

WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT - BOOK 5.

EDWARD BULWER-LYTTON*

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

Envy will be a science when it learns the use of the microscope.

When leaves fall and flowers fade, great people are found in their country-seats. Look!—that is Montfort Court,—a place of regal magnificence, so far as extent of pile and amplitude of domain could satisfy the pride of ownership, or inspire the visitor with the respect due to wealth and power. An artist could have made nothing of it. The Sumptuous everywhere; the Picturesque nowhere. The house was built in the reign of George I., when first commenced that horror of the beautiful, as something in bad taste, which, agreeably to our natural love of progress, progressively advanced through the reigns of succeeding Georges. An enormous facade, in dull brown brick; two wings and a centre, with double flights of steps to the hall-door from the carriageway. No trees allowed to grow too near the house; in front, a stately flat with stone balustrades. But wherever the eye turned, there was nothing to be seen but park, miles upon miles of park; not a cornfield in sight, not a roof-tree, not a spire, only those /lata silentia/,—still widths of turf, and, somewhat thinly scattered and afar, those groves of giant trees. The whole prospect so vast and so monotonous that it never tempted you to take a walk. No close-neighbouring poetic thicket into which to plunge, uncertain whither you would emerge; no devious stream to follow. The very deer, fat and heavy, seemed bored by pastures it would take them a week to traverse. People of moderate wishes and modest fortunes never envied Montfort Court: they admired it; they were proud to say they had seen it. But never did they say—

”Oh, that for me some home like this would smile!”

Not so, very, very great people!—they rather coveted than admired. Those oak trees so large, yet so undecayed; that park, eighteen miles at least in circumference; that solid palace which, without inconvenience,

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could entertain and stow away a king and his whole court; in short, all that evidence of a princely territory and a weighty rent-roll made English dukes respectfully envious, and foreign potentates gratifyingly jealous.

But turn from the front. Open the gate in that stone balustrade. Come southward to the garden side of the house. Lady Montfort's flower-garden. Yes; not so dull!—flowers, even autumnal flowers, enliven any sward. Still, on so large a scale, and so little relief; so little mystery about those broad gravel-walks; not a winding alley anywhere. Oh, for a vulgar summer-house; for some alcove, all honeysuckle and ivy! But the dahlias are splendid! Very true; only, dahlias, at the best, are such uninteresting prosy things. What poet ever wrote upon a dahlia! Surely Lady Montfort might have introduced a little more taste here, shown a little more fancy! Lady Montfort! I should like to see my lord's face if Lady Montfort took any such liberty. But there is Lady Montfort walking slowly along that broad, broad, broad gravel-walk; those splendid dahlias, on either side, in their set parterres. There she walks, in full evidence from all those sixty remorseless windows on the garden front, each window exactly like the other. There she walks, looking wistfully to the far end ('t is a long way off), where, happily, there is a wicket that carries a persevering pedestrian out of sight of the sixty windows into shady walks, towards the banks of that immense piece of water, two miles from the house. My lord has not returned from his moor in Scotland; my lady is alone. No company in the house: it is like saying, "No acquaintance in a city." But the retinue is full. Though she dined alone she might, had she pleased, have had almost as many servants to gaze upon her as there were windows now staring at her lonely walk with their glassy spectral eyes.

Just as Lady Montfort gains the wicket she is overtaken by a visitor, walking fast from the gravel sweep by the front door, where he has dismounted, where he has caught sight of her: any one so dismounting might have caught sight of her; could not help it. Gardens so fine were made on purpose for fine persons walking in them to be seen.

"Ah, Lady Montfort," said the visitor, stammering painfully, "I am so glad to find you at home."

"At home, George!" said the lady, extending her hand; "where else is it likely that I should be found? But how pale you are! What has happened?"

She seated herself on a bench, under a cedar-tree, just without the wicket; and George Morley, our old friend the Oxonian, seated himself by her side familiarly, but with a certain reverence. Lady Montfort was a few years older than himself, his cousin: he had known her from his childhood.

"What has happened!" he repeated; "nothing new. I have just come from

visiting the good bishop.”

”He does not hesitate to ordain you?” ”No; but I shall never ask him to do so.”

”My dear cousin, are you not over-scrupulous? You would be an ornament to the Church, sufficient in all else to justify your compulsory omission of one duty, which a curate could perform for you.”

Morley shook his head sadly. ”One duty omitted!” said he. ”But is it not that duty which distinguishes the priest from the layman? and how far extends that duty? Wherever there needs a voice to speak the word,—not in the pulpit only, but at the hearth, by the sick-bed,—there should be the Pastor! No: I cannot, I ought not, I dare not! Incompetent as the labourer, how can I be worthy of the hire?” It took him long to bring out these words: his emotion increased his infirmity. Lady Montfort listened with an exquisite respect visible in her compassion, and paused long before she answered.

George Morley was the younger son of a country gentleman, with a good estate settled upon the elder son. George’s father had been an intimate friend of his kinsman, the Marquess of Montfort (predecessor and grandsire of the present lord); and the marquess had, as he thought, amply provided for George in undertaking to secure to him, when of fitting age, the living of Humberston, the most lucrative preferment in his gift. The living had been held for the last fifteen years by an incumbent, now very old, upon the honourable understanding that it was to be resigned in favour of George, should George take orders. The young man, from his earliest childhood thus destined to the Church, devoted to the prospect of that profession all his studies, all his thoughts. Not till he was sixteen did his infirmity of speech make itself seriously perceptible: and then elocution masters undertook to cure it; they failed. But George’s mind continued in the direction towards which it had been so systematically biased. Entering Oxford, he became absorbed in its academical shades. Amidst his books he almost forgot the impediment of his speech. Shy, taciturn, and solitary, he mixed too little with others to have it much brought before his own notice. He carried off prizes; he took high honours. On leaving the University, a profound theologian, an enthusiastic Churchman, filled with the most earnest sense of the pastor’s solemn calling,—he was thus complimentarily accosted by the Archimandrite of his college, ”What a pity you cannot go into the Church!”

”Cannot; but I am going into the Church.”

”You! is it possible? But, perhaps, you are sure of a living—”

”Yes,—Humberston.”

”An immense living, but a very large population. Certainly it is in the

bishop's own discretionary power to ordain you, and for all the duties you can keep a curate." But the Don stopped short, and took snuff.

That "but" said as plainly as words could say, "It may be a good thing for you; but is it fair for the Church?"

So George Morley at least thought that "but" implied.

His conscience took alarm. He was a thoroughly noble-hearted man, likely to be the more tender of conscience where tempted by worldly interests. With that living he was rich, without it very poor. But to give up a calling, to the idea of which he had attached himself with all the force of a powerful and zealous nature, was to give up the whole scheme and dream of his existence. He remained irresolute for some time; at last he wrote to the present Lord Montfort, intimating his doubts, and relieving the Marquess from the engagement which his lordship's predecessor had made. The present Marquess was not a man capable of understanding such scruples. But, luckily perhaps for George and for the Church, the larger affairs of the great House of Montfort were not administered by the Marquess. The parliamentary influences, the ecclesiastical preferments, together with the practical direction of minor agents to the vast and complicated estates attached to the title, were at that time under the direction of Mr. Carr Vipont, a powerful member of Parliament, and husband to that Lady Selina whose condescension had so disturbed the nerves of Frank Vance the artist. Mr. Carr Vipont governed this vice-royalty according to the rules and traditions by which the House of Montfort had become great and prosperous. For not only every state, but every great seignorial House has its hereditary maxims of policy,—not less the House of Montfort than the House of Hapsburg. Now the House of Montfort made it a rule that all admitted to be members of the family should help each other; that the head of the House should never, if it could be avoided, suffer any of its branches to decay and wither into poverty. The House of Montfort also held it a duty to foster and make the most of every species of talent that could swell the influence or adorn the annals of the family. Having rank, having wealth, it sought also to secure intellect, and to knit together into solid union, throughout all ramifications of kinship and cousinhood, each variety of repute and power that could root the ancient tree more firmly in the land. Agreeably to this traditional policy, Mr. Carr Vipont not only desired that a Vipont Morley should not lose a very good thing, but that a very good thing should not lose a Vipont Morley of high academical distinction,—a Vipont Morley who might be a bishop. He therefore drew up an admirable letter, which the Marquess signed,—that the Marquess should take the trouble of copying it was out of the question,—wherein Lord Montfort was made to express great admiration of the disinterested delicacy of sentiment, which proved George Vipont Morley to be still more fitted to the cure of souls; and, placing rooms at Montfort Court at his service (the Marquess not being himself there at the moment), suggested that George should talk the matter over with the present incumbent of Humberston (that town was not many miles distant from Montfort Court),

who, though he had no impediment in his speech, still never himself preached nor read prayers, owing to an affection of the trachea, and who was, nevertheless, a most efficient clergy man. George Morley, therefore, had gone down to Montfort Court some months ago, just after his interview with Mrs. Crane. He had then accepted an invitation to spend a week or two with the Rev. Mr. Allsop, the Rector of Humberston; a clergyman of the old school, a fair scholar, a perfect gentleman, a man of the highest honour, good-natured, charitable, but who took pastoral duties much more easily than good clergymen of the new school—be they high or low—are disposed to do. Mr. Allsop, who was then in his eightieth year, a bachelor with a very good fortune of his own, was perfectly willing to fulfil the engagement on which he held his living, and render it up to George; but he was touched by the earnestness with which George assured him that at all events he would not consent to displace the venerable incumbent from a tenure he had so long and honourably held, and would wait till the living was vacated in the ordinary course of nature. Mr. Allsop conceived a warm affection for the young scholar. He had a grand-niece staying with him on a visit, who less openly, but not less warmly, shared that affection; and with her George Morley fell shyly and timorously in love. With that living he would be rich enough to marry; without it, no. Without it he had nothing but a fellowship, which matrimony would forfeit, and the scanty portion of a country squire's younger son. The young lady herself was dowerless, for Allsop's fortune was so settled that no share of it would come to his grand-niece,—another reason for conscience to gulp down that unhappy impediment of speech. Certainly, during this visit, Morley's scruples relaxed; but when he returned home they came back with greater force than ever,—with greater force, because he felt that now not only a spiritual ambition, but a human love was a casuist in favour of self-interest. He had returned on a visit to Humberston Rectory about a week previous to the date of this chapter; the niece was not there. Sternly he had forced himself to examine a little more closely into the condition of the flock which (if he accepted the charge) he would have to guide, and the duties that devolved upon a chief pastor in a populous trading town. He became appalled. Humberston, like most towns under the political influence of a great House, was rent by parties,—one party, who succeeded in returning one of the two members for Parliament, all for the House of Montfort; the other party, who returned also their member, all against it. By one half the town, whatever came from Montfort Court was sure to be regarded with a most malignant and distorted vision. Meanwhile, though Mr. Allsop was popular with the higher classes and with such of the extreme poor as his charity relieved, his pastoral influence generally was a dead letter. His curate, who preached for him—a good young man, but extremely dull—was not one of those preachers who fill a church. Tradesmen wanted an excuse to stay away or choose another place of worship; and they contrived to hear some passages in the sermons—over which, while the curate mumbled, they habitually slept—that they declared to be "Puseyite." The church became deserted; and about the same time a very eloquent Dissenting minister appeared at Humberston, and even professed Church folks went to hear him. George Morley, alas! perceived that at

Humberston, if the Church there were to hold her own, a powerful and popular preacher was essentially required. His mind was now made up. At Carr Vipont's suggestion the bishop of the diocese, being then at his palace, had sent to see him; and, while granting the force of his scruples, had yet said, "Mine is the main responsibility. But if you ask me to ordain you, I will do so without hesitation; for if the Church wants preachers, it also wants deep scholars and virtuous pastors." Fresh from this interview, George Morley came to announce to Lady Montfort that his resolve was unshaken. She, I have said, paused long

before she answered. "George," she began at last, in a voice so touchingly sweet that its very sound was balm to a wounded spirit, "I must not argue with you: I bow before the grandeur of your motives, and I will not say that you are not right. One thing I do feel, that if you thus sacrifice your inclinations and interests from scruples so pure and holy, you will never be to be pitied; you will never know regret. Poor or rich, single or wedded, a soul that so seeks to reflect heaven will be serene and blessed." Thus she continued to address him for some time, he all the while inexpressibly soothed and comforted; then gradually she insinuated hopes even of a worldly and temporal kind,—literature was left to him,—the scholar's pen, if not the preacher's voice. In literature he might make a career that would lead on to fortune. There were places also in the public service to which a defect in speech was no obstacle. She knew his secret, modest attachment; she alluded to it just enough to encourage constancy and rebuke despair. As she ceased, his admiring and grateful consciousness of his cousin's rare qualities changed the tide of his emotions towards her from himself, and he exclaimed with an earnestness that almost wholly subdued his stutter,

"What a counsellor you are! what a soother! If Montfort were but less prosperous or more ambitious, what a treasure, either to console or to sustain, in a mind like yours!"

