

MY NOVEL - VOLUME 8.

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BOOK EIGHTH.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

THE ABUSE OF INTELLECT.

There is at present so vehement a flourish of trumpets, and so prodigious a roll of the drum, whenever we are called upon to throw up our hats, and cry "Huzza" to the "March of Enlightenment," that, out of that very spirit of contradiction natural to all rational animals, one is tempted to stop one's ears, and say, "Gently, gently; LIGHT is noiseless: how comes 'Enlightenment' to make such a clatter? Meanwhile, if it be not impertinent, pray, where is Enlightenment marching to?" Ask that question of any six of the loudest bawlers in the procession, and I'll wager tenpence to California that you get six very unsatisfactory answers. One respectable gentleman, who, to our great astonishment, insists upon calling himself "a slave," but has a remarkably free way of expressing his opinions, will reply, "Enlightenment is marching towards the seven points of the Charter." Another, with his hair /a la jeune France/, who has taken a fancy to his friend's wife, and is rather embarrassed with his own, asserts that Enlightenment is proceeding towards the Rights of Women, the reign of Social Love, and the annihilation of Tyrannical Prejudice. A third, who has the air of a man well-to-do in the middle class, more modest in his hopes, because he neither wishes to have his head broken by his errand-boy, nor his wife carried off to an Agapemone by his apprentice, does not take Enlightenment a step farther than a siege on Debrett, and a cannonade on the Budget. Illiberal man! the march that he swells will soon trample him under foot. No one fares so ill in a crowd as the man who is wedged in the middle. A fourth, looking wild and dreamy, as if he had come out of the cave of Trophonius, and who is a mesmerizer and a mystic, thinks Enlightenment is in full career towards the good old days of alchemists and necromancers. A fifth, whom one might take for a Quaker, asserts that the march of Enlightenment is a crusade for universal philanthropy, vegetable diet, and the perpetuation of peace by means of speeches, which certainly do produce a very contrary effect from the Philippics of Demosthenes! The sixth—good fellow without a rag on his back—does not care a straw where the march goes. He can't be worse off than he is; and it is quite immaterial to him whether he goes to the dog-star above, or

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the bottomless pit below. I say nothing, however, against the march, while we take it altogether. Whatever happens, one is in good company; and though I am somewhat indolent by nature, and would rather stay at home with Locke and Burke (dull dogs though they were) than have my thoughts set off helter-skelter with those cursed trumpets and drums, blown and dub-a-dubbed by fellows whom I vow to heaven I would not trust with a five-pound note,—still, if I must march, I must; and so deuce take the hindmost! But when it comes to individual marchers upon their own account,—privateers and condottieri of Enlightenment,—who have filled their pockets with Lucifer matches, and have a sublime contempt for their neighbour's barns and hay-ricks, I don't see why I should throw myself into the seventh heaven of admiration and ecstasy.

If those who are eternally rhapsodizing on the celestial blessings that are to follow Enlightenment, Universal Knowledge, and so forth, would just take their eyes out of their pockets, and look about them, I would respectfully inquire if they have never met any very knowing and enlightened gentleman, whose acquaintance is by no means desirable. If not, they are monstrous lucky. Every man must judge by his own experience; and the worst rogues I have ever encountered were amazingly well-informed clever fellows. From dunderheads and dunces we can protect ourselves, but from your sharpwitted gentleman, all enlightenment and no prejudice, we have but to cry, "Heaven defend us!" It is true, that the rogue (let him be ever so enlightened) usually comes to no good himself, —though not before he has done harm enough to his neighbours. But that only shows that the world wants something else in those it rewards besides intelligence per se and in the abstract; and is much too old a world to allow any Jack Horner to pick out its plums for his own personal gratification. Hence a man of very moderate intelligence, who believes in God, suffers his heart to beat with human sympathies, and keeps his eyes off your strongbox, will perhaps gain a vast deal more power than knowledge ever gives to a rogue.

Wherefore, though I anticipate an outcry against me on the part of the blockheads, who, strange to say, are the most credulous idolators of Enlightenment, and if knowledge were power, would rot on a dunghill, yet, nevertheless, I think all really enlightened men will agree with me, that when one falls in with detached sharpshooters from the general March of Enlightenment, it is no reason that we should make ourselves a target, because Enlightenment has furnished them with a gun. It has, doubtless, been already remarked by the judicious reader that of the numerous characters introduced into this work, the larger portion belong to that species which we call the INTELLECTUAL,—that through them are analyzed and developed human intellect, in various forms and directions. So that this History, rightly considered, is a kind of humble familiar Epic, or, if you prefer it, a long Serio-Comedy, upon the Varieties of English Life in this our Century, set in movement by the intelligences most prevalent. And where more ordinary and less refined types of the species round and complete the survey of our passing generation, they will often suggest, by contrast, the deficiencies which mere intellectual culture leaves in

the human being. Certainly, I have no spite against intellect and enlightenment. Heaven forbid I should be such a Goth! I am only the advocate for common-sense and fair play. I don't think an able man necessarily an angel; but I think if his heart match his head, and both proceed in the Great March under the divine Oriflamine, he goes as near to the angel as humanity will permit: if not, if he has but a penn'orth of heart to a pound of brains, I say, "/Bon jour, mon ange!/ I see not the starry upward wings, but the grovelling cloven-hoof." I 'd rather be offuscated by the Squire of Hazeldean than enlightened by Randal Leslie. Every man to his taste. But intellect itself (not in the philosophical but the ordinary sense of the term) is rarely, if ever, one completed harmonious agency; it is not one faculty, but a compound of many, some of which are often at war with each other, and mar the concord of the whole. Few of us but have some predominant faculty, in itself a strength; but which, usurping unseasonably dominion over the rest, shares the lot of all tyranny, however brilliant, and leaves the empire weak against disaffection within, and invasion from without. Hence, intellect may be perverted in a man of evil disposition, and sometimes merely wasted in a man of excellent impulses, for want of the necessary discipline, or of a strong ruling motive. I doubt if there be one person in the world who has obtained a high reputation for talent, who has not met somebody much cleverer than himself, which said somebody has never obtained any reputation at all! Men like Audley Egerton are constantly seen in the great positions of life; while men like Harley L'Estrange, who could have beaten them hollow in anything equally striven for by both, float away down the stream, and, unless some sudden stimulant arouse their dreamy energies, vanish out of sight into silent graves. If Hamlet and Polonius were living now, Polonius would have a much better chance of being a Cabinet Minister, though Hamlet would unquestionably be a much more intellectual character. What would become of Hamlet? Heaven knows! Dr. Arnold said, from his experience of a school, that the difference between one man and another was not mere ability,—it was energy. There is a great deal of truth in that saying.

Submitting these hints to the judgment and penetration of the sagacious, I enter on the fresh division of this work, and see already Randal Leslie gnawing his lips on the background. The German poet observes that the Cow of Isis is to some the divine symbol of knowledge, to others but the milch cow, only regarded for the pounds of butter she will yield. O tendency of our age, to look on Isis as the milch cow! O prostitution of the grandest desires to the basest uses! Gaze on the goddess, Randal Leslie, and get ready thy churn and thy scales. Let us see what the butter will fetch in the market.

CHAPTER II.

A new Reign has commenced. There has been a general election; the unpopularity of the Administration has been apparent at the hustings. Audley Egerton, hitherto returned by vast majorities, has barely escaped defeat—thanks to a majority of five. The expenses of his election are said to have been prodigious. "But who can stand against such wealth as Egerton's,—no doubt backed, too, by the Treasury purse?" said the defeated candidate. It is towards the close of October; London is already full; parliament will meet in less than a fortnight.

In one of the principal apartments of that hotel in which foreigners may discover what is meant by English comfort, and the price which foreigners must pay for it, there sat two persons side by side, engaged in close conversation. The one was a female, in whose pale clear complexion and raven hair, in whose eyes, vivid with a power of expression rarely bestowed on the beauties of the North, we recognize Beatrice, Marchesa di Negra. Undeniably handsome as was the Italian lady, her companion, though a man, and far advanced into middle age, was yet more remarkable for personal advantages. There was a strong family likeness between the two; but there was also a striking contrast in air, manner, and all that stamps on the physiognomy the idiosyncrasies of character. There was something of gravity, of earnestness and passion, in Beatrice's countenance when carefully examined; her smile at times might be false, but it was rarely ironical, never cynical. Her gestures, though graceful, were unrestrained and frequent. You could see she was a daughter of the South. Her companion, on the contrary, preserved on the fair, smooth face, to which years had given scarcely a line or wrinkle, something that might have passed, at first glance, for the levity and thoughtlessness of a gay and youthful nature; but the smile, though exquisitely polished, took at times the derision of a sneer. In his manners he was as composed and as free from gesture as an Englishman. His hair was of that red brown with which the Italian painters produce such marvellous effects of colour; and if here and there a silver thread gleamed through the locks, it was lost at once amidst their luxuriance. His eyes were light, and his complexion, though without much colour, was singularly transparent. His beauty, indeed, would have been rather womanly than masculine, but for the height and sinewy spareness of a frame in which muscular strength was rather adorned than concealed by an admirable elegance of proportion. You would never have guessed this man to be an Italian; more likely you would have supposed him a Parisian. He conversed in French, his dress was of French fashion, his mode of thought seemed French. Not that he was like the Frenchman of the present day,—an animal, either rude or reserved; but your ideal of the marquis of the old regime, the roue of the Regency.

Italian, however, he was, and of a race renowned in Italian history. But, as if ashamed of his country and his birth, he affected to be a

citizen of the world. Heaven help the world if it hold only such citizens!

"But, Giulio," said Beatrice di Negra, speaking in Italian, "even granting that you discover this girl, can you suppose that her father will ever consent to your alliance? Surely you know too well the nature of your kinsman?"

"Tu to trompes, ma soeur," replied Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera, in French as usual,—"tu to trompes; I knew it before he had gone through exile and penury. How can I know it now? But comfort yourself, my too anxious Beatrice, I shall not care for his consent, till I 've made sure of his daughter's."

"But how win that in despite of the father?"

"Eh, mordieu!" interrupted the count, with true French gayety; "what would become of all the comedies ever written, if marriages were not made in despite of the father? Look you," he resumed, with a very slight compression of his lip, and a still slighter movement in his chair,— "look you, this is no question of ifs and buts! it is a question of must and shall,—a question of existence to you and to me. When Danton was condemned to the guillotine, he said, flinging a pellet of bread at the nose of his respectable judge, 'Mon individu sera bientôt dans le neant.' My patrimony is there already! I am loaded with debts. I see before me, on the one side, ruin or suicide; on the other side, wedlock and wealth."

"But from those vast possessions which you have been permitted to enjoy so long, have you really saved nothing against the time when they might be reclaimed at your hands?"

"My sister," replied the count, "do I look like a man who saved? Besides, when the Austrian Emperor, unwilling to raze from his Lombard domains a name and a House so illustrious as our kinsman's, and desirous, while punishing that kinsman's rebellion, to reward my adherence, forbore the peremptory confiscation of those vast possessions at which my mouth waters while we speak, but, annexing them to the crown during pleasure, allowed me, as the next of male kin, to retain the revenues of one half for the same very indefinite period,—had I not every reason to suppose that before long I could so influence his Imperial Majesty, or his minister, as to obtain a decree that might transfer the whole, unconditionally and absolutely, to myself? And methinks I should have done so, but for this accursed, intermeddling English Milord, who has never ceased to besiege the court or the minister with alleged extenuations of our cousin's rebellion, and proofless assertions that I shared it in order to entangle my kinsman, and betrayed it in order to profit by his spoils. So that, at last, in return for all my services, and in answer to all my claims, I received from the minister himself this cold reply, Count of Peschiera, your aid was important, and your reward has been large. That reward it would not be for your honour to extend,

and justify the ill opinion of your Italian countrymen by formally appropriating to yourself all that was forfeited by the treason you denounced. A name so noble as yours should be dearer to you than fortune itself.”

”Ah Giulio,” cried Beatrice, her face lighting up, changed in its whole character, ”those were words that might make the demon that tempts to avarice fly from your breast in shame.”

The count opened his eyes in great amaze; then he glanced round the room, and said quietly,

”Nobody else hears you, my dear Beatrice; talk commonsense. Heroics sound well in mixed society; but there is nothing less suited to the tone of a family conversation.”

Madame di Negra bent down her head abashed, and that sudden change in the expression of her countenance which had seemed to betray susceptibility to generous emotion, faded as suddenly away.

”But still,” she said coldly, ”you enjoy one half of those ample revenues: why talk, then, of suicide and ruin?”

”I enjoy them at the pleasure of the crown; and what if it be the pleasure of the crown to recall our cousin, and reinstate him in his possessions?”

”There is a probability, then, of that pardon? When you first employed me in your researches you only thought there was a possibility.”

”There is a great probability of it, and therefore I am here. I learned some little time since that the question of such recall had been suggested by the emperor, and discussed in Council. The danger to the State, which might arise from our cousin’s wealth, his alleged abilities,—abilities! bah! and his popular name, deferred any decision on the point; and, indeed, the difficulty of dealing with myself must have embarrassed the minister. But it is a mere question of time. He cannot long remain excluded from the general amnesty already extended to the other refugees. The person who gave me this information is high in power, and friendly to myself; and he added a piece of advice on which I acted. ’It was intimated,’ said he, ’by one of the partisans of your kinsman, that the exile could give a hostage for his loyalty in the person of his daughter and heiress; that she had arrived at marriageable age; that if she were to wed, with the emperor’s consent, some one whose attachment to the Austrian crown was unquestionable, there would be a guarantee both for the faith of the father, and for the transmission of so important a heritage to safe and loyal hands. Why not’ (continued my friend) ’apply to the emperor for his consent to that alliance for yourself,—you, on whom he can depend; you who, if the daughter should

die, would be the legal heir to those lands?' On that hint I spoke."

"You saw the emperor?"

"And after combating the unjust prepossessions against me, I stated that so far from my cousin having any fair cause of resentment against me, when all was duly explained to him, I did not doubt that he would willingly give me the hand of his child."

"You did!" cried the marchesa, amazed.

"And," continued the count, imperturbably, as he smoothed, with careless hand, the snowy plaits of his shirt front,—and that I should thus have the happiness of becoming myself the guarantee of my kinsman's loyalty, the agent for the restoration of his honours, while, in the eyes of the envious and malignant, I should clear up my own name from all suspicion that I had wronged him."

"And the emperor consented?"

"Pardieu, my dear sister, what else could his Majesty do? My proposition smoothed every obstacle, and reconciled policy with mercy. It remains, therefore, only to find out what has hitherto baffled all our researches, the retreat of our dear kinsfolk, and to make myself a welcome lover to the demoiselle. There is some disparity of years, I own; but—unless your sex and my glass flatter me overmuch—I am still a, match for many a gallant of five-and-twenty."

The count said this with so charming a smile, and looked so pre-eminently handsome, that he carried off the coxcombry of the words as gracefully as if they had been spoken by some dazzling hero of the grand old comedy of Parisian life.

Then interlacing his fingers and lightly leaning his hands, thus clasped, upon his sister's shoulder, he looked into her face, and said slowly, "And now, my sister, for some gentle but deserved reproach. Have you not sadly failed me in the task I imposed on your regard for my interests? Is it not some years since you first came to England on the mission of discovering these worthy relations of ours? Did I not entreat you to seduce into your toils the man whom I new to be my enemy, and who was indubitably acquainted with our cousin's retreat,—a secret he has hitherto locked within his bosom? Did you not tell me, that though he was then in England, you could find no occasion even to meet him, but that you had obtained the friendship of the statesman to whom I directed your attention, as his most intimate associate? And yet you, whose charms are usually so irresistible, learn nothing from the statesman, as you see nothing of Milord. Nay, baffled and misled, you actually suppose that the quarry has taken refuge in France. You go thither, you pretend to search the capital, the provinces, Switzerland, /que sais je/? All in vain,—though—/foi de gentilhomme/—your police cost me dearly. You

return to England; the same chase, and the same result. /Palsambleu, ma soeur/, I do too much credit to your talents not to question your zeal. In a word, have you been in earnest,—or have you not had some womanly pleasure in amusing yourself and abusing my trust?”

”Giulio,” answered Beatrice, sadly, ”you know the influence you have exercised over my character and my fate. Your reproaches are not just. I made such inquiries as were in my power, and I have now cause to believe that I know one who is possessed of this secret, and can guide us to it.”

