols.
A WARD IN CHANCERY	1 vol.
A CHOICE OF EVILS	2 vols.

A FIGHT WITH FATE

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "FOUND WANTING," "FOR HIS SAKE," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1896.

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

A FIGHT WITH FATE.

CHAPTER I.

"AFTER LONG YEARS."

"YES. It is very strange to find oneself in London again after all these years! Strange and delightful," she said to her visitor.

"She" was a handsome woman who might be any age between twenty-eight and thirty-five; her rounded, finely proportioned figure was fully displayed as she stood with one arm resting on the mantel-piece and one foot upon the fender. She had the rich colour which often beautifies a brunette; her brows were a trifle too heavy, but the eyes beneath were large, lustrous, and dark as they could be without being quite black. The mouth, slightly open in a pleased smile, was well

cut, though the lips were somewhat full, and the teeth thus shown were brilliantly white.

She was dressed in black, and a mass of dusky hair was coiled at the back of her head. The visitor, a long-limbed man, lay back in a deep arm-chair, gazing dreamily into the fire. He looked about her own age, and his colouring was nearly as dark, but its darkness was evidently in part the effect of exposure to wind and sun. The scene, a handsomely furnished sitting-room in Renshaw's excellent, if costly, private hotel; time, a chill, misty afternoon which early August seemed to have borrowed from late November, and which made a bright fire most acceptable. Vases and bowls of flowers stood on the mantel-shelf, and on sundry small tables books, magazines, and photographs gave an inhabited air to the room.

"I suppose it's a long time since you were home?" he returned, dreamily, in a deep but refined voice, "and you must have been considerably bored in India?"

"Bored!" she repeated, in a scornful tone. "Bored is a very weak word to express all I endured, especially for the last three years of my life there! You don't know what Mr. Garston

became! Jealous, *you* ought to know he was; but latterly his love of money absorbed every pulse of his existence. I could hardly get enough from him for my personal needs, and I scarcely dared hope to benefit by the riches he was heaping up. He altered his will about once a month, and his one terror seemed to be that his precious gold might fall into the hands of some one who would not guard and hoard it as he had! I was obliged to assume the most miserly habits,—to wear absolute rags, to—— Oh, I hate to think of those days! Then, I feared for weeks—nay, months—that a final will, leaving me penniless, might be discovered. Now! I think I may at last venture to enjoy myself. God knows, I have served long and worked hard for the right!—as long as Jacob did for his joy!"

"I am amazed that a woman of your pluck and resource allowed poor old Garston such a length of tether!" he returned, laughing. "When did he die? You know I have been away in Abyssinia, studying my interesting fellow-Christians in that curious country, and have heard nothing of you for ages."

"Wherever you have been, you have certainly

made small attempt to learn my news," she said, letting her eyes dwell on him with a look half angry, half laughing. "No, Lynford! I may be worldly and self-indulgent,—selfish, if you will,—but you know I am too much a woman to injure any one physically."

"Ah, perhaps! but you would not mind administering mental torture. Eh? *I* know that."

"I don't think you do; on that score we are quits." She heaved a short, quick sigh, and, turning from the fire, sat down beside a small table on which lay an open work-box; a piece of elaborate embroidery lay beside it; this she took up, and, after a moment's pause, asked, "But what of yourself? You have told me nothing."

"I don't seem to have anything to tell! I have been following the example of my master the devil. Wandering to and fro."

"Seeking whom you may devour?" put in Mrs. Garston.

"No. I really never devoured intentionally, and now I find the flavour of my fellow-creatures by no means appetising, on the whole. I have been trotting steadily down the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Of course, that's not my

fault. My predecessors bequeathed more of debts than of funds to pay them, and I must admit I have gone and done likewise,—a degrading confession of weakness!"

"I should never dream of calling you weak."

"Oh, yes, I am! I'm a slave to myself,—not to anyone else, certainly! However, I am on the brink of a complete smash; I am now in town to put matters in trim for the sale of my Woodshire property, and, though I am philosophic on most points, I find it rather a wrench to part with the old home of the Claverings. It's a picturesque place, too."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Garston, smiling softly, and flashing an upward glance into his eyes, "I want a good investment. I'll buy it, if you like?"

"My sweet friend! I doubt if you have money enough. I want a fancy price for a fancy article; as an investment, Lynford is not of the first order."

"I don't think you have any idea how much money Mr. Garston left behind him."

"You must beware of fortune-hunters, then!"

Here a waiter entered, and handed a note to Mrs. Garston. She opened and glanced at it. "Anyone waiting?"

"Yes, 'm,—a young——" He hesitated, and added, "Lady."

"Show her up."

"I shall leave you, then," said Lord Lynford, rising. He was very tall and bony, and wide-shouldered, but eminently good style. He had a strong, rugged face, and, in contrast to his dark moustache, hair, and eyebrows, his eyes were light, keen, and quick, giving the idea of bluish flame in the mouth of a cavern.

"Yes, I must interview this young person alone. She comes quite apropos of your last sentence. Like Becky Sharp, I am going to establish a 'sheep-dog.'"

"Great powers! Why?"

"Because I don't wish to be quite alone; and as I want my dragon to be at my beck and call, I prefer a young person to a young lady, and either to a young relative, even if I had one," and she looked down on the note she held. "It's a nice hand, and clear, at least."

"Well, good-morning. By the way, you are going out of town,—where?"

"I am recommended to try Lynbourne."

"Lynbourne! Why, that's within two or three miles of my old place."

"Indeed! that is curious."

"Till to-morrow, then. I will call and settle what day you can come and meet my cousin at luncheon." He stopped, for the door was thrown open; a young lady walked in,—a tall, slender girl in black, so simply and plainly dressed that there was nothing in her attire to catch the eye, yet her figure and movements produced a pleasant harmonious effect. She wore a blackstraw-hat, from the brim of which fell a shallow curtain of lace, as was the fashion some time before the Franco-Prussian war, and beneath was a fair, fresh, youthful face and eyes of no especial colour, well shaded by long lashes. Her expression was pensive,—indeed, almost pathetic.

"Good-morning," said Mrs. Garston.

"I should have been here earlier had your note reached me by the first post, but I only received it two hours ago," said the "young person." Her voice was unusually sweet and refined, Lynford thought, and he was fastidious in voices.

"Adieu," he said, and, with a slight bow, he passed out of the room.

"You had better sit down; I have a good deal to say to you," began Mrs. Garston, pointing to a chair and resuming her own. "You are Miss Verner?" The girl bowed. "Mrs. Heathcote, the wife of my solicitor, mentioned you to me. I was afraid to advertise for what I want; I am told the crowds attracted by an advertisement are positively overwhelming."

"It is so, I fear, there is so much poverty, so many cruel reverses——" She stopped.

Mrs. Garston did not seem to heed her. "Of course," she resumed, "Mrs. Heathcote's recommendation is very important, and if I engage you, I should like you to know exactly what I want and expect. I have an admirable French maid, but for any writing or reading or keeping accounts she is absolutely useless, and, as I hate trouble, I find I want some one a little above her in station and education,—some one sufficiently a lady to be presentable, to accompany me to public places, and able to write letters for me; but I *don't* want a decayed gentlewoman, with pretensions, to be 'wounded' and slighted if treated like what she really is—a servant! I am not unkind, nor ungenerous, but I hate being bored, and if I agree

to take you, you must not expect to be made a pet of and brought forward! You will have opportunities of seeing your own people, and you can live your own life; sometimes you may be a good deal with me, sometimes I shall see very little of you. Do you understand the position you are to undertake?"

The young aspirant had coloured and grown pale as Mrs. Garston spoke; then a smile lit up her face, changing its habitually pathetic expression to one of amusement, as if the inner spirit had a keen sense of fun.

"I think I do. I am to be an upper servant. Well, service faithfully done is as honourable as anything else! I want to maintain myself, and, as you say, I can live my own life."

Mrs. Garston looked at her with suddenly roused attention, a faint frown contracting her brows.

"Pray, how old are you?" she asked.

"I was nineteen in May last."

"You look older. Pray, are you highly accomplished?"

"No, indeed;" and she laughed a fresh youthful laugh. "I am very ignorant; I was obliged to

leave school at fifteen,—and I never worked well!"

"You did not leave on account of health, I hope?" severely.

"No, chiefly because my father could not afford to pay for me."

"Ah! you can write prettily I see," taking up the note in her gorgeously jewelled fingers. "Can you read aloud?"

"I have read aloud a great deal to my father."

"What is your father?"

"He was submanager of the London and Suburban Bank, Kensington Branch, but was obliged to retire, as he had a paralytic stroke. He died about fifteen months ago. I lost my mother when I was quite young. I live with my half-sister, who is much older than myself. I don't want to be a burden to her any longer."

These facts were rapidly told, as if to save cross-examination.

"Yes; the bread of dependence is bitter," said Mrs. Garston.

"There is no bitterness in anything given by a sister," was the grave reply.

There was a pause.

"Mrs. Heathcote says she has known you since you were a child," resumed Mrs. Garston.

"She is the daughter of one of my father's fellow-clerks, and she has been a good friend to us."

"Well, suppose you come and try how we shall get on for a month? I will give you forty pounds a year. Mind, you must dress well, *very* plainly, but well. It is good pay."

"Yes, it is. I shall save something out of that."

"You must not scrimp your clothes. And we are to be on a strictly business footing. You are not to think yourself badly treated if I dismiss you with a month's wages (I suppose I ought to say 'salary') at any time."

"The difference of name doesn't matter," said Miss Verner, calmly; "it does not affect the value of the money."

"You seem a sensible girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston. "I want to go out of town next week; can you join me on Monday about mid-day?"

"I have some gaps in my wardrobe to fill up, —and as I make my clothes myself——"

"Oh, don't let that stop you! I cannot be delayed. I will give you a month in advance, get what you want ready-made; but, then, remember it will be two months before you touch any more money."

"Thank you, I *will* remember."

Mrs. Garston rose, crossed the room to her writing-table, unlocked a drawer, and took out a cheque-book.

"What is your name, your Christian name?"

"Beatrice."

"Beatrice! That's a very grand name; rather an unsuitable name!"

"Yes, it is. However, you need never hear it. Of course, in your house I shall be Miss Verner."

Mrs. Garston looked keenly at her; her lips parted as if to speak and then closed silently. Something about this girl with her simple air and soft voice puzzled the masterful woman. "In some ways she will suit me and I can send her off if I choose," she reflected. "There is a cheque for five pounds, nearly two months' money; you will not find me ungenerous if you please me, and I daresay you will be of some use for two months."

"I am greatly obliged for the consideration you have shown me," said Beatrice Verner, in a low earnest tone. "On Monday, then, at noon."

"Exactly."

"Then I may go?"

"Certainly; your address is on your note?"

"It is. Good-morning."

"She is almost plain," mused Mrs. Garston, returning to her seat beside the fire. "If she had more colour it would do wonders for her, but she moves like a well-made woman. I wonder if she will be lucky to me. I am inclined to like her. Why am I a weak, miserable, superstitious fool! Why did I ask Lynford to come here! Why do I want to see him! He has forgotten the past. I had begun to forget, and now it has all come back, how vividly, to destroy the happiness I have worked and waited for! Why should I not charm him again! I am as handsome as ever. I read admiration in that child's eyes, just now, and I am a man's beauty! Then I am rich—rich—rich. I may buy Lynford and its master! He must, he shall love me, even for a while. He is changed. He is aged, but there is no one like him; *no* one!" She took a photograph which stood on her work-

table and kissed it passionately,—then she threw it from her angrily,—"and he never even noticed that I still kept it!" she exclaimed. "But his indifference *shall* not last."

Then she rang for her maid, and went into the question of her toilette for that day, when she was to dine with some Indian friends then in town.

Meanwhile Beatrice Verner put on a shabby water-proof, and put up an umbrella not innocent of splits, which had been left in the hall; then she set her face westward, walking quickly and firmly for a considerable distance, till she reached a region of small houses with gardens and high steps to their entrance-doors,—commonplace tenements of fifty or sixty years ago, before the diminutive graces of the miniature Queen Anne's style had been invented.

Into the neatest of these gardens she entered, and tapped at the side- or kitchen-door.

It was opened by a grave, even severe, looking lady, with hair already grey, though she was scarcely old enough for this development; tall and thin, with an ungraceful rigidity of figure. She

too wore black, and her dress was protected by a large white apron.

"What a horrid day!" exclaimed Beatrice, lowering her umbrella.

"Come in and take off your wet things at once. I am sure your feet are damp," said the elder lady.

"I do not think they are, Sarah," and Beatrice crossed the passage to the kitchen, where a small but bright fire glowed. "The warmth here *is* nice?"

"Then, sit down; it is the only fire in the house, but such a damp, chill day as this it would perhaps be wiser to put one in the parlour. The boys coming in would like it."

"Very likely," returned Beatrice, absently, drawing a chair to the fire, and beginning to unlace her boots.

Then Miss Verner, her only sister, said interrogatively,—

"Well?"

"It *is* well, I think. This lady, Mrs. Garston, is going to try me, and, Sarah, she will give me forty pounds a year. Just think of it! She says I am to dress well, but surely twenty pounds for

dress is splendid!—and I will send the rest to you!"

"It seems liberal," replied the elder. "But what kind of woman is she? that is the most important matter."

"She is lovely!" cried Beatrice, enthusiastically. "I love to look at her. But—now, why should I say 'but'? for I do admire her, and she is, in a way, a very grand lady; *but* there are tones and turns in her voice, and even words, which do not seem to me quite like a high-bred gentlewoman."

"What do you know, child, about grand ladies or high-bred gentlewomen? Don't let your fancifulness grow upon you. You have too many whims; never forget that you are middle-class, and no more."

Beatrice laughed softly. "I am not at all likely to forget; still, that is no reason why I should not perceive. I like to observe; it amuses and interests me; and a real gentlewoman would never have pointed out in the clear, unhesitating manner Mrs. Garston did that I was to be an upper servant. Oh! no, you need not warn me against being thin-skinned and weak. I never hesitated

for an instant to accept her offer nor her conditions. I am going to try and enjoy myself, too, *but* I shall have one shield against the darts of contumely; my employer is not likely to get inside the husk of my heart! Though I intend to be tremendously conscientious. Don't fancy Mrs. Garston was rude or rough; she is too content with herself to be needlessly unkind, but I imagine she would never hesitate to strike if necessary."

"I hope she is a *good* woman!" said Sarah, emphatically. "Did she ask if you were church or chapel?"

Beatrice shook her head. "Mrs. Garston is going away on Monday, and wishes me to join her the morning before——"

"And where is she going to take you?" interrupted the elder sister, anxiously.

"I don't know; I never asked. I was only too thankful to find employment—well-paid employment—after all my disappointments to hesitate about going even to Timbuctoo!"

"I greatly object to your going to a great distance, where I can keep no watch over you, nor know the sort of society you are thrown into,—or——"

"Ah! it is no use, Sal dear, trying to keep me with one hand and let me go with the other! You must trust me to myself, and I think you may. I am not a sentimental fool. I don't think myself a beauty. I don't fancy every man a hero, though I like them very much, and they are really kind and nice,—at least, those I have met."

"Perhaps so! But the less you see of them the better, especially in a circle such as this lady will probably have about her."

"I don't think you need disturb yourself, Sarah. It does not seem to me that I shall see much of my future mistress except when there is no one else to keep her company."

"Don't say 'mistress,' Beachy! I don't wish you to be pretentious, but always self-respecting."

"There is no want of self-respect in calling Mrs. Garston my mistress; she pays me, and I do her bidding. If she is intolerable, I will save up my money and leave her; my next venture may be more successful."

"I wish, my poor child, you could stay in the shelter of your own home!"

Beatrice unclasped her hands from round her

knee, and, rising, began to collect her hat and cloak and gloves; then she said, in a soft tone and with a little hesitation,—

"Well, I would rather not! Am I very heartless? I sometimes fear I am. But I feel quite pleased to try a new life. You cannot think how I long for new scenes and new people, change at any cost. No, I cannot be a nice girl, Sarah, and you are ever so much better to me than I deserve. You are awfully good!—yes, 'awfully' is the only word to express the height of your goodness."

"Your life has been monotonous, Beachy," said the elder sister, kindly.

"What has its monotony been to yours, dear Sal? Well," breaking off, "among the new things I pine for are new clothes, and here—here are five pounds Mrs. Garston has given me in advance to buy a dress, or what I most want; *that* was very kind of her! Just think how rich I shall be with three pounds six and eight pence every month, Sarah!"

"We shall want all our time, Beatrice, between this and Saturday, for that is all we have really. It is not raining now. Let us go to Barkers, in

the High Street, and see what we can get for you, as soon as Jane comes in. I was making a list only this morning of your absolute needs; fortunately your underclothes are fairly good, but a new dress and cloak or jacket you must have besides. No, don't put on those boots again; your shoes and galoches will do."

* * * * *

Sarah and Beatrice Verner were the daughters of a typical middle-class man of business; well thought of in the bank where he had served from boyhood, and had steadily risen in the estimation of his employers, when, from over-work or some other cause, he was seized with paralysis. Beatrice was about nine years old when her father's active life ceased, and his eldest daughter took charge of father, sister, and house at the early age of twenty. Verner had married a second time, when his eldest girl was about fourteen, after having been a widower for many years, and all his friends shook their heads over his choice,—a pretty, youthful, graceful, penniless governess, daughter of an impecunious ex-captain of cavalry. She, however, made their modest home very happy, till little Beatrice was nearly five years old, when

a bad attack of bronchitis carried her off. Grief for her loss no doubt hastened the approach of poor Verner's helplessness. He had happily been a prudent and a saving man, he had even speculated cautiously and successfully; but as time went on they were reduced to live upon capital which, with all her care and contrivance, Sarah had hard work to spin out. Hence Beatrice's scanty education, the narrowness and extreme monotony of their lives, and the absolute necessity of finding employment, when the poor father passed away from the mere physical life he had endured for many years.

The sisters were left with no provision beyond the small sum for which Verner had long before insured his life and the little abode he had purchased in happier and more prosperous days. This house the practical Sarah determined to keep and utilize by starting a boarding establishment for young clerks engaged in the bank or city offices. But for every reason it was desirable that a young girl like Beatrice should find some occupation apart from such a *ménage,*—at least, such was her sister's view of the matter.

The elder Miss Verner found what she wanted

much sooner than Beatrice, whose want of training and ignorance of all the "ologies" left her rather in a haze as to what she could attempt. It was, indeed, a most lucky and unexpected chance that sent Mrs. Garston to inquire for a "young person" to be her *lectrice* and *souffre douleur* from her solicitor's wife.

Sarah Verner was right,—life had been almost intolerably monotonous to the bright, eager spirit of her young sister, with its narrow, ceaseless economy, ever drawing in the limits of expenditure; its constant watching and ministering to the unfortunate, who grew daily more and more irritable, exacting, and uninteresting; the unbroken routine of dull duties and petty details. There were times when Beatrice felt she must run away, —were it even to become a maid-of-all-work and never see father or sister again; then a great wave of pity and admiration for Sarah—of deepest indignation with herself—would deluge her heart, and for days she would be so diligent, so submissive, so tender, that her sister was almost alarmed at the angelic sweetness suddenly displayed.

Now the longed-for change had come; and,

so far from being exultant and joyous, Beatrice nearly cried her eyes out at parting from the much-enduring Sarah. How lonely her good sister would be! how those horrid boys would bully her!—yet, no! Sarah had a spirit of her own and could stand up for herself; still, it was cruel to leave her. For herself, Beachy had neither tears nor fears; *she* would float. So, with a very pinky nose and swollen lids she presented herself and a fairly sized black box, containing all her worldly effects, at Renshaw's private hotel, about noon on the appointed Monday.

CHAPTER II.

"NEW GROUND."

FROM the moment of her arrival at Mrs. Garston's temporary abode, Beatrice felt that she had stepped into a new and an astonishing world. The magic power of abundant ready money was suddenly revealed to her. She could not have imagined anyone with so many wants as Mrs. Garston, and all were swiftly supplied; while another characteristic of this potent force was its economic action. Prompt payment secured moderate charges and valuable discounts, for the rich widow disdained no margin of profit which did not entail self-denial.

"Ah! you are up to time, Miss Verner. You can do some commissions for me, as Stéphanie is up to her eyes packing; besides, she is not much good in English shops. Do you want your luncheon, or can you wait till your return?"

"Yes; I am not hungry."

"That is right; I will tell them to get a cab for you by the hour. Don't trouble about paying; it will go down in the bill. Now here is the list. I have put down the shops, too, where I wish the things got, as you may not know the best places; and there—there are ten sovereigns. Bring back all the bills and make out the whole account; I may see if the change is right. It will show what you can do in the way of figures."

Beatrice glanced at the list. It was a long one,—gloves and stockings and books; "powder," "*crême de*" this, "essence de" that; various toilette implements; a heap of trifles for fancy-work. It would take two or three hours to make all these purchases.

"You must be as quick as you can; I want to leave by the three fifteen train. Why, what's the matter? You have been crying? You have made a perfect fright of yourself! I hope you are not emotional and tearful. I can't have a drooping dowdy about me; people will say how cruel Mrs. Garston is to that poor girl."

With instinctive tact, Beatrice managed to augh, though not very merrily.

"Do not be afraid," she said; "I am not given

to weeping, and if I am not happy I shall not stay with you." And she thought, "It will never do to let this rich, domineering woman ride over me,—nor to offend her, either."

"Ah! you are an independent young person, then?"

"No; no one is quite independent. I will do my best about your commission, and earnestly hope to give satisfaction."

"I hope you will; I must say you do not seem of the crying sort. Now go, like a good girl."

"One word!—where are we going? I don't care, but my sister wants to know."

"Oh! your sister is a dragon of prudence, I suppose. Well, we are going to Lynmouth,—a south-coast bathing-place, not quite four hours from town; so you need not trouble about distance. Now, pray, don't worry me with your relatives or anything! I am never ungrateful to people who smoothe things for me."

"Very well!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"Don't lose any more time," said Mrs. Garston, as she rang the bell and desired that a cab might be called, adding an injunction to Beatrice to bring everything back with her.

It must be confessed that Beatrice enjoyed her morning's work. To shop largely, with a sufficient supply of cash, cannot fail to soothe the female and also, we suspect, the male mind. A certain degree of self-reliance enabled her to select what pleased herself, and her taste was good; so she got through her task with a fair degree of rapidity, and when she returned she was met with an approving smile and invited to refresh with much amiability.

"Don't worry about the bills now; we can go into that to-morrow, when I shall have rather too much time. I expect to be very dull at first, but that does not signify."

Beatrice contrived to write a line to her sister, and then time was up. A brougham was at the door; a cab piled with luggage, in which Stéphanie and Hahn, the German courier, took their places, was drawn up behind it, and they were off!

Beatrice felt that it was a semiroyal procession, and wondered vaguely how long she would retain Mrs. Garston's favour. At any rate, it was an experience, and experience was always valuable.

* * * * * *

It was a fine, clear evening when they reached the end of their journey, and Beatrice was enchanted with the aspect of her new dwelling-place.

Lynmouth was prettily placed on the edge of a bay, sheltered on the south-east by a headland wooded on the shore side, and opening wide to the west, where a broad expanse of water was visible. An irregular row of houses and villas, with gardens stretching down to the beach, were nearest the sea; then, on a higher level, came semidetached cottages, lodging-houses, and a couple of streets which made up the business part of the place; and, behind all, a range of uplands, which sheltered the little town and bay from the northern blasts and entitled it to the character of being the south-coast Naples.

At the western extremity of Lynmouth a pier or jetty ran out to some length—where, in summer-time, steamers with excursionists called—and was overlooked by a monstrous, new red-brick hotel, where Mrs. Garston had secured rooms.

The air was fresh and salt; and Beatrice, as the light, invigorating breeze fanned her cheek, felt that life was good; that bright days must lie beyond the curtain of the future.

No such exhilaration seemed to have visited the spirit of her employer. Mrs. Garston was tired, bored, and cross. She was not an ill-tempered woman; she knew what she wanted, and was too intent on achieving her ends to grumble while trying to gain them, still she had fits of impatience which she did not hesitate to display to her employés. The admiring exclamations of Beatrice, therefore, found scant favour in her eyes.

"Pray, spare me these raptures!" she said. "There's no particular beauty in this dull place. You have seen so little, every mole-hill seems a mountain to you. You can't think how tiresome enthusiasm seems, when one does not share it."

"Very well, I will not bore you," said Beatrice, good-humouredly.

"I do hope we shall find a decent dinner ready," resumed Mrs. Garston. "English cooking is very bad." She paused and seemed to think, then she went on, "I believe I had better call you my secretary. A 'companion' sounds like the stuffy guardian of a decrepit old woman with a lap dog. A secretary is not always tied to one's apron-string like a companion. A secretary is not asked on visits."

"Nor a companion either," said Beatrice. "A companion is only a paid substitute for real companionship, which you have when on a visit."

Mrs. Garston looked at her as if her attention was suddenly awakened.

"I believe you are a sensible girl and may suit me."

"I hope I may! Then I shall be content."

Here they stopped at the hotel, and were received by a group of waiters, with all the *empressement* due to a guest who had engaged one of their best suites, and travelled with a secretary, a maid, and a courier. The manager himself ushered them to their apartments, which opened on a wide balcony overlooking the bay and the headland which locked it in.

Mrs. Garston approved, and her very considerable baggage was carried up. Beatrice, to her great satisfaction, found a diminutive but comfortable room in one of the corners of the huge building assigned to her, while Stéphanie had a much larger one next to her mistress.

Mrs. Garston asked for her writing materials and at once settled herself to prepare letters for the post, and Beatrice betook herself to unpack,

to arrange her few belongings, and to make acquaintance with the French maid, who interested her because she was a foreigner; and Beatrice had never met a foreigner before, save the French governess in the school she had attended for a few years, and of whom she had been very fond. She had romantic ideas about French people, and longed to speak the language which seemed to her the acme of refinement.

She did not think of the probability that Madame Stéphanie might look upon her as "a rival near the throne," and resent the sort of superiority implied by the title of secretary; so with the boldness of ignorance she addressed the keen-eyed Frenchwoman, who was small, slight, wiry, exceedingly dark, with distinct moustaches at the corners of her mouth.

"I suppose you speak English?"

"*Var* little; it is *var* strange in my mous; but ze people here are so ignorant, zey know no speaking, only their own. I must then say *notting*," she replied, gruffly.

"That is very tiresome for you! I wish I could speak French; it is such a beautiful language! I used to learn it, but, unfortunately, I left school, and I can only read a very little. I

should be delighted if *you* would speak to me sometimes, and teach me how to pronounce."

"Ah, ma foix! I have somesing else to do! Madame will not let me lose my time over any one but herself."

Beatrice felt rebuffed. "Then I must not trouble you," she said, good-humouredly, though she coloured. This talk took place in the passage leading to the staircase, where Stéphanie was emptying a box containing numerous useful and ornamental articles for the decoration of Mrs. Garston's sitting-room and her general comfort.

"I will carry some of those into the drawing-room for you."

"Bien! they are more your affair than mine." (We will not attempt to reproduce Stéphanie's English after the above specimen.) "You are the secretary,—the dame de compagnie. It is my business to make the dresses and the toilette and the hair. Why should I be fâché with the pictures and the vases, the clocks, the bibelots of the salon! Where I do not sit? Mon Dieu! it is not just."

"No, of course not," returned Beatrice, a little alarmed and a good deal surprised at the unex-

pected wrath thus unexpectedly roused. "I am quite ready to do my share of service when I know what it is."

The Frenchwoman rose from her knees and favoured her interloquitor with a glance from her piercing black eyes. "There, then, take this tray, and put these *objets* in their place; you ought to know how better than me——"

"I'll try," said Beatrice, and she went away with it.

"Ah! she is too complaisant," said Stéphanie to herself. "She wants to push me away gently, but I am not an *imbécile moi!*"

"How disagreeable she is," thought Beatrice, thrown upon herself, "but I shall not take any notice; she may come to like me. I should like to be friends with her," and she applied herself to arrange the various "objets" to the best of her ability, noticing with interest the titles of sundry volumes which were among the impedimenta. "I do hope Mrs. Garston is fond of reading. Why, here are some of Tennyson's poems—and George Eliot's novels—and—but they are not even cut! I hope she will have some new books too. I have read most of these." Then she went back for

another load; that completed the clearance, and Stéphanie screamed for Hahn, the courier, to remove the box. Her voice was high and shrill. Then Stéphanie walked into her own room, without a word, and shut the door. So Beatrice went to her apartment to make some change in her dress, and knocking at the door of Mrs. Garston's room, asked if there was anything for her to do.

"No," said that lady, impatiently. "I hope dinner will soon be ready."

So Beatrice retired to the drawing-room to enjoy gazing from the balcony. The scene seemed of fairy-like beauty to her, and her naturally buoyant spirits rose high.

"It is delightful here," she thought. "Money is a wonderful thing! Perhaps if my poor father could have come to a delicious place like this at the first, he might have got better, and enjoyed his life a little! I wish poor dear Sarah were here!—but I rather think she would enjoy cleaning the house thoroughly better than the finest view in the world. Ah, I am afraid I do not think enough of her! How brave and wise she is! What would have become of me without her——"

"Are you there, Miss Verner!" cried Mrs. Garston. "Don't you know dinner is ready?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon so much!" said Beatrice, coming into the room at a run.

"I fancy you are an enthusiastic miss," said Mrs. Garston. "I must say it would be an extraordinary view that would make me forget my dinner. "Come," and she led the way into the dining-room.

To Beatrice the dinner seemed grand enough for a serene, or even a royal, highness; but Mrs. Garston found fault, though she also gave praise, and conversed a good deal with the very superior waiter who attended on them respecting cooking and comestibles. While she evidently appreciated good things thoroughly, she also pressed her young secretary to eat hospitably enough. "What do you drink? Beer or wine?"

"Oh, thank you,—I have never taken anything but water."

"Perhaps that is just as well. It is better, I believe, for the complexion." Then to the waiter, "Bring a half bottle of Steinberger cabinet, if you have it. They will give me something with that name, at any rate," she said, with a smile,

as the man left the room; "but that won't do with me."