As those words were said, you might have seen at once why Lady Montfort was called haughty and reserved. Her lip seemed suddenly to snatch back its sweet smile; her dark eye, before so purely, softly friend-like, became coldly distant; the tones of her voice were not the same as she answered,—

"Lord Montfort values me, as it is, far beyond my merits: far," she added with a different intonation, gravely mournful.

"Forgive me; I have displeased you. I did not mean it. Heaven forbid that I should presume either to disparage Lord Montfort—or—or to—" he stopped short, saving the hiatus by a convenient stammer. "Only," he continued, after a pause, "only forgive me this once. Recollect I was a little boy when you were a young lady, and I have pelted you with snowballs, and called you 'Caroline'." Lady Montfort suppressed a sigh, and gave the young scholar back her gracious smile, but not a smile that would have permitted him to call her "Caroline" again. She remained,

indeed, a little more distant than usual during the rest of their interview, which was not much prolonged; for Morley felt annoyed with himself that he had so indiscreetly offended her, and seized an excuse to escape. "By the by," said he, "I have a letter from Mr. Carr Vipont, asking me to give him a sketch for a Gothic bridge to the water yonder. I will, with your leave, walk down and look at the proposed site. Only do say that you forgive me."

"Forgive you, cousin George, oh, yes! One word only: it is true you were a child still when I fancied I was a woman, and you have a right to talk to me upon all things, except those that relate to me and Lord Montfort; unless, indeed," she added with a bewitching half laugh, "unless you ever see cause to scold me, there. Good-by, my cousin, and in turn forgive me, if I was so petulant. The Caroline you pelted with snowballs was always a wayward, impulsive creature, quick to take offence, to misunderstand, and—to repent."

Back into the broad, broad gravel-walk, walked, more slowly than before, Lady Montfort. Again the sixty ghastly windows stared at her with all their eyes; back from the gravelwalk, through a side-door into the pompous solitude of the stately house; across long chambers, where the mirrors reflected her form, and the huge chairs, in their flaunting damask and flaring gold, stood stiff on desolate floors; into her own private room,—neither large nor splendid that; plain chintzes, quiet book shelves. She need not have been the Marchioness of Montfort to inhabit a room as pleasant and as luxurious. And the rooms that she could only have owned as marchioness, what were those worth to her happiness? I know not. "Nothing," fine ladies will perhaps answer. Yet those same fine ladies will contrive to dispose their daughters to answer, "All." In her own room Lady Montfort sank on her chair; wearily, wearily she looked at the clock; wearily at the books on the shelves, at the harp near the window. Then she leaned her face on her hand, and that face was so sad, and so humbly sad, that you would have wondered how any one could call Lady Montfort proud.

"Treasure! I! I! worthless, fickle, credulous fool! I! I!"

The groom of the chambers entered with the letters by the afternoon post. That great house contrived to worry itself with two posts a day. A royal command to Windsor—

"I shall be more alone in a court than here," murmured Lady Montfort.

CHAPTER II.

Truly saith the proverb, "Much corn lies under the straw that is not seen."

Meanwhile George Morley followed the long shady walk,—very handsome walk, full of prize roses and rare exotics, artificially winding too,—walk so well kept that it took thirty-four men to keep it,—noble walk, tiresome walk, till it brought him to the great piece of water, which, perhaps, four times in the year was visited by the great folks in the Great House. And being thus out of the immediate patronage of fashion, the great piece of water really looked natural, companionable, refreshing: you began to breathe; to unbutton your waistcoat, loosen your neckcloth, quote Chaucer, if you could recollect him, or Cowper, or Shakspeare, or Thomson's "Seasons;" in short, any scraps of verse that came into your head,—as your feet grew joyously entangled with fern; as the trees grouped forest-like before and round you; trees which there, being out of sight, were allowed to grow too old to be worth five shillings a piece, moss-grown, hollow-trunked, some pollarded,—trees invaluable! Ha, the hare! How she scuds! See, the deer marching down to the water side. What groves of bulrushes! islands of water-lily! And to throw a Gothic bridge there, bring a great gravel road over the bridge! Oh, shame, shame!

So would have said the scholar, for he had a true sentiment for Nature, if the bridge had not clean gone out of his head. Wandering alone, he came at last to the most umbrageous and sequestered bank of the wide water, closed round on every side by brushwood, or still, patriarchal trees. Suddenly he arrested his steps; an idea struck him,—one of those old, whimsical, grotesque ideas which often when we are alone come across us, even in our quietest or most anxious moods. Was his infirmity really incurable? Elocution masters had said certainly not; but they had done him no good. Yet had not the greatest orator the world ever knew a defect in utterance? He, too, Demosthenes, had, no doubt, paid fees to elocution masters, the best in Athens, where elocution masters must have studied their art ad unguem, and the defect had baffled them. But did Demosthenes despair? No, he resolved to cure himself,—how? Was it not one of his methods to fill his mouth with pebbles, and practise, manfully to the roaring sea? George Morley had never tried the effect of pebbles. Was there any virtue in them? Why not try? No sea there, it is true; but a sea was only useful as representing the noise of a stormy democratic audience. To represent a peaceful congregation that still sheet of water would do as well. Pebbles there were in plenty just by that gravelly cove, near which a young pike lay sunning his green back. Half in jest, half in earnest, the scholar picked up a handful of pebbles, wiped them from sand and mould, inserted them between his teeth cautiously, and, looking round to assure himself that none were by, began an extempore discourse. So interested did he become in that classical

experiment, that he might have tortured the air and astonished the magpies (three of whom from a neighbouring thicket listened perfectly spell-bound) for more than half an hour, when seized with shame at the ludicrous impotence of his exertions, with despair that so wretched a barrier should stand between his mind and its expression, he flung away the pebbles, and sinking on the ground, he fairly wept, wept like a baffled child.

The fact was, that Morley had really the temperament of an orator; he had the orator's gifts in warmth of passion, rush of thought, logical arrangement; there was in him the genius of a great preacher. He felt it,—he knew it; and in that despair which only genius knows when some pitiful cause obstructs its energies and strikes down its powers, making a confidant of Solitude he wept loud and freely.

"Do not despond, sir, I undertake to cure you," said a voice behind.

George started up in confusion; a man, elderly, but fresh and vigorous, stood beside him, in a light fustian jacket, a blue apron, and with rushes in his hands, which he continued to plait together nimbly and deftly as he bowed to the startled scholar.

"I was in the shade of the thicket yonder, sir; pardon me, I could not help hearing you."

The Oxonian rubbed his eyes, and stared at the man with a vague impression that he had seen him before;—when? where?

"You can cure me," he stuttered out; "what of?—the folly of trying to speak in public? Thank you, I am cured."

"Nay, sir, you see before you a man who can make you a very good speaker. Your voice is naturally fine. I repeat, I can cure a defect which is not in the organ, but in the management!"

"You can! you—who and what are you?"

"A basketmaker, sir; I hope for your custom." "Surely this is not the first time I have seen you?"

"True, you once kindly suffered me to borrow a resting-place on your father's land. One good turn deserves another."

At that moment Sir Isaac peered through the brambles, and restored to his original whiteness, and relieved from his false, horned ears, marched gravely towards the water, sniffed at the scholar, slightly wagged his tail, and buried himself amongst the reeds in search of a water-rat he had therein disturbed a week before, and always expected to find again.

The sight of the dog immediately cleared up the cloud in the scholar's memory; but with recognition came back a keen curiosity and a sharp pang of remorse.

"And your little girl?" he asked, looking down abashed.

"Better than she was when we last met. Providence is so kind to us."

Poor Waife! He never guessed that to the person he thus revealed himself he owed the grief for Sophy's abduction. He divined no reason for the scholar's flushing cheek and embarrassed manner.

"Yes, sir, we have just settled in this neighbourhood. I have a pretty cottage yonder at the outskirts of the village, and near the park pales. I recognized you at once; and as I heard you just now, I called to mind that when we met before, you said your calling should be the Church, were it not for your difficulty in utterance; and I said to myself, 'No bad thing those pebbles, if his utterance were thick, which is it not;' and I have not a doubt, sir, that the true fault of Demosthenes, whom I presume you are imitating, was that he spoke through his nose."

"Eh!" said the scholar, "through his nose? I never knew that?—and I—"

"And you are trying to speak without lungs; that is without air in them. You don't smoke, I presume?"

"No; certainly not."

"You must learn; speak between each slow puff of your pipe. All you want is time,—time to quiet the nerves, time to think, time to breathe. The moment you begin to stammer, stop, fill the lungs thus, then try again! It is only a clever man who can learn to write,—that is, to compose; but any fool can be taught to speak. Courage!"

"If you really can teach me," cried the learned man, forgetting all self-reproach for his betrayal of Waife to Mrs. Crane in the absorbing interest of the hope that sprang up within him, "if you can teach me; if I can but con-con-con-conq—"

"Slowly, slowly, breath and time; take a whiff from my pipe; that's right. Yes, you can conquer the impediment."

"Then I will be the best friend to you that man ever had. There's my hand on it."

"I take it, but I ask leave to change the parties in the contract. I don't want a friend: I don't deserve one. You'll be a friend to my little girl instead; and if ever I ask you to help me in aught for her welfare and happiness—"

"I will help, heart and soul! slight indeed any service to her or to you compared with such service to me. Free this wretched tongue from its stammer, and thought and zeal will not stammer whenever you say, 'Keep your promise.' I am so glad your little girl is still with you."

Waife looked surprised, "Is still with me!—why not?" The scholar bit his tongue. That was not the moment to confess; it might destroy all Waife's confidence in him. He would do so later. "When shall I begin my lesson?"

"Now, if you like. But have you a book in your pocket?"

"I always have."

"Not Greek, I hope, sir?"

"No, a volume of Barrow's Sermons. Lord Chatham recommended those sermons to his great son as a study for eloquence."

"Good! Will you lend me the volume, sir? and now for it. Listen to me; one sentence at a time; draw your breath when I do."

The three magpies pricked up their ears again, and, as they listened, marvelled much.

CHAPTER III.

Could we know by what strange circumstances a man's genius became prepared for practical success, we should discover that the most serviceable items in his education were never entered in the bills which his father paid for it.

At the end of the very first lesson George Morley saw that all the elocution masters to whose skill he had been consigned were blunderers in comparison with the basketmaker.

Waife did not puzzle him with scientific theories. All that the great comedian required of him was to observe and to imitate. Observation, imitation, lo! the groundwork of all art! the primal elements of all genius! Not there, indeed to halt, but there ever to commence. What remains to carry on the intellect to mastery? Two steps,—to reflect, to reproduce. Observation, imitation, reflection, reproduction. In these stands a mind complete and consummate, fit to cope with all labour, achieve all success.

At the end of the first lesson George Morley felt that his cure was

possible. Making an appointment for the next day at the same place, he came thither stealthily and so on day by day. At the end of a week he felt that the cure was nearly certain; at the end of a month the cure was self-evident. He should live to preach the Word. True, that he practised incessantly in private. Not a moment in his waking hours that the one thought, one object, was absent from his mind! True, that with all his patience, all his toil, the obstacle was yet serious, might never be entirely overcome. Nervous hurry, rapidity of action, vehemence of feeling, brought back, might at unguarded moments always bring back, the gasping breath, the emptied lungs, the struggling utterance. But the relapse, rarer and rarer now with each trial, would be at last scarce a drawback. "Nay," quoth Waife, "instead of a drawback, become but an orator, and you will convert a defect into a beauty."

Thus justly sanguine of the accomplishment of his life's chosen object, the scholar's gratitude to Waife was unspeakable. And seeing the man daily at last in his own cottage,—Sophy's health restored to her cheeks, smiles to her lip, and cheered at her light fancy-work beside her grandsire's elbow-chair, with fairy legends instilling perhaps golden truths,—seeing Waife thus, the scholar mingled with gratitude a strange tenderness of respect. He knew nought of the vagrant's past, his reason might admit that in a position of life so at variance with the gifts natural and acquired of the singular basketmaker, there was something mysterious and suspicious. But he blushed to think that he had ever ascribed to a flawed or wandering intellect the eccentricities of glorious Humour,—abetted an attempt to separate an old age so innocent and genial from a childhood so fostered and so fostering. And sure I am that if the whole world had risen up to point the finger of scorn at the one-eyed cripple, George Morley—the well-born gentleman, the refined scholar, the spotless Churchman—would have given him his arm to lean upon, and walked by his side unashamed.

