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COLONEL NORTON. BY FLORENCE MONTGOMERY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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COLONEL NORTON

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MONTGOMERY,

AUTHOR OF

"MISUNDERSTOOD," "THROWN TOGETHER," "TRANSFORMED,"

ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1895.

TO MY MOTHER.

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OF VOLUME I.

PART II.

CHARACTERS AND CONTRASTS.

COLONEL NORTON.

OPENING CHAPTER.

UNDINE.

"SHE is the most frivolous, selfish, thoughtless girl I ever came across in my whole life."

"Dear Basil, you are rather hard on her. She is so young yet, remember. You must not expect too much of her."

"The most frivolous, selfish, thoughtless girl," repeated the person addressed, as if he had not even heard the rejoinder to his remark, "that I ever met with in my life. And it is to a girl like that Providence has assigned the responsibilities of wealth and property!"

And the speaker, Colonel Norton, a man of thirty or thereabouts, paced up and down the room in a state of irritation.

The lady with whom he was conversing lay back upon her sofa, and watched him with a slightly troubled expression on her pretty, delicate face.

"Now what," he continued presently—"what do you think would bring a soul into such a light, frivolous, unthinking being?"

"A great affection," said his wife, softly, "or," she added in a lower tone, "a great sorrow."

"I don't believe her capable of feeling either," he retorted—"I don't, upon my honour."

Mrs. Norton looked distressed. "Her affections have never been drawn out, Basil."

"I don't think she has got a heart," he answered; "and, moreover, she trifles with those who have. She has plenty of lovers, at any rate," he added rather contemptuously. "She enjoys their attentions and accepts their homage as a matter of course; but there is not one of them that has aroused any sort of real feeling in her, as far as I can see."

"No, not yet," replied his wife, "but it will come."

"Oh, she will marry, of course," he rejoined,

"and I dare say *fancy* herself in love with some empty-headed fellow, as frivolous and shallow as herself. It will probably be with the best waltzer of her acquaintance. That seems to be what she especially values in her admirers. But after all, my dear Adelaide, marriage is only an outward event. People talk as if it were a talisman which was to change a woman's nature and character. It is only an incident in a woman's life. An important one I allow, but she retains her own individuality, I suppose; it is not merged in that of her husband. Oh no! Married or unmarried, Maud will be herself to the end of time; and what with her beauty, and her wealth, and her self-will, she will always have her own way in the world, and she will become a hard, worldly, selfish woman."

"What I mean," said his wife, "is that she has never had an impetus given to her higher nature; never had any one really to look up to, or for whom she could feel respect. You know what her girlhood has been. What I think she needs is the motive-power of a great and inspiring affection; and it is there that I think a good husband would do so much for her. She has never

had any one to draw out her veneration, and that, I think, is so bad for the young."

"I doubt her having much capacity for veneration," he answered, "though of course I quite agree with you that the influence of a good man, if she loved him, might be a factor in the development of her character. But, unfortunately, that is just the kind of man she is *not* likely to marry; for she is inevitably doomed to be the prey of some unworthy fortune-hunter—if he should happen to waltz well, *bien entendu.*"

"Oh, Basil," remonstrated Mrs. Norton, "you hardly do her justice, do you?"

"Yes, I *do,*" he answered; "that is just where you make a mistake. It is because I feel her to be capable of better things that she makes me so angry. The mine is there. But how it is to be worked, how the boring-machinery is to be set in motion so as to bring the hidden ore to the light, is what I cannot see; and the pity of it! For just think of all she might have done with her manifold advantages; all she might have been with her many gifts, for she has mind and intellect too, but they lie as dormant as her soul. It seems such a sad waste. What a pioneer of

good and usefulness she might have been in the world!"

"And may be still," said his wife. "Wait, dear, and see what life will do for her. Experience," she added, with a rather sad smile, "is the only schoolmaster; although, as some one has truly said, the school fees are heavy."

There was a slight pause after this; and then Colonel Norton rejoined, "Yes. But there are many, and I fear she is one, who go through life without garnering any lessons out of their experience. She has so little earnestness or sense of responsibility. You would think that in a position like hers there would be a little to begin upon. The very fact of the possession of wealth and property would arouse it in many long before they were her age. And here is she just upon the eve of her coming of age, without an idea beyond the pleasure of the moment, and her own selfish enjoyment. All she wants is to get all the 'fun' she can from her money. She will simply squeeze the estate like a sponge, and enjoy the income she secures from it; and everything in the way of responsibilities will be left to take care of itself. Did you hear her talking this morning

of the 'fun' she is going to have when she settles at Egerton Court? and all she is going to buy in the way of *objets d'art,* and *bric-à-brac,* etc.; the new stables she is going to build, the gardens and pleasure grounds and golf ground she is going to lay out? There was not the faintest allusion to the tenants or the poor; not a single scheme of benevolence; though Egerton Court is, and she knows it, a most neglected place in all those respects. Why, there is not even a church in the village! The nearest church is in the town, seven or eight miles off. Yet I never heard a word about a new church. No; 'fun' is her only idea. She came out here just to see what 'fun' she could get out of Biarritz; and now she wants to hurry back to England to begin all the 'fun' which she feels is awaiting her there.

"But now we must not discuss her any more, but make up our minds how she is to be conveyed home."

Maud Egerton, the girl under discussion, was an orphan. An only child, left motherless in infancy, and fatherless in early childhood, she had never, as the saying is, "had a chance."

Her guardian was a distant relation of her father's, who, but for the accident of her existence, would have been the heir himself.

He did not view his young relative with any very cordial feelings, and, while he made an excellent steward to her property and fortune, took no personal charge of her herself.

He made her over to two very stiff maiden sisters of his own, who lived a dull, monotonous life at an English watering-place, and who brought her up with the utmost severity, and with no sort of affection. It was with them a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, and their brother paid them handsomely for their trouble.

It had been at this watering-place that Mrs. Egerton had made Maud's acquaintance during a winter she had spent there before her own marriage.

Maud had remained under their charge until she was nearly eighteen. Her guardian had in the mean time married, and was beginning to feel the expense of the education of a large family of sons. He therefore determined to take Maud into his own house for the same reason that had originally induced his maiden sisters to undertake

the charge, *i. e.* the addition her money would make to his income.

Maud quitted her dull home with ill-concealed joy, welcoming the change from life in the uneventful seaside town to a life in London.

She was thrown at once into a very frivolous atmosphere, her guardian's wife being a gay and worldly woman.

Egerton Court was let until within a few months of her coming of age; and the winter before that time had arrived, it had occurred to Maud that a little of the sunshine and gaiety of Biarritz would be pleasant.

She had therefore written to Mrs. Norton to propose paying her a visit. Colonel Norton, always glad to afford his invalid wife any change or pleasure, and hoping that the company of a young girl might be cheering to her, pressed her to accept Maud's offer, and her guardian had brought her out.

This is how it had all come about. And the question of how she was to be got home was now the prominent one, and had led to the above conversation.

"How solemn you both look!" said a laugh-

ing voice, and a bright, beautiful girl entered the room.

Colonel Norton turned round, and his expression changed a little. He could abuse his wife's friend freely, as we have seen, behind her back, but her actual presence always softened him towards her, against his will.

There is always something fascinating in youth and light-heartedness, and he was forced to admit that Maud was rather like a bit of sunshine in the house.

"It is enough to make any one solemn," he said lightly, "to think how such a precious piece of goods as you is to be safely conveyed to England."

"Take me yourself," she said eagerly. "You would enjoy the journey, and then we might stop in Paris, and we could have all sorts of fun. Now do!"

"I am afraid that is quite impossible," he answered. He glanced, as he spoke, at his fragile-looking wife lying on the sofa.

"Why can't I travel with a maid and a courier?" she said. "Surely that would be pro-

tection enough. What nonsense it all is! What harm could possibly come to me?"

"I don't know what your guardian would say," he answered; "and I don't myself think it would quite do. No; I am rather inclined to send you by sea."

"By sea?" she said, opening her eyes very wide.

"These boats go straight to Liverpool," he said, "which would be handy for Egerton Court. There would be no changing, and I could put you in at one end, and Mr. Egerton could take you out at the other."

"Like a parcel," she put in. "Tie my ticket round my neck, and label me, 'To be left till called for.'"

Colonel Norton took no notice of the interruption. "You don't mind the sea, do you?"

"Not a bit," she said; "as far as that goes, I think it would be great fun. But I should have thought you would have considered it more unprotected than the other way, instead of less. Why, I might even make friends on board, or sit at dinner next a strange man!"

"Of course, I should put you under the care of some lady going," he answered.

"She is sure to be laid low the whole time," said Maud, laughing; "and I shall be able to do exactly as I like. All right. I think it will be great fun."

"Fun, fun, fun!" repeated Colonel Norton. "Oh, how tired I am of that word! Have you no other idea of life in your head but fun, as you call it?"

"Not one," she answered gaily. "I mean to have as much of it as ever I can, and enjoy myself to the very utmost. Drink the cup of life to the very dregs. Youth is soon over, and I mean to enjoy it while it lasts."

"And then?" he questioned.

"Oh, then," she answered—"then I suppose I must expect to be dull. Middle-aged people always are. Their fun is over. I see Colonel Norton is going to moralize, by his face, and I always get away when he begins. So good-bye;" and she ran out of the room.

"Hopeless creature," said Colonel Norton, turning to his wife.

"The child has many good points," she said. "She is very affectionate, and very generous. She

would give everything she possesses away to any one who wanted it."

"Oh, that is part of her heedlessness and carelessness," he said; "and there is nothing generous in giving away what you don't feel the loss of. There is no generosity without self-sacrifice, and of that Maud has not a notion."

"She has never been called upon to exercise it yet," answered Mrs. Norton. "Have patience, Basil, and, as I said just now, see what life will teach her, before you quite give her up as hopeless."

With this remark the conversation came to an end, and Colonel Norton went off to make inquiries about ships going from Bordeaux to Liverpool.

PART I.

AN "APOSTLE OF REALITY."

CHAPTER I.

IDEALS.

"The ideal life is in our blood, and never will be still. We feel the thing we ought to be beating beneath the thing we are. Every time we see a man who has attained our human idea a little more fully than we have, it quickens our languid blood, and fills us with new longings."

SOME eight or nine years after the events recorded in the opening chapter, two men were walking up and down the deck of a Channel steamer on her way between Calais and Dover.

It was a lovely moonlight night, and the sea was as calm as a mill-pond. There was nothing to interfere with a "quarter-deck" pacing, nor to interrupt what was apparently a very interesting conversation.

The lights of the harbour were within sight as the conversation drew to a close, and the two men leant over the side of the boat and looked out towards the nearing land.

"Well," said one, as if winding up a subject

long under discussion, "I cannot, in spite of all you say and with due respect for your longer and wider experience, allow that our ideal is *never* realized."

"We can only," rejoined the other, "judge by those we see around us, those we are thrown with, and whom we meet in our daily life."

"Your experience has been unfortunate, perhaps," suggested the younger man.

"Not more so than that of others, I dare say. Of course, I agree with you that our estimate must be in proportion to the best specimen we have had experience of. We all admire goodness in the abstract, and when we come across it in flesh and blood we recognize it intuitively."

"Well, but surely there are those," said the younger man, earnestly, "into whose presence we never come without feeling the better for it, in whose society we feel raised and elevated."

"You are thinking of some one in particular," said his companion, suddenly facing him.

A faint colour rose to the young man's face. "I am," he answered, after a slight hesitation; "but that does not affect the general truth of my observation."

"Indeed it does, though," said his friend, who deemed that the blush and the hesitation pointed to but one conclusion; "it makes all the difference in the world."

"But why?"

"Oh, because," was the rather impatient answer, "illusion will of course do anything, and spread a halo over the most commonplace and undeserving object. Love is blind, you know, so I fear your argument is not worth much."

"You are on the wrong tack altogether," said the young man, his companion's meaning suddenly dawning upon him.

"Is not the person you are thinking of a woman?" inquired the other, looking straight at him.

"Yes," he replied; "but that——"

"Ah, well, there you are, then."

"You are quite on the wrong tack, I do assure you. The person of whom I am thinking is as far above me socially as she is in every other way."

"That does not matter. Love knows no distinctions, or levels them if it knows them."

"But she has been married for years," was the rejoinder, given with a quiet smile.

"Ah, that does make a difference, certainly."

"*Did* you ever," said the younger man, who had turned his head away for a moment, and was gazing out to sea—"did you ever come across these lines—

> " 'And her smile it seems half holy,
> As if drawn from thoughts more far
> Than our earthly jestings are'?"

"Is that the feeling with which she inspires you?" inquired the other.

"It certainly expresses it," was the answer, "and every one who knows her feels in some degree the same. There is a something about her, an atmosphere around her, which makes itself felt directly. I cannot explain it, but there it is. I think you would feel it at once yourself, if you were in her company."

"I should like to know this paragon," said the elder man.

"Should you *really?*"

"Yes, really."

"Enough, I mean, to take the trouble of coming to pay me a visit? I am a poor man,

you know, and my way of living very simple. But I need not say how glad I should be to offer you such hospitality as lies in my power, if you should care to avail yourself of it. I have certainly no inducement to offer you, except an introduction to my ideal lady, at the gates of whose place I live. Her husband has a large property there."

"I should like to pay you a visit in any case," answered his friend, warmly, "even without the inducement you offer me. By the way, what is your paragon's name, if it is not an indiscreet question?"

"Not the least. Her name is Lady Manorlands. Have you never met or heard of her?"

"No. I have lived out of England so long that I have lost sight of everything and everybody."

The speaker, as the reader will have guessed, was Colonel Norton.

The first part of the time that has elapsed since we last saw him, had been spent wandering from place to place in search of health for his wife.

But the time came at length when the

search proved fruitless, and the wanderings ceased.

She lay now in the cemetery at Algiers; and he had, since her death, travelled nearly all over the world, and was now at last returning to England after a many years' absence.

His companion was a young doctor, George Hardy by name, whom he had met in his travels, and taken a fancy to. There was something about the young fellow that had attracted him, he hardly knew why. He was, as the reader knows, impatient of superficiality and frivolity; and there was a vein of quiet earnestness about young Hardy, a nobility of mind and a steadfastness of purpose, which was unusual in one so young: and the more he knew him the better he liked him.

Their conversation was now abruptly put an end to by the bustle and confusion attendant on the boat's arrival.

Colonel Norton was going straight to London, but young Hardy's path lay in another direction. They therefore took leave of each other before leaving the steamer.

It was a hurried farewell, but a compact was

made between them that they should correspond about the contemplated visit, and that the plan should by no means be allowed to drop.

"You will not forget," said George Hardy.

"There is no fear of my doing so," answered Colonel Norton. "I shall want to see you again; and I am, moreover, most anxious and curious to meet your piece of perfection."

And so with a warm grasp of the hand, and a mutual feeling of regret that the companionship of several weeks had come to an end, the two men parted.

Colonel Norton thought a good deal about the young doctor as he journeyed up to London. He had never clearly made out what his social standing was. Hardy always spoke of himself as a very poor man, and yet he had been educated at Baliol College, Oxford. He was reserved about himself and his own affairs; mentioned no relations, except, once or twice, a sister.

In plain English, Colonel Norton could not make out whether he was a gentleman by birth or not. He had come to the conclusion that familiarity with scenes of suffering and of death in the constant attendance on the sick had

wrought out the deeper tone in the young man's character which had attracted him, and that it was this which caused his outlook on life to be more solemn than is generally the case with the young.

From thinking of him, his thoughts strayed on to other young people he had known, with a view to comparing them with the sterling worth and high tone of the youth who had so favourably impressed him.

There came back to him dimly, for it was now a very long time ago, the memory of the bright, beautiful girl he had last seen when he had put her on board the steamer at Bordeaux, on her way to England, and of whom he had heard little or nothing since. He found himself wondering what her fate in life had been.

He and his wife had started on a long sea-voyage almost immediately after Maud's departure, and were out of reach of newspapers and letters for a long while.

It was, therefore, some time before they had any tidings of her, and when at last Mrs. Norton received a letter from her, it was evident that

one or two, if not more, letters had been written, which had never reached their destination.

The one in question had been written several months after Maud's arrival in England, and announced her engagement to a young naval officer, Alfred Mildmay by name.

"A fortune-hunter and a good waltzer, no doubt," had been Colonel Norton's contemptuous remark to his wife on the occasion.

Mrs. Norton had been taken ill soon after, with inflammation of the lungs, and the letter was never answered.

Events had followed quickly, and Maud Egerton and her affairs had faded from his thoughts.

But thinking of young people brought her back to his mind to-day, and he found himself dwelling upon the waste of gifts and opportunities in her case, and wishing she had had more in her of the stamp of the youth he had lately quitted.

"That's the sort of fellow she ought to have married," he said to himself. "What a pity he did not come across her path! What an influence he might have been, and how much good the two together might have done in the world!"

Then he rather smiled to himself at the ana-

chronisms he was constantly guilty of in his thoughts, after the fashion of those who have lived out of the world for a long time; for, of course, there must be a difference of at least six years on the wrong side between Maud Egerton and young Hardy.

He wondered what had become of her, and what sort of a woman she might be now. For his wife's sake, and as one of the last living links with her memory, he thought, if he had time, he would try to find Maud out, and renew his acquaintance with her.

As he thought of her, there came back to him clearly the farewell glance he had had of her. The scene came vividly before him for a moment —the receding steamer, and Maud's young graceful figure, as she stood on deck waving her handkerchief to the last to him, and to all her other friends gathered together on the shore in her honour.

Then his thoughts reverted to his own affairs, to those of his own family—few in number now —with whom he was so soon to meet; and he speculated as to unknown nephews and nieces, etc.; and these meditations occupied him until the train steamed into Charing Cross Station.

CHAPTER II.

RIP VAN WINKLE.

"Il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire."

TRUE to his promise, at the end of some six weeks Colonel Norton arrived on a visit to the small country village which was George Hardy's home.

In the interval he had visited his relations, paid a visit to London, looked up his old friends —tried, in short, to pick up the threads of his life after his many years' absence.

The *résumé* was rather a sad one. He had come to the conclusion, often arrived at in like circumstances, of how very well the world had got on without him; how very little he had been missed, and how completely the gap his place had made had been filled up by others.

He had often been full of compunction at living so much out of England, but now he felt as if he might have spared himself the trouble.

"Il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire," he said to himself, as he sat at the club window on the evening of his first visit there. He had come in rather with the feeling of expecting (not wishing for, but certainly expecting) what he looked upon as the inevitable ovation that awaits the returned absentee.

The club was full of new faces—or of faces which, if not new, bore to him a new appearance. Faces the same and not the same—thinner and more lantern-jawed in some cases, more rotund and rubicund in others, surmounted by heads balder or whiter, as the case might be. Some of these looked up at him over the tops of their papers, and then went on reading. Had he grown lantern-jawed too? Others had said, "Hallo, Norton, is that you? Why, where have you been all this time? It's an age since I saw you," and then equally gone on with their reading. Only one or two had seemed really glad to see him, or interested in what he had been doing for the last ten years. Yet he had looked upon himself as, and he had been, a popular man.

But life, he discovered, moves quickly nowadays, and if you drop out of the ranks your

place is quickly filled by others. There is no time for regrets. Interests there are, so many, so constantly increasing and changing, that the interests of ten years ago seem "as a tale that is told" to the dwellers in cities of the nineteenth century.

Altogether he felt rather "out of it," and more difficulty in finding his niche in the world of present English life, than he had anticipated.

With his family and relations the case had been much the same. All that was left to him were his sisters, three in number, and all married. They had never been particularly congenial to him, and his brothers-in-law were to him—what brothers-in-law generally are to each other!

They had all welcomed him very kindly and very cordially, but after a bit he saw that they were absorbed in the crowd of their own interests, and the long lapse in their communication made them have less in common with him than ever.

There was no place for him in their lives, and even if there had been, he was not the least inclined to fill it. His sisters did not suit him, and never would. He was quite out of har-

mony with their ideas and with their way of life altogether.

The nephews and nieces, too, were a disappointment. The atmosphere in which they had been brought up did not suit his taste, and the training they were receiving did not come up to his views of what ought to be. And though his eldest sister, Mrs. Harrington, invited criticism, and told him how much she valued his opinion, still, when he gave it, he saw clearly enough that she did not like it, and that it only ended in her thinking that he did not appreciate her children, and being "rather hurt" that he did not praise "dear Harry," or admire "poor little Molly," and was he not a little hard on "darling Frank"?

In short, he found, as is so often found, that inviting criticism only means, "Approve of me, praise me, but don't go against me or find fault." In fact, in the case of this particular sister, it meant more; it meant "Applaud me; strengthen me in the good opinion of myself and my ways which I have already formed, and which I do not wish disturbed." And to Colonel Norton that sort of thing was quite impossible. He either approved strongly or disapproved still more

strongly; and in either case he said what he thought without over-consideration for the feelings of his listener. He did not waste any time in compliments; and, in short, he went dangerously near to being that useful but not popular member of society, "the candid friend."

But, nevertheless, his visits to his family depressed him. Wifeless and childless as he was, his sisters were all he had; and he felt lonely among those with whom he had so little in common, and who were absorbed in the ties and interests which he lacked.

Then he left them all, and went up to London again, and mingled in all the different sets of society — political, fashionable, intellectual, would-be-intellectual, etc.

He found many changes, and after a time he wanted to talk them over with somebody else. But he found every one had grown accustomed to them all; and that they did not strike other people as they did him, coming straight upon them after his long absence. They were, and had been all the time, in the midst of them, and they could not stand aside, as it were, as he did, and talk about them, and speculate upon them.

They had not time, moreover; the hurry in which they lived did not allow of it. The "next thing" was always coming quickly, and every minute was filled up. They were apparently quite oblivious of what seemed to him the eddying whirlpool of change in which their lives were lived.

The havoc which the one item Death had made in their midst appalled him; but they did not appear to notice it, any more than they did the extraordinary *bouleversements* it had been instrumental in bringing about. In many households there appeared to him to have been a sort of "general post." Deaths and second marriages had brought about the most curious juxtapositions and unaccountable relationships. Such a one had become the daughter of such another whom he remembered girls together; and he found himself constantly revolving in his mind such problems as these—

> "If Jack's father be John's son,
> What relation is Jack to John?"

Or, "How in the world has her sister become her mother-in-law?" etc.

People tried to explain to him on their fingers

how these things had come about, but he only got the more hopelessly confused.

The difficulty of picking up the threads of his former life seemed to grow greater every day.

In the like circumstances, the mind is apt to revert to more recent and personal interests; and he found his thoughts turning to his late travelling-companion, and to the many interesting conversations they had had together.

He felt, strangely enough, as if he could talk over his return to English life, and his impressions of things and people, better with him than with any one else he could think of; and that, young as he was, he would probably understand and sympathize with him.

A lull in his many engagements occurred, and he made up his mind to propose a short visit to him.

His offer being at once accepted, he found himself, as we began by saying, in about six weeks from the day he landed in England, driving through a quiet little country village on a lovely June afternoon, in search of Doctor Hardy's humble abode.

CHAPTER III.

LADY MANORLANDS.

"For if our virtue go not forth of us,
'Tis all the same as though we had it not."

THE fly stopped before a two-roomed cottage covered with purple clematis. On the door was a brass plate with the unpretending inscription "George Hardy" upon it; and a label on one of the windows bore the word "Dispensary."

The door was opened by a clean, middle-aged woman, who evidently united in her own person the functions of owner and domestic, and represented the whole force of the establishment. Colonel Norton felt glad he had left his servant behind.

"The doctor," she informed him, "was on his rounds, but would be back in a very short time. Would the gentleman be pleased to walk this way?"

Colonel Norton followed her into a tiny little sitting-room, and looked round him with some

surprise. For, judging from the exterior, he had confidently expected to find horsehair chairs, stuffed birds on the mantel-piece, and a table covered with mats and tawdry ornaments in the middle of the room. Instead of which, the room, small as it was, with its low ceiling and cottage windows, was furnished with great, almost artistic taste, and filled with things worth having.

Instinctively, he felt there had been a lady's hand in it, and a lady, too, not only of a refined and cultivated taste, but one with the means of gratifying it. For valuable prints hung upon the walls; a handsome bureau stood in one corner of the room, and the bookcase was filled to overflowing with standard works, well bound, as well as with modern poets and writers. One side was filled with these, and the other side was devoted to medical works.

And yet there was nothing "finiky" or effeminate about the room. It had evidently been borne in mind that it was a man's room, and a man's room it remained. It was a miniature library; not a boudoir.

The whole interior of the cottage contrasted strongly with its very modest exterior.

Presently his eye was attracted by a beautiful print over the mantelpiece of "Christ healing the Sick," and he advanced nearer to examine it. On the margin below, in a woman's writing, were Whittier's lines on the same subject; and as he read them they seemed to him to embody his young friend's view of his profession.

"So stood of old the Holy Christ
Amidst the suffering throng,
With whom His lightest touch sufficed
To make the weakest strong.

"That healing gift He lends to them
Who use it in His name;
The power that filled His garment's hem
Is evermore the same.

"The holiest task by Heaven decreed
An errand all divine,
The burden of the common need
To render less, is thine.

"Beside the unveiled mysteries
Of life and death go stand,
With guarded lips and reverent eyes,
And pure of heart and hand.

"The Good Physician liveth yet,
Thy Friend and Guide to be;
The Healer by Gennesaret
Shall walk thy rounds with thee."

Colonel Norton read the verses over twice. They struck a chord in his heart which was not often reached. As he finished reading he heard a firm, quick step, and the young doctor entered. Colonel Norton turned round, and greeted his fellow-traveller warmly. He was unfeignedly glad to see him again.

The pleasure was evidently mutual. Young Hardy flushed with eager pleasure as he welcomed his friend.

After a short conversation, he took him upstairs to his room—the smallest apartment Colonel Norton had ever occupied, but also tastefully furnished.

"My old Baliol furniture," said George Hardy, as he saw Colonel Norton's eye travel round. "Dinner will be ready almost directly," he added, as he left the room.

"You knew you were coming to visit a poor man, Colonel Norton," remarked the young doctor, as he and his guest entered the little parlour about ten minutes after; "so you will be prepared for homely fare."

"Plain living and high thinking, eh?" laughed Colonel Norton; "all the better."

Conversation on their late travels and experiences flowed freely during dinner, and for some time after; and both were so interested, first in their joint recollections, and then in Colonel Norton's new experiences, that the evening was far advanced before any other subject was started.

"We have been so absorbed in our talk," said Colonel Norton at last, "that we have never even alluded to one of the chief objects of my visit here. The ideal Lady? How is she, and when am I to make her acquaintance?"

"Lady Manorlands is away from home till to-morrow evening," answered George Hardy; "but the day after that I shall hope to introduce her to you. I feel as if I had brought you down on rather false pretences, but I did not know she was going away when I answered your letter."

"My dear fellow!" exclaimed Colonel Norton; "I assure you my visit is to you, and the pleasure of seeing you again has been so great that I declare until this moment I had almost forgotten Lady Manorlands' existence."

"It is very good of you to say so, but the

introduction is, I hope, only delayed, if you can put up with me and my *ménage* a little longer. The worst of it is," he added, "that I fear I shall make but a poor host, on account of the constant interruptions to which a doctor is subject. I have no assistant, so the whole work of a scattered district falls on me, and my time is not my own. But I have *carte blanche,* which I can extend to you, to go anywhere and everywhere in Lord Manorlands' house and grounds, and the pictures and other interesting things there are well worth inspection."

"I always think," said Colonel Norton, "that a person's surroundings in their own home are something of an index to their mind and character; and it will interest me the more in your ideal lady, to find out for myself in that way a little about her, before I make her acquaintance."

"Very well," said George Hardy. "It must of course, though, be a most superficial judgment."

"Oh, of course, of course," answered Colonel Norton, "especially in the case of an old family place and house, where surroundings both inside and out must be to a great extent inherited, not

made. Don't be alarmed. I am only going to gather a general impression, not to form a hard and fast opinion."

"And now, Colonel Norton," said the doctor, "I should so like to hear whether, in renewing friendships and acquaintances after your long absence, you still maintain that one's ideal is never realized."

"My particular experience may be unfortunate," was Colonel Norton's answer, "or my standard too high; but the fact remains. I still maintain my opinion, though I should be more than willing to alter it if I could. I am, therefore, quite coming round to the hope of finding a realized ideal in your lady here. I have certainly not done so elsewhere. And yet I do not think I am exigent, or that I expect too much of poor human nature. I am not looking for impossibilities. Of course, people can't help being imperfect. I should be satisfied with genuine reality. I have not found even that."

George Hardy looked at him inquiringly. There was a note of irritation in his voice.

"Are you," he said, "speaking in the abstract,

or have you some particular person or persons in your mind?"

Colonel Norton laughed.