"You have some charming books, Mrs. Garston," said Beatrice, after a short pause.

"Have I? Well, you must read them to me. Hitherto I have not read much. What with the heat and being sick-nurse for ages, and all sorts of work and worries, I have been able to read very little; you must know I have been in India for years. I wonder I have an atom of complexion left! I ought to be dried up like a mummy!"

"But you have a *lovely* colour!" cried Beatrice, with such hearty admiration in voice and look that Mrs. Garston smiled benignly upon her.

"You are an inexperienced goose," she said. "Take some more peaches. No, I have had rather a hard life, and now I want to make up for lost time. Do you read much?—I mean for pleasure?"

"Oh, yes; I love reading. I have read all the books you brought."

"All of them?" cried Mrs. Garston. "Then you must tell me what's in them, and read me bits here and there. We'll get on quickly that way. Of course, I shall be going a good deal into society by and by, and I want to know what

all the others know. My education has been greatly neglected unfortunately; my father was a very harsh sort of person, taken up with his military duties, and I lost my mother early."

"Ah, so did I!" ejaculated Beatrice.

"Then my father sold me to a disagreeable, tyrannical old man,—as old as himself."

"Sold you!" repeated Beatrice, aghast.

"That is really the only word to describe the transaction."

"How unhappy you must have been!" exclaimed Beatrice, with warm sympathy.

Mrs. Garston glanced quickly at her, and said solemnly, "My only comfort was in the sense of doing my duty."

"Still, it must have been dreadful."

"It was! Let us go into the drawing-room, and you shall read to me before we go to bed. *I am* tired," she yawned, largely; rising from the table, she went into the drawing-room, passing into the balcony.

The sun had set and the light was fading, but there was still enough to show the bay and its surroundings.

"Yes, it is pretty enough," said Mrs. Garston

to Beatrice, who had followed her. Before she could reply, the waiter brought coffee.

"Put it on the table!" said Mrs. Garston, "and tell me whereabouts is Lord Lynford's place."

"The Hall?—right away at the top of the bay, in the woods behind the head, 'm; it's about three miles off. A great many visitors drive over to look at the old place; they say it's very hancient. If you *do* think of going there, I may mention that his lordship is coming down next week, and then no strangers will be admitted."

"So I suppose we had better go soon." And Mrs. Garston laughed; there was a touch of exultation in her laugh. "I suppose you have carriages and horses. We will have a look at the country to-morrow, Miss Verner. It is a lovely, soft evening. Bring out a small table and set the coffee here."

The man obeyed. Mrs. Garston poured out a cup for Beatrice and then slowly stirred her own.

"I should like to see this place," she said, after a short silence; "but I do not wish to go till Lord Lynford is there to receive me. You remember there was a gentleman sitting with me the first time you called?"

"Yes, I remember very well."

"I daresay; he is not a man to be overlooked."

"No; I should not like to vex him."

"Why?"

"He gives me the idea of being wicked,—I beg your pardon! it is not polite to speak so of your friend."

Mrs. Garston laughed as if far from displeased.

"Wicked enough, I daresay! My husband knew him long ago, and we used to see a good deal of him in India. He's the owner of this place I have been asking about. We shall see him down here soon after the 12th."

Beatrice was silent, not seeing any necessity for speech.

"Some more coffee?" asked Mrs. Garston.

"No, thank you."

"Then come in and read to me; it is growing a little chilly."

Mrs. Garston lay down on the sofa and sent Beatrice for a shawl to put over her feet.

"Since I left India I have been staying in Italy; so I am apt to be chilly," she said, as Beatrice tucked her up.

"What shall I read?"

"Oh, anything you like!"

Beatrice selected "Silas Marner," a great favourite of her own; and, growing interested in the well-known pages, read for a considerable time, till, pausing to observe on the excellence of a passage, she found her hearer was fast asleep.

Beatrice gazed at her surprised; then she had some difficulty in suppressing a laugh, and sat quietly contemplating the graceful, recumbent figure and handsome profile of her patroness as her head lay against the pillow. How handsome she was! thought Beatrice; and probably would be kind and good. There was a little something of self-assertion, of hardness—something undefined—which jarred upon the young secretary; but she put the feeling aside.

"I am too ready to find fault," she mused. "One should believe all people good till they prove the reverse, but I cannot; I am always fancying something or other. At any rate, the present is pleasant and promising, and I will not look beyond it."

Here Mrs. Garston awoke and looked round her, bewildered; then she laughed.

"So I have been asleep! Is that a compliment

to your reading?" she exclaimed. "I am very comfortable, but I may as well go to my bed; you can do as you like. Ring for Stéphanie. I always breakfast in my room; you can have what you choose at any time that suits you. Good-night! Here, Stéphanie! take my shawl!"—as the Frenchwoman appeared.

It was barely half-past nine. Beatrice felt very wide awake and hesitated what she should do. The drawing-room was large and oppressively empty; so she betook herself to her own little chamber, and stood watching the moon struggle through some fleecy clouds until its light streamed clear and silvery on the water beneath. Then she sat down and covered four sides of a sheet of paper with a fluent pen, describing in detail the hours which had passed since they had parted that morning, to her sister. Finally, she counted what money was left in her purse, earnestly hoping it would suffice till more was due; as, in spite of a certain amount of easy good humour in Mrs. Garston's manner, Beatrice did not by any means relish the idea of asking her for more.

* * * * *

The first few days of her new life were in-

teresting and amusing enough to Beatrice. Mrs. Garston, though unmistakably bored, was passably gracious. She gave her secretary a mass of small bills to enter in an account-book labelled "personal expenditure" and some short business letters to answer, having scribbled down directions in pencil; and she had the newspaper read aloud to her, and gave much more attention to it than to the great novelist's *chef d'œuvre.* Then they drove round the outside of the property, and Beatrice remarked the deep interest with which Mrs. Garston listened to his replies when she questioned their driver respecting the Hall.

The place was filling rapidly. Whole families —babies, perambulators, and all—arrived by the afternoon trains; and Mrs. Garston's face grew rather discontented as she watched this invasion.

"This is not at all the sort of place I expected," she exclaimed, as she looked down from the balcony at one of the little coasting steamers discharging her passengers; "but I suppose the holidays will soon be over and a different class will succeed. To-morrow will be the 12th, and——"

But her sentence remained unfinished, and, as

her eyes fell on a gentleman who was approaching from the pier, she cried,—

"Why, there is Captain Vincent! I did not know he was in England."

Beatrice looked in vain; she could distinguish no one who looked like a captain.

"I wonder if he knows I am here?" continued the widow; "he promised to let me know when he came to London. However, he will soon learn my whereabouts. Should he come up this afternoon or evening, you can leave the room; I have much to say to him. Don't make a fuss about it; just take up your work or writing and slip away to your room, or anywhere."

"Very well," said Beatrice.

After luncheon, as they were speaking of going out to drive, a card was brought to Mrs. Garston. "Show him up!" she said; and a slight, smart man of middle height, with very black hair and sharp, beady, black eyes, entered. He only seemed to see Mrs. Garston, but Beatrice felt he saw her too, and everything else in the room; but before he had finished shaking hands with Mrs. Garston, she had noiselessly left the room.

CHAPTER III.

"GLEANINGS."

"I BEGAN to think you had gone back to India," said Mrs. Garston, when she had resumed her seat, and her visitor had drawn a chair opposite to her.

"Why? It is a country I hope never to see again."

"Do you mean to say you will throw up your commission?"

"I am not sure; I intend to feel my way; one cannot throw away one kind of substance till you are sure of another in its place."

"Quite right, but belonging as you do to the Indian service, it will not be easy to find employment in England."

"Still it is possible," he returned, carelessly. "I suppose you expected to hear from me, but I thought it wiser to look after some matters about which you wanted information and then report to

you. How splendidly well you are looking! It is like a bath of sunshine to bask in your eyes!"

"No more of this absurd talk," exclaimed Mrs. Garston, sternly, her thick brows almost meeting in an angry frown. "You accepted my terms before we parted at Bombay, when I made it worth your while to understand my reasoning. It would be awkward if I were to break with you."

"Yes! a split between us would be very awkward for *both*," he returned, quietly, looking steadily into her eyes.

"Yours would be the worst awkwardness of the two," she said, and then laughed genially. "There, we must not quarrel, for we can be mutually useful! Come, tell me what you have been doing. You have been loitering on your way home, —doing the Italian towns and their galleries. I wonder if they bored you as much as they did me! But I did them conscientiously, and have got up a proper amount of jargon about them. Oh, I have been studying my part for the London boards diligently, I assure you!"

"Why do you give yourself so much trouble when you have only to come, to be seen, and to conquer?"

"I like to be armed at all points, my friend. I assure you, I was glad to find myself in town —in the town of towns—at last. I came a few days after Lynford. He had been away, you know, for a long time—of all places—in Abyssinia! but he did not look me up till I wrote to him. He said he had not heard of my arrival, which is possible; the society papers take no notice of my movements *yet*."

"Then, I suppose, there was a rapturous meeting!"

Mrs. Garston laughed a mocking laugh. "I think you know enough of Lynford to picture the sort of meeting between him and a woman he had half forgotten. No matter! that phase will pass. Do you know that the ground this little place stands on belongs to him?—or did, for I believe he had sold some of it at a ridiculously low price in his eagerness to touch ready money; and the family seat, Lynford Hall, is barely three miles away?"

"Yes! I have accidentally learned a great deal about Lord Lynford and his family history."

"Nothing wrong, I hope. No flaw in the pedi-

gree?—no possibility of some obscure claimant turning up?"

"No! He is all right. But when I had to see your solicitor, Tearle, about those claims against the Garston estate, Lord Lynford's name was mentioned as wanting a loan. I fancy Tearle does a good deal in that line. He then said he remembered the great Lynford succession suit,—you know the present man came in for the title and estates rather unexpectedly?"

"I know nothing about it," said Mrs. Garston, impatiently.

"He was a second or third cousin of the late Baron Lynford. Now, it seems that at the end of the last century, a Captain Clavering,—Clavering is, you know, the family name,—brother of the Lord Lynford of that date, fell in love with a blue-eyed daughter of the soil, and married her in some irregular fashion that, at any rate, seemed to her sufficient. He was not gifted with much strength of will, for after several years, she managed to make him go through another and perfectly legal ceremony. He had several children, but the youngest, a son, was the only one legitimate. Clavering died, leaving little or nothing,

and his family had hard times. Then Lord Lynford died a childless widower, so the captain's youngest son succeeded,—not without a fight, for the present man's grandfather opposed his claim, and the Lynford lawsuit became rather a *cause célèbre*.

"As is so often the case, a man brought up in poverty thinks there is no end to his wealth if he suddenly inherits property; so young Clavering, or rather Lord Lynford, proceeded to make ducks and drakes of his money. He married one of the De Burghs, a very aristocratic, extravagant lot, and had a son and a daughter; the latter married the Marquis of Alresford, and the son was lost in an Alpine expedition, together with another tourist and his guide."

"Good heavens!" cried Mrs. Garston, "don't say he fell down a *crevasse*, or he will be sure to turn up again and oust our friend!"

"No, no; he is safe enough; they found his mangled remains at the foot of a precipice."

"Ah! that's all right," ejaculated Mrs. Garston.

"The father was broken-hearted, but still he 'brokenly lived on.' They say the peasant cross greatly improved the breed as regards looks and

physique, but it also, I fancy, introduced a taste for strong drink. After the death of his wife, Lynford took to drink, and made a miserable end of it. There's the whole story."

"It's rather curious," said Mrs. Garston, carelessly; "but there is evidently nothing to fear from any claimant, so I need not change my plans. Did you hear anything of Lord Lynford's movements? I thought he would have been at the Hall before this."

"I only heard he was in Scotland."

"He intended being here for the shooting this month. He said so, at least."

Vincent's reply was a slight shrug of the shoulders and a gesture with the hands expressive of non-belief in the steadiness of human intentions.

"Well! If you have made any mems, I should like to see them," resumed Mrs. Garston, after a short pause.

"Yes, I have them here," said Vincent, and he drew a note-book from his breast-pocket.

"You have a young lady staying with you?" he added.

"Yes! are you surprised? She is a useful sort

of companion whom I pay. I am going to be desperately careful, and study appearances to the best of my ability. She seems very ordinary and biddable, so will not be much in my way."

"Don't be too sure. She is rather distinguished-looking and pretty; pretty girls always give trouble."

"*Pretty!*" screamed Mrs. Garston. "With her turned up nose and pale face! Why, Vincent! I thought you were accustomed to better types than *that.*"

Then Vincent opened his note-book, and took out a slip of paper covered with small writing, which furnished matter for a long and serious discussion.

When Beatrice had escaped from the drawing-room, much to her own relief, she sat down in the balcony outside her window to reread a letter which she had received that morning from her sister, and at which she had only glanced cursorily before.

It was amazing, considering that she never seemed to do much, how little time Mrs. Garston left at her own disposal. That lady never paused to arrange matters so as to spare her employés, but would issue her orders just as the whim took

her, so that the executant sometimes had to go a dozen times over the same ground. In spite of her healthy evenness of temper, Beatrice often felt keenly the difference between home and service, though she was inclined to like Mrs. Garston and credited her with good nature. Still, there were little indications in the looks, manner, expressions of the handsome widow which jarred upon her, she could hardly explain why.

It was a real pleasure to read her sister's letter, to dwell on its minute details of the humble home. Did she ever think she would look back to it with such tenderness and appreciation? How sick she used to be of its dulness, its irritating monotony! "I am afraid I was horribly selfish! I never seemed to see how good Sarah was,—but I do now! She has been like a mother to me. Of course, she scolded me; I daresay I deserved it. I hope Mrs. Garston will go to London soon. I do want to give Sarah a kiss!—not that she cares much for kisses. But I am thankful to be off her hands! I hope I shall never cost her anything more; perhaps I shall be able to send her some money to keep, or to use if she wants it. I am glad she is so hopeful. She expects another

boarder next week; then the house will be quite full. I wish she had a better servant; she would not be obliged to work so hard. I must stay on with Mrs. Garston for two years if I possibly can; I should have saved a good bit by that time,– at least, I ought. I do hope Mrs. Garston will not want me to buy another frock soon."

Beatrice folded up her letter and put it away in a small drawer, which she kept locked, and returned to the balcony to watch the movement constantly going on beneath. People came to and fro the pier, carriages drove up to the hotel laden with luggage, a German band discoursed fairly sweet music on the lawn in front, children—some in goat-chaises, some on donkeys—and their attendants crowded down to the sands; all Lynbourne was up and stirring, after the mid-day meal.

Presently a carriage approached on which Beatrice's attention became riveted. The conveyance was open, and was occupied by an old gentleman and a boy, while a man who looked more like a sailor than a valet sat beside the driver.

When the vehicle paused before the entrance,

the sailor-like man descended to open the door; he was short and broadly built, not fleshy, with large, tawny moustache; a soft hat surmounting an exceedingly weather-beaten face, with a pair of stern, solemn, light-brown eyes, as Beatrice afterwards perceived. His movements were heavy but decided, and had none of the supple, civil alertness of a gentleman's gentleman.

From the carriage descended first the old man, —at least, his head had given Beatrice the idea of age, even considerable age, until he alighted and stood upright; then she perceived that he was still erect and a striking figure. Tall, more than ordinarily tall, a grand and powerful form, and as yet showing little of "age's disgrace;" his abundant white hair was turned back from a broad brow, as she saw when he lifted his hat to wipe it with his handkerchief. He was clean-shaven, and Beatrice thought she had never seen a finer face, though the expression was severe, even forbidding. The features were clearly cut and refined, but there was the stamp of suffering of some kind legible on his face as he stood in the early evening light of a sunny day.

He moved aside, while his servant or attendant

stood upon the step and lifted out the boy with tender care; then Beatrice saw that he was deformed and older than she at first thought. The man set him gently down, while the old gentleman gave him a pair of crutches. While he stood for an instant thus, the boy looked up and met the compassionate eyes of Beatrice as she leaned over the balcony, watching with deepest interest the group, about whom she felt there was something uncommon. He smiled a sweet, frank smile, as if he recognised a friend. She drew back, fearful of seeming impertinently curious; then the trio slowly mounted the steps,—the old gentleman keeping pace with the slow movement of the crippled boy, the servant following with a bag, and all vanished within the portals of the hotel.

A few minutes after, while Beatrice stood gazing dreamily at the scene below, one of the light carts belonging to the establishment drove up. It was laden with battered-looking boxes and portmanteaus and an invalid-carriage of the newest invention. When she had seen these carried into the house, Beatrice bethought her that she was wasting precious time, when she ought to be mending or making; she therefore took out her

last piece of stitchery and set diligently to work, her imagination, as busy as her fingers, inventing a drama to fit the figures she had watched below.

There was something not exactly English about them, yet they were not foreigners. The man who fulfilled the functions of a valet had a curiously familiar air in speaking to his superiors, something quite republican. Ah, yes; that must be it! They were Americans—rich Americans—come to this delightful place for the poor boy's health. How white and frail he looked! What a contrast to the two stalwart men in attendance on him! Poor fellow! he ought to have some woman to nurse him! Had he no mother or sister, or——? Here a loud, antagonistic knock at her door startled her from her dreams. Her "come in!" was promptly answered by the appearance of Stéphanie.

"You are to put on your 'at and accompany madame to see a stable."

"A stable!" exclaimed Beatrice, greatly surprised.

"Don't open the eyes like that! If it is not the stable, it is what lives there,—I forget the word."

"Oh, yes; a horse!"

"That is it; and a stupid word for 'cheval' it is! Now, you must not spend one hour on your toilette; madame waits."

"I shall be ready in five minutes."

"Five minutes! Ah! I know your five minutes. Is that all you have of 'ats? Madame will not be pleased; it is a little charity 'at."

"Well, I have nothing better. You have so much taste, Stéphanie, I wish you would make me one."

"*Grand Dieu!*" and Stéphanie paused, petrified by such audacity in a mere "*demoiselle de compagnie.*"

"No. I don't think you like me well enough to take so much trouble," added Beatrice, with a good-humoured laugh, as she thrust a long pin through her hat and the thick coil of hair below it; then she hastily put her work in a drawer and was hurrying away, when Stéphanie called to her.

"You go away like one goose, leaving your key in the lock!—in an hotel, too! Do you want the *femme de chambre* to—what you call rummage everything you have?"

"Oh, thank you! But I don't suppose the chamber-maid would look at anything; she seems very nice."

"Imbecile!" — with the deepest contempt. "Think you there is any one so nice as not to rummage? You would do it yourself!"

"No, indeed; I would not!" cried Beatrice, laughing and pocketing her key as she hurried away.

Stéphanie looked after her with a somewhat indulgent expression. *"Idiote, — mais pas mal honnête!* Make her a hat! What an idea! *Tiens!* I could suit her well—but very well, if such a thing were to be thought of——" Then she took a look round, and finding nothing open to inspection, retired to her own quarters.

Meanwhile, Beatrice reached Mrs. Garston's sitting-room in hot haste, and stopped short on seeing only Captain Vincent, who was walking slowly to and fro.

He also paused, looking coolly at her from head to foot, a half smile on his lips; then he said, civilly,—

"Mrs. Garston has gone to put on her outdoor garments, and will return immediately."

Beatrice bowed and sat down to finish putting on her gloves. Vincent stood by the window.

"Nice lookout here; seems a cheery little place."

"It is delightful! and in the early morning or at sunset quite beautiful. I think——"

"Yes, it is very pretty; and the sail along the coast is very pretty, too, in a tame way. I came by steamer from Portsmouth. Taken a cruise yet?"

"No; I don't think Mrs. Garston cares for going in a steamer."

"Very likely she doesn't. I daresay she'll go out in Lord Lynford's yacht when he comes down; he is a great yachtsman. Know Lord Lynford?"

"No; I have just seen him."

"He is a capital seaman, a crack shot, and all that sort of thing, I am told."

"Been long with Mrs. Garston?" he asked, after a short pause.

"About a fortnight."

"Knew her before?"

"No; an old friend recommended me to her. I am only on trial," she added, with a smile, which

induced Vincent to say to himself, "By Jove! she *is* pretty, whichever way her nose may turn!"

"On trial? Safe for her, eh?"

It seemed to Beatrice that this man was unnecessarily inquisitive and familiar, and yet she did not exactly know how to check him. "I will go and see if Mrs. Garston is ready," she said, rising; but before she could reach the door that lady entered, looking very handsome in her half-mourning attire and a shady hat with soft, gray feathers, turned up at one side, where a cluster of scarlet geranium blossoms lay on her glossy black hair.

"I fear I have kept you waiting, Captain Vincent; but I was obliged to find out where this horse is to be seen. I know now; it is at the end of the esplanade, as you go towards the station. Hahn, my courier, says this is a good chance; for the animal is sound and will go cheap. I have some knowledge of horses myself, but I should like another opinion; so come along."

Passing through the wide entrance hall, Mrs. Garston's quick eye was caught by the rough-looking man whom Beatrice had noticed an hour or two previously and had "placed" as valet to

the crippled boy. He was in the act of moving the invalid carriage out of the way into an inner passage.

"I wonder what that rugged, pioneer-sort of creature can be,—not a gentleman nor a gentleman's servant, I am sure," she said.

"There's a touch of 'seafaring' in his look," remarked Captain Vincent.

"I think he is servant to an old gentleman and a boy whom I saw arrive to-day; they are all rather remarkable in look and style."

"I already feel quite curious about them. What a sign of being in a small, out-of-the-world place," said Mrs. Garston, laughing. "Really, I am growing very sick of it. I don't know how I should get through the day but for the system of baths and exercise prescribed for me." She took Bea's arm as she spoke, allowing the captain to come next her on the other side.

"Prescribed," he repeated. "Why, what need have you for prescriptions? You have the finest health of any woman I ever met!"

"Still, the worry of my life began to tell on me, and the heat of Italy after the heat of India.

I had grown weak and fanciful, but already I feel greatly better and fresher."

"You look fresh enough," he returned, emphatically.

Then the conversation turned on people and topics of which Beatrice knew nothing, and she walked the whole way—perhaps about a mile and a half—without opening her lips or hearing a word addressed to herself. When they reached the stables, she was at once interested in the horses, though not a little alarmed at seeing Mrs. Garston pass so close to their heels, she herself kept near the door. Then the animal under discussion, a handsome bay with black points, was taken out and trotted, walked, and cantered up and down in an adjoining paddock, while the conversation became more than ever an unknown tongue to Beatrice. Hocks and hoofs were discussed, legs felt, the setting on of head and tail mentioned, the girth of barrel talked of, while the creature itself glanced at its possible purchasers with such soft, dark, intelligent eyes that Beatrice quite longed to be on intimate terms with and venture to caress it.

"But a hundred and fifty guineas is a great

deal too much money," said Mrs. Garston, gazing thoughtfully at the mare.

"She is worth every penny of it, ma'am," said the owner of the stables, who had joined them on hearing that some gentry from London were "after" the mare. "She's a real well-bred 'un,—nothing better ever came out of the Lynford stables. My lord himself was over here yesterday to look at her, and I'm thinking he is loath to let her go."

"Do you mean Lord Lynford?" asked Mrs. Garston, quickly.

"Yes, 'm. He's uncommon fond of horses, and doesn't like letting anything he has ridden or grown used to, go out of his stables; he had a good look at h'Ariel,—that's her name,—and got on her back, going over a fence or two, just as light as a feather; then he ses, 'Don't come to h'any agreement with h'any one,' ses he, 'without coming to me first. If I winter at the Hall,' ses he, 'I won't part with her.'"

"What astonishing constancy!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, and Beatrice was struck by the scorn in her tones. "Has Lord Lynford been long at the Hall?"

"I can't exactly say,—might be a week. There's

very little going to and fro between this and the Hall. You see, there's only one or too old servants left now, and a little walking goes a long way with them. Ah, times *is* changed!"

Mrs. Garston was silent for a few seconds. Then she said, carelessly, "I shall think of it, and let you know what I decide. Come, let us go back, Captain Vincent. By the bye," to the stable-keeper, "is there another way back? I don't care to walk along that dusty road again, with the sun in my eyes."

"There is another way, and a pretty way, only a trifle longer. You turn to the right going out of this, and you'll see a stile leading to a path through the cornfield; there's a plank across a bit of a stream at the other side of it, and then you'll be in the pine-wood; keep to your left, and, though it's up and down a bit, it will take you straight enough to the town,—you'll come out by the Little Bethel Meeting-house, not a quarter of a mile from the post-office."

Mrs. Garston thanked him, and they set out on their homeward way.

The path in most places was barely wide enough for two, and Beatrice found herself left

behind and generally ignored. Nevertheless, the walk was delightful,—the odour of pines, the sparse undergrowth of brambles and fern, and the glimpses here and there of the blue sea between the stems of the trees, all was so new, so delightful, in her eyes.

Mrs. Garston was very silent, and received all Vincent's attempts at conversation with discouraging indifference.

They had accomplished about half the distance when a couple of dogs that were running to and fro after the fashion of setters came up barking, as if questioning the right of these pedestrians to march through the woods; then someone whistled, and a gentleman in knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket came up a short, steep hill in front of them, and pausing, raised his soft, brown-felt hat.

Beatrice immediately recognised Lord Lynford, whose face had impressed itself very clearly on her memory.

"Lord Lynford!" cried Mrs. Garston before he could speak. "I had no idea you were here. What an indifferent host, not to have been sooner to call upon me! I look on you as my host,

you know, because I am squatting on your territory."

"Allow me to observe that I only arrived the day before yesterday," he returned, shaking hands, and then raising his hat, with a polite bow, to Beatrice. "Moreover," he continued, "I am now returning from an attempt to find you at your hotel."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Garston, with a smile. "Suppose you turn with us and walk back. Captain Vincent, Lord Lynford. You must remember Captain Vincent at Chandrapore?"

"I have a very distinct recollection of him," returned Lynford, and his tone in some vague way suggested to Beatrice that the recollection was neither advantageous to Vincent nor agreeable to the speaker. However, they all went on together, Lynford and the widow in front, while Vincent was unavoidably relegated to the companionship of the secretary.

"Hum!" said Vincent, with a curl of his lip. "Now the sun has appeared, we shabby little stars are totally eclipsed."

"Of course," returned Beatrice, laughing. "I don't even pretend to be a shabby little star; I

am but a rushlight, useful and perceptible only where there is no other."

"And very useful, then, though your usefulness will not evoke much gratitude."

"Oh! I have my salary, and ought to be content with that."

"You are a sensible young woman," said Vincent, gravely; "and Mrs. Garston is in her usual luck. Generally, lady companions and secretaries are great bores, with their claims and pretensions."

"Are they?" she returned.

Vincent made no reply, and they walked on in silence,—a very sulky silence on his part.

"How cross and disagreeable he is! I don't think he is a gentleman," thought Beatrice; and she listened to the tones of Mrs. Garston's voice, though she could not hear her words. It seemed as if she did all the talking and a good deal of laughing, too; but Beatrice did not catch the sound of Lynford's voice. Occasionally the dogs came up to them. One—a handsome red Irish setter—made great advances to her, thrusting its nose into her hand as it hung by her side. Lynford sometimes turned his head and whistled to

the dogs, and seeing this manœuvre of the setter's, called to him.

"I am afraid he is making too free," he said, politely. "People unaccustomed to dogs do not like these advances from strange ones."

Mrs. Garston turned and stared with displeased surprise at the young secretary, calling the quick-coming colour to her cheek by the sense of wrong-doing her glance created.

"I am not the least afraid of dogs," said Beatrice, vexed at showing disturbance when she had so firmly resolved to be sensible and immovable; "I am flattered by this creature's notice."

"Don't notice him too much; he will take an ell if you give an inch." And they resumed their order of march.

"Lynford is considered a very fascinating personage," said Vincent, after walking some way in silence. "Does he seem like it to you?"

"No; certainly not. I think he is—well, not exactly ugly, but forbidding. I think I should be quite afraid of him, though I ought to be ashamed of such folly."

"It is a natural feeling. Lynford is one of the most overbearing, tyrannical, selfish fellows that

ever breathed! Doesn't care whom he tramples on so long as he gratifies his own fancies."

"What a bad character! I suppose you know him very well," exclaimed Beatrice, astonished at her companion's want of reticence.

"Yes; I knew a thing or two about him when he was out in India, some years ago. It would have made you sick to see the fuss the women made about him."

His denunciation, however, made small impression on Beatrice; in fact, it modified her feeling of distrust towards Lynford considerably, so little did Vincent attract her confidence. Under a dropping fire of unconnected sentences they reached the hotel and paused on the steps.

"Can you not join us at dinner to-day, Lord Lynford?" said Mrs. Garston. "Captain Vincent leaves to-morrow, and I do not the least object to your sportsman's garb?"

"Oh, impossible! I expect my old friend, the rector, to dine with me, and a couple of fellows are to arrive to-night, so I must not quit my post; but I'll have the pleasure of calling soon again. By the way, that mare is at your service while you are here, but I am not sure I shall sell her."

"Thank you very much; we will talk about that. I don't fancy riding with a groom. Do you know I think there is a much prettier view from the east side of the hotel than the other?"

"Are your rooms to the west?" asked Lynford. "They are not so good, in any way. I should advise you to change before anyone else has snatched the eastern suite."

"I think I shall," said Mrs. Garston, holding out her hand. Adieux were exchanged, Lynford making Beatrice a grand bow, while he shot a cold, scrutinising glance at her from under his thick lashes.

"I am frightfully tired!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston. "I shall lie down till dinner-time; then come, if you like."

Vincent brightened at this ungracious invitation, and, taking the hint, turned away to the pier.

"Send Stéphanie to me! I don't want you now," was her dismissal to Beatrice.

CHAPTER IV.

"A NEW ACQUAINTANCE."

MRS. GARSTON'S walk had been too much for her. A few minutes before the hour fixed for dinner Beatrice was summoned to her room. She found her still in her dressing-gown and lying on the sofa. "I have always been so well hitherto," she said, in a complaining tone, "that I overrate my strength. I have done quite too much to-day. As to sitting up at table, it is quite out of the question. So you must explain to Vincent. He is coming to dinner."

