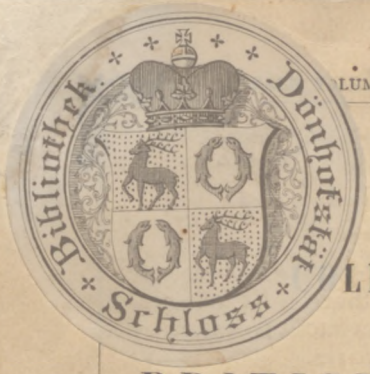

VOLUME SOLD SEPARATELY.

COLLECTION OF BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3787.

KATE OF KATE HALL.

BY

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER (MRS. A. L. FELKIN)

AND

ALFRED LAURENCE FELKIN.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

PARIS: LIBRAIRIE CH. GAULON & FILS, 39, RUE MADAME.

PARIS: THE GALIGNANI LIBRARY, 224, RUE DE RIVOLI, AND AT NICE, 8, AVENUE MASSÉNA.

Latest Volumes.—January 1905.

A Passage Perilous. By ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY. 2 vols.-3690/91.

A simple, ladylike tale of simple, ladylike people, in which melodrama and sensationalism are conspicuously absent, but in which a healthy interest is sustained from beginning to end.

The Long Night. By STANLEY J. WEYMAN. 2 vols.-3692/93.

There is unlimited "go" in Mr. Weyman's new historical story of Geneva in the sixteenth century, and the final attempt of the Savoyards to capture the city.

The Yellow Van. By RICHARD WHITEING. 1 vol.-3694.

A serious treatise and a serious problem in the form of a capital novel, rich in humour and pathos and brilliant in dialogue, by the gifted author of "No. 5, John Street."

The Heart of Rome. By F. MARION CRAWFORD. 2 vols.-3695/96.

Mr. Crawford's new romance has all the fascination of his other Roman stories. He introduces us to the mysteries of an ancient palace, and to one of the strangest features of the Eternal City—the "Lost Water."

Tea-Table Talk. By JEROME K. JEROME. 1 vol.-3697.

Conversation and anecdote, humour and philosophical reflections, told by imaginary and varied characters in Mr. Jerome's well-known and delightful style.

Mankind in the Making. By H. G. WELLS. 2 vols.-3698/99.

This is a serious book, which should be read and pondered on by everyone capable of serious thought, and with the welfare and improvement of the human race at heart. A work which will be lasting in its results.

Adventures of Gerard. By A. CONAN DOYLE. 1 vol.-3700.

A sequel to the "Exploits of Brigadier Gerard," and the closing incidents in the life of that dashing campaigner. We hold our breath while the Colonel of the "Hussars of Conflans" has hairbreadth escapes in nearly every country of Europe.

Katharine Frensham. By BEATRICE HARRADEN. 2 vols.-3701/2.

Miss Harraden's new story changes its venue from England to Norway and back again, and its motif from sorrow to joy by gradations that hold the reader spellbound.

The Relentless City. By E. F. BENSON. 1 vol.-3703.

A highly modern and exciting novel, abounding in keen satire, brilliant wordplay, and some excellent and very "relentless" descriptions of New York and its "four hundred."

An Unshared Secret, and Other Tales. By FLORENCE MONTGOMERY. 1 vol.-3704.

The volume contains five short stories by the celebrated and popular authoress of "Misunderstood," including a delightful idyll, "Tony," which appeared separately in England in a bijou edition.

My Poor Relations. By MAARTEN MAARTENS. 2 vols.-3705/6.

A collection of highly realistic pictures of Dutch peasant life by a master hand. The somewhat gruesome style of the first three stories is pleasantly relieved by a final beautiful conception, "The Summer Christmas."

Odd Craft. By W. W. JACOBS. 1 vol.-3707.

A new collection of those light, humorous tales of bargemen, publicans ar rustics which have made the author justly famous. Their characteristic la guage and behaviour are as irresistibly funny as ever.

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3787.

KATE OF KATE HALL.

BY

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

AND

ALFRED LAURENCE FELKIN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler.

A DOUBLE THREAD	2 vols.
THE FARRINGDONS	2 vols.
FUEL OF FIRE	1 vol.
PLACE AND POWER	2 vols.

KATE OF KATE HALL

BY

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER
(MRS. A. L. FELKIN)
AUTHOR OF "A DOUBLE THREAD," ETC. ETC.
AND
ALFRED LAURENCE FELKIN

COPYRIGHT EDITION

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1905.

"Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate."

The Taming of the Shrew.

DEDICATION.

"EACH TO EACH."

EUCLID.

CONTENTS

OF VOLUME I.

			Page
CHAPTER	I.	Claverley Castle	9
—	II.	Sapphira	29
—	III.	Ladyhall	49
—	IV.	The Invitation	65
—	V.	The Arrival	86
—	VI.	Electricity in the Air	102
—	VII.	The Power of Suggestion	116
—	VIII.	Katharine and Petruchio	133
—	IX.	The Taming of the Shrew	147
—	X.	The Last Will and Testament	165
—	XI.	War to the Knife	180
—	XII.	After the Battle	191

Page

CHAPTER XIII. The Pettigrews 205

— XIV. Elnagar 219

— XV. Orlando Pratt 241

KATE OF KATE HALL.

CHAPTER I.

CLAVERLEY CASTLE.

"THERE is no other way," quoth the Earl, with much stateliness and decision; "no other way," he repeated, and lay back in his chair, his fingers daintily pressed one against the other—he was justly proud of his hands—with the air of a man who has settled a delicate point, and whose sentence is final.

"I am afraid you are right," sighed the Countess. Most women sigh when they suspect that their husbands are right: it is naturally a matter for regret. Then she looked with some apprehension in the direction of her daughter.

Lady Katharine Clare said nothing at all; but an observer—even a careless observer—might have de-

tected, in her compressed lips and defiant pose, strong dissent from the paternal dictum. Her father, at any rate, was under no illusion that in this case silence could be interpreted as consent.

"If in your obstinacy you refuse to agree to my proposal," he went on, addressing his daughter with deliberate emphasis, "there is, so far as I can see, but one alternative. The old place will have to be let or sold, and we shall be compelled to turn out to make room for a set of counter-jumpers."

The Earl contrived with some art to put a touch of pathos into his voice, as he mournfully shook his head over the lamentable prospect he had conjured up with the object of softening Lady Kate's stony heart.

"They will spoil the furniture," added the Countess, "I know they will. People of that class are always untidy in their habits."

Lady Claverley was a stately dame of distinguished manners; but she had a genius for domestic duty, and on a lower social plane would have proved an invaluable housewife. She was mentally incapable of seeing anything by the light of an abstract principle; but she battened on the concrete and revelled in detail. An exceptionally beautiful woman, she was nevertheless utterly devoid of vanity; and her attitude of absolute indifference towards her own wardrobe was a source of abiding sorrow to the heart of her maid. Fortunately for

herself—and still more fortunately for Lord Claverley—she was married before it became the fashion for a woman to regard her husband merely as an interesting and instructive social problem, requiring a purely intellectual solution; she belonged to that blessed generation of women who regarded their husbands in very much the same way as men of science regard the great forces of nature—as dimly comprehended powers, mighty and terrible when uncontrolled, but capable, under proper guidance and management, of being adapted to the most ordinary and domestic uses.

"But what makes us so specially poor to-day, father?" asked Lady Katharine. "Poorer than we were yesterday, or than we shall be to-morrow?"

"The fact that I have been through all the estate accounts with my agent, and have made the pleasing discovery that we simply cannot afford to live any longer at Claverley Castle."

Kate stamped her foot.

"It will be the ruin of the Castle if we let it," cried the Countess, with a mournful shake of her head; "only yesterday Brown was telling me"—Mrs. Brown was the housekeeper—"that nobody in the world but herself knows exactly where to put baths when it rains, so as to keep the water from lying in pools on the carpets; but she knows just the places where the rain comes in."

"It is just possible," suggested the Earl, "that, unlike ourselves, the new tenants might afford to repair the roof."

The Countess looked doubtful.

"Yes," continued the Earl, "I have come across middle-class families where such a thing could be done."

"Then it would be very impertinent of them and a great liberty to come repairing our roof when we hadn't done so," cried Lady Kate; "it would be as bad as putting somebody else's bonnet straight, which I always think is most frightfully rude. But can nothing be done to keep horrid people from meddling with our roof at all?"

"I have pointed out to you the only way to avert this catastrophe," her father replied; "you must marry money—and at once."

"But I don't want to marry at all just yet—not even a man; and it would bore me most horribly to marry a fortune!"

"Then the Castle must go; there is no other way." The Earl spoke sternly, and shot a keen glance at his daughter from under his heavy eyebrows to note the effect of his words. Lady Kate, who was dressed for riding, made no reply, but began humming a tune under her breath. She always hummed when she was out of temper; it was a little way she had; and the more annoyed she was, the more sacred became the

tune. Just now the air happened to be the National Anthem.

"But men with money are always so common," objected Lady Claverley, coming with true maternal solicitude to her daughter's aid; "and poor dear mamma always brought us up to have a great horror of commonness."

"And poor dear mamma also brought you up to have a great horror of poverty, if my memory serves me right," replied the Earl.

"She did, Claverley, and she knew what she was talking about; for poverty is a most uncomfortable thing, and is always associated in my mind with sickness or crime. It seems peculiar for people like ourselves to be poor—very peculiar indeed."

"Nevertheless we are." The Earl's tone was gloomy.

"Well, I repeat it is very peculiar; and I can't imagine what poor dear mamma would have said if she'd been alive."

But Lord Claverley could very well imagine. During the lifetime of the late Marchioness of Dunbar his experience as to what she would say in circumstances of which she did not approve was not such as to render the memory thereof a pleasant playground for the imagination, so he kept silence.

As for his daughter, she merely "confounded their politics," and then proceeded to "frustrate their knavish

tricks." When Kate went on to a second verse she was very angry indeed.

But it took more than ill temper to stop Lady Claverley when once fairly under way. "After all, poverty is worse to bear than commonness; as a matter of fact, common young men are often very well brought up; and if a man is well brought up any woman can make herself happy with him."

Here Kate dashed into the conversation. "I should hate the sight of a husband," she exclaimed; "simply hate and loathe and detest it!"

"I do not know that that very much signifies," remarked her father blandly; "many modern women hate the sight of their husbands—at least so current literature and the daily papers have led me to believe; but they generally contrive to look the other way."

"You mean, papa, that I needn't see much of the man when once I am married to him."

"I mean you need not see anything at all of him. Untoward circumstances may compel people of our class to marry persons of humble origin; but," added the Earl nobly, "nothing can compel us so to forget what is due to ourselves as to visit with them."

"But I daresay he would have some dreadfully common name," remarked Lady Claverley, "Jones or Smith or even Tomkins. You never can tell with people of that sort what they may not be called."

"That again would have no bearing upon the matter in hand. The person to whom we are referring would of course resign his own name and take ours."

"I suppose he would—just as footmen do. Whatever a footman may have been christened, I always insist on calling him Charles. It was mamma's rule, and it saves so much confusion."

"Obviously, my love, the method recommends itself to those who are anxious to keep clear of avoidable error."

"I remember before our present Charles came he wrote to Brown, 'I will answer to the name of Charles and will serve her ladyship faithful.' I thought it so nice and obliging of him, considering that he had been christened Samuel."

"And, may I ask, has he fulfilled his early promise?" Lord Claverley might not be invariably pleasant, but he was always polite.

"Well, Claverley, as a matter of fact I came to your room this morning to talk to you about him; but you began about our poverty and Kate's marriage, and quite put Charles out of my head. He is being rather tiresome just at present—keeps giving notice and stupid things of that kind."

"And is that an unmitigated disadvantage? Although he still answers to the name of Charles, he has

almost entirely outgrown the habit of answering the bell; and that is distinctly inconvenient."

"But he is six foot two and a teetotaler, and so well brought up: he has actually been confirmed and vaccinated!"

"Nevertheless it is his duty to answer the bell if I ring when Perkins is out; and the fulfilment of this duty does not appear to be one of the many excellences of Charles who was christened Samuel."

"But he cleans plate so beautifully. I'm sure it is quite a pleasure to look at oneself upside down in our spoons."

"Moreover he persists in blowing out the taper with which he has lighted the candles: a most reprehensible custom," objected Lord Claverley.

"You should just do as I do: shut your eyes and not smell it," retorted his wife.

"Well, my love (to turn to higher and more interesting subjects), as you have succeeded in elevating the somewhat ordinary name of Charles into an official title instead of a mere Christian name——"

"Just as popes are generally called Pius and spaniels Carlo," remarked Lady Katharine.

Her father ignored the interruption. "So the man of Kate's choice must answer to the name of Clare. Whether he will also 'serve her ladyship faithful' is a

more problematical question—as it apparently is likewise in the case of a footman."

But the mention of Charles had proved too strong a temptation for Lady Claverley: she clung to him as a dog to a bone, and would not be shaken off. "And he is so obliging and good-tempered, and keeps his livery so clean."

"My love, my love, recall yourself. We are speaking of Katharine's future husband." Lord Claverley and his better-half never saw eye to eye upon the question of relative proportion.

"The fact is, Claverley, you so upset him by that scolding you gave him yesterday when he knocked the coal-box over, that this morning he has again given notice. As Brown very properly says, we shall never succeed in getting another footman at such low wages; and yet we can hardly afford to give more."

"But, my love, consider the noise—as well as the uncleanliness—of an overturned coal-box! The hideousness of the crash—totally unexpected as it was—completely threw me off my balance for the time being, and, I confess, almost tempted me to a display of by no means unjustifiable temper."

Lady Claverley sighed. "Almost tempted you? Oh, Claverley, what a way of putting it! And, besides, I don't see how it could have been totally unexpected, considering that Charles has lived with us for eighteen

months. You must know, as well as I do, that he has at least three big upsets a week; and I'm always so thankful when it's coal and not china."

"But, my love, you apparently do not comprehend what excruciating tortures I derive from these sudden and deafening catastrophes—I who am endowed with such an intense longing for the eternal harmony of the great silences."

"My dear Claverley, it is ridiculous to expect that you can get the eternal harmony of the great silences for twenty-five pounds a year and no beer! Because you can't."

The Earl waved his hand in well-bred impatience. "Ah, my love, do not waste valuable time upon the mere trifles of existence such as Charles, when so important a matter as Kate's marriage is staring us in the face."

"It is the mere trifles of existence that lay the table for lunch and go out with the carriage. I always make a rule—poor dear mamma taught it me—to do first what wants doing worst; and Charles leaves this day month, unless something can be done to induce him to stay; while your own commonsense shows you that Kate couldn't possibly be married as soon as that, because people have to be asked in church for at least three weeks, after the right man is chosen."

Here the bride-presumptive again joined in the conversation. "I can't help thinking that I should find

marriage an awful bore. If you are married to a man, you are expected to be always honouring and obeying him, and tiresome things like that. I never honoured or obeyed anybody in my life, and I don't mean to begin."

"I should be the last to affirm that up to the present time honour and obedience have been your most distinguishing excellences," said her father.

"Still, papa, if it could save the dear old place——"

"Which it certainly could, my dear child; let there be no doubts upon that score. And, believe me, you need not allow matrimony to interfere with the well-ordered regularity of existence to which you have hitherto been accustomed."

Lady Claverley laughed. "Needn't she, my dear? That's all you know about being married to a man!"

"But surely, Henrietta, the honour of being allied to our noble and ancient house ought to satisfy any low-born upstart so entirely as to annul in him any desire to intermeddle in affairs that do not concern him, or to intrude in circles wherein he has no rightful place."

"Perhaps it ought; but most certainly it won't. Nothing keeps a man from interfering except not letting him know there's anything to interfere with. And the longer they're married the worse they get."

"Ah! my dear Henrietta, you are mistaking my point. Marriage between equals might—possibly would—confer the right of interference; but a mutual arrange-

ment between patrician blood on the one side and plebeian wealth on the other, could not involve any impertinent arrogance on the part of the inferior of the two contracting parties."

"Probably it couldn't; but all the same it would. It is the things that can't possibly happen which invariably do."

"Well, my love, doubtless you know better than I," said Lord Claverley in a tone which implied that most certainly she did not know half so well; "but I still presume to think that the lower orders have not yet so far forgotten what is due to their superiors as to dare to take advantage of any matrimonial arrangements into which those superiors may deign to enter for purely pecuniary considerations."

But Lady Claverley was no longer attending to her lord. "There's one thing," she said, "we might raise his wages. Brown thinks that he would stay on for another three pounds a year, and I don't think we could get a footman as good as Charles for less than that. Let me see, how much does twenty-five and three come to? I never had much of a head for difficult sums."

"It amounts, my love, to exactly twenty-eight," replied the Earl, who was accustomed by long practice to his wife's somewhat rapid flights of fancy and changes of front.

"Thank you, my dear. How clever of you to do it

so quickly—and all in your head, too, without a pencil or a bit of paper! And there's one other thing we haven't thought of—there's Mrs. MacBalloch."

Lord Claverley's slower mind bravely endeavoured —as was its wont—to keep pace with his wife's. "I likewise have thought of her, but I do not feel convinced that she will be of much benefit to us in our present straits."

"Katharine is her goddaughter; and people are always supposed to leave things to their godchildren when they die." Lady Claverley's English was ever inferior to her commonsense.

"True, my love; but she is not dead—nor do I see any reason why she should be. She is still a comparatively young woman."

Kate's mother after the flesh sighed over the possible longevity of Kate's mother after the spirit. "People never die when you want them to! I've noticed that one's distant relations always refuse to die as long as one's clothes are black or grey. I once kept a cousin of my father's alive for years upon shepherd's plaid. I never wore anything else!"

"In a similar fashion, my dear Henrietta, Katharine MacBalloch will abundantly survive the present crisis in our pecuniary affairs."

"I know she will—even though we called Kate

Katharine after her!" And Kate's mother sighed again over the ingratitude of Kate's godmother.

"And even if she were obliging enough to die to order, it doesn't follow that she'd leave all her fortune to me," suggested the proposed legatee of Mrs. MacBalloch's estates.

Lord Claverley bowed his silvery head. "That is so, my dear child, that is so; there is no class of the community who so disgracefully disregard their parental obligations as godparents. If there were only a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Godchildren I would subscribe to it with pleasure."

"You don't generally get more from your godparents than a silver cup and their blessing," said his wife, "neither of which is much use in after-life."

"As your dear mother wisely points out," continued Lord Claverley, bowing in the direction of his Countess as if to emphasise her wisdom, "it is not safe to put our trust in the early demise of Mrs. MacBalloch, although we have had encouraging news of late that the dear lady's health is not what it used to be—alas!" The *alas!* was an afterthought, and a happy one.

Kate shook her pretty head. "Oh! that doesn't amount to anything. The more delicate people are, the longer they live; and real invalids generally live on for centuries."

"Fragile flowers, such as Katherine MacBalloch, are

apt to linger long upon the stem. Is that not so, my love?" asked the Earl, turning to his wife.

But she gazed at him with the unseeing eyes of those who are thinking of something else. "Yes; I shall decide to raise his wages at once. Poor dear mamma never gave her first footman less than thirty, and she was a splendid manager."

Lord Claverley did not attempt to dispute this. His remembrance of the late Lady Dunbar's power of management was still vivid.

"There is my horse coming round," exclaimed Kate, who had dropped into *The Blue Bells of Scotland* during the last few seconds; "so I'm off. If you succeed during my absence in marrying me to some butcher's boy or grocer's assistant, please let me know; but don't ask me to promise that I won't murder the wretch afterwards—because I shan't." With which cryptic utterance she bounded out of the room, in by no means the best of tempers.

Lady Katharine Clare was the only child of the Earl and Countess of Claverley, born after twelve years of childless married life, and therefore indulged to the top of her bent. As the title was one which could descend in the female line, she thereby saved it from extinction, laying her devoted parents—already overwhelmed with gratitude to her for being born at all—under a still further debt of gratitude. At her father's death she

would be Countess of Claverley in her own right. But it seemed as if an empty title would be all to which she would succeed, as the rapidly decreasing rent-roll of the Claverley estates was already insufficient for the proper keeping up of themselves and the Castle situated in their midst.

The Earl was a typical aristocrat of the old school, distinguished by much consideration for other people and their concerns, and by a still deeper regard for himself and his ancient house. The former attribute was superficial; the latter ingrained. He was refined and courtly and pompous and proud, and had all the chivalrous admiration for his beautiful Countess which such a man invariably cherishes towards the one woman whom he considers worthy of the honour of being his wife.

He did not understand her in the least, nor she him; but what did that matter? They loved and admired one another intensely, and considered nobody superior to each other except themselves; which was held to be a safe foundation for conjugal happiness in the primitive days when George Augustus, fifteenth Earl of Claverley, took to wife the Lady Henrietta Maria Caroline Laurie, fourth daughter of the Marquis of Dunbar.

Lady Kate had inherited much of her father's distinguished bearing and pride of race, with more than a spice, it must be admitted, of her father's self-will

and hasty temper. As for beauty, there was no one in the whole county to be compared with Lady Katharine Clare. She was tall and slender, with curly brown hair, and the most bewitching eyes imaginable. The Clares had always been a handsome people, and this last of the race was the flower of that noble and distinguished family. She was not particularly clever, but she sometimes lighted on a happy expression that passed for wit; and if her temper was not invariably placid, who expects a woman to be at the same time both beautiful and amiable?

Yet for all her charms of mind and person, Lady Katharine did not marry. Ever since she was seventeen, men had come and men had gone, but Kate went on for ever in her lighthearted, irresponsible way, flouting her lovers to their faces for their impertinence in thinking she would stoop to be the goods and chattel of any husband upon earth. She was now just one-and-twenty; and although during the past four years she had had lovers by the score, not one of them had ever knocked at the antechamber of Kate's most obdurate and unsusceptible heart. Till they asked her to marry them she was fascination itself; and then she laughed them out of themselves, dealing ridicule with her sharp tongue until they cursed the day when they had worn their hearts upon their sleeves for this cruel girl to peck at; and then they departed and took unto wife some sweet,

amiable woman, the most unlike they could find to Katharine Clare. These gentle creatures duly consoled their lords and masters, and fiercely hated, as all true women should, the girl to whose refusal they owed their earthly happiness. She was the acknowledged belle of all the balls for miles round; but she was unpopular in the county, was Lady Kate. The woman who has refused a man is rarely beloved in after years by either her quondam suitor or his subsequent wife; and this was Katharine Clare's position in most of the leading houses of Salopshire.

Claverley Castle was a fine old mansion in the west midlands. It stood on rising ground, well protected on the east by dense woods, and faced the south-west, offering a magnificent view across the broad valley with its golden fields and green meadows which sloped downwards to the silver river, and then rose again until they lost themselves in the blue haze of the perpetual hills and everlasting mountains in the distant west. A spacious valley, usually calm and tranquil, beautiful with a peaceful quietude and homelike restfulness; and yet made glorious on a summer's evening by sunsets which covered the whole sky with gorgeous colouring, till the clouds themselves appeared as chariots of fire driven before the wings of the wind. Yet at times a westerly gale would sweep across the vale, reminding it that there were still undreamed-of beauties and delights beyond those azure

hills, and bearing to the midland plain the strength and the scent of the western sea.

The Castle itself was of great antiquity so far as its central portion was concerned, namely, a magnificent hall, where the retainers of mediæval barons were wont to assemble—a hall panelled with oak black with age, decorated with suits of ancient armour, and the superb antlers of many a stately stag. At one end was a dais for my lord's dinner-table; on one side was a huge fireplace, at which an ox might have been roasted whole. Around three sides of the hall ran a gallery, out of which opened the bedchambers. About this central hall successive lords had built and rebuilt, until Claverley Castle became a huge mansion of divers styles of architecture—the whole producing an effect which, if not æsthetically perfect, was at least extremely picturesque.

To keep the Castle in proper repair and to maintain the grounds in decent condition, necessitated a very considerable annual expenditure. Unfortunately agricultural depression had eaten a large hole in Lord Claverley's rent-roll, and he found himself not only unable to maintain the establishment he had formerly regarded as necessary for existence, but even to keep the building waterproof. Hazardous speculation, undertaken in the vain hope of replenishing his dwindling revenues, had turned out unhappily, and the Earl found himself at last

confronted with the question which he had tried in vain to evade, but which now was insistent for an answer—what was to be done? The Earl, though autocratic, was no tyrant; but he knew Kate loved every stone of the place; and try as he would, he could think of no alternative to the letting of the Castle to strangers, save the marriage of his daughter to a rich man. Hence these tears!

CHAPTER II.

SAPPHIRA.

THERE was a fourth member of the family party at Claverley Castle—namely Sapphira Lestrange, an orphaned niece of the Earl. Her mother, the Lady Arabella Clare, had been Lord Claverley's only sister; her father, Aubrey Lestrange, an artist of small repute, once came to Claverley Castle to paint Lady Arabella's portrait, and succeeded in catching the lady as well as her likeness. Poor Arabella had gone away with him, and out of her senses at the same time, though she was certainly old enough to have known better; and she passed the remainder of her life in that leisured repentance which is supposed to be the natural consequence of a hasty and ill-considered union.

Her father never forgave her, but refused to look upon her undutiful face again; and she had no mother, poor soul! to fight her battles for her with the paternal powers. Her brother was less obdurate; but when at last he entered into his heritage she already had entered into hers, and had gone to that home whither neither

paternal affection nor marital remorse could follow her or vex her with their vain efforts to obliterate the indelible past.

She left one child, a daughter, whom she named Sapphira, as a testimony to her painfully acquired conviction that life and love, as far as women are concerned, are one huge lie. And she still further handicapped this same daughter for the race of existence by bequeathing to her a plain face and a passionate heart—a combination to be studiously avoided by all those women who desire happiness.

There is no getting away from the truth that the happiness of a woman very largely depends upon the amount of affection which she is able to win in her passage through life. A man sometimes may be happy without love; a woman, never. Therefore it behoves her to be pleasant, amiable, and adaptable; she must become a proficient in that art of politeness and gentle living, which is after all nothing but the outer form of the inner spirit of Christianity—that spirit which bids us all to love our neighbour as ourselves, and to do unto others as we would they should do unto us. To her a gracious and charming manner will be of more use than a profound knowledge of mathematics—a ready and sympathetic tact of greater advantage than an exhaustive study of the classics. If in addition to social gifts she has the power of working willingly with her hands or

her head, so much the better. But the real happiness of her life—and of the lives of those about her—will depend mainly upon whether in her youth she has learned to open her mouth with wisdom and to guide her tongue by the law of kindness.

This lesson poor Sapphira Lestrange had never been taught; wherefore all her sharpness of wit and readiness of tongue availed her nothing save to add to the number of those who were not her friends.

She was an insignificant-looking girl, with no features to speak of and less complexion. Her mother had died when she was little more than a child; and the subsequent unadulterated society of her father had turned her into an old woman. There were few things connected with the seamy and sordid side of life that Sapphira did not know, and fewer persons dwelling in its sunnier hemisphere whom she did not hate. Her hand was against every man, since she believed that every man's hand was against her; and she abundantly repaid that dislike for herself which she usually aroused by expecting.

After her mother's death Sapphira carried on with her father a miserable hand-to-mouth existence, until his noble brother-in-law procured him a post abroad, which he inadequately filled for a certain period. Then he suddenly disappeared below the horizon-line, leaving no trace whatever of his whereabouts; and it was supposed

that he had given up the ghost in some remote corner of the western hemisphere.

When Aubrey Lestrange left England, a home was offered to his daughter by her uncle, Lord Claverley, who—to do him justice—had always been ready to render such assistance to his dead sister's husband as that husband's deficiencies of character would allow. So Sapphira came to live at Claverley Castle, imbued with a determination never to forgive Lord Claverley for being rich while her father was poor, nor Lady Katharine for being handsome while she herself was plain: a somewhat unjust but by no means uncommon form of implacability. It is always so much easier to forgive people for the evil they have done to us than for the good they have done to themselves.

Aubrey Lestrange was one of those handsome scoundrels, who invariably earn the admiration of women and the contempt of men. His wife adored him, yet he broke her heart by his persistent failure to make anything worth making out of life; and his daughter equally adored him, though he made her as wretched as he had made her mother before her. He possessed the happy knack of disguising his mistakes as misfortunes and his sins as sufferings; consequently he was always pitied and never blamed.

Sapphira loved him when he was present as she would never love anyone else on earth; and in his ab-

sence she brought all her power of imagination to bear upon the idealising of him, until to her he appeared the embodiment of human grace and wisdom and unappreciated virtue. It never occurred to her—any more than it had occurred to her mother—that the person who was to blame for Aubrey Lestrange's failure in life was not the Providence That made him, nor the world that despised him, nor even entirely the devil that tempted him—but Aubrey Lestrange himself.

On the afternoon of the day following the foregoing conversation, the three ladies of Claverley Castle were having tea in the blue drawing-room, and were discussing still further that proposition of the Earl which had caused such searchings of heart in the family circle on the preceding day.

"It does seem hard," remarked Lady Katharine, who was sitting on the hearthrug and playing with her two collies, Bubble and Squeak, "that I should be obliged to marry some horrid man whom I've never seen and can't bear; yet if I don't, papa says we shall all have to go to the workhouse."

"The workhouse indeed!" scoffed Sapphira. "You know about as much about the workhouse as I do about paradise—and are just as likely to go there."

"No, we don't like the workhouse, do we, Squeaky dear?" Kate continued, endeavouring to tie Squeak's

ears into a knot on the top of his head; "they'd give us nasty dog biscuits instead of nice cake, and wouldn't brush our coats properly. No; we'd rather marry a counter-jumper than go to the workhouse, Squeak and I."

"And, after all, he mightn't jump as much as you expected," suggested Sapphira; "my experience is that gentlemen are never as gentlemanly nor cads as caddish as they ought to be; swells never swell nor bounders bound as much as one expects."

"But I've always imagined that the correct thing was love in a cottage," said Kate, turning her attention to the other dog; "just think of it, Bubble darling—a sweet little cottage, covered all the year round with yellow jasmine and scarlet Virginia creeper, and a real hero in it and no cats."

Here the Countess chimed in. "I don't care much for cottages: I never think the drains are satisfactory. And the creepers are always full of earwigs, my dear."

"Mine wouldn't be. The parlourmaid would sprinkle them with Keating's powder every morning, and wash them with carbolic soap once a week till they'd be as clean as my darling Bubble and Squeak. And I'm sure if a woman is so foolish as to marry at all, she ought to marry a man whom she believes to be absolutely perfect."

"But, my dear, she couldn't possibly believe him perfect after she was married to him, even if she did before."

"Since to know is *not* to believe," added Sapphira.

Kate laid her cheek caressingly against Bubble's head, and looked up at her mother with mischievous eyes. "I've always been taught that proper-minded girls indulged in harmless nightmares of being overgrown by briar roses and things till a fairy prince came and kissed them: and then of marrying him and living happy ever after."

"Oh! my dear, there are no such things nowadays as fairy princes. And even if there were, their marriages would be morganatic or something, and I always think those morganatic affairs are so unsatisfactory."

"A sort of apotheosis of poor relationships, Aunt Henrietta."

"Exactly," replied Lady Claverley, who did not know —and did not wish to know—what an apotheosis was. But she made it a rule always to agree with bad-tempered people—a rule which proved her ladyship's wisdom and saved her ladyship trouble.

But Lady Kate was still on mischief bent. "Mother, did you never dream dreams when you were young—insipid, idiotic, maidenly *comme-il-faut* dreams, with roses and music and sunshine and nonsense in them—and then find they came true in papa?"

"Good gracious, child, what an idea! As if any young girl would ever take the liberty of dreaming about such a person as your father—unless, of course, she had indigestion, and then there is no telling what she mightn't dream about. I remember once after eating lobster for supper at a county ball I dreamt that I was married to a bishop! And from that day to this I've never eaten lobster, nor allowed your father to do so; never once!"

"But why prevent uncle from eating what doesn't suit *you?* That seems a strange sort of logic."

"It wouldn't, if you were a married woman, my dear. If you'd got a husband, you'd never let him eat anything that had ever made anybody ill, and not too much that hadn't. When things disagree with your husband it generally ends in his disagreeing with you. At least that's my experience."

