

MY NOVEL - VOLUME 9.

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BOOK NINTH.

INITIAL CHAPTER.

ON PUBLIC LIFE.

Now that I am fairly in the heart of my story, these preliminary chapters must shrink into comparatively small dimensions, and not encroach upon the space required by the various personages whose acquaintance I have picked up here and there, and who are now all crowding upon me like poor relations to whom one has unadvisedly given a general invitation, and who descend upon one simultaneously about Christmas time. Where they are to be stowed, and what is to become of them all, Heaven knows; in the mean while, the reader will have already observed that the Caxton Family themselves are turned out of their own rooms, sent a packing, in order to make way for the new comers.

But to proceed: Note the heading to the present Chapter, "ON PUBLIC LIFE,"—a thesis pertinent to this portion of my narrative; and if somewhat trite in itself, the greater is the stimulus to suggest thereon some original hints for reflection.

Were you ever in public life, my dear reader? I don't mean, by that question, to ask whether you were ever Lord Chancellor, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, or even a member of the House of Commons. An author hopes to find readers far beyond that very egregious but very limited segment of the Great Circle. Were you ever a busy man in your vestry, active in a municipal corporation, one of a committee for furthering the interests of an enlightened candidate for your native burgh, town, or shire,—in a word, did you ever resign your private comforts as men in order to share the public troubles of mankind? If ever you have so far departed from the Lucretian philosophy, just look back—was it life at all that you lived? Were you an individual distinct existence,—a passenger in the railway,—or were you merely an indistinct portion of that common flaine which heated the boiler and generated the steam that set off the monster train?—very hot, very active, very useful, no doubt; but all your identity fused in flame, and all your forces vanishing in gas.

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And do you think the people in the railway carriages care for you? Do you think that the gentleman in the worsted wrapper is saying to his neighbour with the striped rug on his comfortable knees, "How grateful we ought to be for that fiery particle which is crackling and hissing under the boiler. It helps us on a fraction of an inch from Vauxhall to Putney!" Not a bit of it. Ten to one but he is saying, "Not sixteen miles an hour! What the deuce is the matter with the stoker?"

Look at our friend Audley Egerton. You have just had a glimpse of the real being that struggles under the huge copper; you have heard the hollow sound of the rich man's coffers under the tap of Baron Levy's friendly knuckle, heard the strong man's heart give out its dull warning sound to the scientific ear of Dr. F—. And away once more vanishes the separate existence, lost again in the flame that heats the boiler, and the smoke that curls into air from the grimy furnace.

Look to it, O Public Man, whoever thou art, and whatsoever thy degree,—see if thou canst not compound matters, so as to keep a little nook apart for thy private life; that is, for thyself! Let the Great Popkins Question not absorb wholly the individual soul of thee, as Smith or Johnson. Don't so entirely consume thyself under that insatiable boiler, that when thy poor little monad rushes out from the sooty furnace, and arrives at the stars, thou mayest find no vocation for thee there, and feel as if thou hadst nothing to do amidst the still splendours of the Infinite. I don't deny to thee the uses of "Public Life;" I grant that it is much to have helped to carry that Great Popkins Question; but Private Life, my friend, is the life of thy private soul; and there may be matters concerned with that which, on consideration, thou mayest allow cannot be wholly mixed up with the Great Popkins Question, and were not finally settled when thou didst exclaim, "I have not lived in vain,—the Popkins Question is carried at last!" Oh, immortal soul, for one quarter of an hour per diem de-Popkinize thine immortality!

CHAPTER II.

It had not been without much persuasion on the part of Jackeymo that Riccabocca had consented to settle himself in the house which Randal had recommended to him. Not that the exile conceived any suspicion of the young man beyond that which he might have shared with Jackeymo, namely, that Randal's interest in the father was increased by a very natural and excusable admiration of the daughter; but the Italian had the pride common to misfortune,—he did not like to be indebted to others, and he shrank from the pity of those to whom it was known that he had held a higher station in his own land. These scruples gave way to the strength of his affection for his daughter and his dread of his foe. Good men, however able and brave, who have suffered from the wicked, are apt to

form exaggerated notions of the power that has prevailed against them. Jackeymo had conceived a superstitious terror of Peschiera; and Riccabocca, though by no means addicted to superstition, still had a certain creep of the flesh whenever he thought of his foe.

But Riccabocca—than whom no man was more physically brave, and no man, in some respects, more morally timid—feared the count less as a foe than as a gallant. He remembered his kinsman’s surpassing beauty, the power he had obtained over women. He knew him versed in every art that corrupts, and wholly void of the conscience that deters. And Riccabocca had unhappily nursed himself into so poor an estimate of the female character, that even the pure and lofty nature of Violante did not seem to him a sufficient safeguard against the craft and determination of a practised and remorseless intriguer. But of all the precautions he could take, none appeared more likely to conduce to safety than his establishing a friendly communication with one who professed to be able to get at all the count’s plans and movements, and who could apprise Riccabocca at once should his retreat be discovered. “Forewarned is forearmed,” said he to himself, in one of the proverbs common to all nations. However, as with his usual sagacity he came to reflect upon the alarming intelligence conveyed to him by Randal, namely, that the count sought his daughter’s hand, he divined that there was some strong personal interest under such ambition; and what could be that interest save the probability of Riccabocca’s ultimate admission to the Imperial grace, and the count’s desire to assure himself of the heritage to an estate that he might be permitted to retain no more? Riccabocca was not indeed aware of the condition (not according to usual customs in Austria) on which the count held the forfeited domains. He knew not that they had been granted merely on pleasure; but he was too well aware of Peschiera’s nature to suppose that he would woo a bride without a dower, or be moved by remorse in any overture of reconciliation. He felt assured too—and this increased all his fears—that Peschiera would never venture to seek an interview with himself; all the count’s designs on Violante would be dark, secret, and clandestine. He was perplexed and tormented by the doubt whether or not to express openly to Violante his apprehensions of the nature of the danger to be apprehended. He had told her vaguely that it was for her sake that he desired secrecy and concealment. But that might mean anything: what danger to himself would not menace her? Yet to say more was so contrary to a man of his Italian notions and Machiavellian maxims! To say to a young girl, “There is a man come over to England on purpose to woo and win you. For Heaven’s sake take care of him; he is diabolically handsome; he never fails where he sets his heart.—/Cospetto!” cried the doctor, aloud, as these admonitions shaped themselves to speech in the camera obscura of his brain; “such a warning would have undone a Cornelia while she was yet an innocent spinster.” No, he resolved to say nothing to Violante of the count’s intention, only to keep guard, and make himself and Jackeymo all eyes and all ears.

The house Randal had selected pleased Riccabocca at first glance. It stood alone, upon a little eminence; its upper windows commanded the high

road. It had been a school, and was surrounded by high walls, which contained a garden and lawn sufficiently large for exercise. The garden doors were thick, fortified by strong bolts, and had a little wicket lattice, shut and opened at pleasure, from which Jackeymo could inspect all visitors before he permitted them to enter.

An old female servant from the neighbourhood was cautiously hired; Riccabocca renounced his Italian name, and abjured his origin. He spoke English sufficiently well to think he could pass as an Englishman. He called himself Mr. Richmouth (a liberal translation of Riccabocca). He bought a blunderbuss, two pairs of pistols, and a huge housedog. Thus provided for, he allowed Jackeymo to write a line to Randal and communicate his arrival.

Randal lost no time in calling. With his usual adaptability and his powers of dissimulation, he contrived easily to please Mrs. Riccabocca, and to increase the good opinion the exile was disposed to form of him. He engaged Violante in conversation on Italy and its poets. He promised to bring her books. He began, though more distantly than he could have desired,—for her sweet stateliness awed him,—the preliminaries of courtship. He established himself at once as a familiar guest, riding down daily in the dusk of evening, after the toils of office, and returning at night. In four or five days he thought he had made great progress with all. Riccabocca watched him narrowly, and grew absorbed in thought after every visit. At length one night, when he and Mrs. Riccabocca were alone in the drawing-room, Violante having retired to rest, he thus spoke as he filled his pipe,—

”Happy is the man who has no children! Thrice happy he who has no girls!”

”My dear Alphonso!” said the wife, looking up from the waistband to which she was attaching a neat mother-o’-pearl button. She said no more; it was the sharpest rebuke she was in the custom of administering to her husband’s cynical and odious observations. Riccabocca lighted his pipe with a thread paper, gave three great puffs, and resumed,

”One blunderbuss, four pistols, and a house-dog called Pompey, who would have made mincemeat of Julius Caesar!”

”He certainly eats a great deal, does Pompey!” said Mrs. Riccabocca, simply. ”But if he relieves your mind!”

”He does not relieve it in the least, ma’am,” groaned Riccabocca; ”and that is the point I am coming to. This is a most harassing life, and a most undignified life. And I who have only asked from Heaven dignity and repose! But if Violante were once married, I should want neither blunderbuss, pistol, nor Pompey. And it is that which would relieve my mind, cara mia,—Pompey only relieves my larder.”

Now Riccabocca had been more communicative to Jemima than he had been to Violante. Having once trusted her with one secret, he had every motive to trust her with another; and he had accordingly spoken out his fears of the Count di Peschiera. Therefore she answered, laying down the work, and taking her husband's hand tenderly,

"Indeed, my love, since you dread so much (though I own that I must think unreasonably) this wicked, dangerous man, it would be the happiest thing in the world to see dear Violante well married; because, you see, if she is married to one person she cannot be married to another; and all fear of this count, as you say, would be at an end."

"You cannot express yourself better. It is a great comfort to unbosom one's-self to a wife, after all," quoth Riccabocca.

"But," said the wife, after a grateful kiss,—"but where and how can we find a husband suitable to the rank of your daughter?"

"There! there! there!" cried Riccabocca, pushing back his chair to the farther end of the room, "that comes of unbosoming one's-self! Out flies one secret; it is opening the lid of Pandora's box; one is betrayed, ruined, undone!"

"Why, there's not a soul that can hear us!" said Mrs. Riccabocca, soothingly.

"That's chance, ma'am! If you once contract the habit of blabbing out a secret when nobody's by, how on earth can you resist it when you have the pleasurable excitement of telling it to all the world? Vanity, vanity,—woman's vanity! Woman never could withstand rank,—never!" The doctor went on railing for a quarter of an hour, and was very reluctantly appeased by Mrs. Riccabocca's repeated and tearful assurances that she would never even whisper to herself that her husband had ever held any other rank than that of doctor. Riccabocca, with a dubious shake of the head, renewed,

"I have done with all pomp and pretension. Besides, the young man is a born gentleman: he seems in good circumstances; he has energy and latent ambition; he is akin to L'Estrange's intimate friend: he seems attached to Violante. I don't think it probable that we could do better. Nay, if Peschiera fears that I shall be restored to my country, and I learn the wherefore, and the ground to take, through this young man—why, gratitude is the first virtue of the noble!"

"You speak, then, of Mr. Leslie?"

"To be sure—of whom else?"

Mrs. Riccabocca leaned her cheek on her hand thoughtfully. "Now you have

told me that, I will observe him with different eyes.”

”Anima mia, I don’t see how the difference of your eyes will alter the object they look upon!” grumbled Riccabocca, shaking the ashes out of his pipe.

”The object alters when we see it in a different point of view!” replied Jemima, modestly. ”This thread does very well when I look at it in order to sew on a button, but I should say it would never do to tie up Pompey in his Kennel.”

”Reasoning by illustration, upon my soul!” ejaculated Riccabocca, amazed.

”And,” continued Jemima, ”when I am to regard one who is to constitute the happiness of that dear child, and for life, can I regard him as I would the pleasant guest of an evening? Ah, trust me, Alphonso; I don’t pretend to be wise like you; but when a woman considers what a man is likely to prove to woman,—his sincerity, his honour, his heart,—oh, trust me, she is wiser than the wisest man!”

Riccabocca continued to gaze on Jemima with unaffected admiration and surprise. And certainly, to use his phrase, since he had unbosomed himself to his better half, since he had confided in her, consulted with her, her sense had seemed to quicken, her whole mind to expand.

”My dear,” said the sage, ”I vow and declare that Machiavelli was a fool to you. And I have been as dull as the chair I sit upon, to deny myself so many years the comfort and counsel of such a—But, /corpo di Bacco!/ forget all about rank; and so now to bed.—One must not holloa till one’s out of the wood,” muttered the ungrateful, suspicious villain, as he lighted the chamber candle.

CHAPTER III.

RICCABOCCA could not confine himself to the precincts within the walls to which he condemned Violante. Resuming his spectacles, and wrapped in his cloak, he occasionally sallied forth upon a kind of outwatch or reconnoitring expedition,—restricting himself, however, to the immediate neighbourhood, and never going quite out of sight of his house. His favourite walk was to the summit of a hillock overgrown with stunted bush-wood. Here he would sit himself musingly, often till the hoofs of Randal’s horse rang on the winding road, as the sun set, over fading herbage, red and vaporous, in autumnal skies. Just below the hillock, and not two hundred yards from his own house, was the only other habitation in view,—a charming, thoroughly English cottage, though somewhat imitated from the Swiss, with gable ends, thatched roof, and

pretty, projecting casements, opening through creepers and climbing roses. From his height he commanded the gardens of this cottage, and his eye of artist was pleased, from the first sight, with the beauty which some exquisite taste had given to the ground. Even in that cheerless season of the year, the garden wore a summer smile; the evergreens were so bright and various, and the few flowers still left so hardy and so healthful. Facing the south, a colonnade, or covered gallery, of rustic woodwork had been formed, and creeping plants, lately set, were already beginning to clothe its columns. Opposite to this colonnade there was a fountain which reminded Riccabocca of his own at the deserted Casino. It was indeed singularly like it; the same circular shape, the same girdle of flowers around it. But the jet from it varied every day, fantastic and multiform, like the sports of a Naiad,—sometimes shooting up like a tree, sometimes shaped as a convolvulus, sometimes tossing from its silver spray a flower of vermilion, or a fruit of gold,—as if at play with its toy like a happy child. And near the fountain was a large aviary, large enough to enclose a tree. The Italian could just catch a gleam of rich colour from the wings of the birds, as they glanced to and fro within the network, and could hear their songs, contrasting the silence of the freer populace of air, whom the coming winter had already stilled.

Riccabocca's eye, so alive to all aspects of beauty, luxuriated in the view of this garden. Its pleasantness had a charm that stole him from his anxious fear and melancholy memories.

He never saw but two forms within the demesnes, and he could not distinguish their features. One was a woman, who seemed to him of staid manner and homely appearance: she was seen but rarely. The other a man, often pacing to and fro the colonnade, with frequent pauses before the playful fountain, or the birds that sang louder as he approached. This latter form would then disappear within a room, the glass door of which was at the extreme end of the colonnade; and if the door were left open, Riccabocca could catch a glimpse of the figure bending over a table covered with books.

Always, however, before the sun set, the man would step forth more briskly, and occupy himself with the garden, often working at it with good heart, as if at a task of delight; and then, too, the woman would come out, and stand by as if talking to her companion. Riccabocca's curiosity grew aroused. He bade Jemima inquire of the old maid-servant who lived at the cottage, and heard that its owner was a Mr. Oran,—a quiet gentleman, and fond of his book.

While Riccabocca thus amused himself, Randal had not been prevented, either by his official cares or his schemes on Violante's heart and fortune, from furthering the project that was to unite Frank Hazeldean and Beatrice di Negra. Indeed, as to the first, a ray of hope was sufficient to fire the ardent and unsuspecting lover. And Randal's artful misrepresentation of his conference with Mrs. Hazeldean removed

all fear of parental displeasure from a mind always too disposed to give itself up to the temptation of the moment. Beatrice, though her feelings for Frank were not those of love, became more and more influenced by Randal's arguments and representations, the more especially as her brother grew morose, and even menacing, as days slipped on, and she could give no clew to the retreat of those whom he sought for. Her debts, too, were really urgent. As Randal's profound knowledge of human infirmity had shrewdly conjectured, the scruples of honour and pride, that had made her declare she would not bring to a husband her own encumbrances, began to yield to the pressure of necessity. She listened already, with but faint objections, when Randal urged her not to wait for the uncertain discovery that was to secure her dowry, but by a private marriage with Frank escape at once into freedom and security. While, though he had first held out to young Hazeldean the inducement of Beatrice's dowry as a reason of self-justification in the eyes of the squire, it was still easier to drop that inducement, which had always rather damped than fired the high spirit and generous heart of the poor Guardsman. And Randal could conscientiously say, that when he had asked the squire if he expected fortune with Frank's bride, the squire had replied, "I don't care." Thus encouraged by his friend and his own heart, and the softening manner of a woman who might have charmed many a colder, and fooled many a wiser man, Frank rapidly yielded to the snares held out for his perdition. And though as yet he honestly shrank from proposing to Beatrice or himself a marriage without the consent, and even the knowledge, of his parents, yet Randal was quite content to leave a nature, however good, so thoroughly impulsive and undisciplined, to the influences of the first strong passion it had ever known. Meanwhile, it was so easy to dissuade Frank from even giving a hint to the folks at home. "For," said the wily and able traitor, "though we may be sure of Mrs. Hazeldean's consent, and her power over your father, when the step is once taken, yet we cannot count for certain on the squire, he is so choleric and hasty. He might hurry to town, see Madame di Negra, blurt out some passionate, rude expressions, which would wake her resentment, and cause her instant rejection. And it might be too late if he repented afterwards, as he would be sure to do."

