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VOL. 3185.

THE DREAM THAT STAYED.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT.

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IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

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DREAM THAT STAYED

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF

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1897.



THE
DREAM THAT STAYED

BY
ALFRED HAYWARD

"I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

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TO

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BY

WILLIAM C. HARRIS

THE DREAM THAT STAYED.

CHAPTER I.

ON a late day in August, in the height of the grouse season, a party of sportsmen from Castle Dailgarroch, the seat of the Earl of Dailgarroch, had stopped to take their luncheon beneath the shade of some magnificent oak trees. Before them though at some distance, stretched the pathless moors, all roseate purple as a cloud at sunset, and heaving gently from the action of the light summer breeze, like a woman's breast.

The trees which waved above their heads, were backed by a high brick wall—bricks which had been toned down by the passing years, into delicious shades of burnt umber and madder brown, inter-

spersed with the tender green of the tiny lichens, with their fairy flowers of white and lilac mixed with the sober clothing of dark ivy.

The gillies who stood at a respectful distance, with the shooting ponies, had spread the luncheon on a plateau of grass by the wayside, and the men who were about to discuss it, formed a goodly company.

Lord Dailgarroch, their host, was a sturdy, well built country gentleman, who preferred the breeding of short horns, and the cultivation of his ancestral acres to all the gaieties of town, and seldom left his home to wander abroad. His wife shared his love for a quiet country life—he had a large family of boys and girls, who had not yet reached the age of dissipation—they were all perfectly contented with their free and untrammelled existence. They had never been mixed up, in consequence with society scandals or slanders—they heard little of the outside world—they were an exceptionally happy family.

The guests who composed the shooting party on

this occasion, consisted of Sir Guy Valmont, a young man who had recently been re-called from South Africa, where he was going after big game, to take up the title and estates of his uncle Sir Henry Valmont, who had died without leaving issue. He was therefore somewhat looked up to by the rest, as an authority on matters of sport—by all, that is to say but old Admiral Noakes, who was considered to be the most imaginative romancer in the Royal Navy, and had never been known to hear a good story, without capping it with a better. Then there were Mr. Pennington, and Mr. Arnott, two young politicians on different sides of the House, who filled in any gaps in the conversation by arguing with each other. Captain Jerrold was one of the earl's oldest friends, and Lord Edward Milner, one of his youngest, but they were all gentlemen and true men and made excellent company for one another. The last item in the shooting party, was a very important one in his own eyes,—Lord Averil, the earl's eldest son and heir—a tall gawky lad of fifteen, who had been promoted to the honour of carrying

a gun with his father's friends for the first time, and was momentarily jeopardising their lives and his own in consequence. Lord Dailgarroch's conversation was interrupted each moment by an adjuration from himself, or somebody else, to Averil to leave his gun alone or turn the muzzle aside, to which the youth invariably replied.

"O! I say! Can't you leave a man to shoot his own way?"

"I, am afraid you must find shooting over our moors rather tame work, after your South African experiences," remarked Lord Dailgarroch to Sir Guy Valmont, as they stretched themselves out to rest after their morning's work. "Averil! hand that gun over to Chads at once, or you shall have no lunch."

"O! I say, Father," expostulated the lad, "Can't you leave a fellow alone for a minute?"

"Take your choice," replied the earl, "give it into Chads' charge, or go back to the moors by yourself! I'm not going to give you a chance of stepping into my shoes, until I am obliged to."

Lord Averil did as he was told, and the conversation proceeded.

“As I was saying Valmont till that lout interrupted me, this must be poor fun for you after Africa!”

The man he addressed, was about six or seven and twenty. His naturally fair skin had been much browned by exposure, so much so, as to make it a strange setting for his blue eyes. His hair, close-cropped, was a bright chestnut colour, and his moustaches matched his hair. He had good features but with a grave, almost melancholy expression on them, that seemed very much at variance with his position. For he had not entered on his new duties as landlord of one of the finest estates in England, long before he had become engaged to the acknowledged beauty of the season, Mary Raynham, and everyone considered him to be a most fortunate young man. But there was something in his face that belied the idea—something wanting as though his destiny were not yet complete.

He turned his lithe, muscular figure round on the grass as his host addressed him.

"I assure you, Lord Dailgarroch, that you are mistaken. I never enjoyed anything in Africa, as I have enjoyed this morning. Your moors are like a breath of Heaven!"

"They will become so, doubtless, when the angel arrives to transform them," said the other, laughing. "By the way, did Lady Dailgarroch tell you that she heard from Miss Raynham this morning, and she and her father will join us in another fortnight? It is very kind of them to come to us so unceremoniously, and all because of our friendship for you. We are looking forward to making their acquaintance!"

"It is very good of you to say so," returned Sir Guy, "and I think you will like the General! He is a quiet undemonstrative man, but very genial when he unbends. His daughter tells me he has never been otherwise since the loss of his wife!"

"Has she been long dead?"

"Longer than Miss Raynham can remember," said Valmont.

"Ah! well! she won't have time to miss her mother soon," replied the earl.

His guest was silent. Like most Englishmen, he was extremely sensitive of any allusion to his private affairs, and Lord Dailgarroch, in the plenitude of his domestic happiness, was rather addicted to jesting with other men, upon their most sacred feelings.

"But surely there must be very little excitement in grouse shooting," remarked Captain Jerrold, pursuing the former subject, "after the pursuit of lions."

"Perhaps it is the absence of excitement, that makes our present occupation such a pleasant change to me, Jerrold. Excitement is not pleasure, and the pursuit of big game is better in the anticipation and the telling than the reality. There are so many drawbacks, you see! The extreme heat—the miasma—the fevers—the want of comforts, sometimes even of necessaries. The excitement led me on at the

time, but I am not quite sure now that it was worth the candle. The loss of my poor friend Hedley was enough to sober one down in all conscience!"

"He was killed by the natives, was he not?"

"We could never rightly ascertain, but he died—that was sufficient!"

The luncheon was now spread. Valmont filled his tumbler with champagne, and drank it off at a draught, as though the remembrance of his slaughtered companion were too much for him.

"It happened this way," he said presently—"my dear boy" (to Lord Averil who had regained possession of his gun) "if you would kindly turn that weapon another way, I should be greatly obliged to you. I have no particular objection to leave this world for a better, but I should prefer to be operated on more skilfully than you threaten to do."

"Chads!" thundered the earl, "take his lordship's gun away and don't give it back to him, until you have my permission."

The keeper seized the gun and carried it to a

safe distance, whilst Lord Averil, nothing abashed, occupied himself with the cold grouse pie, and Valmont resumed his narration.

“We had all turned in for the night, and knew nothing of Hedley having left the camp, till the next morning, when his native servant reported him missing. Then we didn't think much of it. He was our photographer, and often went out with his camera the first thing in the morning, before the sun was up. However, as the day advanced and we heard nothing of him, we mounted our horses and went in search. About three miles from camp we came upon his smashed camera and his dead body, poor fellow, stabbed in several places and stripped to the skin. But over the body there stood two male lions locked in deadly combat. Have you ever seen two bulldogs fighting when nothing and nobody can separate them?” continued Valmont, addressing the company.

“I've seen much worse than that, my dear boy,” replied Admiral Noakes, “I've seen two mad elephants struggling with each other—the whole of

Ceylon reverberating with their terrible cries—the steam from their nostrils showering like rain—the blood streaming from them like a river! Wait till you've seen that! You won't think much of a couple of trumpery lions then, I can tell you!"

Sir Guy bit his lip as he replied.

"I am sure of it, Admiral, but then you see, I haven't been so fortunate as you, so a lion fight appeared rather a serious thing to me, particularly when taking place over the body of one of my best friends. These brutes went for each other like bulldogs, only with twenty times the force. They were so intent upon killing each other that they proved an easy quarry, for Wilmot,—that was my other chum—and I, shot them dead whilst interlocked. They were magnificent specimens. You have seen their skins at Arlington, Jerrold!"

"Indeed I have, and envied you the possession. They are enormous!"

"Yes! The two beasts were in their prime. They had torn the body but not devoured it. Their instinct doubtless forbad their touching it after

having been stabbed perhaps with a poisoned knife. They were simply quarrelling over the body, as dogs growl over a bone which they do not want to eat. When we separated the dead carcasses, we found that the one brute had fixed his teeth so forcibly in the other's jaw, that he had wrenched one of them from the socket, and it fell out as the natives were skinning him. I had it set and wear it on my watch chain. Here it is!"

He thrust his hand into the breast pocket of his Norfolk jacket, as he spoke and pulled out his chain, but the lion's tooth was not to be seen. Only the gold rim which had encircled its crown, dangled aimlessly alone.

"Where can I have dropped it?" exclaimed the young man ruefully, "I know it was there when I dressed this morning. Have I taken my watch out since? O! yes! I did! You asked me how near it was to luncheon time about an hour ago, Lord Dailgarroch! How provoking!"

He was evidently much concerned at the loss. He stood up and turned out all his pockets and



shook his clothes, but to no purpose. The tooth was not to be found.

"The gillies shall go back and look for it at once," said his host. "Chads and Clavers, Sir Guy has dropped a large tooth, set in gold, off his watch chain, somewhere in the heather. Go back over the ground and look for it, carefully."

"My dear Lord Dailgarroch, pray do not take the trouble. It is quite impossible that they can find it! I must have dropped it in the middle of the moor!"

"Nothing is impossible, Sir Guy," interposed the Admiral. "Would you believe that once, whilst scampering over the desert in the ramshackle transits they used before the excavation of the Suez Canal, I let slip from my finger a most valuable diamond ring—an heirloom in our family, which had been presented to my great-great-grandfather by the Shah of Persia, and had been valued at one hundred thousand pounds! Well! naturally, as you may imagine, I never expected to see it again. The sand of the desert, you know, dry as dust, and shifting

its place with every sirrocco that blows. I regretted the loss of my ring, but I tried to put the thought of it away. It was impossible I should ever regain it. Well! three years afterwards, as I was returning to England, we passed through the desert again and the fact made my thoughts once more dwell upon my loss. As I was relating the story to a fellow passenger, with my eyes fixed on the sand we were travelling over, I caught sight of something shining like a star beneath the wheels of the transit. "Stop! stop!" I cried to the driver, and after a while I succeeded in making him do so. I retraced my steps, searching carefully the while and there, Sir Guy, there,—just where I had dropped it three years before, I found my ring! Wonderful! wasn't it?"

"Most wonderful!" replied Valmont.

The keepers had been standing at their master's back all this while, and the earl repeated his orders to them.

"After the admiral's story, we must certainly try to find your lost tooth, Valmont," he said—then

continued to the men, "Go at once, and do your best, and Averil, you can accompany them. Your eyes are sharp and clear!"

"Oh! I say Father, I haven't had half a lunch!"

"Your mother would say that you had had quite as much as was good for you, so do as you're told. You can carry your own gun too, and exercise your shooting powers on Chads, or Clavers, or yourself, but don't shoot all three this afternoon, because we want someone to bring back Sir Guy's tooth!"

"Not *my* tooth," exclaimed Valmont, laughing, "for it is as big as that of a horse! But I hope they may have the good luck to find it, for I would not have parted with it for a great deal. Whose grounds are within these walls, Lord Dailgarroch? They seem extensive!"

"That is Dungarvon Cottage, Mrs. Stuart's place. We call it the Convent, for the poor lady keeps herself like a cloistered nun, and hardly ever comes outside the walls."

"Why 'poor?'" enquired Valmont. "It seems a very jolly place!"

“So it is! You’d say so if you were inside. It belonged to my old friend Ronald Stuart, one of the best fellows that ever lived. But he died, ten years ago, and his widow has shut herself up from society ever since. Not that she ever mixed freely in it, but she used to visit us at the Castle, and my wife was always pleased to have her company, but we cannot persuade her to come to us now.”

“Ronald Stuart! Ronald Stuart!” said Captain Jerrold, musingly, “Where have I heard that name before? Was he not a Highlander? Had he not a place near Fochabars?”

“I believe he had!”

“What made him come down to the Lowlands then, and settle here?”

“I cannot tell you! I fancy the air was too keen for Mrs. Stuart, and he sold his place in consequence. He perfectly idolised her,—so did she, him—and if she chooses now to sit at home all the year round and mourn for dear old Ronald, I should be the last to blame her,—only she has no right to keep

the Princess shut up in her enchanted castle as well."

"And who is the Princess?" asked Sir Guy.

"Her daughter May, the sweetest creature God ever made, and I can say that, notwithstanding my own tribe of girlies at home. I call her the Enchanted Princess, for the poor child lives in Dreamland, and knows positively nothing of the outside world. She is never allowed to go to a dance or a picnic, or any such little festivity as children love. I say it's a shame, and I have told Mrs. Stuart so to her face, but it is of no use. She thinks it better that May should be brought up quietly with herself, and since she cannot make up her mind to accompany her daughter into society, prefers her not going at all."

"Beastly selfish!" observed Lord Edward Milner, "but most mothers are selfish where their daughters are concerned."

"You are right!" replied Lord Dailgarroch, "we, who are old, should not forget that we have once been young. How can Mrs. Stuart expect such a

child as the Princess—only seventeen on her last birthday—to be happy, cooped up at home with no society, but that of a couple of old women, her mother and her governess, who will neither of them see fifty again? It is ridiculous!”

“She’ll be eloping with the butcher or baker, by and by!” observed Mr. Pennington, sagely.

Lord Dailgarroch shook his head.

“You don’t know May! She is as proud as they are made! Her mother has taught her that to be a Stuart, is a nobler heritage than to be of the blood Royal, and the minx fully believes it. She is a devoted daughter. In her eyes Mrs. Stuart cannot do wrong, and everything that ‘Mother’ says must be right. She is a perfect angel amongst the poor people round us—not a tract-delivering, soup-distributing, sermon-preaching angel, but just their little friend and comforter. If a child dies for five miles round, the Princess is bound to be the first on the spot, to crown the little corpse with flowers, and kiss away the tears of the bereaved mother. She is the best little girl I’ve ever known in my life!”

"And with all this, is she pretty?" asked Lord Edward.

"Pretty, yes! and no fool into the bargain! She would not be Ronald Stuart's daughter, if she were! I am told she is quite a learned young woman, but lessons must even have been an amusement to her, to break the dull monotony of such a life. By Jove! Milner, now I come to think of it, she would be just the wife for you! You want steadying, my boy, and the Princess is such a serious little lady, she would sober you down in no time!"

"Thanks! Don't want to be sobered down," drawled Lord Edward.

"Hush!" said their host suddenly, "by Jove! here she comes!"

All eyes were at once turned in the direction he indicated, to see a young girl advancing rather rapidly towards them, with the bridle of a shaggy Highland pony looped over her arm.

She wore a white cambric dress, without any ornament and a broad-brimmed straw hat, beneath which a pair of shy hazel eyes beamed excitedly.

She had an abundance of light brown hair, straight features, and a delicate complexion, like the heart of a maiden blush-rose.

The men rose in a body to their feet at her approach.

Merely a virginal slip of a girl, not nearly matured to womanhood, and yet a company of men, old and young, stood bare-headed to greet her presence and pay homage to her sex.

The girl acknowledged the compliment by a slight bend of her head, as she addressed herself to the earl.

"Lord Dailgarroch," she said, in a quick breathless way as she reached the spot, "does this belong to you, or any of your party? I found it amongst the heather ten minutes ago." And she held out the missing lion's tooth.

"Thank you, my Princess!" replied the earl, "you have done my friend here a great service. He stumbled over a big stone just now, and knocked out his best molar as you must perceive. But let

me introduce him, that he may thank you himself. Sir Guy Valmont!—Miss Stuart!”

The girl looked up in a startled, incredulous manner, as if she did not know for the moment whether the earl were jesting or not, but as she perceived the folly of his statement, she raised her eyes to Valmont's, smiling.

They were wonderful eyes—the most wonderful eyes, he thought, that he had ever seen, of a pure hazel—the iris of a golden brown flecked with green—and they looked, not *at* him but *through* him, until they seemed to reach his very soul, with an expression, half shy, half bold, but entirely candid. Her gaze almost put him out of countenance.

“Lord Dailgarroch is pleased to be merry at my expense, Miss Stuart,” he said, “but he cannot exaggerate the service you have so kindly done me. I value my ‘molar’ very much, and was regretting its loss deeply, though it was extracted from a lion’s jaw instead of mine!”

“Did you kill it?” she asked, breathlessly.

“I did!”

"Ah! the beautiful creature! Were you not sorry?"

"Not in this case, Miss Stuart, but I have often felt a brute for depriving wild animals of a life which they enjoy so much, and we can never restore to them. But in some cases, it is necessary, you know!"

"Yes! I suppose so," she answered, but she did not seem quite satisfied nevertheless.

"I can never thank you enough for having restored it to me!"

"I am glad I found it," she said simply, "or rather, that I picked it up, for I thought it was only a white pebble at first!"

"Come along, Princess," said Lord Dailgarroch, gaily, "and have some luncheon with us!"

She glanced round and saw that the men were still standing about the table-cloth. Her natural courtesy made her put them at their ease.

"I have had my luncheon, thank you, Lord Dailgarroch," she replied, "but I will sit down by

you for a little while, if your friends will go on with theirs."

She found her way to his side as she spoke, the sheltie following her as a matter of course, and poking his rough head over her shoulder, as she took a seat beside the earl.

"And how is all going on at Dungarvon?" he enquired. "Is your mother quite well, May?"

"O! wonderfully well for her. I think this hot weather agrees with her. She sits out all day on the lawn with her work and books."

"I wish you would persuade her to venture beyond the lawn!"

May's face fell.

"Ah! Lord Dailgarroch, you know what my mother is! She seems to dread the outer world, more each year instead of less. She is as happy in her present life, as she will ever be again!"

"And are you happy too, my dear?" said her friend.

"I could never be happy without her!" the girl said quickly.

“But we have seen too little of you of late, May, and the lassies at home are always asking when you are coming to the Castle again. I am sure Mrs. Stuart would spare you for an hour occasionally if she knew the pleasure it gave us. The Countess and I intend to invade The Cottage to-morrow, and see if we cannot persuade her to let you join us on Averil’s birthday next week, when we are trying to get up a carpet hop!”

May’s eyes sparkled with delighted anticipation.

“O! how kind of you and dear Lady Dailgar-roch! If mother only would! If it is a children’s party, perhaps she will! And I should be so delighted! I have not forgotten my dancing, though I am very hard up for partners. Sometimes I waltz by myself, and sometimes with Toby, whilst Madame de Leuille plays for us. But I have not forgotten it—I have not indeed.”

She was only a schoolgirl then, brimming over with the delightful prospect that opened before her.

“Well! well! we must try what we can do! Tell your mother that we purpose calling on her to-morrow

afternoon. I know she does not like to be taken by surprise. And we shall succeed, May! I shall not quit the house till I have obtained Mrs. Stuart's consent to your joining us!"

"O! you dear!" cried May impulsively, and then reddened like a rose at finding she had been so outspoken before a company of strangers.

"I think I had better return home now," she said, rising to her feet, "or mother will get nervous about me!"

"And where's the duenna?" demanded the earl, "it is a marvel to see you out of doors by yourself, Princess!"

"Madame de Leuville has a sick headache to-day and is keeping her room," replied the girl, "but I have only been to visit my poor people, Lord Dailgarroch, and I generally do that alone. Kelpie and I make long excursions into the country sometimes. He is such a good little fellow. He will stand outside a cottage for me for hours, without stirring an inch."

And she kissed the nose of her pony as she spoke.

"There are several other good little fellows who would do the same service for you for the same reward, May!" laughed the earl, as he waved his hand to her in farewell. "Don't forget to tell your mother that we are coming to see her to-morrow."

All the young men rose to their feet again as she prepared to leave them, but Valmont was the first to gain her side. But she had jumped into the saddle before he reached her, her steed not being much higher than an armchair, and about as steady.

"Thank you once more for bringing me back my treasure!" he said, as he placed the reins in her hand.

May smiled for answer, and gave him another glance from her bewildering eyes—then turned her back upon the shooting party, and ambled soberly away in the direction of her mother's gates.

A silence fell upon the sportsmen as she disappeared, broken by Lord Edward Milner.

"By Jove! what a beautiful girl!" he said with

a low whistle. "I think I shall take your advice, Lord Dailgarroch, and 'go in' for her!" Guy Valmont hated him for the remark. It was offensive to hear a young fool like that, mention a pure, untainted girl in so flippant a manner. But the earl made some laughing reply, and in another minute, the party had risen to pursue their occupation.

CHAPTER II.

GUY VALMONT shot indifferently for the remainder of the afternoon. His thoughts were elsewhere. He was haunted by a resemblance which he could not identify. Of whom was it, that Miss Stuart reminded him? He was quite sure that he had never met her before, and yet her features seemed familiar. A puzzle of this sort disturbs a man sometimes more than a serious matter.

"Missed again, Valmont, by George!" the earl exclaimed, and then he became conscious that he had been wondering the while, if he could have encountered this girl's mother, or father, in society in days gone by, and that her likeness to her parents formed the hazy recollection that teased his memory. But after all, that was very improbable, for Lord Dailgarroch had said that the Stuarts had lived in

seclusion for years, and their daughter was already seventeen—he was thinking nonsense!

He tried his best to shake off the impression she had made upon him, and to address his attention to the matter in hand,—to laugh at the Admiral's stories, which usually began at some critical period when silence was imperative—to echo his host's pleasantries or Lord Edward's meaningless jokes. But it was useless, and at last, he delivered his gun to the keeper and said he had had enough shooting for that day.

“I don't know whether any of you fellows have noticed it,” he said, “but the sun is deucedly hot!—and the thermometer at about 100, in the shade! I feel very much like going home!”

And he lifted his cap and passed his handkerchief over his face and round the back of his neck as he concluded.

“Call *this* hot?” exclaimed the Admiral, “why you don't know what heat is! You should have anchored outside Canton with me, sir, in 1860. The planks of the quarter deck curled up as though

warped, and the sails were scorched as brown as toast. Fifteen men out of my crew died of sunstroke, and the rest were laid up. I alone withstood the weather, but I met with a nasty accident. Placing my hand one morning upon the cannon, I experienced an unpleasant sensation, and in another minute the whole of the skin peeled off the palm like a piece of linen. How it was that my brains stood the atmosphere, I have never been able to determine."

"Perhaps your skull was so thick it couldn't get through it!" giggled Lord Edward.

"No! sir, no!" replied the Admiral, severely, "I daresay you consider the allusion very witty, but less wit than yours has made men challenge each other in my day. It was not the thickness of my head, sir—which is a silly jest which none but a numskull would have thought of—that saved my brains but a cabbage!"

"A cabbage!" echoed the earl, "and how was that, Noakes?"

"Yes! my dear old friend, a cabbage! I always wore one inside my cap—it was gathered fresh for

me each day. A simple remedy but an effective one! Had it not been for that cabbage, I do not know where I might have been at the present moment—as it is, I am here!”

“I didn’t know that cabbages grew in China!” remarked Lord Edward, who was smarting under the old man’s rebuff.

“Doubtless, there are a good many things which you don’t know, my Lord,” replied the Admiral, “and when you have gained the experience that I have, you will be the better able to gauge the value of your knowledge of to-day.”

“I think it is about time we turned our feet homewards,” said the earl, who much disliked this kind of squabbling amongst his guests,” Lady Dailgarroch will expect to see us at afternoon tea, and hear all our news.”

The ponies were summoned, and the party mounted and jogged back to the Castle.

The Countess of Dailgarroch was very fond of Sir Guy Valmont. His mother, now long deceased, had been one of her earliest friends, and she felt cordially

towards her son for her sake. As the shooting party entered the drawing room, where she sat at the afternoon tea table, she made a space beside her on the sofa, and beckoned Valmont to sit down there.

"I hope you have had a good day," she commenced, "but you must have found the heat very trying. The girls and I have done nothing but lounge on the lawn, and even that seemed too much exertion. Dailgarroch tells me that you met my favourite May Stuart! What did you think of her! Is she not very pretty? But perhaps—" with a smile—"you have become fastidious on the subject of beauty, since you are about to marry Miss Raynham."

"Do you know, Aunt Flo," he said,—he had always called Lady Dailgarroch "Aunt Flo" since his childhood, though she was no relation to him—"I think beauty is entirely a matter of opinion. One man's meat is another man's poison, in that respect!"

"With ordinary girls, yes!" replied Lady Dail-

garroch, "but not with one like Miss Raynham, whom the world has chosen as its type of loveliness. I have heard that the photograph shops were full of her portrait this season."

"Yes! Very much to my disgust, and I think, her father's also! She is too good to be hawked about for every lout who chooses, to buy her portrait and carry it home. I mean to put a stop to it as soon as I can, by buying up all the negatives."

"And she will consent to bloom unseen for your sake?"

"O! dear, yes! She is one of the best girls in the world, and thoroughly attached to me!"

"I am quite anxious to see her," said the Countess, "she must be my niece, Guy!"

"I hope so, Aunt Flo."

"Have you had your letters yet? There was quite a little pile for you by the mid-day post."

"No! Harris will have taken them up to my room, where I must follow if I am to be in time for dinner. Au revoir!"

He saw the letters waiting for him as he entered

his apartment, but he had no time to open them then. It was not till two o'clock that he left the billiard room, and ascending to his own quarters, dismissed Harris, and throwing off his coat and waistcoat, drew a chair to the open window, and sat down to have a quiet smoke before he turned in. It was a lovely night,—the dark blue sky was studded with millions of stars, and a soft balmy breeze was stirring through the branches of the trees of Dailgarroch Park. His chamber windows looked upon the terraces from which rose up the odours of a thousand flowers—with the rich, enervating perfume of roses, sodden by the day's heat, and reviving under the dews of night. Every now and then a gentle twitter proved that some sleepy bird had encroached upon his neighbour's perch, or perhaps that a little songster was home too late, and his mate was remonstrating with him. Far off in some hidden dell a nightingale was singing—else, all was peace and rest. *2 y house*

Sir Guy smoked for some time, meditatively—hardly conscious on what theme his thoughts were

running. What a sweet name "May" was for an English girl. The beautiful flower from which it was taken—the may so indigenous to England, with its pure white blossoms, each petal tinged inside with a delicate flush of pink;—with its fragile stamen, and its scent of bitter-sweet. No name could be more appropriate to Miss Stuart, than May. As soon as he saw her, she had reminded him of some white flower in its creamy purity! It was hardly wonderful that her mother feared the contact of the world for her! He could not fancy her taking her part in heated assemblies, a slave to Fashion and Frivolity— with all her lovely maidenhood exposed (as it were) for the public satisfaction. No! Her mother was right! She was better brought up by her side within the walls of Dungarvon Cottage!

He went over her features in detail—he wished he could remember of *whom* it was, that she reminded him. He thought of the broad, low, white brow, shaded by its clusters of curling hair—of the nose, straight and fine as carved ivory, but with opened nostrils that bespoke candour, and whispered

of pride—of the fresh childish mouth with its dewy lips, each with a little curve downwards at the corners, as though tears were much akin to laughter in the girl's temperament and constitution. Lastly—of the wonderful eyes, of brown, streaked with green, the irises clear as crystal and looking like agates under running water—the whites of pale blue like a bird's eggshell—the lashes thick and long, and the brows well-marked and somewhat dusky. Marvellous eyes, with untold capabilities within them of suffering and enjoyment—he was sure he had never seen such in his life before.

But here Guy roused himself rather sharply. What was he about, sitting there and dreaming of a girl who was nothing to him,—of whom he had no right, even to think? It was all on account of not being able to join that broken thread in his memory, where the name of the person she reminded him of, had been lost in the mists of Time. He rose from his seat, and leaving the window, approached the table where his letters lay. There was one from Miss Raynham amongst them. He took it up first.

"Dear Mary!" he murmured, as he placed the envelope to his lips. He opened it quickly and read it with interest.