”Ah, you do!” exclaimed the count. Beatrice did not heed the exclamation, and hurried on.

”But grant that my heart shrunk from the task you imposed on me, would it not have been natural? When I first came to England, you informed me that your object in discovering the exiles was one which I could honestly aid. You naturally wished first to know if the daughter lived; if not, you were the heir. If she did, you assured me you desired to effect, through my mediation, some liberal compromise with Alphonso, by which you would have sought to obtain his restoration, provided he would leave you for life in possession of the grant you hold from the crown. While these were your objects, I did my best, ineffectual as it was, to obtain the information required.”

”And what made me lose so important, though so ineffectual an ally?” asked the count, still smiling; but a gleam that belied the smile shot from his eye.

”What! when you bade me receive and co-operate with the miserable spies—the false Italians—whom you sent over, and seek to entangle this poor exile, when found, in some rash correspondence to be revealed to the court; when you sought to seduce the daughter of the Count of Peschiera, the descendant of those who had ruled in Italy, into the informer, the corrupter, and the traitress,—no, Giulio, then I recoiled; and then, fearful of your own sway over me, I retreated into France. I have answered you frankly.”

The count removed his hands from the shoulder on which they had reclined so cordially.

”And this,” said he, ”is your wisdom, and this your gratitude! You, whose fortunes are bound up in mine; you, who subsist on my bounty; you, who—”

”Hold,” cried the marchesa, rising, and with a burst of emotion, as if stung to the utmost, and breaking into revolt from the tyranny of years, —”hold! Gratitude! bounty! Brother, brother! what, indeed, do I owe to you? The shame and the misery of a life. While yet a child, you

condemned me to marry against my will, against my heart, against my prayers,—and laughed at my tears when I knelt to you for mercy. I was pure then, Giulio,—pure and innocent as the flowers in my virgin crown. And now—now—”

Beatrice stopped abruptly, and clasped her hands before her face.

”Now you upbraid me,” said the count, unruffled by her sudden passion, ”because I gave you in marriage to a man young and noble?”

”Old in vices, and mean of soul! The marriage I forgave you. You had the right, according to the customs of our country, to dispose of my hand. But I forgave you not the consolations that you whispered in the ear of a wretched and insulted wife.”

”Pardon me the remark,” replied the count, with a courtly bend of his head, ”but those consolations were also conformable to the customs of our country, and I was not aware till now that you had wholly disdained them. And,” continued the count, ”you were not so long a wife that the gall of the chain should smart still. You were soon left a widow,—free, childless, young, beautiful.”

”And penniless.”

”True, Di Negra was a gambler, and very unlucky; no fault of mine. I could neither keep the cards from his hands, nor advise him how to play them.”

”And my own portion? O Giulio, I knew but at his death why you had condemned me to that renegade Genoese. He owed you money, and, against honour, and I believe against law, you had accepted my fortune in discharge of the debt.”

”He had no other way to discharge it; a debt of honour must be paid,—old stories these. What matters? Since then my purse has been open to you.”

”Yes, not as your sister, but your instrument, your spy! Yes, your purse has been open—with a niggard hand.”

”/Un peu de conscience, ma chere/,—you are so extravagant. But come, be plain. What would you?”

”I would be free from you.”

”That is, you would form some second marriage with one of these rich island lords. /Ma foi/, I respect your ambition.”

”It is not so high. I aim but to escape from slavery,—to be placed beyond dishonourable temptation. I desire,” cried Beatrice, with

increased emotion,—“I desire to re-enter the life of woman.”

“Eno’!” said the count, with a visible impatience; “is there anything in the attainment of your object that should render you indifferent to mine? You desire to marry, if I comprehend you right. And to marry as becomes you, you should bring to your husband not debts, but a dowry. Be it so. I will restore the portion that I saved from the spendthrift clutch of the Genoese,—the moment that it is mine to bestow, the moment that I am husband to my kinsman’s heiress. And now, Beatrice, you imply that my former notions revolted your conscience; my present plan should content it, for by this marriage shall our kinsman regain his country, and repossess, at least, half his lands. And if I am not an excellent husband to the demoiselle, it will be her own fault. I have sown my wild oats. /Je suis bon prince/, when I have things a little my own way. It is my hope and my intention, and certainly it will be my interest, to become /digne epoux et irreprochable pere de famille/. I speak lightly,—’t is my way. I mean seriously. The little girl will be very happy with me, and I shall succeed in soothing all resentment her father may retain. Will you aid me then, yes or no? Aid me, and you shall indeed be free. The magician will release the fair spirit he has bound to his will. Aid me not, /ma chere/, and mark, I do not threaten—I do but warn—aid me not; grant that I become a beggar, and ask yourself what is to become of you,—still young, still beautiful, and still penniless? Nay, worse than penniless; you have done me the honour,” and here the count, looking on the table, drew a letter from a portfolio emblazoned with his arms and coronet,—“you have done me the honour to consult me as to your debts.”

“You will restore my fortune?” said the marchesa, irresolutely,—and averting her head from an odious schedule of figures.

“When my own, with your aid, is secured.”

“But do you not overrate the value of my aid?”

“Possibly,” said the count, with a caressing suavity—and he kissed his sister’s forehead. “Possibly; but, by my honour, I wish to repair to you any wrong, real or supposed, I may have done you in past times. I wish to find again my own dear sister. I may over-value your aid, but not the affection from which it comes. Let us be friends, /cara Beatrice mia/,” added the count, for the first time employing Italian words.

The marchesa laid her head on his shoulder, and her tears flowed softly. Evidently this man had great influence over her,—and evidently, whatever her cause for complaint, her affection for him was still sisterly and strong. A nature with fine flashes of generosity, spirit, honour, and passion was hers; but uncultured, unguided, spoilt by the worst social examples, easily led into wrong, not always aware where the wrong was, letting affections good or bad whisper away her conscience or blind her reason. Such women are often far more dangerous when induced to wrong

than those who are thoroughly abandoned,—such women are the accomplices men like the Count of Peschiera most desire to obtain.

“Ah, Giulio,” said Beatrice, after a pause, and looking up at him through her tears, “when you speak to me thus, you know you can do with me what you will. Fatherless and motherless, whom had my childhood to love and obey but you?”

“Dear Beatrice,” murmured the count, tenderly, and he again kissed her forehead. “So,” he continued, more carelessly,—“so the reconciliation is effected, and our interests and our hearts re-allied. Now, alas! to descend to business. You say that you know some one whom you believe to be acquainted with the lurking-place of my father-in-law—that is to be!”

“I think so. You remind me that I have an appointment with him this day: it is near the hour,—I must leave you.”

“To learn the secret?—Quick, quick. I have no fear of your success, if it is by his heart that you lead him!”

“You mistake; on his heart I have no hold. But he has a friend who loves me, and honourably, and whose cause he pleads. I think here that I have some means to control or persuade him. If not—ah, he is of a character that perplexes me in all but his worldly ambition; and how can we foreigners influence him through THAT?”

“Is he poor, or is he extravagant?”

“Not extravagant, and not positively poor, but dependent.”

“Then we have him,” said the count, composedly. “If his assistance be worth buying, we can bid high for it. /Sur mon ame/, I never yet knew money fail with any man who was both worldly and dependent. I put him and myself in your hands.”

Thus saying, the count opened the door, and conducted his sister with formal politeness to her carriage. He then returned, reseated himself, and mused in silence. As he did so, the muscles of his countenance relaxed. The levity of the Frenchman fled from his visage, and in his eye, as it gazed abstractedly into space, there was that steady depth so remarkable in the old portraits of Florentine diplomatist or Venetian Oligarch. Thus seen, there was in that face, despite all its beauty, something that would have awed back even the fond gaze of love,—something hard, collected, inscrutable, remorseless. But this change of countenance did not last long. Evidently thought, though intense for the moment, was not habitual to the man; evidently he had lived the life which takes all things lightly,—so he rose with a look of fatigue, shook and stretched himself, as if to cast off, or grow out of, an unwelcome and irksome mood. An hour afterwards, the Count of Peschiera was charming all eyes, and pleasing all ears, in the saloon of a high-born

beauty, whose acquaintance he had made at Vienna, and whose charms, according to that old and never-truth-speaking oracle, Polite Scandal, were now said to have attracted to London the brilliant foreigner.

CHAPTER III.

The marchesa regained her house, which was in Curzon Street, and withdrew to her own room, to readjust her dress, and remove from her countenance all trace of the tears she had shed.

Half an hour afterwards she was seated in her drawing-room, composed and calm; nor, seeing her then, could you have guessed that she was capable of so much emotion and so much weakness. In that stately exterior, in that quiet attitude, in that elaborate and finished elegance which comes alike from the arts of the toilet and the conventional repose of rank, you could see but the woman of the world and the great lady.

A knock at the door was heard, and in a few moments there entered a visitor, with the easy familiarity of intimate acquaintance,—a young man, but with none of the bloom of youth. His hair, fine as a woman's, was thin and scanty, but it fell low over the forehead, and concealed that noblest of our human features. "A gentleman," says Apuleius, "ought to wear his whole mind on his forehead." The young visitor would never have committed so frank an imprudence. His cheek was pale, and in his step and his movements there was a languor that spoke of fatigued nerves or delicate health. But the light of the eye and the tone of the voice were those of a mental temperament controlling the bodily,—vigorous and energetic. For the rest, his general appearance was distinguished by a refinement alike intellectual and social. Once seen, you would not easily forget him; and the reader, no doubt, already recognizes Randal Leslie. His salutation, as I before said, was that of intimate familiarity; yet it was given and replied to with that unreserved openness which denotes the absence of a more tender sentiment.

Seating himself by the marchesa's side, Randal began first to converse on the fashionable topics and gossip of the day; but it was observable that while he extracted from her the current anecdote and scandal of the great world, neither anecdote nor scandal did he communicate in return. Randal Leslie had already learned the art not to commit himself, nor to have quoted against him one ill-natured remark upon the eminent. Nothing more injures the man who would rise beyond the fame of the salons than to be considered backbiter and gossip; "yet it is always useful," thought Randal Leslie, "to know the foibles, the small social and private springs, by which the great are moved. Critical occasions may arise in which such a knowledge may be power." And hence, perhaps (besides a more private motive, soon to be perceived), Randal did not consider his time

thrown away in cultivating Madame di Negra's friendship. For, despite much that was whispered against her, she had succeeded in dispelling the coldness with which she had at first been received in the London circles. Her beauty, her grace, and her high birth had raised her into fashion, and the homage of men of the first station, while it perhaps injured her reputation as woman, added to her celebrity as fine lady. So much do we cold English, prudes though we be, forgive to the foreigner what we avenge on the native.

Sliding at last from these general topics into very well-bred and elegant personal compliment, and reciting various eulogies, which Lord this and the Duke of that had passed on the marchesa's charms, Randal laid his hand on hers, with the license of admitted friendship, and said,

"But since you have deigned to confide in me, since when (happily for me, and with a generosity of which no coquette could have been capable) you, in good time, repressed into friendship feelings that might else have ripened into those you are formed to inspire and disdain to return, you told me with your charming smile, 'Let no one speak to me of love who does not offer me his hand, and with it the means to supply tastes that I fear are terribly extravagant,'—since thus you allowed me to divine your natural objects, and upon that understanding our intimacy has been founded, you will pardon me for saying that the admiration you excite amongst these grands seigneurs I have named only serves to defeat your own purpose, and scare away admirers less brilliant, but more in earnest. Most of these gentlemen are unfortunately married; and they who are not belong to those members of our aristocracy who, in marriage, seek more than beauty and wit,—namely, connections to strengthen their political station, or wealth to redeem a mortgage and sustain a title."

"My dear Mr. Leslie," replied the marchesa,—and a certain sadness might be detected in the tone of the voice and the droop of the eye,—"I have lived long enough in the real world to appreciate the baseness and the falsehood of most of those sentiments which take the noblest names. I see through the hearts of the admirers you parade before me, and know that not one of them would shelter with his ermine the woman to whom he talks of his heart. Ah," continued Beatrice, with a softness of which she was unconscious, but which might have been extremely dangerous to youth less steeled and self-guarded than was Randal Leslie's,—"ah, I am less ambitious than you suppose. I have dreamed of a friend, a companion, a protector, with feelings still fresh, undebased by the low round of vulgar dissipation and mean pleasures,—of a heart so new, that it might restore my own to what it was in its happy spring. I have seen in your country some marriages, the mere contemplation of which has filled my eyes with delicious tears. I have learned in England to know the value of home. And with such a heart as I describe, and such a home, I could forget that I ever knew a less pure ambition."

"This language does not surprise me," said Randal; "yet it does not harmonize with your former answer to me."

"To you," repeated Beatrice, smiling, and regaining her lighter manner; "to you,—true. But I never had the vanity to think that your affection for me could bear the sacrifices it would cost you in marriage; that you, with your ambition, could bound your dreams of happiness to home. And then, too," said she, raising her head, and with a certain grave pride in her air,—and then, I could not have consented to share my fate with one whom my poverty would cripple. I could not listen to my heart, if it had beat for a lover without fortune, for to him I could then have brought but a burden, and betrayed him into a union with poverty and debt. Now, it may be different. Now I may have the dowry that befits my birth. And now I may be free to choose according to my heart as woman, not according to my necessities, as one poor, harassed, and despairing."

"Ah," said Randal, interested, and drawing still closer towards his fair companion,—ah, I congratulate you sincerely; you have cause, then, to think that you shall be—rich?"

The marchesa paused before she answered, and during that pause Randal relaxed the web of the scheme which he had been secretly weaving, and rapidly considered whether, if Beatrice di Negra would indeed be rich, she might answer to himself as a wife; and in what way, if so, he had best change his tone from that of friendship into that of love. While thus reflecting, Beatrice answered,

"Not rich for an Englishwoman; for an Italian, yes. My fortune should be half a million—"

"Half a million!" cried Randal, and with difficulty he restrained himself from falling at her feet in adoration. "Of francs!" continued the marchesa.

"Francs! Ah," said Randal, with a long-drawn breath, and recovering from his sudden enthusiasm, "about L20,000? eight hundred a year at four per cent. A very handsome portion, certainly (Genteel poverty!" he murmured to himself. "What an escape I have had! but I see—I see. This will smooth all difficulties in the way of my better and earlier project. I see),—a very handsome portion," he repeated aloud,—"not for a grand seigneur, indeed, but still for a gentleman of birth and expectations worthy of your choice, if ambition be not your first object. Ah, while you spoke with such endearing eloquence of feelings that were fresh, of a heart that was new, of the happy English home, you might guess that my thoughts ran to my friend who loves you so devotedly, and who so realizes your ideal. Proverbially, with us, happy marriages and happy homes are found not in the gay circles of London fashion, but at the hearths of our rural nobility, our untitled country gentlemen. And who, amongst all your adorers, can offer you a lot so really enviable as the one whom, I see by your blush, you already guess that I refer to?"

"Did I blush?" said the marchesa, with a silvery laugh. "Nay, I think

that your zeal for your friend misled you. But I will own frankly, I have been touched by his honest ingenuous love,—so evident, yet rather looked than spoken. I have contrasted the love that honours me with the suitors that seek to degrade; more I cannot say. For though I grant that your friend is handsome, high-spirited, and generous, still he is not what—”

”You mistake, believe me,” interrupted Randal. ”You shall not finish your sentence. He is all that you do not yet suppose him; for his shyness, and his very love, his very respect for your superiority, do not allow his mind and his nature to appear to advantage. You, it is true, have a taste for letters and poetry rare among your countrywomen. He has not at present—few men have. But what Cimon would not be refined by so fair an Iphigenia? Such frivolities as he now shows belong but to youth and inexperience of life. Happy the brother who could see his sister the wife of Frank Hazeldean.”

The marchesa leaned her cheek on her hand in silence. To her, marriage was more than it usually seems to dreaming maiden or to disconsolate widow. So had the strong desire to escape from the control of her unprincipled and remorseless brother grown a part of her very soul; so had whatever was best and highest in her very mixed and complex character been galled and outraged by her friendless and exposed position, the equivocal worship rendered to her beauty, the various debasements to which pecuniary embarrassments had subjected her—not without design on the part of the count, who though grasping, was not miserly, and who by precarious and seemingly capricious gifts at one time, and refusals of all aid at another, had involved her in debt in order to retain his hold on her; so utterly painful and humiliating to a woman of her pride and her birth was the station that she held in the world,—that in marriage she saw liberty, life, honour, self-redemption; and these thoughts, while they compelled her to co-operate with the schemes by which the count, on securing to himself a bride, was to bestow on herself a dower, also disposed her now to receive with favour Randal Leslie’s pleadings on behalf of his friend.