"You are too sharp," said he. "I had not meant to particularize; but since you have found me out, I must own that it is my own people I have at the back of my mind, and who have left a sense of their unreality upon me. Hardy, I have three married sisters. With them a good deal of my time lately has been spent; from their domestic lives a good deal of my renewed experience of English home-life has been drawn. They are curious people, these sisters of mine, each in her different way. As you do not know their names, there is no disloyalty in saying to you what I am saying. If you knew who they were, of course I should not say a word to you about their affairs or their failings. But it is after living with them that I feel so strongly that it is actions, and not opinions, that one wants; it is what people are, not what they say. Talk does not satisfy one," he went on, lighting a cigarette and throwing himself into an armchair, "or I should be better pleased with all I have lived with lately. For there are fine theories enough

and to spare. People, and my people especially, say any amount of plausible things, and give vent all day long to grand sentiments and lofty ideas. But one wants to see theories and sentiments carried out in people's everyday lives; and that is just what I have failed in doing."

"I am sorry," said Hardy, "that your search for reality should have been so disappointed."

"It has," he replied. "I give you my word, Hardy, that among all those I have seen, there was only one who was single-minded, true, and earnest, and that was my eldest sister's young governess, a girl of one or two and twenty. She was worth the whole lot put together. (By the way, if ever you should want a wife, that is the very girl to suit you. Her views of life, and her ideas altogether, would entirely coincide with yours. But this is only in parenthesis.) She was the only one, as I say, who in any way gave me the impression of reality. As to the rest—— Oh dear," he went on, half laughing and half impatient, "the want of self-knowledge of these dear good sisters of mine! Their self-complacency because their most ordinary and obvious duties are fulfilled really sickens one, or would if it were

not so laughable. I do not say they are not—two of them, at any rate—very worthy sort of people. They *are.* But all they do is to my mind spoilt by that "backward and self-regarding glance" with which they accompany every act of their daily lives. And they never see, either, that they are living the life they prefer, and half the time only following their own inclinations."

At this moment the night-bell rang loudly, and George Hardy went to the door.

Colonel Norton could hear him in conversation with some one who stood there, and he also heard the patter of heavy rain-drops, and the growl of distant thunder.

In a few moments the doctor re-entered, buttoning up his great-coat.

"I am so sorry to leave you, Colonel Norton," he said; "but this is an urgent case, and in an isolated place, with no neighbours near to assist, so I must be off at once, as it is many miles away."

"My dear fellow, what a night to turn out in!" exclaimed Colonel Norton.

"Oh, we must take the rough with the smooth," he answered; "and my gig will take me

there in under an hour, I dare say. My cob is a firstrate goer. I am only sorry to leave you alone, and to have what you were telling me interrupted."

"Oh, never mind," said Colonel Norton. "I have blown off a good deal of steam, and I shall feel better now, I dare say. I'll come to the door and see you off."

The doctor went into the surgery to collect what he wanted, and Colonel Norton, going to the hall door, looked out into the night.

A wind had risen, and the rain was coming down in torrents.

It was pitch dark, save when every now and then the landscape was illumined by vivid flashes of lightning. The gig soon drove up, and in a few moments Hardy appeared, and, bidding the messenger get up beside him, he mounted the box.

Just then a loud clap of thunder startled the horse, which reared and plunged uneasily.

"The storm is coming up," said Colonel Norton.

"Yes, I think so," returned the doctor, as he gathered up the reins in his hands. "Good

night, Colonel Norton. I shall have to drive fast if I am to get there in time."

So saying, he disappeared into the darkness, and Colonel Norton closed the hall door and returned rather disconsolately to the lighted room, now deserted and dull.

"No backward and self-regarding glance *there,*" he said to himself, as he put out the lamp and prepared to go upstairs. "And yet he might have easily "posed" as the devoted and self-sacrificing young doctor driving through the black night—and at the risk of his own neck, too, I should say, in a thunderstorm with that nervous animal—in the discharge of his duty. A real fellow that—none of your shams."

The storm grew and increased in intensity. Colonel Norton could not get to sleep for it for some hours. Streaks of dawn were filling his room with light before he heard Hardy come home.

"Certainly a doctor's life is no sinecure," he said to himself; and he said it again when, on going downstairs to breakfast the next morning, he found that Hardy had already gone out.

He had left a message that Colonel Norton

was not to wait for him, and the latter accordingly sat down to breakfast without him, the housekeeper informing him that the doctor had been sent for to one of Lord Manorlands' children, who had had a slight attack of croup in the night.

Breakfast over, Colonel Norton put on his hat and strolled up towards the park gates, in the hopes of meeting him.

He soon espied him coming towards him, looking bright and cheerful, and apparently none the worse for his want of sleep.

"It's all right," he said, in answer to an unspoken question — "a mere nothing; but Lady Manorlands being away, the nurse got alarmed. It's an ill wind that blows no one any good," he added, "for the nurse, it seems, wrote to say the little boy was not well, and so Lady Manorlands is coming back by an earlier train than she had intended. She is expected early this afternoon. Have you had your breakfast, Colonel Norton? I was obliged to leave home early."

"Thanks, yes," answered Colonel Norton, "I have. I hope you are now going to have yours."

"Yes; and directly after, I am sorry to say, I shall have to leave you again, as I am wanted in another direction. But about midday I expect to have a few hours' leisure."

"All right," said Colonel Norton; "then I will now stroll up to Manorlands to make my inspection, and will join you later."

He went on his way.

It was a lovely scene that met his eye as he entered the park and mounted the hill which led to the house. The grand old building stood high, and the view got more and more extended as he approached the entrance. The foliage in the park was magnificent; the deer lay about in groups under the shade of the trees; and beyond, as far as the eye could see, stretched a beautiful undulating country in all the fresh and varying colour of early spring.

"After all, there is no country like England," said John Bull to himself as he walked along.

He had intended going into the house to see the pictures, but he changed his mind when he got to the door, feeling more inclined to stay out in the balmy air of the June morning.

Striking away to the left, he entered the pleasure grounds and made his way to the back of the house. Here a path led him on to the sloping lawns and up to the open windows of the drawing and other rooms, and he stood for a moment looking in at the arrangements and disposal of the furniture of the interior.

"A womanly woman," he said to himself; and this was the highest praise from Colonel Norton.

It was evidently not only an English country house, but an English home.

On one side of the house was a magnificent group of old cedar trees, which cast a deep shade over that part of the lawn; and the lawn itself stretched for some distance, and sloped down at last to the river which flowed at its base.

He stayed there wandering about for some time, and then, coming back to the front of the house again, he struck across the park to the home farm. From there he found a new way back to the little village, noting on his way a club for young men, some pretty almshouses, and a village library.

"I have come to report progress," he said, when he rejoined his young friend at about one o'clock, "and so far I am entirely satisfied with what I have seen."

"No one is forgotten, I assure you," said George Hardy, "and no stone left unturned to give every one a chance of living their best and highest."

"Ah! that is as it should be," replied Colonel Norton. "More's the pity that those who have the means and the power have not always the will to do likewise."

His mind reverted, as he spoke, to Maud Egerton and all her projects when starting in life, in which schemes for the amelioration of the lives of others had been so conspicuous by their absence.

After luncheon the two men started for a walk. They had a long and rambling stroll; and it was getting on for five o'clock when they turned their steps homewards.

As they approached the village, Colonel Norton noticed in his young friend an inclination to constantly consult his watch and to look behind him in the direction of the railway line. Now and

then he stopped, as if listening intently to some distant sound.

On the third occasion that this happened, Colonel Norton stopped too. He fancied that there might be a nightingale to be heard, for there was an expression of expectancy on the young man's face, as if the sound he heard or expected to hear was a pleasant one.

But all Colonel Norton could distinguish was the distant hum, so familiar now in country places as to be almost as rural as the rumble of hay carts, or any other such sounds—

"Like to the noise of muffled drums
Through the quiet air a faint pulse comes.
Hark! the signal bell's 'ting, ting,'
And the wires jerk and swing,
And nearer, nearer, nearer, nearer,
And clearer, clearer, clearer, clearer,
Come the rattle and rumble and roar and shriek."

Colonel Norton was fond of seeing an express pass, and he leaned against the side of the bridge under which it was coming, and watched it flash by.

"The train rushed by with fiery breath,
It faded away with its cloud of dust,
And then came a silence as of death."

"That is their train," said young Hardy, quietly.

But Colonel Norton rather detected a tone of suppressed excitement in his voice, and noticed that he quickened his pace. He observed also, afterwards, an inclination to veer back towards the high-road, which lay between the park gates and the station.

"What it is to be young!" thought Colonel Norton, as he marked these signs of excitement in his usually quiet and sensible companion—"young and *illusioné*."

"Here comes the carriage," George Hardy said presently, and he drew up on one side of the road to let it pass.

Colonel Norton watched him all this time with great amusement. Indeed, he was so busy watching him that he forgot to look as hard as he intended at the occupant of the carriage, about whom he had till this moment felt some interest and curiosity.

The carriage drove rapidly by, and as it swept past, a lovely face leant forward at the sight of young Hardy, with a bright smile of recognition.

The doctor's face had a faint colour on it as the carriage passed out of sight. His grave face was changed by the sparkle that shone in his eyes, and the smile of pleasure which hovered round his lips.

But the face of his companion was more changed still. All the langour of Colonel Norton's manner was gone, and he was standing stock still, gazing after the retreating carriage with a look of astonishment and bewilderment.

For in the beautiful woman who had leaned forward for a moment as the carriage flashed by, he had recognized—Maud Egerton!

CHAPTER IV.

IS IT ILLUSION OR DELUSION?

"Pour admirer assez, il faut admirer trop; et un peu d'illusion est nécessaire au bonheur."

COLONEL NORTON was so dumbfounded by what he had seen, so taken aback and bewildered, that for a few minutes he could hardly collect his thoughts. He kept on muttering incoherent sentences to himself, and took no notice of his companion, who had turned upon him a face glowing with pleasure and excitement, as if asking for some remark or some tribute, as it were, to the bright and beautiful apparition which, flashing so quickly by, had seemed to leave a track of light behind.

But the expression of Colonel Norton's face was so curious, that young Hardy's changed too, and he hastily exclaimed—

"My dear Colonel Norton! What is the matter?"

"Matter!" spluttered Colonel Norton. "The

matter is that I was never so astonished in all my life. Why, that lady," he said, taking off his hat to cool himself, and pointing in the direction of the receding carriage—"that lady—— Are you sure her name is Lady Manorlands?" he ended abruptly; "not Mrs. Alfred Somebody?"

"You do know her, then?" exclaimed George Hardy.

"Know her?" retorted Colonel Norton. "Why, I knew her when she was a girl of twenty; Maud Egerton was her name then."

"Yes; that was Lady Manorlands' name——"

"But how did she become Lady Manorlands?" reiterated Colonel Norton. "To my certain knowledge, she married a poor lieutenant in the navy, whose name I cannot remember."

"Quite true," answered George Hardy. "Lord Manorlands was a lieutenant in the navy when she married him. Alfred Mildmay was his name. He most unexpectedly became Lord Manorlands through the deaths of some distant cousins. But do tell me, Colonel Norton, what your impression of her was. It would be most interesting to me to know what opinion you formed of her when she was a young girl."

But Colonel Norton, all in a moment, had come to a sudden and fixed resolution. His should not be the hand to destroy this young man's ideal. He would not shatter it and send it to the four winds. He knew too well the bad effect of that spirit in the world, that destroys ideals and drags everything down to the commonplace, and how much harm often had been done that way.

Destroy a young man's ideal, dispel his illusion, and he, perhaps, becomes a cynic and a scoffer. Break down his altar and overthrow his idol, and his faith in woman's goodness, and ultimately even in goodness itself, may be gone for ever. So he determined to say nothing. His lips were sealed.

After a moment's pause he answered, "She was a friend of my poor wife's in those days, and I think I would rather not discuss her."

They walked on in silence, but, on reaching home, Colonel Norton detected a certain restlessness in his young companion, and at last he owned that he had a great deal to talk over with Lady Manorlands, in connection with the child's little attack; and begged Colonel Norton to ex-

cuse him if he went up to the house for a short time, in order to catch her before dressing-time.

Colonel Norton readily gave him leave, smiling to himself at the evident eagerness of the young man to be off; and reflecting that it must be pleasant sometimes to be a doctor, as it gave the right of ingress into a house at all times and at any hour, when ordinary visitors would not be admitted. He would much have liked himself to go up there at once, and renew his acquaintance with Maud Egerton.

So, left to himself, he sat down in the arm-chair by the open window and reflected on the surprise he had had that afternoon. He thought over all that George Hardy had at different times told him of this ideal woman, and tried to piece it together and make it agree, however slightly, with his own recollection of Maud Egerton. It was simply ludicrous!

And yet he had great faith in young Hardy, and great confidence in his judgment. Could such a penetrating young fellow be altogether mistaken? Could a young man of his sense be utterly the victim of a delusion?

And if she was so changed, how had it come about? In what deep waters could Undine have found a soul? Was his wife right, after all? Had the motive-power of an inspiring affection wrought the change? And was this sailor, whom he had so contemptuously dismissed as a "fortune hunter," a good man and a powerful one: whose influence had told thus?

He began to have a great curiosity to renew his acquaintance with her, and to see for himself. So much so, that he felt distinctly pleased when the doctor returned with a special message to him from Lady Manorlands, to the effect that she would be so glad to see him again, and that she would be at home to-morrow afternoon at teatime, if he would come and pay her a visit.

But in the mean time, he was determined not only to tell George Hardy nothing, but to ask nothing; to make no inquiries whatever. He would find out everything for himself, and he would reserve his judgment, and form no opinion until he saw.

About five o'clock the next day, Colonel Norton was walking up the chestnut avenue he had walked up the day before, on his way to

renew his acquaintance with Maud Egerton, *alias* Lady Manorlands.

With very different feelings, he came upon the house lying under the summer sky.

His sense of observation was quickened tenfold since yesterday, piecing things together, and trying to make them agree and blend with the novel sensation of the frivolous girl he remembered, being the prime mover of it all.

He was conducted through the hall, and through the drawing-room towards the open window, being informed that Lady Manorlands was in the garden. A swift glance to the right and left of him, as he followed the servant across the room, confirmed him in his opinion of its owner's feminine refinement; and had he still had any doubts of her identity with his former acquaintance, they would have been dispelled by a full-length picture of Maud Egerton, much as he remembered her, hanging on the wall.

He had only time for a cursory glance at all this, as he followed the servant and stepped out upon the lawn. If he had admired the quiet scene of English homelife before, he was more struck with it than ever now.

There is always something a little melancholy in a house and garden when they are deserted and silent, but now the wide lawn looked alive and human, and pleasant sounds filled the air, for under the shade of the spreading branches of the grand old trees was a settlement of chairs and tables, and the sound of the rattle of teacups and the hum of soft voices in conversation.

(She was not alone, then, he reflected, and he was conscious of a slight sense of disappointment.)

Nothing was wanting to make up the quiet home beauty of the scene; for on the grass, an indispensable adjunct and ornament to a lawn in summer, the agile forms of pretty children were flitting about, the sound of their merry laughter and chatter filling the air as they called to each other at their play.

At the announcement of Colonel Norton's name, a lady rose from her low seat in the shady settlement and advanced to meet him.

Maud Egerton; yes, there was no doubt about that. But the years which had elapsed since he had seen her had changed the bright, pretty girl into something much better—a beautiful woman.

The sensation we expect is hardly ever the one we experience; and whereas we know what thoughts of curiosity and bewilderment were filling his mind as regarded her, when he found himself face to face with her, every other faded away, except that of the circumstances and surroundings of the time when they had been last together. The sunny little villa drawing-room at Biarritz rose before him, the fragile form on the sofa in the window, and a vivid recollection of tones and words now hushed and stilled for ever.

He held Maud's hand for a minute, and tried to speak in his ordinary manner. But the thought of his dead wife swept so vividly over him, that it quite overcame him for a moment; his voice faltered, and he turned his head away.

Lady Manorlands saw it, and evidently felt it too, though without, except by a gentle pressure of the hand, appearing to notice it. She forebore to say anything she may have intended to say, and made no allusion to their former acquaintance. For this womanly tact he was most grateful to her, as he felt that at that moment he could hardly have borne it, especially in full

view, as they were, of the group under the trees. She returned to her seat, and made room for him by her side, offering him tea, and introducing him to the other ladies, thus giving him time to recover himself.

He was still more assisted in doing so—though not by the means he would have perhaps chosen—by a rather tiresome old lady on his other side taking complete possession of him, and engaging him in a conversation which did not interest him in the least. So determined was her onslaught, however, that he was obliged to move his seat nearer to her, thus cutting himself off from any chance of talking to Maud.

As, however, in moving he managed to get his chair opposite to her, he was consoled by thus getting a full view of her face, and being able to watch her furtively in the pauses of his own conversation, while she, wholly unconscious of his gaze, was conversing with somebody else.

He could not always quite hear what she was saying, but the expression told its tale.

Yes, there was no doubt about it. The soul had come. Never was a face so altered. It was, as it had always been, a bright, changing, beauti-

ful face; but to his mind there had always been a want in it. And now the want was fulfilled; there was soul in every line.

Some visitors presently arrived, and the conversation round her grew more general. His garrulous neighbour continued to pour forth her remarks in his ear, so that he could not hear what was going on. But presently she paused for breath, and he could hear what Maud was saying.

Apparently, a lady who was just taking leave was interested in a Convalescent Home in the neighbourhood, and was asking Lady Manorlands if she could give her any toys for a new arrival there, a little boy from London.

Lady Manorlands replied that she did not happen to have any by her just now, but that she would write for some by that evening's post, and have them sent straight to the home.

"Thank you so much; but any old toys would be quite good enough, you know," said the lady, as she wished good-bye.

When she was gone, old Mrs. Portman said she wondered Lady Manorlands took the trouble to send for new toys when there must be so many

old ones in the nursery, adding, that it was wonderful what rubbish pleased poor children—broken carts, and tailless horses, and things that our own children would never miss. She was sure, she said, that little Geordie and Alfred must have many they no longer cared for, which they would be quite ready to give away.

"That is just the reason," Lady Manorlands replied, "that I never allow them to do it; and that is why I am going to send for new ones. It is not that I think new toys will please the little sick boy a bit better than Geordie's and Alfred's old ones; but that I think there is nothing so bad for children as to give away old broken toys they are tired of, and have ceased to care for, under the guise of kindness and charity. Now, if they were willing to sacrifice themselves by giving away something they really cared for, and were *not* tired of, Miss Burdett should have the toys and welcome. But, otherwise, *I* will give the toys, and not Geordie and Alfred."

There was a silence after this; and then, as if afraid of having made Mrs. Portman feel uncomfortable or at a disadvantage, Lady Manorlands added—

"But I should be only too glad to find them willing. Shall I put them to the test? Little Alfred is one of those children who gets so passionately attached to his toys, that if we get him to give up the idol of the hour, it will indeed be a triumph of charity over self. We will see. Geordie darling!" she called out, turning to that part of the lawn where the little boys were at play, "come here, and bring Alfie with you. I have got something to say to you."

The two little fellows ran up joyously at her call, and stood expectant before her.

"There is a poor little boy near here," she said, as they looked up inquiringly into her face with their bright earnest eyes, "who wants some toys to play with. He has no father or mother, poor little fellow, to buy him any; and he is ill, besides, so that he cannot go out-of-doors. Now, will you each of you send him one of yours?"

"Oh yes, yes!" said the elder boy, joyously.

"Which one?" said the other little fellow, rather fearfully. "*Not* mine Bunny?"

"Why not?" questioned his mother, looking at him with a smile.

"I love that Bunny so," he said, with a suspicious quaver in his voice.

"But perhaps the little sick boy loves Bunnies too."

A pause. Little Alfred stood with downcast eyes and a troubled expression on his pretty little face. The said "Bunny" he held by its long ear, loosely dangling by his side. It seemed a part of him; it almost was. It was the "idol of the hour" just now. Where he went, it went; where he slept, it reposed beside him.

At last he raised his eyes with an eager expression, as if some happy thought had just struck him.

"There's lots of tyes," he said, "in the nursery cupboard, what's kite broken and done with; lots. Little sick boy can have 'em all."

He looked doubtfully and yet pleadingly into his mother's face, as if he felt by her expression that she was not quite satisfied with him.

"Ebery one, you know," he added emphatically.

"And you, Geordie," she said, turning to her elder boy, "what will you give the little boy?"

"What shall I?" he answered. "You say, mother."

"Your big donkey," she suggested.

"Oh, that would never do!" was the prompt reply.

"Why not?"

"It would be so heavy, mother, for the poor little boy to carry; it would make his arms ache. And he's got no toy cupboard, you know, to keep it in; so he would have to carry it about all day long. How tired he would get!"

He warmed with his subject and grew more emphatic as he went on.

"Quite unaware of his own motive," said Colonel Norton *sotto voce.*

"Yes, quite," she answered. "How often one sees that!—Very well, darlings," she added, to the children, "neither of you need give your toys to the little boy if you would rather not. You can run back to your game."

The elder boy was silent and thoughtful. He looked at his donkey in the distance. It was no longer a pleasure to him, and the game had lost its delight.

"The serpent has entered his Eden," said Colonel Norton.

"Poor little fellow!" said his mother, softly.

"Do you *want* me to give it to him, mother?" said Geordie. "*Must* I give it to him?"

"No, darling, not unless you like. It is all just as you like, only it would, of course, make the little boy very happy, who has so little to amuse him, and is shut up all day."

"Oh, poor little boy!" exclaimed Geordie, struck with sudden compunction. "Indoors all day!"

"No tyes," put in little Alfred, shaking his head sorrowfully.

"And ill besides," added Geordie.

"What sweet things!" exclaimed old Mrs. Portman. "What feeling hearts they have!"

"Feeling should pass into action," their mother answered, "or it is little worth. . . . You can run back to your game, darlings," she repeated.

The two little fellows turned away rather sobered; but they had not long reached the part of the lawn where they had been playing, before the elder boy came running back, dragging the donkey after him.

"He shall have it, mother; there it is."

He rather hastily pressed the animal into his mother's arms, as if afraid he might repent of his resolution if he delayed at all in bringing it to a consummation.

A burst of applause came from the old lady.

Lady Manorlands gave her an imploring glance, as she accepted the sacrifice that had been offered up; and said very quietly, as she kissed the pretty little face upturned towards her, "I am so glad, darling; it will make him so happy;" and the child ran off joyfully again to his game.

"You don't bring them up to think of nothing but 'fun,' Lady Manorlands," said Colonel Norton, in an undertone.

She looked quickly at him as he made this his first allusion to their former relations, and her face flushed. Then such a troubled look came over it that he was quite sorry he had spoken. She seemed about to say something, and then checked herself. He came to her assistance by changing the subject.

"I do so entirely agree with you," he said, and out loud, "about it being bad for children

to give away what they do not feel the loss of, and then to be lauded for kindness and charity. The principle is a wrong one; and it is not only among children either that one often sees practised this kind of (so-called) charity—a charity which involves no self-sacrifice, and gets undeserved praise."

"Are you thinking of anything in particular?" asked Lady Manorlands.

"Well, at that moment," he answered, turning to her with a smile, "I was. I was thinking of what goes on in so many houses. People put what is left of a luncheon, after every one at the table has eaten heartily, into what they call a 'Bounty-basket,' and then they send it to the poor, and they call it charity."

"Yes, I know," laughed a young girl who was sitting near; "it is like giving away an old gown that one is tired of, when one wants a good excuse for buying a new one. And one is considered 'so kind.' There is, as you say, no self-sacrifice in it whatever; on the contrary, it is a luxury. The space it occupied you want for something else, and you are glad to get rid of it. You have several satisfactions out of the transac-

tion: the sense that it will be very useful where it has gone, the having a new one yourself with a clear conscience, and the thanks for 'your kind thought,' which you complacently accept, though you have no sort of right to them."

"Exactly," said Colonel Norton. "There is no self-sacrifice in any of it; and I for one believe in neither charity, friendship, love, or any other good thing, unless the element of self-sacrifice enters into it."

He watched Maud's expressive face as he talked, and was pleased to see how entirely he was carrying her with him; which was not the case with old Mrs. Portman, who said something to the effect that we lived in a commonplace world, and that all these ideas seemed to her rather high-flown. "You may be quite sure," she said, "that the recipients of your bounty care very little for your motives as long as they get the things."

"Of course," replied Colonel Norton, "I am not for a moment disparaging the acts themselves. By all means let every one go on giving away food and old gowns. All I am inveighing against

is the self-deception that prides itself upon them, and thinks well of itself in consequence."

The expression of Maud's face was all he had to go by, for she said nothing more; but her sympathetic silence pleased him more than a flow of words would have done.

But its expression now changed as he watched it, and assumed one of great interest. She raised her head rather eagerly, and watched some one coming across the lawn.

"Here comes the husband," thought Colonel Norton; "now we shall see."

He looked round too, and to his surprise saw that it was only young Hardy who was approaching. And from the moment that he joined the group Lady Manorlands' attention seemed gone from general conversation.

Soon after his arrival she rose from her seat, and prepared to go indoors with him to see the child he was attending.

Colonel Norton, therefore, felt it time to take leave.

"Do come and see me again, Colonel Norton," she said, as she shook hands; "I feel as if I had not had a word with you yet" (which was very

much what he felt himself). "My husband will be at home to-morrow," she added, "and will so much like to make your acquaintance. Come to luncheon."

"No doubt dear Adelaide was right," said Colonel Norton to himself as he walked home; "it is a great and inspiring affection that has done it, and this Manorlands must be a fine fellow. Maud had, I suppose, more capacity for veneration than I gave her credit for. For there is no doubt about it, Undine has found a soul!"

But he was not going to own himself conquered yet; nor was he going to make that confession to George Hardy as to a realized ideal which he knew the young fellow was expecting. Moreover, he saw little or nothing of his host that evening, so occupied was he in the calls made upon him by his profession.

CHAPTER V.

BAFFLED.

"And her smile it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our earthly jestings are."

COLONEL NORTON was rather provoked with himself to find how impatient he was to be in Maud Manorlands' presence again, and how often he consulted his watch to see if it were getting anything near the time appointed for his visit.

As he walked up to the park gates, a sharp shower came on, and he was not sorry. He thought he might have a better opportunity of talking to her indoors than he had had sitting in those large groups in the garden, when the conversation must be always more or less general.

Lord and Lady Manorlands were standing together in the deep recess of the drawing-room window when he was shown in, and he was struck with their appearance. They were such a very handsome couple. Lord Manorlands came

forward with a pleasant smile, to be introduced to Colonel Norton as "a very old friend of mine," and remained in conversation with him for some time; while she moved away, and gave her attention to some of the other people in the room.

Lord Manorlands had the unmistakable air of the English sailor about him. A bronzed, sunburnt face, and a frank, simple, straightforward manner.

They went in to luncheon, but Colonel Norton did not succeed in getting next to Lady Manorlands, and meanwhile fell a victim again to old Mrs. Portman. However, he hoped after luncheon to get some talk with her. But one or two others hoped the same, and he could not get a chance. He began to get a little piqued. She had said she was so glad to renew her acquaintance with him, yet she seemed to make no effort to do so. This was his second visit, and as yet he had had no opportunity of a word with her.

It was not flattering. She had never once referred to their former relations, and he wanted so much to revive them, and to show he had a great deal in common with her past, and a certain

familiarity with her, which none of the others could pretend to.

There is always a kind of competition for favour surrounding a beautiful woman, and Colonel Norton was by no means too old to feel it, and share in it to a certain extent. She herself appeared to be quite indifferent to the admiration she excited. She could hardly have been unconscious of it; but, perhaps, she was too much accustomed to it to think anything of it.

They were all in a group together, and there seemed no hope of any private conversation. It interested him, as it had done yesterday, to hear her talk, and to gain thereby an index to her opinions, but he got impatient at last. These general conversations were not what he wanted. He was looking for something more. He found himself watching her, sometimes furtively, sometimes attentively. He found himself wondering if she was quite happy. There was on her face, when she was talking, an expression so thoughtful and earnest as to be almost sad; and her eyes had often a far-away expression, as if she were thinking and dreaming of something very far

removed from her present surroundings. Young Hardy's quotation recurred to him—

> "As if drawn from thoughts more far
> Than our earthly jestings are."

It exactly described the expression. But at last the chance came.

She crossed the room, and, sitting down by him, she began to talk about George Hardy.

Colonel Norton was not a vain man, but he was vain enough to feel a little—well, not exactly mortified, but a little bored to find that, far from her interest in him being of a personal nature, it was chiefly as the friend and travelling-companion of young Hardy.

It rather irritated him. He wanted to bring himself to bear upon her, to make her allude to the past, and to comprehend him, as it were, in that part of her life. He would have liked to see her flush again as she had done yesterday, when he had said she did not bring her boys up to think of fun. It was all that he wanted to talk about, not about George Hardy; Hardy was all very well, but he wanted something else just now. However, he resigned himself to talk of what she

wished, and his momentary irritation subsided, and did not become apparent.

He paid a warm tribute to the young doctor —his nobility of mind, his steadfastness of purpose, and the depth and thoughtfulness of his character, so uncommon in young men in general.

Lady Manorlands, he could not help seeing, flushed with genuine pleasure.