CHAPTER IV.

To judge human character rightly, a man may sometimes have very small experience, provided he has a very large heart.

Numa Pimpilius did not more conceal from notice the lessons he received from Egeria than did George Morley those which he received from the basketmaker. Natural, indeed, must be his wish for secrecy; pretty story it would be for Humberston, its future rector learning how to preach a sermon from an old basketmaker! But he had a nobler and more imperious motive for discretion: his honour was engaged to it. Waife exacted a promise that he would regard the intercourse between them as strictly private and confidential.

"It is for my sake I ask this," said Waife, frankly, "though I might say it was for yours;" the Oxonian promised, and was bound. Fortunately Lady Montfort quitted the great house the very day after George had first encountered the basketmaker, and writing word that she should not return to it for some weeks, George was at liberty to avail himself of her lord's general invitation to make use of Montfort Court as his lodgings when in the neighbourhood; which the proprieties of the world would not have allowed him to do while Lady Montfort was there without either host or female guests. Accordingly, he took up his abode in a corner of the vast palace, and was easily enabled, when he pleased, to traverse unobserved the solitudes of the park, gain the waterside, or stroll thence through the thick copse leading to Waife's cottage, which bordered the park pales, solitary, sequestered, beyond sight of the neighbouring village. The great house all to himself, George was brought in contact with no one to whom, in unguarded moments, he could even have let out a hint of his new acquaintance, except the clergyman of the parish, a worthy man, who lived in strict retirement upon a scanty stipend. For the Marquess was the lay impropiator; the living was therefore but a very poor vicarage, below the acceptance of a Vipont or a Vipont's tutor, sure to go to a worthy man forced to live in strict retirement. George saw too little of this clergyman, either to let out secrets or pick up information. From him, however, George did incidentally learn that Waife had some months previously visited the village, and proposed to the bailiff to take the cottage and osier land, which he now rented; that he represented himself as having known an old basketmaker who had dwelt there many years ago, and as having learned the basket craft of that long deceased operative. As he offered a higher rent than the bailiff could elsewhere obtain, and as the bailiff was desirous to get credit with Mr. Carr Vipont for improving the property, by reviving thereon an art which had fallen into desuetude, the bargain was struck, provided the candidate, being a stranger to the place, could furnish the bailiff with any satisfactory reference. Waife had gone away, saying he should shortly return with the requisite testimonial. In fact, poor man, as we know, he was then counting on a good word from Mr. Hartopp. He had not, however, returned for some months. The cottage, having been meanwhile wanted for the temporary occupation of an under-gamekeeper, while his own was under repair, fortunately remained unlet. Waife, on returning, accompanied by his little girl, had referred the bailiff to a respectable house-agent and collector of street rents in Bloomsbury, who wrote word that a lady, then abroad, had authorized him, as the agent employed in the management of a house property from which much of her income was derived, not only to state that Waife was a very intelligent man, likely to do well whatever he undertook, but also to guarantee, if required, the punctual payment of the rent for any holding of which he became the occupier. On this the agreement was concluded, the basketmaker installed. In the immediate neighbourhood there was no custom for basket-work, but Waife's performances were so neat, and some so elegant and fanciful, that he had no difficulty in contracting with a large tradesman (not at Humberston, but a more distant and yet more thriving town about twenty miles off) for as much of such work as he

could supply. Each week the carrier took his goods and brought back the payments; the profits amply sufficed for Waife's and Sophy's daily bread, with even more than the surplus set aside for the rent. For the rest, the basketmaker's cottage being at the farthest outskirts of the straggling village inhabited by a labouring peasantry, his way of life was not much known nor much inquired into. He seemed a harmless, hard-working man; never seen at the beer-house; always seen with his neatly-dressed little grandchild in his quiet corner at church on Sundays; a civil, well-behaved man too; who touched his hat to the bailiff and took it off to the vicar.

An idea prevailed that the basketmaker had spent much of his life in foreign countries, favoured partly by a sobriety of habits which is not altogether national, partly by something in his appearance, which, without being above his lowly calling, did not seem quite in keeping with it,—outlandish in short,—but principally by the fact that he had received since his arrival two letters with a foreign postmark. The idea befriended the old man,—allowing it to be inferred that he had probably outlived the friends he had formerly left behind him in England, and, on his return, been sufficiently fatigued with his rambles to drop contented in any corner of his native soil wherein he could find a quiet home, and earn by light toil a decent livelihood.

George, though naturally curious to know what had been the result of his communication to Mrs. Crane,—whether it had led to Waife's discovery or caused him annoyance,—had hitherto, however, shrunk from touching upon a topic which subjected himself to an awkward confession of officious intermeddling, and to which any indirect allusion might appear an indelicate attempt to pry into painful family affairs. But one day he received a letter from his father which disturbed him greatly, and induced him to break ground and speak to his preceptor frankly. In this letter, the elder Mr. Morley mentioned incidentally, amongst other scraps of local news, that he had seen Mr. Hartopp, who was rather out of sorts, his good heart not having recovered the shock of having been abominably "taken in" by an impostor for whom he had conceived a great fancy, and to whose discovery George himself had providentially led (the father referred here to what George had told him of his first meeting with Waife, and his visit to Mrs. Crane); the impostor, it seemed, from what Mr. Hartopp let fall, not being a little queer in the head, as George had been led to surmise, but a very bad character. "In fact," added the elder Morley, "a character so bad that Mr. Hartopp was too glad to give up to her lawful protectors the child, whom the man appears to have abducted; and I suspect, from what Hartopp said, though he does not like to own that he was taken in to so gross a degree, that he had been actually introducing to his fellow-townfolk and conferring familiarly with a regular jail-bird,—perhaps a bur glar. How lucky for that poor, soft-headed, excellent Jos Hartopp, whom it is positively as inhuman to take in as it would be to defraud a born natural, that the lady you saw arrived in time to expose the snares laid for his benevolent credulity. But for that, Jos might have taken the fellow into his own house (just

like him!), and been robbed by this time, perhaps murdered,—Heaven knows!”

Incredulous and indignant, and longing to be empowered to vindicate his friend’s fair name, George seized his hat, and strode quick along the path towards the basketmaker’s cottage. As he gained the water-side, he perceived Waife himself, seated on a mossy bank, under a gnarled fantastic thorn-tree, watching a deer as it came to drink, and whistling a soft mellow tune,—the tune of an old English border-song. The deer lifted his antlers from the water, and turned his large bright eyes towards the opposite bank, whence the note came, listening and wistful. As George’s step crushed the wild thyme, which the thorn-tree shadowed, ”Hush!” said Waife, ”and mark how the rudest musical sound can affect the brute creation.” He resumed the whistle,—a clearer, louder, wilder tune,—that of a lively hunting-song. The deer turned quickly round,—uneasy, restless, tossed its antlers, and bounded through the fern. Waife again changed the key of his primitive music,—a melancholy belliny note, like the belling itself of a melancholy hart, but more modulated into sweetness. The deer arrested its flight, and, lured by the mimic sound, returned towards the water-side, slowly and stately.

”I don’t think the story of Orpheus charming the brutes was a fable; do you, sir?” said Waife. ”The rabbits about here know me already; and, if I had but a fiddle, I would undertake to make friends with that reserved and unsocial water-rat, on whom Sir Isaac in vain endeavours at present to force his acquaintance. Man commits a great mistake in not cultivating more intimate and amicable relations with the other branches of earth’s great family. Few of them not more amusing than we are; naturally, for they have not our cares. And such variety of character too, where you would least expect it!”

GEORGE MORLEY.—”Very true. Cowper noticed marked differences of character in his favourite hares.”

WAIFFE.—”Hares! I am sure that there are not two house-flies on a window-pane, two minnows in that water, that would not present to us interesting points of contrast as to temper and disposition. If house-flies and minnows could but coin money, or set up a manufacture,—contrive something, in short, to buy or sell attractive to Anglo-Saxon enterprise and intelligence,—of course we should soon have diplomatic relations with them; and our despatches and newspapers would instruct us to a T in the characters and propensities of their leading personages. But, where man has no pecuniary nor ambitious interests at stake in his commerce with any class of his fellow-creatures, his information about them is extremely confused and superficial. The best naturalists are mere generalizers, and think they have done a vast deal when they classify a species. What should we know about mankind if we had only a naturalist’s definition of man? We only know mankind by knocking classification on the head, and studying each man as a class in himself. Compare Buffon and Shakspeare! Alas, sir! can we never have a

Shakspeare for house-flies and minnows?"

GEORGE MORLEY.—"With all respect for minnows and house-flies, if we found another Shakspeare, he might be better employed, like his predecessor, in selecting individualities from the classifications of man."

WIFE.—"Being yourself a man, you think so: a housefly might be of a different opinion. But permit me, at least, to doubt whether such an investigator would be better employed in reference to his own happiness, though I grant that he would be so in reference to your intellectual amusement and social interests. Poor Shakspeare! How much he must have suffered!"

GEORGE MORLEY.—"You mean that he must have been racked by the passions he describes,—bruised by collision with the hearts he dissects. That is not necessary to genius. The judge on his bench, summing up evidence and charging the jury, has no need to have shared the temptations or been privy to the acts of the prisoner at the bar. Yet how consummate may be his analysis!"

"No," cried Waife, roughly. "No! Your illustration destroys your argument. The judge knows nothing of the prisoner. There are the circumstances; there is the law. By these he generalizes, by these he judges,—right or wrong. But of the individual at the bar, of the world—the tremendous world—within that individual heart, I repeat, he knows nothing. Did he know, law and circumstances might vanish, human justice would be paralyzed. Ho, there! place that swart-visaged, ill-looking foreigner in the dock, and let counsel open the case; hear the witnesses depose! Oh, horrible wretch! a murderer! unmanly murderer!—a defenceless woman smothered by caitiff hands! Hang him up! hang him up! 'Softly,' whispers the POET, and lifts the veil from the assassin's heart. 'Lo! it is Othello the Moor!' What jury now dare find that criminal guilty? what judge now put on the black cap? who now says, 'Hang him up! hang him up!'"

With such lifelike force did the Comedian vent this passionate outburst that he thrilled his listener with an awe akin to that which the convicted Moor gathers round himself at the close of the sublime drama. Even Sir Isaac was startled; and leaving his hopeless pursuit of the water-rat, uttered a low bark, came to his master, and looked into his face with solemn curiosity.

WIFE (relapsing into colloquial accents).—"Why do we sympathize with those above us more than with those below? why with the sorrows of a king rather than those of a beggar? why does Sir Isaac sympathize with me more than (let that water-rat vex him ever so much) I can possibly sympathize with him? Whatever be the cause, see at least, Mr. Morley, one reason why a poor creature like myself finds it better employment to cultivate

the intimacy of brutes than to prosecute the study of men. Among men, all are too high to sympathize with me; but I have known two friends who never injured nor betrayed. Sir Isaac is one; Wamba was another. Wamba, sir, the native of a remote district of the globe (two friends civilized Europe is not large enough to afford any one man), Wamba, sir, was less gifted by nature, less refined by education, than Sir Isaac; but he was a safe and trustworthy companion: Wamba, sir, was—an opossum.”

GEORGE MORLEY.—“Alas, my dear Mr. Waife, I fear that men must have behaved very ill to you.”

WAIFE.—“I have no right to complain. I have behaved very ill to myself. When a man is his own enemy, he is very unreasonable if he expect other men to be his benefactors.”

GEORGE MORLEY (with emotion).—“Listen, I have a confession to make to you. I fear I have done you an injury, where, officiously, I meant to do a kindness.” The scholar hurried on to narrate the particulars of his visit to Mrs. Crane. On concluding the recital, he added, “When again I met you here, and learned that your Sophy was with you, I felt inexpressibly relieved. It was clear then, I thought, that your grandchild had been left to your care unmolested, either that you had proved not to be the person of whom the parties were in search, or family affairs had been so explained and reconciled that my interference had occasioned you no harm. But to-day I have a letter from my father which disquiets me much. It seems that the persons in question did visit Gatesboro’, and have maligned you to Mr. Hartopp. Understand me, I ask for no confidence which you may be unwilling to give; but if you will arm me with the power to vindicate your character from aspersions which I need not your assurance to hold unjust and false, I will not rest till that task be triumphantly accomplished.”