Meanwhile Randal Leslie gave a dinner at the Clarendon Hotel (an extravagance most contrary to his habits), and invited Frank, Mr. Borrowell, and Baron Levy.

But this house-spider, which glided with so much ease after its flies, through webs so numerous and mazy, had yet to amuse Madame di Negra with assurances that the fugitives sought for would sooner or later be discovered. Though Randal baffled and eluded her suspicion that he was already acquainted with the exiles ("the persons he had thought of were," he said, "quite different from her description;" and he even presented to her an old singing-master and a sallow-faced daughter, as the Italians who had caused his mistake), it was necessary for Beatrice to prove the sincerity of the aid she had promised to her brother, and to introduce Randal to the count. It was no less desirable to Randal to know, and

even win the confidence of this man—his rival.

The two met at Madame di Negra's house. There is something very strange, and almost mesmeric, in the rapport between two evil natures. Bring two honest men together, and it is ten to one if they recognize each other as honest; differences in temper, manner, even politics, may make each misjudge the other. But bring together two men unprincipled and perverted—men who, if born in a cellar, would have been food for the hulks or gallows—and they understand each other by instant sympathy. The eyes of Franzini, Count of Peschiera, and Randal Leslie no sooner met than a gleam of intelligence shot from both. They talked on indifferent subjects,—weather, gossip, politics,—what not. They bowed and they smiled; but all the while, each was watching, plumbing the other's heart, each measuring his strength with his companion; each inly saying, "This is a very remarkable rascal; am I a match for him?" It was at dinner they met; and following the English fashion, Madame di Negra left them alone with their wine.

Then, for the first time, Count di Peschiera cautiously and adroitly made a covered push towards the object of the meeting.

"You have never been abroad, my dear sir? You must contrive to visit me at Vienna. I grant the splendour of your London world; but, honestly speaking, it wants the freedom of ours,—a freedom which unites gayety with polish. For as your society is mixed, there are pretension and effort with those who have no right to be in it, and artificial condescension and chilling arrogance with those who have to keep their inferiors at a certain distance. With us, all being of fixed rank and acknowledged birth, familiarity is at once established. Hence," added the count, with his French lively smile,—"hence there is no place like Vienna for a young man, no place like Vienna for /bonnes fortunes/."

"Those make the paradise of the idle," replied Randal, "but the purgatory of the busy. I confess frankly to you, my dear count, that I have as little of the leisure which becomes the aspirer to /bonnes fortunes/ as I have the personal graces which obtain them without an effort;" and he inclined his head as in compliment.

"So," thought the count, "woman is not his weak side. What is?"

"Morable! my dear Mr. Leslie, had I thought as you do some years since, I had saved myself from many a trouble. After all, Ambition is the best mistress to woo; for with her there is always the hope, and never the possession."

"Ambition, Count," replied Randal, still guarding himself in dry sententiousness, "is the luxury of the rich, and the necessity of the poor."

"Aha," thought the count, "it comes, as I anticipated from the first,—

comes to the bribe." He passed the wine to Randal, filling his own glass, and draining it carelessly; "/Sur mon ame, mon cher/," said the count, "luxury is ever pleasanter than necessity; and I am resolved at least to give Ambition a trial; je vais me refugier dans le sein du bonheur domestique,—a married life and a settled home. /Peste!/ If it were not for ambition, one would die of /ennui/. /A propos/, my dear sir, I have to thank you for promising my sister your aid in finding a near and dear kinsman of mine, who has taken refuge in your country, and hides himself even from me."

"I should be most happy to assist in your search. As yet, however, I have only to regret that all my good wishes are fruitless. I should have thought, however, that a man of such rank had been easily found, even through the medium of your own ambassador."

"Our own ambassador is no very warm friend of mine; and the rank would be no clew, for it is clear that my kinsman has never assumed it since he quitted his country."

"He quitted it, I understand, not exactly from choice," said Randal, smiling. "Pardon my freedom and curiosity, but will you explain to me a little more than I learn from English rumour (which never accurately reports upon foreign matters still more notorious), how a person who had so much to lose, and so little to win, by revolution, could put himself into the same crazy boat with a crew of hair-brained adventurers and visionary professors."

"Professors!" repeated the count; "I think you have hit on the very answer to your question; not but what men of high birth were as mad as the /canaille/. I am the more willing to gratify your curiosity, since it will perhaps serve to guide your kind search in my favour. You must know, then, that my kinsman was not born the heir to the rank he obtained. He was but a distant relation to the head of the House which he afterwards represented. Brought up in an Italian university, he was distinguished for his learning and his eccentricities. There too, I suppose, brooding over old wives' tales about freedom, and so forth, he contracted his carbonaro, chimerical notions for the independence of Italy. Suddenly, by three deaths, he was elevated, while yet young, to a station and honours which might have satisfied any man in his senses. /Que diable!/ what could the independence of Italy do for him? He and I were cousins; we had played together as boys; but our lives had been separated till his succession to rank brought us necessarily together. We became exceedingly intimate. And you may judge how I loved him," said the count, averting his eyes slightly from Randal's quiet, watchful gaze, "when I add, that I forgave him for enjoying a heritage that, but for him, had been mine."

"Ah, you were next heir?"

"And it is a hard trial to be very near a great fortune, and yet just to miss it."

"True," cried Randal, almost impetuously. The count now raised his eyes, and again the two men looked into each other's souls.

"Harder still, perhaps," resumed the count, after a short pause,— "harder still might it have been to some men to forgive the rival as well as the heir."

"Rival! how?"

"A lady, who had been destined by her parents to myself, though we had never, I own, been formally betrothed, became the wife of my kinsman."

"Did he know of your pretensions?"

"I do him the justice to say he did not. He saw and fell in love with the young lady I speak of. Her parents were dazzled. Her father sent for me. He apologized, he explained; he set before me, mildly enough, certain youthful imprudences or errors of my own, as an excuse for his change of mind; and he asked me not only to resign all hope of his daughter, but to conceal from her new suitor that I had ever ventured to hope."

"And you consented?"

"I consented."

"That was generous. You must indeed have been much attached to your kinsman. As a lover, I cannot comprehend it; perhaps, my dear count, you may enable me to understand it better—as a man of the world."

"Well," said the count, with his most roue air, "I suppose we are both men of the world?"

"Both! certainly," replied Randal, just in the tone which Peachum might have used in courting the confidence of Lockit.

"As a man of the world, then, I own," said the count, playing with the rings on his fingers, "that if I could not marry the lady myself (and that seemed to me clear), it was very natural that I should wish to see her married to my wealthy kinsman."

"Very natural; it might bring your wealthy kinsman and yourself still closer together."

"This is really a very clever fellow!" thought the count, but he made no direct reply.

”/Enfin/, to cut short a long story, my cousin afterwards got entangled in attempts, the failure of which is historically known. His projects were detected, himself denounced. He fled, and the emperor, in sequestrating his estates, was pleased, with rare and singular clemency, to permit me, as his nearest kinsman, to enjoy the revenues of half those estates during the royal pleasure; nor was the other half formally confiscated. It was no doubt his Majesty’s desire not to extinguish a great Italian name; and if my cousin and his child died in exile, why, of that name, I, a loyal subject of Austria,—I, Franzini, Count di Peschiera, would become the representative. Such, in a similar case, has been sometimes the Russian policy towards Polish insurgents.”

”I comprehend perfectly; and I can also conceive that you, in profiting so largely, though so justly, by the fall of your kinsman, may have been exposed to much unpopularity, even to painful suspicion.”

”/Entre nous, mon cher/, I care not a stiver for popularity; and as to suspicion, who is he that can escape from the calumny of the envious? But, unquestionably, it would be most desirable to unite the divided members of our house; and this union I can now effect by the consent of the emperor to my marriage with my kinsman’s daughter. You see, therefore, why I have so great an interest in this research?”

”By the marriage articles you could no doubt secure the retention of the half you hold; and if you survive your kinsman, you would enjoy the whole. A most desirable marriage; and, if made, I suppose that would suffice to obtain your cousin’s amnesty and grace?”

”You say it.”

”But even without such marriage, since the emperor’s clemency has been extended to so many of the proscribed, it is perhaps probable that your cousin might be restored?”

”It once seemed to me possible,” said the count, reluctantly; ”but since I have been in England, I think not. The recent revolution in France, the democratic spirit rising in Europe, tend to throw back the cause of a proscribed rebel. England swarms with revolutionists; my cousin’s residence in this country is in itself suspicious. The suspicion is increased by his strange seclusion. There are many Italians here who would aver that they had met with him, and that he was still engaged in revolutionary projects.”

”Aver—untruly?”

”/Ma foi/, it comes to the same thing; ’les absents ont toujours tort.’ I speak to a man of the world. No; without some such guarantee for his faith as his daughter’s marriage with myself would give, his recall is improbable. By the heaven above us, it shall be impossible!” The count rose as he said this,—rose as if the mask of simulation had fairly

fallen from the visage of crime; rose tall and towering, a very image of masculine power and strength, beside the slight, bended form and sickly face of the intellectual schemer. And had you seen them thus confronted and contrasted, you would have felt that if ever the time should come when the interest of the one would compel him openly to denounce or boldly to expose the other, the odds were that the brilliant and audacious reprobate would master the weaker nerve but superior wit of the furtive traitor. Randal was startled; but rising also, he said carelessly,

"What if this guarantee can no longer be given; what if, in despair of return, and in resignation to his altered fortunes, your cousin has already married his daughter to some English suitor?"

"Ah, that would indeed be, next to my own marriage with her, the most fortunate thing that could happen to myself."

"How? I don't understand!"

"Why, if my cousin has so abjured his birthright, and forsworn his rank; if this heritage, which is so dangerous from its grandeur, pass, in case of his pardon, to some obscure Englishman,—a foreigner, a native of a country that has no ties with ours, a country that is the very refuge of levellers and Carbonari—/mort de ma vie!/ do you think that such would not annihilate all chance of my cousin's restoration, and be an excuse even in the eyes of Italy for formally conferring the sequestered estates on an Italian? No; unless, indeed, the girl were to marry an Englishman of such name and birth and connection as would in themselves be a guarantee (and how in poverty is this likely?) I should go back to Vienna with a light heart, if I could say, 'My kinswoman is an Englishman's wife; shall her children be the heirs to a house so renowned for its lineage, and so formidable for its wealth?' /Parbleu!/ if my cousin were but an adventurer, or merely a professor, he had been pardoned long ago. The great enjoy the honour not to be pardoned easily."

Randal fell into deep but brief thought. The count observed him, not face to face, but by the reflection of an opposite mirror. "This man knows something; this man is deliberating; this man can help me," thought the count.

But Randal said nothing to confirm these hypotheses. Recovering from his abstraction, he expressed courteously his satisfaction at the count's prospects, either way. "And since, after all," he added, "you mean so well to your cousin, it occurs to me that you might discover him by a very simple English process."

"How?"

"Advertise that, if he will come to some place appointed, he will hear of

something to his advantage.”

The count shook his head. ”He would suspect me, and not come.”

”But he was intimate with you. He joined an insurrection; you were more prudent. You did not injure him, though you may have benefited yourself. Why should he shun you?”

”The conspirators forgive none who do not conspire; besides, to speak frankly, he thought I injured him.”

”Could you not conciliate him through his wife—whom you resigned to him?”

”She is dead,—died before he left the country.”

”Oh, that is unlucky! Still I think an advertisement might do good. Allow me to reflect on that subject. Shall we now join Madame la Marquise?”

On re-entering the drawing-room, the gentlemen found Beatrice in full dress, seated by the fire, and reading so intently that she did not remark them enter.

”What so interests you, /ma seur/?—the last novel by Balzac, no doubt?”

Beatrice started, and, looking up, showed eyes that were full of tears. ”Oh, no! no picture of miserable, vicious, Parisian life. This is beautiful; there is soul here.”

Randal took up the book which the marchesa laid down; it was the same which had charmed the circle at Hazeldean, charmed the innocent and fresh-hearted, charmed now the wearied and tempted votaress of the world.

”Hum,” murmured Randal; ”the parson was right. This is power,—a sort of a power.”

”How I should like to know the author! Who can he be? Can you guess?”

”Not I. Some old pedant in spectacles.”

”I think not, I am sure not. Here beats a heart I have ever sighed to find, and never found.”

”Oh, /la naive enfant!/" cried the count; ”comme son imagination s’egare en rêves enchantes. And to think that while you talk like an Arcadian, you are dressed like a princess.”

”Ah, I forgot—the Austrian ambassador’s. I shall not go to-night. This book unfits me for the artificial world.”

"Just as you will, my sister. I shall go. I dislike the man, and he me; but ceremonies before men!"

"You are going to the Austrian Embassy?" said Randal. "I, too, shall be there. We shall meet." And he took his leave.

"I like your young friend prodigiously," said the count, yawning. "I am sure that he knows of the lost birds, and will stand to them like a pointer, if I can but make it his interest to do so. We shall see."

CHAPTER IV.

Randal arrived at the ambassador's before the count, and contrived to mix with the young noblemen attached to the embassy, and to whom he was known. Standing among these was a young Austrian, on his travels, of very high birth, and with an air of noble grace that suited the ideal of the old German chivalry. Randal was presented to him, and, after some talk on general topics, observed, "By the way, Prince, there is now in London a countryman of yours, with whom you are, doubtless, familiarly acquainted,—the Count di Peschiera."

"He is no countryman of mine. He is an Italian. I know him but by sight and by name," said the prince, stiffly.

"He is of very ancient birth, I believe."

"Unquestionably. His ancestors were gentlemen."

"And very rich."

"Indeed! I have understood the contrary. He enjoys, it is true, a large revenue."

A young attache, less discreet than the prince; here observed, "Oh, Peschiera! poor fellow, he is too fond of play to be rich."

"And there is some chance that the kinsman whose revenue he holds may obtain his pardon, and re-enter into possession of his fortunes—so I hear, at least," said Randal, artfully.

"I shall be glad if it be true," said the prince, with decision; "and I speak the common sentiment at Vienna. That kinsman had a noble spirit, and was, I believe, equally duped and betrayed. Pardon me, sir; but we Austrians are not so bad as we are painted. Have you ever met in England the kinsman you speak of?"

"Never, though he is supposed to reside here; and the count tells me that he has a daughter."

"The count—ha! I heard something of a scheme,—a wager of that—that count's. A daughter! Poor girl! I hope she will escape his pursuit; for, no doubt, he pursues her."

"Possibly she may already have married an Englishman."

"I trust not," said the prince, seriously; "that might at present be a serious obstacle to her father's return."

"You think so?"

"There can be no doubt of it," interposed the attache, with a grand and positive air; "unless, indeed, the Englishman were of a rank equal to her own."

Here there was a slight, well-bred murmur and buzz at the door, for the Count di Peschiera himself was announced; and as he entered, his presence was so striking, and his beauty so dazzling, that whatever there might be to the prejudice of his character, it seemed instantly effaced or forgotten in that irresistible admiration which it is the prerogative of personal attributes alone to create.

The prince, with a slight curve of his lip at the groups that collected round the count, turned to Randal, and said, "Can you tell me if a distinguished countryman of yours is in England, Lord L'Estrange?"

"No, Prince, he is not. You know him?"

"Well."

"He is acquainted with the count's kinsman; and perhaps from him you have learned to think so highly of that kinsman?"

The prince bowed, and answered as he moved away, "When one man of high honour vouches for another, he commands the belief of all."

"Certainly," soliloquized Randal, "I must not be precipitate. I was very near falling into a terrible trap. If I were to marry the girl, and only, by so doing, settle away her inheritance on Peschiera!—how hard it is to be sufficiently cautious in this world!"

While thus meditating, a member of parliament tapped him on the shoulder.

"Melancholy, Leslie! I lay a wager I guess your thoughts."

"Guess," answered Randal.

"You were thinking of the place you are so soon to lose."

"Soon to lose!"

"Why, if ministers go out, you could hardly keep it, I suppose."