"I could not satisfy myself," added Colonel Norton, "whether his profession had evolved this serious tone in him, or whether it was there by nature."

"Both, I think," she answered. "He is earnest-minded by nature, and he has a reverence for his profession. He feels the 'work of healing' to be a solemn thing, as no doubt it is. And then I think," she went on after a moment's pause, "that a doctor must be affected by living always behind the scenes, as it were. He is constantly in scenes of trouble and anxiety, and with people at the supreme moments of their lives. Not only the sick persons themselves, but every one surrounding them, are at these times at their most real and their most earnest. Anxiety

and stress of mind causes every one to throw off their reserve or their unreality."

"I quite agree with you there," said Colonel Norton. "All that in a doctor's life must go a great way towards elevating his character: apart from his actual work."

"Yes," she rejoined, thoughtfully. "As often as not he has to minister to a mind diseased, or to a spiritual need, quite as much as to the poor suffering body."

He again agreed with her, while inwardly he was marvelling to hear these sentiments from the lips of Maud Egerton.

But what struck him perhaps even more was the deep interest she showed in George Hardy. It was more like maternal solicitude than anything else, and it puzzled him beyond measure. All she said, too, was said so simply and without the slightest air of mystery, as if, of course, Colonel Norton would know she was interested, and should take it as a matter of course that she should be so.

While he was wondering over it, she went on to tell him, with the same mixture of pride and pleasure, that Hardy was likely to have a practice

in London before long, which would remove him from Manorlands at almost any moment, as the final arrangements in connection with it had been concluded while he was abroad.

"It is a great loss to ourselves in every way," she said; "but we must not think of that."

The conversation, such as it was, was not destined to be long unbroken in upon. Lord Manorlands proposed to his wife that Colonel Norton should be shown a certain picture in the gallery, which he had expressed at luncheon a wish to see. Colonel Norton heartily wished the said picture at the bottom of the sea.

The whole party came too. There was a general move towards the picture-gallery; so there was an end of the *tête-à-tête* for the present.

To make things worse, Hardy himself appeared and joined them. He came nominally with the last report of the little boy upstairs, which he gave with a bright smile of pleasure as a "clean bill of health." But he seemed in no hurry to go away again, but remained on, talking to Lady Manorlands, who again, from the time he came on the scenes, seemed to give him all her attention.

His position in the house, Colonel Norton observed, was quite that of *enfant de famille.*

And now they all, Hardy included, moved on through the rooms on their way to the picture-gallery. They passed through Lord Manorlands' sanctum, where a small wood fire was burning.

"Alfred is such a chilly mortal," said Lady Manorlands, as if to apologize for a fire in June. "I suppose it comes from having been so much in hot climates. The least damp, and he has a fire directly."

"There are few days in this climate," said Lord Manorlands, "when a little fire is not pleasant."

"I think you are so sensible," said old Mrs. Portman, strolling up to the fire, followed by Colonel Norton. "What lovely blue flames!" she exclaimed. "I love that old ship-wood. Look at the purple and orange and blue! How pretty it is!"

"Yes," Colonel Norton answered, gazing at the fire; "it is lovely. Moreover, it gives one a pleasant sort of whiff of the ocean, and translates one into the region of peril and adventure. One

feels there is no end to the stories that old wood might tell us, of exciting scenes and hairbreadth escapes from drowning and shipwreck. I like the sensation. Don't you, Lady Manorlands?" he added, turning to her, for she was standing close behind.

"No," she answered vehemently; "I *hate* it." She seemed more agitated than the occasion warranted. "Alfred," she said, turning round, half impatiently and half appealingly to her husband, "why do you have this wood? Do not have it any more."

"Very well, dear," he said quietly, and with something of a soothing tone in his voice; "I will give orders about it. You shall not see it again."

He seemed quite to understand, and coming to her assistance, as it were, he adroitly changed the conversation, diverting people's attention away from the wood.

But Colonel Norton's attention was not to be diverted. He watched her still, and he noticed how silent she had become, and how mournfully she was gazing at the blue leaping flames. He almost fancied there were tears in her eyes.

She raised them presently, however, and they travelled over the party assembled, as if seeking something on which they might rest. It was her husband's face she was seeking, no doubt. There was, he felt sure, that complete understanding between them which is such a happy thing, and he was old enough to like to see it between young married people.

He was glad to think they were not a "fashionable couple," and he watched her furtively, his eye moving on to see Lord Manorlands' face when his lovely wife's gaze should meet his. He was a fine, manly looking fellow, certainly, and his face was one on which any wife's eye might rest with pride and pleasure.

But what was Colonel Norton's surprise, when the eyes he was watching, travelling round the room, passed over Lord Manorlands', and rested, with the peculiar expression he had noticed before, on the young doctor!

A very peculiar glance it was—as of one who saw something unseen, and it deepened as it fell on George Hardy, and became full of another expression, difficult to define. It was as you would look at any one to whom you had done a

great injury, or in whose way you had stood. All that was expressed by it.

But before he could make up his mind about it, it was gone. With an evident effort, she seemed to shake herself free of her abstraction, and to try and bring back her mind to her present surroundings. She turned to Mrs. Portman, and made some casual remark on a commonplace subject.

In the picture-gallery they found the children playing. It was evidently their happy hunting-ground on a wet day.

Colonel Norton left the group and joined them. He was very fond of children, and, moreover, had been much taken with the pretty boys the day before.

"So you are Alfie?" he said to the little fellow, who, in spite of his selfishness, had attracted him most yesterday.

"Yes, Alfie," answered the child; "but Alfred Egerton Mildmay is my real true name."

"And yours?" said Colonel Norton to the elder boy; "Geordie, isn't it?"

"George Hardy," he answered.

"What!" exlaimed Colonel Norton, thinking

he could not have heard aright. "George Hardy, did you say?"

"Yes," replied the boy; "George Hardy Mildmay."

Colonel Norton was now thoroughly mystified. He remained watching the children—who, after answering his questions, had returned to their bricks—trying to collect his thoughts.

But deep in thought as he was, he could not help observing little Alfred with curiosity and interest. He was so entirely engrossed in what he was doing. He was building a wall as if his whole life depended on what he was doing, and his small frame quivered with suppressed anxiety and tension when, at one moment, the edifice tottered and seemed about to fall.

A voice at Colonel Norton's elbow made him look up, and he found that Lady Manorlands had followed him, and was watching the child too. A swift glance at the group in the distance showed him that the doctor had gone, and he thought he saw a chance of getting her undivided attention at last.

"Alfie does not take things lightly, you see," she said, with a smile. "Whatever he does, he

does with all his heart, and his whole being is in whatever he is intent upon at the time."

"A very happy disposition to have," said Colonel Norton.

"Ah, well, I don't know," she answered. "He takes life intensely, and therefore hardly, and will have many trials in consequence. Nothing is a matter of indifference to him. He is always engrossed in something, and if he has a plan in his head you cannot distract him from it. Geordie is a great trial to little Alfred. For Geordie is a butterfly, and turns to a new game or a new occupation with the greatest ease. Sometimes, when they are playing together, Alfie simply stands and weeps, as Geordie leaves the game in the middle and flies off to something else. He wrings his hands in despair."

"He ought to turn out something remarkable," observed Colonel Norton.

"Oh, well, all this absorption and concentration may go off into pleasure," she said, "he is only a young barbarian, you know. Now, if he only had to work for his bread, or to carve out his fortune for himself, I might have some pride in him. It *is* rather hard on me, isn't it," she

added, half laughing, "to have two eldest sons, two boys heirs to properties of their own? Formed circumstances, inherited tastes—all that is against them."

"Are you something of a radical, Lady Manorlands?" asked Colonel Norton in surprise.

"Not a bit," she answered, "only I am sorry for the boys themselves. For their own sakes, I dislike everything dropping into their laps without any trouble, or effort, or self-sacrifice. How is the bone and muscle of their characters to be formed if everything is made so easy for them? How are the grander qualities to come out?"

"It does not seem to have hurt *you*," said Colonel Norton.

She blushed scarlet.

"Oh, Colonel Norton!" she exclaimed, "you of all people to say that, when you know what you used to think of me."

"That is just the reason I say it," he replied. "You are so different to what I thought you would be."

"Ah! but it is given to few to have such a lesson as I have had."

The words seemed to escape her almost

unawares, and he thought for a moment she was going to confide in him; but she broke off suddenly.

"My hopes," she said, "are in my third and youngest son, who will be free from the trammel of formed circumstances and hereditary tastes, or, rather, from hereditary means of indulging in them."

"But how free from hereditary *tastes?*" exclaimed Colonel Norton.

"Because I mean," she answered, "to try to bring him up differently to his brothers, and not to let him contract these tastes. I am not going to let him learn to shoot, or ride, or anything of that sort."

"I doubt that answering with an English boy," said Colonel Norton, all his own hereditary prejudices and prepossessions rushing over him, "and in these surroundings too, and with brothers in front of him."

"Well, I mean to try, anyhow," she said, with a certain touch of wilfulness in her manner, which recalled the Maud of old. "I often hear people say that it is a great mistake to bring up penniless younger sons exactly like the eldest, and to

accustom them in their childhood to all the luxuries, and to allow them to form all the habits which they will never in the future be able to indulge in; but still they all go on doing it. Now, I mean not only to realize that it is a mistake, but to act upon the knowledge. You think me an idle theorist, I see, Colonel Norton—a sort of charlatan; but wait a few years, and we shall see. I do not say I shall succeed, mind you; I only say I mean to try. But I wish I had better material to work upon. My youngest boy is, unfortunately, the least fitted of the three to fight his own way. He takes things quietly, and is a gentle, yielding, unselfish little fellow, with neither the 'go' of Geordie, nor the intensity of Alfred."

"It seems almost as if you liked selfish natures best," said Colonel Norton, when she paused.

"Oh no, I don't," she replied; "but there is this about them, and so far an excuse for them—they care more. They are more keen about things, and therefore it is more effort to them to give up than it is to those who care less. Look at those two children now; how Geordie is giving

up all the best bricks to Alfred. Well, he cares less. It is a slight thing to him to go without them; but it's a matter of life and death to Alfie. So we must make excuses for them, these poor selfish ones; for they are to be pitied, inasmuch as no doubt the unselfish character is the most lovable and the most beloved, and so gets the best of it in the end. We are all so selfish, that the unselfish person is always the most congenial to us. But to my mind a person who cares is always more interesting. They may be more difficult to live with, but it pays, I think." Her eyes wandered to the pretty boys again. "What I feel so," she said earnestly, "is the responsibility of children. Their lives are so much in your hands to make or mar; and they are, while young, so completely in their parents' power. I long so to do my utmost to teach them to do their very best with their lives from the very first, and so to save them from the vain and impotent regrets which come to those who discover, too late, that they have wasted their lives and their opportunities. Colonel Norton!" she exclaimed suddenly and impetuously, "I shall always be grateful to you for all you used to say to me, all you used to try

and impress upon me. I did not listen or heed at the time, I know; but it came back to me"—she seemed for a moment as if she could not get on—"it came back to me—*afterwards.*"

And now came another interruption.

Lord Manorlands came up to where they were standing, and asked Colonel Norton if he would not come and take up his quarters at Manorlands. He must be very dull at the cottage, with George Hardy out all day and often half the night. He would really see almost as much of his host at Manorlands as he did now.

Lady Manorlands warmly seconded her husband's invitation, and with evident pleasure.

Colonel Norton was decidedly pleased; for he had been feeling himself that it was impossible to take advantage of the young doctor's hospitality any longer, and had been intending to tell him he must be leaving. And yet he wished much to remain a little longer in his present surroundings.

He therefore accepted the invitation for the next day but one, and soon after he took his leave.

He returned to the cottage, well pleased with

the prospect of living in the same house with Maud, and of pursuing his study of her with greater advantage and with more constant opportunities.

"Well?" said the doctor, rather eagerly, to his guest when he returned from his rounds that evening.

"I cannot answer your question yet," answered Colonel Norton, evading the inquiring glance of the young man's eye; towards whom, though he owned unfairly enough, he was feeling a slight sense of irritation; "my opinion is not yet formed."

George Hardy looked disappointed; and Colonel Norton, with a sudden feeling of compunction, said a few words of general praise and appreciation of everything at Manorlands.

"But I reserve my judgment," he added, with a smile, "until after my visit to her in her own house. One cannot judge of a home until one has formed a part of it. I have promised to go there when I leave you, the day after to-morrow, instead of returning to London as I had intended."

"Ah! I am quite satisfied, then, as to your

verdict," said George. "For, more than anywhere else, it is in the deep and intimate relationships of home that Lady Manorlands shines."

Colonel Norton, for some reason best known to himself, did not want young Hardy to see how interested he was in the subject, nor how heartily he already agreed with him. He answered lightly, in a would-be careless manner, "At Manorlands, as elsewhere, I suppose, 'C'est la femme qui fait, ou défait la Maison.'"

But alone, and left to his own reflections, as he was that evening (duty again calling George Hardy away), he was obliged to own to himself, though he would not own it to George Hardy, that he was completely baffled, if not conquered.

It was not delusion on George Hardy's part; it was not even illusion. The young man's ideal, *alias* Lady Manorlands, *alias* Maud Egerton, was a reality.

The heedless and careless girl, as he had called her in that conversation with his wife, with no earnestness, no sense of responsibility, who was to grow into a selfish, frivolous, worldly woman, was gone, and in her place was a—what? An Undine with a human soul; a loving, sympathetic,

high-principled woman, with lofty views of life and its meaning. A changeling indeed!

What did it mean? How had it come about? What had happened?

"A great love, or a great sorrow," his wife had said. On the first head he doubted. It had not been an inspiring love; not the kind his wife had meant. Ever since his introduction to Lord Manorlands he was certain of that. A manly, high-minded Englishman, who loved his wife, respected her, and admired her. To whom she in her turn was evidently devoted, and with whom she was in perfect sympathy. But *she* was the moving spring, not him. She was the pivot round which everything turned.

"A great sorrow?" Well, perhaps. But what? She was a happy, prosperous woman, rich in the love of husband and children, loving and beloved. Where had the sorrow come in? And when?

And what on earth could George Hardy have to do with her past? What was the relationship between them? Why in the world was her eldest boy named after him? What was the meaning of that sorrowful look he had intercepted?

That she was his benefactress was plain.

The refinements of his little dwelling-place, the prints and other things that he had been surprised to find, were no doubt her presents. The handwriting of Whittier's lines under "Christ healing the Sick" was hers. But, then, it was not only that. It was she, he now felt sure, who had set flowing all the best springs in the young man's nature. Hers was the powerful influence that governed his life, and made him so different to other young people.

But why? What could the secret of her deep interest in him be?

Baffled he certainly was, and baffled he was ready to own himself; but for his own growing esteem and admiration for Maud he was quite unprepared, and he rather fought against it.

Maud Egerton! An object of esteem to him and of reverence to another!

But before he went to bed that night he had come to one definite conclusion.

Something had happened, and that something had occurred between his parting with her at Bordeaux and her marriage; and with that something George Hardy was somehow or other connected.

What could that something have been? It was a mystery he could not fathom; but of one thing he felt certain. In that interval, in some deep waters or other, Undine had found a soul.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY MANORLANDS IN HER HOME.

"The many make the household,
But only one the home."

And if he felt this when living at her gates, he felt it ten times more when in her home, a home permeated with the charm she threw over everything.

He daily found something fresh to admire, something fresh to approve of; and her entire absence of vanity or desire for applause made everything she did and everything she said tenfold more attractive.

He watched her narrowly, very narrowly, to see if she would fail, casting about, as it were, for duties left undone, or for some hidden flaw in the motives which prompted the acts. But she stood the test. Neither as wife, mother, nor mistress of the house did she fail in his eyes; and by the time he had been an inmate of her

home for two or three days, he was ready to own himself conquered as well as baffled. Nay, more —to forego further scrutiny, and give himself up to the enjoyment of her refined and cultivated society and conversation; for her social qualities, he had by this time discovered, were not the least part of her charm.

Her wish seemed to be not to "try to please," but "to give pleasure;" and there is such a difference between the two—one is full of self, the other full of others. And he realized more and more every day that her life, her money, her time, and her talents were dedicated to the service of others.

Not that she ever brought forward what she did, or even what her opinions were. He either deduced it from what he saw, or found things out accidentally. For instance, it was by the merest chance that he happened to discover that, busy as her life was, occupied as she was in all sorts of ways, she made a point of always reading at least for an hour a day; and that she held strongly that a woman was more useful to her own immediate surroundings, if she did so, as well as to the world at large; because there is a

certain narrowness of mind about people who do not read, which does a great deal of mischief, and that, as a mother, she considered reading a necessity, so as to keep pace with her sons as they emerged from childhood, from which phase in their lives a mother does not emerge with them if she does not read.

The fascination of her personal beauty, great at any time, was brought out afresh hour by hour in simple domestic life.

With her pretty children round her, every group was a picture, every attitude picturesque; and she, entirely engrossed in them, and in what she was doing with them, was quite unconscious of the effect she produced. She lived and talked with her children in his presence as she would have done had she been alone.

And by degrees, too, the old intimacy began to revive. She had at first, perhaps, been a little afraid of alluding to things which would recall the memory of his wife, with whom, of course, everything connected with Biarritz was associated. But little by little allusions to things that had happened there she let fall incidentally, and reminiscences dropped out naturally.

One evening, after dinner, she had asked his opinion on some subject or other, and he had given it, as he was in the habit of doing, frankly, very frankly.

"That is so like Colonel Norton," she said, laughing, and with more approach to her old manner than he had seen yet. "He was always the 'candid friend;' always told us the plain and unvarnished, very unvarnished, truth. He used to come down upon us all," she continued, turning to her husband, "like a shell exploding in our midst and scattering our little vanities and self-admirations in all directions. It was most amusing the way he used to lay bare for inspection the innermost motives and springs of conduct, by which we were all actuated without knowing it ourselves. I learnt more about psychology from him than I had ever learnt in all my life before, and so did all the rest. He subjected every one to the closest analysis, getting behind the scenes, as it were, saw through us, and gave us all names accordingly."

"And what was his name for you?" inquired Lord Manorlands.

Colonel Norton happened not to be looking

at Maud at that moment, or he would have seen a troubled look come over her face. She flushed faintly, and did not answer.

Thinking she had perhaps forgotten, Colonel Norton supplemented the name. "Und——" he began, but stopped suddenly as his eyes fell on her expressive countenance.

"We had several names for you, Colonel Norton, hadn't we?" she said hastily, as if she wished to divert attention from herself. "There was the 'Apostle of Reality,' the 'Two-edged Sword,' and the 'Lamp of Truth.' Do you remember the lady you used to call 'The Warning'?" she added.

"To be sure I do," he replied, falling into her evident desire to keep herself out of the discussion. "The lady you mean who had always something to recommend, herself a standing example of the inefficacy of what she recommended. Don't you recollect the assurance with which she used to tell every one of a certain hair-wash? 'I have used it for years,' she would say, by way of testimonial, while a glance at her hair made every one say inwardly, 'Then I wont.'"

"Yes," said Maud, laughing; "we were quite

grateful to her for telling us the name, in order that we might avoid it. She was a sort of warning advertisement. I remember, too, how she used to urge us all to try her dressmaker, her own gown fitting like a sack."

"It is all very well to laugh," said Colonel Norton; "but that sort of thing is really very irritating, I think. For if you come to analyze its *raison d'être,* it springs from an enormous root of self-complacency, and blindness to the possibility of being wrong."

"Now, isn't he a dangerous man to have in one's house, Alfred?" said Maud, laughing again. "Colonel Norton is what Hawthorne was accused of being, isn't he? The intellectual vampire who sat in a corner and watched the inmates of the house, when they were off their guard, analyzing characters for psychological purposes."

"I never had any talent that way," said Lord Manorlands; "but it must, I think, be very amusing to one's self, and make society much more interesting."

"Oh, well, I don't know," said his wife. "I am not sure that it is a thing to be envied. No doubt the habit of criticism tends to do away

with illusion, and if you analyze too closely, there is very little poetry left. It is perhaps better to take people upon trust, in Alfred's above-board, sailor-like manner. Don't you think so, Colonel Norton? Besides, one makes mistakes sometimes."

"One does," said Colonel Norton, half to himself; but she heard and flushed again.

"The worst of it is," he said out loud—"the worst of diving beneath the surface, and seeing into the motives of those around you, is that your indignation is constantly aroused, not only by their faults and failings, but by their own blindness to them. They say that suppressed indignation shortens life, and I believe that will be my end. What are you laughing at, Lady Manorlands?"

"I was wondering if it was quite suppressed always," she answered.

"Oh yes, it is," he put in.

"Or supposing," she continued, "that that is what you call suppressed, what would it be if it were what you call expressed?"

"Exactly," he said; "and that is why I suppress it. It is better to do one's self a mischief

than to hurt other people. And my idea is, that if suppressed indignation shortens one's own life, expressed indignation shortens the lives of others. How many a poor wife has had her nerves shattered, and her life consequently shortened by this means!"

The conversation was broken off here, but he felt more satisfied. The old relations seemed more likely to be resumed, and Maud seemed to be getting on more easy terms with him. And he hoped that the renewal of their former easy relationship might lead to intimacy and confidence in time.

Time, however, was speeding on. He could not stay where he was for ever; and, moreover, he had engagements of his own which he could not put off.

He broached the subject of his departure the next day, but it met with unqualified disapprobation.

"Oh no, Colonel Norton," said Maud. "I really cannot let you go yet. You must, at any rate, stay over Sunday. We are expecting a few people down whom I want you to meet; and I shall only let you go then on condition that you

promise to come to us at Egerton Court, where we migrate in August. Unhappy the people who have two homes!"

"I shall not need much pressing, I can assure you," said Colonel Norton.

"We shall be having people up there all the autumn," she went on. "You must tell me what kind of people you like to meet."

"Do you mean what 'kind,' political, literary, artistic, etc., and that I am to choose between?"

"We don't check off our parties in that way; we can't. We live on the Scotch line, you see, and have to take people as they come. I am afraid we jumble up all sorts and kinds together, and leave them to get on as best they can. Expected, perhaps, at different times, they as often as not all come together. We do have curious *omnium gatherums* sometimes. Only what I meant was, that if I knew at what sort of time you were likely to come yourself, I could tell you a little who was coming, so that you might meet the sort of people you liked, which, with so critical a person as yourself, is much to the point."

"Do you think me so very captious, then?" he asked, with some surprise.

"I said 'critical,' not 'captious,'" she answered, with a smile; "and critical I *do* think you, very. So I should like the party, if possible, to be one which would please you."

"Oh, I hope I am not so bad as all that," he said. "By the way, how curious some of these intellectual cliques are nowadays. Some of them, no doubt, are really deep and clever and well-read. But there is the whole host of imitators, who rush off into the thing because it is the fashion, and I came across a clique of that kind the other day. Their knowledge was of the most surface kind, and their ignorance very deep. They discussed Emerson, and spelt his name with two *m*'s. They talked over definitions and synonyms, and the whole of dinner was devoted to the difference between 'self-abnegation' and 'self-effacement'—which the lady next me called 'self-defacement' during the whole of the discussion. Then came 'compunction' and 'remorse.' That took till dessert and long after. I was wishing the ladies would feel a little more of the former, for I was dying for my cigarette."

"Ah," said Lady Manorlands, "you agree with old Thomas à Kempis. 'I had rather,' he says,

'feel compunction than know how to define it.' But, dear Colonel Norton," she continued, "surely it is an improvement on the old state of things? Isn't it better to talk on these kinds of subjects than to gossip about your neighbours' affairs?"

"For some, perhaps," he answered—"yourself, for instance; for if *you* talked like that you would say something worth hearing, and you would say it because you meant it. But these people were mere shams. They reminded me more than anything of Molière's 'Précieuses Ridicules,' or of the old song, 'Miss Myrtle'—

> "'They can chatter of poor laws and tithes,
> And the value of labour and land.
> It's a pity when charming women
> Talk of things that they don't understand.'"

"Well, would you like to meet real literary people? I can, I dare say, bespeak a literary lion."

"Well, honestly, I don't care about knowing literary people. I consider that you get the best of them in their books or addresses or sermons—the cream, so to speak (and that what is left behind after the cream is skimmed off, is often only buttermilk, *i.e.* poor stuff, the ordinary mortal,

in short), and I would rather read and hear them. They then share their best thoughts with us; but at other times they are as we all are, and if you expect them to talk as they write and preach, you expect them to be pedantic, that's all. And if they don't they are a disappointment. So, as I said, I do not care to meet them."

"You do not join in the worship of 'Culture,'" said Lady Manorlands, smiling.

"Well, you see," he answered, "so much of human infirmity mingles with gifts. The gift is divine, but the person who possesses it is not. He is only an instrument for its expression, and vanity and unworthy kinds of ambition are so apt to be mingled with gifts. The poet, perhaps, wants to be a man of fashion, and he panders to the society which perhaps wishes to be thought cultured, through intimacy with intellectual people. It is a sort of exchange. There is an unreality about it all that goes against one."

"Well, when do you think you will come," said Maud, laughing, "that I may clear your path of all these dangers?"

"I could not come, I fear, before the first week in October. I am expecting to have to

contest my old seat at almost any moment, as the sitting member is likely to resign; and I must be preparing for the struggle by living in the county, and bringing myself back to the memories of the electors, after my long separation from them and their interests. Will that time suit you?"

"Any time suits us," she answered; "and Alfred will, I think, be shooting his coverts about that date. We have a party partially made up for that week, but with none of the forbidden ingredients, I think."

"I should so like to make you study a mother and a daughter I know," said Lady Manorlands, after a pause. "I think I shall ask them to Egerton Court on purpose to meet you. I wonder if you happen to know them? The Baroness Carrachi and her daughter?"

"Carrachi?" repeated Colonel Norton. "I feel as if I knew the name."

"He is an Italian, and she is half French and half English. But she has lived abroad almost all her life, and is much more like a foreigner than an Englishwoman."

"I am sure I have met her somewhere. Yes, now I remember I did, at some *table d'hôte* in

an hotel. A handsome, agreeable woman, who insisted on a great deal of attention. Yes, I remember her quite well; I sat next to her, and spent the evening with her and her husband afterwards. She was one of those women who are always wanting one to ring the bell for them, or to fetch their wrap, or to look for something they have dropped. But I don't think they had a daughter. Indeed, I remember hearing they had no children."

"No. This girl is the Baroness's daughter by her first marriage; her name is Ashley. She was brought up in England by her father's family. The girl interests me: and I should like to know her better. I am told she never speaks when her mother is present."

"Her mother is such a tremendous talker, that I don't suppose she could," said Colonel Norton.

"I have often noticed that," said Lady Manorlands. "Talking mothers make silent daughters, and gay mothers generally have sedate girls. One always sees this girl quietly following her mother through the rooms at a party. The Baroness is generally on the arm of a very young man in front. She is a quiet, high-bred looking girl with

large dreamy eyes. I should fancy she found her mother rather overpowering. I shall certainly try and get them to come this autumn while you are with us; and you must help me to make them out, and their relationship to each other."

"I shall be delighted," said Colonel Norton; but inwardly he was thinking it was Maud herself whom it would interest him to study at Egerton Court, and not the Baroness Carrachi and her daughter.

At this moment a servant entered and said that Doctor Hardy would like to speak to Lady Manorlands, and Maud instantly rose and hurried away.

Colonel Norton felt bored as usual, but he was getting a little accustomed to the state of things. At any moment, he now knew well, George Hardy could take her attention away from him and from any one else.

He strolled out into the garden with his cigarette; but it was quite an hour before he heard the wheels of George Hardy's dog-cart driving away.

Passing round to the garden side of the house, he saw, through the open windows of the

drawing-room, that Maud was sitting there alone, reading, and he pushed open the window and went in. She was so deep in her book that she did not hear him.

"I hope I did not startle you, Lady Manorlands," he said, as the sudden rustle of a newspaper caused by the draught made her look up.

"Oh, is that you, Colonel Norton?" she said. "I did not hear you come in."

"What are you so deep in?" he asked, taking a chair by her side.

"Emerson," she answered; "the essay on 'Reading and Books.' You must forgive me," she added with a smile "for I assure you I spell his name with one *m!*"

Colonel Norton looked rather bored. "Nothing I said about all that applies to you," he said. "I told you so at the time. There is no question of surface knowledge or want of real mind in your case. On the contrary," he added, half to himself, "the deeper I dig, the deeper I have to dig. You grow deeper and deeper every day."

Lady Manorlands blushed slightly.

"I always said you were capable of it, you know," he added, "even in your most frivolous days. The mine was always there. The question was, would there ever be earnestness of will to work it? The vein of ore lay deeply hidden under a crust of worldliness and frivolity. But I knew there was mind, as well as soul beneath. Now both have come to light; but what it was that set the boring-machinery in motion, and brought up the treasures, is what has puzzled me ever since I met you again, and puzzles me still. Something must have happened, but I cannot think what."

He looked quickly and questioningly at her. She had again that troubled look in her eyes.