"My darling Guy," it ran. "How glad I was to receive your letter and know that you are enjoying yourself with your old friends. I wish I could say we were doing the same. This place" (she was writing from the house of an uncle) "is abominably dull. I have told you that they are very pious, in the wrong way, which means family prayers, night and morning, and church three times on Sunday. I have positively refused to attend the prayers, and church more than once on Sunday, so I am in their black books all round. Aunt Elizabeth looks upon me as a lost soul, and says she sincerely pities the poor young man who is going to marry me. That's *you*, at least I hope it is! Do you pity yourself? If so we had better cry off before it is too late! My sole amusement here, is eating fruit till I am ill. I tried to get tipsy last night, but I couldn't accomplish it, Uncle John's champagne is too nasty. Father says he shall have the gout if he stays here much

longer. He hates them as much as I do, but you see Uncle has all the money in the family, and he *must* leave some to me, as he has no children himself. But it is a bitter wage to pay for it! Father and I are looking forward so eagerly to visiting Dailgarroch Castle!—for more reasons than one. How kindly the Countess wrote to me, I seem to have known her all my life. I am sure I shall like her as much as you do. And O! to be with *you* all day long—to be able to sneak away together in the grounds and exchange our little confidences—how sweet it will be! Guy, do you know how much I love you—that each parting, however short, makes me love you more and more—and I am looking forward to the time when all your horrid shooting will be over, and—you know what—will happen, and I shall be with my own dear, dear love for ever and ever. Not only in this world, Guy, but in the other too, for I could not live anywhere now without you. That is *my* religion. (How shocked poor dear good Aunt Elizabeth would be if she could read what I have written. “Making a sinful fellow creature into

an idol!" she would say. Well! good-bye for a little while, sinful fellow creature. I like you just as you are, bad or good. Your very loving Mary.

"P.S. Thousands and thousands of kisses."

He read the girlish epistle over twice—smiled at its little bits of fun, and kissed its little bits of love—finally replacing it in the envelope with the ghost of a sigh.

"Dear sweet Mary!" he thought, "how seldom so beautiful a woman is so unselfish! I shall be a lucky man when I get her!"

He pulled a writing case towards him, and unlocking it, drew forth a cabinet photograph of his fiancée. It represented a lovely girl of twenty-one, arrayed in a dress that displayed all the beauty of her rounded arms and perfectly moulded bust and shoulders. Her eyes which were dark blue, were looking him full in the face—her head was crowned with a pile of golden-auburn hair—her mouth was curved in a plaintive smile. As soon as Valmont looked at this portrait, his treacherous memory recovered itself.

“By George!” he exclaimed in a voice of astonishment, “there it is! Miss Stuart reminds me, in some unaccountable manner, of Mary. And yet their features are not alike! Eyes, totally different in colour and expression, and Mary’s nose is far the saucier of the two, it has the slightest possible elevation at the tip—her hair is a richer colour, and her complexion more glowing. Certainly Mary’s mouth has the same droop at the corners as Miss Stuart’s, and both their faces are oval, yet such a number of girls have oval faces. No! it must be in the expression of the mouth. I have always maintained that the mouth is the most expressive feature in a person’s face, and theirs are certainly similar! It is very strange, but only a coincidence of course. The funny part of it is that I should have observed it! And Mary, when in a wicked mood, has a look of diablerie, that Miss Stuart could never, I feel sure, assume. Mary licks her all to fits though, there’s no doubt of that! Well, goodnight my beauty,” he continued addressing the photograph, as he put it back into his writing case, “the sooner

there is no need to say 'goodnight' to you, the better!"

He sat down again by the window with the view to think a little more of Mary, but after a space, was vexed to find that his thoughts had wandered back to the event of the past day, and were speculating if Miss Stuart's eyes were green streaked with brown, or merely brown, flecked with green.

"O! this is d—d nonsense," he exclaimed angrily, rousing himself, "this is the sort of thing that a man must curb. It is utterly ridiculous to think that a fellow cannot control his thoughts, if he chooses to do so. Carelessness in such a particular might lead one into a lot of trouble, for taking no heed, is what makes men inconstant to their vows, and then they blame the women for it instead of themselves. I'll go to bed."

He flung himself down upon his couch, but it was long before he went to sleep. He lay there, trying to force his mind from dwelling on Miss Stuart and to fix it upon Mary Raynham, and the two girls became entangled in his dreams, and gave him a sort

of troubled nightmare, from which he rose unrefreshed and somewhat moody.

On descending to the breakfast table, he heard that Lady Dailgarroch was indisposed, and unable to quit her bed. The extreme heat of the previous day had been, the earl declared, too much for her, and she felt unfitted for anything but rest. Meanwhile her eldest daughter, Lady Alice Kestrel, a girl of sixteen, took her mother's place at the breakfast table, and played hostess to their numerous guests with an assumption of great dignity.

As soon as the meal was concluded, Valmont went out for a ride by himself amongst the leafy lanes and across the moorlands. He had brought two horses with him to the Castle,—one, his own especial favourite, Merrylegs, and the other, a beautiful Irish filly, which he was gentling for the use of his future wife. "The Colleen" gave him unusual trouble that morning. She was so desirous of scudding over the moors at her utmost speed, that it took both his hands to hold her, so that mind and body were fully occupied, and he dwelt no longer

on the little perplexity that had worried him the day before.

"Holloa!" cried Lord Dailgarroch, as "The Colleen" trotted into the stable-yard, as meekly as a lamb, a couple of hours later, "I've been looking for you everywhere, Valmont. I want you to walk with me over to Dungarvon Cottage this afternoon."

"To Dungarvon Cottage," repeated Sir Guy, in surprise.

"Yes! My wife is quite unable to do so, and we mustn't disappoint the Princess. She'll be looking out for us to plead for her appearance here on Averil's birthday, and I wouldn't break my word to her for anything."

"But one of your daughters,—Lady Alice—" stammered Valmont.

"Not a bit of it! I want you! And you'll be delighted with Mrs. Stuart, one of the most elegant and refined women you ever met."

"O! doubtless! The question is, if she will be delighted to see me!"

"Of course she will!"

"You said she was so averse to society!"

"So she is, but it will do her good to pull her out of her shell. But at all events she cannot complain of my taking one of my most intimate friends to call on her. And it is a jolly walk—just three miles over the moors, that is to say if you are not tired after yesterday's tramp."

"O! dear, no! I am not in the least tired. If it is your wish I will accompany you, of course," replied Sir Guy, in an uncertain manner, though secretly pleased at the idea of seeing and speaking to the girl who had so much attracted him again.

CHAPTER III.

MEANWHILE May Stuart was sitting by her mother on the lawn—the French governess being still laid up—and repeating to her half a dozen times over, all that had been said and done during her encounter with the shooting party from the Castle the day before.

Both ladies were occupied with needle work, but whilst May kept her eyes fixed upon hers, Mrs. Stuart was watching every look and noting every tone of her voice, and could not fail to observe how unusually flushed and excited she appeared, whilst reciting her simple adventures. “And fancy, mother, Lord Dailgarroch trying to make me believe that the tooth really belonged to Sir Guy, and for the moment I did believe him, and it made me look so foolish, and Sir Guy laughed, and——”

“But you know, my darling, that Lord Dailgarroch

is always full of fun and trying to take someone in. You should have been prepared for him!"

"Yes, mother—but before so many strangers, six or seven at the least, and I staring at Sir Guy to see where the tooth had come from—a tooth as big as—well! let me see!—as big as your thimble and twice as long. It was too ridiculous!"

"And who were the other men, May?" demanded Mrs. Stuart.

The girl hesitated and coloured faintly.

"I don't think that I remember—I am not sure that I heard their names. Sir Guy Valmont was the only one that Lord Dailgarroch introduced to me. He was *so* glad to get the lion's tooth back. He thanked me, O! ever so many times! Was it not lucky that I spied it, mother, all amongst the heather? When Sir Guy was helping me mount Kelpie, he said——"

"What time did you meet them, my child?"

"About two, just as I was returning from Pitcarrie. And O! Mother, I quite forgot! I have such a

wonderful thing to tell you! Maggie Rowan has a baby!"

Mrs. Stuart's eyes opened wide with horror.

"A—baby?—" she gasped.

"Yes! such a darling! a little boy! I nursed him for a long time. He was only born the night before. He has such a funny little red face, like a squashed strawberry, and weak blinking eyes that cannot keep open more than a minute, but Effie says they will come all right by and by. And I want to ask you if I may buy a long white cloak for him to be christened in, like I gave to our coachman's baby, for he has very few clothes, Maggie says, and it would please her so!"

May was astonished by her mother's decided negative.

"No! no! most decidedly not! What was Effie Moore about to let you enter the cottage? I am disgusted to hear what you have told me. You must not go there again, May! I forbid it! You understand!"

"But why not, mother dear?" pleaded the girl, "what objection have you to my doing so?"

"Because—it is so difficult to tell you, May—because, Maggie Rowan has no right to have a baby. She is a wicked girl, and you must encourage her no longer."

"But her sister Effie has five," persisted May.

"Her sister Effie has a husband, my dear! Cannot you see the difference?"

"Then poor Maggie has no one to help her work for her baby! She will have to do it by herself. Isn't that all the more reason we should help her, mother?"

"No! dear May, no! I cannot explain such things to you. You must take my word for it! Maggie is a bad girl, who has no fear of God before her eyes, and it is our duty to show her that we think so. You must not visit her again!"

"But the poor little baby has done no harm," said May sadly.

"Perhaps not, but it is God's will that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children! If

the poor baby grows up to be a man, he will soon find that out. Good people—respectable, proper-living people, will turn against him, and throw his mother's sin and his own misfortune in his teeth!"

May grew indignant.

"Not *good* people," she exclaimed, "not people who love God, surely, mother! Hard hearted, wicked people, you mean—people who hope to creep into Heaven wrapped round with their own respectability. O! it is cruel—cruel! I thank God that I am not one of those sort of babies, for it would make me hard and cruel in my turn."

Her words seemed to affect Mrs. Stuart strangely. She turned as white as ashes, and sank back in her basket chair.

"May! May!" she said, "what are you saying? Who has been talking to you?"

"No one mother, but yourself! I hope you do not think that I have said anything wrong. Of course I know that Maggie ought to be married—perhaps you are right in forbidding me to go to her cottage until she is married—I will tell her so—but

what has that to do with the poor little baby who has no clothes? You see he has no father to buy them for him, and poor Maggie has been working in the fields all the year. That cannot leave much over for baby clothes. Ah! mother, think, if *I* had been a poor forsaken little baby like that—without a proper father or mother—how would *you* have felt if people had spurned us both for it? It would have broken your heart, wouldn't it?"

"Yes! yes!" murmured Mrs. Stuart in a low voice.

"And I think, when we have been born not only in good circumstances, but with such a good father and mother as mine, one ought, if only in gratitude to God, to try and alleviate the lot of others who are less fortunate than ourselves!"

"Yes, yes!" repeated the elder lady. "Dear May! do exactly as you like in this matter. Let your pure heart guide you, and—and—be thankful, darling—be thankful that no such terrible lot can ever overtake you!"

"Dearest mother, are you ill?" said May, her

attention arrested by Mrs. Stuart's voice. "You are looking very pale! Shall I fetch you your salts or eau-de-Cologne?"

"No, dear! Leave me alone! I shall be better presently!"

"It is a terrible misfortune," resumed May, "to be without a father! I have lost mine, so I can feel for this poor little child, who may never know his. O! Mother, why did Father die, when we wanted him so?"

"May! May! don't talk like that, or you will break my heart!"

"God's ways are so inscrutable," continued the girl, as she bent over her work. "*You* loved him so, and I should have done the same if he had lived until I could appreciate the value of his love. My brave, gallant, handsome father! the best man, Lord Dailgarroch says, that ever lived. It makes me so proud to hear him say so! And to think of all the battles he was engaged in, and of the honours he won. And then he laid all his ambition down to shut himself up in a country place like this with you

and me, and just because it made us happy. You must have been very proud to be his wife, mother!"

"Yes! darling—very proud!"

"Now you know in your circumstances, I wouldn't have let my hero hide himself from society. I should have made him remember what was due to the people he had fought for—the Government who had loaded him with honours, and I should have forced him to go into the world, at all events sometimes so that I might have gone with him, and seen how people envied me for being the chosen companion of his life! My pride would not have been satisfied with this hermit-like existence! I should have felt as if I possessed the Kohinoor, and kept it packed away in cotton wool where no one could enjoy the sight with me!"

"It was your dear father's wish," sighed Mrs. Stuart.

"Ah! well! it is all over now!" said May, "and nothing can be altered. But it will always be my greatest pride to remember that I am his child and yours, dear mother! No one can take that away

from me! I tell him so whenever I take fresh flowers to his grave. I bend my mouth down to the grass and whisper, 'Darling father! don't forget your child, for she can never forget her pride in knowing herself to be yours.' I wonder if I am also of the stuff that heroes are made of, mother!" continued the girl smiling, "or how I should come out in circumstances that demanded courage and determination,—how I should bear shame or humiliation? Not well, I am afraid!"

"May, May! don't speak of such a contingency! Why should you. What shame can reach you, in this peaceful secluded country life? Let us go on as we have begun, dear! Don't begin to fret and pine after a society which I could never make up my mind to enter again—which you may never have the opportunity of entering! Be contented, darling child! Try to be contented!"

May glanced at her mother with surprise. She did not understand the anxious feverish tone her voice was assuming.

"Why! of course! I *am* contented," she answered,

"I am happy as the day is long with you and my books and my animals—You know that surely, dear mother, without my telling you! But there is the drive bell! That must be Lord and Lady Dailgarroch! You have not forgotten that they are coming to see you this afternoon, have you? Shall I order Brown to bring tea out upon the lawn? Now! we will have a nice hour's chat, and you must forget all about disagreeable things!"

She kissed her mother, as she concluded, and arranged the fleecy shawl about Mrs. Stuart's shoulders.

They waited for the sound of carriage wheels upon the drive, but shortly heard the sound of feet instead, and Lord Dailgarroch and Sir Guy Valmont, having left the beaten track, were seen walking across the lawn to where they sat.

"It is Sir Guy, the one whose tooth I found," whispered May with a face that had suddenly flushed crimson, to her mother.

"Well! Mrs. Stuart," cried the earl in his hearty manner, as he came up to her, "if the mountain

will not come to Mahomet, you know, Mahomet must go to the mountain, and so here I am, after this long spell of absence. Let me introduce my friend Sir Guy Valmont to you! Lady Dailgarroch sends her affectionate greetings and a thousand apologies for not having accompanied me here this afternoon, which she quite intended to do, but a nasty attack of neuralgia, brought on by the heat, keeps her indoors. Well! Princess! and how do you do? Blooming as usual I see! Dungarvon Cottage must be a very healthy spot to be accountable for such roses."

"I am very pleased to see you, Lord Dailgarroch, and your friend," replied Mrs. Stuart in a feeble manner, and then to her daughter, "Go, dear, and tell Brown to bring us out tea here!"

"Thank you for saying so, but we don't see half enough of you, Mrs. Stuart, and the Countess is very much put out about it. We have not sufficient society in Dailgarroch to be able to dispense with yours."

"Lady Dailgarroch is always kind," was the

reply, "but she knows what a poor creature I am, and that of late years I have never been able to summons courage to face the world. I am better at home, quiet and at peace. It is the only thing left to me!"

"But you have your daughter to consider!" rejoined the earl a little brusquely, for he lost his patience sometimes with Mrs. Stuart.

"I am happy to say that dear May thinks in all things as I do!" she replied, "she loves our quiet life, and she has no father unfortunately to guard her from the dangers of the world."

"Now, I want to talk to you a little on that subject," said Lord Dailgarroch, in a determined manner.

Mrs. Stuart turned to where May was standing by, with a flushed cheek and eager look in her eye.

"The tea, darling! You forget——" she said, for she thought she would prefer to hear what the earl had to say to her alone.

The girl nodded and turned to walk towards the house.

Guy Valmont, who had been regarding her curiously since his arrival, trying to find out where the resemblance between her and Mary Raynham lay, and who had just come to the conclusion that it had been a chimera of his brain and there was no likeness between them at all, half rose from his seat as May obeyed her mother's suggestion, and wished he might follow her. A happy accident opened the way to him. As she was carrying off an armful of knitting, the ball of wool fell from her hand and rolled away half over the lawn. Guy jumped up and pursued it and by the time he reached her side, some little distance divided them from their elders, and they walked quite naturally into the cottage together.

"What a charming retreat you have here, Miss Stuart," he commenced, "this cottage and the grounds are perfect!"

"Not half so grand as the Castle," laughed May.

"But far more cosy—more like Home," said her companion. "I should think it must be a very old building!"

"It dates from Elizabeth, I believe, but it is most solidly built, with stone walls three feet thick. We have a box tree walk, more than two hundred years old—haunted of course, but with nothing worse that I can see, than earwigs and beetles."

"Many ladies would prefer a ghost," said Valmont.

"I suppose so, but I am not one of those nervous creatures who scream at a mouse. I have been reared differently, and I love all living things, great and small. When I have given Brown my mother's message, I must show you the other side of the cottage. In spring it is like a dream!"

Having spoken to the servant, she passed through the hall to where, on the opposite side, a glass door opened on a lovely flower garden, surrounded by a belt of the choicest shrubs.

"The best of them are over now," said May, regretfully, "but if you could see them about May or June, you would say that Heaven could scarcely be lovelier. We have then, the wild cherry, the acacia, mountain ash, lilac, syringa, laburnum, arabis,

white and pink may, and barberry bushes, all flowering at the same time. Mother and I should be poetesses or novelists or something useful, as I often tell her, in order to turn all this beauty to account. But alas! we are only a very sorrowful woman, and a very stupid little girl!"

"I cannot hear you speak of yourself in so depreciating a manner, Miss Stuart!" remonstrated the young man.

"Ah! but you cannot help it, for it is just the truth! Had my dear father lived—O! do you know!" cried May, interrupting herself, "I have been thinking so much of you since we met!"

Guy coloured at the innocent admission. It was what he too had been doing, thinking, he was afraid, a great deal too much of her, but he would not have presumed to say so.

"Have you?" he answered, looking down into her fearless eyes. To another girl he might have made the confession the opportunity for some piece of flattery, but with this girl, he could not! He felt that her frank intelligence hid nothing behind it.

"Have you? Why?" he repeated.

"Because—though I never knew my father, except as a little child may know a man—I feel that he and you would have been such friends! He was a great sportsman also, I have heard mother say, and such a brave, noble man. He won the Victoria Cross for valour, and had a lot of other medals. They are under a glass case in mother's boudoir. Some day I will show them to you. And though I do not think, if I were a man, that I could ever kill anything, it must be a very brave thing to go after lions. I shall never forget that I found your lion's tooth. It was quite a coincidence in my life. And I suppose there is a story attached to it, since you value it so much."

"Yes! Miss Stuart, there is, but a very sad story, which I do not think you would care to hear. A friend of mine was killed in Africa,—the natives and I arrived just in time to stop the lion, from whose jaw we took that tooth, mauling his dead body. That is why I value it, because I am glad to have been able to prevent such a sacrilege!"

"O! I quite understand! It would have been a desecration! But you are not going back to Africa again, I hope!" she said, turning shy eyes upon him, as he walked beside her. They appeared to have forgotten that they had not come out for a constitutional, and were pacing round and round the path without a thought of anyone but themselves.

"I think not!" replied Sir Guy, smiling, "I am afraid I shall not get the chance!"

"Don't you love England then?" with a little fall in her voice.

"Very much, and Scotland better! My mother was of Scotch descent, so I must always love her country for her sake!"

May's face brightened.

"I thought you had Scotch blood in you," she commenced, "your hair—"

"Carrots!" he corrected her.

"No! no!" indignantly, "it is not carrots at all—it is what they call golden auburn. I won't have you run it down. It's Scotch—my father had it, but

mine, you see, is like my mother's. People say I am just like her! Do you think so?"

"I think you are like yourself, and no one else in the wide world," he replied rashly.

"Do you?" said May, "I am glad! Shall you stay at the Castle long?"

"I do not expect to remain there, more than a month at the outside."

"I shall be so sorry when you go! We see so few people here! Mother is not well enough to go out, and I have no friends! I often wish I had a sister, or a brother to keep me company."

"Brothers are useless creatures," replied Valmont; "as soon as they have ceased being troublesome, they go out into the world, and you have the nuisance of writing to them at regular intervals, with nothing to say. I know what brothers are—I had four of them."

"And are they dead?"

"O! dear no! Very much alive, especially since I have come into my property. They take good care to keep up a correspondence with me now!"

"If you have more brothers than you want, you must send one over here, to take your place when you leave Dailgarroch, Sir Guy."

"Indeed, no one shall take my place, that is, if you will honour me with your friendship, Miss Stuart!"

"O! my friendship is not worth having," said the girl, "no one wants me, but mother! You see I have nothing to talk about, except my flowers, and my animals, and nobody wants to hear about them. All my society lies in my books and sometimes I read till my brain feels quite empty, like a dried-up nutshell."

"Once you came out in the world, Miss Stuart, you would find so many things to talk about, that your tongue would not be able to run fast enough."

"Ah! yes! perhaps, but when will that be?" asked the girl, a little sadly.

At that moment the old butler Brown was seen waddling over the grass to meet them.

"Miss May! Miss May!" he said, "The mistress is waiting for you to pour out the tea for her! You

seem to have forgotten all about your duty, Miss!"

"All right, Brown! We will go at once," replied May, and then she added in a lower voice to Guy, "Don't look so surprised! Old Brown has known me ever since I was born, and often gives me a scolding. But come along, we must go to mother now, or he will give me another!"

Valmont followed her over the lawn, as she flitted like a wood nymph before him, her white frock making her look almost more childish than she was,—her fair brown hair gathered in a loose knot at the back of her head,—and a large bunch of August roses confined by the belt round her dainty waist.

They found Mrs. Stuart, bearing some traces of past agitation.

"Why, mother dear," exclaimed May, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing! my darling," replied Mrs. Stuart, "but you know that talking with our dear, old friend here, always revives sorrowful recollections, and they are apt to overcome me. Give me a cup of tea, May,

and that will do me more good than anything. Has my child been showing you the flower garden, Sir Guy?" she continued, addressing the young baronet for the first time.

"We have been walking for awhile on the lawn at the back of the house," he replied, "what a charming place you have! A perfect, little Paradise! I have never seen any garden that I admired so much."

"I told you it was a lovely little spot," interposed the earl.

Mrs. Stuart did not appear to join in their enthusiasm. She answered indifferently,

"It is well enough! My dear husband died here! That fact would endear it to May and me, if it were the ugliest place on earth!"

Presently she continued, with somewhat of an effort,

"My dearest! Lord Dailgarroch has been persuading me to let you go to the Castle next week for the celebration of Lord Averil's birthday."

May looked up with a face of crimson.

"O! Mother! and will you?"

"Do you expect to derive so much enjoyment from it then, May?" enquired Mrs. Stuart.

"O! I don't know—but—"

"Why! of course she does," said the earl; "what do you think she is made of, Mrs. Stuart—flesh and blood, or adamant? What pretty girl ever disliked a little pleasure yet? Besides Averil and she have known each other as babies! It is but right that she should adorn his birthday party. He is but a lout of fifteen—I let him carry a gun yesterday and I thought we should all have been killed before we got home—but all my children are sincerely attached to May, and I believe, if you refused your consent, that they would set a light to the cottage and burn her out!"

"Ah! well! well! Lord Dailgarroch, I have consented—that is enough!"

"But not if you don't wish it, mother!" cried May, kneeling by her side, "or if you consider it best that I should stay at home with you! Don't think of

me, darling! I would not leave you for all the world, if you would miss me too much!"

"No! no! May, the matter is settled. I have promised Lord Dailgarroch, that you shall go to the Castle, next Tuesday and spend the night there. Madame de Leuille will look after me during your absence. Everything is arranged, so there is no more to be said about it, and it is very kind of the Countess to wish to have you with them!"

"O! it is indeed!" said May gratefully, turning to the earl, "and will you give her my best love and tell her so. And to Alice and Margaret and Cynthia and the rest of them too."

"All right, my Princess! They'll be only too delighted to have you with them again. And if the effect of coming to the Castle is to give you such a charming colour as you have at present, the oftener you come, the better! Valmont! we must be moving on. We have three miles to walk back remember! Good-bye, Mrs. Stuart! I only wish I could have persuaded you to bring your daughter over to us yourself! It would do you all the good in the world!

It's only the first effort, my dear lady! Once screw your courage up to that, and you will enjoy a little society as much as May."

"O! Lord Dailgarroch! I beg of you to spare me! You do not think what you are saying!" said Mrs. Stuart, deprecatingly.

"O! yes! I do! No one better! Come along, May, and walk to the gates with me," and taking the girl's hand, he led her familiarly down the drive.

Sir Guy shook hands with Mrs. Stuart and followed them.

As he bid May farewell, he managed to say,

"Will you give me the first waltz on Tuesday, Miss Stuart?"

"O! will it be a grown-up people's dance? Will *you* be there?" she cried in unaffected pleasure.

"I hope so! If I am alive! May I depend upon your goodness?"

"I don't think I can dance well enough for you," half-whispered May. "I am so much out of practice!"

"Then you must practise with me. Is it a promise?"

"I've never danced with a grown-up man yet!" she continued.

"Holloa! Valmont! there's a compliment!" exclaimed the earl, "she actually takes you for a grown-up man! Come along! We cannot wait for any more nonsense! May! you are going to dance the first dance with him! That settles it. Good-bye!" and they passed out of her sight.

The girl stood for a moment at the drive gates watching them on their homeward way.

"How kind he seems!" she thought, but she was not alluding to the earl, "and what a beautiful expression there is upon his face! And I think he likes me too, just a little! Guy! Guy! It is a pretty name! Sir Guy Valmont! Yes! I like him very much! I wonder if mother likes him too." And with a blush upon her face she turned her steps once more in the direction of the lawn and Mrs. Stuart's tea-table.

CHAPTER IV.

LADY DAILGARROCH was a sweet-tempered, soft, motherly creature, whom no one could fail to love. In her presence, all jarring and wrangling ceased; people forgot to quarrel, and goodwill and harmony prevailed. She would not have allowed it to be otherwise. She was generous and hospitable, but she would not have cared, if not a guest had entered the Castle from January to December. Her husband and her children composed her world. She not only considered her five daughters to be the best and dearest girls that could possibly be met with, but beauties into the bargain—her four sons were all going to be good and great, if not celebrated men, and the moral copies of their father.

She took as much trouble about the preparations for Lord Averil's birthday as if he had been the heir to the throne, coming of age.

She passed her white fingers caressingly through his straight sandy hair as though it fell in hyacinthine locks—she did not see his red knuckles, and bitten nails—his huge hands and splay feet—she never perceived that he was averse to soap and water, or that he oftener smelled of the stables, than the drawing-room. Like all true and loving mothers, she saw in him only the first-born son that had lain upon her breast, the heir whom she had been so proud of bringing into the world. Averil would never be a “lout” or an awkward man to her. He was his father’s son—that was enough, and her own most priceless treasure.

The whole family was *en évidence* on the auspicious occasion, from Lady Alice, the head of the flock down to Baby Hal in his nurse’s arms, and Lady Dailgarroch was in her glory. It was all very well for the earl to have called the festivity a carpet hop to Mrs. Stuart, but the floor of the Castle ball-room had been waxed and the walls decorated with flowers, and a company numbering at least a hundred invited to do honour to the heir. The best

orchestra obtainable from the nearest town had been engaged, for the occasion, and thirty, or forty couples were flying round the room in the very height of enjoyment to its inspiring strains.

Lord and Lady Dailgarroch, the latter looking remarkably young with health and happiness, to be the mother of such a tribe of sons and daughters, were standing in an alcove watching the dancers, when the earl perceived that his wife had suddenly become very silent.

"What's the matter, Flo?" he asked. "Tired out with your exertions, eh?"

"No! dear," replied the Countess, "but, Dail, have you observed how very attentive Guy is to May Stuart?"

"Is he? I'm glad of that!"

"But my dear, this is the fourth waltz that he has danced with her! It is going a little too far, you know!"

"Why? I didn't think Valmont had it in him to dance four whole waltzes. He is generally such a lazy fellow in a ball-room."