"Then, Aunt Henrietta, you compile uncle's culinary *Index Expurgatorius* quite as much for your own comfort as for his."

"More so. Very early in my married life I learned that there was less chance of violent political discussion and bitter religious argument after semolina at lunch than after pastry and fancy sweets; so I gave orders that only plain puddings should be handed to your uncle, and fancy sweets to the visitors and me."

"And he never found it out?"

"Of course not, my dear: how could he? He's a man. But it has made the afternoons much pleasanter for everybody concerned."

Kate was still harping on her one string. "Didn't you make pictures in your own mind about your future husband, mother darling, long before you'd ever seen or heard of papa? Didn't you make up a sort of fancy-man, with eyes from one face and a mouth from another and a nose that was entirely your own invention?"

Lady Claverley leaned back in her chair, and turned over a page of the book upon her lap. It was Sunday: and her ladyship always made a point of keeping the Sabbath most strictly; this was part of a very excellent early training to which she loyally adhered, but which —with some unconscious humour—she modified and adapted to her natural desires and her modern uses. For instance, she talked as incessantly and as generally on Sunday as on any other day: but she always did so with an open Bible on her knee, the pages of which she turned over at intervals. This was her idea of searching the Scriptures. Further, she was very particular always to wear black upon a Sunday; she said she "considered black a very religious colour." Her beliefs might be old-fashioned, but, such as they were, she

acted up to them. And which of the most modern and enlightened among us can do more than that?

"Well, my dear," she replied, "to tell you the truth, I did have silly ideas, when I was quite young, as to the sort of person I should marry when I grew up. I remember he always wore spurs. Spurs used to impress me very much when I was a girl, though I haven't a notion why."

"Yes, yes, mother; please go on. I understand why he wore spurs; they suggest horses and hunting and battles and all sorts of brave and glorious and manly things."

"Well then, the first time your father wore spurs after we were married was when we went to a Court Ball; and they became entangled in my lace flounce (it was lovely old Brussels-point that Aunt Silverhampton had given me as a wedding present), and tore it so dreadfnlly that he swore and I cried. And then I saw for myself how ridiculous all that dream-nonsense was, and how much better it would have been to marry a man who never wore anything more dangerous than elastic-sided boots."

"And wasn't papa like the dream-man in any other respect?"

"Not he; and I wished he hadn't been in that, as it turned out."

"An allegory on life in general and matrimony in particular," said Sapphira; "there is nothing that convinces us of the folly of our wishes like the fulfilment of them."

Kate pensively balanced a piece of cake on Bubble's nose. "All the same, if I meant to marry—which I don't—I should think it much more fun to marry a man that I liked than a man that I didn't."

"But, my dear, when once you are married, you can't think how little it really matters whom you are married to. Lovers vary a bit, I confess; but all husbands are practically the same—given, of course, that they are really nice people and properly brought up." Lady Claverley always laid great stress on what she called "a proper bringing up." According to her ideas, its fruits were shown in slavish obedience to parental prejudices, and in regular attendance of public worship every Sunday morning at eleven o'clock.

"Oh! mother, they can't be; men and women aren't tea-things, where any cup will do to go with any saucer. Now, for my part, if I had to be bothered with a husband at all, I should like an obliging and obedient sort of man, who was devoted to me and did all the things I wanted."

"He might be devoted to you—in fact, he'd be sure to be if he'd any taste or sense. But he wouldn't do

any of the things you wanted; they never do; and then he'd try to make it up to you by doing all the things you didn't want."

"A truly masculine idea of compensation!" Sapphira muttered.

"For instance, when I first married your father he would write poetry to me, and pay me compliments, and do a lot of silly things like that that didn't please me in the least. I remember saying to him not long after our marriage, 'Claverley, I entirely excuse you from ever planting flowers on my grave, and you can marry again as soon as you like; but in the meantime I wish you'd try to be punctual for dinner, and wouldn't scold the servants before visitors.'"

"Oh! mother, how could you—and especially when he'd been so amiably foolish as to write poetry to you?"

"But, you see, he didn't write poetry to the servants—quite the reverse; and it was a waste of time to do it to me, as there was no fear of my giving notice."

"Well, I should like my husband to write poetry," said Kate: "I think it is so sweet and Shakespearean of a man to write odes to his mistress' eyebrow."

"Goodness gracious, child, what an idea! If there is one thing that bores me more than another, it is poetry. I never can see the use of saying things in a silly,

roundabout sort of way, when it would be easier for you to say them straight out, and far easier for other people to understand what you were driving at. I remember when we were engaged, your father would read aloud to me a tiresome, long-winded thing called *In Memoriam,* and I never could make head nor tail of it. Of course it was very sad for the poor young man to die—and abroad, too, where I don't expect he could get proper doctors. I daresay if he'd been taken ill in England, he'd have recovered. But I can't see that all that rigmarole about him mended matters much."

"I wonder you listened if it bored you so, Aunt Henrietta."

"I didn't; but I couldn't help hearing what the thing was about, though all the time I was thinking about my trousseau. But that is the worst of reading aloud; you can't help hearing bits, and it does disturb your thoughts whether you will or no."

"And there's another thing," continued Kate, regardless of her mother's frequent interruptions, "an ideal husband should have curly hair; because men with curly hair are always conceited, and it is so much easier to manage a man who is conceited than a man who isn't."

"Anything else?" her cousin asked.

"Oh! yes, lots of things. The correct and ideal husband should be sad and melancholy, and never

cheerful or amusing. I hate funny men myself, and I think that melancholy ones are always rather interesting and mysterious. I really couldn't bear to have a husband who laughed at things."

"My dear, it'll be a comfort to you when he does laugh," said the Countess. "He won't always."

"But, mother darling, you must admit that from a dramatic point of view people are always more interesting when they cry than when they laugh."

"So they may be; but when husbands don't laugh they don't cry—they swear; and that isn't interesting at all."

"And he should have some secret source of sorrow and suffering. I believe that the orthodox hero of the common or garden girl always suffers in secret."

"The suffering won't be secret long, my dear; at least not if it's at all severe."

"Then the orthodox hero goes to the common or garden girl and tells her of it and asks for her love and sympathy to ease his anguish; and then he thanks her for them on his bended knee. I really know a lot about these things; I've studied them in the contemporary novel."

"He will be much more likely to ask her for a digestive tablet or a mustard leaf, and then to scold her violently if there aren't any in the house."

"And there must always be a sort of mysterious

halo about the ideal husband," continued Katharine; "his wife must never thoroughly understand him."

"She never will," retorted the Countess. "She'll never understand as long as she lives how men can see as much and learn as little as they all do. I've been married for over thirty years, and I've never once missed being offended when your father scolded the railway officials because he was too late for a train. Yet to this day he'll storm at six porters, two guards, and a station-master for letting the train be punctual when he wasn't, and then come and ask me if I've got a headache, as I'm so quiet!"

"Yes, there'd be something highly fascinating and stimulating about a husband one couldn't understand," remarked Katherine.

"He would be almost as instructive as the acrostic or the puzzle column in a weekly paper," added her cousin.

"Well, you'll get one; you may make your mind easy on that score," the Countess replied. "All men are difficult to understand for the simple reason that they are so truthful."

"On the whole," said Sapphira, "there is nothing so misleading as the truth, and nothing so opaque as transparency."

Katharine pouted. "Listen to them, Bubble darling: they're talking about their own affairs and not attending

to me a bit. Here am I giving them a most interesting lecture on the ideal husband. Yet nobody attends to me but dear Bubble and Squeak!"

"Go on, then," said Sapphira, with a laugh; "let us hear more of the hero's perfections."

"Well, he ought to be tremendously strong and self-willed—a sort of combination of Samson Agonistes and Mr. Rochester; and his wife must always know he is master."

"Oh! my dear," exclaimed the Countess, "there is no necessity for her to know that: it will be quite sufficient if she can make *him* think it."

"And he onght to be very brave—something like Richard Cœur de Lion, don't you know?"

"Bless you, child! he'll be brave enough till he sneezes twice or his little finger begins to ache, and then he'll think it is all up with him, and his last hour is come. It'll be when *you* sneeze and when *your* little finger aches that he'll play the part of Richard What's-his-name."

Lady Kate rose slowly from the hearthrug and drew her slender figure to its full height. "And to think that I must give up my freedom for the sake of some horrid piece of wax-work such as this! It is hard on poor me!"

Her mother laughed cheerily. "Not at all, my dear! A married woman always has a better time than a single

one. It is all very well to be single when you're young, but it gets dull as you grow older: and there's something very entertaining in looking out for your husband's mistakes and correcting them. It is one of the few amusements that never pall."

Kate sighed as she gazed at her graceful neck and pretty head in the mirror over the fireplace. "I am certain—absolutely certain—that I should hate the very sight of a husband," she said in a tone of profound resignation; "and that whatever he said or did would only make me loathe him more. And in that case I know I should find it a dreadful bore being married, and shouldn't get any fun out of it at all."

"Stuff and nonsense!" replied her mother. "Why, my dear, when I was a girl it was taken for granted that every woman loved her husband: it never occurred to anybody to do anything else."

Sapphira shrugged her shoulders. "The range of feminine thought has apparently widened since then."

"People never take things for granted, as they used to do when I was young," continued Lady Claverley in an injured tone; women now think it as great a favour and as big an effort to love their own husbands and children as they used to think it to love their enemies and to be civil to the opposing candidate at a county election."

"It is the same in the religious world," said Sapphira; "nothing is taken for granted even there."

"You are quite right, my dear; and that is worse than anything. Why, when I was a girl everybody belonged to the Church of England because it was the Church of England; that was reason enough for anybody—for anybody that was anybody, I mean. It would have been considered positively indelicate for a woman —and especially a young woman—to attempt to think out such things for herself."

"But nowadays every minx of eighteen has invented some special interpretation of the Athanasian Creed, Aunt Henrietta: and by twenty she has compiled and edited a new set of Commandments—less brittle and more mendable than the originals."

The Countess sighed. "That is so: and—as I said before—there is something indelicate to my mind in young women prying into Creeds and Commandments and things like that. I'm sure poor dear mamma wouldn't have approved of it, nor of any fancy religions. I don't like fancy religions myself: they weren't the fashion in my young days, though I must say I wish that orthodox religion wasn't so draughty, and didn't give one cold. I never enter a church that isn't over-ventilated, so that it generally takes me three weeks to go to church—one Sunday to go, and a fortnight to get rid of the cold in my head which is a necessary part of the service."

"Poor mother!" said Kate, with a laugh; "you seem to worship under persecution, like the early Christians."

"I do: and I confess I am not surprised that the Jews were a stiff-necked generation, if their places of worship were anything like ours. To be quite candid, I believe that fancy religions are warmer—though, of course, wickeder—than true ones. But one queer thing I've noticed is that people who belong to fancy religions are always fond of nuts."

"Why nuts, Aunt Henrietta?" inquired Sapphira.

"I haven't a notion why; I only know that they are. Whenever I see people eating nuts I always doubt their orthodoxy. They seem to be encouraging Darwin, and all those dreadful men who pretend that we are descended from monkeys. I cannot consider that nuts are Christian food. I'd as soon eat grass, as Nebuchadnezzar did when he was out of office."

But Sapphira was inclined to argue. "Quite nice men eat walnuts," she said.

"Well, all I can say is, that if they do, they won't be nice long; for there is nothing so upsetting to the digestion as walnuts, and nothing so upsetting to the temper as the digestion. It is not the slightest use telling a man to love his wife and not be bitter against her, as long as you allow him to eat walnuts: because it isn't in human nature that he can obey you."

Kate waltzed across the room, the dogs jumping after her with yelps of delight. "Come along, Sapphira, and let us take these two darlings for a run, or else they'll get fat on too much cake and too little exercise, poor dears! And there's nothing in the world so bad as fatness. As long as I live I shall never cease to sing psalms of joy because I'm thin; at least, that is to say as long as I am thin; and I hope I shall be dead and buried ages before I get stout."

And she danced out of the room, followed by the dogs and Sapphira.

CHAPTER III.

LADYHALL.

In the lowlands of Scotland, not far from the east coast, lies the village of Dunbrae, consisting of a single street of grey stone cottages, which toils painfully up a steep hill crowned by an ancient church. A muddy street—a street with deep ruts—a street with occasional stretches of cobbles—a street wherein the wayfaring man, especially if he ride a bicycle, may and occasionally does err. At such times he is surrounded by a rapturous crowd of bare-legged urchins, who in the broadest Scotch offer him such consolation as is usually bestowed by the cynical caddy on the unfortunate wight who foozles his stroke at golf.

The church is a superb relic of ancient times. The nave and aisles have been restored; but externally it looks much as it must have done centuries ago. Inside, indeed, everything is changed. There was once a rood-screen, dividing nave from chancel, through which could be discerned the lights on the high altar, lights which made the mysterious darkness of the lofty roof still more

mysterious, and which bore daily witness to the Light of the World. No altar now decks the sanctuary; the rood-screen, crowned with the symbol of the faith, is replaced by a wooden partition, which cuts off the chancel from the nave. In front is the pulpit, from which the minister either deduces what lessons he can from the stories of the Old Testament and the Gospel of the New, or else (as one of his parishioners put it) "exposes a psalm."

But the glory of the church is the chancel, with its superb Norman arches and magnificent windows, with its stone monuments and graven brasses bearing their lasting testimony to the virtues of those men and women who did justly and loved mercy and walked humbly with their God in the far-off days of civil warfare and religious persecution. It is now used as a vestry and lumber-room; and where once stood the altar may now be found the pail and mop of the caretaker. But nothing can mar the chaste dignity of the ancient fane. The imagination can overpass the squalid accidents; it can fill chancel, nave, and aisle with the stately accompaniments of a dignified ritual, and can hear the pealing organ and the plaintive chant of the thronging worshippers.

About a mile from the village stood Ladyhall, the abode of Lord Claverley's kinswoman. When the late Mr. MacBalloch bought the Hall it was a picturesque

ruin. But it had been carefully and completely rebuilt under the supervision of a skilful architect, who, with youth and enthusiasm to back up perfect taste and profound study, spared no labour, as Mr. MacBalloch spared no money, in restoring the Hall not only to its pristine splendour, but as nearly as possible to its former style. Modern comforts no doubt abounded, which would have astonished those who built and lived in the mansion long centuries ago. But so far as outward appearance and internal arrangement went, the Hall was very much what it had originally been. Externally it had more the look of a French *château* than of a Scotch castle. It consisted of two parts—one large, one much smaller—united only by a wall, so that he who would pass from one to the other had to go out into the open air. In the middle of this wall was the entrance gate; facing it an old well and a sundial. To the left, as one entered, was the door leading to the main building. This opened into a huge hall, with a large open fireplace; around it were oak settles and plain wooden benches. One end was partitioned off by an open screen, beautifully carved, and served for the dining-room. Out of this hall led winding staircases, on which the bewildered stranger had no difficulty in losing his way. He might, perchance, find himself in a lovely drawing-room, hung with priceless tapestry; or it might be that the door he opened led into a superb ballroom, where walls and

ceilings were painted and covered with strange devices and startling mottoes, some hospitable, some pathetic, and some frankly cynical; or he might find himself in one of the numerous bed-chambers, small but cosy, some with unexpected dressing-rooms, or maybe an oratory. All the rooms had two or three steps inside the doors, ascending or descending, as the case might be, but so arranged that the unwary traveller was bound to tumble upstairs or downstairs with unfailing precision. From the top of the house there was a fine view reaching to the sea, and in the far distance might be seen the grey towers of an ancient and beautiful city.

A house with a strange charm, a wonderful fascination; redolent of old-time memories and the fashion of an elder day, yet replete with every modern comfort. There was a garden, too, where Mary Stuart might have walked—and very possibly did walk—with Darnley, what time her infatuation for the handsome scamp lasted. Like ancient Gaul, according to Cæsar, it was divided into three parts. One was an old-fashioned Dutch garden, with avenues of trees cut into strange shapes, bearing resemblance to all kinds of most fearful wild-fowl; another was an exquisite rosary, carpeted with turf which had been rolled for as many centuries as the famous lawns of Oxford; in the third might be found an ancient wall of great solidity covered in due season with luscious peaches, while in front of it stretched

a bed of delicious fruits, blushing like so many duchesses beneath their strawberry leaves.

Here lived the widow of Sandy MacBalloch, a canny Scot, who, from small beginnings, had made a large fortune as an ironmaster. A proud man was Sandy when Katharine Clare, cousin of the Earl of Claverley, consented to share his hearth and home; a resigned man was Sandy six months later. He was a capable man, who ruled his workpeople with a strong, but just hand. Yet a short experience of married life had taught him that he who has married a woman with a will and a temper of her own, had, if he be a lover of peace, better suppress his own wishes and opinions until he has ascertained the views of his better-half. Mrs. MacBalloch always piqued herself on the strict fulfilment of her marriage vow of obedience, and it is certain she could do so with justice; for after one experience which gave rise to memories of some bitterness, Sandy with much wisdom refrained from giving her any opportunity of a conflict between inclination and duty. This led to a life, if not of domestic happiness, at least of domestic tranquillity. The authority which Mr. MacBalloch felt it inadvisable to exercise within his household, he exerted in the complete restoration of Ladyhall which he had recently purchased. He only lived long enough to see his ambition in this respect fully gratified, and then he slept with his fathers. No child had blessed the mar-

riage; and Mrs. MacBalloch, who was her husband's junior by thirty years, found herself richly left. Sandy's Will was what the most exacting of widows would have wished; there was no irritating restriction as regards a second marriage. Indeed, with the exception of a few inconsiderable legacies, the whole of his large fortune passed without reservation into Mrs. MacBalloch's possession. She had now been many years a widow, and had never displayed the slightest desire to avail herself of the liberty of remarriage. She was tall and slim; her nose was hooked, and a keen eye glittered beneath bushy eyebrows still black. In her youth she had enjoyed no inconsiderable share of beauty, and she was still—at the age of fifty—an extremely handsome woman.

For years she had suffered from weak health; what her particular complaint was no one knew. Whatever it was, her indomitable will prevailed over the feebleness of her frame, and though pronounced by the faculty not once, nor twice, at the point of dissolution, she invariably disappointed their predictions.

There was not very much intercourse between the Earl's family and his kinswoman when Lady Kate appeared upon the scene to be at once the plague and idol of her father. Then Mrs. MacBalloch had been asked, and had not ungraciously consented, to become her godmother. A handsome present, repeated yearly,

had been the outcome. There was an occasional visit of a few days' duration. Mrs. MacBalloch was not averse to her godchild—indeed she treated her with kindness, and rather petted her when they met. But Kate had a temper of her own; and as she grew in years her visits to her godmother were sometimes accompanied by storms. The girl would fiercely rebel against the elder woman's dictatorial ways; she would even resent being petted. As a result for some years the visits had been discontinued. Still there were observers who said that if there were a soft place in Mrs. MacBalloch's heart, it was for her lovely and self-willed goddaughter, who was a replica of what she herself had been when she likewise was a Katharine Clare.

There was another person who had been the recipient of not a little kindness from the owner of Ladyhall. Richard Despard had been a favourite cousin of Mrs. MacBalloch; indeed, there were some who averred that he would not have been averse to a closer connection. However this may be, Richard finally married another woman, who died, leaving him a handsome boy. Richard did not long survive his loss; and George Despard at a tender age was left an orphan. Whether it was a remembrance of an old love, or whether it was simple, if unwonted, kindness of heart, the fact remains that Mrs. MacBalloch took charge of the boy, superintended his education, and when he arrived at years of

discretion made him her secretary and business agent with an adequate salary. He was given clearly to understand that this was the limit of her beneficence; he was not to look for inheritance. From his boyhood his patroness had treated him not unkindly, but without tenderness or affection; and if her hand had bestowed benefits, as it undoubtedly had, yet there was an absence of graciousness which robbed the gifts of half their virtue, and left with the recipient a bitter taste. George Despard, however, was deeply sensible of Mrs. MacBalloch's real kindness, and of all that she had done for him when he was a lonely and penniless orphan. Bitter at heart as he was at times, he had a keen sense of the obligations under which he had been placed. And it was this which induced him to accept a position which was not one in which his abilities could have a proper field, or in which his natural ambition could ever find an opening. It was an added pain to him that, now he was a man, Mrs. MacBalloch treated him with less consideration than heretofore. He was her dependant, but he did not now share the immunity of her servants from the shafts of her ridicule and the venom of her sarcasm. In enduring this, he felt he was but repaying all that she had done for him in the past years; and, however sore the trial, was never drawn into a loss of temper, nor goaded into a retort.

He was a handsome man, tall, with dark hair and a

straight nose. He was careful of his appearance and was always well dressed. He was a notable golfer, yet apparently sane; a keen angler, and he could ride a horse as well as another. A considerable part of his duties had to be carried on in the open air, with a result that he had a well-knit athletic frame, and a splendid complexion brown with health and sea-breezes. Withal, his abilities were above the common. Thanks to Mrs. MacBalloch, he had received an admirable education, and had fully profited thereby. As a boy he had worked well; as a man he had plenty of leisure, and, since he saw little society, he devoted his spare time to reading and to literature. Consequently he had a trained intellect, a mind well stored with the products of a reading which if not profound was at least wide, and the power of expressing his ideas in happily chosen phrases.

So time went on until George Despard found himself eight-and-twenty years old with no especial prospects. Gratitude for her care for him as a child made it impossible, he felt, to give up his post as long as Mrs. MacBalloch lived and needed him. Yet it was difficult for him to see what was to be his future when she died. Thus it happened that reasonably contented, if not happy in his present position, there hung over him a cloud—not only in the sense of a dependent position under a domineering patroness, but the shadow of an uncertain future and of unfulfilled hopes. This lent a

touch of gravity to a disposition naturally cheerful, and a subacid flavour to a humour which was at bottom genial.

One brilliant morning in August Mrs. MacBalloch and George were breakfasting in a cheerful room opening out onto the rose garden. The post-bag had just been brought in, and each was studying with more or less interest a share of its contents. Truth to tell, George's interest was but languid, as his pile of letters was entirely of a business character, so they were put aside to be dealt with later on; and he took up the day before yesterday's *Globe*, and noted with some satisfaction that Surrey was running up a big score against Yorkshire. Meanwhile Mrs. MacBalloch, having finished her correspondence, was apparently lost in thought. She sat sipping her tea at intervals, with her dark eyebrows knitted together, and occasionally looked at George, who was now deep in the capital performance of Kent against an apparently invincible Australian team, which formed the principal attraction of the Canterbury week.

"Did I tell you, George," began Mrs. MacBalloch, "that I had invited Kate Claverley to spend a month at Ladyhall?"

George laid down the *Globe*.

"Lady Kate? No, Mrs. MacBalloch, I don't think you have mentioned it."

"Well, I have."

"She will refuse, I suppose," said George carelessly.

"And why do you suppose?" asked Mrs. MacBalloch sharply.

"Well, she has not been here for some six years; and the last time she came, if I remember right, you and she did not get on particularly well together."

"If she has not been here, as is certainly the case, it is probably because she has not been invited. As you say, we did not get on very well; she did not behave at all nicely, and displayed temper on more than one occasion."

"No doubt, no doubt," said George negligently, as he took up his newspaper again.

"I suppose you mean by that, that it was I who showed temper," said Mrs. MacBalloch angrily.

Despard smiled.

"I wish, George," she went on, "that you would do me the honour to pay some regard to me when I am speaking, instead of reading a newspaper."

"I beg your pardon. I did not know there was anything you wished to discuss. I am all attention."

"Thank you. I wish you to take note of such arrangements as are necessary. Lady Kate, when she was here, certainly showed that she had inherited a good deal of her father's temper; but she is six years older,

and, we will hope, six years wiser. It may be she has learnt to exercise some self-restraint."

"We will hope so," said George politely, as Mrs. MacBalloch paused.

"And if not, it may be of service to her to stay for a time with one who has her welfare at heart, and who will not give way to her whims and fancies, as I am afraid her poor mother does."

Mrs. MacBalloch again paused, as if she expected Despard to speak. He was at a loss what to say, so he took refuge in the safe, if not original, remark, "Exactly."

"You know, George, I have undertaken solemn responsibilities with regard to my goddaughter; and when I have undertaken a responsibility I always endeavour to discharge it to the best of my ability." Mrs. MacBalloch drew herself up as she uttered these noble sentiments. George was a little surprised, as Mrs. MacBalloch had not hitherto shown any especial appreciation of the duties of a godmother, except in so far as boxing the child's ears and sending her to bed on divers occasions and oft were concerned.

"I know that in my case," he said, with some feeling, "you treated me with generosity and kindness, though I had no claim whatsoever upon you."

"Yes, yes, we won't speak of that," said his patroness hastily. "Let us come back to the matter in hand. It

has occurred to me that, as I am getting on in life, I should like all differences there may have been between my cousin's family and myself to be smoothed over. So I have invited the Earl and Countess to come with their daughter."

"And you think they will agree to come?" asked George, with some curiosity. He knew that there had been a good deal of friction between Lord Claverley and his kinswoman; it seemed not a little strange that the invitation should have been given, and he thought it would be stranger still if it were accepted.

"I have little doubt they will. Between you and me, I think they will be glad to have a month away from Claverley Castle without expense. I hear that the financial state of affairs there is unsatisfactory."

Despard began now to have some glimmering of light on the matter; but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself. He remarked vaguely, "If only the weather keeps as fine as it has been of late, it will certainly be very pleasant here."

There was a silence for a minute or two, and then Mrs. MacBalloch said, "You will make the necessary arrangements for their reception?"

"Certainly."

"I shall not have anybody else staying in the house if they come, as I want to become as intimate as pos-

sible with my relations. I think kinsfolk should always be friends."

"Still, intimacy and friendship are by no means the same thing," said George drily: "in fact, frequently actually opposing ones."

"That may be. But I shall do what I think right; and if that stuck-up old nincompoop, my cousin Claverley, chooses to quarrel with me—well, then, he can! At any rate, I shall have done my duty."

"Towards getting up a quarrel, do you mean?"

"No, towards preventing one."

George smiled, but did not speak.

"You always get to know people well when you are *en famille,*" continued Mrs. MacBalloch.

"You do: in fact, sometimes almost too well."

Mrs. MacBalloch rose from the table and slowly walked to the window. Then she paused, and glanced dubiously at Despard, who had also risen. As she did not speak George said, "Have you any further instructions?"

The lady again looked at him, but said nothing. George was quietly withdrawing, and had reached the door, when she, apparently making up her mind, called out:

"Stay a minute, George, there *is* something more that I wish to say."

"Certainly, Mrs. MacBalloch—what is it?"

Mrs. MacBalloch again looked at George, much as if he were a prize ox.

"You are a good-looking fellow, George," she said slowly: "at least, so they tell me. I must admit I can't see it myself."

George laughed cheerfully.

"I daresay I shall pass in a crowd."

"Lady Kate also is very handsome," went on Mrs. MacBalloch slowly, and with some significance.

Despard was quick in his apprehension: he felt at once the subtle suggestion, and flushed hotly.

"So I have been told," he answered haughtily: "but I confess I do not see what that has to do with the present discussion."

"It is best to speak plainly, so that there may be no misunderstandings in the future. Remember, then, that it will never do for you to make love to my god-daughter."

"Mrs. MacBalloch," cried Despard indignantly, "because you have been kind to me in the past you have no right to insult me, or to throw my dependent position in my teeth."

"Tut, tut, George," replied Mrs. MacBalloch good-humouredly, "there's no need for you to get excited. I never mentioned your position."

"No, but you insinuated——"

"There, there; that will do. I like you well enough;

and in pure kindness I warn you not to burn your fingers."

"I understand," said George bitterly: "Lady Kate is a fine lady, and I am a poor gentleman. I daresay you mean to be kind: anyway, your warning shall not be wasted."

"You are not a bad fellow, George," said Mrs. MacBalloch, still in high good humour, as she left the room: "but at times you really are very silly."

If George muttered an expletive or two beneath his breath, we need not be surprised: for he was by no means more perfect than the rest of us, and not unhasty in his temper. But perhaps after all he was merely calling down blessings on the head of his benefactress: in which case his moderation is worthy of all honour.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVITATION.

"We must devote ourselves this morning," said Lord Claverly sententiously to his wife and daughter, "to the discussion of the invitation received to-day from Katharine MacBalloch for us three to sojourn for a month under her hospitable roof. It is a matter which requires serious consideration."

Now serious consideration was a thing which the soul of Lord Claverley loved. He was never happier than when he had assembled his wife and daughter in his own special sanctum to talk over for a couple of hours some trivial question which could easily have been settled in five minutes. His wife considered this very fussy—as indeed it was—but she endured it as a necessity entailed by her marriage vow; while Lady Kate was so intolerant of the whole proceeding that she discoursed sweet music under her breath all the time.

"There are many points to be considered," continued the Earl, marking off those points upon his taper fingers: "first, whether it is wise to accept; secondly,

whether it is desirable; and, thirdly, whether we should do well to accept *in toto* as invited, or whether Kate alone should go, unhampered by parental influence."

"All that we've got to consider," said the Countess, "is what we want to do, and then to do it. I can't see the use of talking in a circle all your days. It makes me dizzy."

"Alas! my love, you are ever too prompt both in thought and action."

"Well, you are not; so we strike an average between us."

"Nevertheless, Henrietta, it is a mistake, believe me, to be too hasty—a mistake to which you must allow me to say you are somewhat prone. You have a most sound and admirable judgment when once you have mastered a situation; but your temptation is to pass sentence in a case before you have duly assimilated the evidence. You do not—you cannot—know all the ins and outs of a question—all the pro and cons—all the modifying circumstances—by instinct."

"I don't want to. I know my own mind, and that's quite enough for me."

Her husband's habit of making mountains out of molehills, and then setting about to climb them with alpenstocks, was always trying to Lady Claverley.

As for Kate, she was so irritated that she was humming straight through *Judas Maccabæus*.

"It appears to me," said the Earl, "that there cannot be two opinions as to the desirability of Kate's accepting this invitation—an invitation couched, I must admit, in most agreeable terms. I never knew Katharine MacBalloch so gracious before: did you, my love?"

"Never. I wonder what she wants out of us."

"Oh! my love, my love, let me beg of you to strangle such uncharitable thoughts ere they see the light."

"I'm not uncharitable, Claverley. But when people suddenly become what you know they are not, you can feel sure they aren't doing it for nothing. Whenever you see anything out of the common—even a chair in an unusual place, or a door open that ought to be shut—you always know there is something behind it. If you've any sense, you try to find out what that something is; and if you happen to be a woman, you generally succeed."

"But, my dear Henrietta, it is impossible to judge actions without a complete knowledge of the motives which prompted them."

"Oh, Claverley, as if I'd the time to bother about motives! I know that certain things are done—and that generally I've got to undo them—and as a rule that is as much as I can manage. And besides if I did know the motives, as you call them, it wouldn't make any

difference to me. Everybody has some sort of a reason for doing a silly thing, and the reason is usually even sillier than the thing itself."

Lord Claverley never condescended to argue with his wife. He said she could not grasp the soundness of his reasoning nor the subtlety of his finesse. Wherein he was quite correct.

"Well, Henrietta, you will admit that it is desirable —most desirable in the face of our present circumstances—that Kate should enter into friendly relations with her kinswoman, Mrs. MacBalloch."

"It is always desirable for young people to make all the friends they can and to keep all the friends they can. They never know when they may want them."

"Certainly, my love, certainly. What a clear way you have of putting things—quite a gift of translucent speech! Therefore we agree that it is a consummation devoutly to be wished that our daughter should endear herself to Katharine MacBalloch; and is not a visit to Ladyhall the very opportunity for cementing this desirable friendship?"

Lady Claverley looked at her daughter. "That depends," she said, "upon Kate herself."

Kate, who was at that moment engaged in the pianissimo rendering of *When Mighty Kings*, did not speak.

"And the question now to be considered is," her

father continued, "whether in the absence or in the presence of her parents Kate will be the more likely to enshrine herself in the lonely heart of Katharine MacBalloch."

"If Kate makes herself pleasant, Mrs. MacBalloch will like her, and if Kate doesn't make herself pleasant, neither Mrs. MacBalloch nor anybody else will like her. It is in her own hands; and it won't make any difference whether she goes visiting by herself or takes all her ancestors since the days of Adam with her."