"But, Colonel Norton," she said, "why do you ask me? Why do you question me like this? Surely you know."

"I?" he answered. "I know nothing. How should I, unless you choose to tell me?"

"But—but," she said, looking more and more bewildered, "I wrote and told—your wife, as much as I could—the bare facts, at any rate."

"She never got the letters," he answered. "They were lost. We were moving about."

"Then," she exclaimed in astonishment, "have you never heard what happened?"

"No, never," he answered. "But you will tell me now?" he said eagerly.

"Tell you now, bit by bit, the whole story?" she exclaimed. "Oh, do not ask me! It is a subject fraught with pain." She added with an effort, and as if to change the subject, "but, at any rate, you can understand that, the soul once found, the rest must follow. Every part that may be useful to others must be developed. I should think it wrong now not to cultivate any powers of mind I may be possessed of, such as they are. I have, therefore, always tried, as far as in me lay, to keep myself in touch with the best thoughts of the best minds. Not that I aspire, or even wish to aspire, to being an intellectual woman. Intellect is all very well in its place and in its way, but the ordinary duties of a woman's life come far first, to my thinking."

She proceeded to carry out what she had just said by laying aside her book, and giving her whole attention to playing the very unintellectual game of spelicans with little Alfred, who, with his elder brother, just now entered the room.

Shortly after, the post came in, and Colonel Norton's thoughts were distracted from the pretty domestic picture in front of him by his letters.

Thoughts so often are turned by the arrival of a post (much as every one always seems to anticipate pleasure in its arrival) into less pleasant and more disturbing channels.

Colonel Norton found this to be the case, for one of his letters was from his eldest sister, Mrs. Harrington, and particularly annoyed him. It made a demand upon him with which he was strangely disinclined to comply.

"We are rather in trouble about dear Frank," the letter said. "And you, my dear Basil, could help us better than any one else; so please come here as soon as you can."

The summons annoyed him considerably; as did also the vagueness of the sentence, which gave him no scope for judging whether it was really something urgent for which he was wanted or not. Yet he felt that, in the absence of any certainty, he could not refuse: particularly as it was a principle with him to make himself useful to his sisters whenever they wanted his help.

He explained the case to Maud, and talked

it over with her, consulting her as to the impression the letter conveyed to her mind.

She was not acquainted with Mrs. Harrington, and therefore could not really judge; but the word "trouble," she said, always alarmed her.

"I should not like to try and persuade you to stay away under the circumstances," she said. "I hope sincerely that there is nothing serious the matter, and that, at any rate, you will make a point of returning here in time for our Saturday-to-Monday party."

"You may be quite sure," was his answer, "that I shall come back as soon as ever I can."

But his annoyance was great, for he felt that probably by the time he returned the house would be full of people, and that he was losing the few intermediate days when he might have had his hostess to himself.

It was therefore, not best pleased, that the next day he left Manorlands, and set off for Mrs. Harrington's, translating himself thereby, as he knew full well, into a very different atmosphere.

CHAPTER VII.

COLONEL NORTON AND HIS SISTERS.

"'Tis a kind of good deed to say well,
And yet words are no deeds."

As the reader will be aware, from Colonel Norton's slight sketches of his sisters to George Hardy in one of the earlier chapters, they were not very congenial to him.

He had owned, however, that two of them were very worthy people in their way. Of these Mrs. Harrington was one.

She was the excellent wife and mother; and she *was* an excellent wife and mother, but nevertheless she lived the life that was most congenial to her, followed her own inclinations in every respect, and never by any chance did anything she did not wish to do, all under the guise or disguise of the excellent wife and mother.

The fact that she fulfilled her duties blinded her eyes to the truth that her life was not really an unselfish one. For her wishes and her duties did not clash, and any one who has given the

subject a thought, will be able to testify that in this clash lies one of the greatest difficulties in life.

Neither was she troubled with conflicting duties — another difficulty to the conscientious mind. Her duties were perfectly clear.

Hers was Domesticity carried to a fault. It became selfish. To Mrs. Harrington the World meant her Home and its own interests; and it was peopled solely and entirely by Mrs. Harrington, her children, and her husband, and those who directly or indirectly ministered to their interests. I put the husband last advisedly, since she was one of those women who is more mother than wife.

She was queen in her own little circle, and in it she ruled supreme. Herein lay one of the dangers to herself in her position. There was no conflict in her life. She felt very virtuous and superior, and yet all the time she was having her own way.

Mr. Harrington did not interfere with her. He was a busy man, and a great deal away from home during the day; and he was, moreover, the sort of husband well content to take everything

upon trust. He believed everything his wife told him, and felt sure, from her account, that everything went on in his establishment far better than in any one else's.

There never were, according to her, such children; never such plans and arrangements as hers; never children and plans likely to turn out so successfully; and he was willing enough to believe that it was so.

It has been said that fatherhood is an incident in a life, and motherhood an occupation. In the case of Mr. and Mrs. Harrington the saying was amply justified.

Mrs. Harrington did not care to go into society. What people with husbands and children want "to be gadding about for, she, Mrs. Harrington, could not imagine. For her part, she was always happiest at home." No wonder. She certainly would not occupy the same position, or receive the same homage, if she went elsewhere.

It was small credit to her that she should prefer her own immediate surroundings, and that her own little kingdom should be her favourite sphere. Such, then, being Mrs. Harrington, no one will be surprised that she should send for

her brother without scruple. She and her concerns were to her paramount to those of any one else. The "trouble" of which she had spoken in her letter, and which had alarmed Lady Manorlands, was some little matter that wanted arranging with the Eton tutor. Her husband was too busy to go down and see about it; and, moreover, understood nothing about Eton. He himself had been educated in a humbler fashion. Colonel Norton, she had decided, was the proper person to attend to it; and it was also worldly wisdom on her part. She wanted her brother to interest himself in his nephew, who she looked upon as his heir.

Colonel Norton's feelings on his arrival may well be imagined. Disgusted at having been lured away from Manorlands, and on such false and petty pretences, at the very moment, too, when he was getting nearer his point, he did not feel in the best of humours as he sat in his sister's drawing-room, drinking his tea, and listening to her flow of talk—first on the subject of dear Frank and his tutor, and then on all sorts of subjects connected with herself and her family.

But she never noticed it. She could not con-

ceive that any other topic could be so interesting. There were tales to be told of the clever questions little Molly had propounded since her uncle was last here, and the amusing things Harry, who was "going to be the wag of the family," had said in the last few days.

The conversation, or monologue rather, ended with the proposal that he should come and see the heroes and heroines of these tales.

Any change was a relief, and he rose at once.

"A happy little party, is it not?" she said, as she took him into the schoolroom, where the children were at tea.

It was very terrible, he felt, but not one of them interested him very much, fond as he was of children.

They were rather, to his mind, self-important, and he had sometimes already wondered whether they would not be the better for a little "wholesome neglect." He had thought, too, that he saw how his sister's disposition was telling in an unfortunate manner, and that the child who made the most of her was the one who succeeded in the long run in getting its own way; and that the

children, moreover, were sharp enough to see this and to act accordingly.

He felt inclined to criticize where he knew he was meant to admire.

They returned to the drawing-room, and he knew how much would have to be gone through about "humble fare" and "taking pot luck," before she had thoroughly prepared him for the dinner-hour. For Mrs. Harrington "cried poor," which was always an annoyance to him. And it was such humbug, too, for he knew it would culminate in an excellent plain dinner, carefully cooked and very hot. Then, again, she was too grateful, and thanked him over-much for any little thing he had given her. Moreover, hers was rather of that class of gratitude which has been described as a "lively sense of favours to come."

He tried to change the subject, and to do so referred to their sister, Lady Travers. But this only brought down upon him a comparison between her sister's children and her own, her arrangements and those of Lady Travers—all, of course, to her sister's advantage. In short, it brought her back with a rush to her favourite subject, her own concerns.

He felt that if he remained much longer with her, what little spirit he had left with him would evaporate. In an environment which unsuited him or jarred upon him, he was apt to sink to zero; and then how should he ever get through the evening? For he had learnt with dismay that his brother-in-law was at a meeting, where he would be detained late; so that a dinner *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Harrington loomed darkly in front of him.

Mrs. Harrington's conversation, moreover, was of that nature that ejaculation was momentarily necessary. Every pause required a note of admiration, a sound of applause, so that he could not rest himself by not listening. His powers of ejaculation, never very great at any time, began to fail him. It was slow torture to him to be in the clutches of any one who so entirely unsuited him.

He felt it must not, could not continue; and in the midst of one of her most graphic domestic sketches he hastily jumped up and said he must get his Bradshaw and look out the morning trains to London, as, if he was to go to Eton the next day, he should have to leave by a very early one.

And he carried his point, in spite of her shrill little shrieks that there were plenty of "willing little messengers" to be found, to whom to do anything for their kind uncle would be a joy for ever, etc.

He was out of hearing before she had reached the end of her sentence, and, gaining his bedroom in safety, he shut the door behind him, and did not emerge till dinner-time.

Once more by himself, a feeling of injury returned upon him at having been so unnecessarily summoned, and so suddenly translated from the Manorlands' atmosphere into his present one. But if anything had been wanting to make him still further appreciate the former, it would have been this; and he began to think, with feelings of compunction, of his conduct to George Hardy.

He felt quite inclined to write to him at once, and confess to him that in Maud a realized ideal had been found, and that only his own pride had stood in the way of his owning it to him before; that, as Hardy had said on board the Channel steamer, no one could come into her presence without feeling the better for it, and that there

was an elevating atmosphere about her and her surroundings which made itself felt directly.

"Nothing like contrast for bringing things home to one," he said to himself as he reviewed the situation, and compared his chattering egotistical relative below to Maud Manorlands. "I shall certainly make my confession to Hardy directly I get back," was his final conclusion as the gong sounded, and he went down to meet his fate.

His fate, however, was not quite what he had anticipated; for when he got into the drawing-room he found what Mrs. Harrington pronounced for him "a pleasant surprise" awaiting him.

Mrs. Ellis, his youngest sister, who lived near, and whose husband was also attending the dinner to which Mr. Harrington had gone, had taken it into her head to dine early and to drive over to spend the evening, for the express purpose of meeting her brother.

The escape from the long *tête-à-tête* he had expected was not otherwise than a relief, though at the same time it was only "out of the frying-pan into the fire;" as Mrs. Ellis was not a bit more congenial to him than Mrs. Harrington,

whom she slightly resembled. They had many points, or rather many faults, in common, though, their circumstances in life being different, those faults showed in a different way.

Mrs. Ellis was a spoilt wife and an old man's darling. She had no children, and her husband devoted all his energies to pleasing and indulging her, as if she were still a child herself, which, in proportion to him, she was.

And it is often to be noticed that where a great disparity of age exists, and where there are no rapidly growing-up children to mark the flight of time, the husband continues to think his wife very young, long after she has ceased to be so. She is still so much younger than him; just as much younger as ever! Sometimes the wife falls in with the idea; and it is only when she meets a contemporary with a tall schoolroom girl or an Eton boy at her side, that it is forced upon her that she is not so young as she was.

Now, Mrs. Ellis was one of the wives who entirely took her husband's view of the case. She adopted a somewhat youthful manner, and had a way of talking and then looking round for applause, as if she were a young and very clever

child, which applause she was always sure to receive from her admiring elderly companion. Having plenty of money and plenty of leisure, she played the Lady Bountiful. But she never really denied herself anything she wanted, or did anything she did not want to do.

She also, like her sister, Mrs. Harrington, did not care to go into society; and, like her, declared herself to be "always happiest at home." But she did not realize that it was indolence chiefly that made her prefer her own surroundings, and the society of her inferiors (so-called), thinking herself very virtuous all the time. For the society of our poor neighbours makes less demand upon us, than does that of our equals; and what is called "great kindness" to the poor may arise from very different motives to those with which it is generally credited. They are more responsive, and more appreciative, and the love of "patronizing" is very strong in some breasts. Apart from indolence, too, the question of our relationship to our inferiors is a very insidious one. As Mozley says, "They look up, we look down. We condescend, and the very act of condescension, reacting on ourselves, produces a feeling of self-

complacency." They unconsciously flatter us, and minister to our self-admiration. And then they never by any chance interfere with our pride. With our equals we are in competition, but with our inferiors it is not so. There is, therefore, no discipline to us in our intercourse with them.

Such being the atmosphere in which Mrs. Ellis perpetually lived, her self-admiration was fostered. She thought herself a model of generosity and kindness, and for no just cause, since nothing is easier than to be generous when you have plenty of money, and few objects on whom to expend it.

However, such was Mrs. Ellis; and here she was come to spend the evening—"come," as she said, with a smile at Colonel Norton, "to hear all his news, and to know what he had been doing with himself since she had seen him last." Having delivered herself of this as her programme, she proceeded to talk the whole time exclusively of her own affairs.

She sat at the dinner-table without eating, having had her own dinner early, and therefore enjoying an advantage as to conversation over the other two, who were more engaged. And,

for the most part, she directed her remarks to Mrs. Harrington, either on subjects of mutual local interest in which Colonel Norton could not possibly join, or else on her own little daily interests.

When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war. And when two egotistical people come together, neither is apt to give way.

He enjoyed the rest and leisure for thought which the juxtaposition gave him, as there was certainly no occasion for him to speak, or, indeed, any opportunity had he wished it ever so much.

There was a running autobiography on each side of their different individual interests; and it would have been almost amusing if it had not been so distasteful to him, to hear the two capping each other with tales of themselves.

Dinner came to an end at last, and they all adjourned to the drawing-room. Here a change of subject might have been expected; but not a bit of it. The sisters went at it again as hard as ever. Their *biographies intimes* were resumed, and bid fair to continue for the rest of the evening.

At last came a subject of general interest—general, that is, from identity of occasion, though looked at by the two ladies from purely personal points of view. This was the lately announced engagement of the daughter of the third sister, Lady Travers, to be followed shortly by her wedding in London.

Here Colonel Norton hoped to cut in, and did his best to do so; but the general interest of the conversation soon faded away, and became a duet once more.

For Mrs. Ellis's chief interest in the event was the gown she was going to "build up" for the occasion, and the choice of the hotel at which she and her husband would stay for the time. And Mrs. Harrington's was that "dear Harriette" was to be one of the bridesmaids, and that this was the first time the said dear Harriette had ever officiated in the like capacity. Her anxiety was whether the colour chosen by the bride-elect would suit the little girl's complexion, and whether the dress would be likely to be useful afterwards.

She was not altogether without interest in her own costume, and asked Mrs. Ellis if she could

tell her of a good and inexpensive dressmaker, ending with an inquiry where Mrs. Ellis intended to go for her own. She supposed Madame D—— (mentioning a first-rate *modiste*).

But this question drew down upon her, from Mrs. Ellis, a lengthy harangue on the subject of grand dressmakers. She thought it, she said, positively wicked to go to them, and give those large sums for gowns that some of her acquaintances did. How they could reconcile it to their consciences, or answer to calls upon their charity when they "threw away" their money like that, she, Mrs. Ellis, could not imagine. For her part she had far too many claims upon her purse.

No, she never on principle went to them, but employed a little dressmaker of her own, who made her things very inexpensively, and whose name she never revealed, for fear of her being got hold of and employed by others when she wanted her, or that her patterns should be used. For she always invented her own costumes. She "thought the thing out," and personally superintended the carrying out of her own designs. The result was always so satisfactory that every one thought her gowns came from Paris,

so completely were they *tout ce qu'il y a du plus chic.*

Here Mrs. Ellis's carriage was announced, and she departed in a perfect whirlwind of self-satisfaction and self-glorification, before any one had time to contradict her, or even to demur to her *ultimatum.*

Mrs. Harrington, however, was not going to let her be alone in her glory. She followed suit the moment the door was closed.

It was all very well, she said, for those who had no children to spend their time and thoughts in "thinking out" and "building up" their clothes. For her part, she had something else to do. Those who had a family to look after—if, that is, they really did their duty by them—had no time, etc.

Here followed a spirited little autobiographical sketch, ending with a peroration on the duties of motherhood, in her case so amply fulfilled.

These "pæans" were now interrupted by the return of Mr. Harrington from his dinner; and, to Colonel Norton's relief, a diversion was effected.

Mrs. Harrington left the two men to them-

selves, and the rest of the evening was spent in the smoking-room.

Over his cigar Mr. Harrington waxed confident on the subject of his son.

It did not appear to him, he said (though he was willing enough to admit he knew nothing about the school), that work was the foremost thing at Eton. It seemed to him that the boy was contracting a taste for games and boating, but especially the latter, which took up all his time and thoughts.

Colonel Norton, who had crossed his legs and looked annoyed at the commencement of his brother-in-law's comments, looked up sharply and with an expression of keen interest on his face as he concluded. But he said nothing, and the conversation soon after turned to other topics.

The next morning dawned brightly; and no schoolboy, starting for the holidays, could feel more happy in the prospect of release and freedom than did Colonel Norton, when the carriage drove up to the door which was to convey him to the station.

His spirits rose. He was quite jocose with his nephews and nieces as they stood in the hall

to see him off, and he called Mrs. Harrington "my dear Georgy," and kissed her quite affectionately as he wished her good-bye.

"I shall go down to Eton without fail this afternoon," he said, "and let you know the result."

Then, amid the fluttering of handkerchiefs of the assembled family, he drove away from the door, returning their demonstration with interest, and breathing a sigh of relief when a turn of the road hid the house from his sight.

He had to go up to London to catch a train at Paddington, which he was just in time to do.

He lay back in his seat as the express sped along, meditating rather moodily on the circle he had left. But as the train neared Windsor, and, rounding the Eton playing-fields, brought the river and the old castle full in front of him, he sat up and looked eagerly round. A sudden change was given to his thoughts, and a rush of boyish recollection came over him.

CHAPTER VIII.

RIP VAN WINKLE AT ETON.

"They are ringing to me the memory
Of cloister and chapel chimes,
And young romantic friendships
In happy college times."

He got out of the train, and, leaving his portmanteau at the White Hart, he walked down the Castle Hill, and took his way to Eton.

He paused on the bridge, and stood for some time looking down upon the river. He had been captain of the boats once, and his heart was with the "wet-bobs" still. Never had he been, never would he be again, such a great man as on that fourth of June some sixteen or seventeen years ago.

It was now past four o'clock, and the rush to the rafts was just taking place.

Perhaps no other sight gives one such a sense of the physical activity, the energy, and the perpetual motion of boy life. They are all busily engaged in assisting to get out oars and boats. Everything is being done with a run. They run for the oars, run for the boats, run perpetually

backwards and forwards between the water and the boat-house, swarming like ants, and quite as industrious.

They have most of them been back to their houses since their names were called in the school yard not ten minutes ago, changed all their clothes for boating-flannels, run across the fields to the river, and now here they are ready; bare knees, bare arms, little gossamer jerseys, and open throats, and all sometimes in the fresh wind of a spring evening, between this and eight o'clock.

Oh, mothers, it is well sometimes you are in ignorance of what is going on!

And yet there is care and caution of a certain sort. When an "eight" comes in from a pull, the coats come on, and the comforters are tied loosely round the throats.

At cricket, too, the coat is there and ready; but, more often than not, it is lying on the wet grass until it is wanted. The remedy must surely be worse than the disease, as also the wet towel curled round the throat or over the head of its owner as he comes home from bathing.

Yet what pictures of health and strength the

boys all look, in the free and healthy outdoor life they lead.

Colonel Norton moved on at last, and walked through the college quadrangle, the sound of the chapel clock bringing back many memories as it fell upon his ear.

He met one or two of the masters, and was struck with their extreme youth. Surely in old days they were very ancient folk; at any rate, he had always deemed them to be so.

He entered the playing-fields from the college cloisters. How exactly the same it all was! The boys were playing in "Upper Sixpenny;" some sitting with legs dangling on the top of the high wall, as he had done himself it seemed to him now but the other day.

He went on to Poet's Walk, and sat down on the seat overlooking the water. There was the very same man in a punt that had always been there; there were the one or two solitary little fourth-form boys fishing on the bank, who to his certain knowledge had always been fishing there on that particular spot.

He strolled on to "Upper Club" and sat down. As he sat there, under the trees, watch-

ing the cricket, the names of all those in his former house kept constantly recurring to him—

"Old faces look upon me,
Old forms go trooping past."

There is nothing more curious in the retrospect of life, when any one tries to throw himself back into the outlook of his youth upon it, than the fact of how utterly different everything has turned out to what he expected, to what his fancy painted. It need not necessarily be less happy, or less prosperous; it is only that it is so entirely different.

In Colonel Norton's case, it no doubt was sadder and less prosperous; and, as he tried to throw himself back to the days when he used to lie on the grass there, dreaming about his future, he realized that it was so.

He had been an ambitious boy, and his thoughts had often gone out into the future, painting in bright colours all that it contained for him—all he would do, all he would be, all he would try to accomplish. The possibilities of life had seemed infinite.

How little he had dreamt then, that when he should have reached his present age, he should

only be a man who had spent, and, as he might almost say, wasted, the best years of his life at foreign "health resorts," and be now with no profession and no career!

Those who had started with him, how differently they had fared!

There was So-and-so, who had been below him in the school, was already a cabinet minister. There was another, just above him, who was in command of a regiment; and the captain of his house was a Don at Oxford.

He who had been one of the foremost, appeared, in the race of life, to have been left behind.

Then his thoughts roamed on to his greatest school-friend (afterward his brother-in-law), who had died of consumption at an early age. From that they travelled on to his visit to that friend's home, which had eventually led to his own marriage; and then to that event itself, and to the opposition it had met with from his own family —to his father's indignation at what he called his "Quixotic folly" in sacrificing his life to a dying, or at any rate a doomed, woman. Well, all that was over now; all that was past and gone.

No doubt, from a worldly point of view, his life had been a little bit a *vie manquée*. But did he regret it now? He asked himself the question as he sat there in the playing-fields, recalling by the power of association what manner of youth he had been.

No boy had ever been more carried away by the actual, or had his eyes more closed to the ideal by absorption in the pleasures of the moment.

Selfish, thoughtless, and excitable, had not the life of enforced obscurity and inactivity which he had been obliged to lead been perhaps the best discipline he could have had? Had not his invalid wife been a factor in the improvement of his character by forcing him to be patient and unselfish?

He had been obliged to live a life of waiting and watching instead of being foremost in the fight, as he had wished and intended. He would have dashed at everything too impetuously in his youth. Perhaps that was why he had had to wait.

How deeply she had bewailed it all herself, poor woman! How often she had lamented that

she was such a drag upon him, and the cause of his wasting the best years of his life. But had they been wasted after all? Had they not done much for him by developing his mental powers; and giving him those long quiet periods for reading and thought, which under other circumstances would inevitably have been given up to sport and active pursuits?

Engrossed in these thoughts, he sat long, watching but not really seeing the cricket; but at last he roused himself.

Well, the time had come now. "After all, I am only thirty-nine," was his reflection, as he rose from his seat and left the playing-fields.

Turning down Keats' Lane, he struck across the meadow to the Brocas, and, emerging from under the bridge, he walked a little way on, and then sat down on the green sward, and gave himself up to the influence of his surroundings. His heart was really on the river, and here it was sparkling and glittering in the summer sunshine.

The air was full of mingled sounds—the splash of oars in the water, the hum of the approaching steam-launch, the trains crossing the

bridge overhead, and happy young voices and gay laughter everywhere.

His eye roamed over the lovely river, covered with every kind of craft. In the foreground the college waterman, sitting in his punt, with two small boys lately passed in swimming, each in his own little boat, drawn up alongside of him for a chat; the old castle crowning the near distance, the flag streaming gaily from its tower.

Then came the "eights" skimming along, the light active figure of the lad in command standing up with the steering-ropes in his hand, his body swaying gently backwards and forwards with the movement of the oars, shouting his directions—"Keep your shoulders up, Bow. Hands well over the stretchers. Time! Time! Keep time. Stroke, you *must* keep clear of the water!"

Cries of "Look ahead!" fell on his ear on all sides and in all sorts of voices. Shrill voices of important little boys steering for big ones. "Look a—head! Look a—he—ad!" Or the calmer "L'ahid, sculler!" of the hired boatman; the general air of gay activity, life, and movement contrasting so sharply with the air of intense in-

dolence which characterized the inhabitants of the house-boats by the river-side, or of the launches moving stealthily by, as if life were all leisure and luncheon and laziness.

It has been said that one of the advantages of accumulated wealth, and of the leisure it renders possible, is that people have time to think of the wants and sorrows of their fellows. One can only hope it may be so; but on such occasions it does not look very like it.

The evening was now wearing on, and Colonel Norton strolled back to the White Hart.

He dined alone that night, and did not take any steps about interviewing his nephew's tutor until the next day.

That little business concluded, he sent for young Harrington, and also for young Travers, his eldest sister's son, and took them both to the hotel to luncheon.

He did not expect to be very much in sympathy with the former, feeling as if the atmosphere in which he had been reared, and of which he had so lately had experience, would not produce anything very congenial; and the other boy he had not yet made acquaintance with. The

cousins lived in different houses, and apparently hardly knew one another.

Still, when he found himself in their company, a sense of their being *his* nephews, his father's grandsons, quite independent of their mothers, or of the Harrington and Travers element, drew him towards them.

"After all, blood *is* thicker than water," he said to himself.

It was just possible that these boys might be a little more like him in nature than they were to their parents. One saw that sort of thing sometimes in the freaks of heredity. He even fancied he detected in Frank Harrington a likeness to his own only brother, who had died when he was fourteen.

But soon he forgot that they were his sisters' sons, or even his own nephews. The common ground of interest in Eton speedily brought both him and the boys together. They were "Eton fellows," and that was enough. They were immersed and engrossed in their school life and the little world of Eton, and on that ground he could thoroughly meet them.

He was far more able to sympathize with

Frank Harrington than the boy's own father was, and that his nephew soon discovered. Mr. Harrington knew nothing about public school life, and had no interest in the *esprit de corps* of Eton. It was a sealed book to him. But the boy was an Etonian, pure and simple; and here he recognized in his uncle a kindred spirit.

He would never dream of saying to him, as he did to his father when questioned or found fault with, "Oh, we never do this or that at Eton."

Both he and young Travers looked up to Colonel Norton with reverence. Had he not once been captain of the boats?

Conversation, therefore, flowed pleasantly and easily at luncheon; and the boys, pleased to find so sympathetic and understanding a listener, chatted to him as they would have done to each other had he not been there.

They walked with him to the station, and, as the train was not up, paced up and down the platform with him in eager conversation.

"Did you know young Manners, either of you?" he asked. "He only left, I think, at Christmas."

The boys looked respectful. Oh yes, they knew Manners; they knew, that is, whom their uncle meant. But he was an awful swell, covered with glory of many kinds. A member of "Pop," captain of his house football eleven, etc.

"He missed his Exam., did he not?"

"His Exam.? Oh, his Army Exam.! yes, he did. But just fancy what hard luck on him to have to work for an Exam. in a football half! He got so knocked up with his work that he was quite thin and weak, and so could not play his best. And he was being tried for the 'Field' and the 'Oppidan Wall.' It had been hard on him, just as he was so busy, to have to waste so much of his time in Army class, and 'trials' coming on as well. It *was* hard luck!"

Colonel Norton would not have satisfied his brother-in-law at that moment. He was standing at the door of his compartment, looking down upon his two nephews with a smile.

Shortly after he took his seat, and the boys stood at the window, talking to him to the last on these and kindred topics, till the train began to move.

When they were quite out of sight, he drew

a long breath of satisfaction, and leaned back in his seat, thinking over his visit to Eton with more pleasure than almost anything had given him since his return to England.

He was the sole occupant of the carriage at first, but as they neared London a young lady and her maid got in at one of the stations.

He was attracted by "that most excellent thing in woman," a low soft voice. Very gentle tones were addressing the porter. He looked up, and saw a high-bred looking girl settling herself in the seat opposite him, with a book in her hand. He inwardly noted that it was not a novel, though what it was he could not quite determine. He glanced at her face. He could do it with impunity, for she was quite unconscious of his presence, and was already deep in her book. It appeared to be very engrossing, for she never looked up after the train had started.

He also soon became engrossed in his newspaper; but in about a quarter of an hour, he heard the low voice again. She asked her maid a question, and was again buried in her book.

Happening, however, to look up himself a little while after, he saw that she was no longer

reading. Her head was thrown back a little, and she was gazing out of the window. She had, he saw now, large dark eyes with an expression in them of thoughtfulness tinged with sadness. In short, her face had an expression of settled melancholy when in repose, which seemed unnatural in one so young, for she did not look more than twenty.

As the train neared London, she put away her book and put on her gloves; and he fancied she gave a sigh of weariness as the express steamed into the heat and noise of a June day in London.

As the train stopped, her book fell off her lap, and he picked it up and gave it to her, which elicited a quiet, very distant bow of thanks; but she did not, as he had rather hoped, speak, for he wanted to hear the musical voice again.

To her inquiry of the footman who came to the door of the railway carriage, the answer was in the affirmative and rather an anxious look came into her face.