WAIFE (in a tone calm but dejected).—“I thank you with all my heart. But there is nothing to be done. I am glad that the subject did not start up between us until such little service as I could render you, Mr. Morley, was pretty well over. It would have been a pity if you had been compelled to drop all communication with a man of attainted character, before you had learned how to manage the powers that will enable you hereafter to exhort sinners worse than I have been. Hush, sir! you feel that, at least now, I am an inoffensive old man, labouring for a humble livelihood. You will not repeat here what you may have heard, or yet hear, to the discredit of my former life. You will not send me and my grandchild forth from our obscure refuge to confront a world with which we have no strength to cope. And, believing this, it only remains for me to say, Fare-you-well, sir.”

“I should deserve to lose spe-spe-speech altogether,” cried the Oxonian, gasping and stammering fearfully as he caught Waife firmly by the arm, “if I suffered—suff-suff-suff—”

"One, two! take time, sir!" said the Comedian, softly. And with a sweet patience he reseated himself on the bank. The Oxonian threw himself at length by the outcast's side; and, with the noble tenderness of a nature as chivalrously Christian as Heaven ever gave to priest, he rested his folded hands upon Waife's shoulder, and looking him full and close in the face, said thus, slowly, deliberately, not a stammer, "You do not guess what you have done for me; you have secured to me a home and a career; the wife of whom I must otherwise have despaired; the Divine Vocation on which all my earthly hopes were set, and which I was on the eve of renouncing: do not think these are obligations which can be lightly shaken off. If there are circumstances which forbid me to disabuse others of impressions which wrong you, imagine not that their false notions will affect my own gratitude,—my own respect for you!"

"Nay, sir! they ought; they must. Perhaps not your exaggerated gratitude for a service which you should not, however, measure by its effects on yourself, but by the slightness of the trouble it gave to me; not perhaps your gratitude, but your respect, yes."

"I tell you no! Do you fancy that I cannot judge of a man's nature without calling on him to trust me with all the secrets—all the errors, if you will—of his past life? Will not the calling to which I may now hold myself destined give me power and commandment to absolve all those who truly repent and unfeignedly believe? Oh, Mr. Waife! if in earlier days you have sinned, do you not repent? and how often, in many a lovely gentle sentence dropped unawares from your lips, have I had cause to know that you unfeignedly believe! Were I now clothed with sacred authority, could I not absolve you as a priest? Think you that, in the meanwhile, I dare judge you as a man? I,—Life's new recruit, guarded hitherto from temptation by careful parents and favouring fortune,—I presume to judge, and judge harshly, the gray-haired veteran, wearied by the march, wounded in the battle!"

"You are a noble-hearted human being," said Waife, greatly affected. "And, mark my words, a mantle of charity so large you will live to wear as a robe of honour. But hear me, sir! Mr. Hartopp also is a man infinitely charitable, benevolent, kindly, and, through all his simplicity, acutely shrewd; Mr. Hartopp, on hearing what was said against me, deemed me unfit to retain my grandchild, resigned the trust I had confided to him, and would have given me alms, no doubt, had I asked them, but not his hand. Take your hands, sir, from my shoulder, lest the touch sully you."

George did take his hands from the vagrant's shoulder, but it was to grasp the hand that waived them off and struggled to escape the pressure. "You are innocent! you are innocent! forgive me that I spoke to you of repentance as if you had been guilty. I feel you are innocent,—feel it by my own heart. You turn away. I defy you to say that you are guilty of what has been laid to your charge, of what has darkened your good

name, of what Mr. Hartopp believed to your prejudice. Look me in the face and say, 'I am not innocent; I have not been belied.'"

Waife remained voiceless, motionless.

The young man, in whose nature lay yet unproved all those grand qualities of heart, without which never was there a grand orator, a grand preacher,—qualities which grasp the results of argument, and arrive at the end of elaborate reasoning by sudden impulse,—here released Waife's hand, rose to his feet, and, facing Waife, as the old man sat with face averted, eyes downcast, breast heaving, said loftily,

"Forget that I may soon be the Christian minister whose duty bows his ear to the lips of Shame and Guilt; whose hand, when it points to Heaven, no mortal touch can sully; whose sublimest post is by the sinner's side. Look on me but as man and gentleman. See, I now extend this hand to you. If, as man and gentleman, you have done that which, could all hearts be read, all secrets known, human judgment reversed by Divine omniscience, forbids you to take this hand,—then reject it, go hence: we part! But if no such act be on your conscience, however you submit to its imputation,—THEN, in the name of Truth, as man and gentleman to man and gentleman, I command you to take this right hand, and, in the name of that Honour which bears no paltering, I forbid you to disobey."

The vagabond rose, like the Dead at the spell of a Magician,—took, as if irresistibly, the hand held out to him. And the scholar, overjoyed, fell on his breast, embracing him as a son.

"You know," said George, in trembling accents, "that the hand you have taken will never betray, never desert; but is it—is it really powerless to raise and to restore you to your place?"

"Powerless amongst your kind for that indeed," answered Waife, in accents still more tremulous. "All the kings of the earth are not strong enough to raise a name that has once been trampled into the mire. Learn that it is not only impossible for me to clear myself, but that it is equally impossible for me to confide to mortal being a single plea in defence if I am innocent, in extenuation if I am guilty. And saying this, and entreating you to hold it more merciful to condemn than to question me, —for question is torture,—I cannot reject your pity; but it would be mockery to offer me respect!"

"What! not respect the fortitude which calumny cannot crush? Would that fortitude be possible if you were not calm in the knowledge that no false witnesses can mislead the Eternal Judge? Respect you! yes,—because I have seen you happy in despite of men, and therefore I know that the cloud around you is not the frown of Heaven."

"Oh," cried Waife, the tears rolling down his cheeks, "and not an hour ago I was jesting at human friendship, venting graceless spleen on my

fellow-men! And now—now—ah, sir! Providence is so kind to me! And,” said he, brushing away his tears, as the old arch smile began to play round the corner of his mouth, ”and kind to me in the very quarter in which unkindness had so sorely smitten me. True, you directed towards me the woman who took from me my grandchild, who destroyed me in the esteem of good Mr. Hartopp. Well, you see, I have my sweet Sophy back again; we are in the home of all others I most longed for; and that woman, yes, I can, at least, thus far, confide to you my secrets, so that you may not blame yourself for sending her to Gatesboro’,—that very woman knows of my shelter; furnished me with the very reference necessary to obtain it; has freed my grandchild from a loathsome bondage, which I could not have legally resisted; and should new persecutions chase us will watch and warn and help us. And if you ask me how this change in her was effected; how, when we had abandoned all hope of green fields, and deemed that only in the crowd of a city we could escape those who pursued us when discovered there, though I fancied myself an adept in disguise, and the child and the dog were never seen out of the four garret walls in which I hid them,—if you ask me, I say, to explain how that very woman was suddenly converted from a remorseless foe into a saving guardian, I can only answer ’By no wit, no device, no persuasive art of mine. Providence softened her heart, and made it kind, just at a moment when no other agency on earth could have rescued us from—from—”

”Say no more: I guess! the paper this woman showed me was a legal form authorizing your poor little Sophy to be given up to the care of a father. I guess! of that father you would not speak ill to me; yet from that father you would save your grandchild. Say no more. And you quiet home, your humble employment, really content you?”

”Oh, if such a life can but last! Sophy is so well, so cheerful, so happy. Did not you bear her singing the other day? She never used to sing! But we had not been here a week when song broke out from her,—untaught, as from a bird. But if any ill report of me travel hither from Gatesboro’ or elsewhere, we should be sent away, and the bird would be mute in my thorn-tree: Sophy would sing no more.”

”Do not fear that slander shall drive you hence. Lady Montfort, you know, is my cousin, but you know not—few do—how thoroughly generous and gentle-hearted she is. I will speak of you to her,—oh! do not look alarmed. She will take my word when I tell her, ’That is a good man;’ and if she ask more, it will be enough to say, ’Those who have known better days are loth to speak to strangers of the past.’”

”I thank you earnestly, sincerely,” said Waife, brightening up. ”One favour more: if you saw in the formal document shown to you, or retain on your memory, the name of—of the person authorized to claim Sophy as his child, you will not mention it to Lady Montfort. I am hot sure if ever she heard that name, but she may have done so, and—and—” he paused a moment, and seemed to muse; then went on, not concluding his sentence. ”You are so good to me, Mr. Morley, that I wish to confide in you as far

as I can. Now, you see, I am already an old man, and my chief object is to raise up a friend for Sophy when I am gone,—a friend in her own sex, sir. Oh, you cannot guess how I long, how I yearn, to view that child under the holy fostering eyes of a woman. Perhaps if Lady Montfort saw my pretty Sophy she might take a fancy to her. Oh, if she did! if she did! And Sophy,” added Waife, proudly, ”has a right to respect. She is not like me,—any hovel is good enough for me; but for her! Do you know that I conceived that hope, that the hope helped to lead me back here when, months ago, I was at Humberston, intent upon rescuing Sophy; and saw—though,” observed Waife, with a sly twitch of the muscles round his mouth, ”I had no right at that precise moment to be seeing anything—Lady Montfort’s humane fear for a blind old impostor, who was trying to save his dog—a black dog, sir, who had dyed his hair—from her carriage wheels. And the hope became stronger still, when, the first Sunday I attended yon village church, I again saw that fair—wondrously fair—face at the far end,—fair as moonlight and as melancholy. Strange it is, sir, that I—naturally a boisterous, mirthful man, and now a shy, skulking fugitive—feel more attracted, more allured towards a countenance, in proportion as I read there the trace of sadness. I feel less abased by my own nothingness, more emboldened to approach and say, ’Not so far apart from me: thou too hast suffered.’ Why is this?”

GEORGE MORLEY.—”The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God;’ but the fool hath not said in his heart that there is no sorrow,—pithy and most profound sentence; intimating the irrefragable claim that binds men to the Father. And when the chain tightens, the children are closer drawn together. But to your wish: I will remember it. And when my cousin returns, she shall see your Sophy.”

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Waife, being by nature unlucky, considers that, in proportion as fortune brings him good luck, nature converts it into bad. He suffers Mr. George Morley to go away in his debt, and Sophy fears that he will be dull in consequence.

George Morley, a few weeks after the conversation last recorded, took his departure from Montfort Court, prepared, without a scruple, to present himself for ordination to the friendly bishop. From Waife he derived more than the cure of a disabling infirmity; he received those hints which, to a man who has the natural temperament of an orator, so rarely united with that of the scholar, expedite the mastery of the art that makes the fleeting human voice an abiding, imperishable power. The grateful teacher exhausted all his lore upon the pupil whose genius he had freed, whose heart had subdued himself. Before leaving, George was much perplexed how to offer to Waife any other remuneration than that

which, in Waife's estimate, had already overpaid all the benefits he had received; namely, unquestioning friendship and pledged protection. It need scarcely be said that George thought the man to whom he owed fortune and happiness was entitled to something beyond that moral recompense. But he found, at the first delicate hint, that Waife would not hear of money, though the ex-Comedian did not affect any very Quixotic notion on that practical subject. "To tell you the truth, sir, I have rather a superstition against having more money in my hands than I know what to do with. It has always brought me bad luck. And what is very hard,—the bad luck stays, but the money goes. There was that splendid sum I made at Gatesboro'. You should have seen me counting it over. I could not have had a prouder or more swelling heart if I had been, that great man Mr. Elwes the miser. And what bad luck it brought me, and how it all frittered itself away! Nothing to show for it but a silk ladder and an old hurdy-gurdy, and I sold them at half price. Then when I had the accident, which cost me this eye, the railway people behaved so generously, gave me L120,—think of that! And before three days the money was all gone!"

"How was that?" said George, half-amused, half-pained,—"stolen perhaps?"

"Not so," answered Waife, somewhat gloomily, "but restored. A poor dear old man, who thought very ill of me, and I don't wonder at it,—was reduced from great wealth to great poverty. While I was laid up, my landlady read a newspaper to me, and in that newspaper was an account of his reverse and destitution. But I was accountable to him for the balance of an old debt, and that, with the doctor's bills, quite covered my L120. I hope he does not think quite so ill of me now. But the money brought good luck to him, rather than to me. Well, sir, if you were now to give me money, I should be on the look-out for some mournful calamity. Gold is not natural to me. Some day, however, by and by, when you are inducted into your living, and have become a renowned preacher, and have plenty to spare, with an idea that you will feel more comfortable in your mind if you had done something royal for the basketmaker, I will ask you to help me to make up a sum, which I am trying by degrees to save,—an enormous sum, almost as much as I paid away from my railway compensation: I owe it to the lady who lent it to release Sophy from an engagement which I—certainly without any remorse of conscience—made the child break."

