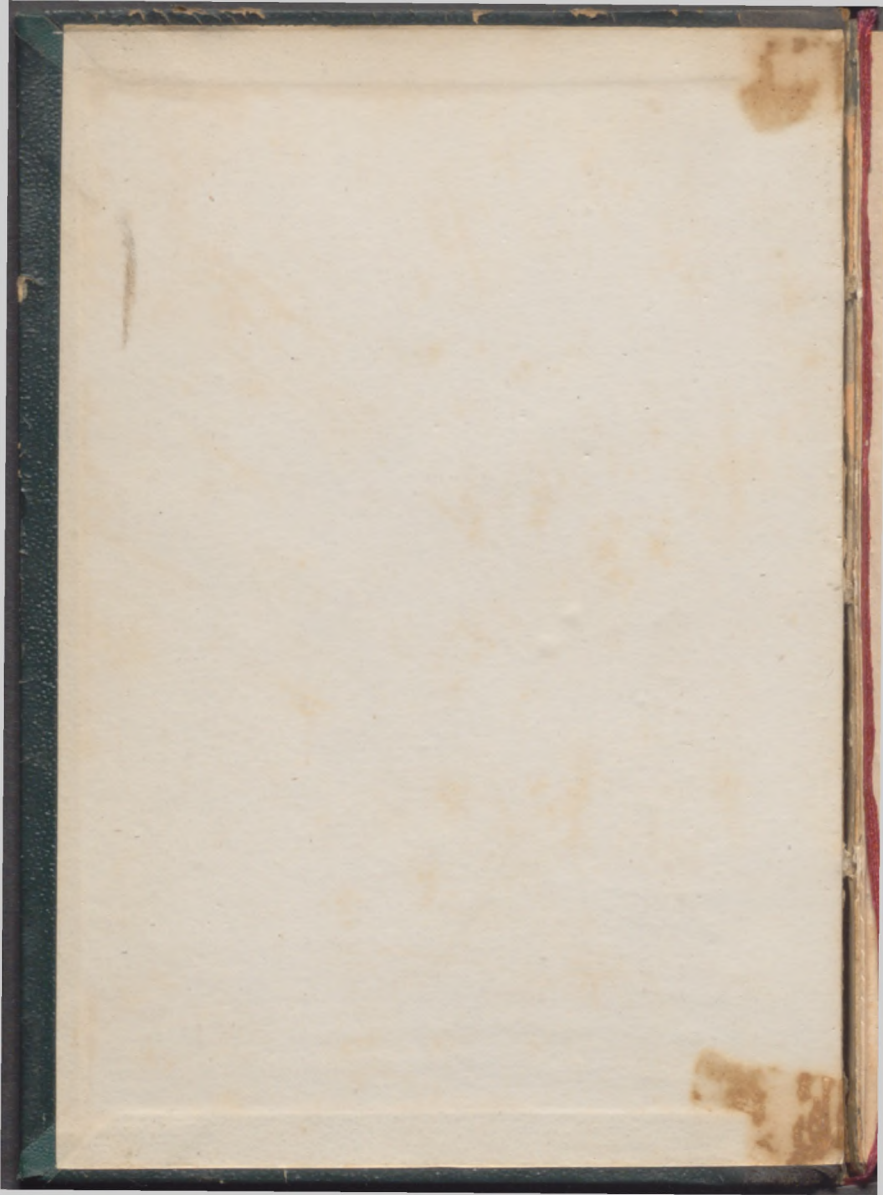


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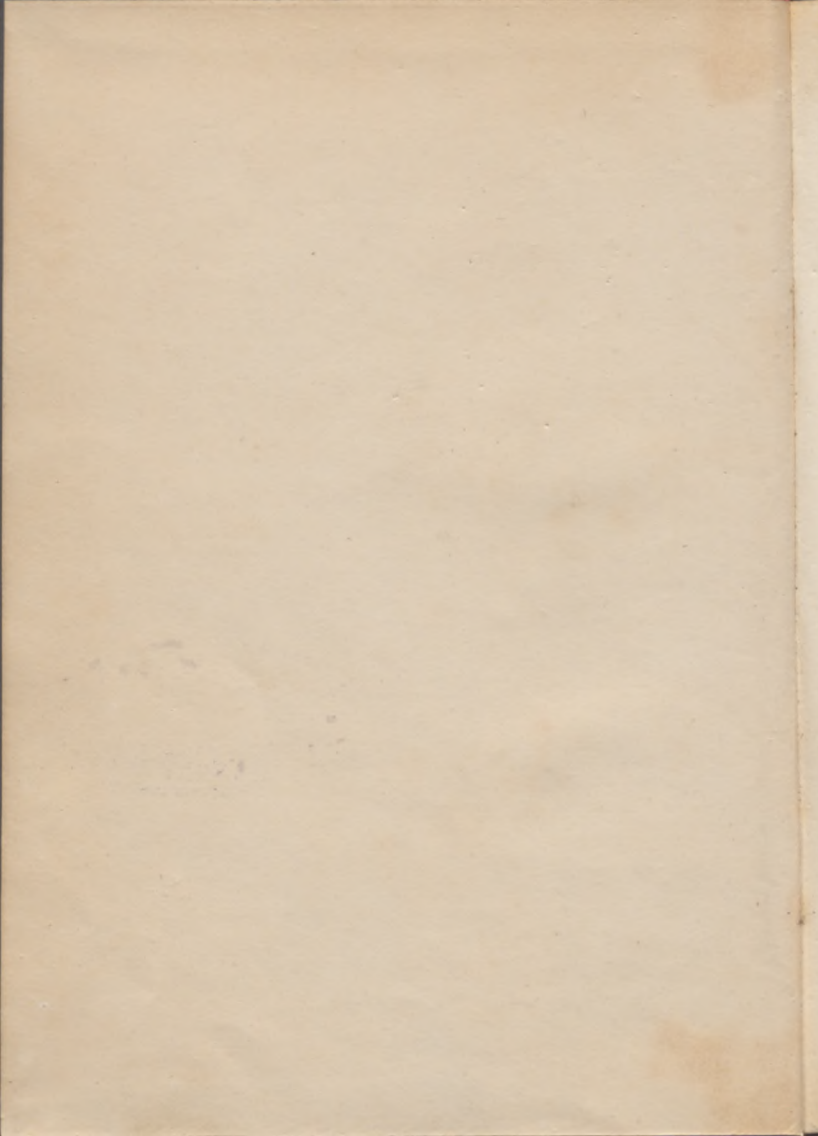
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FIGHTING
THE AIR.

VOL. I.



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FIGHTING THE AIR.

A NOVEL.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "VÉRONIQUE," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1875.

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FIGHTING THE AIR.

A NOVEL.

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FLORENCE MARRYAT.

AUTHOR OF "LADY'S GOSPEL," "KIDNAPER," ETC.

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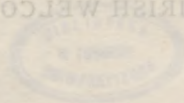
FLORENCE-MARRYAT

TO

THE LADY OLIVE GUINNESS

IN MEMORY OF

AN IRISH WELCOME.



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FIGHTING THE AIR.

CHAPTER I.

Laurence Fane seeks his Fortune.

LAURENCE FANE, of middle-class birth, and the only child of an only child, grew up to manhood with (happily for himself) but few relations to trouble him. Orphaned at an age when his mind was too little formed to feel the loss he had sustained, he was confided to the care of his bachelor godfather Laurence, a rich merchant of Liverpool, who fully intended his godson to succeed him in his business. But the children of the present day are apt to have opinions of their own; and the more young Fane saw of the counting-house the less he liked it. The strict confinement, the dull routine, the monotonous duties sickened him. He had already felt within himself that mysterious, irrepressible desire to go forth and do something above the level of the ordinary world: vague dreams of rendering famous the unstained though humble name his father had bequeathed him, had made him restless, and at last the feeling was no longer to be restrained.

He confided his wishes to his godfather. Old Laurence's fury was unbounded.

"You presume to think for yourself," he exclaimed, "to find fault with the position in which I have placed you. You—a mere lad of two-and-twenty, without name, money, or relations!—"

"It is because I have no relations that I must think for myself," returned the young man. "It is because I have neither name nor money that I wish to make them, sir! I hate the counting-house. Copying letters and book-keeping weary me to death. I would rather break stones on the high road."

"And this is what you call gratitude," rejoined his godfather. "Do you know that I have kept you beneath my care ever since you were seven years old; and that the few hundreds your poor muddle-headed father left behind him have almost all been expended on your education."

"I know that I have much to thank you for, sir, and I am not ungrateful. But you have mistaken my vocation in putting me in business. I shall never make a good merchant. Let me have what money may remain to me, and for the future I will keep myself."

"And in what way—what way?" demanded Mr. Laurence, trembling with anger.

Young Fane reddened.

"By my pen, sir," at last he said boldly. "I know

"I have it in me, and whatever happens I must be an author."

The merchant burst into a derisive peal of laughter.

"*An author!* poor fool. And supposing you were an author, what then? You would join a set of beggarly wretches who never know from one day to another how they will buy bread to feed themselves with on the next, and end by rattling off to their graves at the expense of the parish. Why, there's not an author on the list that would not change places to-morrow with the lad that sweeps out my offices, or that wouldn't be an ass if he didn't," he added in a more uncertain tone.

"Be that as it may," returned young Fane, "my mind is made up on the subject, for I have been thinking over it the last two years. And here, at least, is a proof," he continued modestly, as he drew a gaily covered magazine from his coat pocket, "that I am not mistaken in supposing I have some taste for writing. The editor of this periodical has not only accepted and printed my article on the late change of government, but sends a letter with it desiring to hear from me again."

His godfather's face grew purple.

"And do you mean to tell me that you have dared—yes, dared—to commence writing and publishing without referring to me? That you have stolen the time due to the transaction of my business for your

idiotic scribbling? You're a thief, sir; no better than a common thief."

"Mr. Laurence, I will not stand such an epithet, even from you."

"I cast you off; I will have nothing more to do with you. For fifteen years you have been brought up under this roof, and if you had behaved yourself properly you might have succeeded me in my business, and risen to wealth and renown. But I'll have no author's name confounded with mine. I'll have no romantic fools letting my good property go to rack and ruin, nor a pack of nonsense go forth to the world from my offices; you shall date it from the workhouse first."

"Very good, sir. At least, we are agreed on that point. I don't know how much of my money may be left. I think you told me the other day it was only a few hundreds, but whatever it is I will take it and relieve you of my presence."

"The sooner the better; the sooner the better," replied the old man testily. "Your father left two thousand pounds behind him; you don't suppose he saved that out of his beggarly parson's income, do you? It was part of the money he received with your mother."

"So I have heard you say before."

"From seven to twelve you cost me fifty pounds a year, from twelve to eighteen a hundred; and then

I reckon your board and lodging at another fifty. You didn't suppose I was going to keep you all these years for nothing," continued the merchant, looking up half-maliciously and half-shamefacedly into the young man's countenance.

"I have never thought about it, but I am glad you have, since it lays me under less obligation to you. By your reckoning, sir, there still remains upwards of nine hundred pounds due to me. With that in hand I feel rich, and am sure that I shall make my way in the world."

"And who is to pay me for all the trouble and anxiety I have incurred in your bringing up?" demanded Mr. Laurence.

"I have worked for you four years without pay," replied young Fane, indignantly.

"But without a premium."

"If you consider a premium is still due to you, let me know how much it is, in Heaven's name, and I will pay it and go."

"Well, a premium in the first instance would have been too high for you to pay—and as you say, you have given me four years. Yet a hundred or two would not be much of a remuneration. I shall have to pay some one to do your work, remember."

"Give me eight hundred and let us be quits," cried the young man, disgusted beyond measure at the parsimony of his godfather, and on these terms

they parted, the old man vowing that whatever happened he would never see or speak with his godson again.

Laurence Fane went, of course, to London. It was thence he had first received encouragement—it was there he hoped to make his name. With eight hundred pounds in his pocket, and a strong belief in the future, he felt himself to be independent, and he was not entirely mistaken. He had brains of a very high order—much poetic genius, and a vivid imagination; and, had his education tended to correct the errors of his nature, might have possessed a mind strong enough for anything. But the sensitive, highly organised child had been left, since the death of his parents, entirely to the charge of servants and masters; he had been scared and scolded in the nursery; bullied and browbeaten in the school-room, and all because those placed about him were too ignorant to distinguish between wilful inattention and disobedience, and the wanderings of a wondering newly-opened soul.

In the counting-house it was little better. The senior clerks blamed him for carelessness, whilst he was striving with all his might to bring back his thoughts from the realms of fancy, whither, despite his best efforts, they would wander, and pin them down to the business he had in hand. His godfather (as has been shown) had no more sympathy with him

than the rest; and Laurence Fane was well parted from the surroundings of his earliest years. In London he found friends. The editor who had accepted his first production was so struck by the young man's manners, bearing, and appearance, that he gave him several valuable introductions, and before Laurence Fane had been in town a twelvemonth he had a large circle of acquaintances and a fair literary connection. Of course he began low. Rome was not built in a day; and there is no more uphill path than that which leads to the temple of Fame. Popularity may, and often is, won in an hour, and for no particular merit of the winner's; but Laurence Fane's talent was not of this kind. His was a deep, steady-going dependable brain. He never wrote trash; but his articles lacked the glittering smartness which magazine writers aim at in the present age. His papers would live and probably be referred to ages after he had turned to dust, but editors could not afford to pay for them as liberally as they could for sensational and improbable fiction. This was injustice; but it was fact. The public seemed to think that if an essay were good enough to outlive them, it might bide their time. But the ephemeral matter that was born in the morning and died at night would not brook delay;—like some wine that requires to be drunk as soon as opened or its flavour is lost. Laurence Fane soon found out the truth of this.

Yet he was both hopeful and happy. The ready money he had brought to London enabled him to make a permanent home for himself in two small rooms in the west centre of the town, where he devoted his time to the cultivation of his art. Even for the sake of gain he would not have assimilated himself with those triflers in the field of literature who did not hesitate to sacrifice art, grammar, and even decency to the false taste of the day. He looked upon his work as sacred—on his talents as a responsible gift entrusted to him from above—on his profession as something with which he must either rise or fall, and by which he had determined to rise.

He entered the world of letters under no false pretensions, but took his own name boldly, and laboured for it faithfully; and sooner or later such work must tell.

Of course he had enemies—success is a sufficient guarantee for that—but as he had no near relations to die of envy at his good luck, they were less secret and less bitter than they might have been. At all events he knew where to find and how to meet them, and was not stabbed in the dark at each fresh turn he made. And he had been living thus upon his own resources for eight years when we first met him.

* * * * *

It was a broiling day in July, towards the close of the London season, when even the most hardened and

inveterate of diners-out and dancers began to confess they had almost had enough of it. The street in which Laurence Fane's apartments were situated was as hot as an oven, and the effect of discovering his whereabouts seemed almost too much for the handsome fresh-coloured young man who knocked so perseveringly from door to door, inquiring for him by name. At last he was successful. The landlady, at number forty-five, was induced to acknowledge that a "party by the name of Fane occupied her first floor, but she didn't think the gentleman could see him, as he was still in bed."

"Still in bed?" cried the stranger, who was evidently from the country, as he consulted his old-fashioned silver watch. "Why, it's past twelve o'clock—he can't be in bed at this hour. Is he ill?"

"O! dear, no sir, not as I knows of; but, young gentlemen, they will be late during the season, you see. Not but what Mr. Fane is most regular, and the least trouble of any party I ever lodged. But if you'll step up, sir, if you want particular to see him, I'll ask if he's awake."

"I do wish to speak to him most particularly," said the young man, as he complied with her request, "for I am returning to the country to-morrow morning. Perhaps I could wait for a little till he does wake."

"O, I'll rouse him, sir, never fear. He'll be sure



to get up when he knows you've come. Shall I take your card?"

The stranger reddened, and smiled.

"Well, I haven't got such a thing about me, but if you'll say Mr. West would like to see him, I daresay he'll remember who I am."

By this time he had been ushered into the sitting-room, which was divided from the bed-chamber by folding doors. It was a comfortable-looking apartment, furnished more like the study of some antiquated philosopher, than a young bachelor's sanctum. It contained but few decorations, and those of the gravest order: books and papers being its chief ornaments. Mr. West's attention, however, was immediately arrested by a bronze cast of the Ariadne, which he took to be the model of some black woman or other, and stood gazing at in utter astonishment, whilst the landlady made her presence known by thumping with horny knuckles on the panels of the folding doors.

"Mr. Fane—Mr. Fane—Sir!"

"Holloa! Yes! All right," in a drowsy tone from within.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, sir."

"I can't see any one."

"But he's going into the country to-morrow, sir, and he must speak to you first."

"What's his name?"

"Mr. West, sir!"

"Don't know him. Tell him to go to the devil."

"Not just yet my dear fellow, *please*," interposed the stranger in a loud genial voice.

"By Jove! Are you *there*? Why didn't the woman say so?"

"I *am* here. May I come in?"

"If you like, though I've not the least idea who you are."

Mr. West did not wait for a second invitation, but, opening the folding doors, at once entered the bed-chamber. As his eye fell on the young man who was sitting up in bed and passing his hands through his dishevelled hair, he sprang forward, exclaiming cordially, "My dear Laurence, I should have known you anywhere."

"And I don't believe I ever set eyes on you before," returned the other with a look of blank amazement.

"Can I be so altered? Why, don't you remember George West, and the old Maple Farm, where you spent your summer holidays once, whilst we were having our 'larning' thrashed into us by old Wilkins?"

"*George West!* Is it possible? Why, of course I do, though it must be twenty years ago. Give us your fist, old fellow! *George West!* No wonder I had forgotten. And where on earth have you sprung from?"

CHAPTER II.

An old Friend turns up.

GEORGE WEST laughed heartily.

"Do you think I have come from the bowels of the earth? You have forgotten your geography as well as your friends, Laurence? Maple Farm is no further away than Somersetshire, and the real business that brought me up to town this week, was the cattle show. But I told father if it was possible I'd find you out before I went home again."

"But how did you come to think of me after so many years?" said Laurence Fane.

"Many years—ah, 'tis many years, isn't it, since we cut up such a shine in the orchard, and stripped all father's best trees of their fruit—do you remember that?"

"Perfectly, and how he thrashed you for both of us, because I was a visitor."

"Ugh," responded George West, with a comical face. "I remember that thrashing to this day. Well, after that you know we lost sight of each other. You stayed with old Wilkins and I went up to Yorkshire, where I wouldn't learn anything, and showed such a sorry kind of a disposition that father shipped me off

to my uncle in Australia, and I haven't been home above a couple of years or so."

"Didn't you like it?"

"Not over much. It was altogether different from what I expected, and then my poor mother died, and I got a bit homesick and tired of rambling, and father thought I had better come back and stick to the old place. I'm his only son you know."

"But what made you think of me, George?"

"Well, I've often mentioned you since I came back. We thought you were still with Mr. Laurence, at Liverpool; and several times I talked of going over there and looking you up, but something prevented. And the other day a friend of mine to whom I was speaking of you, told me that you had left your godfather and set up as a writer in London, and if I went to the people who sold your books they'd tell me where you lived, so when I came up to the show last week I said to father if you were to be found I'd find you."

"It is very kind of you," rejoined Fane. "I would not have missed seeing you for worlds. I have not too many friends worthy of the name in this Babylon, as you may suppose."

"But what made you quarrel with your godfather, Laurence? Did he behave badly to you?"

"Scarcely that, but he did not understand my disposition, and the life I lived there was most uncon-

genial to me. Besides I have an independent spirit, West, and the idea of receiving benefits from a man on whom I had no claim, galled me. I felt I could support myself, and the result has proved that I was right."

"And you live by writing books?" said George West, with an air of incredulity. "It is wonderful to me. I cannot even read them. How do you do it now? Do tell me."

Laurence Fane laughed. How often had that question been put to him before by ignoramuses or noodles?

"I like to see you laugh," exclaimed his friend, "it makes you look so like your old self. There is one thing about you, Laurence, that will never change, and that is, your eyes."

They formed a great contrast as they sat together, those young men who were almost of an age.

George West was by far the handsomer of the two. He possessed a magnificent build, with large well-formed features, a florid complexion, bold blue eyes, and a profusion of brown hair and beard. Laurence Fane, on the other hand, though tall, was slightly built. His features were remarkable neither for beauty nor ugliness; but he had a pair of honest, serious, earnest eyes that were apt to haunt even the casual observer long after their possessor had passed from his memory. It was to the unusual expression in

these eyes that George West alluded when he said there was one thing about him that would never alter.

"But come!" cried Fane cheerily, "it strikes me that if I am to have any breakfast this morning I had better be thinking of a bath and a change of raiment."

"What made you so late to-day?" demanded West, as half-an-hour afterwards, they sat before the breakfast tray together. "When I arrived here first and the landlady said you were still in bed, I thought she must be joking."

"My dear fellow, it's nothing for the season. I am never in bed until three or four in the morning (worse luck), so how can I be expected to rise before noon? Indeed, I am considered rather a wonder about here for keeping such regular hours as I do. I work through it all, anyway."

"But why need you go out so much?"

"Can't be avoided. If once you get in the stream of fashionable folly you must go with it, or you will find the current of popular favour turn against you. Besides, most of my engagements are with people who can assist me, or to whom I owe benefits, or whom I dare not offend for my life."

"Well, you don't look as if it agreed with you, Laurence; your face is as white as a sheet, and you seem to have precious little muscle. Look here, old

fellow, you must come back with me to Maple Farm to-morrow, and take a few weeks' rest."

"Impossible! I couldn't leave London for the next three weeks. I am engaged out every night."

"Hang the engagements. I'm sure you're not the fellow to care about dancing, and that sort of thing."

"Never danced in my life! No, it's not that, but there are reasons; in fact, my dear West, it's out of the question."

"Ah! I've found you out," cried the young farmer, bluntly. "There's a woman in the case. I know there is; confess it, Laurence."

"I'm quite sure there is not!"

"Nothing but the desire to please a woman or to enjoy her company, could keep a man in this broiling city when he could be out amongst the trees and bushes."

"That may be your experience, but it is not mine."

"There is not a fair lady in all this great Babylon (as you call it) whose charms are weighing against those of Maple Farm?"

"There is not—and never has been!"

"Oh, come, Fane! I can't quite swallow that. You may not be in love with anyone particular at the present moment, but you can't tell me that you don't know what it is."

"I assure you I do not."

"Thirty years old, and never been in love yet!"

"It is a fact."

"Lord bless you, man! I couldn't believe it from any lips but your own. Never been in love! Why I've been over head and ears regularly every twelve-month since I was able to know what the word meant."

"You haven't associated with the kind of women I am thrown in with perhaps, or you would tell a different story. I should just like to show you a few specimens. Fall in love with them indeed! I'd as soon think of becoming enamoured of my landlady."

"But there must be plenty of nice pretty girls in London."

"They don't come *my* way then! You forget I am literary. No! I've seen a good deal of life, and I've mixed in various phases of society, but I've never seen a woman yet who came up to my standard of what a woman should be. And perhaps it's as well I haven't, for if I were to meet such an one she would be very unlikely to take a fancy to me. I shall continue to live as I have lived—alone."

"A confirmed old bachelor, eh?"

"I don't say that, but I will never marry where I am not loved, and love has gone out of fashion. All the girls think of now are money and position, and I have neither. Besides, I am not at all sure that the goddess

of Love herself wouldn't upset my literary arrangements to that degree that I should wish her gone in a month. A wife and family must seriously interfere with study."

"You are fond of it?"

"Devotedly; I care for nothing else, I would give it up for nothing—even a wife," he added with the sly, arch look that was a peculiar charm of his. "I am ridiculed by some of my compeers because I will not consent to relinquish what appears to me to be a duty, that is to keep up my profession, as far as my humble efforts avail, to its highest standard, instead of simply making as much money out of it as I can. But I have tried and failed—not in the work, but in satisfying my conscience. My art is my religion, and I would rather starve in her defence than live on the wages of her prostitution."

"A fine theory, my dear fellow; but I've roughed it so long in this world that you must pardon me for saying it won't hold water."

"Then I shall die of thirst. Have you read my last article in the *Edinburgh Review*?"

George West blushed and looked conscious.

"Look here! my dear Laurence, you mustn't be angry with me, but I never read anything. Pon my word I don't, except it is the *Somersetshire Chronicle*, just to keep father up with the markets. We haven't time for it down at Busthorne."

"Don't say a word about it, West. It was my egotism prompted the question—but the article I alluded to dealt with the subject we were discussing."

"I take a great interest in everything of that kind," continued West with a praiseworthy but awkward attempt to soothe his friend's wounded vanity, "only you see it's the want of time. You have no idea how much we have to do in the country. The days are not half long enough."

"I should have imagined it was just the other way," replied our hero, smiling. "I always wonder what people who have none of these abominable parties to go to can do with their evenings."

"Come and see," interposed George West, quickly. "I have not given up the hope of persuading you to do that yet, Laurence. Now, be reasonable, the season, as they tell me, is all but over, and you want change of air. Why shouldn't you return with me to Maple Farm? My father expects you, for I wrote him word yesterday that I had procured your address, and should certainly persuade you to visit us. And though my sister is away for the present, my cousin is at home, and will do all she can to make you comfortable."

"I don't remember your sister," mused Laurence Fane.

"She is but seventeen. She was not born when

you stayed at Maple Farm. But I wait for your answer."

"I will strike a bargain with you," said the other. "If you will accompany me this evening to Lady Flitters' 'At Home,' I will go back with you to Maple Farm to-morrow. After all, my remaining engagements are such as I would gladly be freed from."

"To Lady Flitters', 'At Home.' Who on earth is Lady Flitters?"

"Your question would condemn you at once in society, my dear fellow. Lady Flitters is one of our most fashionable authoresses, but I won't give you a list of her works, because she issues one every three months."

"But I have no evening clothes with me—I mean I don't possess any," said George West, honestly correcting himself. "You know we have no use for them down at Bushthorne."

"That's of no consequence. Lady Flitters' gatherings are strictly Bohemian, and her guests appear in any costume that best pleases themselves. For to-night I will keep you in countenance."

"But why insist on dragging me to Lady Flitters'? I have no wish to see her."

"Because you doubted my veracity when I told you I had never been in love. I want to show you the style of women Fate sends me to fall in love with.

After which you will be no more faithless, but believing."

"What if I take it on credit?"

"Then I won't go down to Maple Farm to-morrow."

"Oh! If that is the only alternative I give in."

So as twelve o'clock was on the point of striking, they found themselves at the door of Lady Flitters' house.

CHAPTER III.

Lady Flitters' "At Home."

LADY FLITTERS was a popular authoress; that is to say, the number of three volume novels that Lady Flitters had written and published during the last ten years would have filled a respectably-sized bookcase. But whether Lady Flitters made much money by the offspring of her brain was a question that lay between her publishers and herself. She said she *did*. She was always confiding to her most intimate friends the enormous sum she had received for her last novel, and the tempting offers she had been compelled to refuse.

"Speculator was dying, positively dying to get a novel from me this season. He would have given anything for it; told me to name my own price; but I couldn't oblige him. I have two in hand already, beside my Australian correspondence; and one cannot accomplish miracles. But I never saw any one so disappointed as poor Speculator. He will be at my 'At Home' to-morrow evening. *Do come.*"

It was a good-natured peculiarity of Lady Flitters that she asked every one she encountered to her "At Homes," without for a moment taking into considera-

tion his character, status in society, or capability for adding to the amusement of the evening.

All she cared for was quantity,—to have her rooms filled with the buzz of conversation, to see her guests packed so closely that they could hardly stir, and to persuade one or two well-known professionals to sing, play, or recite; this constituted, in her opinion, a successful *soirée*. The gatherings at her house in consequence, if not always enjoyable, were sometimes very amusing. Those who were at daggers drawn would jostle each other in the crowd,—a matron of unimpeachable virtue and the sternest propriety would find herself wedged in between an actress and a divorcée; authors would meet their critics, lovers the women who had jilted them, editors the writers of their rejected manuscripts,—and throughout the medley might be seen moving, pretty untidy Lady Flitters, with very visible black lines pencilled under her eyes, and more than a suspicion of rouge upon her cheeks, laughing with all the women, flirting with all the men, and making herself generally agreeable.

As Laurence Fane and George West, after perseveringly pushing their way up the crowded staircase, reached her drawing-room door that night, they found a blockade upon the threshold that impeded further progress.

"We must be patient," whispered Laurence to his friend; "but keep your eyes and ears open, and

you will probably see or hear something to amuse you."

An elderly spinster in youthful attire was standing on the threshold and holding forth in unmeasured tones to a young man before her.

"I wash my hands of ever having introduced you to her," she said, vehemently. "She is a syren, who will lure you on to destruction."

George West's blue eyes opened to their fullest extent. "Of whom *can* she be speaking?" he demanded of his companion.

"Only of one of her most intimate friends! Holla, Pelham!" he exclaimed, to the unfortunate subject of the exordium.

The elderly female turned to him at once.

"Am I not right, Mr. Fane? Is Mrs. Littleton's a proper house for Willie Pelham to visit at?"

"I know nothing against Mrs. Littleton's house, Miss Stringer."

"O! of course, you feel obliged to say so, but every one knows what you think. And look at Willie Pelham! Whoever saw a creature more changed than he has become during the last three months?"

"If I am, it's not going to Mrs. Littleton's that has changed me," grumbled the young man.

"It can be nothing else. She has drawn you away from all your old friends. And I say it's not fair when a certain number of ladies and gentlemen are

invited to a party, that one woman should monopolise all the men."

"If they will go after her, how can she help it?"

"They don't go after her, she entraps them. She——"

"Hush, for heaven's sake. Here she comes!"

Miss Stringer made way upon the threshold for the passage of a lady dressed in black, at whom she smiled and nodded in so friendly a manner that George West thought this could not possibly be the woman whose character she had been attacking. But he soon found out his mistake.

"How do you do, Mrs. Littleton?" said Fane, with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Fane. It is a long time since we have seen you at our house."

"It has not been for want of wishing to come. I have tried half-a-dozen times. But you know what it is in the season."

"Of course! Next to impossible. But I quite expected to see you at the Russells' last week. Such a charming party. *You* were not there, were you, Miss Stringer?"

"No! I wasn't asked. I was a little vexed at the omission at first—naturally as you may suppose—but Mrs. Russell has explained it all away, and I feel very much obliged for the consideration that prompted her not to send me an invitation."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I have heard since that there was rather a mixture, you know—one or two people it would be quite as well *not* to meet—and so Mrs. Russell wouldn't even write to me on the subject, which I think so very thoughtful of her."

Mrs. Littleton looked at the speaker in calm surprise.

"Considering," she said after a pause, "that I and my most intimate friends, with their wives and daughters, were invited and went, I hardly think you can be aware how bad a compliment to us your speech imputes, Miss Stringer."

Miss Stringer was about to make some cutting reply when a man from the upper landing attracted by the tones of Mrs. Littleton's voice, made his way through the crowd to her.

"Ah, my dear child!" he said airily, as he kissed the hand she extended to him; "I particularly wanted to have a chat with you. What have you done about the Warton affair, and is it true you are to write the next serial for the 'Vox Populi?' You have seen the *Rasper*, of course? Don't you care two straws about it. But you ought to take proceedings against the paper."

"One cannot quite help *caring*," said Mrs. Littleton, as he led her away, "particularly when it affects one's daily bread."

"*Scoundrel!*" said Laurence Fane, between his teeth as soon as they were out of hearing.

"Who is he?" demanded West.

"The greatest cur unhung. How does he dare to touch that woman's hand or speak to her? It was he that wrote that review in the *Rasper* denouncing her last work as the vilest production that has ever issued from a woman's pen. And all the world knows it but herself."

"Are there no grounds for the assertion?"

"Not one."

"But how can he say so in the face of facts?"

"My dear fellow, we can say anything in England now. The liberty of the press is so great that we may lie away each other's literary reputations without the least fear of punishment."

"But libel is actionable."

"Very true! and it is on that fact that journals like the *Rasper* (which is known as one of the most scurrilous about town) thrive. If the proprietor can only goad on one of his victims to bring an action against him, his fortune for the time is made, and his paper bought up, and read in quarters where it never gained entry before. Why, it was the *Rasper* that hatched into life the great *Fellon* scandal case, by professing indignantly to deny what no one else had ever heard of."

"What a rascally shame."

"You may well say so; but the best revenge to take is to leave its libellous articles unnoticed. Then they fall to the ground. Even when made public they cannot do material harm, as every publisher knows at what worth to take the *Rasper's* abuse. It was well said of that paper the other day, that the highest degradation possible was to be praised in it, since the fact denoted you must be on good terms with the proprietor. But let us try and edge our way into the drawing-room, I want to introduce you to Lady Flitters."

At last they succeeded in finding their hostess, who was enthusiastically cordial to Laurence Fane, and almost equally so to his friend.

"You know Mr. Sigismund, of course?" she said, intimating a gentleman who stood beside her.

"Mr. Sigismund and I have met before, I believe," returned Fane, stiffly, as he moved a little to one side.

"What a charming woman!" exclaimed West. "A very old friend of yours, I suppose, Laurence?"

"Never saw her till the week before last," returned Laurence, "and don't much care if I never see her again. She's too gushing for me. How she's making up to that fellow Sigismund."

"Who is he?"

"Another of your so-called popular authors, and a 'lion,' of course; especially with the women; but

"I'm glad to see his books are going down in the market lately, for if ever a man deserved to fail, he does."

"Why?"

"What do you think of a fellow, West, who, after possessing himself, lawfully or unlawfully, of the secrets of women of fashion, extorts sums of money from them by threatening betrayal, and boasts of his success afterwards?"

"I should say he ought to be kicked by every honest gentleman."

"Sigismund was turned out of his club for it."

"Turned out of his club and admitted *here!*"

"Hush, my dear boy, don't talk so loud. I must answer you as I did about the libels. Everyone is admitted into society in London. That man leaning against the mantelpiece in the next room poisoned his wife."

"Good heavens! Fane, you must be joking!"

"Sober earnest, my dear West. It wasn't proved against him, of course; but everyone knows he did it. I confess it makes me shudder to touch his hand, and I avoid the ceremony as much as possible. Here comes Miss Poppingham. She is a strong-minded woman of the very first water; wears cropped hair; writes for the *Reviler*, and gives out publicly that she doesn't believe in anything."

"Ah, Mr. Fane, I thought you had left town. And

when is the new book coming out? You must let me have it as soon as it appears. It will be quite a pleasure to review it."

("I'd as soon trust a sucking babe in a lion's jaw," muttered Fane.) "Oh, of course, my dear madam," he continued aloud. "Your name shall be the first down on the list. Isn't Miss Masters here to-night?"

"I believe so; but I suppose, as usual, she has hidden herself away on the staircase or the balcony. What a pity it is she is so careless in her behaviour, Mr. Fane. You should caution her a little on the subject."

"I caution her! What on earth should I have to do with cautioning Miss Masters?"

"It looks so bad you know; running after the men as she does, and her poor brother seems quite blind to her goings on. Some one should speak to her really. Ah! there is dear Miss Courtenay. I must have a word with her before I go."

"Two of the most bitter detractors of their own sex in London," quoth Fane as the ladies moved away. "Both disappointed in their own attempts at literature, and ready to fall upon and grind to powder any woman that succeeds. Do you see the lady in blue?"

"What of her?"

"She is Mrs. Littleton's unmarried sister. Mrs. Littleton has always written under her maiden name,

and I can remember the time, before she settled in London, when that woman used to pass herself off as the author. I was introduced to her myself as *the* Miss O'Connor, and only found out the mistake by accident. I believe she accepted invitations on the score of it. When the real Simon Pure appeared, however, there was an end to that, so she took up another cue. She wrote to the papers last week denying Mrs. Littleton's right to her *nom de plume*, and asserting that she was the only Miss O'Connor. Let's go and chaff her about it. Good evening, Miss O'Connor. I read your letter in the *Descriptive* last week. It was very amusing! So like you."

"I was forced to write it in my own defence," said the lady he addressed. "It is so very annoying to me to see my name constantly associated with trashy novels and private theatricals."

"It must be—naturally," replied Fane ("and, particularly as she's never done anything good, bad, or indifferent herself," he added, for the benefit of West, who had difficulty in keeping back his laughter.) "We are a low set altogether, Miss O'Connor. You do well not to countenance us."

"O! I didn't mean such writings as yours, Mr. Fane," exclaimed the lady with a killing glance. "One might well be proud to be connected with such an author as you are. But Mrs. Littleton's novels are really so very—very—"

"Just so! I quite agree with you," replied Laurence.

"That's a nice specimen of a sister," he added to his friend as they left Miss O'Connor's side; "ready to eat the other's head off for jealousy at her success. How thankful I am I have no relations."

"I see hardly any girls here, Laurence."

"How should there be? No one is invited except such as are connected with literature or art in some way or other, or who can run about town alone. What should young girls do in such an assembly? Occasionally you see them in the train of their fathers and mothers, but they always look intensely bored."

"Who is that lovely woman sitting in the corner?"

"Miss Warrington—one of our most industrious and painstaking actresses, and I believe as good as she is clever. But calumny has not left even her untouched. Miss Poppingham and Miss Stringer could talk to you for an hour on her misdeeds. It is by women that women's reputations are slain, West. But come downstairs and have something to drink."