Then at last Kate gave tongue. "I'm not going truckling to anybody for the sake of money, papa, and so I tell you straight out. Nothing would induce me, and it's no good asking me."

"Oh! my dear," remonstrated her mother, "remember whom you are speaking to."

"I am remembering."

"Two — four — six — eight — ten — twenty — twenty-five," said Lady Claverley, counting the stitches on her knitting-needles. "Claverly, how much does three times twenty-five come to?"

"Seventy-five exactly, my love."

"How clever it is of you to add up things so quickly in your head! I never can imagine how you do it."

Lady Claverley was one of those women who are never idle. With ceaseless energy her fingers were for

ever transforming Scotch wool or unbleached calico into useful and unlovely garments for the poor and needy. The only advantage, as far as she could see, of a long conversation with her husband was that it enabled her to get on with her knitting.

"I repeat," said the Earl, "my question: Would it be better for Katharine to go alone to Ladyhall, or for us, her parents, to accompany her? The matter requires careful consideration—very careful consideration."

Kate hummed *Sound an Alarm,* but made no further reply; and her mother was too much engrossed in the intricacies of her heel to attend to minor matters, so Lord Claverley continued without interruption:

"I always think that young persons are more unaffected and spontaneous—more simple, in fact, and therefore more attractive—when their parents are absent. Yet, on the other hand, it is but natural, perhaps, that we elders should consider that our presence —weighted as it is by the influence of years and experience—makes for peace and order and wise-dealing."

"Yes, Claverley, *I* certainly do feel like that; but I don't see why *you* should."

A shade of annoyance passed over the Earl's aristocratic features. "My love, you forget that I am many years older than you are."

"No, I don't; but I've learnt double the quantity in half the time. And then I always know what to say."

"Which, I conclude, I do not." Lord Claverley was still nettled.

"Five—ten—fifteen—twenty. What did you say half of seventy-five was, Claverley?"

"I have never to my knowledge given an opinion on the point; but as a matter of fact it is thirty-seven and a half."

"It can't be; because I can't possibly cut a stitch into halves."

"Nevertheless it is."

Lady Claverley looked reproachful. "Well, it never was before, I'm quite sure of that. I've knitted socks scores and scores of times, and I've never yet had anything so impossible to deal with as thirty-seven and a half. Think again, Claverley; there must be be another half of seventy-five."

"My love, I regret to say that there is not."

The Countess's handsome face grew positively despairing, as she dropped her knitting on her lap. "Then what on earth am I to do? I've got seventy-five stitches on my needles altogether, and I must divide them into two equal parts for the heel; yet your own sense must tell you that I can't possibly split the wool, and make two half-stitches out of one whole."

"Supposing that you put thirty-seven stitches on one needle and thirty-eight on another. That would divide the whole into two practically equal parts and yet leave it seventy-five," suggested her husband kindly.

"And are you sure that thirty-seven and thirty-eight make seventy-five?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Then that'll do beautifully. Oh, Claverley, what a clever man you are! I should never have thought of that myself. Ten—twenty—thirty—thirty-seven."

"But, mother, how have you always managed before? You've knitted hundreds of socks, and never got into this difficulty." It was a noteworthy fact that other people—including her own husband and daughter—were always interested in anything, however trifling, that concerned Lady Claverley. She possessed that indefinable attribute for which we have as yet no better name than *personality*.

"Well, the fact is, Kate, that I've always put on seventy-four stitches before, which divided so nicely into two thirty-sevens. But I've somehow made another stitch this time—goodness knows how!—and I can't be bothered to go back and find it out."

The Earl recalled his wandering sheep. "But what about Mrs. MacBalloch's invitation?"

"Well, papa, I've told you that nothing on earth will induce me to truckle to that woman for her money. I'd

sooner grind a barrel-organ or marry a crossing-sweeper."

"But the other day, if my memory serves me, you declined with equal firmness to marry the crossing-sweeper or his equivalent."

"So I did, and so I shall."

"Then the old place must go—as I have said before, there is no other alternative."

Kate's only reply was a bar of *See the Conquering Hero.*

"The old place—the home of my ancestors since the days of the Crusaders—must be knocked down by the blasphemous hammer of the intrusive auctioneer," repeated the Earl, with a break in his voice.

Kate wavered a little. Claverley Castle was very dear to her. But all she said was, "Nothing on earth will induce me to go and stay at Ladyhall."

"Then you are a very ungrateful as well as a very undutiful daughter." Her father's face was stern.

"I don't care what I am. All I know is that I won't be the guest of that strict, stern, severe Mrs. MacBalloch, and be ordered about as if I am a child."

"But I say you shall."

"And I say I shan't."

"Come, come," said Lady Claverley, "what's all this fuss about? Of course we shall all three go together to stay with Katharine MacBalloch at the time for which

she asks us. I'm sure it will be very nice and we shall all enjoy it. And it will do me a world of good; for what with Charles and poverty and one thing and another, I've had a deal of bother lately, and I want a bit of change and diversion." This last was a master-stroke —and she knew it.

Kate wavered more visibly; she adored her mother. "Of course, mother darling, if you really think it would do *you* good and that *you* need a change——"

"I'm sure I do. Poor dear mamma always said that when you were wearied there was nothing like an entire change of air and scene; and she was right. It would be a treat to me to eat a dinner that I hadn't written out beforehand on a slate; and to have it handed round by servants whose tempers I hadn't to consider."

But the Earl scented danger. "Understand me, Henrietta, if I do decide to go to Scotland, nothing on earth will induce me to stay with Dunbar. I repeat it; nothing under heaven will induce me to visit your brother just now."

His wife soothed him instantly. "Certainly not, my dear; who ever thought of such a thing? Nobody has asked you to go to Dunbar's—not even Dunbar himself. It is your side of the family that we are going to visit now—not mine."

"It is not that your brother and I are not good friends at a distance—we are. But I feel that in the

present precarious state of my affairs, and with all the anxiety that it entails, Dunbar's high spirits—and his wife's incessant chatter—would be more than I could bear."

"Of course it would, my love, and nobody should ask you to bear it," replied the devoted wife.

"Then that decides it, Henrietta," said Lord Claverley, with a gracious wave of the hand; "in this house you are—and always will be, as long as I am master—the first consideration. We will all three repair to Mrs. MacBalloch's at the time mentioned in her letter; and we shall all, I hope—and especially you, my love—derive benefit from the change."

"Two—four—six—eight—ten. The leg looks rather straight; but I never decrease below the calf in charity socks—I don't think it necessary." Lady Claverley had a very nice sense of social distinctions.

"Well, my dear Henrietta and Katharine, I think it is very satisfactory—very satisfactory indeed—that we have arrived at so definite a conclusion after a discussion of only half an hour," said the Earl.

His wife had arrived there before the discussion began; but she did not think it necessary to say so.

"All the same, I expect I shall hate it," sighed Kate, locking her arm in her mother's as they left the room together.

"Oh, my dear, that's silly talk! You'll enjoy it very

much, and so we all shall. I confess I don't care much for Katharine MacBalloch myself—she is too overbearing and domineering for me, and too fond of giving her opinions on matters that don't concern her; but you never need see much of people in their own houses if you don't want to. And I shall take Sapphira with us: she will be company for you."

"But papa has set me against it by all the things he has said. If only he'd left me alone, I should have agreed to go right enough; but now I'm prejudiced against the whole thing." Kate's anger had died down into a sense of injury.

"My dear child, how foolish to take any notice of what your father says! I should have thought you knew him well enough by this time."

"His way of dealing with things always sets my back up; he has a knack of making me angrier than anybody I know," grumbled Kate.

"My dear, that is because you are so like him; you should always leave me to manage him instead of trying to deal with him direct. That's where you make a mistake. If you want him to say a thing, just tell me so quietly, and I'll get him to say it. But when you speak to him yourself, he generally says the opposite from what you want; and then not even I can get him to unsay what he has once said."

Kate bowed before her mother's higher wisdom.

"All right, mother; but you must admit he is trying at times."

"Not at all, my dear," replied Lady Claverley loyally; "your father is a most excellent and honourable and upright man—an ideal English landowner—and I am always guided by his superior judgment, in small matters as well as great, as a true wife ought to be. But I must admit I sometimes wish he'd manage his own affairs, and leave me to manage mine."

"Then do you really think that papa is a clever man?" There was a ring of doubt in Kate's voice. Her mother looked amazed that anybody should need to ask such a question.

"Of course I do—a wonderfully clever man—quite one of the cleverest men I ever met. There is hardly anything that he doesn't know something about, and on which his opinion isn't worth having; and I am sure that anybody with whom he is brought into contact is the better for his counsel and advice. But all the same, my dear, if I were you I wouldn't mention to him that I was going to do things till after I'd done them. I never do; and I'm sure it's the best way."

"Yes, mother, I know what you mean; he might forbid them."

"He'd be sure to, and then stick to what he'd said through thick and thin, just because he had said it. Men are all like that."

"And it is better not to give him reasons for things either—I mean reasons why you want to do things and why you don't."

"Certainly not; never give a man a reason for anything—at least, never the real one. I learnt that lesson a great many years ago. They've got a horrid way of arguing and proving that your reason isn't any reason at all. As if that had anything to do with it! And now I must go and write some letters and see Brown. These discussions of your father's do waste such a lot of valuable time, and they never affect the actual course of events at all. I always know what the ultimate decision will be before he begins to speak." She did not add that the ultimate decision was invariably her own dressed up to look like the Earl's; probably she was not even aware of the fact.

Lady Kate then repaired to the room still known as the nursery, where her late nurse—now her present maid—sewed unceasingly upon her ladyship's behalf.

Mrs. Tiffany (the Mrs. was merely a courtesy title) was what is known in the servants' hall as "a character." When Lady Claverley had a little daughter, having been married for a dozen years without any children at all, she naturally had no experience in the upbringing of them; so she wisely set about finding a capable and experienced nurse, on whose knowledge she might rely when her own was lacking. Mrs. Tiffany exactly ful-

filled this desire. She had lived for over twenty years with a wealthy family of the name of Hopkins, and had successfully brought up five young Hopkinses to respective manhood and womanhood; and now—having launched these several barks triumphantly on the sea of life—she was prepared for fresh worlds to conquer in the shape of the little Lady Katharine Clare.

She was as careful and devoted a nurse to her charge as the fondest mother could have wished, and she abundantly fulfilled all Lady Claverley's hopes and Mrs. Hopkins's recommendations; but—as is often the way in such cases—her heart was with the employers of her youth. According to Tiffany, there was no trial which the young Hopkinses had not endured, no feat which they had not accomplished. Everything that other people did or suffered had been equalled—nay, surpassed—by the phalanx she always referred to by the names of Misannie, Misemmie, Miscarry, Mastrennery, and Mastrerbert.

Kate's childhood had been enlivened and her young imagination fired by Tiffany's reminiscences of this redoubtable family. They provided a sort of interminable epic, which she was never tired of hearing, nor her nurse of reciting. Even now, when she was no longer a child but a woman, and Tiffany no longer a nurse but a maid, the Hopkinses were not as other men, but still had a romance and an interest peculiarly their own;

though it must be admitted that Kate now and again laughed slyly in her sleeve at the traditions clustering round this legendary race—legends which in her younger days she had accepted as gospel.

Above this group of godlike mortals there ruled a beneficent and presiding power spoken of by Tiffany as Missisopkins. But this superior and gracious being played but an unimportant part in the narrations concerning her heroic brood; she was generally introduced by the reciter of the epic rather for the pointing of the moral than for the adornment of the tale.

Mrs. Tiffany prided herself on her precision of diction and her general culture. She was much addicted to quotations and metaphors; and she adapted these to the case in point, on the same principle as the old woman, who, when she read the Bible to her husband, "put in many a bit for his good." Also she never used a word of two syllables where one of three would do.

"Oh, Tiffy," sighed Lady Kate, flinging herself with a groan upon the old nursery sofa, "what do you think? I've got to go and spend a whole month with a fearfully strict woman in Scotland, on the off-chance that she will die and leave me her money."

"Never mind, my lammie, Scotland is a most historical and instructive country, and highly improving to the mind. It was there, I remember, that Mastren-

nery caught pleuritis by wetting his feet in a nasty, damp river."

"And didn't he catch any fish as well?"

"Yes, lovely, boatloads and boatloads of them. He was quite what you call a cracked sportsman was Mastrennery."

Kate's brown eyes twinkled. "How clever of him—and especially as he was so musical as well!"

Tiffany looked at her young mistress in sorrow rather than in anger. "Oh, my lady, what a memory you have got! How often must I impress upon you that it was Mastrerbert that played the piano and Mastrennery that bit his nails?"

"Of course it was, nursey; how stupid of me to forget! But I am sure there was something else that Henry did besides biting his nails."

"You are thinking of his scholarship. He was great at the first-classics was Mastrennery. Latin wasn't Greek to him, as it would be to you and me, my lady: he'd read it as easy as wink."

"I remember now quite well. It was Herbert who played and sang so beautifully."

"He did, my lady—as sweet as a syrupim. At one time there was some talk of him joining the church choir like any processional singer, but his mamma

couldn't abide the notion. And as for Misannie—why, I've often heard Missisopkins say that if only Misannie had been properly trained at the Conservatory in Paris she'd have been a regular Greasy."

"Then why didn't they train her?" asked Lady Kate. "Grisis don't grow on every bush."

Tiffany looked shocked. "Oh! my lady, how can you suggest such a thing? Why, Missisopkins was a regular martingale where the young ladies were concerned, and watched over them like any Diana. She wouldn't have let one of them get their own living—no, not for anything!"

"But about Scotland, nursey? I know I shall hate it!" And Kate's face grew gloomy again.

"No, lovey, you won't. I expect your ladyship will enjoy it ever so when once you're packed and there. I've been in Edinburgh myself, and considered it a most beautiful city."

"I've never stayed there—I've only been through it. But I should like to stop for a few days and go to all the places which my adored Mary Queen of Scots visited. Think of standing on the very spot where they murdered Rizzio before her eyes. She never got over it, poor darling!" And Kate shuddered at the picture which her romantic imagination conjured up.

Tiffany shuddered in sympathy. "No more did

poor Misannie when she saw the cat kill her favourite canary. I shall never forget how upset the poor young lady was. It was days before she got her appetite back properly."

"And I should like to go to Kirk o' Field, where Darnley was blown up," continued Kate, still dwelling in thought upon her beloved Mary Stuart. "I never like Darnley myself—he wasn't nice enough to her; but, all the same, it was dreadful for him to be blown to pieces in that way, just when he thought he was getting everything he wanted."

"It was, my lamb; quite the uptake. It reminds me of Mastrennery, who once put some pincushion caps in his pocket, and forgot all about them, and went to church with his mamma. And in the middle of the service one tumbled out, and he trod on it, and there was such a commotion all through the church as never was. The congregation thought it was anarchists; but Missisopkins knew better, and acted accordingly."

"You see, Tiffy dear, papa wants me to go and stay with my godmother because she's so disgustingly rich and we're so detestably poor; and if I made myself nice to her she might some day leave me a fortune."

"And so she might, my lamb. His lordship is quite correct in his surmise, because, if you remember, there was money in your teacup when I told your ladyship's

fortune the other afternoon. 'There's a change coming,' I said, 'which will rebound to your ladyship's advantage.' And now it's fulfilling itself and coming true. Why, there was Misemmie's godmother, that she'd never set eyes on since she was a baby in long clothes, and yet sure enough when she died she left Misemmie a *Tate and Brady,* and also two dozen silver teaspoons, 'all-marked, so that you couldn't lose them in the wash. You note my words, my lady! there's nothing like making friendly relations of your godfathers and godmothers."

"Well, I only hope that I shall prove that the tea-leaves tell true, Tiffy dear, for I'm dreadfully in want of a fortune just now."

"They'll tell true, lovey; don't you begin to doubt their words. I remember once I saw a stranger in Misannie's teacup as large as life, and yet there seemed no prospect of any stranger coming just then. Yet sure as fate the very next day the man came to tune the nursery piano!"

Kate rose from the sofa and strolled to the door. "I believe you still like the Hopkinses better than you do me, nursey; and think them much nicer and prettier and cleverer than I am."

Tiffany's face assumed a judicial expression. "Well, my lady, I can make no pretence that there was one of them up to you in the matter of looks, because there

was not, and it's no use telling untruths about it, since their faces were plain for anyone to see. But kinder or better and more capable and sufficient young ladies never breathed; and handsome is as handsome does."

CHAPTER V.

THE ARRIVAL.

GEORGE DESPARD made all due preparation for the reception of the Claverleys. He was not a little sore at the warning he had received: his feathers were considerably ruffled: yet it must be granted that he was not without some curiosity to see the fair damsel who was the cause of the outrage to his feelings. Six years ago Lady Kate was an extremely pretty girl; and a very mischievous girl, too, was Lady Kate in those days. She had played him many a prank which he had regarded with the indulgence of two-and-twenty for a madcap of fifteen. But six years make a difference. He was told that Kate had fulfilled the promise of her girlhood, and had grown into a beautiful woman: he had heard rumours of her wilfulness, of her waywardness, of the hearts she had won without a thought—which she had recklessly thrown aside with a laugh. This method of procedure, however satisfactory it might be to my lady, would never do in his case. She should not find him an easy victim, a complaisant dangler, he

promised himself—the sting of Mrs. MacBalloch's tongue still rankling. Yes, he was curious to see her: anxious, perhaps, to show her, as well as Mrs. MacBalloch, with what ease he could assume the impenetrable armour of a cool civility. Cherishing such feelings—yea, almost stroking himself with satisfaction at the possession thereof—he drove over to St. Columba's to meet the Claverleys on their arrival at that most ancient city.

It so happened that Lady Kate was the first to get out of the railway carriage, and to her Despard approached with the intention of offering a greeting which he proposed to be positively arctic in its chilly dignity and politeness. Alas! his contemplated plan of campaign was at the outset disorganised by a rude but complete repulse. Lady Kate, with hardly a glance, and without waiting for him to speak, said coolly, "Oh! will you take my bag?" Then turning to her parents, who were descending to the platform with leisurely dignity, she said, "Very civil of Cousin Katharine: she has actually sent the groom-of-the-chambers to meet us."

"Very civil indeed, my dear," said the Earl, as he fumbled in his waistcoat for his eyeglasses; he was one of those men whose eyeglasses have a positive genius for secreting themselves. As a rule, indeed, an eyeglass in full working order is about as troublesome to find and as difficult to keep as a lively kitten.

"Will you be good enough to take up my bag?" repeated Lady Kate impatiently: "the sooner we are in the carriage the better."

By this time Despard had in measure recovered from the shock to his dignity, though he still felt as if he had been overwhelmed by a moral avalanche. He took the bag which Kate still held out to him, and drawing himself up, said in stately accents almost worthy of the Earl himself, but entirely deficient in the latter's habitual suavity:

"I must apologise for my kinswoman's apparent want of courtesy. As she has no groom-of-the-chambers, she has sent her secretary, who, however unworthy of the honour, will nevertheless do his best—to see after your luggage."

By this time the Earl's struggles in search of his truant eyeglasses had been crowned with success. He carefully adjusted them, and glanced benignly at the tall figure in front of him.

"Why," he cried, starting with surprise, "it is Mr. Despard! How could you make such a mistake, my child?" He held out his hand to George, and went on, "My *dear* sir, you must really pardon the very ridiculous error into which my daughter has most unwarrantably fallen. My love," turning to the Countess, "this is Mr. Despard, whom I am sure you remember."

The Countess did not remember him in the least, which is not surprising, as she had never seen him before. But, like a wise woman, she did not say so directly.

"I have often heard of Mr. Despard and of the great value Mrs. MacBalloch sets on the services he is so good as to render her."

Angry as he was, George could not but shake hands with the Earl and Countess, while Lady Kate looked on. She was rather horrified at the rudeness of which she had unintentionally been guilty: yet she was by no means filled with remorse, as a well-regulated maiden should have been, but rather with a mischievous delight at Despard's dismay. She felt, however, that she must do something in the direction of an *amende honorable.*

"I am awfully sorry, Mr. Despard," she said, with apparent penitence, though he saw clearly enough a naughty twinkle in her eye, "but it's years and years since I saw you, and then you had a lovely little moustache of which you seemed uncommonly proud; and now——"

"And now," answered George, gracefully accepting the situation while inwardly raging at the flippant impertinence of this proud young beauty, "you do me the compliment to think I am handsome enough and dignified enough to be a servant out of livery. When

the happy time comes that my Lady Katharine Clare is engaging her establishment, I shall be able to offer myself for a high position therein, with the best of testimonials—her own." And the secretary bowed.

Lady Kate laughed; he was not taking it badly, she thought. Meanwhile Lady Claverley, who never could be persuaded to leave the cares of travelling to her servants, had discovered, after careful cross-examination of her maid and my lord's man, that every article had been extracted from the luggage-van; and the Earl had discovered that it was confoundedly draughty, and wondered why they could not take their seats in the carriage instead of exchanging compliments on the platform. Lord Claverley's suggestion, like all great ideas, was simplicity itself; and was immediately adopted with no dissentient voice.

The three ladies and the two maids got into the omnibus, followed by Lord Claverley; while Despard—with his lordship's servant—superintended the transfer of the luggage from the platform to the Ladyhall cart. When this operation was concluded, George came to the carriage to assure the Earl that all was well with his goods and chattels.

"Thank you, thank you," said Lord Claverley, with his accustomed courtesy; "I am indeed grateful to you, Mr. Despard, for so ably and efficiently arranging our

arrival. And now shall we start for Ladyhall?" he added, making room for George.

"Pray don't move," replied the latter stiffly; "I am going to ride outside."

"Oh, I'm sure you'd better not," said Lady Claverley anxiously; "it is so cold, even in summer, on the top of an omnibus, and you are quite hot with looking after all that tiresome luggage. There is nothing so likely to give people chills as getting into open carriages while they are warm with exercise; it is a thing I never allow Lord Claverley to do in any circumstances."

"Thank you, Lady Claverley; but I am not susceptible to cold, I am glad to say."

"But you needn't be susceptible; anybody can catch cold from getting into an open carriage while they are hot—even the strongest person," argued the Countess, with bad grammar and good sense. She was so sorry for the summary treatment which George had just received at her daughter's hands, that she addressed him in the somewhat high-pitched and slow-toned voice which one usually uses in conversing with sick persons and young children. It was, on her part, an entirely unconscious display of sympathy with him.

But Despard was not to be appeased. "I am accustomed to driving in open conveyances in all conditions of the weather or of myself."

"Pray come in, pray come in," cried Lord Claverley; "there is plenty of room, my dear sir, plenty of room."

"I should prefer not to incommode you," persisted George, raising his hat and moving away; "if you will allow me, I will ride outside with the rest of the men-servants."

"Well, then, be sure to take a dose of ammoniated quinine the very minute you get indoors," Lady Claverley called after him; "if you don't, you're bound to catch the most fearful cold."

And so they started.

"Really, Kate," said the Earl testily, "you have made a most unfortunate mistake with regard to that young man; most unfortunate! I can see that he is deeply wounded and mortified—as, indeed, I should have been in his place. I can't imagine what you were thinking about to do such a thing!"

Kate laughed. "I was thinking about godmother MacBalloch's groom-of-the-chambers, who apparently has no existence outside of my own thoughts."

"It was a most unpardonable error: most unpardonable and most unladylike!"

At this moment one of the horses gave a loud snort.

"There," cried Lady Claverley, "there he is sneezing

already, poor young man! I knew he'd catch cold if he rode outside."

Kate laughed again. "It wasn't Mr. Despard: it was one of the horses."

Her mother took no notice of her remark. "I shall insist on his taking a dose of ammoniated quinine the very minute we get in." Then, turning to her maid, "Baker, is there a bottle of ammoniated quinine in my dressing-bag?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Then see that Mr. Despard has a dose the very minute we get in—before even the luggage is taken upstairs."

"Yes, my lady."

"One teaspoonful in a wineglass of water: you understand?"

"Quite so, my lady."

"And see that he drinks it every drop—doesn't leave anything at the bottom of the glass."

"Yes, my lady."

"He isn't likely to 'leave a kiss within the cup,' judging from his present behaviour," remarked Sapphira, who had watched the little drama with silent and scornful amusement. She was so used to being placed in a false position herself, and to finding the situation intolerable, that she was not without a certain unholy joy at the sight of poor George's discomfiture.

"And quite proper that he shouldn't," exclaimed her aunt; "for I know no more dangerous habit than kissing people who've got colds in their heads. It is a thing I highly disapprove of, as those running colds are always infectious. I make it a rule myself never to kiss anybody who has sneezed to my knowledge within the last twenty-four hours; as, of course, even if it isn't an ordinary cold, it may be measles. Young people can't be too careful about kissing, as they are even more susceptible than older ones."

All this time Lord Claverley had been looking at the receding view through the omnibus windows. "My dear, you are all so busy chattering, that you are missing the sight of this venerable and picturesque city, so full of interesting and historical associations. Let me beg of you, Henrietta, to turn your attention for a moment from what I may term the philosophy of the medicine-glass to subjects more worthy of your notice. Behold the ruined towers of one of the most ancient cathedrals in Scotland."

"Yes, love, very pretty."

"And the remains of the castle where so much of mediæval history was made."

"Yes, love. One tablespoonful in a wineglass of water: you're sure you understand, Baker?"

"Quite sure, my lady."

"Kate, my child," Lord Claverley went on, "it is

always well for the young to add visible illustrations to their stores of accumulating knowledge; therefore I wish you to note carefully the various landmarks of this quaint and historical town. There is the spire of the University church."

"I see, papa."

"And the University itself."

"I see." Here Kate turned to the faithful Tiffany. "Oh, look, Tiffany, that is the University of St. Columba's. I know you are always nuts on colleges and things like that."

Mrs. Tiffany bridled. "I confess, my lady, that cemeteries of learning have always been of interest to me ever since my dear Mastrennery went to college and caught cold from tumbling out of his boat into the river."

"And a very proper feeling, Tiffany; very proper indeed!" said the Earl, who always made a point of being gracious to his dependants—when he was not unduly irritated against them. "And may I ask, did the worthy son of your late employer graduate at Oxford or at Cambridge?"

"At Cambridge, your lordship; and a damper, wetter place I never did see."

"And he had a serious boating accident, you say? Dear me! How very unfortunate!"

"Yes, your lordship. He tumbled into a river called

the Camphor, or some such name—though if it was Camphor by name it wasn't by nature, for he caught as bad a cold as he ever had in his life. And that's saying a good deal, for they were no light matters weren't Mastrennery's colds. None of your little sniffing, sneezing affairs for Mastrennery; but a regular heavy cold on the chest, with complications and a steam-kettle." And here Tiffany fairly inflated herself with pride in Master Henry's manifold afflictions, as if she had been a herald proclaiming his style.

"Dear me, dear me, very sad—very sad indeed! And to what college was this unfortunate youth attached?"

"To Lock's College, my lord."

Lord Claverley looked puzzled. "Lock's, Lock's? I do not seem to remember the name, Tiffany."

"Begging your lordship's pardon, that's where Mastrennery was. I recall the name quite well, because I said to myself at the time that I wished to goodness he'd turn the lock once for all on such a damp, unhealthy spot, and never go near it again."

Kate began to laugh. "Wasn't it Caius College, Tiffy?"

"Well, my lady, perhaps it was. I shouldn't be surprised. But after all, what's the difference between locks and keys?—they mean the same thing. And now your ladyship mentions it, I do believe that was the

name; and that I said to myself I wished to goodness he'd turn the key once and for all on such a damp, unhealthy spot, and never go near the place again."

Here a motor-car dashed past the omnibus with a loud hiss, causing both horses to shy.

"Oh, dear!" cried Lady Claverley again; "there's that poor young man sneezing again. I knew he'd catch cold if he persisted in going outside."

"That wasn't a sneeze, aunt, it was a motor," explained Sapphira.

"And a most disgraceful motor too," added her uncle; "it is iniquitous—positively iniquitous—to go at such a rate! I cannot imagine how the local authorities can permit this illegal speed. It is dangerous both to life and property."

"Poor gee-gees!" said Kate, "they were frightened out of their wits."

"And almost out of their harness," added Sapphira; "a far more parlous state!"

"I think you might almost make it a teaspoonful and a half, Baker." It was the Countess who spoke.

"Yes, my lady."

To use a slightly mixed metaphor, motor-cars were among Lord Claverley's hardest-ridden hobby-horses; so now he pranced off at full speed. "They ought to be put down by Act of Parliament—by Act of Parliament, my love." He always appealed to his wife in moments

of strong feeling; it was one of the greatest compliments he paid her—a compliment all too rare in these days, when "to go your own way and to let your wife go hers" is the most approved method of easy journeying. The husbands and wives of a bygone day never dreamed of taking these separate paths, but travelled through life hand-in-hand; and these wayfaring men and women—though perhaps fools in some other respects—did not err therein.

"I cannot imagine what the world is coming to," Lord Claverley continued, "with all these horrible newfangled inventions; nothing is any longer our own, not even the high-road."

"No, love, it is quite shocking. I think we'll say a teaspoonful and a half."

"It is, Henrietta; it is a disgraceful state of things. The British aristocracy is an effete power—an extinct volcano—our day is over. The British public appropriates everything—even, as I said before, the high-roads."

"Unless it gave him a singing in the ears." This cryptic speech emanated from the Countess.

"Eh, eh, Henrietta? What did you say, my love? I didn't quite catch your point."

"I was only wondering if a teaspoonful and a half would be too strong a dose for that poor young man. What do you think, Baker?"

"Perhaps it would, my lady."

"Do you think so too, Tiffany?"

"Well, your ladyship, it is very dangerous to take too much of anything—especially strong drugs. I shall never forget how bad poor Mastrerbert was once after a champagne supper, because his mamma made him take a dose of effervescing magnesia the minute he came in, and he said she'd given him too strong a dose. He was quite sick and giddy and couldn't walk straight, and his poor head ached something awful all the next day. Missisopkins was quite in a way, as she'd never known anybody took in that way after effervescing magnesia before; but she supposed it was because she had given him half a teaspoonful more than usual. And, as she said herself, my lady, you can't be too careful in ministering those strong drugs to give the exact amount subscribed."

"I can't think why you bother about that tiresome man, mother," said Kate; "he is the most odious person I ever met."

"But I am so afraid he has caught a cold in his head."

"All the better if he has! For there's certainly nothing else in it; and nature abhors a vacuum," replied Kate the pert.

Meanwhile Despard was engaged in the discovery that the open-air treatment was not proving effective

in soothing his outraged dignity. As a matter of fact he was not sorry for this—on the contrary, he was rather disposed to hug his griefs and to cherish his wounded pride.

If at the station he had proved equal to the occasion and had behaved himself with becoming restraint, he had by no means forgiven Lady Kate for her mistake, if mistake it was. He was not altogether sure that the error was unintentional; it fitted in very well with the mischievous pranks of the spoiled child of six years ago, and with all he had heard of her doings in later years. He might have done her more justice had he not been smarting under the rude kindness of the warning he had received as to the difference in their relative positions. As a result, while the carriage rapidly covered the ground between St. Columba's and Ladyhall, he was engaged in brooding morosely over the scene at the station and in making up his mind that Lady Kate, if a very beautiful girl, was an impertinent minx; that her life had been too pleasant, and her triumphs too easily won. It would be well for her to learn that her charms were not irresistible; that men were not always to be trifled with. It was a branch of her education which, he concluded, had been sadly neglected; it was a branch which he proposed to take as his province. If he had his way, my Lady Kate should learn a thing or two. Yes, all things con-

sidered, Katharine Clare had not made a favourable impression on Mrs. MacBalloch's secretary. Of this fact no one was more conscious than Katharine Clare herself. At the station she had made one or two attempts at a reconciliation. But Despard's *amour propre* was sorely hurt, and he most resolutely declined all overtures for peace. At this Lady Kate began to take offence. If the man was a bear—why, he was a bear —and should be treated accordingly. If he chose to be huffy, she need have no scruples, and any penitence for her mistake was out of place. Nay, rather was it not her duty to drive the lesson home? Apparently he was a stuck-up young man who didn't know his place. In that case it behoved her to teach it him. Wherefore both these young people decided to embark on an educational enterprise which promised to be of some interest; and so far as Lady Katharine was concerned, she proposed to combine instruction to her pupil with amusement to herself.