"But that is just it. Why should he do it to-night? He'll turn that child's head! It's not fair!"

The earl turned *his* head and regarded her seriously.

"My dear girl, you're not in earnest surely. What ridiculous nonsense! One of your guests takes the trouble to be kind to a mere child like May at her first ball, and you resent it as an injury. I thought you had more sense! You ought to be thanking old Guy on your bended knees for trying to make your dance a success! I have seen him whirling round the room with both Alice and Margaret. Why didn't you blame him for that."

"It is quite a different thing! Our girls regard him as a brother! But he is very handsome, Dail! I hardly perceived how handsome he has grown of late, until I saw him in evening dress. Enough to turn the head of any girl! And May does not look the same to me. It is so long since we met, and she has developed into quite a young woman. Look at her now, gazing into Guy's face! Does she look like a child?"

“Certainly she does,—quite a child! But if she were not, what does that signify? Valmont is grown up! He knows what he is about! Leave him alone! He is quite capable of looking after himself!”

“So all you men think, but experience shows that where a woman is concerned, you are helpless to do anything of the sort! And May is really unusually lovely. I don’t think I ever saw such a beautiful girl in my life before!”

“What! not even our Cynthia,” said the earl slyly—Lady Cynthia Kestrel having developed a turned-up nose and plentiful freckles—being in fact the plainest of the family. Lady Dailgarroch coloured. She did not like being hit between the joints of her armour.

“Now! I call that very unkind of you,” she replied, pretending to pout, “if darling Cynthia is not quite so pretty as her sisters, you know she has the sweetest disposition of them all, and we cannot have everything in this world. It would not be fair!”

“Well, well! she shan’t be teased about her chicks,” said Lord Dailgarroch smiling, “but she

must leave other people's chicks alone. Valmont is well able to take care that May comes to no harm. Besides—you seem to forget that he is engaged to Miss Raynham.”

“O! no! I forget nothing, and I hope she will be here soon to look after him! I know that he is engaged and that he is an honourable man, and that I am very fond of him—that is why I am afraid, for that May possesses some magnetic power over him I feel sure. I have never seen him look at anybody as he has done at her to-night!”

“I say! You make me feel quite nervous. I'll go and ask him to dance the next number with Cynthy. Her pug nose will counteract the influence perhaps of May's Grecian one.”

“And send dear May to me. I will tell her that Guy is engaged to be married. That will make her estimate his words at their true value.”

The earl stopped short.

“Flo! I must beg you will do no such thing! I know that Valmont particularly wishes that his engagement to Miss Raynham shall not be bruited

abroad. A fellow doesn't like such things talked about, you know. It makes him look a fool. So say nothing to May about it, please. We shall not give another party whilst he is here!"

"All right, dearest! I daresay you know best."

May Stuart was indeed looking dangerously beautiful! In her white cambric frock and broad-brimmed straw hat she had been a lovely child, but attired in the white lace and muslin which Madame de Leuville had made for her, with her fair head crowned with jessamine flowers, she might have stood for Titania, so airy and graceful and gossamer-light she appeared.

Sir Guy Valmont had found her a charming partner, and the evident pleasure she took in dancing with him, had made him wish he could spend the whole evening, turning round and round with her slender form in his arms. What Lady Dailgarroch had hinted at, he knew to be true. There was something perilously sweet and enticing in this girl, that was drawing him momentarily nearer the brink that divides Honour from Dishonour.

He saw it coming so plainly that he was even able to pause and ask himself if he could possibly help it—if he were a scoundrel, or a victim, irresistibly impelled by Fate to wreck all his hopes of happiness. He tried to fix his thoughts upon Mary Raynham, and to talk only common-places to May Stuart, but each time her clear hazel eyes beamed on him from under the long fringed lashes, an electric shock thrilled through his veins, and stirred every feeling of his nature.

He was quite resolved that if harm came of this sweet association, it should fall on himself alone—he would never sully this child's pure heart, by the utterance of one word which she had no right to listen to or he to speak. But it is easy to make vows, and very difficult to keep them—and since it appeared to give her pleasure to dance with him, he asked her again and again for her own sake—so he said—never mind what followed the indulgence for himself.

As Lord Dailgarroch came up to them, they had

just stopped to rest for a minute in an open doorway, which led out into the grounds.

"Guy, old man!" commenced the earl, "when you have finished off that little girl there, I wish you'd give poor Cynthia a turn. She has been sitting out the last two dances, looking very forlorn, and you would give her great pleasure by asking her for the next."

"Of course I will!" exclaimed Guy, readily, "why didn't you tell me of it before, Lord Dailgarroch! I thought all the girls had partners. What are the boys about? I see a crowd of them giggling and whispering to each other in the corner, whilst the ladies are neglected. Miss Stuart is a little tired and does not wish to dance again just yet, so I will leave her with you and go in search of Lady Cynthia."

As he passed the crowd of half grown men at the corner, he addressed them rather sharply.

"Here! you lads! do you suppose that Lady Dailgarroch asked you here to-night to amuse yourselves, or to make yourselves agreeable to the young

ladies? It is very bad form to huddle up in a corner in this way, and make jokes with one another, instead of asking some of the girls to dance. If it goes on I shall advise Lady Dailgarroch not to invite you down to supper when twelve o'clock comes! You should know better how to behave yourselves!"

This rebuke, coming from so distinguished a man as Sir Guy Valmont, had an immediate effect upon the youthful guests—perhaps the idea of no supper had more—any way they soon dispersed, and half a dozen presented themselves at the same time as himself, before Lady Cynthia Kestrel.

"It is of no use your coming here," said Valmont, "for Lady Cynthia is going to dance with me, but there are several other young ladies, waiting for partners, if you look round the room."

So saying, he bore off the plainest of the flock and commenced his duty dance. But why could he not talk with her, as he had done with May Stuart—why should his mind keep dwelling on the tones of May's voice, and his eyes turning to where she still stood by Lord Dailgarroch's side, chatting gaily,

but not so earnestly, as she had done with himself?

Guy heaved a heavy sigh as he realised the fact. He foresaw a peck of trouble in store for him. He never dreamed that the trouble would fall as heavily on his innocent partner.

After the dance with Cynthia, he found himself again by May's side. He seemed to have drifted there, unconsciously, as two pieces of bark in a stream will keep on knocking up against each other, however often they may be placed apart. Lord and Lady Dailgarroch had left the ball-room, to give some necessary orders concerning the supper, and there was a kind of general lull in the festivities. Valmont looked longingly at the terrace that stretched its length outside the open windows.

"Would not a little turn in the garden be rather pleasant?" he said to May.

"I should enjoy it immensely," she replied, "I feel the room exceedingly warm—that is, if it is the right thing to do, you know!"

"It is the commonest thing in the world," he

replied, "only you must have a wrap of some sort. I must not let you take cold in the night air!"

"I am not a very cold-catching individual," laughed May, "for I almost live in the open air, but I have a little woollen shawl here, all the same. Mother made me bring it, in case I should get heated!"

"It is the very thing!" exclaimed Valmont, as he wrapped it round her. "See! how well aware Mrs. Stuart must be of the proclivities of young ladies at a ball!"

He folded the soft fleecy shawl almost tenderly about her girlish neck and shoulders, and they stepped out upon the terrace, which was illuminated from end to end by a brilliant harvest moon.

"This is almost as garish as the ball-room," said Guy, as he led the way down a flight of stone steps to a more sheltered and secluded part of the gardens. Here was a bench, placed beneath the shade of an acacia tree, the branches of which swept the ground behind them. May sat down with a sigh of complete contentment.

"Have you enjoyed your evening, Miss Stuart?" enquired Guy, regarding her happy face.

"O! so much! I don't seem to know what has happened to me—all the world seems changed—I could go on dancing for ever! I never knew it was so delightful before!"

"O! you would soon grow tired of it!" replied Valmont. "Life should be filled with something better and more satisfying than mere bodily exercise! But perhaps you would rather go back to the ball-room. They are dancing again, you can hear! And Averil was pleading very hard to you for a dance just now. Shall I go and find him?"

"Lord Averil!" repeated May, shaking her head. "O! no! I don't want to dance with Averil, thank you!"

"But he dances very well for a lad! Just as well as I do, for example!"

"Does he? But I don't wish to dance with him all the same! I like people to talk with me, as well as dance!—to talk as you do!" she added in a lower key.

"Sometimes I am afraid I talk too much, but you get me on the subject of travel, and that always unlooses my tongue. I hope I have not wearied you."

"O! never—never! I should like my husband—if I ever marry—to have travelled, as you have, and had lots of adventures, and be able to repeat them to me. Then I should not grow tired of him. He would be like a nice story book that one can read over and over again!"

"Would you like to be married, Miss Stuart?" he asked her.

"If he loved me very much—yes!"

"Ah! May! always keep that resolution. You have found out the secret of earthly happiness, if you hold the conviction that there can be no true marriage without love!"

"But I thought everybody knew that!" rejoined the girl, "why should people marry, unless they love each other?"

"Some marry for the good they may gain—for money, or convenience."

"O! that must be wicked," exclaimed May, opening her eyes, "I thought all husbands and wives began with liking each other (as you and I like each other now, you know), and then it went on and on, until they saw that it was more than liking—that it was Love—and then of course they married. Love is a sort of marriage in itself, isn't it?—a kind of God's marriage—and people go to church that the clergyman may hear them ratify their vows. But that is not the real marriage—it is only the ratification of it!"

"You are right, May! Love is the true marriage. But is it impossible that two people should be very happy in loving each other, without thinking of marriage at all?"

"I think mother would say it is possible, but it would not be right. She was very angry when I told her about Maggie Rowan—"

"What did you tell her about Maggie Rowan?" demanded Valmont, seeing that she hesitated.

"Perhaps I had better not tell you about Maggie Rowan," replied May, "at least not all. But it is

like this! Maggie has a lover but she has not married him, and mother said she had no fear of God before her eyes. So I am sure she would think it wrong of people not to marry, when they love each other!"

"Yes! yes! of course, your mother is right!" said Valmont hastily, as he looked into the pure eyes upraised to his. It was this complete innocence—this fearless frankness—on May's part, that was fast taking his heart by storm. She was just a lovely innocent child, who had been reared to womanhood, without the slightest knowledge of the world, nor its evil—the type of womanhood, that men dream of, but seldom meet—a blossom just opening to the sunshine and gladness of Life, with a large capacity for loving, and an unconscious yearning to fulfil her destiny and be loved in return.

"*You* would not marry where you did not love!" she said presently, laying her ungloved hand on his. The touch burned him like fire, and he drew his hand quickly away. The action evidently hurt her.

"You are shivering!" she cried hastily. "Have I said, or done anything wrong?"

"No! no! Miss Stuart! how can you imagine such a thing?"

"Ah, you called me 'May' just now! I feel sure I have made you angry!"

"Don't talk nonsense! You could never make me angry! But I fancy the others have gone into supper! I have not heard the orchestra for some minutes! Let us go too, or Lady Dailgarroch may be vexed!"

He rose from the seat as he spoke, and she followed his example. As they re-entered the now deserted ball-room, they met the Countess, standing in the doorway by which they had passed out, and looking right and left in search of them.

"O! Guy," she exclaimed as they approached her, "why did you not bring Miss Stuart down to supper at once! I shall not trust her with you again, if you cannot look after her better than this!"

"But indeed it was my fault, Lady Dailgarroch," exclaimed the girl, eager to defend her friend, "I

felt rather warm and asked Sir Guy to take me out in the garden for a little while!" She looked so artless and so distressed that Lady Dailgarroch could not find fault with her. She drew May towards her in passing, and kissed her forehead.

"You mustn't do it again, darling," she said, "for it is not quite safe. What should I say to your dear mother if you took cold? Come and have some supper now! I am sure you must need it!"

She tucked May's arm under her own, as though to protect her from further danger, and led her down to the supper-room, where a noisy, heated crowd were making short work of all the good things provided for them.

After the pure air and heavenly stillness which they had left, the scene was a noisy and vulgar one. May recoiled from it instinctively, and wished for nothing but a quiet corner, and an ice. Her brain was still whirling from the effect of the *tête-à-tête* she had had in the garden, and as Sir Guy Valmont mingled with the crowd, her eyes followed his every movement. She thought that he would have seized

an early opportunity to return to her side, but he did not. He had caught a look in the Countess's eye, which had warned him to keep aloof for a little while. Lady Dailgarroch soon found him out, however, and commenced to give him what might be termed a scolding in disguise.

"You've been awfully good to my young people to-night, Guy, and I owe you a thousand thanks for it! There is nothing more difficult than to make a half and half concern like this, go off well, unless one has a few disinterested helpers, like yourself. Boys are no good at all at a dance. That's a sweet child you were dancing with last!"

"Yes! Who? Which?" said Valmont, with his nose well down in a plate of pigeon pie.

"Why, little May Stuart, of course!"

"Do you call her 'little'? She must be five foot five, if she is an inch!"

"O! well, I used the term because she is such a baby! Only seventeen, on her last birthday and never been allowed to leave her mother's side for a moment! And, by the way, don't let her go out

into the garden again, please, for she is very delicate—I always say consumptive with that transparent complexion—and Mrs. Stuart would have a fit, or something of the sort, if she were to take cold. It is always a frightful responsibility having charge of other people's children."

"I will not take her into the garden again, if you say it will be better not," replied Guy, "but the last thing that would have struck me would have been that she was delicate. She appears a perfect child of nature, and says she lives in the open air. Are not you not a little fanciful about her, Aunt Flo?"

"No! my dear Guy, I do not think I am fanciful at all, and I am quite sure that what I have said is right! She is one of the dearest girls I know, and I should never forgive myself if any harm came to her whilst under my roof. You must introduce her to Miss Raynham, when she comes! May will be no companion for a fashionable young lady from town, who has been presented at Court, and is the beauty of the season——"

"No! indeed!" interpolated Sir Guy.

"But she cannot fail to admire our dear May's looks and her gentle, modest demeanour. She is such a veritable child, with no ideas beyond her mother and her pet animals. By the way the Raynhams will be here to-morrow week, will they not?"

"I believe so, Aunt Flo!"

"I am glad, for your sake, Guy! You have been a dear good boy, to put up with our dull country ways so long, but now your patience will be rewarded. I observe you have been rather silent the last few days, but we shall have all the smiles then, eh?"

"Of course, Aunt Flo," said Valmont, still with his face turned from her.

After this Lady Dailgarroch left him in peace, satisfied that her powder and shot had not been wasted, and that he would not attempt to turn poor May Stuart's head again, nor to treat her as a woman any more.

He loitered about the supper table till the very

last—saw May leave the room on the arm of Lord Averil, whose amorous inclinations appeared to have been awakened by lobster salad and champagne, noted the wistful glances she threw in his direction, as though imploring him to rescue her from the attentions of her boyish cavalier, and after emptying several glasses of wine in succession, walked slowly and sullenly after the rest.

He knew quite well whither Lady Dailgarroch's remarks had tended, and the interference did harm instead of good. Interference generally does. Left to himself, Valmont would probably have conquered the unlawful attraction that was threatening to enchain him, but the effect of being spoken to on the subject, only made him ask himself, what the "deuce business" it was of Lady Dailgarroch's and resolve to let her see that he was not such a fool as to be unable to approach the fire without being burned.

So he walked straight up to May and asked her for another dance.

"But it is the last, and I promised to dance it

with Lord Averil," she whispered, in a tone of dismay.

"Nonsense!" replied Valmont, curtly, for the wine added to the Countess's hints, had somewhat emboldened and excited him; "you have forgotten! You were engaged to me for the after-supper dance, Miss Stuart, and I must claim my right! Here! Averil!" he continued, addressing the son and heir, "go and find another partner for yourself! Miss Stuart is engaged to me!"

"But she said she would dance with me!" exclaimed Lord Averil, with a look of dismay. "O! I say, May, it *is* a shame!"

"Miss Stuart had forgotten she had made a previous engagement," returned Valmont as he put his arm round the girl's waist, and led her into the middle of the room.

May was half pleased, half frightened. She knew that she had *not* promised the last dance to Sir Guy Valmont, and she was quite unused to the little trickeries and deceptions practised by young women in fashionable life, who want to get their own way

in such matters. But she felt as if she had no power to resist. Guy—under the influence of wine and obstinacy, had wound his arm firmly around her—he held her close to him—she could feel his breath against her face—something instinctively whispered to her, that he held her close because he loved her—that this was the beginning of the blissful dream which she had dreamed to herself, of a happy married future. She leaned against his strong powerful figure, as though she had a right to claim its support—she could hear the beating of her own heart and his, as they spun round and round, together.

Presently he whispered in her ear,

“Do you think I might come and see you, May?—that your mother would not be angry?”

“O! no! Why should she be angry? She has spoken several times of you since you called with Lord Dailgarroch, and I think she likes you very much.”

“And you—would you too, like me to come?”

“You know—!” was the low reply, but it contained a world of protestation.

"I will come then—the day after to-morrow, only I had better have some excuse for doing so, or Mrs. Stuart might think it strange! Have you nothing that you could leave behind you—by mistake, you know!"

"Leave behind me!" repeated the girl in bewilderment.

"Yes! Something that you may drop and I may pretend to have found and call to restore to you. Your fan for example!"

May shrunk backwards at the idea.

"No!" shaking her bright head, "I could not do that! It would be like deceiving my mother!"

"I hardly know how I can come then! I must have some excuse! If you were not already inundated with flowers and game, I might take some roses or grouse with me, but I might as well take coals to Newcastle."

"But cannot you come, just to see mother and me? Is that not excuse enough?" demanded May seriously, "just the truth and nothing more!"

"Yes! you are right—only will not Mrs. Stuart think it rather strange?"

"Perhaps she will at first! We have not been accustomed to receive many gentleman visitors," replied May with a happy little laugh,—“but then, you see, I have not been grown up for long, and I do not suppose that mother thinks it will be always so. And Madame de Leuille says that a little society does her all the good in the world, and brightens her up. I wish I could have persuaded her to come here with me! She would have been pleased to see me so happy!”

"And are you very happy—May?"

"I am *now!*" she answered, ingenuously.

Just then the orchestra ceased its strains—the merry couples all stopped at once—several of them, especially the Kestrels and Lord Averil, being loud in their complaints that their ball had been cut short, and begging to be allowed to dance a little longer.

"Dear children!" cried the Countess, "do you know that it is past two o'clock? I shall have you

ill to morrow, if you do not go to bed at once. All enjoyment must come to an end at some time, you know, and you have had a very pleasant evening, so say goodnight to your young friends, like good children, and let us all get to bed!"

She came across May and Guy at that moment, and noticed how flushed and excited the girl looked.

"May darling, you are more than tired, I can see plainly, and will be glad to have some rest, as we all shall!"

"No! no! Mama!" shouted some of her brood, "we are not a bit tired. We could go on for ever!"

"And I too, could have gone on for ever!" whispered Guy, to his partner.

"For ever!" the girl repeated in a dreamy tone, "certain things like dancing, must come to an end, of course, but it is a beautiful thought that—that—Joy" (love was the word that trembled on her tongue, but she dared not say it) "that Joy—can go on for ever!"

He answered her words by a long look.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME DE LEUVILLE did not merely fill the post of governess in the little household of Dungarvon Cottage. She, and Mrs. Stuart had been acquainted since their earliest years. They had conceived an affection for each other from the first moment that they had met, as Helen Bathurst and Amélie Armand, in the Convent school at Paris, where they had been simultaneously sent to finish their education.

For awhile circumstances had separated them. They had returned to their friends, and they had been married, and the trials and troubles of Life had fallen upon both. When those of Mrs. Stuart had been at their worst, she had met again with Madame de Leuville, then a widow, but with unabated affection for her school friend. She had offered to come to Dailgarroch and take charge of the rearing and education of little May, then a baby,

for whom her parents had thought nothing too good, and Madame de Leuille had been engaged to be the head of the nursery, and governess to the child, and to accompany her wherever Mrs. Stuart's unequal health or spirits prevented her going. So she had remained at the Cottage ever since, and was regarded by May as only second to her mother.

As to Mrs. Stuart, she esteemed Amélie de Leuille as her dearest companion and counsellor, and since the death of her husband,—her best friend.

The dance at Castle Dailgarroch had taken place on a Tuesday, and on the Thursday following, Mrs. Stuart summoned Madame de Leuille hastily to her boudoir. The latter was in the midst of regulating the housework for the day, and had no time to spare, and when she reached her friend, she was surprised to find her in her usual health, and in no apparent necessity for her services.

“Dear me!” she ejaculated, almost testily, “do you *really* want me just now, Helen? I was superintending the setting of the milk for butter!”

The two women were a great contrast to each other, both in body and mind. Mrs. Stuart had the remains of great beauty, but beauty of that yielding order that goes with moral weakness. She had never been able to judge for herself in anything—if a stronger, firmer will were not at hand to direct her footsteps, she floundered helplessly into the first quagmire that presented itself. May much resembled her about the mouth and chin, but Mrs. Stuart's eyes were of a cerulean blue,—her nose was insignificantly small—and her hair, now streaked with grey, was the palest gold. In her earlier years, she had ever been making the most deplorable mistakes, and then weeping herself blind over them; but of late, she had become too mentally inert to think for herself, so left the guidance of her affairs in abler hands.

They could hardly have been in better hands than those of Amélie de Leuille, with her womanly tact; her keen insight; her quick understanding, and her firm will. Her hair, which had been raven black, was now snow-white, not with the weight of

years so much as the weight of sorrow, for she had lost her husband and two sons by death in the short space of twelve months, and it had been a hard struggle for her to hold up her head since and take her share of work in this world. But she had determined to conquer grief, and she had done so. In her present position, she was contented, if not happy. She dearly loved May Stuart, and was proud of her as a pupil—and she was glad to be of comfort and assistance to her feeble mother. She was a tall, thin woman, with a handsome face much resembling that of Marie Antoinette, to favour which she wore her hair rolled back from her forehead in the same fashion, and usually, a muslin kerchief, crossed over the bosom of her black silk dress. She had keen dark eyes, an aquiline nose, and the very slightest of moustaches on her upper lip.

As she stood in the doorway of Mrs. Stuart's boudoir, on the present occasion, she had an air about her, which said, that she did not mean to be trifled with.

“What is it that you require?” she continued,

“make haste and tell me, there’s a dear, for I cannot stay above a few minutes!”

This adjuration seemed to throw Mrs. Stuart into an uncontrollable flurry. She all but wrung her hands.

“Can’t you really, Amélie? I want to speak to you so much—to consult you about something of importance!”

“Can’t it wait a little while, Helen? I shall have finished in the dairy in half an hour!”

“O! no! He might be here by that time, and May has only gone for a run round the garden. I want you at once! Do come in and shut the door!”

“This sounds mysterious,” observed Madame de Leuville, as she complied with her friend’s wishes. “The dairy must evidently wait for a little! Now, what is troubling you!”

“Amélie! you heard me say that a young man, Sir Guy Valmont, accompanied Lord Dailgarroch when he paid me a visit last Thursday.”

“Yes! I remember your mentioning the fact!”

"May has just told me, and with some confusion as it seemed to me, that he is coming to see us again to-day."

"And what of it, Helen?"

"O! cannot you understand? A young man like that does not come here for you, or me,—therefore it must be for May! He met her at the Castle—they danced together several times—what he said to her, she has not told me—but the upshot is, that he is going to pay another call at the Cottage this afternoon."

"And does that surprise you so very much, Helen? May is growing up, you know, she has passed her seventeenth birthday. She is also an exceptionally handsome girl."

"Yes! yes! the image of her dear father!" interposed Mrs. Stuart.

"Do you expect to keep her with you always,—that by shutting her up in Dungarvon Cottage you will prevent her fulfilling a woman's destiny? It will be impossible to do that for ever! Love laughs at bolts and bars, they say, and May was never in-

tended to lead a loveless life, nor should you wish her to do so."

"Then you really think that this young man is coming after my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Stuart with frightened eyes.

"I know nothing about this particular young man, but I am quite sure if it is not he it will be someone else. If he is of good character and position (and the earl would scarcely have him as a guest at the Castle else), what objection is there to his courting our May? He cannot even find out if she likes him, without calling to see her in her mother's house!"

"But, Amélie, he cannot—he shall not—take her from me! She is all I have, the last treasure left to me, and I should have to tell him—he must inevitably hear—Ah! Amélie, my dear friend, you know the many troubles I have passed through, save me from this the worst of all, I beseech you!"

Madame de Leuville rose and crossing to the side of Mrs. Stuart, folded her in her arms and kissed her tenderly on the forehead.

“My dear Helen, it is inevitable, if not now, at some future period. You could not in honour allow any man to marry our sweet May without being made acquainted with the truth. But why frighten yourself with what may never come to pass? Sir Guy Valmont may have no idea except that of courtesy, or his own pleasure, in visiting you to-day. A man does not wish to marry every pretty girl whom he admires. Now, put all foolish thoughts out of your head, and treat him as you would any other guest. Whatever has made you think that he is *épris* with May?”

“Only her manner, Amélie! I noticed a certain consciousness about her, the very first time she mentioned his name, and this morning, she was worse. She reddened like a rose under my scrutiny!”

“O! fal-lal! All young girls colour when they discuss the other sex. May has seen so little society, that any trifle would appear of moment to her. But why did you not ask her outright, if he had said anything more than courtesy demands?”

"I did not like to do so! I feared it might put the idea in her head!"

"Well! say no more about it, until you have seen them together this afternoon! After that, you may be better able to judge, how they regard each other!"

"And if it should appear to be the case, Amélie, I shall leave the Cottage at once, and go abroad! We will take the child far away from all such associations, until she has forgotten that they existed!" said Mrs. Stuart, feverishly.

Madame de Leuville smiled grimly.

"*You* must do as you choose, Helen," she replied, "but you will not get me to aid and abet you! I never heard of such a selfish plan in my life! What! you would drag that dear child, who has had little enough pleasure yet, Heaven knows! from the first prospect of happiness that opens before her—put an extinguisher upon her young love—and perhaps kill her in the process. You don't know May as I do, Helen! You have not spent your days and hours by her side, as I have! She has a very proud

nature—a nature that says little of itself, but broods upon every slight. She would obey you, she would go with you, and never see nor speak to this young man again—but if it did not kill her, she would kill herself! She could not live under such an affront!”

“But the alternative, Amélie!” gasped Mrs. Stuart, “how would she bear that?”

Madame de Leuille looked grave.

“You know that it has always been against my wishes and my counsel that you have kept May in ignorance,” she said after a pause, “however, you chose to follow your own decision in the matter, and you will have to pay the penalty. Sooner or later, it will have to be done—and we can only pray that God Himself may support and comfort the dear child under it!”

Mrs. Stuart had thrown herself sobbing on the pillows of the sofa where she sat.

“O! I hope—I hope—that I shall be dead before that time arrives,” she said.

“In order that you may be spared the pain,” re-

marked her friend, "that is a very selfish wish, Helen! You know that May is devoted to you—that she would bear anything for your sake—cannot you make up your mind to bear this for hers?"

"I cannot!—I cannot!" sobbed the mother.

"Well! I do not seem to be doing you much good by remaining here, so I will go back to my dairy," said Madame de Leuville, who knew by experience that Mrs. Stuart was one of those women who, the more they are pitied, the more they lose control of themselves. "But pray do not let May see that you have been crying, for she is very keensighted and if she meets you while in this state, will ferret out the reason before you are aware that you have parted with your secret. Ring and tell Ellen to send her to me as soon as she returns from the grounds, and I will keep her for an hour or two! Meanwhile lock your door, and don't let her in! You understand, don't you, Helen?"

"Yes! I understand!" replied Mrs. Stuart, who obeyed her friend's directions to the letter, and without the least demur.

A short time afterwards, May entered the dairy with blooming cheeks and sparkling eyes to enquire why she could not go into her mother's room.

"Your mother has a slight headache, darling!" replied Madame de Leuville, "so I advised her to keep quiet till luncheon time. But I have finished my household arrangements for this morning, and am quite ready for you. Shall we take Shakespeare into the garden? I think it will be much pleasanter than sitting within doors!"