This ominous and horrid member of parliament, Squire Hazeldean's favourite county member, Sir John, was one of those legislators especially odious to officials,—an independent "large-acred" member, who would no more take office himself than he would cut down the oaks in his park, and who had no bowels of human feeling for those who had opposite tastes and less magnificent means.

"Hem!" said Randal, rather surlily. "In the first place, Sir John, ministers are not going out."

"Oh, yes, they will go. You know I vote with them generally, and would willingly keep them in; but they are men of honour and spirit; and if they can't carry their measures, they must resign; otherwise, by Jove, I would turn round and vote them out myself!"

"I have no doubt you would, Sir John; you are quite capable of it; that rests with you and your constituents. But even if ministers did go out, I am but a poor subaltern in a public office,—I am no minister. Why should I go out too?"

"Why? Hang it, Leslie, you are laughing at me. A young fellow like you could never be mean enough to stay in, under the very men who drove out your friend Egerton?"

"It is not usual for those in the public offices to retire with every change of government."

"Certainly not; but always those who are the relations of a retiring minister; always those who have been regarded as politicians, and who mean to enter parliament, as of course you will do at the next election. But you know that as well as I do,—you who are so decided a politician, the writer of that admirable pamphlet! I should not like to tell my friend Hazeldean, who has a sincere interest in you, that you ever doubted on a question of honour as plain as your A, B, C."

"Indeed, Sir John," said Randal, recovering his suavity, while he inly breathed a dire anathema on his county member, "I am so new to these things that what you say never struck me before. No doubt you must be right; at all events I cannot have a better guide and adviser than Mr. Egerton himself."

SIR JOHN.—"No, certainly; perfect gentleman, Egerton! I wish we could make it up with him and Hazeldean."

RANDAL (sighing).—"Ah, I wish we could!"

SIR JOHN.—"And some chance of it now; for the time is coming when all true men of the old school must stick together."

RANDAL.—"Wisely, admirably said, my dear Sir John. But, pardon me, I must pay my respects to the ambassador." Randal escaped, and passing on, saw the ambassador himself in the next room, conferring in a corner with Audley Egerton. The ambassador seemed very grave, Egerton calm and impenetrable, as usual. Presently the count passed by, and the ambassador bowed to him very stiffly.

As Randal, some time later, was searching for his cloak below, Audley Egerton unexpectedly joined him.

"Ah, Leslie," said the minister, with more kindness than usual, "if you don't think the night air too cold for you, let us walk home together. I have sent away the carriage."

This condescension in his patron was so singular, that it quite startled Randal, and gave him a presentiment of some evil. When they were in the street, Egerton, after a pause, began,

"My dear Mr. Leslie, it was my hope and belief that I had provided for you at least a competence; and that I might open to you, later, a career yet more brilliant. Hush! I don't doubt your gratitude; let me proceed. There is a possible chance, after certain decisions that the Government have come to, that we may be beaten in the House of Commons, and of course resign. I tell you this beforehand, for I wish you to have time to consider what, in that case, would be your best course. My power of serving you may then probably be over. It would, no doubt (seeing our close connection, and my views with regard to your future being so well known),—no doubt, be expected that you should give up the place you hold, and follow my fortunes for good or ill. But as I have no personal enemies with the opposite party, and as I have sufficient position in the world to uphold and sanction your choice, whatever it may be, if you think it more prudent to retain your place, tell me so openly, and I think I can contrive that you may do it without loss of character and credit. In that case, confine your ambition merely to rising gradually in your office, without mixing in politics. If, on the other hand, you should prefer to take your chance of my return to office, and so resign your present place; and, furthermore, should commit yourself to a policy that may then be not only in opposition but unpopular, I will do my best to introduce you into parliamentary life. I cannot say that I advise the latter."

Randal felt as a man feels after a severe fall,—he was literally

stunned. At length he faltered out,—

”Can you think, sir, that I should ever desert your fortunes, your party, your cause?”

”My dear Leslie,” replied the minister, ”you are too young to have committed yourself to any men or to any party, except, indeed, in that unlucky pamphlet. This must not be an affair of sentiment, but of sense and reflection. Let us say no more on the point now; but by considering the pros and the cons, you can better judge what to do, should the time for option suddenly arrive.”

”But I hope that time may not come.”

”I hope so too, and most sincerely,” said the minister, with deliberate and genuine emphasis.

”What could be so bad for the country?” ejaculated Pandal. ”It does not seem to me possible, in the nature of things, that you and your party should ever go out!”

”And when we are once out, there will be plenty of wiseacres to say it is out of the nature of things that we should ever come in again. Here we are at the door.”

CHAPTER V.

Randal passed a sleepless night; but, indeed, he was one of those persons who neither need, nor are accustomed to, much sleep. However, towards morning, when dreams are said to be prophetic, he fell into a most delightful slumber, a slumber peopled by visions fitted to lure on, through labyrinths of law, predestined chancellors, or wreck upon the rocks of glory the inebriate souls of youthful ensigns; dreams from which Rood Hall emerged crowned with the towers of Belvoir or Raby, and looking over subject lands and manors wrested from the nefarious usurpation of Thornhills and Hazeldeans; dreams in which Audley Egerton’s gold and power, rooms in Downing Street, and saloons in Grosvenor Square, had passed away to the smiling dreamer, as the empire of Chaldaeia passed to Darius the Median. Why visions so belying the gloomy and anxious thoughts that preceded them should visit the pillow of Randal Leslie, surpasses my philosophy to conjecture. He yielded, however, passively to their spell, and was startled to hear the clock strike eleven as he descended the stairs to breakfast. He was vexed at the lateness of the hour, for he had meant to have taken advantage of the unwonted softness of Egerton, and drawn therefrom some promises or proffers to cheer the prospects which the minister had so chillingly expanded before him the

preceding night; and it was only at breakfast that he usually found the opportunity of private conference with his busy patron. But Audley Egerton would be sure to have sallied forth; and so he had, only Randal was surprised to hear that he had gone out in his carriage, instead of on foot, as was his habit. Randal soon despatched his solitary meal, and with a new and sudden affection for his office, thitherwards bent his way. As he passed through Piccadilly, he heard behind a voice that had lately become familiar to him, and turning round, saw Baron Levy walking side by side, though not arm-in-arm, with a gentleman almost as smart as himself, but with a jauntier step and a brisker air,—a step that, like Diomed's, as described by Shakspeare,—

”Rises on the toe; that spirit of his
In aspiration lifts him from the earth.”

Indeed, one may judge of the spirits and disposition of a man by his ordinary gait and mien in walking. He who habitually pursues abstract thought looks down on the ground. He who is accustomed to sudden impulses, or is trying to seize upon some necessary recollection, looks up with a kind of jerk. He who is a steady, cautious, merely practical man, walks on deliberately, his eyes straight before him; and, even in his most musing moods, observes things around sufficiently to avoid a porter's knot or a butcher's tray. But the man with strong ganglions—of pushing, lively temperament, who, though practical, is yet speculative; the man who is emulous and active, and ever trying to rise in life; sanguine, alert, bold—walks with a spring, looks rather above the heads of his fellow-passengers, but with a quick, easy turn of his own, which is lightly set on his shoulders; his mouth is a little open, his eye is bright, rather restless, but penetrative, his port has something of defiance, his form is erect, but without stiffness. Such was the appearance of the baron's companion. And as Randal turned round at Levy's voice, the baron said to his companion, ”A young man in the first circles—you should book him for your fair lady's parties. How d' ye do, Mr. Leslie? Let me introduce you to Mr. Richard Avenel.” Then, as he hooked his arm into Randal's, he whispered, ”Man of first-rate talent, monstrous rich, has two or three parliamentary seats in his pocket, wife gives parties,—her foible.”

”Proud to make your acquaintance, sir,” said Mr. Avenel, lifting his hat. ”Fine day.”

”Rather cold too,” said Leslie, who, like all thin persons with weak digestions, was chilly by temperament; besides, he had enough on his mind to chill his body.

”So much the healthier,—braces the nerves,” said Mr. Avenel; ”but you young fellows relax the system by hot rooms and late hours. Fond of dancing, of course, sir?” Then, without waiting for Randal's negative, Mr. Richard continued rapidly, ”Mrs. Avenel has a /soiree dansante/ on Thursday,—shall be very happy to see you in Eaton Square. Stop, I have

a card;" and he drew out a dozen large invitation-cards, from which he selected one, and presented it to Randal. The baron pressed that young gentleman's arm, and Randal replied courteously that it would give him great pleasure to be introduced to Mrs. Avenel. Then, as he was not desirous to be seen under the wing of Baron Levy, like a pigeon under that of a hawk, he gently extricated himself, and pleading great haste, walked quickly on towards his office.

"That young man will make a figure some day," said the baron. "I don't know any one of his age with so few prejudices. He is a connection by marriage to Audley Egerton, who—"

"Audley Egerton!" exclaimed Mr. Avenel; "a d—d haughty, aristocratic, disagreeable, ungrateful fellow!"

"Why, what do you know of him?"

"He owed his first seat in parliament to the votes of two near relations of mine, and when I called upon him some time ago, in his office, he absolutely ordered me out of the room. Hang his impertinence; if ever I can pay him off, I guess I sha'n't fail for want of good will!"

"Ordered you out of the room? That's not like Egerton, who is civil, if formal,—at least to most men. You must have offended him in his weak point."

"A man whom the public pays so handsomely should have no weak point. What is Egerton's?"

"Oh, he values himself on being a thorough gentleman,—a man of the nicest honour," said Levy, with a sneer. "You must have ruffled his plumes there. How was it?"

"I forget," answered Mr. Avenel, who was far too well versed in the London scale of human dignities since his marriage, not to look back with a blush at his desire of knighthood. "No use bothering our heads now about the plumes of an arrogant popinjay. To return to the subject we were discussing: you must be sure to let me have this money next week."

"Rely on it."

"And you'll not let my bills get into the market; keep them under lock and key."

"So we agreed."

"It is but a temporary difficulty,—royal mourning, such nonsense; panic in trade, lest these precious ministers go out. I shall soon float over the troubled waters."

"By the help of a paper boat," said the baron, laughing; and the two gentlemen shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER VI.

Meanwhile Audley Egerton's carriage had deposited him at the door of Lord Lansmere's house, at Knightsbridge. He asked for the countess, and was shown into the drawing-room, which was deserted. Egerton was paler than usual; and as the door opened, he wiped the unwonted moisture from his forehead, and there was a quiver on his firm lip. The countess too, on entering, showed an emotion almost equally unusual to her self-control. She pressed Audley's hand in silence, and seating herself by his side, seemed to collect her thoughts. At length she said,

"It is rarely indeed that we meet, Mr. Egerton, in spite of your intimacy with Lansmere and Harley. I go so little into your world, and you will not voluntarily come to me."

"Madam," replied Egerton, "I might evade your kind reproach by stating that my hours are not at my disposal; but I answer you with plain truth, —it must be painful to both of us to meet."

The countess coloured and sighed, but did not dispute the assertion.

Audley resumed: "And therefore, I presume that, in sending for me, you have something of moment to communicate?"

"It relates to Harley," said the countess, as if in apology; "and I would take your advice."

"To Harley! Speak on, I beseech you."

"My son has probably told you that he has educated and reared a young girl, with the intention to make her Lady L'Estrange, and hereafter Countess of Lansmere."

"Harley has no secrets from me," said Egerton, mournfully. "This young lady has arrived in England, is here, in this house."

"And Harley too?"

"No, she came over with Lady N——and her daughters. Harley was to follow shortly, and I expect him daily. Here is his letter. Observe, he has never yet communicated his intentions to this young person, now entrusted to my care, never spoken to her as the lover."

Egerton took the letter and read it rapidly, though with attention.

"True," said he, as he returned the letter: "and before he does so he wishes you to see Miss Digby and to judge of her yourself,—wishes to know if you will approve and sanction his choice."

"It is on this that I would consult you: a girl without rank; the father, it is true, a gentleman, though almost equivocally one, but the mother, I know not what. And Harley, for whom I hoped an alliance with the first houses in England!" The countess pressed her hands convulsively together.

EGERTON.—"He is no more a boy. His talents have been wasted, his life a wanderer's. He presents to you a chance of resettling his mind, of re-arousing his native powers, of a home besides your own. Lady Lansmere, you cannot hesitate!"

LADY LANSMERE.—"I do, I do? After all that I have hoped after all that I did to prevent—"

EGERTON (interrupting her).—"You owe him now an atonement; that is in your power,—it is not in mine." The countess again pressed Audley's hand, and the tears gushed from her eyes.

"It shall be so. I consent, I consent. I will silence, I will crush back this proud heart. Alas! it well-nigh broke his own! I am glad you speak thus. I like to think he owes my consent to you. In that there is atonement for both."

"You are too generous, madam," said Egerton, evidently moved, though still, as ever, striving to repress emotion. "And now may I see the young lady? This conference pains me; you see even my strong nerves quiver; and at this time I have much to go through,—need of all my strength and firmness."

"I hear, indeed, that the Government will probably retire. But it is with honour: it will be soon called back by the voice of the nation."

"Let me see the future wife of Harley L'Estrange," said Egerton, without heed of this consolatory exclamation.

The countess rose and left the room. In a few minutes she returned with Helen Digby.

Helen was wondrously improved from the pale, delicate child, with the soft smile and intelligent eyes, who had sat by the side of Leonard in his garret. She was about the middle height, still slight, but beautifully formed; that exquisite roundness of proportion which conveys so well the idea of woman, in its undulating, pliant grace,—formed to embellish life, and soften away its rude angles; formed to embellish, not

to protect. Her face might not have satisfied the critical eye of an artist,—it was not without defects in regularity; but its expression was eminently gentle and prepossessing; and there were few who would not have exclaimed, "What a lovely countenance!" The mildness of her brow was touched with melancholy—her childhood had left its traces on her youth. Her step was slow, and her manner shy, subdued, and timid.

Audley gazed on her with earnestness as she approached him; and then coming forward, took her hand and kissed it. "I am your guardian's constant friend," said he, and he drew her gently to a seat beside him, in the recess of a window. With a quick glance of his eye towards the countess, he seemed to imply the wish to converse with Helen somewhat apart. So the countess interpreted the glance; and though she remained in the room, she seated herself at a distance, and bent over a book.

It was touching to see how the austere man of business lent himself to draw forth the mind of this quiet, shrinking girl; and if you had listened, you would have comprehended how he came to possess such social influence, and how well, some time or other in the course of his life, he had learned to adapt himself to women.

He spoke first of Harley L'Estrange,—spoke with tact and delicacy. Helen at first answered by monosyllables, and then, by degrees, with grateful and open affection. Audley's brow grew shaded. He then spoke of Italy; and though no man had less of the poet in his nature, yet with the dexterity of one long versed in the world, and who had been accustomed to extract evidences from characters most opposed to his own, he suggested such topics as might serve to arouse poetry in others. Helen's replies betrayed a cultivated taste, and a charming womanly mind; but they betrayed, also, one accustomed to take its colourings from another's,—to appreciate, admire, revere the Lofty and the Beautiful, but humbly and meekly. There was no vivid enthusiasm, no remark of striking originality, no flash of the self-kindling, creative faculty. Lastly, Egerton turned to England,—to the critical nature of the times, to the claims which the country possessed upon all who had the ability to serve and guide its troubled destinies. He enlarged warmly on Harley's natural talents, and rejoiced that he had returned to England, perhaps to commence some great career. Helen looked surprised, but her face caught no correspondent glow from Audley's eloquence. He rose, and an expression of disappointment passed over his grave, handsome features, and as quickly vanished.

"Adieu, my dear Miss Digby; I fear I have wearied you, especially with my politics. Adieu, Lady Lansmere; no doubt I shall see Harley as soon as he returns."

Then he hastened from the room, gained his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to Downing Street. He drew down the blinds, and leaned back. A certain languor became visible in his face, and once or twice, he mechanically put his hand to his heart.

"She is good, amiable, docile,—will make an excellent wife, no doubt," said he, murmuringly. "But does she love Harley as he has dreamed of love? No! Has she the power and energy to arouse his faculties, and restore to the world the Harley of old? No! Meant by Heaven to be the shadow of another's sun—not herself the sun,—this child is not the one who can atone for the Past and illumine the Future."

CHAPTER VII.

That evening Harley L'Estrange arrived at his father's house. The few years that had passed since we saw him last had made no perceptible change in his appearance. He still preserved his elastic youthfulness of form, and singular variety and play of countenance. He seemed unaffectedly rejoiced to greet his parents, and had something of the gayety and tenderness of a boy returned from school. His manner to Helen bespoke the chivalry that pervaded all the complexities and curves of his character. It was affectionate, but respectful,—hers to him, subdued, but innocently sweet and gently cordial. Harley was the chief talker. The aspect of the times was so critical that he could not avoid questions on politics; and, indeed, he showed an interest in them which he had never evinced before. Lord Lansmere was delighted.