CHAPTER VI.

ELECTRICITY IN THE AIR.

THERE was electricity in the air at Ladyhall—that sort of electricity which makes everybody ready to quarrel with anybody about anything or nothing, as the case may be. And electricity bored Lady Claverley to the verge of extinction.

She hated—with the implacable hatred of the easy-going and good-humoured—anything in the shape of friction. To her, peace was the chief end of existence, and ways of pleasantness the only paths worth pursuing. In her mind, good breeding and good temper were synonymous terms, and the climax of mortal sin what she called "flying into a passion." She herself never argued—never quarrelled—and therefore she had no sympathy nor patience with people who argued or quarrelled with her or with each other. The main object of her calm and well-ordered existence was, as she herself would put it, "to make everything pleasant for everybody," and if in this laudable endeavour she now and then put a shade too much gloss upon ugly facts and

unpopular opinions—well, there is no conditional trust, as far as we know, imposed upon the vast legacy bequeathed to the peacemakers. She liked all things to be cheerful and comfortable, and it was never her fault when they were not, but her most dire misfortune. Perhaps now and again the dear soul was slightly too prone to sacrifice the interests of truth to those of peace, a failing which—though incompatible with saintship—is by no means unendurable in married life. And, after all, more are called to matrimony than to martyrdom, "for which relief much thanks."

The Claverley party had only been a week at Lady-hall, and there were already signs of storm in the atmosphere; but, as Lady Claverley said pathetically to herself, "What could you expect from three bad tempers and two men?"

They were assembled in the central hall one wet morning, rain without and storms within; and as it was the third wet day in succession, there was some excuse perhaps for Lord Claverley now and then to drop into heated argument, and his daughter into sacred music.

"What a pity that it rains!" exclaimed Lady Claverley; "it is nearly always wet whenever I come to Scotland."

"Scotland's no worse than England, when you come to that," retorted her hostess. "I've never seen it rain in my life as I've seen it rain at Claverley."

Human nature never can bear the reproach of a damp climate. It is rare to meet with a man who does not confide in you sooner or later that his particular abode has the lowest rainfall in the British Isles.

Therefore the Earl spoke up. "Pardon me, Katharine, you are mistaken. The rainfall in Salopshire never exceeds, during the wettest season, twenty inches."

Here the Countess rushed in, on peace intent. "Still, Claverley, you must admit they are very full inches; it is dreadfully wet at Claverley sometimes. I wear out my umbrellas at a shocking rate."

"But, my dear Henrietta, I am giving you statistics no one can dispute. The rainfall at Claverley is——"

"Oh! never mind statistics, love; I never trouble about them. And besides, what are statistics compared with umbrellas?—I mean in a case of rain. I assure you a new umbrella only lasts me about three months; it all goes into little holes round the top—and by the top, of course, I mean the bottom."

"That, Henrietta, is because you persistently use your umbrella as a walking-stick, and wear it out against your dress; which proves my point. It is a closed umbrella that gets worn in the carrying—not an open one."

"Of course it is, Claverley; that explains why mine wear out so fast, and why they so often get bent or

something in the umbrella-stand so that I can't open them when it does begin to rain."

A man with a statistic is like a woman with a baby. The moment he sees it he cannot resist stroking it and petting it and dandling it up and down.

"Therefore, my lady, you perceive that your dear husband is right after all, and that the rainfall at Claverley is exceptionally low." The Earl was so pleased at being right that he grew absolutely playful.

"Of course you are, Claverley; and Katherine is right too; because if I didn't think it was going to rain, I shouldn't take an umbrella at all—not even one that won't open."

"I repeat, the midlands are the wettest part of the British Isles," said Mrs. MacBalloch. She never compromised after the fashion of her cousin-in-law. Possibly if she had, the late Sandy MacBalloch's life would have been longer, yet would not have seemed so long.

The Earl looked drearily out of the window and began to quote poetry—a sure sign of depressing weather.

> "O Caledonia stern and wild,
> Wet nurse for a poetic child!"

His wife gave a little scream. "My dear Claverley, that's not at all nice talk!"

"I was quoting, my love, merely quoting."

"Then I wish you wouldn't quote. I can't bear

quotations. They nearly always end in something which would have been better left unsaid."

"Excuse me, Claverley, you were misquoting—as you generally are." Mrs. MacBalloch was not going to mince matters—especially on such a dull morning as this. "The poet said 'meet'—not 'wet.'"

"The poet had no right to refer to such a subject at all," said Lady Claverley, with some sternness, "in any terms whatsoever. But that is the worst of poets; they never seem to know where to stop, or what not to say before young people."

"The poet was all right: it is Claverley that was in the wrong," persisted Mrs. MacBalloch.

The Earl felt nettled. He always prided himself upon an exhaustive knowledge of the poets. "But Caledonia *is* wet: very wet indeed. You must see that for yourself, Katharine."

"The poet did not think so—or he'd have said so."

"I think the poet quite forgot himself," said Lady Claverley severely, always ready to blame the absent if she could thereby conciliate present company.

"No, Henrietta; as I said before, the poet didn't forget himself—it was your husband who forgot the poet."

"But it *is* wet—extremely wet," persisted Lord Claverley, beginning to lose his temper. "Scotland is

acknowledged to be the most rainy portion of the kingdom."

"With the exception of the midlands. I've never seen such rain in my life as I've seen at Claverley."

Again her ladyship felt constrained to rush in between the combatants. "Places vary so much at different times; it just depends on what part of the year you are there, and what year it is. For my part, I don't mind what the weather is like if only there are plenty of nice people—just as at dinner it really doesn't matter what the food is like as long as the guests are agreeable. I remember the nicest party I ever went to was a little scratch affair at the Sandlands'—no *entrées,* but all so cheerful."

These contests bored Lady Claverley horribly; she could always keep her own temper with perfect ease, but when it came to keeping her husband's as well it was a different matter. "Don't argue, my love," she continued; "I can't bear arguments."

"Neither can I," added Mrs. MacBalloch; "even when I am convinced by an argument I never own that I am."

"And I often own that I am even when I'm not," said the Countess, "in order to stop it." She then rose from her chair, and proceeded to collect her knitting-apparatus. The secret of successful warfare lies in

diplomatic retreat; so she prepared to retreat diplomatically as soon as she possibly could.

Meanwhile the younger generation were quarrelling with equal bitterness on the other side of the hall—or rather, as Mrs. MacBalloch more correctly termed it, the house-place; and they had no peacemaker in their midst.

"I can't imagine why people ever come to Scotland," grumbled Lady Kate; "I'd as soon go to the bottom of the sea."

"It is quite as simple a journey, Lady Katharine," replied Despard; "the only difference is in the difficulty of the return."

Kate looked annoyed. This young man invariably tried to appear quite at ease in her august society; and this, so she flattered herself, he could not be.

"Some people think themselves very clever," she remarked airily.

"That is so; and it is a delusion not without its pleasures."

"I wish I could share it," Sapphira said.

"But you couldn't," replied George, with a charming smile; "because in your case, Miss Lestrange, it would not be a delusion."

One of George's many unpardonable sins in Kate's eyes was that he apparently preferred Sapphira to herself; and this, she felt, cast not only a slur upon her,

but also upon his own judgment and taste. No wonder she was well-nigh breaking out into oratorio whenever she was more than five minutes in his unappreciative society!

But Sapphira beamed. She also was quite conscious of the fact that George talked to her far more than he did to her cousin; but she was not yet old enough to have discovered that a man's eye rather than his tongue points out the way which his heart will probably take. When a man talks to one woman and looks at another, the former need not trouble herself to scintillate: for she may rest assured that her most brilliant remarks are irretrievably foredoomed to oblivion.

"I really can't see the good of being clever and witty and educated and nonsense of that kind," said Kate, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders; "for my part I don't see where the fun of the thing comes in, do you, Mr. Despard?" She was determined to make him talk to her, whether he liked it or not.

"It is impossible rightly to estimate a sensation until one has experienced it, Lady Katharine."

Kate looked at him sharply. Was he making fun of her or was he not? The doubt irritated her—and not unnaturally; but his handsome face showed nothing but the most polite indifference. Sacred opera was not far from her lips just then.

Sapphira glowed with satisfaction. Evidently George thought her far cleverer than Kate; which she undoubtedly was. "I am sure Mr. Despard agrees with me," she said, "that the possession of any gift ensures pleasure to its owner; which pleasure is quadrupled by the absence of this gift among the assets of his friends and neighbours."

George laughed. "I am afraid you are right; it is not in what we ourselves possess, but in what others lack, that life's true pleasure lies. The real joy of a red cord is not that we are lucky enough to be inside, but that others are raging furiously together outside; and if the others happen to be our friends and acquaintances, so much the better. I am afraid human nature is pretty bad, Miss Lestrange, taking it all round."

"But to know that one is bad is the next best thing to being good, isn't it?" asked Sapphira.

"That is a common and consolatory notion, but I don't see that to diagnose a disease is quite the same thing as to cure it."

"But the one leads to the other."

"That doesn't at all follow, Miss Lestrange; in fact, it's usually just the opposite where moral rather than physical ills are in question. As a rule, when people say, I know I am proud—or hot-tempered—or jealous—or any other similar thing, you are sure that they have

no intention of trying to cure that failing, but on the contrary are making quite a pet of it."

Kate began humming selections from *The Golden Legend* under her breath. She was out of this conversation, and she did not like being out of things. But the other two went on enjoying themselves undismayed.

"Isn't it funny," said Sapphira, "that people are so pleased to have some faults and so ashamed to have others?"

"Decidedly funny. People are positively proud of being proud, and seem to regard a hot temper as desirable a convenience as a hot plate at breakfast; but who ever heard of anyone's saying, I am so deceitful, or so selfish, or so stingy? Yet I don't know that one set of faults is any worse than the other."

"I suppose they are more unbecoming."

"Or rather that it is the fashion to think that they are more unbecoming—by no means the same thing."

"Then you think that becomingness is a matter of fashion?"

"Certainly, Miss Lestrange; because what we think becoming at one time we think unbecoming at another, and each generation has absolutely different views on the subject."

Kate could bear it no longer. She felt that some-

body must notice her or she should die. To some women attention and admiration are as necessary as air —they absolutely cannot live without them. "What dull, uninteresting talk!" she exclaimed. "I never heard such tiresome, long-winded rubbish in all my life! If you want to talk why can't you find something worth talking about, instead of harping on all those stupid old faults and failings and things?"

The smile died out of George's eyes, and all the expression with it. The face that he turned to the impertinent young lady who thus challenged him was devoid of everything save the coolest civility. "A thousand pardons, Lady Katharine, for inflicting my foolish remarks upon you for so long. Perhaps you will kindly choose a subject which shall be more worthy of your attention."

"Then if you were a woman would you rather be clever or good-looking?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Have you never thought?"

"Certainly not. I don't trouble myself about contingencies which are not in the least likely to arise."

Sapphira sat silent, an unamiable smile upon her lips. It was delightful to hear the redoubtable Kate taken down in this way. She longed to cheer the champion.

Kate made another attack. "But which do you like

best yourself, Mr. Despard—clever women or pretty women?"

"Can't say, I'm sure. You see, I'm not a good hand at generalising."

"But you must have an opinion?"

"No; I should say it depends entirely upon the individual case."

The beauty pouted. "I don't believe you know whether a woman is pretty or not."

"I know whether I think her pretty or not, and that is good enough for me."

"What sort of woman do you think pretty?" The impulse to flirt was rarely resistible to Kate. She loved the sport for its own sake, irrespective of the quarry.

"They are not measured by 'sorts.'"

"I mean what is your style? Do tell me! It would be so interesting to know, wouldn't it, Sapphira?"

But Sapphira knew better than to put her oar in. She was one of the few women who have learned the occasional possibility—and power—of silence.

"But why should my misplaced and feeble admiration be more interesting than my 'stupid old faults and failings,' Lady Katharine?"

"Because I say that it is."

"Pardon me for correcting you: but in this case I

know a good deal more about the matter than you do, and I can positively assure you that it isn't."

Kate's eye twinkled with mischief. "Let me be the judge."

"I fear that is impossible. The verdict is already given."

"But I adore to hear what sort of people other people admire. It always interests me immensely."

"I regret, then, your inevitable disappointment in this case."

"You mean you don't think I should like to hear what sort of things you admire in a woman?"

"I mean I am quite sure I shouldn't like to tell you."

"Because it would hurt my vanity?"

"I did not say so."

Kate laughed. "Never mind; the risk is mine, and I'll take it."

"Precisely. And the secret is mine, and I'll keep it."

"Anyhow, you needn't look so melancholy over it, Monsieur Despair."

"You should never be guided by appearances, Lady Katharine: I am certainly not feeling melancholy."

"I see: only bored."

"I wouldn't contradict a lady for worlds."

"Well," continued Kate, unabashed, "it is a pity

that you don't admire the sort of young lady that I am."

"Pardon me: I should rather say that it is a pity you are not the sort of young lady that I admire, Lady Katherine."

"Perhaps it is a good thing from your point of view that I'm not."

"I was considering the matter entirely from yours."

"Young people," cried Mrs. MacBalloch in her most strident tones, "we are all going to drive into St. Columba's. Go and get your things on."

Which they straightway did: proving again the truth of the statement that the secret of successful warfare is diplomatic retreat.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION.

It was after the Claverley party had been staying at Ladyhall for a little over a fortnight that the Countess approached her lord in the following humble and wifely fashion.

"It is a most remarkable thing, Claverley, but whenever I follow my own judgment in preference to yours, I always seem to make a mistake."

The Earl purred complacently. "Is that so, my love? Is that so indeed?"

Naturally the phenomenon was not so remarkable in his eyes as it was in her ladyship's.

"Yes, Claverley; and it is, as you say, a remarkably funny thing." She really thought he had said so. It is a strange trick of memory that we nearly always think that what we actually said to another person that other person said to us; and it sometimes becomes dangerous as well as strange, when we take to repeating the remarks.

"Well, Henrietta, may I inquire what modern in

stance has suddenly impressed upon your mind the wisdom of this most wise saw?"

"It's about Kate. It was a mistake for us to come up here with her, as you said it would be. You have such sound judgment in things of this kind."

"Yes, yes: I do remember saying something to that effect." He remembered nothing of the kind, having never uttered such a remark; but again memory played one of her tricks. And in this instance it is to be feared that Lady Claverley was not quite so ingenuous as she was in the former one, but took wicked advantage of memory's little joke.

"Yes, Claverley; if you remember, you said that Kate had better come here by herself; but I was obstinate, and persisted that we should all come with her; and so we did. And now, too late, I see how wise you were, and how much better it would have been had I followed your advice."

Lord Claverley remembered it all perfectly (although it had never happened), as his wife intended that he should.

"With your usual good sense," she went on, "you said that Kate would never get on with Katharine MacBalloch as long as we were here to hamper her; and also that Katharine would be far more likely to grow fond of Kate if we weren't on the ground. And it has

all come to pass exactly as you said. You must see for yourself how right you were."

The inspired prophet sighed with that mitigated sorrow which Jonah would have felt had Nineveh indeed been overthrown. "Yes, Henrietta, I cannot help seeing as you say, that my unfortunate prediction has come only too late." Until his wife suggested it, he had not a notion that anything but the most rapturous peace reigned between his daughter and her godmother: nevertheless he believed every word that he said. Such is the power of suggestion.

"Well, Claverley, of course, having realised my own mistake in not being implicitly guided by you, the next thing is to retrace my steps as far as I can, and to walk in yours."

"Certainly, my love, certainly."

"And, as you say, our best course is to go away from here as soon as possible, and to leave Kate and Sapphira at Ladyhall."

"Yes, yes, yes, that does appear to be the wiser—I might almost say the only—course now open to us."

"I quite agree with you. What a wonderful knowledge of human nature you have! I can't think where you picked it all up."

Lord Claverley purred louder than ever. "I have lived a long time, Henrietta, and have kept my eyes open—kept my eyes open, my love, and allowed

nothing, not even the smallest trifle, to escape my notice. That is how I have gained such a clear insight into men and their motives. It is no special gift, I take it; merely the experience of years." And the Earl shook his head with the gravity befitting the wisdom accumulated during decades of leisured ease; while the Countess put on an expression of conjugal reverence and admiration which was an artistic triumph.

"Well, it's very wonderful, wherever it comes from. I wish I had it. But, as I haven't, the best thing I can do is to be guided by yours."

"Quite so, my love; quite so."

"And therefore I shall lose no time in getting you and myself away from here. But the question is, where shall we go?"

"Precisely, Henrietta, that is the question—the only question to be considered at present. Where shall we go?"

"I agree with you that it must be somewhere in Scotland; so that when Kate's visit here is ended she and Sapphira may travel south with us. It would never do, as you say, for two young girls to travel all that way by themselves. You have such proper views as to what is correct for young people."

"Well, I maintain that it is the duty of older people —notably of parents—to see that the young are safely shielded and guarded; and especially in these days when

the daughters of the bourgeosie fly all over the country unchaperoned and undefended. Yes, Henrietta, I am strict on that point, I confess; I would never allow my daughter to go about alone, as do the daughters of the middle classes."

"And quite right, too. But now the question is, what is to become of us? As you have pointed out, two things are clear: it must be somewhere in Scotland; and it must be somewhere where we can stay for an indefinite time, as it would never do to shorten Kate's visit to her godmother."

"That is so, Henrietta; that is so."

"What do you say to going to the Greenhaughs'? They have taken a place in Scotland this year, and begged us to visit them."

The Earl started as if he had been shot. "My dear Henrietta, how could you think of such a thing? I despise and detest Sir Gregory Greenhaugh more than I can express. He is a Radical of the most advanced and dangerous type; and nothing would induce me so far to countenance his principles as to visit at his house. Really, my love, I am surprised at you! I should have thought you knew by now how much I dislike Greenhaugh."

She did—perfectly.

"Well, then, there are the Tattleburys; they've invited us scores of times."

"My dear Henrietta, people who make starch or soapsuds or something of that kind. No, love, I draw the line at tradespeople; I know what I owe to my order."

So did she, dear naughty lady! And—what was worse—used that knowledge to her own advantage.

"Then there's nobody left but old Lady Crosskeys. We shall have to go and stay with her."

"I would sooner go and shut myself up in a nunnery. I wonder at your suggesting such a thing, Henrietta, I do indeed. Why, the woman is no better than a Roman Catholic, with her prayers and her daily services and her Saints'-days! No, my dear, I know what I owe to my early training; I have never yet kept a Saints'-day, and I never will; and, what is more, I will never stay in houses where such Popish customs prevail. Never!"

"And you are quite right, Claverley. Poor dear mamma never approved of Saints'-days; she thought them idolatrous; and daily services, too. She used to say that if you heard two good sermons on a Sunday, it would take you all the week to act up to what you'd learnt in them; so that you'd have no time for such things as Saints'-days and daily services, and the like."

"Your mother was a wonderful woman—a wonderful

woman, my love. In questions of Church government I invariably and entirely agreed with her."

That was quite true. It was on questions concerning domestic government that the late Lady Dunbar and her son-in-law did not always see eye to eye.

"But the question remains," said Lady Claverley, "where are we to go? There doesn't seem anywhere, and yet we must go somewhere."

"Certainly, my love, certainly. We must go somewhere, as you say."

Then the Countess made the move for which she had so carefully—and so capably—paved the way. "I know that you will suggest going to Elnagar to stay with Dunbar for a bit. But Augusta is such a nuisance—she talks so much. I almost think Lady Crosskeys would be better than Augusta!"

"No no, Henrietta; you are letting your feelings run away with you. Garrulity may be bad, but Romanism is worse."

"Do you really think so?"

"Much worse, my love, much worse; and much more far-reaching in its influence."

"Of course, there's that," replied Lady Claverley, with the air of one requiring much persuasion and convincing; "when you stay with people who bore you, you

are bored, and that's the beginning and end of it; but when you stay with people who are revolutionary or common or ritualistic or terrible things of that kind, you seem to be supporting and encouraging them somehow in their dreadful ways. I hadn't thought of that till you suggested it, Claverley; but you have such a happy knack of taking a thing all round and seeing it from every side."

"That, again, is no special gift," replied Lord Claverley modestly; "it is but the result of the experience of life and of a knowledge of the world."

"Then you think we'd better go to the Dunbars'?" said her ladyship, apparently still doubtful. "It isn't what you care about, I know; but, as you say, it seems the only thing just now."

"That is so, my love; I have nothing else to suggest. As you have proved—and rightly so—all my suggestions beside this one are hardly feasible."

"That's the nuisance of it. I wish we could have found something more in your line; but at any rate, Elnagar is better than all those other places."

"Far better, Henrietta; incomparably better."

"And, after all, we mustn't think of ourselves and our pleasure; we must rather consider Kate and her interests."

"Of course we must, my love, by all means."

"That is like you, Claverley, always thinking of other people and never of yourself! And that reminds me: I have had a letter this morning from Augusta Dunbar, asking if we will go on there for a visit after we leave here."

"What a coincidence, Henrietta! What a remarkable coincidence—for an invitation to come for us to go to Elnagar, just when I had decided that to Elnagar we ought to go! It seems almost supernatural. But the law of coincidence is oftentimes very strange."

It is; but not always quite so strange as it appears.

Thus it was decided—as, indeed, Lady Claverley, dear soul! had always intended it should be—that Lady Kate's parents should go on to stay with Lady Kate's uncle and aunt; while that young lady herself, with Sapphira and Tiffany in attendance, should remain at Ladyhall in order to besiege—to the best of her ability—the respective hearts of Mrs. MacBalloch and George Despard.

Now it happened that fate—or whatever mischievous imp was acting as fate's understudy for the time being—decreed that the more Kate Clare fell out of love with George, the more Sapphira Lestrange fell in; so that by the time Kate had arrived at distinctly fierce hatred of that young man, Sapphira had travelled

equally far in the direction of warm affection. Nobody has much patience (and by nobody is meant no woman) with those women who give their love to the other sex unasked; and the feeling is a sound and healthy one on the whole, though perchance a little hard at times; but Sapphira had the excuse that—in a chivalrous anxiety to save her as much as possible from the countless little hurts and pricks dependent upon being a dependant—Despard was a great deal nicer to her than he had any knowledge or intention of being; and it was only after she had been in Scotland for a fortnight, and in love for ten days, that she made the disquieting discovery that love and kindness are by no means always synonymous. True, a clever young woman such as Miss Lestrange ought to have lighted upon this fact at least a week earlier than she did; but—like all women who are unaccustomed to men's attentions—she greatly exaggerated the lasting weight and importance of these transient if gratifying tributes; and—after the manner of her kind—foolishly imagined that a man loved her simply because he was civil: just as the more attractive half of womankind are prone foolishly to think that a man does not love them simply because he is rude.

But when she did at last arrive at the conclusion that George's kindness was not the expression of admiration, but distinctly the reverse, she lost no time in

vowing vengeance against the innocent cause of her shame: for she was far too clever a young woman to see anything exactly as it was, and she exaggerated the secretary's contempt for her quite as egregiously as she had ever exaggerated his liking. As was natural, being but a woman, she felt constrained to punish someone else because she herself had made a mistake, the severity of the other person's retribution being, of course, regulated by the enormity of her own error; and she found an accomplice ready to hand in her cousin Katharine, who was quite as angry with George for being cruel as Sapphira was with him for being kind.

"Did you ever know such a hateful creature in your life?" remarked Lady Kate to her cousin one day apropos of the handsome secretary.

"He is certainly not agreeable," said Sapphira; "or, at least, he does not think that you and I are worth being agreeable to."

Kate was still further ruffled by Sapphira's saying "you and I." Which of us has not experienced a similar irritation when friends, whom we regard as obviously our seniors, say "people of *our* age"—or when fools, whom for the nonce we are suffering gladly, remark, "Such things are quite out of *our* line?"

"Not agreeable?" cried Kate; "what a mild way of

putting it! I should say he was simply the most horrid, detestable, hideous, stupid, aggravating, tiresome creature that ever was invented. I never hated anybody in my life as I hate him."

"I shouldn't so much mind his being stupid if he only didn't think me stupid too," said Sapphira.

"And I shouldn't so much mind his being hideous if he'd only take the trouble to look and see whether I am hideous or not."

"He has vile manners," continued Sapphira; which was distinctly unfair, as he had been most polite to her as long as she would allow him. After all, to refrain from falling in love with a particular woman was not necessarily a breach of etiquette; though the particular woman will maintain to her dying day that it is.

"He has no manners at all," quoth Kate.

"I don't wonder at his being rude to me: I'm a nobody," said Sapphira, with doubtful taste, which she herself would have described as false pride. She never properly grasped the fact that good manners are subjective, not objective; she imagined that if a man was polite to her it was because she was a lady—not because he was a gentleman. It is by no means an uncommon mistake.

"I should like to punish the man for his horridness

to me, if only I knew how," cried Lady Kate, lashing herself to still further wrath by memories of George's indifference to her charms.

"I could tell you how."

"Oh! do, do. It would be lovely to make him suffer for having been so disagreeable. And, besides, I really feel I owe it to my sex that such insolent indifference as Mr. Despard's should not go unpunished."

To be indifferent to indifference is a purely masculine art; no woman worthy of the name has ever yet attained to it.

"But the bother is," Kate went on, "that it is so difficult to invent punishments for people who don't care for you: I mean punishments that hurt. And punishments that don't hurt are no better than umbrellas that won't open, or cash-boxes that won't shut. Mother's umbrellas and cash-boxes are always taken that way; and they really aren't much use in the long run, either as shelters or savings-banks."

"The best way to cure indifference is to turn it into something else."

"Of course it is, most wise Sapphira; the best way to cure indifference is to cure it. I could have told you that myself. Ask another."

"Don't be stupid, Kate. You know what I mean."

"It wasn't I who was stupid this time; it was you. I never heard you say anything more obvious; and I thought that clever people like you always prided themselves upon never saying the obvious thing."

"I may say it; but you don't seem to see it."

"That's because I'm not clever. I never see anything except what's under my nose. And my nose is such a nice small little darling, that you can't expect it to overshadow a very extensive view. Now if I'd got a great aquiline, Gothic thing, like Mr. Despard's, I should see what I should see; and that's more than he does, the wretch, for he never sees anything at all. Bah! I hate the very mention of him."

It is strange that when women hate the very mention of a man they usually mention him with some frequency.

"I know what I should do if I were you," said Sapphira, wishing with all her heart that she were indeed Kate.

"And what's that? Fire away. I'd do anything in my power, or out of it, to convince the creature that he isn't fit to black my sweet little patent-leather boots."

"I don't fancy he covets the office," replied Sapphira drily. Kate's frank vanity and open self-appreciation always irritated her to the verge of madness.

"Well, I wouldn't let him undertake it even if he wanted to," continued the unconscious offender, "unless he could do it better than the men here. I never saw such boot-blacking in my life; it almost reduces Tiffany to a state of coma when my boots come up from the lower depths, looking more like charcoal biscuits than anything else. She positively teems with suggestions as to what 'Missisopkins' would have said in such agonising circumstances. But you are wandering from the point, Sapphira. How am I to punish that odious young man?"

"By making him fall in love with you and then laughing at him."

Kate fairly gasped at the audacity of the suggestion. "Oh, Sapphira, what an idea!"

"It's a very good idea," said the inventor proudly.

"Yes; it isn't bad, I must admit: but it would give me a great deal of trouble, and I hate trouble and effort and perseverance, and worthy things like that."

"Oh! of course, if you don't resent Mr. Despard's obvious indifference to your beauty——"

"But I do resent it, Sapphira—I resent it most frightfully. And I think it so ignorant of him not to understand what a very charming young woman I am; but to treat me exactly the same as he would if I was at least forty, with a squint at that. I feel just like artists feel when people see no difference between the

Academy and the National Gallery. I regard him with sorrow as well as anger."

"Then think how triumphant you'd be if at last he laid his obdurate heart at your feet."

"It would be great fun; I can't deny that. Though I expect even then the creature's heart would be too hard to walk upon till there'd been a steam-roller over it as well."

"Then you could kick it out of your way."

"Oh! Sapphira, that would be worse than football, and football is worse than war. No; I shouldn't touch the thing at all; I should just politely say, 'Excuse me, sir, but I think you've dropped something, which—though worthless to anyone else—may still be of some use to you.' And then I should pass on with one of my sweetest smiles, and take no further notice of the affair."

"Well," asked Sapphira, after a short pause, "are you going to adopt my little suggestion? It would be worth some trouble to bring that young man to his marrow-bones after the way in which he has treated you."

"Yes," replied Kate slowly; "I think I shall. It would be worth some real hard work to succeed in humbling the insolent idiot at last. Yes; I shall take the trouble—though he isn't worth it. But *I* am."

Thus did these two scorned damsels decide to

humble in the dust the proud head of Mrs. MacBalloch's secretary.

But they had reckoned without their host—or, rather, their fellow-guest.

CHAPTER VIII.

KATHARINE AND PETRUCHIO.

"It is no go," sighed Lady Kate, "no go at all! All my efforts are useless; I can make nothing of him. He's more like a log of wood than a man."

Sapphira smiled pleasantly. The failures of our superiors are never without their compensations. "You don't go about it in the right way," she said.

"Yes I do: I go about it every way—the right, and the wrong, and the indifferent. But I can't induce the creature to take the slightest notice of me—much less to fall in love. I don't know what he is made of."

"The usual materials, I suppose."

"But he isn't made of the usual materials, Sapphira —that's just it. The usual materials always dance to my piping, and leave me to call the tune, but this man dances to his own tune, and it isn't one that I ever heard of. Oh dear, oh dear! what shall I do? I never was so insulted in all my life!"

"You don't manage him properly," repeated Sapphira.

"Because he won't be managed—that's the rub! I am gay and impertinent, and sweet, and pensive, and gentle, and imperious by turns; and yet he doesn't seem to see the slightest difference between Kate the angel and Kate the shrew. What can you do with such a man? Why, I don't think he'd see the difference between Cleopatra herself and a nursery-governess! He is thoroughly bad and cruel and hard and deceitful and selfish and horrid; that's what's the matter with him!"

"But you still want to punish him, Kate, don't you?"

"Of course I do—more than ever. First, I want to punish him for his rudeness to me; and, secondly, I want to punish him for not letting himself be punished before—like boys at school who have to write more lines because they haven't written any lines at all, don't you know?"

It was about a week after Lord and Lady Claverley's departure; and their beloved daughter was having anything but a good time. In the first place she and her godmother did not get on very well together. Mrs. MacBalloch was one of the numerous army of married women who think that there is no place in the scheme of creation for the old maid; therefore she urged it on Kate in and out of season that the duty of that young woman, as of all young women, was to marry, and to

marry soon—a doctrine which Lady Katharine disputed to the death; and, in the second place, Mr. Despard was more than ever resolute in his imperviousness towards her ladyship's charms and advances—which, likewise, tried her patience not a little.

"Well, I've got an idea," said Sapphira, who hated George quite as much as her cousin did, though how much that was it is not within the power of any chronicler to say.

"Out with it, then; you are always rather good at getting ideas, I admit. Now, I never got one in my life—an original one, I mean; I only get them second-hand from other people at a reduced price, and the consequence is, they are generally a size too large for me."

Sapphira looked very serious. "My idea is that we should get up some amateur theatricals, and make Mr. Despard act the part of your lover. Ten to one, when he is obliged to do it in play, he'll begin to do it in earnest."

Kate jumped up from her seat and flung her arms round Sapphira's neck. "Oh, you darling, you perfect darling, what an absolutely priceless idea! Of course, he'll fall in love with me after he has made love to me—like throwing puppies into the water to teach them to swim. You always learn to do things by having to do them; and besides—even if he doesn't—we shall still

have the fun of the theatricals; and I'm simply dying for a little fun and pleasure, for this place is as dull as a convent or a convict prison."