"What! am I to receive Captain Vincent?" exclaimed Beatrice, in accents more of surprise than pleasure.

"Why? don't you like him?" asked Mrs. Garston, with a faint degree of interest.

"I neither like nor dislike him. He is a stranger, but I am sure *he* will not like having to dine alone with *me*, and that will make *me* uncomfortable."

"Oh, pooh! nonsense! Part of your duty is to save me from being bored or worried. There is a good dinner,—at least, I hope so; *that* generally consoles a man, and, indeed, some women! So don't worry. Just go and make a civil excuse. As soon as you have eaten you can leave him to smoke and come here to me. Should he be inclined to ask questions, don't answer, and don't let him make love to you. He's not worth powder and shot!"

"Make love to me!" cried Beatrice, opening her eyes in unfeigned astonishment. "He would hardly dream of *that* on one day's acquaintance."

"Oh, you know nothing about it! I sometimes wonder whether you are a simpleton or remarkably shrewd; there—don't worry—go and smooth Vincent down."

With a good-humoured smile, Beatrice left the room, well knowing that to Mrs. Garston there was *point de replique.*

She had hardly reached the drawing-room when Captain Vincent was announced, and Beatrice did her best to compose a neat little speech. Smooth speaking, however, was not her forte, and she had some difficulty in keeping her countenance as she

watched the disgusted, disappointed expression of his, as he realised that he was to dine *tête-à-tête* with the insignificant little secretary.

Beatrice was of too healthy, too strong a nature to be moved or wounded by people to whom she was indifferent. When it came to those few whom she loved, it was another matter.

Still, the dinner was not cheerful, though Vincent did justice to the fare; both were exceedingly silent, and as soon as Beatrice had finished a peach, which she made it a point of honour to peel with much deliberation, she said, pleasantly, "Now, Captain Vincent, good evening! I shall leave you to smoke." She was gone, almost before he could reply.

"You have not been long over your dinner," said Mrs. Garston, with a yawn, when Beatrice rejoined her. "I suppose Vincent was not pleased?"

"He was greatly disgusted," said Beatrice; "still, he preserved some appetite, and I left him to smoke."

"I am horribly tired! Yet I cannot sleep. I wish you would read me something; it might send

me off. What is the name of that last book,—the one you like so much?"

"'Westward Ho!' I think it is more likely to wake you up!"

"No! reading is more likely to prove a soporific. I am not naturally studious,—nothing interests me like life,—real life!"

"This seems real life to me," returned Beatrice, taking up the book.

Though Beatrice had seen so little, she was a keen, quick observer; an impressionist, too, for she was too young to reason respecting her impressions. When two or three days passed, and Lynford failed to pay his promised visit, she drew her own conclusions respecting the cause of Mrs. Garston's restlessness and irritability. The effect of these reflections was to interest her profoundly both in Mrs. Garston and Lord Lynford, especially the former, whose happiness she feared would not be secured by marriage with so unamiable a character as she fancied Lynford must be. Indeed, with her usual facility, she built up a neat little romance round her handsome employer. She saw her bravely but sadly enduring the weary years of unloving servitude with the

cruel tyrant to whom her father had "sold" her, supported by a sense of duty; she felt what a pleasant break in the gray dulness of her life the visit even of an acquaintance so little sympathetic as Lord Lynford must have been. She saw them meet again, both free, and Lynford, remembering the pain of her past, and touched by her loneliness, began to feel and to show a warmer feeling for her than formerly; she responded to it, and now nothing but some little accident that would show each the heart of the other was required to wind up the storiette to the sound of wedding-bells! "Then I shall be sent away," reflected Beatrice. "I suppose people who have husbands don't want companions too! But I really think I should be a pleasanter companion than Lord Lynford. I am sure he could be cruel and tyrannical! Yet I think I should prefer dining *tête-à-tête* with him than with Captain Vincent. He is very polite! Then, I daresay, Mrs. Garston would like to be Lady Lynford,—a great many people would. I should like to be very rich, but I do not think I should care to be called 'my lady.'"

There was nothing in Mrs. Garston's conduct or manners at this time to deserve the thought

and sympathy lavished on her by her ingenuous secretary. She was harsh, rude, exacting, and even quarrelled with Stéphanie and dismissed her, retracting the dismissal next day, however, and patching up a peace with the gift of a nearly new dress.

To Beatrice, however, she made no amends for her trying behaviour,—a secretary is much less important than a clever maid. The day but one following their walk with Lord Lynford, Mrs. Garston, after snubbing Vincent for not having gone up to town, and offending that much-enduring satellite, discovered that she had been deeply wronged by the hotel people because they had not offered her the opposite suite of rooms. "I believe those wretched Americans have them! I shall speak to the manager, and get him to change these. Why should those backwoodsmen have the best rooms?—any others would do well enough for them."

"It must be a great comfort to that poor crippled boy to have a beautiful view from his windows."

"That is nothing to me! Low people of that kind do not care for scenery."

"They do not look like low people. I saw the boy on the beach this morning; the servant was wheeling him in his little carriage. He looked rather cross and miserable,—no wonder, poor child."

Mrs. Garston took no heed of this speech; she rang the bell impatiently. It was quickly answered.

"I want to see the manager," she said, peremptorily; "send him to me." The waiter bowed and disappeared, to be soon replaced by the manager,—a small, light-coloured man, with a low voice and nervous manners.

"Oh, Mr. Manby! I want to ask you why you did not give me those rooms facing south-east? They are far better than these, and I prefer the view."

"Well, madam, we generally reserve that suite for large parties; and as you, madam, had no one with you but your attendants, I thought——"

"If I am ready to pay for them," she interrupted, "why should I not at least have the refusal of your best rooms?"

"I am sure I am exceedingly sorry that you find any cause for dissatisfaction, madam. Had

the rooms not been engaged, we should have been most happy to change your apartments. As it is——"

"As it is," she again interrupted, "there is no reason why those men should not give them up. What has been good enough for me is good enough for them. If I cannot have the rooms I want, I shall take one of the villas which are still unoccupied."

"Well, madam, I should be very sorry if you left our establishment. I shall venture to suggest that Mr. Tyrrell should exchange his rooms for yours, though he is rather an arbitrary gentleman. Unfortunately, he went up to town this morning and does not return till to-morrow evening; but if you will be so good as to wait——"

"Till the day after to-morrow! I suppose I must; but remember that if I cannot have those rooms I will leave the hotel."

The manager bowed and retired.

That evening brought a note from Lord Lynford, on the receipt of which Mrs. Garston's face took a new and ameliorated expression. She made no remark, however, to Beatrice, but she listened more attentively to her reading, speaking

of the plot with some intelligence and a clear recollection of the leading facts; but to the delineation of character, the subtle play, and interaction of motives she was quite impervious.

"These writers worry so about *why* people do things," she said, impatiently. "It is all plain enough! One wants to be rich, or powerful, or admired, or loved, or revenged on those who try to humble you or baffle you. You needn't write yards to describe it all; I seem to understand people easily enough."

"You must be very clever," said Beatrice.

Mrs. Garston looked up quickly at her secretary, but read no sign of satire in her eyes or on her lips.

"I have seen a good deal. I can see that *you* care for me; you feel I am kind and liberal, and I am. You are a curious creature, Beatrice; you admire me, though you are a woman; but at the bottom of all is the knowledge that I am rich and can be of use to you, which is natural enough. There's Stéphanie; she doesn't like me, really, but it is to her interest to serve me. She makes me pay, of course; still she does more with me than you could; we understand each other. If I lost

my money to-morrow, Stéphanie would not stay an hour with me; you might—for two." And she laughed.

"I hope you will never lose your money, Mrs. Garston," said Beatrice, colouring, yet holding back the warm words which sprang to her lips; "poverty would be unendurable to you. I hope, at all events, that I am not more heartless or ungrateful than others."

"I don't believe much in gratitude," returned Mrs. Garston.

"Yours must be a horrid, cold, cruel world!" cried Beatrice. "I believe it would all go to pieces if there was no kindness, no thought for others, to hold it together."

"My world," repeated Mrs. Garston, slowly, "is one for which you are unfit and probably will never enter."

"Perhaps that is just as well for me," returned Beatrice, contentedly; and a pause ensued, which was at length broken by Mrs. Garston speaking abruptly, as if out of her thoughts.

"Lord Lynford tells me he has been called away to his brother-in-law, Lord Frederic Ormonde, who was dangerously ill; but he returns to-day. I

hope he will ask Lady Frederic, his sister, to meet me. I believe she is a very charming woman, of great style and fashion; she might be very useful. I wonder if she is very handsome? They say she is very like her brother."

"Then she cannot be a beauty!"

Mrs. Garston's only reply was a laugh, as if Beatrice had said something very amusing.

The day but one after was soft and grey, with little or nothing of a breeze to stir the air,—an atmospheric condition which drew the perfume from grass and shrubs and flowers. Beatrice longed to go out and wander on the beach; but Mrs. Garston seemed averse to leave the house, though she was restless and silent, occupying herself at intervals with her bank-book and a sheaf of letters from her lawyer. When she put these away, she went out on the balcony and seemed to be gazing at the view for some minutes; then she stepped hastily back into the room, exclaiming,—

"Here is Lord Lynford! he is riding. You need not wait."

"Very well," said Beatrice, gathering up her work and thrusting it into the fine embroidered

velvet bag in which Mrs. Garston liked to keep it. "If you are not likely to want me, may I go for a stroll on the beach?"

"Oh, yes! go where you like, only don't be late for luncheon."

"Thank you," returned Beatrice, and left the room.

The chief staircase of the hotel descended from the corridor on which the rooms occupied by Mrs. Garston opened, and at the end where the chamber of Beatrice was situated; so as she approached her own door she met the solemn waiter who was conducting him and Lord Lynford, face to face.

He stopped, and, bowing politely, asked how she was, with a half smile,—as if she was rather an amusing object, it seemed to her.

"Mrs. Garston at home?" he added.

Beatrice replied briefly and turned into her own room to put on her hat.

Mrs. Garston was standing by the window in rather an expectant attitude when Lynford entered, and he thought he had never seen her look so handsome. There was a soft joyousness in her brilliant eyes,—a look of tender welcome in her

face and even of unusual refinement in her general aspect which he could not recall, even in those by-gone days when she had temporarily fascinated him.

"I thought I was never to see you again," she said, coming forward with outstretched hand.

"You must have known that there was some good reason for my non-appearance," he returned, shaking hands with her. "Ormonde was seized with pleurisy and was in great danger for some hours,—he is never very strong,—so Frances telegraphed for me. She is rather a helpless little woman. However, her husband is coming round. As soon as he can travel I hope he will come to the Hall for a week or two, on his way to the Riviera."

"Then perhaps I may have the pleasure of meeting Lady Frederic Ormonde; I have heard so much of her," and Mrs. Garston looked languishingly into Lynford's eyes. "I believe she is very charming."

"Yes, if she chooses, she is rather taking, but she has a fair share of whims."

"Ah, you doubt if she would like me!" cried the widow, quickly. "That would be unlucky, for,

if she chose, she could be of great use,—in advising me respecting the choice of a house in town, for instance, and many other matters, as I am sure so old and dear a friend as *you* are would wish her to do."

Lynford laughed.

"I assure you, Frances was never of the least practical use to any one in her life, though she is not a bad sort; but you'll be settled in town, and queening it in society, before the Ormondes come back from the Riviera. There's a relation of mine, Mrs. Fielding, who would be a far more useful and efficient 'pioneer.' I must introduce her to you before I leave England."

"And you intend to leave England now? Just when I have arrived?" An eloquent, appealing glance accompanied her words.

"Why, you will be leaving it yourself, I suppose? You will never stand the gloom and depression of an English winter; you'll be off to the sunny south by the middle of October," returned Lynford, quite unmoved.

"Ah, Ralph!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, with a sound of tears in her voice. "You would not

have spoken in *that* tone to me a few years ago, at Umrapore,—all things were different then!"

"Ah, yes! Those were delightful days. But I am happy to think that the 'present' is considerably better for *you,*—you are free, you are your own mistress, rich, and beautiful as ever!"

Mrs. Garston shrugged her shoulders. "I wonder how much happiness my wealth can buy for me!—and you! What is the sum total of *your* present, Lord Lynford?"

"Oh, there's a decided deficit in all directions. I am nearly stone-broke financially. I have no prospect of rebuilding my fortunes, nor of recovering my lost opportunities; my ambition committed suicide long ago, and I have no particular object in existence. So I intend to pull along in a small way, and get what enjoyment I can out of life. I hope I am strong enough not to sink into a grumbler, but bear what I have brought on myself without senseless complaining."

"Money might mend so much!" said Mrs. Garston, in a low tone.

"No doubt! if I could make it myself. However, let us not spoil the present moment with remorseful regrets for the irrevocable past,—the

past always is irrevocable!—but try to catch a few sunbeams while we may. If to-morrow is bright and pleasant, will you do me the honour of coming to lunch? Then I can show you over my rather curious old house. It may interest you. Will two o'clock suit you? I am quite alone."

"I shall be very pleased to come. But, as you are alone, you must let me bring my little secretary. Propriety in England is, I know, a raging lion, and I shall not give myself to its destroying powers."

"What? Your young *souffre douleur?* She is nearly as tall as yourself."

"'Little' applies to her position, not her stature; she is a very small personage, indeed."

"No doubt. Oh, bring her, by all means! Where did you pick her up? She looks like a gentlewoman."

"Yet she is of very humble origin,—the daughter of a broken-down bank clerk, without a penny she can call her own."

"She is fortunate, then——" Lynford was beginning when a waiter, salver in hand, presented himself.

Mrs. Garston took the card which lay upon it, and read aloud, in a tone of some surprise, "Mr. John Tyrrell."

"Will you see the gentleman, 'm?"

"Yes—that is—yes. Show him in;" then, as the waiter retired, she said, rapidly, "He is the American who has the rooms they ought to have given to me." Before she had ceased speaking the door was thrown open and "Mr. Tyrrell" was announced.

Thereupon a striking figure entered,—a tall, very tall, old man, with white hair, fine, wavy, profuse hair, brushed back from a broad forehead; his eyebrows, still thick and dark, shaded large, solemn, deep-blue eyes. He was clean-shaven, and his remarkably resolute, though finely moulded mouth and chin, were fully displayed; his aspect was rather leonine, his skin deeply embrowned and weather-beaten. There was nothing conventionally distinguished about him, yet he had a natural air of strength and nobility.

He paused after a few steps forward, and made a low bow to Mrs. Garston. Then, taking her note from his pocket, said, in deep but

musical tones, "I have ventured to answer your note in person, madam."

"You are very good," she murmured, smiling graciously. Good looks in the opposite sex were always a passport to her favour. "Pray sit down," she added, with a look to Lynford, which he answered by bringing forward a chair.

"Thank you," said Mr. Tyrrell, with a sharp glance at Mrs. Garston's visitor. "My first impulse on reading your missive," he continued, taking the seat offered him, "was to accede at once to your request, as it is but natural to oblige a lady; but when I explain that I have a grandson, a crippled lad of nearly fourteen, who is cut off by the result of a most unfortunate accident from all the joys, the games, the physical exhilaration of outdoor life, and that his greatest pleasure, when not on the beach, is to lie on his couch in the window, which looks both land and seaward, trying to catch the colouring of earth and sky, and fix them in his sketch-book, you will, I think, understand that I must reluctantly refuse, and forgive my apparent want of courtesy, though doubtless 'no' is an answer rarely given to *you,*" and he looked admiringly at her.

"His voice is neither American nor English," thought Lynford, "and it's not a 'society' voice either, but it's a devilish good one."

"Oh, pray say no more, my dear sir!" cried Mrs. Garston, in her sweetest manner. "Your explanation is quite sufficient. I would not disturb you on any account; pray forgive me for troubling you! I am, perhaps, too much accustomed to have my own way, but I hope I am not selfish."

"Of course, you have your own way," returned the old man, with an indulgent smile that gave a great charm to his stern face. "You are the sort of woman who will always rule."

"I have always heard how gallant Americans are," she returned, with a playful shake of the head.

"I am not an American. I am a Britisher right through, though I feel very strange in Britain. It is over fifty years since I stood last on English ground."

"A long expatriation," observed Lynford. "What wonderful changes you must find!"

"Rather, I find everything fresh and new. I was too young to observe things deeply in those distant days."

"And do you think of returning to——" Mrs. Garston paused.

"To Australia," put in Tyrrell. "Not if I can find a home to my liking, and I suppose I shall. My poor lad is greatly taken with this country,—the smoothness and grace of life, and the soft convenience of an old country, where the wheels are well oiled and everything is in its place, is better suited to a weakly invalid than the rough, bracing existence of our colonial home. But he is a bright boy, and has his happy moments, I assure you,—thanks be to God."

"You must have seen the beginning of almost all things in Australia," said Mrs. Garston.

"Not quite, madam. I did not reach Sydney till the beginning of the gold-fever. I had had some experience of American life first."

"You have been a great traveller," returned Mrs. Garston.

"I have gone round considerably in my day,—but I must not trespass longer on you, madam! Perhaps one day you will come and see my poor boy. The sight of you will do him good, if you will be so benevolent." He rose as he spoke, bowed to Mrs. Garston, and less deferentially to

Lynford. "This matter, then, is happily settled, and I wish you good-day."

"What a picturesque old boy!" exclaimed Lynford, as the door closed. "There is something very original about him. He isn't colonial nor English nor American!—that man must have a history."

"No doubt he has!" rejoined Mrs. Garston. "How old is he,—seventy? If so, he might have left his country for his country's good, as somebody says. Fifty years ago, Sydney was a penal settlement."

Lynford laughed. "All things are possible," he said. "But I do not believe *this* man left England at the expense of government. I seem to have seen his face before,—in a dream, perhaps! Well, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow? I'll call for you and your 'lady in waiting' about one o'clock. Will that do?"

"Perfectly. I hope it may be fine. Of course, should it rain——"

"Oh, never mind the weather! I can bring a closed carriage,—and my stay is uncertain."

"How restless you are, Ralph!" reproachfully.

"Am I? Not at all! But business must be attended to. Till to-morrow, then, good-bye."

CHAPTER V.

"BEATRICE TO THE RESCUE."

BEATRICE put on her hat with joy. She loved to be out of doors and alone; indeed, she was a little puzzled as to why Mrs. Garston was always "company" and never companionable, unless they talked of dress.

There were fewer nurses and children on the sands than usual, probably because the grey sky threatened rain.

Intending to take a brisk walk towards the Head, as the day was fresh and cool, Beatrice turned from the more frequented part of the beach and soon found herself almost alone, except for the presence of the crippled boy, who was propped up with pillows in his carriage and busy with his sketch-book. A big St. Bernard pup was playing in a lumbering fashion with a small, golden-brown dog, its colour deepening about the ears and paws,—a curious little animal, with no

marks of race that an English observer could perceive, yet it had not the air of a mongrel.

While she looked at the boy and thought it was the first time she had seen him without his attendant, she observed that he dropped his book and gazed anxiously towards the dogs. At that moment the big puppy rolled the little brown dog over, the latter giving a cry as if hurt. This was immediately echoed by the helpless invalid, who called, "Oh, do help my little dog! he will be killed, and I cannot go to him!" The agony of his tone touched Beatrice, who immediately ran to the rescue. Seeing that the puppy was too rough for his playfellow, she struck him with her sunshade. The puppy retreated, but made dashes at the intruder, barking in an alarming manner.

Though rather afraid, Beatrice managed to pick up his small victim and carried him to his young master.

"Oh, thank you! thank you so much!" cried the boy, hugging the little creature to his breast. "How brave of you to take him from that great brute! Denis has been so long away. I thought I should have seen my poor little doggie killed

before my eyes! Down, Chang! down!"—as the dog tried to lick his face with affectionate ardour.

"I do not think the big dog intended to hurt him; he was only playing," said Beatrice.

"You are a bad, disobedient little beast!" resumed the boy, with a sudden change of mood, slapping his favourite. "Why did you run off and never heed my call? You see what trouble you got into!" And he beat him again.

"Oh, pray, do not punish him so severely!" cried Beatrice. "He cannot understand, and he will perhaps run away from you."

"Not he! He is too fond of me."

"Then you ought not to try his affection."

"I would not let anyone touch him but myself, you know."

"Ah! I am afraid that shows a true tyrant's nature," said Beatrice, smiling.

"Me a tyrant! *me?*" cried the boy, opening his big blue grey eyes in surprise. "I am a poor, weak creature. I could not be a tyrant; I haven't the strength to be tyrannical."

"You may have the will to be tyrannical, though."

"Oh, I have a bad temper, I know; but I am not ill-natured. I say, would you mind staying by me till Denis comes back? He went to get me some sandwiches. I am so hungry!—could not eat a bit of breakfast."

"I will gladly stay with you," said Beatrice, looking down into his pale, thin face with tender compassion.

"Thank you! Then you'll beat off that horrid brute if he comes again?"—the puppy was racing round them—"A pretty thing for a boy to ask from a girl!" added the poor cripple, with bitter self-contempt.

"Oh, I am so much older than you; it is quite natural I should take care of you."

"How much older? I am fourteen, past."

"Nearly six years," she returned, smiling at his question.

"You are the young lady I saw looking down over the balcony the day we arrived here?"

Beatrice admitted she was.

"How tired and sick I was! I thought I should like you to come and bathe my head with water and eau de Cologne. Denny is very good, you know; but he has such big hands. He puts as

much eau de Cologne into my eyes as on my head."

"I should have been very happy to do it or to help you in any way."

"That's because you are sorry for such a poor creature as I am! I wanted my dad—that's grandfather, you know—to ask for you; but he has been queer about making acquaintances since we came 'home,' as he calls it,—to the land of the stranger, I say. You see, away in Australia every creature knew us or wanted to know us; whereas *here* people seem to think we are wild men of the woods."

"Oh, that is nonsense! I should be very pleased to know you. Let me see what you are doing."

"I am trying to sketch 'the Head' and that yacht lying at anchor under it. I am nearly self-taught, so can do but badly. I had some lessons in Paris and London; but I always get sick in towns, and then I have to give up everything and go away."

"But this seems to me wonderfully well done!" exclaimed Beatrice, with sincere admiration. "Why, I should know it anywhere!"

"Would you?" cried the boy, highly pleased. "Still, it is a poor thing. Do you draw? or have you seen many galleries?"

"Oh, no! I haven't an idea of drawing, and I have seen very little of anything."

"I wish you could see the pictures abroad; they make me wild with delight and despair! They are so wonderful, and I shall never, never do anything like them!"

"But you may do very well without being a great master; you may make yourself happy."

"Oh, I want more than that; I want heaps of things I can never get! Oh, here is Denis! What an age you have been, Denny! and I hate being alone! There! you see that great brute of a dog scampering about? Well, he nearly killed poor little Chang! he *would* have killed him if this young lady hadn't gone and dragged him out of his jaws! Wasn't she plucky?"

"I'm awful vexed to have kept you waiting," returned Denis, who had approached from the land side, towards which Beatrice had turned her back as she sat on a ridge of sand; "but I met the master, and he gave me some letters to post."

"Well, it was a shame to keep you! Just fancy if my poor little Chang had been killed! I'd never have forgiven you, nor gran, either!"

"I'm sure we are all obliged to the young lady," said Denis, looking keenly at her; "it was kind of her. Here's your lunch, Master Val," and he proceeded to open a small basket which he carried, producing sundry delicacies and a half bottle of Beaumé. "But as to that dog hurting Chang,—he had never no such intention! Why, he is no more than a pup, he ain't!—just full of play!"

"Well, the play might have been death to Chang, all the same! I say, miss, what is your name? I have often seen you, but I don't know how you are called."

"Miss Verner," said Beatrice.

"Then, Miss Verner, will you have some luncheon with me?"

"Do, miss!" echoed Denis, coolly backing up his young master's invitation; "I'll fetch more knives and forks in a twinkling. It will do Master Val a power of good having a bright young lady to keep him company."

"I am very sorry I cannot stay, but I have

promised to go back to luncheon with Mrs. Garston."

"That is the handsome, black-eyed woman who has the rooms opposite ours? Oh, let Denis go and tell her that you are staying with *me!*"

"No, that would not do,—some other time," returned Beatrice, quickly, seeing the disappointment stamped on the poor boy's thin, pale face and in his eager, wistful, brown eyes.

"I don't like to hear people say 'some other time;' it means never, I think," he said, sadly.

"I should very much like to stay with you,—but—I am not my own mistress, and—there is the *table-d'hôte* luncheon bell! I must go."

"Do come again to-morrow!" cried the boy; "I'll be here on the beach most of the day."

"I will if I can," she returned, taking the long, thin hand he held out; "I want to see how you get on with your sketch. Good-bye, little dog," patting its head. The dog tried to lick her face, for which liberty he was rebuked by his master, and she walked away towards the hotel.

As she went she noticed that a gentleman was leaning against the side of an old boat, which was drawn up beyond high-water mark and which was

a favourite base for gymnastics for the gay troops of children frequenting the beach, now deserted at their dinner-hour. He was tall, and even at a distance looked different from the ordinary mortals to be seen at Lynbourne. As she drew nearer he threw away the cigar he had been smoking and came to meet her; then she recognised Lord Lynford.

"So you have been making friends with the little crippled millionaire?" he said, raising his hat and turning with her.

"Is he a millionaire? His grandfather may be, though he does not give me the idea of one."

"What is your idea of a millionaire?"

"I can hardly define my notion,—someone always clothed in purple and fine linen, with diamond rings and ruby breastpins, and fresh gloves *every* day, which I should like for myself."

"What! would you not prefer the rings and pins?"

"Oh, yes!—to sell; but, to wear, I should prefer fine, delicate old lace. There is a tinge of vulgarity about a great deal of jewelry."

"There is none about this old bushranger!—I have just been talking to him at Mrs. Garston's.

He is quite unconventional, but a gentleman. He has captivated my imagination; he would make a splendid model for a buccaneer,—a navigator of the Spanish main in Elizabeth's time."

"Yes, he would; I saw him the day he arrived. They say he is American."

"*He* says he is Australian. There is something familiar to me in his face. I have been meditating on it while I watched you charming the grandson; and, do you know, I find there's a touch of Irish in his tone,—not the ordinary Irish of Terence the haymaker or Larry the hodman, but a musical something you rarely catch in other voices."

"I wish I had been there to hear. These people interest me so much."

"I suppose you were sent away," said Lord Lynford, with a keen glance at her expressive face.

"I was," she returned.

"It can't be pleasant to be sent out of the room like a naughty child."

"It does not annoy me in the least," said Beatrice, quietly. "I am with Mrs. Garston to be a help, not a hinderance. I don't know her

friends, and never shall; so why should she be troubled with me when she receives them? They have their own recollections and experiences to talk about, in which I have no share."

"You have rare common sense."

"Thank you."

"But," resumed Lynford, "I hope you will do me the pleasure of accompanying Mrs. Garston to-morrow; she has promised to lunch with me."

"You are very kind; I do hope she will take me!" cried Beatrice. "I have never seen a fine old English house, and I am told yours is charming; then I have seen so little."

"Is this your first peep at the sea?"

"No; I rather think I first saw the sea where you have never been, though you are a great traveller."

"Indeed! Where?"

"At Margate."

"Ah! you are wrong; I have visited that classic spot."

"I thought it a delightful place; then I was very happy there."

"I hope that does not imply that you are unhappy now?"

"No, by no means! Mrs. Garston is both kind and pleasant. Even if she were not, she 'is of my life a thing apart.'"

"What! you read Byron?" exclaimed Lynford, in a tone of surprise.

"Is it not right to read Byron?" she asked.

"Oh, I am not sure; some people would say no."

"Right or wrong, I have read most of his poems and think them delightful, though I do not see why he should always be so unhappy. But I must hurry on. Good-bye! Thank you very much for asking me to luncheon."

A smile and bow, but no offer of her hand, and Beatrice turned away towards the hotel, walking at a brisk pace.

Lynford looked after her for an instant and then followed the road which led towards his home.

"And Mrs. Garston thinks she is plain," he reflected. "She is very young,—a trifle unformed; but she has possibilities which may develop into a rare power to charm. I wonder if she is as real, as natural, as she seems? If not, she is a marvellous artist; but women are naturally artists.

She is a gentlewoman; though I suppose if she had been of good birth she would never knock under to Mrs. Garston in this way. Does she knock under, by the way? I fancy there's a tower of strength in her good-humoured acceptance of her present rather anomalous position. She has a deuced pretty, pliant figure and a sweet, pathetic mouth of her own. Mrs. Garston is a gorgeous, painted, gilt, Indian idol compared to the delicate, uncoloured symmetry of this fair young thing. And I was really mastered by that woman's tropical beauty for a few months!—and not so long ago, either! Gad! What a wretched, vacillating, contemptible thing human nature is! How desperately deep the mark of the beast is stamped upon us! Well, your spiritually-minded people get a taste of the mire and clay all the same, every now and then. It's a tiresome world."

Beatrice found herself a little late. Mrs. Garston had sat down to table, and her young companion expected a sharp rebuke for her unpunctuality; but a glance at Mrs. Garston's face showed that sunshine reigned within if the skies were grey without.

"I suppose you did not want any luncheon," she said, good-humouredly.

"Indeed, I do, Mrs. Garston! and when I have eaten, I have quite an adventure to tell you."

"An adventure! you! I can't believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, opening her fine eyes. "You don't flatter yourself that you are the sort of girl men are taken with, do you?"

"This was not a man," returned Beatrice, philosophically; "only a boy, but such an interesting boy!—the American's grandson." She proceeded to give a brief sketch of her rescue of the dog.

"It might turn out a bit of luck for you. But remember, if you let them bribe you into leaving me, you'll repent it."

"Bribe me!" cried Beatrice, flushing a deep rose. "What an unworthy wretch you must think me!"

"No; only a natural wretch," returned Mrs. Garston, laughing. "Well, I had a visit from the distinguished old gentleman himself. Quite an imposing party, I assure you."