"Why, Harley, you love your country after all?"

"The moment she seems in danger, yes!" replied the Patrician; and the Sybarite seemed to rise into the Athenian. Then he asked with eagerness about his old friend Audley; and, his curiosity satisfied there, he inquired the last literary news. He had heard much of a book lately published. He named the one ascribed by Parson Dale to Professor Moss; none of his listeners had read it.

Harley pished at this, and accused them all of indolence and stupidity, in his own quaint, metaphorical style. Then he said, "And town gossip?"

"We never hear it," said Lady Lansmere.

"There is a new plough much talked of at Boodle's," said Lord Lansmere.

"God speed it. But is not there a new man much talked of at White's?"

"I don't belong to White's."

"Nevertheless, you may have heard of him,—a foreigner, a Count di Peschiera."

"Yes," said Lord Lansmere; "he was pointed out to me in the Park,—a handsome man for a foreigner; wears his hair properly cut; looks gentlemanlike and English."

"Ah, ah! He is here then!" and Harley rubbed his hands.

"Which road did you take? Did you pass the Simplon?"

"No; I came straight from Vienna."

Then, relating with lively vein his adventures by the way, he continued to delight Lord Lansmere by his gayety till the time came to retire to rest. As soon as Harley was in his own room his mother joined him.

"Well," said he, "I need not ask if you like Miss Digby? Who would not?"

"Harley, my own son," said the mother, bursting into tears, "be happy your own way; only be happy, that is all I ask."

Harley, much affected, replied gratefully and soothingly to this fond injunction. And then gradually leading his mother on to converse of Helen, asked abruptly, "And of the chance of our happiness,—her happiness as well as mine,—what is your opinion? Speak frankly."

"Of her happiness there can be no doubt," replied the mother, proudly. "Of yours, how can you ask me? Have you not decided on that yourself?"

"But still it cheers and encourages one in any experiment, however well considered, to hear the approval of another. Helen has certainly a most gentle temper."

"I should conjecture so. But her mind—"

"Is very well stored."

"She speaks so little—"

"Yes. I wonder why? She's surely a woman!"

"Pshaw," said the countess, smiling in spite of herself.

"But tell me more of the process of your experiment. You took her as a child, and resolved to train her according to your own ideal. Was that easy?"

"It seemed so. I desired to instil habits of truth: she was already by nature truthful as the day; a taste for Nature and all things natural: that seemed inborn; perceptions of Art as the interpreter of Nature: those were more difficult to teach. I think they may come. You have

heard her play and sing?"

"NO."

"She will surprise you. She has less talent for drawing; still, all that teaching could do has been done,—in a word, she is accomplished. Temper, heart, mind,—these all are excellent." Harley stopped, and suppressed a sigh. "Certainly I ought to be very happy," said he; and he began to wind up his watch.

"Of course she must love you," said the countess, after a pause. "How could she fail?"

"Love me! My dear mother, that is the very question I shall have to ask."

"Ask! Love is discovered by a glance; it has no need of asking."

"I have never discovered it, then, I assure you. The fact is, that before her childhood was passed, I removed her, as you may suppose, from my roof. She resided with an Italian family near my usual abode. I visited her often, directed her studies, watched her improvement—"

"And fell in love with her?"

"Fall is such a very violent word. No; I don't remember to have had a fall. It was all a smooth inclined plane from the first step, until at last I said to myself, 'Harley L'Estrange, thy time has come. The bud has blossomed into flower. Take it to thy breast.' And myself replied to myself, meekly, 'So be it.' Then I found that Lady N—, with her daughters, was coming to England. I asked her Ladyship to take my ward to your house. I wrote to you, and prayed your assent; and, that granted, I knew you would obtain my father's. I am here,—you give me the approval I sought for. I will speak to Helen to-morrow. Perhaps, after all, she may reject me."

"Strange, strange! you speak thus coldly, thus lightly, you, so capable of ardent love!"

"Mother," said Harley, earnestly, "be satisfied! I am! Love as of old, I feel, alas! too well, can visit me never more. But gentle companionship, tender friendship, the relief and the sunlight of woman's smile, hereafter the voices of children,—music that, striking on the hearts of both parents, wakens the most lasting and the purest of all sympathies,—these are my hope. Is the hope so mean, my fond mother?"

Again the countess wept, and her tears were not dried when she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

Oh, Helen, fair Helen,—type of the quiet, serene, unnoticed, deep-felt excellence of woman! Woman, less as the ideal that a poet conjures from the air, than as the companion of a poet on the earth! Woman, who, with her clear sunny vision of things actual, and the exquisite fibre of her delicate sense, supplies the deficiencies of him whose foot stumbles on the soil, because his eye is too intent upon the stars! Woman, the provident, the comforting, angel whose pinions are folded round the heart, guarding there a divine spring unmarred by the winter of the world! Helen, soft Helen, is it indeed in thee that the wild and brilliant "lord of wantonness and ease" is to find the regeneration of his life, the rebaptism of his soul? Of what avail thy meek prudent household virtues to one whom Fortune screens from rough trial; whose sorrows lie remote from thy ken; whose spirit, erratic and perturbed, now rising, now falling, needs a vision more subtle than thine to pursue, and a strength that can sustain the reason, when it droops, on the wings of enthusiasm and passion?

And thou, thyself, O nature, shrinking and humble, that needest to be courted forth from the shelter, and developed under the calm and genial atmosphere of holy, happy love—can such affection as Harley L'Estrange may proffer suffice to thee? Will not the blossoms, yet folded in the petal, wither away beneath the shade that may protect them from the storm, and yet shut them from the sun? Thou who, where thou givest love, seekest, though meekly, for love in return; to be the soul's sweet necessity, the life's household partner to him who receives all thy faith and devotion,—canst thou influence the sources of joy and of sorrow in the heart that does not heave at thy name? Hast thou the charm and the force of the moon, that the tides of that wayward sea shall ebb and flow at thy will? Yet who shall say, who conjecture how near two hearts can become, when no guilt lies between them, and time brings the ties all its own? Rarest of all things on earth is the union in which both, by their contrasts, make harmonious their blending; each supplying the defects of the helpmate, and completing, by fusion, one strong human soul! Happiness enough, where even Peace does but seldom preside, when each can bring to the altar, if not the flame, still the incense. Where man's thoughts are all noble and generous, woman's feelings all gentle and pure, love may follow if it does not precede; and if not, if the roses be missed from the garland, one may sigh for the rose, but one is safe from the thorn.

The morning was mild, yet somewhat overcast by the mist which announces coming winter in London, and Helen walked musingly beneath the trees that surrounded the garden of Lord Lansmere's house. Many leaves were yet left on the boughs; but they were sere and withered. And the birds chirped at times; but their note was mournful and complaining. All within this house, until Harley's arrival, had been strange and saddening

to Helen's timid and subdued spirits. Lady Lansmere had received her kindly, but with a certain restraint; and the loftiness of manner, common to the countess with all but Harley, had awed and chilled the diffident orphan. Lady Lansmere's very interest in Harley's choice, her attempts to draw Helen out of her reserve, her watchful eyes whenever Helen shyly spoke or shyly moved, frightened the poor child, and made her unjust to herself.

The very servants, though staid, grave, and respectful, as suited a dignified, old-fashioned household, painfully contrasted the bright welcoming smiles and free talk of Italian domestics. Her recollections of the happy, warm Continental manner, which so sets the bashful at their ease, made the stately and cold precision of all around her doubly awful and dispiriting. Lord Lansmere himself, who did not as yet know the views of Harley, and little dreamed that he was to anticipate a daughter-in-law in the ward, whom he understood Harley, in a freak of generous roinance, had adopted, was familiar and courteous, as became a host; but he looked upon Helen as a mere child, and naturally left her to the countess. The dim sense of her equivocal position, of her comparative humbleness of birth and fortunes, oppressed and pained her; and even her gratitude to Harley was made burdensome by a sentiment of helplessness. The grateful long to requite. And what could she ever do for him?

Thus musing, she wandered alone through the curving walks; and this sort of mock-country landscape—London loud, and even visible, beyond the high gloomy walls, and no escape from the windows of the square formal house—seemed a type of the prison bounds of Rank to one whose soul yearns for simple loving Nature.

Helen's reverie was interrupted by Nero's joyous bark. He had caught sight of her, and came bounding up, and thrust his large head into her hand. As she stooped to caress the dog, happy at his honest greeting, and tears that had been long gathering at the lids fell silently on his face (for I know nothing that more moves us to tears than the hearty kindness of a dog, when something in human beings has pained or chilled us), she heard behind the musical voice of Harley. Hastily she dried or repressed her tears, as her guardian came up, and drew her arm within his own.

"I had so little of your conversation last evening, my dear ward, that I may well monopolize you now, even to the privation of Nero. And so you are once more in your native land?"

Helen sighed softly.

"May I not hope that you return under fairer auspices than those which your childhood knew?"

Helen turned her eyes with ingenuous thankfulness to her guardian, and the memory of all she owed to him rushed upon her heart.

Harley renewed, and with earnest, though melancholy sweetness, "Helen, your eyes thank me; but hear me before your words do. I deserve no thanks. I am about to make to you a strange confession of egotism and selfishness."

"You!—oh, impossible!"

"Judge yourself, and then decide which of us shall have cause to be grateful. Helen, when I was scarcely your age—a boy in years, but more, methinks, a man at heart, with man's strong energies and sublime aspirations, than I have ever since been—I loved, and deeply—"

He paused a moment, in evident struggle. Helen listened in mute surprise, but his emotion awakened her own; her tender woman's heart yearned to console. Unconsciously her arm rested on his less lightly.

"Deeply, and for sorrow. It is a long tale, that may be told hereafter. The worldly would call my love a madness. I did not reason on it then, I cannot reason on it now. Enough: death smote suddenly, terribly, and to me, mysteriously, her whom I loved. The love lived on. Fortunately, perhaps, for me, I had quick distraction, not to grief, but to its inert indulgence. I was a soldier; I joined our armies. Men called me brave. Flattery! I was a coward before the thought of life. I sought death: like sleep, it does not come at our call. Peace ensued. As when the winds fall the sails droop, so when excitement ceased, all seemed to me flat and objectless. Heavy, heavy was my heart. Perhaps grief had been less obstinate, but that I feared I had causes for self-reproach. Since then I have been a wanderer, a self-made exile. My boyhood had been ambitious,—all ambition ceased. Flames, when they reach the core of the heart, spread, and leave all in ashes. Let me be brief: I did not mean thus weakly to complain,—I to whom Heaven has given so many blessings! I felt, as it were, separated from the common objects and joys of men. I grew startled to see how, year by year, wayward humours possessed me. I resolved again to attach myself to some living heart—it was my sole chance to rekindle my own. But the one I had loved remained as my type of woman, and she was different from all I saw. Therefore I said to myself, 'I will rear from childhood some young fresh life, to grow up into my ideal.' As this thought began to haunt me, I chanced to discover you. Struck with the romance of your early life, touched by your courage, charmed by your affectionate nature, I said to myself, 'Here is what I seek.' Helen, in assuming the guardianship of your 'Life, in all the culture which I have sought to bestow on your docile childhood, I repeat, that I have been but the egotist. And now, when you have reached that age when it becomes me to speak, and you to listen; now, when you are under the sacred roof of my own mother; now I ask you, can you accept this heart, such as wasted years, and griefs too fondly nursed, have left it? Can you be, at least, my comforter? Can you aid me to regard life as a duty, and recover those aspirations which once soared from the paltry and miserable confines of our frivolous daily being? Helen, here

I ask you, can you be all this, and under the name of—Wife?”

It would be in vain to describe the rapid, varying, indefinable emotions that passed through the inexperienced heart of the youthful listener as Harley thus spoke. He so moved all the springs of amaze, compassion, tender respect, sympathy, child-like gratitude, that when he paused and gently took her hand, she remained bewildered, speechless, overpowered. Harley smiled as he gazed upon her blushing, downcast, expressive face. He conjectured at once that the idea of such proposals had never crossed her mind; that she had never contemplated him in the character of wooer; never even sounded her heart as to the nature of such feelings as his image had aroused.

“My Helen,” he resumed, with a calm pathos of voice, “there is some disparity of years between us, and perhaps I may not hope henceforth for that love which youth gives to the young. Permit me simply to ask, what you will frankly answer, Can you have seen in our quiet life abroad, or under the roof of your Italian friends, any one you prefer to me?”

“No, indeed, no!” murmured Helen. “How could I; who is like you?” Then, with a sudden effort—for her innate truthfulness took alarm, and her very affection for Harley, childlike and reverent, made her tremble lest she should deceive him—she drew a little aside, and spoke thus,

“Oh, my dear guardian, noblest of all human beings, at least in my eyes, forgive, forgive me, if I seem ungrateful, hesitating; but I cannot, cannot think of myself as worthy of you. I never so lifted my eyes. Your rank, your position—”

“Why should they be eternally my curse? Forget them, and go on.”

“It is not only they,” said Helen, almost sobbing, “though they are much; but I your type, your ideal!—I?—impossible! Oh, how can I ever be anything even of use, of aid, of comfort to one like you!”

“You can, Helen—you can,” cried Harley, charmed by such ingenuous modesty. “May I not keep this hand?” And Helen left her hand in Harley’s, and turned away her face, fairly weeping.

A stately step passed under the wintry trees.

“My mother,” said Harley L’Estrange, looking up, “I present to you my future wife.”

CHAPTER IX.

With a slow step and an abstracted air, Harley L'Estrange bent his way towards Egerton's house, after his eventful interview with Helen. He had just entered one of the streets leading into Grosvenor Square, when a young man, walking quickly from the opposite direction, came full against him, and drawing back with a brief apology, recognized him, and exclaimed, "What! you in England, Lord L'Estrange! Accept my congratulations on your return. But you seem scarcely to remember me."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Leslie. I remember you now by your smile; but you are of an age in which it is permitted me to say that you look older than when I saw you last."

"And yet, Lord L'Estrange, it seems to me that you look younger."

Indeed, this reply was so far true that there appeared less difference of years than before between Leslie and L'Estrange; for the wrinkles in the schemer's mind were visible in his visage, while Harley's dreamy worship of Truth and Beauty seemed to have preserved to the votary the enduring youth of the divinities.

Harley received the compliment with a supreme indifference, which might have been suitable to a Stoic, but which seemed scarcely natural to a gentleman who had just proposed to a lady many years younger than himself.

Leslie renewed: "Perhaps you are on your way to Mr. Egerton's. If so, you will not find him at home; he is at his office."

"Thank you. Then to his office I must re-direct my steps."

"I am going to him myself," said Randal, hesitatingly. L'Estrange had no prepossessions in favour of Leslie from the little he had seen of that young gentleman; but Randal's remark was an appeal to his habitual urbanity, and he replied, with well-bred readiness, "Let us be companions so far."

Randal accepted the arm proffered to him; and Lord L'Estrange, as is usual with one long absent from his native land, bore part as a questioner in the dialogue that ensued.

"Egerton is always the same man, I suppose,—too busy for illness, and too firm for sorrow?"

"If he ever feel either, he will never stoop to complain. But, indeed, my dear lord, I should like much to know what you think of his health."

"How! You alarm me!"

"Nay, I did not mean to do that; and pray do not let him know that I went so far. But I have fancied that he looks a little worn and suffering."

"Poor Audley!" said L'Estrange, in a tone of deep affection. "I will sound him, and, be assured, without naming you; for I know well how little he likes to be supposed capable of human infirmity. I am obliged to you for your hint, obliged to you for your interest in one so dear to me."

And Harley's voice was more cordial to Randal than it had ever been before. He then began to inquire what Randal thought of the rumours that had reached himself as to the probable defeat of the Government, and how far Audley's spirits were affected by such risks. But Randal here, seeing that Harley could communicate nothing, was reserved and guarded.

"Loss of office could not, I think, affect a man like Audley," observed Lord L'Estrange. "He would be as great in opposition—perhaps greater; and as to emoluments—"

"The emoluments are good," interposed Randal, with a half-sigh.

"Good enough, I suppose, to pay him back about a tenth of what his place costs our magnificent friend. No, I will say one thing for English statesmen, no man amongst them ever yet was the richer for place."

"And Mr. Egerton's private fortune must be large, I take for granted," said Randal, carelessly.

"It ought to be, if he has time to look to it."

Here they passed by the hotel in which lodged the Count di Peschiera.

Randal stopped. "Will you excuse me for an instant? As we are passing this hotel, I will just leave my card here." So saying he gave his card to a waiter lounging by the door. "For the Count di Peschiera," said he, aloud.