"Oh, yes! What is the amount? Let me at least repay that debt."

"Not yet. The lady can wait; and she would be pleased to wait, because she deserves to wait: it would be unkind to her to pay it off at once. But in the meanwhile if you could send me a few good books for Sophy,—instructive, yet not very, very dry,—and a French dictionary, I can teach her French when the winter days close in. You see I am not above being paid, sir. But, Mr. Morley, there is a great favour you can do me."

"What is it? Speak."

"Cautiously refrain from doing me a great disservice! You are going back to your friends and relations. Never speak of me to them. Never describe me and my odd ways. Name not the lady, nor—nor—nor—the man who claimed Sophy.

"Your friends might not hurt me; others might. Talk travels. The hare is not long in its form when it has a friend in a hound that gives tongue. Promise what I ask. Promise it as 'man and gentleman.'"

"Certainly. Yet I have one relation to whom I should like, with your permission, to speak of you, with whom I could wish you acquainted. He is so thorough a man of the world, that he might suggest some method to clear your good name, which you yourself would approve. My uncle, Colonel Morley—"

"On no account!" cried Waife, almost fiercely, and he evinced so much anger and uneasiness that it was long before George could pacify him by the most earnest assurances that his secret should be inviolably kept, and his injunctions faithfully obeyed. No men of the world consulted how to force him back to the world of men that he fled from! No colonels to scan him with martinet eyes, and hint how to pipeclay a tarnish! Waife's apprehensions gradually allayed and his confidence restored, one fine morning George took leave of his eccentric benefactor.

Waife and Sophy stood gazing after him from their garden-gate, the cripple leaning lightly on the child's arm. She looked with anxious fondness into the old man's thoughtful face, and clung to him more closely as she looked.

"Will you not be dull, poor Grandy? will you not miss him?"

"A little at first," said Waife, rousing himself. "Education is a great thing. An educated mind, provided that it does us no mischief,—which is not always the case,—cannot be withdrawn from our existence without leaving a blank behind. Sophy, we must seriously set to work and educate ourselves!"

"We will, Grandy dear," said Sophy, with decision; and a few minutes afterwards, "If I can become very, very clever, you will not pine so much after that gentleman,—will you, Grandy?"

CHAPTER VI.

Being a chapter that comes to an untimely end.

Winter was far advanced when Montfort Court was again brightened by the presence of its lady. A polite letter from Mr. Carr Vipont had reached her before leaving Windsor, suggesting how much it would be for the advantage of the Vipont interest if she would consent to visit for a month or two the seat in Ireland, which had been too long neglected, and at which my lord would join her on his departure from his Highland moors. So to Ireland went Lady Montfort. My lord did not join her there; but Mr. Carr Vipont deemed it desirable for the Vipont interest that the wedded pair should reunite at Montfort Court, where all the Vipont family were invited to witness their felicity or mitigate their ennui.

But before proceeding another stage in this history, it becomes a just tribute of respect to the great House of Vipont to pause and place its past records and present grandeur in fuller display before the reverential reader. The House of Vipont!—what am I about? The House of Vipont requires a chapter to itself.

CHAPTER VII.

The House of Vipont,—”/Majora canamus/.”

The House of Vipont! Looking back through ages, it seems as if the House of Vipont were one continuous living idiosyncrasy, having in its progressive development a connected unity of thought and action, so that through all the changes of its outward form it had been moved and guided by the same single spirit,—”/Le roi est mort; vive le roi!/"—A Vipont dies; live the Vipont! Despite its high-sounding Norman name, the House of Vipont was no House at all for some generations after the Conquest. The first Vipont who emerged from the obscurity of time was a rude soldier of Gascon origin, in the reign of Henry II.,—one of the thousand fighting-men who sailed from Milford Haven with the stout Earl of Pembroke, on that strange expedition which ended in the conquest of Ireland. This gallant man obtained large grants of land in that fertile island; some Mac or some O'— vanished, and the House of Vipont rose.

During the reign of Richard I., the House of Vipont, though recalled to England (leaving its Irish acquisitions in charge of a fierce cadet, who served as middleman), excused itself from the Crusade, and, by marriage with a rich goldsmith's daughter, was enabled to lend moneys to those who indulged in that exciting but costly pilgrimage. In the reign of John, the House of Vipont foreclosed its mortgages on lands thus pledged, and became possessed of a very fair property in England, as well as its fiefs in the sister isle.

The House of Vipont took no part in the troublesome politics of that day. Discreetly obscure, it attended to its own fortunes, and felt small

interest in Magna Charta. During the reigns of the Plantagenet Edwards, who were great encouragers of mercantile adventure, the House of Vipont, shunning Crecy, Bannockburn, and such profitless brawls, intermarried with London traders, and got many a good thing out of the Genoese. In the reign of Henry IV. the House of Vipont reaped the benefit of its past forbearance and modesty. Now, for the first time, the Viponts appear as belted knights; they have armorial bearings; they are Lancastrian to the backbone; they are exceedingly indignant against heretics; they burn the Lollards; they have places in the household of Queen Joan, who was called a witch,—but a witch is a very good friend when she wields a sceptre instead of a broomstick. And in proof of its growing importance, the House of Vipont marries a daughter of the then mighty House of Darrell. In the reign of Henry V., during the invasion of France, the House of Vipont—being afraid of the dysentery which carried off more brave fellows than the field of Agincourt—contrived to be a minor. The Wars of the Roses puzzled the House of Vipont sadly. But it went through that perilous ordeal with singular tact and success. The manner in which it changed sides, each change safe, and most changes lucrative, is beyond all praise.

On the whole, it preferred the Yorkists; it was impossible to be actively Lancastrian with Henry VI. of Lancaster always in prison. And thus, at the death of Edward IV., the House of Vipont was Baron Vipont of Vipont, with twenty manors. Richard III. counted on the House of Vipont, when he left London to meet Richmond at Bosworth: he counted without his host. The House of Vipont became again intensely Lancastrian, and was amongst the first to crowd round the litter in which Henry VII. entered the metropolis. In that reign it married a relation of Empson's, did the great House of Vipont! and as nobles of elder date had become scarce and poor, Henry VII. was pleased to make the House of Vipont an Earl,—the Earl of Montfort. In the reign of Henry VIII., instead of burning Lollards, the House of Vipont was all for the Reformation: it obtained the lands of two priories and one abbey. Gorged with that spoil, the House of Vipont, like an anaconda in the process of digestion, slept long. But no, it slept not. Though it kept itself still as a mouse during the reign of Bloody Queen Mary (only letting it be known at Court that the House of Vipont had strong papal leanings); though during the reigns of Elizabeth and James it made no noise, the House of Vipont was silently inflating its lungs and improving its constitution. Slept, indeed! it was wide awake. Then it was that it began systematically its grand policy of alliances; then was it sedulously grafting its olive branches on the stems of those fruitful New Houses that had sprung up with the Tudors; then, alive to the spirit of the day, provident of the wants of the morrow, over the length and breadth of the land it wove the interlacing network of useful cousinhood! Then, too, it began to build palaces, to enclose parks; it travelled, too, a little, did the House of Vipont! it visited Italy; it conceived a taste: a very elegant House became the House of Vipont! And in James's reign, for the first time, the House of Vipont got the Garter. The Civil Wars broke out: England was rent asunder. Peer and knight took part with one side or the other.

The House of Vipont was again perplexed. Certainly at the commencement it, was all for King Charles. But when King Charles took to fighting, the House of Vipont shook its sagacious head, and went about, like Lord Falkland, sighing, "Peace, peace!" Finally, it remembered its neglected estates in Ireland: its duties called it thither. To Ireland it went, discreetly sad, and, marrying a kinswoman of Lord Fauconberg,—the connection least exposed to Fortune's caprice of all the alliances formed by the Lord Protector's family,—it was safe when Cromwell visited Ireland; and no less safe when Charles II. was restored to England. During the reign of the merry monarch the House of Vipont was a courtier, married a beauty, got the Garter again, and, for the first time, became the fashion. Fashion began to be a power. In the reign of James II. the House of Vipont again contrived to be a minor, who came of age just in time to take the oaths of fealty to William and Mary. In case of accidents, the House of Vipont kept on friendly terms with the exiled Stuarts, but it wrote no letters, and got into no scrapes. It was not, however, till the Government, under Sir Robert Walpole, established the constitutional and parliamentary system which characterizes modern freedom, that the puissance accumulated through successive centuries by the House of Vipont became pre-eminently visible. By that time its lands were vast; its wealth enormous; its parliamentary influence, as "a Great House," was a part of the British Constitution. At this period, the House of Vipont found it convenient to rend itself into two grand divisions,—the peer's branch and the commoner's. The House of Commons had become so important that it was necessary for the House of Vipont to be represented there by a great commoner. Thus arose the family of Carr Vipont. That division, owing to a marriage settlement favouring a younger son by the heiress of the Carrs, carried off a good slice from the estate of the earldom: /uno averso, non deficit alter/; the earldom mourned, but replaced the loss by two wealthy wedlocks of its own; and had long since seen cause to rejoice that its power in the Upper Chamber was strengthened by such aid in the Lower. For, thanks to its parliamentary influence, and the aid of the great commoner, in the reign of George III. the House of Vipont became a Marquess. From that time to the present day, the House of Vipont has gone on prospering and progressive. It was to the aristocracy what the "Times" newspaper is to the press. The same quick sympathy with public feeling, the same unity of tone and purpose, the same adaptability, and something of the same lofty tone of superiority to the petty interests of party. It may be conceded that the House of Vipont was less brilliant than the "Times" newspaper, but eloquence and wit, necessary to the duration of a newspaper, were not necessary to that of the House of Vipont. Had they been so, it would have had them.

The head of the House of Vipont rarely condescended to take office. With a rent-roll loosely estimated at about L170,000 a year, it is beneath a man to take from the public a paltry five or six thousand a year, and undergo all the undignified abuse of popular assemblies, and "a ribald press." But it was a matter of course that the House of Vipont should be represented in any Cabinet that a constitutional monarch could be advised

to form. Since the time of Walpole, a Vipont was always in the service of his country, except in those rare instances when the country was infamously misgoverned. The cadets of the House, or the senior member of the great commoner's branch of it, sacrificed their ease to fulfil that duty. The Montfort marquesses in general were contented with situations of honour in the household, as of Lord Steward, Lord Chamberlain, or Master of the Horse, etc.,—not onerous dignities; and even these they only deigned to accept on those special occasions when danger threatened the star of Brunswick, and the sense of its exalted station forbade the House of Vipont to leave its country in the dark.

Great Houses like that of Vipont assist the work of civilization by the law of their existence. They are sure to have a spirited and wealthy tenantry, to whom, if but for the sake of that popular character which doubles political influence, they are liberal and kindly landlords. Under their sway fens and sands become fertile; agricultural experiments are tested on a large scale; cattle and sheep improve in breed; national capital augments, and, springing beneath the ploughshare, circulates indirectly to speed the ship and animate the loom. Had there been no Woburn, no Holkham, no Montfort Court, England would be the poorer by many a million. Our great Houses tend also to the refinement of national taste; they have their show places, their picture galleries, their beautiful grounds. The humblest drawing-rooms owe an elegance or comfort, the smallest garden a flower or esculent, to the importations which luxury borrowed from abroad, or the inventions it stimulated at home, for the original benefits of great Houses. Having a fair share of such merits, in common with other great Houses, the House of Vipont was not without good qualities peculiar to itself. Precisely because it was the most egotistical of Houses, filled with the sense of its own identity, and guided by the instincts of its own conservation, it was a very civil, good-natured House,—courteous, generous, hospitable; a House (I mean the head of it, not of course all its subordinate members, including even the august Lady Selina) that could bow graciously and shake hands with you. Even if you had no vote yourself, you might have a cousin who had a vote. And once admitted into the family, the House adopted you; you had only to marry one of its remotest relations and the House sent you a wedding present; and at every general election, invited you to rally round your connection,—the Marquess. Therefore, next only to the Established Church, the House of Vipont was that British institution the roots of which were the most widely spread.