"So Lord Lynford told me," said Beatrice, helping herself to an egg-plum.

"Lord Lynford!" echoed Mrs. Garston. "Where

on earth did you see him? How did he happen to speak to you?"

"I met him on the beach as I was coming back to luncheon, and he asked me about the poor boy. Then he said he had met the grandfather with you just before. Was there anything very extraordinary in that, Mrs. Garston?"

"No,—I suppose not!" gazing intently at the speaker. "Only Lord Lynford is a peculiar, fastidious sort of man."

Beatrice laughed. "It is his condescension, then, that astonishes you?—his deigning to speak to me?"

"Don't be flippant or impertinent, Miss Verner. You don't know the depths of your own ignorance."

"Indeed, I do! Still, as Lord Lynford *did* speak, I suppose I was right to reply."

Mrs. Garston was in deep thought, and did not speak immediately; then she asked, carelessly, "Did Lynford speak of me? did he question you about me?"

"He mentioned you, yes; but he did not *question* me about you. He would not do anything so ill-bred, I should think."

"You know nothing about it. Did he ask about Captain Vincent?"

Beatrice shook her head. There was a pause.

"Well, Beatrice, I am going to give you a treat."

"Thank you beforehand," said Beatrice, her face lighting up.

"I am going to lunch at the Hall to-morrow, and I shall take you."

"That will be delightful; thank you very much, Mrs. Garston;" but, with an unusual degree of caution, she did not add that Lord Lynford had invited her; she felt that he was a dangerous subject.

"I hope you have a nice dress and hat to wear, Beatrice?"

"I have those I wear on Sundays, Mrs. Garston. They will do, I suppose? No one will notice what I have on."

"Very likely not, but I don't choose my employees to be badly dressed,—it looks as if I paid badly."

"I am sure that is not the case."

"Still, I don't see why you should not wear a better—that is, a more expensive—style of hat.

You have no right to scamp your dress in order to save my money."

Beatrice opened her eyes a little at this doctrine.

"Do I not look respectable, then?" she asked.

"Oh, you are neat and tidy, but I want more than that."

"Oh, I hate spending my money on my clothes."

"You are an extraordinary girl, Beatrice Verner."

CHAPTER VI.

LYNFORD HALL.

"I ALMOST wish I were going on the beach with that poor boy," said Beatrice to herself, as she put on her hat with extra care, the following morning. "I could talk as well as listen then. With Lord Lynford and Mrs. Garston, I am not supposed to open my lips. I should not mind that, if only I could escape them and wander about by myself. I should think they would not mind if I did." Then she stepped out on the balcony to look at the sea and sky before starting.

It was a fine autumnal day, a wet night having relieved the sky of its grey burden, and left the sun a fair unclouded field on which to produce his exquisitely beautifying effects of light and shade and colour.

Her attention was caught by the face of her new boy friend, upturned eagerly to her as he sat in his little carriage below. "Are you coming?" he called, shrilly.

"No, I cannot. Perhaps I may to-morrow."

"Do try and come," he returned. "Chang wants you, so do I." He waved his hand, and Dennis, who was pushing his carriage, touched his hat; then they went on, and Stéphanie came in to say that Mrs. Garston was ready.

"We must not keep Lord Lynford waiting," she said, when Beatrice entered the room, "and he fixed one o'clock. It is now ten minutes past, and——"

"Lord Lynford," said a waiter, throwing open the door.

"I fear I am late," he exclaimed, when he had shaken hands with Mrs. Garston and bowed to Beatrice. "But I had an unexpected visitor this morning who delayed me,—my legal adviser,

who has been doing his *Villegiatura* somewhere on the coast, and took Lynford on his way to town. You'll find him rather an amusing old fellow. I am very fond of him myself, though he is like a prophet of old whenever he comes near me,—full of mourning, lamentation, and woe."

"You are not very late, and we are quite ready," she returned, smiling upon him admiringly. Even Beatrice, while curiously impressed with a sense of his harshness and indifference, was struck with his fine carriage and distinguished air, though his rough tweed suit would not have been out of place on a game-keeper.

"Let's be off, then. I have brought the dog-cart. It's the best sort of vehicle for getting over the ground and seeing the country. It is a lovely day, and last night's rain has laid the dust for us."

Having assisted Mrs. Garston to the front seat, Lynford helped Beatrice to her place at the back.

"Have you no wrap to put over your knees?" he asked; then turning to Stéphanie, who had carried down her mistress's cloak, he said, "Can you find a rug or shawl for Miss Verner?"

"I know not where to find Miss Verner's things," she said, carelessly.

"There's another rug under the front seat, my lord," said the groom, touching his hat, and he proceeded to get it.

"Indeed, I do not need anything," said Beatrice, colouring, for she knew this care for her would not be acceptable in the eyes of her employer.

"What are we waiting for?" cried Mrs. Garston.

"Call at the stables, and bring me an answer," said Lynford, giving a note to his servant; then he gathered up the reins, and they started at a rapid pace.

It was a delightful drive, at least to Beatrice. The country between the little town of Lynbourne and the headland which sheltered the bay was flat, but rich with golden cornfields now ready for the harvest, also stretches of pasture and common land, where patches of purple heather lent variety to the colouring. A few farmhouses, with their barns and outbuildings, surrounded by large elm- and chestnut-trees, were dotted here and there, giving an air of comfort and prosperity to the scene.

The pace was good, and Beatrice felt exhilarated by the rapid motion. She wished that her good sister could share her pleasure, for she could

gather from her home letters, though she never complained, that Sarah had many anxieties and a hard struggle to make both ends meet. "She wouldn't enjoy all this as I do," mused Beatrice, "but she might to a certain degree, and it would do her so much good. What she would really like best is being with me. Ah, she *is* good to me! I don't love her half well enough." Poor Beatrice was often troubled by a sense of her own ingratitude.

Meantime she could hear that Mrs. Garston was talking fluently, but it seemed to her that Lynford's replies were brief. The road, after crossing a steep bridge over a small river, the Lynn, which gave the town its name, rose gradually as they had reached the foot of the headland; and, turning to address Bea, Lynford said, "In a few minutes you'll get a glimpse of the old house; it is half-way up the slope, among the trees, and looks south-east. We have a view of the sea at the other side of the head. This flat bit of country is a sort of isthmus, but there's higher ground to the left there which defends it from the sea, which I fancy swept over this district in by-gone days."

"How wonderful that seems!" exclaimed Beatrice. "Then, I suppose, the 'Head' was an island."

"I would not discuss things I knew nothing about, Miss Verner, if I were you," said Mrs. Garston, with a contemptuous little laugh.

"Supposition and experiment are finger-posts on the road to discovery," observed Lynford. "If Miss Verner goes on 'supposing,' she may end by squaring the circle."

Beatrice was silent. It wounded her to be snubbed when she did not deserve it, and, as Mrs. Garston was rarely ill-natured save when contradicted or very much rubbed the wrong way, these little unexpected stings were therefore all the more hurtful.

"There—there's the house!" exclaimed their charioteer, pointing with his whip after some minutes' silence. "That is a central tower over the main entrance."

"The situation must be beautiful," said Mrs. Garston, her eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement.

"Yes, it is pleasant enough, but it is by no means a palatial residence,—we were not a grand,

wealthy, powerful race when my ancestors began to build. It is a rambling, irregular edifice, to which each generation has added something; still, it has a certain charm,—at least for me," and he sighed a slight sigh.

"You must deeply regret the necessity of leaving it!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, quickly.

"Reasonable beings can always submit to the inevitable," said Lynford, lightly, and soon after they turned into an old grey gateway surmounted by a moss-grown stone shield over which was carved the family crest,—a dolphin with his back up in a very arched and warlike manner.

The avenue, somewhat grass-grown, led up a rather steep ascent through a thick wood, chiefly oak and beech, till it ended in a flat, open space covered with short velvet-like grass in front of the house, which was of considerable width, two stories in height, and pierced with many mullioned windows. In the centre rose a square tower, crowned by a lantern, and admitting by an arched opening into a quadrangle, in the midst of which was a small flower-garden.

Lynford turned to the left, and drew up at the entrance-door, to which a few broad steps de-

fended by a carved balustrade in grey stone led. The whole edifice was brick, with stone copings and tall, clustered chimneys, in themselves things of beauty, while time and weather had mellowed the colour of the walls to a deliciously soft red-brown, harmonising well with the ivy which here and there clothed the projections or hung about the doorways and chimneys. At the opposite side of the quadrangle were the stables, before which a trellis covered with clematis and other creepers made an effective screen. A smaller gateway to the right gave egress from the back of the premises to the gardens, hot-houses, and farm-yard, and the autumnal sunlight bathed the picturesque scene with its golden glory.

Beatrice jumped down while Lynford was assisting Mrs. Garston, and stood gazing round in great delight.

"What a delightful place!" she exclaimed, quite unable to hold her tongue. "I never dreamt it was so beautiful."

"Don't lose your head in your raptures," said Mrs. Garston, in a low, warning tone, and Beatrice felt she had transgressed in daring to speak without being spoken to.

"Such a home as this is a patent of nobility in itself," she continued, addressing Lynford.

"Yes; nice old place, isn't it? Come in-doors, Mrs. Garston, you must want your luncheon after your drive." He led the way to the entrance, where a grave, grey-haired servant out of livery stood waiting, and as he began to ascend the steps a small, thin, elderly gentleman of a desiccated aspect, with a short, crumpled face, and very sharp green-grey eyes, came forward to meet them. He had white hair, spidery legs, and a look of neatness and fitness, a large seal ring on his right little finger, a frill to his shirt, and a double eye-glass hanging by a black watered ribbon round his neck.

"Ah! here is my legal adviser, my guide, philosopher, and friend; my social saviour, Mrs. Garston," cried Lynford. "Let me present Mr. Pounceby to you. He knows a good deal more about this old house of mine than I do, and will share in the agreeable task of introducing you to the beauties and curiosities of Lynford Hall. Mr. Pounceby,—Mrs. Garston, Miss Verner."

Mr. Pounceby set his heels together and made a neatly finished bow. "I am fortunate to arrive

at such an auspicious moment," he said, in a dry, distinct voice, suggestive of having lived on parched peas for a week, "and we could not have finer weather to show off the venerable mansion."

He stood aside to let them pass, and then followed through an octagon vestibule into a large square hall decorated with antlers, figures in armour, two or three huge heads of bison and elk, and some old frayed banners. Stained-glass windows admitted a dim light, a vast fireplace with a finely carved oak mantel-piece nearly filled one side, while at the back opposite the entrance was a grand oak double staircase meeting in an arch over the passage leading to the interior of the building, from this arch a short flight of stairs led to the upper rooms. Bear, and tiger-skins lay on the dark polished floor, and a big oak table stood under the windows. Across this hall Lynford conducted his guests to a corridor on which various doors opened to the library, a delightful room, though of moderate dimensions, which looked to the front, and caught through the trees on the slope below, a glimpse of blue sea.

"You must take me quite as I am," said

Lynford, drawing forward a luxurious chair for Mrs. Garston, "and that is considerably in the rough, for my domestic staff is of the scantiest. In short, I am a mere bird of passage. Let me take off your dust-cloak," he added, removing it.

"And permit me to relieve you of your——" he hesitated.

"Cape," put in Beatrice, smiling.

A respectable woman in black silk, who bore the stamp of "housekeeper," here made her appearance and took charge of the guests' belongings, and before they could exchange many more sentences the butler opened a door at the farther end of the room and announced luncheon.

It was laid in a breakfast-room which, though panelled in oak, as were nearly all the apartments, was enlivened by gay chintz hangings and clever water-colour drawings of scenes in the sunny south, the windows were open, and the scent of newly-cut grass was wafted into the room by a soft breeze. Beatrice, with a quick, comprehensive glance, took in the exquisitely decorated table, its snowy napery, its glittering, gracefully-shaped old silver and delicately-engraved glass, the ferns, the foliage, and lovely flowers.

The butler and another man out of livery waited, and lunch proceeded merrily. Mrs. Garston looked better, Beatrice thought, than she had ever seen her before. But though a most attentive host, there was a touch of cynicism, of thinly-veiled indifference, in Lynford's manner and expression that revived the shrinking distrust of him which Beatrice had felt so strongly on their first acquaintance, but which was considerably diminished of late.

"Yes, that is a pretty bit of old silver," said the lawyer, noticing that Beatrice had taken up a curious sugar-spoon to examine it. It was large, and made in the shape of a head, which on the convex side was moulded into the form of a turbaned or Moor's head, with a fierce look in the face, and was quite a work of art.

"It is very curious," she returned, "and you see the handle has crescents cut all the way up."

"Probably it was to be used to ladle out some of those terrible compounds our ancestors dared with amazing courage to swallow,—spiced hippocras or rum punch," suggested Mr. Pounceby.

"I suspect some of my respectable ancestors looted it from the Spaniards, either afloat or

ashore. You must know, Mrs. Garston, that some three hundred years ago the Claverings were formidable freebooters and played no mean part in the blood-stained story of the Spanish main, sometimes even making descents on the coast of Spain itself. This old hall was begun by an enterprising member of the family who was much admired in his day, and rejoiced in the gentle *sobriquet* of 'Hell-fire Clavering,'—Clavering is our family name, you know. He also built a church in the village down below there; but that was too much for his patron, Old Nick, who avenged the affront by burning down the church on two different occasions, so that the villagers have been obliged to say their prayers in another parish. There's no contending with such an adversary as the devil."

"What a story!" cried Mrs. Garston; "and who could imagine that a man like you could be descended from pirates or buccaneers!"

As she spoke, Beatrice looked straight at Lynford in an unconscious, reflective manner, as if considering whether he had any buccaneering indications about him.

Lynford laughed. "I see Miss Verner reads

'freebooter' between the faint lines modern civilisation has traced upon my character."

"Yes," returned Beatrice, dreamily, and still gazing at him, "I think you would have been a very good freebooter."

"What a contradiction!" cried Lynford, still laughing. "For heaven's sake, if I am to be a freebooter, let me be a thorough-going 'Hell-fire'!"

"Yes, but that's what I meant," said Beatrice, simply.

"Really, Miss Verner, you seem to have lost your mind and manners both!" exclaimed Mrs. Garston, with ill-concealed anger.

"I did not mean to say anything disagreeable," she returned, colouring up; "I don't think Lord Lynford minds."

"Not in the least. I suspect Hell-fire Clavering was worth a dozen of me. He must have been a man of perseverance and resolution, which I am not, I fear; but he would not have been appreciated in the present day."

"At the present time he would probably have been an energetic philanthropist," said Mr. Pounceby.

"Energetic, no doubt," returned Lynford; and

then the talk drifted away to people and subjects of which Beatrice knew nothing. Indeed, she would have kept silence in any case, as she felt quite ashamed of herself, and was well aware she was in deep disgrace with Mrs. Garston.

Luncheon over, Lynford proposed to look over the house; so Mrs. Dobbs, the housekeeper, was summoned. She soon obeyed, and came armed with a huge bunch of keys; then the usual routine was gone through,—the "haunted chamber" and some tapestried rooms; the late lord's study; the secret stair in the older part of the house, the "hiding-place" of the Cavalier and Roundhead period; the window from which a beautiful daughter of the house escaped with a Spanish lover,—all were shown.

"At least the old house is so far distinguished," said Lord Lynford. "Neither Queen Elizabeth nor Mary Queen of Scots ever spent a day or a night here; nor did either of these indefatigable royal needlewomen work a chair or a cushion for Lynford Hall. Now let us go to the portrait-gallery; a very few minutes will suffice. The Claverings are a grim-looking race; beauty is not one of our characteristics."

The gallery was a long passage which connected the older and newer portions of the house; and, as the owner said, the portraits of the defunct barons, their wives and daughters, were somewhat forbidding.

During this tour of inspection Mrs. Garston was very silent; in fact, she was too profoundly interested to talk.

What a house! what relics of past ages of riches and stately position! How glorious to be mistress of such a home and wife of the man who had inspired her with the strongest passion of her not by any means unimpassioned existence! Surely, if her wealth could save this treasure-house and restore it to its owner, gratitude might rouse the tenderness once so sweet, so abundant, and now chilled by absence, inconstancy,—heaven knew what! So she listened and smiled honeyed smiles, not a few of which fell upon the chippy little lawyer, who showed her much deferential attention.

"You must know," said Lynford, as he was leading his guests towards the staircase, "that the original house of the Claverings when they were farmers and mariners, not to say buccaneers, was

a rugged sort of fortalice, half-way down to the shore on the west. It is now in ruins,—rather picturesque ruins."

"I should like so much to see them!" exclaimed Beatrice, speaking for the first time since her transgression at lunch."

"Would you? I daresay Mrs. Dobbs will act guide for you; she knows her way about this place a good deal better than I do,—eh, Mrs. Dobbs? Will you conduct this young lady to the pirates' hold? It will not take you half an hour."

"Certainly, my lord. But, excuse me, it is all uphill returning; better three-quarters of an hour, my lord."

"All right. Mrs. Garston, you would perhaps prefer looking at some of the old deeds and charters in the muniment chamber to a warm walk——"

"Yes, I should," she interrupted, quickly.

Before Lynford could reply his valet approached with a letter. "Messenger waiting, my lord," he said. How sweet the appellation sounded in Mrs. Garston's ears! but "my lady" applied to herself would be still sweeter.

"Pray excuse me," said Lynford, opening it.

Having glanced at the contents, he smiled and said, "It is from our Australian friend, Mrs. Garston. He did not know who I was yesterday or would have asked my permission to go over my ancestral dwelling, as such ancient places have immense interest for a visitor from a land where all things are new. The old boy writes a most clerkly hand; I must send him a few lines. Pounceby, take Mrs. Garston to the muniment room; you will explain all about the contents better than any one else. I'll give you the key below. Then Mrs. Dobbs will be at your service, Miss Verner."

At the foot of the stairs the party broke up, and Beatrice was greatly relieved to find herself alone and talking freely to the dignified housekeeper, who was a sensible, fairly well-educated woman, and who firmly believed in the greatness and importance of the house of Lynford.

It was a delightful walk through a patch of pine wood. The strong afternoon sun drew out the aromatic perfume of the pines, and the air was full of the sleepy, soothing murmur of insects; while the soft, wooing "coo" of the wood-pigeon came at intervals from the lower woods,

where oaks, elms, and beech predominated. A little, clear, brown, brawling brook ran by the path for the greater part of the way; this, Mrs. Dobbs explained, used to fill the moat which surrounded the Clavering stronghold, but it had long ago been allowed to empty itself, and the rivulet went on its own way to the sea.

"They do say," observed Mrs. Dobbs, "that the wood all around here is haunted by a white figure, the ghost of a poor lady—a nun—that one of the wicked Claverings carried off and kept in the castle, till one night she managed to escape, but lost her way and was found dead in the water, just inside the little pier down there."

Here the path turned abruptly to the right, and, bending round a huge grey rock crowned with short grass and heather, led out of the wood on to a flat piece of ground, from which was a steep, short descent to the sea. On the left, and scarcely distinguishable from the grey stone-strewn hillside, which here faced the west, were the ruins,—and extremely ruined they looked. A precipitous path, aided here and there by rough steps, led to a small pier below, which, sheltered by the headland, formed a convenient little har-

bour. A small cottage with a tiled roof was niched in between the water's edge and the first upward heave of the promontory, where a caretaker evidently resided, as some blue smoke curled lazily towards the sky. Away to the right, and dwarfed by distance, the villas and terraces of Lynbourne lay laughing in the westering sunshine, which had turned the narrow entrance to the bay into a broad band of molten gold. The blue waters were dotted with sundry small craft on fishing or pleasure bound, and the surrounding range of hills looked dimly blue in the haze of the glowing afternoon.

"What a charming view!" cried Beatrice. "I did not think Lynbourne could look so pretty; do stop here a little while."

"Certainly, madam; only, my lord told me to get through the ruins as soon as I could, as he thinks of returning by water if the lady likes."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" cried Beatrice. "Come on, then, by all means," and they walked briskly towards the old tower. The projection on which the drawbridge used to rest still stood in its place, but they were obliged to scramble down into the moat and up again to enter the ruins.

Only one side of a square tower was left and some fragments of crenellated wall, but Beatrice could see that it was a place of great strength, as on the southern and eastern sides there was a sheer precipice down into the water.

It was a desolate spot, for the wood ceased with the shoulder of the hill which sheltered it, and around the tower was only some scanty purple heather and an abundance of loose grey stones.

"They do say," resumed the housekeeper, "that there's no end of treasure buried in the tower, but my lord laughs at the notion, and says that no Clavering ever left gold under ground when he could use it above."

Walking out to an angle of the castle-wall, Beatrice caught a glimpse of the mast of a boat peeping from behind some projecting rocks beneath. "Then Lord Lynford uses this little harbour?" she asked.

"Yes, madam. His yacht is in the yard at Lynbourne for repairs just now, but in general she lies just outside the pier there. The anchorage is very good, I am told, and the shelter complete."

After some fifteen or twenty minutes spent in

exploring the ruins, Beatrice and her guide returned to the path by which they had entered, and as she reached the bottom of the moat Beatrice perceived a man leaning against a fragment of masonry. He wore a straw hat and a sort of sailor costume, and was smoking. While she looked a stone on which she trod loosened and fell. At the sound the smoker turned, and she saw it was Lord Lynford.

"Well, have you explored the ruins?" he asked, putting out his hand to help her down the last few steep, slippery steps. "It occurred to me that it is a delightful day for a cruise, so I sent word to Mrs. Garston to meet us here."

Beatrice felt it was a little appalling to be thus *tête-à-tête* with Lord Lynford, though it was curious how much more at ease she usually felt when alone with him. His tone was less harsh and more natural; in fact, his unaffected manner made her forget the wide distance between a peer of the realm and the penniless daughter of a broken-down clerk.

"I had a hasty look round," she said, as they ascended.

"Ah! they are worthy more than a cursory

glance; but you can come and examine them at your own sweet will. There is a short cut from the last villa,—the one close down on the beach, —at this end of Lynbourne, right across the sands—the cord of the bow—to my little harbour. It's scarcely half an hour's walk when the tide is out. I'll tell Hawkins, my guardian of the pier, to let you pass always; strangers are strictly forbidden. There! you see that new, flaming Queen Anne edifice?"

They had now reached the top of the bank and stood looking out over the bay.

"Yes, I know it," said Beatrice, "and I should like to come and walk about here when I can."

"Ay! that is it," returned Lord Lynford, smiling, as he looked down into her eyes, and she remarked how wonderfully his face softened. "I suspect you have but a small amount of liberty. You were a naughty girl at luncheon; you forgot yourself and spoke out what you thought. Don't do it again, or worse may befall you."

"You don't know how hard it is for me to keep silent," exclaimed Beatrice. "I only hope I did not seem rude and presumptuous."

"Not to me," returned Lynford. "I quite

agreed in your view of the subject; but you had better be 'on guard' if you intend to have a tolerable life. By the way, why do you stay with her? She is a charming woman, but a difficult mistress, I suspect."

"She has, on the whole, been nice to me," said Beatrice, loyally. "I stay with her because I wish to relieve my sister, on whom I am quite dependent."

"What! did she turn you out?"

"Sarah turn me out? No, she has done everything for me. Why do you ask?—you, a stranger."

"Ah! I take the hint, Miss Verner; I see you think me intrusive and inquisitive."

Beatrice was silent for an instant; and then, looking steadily at him, replied, "Yes, rather."

"I humbly crave your pardon. I fear I must seem so; yet—you'll promise to forgive if *I* promise never again to offend?"

"Of course I will," she returned, smiling.

"Do you know your face is about the most deceptive I have ever seen?" exclaimed Lynford, impulsively.

"How can you say so? You must apologise more amply than before."

"No; this time I will explain, not apologise. To look at you, one would think you were the most pensive, even lachrymose, of young ladies; and as soon as you begin to speak it is like a new slide in a magic lantern,—behold! a sensible, practical, mirth-loving creature, with a tinge of mockery for all that is unreal or affected."

"Ah! you are amusing yourself inventing nonsense; but I do not mind."

"No, I see you do not. However, I cannot help my impressions; don't fancy I invent."

They had reached the top of the bank that had once sloped down into the moat, and Lynford turned to the housekeeper and asked,—

"Have we the wherewithal to make tea on board, Mrs. Dobbs?"

"Certainly, my lord. Hawkins came up and asked me for stores this morning; he said he thought your lordship might be going out this afternoon."

"Thoughtful mariner!" returned Lynford. "We need not detain you longer, then; good-morning."

"Good-bye, and thank you for your guidance," added Beatrice.

"We go down this path," said Lynford, indicating a track which seemed to Beatrice to go sheer over a precipice into the sea.

"What! down there?" she asked, with no small alarm.

"Oh, it's safe enough; it turns to the right there and is not steep afterwards. Give me your hand for the first few yards."

Beatrice instantly obeyed, holding his tightly till, reaching the promised turn, she perceived that the path went along the face of the hill, with a little parapet of grass and stones to safeguard those who traversed it; then she immediately loosed her hold and followed her host contentedly enough.

"You owe me an apology now!" he exclaimed. "You know you did not believe me; you know you thought I was leading you to perdition."

"And do you think I should have readily given you my hand to be led there?"

"No, certainly not,—at the present stage of our acquaintance," said Lynford, turning to look at her with that peculiar pale flame in his eyes which had struck her on their first meeting. How much she disliked him when that sinister light

played under his dark lashes! though at other times she found him agreeable and amusing.

"I should be very unpractical if I did," she replied.

Lynford paused for a moment, still contemplating her; then, pointing to a quiet little nook between two rocky, projecting crags, where the boat and the boat-house found shelter, said, "There's the 'Elphin;' and, as she is an extra light craft, I hope we'll find enough air to waft her across the bay before sundown."

Little more was said. On reaching the pier or jetty, Lynford called to Hawkins, who was the boatswain of his yacht, to bring a cushion for the lady, and established Beatrice on some stones, where she could watch the unmooring of the pleasure-boat and the process of bringing her alongside, in which her host went to assist. Here she was soon joined by Mrs. Garston and the lawyer, both apparently in excellent humour with themselves and each other. In a few minutes they set sail and floated out into the golden waters of the bay.

It was a delightful cruise; and though she scarcely spoke or heard what the others said,

Beatrice thought it a fitting conclusion to one of the most delightful, if not *the* most delightful, day she had ever spent.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

DINNER was late at the Hall that evening, or rather night, for what breeze they had was against the return voyage of the "Elphin." Nevertheless, a skilful cook knows how to preserve the viands of an unpunctual master from the destruction of delay.

Mr. Pounceby, to whom dinner was rather a sacred rite, was frantically hungry, and loud in his praise of the genius of an artist who could send up a dinner ordered at seven-thirty unspoiled at nine.

"You should keep that woman—it *is* a woman, I suppose—at all costs. She is invaluable!" exclaimed the little lawyer, throwing himself back in his chair when the servant left them to themselves. "I really never dined more satisfactorily."

"My dear sir, what is the use of a cook without a kitchen?" asked Lynford, filling his glass with claret and pushing the port towards Pounceby. "I shall soon be homeless and a wanderer, so I shall make over my artist to you if you and Mrs. Pounceby so desire."

"It is my opinion that you need not be homeless nor a wanderer unless you choose," returned the lawyer, with a knowing air.

"What do you mean? I should certainly keep Lynford if it were possible. With the usual 'cussedness' of my sort, I begin to be fond of the place when it is about to slip from my grasp. When I succeeded to the estates I was little over five-and-twenty, a rackety, reckless youngster. God, what a glorious thing life was then, with all the glow, the perfume, the intoxication of prosperous youth pervading it! Accustomed to short commons in all matters of outlay and enjoyment, I fancied the revenues of Lynford inexhaustible, and plunged into extravagance up to the chin, never remembering that the property was already encumbered. Then it bored me to stay here, unless I had a rabble-rout like that of Comus to make time pass; and then I grew sick of it all,

and—— There's no use in recapitulating what *you* know too well. Well, now I begin to fancy that life here, with an occasional break, might be pleasant enough——"

"With one fair spirit for your minister," interrupted Pounceby.

"I don't care much for fairness of spirit. I prefer fairness of flesh, Pounceby. I am of the earth, earthy."

"I believe you are in a vein of the most amazing luck, my lord." The lawyer occasionally marked his sense of his client's position as he would have put in 'sir' to a commoner. "I believe you might keep Lynford, pay your debts, and secure a delightful minister, fair both in flesh and spirit, for the asking."

Lynford looked at him keenly. "Don't speak in dark sentences, my good friend; speak clearly."

"Well," resumed Pounceby, replenishing his glass, "you know I spent a very interesting hour this afternoon with your charming guest in the muniment room?"

Lynford nodded.

"She was deeply interested in my brief sketch of the family history, and unfeignedly sorry that

this fine old place should pass out of your hands. Then, in a very nice and delicate manner, she let me know that she wished for some investment for her money, and, in short, proposed to buy the estate."

"She hasn't money enough," cried Lynford, with brutal directness.

"I am not so sure of that. She told me of the various securities and investments she held,—I can easily verify her statements,—and she gave me to understand she is good for sixty-five thousand as purchase-money for the estate."

"Too little, my good friend. I want a hundred."

"I doubt if you will get it, Lord Lynford. Your estate is a fancy article, and fanciful millionaires don't turn up every day. Moreover, I am inclined to think that you need not relinquish the property. The matter might be settled amicably, or even lovingly, between you."

"Ha!" said Lynford, laughing. "Is she inclined to bid for the master as well as the mansion?"

"Well, well, my dear Lord Lynford, it is not

unnatural on her part,—a first-rate position and a —well, a desirable husband."

"I would blush if I could. But, no, my good old friend; my lands may be in the market, but *I* am not! No amount of money could tempt me into matrimony. That holy state smacks too much of martyrdom to be attractive. I really believe that the fact of a woman having wifely rights would turn me against Venus herself! Not that I am in the least averse to the society of the fairer portion of humanity. In fact, I was rather too fond of it, and like it well enough still, but let it be unshackled by conventional bands."