She got out and followed the footman to an open carriage which was waiting, in which a very handsome woman was seated dressed in the ex-

treme height of the fashion. The girl got in, and it drove off rapidly. As it passed, Colonel Norton looked round for a moment, and to his surprise received a very gracious bow from the lady in question.

He raised his hat in return, rather puzzled; but, as the carriage disappeared, he suddenly remembered that this was the lady of whom Maud had been talking only a few days before—the Baroness Carrachi.

This girl, then, must be her daughter, the very person Maud had expressed a wish he should study! "A quiet high-bred looking girl, with large dark eyes." The description tallied exactly, as Maud's words recurred to him.

Musing that it was a funny coincidence, he called a hansom and drove off to Waterloo Station, on his way back to Manorlands.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE STEP NEARER.

"It is not that we dislike what is great and high, but that that which lies so close to us engrosses us entirely."

IMPATIENT as he was to find himself in Maud's presence again, Colonel Norton remained true to

the resolution he had formed at Mrs. Harrington's, and as soon as he arrived at the station, instead of going straight to Manorlands, he walked round to George Hardy's cottage to make his *amende.*

But to his surprise, he found the house shut up, and the landlady, when she answered his knock, informed him that the doctor was away. He had gone to London, she said, the day before, and was not expected back till next week.

Colonel Norton realized that this meant that he would not see George again, as he himself would have left Manorlands ere Hardy returned; and he was seized with compunction at parting thus with his friend and quondam fellow-traveller. More than ever did he feel that his conduct, or rather perhaps his feelings, towards the young man had been ungracious and ungrateful. After all, he owed his renewed friendship with Maud entirely to him.

But, in spite of compunction, he could not altogether repress a slight sense of relief at the thought of Hardy having departed from the scene. He felt that, at any rate for the remainder of his visit, he should have Maud more entirely

to himself, and that there would be no more danger of those constant interruptions of his *tête-à-tête* conversations with her, caused by the young man's ingress into the house at all hours, and the consequent withdrawal of her attention and interest.

He felt it strongly when, on his arrival at the house, he was shown into the drawing-room, and found her alone. The evening had turned damp and chilly, and it was evident she was not going to spend the children's hour as usual in the garden. They had not as yet come down, and there seemed a prospect of a little conversation with her before they arrived.

She rose from her seat and greeted him warmly.

"I am so very glad to see you again, Colonel Norton," she said; "and so glad, too, to hear there was nothing really the matter. It was so good of you to send me that little line. Come and tell me all your news," she added; "and let me give you some tea."

He took a seat by her side, and, with a sigh of relief at finding himself once more in congenial company, he entered into a little account of all

his adventures, ending with his meeting little Miss Ashley in the train.

"And now tell me yours," he concluded. "What has been going on here since I went away? By the way," he added, "what has become of George Hardy?"

"Oh, such good news!" she said, with a radiant smile, and the same look of pride mixed with pleasure which he had seen on her face once or twice before. "The vacancy for which he has been waiting has occurred, and now he will begin his London career. He has gone up to make his arrangements, and to look out for a house, so he will not, I am afraid, be back before you are gone. He, however, sent you all sorts of messages, and hopes you will go and see him some day in London when he is settled."

"That I will certainly do," said Colonel Norton.

And now the door opened, and the three little boys entered, keen for the attention and amusements of the "children's hour."

Though sorry to have the *tête-à-tête* broken off, Colonel Norton did not altogether regret the interruption. He had quite realized that he was

more likely to get at her inner self through her children than in any other way. Already each time that he had brought her at all near the point he desired, the opportunity had always grown out of a conversation about them.

Moreover, he was himself much interested in the pretty boys, each so different and each so interesting in his own way. Their characters showed even in their games.

Little Alfred had at once claimed his mother's attention for "spelicans." Geordie, restless at being confined to the house, was flitting about the room, trying to find some scope for his untiring energy. He had a large ball in his hand, which he every now and then tossed into the air and caught; while in the intervals he was busy manufacturing a four-in-hand coach with chairs, the driver's seat composed of cushions piled on the top of the back of the sofa.

Little Claud looked on with great admiration, and lent all the assistance in his power.

Alfred all this time was playing "spelicans," as if his life depended on disentangling his man from the heap which lay over it, and during the process his whole small person was in a state of tension.

Colonel Norton watched him with interest. "How delightful it must be to care so much about a thing!" he said in an undertone to Maud.

"It has its disadvantages," she answered, pointing to the flushed face and trembling fingers. "And, moreover, it is all very well as long as things go smooth. But wait till a check or disaster of any kind occurs, and then see."

As she spoke, and just as the child's hot and shaking hands had all but disengaged the spelican he was guiding, from under the confused heap where it lay, Geordie's ball was flung into the air again, and, as it descended, it fell with a crash right into the middle of the spelicans, scattering them in all directions, some to the other end of the table, and the rest on the floor.

Little Alfred looked for a moment as if he could hardly believe or take in the extent of the catastrophe; and then, as its magnitude dawned upon him, he gave vent to a cry of despair, followed by a burst of bitter tears.

"You see, there is another side to the joys of absorption," said Maud to Colonel Norton, as she took the child in her arms and tried to console him.

But he was not, as she knew well by experience, to be consoled or even distracted.

The only words audible among his sobs were to the effect that "no game would ever—ever—be so nice—again—never—never agai—n—n!" "No compensations" was evidently an article in little Alfred Mildmay's creed.

Finally, he got off his mother's lap, still sobbing, and, with infinite care and patience, began to pick up every spelican off the floor and the table, and to try to arrange them in exactly the same order they had been when the disaster occurred. In this task he was ably seconded by the active and remorseful Geordie.

"Now, can you call that a happy disposition?" said Maud to Colonel Norton.

"Well, perhaps, not exactly," was his answer; "but still—

"'Who would dare the choice, neither or both to know
The finest quiver of joy or the agony thrill of woe,
Never the exquisite pain, then never the exquisite bliss,
But the heart that is dull to that, can never be strung to this.'"

"Ah, well, yes," she said. "But this determination to renew what is gone, and to revive past joys, what is it but a fight against the in-

evitable? And what is more hopeless and wearing than that?"

She watched the little fellow intently for a few minutes as, still sobbing softly to himself, he patiently pursued his laborious task—sobs which rose almost to a wail sometimes, as Geordie, with well-meant but unsuccessful zeal, attempted to hasten matters a little.

"That one weren't *there*, Geordie. That not at all the place it were in"—relapsing into a quiet little undertone of despair. "Oh dear, oh dear! it'll never be so nice again—never!"

"Not," Maud went on, turning after a pause to Colonel Norton—"not that I wish him otherwise. Only I am sorry for him, poor little fellow. But I would far rather my children cared too much than too little; anything is better than thoughtlessness and frivolity. I don't want them to think life is all holiday. I want these two elder ones to feel from childhood that property is a responsibility, and not a place to find amusement in, and a means of indulging in sport, etc., as I know so many boys in their position do."

She paused a moment, while Colonel Norton again felt that sense of bewilderment that it

should be really Maud Egerton who was thus talking.

"Then," she went on, unconscious of the effect she was producing, "I want little Claud, whose lot in life is such a different one to theirs——"

She stopped short as Colonel Norton touched her on the arm, and glanced round. Following the direction he indicated, she saw the said little Claud—the little embryo Philistine—perched up on the back of the sofa, which his elder brother had vacated, with a whip in his hand, and the four chairs harnessed in front of him, at the reins of which he was tugging with all his might, his face the picture of delight and excitement.

"Why don't you make him get down at once, Lady Manorlands?" laughed Colonel Norton. "He is contracting hereditary tastes which he will have no hereditary means of indulging in."

She laughed, too, but blushed a little. "I did not say I should *succeed*, you know," she said; "I only said I meant to try. But, Colonel Norton, you of all people ought to understand and enter into my fears as regards frivolity and thoughtlessness with my children."

There was a slight stress on the word *my,* and Colonel Norton caught her meaning.

"And in these respects," she went on, "it is Geordie who makes me most anxious. He has such an extraordinary capacity for enjoyment, and my fear is he will be carried away with the joy of life, and by the spirits with which he is bubbling over."

"He reminds me so much of you," he said. "I can fancy, as a child, you were just the same."

"That is small comfort," she answered; "and perhaps that is what helps to make me anxious about him in the future. Every day, as he grows older, fresh powers and opportunities of enjoyment will open out before him as they do with all boys in his position; and I do so dread his looking upon life as a playground, and ending perhaps by being entirely given up to pleasure and excitement. He *has* a deeper nature, but he very seldom lets us see it. Much, I feel, will have to happen before the deeper part of his nature has a chance of coming out."

"The actual is so very present when one is young," remarked Colonel Norton. "It is so

much nearer than the ideal, that one can perhaps hardly wonder at it."

"I know," she said eagerly; "that is just what I mean. The young do not see the true proportion of things, and *how* is one to make them? It is this absorption in the seen that works such mischief with us all, and makes us live such poor unworthy lives. It obscures the reality beneath. It is just that which I feel so strongly, and which I long so to prevent in him."

"But why," said Colonel Norton, "should you not hope as much for your boy from the lessons of life as you appear to me to have gained yourself? Why should he not learn the same lessons as you have, and with the same results?"

"The lessons of life," she said in a low voice; "the same lessons that *I* have learnt! How could he? Mine was so peculiar, so—— It is never likely he should have my experience. And God forbid he should!" she added in much agitation.

She paused a moment, as if overcome by some recollection.

"But when one *has* once realized these

things," she added suddenly and almost passionately, "life never wears the same aspect again —never! Once one has stood face to face with the realities of life and death, nothing can ever look the same again."

Her face assumed the peculiar expression he had seen it wear on a former occasion, and she went on in a low dreamy voice.

"And when once one has had a glimpse of life as it should be viewed, as it should be lived, even from afar, one's own can never be lived in quite the same way any more. For it is a glimpse of a view which dwarfs to their proper value all our petty aims and unworthy interests; it is a glimpse of something which moves in a higher cycle, and breathes a purer air."

"You speak as if you had met with it!" exclaimed Colonel Norton, struck by her manner. "What is it you are thinking of, Lady Manorlands? Tell me."

"I cannot speak of it yet," she answered. Her voice faltered, and she got up and left the room.

CHAPTER X.

A SATURDAY TO MONDAY PARTY.

"Ridicule shall frequently prevail
And cut the knot when graver reasons fail."

"To appropriate emotions caused by the gifts of others is a faculty that exceptionally handsome people almost all of them possess."

"THE 4.15 from London brings every one down in good temper," said Lord Manorlands the next day at luncheon. "I always recommend that train. People arrive flushed with triumph, quite elated with themselves. They come into the house full of it. 'What a rattling good train that is! I don't think we stopped once. We came swinging down.' It makes a good start in a party when every one arrives so pleased."

"Yes," answered Colonel Norton. "I observe now that every country house has its own train, just as it has its own curry and its own salad. Who is coming to-day?" he added, turning to Lady Manorlands.

"First of all, the Percys," she answered; "and that was one reason among many why I wanted you to be here, as I should like you to make

their acquaintance before you meet them at Egerton Court. They live near us in the north, and we share our friends, theirs coming to us on their way to Scotland, and ours going to them on their way south. She is Alfred's sister, you know."

"Pretty?"

"How inevitable is that question," said Maud, "whenever one mentions a woman's name! But I consider it one quite beneath you, Colonel Norton. However, since you will ask it, she *is* very pretty, and her husband I am sure you will like. Then there will be Miss St. Leger, a musical genius, who would like to be a professional, but whose position in life prevents it; or rather, I should say, whose parents will not allow it."

"Handsome?"

Lady Manorlands moved impatiently.

"If handsome is as handsome does," she answered, "then Alice St. Leger is handsome beyond words, for her playing is beautiful, and her voice is—well, I won't say divine, but it, at any rate, rouses the divine in those who hear her. But otherwise——"

"Hideous, I see," said Colonel Norton.

"You are as bad as the rest, after all," said Maud, with another impatient gesture. "You care only for the surface, and do not look beneath."

"No, I deny that. Beauty is a reality, not a sham. It is, or ought to be, the expression of the soul within."

"I am glad you say 'ought to be,'" said Maud, with a half-laugh, but with something of a sigh as well. "For I am afraid it is not always so."

"Ah, well, of course in that case it is not the highest type of beauty, and I do not care about it. But, in the abstract, I maintain what I said. And, moreover, Kingsley backs me up: 'Beauty is God's handwriting. Welcome it in every fair face, every fair sky, every fair flower.' And I *do*.

"Well," she returned, "then there is Lord Erskine. I fear, Colonel Norton, he is a young man who will be a deep trial to you. I had better give you warning before he comes."

"Why? What is he like?"

"I think I shall leave you to discover that for yourself," she replied.

"Oh," put in Lord Manorlands, "he is an

aggressive, airified young fellow, with a great sense of his own importance."

"As Alfred has said so much," resumed Maud, "I will tell you that he is one of those *nil-admirari*, nothing-worth-caring-about young men you meet with nowadays, and that he is by way of being a cynic. He has no sense of humour, and I always think when that is the case that anything of sarcasm sounds so much more ill-natured. His weapon, too, is detraction."

"I almost wonder you have such an unattractive person to stay in your house," remarked Colonel Norton.

"He is Alfred's first cousin," answered Maud, "and an orphan with no near relations of any kind. Having been in the same forlorn position myself, I have rather a fellow-feeling for him."

"Besides, she hopes to improve and reform him," said Lord Manorlands; "and if any one could do it, it will be her. He has a profound admiration for her. It is the best trait in his character, to my mind, and redeems his many imperfections. The only fault he can find in her is that she is too cosmopolitan. She likes all sorts and conditions of men too much to please

him. That annoys him. He likes to live exclusively with one set of people, and a new face is a sort of horror to him. He greets its appearance with a 'Who-in-the-world's that?' sort of expression."

"But I'm sorry for him," said Maud. "He suffers for it, as we all make the world we live in; and I should be truly sorry to live in *his*."

"Take him in hand, Norton," said Lord Manorlands; "a few plain truths would do him all the good in the world. It would be a real kindness."

Colonel Norton was out fishing when the party arrived in the afternoon. Attracted by the beauty of the evening, he stayed late by the river, and strolled slowly home; so that when he reached the house, and looked into the drawing-room, it was empty.

Every one had evidently gone up to dress for dinner. Hearing, however, sounds from the music-room, he went on there and entered.

There was no one to be seen, but some one was playing on the organ, and that in so powerful a manner that he stopped spell-bound by the

beauty of the music which was pealing forth. He stood listening to the note which would—

"Shoot into the depths and burrow awhile
Broad on the roots of things."

And the other which would—

"Mount and march like the excellent minion he was;
Ay! another and yet another, one crowd, but with many a crest."

Presently the sound of a lovely pathetic voice swelled out into the silence; and he stood in rapt, almost breathless attention. The rolling notes of the organ, the pathos of the tones of the voice in the dim light of the room, affected him strangely, and brought a lump into his throat.

The sounds ceased, and there stole quietly from behind the organ one of the plainest women he had ever seen. She did not perceive him, but went out of the room and up the stairs on her way to dress for dinner.

With a sensation of disappointment, Basil Norton followed her example, half ashamed of himself for feeling disappointed. He revenged himself by laying the blame on the innocent performer.

"A woman who plays and sings like *that,* has no business to be ugly," he said to himself.

He was rather late for dinner, and the drawing-room was full when he entered it.

"Norton," said Lord Manorlands, as he approached, "let me introduce you to a representative of a very large class of the present day. You are fond of representative types, I know, and this one will be new to you, inasmuch as it has sprung up of late years. But the sooner you make its acquaintance the better, as you will meet it at every turn."

He put his arm as he spoke, round a tall, good-looking youth, who was standing near him. "My youngest brother, Philip Mildmay, who, in common with most youths of his age, is 'cramming for the army.'"

The good-looking youth smiled brightly as he shook hands with Colonel Norton.

"I have taken stock of this class already," said the latter. "I noticed when I first came to London that, whenever I asked any young fellow what he was doing, the answer invariably was 'Cramming up at James's,' or 'cramming up at' somewhere or other."

"And another thing you may have noticed," continued Lord Manorlands: "if you ask any of

these fellows if they think they will pass well, the answer as invariably is, 'Oh dear, no. If I just scramble in, I shall be quite satisfied.'"

"I should not think that would be the case here," said Colonel Norton, looking at the bright, intelligent face at his side.

"Oh, I don't know," laughed the boy; "much the same, I am afraid. It's an awful grind, you know."

"He's only going to get in by 'the skin of his teeth,' as they all say, no doubt," said Lord Manorlands. "In common with the rest, he has obeyed Cardinal Wolsey's injunction to the letter, and 'flung away ambition.' He's a type, as I told you, of the youth of the day which the public schools turn out by the hundred."

Young Mildmay laughed, and seemed quite unruffled by his elder brother's remarks. He was probably accustomed to them.

Shortly after, they all went into dinner, and Colonel Norton found himself next to Lady Percy on the one side, his neighbour on the other being the plain person of the organ.

She was even uglier than he had thought; but he turned to her at once and said, "We met

in the music-room just now, I think," and added a few earnest words of appreciation of the beauty of her playing and singing.

The girl flushed with pleasure, but it was not a becoming flush. It did nothing for her in the way of lighting up her face, as the blushes of some people do.

But with those notes and tones still ringing in his ears, he would not be discouraged. Dull and uninteresting as she looked, she must be in sympathy with the source and meaning of deeper things, if she could express them in one way so perfectly. For—

"Each sufferer says his say,
His scheme of the weal and woe;
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear.
The rest may reason and welcome;
'Tis we musicians know."

So he determined to cultivate her, and laid himself out to be very agreeable to her during the first part of dinner. But he found there was not much to be got out of her, and did not feel rewarded for his efforts. It was evident, he thought, that she had only one form of expression, albeit that was a very beautiful one. After a time he felt that, eagerly as he looked forward to hearing

her play and sing again, he should never care to have her as a neighbour at dinner any more.

Meantime, poor plain Miss St. Leger, accustomed to have her music praised, but wholly unaccustomed to the exclusive attention he was lavishing upon her, was completely fascinated, and had never enjoyed a dinner-party so much.

"You will sing to us again after dinner, I hope," he said, as the conversation came somewhat to a standstill; "I shall look forward to hearing you again so much."

Miss St. Leger readily acquiesced, with a smile and flush of pleasure; and then Colonel Norton turned to Lady Percy, and began to talk to her. She was both pretty and agreeable, and he soon became engrossed in his conversation.

He had not as yet had time to glance round the table. There came a pause at last, however. He turned towards Maud, and his eye fell on the airified, sententious young man who had taken her in to dinner.

Colonel Norton immediately felt as some people do when there is a cat in the room.

It was a case of spontaneous antipathy; and was felt by Lord Erskine in return, though in a

different manner, the measure of such feelings being always in proportion to the strength of the character. On the latter side it was mere petty and instinctive jealousy. He had detected Colonel Norton at once as the "new star" in the Manorlands hemisphere, and he was always very suspicious of these "new stars." Lady Manorlands' cosmopolitan tendencies kept him always on tenterhooks.

Maud, catching Colonel Norton's eye, introduced the two men to each other; and rather stiff bows were exchanged.

The young man was aggressive beyond a doubt, and at once launched out in a kind of conversation which partook of a species of attack. But he put his foot in it directly. He was no match for Colonel Norton. He had not his sense of humour, his power of repartee, nor his calm of temper and manner, and he was soon worsted in the dialogue that ensued.

Philip Mildmay, who was not far off, took in the position at once, and was seized with uncontrollable delight and amusement at the neat way in which Colonel Norton handled his antagonist, and laid him, metaphorically, sprawling at his feet,

Lady Manorlands presently inserted a new topic, by asking Lord Erskine a direct question; and while he turned to her to respond, young Mildmay began to talk to Colonel Norton across the table. They got upon the subject of a mutual acquaintance, an officer in the Guards, who had distinguished himself on more than one occasion, and for whom the young man apparently entertained a boyish feeling of hero-worship. He was dilating with enthusiasm on the qualities of his hero, when Lord Erskine's attention was arrested. He was always uneasy when any one was being praised.

"Oh, don't be keen, my dear fellow," he said; "it's bad form to be keen. Hero-worship and enthusiasm, and all the rest of it, doesn't pay. It's all rubbish; don't be taken in. Nothing and no one is worth getting excited about. Don't you agree with me, Lady Manorlands?"

"No," she said, with sudden vehemence, "you know I don't. I think the want of hero-worship in this age, and the spirit of *nil admirari* which is so common, are some of the most disastrous things of our day. Sooner than see my children without the power of appreciating and admiring

what is great and noble and heroic in their fellow-men, I would have them carried away by enthusiasm, even if it did end in their being sometimes mistaken, or, as you call it, 'taken in,' though I altogether deny that being necessary."

There was rather a silence after this.

Maud had spoken with strong feeling, almost with emotion, and Lord Erskine was put down as far as she was concerned. He evidently did not argue with *her*.

But he added something to Philip, to the effect that the proof of what he had said was that "no man was a hero to his *valet de chambre*."

"Exactly, but why?" said Colonel Norton, seeing that the boy was rather nonplussed, and coming to his assistance—"because it is only a hero who can appreciate a hero."

Lord Erskine did not try it on again. He contented himself with muttering *sotto voce* that the "hero" in question was "very unpopular in the army;" but no one took any notice, and the subject dropped.

Presently, however, he and Colonel Norton fell foul of each other again.

Speaking partly to the table, and partly to Lady Percy, who had asked him his opinion, Colonel Norton had made some remarks on a political topic just now much under discussion. Lord Erskine instantly cut in, and contradicted him flat. Colonel Norton turned towards him in reply, and Lord Erskine was worsted in the dialogue which ensued. Finding himself in a dilemma, he rather irrelevantly accused Colonel Norton of trying to get up a political argument, and of courting controversy.

Colonel Norton looked up with surprise, but answered quietly, "Believe me, no; I had no such intention. I hate controversy of any sort, political or otherwise. In short, I am the very last man in the world to pitch upon. I am so very much, in fact, perhaps a little *too* much, the other way. For I am somewhat of Cardinal Manning's opinion, who I heard say at a meeting at Grosvenor House the other day, that if we would only do together all those things about which there is no controversy, we should soon find we had nothing left to controverse about. Moreover," he added more lightly, "if I argue at all, it is never at dinner. I obey the golden rule on that point."

"What golden rule?" asked Philip Mildmay, who thought he saw from Colonel Norton's face that there was something behind, and he was desirous of seeing Lord Erskine floored again.

"If you don't know it, my dear young fellow," said Colonel Norton, "let me recommend it to your notice; you will find it useful through life. 'Never argue at dinner, because the man who is not hungry always has the best of the argument.'"

He helped himself as he spoke to the dish which was being handed to him, and which Lord Erskine had just refused, and everybody laughed. Lord Erskine looked furious, but was not quick enough to think of any suitable retort.

"Now, you mark my words, Maud," said Lady Percy to her sister-in-law, as they came out from dinner, "those two men will quarrel."

"Oh, I hope not," said Maud, but a little anxiously; "and I think not. It takes two to make a quarrel, and I am sure Colonel Norton will never allow himself to be one."

"Tell me, dear," said Lady Percy, seating herself by Lady Manorlands, "who is this Colonel Norton? Is he not a new friend of yours?"

"On the contrary," was the reply, "a very old one. I knew him before I married. Oddly enough, I have never seen him since until now. The merest chance threw him across my path again. Do you like him?"

"Yes, I do," said Lady Percy. "He interests me. His conversation is original, and he is unlike other people, which is always refreshing. But I am a little alarmed at him. He is rather a cynic, isn't he?"

"Not a cynic," said Maud; "only a critic."

"It is much the same thing. He and Erskine are birds of a feather, I should say. And it seems to me rather formidable to have two cynics in the house at once—or two critics, if you like it better."

"Oh," rejoined Maud, warmly, "you cannot compare the two. Colonel Norton is never ill-natured and never egotistic; nor does he, like Erskine, make his criticisms from an ulterior motive. He has, no doubt, the faculty for seeing into people and behind the springs of motive and character; so that the unrealities of others and their self-deceptions are very clear to him, and he is very searching in his search for reality. But

he never *wants* to find flaws in others. He wants to find perfection, or at any rate genuine reality, and he is constantly, of course, disappointed. Erskine, on the contrary, is really gratified when he finds out people's imperfections. The more he finds, the better he is pleased. Colonel Norton is troubled. He has enthusiasm for goodness; Erskine has not."

"Yes, I see," said Lady Percy; "you mean that there are two sorts of critics: those in search of perfection, who regret when they see how far short of their standard they themselves and those around them fall; and then those who are simply detractors. And you would put Colonel Norton in the first category, and Erskine in the second."

"Exactly. And it is this which makes the difference between the two men and the effect they produce. The one uplifts, the other depresses. One is always seeking an ideal; the other is always seeking to destroy the ideals of others. Colonel Norton is a tonic. Did you not find him so?"

"Oh yes, decidedly," said Lady Percy, laughing. "But I liked him, and we got on capi-

tally. Still, he *is* analytical. Now, that's the sort of man who could never fall in love."

"Why?"

"Because he could never be blinded by any sort of illusion, and something of the kind is necessary to falling in love, I consider. I don't mean necessarily *delusion;* but a little glamour of some sort, I think you must have. Now, Colonel Norton sees right through everybody too much. No; he could never fall in love."

"But, my dear," said Maud, "he was in love once."

"Was he? Who with? Do you know? She must have been an angel indeed."

"Why, his wife, of course," said Maud.

"His wife!" exclaimed Lady Percy, in astonishment. "You don't mean to say he ever had a wife?"

"Certainly," said Maud. "I knew her very well; in fact, it was through her I knew him. She has been dead many years now."

"Now, I *should* like to know what sort of person she was," exclaimed Lady Percy, "and if she in any way satisfied him, or came up to his standard!"

"She was a great invalid," Maud answered. "She died of consumption. He was quite devoted to her."

"Ah!" said Lady Percy, reflectively. "Compassion. Yes, that I can quite imagine in Colonel Norton. I could fancy he might be very tender-hearted where his compassion was drawn out. That is one reason, perhaps, why I did not interest him very much. I think," she added, with the little exultant laugh of a happy, satisfied woman, "I am a little too prosperous for him. I feel somehow as if he would have liked me better if he could have been a little sorry for me."

"You have gauged him very correctly," said Maud. "Directly he is sorry for a person, or, in other words, the compassionate side of his nature is aroused, all that criticism and sarcasm disappear at once. I never heard him say a word to his wife that was not tender and gentle, and he was the most unselfish of husbands. Everything was given up for her sake, because the doctors said she must not live in England. He left the Guards, resigned his seat in the House of Commons, and went off to live abroad. He had already begun to make his mark, and was spoken

of as one of the rising young politicians of the day."

"Did he know she was consumptive when he married her?" asked Lady Percy.

"It was not till they were engaged," replied Maud, "that it was discovered she was actually in a consumption, and many a man would have broken it off; and his family urged him to do so. But he held to his word. He was told, I believe, that it would kill her if he did not marry her, she was so deeply in love with him. But he must have seen from the first that it meant expatriation and an end to his political career, as, in fact, it proved."

"And was the marriage a success?" asked Lady Percy.

"I don't know," answered Maud, reflectively. "I was young then, and did not look into things much, or consider them very deeply. But looking back now, I think, from things she used to let drop sometimes, that she felt she had ruined his career by marrying him, and that she must often have regretted it. But, mind you, I never heard *him* say a word that led me to think he shared her opinion."

"He must be a good fellow," said Lady Percy, "and I quite long to find him a nice wife to make up to him for his heroically unselfish conduct."

"If ever he should want a wife, he would certainly find her himself," answered Maud, "without assistance from any one. And I think he had better be left to do so. For he is a peculiar man, and not every woman would be happy with him. He can be hard and even harsh to those he despises or dislikes, and an uncongenial wife would intensify that side of him. Still, of course, a woman in the world there must be who would satisfy his critical nature and draw out the best part of him, without, I hope, being an invalid."

"Yes, I dare say," said Lady Percy; "but still I maintain what I said at first, that, in order to draw out the tender and gentle side of him, she must in some way arouse his compassion. Of that, somehow, I feel quite sure. What is he going to do now?"

"Get into Parliament again at the first opportunity, where I am certain he will distinguish himself yet. At any rate, I sincerely hope so. Well, now," she added, rising from her seat, "I

want you to hear Miss St. Leger sing. Alice," she continued, turning towards the young girl, "I wonder if you will give us one song before the men come in?"

Miss St. Leger rose at once and went to the piano. She sang a simple German song, but she sang it so beautifully, her voice was so perfectly trained as well as so touching, that Maud's eyes filled with tears.

"How delightful it must be to be able to sing like that!" she said, with a sigh, when the song came to an end.

"Yes," exclaimed Lady Percy; "I have always so longed for a voice!"

"Why?" asked Alice St. Leger.

"Oh," she answered, "because one would then have had a chance of expressing those vague but beautiful feelings which even the most thoughtless of us feel floating through our minds sometimes."