Now the Viponts had for long generations been an energetic race. Whatever their defects, they had exhibited shrewdness and vigour. The late Marquess (grandfather to the present) had been perhaps the ablest (that is, done most for the House of Vipont) of them all. Of a grandiose and superb mode of living; of a majestic deportment; of princely manners; of a remarkable talent for the management of all business, whether private or public; a perfect enthusiast for the House of Vipont, and aided by a marchioness in all respects worthy of him,—he might be said to be the culminating flower of the venerable stem. But the present

lord, succeeding to the title as a mere child, was a melancholy contrast, not only to his grandsire, but to the general character of his progenitors. Before his time, every Head of the House had done something for it; even the most frivolous had contributed one had collected the pictures, another the statues, a third the medals, a fourth had amassed the famous Vipont library; while others had at least married heiresses, or augmented, through ducal lines, the splendour of the interminable cousinhood. The present Marquess was literally nil. The pith of the Viponts was not in him. He looked well; he dressed well: if life were only the dumb show of a tableau, he would have been a paragon of a Marquess. But he was like the watches we give to little children, with a pretty gilt dial-plate, and no works in them. He was thoroughly inert; there was no winding him up: he could not manage his property; he could not answer his letters,—very few of them could he even read through. Politics did not interest him, nor literature, nor field-sports. He shot, it is true, but mechanically; wondering, perhaps, why he did shoot. He attended races, because the House of Vipont kept a racing stud. He bet on his own horses, but if they lost showed no vexation. Admirers (no Marquess of Montfort could be wholly without them) said, "What fine temper! what good breeding!" it was nothing but constitutional apathy. No one could call him a bad man: he was not a profligate, an oppressor, a miser, a spendthrift; he would not have taken the trouble to be a bad man on any account. Those who beheld his character at a distance would have called him an exemplary man. The more conspicuous duties of his station—subscriptions, charities, the maintenance of grand establishments, the encouragement of the fine arts—were virtues admirably performed for him by others. But the phlegm or nullity of his being was not, after all, so complete as I have made it, perhaps, appear. He had one susceptibility which is more common with women than with men,—the susceptibility to pique. His /amour propre/ was unforgiving: pique that, and he could do a rash thing, a foolish thing, a spiteful thing; pique that, and, prodigious! the watch went! He had a rooted pique against his marchioness. Apparently he had conceived this pique from the very first. He showed it passively by supreme neglect; he showed it actively by removing her from all the spheres of power which naturally fall to the wife when the husband shuns the details of business. Evidently he had a dread lest any one should say, "Lady Montfort influences my lord." Accordingly, not only the management of his estates fell to Carr Vipont, but even of his gardens, his household, his domestic arrangements. It was Carr Vipont or Lady Selina who said to Lady Montfort, "Give a ball;" "You should ask so and so to dinner;" "Montfort was much hurt to see the old lawn at the Twickenham villa broken up by those new bosquets. True, it is settled on you as a jointure-house, but for that very reason Montfort is sensitive," etc. In fact, they were virtually as separated, my lord and my lady, as if legally disunited, and as if Carr Vipont and Lady Selina were trustees or intermediaries in any polite approach to each other. But, on the other hand, it is fair to say that where Lady Montfort's sphere of action did not interfere with her husband's plans, habits, likings, dislikings, jealous apprehensions that she should be supposed to have any ascendancy over what exclusively belonged to himself

as /Roi faineant/ of the Viponts, she was left free as air. No attempt at masculine control or conjugal advice. At her disposal was wealth without stint, every luxury the soft could desire, every gewgaw the vain could covet. Had her pin-money, which in itself was the revenue of an ordinary peeress, failed to satisfy her wants; had she grown tired of wearing the family diamonds, and coveted new gems from Golconda,—a single word to Carr Vipont or Lady Selina would have been answered by a *carte blanche* on the Bank of England. But Lady Montfort had the misfortune not to be extravagant in her tastes. Strange to say, in the world Lord Montfort's marriage was called a love-match; he had married a portionless girl, daughter to one of his poorest and obscurest cousins, against the uniform policy of the House of Vipont, which did all it could for poor cousins except marrying them to its chief. But Lady Montfort's conduct in these trying circumstances was admirable and rare. Few affronts can humiliate us unless we resent them—and in vain. Lady Montfort had that exquisite dignity which gives to submission the grace of cheerful acquiescence. That in the gay world flatterers should gather round a young wife so eminently beautiful, and so wholly left by her husband to her own guidance, was inevitable. But at the very first insinuated compliment or pathetic condolence, Lady Montfort, so meek in her household, was haughty enough to have daunted Lovelace. She was thus very early felt to be beyond temptation, and the boldest passed on, nor presumed to tempt. She was unpopular; called "proud and freezing;" she did not extend the influence of "The House;" she did not confirm its fashion,—fashion which necessitates social ease, and which no rank, no wealth, no virtue, can of themselves suffice to give. And this failure on her part was a great offence in the eyes of the House of Vipont. "She does absolutely nothing for us," said Lady Selina; but Lady Selina in her heart was well pleased that to her in reality thus fell, almost without a rival, the female representation, in the great world, of the Vipont honours. Lady Selina was fashion itself.

Lady Montfort's social peculiarity was in the eagerness with which she sought the society of persons who enjoyed a reputation for superior intellect, whether statesmen, lawyers, authors, philosophers, artists. Intellectual intercourse seemed as if it was her native atmosphere, from which she was habitually banished, to which she returned with an instinctive yearning and a new zest of life; yet was she called, even here, nor seemingly without justice, capricious and unsteady in her likings. These clever personages, after a little while, all seemed to disappoint her expectations of them; she sought the acquaintance of each with cordial earnestness; slid from the acquaintance with weary languor, —never, after all, less alone than when alone.

And so wondrous lovely! Nothing so rare as beauty of the high type: genius and beauty, indeed, are both rare; genius, which is the beauty of the mind,—beauty, which is the genius of the body. But, of the two, beauty is the rarer. All of us can count on our fingers some forty or fifty persons of undoubted and illustrious genius, including those famous in action, letters, art. But can any of us remember to have seen more

than four or five specimens of first-rate ideal beauty? Whosoever had seen Lady Montfort would have ranked her amongst such four or five in his recollection. There was in her face that lustrous dazzle to which the Latin poet, perhaps, refers when he speaks of the—

”Nitor
Splendentis Pario marmore purius . . .
Et voltus, nimium lubricus adspici,”

and which an English poet, with the less sensuous but more spiritual imagination of northern genius, has described in lines that an English reader may be pleased to see rescued from oblivion,—

”Her face was like the milky way i’ the sky,
A meeting of gentle lights without a name.”
(Suckling)

The eyes so purely bright, the exquisite harmony of colouring between the dark (not too dark) hair and the ivory of the skin; such sweet radiance in the lip when it broke into a smile. And it was said that in her maiden day, before Caroline Lyndsay became Marchioness of Montfort, that smile was the most joyous thing imaginable. Absurd now; you would not think it, but that stately lady had been a wild, fanciful girl, with the merriest laugh and the quickest tear, filling the air round her with April sunshine. Certainly, no beings ever yet lived the life Nature intended them to live, nor had fair play for heart and mind, who contrived, by hook or by crook, to marry the wrong person!

CHAPTER VIII.

The interior of the great house.—The British Constitution at home in a family party.

Great was the family gathering that Christmas-tide at Montfort Court. Thither flocked the cousins of the House in all degrees and of various ranks. From dukes, who had nothing left to wish for that kings and cousinhoods can give, to briefless barristers and aspiring cornets, of equally good blood with the dukes,—the superb family united its motley scions. Such reunions were frequent: they belonged to the hereditary policy of the House of Vipont. On this occasion the muster of the clan was more significant than usual; there was a ”CRISES” in the constitutional history of the British empire. A new Government had been suddenly formed within the last six weeks, which certainly portended some direful blow on our ancient institutions; for the House of Vipont had not been consulted in its arrangements, and was wholly unrepresented in the Ministry, even by a lordship of the Treasury. Carr Vipont had therefore

summoned the patriotic and resentful kindred.

It is an hour or so after the conclusion of dinner. The gentlemen have joined the ladies in the state suite, a suite which the last Marquess had rearranged and redecorated in his old age, during the long illness that finally conducted him to his ancestors. During his earlier years that princely Marquess had deserted Montfort Court for a seat nearer to London, and therefore much more easily filled with that brilliant society of which he had been long the ornament and centre,—railways not then existing for the annihilation of time and space, and a journey to a northern county four days with posthorses making the invitations even of a Marquess of Montfort unalluring to languid beauties and gouty ministers. But nearing the end of his worldly career, this long neglect of the dwelling identified with his hereditary titles smote the conscience of the illustrious sinner. And other occupations beginning to pall, his lordship, accompanied and cheered by a chaplain, who had a fine taste in the decorative arts, came resolutely to Montfort Court; and there, surrounded with architects and gilders and upholsterers, redeemed his errors; and, soothed by the reflection of the palace provided for his successor, added to his vaults—a coffin.

The suite expands before the eye. You are in the grand drawing-room, copied from that of Versailles. That is the picture, full length, of the late Marquess in his robes; its pendant is the late Marchioness, his wife. That table of malachite is a present from the Russian Emperor Alexander; that vase of Sevres which rests on it was made for Marie Antoinette,—see her portrait enamelled in its centre. Through the open door at the far end your eye loses itself in a vista of other pompous chambers,—the music-room, the statue hall, the orangery; other rooms there are appertaining to the suite, a ballroom fit for Babylon, a library that might have adorned Alexandria,—but they are not lighted, nor required, on this occasion; it is strictly a family party, sixty guests and no more.

In the drawing-room three whist-tables carry off the more elderly and grave. The piano, in the music-room, attracts a younger group. Lady Selina Vipont's eldest daughter, Honoria, a young lady not yet brought out, but about to be brought out the next season, is threading a wonderfully intricate German piece,

”Link'd sweetness, long drawn out,”

with variations. Her science is consummate. No pains have been spared on her education; elaborately accomplished, she is formed to be the sympathizing spouse of a wealthy statesman. Lady Montfort is seated by an elderly duchess, who is good-natured and a great talker; near her are seated two middle-aged gentlemen, who had been conversing with her till the duchess, having cut in, turned dialogue into monologue.

The elder of these two gentlemen is Mr. Carr Vipont, bald, with clipped

parliamentary whiskers; values himself on a likeness to Canning, but with a portlier presence; looks a large-acred man. Carr Vipont has about L40,000 a year; has often refused office for himself, while taking care that other Viponts should have it; is a great authority in committee business and the rules of the House of Commons; speaks very seldom, and at no great length, never arguing, merely stating his opinion, carries great weight with him, and as he votes vote fifteen other members of the House of Vipont, besides admiring satellites. He can therefore turn divisions, and has decided the fate of cabinets. A pleasant man, a little consequential, but the reverse of haughty,—unctuously overbearing. The other gentleman, to whom he is listening, is our old acquaintance Colonel Alban Vipont Morley, Darrell's friend, George's uncle,—a man of importance, not inferior, indeed, to that of his kinsman Carr; an authority in clubrooms, an oracle in drawing-rooms, a first-rate man of the beau monde. Alban Morley, a younger brother, had entered the Guards young; retired young also from the Guards with the rank of Colonel, and on receipt of a legacy from an old aunt, which, with the interest derived from the sum at which he sold his commission, allowed him a clear income of L1,000 a year. This modest income sufficed for all his wants, fine gentleman though he was. He had refused to go into Parliament,—refused a high place in a public department. Single himself, he showed his respect for wedlock by the interest he took in the marriages of other people; just as Earl Warwick, too wise to set up for a king, gratified his passion for royalty by becoming the king-maker. The Colonel was exceedingly accomplished, a very fair scholar, knew most modern languages. In painting an amateur, in music a connoisseur; witty at times, and with wit of a high quality, but thrifty in the expenditure of it; too wise to be known as a wit. Manly too, a daring rider, who had won many a fox's brush; a famous deer-stalker, and one of the few English gentlemen who still keep up the noble art of fencing,—twice a week to be seen, foil in hand, against all comers in Angelo's rooms. Thin, well-shaped,—not handsome, my dear young lady, far from it, but with an air so thoroughbred that, had you seen him in the day when the opera-house had a crushroom and a fops' alley,—seen him in either of those resorts, surrounded by elaborate dandies and showy beauty-men, dandies and beauty-men would have seemed to you secondrate and vulgar; and the eye, fascinated by that quiet form,—plain in manner, plain in dress, plain in feature,—you would have said, "How very distinguished it is to be so plain!" Knowing the great world from the core to the cuticle, and on that knowledge basing authority and position, Colonel Morley was not calculating, not cunning, not suspicious,—his sagacity the more quick because its movements were straightforward; intimate with the greatest, but sought, not seeking; not a flatterer nor a parasite, but when his advice was asked (even if advice necessitated reproof) giving it with military candour: in fine, a man of such social reputation as rendered him an ornament and prop to the House of Vipont; and with unsuspected depths of intelligence and feeling, which lay in the lower strata of his knowledge of this world to witness of some other one, and justified Darrell in commending a boy like Lionel Haughton to the Colonel's friendly care and admonitory counsels. The Colonel, like other men, had

his weakness, if weakness it can be called: he believed that the House of Vipont was not merely the Corinthian capital, but the embattled keep—not merely the /dulce decus/, but the /praesidium columenque rerum/—of the British monarchy. He did not boast of his connection with the House; he did not provoke your spleen by enlarging on its manifold virtues; he would often have his harmless jest against its members, or even against its pretensions: but such seeming evidences of forbearance or candour were cunning devices to mitigate envy. His devotion to the House was not obtrusive: it was profound. He loved the House of Vipont for the sake of England: he loved England for the sake of the House of Vipont. Had it been possible, by some tremendous reversal of the ordinary laws of nature, to dissociate the cause of England from the cause of the House of Vipont, the Colonel would have said, "Save at least the Ark of the Constitution! and rally round the old House!"