"O! yes, Madame de Leuville!" cried May, "I was just going to propose the same thing!"

They were reading Henry the Fourth, and after awhile, commenced a discussion on the characters of Lord Percy and Hotspur.

"The more one sees of people," said May, "the more one understands the wonderful knowledge of nature, which Shakespeare must have possessed. One meets his characters constantly. Now, Lord Dailgarroch is very much like Falstaff, isn't he? so fat and round and jolly—always making jokes, and looking as if he had never had a trouble in his life!"

"I don't think the earl would feel himself flattered by your simile, May! Falstaff is generally supposed to have been inordinately fat, and both coarse and common. I shouldn't tell Lord Dailgarroch of his prototype, were I you?"

The girl laughed softly.

"Well. Hotspur then, I should choose Sir Guy Valmont for Hotspur, for though he is not a soldier, he is a brave man and, I should think, hot-tempered. He has travelled in South Africa, and shot lions and hippopotami, and all sorts of savage animals. Once he was walking alone through the jungle and he met a gorilla as tall as himself, and twice as broad, and it looked as though it were going to attack him, but when he pointed his rifle at it, it shewed all its awful teeth, and hobbled away! Wasn't it a good thing! Fancy, if it had killed him instead." And May gave an involuntary shudder.

"Is that the gentleman who purposes calling on your mother this afternoon?" asked Madame de Leuville, diplomatically.

May reddened up as Mrs. Stuart had described her doing before.

“Yes!”

“Is he very pleasant, May?”

“I—I—think, so, Madame! He was very kind to me! He—he—danced five times with me on Tuesday.”

“And is his visit paid to you, or to your mother?”

“To mother, I suppose,—” replied the girl with some hesitation, “at least, he did not say to whom he should pay it! He asked me if he might call, and I said ‘Yes,’ that was all!”

And May, who was sitting on the grass at the feet of Madame de Leuville, leaned her head gently against her governess’s knee.

“I think you like this gentleman very much, May dear!”

“He says he likes me!” whispered the girl.

“Have you told your mother?”

“O! no! How could I? I am not sure yet—only—he talked to me and was very kind, but the other thing—O! Madame de Leuville, it would be

too much to expect, from him, to such a girl as me! How could I interest him for long?—he, who has travelled half the world over, and I,—who have never seen anything beyond this stupid little village? I am unfit—unworthy!”

“May! you have never hidden anything from me yet,” urged her friend, “tell me the truth, darling, and I will hold it in the strictest confidence! Do you *think* that Sir Guy Valmont cares for you? Have you any feeling for him yourself?”

“Madame de Leuville! I don’t know how to tell it to you, but I have dreamed of him ever since the first time we met! I cannot help it! His face seems always before me! His voice always in my ears! Don’t tell me that it is wrong, for that would make me so unhappy! And—and—he says that he likes me. He called me ‘May’—and he wanted me to leave my fan behind me, so that he might have an excuse to come here to-day, but I said, if he wished to call, he must take me and mother for his excuse!”

“And a very good excuse too, my darling, as

doubtless Sir Guy acknowledges! There! that will do, dear. Don't worry yourself for it will all come right by and by. But be patient, May, and don't let him see that you like him too soon. If he is a good and honourable man, as I am sure he must be, he will tell your mother all about it, as soon as he thinks fit, and then, you will be very happy indeed—won't you?"

May raised so glowing a face to hers, that Madame de Leville, born of a less cold nation than our own, was struck by the look of passion in it.

"Do you think," she cried, in a sort of ecstasy, "that it ever—ever—will come true?"

"I am *sure* it will!" said the other, and then May raised herself from her lowly position and clasped her governess round the neck.

"O! Madame!" she whispered, "if it were, I think that I should die of joy. He is so handsome—so clever—and I am sure that he is good. When he talks to me, I feel as if I had never had a companion in my life before. If he were to ask me to go away with him to-morrow, and never see anybody

but himself again—I shouldn't do it of course, because I couldn't leave dear mother and you—but I am sure that I should *want* to do it,—that not doing it would be a dreadful grief and disappointment to me! Is it wrong? Am I a bad girl to think so? What has come to me? I never thought like that of anyone before!”

“No! dearest child, you are not wrong, nor wicked! Your thoughts are quite natural, but you must try not to indulge them until you have a right to do so. It is the awakening of womanhood in you; May—the longing which every true woman has, to become the life-long companion and sympathiser of some good, loving man. It is not wrong of you to think thus, dear, but it is foolish. Sir Guy Valmont may regard you only as a simple little girl, to whom he wishes to shew kindness. You must try and banish him from your mind, until he has told you plainly that he loves you and wishes to make you his wife!”

May shook her head.

“I can never, *never* do that!” she said.

"Let us go on with Shakespeare then! If this young man feels for you as you desire, he will soon let your mother hear all about his hopes and wishes, for he could not go on calling here, without giving a reason for it! Why do you droop your head? Have you lost all interest in the loves of Lord and Lady Percy? Let us go for a drive then! A little fresh air will do both of us good!"

And so she tried to turn the girl's thoughts into another direction, and to banish Sir Guy Valmont until the afternoon.

When he came true to his promise, the three ladies were on the lawn together, for Mrs. Stuart had insisted upon Madame de Leuville making one of the party. Sir Guy did not join them as he had done before, when in the company of Lord Dailgarroch—he did not feel intimate enough—but walked demurely to the hall door, when he was introduced to the drawing-room, and conducted thence with much formality by Brown on to the lawn.

"I trust, Sir Guy," said Mrs. Stuart, rather stiffly, "that you will pardon the liberty I have taken in

asking you to come out and speak to me here, but I am, as perhaps you have heard, somewhat of an invalid, and this sultry weather makes me indisposed to move about!"

Sir Guy, after having shaken hands with the mother and daughter, and been introduced to Madame de Leuville, made some halting reply to this exordium, hardly knowing what he said the while. The fact being, that now he had intruded his presence upon the inmates of Dungarvon Cottage, he did not know what excuse to make for being there, and his hostess still further embarrassed him by observing.

"May I ask to what I owe the pleasure of this visit? I suppose you bring me some message from my friends, the Dailgarrochs?"

Guy coloured and looked very handsome and very foolish as he replied.

"I wish I did, Mrs. Stuart, as in that case I should have been assured of a welcome! But I must confess that I merely looked in when passing, to hear how Miss Stuart was after her exertions of last Tuesday! I suppose you have heard that we

were very dissipated, and kept it up till past two o'clock, and I thought she might have felt the effects of such unusually late hours!" And he glanced at May as he spoke. She answered for herself.

"O! no! I am quite well, thank you, and I enjoyed it immensely. I only wish Lady Dailgarroch would give a dance every week!"

"If it resembled the last, it would be delightful," said Guy.

"Are you making any lengthened stay here?" was Mrs. Stuart's next question.

"I do not think I shall be here more than another month! Lord and Lady Dailgarroch are old friends of my family, and the Castle is like another home to me, so I might stay there altogether if I chose, but I think I shall have intruded long enough upon their hospitality by that time!"

"Since you are such old friends, it is strange I should not have heard your name from them before," remarked Mrs. Stuart in an unpleasant tone, which nettled Amelie de Leuille.

"How is it possible that you should hear the

name of anyone, since you shut yourself up in this prison from years' end to year's end, Helen?" she interposed; "I have heard the name of Sir Guy Valmont more than once, and so would May have done, had she not been too much of a child to notice it! I believe your late mother and Lady Dailgarroch were great friends, Sir Guy!"

"They were," said the young man, looking at her gratefully, "and I was taught to regard the Countess as a second mother! After my own mother's death, I spent all my holidays at the Castle, and remember the birth of each one of their children. I have no home now, but that of the Dailgarrochs."

"Your own estate?" said Madame de Leville, enquiringly.

"Allingham in Surrey! Yes! it is very charming, well wooded, and preserved, but terribly lonely. I have never really inhabited it yet!"

"You are waiting doubtless, till you can take a mistress there," continued Madame, smiling.

The young man coloured painfully, and commenced to stammer.

“O! yes! Perhaps! But that may be some time yet!—I—I—never think of it!”

And he fixed his eyes on May, as if he connected her with the idea. In reality, he was wondering if she would interfere with that fixed plan of his—if it would all fall to the ground, from this entanglement of his affections—if he had marred the pleasant prospect that stretched out before him, and should find there was nothing wherewith to replace it. May looked back at him, eagerly—sympathisingly. She perceived that for some unknown reason,—since she had confided to her nothing—her mother did not like Sir Guy, that she was cold and uncordial—and the girl longed to get away with him alone somewhere, and try to atone for the inhospitality with which she thought he had been received.

“My daughter tells me you have been a great traveller?” said Mrs. Stuart, “or what appears to be a great traveller in her inexperienced eyes. You have certainly been very kind in trying to amuse her, with your tales of adventure. Children love to hear stories, and my little May has not had many

opportunities of meeting people, who can tell her of other lands than her own!"

"I have told Miss Stuart nothing but the truth," returned Guy, who was beginning to feel nettled at the tone Mrs. Stuart assumed towards him; "had she been a child, I might have invented something for her amusement far more startling in its wonders, than ever occurred!"

"*We* consider her quite a child!" said Mrs. Stuart, with a faint smile, "more so in inexperience perhaps, than age, but with no thoughts, I am thankful to say, beyond childish things!"

"I think you are mistaken there, mother!" said May in a quivering voice.

"And you do not give *me* much credit as her instructress," chimed in Madame de Leuville, sharply, "I'll venture to say that though dear May has never been beyond this pokey little Scottish village, she knows as much, and perhaps a great deal more, than half the girls educated in towns—more too—not of the world and its deceits and disappointments,—but of men and manners, of history past and

present, and of the best books that have been written for our edification. I should not mind my pupil being subjected to the stiffest examination for women, Sir Guy, and she would come off with flying honours too, though her mother *does* consider her such a child!"

"I am sure of it," replied the young man, "Miss Stuart's conversation is proof of the fact!"

Which sounded as if their conversation on the bench in the moonlight, and in the intervals of the dance, had been on the deepest subjects,—but he did not quite know what else to say.

"Had we not better order tea?" remarked Madame de Leuville to Mrs. Stuart. But there was a look in the other's eye, that made Guy rise to his feet, and say,

"Thanks! Not for me! I have intruded here long enough already! Good afternoon!" and with a grave smile, and a profound bow, which included all the ladies, he turned on his heel and walked away.

There was a profound silence until the sound of

his footsteps had died upon the gravel, and then May, after throwing a plaintive glance towards her governess, and with a suspicious moistness about her eyes, rose, and went slowly towards the house.

"May! you can tell Brown to bring tea now!" called Mrs. Stuart after her.

"Well!" began Madame de Leuville, as soon as the girl was out of hearing, "of all the discourteous, uncalled-for receptions, yours of this inoffensive gentleman appears to me the worst! He walked three miles to pay you an afternoon call, and you let him return without even offering him a cup of tea! If this is English hospitality, and politeness, thank God I am French!"

"I do not wish him to come again!" replied her companion.

"Anybody could see that—himself the best of all! You have been perfectly successful, you may congratulate yourself so far! But do you suppose that your ruse will succeed, not only with this young man, but with any future young man who may take a fancy for May! Do you think they are all fools, and

that if you forbid them the front door, they will not come in by the back?"

"May would not license such an outrage!" said Mrs. Stuart, proudly.

"I don't know if you repeat this sort of thing often, *what* she might not be persuaded to do! There is a love stronger than that we bear our mothers, remember:—the claim of Nature for its right! You should be the last person to deny, that Nature is oftener stronger than Duty, Helen."

Mrs. Stuart began to weep with her face in her hands.

"Oh! Amélie! you are cruel—cruel—to remind me of the past!"

"You will find it much crueller when May reminds you—when she comes to you some day, armed with the truth, and says, 'what right had you to deny me the privileges which you claimed for yourself? *I*, who am flesh of your flesh, and bone of your bone! what reason had you for thinking I am made of different materials to what you were, or that I can stand

that, which was too much for you?' *That* is what will make you wince, Helen!"

"O! spare me!—spare me! You know how I love her! how I long to keep her from even the knowledge of evil!"

"You are attempting an impossibility! You can't do it! As I told you this morning, sooner or later, May must know everything, and you should have told her long ago. Forgive me if I seem harsh, but I must say what I believe to be right. Cannot you see that these two young creatures love each other? I could read it in their eyes—in every tone of their voices. And now you have offended an honourable gentleman, and hurt your own child's feelings. To what purpose? They will contrive to see each other, all the same, but it will not be on your lawn!"

"Good Heavens! Amélie! do you mean to insinuate that May would stoop to deceive me?"

"I insinuate nothing, but I know that when the spark of love has been set alight in the breasts of a young man and a young woman, they will contrive to keep it burning, spite of guardians and tutors.

Besides, what obstacle is there to their seeing each other and improving their acquaintance? They are both free! Men and women who are not free, have managed such things before now, and broken every law, human and divine, in order to get their own way! Why should you expect May to be made of different stuff from the rest of the world?"

"What shall I do?" said Mrs. Stuart, wringing her hands.

"You can do nothing now but leave the matter alone, and when Sir Guy comes here again, be more civil to him. You might let me write him a note to say that you were feeling ill this afternoon, but if he can find time to call again, you hope to be better! That would bring him fast enough!"

"No! no! I could not consent to it! It would seem like courting my Fate!"

"Very good, have your own way, but I have no further suggestions to make."

And Madame de Leuville also rose, and left her, whilst she went in search of her poor disappointed May.

Brown appeared in due course with the tea tray, but Mrs. Stuart felt very lonely—not to say, guilty—as she sat there, by herself, and sorely missed the usual attentions of her daughter and her friend, who were consoling each other in a room indoors.

CHAPTER VI.

THIS fiasco proved, temporarily, a good thing for Guy Valmont. It opened his eyes to the folly of which he had been guilty. Mrs. Stuart's cool reception—her evident relief when he rose to take his leave—her determination to ignore the fact that he could possibly regard her daughter in any light but that of a child—galled his sensibilities.

He saw that he had thrust his company, where it was not welcome; that he had committed a breach of etiquette;—and for what? Had Mrs. Stuart received him differently, had she extended a cordial welcome to him, believing him, as she must have done, to be seeking the society of her daughter, how could he have excused his conduct? How could he have any right to pursue his acquaintanceship with May, seeing that he was bound in word and honour to another woman? He passed his hand several

times over his brow, as he walked thoughtfully homeward, as though he would clear away the confusion that reigned in his mind.

Was Constancy a virtue that could be encouraged and persevered in, or was it a feeling dependant on circumstances, on the fact of one spirit having happily found and allied itself to the one other that fitted into and sympathised with it?

Was Love simply the passion begot of the influence of Charm and Beauty, and was it a man's own fault if the charm ceased and the beauty became valueless? These were the questions that he asked himself and brooded over as he took his way back to the Castle? He had thought that he loved Mary Raynham—he had dwelt with rapture on the idea of calling her his, and the happy Future they would spend together. He knew of nothing that should make him *un*-love her, she was still as amiable, as beautiful, and as fond of him! What was it in this child's eyes that had had the power to make the Past tasteless to him? He would not indulge in such folly any longer—he would be a man, and put

it away from him—it was impossible but that, with the will, he should also find the power to overcome any foolish, useless dream that had, for a moment, obscured the straight path before him.

As he entered the Castle and crossed the upper corridor to his bedroom, he encountered Lady Dailgarroch, sweet and smiling as usual.

“Come here, Guy,” she said; “I want to show you something!”

She threw open a door near which she was standing, as she spoke, and they entered the room together. It was the best guest chamber of the Castle. It had been decorated and furnished on the occasion of some Royal visit to Dailgarroch, and was quite a show apartment.

The panels in the walls were beautifully painted with groups of Oriental flowers and birds—the carpet was from an Indian loom—all the china and woodwork were from the East. On the spacious bed lay a coverlet of rose-coloured satin covered with rich lace—the curtains and draperies were fashioned of the same expensive materials.

"What do you think of it?" enquired the Countess.

"It is all very gorgeous!" replied Valmont, wondering why she asked his opinion.

"So Prince Adalbert said when he lodged here! He asked me quite seriously to take the coverlet away for fear he should soil it! Will she like it, do you think?"

"Who is 'she'?"

"Why! Miss Raynham, of course! I had decided to put her here!"

"But for what reason? She is not used to such grandeur. She will be quite contented with a humbler apartment. Perhaps, like your Prince, she would prefer it!"

"Nonsense! I want to pay her all the attention in my power for your sake. I cannot help feeling that she is one of the family. And in case she is nervous, I have put the old gentleman next to her, and her maid in the dressing-room."

"Mary nervous! You don't know her!" rejoined Guy, "I never met a young woman better able to take care of herself!"

"Well! whatever she may be, she is your choice, and I am prepared to open my arms very wide to receive her! This is the only opportunity I shall have of doing homage to the beautiful Miss Raynham. Next time we meet, I suppose she will be the beautiful Lady Valmont! Guy, dear boy, how white you are looking! Ought you to wander about in this extreme heat? Where have you been?"

"Over the moors, trying to recall some of my African reminiscences. What do you suppose this heat is, compared to that of the torrid zone? I think it is most delightful!"

"You don't look as if you had enjoyed it, any way! Come down to the library, and let me give you a cup of tea!"

"No! thank you, Aunt Flo! I have some letters to write and am going up to my room."

"When they are finished then—it is only just five o'clock!"

"Yes! I will join you by and by! Ta-ta!"

Somehow he felt as if he should never relieve his burthened soul until he had written to Mary.

For a few minutes after he had opened his writing case, and prepared his paper, he leant his head disconsolately upon the table, without getting any farther, but after a while he caught up his pen and wrote rapidly,

“My dearest Mary. You must forgive me for not having written to you the last few days, but we have been shooting almost without intermission for the whole week. They had a kind of a carpet hop here last Tuesday on the occasion of young Averil’s birthday. I wish sincerely you had been here. We all joined in the festivities, but the guests were chiefly of the bread and butter order. I have felt rather ‘down-in-the-mouth’ lately. I hope your advent will brighten me up. I feel so unsettled and dissatisfied, and as if all the world were wrong! Perhaps it is this sultry heat, which appears to upset everyone in some way or other. I shall be glad now when the eventful day arrives and we can commence our journey through life together. You were undecided when we parted, whether October or November would suit you best. Make it October,

dearest, or September if you can manage it! Hang the partridges! I would far rather be steaming down the Rhine with you! Will you think it over, and make up your mind? We could leave Dailgarroch together, and you would still have a month in which to make your final preparations. I am getting rather sick of waiting so long.

“Remember me to your father, and believe me ever yours, Guy.”

“There!” he thought as he fastened the envelope and directed it, “that will probably settle the matter! And once married, I will never come near this place again! O! May! sweet, darling, innocent child! why did I ever meet you? What fatal charm is it that you hold for me, that I cannot forget the glance of your eyes, or the tone of your voice? And yet I have never had one caress from you—not one simple little fluttering caress—and Mary has sometimes almost overwhelmed me with the vehemence of her love! I am afraid our sex is rather ungrateful! What is far out of our reach, we long for, and what we hold, we usually despise. But I should

be a perfect brute, to despise the open, generous affection that Mary gives me, so far beyond all my deserts. I don't despise it—I am grateful for it—I am sure I am—only—only—my thoughts wander from and above it, to the moment when May placed her slender white hand so timidly on mine, and raised her shy glance to my face. “*You* would never marry where you did not love!” she said! O! my dear sweet child! I shall never marry where I *do* love—I feel that now for the first time in its full force. I love you! I love *you*, my sweetest and purest, and let moralists and prudes say what they will, I cannot help it, any more than I can help living! It came without my volition, and it must go or stay as Fate wills! The only thing that I *can* promise is to do my duty—no! not my duty,—there can be no duty in marrying when your fancy has faded—but I will keep my word, and no man can do more or less.”

When he prepared to join the downstairs party at last, there were so many traces of the mental conflict he had passed through upon his features,

that he decided to remain where he was until the bell sounded for dinner. And then the excuse that he had been writing to Miss Raynham was considered an all-sufficient one by his indulgent hostess.

For days after, Sir Guy put a violent restraint upon himself, and did not go near Dungarvon Cottage. He would not even walk in that direction. But when Monday evening arrived the craving in his heart to exchange speech once more with May Stuart was too great to be denied. The Raynhams were expected on the following Wednesday. After their arrival he would probably not see her again, and he felt that it would be unkind to leave Dailgarroch without one farewell word. He put forth sundry hints to his host and hostess, concerning the probability of their meeting at the Castle, but whether by chance or design, there was no response. Possibly the Countess had cautioned her husband not to encourage the little flirtation she had observed between Guy and May, and he pretended not to understand what he meant. But a man's heart will not be put off by finesse, and the little difficulties

placed in his way, made him only the more determined to speak with May Stuart once more, before he resigned her acquaintanceship for ever.

He set forth fully resolved if he met her, to tell her of his engagement to Mary Raynham, and thus ease his conscience of any slight fears it entertained that their intercourse had affected, or might affect, the girl as much as it had done himself. He would tell her gently, he thought, how sweet their acquaintanceship had been to him, and how much he should have liked to pursue it, but that he was to be married soon and leave England for awhile, so he had come to tell her so, and thank her for the pleasant hours they had spent together. He did not intend to enter the doors of Dungarvon Cottage—he could not have endured a repetition of his former reception—but he fancied by lingering near the gates, he might encounter May coming out, or going in, or obtain speech of some servant who would inform him if the mistress of the house were at home, or where her daughter might be found. Looked at from every side, it was a lame chance, but his heart

urged him to go at all hazards and at all hazards he went. He arrived at the spot by three o'clock, on a hot afternoon and he sat down by the wayside to rest, until it might become cooler. Surely, he said to himself, May would not keep entirely indoors on such a sultry day. But he had sat there for more than an hour before she appeared.

Mrs. Stuart, who had never been quite satisfied with herself since she had driven Sir Guy Valmont by her curtness from her gates, had been more irritable than usual with Madame de Leuville and May.

May's extreme pallor, which had driven all the rose flush away since that fatal afternoon, pierced her mother's heart as with a sword, but she was too proud to acknowledge it. Her daughter could not marry Sir Guy Valmont—so she told herself—therefore it would have been folly not to nip any flirtation between them, in the bud, and far kinder than if she had permitted their acquaintanceship to ripen into love, and then inform them, that they must part. But she kept her own counsel and made May in-

tensely miserable by not mentioning the events of that afternoon, nor giving any reason for them.

She had commenced to read book after book that day in order to try and amuse her mother, but Mrs. Stuart found some fault with each one. *This* was too dull—*that* too silly—and the third too melancholy. At last May took up the newspaper in despair, and began to read out a column of fashionable intelligence. She gave her the interesting details of one lady's dress, and the scandal concerning the breaking-off of another lady's marriage, and then she came to the following,

“We are given to understand that the beauty of last season, Miss Raynham, daughter of General Alexander Raynham, is at present staying with her father in the south of England. This young lady, whose beauty is so great as to have attracted notice in the very highest quarters, is a peerless blonde with chestnut hair, dark blue eyes—and a figure which is said to be beyond compare. It is rumoured that, after she had been presented at Court, Her Majesty asked for a photograph of her to adorn her

album. Miss Raynham who is just of age is to be married in the autumn."

May laughed a little over this paragraph.

"I wonder how a girl can like to read such things of herself!" she said; "it sounds very vulgar to me, mother—as if nothing were sacred—not one little item kept back for the enjoyment of those at home, or whom she loves best! Her husband will feel as if there were nothing left for himself more than others—as if every servant who can spell out the newspaper must know as much about his wife as he does! I don't think I should like to be such a great beauty as all that—would you?"

She glanced up smiling, but was horrified to see her mother's features, twitching as if she were undergoing some horrible torture.

"Mother! mother! what is the matter? are you ill?" exclaimed the girl, in a voice of alarm.

Presently, tears slowly filled her mother's eyes, and rolled down her cheeks, and relief came to her in a storm of sobs.

"Doddy!" she murmured, "O! Doddy! Doddy!"

May ran off in a fright to find Madame de Leuville.

"Do come to mother!" she urged, "I cannot think what has happened to her! I think she is going off into hysterics!"

"I'll tell you what it is, May!" replied Madame, as they hurried back together. "Your mother wants change! It is absurd her cooping herself up in this place as she does, year after year, and never breathing another air. It is ten years now since your poor father died, and she has never left Dailgarroch since. She is getting hypochondriacal! She should go away for three or four months to the sea-side!"

"How I wish you could persuade her to do so!" said May. "If mother falls ill, added to all the rest, I don't know what I shall do!"

Madame de Leuville did not question what "all the rest" alluded to, but she kissed May's broad white forehead, and said,

"My poor darling! It would do you as much good as her! Perhaps if I can contrive to frighten

her on the score of *your* health, I might induce her to take you away for awhile!"

"O! never mind me! I don't matter!" replied the girl, faintly.

They found Mrs. Stuart weeping copiously, and mingling her tears with all sorts of exclamations and reproaches which May did not understand. Madame told her that she had better leave her mother, and go for a ride on her pony.

"This is only an hysterical attack, from which she will recover best alone," she said, "and you are looking terribly pale, my dear child! Go over to Pitcarrie, or Gouldburn, and don't come back till tea-time!"

"But mother may want me!" remonstrated May.

"Not a bit of it! The more you talk to her, the worse she will be! What was it that upset her?"

"Nothing at all that I am aware of! I was just reading the fashionable news in *Modern Society* to her—just here! about Miss Raynham," said May, placing her finger on the paragraph.

"Doddy! Doddy!" murmured Mrs. Stuart, inarticulately.

"All right! dear May!" said Madame de Leuville hastily, "Go for your ride, and leave your mother to me! I'll give her a few drops of lavender. Now! Helen, rouse yourself a little, if you please! You are not alone, the servant will be here in a minute with a glass of wine for you! Don't talk any more nonsense but listen to me!"

So May heard their mutual friend discoursing, as she gladly left them, and went slowly and languidly into the open air. She had decided to dispense with the pony, she would rather have no one but herself to look after—nothing but her own sad thoughts to wrestle with. She had had so little leisure since that afternoon—only four days ago, but it seemed as if it must have happened years before—that Sir Guy had risen and left their presence with only a bow, and her beautiful dream seemed over.

She hardly knew what she had expected or hoped for—she only felt that she should never meet her friend again. Mrs. Stuart had vehemently declared

that she should never enter the Castle any more—that the earl had obtained her consent on false pretences and she would not trust him with May again—and, of course, Sir Guy would not call a second time at the Cottage, it would be an outrage to his dignity, after the cold and curt reception he had encountered there. Anyone could see how offended he had been by his hasty departure and frigid bow. May reviewed these things—also the delightful evening she had passed at the Castle, and sundry words and looks that had passed between her and the hero of her dreams on the following morning, until she had worked her feelings up beyond repression, and sitting down on a bench in their own grounds she gave vent to a burst of tears.

“I know—I know!” she sobbed to herself, “that it was all nothing,—that I am but a child compared to him and not worthy of his love—but O! it was so sweet, so very sweet, and I shall never, never have it come again!”

She wept herself dry, poor little maiden, and when she rose at last, to resume her stroll, her eyes

and cheeks were blistered by the excess of her emotion, and her breath was drawn in long gasping sobs.

"It is dead!" she thought as she pressed through the gates, "it is like a death that can never be repaired, but all my life, I shall never forget him, not if I knew one hundred men and they all said nice things to me at once! I shall remember him always,—in my life, and in my death, for I would die for him to-morrow if it would do him any good—my hero, my king!"

And as she thought thus, she turned out of the gates and there, waiting for her, sitting by the wayside, with a look of expectation on his face was her hero and her king.

He had turned his head in her direction as soon as he heard the swing of the drive gate, but May did not perceive him until she had advanced a few steps further. She gave a little gasp and a cry, and stood stock still on the roadway, staring at him as though she were suddenly transfixed.

Guy was on his feet in a moment.

"Miss Stuart—May—don't be angry, but I was waiting for you!"

"*You*—you were waiting—for *me*?" she said with a glad ring in her voice.