As they threaded their way past the landing again, they found that Miss Stringer had got hold of Mrs. Littleton.

"I wish you loved me a little, dear," she was saying plaintively, as she knelt beside her, "but you have so many people to love you. I suppose it is not to

be expected. Look at this naughty Willie Pelham. You've quite fascinated him. But who can be surprised at it. I am sure I am not, and I admire his good taste, and so I always tell him."

Down in the refreshment room Fane noticed that his companion looked quite disturbed.

"I can't stand this sort of thing, Laurence," he said, in explanation; "envy, deceit and malice upon every side. How you can mix with them and hold your tongue is incredible to me. I should be telling my real opinion to everyone."

"And find yourself in a jolly scrape in twelve hours, and all your hopes of success gone in twelve months. Ah, my dear fellow, we can't afford to be so frank in London. The utmost one can do is to keep as free of the turmoil as possible."

"And have you not one real true friend amongst them all?"

"Several! though I have not run against them to-night. This is *London*, remember! not *Literature*. There are no kinder or more generous men and women than are to be found in my profession. It is the outsiders, those who would enter the lists but have proved themselves incapable, who poison our society. See! how calm and unconcerned a woman like Mrs. Littleton can afford to be."

"She appeared to take it all very quietly."

"Because she knows that where she has one enemy

she has a dozen friends. But after what I have shown you to-night, old fellow—and this being the only society which it is my interest to enter—you will not be surprised at my repeating what I said this morning, that I have never yet fallen in love."

CHAPTER IV.

Maple Farm.

ON the next afternoon the two men travelled down together to Maple Farm. Bushthorne was half-a-day's journey from London, and, owing to fatigue and the heat of the weather, Laurence Fane slept for the best part of the way. When George West woke him up, about six o'clock in the evening, with the news of their arrival, and he leapt from the railway carriage on to the platform, it seemed as though he had been suddenly transported into a new world.

"By Jove! what a change!" he exclaimed, as he stretched his limbs and looked around him.

He might well think so. The London train with a screech and a groan had already passed upon its way, and the country porters were demanding in stern, hard, Somersetshire dialect, whether the gentleman wanted a fly to take him to his destination.

"Not a bit of it," cried George, who had been looking after the portmanteaux. "This gentleman goes with me. Is my trap here, Wilson?"

"It's here right enough, Mr. George;" said a voice over the wooden paling that divided the station from the road.

"Oh! You're punctual for once, are you, Robert?" replied his master. "That's a comfort. Just see that baggage stowed into the back, will you? Down Rose, down Juno! Good dogs!" he continued to a brace of setters that leaped violently upon him. "Now, Fane my dear fellow, up into the dog-cart and I'll bowl you home in no time. I expect you won't be sorry to see your supper."

"I can hardly believe I'm here," replied his friend, as they commenced the journey to Maple Farm. "I feel like the prince in the fairy tale, who had but to sit down on his enchanted carpet to be transported anywhere. Is it possible I woke in town this morning?"

"Smells rather different, doesn't it!" remarked George, laconically.

Fane drew in a long breath, but said nothing. The road they were traversing was an ordinary one; but the views that broke on them every now and then above the hazel and wild bramble hedges were beautiful. Long lines of Somersetshire hills, clothed with the richest green, their red marl tops looking ruddy in the light of the setting sun; grazing meadows in which the cattle stood ankle deep in cool thick grass; little valleys running with streamlets of clear water, fringed with blue forget-me-nots and dark green cresses; and tangled copses of nut and blackberry bushes, which would be a perfect paradise for boys a

few months later. They passed through several villages, each cottage of which stood in its own flower and kitchen garden, and had a group of sunburnt, flaxen-poll'd children hanging about its wooden gate —by orchards laden with promise for the cider harvest —and by wide commons, destitute of all shelter except furze bushes, amongst which the donkeys, turned out for the night, were cropping their evening meal.

George West's cob—a celebrated trotter—took them past all these scenes with such rapidity, that Fane remembered them afterwards more as he would have done a panorama of pleasant pictures than part of the reality of life.

“Here we are,” exclaimed his friend, as he turned the dog-cart sharply into a large white gate. “You don't expect too much I hope, Laurence; it's nothing but a farm you see, after all.”

He was correct. Maple Farm made no pretension to be esteemed a gentleman's country seat; though it was none the less pleasant for that reason.

It was approached by a road cut through several acres of pasture land, on which calves, mares with their foals, and superannuated horses were quietly grazing. On one side was the stack and flail yard, on the other the stables. A large horse-pond covered with ducks and geese stood in the way; groups of labourers carrying their tools passed them with respectful obeisance.

"I wonder how you'll like this sort of thing?" said West, almost uneasily, "we're awfully primitive in this part of the world."

"I am revelling in it already," answered Fane. As they drew near the farmhouse he perceived that it was a long, low building, covered with vines and pear trees, and surrounded by an extensive orchard.

"O! I remember it all well now," he exclaimed suddenly. "We slept in that room on the right, above the pear tree, West, and made ourselves ill by eating all the pears within our reach."

"Don't wonder at it, my dear fellow. Those are the hardest baking pears we have, and when at their ripest are of the consistency of wood. I am surprised we live to tell the tale."

The front of the house was laid out in an old-fashioned country garden, in which lilac, laburnum, rose, and syringa bushes, shaded beds of sweet williams, marigolds, and tiger-lilies planted expressly for the benefit of the long row of beehives that stood under shelter on the warmest side. West drew up at the little wicket that shut off the garden from the farm.

"We must dismount here, Fane. Couldn't get any nearer if we were dying. I've tried over and over again to persuade my father to have a drive cut up to the old house, but he won't hear of it."

"I'm sure it would be ten thousand pities if he

did. It would quite destroy the character of the place. My dear West, if you only knew when one does get away into the country, how delightful it is to get *quite away*."

"Well, for my own part, I must say I've roughed it too long in the Bush to care about inconveniencing myself for the sake of appearance. But let's go in and see if we can find any of my people."

They walked up the narrow garden path together, where the door stood open within the deep creeper-covered porch. A young girl, clad in a tight-fitting grey dress with white linen collar and cuffs, came quickly to meet them in the hall.

"We saw you coming, George, and we guessed you must be bringing your friend with you," she said, as she shook hands with West.

"Yes! Let me introduce him to you. Mr. Fane! This is my cousin Margarita Hay, Fane; the best little girl in the world. What have you got for us to eat, Margarita?"

"You had better come and see," she answered smiling. "Your father is waiting for you in the dining-room."

She turned and led the way as she spoke, and Fane was struck, not with her appearance, but the complete absence of anything like self-consciousness, or awkwardness, in her manner. In the dining-room they found Mr. West, a fine old gentleman of the

squire type, who was proud of his agricultural knowledge and success, and liked better to hear himself called "Farmer West," than by any other title.

"You're very welcome, Mr. Fane," he said, with old-fashioned politeness. "My son was very anxious to find you out again, so I am glad he has succeeded, and if you can make yourself happy with us you are welcome to stay as long as it suits your convenience."

"I hardly know how to thank you sufficiently for your kindness," replied Laurence Fane, "especially as I have no claim upon it. It is not the first time you have extended hospitality to me as a friendless wanderer, Mr. West."

"Ah! you're alluding to the time when I carried you off from the clutches of old Laurence's house-keeper at Liverpool. Lord! what a poor funny little creature you were then. You hadn't as much colour in your cheeks as a winter rose. And you don't look over strong now."

"I am well enough, thank you; but a London life doesn't conduce to a robust appearance."

"Well, I hope you'll put on flesh and colour whilst you're here, sir; and, as a preliminary, suppose we sit down to supper. We don't eat our dinners just before we go to bed in these parts, Mr. Fane; but I hope that won't make any difference to your appetite."

"None in the least, as I'll do my best to show

you," replied Laurence Fane; but as they drew near the table he thought the meal might just as well have been designated dinner as anything else.

A huge ham and round of cold beef stood at one end, brawn and pigeon pie flanked the sides, whilst strawberries and cream, and fresh honey-comb, with home-made rolls and cakes, filled up the interstices.

In the centre stood a large China bowl of roses, and over them Fane could just see the fair calm face of the young girl, Margarita Hay, as she poured out the tea for her uncle and herself, the young men preferring to patronise the foaming tankards of ale that stood ready for them on the sideboard.

There was not much conversation carried on during the process of eating, and that little was devoted to explaining the reason of Laurence Fane's estrangement from his godfather to Mr. West.

"You do right to be independent," said the old man. "I never knew much of Mr. Laurence, but that little I did not like. He was not to be relied on. In all probability he would have kept you working for him for years, and never left you anything after all."

"Very likely; and though I never counted on his making me his heir, I knew that people would think I did, and the notion galled me. I would, at any time, rather spend a shilling earned by my own exertions than five pounds given me by another."

"I admire your spirit, sir," said Mr. West, as he

rose from the table and strolled out into the garden. The others took their chairs into the orchard behind the house, and sitting down under the fruit trees, smoked in silence and content. The soft evening air about his face, the cool grass beneath his feet, the complete absence of everything like a disturbing element (to say nothing of the effects of a good meal), seemed to lull Laurence Fane's mind into a state of the most blissful repose.

"I say," remarked West, suddenly, after a long pause, "just compare this with Lady Flitters' 'At home,' eh? What a contrast!"

"Don't speak of it," said Fane indignantly. "It seems like sacrilege."

The heat—the crowd—the scandal appeared to him now, on looking back to them, like some unholy feverish dream that he would willingly forget. And so he smoked on with that delicious sense of calm about him—the only sound to be heard an occasional faint rustle in the leaves above his head—the only sight to be seen the pure profile of Margarita Hay's face, as it was bent over the work in her lap.

CHAPTER V.

"Margarita and her Godchildren."

WHETHER from the effects of the journey, or the country air, or the sweet fresh linen, scented with lavender, in which he was laid, Laurence Fane slept late on the morning succeeding his arrival at Bushthorne. He woke in a wide low-ceilinged room, the prevailing tints of which were green and white, and the only ornaments two dark blue China vases, for which a connoisseur in porcelain would have given an incredible sum of money, but which were used at Maple Farm for no worthier purpose than to hold dead rose leaves and dried sprigs of rosemary. The casement window was hooked open by an iron rod, and the leaves of the pear tree, curling inward, kept tapping on the diamond panes with a gentle movement that could scarcely be called sound; but a large bumble-bee, attracted by a tumbler of mignonette that stood upon the window sill, had effected an entrance, and was buzzing round the walls of his self-elected prison. It was this noise that roused Fane, who lay for some moments seriously considering where he was and how he had come there. The crowing of a gallant cock in the strawyard beyond, and the

snapping of a little terrier on the garden path below, however, soon brought him to his senses, and then he became aware of the sound of childish voices joined in recitation in the orchard that lay beneath his window.

God made the bird, and gave it wings
To bear it through the air,
When on the tree it sits and sings,
He makes it happy there.

"Hush! Bessy. Hush! Peggy," said another voice with prolonged caution, "you mustn't speak so loud, or we shall wake the gentleman in that room."

"What gentleman, godmother?"

"A gentleman that came all the way from London yesterday, and is very tired, and wants to sleep a long time that he may rest himself."

Then a child's laugh commenced, but was instantly stifled.

"Why do you laugh, Maggie? It is silly not to answer. Tell me, Mary, why does Maggie laugh?"

"Because, godmother, she says it's nearly dinner time, and the gentleman's still in bed."

"Ah! that seems very strange to you, doesn't it? but this gentleman has not had his breakfast yet."

"We had ours at seven o'clock, godmother!"

"And it is now twelve. No wonder you are ready for your dinner. Well, you can say the hymn once over again, and then you can leave me to look after

the gentleman's breakfast. Now, Mary, you begin, and mind, Gracie, you don't make a mistake this time."

"God made the bird, and gave it wings."

Laurence Fane's curiosity was roused. He had recognised the tones of Miss Hay's voice, and wondered whose family it was she had collected round her. He left his bed, crept to the open window, and peeped cautiously on the scene below. There she sat, in a simple morning dress, without any covering to her head or shoulders, knitting beneath the shade of an apple tree, with about a dozen children of all ages clustered on the grass about her. Some were lying with their curly heads upon her lap, others leaned against her shoulders, one was actually in her arms and greatly impeding the progress of her work. Yet she knitted on, apparently quite used to the invasion, and turning her eyes neither to the right nor to the left. When the verse was concluded for the second time, Margarita put down the youngster on her lap with a kiss, and rose to go. Fane instantly drew backwards.

"Now you must run home, my children," she said, caressingly, "and leave me to my business."

"We may come again to-morrow, godmother?"

"No, not to-morrow, nor the next day, but on Friday perhaps. Godmother Daisy comes home on

Friday, you know, and we must pick lots of flowers to make the house beautiful for her, and a very large nosegay for her bedroom. And all Godmother Daisy's boys must come up and have tea on the orchard grass."

"And not the girls, godmother," cried a plaintive little voice.

"Of course the girls, dear Peggy. Do you think I would leave my little children out? But godmother Daisy will be longing to see her boys. She has sent her love to them in every letter, and she is bringing home a large new book, full of pictures, on purpose to teach them out of."

The voices died away by degrees as the young girl left the orchard, with the children clustering about her. Fane watched them till the last.

Margarita reminded him of a "Madonna," or a figure of "Charity," or of some nun taking orphan children to her bosom, and the memory interested him and lingered with him till he had finished dressing. Then he descended to the same room they had supped in the night before, and found his young hostess waiting for him there.

"I trust I have not put you to much inconvenience," he said on entering.

"None at all. My cousin has just returned. He will be in directly. I hope you slept well and feel the better for it."

"I am perfectly rested, thank you. And it was so pleasant to be wakened by the voices of the little ones in the orchard."

"O! I hope we did not disturb you."

He was about to answer when George West made his appearance.

"Well, old fellow, how do you feel? Ready for a ride on horse-back, or a day's fishing, or a turn in the hay field. I hope those brats of Margarita's didn't wake you up. I heard them howling in the orchard."

"O! I didn't let them sing, I assure you, George," interposed Miss Hay, with some trepidation.

"I was about to mention them as you entered. I thought them a most charming little group. A Sunday School class of yours, I suppose, Miss Hay, or something of that sort."

"Thereby hangs a tale!" said George, slyly.

"Now don't tease, George," replied his cousin.

"But I am really rather curious on the subject," said Fane in the midst of his breakfast. "I heard them call you godmother. May I ask the reason?"

"Well, the truth is they *are* my godchildren."

"The truth is," broke in George, "that my cousin holds some rather quixotic notions about duty, and when people won't do their duty she does it for them. Consequently——"

"Now, you know, George, Daisy goes hand in hand with me in this."

"Because you converted her. Consequently"—continued George, unflinchingly—"these two girls, finding that one-half of the infantine population of Bushthorne go unbaptized, and that the principal excuses made by their parents are that they can't afford to pay the christening fees, and they have no one to be godmother to them—spend all their money and their time in standing sponsors to these brats, and training them up in the way they should go afterwards."

"O, George! how you do exaggerate," exclaimed Miss Hay, looking really distressed. "Please, Mr. Fane, don't take all he says for gospel. Daisy and I have several godchildren in the village, it is true, and we teach them occasionally,—it's very natural one should, isn't it?—but I hope we never let them interfere with other duties."

"Don't be silly, Margarita. You know I was only in fun. Only those brats do kick up a confounded row about the house sometimes you will allow."

"I expect they will 'kick up a row,' as you call it, on Friday, George, when Daisy comes home. All her boys are to be here for the occasion, and they will be delighted to see her again. Daisy's first god-child was a boy, Mr. Fane, and mine a girl, and so

we have kept to it ever since, and she takes all the boys and I all the girls."

"I am afraid Miss West must have the worst of the bargain."

"O! I don't know that. My little god-daughters are very unruly sometimes. Only the funny part of it is, the mothers will call all the babies after me, and the difficulty I have in thinking of nicknames by which to know them apart is very amusing. My cousin, of course, has not to encounter the same drawback, though several of hers have been called 'George' after 'the young squire.' One woman *would* call her boy 'Daisy' notwithstanding all our remonstrances; and although the poor child is only five years he is already beginning to be heartily ashamed of it."

"It is certainly less suitable for a ploughboy than for a young lady," replied Fane, laughing. "May I ask what your cousin's real name is?"

"Margarita, the same as mine. We were both named after our grandmother; but my cousin is two years younger than myself, and when I came to live with uncle they called her Daisy, to distinguish the two."

"And have you never had a nickname?"

Margarita shook her head.

"She is too good and steady for a nickname," said George West rising. "She's the guardian angel

of the place. I don't know what we should do without her. If you're likely to be much longer, Fane, I'll just run down to the stables and back again, for I have to meet our 'vet.' there at one."

"All right, my dear fellow; I have a few letters of importance to write, and confess to still feeling sufficiently lazy to prefer lounging about in this room or under those trees to taking violent exercise in the sun. Unless I shall be inconveniencing Miss Hay by my presence."

"Oh no, indeed. I was about to take my book out into the orchard again, or I will remain here, whichever you like best."

"If I may choose, I prefer the orchard, always supposing your company to be included."

So they left the breakfast-room for the shade of the fruit trees, and whilst Margarita sat with a book in her lap, Laurence Fane lit his cigar and lounged at some distance from her.

Presently he spoke, as though his words were the continuation of a train of thought.

"And so your cousin Miss West, returns home on Friday. Has she been away long?"

"Only a fortnight, but it seems a long time to me. We have been so seldom separated!"

"You are very fond of her?"

"Oh, very! We are like sisters. How should it

be otherwise? I have lived here ever since I was three years old."

"Indeed!"

"Yes! My father and mother were both dead then. Mother was uncle's favourite sister, and I was her only child. So he brought me here to be his. And I could not have loved my own father more than I do him."

"How strange! I too was an only child, and an orphan at the age of seven. But I had no kind uncle to take me home and be a father to me."

"Hadn't you!" demanded Margarita with interest.

"No. I was confided to the care of my godfather, who was no relation, and took no trouble about me. So when I came of age I started on my own account, and have lived alone ever since."

There was a pause, and then the girl remarked:

"You have been very successful, George says?"

"In my profession you mean.—Yes, pretty well, but nothing can make up for the loss of home. Is your cousin Daisy like you?"

"O, not at all. She's a very pretty girl."

This assertion was made apparently so free from all self-consciousness or affectation, that Fane glanced at the speaker, wondering if she were really unaware of her own attractions. The extremely plain manner in which she was dressed, and the simple way in which her brown hair was twisted round her small,

shapely head, might have caused a casual observer to pass her by as "nothing particular." But there was something in the expression of her sweet, serious face that was very attractive to Laurence Fane. He read determination in the lines of her mouth—sympathy in the glance of her eyes—and felt that she was a woman to be trusted and depended upon—made not to be the plaything of an hour, but a friend and counsellor for life. He thought that he should like to tell her, or someone like her, of his hopes and disappointments, his struggles and successes, and to read in her clear truthful glance whether he had done right or wrong. He should like to have her for a friend or a sister (as this happy Daisy had), and to be assured, whatever happened, that her affection would never forsake him. She looked like an embodiment of peace and rest and contentment—a harbour from the trials of the world—a refuge from one's own treacherous thoughts. It was her voice that broke in upon his reverie.

"I wonder if you will like Daisy very much, Mr. Fane. I can't imagine anyone *not* liking her. We call her the Sunbeam sometimes. She lights up the old house so."

"She is very lively, I suppose."

"Oh! she is all life, and so good-tempered. The friends with whom she is staying at Taunton say that they don't know what they shall do without her. But

she would rather be with me," added Margarita, with a flush of happy pride.

"And why did not you accompany her to Taunton?"

"O, uncle couldn't spare me. I am his house-keeper, you know, and manage everything indoors. And the dairy and poultry-yard into the bargain," she said, laughing.

"It must take up a great deal of your time. Have you any leisure for reading?"

"Pretty well. I generally read an hour or two during the day."

"And which are your favourite authors?"

"In prose or poetry, history or romance?"

"In all."

"What a task you set me. I must consider a little. Well, I think I must say Lytton for prose and Shakespeare for poetry, Macaulay for history, and Thackeray for romance."

"Let me know your reasons."

"I am not sure if I have got any. I believe I am guided by instinct. Perhaps it is because I like all four subjects equally—and Lytton's prose is as much like poetry as Shakespeare's poetry is like prose—and Macaulay's history as like romance as Thackeray's romance is like history. Does that sound very stupid?"

"Not at all. It is an answer that has sprung from

observation, and I think you are right. Have you read Byron?"

"Yes."

"I like you so much for saying so."

"But it is true," replied Margarita, with wide open eyes.

"I have no doubt of it; but had I put the question to a town-bred young lady she would either have denied it point blank, or told me I was 'really too bad;' and if I went on talking in that shocking manner she should tell her mamma of me."

"But is it shocking—to read Byron I mean?"

"Many ladies say so—but all ladies do it."

"Of course I know," continued Margarita, "that his poems occasionally treat of subjects which could not be discussed in general society, but the world is full of such subjects—we cannot pass through life without seeing and hearing of them. Is it worse to read of than to come in actual contact with crime?"

"To a pure mind like yours, certainly not."

"I am so glad to hear you say so; because I enjoy Byron's genius, and I should be sorry to think I could enjoy what is not right."

"Have you ever written verses yourself, Miss Hay?"

Margarita reddened and smiled. "What makes you think of such a thing?"

"Because I see that you feel earnestly on most topics, and people who do so generally give vent to

their feelings in composition of some sort. Come, confess that you have."

"I suppose most girls have, at some time or other, and I am like all the rest. Daisy has written really very pretty verses. If I were not afraid of her anger I would read you some."

"I don't want to hear Daisy's. I wish for yours."

"Oh, Mr. Fane, don't be absurd. As if I should be so silly as to trouble you with them. You, a real author too. What must you think of me?"

Laurence Fane did not say what he thought of her, but he reiterated his desire to hear the verses, and kept up a species of teasing match with her on the subject till young West appeared to call them to their early dinner.

CHAPTER VI.

Daisy disappoints them.

THE days at Maple Farm went by very regularly. Breakfast at eight, dinner at three, supper at nine, and the intervals of time occupied by walking, riding, or smoking in the orchard. This made up the sum of our hero's new existence. He kept on repeating to himself how peaceful and restful it all was, and how contented he felt, forgetting that we are never more contented than when we omit to notice that we are so. But the fact is that, before he had been established at Bushthorne for a couple of days, he experienced a certain amount of *ennui*. It is difficult to make any violent alteration with success. The life he had been leading was far too artificial and unnatural an one to last long; but the complete calm by which it had been succeeded seemed to stultify instead of clear his intellect. The echo of the great roar of London was still in his ears; he had thrown off his armour before the tournament was ended; and more than once had he remarked casually to his friend George that he had brought him away so suddenly, he thought he must just run up again at the beginning of the week to set matters straight before finally leav-

ing town. To all which suggestions George merely clapped him on the back, declaring that now they had caught him they should not let him go again in a hurry, and he might consider himself settled at Maple Farm for a month at the very least. And it always ended by Laurence Fane finding his way back into the orchard, to smoke and dream by the side of Margarita Hay. He had never left her alone about the verses; but though she was evidently flattered by his importunity, her modesty would not permit her to accede to it. One day, as Fane was turning over some volumes from the little bookcase that adorned the principal sitting-room, however, he came upon a sheet of note-paper scribbled over in pencil, which, on examination, proved to be a rough copy of verses signed "M. H." He rushed triumphantly into her presence, holding them high above his head.

"Excelsior!" he cried. "Now, Miss Poetess! you are at my mercy. No more entreaties upon bended knees, to read your verses. I have found some between the pages of Tennyson, and I shall judge of their merits for myself."

So saying he spread out the paper against the window-pane. Margarita coloured violently, but she did not speak. He expected she would have leaped up from her seat after the fashion of excitable young ladies, and tried to wrench the paper from his hand, or at least remonstrated in a plaintive voice against

his cruelty. But her silence made him hesitate. He turned, and saw her quietly continuing the work on which she was engaged, though she looked rather disturbed.

"Shall I annoy you by reading them?" he inquired.

"No, I won't say that, and to prevent your doing so seems like conceit. You know that you are a clever, educated man, and I am only a simple country girl who writes such nonsense occasionally to amuse her leisure hours, I know it also. Only, remember that, and don't criticise them."

He read the verses through once to himself, and then aloud.

Oh! thy love is to me as the fresh salt breath

That blows over the foam-fleck'd sea,

And it blows and it breathes for me!

Till, if I stood under the Shadow of Death,

The sound of thy voice, and the sense of thy breath,

Would recall me to life and thee!

Oh! thy love is to me as the rich red wine,

Pressed out from the grape's ripe store:

And I quaff of it more and more.

My heart and my soul are commingled with thine,

Till I tremble to drain the last drop of the wine

That is hid in thy heart's deep core.

Oh! thy love is to me as a free wild bird,

That I long to ensnare and to hold

Till both captor and captive grow old.

To fly with it far from the eye of the herd

Who would strive to tear from my warm bosom my bird,

And leave my heart empty and cold.

Oh! thy love is to me as a sweet new life,
Poured into my languishing veins,
And it eases my cares and my pains—
Till I rise up again with fresh energy rife,
To thank heav'n that 'midst all the turmoil of life
The joy of thy love still remains!

Fane finished the verses and was silent. Margarita mistook his silence for disapprobation.

"I wish you wouldn't read such rubbish," she said vexedly, "I'm sure I can't think how it could have got into Tennyson. I wrote it ages ago and never copied it out. I am ashamed you should have seen it."

"You have no need to be ashamed," he answered slowly. "Of course they have faults,—most first attempts have—but they have life and promise. You will be an author, Miss Hay, some day, if you choose."

"An author! I? Oh, Mr. Fane, what can you mean?" she exclaimed, crimson with pleasure.

"Just what I say. The mind that composed these verses 'ages ago' will compose something infinitely better in the 'ages to come,' if it chooses to do so. I had no idea you could have written anything half so good. You have surprised me."

He came close to her as he spoke.

Tears were standing in her eyes.

"If you only knew," she whispered, "how I have longed and hoped——"

"To write?"

She nodded her head, she was afraid to say more.

"You shall," he exclaimed, enthusiastically. "I will help you."

"Will you? *Really?*"

"You do not distrust my sincerity, I hope. I mean what I say. If you will let me see what you have already done I shall be able to advise you as to the direction of your talents, and when you have written something worth publishing I will try and place it for you. I have a certain amount of influence in London, and think I can at least promise you a start. But it will require perseverance, remember, and an amount of study, and you may not have the patience for that."

"O, indeed I shall. I am only too grateful to you for holding out the hope. I can hardly believe it is possible! How little I thought it when George brought you down here."

"And how little I thought I should find anyone at Maple Farm to sympathise in my pursuits. The literary profession is not all roses, Miss Hay. I have had many disappointments during my career, and encountered not a few troubles."

"Tell me about them," she said softly.

Then he related to her how, when he first came into public notice, critics had been paid to run him down, until the publishers were almost afraid to

issue his books, and how to that day a certain well-known reviewer was, for personal reasons, so dead set against him that he never permitted a line he wrote to escape the most virulent abuse.

"But he cannot damage me," said Fane, in conclusion, "unless I lose my temper some day, and commit manslaughter, and have to accept a free passage out to the Colonies."

"Do you mean to be transported?" asked Magarita, horror-struck.

"I was only jesting," he answered with a laugh, "No! I hope it won't come to that, though I often think I shall not be happy till I have kicked him. May I ask what that wreath you are making is for, Miss Hay?"

"Isn't it pretty? All red and white daisies. It is for my dear Daisy's bedroom, to hang over her mother's picture. I always put one there on high days and holydays."

"And is to-day a high day?"

She stopped short and looked at him.

"Why, Mr. Fane, she is coming back this afternoon."

"Oh! ah! yes; I forgot! Pray forgive my bad memory. I thought the dining and drawing rooms looked very bower-like and festive!"

"Daisy is so fond of flowers, we could not have too many to please her, and they are all her own,

She takes entire charge of the garden. Is it not good of her?"

"Very good. She does not dig and delve, though, in it, I suppose?"

"O, no! the gardener does that, but she gives all the directions about what flowers she would like. It would be extra trouble for me, you know, and Daisy is always ready to save me trouble, dear girl."

She quitted the room as she spoke, to dispose of the daisy wreath, leaving Fane in a state of conjecture as to what sort of person this cousin could be whom Margarita praised so freely. He had not been accustomed to hear women laud each other after that fashion, and to feel it was sincere. He admired Miss Hay so much for it. He thought her such a sweet, affectionate girl, so unlike the generality of her sex, so modest and unaffected, and pure, and with it all so intelligent. He had never met a woman who interested him so much before.

During the remainder of the day he heard of little but the anticipations of Daisy's return. Margarita was brimming over with happiness. Not boisterous mirth, but quiet subdued happiness at the prospect of meeting her cousin again, which made her eyes look softer and her voice sound sweeter than it had done before. The five o'clock tea table was spread with delicacies and covered with flowers; about the orchard were scattered all the boy and girl godchildren, eagerly

expectant, not only of Miss West's arrival, but of sitting down round the cloth which was spread upon the grass and piled with plum buns, and at the door stood Margarita with a bunch of roses in her bosom, and a smile of welcome on her lips, ready to catch the first glimpse of the new-comer.

Fane heard the wheels of the gig, in which George West had driven over to Taunton to fetch home his sister, stop at the garden-gate. He heard Margarita run down the path to greet him, and then come slowly back again—*alone*. He went out and met her in the hall.

"I hope nothing is the matter!"

"O no!" with trembling lips. "It is nothing really—only they've got a party over at Taunton, and Daisy can't come home to-day."

"She will be here to-morrow, doubtless," he said, consolingly.

"Perhaps; any way soon. Please, don't think me very stupid, Mr Fane, but I am rather disappointed, and—don't let us talk about it any more."

"Come, children," she continued a minute after, as she passed into the orchard, "come and have your tea. Godmother Daisy is not coming home this evening, but you must think of her all the same as you eat your buns, and hope she'll be here very soon."

She was as cheerful as ever before her uncle and

her cousin (who naturally thought little of a few hours' delay in the appearance of Miss Daisy), but Fane, who watched her narrowly, saw how much she felt the disappointment.

Once in the course of the evening, on looking up, she caught his eye and guessed his thoughts.

"She is sure to be here next week," she said, smiling at her own folly as she left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

Laurence Fane alters his Mind.

At the back of Maple Farm, beyond the orchard and its surroundings, and next to the high road, lay a wide meadow, intersected by a sparkling trout stream, and two days after the events narrated in my last chapter, as Laurence Fane, making believe to fish, was lazily lying on its bank, he saw Margarita Hay coming towards him laden with papers.

"Uncle sent me to find you," she said, as she drew nearer. "The post-boy has just come back from Taunton, and there are so many letters and parcels for you, he thought you might wish to receive them at once."

"He is very kind," replied Fane, "and you are still kinder to take the trouble to carry them all this way. Indeed, Miss Hay, you should not have laden yourself in this manner. You make me feel quite ashamed."

"O! I am used to be a beast of burden," she said merrily, as she tumbled them all upon the grass. "There they are. Five newspapers, seven letters, and a parcel. About as much as the boy carries for Maple Farm throughout the year,"

"See what a nuisance I am! I had much better go back to my smoky rooms in London. Ah! I am glad that has come though," catching up the parcel and tearing off its wrapper. "This is a copy of my last book, Miss Hay. 'Social Essays.' Rather dry reading, I am afraid; in parts, and not *at all* poetical, mind you; but still I thought, perhaps, (since you have been kind enough to express an interest in my work,) that you might like to look through it."

"Did you send for it for me to read?" she said, as he held the book towards her.

"I sent for it for you to accept, if you will do me that honour," he answered quietly.

Margarita blushed from brow to bosom.

"O! Mr. Fane! it is very good of you. I don't know what to say. I shall value it so very, very much. And you will write my name in it?" she added with girlish eagerness.

"Certainly—if it will give you any pleasure; but I warn you it is not a young lady's book, and I dare say your verdict will be that the outside is the best part of it."

She did not answer, but sat down at a little distance from him, and began with eager fingers to turn over the leaves, whilst he read the letters she had brought him. He threw down the last one with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Is anything wrong?" she inquired timidly, looking

up with a face still red from the unexpected pleasure his gift had given her.

"Only the usual worry. Some one has been taking my name in vain in the papers, and my friends are of course the first to point it out to me. I shall have to go back to town after all. I don't see how it can be avoided."

"If it is necessary, of course you must go," she answered softly.

"I think it is necessary. I told George so the other day. He dragged me away so suddenly I hadn't time to finish several little things I had in hand, and my literary affairs are getting somewhat confused in consequence. I have had a very pleasant time of it down here, but pleasant times are not for hardworking people, as perhaps you will find out some day, Miss Hay. I am afraid I must run up by the evening train."

She tried to smile, but she did it very badly.

"I am so sorry," she said ingenuously. "I wanted you so much to know Daisy. I am sure you would get on so well together."

"I have no doubt of it, but I hope it is only a pleasure deferred. Perhaps, if you are good enough to second the proposal, George may drag me back again some day, I *must* come again, if it is only to see how your literary labours get on, you know."

"Ah! don't joke about that! I shall never do any-

thing by myself. I have too much work here and too little encouragement. Uncle and George would tease me to death if they knew."

"But I won't have you speak so despondingly. You have your cousin to sympathise with you, and true talent, combined to perseverance, always succeeds in the end you know. But you must read a great deal more than you have done."

"I hope to do so. I intend to, if I possibly can."

"And if you will permit me I will write out a list of the books which will help you most, and, perhaps, I could lend you a few from my own collection."

"How very kind you are."

"Not at all. I am only too glad to be of use to you. This will be one good, will it not, of my going back to town? I shall be able to send you a parcel by train."

Margarita did not look as though the books would compensate for the loss of his company, but she answered, "You have quite made up your mind to go then?"

"Yes!—I think so—by the last train this evening, if quite convenient to yourselves. A man whom I particularly want to see leaves town the day after tomorrow, so I must look sharp or I shall miss him. Do you know where George is?"

"He is gone to Taunton. He had no idea of this," she answered, as she rose slowly to her feet; "but I will go and tell Uncle, and I am sure everything will be ready for your departure."

"Stay, Miss Hay," he ejaculated, rising also. "Pray, do not take the trouble. Let me go myself and tell Mr. West."

"You had better not. He is paying the men their wages to-day, and he never likes any one to interrupt him at those times except myself. Besides, I was going to him any way. I—I—couldn't stay here any longer—I haven't time, and—and—thank you so much again, Mr. Fane, for the book. I will tell them that you must go this evening."

And so saying the girl turned her face from his, and walked steadily towards the house.

Laurence Fane threw himself down upon the grass again with a sigh. He was sorry to leave Margarita: he had really conceived so deep an interest in the young girl, and her modest ingenuous ways; but he felt that it was a sad waste of time remaining at Maple Farm. He could not write a line there. Study and seclusion were things unknown, and there was not a room to which he could retire and work—and his work was his bread, and there were so many things waiting to be done. That article for the *Britannia*, for instance, and his colonial and provincial correspondence, beside promises innumerable which he

had not yet fulfilled. This dreamy, inactive life was very delicious whilst it lasted, but would it fit him any the better for the life that was reality? It was very pleasant to lie about all day on the grass, doing nothing, but it palled after a while, and he could not help acknowledging by bed time that he felt the want of company. George West was a downright good fellow, hearty and hospitable in the extreme, but George was almost always employed about the farm; he had his own work to do, and Laurence Fane too often felt like a nonentity. So he determined he was quite right in deciding to go back to town. He could return to Bushthorne a little later if the Wests desired it—he should like to return—he would be sorry to think he had seen the last of Margarita Hay, but for the present he had had enough of it. Such were his thoughts as he continued to lie on the streamlet bank, until he was roused from his reverie by the sound of laughter and horses' hoofs in the road beyond. With the exception of a few labourers, it was the first time he had seen any one pass that way, and he looked up with interest. Above the top of the high hedge by which the meadow was surrounded, he could distinguish the moving heads of the riders, but that was all. Presently the laughter grew louder. Some one called out, "I will—I am determined—Good-bye," and the next moment there came crashing through the hedge a young lady, in a grey riding-habit, mounted

on a stout cob, which galloped rapidly across the meadow.

The girl seemed quite at her ease, as she turned round in her saddle and waved her hand to her companions in the road.

"I told you I'd do it," she exclaimed, at the top of her voice. "I shall be home a quarter of an hour before you," and she continued to ride at a fast pace towards the spot where Fane was lying. He rose as she approached. He was not at all sure if this daring young female who scrambled through hedges would have any scruple in putting her horse at the trout stream and floundering into his lap. The action attracted her attention. She stopped short on the opposite side of the water, and looked at him. He took off his hat and bowed.

"I've not the least idea who you are," she said, shaking her head in the most comical fashion.

"Nor have I the good fortune to know your name," he answered. "Mine is Fane."

"Oh! Are you George's friend? Why, I've come here on purpose to see you," she said, naively.

"I am only too much honoured by the suggestion. Do I then see Miss West?"