Kate was so delighted with her cousin's suggestion that she straightway flew to consult Mrs. MacBalloch as to the feasibility of the scheme; and that lady—who was always willing for young people to enjoy themselves as long as they did so in her way and not in their own—by a fortunate chance, was as much taken with the idea as her goddaughter had been, and fell in with the plan at once. In her younger days she had been very fond of theatricals, and very clever at them; so she was only too ready to revive an old pleasure, and to renew an almost forgotten interest.

The only sign of storm arose when it came to settling the play to be performed. Kate naturally wanted a modern piece; but Mrs. MacBalloch put down her small but weighty foot, and decreed that it should be Shakespeare or nothing. This would probably have led to a serious quarrel—and to the frustration of the plan—if Sapphira had not, contrary to her usual custom, devoted herself to the manufacture of peace. She was wise enough to see that it would be a Shakespeare play or no play at all, and she recognised the fact—even persuaded Kate to recognise it also—that half a loaf (this was how those two young women of the Philistines de-

scribed to each other the works of the great master) was better than no bread.

After much (and this time amicable) discussion, *The Taming of the Shrew* was the play fixed upon. It was decided that Kate should take the part of Katharine, George that of Petruchio, and Sapphira that of Bianca; while the minor parts were to be played by various young people in the neighbourhood. Invitations were sent out to all the countryside, and it was to be a very grand affair altogether, ending in a ball, followed by a supper. In short, Mrs. MacBalloch decided to do the thing handsomely.

Then followed a delightful three weeks of designing dresses and learning parts and having rehearsals: a time when people were knit together by united effort and common interest—when the air was full of quotations and ripe with jokes, and the jokes were of that most delectable sort which are only comprehensible to the initiated, and which are caviare of caviare to all not *au fait* with a particular piece and all the references therein.

It is a noteworthy fact that almost any speech is funny if only people make it often enough. Remarks such as, "It is really of no consequence," or, "Why, certainly," have not in their essence any special wit; yet when constant repetition has turned them into catch-words, they become positively side-splitting in their effect,

and the oftener they are repeated the funnier they are. None of us can explain why this is; yet we are all aware of it—and especially those of us who have ever taken part in amateur theatricals. And this is why the preparation of a play is so delightful to all concerned. We all want to be witty and amusing, and generally find the attainment beyond us; but what is easier than to repeat at intervals, "What, never?—well, hardly ever," or, "Just my sort"—and what, to those who are in the know, can be more screamingly funny?

As for George, he was still mounted at the very top of his highest horse; but he was young, though so untender, and had by no means outgrown his youthful delight in heart-easing mirth and all the other good things mentioned in *L'Allegro,* so that the laughter and jollity arising from the preparation of the play was as enjoyable to him as it was to Kate herself. Now and again, it must be admitted, he was sorely tempted to dismount from his steed, and dance along hand in hand with the bewitching Katharine, forgetting for the nonce that they two ought to hate—or at least ought not to love—each other, forgetting, in fact, everything, save the freemasonry of youth and health and high spirits; but then he would remember himself and his dignity and all the paraphernalia of his wounded prestige, and would sit more firmly than ever on his stately mount, communing with his own soul how he owed it to himself to keep

that most irritating young woman at a distance. Poor George! He was not yet old enough or wise enough to have learnt that what we owe to ourselves is a debt the payment whereof gives little satisfaction—and the receipt even less.

And as the days went on and rehearsal succeeded to rehearsal, George discovered that there were two Georges in the field, and one of the Georges had to confess to the other the melancholy fact that he was playing the traitor. In short, he could not act with Kate without being influenced by her charm. He was not in love, but he was beginning to recognise the fact that the young lady, whom his outraged feelings condemned him to detest, was not without a certain fatal fascination. He caught himself on several occasions gazing at her with undisguised admiration; there were times when, to his astonishment, he forgot to hug his wrongs and to cherish his natural resentment, when he was actually guilty of amicable feelings towards his "beauteous enemy," to quote Don Whiskerandos. Of course, on such occasions, the other George took the traitor roundly to task, recalled the slighting words, the careless negligences, and vowed that never, never would he pardon such wilful insults. But the fact remains that a kindlier feeling not infrequently possessed his heart, only to be expelled when a remembrance of his wrongs renewed his old resentment.

Mrs. MacBalloch was in fine form. She enjoyed the bustle and excitement of preparation, and she also considered that the contemplated entertainment would further the object that she had at heart, namely, the marriage of her goddaughter. She had already seen enough at the rehearsals to show her that Kate would act well and would look even better; therefore what more likely than that one of the numerous eldest sons on the list of the invited should take that opportunity of falling in love with Lady Katharine Clare?

With some lack of tact—wilful people being very rarely tactful—Mrs. MacBalloch mentioned to Kate her wishes upon this point, and Kate, unfortunately, did not take the suggestion in good part, she also being of an unadaptable pattern. Dark beauties, such as Lady Kate and her godmother, are not usually smooth-tongued; they are made of sterner stuff.

"I can't think why you are so keen on my getting married, Cousin Katharine," she expostulated; "I hate men."

"That don't signify. One will be enough for the purpose, and you could make an exception in his case. As for the rest, the more you hate them the better he'll be pleased."

"Then nothing will induce me to hate them."

"Very well. In that case the less you hate them the better they'll be pleased. It's all one to me."

"But I don't want to get married, and, what's more, I won't."

"Then you'll be a fool." It had never been Mrs. MacBalloch's custom to mince matters, either during her late husband's lifetime or since, and matters which are not minced are sometimes a little tough in the swallowing.

"I can't for the life of me see," Kate went on, "why people should always be in pairs, like stockings or grouse or candlesticks. Why can't a woman be unique and stand alone, as if she were an umbrella or a drinking-fountain or a table-centre? Some things are made singly—like nosebags; and some in pairs—like spectacles. I happen to be one of the nosebag, table-centre species, and have no need of another to match me."

"No, you aren't; no woman is. And when she does stand alone she is only an odd one belonging to a pair, the other having been mislaid."

"I know; like a drawing-room vase that is banished to a spare-room, because it can't remain in the drawing-room after its fellow is broken."

"Exactly; and it is dull for a vase in the spare-room. The drawing-room is its proper place."

"You don't know me, Cousin Katharine, and how unique I am, and how capable of standing as a centre

ornament all by myself on the drawing-room mantelpiece."

"Perhaps not," replied Mrs. MacBalloch drily, "but I know my world, and I know that there is no place there for a single woman without money. A rich woman can please herself, I admit; she will always have a position of her own, though even then she wants someone to look after her property for her; and a husband is on the whole less trouble and more credit than a land-agent. For my part I approve of husbands, and think no establishment complete without one. But for you, you simply cannot afford the luxury of remaining single, my dear Kate."

Kate flushed with anger. "Yes, I can—and will."

"No, you can't—neither could I when I was your age. Hence your late second-cousin-in-law."

"But I repeat, I can and will."

"And I repeat, you can't and shan't."

"Money isn't everything," argued Kate, with a toss of her head; "I have rank."

"Pshaw! An exploded fetish."

"Beauty, then."

"Pooh! A stock-in-trade that won't keep."

"A pretty wit of my own."

"Worse and worse. A distinct disadvantage."

"And no brains worth calling such."

"The only lasting good you have mentioned. There is plenty of room in the world for fools."

"Then I'll take my share of it," quoth Kate.

"And no one deserves it better, for you appear to me, my dear, to be a fool of the finest water."

Kate did not reply this time, but hummed a few bars of the *Sicilian Vespers*.

"And you will have a title of your own," her godmother went on, "which makes the matter much worse. A single woman is bad enough, but a single Countess is positively indecent."

Kate walked to the door, her head in the air. "Nothing will induce me to marry, so I tell you so once for all. I hate men, and I'm not going to have one always dangling from my *châtelaine* to please anybody."

"Tut, tut, my dear, you are endowed with the capacity of making any man supremely miserable. It is a pity that so much talent should be wasted."

Kate's only reply was a violent bang of the door, as she shut it behind her.

She went straight to her room, still boiling with rage, when she found the faithful Tiffany, into whose sympathetic ear she poured—as she had been wont to pour all the troubles of her childhood—the present enormities of Mrs. MacBalloch.

"That cruel woman has been telling me that I ought

to go and marry some disagreeable, selfish brute of a man; and I won't, I won't, I won't!"

"And I wouldn't, lovey, if I didn't want to," replied Tiffany, very much in the same tone she would have used had her young lady declined to take a dose of medicine or to learn a spelling lesson.

Kate flung herself down upon a sofa. "I hate men, and I've always hated them, and I always shall hate them. And where's the sense of marrying things that you hate?"

"None at all, my lady, none at all: I wouldn't go and marry a man for anything if I were you—not if I felt like that."

"I shan't. I shall never marry at all as long as I live."

"Oh! I wouldn't say that, lovey," cried Tiffany in tones of remonstrance, as if there were plenty of things besides men that Lady Kate could marry if she preferred.

"Yes, I shall and I shan't. I mean I *shall* say it, and I *shan't* marry."

"Well, your ladyship must just think it over and not be fussed about it, and do nothing in a hurry," said the handmaiden soothingly, "and be sure and wait for Mr. Right, and see when he comes that he's a nice personable gentleman."

Kate groaned. "I believe at the bottom of your heart you approve of marriage, Tiffy."

"Well, my lady, I do and I don't, as the saying is. If parties must marry, let them choose them as are companionable, and not be carried away by mere good looks and nonsense of that kind. I've no patience with those folks who marry to taste and repent at pleasure."

"I should repent immediately whoever I married. If he was an angel from heaven, I know I should soon get to hate him, I should be so tired of him."

"Not if he was Mr. Right, lovey; that makes all the difference. I remember Miscarry always said that nothing would ever induce her to marry a man who sang, because she had had so much music at home and was sick of it; yet when Mr. Right came (which, by the way, his name was Carpenter), he was at it from morning till night, and Miscarry accompanied him. Oh! you should just have heard him sing *With virtue clad* out of Haydn's *Cremation;* it was something beautiful!"

"That was all very well for Carry, but *I* couldn't marry a man simply because he sang and played the piano and did other parlour tricks."

"Of course not, my lady. But I daresay he'd do something else quite as nice."

"No, he wouldn't; he'd do everything that was horrid, and I should hate him."

"Never mind, my lady, never mind. Just wait pa-

tiently, and something nice'll turn up, don't you fear. But your ladyship mustn't be in a hurry."

"I'm not," replied Kate. Which was quite true.

"You see, my lady, a husband lasts a long time, so it ought to take a long time to select one. It's a great mistake to choose things in a hurry that wear for a long time. I shall never forget how Misemmie once bought a sponge in a hurry, and then when it came home she couldn't abear it, it was so much bigger when it was in the water than it had looked in the shop. And yet she had to make it do, because a sponge is too expensive a thing to throw away, and Missisopkins wouldn't have heard of such extravagance either, and it lasted for months and months, that sponge did, and wouldn't wear out."

Kate laughed. "Foolish Emmie!"

"She was that, my lady. And I said to her, 'Misemmie, let this be a lesson to you never to take a short time in choosing what you will take a long time in using.' And from that time to this she never did."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

THE evening, to which Kate had been looking forward with so much eager excitement, at length arrived. All was ready. The house was filled with guests, including Lord and Lady Claverley, who had returned from Elnagar for the occasion. The last rehearsal had been held; the stage manager had hurled his final objurgations at the players' devoted heads; the scene-painters were putting the finishing touches to the scenery; the dressmakers were busy with the alterations which every woman will recognise as being absolutely necessary in the ladies' costumes.

Despard, busily engaged in seeing after the final preparations for the reception of the guests, was a prey to mingled feelings. He felt tolerably secure with regard to his own part in the play. It is true he had a wholesome dread of stage-fright—even as the distinguished admiral, who, when asked how he felt when going into action, replied, "I was horribly afraid of being afraid." But as he had gone through the ordeal

of the dress rehearsal with complete success, he philosophically said to himself that he supposed that it would be all right in the end, and if he did break down, why he did, and there was an end on't. But he had another dread and a more potent: and this was how he was to play his part with Lady Kate, and yet keep his head. At the thought of her bewitching face, her haughtiness, her struggle for mastery, her complete submission, the hot blood went coursing through his veins, his heart beat wildly, and he wondered whether he could restrain himself from clasping her in his arms and swearing that the prettiest Kate in Christendom must be his.

"It's but for one night, thank Heaven!" he muttered to himself. "I must get through this evening. Confound the girl! Why should she have set her heart upon getting up this play, and turning my head with her charming and provoking ways? And yet how pretty she is! Of course, if I were to let her know how much I admire her, she would—teach me my place"—and he smiled grimly. "No, my Lady Kate," he went on, "you shan't have that satisfaction. It's only one more day: to-morrow you will find me—in my right mind."

Nevertheless George was to outward appearance calm enough; and issued his orders and superintended every detail with complete *sang-froid,* until he was able

to assure Mrs. MacBalloch that everything had been done that could be done, and that all was ready for the arrival of the guests. That excellent lady, however, was by no means to be satisfied by her secretary's assurance, though she might have learnt by now that when George Despard said a thing was so, it was so. Truth to tell, she was apparently in a state of nervous excitement; and even as Mr. Peter Magnus, on the eve of his proposal to the maiden lady of mature years, insisted on having the portmanteau, the bag, and the brown-paper parcel extracted from the boot of the Ipswich coach, in order that he might have ocular demonstration of their having been placed in that secure receptacle, so Mrs. MacBalloch insisted on personally inspecting such arrangements as could be seen, and cross-examining George on the orders issued to his numerous subordinates. He bore it with unexampled patience; and, having gone through the whole matter three several times, escaped to his own room, to snatch a hasty meal before donning his costume for the play.

As for Kate, she likewise was being dressed for her part, with her faithful henchwoman in attendance.

"I wish to goodness you'd chosen a prettier piece, my lady," grumbled the latter, "and with proper fashionable dresses instead of these outlandish garments

that Missisopkins wouldn't have worn even as dressing-gowns—at least, not when she went out visiting. She was always very particular about her best dressing-gowns was Missisopkins; and quite right too: for to my mind there's nothing makes a spare-room look so recherchy as a nice pale blue or pink flannel dressing-gown hanging up behind the door."

"I'm sorry you don't like our play, Tiffy," replied Kate meekly; "but, you see, it is Shakespeare who is responsible for it, not we."

"But you are encouraging him by acting in it, my lady; and I never did care for Shakespeare myself—never. He isn't my style, and it's no use pretending that he is. He writes such a lot of rubbish about nothing that nobody can understand, and wouldn't want to if they could. Look what a rigmarole that poor Lord Wolseley is always talking in *Henry the Eighth;* and as for that old Falsetooth in Henry the Something-else—why, I think he is positively low at times. I wonder how any gentleman could have demeaned himself by writing about such a person." And Tiffany pursed up her lips in disgust.

"You are very well up in Shakespeare apparently, in spite of your disapproval, Tiffy."

"I used sometimes to take the young gentlemen to see his plays in the holidays, because Missisopkins

wished it; but it was always against my judgment, and I told her so. I didn't see what good it did them to hear of the goings on of such people as Othello and Desde—somebody—or—other, or What's-his-name and Cleopatra. So different from the example set them by their dear papa and mamma!"

Kate politely stifled a laugh.

"For my part," Tiffany continued, "I can't think why you didn't choose a really nice play, such as *The Area Belle* or *Box and Cox*. Those are the sort of pieces that I like, and that it can't do nobody any harm to see."

"Well, but, Tiffy, it couldn't do anybody any harm to see *The Taming of the Shrew*."

Again Tiffany pursed up her lips. "I'm none so sure of that, my lady. What an example it sets to husbands. And suggests all sorts of troublesomeness to them, too, which they would never have thought of left to themselves."

"Yes; I'll admit that Petruchio doesn't set a very good example to husbands."

"By no manner of means. Your ladyship should just have seen the curate that Misemmie married; he'd never have contradicted his wife, or thrown the supper about, or done any of them outlandish tricks. Why, on

a Sunday night, when there was nothing but cold beef for supper, and that as tough as leather, you'd never hear a murmur from him. Now he *was* a gentleman, and no mistake; very different from that young man in the play."

"Nevertheless, it would be more fun to be married to Petruchio than to a curate, I should think."

"Law, my lammie, folks don't marry for fun!" expostulated Tiffany, as she heated the curling-tongs. And then both mistress and maid became absorbed in the intricacies of an Early Italian toilet.

An hour later the splendid ballroom was filled with a brilliant throng; the black coats of the men contrasted with the gay dresses of the ladies; and here and there the tartan of a Highlander (or of a Southron, who on the strength of a shooting desired above all things to be considered a Scotsman) added a touch of picturesqueness to the scene. As Mrs. MacBalloch surveyed her assembled guests, she noted with inward satisfaction the presence of two or three most eligible eldest sons; and shook her head over a good-looking detrimental making himself exceedingly agreeable to a handsome girl, the sparkle of whose jewels was only exceeded by that of her eyes, bright with the excitement of present naughtiness and coming pleasure. Mrs. MacBalloch determined that she would take very good care that

Captain Spencer should have little opportunity of trying the effect of his black moustache, his V.C., and his empty pocket on the irresponsible Lady Kate. No, Kate should make a brilliant match; on this point her domineering godmother was determined. And when Mrs. MacBallloch had made up her mind, it required an earthquake or a motor-car to move her. It was without a shadow of a doubt as to the result of her plans that she settled herself in her comfortable armchair in the centre of the front row, and prepared to enjoy the play. And very much did she enjoy it; nor were her guests behindhand in their delight and in their applause. It was a complete success; as arranged for this performance, while including everything essential to the plot, it was short enough to be entertaining without causing fatigue. It was played brilliantly and crisply by all; but the bright, particular stars of the evening were Lady Kate and George Despard.

Never had the future Countess of Claverley appeared so charming; whether as Kate the curst, quarrelling with her sister, or exchanging swift thrusts of barbed wit with Petruchio, or after her marriage mazed by her husband's violence, or finally as the submissive wife—all through she did not seem to be acting at all; she was Katharine to the life. And Despard was not to be outdone by her. Throwing aside the impassivity wherewith he had protected himself ever since the

mistake at the station, he fairly let himself go. He revelled in the task—unreal as it was—of bringing the haughty beauty to subjection. As with Kate, so with George—only to a far greater degree—it was not acting at all; for the time being he *was* Petruchio.

The curtain fell amid general applause and loud calls for the actors. Last of all, George led Lady Kate before the curtain, and as he did so he could hardly hear the cheers for the tumultuous beating of his heart. Kate curtseyed again and again to the audience; and when, with the prettiest grace imaginable, she turned and made a reverence to George, it was as much as he could do to refrain from taking her in his arms and kissing her before them all. Yet, though he contrived to control himself, though none knew what it cost him to beat down that strong heart of his, he knew what it all meant. Lady Kate had triumphed: all his resolution, all his pride, all his outraged vanity went by the board. He loved her: he loved her more than life itself. Love was stronger than pride. Love was stronger than revenge. Love was stronger than hate; for he acknowledged that he had hated her. Love was the crown of life. He felt a thrill of exultation as he confessed to himself his love, hopeless as he well knew it to be. What was life without love? Nay rather, could he be said to have lived at all, until that blest moment—that bitter moment? There did not seem to him any strange-

ness in the two feelings. Come what come might, love had entered into his life with its exquisite bliss, its excruciating torture.

And Lady Kate, what were her feelings? The spectators only saw a bewitchingly pretty, wilful girl bowing before a tall man who wore a conventional smile on his handsome face. But Lady Kate, with feminine intuition could see behind that conventional smile. She did not know all that was in Despard's heart, but she saw enough in his eyes to know that she had conquered. He loved her: yes, he loved her: and a thrill of triumph shot through her. His heart was hers, all hers, she saw, to do what she liked with. The disposition of that heart troubled her but little; a trifle like that might be postponed till to-morrow. Kate was living in the present. She had won the game, and the defeat of the enemy should be turned into a rout. The play was over, was it? To Kate the play was only at its beginning. There was the ball, there was the supper; and Lady Kate intended to make the most of her opportunity. Never again was she likely to have such another. Her foe was captured; before the evening was over he should acknowledge himself her slave.

It had been arranged that the dance should be held in the great hall, while the temporary theatre was cleared and prepared for the supper. The actors having agreed beforehand to wear their stage attire for the

rest of the evening, there was no delay. As he was conducting Kate to the ballroom, Despard, in a somewhat hesitating voice, begged for a dance.

"Nay, sir," said Kate, her eyes sparkling saucily, "it is not for you to beg; you forget—the shrew is tamed."

"Well?"

"So for this night it is for you to command. What is your will, sir, that you send for me?" And Kate made the prettiest little curtsey in the world.

Despard fell into the humour of the situation. "Why not?" he thought to himself. "I may as well have one night's happiness. To-morrow——" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"If you will have it so, Mistress Kate, my commands are these: you will dance the first dance with me. Then you will entertain our guests. But when the time comes I shall take you in to supper myself."

"That will be lovely," cried Kate, with delight. Then meekly dropping her eyes she repeated, "It is for you to command, and for me to obey."

They had now reached the ballroom, and were quickly surrounded by friends eager to offer their congratulations. Among them were the Earl and Countess.

"My child," quoth the Earl in touching accents, "you have fulfilled — nay, more than fulfilled — your father's fondest hopes. Those charming lines of the great bard on due wifely submission were never more nobly recited. And you, sir," turning to Despard with a courtly bow, "have worthily maintained the authority of a husband. Indeed, sir, your acting was—if a humble criticism may be permitted to a man of age and experience—your acting, I say, was perhaps a little too realistic. In the supper scene there was vividly brought to my imagination Charles upsetting the coal-scuttle—a habit, I regret to say, common to all footmen—or letting fall the vegetable-dishes. Do you not agree with me, my love?" turning to his wife.

"Yes, Claverley, of course you are right; it was just like Charles, only more so if possible," agreed the Countess. "But I cannot say, Kate, that I at all approve of such a waste of good food. I am sure Brown could never keep the weekly books down if your father were to throw the meat about in the way your husband did in the play."

At this word George glanced at Kate, who blushed and laughed gaily, though she clearly saw the passion in his look. At this moment Mrs. MacBalloch came up.

"Katharine, you acted capitally. And you, George, weren't at all bad. But the play is over, and we have

no time for empty compliments. Get your partners, young people, as soon as you can. Katharine, let me introduce you to the Master of Killeven." Then in a slightly lower tone: "He is to take you in to supper presently. George, go at once and tell the band to strike up."

Despard flushed hotly, and it must be admitted that Mrs. MacBalloch spoke as if she were giving an order to a recalcitrant page-boy.

"I beg your pardon, Cousin Katharine," said Lady Kate, "but I cannot have my husband ordered about in this way. Besides, Petruchio is engaged to me for the first dance."

"Engaged to you? Don't be absurd, Katharine. I never heard such nonsense. George, go at once."

"You will stay where you are, Mr. Despard," cried Lady Kate imperiously. Then she suddenly became meek and submissive. "I crave your pardon, my lord Petruchio; but 'twas your order that I should dance with you, and it is for me to give you such duty as the subject owes the prince."

Mrs. MacBalloch began to tap the floor with her foot. Her temper was fast rising, but she remembered in time her duties as hostess. She saw that Kate was in one of her maddest humours, and that any attempt to coerce her would only produce a violent scene; and

it would never do to risk a scene before eligible eldest sons. So with a strong effort she crushed her rising passion; and with an inward resolve to give my lady Kate the full benefit of her opinions on the morrow, she smoothed her brow and gracefully succumbed.

"Very well, my dear," she said; "have it as you choose. We will all be at Petruchio's orders to-night." She turned to Despard and went on: "Perhaps, sir, it will please your lordship for the dance to proceed."

George gravely bowed, and in a few minutes the floor was covered by a crowd of dancers. Meanwhile Mrs. MacBalloch was giving Lord and Lady Claverley the benefit of her opinion of modern young ladies in general and of their only daughter in particular.

"I cannot agree with you, I regret to say," said the Earl in his most dignified accents. "It seems to me only natural that young people should enjoy themselves. Kate is no doubt excited by the play; but, in my humble opinion, it is a most pleasing idea to carry on the comedy during the dance, and an appropriate and delicate compliment to Mr. Despard, who has played admirably to-night, and is, I am sure, a most excellent and worthy young man."

"Very excellent, very worthy," replied Mrs. MacBalloch drily; "but I am not so sure that you will be pleased to have him proposing to become your son-in-law."

The Earl was evidently nettled, and preparing to carry on the argument with some heat. But his wife, intent as usual on the blessings of peace, forestalled him.

"I am sure, Katharine," she interposed in her most soothing accents, "that Mr. Despard has much too well regulated a mind to make such a mistake as to his position, or to misinterpret Kate's behaviour to-night. But I *quite* agree with you that she has been indiscreet. It was very wise of you not to try and check her to-night; but to-morrow I will give her a little talking to."

"And so will I," quoth Mrs. MacBalloch grimly; and no one who saw her could imagine that she intended to err on the side of leniency in the proposed expostulation with her wilful young kinswoman.

Meanwhile the delinquent was enjoying herself immensely. Her high spirits were contagious, and Mrs. MacBalloch had at least the satisfaction of knowing that the evening was an immense success. With the exception of Sapphira, who looked on at the realisation of her scheme with an envious vexation, the only person there not entirely happy was George himself. True, to outward appearance he was the picture of cheerfulness. Handsome, clever, successful so far as the acting was concerned, he received compliments and congratula-

tions on all sides, and he met his triumph with modesty, yet with satisfaction. He was not one of those who pretend to care little for popularity. As a result he was pronounced on all sides as agreeable and pleasant as he was good-looking. Yet in his heart of hearts he was profoundly dissatisfied. He could not but feel how hollow was his success, how transient his triumph. Nevertheless, for this one night he would bask in Kate's smiles, even if to-morrow he was made the butt of her scorn. Careless of future misery or future insults, he would enjoy the present while it lasted. It was, then, with an elate air and a bright smile that he approached Kate to lead her in to supper. All through the meal Lady Kate was in the gayest mood. She showed a pretty deference to whatever George said. She was determined to lure him on until his love should overmaster his self-restraint. The surest way seemed to be to carry on the jest that they were still Katharine and Petruchio. But although she saw how deeply George was in her toils, and although he carried on the game with spirit and with skill, he still kept a firm grip of himself.

When supper was over, Lady Kate rose from the seat which she occupied next to Despard's at the head of the table, the place of honour having been allotted to these two chief performers in the evening's entertain-

ment. And a handsome couple they looked in their fancy dresses, the panelled walls serving as an admirable background to their quaint costumes; so handsome, in fact, that every eye was upon them, and every ear attentive to their pretty fooling.

"Husband, let's follow to see the end of this ado," quoted Kate from her recent part, preparing to lead the way back to the ballroom, and eliciting a fresh burst of applause from the rest of the company.

The temptation to continue the quotation was too strong for George; for the life of him he could not resist it. "First kiss me, wife, and we will," he replied in a voice thick with emotion.

The demon of coquetry lurked in Kate's eyes. "What, in the midst of the street?" she asked in mock consternation.

Her Petruchio was equal to the occasion. "What, art thou ashamed of me?" he demanded in equally effective tones.

Then the very devil of mischief entered into Lady Kate. With a touch of consummate art she suddenly transformed her coquetry into tenderness, her remonstrance into submission. With drooping eyelids and a pretty little gesture of surrender she turned toward Petruchio, softly murmuring the words of her Paduan namesake, "Nay, I will give thee a kiss; now, pray thee, love, stay."

It was too much for George. Her words, her gesture went to his head like wine. With a wild laugh he suddenly caught her to him, and kissed her passionately on the lips before them all.

There was a moment's silent amazement at the strange turn that things had taken; and then a fresh burst of applause at the savage realism of Despard's acting. This was even better than he had been upon the stage. As for Kate, she freed herself, furiously blushing, and with indignation flashing from her eyes.

"How dare you!" she cried; and rushed from the room.

George reeled like a drunken man; and then, sinking into his chair, dropped his head on his hands, muttering hoarsely, "What have I done? What have I done? I must have been mad!"

The Countess had followed Kate from the room, but the Earl, though much shocked, did not lose his accustomed urbanity. "The play is over," he said; "your act, my dear sir, was perhaps not unnatural—though carried a little too far—yes, a little too far."

"I beg your pardon," began George.

"Not a word more, my dear sir, not a word more," said the Earl, waving his hand as one who closed an unpleasant incident.

"The young minx has met her match," muttered Mrs. MacBalloch to herself. "I'll have a word with Master George to-morrow morning—but all the same, I'm glad he punished her, the little vixen!"

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

BUT a speedy change was destined to come o'er the spirit of the dream.

Next morning there was weeping and wailing and wringing of hands at Ladyhall; for the excitement of the preceding evening had proved too much for Mrs. MacBalloch, and she had quietly passed away in her sleep. She had faced death as she had faced life—alone and with a good courage; and when the maid came to call her as usual in the morning, she found her mistress lying dead with a smile upon her handsome face. At least the slim, tired body lay still and smiled: the indomitable spirit had gone forward into the next phase of continuous existence, where it could learn—unhampered by the many infirmities of the flesh—those lessons which it had failed to master during its sojourn upon earth.

True, Katharine MacBalloch had not been altogether idle during her time of probation in this world: she had learnt to meet life's troubles with courage, its trials

with wisdom — to manage her affairs with discretion, and to give willingly of her abundance, regarding her fortune as a trust rather than as a freehold possession; she had behaved herself with justice towards her equals and with generosity towards her dependants: she had never allowed beauty or sickness or wealth—three of the sorest temptations to selfishness that ever beset the sons and daughters of men—to render her indifferent to the claims of those about her, or careless of their interests. But she had still much to learn. And it is not in lessons of courage and discretion and generosity and justice, valuable though they be—but in learning to take the yoke upon them and to be meek and lowly in heart—that men and women at last find rest unto their souls.

Experience had taught Katharine MacBalloch much: but for the great final lessons, without the learning of which she could never be made perfect, she required another Teacher.

As was natural, there was regret as well as interest felt for Mrs. MacBalloch's death throughout all the country round Ladyhall. She had not been altogether popular; her tongue was too sharp for that: but she was a woman of strong personality; and it is people with strong personality that leave blanks behind them when they go away.

It is a strange gift, this thing that we call personality.

It is quite different from—though not opposed to—charm; and is equally indefinable: nor is it the same thing as intellect or ability. But it is the attribute which gives to some the knack of filling a room when they come into it, and of emptying it when they go out; of writing their names so indelibly upon everything they touch, that such things for ever after bear their sign-manual: and of so impressing their individuality upon all those with whom they are brought into contact that they can never be—even to the most slight acquaintance—quite as if they had never been. This subtle and far-reaching influence may be for good, and it may be for evil: but the world is slow to learn that evil is not more infectious than good. If we can catch a disease from certain persons, we can also catch health from others: if some companions exhaust and depress, others equally exalt and vivify. Therefore to be healthy-minded and healthy-bodied is a duty we owe to our neighbours quite as much as to ourselves: it is what we *are*, even more than what we *do*, that really helps or hinders those around us. Are we strong, vigorous, hopeful, joyous?—then we are disseminating strength and vigour, hope and joy wherever we go: but if on the contrary we are depressed and timid, anxious and morbid, then are we infecting the moral atmosphere with insidious germs of fear and misery, doubt and despair.

Mrs. MacBalloch, having her full share of this gift, was missed in all the countryside for miles round St. Columba's. People talked of her incessantly for the next few days, smoothing over her faults and exaggerating her virtues as they would never have done while she still lived. And then they turned from the contemplation of her character, and discussed with even more zest the possible disposition of her property.

On this point no one experienced more anxiety than did Lord Claverley: and no one awaited with more curiosity than that nobleman the reading of his cousin's Will. Had Mrs. MacBalloch left anything to Kate or had she not? That was the question that tormented the Earl's consciousness night and day. Had she so disposed of her wealth that Claverley Castle would be henceforth secured to the house of Clare: or had she left her husband's property back into her husband's family, thereby consigning her own kinsfolk to disaster and ruin, or her goddaughter to a loveless marriage?

Lady Claverley on this score was hardly less anxious than her husband. Though not romantic herself, she could not bear the idea of her daughter's contracting a union which would sacrifice happiness to pecuniary advantage; nor, on the other hand, could she contemplate with equanimity the notion of herself, her husband, and

her child being turned out of house and home, and wanting the absolute necessities of life.