"Certainly! For you, and you only!"

He took her two hands in his and gazed into her face.

"But how is this? You have been crying! Is anything the matter?"

She could not deny the charge. Her beautiful eyes were surrounded by a pink rim—the lids were swollen—each cheek was blurred with irregular and blotchy stains.

"I—I—thought I should never see you again," she faltered.

"And that made you cry? Dear child! how could you think so little of me—that I should leave Dailgarroch without wishing you good-bye!"

"But—but—" sobbed May, "mother was so unkind to you, the day you came to us, and I was afraid—I was afraid—"

"Mrs. Stuart did not appear particularly glad to

see me, I allow that, but I have blamed myself for it, more than I have done her! I ought not to have intruded on your family party without an invitation. But don't let that worry you! It is past, and I shall not offend again."

"But that is just what *does* worry me," replied May, "because I had hoped that she would like you, as—as much as I do, and I believe she would if she only knew you, but how is she to know you if you cannot come to see us sometimes!"

"Well! it would not make much difference in any case now, as I shall be leaving Dailgarroch soon."

"But you will come back," said the girl with a note of quick alarm. The young man had sought this interview with the determination to give May some inkling of the prospect that lay before him, and which he was bound to fulfil. But her evident pleasure at meeting him again—her fear lest they should be separated for long—her beaming eyes—her tender glance—all combined to make his courage ooze from his fingers' ends. He *could* not, he told

himself, quench the lovelight in her eye, nor turn her glad voice into one of mourning. The task was too hard for him; he must leave it to Chance to break the news to her that his faith was pledged elsewhere. Still—he dared not accept the homage she was offering him in every tone and look—he must try to make her understand that their pleasant intercourse had been nothing more than ordinary, and that when he left the Castle, it would not be renewed.

“Will you walk a little way with me, May? I should like to have a talk with you before we part!”

“Oh! yes! Why not? There can be no harm in that, can there?”

“I am going to tell you a secret, May!—that from the first moment I met you, I felt that there was sympathy between us, and I wanted you for my friend. Will you always think of me as your friend, dear?—whether it be a long, or a short time before you see or hear of me again, will you never fail, when you remember my name, to say to yourself, ‘He is my friend!’”

"No! never!" whispered the girl.

"There are circumstances in my life over which I have no control—which may compel me to be absent from England for some time—that may separate us, more certainly than——"

"But not for always," interrupted the girl eagerly, "O! surely not for always, Guy! You will come back to me—you will not let me stay here all my life, looking and waiting for you——"

He gazed at her flushed agitated face,—in which her love for him was but too plainly portrayed, and smitten with the sense of the injury he had done her, he exclaimed,

"My God! what have I done?"

"Nothing—nothing—except make me love you, and you knew that before! Is there any reason that I should *not* love you?" said May in a trembling voice.

"Yes! yes! I ought not to have said, or done anything, to make you think that we could ever be more than friends to one another. There is a barrier, May—a barrier that existed long before we met—

something which prevents my saying to you, as I would wish to say, 'I love you! Be my wife!'"

The girl looked both pained and puzzled, but she answered gently. "If there is a barrier which we cannot overcome, we must submit to it, Guy! You love me, you say, and that is enough for my happiness! How strange it seems that we should love each other, who had not even met, a month ago! It is like a beautiful, unearthly dream, except that it will last! Guy, tell me that it will last—*for ever.*"

"Yes! dear, I think that it will last *for ever!*"

"Why then do you look so sad? To love you and to know that you love me, would be more than sufficient to make me happy for a lifetime, and as for my dear mother, I think she will be rather glad to hear that there is a barrier to prevent your taking me away from her. Guy, you will tell her of this—of our mutual love! She must be told!"

"No! May, I cannot! That is the sad part of it?"

"Why?"

"Because, my darling—ah! don't look at me so

wistfully, you make me feel a brute—it is not the custom in this world for a man to go to a lady and say, ‘I love your daughter, but I cannot marry her!’ It would be considered an insult, and Mrs. Stuart might justly say, that I had no right in that case to speak of it at all, and that neither she, nor you, should ever see me again!”

“But that would be very unkind, and just because you loved me! I think you mistake my mother, Guy! It is an honour to be loved by such a man as you, and she could not fail to see it! Besides after all, who does it concern but ourselves?”

“If you think so, darling, let us keep it to ourselves! Ah! May, you are too young and innocent! I am not the man you take me for! Suppose I had deceived you from the beginning—suppose I were to tell you now, that I am a married man, and have no right to steal the love of any girl—however unwillingly? What then?”

He turned and was horrified to see how ghastly white she had become. She put out her hand appealingly and grasped at his coat-sleeve to save herself

from falling. A film had spread over her eyes, and her frame shook like a leaf in the wind. He thought she was going to faint.

"May! May!" he cried, as he supported her in his arms, "what have I said—what are you thinking of? I am not married, dear, indeed! I was only jesting with you!"

The faint tinge returned slowly to her cheeks, and with a deep sigh she disengaged herself from his embrace.

"You mustn't jest with me about that!" she replied faintly, "I thought for the moment, that it was true!"

This incident broke down all Guy's self-control. He caught May again in his arms and strained her to his breast.

"O! my love! my love!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that you can love me like this? Would my desertion of you now, be worse than death?—would my fidelity ensure you Life and Happiness? May! what have you done to me? How have you bewitched me? Before I saw you my heart and hopes

were set on quite another prospect, but as soon as my eyes had met yours, the Past melted like a dream, and I have thought of nothing and nobody since, but you. We will not part, May—we will *not* part! Let all the rest go! I must hold you tightly in my arms! What is ambition or fortune or faith, compared to such overwhelming love as this! My own, my own,—we will be each other's yet! I will overleap this barrier—I will trample it down by the force of my own will, and when it is removed, I will go to your mother, darling, and say to her, 'I love your daughter as man never loved woman yet, and if you will not give her to me I will take her by force and make her my very own.' Shall I, May—shall I?"

Her wet cheek, still cold from the effects of her late fright, was pressed to his—her eyes were gazing—gazing—right into his own—her quivering lips whispered in an ecstasy of feeling, "Yes! yes! yes!"

Then Guy kissed her tears away and sealed his promises upon her lips, and wound his arm gently around her slender waist, and led her from the high road to where a leafy dell afforded them seclusion.

Here he made her sit down to stay the trembling of her limbs, and laid her head gently against his shoulder, and they were both silent from excess of feeling, drunk with the delirium of Love.

He had done it then—he had given this girl-child the assurance of his affection, and he would have to carry it out at any risk to himself or others. Yet even in the first moment of happiness at knowing she was his—at reading all her love for him in her speaking eyes—Sir Guy Valmont, shivered with apprehension of the net in which he had entangled his honour. What was he to say to General Raynham,—what to Mary, whom he had so lately thought he loved? And when he had cut the Gordian knot that bound him to them, would Mrs. Stuart consent to give her child to him?

The thought kept him silent, and despondent, even while May's sweet face was lifted ever and anon to his, and her soft voice babbled of her contentment in his very ear.

“I am so happy—so happy!” she murmured, “I did not dream that there could be such happiness

in this world! I was telling Madame de Leuille the other day how much I loved you—O! she has known me all my life and I was not ashamed to tell her!—and that I knew how unworthy of you I am, and how unlikely it was that you should ever think of me as a companion, and she said that she was sure it would all come right in the end, and it has, you see—it has!”

“But May, you must never say again that you are not worthy of me! It is *I*, love, who am not worthy of such a pure, innocent creature as yourself! You must learn to see me as I am, or you will be terribly disappointed afterwards. I have led a very wild life, dear,—such a life as you have never dreamt of, and I am full of faults even now. I am not sure that loving you is not a sin for me, but it is a sin I could not have helped if I had been lost for ever for it. So you mustn't be shocked if, in the time to come, you hear more harm of me than good—only remember, that I love you as I have never loved a woman before, and that I will keep my troth with you if I die for it!”

"I could never think you wrong whatever you might do," returned the girl, "and especially now, when you are my very own! O! Guy, what happiness—what happiness!"

"Yes! dear, but you understand that we must keep it to ourselves for a little while! You will not tell your mother, or anyone until I give you leave! I have that barrier to overcome first, remember, and when that is accomplished, I will write and tell you that I am coming to Dungarvon Cottage openly to ask your hand of Mrs. Stuart. And after that, May—after that!"

"O! she must—she *shall*—give her consent!" exclaimed the girl, "she cannot mean to keep me all my life without love or companionship! She will have Madame de Leuville, to keep her company, and I shall very, very often see her, shall I not? I love my poor mother dearly. She has been so good and patient under her troubles, and what an awful trouble it must have been to lose my father—and I know she has led a most unhappy life! A few weeks ago I thought nothing on earth would have persuaded

me to leave her side, but now—now—O! what a wonderful thing this is, that transforms one's whole life—that makes the world seem like another place—that makes oneself another person! Nothing is the same with me to-day that it was, yesterday! I love my mother still, and Madame, and my friends—but all those loves, though they have not faded, seem to have retreated to the background—as if *your* love, Guy, had burst above my head like the sun, and made all lesser lights grow dim. O! my glorious Sun! You will be the light of my life for evermore!”

“My Sweet!” said Guy tenderly, “I hate to remind you of the time, but it is five o'clock, and I shall have to give an account of myself at the Castle.”

“How horrible it is to part!” cried May, standing up.

“It is indeed, but let us hope it will not be for long! Mind! I will write to you when I have any news, and till then we must keep our secret to

ourselves! Good-bye, my sweetest May, and Heaven
keep you!”

He accompanied her until she had entered the
precincts of her mother's home and then with a
wave of his hand, he turned upon his heel and went
back to Castle Dailgarroch,—in a mood for which
no man need have envied him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Hall at Castle Dailgarroch was a rare mixture of modern comfort and barbaric splendour. The walls were of grey marble, ornamented at intervals with bas-reliefs of hunting and shooting parties in primeval costumes,—the interstices being filled with groups of armour, antique weapons of the chase, and stuffed wild animals.

At each end was a large fireplace for burning logs, the floor was covered with skins and Indian rugs, and furnished with divans and lounging chairs, whilst wherever they could be seen with advantage, were placed towering palms and other exotic plants, to give grace and elegance to the whole. A few writing tables were in the centre, and large screens stood against the doors to make the place cosy, for it was of grand dimensions, being a complete square of sixty feet.

Lady Dailgarroch and her women friends seldom troubled the hall with their presence, except in passing in and out of the Castle. It was considered par excellence the smoking-room of the earl and his guests, where they might lounge if need were in splashed gaiters and shooting jackets, without fear of incurring the censur  of the lady of the house. On the afternoon that General Raynham and his daughter were expected, the hall was pretty well filled with the earl's friends,—the only man absent being Sir Guy Valmont.

Presently the Countess was seen peeping from behind one of the massive screens that stood before the doors. She was attired in a pale pink tea-gown of delicate manufacture, and trimmed with costly lace—her brown hair was decorated with pink ribbons, she looked very festive indeed.

“Dail!” she said, calling the attention of her husband to her presence.

“Well! my dear, what is it?” replied the earl, who was busy with a new long bore just received from town,

"It is nearly five o'clock, and the carriage started for the station half an hour ago! Where is Guy?"

"I'm sure I don't know! Anyone know where Sir Guy is?" he continued addressing the company.

"I haven't seen him all the afternoon," said Lord Edward Milner.

"He spoke to me at luncheon and asked what we were going to do till dinner time," added Admiral Noakes.

"I saw him leave the Castle about three!" said Pennington.

"How very provoking! Where can he be?" exclaimed Lady Dailgarroch, advancing a little further into the hall, "Dail! cannot you send someone after him?"

"Where am I to send, my dear? Now! don't fidget yourself about the boy! He'll turn up at dinner all right!"

"But you don't understand!" said his wife, "this is the afternoon that we expect the Raynhams to arrive—the carriage has already gone to the station

to fetch them—it will be monstrous if Guy is not here to receive his *fiancée*?”

“But why? Can’t you do the honours of your own house?”

“It will seem so strange—so neglectful—I cannot bear the idea that he should not be here to welcome them. Dail, he *must* be found! Send some of the men out into the grounds to see if they can find him. I will never forgive him, if he leaves me to receive them alone!”

“All right!” sung out the earl. “He’ll be here, never fear! The sly fellow is doing himself up “pretty” in his own room, and will burst upon you like a meteor, as the carriage wheels sound upon the drive! Trust him to be there!”

“I do not trust him at all! I do not know what has come to Guy lately, but of course, you must make a jest of everything!” replied the Countess, as she withdrew rather crossly to her own apartments.

“How the women do bother about etiquette!” observed Lord Dailgarroch, as his wife left them, “the Countess cannot understand that the unfortunate

fellow would prefer to greet his lady-love when not surrounded by a cynosure of feminine eyes!"

The fact of Sir Guy Valmont's engagement to Miss Raynham having by now been fully bruited abroad, there was no more hesitation in mentioning it.

"That's all very well," chimed in Lord Edward, "but it doesn't strike me that Valmont's very hot about it! He said yesterday when you spoke of young Masters' marriage, that a man was a fool ever to contemplate such a bondage!"

"O! he must have been joking!" said the earl, "Valmont's not the man to wear his heart upon his sleeve!"

"But if so, he needn't go out of his way to tell lies about it!"

"Perhaps he was 'hooked' into the business, and would like to cry off," suggested the Admiral.

"Faugh!—and to the beauty of the season?" exclaimed Arnott.

"My dear fellow! all is not gold that glitters. When I was a young man—not a bad looking one either, I can tell you—I went to a ball. Of course

I went to innumerable balls,—I was midshipman then aboard the ‘Snapshot’ and as smart a young officer as any in Her Majesty’s service—but at this particular ball, I was introduced to a doosidly pretty girl. By Jove! Sir, talk of the girls now-a-days, they’re nothing, positively *nothing*, compared to the girls of thirty years ago, with their glossy curls, and jimper waists and neat white muslin dresses, tied up with blue ribbons! Well! this girl,—sweet pretty creature, but I forget her name—made such an impression upon me, that I made love to her all the evening, and towards the end of it, I had taken so much champagne, that what between love and wine, I had no recollection of what occurred. The next morning, I met a brother officer. ‘Holloa! youngster,’ he said, ‘so you made an ass of yourself last evening, did you? How do you expect to keep a wife on middy’s pay?’ ‘Don’t know what you mean,’ says I. ‘Go and call on the Manleys,’ he says—yes! that was the girl’s name, Manley—‘and you’ll soon find out.’ Presently I received a note from the young lady herself. ‘My darling Jim. You have made me

so happy! Mama will see you to-day at noon. Ever your affectionate Nelly.' By Jingo! I had done it, sir! I had engaged myself without knowing it, and I found on enquiry that they meant to keep me to my word! I had to go on making love to her—Lord! how she did pall on one's senses, after a few trials—and giving her presents all the time the 'Snapshot' was in Malta, but as soon as she left, I went with her, and never wrote to Miss Nelly again! Didn't I bless my lucky stars that I was a sailor! I believe the Manleys have been dodging me all over the world ever since, but they've never caught me! Lucky escape, sir, lucky escape!"

"For Miss Manley, Admiral?" enquired Lord Edward.

"No! my Lord, no! For myself—for old Jim Noakes," replied the Admiral slapping his chest. "But that's the way young men are trapped into marriage sometimes by artful and designing females."

"Well! there's no question about entrapping in Valmont's case," observed the earl, "Miss Raynham was the coveted prize of the season, and everyone

thought him a very lucky man for securing her. He is a dear good fellow, but not such a great catch in himself, you know! I believe the contemplated marriage is one of pure affection, as it well may be!"

"But why this indifference then?" said the Admiral.

"Pooh! a young man's sensitiveness, that is all! Valmont fears your jokes on the subject. He'll sneak round by the back way, by and by!"

"Perhaps he is carrying out a 'merrie little conceit,' like the bride in the Mistletoe Bough," suggested Pennington, laughing, "and skipping along the corridors to find a convenient oak chest to hide in."

"Where—some twenty years hence, the blooming Miss Raynham, then an aristocratic matron with a family of grown-up daughters, may light upon his 'skelington,' with eyeless sockets and grinning jaws," continued Lord Edward.

"What are you fools laughing about?" quoth Lord Dailgarroch.

"It's all very well for them to laugh at such

things," chimed in Admiral Noakes, "it is because they have not yet experienced them."

"O! come! You're never going to tell us, that you knew a bridegroom who disappeared in that manner," exclaimed Lord Edward. "Draw it mild, Admiral! Haven't we swallowed enough for this afternoon?"

"Some people, young man, might be put off from relating a veracious narrative by your flippancy," said the old man sternly, "but I do not see why your friends should suffer by the loss, because of your folly. Some years ago I was best man at a wedding—that is, I was asked to be so. All apparently went right, and at the appointed time, the bride and bridesmaids—the family and friends—were assembled in the church, only one being missing, and that an important item—the bridegroom! At first it was made a subject of jesting, but as the hours went on and he did not appear, surprise gave place to alarm."

"Did they eat the wedding cake?" asked Lord Edward.

"No! Sir! They did not eat anything—they were too much concerned to have an appetite!"

"You *must* have been concerned, Admiral!" continued his tormentor, which remark, since the Admiral was noted for the way he managed a knife and fork, brought down a roar of laughter from their auditors.

"It may be funny," continued the old man, "to laugh at the misfortunes of our fellow creatures, but I could never see the fun of it myself! The poor young man was missing—the girl was in despair! Search was made everywhere for him. The ground was dug up for miles around to find traces of his body without success. Every river and stream in the United Kingdom was dragged, but no traces of him came to light! The newspapers were inundated with advertisements and paragraphs—the walls of every town covered with bills offering an enormous reward, without effect. Months went on—years rolled away."

"Centuries elapsed," said Lord Edward.

"No! Sir, not centuries, seeing that *I* still live to

tell the tale. But my young friend was never traced—not a sign, a word, a rumour. He had disappeared off the face of the earth as completely and mysteriously as if he had fallen through it.”

“Perhaps he had!” said Lord Edward.

“If you know the end of this story better than I do, my lord, perhaps you will have the kindness to finish it! But I appeal to the rest of our friends! How do you suppose, gentlemen, the missing man was found, by whom and where?”

“Cannot imagine!” replied the men, simultaneously.

“Well! I will tell you. Some ten years afterwards, as I was shooting in the Panymur jungle with my brother officers, I brought down a magnificent tiger. He measured twenty-two feet from tip to tail—I give you my word for it! Naturally I wished to preserve his skin. The natives flayed him. We perceived that his stomach was somewhat inflated as though he had gorged himself lately. Thinking to find an antelope, or wild pig, we opened it, when—there lay the missing bridegroom, dressed in his

wedding suit of blue cloth, white waistcoat and lavender pants. We were astonished!"

"I should think you might well be!" said the earl. "By the way, Noakes, how did he get out to the Panymur jungle?"

"That I cannot tell you! He was beyond questioning! But there we found him at last, perfectly preserved, with a smile upon his face."

"Were his clothes damp?" demanded Pennington, with supernatural gravity.

"I do not know, Mr. Pennington! I was not the one to undress him," replied the Admiral pompously.

"This is intensely interesting," said Lord Edward, "I feel as if I had not lived before this afternoon. But what I want to know is, whether the deceased gentleman had worn his wedding suit for ten years, or if the twenty-two foot tiger had taken all that time to digest him. I think you should have tried to resuscitate him, Admiral! It would have been a triumph of skill had you succeeded!"

"Talking of resuscitation," replied the Admiral,

“reminds me of a case when I saw a man recalled to life, after having been buried for three years.”

“O! do tell us that!” cried Lord Edward, eagerly.

But at that moment the carriage stopped at the entrance of the Castle.

“By Jove!” exclaimed the earl, “here are our guests, and that villain Valmont has not put in an appearance yet!”

The Countess came round the screen as he spoke. It was always her graceful custom to welcome her guests on the threshold of her home. She was accompanied by Lady Alice Kestrel.

“Guy has not returned yet,” said Lady Dailgaroch in a tone of vexation, “it is most annoying of him,—what *am* I to say to Miss Raynham?—I shall have a crow to pluck with him for this to-morrow!”

She had no time for more, for the hall door had been thrown wide open, and a tall graceful figure was ascending the steps.

“Miss Raynham!” exclaimed the Countess, as she

advanced and shook the young stranger cordially by the hand, "I am delighted to welcome you and General Raynham, to the Castle. My husband, Lord Dailgarroch, My daughter, Lady Alice Kestrel! But do not stand here! The evenings are getting chilly. Come into the drawing-room, or would you prefer going up to your room first?"

"I would rather go into the drawing-room with you!" replied a very sweet low voice, as the girl glanced round the hall, as if in search of her lover.

"Come then, and have a cup of tea before you take your things off!" said Lady Dailgarroch, as she led the way, the earl following them with the General.

As Mary Raynham reached the drawing-room, she pulled off the large hat and veil, which had thitherto concealed her features, and threw her travelling mantle to one side. The long railway journey had somewhat discomposed her luxuriant hair, and made her cheeks pale with fatigue, but her new friends were astonished at her beauty all the same. They had heard so much of it beforehand, that it

would not have been surprising if the reality had disappointed them a little—it is generally so with our anticipations in this world—but Lord and Lady Dailgarroch thought simultaneously that they had never seen such rich, ripe loveliness in their lives before. May Stuart who had been their type of a pretty girl till then was also beautiful, but Mary Raynham beside the remembrance of May, was like a blooming fragrant rose, with the morning's dew still wet upon it, compared to a straight tall virginal lily. Her charms were of that glowing order that enchains the senses at once.

Her abundant hair was of a chestnut shade that seemed to be sparkling with golden threads—her deep blue eyes had slumbering fires in their depths—her skin, though delicately fair, bore crimson blood beneath it, ready to rise in rich waves to the surface with each emotion—her graceful figure did not display one angle, but was all curves and sinuous lines.

In fact, though still a girl, she gave one the idea of a finished woman of the world—of Youth crowned

with the ripeness of Maturity—a glowing Bacchante, in her purity and innocence, before the satyrs, in the shape of hardness, and disbelief, and uncharitableness, had got hold of her. She held capabilities in her, no doubt, of Good, but also of Evil—it would be whichever way the world treated her, with Mary Raynham. But with it all, she had a winning smile and taking manner and her father seemed proud to watch the effect she produced upon the earl and countess.

“How can I thank you sufficiently, General Raynham,” commenced Lady Dailgarroch, as she poured out the tea, “for bringing your daughter to visit us? Of course, as you may imagine, we have been most anxious to make the acquaintance of you both, but it was too kind of you to accept so unceremonious an invitation, to such a dull place as the old Castle.”

“Sir Guy does not appear to have found it dull,” replied the General, “and I feel sure that Mary and I shall enjoy ourselves very much whilst we are your guests. We both love the country, and you seem to have beautiful scenery about here!”

"It is generally considered so, and the moors are in their perfection. I suppose you shoot, General! My husband's preserves are said to be the best in the county!"

"And the grouse are as thick as peas this season," interposed the earl. "Guy is a first-rate shot but he has not been able to thin them yet! We must take you out with us to-morrow, General!"

"I shall be delighted, that is, if we are allowed the use of Guy!" replied the General with a sly glance at his daughter.

"And, by the way," said Miss Raynham, "where *is* Guy? I quite expected he would be here to welcome us and introduce us to you, Lady Dailgarroch!"

The tone was one of disappointment—it put the Countess in a fluster.

"My *dear* Miss Raynham!" she said in a nervous voice, "I am afraid there has been a mistake somewhere, and that *I* am to blame. Guy asked me particularly the exact hour at which you were expected to arrive, and I was so busy this morning,

thinking of other things, that I think I must have given him the wrong train. There is one that comes in at seven, and the other men said they saw him walk off in time to catch it. I fancy he meant to meet you on the road! What will you say to me for my unpardonable carelessness?"

"Oh! I do not feel so concerned about it as all that!" returned the girl laughing, "I should have known it was an error, because Guy is the most punctilious of men as a rule. He will be back to dinner no doubt!"

"Of course," said Lady Dailgarroch, "and with a scolding for poor Aunt Flo into the bargain. Do you know that he calls me his Aunt Flo? I have known him ever since he was in frocks!"

"Oh! yes! I have heard all about that!" answered Miss Raynham, "and how highly he esteems you and all your family. He always calls the Castle 'home.' How good it is of you and the earl to have made it 'home' for him!"

"I trust he may ever consider it so, and when I say 'he,' I include yourself," said the Countess, lay-

ing her hand kindly on that of the girl, "your interests and Guy's will never be divided in my mind now."

"I hope not, most sincerely," said Mary with a deep sigh.

"It's a terrible case here," remarked the General, with another glance at his lovely daughter. "It will be a relief for all parties when a certain event is happily over!"

"Now father! don't tease!" exclaimed Mary. "You know you will be so miserable without me, that you will not know what to do with yourself! I fully expect before I have been away a couple of days to receive a wire urging my immediate return, on account of General Raynham not having eaten, drunk, nor slept since my departure! Isn't that the truth now, father?"

"I won't deny it, my dear! You are all I have left to me!" replied the General.

"You should consider that a great compliment, Miss Raynham," said Lady Dailgarroch.

"He knows," said the girl, with a fond look in

her father's direction, "that I shall be almost as miserable without him, as he without me! We have never been separated yet, and we shall never be separated long, that is, with my consent!"

General Raynham returned his daughter's glance with one still more loving. There was evidently a great affection between the two. He was a handsome man still, in the prime of life, and probably a good deal of his pride in Mary emanated from the fact that she closely resembled him, for there is nothing a man likes better than to have a child who is the image of himself, or what he has been. In his college days, Alexander Raynham had been nicknamed "Adonis" and had well deserved it. In middle age, he was better looking than he had been when young—more manly—stalwart—and thoughtful looking. But his was a melancholy face, and he seldom smiled except when he was gazing at his daughter.

After a little time spent in conversation, as Sir Guy did not make his appearance, Lady Dailgarroch proposed that Miss Raynham should be shown her

sleeping chamber, and insisted upon accompanying her there. Her maid having been summoned to convey her travelling things upstairs, Mary ascended the grand stone staircase, by the side of her hostess, and entered the guest chamber which had been prepared for her. She did not express the least surprise at the grandeur that surrounded her, but sunk down on the couch with the greatest nonchalance stretching out her pretty feet in order that her maid might relieve her of her boots. She had evidently been accustomed to every sort of luxury, and having seen her comfortably settled, Lady Dailgarroch withdrew, and left her with her attendant. Having rested for a little while, Mary assumed her most becoming dress and sauntered into the corridor, just as the second gong sounded for dinner. She was walking leisurely along, fastening a bracelet, one of Sir Guy's presents, on her wrist, when a shadow emerged from the dusk of an oriel window at the further end, and advanced towards her. It was Guy Valmont, in his evening dress.

"How are you, Mary?" he said quietly.

The girl looked up and as she recognised who had addressed her, her face became a flame of colour, and her eyes flashed like diamonds. It was very evident that she loved him.

"Guy!" she exclaimed, as she came forward to meet him. "O! my dearest boy, how glad—how very, *very* glad, I am to see you!"

She put her bare arms about his neck, and kissed him passionately. He started back as if he had been shot.

"Take care! Someone may see you! One is never safe for a moment in this corridor!"

Mary pouted a little.

"Never mind! They didn't! As if I could meet you again like a stranger, after this weary parting? O! Guy, how sweet you are looking! You are actually browner than when you left town. And have you enjoyed yourself, if ever so little, without me? And are you glad to see me again? And why weren't you here to receive me when I arrived? That was unkind of you!"

"I am so sorry," he stammered in reply, "I in-

tended to be here of course, but I was rather afraid of the fellows chaffing, and so I went out for a solitary stroll, and I—I—forgot the time! Will you forgive me?"

"Forgive you? What is there that I would not forgive you, Guy? I am too happy at meeting you, to be able to scold! So—take your forgiveness, you bad boy, and say you'll never do it again!"

She advanced her blooming cheek to his face as she spoke, and he was fain to kiss it—an obligation for which he would not have found it difficult to find a substitute, if need be.