"Yes! I'm Daisy! I've just ridden over from Taunton with my friends. They don't want me to leave them till the end of the week; but I declared I

wouldn't stay another day unless they let me ride over to see father and Margarita and——you!"

"And now you have come, you mustn't let them take you back again."

"I don't think I will; but they'll be in an awful state about it. Both the Miss Hughes have come, and their brother; but they would go round by the high road. They thought it so shocking of me to come through the hedge; but it's two miles the other way nearly; and I wanted to see father, you know, and Margarita."

"Naturally; but how are you going to cross the stream?"

"I shall jump it at the other end. Good-bye!"

She turned her horse's head away from him with a bright smile as she spoke, and he stood gazing at her as if he had been in a dream. She was very pretty—this creature that had burst upon him like a vision. Her light supple figure waved about like a reed on the back of the tall animal she rode; her brown waving hair hung half-way down her back, the large blue eyes, the dimpled cheeks, the rosy mouth, were child-like in their frank innocence. Fane thought he had never seen so bright and beautiful a girl before, and yet the appearance of her had given him a painful shock for which he was unable to account. He watched her clear the narrow end of the stream and gallop up the meadow towards the

farm, and as soon as she had disappeared from sight he gathered up his papers and fishing tackle and quickly followed her. As he passed through the orchard he thought the quiet old place seemed transformed. The domestic *ménage* was all in a flutter, dogs were running about wagging their tails, servants were bustling from kitchen to parlour. Through the open windows he could hear her ringing laughter.

“Oh, Mr. Fane, I am so glad you have come home,—Daisy is back,” cried Margarita, as she ran to meet him, rippling with smiles.

“I know it, Miss Hay. I have already had the pleasure of meeting her in the meadow,” he answered, and Daisy blushing gave him her hand, and said it was very lucky she hadn’t ridden over him, wasn’t it?

“But the Hughes will be here directly, my dear,” she continued, turning to her cousin. “And they quite expect I shall return with them to Taunton, you know, for there’s the cob.”

“Oh, never mind the cob. George will take him over. You won’t go back, will you, Daisy? For Mr. Fane is going away this evening, and I shall be lonely without either of you.”

“Mr. Fane going away this evening!” echoed Daisy. “Oh, that’s too bad, I declare. Just as I come too. And when I took the trouble to ride over from Taunton on purpose to see you.”

"Oh, Daisy, my darling, how can you talk so?" said Margarita, with loving reproof.

"But it's true, Rita; I did really come for that. I was so afraid he'd be gone by the time I returned; and if *I* stay *you'll* stay, won't you?" she continued, addressing Laurence Fane.

"If I can only settle my business without——" he began.

"Of course you can if you try. Anybody can do anything by trying. Oh, there's my darling old George," she cried, as she flew into her brother's arms. "I've come home, at last, you see, George, and without your help either."

"Well, you needn't throttle a fellow if you have. Hands off, Daisy! There never was such a girl for hugging. Are those the Hughes I see coming up the drive?"

"Yes. I rode over with them."

"And left them to find their way here alone? That's polite. I hope you've got a good dinner for us to-day, Margarita, so that the Taunton folks will have no opportunity to say that we live on bacon and beans. Hollo, Fane, my dear fellow, I'm so sorry to hear you must leave us this evening."

"He's not going, George," said Daisy.

"Not going? but father says that Margarita told him——"

"Well, so Mr. Fane told me," interrupted his cousin, laughing.

"We seem all at loggerheads. Which is it to be, Laurence? What do you want to do?"

"Oh! I want to stay here. There's no question about that," said Fane. "Only——"

"We won't have any 'onlys,'" cried Daisy, imperatively. "You must stay. Oh yes, *do* stay. *Say* you'll stay," she continued, coaxingly. "It would be too bad to go just as I've come home, you know."

"But if Mr. Fane's business requires his presence elsewhere——" commenced Margarita.

"Perhaps I could manage to transact it by writing, just for a day or two," said Laurence Fane, decisively.

"Oh, of course you can. So that's settled, and George needn't bother about anything to take you to the station in, but ride the old cob quietly back to Taunton in the evening. Here come the Hughes. Now for the tug of war. They'll be so angry when they hear I am going to stay. George, you must be very attentive to them to make up for it. And, Mr. Fane, take care of your heart, for they're both fascinating and both single. Come and help me off with my habit, Rita. I want to get the explosion over before they see me again. Tell them father won't let me go back George, and Oh, *do* be attentive, to make up for it!"

And she darted out of the room and up the stairs like a wild thing.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Twin Cherries on one Stalk.”

THE day was over. The Hughes were gone. George had meekly mounted the cob, and accompanied them to Taunton, with the intention of walking back in the evening. Old Mr. West was still deep in the mysteries of his corn chandler's account; and Laurence Fane was left alone with the two girls. They were sitting together in a deep locker that formed the window sill, and he was in an arm chair at the opposite side of the room, thinking what a pretty picture they made. Daisy—robed in a red and white cotton dress, which showed every line of her rounded figure, her hair wreathed with the namesake flowers, that Margarita had disposed so lavishly about her room,—was lying in her cousin's arms, her head upon her shoulder; their hands fondly clasped together, whilst Margarita, proud and happy, held her darling close to her, every now and then imprinting a kiss upon her forehead. There were evidently no secrets between the two, and little thought of concealment, they talked as openly as if they had been alone.

"Only think, Daisy, Mr. Fane gave me a book this morning—one he has written himself."

"Did he? How jolly for you! What kind of books do you write, Mr. Fane—nice ones?"

"That depends entirely on what you call 'nice,' Miss West."

"Stories—all about love and fighting—like 'Under Two Flags,' or 'Guy Livingstone,' or 'Archie Lovell.'"

"No; I am afraid I shall fall dreadfully in your opinion when I tell you I have never written a novel, and I am not sure that I ever shall. My work is chiefly confined to dull essays and political articles."

"How horrible! But why don't you write a novel?"

"Because one ought to know something of the subject on which one writes, Miss West, and novels chiefly deal of love."

"And don't you know anything of that?"

"Daisy! how *can* you?" said Margarita.

"There is no harm in putting a simple question, Rita. Mr. Fane need not answer it if he doesn't choose."

"If you had asked me this morning I should have said '*No*,'" replied Laurence Fane.

"O! that's stupid—that's commonplace," said Daisy, reddening.

Margarita said nothing.

There was an awkward pause. It was broken by the younger girl.

"What's the book he gave you about, Rita?"

"I have not read it yet, darling," replied the other gently.

"I warned Miss Hay at the time she would find it uninteresting."

"But I do not think I shall; I love reading so much," said Margarita. "Mr. Fane has been so kind as to offer to write me out a list of books to study, Daisy; and—I don't know what you will say to this, I am afraid you will think I have grown terribly bold—but I have let him read some of my verses."

"Oh!——" with a prolonged intonation of horror, "Not any of mine, I hope, Rita. Not the ones about the sailor."

"No! no, dear! of course not, though you write much better than I do."

"He shouldn't see them if he was dying. I'd kill myself first."

"You excite my curiosity terribly," said Laurence Fane, laughing. "I complimented your cousin highly on her verses. I think them wonderfully good. Perhaps I should say the same of yours."

"You'll never see them to say one thing or the other," retorted Daisy. "Will he, dear Rita?"

"Not unless you show them to him yourself, Daisy, certainly."

"And that will never be. How are all the god-children getting on?"

"Quite well. They were up here on Friday to welcome you home, only you never came, you naughty child."

"It wasn't my fault. They wouldn't let me. You don't know how the creatures worried my life out about it. But Phœbe said just now you had received a letter from Willie for me."

"So I did. I had almost forgotten it. Wait a moment. I will go and fetch it."

She slipped from her seat as she spoke and quitted the room. Laurence Fane and Daisy were alone in the gloaming.

"You have made me so miserable," he said, as he left his seat and drew nearer to hers.

"Miserable! Why?"

"Talking about writing verses to sailors. Who was the happy sailor you wrote your verses to?"

"What nonsense! What can it signify to you?"

"I do not know, I am sure, and yet it seems to signify. I tell you it has made me quite miserable."

"Ah! you want to coax me into showing them to you that you may laugh at them, as I have no doubt you've done at poor Margarita's."

"How unkind you are. Your cousin does not distrust me like this. She believes I speak the truth."

"Well, you have hers to criticise. You must be content with that."

"I should never dream of criticising yours."

"Ah, I suppose they would not be worth it."

"I don't think I should consider if they were worth it or not. It would simply seem impossible to me to criticise without the idea of spurring a person on to higher efforts, but you were not made for effort."

"Thank you for a very bad compliment, Mr. Fane. I would have you know that if I cannot write verses I can ride and skate and swim and milk cows just as well as Margarita, and some people think better."

"I meant you were not made for work. I would rather compose verses in your honour than read those you have written."

"I daresay you would," with a merry laugh. "Do you ever write poetry?"

"Sometimes."

"Oh, do write some to me. I should like it so. No one has ever written verses to me."

"Not even the sailor?"

"How you do go on worrying about the sailor. It only came from my big god-son Willie Clarke—he was twelve years old before he was christened—going to sea; which made me think——"

"How you have relieved me. I began to fear——"

"What— Ah, here comes Rita with Willie's letter.

Now, I will show you how nicely he writes. Margarita, my dear, the candle is right in my eyes, it blinds me."

Margarita Hay looked for a moment at her cousin in silence. Daisy's cheeks were crimson. She glanced at Laurence Fane. His eyes were downcast, and he was twitching the toe of his boot with a little cane. She removed the candle to a more convenient distance, and went and sat down at the furthest end of the room.

"Oh! Willie is at Malta. 'My dear lady, our ship is at Malta'—what a travelled monkey he will be by the time he comes back again. 'It is a beautiful place. There is lots of oranges.' Oh, don't look like that, Mr. Fane, he is such a dear good boy, and I didn't say he could speak grammar. 'I wish you was here and Miss Margret.' Isn't that sweet of him? Yes, I wish we were, Willie. 'It is very hot, and I am quite well, thank you, and doing well, and often think of Bushthorne and mother and you, and I have writ a letter to mother too, but if you will tell her I have writ to you——' Why, what has become of Margarita?" cried Daisy, suddenly, as she looked up and perceived her cousin had vanished. Laurence Fane moved still closer to her.

"I think your father called her," he replied. "Put down that stupid letter, Miss West, and come and have a turn in the orchard."

"A stupid letter indeed! I think it's very clever,"

she said brightly; but she did not refuse his request, and for nearly an hour they paced up and down the greensward together—much the same as he had walked every evening with Margarita—yet so different—oh, so different!

They did not return to the house till supper time, and then they found all the family assembled round the table.

"Well, my pet," said Farmer West fondly, as he caught sight of his blooming daughter. "And so you've been making friends with Mr. Fane, have you? You don't often see such roses as these up in London, I guess, sir," he continued, as he pinched her blushing cheeks.

"No, indeed," replied Laurence, but he turned the conversation almost directly.

"I am so glad you like her," whispered Margarita as they parted for the night.

"Who could help it? She is a perfect Hebe, gifted with the intelligence which I deny to the classical beauties."

"Oh, she's a darling! There is not her equal," replied the girl warmly. "Does not the whole place seem lighted up with her beauty and fun?"

"And your appreciation of them," he answered. "There is nothing to me more pleasant, Miss Hay, than to hear women praise each other."

"Daisy and I are not *women*," she retorted gaily,

“we are *one*. I can imagine nothing good coming to me unless she shared it.”

“Hermia and Helena, twin cherries on one stalk,” said Laurence Fane as Daisy joined them. “Well, I fear you will have to be separated some day.”

“Never!” cried the girls simultaneously, with their arms cast round each other.

“What! not when Miss West runs off with that fascinating sailor?”

“I am *not* going to marry a sailor,” said Daisy, vehemently. “I hate sailors, and I——”

“Finish your sentence, Hermia!”

The girl laughed softly, and laid her head on Margarita’s shoulder, and looked up archly from her resting-place.

“And you——” continued Laurence Fane.

“I—I—*hate you!*” said Daisy, plumply, “for saying so—you know—for saying so——”

“Ah! that *postscript* won’t do—it is too plainly an afterthought. Miss West, we are enemies from this moment.”

“She didn’t mean it, Mr. Fane, indeed she didn’t,” said Margarita, almost in distress.

“What nonsense, Rita. I *did* mean it! It is hateful he should go on at me about sailors in that way, when I have told him it is nothing.”

“I will try soldiers to-morrow.”

“You shall try them on Magarita them, for I won’t

stay here to be teased by you. I shall go back to Taunton."

"Taunt on," said Fane, forgetting his manners.

"Oh, if he is beginning to make puns we will leave him," cried Daisy, and she drew her cousin away.

"My dear! what a creature," she commenced as soon as they had reached the privacy of their sleeping chamber. "Did the wretch pester in that way about your verses?"

"No!" said Margarita laughing, "I have never heard him talk such nonsense as he has this evening. I thought him rather serious hitherto."

And indeed, when in the waking silence of the night that followed, she came to think over the events of the past day, she was as much at a loss to account for the change in her guest's demeanour as her cousin was.

CHAPTER IX.

George West makes a Mistake.

LAURENCE FANE also was unusually restless that night, and when he sprang out of bed the next morning, and began hurrying on his clothes, like a school-boy impatient to commence his holiday, the sensation of excited anticipation was so new to him that he stopped short in his dressing to ask himself what it was. There are few of us who do not laugh at the idea of love at first sight, and hitherto he had belonged to the majority. The notion that a man could allow his senses to get so much the mastery as to persuade him to believe that in a few hours he had fixed upon the woman who was to make him happy for life, was to Laurence Fane so utterly absurd that he had never tried to entertain it. To his mind, the feeling that preceded affection should be entirely an unconscious one. By force of her beauty, or amiability, or talent, a woman should creep by such small and slow degrees into a man's heart, that by the time he discovered the fact of her occupation she should have gained so firm a footing there, that by no effort of his own will should he be able to displace her. Love, as he pictured it, should invariably be prefaced

by a steady growing but sure esteem, founded on some reliable basis of character or disposition. It had much to do with this idea that his own heart had remained free so long, for in the whirl and dissipation of London life he had no time to analyse the idiosyncracies of those with whom he was thrown in contact, and he did not believe in the capability of loving without. He did not know that love is the same all the world over, and its apparent variability is dependent on the disposition that receives it. Like the seed in the Bible, on some ground it springs up without root and withers away, and in others it brings forth fruit a hundred fold. In some soils it lies quiescent for weeks and months before its tender blade is seen to appear; in others it springs up in the morning, and is a spreading tree before night. But Laurence Fane did not soliloquize thus. He did not even suspect that he had fallen a prey to the universal enemy of man. He only questioned uneasily why he should put himself to the inconvenience of a hurried toilet in order to meet "those girls" again. Yet the unanswerable inquiry did not have the effect of making him relax one effort to get down-stairs as early as possible. Once there, all argument with self was out of the question. Daisy looked so charmingly coquettish in her print dress and holland apron, and Margarita was so willing to accompany them wherever they wished to go, and so quietly pleased to see them

enjoying themselves, that he had been dragged round the cow-shed and the stable, and forced to inspect the rabbit hutches and pigeon house before he knew where he was. He walked more and talked more (so he said afterwards), during the ramble before breakfast on that eventful morning, than he had done in any twenty-four hours spent at Maple Farm before.

But then it was so pleasant to follow in the train of those two light-hearted girls; to hear Daisy's ceaseless flow of chatter, to watch her caressing the happy cows and horses, and to mark the pride with which her cousin listened to her saucy answers, and turned to catch a sympathetic glance of admiration from their mutual friend. He suffered himself to be led hither and thither, acquiescing in all his companions said, and scarcely knowing that he acquiesced, whilst his eyes were fastened upon Daisy's speaking countenance, and his ears drank in each word of her liquid voice. And yet the girl, strictly speaking, was not so much handsomer than her cousin; on the contrary, although her colouring was more brilliant, her features, when analyzed, were not so good. What was it in her that fascinated him? He could not tell, he did not stop to think. Only as she stood there laughing at him from under the brim of her garden hat, her clear childish eyes, her dewy mouth, her soft dimpled face, all went to make up such a picture of youth and innocence and purity, as it seemed to Lau-

rence Fane he had never seen before. She was like a fresh sweet rose just culled from the garden, cool and sparkling with dew, like one of her own white pigeons with its soft shy eye and pouting breast,—like everything that breathed of the country, and home, and rest, and was furthest removed from London life, and heated rooms, and artificial glare. She was a new Experience to him. From that day he was contented only in her presence, and restless away from her side. If she went for a walk with her cousin, or a ride with her brother, he fidgeted all over the place and could settle to nothing till her return. If he could write his letters sitting at the same table with her, or read a book stretched on the sward at her feet, he was completely happy. He gave up all idea of going back to town, but transacted his business there by letter, established a writing table in his own room, and settled himself down as one of the family at Maple Farm. And so three weeks slipped away almost imperceptibly, and August was in its wane.

Daisy herself seemed perfectly unconscious of the conquest she had made. Whilst Laurence Fane was doing all in his power to intercept her if she ran with a message to the stables, or paid a solitary visit to some of the labourers' cottages, she never appeared to guess his reason for desiring a *tête-à-tête* with her, and was always unwilling to engage in anything in which Margarita did not bear a part.

The two girls were so devoted to one another, they had been so much accustomed to share and share alike from their infancy, that it seemed as though one could not enjoy a pleasure of which the other did not partake.

"Rita, my darling," Daisy would whisper, as she hung with a burning face over her cousin's chair, "will you come out riding with me to-day?"

"I thought the filly was lame, Daisy."

"So she is, but I have coaxed George to lend me his horse, so you can take that if you like, and I will ride the pony."

"And where do you want to go?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular,"—hesitatingly—"only it would be nice, wouldn't it?"

"Very nice, my darling; but I have your new muslin to finish for Sunday, and it will never be ready unless I can work at it this afternoon."

"Never mind the muslin, Rita, I can wear my silk for once in a way; but come out riding."

"And why this great anxiety, Puss? What's in the wind now?" said Margarita, smiling.

Daisy reddened still more.

"Nothing's in the wind, but Mr. Fane wants to see Gorse Bottom, and I won't go without you."

"Oh! Mr. Fane is going, is he?" and Margarita became at once serious. "Well, I should like it of all things, of course, Daisy—only——"

"Only—what?"

"Your dress—you see—I ought not to give up duty for pleasure, I'm afraid."

"Oh! you must—you *shall* give it up," cried Daisy, impetuously. "I don't care a pin about the dress, and I shall go and order the horses at once. Say you'll go—dear, sweet darling, Margarita, do say you'll go with your own Daisy."

And Margarita Hay, nothing loath, would kiss the dear face upturned to hers, and yield the point.

This was all very delightful to Daisy, and perhaps to her cousin, but it was anything but delightful to Laurence Fane. He wanted to get Daisy all alone that he might imbue her with a few of the notions that were floating through his own mind. He had questioned himself several times since that first morning, and answered the question pretty plainly, and left off speculating on his feelings or their cause. He knew that he was in love now, that he had committed the incredible folly of falling in love at first sight with a charming and loveable girl, and that if his love were not returned he should go back to town a very miserable and unfortunate man. He saw that Daisy, if cognisant of the passion she had awakened, was very shy of giving him opportunities of declaring it, or ascertaining her feelings on the subject, and how could he speak until she had done so. Yet, try as he would, he could not manage to procure a private

interview with the girl. From breakfast to dinner, and from dinner to supper, Margarita Hay was always by her side. And it was not Margarita's fault either. It was Daisy who would not leave her cousin, but ran after her like a bleating lamb wherever she went, and appeared to take delight in seeing his look of disappointment whenever he was cheated of a few moments alone with her. At last Laurence Fane grew discontented and gloomy. He chose to believe that Margarita West knew of his attachment and was amusing herself at his expense, and he did—what most men under the circumstances would have done—he sulked. George West was the first to perceive it; dear, honest George West, who could not bear to see any change in his friend's demeanour.

“Fane, my dear fellow, what's up? I am afraid you must be getting tired of us.”

“What should have put such an idea into your head?”

“You are so unlike yourself. I have hardly heard your voice the last two days, and your face is as long as a hatchet. What is the matter?”

“Nothing, I assure you.”

“It can't be nothing. Have you had a row with anybody? Are either of the girls at the bottom of it?”

Dear old George had no more idea of asking Laurence Fane his “intentions” than of asking him to fly to the moon, but the latter chose to take it in that light.

"Well! Since you put the question so pertinently, George, I will answer you with frankness. One of the girls *is* at the bottom of it. I find I have seen more of Margarita than is good for me. I love her and I want to ask your father's consent to my addressing her."

"You love Margarita!" said George West, and then there was silence between them.

"The idea does not seem agreeable to you," said Laurence Fane, presently.

Still his friend made no answer.

"George, old fellow, I shall be awfully cut up if you make any objection. If there is any obstacle in the way you shouldn't have thrown me with her as you have done. Here have I been left for three weeks constantly in her company, and I defy any man, who has no previous attachment, to see her as I have seen her and not love her."

"Oh, doubtless! She is an excellent girl, we all know that—but—but—you must forgive me, Fane, for seeming so queer about it, but I must say you have taken me very much by surprise."

"Do you think your father will make any serious objection?"

"I cannot say. I don't know how he will ever make up his mind to part with her."

"But it must have come, sooner or later, and you know that my birth and means are, to say the least

of them, on a par with the average. Also I hope that I am not calculated to make a worse husband than the generality of men."

"Oh! It is not that; you mistake altogether. Have you spoken to her yet?"

"I have not had an opportunity. The cousins are so constantly together. There is no speaking to one alone. For aught I know she may have the greatest aversion for me!"

George West's face brightened.

"Hardly that, my dear Laurence, but girls have their fancies, you know, and Margarita has been reared in the country. I hardly know how she would like a town life."

"I would *make* her like it."

"She has always appeared most interested in country pursuits. She is the right hand of Maple Farm, you know."

"Hardly so much so as her cousin, surely."

"You are quite mistaken. Daisy takes her share, of course. It would be very unfair if she did not do so. But Margarita's work is of far greater importance."

"But that is just what I said. Miss Hay is so much help to her uncle that I think he might manage to spare me his daughter."

George West veered round and seized his friend by the hands.

"Is it of *Daisy* you have been speaking all this time?"

"Of whom else should it be?" demanded Laurence, surprised in his turn.

"Oh, my dear fellow. I am so glad. I am so thoroughly delighted. I never heard any news that pleased me so much. And you care for Daisy, for my pretty saucy sister? My dear Laurence, how good you are. There is no one in the wide world I should have liked to give her to so much."

The sudden change in his demeanour so startled Laurence Fane that at first he hardly knew how to reply.

"I am very much obliged to you, George," he said, as soon as he had recovered himself; "but I cannot imagine how you can have made such a mistake. I thought I said so plainly that I was in love with Daisy."

"But you call her 'Margarita,' my dear fellow, and we never call her anything but 'Daisy.' When you said Margarita I thought of course that you meant the—the other one."

"I never think of her except as 'Margarita,'" replied Fane, musingly. "Nick-names are all very well for every-day use, but when one's deepest and most sacred feelings are involved, even so innocent a jest seems mockery."

George West made no comment on this remark. His own mind had been set at rest, and he had not

the necessary sentiment wherewith to follow his friend's train of thought.

"Fancy your liking Daisy! By Jove, how luckily things do turn out. My father will be in no end of a way about it, I can tell you. He has never looked to her marrying any one above a farmer."

"He will not be so unwilling to give her to me, do you mean, as though I were to ask him for his niece?" said Fane, meaningly.

"She is not half the use to him, you see," replied George, with some degree of confusion. "However, go yourself and ask him what he thinks about it. You will find him in the little back parlour."

"But I have not yet spoken to your sister, remember."

"My father will be all the better pleased if you ask his permission first. It's an old-fashioned custom, you know, and he's an old-fashioned fellow; and, however it turns out, he will always think of it as a great compliment."

"You encourage me so much, George, that I will go at once, for this suspense is killing me. When I think of her fresh heart and mind, and her lovely face, and——but there, it's no use tantalizing myself with conjectures. I will go and dash into the subject at once."

"And mind you call her by her right name," cried George, laughingly, as they parted company.

CHAPTER X.

Daisy cries for Nothing.

FARMER WEST had but one objection to make to Laurence Fane's proposal for his daughter—the uncertainty of his professional income. Our hero naturally tried to argue him out of this idea.

“It is a very general notion, sir, that a literary man's earnings are more uncertain than those of a clerk or a merchant, or indeed of men of any profession. You depend on your brains for your daily bread, people say. Take away your brains and where are you? My answer is, Take away the brains of any man and where is he? It is true that the workhouse provides for the pauper, and a liberal government pensions off her disabled soldiers and sailors with a pittance that helps to starve them out of the world as quickly as possible; but who provides for the paralyzed doctor, the consumptive clergyman, the insane merchant? These men must depend, as I do, on the mercy of Providence. God has gifted me with health and strength and a certain amount of brains. So long as they last, they shall not only work for your daughter's maintenance, but lay up something, I trust, to provide for her in case of my death. And if my brains fail

me, I'll use my hands and every power that I possess for her support. I can say no more."

"You have said quite enough, Mr. Fane," replied the old farmer warmly. "You've been frank with me and I'll be frank with you. I've been a working man all my life, and I shall be a working man till my death. My only property consists of this farm, which goes to George, for I had hoped Daisy would have married a man of property too, with something (that is to say) that he could settle on her. But if she likes you I've nothing to say against it. You're of better birth than ourselves, and move in a better position, so that's something gained; and with respect to providing for the girl in case she has the misfortune to lose you, why, if you'll insure your life for a couple of thousand pounds or so, I'll come down with five hundred on the wedding day, and that's the most I'm afraid I can do."

"It is more than I expected," said Laurence Fane. "If you give your daughter to me, Mr. West, it is all that I desire. But she knows nothing of this, remember. She may refuse to have anything to say to me."

"Oh, she guesses all about it, I'll bet, the sly jade. Women are fickle creatures, sir. They read us much more clearly than we can read them. I warrant you have but to ask her."

"I wish I could believe it. But Daisy has given

me no reason to do so. On the contrary, she rather seems to avoid being left alone with me than otherwise."

"Did you ever watch a fielded filly come up to a feed of corn?" said Mr. West. "How she arches her neck and twists her quarters, and plays all manner of pranks, keeping her eye well round the corner the while, on the look-out for the halter. Bless you, it's just the same with girls. They want the halter, sure enough, but they're not to be caught all of a sudden. 'Tis the way of the sex."

"Ah, I shall have to come to you for instruction, I see," said Fane, laughing; and the old man, nothing loath to be thought an authority on the subject, declared his willingness to teach him all he knew, and "wished him good luck in his wooing."

It was not brought to a climax so speedily, though, as the father had anticipated or the lover had hoped.

Daisy was open to a confidential conversation, and not averse to flattery, but directly it came to anything of a closer nature, she took fright and ran away. The fact being that she had never been made love to before. The first attempt seemed a complete failure.

The old farmer had retired to bed; George had gone into the smoking-room; the girls were about to mount the staircase to their chamber, Margarita Hay having already gained the landing.

"Stay one moment," said Fane imploringly, as he detained Daisy's hand.

"What for?" returned the girl, aloud.

"I want to speak to you."

"What about? Oh, how you do wrench my hand. Do you think I have no bones to be hurt?"

"Daisy, my darling, don't talk so loud, you'll wake uncle," said Margarita from over the top banister.

"There! I must go, you see, or I shall get into a scrape."

He let her mount a few stairs whilst he retreated to the parlour.

"Miss West! Miss West!" he called loudly thence a moment afterwards.

"Oh, what *does* that pest want? Just listen to him, Rita, bawling the house down. Hus—s—s—h," she continued, in an emphatic whisper; "what is it, Mr. Fane? you mustn't make such a noise."

"Come down-stairs. You've left something behind you."

"It doesn't signify."

"It signifies very much. You must come and fetch it."

"It can wait till to-morrow morning."

"It can't wait."

"It shall!"

"Daisy, my dear, why don't you go down and fetch

it, whatever it may be, instead of arguing with Mr. Fane over the banisters?"

"Because I don't see why I should go down at his bidding."

"Don't be a goose, but go. I want you to come to bed, it is getting so late."

"I have come," said Daisy in the most dignified manner, as she entered the darkened parlour, "because Rita asked me to do so, and not because you did. And now where is this wonderful thing that I have left behind, and what is it?"

"It is my heart, darling," exclaimed Laurence Fane passionately, as he caught her in his arms, "that has been longing and burning to speak to you for days past. O Daisy, say that you like me a little!"

But the energetic action alarmed and offended her.

"Mr. Fane, how can you? how dare you? How very rude you are," she said hurriedly as she twisted herself out of his grasp; "and to say I had left something behind too! It is not true; it is not right. You are very unkind. I shall tell Rita," Daisy finished with a gasp, as she turned and left him standing there alone.

But she did not tell Rita.

"It was a mistake—it was only his nonsense," she said in answer to her cousin's inquiries; but she sat thoughtfully before her glass thinking of the "mistake" long after Margarita had gone to sleep. She wondered

why he had said it, and what he meant, and whether he would mention it again, and whether he could possibly mean——

She met Laurence Fane with a very bright bloom on her cheek the next morning, but he had interpreted her action as annoyance and dislike, and resolved into his former gloom in consequence.

Now it was the cousins' turn to comment on the change in his behaviour.

"What can be the matter with Mr. Fane?" remarked Margarita a few days afterwards. "He has lost all his fun. You haven't been quarrelling with him, have you, Daisy?"

"I——I——quarrelling?" replied the younger girl, confusedly, "why should I?"

"I hope he is not home-sick," said Rita, thoughtfully.

"He must go home some day," replied the other.

The idea oppressed both of them, and for a while they were silent.

"I don't know that it is a good thing to have visitors in such a quiet house as ours," said Margarita, presently, "it makes one miss them so dreadfully when they are gone."

"Yes."

"When they have mixed as freely with the family as Mr. Fane has done too, they seem almost to become part of it, and there must be a certain blank

left when it breaks up again. He has been here nearly two months."

"Yes."

"He came the end of July, and this is the fifteenth of September. He says he must be in town again by the first of October."

"Does he?"

"And then we shall have to spend our days together again, Daisy. What dull company we shall seem for each other after having enjoyed his delightful conversation." And Margarita fell to thinking with her head bent over her work.

In a few minutes it struck her as strange that Daisy should not answer her. She looked up. Daisy was gone. She had slipped away through the open door into the garden before the house.

There was a loud throbbing motion going on inside her bosom, and a buzzing in her ears which she couldn't account for and wanted to get rid of. So she employed herself in culling certain flowers and arranging them neatly together in her hand, though she had not the slightest notion whether they were roses, or carnations, or gilly flowers that she honoured with her preference.

"For whom is that charming bouquet?" said a voice near her. She started. Laurence Fane was in the arbour surrounded by a pile of newspapers and smoking.

"For no one in particular."

"You wasteful girl. Haven't you picked more flowers this morning already than you know what to do with?"

"This morning!" she answered vaguely, and raising her eyes to his.

"Holloa! what's this?—you've been crying."

"I haven't," she said boldly, with a woman's first impulse to save her pride.

"That's a story, Daisy, you have. What was it for?"

"I don't know."

"That's another! No woman cries without knowing the cause. Tell me," he added, more softly, "has anything distressed you?"

The tenderness of his tone made the tears come in good earnest. They filled Daisy's tell-tale eyes and coursed silently down her cheeks. The sight of them made Laurence Fane forget how she had met his first advances.

"My darling," he exclaimed earnestly, "you are really unhappy. Oh, Daisy! if you knew how unhappy it makes me to see you so. I am afraid you were angry with me the other evening."

"No. I——wasn't——," she answered, catching her breath like a sobbing child.

"Then show me I am forgiven by telling me what

distresses you now—any quarrel—any annoyance—any disappointment?”

To all of which queries Daisy could only shake her head, whilst she strove to gulp down her rising emotion. Laurence Fane had drawn her into the arbour by this time, and taken a seat by her side.

“It has nothing to do with me, has it?” he inquired presently.

She was about to shake her head again, but stopped. He observed the hesitating action.

“Has it? My dearest child! But what? Who has dared to say anything to you against me?”

She would not answer at first, but he dragged the truth from her.

“They—they—say,” gasped Daisy, with a very red face, “—that you are going back to London soon, and I think it will be very dull without you, and so does Margarita. That’s all.”

Laurence Fane’s countenance underwent all sorts of changes. He guessed the truth now, the truth for which he had been waiting, but he had had no idea that when it came it would so overwhelm him with delight. He felt as though heaven had opened at his feet.

“Shall I tell you the reason, Daisy? dear, dear Daisy. The reason is because—*you love me!*”

CHAPTER XI.

“Daisy’s tremendous Secret.”

It was the same day, but later in the evening. Margarita Hay was busy ordering her dairy-maids about, and Daisy was pattering after her over the cool bricked dairy floor, and sadly incommoding her movements and confusing her directions by her presence and her chatter.

“Sarah! those tins have not been scoured out. Put them in boiling water at once—(just stand out of the way, Daisy dear, and let her pass.) Where are the new butter cloths? I said these were not to be used again. (How hot your cheeks are, darling; what have you been doing to yourself?) I have promised Stoke’s widow a quart of skim-milk a day for her pig. See that she has it, Mary. And they sent word from the Manor House this morning that they should require four pounds of our butter a week till the season’s over, so lay it aside on churning day till the servant fetches it. (Dear Daisy, I can hardly move whilst you cling to me so. What *is* the matter?)”

“I want to speak to you, Margarita,” in a loud whisper. “I want to tell you something.”

“What is it?”

"Oh, I couldn't say it here, it's a tremendous secret."

"All right, darling," replied her cousin, laughing; "if you will only wait till I have finished with my milk and butter I will go out into the garden and hear this tremendous secret."

She occupied herself with the dairy maids for some few minutes longer, and then turned to the girl who was clinging to her side.

"Now, you little goose!" she said, fondly, as she drew her out into the garden.

Daisy answered nothing, but threw her arm round Margarita's neck with a tight feverish clasp, and walked rapidly down the gravel path.

"Why, where are you going to, dear?"

"Anywhere! To the farthest end! O, Rita, however shall I tell you?"

"You'll have no breath left to tell me anything with, if you run at this rate. Child, you are throttling me! Do have a little mercy. Are we not far enough from the house now? Come into the arbour."

"Oh no! no! not the arbour. I could never tell it you in the arbour," cried Daisy, hysterically.

"Why not? Is it something so very wonderful? I'll lay anything I can guess it beforehand."

"I am sure you couldn't, not if you guessed for a thousand years. And however I shall tell it to you I don't know."

"You begin to excite my curiosity. Shall we sit down on the grass? I shall drop from fatigue if you drag me about much longer."

"Yes! by this bush. Are you sure no one can see us from the house, Rita?"

"Who could see us behind this syringa, you little ninny, and in the dusk too. Come now, Daisy, what is it?"

"*I never can tell you,*" exclaimed Daisy, leaning on Margarita's shoulder.

"And this is what you have given me all this trouble for, Daisy? Well, I have plenty to do, my dear, so I shall go back to the house."

"Oh no! no! you must stay, it will come, directly, but I don't know how to say it."

"Daisy," in a solemn voice, "you haven't been doing anything wrong, have you?"

"Margarita, how could I? What is there wrong to do?"

"Then, why can't you tell me?"

"I'm ashamed; it is so horribly quick."

"It strikes me it's horribly slow, my dear; however, I suppose I must be patient, and I shall hear it all in time."

"You shall, indeed. Tell me, Margarita, is five weeks a very short time?"

"You ridiculous child! what do you mean? Short for what?"

"Oh!—for anything," said Daisy, incoherently.

"It's a long time to be in pain, I should think, Daisy, or in suspense or in danger, but it is a short time when everything goes right. Don't you remember when we went to the seaside after the measles, how fast the days went? When it was time to return home we could hardly believe we had been there for a whole month. I wonder if we shall ever be so happy again as we were then?"

Margarita sighed and lapsed into a reverie. Daisy was obliged to recall her to the subject in hand.

"But about the time, Rita, dear. Do tell me the truth; is it a horribly disgraceful short time to—to—to fall in love, for instance? Oh! do tell me quick."

"*To fall in love!*" said Margarita, with astonishment. "Why, what on earth should you want to know for? You're not going to fall in love with anybody, I hope, Daisy."

"You are so provoking," said Daisy, petulantly. "I ask you a question and you answer me with another question. I suppose it is horrible and disgraceful, and abominable and wicked! Then why not say so at once and have done with it?"

"Daisy!"

"Oh, I know I'm all wrong. I always am all wrong, but I can't help it, and it's done now; and I said that I did—and—and—if you are angry with me

I shall be miserable!" cried Daisy in a burst of tears as she flung herself into Margarita's lap.

A light seemed to dawn upon the elder girl's mind.

"My darling," she said tenderly, as she raised the wet hot face and kissed it. "You forget that I don't understand a word that you are saying. But I think I have guessed the secret, Daisy. Some one has made you an offer of marriage. But who can it be? Not Mr. Hughes?"