Kate herself, too, was not without curiosity. She hated the idea of marriage—she equally hated the idea of leaving her dear old home; and it seemed so easy for Mrs. MacBalloch to have solved both these problems in a satisfactory manner, if only that lady had seen fit so to do.

Perhaps the person least concerned about the contents of the Will was George Despard. His late patroness had always made it clear to him that her kindness would end with her life—that she had no intention of leaving him anything but a small annuity sufficient to save him from absolute want should his health break down. For the rest, if he wanted money he must work for it, as her late husband had done; and if she had omitted to provide him with a way of making a similar fortune—or, indeed, any fortune at all—George was sufficiently just to own that this was quite as much his fault as hers. If he had insisted on adopting a profession and taking his career into his own hands, Mrs. MacBalloch—though she might have grumbled at the time—would most certainly have provided him with the means of so doing. But—with an overscrupulousness that was characteristic of the man—he had chosen to consider it his duty to devote himself to his benefactress as long as she lived, in consideration of the fact that

she had adopted and educated him from his birth, though under no obligation to do so; and he was by no means the sort of man to make a sacrifice which he thought himself bound to make, and then to grumble when the bill for the burnt-offering came in. That she did not appreciate his sacrifice had nothing to do with it; Despard was one of the men who do right for its own sake, and not for their own advantage or other people's; and, after all, the efficacy of a sacrifice is not measured by its returns, as is the value of an investment.

An old divine once preached a sermon, the text being, "Whoso giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." His sermon consisted of these words: "My friends, you have the means; you have heard the promise; if you are satisfied with the security, down with the dust." But though in this investment there are undoubtedly "safe profits," there are by no means "quick returns." And those men and women who expect their wave-offerings and burnt-sacrifices to bring in a satisfactory half-yearly balance-sheet, will be grievously disappointed.

On the morning after Mrs. MacBalloch's death George had a short interview with Lady Katharine. "I cannot ask your forgiveness," he said, and his face was as white as marble; "my offence was beyond all pardon, but I wish all the same to express my remorse

that I should so far have forgotten myself; and to tell you that the withdrawal of your friendship is nothing more than I richly deserve. I accept my punishment without a murmur—but not, believe me, without many a regret.

But Kate's mood had entirely changed; she was no longer the accomplished coquette or the offended queen of last night; she was merely a warm-hearted girl, still trembling with the shock of having come, for the first time in her life, within the Shadow of the Dark Valley. For the time being the Great Reality had put far from her all shams and all frivolities. What place was there for mirth and banter while the rustling of the wings of the Angel of Death was still quivering in the air? What room was there for anger or bitterness while the footfalls of the Great Reconciler were still resounding on the threshold?

"Oh, please don't be sorry," she cried, stretching out both her hands to George in childish entreaty; "please don't be unhappy about that. I feel just now that little things matter so little, while great things matter so much, that I couldn't bear to know that anybody was worrying and fretting about a little thing like that."

"Did you call it a little thing?" George's voice was thick with emotion. She was more lovable than ever in this new, childlike, spontaneous mood; yet he

could not altogether agree with her ideas of proportion.

"Of course it was—compared with what has happened since. I have never come near to Death before, you know; and everything seems little and unimportant beside that."

George thought to himself that there was one thing even stronger than Death. But she did not know it yet, and he dared not teach her.

"Then you forgive me?" was all he said.

"Yes, yes, of course I do; I feel that after what has happened I can never be angry, or silly, or frivolous again." So for the time being they became friends.

Mrs. MacBalloch was buried in the little churchyard which surrounds the fine old Norman church of Dunbrae. There in the shadow of that stately fane, which through nine centuries had testified to those things which are not seen but are eternal, they laid her to await, with a patience she had never learnt in life, the dawning from beyond the Eastern Sea of the Resurrection Morning.

At last it was all over; and the party returned to Ladyhall and assembled for the reading of the Will—that document which might mean so gloriously much or so cruelly little to sundry of those present.

And this is what they heard.

The late Mrs. MacBalloch left an income of five

hundred a year, chargeable on the estate, to her secretary, George Despard; and the remainder of her large property, both real and personal, she bequeathed to her goddaughter, the Lady Katharine Clare.

But on one condition, namely that Lady Katharine was either married at the time of the testator's death, or within six months of that date.

If six months after Mrs. MacBalloch's death Lady Kate were still single, she forfeited her right to inherit under the Will; and the property was then to be divided between George Despard and the next of kin to the late Sandy MacBalloch, one Ebenezer Pettigrew.

During such time as should elapse between the death of the testatrix and Lady Katharine's marriage (if the latter were not married at the time of Mrs. MacBalloch's demise), Despard was appointed to manage the estates as he had done heretofore, handing them over to Lady Katharine on the occasion of her marriage, should that take place within the appointed time. If, on the contrary, Lady Kate did not, or would not, marry, then Mrs. MacBalloch's Scotch estates, with their revenues of some twenty thousand a year, went to Ebenezer Pettigrew; and Mrs. MacBalloch's personalty, amounting to about half a million, was equally divided between him and George Despard.

Thus did the dead hand of her godmother press poor Lady Kate still further towards the goal which she

hated—the goal of marriage; and thus did Katharine MacBalloch still make her domineering spirit felt by those with whom she had had to do.

Lady Kate was frankly furious—and not unnaturally so. She felt that a ghastly trick had been played upon her—as, indeed, it had. What right had the living and the dead thus to conspire against her to force her into some marriage which she dreaded and disliked? Instead of helping her, as she had fondly hoped it would, to retain her beloved Claverley Castle without the hated expedient of marriage, her godmother's Will had made matters worse for her all round: it had increased tenfold the desirability and importance of the step from which she shrank, and it tended to hurry on the taking of that step to an alarming degree. Now she must not only marry, but she must marry at once, or else she must lose Claverley and all the things that made life delightful to her. Surely it was a sad and unwarrantable strait for any young woman to be placed in by a dead hand.

Like all wilful people, Mrs. MacBalloch had only seen one side of the question—and that was her own. She was so much impressed by the desirability of marriage in a woman's career that she did not allow for the fact that the married life, as much as the religious life, is a distinct vocation. Good wives—like inferior poets—are born, not made; and really typical old

maids are the same. Have we not, all in our time, come across married women, the mothers of large families, who are, nevertheless, old maids to their dying day—with their primness and prudery, and devotion to detail? And have we not also, over and over again, met with large-hearted, tender-natured women, whom all men admire and reverence, and all children cling to and love, and yet who by some strange accident of fate or fortune, or by some unaccountable freak of chance or choice, are destined to lead single lives? Wherefore it behoves us all to be careful ere we take it upon ourselves to play the part of our neighbours' Providence, or to swear ourselves in, for the time being, as special constables of Fate.

Lord Claverley's feelings were mingled. If on the one hand he was delighted at the idea of his daughter's inheriting so large a fortune, on the other he was mortally offended that she should be subjected to what he considered a degrading condition. Nevertheless, he argued with his usual inconsistency, Kate must marry sooner or later: her hereditary title demanded it; and it was worth while hurrying on an inevitable occurrence for the sake of estates bringing in twenty thousand a year, with half a million in addition to clear off the encumbrances of the Claverley property.

Lady Claverley, too, was divided in her mind, as was her lord and master. Naturally, she viewed the

defects of persons related to his side of the house with less leniency than the faults of those connected with her own: and she considered that Katharine MacBalloch was to blame in attaching such a condition to her bequest. But her daughter's eventual marriage was as much a foregone conclusion with her as with her husband: and now that Kate could please herself in the matter of choice, and was bound merely to marry a man, and not to marry money, her mother did not see that she had much to complain of. Mrs. MacBalloch had laid no restrictions whatever upon Kate's choice: as long as she married at all, it did not matter to her godmother whom; and with all the noble army of fascinating and ineligible suitors to choose from, surely Kate would be hard to please if she could not find one to her taste! Lady Claverley had been young herself once upon a time: so she knew, better than anyone could tell her, that though millionaires and eldest sons had their undoubted limitations, there were no bounds whatever set to the charms and fascinations of penniless subalterns and younger sons. One of the numerous daughters of the late impecunious Marquis of Dunbar could not allow her thoughts to wander into these dangerous and delightful preserves: "Poor dear mamma" saw to that. But Kate, lucky Kate, could afford to marry the very poorest of church mice or the very smartest of young soldiers if so it pleased her; and her

mother could not repress a faint sigh of envy as she thought of this. But the Countess speedily strangled the sigh in its earliest stage, and turned her wifely thoughts to a dutiful contemplation of how wise Claverley always was in forming his own judgment, and how kind in always following hers. Lady Claverley was a good woman and an excellent wife.

But the person who was most upset by Mrs. MacBalloch's Will was George Despard. The five hundred a year left unreservedly to himself was as much—nay, more—than he had ever expected, and more than fulfilled the statement of his patroness that she would leave him enough to keep him from the workhouse. But the possible inheritance! Two months ago he would have been profoundly indifferent. Money for its own sake was a matter of no moment to him: money that made marriage with Kate a reasonable possibility was quite another thing. But the chance of money which might come to him if Kate did not marry, while her marriage with any other would cause the dream of inheritance to vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision, made a veritable Tantalus of him. True, should Kate marry another—and he had no illusions on the question of her indifference to himself—why then he had little interest in the disposal of Mrs. MacBalloch's fortune. If only she had absolutely left him the share that was now contingently his, he could at least have wooed

Kate and put it to the test, and so won or lost it all. But the terms of the Will placed him in an invidious position with regard to the Claverleys. His influence with Mrs. MacBalloch was well known; and it seemed as if, smarting under the slight he had received at Lady Kate's hands, he had set—at least partially—her kinswoman against her, and had done so to his own advantage. The date of the Will—a fortnight after the Claverleys' arrival—would lend force to this conjecture. As he brooded over these things, George Despard grew very bitter. Life had been, if not easy for him hitherto, at least not unduly hard. Now, however, fate seemed intent on pressing heavily upon him. And then he thought of the time limit. Supposing after all Lady Kate did not marry within the six months. She had made no secret during the last few days of her kinswoman's anxiety for her marriage, and her resolve not to be forced into it. She was self-willed, Despard knew; she was quite capable of carrying out her resolve. In that case the money would go to the Pettigrews and himself—while the Claverleys, as he knew very well, would have to give up the castle. He could, of course, hand over his share to her; but no, that would not do. She was proud, too, and would accept no pecuniary benefit at his hands. He thought long and deeply. If she remained unmarried—— Suddenly an idea struck him, and a curious smile crossed his face. Yes, that

might do, he thought, with a look of triumph in his eyes. "My Lady Kate, you have had your day of success and pride and superciliousness. A time may come when fate will put it in my power to take a becoming revenge."

CHAPTER XI.

WAR TO THE KNIFE.

As was but natural—and unwise—George was very anxious to have an interview with Lady Katharine as soon as possible, in order to convince her, as he imagined, that he had been as ignorant and as innocent as she herself with regard to the contents of Mrs. MacBalloch's Will. During the day of the funeral he found no opportunity of seeing her alone; but the following morning fortune—or was it misfortune?—favoured him, and he came upon Lady Kate sitting disconsolately by herself in the tapestried drawing-room. Thereupon the misguided young man congratulated himself upon his luck, and straightway rushed upon his doom.

"I am very glad to find you alone, Lady Kate," he began, "as there is something that I must say to you, and say to you at once."

Lady Kate drew herself up and looked at him defiantly. "My name is Katharine," was all she said.

George started. Was this the wayward and im-

pulsive creature whom he had held to his heart only a few short days ago, and who had played the part of his wife so charmingly during the comedy and at the supper afterwards? Was this the girl whom under an uncontrollable impulse he had offended apparently past forgiveness; and who had yet so nobly and so sweetly granted him her forgiveness when he had confessed his sin? It seemed incredible that the same woman could be so scornfully proud and so bewitchingly humble. But he was too much in earnest to be baulked by a girl's contempt; so he went on: "I want to lose no time in telling you, Lady Katharine, that I consider Mrs. MacBalloch's Will iniquitous."

"Indeed," remarked Kate ironically.

"Of course I do; you can't imagine that I approve of it?"

"I am afraid you underrate my powers of imagination, Mr. Despard."

"What do you mean?"

"My meaning, I should say, is clear enough. The date of the Will shows the hand you had in the matter."

"The date?"

"Yes—a fortnight after we arrived here. I see it all. You were offended at the mistake I made at the station, and this is your revenge."

George gasped. "You don't mean to say—you can't mean that you think *I* had a hand in this Will."

Kate shrugged her shoulders.

"Why deny it? The whole thing is too obvious. I can only congratulate you on your skill—and on your moderation. It was a master-stroke putting in a condition you knew I would not fulfil, and so securing the money."

"You dare to make such an accusation against *me?*" said George haughtily. "You will apologise to me at once for the insult."

"You are acting extremely well," said Kate, with an irritating smile. "Let me again congratulate you—you have made excellent use of the rehearsals."

"Listen to me," he began; and most women would have been afraid of the tone of his voice, it was so ominously quiet. But Kate did not know what fear was. "I swear to you by all I hold sacred that I was as ignorant as a babe of the contents of that Will; and that I would have cut off my right hand sooner than have allowed it to be drawn up, could I have prevented it."

"'Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise.' You are to be congratulated, Mr. Despard, on the lack of knowledge which has redounded so abundantly to your advantage without in the least interfering with the exquisite balance of your conscience. If knowing

of Mrs. MacBalloch's excellent intentions would have compelled you to frustrate them to your own disadvantage, how fortunate for you that the dear lady kept you in the dark!"

This was intolerable. Nevertheless George put a strong restraint upon himself, and went on: "I give you my word—and whether you accept it or not is your affair, not mine—that had I known of this abominable intention I would have done everything in my power to prevent its fulfilment. But I did not know."

"So you say." And Kate's smile was by no means a pleasant one.

Then George's rage boiled over. "Do you think me a thief and a liar?"

"I wasn't thinking about you at all. The honesty of the various members of my late godmother's household is a matter of no moment to me."

"Do you mean to say you believe that I used my influence—if I had any—over Mrs. MacBalloch, in order to get a Will made in my interest and against yours?"

"A man is a fool who doesn't look after his own interests, Mr. Despard, and I should be sorry to think you a fool."

Again George controlled himself and spoke quietly. "Then let that be; we will pass on to the next thing I have to say to you."

"By all means; for the time I have to place at your disposal is not unlimited." And Kate glanced at the watch she wore upon her wrist.

The insolence of the action almost maddened George; nevertheless he still held himself together. "You will understand, Lady Katharine, that the bare idea of being benefited myself by your loss of the property is intolerable to me."

"Pardon me, I understand nothing of the kind. I should have thought any man would have been thankful for a fortune—by whatever means it happened to be obtained."

"Heaven knows I should be thankful for a fortune. You do not know what it would mean to me! But not obtained in such a way. You do me an injustice—a base and cruel injustice."

"Possibly. But I confess I have hitherto seen nothing in your behaviour to give the impression that you are such a perfect Bayard up to date."

George laughed bitterly. "I am no Bayard, Heaven knows! But I am a man, and it would be intolerable to any man to become enriched at the expense of a woman."

"Indeed. You are fortunate, Mr. Despard, both in your experience of men in general and in your opinion of yourself in particular. You certainly live in a most charming and delightful paradise—of fools."

Once more Despard strode up and down the room in his rage, and once more he pulled himself together and tried to speak calmly, Kate looking at him meanwhile with that disdainful smile still upon her lips. "It is no good wasting any more words, Lady Katharine."

"Not the slightest."

"It is useless, I see, for me to try and convince you that I am not to blame for the indignity that has been put upon you."

"It has taken you a long time to perceive the obvious, Mr. Despard."

"Then I will come to the point at once," said George roughly. "What I want to know is whether you will fulfil Mrs. MacBalloch's conditions, and secure for yourself the property by marrying me?"

Then it was Kate's turn to spring to her feet, her eyes blazing. "I see your little game. You make this impertinent, this unheard-of proposal, because you think that in this way you will do considerably better for yourself than you have done already."

"No," thundered George. "I make it because I love you."

"You want the whole of the property instead of only a portion."

"I don't: I want you."

Kate stamped her foot. "I wonder how you dare," she cried.

"Easily enough," the man answered, with a harsh laugh; "I may not be a gentleman, but I am not a coward. I love you, Lady Katharine, and I am neither ashamed of loving you nor afraid of telling you so."

"It is an insult."

George seized both her hands in his with a fierce grasp, and tall as she was, he towered above her. "Before Heaven you lie, Lady Kate! The love of an honest man is no insult to any woman."

"It is an insult for you to presume to tell me that you love me."

"I don't care. I love you, I love you, I love you!"

"You love my property, you mean—the Ladyhall estate."

"Not I! I love *you;* I love your hair and your eyes and your mouth and your voice and even your temper. I worship you so that I could kiss your dear feet. I love you, Kate; do you hear, I love you? I love you as I love the hope of heaven."

"And I hate you as I hate the fear of hell."

George drew his breath hard, yet he still held her hands in his iron grasp. "Then if my love is an insult, why did you stoop to win it? Surely if it is the

low thing that you make out, it was unfit to be even the plaything of so fine a lady."

"How dare you say such things?" cried the girl, trying in vain to take away her hands from him. "I never stooped to win the love of such a man as you!"

"You did; and you know that you did. Do you think I hadn't the wit to see how you laid yourself out to bewitch me and to compel my love? I saw through you, my lady; saw completely all your little tricks. It offended your vanity that even such a contemptible worm as myself—your godmother's hired servant—should be able to withstand your charms; so you deliberately set about to conquer me. And I—poor fool that I was!—was clever enough to see through your wiles, and yet not strong enough to resist them. So you succeeded, Lady Katharine, in your admirable, your womanly effort to take a man's heart by force in order that you might break it. I congratulate you on the success of so praiseworthy an attempt. Your egregious vanity once more is justified!"

Kate stood silent and motionless, as if spell-bound by the impassioned torrent of his words.

"And now, forsooth," he went on, "you consider your white hands befouled by touching the very thing that you stooped to pick up. You have no one but yourself to thank! If you had let me alone, I should

have been only too thankful to let you alone. I can assure you it was no delight to me, but absolute torture, to see myself chained to the other poor fools who adorn your chariot wheels. I despised myself for having been compelled against my will to love you, even while I was loving you as my own soul."

Then at last Lady Kate found words. "And I conclude you despise yourself even more now."

"Not I!" And George trembled with the intensity of his passion. "Now I despise you."

Kate's eyes blazed like stars. "Me? You dare to despise me?"

"With all my heart. The woman who deliberately plays with a man's love deserves nothing less than all men's scorn."

"I will never forgive you as long as I live."

"I don't ask you to forgive me; I ask you to marry me."

"I would sooner die than marry you. Do you think that I am the sort of woman who would marry for the sake of money a man whom she detests? You judge me by yourself, I see, Mr. Despard."

George loosed his grip of her hand so suddenly that she almost fell backwards. "Do you really mean that?"

"I do: every word of it."

The passion died out of Despard's face and voice,

and a deep sadness took its place. "Do you mean that it was all play, Kate—that there was no grain of love for me hidden among the chaff of your amusement and sport? I sometimes thought that there must be, or else you couldn't have played the part so well."

Kate laughed. "Then you were mistaken. It was your vanity—not mine—that played you false this time."

Still George pleaded. "Oh, Kate, Kate, have pity on me! If there was the least spark of love for me in your heart, I would fan it and shield it till it grew into a flame. My darling, I will make you love me, if only you will let me try."

"You flatter yourself, Mr. Despard."

"Did you never love me at all, not even for a passing moment? Oh, Kate, Kate, tell me that you are not the heartless coquette you have pretended to be."

"*I* don't tell lies to suit my own purpose."

George swallowed the insult and pleaded once more.

"Then did you never love me?"

"Never. I hated you and despised you from the moment I met you at the station, and I shall hate and despise you as long as I live."

"Is this your last word?"

"It is."

"Then is it to be war between us and not love?"

"Yes, war to the knife."

"Then that is all I have to say. Go your own way, Lady Katharine, and I will go mine. And may God forgive you for having broken an honest man's heart, and laid his life waste, and turned all its sweetness into gall."

And with that he turned on his heel and went out of the room, leaving Katharine alone with her triumph.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

Lady Kate was left alone with her triumph. Yet as she sat in the tapestried drawing-room and communed with herself on the stormy interview, the fruits of her victory did not appear very substantial. They had seemed fair enough in the first flush of success; but now, as she set herself to enjoy them, they began most unaccountably to crumble into dust. True, she had humbled the officious and offending secretary; true, he had declared himself to be her devoted slave, only to be spurned by her pretty feet. But, after all, what a poor triumph it was! and how paltry were the means by which it had been attained! As she recalled the injurious words she had used, the insinuations she had not scrupled to make, Kate blushed for herself. Of course, she had never meant the things she had said, as she very well knew as they came back to her memory—though they had come naturally enough from her tongue in her rage and disappointment. Womanlike, she had not only said more than she had any idea of saying

until carried out of herself by the excitement of the moment, but, womanlike, she was all the more angry with him because she had been unjust. She was filled with remorse so far as she herself was concerned, but not with penitence as regards the man. The desire to humble herself and to make amends might possibly come, but the time for this was not yet. She had to find an excuse for herself—and the only way to do so was to find further cause for blame in him. And this she did easily enough. He should never have come worrying her at such a time; he might have known that she could not stand nonsense just now; and what did it matter what his attitude with regard to the Will was? The man was utterly self-centred; who troubled about his thoughts or opinions?

And then Kate remembered, with a touch of gratification which was balm to her wounded soul, that she had conquered after all. Her adversary, however brutal, however undeserving, however indifferent he had seemed, was still human. He had felt her power; he had succumbed to her attractions. Kate, young as she was, was not likely to make any mistake on an important point like this. He loved her—and she knew it, in spite of her accusation of self-interest in his declaration.

But my Lady Kate's troubles were not yet over. Just as she had begun to find solace in the comfortable

glow of gratified vanity, and to quiet her conscience by the easy method of dismissing unpleasant pricks with the reflection that she would make it all right with that disagreeable secretary some day or other, the door opened, and her father came in with stately stride. Marching solemnly across the room, he slowly sank into the easiest chair he could find, and gravely shaking his head, gazed at his daughter with melancholy and tender interest.

"Well, papa, what is the matter?" exclaimed Kate somewhat impatiently. She had a presentiment that the Earl was on the warpath so far as her peace of mind was concerned.

"My child," quoth he in tragic accents, "I am distressed beyond measure at this incredible, this unexampled, this iniquitous Will to which your cousin Katharine has subscribed her name."

"You can't be more aggravated than I am, if that is what you mean."

"That is not at all what I mean, my child. And you will allow me to point out that aggravation is not the feeling with which a testamentary document should inspire you. It is pity, not anger, it is sorrow, not resentment, that fills my heart as I think of my lamented cousin."

"I hope she's having a warm time of it, wherever she is," muttered Kate vindictively.

Fortunately the Earl did not catch this remark, or he would have administered to the culprit a well-deserved if long-winded rebuke. As it was, he sat silent for a minute; then he burst out desperately—

"Kate, my child, something must be done."

"I quite agree with you, papa; but it's not so easy to see what that something is. We can't, I suppose, make out that Cousin Katharine was cranky, and not fit to sign a will?"

The Earl shook his head hopelessly.

"Out of the question, my love, out of the question. Such a disposition of the property, or rather such a condition attached to the disposition of the property, would certainly suggest a doubt as to the sanity of the testatrix, but not such a doubt as the Court could possibly entertain."

"Then that is because the Court is composed of men," said Kate. "Any woman would see with half an eye that Cousin Katharine must have been out of her senses to make such a will. But that's the way with judges; you never get justice from them!"

"That may be, my love, that may well be!" said the Earl suavely; "there is, I believe, excellent authority for the classic statement that 'the law is a ass.'"

"That's a very sensible remark of yours, papa," cried Lady Kate admiringly. She was not a competition wallah, and fondly imagined that the epigram was

spontaneous. "But if the law won't help us, what can be done?"

"There is only one course open," pronounced the Earl solemnly. "As I said at Claverley three months ago, you must marry." The Earl uttered these authoritative words in his deepest accents, so as to lend all pomp and dignity to the parental dictum.

"I can't, and I won't," replied the girl mutinously.

"Yes, my love, you will," said her father persuasively; "it is only a little thing after all. I assure you that many girls have married before this, and have found the holy estate quite tolerable. It is, indeed, a common course of action. I have frequently come across such cases."

"I hate men," burst out Kate; "they are stupid and selfish and obstinate; they only care for themselves and their dinner and their sports. I hate the sight of them. And I won't marry one. So there!"

"You forget, my child, that the case is somewhat different from what it was when we discussed it at Claverley. *Then* the question was one of marrying money, and I admit that, desirable as such a course seemed, and bound as I felt to commend it to you, I had no small sympathy with you in your repugnance to what might not unjustly be regarded as a sordid act. But now all you have to do is to marry someone or other; the person is quite a secondary matter. He may

be a belted earl, or what is, I believe, familiarly known as a detrimental. Should a handsome young fellow—of good birth, of course, yet with a scanty purse—attract your fancy, no monetary question need arise. You can pick and choose, my love, you can pick and choose!"

This was a new light on the subject, and Kate visibly softened.

"You seem very anxious to get rid of me, papa," she said.

"Nay, my child, you do me injustice. How can I look forward with satisfaction to the prospect of being deprived of the companionship of one who is the light of my eye, the joy of my life? It is only because it is for your good, and for the preservation for you of your ancestral home, that I can steel myself to the loss which your marriage would entail."

And the Earl drew forth a large silk pocket-handkerchief, wherewith to conceal his emotion.

"In that case, papa, if you can't bear the thought of parting with me, why not keep me with you always?" Then flinging herself in her father's arms, she cried, "Oh, papa, I don't want to marry. Keep me with you always, papa, always!"

At this appeal the Earl's emotion became genuine. He kissed his daughter fondly, and tried to comfort her.

"It is because it is for your future good, my love.

I don't ask you to marry anyone you don't love. You have still six months, and surely in that time you, with your beauty and charm, will meet with someone worthy of you; one with whom you can be happy. If not, I will urge you no further, but the old house will be gone —will be gone!"

"Papa, I will try, I really will; but do not hurry me."

"Certainly not. You shall have as much time as you like. But still you will remember, you *must* marry within six months. Come, my love, sit down with me here, and let us talk it over. Suppose you go to stay at Elnager. Your mother shall write to your Aunt Dunbar. I know they are having a series of house-parties, and you will meet many young men, suitable for the purpose. Now if you will only promise me that you will not begin with a prejudice against everyone, I am sure you will charm some nice young fellow, and live with him happily ever after."

Kate sighed deeply. "If it must be so, it must. Yes, papa, I'll do my best. But I'd far rather stay at home with you and mother."

With this the Earl had to be content.

A few days later Lady Kate departed for Elnagar, under the escort of Sapphira and the discreet Tiffany. After seeing their daughter off, with many prayers uttered and unuttered that she might find a husband and

thus secure a fortune for herself and save the family home from the desecration of an alien and possibly plebeian occupation, the Earl and Countess returned to Claverley Castle to face the alarums and excursions of the "faithful Charles," and the incursion of the rain, despite Mrs. Brown's heroic exertions with the baths, as best they might.

Ladyhall, so lately the scene of brightness and festivity, crowded with a brilliant throng of gay revellers, was thus left deserted, and George Despard found himself alone. How desperately alone he was, none knew but himself. How bitterly sore at heart, how grimly at war with the world at large and Lady Kate in particular, how doggedly resolved that come what may *he* would not benefit to the disadvantage of the woman he loved and who spurned him, he hardly himself knew. Still, he could have given some interesting details on these points. But he was dimly conscious of a dull pain at his heart, and went about his duties with an apathy which was strangely inconsistent with his usual cheerful energy. In time the numbness passed away, and he began to feel the biting agony of his wounds. Then he set his teeth, and vowed to himself he would tear from his heart all memory of the woman who had bewitched him. But all the time he knew that he was a fool to think that possible. Then he would ponder, as he rode round the estate, over the future. Kate

would be sure to marry, so he said to himself; she would hardly keep the determination she had hastily expressed when he last saw her, and sacrifice her future to a whim. She could scarcely be so unwise, from a worldly point of view, as that. No; some handsome fortune-hunter would turn up and contrive to please her wilful fancy. He was a fool to imagine that the Will would have any other effect than that contemplated by the imperious testatrix. But if it should not be so? If, after six months, Lady Kate still kept to her determination to remain single? Why, then—why, then—the next of kin should not have the estate! There was still a weapon in his armoury of which Lady Kate little knew, and despite all her obstinacy, she should enter into her inheritance. At least so George Despard promised himself, with a bitter smile upon his handsome face.

Meanwhile Kate herself was having what is known as a real good time (falsely so called) at Elnagar, little dreaming of what was passing in Despard's mind—indeed, never giving a thought more than she could help to that melancholy young man. The remembrance of him and his misdeeds was too little to her taste to be indulged in with unnecessary frequency, and only led to an increased feeling of bitter resentment. Her aunt received her with open arms. The Marchioness had been duly informed by her sister-in-law of the terms

of the Will, and of the hopes entertained that Kate might find among the guests at Elnagar one who would enable her to fulfil the requisite condition. The Countess had implored her aid in this matter, and had carefully coached her in the way whereby Kate's foolish obstinacy might be overcome. Lady Dunbar had formed her own opinion on this point; she had her plan of campaign, and preferred to carry it out in her own way. It was a simple one. Mrs. MacBalloch had tried to force Kate into marriage by bullying her. The Marchioness would try the opposite plan: she would be amiability itself, and be especially careful to allow no suspicion of an iron hand to penetrate through the thick velvet of the glove.

After the season of stress and storm at Ladyhall, her aunt's kindness and gentle consideration were very grateful to Kate. No doubt she had enjoyed the strife of wills; a contest with a capable foe, who hit hard and did not shrink from either the retort courteous or the countercheck quarrelsome, never came amiss to Kate. But she was tired of conflict: the sudden death of her kinswoman had been a greater shock to her than she was aware of; it was the first time she had ever come across Death as a living reality; and we are never quite the same after this experience has once been ours. Then the reading of the Will, the stormy scene with George, the pricks of conscience which she could not

altogether stifle, however much she tried to repress her remembrance, her father's anxiety—all these had tried her nerves. But above all there was the civil war in her own heart—the desire, at times the overmastering desire, to save her old home from desecration; and, on the other hand, her aversion from marriage, from the surrender of her freedom, from the submission of her will to another.

Hitherto Kate had lived a free, irresponsible, light-hearted existence. Like other girls, she had had her dreams of marriage, and a gallant lover; but they were dreams only—a something in the distance, pleasurable, and a little bit frightening—all the more pleasurable on account of the undefined dread, so long as that something remained afar off. So, too, Death had been a fact which she had acknowledged, just as many recite the Creed. It never occurs to them to doubt the facts contained therein—still less does it occur to them that the facts have any relation whatever to their own life and conduct. So, too, it had never occurred to Kate that Death could in any way touch her. She had often spoken in careless jest—the result of want of thought rather than callousness—of the prospect of her kinswoman's death and her expectations therefrom. But now Kate found herself face to face with the realities of life. Death had touched her with his icy hand, and she knew that the old easy life of careless irresponsi-

bility was over. She resented the knowledge; she struggled fiercely in her own heart, but none knew better than she that such struggle naught availed. So she threw herself into the social life at Elnagar, and tried her utmost to forget the events of the last few weeks, and to live in the present, careless of the future. In such circumstances the soothing tactics of Lady Dunbar were perhaps the best that could have been adopted. Anyway Kate felt the kindness, and was much comforted. So consoling, indeed, did she find her hostess that she began to pour out her troubles into her sympathetic ear. When Kate deplored the apparent necessity of letting Claverley Castle to some rich shopkeeper, the Marchioness would remark in soothing accents that it was certainly distressing, yet many other noblemen of ancient lineage had suffered a like inconvenience; and, after all, very respectable people could be discovered here and there in the commercial world, and no doubt they would be fortunate enough to find an eligible tenant. Then Kate would remark, with a prodigious sigh and a touching resignation, that she supposed she owed it to her parents to avert the catastrophe by marrying. Whereupon her aunt would reply that Kate would certainly be wise if she were to adopt this course; that marriage was an honourable estate, and one to which girls might look forward as a natural incident in their lives. At this Kate would fiercely remark that she

hated men, and she would like to see the man whom she would swear to honour and obey. With a mournful shake of her head, Lady Dunbar agreed with her; men were by no means better than they should be; it was no doubt a ridiculous thing to put such a word as *obey* in the marriage service; no nice man would ever expect such a thing from his wife; still Kate was no doubt right in thinking that husbands as a rule were queer creatures, and the less a girl had to do with them the better.