The advocate saw that he had made an impression, and with the marvellous skill which his knowledge of those natures that engaged his study bestowed on his intelligence, he continued to improve his cause by such representations as were likely to be most effective. With what admirable tact he avoided panegyric of Frank as the mere individual, and drew him rather as the type, the ideal of what a woman in Beatrice’s position might desire, in the safety, peace, and Honour of a home, in the trust and constancy and honest confiding love of its partner! He did not paint an elysium,—he described a haven; he did not glowingly delineate a hero of romance,—he soberly portrayed that Representative of the Respectable and the Real which a woman turns to when romance begins to seem to her but delusion. Verily, if you could have looked into the heart of the person he addressed, and heard him speak, you would have cried admiringly, ”Knowledge is power; and this man, if as able on a larger

field of action, should play no mean part in the history of his time."

Slowly Beatrice roused herself from the reveries which crept over her as he spoke,—slowly, and with a deep sigh, and said,

"Well, well, grant all you say! at least before I can listen to so honourable a love, I must be relieved from the base and sordid pleasure that weighs on me. I cannot say to the man who woos me, 'Will you pay the debts of the daughter of Franzini, and the widow of Di Negra?'"

"Nay, your debts, surely, make so slight a portion of your dowry."

"But the dowry has to be secured;" and here, turning the tables upon her companion, as the apt proverb expresses it, Madame di Negra extended her hand to Randal, and said in the most winning accents, "You are, then, truly and sincerely my friend?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"I prove that I do not, for I ask your assistance."

"Mine? How?"

"Listen; my brother has arrived in London—"

"I see that arrival announced in the papers." "And he comes, empowered by the consent of the emperor, to ask the hand of a relation and countrywoman of his,—an alliance that will heal long family dissensions, and add to his own fortunes those of an heiress. My brother, like myself, has been extravagant. The dowry which by law he still owes me it would distress him to pay till this marriage be assured."

"I understand," said Randal. "But how can I aid this marriage?"

"By assisting us to discover the bride. She, with her father, sought refuge and concealment in England."

"The father had, then, taken part in some political disaffections, and was proscribed?"

"Exactly; and so well has he concealed himself, that he has baffled all our efforts to discover his retreat. My brother can obtain him his pardon in cementing this alliance—"

"Proceed."

"Ah, Randal, Randal, is this the frankness of friendship? You know that I have before sought to obtain the secret of our relation's retreat,—sought in vain to obtain it from Mr. Egerton, who assuredly knows it—"

"But who communicates no secrets to living man," said Randal, almost bitterly; "who, close and compact as iron, is as little malleable to me as to you."

"Pardon me. I know you so well that I believe you could attain to any secret you sought earnestly to acquire. Nay, more, I believe that you know already that secret which I ask you to share with me."

"What on earth makes you think so?"

"When, some weeks ago, you asked me to describe the personal appearance and manners of the exile, which I did partly from the recollections of my childhood, partly from the description given to me by others, I could not but notice your countenance, and remark its change; in spite," said the marchesa, smiling, and watching Randal while she spoke,—"in spite of your habitual self-command. And when I pressed you to own that you had actually seen some one who tallied with that description, your denial did not deceive me. Still more, when returning recently, of your own accord, to the subject, you questioned me so shrewdly as to my motives in seeking the clew to our refugees, and I did not then answer you satisfactorily, I could detect—"

"Ha, ha," interrupted Randal, with the low soft laugh by which occasionally he infringed upon Lord Chesterfield's recommendations to shun a merriment so natural as to be illbred,—"ha, ha, you have the fault of all observers too minute and refined. But even granting that I may have seen some Italian exiles (which is likely enough), what could be more natural than my seeking to compare your description with their appearance; and granting that I might suspect some one amongst them to be the man you search for, what more natural also than that I should desire to know if you meant him harm or good in discovering his 'whereabout'? For ill," added Randal, with an air of prudery,—"ill would it become me to betray, even to friendship, the retreat of one who would hide from persecution; and even if I did so—for honour itself is a weak safeguard against your fascinations—such indiscretion might be fatal to my future career."

"How?"

"Do you not say that Egerton knows the secret, yet will not communicate; and is he a man who would ever forgive in me an imprudence that committed himself? My dear friend, I will tell you more. When Audley Egerton first noticed my growing intimacy with you, he said, with his usual dryness of counsel, 'Randal, I do not ask you to discontinue acquaintance with Madame di Negra, for an acquaintance with women like her forms the manners, and refines the intellect; but charming women are dangerous, and Madame di Negra is—a charming woman.'"

The marchesa's face flushed. Randal resumed: "'Your fair acquaintance' (I am still quoting Egerton) 'seeks to discover the home of a countryman

of hers. She suspects that I know it. She may try to learn it through you. Accident may possibly give you the information she requires. Beware how you betray it. By one such weakness I should judge of your general character. He from whom a woman can extract a secret will never be fit for public life.' Therefore, my dear marchesa, even supposing I possess this secret, you would be no true friend of mine to ask me to reveal what would imperil all my prospects. For as yet," added Randal, with a gloomy shade on his brow,—"as yet, I do not stand alone and erect,—I lean, I am dependent."

"There may be a way," replied Madame di Negra, persisting, "to communicate this intelligence without the possibility of Mr. Egerton's tracing our discovery to yourself; and, though I will not press you further, I add this,—You urge me to accept your friend's hand; you seem interested in the success of his suit, and you plead it with a warmth that shows how much you regard what you suppose is his happiness; I will never accept his hand till I can do so without blush for my penury,—till my dowry is secured; and that can only be by my brother's union with the exile's daughter. For your friend's sake, therefore, think well how you can aid me in the first step to that alliance. The young lady once discovered, and my brother has no fear for the success of his suit."

"And you would marry Frank if the dower was secured?"

"Your arguments in his favour seem irresistible," replied Beatrice, looking down.

A flash went from Randal's eyes, and he mused a few moments.

Then slowly rising, and drawing on his gloves, he said, "Well, at least you so far reconcile my honour towards aiding your research, that you now inform me you mean no ill to the exile."

"Ill!—the restoration to fortune, honours, his native land!"

"And you so far enlist my heart on your side, that you inspire me with the hope to contribute to the happiness of two friends whom I dearly love. I will, therefore, diligently try to ascertain if, among the refugees I have met with, lurk those whom you seek; and if so, I will thoughtfully consider how to give you the clew. Meanwhile, not one incautious word to Egerton."

"Trust me,—I am a woman of the world."

Randal now had gained the door. He paused, and renewed carelessly,—

"This young lady must be heiress to great wealth, to induce a man of your brother's rank to take so much pains to discover her."

"Her wealth will be vast," replied the marchesa; "and if anything from

wealth or influence in a foreign State could be permitted to prove my brother's gratitude—”

”Ah, fie!” interrupted Randal; and, approaching Madame di Negra, he lifted her hand to his lips, and said gallantly, ”This is reward enough to your preux chevalier.”

With those words he took his leave.

CHAPTER IV.

With his hands behind him, and his head drooping on his breast, slow, stealthy, noiseless, Randal Leslie glided along the streets on leaving the Italian's house. Across the scheme he had before revolved, there glanced another yet more glittering, for its gain might be more sure and immediate. If the exile's daughter were heiress to such wealth, might he himself hope—He stopped short even in his own soliloquy, and his breath came quick. Now, in his last visit to Hazeldean, he had come in contact with Riccabocca, and been struck by the beauty of Violante. A vague suspicion had crossed him that these might be the persons of whom the marchesa was in search, and the suspicion had been confirmed by Beatrice's description of the refugee she desired to discover. But as he had not then learned the reason for her inquiries, nor conceived the possibility that he could have any personal interest in ascertaining the truth, he had only classed the secret in question among those the further research into which might be left to time and occasion. Certainly the reader will not do the unscrupulous intellect of Randal Leslie the injustice to suppose that he was deterred from confiding to his fair friend all that he knew of Riccabocca by the refinement of honour to which he had so chivalrously alluded. He had correctly stated Audley Egerton's warning against any indiscreet confidence, though he had forborne to mention a more recent and direct renewal of the same caution. His first visit to Hazeldean had been paid without consulting Egerton. He had been passing some days at his father's house, and had gone over thence to the squire's. On his return to London, he had, however, mentioned this visit to Audley, who had seemed annoyed and even displeased at it, though Randal knew sufficient of Egerton's character to guess that such feelings could scarce be occasioned merely by his estrangement from his half-brother. This dissatisfaction had, therefore, puzzled the young man. But as it was necessary to his views to establish intimacy with the squire, he did not yield the point with his customary deference to his patron's whims. Accordingly he observed that he should be very sorry to do anything displeasing to his benefactor, but that his father had been naturally anxious that he should not appear positively to slight the friendly overtures of Mr. Hazeldean.

"Why naturally?" asked Egerton.

"Because you know that Mr. Hazeldean is a relation of mine,—that my grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Ah!" said Egerton, who, as it has been before said, knew little and cared less about the Hazeldean pedigree, "I was either not aware of that circumstance, or had forgotten it. And your father thinks that the squire may leave you a legacy?"

"Oh, sir, my father is not so mercenary,—such an idea never entered his head. But the squire himself has indeed said, 'Why, if anything happened to Frank, you would be next heir to my lands, and therefore we ought to know each other.' But—"

"Enough," interrupted Egerton. "I am the last man to pretend to the right of standing between you and a single chance of fortune, or of aid to it. And whom did you meet at Hazeldean?"

"There was no one there, sir; not even Frank."

"Hum. Is the squire not on good terms with his parson? Any quarrel about tithes?"

"Oh, no quarrel. I forgot Mr. Dale; I saw him pretty often. He admires and praises you very much, sir."

"Me—and why? What did he say of me?"

"That your heart was as sound as your head; that he had once seen you about some old parishioners of his, and that he had been much impressed with the depth of feeling he could not have anticipated in a man of the world, and a statesman."

"Oh, that was all; some affair when I was member for Lansmere?"

"I suppose so."

Here the conversation had broken off; but the next time Randal was led to visit the squire he had formally asked Egerton's consent, who, after a moment's hesitation, had as formally replied, "I have no objection."

On returning from this visit, Randal mentioned that he had seen Riccabocca: and Egerton, a little startled at first, said composedly, "Doubtless one of the political refugees; take care not to set Madame di Negra on his track. Remember, she is suspected of being a spy of the Austrian government."

"Rely on me, sir," said Randal; "but I should think this poor doctor can scarcely be the person she seeks to discover."

"That is no affair of ours," answered Egerton: "we are English gentlemen, and make not a step towards the secrets of another."

Now, when Randal revolved this rather ambiguous answer, and recalled the uneasiness with which Egerton had first heard of his visit to Hazeldean, he thought that he was indeed near the secret which Egerton desired to conceal from him and from all,—namely, the incognito of the Italian whom Lord L'Estrange had taken under his protection.

"My cards," said Randal to himself, as with a deep-drawn sigh he resumed his soliloquy, "are become difficult to play. On the one hand, to entangle Frank into marriage with this foreigner, the squire could never forgive him. On the other hand, if she will not marry him without the dowry—and that depends on her brother's wedding this countrywoman—and that countrywoman be, as I surmise, Violante, and Violante be this heiress, and to be won by me! Tush, tush. Such delicate scruples in a woman so placed and so constituted as Beatrice di Negra must be easily talked away. Nay, the loss itself of this alliance to her brother, the loss of her own dowry, the very pressure of poverty and debt, would compel her into the sole escape left to her option. I will then follow up the old plan; I will go down to Hazeldean, and see if there be any substance in the new one; and then to reconcile both. Aha—the House of Leslie shall rise yet from its ruin—and—"

Here he was startled from his reverie by a friendly slap on the shoulder, and an exclamation, "Why, Randal, you are more absent than when you used to steal away from the cricket-ground, muttering Greek verses, at Eton."

"My dear Frank," said Randal, "you—you are so brusque, and I was just thinking of you."

"Were you? And kindly, then, I am sure," said Frank Hazeldean, his honest handsome face lighted up with the unsuspecting genial trust of friendship; "and Heaven knows," he added, with a sadder voice, and a graver expression on his eye and lip,—"Heaven knows I want all the kindness you can give me!"

"I thought," said Randal, "that your father's last supply, of which I was fortunate enough to be the bearer, would clear off your more pressing debts. I don't pretend to preach, but really, I must say once more, you should not be so extravagant."

FRANK (seriously).—"I have done my best to reform. I have sold off my horses, and I have not touched dice nor card these six months; I would not even put into the raffle for the last Derby." This last was said with the air of a man who doubted the possibility of obtaining belief to some assertion of preternatural abstinence and virtue.

RANDAL.—"Is it possible? But with such self-conquest, how is it that

you cannot contrive to live within the bounds of a very liberal allowance?"

FRANK (despondingly).—"Why, when a man once gets his head under water, it is so hard to float back again on the surface. You see, I attribute all my embarrassments to that first concealment of my debts from my father, when they could have been so easily met, and when he came up to town so kindly."

"I am sorry, then, that I gave you that advice."

"Oh, you meant it so kindly, I don't reproach you; it was all my own fault."

"Why, indeed, I did urge you to pay off that moiety of your debts left unpaid, with your allowance. Had you done so, all had been well."

"Yes; but poor Borrowell got into such a scrape at Goodwood, I could not resist him; a debt of honour,—that must be paid; so when I signed another bill for him, he could not pay it, poor fellow! Really he would have shot himself, if I had not renewed it. And now it is swelled to such an amount with that cursed interest, that he never can pay it; and one bill, of course, begets another,—and to be renewed every three months; 't is the devil and all! So little as I ever got for all I have borrowed," added Frank, with a kind of rueful amaze. "Not L1,500 ready money; and the interest would cost me almost as much yearly,—if I had it." "Only L1,500!"

"Well; besides seven large chests of the worst cigars you ever smoked, three pipes of wine that no one would drink, and a great bear that had been imported from Greenland for the sake of its grease."

"That should, at least, have saved you a bill with your hairdresser."

"I paid his bill with it," said Frank, "and very good-natured he was to take the monster off my hands,—it had already hugged two soldiers and one groom into the shape of a flounder. I tell you what," resumed Frank, after a short pause, "I have a great mind even now to tell my father honestly all my embarrassments."

RANDAL (solemnly).—"Hum!"

FRANK.—"What? don't you think it would be the best way? I never can save enough,—never can pay off what I owe; and it rolls like a snowball."

RANDAL.—"Judging by the squire's talk, I think that with the first sight of your affairs you would forfeit his favour forever; and your mother would be so shocked, especially after supposing that the sum I brought

you so lately sufficed to pay off every claim on you. If you had not assured her of that it might be different; but she, who so hates an untruth, and who said to the squire, 'Frank says this will clear him; and with all his faults, Frank never yet told a lie!'"

"Oh, my dear mother!—I fancy I hear her!" cried Frank, with deep emotion. "But I did not tell a lie, Randal; I did not say that that sum would clear me."

"You empowered and begged me to say so," replied Randal, with grave coldness; "and don't blame me if I believed you."

"No, no! I only said it would clear me for the moment."

"I misunderstood you, then, sadly; and such mistakes involve my own honour. Pardon me, Frank; don't ask my aid in future. You see, with the best intentions, I only compromise myself."

"If you forsake me, I may as well go and throw myself into the river," said Frank, in a tone of despair; "and sooner or later, my father must know my necessities. The Jews threaten to go to him already; and the longer the delay, the more terrible the explanation."

"I don't see why your father should ever learn the state of your affairs; and it seems to me that you could pay off these usurers, and get rid of these bills, by raising money on comparatively easy terms—"

"How?" cried Frank, eagerly.

"Why, the Casino property is entailed on you, and you might obtain a sum upon that, not to be paid till the property becomes yours."

"At my poor father's death? Oh, no, no! I cannot bear the idea of this cold-blooded calculation on a father's death. I know it is not uncommon; I know other fellows who have done it, but they never had parents so kind as mine; and even in them it shocked and revolted me. The contemplating a father's death, and profiting by the contemplation it seems a kind of parricide: it is not natural, Randal. Besides, don't you remember what the Governor said,—he actually wept while he said it,—'Never calculate on my death; I could not bear that.' Oh, Randal, don't speak of it!"