Miss St. Leger looked from one to the other of the pretty women before her, whose expressive eyes were still reflecting the pathos of her song.

"There are quite as clear and much more beautiful ways of expressing feeling," she said

quietly, and rather wistfully; "music is often indefinite and intangible."

"You are thinking of poetry, perhaps," said Maud. "But, now, when you sing you give us both. Poetry married to music! What more would you have?"

Alice St. Leger shook her head, and said there were other and simpler ways.

"What is it you are thinking of?" said Maud, with some curiosity.

"I am thinking of beauty," the girl answered, with something that sounded like a sigh—"beautiful and expressive faces; eyes through which the soul looks. There is no labouring expression needed; the thing speaks for itself."

Maud tried to combat this opinion, but the girl was firm. She had pretty sisters, and spoke feelingly. She had, too, a fair knowledge of society already, and had learnt her lesson by practical experience. She was accustomed now to awaken emotions by her music, which all went to the pretty people, and to be left alone at the piano directly the sound of her voice died away. She was prone to exaggerate her own deficiencies, and had even taught herself to fancy that the

moment she turned her face towards her audience the spell of her music was over, and that, Gorgon-like, she turned her beholders into stone.

When the men came out from dinner, Lady Manorlands observed that Miss St. Leger looked quickly and rather eagerly up for a moment, and then as quickly down again. She further observed that at that moment Colonel Norton appeared to be making his way towards her, and the next that he went straight up to Lady Percy. Maud crossed the room and sat down by her.

"Will you sing, Alice, dear," she said, after a few moments' conversation, "or will you come into the music-room and play to us on the organ?"

"Whichever you like," Miss St. Leger answered; but as she spoke she glanced in the direction where Colonel Norton was sitting. He overheard Lady Manorlands' question, and turned round, without, however, leaving his seat by Lady Percy.

"Oh, sing, please, Miss St. Leger!" he exclaimed. "The human voice is worth all the instruments in the world. And, you know, we made a compact at dinner that you should. I have been thinking about the song we were to have all the time we have been smoking our

cigarettes, and getting impatient for the moment to arrive."

Alice St. Leger, looking pleased, rose at once and went to the piano. And now certainly her turn came. Every one in the room was perfectly silent, and all turned their eyes towards her as the sound of her clear, melting voice floated through the room. They were all more or less moved, but Lady Manorlands was the most moved of all. The whole poetry of the song was reflected and embodied in the expression of her lovely face, in the rapt look of her eyes, in the tremulous lines of her mouth. Touched and swayed by the power of the music, some deep emotion was called up within her, and shone forth in her whole look and attitude.

Wholly unconscious of herself, and all the more beautiful for that unconsciousness, she sat, carried away by her thoughts, gazing fixedly at the young singer.

Miss St. Leger might sing like an angel, but as soon as she stopped, the illusion was over. A plain, ordinary person got up from her seat. There was no particular expression on the demure, plain face; and all the thoughts called forth by

the song found a local habitation and a name on Maud's beautiful and expressive countenance.

What wonder that Colonel Norton's or any one else's thoughts should travel quickly from sound to sight, and their eyes rest on the one face to the exclusion of the other, to the ignoring even of the author, the creator of the emotion?

The room, however, rang with applause.

Lady Manorlands roused herself from her dream, and appeared to make an effort to shake it off. Her eyes, still misty, followed Alice St. Leger to her seat. She looked at her vaguely at first, but presently with a questioning expression. For she fancied the girl's face wore a look of disappointment.

Colonel Norton's voice, at her own side, made her turn round. "Now, was not that beautiful?" he said, with an unusual enthusiasm in his manner.

"I told you so," was her answer. "Did I not say that Alice St. Leger's voice was little short of what might be called divine, or, at any rate, roused the divine in others?"

"Well, you did not overstate it," he answered, in a low voice, for he was still under the spell of the song.

"Go and talk to her," said Maud, "and tell her how much you enjoyed her singing."

"I will certainly," he replied; and he crossed the room and stood by Miss St. Leger for a minute or two; but he soon came back again.

"Well?" questioned Maud.

"I have asked her to sing again," was his reply.

"Nothing more than that?" she said, a little reproachfully. "Did you not talk to her a little first?"

He answered that she did not seem inclined to talk. He supposed they had exhausted their conversation at dinner. He was mentally adding that, but for her marvellous gift of song, he should be inclined to think she was not capable of feeling, sentiment, or poetry. She was, to his mind, rather an uninteresting, matter-of-fact sort of person.

"How stupid and blind men are!" thought Maud to herself, but she said no more.

Meanwhile Lord Erskine had taken a seat on her other side, and every one was again silent while Miss St. Leger sang another song.

"I like that sort of singing," said Lord Erskine,

in his patronizing, supercilious way when the song had come to an end. "It makes one feel so good."

"Nothing like a new sensation, eh?" said Colonel Norton.

Lord Erskine glanced suspiciously at him.

"I like good people," he said sententiously, and with the air of having some indistinct idea of paying Lady Manorlands a compliment, for he turned his eyes towards her as he spoke.

"Of course you do, my dear fellow. We all like other people to be good, because it reacts so pleasantly on ourselves."

"I don't know what you mean," said Lord Erskine, "nor what your views on the subject may be. All I know is, I admire goodness more than anything else in the world, and especially unselfishness. When I am staying in country houses, I always admire the unselfish girls; and it is for that quality I should look out in a wife instead of beauty or wealth, or any of the things that others are always on the look-out for."

"Of course," said Colonel Norton; "exactly. The liver wing of the chicken, the best seat in the carriage, and the most comfortable chair by

the fire. She would help you to coffee first, and to tea last, and content herself with the drumstick (*i.e.* the second best) on all occasions. That is just what I say. We all admire goodness in others. Is not that the case, Lady Manorlands?"

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "I suppose so. But take goodness in the abstract—real genuine goodness, I mean—has it not always provoked antagonism and opposition in the past, and does it not do so still?"

"No; I don't think it is the case now. That is just one of the differences I notice so much coming back into society. Every one admires goodness, every one talks of religion. Fifteen years ago, the introduction of religion into conversation at dinner would have subjected the speaker to a certain amount of obloquy. He or she would have been considered, at any rate, peculiar. Now all that is at an end. There is no such thing as religious persecution now. You cannot think how the difference strikes me, since I have mixed in English society again."

"Well, that is an improvement surely," said Maud.

"Of course it is," he answered. "Only what

I mean is that people are not put to the test so much, as it were, and therefore it does not imply so much as it would once have done. For, there being no danger of the opposition and antagonism you spoke of, moral courage, that most rare of all fine qualities, is not required. It seems to me there is no religion of thorns now; it has become a religion of roses. But," he added more lightly, "what I meant when I said we all admire goodness in others, was the kind of goodness we can all appreciate when displayed towards ourselves. Sweet temper, unselfishness, etc.; we all like to meet with them. There are people who let us be as cross and odious as we like without retaliating. We do them all sorts of injuries and say all sorts of unjustifiable things, and they meet us again as if nothing had happened, and do not make us suffer for it, though we richly deserve that they should. Well, all that is very delightful. Oh, hurrah! Miss St. Leger is going to sing again!"

Lord Erskine looked as if he would have liked to refute what Colonel Norton was saying, but evidently felt he was not up to it. And even his antagonistic feeling was dispelled by the beauty of the song Miss St. Leger was

now singing; and the evening ended more harmoniously than it had begun.

"Colonel Norton," said Maud, detaining him for a moment as they all passed into the hall on their way to bed, "do not make an enemy of Erskine. He might be a very disagreeable one."

"My dear lady," said Colonel Norton, laughing, "what possible harm could the young fellow do *me?*"

"Ah, one never knows," she answered; "and——"

"Will you have a candle?" said the voice of Lord Erskine, close by, before she had time to finish what she was saying.

The ladies filed upstairs, and the men went into the smoking-room.

CHAPTER XI.

"LES LARMES DANS LA VOIX."

"Is her sister like her?" asked an enamoured poet of a friend of the family.

"Very like her," the common-sense friend responded cautiously; "but I wouldn't advise you to see her just yet, or you'd find out too soon how the trick is done."

THE next day was Sunday, and the whole party walked down to the church in the village.

The rector happened to be away, and the sermon was preached by a very young curate, fresh from the university, who held forth for some fifteen minutes on various subjects (except, perhaps, religion), to his more maturely experienced congregation.

He disposed, in a few moments, of every difficulty and every doubt which has ever exercised the mind of man or torn his heart in two. He proceeded, with a light heart and an airy manner, to show how easily he could solve all the problems of life, and find satisfying answers to all the needs and longings of the human heart and of suffering humanity: winding up the first part of his discourse with these words, "And now, having disposed of all these difficulties and objections, I will proceed with my sermon." Which he did, by cramming into a few moments an exhaustive list of all the reflective writers and poets, with a glance at the writings of each on the way. He flew, with lightning speed, from Plato to Chaucer, and from Chaucer to Matthew Arnold and Carlyle, till the minds of the more educated of his congregation reeled with racing after him, and the uneducated, of course, ceased to listen at all.

The occupants of the Manorlands' pew began to show manifest signs of annoyance, and the farmers slept soundly. Colonel Norton crossed and uncrossed his legs once or twice impatiently, and then found food for his thoughts elsewhere.

Just in front was a pew full of little girls—sisters—ages ranging from six to sixteen. Their profiles were all turned to him as they sat with their faces towards the preacher, and he noted with interest how curious was the family likeness in their faces, though some were pretty, some were plain; some common-looking, and some high-bred. It seemed all to lie in the cut of the features; and the slightest variation in the curve of the upper lip, and in the shape of the chin or the turn of the line of the nose, made the difference between one handsome little girl and the particularly plain, common-looking sister who sat next her. He had to look hard and long to see wherein the difference lay, and why there should be such a deviation between them when they were really alike.

The curate, meantime, had brought his sermon to a close with a Latin quotation, and the congregation streamed out of church.

"A young man ought never to be allowed to preach!" exclaimed Lord Manorlands, as the party walked home; and every one cordially agreed with him.

"I cannot stand listening to these boys," said Colonel Norton. "And yet," he added to Maud, as he and she fell back a little behind the rest —"yet one cannot help feeling that everything must have a beginning."

"Ah, but, Colonel Norton," she said, "a really earnest-minded man would be very different, however young he might be. That young man is not earnest—as little earnest as he is diffident. He, of course, needs experience of life and of human nature; but it is not only that. He lacks humility, sympathy, and many other graces."

"Yes. But it is life and experience which teach sympathy and humility. I should like to hear that fellow ten or fifteen years hence. I have no doubt by that time he will have something very different to tell us."

"Yes," she assented; "and I think that is why one likes to hear middle-aged or elderly men preach. They have a certain ring in the voice which experience of the difficulties and

troubles of life, and sympathy with sorrow and with human infirmity, can alone give. Those who have sinned or failed themselves, are always those who are most tender to others. I always so like that story that was told of St. Peter in the early Church."

"What was that?"

"That if," she answered—"if, when he was preaching, a cock crew, and the sound came into the place where he was, he could for the time go no further; but that, when he began again, there would be an emotion and a tenderness in his voice which would melt the most hardened sinner in the congregation."

Her voice, as she spoke, had the very ring she was describing.

He glanced at her, wondering what thought underlay what she was saying.

"Les larmes dans la voix," he said, "as it is called in singing."

"Yes, and a singing voice, too, without it, loses half its charm. Very young singers seldom have it. How should they? They—

" 'Wait for their story . . .
. . . Long years will bring it.'

But till then, there will be a something wanting in their singing, clear, ringing, and joyous as their voices may be."

They had now come up with the rest, and all went into the house together.

"Who were all those little girls in front of us in church?" asked Colonel Norton at luncheon.

"The clergyman's children," Lady Manorlands answered. "I saw you studying them very attentively, and wondered why. They are all wonderfully alike, are they not?"

"Well, that was just the point I was studying," he said. And he proceeded to repeat what he had observed about the likeness in unlikeness of the family face.

He was going on to discuss the subject still further, when a warning look in Maud's eyes stopped him from saying more, though he did not understand her motive.

"What was it?" he asked later in the afternoon, when, every one having dispersed, he found himself alone with her. "Was I putting my foot in it in any way at luncheon?"

"Oh, about family likeness," she rejoined.

"Poor Alice St. Leger was looking so dreadfully uncomfortable, and you were so sublimely unconscious."

"But why?" he inquired, puzzled.

"She belongs, you know—or rather you *don't* know, or you would not have said what you did —to a very pretty family. She, poor girl, is the only plain one, and she feels it so. One of her sisters is quite remarkably handsome, and yet she and Alice are wonderfully alike. All that you were saying seemed to apply so exactly to her, and I did not know what more might be coming. It made me quite nervous."

"Well, if that was the case," he said, "I should certainly have made matters worse if I had gone on, for I was going to ask you if you remembered what Grant Allen says about family likeness in his article in one of the reviews on 'Genius and Talent.'"

"Oh dear," exclaimed Maud, "how thankful I am I stopped you in time! You said quite enough as it was. Poor Alice! You must make amends by talking to her a little more this evening than you did last night."

"I find her difficult to get on with in conver-

sation," was his reply. "But I will ask her to sing my favourite sacred song, 'Oh, rest in the Lord.' I am sure she would sing it quite beautifully."

Lady Manorlands said nothing more, but she reflected how difficult it was to make a man understand anything where an ugly woman was concerned.

Dinner passed off peacefully, and so did the evening that followed. Colonel Norton, acting upon Maud's request, took a seat by Miss St. Leger for a time after dinner, and devoted himself to her; and this took him away from the immediate vicinity of Lord Erskine, who was, of course, in possession of Lady Manorlands.

Lord Erskine himself, too, was evidently afraid of scorching his wings again, and prudently left Colonel Norton alone. Moreover, the soothing effect of sacred music was not without its effect upon everybody.

"Hymns," as Colonel Norton remarked to Lady Percy, "would break the hardest heart."

And Miss St. Leger sang more beautifully than ever that night. Her whole soul seemed in her voice. Lady Manorlands sat in rapt silence,

drinking in the sounds. Colonel Norton stood by the organ; and there was no doubt that their united love for *les larmes dans la voix* was here fully satisfied.

"Plenty of soul in *that* voice!" he said, dropping into the chair next Maud, directly the last lovely note had died away.

But, with all his penetration, he did not see what brought it there; saw no connection between the poetry of the thrill in the voice and the prosaic fact that he was turning over the leaves!

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE POINT OF A CONFIDENCE.

"Who view life steadily, and view it whole."

THE next morning the party dispersed. Colonel Norton and Lady Manorlands remained standing on the doorsteps, watching the last carriage drive away.

"Well," he said, as it disappeared, "that little incident is closed. We shall never see all that exactly the same again. That little phase in life is over."

"How can you tell?" she answered. "Some permanent result there may be, of which we not only know nothing, but may never know."

Her thoughts, she could not tell exactly why, were at that moment of Alice St. Leger.

"Then, I always dread a sting of any kind being left after a party," she continued, "and I do not feel at all sure you have not made a life-long enemy of Erskine."

Colonel Norton laughed merrily at the idea, but he did not succeed in disabusing her mind of the notion.

"You do not know him as well as I do," she said.

But Colonel Norton was not inclined to be thoughtful, or to take up anything from a grave point of view; and certainly not inclined to see anything on *en noir*. He was in high spirits. Every one being gone, he was once more alone with his host and hostess. He had quite made up his mind to stay till Wednesday, and he felt the time would be propitious to make another effort to gain Maud's confidence. It would, moreover, be his last chance of doing so, until he went to Egerton Court in October, as she was not coming up to London for another fortnight, by which time he would have left it. Everything seemed in his favour, for Lord Manorlands an-

nounced at luncheon that he was obliged to go out for the whole afternoon on business, and that he must therefore consign the one remaining guest to his wife's care; which charge she accepted with a smile, saying she hoped he would not find it very dull alone with her and the children. She would do her best to entertain him.

Nothing could exceed the beauty of the day when, soon after luncheon, Colonel Norton, Maud, and the little boys started for a stroll through the woods, on their way to the rhododendron avenue, which was just now in its full splendour. They stopped every now and then to listen to the nightingales, and then walked leisurely on, talking little or not at all, as they felt inclined; the birds singing round them, the children running on in front. They came to the avenue, and wandered on through a dream of beauty and colour; where the flame-coloured azalia vied with masses of pale purple rhododendron piled one on the top of the other; and rising like billows above the line of sight. Now and then a deep crimson mass, more gorgeous still, stood out from among the rest. They sat down at last upon a mossy bank,

and began talking over the party just broken up, and the various characters of which it had been composed.

"It is certainly very interesting," said Colonel Norton, "to see human nature displayed before one in everyday life and in the same house. That, I think, is one of the great interests of country-house visiting. People play their parts, as it were, before one, and then the curtain falls, and the actors disappear. The play is played out."

"When you come to us at Egerton Court," said Maud, "you will have full scope for your taste; for people succeed each other quickly, and, as I told you, are of all sorts and kinds. The comings and goings are constant. You must not, however, be too critical, for such gatherings need a good deal of harmonizing sometimes to make them go off pleasantly, as you may imagine."

"And I am to meet the Baroness Carrachi and her daughter, am I not?"

"I hope so. I shall certainly try to secure them. That girl interests me, and I should like to know her better. She does not look to me very happy. I told you, I think, that she was

brought up away from her mother, and that they never met till this year. What a dreadful moment that must have been for both! Fancy a mother and her child meeting like that, perfect strangers! And the risk, too, of each not finding the other all she wished and expected; very sad, I think."

There was a pause after this, and then she said—

"I wonder, Colonel Norton, that you, who are so fond of analyzing and putting people under a microscope, should not have taken to science. Your search after truth and reality would have found satisfaction there, would it not?"

"That is not exactly my idea of truth," he answered—"*facts*, if you like; but I prefer searching for the truth which lies behind and beyond the facts. Don't, my dear Lady Manorlands," he added, "cultivate the scientific spirit in your sons."

"Why?" she asked. "I am not the least anxious to, but I should like to hear your reasons."

"Because," he answered, "a scientific training, as Miss Cobbe says, 'will compel him always to think first of the lower side of human life. The

material fact will be uppermost in his mind, and the spiritual meaning thereof more or less out of sight. . . . He will view his mother's tears,' she warns us, 'not as expressions of her sorrow, but as solutions of soda and of phosphates of lime; and will reflect that they are caused, not by his heartlessness, but by cerebral pressure on her lachrymal glands.'"

At this moment little Alfred, attracted by the expression of his mother's face, ran up to her, and, putting his arms round her neck, asked her in a whisper why she looked "so sad, so defferly sad!"

"No, I will certainly take your advice, Colonel Norton," said Maud, when she had soothed the little fellow with her laughter and kisses.

From that he led her on to talk of her children, and of her plans and ideas for them. The more thoughtful side of her nature appeared to him to be incorporated with her desire for their highest well-being; and she sometimes gave vent to these thoughts in such a way as might make it easier, he thought, to get her on the subject of her own past, as connected in some way with her children's future.

Struck by some of her remarks, revealing, as they did, how deeply and how earnestly she must have pondered the subject, Colonel Norton suddenly exclaimed, looking at her fixedly—

"You have come to these conclusions early, Lady Manorlands. They are generally the outcome of a long life and of much experience—in short, of the 'mellow wisdom of age.' This is, as a rule, only reached by those who, having come in sight of the end, see the whole more clearly;

"'Who view life steadily, and view it whole.'

You have reached it in time to act upon it. How?"

Again the troubled, agitated look broke over her face, and her hands moved nervously. His penetrating look of inquiry was fixed upon her. She tried to speak, but her voice faltered, and she turned her head away.

"Maud," he said, "we have twice come to this point. Do not put me off again. I am going away soon, and shall not see you again for some months. Won't you try to explain to me before I go?"

"I will, I promise I will," she said, when she saw how much in earnest he was; "but you must

let me choose my own time. I owe it to you, perhaps, to do so; but it is a tremendous effort to me to refer to a terrible and most painful episode in my life. I cannot always answer for myself. Still, I will try——"

She broke off, as a servant was seen advancing down the avenue with a telegram in his hand.

"For me?" she inquired, as the man drew nearer.

"No, my lady; for Colonel Norton."

Colonel Norton opened the telegram, and a look of great annoyance came over his face.

"This is urgent," he said, looking at his watch. "I am afraid I must be off to London at once. Is there time to catch the afternoon train?"

It was a telegram from his election committee, summoning him to an important meeting in the constituency, and brooked of no delay.

And so it came to pass that, within an hour of the sudden interruption of the conversation, he found himself in the express, being borne at the rate of forty miles an hour further and further away from Manorlands.

CHAPTER XIII.

RUTH ASHLEY.

"Character is formed by nature and nurture."

ONE unmitigated evil has resulted from the fact of our colonial possessions. It is the enforced separation between parents and children. Hardly have the little creatures passed safely through the anxieties of teething and other infantine ailments, and reached the attractive age of three or three and a half, than they begin to droop. Like hothouse plants, they are forced. The result is, that they must be, according to the customary expression, "sent home." And what does this mean? Practically it means sent *away* from home; away from mother, father, and baby brothers and sisters, to be brought up by either grandparents, uncles and aunts, or, worse still, by strangers, in a "Home for Anglo-Indian Children," or some sad necessity of the kind.

We are not going to touch upon the risks they run of being neglected, or of being brought up badly, or without sympathy and affection. We will assume for the moment that they are in good, safe, and kindly hands, and dwell only on the

sad fact of their separation from their legitimate protectors, and the inevitable consequence. The year-after-year separation, widening as every month flies past, makes the image of the mother and the father fade gradually in the child's mind and recollection, until it becomes first a shadow, and at last a complete blank.

In the mind of the parents, meanwhile, the image of the child does *not* fade. On the contrary, the recollection of the little face and form as they were at the hour of parting, grows stronger and stronger from constantly dwelling upon them in thought.

But, alas! all this time the reality *is* fading. And the child they parted with is changing so entirely in every way, that what they have in their mind's eye is a memory, nothing more. They will never see that child again. What they will see will be a tall girl, or a big schoolboy; but that curly-headed darling it cost them so much to part with, never, never again!

And finally comes what is sometimes the saddest part of all—the re-union. The long-looked-for moment arrives; the long-dreamt-of hour of meeting comes. What disillusion! What

disappointment! There stands before you, perhaps, the very type of young girl you least expected, and least desired your daughter to be. The very thing you did not wish has been done, the very training you disapprove of has been given. You see ways you hated in your husband's family, and things you disliked in your own.

On the other side, there stands before the eager, questioning gaze of the grown-up girl, a face and a figure which she had never dreamt of in her mother, or associated with her idea of her. And the consequence is, a chill sense of disappointment. Fear for their future intercourse steals over both parent and child. The first impression increases on further acquaintance, and, it may be, ends in estrangement, if not even dislike.

In one of the most beautiful parts of one of the most beautiful counties in England there stood, many years before this story opens, a lovely old rectory. It was a model rectory, comfortable even to luxury inside; and surrounded without by gardens, pleasure-grounds, meadows, and woods. It was inhabited by one of the old race of "Squar-

sons," the Reverend Edward Ashley, who had held the living for over forty years. The parish was small; the people well cared for. Peace and plenty reigned both within and without.

Here he had brought his wife; in the days of his youth, their only child, a son, had been born; and here he and his wife hoped to lay their bones when the appointed time should come. There had been only one trial in their life, and that had been the marriage of that son, while still little more than a youth, to one they would never have chosen as a daughter.

She was more than half a foreigner by birth, and had lived all her life abroad. Their son had entered the diplomatic service, and it was while attached to one of the embassies that he had made her acquaintance. He married her abroad, and brought her home when he came next on leave, to be introduced to his parents, and to his dear old home.

It is easy to imagine how repugnant the quiet life of the rectory was to one so gay and worldly as the wife their son had chosen. She could not endure it, and she visited it as little as possible. Finally, she resisted all her husband's attempts to

spend his future periods of leave there, and he, therefore, either did not come so often himself, or else came without her.

After a time he was appointed to a distant and hot climate, and they saw no more of her.

The trial of parting with their son to such a great distance had one mitigation. His child, a little girl of two years old, was left in their charge during his absence, as it was impossible for a child to accompany her father and mother to so unhealthy a place.

In a very short time, their son fell a victim to the climate. His widow did not return to England to claim her child, as would have seemed natural; and in less than a year she wrote to announce that she was about to contract a second marriage.

In her letter, she begged them to continue to take charge of little Ruth, until such time as she should return. That time, the letter added, was far distant, as her husband elect was an Italian, the Baron Carrachi, and he had just obtained a diplomatic appointment in a climate unfit for children. She would, therefore, neither be able to return to England herself for many years, nor

to have the child sent out to her. Then, with a few messages to the little girl, and a request that she might have, from time to time, news of her welfare and progress, the letter ended.

The announcement, though in one sense a blow, was in another a great relief both to Mr. and Mrs. Ashley. They mistrusted their daughter-in-law, and had dreaded her coming home and taking the little grand-daughter away; not only because it would have grieved them to part with her, but because they feared what the bringing-up of such a mother might be.

The next letter they had from her was signed "Katherine Carrachi;" and with the change of name they felt they had done with their daughter-in-law for ever.

From time to time, in the years that followed, she wrote from the far-distant place to which her husband had been appointed, but she did not interfere in any way with the plans for her child's bringing up and education, which Mrs. Ashley dutifully submitted by letter for her consideration and approval. She always expressed entire satisfaction with all the arrangements made—probably,

as Mrs. Ashley shrewdly suspected, from complete indifference to the whole thing.

At the end of several years Mrs. Ashley had a fright, for the Baron Carrachi's appointment terminated, and she feared the baroness might come home. But he was almost immediately re-appointed elsewhere, and she breathed freely again.

That the day must come at last, she knew; but she hoped and prayed it might not be till Ruth was grown up, and her character sufficiently formed to be independent of her mother's influence. And so little Ruth grew up among pure and peaceful surroundings, and in careful training.

Time flowed on till she was eighteen, and still there seemed no more prospect than there had hitherto been of her mother's return. She was, of course, the idol of her grandparents, but she was not over-indulged. Duties were required of her as of a clergyman's daughter, and these she performed faithfully and well.

But for the greater part of the day her time was her own, and she was entirely thrown upon her own resources. Books and nature were her companions, and, wandering about by herself in woods and fields, the girl grew every day more

dreamy and imaginative. Her natural thoughtfulness was intensified by the life she led.

Amusement of any kind there was none in that secluded spot, and there were absolutely no neighbours.

Her grandfather, who was a clever and a cultivated man, directed her reading; and her many hours of leisure and solitude gave her time to reflect upon and digest what she read until it became her own.

Deeply religious himself, he inculcated in her the fervour of true religion, and lofty ideas of life and its meaning, and she drank in his lessons eagerly.

It was no one-sided religion that he taught; not this "view" or that "view" in particular; it was the whole Gospel; and "Do not talk, but act," was the burden of his teaching. He would speak to her of the dedication of the life, the surrender of the will; the beauty of self-sacrifice, the strength of silent endurance.

"Such sermons," he told her, "they who run may read," and were worth all the others put together.

She was not ignorant of the tone of thought of the day. He did not conceal from her the

unbeliefs of the highly critical age into which she had been born. He prepared her for what she might find when she mixed more with the world at large.

But what he impressed upon her in connection with this subject was, that a great part of the doubt and unbelief so rampant, was due to the un-Christian characters and conduct of professing Christians.

"The vast majority of men," he said—and it was his favourite maxim—"are utterly unable to understand an argument; all can appreciate a character."

The world at large, he said, judges by *results*. It was looking on to see if profession meant performance; or, in other words, if religion was acted upon and carried out in the daily life. The Christian religion, professed but not practised, was not only the cause of much unbelief at home, but the recognized check and stumbling-block to missionary effort abroad.

The Christians of this day were on their trial, he considered, and those whose real wish was to glorify God must excel in all Christian virtues, and so recommend the religion which guided

their lives; must be, in short, not only Christians, but Christ-like.

And his lessons sank into a soil very ready to receive them.

The girl's life was a very happy one, but it was lonely, in spite of all the love and care with which she was surrounded. It was lonely in the sense of being companionless, monotonous, dull. Her grandparents were too old to live her life, and she was too young to live theirs; though that was the life she had perforce to live.

There were times when she would long for an existence which had more life and movement in it; one which was not bounded by the rectory garden, nor measured out by the punctual-to-a-minute breakfast, luncheon, and dinner bells; nor rounded to a close at ten o'clock, when the lights were put out in the house, almost as in the old Curfew days.

Youth and hope beat sometimes too high within her for her to be quite satisfied with the monotonous tenor of her days. It was a very peaceful life, no doubt. There were no troubles in it, no disagreeables; it was very even, very calm. But one has, perhaps, to learn to ap-

preciate such a life by an experience of how very much it *can* be to the contrary, and at eighteen or nineteen one does not value it as one comes to do later.