"Mr. Hughes!" exclaimed her cousin, as she lifted up a pair of indignant eyes, "that hideous, red-faced, sandy-haired creature, Alfred Hughes! Good gracious me, Rita, what do you think I am made of?"

"My child, if he liked you how could you help it? But who else is there? I know everyone you know, dear Daisy."

"Can't you guess? Can't you guess? Somebody who—somebody who is— Oh, Rita, can't you guess?"

"*Not Mr. Fane, Daisy.*"

Daisy's only answer was to bury her burning face anew in Margarita's bosom, whilst she exclaimed, "I knew you would say it was a great deal too soon."

Margarita Hay turned suddenly pale. She could *feel* herself turn pale even in the fast descending dusk, and a cold sickness assailed her. She did not stop to ask herself why the fear that oppressed her should

have so unusual an effect. She only knew that for a few moments she could not trust her voice to answer. Then she spoke almost in a whisper.

"I understand, dear——only surely he has said nothing?"

"Said nothing! Why, Margarita, he has asked me to be his wife. Do you call that 'nothing?'"

"When?"

"This afternoon, in the orchard."

"*His wife!* What will uncle say?"

"Oh, he spoke to my father first, long ago, more than a week—and father wishes it. And so does George, Rita—and—and—*so do I.*"

"You wish it. You wish to marry Mr. Fane? You love him, Daisy?"

"Oh, Margarita, indeed——indeed I do. He is so good, you know, and so handsome and so clever, and he is very fond of me. He says," continued Daisy, with a modest downcast look, which no one saw, "that he never met any woman before whom he would have cared to marry, and you know I have not met any man, Rita. And when he spoke to me this afternoon, and kissed me—you don't think it wrong, do you?—I felt then how very much I do love him, best in all the world, I think. But you next, Rita, you next."

"Oh, my child, my child, my child!" cried Margarita suddenly, as she spread out both her arms and

folded her cousin in her embrace, and rocked her to and fro, and cried over her as if her heart had been breaking.

"You are not sorry, dear Rita, are you? Say you are not sorry."

"Sorry, darling! How can I be sorry for any good thing that happens to you? and it is a good thing, my Daisy. A good and a great thing to have won the heart of such a man, and to be chosen from all the world to be his wife, my little Daisy, my dear, dear friend and sister. But how shall I live without you?"

"Oh, you will often come to see us, Rita, and we shall come to see you. It will be jolly to live in London, won't it? And he is going to take me to all the theatres. And you don't think the time too short, then—not disgracefully short."

"It might have been longer, certainly," said Margarita, smiling through her tears; "but 'disgraceful' is no word to be used for him or you, Daisy."

"And how little I imagined, Rita, when he has been pestering and teasing me out of my life, that I should ever like him well enough to marry him. I believe he will worry me into the grave as it is. He is awfully presuming too, and takes horrible liberties, already, the creature! I believe I have turned his head by saying 'yes' too quickly. Shall I tell him it was a mistake, and he must give me a month to con-

sider of it? I should like to see his face when he heard it."

"Hush! no, Daisy, it is too solemn a thing to jest about. You have come to the most important part of your life, my darling, and you must try and look at it from a serious point of view. You can never be so clever and so learned as Mr. Fane, that is impossible, but since he has chosen you for his companion and friend, you must do your utmost to show him that you can be something more than a silly thoughtless girl. You must be sober and sensible, and——"

"Sober and sensible! Good gracious, Margarita, you frighten me! I can't be sober and sensible, and if Laurence doesn't like me as I am, I shall break off the engagement at once; and, after all, darling, when I come to think of it, I don't believe that I can part with you. I have been too hasty, as usual. I shall tell him so. Oh, why are there such things as men in the world to come and break up happy peaceful families, and drag a poor unfortunate girl away from her own cousin!"

"No one will ever be able to drag our hearts asunder, Daisy."

"I won't marry him, Rita. I won't marry any one. I never thought of the vows we have made to live together all our lives. It was a mistake. I shall tell him so!"

"You will tell him no such thing, dear! You will be very grateful to him for all his love, and make him the best wife that ever man had. That is what I prophesy."

"Margarita! Margarita! Margarita!"

Both the girls started. It was *his* voice.

"He is calling you," said Daisy, wonderingly.

"That is hardly probable. Haven't you observed that he always addresses you by your own name? Go to him, dear Daisy, don't keep him waiting."

"You must come too."

"Nonsense, dear child. As if lovers wanted a third person at their interviews."

"Then I shan't stir."

"How silly of you! Are you in earnest?" said Margarita, as the name again resounded from the portico of the house.

"Quite in earnest. Do you think I am going to run like a dog whenever he whistles to me? Do come, Rita."

And so Margarita rose, and with their arms entwined about each other, the girls returned to the house.

"I have brought back your truant, Mr. Fane," exclaimed Margarita Hay.

It was too dark for him to see their faces plainly, but the tone of her voice told him that the news had reached her.

"Thanks," he said, laughingly, as he took hold of Daisy's hand and drew her towards him. "I never saw such a flitter-ti-gibbet in my life. She is here, there, and everywhere, in the course of a minute. To whom have you been making love now, Miss Daisy?"

"Not to you," she answered, pertly.

"Of course not, or I should have had no need to put the question. Have you been with the dogs, or the horses, or the pigeons, or the cows?"

"I have been with nobody but Rita, behind a syringa bush. Telling her the great secret," she added in a low tone.

"And what does Rita say to the 'great secret'?"

"She says I'm much too good for you."

"Oh, Daisy," interposed Margarita gently.

"You are quite right, Miss Hay. She was quite right, my darling. You are much, *much* too good for me. I know it well. I know that you are so pure and innocent and guileless, and I have led so careless and thoughtless a life that——"

"I cannot consent to be adoréd in public," cried Daisy, as she placed her hand upon his mouth.

He caught and kissed it.

"If I may not say it in public," he replied, "you shall come and hear it all in private," and with his arm still round her he turned and walked into the sitting-room.

Margarita Hay stood where they had left her, long

enough to hear the low sweet tones—the half-smothered laugh—the whispered remonstrance, that told they had no need of her presence to increase their happiness, and then she walked slowly away.

For the first time she realized that her cousin—her companion from infancy—was virtually gone from her, and she felt as though her heart was bursting.

CHAPTER XII.

Jack Reeves' Opinion.

THE next few days went by like a blissful dream, Laurence Fane was in a delirium of delight; the girl he loved scarcely less happy. He engrossed almost all her time, and they spent long hours together in the shady woods that surrounded Busythorne, giving and receiving lessons in the divine art of love.

The first interruption that occurred to cast a slight cloud over their horizon was the necessity of Laurence Fane's return to London.

He was already behind-hand with his engagements; his professional duties demanded his presence in town, and, notwithstanding Daisy's loving remonstrances and regrets, he left Maple Farm on the first of October.

But there was another reason for his departure which greatly reconciled her to it. Their marriage was fixed to take place in the following January, and Laurence had to engage a house and furnish it for her reception. And, when everything was ready, he had promised to return to spend Christmas with them before he transplanted his wild flower from Maple Farm to the atmosphere of London. Meanwhile there

was the delight to look forward to of receiving and answering his letters, and the task—so dear to a female mind—of preparing the wardrobe wherewith she was to enter her new home.

Altogether Daisy was not so greatly to be pitied.

* * * *

Everyone knows what it is to come back to one's home in London after a prolonged sojourn in the country or by the seaside. How dusty and dirty and confined the streets look, after having breathed the fresh air of the moors or stretched our limbs along the unbounded beach. What an air of discomfort reigns in the unused rooms from which all our Lares and Penates were carefully locked away before we left them to the tender mercies of the landlady and the charwoman? How mournfully we sigh as each fresh discrepancy crops up to view, and we are told there is none of *this*, and *that* is wanted immediately, and please will we give some money for the other, and we realize that we are all at sixes and sevens, and shall not feel at home again for many a long day to come. Bachelors cannot experience so much discomfort on returning to their rooms as a householder does—still there was a sufficient amount of disorder and inconvenience about Laurence Fane's apartments when he saw them again, to make him wish more than once that he was back at Maple Farm. His pictures had been taken from the walls and hung

up again crooked—his books replaced in the book-case with their titles downwards—his ornaments moved from their familiar places. There was no brandy in the cellaret, the castors were empty, the landlady had no one she could send out just at that minute for a rumpsteak or beer. His writing table was turned topsy-turvy; he felt no inclination to sit down to work; his chum and companion, Jack Reeves, who occupied the second floor, had not yet returned from Switzerland.

Laurence Fane swore a little, grumbled a great deal, and wandered off to his club. Here he procured his chop and his claret, but the company was few and far between. Plenty of men of his acquaintance were there, but no men whom he called friends. He felt solitary and depressed, strolled down to the office of the paper for which he worked, found the editor was out of town, and no one knew when he would return; cursed the lot that tied him down to such an existence, and went home again somewhat out of temper. What was his delight on reaching his door to find a hansom standing before it, and Jack Reeves' well-known portmanteau being dragged up the hall steps by the cabman.

"Returned!" he shouted breathlessly to the landlady as he entered.

"Yes, sir," she answered sourly; "and I do wish gentlemen would be considerate enough to give one a

little notice of their comings and goings, instead of bursting in like comets as one may say. Mr. Reeves is in your room, sir; for I've just got the carpet up in his'n, and can't hurry myself to put it down for no one."

He did not stay to listen to her complaint, but rushed upstairs, two at a time. The idea of seeing his old companion again had dispersed all melancholy at once.

"Holloa! old fellow," he exclaimed heartily, as they shook hands. "And so you're back? Deuced glad of it, Jack. I was wondering what I should do with myself here all alone. It's beastly work coming back to stay in London after a two months' stretch in the country. How have you enjoyed yourself?"

"Uncommonly. I've been through Switzerland and the Tyrol, and had a fortnight in Paris on my way back. What have you done?"

"I've been staying with friends in Somersetshire," replied Fane with a blush.

"All the time?"

"Yes!—All the time."

"Wasn't it rather slow? I thought you had some idea of going to Spain this year."

"So I had, but it never got beyond the idea. It's deuced expensive moving about, and I was down at a quiet place near Taunton."

"Ah! did heaps of work, I dare say. Lucky fellow! I'm frightfully behind-hand."

Fane laughed uneasily, and changed the subject.

"Dined, Reeves?"

"Yes, at Charing Cross—on my way here. Knew the old woman would kick up a shindy if I asked for a chop on arrival. Going out this evening?"

"Haven't thought of it. Would much rather have a pipe here with you."

"So would I. We'll send the old girl out for more brandy and soda, and have a quiet evening by ourselves. Got lots to tell you as soon as I've washed this infernal dust out of my throat."

They had a fire kindled in the grate, and sat down together over their liquor and tobacco, as chatty and confidential as two women who have met for the purposes of a "good confab."

But on *the* subject Fane could not make up his mind to speak. He was longing to make a confidant of Reeves, to tell him of Daisy's beauty and vivacity, and his own happy prospects; but men are proverbially shy of mentioning these matters to each other, and for some time he could not summon up courage enough to introduce it. He knew, however, that sooner or later it must be broached, for Reeves and he (who had occupied the same house for some years past) had many little things in common, and it had been an understanding between them, that if at

any time either wished to leave, he was to give the other who remained proper notice of his intentions. Added to which, Laurence Fane knew nothing of the best plan by which to set about finding, engaging and furnishing a house for Daisy and himself, and he wanted his friend's assistance in this matter. So that when the brandy and soda and pipe had had their proper effect, he unbosomed himself.

"Jack!"

"Well, old fellow!"

"I'm afraid you'll say I've made an awful ass of myself."

"What's up now?"

"But——I'm going to be married!"

Jack Reeves leapt up on his chair.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. Then he settled down again; drew a long whiff from his pipe, heaved a sigh and added solemnly:

"You *are* a fool."

"I knew you'd say so," said Laurence Fane, "but she's awfully pretty, Jack."

"You *are* a fool," repeated his friend.

"But one must be married some time, you know, and after all it's just as well to be settled—and——. She's only seventeen, Jack, but such a figure—*such* a splendid supple rounded figure, and *such* a complexion. Talk of your Venuses and Hebes. There never was

a piece of sculpture or painting yet that came up to her."

"You *are* a fool," said Reeves solemnly for the third time.

"Well, you needn't go on repeating it in that aggravating manner, if I am," replied Fane as he lit another pipe and turned his back upon his companion, sulkily.

"Come! don't huff, old fellow!" said Jack's genial voice presently.

"You have done enough to make a fellow 'huff' as you call it."

"I didn't mean what I said, you know that as well as I do. And I really am awfully anxious to hear all about this lady. Who is she? What's her name? Where did you meet her?"

Laurence Fane made no reply.

"Has she got any tin—any literary connections that will help you on?"

Still no answer.

"Is she very accomplished—very clever—likely to aid instead of hinder you? Laurence, dear old boy, come out of your sulks, and tell me all about it."

He could not resist the kind coaxing voice, besides he wanted to eulogize upon the subject nearest to his heart.

"I don't know what she has or hasn't, Reeves; whether she will drag me down or pull me up; but I

know that she is the loveliest, purest, sweetest-tempered angel that ever condescended to bless a man, and that if I lived the life of a saint to the age of Methusaleh, I could never be half worthy enough of her."

"After that I have got nothing more to say," observed Jack Reeves quaintly.

"And we're to be married in January, Reeves, so I shall have to give up these rooms in December, and get a house and furnish it by that time; and I shall want your help, if you will give it me, and your advice and all that. It will be of the greatest possible assistance."

"Well, you are a——" commenced Jack again, but there he stopped short. "You are a lucky man, old fellow," he continued rapidly, as he slapped Fane on the shoulder, "and I congratulate you with all my heart. Next January, is it to be? Only three months of single wretchedness, and then your fortune's made for life. Happy dog! How I wish that it was I!"

"Ah, you may well say so," replied his unsuspecting friend.

CHAPTER XIII.

The House at Notting-hill.

MEN are estimable creatures; there is no doubt that Providence created them for some wise purpose, and that in many instances they fulfil the purposes for which they were created. But there are some things they can't do as well as women; and one is, to take a house and furnish it. They have not the same patience in selection, foresight in provision, and prudence in expenditure, as the weaker vessel; nor, I may add, the same interest in the task that turns fatigue and trouble into pleasure.

But it must be observed that I speak of men and women—not of the fools of either sex—who do not know the names of the virtues enumerated above. Men, as a rule, furnish *too* well, and when they have spent double the money they intended for the purpose, curse and swear at the exorbitant demands of tradesmen, and the difficulty of maintaining a family with decency. They must have morocco and mahogany in the dining-room, and black and gold furniture in the drawing-room, and “hang it all, whatever we screw in, let us have good glass and china on the dinner table, and a spare bed-room that we're not

ashamed to ask a friend to sleep in." And those very necessary, though unseemly sources of domestic comfort,—saucepans, dish-covers, and gridirons,—which are so seldom mentioned above stairs, and consequently so easily forgotten (until the bill for them comes in) are omitted from the calculation altogether, until there is not sufficient money left to defray their rather formidable expenses.

"I don't care how plain things are, but what I have I like to have good," is a common assertion with men, and one which we might all feel inclined to echo. But unfortunately, plain *good* things are, generally speaking, the most expensive of their kind, and if we require our possessions to last till the future, we must pay for them in the present. Laurence Fane was one of these minded men. He liked things plain and good, and spent in consequence twice as much as he need have done upon the new house. He had no mother or sister to advise him—he had not even a female friend in London to whom he could turn in this emergency. He had only his own judgment to go upon, and the eccentric and not always prudent advice of Mr. Jack Reeves. He commenced naturally by taking the house. Having secured lists of houses to let from every agent in town, and laid himself open to receiving the same quarterly for many years to come, he set out upon his weary search, and got sick of it in a couple of days. The houses in the localities

he had selected, Hyde Park, Regent's Park, and St. John's Wood, were all so small and so dear, and the obstacles which beset the hirer in the shape of repairs, premium, or fixtures so formidable, that Fane gave up the idea of finding one to suit him in either of these quarters, and turned his thoughts to Notting-hill.

Notting-hill was out of the way, certainly; but then Notting-hill was airy and healthy, and high, and the houses had small gardens attached to them, and Margarita would not feel the change from the country perhaps so much as she would have done nearer the town. Besides, at Notting-hill, he could procure a house for just half or one-third the rent he was asked to pay in the Regent's Park.

He had seen a six-roomed house at the West End, in a dark narrow street, with a mews at the back, for which the agents had asked him one hundred and fifty pounds a year. He found a six-roomed house at Notting-hill, in a nice airy situation, and a tiny garden, for which they asked him fifty. Seeing how much he appreciated the difference, the Notting-hill agents led him on to view another in the same locality, with ten rooms, at ninety pounds a year.

The rooms were larger and loftier than those he had seen previously—the six-roomed house looked mean after them. He had not the courage to refuse the more commodious habitation, and decided to take it on a three years' lease. It was so wonderfully

cheap by the side of the West End domicile, that he forgot a cheaper one would have served his purpose. Besides—as he argued to himself—“money is never thrown away on anything that conduces to one’s health. If Margarita and I have to save in anything, it shall not be house-room.”

Then came the furnishing. Laurence Fane held ideas of his own on this head: to the effect that it is much cheaper to pick up furniture as you find it to suit you, than to give a wholesale order, and as his taste lay in the mediæval style he ransacked Wardour-street and many other streets from top to bottom, in search of carved oak, and dark blue china, and engraved brass, wherewith to decorate his dining-room and study—and succumbed more than once, on his way, to the temptation of Venetian glass and marqueterie, and Dresden china for Daisy’s drawing-room.

He was committing no fraud in purchasing such things—he was not even guilty of extraordinary weakness, for he had some knowledge of their actual worth, and great taste in their selection. He was only doing what hundreds of men have done before him—resting on an uncertainty, as though his world contained no such thing as change—and expending all the money he had in hand, without a thought that the morrow might bring unavoidable expenses which could not be met by anything but cash.

He had been used to exhibit great nicety of selection, and some extravagance in the furnishing of his bachelor apartments, which were models in their way, and he could not bring himself to make the rooms in which he was to instal his peerless Margarita less beautiful. Surely nothing that he had the power to procure could be too good for her. So he had all the papers of the house pulled down and replaced by such as suited his more artistic fancy; furnished the rooms simply but well; hung the walls with pictures, and strewed the tables with books and china, and then discovered, to his mortification, that he had not yet supplied the basement nor the attics, and was short of cash.

"It's deuced unfortunate just at this time," he remarked, in talking over the matter with his friend Reeves, "that I've had a row with the editor of the '——' You remember how he used to pay me. I did half the work of the paper last season, and even when I was down in the country, hardly a post came in without bringing me an order of some sort. I've done his social and political leaders on and off for the last eighteen months. Well, when I came back to town, not having heard from him for a week, I strolled over to his office to ask the reason. 'Did you get my copy in time last night?' I said. 'Yes,' he replied; 'but we didn't use it, Fane. The fact is, Horne was before hand with you.' 'Horne!' I ex-

claimed. 'And who the d——I gave him the right to do it?' He shrugged his shoulders—said these matters were not entirely in his hands (a lie, of course), and that the proprietor of the paper thought an occasional change of writers advisable. I couldn't condescend to argue with him, but asked who was to do the sporting correspondence this autumn. He had given it to Captain Baynes, he said. And the reviewing? Oh! he should be most happy to let me have a little occasional reviewing, and would I take two sets of books home with me then. I told him I would see him d——d first, and walked down-stairs, and so ends my connection, I conclude, with the '——' "

"You are much too hasty," replied Reeves. "No man in our profession can afford to offend an editor. In the first place what he said has much truth in it; in the second, consider what numbers are striving to obtain the work which we monopolize, to do it upon lower terms, and perhaps as well. Editors have their employers' interests to consider as well as their own. I think press men are too apt to forget that fact in their endeavours to serve themselves."

"Admirably put, my dear Jack, but it doesn't restore my money. That paper was worth £5 a week to me."

"And had you continued to do the reviewing you might have regained it all in time."

"I would starve first. No! If they can get others

to do my work better and cheaper, then let them get them. Shall I prostitute my pen to serve the purposes of a penny paper, or to put a few extra pounds into my purse?"

"You are talking nonsense, my dear boy."

"Listen to me, Jack. You know I never can make up my mind to send in 'scamped' work. What I write I must write to the best of my ability. Careful composition takes time, and we who live by our pens know that time means money."

"Of course, and when the Editor of the '——' finds another fellow to do the work in half the time and for half the money, he puts him on the paper instead of you: and small blame to him, Laurence. You would do the same yourself if you stood in his place."

"I don't think so; but it makes no difference to my resolution. It was a long time before I would accept press work, and I am glad to have done with it. It is unworthy of a pen that can do higher things."

"You will find none more profitable, Fane, take my word for it."

"It is awkward, at this moment, I acknowledge, but I shall borrow a couple of hundred to begin with. I have long had an idea sketched out in my mind, which I have never had the leisure to accomplish. I shall begin to work at it in good earnest now. It is

just the sort of quiet occupation I shall like to follow for the first few months of my married life."

"What is it to be? A novel?"

"*A novel!*" echoed Fane, contemptuously. "Not exactly. A work on Composition and the direction of the Imaginative Faculties. It is sure to take."

"Humph!" said Jack Reeves.

* * * * *

The furnishing of the house at Notting-hill proceeded rapidly. Laurence Fane, released from the constant strain of press work, devoted all his leisure to the volume that was to produce so much excitement in the literary world in the spring, and the weeks sped towards Christmas.

Meanwhile all the thoughts that he could spare from necessary labour were given to Margarita West and the sweet days that were coming. He did not know how much he loved her till he sat down in those dull rooms by himself; he could not have believed that a simple woman could have wound herself in so short a time about his heart-strings as to make life a desert when her presence was withdrawn. It was with him as it is with many men. He had left Love till so late that when it burst upon him it absorbed his every faculty, and hardly left him the power to think of anything else. Daisy's sweet face sadly interfered with his work during those three months of waiting. He used to try and drive her by

violence from his thoughts whilst he attacked his composition, only after a few minutes' hard writing to let the pen fall idly from his hand, whilst he mused upon her sunny smiles, her girlish blushes, the soft touch of her lips, and the rounded lines of her undulating figure.

"This will never do," he exclaimed one evening angrily to himself. "If I am to lose my head and fall into reveries over her beauty on every occasion, the sooner I am married to my darling the better. Oh! how sweet, how enchanting, how divine she is. I've half a mind to run down to Busythorne to-morrow."

But, luckily for himself, that half mind never grew to a whole one, for he had made a resolution, not to leave town again till Christmas.

He wrote to her almost every day though, and he could not have lived without her letters in return. They were such simple childish effusions that a man less in love than he was might have smiled at them, but to Laurence Fane they seemed redolent of purity and devotion and single-heartedness. As indeed they were.

They came straight from the girl's heart, they breathed her true thoughts and hopes and wishes, and they made the man who received and believed in them, a better and humbler man. If he had always feared he was unworthy of her, he knew it for a certainty now.

Time went on. Christmas was near at hand. The house at Notting-hill (of which the most vivid descriptions and the most ardent praises had passed backwards and forwards between the lovers) was ready and complete. Laurence Fane had borrowed his two hundred pounds, given up his bachelor apartments, and, without a misgiving for the future, started on his road to Bushthorne. The weather was genial for the time of year; the panes of the railway carriage windows were covered with frost; the horse's feet rang cheerily on the hardened road as George West drove him to Maple Farm. All were well there, thank God! They wanted no one but himself to complete their Christmas party. George, delighted to welcome again his old friend, so soon to be his brother, rattled on merrily, but for the last half mile of the journey Laurence made few replies. He was too nervous and excited to talk—he was trembling with eagerness to see Margarita again.

As the dog-cart bowled up the familiar road to the Farm, and stopped at the garden gate, Fane scrambled down hastily and clumsily.

“Take care, old fellow,” sang out George, “or you'll come to grief over that wheel. There's no need to be in such a deuce of a hurry. I see Miss Daisy sneaking in the shadow of the porch, and a minute more or less can't make much difference, eh?”

Ah! how little he knew about it.

Laurence Fane stumbled up the gravelled path feeling as though he were half intoxicated with the coming pleasure. Eager as a man to reach the promised goal, yet nervous as a girl at the prospect before him. Even in those few moments he had time to fancy he should never reach the porch.

Nor did he—*alone!*

For as he neared it sufficiently to be distinguished a shriek of delight issued from the house. Something rushed to meet him down the garden path, and amidst the gloom and the cold, he received in his wide-opened arms the warm breathing form of his darling. Her head was on his heart: he felt the pressure of her clinging hands: the tears of joy that lay upon her cheeks; and even before he returned her affectionate embrace, he raised his head to thank God he held his own again.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Wooded and Married and A’.”

FOR a few minutes there was utter silence between them. Daisy’s was the voice to break it.

“Oh, Laurence! I never knew how much I cared for you till now.”

“My own darling! This has been a weary separation, but it is the last—it is the last!”

He drew her into the lighted parlour where old Mr. West and George, who had slipped round from the stables the back way, were ready to receive and welcome him.

“And where is Miss Hay?” asked Laurence, after the first greetings were over. “I hope she is quite well.”

“Poor dear Rita! She was here a minute ago. I can’t think where she has run to. No. She is not well, Laurence—at least I say so. She has grown very thin and pale this autumn, and is not half her usual self. She declares it is all the effect of an obstinate cold she caught some time ago, but I think it is more your fault than that of anybody else.”

“My fault!” exclaimed Fane, smiling.

“Yes, in advising her to study as you did. She

spends every spare moment in poring over those musty old books, and writing out what she reads from memory, and I don't know what else."

"How sensible of her!"

"I wish you wouldn't say so"—pouting. "It is no compliment to me. I have read nothing since we parted except a few novels, and *your letters*," she added shyly. "I tried to read the book, you gave Rita, but I suppose it is too deep for me, Laurence. I must confess I liked your letters best."

"You darling," he whispered fondly. "I wouldn't have you turned into a book-worm for anything. Be yourself, my Margarita, and keep on loving my letters and my words, and I will never ask you to dive into anything deeper or more dull!"

"Here is Rita," exclaimed Daisy, as her cousin entered the room.

Laurence Fane went up and shook her by the hand heartily. He was truly pleased to see this girl again. Her affection for Daisy alone would have endeared her to him, and the knowledge that she had followed his advice in the matter of her studies caused him to feel still more favourably inclined towards her. She was a good girl, and a sensible girl. An excellent friend and companion for his Daisy, and an interesting pupil for himself. So he welcomed her in the freest and most cordial manner. But he was struck with the alteration in her appearance since he had seen her

last. The clear pale complexion had given way to a muddy white, her eyes were sunk and lacked their former brightness, her figure had sadly fallen away.

"I am sorry to see you looking so poorly," was his first remark.

"I am all right," replied Rita, blushing crimson.

"You are *not* all right, darling!" exclaimed her cousin eagerly. "Father! George! you hear what Laurence says. He sees the difference in Rita at once. Now will you believe what I say. Oh, Rita, do let us send for Dr. Brown."

"What good could he do me?" she replied, with a certain amount of annoyance. "I eat and sleep, and work just as I used to do. What more can you want? Daisy dear, don't be foolish. You know if there is one thing that vexes me more than another, it is having remarks made upon my looks."

"Well, I won't say another word, Rita, particularly as Laurence has just arrived. We must all be happy this evening, mustn't we? and decide what we are to do to make this Christmas the merriest we have ever had. The last Christmas I shall ever spend amongst you, Rita," she added softly.

"God forbid!" cried Fane.

"I mean—as—as——"

"As silly Daisy West," interposed her brother.

"Let us hope so, my dear. Let us hope that by

this time next Christmas, you may be turned into a sober-sided, sensible matron."

"My precious wife," whispered Laurence in her other ear. She had been about to resent George's speech with some saucy rejoinder, but the whisper stayed her. She answered it by creeping closer to her lover's side and remaining there for the rest of the evening—silent but content.

* * * * *

The wedding was fixed to take place on the sixth of January. The preparations for it, which though very simple and unpretending, were quite in character with the social position of the bride, had been completed before Laurence Fane joined them, and no *contretemps* occurred to make any change in the programme necessary. But one thing he observed during the short space of time between Christmas Day and his wedding morning which surprised and interested him. The characters of the two girls with whom he was about to become so closely connected seemed to have undergone great alterations since he had studied them last. Margarita Hay, who had always been so cheerful, active, and obliging, appeared to have lost half her spirits. She fulfilled all her duties as heretofore, but she moved about the old farm-house so silently and sluggishly that labour seemed to be a pain instead of a pleasure to her, whilst her cousin Daisy's girlish pertness and nonsense had vanished

with her coming honours, and left a very tearful and rather fearful girl in their stead. The strong attachment which existed between these girls was beginning to show itself as it had never done before, and it is not too much to affirm that Daisy not only said, but really felt now the time was come, as if she could rather give up her promised husband than part with her more than sister.

"Don't be angry with me, Laury," she would sob, "don't be disappointed, but I feel as if I never *could* go through with it. To part with Rita—never to see Rita again—Oh, my heart will break."

"But, my darling, what makes you fancy you will never see her again? Your cousin will come and stay with us, of course, at least I sincerely hope she will, as soon as ever we return to London. And then my bird can have her all to herself, as much as ever she likes, whilst I am working in my study, or attending to business out of doors."

"But Rita says *no!* She says she cannot come—that father will not spare her—and we shall have each other, and will not want her! But I *do* want her, Laury—(you won't be vexed with me for saying so, will you?) and I always *shall* want her to my very life's end, for she has been the best and the dearest, and the sweetest sister that ever a girl had."

"My own love, if it were possible for me to do so, I should love you less if I thought you could ever

forget what your cousin has been to you. She has been mother, and elder sister, and friend, all in one. She was the first who praised you to me. As long as I live and love you, Margarita, I can never forget the terms in which she spoke of you to me, nor cease to be grateful to her for them."

"Dear, sweet Rita! How shall I ever say good-bye to her?"

"Do not say 'good-bye.' Kiss her for your husband and yourself, and bid her pack up her box to be ready to meet us on our return to town."

It was a very plain and unpretentious wedding, but in other respects, much like ceremonies of the same description. Neither bride nor bridegroom looked their best—they never do—but they went through their parts without a blunder, and were too much excited to think of anything excepting how glad they should be when it was all over. Then followed a substantial breakfast in the dining hall of the old farmhouse, at which Laurence Fane first exerted his marital authority by insisting on his wife eating a good meal before they started. He intended taking her to Clifton for a fortnight before they returned to town, and had no wish to have her ill from fasting as well as crying before they got to the end of their journey. So he behaved in a most unlover-like fashion by piling her plate with cold chicken and pigeon pie, and refusing to let her stir until she had

done what her appetite really prompted her to do, and kept her down in her seat for the last quarter of an hour by talking of subjects in which he knew she would be interested.

"Where is your cousin?" he whispered, after a while. "I have a little present which I have been vainly trying to find an opportunity to give her."

"Have you?" exclaimed Daisy, with sparkling eyes. "How good of you, Laury. What is it?"

He drew a morocco case from his coat pocket, and, opening it, showed her a brooch, ear-rings, and locket, in chased gold.

"Like mine!" said Daisy, clasping her hands. "How pleased she will be."

"They're not so good as yours, Margarita; the best of all that I ever have now will be my wife's, but I think they are pretty. Will you give them to her? They are from both of us remember!"

"Oh you darling! and how kind of you," she exclaimed, excitedly. "Yes, let me give them. How delighted she will be. May I go now, Laury?"

"I think you may. It is almost time to change your dress."

"But where is Rita? She has moved from her place, why didn't she wait for me?"

"I think perhaps she has gone to your room to prepare your travelling things. Go to her, love. When

the other women see you rise, they will rise too. They are waiting for you to give the signal."

The bride did as she was desired, and with her usual impetuosity reached the door first, and sprang up the staircase to her cousin's room. The scream which resounded through the house as soon as she had gained it, told the men in the breakfast-room that something was the matter.

"Good Heavens! Margarita's voice," cried Fane, as he dashed upstairs after her.

He found her kneeling in her bridal dress on the floor of the bed-chamber, supporting her cousin's head upon her knee. Margarita Hay had fainted.

"Is she dead? Is she dead!" screamed all the women together.

"No! No! of course not," said Laurence Fane. "She is in a swoon; thank God it is no worse. Stand by, ladies, if you please. Open that window; give her all the air you can, and I will fetch some cold water."

He ran down-stairs again, quieted the apprehensions of the farmer and his son, delivered Miss Hay over to the care of the oldest female servant in the establishment, and tried to wait patiently for the re-appearance of his wife.

She came at last, dressed for her journey, but with very red eyes and a look of disquietude.

"Rita is better," she said in answer to their in-

quiries, "but she is not well enough to come downstairs yet. She likes the present, Laury; she sent you her kindest thanks. But, oh! how I wish I hadn't to leave her when she is so ill."

"Come on, Daisy, and don't make a fuss about nothing," said her brother, sharply. "Rita will be well again by tea time. She is only over tired."

The boxes and portmanteaus were waiting in the hall, the hired carriage that was to take them to Taunton at the door. George knew his sister's sensibilities, and the best way of treating them. He felt for Laurence Fane, and did not see why the pleasure of his wedding journey should be disturbed for such a trifle.

"She'll be as right as a trivet by to-morrow morning," he repeated cheerily, as he hastened the movements of the servants, and shut the carriage door upon the newly married couple. "Good-bye, Daisy. God bless you, old fellow. Let us know you arrive safe. I'll write about Margarita to-morrow. All right, coachman. Drive on," and Maple Farm was left behind them, almost before they knew they were off. Naturally the first thing Laurence did was to pull down the blinds, the next to take his wife into his arms, and kiss her five minutes without stopping.

"You're my *very, very* own now, darling," he said, "and no one can ever take my wife away from me again."

She responded to his embraces and crept up close to his side, but her thoughts were left behind her.

"Do you think Rita *will* be as 'right as a trivet' by to-morrow morning?" she inquired anxiously. "Isn't it very dangerous to faint?"

"I don't think so. Has she never fainted before?"

"Never! nor I either. We have never fainted in our lives."

"That is strange. She must have over exerted herself, as George said, about the breakfast. Depend upon it, darling, she will be as well as ever in an hour or two."

"Oh! I hope she will," said Daisy wistfully.

"You mustn't think of it now, Margarita. You must think of nothing to-day but my great love for you, and how I thank you from the bottom of my heart for coming to make the sunshine of my life. You love me, too, my angel, do you not? Say so, Margarita, my wife!"

"I love you the best in the world, Laury," she answered slowly. "I love you so much that sometimes I wonder where all my love comes from; but oh! I do so wish"—with a long drawn sigh—"in the midst of all this great happiness, I can't help wishing that Rita had not fainted!"

CHAPTER XV.

The Fate of the new Book.

THE house at Notting-hill looked very charming in Laurence Fane's eyes when Margarita was settled down as mistress there. The few weeks they had been married had drawn the husband and wife very closely together, and he felt more than contented with the lot he had marked out for himself.

Some men expect too much from their wives. They marry childish, inexperienced girls, and are disappointed if they do not at once attain the standard of other married women. This is unreasonable. Housekeepers and nurses are not made by intuition—they have to buy their experience, often very dearly—and make many failures before they succeed. The man who takes a very young girl for his wife has generally a great deal to put up with. He has need of much patience. As much as though he engaged a raw lad as amanuensis, or a girl out of the workhouse as cook. When we hire inexperienced servants we expect to suffer for it and to have to teach them their work; but the young wife, fresh from her schoolroom, who has not perhaps been accustomed even to the society of men before, whose mother has bought all her wardrobe, and who has never seen food till it was

placed upon the table, is considered imprudent and extravagant if she wastes her husband's money, and mismanages her servants and children. How can it be otherwise? The public assert that the girl should acquire this knowledge before she leaves her mother's wing, and her mother will tell the public for answer that she prefers not having her purse emptied and her household turned topsy-turvy to provide experience which must be purchased at too heavy a cost, and that if men will marry girls of seventeen they must take the consequences. Laurence Fane was more fortunate in this respect than many others. He had chosen his wife from a position in which she had been compelled, more or less, to manage for herself, and the results were very advantageous to the comfort of the new household. Daisy was not such a housekeeper as her cousin Margarita, but she had made many a pudding and pie with her own hands at Maple Farm, and knew fresh eggs from stale, and good meat from bad, in a way that would have astonished some of the young ladies at the West End; and all her country acquirements she was more than ready to put into action for her husband's benefit. She was delighted with the house he had prepared for her. She thought there never had been prettier nor more elegantly furnished rooms than those she now called her own, nor a pleasanter road to live in, nor a dearer, tinier little garden than that in which she

grubbed half her days, but could never persuade any thing to grow. Yet Daisy, in all the pride of her new dignity and possessions, could not forget her country breeding, but went down into her kitchen regularly every morning to help her young cook with the more delicate part of her duties, and Laurence used to think his wife never looked prettier than as he caught sight of her sometimes, with the sleeves of her morning dress tucked up above her dimpled elbows, and her white hands covered with flour and bread crumbs. Not that she was unable to play the lady, either. Her simple unaffected manners were her passport wherever she went, and if she sometimes laughed a little louder than strict etiquette demanded, or asked a question than displayed her ignorance, it was done with so much frankness and genuine good faith that no one could be angry with her—much less her husband, who loved her better every day she lived. She tried his patience sometimes, there is no doubt. What mortals can live cheek by jowl for months together without trying each other's patience, but he never lost his temper with her.