"I respect your sentiments; but still, all the post-orbits you could raise could not shorten Mr. Hazeldean's life by a day. However, dismiss that idea; we must think of some other device. Ha, Frank! you are a handsome fellow, and your expectations are great—why don't you marry some woman with money?"

"Pooh!" exclaimed Frank, colouring. "You know, Randal, that there is but one woman in the world I can ever think of; and I love her so devotedly, that, though I was as gay as most men before, I really feel as if the

rest of her sex had lost every charm. I was passing through the street now—merely to look up at her windows.”

”You speak of Madame di Negra? I have just left her. Certainly, she is two or three years older than you; but if you can get over that misfortune, why not marry her?”

”Marry her!” cried Frank, in amaze, and all his colour fled from his cheeks. ”Marry her! Are you serious?”

”Why not?”

”But even if she, who is so accomplished, so admired, even if she would accept me, she is, you know, poorer than myself. She has told me so frankly. That woman has such a noble heart,—and—and—my father would never consent, nor my mother either. I know they would not.”

”Because she is a foreigner?”

”Yes—partly.”

”Yet the squire suffered his cousin to marry a foreigner.”

”That was different. He had no control over Jemima; and a daughter-in-law is so different; and my father is so English in his notions; and Madame di Negra, you see, is altogether so foreign. Her very graces would be against her in his eyes.”

”I think you do both your parents injustice. A foreigner of low birth—an actress or singer, for instance—of course would be highly objectionable; but a woman like Madame di Negra, of such high birth and connections—”

Frank shook his head. ”I don’t think the Governor would care a straw about her connections, if she were a king’s daughter. He considers all foreigners pretty much alike. And then, you know” (Frank’s voice sank into a whisper),—”you know that one of the very reasons why she is so dear to me would be an insuperable objection to the old-fashioned folks at home.”

”I don’t understand you, Frank.”

”I love her the more,” said young Hazeldean, raising his front with a noble pride, that seemed to speak of his descent from a race of cavaliers and gentlemen,—”I love her the more because the world has slandered her name,—because I believe her to be pure and wronged. But would they at the Hall,—they who do not see with a lover’s eyes, they who have all the stubborn English notions about the indecorum and license of Continental manners, and will so readily credit the worst? Oh, no! I love, I cannot

help it—but I have no hope.”

”It is very possible that you may be right,” exclaimed Randal, as if struck and half convinced by his companion’s argument,—”very possible; and certainly I think that the homely folks at the Hall would fret and fume at first, if they heard you were married to Madame di Negra. Yet still, when your father learned that you had done so, not from passion alone, but to save him from all pecuniary sacrifice,—to clear yourself of debt, to—”

”What do you mean?” exclaimed Frank, impatiently.

”I have reason to know that Madame di Negra will have as large a portion as your father could reasonably expect you to receive with any English wife. And when this is properly stated to the squire, and the high position and rank of your wife fully established and brought home to him,—for I must think that these would tell, despite your exaggerated notions of his prejudices,—and then, when he really sees Madame di Negra, and can judge of her beauty and rare gifts, upon my word, I think, Frank, that there would be no cause for fear. After all, too, you are his only son. He will have no option but to forgive you; and I know how anxiously both your parents wish to see you settled in life.”

Frank’s whole countenance became illuminated. ”There is no one who understands the squire like you, certainly,” said he, with lively joy. ”He has the highest opinion of your judgment. And you really believe you could smooth matters?”

”I believe so; but I should be sorry to induce you to run any risk; and if, on cool consideration, you think that risk is incurred, I strongly advise you to avoid all occasion of seeing the poor marchesa. Ah, you wince; but I say it for her sake as well as your own. First, you must be aware, that, unless you have serious thoughts of marriage, your attentions can but add to the very rumours that, equally groundless, you so feelingly resent; and, secondly, because I don’t think any man has a right to win the affections of a woman—especially a woman who seems to me likely to love with her whole heart and soul—merely to gratify his own vanity.”

”Vanity! Good heavens! can you think so poorly of me? But as to the marchesa’s affections,” continued Frank, with a faltering voice, ”do you really and honestly believe that they are to be won by me?”

”I fear lest they may be half won already,” said Randal, with a smile and a shake of the head; ”but she is too proud to let you see any effect you may produce on her, especially when, as I take it for granted, you have never hinted at the hope of obtaining her hand.”

”I never till now conceived such a hope. My dear Randal, all my cares have vanished! I tread upon air! I have a great mind to call on her at

once.”

”Stay, stay,” said Randal. ”Let me give you a caution. I have just informed you that Madame di Negra will have, what you suspected not before, a fortune suitable to her birth. Any abrupt change in your manner at present might induce her to believe that you were influenced by that intelligence.”

”Ah!” exclaimed Frank, stopping short, as if wounded to the quick. ”And I feel guilty,—feel as if I was influenced by that intelligence. So I am, too, when I reflect,” he continued, with a naivete that was half pathetic; ”but I hope she will not be very rich; if so, I’ll not call.”

”Make your mind easy, it is but a portion of some twenty or thirty thousand pounds, that would just suffice to discharge all your debts, clear away all obstacle to your union, and in return for which you could secure a more than adequate jointure and settlement on the Casino property. Now I am on that head, I will be yet more communicative. Madame di Negra has a noble heart, as you say, and told me herself, that, until her brother on his arrival had assured her of this dowry, she would never have consented to marry you, never crippled with her own embarrassments the man she loves. Ah! with what delight she will hail the thought of assisting you to win back your father’s heart! But be guarded meanwhile. And now, Frank, what say you—would it not be well if I ran down to Hazeldean to sound your parents? It is rather inconvenient to me, to be sure, to leave town just at present; but I would do more than that to render you a smaller service. Yes, I’ll go to Rood Hall to-morrow, and thence to Hazeldean. I am sure your father will press me to stay, and I shall have ample opportunities to judge of the manner in which he would be likely to regard your marriage with Madame di Negra,—supposing always it were properly put to him. We can then act accordingly.”

”My dear, dear Randal, how can I thank you? If ever a poor fellow like me can serve you in return—but that’s impossible.”

”Why, certainly, I will never ask you to be security to a bill of mine,” said Randal, laughing. ”I practise the economy I preach.”

”Ah!” said Frank, with a groan, ”that is because your mind is cultivated,—you have so many resources; and all my faults have come from idleness. If I had had anything to do on a rainy day, I should never have got into these scrapes.”

”Oh, you will have enough to do some day managing your property. We who have no property must find one in knowledge. Adieu, my dear Frank, I must go home now. By the way, you have never, by chance, spoken of the Riccaboccas to Madame di Negra.”

”The Riccaboccas? No. That’s well thought of. It may interest her to

know that a relation of mine has married her countryman. Very odd that I never did mention it; but, to say truth, I really do talk so little to her: she is so superior, and I feel positively shy with her."

"Do me the favour, Frank," said Randal, waiting patiently till this reply ended,—for he was devising all the time what reason to give for his request,—"never to allude to the Riccaboccas either to her or to her brother, to whom you are sure to be presented."

"Why not allude to them?"

Randal hesitated a moment. His invention was still at fault, and, for a wonder, he thought it the best policy to go pretty near the truth.

"Why, I will tell you. The marchesa conceals nothing from her brother, and he is one of the few Italians who are in high favour with the Austrian court."

"Well!"

"And I suspect that poor Dr. Riccabocca fled his country from some mad experiment at revolution, and is still hiding from the Austrian police."

"But they can't hurt him here," said Frank, with an Englishman's dogged inborn conviction of the sanctity of his native island. "I should like to see an Austrian pretend to dictate to us whom to receive and whom to reject."

"Hum—that's true and constitutional, no doubt; but Riccabocca may have excellent reasons—and, to speak plainly, I know he has (perhaps as affecting the safety of friends in Italy)—for preserving his incognito, and we are bound to respect those reasons without inquiring further."

"Still I cannot think so meanly of Madame di Negra," persisted Frank (shrewd here, though credulous elsewhere, and both from his sense of honour), "as to suppose that she would descend to be a spy, and injure a poor countryman of her own, who trusts to the same hospitality she receives herself at our English hands. Oh, if I thought that, I could not love her!" added Frank, with energy.

"Certainly you are right. But see in what a false position you would place both her brother and herself. If they knew Riccabocca's secret, and proclaimed it to the Austrian Government, as you say, it would be cruel and mean; but if they knew it and concealed it, it might involve them both in the most serious consequences. You know the Austrian policy is proverbially so jealous and tyrannical?"

"Well, the newspapers say so, certainly."

"And, in short, your discretion can do no harm, and your indiscretion may. Therefore, give me your word, Frank. I can't stay to argue now."

"I'll not allude to the Riccaboccas, upon my honour," answered Frank; "still, I am sure that they would be as safe with the marchesa as with—"

"I rely on your honour," interrupted Randal, hastily, and hurried off.

CHAPTER V.

Towards the evening of the following day, Randal Leslie walked slowly from a village in the main road (about two miles from Rood Hall), at which he had got out of the coach. He passed through meads and cornfields, and by the skirts of woods which had formerly belonged to his ancestors, but had been long since alienated. He was alone amidst the haunts of his boyhood, the scenes in which he had first invoked the grand Spirit of Knowledge, to bid the Celestial Still One minister to the commands of an earthly and turbulent ambition. He paused often in his path, especially when the undulations of the ground gave a glimpse of the gray church tower, or the gloomy firs that rose above the desolate wastes of Rood.

"Here," thought Randal, with a softening eye,—"here, how often, comparing the fertility of the lands passed away from the inheritance of my fathers, with the forlorn wilds that are left to their mouldering Hall,—here how often have I said to myself, 'I will rebuild the fortunes of my House.' And straightway Toil lost its aspect of drudge, and grew kindly, and books became as living armies to serve my thought. Again—again O thou haughty Past, brace and strengthen me in the battle with the Future." His pale lips writhed as he soliloquized, for his conscience spoke to him while he thus addressed his will, and its voice was heard more audibly in the quiet of the rural landscape, than amidst the turmoil and din of that armed and sleepless camp which we call a city.

Doubtless, though Ambition have objects more vast and beneficent than the restoration of a name, that in itself is high and chivalrous, and appeals to a strong interest in the human heart. But all emotions and all ends of a nobler character had seemed to filter themselves free from every golden grain in passing through the mechanism of Randal's intellect, and came forth at last into egotism clear and unalloyed. Nevertheless, it is a strange truth that, to a man of cultivated mind, however perverted and vicious, there are vouchsafed gleams of brighter sentiments, irregular perceptions of moral beauty, denied to the brutal unreasoning wickedness of uneducated villany,—which perhaps ultimately serve as his punishment, according to the old thought of the satirist, that there is no greater curse than to perceive virtue yet adopt vice. And as the solitary

schemer walked slowly on, and his childhood—innocent at least indeed—came distinct before him through the halo of bygone dreams,—dreams far purer than those from which he now rose each morning to the active world of Man,—a profound melancholy crept over him, and suddenly he exclaimed aloud, "Then I aspired to be renowned and great; now, how is it that, so advanced in my career, all that seemed lofty in the end has vanished from me, and the only means that I contemplate are those which my childhood would have called poor and vile? Ah, is it that I then read but books, and now my knowledge has passed onward, and men contaminate more than books? But," he continued, in a lower voice, as if arguing with himself, "if power is only so to be won,—and of what use is knowledge if it be not power—does not success in life justify all things? And who prizes the wise man if he fails?" He continued his way, but still the soft tranquillity around rebuked him, and still his reason was dissatisfied, as well as his conscience. There are times when Nature, like a bath of youth, seems to restore to the jaded soul its freshness,—times from which some men have emerged, as if reborn. The crises of life are very silent. Suddenly the scene opened on Randal Leslie's eyes,—the bare desert common, the dilapidated church, the old house, partially seen in the dank dreary hollow, into which it seemed to Randal to have sunken deeper and lowlier than when he saw it last. And on the common were some young men playing at hockey. That old-fashioned game, now very uncommon in England, except at schools, was still preserved in the primitive vicinity of Rood by the young yeomen and farmers. Randal stood by the stile and looked on, for among the players he recognized his brother Oliver. Presently the ball was struck towards Oliver, and the group instantly gathered round that young gentleman, and snatched him from Randal's eye; but the elder brother heard a displeasing din, a derisive laughter. Oliver had shrunk from the danger of the thick clubbed sticks that plied around him, and received some stroke across the legs, for his voice rose whining, and was drowned by shouts of, "Go to your mammy. That's Noll Leslie all over. Butter shins!"

Randal's sallow face became scarlet. "The jest of boors—a Leslie!" he muttered, and ground his teeth. He sprang over the stile, and walked erect and haughtily across the ground. The players cried out indignantly. Randal raised his hat, and they recognized him, and stopped the game. For him at least a certain respect was felt. Oliver turned round quickly, and ran up to him. Randal caught his arm firmly, and without saying a word to the rest, drew him away towards the house. Oliver cast a regretful, lingering look behind him, rubbed his shins, and then stole a timid glance towards Randal's severe and moody countenance.

"You are not angry that I was playing at hockey with our neighbours," said he, deprecatingly, observing that Randal would not break the silence.

"No," replied the elder brother; "but in associating with his inferiors, a gentleman still knows how to maintain his dignity. There is no harm in playing with inferiors, but it is necessary to a gentleman to play so

that he is not the laughing-stock of clowns.”

Oliver hung his head, and made no answer. They came into the slovenly precincts of the court, and the pigs stared at them from the palings, as their progenitors had stared, years before, at Frank Hazeldean.

Mr. Leslie, senior, in a shabby straw-hat, was engaged in feeding the chickens before the threshold, and he performed even that occupation with a maundering lack-a-daisical slothfulness, dropping down the grains almost one by one from his inert dreamy fingers.

Randal’s sister, her hair still and forever hanging about her ears, was seated on a rush-bottom chair, reading a tattered novel; and from the parlour window was heard the querulous voice of Mrs. Leslie, in high fidget and complaint.

Somehow or other, as the young heir to all this helpless poverty stood in the courtyard, with his sharp, refined, intelligent features, and his strange elegance of dress and aspect, one better comprehended how, left solely to the egotism of his knowledge and his ambition, in such a family, and without any of the sweet nameless lessons of Home, he had grown up into such close and secret solitude of soul,—how the mind had taken so little nutriment from the heart, and how that affection and respect which the warm circle of the heart usually calls forth had passed with him to the graves of dead fathers, growing, as it were, bloodless and ghoul-like amidst the charnels on which they fed.

”Ha, Randal, boy,” said Mr. Leslie, looking up lazily, ”how d’ ye do? Who could have expected you? My dear, my dear,” he cried, in a broken voice, and as if in helpless dismay, ”here’s Randal, and he’ll be wanting dinner, or supper, or something.” But, in the mean while, Randal’s sister Juliet had sprung up and thrown her arms round her brother’s neck, and he had drawn her aside caressingly, for Randal’s strongest human affection was for this sister.

”You are growing very pretty, Juliet,” said he, smoothing back her hair; ”why do yourself such injustice,—why not pay more attention to your appearance, as I have so often begged you to do?”

”I did not expect you, dear Randal; you always come so suddenly, and catch us /en dish-a-bill/.”

”Dish-a-bill!” echoed Randal, with a groan. ”Dishabille! you ought never to be so caught!”

”No one else does so catch us,—nobody else ever comes. Heigho!” and the young lady sighed very heartily. ”Patience, patience; my day is coming, and then yours, my sister,” replied Randal, with genuine pity, as he gazed upon what a little care could have trained into so fair a flower, and what now looked so like a weed.

Here Mrs. Leslie, in a state of intense excitement—having rushed through the parlour, leaving a fragment of her gown between the yawning brass of the never-mended Brummagem work-table—tore across the hall, whirled out of the door, scattering the chickens to the right and left, and clutched hold of Randal in her motherly embrace. "La, how you do shake my nerves," she cried, after giving him a most hasty and uncomfortable kiss. "And you are hungry too, and nothing in the house but cold mutton! Jenny, Jenny, I say, Jenny! Juliet, have you seen Jenny? Where's Jenny? Out with the odd man, I'll be bound."

"I am not hungry, Mother," said Randal; "I wish for nothing but tea." Juliet, scrambling up her hair, darted into the house to prepare the tea, and also to "tidy herself." She dearly loved her fine brother, but she was greatly in awe of him.