"You are a good girl, Mary," he sighed, "and I am not half worthy of you."

"Rubbish! You know that I'm as bad as they're made directly I'm put out. Father and you spoil me so between you, that I've no opportunity of showing what I can do, but you just wait a bit, and you'll see!"

She laughed softly as she said the words and slipped her arm through his.

"I wonder how soon the guilt will wear off the

gingerbread, Guy, and you will get tired of me and take up with some other girl!"

"Don't talk like that! You hurt me, Mary."

She laughed again as though the notion were too absurd to be entertained for a single moment.

"Well! I suppose it is time we were going down to dinner. The second gong has sounded some time ago. Guy, darling, don't make eyes at me across the table, whatever you do, for everybody will be glaring at us!"

"Am I usually guilty of that sort of thing in public, Mary?" he asked.

"No! but there's no saying what you might be, after so prolonged an absence! O! Guy, I feel as if I were in Heaven, to be so near to you again!"

"A poor sort of Heaven, dear!" he said.

"Not at all! The only Heaven that I know! I suppose we all have our different ideas of Heaven, and mine is *You!* But come along! We have no time for spooning now! Wait till dinner is over!"

"Not much time then with such a crowd about!" he said, in a depressed tone.

“Never mind! One must be on duty sometimes! And our joy will keep till to-morrow! There is no uncertainty about it! We have but to command it at will!”

She smiled joyously in his face, and he led her down the staircase as she spoke.

Her appearance at the dinner-table was the subject of much curiosity and comment. Her beauty flashed on all the male guests as a revelation.

The ladies viewed her with something like apprehension,—or might it be called jealousy. She had been very much over-rated, they considered. Her manners, if not fast, were decidedly free, and she seemed to have a large amount of confidence. Altogether, they were not disposed to “cotton” to Miss Raynham. What woman, gifted beyond others, either with Beauty or Brains, is ever congratulated by her own sex? Should she be clever, they find her distressingly plain—should she be beautiful, they wish she had more, or less, to say for herself! But Miss Raynham heeded nothing of the silent criticism going on around her. She noted the

men's admiration of her charms, and, for Guy's sake, she was happy.

After dinner, the adulation continued. She was gifted with a fine fresh voice, which had been well cultivated and she sung, with both taste and feeling. The men clustered round the piano like bees, and the rest of the female company was deserted. Lord Edward clamoured for song after song.

Old Admiral Noakes begged her to sing him "Tom Bowling", and Messrs. Arnott and Pennington each declared for his especial favourite.

Under cover of the general confusion, Sir Guy Valmont drew near to General Raynham.

"Well! my boy," said the elder man kindly, "and how have you amused yourself, whilst here?"

"Pretty well, General! The Dailgarrochs have been as kind as kind could be, and the shooting is excellent! But the place in itself is dull, you know!"

"Really! No nice families about?"

"A few, but very much scattered! They had a dance here, last week, but the guests did not

number more than a hundred, and half of them were children. The estates are miles apart, and an afternoon call means a three days' journey into the wilderness!"

"But you have had a pleasant visit!"

"Lady Dailgarroch is always so good, that any visit to the Castle must be pleasant to me!" replied Valmont and he sighed.

"You have missed us, my boy! I am sure!"

"Yes! General, and I wish I had never left you and Mary."

"Well! well! we are together again and it is all right! Have they a billiard table here?"

"A very good one! Do you feel disposed for a game?"

"If you don't mind! But I do not like taking you away from Mary."

"My dear General! there's no chance of my getting near her with that crowd. Several of the men have gone there. Let us join them."

Accordingly they rose quietly and left the room

together, and presently Miss Raynham turned round on her music stool and said,

“Guy dear! will you ask Joynders to bring down the music case from my room?”

“My dear Miss Raynham,” interposed the Countess, “I think Guy has gone to the billiard room with the other gentlemen.”

Mary looked annoyed but she would not express it.

“He never cared for music,” she said, carelessly, “it is one of the very few points on which we differ. What is the song you mentioned, Admiral Noakes? ‘Hearts of Oak.’ I think I know the air, and will try to sing it from memory.”

But her voice was not so certain as before, nor perhaps her memory, for after the first stanza she took her hands off the keys, declaring that she had forgotten the rest.

They were early birds at the Castle, and when ten o'clock had struck and the servants had brought in a tray with cake and wine, the Countess showed symptoms of going to bed.

The ladies all rose and bade her goodnight,—only Mary lingered, looking in a wistful manner at the door.

“I suppose I ought to go too,” she said, “but I wonder where Guy and my father are! I conclude they will come back to say goodnight to me!”

“Harley!” said the Countess, addressing the servant. “Go and tell General Raynham and Sir Guy Valmont that we are waiting to bid them good-night!”

The man left the room but returned after a second to say that the General and Sir Guy had gone out on the terrace for a smoke, with the rest of the gentlemen.

“Follow them, and deliver my message!” said Lady Dailgarroch authoritatively.

“No! no! dear Lady Dailgarroch, not on my account, I entreat you,” cried Mary Raynham, “I would much rather not disturb them! Let us go to our rooms, at once! We shall see them again to-morrow!”

There was a sound as of *larmes à la voix*, in the

girl's accents, but her hostess would not appear to notice it.

"Just as you like, dear Miss Raynham, of course," she replied, "and indeed it is not perhaps worth while to disturb them for such a little matter, Good-night! I hope that you will sleep well after your long journey, and that you may wake refreshed and well in the morning!"

She held out her hand and pressed that of her young guest warmly, as she spoke, but she could not help seeing that Mary's eyes were swimming in tears as she responded to her farewell greetings.

CHAPTER VIII.

LADY DAILGARROCH, who, like most happily married women, took a great interest in all engaged couples, was determined to pave the way for the exchange of mutual confidence between her favourite Guy Valmont and Mary Raynham.

Accordingly, the next morning, when breakfast was over, and the company were standing about the room in little groups, discussing their plans for the day, she went up to the bay window, where General Raynham stood with his daughter and future son-in-law.

"What would you like to do this morning, Miss Raynham?" she commenced, "will you ride, walk, drive, or 'laze' as Guy calls it?"

"I should prefer a jolly ride over the moors!" replied the girl, brightly, "that is if Guy can accompany me!"

"Why! of course he can accompany you! What is he here for, else? I think you are wise, Miss Raynham! It is a delightful morning, and there is a pleasant breeze ruffling the moors that will make it not too hot!"

"Do you want to go, Guy?" asked Mary, wistfully.

The young man roused himself.

"I am at your service always," he said; "what time will suit you best? Shall we say twelve o'clock? I am afraid 'The Colleen' is not fit for you to mount yet!"

"No! no!" interposed the Countess, "Miss Raynham must have my Topsy, who is as gentle as a lamb! Order them to saddle her, Guy, and when you have settled that, you had better take Miss Raynham round the Castle and show her all that there is to be seen. Don't forget the haunted room, and 'Ye Ladye's Pleasaunce Chamber' where there are two large cupboards, Miss Raynham, said to have been used for hiding lovers, in bygone days."

"O! what fun!" cried Mary, "Guy, you must

let me see how you would fit into them! Now! don't be long ordering the horses! I will wait for you here."

"All right!" replied Sir Guy, as he walked out of the room.

There had not been a frown upon his brow, nor a dissentient note in his voice, and yet his manners were not those of an ardent and expectant lover. Lady Dailgarroch looked after him thoughtfully, as he disappeared, and then, as if his behaviour needed some apology, she said.

"I don't think Guy has been quite well lately. You know how touchy young men can be if questioned concerning their health, but he has been much more quiet than usual, and at times, depressed. Perhaps the weather has affected him!"

Mary Raynham did not seem to think it a matter of any consequence.

"Doubtless it is the weather, which has been hot enough to upset anybody. And you know, father, I have always told you that I did not consider Guy to be very strong. He had an attack of jungle

fever in Africa, Lady Dailgarroch and the doctors say he will always be subject to it! But thank Goodness! it never affects his temper. He has one of the sweetest tempers in the world!"

"It is an excellent thing to begin life upon," said the Countess, smiling.

"I know it!" replied Mary, smiling too.

In a few minutes, Guy was back again, having settled everything for the morning's ride.

"And what are you going to do with yourself, General?" he enquired of Mary's father; "Lord Dailgarroch is going after the partridge this morning, I suppose you will join the party!"

"Perhaps, my dear boy, but I confess to feeling rather tired after yesterday's journey, and the Countess is good enough to say she will bear me company if I elect to stay indoors. So, run off, with Mary, and enjoy yourselves. I am quite capable of looking after Number One!"

He nodded and smiled at them, and the young lady taking the initiative, by leaving the room, Sir Guy had no option but to follow her.

They climbed the high staircase together, Mary's tongue going nineteen to the dozen in her glee at being with her lover again. She guessed that the Countess had sent them on this errand for the express purpose of letting them have a few minutes to themselves where none of the visitors were likely to disturb them,—so that she felt much more inclined to talk to her future husband, than to inspect the curiosities to which he introduced her. He who, on the other hand, would have given anything *not* to be left alone with her, tried all in his power to direct her attention to the bygone mysteries of the Castle.

“Is *this* the haunted room?” exclaimed Mary with a curled lip, as he ushered her into a bed-chamber, draped in yellow satin, and moth eaten lace; “well! I don't think much of *that*! Let us sit down and have a comfortable talk together!”

“No! Mary, not on those chairs,” said Guy, quickly, “the Countess always begs that no one will use them, as they are so worm eaten that she is afraid of their falling to pieces. They are the

same that were here in the time of Henry the Eighth."

"And what is the ghost like, pray? Have you seen her," demanded Mary, hanging on his arm, and turning her pretty face up to his.

"How should I? You know I have no faith in such things? Lady Dailgarroch will tell you all about her—that she appears in this room on such festivals as Christmas-tide and All Hallows E'en, dressed in a yellow satin gown——"

"A bit of the bed-curtains," laughed Mary. "No! I won't believe that! Even a ghost would have more taste than to appear in the same shade as the furniture of the room. White satin, now, or a nice coffee-brown, I could place some faith in, but yellow satin,—pooh-bah!—she must be a young woman of so little originality, that I wouldn't look at her a second time! I'm tired of the haunted room, Guy! Take me somewhere else!"

"This is what Aunt Flo calls 'Ye Ladye's Pleasaunce Chamber,'" continued Guy Valmont, as he threw open the door of an octogan boudoir, on

the same floor. It was a pretty, faded little place, furnished with spindle-shank chairs and tables, upholstered in what had once been blue damask.

The white panels of the walls were painted in sickly groups of pale-coloured flowers, and the tiny sofas could barely hold two persons comfortably. But that was enough for Mary Raynham, and quickly taking possession of one she signalled to her lover to place himself beside her.

"Bother all these old reminiscences!" she cried, "come and sit down by me and let me tell you how much I love you! Yes! shut the door, that's right, though I don't suppose anybody will come in. And if they do, they will soon pop out again when they see that we are here. I suppose everybody in the Castle knows, that we are going to be married, Guy."

"I suppose there are very few who do not," he answered.

Mary nestled down beside him, laying her head upon his shoulder, so that her eyes could fix themselves upon his face. She evidently expected that

he would take the opportunity to embrace her, and most men would have told themselves that it was their duty, and have done their duty accordingly. But somehow Sir Guy Valmont could not. He had determined so to behave to the woman who considered herself still bound to him, as to force her to ask what ailed him, and give him the chance of telling her, something, of what was in his mind. But now that they were alone he found the task more difficult than he had anticipated. With Mary's head upon his shoulder—with her hand clasped in his—with her adoring eyes fixed upon his face—how could he tell her that his heart had wandered beyond his own jurisdiction—away from her, and to another woman—and that he felt like a scoundrel between the two.

It was impossible! He must put it off to some more favourable opportunity.

"Now!" exclaimed Mary, radiantly, "Tell me everything that you have thought and said and done since we last met!"

"Isn't that rather 'a large order,' Mary?"

"Don't talk slang, sir, but do as I say! You know pretty well all that I could tell you about myself, but your letters have been very meagre ones, and contained no news whatever!"

"But what news is there to tell from a place like this? You would not care to hear how many brace of grouse I had potted in the day, nor what I had consumed for luncheon, or dinner—would you?"

"But I suppose you had some *thoughts*, Guy—you thought of me sometimes," said the girl, pouting.

"I was always thinking of you, Mary! I may say with truth, that I have thought more of you during the past month, than I have ever done in so short a space of time before!"

"That's nice, that's what I like to hear!" said Mary, "and of our marriage also, Guy! You thought of that!"

"Very often! and the more I think of it the more important it appears to me. It is a very serious undertaking, Mary."

"What, marriage? But everybody does it all the same!"

“But how few do not repent it afterwards! It is *that* which makes it so serious—the fear whether people will find they are unsuited to each other when it is too late to remedy the evil.”

“O! Guy, how horrid of you!” exclaimed the girl, “I do believe you are going to cry off your bargain after all!”

But she had no belief in what she said.

“No! no! Mary. Don't talk of such a thing, please! All my doubts spring from the other side! Am *I* worthy of *you*? That is what worries me! I do not think I am a particularly nice person, when all's said and done. I am very silent and uncommunicative at times—some fellows call me glum! And sometimes, I think I have a fickle disposition. My thoughts are all on hunting and sport—I have none of the *petits soins* that women delight to receive from men. I cannot be anything of a companion to a lively girl like you! I cannot conceive what you see to love in me! I am sure I shall turn out a great disappointment.”

Mary turned up her face and kissed him on the cheek.

"Now! you be quiet!" she said, smilingly. "I told Lady Dailgarroch this morning, that probably you were going to have one of your nasty little attacks of jungle fever, and now I'm sure of it! What nonsense to talk in that silly way. Do you suppose that I expect to marry a man, or an angel? Of course you don't rattle on as I do. If you did, there would be no chance for me! I like you silent, and you like me noisy, and we are the principal people to be considered. Now! don't talk of yourself any more, but tell me what you have been doing. You wrote me that you had had a dance at the Castle! Who came to it. Were there any nice girls here? With whom did you dance, Guy?"

"Oh! that was a children's affair, given in honour of Averil's birthday. I danced with all the brats in turn, as was my duty! There were several married women present, but very few girls from outside. I don't think there are many to ask."

"Lady Dailgarroch says there is a charming girl

living near here, called May Stuart! Have you seen her? Was she present?"

"Yes! I have seen her! She came to the dance," replied Guy, through set teeth.

"And is she so beautiful?"

"She is pretty, but I do not think she would be considered so beautiful as yourself! But she is not much more than a child—only seventeen."

"The Countess seems to think a great deal of her! I heard her speaking of her to a lady after dinner last night!"

"Aunt Flo has known her I believe since she was a baby, and is consequently partial to her!"

"Guy! there is something in your voice which makes me think you do not like this May Stuart!"

"Indeed you are quite mistaken, Mary! No one could dislike her! She is too childish and simple!"

"Then why have you got so red?" persisted the girl.

He rose gently and displaced her from her support.

"If we are going for that ride," he said, "it is

time you got your habit on! And the sooner we are off, the better, for notwithstanding Aunt Flo's prophecies of a delightful morning, I should not be surprised if we had a little rain, later on. And a good job too—the country wants it badly.”

Miss Raynham rose slowly, and stood by his side.

“Do you know,” she said, “that you haven't kissed me once, since I arrived?”

“O! I'm sure I have!” asserted Sir Guy, though well aware that he had not.

“*You have not!*” replied his *fiancée*, in a decided tone, “but—” a little falteringly—“if you—don't—care to—I am not going to be the one to ask it as a favour!”

He was obliged then to take her in his arms and kiss her. No man could have done less. But he felt himself a hypocrite the while.

“I'm a horribly grumpy fellow, am I not, Mary?” he said, as he released her.

“You never used to be!” she said, blinking the tears off her lashes, “and you won't be so any more—will you?”

"No! never!" he replied, and he kissed her again, and she went off to dress for her ride in the highest spirits.

But a gloom, darker than before, settled down on his face, as soon as she had left him alone.

"What am I to do?" he thought, "where is it to end? My God! in what a net I have entangled myself!"

Had it been *only* himself, he would have kept his plighted word, at whatever consequence to his happiness. But he was not alone in misfortune! He had dragged down sweet, innocent May with himself! Both girls loving him at the same time. It seemed too horrible! One of the three must inevitably suffer! Which should it be? When Guy thought like this, he had half a mind to put a bullet through his own brain and settle the question.

He tried to make the ride over the moors as pleasant to Mary as he could, but the attempt was somewhat of a failure, and she returned to the Castle with a headache, which she attributed to the heat of the sun.

The Countess advised her to lie down in the afternoon to recover herself, and the girl retired to her own room, where she had a good cry in secret over the failure of her anticipated meeting with her lover.

“It is all my own folly!” she thought bravely. “I expect too much of him. I always knew that his whole heart was set upon sport, and because he has not so much time to ‘spoon’ now, as during the season, I am silly enough to fancy he has cooled towards me. What a bad preparation for marriage! Of course I cannot expect him to go on making love for ever! It is what I have always condemned as so absurd in other women and yet I am doing exactly the same thing myself. Dear old Guy! I am sure he loves me, and very soon we shall be alone together, with no horrid guns or shooting parties to interfere between us! And till then, I will be sensible, and let him go his own way without any reproaches!”

With this resolve, Mary attired herself as becomingly as she knew how, and descended to the dinner

table, resolved not to be foolish again, but to take the goods the gods allowed her, and be thankful. Her father eyed her rather anxiously as she entered the room. He was literally bound up in his daughter, and the least symptom of illness or annoyance on her part, filled him with alarm. To his relief, however, she looked as blooming and happy as usual, and he returned to the conversation, which her entrance had interrupted, with additional zest.

She sang again in the evening, and Sir Guy stood by the piano and turned over her music at the wrong times, which, however, appeared to call forth nothing but smiles from the singer, and the time went happily on until he joined his comrades in the smoking-room, and she was free to retire to rest.

But the next morning, the farce began over again. Guy strove hard to do his duty, and as duty went, he did it, but there was something missing from his look and his voice, which Mary could not ignore, though she tried hard to do so. Women are very intuitive, and often guess, where they can neither prove, nor understand. Guy smiled whenever his

eyes met hers—he gave her the required number of kisses—he danced attendance on her all the morning—and yet she *knew* there was something different from former days, and something wrong with his affection for her, though he studiously denied it. A man cannot deceive the woman who loves him—sometimes the assertion holds good both ways,—but the *beau sexe* is more used to deception and carries it out more successfully. Men have often lived for years in the belief that women loved them, and found out after all that they have been deceived from the beginning. But when have women done so? They are quick as lightning to discover the first breath of coldness in a glance, a touch, a kiss—and to accuse the victim to his own undoing.

Men attribute this fact to the greater capacity for deceit in women,—but they should add, their greater cleverness. There is no doubt that the sixth sense Intuition, is possessed by the weaker sex to an abnormal degree, and men have no power to cope with it! Added to which, women are far the cooler of the two in Love! They want affection more than

passion, but men are so blinded by their own senses that so long as *they* are gratified, they think little whether the gratification given, is as great as that received. So that they leave the other side pretty free to judge them at their proper value.

Mary Raynham could not have proved in a court of law that Sir Guy Valmont's love for her was not the same as when they parted, but she felt the truth in her innermost being, and resented it accordingly.

The third day found her looking so worried and ill that General Raynham's fears were roused, and when she retired to her room in the afternoon, he followed her.

He found her in a little boudoir adjoining her bedroom, lying on the sofa in a dressing gown, and crying as if her heart would break.

"My dearest child!" he exclaimed in genuine alarm, "whatever is the matter with you? Are you ill, Mary? If so, let me ask Lady Dailgarroch to send for her doctor! I cannot see you in this state without seeking assistance for you!"

But Mary only turned her face further away from him, and said,

“It is nothing—nothing!”

“My dear, that is nonsense! You cannot be such a silly girl as to cry for nothing! Your behaviour is exciting comment from our hosts. Is it anything to do with them, Mary? Are you not comfortable at the Castle? Do you not get on with the Countess?”

“O! yes! I like her exceedingly,—she is a darling—she told me to call her ‘Aunt Flo’ yesterday. Both she and Lord Dailgarroch have been kindness itself to me.”

“Then—why do I find you in this condition, Mary?”

There was no reply.

“My dear little girl,” continued the General in a sad voice, “cannot you confide in me? You have no mother—the great misfortune which blighted my life must fall heavily on you at this juncture, when most girls have so much to tell and hear from their mothers—but, since that cannot be remedied, try to

look on me as your next best friend. You are all the world to me, dear, and you are making me very unhappy! I cannot believe that your trouble is beyond remedy. Tell me what it is!"

His tone was so melancholy, and his handsome features were so grave, that Mary could resist his appeal no longer. She raised herself on her elbow, and said,

"You will keep my secret, father!—you will consider my confidence as sacred?"

"Have I ever played you false yet, my darling?"

"O! no! no! but this may be all a chimera on my part—I may have misjudged him—it may come right in the end—and then——"

"Have you quarrelled with Valmont, Mary?"

"No! We have not had a single differing word. Only—O! Father, I hardly know how to tell you—but he is not the same as he used to be! He has ceased to love me, I am sure of it!"

"Ceased to love you! Impossible!" exclaimed the General, who thought that the very least his daughter deserved was that her lover should lie at

her feet and worship her for the remainder of his life. "Mary! I cannot believe it! Who told you so? Has he presumed——"

"O! dear no! Now, father, that is just what I dreaded if you should hear the cause of my tears—that Guy is in fault! Whereas he has been as kind as can be, and would be as surprised, I daresay, as yourself, if he heard that I had found anything to cry about."

"Then what, in Heaven's name, my child, distresses you so?"

"I cannot tell you, except what I said just now,—that Guy does not love me as he used to do."

"From what do you judge it to be true?"

"I cannot tell you," she repeated, "I could not pick out one look or gesture or word, to prove what I say,—but the conviction is there, all the same! Something has come between us—I am not what I once was, to him—I know it, and I feel it, but I have nothing more to tell you."

And Mary turned her face round on the cushion again and cried silently.

General Raynham was puzzled what to do. If Sir Guy Valmont had neither said, nor done, nor looked in any way for which he could be called to account, it would be impossible to remedy the evil by speaking to him about it. All he could conjecture therefore, was that his daughter was hysterical or over-tired, or upset in some manner that made her think that black was white. He sat by her side, without speaking until her burst of tears had somewhat subsided, and then he said quietly.

“Mary, my dear, I believe you are only learning the lesson that Matrimony teaches most women, a little before the time. There is no greater truth than this,—that men and women are two different creations. Hitherto, you have had Guy all to yourself in the London season,—a function by which he, like most of his sex, is so utterly bored, that it was an infinite relief to be able to devote his time to you. But now you meet him amongst his fellow sportsmen, and following the occupation which he cares for most. You knew from the beginning that he loves nothing so much as hunting and shooting—both of them,

manly sports which you should be proud to think that he excels in. His mind is occupied at present with this, and probably he has not so much leisure to fix his thoughts upon you. But it is not necessarily an evidence of decrease of affection on his part. I feel certain that he loves you just the same as he ever did, but he may not like to shew it as openly amongst a crowd of strangers, as when we were alone at home together. Come! my dear child, be reasonable! If you expect the period of Courtship to extend itself throughout your married life, you are much mistaken and will end by being woefully disappointed."

"I do not expect it—I am not a fool!" exclaimed Mary, irritably, "but I can see when a man is in earnest and when he is only pretending, as well as other women. Father! I repeat that Guy has cooled towards me—I do not know why, or wherefore—but it is true! I think he is growing tired of making love to me, that our engagement galls him. And yet—and yet—he is so sweet and kind and patient, I have not one fault to find with him!"

"This all appears very absurd to me," said her father, impatiently, "He is all that is sweet and kind and patient—and yet he is tired of you and your engagement galls him—why! you talk nonsense, and contradict yourself at every other word! Mary! I begin to feel quite angry with you, and if *I* were your lover, I would break off my engagement at once with such an unreasonable, capricious girl!"

"Father! you are not a woman—"

"So my dear, I have always been told!"

"And were I to sit here and talk to you till Doomsday, you would never understand what I mean. If you were a young man now, and loved a girl, when you took her in your arms, even if she came of her own accord, could you not distinguish whether she came eagerly and joyfully, or if she did so, merely to please you? Do you think that I cannot distinguish between a man's ardour and a man's complaisance? If I could not, Guy would have taught me last season. And I cannot unlearn the lesson—I cannot!—I cannot!"

"I understand all that you have said, my dear—"

still, I believe that in this instance, you are mistaken. I have seen nothing in Guy myself, but the greatest devotion to you, but I think the dear fellow may be a little out of sorts. You may remember the Countess hinted at something of the kind the first evening we arrived, and if so, all this misunderstanding between you is fully accounted for! Have a little patience, Mary. Do not judge him too hastily, and above all, dearest, do not make yourself ill and unhappy without a cause. It would hurt me exceedingly if people observed your disappointment, and Guy would not think the better of you, if he discovered that you were not satisfied with his attentions!

“Father! what are your dreaming of?” cried the girl, “as if I would let him suspect it! I would die first! I would never have told you of my trouble, had you not pressed me, and you *promised*, remember! that you would keep my secret. My mother, were she alive, would never have betrayed me, and you said you would fill the place of my mother to me.”

“And so I will, my dearest child, and the first thing your mother would have said to you, would have been,—ring for a cup of coffee, to ease your head, and let your maid place some wet cloths over your forehead to obliterate the traces of your tears. And should they be ineffectual, Mary, do not come down to dinner to-night, but make some excuse and let the company think what they like, sooner than see that you have been weeping. Will you do as I say?”

“Yes! father!” she replied languidly, “what time is it now?”

“Nearly five, my dear!”

“Then I had better make up my mind to remain in my room for the evening, for I shall not be fit to be seen by seven.”

Which indeed seemed likely, for she had wept so violently that her eyelids were puffed and her features were swollen beyond recognition of their normal shape. She regarded herself in the mirror, and laughed at the picture she presented.

“The beautiful Miss Raynham!” she exclaimed,

with a courtesy. "O! Father, tell me, is any man on earth worth my making such an object of myself?"

"Not in my opinion, Mary, and especially when you have arraigned him on so paltry a charge! Come! be my sensible daughter, and look at the position from a practical point of view. This is only sentimentality, you know. There is hardly a girl in all Christendom who would not jump to be in your shoes, as regards money, and prospects and beauty, and your future husband, and yet you lie here, squinneying over an imaginary evil! I really thought you had more sense!"

"O well! perhaps it's a mistake after all! Shall I take a warm bath and come down to dinner as usual?"

"I think it would be a very wise plan, that is, if you are sure of yourself. It will obviate my having to make false excuses for you too, which you know, I hate!"

"Very well, Dad, if you will take yourself off, I

will ring for Joynders and make myself 'beautiful for ever.'"

She seemed almost as bright now, as she had been depressed before, and whisked about the room in the most lively manner, debating what she should wear, and what they would do to amuse themselves during the coming evening.

When Joynders appeared with her coffee, and received orders to prepare a warm bath for her mistress, the General left his daughter, but he was not half so easy as he professed to be, and went straight to his own room, where he sat for the next hour, with his head in his hands wondering how he could arrive at the truth, without betraying Mary's confidence.

That Guy Valmont, who had seemed so devoted to her whilst in town, could have wearied of so beautiful a creature, he could not believe,—still he knew that men were fickle, and he had great faith in Mary's judgment. She was not the sort of girl to cry over an imaginary evil, and he felt certain she

must have had good reason for suspecting that her lover was not all he used to be.

If it should prove to be true—what a shame!—what an outrage—to his motherless girl! The General ground his teeth together as he pondered over the case, and determined that the offender (if an offender he were) should not get off scot-free.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Lady Dailgarroch had been entertaining a visitor in the drawing-room. Afternoon calls were not very frequent occurrences at the Castle, and the Countess had generally to be searched for, in the nursery, or the stables, or the grounds, when anybody came to see her—on the present occasion, she appeared from the garden, a girl of three years old clinging to her skirt, and a boy of ten months in her arms,—the entire group shaded by a large Zulu hat, which almost bonneted the mother.