The Colonel had none of Guy Darrell's infirmity of family pride; he cared not a rush for mere pedigrees,—much too liberal and enlightened for such obsolete prejudices. No! He knew the world too well not to be quite aware that old family and long pedigrees are of no use to a man if he has not some money or some merit. But it was of use to a man to be a cousin of the House of Vipont, though without any money, without any merit at all. It was of use to be part and parcel of a British institution; it was of use to have a legitimate indefeasible right to share in the administration and patronage of an empire, on which (to use a novel illustration) "the sun never sets." You might want nothing for yourself; the Colonel and the Marquess equally wanted nothing for themselves but man is not to be a selfish egotist! Man has cousins: his cousins may want something. Demosthenes denounces, in words that inflame every manly breast, the ancient Greek who does not love his POLIS or State, even though he take nothing from it but barren honour, and contribute towards it—a great many disagreeable taxes. As the POLIS to the Greek, was the House of Vipont to Alban Vipont Morley. It was the most beautiful, touching affection imaginable! Whenever the House was in difficulties, whenever it was threatened by a CRISIS, the Colonel was by its side, sparing no pains, neglecting no means, to get the Ark of the Constitution back into smooth water. That duty done, he retired again into private life, and scorned all other reward than the still whisper of applauding conscience.

"Yes," said Alban Morley, whose voice, though low and subdued in tone, was extremely distinct, with a perfect enunciation. "Yes, it is quite true, my nephew has taken orders,—his defect in speech, if not quite removed, has ceased to be any obstacle, even to eloquence; an occasional stammer may be effective,—it increases interest, and when the right word comes, there is the charm of surprise in it. I do not doubt that George will be a very distinguished clergyman."

MR. CARR VIPONT.—"We want one; the House wants a very distinguished clergyman: we have none at this moment,—not a bishop, not even a dean! all mere parish parsons, and among them not one we could push. Very odd,

with more than forty livings too. But the Viponts seldom take to the Church kindly: George must be pushed. The more I think of it, the more we want a bishop: a bishop would be useful in the present CRISIS." (Looking round the rooms proudly, and softening his voice), "A numerous gathering, Morley! This demonstration will strike terror in Downing Street, eh! The old House stands firm,—never was a family so united: all here, I think,—that is, all worth naming,—all, except Sir James, whom Montfort chooses to dislike, and George—and George comes to-morrow."

COLONEL MORLEY.—"You forget the most eminent of all our connections,—the one who could indeed strike terror into Downing Street, were his voice to be heard again!"

CARR VIPONT.—"Whom do you mean? Ah, I know! Guy Darrell. His wife was a Vipont; and he is not here. But he has long since ceased to communicate with any of us; the only connection that ever fell away from the House of Vipont, especially in a CRISIS like the present. Singular man! For all the use he is to us, he might as well be dead! But he has a fine fortune: what will he do with it?"

THE DUCHESS.—"My dear Lady Montfort, you have hurt yourself with that paper cutter."

LADY MONTFORT.—"NO, indeed. Hush! we are disturbing Mr. Carr Vipont!"

The Duchess, in awe of Carr Vipont, sinks her voice, and gabbles on, whisperously.

CARR VIPONT (resuming the subject).—"A very fine fortune: what will he do with it?"

COLONEL MORLEY.—"I don't know; but I had a letter from him some months ago."

CARR VIPONT.—"You had, and never told me!"

COLONEL MORLEY.—"Of no importance to you, my dear Carr. His letter merely introduced to me a charming young fellow,—a kinsman of his own (no Vipont),—Lionel Haughton, son of poor Charlie Haughton, whom you may remember."

CARR VIPONT.—"Yes, a handsome scamp; went to the dogs. So Darrell takes up Charlie's son: what! as his heir?"

COLONEL MORLEY.—"In his letter to me he anticipated that question in the negative."

CARR VIPONT.—"Has Darrell any nearer kinsman?"

COLONEL MORLEY.—"Not that I know of."

CARR VIPONT.—"Perhaps he will select one of his wife's family for his heir,—a Vipont; I should not wonder."

COLONEL MORLEY (dryly).—"I should. But why may not Darrell marry again? I always thought he would; I think so still."

CARR VIPONT (glancing towards his own daughter Honoria).—"Well, a wife well chosen might restore him to society, and to us. Pity, indeed, that so great an intellect should be suspended,—a voice so eloquent hushed. You are right; in this CRISIS, Guy Darrell once more in the House of Commons, we should have all we require,—an orator, a debater! Very odd, but at this moment we have no speakers,—WE the Viponts!"

COLONEL MORLEY.—"Yourself!"

CARR VIPONT.—"You are too kind. I can speak on occasions; but regularly, no. Too much drudgery; not young enough to take to it now. So you think Darrell will marry again? A remarkably fine-looking fellow when I last saw him: not old yet; I dare say well preserved. I wish I had thought of asking him here—Montfort!" (Lord Montfort, with one or two male friends, was passing by towards a billiard-room, opening through a side-door from the regular suite) "Montfort! only think, we forgot to invite Guy Darrell. Is it too late before our party breaks up?"

LORD MONTFORT (sullenly).—"I don't choose Guy Darrell to be invited to my house."

Carr Vipont was literally stunned by a reply so contumacious. Lord Montfort demur at what Carr Vipont suggested? He could not believe his senses.

"Not choose, my dear Montfort! you are joking. A monstrous clever fellow, Guy Darrell, and at this CRISIS—"

"I hate clever fellows; no such bores!" said Lord Montfort, breaking from the caressing clasp of Carr Vipont, and stalking away.

"Spare your regrets, my dear Carr," said Colonel Morley. "Darrell is not in England: I rather believe he is in Verona." Therewith the Colonel sauntered towards the group gathered round the piano. A little time

afterwards Lady Montfort escaped from the Duchess, and, mingling courteously with her livelier guests, found herself close to Colonel Morley. "Will you give me my revenge at chess?" she asked, with her rare smile. The Colonel was charmed. As they sat down and ranged their men, Lady Montfort remarked carelessly,

"I overheard you say you had lately received a letter from Mr. Darrell. Does he write as if well,—cheerful? You remember that I was much with his daughter, much in his house, when I was a child. He was ever most kind to me." Lady Montfort's voice here faltered.

"He writes with no reference to himself, his health, or his spirits. But his young kinsman described him to me as in good health,—wonderfully young-looking for his years. But cheerful,—no! Darrell and I entered the world together; we were friends as much as a man so busy and so eminent as he could be friends with a man like myself, indolent by habit and obscure out of Mayfair. I know his nature; we both know something of his family sorrows. He cannot be happy! Impossible!—alone, childless, secluded. Poor Darrell, abroad now; in Verona, too!—the dullest place! in mourning still for Romeo and Juliet! 'T is your turn to move. In his letter Darrell talked of going on to Greece, Asia, penetrating into the depths of Africa,—the wildest schemes! Dear County Guy, as we called him at Eton! what a career his might have been! Don't let us talk of him, it makes me mournful. Like Goethe, I avoid painful subjects upon principle."

LADY MONTFORT.—"No; we will not talk of him. No; I take the Queen's pawn. No, we will not talk of him! no!" The game proceeded; the Colonel was within three moves of checkmating his adversary. Forgetting the resolution come to, he said, as she paused, and seemed despondently meditating a hopeless defence,

"Pray, my fair cousin, what makes Montfort dislike my old friend Darrell?"

"Dislike! Does he! I don't know. Vanquished again, Colonel Morley!" She rose; and as he restored the chessmen to their box, she leaned thoughtfully over the table.

"This young kinsman, will he not be a comfort to Mr. Darrell?"

"He would be a comfort and a pride to a father; but to Darrell, so distant a kinsman,—comfort!—why and how? Darrell will provide for him, that is all. A very gentlemanlike young man; gone to Paris by my advice; wants polish and knowledge of life. When he comes back he must enter society: I have put his name up at White's; may I introduce him to you?"

Lady Montfort hesitated, and, after a pause, said, almost rudely, "No."

She left the Colonel, slightly shrugging his shoulders, and passed into

the billiard-room with a quick step. Some ladies were already there looking at the players. Lord Montfort was chalking his cue. Lady Montfort walked straight up to him: her colour was heightened; her lip was quivering; she placed her hand on his shoulder with a wife-like boldness. It seemed as if she had come there to seek him from an impulse of affection. She asked with a hurried fluttering kindness of voice, if he had been successful, and called him by his Christian name. Lord Montfort's countenance, before merely apathetic, now assumed an expression of extreme distaste. "Come to teach me to make a cannon, I suppose!" he said mutteringly, and turning from her, contemplated the balls and missed the cannon.

"Rather in my way, Lady Montfort," said he then, and, retiring to a corner, said no more.

Lady Montfort's countenance became still more flushed. She lingered a moment, returned to the drawing-room, and for the rest of the evening was unusually animated, gracious, fascinating. As she retired with her lady guests for the night she looked round, saw Colonel Morley, and held out her hand to him.

"Your nephew comes here to-morrow," said she, "my old play-fellow; impossible quite to forget old friends; good night."

CHAPTER IX.

"Les extremes se touchent."

The next day the gentlemen were dispersed out of doors, a large shooting party. Those who did not shoot, walked forth to inspect the racing stud or the model farm. The ladies had taken their walk; some were in their own rooms, some in the reception-rooms, at work, or reading, or listening to the piano,—Honoraria Carr Vipont again performing. Lady Montfort was absent; Lady Selina kindly supplied the hostess's place. Lady Selina was embroidering, with great skill and taste, a pair of slippers for her eldest boy, who was just entered at Oxford, having left Eton with a reputation of being the neatest dresser, and not the worst cricketer, of that renowned educational institute. It is a mistake to suppose that fine ladies are not sometimes very fond mothers and affectionate wives. Lady Selina, beyond her family circle, was trivial, unsympathizing, cold-hearted, supercilious by temperament, never kind but through policy, artificial as clock work. But in her own home, to her husband, her children, Lady Selina was a very good sort of woman,—devotedly attached to Carr Vipont, exaggerating his talents, thinking him the first man in England, careful of his honour, zealous for his interest, soothing in his cares, tender in his ailments; to her girls prudent and watchful, to her

boys indulgent and caressing; minutely attentive to the education of the first, according to her high-bred ideas of education,—and they really were "superior" girls, with much instruction and well-balanced minds,—less authoritative with the last, because boys being not under her immediate control, her sense of responsibility allowed her to display more fondness and less dignity in her intercourse with them than with young ladies who must learn from her example, as well as her precepts, the patrician decorum which becomes the smooth result of impulse restrained and emotion checked: boys might make a noise in the world, girls should make none. Lady Selina, then, was working the slippers for her absent son, her heart being full of him at that moment. She was describing his character and expatiating on his promise to two or three attentive listeners, all interested, as being themselves of the Vipont blood, in the probable destiny of the heir to the Carr Viponts.

"In short," said Lady Selina, winding up, "as soon as Reginald is of age we shall get him into Parliament. Carr has always lamented that he himself was not broken into office early; Reginald must be. Nothing so requisite for public men as early training; makes them practical, and not too sensitive to what those horrid newspaper men say. That was Pitt's great advantage. Reginald has ambition; he should have occupation to keep him out of mischief. It is an anxious thing for a mother, when a son is good-looking: such danger of his being spoiled by the women. Yes, my dear, it is a small foot, very small,—his father's foot."

"If Lord Montfort should have no family," said a somewhat distant and subaltern Vipont, whisperingly and hesitating, "does not the title—"

"No, my dear," interrupted Lady Selina; "no, the title does not come to us. It is a melancholy thought, but the marquise, in that case, is extinct. No other heir-male from Gilbert, the first marquess. Carr says there is even likely to be some dispute about the earldom. The Barony, of course, is safe; goes with the Irish estates, and most of the English; and goes (don't you know?) to Sir James Vipont, the last person who ought to have it; the quietest, stupidest creature; not brought up to the sort of thing,—a mere gentleman-farmer on a small estate in Devonshire."