But although the Marchioness nobly carried out her policy of never thwarting her niece, she took very good care always to have a good-looking, desirable young man on the spot, and to give the said young man every opportunity of making himself agreeable to the future Countess and presumptive heiress. And very agreeable these young men made themselves—alas! with little comfort to their own peace of mind. The natural reaction came to Kate. She threw aside—for the time—all remembrance of the sad events that had so impressed her. She flung herself heart and soul into any amusement that might occur; she sought oblivion in the Lethe of constant gaiety and frivolity. She flirted outrageously with the eligible bachelors sedulously provided by her hostess; and when they became serious in their attentions, she laughed in their faces with a pretty insolence that was maddening and yet bewitching.

She out-Kated the Kate who had wrought such havoc among the susceptible hearts of Salopshire. As she queened it among the guests at Elnagar, easily triumphing over rival beauties, she was pronounced by the men charming, adorable, fascinating, and to be desired above all other maidens—but they always finished their panegyric with an ominous *but*.

And through it all in her heart of hearts she was miserable. The new feelings aroused by her first contact with trouble were dormant, not dead. They were crushed down by Kate in her mad revolt, but she had not succeeded in killing them. She well knew the better way, even while she so obstinately followed the lower road. She had no illusions about herself. And so the days and the weeks rolled on; and she felt as though condemned to death, with the fatal hour approaching with slow but inevitable steps. To the world at large she seemed the apotheosis of brilliant success and happiness. Yet Kate cried in her heart, "Vanity of vanities," and was a miserable woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PETTIGREWS.

In a large and gloomy house, situated in a large and gloomy suburb not five miles from the Marble Arch, Mr. and Mrs. Ebenezer Pettigrew and their son and daughter sat at meat. The late Mrs. MacBalloch's Will had produced almost as great an effect upon the Pettigrews as upon the Claverleys; and by no means a more agreeable one.

If Mrs. MacBalloch had left nothing at all to the house of Pettigrew, it would never have occurred to them to make any complaint or to discover any cause of offence; for although Ebenezer was actually the defunct Sandy's next of kin, he was merely a cousin on the mother's side, and had no legal claim at all on the fortune which MacBalloch had created for himself out of nothingness, and had left to his well-born widow to dispose of as she thought fit. But because Mrs. MacBalloch had left them the off-chance of a very large fortune indeed, they were mortally and bitterly offended that she had not made this off-chance an absolute certainty.

Wherein the Pettigrews were in no wise different from the rest of mankind who are concerned in the bequeathing and the inheriting of money.

Ebenezer was the sort of man who is always described as "having an eye to the main chance." The other eye, whenever he had time to attend to it, he fixed upon things above. Whether it was owing to this dual point of mental view—or whether it was merely a personal defect inherited from an unbeautiful ancestry—who shall say? But the fact remains that the orbs of Ebenezer's flesh were as twofold in their range as the orbs of Ebenezer's spirit. In short, he squinted.

The slight defect in Mr. Pettigrew's personal appearance conveyed the impression to those about him that when he was apparently looking one way, he was in reality looking quite another; and in this they did him no injustice. But the remarkable thing was that by vainly trying to take in other people, he successfully took in himself. He actually believed he was all that he pretended to be.

His profession was what is usually known as "sharp practice;" his pastime was the study—or rather the exposition—of theology. He had a wonderful facility for imputing motives to an overruling Power, Whom he never referred to more explicitly than by the term, "Those Who know better than we do;" and he gave

the impression that in thus placing himself (as "we") second in the scale of omniscience, he erred on the side of humility and self-depreciation. But it was noteworthy that Those Who knew better than Mr. Pettigrew, merely differed from him in degree, and never in kind, of knowledge—according, that is to say, to Mr. Pettigrew's own exposition; otherwise, of course, he would not have admitted that They "knew better"—or even so well. He apparently regarded Eternal Wisdom as having nothing more to do than to second the resolutions and support the amendments of Ebenezer Pettigrew; in short, to grant a sort of royal assent to any suggestions that he thought fit to inculcate and carry through. His nominal calling was that of a stockbroker.

The chosen helpmeet of this worthy man was a tall, gaunt woman, whom he took to wife some time after she had passed her *première jeunesse.* As he gracefully put it during the days of their engagement, "Those Who knew better than we do had seen fit to withhold from Ann Pinchard the fatal gift of beauty." They had. Of that the most casual observer could not for a moment entertain a doubt. But though beauty had been withheld from Ann, wealth had not. Her father, the inventor of an innocuous patent medicine, had amassed a considerable fortune thereby; and this none knew better than Ebenezer.

Mrs. Pettigrew was a worthy woman, an indefatigable

novel reader, and a good wife; but she had one fatal defect, and that was an overwhelming sense of her own gentility. In most people gentility, if they possess it at all, is a somewhat passive and negative gift; but Ann had it in an active, an inflammatory, a positively virulent form. In her it did not merely mean the absence of vulgarity; it meant a distinct thing in itself—a terrible, positive, blood-curdling thing, which made even vulgarity seem attractive by comparison. There never was a moment in Mrs. Pettigrew's life when she was absolutely natural—never a moment when she left off strenuously behaving herself and being actively genteel. She always maintained—in and out of season—that she had "noble blood in her veins;" though how it had got there was a mystery which even she never succeeded in elucidating. But given that it was there, as she said, why couldn't she let it alone for a bit, instead of introducing it into everything, as if she had lived in Egypt at the time of the First Plague?

The results of this somewhat uninteresting union were twofold, namely, a son called Samuel, a promising youth of some five-and-twenty summers, whose powers of contradiction almost crossed the border-line of genius; and a daughter, Matilda, four years older than Samuel, whose youthfulness was as obtrusive as her mother's good breeding.

"Doubtless," remarked Mr. Pettigrew, rubbing his

hands together in a pleasing way that he had, "all that happens is for the best, or it would not be permitted to transpire; but I cannot—nay, I cannot—commend the disposition of property dictated by our late cousin, Mrs. MacBalloch, in her last Will and Testament."

"Alas! papa," sighed his better-half, "your words are only too true. Who was Katherine MacBalloch that she dared to permit some unknown damsel to stand between the children of a Pinchard and their rights?"

"The old girl had a perfect right to do what she liked with her own," argued Samuel.

"No, Samuel," replied his father, "that is not so. Money is nobody's own—it is given to us as a sacred trust—and therefore the late Mrs. MacBalloch had no right whatsoever to dispose of her fortune save in the proper or, I may say, the legitimate direction." By which, of course, he meant into the pocket of Ebenezer Pettigrew.

"And how my children would have graced a fortune!" exclaimed Mrs. Pettigrew, lifting her eyes upwards, and apparently addressing a pair of enlarged photographs of her late parents hanging upon the opposite wall. "The Pinchards are fitted to adorn any position; there are no social heights too perilous for them to attain."

"All the same, ma," persisted Samuel, delighted to have found so easily a strong and enduring bone of contention, "the old girl had a perfect right to do what she liked with her own."

His mother removed her glance from her dead parents to her living son. "Ah, Samuel, *you* to say that —you who ought to have been Mrs. MacBalloch's heir, ruling over that kingly mansion in the far north —you with the Pinchard temper and the Pinchard nose!"

"Blow the Pinchard nose!" Samuel rudely exclaimed.

His mother proceeded implicitly to obey him. The slightest shadow of disrespect towards the Pinchard blood—even from those who were impregnated with the sacred fluid—invariably reduced her to tears.

"Good gracious, ma, never mind!" cried her daughter. "For goodness' sake, don't cry."

"It pains me—it pains me inexpressibly—to hear my children speak scornfully of their great heritage—the heritage of the Pinchard blood," groaned Mrs. Pettigrew; "that blood which has been shed so freely on the various battlefields of England—At Agincourt and Cressy and Waterloo!"

Samuel uttered a loud guffaw. "Not one of which

is in England at all. Well done, ma! It seems to me that the Pinchard blood may be nuts on history, but at geography it's a gone coon!"

Matilda giggled her applause. "Oh, Sam, what things you say!"

But Mrs. Pettigrew had not battened for long years upon the *Family Herald* for nothing. "I repeat," she said, drying her pale grey eyes, "that I cannot bear to hear my children speak disrespectfully of their ancestry. Noble blood is a priceless gift, and ought to be regarded as such. How often must I remind you that the Pinchards are originally a Huguenot family that came over with William the Conquerer; and their name is derived from an old French word—*pincer,* to seize hold of—because they grasped so much land, and kept it, at the time of that distinguished monarch?"

"And they seem to have been on the pinch ever since," added the incorrigible Sam.

Here Mr. Pettigrew interposed. "Hush, Sam, don't vex your mamma; though for my part I think it is dangerous and somewhat carnally minded to set so much store upon the mere accident of birth."

"Birth is no accident—no mere incident in one's career," exclaimed Mrs. Pettigrew, it must be admitted with some truth. "It is the very foundation and ground-

work of our characters. The manner of men from whom we are descended decides to a great extent the manner of men that we are. I am what I am because my ancestors were what they were. It was countless generations of long-forgotten Pinchards that laid the foundations of my present character as it is now."

"By Jove, ma, you seem to have as many foundation-stones as a Nonconformist chapel!"

"Peace, Samuel! I repeat that I and my children are but the coping-stones of an edifice which generations of Pinchards have built up—the edifice of the Pinchard character; we are but the capitals of pillars, whose foundations were laid by the Pinchards who lived in the days of Elizabeth."

"Then all I can say is that the Pinchards who lived in the days of Elizabeth were precious poor architects."

"Samuel," retorted Samuel's mother, "in insulting my ancestors you insult me, who am but their result —their effect—their inevitable consequence." Again she lifted her eyes to the enlarged photographs, and sighed.

"No offence to you, ma, I'm sure. I should no more dream of thinking you were the same as those old Elizabethan chaps than I should dream of thinking to-day's potato-pie was the same as last Sunday's dinner.

Oh no, by no means, not at all!" And Sam cheerfully winked across the table at his sister.

"Oh, Sammy, what things you say!" the latter repeated, vainly endeavouring to stifle her merriment. Poor Matilda was always torn asunder by a natural desire to dissolve into laughter at what she considered her brother's exuberant wit, and a laudable intention to keep, as far as in her lay, the first Commandment with promise.

"Maud, do not encourage Samuel in his fatuous folly," said her mother sternly. Mrs. Pettigrew always called her daughter by the French form of her somewhat ordinary name, taking as her precedent the Empress-mother of King Henry II.

"Oh no! ma, certainly not." And Matilda relapsed again into dutiful solemnity.

"I repeat," said Mrs. Pettigrew, "that Katharine MacBalloch had no right to put this insult on the descendants of the Pinchards and thus to defraud them of their natural inheritance." In this good lady's imagination—so successfully trained by serial and ephemeral fiction—Samuel had already acquired the position of an undoubted heir-at-law, feloniously ousted from his rightful place by a rank supplanter. "This beautiful Scottish mansion was my son's by right, with all the lands and money that appertain to it; and bitterly does my mother-

heart resent that a proud and haughty stranger—daughter though she be of a hundred earls—should come between my child and his inheritance." Mrs. Pettigrew was thoroughly enjoying herself. This present incident—as seen through her mental eye—was quite fit for publication in any sensational journal.

"Katharine MacBalloch has gone to her account," said Mr. Pettigrew in his most unctuous manner, "where she will doubtless reap the fit and proper punishment of her unjustifiable disposition of her property. It is not for us to judge her." (Here Ebenezer's overflowing Christian charity almost carried him away.) "Let her rest in peace." (The last thing he would have wished her to do, all the same, after she had made such a will.) "But let us look to our own souls, and beware lest the love of money is engendering in us feelings contrary to our Christian profession and calling—lest our natural disappointment at the loss of what was our own is leading us into uncharitable thoughts with regard to those who have supplanted us. Nevertheless I cannot but feel that I should do far more good with this money than will the frivolous daughter of an ancient and degenerate house."

"It is hard for a mother's heart to forgive those who have injured her children," said Mrs. Pettigrew, inwardly pluming herself upon the dramatic power both of the sentiment and of her expression of it. She was feeling

—and speaking—exactly as an outraged mother in the *London Journal* or *Bow Bells* would speak; therefore, for the nonce, she was content.

"Quite true, my love, quite true; nevertheless Christianity compels us to perform this hard task, and we have no option but to obey. Therefore I feel it my duty—my bounden duty—to forgive those bloated aristocrats who have come between us and our rights."

"Very noble of you, Ebenezer! But, remember you are not a mother," groaned Mrs. Pettigrew, apparently overwhelmed by the responsibilities and temptations of her office.

Her husband did not attempt to dispute this obvious statement.

"Neither are you a Pinchard," added the lady, feeling exactly as if she were a Roman matron, and Sammy had been brought home upon his shield.

This likewise passed unchallenged.

"Therefore," continued Sammy's mother, reaching her climax, "Christian behaviour comes easy to you, Ebenezer; but the Pinchards are cast in a sterner and more pagan mould." She spoke as if Christian behaviour were an amiable weakness, practised only by persons of plebeian origin. In fact that was how it was usually treated in the literary organs which she patronised.

"Yes, Ann, I shall forgive these Claverleys—I shall forgive them from the bottom of my heart," continued her husband, thinking that, with a little judicious management, considerable money might be made out of the incident, even though Lady Katharine fulfilled the condition of Mrs. MacBalloch's will. "Nay, more," he went on, "I shall not only forgive, I shall forget; I shall approach them upon a footing of good fellowship; I shall treat them as friends."

But Mrs. Pettigrew was revelling in her wrongs. "My poor, ruined children," she exclaimed, gazing with watery eyes at her offspring, who were engaged in silently fulfilling the claims of two by no means small appetites. "My heart is too full to tell you even half of what I feel."

"Same here! only in my case it's the mouth and not the heart that's too full," replied Samuel genially; whilst Matilda nearly choked in her endeavour to laugh and swallow at the same time.

"I am thankful that dear papa is not spared to see this day," continued Mrs. Pettigrew in a mournful voice, gazing with a rapt expression of countenance at the large photograph of the departed medicine-maker, as she raised her apparently heart-felt though irrelevant *Te Deum*.

"I fear there is no hope but that the young woman

will marry during the appointed time," sighed Mr. Pettigrew: "such is the ingrained depravity of the human heart! But Those Who know better than we do, saw fit to make the aristocracy thus; and it is not for us to complain. Nevertheless the Earl must see that some compensation is due to my disappointed and supplanted family: and I shall expect him to make such compensation without delay."

Then a great idea was suddenly vouchsafed to Mrs. Pettigrew—an idea born of much sensational literature. "There is only one compensation that would satisfy my wounded maternal heart," she said, "and that is that Samuel himself should wed this young woman, and so restore its rights to the Pinchard family."

"Good gracious, ma, what wonderful thoughts come into your head!" exclaimed Matilda; while Sammy himself fairly choked outright with combined excess of amazement and cold ham.

But Mr. Pettigrew grasped the notion at once in all its significance; and made up his mind on the spot that he would, as he expressed it to himself, "work it," or be —— what he devoutly hoped Mrs. MacBalloch was.

"A capital idea, my dear; what an imagination you have! It is indeed a gift for which to be thankful, a vivid imagination such as yours. Yes, yes, Samuel

shall unite the properties and do away with the family feud by marriage with Lady Katherine Clare. And as a token of my absolute forgiveness of that young woman, I shall graciously receive her as a daughter-in-law."

CHAPTER XIV.

ELNAGAR.

"I WONDER if life really is worth living after all," remarked Lady Katharine Clare to a company of select friends who were lunching together among the heather on the moors of Elnagar. It was late in the season, and the purple was fast fading into a russet brown; but here and there were patches of bracken which shone like burnished gold; and the hills still wrapped around them some remnants of their royal purple, just to show how glorious had been those better days which they once had seen.

The ladies of the party had been walking all the morning with the guns; and now both the sportsmen and their attendant nymphs had assembled to partake of Lady Dunbar's most excellent lunch. The cheerful assembly consisted of Kate and Sapphira, chaperoned by Lady Dunbar's married daughter, Lady Jean Hannington; also of Sir Godfrey Hannington, husband of the above; the Marquis of Taybridge, son of the Duke of Deeside; Captain O'Flynn, eldest son of the Baron

of the name; and a certain Mr. Wilkinson, a very young member of the House of Commons, who—in his own opinion at least—was more distinguished and important than all the rest of that weighty assembly put together.

"I think that depends upon whether you make it worth living," replied Sapphira, "by leaving undone all you ought to do, and doing all you ought not."

"To be or not to be, that is the question," said Mr. Wilkinson, with all the sententiousness of politically successful youth. He could no more have resisted a trite quotation or an obvious retort than he could have imagined that the leaders of his party knew better than —or even as well as—he did.

"According to Sapphira, to behave or not to behave, that is the question," said Lady Kate.

"It is always better to behave than not," argued Lady Jean. "I've tried first one, and then the other, so I know."

"You never tried the one, to my knowledge," retorted her husband, with a laugh.

"Probably not, dear. I always suit myself to my company, and I think it is one of the first duties of a wife to adapt herself to her husband and his friends—most especially to his friends."

Sir Godfrey's huge sides shook with mirth. His

admiration for his wife's intellectual powers reached the point of worship.

By this time Lord Taybridge, who always moved slowly and surely, being a sort of conversational tortoise, crawled into the lists. "I remember that someone—I regret that I cannot recall at the moment who it was—remarked that the answer to the question, 'Is life worth living?' depends upon the digestion. It was considered a very witty remark. I admit that I cannot myself quite see the wit"—he pronounced it "wut"—"but to me it seems a very comprehensive and sensible sentiment."

"You have quoted it wrongly," said Mr. Wilkinson, who was ever ready to put people right; "the original aphorism was that, 'Is life worth living?' depends upon the liver."

"That," replied the corrected Marquis, "is a distinction without a difference. Digestion means the same as liver, and is — to my mind — a far more euphonious expression. I repeat that whether life is worth living or not depends upon the digestion; and I fully agree with the remark."

"But where is the joke when you put it that way?" asked Kate.

"There is no joke when I put it any way, as far as I can see: I distinctly said that there was not, if you

remember. I subscribe to the sense of the remark, but I fail to see any wit in it."

"You don't like jokes, do you, old man?" said Hannington in a soothing voice.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say I don't like them," replied Taybridge cautiously, "when they are there; but it is no use pretending that I can see a joke when there is no joke to be seen: now is it?"

Sir Godfrey cordially agreed with him. "None at all, old fellow."

"But I wouldn't say I dislike them," Lord Taybridge continued, "or even disapprove of them. In fact I've heard one or two that have almost made me laugh. My father tells a capital story of a man who saw his footman tumble down with the tea-tray, or something, and said it was a *lapsus linguæ;* and then another man—I forget if it was any relation of the first man, but it might have been—made his footman tumble down with all the breakfast-things the next morning on purpose to say the same thing; and, of course, there was no point in it."

The rest of the company laughed so immoderately over this resurrection in so remarkable a form of a fine old crusted and ivy-mantled anecdote, that Lord Taybridge felt he had scored a distinct success; in fact, for the time being, he plumed himself on being quite the funny man of the party. So—emboldened

by recent triumphs — he continued, "But we have wandered from Lady Katharine's original proposition —namely, whether life is worth living. For my part, I repeat that it is entirely—or perhaps it would be more correct to say principally"—here the speaker cast a defiant look in the direction of Mr. Wilkinson—"a question of the *digestion:* that is to say, our enjoyment of existence is wholly—or, anyway, to a great extent—a matter of health."

"While Miss Lestrange thinks it a matter of conscience," added Lady Jean.

"Pardon me, I said of want of conscience," retorted Sapphira. "To be good is not to be happy."

Again the tortoise bounded into the lists. "I fancy you are misquoting the proverb: I believe—though I cannot confidently affirm the fact without verifying the quotation — that the proverb really is, 'To be good is to be happy.' At least that is the impression that it has always left upon my mind."

"And which you have acted up to, Lord Taybridge," added Lady Kate.

"No, I wouldn't go so far as to say that; that I have always endeavoured to act up to it, would be perhaps a more truthful rendering."

"Silly idiot!" said Lady Kate to herself, indulging under her breath in two or three bars of Haydn's *Hymn to the Emperor.* Then she remarked aloud,

"Proverbs are always misleading. For instance, could anything be more absurd than to say that 'handsome is as handsome does?'—because really it isn't in the very least."

"As a matter of fact," Lady Jean remarked, "it is the exact opposite—in short, an alternative. If you happen to be handsome, you needn't trouble to behave handsomely; while if you are not handsome, handsome behaviour is the only course open to you. The handsome woman and the plain woman play two totally different games."

Kate agreed with her. "In the game of life the handsome woman scores by honours, and the plain woman by tricks."

"That is so," added Sir Godfrey; "honours don't count in plain suits."

"The nuisance is," his wife continued, "that handsome doing takes up so much more time than handsome looking—just as curly-haired women have longer lives than straight-haired ones."

"Pray how is that?" inquired Mr. Wilkinson, whose thirst to receive information was only second to his desire to impart it; "I had no idea that curly hair was a source of longevity."

"Well, you see, it is like this," explained Lady Jean. "Kate has curly hair and I have straight hair; therefore I have to curl my hair, and she hasn't to

curl hers. Now, roughly speaking, I—either personally or else vicariously through my maid—spend at least a quarter of an hour every day in curling my hair, and that tots up to close on two hours a week. Two hours a week is eight hours a month, eight hours a month is ninety-six hours a year, and ninety-six hours a year is eight working days, which is practically a week."

"What a head for figures!" murmured Sir Godfrey in mock admiration.

"Well, it's all right; I've worked it out with a pencil and paper. Now, where was I? You shouldn't have interrupted me, Godfrey."

"I apologise most humbly. You'd got to eight days being a week, which they aren't."

"Oh! that's near enough for figures. Figures never are very accurate, you know."

"Indeed, my love. I had hitherto always erroneously imagined that mathematics was the one exact science. To know and love you is, indeed, a liberal education."

"How silly you are! What I mean is that my figures are never very accurate."

"There the meeting is with you; pray proceed," replied Sir Godfrey.

"Well then, a curly-haired woman's year is at least a week longer than a straight-haired woman's

year; so that, if they both live to be eighty, the curly-haired woman has had a year and eight months more time either for work or play than a straight-haired woman, and her life has been a year and eight months longer. Q. E. D."

Here Lady Kate chimed in. "But if you trust to good behaviour instead of artificial aids to enhance your beauty and obviate your deficiencies, you'll find it a delusion and a snare. Kind hearts may be more than coronets, but they are infinitely less than curling-tongs—as aids to beauty."

"And that sort of thing is an awful waste of time," added Lady Jean. "I once kept my temper for a whole week in the hope that it would transform my very *retroussé* nose into a more regular type of feature; but I regret to inform you that it had not the slightest effect on the offending and ascending organ, while it did Godfrey no end of harm."

"How was that?" asked the inquiring Marquis. "I cannot see how harm could come to any man through his wife's keeping her temper."

"Don't you see, only one of us can be out of temper at once? That's obvious."

"But why not?"

"Because, my dear Taybridge, if I lose my temper and Godfrey loses his temper at the same time, then we haven't got a temper between us; and there must be a

temper somewhere in the house, just as there must be a fire in the kitchen. So it stands to reason that when I am out of temper he must be in, and *vice versâ*. Therefore it is extremely bad for him when I keep my temper, and so give him a chance of losing his."

"But I do not see—indeed I do not—the necessity for either of you to be out of temper."

Lady Jean shrugged her shoulders. "That comes of being unmarried," she said. "If you weren't so single—so absurdly single—you'd recognise the necessity at once."

"No; there again you must permit me to differ from you. If I were so fortunate as to be married, I should never be out of temper with my wife—never." And Lord Taybridge cast a meaning glance in the direction of Kate.

"Possibly not; but that wouldn't preclude the possibility of a loss of temper among the pair of you," retorted that young lady; "a temper might be missing, even if it wasn't yours."

"As a matter of fact," continued Lord Taybridge, "I think I may say that I never—or at any rate very rarely—am out of temper. I rejoice in a most equable disposition; my mother has often remarked upon it; and has—I think with some justice—attributed it to the excellence of my health. For I consider that good temper, like the enjoyment of life, is to a great extent"

—here the speaker turned with emphasis towards Mr. Wilkinson—"a question of the *digestion.*"

"Temper is like wit," murmured Lady Kate; "a man may not have it himself, and yet be the cause of it in others."

"I think that here at least we have an answer to Lady Katharine's conundrum; if life is worth living depends upon whether we can keep our tempers, by which, of course, I mean whether other people can keep theirs," quoth Captain O'Flynn.

"I agree with you," cried Lady Jean; "and, further, I consider that the only two things in the world which justify a woman in losing her temper are clothes and husbands—clothes when they are new, and husbands when they are old."

"But, faith, why are old husbands more trying than young ones?" asked the gallant O'Flynn.

"I don't know; you must ask them. They've been at it longer, I suppose."

"Then why aren't old wives more trying than young ones, too, Lady Jean?"

"They are; much."

"On the contrary," remarked Mr. Wilkinson, "I should have imagined that the longer two people were married to each other, the better they would become acquainted, and the more each would know what annoyed the other."

"They do; and say it. That's what makes them so much more aggravating than the new ones. The new ones mean to be just as disagreeable; but the old ones know better how to do it."

"I agree most fully—or rather I should say to a considerable extent—with O'Flynn, that the happiness of life, and particularly of married life, depends upon whether you have a good temper," said Lord Taybridge.

"Or rather upon whether the person you are married to has a good temper," retorted Lady Jean; "which is really what Captain O'Flynn said. That is what makes Godfrey such a blissful creature."

"His happy disposition, you mean?"

"No, mine."

"Yes, Lady Jean," Taybridge continued, "I should judge that you speak correctly when you state that you are blessed with an equable disposition; though I doubt —I very much doubt—whether this fact is not owing to a happy accident of fortune more than to any special merit on your part; because, as I have already stated, I consider that good temper is to a great extent, if not entirely, a question of the——"

"Liver," cried Lady Kate. She could not have helped it to save her life.

Lord Taybridge fairly jumped; then, regaining his composure, he added, "Of the *digestion.*"

"A good temper," remarked Captain O'Flynn, "is a great blessing, especially when it belongs to someone else."

Lady Jean sighed. "I began life with two huge mistakes—I could keep my temper and ride with my back to the horses; and I have been expected to do so ever since. Other happier souls can turn as red over the one and as green over the other as they choose, and then they have either their own way or the seat of honour, whichever they happen to want; but anything and anywhere will do for poor me. I know, if I live long enough, I shall ride to my own funeral with my back to the horses, as that is always my fate, worse luck! And yet I should enjoy a jolly old squabble or a drive face-forwards as much as anybody; only it is never my turn."

"Poor child!" exclaimed her husband, with a shout of delighted laughter.

"But the hard thing is," she continued, "that Godfrey looks much better tempered than I do, while all the time I am much better tempered than Godfrey."

"I deny your premises," retorted the handsome giant.

"But, darling, even your modesty must admit that, to a casual observer, requires some elucidation. You surely cannot intend to infer you appear the more amiable of the two."

"Oh! those weren't the particular premises that I was objecting to, my love."

"But surely even your vanity can't pretend that you are really more amiable than I am?"

"That was the idea."

"Pooh! Flat burglary as ever was committed! If you think that, you'll think anything."

"I do. I think you are the most charming woman alive."

"Not at all bad for you! Thank you." And Lady Jean blew her husband a kiss across the heather.

"Now if you ask me whether life is worth living," said Captain O'Flynn, "I should say it depends on whether you are married or not; for there's never a single man or woman that I know that was really happy until they married."

Lady Kate tossed her head. "That's nonsense, Captain O'Flynn—sheer nonsense. To my mind the very expression, 'a happy marriage,' is a contradiction in terms. You might just as well talk about a square circle or a flat mountain or a sensible man."

"Nevertheless," argued Mr. Wilkinson, "even some mountains are flatter than others, and some men are more sensible than others."

"Are they? I never happened to meet them."

This, from his idol, was more than Lord Taybridge could stand. "Excuse me, Lady Katharine, but your

last remark that you have never been so fortunate as to meet a sensible man: that is manifestly impossible."

Kate's pretty mouth grew obstinate. "That is what I said."

"But, believe me, you are mistaken—egregiously mistaken. I remember that Thomas Carlyle once stated —as I thought most unjustly—that the population of the British Isles was so many millions (I regret to say that I cannot at the moment recall the exact number of millions, but it has no bearing upon the point of the story), who were mostly fools. I was so struck with the gross injustice of this remark that I made a careful calculation—founded upon personal observation— as to how many sensible men there were on an average to one fool."

"As it was from personal observation, he was never without his minimum," murmured Sapphira under her breath to Captain O'Flynn, who replied by a sympathetic smile.

"And what do you think the result of my observation was?"

"I haven't an idea; please tell me?" asked good-natured Lady Jean. "It always gives me a headache to guess conundrums, just as riding with my back to the horses ought to—and won't."

"Well, the result was that in England I found that

there were five and a half sensible men to one fool, while in Scotland there were seven and three-quarters sensible men to one fool; which proved that Thomas Carlyle was utterly wrong. Very interesting, wasn't it?"

"Extremely," replied Lady Jean politely, at the same time nodding at her husband in order to induce him to suppress—or at any rate conceal—his mirth, and thereby adding to it, as wives so often do. A wifely hint—be it concealed in a nod across the table or a kick under it—nearly always precipitates the catastrophe which it was intended to avert.

"It appears to me," remarked Mr. Wilkinson in that didactic manner whereby he usually instructed the House of Commons, "that matrimony, taken as a fine art, is the one thing that makes life worth living."

"By the way," said Lady Kate, "I wonder if matrimony is an art or a science. What is the difference?"

Mr. Wilkinson was only too pleased to instruct her. "A science is something that we know, and an art is something that we do."

"Well, then, matrimony is neither the one nor the other," retorted Lady Jean, "for it chiefly consists in knowing what not to do."

"I should say that the science of matrimony is knowing better than to get married at all," said Kate.

Sapphira shook her head. "No: the science lies in knowing whom to marry."

"In short," exclaimed O'Flynn, "is love worth loving depends upon the lover."

Taybridge felt bound to interfere. "Surely *husband* is a more correct term. If love is worth loving depends upon the husband. There, dear Lady Katharine, you have the matter in a nutshell. And talking of nutshells recalls to my mind a story that makes my dear father laugh considerably whenever he tells it."

"Let us hear it, there's a good fellow," said Sir Godfrey.

"Well, it was once at mess when he was with his regiment in Ireland—at least I believe it was Ireland, though I am not absolutely sure—and someone said something about something being in a nutshell—I forget what it was, but that has no bearing upon the story."

"None at all," agreed Sir Godfrey: "get on to what has."

"I'm coming to that if you will only give me time, but you are such a one for hurrying a fellow."

"And a joke is too serious a matter—like matrimony—to be taken in hand lightly or unadvisedly," said Sir Godfrey, with a supernaturally grave face, thereby causing a perfect shower of nods from his wife's small head.

"I wish to goodness, Godfrey, that you'd listen to

me when I nod at you!" she remarked in an audible aside. "Now that we are married, you never pay the slightest attention to any of my hints, however loud I shout: though when we were engaged you heard my softest words."

"But I never *said* they were soft, my love; I only *thought* so."