She was so sweet and confiding and innocent: so quickly hurt, so easily conciliated, and withal so fond of him that he would have been less than man not to return her appreciation as ardently as she bestowed it.

And, besides all this, Daisy was sensible. She was not one of those brainless women who disgust

their husbands with their folly, even whilst the men feel remorsefully that they have no other fault to find with them. She was simple to a degree, but she was not silly. Laurence's word was law to her. She would no more have dreamt of disputing his wishes than of defying them; consequently, there were no quarrels, and the household owned a master. As soon as he had explained to her that it was necessary for both their well-being that he should be left alone and absolutely undisturbed during the hours he was writing, his study became sacred, and when he had closed the door behind him, he knew not even a tap would sound upon its panels until he chose to throw it open again.

Whatever emergencies arose during that interval Daisy acted in for herself, whatever visitors called she received, whatever messages were sent she replied to. Very often she made mistakes. Wrong answers were delivered, wrong people admitted; but the feeling of security and certain quiet was so great a boon that Laurence never did more than smile at her efforts to relieve him, and prophesy she would soon be as good a man of business as himself. When his work was over he generally took his wife out walking, or to some entertainment, and the marvels she witnessed during the first three months of her married life were more than Daisy had ever seen before. Meanwhile, there came one disappointment.

Rita was not able to visit them. Her duties at the farm and her delicate health were her excuses for refusing all their invitations, added to which (as she wrote to Daisy) she did not think it would be fair to leave her uncle and George to manage as they best could without her. "It is very dull now you are gone, my darling," so ran part of one of her letters, "and how much more your dear father would feel it if I left him too. Be content, my Daisy, with the blessings Heaven has sent you. You are happy, thank God, and no one rejoices more in your happiness than I do, but I cannot leave Maple Farm at present, and I don't know when I shall be able to do so."

Daisy was, of course, deeply hurt by her cousin's repeated refusals. She cried bitterly at first, and almost refused to be comforted; but Laurence pointed out to her how seldom marriage does not in a measure break up family relations, and promised she should visit her old home again in the summer, till the poor child was ashamed of her weakness, and tried hard to convince herself that it was the law of nature and something she must accept as inevitable. But though she was very quietly happy and grateful for her husband's love, Daisy was never quite the same saucy light-hearted Daisy she had been at Maple Farm after she knew that she must give up hoping for Margarita's presence at Notting-hill.

Laurence Fane's book progressed rapidly. It was written on a subject he had long thought about, and which deeply interested him; consequently, there was no check to the flow of his ideas. From time to time he communicated his progress to Jack Reeves; occasionally he would read out a few pages for his wife's benefit, but as a rule he kept his composition to himself. He wanted it to burst upon the world without any preparation. He had great faith in its being a book that was needed by the age, and that contained some original ideas on a most important matter. He looked to it to return him the money he had been compelled to forestall, and to provide a certain dependence for the future. Had his work been done justice to, it might have accomplished as much as its author hoped for; for it was a clever, brilliant exposition of the theory it professed to uphold. But unfortunately Fane, like all literary men, had his enemies as well as his friends, and his late conduct, with respect to the —— newspaper, had tended to increase rather than diminish their number.

"There's that conceited brute, Fane, bringing out a work on the 'Imaginative Faculties,' I see," said Horne, the very man who had supplanted him. "Thinks he'll teach us all our business I suppose. I'll put a spoke in his wheel if I can, he may depend upon that."

"I hear he's got a chapter devoted to 'False

Imagination,' in which he accuses half the craft of being pillagers of each other's ideas," cried a little red-faced fellow who was well known to have cribbed the plot of a celebrated author for his last novel, and been shown up in the papers for it. "D——d impertinence! that's what I call it. What should Fane know about other people's brains? Hasn't got a notion in his own if the truth were told."

"He wants putting down," said a third. "I hate fellows who come out with their beastly new theories and expect all the world to adopt them."

"No one will read him but the reviewers, that's one comfort," quoth a fourth. "Everything Fane writes is as dull as ditch-water."

"And almost as shallow," said the newspaper critic. "Wait till his book comes into my hands and see what a slating I'll give it in the——. This is an awfully dull time of year, we want something to make the paper go a bit."

And consequently "slate" it, the critics did, until one would have thought instead of being simply a well written, well meaning ventilation of a new and perfectly innocent idea, poor Laurence Fane's book was something too gross, too indecent, and too libellous to place on any respectable table.

Now Laurence Fane did not mind an unfavourable review. In the first place, like most of his craft, he

was used to them. He knew that as one swallow does not make a summer, neither does one critic's opinion make the public verdict, and had always taken his chastisements good-humouredly if not willingly. In the second, he was ambitious and a review, however sharp, so long as it was just, showed him his faults and stimulated him to great exertions for the future. No author who is sensible, minds a clever, stinging, just review. But this was altogether a different case. He had risen one step of the ladder. He was working on his own account now, and the men who had so vilified his name and exertions were the very men who, but a short time since, had been but too glad to secure those exertions for their own benefit. It was not an enemy who had done this, or at all events not an open enemy, then he could have borne it—or so he thought. But that the men with whom he had been boon companion and fellow-worker, should go out of their way to do him an injury—this is what he so bitterly resented. It was the ruin of his book. He had consented to publish it on half profits. As soon as the acrimonious review appeared the sale stopped, the publishers looked blank, and declared they had not yet repaid themselves.

Fane was furious. All his hopes of returning the borrowed money, or of making a competence for Margarita—all his dreams for the future lay in the success of that book; and he swore he would have

the law of the newspaper that had calumniated him and it.

Jack Reeves entreated him to be cautious. He represented to him that to go to law about it was only to throw good money after bad—that the proprietors of the “——” would never have permitted the review to appear had it been actionable—and that he must see it was careful to abuse only his work, and not his private character. He reminded him how many authors had burnt their fingers at the same game—that the very reason the review had been published was in order to attract notoriety for the “——” and that the best way to be revenged on the paper was to take no notice of it at all.

But Fane would not be pacified nor reasoned with. Usually so sensible, he showed himself in this instance deaf to all advice or argument. It was his wife's prospects that were injured by the failure of his book—it was *her* future for which he was fighting, and by heaven—if there was justice to be had in England he would have it for the review in the “———”

He had consulted a lawyer on the subject, and the lawyer thought he had a very good case. Some of the sentences might be construed as personal, and with that construction were decidedly open to an action for libel.

Jack Reeves implored him to consider and abused him for his folly in not considering, without effect.

Laurence Fane was determined to have revenge. It was neck or nothing; cure or kill—with him, but he felt certain of success, consequently he laid an action for libel against the newspaper, and the case was decided to come off in the autumn. But he was so disappointed and dispirited, and the suspense of waiting so excited him that he did little work, worthy of the name, between that time and the period appointed for the hearing of his case.

CHAPTER XVI.

Laurence Fane is ruined.

THE season returned; London was filling fast. Laurence had often spoken to his wife of this busy, fashionable, foolish time; had given her vivid descriptions of the hours people kept, the dresses they wore, the excesses they were guilty of; and seen her blue eyes dilate with wonder as she heard of all the trouble and fatigue society undergoes for the sake of pleasure.

"I should be very sorry to see my darling turned into a fashionable London lady," he had said on one of these occasions, as he fondly stroked her glossy hair, "I wouldn't have you associate familiarly with some of the women I have met at the best houses in town, night after night, for anything in the world, Margarita; to have your pure mind tainted by their lax morality, or your fair fame a butt for their scandalous remarks. Yet, I should like to introduce you to some of my old acquaintances—to some of the women who have pulled caps for me. I suppose you think no one can ever have been so foolish—eh?"

"Oh, Laury! who could they find better worth pulling them for?"

"You little goose! But it will be fun, won't it? I

wonder what they'll say when they first see my rosebud! I bet there won't be a woman fit to hold a candle to you in the room. They'll be ready to die of envy at your beauty."

Daisy reddened and giggled, but liked the compliment.

"Perhaps they won't see it, Laury. Perhaps they won't ask me to their parties."

"Not ask you, dear love! What are you thinking of?"

"Why we have been married three months you know, and very few people have called. Only the doctor's wife and old Mrs. Marshall, and my cousins the Hillmans. Because you don't count Mr. Reeves and Mr. Pelham, and your other gentlemen friends, do you?"

"No! darling! their visits are to me. But everybody has been away, Margarita. It is only paupers like ourselves that live in London out of the season. Now they are coming back and settling down again, and when they have had time to find out that I have taken a wife to myself they will call upon you, and ask you to their houses with me. And my darling must have one or two very pretty evening dresses made. The prettiest she can think of. For though the simpler you are dressed the better you please me, Margarita, I won't take you out worse dressed than other women. I am too proud of my wife for that."

"Oh, you conceited boy! Will not my white muslin or that pretty blue barege you admire so much, be good enough?"

"Certainly not. You must have some silk dresses, grand ones, sweeping on the floor behind, and all puffed about with flowers and different things—dimity or whatever you call it—but the dressmaker will know, I suppose."

But at the idea of a grand silk dress puffed out with dimity, Daisy went off into such an indecorous fit of laughter that her husband stopped giving her advice on the subject of her millinery, though he did not forget the occasion that called it forth. He was most anxious that his wife should shine amongst the circle to which he fully expected to introduce her, and went to some expense to see she should be properly equipped for the occasion.

The dresses arrived to order, but the invitation did not. Laurence Fane belonged to a set who had so large a circle of acquaintance that they required to be constantly reminded of the existence of, at least, their bachelor friends, to prevent them slipping out of their memory altogether.

Half of them had forgotten his name since the season began, the other half delayed to send him a card until he had paid them the compliment of a call. His marriage had taken place so privately, and his wife's position had been so obscure, that very few

people knew he was married at all, and those few had not taken the trouble to ascertain if he was living in town. To one or two acquaintances, whom he met whilst walking in the park, he introduced his wife, but the look of surprise with which the introduction was received, had generally been followed by a look of pity.

"Married! Mr. Fane! You don't mean to say so? I had not the least idea of it. What a shocking example for all your young friends. I am sure I am delighted to make Mrs. Fane's acquaintance. Her first season in London, I suppose. Ah! you will find it a terrible strain on the nerves, Mrs. Fane. Nothing but hurry and worry. Good afternoon. I see my girls beckoning to me. I must be going. Delighted to have met you. Good-bye."

And there it usually ended.

If one of the "girls," perhaps the week after, when sending out the cards for her mamma's "At Homes," demanded if Mr. Laurence Fane's name was to be included in the list of visitors, she was met by some such speech as the following:—

"Fane! my dear! Which Fane! Oh! the writer! No! scratch him out. I met him in the Park the other day, and he's married. We can't have any more women in the room—we have twice too many on our list already—and married men are of no earthly use.

Scratch him out?" And scratched out he was accordingly.

Laurence had often grumbled at these parties of old. He had spoken of them (as we have heard him do to George West) in the most uncomplimentary terms, and had really considered the exigencies of society as the greatest nuisance of a London life. He had often thought, too, how much pleasanter and more domestic matrimony would be, were it not for the social curse of visiting, which prevented a man ever knowing when he might command the comfort of his wife's company. He would have shrunk with horror at the idea of his sweet innocent Margarita ever growing to be like minded with most of the women she would have been forced to associate with at evening parties; and yet, as the time went on, and she was not asked out to them, he fretted over the omission. It was for her sake. It was because he felt the slight to her that he boiled and fumed over the vulgarity of the women, who would have called six times running to procure the notice of a countess, but could pass over such charms as Margarita's, because her husband had no title, and could not afford to live nearer to Park-lane than Notting-hill. This matter, trifling as it appeared (for had their table been strewn with invitations he would not have allowed his wife to accept more than a select few) weighed upon his spirits until Daisy caught the infection, and became depressed also.

"Dear Laury," she said, coaxingly, one day as she climbed upon his knee, "what is the matter that you look so grave? Is it because I have not had an opportunity yet of wearing the new dresses you were so kind as to get for me? I didn't think my boy could be so foolish."

"I know I'm a fool to think about it, Margarita, but last season I had more invitations than I knew what to do with. I had a perfect pack of cards upon my table, and now to think that these same people do not send us one. I cannot understand it."

"I can, dear Laury, it is so very evident. Last season you were unmarried, and this season——"

"This season I have the very sweetest wife man ever had. Thank God for it! If I could believe that were all, Margarita, I wouldn't care two straws. But I am afraid you must feel it and be dull."

"I am *not* dull, dearest. I have so much to do, and it is so hot now that I doubt if going out in the evenings would give us any pleasure. I would much rather walk in the Park with you, Laury."

"Oh, you unfashionable girl. What would the married belles of last season say to hear you affirm you would rather walk with your husband than flirt without him?"

"Flirt?" said Daisy, knitting her brows. "You are joking with me, Laury. It is only girls who flirt, and then dear Rita used to say it was very wrong."

That was when I used to flirt with that wretch Alfred Hughes. But it was only a very little bit, you know, dear Laury, and long before I knew you; so you don't mind, do you?" with a kiss upon his hair.

"I mind dreadfully, Mrs. Fane, and I wish you wouldn't rumple my hair in that manner. If I had heard of this before I don't think I should have married you. Fancy being tied to a flirt. A horrid heartless flirt. I shall have a row with Alfred Hughes when I go down to Bushthorne."

"O, you won't really, will you?" cried Daisy, hurriedly, and then seeing her husband's look of amusement, "You darling! you were only joking with me, what a stupid I am. But oh!" with a sigh, "how delightful it will be to get down to Maple Farm again. How I long—how I long—for the time to come."

"You are not feeling ill, my dearest," said Fane, tenderly, for Daisy had been looking rather pale of late.

"O no, Laury, not at all—only—only—"

"Only what! my pet? You must hide nothing from me, Daisy."

"Only—" in a very low whisper, "*I want Rita—*"

* * * * *

After this and several similar conversations, it was a real trial to Fane to be obliged, at about the end of August, to call his wife to his side and speak to her after this manner.

"Margarita, my child, I have a great disappointment for you."

"A disappointment, Laury?"

"Yes, darling. It cuts me to the heart to tell you, but it is unavoidable. My libel case is coming on almost directly, and I can't leave town. You must go to Maple Farm alone."

"Oh, Laury!"

"I know it will destroy half your pleasure, and I would give my right hand to prevent it, but for both our sakes I must remain here—so much depends upon it, Margarita. So you will be a good girl, and not make the task harder than it is already?"

"Of course not, dear."

"You will go to Maple Farm, as we arranged, and be as happy there as you can, without me."

"No, Laurence."

"What do you say, Margarita?" It was the first time since their marriage that she had ever contradicted him.

"I cannot go without you, darling. I will be good; I will not fret or grumble. I will forget all about Maple Farm, or that we ever meant to go there—but let me stay with you."

"Stay with me, my sweet! in this hot, dirty town, and when you are in such want of fresh air. Dearest child, I cannot consent to it."

"Oh, Laury, you must! Don't send me away. I

can bear anything with you, but I should fret myself to death, down in the country, all by myself. Dearest love, do let me stay."

"All by yourself, Daisy! Why, have you forgotten that you are going to your father and brother and cousin? Have you forgotten how much you have been longing to see Rita again?"

Daisy swallowed down a sob of disappointment, but remained firm.

"No, no! I have forgotten nothing—but what are they to me compared to you? Husband! Don't let me leave you—not *now*. I shall die if you make me go to Maple Farm."

He raised her in his arms and held her close against his heart.

"I didn't think you loved me so much as this, my Margarita!" he said, in a broken voice.

She did not answer, but she clung to him as a child clings to its mother, and the end was, they remained in town together. It seemed as though Fate interposed to prevent the two Margaritas meeting again.

The libel case of Fane *versus* the proprietors of the —— newspaper was heard early in the autumn. It occupied nearly ten days, and was long remembered afterwards as one of the most celebrated actions on record.

The counsel on either side were keen and clever;

the witnesses numerous, and the reports of the cross-questioning filled half the daily papers. Had the case been decided in favour of the complainant, a cause would have been gained to benefit, not only himself, but the whole race of authors; but the law is compelled to stick to evidence, and evidence was against him.

By inference his character had been grossly attacked; but inference is not law. After a hard battle, well fought and sustained on both sides, the legal authorities were obliged, though sorely against their own inclinations and knowledge of what was just, to give judgment in favour of the proprietors of the — newspaper, and Laurence Fane went out of court—a ruined man!

CHAPTER XVII.

The Christmas after.

It was the Christmas after Laurence Fane's marriage. The twentieth of December, the day he had gone down to Maple Farm to marry Daisy West, had returned again. This time it was a regular old fashioned Christmas, with plenty of frost and snow. The autumn had been unusually mild, and the winter which followed it promised to be, as is common in such cases, unusually severe. The little trees that decorated the gardens in Notting-hill had shrivelled up into mere sticks, and the shrubs in the window-boxes were dry and brown. As Jack Reeves took his way from the nearest Metropolitan Station to the Fanes' house he hardly expected to find them still in London. He had heard that they intended spending their Christmas at Bushthorne, and almost hoped, as he noted the cheerless look of everything around, that they were comfortably ensconced down at Maple Farm. But the servant who opened the door said her master was at home, and Laurence Fane's voice calling him by name, made him take his way at once to the study. There he found his friend sitting before the fire idle, and looking much depressed.

"Well, Laurence, old boy, how goes it with you?"

"Indifferently well, Jack."

"I'm sorry to hear that. How is Mrs. Fane?"

"Oh, she's first-rate, thank you."

"And the child?"

"Thriving—so they tell me."

"Well, what in Heaven's name should make you so low, then?"

"Am I low? I wasn't aware of it."

"You speak as though you were. I half expected to find you had left town. When do you start?"

"It is not decided."

"Before Christmas Day, I suppose?"

"Perhaps. If Margarita wishes it we shall."

"Fane, my dear fellow, it's no use denying that you are horribly out of spirits. What is it ails you?"

"Everything, Jack, if you must know. I have been sitting here brooding by myself for the last week, and I've come to the conclusion that I've made a terrible mistake."

"In what way?"

"By my marriage."

Jack Reeves started and looked much concerned.

"Oh, Laurence, don't tell me that! I thought if any one was happy in his married life it was yourself."

"I am miserable."

"Good heavens! You have had no quarrel, have you—no disagreement?"

"Disagreement? Quarrel? You mistake me altogether. My unhappiness has nothing whatever to do with my wife."

"You relieve me infinitely. I thought—you'll forgive me even for the thought, won't you, old fellow?—that, being the man you are, and having married so very young and unsophisticated a girl, that—(we hear of such things every day you know)—that——"

"That I might have expected double from her than what I had any right to do, and vented my disappointment on her unoffending head? No, Reeves, I am not made of so slight elements. I will speak to you openly. Your advice may be of use to me."

"I am sure anything on earth that I could do——" murmured Reeves.

"I am sure of it, old fellow, and will tell you everything. But first, that we may start fair—let me repeat that my present dilemma is due to no one's folly but my own. I married, as you justly observe, a very young and inexperienced girl, but she has always proved so docile and obedient that any small errors she may have committed have been entirely due to my faulty guidance."

"Mrs. Fane has always appeared to me to be entirely devoted to you, Laurence."

“And so she has been, God bless her. Never had man a sweeter or more affectionate wife. She has been the sunshine and made the happiness of this house ever since she entered it. Whatever happens to me I can never regret that I married her.”

“I was sure you would say so.”

“I repeat it most emphatically. I brought her home here, an innocent, confiding child. She has proved to be all, and more than I expected of her, and may God judge me as I repay her love. Whatever the future has in store for us, remember, Jack, that I said those words to you.”

“And now she has brought you a child, to increase, I hope, your mutual affection. What more can you desire?”

“Money, Jack, to support them both.”

“Are you so hard up as all that? Can't I lend you some to carry on the war?”

“Dear old fellow,” said Fane, as he put back the other's hand, “I thank you so much for the offer. But to borrow would only increase my difficulties. I am a ruined man, Jack. I have never recovered that lawsuit, and I never shall.”

“It was an awful pull, there is no doubt, and a decided shame they gave it against you,” replied Reeves, with a long face, “but I can't believe it will affect you long. Everybody knew you were in the right.”

"But every one has acted as though I were in the wrong. The case going against me completely ruined the sale of my book at the time, and prevented my getting any press work afterwards. I was in debt when it occurred, and I've hardly made any money since. As there's a God in Heaven, Reeves, I haven't made five pounds this month."

"What is to be done?"

"I have been putting that question to myself for the last fortnight, and an opening seems to have presented itself to-day. I must leave England."

"Leave England? For what place, and how?"

"For Australia, and as a confidential clerk in Putnam and Steers' house in Melbourne. I was used to bookkeeping, you know, in old Laurence's office."

"Fane, you are joking."

"I am in sober earnest, Jack. It is the best chance Fate has sent me, and I ought to think myself lucky to obtain it. A friend of my godfather's met me accidentally about a month ago, and asked if I knew of any man in want of such a situation. The conversation occurred to me last week, and I wrote to ask if the place was still vacant. A letter this morning tells me it is. The salary is four hundred a year, and my passage money will be paid. If I accept the position I must start from Liverpool next month. I was just about to write my answer when you came in."

"Have you consulted your wife in the matter?"

"There is no need. She would go to Erebus with me."

"I daresay; but I think you should ascertain what she thinks about it. And her father? How will he like her to leave England?"

"Jack! Don't madden me with surmises. If my wife and child are not to starve I must make money for them, and I know of no other way. By the sale of this furniture, and the help of the five hundred pounds my wife brought me on our marriage, I hope to clear off my debts and start from England a free man. Once in Australia I shall be able at least to support them—may make in time, who knows? their fortune, and bring them home again some day rich and independent. It's a first-rate prospect. Don't talk me out of love with it."

And Fane laughed a loud sarcastic laugh that betrayed the despondent character of his anticipations.

"But Laurence! What about your writing? Do you intend to give up all the dreams of Fame you have revelled in for so many years past? Can you relinquish so easily all your hope of success, of making a name for yourself, of leaving posterity a work that shall not die?"

Laurence Fane covered his face with his hands.

“Don’t speak of it, Reeves,” he said, brokenly, “for God’s sake!”

There was silence between them for some minutes, and then he went on passionately:

“Were I still single, I would risk everything, dare everything, to maintain the position I have made. I would fight my way inch by inch to the top of the ladder, if I starved in the endeavour to attain it. But can I let these innocent creatures, dependent on me for their daily bread, suffer want whilst I struggle for a name—a bubble which may burst, even though their lives have been risked for it? Reeves, when my wife’s father heard of my intentions respecting her, he had but one objection to the marriage—the uncertainty of my professional income. I argued it out with him, of course. I said as long as I had brains I would work for her, and if my brains failed I would use my hands. I little thought that the time for fulfilling my promise would come so soon, but here it is. My brains *have* failed, that is to say, through my headstrong will I have ruined their prospect of employment, but my hands are still left, thank God, and they shall be at my dear girl’s service till my life’s end. I have no more to say.”

“I honour you for your determination,” replied his companion. “But is there no alternative? Need you leave England? Would not your father-in-law advance you money until you are set up on your legs

once more? I think, by using a little interest, some of us might manage to get you on the press again."

"No! Do not tempt me, Jack. In the first place I could not, after having been married only eleven months, go and ask Mr. West for money. I have too much pride. He is a hard-working man himself, and he has other children. I must bear the brunt of my own imprudence. And I do not think I could get the same employment, certainly not the same salary—in England. In Australia I shall be able to support my family comfortably on four hundred a year, and may have some leisure to pursue my own profession into the bargain."

"And you have no doubt of Mrs. Fane's ready acquiescence in the proposal."

"You shall judge for yourself. I will break the news to her at once."

"Pray don't," exclaimed his friend, who had a man's righteous horror of anything like a scene. "I assure you, Fane, it is a subject that had much better be broached in private. Your wife is sure to have some misgivings, and will require a little time to become reconciled to the idea."

But Fane had already opened the door and called Margarita's name. She responded at once from the upper story.

"Coming, darling! Coming in one moment, only I must bring baby," and the next minute she was

standing on the threshold, glowing with health and beauty, with her infant on her bosom.

"Oh, Mr. Reeves! I didn't know that you were here. Have you seen my boy lately? He is growing so fat. Look up, sir," she continued to the winking, blinking, red-faced bundle in her arms, "open your eyes, and speak to your godpapa. There! Aren't his lashes growing long and dark, just like Laury's; and he has such strong little fists. Just try to unclench them, Mr. Reeves. It will take all your strength, I can tell you. Oh! he has hold of my hair. The wretched little monkey. I shall have to tuck it up under a mob cap soon. Let go, babs! I assure you he hurts terribly. He pulls it as though he were a twelvemonth old."

So she ran on, chattering and laughing, with her lovely, blushing, happy face, from which Laurence Fane seemed as though he could not take his eyes.

"I wanted to speak to you, my darling!" he said, as soon as there was a pause.

"Yes, Laury. What is it?"

"Reeves and I have been talking over a certain matter this morning. It is not a pleasant matter, Margarita. It is about my debts, and want of work, you know."

"Ah! can't Mr. Reeves get you some?" cried Margarita with a quick beseeching look at her hus-

band's friend, which made him wish he could give up half his own for her sake.

"He would if he could, my dear, but it is impossible," replied Fane hurriedly. "In literary matters each man stands on his own merit. But I have had a very good appointment offered me by a friend, Margarita, which will bring us in sufficient money to live comfortably. The only drawback to it is that it is not in England. What would you say to my going out to Australia, darling?"

She looked at him for one moment with bated breath. Then an expression of intense fear passed over her countenance and she flew to his side.

"Not without me, Laury," she exclaimed anxiously, "*not without me.*"

He glanced up at Reeves with a face full of pride.

"Is it expatriation she dreads most?" he said quietly, as he threw his arms round the kneeling figure of his wife.

"*Without you!*" he continued fondly to her, "*without you*, my own darling girl—you'd better tell me to die at once."

She hid her crimson face upon his breast.

"I don't care for anything," she whispered. "I don't care where we go or what we do, so as I have you and baby, Laury."

"I know you wouldn't, dearest, after a time, but it will be hard at first, Margarita. Hard for both of

us. I, to leave my country and my work, to give up all my dreams of fame; and you, to be separated from your father and brother and cousin."

At this thought the tears rushed into his wife's eyes and her lip trembled.

"Yes, it will be very hard," she answered; "but—but, if it is for *you*, Laury——"

"It is for us all, Margarita. It is especially for the sake of the baby, that he may be brought up as his father was before him."

"I could do anything for baby," replied Margarita.

"Then I am to write and accept the offer? I may say we will be ready to start for Melbourne in a month from this time?"

"A month? Oh, it is a very, very little while. Only a month? But if you think it right, darling——"

"I do think it right, my dear."

"And you will take me to Bushthorne first?"

"Certainly. If I close with my friend's proposal we will go down to Bushthorne to-morrow."

"Oh, how delighted Rita will be," exclaimed the girl, her thoughts immediately riveted upon the present. "She is longing to see baby. She will be half mad with joy. Only fancy, Mr. Reeves! We have been separated for eleven whole months—we, who were never apart for more than a week or two all our

lives before. I am sure Rita will say I am taller. I have grown, haven't I, Laury, since we were married?"

"I believe you have, dear. Certainly prettier, if not taller."

"Oh, you bad boy, to flatter so! Baby will never say such things to his wife when he grows old, will you, baby? I shall go at once and pack my things in readiness for to-morrow."

"Rita will feel your leaving England terribly," said Fane, wishing to try his wife.

She stopped upon the threshold, and sighed.

"Poor, dear Rita! Yes. I am sure she will, *terribly*. So will papa and George. But if it is right, Laury, and you think it best for baby, and for you, it must be, mustn't it? And some poor wives are left behind when their husbands go to India or Australia. Mrs. Hervey was—I couldn't bear that, it would kill me. But as long as I have baby-boy and you——"

"Go to your packing, darling, and leave Reeves and me to talk this matter over quietly. Is that the sort of woman you could bear to see dragged down to uncomplaining poverty and privation, Jack?" he continued, as his wife disappeared and left them together. "A creature all love and submission and faith. I would kill myself first."

"She is one in a thousand," replied Reeves warmly. "And I don't wonder at your sacrifice. Well, I'll say

no more about it, Fane, except to wish you good luck, and to beg you will make use of me in any way you can. Can't I see after the sale of the furniture whilst you are at Maple Farm? You have no time to lose."

And for the remainder of the morning the friends were discussing and arranging the more practical part of the change that lay before them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Home again.”

LAURENCE FANE did not take his wife down to Maple Farm until Christmas Eve. He thought it better that the views of the intended alteration in his prospects should be conveyed to Margarita's friends by letter; and the answers he received were characteristic of the writers. Farmer West was surprised, and a little startled, but chuckled inwardly, nevertheless, at the notion that his fine gentleman son-in-law had been obliged to come round to *his* ideas of literature as a profession, and to confess that hand-work paid better than head-work after all. Yet he was proud also to see that Fane was not above using his hands or keeping his promise, and wound up his letter by telling the young man that he believed he had done the best thing for his wife and himself, and he should be the first to wish them God-speed in the New World. As for George, he looked upon the voyage and expatriation as a mere trifle, and wondered that any one could make as much of it as Fane seemed to do. He had been out to the Bush and back, and would do the same to-morrow if anybody would make it worth his while, and he hoped if his

brother-in-law heard of anything good out there that he would write and let him know of it, and let him join them. He considered the new chance a jolly good thing from beginning to end. Fane would see a country that would really interest him, and be introduced to phases of life that might prove of the greatest service if he ever returned to his old profession. In fact, George's letter was so encouraging that Laurence's spirits rose ten per cent. on receipt of it, and by the time the business was settled he had begun to regard his new prospects more in the light of pleasure than duty. Margarita Hay's answer was addressed to her cousin, and differed from the others, insomuch that she never mentioned the fact of their near separation, but dwelt feverishly on the expectation of seeing Daisy again at Maple Farm, and being introduced to the wonderful baby. There was a want of life and vigour about Rita's letter, except when she wrote of meeting Daisy, that struck Laurence (so used to criticizing) at once, and made him reflect upon the cause. Could she be jealous of her cousin's happiness? That was hardly likely? Or did she suppose that Daisy's new cares and pleasures would make an estrangement between them, an interruption to the loving intercourse they had maintained since childhood? Could he have watched the marble pallor that overspread Margarita Hay's countenance as she listened to the fiat of a speedy separation between her

cousin and her cousin's husband and herself, his questions might have answered themselves. Could he have heard the exceeding bitter cry with which she flung herself afterwards upon her bed, exclaiming, "What difference can it make to me? It is but one pang more in a life that must be for ever lonely"—he might have guessed the reason that she could not trust herself to write of the new disappointment in store for her.

The Fanes arrived at Maple Farm late in the afternoon. Of course there was the usual excitement in their welcome, attendant on meeting after a long separation, to which was added in this case, the curiosity to see the baby. Daisy, glowing with the pride and importance of a very young mother, fully imagined that no one could possibly wish to see or speak or think of anything until her son had been presented and examined and handed all round the family, his age, his size, and his appearance commented upon, and his wonderful precocity and infantile good qualities duly discussed.

This kind of twaddle not being pre-eminently interesting to men, Daisy and her cousin Rita soon found themselves left alone with the hero of the occasion.

Laurence had heard it all so often before that he was delighted to seize the first opportunity to slip away with his friend George (who heartily despised babies in long clothes) for a walk round the farm be-

fore the cloth was laid for dinner. Even the old farmer, who was perhaps the one most pleased, after Daisy, with the new comer (for all men and women are proud to be made grandfathers and grandmothers, it is so much honour without any trouble or expense), evidently thought when he had pinched the baby's cheek and kissed his mother's that his duty was over, and returned to his own occupations as speedily as possible. Then Margarita led Daisy up to the room that had been prepared for her husband and herself, and which happened to be the very one the cousins had always occupied together, and opened into another chamber which they had made their play-room, but was now fitted up for the use of nurse and baby.

"Why, Rita, dear, our old room!" cried Mrs. Fane in astonishment. "And where do you sleep, then?"

"On the other side of the passage, darling! I have never slept here since you left us, Daisy. I could not. It was so lonely. See," she continued in a tone of affected liveliness, "your old pictures are still hanging in their places, and here are all your baby books. I thought you would like to find everything as it was when you went away."

"Yes, of course," replied Daisy, who was examining the window-sashes anxiously meanwhile. "You are sure there is not a draught from this window, Rita, aren't you? Baby has never had a cold since he was

born, and I should be so vexed if he were to catch one now."

"I think not, dear, but I will have some list nailed round it if you are afraid. Oh, Daisy, how strange it seems to see you with a baby. You, whom I always looked upon as half a baby yourself."

"My dear! I was eighteen on my last birthday: please to remember that. Though Laury does say sometimes when I am nursing baby that I look like a great school-girl with a doll."

"He is very fond and proud of you, darling," said Margarita, softly.

"What, my Laury? Oh, he dotes upon me. He never crosses me in a single thing. He's the dearest old boy in all the world."

"And you love him as much as he loves you?" said Margarita.

"*Love him?* Why, Rita! what a question. Of course I love him—better than all the world, except baby. How could I help loving him? *The father of my child.*" Daisy pronounced this last epithet with proud consciousness and a certain amount of dignity, but Margarita would rather have not heard her use it.

Why should she quote the natural effect of her marriage with Laurence Fane as a reason for loving him, over and above the many instances of affection she must have received from him in the shape of forbearance, control, sympathy, and patience?

But Daisy was only following her instincts. She was a woman born to be a good daughter and a good wife, but above all she was a woman born to be a good mother. The maternal instinct was with her the strongest, and would in time weigh down all others. Had she never won a husband she would have remained the fondest of daughters; had she never borne a child—the most devoted of wives. But as she merged her lovely laughing girlhood in the dignity of marriage, and lost her individuality in that of Laurence Fane—so the fullness of her maternal affection was commencing to absorb all lesser feelings. They would not die, but they would be eclipsed. They would be drawn into the vortex of which her child, or children, should form the centre, and derive their effulgence, solely from the extent to which they re-acted on the more absorbing interest. Margarita had often heard wives speak of their husbands after the fashion Daisy did, and it had always struck her as a wrong reason to give for their affection. We should love the gift for the sake of the giver, not the giver for the sake of the gift. But a husband usually finds a formidable rival in his child, and the most devoted couples are generally those who have brought no interloper into the world to seduce their hearts from one another. Margarita thought of this, and sighed for Laurence's sake.

Yet she could not look at his child peacefully

cradled in its mother's arms, nor at Daisy's adoring face, as she bent over it, and wish the little creature had not been. She could only feel thankful that her darling was back with her again—happy, loving, and prosperous; and had hardly time to wonder that in the contemplation of their present comfort, they all seemed to think so little, except herself, of the coming separation.

CHAPTER XIX.

Daisy thinks it looks like it.

"DAISY!" said Laurence Fane, suddenly, to his wife the next day, "your cousin is very much changed."

"Changed, Laury! How?"

"My dear! is it possible you do not see how thin and pale she has grown? As soon as I had time to observe her narrowly, I was quite shocked. Her cheeks are positively sunken, and she has lost all her spirits. What has she been doing to herself?"

"I don't know, Laury. She says she feels quite well. I suppose it's the effects of that dreadful cold still. She has had another attack of it this autumn."

"There's something much more serious the matter with her than a cold, Margarita. I wonder you have not observed it sooner; but you are so absorbed in that precious baby, I believe you have no eyes for anything else."

"Oh, Laury, what a shame. Would you have me neglect him then? Whom should I look after but him—the precious darling treasure? You are not in earnest, Laury?"

"My dear love, no. Would I have you one jot

less a tender mother than you are? Only you do spend an unconscionable time in the nursery now, and I thought your cousin might feel the difference."

"Do you think so? Dear, sweet Rita. I should be miserable if I thought it was true. But she knows Master Baby takes up nearly all my leisure,"

"Any way that would have no bearing on her present state of health, and to my mind she looks very ill."

"Of whom are you speaking?" inquired George, who entered at the moment.

"Of Miss Hay. I was remarking to your sister how much she has fallen off in looks since we were here last."

A shade passed over George West's countenance. He came up to the table where they were sitting—lay down his hat and stick, and took a chair beside them.

"I am glad you see it as well as I do. I have spoken to my father again and again on the subject, but he persists there can be nothing wrong. You may be able to do some good in the matter."

"George! are you quite serious?" said Daisy with concern, "tell us how long she has been ill?"

"I can hardly say when it began—but I noticed it first when I returned from a week's shooting at Harrows. It quite alarmed me."

"And has she spoken to a doctor?"

"Dr. Barnes has been over twice from Taunton, but all he said was that a little change would be advisable. But you know what Margarita is. She can't leave home. If she could have gone anywhere I suppose it would have been to Notting-hill."

"Yes, we wanted her so much, and asked her so often," replied Daisy, "but it was always the same excuse, that papa couldn't spare her. Oh, George, what shall we do? It makes me miserable to think she should be suffering."