L'Estrange started; and as Randal again took his arm, said, "So that Italian lodges here; and you know him?"

"I know him but slightly, as one knows any foreigner who makes a sensation."

"He makes a sensation?"

"Naturally; for he is handsome, witty, and said to be very rich,—that is, as long as he receives the revenues of his exiled kinsman."

"I see you are well informed, Mr. Leslie. And what is supposed to bring hither the Count di Peschiera?"

"I did hear something, which I did not quite understand, about a bet of his that he would marry his kinsman's daughter, and so, I conclude, secure to himself all the inheritance; and that he is therefore here to discover the kinsman and win the heiress. But probably you know the rights of the story, and can tell me what credit to give to such gossip."

"I know this at least, that if he did lay such a wager, I would advise you to take any odds against him that his backers may give," said L'Estrange, dryly; and while his lip quivered with anger, his eye gleamed with arch ironical humour.

"You think, then, that this poor kinsman will not need such an alliance in order to regain his estates?"

"Yes; for I never yet knew a rogue whom I would not bet against, when he backed his own luck as a rogue against Justice and Providence."

Randal winced, and felt as if an arrow had grazed his heart; but he soon recovered.

"And indeed there is another vague rumour that the young lady in question is married already—to some Englishman." This time it was Harley who winced. "Good heavens! that cannot be true,—that would undo all! An Englishman just at this moment! But some Englishman of correspondent rank I trust, or at least one known for opinions opposed to what an Austrian would call Revolutionary doctrines?"

"I know nothing. But it was supposed merely a private gentleman of good family. Would not that suffice? Can the Austrian Court dictate a marriage to the daughter as a condition for grace to the father?"

"No,—not that!" said Harley, greatly disturbed. "But put yourself in the position of any minister to one of the great European monarchies. Suppose a political insurgent, formidable for station and wealth, had been proscribed, much interest made on his behalf, a powerful party striving against it; and just when the minister is disposed to relent, he hears that the heiress to this wealth and this station is married to the native of a country in which sentiments friendly to the very opinions for which the insurgent was proscribed are popularly entertained, and thus that the fortune to be restored may be so employed as to disturb the national security, the existing order of things,—this, too, at the very time when a popular revolution has just occurred in France, and its effects are felt most in the very land of the exile;—suppose all this, and then say if anything could be more untoward for the hopes of the banished man, or furnish his adversaries with stronger arguments against the restoration of his fortune? But pshaw! this must be a chimera! If true, I should have known of it."

[As there have been so many revolutions in France, it may be convenient to suggest that, according to the dates of this story, Harley no doubt alludes to that revolution which exiled Charles X. and placed Louis Philippe on the throne.]

"I quite agree with your lordship,—there can be no truth in such a rumour. Some Englishman, hearing, perhaps, of the probable pardon of the exile, may have counted on an heiress, and spread the report in order to keep off other candidates. By your account, if successful in his suit, he might fail to find an heiress in the bride."

"No doubt of that. Whatever might be arranged, I can't conceive that he would be allowed to get at the fortune, though it might be held in suspense for his children. But indeed it so rarely happens that an Italian girl of high name marries a foreigner that we must dismiss this notion with a smile at the long face of the hypothetical fortune-hunter. Heaven help him, if he exist!"

"Amen!" echoed Randal, devoutly.

"I hear that Peschiera,'s sister is returned to England. Do you know her too?"

"A little."

"My dear Mr. Leslie, pardon me if I take a liberty not warranted by our acquaintance. Against the lady I say nothing. Indeed, I have heard some things which appear to entitle her to compassion and respect. But as to Peschiera all who prize honour suspect him to be a knave,—I know him to be one. Now, I think that the longer we preserve that abhorrence for knavery which is the generous instinct of youth, why, the fairer will be our manhood, and the more reverend our age. You agree with me?" And Harley suddenly turning, his eyes fell like a flood of light upon Randal's pale and secret countenance.

"To be sure," murmured the schemer.

Harley, surveying him, mechanically recoiled, and withdrew his arm.

Fortunately for Randal, who somehow or other felt himself slipped into a false position, he scarce knew how or why, he was here seized by the arm; and a clear, open, manly voice cried, "My dear fellow, how are you? I see you are engaged now; but look into my rooms when you can, in the course of the day."

And with a bow of excuse for his interruption to Lord L'Estrange, the speaker was then turning away, when Harley said,

"No, don't let me take you from your friend, Mr. Leslie. And you need not be in a hurry to see Egerton; for I shall claim the privilege of older friendship for the first interview."

"It is Mr. Egerton's nephew Frank Hazeldan."

"Pray, call him back, and present me to him. He has a face that would have gone far to reconcile Timon to Athens." Randal obeyed, and after a few kindly words to Frank, Harley insisted on leaving the two young men together, and walked on to Downing Street with a brisker step.

CHAPTER X.

"That Lord L'Estrange seems a very good fellow."

"So-so; an effeminate humourist,—says the most absurd things, and fancies them wise. Never mind him. You wanted to speak to me, Frank?"

"Yes; I am so obliged to you for introducing me to Levy. I must tell you how handsomely he has behaved."

"Stop; allow me to remind you that I did not introduce you to Levy; you had met him before at Borrowell's, if I recollect right, and he dined with us at the Clarendon,—that is all I had to do with bringing you together. Indeed I rather cautioned you against him than not. Pray don't think I introduced you to a man who, however pleasant and perhaps honest, is still a money-lender. Your father would be justly angry with me if I had done so."

"Oh, pooh! you are prejudiced against poor Levy. But just hear: I was sitting very ruefully, thinking over those cursed bills, and how the deuce I should renew them, when Levy walked into my rooms; and after telling me of his long friendship for my uncle Egerton and his admiration for yourself, and (give me your hand, Randal) saying how touched he felt by your kind sympathy in my troubles, he opened his pocket-book, and showed me the bills safe and sound in his own possession."

"How?"

"He had bought them up. 'It must be so disagreeable to me,' he said, 'to have them flying about the London moneymarket, and those Jews would be sure sooner or later to apply to my father. And now,' added Levy, 'I am in no immediate hurry for the money, and we must put the interest upon fairer terms.' In short, nothing could be more liberal than his tone. And he says, he is thinking of a way to relieve me altogether, and will call about it in a few days, when his plan is matured. After all, I must

owe this to you, Randal. I dare swear you put it into his head.”

”Oh, no, indeed! On the contrary, I still say, Be cautious in all your dealings with Levy. I don’t know, I ’m sure, what he means to propose. Have you heard from the Hall lately?”

”Yes, to-day. Only think—the Riccaboccas have disappeared. My mother writes me word of it,—a very odd letter. She seems to suspect that I know where they are, and reproaches me for ’mystery’—quite enigmatical. But there is one sentence in her letter—see, here it is in the postscript—which seems to refer to Beatrice: ’I don’t ask you to tell me your secrets, Frank, but Randal will no doubt have assured you that my first consideration will be for your own happiness, in any matter in which your heart is really engaged.’”

”Yes,” said Randal, slowly; ”no doubt this refers to Beatrice; but, as I told you, your mother will not interfere one way or the other,—such interference would weaken her influence with the squire. Besides, as she said, she can’t wish, you to marry a foreigner; though once married, she would—But how do you stand now with the marchesa? Has she consented to accept you?”

”Not quite; indeed I have not actually proposed. Her manner, though much softened, has not so far emboldened me; and, besides, before a positive declaration, I certainly must go down to the Hall and speak at least to my mother.”

”You must judge for yourself, but don’t do anything rash: talk first to me. Here we are at my office. Good-by; and—and pray believe that, in whatever you do with Levy, I have no hand in it.”

CHAPTER XI.

Towards the evening, Randal was riding fast on the road to Norwood. The arrival of Harley, and the conversation that had passed between that nobleman and Randal, made the latter anxious to ascertain how far Riccabocca was likely to learn L’Estrange’s return to England, and to meet with him. For he felt that, should the latter come to know that Riccabocca, in his movements, had gone by Randal’s advice. Harley would find that Randal had spoken to him disingenuously; and on the other hand, Riccabocca, placed under the friendly protection of Lord L’Estrange, would no longer need Randal Leslie to defend him from the machinations of Peschiera. To a reader happily unaccustomed to dive into the deep and mazy recesses of a schemer’s mind, it might seem that Randal’s interest in retaining a hold over the exile’s confidence would terminate with the assurances that had reached him, from more than one quarter, that

Violante might cease to be an heiress if she married himself. "But perhaps," suggests some candid and youthful conjecturer,—"perhaps Randal Leslie is in love with this fair creature?" Randal in love!—no! He was too absorbed by harder passions for that blissful folly. Nor, if he could have fallen in love, was Violante the one to attract that sullen, secret heart; her instinctive nobleness, the very stateliness of her beauty, womanlike though it was, awed him. Men of that kind may love some soft slave,—they cannot lift their eyes to a queen. They may look down,—they cannot look up. But on the one hand, Randal could not resign altogether the chance of securing a fortune that would realize his most dazzling dreams, upon the mere assurance, however probable, which had so dismayed him; and on the other hand, should he be compelled to relinquish all idea of such alliance, though he did not contemplate the base perfidy of actually assisting Peschiera's avowed designs, still, if Frank's marriage with Beatrice should absolutely depend upon her brother's obtaining the knowledge of Violante's retreat, and that marriage should be as conducive to his interests as he thought he could make it, why—he did not then push his deductions further, even to himself,—they seemed too black; but he sighed heavily, and that sigh foreboded how weak would be honour and virtue against avarice and ambition. Therefore, on all accounts, Riccabocca was one of those cards in a sequence, which so calculating a player would not throw out of his hand: it might serve for repique, at the worst it might score well in the game. Intimacy with the Italian was still part and parcel in that knowledge which was the synonym of power.

While the young man was thus meditating, on his road to Norwood, Riccabocca and his Jemima were close conferring in their drawing-room. And if you could have seen them, reader, you would have been seized with equal surprise and curiosity: for some extraordinary communication had certainly passed between them. Riccabocca was evidently much agitated, and with emotions not familiar to him. The tears stood in his eyes at the same time that a smile, the reverse of cynical or sardonic, curved his lips; while his wife was leaning her head on his shoulder, her hand clasped in his, and, by the expression of her face, you might guess that he had paid her some very gratifying compliment, of a nature more genuine and sincere than those which characterized his habitual hollow and dissimulating gallantry. But just at this moment Giacomo entered, and Jemima, with her native English modesty, withdrew in haste from Riccabocca's sheltering side.

"Padrone," said Giacomo, who, whatever his astonishment at the connubial position he had disturbed, was much too discreet to betray it,—"Padrone, I see the young Englishman riding towards the house, and I hope, when he arrives, you will not forget the alarming information I gave to you this morning."

"Ah, ah!" said Riccabocca, his face falling. "If the signorina were but married!"

"My very thought,—my constant thought!" exclaimed Riccabocca. "And you really believe the young Englishman loves her?"

"Why else should he come, Excellency?" asked Giacomo, with great naivete.

"Very true; why, indeed?" said Riccabocca. "Jemima, I cannot endure the terrors I suffer on that poor child's account. I will open myself frankly to Randal Leslie. And now, too, that which might have been a serious consideration, in case I return to Italy, will no longer stand in our way, Jemima."

Jemima smiled faintly, and whispered something to Riccabocca, to which he replied,

"Nonsense, anima mia. I know it will be,—have not a doubt of it. I tell you it is as nine to four, according to the nicest calculations. I will speak at once to Randal. He is too young, too timid to speak himself."

"Certainly," interposed Giacomo; "how could he dare to speak, let him love ever so well?"

Jemima shook her head.

"Oh, never fear," said Riccabocca, observing this gesture; "I will give him the trial. If he entertain but mercenary views, I shall soon detect them. I know human nature pretty well, I think, my love; and, Giacomo, just get me my Machiavelli;—that's right. Now leave me, my dear; I must reflect and prepare myself."

When Randal entered the house, Giacomo, with a smile of peculiar suavity, ushered him into the drawing-room. He found Riccabocca alone, and seated before the fireplace, leaning his face on his hand, with the great folio of Machiavelli lying open on the table.

The Italian received him as courteously as usual; but there was in his manner a certain serious and thoughtful dignity, which was perhaps the more imposing, because but rarely assumed. After a few preliminary observations, Randal remarked that Frank Hazeldean had informed him of the curiosity which the disappearance of the Riccaboccas had excited at the Hall, and inquired carelessly if the doctor had left instructions as to the forwarding of any letters that might be directed to him at the Casino.

"Letters!" said Riccabocca, simply; "I never receive any; or, at least, so rarely, that it was not worth while to take an event so little to be expected into consideration. No; if any letters do reach the Casino, there they will wait."

"Then I can see no possibility of indiscretion; no chance of a clew to

your address.”

”Nor I either.”

Satisfied so far, and knowing that it was not in Riccabocca’s habits to read the newspapers, by which he might otherwise have learned of L’Estrange’s arrival in London, Randal then proceeded to inquire, with much seeming interest, into the health of Violante,—hoped it did not suffer by confinement, etc. Riccabocca eyed him gravely while he spoke, and then suddenly rising, that air of dignity to which I have before referred became yet more striking.

”My young friend,” said he, ”hear me attentively, and answer me frankly. I know human nature—” Here a slight smile of proud complacency passed the sage’s lips, and his eye glanced towards his Machiavelli.

”I know human nature,—at least I have studied it,” he renewed more earnestly, and with less evident self-conceit; ”and I believe that when a perfect stranger to me exhibits an interest in my affairs, which occasions him no small trouble,—an interest,” continued the wise man, laying his hand on Randal’s shoulder, ”which scarcely a son could exceed, he must be under the influence of some strong personal motive.”

”Oh, sir!” cried Randal, turning a shade more pale, and with a faltering tone. Riccabocca, surveyed him with the tenderness of a superior being, and pursued his deductive theories.

”In your case, what is that motive? Not political; for I conclude you share the opinions of your government, and those opinions have not favoured mine. Not that of pecuniary or ambitious calculations; for how can such calculations enlist you on behalf of a ruined exile? What remains? Why, the motive which at your age is ever the most natural and the strongest. I don’t blame you. Machiavelli himself allows that such a motive has swayed the wisest minds, and overturned the most solid States. In a word, young man, you are in love, and with my daughter Violante.”

Randal was so startled by this direct and unexpected charge upon his own masked batteries, that he did not even attempt his defence. His head drooped on his breast, and he remained speechless.

”I do not doubt,” resumed the penetrating judge of human nature, ”that you would have been withheld by the laudable and generous scruples which characterize your happy age, from voluntarily disclosing to me the state of your heart. You might suppose that, proud of the position I once held, or sanguine in the hope of regaining my inheritance, I might be over-ambitious in my matrimonial views for Violante; or that you, anticipating my restoration to honours and fortune, might seem actuated by the last motives which influence love and youth; and, therefore, my dear young friend, I have departed from the ordinary custom in England,

and adopted a very common one in my own country. With us, a suitor seldom presents himself till he is assured of the consent of a father. I have only to say this,—if I am right, and you love my daughter, my first object in life is to see her safe and secure; and, in a word—you understand me.”

Now, mightily may it comfort and console us ordinary mortals, who advance no pretence to superior wisdom and ability, to see the huge mistakes made by both these very sagacious personages,—Dr. Riccabocca, valuing himself on his profound acquaintance with character, and Randal Leslie, accustomed to grope into every hole and corner of thought and action, wherefrom to extract that knowledge which is power! For whereas the sage, judging not only by his own heart in youth, but by the general influence of the master passion on the young, had ascribed to Randal sentiments wholly foreign to that able diplomatist’s nature, so no sooner had Riccabocca brought his speech to a close, than Randal, judging also by his own heart, and by the general laws which influence men of the mature age and boasted worldly wisdom of the pupil of Machiavelli, instantly decided that Riccabocca presumed upon his youth and inexperience, and meant most nefariously to take him in.

”The poor youth!” thought Riccabocca, ”how unprepared he is for the happiness I give him!”

”The cunning old Jesuit!” thought Randal; ”he has certainly learned, since we met last, that he has no chance of regaining his patrimony, and so he wants to impose on me the hand of a girl without a shilling. What other motive can he possibly have? Had his daughter the remotest probability of becoming the greatest heiress in Italy, would he dream of bestowing her on me in this off-hand way? The thing stands to reason.”