Randal seated himself on the broken pales. "Take care they don't come down," said Mr. Leslie, with some anxiety.

"Oh, Sir, I am very light; nothing comes down with me." The pigs stared up, and grunted in amaze at the stranger. "Mother," said the young man, detaining Mrs. Leslie, who wanted to set off in chase of Jenny, "Mother, you should not let Oliver associate with those village boors. It is time to think of a profession for him."

"Oh, he eats us out of house and home—such an appetite! But as to a profession, what is he fit for? He will never be a scholar."

Randal nodded a moody assent; for, indeed, Oliver had been sent to Cambridge, and supported there out of Randal's income from his official pay; and Oliver had been plucked for his Little Go.

"There is the army," said the elder brother,— "a gentleman's calling. How handsome Juliet ought to be—but—I left money for masters—and she pronounces French like a chambermaid."

"Yet she is fond of her book too. She's always reading, and good for nothing else."

"Reading! those trashy novels!"

"So like you,—you always come to scold, and make things unpleasant," said Mrs. Leslie, peevishly. "You are grown too fine for us, and I am sure we suffer affronts enough from others, not to want a little respect from our own children."

"I did not mean to affront you," said Randal, sadly. "Pardon me. But who else has done so?"

Then Mrs. Leslie went into a minute and most irritating catalogue of all the mortifications and insults she had received; the grievances of a petty provincial family, with much pretension and small power,—of all people, indeed, without the disposition to please—without the ability to serve—who exaggerate every offence, and are thankful for no kindness. Farmer Jones had insolently refused to send his wagon twenty miles for coals. Mr. Giles, the butcher, requesting the payment of his bill, had stated that the custom at Rood was too small for him to allow credit. Squire Thornhill, who was the present owner of the fairest slice of the old Leslie domains, had taken the liberty to ask permission to shoot over Mr. Leslie's land, since Mr. Leslie did not preserve. Lady Spratt (new people from the city, who hired a neighbouring country-seat) had taken a discharged servant of Mrs. Leslie's without applying for the character. The Lord-Lieutenant had given a ball, and had not invited the Leslies. Mr. Leslie's tenants had voted against their landlord's wish at the recent election. More than all, Squire Hazeldean and his Harry had called at Rood, and though Mrs. Leslie had screamed out to Jenny, "Not at home," she had been seen at the window, and the squire had actually forced his way in, and caught the whole family "in a state not fit to be seen." That was a trifle, but the squire had presumed to instruct Mr. Leslie how to manage his property, and Mrs. Hazeldean had actually told Juliet to hold up her head, and tie up her hair, "as if we were her cottagers!" said Mrs. Leslie, with the pride of a Montfydget.

All these, and various other annoyances, though Randal was too sensible not to perceive their insignificance, still galled and mortified the listening heir of Rood. They showed, at least, even to the well-meant officiousness of the Hazeldeans, the small account in which the fallen family was held. As he sat still on the moss-grown pales, gloomy and taciturn, his mother standing beside him, with her cap awry, Mr. Leslie shamblingly sauntered up, and said in a pensive, dolorous whine,

"I wish we had a good sum of money, Randal, boy!"

To do Mr. Leslie justice, he seldom gave vent to any wish that savoured of avarice. His mind must be singularly aroused, to wander out of its normal limits of sluggish, dull content.

So Randal looked at him in surprise, and said, "Do you, Sir?—why?"

"The manors of Rood and Dulmansberry, and all the lands therein, which my great-grandfather sold away, are to be sold again when Squire Thornhill's eldest son comes of age, to cut off the entail. Sir John Spratt talks of buying them. I should like to have them back again! 'T is a shame to see the Leslie estates hawked about, and bought by Spratts and people. I wish I had a great, great sum of ready money." The poor gentleman extended his helpless fingers as he spoke, and fell into a dejected revery.

Randal sprang from the paling, a movement which frightened the contemplative pigs, and set them off squalling and scampering. "When does young Thornhill come of age?"

"He was nineteen last August. I know it, because the day he was born I picked up my fossil of the sea-horse, just by Dulmansberry church, when the joy-bells were ringing. My fossil sea-horse! It will be an heirloom, Randal—"

"Two years—nearly two years—yet—ah, ah!" said Randal; and his sister now appearing, to announce that tea was ready, he threw his arm round her neck and kissed her. Juliet had arranged her hair and trimmed up her dress. She looked very pretty, and she had now the air of a gentlewoman,—something of Randal's own refinement in her slender proportions and well-shaped head.

"Be patient, patient still, my dear sister," whispered Randal, "and keep your heart whole for two years longer." The young man was gay and good-humoured over his simple meal, while his family grouped round him. When it was over, Mr. Leslie lighted his pipe, and called for his brandy-and-water. Mrs. Leslie began to question about London and Court, and the new king and the new queen, and Mr. Audley Egerton, and hoped Mr. Egerton would leave Randal all his money, and that Randal would marry a rich woman, and that the king would make him a prime minister one of these days; and then she should like to see if Farmer Jones would refuse to send his wagon for coals! And every now and then, as the word "riches" or "money" caught Mr. Leslie's ears, he shook his head, drew his pipe from his mouth, "A Spratt should not have what belonged to my great-great-grandfather. If I had a good sum of ready money! the old family estates!" Oliver and Juliet sat silent, and on their good behaviour; and Randal, indulging his own reveries, dreamily heard the words "money," "Spratt," "great-great-grandfather," "rich wife," "family estates;" and they sounded to him vague and afar off, like whispers from the world of romance and legend,—weird prophecies of things to be.

Such was the hearth which warmed the viper that nestled and gnawed at the heart of Randal, poisoning all the aspirations that youth should have rendered pure, ambition lofty, and knowledge beneficent and divine.

CHAPTER VI.

When the rest of the household were in deep sleep, Randal stood long at his open window, looking over the dreary, comfortless scene,—the moon gleaming from skies half-autumnal, half-wintery, upon squalid decay, through the ragged fissures of the firs; and when he lay down to rest,

his sleep was feverish, and troubled by turbulent dreams.

However, he was up early, and with an unwonted colour in his cheeks, which his sister ascribed to the country air. After breakfast, he took his way towards Hazeldean, mounted upon a tolerable horse, which he borrowed of a neighbouring farmer who occasionally hunted. Before noon, the garden and terrace of the Casino came in sight. He reined in his horse, and by the little fountain at which Leonard had been wont to eat his radishes and con his book, he saw Riccabocca seated under the shade of the red umbrella. And by the Italian's side stood a form that a Greek of old might have deemed the Naiad of the Fount; for in its youthful beauty there was something so full of poetry, something at once so sweet and so stately, that it spoke to the imagination while it charmed the sense.

Randal dismounted, tied his horse to the gate, and, walking down a trellised alley, came suddenly to the spot. His dark shadow fell over the clear mirror of the fountain just as Riccabocca had said, "All here is so secure from evil!—the waves of the fountain are never troubled like those of the river!" and Violante had answered in her soft native tongue, and lifting her dark, spiritual eyes, "But the fountain would be but a lifeless pool, oh my father, if the spray did not mount towards the skies!"

CHAPTER VII.

RANDAL advanced—"I fear, Signor Riccabocca, that I am guilty of some want of ceremony."

"To dispense with ceremony is the most delicate mode of conferring a compliment," replied the urbane Italian, as he recovered from his first surprise at Randal's sudden address, and extended his hand.

Violante bowed her graceful head to the young man's respectful salutation. "I am on my way to Hazeldean," resumed Randal, "and, seeing you in the garden, could not resist this intrusion."

RICCOBOCCA.—"YOU come from London? Stirring times for you English, but I do not ask you the news. No news can affect us."

RANDAL (softly).—"Perhaps yes."

RICCABOCCA (startled).—"How?"

VIOLANTE.—"Surely he speaks of Italy, and news from that country affects

you still, my father.”

RICCABOCCA.—“Nay, nay, nothing affects me like this country; its east winds might affect a pyramid! Draw your mantle round you, child, and go in; the air has suddenly grown chill.”

Violante smiled on her father, glanced uneasily towards Randal’s grave brow, and went slowly towards the house. Riccabocca, after waiting some moments in silence, as if expecting Randal to speak, said, with affected carelessness,

”So you think that you have news that might affect me? /Corpo di Bacco! I am curious to learn what?”

”I may be mistaken—that depends on your answer to one question. Do you know the Count of Peschiera?”

Riccabocca winced, and turned pale. He could not baffle the watchful eye of the questioner.

”Enough,” said Randal; ”I see that I am right. Believe in my sincerity. I speak but to warn and to serve you. The count seeks to discover the retreat of a countryman and kinsman of his own.”

”And for what end?” cried Riccabocca, thrown off his guard, and his breast dilated, his crest rose, and his eye flashed; valour and defiance broke from habitual caution and self-control. ”But—pooh!” he added, striving to regain his ordinary and half-ironical calm, ”it matters not to me. I grant, sir, that I know the Count di Peschiera; but what has Dr. Riccabocca to do with the kinsman of so grand a personage?”

”Dr. Riccabocca—nothing. But—” here Randal put his lip close to the Italian’s ear, and whispered a brief sentence. Then retreating a step, but laying his hand on the exile’s shoulder, he added, ”Need I say that your secret is safe with me?”

Riccabocca made no answer. His eyes rested on the ground musingly.

Randal continued, ”And I shall esteem it the highest honour you can bestow on me, to be permitted to assist you in forestalling danger.”

RICCABOCCA (slowly).—”Sir, I thank you; you have my secret, and I feel assured it is safe, for I speak to an English gentleman. There may be family reasons why I should avoid the Count di Peschiera; and, indeed, he is safest from shoals who steers clearest of his relations.”

The poor Italian regained his caustic smile as he uttered that wise, villanous Italian maxim.

RANDAL.—"I know little of the Count of Peschiera save from the current talk of the world. He is said to hold the estates of a kinsman who took part in a conspiracy against the Austrian power."

RICCABOCCA.—"It is true. Let that content him; what more does he desire? You spoke of forestalling danger; what danger? I am on the soil of England, and protected by its laws."

RANDAL.—"Allow me to inquire if, had the kinsman no child, the Count di Peschiera would be legitimate and natural heir to the estates he holds?"

RICCABOCCA.—"He would—What then?"

RANDAL.—"Does that thought suggest no danger to the child of the kinsman?"

Riccabocca recoiled, and gasped forth, "The child! You do not mean to imply that this man, infamous though he be, can contemplate the crime of an assassin?"

Randal paused perplexed. His ground was delicate. He knew not what causes of resentment the exile entertained against the count. He knew not whether Riccabocca would not assent to an alliance that might restore him to his country,—and he resolved to feel his way with precaution.

"I did not," said he, smiling gravely, "mean to insinuate so horrible a charge against a man whom I have never seen. He seeks you,—that is all I know. I imagine, from his general character, that in this search he consults his interest. Perhaps all matters might be conciliated by an interview!"

"An interview!" exclaimed Riccabocca; "there is but one way we should meet,—foot to foot, and hand to hand."

"Is it so? Then you would not listen to the count if he proposed some amicable compromise,—if, for instance, he was a candidate for the hand of your daughter?"

The poor Italian, so wise and so subtle in his talk, was as rash and blind when it came to action as if he had been born in Ireland and nourished on potatoes and Repeal. He bared his whole soul to the merciless eye of Randal.

"My daughter!" he exclaimed. "Sir, your very question is an insult."

Randal's way became clear at once. "Forgive me," he said mildly; "I will tell you frankly all that I know. I am acquainted with the count's sister. I have some little influence over her. It was she who informed me that the count had come here, bent upon discovering your refuge, and resolved to wed your daughter. This is the danger of which I spoke. And

when I asked your permission to aid in forestalling it, I only intended to suggest that it might be wise to find some securer home, and that I, if permitted to know that home, and to visit you, could apprise you from time to time of the count's plans and movements."

"Sir, I thank you sincerely," said Riccabocca, with emotion; "but am I not safe here?"

"I doubt it. Many people have visited the squire in the shooting season, who will have heard of you,—perhaps seen you, and who are likely to meet the count in London. And Frank Hazeldean, too, who knows the count's sister—"

"True, true" interrupted Riccabocca. "I see, I see. I will consider, I will reflect. Meanwhile you are going to Hazel dean. Do not say a word to the squire. He knows not the secret you have discovered."

With those words Riccabocca turned slightly away, and Randal took the hint to depart.

"At all times command and rely on me," said the young traitor, and he regained the pale to which he had fastened his horse.

As he remounted, he cast his eyes towards the place where he had left Riccabocca. The Italian was still standing there. Presently the form of Jackeymo was seen emerging from the shrubs. Riccabocca turned hastily round, recognized his servant, uttered an exclamation loud enough to reach Randal's ear, and then, catching Jackeymo by the arm, disappeared with him amidst the deep recesses of the garden.

"It will be indeed in my favour," thought Randal, as he rode on, "if I can get them into the neighbourhood of London,—all occasion there to woo, and if expedient, to win, the heiress."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Br the Lord, Harry!" cried the squire, as he stood with his wife in the park, on a visit of inspection to some first-rate Southdowns just added to his stock,—"by the Lord, if that is not Randal Leslie trying to get into the park at the back gate! Hollo, Randal! you must come round by the lodge, my boy," said he. "You see this gate is locked to keep out trespassers."

"A pity," said Randal. "I like short cuts, and you have shut up a very short one."

"So the trespassers said," quoth the squire; "but Stirn insisted on it—valuable man, Stirn. But ride round to the lodge. Put up your horse, and you'll join us before we can get to the house."

Randal nodded and smiled, and rode briskly on. The squire rejoined his Harry.

"Ah, William," said she, anxiously, "though certainly Randal Leslie means well, I always dread his visits."

"So do I, in one sense," quoth the squire, "for he always carries away a bank-note for Frank."

"I hope he is really Frank's friend," said Mrs. Hazeldean. "Who's else can he be? Not his own, poor fellow, for he will never accept a shilling from me, though his grandmother was as good a Hazeldean as I am. But, zounds, I like his pride, and his economy too. As for Frank—"

"Hush, William!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean, and put her fair hand before the squire's mouth. The squire was softened, and kissed the fair hand gallantly,—perhaps he kissed the lips too; at all events, the worthy pair were walking lovingly arm-in-arm when Randal joined them.

He did not affect to perceive a certain coldness in the manner of Mrs. Hazeldean, but began immediately to talk to her about Frank; praise that young gentleman's appearance; expatiate on his health, his popularity, and his good gifts, personal and mental,—and this with so much warmth, that any dim and undeveloped suspicions Mrs. Hazeldean might have formed soon melted away.

Randal continued to make himself thus agreeable, until the squire, persuaded that his young kinsman was a first-rate agriculturalist, insisted upon carrying him off to the home-farm; and Harry turned towards the house; to order Randal's room to be got ready: "For," said Randal, "knowing that you will excuse my morning dress, I venture to invite myself to dine and sleep at the Hall."

On approaching the farm-buildings, Randal was seized with the terror of an impostor; for, despite all the theoretical learning on *Bucolics* and *Georgics* with which he had dazzled the squire, poor Frank, so despised, would have beat him hollow when it came to the judging of the points of an ox, or the show of a crop.

"Ha, ha," cried the squire, chuckling, "I long to see how you'll astonish Stirn. Why, you'll guess in a moment where we put the top-dressing; and when you come to handle my short-horns, I dare swear you'll know to a pound how much oil-cake has gone into their sides."

"Oh, you do me too much honour,—indeed you do. I only know the general principles of agriculture; the details are eminently interesting, but I

have not had the opportunity to acquire them.”

”Stuff!” cried the squire. ”How can a man know general principles unless he has first studied the details? You are too modest, my boy. Ho! there ’s Stirn looking out for us!” Randal saw the grim visage of Stirn peering out of a cattleshed, and felt undone. He made a desperate rush towards changing the squire’s humour.

”Well, sir, perhaps Frank may soon gratify your wish, and turn farmer himself.”

”Eh!” quoth the squire, stopping short,—”what now?”

”Suppose he were to marry?”

”I’d give him the two best farms on the property rent free. Ha, ha! Has he seen the girl yet? I’d leave him free to choose; sir, I chose for myself,—every man should. Not but what Miss Stick-to-rights is an heiress, and, I hear, a very decent girl, and that would join the two properties, and put an end to that law-suit about the right of way, which began in the reign of King Charles the Second, and is likely otherwise to last till the day of judgment. But never mind her; let Frank choose to please himself.”