"Ah no! The bliss youth dreams is one
For daylight, for the cheerful sun,
For feeling nerves and living breath;
Youth dreams a bliss on this side death:
It hears a voice within it tell,
Calm's not life's crown, though calm is well."

She felt sometimes a longing to drink of the draught of life's joys, and to experience a little of all that it has to give. She would dream, as she wandered about alone, of a life which was all light, and love, and brightness; one more complete and satisfying than any she had yet had experience of.

And Ruth's day-dreams were apt to take the same direction. There was a point in her future towards which her thoughts were ever straying—a fixed point which was to be the turning one in her life; the key which was to unlock the gate of life to her, and reveal to her all its hidden enchantments.

It was not marriage. That, no doubt, flitted across the stage of her fancy. But that was

vague, intangible; whereas *her* point was certain, though she might still have to wait for it long.

It was the return of her long-absent mother.

She could not remember her the least. She had not the faintest recollection of any life previous to the one she was leading. But she had dwelt and dwelt upon the subject, till she almost fancied she knew exactly what she was like; and her imaginative faculty helped her to endow her mother with qualities of her own fancy.

Her grandmother had never enlightened her on the subject. It was one she had always avoided. But she had no idea how much and how often the girl pondered upon it, nor how she was building up day by day, and year by year, an image which never had, and never, never could have, any sort of substance or reality.

Ruth had noticed that both her grandparents were always singularly silent about her mother, though of her dead father she had heard much and often. But in her own mind she had put this down to the fact that of course they had seen but little of their daughter-in-law, whereas their own son was a different matter altogether. So that she was not the least suspicious.

Mrs. Ashley had always felt it would be wrong to poison a child's mind; and, as she had very little good to say, had thought it wisest to say as little as possible, and even to hold her tongue altogether.

In the event of the baroness's return, she had always intended to give her grand-daughter warning that she might not find her mother quite what she had been accustomed to, or perhaps expected. But then the time had never come, and it seemed, as years went on, likely to be delayed until Ruth was of an age to require neither warning nor caution.

And so it got put off and put off, as things do get put off which are always hanging over our heads and yet never seem to come any nearer.

Time went on, and Mrs. Ashley got accustomed to the state of things, and ceased to expect anything to happen; like people who live under the shadow of a burning mountain, or with a possible flood always at their doors. Perhaps in the mean time, she thought, some good man would appear and take the girl into his safe keeping, thus making her independent of her mother for ever.

But before there was any idea of such an event, and while Ruth was still only twenty, the summons had suddenly and unexpectedly come.

The climate of the place to which the Baron Carrachi had last been appointed had begun to disagree with the baroness, and she was ordered by the doctors to leave it at once. The baron was obliged to remain there, and the baroness had made up her mind to come straight to England by herself.

She wrote to Mrs. Ashley to announce her intention; to say she would be already on her way when the letter reached; and to beg that her daughter might be sent to her on her arrival, to take up her abode with her in London.

And so the crash came. Long expected, long dreaded, and the chance of such a summons now almost lost sight of, its coming was so sudden that every one's breath was taken away. From the day the letter arrived, until the day of Ruth's departure, there were hardly ten days, and the time was much taken up with the bustle of preparation.

Indeed, it was all so sudden and hurried that Mrs. Ashley hardly realized Ruth was really going,

till the moment of parting came. As the girl stood before her to say good-bye, it came over her that she was sending her away without one word, one hint, or warning.

Should she do it now, or was it too late? *Ought* she to do it, and if so, should she not, even at this the eleventh hour, do it still? She felt unable to determine or to make up her mind what was for the best, or where her duty lay.

She held her granddaughter by the shoulders for a moment, and looked into the depths of the girl's star-like eyes with a pondering, questioning gaze, which had in it something of an appeal, and something of sorrowful sympathy. So much so, that Ruth looked with a wondering expression on her face, into her grandmother's sad, almost deprecating eyes.

But Mrs. Ashley could not make up her mind to speak, to warn, to chill. She removed, with a slight sigh, the pressure of her hands on the young girl's shoulders, and imprinted a long, lingering kiss on the fair young brow.

So she told her nothing, and let her go!

PART II.

CHARACTERS AND CONTRASTS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BARONESS CARRACHI.

No two natures could have been found more totally dissimilar in every respect, nor have afforded a more striking antithesis, than that of the girl we have been describing, and that of the mother to whom she was on her way.

Worldly, shallow, vain, and frivolous, living entirely for pleasure; restless and dissatisfied the moment she was out of society; never content when in it unless she was attracting not only some one, but every one—such was the Baroness Carrachi, such the substance of the girl's dream of years, such the reality to which she was hastening, her heart beating with every kind of happy anticipation.

Mind the Baroness had none, heart very little. Her one aim in life was admiration, from whomsoever she could get it, and to gain homage and attention she would have sacrificed anything or anybody without a thought. And as her one aim was admiration, so her one dread was of the day when it should cease to be hers, and she would find herself eclipsed by and put aside for other and younger women. She dreaded getting old with a great and unspeakable dread. Every morning she looked anxiously in the glass to see if there were any indications, however faint, of lines and creases in her clear, smooth skin.

She was what is called a "wonderfully well-preserved woman." She did not look a day more than thirty, though she was in reality thirty-eight; and it was her great ambition to be taken for even younger than she looked. She wore white, and affected the most girlish costumes (which, owing to her extremely youthful appearance, did not misbecome her), and she put on manners to match. Now the *ingénue* and now the "young coquette," she was seldom natural for a minute.

She did not realize, and probably never would, that every age and every stage of life has

its own fitness, its own charm, and its own beauty, and that, as a very handsome woman of nearly forty, she would have been much more really attractive than as a would-be girlish one of seven or eight and twenty.

As regarded her expected daughter, her prominent feeling was, not the curiosity, the hopeful longing which might have been expected in the case of an only child not seen since babyhood, but that with a grown-up daughter by her side all that affectation of extreme youth would become impossible. True that she *was* very young to be the mother of a grown-up girl; true that she was only eighteen years her senior; still, the very fact was a standing proof that she was not, and could not possibly be, as young as she looked, and as she was generally considered. And, besides, let a woman look as young as she may for her age, when real youth, genuine youth —the real thing—comes alongside of her, it is a different matter altogether; and Ruth was only twenty. Of all this the baroness was fully aware, and it annoyed her considerably.

And now, in a drawing-room of an hotel in Mayfair, she sat minutely expecting her daughter's

arrival. The fears we have been describing were occupying her mind, growing stronger and stronger as the moment of realization drew near. And yet she could not make up her mind exactly what she *did* wish as regarded her. For, though one moment she was afraid she might be a younger edition of herself, which would be more fatal than anything, the next she feared that if she did not resemble herself she might take after her father's family, which was not nearly such a handsome one as her own, and the baroness did not wish to have to drag about a plain daughter. She liked to be proud of her belongings, and to be envied by others for her possessions.

She even found herself dwelling for a moment on the prospect of a position so novel as to be almost exciting—that of the triumphant chaperone who brings her daughter's first season to a close by a brilliant marriage, the envy of all the other mothers. And, of course, she reflected, something of the sort there must be. At the end of a year or less she would return to her husband, and the girl must be "settled" before that.

She could not send her back to her ageing grandparents to vegetate in a place where she

was never likely to see a man of any calibre, where the *parti* was an unknown quantity; neither could she take her back with her. It would not smile on M. le Baron to be saddled with a grown-up "step-daughter"! "Mon Dieu! Quelle idée!" She laughed aloud at the thought.

No; the girl must be disposed of in the course of the year, and she was one who ought to make a good match, inasmuch as she had very good expectations, which she, the baroness, must take care to make widely known. From a grandfather, too, which was so much better than from a father, as being within more appreciable distance of realization.

She had reached this point in her meditations when she heard steps outside in the passage, and the next moment the door was thrown open, and the long-expected arrival was announced.

All the baroness's fears returned upon her with full force, and threw all her more recent thoughts entirely into the background. But her first glance at the quiet, grave girl who entered reassured her. Her quick eye took in in a moment the high-bred appearance of the girl, and wherein she resembled herself; took in, also, with

a start and a sort of nervous shrinking, the likeness in expression to her first husband, of whom she had been rather afraid; but took in, also, that the brightness, vivacity, and animation which formed some of her own chief attractions were lacking in her daughter; and last, but not least, that the girl was a complete amateur in the art of dress.

"Mon Dieu!" she said to herself, "quelle toilette! quelle chaussure!"

Outwardly she allowed none of these feelings to appear, but flew forward with rapturous cries of "Ma fille! ma fille!" while in a gushing and effusive manner she enclosed Ruth's slight form in a fervent embrace, kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other over and over again.

"Une Anglaise des Anglaises!" she said to herself as she noted the shy, undemonstrative manner, little guessing how the young girl's heart was beating with tumultuous emotion, nor what a thrill of yearning love and passionate admiration was springing up in her breast as she stood at last face to face with the reality of her dream—face to face with the (to her) radiantly beautiful apparition, which not only realized, but far, far surpassed her most sanguine expectations.

Thus, then, they had met, this long-separated mother and daughter, in the early part of the spring in which Colonel Norton had returned to England, and about three months before he had travelled with Ruth Ashley in the train.

And on the young daughter's side the glamour of that first meeting lasted for long.

CHAPTER II.

LADY TRAVERS.

"Some are born for great things,
Some are born for small;
And of some it is not stated
Why they were born at all."

AFTER his abrupt departure from Manorlands, Colonel Norton was detained among his constituents for some time, so that he did not arrive in London for nearly a fortnight. It was with some difficulty that he got away even then; but he was under a promise to his eldest sister, Lady Travers, to take up his abode in her house, as, owing to the approaching wedding in her family, she wanted her brother's assistance in many ways. She was a widow, and had a large family of sons

and daughters of all ages. Two of her daughters were grown up, and her eldest son was married.

Now, Lady Travers was the one of his sisters who I will not say suited Colonel Norton best, but at any rate unsuited him least, though she was by no means so worthy a person as to the performance of her duties as the other two. But at least she was not egotistical, self-complacent, nor self-satisfied. She did not deceive herself as to herself in any way. She was fully aware of her own faults and shortcomings, though she made no sort of effort to amend.

Hers was an indolent, shallow nature, and she shifted her duties on any one who would undertake them—the nurse, the governess, the schoolmaster. Her sense of responsibility was *nil*, both as regarded her children and every one else.

But it is to be noted that these kind of people seem to have the power of raising up around them, almost, as it were, creating, strong, capable characters who do the work left undone. Lady Travers was no exception to this rule; and it was in her family that there lived the young girl of whom Colonel Norton had spoken to George Hardy. On her young but willing shoulders the

chief burden, not only of the education, but of the training and responsibility of the younger children fell.

On Colonel Norton's arrival in town, he drove straight to his sister's house, and found the family assembled at luncheon. He had to be introduced to the young man, whose acquaintance he had not yet made, and he offered all the usual congratulations expected on these occasions. But it was a match he did not approve of. He considered it an undesirable one in many respects, and he could not help feeling that a mother who had had more common sense and more insight into character, would from the first have seen it was wiser to keep the young people apart, and prevent an intimacy growing up between them.

However, Lady Travers had not done so; and as she never saw below the surface, or an inch beyond her own nose, and did not, moreover, possess the confidence of her daughter, she had been completely taken by surprise, not only by the declaration on the part of the young man, but at finding the girl had been long expecting it. With her grown-up children it was the same as with the ungrown-up. As in infancy she left

them to the nurse, and in childhood to the governess, so now she left them to themselves.

Nevertheless, Colonel Norton was for the moment a little carried away by the sparkling eyes and beaming faces of the engaged pair, though it seemed to him as if these young people were playing at it all, and as if the depth and meaning of life and love belonged to him and to his contemporaries, and not to these boys and girls. He had constantly to remind himself, as regarded the young, that "though the things were old, they themselves were new."

When the young couple had started for their walk, he sat down to have a chat with his sister before she went out for her afternoon drive. He found she was rather aggrieved at the long delay in his arrival, and full of the trouble this wedding was giving her in the way of arrangements and preparation; what an exertion it all was, and how she would certainly have to go to some German waters to recruit directly it was over, etc.

"You must really stay quietly here now, Basil, till this affair is over," she ended; "you must give your mind to all this, and see me through it. I am nearly worn out with it all. One wants a man

in the house every minute for the business part of it all, lawyers and all the rest. One wants some one on the spot to go to in any difficulty. Travers is no good to me now. A married son is no use. He is entirely taken up with his own affairs, wife and new baby, and all the rest."

He let her have her grumble thoroughly out, and promised to interview the lawyers, and save her all further trouble; and then he began to talk of other things.

He had not seen her since he had been down to Eton; but she took, he observed with surprise (for he never really got accustomed to her), the very minimum of interest in what he told her, or rather attempted to tell her, of his recent visit to her son. She was much more full of her own health, an unfailing source of interest to her, though she was not really more delicate than her neighbours.

"I am glad," she said, with a yawn right in the middle of something he was saying about the boy—"I am glad you had him out. He was pleased, I dare say. He is always writing and asking me to come down, and this will save me the trouble."

Then she suddenly passed on to some quite different subject. Her conversation was always discursive, and she skimmed lightly over the surface of things for some minutes, and continued to flit like a bee from one topic to another, when she rather startled him by asking if he was thinking of marrying again. However, there was this peculiarity about Lady Travers, that she never waited for an answer to her questions, but rippled on to something else. This was rather a comfort, as you felt you need never tell her anything you did not want to tell her, and yet she would never find it out.

It was so on this occasion. "Poor Georgy would not be pleased," she said, laughing and yawning without a pause. "She looks upon Frank as your heir. You do send him to Eton, don't you?"

It was impossible to be annoyed. She was not really the least inquisitive. She had yawned again before she had ended her inquiry. The answer interested her so little.

"The wedding is just ten days from to-day, is it not?" he said presently.

"Oh, don't talk of it!" she exclaimed; "the

time seems so short for all that's got to be done in it. And there's Winnie goes off for her walk, and leaves all the trouble to me. Girls are so selfish. All they think about is what they like best to do themselves. I must go and dress now, Basil," she added, rising unwillingly from the sofa; "the carriage will be here directly."

Colonel Norton sat thinking about his sister after she had left the room, until roused from his reverie by the sound of her voice on the staircase, on her way down to the hall. Then he went to the window, and watched her get into the carriage and drive away. Her open landau was by no means the "bird's nest" which some London mothers' carriages are in the season. One grown-up daughter took her seat by Lady Travers's side, and the opposite seat was empty.

"Where are all the younger children, I wonder?" he said to himself.

He thought he would try to find them, and set off to discover the distant schoolroom. Guided by the sound of five-finger exercises and scales, he was not long in coming upon it. The day was hot, and the door was wide open, so that he had a full view of what was going on inside.

A girl between fifteen and sixteen, with a long "pigtail" of thick hair hanging down her back, was writing at a table in the middle of the room. Opposite her a boy of about nine, with many sighs of deep boredom, was apparently doing a Latin exercise; while the young governess, who had so favourably impressed Colonel Norton, was sitting at a piano in the distance, with her back turned to the table, giving a music-lesson to a third pupil, younger than either of the others.

No one observed him as he stood in the open doorway, an interested spectator of the scene before him.

"Count, dear, count," was the order from the distant piano, which elicited the strange but earnestly given answer from the pupil (a scrap in a white pinafore, with a mass of fluffy hair tied back in a bunch behind her ears), "It only puts me out, Vally."

"That clock doesn't move," muttered the boy at the table, whose labours came legitimately to an end at 3.50. "It must have stopped."

He rose under cover of the turned back which was superintending the music, and, advancing to the mantelpiece, laid his ear against the clock.

Loud steady ticking was the result of this oral experiment, and he returned with a sigh to his seat. But in doing so he caught sight of his uncle behind the door, and nudged his elder sister's arm.

Seeing he was discovered, Colonel Norton came forward and greeted his young relations. The governess and her pupil looked round, and then the former came up to him with a pleased smile.

"Do not let me disturb you all," he said, after he had shaken hands. "May I sit here and look on?"

Permission was readily granted, and she soon became absorbed in her teaching, and seemed wholly unconscious of his presence. He watched her concentration with admiration, and her keenness and interest in what she was teaching.

The lesson came to an end, and the children began putting away their books preparatory to going upstairs to dress for their walk.

"Thank you very much," said Colonel Norton, "for allowing me to be audience, Miss—Miss——" He looked inquiringly at his nephew.

"We call her Vally," said the boy, "but Valentine is her real name."

"Thank you very much, Miss Valentine."

"Oh, call her Vally, Uncle Basil!" exclaimed the sprite with the fluffy hair. "Why don't you call her Vally?"

"Or Val?" suggested the boy.

"Miss Vally, then," said Colonel Norton, with a smile.

The children went away, and he remained on to have a little talk with their instructress. He was every moment more confirmed in the favourable impression the girl had made upon him. There was a power and an earnestness about her which was striking; and she was enthusiastic on the subject of teaching. She gloried, she told him, in being a governess, and she loved teaching for its own sake.

"I would not be anything else for all the world," she said, with sparkling eyes; "I think it is one of the grandest professions possible."

But perhaps what struck him even more was her conscientiousness. She had little or no encouragement in her task; nobody inquired, nobody apparently cared, what she did or did not do by her pupils. Still she went on, keenly and zealously. There was a depth and a serious-

ness about her beyond her years; and he felt again, as he had felt before, when he first made her acquaintance, that she was one in a thousand. He was glad that these poor little neglected relatives of his should have had her, even for a time, thrown across their path.

He left the schoolroom, announcing that, with her permission, he would often look in again in the course of his ten days' stay.

The incident, he hardly knew why, recalled George Hardy to his mind, and the train of thought which ensued brought Maud once more before him. As he compared her in the character of mother to Lady Travers, new beauties seemed to stand out, and she realized his ideal more than ever.

The *amende honorable,* which he had felt to be due to Hardy, and which he had been prevented making by his sudden disappearance from Manorlands, was, it occurred to him, possible now. It should be made at once. Hardy was settled now on the other side of the Park, in a small house of his own. He would go and see him this very afternoon.

Accordingly, at about six o'clock he strolled

through the Park to Grosvenor Gate, intending to pick up a hansom there. It was a lovely evening, and the Park was full.

Women he saw in plenty as he walked along —lovely girls with lovely faces, and the still more lovely faces of women of maturer beauty. But above them all rose in his mind's eye the face of Maud amid the sights and sounds of spring.

The rhododendrons were beautiful all round in their gorgeous colouring, rarer and choicer in their tints than those he had left at Manorlands on the day he had been so hastily summoned; but with the associations that had gathered round them, those others seemed to him far more beautiful.

He realized how much had issued to him from his visit to George Hardy's little home. How little he had thought, when he went there, that he was to have such an interesting experience and make such an unexpected discovery! No doubt he owed the young man a large debt of gratitude, and he felt glad that he was going to acknowledge it.

Arrived at Grosvenor Gate, he called a hansom and drove off to Hardy's house.

The maid who opened the door, answered, in reply to his inquiry, that the doctor had just come in, but was going out again almost immediately.

Colonel Norton gave her his card to take to her master, with a message that he would not detain him long.

She soon returned, and, requesting him to follow her upstairs, she showed him into a room divided from the next by folding-doors, and in a few minutes George entered.

"I am so glad to see you, Colonel Norton," he said warmly, as he shook hands. "It is very good of you to take the trouble to come and see me, and I am so glad that I happened to be at home. In another five minutes I should have started again."

"You have got into harness quickly," said Colonel Norton. "Why, how long have you settled in London?"

"Not so very long," was the reply. "But I have a great deal to do already, and work brings work, you know."

He was too modest to add, what was really the truth, that his skill as regarded children had

already brought him into favour with many mothers in London.

"Hardy," said Colonel Norton, "I have come to make a confession to you;" and he proceeded to say what he had resolved to say when chafing under Mrs. Harrington's roof a few weeks before.

Hardy listened with evident pleasure, but with an air of appropriation which mystified Colonel Norton again. He added a few warm words of his own in praise of Lady Manorlands, and then the conversation passed to other subjects.

Colonel Norton thought the young man already much altered. He was grave and preoccupied, and owned that he was much absorbed in the thought of one of the cases he was attending. He appeared also to be greatly overworked; he had been up all night, and not only his rest, but his intervals for food seemed to be much broken in upon.

"You must marry, Hardy," said Colonel Norton. "You want somebody to look after you, and see you do not kill yourself by overwork. I will undertake to find you a wife, if you like," he added, "as I know you have no time to look out for one yourself. I have a lady in my eye who

would exactly suit you. If you remember, I mentioned her to you when I was staying with you at the cottage."

"Did you?" said Hardy, smiling; "I had forgotten. I am sure," he added, "your choice would be a wise one, and that I may safely leave myself in your hands. And I thank you very much for your kind interest. But I am afraid she would have a dull time of it; for I should not have more time to give to a wife than I have to give to the search for one."

"Ah, that does not matter," Colonel Norton answered; "the lady I am thinking of is full of resources, and would never find time hang heavy on her hands. Well, good-bye, my dear fellow. I am interrupting you, I know. You want to be off again. I am very glad I just happened to catch you."

Colonel Norton walked home, entering the Park at Stanhope Gate; and as he passed along, he came upon a large group of ladies sitting under the trees, among whom he recognized the Baroness Carrachi, and at her side he caught sight of the girl with whom he had travelled the other day. He was suddenly seized with a

determination of getting himself introduced to her. He advanced to the baroness on the strength of her former bow of recognition, and took off his hat.

She greeted him with great effusion of manner, and he stood talking to her for a few minutes. She did not introduce her daughter until he asked her to do so, and even then she only just indicated the girl, and continued to talk to him herself.

However, some one else coming up a moment after distracted her, and in the interval he found an opportunity of saying to Miss Ashley, "I think we met in the train the other day."

She looked puzzled, answered indifferently, and seemed to have neither any recollection of the circumstance nor any particular desire to pursue the conversation. He felt slightly rebuffed, but would have made an effort to go on, had not the baroness now turned back to him and engaged him in talk, from which he found it difficult to escape. He took his leave as soon as he conveniently could, and went home.

CHAPTER III.

THE GULF BETWEEN DRAWING-ROOM AND SCHOOLROOM.

"Humour is a sense of contrast, and is closely allied to pathos, being but its other side."

During the days that intervened before the wedding, Colonel Norton found himself, whenever he had leisure, strolling up to the schoolroom, and identifying himself with the young lives there.

These younger nieces of his were apparently of little account in the house, and their mother, it appeared to him, seldom saw them. They lived their lives in the schoolroom almost entirely. He liked these two much better than he did their elder sisters. They were straightforward and unaffected, and gave him the impression of having more in them, and of being more real. This, he could not help suspecting, was the work of the little governess. There were traces of her influence on her pupils. There was certainly no other avenue through which the influence could have come.

That wild, excitable little sprite Gwen, with her fluffy hair and bright dancing eyes, attracted

him greatly; she was so natural and unspoilt, and so delighted with any little thing he did for her, or any little pleasure which he provided for her. She was so enchanted to see him whenever he appeared, and begged him so earnestly not to go whenever he got up to leave the schoolroom, that he was quite touched. She was so out of all proportion grateful for what he did, clinging to him with kisses and thanks so vehement for some trifling gift he brought her, that it made him feel almost sad; for he could not help thinking how unaccustomed she must be to have her little life made bright by the small things which make children happy.

The "sacred duty of giving pleasure" was evidently one of the many maternal duties his sister neglected and ignored.

The schoolroom was to him quite a fresh field of study and observation; for he knew nothing of schoolroom girls, their ways, habits, aims, and ambitions. Their life to him was something very novel and peculiar, and their outlook on life amused him extremely.

Their landmarks, and the importance attached to them, puzzled him much at first. It was like

exploring a new country or learning a new language. The "out" or "not out" had been hitherto as much as he could master; but now he found there were many other gradations and phases, all considered of the greatest moment by these young people in their opening lives.

"Uncle Basil, do persuade mother to let me have my hair up. I'm quite the last of the fifteens in Hamilton Gardens with a pigtail. I'm too tall now, ain't I? *Do* say you think so, and try to make her think so too."

"And me to have a pigtail, because my hair down is so hot," struck in the sprite; "it's really *boiling*. Now, do ask her, Uncle Basil, will you?"

Such speeches were Greek to him, and he would look inquiringly and with a puzzled look at the little governess for an explanation.

But when at last he did understand, and, on the next occasion that he found himself alone with Lady Travers, broached the subject according to his promise, and made an appeal for the "last of the fifteens with a pigtail," he found he had come upon one of Lady Travers's special obstinacies, and discovered that she was for keep-

ing these younger daughters of hers back as much as possible, and as long as possible.

When he expressed a little remonstrance, he was met with, "Oh, my dear Basil, I can't have so many grown-up girls about me! If Agnes has her hair up, she will look seventeen at once. She must be kept in the background. You amuse me, Basil," she added, laughing and yawning, "you are so keen about things. It's all new to you, you see. But I have been at it so many years. I've got far too many children to take interest in each one. I have to take them in the mass, or I should never do it at all. I can't individualize. I haven't time, or strength. I can only think of them as 'the grown-ups,' and 'the schoolrooms,' and 'the schoolboys.' Thank goodness, I've done with the nursery. When I divide like that, I can remember how many there are. Otherwise I never can remember even how many I've got if I'm asked in a hurry. And as to their ages, don't ask me. They're always changing, you see. But when I divide them like that, I know there are nine altogether, four boys and five girls. I was really happier when all the girls were in the schoolroom. They were more off my

hands, and gave me less trouble than they do now they are out. So I shall be glad if Juliet and Blanche soon follow Winnie's example, and then I shall get a few years' rest, and a little time to myself before Agnes comes out. And I mean to keep her in the schoolroom, keep her a child in short, as long as I can."

"And how will Agnes like that?"

Lady Travers looked surprised. "I am sure I don't know. I don't inquire into all their ideas and fancies."

Colonel Norton began to wonder whether it was not this "wholesome neglect" that made the younger girls so nice. The Harringtons were taught to think themselves so very important. But this did not make him exonerate Lady Travers.

"That is a very nice little governess of theirs," he said presently.

"She seems to do," she answered, with a yawn. "I hear no complaints on either side, which is a mercy. It's a grumble of some sort generally. If it's not the governess it's the girls, and if it's not the girls it's the governess, as a rule. But this one goes on quietly, and I never hear a word about anything. I got her in a hurry, and she

can't stay long, as she had promised herself elsewhere in a year or so. The only fault I have to find with her is that she is too keen about education and all the rest of it."

"Too keen about education?" said Colonel Norton, with raised eyebrows.

"Yes; like all the girls of her class nowadays —colleges, examination, and all the rest. She wants to go in for one of these tiresome examinations just as we shall be leaving London, and just as I want her to look after the girls while I am at Vichy. I really don't see how I am to let her go. Juliet I take with me, and Blanche can go to her brother, and the boys I have disposed of one way and another. But I don't know what to do with these two. I must see if I can't get her to put off this stupid examination."

"My dear Bertha! Put off an examination! How can you talk such nonsense? Why, you might spoil all her prospects in life."

"That's just what she says. It's such a bother. Dear me, what a bore one's schoolroom girls are! —neither fish nor fowl, a sort of inconvenient betwixt and between. Glad as I am to have done with the nursery, I sometimes wish they

were all in it still, particularly at this time of the year. It was so easy to pack them all off to a seaside lodging with the nurses when one wanted to get rid of them, and one never had need to think of them again."

Colonel Norton paced up and down the room without speaking, while his thoughts reverted to Maud Manorlands and her earnest words about a mother's responsibilities.

"You're shocked, I see, Basil," came with another yawn from the sofa. "But it's no use expecting me to be the ideal mother. I'm *not*. You must look to Georgy for that. I never did care for children, as you know, and I can't think why I was given such a lot. Dear me," the sleepy voice went on, "I wish one's sisters were more use. Perhaps *you* would try and persuade one or other of them to have the two girls? Georgy"—with a laugh—"would do anything you asked her, I know. Not that I think I can expect her, with that houseful of children, to take in more."

"Just the reason, I should think," said Colonel Norton, "one or two more or less could not make much difference. And Georgy lives, or professes

to live, a life so entirely devoted to children, that they could never be in her way."

"Georgy's love for children doesn't extend beyond her own," said Lady Travers, with a laugh. "I *have* once or twice asked her to mother some of mine when I wanted to get rid of them, but there's always been some excuse or another. Either it's that she's afraid of other children bringing the measles, or something. I don't really expect much of her. But I do think Amy, with no children and that large house, might take in my two 'Schoolrooms' for a bit."

"And won't she?"

"Not without a governess. She won't have them alone."

"Why not?" said Colonel Norton, frowning a little.

"Won't be bothered with the trouble of them, I suppose. I am sure I don't blame her myself. I can quite understand it—especially where Gwen is concerned."

"And why Gwen in particular?"

"Oh, she's such a restless, tiring little creature, never still for a moment, and always dissatisfied; crying at the least word you say; always wanting

something she has not got, or to do something one does not want her to do. I always feel I may safely say 'No' to anything she asks me, without waiting to know what it is; it's so sure to be something tiresome. I know I can't stand her in the room with me for ten minutes at a time. If I've not got a headache, she gives me one."