"I am afraid she sits up too late at night," continued George. "Several times when I have been late myself I have caught her reading or writing in her room, and when I have remonstrated with her, she has said it was her only recreation, and begged of me not to tell my father. But she never neglects one of her house duties, and it cannot be a good thing you know, for a girl to work all day, and half the night too."

"It is madness in her state of health," said Fane hastily. "What does she read, George?"

"I can hardly tell you—I don't take much interest in such things myself, you know—but all sorts of books; poetry and history and travels. I found her with a list of books once in your handwriting, Fane, which she said you had recommended her to study. If that is the case, I wish you'd *un*recommend them

to her again, for she'll kill herself if she goes on in this way much longer."

"I will take the first opportunity of speaking to her on the subject," said Fane, gravely. And the first opportunity occurred that same evening.

It was twilight. The candles had not yet been lighted in the old-fashioned parlour, but the wood fire made every object visible by its flickering blaze. Daisy had gone up-stairs to wash and undress baby, and Laurence found himself alone with Margarita Hay, who was seated opposite to him, knitting by the firelight.

He looked at her for some moments in silence. The pale, finely cut features, which had always struck him as being so essentially pure and chaste looking, were sharpened almost to a loss of beauty—the once serious eyes were now deeply sad, the figure attenuated, and the whole expression one of settled melancholy.

"Miss Hay," he said suddenly. She started and looked up. Her whole face became crimson. Even in that one moment of pitiful comparison between her fading youth and Daisy's bright dimpled loveliness, Laurence Fane could not help observing how like a beautiful statue she had become.

"Why did you never come to stay with us in London?"

"I told dear Daisy so often. Because it was

quite impossible Uncle could spare me from the farm. Else you must know how glad I should have been to see her again. How I longed to do it."

"I am afraid you have felt the separation greatly."

"I could not fail to do so, we were so much attached to one another."

"*Were!* You *are* you mean."

She sighed heavily.

"Ah, Mr. Fane! it will never be the same again. It would be impossible. She has so many new ties, with you and the baby. How could she feel, dear Daisy, how could she be expected to feel just the same towards those she has left in her old home?"

As she uttered these words Margarita's voice broke, but she conquered the emotion.

"I think you misjudge her," said Fane kindly. "It is true she has new cares and pleasures, but she would be more than ungrateful to forget all the love you lavished upon her for so many years, and Daisy is not ungrateful."

"She is everything that is dearest and best," replied Margarita, warmly. "Don't think I meant to blame her, even in the slightest degree; but it is only natural that things should be as they are."

"Our sudden determination to leave England must have greatly surprised you. What do you think of it?"

At this allusion her lip trembled visibly.

"I try to put it amongst the inevitables," she said, after a slight pause. "I cannot realize it, but I know it must be. I try not to think of it until I am obliged."

"Your cousin takes to the idea wonderfully well. She surprised me by her ready acquiescence."

"She goes with you," said Rita, simply.

"Yes—and her child. I believe we constitute her world. God bless her! She does credit to your training, Miss Hay. She is the best wife and mother that ever lived."

"I knew she would be."

"And I feel that as long as she is by my side I can be happy, even in exile. But I should like to see one thing altered before I go."

"What is that?"

"Those grave looks of yours. Whence do they come? I think I can remember you much more lively when I first came to Maple Farm."

"I am growing older," replied Margarita, with a sad smile.

"The god-children who used to sing so prettily in the orchard, the pony you rode, the pet dogs and cat; what has become of them all?"

"The god-children—boys and girls—come to see me still for weekly instruction. I have not ridden much lately as I have not felt strong enough, and

the dogs and cats chiefly belonged to Daisy, and otherwise things are pretty much as they were."

"Do you ever write poetry now?"

"No!" she answered, in a low voice full of pain.

"If you remember, we had some long conversations on that subject before I ever saw Miss Daisy, and I advised you to study certain works, and improve your taste for literature. I thought you had a decided taste that way. But then I did not know that you would have so much house-keeping on your hands as well. I hope that you have not followed my advice too literally. I hope you do not study too hard."

"Who say's I do?" she asked quickly.

"Cannot I put this and that together? I know you *do* study, because my wife has told me so, and I see that you have lost your health. The natural deduction from which is that you are over exerting either your brain or your body. Which is it, Miss Hay?"

"It little signifies."

"How can you say so, when you know how valuable your health and well-being are to all around you? What would Mr. West and George do without you? What would Daisy feel if you were to fall ill?"

"She has you—and the baby," repeated Margarita in a stifled voice.

"We could not make up to her for your loss; and if you will permit me to say so Miss Hay—Rita—I too should feel deeply any misfortune that happened to yourself. Your pale looks seem to reproach me as it is—I fancy I have had something to do with them in taking your cousin away from you."

"Oh! no!—no!—and if it were so, how could you help it? It is not your fault. It is no one's fault but my own."

"Can I do anything to help or advise you? Rita, try to look upon me as a friend—a brother! I am the husband of one whom you have always regarded as a sister. Let me share her right to comfort you."

"It is not possible! Indeed, Mr. Fane, you entirely mistake. I am very much obliged to you for your advice, and I will follow it so far as to promise you I will not study so much as to knowingly injure my health. But for the rest I am in the hands of God, and He must order my future as He thinks best."

"You have no secret sorrow that preys upon your spirits?" he said wistfully.

"None—in which you can help me," she answered shortly, as she rose and left the room.

He was almost afraid that his last suggestion had offended her, but he did not attempt to remedy

the error. He thought he knew now why she was suffering; and that it was wounded affection and jealousy at her cousin having formed new and closer ties for herself that had made such an alteration in Margarita Hay.

"Poor girl," he ruminated, as he took his way up-stairs to his wife's apartment, "what a fund of affection she must possess, what a mine of wealth it will prove for the man who knows how to work it. It is ten thousand pities she should be buried down in this place, where she never sees any one fit to be her husband. I wish she were going out to Australia with Daisy and me."

He sat down by his wife's side, and told her almost verbatim, what had passed between him and her cousin.

"And did she say that?" exclaimed Mrs. Fane, with open-eyed wonder, as he arrived at the last sentence. "Oh, I see it all now. How delighted George will be."

"What do you mean, Margarita?"

"Why, my dear, he has been sitting with me here for the last half hour. We have been having *such* a confab, and he has been telling me all his secrets. And what do you think, Laury? He wants to marry Rita."

"George wants to marry your cousin Rita? Ah, now I remember!" For the conversation he had held

with George on the occasion of his proposing for Daisy, and the change which had occurred in his friend's demeanour, when he understood it was his sister and not his cousin that Fane wished to marry, flashed upon his memory.

"Yes; wouldn't it be nice?" continued Daisy. "She could stay here always then. She would be quite the mistress of the farm, and take care of papa, and they would all be happy together. Wouldn't it be *charming*?"

"I don't think so at all."

"You don't think so, my dear Laury! What could be better?"

"If your cousin approves of it, of course it's all right; but I should think she might find a more suitable husband than George."

"Than my own brother George? Oh, Laury!"

"His being your own brother, my darling, doesn't make him of the same tastes and disposition as Rita. She is a refined, high-souled, intellectually inclined woman, and George is, well, just the opposite I should say."

"But you are intellectual and high-souled, Laury, and I am just the opposite, and yet we get on very well together," said Daisy, fondly.

He answered her with a kiss.

"No, no, my darling—don't deceive yourself. Our cases are quite different. You can appreciate my

tastes if you don't follow them, but George, though he's a thoroughly good hearted fellow, could no more sympathize with your cousin's proclivities than one of his bullocks could. What says Rita to the proposal?"

"Oh, he hasn't proposed to her yet. He is too bashful, poor dear fellow, and too much afraid of being refused, so he came to ask me if I could find out for him, quite in a roundabout way, you know, whether Rita would have him or not."

"I would advise you not to meddle in the matter, dear."

"But I thought from what you told me just now, Laury, that perhaps her pale looks and her secret sorrow may be attributable to the same cause, and she may *want* George to propose, eh? It looks like it now, doesn't it?"

The idea seemed to please Fane less and less. He got up and began walking about the room.

"It would be a positive sacrifice," he said. "George will never be anything but a common farmer, and that girl has in her the capability for anything. Margarita, if you speak to her at all about this matter, you must do all you can to reason her out of the idea of marrying your brother. It would be throwing herself away."

"But what would poor George say?" demanded Daisy.

"George be hanged! I mean the chief person to be considered is your cousin, and I am sure she would be miserable with him."

"I am not so sure of that," said Daisy pouting. "And I don't think Rita would agree with you either. I believe it is fretting for him that has made her so thin. Now it does look like it, Laury, doesn't it?" she repeated. "Say it looks like it."

But Laurence Fane would not allow anything so opposed to his own ideas of right and wrong, and his wife's supposition recurred to vex him oftener than he could have supposed it capable of doing during the remainder of their visit at Maple Farm.

CHAPTER XX.

Good-bye to England.

LAURENCE FANE was compelled to leave Busthorne at the beginning of the new year, but he would not take Daisy away. In her affection for him and dismay at the briefest separation, she would have insisted upon accompanying him to London when he went to make arrangements for their voyage, but his stronger will overbore hers, and he would not permit her to leave her father and her cousin until it became absolutely necessary.

By his desire, her outfit, which was very plain and simple, was procured from Taunton, and prepared under her own supervision, and she had nothing further to do but to wait quietly at home till her husband returned to fetch her. The furniture of the house at Notting-hill had been sold and the lease disposed of, without any serious loss, and the money thus realized, added to the five hundred pounds which old Mr. West had given his daughter on her wedding day, enabled Laurence Fane to settle all his liabilities, and defray the expenses of his wife's passage and outfit.

He returned from London in excellent spirits. To feel himself once more a free man, to have got

rid of the fearful burden of debt which had weighed him down for so many months past, was sufficient in itself to make him cheerful. Added to which the ship by which they were to sail, "The Queen of the Wave," was a very fine one, with excellent accommodation, and he had already made friends with several of the passengers going by her. It was true she carried two hundred emigrants, and Fane had feared at first that this circumstance might interfere with his wife's comfort, but the stern cabin which he had been enabled to procure for her, chiefly on account of the excellent reputation the name of his future employers held amongst the maritime and mercantile population, promised to be as luxurious a berth as anyone in her position had a right to expect. Daisy was never tired of asking every particular concerning the temporary house she was so soon to inhabit, and made Laurence tell her again and again of the position of the bed and the washing-stand, and how conveniently the lockers for their clothes fitted under the bedstead, and the swing trays that depended from the centre of the low ceiling held everything that was useful for their daily comfort.

To have heard the husband and wife talk together of their approaching voyage, and laugh over the many contrivances they affected for their convenience, or the shifts to which they knew they would have to be subjected before it was over, one would have thought

they were about to start on a pleasure excursion in an amateur yacht, rather than to make a journey to the other side of the world. In his excitement and relief from the weight which had oppressed him, Laurence Fane seemed temporarily to have forgotten the sacrifice he was making, in relinquishing the dream and hope of a life-time to resume the very occupation he had once given up in disgust. But it was only seeming. He had not forgotten it. Often and often the remembrance returned to vex him, but he put it from him resolutely. He was not entirely a dreamer. He had good hard stuff in him that gave him power to resist the shocks of this world, and a capacity for making the best of what was inevitable, that stood him in good stead at the present juncture. Besides, he was about to take Daisy away from all her own relatives, and he dreaded the moment when her spirits should give way, and she might even reproach him with being the cause of their separation.

But at present there seemed no fear of such a calamity. Daisy was as eager to see "The Queen of the Wave," and make that stern cabin comfortable, after her own ideas of comfort, as though to go to Australia had been the goal she had been striving for; and her husband and brother and father encouraged her hopefulness by every means in their power. They were all so cheerful and merry over the idea, that there seemed no place for tears, and

Margarita Hay often detected herself in the act of wondering if they could all be such children as to overlook what this separation involved—the loss of Daisy for years. *She* did not dare even to think of it, for fear she should lose all her courage and her helpfulness at the very time her darling needed them most; but went about the house sorting the baby's clothes, or repairing such as needed it, to save Daisy every stitch of work upon the voyage that she could, with a smile upon her face and a heart of lead.

Laurence Fane greatly feared the final parting. He dreaded lest his wife's spirits should have been assumed to hide her real feelings, and that when the time came to say "Good-bye," she would break down. But he need not have done so. It is true that when Daisy kissed her father and Margarita for the last time, she clung about their necks and sobbed as if her heart were breaking, but her tears were the natural outburst of a girlish grief—there was no despair about them. They might scald her cheeks for a few hours, but they would leave no scars upon her heart, nor would the remembrance haunt those who witnessed them. There was something far more touching in Margarita's silent agony, as she held her cousin for a few brief moments in her arms with a grip like death, and released her without a single sob. There was something in her look that startled and almost alarmed Laurence Fane as he took her cold passive

hand in his for the last time and tried to rouse her by a cheerful farewell. "Good-bye, Rita, and God bless you," he exclaimed. "We shall be back almost before you know it, and you will be astonished to find how fast the time has flown. Daisy shall write to you from London. Good-bye!" and with a smile that was meant to be reassuring he was gone. So the old farmer and his niece passed into the quiet homestead again, hand in hand (for George had accompanied his sister and brother-in-law to town), and none but their own hearts knew how desolate it looked to them thenceforward. As for Daisy, her sorrow was forgotten before they were half-way to their destination. It was not good for baby that she should cry, and Laurence Fane soon found that his self-imposed task of drying her tears had become a sinecure, and put his handkerchief into his pocket again. I do not blame Daisy. She was leaving England, it is true, and all those who made and administered to her early happiness; but she was going with her husband and her child, and the married woman who can disentangle her affections and her thoughts from all but those who form her immediate domestic circle is a very happy and sensible creature. To own a divided heart is not only inconvenient, it is sometimes disastrous to all earthly comfort; and Daisy's husband was the last person to find fault with her when she whispered:

in his ear that she *could* not grieve very long for anything whilst they were together.

Her brother, too, was delighted to see the return of sunshine, and the remainder of the journey was accomplished under auspices that might almost be termed gay. George was full of descriptions of all the delights and wonders that awaited them in their new home, till his sister became quite impatient of the four months' voyage that lay between her and so much pleasure, and eager to commence and get it over.

They slept that night at an hotel near the docks, and went on board early next morning, as "The Queen of the Wave" was announced to start at noon. Daisy had never seen the sea before, and amused her brother and husband by the supposition that the dirty water in the docks bore any resemblance to the bright beautiful waves of the ocean. The deck of the ship was crowded with the emigrants who had not yet shaken down into their places, and were, many of them, too much overcome at the thought of expatriation to care whether they were comfortable or not. Daisy was very much interested and moved by the distress she saw around her. She even stopped to speak to one poor old woman and ask why she was crying.

"Can you ask why?" returned the woman, "when another hour will see us out of sight of old England, and God only knows if we'll ever see it again."

"But do you go alone, then, my poor soul?"

"Oh no, Miss, my old man and the lads are aboard too, but that don't make it any better. I've left more than enough behind me as it is. The Lord have mercy upon them and me."

And she recommenced her monotonous wailing.

"She has her husband and her sons with her," repeated Daisy to Laurence with unmitigated wonder, "and yet she can be miserable. Oh, Laury, she can't love them as I do you and baby."

"Perhaps not, my own darling! There are few who love as we do."

"I shall go a great deal amongst these poor people on the voyage, Laury, and try to read to them, and teach them as Rita and I used to do in the village at home. It will amuse them and do them good, won't it, dear?"

"I dare say it will, my love! But here is George waiting to inspect our cabin, and make any alterations for our comfort, that his former experiences may suggest. Have you the hammer and nails, George? This way, old fellow! You see, Daisy will have our ladder, by which she can fall down and smash the baby, on her exits and entrances. It's all plain sailing here. This is the door, my darling, number two, you will observe. There now! there's a palace for you."

It was really a very comfortable cabin, with every

convenience in it that they could require, and for the next hour, the two men, stripped of coats and waistcoats, went to work with a will, and fixed and arranged everything in readiness for the start even to nailing up the framed photographs of George and her father and Rita over Daisy's berth, whilst she sat by and nursed her baby, and thought she should be as happy as a queen with this dear funny little room, which began to look just like Robinson Crusoe's hut, all for her own. But by the time the task was ended, they were commencing to clear the decks of all but the passengers, and George West was compelled to leave them.

The husband and wife, with their child between them, stood watching him from the gunwale of the vessel, as "The Queen of the Wave" was slowly towed out of the docks, and left him standing amidst the crowd upon the wharf.

"Can you distinguish him still?" said Laurence. "See! darling, he is waving his handkerchief to you. Where is yours? You must wave it in return."

"I can't!" exclaimed poor Daisy, as she buried her face against him in a burst of tears, and realized, for the first time, that she was indeed cut off from all whom she had loved, and who had loved her in the happy innocent past, fading from her present as her brother's figure was fading on the quay.

CHAPTER XXI.

Daisy becomes prophetic.

POOR Daisy had soon something else to think of besides the fact of parting with her brother. "The Queen of the Wave" gained the open sea, and commenced to dip and bend, and rise and fall, in that charming manner that looks so easy and graceful, and feels so unpleasant.

Laurence Fane was an excellent sailor; but his blooming little wife was one of the first to succumb to the motion. She tried hard to keep up. She wanted to stay on deck with her husband, and though she was turning all sorts of colours at each fresh billow over which the vessel danced, she elung manfully to his arm, and, with her baby folded to her bosom, tottered backwards and forwards by his side, feeling as though each minute would be her last—of dignity!

"Daisy, my darling! this is too much for you," said Fane suddenly, as he looked at her pallid face. "You can't carry about that heavy child in this state. You must go into the cabin and lie down."

"Oh, no! Laury, do let me stay with you; whatever happens let me stay with you."

"My child, you don't know what you are asking. You'll be horribly ill in another minute, and the sight of all these people about will make you infinitely worse."

For the emigrants, who were all huddled together on the quarter-deck, were beginning to feel very uncomfortable also, and their groans and moans and lamentations were enough to startle a stouter heart than Daisy's.

"Sit down here for a minute," continued Fane, as he disposed his wife on a pile of luggage, "and I will run down and make the cabin comfortable before you enter it."

She sat helplessly where he had left her, feeling more ill and wretched than she had ever done in her life before. The unconscious infant looked up in her face, and struck out his little fists towards it. Her lips mechanically kissed the tiny fingers that were pressed against them, but Daisy's courage (and she never possessed much) had all evaporated, and she could not even smile at him.

"Bless his little heart! he don't know the trouble that's before him," said a weary voice at her side.

Daisy turned towards the speaker. She was a thin, half-starved looking woman of about five-and-twenty, with hollow eyes and continual cough, who was sitting next her on a pile of baggage.

"Are you married? Have you any babies of

your own?" inquired Daisy, almost forgetting her own discomfort in the pleasure of exhibiting her child.

"Yes, I am married—worse luck—but I ain't got no babies, thank God," replied the woman.

"And is your husband with you?"

"No! I'm going to find him in Australia, and I hope we may all go to the bottom before we get there, I do."

Daisy shuddered—a sudden horror seemed to take hold of her.

"Oh, you shouldn't say that—it's wicked,—think of what you are wishing—and with all these poor souls on board, too,—and me—and my little baby."

"Well, what's the use of wishing other?" said the woman. "There's nothing but trouble and misery afore the lot of 'em. Why, if I had a baby I'd sooner chuck 'im overboard at once than rear 'im up to be like other men."

"I am afraid you are very unhappy," said Daisy, softly, "and I cannot talk to you now because I am ill, and my husband wishes me to be alone; but when I am better I should like to see you again, and explain some of these things to you. What is your name?"

"Jane Ellis."

"And may I ask for you, Jane, when I am able to come on deck again?"

"All right, if you're here to do it," replied the woman surlily.

Daisy was quite relieved when Laurence joined her.

"I have been talking to such a strange woman, Laury," she said, when they had reached the shelter of their cabin, "and she said such horrid things—that she hoped we should all go to the bottom before we reached Australia. Wasn't it awful?"

"You shouldn't have listened to her. I daresay she had had too much to drink. These poor creatures who leave their homes and families without any hope of returning to them, have much to bear, and in many cases feel it very deeply. And then it is a great temptation to them to have a parting glass with their friends. You will find her in a very different frame of mind I daresay, when you meet again."

"I hope so. She frightened me. Laury, do you think there is any danger—the very slightest danger—that we may go to the bottom?"

Fane burst out laughing.

"My dear child, what an idea! Why 'The Queen of the Wave' is one of the finest ships on the line. She has performed the voyage at least thirty times with the most perfect safety. Go to the bottom! She couldn't go to the bottom if she tried. She is a perfect cork for lightness and durability."

"I am very glad," said Daisy in a low voice, "for baby's sake, you know, and yours."

"And for your own, too, I hope, little woman. What would baby and I do without you? Why Daisy, you don't think I would trust my greatest treasure to the ocean unless I had taken every possible human precaution first?"

"No, no, dear Laury, of course not; and I am very silly to have asked such a question. It was only because that woman spoke so strangely. Poor thing, I feel so sorry for her."

"Don't think anything more about her now, Daisy, but get into bed and lay your aching little head upon your pillow. It is nearly six o'clock, and baby will soon be asleep by your side, and I hope you will both rest soundly till the morning. When the passengers' tea is served I shall bring you a cup, and see how you are."

He assisted her and the child to undress with all the tenderness of a woman, and did not leave them until they were settled for the night. And then he turned up the collar of his rough coat, and with his hands in his pockets, and a lighted cigar between his teeth, walked thoughtfully up and down the deck, thinking a little regretfully of the past and sadly of the future. It was all over then,—the career he had chalked out for himself—to follow which he had thrown up the chance of being his godfather's heir,—

had proved a failure. He should never make a name in the world of letters. All that remained for him now was a life of servitude. Not for a moment did it glance across the mind of Laurence Fane that the fact of his being burdened with a wife had anything to do with his present condition, and had it done so, he would have rejected the possibility of greater happiness in freedom with scorn. Daisy was one with him. He loved her with a devotion such as husbands seldom feel after twelve months of married life, and would sooner have starved with her than lived without her. Was it not for her sake that he had accepted this appointment—that he had chosen expatriation and labour, which in his soul he detested,—rather than make another effort which might prove equally futile as the first, to win the position he coveted? He knew that had it not been for Daisy and the child, he would have struggled on until he had regained the footing he had lost; but their interests were too precious to be risked in the smallest degree, even though his love and courage stood guarantee for their defence. He knew, as he paced up and down the deck that night, that he had completely cut himself off from association with the only world for which he cared, and yet he did not regret it. He thought of those two helpless creatures in the cabin below, who depended for everything upon him; of the young mother, as innocent as the baby that slumbered beside her, and

the new life so mysteriously given to her care; and he vowed in his heart that he would sacrifice not only his inclinations and desires, but his blood itself if necessary, to fulfil the duties he had undertaken towards them. How happy he was compared to many of his fellow-creatures! How thankful he ought to be for the means of making a suitable provision for those who were so dear to him! Laurence Fane glanced at the groups of emigrants lying about as the thought passed through his mind, and shuddered.

"Do you mean to pass the night on deck?" he inquired of one of the men who, wrapt up in a piece of tarpaulin, was groaning with sea sickness, and looking abjectly miserable.

"Where are we to go to?" was the sullen answer.

"Is there not proper accommodation for you below?"

"Aye, so they say; but there don't seem much signs of it yet; the gangway choked up with baggage, and it ain't an easy job anyway to get a couple of hundred souls to shake down into a place that ain't big enough to hold half the number."

"Are there really as many of you as that?"

"Just so many, neither more nor less, and with eight boats to carry us if anything should happen to the ship. The Lord reward them as fitted her out for us."

"Come my friend; you mustn't talk in that strain,

—what's the use of anticipating evil? We're in a fine ship, under the command of a good captain, and with every prospect of a fair voyage. You'll sing to a very different tune when you see the green fields and trees of the New World."

"I daresay I shall—*when* I see 'em," replied the emigrant; and Fane walked away from him feeling uncomfortable, though he could hardly tell why.

The passengers' tea was being carried into the cuddy, and he remembered that he had promised to take a cup to his wife. Following the stewards he found himself in a very different atmosphere from that outside. The cuddy was well lighted and warm, and the passengers who had already made friends with one another, were laughing and talking pleasantly together. Fane forgot the cold and the darkness; the rushing waters, and the emigrant's complaints, to which he had been witness on the lower deck, and had just commenced to mingle in the conversation, when a piercing scream arose from the stern cabin. For a minute he stood still, scarcely believing it could be Daisy's voice, until the first scream was followed by a second and a third, and he put down the cup of tea he had just procured for her, upon the table and rushed towards her apartment. The lamp was burning; the baby was still lying fast asleep, a warm, insensible, little lump of humanity by her side, but Daisy was sitting up in her berth, with her eyes shut,

holding out her arms and screaming aloud with terror.

"Daisy! Daisy! my own darling! What is it? Wake up, my child! Oh, what are you dreaming?" exclaimed her husband, almost as frightened as herself. She opened her eyes, gazed at him for a moment in vague terror, then threw herself into his arms and clung to him with the tightness of despair.

"Oh, Laury, hold me fast! don't let me go! It is coming! it is coming! Oh, don't you hear it?"

"What is coming?"

"The water—the horrid, cold, green water! We are sinking—we shall go to the bottom—save me, Laury—save me. We shall all be drowned."

He perceived now that she was suffering from nightmare, and the first thing he did was to rouse her thoroughly.

"Wake up, Daisy, you are dreaming still; wake up, my dear," he continued, shaking her.

Daisy understood where she was now. She looked round the cabin, then threw herself back on her pillow and burst into tears.

"Oh, I have had such a dreadful dream, such an awful dream. I thought the ship had gone down and all the water came through the windows, and that woman, Laury—that woman I told you of, who spoke so wickedly—came between you and me, and laughed at us, and wouldn't let me go to you. You were

holding out your arms to me and I was longing to get to you but *the woman* stood between us and I couldn't pass."

And Daisy shuddered visibly.

"My darling, it was only a dream. Your sickness has made you a little feverish and uncomfortable, and you went to sleep thinking of unpleasant things. Let me go and fetch you a cup of tea."

But she clung to him and would not let him go.

"No, no! pray don't leave me. I shall die if I am left alone. Oh, Laury! take me away from this horrid ship. I am wretched. I am miserable. I know something is going to happen. Take me back to England and never let me see the sea again."

He treated it as a girl's wayward fancy. How else could he treat it?

"My own Margarita, do you know you are making a little fool of yourself? How could I take you back to land when we are in the middle of the Channel? I know you feel very uncomfortable at present, dear, but you will be all right in a day or two, and the best sailor on board. Why, you were always so anxious to be on the sea."

"Oh, I don't like it. I am frightened," said the girl, shivering. "I can hear the waters rushing under us, and they frighten me to death. Promise we shall get out at the first port, Laury, and that you'll take me back to Maple Farm."

"Hush, hush, dear; you mustn't talk such nonsense. You'll be quite ashamed of yourself to-morrow morning. Now be good and let me go and fetch your tea."

But Daisy wouldn't be good, and her agitation continued so long that Fane thought it best to consult the ship's doctor, who pronounced her attack to be one of such extreme nervous terror as to make it advisable to administer a sleeping draught. So under the influence of morphia her frightened blue eyes at last consented to close themselves in sleep, and when he was assured that she was slumbering soundly and not likely to wake until the morning, her husband returned once more to the fresh air and the darkness and the deck.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Midnight Alarm.

SOME few of the emigrants may have crept down to the miserable sleeping places provided for them, but the majority still lay huddled together about the fore-castle and the lower deck.

Fane went up on the poop to get out of their way, and there fell into a mood that, compared to his former one, was almost despondent. His wife's attack had not alarmed, but it had much disturbed him. What could be the reason she had taken this sudden aversion to, and terror of, the sea? She had been so bright and hopeful until now, so much more so than he had ever expected her to be that this unaccountable change puzzled him. He thought how unfortunate it would be if she was unable to shake it off, and the few months' voyage became, in consequence, a misery to her instead of a pleasure. He speculated on this thing and on that, until he tired himself out, and sat down, without intending to do more than sit down, on a sail that lay near the vessel's mast. But Laurence Fane had passed through a great deal of fatigue and excitement that day, and was wearier than he imagined. He had not comfortably

ensconced himself on the sail for long, watching the stars through the wreath of smoke which his cigar sent up like incense towards them, and thinking with much chagrin of the wretched human emigrant whose folly had caused so unadventitious a commencement to their journey, when his eyes insensibly closed upon all outward things, and he fell fast asleep.

* * * * *

“Fire! Fire! Fire!”

The cry rang out like an agonized appeal to heaven, and was followed by much shouting, trampling of feet, rattle of chains, and hurrying from every part of the vessel.

“Out of the way there,” cried a sailor, as he unceremoniously pulled the sailcloth from under our hero’s prostrate figure.

Fane was on his feet in a moment. He was about to expostulate, to ask the reason of his sudden ejection, or perhaps to swear a little at the intruder, when his ear caught the sound that rose up like a simultaneous shout from below.

“Good God!” he exclaimed, “what is the matter?”

“Matter enough,” said the sailor roughly, “as you may see without asking”—and he hurried away with the sail-cloth under his arm. Fane was bewildered. For the first moment he could understand nothing. Cries were ascending on every side; figures rushed

past him in the darkness—orders were being bawled out through a speaking trumpet—still no one stopped to tell him whence the confusion arose. Then the voices rang out again in unison from the lower deck; and their cry was:

“Fire! Fire! Fire!”

He understood it all now. The ship was in danger—their lives were at stake—their lives, the lives of Margarita and his child!

It did not need the strong breeze that was blowing athwart the vessel to clear his faculties now. With one bound he was down the companion ladder, and mingling with the frightened crowd upon the quarter deck. There were the whole crew hard at work, baling water into the hold from which a dense column of smoke arising prevented anything beyond it being visible, whilst the unfortunate emigrants, driven hither and thither, knocked down and trampled over, found no rest for the soles of their feet, but swarmed over the whole vessel, and yet were always in the way. What with the hustling of the crowd, the activity of the sailors, and the bawling of the captain, Fane found it difficult enough to gain any reliable information, for directly he seized hold of a man, he was either parted from him by the crowd, or duty forbid him to stop long enough to answer his questions. But at last he found himself, shoulder to shoulder, with one of the stewards.

“What is all this about, Steward?” he said, hurriedly. “Is there any danger?”

“Quite impossible to say, sir. The men can’t get down into the hold where the fire broke out, to see how far it extends. Take care, sir! Stand more that way, or you’ll be knocked overboard.”

As he obeyed the friendly injunction, Laurence found himself clutched by the wrinkled fingers of a dirty old woman.

“Oh, do ye happen to know what’s become of Jane Ellis?” she cried. “For the love of the Lord, sir, tell me if the gal’s on board ship or no.”

“I really can’t tell you, my good woman. I know none of the passengers by name,” replied Fane, as he tried to shake her off.

“Oh, but she’s poor John Green’s only daughter, and I promised John on his dying bed I’d look arter her on the voyage, and I’ve never give her a thought from the moment I come on board till now. And here’s a judgment come upon us,” continued the crone, in a croaking voice. “We shall all be burnt up, as we stand here, to a moral certainty. The Lord have mercy upon us!”

Fane shuddered as he heard the old creature’s groans and reiterations of a coming judgment; his heart was standing still with fear for Margarita and her child, but he was a man, and he would not show his apprehension openly while others concealed theirs.

But at this juncture another shout arose from the emigrants, and Fane, turning, saw with consternation, a huge tongue of flame bursting out from the other end of the vessel, and licking the sides of the poop.

"Merciful heavens!" cried the steward, "it's broken out at the stern."

"Cut down the boats," roared the captain, through his trumpet. "Lower the boats and man them as quick as you can."

The men rushed to obey orders, the mob of emigrants and passengers bore down before them upon the cuddy doors, but Fane, with a face gray as ashes, and a firmly composed mouth, fought his way through them, inch by inch, as though he battled for his life, until he reached the door of the stern cabin.

"My wife! my child!" were the only two thoughts in his heart at that terrible moment. His own life, by comparison, seemed less than nothing.

He burst open the cabin. They were slumbering in their berth as soundly as though they lay quiet and safe beneath one of the dimity-curtained beds at Maple Farm; Daisy from the effects of the sleeping draught administered to her, and the infant as such unconscious creatures always do. Fane looked at them in speechless agony, but there was no time for anything but action. He heard the orders that were being delivered on deck. With a sudden pang he remembered what had been told him of the inefficiency

of boat accommodation in case of accident, and fearful lest, in the rush that would inevitably be made for the boats, no room might be found there for his treasures, he hastily wrapped his wife and child in a blanket and conveyed them on deck. The noise, the movement, the cold air, roused Daisy from her narcotic sleep, and as he stood close to the gangway with her in his arms, she opened her blue eyes, stared wildly around, and then made a frantic effort to disengage herself from them.

"Oh, where am I?"

"Hush, Margarita, hush, dear love, be quiet; I am near you."

"But what is happening? and why am I like this," touching her strange garments. "Oh Laurence, tell me."

"I am here, my wife, and God is here, don't be afraid. There has been an accident, Margarita, the ship has caught fire, and it is necessary I should put you in a boat. There was no time to dress you, dearest, but you will soon be on shore."

"But must I go like this?" she answered. "And in the dark and cold? And baby too! He will die upon the water. Oh, Laury, we shall all die together."

A silent aspiration rose up from his heart, "Oh, that we might!" But he only pressed her closer to him.

"My own love! my own darling! Listen to me. This is necessary. It must be; therefore bear it like a brave Christian woman. See all these poor creatures around us, they have to bear it as well as we. Pray to God to give you courage, and neither baby nor you will take any harm. Keep it folded round both of you. God bless you, my precious wife. I wish I had died before I had exposed you to this!"

She had closed her eyes and was leaning against his shoulder shuddering, but she did not make any further objection.

The boats were all over the side by this time, and the sailors were filling them fast.

"Women and children first," shouted the captain, as the passengers and emigrants crowded to the gangway.

"Means, 'Men go to the bottom,'" said a surly voice at Fane's elbow.

"Well, my friend, and better so, than we should live to see women perish," he replied.

Daisy looked up in terror.

"Laury, *we* shall go together!" she said, in a voice of agony.

"Yes, yes, love; or very near together," he said in order to pacify her.

"Now then, sir, if you wish the lady to go," exclaimed a sailor who was engaged in carrying the wo-

men down the gangway, as he extended his arms for Daisy.

"By all means!" cried Fane, as he placed her in them; "but be careful, she has an infant with her."

"Laurence! husband!" shrieked Daisy. "Let me stay with you—let me die with you! Oh, don't let them take me away."

"*Margarita!*" he said, as for one moment he detained her to press a passionate kiss upon her innocent frightened face—and there was more love conveyed by his pronounciation of her name at that moment than could have been expressed by a dozen superlatives. "*Margarita!* for my sake—for God's sake—go!"

The dense smoke ascending from the hold was enveloping their figures; from the stern of the vessel the flames, with a bright glare and a horrid crackling sound were wreathing about the bulwark and the masts. Every man who could be pressed into the service or spared from the boats, was employed in trying to put out the fire, and yet it still raged on, and the captain knew the majority of his living freight was doomed.

"Off with those boats from the ship's sides," he exclaimed, "or they will be struck by the burning timbers."

"Now then, Missus!" cried the sailor as he unceremoniously seized Daisy as though she had been a bundle of clothes, and carried her down the slippery

gangway, at the foot of which the frail little boat was dancing up and down in the cold and the darkness to receive its living burden.

"Laurence, Laurence, you will follow me!" she screamed.

"In a moment, love; in less than a moment," he called out after her.

And he was right, for even as he spoke, a sudden burst of flame from the hold drove the shrieking mob, pushing and trampling upon one another against the spot where he stood, with such force as to propel him and several other victims into the surging sea.

In less than a moment from the time he spoke to Margarita, Laurence Fane was battling with the channel waves. In less than a moment after, "The Queen of the Wave" gave a heavy lurch and sucked him under her burning sides.

CHAPTER XXIII.

On the open Sea.

THE cold grey light of the January morning had begun to make itself visible before our hero recovered consciousness. He came to himself as a man who has lain down in the full vigour of life to have some fearful operation performed under the influence of chloroform comes to himself—with a vague knowledge of having undergone some great calamity that has left him maimed and helpless. He awoke, sick, trembling, and confused; and lay still for a few moments, powerless to remember where he was. A bleak wind was blowing across the Channel on his saturated garments, and making him feel icy cold; he turned on his side, touching his clothes with a strange wonder, as he questioned himself why it should be so. This movement brought him in contact with the skirt of a soiled and draggled gown, from which he recoiled with distaste, and the effort roused his senses. He began to hear a few fragments of talk, mingled with the lamentations of women and a child's wailing. Remembrance came back to him; he started up with the cry "Margarita!"

"Hollo, mate! You've come round at last, have you?" said a voice, not unkindly, by his side.

Laurence Fane stared from right to left. He was in a boat crammed as full as it could hold of men, women, and children, tossing about in the middle of the Channel, and making but small way against a chopping wind, dead against her, at five o'clock in the morning.

"How did I come here?" he inquired wildly. "The other boats, where are they?"