“Ah! Mrs. Lytton!” she exclaimed, as she gave the visitor her disengaged hand, “I am very glad to see you! Here I am as usual you see bowed to the earth, beneath my weight of responsibilities. Have you brought any of your children over? The others are in the garden somewhere, and will be delighted to give them tea out there!”

"You are always so kind," replied Mrs. Lytton, who was the wife of the clergyman of Dailgarroch, and like many other parsons' wives, interfered a great deal more in the parish affairs than the parishioners cared for: "I took the liberty of bringing my little Tommy with me and Lady Cynthia was good enough to carry him off. What beautiful children, yours are. These are the two youngest, I believe!"

"Yes! They're rather nice, aren't they?" replied the Countess, proud as a peacock of her fine lumping babies, "This is Muriel and this is my little Hal! Last but not least! He weighs more than thirty pounds already, the rascal!" And she kissed the baby vehemently as she spoke, and settled down with him in an easy chair.

"And what brings you over this afternoon, Mrs. Lytton," she continued, "nothing wrong with the parish I hope! Am I later than usual with my subscriptions? How is Mr. Lytton? You will stay and have some tea with me of course!"

"Your ladyship is too good, I shall be delighted!

No! nothing is wrong in Dailgarroch, thank God, and my husband is as well as usual! What a charming party you gave us last Tuesday week, Lady Dailgarroch! I do not know when I have enjoyed myself so much! I told Mr. Lytton that he had missed a great treat, but clergymen are not their own masters. My girls were in raptures! I have heard of nothing else, ever since! It is so seldom that they get the chance of a dance!"

"I am so glad to hear that it was a success," replied the Countess, ringing the bell for tea, "we must try and get up another before our young men guests leave us! I really consider it quite a duty in a place like this to do all one can to amuse one's neighbours."

"You were kind enough on that day," resumed Mrs. Lytton rather hesitatingly, "to offer to lend me some magazines, Lady Dailgarroch—the Westminster, I think, and the Idler! If I might venture to remind you of it, and it would be perfectly convenient, I should like to take them home with me now! They would be an inestimable boon in the evenings!"

"But—I sent them to you!" replied the Countess with a puzzled look.

"O! no indeed—at least I have not received them!"

"I sent them the very next day, Wednesday, by Sir Guy Valmont!" repeated Lady Dailgarroch, decidedly,—“I remember the circumstance particularly, because I tied up the parcel myself!"

"I am sorry to say that they never reached me!" said the parson's wife, with a simper.

The servants were just then bringing in the tea tray.

"Harley!" said Lady Dailgarroch to the butler, "go into the library, and see if you can find a small parcel of magazines, tied up in a newspaper."

The man disappeared, and in a few minutes returned with the parcel in question.

"Where did you find it?" demanded the Countess.

"On the table by the window, my lady!"

"How very provoking! It was there we were standing when I gave them into his hand! I hope you will forgive the apparent negligence, Mrs. Lytton.

You perceive that it was not my fault. Young men are terribly forgetful as a rule, but Sir Guy is generally so steady, that I trusted him in preference to my husband who is as great a boy as any. But he is an *engaged* young man so we must forgive him. I suppose his thoughts were far away at the time."

"Sir Guy Valmont!" reiterated Mrs. Lytton, "is that the good-looking, tall young man who danced so many times with Miss Stuart at your party, Lady Dailgarroch?"

The Countess bit her lip, and answered, "Yes!"

"Ah! I *thought* he was engaged!" said the parson's wife.

"But why?"

"Because I happened to see the young couple in a very interesting attitude: he, with his arm round her waist, and she, with her head on his shoulder."

"Impossible!" gasped Lady Dailgarroch.

"Not at all impossible, but pray do not mention it again! Of course they were not aware of my vicinity, and it would make them feel awkward!"

“But *where* was it? *How* could you have seen them?” asked the Countess, who knew that Mary Raynham had not been near the parsonage since her arrival.

“It was last Thursday week, two days after your ball! I was returning from my parish work, about five o'clock, and went home by Mrs. Stuart's place—by that part of the park where the rail fence is broken through, you know! There is a little dell just there, which slopes down from the high road, and I was about to walk through it, when I saw the young people, as I have told you—both seated on the grass—Sir Guy with his arm round her, and Miss Stuart with her head on his shoulder! Of course I slipped away at once, and left them to themselves, but it does not surprise me after that, to hear you say they are engaged. Indeed, anyone could have seen how much taken he was with her at your dance, and I suppose they settled it then, eh?”

“I—really—don't know!” replied the Countess, with a flushed cheek and an air of distraction, as

she tried to disentangle the chubby hands of Baby Hal from her hair.

"Sir Guy is very handsome!" remarked Mrs. Lytton.

"Yes! He is very handsome!"

"And well-off into the bargain I have heard!"

"Yes! He is well-off," said Lady Dailgarroch, mechanically.

"It will be a good marriage for Miss Stuart, for her mother has kept her so much at home, that she has not had many chances of being seen. She will owe it all to your ladyship!"

"Mrs. Lytton," exclaimed the Countess, hurriedly, "will you oblige me by not letting this little story go any further. Pray, promise me that it shall not! Nothing has been made public yet—it would annoy me and the earl exceedingly—Sir Guy would——"

"O! of course, of course, if you wish it!" replied her visitor. "I quite understand that it is not always desirable to bruit such things abroad before the young people may have entirely made up their minds,—only, as you said he was engaged——"

“O! yes! yes! it is all right, only—if you will keep it to yourself, for a little longer—if Mrs. Stuart,—I mean, if Lord Dailgarroch were—O! I beg your pardon, will you not have another cup of tea?”

Poor Lady Dailgarroch did not know what she was saying—her brain was in a whirl—all she wanted was, to get rid of her visitor, and have a few moments in which to think over what she had told her. She proceeded to behave in the most eccentric manner, first proposing that they should join the children in the garden, and then remembering that they might meet Sir Guy and she would hear him congratulated on his engagement to May—next sending for the nurses to take her children away, and anon, remembering that their presence would probably prevent the men making a raid upon the drawing-room. At last, she blurted out in the most unprecedented manner, that she had such a blinding headache she could hardly keep her eyes open, and sent Mrs. Lytton off so astonished at her behaviour, as to express a hope over the parsonage tea, that poor Lady Dailgarroch was not taking a little more

than was good for her, but really the way she went on—and the things she did—etc., etc., were too extraordinary to be repeated.

And the Countess, meanwhile, was staring at herself in the mirror on her dressing table, and asking her reflection over and over again. "What on earth am I to do? Is the man mad? These two girls must be saved at all risks, but how is it to be done?"

She pondered over ways and means for a long time, and then the thought suddenly occurred to her, "The General!"

"Yes!" she continued inwardly, "if it is to be done at all, it must be through *his* means. He is a man of the world—he knows his own sex, and what weak fools they are—he will take what I say, in the spirit it is intended! I will confide the story of this little midsummer madness to him and ask him to take his daughter and Sir Guy away. That will be it! He will not be too hard upon Guy, and will see that, if taken in time, this folly will blow over. But

the great thing will be, to keep it from Miss Raynham's ears!"

Some people might feel surprised that the Countess did not apply for assistance in her dilemma, to the earl. But wives may be very fond of their husbands, and yet be aware of their foibles.

She would as soon have thought of appealing to the parson's wife as to Lord Dailgarroch. He was not the man to keep a secret, or to manipulate a matter delicately. Guy's peccadillo would have become the property of the smoking and billiard rooms before the night was over.

No! The Countess had determined to make the General her ally, and to that purpose she kept studying his face all dinner time. It was a good face—a little weak, perhaps, but thoroughly honest, kind, and serious.

He was not the sort of person to laugh and bluster over his neighbour's sins, as though they were excellent food for jesting. He would be very merciful and very kind, but he would regard them in

their proper light, and prevent them, whenever he could. General Raynham raised his eyes once or twice during the meal, as he felt intuitively that his hostess was looking in his direction, but as she caught his glance, she smiled, and he thought no more of the matter. Mary's demeanour occupied his thoughts to the exclusion of all else. He had watched for her advent rather anxiously, and was surprised to see her enter the drawing-room as the second gong sounded, in the company of Lord Edward Milner, looking flushed, excited, and happy,—just as if the interview between them in the boudoir, had never taken place. He did not know that she had encountered Sir Guy Valmont in the upper corridor, some ten minutes previously, and that he had been about to pass her with a quiet nod of recognition, when she stopped him, and the following conversation ensued between them:

“Well! Guy! I think you might say a few words to me, after having been absent all the afternoon!”

“I have been over the Lower Farm with Lord Dailgarroch, Mary, looking at the brood mares!”

"What has that to do with me? *I* was not with you!"

"You would not have been interested, if you had been!"

"Neither do you appear much interested in *me?*"

"What an absurd idea! What has put your back up? Haven't you been amusing yourself also?"

"Admirably! I played billiards with Admiral Noakes till I was tired—then I went for a scamper with Lord Edward—and finally took a lovely stroll in the Park, with Mr. Pennington!"

"I'm very glad to think that you enjoyed yourself, Mary."

She stamped her foot to try and keep down her rising temper.

"Enjoyed myself!" she cried shrilly, "I rather think I *have* enjoyed myself! The fact is, I've shut myself up a great deal too much, especially since I have been engaged to you. I didn't know there were so many delightful men in the world! I feel awfully obliged to you for giving me the opportunity

of finding it out! I feel that I need never be dull again now!"

And she was about to pass him on her way downstairs.

"Mary!" he called after her, suddenly.

"Yes! What is it?" she answered, without turning round.

"I—I don't wish of course—in fact, I have no right—to interfere with your amusements (if such things do amuse you), but—with regard to Lord Edward Milner, I wish you would be careful. He does not bear the best of reputations with respect to women, and I should be sorry—I mean, your father would, I am sure——"

"Indeed! *Would* he, and *you* also?" exclaimed the girl, pertly, "but I rather fancy this is a matter for my own decision. You don't want all the license for yourself, I suppose! You like mares and shooting, and billiards, and I like—Lord Edward Milner! *Chacun à son goût, mon cher! Au revoir!*"

And she tripped merrily down the stairs, leaving Guy gnawing his moustaches with vexation. In

the vestibule, as ill luck would have it, she met Lord Edward, arrayed in his war paint, and on his way to the drawing-room which they entered together.

Lord Edward had already displayed a vast admiration for the beauty of the season, and voted her, "a d—d sight too good for that prig, Valmont!" He was quite ready, in consequence, to magnify any crumbs of encouragement, which she might let fall in his direction.

What looked like a very violent flirtation commenced at once between them and by the time that dinner was over, it had attracted the attention of everyone present. Mary, flushed, excited and radiant, laughed and talked incessantly with her companion, who regarded her with unequivocal signs of admiration, whilst Sir Guy at the opposite side of the table, hardly raised his eyes from his plate, at what was making the rest of the company stare with amazement.

General Raynham regarded his daughter with consternation—Lady Dailgarroch grew red and un-

comfortable—the earl kept up a low whistle to himself—and every guest was, more or less, relieved when the Countess gave the signal for retiring, and the beautiful Miss Raynham, with a last reminder to Lord Edward, that they were engaged to take a moonlight walk together after dinner, went laughing like a Bacchante from the room.

An ominous silence fell on the men when the women had taken their departure. Naturally no remarks on what had taken place could be made in the presence of General Raynham and Sir Guy Valmont, who sat like Banquos at the feast, and the usually merry circle broke up much sooner than usual.

The father and the future husband of the lovely miscreant seemed mutually to avoid each other's society, and after a while, the General found himself in the drawing-room, which except for the mistress of the house, was deserted.

“It is such a lovely evening, that no one will stay indoors,” said Lady Dailgarroch, “and I really cannot blame them, for we must not expect to keep

the summer with us much longer. Let me give you a cup of tea, General, and then if agreeable to you, we will take a stroll upon the terrace, which is after all safer for old folks like you and me, than the dewy grass!"

They could afford to call themselves old, this well-preserved man of fifty, and his comely hostess, who did not look more than thirty in her dinner dress.

"I shall be delighted," replied the General, but he sighed as he said the words.

"What a sigh!" exclaimed the Countess, laughing, though in reality she felt rather sad; "that is not very complimentary to me, General! I shall have to let you off that walk, if you look so unhappy about it!"

"No! no! indeed! There is nothing that I should like better, Lady Dailgarroch! I wish to speak to you! There are some things on which, I think, you may be able to set my mind at rest!" And he sighed again.

The Countess guessed what was coming! What

was she to do now, with the secret that was oppressing her? Should she keep it to herself, or share it with her guest? But she would not let it leave her keeping all at once. "Great wits jump together," she answered, smiling. "Strange to say, I have been also wishing to have a few words in private with you. Shall we walk on the terrace as I suggested? There is no one there!"

"I am at your commands, Countess," said the General as he rose, and followed her on to the terrace which was a vast plateau running round three sides of the Castle. The air was soft and balmy—and the heliotropes and geraniums blooming in the stone vases placed at intervals, along the balustrades, filled it with a rich odour.

Lady Dailgarroch stopped and plucked a few sprays of the flowers as she went—she felt nervous and miserable at the idea of the disclosure before her. It was some time before either of them had the courage to begin. At last the General said,

"Lady Dailgarroch! what is the matter with Sir Guy Valmont? Can you tell me? Is he ill? To

what but illness can one attribute his consistent melancholy? He was not like this whilst in London!"

"Do you think he finds this place rather dull, General?"

"What! With my Mary here? Excuse me, Lady Dailgarroch, but what should a lover want more? When I was young, we would rather have had a cabin and a crust of bread with the girls we loved, than a palace without them! But everything seems changed since then."

"Is Guy so very melancholy?" demanded the Countess, trying to temporise.

"I think so! I see an immense difference in him! He was a light-hearted, careless boy when we first knew him!—now, he seems scarcely ever to smile, and is always sneaking away by himself, or with the other men. I don't like it, Lady Dailgarroch! I don't indeed! My daughter's happiness is the dearest thing left in this world to me, and I won't stand by and see it trifled with!"

"But surely, Miss Raynham has not observed this!" said the Countess anxiously.

Her question recalled his promise to the General's mind.

"No! no!" he said, "Mary, God bless her! is as happy and confident as a girl can be—loves the fellow too from the bottom of her heart, and can see no wrong in him! But I am her protector, and bound to prevent any suspicion or disappointment, marring her life. And I don't like Valmont's behaviour since we came here—that's the truth, Lady Dailgarroch,—and I come to you as a friend to ask if you can help me to a solution of the mystery. You are a mother and a sensible woman, and will treat my confidence, I am sure, in the spirit in which I give it. Has anything happened to your knowledge, since Valmont has been staying with you, that can account for his altered manner!"

"You put me rather in a quandary, General," she replied, "and yet, I have been deliberating all the afternoon whether I ought not to speak to you about it. I have seen what you mention of course—I think everyone has—though I am sure Guy is not aware of the fact. You mustn't think that I take his part, if

I speak leniently of him, General, for his mother was more like my sister than my friend, and I look upon him as a son."

"I have heard as much!" returned General Raynham.

"Well then, not to keep you in suspense, I have been a little uneasy myself about him, of late. Mind! what I am about to tell you is in the strictest confidence, for after all it may only be my diseased fancy that has conjured it up. But—but—there is a very pretty girl living near here——"

"Another woman!" ejaculated the General, "I might have guessed as much!"

"Now, General, pray don't jump at conclusions, until you have heard all. This young lady came to a little dance that we gave some weeks since, and certainly Guy paid her a great deal of attention—so much so that I resolved not to ask her to the Castle again whilst he was with us—but since then I have heard—an acquaintance told me—that he has visited at her mother's house, and been seen with the girl herself, sitting in the woods."

"The scoundrel!" said the General between his teeth. "He shall answer to me for this, by Jove!"

"Now, my dear General! you *promised* me to be patient! This may all mean nothing—a thoughtless young man's admiration for a lovely girl, who is thrown in his way—who is not much more than a child in years—and is almost in the position of an orphan, for her mother is an invalid who never leaves her own home, and therefore May has no one to protect her from the danger of meeting a handsome young fellow like Sir Guy!"

"But he—*he* ought to know better—and engaged to my Mary too! There is no excuse for him—none—!"

"I quite agree with you, General, but what I mean is this, that as he can never have had any serious thoughts of deserting Miss Raynham for this girl—and his melancholy simply arises perhaps from his self-accusing conscience to think he should have lapsed ever so little from his plighted word—don't you think it would be better to help him to overcome his fancy (if he *has* conceived a fancy) for this

pretty child, instead of making a rupture between you, which may never be properly repaired. I shall be more sorry than I can say, to lose you all, but my advice is, to get Guy away from this place as soon as possible,—take him and Miss Raynham away together, remove him from the chance of meeting this girl again, and he will recover his senses. I feel sure that will be the best thing to do.”

“All that you say, Lady Dailgarroch, convinces me that I am right in judging you to be as sensible as you are kind-hearted,” replied the General. “This young lady you say is beautiful!”

“She is indeed! She is lovely! Not quite in your daughter’s style perhaps because she is so undeveloped, but still, giving every promise of a rare beauty in the days to come. She is a great favourite with us, as we have known her ever since she was an infant—this makes it difficult for me to say whether she might not invade us at any time, for she has always been made most welcome here. Her father was one of Dailgarroch’s best friends, but he died ten years ago. Her mother is a nervous invalid,

who fancies she cannot walk a step, so poor little May is almost dependant upon us for amusement. She has been like a sister to my girls, so you see it would be impossible for me to guarantee she should not come to the Castle!"

"Of course—no one is to blame in the matter but one, and that is Guy."

"And in *his* cause, dear General," said Lady Dailgarroch, in her most coaxing manner, "you must try and throw your memory back to the days when you too were young and ardent, and a pretty face was apt to turn your head for awhile. I cannot believe that dear Guy has meant any wrong. His heart has never wandered, I am convinced, from its legitimate object, only she was away and he was tempted and made a fool of himself for the moment. You have all done it at times, haven't you? I am sure a little prevention will prove his best cure. Take him away from Dailgarroch!"

"What is this young lady's name?" demanded the General, "and where does she live?"

"Her name is May Stuart, and she lives at Dun-

garvon Cottage, close to the church and parsonage. She is a daughter of the late Colonel Ronald Stuart, the Indian hero, of whom you must have heard. He retired some years before his death, and settled here. Her mother must have been a very handsome woman but as I said before, she is a great invalid. She has never recovered the loss of her husband!"

They were standing by the balustrades overlooking the terrace as she spoke, and General Raynham suddenly sat down on the broad coping which surmounted them. The Countess took her stand before him.

"So you see, dear General, not only for Guy's sake and Miss Raynham's, but for Mrs. Stuart's, it would be far kinder and wiser not to take any public notice of this little matter! It would distress her very much to think that May had been talked about. She is so *very* particular!"

"*Very particular!* Yes! yes! I understand!" murmured her companion.

"I'm afraid the poor child would never hear the last of it, and be kept a closer prisoner than before!

And I am sure, May is not to blame. I do not think she even knows that Guy is an engaged man. He had asked us not to bruit the news abroad until Miss Raynham arrived, he was afraid of being 'chaffed' on the subject! She merely regarded him as a pleasant acquaintance—the first grown-up partner that she had ever had! You need not be afraid of poor little May, I can assure you! She is a veritable baby, whose innocence alone was the motive that attracted Guy. Now that is positively all I have to tell you, General, and you will promise me not to make a scandal of it!"

"My dear lady!" said the General in rather a strange husky voice, as it appeared to her, "I am not the man to create a scandal about anything. I have suffered a good deal of obloquy during my lifetime, simply because I preferred to suffer in silence, sooner than air my grievances before the world. If this matter is passed over—that is if Guy will give the young lady up—it shall all be as if it had never been. Especially am I anxious that no rumour of the sort should reach my daughter's ears,

perhaps to embitter all her married life. Mary is devoted to her lover, and has entire faith in him, but she is a very high-spirited girl, and I would not answer for her action, if she found out that Guy had been playing her false, even by so much as a flirtation behind her back. But I may depend upon you!"

"Emphatically!" replied the Countess, "I would bite out my tongue sooner than injure either of them. And Guy will be the first to see the folly of his conduct as soon as he has time to think. May Stuart beside Miss Raynham!—why! it would be like a lily of the valley beside a queen rose! The one will fill the position of his wife with pride and honour to him; the other—dear, sweet child—would be no more fit for it, than my Persian kitten! Dear General Raynham, do set your heart at rest about these young people—only, take Sir Guy away from here, as soon as possible!"

"I will remember every word you have said," was his reply.

They resumed their walk, but he was so taciturn

that the Countess grew tired of him and let him steal off to the smoking room, whilst she rejoined her guests in the drawing-room.

Mary was there, seated at the piano and pretending to play and sing, whilst Lord Edward Milner hung over the key board in a rapture of admiration. Sir Guy Valmont was not present, but his *fiancée* did not seem to miss him, as she listened with a burning face to the compliments which were being whispered in her ear. The other ladies of the party, who had now got a lovely subject for scandal, were improving the opportunity in the back drawing-room, when the Countess appeared to recall them to their obligations as guests.

Meanwhile the General, instead of entering the smoking room as he had professed to be about to do, crept round to the other side of the Castle and walked straight up to his own apartment. His man followed him with cat-like feet, to learn if he required anything, but found himself dismissed without ceremony, whilst his master sat down by the table in an attitude of the greatest despondency.

“The—daughter—of—Ronald—Stuart!” he thought; “the daughter of my greatest enemy,—presuming to come between my beloved Mary,—my beautiful, motherless girl, and her happiness! No! no! it shall not—cannot be! It is an outrage—a sacrilege—an unheard-of piece of injustice!

“*Ronald Stuart’s daughter*, to rob Mary of her lover—of her promised husband—to ruin all her prospects—to cast another abiding shame upon our family! I will kill her with my own hand first.

“And yet, she is young and innocent and ignorant of what she is doing!

“Poor child. I cannot help feeling for her disappointment, and yet, it must be *she*—or *Mary*! Truly, ‘the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children’—it is cruel, but it is God’s law.

“At whatever cost to myself, I must see this girl’s—*mother*, and put the case before her. Surely, she cannot have entirely forgotten. She must acknowledge the justice of my plea, and prevent this young man from meeting her daughter again.

She must promise to give up his acquaintance

from this day, entirely and completely, and then I will take my Mary, far away, and never let her come near this cursed spot any more. There *must* be a curse hanging over it, and the first fruits have fallen upon my poor child.

“But she shall never hear of it through me, and if I can save her from its effects, I will!”

He retired to rest in the same mind, and waked with it in the morning.

CHAPTER X.

SIR GUY VALMONT was surprised the following morning, whilst engaged with something in the stables, to see General Raynham enter the yard, and mount a grey cob which Lord Dailgarroch had lent him during his stay at the Castle. He was by his side in a moment. His manner possessed all its former cordiality and frankness for the General, although he and Mary seemed to be drifting apart.

“Are you coming out shooting with us this morning, General, or are you off for a ride?” he asked.

"I am going for a little gentle exercise through the lanes, Guy," said the elder man.

"Let me go with you. Merrylegs can be saddled in a brace of shakes. We do not seem to have exchanged three words, since your arrival."

"That is not my fault, Valmont, but I thought you were better engaged. I would rather ride by myself though, thanks. I have some serious matters to think over, and am going in search of solitude and quiet."

Sir Guy looked disappointed.

"All right! Take care of yourself, and come back soon!" he answered.

"And you will keep Mary company during my absence," said the General, "you must not forget, Guy, that though *you* are amongst old friends, she is with strangers, and needs your society more than she would do at home. I don't think Mary has looked quite herself the last day or two."

"You do not think that she is ill," exclaimed the young man.

"No! perhaps not ill, but she may have expected

to have a little more of your society after an absence of so many weeks. Girls are queer creatures in some respects, you know, Valmont, 'feckle cattle to shoe behind,' but Mary is truly attached to you, I am sure of that!"

Guy heaved a deep sigh, and turned his head slightly away.

"I will not forget!" he said, as the General walked his cob out of the yard.

He rode very slowly all the way, meditating deeply the while and very nervous at the prospect of the interview before him, so that it was past noon when he entered the drive gates of Dungarvon Cottage, and went quietly up to the hall door,—Mrs. Stuart and May, who were sitting together in the boudoir, not being cognisant of his arrival, until a maid burst into the room with the announcement that a gentleman from the Castle asked to speak to her mistress.

At those words, "a gentleman from the Castle," May's face changed from the clearest white to the deepest crimson. She had no doubt in her own

mind as to *who* the visitor would prove to be. The "barrier" then had been overcome—the difficulty was removed—he had arrived, like the princes in the fairy tales, to demand her hand in marriage of her mother.

"A gentleman!" repeated Mrs. Stuart, peevishly, "*what* gentleman? You know, Caroline, that I never see any visitors unless I have been apprised of their coming. What is this gentleman's name?"

"He didn't give any name, madam. He only asked if you was at home, and when I said 'Yes,' he said, 'Go and ask if Mrs. Stuart can see me for a few minutes on pertikerlar business!'"

"You should have told him at once that I never receive anyone at this time of the day. May! what am I to do?"

"Shall I go down and tell him, mother, that you are not able to see him?" asked the girl, with a heart beating so rapidly, that she was afraid her mother and the servant must hear its fluttering.

Mrs. Stuart noted the agitated manner—the blushing face of her daughter, and decided that it

would be unwise to let her see the stranger without witnesses. "It is that presuming young man again," she thought, "in regard to whom, Amélie is encouraging May to a shameful extent. I will see him by myself, and tell him plainly that he is not to enter my doors again."

"Go upstairs to your own room, May," she said turning to her daughter, "and do not come down until I send for you," and then to the servant, "you can show the gentleman up here, Caroline, and see that I am not disturbed until he has left the Cottage. He may come on important business."

May flew back and kissed her mother.

"I am sure that he does!" she whispered, with a burning cheek, "and O! mother! you will be kind to him, will you not?"

"I shall be as kind as it is possible for me to be, dearest!" replied Mrs. Stuart, as she dismissed the agitated girl.

She had settled herself in her chair and was thinking over the best way in which to convey her meaning, once and for ever, to this young man who

was daring enough to wish to rob her of her child, the only treasure she possessed, when Caroline reappeared at the door, and without further preface than, "the gentleman, please madam," ushered General Raynham into the room.

Mrs. Stuart glanced up hurriedly. She saw at once that the intruder was not Sir Guy Valmont, but her eyesight was weak and her glasses were not at hand, so that she did not recognise *who* it was, that stood before her, until the deep voice of the General uttered her name, "*Helen*". At that sound, Mrs. Stuart almost slid from her chair to the ground. She became deathly white—her teeth chattered—she clasped her thin hands together in an attitude of supplication—and bent her head upon her breast and groaned.

"Alick!" she murmured, "have mercy!"

"*Mercy!*" he repeated grimly, "why should you ask me for that? Have you not received it in full measure at my hands? Have I not shown mercy, both to you and others, in concealing your sin—in leaving you to live the life you chose for yourself,

in peace and silence—in hiding your fault, as far as in me lay, from the censorious world? Even your nearest friends Lord and Lady Dailgarroch believe in you as a good woman—they know nothing of your past—I, myself, did not know that you were living here, until the fact was accidentally disclosed to me last evening. Is that not mercy? Could I have done more?”

“You never divorced me,” she wailed. “You knew what was my chief hope—my first desire—to become the legal wife of the man for whom I left you. But you refused to set me free—you withheld your hand, that he and I might not have the opportunity for atonement. Was *that* mercy? Was it not rather the proof of a deep-seated malice and revenge?”