Colonel Norton walked to the window and looked out. This same Gwen thus described had, as we know, taken a strange hold upon him. What would he not have given to have had a little daughter like her, of his very own?

But he said nothing. What was the good of speaking? It was no use coming down upon Lady Travers. The two-edged sword was powerless here. Even a sword cannot cut through a cushion; it offers a sort of dull, muffled resistance.

"Wherever she is," continued Lady Travers, in her comfortable way, wholly unconscious of the effect she was producing, "there is sure to be a bother and a fuss. She's all of a jump herself, and she seems to have that sort of effect upon the others. The rest go on quite quietly till she dashes in among them, and then there is a noise directly. She has improved since I got

rid of the old family nurse, who spoilt her so, and been regularly in the schoolroom; but I believe she upsets it dreadfully."

"Upsets it?" said Colonel Norton. "How do you mean? In what way does she upset it?"

"Oh, she always contrives to make the others laugh and giggle in the middle of their lessons by saying something ridiculous. Bob, I believe, she can set off at any moment, though how she does it I don't know. I always find the boy quiet enough. There comes a titter (so some of the governesses have told me), and Gwen is always found to be the one who set it going. I don't understand it myself, but there it is."

It was not much wonder Lady Travers did not understand. The child had the keenest sense of humour; Lady Travers was utterly devoid of it. The child was full of deep feeling; Lady Travers had very little. Little Gwen took everything hardly; Lady Travers took things as they came. She had an easy time of it, for she saw neither the humour nor the pathos of things. And life is a comedy to those who think, and a tragedy to those who feel.

"And so," concluded Lady Travers, sleepily,

"I don't wonder that Amy should not jump at the idea of having her quiet house invaded. But I wish all the same, Basil, you would try and see what you could do to persuade her; for I am at my wits' end what to do with the girls."

"I will, certainly," said Colonel Norton, gravely.

He left the room shortly after, for his patience with his sister was nearly exhausted; and, besides, she was nearly asleep. He made his way to the schoolroom. He felt that there he should find a more congenial atmosphere. He knocked lightly at the door, but no one answered.

"I suppose they are all out," he said to himself, so he opened the door and looked in. The room was empty. Or at least he thought so at first; but, on hearing a slight movement, he penetrated further, and saw little Gwen lying back in an armchair, with a mournful expression on her usually bright little face.

"What is the matter, my dear little girl?" he said, advancing to her, and drawing a chair close to hers. "And why are you all alone?"

"I've got a headache," she answered, with a slight quiver in her voice. "The others are gone out walking, and I'm so dull all alone."

"Does anybody know you have got a headache?" was his next question, as his thoughts reverted to the comfortable figure he had left on the sofa in the drawing-room.

"Oh yes," replied the little girl; "Vally knows. But she had to go out walking with Agnes and Bob, so she was obliged to leave me alone. But she said she would take as short a walk as she possibly could, and then come back to me."

"And do you often have headaches, my child?" he said tenderly.

"Yes," said the child, putting her hands to her head, "*rather* often."

Her eyes grew dim for a moment, his words and tones of sympathy bringing tears into them.

"Shall I stay with you till she comes back?" asked Colonel Norton.

"Oh, Uncle Basil, do, do! That would be nice!" she exclaimed.

He laid his cool hand on her hot little forehead. "You must not get excited," he said, smiling, "or I shall do you more harm than good."

"Perhaps you could tell me a nice quiet story," she said wistfully.

"Perhaps I could," he answered, smiling down upon her.

"What will it be about?" she questioned eagerly.

He waited for a moment before he answered, and then said, "About a beautiful lady who is kind to every one, who always tries to make her little children good and happy, and who is good and happy herself."

"I should like to hear about her," the child said, settling herself back in her armchair with a look of supreme content.

Then he began, and having in his mind's eye Lady Travers, and by means of contrast bringing out more strongly all motherly virtues and all motherly love and unselfishness, he half unconsciously painted to his interested little listener Maud Manorlands in her home. Warming with his subject, there returned to him, by the power of association, the lovely surroundings with which the thought of her was connected; so that he wove into his tale and brought vividly before the child the sweet sounds and sights of spring—the cuckoo and the nightingale; the wild flowers and the blossoms; the forms of the pretty children

playing in the woods or in the gardens; and Maud, the presiding genius of it all. He hardly knew he had painted a real person until he stopped.

"Oh, Uncle Basil," exclaimed little Gwen, "*what* a pretty story! Is it true? Is the lady real? Is she alive? Do you know her?"

"Yes," he answered, smiling down upon the eager little questioner. "She is, I am glad to think, a real live lady, and the story is quite true."

"I *would* like to know her!" the child said, clasping her hands together.

"Perhaps you shall some day," he said thoughtfully, his hand gently passing over her hair.

Little Gwen lay quiet for a few minutes, and then said, "Vally has got a beautiful lady, too, who she often tells me about. She is good and kind to everybody, too. Vally loves her very much. She keeps her picture in her room. Would you like to see it, Uncle Basil? She is such a pretty lady; I like to look at her face."

"Yes, dear, I should like to see it. But never mind now; another time will do. You had better lie quite still till your headache is better."

"It *is* better," she answered; "your story has taken it quite away. Pretty stories often do. But

no one ever tells me any now, except, of course, Vally. Look how I can move my head about! I could not turn it round when you came in without its hurting me before you came in, and look what I can do now!"

As she spoke, she shook her fluffy head about till her wild hair stood round her face like a halo, and her bright eyes shone out like stars in the midst.

"You're quite a doctor, ain't you, Uncle Basil?"

"I have had a great deal to do with sick people and illness, dear," he said; "you know, your poor Aunt Adelaide was a great invalid."

The child looked at him wistfully. A deeply sympathetic expression came into her eyes, but she did not speak.

"I'm going to fetch the picture now," she said, after a short pause.

She got up as she spoke, and disappeared into an adjoining room, returning almost immediately with a large photograph in her hand, at which she gazed admiringly as she walked along.

"There!" she said triumphantly as she put it on his lap, "isn't that a beautiful lady? Almost

as beautiful as the one in your story, I should think."

As the child spoke, Colonel Norton had somehow an undefined feeling of what was coming, and that he knew what he was going to see. So that he was hardly surprised when, on looking down, he saw before him the face of Maud Manorlands, and realized that the "Beautiful lady" of Miss Vally's stories and the heroine of his own were one and the same person.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVER-WIDENING CIRCLE.

"Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence."

NEVERTHELESS, he started just a little, and the child at once exclaimed, "*Do* you know her, Uncle Basil?"

"Yes, dear, I do; and she is as good as she is beautiful."

"Oh, then, Uncle Basil, if she is good and kind, do ask her not to take Vally away. She wants her for her own little boys. What should I do without Vally. How lonely I should be!"

"Come and live with me, little Fluff," he said

fondly, laying his hands caressingly on her wild hair. "I am all alone and very lonely."

The child responded quickly and joyfully to his caress.

"Oh yes, yes," she said eagerly. "Promise me, will you, Uncle Basil, that you will ask mother to let me come and live with you when Vally goes away from us?"

"What will mother say to that?" he asked.

"Oh, *she* won't mind," answered little Gwen. "She doesn't want me herself, you know. She says I always give her a headache."

Colonel Norton's brow darkened at her words.

The child looked sad, too. Her little face took a wistful and pathetic expression, and her lips quivered as she said, "Father *always* wanted me, and I never gave *him* a headache."

Colonel Norton took the little girl on his lap, and kissed away the gathering tears. He sighed as he felt the nestling head against his shoulder and the tight clasp of the clinging little fingers. She had settled herself so confidingly in his arms, with one of his hands clasped in both of hers.

"Lie still, darling," he said, "and I will tell you another story."

And he told her of a child who was one day standing by a pond, throwing stones into the

water, and watching the circles they made grow wider and wider, till they merged into space and were lost to his view. He tried to follow them with his eyes and could not, though it had seemed so easy at first.

He rubbed his eyes, and tried with a new stone, and another, and another; but, let him keep his eyes as wide open as he would, he always lost sight of the circles, and tried to follow them in vain. A bewildered sensation came over him. He felt puzzled and confused. "Oh!" he cried at last, "what becomes of the circles, and where do they go?"

But there was no answer to his question, for no one could tell him what he wanted to know.

The story had just come to an end, when the schoolroom party returned from their walk, and, as soon as Colonel Norton could get the little governess alone, he inquired of her about Gwen's headaches, and extracted from her (though he felt she gave the information unwillingly) the fact that she could not get Lady Travers to attach any importance to them. The little girl, Lady Travers said, was fidgety, nervous, and excitable, and had been so from a baby.

There was nothing in the world to be uneasy about, and their best plan was to take as little

notice as possible. The more Gwen was petted the worse she would get, and Miss Vally was over-fussy.

"But I do not think I am," said the young girl, earnestly. "I am sure something might be done about these headaches, even if they are nervous. I do what I can in excusing her her lessons, and making those she does as light as possible; but she seems to me to have headaches more frequently lately than she did. Do you think, Colonel Norton," she added shyly and hesitatingly, "that *you* could speak to Lady Travers about it, and try to persuade her to have medical advice?"

"I will certainly do so," said Colonel Norton, gravely; and he left the room, struck with the fact of how much there be, in these days of "grandmotherly" legislation and reform, of neglect of the children of the upper classes.

Why, if little Gwen, he reflected, had been the child of a working man, the district visitor, or the officers of the country-holiday fund, would have boarded her out in the country among the hayfields, or sent her to a home by the sea. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, even, might have stepped in, and seen she stood in need of medical advice.

He determined to lose no time in speaking to his sister on the subject, and went straight back into the room where he had left her for that purpose.

However, he found the drawing-room empty, and the footman, who was drawing up the blinds, informed him that her ladyship had gone to lie down, and that at these times no one was allowed to disturb her by delivering messages at her door.

To the uninitiated, such as Colonel Norton, it appeared that that was what his sister was doing when he left her half an hour ago, and that, moreover, she was very rarely doing anything else. But it was evidently hopeless to get hold of her at present, so the attempt must be given up for the time being.

It struck him, as he went downstairs, that George Hardy would be the very man to consult about the little girl. Maud had spoken more than once of his skill as regarded children. He thought he would go and see himself in the mean time. He wanted to pay him another friendly visit, and he might just mention little Gwen to him.

He carried out his intention later in the afternoon, when he knew the young man would be likely to return from his rounds, and arrived

at his door at about seven o'clock. He was informed that the doctor was at home, but that he was engaged with a lady at present.

Colonel Norton told the servant not to disturb him, but that he would wait till it suited the doctor to come and speak to him. As he mounted the stairs, following the maid to the room where he had seen Hardy before, he could not help thinking to himself that the chain of events seemed likely to offer him the opportunity he wanted of making George Hardy and little Miss Vally known to each other, and was amused at the idea of finding himself in the very novel position of a matchmaker. And, by the way, what a curious coincidence it was that the circle of Maud's influence should have reached, as it evidently had, that young girl!

When he reached the drawing-room, he found the folding-doors which divided the room in two were shut, and that Hardy was in the back room in conversation with a lady. He could hear the voices quite plainly, though not plainly enough to distinguish what they said, and he thought he knew the lady's voice. Presently he became certain that he did. The voice was the little governess's, the very person of whom he was just thinking!

Another curious coincidence! What could she be doing there? Was she consulting him about herself, he wondered, or could she also have taken it into her head to consult him about Gwen? But in a few minutes he was rather startled by the sound of her laugh, and by tones in the conversation which showed that the speakers were not professionally engaged, but were talking about things apparently mutually interesting, and in an intimate and familiar manner. Could it be that, by a coincidence more extraordinary still, the climax he was anticipating was already reached — brought about, perhaps, by Lady Manorlands, their apparently mutual friend?

He began to feel almost as if George had played him false, or, at any rate, had not been quite open with him. Just as he had come to this conclusion, he heard the voice of the servant in the next room informing her master that Colonel Norton was waiting to see him—an announcement which was followed by an exclamation of pleasure from George, and the instant throwing open of the folding doors.

Yes, he was not mistaken. There stood little Miss Vally, looking certainly surprised and pleased, but by no means, as he had half expected, shy or discomfited. There was not an atom of self-

consciousness in her manner, as she looked up at him with her usual frankness and said—

"How do you do again, Colonel Norton?"

He looked from the girl to the doctor, and from the doctor to the girl again, puzzled.

George Hardy also looked from the girl to Colonel Norton, and back again, apparently puzzled also. Then he said quietly—

"I see you are already acquainted; otherwise I was just going to ask you to let me introduce —my sister."

CHAPTER V.

VAIN SPECULATIONS.

"Sympathy is a feeling related to an object. Sentiment is the same feeling, seeking itself alone."

THUS suddenly and in a moment did Colonel Norton's little castle in the air collapse. He stood, the picture of bewilderment, scanning the two faces in front of him, seeing the family likeness between them, and remembering as he did so that from the first Miss Vally had recalled some one to him, though he had never been able to say who it was.

As soon as he had collected his thoughts again, he was obliged to account to the brother and sister for his palpable astonishment by owning

to them what his plan had been, which confession was, of course, received by them with great amusement.

"Yes," he said to Hardy, as he joined in the laugh against himself, "this is the very lady of whom I have spoken to you more than once. And I am much disappointed," he added, "for I shall never find such a wife for you again, I know. But I see now that you are as like as two peas. I always said there was a great likeness in your ways of thinking, you know. But why," he concluded, turning to the young girl—"why do you go about under a feigned name?"

"Under a feigned name?" she repeated, looking puzzled.

"Yes. You told me, or at any rate the children did, that your name was Valentine."

"So it is," she rejoined; "my name *is* Valentine—Valentine Hardy."

"Oh, I see," he said; "it is your christian name. Now, why did I jump to the conclusion that it was your surname? Ah, well," he went on, laughing, as he took his leave, not wishing to intrude further on the hardly earned leisure of the brother and sister, "I shall always think it a great pity. But I suppose, Miss Hardy, I must make up my mind you shall go in for ambition

instead of matrimony; and as you are so wonderfully useful where you are, it would perhaps be a pity you should marry—at any rate just yet. So I will console myself with that reflection in order to soften my disappointment. For, as I said before, I shall never find such a wife for your brother again."

And, so saying, he went his way. "Now, *what,*" he mused to himself as soon as he got out of the house—"what on earth can Maud's mysterious interest in those two young people arise from?"

But the more he wondered the farther he seemed to get from coming to any conclusion. He speculated in vain. He found himself wondering whether, if he were to mention this girl's name to her, her face would assume the same air of deep, almost anxious, interest it was wont to do when George Hardy was in question. He almost longed to make the experiment. However, it was no use thinking about it, for he would have no chance of doing so for ages. He must now wait patiently until October before there was a hope of any light being thrown upon the subject. Till then he was as far off as ever from his point.

As he walked away he suddenly remembered

that, in the change which had been given to his thoughts, he had quite forgotten the main object of his visit to Hardy—the talk he had meant to have about little Gwen. It was too late now; but he made up his mind to secure Lady Travers's attention that very evening without fail, and speak to her seriously on the subject.

Meantime he bethought him of his promise of trying to get Mrs. Ellis to take charge of the Travers schoolroom girls for a while, and, knowing her to have arrived at an hotel in preparation for the wedding, he bent his steps thither. He found her at home, and after a little chat he broached the subject, explaining their sister's difficulties as regarded her younger daughters.

Now, Mrs. Ellis had an uncomfortable feeling that her brother did not worship at her shrine; nay, more, that he even ventured sometimes to disapprove of her. She was vulnerable only where she thought she did not get applause. She "scented blame from afar," and it put her not only on the defensive, but on her mettle; for she was piqued by the feeling, and wanted to win him over. She therefore made no difficulties, but instantly consented to his proposal, because she wanted to right herself in his estimation, and to shine in his eyes.

She was really bored to death at the idea of having the girls. She was so afraid they might interfere in some way with her comfort, or interrupt her in some of her own plans; so totally was she unaccustomed to do anything she did not wish to do, or to put herself out of her way for others. Outwardly, she let none of this appear, but agreed to Colonel Norton's requests in every respect, with a great deal to say of how glad she always was to help other people and to make herself useful, with other wholly untrue statements of the kind. Inwardly, she was saying to herself that the girls could spend most of the day with their cousins, the Harringtons, and so not be in her way.

That evening, when Colonel Norton informed Lady Travers of the successful result of his mission, he took occasion to speak to her also about little Gwen; and with such good effect that the next day George Hardy was sent for, and the little girl placed under his care.

The opinion he gave of her was on the whole a reassuring one. There was nothing, he said, radically wrong with the child, but she was living just the life she ought not to live. What she wanted was a free country life, and to be out-of-doors as much as possible. She must leave

London directly, and be for some months either at the seaside or in some bracing country air.

The upshot of this verdict was that Valentine Hardy at once declared it her intention to postpone her examination for another six months, and to go with little Gwen wherever Lady Travers settled to send her—which self-sacrifice was accepted by Lady Travers with the utmost *sang-froid* and as a matter of course.

Mrs. Ellis's offer therefore ran to waste, and Colonel Norton could not help feeling rather glad it should be so; for he had felt, all the time he was talking to her on the subject, very doubtful whether the girls, and especially little Gwen, would have been happy with her.

A day or two after, he found himself in all the bustle of a smart London wedding. He arrived in church in good time, having promised Lady Travers to act as sidesman to her part of the family and guests, and to see, as she expressed it, "that things went straight, and all the rest."

The sight of little Gwen at the door among the bridesmaids was to him by far the most interesting part of the proceedings, her bright eyes that nothing escaped shining out of her mass of tangled fluffy hair, and her little hands holding an enormous bouquet, shaking slightly.

He remained talking to her for some minutes, and entering into her excitement; but his own relations now began to arrive, and his hands were soon full.

First came Mrs. Ellis, gorgeously apparelled in a costume which was *tout ce qu'il y a du plus chic,* followed by her admiring elderly husband. Then came Mrs. Harrington and her string of boys and girls, talking loudly to him all the way up the aisle about her own affairs. What a bustle it had been to get all the children dressed and off so early; how nearly they had missed the train; how good little Molly had been on the journey, how still she had sat, what funny things she had said; what wise things little Harry had said about weddings; how lovely Harriette looked in her bridesmaid's dress; how fortunate it was the colour chosen suited her complexion so perfectly, etc.!

He got her and her tribe into a pew as quickly as possible, and then left them to attend to the new-comers.

Presently he saw advancing up the aisle the Baroness Carrachi and her daughter, and he went forward to find them seats.

He had time to observe the difference in the demeanour of the two—the girl kneeling down

as she entered the pew; the mother seeming entirely oblivious of the fact that she was in church, looking about her, nodding, chatting, and laughing.

And now, moving slowly up the church, came the long train of bridesmaids and choir-boys, and the ceremony began.

When it was over, Colonel Norton tried to find the baroness and her daughter again, for he wanted to get an opportunity of speaking to the latter; but the claims of his family kept him fully occupied at the church door, and he did not succeed in doing so.

He saw them, however, later, as he was standing on the landing of his sister's house, watching the people come up the stairs. No doubt, he reflected, the baroness was a very handsome woman, and apparently an attractive one, for, as she reached the top of the staircase, she was surrounded at once. Her daughter meanwhile stood, just as Maud had described, patiently behind. She was hidden in the crowd, and he could not see her well, nor reach her, though he tried hard to do so.

The usual routine followed: the inspection of the presents; the disappearance of the bride to put on her travelling-dress; her reappearance, and her departure.

When all this was over, Colonel Norton turned round in search of the pair he had been observing; but they were not to be seen. They had apparently gone off before the bride.

Rather disappointed, he was proceeding upstairs again, when his thoughts were distracted by the sight of little Gwen thrown down on a chair in the back part of the hall, in floods of tears. Miss Hardy was bending over her.

"She cannot bear seeing any one go away or saying good-bye," she whispered to him as he advanced. "And then they say she has no feeling," she added rather indignantly, as she took the child in her arms and soothed and kissed her.

Colonel Norton saw it was better he should not show himself just then, and therefore drew back to allow Miss Hardy to pass, as, with her arms round the child and the little girl clinging closely to her, she wound her way upstairs and passed out of sight.

Musing that it was a pretty sight, he went to get his hat, and left the house, with the reflection running in his head that "marriage makes one union, but many separations."

Mrs. Ellis had reproached him at the breakfast with not having been to see her again, adding that if he came to the hotel immediately

after the wedding festivities were over, he would still find her, as she was not going home till a late afternoon train.

He had promised to do so; and now wended his way thither, calling at his club on the way to get his letters. He was delayed there by finding one or two which required immediate answers, and the consequence was that, when he reached the hotel, he was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Ellis had just that moment gone.

Not altogether sorry, he was turning away when his ear was attracted by a very eager voice asking for Mrs. Ellis. The same answer was given to the inquirer as had just been given to himself, but it was received in a very different manner, and apparently with very different feelings.

"Gone!" he heard a young voice exclaim in a tone of despair—"gone!"

He turned hastily round, and saw a young woman with a pale face trying in vain to suppress a burst of tears. She had sunk down in the porter's chair, and her whole form was shaking with the sobs she seemed unable to control.

He was just going to advance towards her, when a lady coming down the hotel stairs fore-

stalled him, and, thinking a lady was perhaps a more fitting person than himself to inquire into the cause of the young creature's trouble, he drew back.

Bit by bit the lady extracted the girl's story from her. There was nothing very new in it; it is one, unfortunately, only too common. A hurried order for a gown at only a day or two's notice, a promise of an instant settlement, and a broken promise on the part of the customer.

The poor girl's part of the contract had been conscientiously fulfilled. She was determined, she said, that the lady should have her dress in time, even if she had to sit up all night to finish it; and she had done so, nursing a sick mother all the time. They had got behind with the rent, she added, and were looking to the money this very day to pay the landlord, who was threatening to turn them out did they not do so.

But on the other side the contract had been broken, and now the lady was gone out of town, and what the consequence would be to her poor sick mother, the girl did not dare to think.

A small piece of paper had fluttered from her hand, and was lying at Colonel Norton's feet. In the abandonment of her despair, she was not aware that it had done so.

He picked it up with a view to returning it to her, when she should be more composed; and, the sad story having now come to an end, he was advancing to do so, when his eye fell upon it, and an angry exclamation broke from him.

He read the following words:—

"Due by Mrs. Ellis to Anne Smith.

"To making a dress for wedding; providing velvet, lace trimmings, linings," etc.

There was a receipt-stamp upon it, but it was not a receipt; it was an unpaid bill.

He raised his hat to the lady and said, "I think you may leave this unfortunate affair to me. I am sorry to say the defaulter in question is my relation. I am bound, therefore, to repair her act of carelessness."

Then turning to the girl, he asked her to come into the hotel office and receipt the bill, which, as he happened to have his cheque-book in his pocket, he could immediately pay.

It was but the work of a few minutes, but it went to his heart to see the radiant face of the poor girl, as she thanked him over and over again for what she called his "great kindness," and what he called her rights and a simple act of justice.

But his indignation against Mrs. Ellis was

thoroughly aroused, remembering as he did her boasting conversation with Mrs. Harrington on the subject of dressmakers, and her high-flown theories, so flagrantly contradicted by her conduct. "An arm-chair philanthropist indeed!" he muttered to himself as he walked down Piccadilly, on his way to his club, where he penned a letter to his sister, telling her what he had done.

The letter was short and to the point. It contained a simple account of the incident as it occurred. Nevertheless, it caused a good many tears to be shed by Mrs. Ellis, whether of mortification or sorrow it is not for us to say. We will hope it was the latter, for "the tear in the eye of the self-satisfied man is the lens through which he first sees heaven."

Colonel Norton did not return to Lady Travers's, for the house was all in confusion, and he knew she was not likely to reappear all the evening. So he dressed and dined at his club. "I must soothe my savage soul with music to-night," he said to himself; and he went to a Richter concert.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RICHTER CONCERT.

"Music is a language by itself, and enables us to express and to give force to those deeper feelings of the human heart which struggle for expression."

COLONEL NORTON felt its influence directly he got inside St. James's Hall, which he did in time for the conclusion of the first piece.

He remained standing at the door where he had entered till the movement was finished, casting his eyes, as he did so, over the closely packed audience, recognizing an acquaintance here and there among them. As his eye travelled along the rows in the distance where his seat was likely to be, it suddenly lighted on the Baroness Carrachi and her daughter, sitting together in the front row.

He could see, even from that distance, how different their pose was. The girl sat so still and moved her head so little, such a contrast to the fidgety, restless movements of her mother at her side. The baroness was never still for a moment; he could see, by the flashing of the diamonds in her hair, how restless her head was. She was always on the look-out for something or

some one, either to admire or talk to her, he supposed.

He wondered to see them without a man in attendance. After all, he reflected, as his eyes rested on the girl, there is a great charm in repose.

On looking again, he saw he was wrong about their being alone. He saw, by the position of the baroness's head, that there was a man on the other side of her, to whom she was talking, or would talk directly the stopping of the music gave her a chance. Of course, the man was next *her*. The seat on the other side of the daughter, he observed, was empty. As usual, the mother was monopolizing all the attention.

The movement came to an end, and he advanced to his place. As he did so he found his seat was not only in their row, but next to theirs. By a curious chance, which he was conscious gave him a slight feeling of gratification, it was the very seat he had noticed was vacant. It was next to Miss Ashley.

Here, then, at last was a chance of speaking to her without being broken in upon by the baroness; for the latter's head was turned away, and she was busy chattering to her neighbour.

He dropped quietly into the seat. The girl looked round for a minute, and recognized him with a grave bow.

He saw now that she was much prettier than he had thought. He had never seen her in anything but a hat before. She had a very pretty little head, well set on her shoulders, and there was a very *distingué* air about her which her mother lacked. Her hair was fair and wavy, bringing out in contrast the darkness of her eyes and eyelashes. But she was too grave to be pretty, and her face wanted brightness and animation. It was almost expressionless at times.

However, he was determined to talk to her, and not to be put off by the distant nature of her bow of recognition. So he made some remark about the music, and the baroness, attracted by the sound of voices, turned round.

He became at once aware that all chance of conversation with the daughter was gone. The baroness greeted him with the greatest effusion, and nothing would do but that he must change places with his neighbour and sit next her. The girl rose at once, and he was obliged, reluctantly, to take his seat between them. He hoped, however, to get a few words with her whenever the baroness talked to her friend on the other side.

But now the music began again, and every one was silent.

Madame Sand said she had been struggling throughout her life to give expression to the ideas which the musical notes of Chopin enabled her to express directly. This was not Chopin's music; it was Wagner's unsatisfied and unsatisfying music —one of those overtures which seems to express and embody all the unrest of the present day.

Colonel Norton watched the thoughtful face at his side, and wondered what thoughts the music was expressing for her. They were sad ones, he feared, to judge by her face. Did it express unrest to her, he wondered. She looked so calm and quiet.

As the reeds took up the plaintive wail in the "Lohengrin," the eyes seemed almost to fill with tears. To his dismay he caught the sound of a sob beside him, a sort of catch in the breath.

He looked away quickly, not wishing her to know she was observed. But when he glanced at her again, she was sitting as still as ever, her face as immovable, the small head had the same poise, the whole figure the same attitude of repose that had struck him before.

The applause was tremendous at the con-

clusion, and the baroness turned to him for sympathy, exclaiming loudly, as she clapped her small well-gloved hands together, "Ah, bravo! bravo!"

Somehow he wished it had been the daughter instead of the mother who had turned to him for answering sympathy and appreciation. He looked at her again. Her hands lay in her lap in a way which added to the sense of repose about her. He was seized with a desire to make her speak.

"And you, Miss Ashley?" he said, turning full upon her. "What did you think of it?"

She looked surprised at first, and as if she thought her opinion were little worth having, or was unaccustomed to be asked for it. But, on his repeating his question, she turned her face to him for a moment and said, "I thought it was beautiful!"

Her manner was almost indifferent, but he noticed how tightly her small hands were clenched together.

He looked at her again once or twice during the evening as the concert went on. He noted her breath came quick and short sometimes; and, meeting her eyes as it were accidentally, once when the beauty of some passage struck them both forcibly, he saw how soft was their expres-

sion. But he had no further chance of conversation, as the baroness completely took possession of him whenever there was a pause in the music, and until the moment when he handed her into the carriage at the conclusion of the concert.

As he walked home he reflected with some pleasure that he should have an opportunity of making further acquaintance with little Miss Ashley at Egerton Court, and according to Maud's expressed desire.

His autumn prospects pleased him. It was pleasant to look forward to meeting in the same house two women who, each in her different way, interested him, and whose histories were not easy to discover.

The next day he left London on his electioneering campaign, and it was fully two months and a half before he set out for his tour of visits in the north. By that time the sitting member for his county had resigned, and he had come off victorious in a closely contested election.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3061.

COLONEL NORTON. BY FLORENCE MONTGOMERY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.