Actuated by his resentment at the trap thus laid for him, Randal was

about to disclaim altogether the disinterested and absurd affection laid to his charge, when it occurred to him that, by so doing, he might mortally offend the Italian, since the cunning never forgive those who refuse to be duped by them,—and it might still be conducive to his interest to preserve intimate and familiar terms with Riccabocca; therefore, subduing his first impulse, he exclaimed,

”Oh, too generous man! pardon me if I have so long been unable to express my amaze, my gratitude; but I cannot—no, I cannot, while your prospects remain thus uncertain, avail myself of your—of your inconsiderate magnanimity. Your rare conduct can only redouble my own scruples, if you, as I firmly hope and believe, are restored to your great

possessions—you would naturally look so much higher than me. Should these hopes fail, then, indeed, it may be different; yet even then, what position, what fortune, have I to offer to your daughter worthy of her?"

"You are well born! all gentlemen are equals," said Riccabocca, with a sort of easy nobleness. "You have youth, information, talent,—sources of certain wealth in this happy country,—powerful connections; and, in fine, if you are satisfied with marrying for love, I shall be contented; if not, speak openly. As to the restoration to my possessions, I can scarcely think that probable while my enemy lives. And even in that case, since I saw you last, something has occurred," added Riccabocca, with a strange smile, which seemed to Randal singularly sinister and malignant, "that may remove all difficulties. Meanwhile, do not think me so extravagantly magnanimous; do not underrate the satisfaction I must feel at knowing Violante safe from the designs of Peschiera,—safe, and forever, under a husband's roof. I will tell you an Italian proverb,—it contains a truth full of wisdom and terror,

"'Hai cinquanta Amici?—non basta. Hai un Nemico?—e troppo.'" [“Have you fifty friends?—it is not enough. Have you one enemy?—it is too much.”]

"Something has occurred!" echoed Randal, not heeding the conclusion of this speech, and scarcely hearing the proverb, which the sage delivered in his most emphatic and tragic tone. "Something has occurred! My dear friend, be plainer. What has occurred?" Riccabocca remained silent. "Something that induces you to bestow your daughter on me?" Riccabocca nodded, and emitted a low chuckle.

"The very laugh of a fiend," muttered Randal. "Something that makes her not worth bestowing. He betrays himself. Cunning people always do."

"Pardon me," said the Italian, at last, "if I don't answer your question; you will know later; but at present this is a family secret. And now I must turn to another and more alarming cause for my frankness to you." Here Riccabocca's face changed, and assumed an expression of mingled rage and fear. "You must know," he added, sinking his voice, "that Giacomo has seen a strange person loitering about the house, and looking up at the windows; and he has no doubt—nor have I—that this is some spy or emissary of Peschiera's."

"Impossible; how could he discover you?"

"I know not; but no one else has any interest in doing so. The man kept at a distance, and Giacomo could not see his face."

"It may be but a mere idler. Is this all?"

"No; the old woman who serves us said that she was asked at a shop 'if we were not Italians'?"

"And she answered?"

"'No;' but owned that 'we had a foreign servant, Giacomo.'"

"I will see to this. Rely on it that if Peschiera has discovered you, I will learn it. Nay, I will hasten from you in order to commence inquiry."

"I cannot detain you. May I think that we have now an interest in common?"

"Oh, indeed yes; but—but—your daughter! How can I dream that one so beautiful, so peerless, will confirm the hope you have extended to me?"

"The daughter of an Italian is brought up to consider that it is a father's right to dispose of her hand."

"But the heart?"

"/Cospetto!/" said the Italian, true to his infamous notions as to the sex, "the heart of a girl is like a convent,—the holier the cloister, the more charitable the door."

CHAPTER XII.

Randal had scarcely left the house before Mrs. Riccabocca, who was affectionately anxious in all that concerned Violante, rejoined her husband.

"I like the young man very well," said the sage,—"very well indeed. I find him just what I expected, from my general knowledge of human nature; for as love ordinarily goes with youth, so modesty usually accompanies talent. He is young, ergo, he is in love; he has talent, ergo, he is modest, modest and ingenuous."

"And you think not in any way swayed by interest in his affections?"

"Quite the contrary; and to prove him the more, I have not said a word as to the worldly advantages which, in any case, would accrue to him from an alliance with my daughter. In any case: for if I regain my country, her fortune is assured; and if not, I trust" (said the poor exile, lifting his brow with stately and becoming pride) "that I am too well aware of my child's dignity, as well as my own, to ask any one to marry her to his own worldly injury."

"Eh! I don't quite understand you, Alphonso. To be sure, your dear life is insured for her marriage portion; but—"

"Pazzie-stuff!" said Riccabocca, petulantly; "her marriage portion would be as nothing to a young man of Randal's birth and prospects. I think not of that. But listen: I have never consented to profit by Harley L'Estrange's friendship for me; my scruples would not extend to my son-in-law. This noble friend has not only high rank, but considerable influence,—influence with the government, influence with Randal's patron, who, between ourselves, does not seem to push the young man as he might do; I judge by what Randal says. I should write, therefore, before anything was settled, to L'Estrange, and I should say to him simply, 'I never asked you to save me from penury, but I do ask you to save a daughter of my House from humiliation. I can give to her no dowry; can her husband owe to my friend that advance in an honourable career, that opening to energy and talent, which is more than a dowry to generous ambition?'"

"Oh, it is in vain you would disguise your rank," cried Jemima, with enthusiasm; "it speaks in all you utter, when your passions are moved."

The Italian did not seem flattered by that eulogy. "Pish," said he, "there you are! rank again!"

But Jemima was right. There was something about her husband that was grandiose and princely, whenever he escaped from his accursed Machiavelli, and gave fair play to his heart.

And he spent the next hour or so in thinking over all that he could do for Randal, and devising for his intended son-in-law the agreeable surprise, which Randal was at that very time racking his yet cleverer brains to disappoint.

These plans conned sufficiently, Riccabocca shut up his Machiavelli, and hunted out of his scanty collection of books, Buffon on Man, and various other psychological volumes, in which he soon became deeply absorbed. Why were these works the object of the sage's study? Perhaps he will let us know soon, for it is clearly a secret known to his wife; and though she has hitherto kept one secret, that is precisely the reason why Riccabocca would not wish long to overburden her discretion with another.

CHAPTER XIII.

Randal reached home in time to dress for a late dinner at Baron Levy's.

The baron's style of living was of that character especially affected

both by the most acknowledged exquisites of that day, and, it must be owned, also, by the most egregious /parvenus/. For it is noticeable that it is your /parvenu/ who always comes nearest in fashion (so far as externals are concerned) to your genuine exquisite. It is your /parvenu/ who is most particular as to the cut of his coat, and the precision of his equipage, and the minutia, of his menage. Those between the /parvenu/ and the exquisite, who know their own consequence, and have something solid to rest upon, are slow in following all the caprices of fashion, and obtuse in observation as to those niceties which neither give them another ancestor, nor add another thousand to the account at their banker's,—as to the last, rather indeed the contrary! There was a decided elegance about the baron's house and his dinner. If he had been one of the lawful kings of the dandies, you would have cried, "What perfect taste!"—but such is human nature, that the dandies who dined with him said to each other, "He pretend to imitate D—! vulgar dog!" There was little affectation of your more showy opulence. The furniture in the rooms was apparently simple, but, in truth, costly, from its luxurious comfort; the ornaments and china scattered about the commodes were of curious rarity and great value, and the pictures on the walls were gems. At dinner, no plate was admitted on the table. The Russian fashion, then uncommon, now more prevalent, was adopted, fruit and flowers in old Sevres dishes of priceless /vertu/, and in sparkling glass of Bohemian fabric. No livery servant was permitted to wait; behind each guest stood a gentleman dressed so like the guest himself, in fine linen and simple black, that guest and lacquey seemed stereotypes from one plate.

The viands were exquisite; the wine came from the cellars of deceased archbishops and ambassadors. The company was select; the party did not exceed eight. Four were the eldest sons of peers (from a baron to a duke); one was a professed wit, never to be got without a month's notice, and, where a /parvenu/ was host, a certainty of green peas and peaches—out of season; the sixth, to Randal's astonishment, was Mr. Richard Avenel; himself and the baron made up the complement.

The eldest sons recognized each other with a meaning smile; the most juvenile of them, indeed (it was his first year in London), had the grace to blush and look sheepish. The others were more hardened; but they all united in regarding with surprise both Randal and Dick Avenel. The former was known to most of them personally, and to all, by repute, as a grave, clever, promising young man, rather prudent than lavish, and never suspected to have got into a scrape. What the deuce did he do there? Mr. Avenel puzzled them yet more. A middle-aged man, said to be in business, whom they had observed "about town" (for he had a noticeable face and figure),—that is, seen riding in the Park, or lounging in the pit at the opera, but never set eyes on at a recognized club, or in the coteries of their "set;" a man whose wife gave horrid third-rate parties, that took up half a column in the "Morning Post" with a list of "The Company Present," in which a sprinkling of dowagers fading out of fashion, and a foreign title or two, made the darkness of the obscurer

names doubly dark. Why this man should be asked to meet them, by Baron Levy, too—a decided tuft-hunter and would-be exclusive—called all their faculties into exercise. The wit, who, being the son of a small tradesman, but in the very best society, gave himself far greater airs than the young lords, impertinently solved the mystery. "Depend on it," whispered he to Spendquick,—depend on it the man is the X. Y. of the 'Times' who offers to lend any sum of money from L10 to half-a-million. He's the man who has all your bills; Levy is only his jackal."

"'Pon my soul," said Spendquick, rather alarmed, "if that's the case, one may as well be civil to him."

"You, certainly," said the wit. "But I never have found an X. Y. who would advance me the L. s.; and therefore I shall not be more respectful to X. Y. than to any other unknown quantity."

By degrees, as the wine circulated, the party grew gay and sociable. Levy was really an entertaining fellow; had all the gossip of the town at his fingers' ends; and possessed, moreover, that pleasant art of saying ill-natured things of the absent, which those present always enjoy. By degrees, too, Mr. Richard Avenel came out; and, as the whisper had circulated round the table that he was X. Y., he was listened to with a profound respect, which greatly elevated his spirits. Nay, when the wit tried once to show him up or mystify him, Dick answered with a bluff spirit, that, though very coarse, was found so humorous by Lord Spendquick and other gentlemen similarly situated in the money-market that they turned the laugh against the wit, and silenced him for the rest of the night,—a circumstance which made the party go off much more pleasantly. After dinner, the conversation, quite that of single men, easy and /debonnaire/, glanced from the turf and the ballet and the last scandal towards politics; for the times were such that politics were discussed everywhere, and three of the young lords were county members.

Randal said little, but, as was his wont, listened attentively; and he was aghast to find how general was the belief that the Government was doomed. Out of regard to him, and with that delicacy of breeding which belongs to a certain society, nothing personal to Egerton was said, except by Avenel, who, however, on blurting out some rude expressions respecting that minister, was instantly checked by the baron. "Spare my friend and Mr. Leslie's near connection," said he, with a polite but grave smile.

"Oh," said Avenel, "public men, whom we pay, are public property,—aren't they, my Lord?" appealing to Spendquick.

"Certainly," said Spendquick, with great spirit,—public property, or why should we pay them? There must be a very strong motive to induce us to do that! I hate paying people. In fact," he subjoined in an aside, "I never do."

"However," resumed Mr. Avenel, graciously, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Mr. Leslie. As to the feelings of our host, the baron, I calculate that they have got tolerably tough by the exercise they have gone through."

"Nevertheless," said the baron, joining in the laugh which any lively saying by the supposed X. Y. was sure to excite, "nevertheless, 'love me, love my dog,'—love me, love my Egerton."

Randal started, for his quick ear and subtle intelligence caught something sinister and hostile in the tone with which Levy uttered this equivocal comparison, and his eye darted towards the baron. But the baron had bent down his face, and was regaling himself upon an olive.

By-and-by the party rose from table. The four young noblemen had their engagements elsewhere, and proposed to separate without re-entering the drawing-room. As, in Goethe's theory, monads which have affinities with each other are irresistibly drawn together, so these gay children of pleasure had, by a common impulse, on rising from table, moved each to each, and formed a group round the fireplace. Randal stood a little apart, musing; the wit examined the pictures through his eye-glass; and Mr. Avenel drew the baron towards the side-board, and there held him in whispered conference. This colloquy did not escape the young gentlemen round the fireplace; they glanced towards each other.

"Settling the percentage on renewal," said one, sotto voce. "X. Y. does not seem such a very bad fellow," said another.

"He looks rich, and talks rich," said a third.

"A decided, independent way of expressing his sentiments; those moneyed men generally have."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Spendquick, who had been keeping his eye anxiously fixed on the pair, "do look; X. Y. is actually taking out his pocket-book; he is coming this way. Depend on it he has got our bills—mine is due to-morrow!"

"And mine too," said another, edging off. "Why, it is a perfect /guet-apens/."

Meanwhile, breaking away from the baron, who appeared anxious to detain him, and failing in that attempt, turned aside, as if not to see Dick's movements,—a circumstance which did not escape the notice of the group, and confirmed all their suspicions,—Mr. Avenel, with a serious, thoughtful face, and a slow step, approached the group. Nor did the great Roman general more nervously "flutter the dove-cots in Corioli," than did the advance of the supposed X. Y. agitate the bosoms of Lord Spendquick and his sympathizing friends. Pocket-book in hand, and apparently feeling for something formidable within its mystic recesses,

step by step came Dick Avenel towards the fireplace. The group stood still, fascinated by horror.

"Hum," said Mr. Avenel, clearing his throat.

"I don't like that hum at all," muttered Spendquick. "Proud to have made your acquaintance, gentlemen," said Dick, bowing.

The gentlemen thus addressed bowed low in return.

"My friend the baron thought this not exactly the time to—" Dick stopped a moment; you might have knocked down those four young gentlemen, though four finer specimens of humanity no aristocracy in Europe could produce, —you might have knocked them down with a feather! "But," renewed Avenel, not finishing his sentence, "I have made it a rule in life never to lose securing a good opportunity; in short, to make the most of the present moment. And," added he, with a smile which froze the blood in Lord Spendquick's veins, "the rule has made me a very warm man! Therefore, gentlemen, allow me to present you each with one of these" —every hand retreated behind the back of its well-born owner, when, to the inexpressible relief of all, Dick concluded with,—"a little soiree dansante," and extended four cards of invitation.

"Most happy!" exclaimed Spendquick. "I don't dance in general; but to oblige X—I mean, to have a better acquaintance, sir, with you—I would dance on the tight-rope."

There was a good-humoured, pleasant laugh at Spendquick's enthusiasm, and a general shaking of hands and pocketing of the invitation cards.

"You don't look like a dancing man," said Avenel, turning to the wit, who was plump and somewhat gouty,—as wits who dine out five days in the week generally are; "but we shall have supper at one o'clock."

Infinitely offended and disgusted, the wit replied dryly, "that every hour of his time was engaged for the rest of the season," and, with a stiff salutation to the baron, took his departure. The rest, in good spirits, hurried away to their respective cabriolets; and Leslie was following them into the hall, when the baron, catching hold of him, said, "Stay, I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER XIV.

The baron turned into his drawing-room, and Leslie followed.

"Pleasant young men, those," said Levy, with a slight sneer, as he threw himself into an easy-chair and stirred the fire. "And not at all proud; but, to be sure, they are—under great obligations to me. Yes; they owe me a great deal /a propos/, I have had a long talk with Frank Hazeldean, —fine young man, remarkable capacities for business. I can arrange his affairs for him. I find, on reference to the Will Office, that you were quite right; the Casino property is entailed on Frank. He will have the fee simple. He can dispose of the reversion entirely. So that there will be no difficulty in our arrangements."

"But I told you also that Frank had scruples about borrowing on the event of his father's death."

"Ay, you did so. Filial affection! I never take that into account in matters of business. Such little scruples, though they are highly honourable to human nature, soon vanish before the prospect of the King's Bench. And, too, as you so judiciously remarked, our clever young friend is in love with Madame di Negra."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No; but Madame di Negra did!"

"You know her?"

"I know most people in good society, who now and then require a friend in the management of their affairs. And having made sure of the fact you stated, as to Hazeldean's contingent property (excuse my prudence), I have accommodated Madame di Negra and bought up her debts."

"You have—you surprise me!"

"The surprise will vanish on reflection. But you are very new to the world yet, my dear Leslie. By the way, I have had an interview with Peschiera—"

"About his sister's debts?"

"Partly. A man of the nicest honour is Peschiera." Aware of Levy's habit of praising people for the qualities in which, according to the judgment of less penetrating mortals, they were most deficient, Randal only smiled at this eulogy, and waited for Levy to resume. But the baron sat silent and thoughtful for a minute or two, and then wholly changed the subject.

"I think your father has some property in —shire, and you probably can give me a little information as to certain estates of a Mr. Thornhill, estates which, on examination of the title-deeds, I find once, indeed, belonged to your family." The baron glanced at a very elegant memorandum-book.—"The manors of Rood and Dulmansberry, with sundry

farms

thereon. Mr. Thornhill wants to sell them—an old client of mine, Thornhill. He has applied to me on the matter. Do you think it an improvable property?"