”I’ll not fail to tell him so, sir. I did fear you might have some prejudices. But here we are at the farmyard.”

”Burn the farmyard! How can I think of farmyards when you talk of Frank’s marriage? Come on—this way. What were you saying about prejudices?”

”Why, you might wish him to marry an Englishwoman, for instance.”

”English! Good heavens, sir, does he mean to marry a Hindoo?”

”Nay, I don’t know that he means to marry at all; I am only surmising; but if he did fall in love with a foreigner—”

”A foreigner! Ah, then Harry was—” The squire stopped short.

”Who might, perhaps,” observed Randal—not truly, if he referred to Madame di Negra—”who might, perhaps, speak very little English?”

”Lord ha’ mercy!”

”And a Roman Catholic—”

”Worshipping idols, and roasting people who don’t worship them.”

"Signor Riccabocca is not so bad as that."

"Rickeybockey! Well, if it was his daughter! But not speak English! and not go to the parish church! By George, if Frank thought of such a thing, I'd cut him off with a shilling. Don't talk to me, sir; I would. I 'm a mild man, and an easy man; but when I say a thing, I say it, Mr. Leslie. Oh, but it is a jest,—you are laughing at me. There 's no such painted good-for-nothing creature in Frank's eye, eh?"

"Indeed, sir, if ever I find there is, I will give you notice in time. At present, I was only trying to ascertain what you wished for a daughter-in-law. You said you had no prejudice."

"No more I have,—not a bit of it."

"You don't like a foreigner and a Catholic?"

"Who the devil would?"

"But if she had rank and title?"

"Rank and title! Bubble and squeak! No, not half so good as bubble and squeak. English beef and good cabbage. But foreign rank and title!—foreign cabbage and beef!—foreign bubble and foreign squeak!" And the squire made a wry face, and spat forth his disgust and indignation.

"You must have an Englishwoman?"

"Of course."

"Money?"

"Don't care, provided she is a tidy, sensible, active lass, with a good character for her dower."

"Character—ah, that is indispensable?"

"I should think so, indeed. A Mrs. Hazeldean of Hazeldean—You frighten me. He's not going to run off with a divorced woman, or a—"

The squire stopped, and looked so red in the face that Randal feared he might be seized with apoplexy before Frank's crimes had made him alter his will.

Therefore he hastened to relieve Mr. Hazeldean's mind, and assured him that he had been only talking at random; that Frank was in the habit, indeed, of seeing foreign ladies occasionally, as all persons in the London world were; but that he was sure Frank would never marry without the full consent and approval of his parents. He ended by repeating his assurance, that he would warn the squire if ever it became necessary.

Still, however, he left Mr. Hazeldean so disturbed and uneasy that that gentleman forgot all about the farm, and went moodily on in the opposite direction, reentering the park at its farther extremity. As soon as they approached the house, the squire hastened to shut himself with his wife in full parental consultation; and Randal, seated upon a bench on the terrace, revolved the mischief he had done, and its chances of success.

While thus seated, and thus thinking, a footstep approached cautiously, and a low voice said, in broken English, "Sare, sare, let me speak vid you."

Randal turned in surprise, and beheld a swarthy, saturnine face, with grizzled hair and marked features. He recognized the figure that had joined Riccabocca in the Italian's garden. "Speak-a-you Italian?" resumed Jackeymo.

Randal, who had made himself an excellent linguist, nodded assent; and Jackeymo, rejoiced, begged him to withdraw into a more private part of the grounds.

Randal obeyed, and the two gained the shade of a stately chestnut avenue.

"Sir," then said Jackeymo, speaking in his native tongue, and expressing himself with a certain simple pathos, "I am but a poor man; my name is Giacomo. You have heard of me; servant to the signore whom you saw to-day,—only a servant; but he honours me with his confidence. We have known danger together; and of all his friends and followers, I alone came with him to the stranger's land."

"Good, faithful fellow," said Randal, examining the man's face, "say on. Your master confides in you? He has confided that which I told him this day?"

"He did. Ah, sir; the padrone was too proud to ask you to explain more, —too proud to show fear of another. But he does fear, he ought to fear, he shall fear," continued Jackeymo, working himself up to passion,—for the padrone has a daughter, and his enemy is a villain. Oh, sir, tell me all that you did not tell to the padrone. You hinted that this man might wish to marry the signora. Marry her!—I could cut his throat at the altar!"

"Indeed," said Randal, "I believe that such is his object."

"But why? He is rich, she is penniless,—no, not quite that, for we have saved—but penniless, compared to him."

"My good friend, I know not yet his motives; but I can easily learn them. If, however, this count be your master's enemy, it is surely well to guard against him, whatever his designs; and to do so, you should move into London or its neighbourhood. I fear that, while we speak, the count

may get upon his track.”

”He had better not come here!” cried the servant, menacingly, and putting his hand where the knife was not.

”Beware of your own anger, Giacomo. One act of violence, and you would be transported from England, and your mast’r would lose a friend.”

Jackeymo seemed struck by this caution.

”And if the padrone were to meet him, do you think the padrone would meekly say, ‘Come sta sa Signoria’? The padrone would strike him dead!”

”Hush! hush! You speak of what in England is called murder, and is punished by the gallows. If you really love your master, for Heaven’s sake get him from this place, get him from all chance of such passion and peril. I go to town to-morrow; I will find him a house, that shall be safe from all spies, all discovery. And there, too, my friend. I can do what I cannot at this distance,—watch over him, and keep watch also on his enemy.”

Jackeymo seized Randal’s hand, and lifted it towards his lip; then, as if struck by a sudden suspicion, dropped the hand, and said bluntly, ”Signore, I think you have seen the padrone twice. Why do you take this interest in him?”

”Is it so uncommon to take interest even in a stranger who is menaced by some peril?”

Jackeymo, who believed little in general philanthropy, shook his head sceptically.

”Besides,” continued Randal, suddenly bethinking himself of a more plausible reason,—”besides, I am a friend and connection of Mr. Egerton; and Mr. Egerton’s most intimate friend is Lord L’Estrange; and I have heard that Lord L’Estrange—”

”The good lord! Oh, now I understand,” interrupted Jackeymo, and his brow cleared. ”Ah, if he were in England! But you will let us know when he comes?”

”Certainly. Now, tell me, Giacomo, is this count really unprincipled and dangerous? Remember I know him not personally.”

”He has neither heart nor conscience.”

”That defect makes him dangerous to men; perhaps not less so to women. Could it be possible, if he obtained any interview with the signora, that he could win her affections?” Jackeymo crossed himself rapidly and made

no answer.

"I have heard that he is still very handsome." Jackeymo groaned.

Randal resumed, "Enough; persuade the padrone to come to town."

"But if the count is in town?"

"That makes no difference; the safest place is always the largest city. Everywhere else, a foreigner is in himself an object of attention and curiosity."

"True."

"Let your master, then, come to London, or rather, into its neighbourhood. He can reside in one of the suburbs most remote from the count's haunts. In two days I will have found him a lodging and write to him. You trust to me now?"

"I do indeed,—I do, Excellency. Ah, if the signorina were married, we would not care!"

"Married! But she looks so high!"

"Alas! not now! not here!"

Randal sighed heavily. Jackeymo's eyes sparkled. He thought he had detected a new motive for Randal's interest,—a motive to an Italian the most natural, the most laudable of all.

"Find the house, Signore, write to the padrone. He shall come. I'll talk to him. I can manage him. Holy San Giacomo, bestir thyself now,—'t is long since I troubled thee!"

Jackeymo strode off through the fading trees, smiling and muttering as he went.

The first dinner-bell rang, and on entering the drawingroom, Randal found Parson Dale and his wife, who had been invited in haste to meet the unexpected visitor.

The preliminary greetings over, Mr. Dale took the opportunity afforded by the squire's absence to inquire after the health of Mr. Egerton.

"He is always well," said Randal. "I believe he is made of iron."

"His heart is of gold," said the parson.

"Ah," said Randal, inquisitively, "you told me you had come in contact with him once, respecting, I think, some of your old parishioners at

Lansmere?"

The parson nodded, and there was a moment's silence.

"Do you remember your battle by the stocks, Mr. Leslie?" said Mr. Dale, with a good-humoured laugh.

"Indeed, yes. By the way, now you speak of it, I met my old opponent in London the first year I went up to it."

"You did! where?"

"At a literary scamp's,—a cleverish man called Burley."

"Burley! I have seen some burlesque verses in Greek by a Mr. Burley."

"No doubt the same person. He has disappeared,—gone to the dogs, I dare say. Burlesque Greek is not a knowledge very much in power at present."

"Well, but Leonard Fairfield—you have seen him since?"

"No."

"Nor heard of him?"

"No; have you?"

"Strange to say, not for a long time. But I have reason to believe that he must be doing well."

"You surprise me! Why?"

"Because two years ago he sent for his mother. She went to him."

"Is that all?"

"It is enough; for he would not have sent for her if he could not maintain her."

Here the Hazeldeans entered, arm-in-arm, and the fat butler announced dinner.

The squire was unusually taciturn, Mrs. Hazeldean thoughtful, Mrs. Dale languid and headachy. The parson, who seldom enjoyed the luxury of converse with a scholar, save when he quarrelled with Dr. Riccaboecca, was animated by Randal's repute for ability into a great desire for argument.

"A glass of wine, Mr. Leslie. You were saying, before dinner, that burlesque Greek is not a knowledge very much in power at present. Pray,

Sir, what knowledge is in power?"

RANDAL (laconically).—"Practical knowledge."

PARSON.—"What of?"

RANDAL.—"Men."

PARSON (candidly).—"Well, I suppose that is the most available sort of knowledge, in a worldly point of view. How does one learn it? Do books help?"

RANDAL.—"According as they are read, they help or injure."

PARSON.—"How should they be read in order to help?"

RANDAL.—"Read specially to apply to purposes that lead to power."

PARSON (very much struck with Randal's pithy and Spartan logic).—"Upon my word, Sir, you express yourself very well. I must own that I began these questions in the hope of differing from you; for I like an argument."

"That he does," growled the squire; "the most contradictory creature!"

PARSON.—"Argument is the salt of talk. But now I am afraid I must agree with you, which I was not at all prepared for."

Randal bowed and answered, "No two men of our education can dispute upon the application of knowledge."

PARSON (pricking up his ears).—"Eh?—what to?"

RANDAL.—"Power, of course."

PARSON (overjoyed).—"Power!—the vulgarest application of it, or the loftiest? But you mean the loftiest?"

RANDAL (in his turn interested and interrogative).—"What do you call the loftiest, and what the vulgarest?"

PARSON.—"The vulgarest, self-interest; the loftiest, beneficence."

Randal suppressed the half-disdainful smile that rose to his lip.

"You speak, Sir, as a clergyman should do. I admire your sentiment, and adopt it; but I fear that the knowledge which aims only at beneficence very rarely in this world gets any power at all."

SQUIRE (seriously).—"That's true; I never get my own way when I want to do a kindness, and Stirn always gets his when he insists on something diabolically brutal and harsh."

PARSON.—"Pray, Mr. Leslie, what does intellectual power refined to the utmost, but entirely stripped of beneficence, most resemble?"

RANDAL.—"Resemble?—I can hardly say. Some very great man—almost any very great man—who has baffled all his foes, and attained all his ends."

PARSON.—"I doubt if any man has ever become very great who has not meant to be beneficent, though he might err in the means. Caesar was naturally beneficent, and so was Alexander. But intellectual power refined to the utmost, and wholly void of beneficence, resembles only one being, and that, sir, is the Principle of Evil."

RANDAL (startled).—"Do you mean the Devil?"

PARSON.—"Yes, Sir, the Devil; and even he, Sir, did not succeed! Even he, Sir, is what your great men would call a most decided failure."

MRS. DALE.—"My dear, my dear!"

PARSON.—"Our religion proves it, my love; he was an angel, and he fell."

There was a solemn pause. Randal was more impressed than he liked to own to himself. By this time the dinner was over, and the servants had retired. Harry glanced at Carry. Carry smoothed her gown and rose.

The gentlemen remained over their wine; and the parson, satisfied with what he deemed a clencher upon his favourite subject of discussion, changed the subject to lighter topics, till, happening to fall upon tithes, the squire struck in, and by dint of loudness of voice, and truculence of brow, fairly overwhelmed both his guests, and proved to his own satisfaction that tithes were an unjust and unchristianlike usurpation on the part of the Church generally, and a most especial and iniquitous infliction upon the Hazeldean estates in particular.

CHAPTER IX.

On entering the drawing-room, Randal found the two ladies seated close together, in a position much more appropriate to the familiarity of their school-days than to the politeness of the friendship now existing between them. Mrs. Hazeldean's hand hung affectionately over Carry's shoulder, and both those fair English faces were bent over the same book. It was

pretty to see these sober matrons, so different from each other in character and aspect, thus unconsciously restored to the intimacy of happy maiden youth by the golden link of some Magician from the still land of Truth or Fancy, brought together in heart, as each eye rested on the same thought; closer and closer, as sympathy, lost in the actual world, grew out of that world which unites in one bond of feeling the readers of some gentle book.

"And what work interests you so much?" asked Randal, pausing by the table.

"One you have read, of course," replied Mrs. Dale, putting a book-mark embroidered by herself into the page, and handing the volume to Randal. "It has made a great sensation, I believe."

Randal glanced at the title of the work. "True," said he, "I have heard much of it in London, but I have not yet had time to read it."

MRS. DALE.—"I can lend it to you, if you like to look over it to-night, and you can leave it for me with Mrs. Hazeldean."

PARSON (approaching).—"Oh, that book!—yes, you must read it. I do not know a work more instructive."

RANDAL.—"Instructive! Certainly I will read it then. But I thought it was a mere work of amusement,—of fancy. It seems so as I look over it."

PARSON.—"So is the 'Vicar of Wakefield;' yet what book more instructive?"

RANDAL.—"I should not have said that of the 'Vicar of Wakefield.' A pretty book enough, though the story is most improbable. But how is it instructive?"

PARSON.—"By its results: it leaves us happier and better. What can any instruction do more? Some works instruct through the head, some through the heart. The last reach the widest circle, and often produce the most genial influence on the character. This book belongs to the last. You will grant my proposition when you have read it."

Randal smiled and took the volume.

MRS. DALE.—"Is the author known yet?"

RANDAL.—"I have heard it ascribed to many writers, but I believe no one has claimed it."

PARSON.—"I think it must have been written by my old college friend, Professor Moss, the naturalist,—its descriptions of scenery are so

accurate.”

MRS. DALE.—“La, Charles dear! that snuffy, tiresome, prosy professor? How can you talk such nonsense? I am sure the author must be young, there is so much freshness of feeling.”

MRS. HAZELDEAN (positively).—“Yes, certainly, young.”

PARSON (no less positively).—“I should say just the contrary. Its tone is too serene, and its style too simple, for a young man. Besides, I don’t know any young man who would send me his book, and this book has been sent me, very handsomely bound, too, you see. Depend upon it Moss is the loan—quite his turn of mind.”

MRS. DALE.—“You are too provoking, Charles dear! Mr. Moss is so remarkably plain, too.”

RANDAL.—“Must an author be handsome?”

PARSON.—“Ha! ha! Answer that if you can, Carry.” Carry remained mute and disdainful.

SQUIRE (with great naivete).—“Well, I don’t think there’s much in the book, whoever wrote it; for I’ve read it myself, and understand every word of it.”

MRS. DALE.—“I don’t see why you should suppose it was written by a man at all. For my part, I think it must be a woman.”

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—“Yes, there’s a passage about maternal affection, which only a woman could have written.”

PARSON.—“Pooh! pooh! I should like to see a woman who could have written that description of an August evening before a thunderstorm; every wild-flower in the hedgerow exactly the flowers of August, every sign in the air exactly those of the month. Bless you! a woman would have filled the hedge with violets and cowslips. Nobody else but my friend Moss could have written that description.”

SQUIRE.—“I don’t know; there’s a simile about the waste of corn-seed in hand-sowing, which makes me think he must be a farmer!”

MRS. DALE (scornfully).—“A farmer! In hobnailed shoes, I suppose! I say it is a woman.”

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—“A WOMAN, and A MOTHER!”

PARSON.—“A middle-aged man, and a naturalist.”