"Safe enough, you may be sure," replied the man who had spoken to him before. "There's one"—pointing to leeward—"in sight of us, and the others have run on shore before now, likely enough. It's a nasty morning to be out in an open boat, but you might have been colder still by this time if we hadn't picked you up."

"Did you pick me up?" said Fane, vaguely.

"Ah, sure enough! You were knocked overboard when the mast went, I reckon, and it's a providence you floated our way, for we were the last boat to leave the vessel."

"My wife, my child!" groaned Laurence.

"Left in the ship?" inquired his new friend.

"No, no. Thank God! but in these open boats before such a wind—what may not happen to them?"

"Don't you fear. They're safe enough, little

doubt. It's the poor souls left on board we ought to think of."

"What has become of the vessel, then?"

"Burned to the water's edge, and with as good a skipper in her as ever walked planks," replied the man solemnly.

There was a pause in the little company after that, till the silence was broken by a woman's voice.

"And poor Jane Ellis, too, she's gone to the bottom with the rest of 'em, if ever a body did. And I promised John Green on his dying bed that I'd look after his gal, and his curse will follow me to mine for never giving a thought to her from that day to this."

Laurence Fane turned towards the speaker.

It was the old crone who had clutched his arm in the terrible confusion that preceded the calamity, the details of which were only just coming back clearly to his mind.

How her presence recalled the sudden shock—the fear—and now the sickening uncertainty. He sprang to his feet with all a man's desire to drown the terrors of suspense in action.

"Is there nothing for me to do?" he exclaimed, loudly. "Cannot I take the oars for some of you?"

"You'll find it hard work against this sea," said the sailor nearest to him, "and in your state, too. You'd much best lie quiet."

"I can't lie quiet. I am all right again now. Give me an oar, for God's sake, and let us talk, or I shall go mad."

But he had calculated beyond his strength. Before he had pulled two strokes, the heavy oar fell from his nerveless hand.

"I am weaker than a woman," he said despairingly.

"Hold up," quoth the other. "There's more than enough of us to do the work, and we're not so far from Deal now."

"When shall we reach land?"

"Before night, any way, if the wind don't take to shifting. We've had the devil's own luck so far."

"Aye! with not a morsel to eat nor a drop to drink!" said a grumbling voice from the bottom of the boat.

"And only the rags we were sleeping in to cover us," cried another.

"And wid no knowledge if me poor husband is saved or drowneded intirely. The Blessed Virgin make his bed the night," chimed in an Irishwoman, who had two poor little children clinging to her and shivering with the cold.

"Now I call that downright ungrateful of the lot of you," replied an old sailor. "Here, whilst hundreds have perished in that there poor doomed vessel, we've got straight off with our lives and a good boat under

us, and yet you're all ready to curse the Almighty because you haven't got a hot dinner served for you in the middle of the ocean. I call it a tempting of Providence."

"Come, Parsons! they didn't mean it," said another good-naturedly, as he took off his own jacket to put round the shoulders of a poor girl more dead than alive with the cold. "They'll all be thanking the Lord on their bended knees to-night for their safety, I warrant."

"And what'll be the use of safety to me," continued the Irishwoman, "if the poor husband is lying at the bottom of the say? And all the bits of things have gone down with the poor ship. Ochone! Ochone!"

Fane heard her and shuddered. What would be the use of life—of safety—to him if his treasures were not rescued from the waves as well?

He dared not think of it. The doubt, the suspense, were such awful agony, he could only wish, if they were not soon ended, that he had never recovered his consciousness.

The day wore on. The solitary boat which had accompanied them so far, and which every eye had been strained at in vain hope of recognizing her crew, was lost to sight again, and they seemed left alone on the wide ocean. In the distant horizon the cliffs of Deal were visible, but the sea was contrary, and

they had a heavy load and made very little progress against the waves. The cold was piercing, the children had cried themselves to sleep, the women slept with them, or lay silent and despairing at the bottom of the boat, whilst such of the men as could row relieved each other at the oars. As soon as Fane could shake off the weakness which had succeeded his partial drowning, he worked incessantly. His mind was in a fever of anxiety, and he found no rest except in such over-exertion as threatened to leave disastrous effects as soon as it should be concluded; and in a fierce trampling down of pain that found vent in unnatural hilarity and recklessness of bearing.

"Be patient with the poor devils," he said to a young fellow who was threatening to gag a woman if she didn't stop crying; "they don't know when they are well off. They'll look back on it all as a pleasure party by-and-by. What time did you say we should be in to-night, Jack?"

"Can't say for certain, sir," replied the sailor, who had found out Fane's rank by this time, "but if we don't run foul of a ship we ought to make Deal in another six or eight hours at this rate. Better let me take the oar, sir."

"Not a bit of it, I'm as fresh as a daisy."
But as he said the word inadvertently, a change came over his countenance, and he staggered backward on his seat.

"You're done up, sir; it's my time now," cried the old sailor, seizing the oar from him. "Now, my lads, all together."

Fane chafed at his own weakness.

"It's that confounded knocking about I had under the vessel," he said in a tone of vexation. "It seems to have taken all the muscle out of me. I shall be another man when I've had something to eat. What a glass of grog you and I will have together in Deal, to-night, Jack."

"Ay, ay! that's the way, sir; keep up your spirits. Thank the Lord for His mercies, and think as little as one may of them that's gone."

"Is there no hope, then, for those we left behind?"

"Precious little, I'm afraid, for if a ship came within hail of 'em, she'd be afraid to bear down on such a living mass. But all these things is managed for us, sir. Some must live and some die, or how would the world go on? All we can do is to be thankful for what we've got."

"It's all very well to talk after that fashion," crooned a quavering voice from the other end of the boat, "but I'll never get the thoughts of Jane Ellis out of my head till my dying day. She was that sick, poor creature, that maybe, she'd a never seen the end of the voyage, but she was a deal too good I warrant to be shrivelled up like a moth at a candle." Fane

started. He wondered if he was ever to hear the last of Jane Ellis.

"Well, I didn't mean to hurt you," replied the sailor, "but if the poor lass was sickly perhaps it won't make so much difference to her, arter all. It's the young, and the blooming, and the healthy as have gone down in that ill-fated wessel as *I'd* cry over."

"I suppose the boats are all sure to be in to-night," said Fane, quickly.

"I hope so, sir, I'm sure, or the poor critters will fare badly. But the wind was dead agen them at first, and they're apt to get blown about a little. There's eight of them in all, and I shall be glad to see 'em counted over."

"But there can be no real danger in such a sea as this," cried Laurence Fane.

"Bless you, no, sir, but they aren't likely all to come in at the same time. It may be two or three days before they're collected together."

"*Shall I live through them?*" he groaned inwardly, as the thought of the suspense before him passed through his unhappy mind.

But the excitement of their position, and the necessity for immediate action, gave him strength to bear up for the present.

Three—four more hours of hunger and thirst—of cold—of alternate doubt and hope, passed away, and

then they ran athwart the bows of a Dutch vessel bound for Deal, the commander of which, after much parleying and attempts at explanation between the English and foreign sailors, consented to take them on board—they were seventeen in all—and land them on the shores they had so lately quitted.

At ten o'clock that night the Dutch vessel anchored off Deal, and the greater part of the shipwrecked crew, Fane amongst the number, rushed on shore.

No tidings had been received of any of the other boats, and they were the first to announce the news of the burning of "The Queen of the Wave."

The oldest sailor left at once to report the calamity to the owners of the vessel, and Laurence Fane was left in the strange town alone.

By the next morning another boat touched shore; and the safe arrival of two more was telegraphed from the coast of Wales.

But none of them was the long-boat in which he had placed Margarita and her child.

He thought of lingering about Deal, but was assured that news would reach him sooner in London than any other place. Added to which it was unlikely that the missing boats would all make for the same port. Some, it was argued, might have been blown towards France, whilst others would be heard of at any place between Eddystone Lighthouse and the southern coast.

So Fane, unwillingly and despondingly, but yet borne up by an unnatural strength begotten of excitement and uncertainty, found his way back to London, and on the morning of the second day, haggard, disordered in appearance, and unshaved, staggered into Jack Reeves' apartments.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The missing Boat.

JACK was in his dressing-gown and slippers, kneeling on his knees before the fire and toasting a sausage on a breakfast fork. He heard the door open without turning round.

"This is too bad, Mrs. Adams!" he called out, supposing the intruder to be his landlady. "Here's the third morning that daughter of yours has sent up my sausage half raw. I wish to goodness I had never given her that crown on Christmas day." But the heavy step and the silence undeceived him; he looked up just as Fane sunk down exhausted into a chair.

"Laurence! old fellow! Why, where the dickens have you sprung from? Hasn't the ship sailed? Didn't you go to Liverpool? Is Mrs. ——? There's nothing the matter, is there?" he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself as he noticed his friend's general appearance of disorder.

"Matter, Jack? Only that I've lost everything—*everything!* That I am ruined—*alone!*"

"Not dead?" cried Jack.

"Oh, how I wish I knew—how I wish I knew,"

said Fane, in a voice of despair, as tired out and broken down by the events of the last twenty-four hours, he laid his head down on the table and burst into tears.

Reeves was greatly shocked. He had never seen Fane in such a condition before, and he could not understand it, but as soon as the latter had recovered his voice he related to him all that had occurred.

"Of course it will come right," said poor Laurence in conclusion, trying to cheat himself into believing what he so much desired, "and you mustn't think anything of my firing away as I did just now, Jack. It's from over-fatigue and fasting. The sailors say—and they are the best authorities, you know—there's not the slightest doubt but that all the boats will be in, in the course of a few hours, and I shall be telegraphed to, directly the long-boat makes her appearance, only it is rather trying to wait. It was so cold, too. I can't think how they'll get on. I daresay Margarita will stand it well enough, but I'm afraid it will fare badly with the poor little chap. He's only a couple of months old, you see."

"Oh, I shouldn't worry about that," replied Reeves, briskly, although he entertained from the beginning the most ghastly fears for the safety of the missing woman and child. "Babies are such wonderful creatures, you know, they live through everything, and his mother is sure to keep him warm. Have some coffee,

Fane. You look perishing with cold and hunger. What have you eaten since coming on shore?"

"Very little. It was such a disappointment to find she had not arrived before me. But I will eat now, Jack, for I may receive a telegram from Deal any moment to summon me back again."

"Of course! and all this travelling will knock you up without food. Have my sausage. It's beautifully brown now, and I'll have another cooked for myself in no time."

But the attempt at eating was a failure. Laurence Fane swallowed a few mouthfuls and then abandoned his breakfast with a sigh.

"Don't be vexed with me, Jack, but to tell truth, I'm too much excited to eat. I do so long to see my dear girl again. I am afraid she will have suffered so much suspense during our separation. And you know what it is, Jack. When you're expecting a thing and it's coming very near—a meeting with any one you love, for instance—you can't eat, you can't eat."

He pushed his plate away from him as he spoke, and sat for a moment in deep thought.

"I told old Parsons—that's the sailor who took the command of our boat," he said presently, straightening himself as by a great effort, and trying to speak unconcernedly, "that he would find me here when he has any intelligence for me. He came up to town

yesterday to report the accident to the ship's agents, and he said he should remain here, as the arrival of the boats is sure to be telegraphed to the agents first of all. So, if Parsons should come whilst I'm out, Reeves, you'll know what to say to him, won't you?"

"Where are you going to, Fane? You're not fit to go out."

"I'm just going round to the agents to let them know my whereabouts, that's all! Where do you think I had better take my Margarita on arrival?"

"Home to her father. Have you let them know yet?"

"No, where's the use? They're simple people, you see, and they'd fret themselves to death, fancying all kinds of horrors. I shall wait till she joins me, and let them have the whole of our adventures together. Will that not be the best?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Jack, dubiously, "perhaps it would. I think I should write to the brother, though."

"The very one I don't want. George is all very well, but he is too boisterously funny at times. I would rather wait till my wife has arrived."

"All right, old fellow; do as you wish. Shall I accompany you to the ship's agents?"

"No, thank you! I would rather go alone."

He wandered away listlessly, but returned almost radiant.

"Two more boats in," he said gleefully, "and their crews safe. One came on shore at Lyme-Regis, in Devon, you know, and the other at Newhaven. Curious how these little barks get buffeted about and driven out of their course, isn't it? There are only two more now to be accounted for, and Parsons (whom I met at the agents') says they're pretty sure to arrive to-night. Indeed the Newhaven boat says she came in alongside of one of them till within a few miles of shore."

"Which one?"

"They hadn't said, but Parsons thinks it must have been the long-boat, because they put off about the same time. The long-boat would travel slower, you know, Reeves. It holds such a lot of people—forty, or thereabout."

"Indeed! Well, you are happier about it now, old fellow, aren't you?"

"Much happier! It was only the idea of Margarita feeling the cold and exposure, you know, that ever bothered me; but Parsons says they've got on capitally in the other boats. And there were a lot of little children on board. I shall have to leave you to-night, Reeves, I'm sure."

"All the better, Laurence, for such a pleasant errand. But you must eat a little more at luncheon than you did at breakfast, or your strength will break down."

"How can one eat when one is so happy? How-

ever, I'll try, if it's only to please you. Jack, you are awfully kind to me."

As they sat at luncheon a telegram was brought in. "Jolly-boat just heard of from Calais. Passengers safe. Spoke with long-boat at starting. Expect she has been driven in same direction."

"Here's a disappointment," said Fane, wearily. "It may be days before we meet again, my darling girl."

"Come, come, Fane, it's not so bad as it seems. You may hear of the boat's arrival any moment, and you have but to cross the Channel to her. Have you any money, old boy?"

"More than sufficient, thank you. I had not changed my clothes when the accident occurred, and all my money was in my pocket."

"How *did* the accident occur, Fane?"

"No one knows, and I don't suppose it will ever be satisfactorily determined. Parsons thinks some of the emigrants may have fired the ship unknowingly. Several of them were drunk."

"It's an awful business."

"You may well say so. I have lost all my personal property, of course, but I shall have no time to think of that till I have seen my wife and child again. Then I may begin to lament over it. At present my mind is filled with but one idea."

He strolled down to the agents after luncheon,

and hung about their office all the afternoon, but without success. No further telegram arrived that day.

By bed time his spirits were beginning to flag. Another night on the open sea for his tender wife and child! The thought was agony. Reeves tried to persuade him to go to bed, but he sat up in an arm-chair all night in hopes a message might be sent to him. The morning found him in the same state of suspense as before.

It was now the fourth day since the accident had occurred. Jack Reeves left his friend moody and desponding in his apartments, and, under pretence of business, slipped down himself, to the agents' office, to make private inquiries on the subject. They neither raised his hopes nor grounded them. They thought it very probable the long-boat could be heard of yet. They had known boats missing for a much longer time. She might have been blown out to sea in a contrary direction. They should not give her up themselves for weeks to come. At the same time they thought that if she had gained any of the Channel ports, intelligence would have been received of her before then.

Jack Reeves was puzzled what to do. His friend was moping at home, and expecting news to arrive every moment, and hope deferred might make him lose heart altogether. If he heard the agents' opinion

about the matter, he might shake himself up a little and try to bear the inevitable suspense with patience. On the whole he decided it would be the best to tell him. Poor Laurence did not receive the intelligence gratefully. He got into a terrible passion—cursed the agents for their stupidity—cursed the fate which had caused the only boat in which he had any interest to be the last to arrive, and finally rushed out of the house and was lost to sight for several hours, during which time he attempted by violent exercise for which he was totally unfitted, and reckless hilarity, which only made the dagger he carried in his heart stab deeper, to stamp down the demons that were wrestling for his sanity.

When the fifth and the sixth day had gone by without bringing news of the missing boat, Jack Reeves took upon himself to communicate with the inhabitants of Maple Farm. He broke the intelligence of the calamity to them as gently as possible, and begged them to assist him in assuaging Fane's unspeakable anguish. The day after the receipt of Reeves' letter, George West came up to town. He asked to speak to his correspondent first, and the two men met in the little room below Jack's apartments.

George West was very pale and stern, and he wrung Reeves' hand in silence.

"This is a bad business," he said at length.

"It is a bad business, Mr. West, but it is not hopeless. I thought it right, however, that you should not be kept longer in ignorance."

"Thank you. I suppose we should have heard it sooner or later, but we live so much in the dark down there. We never see a paper. I want to persuade Fane to come back with me to Maple Farm."

"I hope you may. It would be the very thing to rouse him. He has hardly left his seat yesterday or to-day."

"Let us go to him."

When they entered the room Laurence Fane was leaning forward on the table with his head resting on both his hands. As he caught sight of George West he started to his feet.

"What has brought you here?" he demanded angrily.

CHAPTER XXV.

A welcome Telegram.

It was a strange welcome to bestow on the man who had travelled all the way up from Somersetshire to comfort him in his suspense. George West hardly knew what to make of it. He thought Fane must have been drinking.

"I have come, Laurence," he said, almost timidly, "because I thought I might be of use to you. This sad news only reached us yesterday."

"What sad news?"

"Why of Daisy's—of the fact of my sister—of the boat in which"—replied George, stammering.

"Of the fact of the boat which carries your sister not having touched shore quite so soon as the others, I suppose you mean? What is there sad in that? They'll take good care of her, George, you may depend upon it. Nothing can exceed their kindness to the women and children. And she'll be here tomorrow or next day at latest—certainly the next day—at the very latest," continued Fane, half to himself, as he rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room.

"Oh, no doubt," replied George, "but meanwhile,

old fellow, don't you think it would be as well if you were to run down with me to Maple Farm? My father and Rita feel awfully for you of course, and——”

“*Feel* for me? Why?”

This question was as difficult to answer as the other.

“Feel for your suspense, I mean, and the bother of waiting and all that, and would like to make you as comfortable in the interim as they can. I am sure you would pass the time away more pleasantly with us than here.”

“There will be no time to pass away. I am perfectly comfortable as it is. And I cannot leave the spot. I may be wanted at any moment.”

“You could return at an hour's notice.”

“An hour would be too long. My wife will want me directly she lands. Besides, I have no wish to leave town.”

“Well, I won't worry you about it, Fane, but I should like to be of some use to you. Is there nothing I can do?”

“There's nothing to be done, but wait till she arrives. I can't understand what you are driving at.”

“I am driving at nothing except a desire to prove myself your brother, Laurence. My poor father is very anxious to see you. He feels this acutely.”

“That is, I conclude, because he has received some garbled version of the matter, and understands nothing

about it. I knew how difficult it would be to explain, and that is why I did not write to you at once. I should have liked you to hear nothing till Margarita was able to write herself. And you would have done so had it not been for this tiresome delay."

"It is just as well," replied George, sorrowfully; "my father is getting very old now and cannot stand bad news as easily as he did a few years ago."

"He will not have to stand it," said Laurence Fane, almost snappishly. "Tell him there is no need to be anxious, and if he wishes it, Margarita and the child shall go down to Maple Farm to convince him of the fact as soon as they arrive."

"And you will not come down yourself?"

"How can I? I am expecting a telegram every hour to summon me, heaven knows where, to meet them."

His brother-in-law dropped the subject, and tried to discourse of irrelevant matters, but as the day wore on, his presence even, seemed a source of irritation to Laurence Fane.

"I think you will be much wiser to go back to Maple Farm yourself," he said. "You have your own business to attend to, and can do no good here. Tell your father I am much obliged for his sympathy, but I am thankful I do not need it. My personal losses are, after all, not so very great; for luckily I saved all

my coin, and as soon as my wife joins me, I shall make arrangements for a second start to Sydney. I owe this to my employers who paid my passage out. And we shall have better luck next time, depend on it. It's not likely that two vessels will be burned to the water's edge consecutively," he ended with an unnatural laugh.

"All right!" said George West, as he rose to his feet. "I will leave you if my presence is any annoyance. But—if—if—Daisy should *not* arrive quite so soon as you expect, Fane, what do you propose to do then?"

"Wait here till she does come," replied the other quietly. "But as I've already told you, there's no question about the matter."

George West was very sincerely attached to Laurence Fane, and the tears came into his eyes as, before he quitted the house, he related this circumstance below-stairs to Jack Reeves.

"I can't make him out," he said, "he seems so sharp and irritable—so unlike himself. I thought trouble softened people's hearts instead of hardening them."

"Not always, Mr. West; and can't you see that the poor fellow is fighting like a devil against his own terrible suspicion, and the least allusion to it drives him frantic? I think it is as well you are going.

Fane is just in that state when kindness maddens instead of soothes."

"But I can't bear to leave him here, a prey to his own thoughts. This calamity is common to us all—my poor father and cousin are feeling it dreadfully, and it seems so unnatural we should not bear it together."

"It is not a calamity yet, remember. It is only a fear. Should his suspicions become certainties, which God forbid, I have no doubt Fane will turn to your family as his best and only comforters."

"And meanwhile——?"

"I will keep you strictly informed of all that takes place. But it will be as well to tell you at once, Mr. West, that it may be weeks or months before we receive any further news."

"Poor Rita!" said George, as he turned away. Jack Reeves wondered he didn't say "My poor father," but he bid him good-bye without any further comment.

* * * * *

"Fane, my dear fellow," said Reeves a few days afterwards, "I wish you'd review those books for me. I'm done to death with work this week, already."

No further information had been obtained with regard to the missing boat, and though Laurence Fane had never mentioned the circumstance, his friend knew that he took no sleep by night, and saw that he

was falling into a state of greater apathy every day. He would not speak of his fears; he denied the existence of them, if alluded to; but Reeves knew that the man was quivering all over with the agony of suspense, and determined, if possible, to induce him to work, in order to distract his mind from constantly dwelling on the same fearful thought.

Fane accepted the task mechanically. He believed it was proposed solely to relieve his friend, and he read the volumes offered him with a determination that amounted to fierceness, and criticized them in sharp bitter reviews that must have made the authors' ears tingle. As soon as he had completed his first task, Reeves procured him a second, and thus between paroxysms of hard work and dull despair the silent weeks wore round. Each morning Laurence Fane took his way down to the agents' office, and put his mechanical inquiry, to receive the hopeless answer (delivered probably in the most cheerful of voices by some careless office clerk) "*No further news to-day, sir!*" and then wended his steps back again to Jack Reeves' lodgings, to write or review or transcribe, as might suit his friend's notions best. He was in no lack of money, for Reeves insisted upon his taking the pay for his own work, and before he had been a week back in town the newspapers were good enough to receive leaders again from their old favourite.

Reeves' efforts and his own hard state of mind (for there are men who compose better in adversity than prosperity) made everything he wrote acceptable, and it seemed as though he would have little difficulty in regaining his position as a pressman. Still he laboured as if in a dream. In every stroke of his pen he read but one name and one idea, and had no more notion, when they were completed, of what his pages contained, than if he had never seen them. He was gradually sinking into a condition of sullen despair.

* * * * *

The fourth week had opened. Things were in this condition still. Jack Reeves had secretly written to the Wests to prepare themselves to hear the worst, when one day a letter, sent by a private messenger from the agents' office, was put into his hand. It was addressed to Laurence Fane but in his friend's service he had no hesitation in tearing it open. The contents were as follows:

"Dear Sir,—We have much pleasure in informing you that, per telegram just received, we learn that the passengers and crew of 'The Queen of the Wave' long-boat were put on shore at Calais last night, by a Spanish vessel, and will be forwarded to Dover by the midday boat. They may be expected to arrive there about four o'clock p.m. Any instructions with

which you may favour us shall be strictly attended to. We are, dear sir, yours faithfully,

“For Messrs———and———,

“J. MANSON.”

“*At last!* Thank God!” cried Reeves, heartily. “And now, how to break the good news to poor Fane!” He burst into the sitting room noisily, and with a broad grin on his face.

“Jack!” said Laurence, looking up in solemn astonishment.

“You’ve borne disappointment like a Trojan, old fellow!” exclaimed Reeves. “Do you think you could stand a little good news for a change?”—and then catching the expression of pain that passed over his friend’s features, he continued hastily, “It’s all right, old boy. Don’t break down now, for God’s sake. Your wife was landed at Calais yesterday. She will be at Dover this afternoon. She’ll——Why, Fane! Fane! this is not like you,” he broke off suddenly as he saw Laurence’s head sink lower and lower on the table, and heard the loud unrestrained passion of weeping with which he hailed the intelligence! For a few moments Reeves stood by his friend in silence, then Laurence dashed his hand across his eyes, and stood upright.

“Jack!—*is it true?*”

“True, Laurence! Do you think I’d be so cruel

as to raise your hopes for nothing—there's the agents' letter, read for yourself, old fellow, and then tell me if it isn't true?"

"I knew we should meet again!" cried Fane in a transport of gratitude as he pressed the paper to his lips. "I knew my darling couldn't be dead, I was sure God could never have the heart to bury so much loveliness in the cruel sea. Oh, my darling, my darling! My own wife! My beautiful Margarita! What a hell of suspense I have suffered since I parted from you! How I have wept—how I have prayed that we might meet again! And now to think that I shall hold you in my arms, that I shall see your sweet eyes gazing into mine, that I shall feel the touch of your soft lips! Oh, I shall go mad. I shall go mad with happiness before the moment comes."

He *was* like a madman! Neither the presence of his friend, nor his entreaties that he would calm himself, had the least effect upon him.

"How can I be quiet when I know that when this night falls I shall have my angel pillowed on my breast again? Oh, Reeves, you remember her!—her childish beauty, her sweet innocent ways, her wealth of devotion for myself. I have thought of those dimpled limbs lying beneath the water, of those dear eyes closed, that bright hair dank and tangled, till I wonder I have not made away with myself. I should have made away with myself," he added in a hoarse

whisper coming close to Reeves' ear, "if this blessed news had not come to save me."

"Hush! Fane! you mustn't talk of such a thing. It is wicked—ungrateful! Think only now of the happiness in store for you."

"I do! I do! and of the mercy of God. Stay! Where is the letter? What time will they be at Dover? Four o'clock, and now it is only ten. Six weary hours before I can see her! What shall I do with myself? How can I support life till then?"

"I'll tell you, Fane! You must first eat a good meal—you've hardly touched anything the last week—and then we will go down to Dover together. And I think if you were to shave yourself it would be advisable; you look rather deplorable at present. Meanwhile I will send a telegram off to Maple Farm."

"Yes, do, there's a good fellow! and tell them I will take my darling down to Somersetshire to-morrow, and we shall all be together again by supper time. And—and—but I can remember nothing more, and you will know what to say. O! Reeves! I can think of nothing now but her. My dimpled darling; my sweet, sweet love; my precious Margarita! I think my heart will burst before I meet her. I think I shall go wild when I see her face once more—I think—I think——Hold me, Reeves, my head is going round. O! my God! this happiness will really drive me mad!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

The End of Hope.

THE few hours that followed were very trying ones to Reeves. He could neither make Laurence Fane eat nor conduct himself in an ordinary manner. The poor creature, raised suddenly from the depths of despair to the highest pinnacle of hope, was for a time bereft of his senses. It was impossible they could start for Dover for a couple of hours, and during that time Laurence walked incessantly up and down the room, raving about his wife, and harrowing his own mind and that of his friend by minute descriptions of what he should have done had she been lost to him, or what he should do now did any accident occur to prevent their meeting. At Reeves' request he tried to swallow food, but in his feverish condition it was physically impossible, and all he could do to keep up his strength was to drink copious draughts of brandy and water. At last they were in the train, where the presence of strangers restrained in some measure the terrible excitement which Reeves was beginning to fear would have its effects upon Laurence's health. Yet the enforced silence appeared to oppress his mind in so ghastly a manner that he

was compelled to feel glad when they had reached their destination and poor Fane's tongue might be let loose again.

They had then more than a couple of hours to wait before the Calais boat could possibly arrive, but Laurence employed his time pretty well, in ordering rooms for himself and family at the hotel, and purchasing a warm shawl and similar comforts which he supposed his wife might need as soon as she came on shore. Jack Reeves watched him in silence. Now that the moment had come so near he feared—he knew not what! But somehow the feel of the soft fleecy shawl which his friend called on him to examine and admire, made him shudder as though it had been the touch of a dead hand.

* * * * *

The afternoon was rather stormy, and a quarter to five had sounded before the Calais boat steamed up to the Dover landing place. Laurence Fane and Reeves were the first to rush on board.

"Where are the passengers by 'The Queen of the Wave' long-boat?" demanded the former breathlessly, of the first man he met.

The person he addressed stared at his impetuosity. "Some of them are yonder," he said carelessly, as he pointed to the stern of the vessel, "and some of them may be below. Are you Messrs——and——'s agents?"

"No! No! Friends of some of the passengers," replied Reeves, quickly.

"Oh. Well, I suppose you'll want to see the crew. Here's one of them," he continued, as a seaman in very tattered shirt and trousers came forward and touched his hair.

"Mrs. Fane! I want Mrs. Fane! Where is she?" said Laurence, addressing him.

"Mrs. Fane, sir. Was she amongst the passengers by the long-boat from 'The Queen of the Wave'?"

"Yes! Yes! I placed her in the boat myself. She had a baby with her."

"Oh, you were aboard, were you, sir? It's been a bad business altogether, and we may thank the Lord we stand here together. There's many a good man has gone to the bottom in her."

"But we are most anxious to see Mrs. Fane. She is this gentleman's wife," interposed Jack Reeves.

"Oh, well, sir, you'll find her below, I daresay, with the other lady. We had but two first-class females with us."

"And a little child?" said Fane, anxiously.

"And a little child, sir. That's below too, I reckon, leastways they went down at Calais."

They had no time to hear more now, but hurried off to the ladies' cabin. It was as usual, full of women and children in every stage of sickness and every style of costume. The stewardess with becom-

ing dignity blocked up the doorway to prevent their ingress to the sanctum, but it was no time to stand on ceremony.

"I want to see one of the passengers by 'The Queen of the Wave' long-boat, the lady with the little child. I must see her, tell her her husband has come to take her on shore."

At these words, audibly spoken, there was a scream and a slight confusion in the ladies' cabin, and a woman wrapped in a dark cloak, and still weak from sea sickness, came staggering forward.

"Edward, I thought we should never meet again," she exclaimed as she fell into his arms. Poor Fane had sufficient sense left to know it was not Daisy.

"Madam! madam!" he said as he tried to shake her off, "you have made a mistake. My name is Fane, and I came to meet my wife who is amongst the passengers. Margarita!" he continued in an agony of longing, "oh, where are you?"

The poor woman who had made the mistake fell back from him with a burst of tears.

"You said the lady with the child," she sobbed, "and I thought it must be Edward. Mary, Mary," she went on to a little girl who nestled up to her, "we shall never meet your dear father again."

"He may be coming," said poor Laurence, "there is no knowing—but my wife, cannot you tell me anything of her?"

"I don't know," she replied. "I understood there were only two ladies, and the other is Miss Marston, who is too ill to speak to you. Was your wife amongst the passengers?"

"Yes! Yes! Reeves, what is this awful mystery?"

"Hush, Fane; we know nothing yet for certain. There is a sailor wants to speak to you. Come into the next cabin."

"If you please, sir, were you inquiring after a lady missing from the long-boat?"

Reeves answered for him. Fane had already lost the capability of answering.

"Because I had the command of that there boat till the Spanisher picked us up, and I knows every soul that was in it, and I've got a list of 'em here to show to the agents as soon as ever I goes on shore," continued the seaman, producing a piece of paper.

The friends looked at it together. After some twenty names of men, seamen, and emigrants, was written:

Ellen Marston	}	Passengers.
Amy Hudson		
Mary Hudson		
Ann Harris	}	Emigrants.
Susan Harris		
Charlotte Harris		
Lydia Kay		
Mary Burns		
Ellen O'Connor		
Margaret Doolan		
Alice Doolan		
Jane Ellis		

"And are these all?" said Reeves, when they had finished.

"Them's all, sir."

"*But where is my wife then?*" demanded Laurence Fane fiercely, as he sprang forward. "Where are my wife and child, whom I put on board that cursed boat with my own hands? Why," he went on hurriedly as he stared in the seaman's face, "why, *you* are the man who took them from me. You are the man who stood at the head of the gangway, and into whose very hands I placed them."

"True for you, sir! I daresay I am; and now I come to think of it, I remember your face as well as you seem to do mine. I did stand at the top of that 'ere gangway and carry those poor creatures down into the boat, and I mind your giving a lady into my arms, and telling me to take care of 'er, though I never gave it a thought from that to this."

"What have you done with her, then?" cried Fane, loudly.

"Well, sir, when I said just now as them names on that list was all, I meant all as has come on shore. But it was a bitter night as we put off, as you must know well, and for more than four days we was out at sea, driven contrary, before the Spanisher give us a helping hand, and there was some poor creatures amongst us as couldn't stand the cold and the exposure, and I reckon your lady was amongst them."

No one answered him, but Reeves placed his hand upon the shoulder of his friend, who was standing bolt upright against the cabin wall, staring at nothing, apparently, but breathing hard.

"I have a list here," continued the old man, as he fumbled in his trousers pocket. "One of them as hasn't reached shore—but I cannot say certain as to their names, cos some was unbeknown to all of us. But I've got a rare memory for faces and such like, and when I got aboard of the Spanisher I asked for pen and ink and wrote down all I could remember for the sake of their friends."

"That was thoughtful of you," said Reeves, wishing to break the horrible silence.

"Well, sir. I thought it might be a help or a comfort, maybe, but 'taint much when all's said and done. If that Spanisher hadn't hailed us when she did, we should all have gone the same way, I fancy. And there she were outward bound for a foreign port, and we without a coin between us to send word home of our whereabouts. I thought she'd never a touched at Calais, sir."

"I daresay you did."

"But here's the memorandum, such as it is," he continued, producing a crumpled piece of paper. "Shall I read it to you, sir?"

"Yes, yes, make haste. Don't keep us in suspense."

“Died on the second day, Mrs. Moss, emigrant; dark eyes and hair, stout, about 50 years old; and a boy called Edward, surname unknown, aged about 3. —On the third day two children fell overboard from crowding, belonged to no one, called themselves Anne and Nelly, aged about 7 and 10, light hair and eyes. —On the 4th day a young woman died from exposure; fair hair, blue eyes; aged about 20, or a little older. Had been put in boat in night-dress; name unknown.”

“And I’m most afraid,” said the seaman, shaking his head as he folded up his document, “I’m ’most afraid that may have been the lady you’re asking after, for I mind she was very nice-looking.”

“But the child—there was a child,” said Reeves, breathlessly.

“I remember the women told me something about a baby as was knocked overboard before we started, by one of the falling spars of the vessel, sir, but I didn’t take much count of it at the time. Lor! when one’s life is at one’s fingers’ ends, as one may say, there ain’t much count taken of a poor baby. But there wasn’t none under three years old taken on board the Spanisher, that I know.”

“And is that really all that you can tell us?” demanded Reeves.

“It’s all, sir. It’s all that’ll ever be known of ’em, for what we’ve got with us you’ve seen the list of;

and I'm truly sorry for the gentleman, that I am, but fate is fate, and there's nothing more to be said about it. And saving your presence, sir, I'll just go and look after the emigrants going ashore, for in a way I'm responsible for 'em, and shouldn't like it to be said as I didn't do my duty."

So saying, with a scrape and a bow, the seaman withdrew.

"Fane!—Fane! my dear fellow—this may be a false report; this may not be true!" said Reeves, anxiously, as the old man disappeared. But there was no answer to his remark.

"We will apply to the agents, Laurence, we will not rest till we have sifted this matter to the very bottom."

He touched his friend upon the shoulder as he spoke. The upright speechless figure, without life or motion, fell prostrate on the cabin floor.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Shadow of Death.