Randal listened with a livid cheek and a throbbing heart. We have seen that, if there was one ambitious scheme in his calculation which, though not absolutely generous and heroic, still might win its way to a certain sympathy in the undebased human mind, it was the hope to restore the fallen fortunes of his ancient house, and repossess himself of the long alienated lands that surrounded the dismal wastes of the mouldering hall. And now to hear that those lands were getting into the inexorable gripe of Levy—tears of bitterness stood in his eyes.

"Thornhill," continued Levy, who watched the young man's countenance,— "Thornhill tells me that that part of his property—the old Leslie lands—produces L2, 000 a year, and that the rental could be raised. He would take L50,000 for it, L20,000 down, and suffer the remaining L30,000 to lie on mortgage at four per cent. It seems a very good purchase. What do you say?"

"Don't ask me," said Randal, stung into rare honesty; for I had hoped I might live to repossess myself of that property."

"Ah, indeed! It would be a very great addition to your consequence in the world,—not from the mere size of the estate, but from its hereditary associations. And if you have any idea of the purchase, believe me, I'll not stand in your way."

"How can I have any idea of it?"

"But I thought you said you had."

"I understood that these lands could not be sold till Mr. Thornhill's son came of age, and joined in getting rid of the entail."

"Yes, so Thornhill himself supposed, till, on examining the title-deeds, I found he was under a mistake. These lands are not comprised in the settlement made by old Jasper Thornhill, which ties up the rest of the property. The title will be perfect. Thornhill wants to settle the matter at once,—losses on the turf, you understand; an immediate purchaser would get still better terms. A Sir John Spratt would give the money; but the addition of these lands would make the Spratt property of more consequence in the county than the Thornhill. So my client would rather take a few thousands less from a man who don't set up to be his rival. Balance of power in counties as well as nations."

Randal was silent.

"Well," said Levy, with great kindness of manner, "I see I pain you;

and though I am what my very pleasant guests would call a /parvenu/, I comprehend your natural feelings as a gentleman of ancient birth. /Parvenu! Ah, is it not strange, Leslie, that no wealth, no fashion, no fame can wipe out that blot? They call me a /parvenu/, and borrow my money. They call our friend the wit a /parvenu/, and submit to all his insolence—if they condescend to regard his birth at all—provided they can but get him to dinner. They call the best debater in the parliament of England a /parvenu/, and will entreat him, some day or other, to be prime minister, and ask him for stars and garters. A droll world, and no wonder the /parvenus/ want to upset it.”

Randal had hitherto supposed that this notorious tufthunter, this dandy capitalist, this money-lender, whose whole fortune had been wrung from the wants and follies of an aristocracy, was naturally a firm supporter of things as they are—how could things be better for men like Baron Levy? But the usurer’s burst of democratic spleen did not surprise his precocious and acute faculty of observation. He had before remarked, that it is the persons who fawn most upon an aristocracy, and profit the most by the fawning, who are ever at heart its bitterest disparagers. Why is this? Because one full half of democratic opinion is made up of envy; and we can only envy what is brought before our eyes, and what, while very near to us, is still unattainable. No man envies an archangel.

”But,” said Levy, throwing himself back in his chair, ”a new order of things is commencing; we shall see. Leslie, it is lucky for you that you did not enter parliament under the government; it would be your political ruin for life.”

”You think, then, that the ministry really cannot last?”

”Of course I do; and what is more, I think that a ministry of the same principles cannot be restored. You are a young man of talent and spirit; your birth is nothing compared to the rank of the reigning party; it would tell, to a certain degree, in a democratic one. I say, you should be more civil to Avenel; he could return you to parliament at the next election.”

”The next election! In six years! We have just had a general election.”

”There will be another before this year, or half of it, or perhaps a quarter of it, is out.”

”What makes you think so?”

”Leslie, let there be confidence between us; we can help each other. Shall we be friends?”

”With all my heart. But though you may help me, how can I help you?”

"You have helped me already to Frank Hazeldean and the Casino estate. All clever men can help me. Come, then, we are friends; and what I say is secret. You ask me why I think there will be a general election so soon? I will answer you frankly. Of all the public men I ever met with, there is no one who has so clear a vision of things immediately before him as Audley Egerton."

"He has that character. Not far-seeing, but clear-sighted to a certain limit."

"Exactly so. No one better, therefore, knows public opinion and its immediate ebb and flow."

"Granted."

"Egerton, then, counts on a general election within three months, and I have lent him the money for it."

"Lent him the money! Egerton borrow money of you, the rich Audley Egerton!"

"Rich!" repeated Levy, in a tone impossible to describe, and accompanying the word with that movement of the middle finger and thumb, commonly called a "snap," which indicates profound contempt.

He said no more. Randal sat stupefied. At length the latter muttered, "But if Egerton is really not rich; if he lose office, and without the hope of return to it—"

"If so, he is ruined!" said Levy, coldly; "and therefore, from regard to you, and feeling interest in your future fate, I say, Rest no hopes of fortune or career upon Audley Egerton. Keep your place for the present, but be prepared at the next election to stand upon popular principles. Avenel shall return you to parliament; and the rest is with luck and energy. And now, I'll not detain you longer," said Levy, rising and ringing the bell. The servant entered. "Is my carriage here?"

"Yes, Baron."

"Can I set you down anywhere?"

"No, thank you, I prefer walking."

"Adieu, then. And mind you remember the /soiree dansante/ at Mrs. Avenel's." Randal mechanically shook the hand extended to him, and went down the stairs.

The fresh frosty air roused his intellectual faculties, which Levy's ominous words had almost paralyzed.

And the first thing the clever schemer said to himself was this,

"But what can be the man's motive in what he said to me?"

The next was,—

"Egerton ruined! What am I, then?" And the third was,

"And that fair remnant of the old Leslie property! L20,000 down—how to get the sum? Why should Levy have spoken to me of this?"

And lastly, the soliloquy rounded back—"The man's motives! His motives!"

Meanwhile, the baron threw himself into his chariot—the most comfortable, easy chariot you can possibly conceive, single man's chariot, perfect taste,—no married man ever had such a chariot; and in a few minutes he was at ——'s hotel, and in the presence of Giulio Franzini, Count di Peschiera.

"Mon cher," said the baron, in very good French, and in a tone of the most familiar equality with the descendant of the princes and heroes of grand medieval Italy,—"/mon cher/, give me one of your excellent cigars. I think I have put all matters in train."

"You have found out—"

"No; not so fast yet," said the baron, lighting the cigar extended to him. "But you said that you should be perfectly contented if it only cost you L20,000 to marry off your sister (to whom that sum is legally due), and to marry yourself to the heiress."

"I did, indeed."

"Then I have no doubt I shall manage both objects for that sum, if Randal Leslie really knows where the young lady is, and can assist you. Most promising, able man is Randal Leslie—but innocent as a babe just born."

"Ha, ha! Innocent? /Que diable!/"

"Innocent as this cigar, /mon cher/,—strong certainly, but smoked very easily. /Soyez tranquille!/"

CHAPTER XV.

Who has not seen, who not admired, that noble picture by Daniel Maclise, which refreshes the immortal name of my ancestor Caxton! For myself, while with national pride I heard the admiring murmurs of the foreigners who grouped around it (nothing, indeed, of which our nation may be more proud had they seen in the Crystal Palace),—heard, with no less a pride in the generous nature of fellow-artists, the warm applause of living and deathless masters sanctioning the enthusiasm of the popular crowd, what struck me more than the precision of drawing, for which the artist has been always renowned, and the just, though gorgeous affluence of colour which he has more recently acquired, was the profound depth of conception, out of which this great work had so elaborately arisen. That monk, with his scowl towards the printer and his back on the Bible over which his form casts a shadow—the whole transition between the medieval Christianity of cell and cloister, and the modern Christianity that rejoices in the daylight, is depicted there, in the shadow that obscures the Book, in the scowl that is fixed upon the Book-diffuser;—that sombre, musing face of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, with the beauty of Napoleon, darkened to the expression of a Fiend, looking far and anxiously into futurity, as if foreseeing there what antagonism was about to be created to the schemes of secret crime and unrelenting force; the chivalrous head of the accomplished Rivers, seen but in profile, under his helmet, as if the age when Chivalry must defend its noble attributes in steel was already half passed away; and, not least grand of all, the rude thews and sinews of the artisan forced into service on the type, and the ray of intellect, fierce, and menacing revolutions yet to be, struggling through his rugged features, and across his low knitted brow, —all this, which showed how deeply the idea of the discovery in its good and its evil, its saving light and its perilous storms, had sunk into the artist's soul, charmed me as effecting the exact union between sentiment and execution, which is the true and rare consummation of the Ideal in Art. But observe, while in these personages of the group are depicted the deeper and graver agencies implicated in the bright but terrible invention, observe how little the light epicures of the hour heed the scowl of the monk, or the restless gesture of Richard, or the troubled gleam in the eyes of the artisan, King Edward, handsome Poco curante, delighted in the surprise of a child, with a new toy, and Clarence, with his curious, yet careless, glance,—all the while Caxton himself, calm, serene, untroubled, intent solely upon the manifestation of his discovery, and no doubt supremely indifferent whether the first proofs of it shall be dedicated to a Rivers or an Edward, a Richard or a Henry, Plantagenet or Tudor—'t is all the same to that comely, gentle-looking man. So is it ever with your Abstract Science!—not a jot cares its passionless logic for the woe or weal of a generation or two. The stream, once emerged from its source, passes on into the great Intellectual Sea, smiling over the wretch that it drowns, or under the keel of the ship which it serves as a slave.

Now, when about to commence the present chapter on the Varieties of Life, this masterpiece of thoughtful art forced itself on my recollection, and illustrated what I designed to convey. In the surface of every age it is often that which but amuses for the moment the ordinary children of pleasant existence, the Edwards and the Clarences (be they kings and dukes, or simplest of simple subjects), which afterwards towers out as the great serious epoch of the time. When we look back upon human records, how the eye settles upon WRITERS as the main landmarks of the past! We talk of the age of Augustus, of Elizabeth, of Louis XIV., of Anne, as the notable eras of the world. Why? Because it is their writers who have made them so. Intervals between one age of authors and another lie unnoticed, as the flats and common lands of uncultured history. And yet, strange to say, when these authors are living amongst us, they occupy a very small portion of our thoughts, and fill up but desultory interstices in the bitumen and tufo wherefrom we build up the Babylon of our lives. So it is, and perhaps so it should be, whether it pleases the conceit of penmen or not. Life is meant to be active; and books, though they give the action to future generations, administer but to the holiday of the present.

And so, with this long preface, I turn suddenly from the Randals and the Egertons, and the Levys, Avenels, and Peschieras, from the plots and passions of practical life, and drop the reader suddenly into one of those obscure retreats wherein Thought weaves, from unnoticed moments, a new link to the chain that unites the ages.

Within a small room, the single window of which opened on a fanciful and fairy-like garden that has been before described, sat a young man alone. He had been writing; the ink was not dry on his manuscript, but his thoughts had been suddenly interrupted from his work, and his eyes, now lifted from the letter which had occasioned that interruption, sparkled with delight. "He will come," exclaimed the young man; "come here,—to the home which I owe to him. I have not been unworthy of his friendship. And she—" his breast heaved, but the joy faded from his face. "Oh, strange, strange, that I feel sad at the thought to see her again! See her—Ah, no! my own comforting Helen, my own Child-angel! Her I can never see again! The grown woman—that is not my Helen. And yet—and yet," he resumed after a pause, "if ever she read the pages in which thought flowed and trembled under her distant starry light, if ever she see how her image has rested with me, and feel that, while others believe that I invent, I have but remembered, will she not, for a moment, be my own Helen again? Again, in heart and in fancy, stand by my side on the desolate bridge, hand in hand, orphans both, as we stood in the days so sorrowful, yet, as I recall them, so sweet? Helen in England—it is a dream!"

He rose, half-consciously, and went to the window. The fountain played merrily before his eyes, and the birds in the aviary carolled loud to his ear. "And in this house," he murmured, "I saw her last! And there,

where the fountain now throws its spray on high,—there her benefactor and mine told me that I was to lose her, that I might win—fame. Alas!”

At this time a woman, whose dress was somewhat above her mien and air, which, though not without a certain respectability, were very homely, entered the room; and seeing the young man standing thus thoughtful by the window, paused. She was used to his habits; and since his success in life, had learned to respect them. So she did not disturb his reverie, but began softly to arrange the room, dusting, with the corner of her apron, the various articles of furniture, putting a stray chair or two in its right place, but not touching a single paper. Virtuous woman, and rare as virtuous!

The young man turned at last, with a deep, yet not altogether painful sigh,

”My dear mother, good day to you. Ah, you do well to make the room look its best. Happy news! I expect a visitor!”

”Dear me, Leonard, will he want lunch—or what?”

”Nay, I think not, Mother. It is he to whom we owe all,—’*Haec otia fecit.*’ Pardon my Latin; it is Lord L’Estrange.”

The face of Mrs. Fairfield (the reader has long since divined the name) changed instantly, and betrayed a nervous twitch of all the muscles, which gave her a family likeness to old Mrs. Avenel.

”Do not be alarmed, Mother. He is the kindest—”

”Don’t talk so; I can’t bear it!” cried Mrs. Fairfield.

”No wonder you are affected by the recollection of all his benefits. But when once you have seen him, you will find yourself ever after at your ease. And so, pray smile and look as good as you are; for I am proud of your open honest look when you are pleased, Mother. And he must see your heart in your face, as I do.”

With this, Leonard put his arm round the widow’s neck and kissed her. She clung to him fondly for a moment, and he felt her tremble from head to foot. Then she broke from his embrace, and hurried out of the room. Leonard thought perhaps she had gone to improve her dress, or to carry her housewife energies to the decoration of the other rooms; for ”the house” was Mrs. Fairfield’s hobby and passion; and now that she worked no more, save for her amusement, it was her main occupation. The hours she contrived to spend daily in bustling about those little rooms, and leaving everything therein to all appearance precisely the same, were among the marvels in life which the genius of Leonard had never comprehended. But she was always so delighted when Mr. Norreys, or some rare visitor came, and said,—Mr. Norreys never failed to do so,—”How

neatly all is kept here. What could Leonard do without you, Mrs. Fairfield?"

And, to Norreys's infinite amusement, Mrs. Fairfield always returned the same answer. "'Deed, sir, and thank you kindly, but 't is my belief that the drawin'-room would be awful dusty."

Once more left alone, Leonard's mind returned to the state of reverie, and his face assumed the expression that had now become to it habitual. Thus seen, he was changed much since we last beheld him. His cheek was more pale and thin, his lips more firmly compressed, his eye more fixed and abstract. You could detect, if I may borrow a touching French expression, that "Sorrow had passed by there." But the melancholy on his countenance was ineffably sweet and serene, and on his ample forehead there was that power, so rarely seen in early youth,—the power that has conquered, and betrays its conquests but in calm. The period of doubt, of struggle, of defiance, was gone, perhaps forever; genius and soul were reconciled to human life. It was a face most lovable; so gentle and peaceful in its character. No want of fire; on the contrary, the fire was so clear and so steadfast, that it conveyed but the impression of light. The candour of boyhood, the simplicity of the villager, were still there,—refined by intelligence, but intelligence that seemed to have traversed through knowledge, not with the 'footstep, but the wing, unsullied by the mire, tending towards the star, seeking through the various grades of Being but the lovelier forms of truth and goodness; at home, as should be the Art that consummates the Beautiful,—

"In den heitern Regionen
Wo die reinen Formen wohnen."

[At home—"In the serene regions
Where dwell the pure forms."]

From this reverie Leonard did not seek to rouse himself, till the bell at the garden gate rang loud and shrill; and then starting up and hurrying into the hall, his hand was grasped in Harley's.

CHAPTER XVI.

A full and happy hour passed away in Harley's questions and Leonard's answers,—the dialogue that naturally ensued between the two, on the first interview after an absence of years so eventful to the younger man.

The history of Leonard during this interval was almost solely internal, the struggle of intellect with its own difficulties, the wanderings of imagination through its own adventurous worlds.

The first aim of Norreys, in preparing the mind of his pupil for its vocation, had been to establish the equilibrium of its powers, to calm into harmony the elements rudely shaken by the trials and passions of the old hard outer life.