"He is not here?"

"No. Lord Montfort does not like him. Very natural. Nobody likes his heir, if not his own child; and some people don't even like their own eldest sons! Shocking; but so it is. Montfort is the kindest, most tractable being that ever was, except where he takes a dislike. He dislikes two or three people very much."

"True; how he did dislike poor Mrs. Lyndsay!" said one of the listeners, smiling.

"Mrs. Lyndsay, yes,—dear Lady Montfort's mother. I can't say I pitied her, though I was sorry for Lady Montfort. How Mrs. Lyndsay ever took in

Montfort for Caroline I can't conceive! How she had the face to think of it! He, a mere youth at the time! Kept secret from all his family, even from his grandmother,—the darkest transaction. I don't wonder that he never forgave it."

FIRST LISTENER.—"Caroline has beauty enough to—"

LADY SELINA (interrupting).—"Beauty, of course: no one can deny that. But not at all suited to such a position, not brought up to the sort of thing. Poor Montfort! he should have married a different kind of woman altogether,—a woman like his grandmother, the last Lady Montfort. Caroline does nothing for the House,—nothing; has not even a child,—most unfortunate affair."

SECOND LISTENER.—"Mrs. Lyndsay was very poor, was not she? Caroline, I suppose, had no opportunity of forming those tastes and habits which are necessary for—"

LADY SELINA (helping the listener).—"For such a position and such a fortune. You are quite right, my dear. People brought up in one way cannot accommodate themselves to another; and it is odd, but I have observed that people brought up poor can accommodate themselves less to being very rich than people brought up rich can accommodate themselves to being very poor. As Carr says, in his pointed way, 'It is easier to stoop than to climb.' Yes; Mrs. Lyndsay was, you know, a daughter of Seymour Vipont, who was for so many years in the Administration, with a fair income from his salary, and nothing out of it. She married one of the Scotch Lyndsays,—good family, of course, with a very moderate property. She was left a widow young, with an only child, Caroline. Came to town with a small jointure. The late Lady Montfort was very kind to her. So were we all; took her up; pretty woman; pretty manners; worldly,—oh, very! I don't like worldly people. Well, but all of a sudden a dreadful thing happened. The heir-at-law disputed the jointure, denied that Lyndsay had any right to make settlements on the Scotch property; very complicated business. But, luckily for her, Vipont Crooke's daughter, her cousin and intimate friend, had married Darrell, the famous Darrell, who was then at the bar. It is very useful to have cousins married to clever people. He was interested in her case, took it up. I believe it did not come on in the courts in which Darrell practised. But he arranged all the evidence, inspected the briefs, spent a great deal of his own money in getting up the case; and in fact he gained her cause, though he could not be her counsel. People did say that she was so grateful that after his wife's death she had set her heart on becoming Mrs. Darrell the second. But Darrell was then quite wrapped up in politics,—the last man to fall in love, and only looked bored when women fell in love with him, which a good many did. Grand-looking creature, my dear, and quite the rage for a year or two. However, Mrs. Lyndsay all of a sudden went off to Paris, and there Montfort saw Caroline, and was caught. Mrs. Lyndsay, no doubt,

calculated on living with her daughter, having the run of Montfort House in town and Montfort Court in the country. But Montfort is deeper than people think for. No, he never forgave her. She was never asked here; took it to heart, went to Rome, and died.”

At this moment the door opened, and George Morley, now the Rev. George Morley, entered, just arrived to join his cousins.

Some knew him, some did not. Lady Selina, who made it a point to know all the cousins, rose graciously, put aside the slippers, and gave him two fingers. She was astonished to find him not nearly so shy as he used to be: wonderfully improved; at his ease, cheerful, animated. The man now was in his right place, and following hope on the bent of inclination. Few men are shy when in their right places. He asked after Lady Montfort. She was in her own small sitting-room, writing letters, —letters that Carr Vipont had entreated her to write,—correspondence useful to the House of Vipont. Before long, however, a servant entered, to say that Lady Montfort would be very happy to see Mr. Morley. George followed the servant into that unpretending sitting-room, with its simple chintzes and quiet bookshelves,—room that would not have been too fine for a cottage.

CHAPTER X.

In every life, go it fast, go it slow, there are critical pausing-places. When the journey is renewed the face of the country is changed.

How well she suited that simple room; herself so simply dressed, her marvellous beauty so exquisitely subdued! She looked at home there, as if all of home that the house could give were there collected.

She had finished and sealed the momentous letters, and had come, with a sense of relief, from the table at the farther end of the room, on which those letters, ceremonious and conventional, had been written,—come to the window, which, though mid-winter, was open, and the redbreast, with whom she had made friends, hopped boldly almost within reach, looking at her with bright eyes and head curiously aslant. By the window a single chair, and a small reading-desk, with the book lying open. The short day was not far from its close, but there was ample light still in the skies, and a serene if chilly stillness in the air without.

Though expecting the relation she had just summoned to her presence, I fear she had half forgotten him. She was standing by the window deep in reverie as he entered, so deep that she started when his voice struck her ear and he stood before her. She recovered herself quickly, however,

and said with even more than her ordinary kindness of tone and manner towards the scholar, "I am so glad to see and congratulate you."

"And I so glad to receive your congratulations," answered the scholar in smooth, slow voice, without a stutter.

"But, George, how is this?" asked Lady Montfort. "Bring that chair, sit down here, and tell me all about it. You wrote me word you were cured,—at least sufficiently to remove your noble scruples. You did not say how. Your uncle tells me, by patient will and resolute practice."

"Under good guidance. But I am going to confide to you a secret, if you will promise to keep it."

"Oh, you may trust me: I have no female friends."

The clergyman smiled, and spoke at once of the lessons he had received from the basketmaker.

"I have his permission," he said in conclusion, "to confide the service he rendered me, the intimacy that has sprung up between us, but to you alone,—not a word to your guests. When you have once seen him, you will understand why an eccentric man, who has known better days, would shrink from the impertinent curiosity of idle customers. Contented with his humble livelihood, he asks but liberty and repose."

"That I already comprehend," said Lady Montfort, half sighing, half smiling. "But my curiosity shall not molest him, and when I visit the village, I will pass by his cottage."

"Nay, my dear Lady Montfort, that would be to refuse the favour I am about to ask, which is that you would come with me to that very cottage. It would so please him."

"Please him! why?"

"Because this poor man has a young female grandchild, and he is so anxious that you should see and be kind to her, and because, too, he seems most anxious to remain in his present residence. The cottage, of course, belongs to Lord Montfort, and is let to him by the bailiff, and if you deign to feel interest in him, his tenure is safe."

Lady Montfort looked down, and coloured. She thought, perhaps, how false a security her protection, and how slight an influence her interest would be; but she did not say so. George went on; and so eloquently, and so touchingly did he describe both grandsire and grandchild, so skilfully did he intimate the mystery which hung over them, that Lady Montfort became much moved by his narrative; and willingly promised to accompany him across the park to the basketmaker's cottage the first opportunity.

But when one has sixty guests in one's house, one has to wait for an opportunity to escape from them unremarked. And the opportunity, in fact, did not come for many days; not till the party broke up, save one or two dowager she-cousins who "gave no trouble," and one or two bachelor he-cousins whom my lord retained to consummate the slaughter of pheasants, and play at billiards in the dreary intervals between sunset and dinner, dinner and bedtime.

Then one cheerful frosty noon George Morley and his fair cousin walked boldly /en evidence/, before the prying ghostly windows, across the broad gravel walks; gained the secluded shrubbery, the solitary deeps of park-land; skirted the wide sheet of water, and, passing through a private wicket in the paling, suddenly came upon the patch of osier-ground and humble garden, which were backed by the basketmaker's cottage.

As they entered those lowly precincts a child's laugh was borne to their ears,—a child's silvery, musical, mirthful laugh; it was long since the great lady had heard a laugh like that,—a happy child's natural laugh. She paused and listened with a strange pleasure. "Yes," whispered George Morley, "stop—and hush! there they are."

Waife was seated on the stump of a tree, materials for his handicraft lying beside neglected. Sophy was standing before him,—he raising his finger as if in reproof, and striving hard to frown. As the intruders listened, they overheard that he was striving to teach her the rudiments of French dialogue, and she was laughing merrily at her own blunders, and at the solemn affectation of the shocked schoolmaster. Lady Montfort noted with no unnatural surprise the purity of idiom and of accent with which this singular basketmaker was unconsciously displaying his perfect knowledge of a language which the best-educated English gentleman of that generation, nay, even of this, rarely speaks with accuracy and elegance. But her attention was diverted immediately from the teacher to the face of the sweet pupil. Women have a quick appreciation of beauty in their own sex; and women who are themselves beautiful, not the least. Irresistibly Lady Montfort felt attracted towards that innocent countenance so lively in its mirth, and yet so softly gay. Sir Isaac, who had hitherto lain /perdu/, watching the movements of a thrush amidst a holly-bush, now started up with a bark. Waife rose; Sophy turned half in flight. The visitors approached.

Here slowly, lingeringly, let fall the curtain. In the frank license of narrative, years will have rolled away ere the curtain rise again. Events that may influence a life often date from moments the most serene, from things that appear as trivial and unnoticeable as the great lady's visit to the basketmaker's cottage. Which of those lives will that visit influence hereafter,—the woman's, the child's, the vagrant's? Whose? Probably little that passes now would aid conjecture, or be a visible link in the chain of destiny. A few desultory questions; a few guarded answers; a look or so, a musical syllable or two, exchanged between the lady and the child; a basket bought, or a promise to call again. Nothing

worth the telling. Be it then untold. View only the scene itself as the curtain drops reluctantly. The rustic cottage, its garden-door open, and open its old-fashioned lattice casements. You can see how neat and cleanly, how eloquent of healthful poverty, how remote from squalid penury, the whitewashed walls, the homely furniture within. Creepers lately trained around the doorway; Christmas holly, with berries red against the window-panes; the bee-hive yonder; a starling, too, outside the threshold, in its wicker cage; in the background (all the rest of the neighbouring hamlet out of sight), the church spire tapering away into the clear blue wintry sky. All has an air of repose, of safety. Close beside you is the Presence of HOME; that ineffable, sheltering, loving Presence, which amidst solitude murmurs "not solitary,"—a Presence unvouchsafed to the great lady in the palace she has left. And the lady herself? She is resting on the rude gnarled root-stump from which the vagrant had risen; she has drawn Sophy towards her; she has taken the child's hand; she is speaking now, now listening; and on her face kindness looks like happiness. Perhaps she is happy that moment. And Waife? he is turning aside his weatherbeaten mobile countenance with his hand anxiously trembling upon the young scholar's arm. The scholar whispers, "Are you satisfied with me?" and Waife answers in a voice as low but more broken, "God reward you! Oh, joy! if my pretty one has found at last a woman friend!" Poor vagabond, he has now a calm asylum, a fixed humble livelihood; more than that, he has just achieved an object fondly cherished. His past life,—alas! what has he done with it? His actual life, broken fragment though it be, is at rest now. But still the everlasting question,—mocking terrible question, with its phrasing of farce and its enigmas of tragical sense,—"WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT?" Do with what? The all that remains to him, the all he holds! the all which man himself, betwixt Free-will and Pre-decree, is permitted to do. Ask not the vagrant alone: ask each of the four there assembled on that flying bridge called the Moment. Time before thee,—what wilt thou do with it? Ask thyself! ask the wisest! Out of effort to answer that question, what dream-schools have risen, never wholly to perish,—the science of seers on the Chaldee's Pur-Tor, or in the rock-caves of Delphi, gasped after and grasped at by horn-handed mechanics to-day in their lanes and alleys. To the heart of the populace sink down the blurred relics of what once was the law of the secretest sages, hieroglyphical tatters which the credulous vulgar attempt to interpret. "WHAT WILL HE DO WITH IT?" Ask Merle and his Crystal! But the curtain descends! Yet a moment, there they are,—age and childhood,—poverty, wealth, station, vagabondage; the preacher's sacred learning and august ambition; fancies of dawning reason; hopes of intellect matured; memories of existence wrecked; household sorrows; untold regrets; elegy and epic in low, close, human sighs, to which Poetry never yet gave voice: all for the moment personified there before you,—a glimpse for the guess, no more. Lower and lower falls the curtain! All is blank!