THREE months had elapsed since the wrecked crew of the long-boat had arrived at Dover. May had returned again. In the Great Babylon, the roll of carriage wheels, the red and white striped awnings to the balconies, the new fashions displayed in the shop windows, and the new pieces advertized in the play-bills, all told one tale, that the most beautiful season of the year had commenced, and that people who had plenty of money at their command and carte-blanche to rove the world, were about to show their want of good sense by choosing that very time of all times to remain in town and waste their strength and dissipate their good looks by hot rooms, late hours and indigestible food. In the country nature told a different story. There had she clothed the young woods with tender green, and spread a carpet of pale blue hyacinths, deep purple orchises, and frail white anemones. There the silver fronds of the basket and hartstongue ferns were springing up above their bed of russet leaves, whilst the birds chanted a pæan of thanksgiving for the return of so much beauty; and the fresh, soft breeze swayed the saplings to and fro, and gently

moved the leaves that were too new to rustle a remonstrance. Round Maple Farm the blades of wheat and barley were just showing above the rich red earth, and the air was filled with the lowing of calves and the bleating of little lambs, that had sprung into existence with the first breath of spring. The whole country side seemed full of life, and hope, and gladness; but under the roof-tree itself the shadow of death had fallen and blotted out its sunshine. The inhabitants of Maple Farm still went about their several employments, and performed them faithfully. They were born to labour, and had no time, luckily for themselves, to sit down with folded hands, and cry. But the misfortune that had fallen on them with the new year was not aroused the less because they mourned in silence. The edge of it had not been blunted. Old Farmer West, whose tranquillity had not been disturbed for a day before since the loss of his wife, now went about the homestead with a slouching gait and downcast eyes. When he had occasion to speak to his men on business his manner was much the same as it had ever been, though the labourers did say they had "never known the old master cut up so sharp before;" but as soon as he believed himself unnoticed his head would sink forward on his breast, and he would saunter along the bye-paths, muttering to himself, "*Drowned! My Daisy drowned!*" The brother felt it less. It had been a terrible shock at

the time, but three months is an age in most young lives, and George West's was full of occupation and interest. He still looked very grave if any allusion was made to their common loss, but he was nursing certain private hopes of his own just then, and the chances of their fulfilment or disappointment engrossed his mind, to the exclusion of all else. And allusion was very seldom made in Maple Farm to Daisy's death, which precaution had chiefly grown out of the abandonment of Rita's grief, which threatened at one time to affect her entire system. Even now, when some careless remark called back the past, or an old ribbon, or book, or plaything turned up to bring back the remembrance of Daisy's lovely childhood, or blooming youth, her cousin's paroxysms of anguish were so excessive as greatly to alarm her friends. But she went about her household duties as before, with the power apparently of preserving general control, and the great object of her uncle and George, was to keep the subject of her dead cousin as much as possible in the background. So the three went on their weary roads, together yet apart—the old man's hair growing whiter every day; George, longing that Rita would let him comfort her for Daisy's loss, yet not daring to make the proposition; and Rita quite unconscious of his kind intentions towards her, thinking only how she could lighten this great grief to her poor uncle, and longing—Heaven only knows how fervently—that she

might soon quit a world that had become desolate to her since Daisy died. One morning she was employed in a very homely task upon the patch of grass outside the garden rails. She was counting over and feeding the occupants of some dozen coops placed on the sward. Homely as it was, the work brought the tears into her eyes, for it had always been Daisy's business to look after the young poultry—Daisy, who loved all tender creatures, from the furry kitten she carried about in her pocket, the fluffy little ducks and chickens, the ungainly spindle-shanked colts and the innocent-faced lambs, down to the poor little red-faced baby who shared her cruel grave. Rita caught up a lemon-coloured chick who had entangled his leg in a fallen twig, and was chirping loudly for assistance, and kissed it for Daisy's sake, whilst her tears wetted its velvet covering.

"Margarita!" called her uncle's voice from the farm porch. "I want to speak to you, my dear. Come into my settling room."

She brushed her hand hastily across her eyes and joined him. He was looking unusually grave, and held an open letter in his hand.

"Here's bad news from London, Margarita," he said, without further preface. "We're going to lose poor Laurence now."

She staggered backward, but saved herself from falling by grasping with one hand at a chair.

"Ah, poor child," said Mr. West, "it brings it all back again, doesn't it? That's just what I feel myself."

There was the silence of a minute, and then he went on.

"However, what I was going to say is, here's a letter from Mr. Reeves, the gentleman you know that poor Laurence has been living with, and he says he's very ill—very ill indeed—quite broken down, and he thinks some of us had better go up and see him, if we want to see him again."

"*Dying?*" said Rita in a low voice.

"Seems like it from this letter. Seems as if everyone was dying, my girl, don't it? *My poor Daisy!*" sotto voce, "*My poor drowned girl!*"

"What do you mean to do, uncle?"

"Well, I suppose George ought to go up and see him, though I don't know what use he can be; still we're his only connections you know!"

"Uncle, *let me go!*"

The tone was so imploringly urgent, Mr. West looked up in surprise.

"You, my dear! what good could you do?"

"I could nurse him, uncle, and if—if he should die—why you know how I loved Daisy, and *he* knows it, and perhaps my presence——"

What Rita further meant to say was lost. But she had said enough.

"You're right, my dear; you're quite right. I wonder I did not think of it before. Of course poor Laurence would like to have you, and there's nothing, no, *nothing* like a woman in a sick room. But how will you go? Who will take you? And will Mr. Reeves be able to get you apartments near enough to his?"

"Dear uncle, George can see to all that. He will go to town with me and stay there all the time. It may be a very little time. But how are we to leave you?"

"Don't you think of me," replied the farmer roughly; "here's this poor chap—my Daisy's own husband—delirious and dying, and I know not what, and it's our duty to go to him; and duty must be done, my dear, at any cost."

She kissed him in reply, and said no more. She was bewildered by her own proposal, and the suddenness with which he had accepted it. But when George was called in to the family conclave he seemed to take a different view of the matter. He was "awfully" sorry for poor Fane, and he would go to town by the first train, but he could see no necessity for Rita accompanying him. There would be no room for her in the house; the fever might be infectious. Fane had probably a hospital nurse to attend on him, and Rita would only be in the way. The father and son argued the point for half an hour.

Margarita would take no part in the discussion. Finally it was resolved that Reeves should be telegraphed to for his opinion. The answer was decisive.

"By all means bring Miss Hay. It is just what I wanted, but was afraid to ask. No danger of infection."

So the same afternoon saw George and Rita drive up to the door of Jack Reeves' apartments. He was in the hall to receive them.

"So good of you to come, Miss Hay," he exclaimed, without waiting for an introduction. "He's awfully ill, poor fellow. No one knows how it will end." He drew them into the lower room to tell them all about it.

"Fane has been over-working himself ever since last February," he said. "I have warned him over and over again of the consequences. I have implored him to take a rest and go down and see you all at Maple Farm, but you know how steadily he has refused to do so. I suppose the poor old boy found it was the only way to kill thought, but I knew it couldn't last. Well, on Monday I left him writing here, as usual, went down to my club, came back and found him lying unconscious on the floor. I sent for a doctor, who ordered him to be conveyed at once where he might lie pretty quiet for a few hours, when all of a sudden he became in a high fever, and broke

out raving and there he's been raving ever since. He won't know you Miss Hay—he doesn't know anyone. The doctor says it's on the brain, and he's very uncertain how it will turn out, he's brought his strength down so low by fretting. But I was sure I was right in telling you the worst."

"We are so much obliged to you," said Margarita, softly. "We should never have forgiven ourselves if anything had happened without our being here. You know, perhaps, how much he has cut himself off from us all since—since——"

"Yes, yes; I understand. So he has from me and everybody. I believe it is his unnatural reticence that has brought on this illness. His trouble has broken his heart."

"I think it would have been much better if he had taken up the Australian appointment as first proposed, instead of humbugging on here," remarked George, with a man's disregard of sentiment.

"So do I, but it was impossible to persuade him, though the gentleman to whom he was indebted for its presentation was most anxious he should do so. He insisted upon staying here and writing his brains out."

"Have you heard positively nothing more of my poor sister since that day?"

"Nothing, Mr. West."

"Then I suppose there really is *no doubt* upon the subject?"

Margarita glanced at her cousin with an expression of the intensest pain. Reeves caught the glance.

"*Not the slightest.* I should not have alluded to so painful a topic if you had not started it, but since you have done it, I must tell you that on my own account I prosecuted the most searching inquiries concerning it. I even went so far as to examine the passengers by the long-boat personally, and I have no scruple in declaring, on their evidence, that the lady who died of exposure on the fourth day was your poor sister. How could it be otherwise? She was certainly placed in that boat, and as certainly it arrived without her."

"You questioned all the emigrants yourself?"

"All who were of an age to give any information on the subject, or who were capable of doing so. One lady died almost immediately on coming on shore, and two imbeciles had been removed to the asylum. But this is of course nothing. I spoke to perhaps twenty adults, and they were unanimous in testifying to the death of the person referred to."

"But I cannot understand their ignorance of my poor sister's name."

"You must remember that they had not been forty-eight hours at sea when the accident occurred, and, as a rule, first and second-class passengers never meet.

Added to which, most of the poor women were put in the boat in their night gear. So, unless Mrs. Fane had told her name to some of her companions, it is impossible they could have known who she was."

"It seems strange she should not have told it," persisted George.

"I think there is no doubt she lost her poor little infant almost as soon as she was lowered into the boat, and her grief may have kept her silent. But come," continued Jack Reeves, as he watched the tears that were dropping on the bosom of Rita's black dress, "do not let us discuss this unhappy subject any longer. I have a little refreshment prepared upstairs, of which I hope Miss Hay may be persuaded to partake, and then we will go and see our poor patient. How glad the nurse will be to welcome you, Miss Hay! She is worn out already with sitting up by night and day, with, perhaps, as unreasonable a subject as she has ever had to tackle. Poor Fane! He was patient enough, Heaven knows, whilst he had his senses, but he's making up for it now, by Jove!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Margarita saves Laurence Fane.

THE cousins were soon able to verify Jack Reeves' assertion for themselves. Laurence Fane, in the false strength of his delirium was terrific, and for several days and nights it was impossible the women could attend him without help. But at the end of that time the fierceness of his disorder abated, and left him passively tranquil, but so weak as to be unable to lift his hand to his mouth. The danger of death was now greater than before, but the immediate necessity for resistance was past, and so Mr. Reeves and George West vacated, in a great measure, the sick room, and left the patient in the charge of his nurses, whilst they relieved the monotony of the preceding week by a little innocent gaiety. Rita was glad when they began to spend their evenings from home. They meant to be kind to the poor creature, who lay shorn of strength and muscle, like a lay figure on his bed, but their attentions were more rough than delicate. Laurence Fane neither spoke nor moved, to all appearance the fever had left him blind, deaf, and dumb, but she was never quite sure how much he saw or heard; she was always afraid lest the audible and plain-spoken re-

marks on his condition, which his male friends were in the habit of making in his presence, might be as comprehensible to himself as they were to her. No one thought he could recover, not even the hospital nurse. His pulse was scarcely to be distinguished; his limbs, notwithstanding the utmost precaution, remained cold as ice; it was with the greatest difficulty that a spoonful of nourishment was occasionally forced down his throat. Every morning the doctor said that the evening would decide the case one way or another. Every evening he was astonished to find his patient in precisely the same condition. He said he must have a constitution of iron to cling to life with so tenacious a hold, and the strength of an ox not to have fulfilled his own prognostications by dying long before. He ordered him medicine to be taken at stated intervals; but it was the beef-tea and the brandy that Margarita and the nurse poured with such untiring regularity down his throat, that saved Laurence Fane's life. These two women, each so good and devoted in her own way, lived the lives of penitents and martyrs whilst the man, who had no particular claim on either of them, required it. They never took a meal in comfort during the whole period of his illness. They would not have slept except to relieve each other of the burden of night-watching. They scarcely left the sick room but for a few moments, to inhale the fresh air at an open window, and

return again. They sat beside their great child—stretched silent and helpless on his bed—by night and day, thinking of nothing but *his* food, *his* medicine, *his* comfort; and never praising one another or taking the least credit to themselves for their patience and assiduity and care.

At last they were rewarded. At last—it was one dusky afternoon, when the only light in the sick room was the flickering reflection of the fire—Laurence Fane, after having lain for ten days, conscious yet without showing any signs of recognition, pulled Margarita Hay by the dress, and demanded, in a broken and hollow voice,

“*Who are you?*”

She stood for a moment silent, wondering if the knowledge of her identity would harm him. Then she answered, cautiously,

“Don’t you know me? I am your nurse.”

“My nurse? I have been ill then?”

“Very ill—but you are better now.”

“How strange! I thought I felt rather queer,” he said, putting his hand upon his head.

“You must try not to think—we will think for you. Let me go and fetch you some tea.”

“No, no!—stay here!”

His gaunt hand clutched at her dress again as he spoke, and she was forced to remain.

"I like you," he uttered with difficulty; "don't go away."

"I will not, if you are good, and promise not to talk."

"Take my hand," he whispered, with a faint smile.

She did as he asked her, and called to the nurse to fetch what was required; but when it was brought him, Laurence Fane, still grasping her dress, had fallen again to sleep. So she had to sit for more than an hour whilst he slept and held her. How the weakness engendered by her long vigils made her tremble at the contact!

When he roused the next morning, he seemed quite conscious and spoke coherently. The hospital nurse, whose turn it was to sit up, came into Margarita's room with the joyful intelligence.

The girl dressed herself hastily, and going down stairs, advanced to the bedside with a face full of pleasure.

"I am so glad you are better," she said, tenderly. But at the first glance he cast at her, his countenance became overshadowed, first with surprise and then with an indescribable horror.

"*Who—who are you?*" he gasped out again, evidently forgetting all about the day before.

"Don't you know me, Mr. Fane? I am Margarita," she said affectionately.

"*Margarita!*" he repeated, with knitted brows.

"Yes!" ("*Daisy's cousin*," she was about to add, but remembered herself in time.) "Margarita Hay, from Maple Farm. Don't you remember your old friend George, Mr. Fane, and poor uncle, and all the rest of us at Bushthorne?"

He gave a deep groan, and turned his face round on his pillow.

"Yes! Yes! *I remember!*" he said slowly.

"When we heard you were ill," continued Rita, thinking now the ice was broken he had better hear it all at once, "George and I came up, Mr. Fane, to nurse you. Poor George has been so anxious about you, Mr. Fane. He is not up yet, but as soon as he is he will be delighted to hear you are better. When you were at the worst, he and Mr. Reeves were with you day and night."

"It is very good of you all," he answered wearily.

"But we were so glad to be of any use. And now there is nothing left for you to do but to get quite well and strong again. Bring me the warm water, nurse," she went on cheerfully, "and I will wash Mr. Fane's face and hands, whilst you get ready his breakfast. Now, Mr. Fane, you must lie quite still and let me do just what I please with you. You have no idea what a good child you have been all through your illness, so I hope you won't begin to be naughty and tiresome now."

"I suppose I couldn't do it for myself?" he said wistfully, as he watched the preparations.

"Not just yet; but I daresay you will to-morrow or next day. You will be out of our hands before you know it, and turning up your nose disdainfully at the idea of being helped. But at present you would find it too great an effort."

She washed his face and hands and brushed his hair, and could hardly prevent tears rushing into her own eyes at the hopeless expression she met in his. He submitted to the operation passively, and eat and drank the food that was offered him, but from the moment that memory returned with consciousness, Laurence never smiled or proffered a remark again. He seemed to lie on his bed and *think*, night and day. Neither Jack Reeves' jokes nor George West's earnest solicitude could extract more from him than the most apathetic reply. The progress he had made so steadily stopped short. He waked up each morning as languid as he had been the day before.

"This will never do;" exclaimed the doctor, who began to think his credit was at stake. "There is no strength to spare for falling off, we must rouse our patient, Miss Hay, we must rouse him effectually, or he will never get up from that bed again."

But how was he to be roused, that was the question. It was discussed in conclave again and again, without effect! The men tried all they could do in the way

of cheerful conversation, but their jests were unresponded to, and their pleasant stories fell pointless to the ground. The gaunt figure on the bed could neither laugh nor cry, and Margarita Hay prayed incessantly that some way might be opened for her to move his lifeless feelings. At last she nerved herself for a powerful effort. The medical man had spoken most despondently that morning of his patient's state, and the girl felt desperate. She knew that she had read his inmost thoughts aright, and determined that at all risks she would speak out. But the road must be cleared for action.

"Nurse," she said in her most insinuating manner, when her cousin and Mr. Reeves had left the house, "I want you to go for a walk to-day, and let me remain with Mr. Fane. This may go on for some time longer, and we shall both be incapacitated for nursing if we neglect to take exercise."

"You're quite right there, Miss," replied the unsuspecting nurse, "and I will go as soon as ever I've put the room tidy."

So in another hour Margarita found herself alone with Laurence Fane. Now that the time was come she trembled, but it was with excitement, not with fear. She took her work and sat down by his side.

His worn and haggard eyes were fixed upon the blank prospect of wall from his bed-room window, and he did not stir or speak at her approach.

"Mr. Fane," she began, with assumed cheerfulness, "now that I have got you all to myself, I want to scold you a little. The doctor is very much disappointed at the slow progress you are making, and so are we all. You were getting on so nicely at first, and now you seem to gain no strength whatever. And I think it is partly your own fault."

He turned his hollow eyes toward her then, but he did not attempt to refute her assertion.

"You mustn't think me unkind to say so," continued Margarita, "but if you would make an effort to shake off the bad thoughts that oppress you, you would aid very much in your own recovery. Of course we all know how difficult it would be;—we know that—that—we can feel—we can understand——"

But here all Margarita's philosophy gave way, and the scalding tears she could not restrain, forced down her cheeks.

"Oh, Mr. Fane!" she went on suddenly, as her work slipped from her hold and she turned round and grasped his passive hand, "*Do you think I can't feel for you!* My precious Daisy! My sweet, sweet girl! It breaks my heart even to think of her, and yet I have had to keep it in for the sake of others."

She turned her streaming eyes to his, and the sight unlocked the fountain of his own silent grief.

"You know how I loved her!" she went on impetuously. "You know how she was the light of my whole life. Can you imagine what I felt when I heard that I should never see her dear face once—that she was lost to me for ever, and in such a cruel, cruel way. Oh, don't think me heartless for speaking to you like this. My heart is breaking for your trouble and my own, but I am sure it will be less hard to bear if we speak of it to one another. You have locked yours up in your own breast, and it is killing you by inches. Be wise. Be merciful to those who hope for your recovery. Don't do such violence to your feelings any more. Speak to me of your lost darling. Tell me how sweet, and pure, and good she was; how much you loved her, how wretched you are without her; and I will weep with you till we can weep no longer. Tell me you never can be happy again—that you are going mad with grief at losing her; but speak, Mr. Fane. For the sake of our dead darling speak, and don't let this unnatural silence poison your existence any longer."

He turned towards her then. He could not speak, but he was weeping. Slowly the tears came at first, as though from want of courage they could not force their way over his dry and heated eyeballs; but as she talked to him and wept over him, they came faster, until a gust of passionate emotion seemed to break down the barriers of reserve for ever.

"You have saved me," he articulated hoarsely, when the tempest was somewhat abated. "I did not wish to live. I had no hope left for this world; but whilst there is work to do I will try to do it, Rita, for your sake—and hers."

was lost to me for ever, and in such a way. Oh, don't think me heartless for speaking to you like this. My heart is breaking for your trouble and my own, but I am sure it will be less hard to hear if we speak of it to one another. You have locked yours up in your own breast, and it is killing you by inches. Be wise—be merciful to those who hope for your recovery. Don't do such violence to your feelings any more. Speak to me of your past darling. Tell me how sweet and pure and good she was; how much you loved her, how wretched you are without her; and I will weep with you till we can weep no longer. Tell me you never can be happy again—that you are going mad with grief at losing her; but speak, Mr. Fane. For the sake of our dear darling speak, and don't let this unnatural silence poison your existence any longer."

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CHAPTER XXIX.

George is disappointed.

AFTER this outburst of feeling, Laurence Fane's recovery was rapid, and in June they took him down to Maple Farm. The doctor had advised him at all hazards to try country air for a few months after his illness, and he was too weak and dependent still to form any decided opinion on the matter. So, gaunt and emaciated, looking more like a living skeleton than a man, and with the new hair on his shorn head just advanced to that stage when, as George West irreverently remarked, it would make an excellent blacking brush, Laurence said good-bye to his kind hospital nurse and Jack Reeves, and allowed himself to be driven to the railway station and conveyed to Bushthorne as if he had been a mummy or a bundle of old clothes. Once established at the Farm (where everyone tried as much as possible to divert his mind from dwelling on the past,) and the painful meeting with old Mr. West over, he gained flesh and strength every day. It was a great trial to him when he first left his room and crept down stairs to the familiar parlour, where he had first learned to love Daisy — where he had told her of his affection — where

he had sat with his child upon his knee, and felt that as far as her presence was concerned it was deserted evermore. His emotion on that occasion was so violent, and the subsequent prostration so extreme, that his father and brother-in-law were quite alarmed, and wanted to send to Taunton for a doctor. But Rita came to their assistance, and spoke to the bereaved husband so meekly and soothingly of his wife's present condition,—not lying under the cold water with her fair features marred by the progress of decay, but serenely happy in some brighter sphere than this, with her baby cradled on her bosom, that the man's strong grief was lulled into a gentle melancholy, under the influence of which he became once more tranquil. And when the first bitterness was over he began to take pleasure in thinking he was in his Margarita's home, surrounded by the people who had loved her, and the inanimate objects she had been wont to use. With the idea of sparing his feelings they had placed him in a bed-room far away from the one he had occupied with her; but as he grew stronger and more calm, he asked as a favour to be allowed to sleep in it again.

"I want to be on the same mattress my darling lay on, and to be surrounded by the objects she last used on shore. O! Rita, I can see her now as she sat that last evening over her bed-room fire, with her baby at her breast, chatting to me of the voyage that

was before us. How hopeful she was; how unsuspecting. How contented to go anywhere so she went *with me!* My poor love, how little I thought I was dragging you to your death."

Rita encouraged him in his confidence. She never bid him think of other things, nor try to salve over the wound with the ointment of distraction. On the contrary she talked with him. She enlarged on the subject. She brought him every relic of Daisy's which she most cherished, till he could weep over them no longer. She let his grief have fullest vent, and the evil worked its own cure. In a very few weeks, Laurence Fane could talk of his dead wife without emotion, though he seemed never tired of talking of her.

But his confidences were kept exclusively for Rita's ear. The subject was still too sore a one for him to dilate on openly. He never mentioned Daisy's name to her father or her brother, and the men were unaware of the extent to which it was familiar to Margarita Hay.

Laurence spoke of her as "Margarita" now. It had been a terrible effort at first. That name by which he had called his dead wife only at the most sacred moments, was hallowed in his eyes, and he could not bear to hear it lightly mentioned. But after a while, the sound had soothed him. It did not seem as though *his* Margarita were quite gone, while

her name-sake remained to whisper words and comfort.

"Margarita," he had said one day, softly, whilst she sat working by his side.

"Do you want anything?" inquired Rita, glancing at him.

"No! I did not mean you! I was thinking of my Margarita."

A look of pain passed over her features, and he saw it.

"Forgive me!" he said, "I did not mean to distress you."

"You do not distress me, except for yourself. I wish, for your sake, I had any other name."

"Don't say that. It is becoming a pleasure to me to think you are so called. Don't you believe me, *Margarita*?"

The girl coloured. Grief and nursing, added to her previous ill-health, had left her but the shadow of her former self; but when she coloured, her likeness to her once blooming cousin was most apparent.

"You look like my Margarita now," said Laurence, earnestly, seizing her hand; "like what she might have been had she nursed me through this tedious illness, without any consideration for her own health and comfort. My kind nurse—my dear sister! how can I thank you sufficiently? I have tried so often to do it and failed. Let me call you 'Margarita,' and every

time you hear the name, think that *she* is thanking you with me for all your goodness to me! I should have died without you—*Margarita!*"

She could not trust her voice to answer him; but from that moment Fane and his dead wife's cousin were "Laurence" and "Margarita" to each other. But as soon as he was well enough to exert his fingers and his brain, Margarita would not let the young widower spend his time any longer in moping about the garden and the orchard; or pouring his lamentations over the irrevocable past into her sympathizing ear. She was a woman of energy and action, and she knew that grief has little chance of cure in idleness. So she brought her now convalescent patient pens and ink and paper, and insisted upon his writing something. Fane was not unwilling to take her advice. The last month had made a wonderful improvement in his strength and spirits, and he was longing to get into harness again. Men as a rule treat their troubles very differently from women. A blight crosses the sunshine of their lives as a cancer springs up in the body—suddenly, but surely. There is no tampering with such a scourge, they must kill it or else it will kill them; so out comes the knife, and one deep sharp incision erases it for ever. But women bathe their mental cancers with milk and water, or something equally innocuous, and bind them up tenderly, and shrink when they are exposed to the light, and are as

far from cure as at the first, when men are walking the world once more, upright and free and heart whole.

Laurence Fane was not a man to forget easily. To the last day of his existence, the thought of Daisy would be a tender, sacred memory in his heart, but he was thankful to find, that with reaction came a new desire of life. He was not so much in love with his cancer as to desire to keep it when the Almighty Goodness provided a cure. So that when he found that he could think and compose again, and with the power to please himself, he set to work with a will, and became almost cheerful. Margarita and he were not separated by the new duty. He had been rather assured and self-indulgent with the feeling consequent on his long illness, and being as yet far from strong, found it convenient to call his guardian nurse whenever he wanted a quotation found, or a book of reference, and sometimes even an idea! He was astonished to find by reason of this intercourse, how nearly their minds were on a level, how well read she was, and how aptly her memory retained her learning. The course of self-instruction she had undergone at his instigation had borne its fruit, and Laurence often detected himself wondering he had never discovered the riches of this girl's intellect before, and whether the man she married (if she ever married) would be able to appreciate the treasure he would gain. During

the course of their many confidences he had told her all about his former literary reviews, the complete defeat he had suffered at the hands of his enemies, and the utter despondency it had engendered. But Margarita had not condoled with him on that occasion. Her eyes had flashed fire, and she had said decidedly:

“I would not have let them triumph over me, Laurence. I would have got up on my feet, again and again, never mind how bruised and beaten, and so long as I felt myself to be in the right have defied them to crush me for ever. What is the good of a mind like yours if it has not strength added to its power? A weak man cannot do more than fly. And right and might *must* conquer in the end, if the whole world is against it. If I had had any influence over you at that time I should have said to you, ‘Stay! It is only a coward who leaves the field whilst the battle is raging. Even if you wield your sword from the gaol or the workhouse, stay and fight with the weapons God has given you until he takes them from your hand.’”

She stopped, fearing lest her words should seem to cast any reflection on Daisy’s former influence, but Laurence did not seem to notice the unintentional allusion. He had caught her energetic tone and echoed it.

“You are right, Margarita!” he exclaimed. “How

strange that I should seem to hear the truth for the first time from your lips. I *was* a coward. I tried to fly when I should have fought. But I will never do so again. I see now that heaven has given me these talents for a peculiar purpose, and I will exercise them. There is nothing to tempt me to a different course," he added in a lower tone, "I have but myself to work for now."

This was an unanswerable assertion, and Margarita did not refute it. She only sighed and resumed her work.

But there was one person who viewed this continual intercourse between Laurence and his cousin with increasing disapproval, and that was George West. He complained incessantly of the state of affairs: declared that Fane kept Margarita from more important duties; and that now he was convalescent, there was no earthly reason he should not return to town. To sympathize with the husband of your deceased sister up to a certain point is all very well, but to watch the woman you want to make your wife sympathizing with him also, and much more effectually than yourself, is not so pleasant. At all events George West did not find it so. He spoke to Margarita on the subject, but she blushed and laughed his objections on one side, and then he mentioned it to his father.

"It's anything but agreeable for me," he said

grumblingly. "Here's poor Daisy gone, and Rita turned into a hospital nurse, with no eyes nor ears for any one but Fane. The fellow's quite able to fetch and carry for himself. Why doesn't he go back to London and look out for another wife if he wants somebody to run after him all day? I'm getting sick of it, and shall cut my stick and go back to Australia if it's to go on like this much longer."

"I can't give Fane a hint to return to town," replied his father. "He's my poor dead girl's husband, and it shall never be said he hasn't a home at Maple Farm. But if you're anxious about Rita, George, why don't you put the question to her at once. Girls don't like a man any the better for being timid of them. Ask her downright to marry you, and I'll lay a hundred of wheat to a bundle of chaff she'll say 'yes.'"

"Do you really think so?" demanded George, eagerly.

"Of course I do! Why shouldn't she? She's known you all her life, and there isn't your equal within twenty miles of Bushthorne. Just you ask her, George, and have done with it. I shall be glad myself when the business is settled; for though Margarita's always been like a daughter to me, she will be doubly so as your wife. I shall almost forget

then," continued the old farmer with half a sob, "that my pretty one's gone."

On this hint George spoke. It was now September. Eight months had gone by since the news of the wreck of "The Queen of the Wave" had arrived to sadden their little household. The broad band of crape round the old farmer's hat had grown rusty and brown, and Margarita occasionally tied up her hair with a purple ribbon, or wore a bunch of autumn flowers in her bosom to relieve the blackness of her mourning garb.

Even Fane had been known to lounge about the farm in a grey tweed shooting coat—everything was beginning to look a little less gloomy, and George thought it was a favourable opportunity for him to speak. So he followed his cousin about one afternoon when she was performing some charitable duties in the village, until she turned round laughingly to ask him what he wanted.

"I want to speak to you, Rita! I have wanted to speak to you for some time past."

"Have you, George? What is it?"

"I know I shall make a mess of it," he began in his blundering fashion, "but, look here, Rita, we've known each other ever since we were little children, haven't we? and I always cared for you a great deal more than I did for poor Daisy, and now that I am the only one left, of course, whenever my father goes,

Maple Farm and all that he has to leave will be left to me."

"George, whatever are you driving at?"

"Why, I want you to say that you'll share it with me, Rita. You've always said you looked on me as a brother, and so it will seem much more natural, I should think, that you should stay here instead of going anywhere else."

"But I'm not going anywhere else."

"They'll ask you some day—some one will ask you, Rita—and that's why I speak first, and if you'll be my wife——"

"*Your wife, George?*"

Had the man really been her brother, he could hardly have surprised her more.

"Yes. My wife. Why not?"

"How can you talk of such a thing! Why I am your sister—as much your sister as our poor lost darling was—in heart if not in deed. I couldn't be your wife. The idea is horrible to me!"

"Sister! Nonsense," replied George, with a frown. "You are my cousin. You know it perfectly well, and I have loved you for years, Rita."

"Yes, as a brother, nothing more. George, whatever made you dream of ever being anything else?"

"How could I help dreaming of it when I see how sweet and dear you are. Rita, don't say 'no,' all at once. You're very fond of my poor father,

and the old man wants you for a daughter. He says he shall think he has got Daisy back again if you marry me. And you will live here amongst all the people you know so well, and have the house poor Daisy was born and brought up in for your own. Say 'yes,' Rita; say you'll be my wife."

"I can't, George," said the girl firmly. "I wish I could."

"That is not true. If you wished you could, you could."

"Not with honour to myself. I wish I could for uncle's sake, and perhaps a little for yours, for I owe him everything, George, and it hurts me dreadfully to give you pain. But I can't, I can't. It would be a lie."

"Why don't you say at once that you hate me?" said the young man sullenly.

"Because that would not be true either. I don't hate you, George, I am very fond of you; so fond that I could give anything had this not been. I would work for you and your father to the last day of my existence, if it could do you any good, and prove my gratitude, but I can't marry you. It would be the cruelest thing in the world."

"Why can't you leave me to judge of that? I am willing to take you as you are."

"Because you don't know my heart as I know it," replied Rita, sorrowfully. "How obstinate it is, how

reserved, how much it lives within itself. George, don't speak to me any more on this subject; you can't think how it pains me."

"I shall not speak to you again, but I must say all I have to say now. Think of it once more, Rita. I have loved you for years, and I will make you mistress of all I have. When my father dies you will be without a home. What are you to do then?"

"Beg! sooner than marry a man for what he can give me," said the girl, proudly.

"You are so touchy, one can hardly speak to you, but you must know what I mean. Marry me, dear Rita, and let me place you above all want."

"Oh, George! I know you are far too good and kind to me. My dear cousin, I like you too much to marry you. I am a loving sister. I should be a very unloving wife. Don't torture me any more on the subject, but try and forget all about it or we shall no longer be able to live in peace together."

"*Try and forget all about it!*" echoed George West. "That is the way you women give us stones when we have asked for bread. How *can* I forget all about it when your presence will remind me of it every day?"

"If you say that, I shall have to leave Maple Farm."

"No, no, Rita. I didn't mean it. Don't leave us, for heaven's sake. Give me your sister's love still,

and I will try and stamp out the memory that I ever asked for more. But is your decision really final? Will you never change your mind?"

"Never, George. It is impossible. If we lived to the age of Methusaleh, I should give you the same answer. *I cannot marry you.*"

"Very good," he answered curtly, as he turned on his heel; "then I daresay some one else will."

CHAPTER XXX.

He tries to console himself.

GEORGE WEST was absent from the supper table that evening. His father asked for him, and Laurence Fane asked for him, but he was not forthcoming. The servants knew nothing of his whereabouts, and when they questioned Margarita, she only blushed and said she had not seen him since the afternoon.

"Come here, my girl!" said the farmer approvingly, as he watched her reddening cheeks. "I think you must have been buying some of those rouge pots with the new-fangled names, when you were up in London t'other day. I never saw you look so well as you've done for the last month. Is it the weather, or is it the work, or have you got some pleasant secret fluttering about in this little heart—eh, Rita? You look for all the world like my poor Daisy to-night! Doesn't she, Laurence?"

"Don't, uncle!" expostulated Rita, in a low voice; but Laurence had already glanced her way. He finished his scrutiny with a deep sigh, and cast down his eyes upon his book again.

"Where's George, my pretty?"

"I don't know, uncle!"

"Ah, you rogue!" pinching her cheeks.

"Indeed, I don't know why you should call me so. I walked with George to the village to-day, and he left me at the Taunton cross-roads. I have not the least idea where he has been since."

"Gone to visit the Taunton jeweller, perhaps. Eh, pussy?"

She knew what he was hinting at, and grieved to think how disappointed he might be when he came to hear the truth. And the knowledge made her so gentle and caressing in her manners toward the old man, that Fane could not help watching her, and thinking that he had never seen such a combination of womanly grace and tenderness and strength of mind before.

George did not make his appearance until the following day at noon. Then, muddy and rather disordered-looking, he flung himself into his father's sanctum, and slammed the door behind him.

"Well, father," he commenced roughly, "I've followed your advice. I'm going to marry."

"I'm so glad," said the old farmer, rubbing his hands. "I thought it was all right last night when I saw our little Rita, colouring up like a peony whenever your name was mentioned. I congratulate you, George. Give me your hand. She's the best and dearest girl in the world, and you'll have a wife in a thousand."

"Hold, hold, old boy. You're hitting rather beyond the mark. I said I was going to marry, but I didn't say whom."

"Whom should you marry but Rita, George?"

"Why, she's not the only woman in the world, is she, father? She's a jolly good girl, and all that sort of thing, of course. I've nothing to say against Rita; but still we've grown up rather too much, I fancy, like brother and sister, to be able to change our tactics now."

"But you told me you loved her!"

"So I did. So I do! And I spoke to her about it, into the bargain, but she talked me out of the notion, and I think, after all, she's right. I never made any difference between her and Daisy, you know; and it seems rather unnatural that we should begin to think of each other now as husband and wife. I could have done it, I dare say; but Rita doesn't fancy it—and—and—well, we agreed to say no more on the subject!"

"I'm very sorry," said his father, with a downcast countenance. "I quite reckoned upon getting our little Rita for a daughter. And now someone else will be taking her away from us. I'm an old man, George, and shan't be of much use long, and when I'm laid up by the fire, the homestead will look very lonely without a woman about it!"

"That's just what I think," replied George, eagerly,

"and so I'm determined to marry, whether or no. I consider it my duty. And I've got the promise of a girl who'll make you as good a daughter as any one, father, and me as good a wife as I shall want."

"Why? Have you been courting any one else, George?"

"I don't know what you call 'courting.' I put the question to Carrie Hughes, and she took me like a shot."

"*Carrie Hughes!*" ejaculated the farmer, in astonishment. "What, the little fat one!"

"Well, I suppose she won't make the worse wife for that," replied his son, curtly. "She's been sweet on me—so her brother says—for the last twelve months, and it is but fair she should have her innings now."

"Carrie Hughes," repeated Mr. West, "and that's where you have been passing the night, I suppose then, George?"

"Yes. I walked over yesterday afternoon, and they asked me to stay. And Carrie's not half such a bad girl you know, father, when all's said and done."

"Oh, no! I've nothing to say against her, though my poor Daisy used to laugh uncommonly at Alfred Hughes's sisters."

"Daisy used to laugh at everybody."

"Still I can't help wishing it had been our Rita. She has grown up amongst us ever since she was a

baby. She was as fond of my dear girl as if she had been her own sister. And she's the very image of her poor mother that's dead, and I should have liked to have had Margarita Hay for a daughter, George."

George rose from his seat, turned his back to his father, and looked steadily out of the sanctum window.

"Look here, dad," he said after a pause, "don't you mention that to me again. It's not to be, and there's an end of it. I asked her several times, and she said 'No.' She said she should never say anything but 'No' if she lived to be as old as Methusaleh. And I'm not going to let my heart be broken for the sake of any woman in the world."

"You're quite right, George; you're quite right, and I hope Carrie will make you the wife you deserve. Still, still——"

But his son had left the room before he could complete his sentence.

The announcement of George's intended marriage excited much discussion in the household.

"The idea of his choosing one of those pug-nosed, red-haired little Hugheses," said Fane in confidence to Rita. "What can be the secret of it?"

"You had better ask him, Laurence."

"I think I should get at the truth better by asking you."

"What nonsense."

"Is it nonsense? I heard about George's aspirations in a certain quarter long ago. I remember my poor Daisy telling me all about them when we were at Maple Farm together. She thought it the most natural thing in the world, dear loving little girl, that you should marry him. I said I was sure you never would. Was I not right?"

"You have just heard he is going to marry Carrie Hughes. We don't countenance bigamy down at Bushthorne."

"But you never would have married him, would you, Margarita?"

"Certainly not. I look on George as a brother."

"But if you had not looked on him as a brother, still you wouldn't have married him, would you?"

"How pertinacious you are. Why don't you try and dissect my feelings with regard to Alfred Hughes or Mr. Reeves?"

"Because I have no interest in *them*, Margarita."



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