"I cannot listen to such blasphemy!" cried Pounceby. "You're not as bad as you make out. You must renounce such paganism and take the goods the gods provide,—first-rate goods they are! Mrs. Garston is a lovely woman,—I don't know when I saw a fairer,—well-bred, too. She would take society by storm, and, I fancy, she has a weakness for you."

"She is not so foolish. She knows me well enough to know I should be a detestable husband, and I know her well enough not to aspire to the proud position of being hers."

"I don't understand. I thought you were the best of friends out in India."

"Oh, possibly; but that was five years ago. You do not credit either of us with so dull a virtue as constancy."

"I wish to heaven you had married a bright, affectionate, true-hearted wife ten years ago."

"So do I with all my heart. But I missed that, and—— There is no use in regretting what cannot be regained. Listen to me, Pounceby: I will not marry Mrs. Garston,—nay, more, I will not sell Lynford to her. By heaven, she shall *never* rule here! I will take nothing under a hundred thousand pounds for the old place, and I'll only sell to a man!"

"My dear lord, you are slightly demented. This place will never command such a price. There is no prospective gain in it. Even if Lynbourne becomes the queen of bathing-places, it would only destroy the charm of this domain to cut it up into terraces and villas."

"Nevertheless, such is my resolution. Another glass of wine, Pounceby?"

"Thank you, no. The long hours in the strong sea air have been too much for me,—I can scarcely keep my eyes open. I'll bid you good-

night; may common sense visit you in your slumbers! There's a mid-day train to town? Well, I'll take it. We can have a good talk about the sale and other matters before I start."

"Good! and I'll smoke a weed in the moonlight before I turn in."

It was a splendid night, and Lynford strolled to and fro at the further side of the lawn, watching the moon slowly rise above the twisted, ivy-draped chimneys, which were one of the beauties of his beautiful house. The serene loveliness of the night did not soothe the irritation which his talk with Pounceby had aroused. He was suffering from the most exasperating species of anger, rage against oneself. Out of memory's cavern, at first dimly, but gradually clearer and more vivid, all his past rose up.

His boyhood; his pleasant, careless, much-indebted father; his sweet invalid mother, so early snatched from the struggle of life; his pretty, petted sister, whom he loved, yet envied for the sort of immunity which bore her successfully, painlessly, through all the family troubles. His own social success and monetary trials, and the joys and agonies of his first serious love-affair. How wildly

in love he was with the fascinating daughter of his chief, the English minister at a sociable little German "Residenzstadt," where everything was so courtly, though so homely and marvellously cheap! Yet what an amount of debt he contrived to accumulate there! Ay! It was a glorious time, when he believed the beauteous Evelyn loved as she was loved, when she used to steal out to meet him on moonlight nights such as this one, in the pretty though stiff and stately gardens of the embassy, and they loitered together on the terrace overhanging the swift, rolling river which swept round the little fortress town. How charming she was, with her soft flaxen hair, her innocent blue eyes, and fresh baby mouth that rarely refused him the lingering sweetness of a parting kiss! What mortal agony it was when, weeping in his arms, she told him how her cruel mother, her indifferent father, insisted on her marrying the elderly, goggle-eyed, much-experienced and exceedingly wealthy Marquis of D——, a well-known figure in London society! And young Clavering cursed his fate that his impecuniosity forbid his carrying her off then and there from the fiends who oppressed her. That was a very important crisis of his life.

He was never quite the same after. He got promotion about that date, and had a very lively time in St. Petersburg. He remembered being rather disgusted with himself for so soon regaining the power of enjoyment. Then came that season in London, when he renewed his acquaintance with the greatly admired Marchioness of D——, finding her more fascinating than ever; and how madly he urged her to leave her heartless grandeur and come down into poverty and disgrace with him! The sullen sense of self-contempt for his own helplessness in her hands with which he accepted her refusal, and the consolation wherewith she did not hesitate to soften its harshness. Another year or so of chequered fortune, and he succeeded to the family title and estates. Of existence since memory presented a kaleidoscope picture of pleasure, excitement, success, extravagance, and slowly gathering cynical weariness of it all. Here his reflections grew indistinct, and he began to think of the curious likeness, yet dissimilarity, between Mrs. Garston's humble secretary and the lovely image of his old idol, framed as it was in the gold and jewels of wealth and rank. There was the same delightful simplicity about

both, the same delicious purity of colouring, but Beatrice when in repose had a tender intensity of expression of which Evelyn was incapable,—a touch of human warmth and earnestness which in no way interfered with the natural grace of what Lynford suspected was a very perfect form. He remembered what a pretty foot and ankle he had caught sight of as she descended the side of the old moat,—pretty in spite of an ordinary ready-made shoe. How charming she might be if her heart or circulation were touched with the divine fire, and "gave out all its sweets to love's exquisite flame!" She might prove companionable; there was a piquant touch of common sense about her. Gradually the vision of his dainty marchioness faded away and Beatrice replaced that diaphanous image.

It was not the first time his thoughts had dwelt on the insignificant secretary with a degree of pleasure touched with tenderness that astonished himself, and now it seemed more difficult than ever to banish her from his thoughts.

"I am an unspeakable idiot," he thought; "years and experience ought to have made me pretty well case-hardened by this time, and by all

that's foolish there are echoes of the old romance, half dream, half passion, reverberating through the hollows of my heart,—at least, the thing that beats and still even thrills within me. I must get away from such asinine weakness. And Mrs. Garston thinks she is plain; so much the better. If she *knew,* I fancy a cup of 'cold poison' would be her secretary's reward. Poor young thing! She would be considerably happier, ay, and safer, as *my* companion than Mrs. Garston's, and I suppose the sale of this old place will leave me the wherewithal to exist. Bah! What a fool I have always been! I must be man enough to say 'no' to myself now at last. Yes, a fool in some things; as to the rest, well, chance shall be my guide. Ah! this is just like one of the nights long ago in the old German garden. Good-night, my Lady Moon, you'll soon be behind the trees." He threw away the end of his second cigar and went in-doors.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Garston had on the whole been highly pleased with her day. She had never before seen one of the "stately homes" of England's nobility, and she was immensely struck with its quiet grandeur. Living in such a place must, she

thought, by the force of contact turn anyone into a high-bred lady or gentleman; *per contra,* there was extraordinary hardness and coldness under Lynford's hospitable attention which was all that could be desired. Common sense told her that the passion she had once inspired was dead,—cremated, reduced to less than a pinch of dust, and even that scattered to the four winds of heaven. But common sense has but a poor chance of being heard against strong desire and determined will.

She had succeeded in many a scheme, why not revive the extinct fires, which would guide her into the promised land of social distinction? But why—why was Lynford so chary of his visits, so reluctant to bestow the light of his countenance upon her? Perhaps he did not like coming to a vulgar crowded hotel. And Mrs. Garston decided *that* was quite enough to deter him. In fact, she began to feel it was quite unfit for her to stay in.

After sitting silent, a letter from Captain Vincent in her hand, she suddenly addressed her young secretary, who was making entries in a volume entitled "Petty Cash."

"It is rather a pretty house,—about the best here, is it not?"

"Which house, Mrs. Garston?"

"That Gothic villa at the end of the esplanade. The last house on the road to Lynford."

"Yes, I know, with the garden and a conservatory at the far end."

"Put on your hat, Miss Verner, we will go and look at it. It was unlet yesterday; at least, the bills were still up."

"Oh, very well; I shall be delighted," cried Beatrice, gladly shutting up her book and putting the writing-table in order.

Though she dressed quickly, Beatrice found Mrs. Garston ready and waiting for her when she returned to the sitting-room. She was in deep thought and looking out of the window.

"It is a nice bright little place," she said, as if to herself. "I daresay land here will be of great value in a few years."

"But if they build much more it will spoil the place," returned Beatrice.

"And fill the ground landlord's pocket. Come along, Miss Verner; I want to return in time for tea. I rather expect Captain Vincent this afternoon."

Beatrice received this intelligence with anything but a look of pleasure, and they walked on slowly towards the east esplanade where Villa Marina was situated.

"Do you remember what Lynford—I mean Lord Lynford—said at luncheon about staying or not staying here?" asked Mrs. Garston, abruptly, breaking the silence, which had lasted for a considerable time.

"Yes; he said that he would not leave Lynford till winter, or till he was obliged to make way for the buyer, if any one would buy it."

Mrs. Garston laughed softly.

"It would be rather cruel to turn him out, would it not? He seems to suit the place and the place him," she said.

"Still, if he wants money I suppose he must sell it."

A pause, then Mrs. Garston asked, "Why don't you like Vincent?"

"Do I dislike him?"

"Don't you know?"

"I never thought whether I did or not. But I believe I should prefer being alone to talking with him."

"He is not a bad-looking little fellow," said Mrs. Garston, carelessly. "Has he been rude to you?"

"Oh, no, not rude, but not particularly civil,—not like Lord Lynford."

"Is Lord Lynford particularly civil?" quickly.

"I mean he treats me as if I were a lady, whereas——"

"Do not fancy that is remarkable. He would speak to his housemaid in the same way."

"I daresay that is what I like about him."

"And nothing else?" asked Mrs. Garston, stealing a keen and not very friendly glance at her secretary.

"Well, no; of course, it is no matter what I think; but there is a cruel look about his eyes; I am very sure he is very tyrannical and selfish."

"Are you not imprudent, Miss Verner, to speak in this frank fashion? How do you know that I may not marry Lord Lynford one day, and your opinion must therefore offend me?" asked Mrs. Garston, a more good-humoured expression stealing over her face.

"Oh, I have no doubt he will persuade you

to marry him," returned Beatrice; "at least, I have always thought so."

"Why, do you think him irresistible?"

"No, by no means."

"Then why do you risk offending me?"

"Because my opinion is of so little importance you would not care enough to be offended, and if it could make you hesitate and find out whether Lord Lynford would really make you happy, why, I should be so glad to be of the least use to you——" She hesitated and paused.

Mrs. Garston burst out laughing. "Well said, Miss Wiseacre; I am much obliged to you. You don't seem to see that speaking in this way is taking a great liberty."

Beatrice blushed vividly. "Then I beg your pardon. I am too thoughtless. I will not offend again."

"No, you had better not," said Mrs. Garston, who seemed in high good humour, "or I shall punish you severely. Now, why do you imagine Lord Lynford wishes to marry me?"

"I can hardly say why, only it seems natural he should. You are beautiful,"—looking at her mistress gravely, with an air of conviction,—"and

I fancy he was fond of you long ago,—at least——" She stopped.

"Long ago is not now," interrupted Mrs. Garston, "and I am not sure that it is of any use either. Pray, what do you know about love? You give me the idea of being an absolute simpleton in all such matters. Pray was any one ever in love with you?"

"Yes; two boys were," returned Beatrice, laughing. "They are the brothers of my school friend who took me to Margate. They were very funny."

"Indeed! How old were they?"

"One was fifteen, the other seventeen or eighteen."

"Ah! boys of eighteen are very nice sometimes."

"This one was not; he was dreadfully stupid. Tom, the younger one, was amusing but tiresome; he was always playing tricks on me,—putting wet sea-weed and dead jelly-fish in my jacket pockets, and wanting to kiss me."

"And the other,—did he want to kiss you?"

"Oh, no; he was afraid to shake hands with me."

"Look at me," said Mrs. Garston, suddenly. Beatrice obeyed, in some surprise. "I wonder if you will ever develop into a handsome, attractive woman," she continued, with insolent frankness; "you have better points than I thought."

"No, I don't imagine that could ever be," returned Beatrice, quietly; "but I suppose I shall get on somehow without it. My sister says there is always room for useful people."

"A sound doctrine; but have you no ambition?"

"Yes; I want to be happy."

"Let Vincent make love to you," resumed Mrs. Garston, laughing; "it would pass the time pleasantly for you and perhaps suit me."

"It would make the time very disagreeable to me and to poor Captain Vincent, too. Why, he looks on me as a sort of upper servant."

"You think so? Then he has been rude?"

"Oh, no; but he cannot conceal it. Do not suppose I mind; I really do not."

"You are a curious creature. I cannot make out whether you are a noodle or a deep one."

"I am sure I don't know, either," returned Beatrice, with careless good-humour.

These words brought them to Villa Marina, and Mrs. Garston was soon deeply engaged, first, in a survey of the rooms,—a pretty breakfast-room or study; a dining-room; a long, large, handsomely furnished drawing-room, opening into a conservatory, from whence there was access to the garden and a patch of copse wood beyond; over these were four or five bedrooms. The owners of this attractive abode were an ex-cook-housekeeper and butler, who had united their fortunes in holy matrimony and were already trembling at the risks of their "great undertaking."

The good woman of the house was ready to promise all things in order to catch such a whale as Mrs. Garston, and that lady did not fail to take advantage of her would-be landlady's eagerness.

"And you feel quite sure you can cook? Indifferent dinners are what I cannot submit to."

"Well, 'm, I think I may promise you will be satisfied with mine. I was five years with the Honourable Colonel Kitchener, of the Guards, and he wasn't easily pleased; then I was three years and a half with Lord and Lady Frederic Ormonde, the sister of my Lord Lynford; and any

one accustomed to London will tell you the table *they* kept."

"Well, I know nothing much of London,—I haven't long returned from India,—but I know what is good, and I will have it."

"Certainly, 'm."

"Well, send your husband round to me to-morrow before twelve,—if you come into my terms and keep two additional servants. I suppose you could take us in on Thursday?"

"Of course; or to-morrow, if you wish, 'm."

"No, thank you; Thursday would do very well. Really, the view from these windows is very pretty,—better than from the hotel."

"Yes, 'm; and then you are quite to yourself here,—no one to overlook you, and quite a private way through the woods to the Head. Our nearest neighbours are half a mile distant. That is Albion Lodge,—that white house; Sir Michael and Lady Beverly have taken it for two months. They wanted to come here, but wouldn't give the price."

"Then you will send your husband to me to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, 'm. Whether he will agree to the terms or not,—for two months certain he might."

"I am very sure he will; good-morning. Come, Miss Verner; it grows late."

They left the house, turning their steps townward.

"I think I have done a good stroke of business," said Mrs. Garston. "It will cost me considerably less to live in my own house than at an hotel, for, of course, it is practically mine; I hire it and its owners. What an awful glare in one's eyes! and no escape from it all the way back!"

"I think I could find the way into that wood. You remember where we met Lord Lynford the day you went to look at the horse?"

"Then let us go, by all means. I shall be burnt to deep sienna by the time we reach the hotel if we cannot find shelter."

They turned down a lane on the right, which, as Beatrice suggested, led to the piece of woodland. A gate barred the way, but a few feet from it was a stile,—rather an awkward stile. This was easily surmounted, and with a sense of relief they followed the shady pathway leading to the town.

Mrs. Garston was silent and in deep thought. Things seemed propitious all round. Villa Marina

was exactly the sort of house, the situation which suited her. If there was no obstacle to their free intercourse, she could surely win Lynford back; all she asked was time and opportunity. Beatrice Verner, too, suited her admirably. She was certainly puzzling. She was bright, quick, intelligent; but her straightforwardness was unaccountable. Was it weakness, ignorance, or profoundest art? At any rate, she believed in her employer and admired her,—this Mrs. Garston thoroughly believed; and though but slenderly equipped, as far as education went, she knew enough to be a most efficient help to Mrs. Garston, who, in some directions, was extremely ignorant. Moreover, she found her secretary's writing clear and even elegant, while her own was neither; so she privately and diligently strove to copy the small, firm characters in the notes and memoranda written for her by Beatrice. In short, Mrs. Garston felt a nearer approach to liking for her young employee than any other woman had ever drawn forth. One ingredient in this attraction was what she considered the girl's plain, commonplace appearance. She was ladylike, certainly, but had so little colour,

such simple, unpretending manners, so little taste for dress, that Mrs. Garston felt sure no man would notice her more than he would a table or a chair.

As they reached the end of the wood the sound of voices approached them, and soon they found themselves face to face with the Australians, as they were now termed since the old man's explanation. He raised his hat and assisted to wheel his grandson's little carriage to one side, making all the room he could to let Mrs. Garston and Beatrice pass. The former paused and spoke very graciously to him, while the crippled boy stretched out his hand eagerly to Beatrice.

"This is the young lady, dad," he said. "I *do* wish you could come with us into the woods."

"Thank you heartily for your kindly help to my boy," said Mr. Tyrrell, gravely, with an expression which gave weight to his words; "I am the debtor to anyone who contributes in any way to his comfort or pleasure," and he held out a large, brown, long-fingered hand. Blushing and

smiling, Beatrice put hers into it, rather embarrassed by the steady, searching gaze which he fixed upon her.

"What is your name, young lady?" he added, still holding her hand.

"Verner,—Beatrice Verner," she returned.

"Beatrice Verner," he murmured, as if trying to recall something. "No, I never met anyone of that name before," he said, and there was a disappointed ring in his voice.

"May she come with us?" repeated the boy, pertinaciously, addressing Mrs. Garston. "I want her to help me pick some of the leaves; they grow all about in the upper part of the wood."

"Pray forgive this unceremoniousness," said the old man. "I rarely contradict him, and he expects the same from everyone."

"I am sure Miss Verner will be happy to accompany your grandson," returned Mrs. Garston, with unusual geniality; "and at present I can spare her, which at all times I cannot."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Beatrice and her new friend together.

"Then perhaps you will allow me to escort you back to the hotel," said Mr. Tyrrell, with the sort of careful, serious politeness which suited his grand, patriarchal figure. "My poor boy will not want me now."

And Mrs. Garston readily consented.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A RETROSPECT."

JOHN TYRRELL was one of the first successful diggers who profited by the golden stores entombed in Australian soil.

He was thrown on the world in his eighteenth year a penniless orphan, quivering in every nerve with anguish at the loss of a mother whom he loved and revered, yet could not save from the hardships of biting poverty by his unassisted efforts. She died, too, just when there was a chance of comfort and repose; add to this the sense of bitter wrong, and the mood in which the young wanderer set forth to seek, not fortune,—he was too crushed to dream of ambition,—but mere existence, independent existence, may be imagined.

In the first quarter of the present century America was the land of promise to all adventurous Irishmen, the refuge of those who de-

spaired. Tyrrell had, however, a sufficient alloy of Saxon blood in his veins to impart the strength and toughness requisite to stand the friction and conflict of life and to resist the intoxication of success.

He was among the first of the Californian gold-seekers, and for many a day held his life in his hand. At first his moodiness condemned him to a somewhat isolated life. But gradually his physical force, his fine form, almost reckless courage, and unswerving faithfulness to his word gave him a certain degree of power among his mates; while the sense of this appreciation soothed him, and though he never became a light-hearted man, he grew genial and kindly, and a prime favorite with his few intimates.

When the gold-fields of Australia began to be spoken of, he made his way to Sydney, alleging as a reason his preference for British as compared with American rule. Here he met with severe losses, and reached the scene of his future labours in an impoverished condition, though he did manage to leave a tolerable deposit in a Sydney bank. After some little time, he perceived that it was better to make others dig for him than to

dig for himself. He therefore started a rude kind of hotel and drinking-bar, where the diggers spent most of their money. Even this rather disreputable calling was rendered more decent by Tyrrell's strength of character. By degrees men trusted him with their money to guard for them, and many were turned from their drunken habits by this man, who, though a publican, was by no means a sinner, and whose high place in public estimation was partly no doubt due to his readiness with the revolver or any other weapon that came to hand, including those given him by nature.

In the midst of this rough life he married a gentle, delicate girl, the daughter of a broken-down squatter, who had left her penniless and defenceless when he died of drink. Compassion on one side and dire need on the other made up the match, but before many months were over the young wife thought that earth held no equal to her husband, while he only lived for the short evening hours he could spend with her. All that could keep their home bright and beautiful and secluded from the roughness of the miners' camp was accumulated round the homely shrine which held Tyrrell's treasure.

Destiny, however, was not yet conciliated. After some years of peaceful happiness and the birth of a son, the delicate young wife took cold, her lungs were soon attacked, and she was not strong enough to bear the strain of a long illness. So Tyrrell was left alone, with only his little boy to link him to life.

This cruel sacrifice to fate seemed to have satisfied the furies, and from this time forward everything touched turned to gold. By the time his only son was old enough to choose him a wife his alliance was sought by the most prominent of the colonial families. He soon made up his mind on this momentous question, and once more Tyrrell thought he had laid the foundations of a home, but it was not to be.

Young Tyrrell was passionately fond of the sea. His yacht was the pride of the colony, and after his very happy marriage perhaps his greatest pleasure was cruising about among the lovely islands of the southern sea with his wife. In due time a baby son was added to the party,—a baby which was almost as much the idol of the grandfather as of the young mother.

These halcyon days, however, were brought to an abrupt and tragical ending.

The beloved grandson of John Tyrrell was little more than two years old when, returning to Sydney after a longer cruise than usual, the "Sea Bird," his son's yacht, was caught in a severe gale, and driven on the rocks of one of those smiling islands that looked so invitingly beautiful in sunshine and fair weather. The vessel went to pieces, and every soul was lost save two,—one a sailor who had been in the royal navy, a man who stood high in the estimation of the yacht's unfortunate owner, and the poor baby, who had been given to his care by its despairing mother just before she herself was engulphed in the waves. The man, more by good fortune than pluck or presence of mind, though he had both, saved himself and his little charge, bringing back to the cruelly bereaved grandfather the only object which made life worth living.

Later it was found that, owing to some injury to the spine incurred during that terrible night of storm and wreck, the heir of John Tyrrell's wealth was doomed to the suffering, the mere partial existence of a crippled invalid.

All that wealth and skill could do to repair the child's injuries was done, to no avail, and John Tyrrell, whose admiration for physical force and beauty was almost unreasonable, was doomed to watch the development, we cannot say growth, of the pale, puny, sickly child, who was to inherit the name and represent the splendid young man who had been his father. But under John Tyrrell's grave, stern exterior beat a true and tender heart, and he determined that his task for the remainder of his days should be to make life more than endurable to his son's son. The task was not an easy one, for, in addition to his physical disabilities, the little invalid was thoroughly spoiled.

Tyrrell made up his mind, soon after his grandson emerged from early childhood, to return to England and establish Valentine there, before he himself was too old to choose his guardians and the friends who must surround him, with the judgment he knew he possessed; sharpened as it was by wide experience of all sorts and conditions of men—rugged, uncouth men—little accustomed to the wiles and shams of civilisation, but exceedingly human creatures with strong characteristics writ large, which he who ran might read.

It took a good many years to wind up his business—his various undertakings in Australia—and transfer his capital, with as little loss as possible, to England chiefly. Lastly, he followed with his precious boy and the faithful Denis, to whom he owed the child's life. They travelled very slowly after reaching Malta. Italy seemed to suit Val, who, young as he was, began to enjoy pictures, statues, scenery, beauty in all forms.

It was nearly two years from the time they left Australia before they reached London. Here Tyrrell felt much more at ease and content than on the Continent. The city, with its enormous tide of commercial life, fascinated him. The extraordinary ease and facility of existence for the rich amazed and delighted him. The endless sources of intellectual pleasure and novelty interested him, as promising something of an enjoyable future for his crippled grandson, and he soon came to the conclusion that no country was so suited to his wants, none so likely to render his life bearable, as "the old countrie."

Then when Val, over-excited by the crowded concerts he attended (he dearly loved music), the splendour of the opera, the endless interesting and

historical sights of the mighty metropolis, grew pale and incapacitated from enjoying anything, a fashionable doctor ordered him to Lynbourne.

While we have glanced at the Tyrrell history, Beatrice, Val, and Denis had gone into the broader part of the wood, which filled a tolerable wide space, sheltered by the Head on one side and the inland range of low hills at the other.

Here was to be found ground-ivy, and plenty of other exquisitely shaped and coloured foliage, the rich undergrowth of this pleasant bit of woodland. Chang, the little brown-yellow dog, was also of the party, and acknowledged Beatrice very graciously. He was very happy sniffing and rustling about among the dried leaves and bracken, which already announced the approach of autumn.

"These are beautiful," cried Val, as Beatrice deposited a large collection of various leaves in the boy's carriage, which could only follow the broader path, where Beatrice and his attendant left him to gather the treasures he coveted.

"Do you know what I want them for?"

"No; I cannot guess."

"I am finishing up a sketch of this wood, and I want to take the colours of these leaves and

have them by me. I should like to show you my drawings. They are no great things, you know, but I fancy I could get on if I had more teaching. Gran' promises I shall have a master when I am stronger. I say, Miss Verner, do come back and have tea with me and gran' out on the balcony. I'll show you all my sketches and photos."

"I should like to go so much, but I'm afraid I shall not get leave; Mrs. Garston likes me to be with her at dinner."

"I daresay she does," said the boy; "but she might *lend* you to me once in a way."

"If we meet her she may consent, but I fear she wants me this evening."

"Do make gran' ask her; people never refuse gran' anything."

"How does he bewitch people?"

"Oh, I don't know; but he does, doesn't he, Denis?"

"Faith he does," returned Denis, with hearty confirmation; "and when he doesn't coax he *ordhers,* so it comes to the same."

Beatrice laughed,—there was something irresistibly comic to her in the man's mode of speech,

—whereupon he laughed, too, sympathetically, but by no means disrespectfully.

"You must not mind Denis," remarked the boy. "He is a queer old chap, but I don't know what I should do without him."

"I am sure he is very kind," said Beatrice, softly.

"Why is Mrs. Garston nasty and selfish?" asked Val.

"She is not ill-natured; she is quite nice to me."

"Why do you live with her? Is she your aunt or any relation?"

"No; I have only known her for five or six weeks, and I live with her because she wants my help and I want her money," said Beatrice, who was folding up their collection of leaves in a newspaper which Denis produced from one of his many pockets.

"Oh, she gives you money, does she? I do wish you would leave her and come live with me. Gran' would give you any money you wanted. He doesn't know what to do to amuse and please me sometimes when I am cross."

"Would you care to have a girl with you who

could forsake her first friend the moment something better or pleasanter offered? Besides, you might grow tired of me in a few weeks."

"Well, yes, I might," looking earnestly at her. "Somehow, I don't think I should. Gran', too, says he likes your face."

"An' small blame to him," put in Denis, who was leaning against a tree, listening to the conversation, and surveying the speaker with a benevolent expression.

"And why ought you not to leave Mrs. Garston?"

"Because we have made an agreement, and so long as she fulfils her part I am bound to her; she has been very nice to me, too, as I said."

"Well, I don't like her," growled Val, "and I daresay you won't by and by. Denis, I want to go back and have my tea. Perhaps we'll meet dad and Mrs. Garston on the way."

The crippled boy was rather silent during their return progress. But he managed a little grumbling.

"Gran'dad is going over to look at that old house of Lord Lynford's to-morrow, and he won't take me; says he wants to be by himself. Isn't

it disagreeable? I say, Miss Verner, ask that Mrs. Garston of yours to let you spend the day with me; we'd have a nice luncheon, and drive over to that pretty fisher village at the opening of the bay. Then I could show you all my curios and things. It would be so jolly."

"I should like it very much. I will ask Mrs. Garston," returned Beatrice.

"Do; do, like a dear girl," cried the boy.

"Faith, if you asked her yourself, Masther Val, she'd never say no to you," put in Denis.

"Well, I'll write her a note."

But by the time they reached the hotel the poor fellow was too tired to do more than drink a cup of tea, and then let Denis cover him up on the sofa, where he soon fell asleep.

On reaching her own quarters Beatrice found Mrs. Garston was engaged with Captain Vincent, so kept in her room till Hahn, the courier, knocked at her door to tell her that dinner was on the table. The meal passed pleasantly. Mrs. Garston did most of the talking. She was in good temper and good spirits. Captain Vincent did not seem aware that Beatrice was present. He left them early, saying some Indian friends of his were stay-

ing at Lynbourne, and he had promised to call upon them. When he was gone, Mrs. Garston threw herself into a corner of the sofa and yawned largely. Then she began to unclasp her bracelets and take the tortoise-shell pins out of her hair.

"And what did you do with your new friend the cripple?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing particular. I gathered some leaves and berries for him. He asked me to stay and have tea, but not knowing what you might want I refused."

"Of course; quite right."

"He wanted me to lunch and drive with him to-morrow. Of course, I did not accept."

"Of course not," in a high key. "Don't let those people lure you away from me. I don't believe they are millionaires, or anything more than fairly well off. Both Hahn and Stéphanie tell me they live quite economically. They have the plainest food, and drink only beer and thin Bordeaux. They have no carriage nor any horses; nor does the old man sport a morsel of jewelry. The strange sort of valet or attendant of theirs boasts a good deal of his master's wealth, which rather disposes me to think that they may be

adventurers. Do be prudent. *I* am substantial, —don't leave me for a shadow."

"Do you think me capable of such disloyalty, Mrs. Garston?" indignantly.

"Oh, one never knows."

CHAPTER IX.

"NEW FRIENDS."

MRS. GARSTON had plenty for Beatrice to do next day, so she did not even attempt to mention her new friend's invitation to spend it pleasuring with him. This was a great disappointment, though she fancied she was prepared for it.

She was immensely interested in Val. He amused her and made her feel younger by contact with his youthfulness. His avowed liking pleased and attracted her, while her deep compassion for the masculine spirit imprisoned in a poor, disabled frame completed the spell. Her regret was increased by a note in large, heavy writing—strong enough for a much maturer individual—from Val himself, saying gran' had started to walk over to Lynford, and asking if she couldn't come at once and dine with him early, so as to have a long afternoon for their drive. Beatrice wrote a hasty line expressing her deep

regret at not being able to accept his invitation, and then set about her work with a sigh of regret.

As she anticipated, Mrs. Garston's negotiations for the Villa Marina came to a favourable conclusion; so she set her people in motion to prepare for the flitting. Suddenly, when her drawing-room was all upset,—her photographs and ornaments being partly stowed away in their packing-case,—and she herself not *en grand tenue,* though always well and becomingly dressed, "General and Mrs. Brandling" were announced, partly to her satisfaction, partly to her annoyance.

These were Indian acquaintances, and in India Mrs. Brandling had been a personage. First, she was the Honourable Mrs. Brandling; next, she was a woman who knew her own value, and not only estimated it above its market value, but contrived to make others accept her estimate. She had been the leader of society at C——, and in those days had hardly deigned to notice the wife of an obscure civilian not in the civil service. Now things were changed, and Mrs. Garston determined to profit by the change, and to enjoy it.