SQUIRE.—"No, no, Parson, certainly a young man; for that love-scene puts me in mind of my own young days, when I would have given my ears to tell Harry how handsome I thought her; and all I could say was, 'Fine weather for the crops, Miss.' Yes, a young man and a farmer. I should not wonder if he had held the plough himself."

RANDAL (who had been turning over the pages).—"This sketch of Night in London comes from a man who has lived the life of cities and looked at wealth with the eyes of poverty. Not bad! I will read the book."

"Strange," said the parson, smiling, "that this little work should so have entered into our minds, suggested to all of us different ideas, yet equally charmed all,—given a new and fresh current to our dull country life, animated us as with the sight of a world in our breasts we had never seen before save in dreams: a little work like this by a man we don't know and never may! Well, that knowledge is power, and a noble one!"

"A sort of power, certainly, sir," said Randal, candidly; and that night, when Randal retired to his own room, he suspended his schemes and projects, and read, as he rarely did, without an object to gain by the reading.

The work surprised him by the pleasure it gave. Its charm lay in the writer's calm enjoyment of the beautiful. It seemed like some happy soul sunning itself in the light of its own thoughts. Its power was so tranquil and even, that it was only a critic who could perceive how much force and vigour were necessary to sustain the wing that floated aloft with so imperceptible an effort. There was no one faculty predominating tyrannically over the others; all seemed proportioned in the felicitous symmetry of a nature rounded, integral, and complete. And when the work was closed, it left behind it a tender warmth that played round the heart of the reader and vivified feelings which seemed unknown before. Randal laid down the book softly; and for five minutes the ignoble and base purposes to which his own knowledge was applied stood before him, naked and unmasked.

"Tut!" said he, wrenching himself violently away from the benign influence, "it was not to sympathize with Hector, but to conquer with Achilles, that Alexander of Macedon kept Homer under his pillow. Such should be the true use of books to him who has the practical world to subdue; let parsons and women construe it otherwise, as they may!"

And the Principle of Evil descended again upon the intellect from which the guide of Beneficence was gone.

CHAPTER X.

Randal rose at the sound of the first breakfast-bell, and on the staircase met Mrs. Haaeldean. He gave her back the book; and as he was about to speak, she beckoned to him to follow her into a little morning-room appropriated to herself,—no boudoir of white and gold, with pictures by Watteau, but lined with large walnut-tree presses, that held the old heirloom linen, strewed with lavender, stores for the housekeeper, and medicines for the poor.

Seating herself on a large chair in this sanctum, Mrs. Hazeldean looked formidably at home.

"Pray," said the lady, coming at once to the point, with her usual straightforward candour, "what is all this you have been saying to my husband as to the possibility of Frank's marrying a foreigner?"

RANDAL.—"Would you be as averse to such a notion as Mr. Hazeldean is?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"You ask me a question, instead of answering mine."

Randal was greatly put out in his fence by these rude thrusts. For indeed he had a double purpose to serve,—first, thoroughly to know if Frank's marriage with a woman like Madame di Negra would irritate the squire sufficiently to endanger the son's inheritance; and, secondly, to prevent Mr. and Mrs. Hazeldean believing seriously that such a marriage was to be apprehended, lest they should prematurely address Frank on the subject, and frustrate the marriage itself. Yet, withal, he must so express himself, that he could not be afterwards accused by the parents of disguising matters. In his talk to the squire the preceding day, he had gone a little too far,—further than he would have done but for his desire of escaping the cattle-shed and short-horns. While he mused, Mrs. Hazeldean observed him with her honest sensible eyes, and finally exclaimed,

"Out with it, Mr. Leslie!"

"Out with what, my dear madam? The squire has sadly exaggerated the importance of what was said mainly in jest. But I will own to you plainly, that Frank has appeared to me a little smitten with a certain fair Italian."

"Italian!" cried Mrs. Hazeldean. "Well, I said so from the first. Italian!—that's all, is it?" and she smiled. Randal was more and more perplexed. The pupil of his eye contracted, as it does when we retreat into ourselves, and think, watch, and keep guard.

"And perhaps," resumed Mrs. Hazeldean, with a very sunny expression of

countenance, "you have noticed this in Frank since he was here?"

"It is true," murmured Randal; "but I think his heart or his fancy was touched even before."

"Very natural," said Mrs. Hazeldean; "how could he help it?—such a beautiful creature! Well, I must not ask you to tell Frank's secrets; but I guess the object of attraction; and though she will have no fortune to speak of, and it is not such a match as he might form, still she is so amiable, and has been so well brought up, and is so little like one's general notions of a Roman Catholic, that I think I could persuade Hazeldean into giving his consent."

"Ah," said Randal, drawing a long breath, and beginning, with his practised acuteness, to detect Mrs. Hazeldean's error, "I am very much relieved and rejoiced to hear this; and I may venture to give Frank some hope, if I find him disheartened and desponding, poor fellow?"

"I think you may," replied Mrs. Hazeldean, laughing pleasantly. "But you should not have frightened poor William so, hinting that the lady knew very little English. She has an accent, to be sure; but she speaks our tongue very prettily. I always forget that she 's not English born! Ha, ha, poor William!"

RANDAL.—"Ha, ha!"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"We had once thought of another match for Frank,—a girl of good English family."

RANDAL.—"Miss Sticktorights?"

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"No; that's an old whim of Hazeldean's. But I doubt if the Sticktorights would ever merge their property in ours. Bless you! it would be all off the moment they came to settlements, and had to give up the right of way. We thought of a very different match; but there's no dictating to young hearts, Mr. Leslie."

RANDAL.—"Indeed no, Mrs. Hazeldean. But since we now understand each other so well, excuse me if I suggest that you had better leave things to themselves, and not write to Frank on the subject. Young hearts, you know, are often stimulated by apparent difficulties, and grow cool when the obstacle vanishes."

MRS. HAZELDEAN.—"Very possibly; it was not so with Hazeldean and me. But I shall not write to Frank on the subject for a different reason—though I would consent to the match, and so would William; yet we both would rather, after all, that Frank married an Englishwoman, and a Protestant. We will not, therefore, do anything to encourage the idea."

But if Frank's happiness becomes really at stake, then we will step in. In short, we would neither encourage nor oppose. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"And in the mean while, it is quite right that Frank should see the world, and try to distract his mind, or at least to know it. And I dare say it has been some thought of that kind which has prevented his coming here."

Randal, dreading a further and plainer *eclaircissement*, now rose, and saying, "Pardon me, but I must hurry over breakfast, and be back in time to catch the coach"—offered his arm to his hostess, and led her into the breakfast-parlour. Devouring his meal, as if in great haste, he then mounted his horse, and, taking cordial leave of his entertainers, trotted briskly away.

All things favoured his project,—even chance had befriended him in Mrs. Hazeldean's mistake. She had, not unnaturally, supposed Violante to have captivated Frank on his last visit to the Hall. Thus, while Randal had certified his own mind that nothing could more exasperate the squire than an alliance with Madame di Negra, he could yet assure Frank that Mrs. Hazeldean was all on his side. And when the error was discovered, Mrs. Hazeldean would only have to blame herself for it. Still more successful had his diplomacy proved with the Riccaboccas: he had ascertained the secret he had come to discover; he should induce the Italian to remove to the neighbourhood of London; and if Violante were the great heiress he suspected her to prove, whom else of her own age would she see but him? And the old Leslie domains to be sold in two years—a portion of the dowry might purchase them! Flushed by the triumph of his craft, all former vacillations of conscience ceased. In high and fervent spirits he passed the Casino, the garden of which was solitary and deserted, reached his home, and, telling Oliver to be studious, and Juliet to be patient, walked thence to meet the coach and regain the capital.

CHAPTER XI.

Violante was seated in her own little room, and looking from the window on the terrace that stretched below. The day was warm for the time of year. The orange-trees had been removed under shelter for the approach of winter; but where they had stood sat Mrs. Riccabocca at work. In the belvedere, Riccabocca himself was conversing with his favourite servant. But the casements and the door of the belvedere were open; and where they sat, both wife and daughter could see the *padrone* leaning against the wall, with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on the floor; while Jackeymo, with one finger on his master's arm, was talking to him with

visible earnestness. And the daughter from the window and the wife from her work directed tender, anxious eyes towards the still, thoughtful form so dear to both. For the last day or two, Riccabocca had been peculiarly abstracted, even to gloom. Each felt there was something stirring at his heart,—neither, as yet, knew what.

Violante's room silently revealed the nature of the education by which her character had been formed. Save a sketchbook, which lay open on a desk at hand, and which showed talent exquisitely taught (for in this Riccabocca had been her teacher), there was nothing that spoke of the ordinary female accomplishments. No piano stood open, no harp occupied yon nook, which seemed made for one; no broidery-frame, nor implements of work, betrayed the usual and graceful resources of a girl; but ranged on shelves against the wall were the best writers in English, Italian, and French; and these betokened an extent of reading, that he who wishes for a companion to his mind in the sweet commune of woman, which softens and refines all it gives and takes in interchange, will never condemn as masculine. You had but to look into Violante's face to see how noble was the intelligence that brought soul to those lovely features. Nothing hard, nothing dry and stern was there. Even as you detected knowledge, it was lost in the gentleness of grace. In fact, whatever she gained in the graver kinds of information became transmuted, through her heart and her fancy, into spiritual, golden stores. Give her some tedious and arid history, her imagination seized upon beauties other readers had passed by, and, like the eye of the artist, detected everywhere the Picturesque. Something in her mind seemed to reject all that was mean and commonplace, and to bring out all that was rare and elevated in whatever it received. Living so apart from all companions of her age, she scarcely belonged to the present time. She dwelt in the Past, as Sabrina in her crystal well. Images of chivalry, of the Beautiful and the Heroic,—such as, in reading the silvery line of Tasso, rise before us, softening force and valour into love and song,—haunted the reveries of the fair Italian maid.

Tell us not that the Past, examined by cold Philosophy, was no better and no loftier than the Present: it is not thus seen by pure and generous eyes. Let the Past perish, when it ceases to reflect on its magic mirror the beautiful Romance which is its noblest reality, though perchance but the shadow of Delusion.

Yet Violante was not merely the dreamer. In her, life was so puissant and rich, that action seemed necessary to its glorious development,—action, but still in the woman's sphere,—action to bless and to refine and to exalt all around her, and to pour whatever else of ambition was left unsatisfied into sympathy with the aspirations of man. Despite her father's fears of the bleak air of England, in that air she had strengthened the delicate health of her childhood. Her elastic step, her eyes full of sweetness and light, her bloom, at once soft and luxuriant,—all spoke of the vital powers fit to sustain a mind of such exquisite mould, and the emotions of a heart that, once aroused, could ennoble the passions of the South with the purity and devotion of the North.

Solitude makes some natures more timid, some more bold. Violante was fearless. When she spoke, her eyes frankly met your own; and she was so ignorant of evil, that as yet she seemed nearly unacquainted with shame. From this courage, combined with affluence of idea, came a delightful flow of happy converse. Though possessing so imperfectly the accomplishments ordinarily taught to young women, and which may be cultured to the utmost, and yet leave the thoughts so barren, and the talk so vapid, she had that accomplishment which most pleases the taste, and commands the love, of the man of talent; especially if his talent be not so actively employed as to make him desire only relaxation where he seeks companionship,—the accomplishment of facility in intellectual interchange, the charm that clothes in musical words beautiful womanly ideas.

“I hear him sigh at this distance,” said Violante, softly, as she still watched her father; “and methinks this is a new grief, and not for his country. He spoke twice yesterday of that dear English friend, and wished that he were here.”

As she said this, unconsciously the virgin blushed, her hands drooped on her knee, and she fell herself into thought as profound as her father’s, but less gloomy. From her arrival in England, Violante had been taught a grateful interest in the name of Harley L’Estrange. Her father, preserving a silence that seemed disdain of all his old Italian intimates, had been pleased to converse with open heart of the Englishman who had saved where countrymen had betrayed. He spoke of the soldier, then in the full bloom of youth, who, unconsolated by fame, had nursed the memory of some hidden sorrow amidst the pine-trees that cast their shadow over the sunny Italian lake; how Riccabocca, then honoured and happy, had courted from his seclusion the English signore, then the mourner and the voluntary exile; how they had grown friends amidst the landscapes in which her eyes had opened to the day; how Harley had vainly warned him from the rash schemes in which he had sought to reconstruct in an hour the ruins of weary ages; how, when abandoned, deserted, proscribed, pursued, he had fled for life, the infant Violante clasped to his bosom, the English soldier had given him refuge, baffled the pursuers, armed his servants, accompanied the fugitive at night towards the defile in the Apennines, and, when the emissaries of a perfidious enemy, hot in the chase, came near, had said, “You have your child to save! Fly on! Another league, and you are beyond the borders. We will delay the foes with parley; they will not harm us.” And not till escape was gained did the father know that the English friend had delayed the foe, not by parley, but by the sword, holding the pass against numbers, with a breast as dauntless as Bayard’s on the glorious bridge.

And since then, the same Englishman had never ceased to vindicate his name, to urge his cause; and if hope yet remained of restoration to land and honours, it was in that untiring zeal.

Hence, naturally and insensibly, this secluded and musing girl had

associated all that she read in tales of romance and chivalry with the image of the brave and loyal stranger. He it was who animated her dreams of the Past, and seemed born to be, in the destined hour, the deliverer of the Future. Around this image grouped all the charms that the fancy of virgin woman can raise from the enchanted lore of old Heroic Fable. Once in her early girlhood, her father (to satisfy her curiosity, eager for general description) had drawn from memory a sketch of the features of the Englishman,—drawn Harley, as he was in that first youth, flattered and idealized, no doubt, by art, and by partial gratitude, but still resembling him as he was then, while the deep mournfulness of recent sorrow yet shadowed and concentrated all the varying expressions of his countenance; and to look on him was to say, "So sad, yet so young!" Never did Violante pause to remember that the same years which ripened herself from infancy into woman were passing less gently over that smooth cheek and dreamy brow,—that the world might be altering the nature as time the aspect. To her the hero of the Ideal remained immortal in bloom and youth. Bright illusion, common to us all, where Poetry once hallows the human form! Who ever thinks of Petrarch as the old, timeworn man? 'Who does not see him as when he first gazed on Laura?—

"Ogni altra cosa ogni pensier va fore;
E sol ivi con voi rimansi Amore!"

CHAPTER XII.

And Violante, thus absorbed in revery, forgot to keep watch on the belvidere. And the belvidere was now deserted. The wife, who had no other ideal to distract her thoughts, saw Riccabocca pass into the house.

The exile entered his daughter's room, and she started to feel his hand upon her locks and his kiss upon her brow. "My child!" cried Riccabocca, seating himself, "I have resolved to leave for a time this retreat, and to seek the neighbourhood of London."

"Ah, dear father, that, then, was your thought? But what can be your reason? Do not turn away; you know how care fully I have obeyed your command and kept your secret. Ah, you will confide in me."

"I do, indeed," returned Riccabocca, with emotion. "I leave this place in the fear lest my enemies discover me. I shall say to others that you are of an age to require teachers not to be obtained here, but I should like none to know where we go."

The Italian said these last words through his teeth, and hanging his head. He said them in shame.

"My mother—[so Violante always called Jemima]—my mother—you have spoken to her?"

"Not yet. THERE is the difficulty."

"No difficulty, for she loves you so well," replied Violante, with soft reproach. "Ah, why not also confide in her? Who so true, so good?"

"Good—I grant it!" exclaimed Riccabocca. "What then? 'Da cattiva Donna guardati, ed alla buona non fidar niente.'—[From the bad woman, guard thyself; to the good woman trust nothing.]—And if you must trust," added the abominable man, "trust her with anything but a secret!"

"Fie," said Violante, with arch reproach, for she knew her father's humours too well to interpret his horrible sentiments literally,—"fie on your consistency, Padre Carissimo. Do you not trust your secret to me?"

"You! A kitten is not a cat, and a girl is not a woman. Besides, the secret was already known to you, and I had no choice. Peace, Jemima will stay here for the present. See to what you wish to take with you; we shall leave to-night." Not waiting for an answer, Riccabocca hurried away, and with a firm step strode the terrace, and approached his wife. "Anima mia," said the pupil of Machiavelli, disguising in the tenderest words the cruellest intentions,—for one of his most cherished Italian proverbs was to the effect that there is no getting on with a mule or a woman unless you coax them,—"Anima mia, soul of my being, you have already seen that Violante mopes herself to death here."