Here Taybridge began again. "Well, as I was saying, somebody said, 'You've put the case in a nutshell, Taybridge.' (I forgot to say that this happened in my grandfather's life, so that my father was Taybridge at that time.) 'Exactly,' said one of the subalterns, a very witty chap; 'but that's where the Captain ought to be.' Smart, wasn't it?"

"Are you sure he didn't say the Colonel?" suggested Sir Godfrey mildly.

"As far as my memory serves me, he said the Captain," replied Taybridge, decidedly nettled; "but Captain or Colonel, whichever it was, has no bearing upon the point of the story. The point is about somebody being in a nutshell, don't you see?"

Sir Godfrey nodded his head judicially. "I'm sorry to hurt your feelings, Taybridge, but truth compels me to admit that it is a better story when you say the Colonel instead of the Captain."

But the usually amiable Marquis was still rather sulky. "I don't see that it really matters which it was,

as long as it was one of the officers in the regiment; and you make a confounded mess of a story, Hannington, when you keep fussing over unimportant details in that way—a most confounded mess!"

Sir Godfrey would have laughed outright if he had not the fear of his wife before his eyes; but the warning grimaces of that young lady at the moment were such as no right-minded husband could defy—and live. So he was content with a modest choke.

But the free and unmarried members of the party indulged in their mirth without restraint, much to the delight of Lord Taybridge, who, for the second time in one day, had scored an obvious conversational success. Therefore he continued, "I remember another story of the same chap—the one who said the Captain was in a nutshell, don't you know?—when they were discussing laying a request before the House of Commons for all volunteers to wear grey uniform in order to distinguish them from the regulars. At least I think it was the House of Commons; but it might have been the War Office. If it wasn't one, it must certainly have been the other; but I regret that at the moment I cannot exactly recall which it was. Still, whichever it was has no bearing upon the point of the story."

"I believe a question like that would be settled by the War Office," remarked Mr. Wilkinson.

"I do not think so: as far as my memory serves me, it was the House of Commons."

"I feel sure it must have been the War Office," persisted Mr. Wilkinson, with some heat.

"And I am just as convinced it was the House of Commons," retorted Taybridge, with equal warmth.

Then Sir Godfrey did a sinful thing, for which his wife duly scolded him afterwards: he slyly egged the combatants on to further battle. "I believe Taybridge is right, and that the House of Commons would settle a matter of that kind," he said.

"Not a bit of it," replied Mr. Wilkinson; "a thing of that kind is always referred to the permanent staff."

"Not it," responded Taybridge; "a matter such as that—which entails the spending of public money—is always decided by the House of Commons. Now you question it, I feel absolutely certain it was the House of Commons."

"And I feel equally certain it was the War Office."

By this time Sir Godfrey was in an ecstasy of delight; and was just about to add further fuel to the already blazing fire when his better-half forestalled him. "But you are forgetting the story itself, Lord Taybridge, which we are all dying to hear. Do please tell it."

"By Jove! so I was. Well, as I was saying, my

father suggested that a petition should be laid before the *House of Commons"*—here the speaker looked towards the member of that august assembly and spoke with decided emphasis—"before the *House of Commons,* I say, that the uniform of the volunteers should be grey. 'If you do,' replied the witty chap—the one that made the joke about the Captain being in the nutshell, don't you know?—'they'll only take it as scarlet.' Smart, wasn't it?"

"Killing," roared Sir Godfrey, "simply killing! And it would have been even smarter if he'd said they'd take it as red."

"Well, he didn't," replied Lord Taybridge, with some asperity. "Besides, what difference would it have made? Aren't red and scarlet the same colour?"

"Of course they are," said Lady Jean in a soothing voice, making signs of reproof to her lord and master; "scarlet is only a shade of red."

"And it is the shade that soldiers happen to wear," added Lady Kate; "while the same shade on huntsmen is called pink."

Lord Taybridge was mollified. "Exactly so; now if I'd said he said they'd take it as pink, I could have seen some sense in Hannington's objection, because soldiers' coats never are called pink."

"Of course they aren't," added kindhearted Lady Jean.

"Well, I think we ought to be getting on," said Sir Godfrey, rising from the heather as quickly as suppressed mirth would allow him; "and you'd better go home, there's a good girl, and take Lady Kate and Miss Lestrange with you—or else you'll all be knocked up to-morrow, and not able to come out at all."

So the men went on with the day's sport, while the ladies found their carriage and drove back to the house; and all the time Lady Kate's heart was heavy within her.

She tried her hardest to laugh and talk with the others, but somehow she could not succeed—or if she did, she felt that she was playing a part, and that her smiling face was but a hollow mask hiding a very sad brow indeed. She could not understand what had come to her—to her, who hitherto had laughed at everything, and to whom the realities and the responsibilities of existence were alike unknown. Was it that death had passed by so near to her that she could never properly enjoy life again? Or was it that her hatred of George Despard was so deep and so bitter that it soured her character and poisoned for her the very springs of existence? She herself inclined to this latter explanation; for he was increasingly in her thoughts, and—she argued—you must hate a man very much indeed when you begin to think about him constantly. She had not thought much about him at first,

She had even gone to the length of assuring herself several times that she had completely forgotten him; and if a woman actually remembers that she has forgotten a man—well, of course, she has.

She was growing weary of all the banter and frivolity at her aunt's; she longed for something more solid and serious—something more in accord with her own mood. She wanted to discuss old problems and to formulate new faiths—in short, to do everything that every other young girl wants to do the first time she is confronted with reality; and that every young girl thinks that no other girl but herself ever wanted to do since time began.

And it was just when matters had reached this crisis that Orlando Pratt came to Elnagar.

CHAPTER XV.

ORLANDO PRATT.

"KATE, a new man has come." So spake Miss Lestrange to her cousin, who was half buried in a huge armchair before a welcome fire—the evenings were growing chilly in the north—in her room upon that same afternoon.

Kate looked up languidly.

"I'm glad of it. A new man may mean a new sensation, and I am sick to death of Taybridge with his solemn jokes, and Wilkinson with his still more solemn dogmatism. Who was it that said dogmatism was but full-grown puppyism?"

"A very sensible man, I should say," replied Sapphira. "But are you not paying Mr. Wilkinson a compliment by suggesting that he had left the stage of puppyhood behind him?"

"You are right, Sapphira. A more egregious and self-satisfied puppy I have never met. But who is the new man?"

"A Mr. Orlando Pratt."

"I never heard of him."

"Nor I; but Lady Dunbar says he is an Oxford man, and reputed to be very clever. Mr. Wilkinson pronounces him to be a conceited ass. Sir Godfrey informs us that he writes poetry which nobody reads, and is so superior that he will put us all right—but that he will do it with consummate gentleness."

Kate got up and yawned.

"Well, anyway, he will be a change from young Wilkinson, who puts us right with consummate rudeness. Let us go and have some tea, and sample this new man. From your account of him he's just the sort of man to be in the drawing-room at tea-time. And if he isn't there, Aunt Dunbar can tell us all about him."

Lady Kate was right in her prognostication. When they reached the drawing-room they found the new arrival surrounded by an admiring bevy of enthusiastic admirers.

Mr. Orlando Pratt was a shining light of what he flattered himself was the most intellectual and advanced of Oxford colleges, and he had not a shadow of a doubt that he was the most intellectual and advanced member of its justly celebrated senior common-room. If, as all good Megatheria fondly believed, Megatherion College was the hub of the universe, he, in his own estimation, was the chief diffuser of the sweetness and

light that irradiated from that magic spot. He was a tall, thin man, with somewhat scanty sandy locks, which he wore long behind. He had a white forehead, high rather than broad, a thin, hooked nose, and a large mouth with clean-shaved lips. He had thin hands with long fingers, which he was fond of waving languidly to give point to the pearls of wisdom which fell from his mouth. He had a soft voice, and when he corrected the errors of his weaker brethren, it was with an air more of pity than contempt. His whole manner bespoke one who was deeply impressed with the tragic pathos of life, of the ineffectual folly of his fellow-men, and, above all, of his own supreme superiority. Mr. Pratt could not boast of great wealth, but he had a modest competence in addition to his Fellowship. With all his apparent contempt of the world, he had a very considerable interest in creature comforts. He was a connoisseur of delicate cookery and an expert in choice vintages. If not of social distinction, he had contrived to live with the best set at Oxford, and was a welcome guest at many a country house. In his way he was no mean celebrity, and men of high social position were not averse from claiming his acquaintance.

"I am glad you have arrived upon the scene, Kate," said Lady Jean, after her mother had duly introduced the new arrival to the two girls, "as we are continuing the argument we began at luncheon."

"What a feeble thing to do!" cried Kate. "It reminds one of naughty children who are made to eat up at tea-time whatever they have refused to eat at dinner."

"But you are under a misapprehension, Lady Katharine," explained Lord Taybridge; "it is not the actual luncheon we are continuing, but the conversation at luncheon."

"Oh, I grasped as much! Your intellectual fare at present consists of political rissoles *à la* Wilkinson, and hashed anecdotes served with Taybridge sauce." Kate was decidedly impatient, and as she stood by the huge wood fire, warming one small foot, she looked like some restive young warhorse scenting the battle from afar. "And I repeat that I think it very feeble of you all to hash up and continue your conversation in this way—just as if it were a piece of Sunday beef or a serial story in a daily paper."

"Permit me to differ from you, Lady Katharine," said Orlando Pratt in a gentle drawl.

Kate turned her head with a start; to differ from her was exactly what she did not permit. But it required a cleverer woman than Lady Katharine Clare to frighten Mr. Pratt. So he slowly continued: "There is nothing so wearisome as novelty! It is difficult to say which are the most fatiguing—new ideas, new religions, or new boots."

"For my part I adore new things," retorted Kate. "I make a point of always curtseying to the new moon."

"So do I—because there is nothing new about it; it is only the old moon cleaned and retrimmed, without even being turned."

"Well, anyway, I pretend that it is new, or else I should not curtsey to it," persisted Kate.

Pratt looked lazily at her through his half-closed eyelids. "Naturally, Lady Katharine; but that is because you are young."

Now if there is one thing that enrages a woman more than being told she is old, it is being told that she is young—given, of course, that there is some foundation for either assertion.

"I don't see what my age—or want of age—has to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it. The young adore what is young; the old adore what is old. We all make gods in our own image, and then fall down and worship them."

"Oh, how very interesting!" exclaimed Lady Jean, who did not think it interesting in the least. Kate, on the contrary, thought it interesting, but did not say so.

"In the same way," Pratt continued, "the people

whom we most admire are *éditions de luxe* of ourselves."

"I always understood, Pratt, that it was your rule to admire nobody," put in Wilkinson.

"Precisely," remarked Mr. Pratt calmly. "I have myself never met such a person as I described."

"But I thought it was an axiom," argued Kate, "that people invariably fall in love with their opposites?"

"It is an anxiom, and therefore wrong. An axiom —like a proverb—is an elevating lie which conceals as far as possible a degrading truth."

"That is just what we were saying at lunch, Mr. Pratt, if Kate will excuse my referring to it," exclaimed Lady Jean; "only we did not put it quite so neatly."

Orlando waved his hand in a graceful, if somewhat affected manner. "I am only too happy, ladies, if I have succeeded in embodying some of your recent inspirations. And I think if you will go deeper into the subject, you will see that we are right. In fact I go so far as to affirm that there is no proverb extant which does not endeavour to teach us what we know to be untrue."

"There I totally disagree with you," said Mr. Wilkinson; "a proverb is proverbially the wisdom of many embodied in the wit of one."

"I should rather describe it as the wisdom of many refuted by the wit of one," Orlando replied. "For instance, we are taught by a proverb that 'Two blacks won't make a white,' while we all know that they will. A precedent justifies almost any action; and it is only the deeper blackness of our friends that satisfactorily whitewashes ourselves. The more we are accustomed to a crime, the less we are shocked at it. One black is black, I admit; but a large quantity of blacks all together become almost dazzling in their whiteness."

Wilkinson was again about to interrupt him, but Pratt did not give him an opening; he had not travelled all the way to Scotland to hear another man talk, or to let anybody else do so. So he calmly continued—

"Countless instances only serve to show further how right we are. What is 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves' but an obviously artificial herring, drawn across the trail of the commercial truth that only by great speculations are great fortunes amassed—that reckless speculation—or peculation—is the only royal road to success? What is 'Blood is thicker than water' but a feeble contradiction of the universal fact that there are no people so consummately irritating as one's own relations?"

But this was more than Lord Taybridge could stand. "Oh, I say, that is all rot! I am sure that blood is thicker than water; my mother says it is."

"Hers may be," replied the imperturbable Pratt; "mine is not."

"Nevertheless," remarked Lady Dunbar, "proverbs must be more or less true."

"On what compulsion must they?" Sapphira asked.

"Oh! because they are always supposed to be."

"My dear madam," said Orlando, "proverbs are nothing but moral blank cartridges, wherewith the young idea is charged, in order to prevent its shooting in the preserves of its elders. We are taught in our youth not to play with fire; and we learn as we grow older that it is the only really satisfactory plaything in the world. If nobody had ever played with fire, the steam-engine would never have been invented; not to mention sundry other interesting experiences which we should have missed entirely. We are taught in our youth that it is love which makes the world go round; while as a matter of fact, the spirit of competition—accentuated by the hatred which competition necessarily engenders—is the propelling force. Believe me, a world moved entirely by love would progress at the same speed as Joshua's moon in Ajalon, or as the South Eastern. Yes; proverbs are intended for external application only; we are never expected to believe them ourselves."

But Marchionesses are not silenced so easily as all that. "They are nothing of the kind, Mr. Pratt. Now

what could be truer than to say, 'Nobody knows where the shoe pinches as well as he who wears it'?"

"That true, dear lady? It is utterly and abominably false. As a matter of fact, the wearer of the shoe is the only person who does *not* know where it pinches. If the wearer of the shoe knew where it pinched as well as do the onlookers, two-thirds of the married men of my acquaintance would have been hanged for wife-murder."

Lady Dunbar looked shocked. "Oh, Mr. Pratt, what a peculiar thing to say!"

"Truth always sounds peculiar, my dear madam, we are so unaccustomed to it. The ignorance of most wearers of the matrimonial shoe is to my mind one of the world's greatest miracles. Know where it pinches? On the contrary, it is usually where it pinches most that they particularly pique themselves upon its fit. We onlookers wonder that with such a shoe they can bear to walk the earth at all; we should consider amputation of the entire foot a lesser evil. But as for them, they are running and leaping like young harts upon the mountains, and are as unconscious of our sympathy as of their need of it."

Lady Dunbar still looked shocked, but her niece laughed. Kate could not help listening to the man in spite of herself.

"I see, Mr. Pratt, that you disapprove of marriage as much as I do," she said.

But Orlando demurred. "On the contrary, Lady Katharine, I very much approve of it, when it is suitably and artistically carried out. But how like a woman to argue that because I object to a pinching shoe I should therefore choose to go barefoot! Believe me, there are such things as shoes that fit—there is such a thing as marriage without repentance."

"I very much doubt it," cried Kate, with her customary toss of the head.

"According to my cousin," said Sapphira, "marriage is the grave of love."

"Precisely," added Orlando; "and therefore the gate into love's paradise."

Again Kate could not help admiring the man's neatness of phrase.

"There is a proverb," Orlando continued, "that is responsible for the unhappiness of many marriages."

"And what is that?" asked Mr. Wilkinson.

"'What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander'—a most misleading platitude, and one which gives women quite erroneous notions. The two birds are totally different; and what is suitable seasoning for the one would prove a highly inappropriate condiment with the other."

"Then what *is* the proper sauce for the goose, Mr. Pratt?" Kate asked.

"Apple sauce—which she prepared for herself in Eden some six thousand years ago. There is a certain acidity—not to say bitterness—about it, I admit; but it has its compensating sweetness. The gander, however, is a tougher bird, and requires something decidedly stronger and more piquant. When a woman has once learnt that what is sauce for herself is not sauce for her husband, and never will be, and that she had better not inquire what is, she has passed the Little-go of matrimonial education."

"I conclude," remarked Mr. Wilkinson, "that 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure' is another of the proverbs to which you take exception."

"Most decidedly. The repentance depends upon *whom* you marry—not upon *when.*"

"But," Mr. Wilkinson argued, "the longer you are making up your mind, the less likely you are to make a mistake."

"Not a bit of it, my dear fellow. Love has its origin not in knowledge of other people's virtues, but in ignorance of their faults."

"Then the longer you know them, the more likely you will be to discover their faults." And Mr. Wilkinson glared triumphantly at his adversary.

"Certainly not. The only faults that really make

you dislike people are the faults that strike you at once, such as the sound of their voices and the shape of their hands and the way in which they move. We pity people for bad morals; it is only for bad manners that we hate them."

"Then do you mean to say," asked Kate, "that if we don't see a person's faults at once, we shall never see them?"

"Certainly; and if we do see them at once we shall see them always. Therefore nothing but love at first sight is a sure foundation for married happiness; a union based upon mutual esteem is begun in wisdom and consequently bound to close in tears. All the great mistakes in life have their root in caution; second thoughts are invariably misleading."

"I think the great secret of a happy marriage is to marry young—while the character is to a great extent unformed, and therefore adaptable." Lady Dunbar was speaking for her niece's benefit.

But Orlando speedily pushed aside arguments with a wave of his hand. "Not a bit of it, my dear madam, not a bit of it. That is another piece of the false coinage of platitude which is supposed to pass as current coin of the realm. Youth is the least adaptable period of our lives, just as it is the most serious."

"But, my dear fellow, that is nonsense—sheer non-

sense; youth is, and must be, the gayest and least serious time of life," cried Mr. Wilkinson.

"Nevertheless it is not; nothing is so grave and solemn and overwhelmed with responsibility as youth—nothing is so devoid of humour. The skies of April are not sterner nor the winds of May more harsh than the opinions and judgments of the very young. If you wish to impress the young, you must treat life as a serious matter; if you wish to comfort the old, you must treat death as a trifling one. The old are charmed by laughter and the young by tears."

"Well, then," asked Lord Taybridge in his most ponderous and convincing manner, "I should like to know what parents mean when you come of age and they tell you you must begin to take life seriously, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

Mr. Pratt sank languidly back in his chair with a sigh. "My dear fellow, why ask *me* what parents mean? I haven't a notion myself, and I very much doubt whether they have."

"Then how can they do you any good when they say things to you?" persisted Taybridge.

"They don't. Improving conversation is like saccharine—it doesn't do you any good; but, unlike sugar and some other conversation, it doesn't do you any harm. That is all that can be said for it."

"Don't you approve of early marriages, then, Mr. Pratt?" asked Lady Jean.

"Not as a rule."

"Why not?"

"Because the basis of married happiness is a common ground of humour. The great thing in choosing a husband or a wife is to choose someone who laughs at the same things that we ourselves laugh at. That is all that really matters. If we only take care of the smiles, the tears will take care of themselves. And the sense of humour is undeveloped in the very young. You cannot tell before you are five-and-twenty what are the precise things that you are going to spend the rest of your life in laughing at."

"It certainly does not answer," remarked Sapphira, "for a woman with a sense of humour to marry a man without one."

"But, my dear lady, there is no such thing as a person without a sense of humour. Different people have different-shaped senses of humour, but all have the sense in some sort. Supposing, however, that mine is square and yours is lozenge-shaped, mine will include things which yours does not include, and *vice versâ;* and in choosing a life-partner it is well to select one whose sense of humour is the same shape as one's own, otherwise life's laughter will be in canon instead of in unison."

"But how can you tell whether another person's humour is the same shape as yours?" Kate asked.

"Easily enough. I have one or two test-jokes with which I try people at once. If their lips smile and not their eyes, I have nothing more to do with them. If their eyes smile and not their lips, we are friends for life."

"I call that a capital idea," exclaimed Lord Taybridge. "I've a very strong sense of humour myself, and I should not care to marry a girl who did not know a joke when she saw one."

"Of course you would not," Pratt replied. "I would therefore advise you to compose a list of test-jokes so as to prepare the candidate for matrimony, and see if she is eligible for a nomination."

"Now, there's a very funny tale the Duke tells (I may mention in passsing that it is from him that I inherit my strong sense of humour), and I should say if a girl didn't see the joke of that she'd never see anything."

"Tell it, there's a good fellow!" said Sir Godfrey, looking up from the book he was reading, and for the first time joining in the conversation.

"Well, there was once an awfully funny fellow called Sidney Smith, or Jones, or something of that kind, and the London County Council were talking about putting a wooden pavement all round St. Paul's Cathedral, or round Westminster Abbey—I forget exactly which it was at the present moment, but which-

ever it was has no bearing upon the point of the story."

Here Mr. Wilkinson—in his usual quest for unsullied truth—interrupted the speaker. "It could not possibly have been the London County Council. There was no such body in Sidney Smith's time."

"But I am sure it was."

"And I am absolutely certain it couldn't have been."

"Are *you* telling the tale or am *I?*" asked Lord Taybridge, it must be admitted with some dignity.

"*You* are, old fellow, so push on with the joke," cried Sir Godfrey, who by this time had laid down his book altogether, and was thoroughly enjoying himself.

"I shall get to it in time if you won't hurry me so. Well, as I was saying, the *County Council*"—this with one of his lordship's usual glances in the direction of Mr. Wilkinson—"were discussing whether or not to have a wood pavement laid down round either St. Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey—I can't at the moment recall which."

"But whichever it was has no bearing upon the point of the story," quoted Kate pertly.

"Precisely so. Well, then, this Smith, or Jones, or whatever his name was—I forget exactly what was his name, but I know he was a very witty person—said the *County Council*" (here another triumphant glance at

Mr. Wilkinson) "had but to consider the question, and there was the wood pavement. Smart, wasn't it?"

"Exquisitely so," murmured Pratt, as soon as he could speak for laughing, the rest of the party being equally convulsed with mirth.

"I knew you'd think it a good story," said Taybridge, with considerable complacency. "Now if a girl couldn't see the joke of that, I should say she had no sense of humour."

Kate certainly passed the test so far, for she was positively wiping her eyes in her excess of laughter.

"And yet," remarked Sir Godfrey, "there are people who in telling that story would alter it into 'they had only to put their heads together, and there was the wood pavement.' I've heard the tale told that way myself."

"Well, it wouldn't have been any funnier, would it?" asked the successful raconteur.

"Certainly not, nor half so funny," replied Hannington; while Kate went off into fresh peals of merriment.

"I can generally see a joke myself," continued Taybridge, "if only I have time. If you don't see it just at first, it is a great help to write it down—just as my mother does when she doesn't know how to spell a word. You nearly always can see it then."

But it was high time for Orlando once more to take the stage: he felt he had waited in the slips quite long

enough. "Again, people will inform you—I mean really good, improving people, who never tell you the truth for fear it should do you harm—that the basis of married happiness is unity in the great objects of life. Nothing of the kind. Married people can differ as much as they like about the main issues of existence, as long as they agree about its amusements. It won't in the least matter having two religions or two politics in a home if you have only one game. If a husband and wife agree that golf—or bridge—is the only game worth playing, they will never quarrel over Tariff Reform or Apostolic Succession."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Pratt, I still hold that people should marry when they are young and adaptable." Lady Dunbar again spoke with a view to her niece's spiritual welfare.

"Oh! no, no, dear lady. Youth is so infallible; and infallibility is the one unpardonable sin in married life. When you are young, you always know you are right: when you grow older you know that hardly anybody is right, and certainly not yourself; which state of mind conduces considerably to conjugal happiness."

"I do not agree with you at all."

"But, Lady Dunbar, you *must* agree with me, if only you will give the matter your serious attention. Think how exceptional youth is—how it believes that nobody ever thought as it thinks, or felt as it feels:

and it is so terribly commonplace nowadays to be exceptional, and so exceptional to be commonplace. And think of being married to a creature who regarded itself as unique! It would bore one to death."

"You wouldn't like to marry an exception, would you, Mr. Pratt?" asked Lady Jean.

"If I did, she would never prove her rule."

"But you surely can't mean that you would like to be commonplace yourself," exclaimed Kate in an expostulating voice.

"I should revel in it, it would be so distinguished. But alas! it is impossible."

Here Lady Dunbar met Mr. Pratt half-way. "It certainly is a mistake for a girl to get a reputation for being exceptional: I agree with you so far. It always hinders her from marrying well."

"My dear lady, it is a mistake for anyone to get a reputation for anything. If you do, you will never be allowed to do or be anything else as long as you live."

Here Mr. Wilkinson interposed his usual apt quotation. "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him."

Orlando positively shuddered. "No, no, no; not a bit of it! Give a dog a good name, and hang him, would be nearer the mark. It is a reputation for virtue that is socially so damning."

"Oh, Mr. Pratt, what a thing to say!" Again the Marchioness looked shocked.

Orlando shrugged his shoulders. "Truth—like murder—will out, and—also like murder—is generally unpleasant. Let me multiply instances. What could be more damaging to a man than a reputation for unselfishness? Every woman with whom he dances will imagine it is because she is plain: every woman to whom he talks will believe it is because she is stupid."

"I like unselfish men," said Kate, suddenly seized with a spirit of contradiction.

"That, Lady Katharine, is because you don't know any; no really unselfish man would ever speak to you. Again, what could be more disastrous to a woman than a reputation for good temper? Her male friends will neglect her for those whom they love less and fear more, and her female friends will borrow her best sunshade."

"But her male friends will want to marry her," replied Lady Dunbar.

"That is so, and will bully her for the rest of their lives."

Sir Godfrey laughed. "Will they, Pratt? Wait till you've married a good-tempered woman."

"It is time to go and dress," said the Marchioness, rising from her seat, and thinking that Mr. Pratt's influence was not exactly the one most suited to her already too turbulent niece. Lady Kate was quite self-

willed and cantankerous enough without needing this man's unconventional views to make her more so; and the Master of Killeven was arriving next day—one of the most eligible suitors that Lady Dunbar had provided for this most super-dainty of Kates. It would never do for Mr. Pratt to draw away Lady Katharine's attention from so admirable a young man as the Master of Killeven.

But the fact that her aunt deprecated this new and baneful influence, in no way prevented Lady Kate from succumbing to it. During the next few days she and Orlando became great friends. Kate was young enough to be impressed by Pratt's affected cynicism, and clever enough to appreciate his undoubted ability. Having met him in the nick of time when she was feeling out of tune with the easy frivolity of the rest of the party, she believed he was much more in earnest than he was, or than he even pretended to be. To her he seemed an embittered and disappointed man of the world, who had eaten whole apple-pies of Sodom and found them dissolve into dust-bins; and in her present frame of mind that was exactly the kind of thing to fascinate her. Orlando, too, was wise enough not to make love to her just then, but to convey to her, in a subtle way, the impression that he regarded her as an intellectual comrade rather than a possible wife; and there is nothing more flattering to the female mind than to be

treated as the one thing that it is not. Foolish men praise women for the charms which they undoubtedly possess; wise men for those in which they are conspicuously lacking. In fact there is only one thing which delights a woman more than to be commended for an excellence to which she could not possibly attain, and that is to be scolded for a fault of which she could not possibly be guilty. These form the two surest and strongest weapons of flattery in man's armoury, and they rarely, if ever, fail.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

Latest Volumes.—January 1905.

Denis Dent. By E. W. Hornung. 1 vol.-3708.

Mr. Hornung's Australian scenes are as good as ever. The hero's adventures at the diggings and on the bloody field of Inkerman are most graphically described.

A Daughter of the Vine. By Gertrude Atherton. 1 vol.-3709.

Another of Mrs. Atherton's brilliant stories of old California, breathing the passionate nature of its half Spanish inhabitants, and the picturesque beauty of their country.

If Only, etc. By F. C. Philips. 1 vol.-3710.

A good story in the best style of the author of "As in a Looking Glass;" with other sketches, and a comedy written in collaboration with Sir Augustus Harris.

The Quaint Companions. By L. Merrick. 1 vol.-3711.

The loneliness and sadness of an Ethiop's life among his white brethren here forms the *Leitmotif* of a powerful and able novel; the human interest of which will stir the reader strongly. The story takes place in England.

Twelve Stories and a Dream. By H. G. Wells. 1 vol.-3712.

A collection of short fantastic tales in the vein that Mr. Wells has long made peculiarly his own. "The Magic Shop," the second story in this volume, will appeal to boys and their parents alike.

Doctor Xavier. By Max Pemberton. 1 vol.-3713.

The author of "A Wo[illegible]ronstadt" is probably the be[illegible] sensational writer. There are [illegible] dramatic situations in this imagi[illegible] a struggle for a throne.

The Courtship of Morrice Buckler. By A. E. W. Mason. 2 vols.-3714/15.

"Arms and the Woman" is the theme of this old-time romance, the picturesquely striking scenes and incidents of which take us alternately to London, Bristol and the Tyrol.

His Fortunate Grace, etc. By Gertrude Atherton. 1 vol.-3716.

This new volume by a favourite authoress contains three stories. The first describes the experiences in America of an heiress-seeking English Duke.

Shipmates in Sunshine. By F. F. Moore. 2 v.-3717/18.

The flirtations and harmless intrigues of his fair fellow-passengers on a Caribbean cruise throw an additional glamour over the magnificent tropical scenes among which Mr. Moore takes us.

Kitty Costello. By Mrs. Alexander. 1 vol.-3719.

This posthumous work by the late Mrs. Alexander is of peculiar interest as being to some extent founded on the recollections of her own girlhood.

Stella Fregelius. By H. Rider Haggard. 2 vols.-3720/21.

This is not a South African story but a fantastic tale of a modern dreamer's successful attempt to establish communication with the spirit world.

The Jesters. By "Rita." 1 vol.-3722.

The authoress of "Souls" is one of the brightest and cleverest depicters of the "smart set" in modern society. This Cornish romance is a prettily constructed love-story with just enough sarcasm to make it "go."

Essays and Ad 1900-1903. By BURY (SIR JOHN LUBBOCK). 1 vol. - 3723.

The volume treats of a great variety of subjects, on one or two of which the author's erudition and experience throws a new and valuable light.

A Monte Cristo in Khaki. By the late COL. RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE. 1 vol. - 3724.

A story of war, crime and intrigue, in which the Cuban expedition and the relief of the Pekin legations are graphically described.

My Friend Prospero. By HENRY HARLAND. 1 v. - 3725.

A bright and witty romance by the author of "The Cardinal's Snuff-Box" and "The Lady Paramount." As in his other works, the scenes of this story are laid in Italy.

The Triumph of Mrs. St. George. By PERCY WHITE. 2 vols. - 3726/27.

A society drama of unusual interest. Mrs. St. George is a fascinating adventuress who will steal the reader's sympathies.

Made of Money. By DOROTHEA GERARD. 1 vol. - 3728.

The troubles of a multi-millionaire and the burden of great riches here form the theme of a bright story of England and Italy.

The Magnetic North. By ELIZABETH ROBINS (C. E. RAIMOND). 2 vols. - 3729/30.

This is a story of the "Long Trail" to the Klondyke. Miss Robins' descriptions of the ice-bound North are vivid to the point of making the reader shiver.

The doings (and misdoings) of high society dames are once more pilloried by Mr. Benson's caustic pen. An American millionairess plays the pleasant part of fairy godmother.

Incomparable Bellairs. By AGNES and EGERTON CASTLE. 1 vol. - 3733.

A collection of delightfully picturesque old-world tales of incidents in the life of a society belle when Bath was the vortex of English fashion and gaiety.

The Woman with the Fan. By ROBERT HICHENS. 2 vols. - 3734/35.

Mr. Hichens is here as brilliant as ever in his portrayal of the follies and vices of the "smart set," though the story is resonant with a deeper note of human interest than the title would lead us to expect.

Tomaso's Fortune, and Other Stories. By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN. 1 v. - 3736.

The late Mr. Merriman was almost without a rival in the art of telling a tale, and he was never without a good tale to tell. These short stories of many lands and climes are fully up to the best he has ever done.

Red Morn. By MAX PEMBERTON. 1 vol. - 3737.

One of the best stories that Mr. Pem[illegible] written for many a day. The adventures and experiences of the heroine — an American heiress — are both varied and startling.

The Tauchnitz Edition is to be had of all Booksellers and Railway Bookstalls on the Continent, price M 1,50. or 2 francs per volume. A complete Catalogue of the Tauchnitz Edition is attached to this work.