She was going through the list of her belongings to see if all was right and in good condition

before moving into her new quarters, and was standing by the writing-table, dictating some particulars to be added to the list which Beatrice was writing down, when these distinguished visitors appeared. The general,—a stout, bluff-looking man with a red face and huge, iron-grey moustaches. His wife was tall and extremely thin, with sharp, light eyes and a rather distinguished air. She was very plainly attired in a dark-blue serge costume, with a small, toque-like straw hat edged with blue velvet and decorated with a white wing.

"Mrs. Brandling! This is indeed a surprise!" and Mrs. Garston shook hands very cordially. "I had no idea you were even in England."

"And we only heard of your being here yesterday from Captain Vincent. We found him at the Barrets, where we had looked in for a game of whist."

"Thought we'd beat up your quarters," added the general, in a loud, "guard, turn out!" kind of voice, "as we are going on to Scarborough the day after to-morrow. I've cut the service, you know; it's an infernal, beggarly concern. By

George, Mrs. Garston, you look stunning! English air is the best beautifier, hey?"

He twirled his moustaches and cast an enquiring glance at Beatrice, who sat down again after looking at Mrs. Garston for instructions. That lady nodded towards the writing on which she was engaged.

"It is very nice to see you again," she said, sweetly, "only I wish you were going to stay longer. The air here has quite set me up, but I should have found it very dull had not Lord Lynford come down for the shooting and brightened us up a little; we were lunching with him the day before yesterday. He has the most charming old house; you really ought to see it."

"Ah, yes; to be sure! And he is still a bachelor? I have not heard of his marriage yet."

"Yes, and I do not fancy he is at all matrimonially inclined; but he is as pleasant as ever."

"Fancy he is considerably dipped," said the general. "Fast, very fast,—at least he was when I knew him."

"And are you making any stay here?" asked Mrs. Brandling.

"Well, yes; I have just taken a villa for a couple of months. We move in to-morrow; that is why you find me in this dismantled condition and Miss Verner, my secretary, so hard at work," —a slight wave of the hand towards Bea, as much as to say, "I *have* a secretary, but she is of no importance." The general rose up and bowed; Mrs. Brandling bent her head slightly. Beatrice looked, smiled, and bent hers; then continued her task without a word.

"And so you are going to stay on here!" exclaimed Mrs. Brandling. "Don't you think you will be horribly bored?"

"You see I was so long a sick-nurse that I find crowds and society rather too much for me as yet."

"Still, I imagine your life was not without its excitements," said Mrs. Brandling, in a gentle tone.

"You are right," returned her interlocutor; "I had a good deal of very painful excitement, especially towards the end."

"Ah! there is no use in looking back on a painful past," remarked the general, comfortably;

"but don't bury yourself too long in this Arcadian spot. I tell you what you'll do. You know I've lost my poor brother Bob and come into his property in Yorkshire, not far from Scarborough. We are going to have some jolly good fellows of both sexes down for shooting about the 20th. You come and join us. We'll take deuced good care of you, and it will be a bit of a change, you know. It is a small, unpretentious place; but we can put up a few friends fairly well, and there's a capital neighbourhood."

"Yes, do come, dear Mrs. Garston," said Mrs. Brandling, quite warmly; "I don't think you ever met my nephew. He is rather amusing,—a regular London man. You see he was in the blues, and has only seen social service."

"You are very kind," returned Mrs. Garston, successfully suppressing all outward signs of the inward joy which uplifted her heart. "I shall look over my engagements, and if I have a few days to spare, will gladly give them to you. Later on I think of going to Pau or the Riviera."

"Oh, there's plenty of time for that!" cried Mrs. Brandling. "Pray dine with us to-day, and we'll arrange matters. We are staying at a nice,

quiet little place, 'The Admiral'; very cosey and free from Cook's people; half-past seven."

"I shall be most happy," said Mrs. Garston, smiling graciously, and the conversation turned on India and Indian gossip, until the visitors, with many expressions of pleasure at this unexpected meeting, took leave of the fair widow.

"I was surprised to see Mrs. Brandling walk in," exclaimed Mrs. Garston when they had departed. "But only fancy putting up at a second-rate place like 'The Admiral!' It is quite an insignificant little inn near the old jetée, where everyone went, I believe, in former days, when there was no other place to go to. Of course, if Mrs. Brandling goes there, she will think that quite enough to make it the first place in the town. She is looking wonderfully older. To be sure, a scraggy woman always looks older than a plump one. Well, times are changed."

"She is very nice-looking and lady-like," said Beatrice.

"Nice-looking! Why, she is forty if she is a day!" cried Mrs. Garston.

"But people do not always become ugly at

forty. I am sure *you* will be as handsome as ever at forty."

"Much obliged to you, I am sure," said Mrs. Garston, laughing. "You don't know how far or how near that terrible epoch is. Well, this invitation is most disturbing. I really have nothing quite fit to wear; just call Stéphanie, will you? She must make me fit to be seen."

An eager discussion followed between the Frenchwoman and her mistress, and Beatrice applied herself to finish her list, smothering a regret that Mrs. Garston had been so emphatic in her refusal of permission to spend even part of the day with her boy friend. From seven or quarter-past she would be free and alone. But there! the thing was past, and it was useless to complain.

At quarter-past seven Mrs. Garston set forth, in admirably arranged *demi-toilette* and an excellent temper. Beatrice put up her writing, and was beginning to wrap some of the smaller ornaments in silver paper, when a knock on the door struck her ear.

A little surprised, she at once said, "Come in," when the door opened to admit Denis.

"Begging you a thousand pardons, miss," he began, "for making so bold, but Master Val has been out on the balcony, and seen the lady drive away, all dressed for a party; so he insisted that I should come and ask if you wouldn't be so obliging as to take a bit o' supper with him. Mr. Tyrrell came in late, and wonderful tired for him, so he is gone to his own room, and Master Val is down-hearted and mournful-like, so maybe you'd be so good as to come and cheer him up a bit. It would be real kind."

Beatrice never stopped to think; nothing more innocent could be devised according to her ideas; so, with a bright smile, she immediately replied, "Oh, yes! I shall be very pleased to go to him. I'll just tell Stéphanie, and come back to you."

"Going out without the permission of madame!" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, whom Beatrice found sitting beside a pile of needlework, with a yellow-paper-covered book in her hands. "You will what you call 'catch it.'"

"I do not think so. I am not neglecting any work of Mrs. Garston's, and therefore I am free."

"Madame will not be of your advice, and what for you do it? A cripple child is not very amusing."

"Well, he interests *me*. So good-evening, Stéphanie."

The boy was leaning back on the cushions of his sofa holding a book, but not reading, for his eyes were fixed on the door.

"Ah, so you've ventured to come!" he exclaimed. "I thought you would. Have you dined? Oh, at luncheon,—that is nothing. We'll have supper presently. Now, Denis, get out my big photograph books, and I will take you all through Italy. Do you love pictures? Yes; I thought you did. Here,—here is Chang coming to welcome you. He knows you are a friend, for he notices very few people."

Beatrice stroked the little creature, who soon returned to his master's couch, and curled himself up at his feet.

While Denis got out the photographs Bea looked round the room, which was large and handsomely furnished, but bare-looking,—a few books, a pile of newspapers, a bundle of sticks and umbrellas in a corner, and a bunch of rather

faded flowers thrust into an ill-shaped vase were the only additions to the monotony of the hotel furniture.

"Have you been in Italy?" began the boy, opening the larger of his books.

"Oh, never, and I don't suppose I ever shall."

"You ought to make Mrs. What's-her-name take you."

"That is not very likely," she said, laughing.

"We will begin at Malta, — that's the first place in Europe we stopped at."

An hour passed swiftly. The boy had much to say about each view, and spoke, Bea thought, surprisingly well. Her deep interest gratified him, and revived the memory of his first impressions and delight in this new world of beauty and art he had traversed since he quitted his antipodean home. "You know everything is new and rough out in Australia. If I had been strong and able to hunt, to ride after cattle, as the men out there do, I should have been fonder of home, but I am a poor creature, and always will be. The doctors talk a lot of bosh to gran', but they can't give new legs, can they? Sometimes it makes me very miserable; then I am cross and hate people,

or think everyone despises me. Oh, I could be so cruel sometimes! But, now, you—you don't dislike me?"

"I like you very much," said Beatrice, softly.

"Yes, I think you do; but I don't think everyone does, nor everyone who says they do. Mrs.—your lady,—I forget her name,—she is very sweet to me; but if I belonged to her and was in her way,—well, it wouldn't be nice for me."

"I think you are not just to Mrs. Garston."

"Now, gran'," he went on, "is not like that; he never changes. He pities me awfully, and that makes me furious. If we ever get to be friends, you must never pity me, Beatrice, or I'll be very bad to you. May I call you Beatrice, and will you call me Val?"

"Yes, I should like you to call me Beatrice; but might not Mr. Tyrrell think me taking a liberty?"

"Who?—dad, gran'dad? Oh, not he! He is never vexed about little things; but when he *is* vexed, there is no mistake about it; I've seen the fellows at home tremble before him. Something put him out to-day,—not made him angry, but melancholy; he looked white and his eyes hollow.

He has been in his own room ever since he came in, and he just said Lynford was a fine place and a home a man might well be proud of."

"Yes, it is beautiful! You must go and see it, Val. There are pictures and books and such lovely trees."

"I don't want to go till Lord Lynford goes right away. He wrote very civilly to gran', but I daresay he despises us as vulgar colonials."

"No one can say or think that of your grandfather; he has a sort of kingly look," cried Beatrice.

"And my appearance is uncommon too, unfortunately," put in Val, with a grin. "You know this Lord Lynford, don't you?"

"I see him when he comes to Mrs. Garston; I can hardly say I know him."

"Do you like him?"

"I ought not to say I like or dislike him, but I did dislike him; there is something hard and contemptuous in his look and manner. But I have liked him better since I have seen him at home; he is very nice in his own house."

Here the door opened slowly and Mr. Tyrrell came in. He wore a sort of short smoking-coat of black velvet, which suited him well. His fine,

commanding eyes looked dim and weary, and he seemed older than when Beatrice had seen him first.

"Miss Verner has come to sup with me, gran'," cried Val, as his grandfather entered.

"She is very good," said the old man, courteously. "We have seldom the honour of a lady's company, eh, Val?"

"I am sure I don't want them," returned the boy; "they are generally stupid and cranky. Do you remember all the women that used to worry round us in the hotels abroad? I was sick of them."

"He is an ungrateful youngster, Miss Verner," said Tyrrell, his eyes resting on her with a sad, searching look. "But supper or dinner ought to be ready, Val. You don't heed the time in pleasant company; it must be nearly nine o'clock."

"Ah, then I must not stay much longer," cried Beatrice; "I should not like to be out when Mrs. Garston returns."

"Why?" asked Mr. Tyrrell. "Does she disapprove of your visiting my boy?"

"No, certainly not; but I think I ought to be

at home to receive her. She would think it disrespectful of me to be out."

"This is a little like slavery, isn't it?"

"No, I do not think so; I suppose a certain degree of observance is her due."

"Probably you are right," returned the old man, thoughtfully; "and—but here is supper, and before you go you must eat with us."

The waiter entered as he spoke, and began to set forth a table with good things swiftly.

"I am quite hungry," cried Val; "I don't know when I was hungry before."

"Perhaps because you have already been well entertained," said his grandfather, with a kindly smile which lent wonderful beauty to his fine though rugged face.

"I suppose so. Is it likely one can care for food when you have been bored and tired?"

Tyrrell placed a chair for Beatrice and attended to her wants with most polite but fatherly care, and apparently resisting an inclination to silence, tried to make himself agreeable.

"Is Lynford a very fine house, gran'?" asked Valentine, when he had partially satisfied his hunger.

"It is not 'fine' so much as it is noble. I could not help asking myself, as I walked through the halls and passages and up and down the grand staircase, if such a dwelling must not have an influence on those who dwelt within it? The thought of the men of one's own blood who have lived and suffered and struggled through life under the same old roof ought to sanctify it."

"But Lord Lynford said that his forefathers were a wild, piratical set of freebooters, and had built the house, or the first part of it, out of ill-gotten gains," said Beatrice.

"I don't think those freebooting fellows were so bad; they were men, every inch of them, and true to each other. Besides, the moral standard of those days was different from ours. When I was young and fighting my way up from the lowest round of the ladder, I used to rail against the aristocracy as an idle, useless crew; but I think differently now. As a class they were necessary to the progress of our civilisation, and there are a lot of fine individuals among them; yet it does sting a man who is working hard, on half rations, that there are others who have all that makes life beautiful and easy and enjoyable,

which they have never earned nor merited, by the mere accident of birthright. Yet even this works in for the benefit of the whole. But, at any rate, Lord Lynford seems a man as well as a nobleman. I met him as I was leaving the house. He stopped me to ask what I thought of it, and took me into the library, which is not shown with the rest of the rooms. He talked — talked well, too — of politics and various subjects. It must take generations of men accustomed to physical and mental ease, of education and high, assured position, to produce that sort of simple but commanding manner. He seemed in his right place as master of that fine old pile."

"Yes; I wonder it does not break his heart to leave it."

"Leave it! Why, he does not think of leaving Lynford?"

"I believe he does," returned Beatrice. "I heard him talking to Mrs. Garston about selling the whole property because he wanted money."

"Lynford to be sold!" said Tyrrell, his eyes lighting up with a sudden flash, and then darkening to sadness as they turned to his grandson. "That should not be! A man who is the trustee

of such a treasure should guard it as he would honour or life."

"Ah, yes! But, somehow, so many people who have large fortunes and lovely houses *do* want money and sell their places. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned it, but Lord Lynford spoke quite openly; he did not seem to mind much."

There was a long silence. Tyrrell leaned his elbow on the table and shaded his eyes with his hand, and Val was feeding Chang with cake.

"Destiny is strange!" said the old man at last, removing his hand from his eyes to take up the grape-scissors. "Let me give you a few more grapes," he added, in an altered voice, and he proceeded to replenish his guest's plate.

"You must take me to see this wonderful place, gran'," said Val. "Could I walk about with my crutches?"

"Yes, and Denis. For the oak floors are slippery, and a fall would be very bad for you."

"Are there many pictures there?"

"There's something of everything there, my boy. Yes, you shall see it, and soon. For Lord Lynford is going to run his yacht at the Portslade

regatta, and will be away nearly a week. He was so good as to say I might go and look over his place whenever I liked, so I thought it would be only polite to go when he is away."

"I suppose this Lord Lynford is a great swell," said Val; "a bloated aristocrat."

"There is something very distinguished about him," returned Mr. Tyrrell, "but nothing bloated."

"Now, Beatrice, I will show my sketches," began Val, but she refused to stay, and when the boy pressed her, his grandfather interposed.

"Your friend knows what is right to do, so let her go, boy. Mrs. Garston will let her come again, perhaps. It is time, too, you went to bed yourself. So say good-night, and I will see Miss Verner safely to her own rooms."

"Oh, you really must not take that trouble, dear sir."

"Old as I am, I cannot be so uncourteous to a young lady, and it is no trouble."

"Do try to come again soon," cried Val, holding her hand, "won't you?"

"Indeed I will, dear Val!" The little dog gave her its paw, and Beatrice went away, feeling very

small beside the tall, stately old man who insisted on seeing her safely within her own door.

"I thank you very heartily," he said, "for the pleasure you have given my poor boy. I hope Mrs. Garston will allow you to come again."

"It has been a most happy evening to me!" exclaimed Beatrice, smiling radiantly.

Mr. Tyrrell gazed at her with a kindly, earnest glance. "It is good to hear you say so, my child," he said. "And you are sure Lord Lynford means to sell his beautiful home?"

"I certainly heard him speak of doing so."

"Good-night, Miss Verner."

"Good-night, and thank you very much."

Beatrice found the lamp burning in Mrs. Garston's room, but no sign of Stéphanie, so she took a book and waited. In about an hour that astute personage entered, hastily and breathless.

"It is madame who arrives," she exclaimed. "She did not intend to be so late."

Mrs. Garston came in before she could say more. She was looking well and pleased.

"Really, a little society is a great relief," she said. "We had quite a pleasant little dinner.

Why, Miss Verner, you have sat up too!—that was not necessary."

"I have spent the evening with my young Australian friend, so I thought I would wait for you."

"Oh, indeed! Well, you need not wait any longer now. Good-night."

CHAPTER X.

"A SPORTING OFFER."

THE next two days were fully occupied in changing their abode. At least, Beatrice and Stéphanie were very busy. Mrs. Garston rode away with Captain Vincent to lunch with some acquaintances in the neighbourhood, whom she had met at the Brandlings', where the party had been made up; and as the handsome widow availed herself of Lynford's request that she would ride the horse she had admired, she presented a charming picture of a well-mounted, well-equipped Amazon. She was so pleased at the prospect of being well launched in English society that the non-appearance of Lord Lynford for three days did not ruffle her temper, though she thought it a little uncivil on his part to have let her gather from newspaper gossip that he had sailed for Portslade, as his yacht was entered for the regatta there.

Beatrice was pleased with the change of residence. The quiet seemed delightful after the noise and racket of the hotel, while the view of the bay and its sheltering headland was, she thought, more beautiful than from the other side. She enjoyed arranging the drawing-room and decorating it with flowers.

"It is a real solitude here," said Stéphanie, pausing in her labours of unpacking and arranging to relieve her mind by a little talk; "not the least society! One loses the gift of speech like this. No one to speak to but that half *imbécile* of a German, Hahn, who is without ideas. It is not very gay, *par exemple.*"

"The people of the house seem pleasant enough, and very civil."

"No doubt. But they are mere provincials. Of course, now madame makes more acquaintances, I shall have more liberty. *Dieu,* how *triste* it has been! I wonder you are alive, mademoiselle, —at your age, too!—your only diversion to amuse a poor cripple. However, I should not be surprised if you had a change soon. Madame intends to marry my lord."

"I am sure I hope he will make her happy if she does."

"No, he will not. He is one wicked, bad man! He wants her money,—that is all!"

"Do you really think him bad? Bad-tempered, perhaps," said Beatrice, much concerned. She had an idea that Stéphanie was a person of vast experience and superior judgment.

"Bad-tempered, bah!" said Stéphanie, with infinite contempt; then she rose up from the chair on which she had sunk, and went about her business.

Mrs. Garston approved of what had been done, and her satisfaction was completed by the reappearance of Lord Lynford on the Sunday following her installation at Villa Marina. She had not yet risen from the luncheon-table when he arrived, but he refused her offers of refreshment.

"I am not much of a luncheon-eater," he said, "and came in at this hour as I thought I should find you before you went to—oh, to afternoon service."

"Afternoon service!" cried Mrs. Garston, laughing. "Don't you think morning service enough?"

"Well, yes, if you go. It struck me that the

service is shorter in the afternoon, eh, Miss Verner?" with a good-natured attempt to draw her into the conversation. "How is your crippled friend? Seen him lately?"

"Only once since we came here, and then he did not seem very well."

"Fine old fellow, the grandfather. Something original about him, though he does not talk much."

"Guess who called on me last Tuesday?" asked Mrs. Garston, who did not understand why Lynford should waste his words on her insignificant secretary.

"How can I possibly tell?"

"General and Mrs. Brandling. You must remember them. He was in command when you were at Chandrapore."

"Ah, yes; she was something of a May-pole."

"Exactly. Well, they were staying here at 'The Admiral.' Captain Vincent met them."

"Ah! Vincent, is *he* here?"

"Yes; have you any objection?" she asked, showing her brilliantly white teeth, with an amused smile.

"Objection? No. Why should I? What business have I to object to his knowing or being with

anyone, so long as I am not obliged to cultivate him myself?"

"Then you do not object to *my* cultivating him?"

"I have no right to interfere with you, Mrs. Garston."

She sighed and looked down, and Beatrice rose quietly and went through one of the open windows into the garden.

"You have a very discreet secretary or a well-trained one," continued Lynford, laughing, as he noticed this exit.

"I could not put up with any dullard who did not know how to efface herself when she was not wanted," returned Mrs. Garston, carelessly. "Beatrice Verner knows her own interest too well not to study me. She hasn't a sou, and has neither kith nor kin that I can make out except an old maiden sister. It is a great chance for her to be with me."

"No doubt," said Lynford, absently, and he was silent for a minute or two.

"Do you know," continued Mrs. Garston, "that General Brandling has succeeded to some property and a place somewhere in Yorkshire? They

have asked me to go and stay there on the sixteenth."

"Ah! indeed. It may be an amusing change. I fancy you must be rather bored here. The sixteenth? I am going up to London about that time, and to cruise over to the Channel Islands. There's a relative of mine appointed governor of Jersey, and I have promised to look him up."

"And then?" asked Mrs. Garston, with a little anxiety in her tone.

"Oh, then I shall return to the Hall, and stay on till some one buys the old place. I have pretty well come to the end of my tether, my fair friend, and I am like the reduced gentlewoman who was driven to cry, 'Buy my fresh eggs!" in the street, and ejaculated between each cry, 'I hope nobody hears me.' I want to sell Lynford, but I object to its being publicly advertised. Miserable weakness, eh?"

"I entirely sympathise with you," cried Mrs. Garston, earnestly. "But why advertise it when you can dispose of it by private contract? I am ready to invest nearly all I possess in its purchase."

"Dear Mrs. Garston, I cannot listen to such

a proposition of self-sacrifice. Personally, I can have nothing to do with the sale. I leave it all to Pounceby."

"Do you think the self-sacrifice would be *so* great?" asked Mrs. Garston, with a long, languorous glance from her large, soft eyes, as the colour mounted in her cheek.

"Yes; decidedly. You haven't counted the cost. Just imagine yourself hampered with an unwieldy, unprofitable property, and a big house in which you would be moped to death if it were not full of people,—at the same time believe me you would find large house parties an awful nuisance. For my own part, I look forward with joy to the perfect freedom of 'a life on the ocean wave,' once I have cleared my decks of the wreckage. My yacht and a small flat in town, when I put in to refit, will be all I can manage in future, and quite enough, too."

"And will such a life suffice you," she exclaimed, with emotion which he well understood. "Once, and not so long ago, I did not believe I should have heard such words from your lips. Have you no regard for your position, for the brilliancy of the lot you renounce, merely because

you will not stretch out your hand and take the means of restoration which wait your acceptance? You might be anything you like——"

"Exactly! I shall certainly *do* what I like," he returned, with a hard laugh. "I prefer freedom to obligation, and, as you must know, I have had enough of money-lenders. Cent. per cent. is too much for accommodation."

"And even a free gift?" she asked, in an unsteady voice.

"My dear Mrs. Garston! There is no such thing. There is no use in trying to save a doomed man. Many thanks to you for your very flattering interest in a worthless bohemian like myself. So—— What are you going to do this afternoon? There's a delightful breeze; would you care for a sail?"

"Thank you, no. I have a headache. I shall go and lie down. The wind is nor'east. It is one of the few things that disagree with me, so I must wish you good-morning, Lord Lynford."

"Ah, you are right! Nothing like the darkened seclusion of one's own room. You have changed for the better, Mrs. Garston. This is a great improvement on the hotel. It is clear of

the dusty little town, too. Hope to hear you are all right to-morrow."

Choking with mortification, disappointment, and indignation, Mrs. Garston locked herself into her room, and wept bitter, scorching tears at this undisguised rejection by the man who once sought her eagerly, and responded so warmly to her veiled advances. Now he told her plainly he would have none of her, that he preferred a wandering, obscure life to her beauty, her gold, her proffered love! What had changed him? True, they had long ago ceased to correspond, and had she only love to offer she could have better understood his cruel indifference.

Could he be jealous of Vincent? Impossible! and it was very unlikely he had heard any of the absurd, ill-natured gossip which had been more or less circulated about him when he had been so useful to her during her husband's last illness. Her heart beat with the unspeakable fury of a woman scorned, but it was not all over yet. Some counter-influence to her own was at work, and she would not throw up the sponge till some fresh proof of Lynford's estrangement overwhelmed her.

Meanwhile, Lynford, with a dark look of annoyance on his face, walked slowly down the garden and through the gate, which opened on a raised footway running along the land side of the beach.

Here he paused, looking right and left, as if seeking for something. Then he turned towards the road leading to the Hall, and crossed the beach to a group which was standing down near the water's edge.

It consisted of Val Tyrrell, the faithful Denis, and Beatrice. The boy was, as usual, propped up with cushions in his invalid-carriage.

"And how goes it to-day?" asked Lynford, shaking hands with him. Beatrice never liked Lord Lynford so much as when he spoke to Val. A softer, franker look came into his eyes, a kindlier tone into his voice; it seemed that something more genial and natural came back to him from his vanished youth.

"It goes very badly," said Val, shaking hands with him. "Gran' went off to town; I have had a horrid headache for two days, and Miss Verner has never come near me."

"What a list of woes! Well, it is not very

good for your head to stand here in this strong sunlight."

"We only stopped form a minute to look at that beautiful pleasure-boat lying out there. I should like to paint it."

"Well, so you shall. It is mine. Would you like a sail in her?"

"It would be too delightful! I don't know when I was on the water,—but how shall we manage?"

"Easily enough. I have two men with me. The reclining-board of your little carriage takes out, doesn't it? Well, one of my men shall help Denis to carry you in,—they won't mind wet feet, —and then we will put away the rest of your ingenious conveyance somewhere out of sight."

"Oh, yes," put in Beatrice, "I can wheel it up to our garden, and it can stand behind the gate till you come back, Val."

"Well thought of, Miss Verner!"

"I'll just wait and see you on board; then I will take away the carriage."

"How do you mean? You are coming yourself," cried Lynford.

Beatrice shook her head.

"Alas, no! I could not stay away without leave, and——"

"You need not trouble about Mrs. Garston," he interrupted, almost eagerly. "She will not want you; she has gone to lie down. She has a bad headache."

"But that is the very reason I must stay with her," said Bea, smiling.

"Nonsense! She will not miss you."

"Even so, I should not like to be away. Stéphanie is going out too this afternoon."

"You don't care to come,—that is the real reason of your reluctance."

"No, no, indeed, Lord Lynford. I should dearly like to go, but I ought not,—I must not. If you ever give me another chance, I will gladly go, I assure you," she added, with the sweet frankness that had so great a charm for him.

"But I am going away."

"Ah! I am very sorry, but I must not go to-day."

"I am thoroughly sold!" exclaimed Lynford, laughing. "There's nothing left me but to grin and bear it. However, you and I must manage a sail another time."

"Thank you," said Beatrice, with a little bow, while she thought, "I would rather not be quite by myself with him. There is something in him I am half afraid of. I ought to be ashamed of such folly, but I cannot help it."

She stood watching the embarcation of the party. She kissed her hand to Val, then wheeled the little carriage to its place of shelter, and went in-doors.

In the hall she met Stéphanie going out. "Lord Lynford tells me Mrs. Garston has a bad headache."

"Yes, bad,—very bad! More than a headache: she has been weeping, and walking to and fro; indeed, it seems to me she has a *crise de nerfs*. It is all since milor' went away. It will not be pleasant for you and me, I can tell you!" Mademoiselle Stéphanie nodded sagely, and went her way.

Beatrice went slowly towards her own room, not a little puzzled. There was a certain abruptness—an authoritative air—about Lord Lynford that made him seem formidable, but she did not think him cruel or unkind; and why should he be

unkind to any one so fond of him as Mrs. Garston evidently was? It was a bad trait in his character.

But Beatrice did not spend many thoughts on this question. Having told one of the house-servants that she would be in her room should Mrs. Garston want her, she took out her desk and applied herself to read over the last two or three letters she had had from her sister before writing a long one in return. Miss Verner's letters were neither frequent nor long, for she had a very busy life, yet they were always a source of pleasure to the younger sister, albeit neither effusive nor sentimental.

The profound interest, the unselfish regard which made Bea the one object of Sarah's life, made itself felt in every sentence, and Bea's heart glowed with gratitude as she read. "And I don't deserve it,—really, I don't," she thought, looking back on her early, heedless girlhood and her impatience of her sister's steady discipline,—her dissatisfaction with the monotony of a home on which the shadow of mortal sickness always dwelt.

How pleased she had been to quit it for what at first seemed a brighter and more luxurious

life! Now, after a couple of months' experience, her views of Mrs. Garston and existence under her rule were considerably modified. As has been shown, she was in no way fanciful nor exacting. She considered herself perfectly well treated by her employer, whom she sincerely admired and to whom she was at first disposed to attach herself. Now that tendency had faded away,—she could hardly tell how. The conviction had grown upon her that to Mrs. Garston she was a useful instrument, and nothing more. Her utmost efforts to please, to be useful, called forth no response; her joy or sorrow excited no sympathy. If she were to expire before her employer's eyes it might draw forth a peevish sense of being injured or bored, but no more; and though much too sensible not to take refuge herself in the stronghold of indifference, she found a degree of depression, a feeling of isolation, growing on her. Every one she met was hard and selfish except the old Australian and his grandson; and in her heart of hearts she longed to be back with her dear, cranky Sarah,—doing real work and giving real help, "instead of playing at work, as I do here," she murmured. "I wonder why Mrs. Garston keeps

me? It is waste of money for an economist, as she certainly is, in spite of her love of fine things and good things; still, I hope she will keep me long enough to let me save a little money. I must never go back to be a burden; and it is evident that poor, dear Sarah has enough to do to make both ends meet. In another year the house may be more prosperous." She read on yet another letter. "The worst of it is," wrote Sarah, "that the elderly men expect as good dinners for thirty shillings and two pounds a week as they have at a high-class restaurant, and the young ones sometimes leave the gas burning all night; and they never dream of wiping their feet on the muddiest day, while the way they throw matches about is positively appalling. I am thankful to think the house is well insured. The furniture begins to look very shabby, and they let candle-grease drop on the stair-carpet in a downright shameful manner; but, withal, I must say they are very nice and polite to me. The most difficult of them all is Mr. Theophilus Jones. He is a Congregationalist, and rather greedy; indeed, he worries more about getting the worth of his money than all the rest put together. You'll be

sorry to hear that Mrs. Heathcote has been in a very delicate state of health; it's nerves and neuralgia. They say she must winter in a warm climate. I am quite grieved about her; she has been a good friend to us." "Poor Sarah! She wants me wofully, and I wish I could go to her, but I must not think of it just yet."