“No! by Heavens, *no!*” exclaimed the General, who had seated himself near her. “Helen, you never made a true estimate of my love for you!—you could not appreciate it! Forgive me, if I am compelled in answer to your reproaches to touch on a subject, I hoped never to mention again. But you were my wife—Ronald Stuart was my friend. He

robbed me of you—you robbed me of yourself! That is true, but I felt that that deed, foul as it was, could not un-make you my wife—the wife to cherish and succour whom, I had taken a solemn oath in God's presence. Had you left me twenty times over, I never would have relinquished my Heaven-given right to have and to hold you till my life's end. *That* is why I did not divorce you, because I do not believe in divorce and should have thought my sin only next to yours, had I* given you up to him. Helen! you were my idol! You know it! Why did you leave me? Had you confessed your weakness to me, and asked my pardon, you might have broken my heart—you broke it when you went—but I would never have cast you from me to be the football of the world!"

Mrs. Stuart was sobbing with her face in her hands.

"I know it," she said, "but I was never worthy of you, Alick!"

"Do not call me by that name!" he interrupted

sternly. "It was the one you used, when I believed you to be all my own."

"Forgive me! It was the force of old times that came over me, from seeing you again. I know that I should have said General Raynham. But deeply as I feel my position in your presence (and in consequence of your action I am neither a wife nor a widow) you must not say a word against poor Ronald. He sinned against you, true, but it was my fault more than his, and he did all he could to make it up to me. He relinquished his ambition for my sake—he was a good, true, loving husband to me for many years—he was the father of my child—and now that he has gone to pay the penalty which he incurred for my sake, no one—No! not you, nor the law, nor the Queen herself (if it could be so) shall say one single word against his honour and his truth before me. My poor Ronald! If I have suffered, so did he, and I pray God, night and morning that He will make it up to him now in His Eternal Kingdom!"

"By George! and I admire you for it!" exclaimed the General stoutly, "neither will I say one word

to throw blame upon the dead. Ronald is no longer here to defend himself, but his best monument is your honest praise of him."

There was silence between them for a little while, and then Helen asked,

"What has brought you here? Why did you elect to stir up these bitter memories after a silence of so many years?"

"Because when you deserted me and your home, you left someone there, Helen, who should have been dearer to you than yourself! I could have better forgiven you for leaving me, than for renouncing all claim to your little child. Have you quite forgotten 'Doddy?'"

At the mention of that name, Mrs. Stuart burst into a passionate flood of tears, whilst she rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair, as though she had completely lost control of herself.

"O! my Doddy! my little Doddy! Tell me of her, Alick! For God's sake, tell me of my child! It has been the sorest part of my punishment, to lie awake at night, thinking of all her loving baby ways

—to wake in the mornings and know that I should never again hear her little voice say ‘Muvver.’ It broke my heart—it broke my heart! Although I have another daughter, she could never, *never* take the place of my first-born—of my little Mary to me! Is she pretty, Alick? Ah! she must be, she was so much like you! And is she married, and does she—does she remember—*me?*”

“Remember *you*, Helen? What are you dreaming of? Do you imagine I could let her grow up and believe she has a mother living? Of course she thinks that you died (as you *did* die to her), when she was a little child! She has not even seen a likeness of you! She has never known but one parent—myself!”

“Of course! of course! I did not know what I was saying! And is she pretty and happy? My poor deserted child!”

“She is considered to be beautiful and until lately,—she was happy! You asked me just now, Helen, why I had come to see you and revive bitter recollections. Nothing would have induced me to do

so, unless the sacrifice had been necessary for our child."

"For Mary?" she asked in astonishment.

"For Mary," he repeated gravely. "You ask me if she is happy. She arrived at the Castle about as joyous a creature as God ever permitted to live, full of the anticipation of meeting again the man she is engaged to marry and to whom she is devotedly attached—Sir Guy Valmont!"

"Sir Guy Valmont!" she repeated in a dreamy manner.

"Ah! you see the reason of my visit perhaps now! Sir Guy is not all that he used to be. He has become moody, distracted and at times, melancholy. I hear that he has met and been much attracted by your daughter—that he has visited at your house—that they have been seen holding private meetings in your grounds. All this is an insult to Mary—and it must be put a stop to."

"May meeting Sir Guy secretly," exclaimed Mrs. Stuart, "O! impossible!"

"It is not impossible, because it has occurred.

The young people have evidently taken a fancy for each other—on your daughter's side, a sufficiently innocent one, doubtless—but with my future son-in-law, the indulgence of such a fancy is most reprehensible. I cannot believe that he intends to carry it so far as to interfere with his engagement with Mary, but I will not run the risk of such a calamity. We have had enough of breaking faith in the family already. I am here therefore to exact a promise from you that you will put a stop to all such proceedings at once."

"O! I will indeed! The young man has called here, on two occasions, but I had already made up my mind not to receive him any more. He shall not be admitted after to-day."

"But that will not be sufficient security for me! I need not remind you, Helen, that young men and women resent interference in their love affairs, and sometimes break all ties of honour or affection, in order to gratify them. You must put a greater stress of moral force upon your daughter, than is conveyed

by your prohibition. Is she aware of the circumstances of her birth?"

"O! no! no!" cried Mrs. Stuart, shrinking from him, "how do you suppose I could blight her young life, by telling her such a story? May is as innocent as a child! She knows nothing of the wickedness of the world. It would be impossible to tell her such a thing!"

"And when she marries, what then?" demanded the General. "Is she to go to her husband a living lie—will any honest man take her, without some proof that she is honourably born?"

"I do not know," said Mrs. Stuart, weeping. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"But the day has come, Helen, and the evil must be revealed. You must tell your daughter the story of her birth,—you must tell her that the man she fancies is the affianced husband of her sister—you must make her refuse to see him ever again. This is an ugly sore. It can only be healed by a thorough cleansing and cauterisation, that will last for ever."

"You set me too hard a task!" sobbed Mrs. Stuart. "Think of the years she has spent in loving and honouring me and her dead father, and now to upset it all—to tell her she has been deceived—that all the time she has thought us to be an honoured husband and wife, we were—we were—O! Alick; kill me where I stand, but don't tell me that I must destroy my child's regard for me for ever!"

"She is not your only child!" replied the General. "Mary, who is quite as beautiful, as innocent, as loving as May, has to bow beneath the same shame—the shame which you have brought upon them both! I shall be compelled to make the same confession to Sir Guy, before he marries Mary. It has been on my mind for months, but I shall tell him now as soon as ever I have got him away from Dailgarroch. You owe it to your daughter to give her some explanation *why* she must never think any more of Sir Guy. Let it be a full and complete one—unburden your mind at once of the load of deception it has borne—and you will feel the happier for it afterwards. You may depend on that!"

"She will never love me as she has done, again."

"Perhaps not! but is that not part of the penalty we all have to bear for our sins committed upon earth. The majority of us have our hell before we pass away. Poor Helen! I can well believe that you have expiated your mistake by many bitter days and nights. But take courage! Be brave! Try and regard this last sad necessity, as part of your punishment, and to believe that God will give you greater ease of mind in return for it. Remember! it is not for myself, but for *Mary* that I ask it!"

"Alick! you have always been too good to me! I *will* do it, for your sake, as well as my sweet *Mary's*, and to show you that I am truly repentant for the bitter wrong I did you. May shall know all tomorrow,—*for Mary's sake!* O! my little *Mary!* If I could only see her once again!"

General Raynham drew a photograph from his pocket.

"I brought this to show you, in case you needed any special pleading on her behalf," he said. "You

will not wonder now that I am fond and proud of her! People call her like me, because they have never seen you, but she is the living image of what you were when I married you—the first and the last woman that I have ever loved!”

He held the portrait towards her as he spoke. It was the same that Guy Valmont had in his room. The poor mother gazed at it until her tears fell fast upon the lovely likeness.

“And I am the mother of such a being as this!” she said in a faint voice, “and I gave her up! God forgive me!”

She returned the portrait to him as she concluded.

“Would you like to keep it, Helen?” he said, softly.

“May I, O! *may I?* But I am not worthy!”

“You are her mother, Helen! I never forget that! I always pray for you, as her mother!”

She sank on her knees and kissed his hand.

“No! no! not that—not there!” exclaimed the General, as he raised her quickly, and replaced her

on her chair, "I cannot bear it! Helen! I have been made very unhappy by your loss, but never hard! I loved you too well for that, and real Love, you know, does not change when its object changes! And the time is getting on, my dear! We are an old man and woman now. Some people may be able to bear their enmity to the grave, but they are made of sterner stuff than myself! It will not be very long before we must meet in the presence of our Maker to give account for all our doings in the flesh. Where then will be these petty troubles? Where these heart-burnings—these jealousies—these desires for an unsatisfying revenge? Lost in the infinity of God—sunk in the remembrance of our own short-comings! My poor wife, if my forgiveness will give you one moment's ease, take it, fully and freely, as I hope to be forgiven at the last Day, myself!"

Mrs. Stuart could not answer him. She only sat there, with her face hidden in her hands.

"I am going now," he said presently, "and we may never meet again! I rely upon you to keep your

promise to me—to let your daughter fully understand the circumstances of the case, and that in encouraging Sir Guy's attentions, she will be robbing her sister of her right. When she has dismissed him, and we have left Dailgarroch, I will take it on myself to tell him the reason. Let him think now, that May obeys *your* orders only."

"I will!" she answered slowly.

"And may God bless you, Helen! I say it with the same fervour as I did, the first day that you lay in my arms. May—God—bless—you!"

The next thing of which Mrs. Stuart was conscious was, that Madame de Leuville had entered the room.

"Helen!" she exclaimed breathlessly, "*who* was the gentleman who rode down the avenue just now? I was at my window, and I saw—he seemed to me to resemble—to have a look of——"

Mrs. Stuart lifted her face from the shelter of her hands. She looked dazed and dizzy, as though she had but just awakened from a dream.

"You were not mistaken," she answered slowly, "it was *he!*"

"General Raynham! But why does he come here? Where on earth did he spring from?"

"He is staying at the Castle! He heard of my vicinity from Lady Dailgarroch. He came to speak to me of May."

"*Of May?* Whoever told him of May? I did not know he was aware that she existed. What right has he to mention her to you?"

"Amélie!" said Mrs. Stuart, extending the hand which held the photograph of Mary, "look at that!"

"What a lovely girl!" cried Madame de Leuille, as she examined it, "what eyes! what hair! what a figure! Who is it?"

"*Who is it?*" echoed Mrs. Stuart shrilly, who is it? Why! it is my daughter — my Mary — my little Doddy! It is the fair-haired baby girl I rocked to sleep so many nights upon my bosom—my first-born—the treasure I left behind me! Can't you understand, Amélie? This is my eldest darling, whom I have never seen since she was a toddler of

two years old—and now she is twenty, and engaged to be married to Sir Guy Valmont, the young man who called upon us here!”

“To *Sir Guy Valmont!*” said Madame de Leuville, turning pale, “O! my poor May!”

“And why not my poor Mary?” demanded her friend, almost acrimoniously, “why is not one to be pitied, as much as the other? Are they not equally my flesh and blood? Why should the younger rob the elder of her birthright—the elder who has had no mother to watch over and guard her?”

“Calm yourself, dear Helen! This unfortunate interview has excited you! Tell me, *why* did General Raynham seek you out after the lapse of eighteen years? What motive had he for coming here?”

“Cannot you guess? He has discovered that Sir Guy Valmont is taken with my youngest daughter—he demands an explanation of his conduct—he calls on me to explain to May why the circumstances of her birth preclude her accepting such a

proposal even if it were made to her—and to hear her dismiss him for ever from her presence.”

“But that is cruelty,” interrupted Madame de Leuville, indignantly, “and he has no right to demand such a sacrifice of you, or May. I am aware that I have urged you for years past, to let the dear child learn the truth, but my motive was to prevent her hearing it from the outside world instead of yourself. But to tell her so suddenly, and at the same moment as she knows she must relinquish her lover, will be very, very hard. And why should this young man not make his choice between the two? I conclude he knows his own mind. If he prefers May to Mary, why should he not marry her?”

“O! never! Do not suggest such a thing!” cried Mrs. Stuart. “He would throw her up at once, if he learnt the secret of her birth,—and then, what good would her refusal of him do to Mary? I *must* think of Mary, Amélie—my first-born darling baby! Her happiness must not be ruined because May has come between her *fiancé* and herself. And May, if

she knew all, would be the last to abet him in such an act of treachery. Her own sister: Ah! it is too terrible! It must be put a stop to at once!"

"Well! do not think of it any more to-day, Helen! You are terribly upset. If the General had had any consideration for you, he would have written, instead of calling in person. He must have known his presence could not be welcome!"

"Don't say anything against him, Amélie," interposed Mrs. Stuart feebly, "because he was all that is noble, generous, and kind to me! He did not utter one word of reproach! He seemed sorry for May,—but he has his own child—*our* child—to think of first!"

"And pray, what was the young man about to come philandering after our darling, when he knew his word was plighted elsewhere? *He* is the one to blame in the matter after all, and nothing he gets can be too hard for him! If it could only pass over our May!"

"May! yes! I am afraid that May will suffer—but then, so would Mary—my sweet Doddy! O!

Amélie! Amélie! I have ruined both their young lives. I—their own mother, who brought them into the world—have been their curse instead of their blessing!”

Madame de Leuille might have improved the occasion at this juncture, with a well-directed homily, but she refrained. Mrs. Stuart was in no condition to be lectured. Her interview with her husband had left her fit for nothing, but to be soothed and quieted.

“When do you propose to make these disclosures to May,” demanded her friend, “she is upstairs all this while, and very curious to learn who the gentleman can be, who has been closeted so long with you. Will you call her down, and tell her at once!”

But this idea seemed to terrify Mrs. Stuart beyond description. She cowered in her chair, and shook like an aspen leaf.

“Now! at once!” she exclaimed; “O! no! Amélie! I could not—it would be impossible to me! Let me have a little time in which to recover myself—in

which to make up my mind—to think over what I shall say——”

“My dear Helen, of course! You must choose your own time and place. But don't you think it would be advisable for you to lie down now, and let me give you a composing draught. You are trembling all over, and will be worse if you do not have a rest. Come! be good, and do as I tell you.”

Her poor nervous friend was only too glad to be taken in hand by her stronger will and thought and acted for, so in a few minutes Madame de Leuille had undressed and put her in bed, and was summoning May to bring her the bottle of soothing drops, which Mrs. Stuart was accustomed to take after an hysterical attack.

“May, darling!” she called to the upper storey, “your dear mother has a violent headache! Bring me the vial of morphia which you will find in the cupboard above my washing stand. A wineglass and teaspoon too, dear, please!”

At the first note of alarm about her mother, May came flying downstairs, with the required medicine,

full of anxiety to learn the cause of her sudden illness.

"Dear, darling mother!" she exclaimed in her sweet, fresh young voice, "what has made you ill? Has it anything to do with the old gentleman? What did he want with you, mother? Did he bring a message from the Castle?"

"Don't worry your mother with questions now, May!" interposed Madame de Leuville, "she has received some disagreeable news, and I want her to go to sleep and recover herself. She will tell you all that you need to know to-morrow. Just measure out the composing draught, there's a dear child, and fill the wineglass with water."

"How much, madame?" enquired the girl, with the bottle in her hand, "a teaspoonful?"

"A *teaspoonful*, dear child," exclaimed Madame de Leuville, "do you want to kill your mother outright? Ten drops, please! Here! give it to me, perhaps your hand is not as steady as mine! It will not do to make a mistake. That is a very dangerous medicine, improperly handled!"

"Do you mean to say that a teaspoonful would *really* kill a person?" asked May, with wondering eyes, "such a very little portion! It seems incredible!"

"It is true nevertheless, May. There is enough in that bottle to kill a dozen men, so always be most careful with soporifics. Cork the vial tightly and put it back in its place!"

"Let me give it to mother first," pleaded May, as she approached the bed, "here, darling mother, is your medicine! Drink it up quick like a good girl, and then we will draw down the blinds and leave you to sleep as long as you can."

"May! May!" said Mrs. Stuart, in a troubled, anxious voice, "*you* would never despise me, darling, whatever I did—*you* would never turn against your poor mother,—or run away and leave her all by herself, would you?"

The girl's eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Desert you, mother—leave you—despise you—*you*, my beloved and honoured mother? O! what a funny thing to say! Why! I would die first!" And

May stooped down and kissed the invalid half a dozen times over.

"Come May, come away now! It is best to leave her quite to herself!" whispered Madame de Leuville, as she drew the girl from the bed-chamber.

"But what could have made mother think of such a thing?" repeated Mary, as she found herself alone with her governess, "despise her! How could I despise my own mother! If she were a murderess, I should love her just the same! She must always be—my mother!"

* * * * *

Meanwhile matters had not been going very merrily at the Castle. Mary Raynham and Sir Guy Valmont had had a regular quarrel.

When the girl waked in the morning after her very reprehensible flirtation with Lord Edward Milner, she felt very penitent and ashamed of the sorry means she had adopted to revenge herself upon her lover, and had Guy shown any disposition to make the *amende honorable*, she would certainly have met him half way.

He was not far from doing it. He also had taken himself to task during the night watches, and resolved to stamp out all unholy thoughts, and be more as he used to be to Mary Raynham for the future. He saw himself in a terrible dilemma. He had certainly let his heart slip away from his betrothed into the hands of May Stuart, but he could not marry them both.

Someone must suffer in consequence, and since the fault was his alone, he was the proper person to expiate it. He had resolved therefore to write to May and tell her the entire truth, and ask her forgiveness for any annoyance he might have brought upon her, through his weak folly.

And then Mary and he would be married and he would take good care never to approach Dailgarroch again, until his wound was completely healed. He was in this disposition when he encountered General Raynham in the stable-yard, and went to seek Mary directly he parted company with him. But on the way he unfortunately met Lord Edward Milner, with a rose in his button-hole,

which Mary had worn in her bosom the night before.

Guy recognised it directly from the fact that it was a very rare sort—one of a bunch of five, which Lord Dailgarroch had gallantly presented to his fair guest, telling her at the same time that they were the only blossoms which his gardener had been able to procure from a plant expressly imported from Persia.

He had said something pretty at the time, about her being as rare a blossom as the Persian rose, which had caused all eyes to be turned upon the valuable flowers. Later in the evening Guy had said jestingly to Mary, that he supposed it would be of no use asking her for one of her treasures, and she had answered him quickly, that she should not dream of parting with a gift so graciously bestowed. And now he encountered the dapper little lord, stepping jauntily along in his light spring suit, with one of the dusky beauties in his button-hole. The sight turned all Sir Guy's milk of human kindness to gall.

He found his *fiancée* leaning negligently back in a basket chair on the terrace and he "went for her" (as the saying is) at once.

"Mary!" he commenced, and she could see he was going to say something unpleasant by the expression of his face, "do you remember what I said to you yesterday, regarding Lord Edward Milner?"

"No! Did you mention him?" she answered, indifferently.

"You know I did! I told you that he bears an evil reputation with respect to women—that it is damaging to any girl's credit to be intimate with him—and I begged you to be careful! Instead of which, you chose to make yourself conspicuous all the evening, by flirting with the little beast, and this morning I meet him with one of the roses, Lord Dailgarroch gave you, in his button-hole."

"What of it? Has the earl complained? I suppose I may give my flowers to whomever I choose!"

"Most certainly *not!* To give a man the flower you have worn all the evening in your bosom, is a mark of appreciation and intimacy such as I will

never allow in the girl who is to be my future wife!"

"Indeed! Well! I think, that, considering the very little attention you pay me yourself, you are usurping a husband's privilege of finding fault and laying down the law, a great deal too soon! We are not married yet, remember, and if I find Lord Edward Milner, or any other man, more agreeable than yourself, I shall exercise my right of choice, as I see fit!"

She was quite delighted to find how easily she could make him jealous, only like many another woman in the same circumstances, she went a little too far.

"Not married yet! Perhaps not, but considering our marriage is fixed to take place six weeks hence, I should think I have a right to say what I like, or do not like in you, already!"

The girl turned her lovely saucy face up to the blue sky and flaunted the supposition.

"I do not agree with you! There's many a slip t'wixt the cup and the lip, and if these things

are done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? By the way, it never struck me before how exquisitely appropriate that text is to engaged people. You are the very image of a 'green tree' at present, and I have no doubt that when we are married, I shall find you exceedingly 'dry.'

"You are pleased to be witty!" replied Sir Guy Valmont, as he turned from her and twirled his tanney moustaches. Few men can stand being laughed at, especially by young women. He did not know how to respond to her raillery in the same jesting tone, so he took refuge in anger. He tugged at his moustaches until he hurt himself, and then he turned round upon her fiercely,

"Look here!" he said, "this may be a very pretty joke for you, but I am in earnest about it, and if you will not give me your promise not to encourage that ape any more, I shall refuse to fulfil my engagement with you and will tell General Raynham the reason why."

But this threat raised the feminine indignation to

such a pitch that all the arrows in Mary's quiver went flying abroad at once.

"*You* will refuse to marry *me!*" she exclaimed, starting from her chair, "I never heard such a piece of impudence in my life before! *You* and *me!* Why! I could have accepted half a dozen better men than yourself, last season—better in birth and looks and fortune—if I had not been an idiot—yes! an *idiot* to take a fancy to yourself! Do you imagine you are such a grand match for me?—a mere baronet with a rubbishing little estate down in Surrey! Why most girls would prefer a military hero or a successful explorer, or a Master of Foxhounds, —or anything in fact, a little less common than a baronet who grows like a blackberry, upon every hedge."

"Your ideas have risen," he replied scornfully, "a baronet is no longer good enough for you apparently! Doubtless you are aspiring to a higher position in life—to be a lord's wife with the reversionary interest of a dukedom! You *might* reach it, you know! The dukedom of Rotherhithe is in

the direct line, there are only five brothers I think between it and Lord Edward, so that you really have a chance of attaining that dignity, if you play your cards well!"

"A fifth son! pooh!" cried the offended beauty, "no such thing! I should aspire to a ready-made dukedom, thank you, and wear the coronet at once! I have jotted down two or three eligibles in my mind already, whom I should go in for next season, if I were only free!"

"O! don't let that stand in the way of your advancement, Miss Raynham," said Sir Guy, "for I set you free at once! I desire to break an engagement, which is only held, by your own showing, for convenience's sake, and beg to return you the troth you plighted with me under such an error of judgment."

He drew from his little finger as he spoke, a plain gold ring, and placed it quietly in her lap. Mary—for her part—took off the half hoop of brilliants with which he had sealed his engagement to marry her, and sent it flying to the other end of

the terrace. She knew she was losing what she loved and valued most on earth, and she would have broken down, had she not called her pride and anger to her assistance.

“Take your paltry ring!” she cried, whilst the crimson colour flamed in her cheeks and indignation made her eyes shine like diamonds, “and never let me see it, or you again! You have changed towards me—I have perceived it ever since we came to the Castle—and you take this unmanly way of ridding yourself of a chain, which has grown irksome to you. I thought—I hoped—Ah! if you have any manliness left, quit my presence at once, and don’t force me to say all that I think of you! Sir Guy Valmont, you are free! Go!”

He responded to her heated words by a low bow, and walking off the terrace, sent his servant to pick up the diamond ring, whilst he betook himself to his own room.

What he should say to General Raynham and the Dailgarrochs, he did not know—whether he should stay at the Castle, or leave by the next

train, he could not tell—the first inclination that came over him, was to write to May Stuart, and leave all the rest to chance.

His letter was brief, but to the point.

“My darling May. The obstacle is overcome—I have leapt the barrier—I am free to ask you to become my wife! Ah! sweet darling, will you draw back now? If you do, you will blight the whole of my future life!

“But you are truth itself, I will not believe it of you. I shall call at the Cottage to-morrow afternoon at three, and ask your hand formally of Mrs. Stuart. Surely she will give her consent. And after that—I dare not think of the joy, the rapture, that opens out before me. And all my life I will be yours and yours only. Good-bye, sweet May! Look out for me to-morrow. Your loving Guy.”

His letter was carried from the Castle to be posted, just as the General having returned from his interview with Mrs. Stuart, sought the presence of his daughter. And the first words she saluted him with, were, “Father! it is all over! We have

returned each others' rings. Guy and I have parted for ever!"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" exclaimed the General, concerned to hear that the painful interview he had just passed through, had been undertaken for nought; "a mere lovers' quarrel! It will be all right again to-morrow! It *must*."

"No such thing!" retorted Mary, with a strangely excited and inflamed countenance, "we have parted by mutual consent! My dear father! I wonder you didn't see it coming long ago! The fact is, we are utterly sick of one another!"



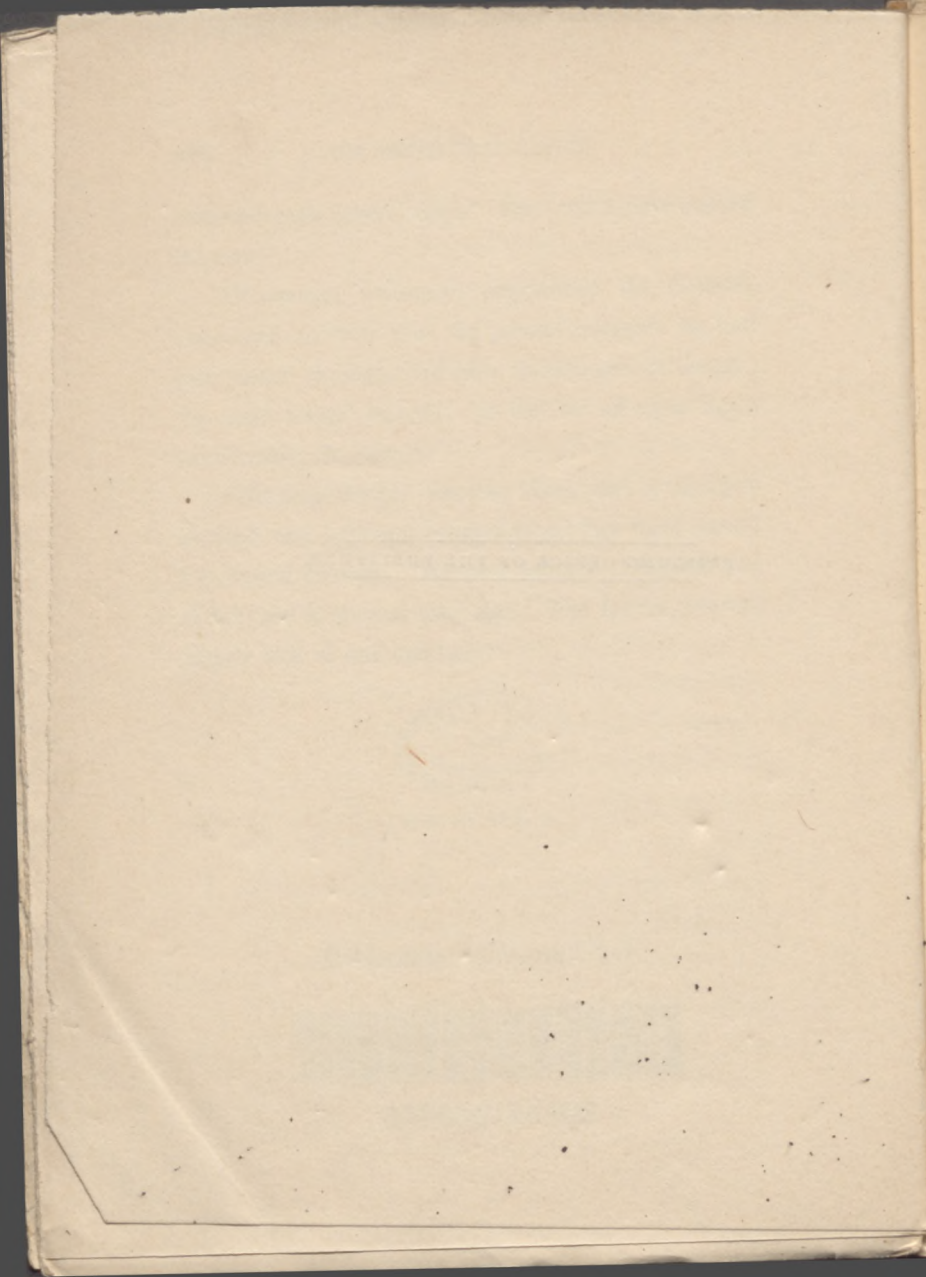
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