"She, poor child! Oh, no!"

"She does, core of my heart,—she does, and is as ignorant of music as I am of tent-stitch."

"She sings beautifully."

"Just as birds do, against all the rules, and in defiance of gamut. Therefore, to come to the point, O treasure of my soul! I am going to take her with me for a short time, perhaps to Cheltenham or Brighton. We shall see."

"All places with you are the same to me, Alphonso. When shall we go?"

"We shall go to-night; but terrible as it is to part from you,—you—"

"Ah!" interrupted the wife, and covered her face with her hands.

Riccabocca, the wildest and most relentless of men in his maxims, melted into absolute uxorial imbecility at the sight of that mute distress. He put his arm round his wife's waist, with genuine affection, and without a

single proverb at his heart. "Carissima, do not grieve so; we shall be back soon, and travelling is expensive; rolling stones gather no moss, and there is so much to see to at home."

Mrs. Riccabocca gently escaped from her husband's arm. She withdrew her hands from her face and brushed away the tears that stood in her eyes.

"Alphonso," she said touchingly, "hear me! What you think good, that shall ever be good to me. But do not think that I grieve solely because of our parting. No; I grieve to think that, despite all these years in which I have been the partner of your hearth, and slept on your breast,—all these years in which I have had no thought but, however humbly, to do my duty to you and yours, and could have wished that you had read my heart, and seen there but yourself and your child,—I grieve to think that you still deem me as unworthy your trust as when you stood by my side at the altar."

"Trust!" repeated Riccabocca, startled and conscience-stricken; "why do you say 'trust'? In what have I distrusted you? I am sure," he continued, with the artful volubility of guilt, "that I never doubted your fidelity, hook-nosed, long-visaged foreigner though I be; never pryed into your letters; never inquired into your solitary walks; never heeded your flirtations with that good-looking Parson Dale; never kept the money; and never looked into the account-books!" Mrs. Riccabocca refused even a smile of contempt at these revolting evasions; nay, she seemed scarcely to hear them.

"Can you think," she resumed, pressing her hand on her heart to still its struggles for relief in sobs,— "can you think that I could have watched and thought and taxed my poor mind so constantly, to conjecture what might best soothe or please you, and not seen, long since, that you have secrets known to your daughter, your servant, not to me? Fear not,—the secrets cannot be evil, or you would not tell them to your innocent child. Besides, do I not know your nature; and do I not love you because I know it?—it is for something connected with those secrets that you leave your home. You think that I should be incautious, imprudent. You will not take me with you. Be it so. I go to prepare for your departure. Forgive me if I have displeased you, husband." Mrs. Riccabocca turned away; but a soft hand touched the Italian's arm. "O Father, can you resist this? Trust her! trust her!—I am a woman like her! I answer for her woman's faith. Be yourself,—ever nobler than all others, my own father."

"Diavolo! Never one door shuts but another opens," groaned Riccabocca. "Are you a fool, child? Don't you see that it was for your sake only I feared, and would be cautious?"

"For mine! Oh, then do not make me deem myself mean, and the cause of meanness. For mine! Am I not your daughter,—the descendant of men who never feared?" Violante looked sublime while she spoke; and as she ended

she led her father gently on towards the door, which his wife had now gained.

"Jemima, wife mine! pardon, pardon," cried the Italian, whose heart had been yearning to repay such tenderness and devotion,— "come back to my breast—it has been long closed,—it shall be open to you now and forever."

In another moment the wife was in her right place,—on her husband's bosom; and Violante, beautiful peacemaker, stood smiling awhile at both, and then lifted her eyes gratefully to heaven and stole away.

CHAPTER XIII.

On Randal's return to town, he heard mixed and contradictory rumours in the streets, and at the clubs, of the probable downfall of the Government at the approaching session of parliament. These rumours had sprung up suddenly, as if in an hour. True that, for some time, the sagacious had shaken their heads and said, "Ministers could not last." True, that certain changes in policy, a year or two before, had divided the party on which the Government depended, and strengthened that which opposed it. But still the more important members of that Government had been so long identified with official station, and there seemed so little power in the Opposition to form a Cabinet of names familiar to official ears, that the general public had anticipated, at most, a few partial changes. Rumour now went far beyond this. Randal, whose whole prospects at present were but reflections from the greatness of his patron, was alarmed. He sought Egerton, but the minister was impenetrable, and seemed calm, confident, and imperturbed. Somewhat relieved, Randal then set himself to work to find a safe home for Riccabocca; for the greater need to succeed in obtaining fortune there, if he failed in getting it through Egerton. He found a quiet house, detached and secluded, in the neighbourhood of Norwood. No vicinity more secure from espionage and remark. He wrote to Riccabocca, and communicated the address, adding fresh assurances of his own power to be of use. The next morning he was seated in his office, thinking very little of the details, that he mastered, however, with mechanical precision, when the minister who presided over that department of the public service sent for him into his private room, and begged him to take a letter to Egerton, with whom he wished to consult relative to a very important point to be decided in the Cabinet that day. "I want you to take it," said the minister, smiling (the minister was a frank homely man), "because you are in Mr. Egerton's confidence, and he may give you some verbal message besides a written reply. Egerton is often over cautious and brief in the *litera scripta*."

Randal went first to Egerton's neighbouring office—Egerton had not been

there that day. He then took a cabriolet and drove to Grosvenor Square. A quiet-looking chariot was at the door. Mr. Egerton was at home; but the servant said, "Dr. F— is with him, sir; and perhaps he may not like to be disturbed."

"What! is your master ill?"

"Not that I know of, sir. He never says he is ill. But he has looked poorly the last day or two."

Randal hesitated a moment; but his commission might be important, and Egerton was a man who so held the maxim that health and all else must give way to business, that he resolved to enter; and, unannounced and unceremoniously, as was his wont, he opened the door of the library. He started as he did so. Audley Egerton was leaning back on the sofa, and the doctor, on his knees before him, was applying the stethoscope to his breast. Egerton's eyes were partially closed as the door opened. But at the noise he sprang up, nearly oversetting the doctor. "Who's that? How dare you?" he exclaimed, in a voice of great anger. Then recognizing Randal, he changed colour, bit his lip, and muttered dryly, "I beg pardon for my abruptness; what do you want, Mr. Leslie?"

"This letter from Lord—; I was told to deliver it immediately into your own hands. I beg pardon—"

"There is no cause," said Egerton, coldly. "I have had a slight attack of bronchitis; and as parliament meets so soon, I must take advice from my doctor, if I would be heard by the reporters. Lay the letter on the table, and be kind enough to wait for my reply."

Randal withdrew. He had never seen a physician in that house before, and it seemed surprising that Egerton should even take a medical opinion upon a slight attack. While waiting in the ante-room there was a knock at the street door, and presently a gentleman, exceedingly well dressed, was shown in, and honoured Randal with an easy and half-familiar bow. Randal remembered to have met this personage at dinner, and at the house of a young nobleman of high fashion, but had not been introduced to him, and did not even know him by name. The visitor was better informed.

"Our friend Egerton is busy, I hear, Mr. Leslie," said he, arranging the camellia in his button-hole.

"Our friend Egerton!" It must be a very great man to say "Our friend Egerton."

"He will not be engaged long, I dare say," returned Randal, glancing his shrewd inquiring eye over the stranger's person.

"I trust not; my time is almost as precious as his own. I was not so fortunate as to be presented to you when we met at Lord Spendquick's.

Good fellow, Spendquick; and decidedly clever.”

Lord Spendquick was usually esteemed a gentleman without three ideas.

Randal smiled.

In the mean while the visitor had taken out a card from an embossed morocco case, and now presented it to Randal, who read thereon, "Baron Levy, No.-, Bruton St."

The name was not unknown to Randal. It was a name too often on the lips of men of fashion not to have reached the ears of an habitue of good society.

Mr. Levy had been a solicitor by profession. He had of late years relinquished his ostensible calling: and not long since, in consequence of some services towards the negotiation of a loan, had been created a baron by one of the German kings. The wealth of Mr. Levy was said to be only equalled by his good-nature to all who were in want of a temporary loan, and with sound expectations of repaying it some day or other.

You seldom saw a finer-looking man than Baron Levy, about the same age as Egerton, but looking younger: so well preserved, such magnificent black whiskers, such superb teeth! Despite his name and his dark complexion, he did not, however, resemble a Jew,—at least externally; and, in fact, he was not a Jew on the father's side, but the natural son of a rich English grand seigneur, by a Hebrew lady of distinction—in the opera. After his birth, this lady had married a German trader of her own persuasion, and her husband had been prevailed upon, for the convenience of all parties, to adopt his wife's son, and accord to him his own Hebrew name. Mr. Levy, senior, was soon left a widower, and then the real father, though never actually owning the boy, had shown him great attention,—had him frequently at his house, initiated him betimes into his own high-born society, for which the boy showed great taste. But when my Lord died, and left but a moderate legacy to the younger Levy, who was then about eighteen, that ambiguous person was articulated to an attorney by his putative sire, who shortly afterwards returned to his native land, and was buried at Prague, where his tombstone may yet be seen. Young Levy, however, contrived to do very well without him. His real birth was generally known, and rather advantageous to him in a social point of view. His legacy enabled him to become a partner where he had been a clerk, and his practice became great amongst the fashionable classes of society. Indeed he was so useful, so pleasant, so much a man of the world, that he grew intimate with his clients,—chiefly young men of rank; was on good terms with both Jew and Christian; and being neither one nor the other, resembled (to use Sheridan's incomparable simile) the blank page between the Old and the New Testament.

Vulgar some might call Mr. Levy from his assurance, but it was not the vulgarity of a man accustomed to low and coarse society,—rather the /mauvais ton/ of a person not sure of his own position, but who has resolved to swagger into the best one he can get. When it is remembered that he had made his way in the world, and gleaned together an immense fortune, it is needless to add that he was as sharp as a needle, and as hard as a flint. No man had had more friends, and no man had stuck by them more firmly—so long as there was a pound in their pockets!

Something of this character had Randal heard of the baron, and he now gazed, first at his card, and then at him with—admiration.

“I met a friend of yours at Borrowell’s the other day,” resumed the baron,—“young Hazeldean. Careful fellow—quite a man of the world.”

As this was the last praise poor Frank deserved, Randal again smiled.

The baron went on: “I hear, Mr. Leslie, that you have much influence over this same Hazeldean. His affairs are in a sad state. I should be very happy to be of use to him, as a relation of my friend Egerton’s; but he understands business so well that he despises my advice.”

“I am sure you do him injustice.”

“Injustice! I honour his caution. I say to every man, ‘Don’t come to me: I can get you money on much easier terms than any one else; and what’s the result! You come so often that you ruin yourself; whereas a regular usurer without conscience frightens you. ‘Cent percent,’ you say; ‘oh, I must pull in.’ If you have influence over your friend, tell him to stick to his bill-brokers, and have nothing to do with Baron Levy.”

Here the minister’s bell rung, and Randal, looking through the window, saw Dr. F— walking to his carriage, which had made way for Baron Levy’s splendid cabriolet,—a cabriolet in the most perfect taste, baron’s coronet on the dark-brown panels, horse black, with such action! harness just relieved with plating. The servant now entered, and requested Randal to step in; and addressing the baron, assured him that he would not be detained a minute.

“Leslie,” said the minister, sealing a note, “take this back to Lord —, and say that I shall be with him in an hour.”

“No other message?—he seemed to expect one.”

“I dare say he did. Well, my letter is official, my message is not: beg him to see Mr. — before we meet,—he will understand,—all rests upon that interview.”

Egerton then, extending the letter, resumed gravely, “Of course you will not mention to any one that Dr. F— was with me: the health of public

men is not to be suspected. Hum,—were you in your own room or the ante-room?”

”The ante-room, sir.”

Egerton’s brow contracted slightly. ”And Mr. Levy was there, eh?”

”Yes—the baron.”

”Baron! true. Come to plague me about the Mexican loan, I suppose. I will keep you no longer.”

Randal, much meditating, left the house, and re-entered his hack cab. The baron was admitted to the statesman’s presence.

CHAPTER XIV.

Egerton had thrown himself at full length on the sofa, a position exceedingly rare with him; and about his whole air and manner, as Levy entered, there was something singularly different from that stateliness of port common to the austere legislator. The very tone of his voice was different. It was as if the statesman, the man of business, had vanished; it was rather the man of fashion and the idler who, nodding languidly to his visitor, said, ”Levy, what money can I have for a year?”

”The estate will bear very little more. My dear fellow, that last election was the very devil. You cannot go on thus much longer.”

”My dear fellow!” Baron Levy hailed Audley Egerton as ”my dear fellow”! And Audley Egerton, perhaps, saw nothing strange in the words, though his lip curled.

”I shall not want to go on thus much longer,” answered Egerton, as the curl on his lip changed to a gloomy smile. ”The estate must, meanwhile, bear L5,000 more.”

”A hard pull on it. You had really better sell.”

”I cannot afford to sell at present. I cannot afford men to say, ’Audley Egerton is done up,—his property is for sale.’”

”It is very sad when one thinks what a rich man you have been—and may be yet!”

”Be yet! How?”

Baron Levy glanced towards the thick mahogany doors,—thick and impervious, as should be the doors of statesmen. "Why, you know that, with three words from you, I could produce an effect upon the stocks of three nations, that might give us each a hundred thousand pounds. We would go shares."

"Levy," said Egerton, coldly, though a deep blush overspread his face, "you are a scoundrel; that is your look-out. I interfere with no man's tastes and conscience. I don't intend to be a scoundrel myself. I have told you that long ago."

The usurer's brows darkened, but he dispelled the cloud with an easy laugh.

"Well," said he, "you are neither wise nor complimentary, but you shall have the money. But yet, would it not be better," added Levy, with emphasis, "to borrow it without interest, of your friend L'Estrange?"

Egerton started as if stung.

"You mean to taunt me, sir!" he exclaimed passionately. "I accept pecuniary favours from Lord L'Estrange!—I!"

"Tut, my dear Egerton, I dare say my Lord would not think so ill now of that act in your life which—"

"Hold!" exclaimed Egerton, writhing. "Hold!"

He stopped, and paced the room, muttering, in broken sentences, "To blush before this man! Chastisement, chastisement!"

Levy gazed on him with hard and sinister eyes. The minister turned abruptly.

"Look you, Levy," said he, with forced composure, "you hate me—why, I know not."

"Hate you! How have I shown hatred? Would you ever have lived in this palace, and ruled this country as one of the most influential of its ministers, but for my management, my whispers to the wealthy Miss Leslie? Come, but for me what would you have been,—perhaps a beggar."

"What shall I be now, if I live? And this fortune which my marriage brought to me—it has passed for the main part into your hands. Be patient, you will have it all ere long. But there is one man in the world who has loved me from a boy, and woe to you if ever he learn that he has the right to despise me!"

"Egerton, my good fellow," said Levy, with great composure, "you need not threaten me, for what interest can I possibly have in tale-telling to

Lord L'Estrange? Again, dismiss from your mind the absurd thought that I hate you. True, you snub me in private, you cut me in public, you refuse to come to my dinners, you'll not ask me to your own; still, there is no man I like better, nor would more willingly serve. When do you want the L5,000?"

"Perhaps in one month, perhaps not for three or four. Let it be ready when required."

"Enough; depend on it. Have you any other commands?"

"None."

"I will take my leave, then. By-the-by, what do you suppose the Hazeldean rental is worth-net?"

"I don't know, nor care. You have no designs upon that too?"

"Well, I like keeping up family connections. Mr. Frank seems a liberal young gentleman."

Before Egerton could answer, the baron had glided to the door, and, nodding pleasantly, vanished with that nod. Egerton remained, standing on his solitary hearth. A drear, single man's room it was, from wall to wall, despite its fretted ceilings and official pomp of Brahmah escritaires and red boxes. Drear and cheerless,—no trace of woman's habitation, no vestige of intruding, happy children. There stood the austere man alone. And then with a deep sigh he muttered, "Thank Heaven, not for long,—it will not last long."

Repeating those words, he mechanically locked up his papers, and pressed his hand to his heart for an instant, as if a spasm had shot through it.

"So—I must shun all emotion!" said he, shaking his head gently.

In five minutes more Audley Egerton was in the streets, his mien erect, and his step firm as ever.

"That man is made of bronze," said a leader of the Opposition to a friend as they rode past the minister. "What would I not give for his nerves!"