Then Beatrice took up her pen and wrote a long, full letter,—one of those soul-satisfying epistles which carries conviction to the recipient that the heart of the writer had been fully and freely poured out.

This finished, she put away her things carefully, and, leaning out of the window, gazed dreamily over land and sea, thinking of all that had happened since she had ventured forth from the shelter of home. The events had been few and small, yet how much she had seen and learned! How would the old love-affair—as she suspected it was—between Mrs. Garston and Lord Lynford end? She was quite sorry to think him cruel; for he had been nice to her in a noiseless, unobtrusive way that created a curious sense of trust and safety.

She closed her letter and addressed it. This

done, she solaced herself with one of Hawthorne's delightful stories, lent her by her boy friend from out his ample store, for he was an omnivorous and indiscriminate reader.

As the evening closed in, she grew uneasy at receiving no summons from Mrs. Garston and ventured to tap at her door.

"Who is it?" was the response.

"Beatrice Verner."

"Has Stéphanie returned?"

"Not yet."

"Then come in and help me to dress," said Mrs. Garston. "I must have been asleep," she added, as Beatrice entered.

"Then I hope your head is better."

"How do you know that I had a headache?"

"Lord Lynford told me. He came down the beach to speak to Val Tyrrell, and took him for a sail."

"What in the world does he see in those uncouth Australians, that he shows them so much civility!" she exclaimed, impatiently, as she took off her dress and then pointed to her dressing-jacket.

"I suppose he likes them," said Beatrice.

"Why? They are very ordinary people, and as to their wealth, I do not believe in it."

"I must say they interest me."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Mrs. Garston, contemptuously, as she shook down her abundant locks. "I suppose you have no idea of dressing hair?"

"Only my own."

"And that indifferently. You are really rather useless! If you could unite the functions of secretary and lady's-maid I might get rid of Stéphanie, who is an insolent, unfeeling creature, and you might earn more money."

"Thank you, Mrs. Garston! I should be a very poor substitute for Stéphanie, and I am not inclined to accept the double service."

"I suppose you would consider it a great degradation to be my lady's-maid?"

"Indeed, I should not; but I prefer the position of secretary; I am more fitted for it."

"There is nothing so contemptible as the pride of empty pockets."

"I can't help thinking that purse-pride is worse; and, Mrs. Garston, if you think me useless, pray do not hesitate to dismiss me; I daresay I should find something else to do."

"No doubt you would," interrupted Mrs. Garston, angrily. "I see you think you would be better off with that old bushranger, Tyrrell; but they shall not take you from me, and if you behave badly to me you shall regret it!"

"I should be sorry to do so, Mrs. Garston."

"I hope so. Now give me my lilac tea gown and go dress yourself. Vincent dines here, and you must look respectable."

"Do you really want me at dinner?"

"I should very soon tell you if I did not."

Beatrice had never known Mrs. Garston in so furiously bad a temper. She was distressed, but not frightened, and could not help conjecturing what chance she might have of being asked by Mr. Tyrrell to be companion and reader to his crippled grandson, were she free. "I should be much happier," she thought; "but I will not act shabbily or ungratefully to my first friend."

Mrs. Garston looked very pale and lowering at dinner. Beatrice noticed that Captain Vincent cast curious and enquiring glances at her from time to time. He did his best to keep up the conversation, but with no great success.

When they were taking coffee in the drawing-

room, Mrs. Garston, after stirring her cup for a few minutes in thoughtful silence, asked Captain Vincent, with sudden animation, "When are you going to town?"

"Oh, any time; I'm not particular. Town is a desert just now."

"I really wish you would go to-morrow; *I* will follow on Tuesday. I want you to find out an agent or solicitor for me."

"What! are you dissatisfied with Blackett?"

"No; but I want some work done which cannot be traced to me, and everyone knows he is my man of business."

"This sounds mysterious," said Vincent.

"That is no matter; you shall hear the whole matter in town. Try and get on the tracks of some highly respectable man or firm as soon as possible, for what I want must be done quickly."

"Very well, Mrs. Garston. Shall I find you the day after to-morrow at——" He paused.

"At Renshaw's?—yes. Come in to afternoon tea, and be sure to bring me some news. That will give me two whole days before I go to the Brandlings, and on my return I shall stay a few days longer. That is all I need say at present.

You can give me a good deal of help if you choose."

"And of course I do choose," he returned.

"Oh, Mrs. Garston!" cried Beatrice, with eager, sparkling eyes, "if you are going away for so long, may I go up to town to see my sister? It would be so delightful."

"I dare say. Whatever may be the true reason of your wish to pay a visit to town, I cannot allow it."

"I should only stay a week," urged Beatrice.

"No!" returned Mrs. Garston, harshly. "If I left these rooms quite unoccupied, the people of the house would let them to objectionable tenants and profit at my expense. No! there is no use in worrying me; I will *not* consent! Your business is to be a sort of watch-dog, and I shall insist on your doing your duty."

And Beatrice felt there was *point de réplique.*

CHAPTER XI.

"A STRANGE COMFORTER."

It was a cruel blow to Beatrice, this decree of Mrs. Garston's. For some days, since her visit to the Brandlings had been talked about, Beatrice had planned to ask for a holiday, and enjoy a week or two with her sister. It never occurred to her that Mrs. Garston would refuse, and for a moment she was inclined to rebel against this unreasonableness on the part of her employer; but with this rebellious thought came the consciousness that she was bound not to increase Sarah's difficulties, and that disobedience would entail immediate dismissal. No! prudence was the better part of valour, and she would endure yet awhile.

She was therefore quite herself next day, and gave Stéphanie what assistance she required in preparing her mistress's belongings for her intended absence.

"You might as well do some needlework,

Miss Verner, while I am away," said Mrs. Garston, as she was partaking of early luncheon previous to starting. "Stéphanie has some lace of mine to mend. She says she has shown you how to do it."

"I shall do my best, but I cannot do it like Stéphanie."

"I don't suppose you can; but it is not very fine lace,—don't touch the Brussels point!—and you can copy all the items out of the petty cash-book into the general expenditure book. Be very careful not to make mistakes; I hate to see scratching in my accounts. I don't want you to write often. But let me know if any people call. Be sure you see that the rooms are dusted and kept carefully, especially the things I have hired. Of course, you will not want late dinner,—luncheon and high tea will do. Eh?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"And don't sit up too late, burning gas, for I have settled all that with Mrs. May. I suppose you have your own money for your personal expenses. You will find plenty of paper in the stationery-box for any letters you may write on *my* account. So good-bye. I have no time to

spare; we'll scarcely catch the train. Good-bye. I'll let you know my change of address." A hasty shake of the hand, and she hurried away.

"Adieu," whispered Stéphanie. "Amuse yourself well,—that is, as well as you know. You may have the books I leave in my room to read if you like. Adieu, *chère* mademoiselle."

The next minute Beatrice heard the carriage roll away, and returned to the drawing-room, feeling curiously desolate.

It was a gloomy day. Gusts of wind drove sudden, blinding showers across the bay. Not a creature was visible on the beach; the scene was wild and dreary as Beatrice had never seen it before.

The drawing-room felt chill, too, for the autumn was now advanced.

While Beatrice looked out on the storm-vexed water the landlady came into the room.

"It's a horrid day for travelling, ain't it, miss? I never saw a worse one, even in December. Would you like a fire? Mrs. Garston said you could have a fire in one room or the other."

"Oh, thank you. I would rather stay in the dining-room, and not see the bay."

"I think you are right, miss. And at what hour would you like your tea?"

"Oh, five or six,—any time."

"Better say six, or you will want supper before you go to bed."

"Very well, Mrs. May. Shall you be sending into the town? for I should like to send a letter to the post and a note to the Pier Hotel."

"Yes,—certainly, miss. I'll be sending to the butcher's later on."

Beatrice therefore returned to the dining-room, and indulged herself by writing a long letter to her sister and a little note to her friend Val, telling him that she was alone, and that if it were fine next day, she would look for him on the beach about eleven.

These missives she took herself to the kitchen; then fetching a book from her own room, sat down by the big bare dining-room table, intending to divert her thoughts.

But they were rebellious, and would follow their own course. She had been so dreadfully disappointed; it was such useless, whimsical tyranny leaving her behind to waste her time, and do no real service to her employer, when she

might have cheered and assisted her good sister. She chafed against the necessity of submitting, and remembered that she would soon be at the end of her quarter, and that not much of her salary would be coming to her, as she had been obliged to draw upon it to provide the smart things Mrs. Garston wished her to wear. And she had fancied forty pounds a year an inexhaustible fortune! If she could have sent eight or ten pounds to that struggling sister, she felt she could have borne anything; but to be helpless and virtually penniless, yet bound hand and foot; for she dreaded to be out of employment, and thrown a burthen on her sister's hands.

How she hated her last pretty frock and hat! She did not really want them or wish for them; the first she had bought were still quite respectable, and now she seemed to have sacrificed herself in vain!

Here, in the unchecked freedom of her solitude, and oppressed by the chill gloom of the atmosphere, she broke down, and, resting her elbows on the table, covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. She was by no means given to weeping, being by nature brave and bright, but her

imagination was quick; it depicted Sarah's lowly, laborious life, and the small chance she had of helping her, in such vivid colours that for a while Beatrice could not resist caving in.

She had wept with an occasional sob for several minutes, when a door which led into the drawing-room opened, and looking up at the sound, Beatrice to her immense surprise saw Lord Lynford, who paused on the threshold.

In her astonishment Beatrice forgot her tear-stained condition, and rose with an attempted smile, while he, closing the door, advanced, and, taking her hand, said with more kindness in his voice than she thought it could express, "Why, what is the matter, my poor child?" The words recalled her to the regions of common sense,—her griefs and wrongs seemed to shrivel up into comparative insignificance, and she blushed with shame at her own weakness.

"Indeed, indeed, I have not much to cry about!" she exclaimed, suddenly soothed by the compassion in his eyes, which were bent upon her with a look she had never seen in them before. "I am quite ashamed; you will think me so silly."

"Still, tell me what is the matter?" He let her hand go and drew a chair beside her.

"Well, then, Mrs. Garston has gone to town this morning. I asked her to let me go and stay with my sister, who is very fond of me; it was such a good chance, you know. She refused, and I have really nothing to do. So when she had gone, and I had written to my sister (who will be cruelly disappointed), I felt so lonely, and the weather is so dreary, and the wind whistles so mournfully, —I am not often such—a goose,—but the tears *would* come. I am quite right now." Her voice faltered as she paused.

"I don't think you are," said Lynford, contemplating her from under his half-closed lids. "Why are you vexed because I find you in tears? Do you think me too much of a brute to feel for you?"

"Oh, no. I never thought you a brute; *indeed,* I did not; but I don't suppose you could understand the sort of feeling that made me—made me make a fool of myself."

"I understand you better than you think," said Lynford, slowly, as if to himself; then he added, "What induced that woman—I mean Mrs.

Garston—to leave you here? Was it an act of simple tyranny, or——"

Beatrice looked up in no small wonderment. "You are a great friend of hers I thought."

"Of course I am," he said, with a laugh. "But you know we are always being surprised by sudden revelations in the characters of our friends. Pray what have you done to displease Mrs. Garston?"

"Nothing, nothing that I can remember. Indeed, I thought she liked me very much."

"Ah! did you? Possibly. I don't see that you can be of much importance to her."

"No, indeed, nor to anyone else," said Beatrice, with a smile half humorous, half pathetic; "still, I tried to be useful."

There was a short pause. Then Lynford asked,—

"It's not a pleasant sort of life—yours?"

"I have not found it unpleasant," she returned, with some hesitation. "You cannot expect to have everything you want, especially when you must earn your bread."

"Or, as the Scripture expresses it, to eat the bread of painfulness. All this virtuous self-suppression is enough to turn a natural healthy-minded

girl, with the inevitable longing for change and enjoyment, into a discontented devil."

"I hope not, Lord Lynford."

"Oh, yes, it does," he persisted. "Now, the life that would keep you young, that would develop your intellect, enlarge your judgment, gladden and mellow your heart, would be the constant companionship of an affectionate, appreciative friend, older and more experienced—I do not say wiser—than yourself, to whom you would be most precious, with whom you could roam through all the most famous and beautiful places in the world, and with whom you would grow into complete union of thought and feeling, living apart from and independent of the world."

"Oh, that would be quite an ideal and impossible state of things!" cried Beatrice, with a healthy rippling laugh. "No one could expect all those luxuries. Half of them would be enough for me, and a good deal more than I could ever expect. But I should never have imagined *you* could paint such a picture. I could not imagine *your* wanting such championship, or any companionship at all."

"You are not a very profound judge of char-

acter, I fear, and I did not say that *I* needed the ideal friendship I describe."

"No, you did not. But you must need something of that sort or you could not describe it."

"That's shrewdly said," he returned, smiling. "And what are you going to do?—break with your fair tyrant?"

"Oh, no; I cannot afford to do that, nor do I quite wish to do it. Mrs. Garston has not been unkind to me. It has been a great help to be with her, and I am afraid there has been a dash of bad temper as well as sorrow in my tears."

"You are a philosopher if you can thus sit in judgment on yourself. Why are you so anxious to stay with Mrs. Garston?"

It was a home question, but put with such frank kindliness that Beatrice answered it without hesitation, and in less than half an hour of quiet, friendly talk, without the slightest idea on the part of Beatrice that she was being dexterously cross-examined, Lynford drew from her every particular of her very uneventful life. Her rather helpless position, her great desire not to be a burden on her sister's already overburdened shoulders.

"But I must not tire you with all this talk about myself and my affairs," she exclaimed suddenly, surprised to find how confidentially she was speaking to the man she had at first feared and disliked.

Lynford laughed. "Do you think I should have let you go on if I were bored?" he asked. "I did not think women had so much pluck and endurance. This sister of yours must be a brick! And so you fancy you were rather a handful to her in former days, eh?"

"I am sure I was. I was so tired of having neither work nor amusement that I should have done anything for a change; and Sarah wanted me to be like herself,—satisfied with duty and all that sort of thing. Oh, I am afraid I was selfish and unfeeling!"

"A regular monster, eh? I always thought there was a certain degree of hardness about you."

She looked at him earnestly.

"But I feel differently now. I think I could be quite happy even slaving with Sarah, though I must say I love amusement and pretty things, and the theatre. Oh, the theatre *is* heavenly!"

"A good many people would tell you it was the other thing." He paused and thought a moment, then took out a note-book. "You say your sister takes boarders or keeps a pension,—it's all the same. Tell me her address; I might be able to send her some inmates."

Beatrice opened her eyes in astonishment and coloured with gratitude.

"How very good you are, Lord Lynford! I should never have imagined you would take that trouble."

"Ha! you thought me a hard-hearted, mocking devil!"

"Oh, no! not exactly. I am sure I did you injustice; I am sure now you have a heart."

"*You* have every right to believe that!" returned Lynford, with slight emphasis, which she did not heed. He looked at her intently for an instant and went on. "Well, the address."

"Oh, I do not think there is any use in giving it to you! None of your friends—no one like you—would stay for an hour in our house. I cannot fancy you coming in to tea and cold meat at seven o'clock, with dried haddock for a treat and buttered toast as an extra luxury! or con-

sidering the Sunday meal, at half-past one, with no wine, and only bitter beer for the Sybarites who can afford it, as dinner! No, it is very kind of you; but I do not think you could help us."

"If you fancy every gentleman leads the self-indulgent, extravagant life I have, you are very much mistaken. I have known lots of fine fellows glad enough to get decent food and lodging cheaply. Come! what's the address?"

Beatrice gave it at last, with an amused smile, and Lynford wrote it down; then a short silence ensued, and Beatrice bethought her of her duties to her visitor.

"You will have some tea, will you not?"

"Tea!" said Lord Lynford, starting from his thoughts. "Yes, by all means; thank you."

While Beatrice rang and ordered it, Lynford walked to and fro and looked out of the window.

"The clouds are breaking and the wind has changed," he said. "If to-morrow is fine, come out for a sail, Miss Verner; it will be better than moping alone here."

Little as she knew of the world, Beatrice had a vague impression that it would not be quite the thing to go out alone with Lord Lynford; secondly,

that Mrs. Garston would by no means approve of such a proceeding; finally, though she liked him ever so much better than she did an hour ago, she by no means liked Lynford well enough to fancy a long *tête-à-tête* with him,—away at sea, too!

"Thank you very much; but I don't think I can go to-morrow."

"The next day, then?"—looking keenly at her.

Beatrice shook her head.

"What! don't you want to come? Why, the other day you were—or said you were—immensely disappointed because you could not come out with young Tyrrell."

"And I was!" she exclaimed; "but the real truth is, I don't think Mrs. Garston would be pleased."

"She need know nothing about it."

"Oh, she must! I certainly should not hide anything from her; it would be wrong and foolish."

"I don't fancy you want to go yourself."

The appearance of tea saved Beatrice from the necessity of a reply.

Lynford did not make much progress with

"the cup which cheers but not inebriates," and Bea fancied he looked stern and displeased.

"You will be writing to Mrs. Garston?" he said.

"Oh, yes; of course."

"Then, pray, tell her I called and was greatly surprised to find her flown. I am going up to town to-morrow myself, and will look her up. She is at Renshaw's, I suppose?"

"Yes; she will be there for a few days before she goes to Yorkshire."

"It was rather a sudden decision,—her going to town?"

"It was. How I wish she had allowed me to go too!"

"I see that rankles," he returned, with a slight smile. "Do not sit down when I am gone and fret about it,—and I must go now."

"Oh, no! You have taken me out of all that, and I am very much obliged to you."

"And what are you going to do with yourself to-morrow?"

"If it is fine I am going to meet Val Tyrrell on the beach. Perhaps he will ask me to drive with him. He wanted me to go once before, but I couldn't."

"Mrs. Garston, eh?"

"Yes," said Beatrice, shortly.

"And this is why you rejected my boat and myself?"

"No! no, indeed!" said Beatrice, earnestly. "I did not think of it, and it is very uncertain."

Lynford shook his head. "I feel much humiliated," he said; "so good-bye, and—forgive me if I offer a word of counsel: find some other engagement; you will gain little or nothing here, and Mrs. Garston is no true friend to you."

"She may be better than you think. Good-bye, Lord Lynford. Thank you heartily for your wish to help us." She put her hand into his, which he held out, and said, more softly than she thought he could speak,—

"I should like to give you a fairer, brighter life than you have at present." Then he went away, without waiting for an answer.

Beatrice gazed after him, bewildered by his change of tone and manner. "How extraordinary that he should be so suddenly kind and thoughtful! Why does he imagine I ought to have all the good things he described in his wonderful speech about companionship,—he, such a harsh,

haughty man? I suppose it amused him for a little; but he is more good-natured than I thought. If he has such an opinion of Mrs. Garston, why does he keep such friends with her? It is not being honest. He can be very nice, but I have a sort of fear of him still. I would far, far rather be with Val."

Here Mrs. May entered with a note. "Please, miss, Mr. Tyrrell's servant has just brought this."

On opening it Beatrice found a few straggling lines in Val's large, unformed hand:

"DEAR BEATRICE,—If you are by yourself, do, *do* come to dinner with me and gran'. He will be so pleased, so shall I. Denis will take a fly with him, so *do* come.

"Your loving friend,

"VAL."

"Is there a carriage at the door?"

"Yes, miss,—one of the Pier Hotel flies."

Beatrice went out into the hall. "I shall be so pleased to go, Denis," she cried, "and will not keep you waiting."

"Thank you, miss. The young master will be pleased."

When Lynford left Villa Marina he turned towards the Hall, walking steadily in the face of a strong breeze, which he rather enjoyed. Though accustomed to a luxurious life, he was not by nature indolent or averse to personal exertion, and as his nerves grew braced by "the wild west wind," he thought with increasing interest of the interview he had just had. "There is not an ounce of fool's flesh about that girl! Yet there's no mannish, outspoken daring in her frankness. She is a thorough woman,—soft and tender, and might be infinitely loving, but as yet quite undeveloped. The man who first stirs her heart will have a glorious find. Is she as real as she seems? It is almost impossible to believe it. I don't think she likes or trusts me. She must get over that. She may be no beauty, but she's full of charm,—the round of her cheek, the turn of her throat, then her pathetic mouth, that can smile so merrily! I was desperately inclined to comfort her with kisses when I found her crying so bitterly. What a heartless, cruel, selfish, fleshly, handsome animal Mrs. Garston is! What use are

such women in the world, except to play the devil with men who are asses enough to be attracted by them! *She* shall never be mistress at Lynford. Where did that sweet child get her air of good-breeding,—the fine, delicate poise of her head? I never expected to be such a fool again. But it's delicious. I feel young once more. Thanks, my dainty wood-nymph, my lowly, fragrant violet, for the glorious gift!"

Lynford was by no means sentimental, yet he dreamt heavenly dreams, even through dinner, but they did not impair his appetite. While he was still dallying over a glass of fine Burgundy and some olives the post came in, and among his letters was this one:

"DEAR LORD LYNFORD,—You were a madman to put such a price on the Hall and its belongings. But I have found another lunatic, who is inclined to give it. Hope to be with you to-morrow about five. Yours truly,

"10, 2, '95. P. POUNCEBY."

CHAPTER XII.

"A SURPRISE."

"I AM glad old Pounceby has found a companion lunatic for his original madman. By George, if anyone will give the hundred thousand I professed to stand out for, I'll be agreeably surprised! Who can it be?" mused Lynford, when he had read this brief epistle.

He filled himself another glass of Burgundy, and continued to think. "A big publican, or the owner of half a dozen penny publications, or a successful railway contractor with the yellow clay not yet brushed off his boots?—but these men are not so numerous as they were in the sixties. Perhaps a bloated spider of a stock-broker; if so, the old Hall may be in the market once more before many months are over. It is an infernal shame to my predecessor and myself that we should have lost our hold on this fine old place, and for what? To squander money on baubles animate and in-

animate. Bachelorhood is rather an unholy state. I wish I had married!—though, looking back at my tolerably wide experience, I don't remember any one of the charming creatures I have been deucedly fond of from time to time that I should particularly like to see opposite me at the present moment. Am I especially heartless? At any rate, a wife of the class from which I am bound to choose would be a costly means of retrenchment, —a simple, sincere, womanly woman to love and cherish, and—— Bah! this sudden chance of extrication from a humiliating load of debt must have upset my mental equilibrium, or I should not drop into this drivel. 'There's many a slip between the cup and the lip.' A man who is about to 'shell out' to such an extent is apt to expect a good deal; something is sure to turn up about the title or the conditions of sale. But it is pure waste of thought to speculate in this groundless fashion. Old Pounceby will explain everything to-morrow, and till then I can only wait. Ah, one hundred thousand pounds! I wonder how much of it will stick to my fingers. Very little, I suspect. Then, there's that property in Lynbourne. They tell me that is increasing in value. Well, spring

and summer cruising, autumn and part of the winter hunting, and a short spell of town when the House is sitting needn't be so bad, and won't cost much. But, as years go on, it is rather a disgrace to be a nobody, a peer of no importance. It will be a lonely life, too, as years roll on! Pooh! is it possible I have any illusions about domesticity? Such a thing exists, I really believe, but it is extremely rare. I don't fancy being always alone, and I don't want a man companion. No! I want metal more attractive. Perhaps I have found it! It might be a good act to save that bright young thing from the slow extinction which her lot threatens, though not exactly on the usual lines of benevolence. Ah! How she could enjoy——"

Here he rose and rang for the butler, determined to resist his thoughts.

"Tell Mrs. Dobbs that Mr. Pounceby will come down to-morrow for two or three days; and, Hervey, light the reading-lamp. I shall take coffee in the library."

The evening papers, a leader on the approaching general election, and writing some invitations to, perhaps, the last shooting-party he would ever

entertain in the home of his forefathers kept Lynford occupied till bed-time, when he retired, in a less exhilarated condition than might have been expected in a much embarrassed man who had a hopeful glimpse of a hundred thousand pounds.

Lynford's expectations and curiosity, however, were not to be gratified as soon as he hoped.

Next morning brought a telegram from Pounceby,—"Unavoidably delayed; will be with you by noon to-morrow."

Lynford indulged in a few big "D's," and, as the morning was bright and beautiful, sallied forth with dog and gun into the preserves nearest the house.

He was not in good form, however, and missed more birds than he brought down. It was still early, for he had been up by times; so he returned to the house and sent an order to the boat-house that Hawkins should have the little 'Elphin' ready in an hour for a sail across the bay.

Once afloat, Lynford, who was an experienced steersman, took the tiller, and, almost of her own accord, the little vessel seemed to shape her course for Lynbourne pier.

As he stood close to the shore, — for the

'Elphin' was of very light draught,—he made out the group of which he was in search.

Val Tyrrell was in his carriage, with his sketching-block and pencil, while Beatrice sat beside him, with a book open on her knee. Denis was throwing stones into the water for Chang, who barked vehemently at the little, rippling waves, but carefully retreated before their advance. Besides these, he recognised the tall figure of Mr. Tyrrell advancing towards the others.

Lynford ran his little craft alongside a small, rough jetée, where the rowing-boats which plied for hire, lay.

The first to perceive him was Tyrrell, who came forward with a frank, welcoming smile.

"You have a smart little craft," he said, as they directed their steps towards the invalid. "There's a wonderful charm to me in the number of these pretty little boats that crowd about the bathing-places in England; they are the sort of plaything British Islanders ought to have. You seem to handle the tiller as if you knew what you were about," added the old man; "not as if you had lived all your life in drawing-rooms."

"Ah! Well, perhaps not; I have always liked

to vary the scene, and the sea has great charms for me."

"Ay! and for me! I have done some service before the mast in the course of my rather chequered existence,—rather a different sort of experience from cruising about in a well-appointed yacht!" These words brought them close to Val's carriage.

"My poor lad is quite bright this morning; he is so pleased to have his new friends with him," said Mr. Tyrrell, with a touch of pathos in his tone.

Beatrice was reading aloud, and, looking up at their approach, exclaimed, "Oh, Lord Lynford! I thought you were going to town?"

"I had a telegram from my lawyer. He offers to come to me," he returned.

"And I have written to Mrs. Garston this morning telling her you would be in London to-day."

"On my head be it!" said Lynford; then he bent to speak to Val and notice his drawing.

Beatrice was struck by the kindly interest he showed to the crippled boy. She could hardly believe it was the same Lynford, whose harsh,

mocking tone and look had so struck and repelled her that afternoon—which now seemed pushed away, ages back—when first she saw him.

"And what are you reading?" he asked, turning to her.

"'Tom Brown's School Days,'" said Val. "It is so interesting, only the boys seem a little brutal; but I suppose they seem so to me because I am a poor, weak creature. If I had been like others I should have enjoyed fighting and struggling too."

"Never mind! Tom Brown and his friends had no Miss Verner to read out to them," returned Lynford, cheerfully.

"I am afraid they would not have valued that privilege very much," said Beatrice, laughing.

"As it is an ideal morning, suppose you all honour my little pleasure-boat by coming out for a cruise. You shall make it as long or as short as you like."

"I should say with pleasure, if you will honour *me* by returning with us to luncheon," said Tyrrell, with grave courtesy.

Lynford consented with alacrity; then, turning to Beatrice, observed, "You could not have a better day for your initiative on the ocean wave."

"Yes, I should like to go," she said, with some hesitation; "but,—you know so much more about things than I do,—tell me, do you think Mrs. Garston would be displeased—if—if I went?"

"My dear Miss Verner, you are a free-born Briton. Mrs. Garston has no right to interfere with your liberty of action."

"Perhaps not; but there are so many unwritten laws of good taste and good manners that I should be sorry to infringe."

"I don't think the severest Mrs. Grundy could find fault with you for using your temporary and complete liberty,—eh, Mr. Tyrrell? Here's Miss Verner wondering whether she ought to come out boating with us."

"My dear young lady," said the Australian, kindly, "you must come with *me*. I shall act father on this occasion, and Mrs. Garston can have no objection."

"Oh, thank you! I shall be only too pleased to go," cried Beatrice, sparkling all over; so they went.

It was a delightful expedition. Lynford and Mr. Tyrrell did most of the talking, and Beatrice

listened with wondering interest to their tales of many lands.

Lynford was quite eloquent about the delights of yachting,—the joy of taking your home with you from one famous place to another. "And the most interesting and historical towns are nearly all on or near the seaboard," he continued. "Genoa, Leghorn,—you may add Florence, it is so near Rome,—Naples, Palermo, Trieste, Malta, Ravenna, Athens, Constantinople, Alexandria,—an endless list; then you have always a pleasant home to retreat to from semi-barbarous places. A yacht, with a kindred spirit to be one's comrade, is perfection."

"Ay! you can buy the yacht and supply it with every comfort; but the kindred spirit,—that is the difficulty."

"True! Still, such a thing is to be found," returned Lynford. He grew silent, and a dreamy look stole over his somewhat harsh face.

Beatrice was thoroughly happy, as she sat listening and holding Chang on her lap. Lynford rarely spoke to her; but if she moved,—if a fresh view presented itself and she wished to see it,—his hand was always ready to assist her. He

seemed to know by instinct what she was going to do and where she wished to go. Then they returned to a late luncheon, where Beatrice found herself made much of by the fine old "bush-ranger," as Mrs. Garston called him. Altogether it was a day long to be remembered, and Beatrice wondered more than ever at the new light in which Lord Lynford appeared.

The long time spent in the open air had fatigued Val, and his grandfather insisted on his going to lie down in his own room.

Beatrice therefore wished them good-bye.

"My poor boy will want to see you to-morrow," said the old man, kindly, "and while you are free it would be very kind of you to gratify him. If I do not ask too much?"

"Oh, I gratify myself in coming. Perhaps he will come and pay *me* a visit."