The theory of Norreys was briefly this: The education of a superior human being is but the development of ideas in one for the benefit of others. To this end, attention should be directed,—1st, To the value of the ideas collected; 2dly, To their discipline; 3dly, To their expression. For the first, acquirement is necessary; for the second, discipline; for the third, art. The first comprehends knowledge purely intellectual, whether derived from observation, memory, reflection, books, or men, Aristotle or Fleet Street. The second demands training, not only intellectual, but moral; the purifying and exaltation of motives; the formation of habits; in which method is but a part of a divine and harmonious symmetry, a union of intellect and conscience. Ideas of value, stored by the first process; marshalled into force, and placed under guidance, by the second,—it is the result of the third, to place them before the world in the most attractive or commanding form. This may be done by actions no less than words; but the adaptation of means to end, the passage of ideas from the brain of one man into the lives and souls of all, no less in action than in books, requires study. Action has its art as well as literature. Here Norreys had but to deal with the calling of the scholar, the formation of the writer, and so to guide the perceptions towards those varieties in the sublime and beautiful, the just combination of which is at once CREATION. Man himself is but a combination of elements. He who combines in nature, creates in art. Such, very succinctly and inadequately expressed, was the system upon which Norreys proceeded to regulate and perfect the great native powers of his pupil; and though the reader may perhaps say that no system laid down by another can either form genius or dictate to its results, yet probably nine-tenths at least of those in whom we recognize the luminaries of our race have passed, unconsciously to themselves (for self-education is rarely conscious of its phases), through each of these processes. And no one who pauses to reflect will deny, that according to this theory, illustrated by a man of vast experience, profound knowledge, and exquisite taste, the struggles of genius would be infinitely lessened, its vision cleared and strengthened, and the distance between effort and success notably abridged.

Norreys, however, was far too deep a reasoner to fall into the error of modern teachers, who suppose that education can dispense with labour. No mind becomes muscular without rude and early exercise. Labour should be strenuous, but in right directions. All that we can do for it is to save the waste of time in blundering into needless toils.

The master had thus first employed his neophyte in arranging and compiling materials for a great critical work in which Norreys himself was engaged. In this stage of scholastic preparation, Leonard was

necessarily led to the acquisition of languages, for which he had great aptitude; the foundations of a large and comprehensive erudition were solidly constructed. He traced by the ploughshare the walls of the destined city. Habits of accuracy and of generalization became formed insensibly; and that precious faculty which seizes, amidst accumulated materials, those that serve the object for which they are explored,—that faculty which quadruples all force, by concentrating it on one point,—once roused into action, gave purpose to every toil and quickness to each perception. But Norreys did not confine his pupil solely to the mute world of a library; he introduced him to some of the first minds in arts, science, and letters, and active life. "These," said he, "are the living ideas of the present, out of which books for the future will be written: study them; and here, as in the volumes of the past, diligently amass and deliberately compile."

By degrees Norreys led on that young ardent mind from the selection of ideas to their aesthetic analysis,—from compilation to criticism; but criticism severe, close, and logical,—a reason for each word of praise or of blame. Led in this stage of his career to examine into the laws of beauty, a new light broke upon his mind; from amidst the masses of marble he had piled around him rose the vision of the statue.

And so, suddenly, one day Norreys said to him, "I need a compiler no longer,—maintain yourself by your own creations." And Leonard wrote, and a work flowered up from the seed deep buried, and the soil well cleared to the rays of the sun and the healthful influence of expanded air.

That first work did not penetrate to a very wide circle of readers, not from any perceptible fault of its own—there is luck in these things; the first anonymous work of an original genius is rarely at once eminently successful. But the more experienced recognized the promise of the book. Publishers, who have an instinct in the discovery of available talent, which often forestalls the appreciation of the public, volunteered liberal offers. "Be fully successful this time," said Norreys; "think not of models nor of style. Strike at once at the common human heart,—throw away the corks, swim out boldly. One word more,—never write a page till you have walked from your room to Temple Bar, and, mingling with men, and reading the human face, learn why great poets have mostly passed their lives in cities."

Thus Leonard wrote again, and woke one morning to find himself famous. So far as the chances of all professions dependent on health will permit, present independence, and, with foresight and economy, the prospects of future competence were secured.

"And, indeed," said Leonard, concluding a longer but a simpler narrative than is here told,—indeed, there is some chance that I may obtain at once a sum that will leave me free for the rest of my life to select my own subjects, and write without care for remuneration. This is what I

call the true (and, perhaps, alas! the rare) independence of him who devotes himself to letters. Norreys, having seen my boyish plan for the improvement of certain machinery in the steam engine, insisted on my giving much time to mechanics. The study that once pleased me so greatly now seemed dull; but I went into it with good heart; and the result is, that I have improved so far on my original idea, that my scheme has met the approbation of one of our most scientific engineers: and I am assured that the patent for it will be purchased of me upon terms which I am ashamed to name to you, so disproportioned do they seem to the value of so simple a discovery. Meanwhile, I am already rich enough to have realized the two dreams of my heart,—to make a home in the cottage where I had last seen you and Helen—I mean Miss Digby; and to invite to that home her who had sheltered my infancy.”

”Your mother, where is she? Let me see her.”

Leonard ran out to call the widow, but to his surprise and vexation learned that she had quitted the house before L’Estrange arrived.

He came back, perplexed how to explain what seemed ungracious and ungrateful, and spoke with hesitating lip and flushed cheek of the widow’s natural timidity and sense of her own homely station. ”And so overpowered is she,” added Leonard, ”by the recollection of all that we owe to you, that she never hears your name without agitation or tears, and trembled like a leaf at the thought of seeing you.”

”Ha!” said Harley, with visible emotion. ”Is it so?” And he bent down, shading his face with his hand. ”And,” he renewed, after a pause, but not looking up—”and you ascribe this fear of seeing me, this agitation at my name, solely to an exaggerated sense of—the circumstances attending my acquaintance with yourself?”

”And, perhaps, to a sort of shame that the mother of one you have made her proud of is but a peasant.”

”That is all?” said Harley, earnestly, now looking up and fixing eyes in which stood tears upon Leonard’s ingenuous brow.

”Oh, my dear Lord, what else can it be? Do not judge her harshly.”

L’Estrange arose abruptly, pressed Leonard’s hand, muttered something not audible, and then drawing his young friend’s arm in his, led him into the garden, and turned the conversation back to its former topics.

Leonard’s heart yearned to ask after Helen, and yet something withheld him from doing so, till, seeing Harley did not volunteer to speak of her, he could not resist his impulse. ”And Helen—Miss Digby—is she much changed?”

"Changed, no—yes; very much."

"Very much!" Leonard sighed.

"I shall see her again?"

"Certainly," said Harley, in a tone of surprise. "How can you doubt it? And I reserve to you the pleasure of saying that you are renowned. You blush; well, I will say that for you. But you shall give her your books."

"She has not yet read them, then?—not the last? The first was not worthy of her attention," said Leonard, disappointed. "She has only just arrived in England; and, though your books reached me in Germany, she was not then with me. When I have settled some business that will take me from town, I shall present you to her and my mother." There was a certain embarrassment in Harley's voice as he spoke; and, turning round abruptly, he exclaimed, "But you have shown poetry even here. I could not have conceived that so much beauty could be drawn from what appeared to me the most commonplace of all suburban gardens. Why, surely, where that charming fountain now plays stood the rude bench in which I read your verses."

"It is true; I wished to unite all together my happiest associations. I think I told you, my Lord, in one of my letters, that I had owed a very happy, yet very struggling time in my boyhood to the singular kindness and generous instructions of a foreigner whom I served. This fountain is copied from one that I made in his garden, and by the margin of which many a summer day I have sat and dreamed of fame and knowledge."

"True, you told me of that; and your foreigner will be pleased to hear of your success, and no less so of your grateful recollections. By the way, you did not mention his name."

"Riccabocca."

"Riccabocca! My own dear and noble friend!—is it possible? One of my reasons for returning to England is connected with him. You shall go down with me and see him. I meant to start this evening."

"My dear Lord," said Leonard, "I think that you may spare yourself so long a journey. I have reason to suspect that Signor Riccabocca is my nearest neighbour. Two days ago I was in the garden, when suddenly lifting my eyes to yon hillock I perceived the form of a man seated amongst the brushwood; and though I could not see his features, there was something in the very outline of his figure and his peculiar posture, that irresistibly reminded me of Riccabocca. I hastened out of the garden and ascended the hill, but he was gone. My suspicions were so strong that I caused inquiry to be made at the different shops scattered about, and learned that a family consisting of a gentleman, his wife, and

daughter had lately come to live in a house that you must have passed in your way hither, standing a little back from the road, surrounded by high walls; and though they were said to be English, yet from the description given to me of the gentleman's person by one who had noticed it, by the fact of a foreign servant in their employ, and by the very name 'Richmouth,' assigned to the newcomers, I can scarcely doubt that it is the family you seek."

"And you have not called to ascertain?"

"Pardon me, but the family so evidently shunning observation (no one but the master himself ever seen without the walls), the adoption of another name too, led me to infer that Signor Riccabocca has some strong motive for concealment; and now, with my improved knowledge of life, and recalling all the past, I cannot but suppose that Riccabocca was not what he appeared. Hence, I have hesitated on formally obtruding myself upon his secrets, whatever they be, and have rather watched for some chance occasion to meet him in his walks."

"You did right, my dear Leonard; but my reasons for seeing my old friend forbid all scruples of delicacy, and I will go at once to his house."

"You will tell me, my Lord, if I am right."

"I hope to be allowed to do so. Pray, stay at home till I return. And now, ere I go, one question more: You indulge conjectures as to Riccabocca, because he has changed his name,—why have you dropped your own?"

"I wished to have no name," said Leonard, colouring deeply, "but that which I could make myself."

"Proud poet, this I can comprehend. But from what reason did you assume the strange and fantastic name of Oran?"

The flush on Leonard's face became deeper. "My Lord," said he, in a low voice, "it is a childish fancy of mine; it is an anagram."

"Ah!"

"At a time when my cravings after knowledge were likely much to mislead, and perhaps undo me, I chanced on some poems that suddenly affected my whole mind, and led me up into purer air; and I was told that these poems were written in youth by one who had beauty and genius,—one who was in her grave,—a relation of my own, and her familiar name was Nora—"

"Ah," again ejaculated Lord L'Estrange, and his arm pressed heavily upon Leonard's.

"So, somehow or other," continued the young author, falteringly, "I wished that if ever I won to a poet's fame, it might be to my own heart, at least, associated with this name of Nora; with her whom death had robbed of the fame that she might otherwise have won; with her who—"

He paused, greatly agitated.

Harley was no less so. But, as if by a sudden impulse, the soldier bent down his manly head and kissed the poet's brow; then he hastened to the gate, flung himself on his horse, and rode away.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord L'Estrange did not proceed at once to Riccabocca's house. He was under the influence of a remembrance too deep and too strong to yield easily to the lukewarm claim of friendship. He rode fast and far; and impossible it would be to define the feelings that passed through a mind so acutely sensitive, and so rootedly tenacious of all affections. When, recalling his duty to the Italian, he once more struck into the road to Norwood, the slow pace of his horse was significant of his own exhausted spirits; a deep dejection had succeeded to feverish excitement. "Vain task," he murmured, "to wean myself from the dead! Yet I am now betrothed to another; and she, with all her virtues, is not the one to—" He stopped short in generous self-rebuke. "Too late to think of that! Now, all that should remain to me is to insure the happiness of the life to which I have pledged my own. But—" He sighed as he so murmured. On reaching the vicinity of Riccabocca's house, he put up his horse at a little inn, and proceeded on foot across the heathland towards the dull square building, which Leonard's description had sufficed to indicate as the exile's new home. It was long before any one answered his summons at the gate. Not till he had thrice rung did he hear a heavy step on the gravel walk within; then the wicket within the gate was partially drawn aside, a dark eye gleamed out, and a voice in imperfect English asked who was there.

"Lord L'Estrange; and if I am right as to the person I seek, that name will at once admit me."

The door flew open as did that of the mystic cavern at the sound of "Open, Sesame;" and Giacomo, almost weeping with joyous emotion, exclaimed in Italian, "The good Lord! Holy San Giacomo! thou hast heard me at last! We are safe now." And dropping the blunderbuss with which he had taken the precaution to arm himself, he lifted Harley's hand to his lips, in the affectionate greeting familiar to his countrymen.

"And the padrone?" asked Harley, as he entered the jealous precincts.

"Oh, he is just gone out; but he will not be long. You will wait for him?"

"Certainly. What lady is that I see at the far end of the garden?"

"Bless her, it is our signorina. I will run and tell her you are come."

"That I am come; but she cannot know me even by name."

"Ah, Excellency, can you think so? Many and many a time has she talked to me of you, and I have heard her pray to the holy Madonna to bless you, and in a voice so sweet—"

"Stay, I will present myself to her. Go into the house, and we will wait without for the padrone. Nay, I need the air, my friend." Harley, as he said this, broke from Giacomo, and approached Violante.

The poor child, in her solitary walk in the obscurer parts of the dull garden, had escaped the eye of Giacomo when he had gone forth to answer the bell; and she, unconscious of the fears of which she was the object, had felt something of youthful curiosity at the summons at the gate, and the sight of a stranger in close and friendly conference with the unsocial Giacomo.

As Harley now neared her with that singular grace of movement which belonged to him, a thrill shot through her heart, she knew not why. She did not recognize his likeness to the sketch taken by her father from his recollections of Harley's early youth. She did not guess who he was; and yet she felt herself colour, and, naturally fearless though she was, turned away with a vague alarm.

"Pardon my want of ceremony, Signorina," said Harley, in Italian; "but I am so old a friend of your father's that I cannot feel as a stranger to yourself."

Then Violante lifted to him her dark eyes so intelligent and so innocent,—eyes full of surprise, but not displeased surprise. And Harley himself stood amazed, and almost abashed, by the rich and marvellous beauty that beamed upon him. "My father's friend," she said hesitatingly, and I never to have seen you!"

"Ah, Signorina," said Harley (and something of its native humour, half arch, half sad, played round his lip), "you are mistaken there; you have seen me before, and you received me much more kindly then."

"Signor!" said Violante, more and more surprised, and with a yet richer colour on her cheeks.

Harley, who had now recovered from the first effect of her beauty, and who regarded her as men of his years and character are apt to regard ladies in their teens, as more child than woman, suffered himself to be amused by her perplexity; for it was in his nature that the graver and more mournful he felt at heart, the more he sought to give play and whim to his spirits.

"Indeed, Signorina," said he, demurely, "you insisted then on placing one of those fair hands in mine; the other (forgive me the fidelity of my recollections) was affectionately thrown around my neck."

"Signor!" again exclaimed Violante; but this time there was anger in her voice as well as surprise, and nothing could be more charming than her look of pride and resentment.

Harley smiled again, but with so much kindly sweetness, that the anger vanished at once, or rather Violante felt angry with herself that she was no longer angry with him. But she had looked so beautiful in her anger, that Harley wished, perhaps, to see her angry again. So, composing his lips from their propitiatory smile, he resumed gravely,

"Your flatterers will tell you, Signorina, that you are much improved since then, but I liked you better as you were; not but what I hope to return some day what you then so generously pressed upon me."

"Pressed upon you!—I? Signor, you are under some strange mistake."

"Alas! no; but the female heart is so capricious and fickle! You pressed it upon me, I assure you. I own that I was not loath to accept it."

"Pressed it! Pressed what?"

"Your kiss, my child," said Harley; and then added, with a serious tenderness, "and I again say that I hope to return it some day, when I see you, by the side of father and of husband, in your native land,—the fairest bride on whom the skies of Italy ever smiled! And now, pardon a hermit and a soldier for his rude jests, and give your hand, in token of that pardon, to Harley L'Estrange."

Violante, who at the first words of his address had recoiled, with a vague belief that the stranger was out of his mind, sprang forward as it closed, and in all the vivid enthusiasm of her nature pressed the hand held out to her with both her own. "Harley L'Estrange! the preserver of my father's life!" she cried; and her eyes were fixed on his with such evident gratitude and reverence, that Harley felt at once confused and delighted. She did not think at that instant of the hero of her dreams, —she thought but of him who had saved her father. But, as his eyes sank before her own, and his head, uncovered, bowed over the hand he held, she recognized the likeness to the features on which she had so often gazed.

The first bloom of youth was gone, but enough of youth still remained to soften the lapse of years, and to leave to manhood the attractions which charm the eye. Instinctively she withdrew her hands from his clasp, and in her turn looked down.

In this pause of embarrassment to both, Riccabocca let himself into the garden by his own latch-key, and, startled to see a man by the side of Violante, sprang forward with an abrupt and angry cry. Harley heard, and turned.

As if restored to courage and self-possession by the sense of her father's presence, Violante again took the hand of the visitor. "Father," she said simply, "it is he,—he is come at last." And then, retiring a few steps, she contemplated them both; and her face was radiant with happiness, as if something, long silently missed and looked for, was as silently found, and life had no more a want, nor the heart a void.