"I shall see you home," said Lynford, decidedly. "I have sent the boat back and shall walk."

"Thank you," returned Beatrice, absently. She was meditating a daring deed,—*i.e.*, inviting Val and Chang to tea with her. It would be delightful!

She therefore bid her host a gay good-bye, and a little to her amusement set off with her distinguished escort.

Lynford was rather silent, and having nothing to say, Beatrice did not see any necessity to invent one.

"You seem to enjoy sailing," he exclaimed, at last.

"Yes, very much, even when it is rough. I went out once or twice with Mrs. Garston before you came when it was blowing quite hard, and it did not affect me at all beyond giving me a sense of exhilaration."

"And what are you going to do with yourself all the rest of the day? Sit down, and weep, and make yourself miserable?"

"No, indeed, Lord Lynford!" indignantly. "Pray do not think me so silly. I wish you had not come in just when you did. I very seldom cry."

"Never mind, Miss Verner. I shall keep your secret. A secret between two people is a strong tie, I assure you."

"I daresay it is if it is an important one; but ours is of so little matter."

"*Ours,*" repeated Lynford. "There!—there is a partnership established at once."

Beatrice laughed, but made no reply, and after a short pause asked, "Do you think Mrs. Garston would be vexed if I had Val to tea? You know her so much better than I do."

"I should think I did," he returned. "She would have no right to be angry, but it doesn't follow that she would not. She is a specially jealous woman, and if I were you I would not coquette with these Australians. The old man talks of going off to some German bath, and you may never see them again, while if you offend madame,—not a difficult task,—she'll send you to the right about at a moment's notice. I would not break with Mrs. Garston unless I was sure of some other shelter. These Tyrrells will do you no good."

"But they have done me good already," cried Beatrice. "I am quite happy with Val, and Mr. Tyrrell is delightful."

"He is a splendid old chap, I acknowledge, but the boy is depressing. Poor little devil! It would have been infinitely kinder to have given him a strong dose of chloroform when they found

his spine wrong, than to keep the spark of life alive in him so carefully."

"Do not say that. He has many pleasures. I don't think he is often unhappy."

"Perhaps not *now*. But just imagine what it will be when the mind—the spirit of a man begins to develop in him, and he has or promises to have a strong nature. Picture what it will be to feel weaker,—more helpless than the weakest woman. Never to know the pride and joy of possessing physical force,—of thrashing an insolent enemy,—the rapture of being loved by a woman."

"But, Lord Lynford," she interrupted, "women will always feel for him, and be kind to him."

"Very likely; but don't you know that a man who gets no more than this hasn't lived at all. Why, the nearest approach to heaven is to feel that some woman's heart beats for you and longs for you. For the moment it's the greatest triumph man can know."

"Is it?" murmured Beatrice, not saucily but thoughtfully, as if considering a new proposition. "Still, Val may be very happy without all that."

"In his position *I* would blow my brains out, —only I should probably lack the pluck."

"Well, good-bye, Lord Lynford," said Bea, pausing at the gate of Villa Marina.

"Ah! here we are. You'll understand the full misery of poor Val's lot when your own heart asserts itself," he added, with sudden, searching look into her eyes which startled her, and brought the soft, swift colour into her cheeks most becomingly.

"Don't you think you ought to ask me in and give me a cup of tea?" he continued, for he found it a great nuisance to be compelled to leave her when she looked so fresh, so prettily startled.

"But I would rather not," returned Beatrice, frankly but gently.

"Thank you, Miss Verner. I never before was so severely rebuffed."

"I am afraid it did sound rather rude, but I am sure you understand me," said Beatrice, steadily, though her cheeks again flushed and paled.

"Yes, I *do* understand you, better than you think. I sometimes fear I am a little too rough myself. If I have ever unconsciously displeased you, I pray your forgiveness." He held out his hand.

"Indeed, you have never displeased me. You have always been very nice," said Beatrice, heartily, as she put hers into it.

"Then we are fast friends from henceforth and for evermore."

"At any rate, whenever we meet," said Beatrice, smiling, and finding it not unnatural that he should hold her hand close and long, considering they were vowing eternal friendship. Feeling her try to draw away from his clasp he released her, and with a smiling *au revoir* passed on.

* * * * *

Although Lynford flattered himself he was on the whole philosophic, the next day seemed to drag its weary length with remarkable weariness until Mr. Pounceby arrived just before dinner. The lamps were lighted, and the breakfast-room, where the table was set, looked the picture of comfort and refinement.

Till the servants had served coffee and left the room Lynford and his guest spoke of politics and sport, but as soon as they were alone Lynford filled the lawyer's glass with some very special port, and raising his own, opened the proceedings by the interrogative monosyllable,—

"Well?"

"Exceedingly well, my dear lord," exclaimed the lawyer, who was as lively and active as a parched pea. "I assure you this would-be purchaser is no man of straw, but a *bona-fide* millionaire. He has taken an extraordinary fancy to the old place, and is as eager to possess it as a baby to get hold of a new rattle; though he is no chicken."

"He must have seen it before I came down from town," said Lynford, "for I let as few of the sea-bathing raff as I can help inside the gates. But the most virtuous even of ancient retainers can't resist a tip."

"Well, at any rate, my man seems to have seen the place very thoroughly. He came to me himself, instead of leaving preliminaries to his legal advisers,—and they are first-rate men, I assure you. I saw he was not staggered even when I named the large sum you intended to ask, but said he would see me again when he had thought over the matter. Two days after he reappeared, when he stipulated that the price must cover the furniture, pictures, plate, family reliques, and the horses at present in the stable, save one, which

you might choose yourself. Moreover, you were to be at liberty to remove any articles of furniture and plate, any books, pictures, curios, antiques, you may have yourself chosen and purchased or received in a gift before or after your accession to the title and property. In fact, he only wants what absolutely belongs to the house and is identified with it."

"Rather curious, isn't it?" said Lynford, thoughtfully.

"Exceedingly so. Beyond this, he says that if you have a good stock of wine in the cellars, he will take it at a valuation, should you be inclined to sell, for he supposed your wine was of the best, and he himself did not know good from bad."

"What an extraordinary admission for a parvenu!—for, of course, only a parvenu could give a hundred thousand pounds for anything. Who, in the name of Heaven, is this Mæcenas?"

"I fancy you know him. He is staying down here, or has been staying here; he is an Australian, and his name is Tyrrell."

"Tyrrell!" exclaimed Lord Lynford, in great surprise; "our handsome old backwoodsman?

Why, I was with him all yesterday, and he never gave the smallest intimation that he intended to supplant me in the home of my fathers. By Jove, I would rather he had it than many others I could name. But, Pounceby, are you sure he has the cash?"

"I am. I have left nothing undone to satisfy myself on this point. You know Sir John Beeswing, who is chairman of the great Home and Colonial Joint-Stock Bank? Well, he is a very good friend of mine, and he assured me—indeed, proved to me—that Tyrrell could pay two hundred thousand for a fancy article if he chose. It seems he made no end of money during the gold-fever, and has transferred almost the whole of it to England. Well, how say you? Will you accept?"

"I should be a madman indeed if I did not! But I cannot get over the astonishment of the whole thing. The old fellow is making a mistake, though. He cannot enjoy the place for more than fifteen years at the outside, and then he must leave it to a sickly, crippled boy, who might get all the enjoyment he is capable of enjoying out of a thousand a year; but, for all we know, he may have some strapping young kinsman, riding after

wild cattle or hunting kangaroos at our antipodes, to come after this poor boy. Come, Pounceby, let's see what can be saved out of the fire after I clear everything."

Lynford rose, and the curiously assorted brace of friends betook themselves to the library, where they covered much paper with estimates and rough calculations, the results of which were fairly satisfactory.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES."

WHEN Pounceby returned to town, he took with him full instructions for completing the sale of Lynford to Mr. Tyrrell on the footing of the latter's proposition, with a few alterations.

The chirpy little lawyer, though highly pleased at the prospect of his favourite client being delivered out of his difficulties, could not conceal his regret at the necessity for his parting with his old place. He did not see why his client should not secure it, and a handsome wife into the bargain.

This opinion he ventured to express, and was not a little surprised at the vehemence with which his suggestion was rejected.

"I tell you, I should go to the devil within a year if I married that woman!" cried Lynford.

To Pounceby this seemed inexplicable, and he said so.

Whereupon a brief but sharp argument ensued, which left both "of the same opinion still."

Nevertheless, the loyal little lawyer bade his host a hearty good-bye and departed, promising to set matters agoing, and to keep them going at as good a pace as the law's delay would permit, until all the preliminaries were accomplished and the money lodged to Lynford's credit.

Meantime, Beatrice looked in vain for a letter from Mrs. Garston, though she herself did not fail to send her rather exacting patroness a true account of the various visitors, not only birds of passage who had seen or met Mrs. Garston on the Continent, but even dwellers within the threshold of that sacred circle called "the county." She also mentioned that Lord Lynford had not gone up to town, as she believed there were visitors at the Hall.

Meantime, she was unusually happy. Nearly every afternoon she spent with Val and his canine companion, attended by Denis, and more than once the crippled boy had his afternoon tea with her.

The mornings she gave the tasks left her by Mrs. Garston, and so diligently did she work that

the first week of that lady's absence saw them all completed.

It was the second day after Pounceby's departure, and Beatrice was making tea for her new friends in their room at the hotel, when Lord Lynford was announced.

Mr. Tyrrell received him with his usual grave cordiality, Val with a joyous welcome.

"I thought you would have come yesterday," cried the boy, "and I want to show you a picture I made of the old fort there at the opening of the bay. Gran' likes it, so does Bea." He had soon contracted her name, for which his grandfather had seriously rebuked him, thereby drawing a smiling permission from the young lady herself. "But she says that she would like to know what you think, for you have so many beautiful pictures yourself that you cannot be very easily pleased."

"Yes, show it to me, by all means," returned Lynford, drawing a chair beside the tea-maker. "But I am not sure that the possession of pictures —even fine pictures—makes one a good judge. Besides, there are very few chosen by me at the Hall. You must come up and look at them one

day. You hadn't time to see them properly when you came before."

"Oh, yes, thank you!—and may I bring Beatrice?"

"Most certainly, if she will so far honour my poor house."

"Oh, you may be sure I shall!" cried Beatrice, gaily. "It is a treat for me to go there."

"And pray let us go before that disagreeable Mrs. Garston comes back," added Val; "for she would be sure to prevent her. I don't like that——"

"I forbid you to speak in that way, boy, of any lady. It is rude and disrespectful, and unbecoming a gentleman, which I hope you are," said his grandfather, emphatically. "Why should you dislike Mrs. Garston?"

"Because she is selfish and ill-natured, and will not give Beatrice Verner to *me!* She has everything and I have nothing, or next to nothing, and yet she will not give me what I want. *You* agree with me, Lord Lynford, I know."

"I am not going to commit myself, Val."

"And Bea is *very* silly. She ought to do

what she likes, and come to us; she isn't a slave."

"I hope I shall always be a slave to conscience," said Beatrice, laughing. "Mrs. Garston has never been unkind to me, and I must not break faith with her."

"Miss Verner is quite right," observed Mr. Tyrrell, "and you must say no more about it, Val."

"No. I fancy if Miss Verner intends to bestow her valuable services as secretary on any one after Mrs. Garston she must earn her best recommendation," observed Lynford, "and Mrs. Garston would do full justice to a tale of treachery if she had any to complain of."

"No doubt; and so we must, however reluctantly, drop the subject," said Mr. Tyrrell.

Lynford looked at him with wonderfully increased interest as he spoke. So this was the man who was to reign in his stead, to possess himself of all the stately heirlooms, the precious relics, accumulated by generations of deep-brained, daring, astute Claverings! All to pass into the hands of a successful digger! Strong hands, it is

true, hardened and enlarged by the daily use of the pick and the rocker. Yet Lynford was man enough to feel that, although they were scarred and roughened by toil, they were yet clean, and the gold they had gathered was less alloyed by baser metal than that collected by the more delicate fingers of the "promoter," the "stock broker," the turfman, or even the lawyer. No, aristocrat as he was to the marrow of his bones, he would not have been ashamed to have stood in Tyrrell's shoes. "He's a deuced fine old fellow," he mused while Tyrrell was directing the waiter, for whom he had rung, to have an open carriage ready in a quarter of an hour, as "the boy" and Miss Verner would like to drive. "He really does seem one of nature's gentlemen. He'll be a boon, with his ready money and his evidently strong organising powers, to my rather neglected tenantry. There is a quiet power about him and a wonderful natural dignity that would seem at home in the Upper House. By Jove, there are not many hereditary legislators would stand comparison with him."

Here Tyrrell turned to his guest and said, "These children would like to watch the sunset

from the Point" (a low spit of land at the side of the bay, opposite the Head), "so they had better be off. Are you riding or walking, Lord Lynford?"

"I am riding."

"Then, if you will allow me, I'll ride back with you part of the way."

"I shall be very much pleased to have your company," said Lynford, cordially. "I want some talk with you."

"And I with you," returned the old man.

The carriage was soon ready. Both Lynford and his host inspected the departure of Val and Beatrice, with Denis on the box.

"You are going to ride?" said Bea, looking at the horses, which were being led to the door. "How pleasant it must be to ride!"

"Would you like to learn?" asked Lynford, raising his eyes with the soft, smiling expression that generally came into them when they met hers.

"Of course, I should like to try; but it would be a cruel loss of time."

"Could you improve the shining hours of your liberty and take a lesson from me?"

"I am afraid that would not be wise," she said, smiling.

"You had better hear what *I* have to say on that subject."

Before she could reply the carriage rolled off. The tide was out when Lynford and his new acquaintance mounted, and they turned to the beach, where the wet sand gave them a firm, smooth footing.

"You cannot have found your steed in the Pier Hotel stables," said Lynford, eying Tyrrell's "mount" appreciatively. He was a powerful dark chestnut, with a small, distinct star of white on his forehead, and showed both bone and breeding, with full, intelligent eyes and square-cut nostrils. The future lord of Lynford sat him as if horse and rider were cut from the same block.

"No," returned Tyrrell, stroking the animal's neck. "I picked him up at Tattersal's when I was in town the other day. I think he is the right sort. We know a good horse in the colonies when we see one."

"I should say you did! That horse must be worth an earl's ransom."

"If I am not mistaken, he is worth a good

many 'humans,' as Cousin Jonathan says. He is a fine, generous-natured brute."

"Hope you will enjoy many a ride on him in this part of the world," said Lynford, courteously. "If I may presume to speak of business in the absence of our respective legal advisers, I should say I am glad to find my old place has found so much favour in your eyes that you are disposed to give me my terms."

"It is a high price, my lord, but there is no reason why I should not indulge my whims. Nevertheless, it must seem poor pay to *you* for the pain of parting with it."

"You overrate my sentiment on that subject, my dear sir. You must know I never even saw the old Hall till I was five-and-twenty and no family associations are entwined with it. I feel more liking for the place now that it is about to pass from me than I ever did before, and that is partly because I am ashamed of a rather reckless, profitless life. My predecessor was—well, not prudent, and his son reproduced the parental follies. As soon as young Hubert Clavering was of age he joined his father in breaking the entail, and sold some valuable bits of the land. Then

the poor fellow was killed by a fall from his horse out hunting. My kinsman, who had married late in life, was quite broken by the blow, and only survived his son by about four years. The mother bore up with more courage, and only died some eighteen months ago, when her jointure returned to the estate,—a very welcome addition."

"Whom did he marry?" asked Tyrrell, who seemed deeply interested.

"Lady Barbara Blazingham, a daughter of the Duke of Hellandyke,—a first-rate horsewoman, with a devil of a temper."

"I suppose, then, he had not a very happy time of it,—poor man!"

"I believe they rubbed on together fairly well; at any rate, he felt his loss, when the son was killed, considerably more than she did."

"He was as unlucky as myself. I, too, lost my only son,—my only child,—but I had him with me longer." And Tyrrell, in a few words, told his companion of the foundering of the yacht and loss of nearly all on board, including her owner and his wife, and of the supposed injuries which had made his grandson a cripple for life.

"It has been my one object, since my poor

little lad emerged from childhood, to make a safe and beautiful home for him in England. The colonies are too rough for so tender a plant, and I have long coveted your fine old place."

"Indeed!" cried Lynford. "Why, you have seen very little of it."

"That little was enough," returned the old man, drily.

"Well," said Lynford, "I am, of course, sorry that the fortunes of war—or, rather, my own extravagance—oblige me to part with my paternal acres; but as I must, why, I am rather glad they are to be yours. You will be a better landlord than I ever was, and by and by you might go into Parliament and do the state good service as regards colonial matters, about which we know too little."

"Into Parliament!" repeated Tyrrell. "No, I am too old to make a fresh start of any kind; I only want to live peaceably and make my boy's existence as happy as I can. He has been a little low and feverish just lately, so I am thinking of taking him away to some German baths—I forget the name—to strengthen him up for the winter; and while this business is dragging through,—a

large transaction of this kind cannot be accomplished all in a minute,—I wish I could take that nice young creature, Miss Verner, with us. She brightens my poor Val up more than anyone else ever did; but, of course, we must not meddle with her."

"I am not sure how it would work having a girl like Miss Verner with your grandson," returned Lynford, carelessly. "He is too old for a *gouvernante,* and she would want to go back to her own people; so the last state of Val would be worse than the first."

"Ay! He might grow fond of her, and then parting would hurt him?"

"Just so. You get a tutor,—a nice High Church clerico, who plays the organ and sings. He'd amuse the boy and excite him less. Ill or well, crippled or sound in mind or limb, the sexes have a curious effect on each other ever since God created them male and female."

"Faith, you are right, Lord Lynford, though I trust nature will be merciful to my boy. But what I see, or think I see, is that, if his head is well occupied, his heart—or, rather, his senses —won't trouble him."

They had now reached the edge of the Lynford property, and Mr. Tyrrell drew rein.

"I'll leave you here," he said; "I don't care to intrude on the home I am going to take from you."

"I assure you I do not feel your visits in the least intrusive," returned the other, earnestly; "and I hope you and Val and his fair young friend will come up to luncheon one day soon,—very soon, if you please, for in a few days I expect some fellows to shoot over the more distant coverts, which I have not yet attacked; and you would rather come, I know, while I am alone."

"Thank you, Lord Lynford; I certainly should. Then would Tuesday next suit you? We must be moving the end of the week."

"By all means! Come on Tuesday, and bring your pretty *protégée* with you."

"Miss Verner?—yes, with pleasure. I like the colleen myself. I can never feel her a stranger, somehow; when I look in her face, an old friend seems to look at *me* out of her eyes."

"And very bright eyes they are," said Lynford, with a good-humoured laugh, as they shook hands and parted.

"No, my fine old fellow," said Lynford to himself, as he rode slowly homeward; "I hope and believe there's a fairer, happier life before my charming Beatrice than ministering to the crooked cranks and sickly fancies of a confirmed invalid. I wonder how she is mentally constructed. Is she steeped in copy-book axioms or saturated with biblical morality?—which, by the way, biblical men and women rather disregarded. Why does the word 'immorality' apply only to one class of offences against the decalogue? People never seem to think it is immoral to lie, or cheat, or slander. Now, all these things are deucedly bad; but no woman is ever punished for them as severely as *she* is who dares to share the life of the man she loves, without legal sanction. I suppose this last is worse for society in its collective aspect; whether it is or not, I am sure I do not care. Even in such connections one may be unprincipled or honourable; but I don't fancy a duly authorised Lady Lynford, a full-fledged peeress. Besides, it's too expensive a luxury,—deucedly stiff and frigid into the bargain. No! a pleasant, tender, unhampered friendship, *not* platonic, is the best style of relationship, and much better for my sweet,

new love. She is a lady, and intelligent. Can a man ask more in addition to a charming face and a graceful form? She has sense, too, and natural perception. She will see how much better off she will be with me than with anyone else. Still, she is not one bit in love with me,—not one bit. I think she is half afraid of me," and he laughed a low laugh of quiet enjoyment,—perhaps at the pleasant prospect of accustoming this shy bird to his presence, to his love. "Though she is no fool, she is quite transparent, and looks upon me as something so far away and apart from her that I doubt if she ever gives me a thought, once I am out of her sight; but she must think of me,—she shall! I am glad that old Australian and his cub are going off to Germany. So far they have been useful; now they begin to be damnably in the way. If she broke with Mrs. Garston and took refuge with the Tyrrells, that would be—well, no; not checkmate; nothing shall do that! But this colonial millionaire is quite capable of giving her a portion and marrying her to some smug and comfortable grocer or lawyer's clerk, while I would give her a life far more suited to her higher nature. I must lay some train for meeting her,—

of some intercourse that will give me a chance of winning the game."

Having come to this rather indefinite conclusion, Lynford gathered up his reins, which had hung loosely on his horse's neck, and, speaking to him, the well-trained animal quickened his pace and soon brought him to his own door.

That evening's post brought him a letter from Pounceby.

"It seems to me there's going to be a run on your property. I found an offer from another would-be purchaser on my return. It is from a gentleman who says he wishes to settle in England after a long residence in Ceylon. He wants to know what is the lowest sum you would take for the Hall and its dependencies. I shall answer this, as 'there's many a slip between the cup and the lip,' and it's as well to have another string to your bow."

This letter set Lynford thinking, though on very different lines from those of his previous meditations. Finally he finished his evening by writing a long letter to his confidential adviser.

This period of unusual freedom—the loneliness which Beatrice had half dreaded—was

passing swiftly and pleasantly, and she no longer felt anxious for a return to the former routine of her days. The constant occupation with trifles of no importance, which she was inclined to think were partly invented to employ her, was infinitely wearisome, while she longed to be helping her hard-worked sister. "I wonder Mrs. Garston keeps me," she thought, as she put on her best frock and hat to honour her companions and Lord Lynford's luncheon on the following Tuesday, which was a beautiful, soft grey autumnal day. "I daresay she will not want me much longer now she is less lonely and is asked out more. If she sends me away I will try and stay at home; perhaps I might save a servant. It is not a very ladylike employment,—dusting and scrubbing and cooking. My poor hands, which have grown quite nice here, would soon be red and rough; but then the work would be for our own home,—our own independence, and we should be ever so much happier. Then I should get a little time for reading of an afternoon and on Sundays. Yes; we might manage with a woman for two or three hours every morning, and the boarders seem so good-natured. I am sure they would not mind

waiting on themselves at their Sunday dinner. I really would not like having to wait upon them. I wonder what Lord Lynford would say if he saw me in a cap and apron. He would be amused," and she laughed merrily, showing the pearly teeth, which made her smile so radiant. "I never fancied Lord Lynford could be so nice as he has been. He quite likes Mr. Tyrrell, though I am vexed by his contemptuous pity for poor Val. He is so haughty—carelessly haughty—and strong himself that his heart is too hard for real pity. I always feel that he may be good-natured when he is pleased, but he might be very cruel if he were displeased. I am too silly, I am sure, but I *am* afraid of his eyes."

Here the sound of carriage-wheels broke up her reflections, and hastily thrusting a long pin through her thick coil of hair to steady her hat, —a pretty grey hat trimmed for her by Stéphanie in a genial moment,—she ran down-stairs to meet Mr. Tyrrell and Val as they drew up.

"Isn't it a delightful day?" cried Val, who was comfortably installed on a species of stretcher —fitting his carriage—which folded up ingeniously and was held by Denis on the box.

"Come and sit by me," continued Val.

"Oh, no; that is Mr. Tyrrell's place," said Beatrice.

"Not when he takes the stretcher," returned that gentleman. "I am too big for the space left at that side."

The drive to the Hall was very pleasant. Val was in high spirits and talked gaily, but his grandfather looked at him with some anxiety, for he had too much colour, and his eyes were feverishly bright.

At the entrance they were received by Lynford, who had been strolling through the stables, and he assisted Denis with kindly care to transfer Val to the little carriage when it was lifted up the steps and made ready.

Again Beatrice admired the noble Hall,—the mixture of grandeur and homelike comfort,—and for a passing moment sighed for the beauty and nobility of such a dwelling. There was a strong strain of the artist in her nature,—"a thing of beauty was a joy to her forever."

Val examined the armoured figures, the old weapons, the hunting trophies, which adorned this

part of the house, and could be hardly torn away when luncheon was announced.

Lynford never appeared to greater advantage than as a host. There was a genial *bonhomie* in his welcome, which yet was thoroughly high-bred, and on the present occasion he seemed thoroughly pleased to receive his guests.

The respectable Dobbs in person conducted Beatrice to take off her hat and jacket in a luxurious bedroom, and Denis was invited to wait on his young master at luncheon.

Everything seemed so sunny, so homelike, that Beatrice felt her spirits rise to concert pitch, and talked a little more than usual.

Before the repast was over Lord Lynford said to Tyrrell, "It might be as well if you would come over the house with me, and I will point out to you the few additions I have made to the furniture and objects of art. They are not numerous."

"And, oh, do let me see the pictures!" urged Val.

"Yes, by all means; but you must allow yourself to be carried up-stairs; then you can go about at your own sweet will."

As soon as luncheon was finished they ad-

journed to the picture-gallery, which consisted chiefly of family portraits. At one end, however, there were some charming land- and seascapes by foreign artists, and a few *genre* pictures of decided merit, with one of which, "A Study at Fontainebleau," Val was greatly fascinated. "Is it not lovely, gran'?" he cried. "One seems to see miles away between those trees."

"Then you must do me the pleasure of accepting it," said Lord Lynford. "This end of the gallery is covered by my canvases,—mine by purchase, I mean,—and if you will have it I will leave you 'A Study at Fontainebleau.'"

"Oh, thank you ever so much!' cried Val, his eyes sparkling. "I should love to have it. Gran', may I take it away with me?"

"Better leave it till you return," put in Lynford.

"Return?" asked Val. "Are we going away? Are we coming back?"

"And what can I give you?" asked Lynford, in a low tone, turning to Beatrice.

"To me? Oh, nothing! It is pleasure enough to come here."

"For me,—yes," he returned, and immediately

wished to recall the words, till he observed that no one noticed them, not even her to whom they were addressed.

"There's a sweet face!" exclaimed Val, pointing to a delicate, dreamy-looking girl sitting in a window, in a puritanical coif and cape. "Who was she?"

Lord Lynford turned his gaze upon it. "Ah!" he said, "that was a Lady Clavering of the Stuart period. She was the daughter of a Roundhead, and Sir Ralph Clavering of that day carried her off under rather peculiar circumstances. It is believed they were a most loving couple."

"I like that picture," said Mr. Tyrrell, looking thoughtfully at it. "Does it strike you, my lord, that it greatly resembles our young friend?" and he waved his hand towards Beatrice.

"As you suggest the idea, yes; it is not unlike. If Miss Verner had a coif and cape she might be very like. If you ever go to a fancy ball, Miss Verner, you ought to adopt this costume."

"There is small chance of my going to a fancy ball. I wish there were!" she cried.

Tyrrell smiled at the hearty sincerity of her tone. They then descended to the rooms usually

occupied by Lord Lynford when he was at home. The small dining-room was hung with charming water-colour drawings of scenes in Italy, and Val recognised many with rapture.

"These, I presume, are all your personal property?" asked Tyrrell.

"Yes, all of them; but if your grandson will choose two or three, they are at his service."

"You are too generous, too kind!" exclaimed Mr. Tyrrell.

"I must beg you to make use of this opportunity to look at the pictures and some of the family relics, as you talk of leaving, and I myself shall not remain here much longer."

"I should like to look at your family portraits," returned Tyrrell. "They have a great interest for me, but all the rest I am content to leave to you. I do not wish to retain anything that is your *personal* property, and you know better than anyone else what is yours."

"I fancy it is not difficult for you and me to deal together," said Lynford, with a frank laugh. "So come and inspect my forefathers; on the whole, they are a hard-featured lot. Will you accompany us?" This to Beatrice and Val.

"I am too tired," said the latter. "Won't you stay with me, Bea?"

"Yes, if you like. Shall we go out on the lawn?"

The *partie carrée* separated, and Tyrrell followed his host to the gallery, which occupied a large part of the second story.

Lynford was not very well up in the family history until they came to the later generations. "That is the first Lord Lynford," he said, pointing to a dark, rather fierce-looking Cavalier, in all the satin and feather finery of the Restoration period, wearing those delightful soft yellowish-leather boots, with lace falling from the wide tops, which express such a mixture of the ruffian and fine gentleman. "He did the king good service, and his majesty rewarded him cheaply with a baron's coronet. He married a Venetian lady, said to be a great beauty; curiously enough, there is no portrait of her. She seems to have improved the race, as far as looks go. Then came his two sons. The second, that cold, prim-looking man, espoused the cause of William III.," and so on.

"Who is that young man in uniform," asked Tyrrell; "there, the second from the door?"

"Oh, that is Captain Dick Clavering. He was in Ligonier's horse, and was quartered in Ireland. There he made a *mésalliance*. He was generally a scamp, and cut by the family. He was the second son. He died in obscurity. Then the Lord Lynford of that day, his elder brother, dying without heirs, a son of this Richard succeeded after a long and costly lawsuit. I believe the elder children were illegitimate."

"No!" said Tyrrell, in a deep, indignant tone. "I remember that lawsuit well; it made a stir in Ireland when I was a boy. But the law in the matter is a disgrace to justice and common sense." He stretched out his hand with a gesture of denunciation.

"A good deal of our law is," returned Lynford, carelessly. "I never went into the question of my predecessor's claim. He is here somewhere."

Tyrrell looked round, and then moved towards the portrait of a good-looking man, with a weak, pleasant face and light auburn hair, who was represented standing on the steps of the entrance to the Hall, in pink and top-boots, a hunting-crop

under his arm, putting on his glove. "He is not much like the rest of you," said Tyrrell, abruptly, and there was a touch of dislike in his tone.

"No; he is of a different type. There is his son——"

"Is there no picture of his mother here?" interrupted Tyrrell.

"No. I fancy she was a mere peasant girl."

"Then there could be no room for her here," remarked Tyrrell, and remained silent for some moments, with a curious look, sad and stern. "Come," he said at last, as if rousing himself, "let us look for the youngsters."

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.